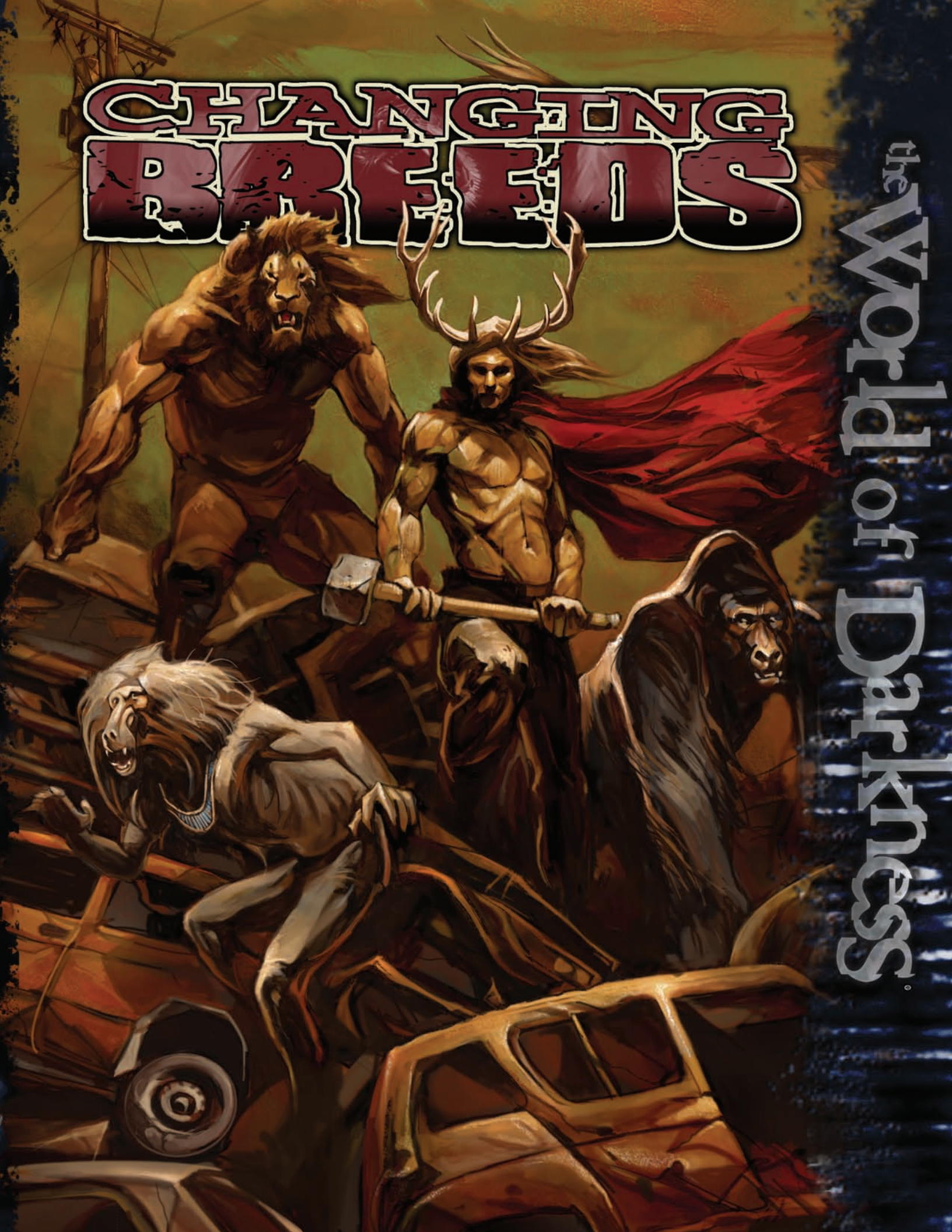
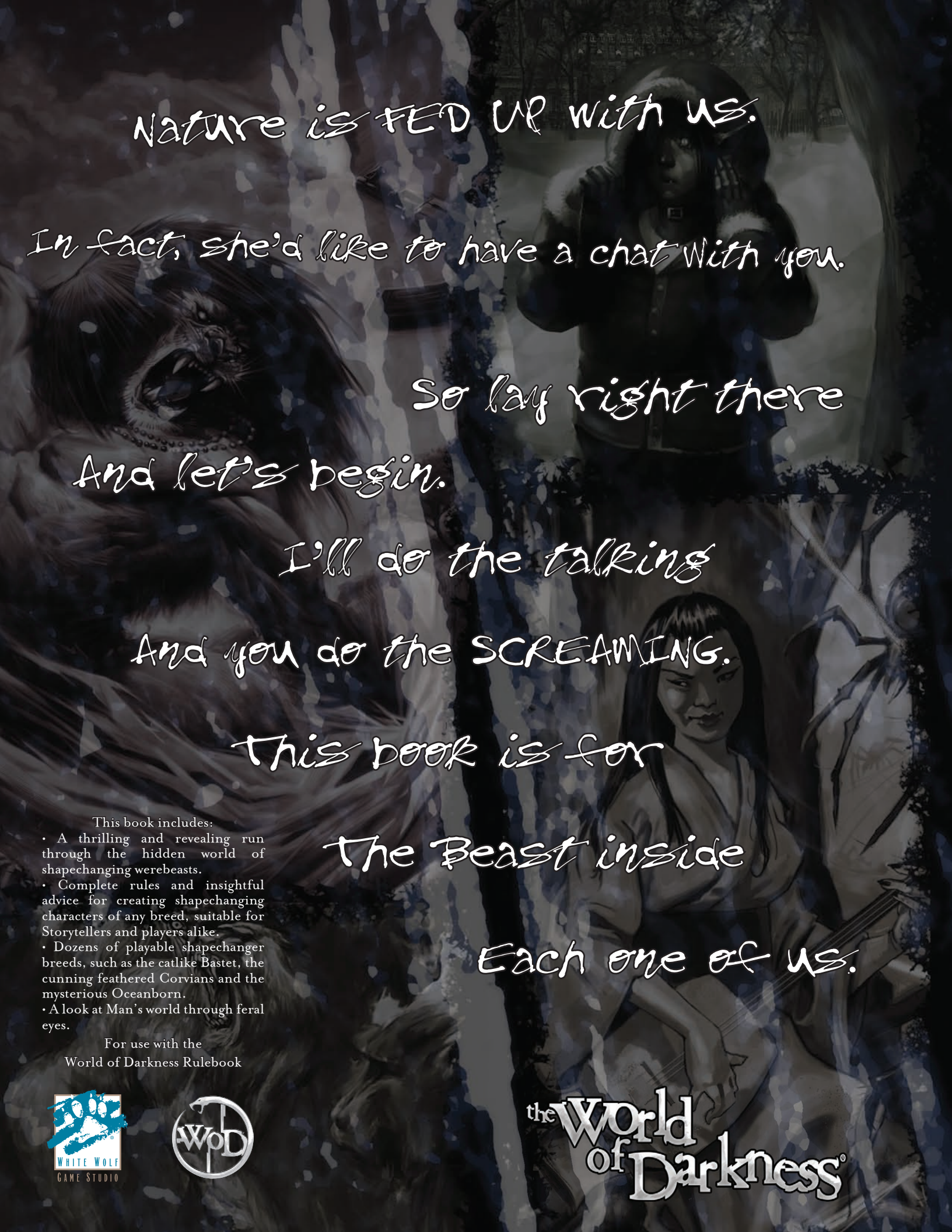

CHANGING BREEDS
the World of Darkness



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- Dozens of playable shapechanger breeds, such as the catlike Bastet, the cunning feathered Corvians and the mysterious Oceanborn.
- A look at Man's world through feral eyes.

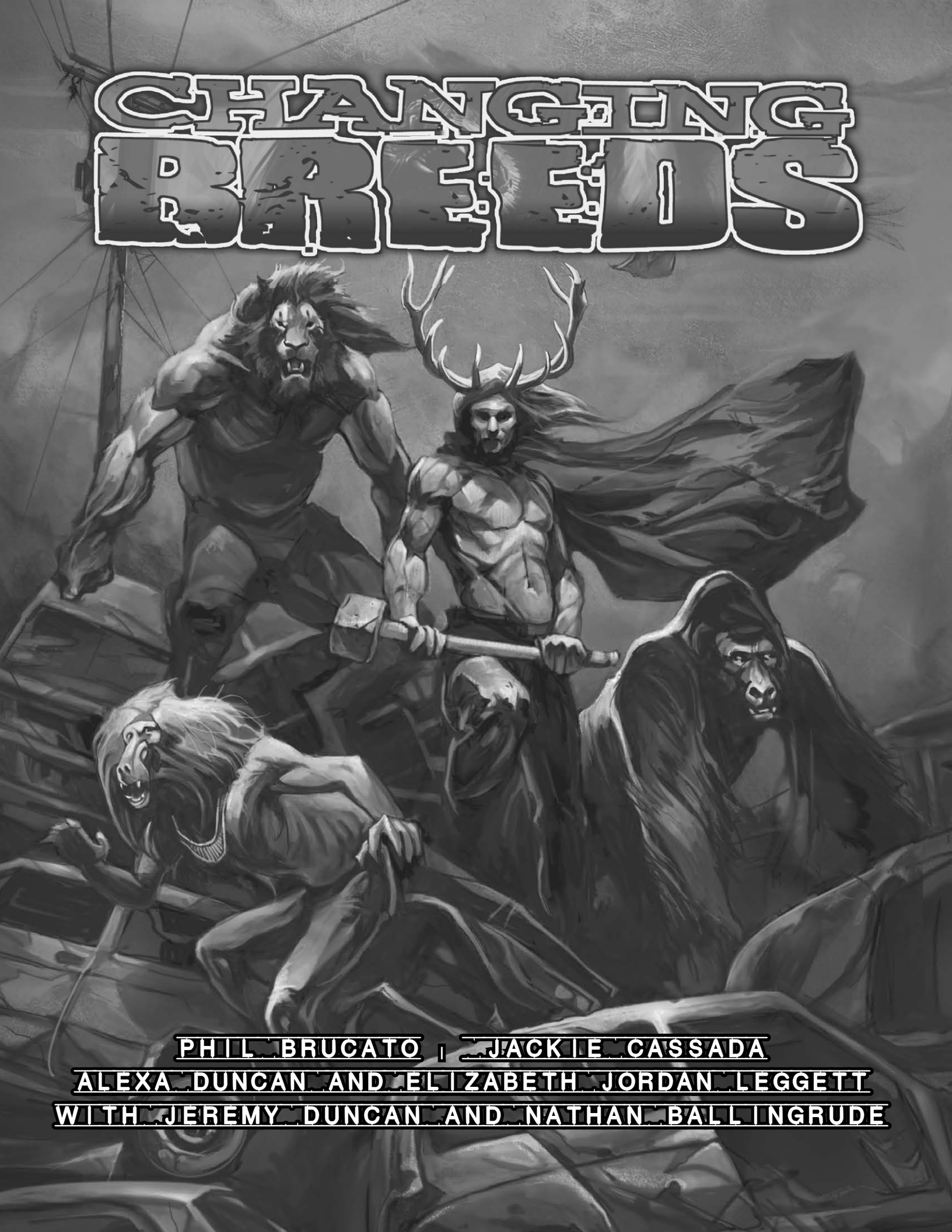
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the World of Darkness®

CHANGING BREEDS



PHIL BRUCATO | JACKIE CASSADA
ALEXA DUNCAN AND ELIZABETH JORDAN LEGGETT
WITH JEREMY DUNCAN AND NATHAN BALLINGRUDE



When I came into this country,
I crossed the desert on foot.
We moved at night,
eating stale tortillas
and stealing water from cattle troughs.

The man who guided our crossing
called himself "COYOTE,"
but the only beast in him
was MAN.

He carried a pair of wire cutters
for the ranchers' fences
and a SMALL SILVER GUN
tucked into the back of his trousers.

I was already wary of his gun,
and though I trailed as far behind him
as COMMON SENSE
and the land allowed,
I had caught something unpleasant in his scent
— a whiff of BURNT RUBBER
covered over with talcum powder.

I had heard stories about what men like him might do to a girl like me in the heart of the desert.

Sometimes the Border Patrol or a rancher found us before it was too late, other times not.

The lucky ones were sent back across the border, where they began the trek again.

It was a journey fit only for the desperate.

But this country across the wide desert was the furthest I could imagine from the humid mountains of my childhood.

Across the desert, they wouldn't curse me and spit on my shadow.

If I made it, I could DISAPPEAR like SO MANY OTHERS before me.

My past worn away by the winds and sand, I would emerge



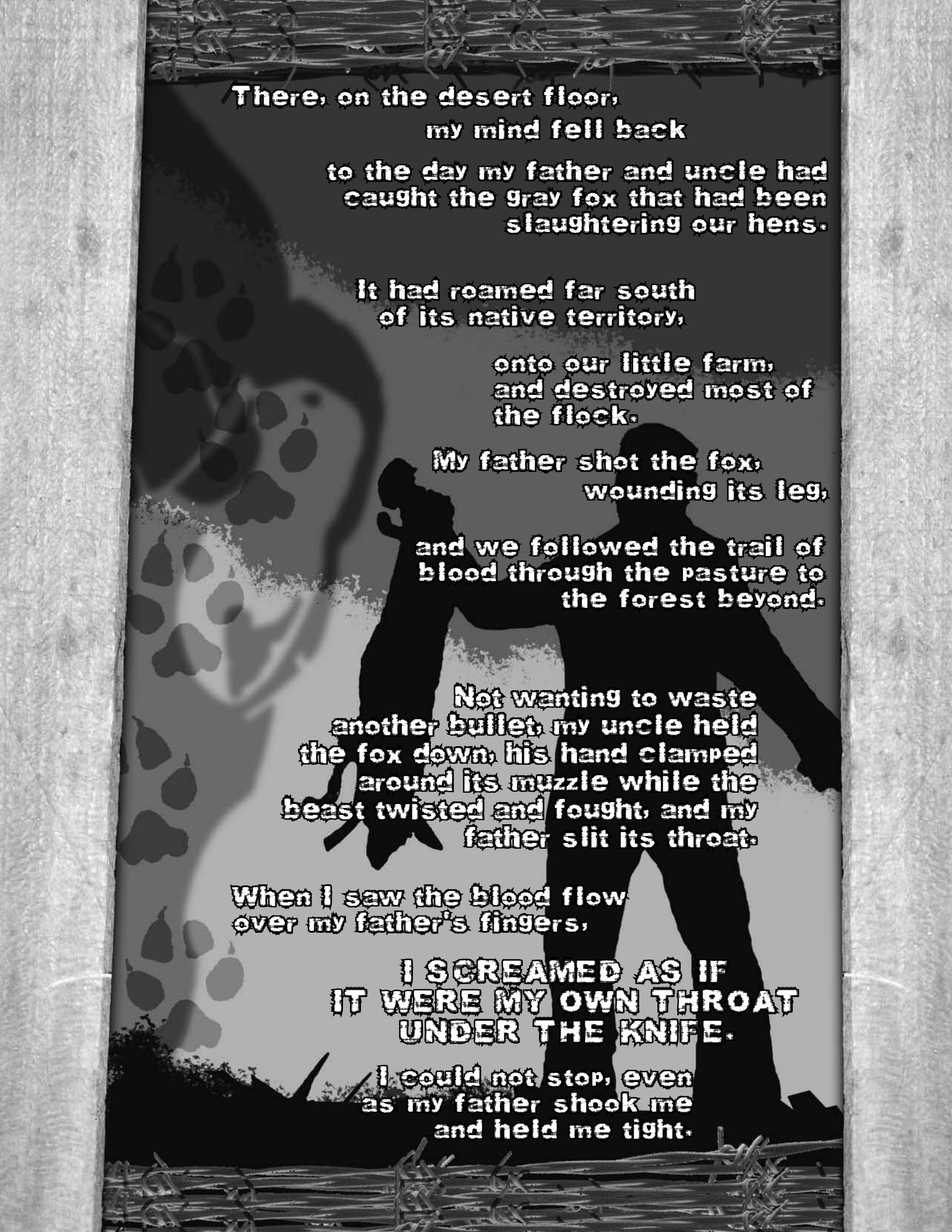
BLANK AND NEW

ON THE OTHER SIDE.

THE COYOTE CAME FOR ME AFTER THE MOON WENT DOWN ON THE FIFTH NIGHT.



It was pitch-dark, and cold enough that if you held up a flashlight, you could see your breath. I had fallen behind the others, thinking the coyote would take up the lead. Then out of the darkness, he fell in step beside me. I tried to walk faster, but he took his gun and made me lie down among the dry brush. I could see the dim sweep of flashlights and lanterns far in front of us. I cried. I kicked. I bit. He bruised my wrists and legs as he pinned me under him. His burnt smell was all around me.


There, on the desert floor,
my mind fell back
to the day my father and uncle had caught the gray fox that had been slaughtering our hens.
It had roamed far south of its native territory,
onto our little farm, and destroyed most of the flock.
My father shot the fox, wounding its leg,
and we followed the trail of blood through the pasture to the forest beyond.
Not wanting to waste another bullet, my uncle held the fox down, his hand clamped around its muzzle while the beast twisted and fought, and my father slit its throat.
When I saw the blood flow over my father's fingers,
I SCREAMED AS IF IT WERE MY OWN THROAT UNDER THE KNIFE.
I could not stop, even as my father shook me and held me tight.

I screamed with that same pitched agony on the desert floor, under the coyote,

AND FELT SOMETHING BREAK LOOSE INSIDE OF ME: A SKIN-TEARING, BLOODY SCREAM.

From far away, I saw the gray fox collect its bones and leap to life. It fastened its jaws on the coyote's throat. His windpipe collapsed in its grip, robbing him of anything but a dry, silent gaping as the fox's nails shredded the soft skin of his stomach.


When the coyote lay still,
my fox fled,
swift and sure-footed,
across the desert
As the sun
broke over
the horizon,
the fox
curled its
dark tail
around itself
and slept.
I woke on the edge of
the desert, miles from
my fellow travelers,
naked and streaked
with blood in the
morning sun . . .

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Author Dedication

The Changing Breeds is dedicated with love and thanks to Feral, Pooka, Katydid, Prey, Diane and most especially Cory.



Coming Next:
World of Darkness:
Midnight Road

WHITE WOLF PUBLISHING
2075 WEST PARK PLACE BOULEVARD
SUITE G
STONE MOUNTAIN, GA 30087

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PRINTED IN CANADA.



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Introduction

You ruffled your feathers and, breaking free of your cage, You took to the air, bound for your soul's world . . .
– Mevlana Jajalu'ddin Rumi, *Divani Shamsi Tabriz, #48*

In the heart of every man and woman, there's a beast. And that truth fascinates and terrifies us all.

We like to think we're different. Unique. "Higher" in form and function than "mere" animals. And perhaps in the towering cities of our era, that's true. But in the rugged landscapes of jungle or savannah, in the ocean depths or the forest shadows, our advantages disappear. Stripped of tools and technology, a man or woman in the wilderness becomes simple, naked prey. To survive, that person must return to the primal soul. To the beast. To the animal within.

Some people are closer to that beast than others. In them, Beast and Man share one skin.

Man is a clever monkey. An abstract animal, he reshapes his surroundings to suit him best. Sometimes, though, he forgets that he *is*, at heart, an animal. In the shadows of his world, though, the beast-folk remind him. Not through crude terrorism or remote perfection but by simply being *there*. As always, they haunt those secret places where he *thinks* he's in control. And as they have since Man's inception, they haunt his dreams as well.

As legends say, the beast-folk have always been with us. These days, though, they seem to be *everywhere*: weasels in the boardroom, tigers in the bedroom, crow-folk on the side of the road. Look carefully at the reflections of your friends and neighbors. Spot that cat-like gleam in your lover's eye? The bullish tilt in a rival's head? The feathered shadows cast behind that homeless dude in the park? You see them now, don't you — the signs of the beast? Did you, perhaps, ever see them in yourself?

These "changing breeds" aren't strangers. They're *us*. Not some different species but distillations of our own. For whatever reason, they defy what Man calls "possible" to let a deeper truth emerge. We *all* have animals inside. Sometimes, that beast claws its way out, and when it does, the laws of Man bleed. Nature becomes the only Law. A man becomes an animal in *fact* as well as fancy.

Most folks have divided souls.

Not the beast-folk.

In them, Animal and Man are joined.

And now, you're one of them.

Beauty of the Beast

Welcome to **The Changing Breeds**, a look beneath the skins of were-cats, bears, birds and even bugs. As a stand-alone supplement to the World of Darkness line, this book helps you assume the persona of a human being who occasionally turns into an animal. Of course, that transformation is imaginary — the only magic working here is your mind. In the mysterious landscape of the World of Darkness, though, you can swim with the fishes, soar with the eagles or even run with the wolves.

Sound fun? It is. But it's not *easy*. In that world, things never are.

The World of Darkness is a fractured mirror of our own. And there, as in our own world, Man has fucked Nature inside-out. His boundless ego, carelessness and absolute conviction that he is the center of his universe have torn the wild world apart. Forests fall. Oceans become cesspools. The weather itself screams with protest, and while it's fashionable to blame outside entities for this catastrophic state of affairs, human greed and stupidity are the real demons here. Man is the animal that shits where he eats, then proclaims himself a god for it. And now Nature has had enough.

For almost three millenniums, the clever monkey has had his way. Now, with life unbalanced and Man broken from his animal self, Nature wants her world back. Inside some human hearts, she rises. Her instinct becomes a storm. Folks with an affinity for animals find how deeply that connection runs. The inner animal comes forth, and the resulting beast is neither animal nor man but the best and worst elements of both.

Shapechangers are not fluffy critters. The most notorious combine human and animal predations, and even "innocuous" ones such as swan-maids or mice-men can be *very* dangerous. In ancient lore, folks who could assume animal forms were forces to be reckoned with. They might command strange magics, summon hordes of beastly allies, seduce you off in the night or simply tear your throat out. Even their human forms were disturbing — often beautiful, always unpredictable. Just as their animal kin, they were passionate, direct, temperamental and uncannily *aware*. Deeply in touch with the living world, these people seemed equally at home in either skin, yet restless in both. Now these days, with a cruel divide between humanity and the beasts, these folks seem more restless than ever. Yet for all their fearsome power, the changing breeds are no arbitrary monsters. Truth be told, they seem perfectly *natural*. And for other, "mere" human beings, that fact may hold the most terrible kind of charm.

Beneath the Skin

Technically, shapechanging is impossible. Laws of mass, energy, biology and time insist that one species cannot become another. Anyone, however, who's stepped behind the curtains of the World of Darkness knows that "impossible" merely means "rare." Tell the guy running for his life that his ex-girlfriend *didn't* just become a panther! So yes, physical laws get bent when the changing breeds appear. Who *are* these people, and how do they do what they do?

Each culture features legends of animal-folk. You can find spider-women in China, shark-men among Pacific islanders, werewolves in German myth and werebulls in ancient Greece. Yet not all *shapechangers* belong to the true *changing breeds*. The World of Darkness is vast and mysterious, filled with creatures that defy rational explanation. And when it comes to people who assume the forms of beasts (or vice versa!), the rules of "reality" seem shakier than ever. So before we get much further, let's define what we mean by "the changing breeds":

A member of "the changing breeds" is a person who shares a metaphysical connection to an inner animal. This connection allows that person to shift between human and animal forms. The connection is innate, primal and mysterious. No one knows really why or how it happens, but once opened, that bond cannot be broken except by death.

These so-called Changing Folk go by many names: shifters, changers, werecreatures and beast-folk. They've been called two-hearts, skinwalkers, beast-bloods, werewitches and much worse. Some shapechangers refer to themselves as *Nahuals*, *feralis* or simply *ferals*. The latter word has become common in the occult subcultures of the World of Darkness; when vampires, mages and the like refer to beast-folk, these World of Darkness inhabitants often use the term "ferals." Even so, there's no "formal name" for animal-souled shapechangers. Unlike the Uratha or Kindred, the changing breeds have no shared culture to unite them. Diversity, not unity, is their natural state.

The World of Darkness holds many kinds of shapechangers: sorcerers who turn into beasts, vampires who assume animal forms, spirits who possess human hosts, skin-stealing madmen and other mysteries besides. This is not a book about them, though. **The Changing Breeds** deals specifically with human beings who share potent animal souls. Both the human and animal aspects are innately "natural" — that is, they're not mythical hybrids, victims of spirit-rape or manipulators of magical predation. Although shapechangers are clearly magical, their powers don't come

Where Wolves?

Technically, the Uratha found in **Werewolf: The Forsaken** are members of the changing breeds, whether either group wants to admit it or not. The shifters found in this book, though, don't limit their existence to the Uratha cosmology. A Lakota buffalo-woman would snort derisively at the notion that she should bow to Father Wolf's brood . . . just before she tramples the offending wolf-child under her hooves! Although some of the beast-folk in this book share the Uratha view of Creation, many beast-folk do not. A handful of changers *do* acknowledge the spirit world, but the majority focus on the mortal realm instead. In short, don't define a feral by the terms and viewpoints expressed in **Werewolf: The Forsaken** — that feral probably won't do so!

Much to their contempt, the Uratha are not the only "werewolves" in existence, either. Other changers — sometimes called "wolfkin" or "Vargr" — bond with the wolf-soul and assume lupine shapes as well. These werewolves, however, are not in any sense Uratha. They transform into *wolves,* not *wolf-men*, and lack many of the notable — and notorious — traits of their blood-cousins. Most Uratha consider these wolfkin to be, at best, poor cousins. You can read more about the "other" werewolves on **p.156**, and judge for yourself!

from magic spells or rituals; rather, they seem to be inborn or at least inherited. Even before these ferals inherit their shapechanging talents, there's an animalistic edge to their personalities. A true member of the changing breeds feels an accord between two vastly different entities: a "wild" animal and a "civilized" human being. Compared to this innate harmony, the other shapechangers are cheap imitations.

Accords: Song of the Souls

Long ago, it's been said, humans and animals were kin. In time, though, some catastrophe shattered the bond between them. Animals and people grew apart, and humans began to use and abuse the beasts. In time, science and religions claimed that animals were soulless, mindless *things*, living on instinct for Man's convenience.

Ferals know better. In them, the discord between human and animal reaches an *accord* — a spiritual harmony composed of longing, awareness, hunger and rage. Similar to a musical phrase, this accord combines elements of human consciousness and animal instinct, forming one of five different archetypal "roles": the Den-Warder, the Heart-Ripper, the Root-Weaver, the Sun-Chaser and the Wind-Dancer. These roles shape — but do not define — the nature of each werebeast. And through them, dissonance becomes a wild cry of unity.

Feral Hearts

However unified the werefolk may be inside, they *don't* share a common culture. There's no parliament of werebears or concord of spider-folk. Sure, a Corvian werecrow *might* collaborate with a Rajanya weretiger . . . but he'd be just as likely to steal her food or eat her corpse! Ferals tend to be rather independent, and it's unusual to find more than two of them congregating unless they come from extremely social species or they've established a *butoka*, or common sanctuary. For the most part, beast-folk keep tend their own business and leave tribal politics to vampires and werewolves.

Shapechangers range across the animal kingdom. There are werespiders, swans, stags and swine. Most ferals, though, come from the "greater beasts" — that is, animals that have potent physical, spiritual and symbolic power. Not all werebeasts are carnivores, though; folklore describes bison, bulls, horses and even elephants that walk in human form. Regardless of the animal, shapechangers are *dangerous*. There's something uncanny about those who live so close to the beast. You can see it in their eyes and smell it on their skins. Ferals are just that: *feral*. They might seem mannered, but they're never tame.

The feral heart of a shapechanger is Nature incarnate, not a "beast" as vampires understand the term but a channel to animal instinct. That mixed blessing includes sharp senses, startling directness, raw physicality and a visceral awareness about the blood, breath and bones of the natural world. On the downside, a feral person is touchy about things such as pollution and other forms of human carelessness. Her ideas about hygiene and personal space can seem rather . . . primal, and her very presence seems attractive to some folks and freakish to others. In general, a shapechanger is quick to love, quick to bolt and quick to anger. She can sense the thrum of possibilities all around her, and can kick into fight-or-flight in no time. Just as animals, the werefolk seem very much *alive*. This makes them charming, puzzling and sometimes terrifying company.

Nahual: The Beast-Soul

The word *animal* comes from *anima* — "life, breath." And just as a person breathes at her first moment of life, so the beast is with her from the beginning. That animal often slumbers until puberty, but signs of that wild heart emerge at infancy. The child might seem curious as a cat, quiet as a mouse or stubborn as a mule. He'll have unusually thick, luxurious hair and uncannily sharp senses. He may ramble through the woods or watch the Discovery Channel with palpable longing. Depending on the nature of his inner beast, he'll act timid, aggressive, watchful or voracious. Eventually, the beast comes through, and many questions in that child's life are answered . . . while many more are raised.

That inner beast is sometimes called a *Nahual*, a "shadow-animal soul." Originally taken from the Aztec language, this word has no direct English translation. It refers to the animal soul, the shapechanger in general, and to the totemic aspect of that person's spiritual "power animal." Each shapechanger has a single animal Nahual to which he or she is bound. That beast is a part of the feral's soul, and cannot be changed or removed. In most cases, the Nahual manifests through the human form in subtle clues — slightly shiny eyes, glossy crow-black hair, growls and purrs, physical tics and postures, and so on. The shapechanger meets this animal in dreams and shares an affinity with it in the physical world. Beings who can see auras note a shadow of the Nahual hovering around the human form; sometimes, that shadow can even appear to mundane eyes, in which case the person has a *lot* of explaining to do!

The Changing Gift

How does this Changing Gift emerge? No one really knows, and everyone's got a different story. One girl might shelter a dying deer who seems to pass on its spirit. Another boy might dream about becoming a bear until he wakes up naked in a cave. A young woman with equestrian talents might find herself running beside her favorite horse one night, while a thief-in-training cackles with crow-like glee the day he finds black feathers in his bed. The beast appears in an unexpected yet symbolically appropriate way, and from that day on, the feral's life becomes the stuff of legends.

Forms of the Beast

How many forms can a shapechanger take? That, too, depends on the individual. Some shift between their hu-

man forms and an unusually large animal, while others can take on a weird hybrid form that mingles human and animal together. A handful of shapechangers can assume a bestial human form and a primal throwback monster, but these forms often emerge with time and experience. The majority of shapechangers have two or three forms, but Nature makes exceptions to every rule . . .

Enough!

Long ago, the changing breeds may have lived in some version of harmony between Man and Nature. Indeed, many legends say the changing breeds were intended to be living bridges for both. That may still be true, but the relationship between humanity and its world has changed. After more than 200 years of devastation and extinction, Nature is fed up with Man. From faraway villages to deep urban centers, people are inheriting an impossible gift. Lion-men have reappeared in Sierra Leone. Crow-girls caper in Central Park. Goat-gods lead black magic rites in the ruins of New Orleans. Nature seems to be up to something, and whether that's intended as a favor or a fight remains to be seen . . .

At War with the World?

Man, then, is the greatest enemy a feral knows. Not humanity in general, but the worst aspects of Mankind: Man the Hunter. Man the Despoiler. Man the Exploiter of All He Surveys. The clever monkey's antics burn the hearts of all feral-born people. This enmity isn't limited by gender — a woman can be every bit as wasteful and careless as a man — but it pervades every aspect of a feral's world whether he wants to feel it or not. The fact that he himself is human makes the struggle that much worse. To be feral at heart is to feel kinship with both the road-kill and the driver who crushed it.

This struggle comes through in different ways for different werefolk. Some become hermits, withdrawing until there's nowhere left to run. Others subvert human society by undercutting its foundations. A few resort to terrorist strikes, while others roam the fringes and hunt the most dangerous game. And then there are folks who try to change Man's world from within,



Crossover Characters

Some shapechangers congregate with other supernatural folk. Vampires, mages and other creatures may find contacts or allies among the changing breeds. For World of Darkness troupes that enjoy crossover games, a feral character makes an excellent (if sometimes contentious) addition to a **Mage** or **Vampire** chronicle. In some cases — such as werebats and vampires or werecats and witches — such friendships seem poetically perfect.

A **Werewolf** chronicle could be a bit more problematic for shapechanging characters. Although animal-people might seem like perfect companions for the werewolves, the Uratha consider themselves to be the ultimate and rightful predators of all other species. It's also hard to tell the difference between Hosts, skin-thieves and beast-blooded ferals when you're looking in from the outside. A Minjur wererat may find herself gutted by overeager Uratha before she ever gets to prove the distinction.

Storytellers should be careful not to overdo such crossover casts. A roving "Scooby Gang" of supernatural critters can spoil the ominous mood behind the World of Darkness. Unless you're running a feral-based chronicle, we suggest no more than two changing breed characters per group — these beings are rare, mysterious and often unsociable. Still, for players who don't mind a bit of friction between their characters, **The Changing Breeds** can provide additional character options for your troupe.

fighting with soft words and sharp claws to undo the damage before it's too late. In all cases, though, a shapechanger feels torn between fury and compassion. Being human, he loves the world to which he was born. Being animal, he loathes what's been done to make that world. And being both, he feels sympathy for each side . . . even as he tears the skin of his prey.

Werefolk are restless and volatile. There's a predator in each one. Despite the accord within their souls, these beings itch beneath their skins. Belonging to two worlds yet at home in neither, ferals wander from task to task, job to job, destiny to destiny. Some seek peace; others pick fights. Many have trouble come their way even when they do their best to avoid it. Perhaps that's the cost of their gift: fate forces them to act even when they'd rather be left alone. And so, no feral *truly* lives at peace. Inside each one, there's a monster waiting.

Other monsters haunt that world, too — creatures with hungry souls and jagged claws. The Children of the Wolf stalk what they feel are their rightful prey, the Eaters of the Night grasp for pawns, the Callers of the Key work their secret arts. All three strive to conquer everything in sight, and often draw werefolk into their designs. A wizard may seek a werecat ally, a vampire might try to sample bull-man blood, a werewolf could decide to cull that nest of rat-folk, proclaiming his ancient right to hunt. Man on his own is bad enough; Man with shadow-powers is a nightmare!

And so, a feral lives in a nightmare world, seeking harmony but often denied it. Can anyone really blame him, then, when he decides to become a nightmare himself . . . ?

Legends and Realities

Human legends are full of shapechanging beasts, and the changing breeds are as diverse as the creatures they reflect. Myths and movies, romance novels and media subcultures have given us a pile of preconceptions about the beast-folk. The most common truths and fallacies about such creatures in the World of Darkness are as follows:

The Changing Gift is contagious. Myth. You cannot be turned into a weresnake if one bites you. That Gift is there from birth.

You can spot a shapechanger in her human form through subtle clues in her appearance: Fact. Although the usual folklore clues (hairy palms, unibrows, long index fingers, etc.) are false, ferals tend to carry hints of their animal nature in their mannerisms, hair color and texture and physical builds.

Animal-folk are all of "exotic" ethnic descent: Myth rooted in fact. A feral can be born from any ethnicity; most, however, come from regions where people live in close proximity with the animals in question, and have deeply symbolic attachments to them. A werecougar, for example, will probably come from American stock, while a werelion would probably have African ancestry.

Humans become animals through magic spells, curses or demonic pacts: Partly fact. There *are* skinthieves and sorcerers who use magic to take animal forms. In many cases, it's virtually impossible to discern the difference between a feral and a magical skinchanger. This book, however, deals with people who have innate animal souls. For other shapechangers, see World of Darkness books such as **Skinchangers**, **Predators**, **Mage: The Awakening**, **Werewolf: The Forsaken** and so on.

Beast-folk are "pets" created by or mad doctors or sorcerers: Myth, with roots in fact. Some hideous beast-abominations *have* been crafted by human madmen. The changing breeds, though, are not among them. (See above.)

Beast-folk turn feral under the full moon: Myth. Ferals can change at will unless the harmony between their human and bestial selves is lost.

If you cut off a werebeast's paw, it will transform into a human hand: Fact. The old stories are true — a feral's corpse or body parts return to their human form within a minute or two of severance. Likewise, the blood and organs of a werebeast retain their human nature. A weresnake's blood returns a human result on DNA testing, and his lungs, if examined post-mortem, appear perfectly human.

Werecreatures can be killed only by silver: Myth rooted in fact. Similar to werewolves, ferals are very hard to kill, often regenerating an injury before it proves fatal. Silver, though, is a weakness for werebeasts as a whole. Why this susceptibility to "Moonbane" exists is a matter of debate. Still, the Changing Folk appear to be cursed for some reason by the touch of silver. Maybe the werewolves had something to do with that . . .

Real animals fear shapechangers, or bond with them intensely: Partially fact. A feral person bonds unusually well with "real" animals of her Nahual species. From animals who normally fear or hate that species, though, the shapechanger evokes an unusually fierce response. A catman, for example, would not deal well with dogs or birds.

Animal-spirits take over human bodies and turn them into parodies of human beings: Fact, but not for the changing breeds. The so-called *Hosts* are dealt with at length in **Werewolf: The Forsaken**, **Predators** and **Skinchangers**.

Ferals are just eccentric human "furries": Myth, with elements of truth. Some people consider themselves "animals under the skin"; a few of these *therians* even possess the Changing Gift. For the most part, though, furries are human beings and ferals are just a little bit *more* . . .

Any animal could be a shapechanger in disguise: Myth. Although all shapechangers can assume a fairly "natural" animal form, those forms are always slightly larger and more aggressive than true animals of that species.

All changing breeds are predators: Myth. They all, however, share a streak of human aggression.

The changing breeds all serve one great master: Myth. Some groups *do* serve gods or patrons, but doing so is an individual's choice, not an inborn mandate.

Beast-folk are all sub-human or insane: Myth with elements of fact. Although the feral heart burns inside each shapechanger, a beast-person can be as sane or intelligent as any other human being. Still, that bestial element can overwhelm the human intellect, making the shifter *truly* feral.

Animal-folk are cute, cuddly tree-huggers: Myth. Nothing could be further from the truth . . .

Theme and Mood

A member of the changing breeds lives each day of his life balancing between humanity and his animal self. In that vein, a chronicle that features one or more characters from **The Changing Breeds** takes on some of the themes and moods of this book. Whether you're a player or a Storyteller, we suggest adding these elements to a shapechanger saga. You might be adding a single werecrow to an ongoing World of Darkness story or weaving a whole chronicle around the adventures of a feral group. Either way, the following story elements will come into play eventually.

Theme

As habitats shrink and cities multiply, a theme of *urgent righteous fury* surges through any tale of the feral folk. As you might imagine, people who are intimately tied to Nature are fed up with the carelessness of their fellow human beings, and many aren't shy (or squeamish) about how they handle such situations. This isn't the Death Rage of Uratha hunters but a primal mix of disgust and desperation. As humans sharing animal souls, the beast-folk know both sides of the crisis. Still, affairs can't continue as they have been. Something *must* be done about it — *soon*. Otherwise, everything that matters to a feral soul will be destroyed.

Tied in with that dilemma is the theme of *balance*. After all, a feral walks between two worlds. Her soul craves homes in each while seeing the dangers of both. Her talents mark her as a herald between Man and Nature, and to fulfill that task she'll have to find some form of peace between them.

Mood

Animals experience their world in a visceral, shameless wash of powerful sensations. And so it's . . . well, *natural* that a changing breed tale features *raw sensuality* as its dominant mood. Compared to the stunted perceptions most humans take for granted, a feral feels her world with staggering acuity. This awareness cuts both ways, though — a cloud of smog or pile of trash seems 10 times fouler to a Brythian swan than it would to a normal boy . . . although some scavengers might find that even more appealing! As players or Storytellers, be sure to take all the senses into account. Potent sensations can go a long way toward establishing the proper mood for a feral-based tale.

How to Use This Book

By now, you've learned the basics about the changing breeds through this **Introduction**. Let's see what the rest of the book has to offer . . .

Chapter One: The Wild Heart lays out the vital lore, theories and particulars regarding the changing breeds as a whole.

Chapter Two: Building the Perfect Beast explores the rules and guidelines for making and running a feral character. These include new Advantages, Aspects, rules for werebeast shapes and the strange effects of the Delusion.



Chapter Three: The Breeds Beneath Our Skins ranges across the spectrum of beast-folk, revealing their legends and traits, habits and talents.

And finally, **Chapter Four: Faces in the Smoke** reveals a collection of werebeast characters, from Old Man Possum to a surprisingly deadly deer-girl.

Read carefully — and enjoy the show!

Sources and Inspiration

Stories of animals, people and combinations of the two have filled human legendry since the first human beings began to speak. In creating this book, though, some tales and media have been more influential than others . . .

Fiction

Bitten by Kelley Armstrong. Although this book is a werewolf novel, it features rich portrayals of the feral heart and animal sensuality.

Tarzan of the Apes and other related books by Edgar Rice Burroughs. Perhaps Tarzan wasn't the *original* Noble Savage, but he's certainly the most *popular* one!

"My Lady of the Hearth" by Storm Constantine. Think your cat might make a great human? Think again.

"Birds," "Crow Girls," *Greenmantle*, *Someplace to be Flying*, *Spiritwalk*, "Seven Wild Sisters," "Wild Horses" and many other tales by Charles de Lint. Simply listing all the shapechanging inhabitants of de Lint's universe would take half up this chapter . . . his Crow Girls, though, are especially notable.

Anansi Boys and "A Dream of a Thousand Cats" (from *The Sandman*) by Neil Gaiman. The novel explores a realm of shapechanging beasties, while the story presents a classic look at human-feline relationships.

Grimm's Fairy Tales by William and Jakob Grimm. In any of their many incarnations, Grimm's tales feature shapechanging people and their often dark adventures.

The Conan stories of Robert E. Howard. Often described as "pantherish," "feral," "wolf-like" and in other animalistic terms, Conan is more beast than man, yet remains superior to the "civilized" folk he meets.

Owl in Love by Patrice Kindl. This teenage wereowl has a Changing Gift that runs in the family.

The Jungle Book by Rudyard Kipling. This should be obvious . . .

The Firekeeper series (*Through Wolf's Eyes*, *Wolf's Head, Wolf's Heart*, *The Dragon of Despair*, *Wolf Captured*, *Wolf Hunting* and *Wolf's Blood*) and *Brother to Dragons, Companion to Owls* by Jane Lindskold. A saga about a feral girl, her animal companions and their adventures in high-fantasy courts, this series features an entertaining dichotomy between "totemic" animal ideals and the ways in which wild things actually behave. Meanwhile, *Brother to Dragons* presents a potentially insane young lady and the mad world she inhabits.

"The Shadow Over Innsmouth," "The Dunwich Horror," "Imprisoned With the Pharaohs," "Rats in the Walls," "Pickman's Model," "The Other" and "The Cats of Ulthar" by H.P. Lovecraft. These classic stories present animalistic humans or magical animals involved in mysterious doings on the edge of human sanity.

Touching Spirit Bear by Ben Mikaelsen. This must-read teen novel brings a wild boy to balance through an ordeal with a grizzly bear.

Equus by Peter Shaffer. A powerful play about a boy obsessed with horses. The film version stars Richard Burton and Peter Firth.

The Orphan's Tales: In the Night Garden and *In the Cities of Coin and Spice*, plus *Yume No Han: The Book of Dreams* and *The Labyrinth* by Catherynne Valente. An enchanting swirl of tales within tales, the Orphan's Tales series features fox-girls, selkies, bear-folk, snake queens, dog-men, swan-sisters and a host of other shapechanged characters.

The Kitty series by Carrie Vaughn (*Kitty and the Midnight Hour*, *Kitty Takes a Holiday* and especially *Kitty Goes to Washington*). A werewolf radio host named Kitty quickly goes on to become an unwitting spokesperson for the supernatural world. *Kitty Goes to Washington* features a sexy werejaguar to boot!

The Island of Doctor Moreau by H.G. Wells. Behave as men or enter the House of Pain . . .

The White Wolf books dealing with the changing breeds both old and new, all by various authors. The most important among these books would be the current **World of Darkness: Skinchangers** by Chris Campbell, Jess Hartley and Peter Schaefer; even so, the older "classic WoD" books have been very influential, too . . . especially since two of those authors wrote this book as well!

The Wood Wife and *The Coyote Road: Trickster Tales* by Terri Windling (author of the first, editor with Ellen Datlow of the second). Both books feature potent tales of animal-folk in the modern world.

Additional Inspirations

Grendel by John Gardner, *The Owl Woman* by Elen Sentier, *Deerskin* by Robin McKinley, *The Shape Changer's Wife* by Sharon Shinn and *The Rose and the Beast: Fairy Tales Retold* by Francesca Lia Block. There's also a huge body of "shifter" fiction in the paranormal romance subgenre. Although none of these books were specifically influential to **The Changing Breeds**, werebeast fans can find plenty of titles such as *Jaguar Moon* by Teri Adkins, *Nocturnal* by Madelaine Montague, the *Immortal Ops* series by Mandy M. Roth and *Ghost Cats* by Jaycee Clark, Elaine Corvidae, Shelley Munro and Michelle M. Pillow.

Nonfiction

Books that informed or inspired **The Changing Breeds** include the following:

The Life of Mammals by David Attenborough

Medicine Cards: The Discovery of Power Through the Ways of Animals by David Carson, Jamie Sams and Angela C. Werneke

Africa's Animal Kingdom: A Visual Celebration by Kit Coppard

Native American Myth & Legend: An A-Z of People and Places by Mike Dixon-Kennedy

Living Stories of the Cherokee edited by Barbara Duncan

American Indian Myths and Legends by Richard Erdoes and Alfonso Ortiz

Women Who Run With the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype by Clarissa Pinkola Estés

Spirits of the Wild: The World's Great Nature Myths by Gary Ferguson

Animals in Translation: Using the Mysticism of Autism to Decode Animal Behavior by Temple Grandin and Catherine Johnson

Intimate Nature: The Bond Between Woman and Animals edited by Linda Hogan, Deena Metzger and Brenda Peterson

Wild Life: The Remarkable Lives of Ordinary Animals by Edward Kanze

In the Company of Crows and Ravens by John M. Marzluff, Paul Ehrlich and Tony Angell

Cesar's Way: The Natural, Everyday Guide to Understanding and Correcting Common Dog Problems by Cesar Millan and Melissa Jo Peltier

The Nine Emotional Lives of Cats: A Journey Into the Feline Heart by Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson

The Orphan Girl and Other Stories: West African Folk Tales by Buchi Offodile

Inside the Animal Mind: A Groundbreaking Exploration of Animal Intelligence by George Page

Living Wisdom:Animal Spirits by Nicholas J. Saunders

Crows: Encounters With the Wise Guys by Candace Savage

The Others:How Animals Made Us Human by Paul Shepard

Additional Inspirations

For the psychology and behavior of feral folk, we drew from self-help books such as *Yes, Your Teen Is Crazy!: Loving Your Kid Without Losing Your Mind* by Michael J. Bradley and Jay N. Giedd, *The Dark Side of the Light Chasers* by Debbie Ford and *Reviving Ophelia* by Mary Pipher and Ruth Ross.

Other sources for beast-folk lore include *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia* by Jeremy Black, Anthony Green and Tessa Rickards, *Monsters: An Investigator's Guide to Magical* Beings by John Michael Greer, *Harper's Encyclopedia of Mystical and Paranormal Experience* by Rosemary Ellen Guiley, *The Element Encyclopedia of Witch Craft: The Complete A-Z for the Entire Magical World* by Judika Illes, *Symbols of Africa* by Heike Owusu, *The Magician's Companion: A Practical and Encyclopedic Guide to Magical and Religious Symbolism* by Bill Whitcomb, wikipedia.com, National Geographic and Smithsonian magazines, *Shaman: The Paintings of Susan Seddon-Boulet* published by Pomegranate Press and *The Dorling Kindersley Visual Encyclopedia of Animals* by Dorling Kindersley.

Movies

Although there are no shapechanging animals in *An Inconvenient Truth* or *Koyaanisqatsi*, those films inspired the "urgent fury" theme running throughout this book.

The essential documentary *Grizzly Man* shows what happens when a modern dude goes feral. Was he brave, crazy, stupid or all three? No easy answers here.

The Bear, directed by Jean-Jacques Annaud, tells the story of an orphaned bear cub's struggle to survive. Told with insight, charm, humor and virtually no dialog, this film provides a master class in ursine behavior . . . and a scathing look at human intrusion into the wilderness.

The original versions and the remakes of *Cat People* and *The Fly* explore fear, transformation and gender conflicts when someone's "inner beast" comes out.

Tarzan and His Mate and *Greystoke: Legend of Tarzan of the Apes* capture the feral grace and passion of a character who's often considered a joke. The older film also features a ravishing Jane who's as sexily animalistic as her "ape-man."

Although *Babe* and *Babe 2: A Pig in the City* are comedies, both films have sobering things to say about the relationships between humans and our animal companions. *Babe 2*, in particular, features some very dark undercurrents involving abandonment, cruelty and medical experimentation.

The Russian thrillers *Night Watch* (*Nochnoy Dozor*) and *Day Watch* (*Dnevnoy Dozor*) feature feral shapechangers and fantastic evocations of the World of Darkness.

The *Jaws* films (and their many rip-offs) offer powerful themes and images about implacable Nature, unconscious fears and the terror of sharp teeth. *Grizzly*, meanwhile, is a landlocked *Jaws* rip-off that still manages to evoke a potent sense of fear.

The Blair Witch Project inspires the gut-freeze terror of being truly lost in the woods . . . at night . . . when something's after you. . . .

Dagon features a very creepy town whose Changing Gift ties them to the sea. *Donnie Darko*, meanwhile, shows how eerie a man-sized rabbit can be.

The Protector (Tom yung goong) is an astonishing martial arts flick featuring Tony Jaa and his two elephant "kinfolk." Worth seeing for Jaa's feral athleticism, and for the spiritual relationship he shares with those elephants.

As for *Animal Farm* . . . well, "All animals are created equal, but some are more equal than others . . ."

For roleplayers seeking inspiration, check out the feral characters played by Jodie Foster in *Nell*, Anthony Hopkins in *The Silence of the Lambs* and *Hannibal* (which also features scary swine), Summer Glau in *Serenity*, Robert De Niro in *Cape Fear*, Angela Bassett in *Strange Days*, Daniel Craig in *Casino Royale*, Samuel L. Jackson in *Jungle Fever* and Angelina Jolie in *Girl, Interrupted*. Few of these films are fantasies *per se*, but you can see the beast just under the skin in each performance.



Additional Inspirations

An American Werewolf in London, *Brotherhood of the Wolf*, *Captive Wild Woman*, *Cruel Intentions*, *The Ghost and the Darkness*, *Ginger Snaps*, *Gorillas in the Mist*, *The Island of Lost Souls* and *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, *The Jungle Book* (animated and live-action versions), *March of the Penguins*, *Passion in the Desert*, *Two Brothers*, *The Wasp Woman*, *Wolf*, *Wolf's Rain* and *Wolfen*.

Music

A short list of the musical artists who've inspired this book and the changing breeds in general would include Afro Celt Sound System, Azam Ali, Emilie Autumn, Sheila Chandra, Daemonia Nymphe, Dead Can Dance, Lisa Gerrard, Yungchen Lhamo, Loreena McKennitt, S.J. Tucker, Steve Roach, Wendy Rule and Vas. Although Maddy Prior's music in general wasn't a big influence, her song cycle "The Fabled Hare" (from the album *Year*) warrants honorable mention for tying rabbits, women and shapechangers together through a single soul. The same album also features a chilling take on the classic raven song "Twa Corbies."

Lexicon

Common Terms

accord: The "harmonic pitch" of a shapechanger's soul, tending toward one of five *Heart-Paths*.

***aiaetha* (aii-ay-tha):** The reflection a shapechanger sees of her other self. Most times, this reflection is internal; occasionally, it might be seen by outside observers as well.

Alpha: The leader of a feral *band*, regardless of species. Also one of a mated pair who jointly commands that group.

band: A group of cooperating shapechangers. Also called a *pack*, *gather*, *troop*, *murder* or *flock* when the species suits the term.

beast-blood: A *feral*, especially one who's descended from a family of known shapechangers. Also known by the name of the beast in question, i.e., bear-blood, raven-blood, etc.

Berserk, the: From the Norse term for shapechanging warriors; capitalized, it refers to a wild fit of rage or panic. (See also *the Fury*.)

butoka (boo-TOKE-ah): A sanctuary where



shapechangers of different types meet in relative safety. Established either in remote wilderness or on private human properties, these hideaways allow ferals to "be themselves" without threats from humans or other night-creatures.

Change, the: The act of shifting forms.

Changing Gift: Common, often sardonic, term for the talent that allows a person to become an animal as well.

Changing Folk: A formal name for *ferals* as a whole.

Den-Warder: The Protector accord, which nurtures, sustains and guards a feral person's loved ones. Typified by mother bears, guard dogs and worker ants.

Delusion, the: Psychic screen of denial that rationalizes or blocks out memories for human beings who witness a shapechanger in action.

Essence: Spirit energy, used to employ certain magical powers.

feral: Common term for animal-souled shapechangers.

First Change: The night the inner beast bursts out.

First Tongue, the: Legendary language of a bygone world. Now remembered in the language of spirits.

Fury, the: Innate combination of instinct and disgust at Man's ways.

going beast, *or* **going feral:** Shifting from human into animal form.

harmony: The sense of balance between Man and Nature in a feral's life. (Capitalized, it also refers to the game trait that takes the place of Morality for a changing breed character.)

Heart-Path(s): The five *accords*, either singly or collectively.

Heart-Ripper: The Predator accord, which revels in hunting, fighting, tormenting and killing. Epitomized by rabid dogs, sadistic cats and the Big Bad Wolf.

kin: People or animals who keep close company with ferals yet lack the Changing Gift.

Lost Folk, the: Shapechangers who go too far toward either human or beast and lose the ability to share both.

Man, Beast and Nature: The archetypal trinity of a werebeast's world. Capitalized as honorifics, "Man" is the gender-neutral principle of humanity, "Beast" is the essence of animals and "Nature" is the living world beyond those two elements.

Moonbane: Silver, which burns the skins of feral folk.

Moon-Callers: Werewolves.

Nahual (nah-HOO-al): The animal aspect to a feral's soul, somewhat like a "totem power animal," but found internally rather than externally. From an Aztec word for "animal shadow soul," this term can also refer to ferals in general.

newblood: A young shapechanger or fresh member of a *band*.

quiet codes: Lessons that reflect the laws of Nature and the threats of Man.

rabbit run: The blind-panic form of a *Berserk* fit.

Regency: A wealthy, influential family that takes pride in an ancestral Changing Gift.

Root-Weaver: The Builder accord, which invents, constructs, repairs and designs technology and structure. Embodied by weaving spiders, dam-building beavers and burrow-carving groundhogs.

running off: The act of casting a feral out of her band. Also called *running out*.

"shit-speak": Communication through elimination, animal-style; expressing one's self in methods that humans find disgusting.

soul-kin: Natural animals that share a shapechanger's Nahual species, i.e., tigers for Rajanya.

Storm, the: The rough period before and during a feral human's *First Change*.

Sun-Chaser: The Rebel accord, which makes its own defiant path in the world. Personified by the lone wolf, the clever fox and the Trickster Coyote.

therian: Uncommon name for a *feral*; also a normal human who considers himself an animal at heart.

tiger storm: The blood-rage form of a *Berserk*.

were-: Prefix referring to a human who assumes an animal form (*werecat*, *werehawk*, etc.) Originally drawn from a Germanic word for "man," *were* features mystical connotations that essentially mean "one who knows how to change form."

Wind-Dancer: The Visionary accord, which guides intuition and inspiration. Symbolized by the wise owl, the wild stallion, the spirit-wolf and the Great Old Bear.




MACK



It looks and stinks like Hell.

My nostrils try to lock tight against it all, but it's no use. The seething mass of asphalt steam blasts through my skull regardless. The air-conditioner and tight-wound windows don't help at all. I can only imagine what suffering the men out there must feel.

Then again, they're not like me.

Their yellow plastic heads bob and tilt on over-muscled necks. The blazing safety vests they wear burn my eyes, but I think that's the idea. Some lounge against their shovels and picks, while others wave flags, joke around or spread boiling tar behind the black steel beast that shits it out. I try to remind myself that this is necessary; without tar-spreaders and their foul machines, my truck would be damned near useless. I certainly couldn't roam the interstate like some retarded cowboy in a metal-skinned steed. I'd be stuck walking everywhere . . . or, at best, maybe bouncing my ass in a cart pulled by skittish drays. I can't ride, someone like me. Horses scare easy at the scent of bear.

Huh. Some "bear" I am! My thick ass dents a dry peeling cushion that used to be some cousin's hide. What possessed me to buy a truck with leather seats, I don't know. There's Coca-Cola aftertaste burning on the back of my tongue. That's not hibernation fat jiggling over my belt — it's 100% pure Grade-A flabby American man-tit. Sure, I'm a furry old cuss, but if I had the slightest shred of self-respect, I'd open this rattletrap's door and swipe a few of those plastic bobble-heads right off their fucking necks.

Jesus, it stinks worse than death.

But I need it, I tell myself. I need that road paved. So I hold my breath as the flaggers wave us by, trying not to imagine the earth screaming under her thick black skin. Trying not to think about the roadkill. Trying not to imagine the dens displaced, the streams diverted, the poisons boiling through the air or leeching into the water table from this monument to my convenience.

And it just doesn't work. I can't not think about it. The stink of Hell is too great to ignore.

I try to ignore the itching underneath my skin. The ache in the bones beneath my face. The sledgehammer chorus in my heart and the phantom sear of asphalt stench that follows me all the way home.

I can't not think about that, either.

I need to go out. Soon.

There's a billboard near my house: THERE ARE NO BEARS IN OUR WOODS. I'm not sure what it's supposed to mean. There's no attribution or advertisement attached. Is the message bragging? Mournful? Alarmed? Were the sponsors of that board saying that the lack of bears was a good thing or a bad thing?

All I know is that they're mistaken.

And tonight, I'm gonna prove them wrong.

Chapter One: The Wild Heart

When you look into an animal's eyes, a kindred spirit looks back at you. Through most of human existence, this bond was recognized, even revered. Yet for the last few centuries, Man has convinced himself that animals are just stupid beasts. Being called "an animal" has become the sort of insult given to serial killers and politicians. Even then, though, there's an undercurrent of admiration, as if such a vicious *thing* held a throwback gift to an older sort of humanity.

In the case of the changing breeds, that's the absolute truth.

Ferals are human beings. Yet they're also animals in fact as well as spirit. In the old days, ferals may have been shamans, warrior-kings, priestesses and oracles; now they're just freaks. Or are they? There's something regal even now in the steady gaze of a feral human being.

So where do they come from? What are they like? How can they work an impossible gift, and what effects does that gift have on them in return? That's the matter we find here at hand. Before you can take on a feral's skin, you have to know at least a little bit about what's going on behind her eyes. Always, though, there'll be unanswered questions. Mystery is part of an animal's allure.

Barbarism is needed every four or five hundred years to bring the world back to life. Otherwise, it would die of civilization.

– Edmond and Jules de Goncourt

Thou, Nature, Art My Goddess ...

First, understand this: We have always been here. From the first stirrings in Eden or the tentative footsteps of the mud-people, we have been here. Our legends are as many as the stars in the sky, yet one thing is certain: we are as old as the first flames in a cave-dweller's hand . . . and older than that besides! When the first beast nuzzled the first human child, we were there.

In the beginning (for isn't that how such tales always start?), there was only dust and spirit. A whirl of stars above vast nothingness. Yet in that vast nothingness, something stirred. Was it the hand of God Almighty rising from His restless sleep? Was it Raven cracking the primordial First Egg? Did Tiamat stretch her endless wings and call the gods to war? No matter — there are myths enough for men to fill their books with. Let us simply say that Possibility became Form and the world we know was born.

It is a fact that others came before us — huge entities that blotted out the sun. Scientists would call them dinosaurs, but other myths speak of Great Old Ones and visitations long since passed. I myself have seen no such things, yet I know in my bones they were there. In any case, the beasts and men we know of now were yet to walk the earth. Something vast and Elder ruled the lands and seas . . . something that has perished or at least passed beyond the realm of normal sight. In their passing, the First were born, and it was they who laid the groundwork for the earth where we now roam.

The First

It's been said that the First were the greatest of our kinds: beasts and human beings who embodied all that we could be. Of course, it's also said that we are now refinements of the crude designs of those First Beings. Were they the best or worst of us? No matter — once again, they existed, and for us that is enough. Those First did hunt each other: men hunted animals, beasts hunted beasts, men hunted men and the world lived red. Yet there existed a primal balance, a sense that all was right even when

blood flowed freely. There was passion and predation — birth, death and birth again. Call it Eden if you will: the earth, an endless Garden with perfect cycles of life and death.

Kin and Cousins

We were all family then: human and animal, flesh and spirit were all one. It's been said that our First ancestors could shift between human and animal forms as naturally as you or I can breathe. Other stories, though, speak of bargains struck, of tricksters and mothers and children born from moonlight. I have heard that we changers were shaped from Coyote's dung, or from the tears of angels cast down from heaven. Travel far enough, and you'll hear about women giving themselves in love and lust to beasts, or of lost gods who spread their seeds in mortal wombs. The Snake that tempted Eve, it has been said, was her lover, too; still other legends speak of Lilith, who lay with gods, men and beasts alike in the days before Eve was born. Perhaps the djinn cloaked themselves in flesh and took passion with all species, or the gods of Egypt rose from holy unions to stand beside men and beasts. Again, it doesn't matter. Those days are past. We are left with what we are, and that is miracle enough.

In that time, there was Nature, Goddess of us all. There were no fields to till, cars to fuel or hammers bending iron to our will. When we dressed at all, it was in the skins of cousins we had slain. So was it Nature, then, that birthed our Changing Gift? Was the talent of skin-shifting given as a bribe or blessing? Did the First Beasts mate with the First Humans to create our pedigree? Or did our Gift swell up in the breasts of shamans who dared our cousins' dens? So many stories, all ending the same way: people could become beasts that could become people once again. The line between them — if there was a line at all — was thin and changeable. As Mother's birthright, we shared a single heart, and our skins could change to match its beat.

Humanity and the beasts lived in savage harmony then, taking food when necessary, sharing favors when they could. We hunted together, loved together, fought together, died together. Love and blood were our communions, and the Clever Monkey knew his place. A pity that wasn't to last.

The Clever Monkey

What is it hammering inside our skulls that drives us toward achievement? What spurs the Clever Monkey and his games of overkill? Did the First Men stare into their flames and see the cities rise? Or was it cold and famine that drove them to seek more? Did gods visit them in cloaks of gold, or were pacts with demons struck? Is it simply that we humans are a restless breed? In any case, the Clever Monkey learned his tricks and brought them first into the world.

It probably began with the fire that drove beasts into the night. Or the spears and knives that gave Man claws of his own. It may have been the garments fashioned out of elk hide or the paints blasted on to cave walls to celebrate the hunt. The Clever Monkey's intellect was restless, making words and weapons, clothing and creeds. In time, the beasts either slunk away in fear or gathered at his fire to share Man's meals. Was it then, I wonder, that he began to see himself as their superior? Or was something else at work?

The Rending

The ages have given us myths of snakes and ravens, tempters and satans, willful women and murderous men. Could one crisis have been enough to rend humanity apart from our animal kin? Or was it the gradual progress from fire pit to field? Whatever caused it, the damage was done. The Clever Monkey became Man the Conqueror: slayer of beasts, despoiler of the earth and oppressor of his own kind.

Understand me: when I say "Man," I do not speak of male and female. Although men certainly took up the bloody plow of Cain, women also played their part. Legends speak of war-goddesses and hags — battle-crows and hungry crones. Men and women both set their steps away from Nature and beat a path of new design. That path drove the beasts into hiding, crafting enmity where unity once stood.

Two Beats, a Single Heart

And our kind, our changing breeds? Perhaps they rose up then, reminders of what soon was lost. Tales speak of diplomats between our realms, folks born of two souls to hold the hands of each. Other legends, gorier, cast us as predators of Man. We were, it's said, warders of Nature's world, guardians at the gates of Eden. One tale describes the angels placed by God as an eagle, a lion and a bull. Others set us at the thresholds of the moon, following a chorus of light-spirits through the world of Man. The songs of our wolf-brothers, the so-called Uratha, draw our pedigrees from parental spirits — Mother Serpents and Father Wolfs. In any case, we rose, our hearts beating to the twin pulse of animal and Man.

Through time and trial, we learned to dance with our twin selves. The beast recognized the human, while the human saw the beast. There's a term for this: aiaetha, which means "the soul which sees itself." It manifests in dreams and vision quests, sometimes even in reflections other folk can see. This aiaetha called us off from the fields of men, to run naked with the beasts under the light of sun or moon. In time, men learned to fear us even when we did not hunt among them. We were anathamized for our twin souls, driven out or hunted down. Soon there was no place for us at the Clever Monkey's fire. He might yoke the dogs and oxen, but our twin hearts could not be tamed.

Rise of Man

Like Babel, the Clever Monkey rose, soon towering over Nature. He felled forests, changed rivers, ripped stones from their earthen beds. It was magnificent, true — you and I would not be here without such accomplishments. But as plains became cities and plows became swords, Man the Conqueror forgot his cousins and forged new gods.

Are there gods, I wonder? Or are we crafters of our own destinies? There are spirits, *true enough, beyond the mortal realm, but I wonder — are there truly* gods? *To match his grand ambition, Man set his worship above the Nature he once revered and carved pantheons in his own image. Originally, these gods hailed from wilderness; in time, though, they demanded temples and scriptures to their glory. Is it any wonder that the*





most notorious of those scriptures proclaimed Man as lord of all creation, second only under God? Or any wonder that such lords would eventually subjugate their world?

Man the Despoiler

In the shadows of that world, we moved — the changing kind. We slept in wolf dens and capered with the bears. Beneath the waves, we swam with sharks, and in the skies we wore hawk wings. Slipping between forms, we lived among animals and humans. We learned crafts of making and arts of magic. In some places, we even became valued members of Man's community. But again, it wasn't to last.

Man set himself at odds with Nature. Convinced of his divinity or terrified by his mortality, he defied the cycles of life and death. His priests wove tales of hells below and gods above. To drive Man on, they turned their brothers and sisters against the wild world. Fear became their gospel and ruin, their empire. Nothing could be worse, they said, than to be like beasts. The cousins we embraced were demonized; soon, we were demonized, too. Fires blazed in city squares and witches, changers and innocent animals screamed their last breaths to uncaring skies.

The dregs of that world birthed nightmares. The restless and hungry dead — always with us in one form or another — spread like plague. Sorcerers wove their dreadful arts with the conviction of Man at his worst. Sometimes we joined them, finding kinship in our secrecy; other times, we battled them or became their slaves. A lot of us just fled, *to the wilderness where Man's corruption could not reach. Soon, that became impossible. The Clever Monkey had his sights on* everything, *and no land stayed beyond his reach. With him came the night-folk, and nowhere could truly be called "wild" for long.*

In time, industry outpaced faith. Polished steel and polished minds ruled the day. Yet as scrubbed-up Men of Reason mapped the heart of the living world, they inked its lines in blood. Tribal people were enslaved, beasts were slaughtered to extinction, trees were cleared from lands to sail and sink across the seas. I won't say nothing *good came of it all, but Man's harmony was lost in his ambitions. Coal smoke and gold dust ruled Man's heart, and in their wake they left mountains of skulls behind.*

Return of the Wild

"Man has conquered Nature," it was said. And for a while, it seemed that might be true. Our changing breeds faltered, caught between the rush of Man and the retreat of Beasts. When lions, tigers and bears become trophies and child's tales, where were people like us supposed to turn? The rare Changing Gift became rarer still; generations passed without it manifesting. The sects that nurtured us were converted to "reason" or swept away. Occasionally, a person "went feral"; sometimes, he might even be called a "noble savage" before his inevitable civilization. Yet there was little room for our kind in that world, and we faded into legendry.

Until now.

Nature has had enough. *The cycle has begun again. Across the world, tides rise and the earth trembles. Beasts long thought "docile" have returned to teach Man what fear means. In the cities, children paint themselves like animals and pound skin drums like wildmen. The seasons shift like titans in uncertain beds, and the machines that made Man so proud suddenly look like toys instead. You and I are products of this age — changing hearts in a changing world. The Clever Monkey has been caught with his fingers in a trap, and we can smell his nervousness. Do we set him free? Or tear his throat out? He is* us, *after all, and his trap is ours as well. Can we find a new and savage harmony? Or is our world of darkness too far gone to save?*

When I listen, I hear two heartbeats. In the mirror, I see two selves. What do you *perceive, I wonder? When your soul looks into itself, what reflection do you see? Are you running through the shadows or stepping into light? I can't answer those questions for you. That role is yours to play. But there's a beast in your mirror. It has always been there. And then and now, it's part of you.*

The past is done. This moment is the one that matters now.

The Changing Gift

The feral heart is a gift. It is not, however, an easy one to receive or bear. A person with "wild blood" finds herself going up against everything the modern world calls civilized or sane. Her animal nature may or may not be predatory, but the restless and sometimes cruel streak of humanity colors that essential nature into something dangerous. Intrinsically human yet undeniably bestial, she may be considered difficult, temperamental, even retarded by her human peers. By the standards of modern psychology, she's probably considered autistic. Until she assumes her animal form, she'll feel lost . . . and once she *does*, she'll know that no place in the modern world can truly be called her home.

So what's it like to host the Changing Gift? How does it work? What does it do? How does a feral realize what she truly is, and what happens when and if she does? What if she *doesn't* accept the Gift? And where can she turn when life itself seems impossible? Let's explore that world and see. . . .

(***Note:*** For game rules regarding these particulars, see Chapter Two: Building the Perfect Beast.)

Stirrings

"Wow, you're *weird*!" That's the common litany of a shapechanger's childhood. Whether those words are spoken in Bantu or Bronx English, the refrain's the same. That weirdness isn't always a bad thing, of course. As the child soon discovers, some people will find that oddness utterly compelling. "Animal magnetism" is more than just a phrase to a feral person. From childhood onward, it's a fact of life.

A future shapechanger manifests signs of his beast-nature long before he can truly change. Those signs depend on his animal aspect. He might caw like a raven when he's laughing, or bark like a jackal in his crib. Chances are, he'll

have unusually thick and luxurious hair, large and expressive eyes, notable teeth and sharper-than-average senses. His physical build will depend a lot on the animal aspect as well, while his temperament mirrors that animal nature, too. A lion-child, for instance, would be bold and fierce, the opposite of a rabbit-boy. He might seem eager or distracted, but there's a sense of presence in everything he does. When he acts, he does so with unusual, even unnerving, conviction.

Folktales claim that you can spot a wild child by certain signs. While that's true, those signs are almost always wrong. There are no "set" finger-lengths or phantom tattoos on the child's body. Every so often, strange birthmarks might be found — signs that resemble paw prints or fur markings. He might emerge from the womb with large, sharp teeth, or she may sport a hairy tail. This sort of foreshadowing, though, is rare. Most times, the animal birthright is subtle. The big changes come afterwards, when the surge of hormones ushers in puberty and brings that boy or girl face-to-face with the animal soul: the *Nahual*.

The Nahual

The core of any shapechanger's life is her Nahual: the animal aspect to which she's bound. Many people think of this aspect as a totem or power animal yet the bond runs much deeper than that. The Nahual is not an external entity but an innate part of that person from birth. Although it's not discernibly genetic, you could say it's in her blood.

Every feral has one Nahual. She might enjoy the presence of other animals, even gravitate toward certain ones, but the Nahual is singular and constant. Characteristics of that beast come through in her personality, mannerisms and quirks as well as certain aspects of her physical build. A cheetah-blooded person, for example, would be thin and lean, while a bear-blooded one would be massive in comparison. As the child grows, the nature of the animal emerges. A rat-child might be sneaky, an owl-kid watchful. People start to coin nicknames for the child without ever knowing why; the tradition of animal names may come from such awareness.

Like Calls to Like

From birth onward, that person shares an affinity with other "natural" animals of that type; a cat-girl, for example, bonds intuitively with felines, while a bull-boy seems at ease around bovines male and female. On the flip side, natural rivals or prey of that animal (rabbits with cats, for example) will sense the Nahual even if the feral person has never changed shape. Those animals will go out of their way to flee or attack that person when she gets closer than they care to be! This bond is empathic, not telepathic. The feral person isn't so much able to "read" other animals as she just "feels" like one of them at heart.

Animals aren't the only ones who might notice the inner beast. Other people — especially ones with highly developed mystical awareness — can sense the animal presence under the person's skin, even when they don't realize what they're seeing. Aunt Judy, for example, might buy stuffed tigers for Butch "because he just seems like a little tiger to me." For people with more



Animal Nature

Though human by birth, ferals *are*, at heart, animals. And despite centuries of human self-delusion, those "dumb animals" have complex thoughts and emotions. So how *does* an animal think? And how does life appear to beast-blooded person?

According to decades of studies and experience, naturalists believe that animals often . . .

• Deal with the world as it *is*, not the way it *might be*.

• Perceive that world in images and impressions, not words or abstract concepts.

• Infer more from tone and posture than from spoken words.

• Possess a sense of "self," but as part of a larger whole, not as a unique and independent entity.

• Have little sense of "self-control" unless they're trained to behave in certain ways.

• Follow innate impulses but learn to work around circumstances.

• Recognize cause and effect.

• Remember impressions and recognize patterns with startling accuracy.

• Have strong and flexible concepts of "family."

• Communicate through gestures, scents, intonations, touch and emotional awareness — and sense keenly the emotions of others.

• Lack abstract senses of "right" and "wrong," but understand active social rules and behavior.

• Focus utterly on the task at hand.

• Express their needs and wants clearly and directly . . . although not always *honestly* if there's something to be gained from deception.

• Learn, grow, feel emotions and suffer pain.

Humans can't *really* know what it's like to be a beast. Even shapechangers filter those impressions through their human birth perspective. Still, the idea that animals are just complex machines has been discarded by all but the most diehard behaviorists. Animals *think*. They *feel*. They learn, communicate and suffer. Though their consciousness is not our own, they *do* possess consciousness. And for role-players, Storytellers and humans at large, that truth has profound consequences in and out of the game.

informed perceptions — say, vampires or wizards — spotting that beast-soul is easier, though not always assured. Sometimes it appears as an animal shadow in the feral person's aura, as a glint of beast in her eyes or as a whiff of animal in her scent. Every so often, the beast-soul might manifest as a *real* shadow or reflection, especially if the human and animal natures have fallen out of harmony with one another. At that point, *anyone* can see the shadow of the beast, and the shapechanger will probably need to hide.

Spiritual Concerns

Regardless of the person's religious convictions (or lack of them), the Nahual bond is spiritual as well as physical. Unlike religion, though, the Nahual bond cannot be "converted" to another path. While ferals can learn certain magical arts, ferals cannot become mages in the Awakened sense, or be turned into members of the undead host. Similar to an animal, the feral simply is what he is.

Certain spirits recognize a shapechanger for what he is, too, especially spirits attuned to that inner beast. Crow-spirits, for example, sense a Corvian shapechanger as one of their own even if he has no idea what they are himself. In time, he might begin to learn more about the spirit world from such spirits . . . assuming he can wrap his head around the idea! Unlike their Uratha cousins, most shapechangers remain blissfully (or cursedly!) unaware of the vast spirit realm. The Nahual may be spiritual in nature, but the Nature the Nahual understands is more earthy than ephemeral.

For folks with strong religious beliefs, the Nahual bond can be traumatic. A fundamentalist Christian or Muslim, for instance, would probably consider herself a "bad seed" or victim of demonic possession when her inner beast appears. Indigenous people have an easier time assimilating their animal natures, but *understanding* your condition and *liking* it are very different things! Even among tribal cultures, the idea of turning into a wild animal smacks of evil magic. In Africa, where hundreds are of people are still murdered each year for witchcraft, the Changing Gift can get you killed by folks who know *exactly* what you are.

Aiaetha: The Reflection

As you stare into a mirror or a pool, a reflection of you stares back. If you're one of the changing breeds, that reflection sometimes takes the form of each of your other selves: a snake-man, for example, gazing at himself might see a serpent in a pool of water; from the other side of that reflection, the serpent would see a man. This is *aiaetha* — "the soul seeing itself." Through *aiaetha*, a feral comes to recognition. The Nahual sees the person, the person sees the beast, they try to come to terms . . . and both soon go utterly insane.

The Storm

As the child grows, the beast-soul calls out to the human self through dreams, visions and glimpses in the mirror. This starts out innocently enough but soon attains

Berserker

In Old Norse, *ber sark* means "bear shirt"; *sark* also translates to "armor," and both connotations refer to the shapeshifting warriors who assumed bear-like forms in battle. Supposedly, such men went into battle naked or dressed only in bearskin cloaks, then attained frenzies that made them damned near unstoppable. The Norse had deep shapeshifting traditions, and their most fearsome warriors were said to transform into bears (*berserkers*) and wolves (*vargrs* — meaning "wolf" and "outlaw"). For more details about the Berserk fit, see "Berserk: The Rabbit and the Tiger," **p. 34**.

hurricane ferocity. Night terrors shake the child from her sleep; hallucinations haunt her days. The beast-soul seems to stalk her through real streets or phantom woods. She might glimpse it in a pool of water or smell it when she sweats. Certain animals seem drawn to her presence while others snarl or run away. She might start acting like her animal, too — hissing, hiding, digging, biting. The child withdraws or grows increasingly aggressive. Her parents start to worry then; what's happening with their kid? As the beast-soul's cries increase, the human seems possessed, deranged, retarded or all three. This is *the Storm* — a time when life seems to go insane.

Imagine your soul as an echo chamber. Now scream in it. Add the howls of an animal, and you understand the Storm. To a feral on the edge of transformation, these psychic screams bounce her off the walls of madness. In older times, a child in this stage would be sent off to shamans, oracles or warrior-priests; these days, they're sent to therapy. Instead of initiation, she gets medication . . . or worse yet, punishment. A kid might run away from home, take up drugs or break every rule in sight. Cutting, fucking, praying — nothing seems to help. Until the beast and human reach harmony, self-reflection is a nightmare. Even if both aspects had seemed harmonious before, the edge of the First Change cuts them like rusty wire.

Release: The First Change

Finally, something gives. A shove brings the Storm to a peak. This shove often comes from outside, but it's different for every feral. Some are attacked by beasts or people, while others battle with the elements. Occasionally, the Change might come as the culmination of a harsh initiation ritual; more often, though, a sudden life-threatening ordeal — drug overdose, car crash, natural disaster, near-fatal assault — that brings on the Change. To survive, the person embraces the animal soul, and the Beast bursts through. Some folks call this *the Release*: an explosion of sensations and revelation. After months or years of tumult, everything suddenly seems *right*.

Berserk!

When human barriers collapse and the inner beast breaks free, a feral goes truly and utterly *Berserk*. Most times, he doesn't even realize what's happening — his conscious mind shuts down and instinct takes over. Depending on the animal, this frenzy can be a frantic escape (the *rabbit run*) or a bloodthirsty rampage (the *tiger storm*). Whatever that beast must do to be free, it *will* do. If that means running through fire or tearing up a busload of nuns, the feral will throw himself utterly to that task. It's a hell of a way to wake up . . . but then, Nature can be a real bitch.

The First Change *hurts*. Ripped between the body it has always worn and the one that now escapes, the changer's physical form tears itself apart. Bones crack, skin rends, hair burns through the pores while senses blaze with sharp acuity. Anything the shifter wears is either shed or shredded. Meanwhile, the conscious human mind hides itself in fear. *ItsonlyadreamItsonlyadreamItsonlyadream* is its mantra of denial; the animal mind, though, revels in finally being *free*! Its howls of joy echo in the changer's head. By the time the feral's human form and limits are discarded, the feral feels more *alive* than he has ever been before.

Nature needs survivors, so the First Change is always painful. It challenges the changer to survive. Most times, that final crisis relates somehow to the animal form: a bird-person might find himself falling, while a predator must kill; an aquatic shapeshifter may be trapped underwater, while a burrowing one screams underground. Either way, human limits must be shattered. Only instinct can remain.

This Berserk state lasts as long as it needs to last. Some ferals come out of it in a minute or two, while others run free in beast-form all night. While it lasts, the human mind sees its actions as a dream . . . or a nightmare. Eventually, though, both sides calm down. Finding a reflective surface (water, glass, mirror, etc.), the changer stares into it, acknowledging its human and animal aspects. In time, they come to an *accord* — an agreement where both can share the same skin and soul. The cry of freedom and the scream of madness merge into a harmonious song of the soul. There will be many times that the song goes dissonant, but for the moment, harmony prevails.

For reasons only Nature understands, the First Change almost always occurs at night. Perhaps the influence of God's order or Man's rationality comes through in sunlight; more likely, the night reflects primordial darkness. At night, all things seem possible — magic most of all. And yes, the Change *is* magic as humans understand it. It's just magic of a primal sort. The art of Nature, not the artifice of Man.

Speaking of artifice: the feral may have a *lot* of explaining to do. Chances are good that he'll wake up naked, miles from home. His room may be demolished; his loved ones might be terrified. Although a psychic balm called *the Delusion* tends the wounded minds of humans who've seen the Change,



there's sure to be collateral damage and sticky questions in its wake. Unless the feral is *very* lucky, the final stage of his ordeal involves scraping the pieces of his human life back together — or running like hell if things are too messy to fix.

The Delusion

Fortunately for the beast-folk, Nature provides cover: the Delusion, a potent screen of denial. When normal humans see something they're not supposed to see — like, say, a woman changing into a panther — this primal instinct kicks in. Its effects are neither perfect nor long-lasting, but the Delusion gives a much-needed edge to Nature's chosen people.

No one's certain why or how the Delusion works. Is it an instinctive reaction to a mystic predator? If so, then why does it shield *all* changing breeds? Perhaps a modern denial reflex? If so, why does it apply to indigenous folk as well? Could it be a philosophical rejection of "things that should not be"? Then why does it also blur photographic and video images? The best explanation is simply that Nature needs her changing breeds alive, and that the Delusion functions as mystic camouflage. Similar to a chameleon's changing skin or a rabbit's seasonal coat, the Delusion's not *perfect* cover, but it helps.

The word *delusion* means "to play false." That's exactly what the Delusion does with memories and senses. People who witness a changer shifting between bodies, assuming the dreaded War-Beast shape, committing a spectacular act of carnage or performing some supposedly "impossible" act of athletics or magic often suffer a momentary breakdown. Their conscious minds refuse to accept the evidence of their senses, or those senses delude the witnesses about what they perceive. Folks hit with the Delusion suffer gaps of memory, black out, run screaming or fall into gibbering fits. Afterward, they do everything they can do to rationalize or forget what they've witnessed. People who've seen "what should not be seen" take up drinking, drug themselves senseless or lock down into "that never happened" mode. Again, this syndrome doesn't *always* occur, but it provides "plausible deniability" for ferals caught out in the open by their Changing Gift.

The Delusion also spoils mechanical image technology. This might be the hand of Nature reaching out to smear Man's proud achievements. A feral changing or assuming the War-Beast form in front of photographic, digital imagining or sound recording equipment creates a "haze" of static or shadow. Images are blurred and sounds, distorted. Of course, this Delusion can *backfire*, too. For certain folks, these phenomena inspire suspicion, and a careless werebeast might find a determined monster-hunter on her tail after a brief appearance on the wrong camera. . . .

Aftermath

Dawn. A new day, a new self. The feral has survived her First Change and reached at least a temporary sense of peace. She feels the animal stirring under her skin as she rejoins the human herd. Now, though, she's *different*. Her senses, already keen, remain on edge. She sees a different face in the mirror — perhaps her animal Nahual, perhaps her familiar human face but with a fresh luster in her eyes. Although she's returned to her former shape, she is not the person she once was. Whatever happened the night before, our feral person is now a beast as well. So where does she go from there?

In many cases, the shapechanger simply bolts from his or her old life and makes a new one elsewhere. Some runaway teens may, in fact, be ferals trying to sort things out in fresh (if dangerous) surroundings. If there's wilderness nearby, the feral often flees into it, taking whatever she can grab and carry. This flight may become an initiation; to understand the beast inside, the person must live like one as well. She might leave every human crutch — even clothing — behind as she searches for her new self; or she might grab every human comfort she can carry in an effort to remind herself who she was before. Either way, she strives to match her external surroundings to her inner landscape.

An uncommonly determined or disciplined feral might tough it out back home. Reassuming his old life, he tries to puzzle things out in familiar surroundings. Acting as if nothing happened, he hits bookshops, libraries and occultist groups in an effort to understand what he's become. For certain accords, this may be the better path to sanity. Building a firm foundation for his new life, the shapechanger experiments with forms and fashions. Chances are, he'll adopt a radical new persona to reflect who he feels like now: a jock might become a hippie, a geek may take up athletics, a stoner could go sober and become an honor student while he ponders his next move. At night, he'll slip out and assume beast-form, seeking the new destiny beneath his skin.

A desperate feral might remain stuck in the ruins of her old life, trapped by circumstances, poverty or fear. There may be someone she doesn't dare to leave behind — a lover, child, ailing parent, even pet — or she might be so broke or city-locked that there's no way to escape. This often happens when religious people hit the Change; the trauma of transformation challenges everything they believe, and our feral might consider herself demonic or possessed. Bouncing off the walls of her old existence, though, can drive a shapechanger crazy. A feral in this state often turns to drink, drugs, depression, promiscuity or fanaticism. Too bestial to stay, too frightened to leave, she eventually does something she can't take back, and winds up running away, captured or dead.

Balancing Act

Either way, the First Change alters the shifter's life for good. From that point on, that person must come to an accord with his beast. He might meditate in the dark, take up dance or athletics, join an occult fellowship or seek out others of his kind. He could adopt an animal companion, draw or paint self-portraits of his animal self, make clothes or costumes that match his Nahual or even join a group of



"otherkin" — people who believe (sometimes correctly) that they're not entirely human. Whatever tools he adopts, our feral has serious self-searching to do.

When he can, a new feral spends hours in front of reflective surfaces, watching his face and body shift between human and animal shapes. Contemplating the *aiaetha* seems like the natural way to strike a balance in his soul, so he'll literally mirror himself whenever possible.

Eventually, though, the changer must run free. His Nahual demands open spaces. Until he breaks away from Man's dominion, a feral feels constrained. No balance can be reached until the beast catches open sky and raw earth beneath his paws.

Harmony

In Nature, there is *harmony* — a sense of balance between elements. A shapechanger feels pulled between her animal and human selves, and to sort it out she strives for harmony inside. This *isn't*, though, a floaty New Age state. "Feral" means "like a wild beast," and our feral's sense of harmony has a very wild edge.

To maintain harmony, a shapechanger can be neither too bestial nor too human in her behavior. If she gets too wild, her Nahual takes over and creeps through its human mask; if she's too restrained, the beast retreats, and her wild talents fade. Either way, extremes breed erratic behavior. A feral who goes too far out of harmony becomes dangerous, to herself and to everyone nearby.

Discord

When harmony falters, discord descends. A shapechanger can be trapped in a single form, grow demented or alert other people to her twin nature. Occasionally, the *aiaetha* becomes visible to other people, giving a feral person an animal's shadow or reflection. Folk tales of *kitsune* women with fox-like shadows come from such discords, which could be blamed on the culture's rigid codes of behavior. A shapechanger must exercise each side of his nature. If either the human self or bestial Nahual dominates, the other side gets restless, often to disastrous effect.

The Lost Folk

A shapechanger who slips too far out of balance renounces her Changing Gift. Either she becomes an animal and forsakes humanity, or she loathes her bestial self and stays locked in human form. Both extremes become monsters — hunters of the very worst kind whose irrational hatred of their "other self" leads to violence. Legends call such creatures *the Lost Folk*, ruined souls burning with fanatical hatred. As beasts, they tear humans to bits for fun; as humans, they stalk and torture animals because they *can*. Both extremes inflict great pain and sorrow before their inevitable demise. Sadly, these degenerate souls are often clever, and use their skills and surroundings to literally get away with bloody murder.



Accords: The Heart-Paths

When the wild heart cries out, it echoes through a feral's soul. During the Storm and First Change, that echo rises to a scream; as a shapechanger sorts himself out, though, that scream becomes a song. Just as the howl of wolves or the lowing of cattle, that song holds harmony. And when a human voice meets the wild cry, that harmony speaks volumes about the soul that sings it.

Accord means "agreement," "reconcile" and "a harmonious mix of sounds." To the changing breeds, an accord does all those things: it sets an "agreement" between intellect and instinct, reconciles the realms of Man and Nature, and reflects the "pitch" of the wild cry inside. Shaped, perhaps, by a combination of human symbolism and animal behavior, the accords reflect five *Heart-Paths*. Each one has archetypal significance, common personality traits, roles in the human and animal worlds, and a musical pitch that echoes in the shapechanger's heart . . . and sometimes in his voice as well.

These accords aren't bound to species. Each breed can assume any one of the five Heart-Paths. While some breeds seem more inclined toward certain accords (say, tigers to the Heart-Ripper) than to others (the Root-Weaver), the accords come more from the human side than from the beast. Nature, in her infinite diversity, provides surprising combinations for her favored children. A hare-changer, for example, might not have sharp fangs, but his sharp wits can be as deadly as any set of teeth.

Unlike the Nahual, an accord can change. A Heart-Ripper, for example, might forsake her bloody ways for love or curiosity. Such changes always come from crisis, though — often preceded by another round of the Storm. As the feral's sense of self breaks down, her behavior grows unstable. Through discipline or guidance, she might change her ways with little suffering; more often, though, the shift involves a minor First Change night — a bit less bloody but no less painful.

Among shapechangers, five accords dominate the breeds. There's talk of other Heart-Paths, too, but where animals are concerned, there are many possibilities and few solid answers. The primary accords are called . . .

Den-Warder: The Protector

Without home or family, neither beast nor human survives for long. And while any creature can have a place in the world, the Den-Warder guards his place with his life. In human terms, this accord is the Protector, who nurtures and defends the things he loves. Embodied in the animal kingdom by the guard dog or mother bear, this Heart-Path sustains devotion, honor, loyalty and affection. Generally, these folk are even-tempered, romantic, honest and ethical. Their voices are often melodic and comforting, like the music in their souls. On the downside, they can be stubborn and gullible, too. If betrayed, their hearts break hard . . . unleashing all the fury of hell on those who deceive them.

Heart-Ripper: The Predator

Anyone can kill. A Heart-Ripper enjoys it. Not simply a hunter, this accord revels in fighting and destruction. She's the Predator with a bloody muzzle, the rogue tiger or battle-crow. In her human guise, she could be a serial killer, slaughterhouse worker or gun-crazy nut job. She's volatile and cruel, but often charming and confident, too. There's a manic, dissonant quality to this heart-music, and it comes through sometimes in a brittle or menacing voice. The blood she spills may be metaphorical most of the time (this type *loves* sadistic mind-games!), but every so often the Heart-Ripper must kill for real.

Root-Weaver: The Builder

If building seems to be a human trait, just watch birds, ants or beavers at work. Innovative and industrious, the Root-Weaver creates structures and technology for pleasure and survival. Symbolically, this Heart-Path reflects the Builder or Technician whose achievements might be physical or social. This one's smart enough to puzzle her way around almost any problem, and can often be found up to her arms in grease and machinery. On the animal side, she's the worker bee or tool-slinging monkey — a beast for whom mere Nature isn't good enough. While working, she often whistles or sings in a soft, steady voice . . . or makes up songs to match her inner music as she goes along. A clever, hard-working accord, this Heart-Path leads to prosperity, but can be too radical or tenacious for her own good.

Sun-Chaser: The Rebel

You can't capture the sun, but this Heart-Path tries anyway. Restless and curious, he refuses to submit to limitations. Symbolized by the Rebel or Trickster, this one's full of clever schemes that never seem to work out right. He's always broke but never broken. The music in his heart is a symphony of infinite longing. His animal-self could be seen as the playful puppy who shits all over the house; on a darker note, though, he's the rogue hyena prowling the streets, who's not too proud to add a child to his meal. This kind turns mean in a hurry, especially if he feels threatened or confined. Romantic but uncommitted, he can be a heartbreaker if you catch his eye. True, he's cunning, visionary, fierce and often beautiful. Anyone, though, who chases the sun is bound to have blind spots, and his often lead him over a cliff.

Wind-Dancer: The Seer

Some beasts are meant to wander, seeing everything but keeping nothing. Just as the wind, they blow through life, flying but never settling. You may find their paw prints on the ground in the morning, or catch sight of them in the distance on the wing. Archetypally, this is the Seer, a visionary vagabond whose lantern illuminates a distant path. In animal terms, she's the screaming hawk or owl, swooping down from nowhere to snatch

up what she sees before winging off to devour it alone. Drawn to secrets but inclined toward secrecy, this accord prefers her own companionship. She's brilliant but unfathomable, often speaking or singing words few others understand. Her inner song rumbles like a night-time storm, rich with promises and threats. Other folks find her inspiring yet puzzling. If only they could get a *hold* on her . . . but then, no one truly holds the wind.

Living Feral

The frenzy passes. The impossible becomes real. Human and beast share one body. Now what?

Laying Low

The first trick involves hiding. After all, if the shapeshifter gets caught on YouTube, it's all over. Police, reporters, scientists, the government — lots of folks would *love* to get their hands on some real, live evidence of trans-species metamorphosis. The animal's first instinct calls for freedom, and the human knows how short that freedom will last if his true nature is revealed. So before all else, the shapechanger learns to hide.

This isn't as difficult as it sounds. The human world is filled with cracks in which to disappear. With towering cities, deep wilderness and the suburbs in between, a person can get lost easily. And then there are the stay-at-homes, folks who hide behind closed curtains and computer screens. For a new-Changed feral, the Internet offers fellowship without identity. He can come and go as he pleases, be whomever he wants, then log off and disappear. Everyone needs an income, and for shapechangers, the telecommute is a godsend. Meanwhile, panhandling, odd jobs, carpentry and handouts provide sustenance for folks without such skills. All in all, Man's world provides plenty of places to hide.

It's hard, though, to stay hidden for long. With video cameras everywhere and plastic identity cards almost required, a feral remains hard-pressed to keep a low profile. The Delusion blurs transformations and other overt displays, but in his human guise, he remains recognizable. And then there's criminology; most beast-folk cross paths with the law eventually, and between DNA testing, fingerprints, databases and other tools, the law often wins. If the feral keeps moving, he'll be hard to keep track of; if he keeps his old residence and job, though, there may soon be an unwelcome knock at the door. . . .

In rural areas, Third World nations, wilderness and war zones, it's easier to hide. Country folk don't ask many questions and rarely appreciate attention. Non-industrial areas have less media surveillance, with many places to run free. The wilderness is ideal for beast-folk — indeed, it's where many of them live. That wilderness is shrinking, though, and a new arrival may find himself fighting for territory. And then there are war zones — perfect playgrounds for a Heart-Ripper who doesn't mind the constant possibility of death. Away from the media circus, these regions provide shelter for many modern werebeasts.

For flamboyant ferals, there are plenty of subcultures to get lost in, too. Homeless folks, hitchhikers, Rainbow People, Ren Faire performers, therians, entertainers, hunters, backpackers, bikers — such people slip in and out of sight by virtue of what they do. Grab a guitar, a pack and the right clothes, and you can travel constantly without anyone asking questions. For wealthy or beautiful ferals, there's the jet-set, where entertainingly exotic company is always welcome. And then there are artists, poets, street performers and other outlaws who surf from couch to couch on endless tides of goodwill so long as they remain . . . housebroken.

Being housebroken, though, is part of the problem. Sure, he's *human*, but a feral is a wild animal at heart. He can't be caged, can't tie himself down. Once he's Changed, his erratic temperament deepens. He'll pick fights, snarl, snap at jokes and cry for no reason. He may go days or weeks without bathing; if he wants to fuck, he'll say so bluntly. In fights, he'll bite hard and may even transform. If the feral seemed weird before, he's *really* weird now. Especially in the early days of his new life, a werebeast makes unsettling company.

And so, he keeps moving or tries to settle down. Wherever he goes, however, our feral must have room to run. If he's a bird-shifter, he needs high elevations; if he's a hunter, he must have prey, a canid craves a pack, a tiger, solitude. The needs of the person must fit the needs of the beast as well. And both parties need to lay low. In Man's world, attention can be death.

Breeds: You Are Your Beast

At the core of every feral, there's the animal. As she comes to terms with her new life, a shapechanger deepens her connection to that beast. Sure, that connection has always been there. It's a big leap, though, between loving cats and being a werepanther. When the reality of that beast sets in, the feral learns how to balance its nature with her abilities.

That balancing act depends a lot on the animal soul; a hawk-blood feral will have an easier time adjusting to her lot than an Oceanborn one will. Whatever she becomes, the shapechanger must accommodate her animal self. A land-locked wereshark, for example, should move to the coast . . . or find herself a really good aquarium.

Power Animals

The world hosts millions of animal species; most Nahuals, though, are power animals: bears, cats, horses, hawks. In short, they're big, strong and often fierce. Humans revere such beasts (symbolically, at least), and that reverence plays a large role in the werebeast bond. The synergy between Man and Nature seems to demand mutual respect, and although a werelemming *might* be possible, it's *highly* unlikely!

Not all power animals, though, are large. Hares, rats, cats and insects share close bonds with humanity, too. Shapechanger lore is filled with such creatures, and although most folks might laugh at the idea of a "wereroach," the specter of a man dissolving into a sea of roaches is enough to send most folks shrieking toward insanity.

Legendary Breeds

The changing breeds are known by symbolic connections, not modern taxonomy. Their roots reach into ancient folklore, not scientific categorization. Among the many changing breeds, the most legendary groups include the following:

• *The Bastet* — Named for their most notorious godhead, these cat-folk range from supple wildcats to noble yet implacable weretigers.

• *The Land Titans* — The rarest but most powerful shapechangers, these elephant- and rhino-men seem more like endangered gods than mortal beings.

• *The Laughing Strangers* — Tricksters, robbers, beautiful eccentrics . . . how much of the reputation of these weasel-, rat-, hare-, coyote- and fox-folk is earned, and how much is propaganda?

• *The Pack* — Loyal yet ferocious, these cousins of the werewolves count wolfkin, dog-bloods and hyena-people among their ragged band.

• *The Royal Apes* — Despite their brutish stereotype, these uncomfortably man-like beasts include sagacious mystics along with tree-swinging tricksters.

• *The Spinner-Kin* — Grandmother Spider weaves her web across the world, and while her children seem quite sinister, they create the most beautiful designs imaginable.

• *The Ursara* — From shy black-furs to ferocious grizzlies, these werebears boast potent medicine and terrifying rage.

• *The Wind-Runners* — Stags, elk, horses and deer blend grace, speed and strength with human cunning and an urge for freedom.

• *The Wing-Folk* — Corvians, swan maids, owl-folk, even werebats are joined by their outstretched wings and the open sky.

Although the spectrum of breeds is wide, the Changing Gift is *rare*. It's tempting to imagine large herds of Elken-volk running wild across the steppes; if such things *ever* existed, though, those days are long since gone. In the modern age, most ferals are solitary; a city with millions of inhabitants might host two or three dozen werebeasts, and they probably won't know one another. Unlike werewolves or vampires, breeds seldom congregate. They might share common traits, but that's about *all* they share.

Certain breeds are more social than most. Pack ferals, for example, often seek out one another. Certain Wing-Folk, such as Corvian werecrows, hang together in small groups, too. Many breeds, though, detest others of their kind; if two Rajanya tigers meet, there'll soon be blood on the ground. Ultimately, each feral decides the company he or she prefers. Restless and independent, the changing breeds are as diverse as their animal and human kin.

Blood Calls to Blood

Magical blends of human imagination and animal nature, the "breeds" aren't really breeds at all. The Changing Gift seems to depend more upon a human/animal bond than on genetic lineage. Still, there's something about blood that calls to blood. Certain human clans are known for shapechanging talents, or for bonds with totem beasts.



So is the Changing Gift inherited? Or does it start in each feral's soul? For now, the answer is a mystery. Different groups have their own opinions on that subject. The Bandaris clan has a legacy of horse-blood; Fawn Richards, though, has a personal connection to the spirit of a deer. Feral bonds *are* often cultural. A werelion, for example, is more likely to come from Sierra Leone than San Francisco. Even so, the odd "weasel in the woodpile" turns up in families with no unusual histories, and a German girl from Tennessee might become a black-furred lioness with no tie to Africa closer than the map on her wall. Nature likes keeping little secrets, and the Changing Gift is one of them.

The Forms: What Can You Do?

Most shapechangers slip between three forms:

• The *Man-Guise*, the feral's birth-form and usual shape;

• The *Primal Beast*, an unusually large and powerful animal;

• . . . and the *War-Beast*, an uncanny synthesis of human, animal and god.

A few accomplished shapechangers can take intermediary forms as well:

• The *Throwback*, a disconcerting mix of primal human and monstrous beast;

• . . . and the *Dire Beast*, a hulking terror far larger than any modern animal of that kind.

Most ferals, though, slide between the three basic forms. Only the most magical or experienced shapechangers — such as the Uratha werewolves — can assume all five forms. For most ferals, that's a trick that takes years or even decades to master.

Changing Shape

What happens when a feral takes on her animal shape? Once the trauma of the First Change has passed, the shift becomes more natural. Still, it can be challenging. The Changing Gift is magic. But it's *Nature's* magic, and it works Nature's way.

The so-called laws of science mean nothing when the Changing Gift takes hold. A person can sprout tusks or spill into a swarm of spiders. She may grow or shrink dramatically. This transformation can be painful, and takes getting used to even when it's not. As she changes, the feral's senses explode into a vast new spectrum. Scents grow stronger while colors shift. Limbs twist in unfamiliar ways. Muscles flow like quicksilver. Bare skin gives way to fur or scales. Muscles and bones re-knit in seconds. Within a few heartbeats, the human has become the beast.

Although it's magical, the shape-shift has its limits. Obviously, there's got to be enough room nearby to assume the new shape. Also, synthetic clothing or man-made materials will not Change. Unless a feral's wearing leather, skins or raw silk, he must strip down before he shifts forms — anything else either tears, binds or falls right off. Objects must be carried in leather pouches or skin-worked bags, or they'll be left behind. Jewelry may stay attached, but only if it's made of bone or precious stones. (Metal piercings provide an exception, probably because they're worked into the feral's skin.) Body paint and tattoos carry over into man-like forms, but disappear in the Beast or Dire shapes. Finally, worn items of technology stop working when a shapechanger transforms. A cell phone, for example, may burn out if a feral wears it when he "goes beast." For these reasons, many ferals dress in tribal or archaic fashions, and remove things such as watches or Palm Pilots before they transform.

Nature's Gifts

Folklore credits the changing breeds with an array of magic powers. Those tales exaggerate. Still, the feral folk *do* have some impressive tricks and talents to employ. Most of these gifts combine animal physicality with human flexibility; a few, though, open channels to the living world and turn its power to their advantage.

Keen Senses

The most obvious element of the Changing Gift aside from the Change itself involves the sharp sense of the animal world. While humans *think* more than we *perceive*, animals live and die by their perceptions. From childhood, each feral has unusually keen senses; after the First Change, that acuity deepens. Many shapechangers can see in near-darkness, hear outside the human spectrum and *feel* with devastating clarity. The flipside, of course, is that Man's world is filled with noise. Ferals in urban environments live in constant states of sensory overload, and often grow twitchy as a consequence.

Beast Talents

A shapechanger in animal form adopts the natural talents of her beast. A crow-girl, for instance, can fly, while a dolphin-blood can hold her breath indefinitely. Most of these abilities are limited to the Primal and War-Beast forms (and the Dire, if she can assume that form); a few talents carry over, though, such as agility or a certain toughness. Beast talents often magnify the power of the original animal. A Rajan's claws, for instance, are larger and sharper than a real tiger's claws would be.

Healing

Nature needs her children healthy. And so, ferals draw her power from the earth to heal themselves when they're sick or injured. Most werebeasts just need time to lick their wounds before they're back in fighting trim. In some cases, they can help other folks as well — bears and dolphins, for example, are potent healers. This talent seems to be innate — every changing breed has it, even if that breed would rather run than fight.



Symbolic Traits

Many werebeasts have *unusual* talents, too: prophecy, truthsight, mimic powers, camouflage and so on. They might influence the weather or pass good luck on to their friends. These gifts seem to come from the human imagination, or through symbolic associations with that breed of beast. Generally, a feral must learn how to use these special talents, and then spend spirit energy (called Essence) to set them into action. Such gifts make feral elders quite dangerous; an enemy might see an old fox-woman as easy pickings, yet miss the potent magics she holds in reserve. . . .

Beast Magic

A handful of ferals specialize in magic, either drawing it from the elements, as the C'hi Hsu spider-folk do, or from the spirit realm, as the Bubasti werecats. This, too, is a rare trait learned by elders through hard-won experience. The average feral knows nothing about this sort of magic. Nevertheless, those who understand it become the stuff of ghastly legends.

Downsides of the Gift

Nothing is free, especially not in this dark world. Even after the Storm subsides, a shapechanger lives a difficult life. There are hunters to consider, and madness and the loss of one's human or animal self. Still, most ferals revel in their Changing Gift. Though challenging, it sets them free.

The Hunt

Just as their animal cousins, feral people hunt and are hunted. This is as true for vegetarian werewolves as it is for carnivorous ones; the former may hunt for secrets, shelter, love or thrills, but still she hunts. Restlessly curious, a feral craves stimulation. Although animals seem content to live life as it comes, shapechangers are always looking for *more*.

By the same token, a feral often winds up as somebody's prey; that hunter might be trying to find out her true nature, enlist her to a cause or capture her for love, power or food. Some hunters just see a great big beast to mount on their walls; others spot the human in those animal eyes and want to make it *theirs*. The night-folk (vampires, mages and so forth) are notorious hunters of the changing breeds. And the Uratha — *born* hunters — seem worst of all. Still, it's Man the Despoiler who's a feral's worst enemy. He might be a lone gunman, a government agent or a weirdo with a video camera, but he presents the most dangerous kind of threat.

Moonbane: Silver

The legendary weakness of werewolves to silver carries over to their changing kin. Sometimes called *Moonbane*, the precious metal burns exposed skin and inflicts vicious wounds when fashioned into weapons. Hunters who know this open secret can give ferals a *very* hard time.

The silver allergy affects a shapechanger in every form, although Moonbane harms his Man-Guise least. In that form, Moonbane causes minor discomfort, itching and a rash. If Moonbane cuts him, though, that cut runs unusually deep and takes a long time to heal. In the bestial forms, silver is painful even to touch; as a weapon, silver slows the speed of Nature's healing gift and seems to burn like fire in the wound. Legends disagree about the reasons for Moonbane's effects. Could there be some spiritual curse at work, or a rivalry between earthly Nature and the distant moon? As an element of our world, silver *shouldn't* harm werebeasts so badly. A feral, though, has only to hold a pure Moonbane necklace in his hand to remember why that metal got its name.

Losing One's Self

As we've seen, a feral can slip her hold on either humanity or the beast. Going too far to the wild side unleashes weird behavior, while acting too civilized blocks the passion of the beast. If either condition lasts too long, a shapechanger might lose her Changing Gift completely. At that point, it takes assistance from friends who know both sides of that person to remind her what she's lost — and then help her get it back again.

Berserk: The Rabbit and the Tiger

Sometimes, the beast wants to fight or flee. Instinct takes over, and if something blocks her way, that feral may go crazy. Similar to the First Change, this Berserk state can be devastating. Everyone in sight becomes an enemy, and the shapechanger flies into either a rabbit run or a tiger storm.

A rabbit run is blind panic, a race to escape by any means at all. Fire, loud noise or intense pain can drive even the most ferocious breeds to run. This flight lasts until the feral calms down or the trigger for the fit is very far away.

A tiger storm unleashes blood fury. Blurring friends, rivals and innocents into a single smear of red, this fit gives the Berserk state its fearsome reputation. Cleverness and stealth are forgotten in a tiger storm. There's just a whirl of claws and cries that last until either the feral or the threat has fallen.

Any breed can go Berserk. Some are more likely to rabbit away while others tend toward tiger. The aftermath of a Berserk often sends the feral into flight or hiding. And so, even for the most ferocious breeds, this state is worth avoiding.

The Fury

Man's careless ways make werebeasts bristle. How *dare* a person toss burning cigarettes out her car window? Confronted with such selfishness, ferals sometimes fall into *the Fury*, an instinctive revulsion with humanity. Depending on the feral's species and the offender's deeds, this Fury might be minor (pissing on her car), serious (smashing her window) or severe (attacking her personally). Unlike the Berserk, this Fury is calm and calculated, if not always *wise*. For obvious reasons, this reaction often gets feral folk in all kinds of trouble.

Friends, Family and Companions

Loneliness can drive you crazy. And for a shapechanger, whose life is . . . shall we say, *complicated*? . . . companionship can mean the difference between a long life and forgotten bones.

So where can a feral find company? True, he might have human friends and associates, but really — how many of them can he count on if things get bloody? With whom can he share the hunt, and where can he find help when Nature's gifts just aren't enough to serve?

A lucky feral may have a support system in place that understands what he's going through. Perhaps he's been born into a family with a history of "changing blood." Or he belongs to a group of occultists or otherkin who're more accommodating of the impossible. (Of course, such friends may also run screaming when their buddy actually *does* turn into a grizzly bear.) He might be scouted out by older shapechangers who spot symptoms of the Storm and know what's coming, or he could run with an urban tribe that stands by its people even when they're not "people" anymore. If nothing else, he could simply have very loyal friends and family. When he's tempted to bolt, these people may anchor a new-Changed feral to stability . . . and if *they* bolt instead, he may truly be lost.

Feral Clans and Dynasties

As we've seen, the Changing Gift sometimes carries through human bloodlines. Great-Grandma may have possessed "the gift," or Uncle Joe might disappear into the woods for days "to take care of family business." When the Storm begins, members of the clan who know the score might provide comfort and guidance for the youngster; certain families might even cultivate the Gift from infancy, noticing the signs of a potential Change long before they manifest. In industrial societies, such clans are rare — it's *impossible*, after all, for a person to actually become an animal. Rural, isolated or elite clans, on the other hand, may see the wild heart for what it is, and have enough experience or family lore to know what to do about it.

Purging the Curse

That "solution" isn't always kind. While some feral clans cultivate the Gift, others abhor it. A shapechanger could find herself locked in the basement by Mama, who swears that "the old curse" won't take her little girl! A religious clan might regard the wild heart as the Devil's work, and try to purge it from their child with fire. A kid could be drugged to *Shawn of the Dead* proportions, or sent to a "rehab center" that may or may not be what it seems. None of this will *stop* delivery of Nature's Gift, of course, but such measures could make the Change an even worse ordeal.

A feral unlucky enough to live in witch-frightened lands has a *real* ordeal ahead of her. Rural or war-torn places with tribal justice deal seriously with "evil magic." Mobs and tribal councils pronounce death sentences on those who seem . . . *unnatural* . . . and such folks have no patience for people who become beasts. There's a huge difference between a comforting folktale and bloody fact, and the truth is, people who turn into lions are no more welcome in South Africa than they are in South Central. And similar to the girls turned over for clitoridectomies or *sutti*, the feral's harshest betrayal may come from her own family.

Tests and Rituals

The following things may done to or for a suspected or budding shapechanger — or might be performed *by* someone who suspects he might be a shapechanger, and who either wants to be one or is scared of that possibility. Especially traumatic tests or rituals might actually provoke the First Change or inflict significant emotional and/or physical harm.

• To cure an "affliction"

Praying and undertaking prayer vigils

Binding, chaining or locking in a room

Administering anti-psychotic drugs

Dunking, boiling baths or waterboarding

Torturing or attempting murder by burning

Smudging with incense, sage or wolfsbane

Beating with thorns, nettles or oak, rowan or teak wood

Hanging charms of silver, herbs or cold iron on walls or body

• To nurture the Gift

Feeding raw meat

Praying to animal spirits or deities

Dressing in furs or animal-skin garments

Performing rituals to "call out the beast"

Whipping or beating to "toughen him or her up"

Enduring harsh outdoor ordeal to "bring out the wild side"

Being given (or forced to wear) animal mask or costume

Providing stuffed or live "pets" of appropriate animal

Supporting the Gift

Clans that *do* nurture the Changing Gift often have their own customs. A known shapechanger may be treated like a prize breeding horse or an honor student, with all attendant pressures, especially if he belongs to one of the exclusive Regencies. He'll probably be subjected to initiatory rituals and intense supervision. After all, the proud clan wouldn't want *anything* to happen to their blessed darling. Nor would they want an "unworthy" offspring to secure the family legacy. The budding feral will be tested, prodded, watched and trained — and God help him if he rebels. There's not much difference between a "nurturing" clan's discipline and the tortures of a disapproving family; in fact, the "loving" relatives might actually inflict greater emotional pain.

A truly fortunate feral is born into a clan that values the Changing Gift *and* respects her freedom. For such people, the family's love and support can lessen the trauma of the Storm and provide a safe place for the First Change. Some clans or dynasties keep large estates or expansive properties for their feral members, setting them loose to hunt or play when the need takes them. These families have celebrations to honor the First Change — exchanges of gifts and blessings, songs and family lore. The new feral may be given an heirloom from a beast-blooded relative, or told secrets from the hidden side of the clan. Of course, these families can be fiercely protective of their animal offspring, too, and often expect that protection from the beast-folk in return. For them, though, the Changing Gift is a blessing not a curse.

Despite the label "feral clan," a beast-blooded family can be quite sophisticated. Balancing out the wild side with refinement, such a family could give Emily Post's clan lessons in etiquette. A feral's relatives could resemble the Huckstables, the Sopranos, the Simpsons or the clan from *The Hills Have Eyes*. The prime distinction is that, unlike most families, feral clans know a shapechanger for what she truly is.

"Breeding True": Pedigree

The Changing Gift may or may not follow bloodlines. Many people, though, suspect that it does. "The blood will tell," as they say. And so, most feral clans work to keep that bloodline pure — either by purging bestial elements or by breeding them true.

In some families, such as Florida's depraved Clancy clan, all-ages incest provides traditional breeding stock. Other clans wait until their members reach puberty and show signs of the Changing Gift. In families that understand the patterns of genetics, potential mates are seduced, enticed, arranged for or even captured, then brought to the beast-blooded relative for company and breeding stock. Many families across the world claim lineage from an animal or shapechanger, and some still keep that heritage alive through arranged marriages or raw slavery.

Not all "breeding arrangements" are so brutal. For certain clans — especially the so-called Regencies — the family beast is a mark of pride. Coats-of-arms feature the animal; names echo it ("Corleone," for example, comes from *Cuor di Leone* — "lion's heart"), and that mystique attracts potential suitors. The raw animal charisma of a werebeast can be enough to secure an endless chain of lovers, preserving the bloodline out of sheer numbers. Does it work? Who knows? As with normal animal breeding, the desired trait may follow through, or may not.

Regencies: The Feral Dynasties

In families known for feral blood, a proven shapechanger is precious. He may be spoiled, groomed for success, trained in special skills or even paraded in front of other feral families as an example of success. The small but influential circle of Regencies takes pride in their animal legacy. These prosperous "regal houses" emblemize their changing legacy in gorgeous heraldic crests, and affect aristocratic airs flavored with the aura of a beast.

The Regal Beast

Although rumors of wild birth have provided regal status for millennia, the Regencies acquired their current form in the 1600s. Taking an ancestral Nahual as its symbol, each feral dynasty shares an elite subculture with others of its kind. Every Regency holds a certain animal as its "crest" — its patron beast. Obviously, these are regal power animals: bulls, lions, bears, leopards, horses, even a shark. One dynasty, the Zhî family, has a spider as its crest. No "vulgar" beasts are acceptable among the Regencies, although the Divous clan (now fallen out of favor) had a boar as its crest. To stay in favor, a clan must have had at least one shapechanger of its regal breed among its living members within the last 25 years. Dynasties that fail that requirement are dropped from the rolls until a new member emerges.

Pride and Price

Regency members are expected to be eloquent, brave, clever and intelligent whether they possess the Gift or not. Favoring an "old money" flavor, these clans school each relative in etiquette, social acumen and athletic skills such as fencing and horsemanship. Yet behind their polished facades, the Regencies prize vigor and ruthlessness. Cowardice and poor health simply aren't tolerated, and some dynasties supposedly feed their weaker members to the bestial ones.

Dynastic shapechangers are given constant tutelage, respect and supervision. As living embodiments of family honor, they have access to wealth and privilege. Yet, just as with any noble family, this legacy costs dearly. A Regency feral plays by the family's rules or suffers the family's wrath. She *is*, after all, a symbol of the house, and must act accordingly.

Family Business

Regencies meet twice each year, in remote and often luxurious locations. Plenty of room is provided for the

animal-selves to run free; the people, meanwhile, scheme and socialize. Deals are made and alliances are arranged. Family beasts — natural and shapechanged — are trotted out to display the skill and beauty of the house in question. Each dynasty competes to show its prowess to the others. While it's debatable whether or not the Regencies actually "control" world affairs, each one commands a formidable amount of wealth and influence.

The current roll of Regencies features 14 families in good standing: Bandaris, Chandra, Chu, Corleone, Hart, Lhamo, Mbube, Natolo, Rothburg, Sangrief, Toranaga, Vikarnes, Zafarani and Zhî. More than a dozen others have risen and fallen from the rolls over the years, either through mundane misfortunes or lack of the Changing Gift. Each family boasts substantial financial and social resources, and has been rumored to use them to secure other ferals as pets, agents, bodyguards or playmates. A desperate family may even bribe or kidnap an unrelated feral to use as breeding stock or to groom as one of their own. Each dynasty, after all, is supposedly blessed by its regal beast, and people have been known to create their own "blessings" in difficult times.

Urban Tribes

On the flipside of that splendor lies the urban tribes: subcultures of people who renounce mainstream society in favor of stylish primitivism. Some tribes affect garish clothes and manners, while others keep low profiles unless they're hanging out among their own kind. For independent ferals, an urban tribe makes a great support network. Chances are, the people nearby will accept and support a person who turns bestial occasionally. Whether a feral's tribe includes backpackers, doom-cultists or fire-spinning hippies, she can find fellowship among the various subcultures. Since a *chosen* family often beats blood-relations, the shapechanger can select people who meet her current, more primal needs. If (or *when*) things fall apart, she can disappear with little fuss. Folks come and go in urban tribes, and if you're careful, it's easy to stay anonymous.

Wanderers

The obvious tribe for a werebeast is one that keeps moving. That's what wanderers do. Whether they're hitchhikers, globe-trekkers, professional adventurers, extreme athletes, backpackers, bikers, surfers, Deadheads, Rainbow Children or just plain bums, these folks stay on the move. Living out of backpacks and sleeping wherever they can grab a nap, these mobile tribes exist between the cracks of a mass-transit world. Adopting flamboyant names and fashions, such people re-invent themselves, make friends easily and rarely ask questions that can't be answered with a charming smile.

Bonds between wanderers tend to be fast but trusting. They're quick to pass on tips about hazards, customs or geography. Wanderers have useful skills as well — medical training, survival savvy, scrounging and more. Self-reliant, they disdain authority and convention. A feral can blend in easily in such company, yet count on help if she knows how to ask.

Runaways and Orphans

Help is hard to find for runaways — kids fleeing from family drama. By default, many ferals wind up among runaways, at least for a while. Surviving on kindness, bribes or criminal activity, these kids resemble small animals living in the shadow of larger beasts. Not all are addicts or prostitutes, but a depressing number wind up that way.

Some kids don't run away on purpose. Cast out by their families or orphaned by disasters, some kids make their way through cleverness and luck. Similar to runaways, these kids take care of their chosen packmates and keep wary eyes on everyone else. Regions torn by war or crime can host thousands, even millions, of these children. Often hardened by deprivation and violence, these kids become kindred spirits to the beast-folk. Parts of Africa, South America and the Middle East have packs of children governed by feral shapechangers, and gangs of that kind may be found in Europe and the United States as well.

Gangs

There's not much difference between a wolf pack and a gang . . . or at least that's what folks would like to believe. Just as an animal pack, an urban gang gathers for mutual protection, stakes out territory and governs itself through self-managed hierarchy. And similar to most animals, gang members often follow the most capable leader, then turn on or replace him if he can't stay on top of things. For an urban feral, what could be more natural?

An urban gang provides an ideal family for a shapechanger or two. There's company, entertainment, protection and an outlet for the wild heart. The downsides, though, include sensory overload, frequent violence and the constant possibility of capture. Yes, it's true — big-city police forces *do* believe in monsters. Any officer who's brought in a "street kid" who ripped his way out of a locked cell (and through a few cops as well) can attest that sometimes "impossible" is just a word.

Bands, Faires and Carnivals

A feral with looks, talent or a good strong back can score a gig with traveling entertainers. Rock musicians, wayward Rennies, carney people and so forth provide excellent cover for a shapechanger on the run. The work's often hard, but the company's great among these vagabond misfits. A carnival could make a perfect choice for a shapechanger to live — provided they treat their animals well. (Some dark carnivals claim to have beast-blooded captives among their attractions, but they're just exaggerating . . . aren't they?)

Furries and Therians

Who better to chose as a feral tribe than people who already believe they're animals at heart? Whether they take the idea seriously or regard it as a playful kink, furries and various *therians* (people who feel like animals at heart) envi-

sion themselves as non-human souls trapped in human form. They share a feral's deep affinity for certain beasts and animal behavior. True, the furries and therians' idea of "animal" is often idealized, but such folks make excellent friends for people with truly wild hearts . . . so long as they don't wind up with *real* hearts bleeding on their living-room floors.

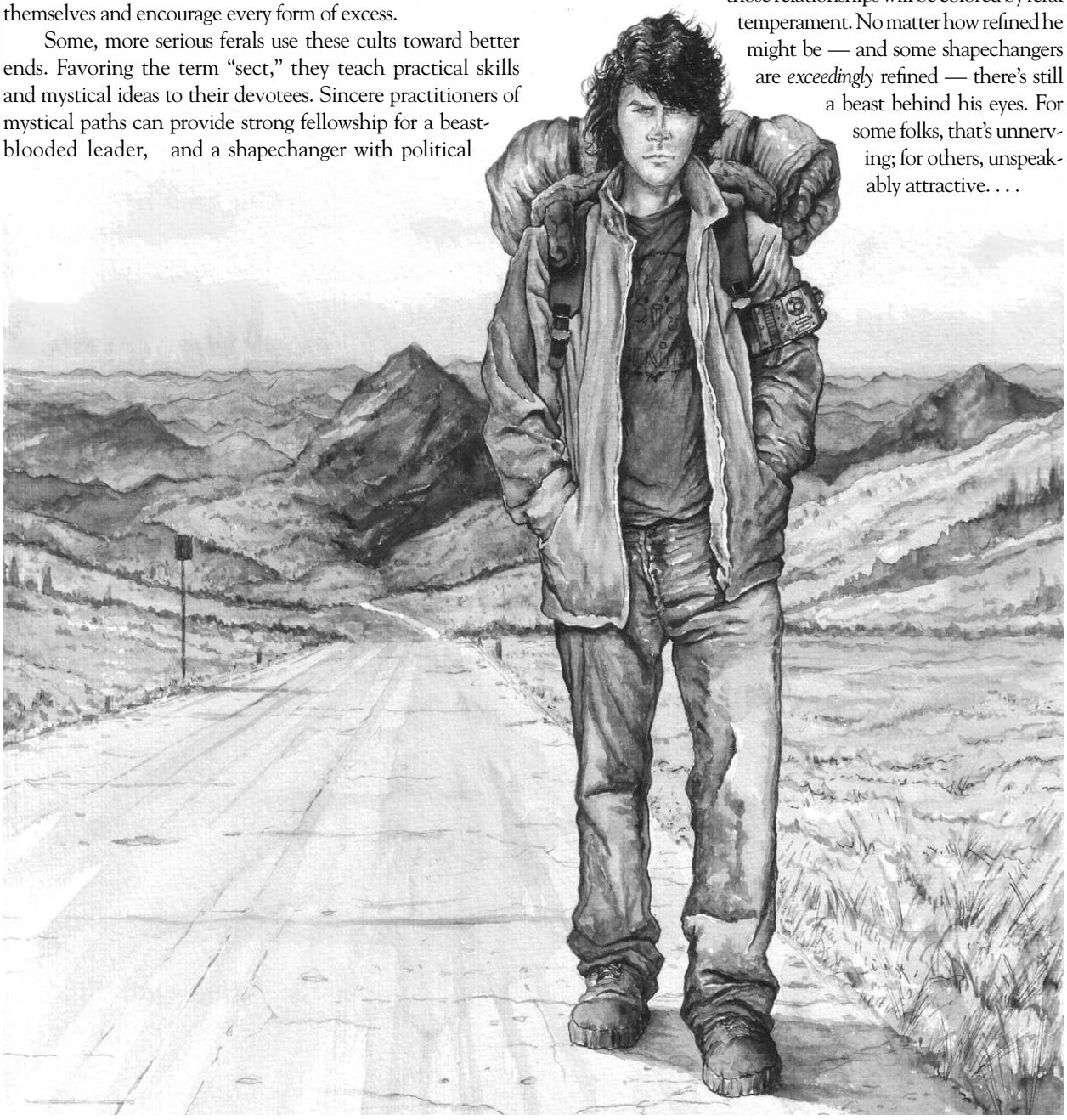
Cults and Sects

Back when the witch-craze burned its way across Europe, the image of a beast-man rising out of a coil of dancers haunted the minds of witch-hunting churchmen. Was it ever true? Whether shapechangers really governed witches' sabbats way back when, some ferals have run with that idea. Horned Ones, Bastet and Laughing Strangers excel at this game. Gathering occultists and disaffected teens, these ferals form cults around themselves and encourage every form of excess.

Some, more serious ferals use these cults toward better ends. Favoring the term "sect," they teach practical skills and mystical ideas to their devotees. Sincere practitioners of mystical paths can provide strong fellowship for a beast-blooded leader, and a shapechanger with political ideals might use her sect to advance community activism and spread social ideals. Of course, that "activism" could also include gutting the local land developer and burning his fleet of tractors. The sinister image in the witch-hunters' minds might not have been total fabrication, and the devils that they feared are still alive and well in the modern world.

Friends and Followers

A shapechanger eventually makes friends, wherever he finds them. They could be old buddies who knew the feral before the Change, or new acquaintances who've met "the new him." As he grows from a kid on the run to an adult walking the wild path, the shapechanger forms bonds with any number of people . . . and animals as well. Close as they might be, however, those relationships will be colored by feral temperament. No matter how refined he might be — and some shapechangers are *exceedingly* refined — there's still a beast behind his eyes. For some folks, that's unnerving; for others, unspeakably attractive. . . .



Caretakers, Lovers, Devotees and Kin

The phrase "animal magnetism" fits the average feral to a "T." Even if his Nahual is a particularly loathsome beast, some folks will find him irresistible. Depending on the relationship's dynamics and the shapechanger's desires, this bond could play out many ways:

Caretakers

Most humans have an "*Awwwww* . . ." reflex when it comes to certain animals. A kitten, for example, charms almost anyone. Even a repulsive beast can inspire sympathy if it's wounded. And so, many ferals find *caretakers* — people who go out of their way to help a werebeast, even if doing so puts them in danger.

Generally, a caretaker comes to the rescue of a feral in distress — shot, cornered, hit by a car and so forth. The werebeast might look human at the time, but it's usually the animal that gets the caretaker's attention. Something in those circumstances evokes compassion, and the person helps the feral even when it seems crazy to do so. The "What am I *doing*?!?" alarm might be sounding in her head, but the caretaker still lends a hand. That help might include medical aid, financial assistance, a well-timed alibi or just a place to crash for the night. The person might help temporarily, or provide steady shelter for the feral when he needs it. Depending on how the feral handles that situation from there, the bond might deepen into a more permanent relationship or blow up in bloodstains and tears.

Lovers

People and animals need love. They often go about getting it in different ways, though, and the mating instincts and affectionate behaviors of one might clash with the other. For beast-blooded folk, the niceties of human romance can be more complicated than usual. All the same, shapechangers can give or inspire the deepest kind of devotion.

Animals are rather . . . *direct* about their desires. Feral people are often the same way. An amorous shapechanger could purr, lick, sniff or bite the object of her attentions. She might head-butt him, preen like a mating bird or simply grab him by the collar and slam him into the nearest wall. As usual, the ways in which shapechangers behave when they're affectionate depend a lot on the inner beast — a courting crane and a lusty Rajan will handle their desires very differently. In both cases, though, the animal instincts show, and by human standards, they can seem embarrassingly forward. Sure, the human side can bridle the beast's passions, but it takes a bit of effort to do so . . . and removes some of the fun from the mating game.

A feral's mere presence is compelling. A normal person may find this presence irresistibly attractive or incredibly creepy — and very often both. It's often intimidating, too. Between the shapechanger's keen senses, vital presence and forthright behavior, would-be mates often feel caught between fucking and fleeing. Folks with a thing for Bad Boys or Bad Girls can be deeply snagged by a feral's attentions. Compared to the average date, a weretiger burns bright indeed. (As for sex . . . the term "collateral damage" fits a werebeast's nights of passion well. Whether this is a good thing or not depends on the extent and nature of that damage.)

From there, things hop a roller-coaster ride through heaven and hell. Some breeds mate for the moment, while others try to mate for life (*whose* life is open to debate), and a few try to eat their partners in the afterglow. The human side often struggles with the beast, but the urge to follow animal mating patterns is strong. Generally, the feral's devotion to the relationship depends on a common ground between the human's ideals, the beast's instincts and the partner's inclinations. That devotion can be abusive, affectionate or a puzzling mix of both. Either way, it *won't* be boring. Ferals tend to be temperamental, vibrant and often jealous lovers, and a werebeast's affection can be the best *and* worst experience her partner has ever known.

Devotees

Just as animals inspire great loyalty, those people who share the animal soul win great loyalty from others. Such devotees could be friends who know about the Changing Gift but don't scare easily, people drawn to a feral without knowing why, animal-lovers whose affections extend to shapechanging beasts or folks who revere the werebeast as an incarnation of mystic or divine power. When push comes to shred, these people have the feral's back. Though severe shocks can drive them away, such devotees anchor the feral to the human world.

Devotees can run errands, pull strings or offer shelter or a warm bed. They might rally to the shapechanger's call, or provide good counsel and a crying shoulder. All things being equal, they can also tax her affections, try her patience, put her on a pedestal or kick her to the curb just when she needs them most. Such people often help a feral out of their own wants and needs, and such needs can become oppressive, draining, even dangerous. Because of this, a smart shapechanger keeps her devotees at a distance. The more they know about her, the more vulnerable she is to them . . . or without them.

Kin

Most ferals also have *kin* — folks who lack the Changing Gift but know the shapechanger for what he is. Despite the name, such kin aren't always related by blood. They could be relatives, friends, lovers, children, business partners, groupies, employees, cultists or even slaves. Either way, they're still considered part of the shapechanger's "family," and will be protected and cared for as low-status but valued members of his band.

Kin know the score. They recognize, respect and often revere the Changing Gift. True ferals hold higher status in the social pecking order than kin do . . . but that's as it



Feral Children

Breeding comes as natural as breathing. So, do werebeasts reproduce? Of course — a bit less prolifically than humans or animals, perhaps, but werebeasts *do* breed children. Do those children inherit the Changing Gift? Ah, that's the question.

Normally, the Gift does not breed through. If it did, the world would be filled with werebeasts. Although the occasional feral child is born to one or two beast-blooded parents, the offspring are almost always "normal" human beings . . . or normal animals, as ferals breed with beasts of their species as well. Every so often, a chilling genetic twist results in a human child born to an animal, or an animal born to a human mother; such aberrations are almost always fatal to the mother . . . and often to the child as well, as the parent's companions usually kill the infant afterward. Sometimes, though, compassionate people or animals raise the unnatural new child as their own. These "beast births" (uncanny no matter which species they happen to be) often *do* manifest the Changing Gift later in life, and are "feral" in behavior, whether or not they actually change form.

Children of werebeasts often share their parents' touchy nature whether or not they manifest the Gift. Raising such a child can be trying for a family of any species. Although the youngster follows his dominant parent's species behavior for the most part, certain idiosyncrasies from the other breed come through. This lends a dysfunctional air to the families of changing parents, especially if other sordid practices "keep the family blood pure," as they say.

So is every child of a changing parent a beast? Nope. Strong discipline and parental love can direct a child's "wild" energies toward more productive ends. Still, the parents of a changer's child will have their work cut out for them. And until the child's adolescence has come and gone (sometimes not even then), the family won't know whether or not there's a literal fox in their henhouse. . . .

should be. A shapechanger, after all, is *incredible*, while kin are "ordinary." Some kin get jealous or discouraged about their status, while others accept their lot. Smart ferals, meanwhile, treat their kin respectfully. Disgruntled kin can be *incredibly* dangerous, as they know a feral's strengths and weaknesses. The most fearsome hunters began as abused kin, and they carry that grudge to any werebeast they can find.

Animal Companions

When people fail, animals come through. Indeed, many shapechangers trust beast-friends more deeply than they'll trust human ones. If possible, a feral person keeps one or more companions of her Nahual species close at hand. A Pack changer, for example, will probably have a few dogs or wolves nearby, while cats trail a Bastet everywhere.

Some animals make better companions than others. A cat-person has an easier time housing her kin than a gator one would, for instance. Many changers prefer to live in their species' natural habitat for just that reason. After all, a Land Titan can't keep her elephant in Manhattan.

Beast companions are like *siblings*, not pets. Any harm that comes to one will devastate the other . . . perhaps provoking a fatal rampage. While both sides recognize the feral's power, the human and the animal regard one another as family. In human company, they seem unusually close; in private, they relate to each other in animal terms, sniffing, growling, rough-housing and curling up together in the wild way. Although they seem weird by humans standards, those emotional bonds are *real*. They run as deep as any human love and often, for ferals, much deeper.

Beast Mates

Strange bites. Wild sounds. Glances between a person and her "pet" that seem more . . . *knowing* . . . than affectionate. Yes, ferals *do* bond with lovers from the bestial side of their nature as well as the human side. While those bonds might seem "unnatural" to most humans, such bonds are perfectly natural for the Changing Folk. The changing breeds are, after all, humans *and* animals at heart. Instincts and feelings can run strong on all sides, and although the intimate details of such relationships are best left unspoken, shapechangers can reproduce with their Nahual species as well as with human beings.

A feral with an animal mate has to be *very* careful in human society. Law and custom remain utterly appalled by the idea of such partnerships. Animals can also be possessive with their human mates. A person who gets emotionally or physically close to a shapechanger might find himself gored, mauled or otherwise attacked by that person's "pet" even if nothing sexual is going on between anyone involved.

Solitude

For certain shifters, the complications of a relationship can be too much to manage. For a while, at least, a feral might simply go off to be alone. She could retreat to the deep wilderness, lock herself in her apartment or hide behind a computer screen or TV until she feels ready to deal with the world again. The world, of course, usually has other ideas, and although a shapechanger might win a brief respite from the pressures of her life, events and people tend to catch up with her eventually.

Feral Society

All things in Nature are interconnected, and ferals are no exception. Whether a shapechanger's soul-breed is social or not, he has a place in the greater world. And although the changing breeds lack the social intricacies (and sheer numbers) of their werewolf kin, that shapechanger must deal sooner or later with the larger aspects of feral society: groups, dominance, territory and communication. Without such knowledge, the feral's lot is lonely indeed.

Feral Groups

Forged by shared purpose, fellowship and occasionally blood, a feral group can be united or diverse. In wild regions, a group might share the same species, while urban ferals cluster into small bands made up from different breeds. Long ago, it's been said, large groups of werebeasts roamed the world; now, such groups are rare and scattered. Many shapechangers go years on end without meeting another one of their kind. Those who do, however, often gather into groups for mutual protection and social company. These groups are . . .

Breeds

The so-called breeds are only distantly related. There are no conclaves of the Wing-Folk, though "birds of a feather" *do* flock together. Some species within a given breed socialize with one another, while many remain solitary. The common ground between breed-kin lies more in their behavior, appearance and symbolic nature than in established social structures within that breed.

Species

Species, on the other hand, often share common culture and lore. Closely related by form and temperament, a feral species may impose certain rules or structure on its members. Bubasti werecats, for instance, claim descent from the Goddess Bastet and share a fascination for magic and secrecy. A shapechanger born into a social species could have a tribe waiting for him when he emerges from his First Change. He may even be guided or forced through that Change by his future breed-mates, who recognize him for what he is even if that identity remains a mystery to him.

Bands

Small tribes, often composed of shapechangers from different species, band together out of common needs, interests or threats. These groups can be called *packs*, *flocks*, *gathers*, *murders* and so on, but *bands* is as good a term as any and better than most. A core element of feral society, the band maintains its purpose and cohesion through dominance, submission and overall cooperation. Folks who can't contribute aren't welcome in a band.

Status and Dominance

Animals like to know who's boss. And so, werebeasts often follow definite pecking orders within their groups. As in human groups, these rules are open to a certain amount of debate . . . but not much. The instinct to follow the leader runs strong in pack-based ferals. Independent shapechangers usually gather with non-feral companions or walk their path alone.

The Alpha

Regardless of species, most feral bands are led by an *Alpha* or *Alpha pair* — the most charismatically dominant individuals within that band. Influenced by animal dominance behavior and the human need for order, the Alpha role transcends pack-oriented werebeasts. Among such bands, the Alpha sets the tone for the group as a whole, and makes most of the band's major decisions. Such leaders accept input but not disrespect. To challenge an Alpha's decision is to challenge the Alpha himself.

Generally, an Alpha secures his position through force of personality, smart decisions and the occasional fight. He may not be the strongest member of a group (and often isn't), but his combination of wits, balls, social savvy and fighting prowess must impress every other member of the band if he wants to stay on top. Truly Alpha ferals take command naturally; they're the first ones through a door, the folks who expect others to obey them without question. Challengers are met with a hard, even stare and a "Did you have a question?" sort of remark. Such is an Alpha's force of personality that the stare alone is often enough to resolve the issue. If not, someone's gonna get hurt.

Alphas lead by example, and challengers provide examples for others who might disagree. A challenged Alpha puts her rival down as hard and fast as possible, to resolve the issue quickly and to remind everyone why *she's* the boss. Since ferals are *feral*, that takedown combines a physical beating with quick wits and unquestionable dominance. While that beating is rarely fatal (it's not wise to kill packmates), the challenger will *know* he's been whipped. Since animals (and most people) instinctively submit to a dominant force, the challenger usually offers to surrender after one or two decisive hits. Standing over her rival, the Alpha affirms her leadership with a quick snarl or sharp bite, glares at the rival and anyone else who might be watching, and lets the chastened packmate rise to his feet again. An Alpha who *can't* resolve disputes forcefully doesn't remain Alpha for long.

An Alpha pair works cooperatively to run the band. Almost always composed of a mated male-female couple (or, if both Alphas are gay, a mated masculine and feminine couple), the two support one another's decisions. When they disagree, these ferals keep it private. In front of their bandmates, the pair presents a united front. A challenge to one is a challenge to both, although to save face only one of them will resolve it. Individually, each Alpha rides herd

over his or her gender within the group. An Alpha who slips in the eyes of his or her gendermates may be quickly replaced as leader and lover by a winning challenger.

To stay on top, the Alpha must balance domination with goodwill. A tyrannical leader soon winds up under his bandmates' fangs. It's been said that the wise Alpha keeps one hand human and the other hand beast. He listens to advice, provides comfort as well as command and watches the horizon for threats and opportunities.

A band can take its Alpha down. There'll probably be a fight, but force of numbers often overwhelms even the toughest Alpha. Teeth and horns flashing, the angry pack might wound or kill its former leader, kicking him out or sending him to the bottom of the pecking order. More "reasonable" ferals prefer to shun their Alpha instead; after all, a leader leads only as long as others obey his commands. Eventually, though, the group must confront its soon-to-be displaced Alpha . . . and *someone* winds up bleeding. Unless there's a better leader waiting, that challenge may resolve itself with the old Alpha being "put on notice" but keeping his status for the time being. If a strong challenger exists, though, the Alpha may wind up on his own . . . or dead. Between their human and their animal natures, ferals can't stand weakness in a leader.

The Pecking Order

Beneath the Alphas, each feral sorts out his or her place within the group. Animals are practical, and so status depends on accomplishments, not titles. A werecrow, for instance, doesn't care if you're a bum or a CEO — he cares about what you bring to his flock. Everyone must contribute *something* to the group in order to belong. Through action and personality, the bandmates sort out the group's pecking order from Alpha to Beta to Omega. Sharp, vital members rise to the top while weaker members occupy the bottom. It's not often *kind* — but then, Nature rarely is.

The social personality of the band depends on the species of its Alpha. A spider-led group is subtle; a bull-led one, brutal. Like birds pecking one another, ferals act out their dominance behavior constantly. Weak members get teased, hassled and occasionally beaten by the stronger ones until the weak ones either get tough, leave the group or accept their place at the bottom. Still, a band takes care of its own. If an outsider attacks even the weakest member of that band, everyone comes to that feral's aid. The pecking order might be cruel, but ferals stick together. To take on one is to take on all.



The Predation Cycle

Nature does not exist in a constant state of violence. Still, the Changing Folk follow the instinctive cycle of prey and predation. Lions *eat* and deer are *eaten*, and that's the truth of life. Ferals, therefore, can be and often *are* one another's predators. Their shared legacy doesn't keep them from hunting one another, any more than fellowship prevents murder among men.

In the wild, shapechangers follow their instinctive roles. If a werelion spots a bison-blood, the chase is on and one of them will probably die. In their human skins, those predatory roles still tug at their hearts. The lion may wear a three-piece suit, but if he scents his instinctive lunch, he might literally salivate over it. Likewise, a lion *won't* accept a hare as leader — that runs counter to every instinct they both possess.

Among mixed bands, the predation dynamic makes things *very* tense between ferals of competing breeds. No matter how reasonable the people might be or how urgent their common cause, the predators and prey remain edgy around one another. This goes double for rival predator species, and it's one of the reasons such associations are short-lived. Literally by Nature, ferals don't easily cooperate unless their species co-exist as well. The human element allows for brief goodwill, but long-term harmony is rare.

The Band and Its Ways

Similar to a human tribal or musical group, a shapechanger band calls individuals together for a shared cause. Within such groups, a dominant Alpha (or Alpha pair) takes charge and directs the actions and customs of that group. The Alpha "calls the tune," as they say, for that band. Anyone who disputes the Alpha's decisions can back down, take over or get the fuck out.

A band may be composed of shapechangers of different species; bands of the same species (or at least the same breed) often go by an appropriate name — a murder of werecrows, a troop of wereapes, etc. Either way, that band follows a definite pecking order, which can be loose or strict depending on the Alpha's animal species. New members must prove themselves, while older ones keep the band healthy. Everyone pulls his weight, though — simply being a shapechanger isn't enough. Members who can't or won't contribute to the band's well-being are driven out or left behind.

Bands form around a purpose that suits the human and animal natures of its members. Rock bands, construction teams, mercenary comrades, hunting buddies, geek squads, farm collectives, road gypsies, trucking brotherhoods, crime gangs, hiking packs, healing circles, celebrity entourages, small business firms and even gaming groups all make excellent feral bands. Each band has a territory, resources and associates without the Changing Gift. The details, of course, depend on the nature of that group: a law firm will have wealth, political power and a non-feral staff, while hitchhikers share a handful of gear and know people with whom the band can crash for a night or two. It's the Alpha's responsibility to provide those things for his band; an Alpha who can't keep his group healthy won't remain Alpha for long.

Initiating Newbloods

To thrive, a band needs new blood. That blood, however, must flow well within the group. When a new member approaches (or is approached to join) a band, she'll have to prove she can fit in with it first. If she can't hang tight, they're not interested in keeping her.

Most bands have *newblood initiations* — a task or array of tasks for a newblood to accomplish before she's taken seriously. Traditionally, a werebeast must fulfill three tasks in order to join a band. One involves wits, the second demands power and the third requires courage. These tasks depend on the nature of the pack and the species of the newblood. Often, an initiation forces the newblood to run *counter* to her usual nature; a weretiger, for example, might have to sneak small items past human guards, while a werefox faces off against a powerful brute. These tasks will be challenging but not impossible. If the band doesn't want the newblood to join, the band won't even offer her the chance to do so.

The band's Alpha usually decides the nature and number of the initiatory tasks. If he likes the newblood, those tasks may be easier — though not *too* easy! — than they would be if the Alpha seems hostile. Of course, many Alphas play mind games with prospective members. The leader often runs a good cop/bad cop routine with another member of the group to test the newblood's temper. An Alpha might genuinely like or respect the "youngster," yet treat her with contempt to see how she responds. Or he may favor her with compliments, and then yank the proverbial rug out from under her just before initiation. Either way, the pack as a whole tries to provoke or unnerve their candidate. After all, if she can't hack it then, they can't count on her in a bind.

Assuming that she passes the tests, the newblood is welcomed into the fold with a ritual. As usual, this rite depends on the Alpha's personality. A mystical Bubasti will stage a complex ceremony, while a jovial Ursara slaps his new mate on the back and offers her a beer. At rite's end, all members assume animal form and take the newblood on a run to celebrate. Once she proves her worth, she's family.

Running Off

Even family has its limits, though. Troublesome members are abandoned or asked to leave. If a feral proves too rough to tame, his band might run him off. After a series of warnings, the miscreant winds up on the end of a good ass-kicking. If *that* doesn't work, the Alpha and her close supporters take him down as hard as they can without killing him, then pronounce a formal renunciation of his ties to the band and either chase him or drag him away. From that moment on, the troublemaker

is "run out" — exiled forever from the band's company and forbidden, on pain of death, from re-entering their territory. What happens to him then is none of their concern. He might survive the exile, but he's dead to them.

Territory

Beasts, even nomadic ones, need homes. And so, any feral band worth that name has its own territory. That home could be as small as a van or as vast as a national park — if a werebeast can secure her territory, she can keep it. A large area, of course, is harder to maintain. Unless it's truly remote, such territory often belongs to a band, not an individual . . . except, of course, if that individual is a powerful, respected elder of her kind.

A territory must suit animal and human needs. The inner beast must have somewhere to run, fly, swim, burrow or hunt, while the human aspect craves comfortable surroundings. Classically, those surroundings include cottages, huts, elaborate gardens or puzzling caves; modern territories include apartment buildings, warehouses, shops, offices, estates, laboratories, communes, farms, playgrounds and zoos. Meanwhile, creatures who fly, swim or burrow prefer territories that suit their animal nature: coastal shoals, lagoons, reefs, cliff sides, mountain peaks, skyscraper roofs, cave warrens, claustrophobic tunnels and so on. Anyplace where the human and animal aspects can reside provides space for a werebeast's territory. If the space belongs to a band instead, the territory suits the Alpha's taste first and the needs of the others from there.

Finding the Spot

To secure a territory, a werebeast or band first finds it and stakes it out as their own. That part's easy enough — so long as no one else has claimed it first. Assuming that no other party comes along to challenge that feral's right of dominion, the territory can be considered her protectorate . . . at least for now.

Marking Territory

Once she secures the area, the feral marks its heart and borders in her human and animal forms. Using an instinctive combination of symbols, scent and excretions (urine, feces, spit or blood), the shapechanger instinctively posts "This is *mine*!" warnings to anyone who knows how to read those signs. Most human beings remain clueless about the markings; they might see graffiti or piled stones, but seldom understand the significance behind them. Other ferals, however, can perceive the scent and bodily markings left behind . . . and strong markings indicate a powerful owner.

Ferals who understand spirit magic employ mystic rites to mark their territory in the spirit world as well. Uratha packs mark their grounds this way, as do most werecats, spider-folk and Ursara. A spirit-marked territory can be noticed by mages, vampiric sorcerers, werewolves, spirit entities and suitably-attuned ferals, but remains invisible to normal human beings unless the marks include cairns, claw scratches, wooden poppets or other obvious signs.

Securing the Grounds

Once a feral's marked his territory, he regularly prowls its grounds. An Alpha often takes this duty on himself, while a pair shares that responsibility. Kin, allies and other members help out, too. Prowling ferals hunt or gather their food during such excursions, and often take time to rest or play as well.

Smart ferals take precautions — they station guards, cast spells, build traps or set up technological warning systems to protect their dens. No territory, though, stays secure forever. Eventually, uninvited visitors arrive. Such trespassers may be warned — often politely, sometimes violently — that they're on someone else's turf. Harmless visitors are simply watched, while dangerous (or delicious) ones may be attacked without any warning at all.

(Certain shy feral breeds prefer to spring traps or send allies against trespassers rather than confronting them face-to-face. In such cases, the traps will be extremely tricky, and the allies very loyal. Most often, though, a feral band or creature defends its home ground personally. After all, a werebeast who can't protect his territory has no business claiming one at all.)

Striking Deals for Passage or Privilege

In most cases, a deal can be struck allowing the newcomer to pass through or hunt within the territory in exchange for a gift or favor. Obviously, the feral wants the upper hand in such situations. And so, the shapechanger puts on a real show when handling the deal, using whatever tricks or talents he can manage in order to impress his "guest." Chances are, he's been watching the intruder from a distance, learning what he can about that visitor before he confronts her. Appearing suddenly, the werebeast makes a cryptic remark or commits an act of shocking violence. The deal proceeds from there, with the feral getting as juicy a bargain as possible from his (hopefully) awestruck visitor.

Assuming all goes well, the visitor offers something to the beast, and the beast grants her limited hospitality. Traditional "prices of passage" include gossip, trinkets, magic, oaths of service, favors, sex or a choice share from the hunt. If things go badly for the werebeast, he'll attack if he can, run if he must and make life as difficult as possible for the trespassers until they're out of his domain.

Submitting Territory

When a feral's too old, shy or weak to fight trespassers, he submits a portion of his holdings to the newcomer. If possible, he'll get something for his trouble — no one wants to abandon home for nothing. Should the trespasser prove too powerful for the old feral to resist, though, the werebeast bolts for good unless he's backed into a corner or forced to surrender something too valuable to leave. At the

end of the day, home's just a place to lay his head! For all the Changing Folk's ferocity, most favor an animal's instinct for self-preservation. Beasts, after all, prefer life and health over holdings and possessions.

Butokas

Sometimes, generous ferals share their dominion with others of their kind. Such gatherings, called *butokas*, create temporary safe havens for ferals of all breeds. In folklore, butokas hosted hundreds of werecreatures; in this age, it's rare to find one with more than 20. Still, it's an impressive sight. Imagine hawk-people, werebulls, a spider-woman in the corner sharing gossip with a bear . . . a butoka is truly the stuff of legends.

According to tradition, the first butoka took place in Eden after the humans were expelled. While that's probably an exaggeration, the idea *is* incredibly ancient. Providing comfort for human and animal aspects, a butoka resembles an oasis where no visitor gets eaten. While it lasts, a butoka preserves common ground. Hospitality bans violence within the borders of a butoka, so long as its guests follow the rules of their host. There, predators and prey step out of their usual roles. The lion literally *can* lay down with the lamb if both decide to curl up together.

Peaceful as it might be for Changing Folk, a butoka can be fatal to anyone who's *not* beast-blooded. Outsiders are considered fair game, especially if they're humans or the undead. Kin are rarely welcomed in a butoka at all, and "trespassers," as the saying goes, "will be eaten." Ferals of all kinds team up to hunt unwanted company; the last thrill of an intruder's life may be the thunder of a bull behind him as huge owls descend and a vast spider drops down from her web. . . .

A typical butoka takes place in either remote wilderness or at a private club or estate. Guests assume whatever shapes they like, though War-Beasts are usually discouraged. Food, drink, entertainment and comfort are arranged ahead of time to suit all kinds of animal and human guests. Areas get set aside for games, chases and hunts; warm fires, watering holes, cozy dens and warm spots in the sun are all prepared for company. The host group might assign their kin to handle the chores, but other non-ferals are strictly banned. Guests who violate the rules are asked to leave; if they resist, the hosts may call an open hunt, with those guests as everybody's prey.

Most butokas are temporary. Similar to festivals, butokas last a short time and then the visitors disperse. A rare few butokas, though, take place regularly in clubs or secluded estates owned by powerful shapechangers and their friends. These safe grounds feature lethal security measures (animal *and* technological) against trespassers, and problems are handled with all the mercy of a striking cobra.

Room to Move or Be Alone

The life of a shapechanger is often solitary by necessity, if not always by nature. Because of the scarcity of their kind, it's difficult for those of the changing breeds to find others like themselves, much less humans or other creatures who understand the changing breeds' nature, yet mean them no harm.

In rural areas, shapechangers may turn to their animal kin for companionship, running wild with packs of wolves or stalking the savanna with prides of lions. But for those who live in cities, and especially for creatures inclined to live in flocks or packs, the Changing Gift can make life hell.

Without a group to belong to, pack-minded creatures often feel adrift. Their zeal for life and sense of purpose are tied directly to their relationship with others of their kind. Unless they can find or establish a butoka, their solitude often deteriorates into loneliness and self-destruction.

Other ferals, though, flourish in a solitary environment — even derive strength from it. Such creatures find it emotionally taxing to deal with humans, even in ordinary, everyday circumstances. For the bear-man or the panther-girl, time alone can mean a chance to attune the soul to the ways of Nature, gather strength to carry out day-to-day interactions with the world at large and restrain one's self from unleashing the most vicious abuse on those they know and love.

When they can, solitary creatures live almost completely alone, visiting their mate or a butoka at irregular intervals. They prefer to live off the land in a remote area, or cloister themselves in their city dwellings if they have no other retreat. Yet even the most solitary creatures crave some interaction with their own kind. It's easy to confuse a desire for independence with a desire for solitude. The cat-girl in the corner of the bar may seem aloof, but what she really wants is attention and affection — so long as it's on *her* terms. She prefers to keep to the edges of the group, near her own kind, but never *too* close. She isn't alone, but neither is she beholden to anyone except herself.

Communication

When ferals share the same species, communication is easy enough to manage. When a band of different species gathers, though, it can be hard to get ideas across. Because shapechangers often favor their species' native lands, a diverse group can't even count on a shared human tongue. How, then, do the changing breeds communicate?

Gesture, Scent and Vibes

All beasts understand certain non-verbal cues. A snake and a mouse need not share a language to know who's trying to eat whom. These cues come across in combinations of physical postures, scents, subsonic vibrations and the sublime awareness some folks call "energy." While humans often "think their way around" such perceptions, animals depend on them, and ferals trust a mixture of the two. This makes shapechangers keen but unusual conversationalists. Attuned to subtle signals, the Changing Folk think like people but perceive like beasts.



Feral Pictograms



BEWARE – HUNTERS!



BUTOKA



CLAIMED TERRITORY



DANGER!



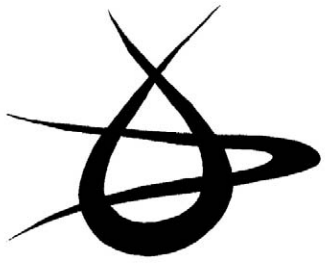
FRIENDLY



GOOD FOOD



HAUNTED



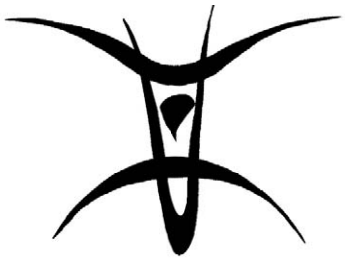
HAZARDOUS GROUND



KEEP OUT!



MAN THE DESPOILER



MINE!!!



PROTECTED



SAFE GROUND



THIS PLACE MUST BE DESTROYED!



VAMPIRES



WIZARDS



WOLF-COUSINS

Subtle as these signals are, they can't communicate abstract concepts. Their meanings are immediate and direct: *Food, Safe, Warning, Play*. Still, a feral can spot subtle clues in simple messages; a playful stranger might be scared as well. Such non-verbal signals rarely lie. It's one thing to control your words, quite another to shift your scent . . . thought certain ferals can do that as well.

Glares and Stares

There's a world in an animal's eyes. Without language, he communicates volumes with a single glare or stare. Infamous for their staring contests, shapechangers can read or express potent emotions without saying a word. And, just as most predators, shapechangers can read fear in even the steadiest gaze.

Barks, Cries and Howls

Many beasts don't communicate verbally, even when they *can*. Others possess wide vocabularies of howls, whines, squeaks and groans. More often than not, the subtle levels of those cries speak only to animals of that species. The obvious levels, though, are as direct as a cat's hiss or a tiger's roar.

Instinctively, a feral person understands the cries of her soul-species. She can mimic them, too, with unnerving accuracy even before her First Change comes. So long as her human throat or mouth can form the sounds, a shapechanger can "speak" with her bestial kin. Even if not, she understands their cries as well as any animal, although without magic she can't understand other species to nearly the same extent.

Images

Animals and people instinctually recognize patterns. For shapechangers, those patterns form a variety of expressive images. From human letters to claw marks to stacked objects or works of art, a feral can express a wealth of ideas. And although many of those ideas demand a special kind of literacy, some symbols are easily understood.

In the wilderness, ferals leave rough claw hatchings, wood-weavings and patterns of branches, stones, sand, feces or ice. Humans often recognize such marks but rarely know what to make of them. Certain species, such as the Bubasti or Uratha, have complex languages of glyphwork that only they can understand. Most feral packs have private "languages," too; to read them, you must belong to that band. A handful of these symbols, though, have become common pictograms, spread across the world by legends, use and finally the Internet. Although these rough codes lack the sophistication of Bubasti glyphwork, any feral who knows how to read them can spot these messages and decipher their intentions.

Touches and Caresses

To most humans, touch is too intimate to share freely. Animals, however, communicate through grooming, swatting, sniffing, licking, biting, fucking, rubbing flanks, butting heads, curling tails and generally behaving like the touch-junkies they are. Ferals favor their animal instincts — and often get in trouble for it. For that reason, they often avoid touching someone at all. In human company, a shapechanger may, in fact, stand *too* rigid and touch *too* little until she learns what is and is not appropriate. Once she's comfortable, though, the werebeast touches people and objects constantly.

Touch communicates through feeling, scent and often taste. Animals and ferals roll around in important areas, to leave their scent behind and to absorb "a bit of that place" into themselves through touch. Although such contact can be forceful, beast-bloods are surprisingly tender with their touch as well; a soft tap from an Ursara grizzly is as surprising as it is affectionate.

"Shit-Speak"

Beasts spray. So, sometimes, do beast-folk. One of the most distressing habits of the changing breeds, "shit-speak" involves pissing in corners, crapping on floors, drooling on loved ones and rolling in revolting substances.

Despite appearances, shit-speak isn't always insulting. Certain animals crap for joy or spray their most beloved things. Feral people usually control themselves more tightly than that, but if one wants to send a message, shit-speak gets the job done. An obviously disgusting method by human standards, shit-speak can be quite eloquent. Nothing says "I hate you" like a ripe turd dropped in the middle of a bed.

Empathy and Telepathy

Similar to animals, beast-bloods are remarkably sensitive to emotions. A feral can read feelings without exchanging a word. This makes them hard to lie to, but extremely easy to trust. Of course, shapechangers can be astonishingly *manipulative*, too. After all, it's child's-play to tell someone what he wants to hear when you already know what he craves.

Certain shapechangers are outright telepathic, reading complex thoughts as well as overall emotions. With eye contact (and sometimes less), a telepathic feral skims the surface of her subject's mind. Imagined words can pass unspoken, echoing between the shapechanger and her intimate. Most people, though, find this method of communication invasive — and animals don't often like it, either. Unless express permission has been granted (and sometimes even when it *has*), the spider-step of a telepath's thoughts leaves a person shaken and frequently hostile.

The First Tongue

In the beginning was the Word, and this may have been it. Legends claim that all creatures instinctively

spoke the same language during the First Days, a language that might have been the very words spoken by God or the gods during the age of creation. That First Tongue was corrupted after the fall of Paradise, however, and only a shadow of it remains. Spoken by spirits and a handful of shapechangers, this sibilant language forms the basis of otherworldly mysticism. Most ferals have heard only vague things about it if they've heard of it at all. A few, though, employ it as an idiom of respect and diplomacy with the Uratha werewolves and other spirit-kin.

Human Words

Man has his advantages. When a feral wants to get abstract ideas across, he resorts to human words and letters. Depending on his personality, he might love human language dearly or avoid it as much as possible. Extremely feral people forget how to speak in human terms at all, and communicate solely through animal sounds, gestures and activities.

The Quiet Codes

Unlike werewolves and other night-folk, the changing breeds have no formal code of behavior. Even so, certain groups *do* have laws and lessons, and a feral who acts out badly in human society may be "put down" by other ferals out of simple self-preservation.

Between such social pressures and the more frequent threat of self-destruction, a shapechanger with common sense maintains a set of "quiet codes" that protect the Changing Folk from hunters, ravagers and her own stupidity. This isn't a written law, exactly, though versions of it have been transcribed; instead, it's a "lore of living" that most bands and elders teach their young. Just as any other edict, the quiet codes have detractors and rebels. Still, when the proof crackles beneath bare paws, it's hard to argue with Mother Nature.

The Tiger Feeds the Worm

Nature moves in cycles, and ferals know it. No one is immune to the cycle of life, death and renewal. Even the greatest predator dies someday . . . and then the smallest scavengers feed on him in turn. This realization keeps many ferals from thinking too highly of themselves and succumbing to the proud curse of Man.

Revere the Gifts and Ways of Nature

More *advice* than *law*, this expression reminds a shapechanger to honor the little things in life. While the Clever Monkey bangs around his cage, an animal basks in sunshine or watches dust motes play in a ray of light. Life is full of miracles, and to realize that is to live in a constant state of gratitude. On a darker level, life is also *short*, and death can ride on sudden wings. A feral learns to enjoy what he has, respect what he meets and recognize that life is a gift that can — and someday *will* — be taken back. Therefore, enjoy that gift and make the earth proud for having shared it with you.

Don't Shit Where You Eat

Actions have consequences. Shit in your food, and you'll be eating shit, too. For some reason, human beings never seem to learn this lesson. The Changing Folk, however, know it well. Attuned as they are to Nature and its ruin, the beast-bloods realize how close we all stand to the edge of extinction. Some breeds, such as the Bastet and Ursara, have seen their soul-species all but exterminated by the Clever Monkey's foolishness. Their rage is awful, but it's instructive, too. Even as a Hanumani ape rips a hunter limb from limb, the ape knows that his own wrath could poison him just as deeply.

Let Night Be Your Concealment

Secrets love the dark. And if they want to live, ferals must be secretive about who and what they are. This used to be easier to do back in the days before electric light. Not long ago, a shapechanger could assume his bestial form and hunt unhindered after sundown. Now, with infrared scanners, night-vision goggles and perpetual twilight everywhere, the night isn't nearly as secure as it once was. Still, a feral who wants to run with the wolves can still find thick shadows to get lost in for a while. And if she wants to *keep* running free, she'd better do it at night. Daylight is no great friend to a shape-shifting beast.

Of all the quiet codes, this may be the most important. The mystery of the Gift must be preserved; otherwise, it becomes mundane . . . and eventually ineffective. Although the Delusion protects the Changing Folk, it's still vital to hide the Gift from Man. Indeed, it may be the Terror Unseen By Night that keeps the Delusion strong in the modern world. Without that primal sense of dread, the Delusion itself might fade away. And between Man's technological ruthlessness and the other greedy night-folk, werebeasts *seen* are werebeasts *dead*.

Balance Beast and Man as One

The thin path between two hearts is the road each feral must walk alone. Following either extreme is to lose all sense of self. A shapechanger who's too civilized feels her inner beast falter; one who's too bestial slips her human mask for good. Either error can cost her the Changing Gift, her loved ones and maybe life itself. To remain free, she must maintain harmony between the Man's world and Nature's cry. Those stakes are personal, but they're very, very high.

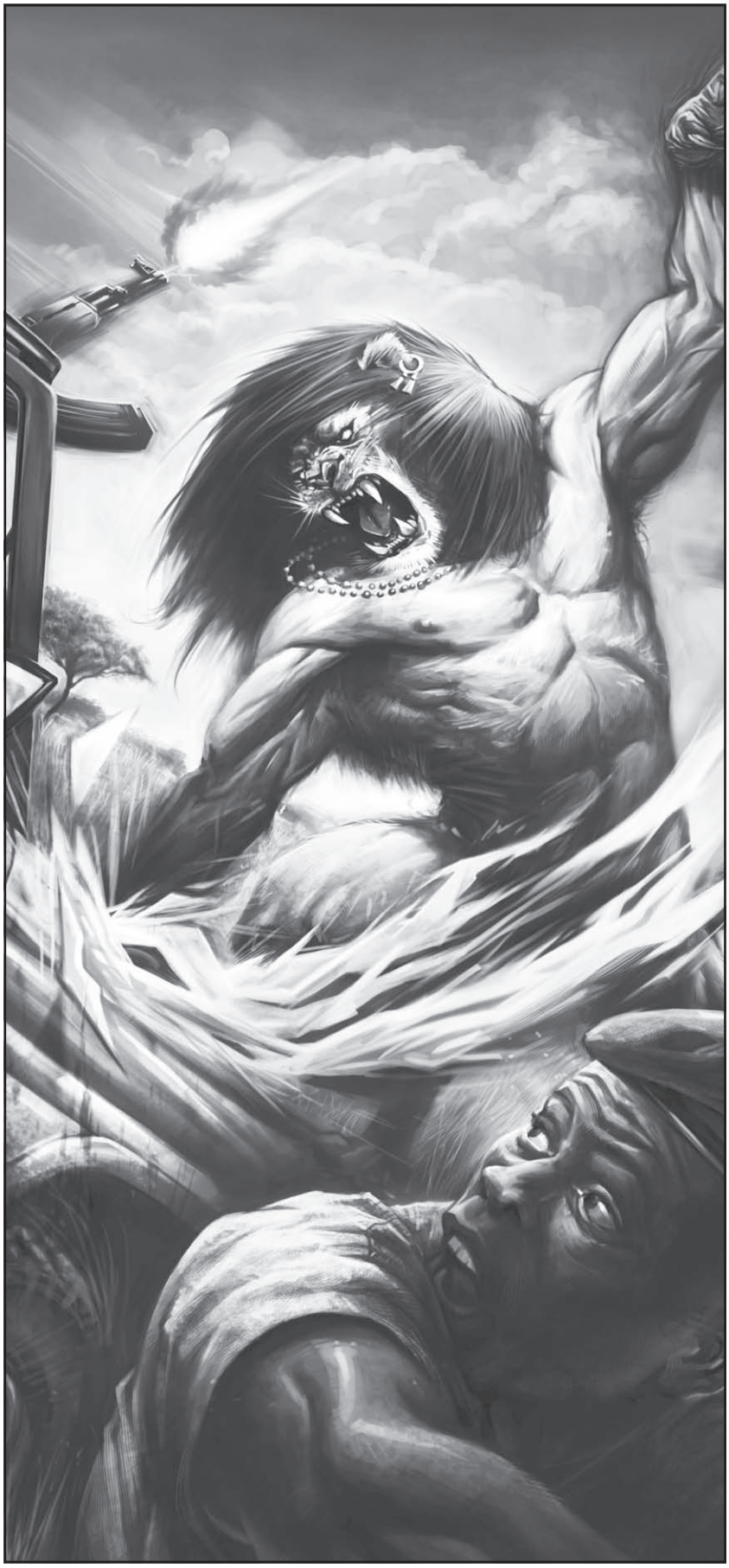
The Man-*Hunter* Becomes the Man-*Hunted*

What Man fears, Man kills. That truth has been measured in bones. No matter how strong or clever a single shapechanger might be, there are too many humans to eradicate. The more notorious a creature becomes, the more dedicated people become to hunting it down. For clear reasons, such hunts pose a threat to all changing breeds, and werebeasts do what they can to minimize such threats by hunting down a "rabid" feral before Man gets too deeply involved.

Do ferals kill people? Of course — but ferals should do so *carefully*. A rampage calls down more attention than any werebeast can handle. For the sake of each shapechanger, this law is gospel. A feral who spills blood recklessly puts all Changing Folk at risk, and becomes their enemy as well as Man's.

The World: Hunters and Prey

Alone or in a band, a werebeast faces a vast and often hostile world. Regardless of her Nahual species, she carries the air of a human predator. She's closer to Nature than most folks could ever understand, yet combines the best and worst aspects of humanity and the beast. She can speak, reason, probably write and often understand the puzzling intricacies of Man's world — then shuck her clothes and run off to join the wild. Through keen senses and a sharp mind, she experiences a world of vast potential. Yet that world is wrapped in darkness, and she's one of its biggest shadows. A walking impossibility, she's close to everything yet belongs to nothing. Each feral individual handles that dichotomy on his or her own terms. Still, certain observations can be made about a werebeast and the world around her, and many of them start with her own humanity. . . .





Mankind

The best friend and worst enemy of the changing breeds is Man. And with good reason. Beasts don't fear gods or monsters. They fear human beings. It's not werewolves, after all, who filled the Old West with skulls and empty skins. It's not vampires who bulldoze the forests of the world. It's not spirits of corruption who've put Earth's most magnificent beasts on endangered-species lists. It's us. Just us.

Yet the Changing Folk are human beings, too. They drive cars, live in McMansions and eat fast food. Whether they come from tribal cultures or New York City, they understand the paradox of being predator and prey. Ferals know first-hand the better side of being human. That's what complicates their relationship with Man — they know his best and worst sides because they're both as well.

Man cultivates. He beautifies. He makes life interesting in the best and worst ways imaginable. "He's" an abstraction that's bigger than any person, male or female. Man is an attitude that sometimes takes on a life of his own. And for feral people, he's the rock in the road around which they cannot go. By virtue of what they are, they *have* to deal with him.

Man's most dominant aspects in the feral world are . . .

The Clever Monkey

Human ingenuity presents a beast-blood's greatest paradox. It frees a shapechanger from drudgery, yet fills his world with toxins. Man's ingenuity provides fast cars but runs over his kin with them. His ingenuity supplies safe and endless food while filling stockyards with cruelty. Some ferals go insane from the moral crux: close your eyes or live furious? Man's cleverness has *literally* remade the world, for better and worse at once.

Many werebeasts favor their human side. They swallow hard and enjoy their toys. Root-Weaver ferals are especially fond of Man's inventiveness, and spend most of their lives up to their elbows in tech and machinery. Even then, though, they do what they can to minimize the damage. Political action, green technology and the occasional monkey-wrenching job mitigate some of the moral confusion. *If this is Man's world,* they say, *I'll work with what I have and fix what I can.*

Other ferals are more radical, either running away or turning terrorist. On the fringes of Man's world, they hunt humans and gut technology. There are *reasons* why pipelines take so long to build, why joggers get mauled and lights blink out in the middle of the night. Some ferals have had *enough*, and in small but vicious ways, they bite the Clever Monkey's fingers.

Man the Conqueror

The Clever Monkey, though, has a *very* big club . . . and a gun, and lots of friends. It isn't just Man's intellect that rapes Nature — it's his ruthlessness as well. Man the Conqueror picks up where the Clever Monkey leaves off. He's the biggest jock with the biggest cock, and the natural world pays the price.

Man the Conqueror shows up in a truckload of rednecks or a plane full of jet-setting sportsmen. "He" can be male or female — it's the attitude that counts. He's the one who hunts for sport, not hunger, who kills just because he *can*. He's a predator out of balance, the sworn enemy of beast-kind. Ferals trick him when they're able, kill him when they can and piss on anything he holds sacred. After all, he's done the same for them.

This aspect of Man is the ultimate hunter. He drives species to extinction for laughs. Once, he protected and fed his family. Now he's a walking sickness. Among ferals, this aspect embodies all that's worst about humanity. Indeed, it's said that demon-spirits have taken on his form and become living archetypes of the Conqueror's ego. These Great White Hunters terrorize the wild world. *Human* hunters are bad enough, but these things are pure evil. Ridden by spirits of bloodlust and hate, they're the boogiemen of the feral world — incarnations of Man the Conqueror gone mad.

Man the Despoiler

The word *man* comes from "hand" and "to fortify." Man the Despoiler can't stop doing either one. To "fortify" his world, he "man-handles" everything in sight. And so, forests fall and skies boil with the mess he creates everywhere.

Man the Despoiler is greed unchecked. He uses and then throws away his world. Years back, he wrote gospels to himself that made him master of the earth. He's been living that way ever since. Wrapped up in his selfish, mechanistic view of life, he loots and pollutes for phantom dollars on an endless spreadsheet. In human form, he's the CEO, the speeding trucker or the kid tossing cigarette butts on the ground. Damn the rest of the world for getting in his way! That world exists for his convenience, and does so at his pleasure.

Ferals whisper that the Despoiler has other forms as well — incarnations of greedy carelessness. These entities may have once been men, but malignant carelessness ate their humanity away. Now they're incarnations of the Despoiler, creatures dedicated to the ruin of their world. Sadly, that world's power is on their side. The Despoiler's attitude remains so strong that it has become, to Man's shame, his dominant legacy on Earth . . . at least for *now*. . . .

Man the Clueless Fuck

He doesn't mean any harm. That doesn't mean he's harmless. The Clueless Fuck honestly tries to do the right thing (or at least tries *not* to make a mess). But whether he's tossing trash while hiking or starting plagues while looking for their cure, this aspect of humanity creates ruin out of good intentions.

In human form, the Clueless One claps animals into zoos, "studies" them cruelly or hops into lion cages to bond with the beasts. He's the New Age mystic who wrecks a forest while worshipping a tree. Ferals regard him with compassionate disgust; some *were* him before the Change set in. Sometimes, though, corruption sets in. Such people wind up destroying Nature in order to save it, and to werebeasts, these people are as dangerous as any other foe.

So why not simply exterminate the human species? Because Man still provides growth and culture in a wild world. At his best moments, he redeems himself with amazing creativity. Through human efforts, beasts and species that would have vanished are restored; in human industry, Nature's beauty is enhanced. The "hand" that often destroys also nourishes as well. Man creates art, refines craft and maintains hope, and the world is better for that.

The human animal is a paradox, the human who *literally* becomes an animal, more so. For a feral, it's infuriating. She loves her human world but hates what's been done to create it. And so, her relationship with Man's realm isn't easily defined. Sometimes, it's a night at the museum . . . and then again, it's veins in her teeth.

Natural Beasts

Human legends sometimes call shapechangers "the beast kings." A true feral knows how laughable that idea is. True, the Changing Folk attract kin from their related animal species. *Mastery*, though, is another matter, one that real animals will quickly contest against an arrogant beast-blood.

True animals regard a beast-blood with wary respect. Instinctively, they can smell the Changing Gift on any form the feral wears. Depending on the species, the animal might challenge the stranger, submit to her as to an Alpha or run like hell. Generally, a powerful beast will challenge the man-blood with snarls or glares; if the beast is angry or predatory, it might simply attack. Prey species, confronted with their natural enemies, often flee. A werelion smells like death to most natural animals, while a hare-man still smells like lunch.

To the feral folk, natural beasts often seem more *true*. A shapeshifter might look longingly at animals of his species, wishing he could be even *more* like them. A contemplative beast-blood could see true animals as guides, omens, role models or protected kin. A voracious feral, on the other hand, may take Man the Conqueror one step further and consider himself the ultimate predator.

The Night-Folk

To a feral, nothing is "supernatural." All things are of Nature, although for some (for example, vampires) that Nature is perverted. And so, most Changing Folk remain fascinated with the shadow-side of their world: the sorcerers and fierce cousins who share their place in Man's nightmares. . . .

Werewolves: The Moon-Callers

Perhaps the most infamous of their kind, the man-wolves of the Uratha share a closeness that few other breeds can match. While most shapechangers gather in small bands or live in solitude, the ferociously social werewolves create vast tribes and complex myths. Sometimes they seem more legend than flesh . . . until claws and howls remind the other ferals why they still fear Father Wolf.

According to Uratha lore, Father Wolf was the primal predator, a guardian of order before the rise of Man. (Why Father Wolf didn't do a better job is a touchy subject for most Moon-Callers.) All cultures, of course, weave self-serving myths, but werewolf lore seems to have hints of truth. Ferals who understand the spirit realm recognize the totems and corrupters that Uratha deal with regularly. Beast-mystics share the magic talents that Uratha take for granted. There's something *different* about the werewolves, though most ferals hate to admit it. If nothing else, werewolves are among the deadliest creatures on Earth, and are worth respecting for that alone.

Most werebeasts avoid their lupine cousins when possible. There's something fanatical about the wolves. Certain breeds, such as the Laughing Strangers and Spinner-Kin, are often mistaken for spiritual parasites by Uratha hunters, and wind up gutted on general principle. Even weretigers tread lightly around the wolves. Although werewolves are clearly feral, too, the Moon-Callers seem like a breed apart.

Mages: Keepers of the Key

Witches and magicians hold long connections to the feral folk. Their talents place them outside the usual human herd, and certain breeds (notably Bastet, Wing-Folk and Horned Ones) share mutual fascinations with the mystics. Still, the Keepers of the Keys to Creation can be haughty, obtuse and unpredictable. Too often, their respect for Nature plays second fiddle to raw ambitions. In some regards, the so-called mages embody the worst elements of Man the Despoiler, but with more power at their disposal.

To many wizards, Nature is a puzzle-box to be unlocked and plundered. This attitude sets feral teeth on edge. Compared to the beast-folk, these walking enigmas seem feeble in body but Alpha in disposition. That combination seems instinctively confusing to most Changing Folk, who often challenge a wizard's right to lead. Whether that challenge ends with the wizard's guts on the floor, the feral's fur in cinders or both parties sharing a beer depends on the power and diplomacy of each rival. Mages and shapechangers can make great friends or vicious enemies. Either way, though, they remain mysteries to one another.

Vampires: The Hungry Dead

The most voracious monsters are humans who refuse to die. For some mad reason, these Eaters of Night cut themselves out of the sacred cycle of life, death and renewal. And so, they're always hungry. Always consuming. Always interfering with the lives and fates of others while draining the lifeblood of the world. To most werebeasts, vampires are lovely parasites — charming, fascinating, walking disease. While certain ferals enjoy the company of the undead (or at least take advantage of that company), all Changing Folk bristle instinctively at their presence.

To be undead is to mock Nature's order. To be *human* and undead is even worse. Vampires take all the worst and best traits of Man the Despoiler up to the next level. They consume for *lifetimes*, yet give little back in return. As embodiments of Man the Hunter, they're likewise loathsome. The vampire doesn't cultivate — he merely destroys.

And yet these fatal parasites have their charms. They're closer and more honest about their bestial side. They wield respectable amounts of power. The best indulge sensuality and beauty, while the worst retain a fetching brutishness. As animals and people, werebeasts remain fascinated by vampires. Werebeasts can literally smell the decay on these . . . *things* . . . and yet respect their Alpha tendencies. Certain feral cultures nurture their relationships with the Hungry Dead, skimming secrets from them like cream. But a vampire lacking an Alpha's charisma or some other charming trait is a walking bloodstain. No matter what its breed, a werebeast considers such monsters prey.

Spirits: The Primal Essence

Ferals are earthy. Their realms are forests and fields, not distant spirit lands. Even so, certain breeds explore the so-called Shadow, drawing magic — and occasional trouble — back to the mortal lands with them.

The most obvious entities that feral folk encounter are spirits of Nature herself. Ephemeral animals, ghostly plants, totem beasts and the occasional flesh-riding Spirit-Thieves occasionally manifest in the Earthly realm. Near places of power (often called *loci*), these entities pass through into Man's world, and shapechangers sometimes pass through into the Shadow the same way. Incarnations of Raven, Fox, Elephant and so forth, these spirits resemble sharper, more vital versions of their fleshy descendants. They communicate in recognizable barks and howls, yet seem far more *aware* than mortal beasts or human ferals. For ferals who crave a connection to "deeper levels" of their wild hearts, such spirits seem like angels; indeed, they *are* angels for all intents and purposes. As any mystic knows, however, "angels" can be frightening. As "right" as they might seem to beast-blooded humans, these entities may be ruthless, amoral and implacably powerful.

Spirit Matters

The complex realm of spirits and their ways goes far beyond the scope of this book. Troupes that want to incorporate the Shadow and its inhabitants into a changing breeds chronicle should check out **Werewolf: The Forsaken**, **The Book of Spirits**, Chapter 8 in the **World of Darkness Rulebook** and perhaps **Mage: The Awakening** for further details. Animal-Claimed spirit Hosts are described more fully in **World of Darkness: Skinchangers**, along with the loathsome skinthieves.

Restless spirits sometimes snatch the bodies of human or animal Hosts. Guiding or possessing them, these predators wreck awful changes on their prey. Occasionally, beast-spirits possess human "horses" and ride them mercilessly, turning them into shapechangers of their own design. When this happens, it's often difficult to tell a possessed shapechanger from a beast-born one. Spiritually attuned ferals can literally smell the difference, but most others cannot. These *Hithimu* tend to be more malignant in behavior and intention than mortal shapechangers, and become prey for the raging Uratha. Many ferals have been ripped to shreds by werewolves who couldn't or wouldn't recognize the difference. And so, the Claimed present a double danger to feral folk: the Claimed mock the Changing Gift with their pretensions and breed violence between Moon-Callers and their natural kin.

Clever mystics among the changing breeds summon and bind spirits as the werewolves do. Though less favored by ancestry, these mystics learn potent tricks from their spirit allies. Most times, such ferals deal with the spirits of animals or plants; every so often, though, one might forge pacts with the weirder spirits — conceptual-spirits, artificial entities or the hybrid outcasts called *magath*. Wind-Dancer and Root-Weaver accords seem especially drawn to such experimental thinking, which seems to run counter to Nature's earthly order. All in all, ferals avoid the eerie Shadow. Most beast-blooded folk would rather feel Earth's air across their feathers or Earth's mud beneath their paws.

Horrors

Beasts bristle at odd sounds for a reason: they know what horrors the night contains. Between the shadows of the *known* lies the infinite *unknown*, and animals

instinctively fear that mystery. Humans, of course, are drawn to it even as their own skin ripples at the thought. And so ferals, being both, are likewise drawn by the Great Unknown and utterly appalled by it.

This world is filled with mysteries, from skin-stealing monsters to screaming pools of goo. Ghostly haunters, man-crafted abominations and warped humanoid *things* keep a feral's fur rippling. The most obscene horrors, though, are ones that masquerade in beastly guise. These so-called *skinthieves* steal the Changing Gift through sadistic magic, then pretend to be animals for their own sick pleasure. No creature — spirit, human or even vampire — turns a feral's stomach like a skinthief. Without mercy or exception, a creature that skins animals in order to become one is sent screaming to its judgment as painfully as possible.

Nature holds mysteries of her own. No feral can hope to learn them all. The most adventurous elder realizes that he's only touched a brief ripple of life's tapestry. The Great Unknown lingers on the edges of comfort, and a wise beast-man, as long as he lives, knows how little he truly understands.







Fire trucks and camera crews should be banned from the scene of a suicide jump. Their presence burns away the dignity of the fall. Their presence makes it tawdry and cold. There is no hope for flight with witnesses. All is taken away that might make it holy. I am far, far away from the city. That will not happen to me.

I used to believe that I was afraid of heights. Looking straight up to the tops of the snow-heavy pines washed my stomach in vertigo, and I had to look away. I did not yet know the taste of joy.

I thought it was terror.

At the top of Whistling Mountain, I looked down onto the expanding swath of the winter-gray fields from the top of the plateau and felt only delight and giddy expectation. It made me crave and ache for something I could not give voice. I returned to camp below feeling a hollowness. Sleep swooped in with silent feathers.

Now I am not where I was before.

For the first night, I tried to hold onto the hope of insanity. For the brief moments that I could convince myself that I was delusional, I was content to just observe the absurdity and horrific beauty of it all. I tried to convince myself it was all a dream, that the rocks and wind were just jumbles of concerns my waking mind had yet to process. Yet my cramping calves and hunger refused to be ignored or filed away under the guise of a nightmare.

Yesterday, I woke up, and hunger had left me. Copper coated the back of my mouth, a flavor I loathed to love. My feet had nowhere to go when I became sick. The ledge had not expanded during my unconscious travels. I tried to pretend my repeating thought was not my own.

When you have run out of time for fear, there is always time left for change. The phrase sweated out of me as I yanked the long white spotted feather out of my arm. I needed to make it real, to hold it in my hand. It had taken so long to do. The long quill was buried deep in my flesh. Nausea swam through me as at last I plucked it out. My blood ran down my fingers as I held it high in the wind. This token of my wanderings will be my sepulcher.

Today, I will be the owl, the one in my dream. My throat is raw. Echoes of my own growling krrooo-oo and screaming screech return to me. There will be barks, hair-raising shrieks, coos and beak snappings. Sounds of speech I have never imagined, but are mine.

In a fair world, there would be no cliff ledges for leaps of faith. The world has no use for fairness. I am standing in a niche on this rock face. It is time to fly or fall.

Building the Perfect Beast

There's an animal beneath your skin. Under the illusions of fashion and technology, you're one of *them*. A beast. An animal. A monster. The words themselves reveal it.

In English, the root of *beast*, *being*, *behold* and perhaps even *beauty* is the word: *be* — "to exist." Meanwhile, monster comes from *monere* — "to warn or reveal." Monsters, then, reveal truths about ourselves, and this is never more true than when we choose to play a monstrous beast.

So how do you build the perfect beast? And how "monstrous" will your beast become?

I sit looking at pages of centaurs trampling the soil of Argos – and outside my window he is trying to become one . . .

– Peter Shaffer, Equus

Step One: Character Concept

Before the First Change — and after it, for that matter, your feral is a human being. Although you probably have a beast in mind already, decide who the *person* is as well. Chances are, that person has probably been influenced by her inner beast all along; if so, her Nahual may offer hints about the person she was before the beast breaks through. That First Change rarely happens before puberty, and almost never after the age of 30, so your character will have at least some idea about her identity by the time the Changing Gift appears.

Step Two: Select Attributes

Ferals range from brainy recluses to brawny killers. Most, however, have at least *some* physical aptitude before the Change. Likewise, they tend to be a little . . . *odd* . . . by human standards — either really charismatic or deeply unsociable. Although it's not a hard-and-fast rule, you may want to make Physical Attributes your feral's primary or secondary set, with Social either the primary or tertiary set (reflecting either a strong "animal magnetism" or a desire to be left alone).

Just as all other World of Darkness characters, ferals begin with the usual one dot in each trait, plus the standard 5/4/3 configuration for the remaining Attribute dots.

Step Three: Select Skill

Likewise, a feral character begins play with the usual 11/7/4 allotments for Skill dots. And although it's not a universal rule, many ferals have an innate affinity for animals, silence and the great outdoors. In game terms, we suggest starting a new feral character out with at least one dot in the following Skills: Animal Ken, Stealth and Survival. This reflects the feral's instinctive talent toward those areas, and the things he's probably done to refine those instincts before the Change kicks in.

Step Four: Select Skill Specialties

A feral character also begins with the usual three Skill Specialties. You're free to assign them where you like, with an eye to that character's previous experience.

Each accord, however, has certain Skill Specialties affiliated with it. The Root-Weaver, for example, is especially good with Academics, Crafts and Sciences. In addition to your usual three Skill Specialties, you may choose one Specialty from those accord-related Skills, for a total of four Specialties. You

Character Creation Process

As with any other character, the process begins with the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, pp. 34–35, employing the usual rules and traits detailed in Chapters 2 through 5 of that book. In Step Five, add the feral supernatural template.

Choose a Nahual (see **p. 57-58, 64-73**).

Choose a breed and species within that breed (see **p. 120-203**).

Select the appropriate Aspects (see **p. 74-95**), based on your breed.

Ferals can pick additional Merits detailed in this book (see **p. 95-97**).

Morality now becomes Harmony (see **p. 100-102**).

If you'd like to build a beast-kin character instead of a full-blooded feral, you can select the Beast-Kin Merit (see **p. 96**), which costs four of your usual seven Merit-allotted points. Ferals who have already undergone the First Change cannot take this Merit, and if your character begins as a kin and becomes a full werebeast, all benefits of that Merit are lost.

Whose Rules?

Non-player werebeasts in a **Werewolf: The Forsaken** chronicle may instead use the rules and guidelines given in **War Against the Pure**, Chapter Four. Those rules, however, are intended to create mysterious monsters, not player-level characters. Likewise, the book **World of Darkness: Skinchangers** uses rules for skinthieves and Claimed characters whose shapechanging abilities are stolen or imposed. Feral shapechangers, however, are born to be what they are. To create player characters of that distinction, use the rules presented in this book.

Terminology Note: In **War Against the Pure**, both inborn and unusual traits are called Aspects; in **World of Darkness: Skinchangers**, inborn abilities are simply assumed to exist, while unusual abilities are called Aspects. For clarity, **The Changing Breeds** simply calls "Inborn Aspects" *Favors*, and refers to unusual abilities as *Aspects*.



don't have to take the Skill in question, but if you don't, that free Specialty is lost.

Step Five: Add Feral Template

When the Storm strips away all that person's sense of self and the Changing Gift shows who she was all along, that person becomes something *more* than "only human." In game terms, you add a template that gives her special innate abilities. Note that you cannot "stack" templates together: a werecat cannot also become a vampire. Her soul already "belongs" to the Nahual spirit, and vice versa. To alter one is to destroy them both.

Feral characters have certain innate gifts and drawbacks that make them what they are. Each player character who employs the feral template gains the following benefits and drawbacks that define her wild heart.

Common Traits: Shapeshifting, Healing, Fury, Silver and Delusion

All feral characters, regardless of breed, share the following common traits:

• **Shapeshifting:** The defining talent of the werebeast, the Changing Gift allows the feral to shift between human, animal and a ferocious hybrid form.

• **Healing:** All ferals heal at a phenomenal rate.

• **Fury and the Berserk:** Bestial instincts and innate disgust with Man's depredations imbue every feral with a Fury that can take several different forms.

• **Weakness to Silver:** The vulnerability to Moonbane remains a puzzling but constant thorn in every feral's paw.

• **The Delusion:** The illusions of Man cannot handle certain truths. Faced with the Changing Gift, the Berserk or a feral in mid-shift, human minds or technologies suffer the Delusion . . . if only for a moment.

These traits are discussed further in the following sections.

Nahual: Breed and Species

Whether your character has hit his First Change or not, the Nahual resides within him from birth. This beast-soul determines the breed to which he belongs, as well as the species of that breed.

In most regards, the Nahual, breed and species are one and the same. A Rajan, for example, is a specific kind of weretiger. If you wanted to build that character, you'd probably have a weretiger (his Nahual) in mind from the beginning. This would be one of the Bastet breed, from the Rajanya species. All three are tied together; you couldn't, for example, have a Rajan wereraven from the Laughing Strangers breed.



The Nahual determines your character's breed. The Nahual may determine his species within that breed, too, although some breeds have several species within that animal "type." Each breed features several Favors that your character *must* have, and determines that kind of animal he is at heart.

Details about the Nahual can be found on **p.25-26**. For elaborations about the breeds, see Chapter Three.

Accord: The Heart-Path

Where the human imagination meets the soul of a beast, the two strike an *accord*. For your character, this trait offers guidelines for his inclinations. A Root-Weaver, for example, enjoys making and shaping things, while a Heart-Ripper enjoys taking them apart. Similar to the Nahual, the accord rests inside the feral even before his First Change begins. As a kid, he may have enjoyed Legos and puzzles (a Root-Weaver) . . . or he may have been a terrorist brat (the Heart-Ripper).

Together, your concept, breed and accord provide a good impression about your character's overall nature. A Den-Warder weredog, for example, would be ferociously loyal, trustworthy and perhaps a bit short-sighted. Concept-wise, this guy might be an honest cop, good buddy or playground "bodyguard" for bullied kids. All the same, you don't want to define him *too much* by such traits. An accord reflects an overall personality, but there's still plenty of room to move. The Root-Weaver could be a mechanic, scientist, city planner or computer geek, with his own quirks and motivations. Each feral is an individual, so treat him like one.

Systems-wise, each accord features Skill Specialties and Aspects. For details about them, see **p. 64-73**.

Favors

Beasts have abilities that people do not: wings, fangs, a dramatically large or small size and so on. These Favors from Mother Nature manifest only in the shapechanger's Primal or War-Beast forms. In a feral's human guise, he lacks such gifts.

Each breed has three Favors that "come with the territory" for such creatures. A few Favors resemble Merits in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, and are described that way in game terms. No, these Favors aren't always "balanced" in game terms, any more than a mouse and a lion are "balanced" in real life. Even so, the human element provides a certain balance among beasts; a shapechanging hare, for example, is far more clever and magical than a normal bunny.

Aspects

Nature's bounty goes beyond the Changing Gift. To help her chosen folk survive, she lends them certain Aspects. In story terms, these traits reflects unusual blessings that the feral character enjoys. In game terms, Aspects are abilities beyond the usual Favors included in that character's breed.

A beginning character gets seven points to spend on Aspects. These Aspects are innate, although certain ones might take a little while to manifest after the First Change (see the listings for specifics). For details about Aspects, see **p. 61, 74-95**.

Step Six: Select Merits

A beginning character has seven dots with which to purchase Merits. These traits can be whatever you want them to be, although they really should fit your concept. A Kenyan street kid, for instance, won't have Resources . . . though he *may* have Retainers. For Merits available only to ferals, see **p. 61, 95-97**.

Step Seven: Determine Advantages

The various Advantages are elaborated in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, Chapter 5. For ferals, though, some of those traits work a little differently. . . .

Essence

A feral who manages to balance his animal and human selves attains a strong spiritual harmony (see below). In story terms, this infuses him with a miraculous sense of energy. As a game trait, this Essence allows him to change shape easily and perform certain magical acts that go beyond the abilities of a raging beast.

All feral characters have Essence. This trait isn't static, though — it goes up and down as your character changes forms, heals and uses certain Favors. A new feral character begins with an Essence trait equal to his Harmony trait (again, see below). Generally, that means that he would begin play with Essence 7. If you want, however, you can trade Harmony dots for extra experience points during character creation. In that case, though, you'd begin with an Essence of 6 or less.

For details about Essence, see **p. 99-100**.

Feral Heart

Feral means "wild beast." And at heart, that's what each feral person is: a beast. Close to Nature even in the city, he sees things differently than a "normal" human being would, and rubs certain people the right or wrong way. The stronger his connection to the Feral Heart, the more bestial — for good and ill — he becomes.

Each starting werebeast begins with a single point of Feral Heart. You can increase that trait by spending three Merit dots for each additional dot of Feral Heart. To start with a Feral Heart of 2, for example, you'd spend three Merit dots, while six Merit dots would allow you to start with Feral Heart 3.

For details about Feral Heart, see **p. 98-99**.

Harmony

To maintain balance between the human and animal realms, a feral must maintain Harmony. Unlike human Mortality (which Harmony replaces), this trait reflects your character's relationship with the ethics of Nature and Man. A strong Harmony rating reflects a feral who co-exists easily in both worlds; a low one reveals a disintegrated werebeast who's heading for a breakdown.

Just as most characters, a feral begins with a Harmony of 7. However, as an optional rule the Storyteller may allow a player to trade Harmony points for experience points *during character creation only*. For one point of Harmony, you get an additional five experience points; only two points of Harmony can be traded this way, dropping your beast down to Harmony 5 and earning 10 experience points at the cost of his stability. This trade reflects a feral whose traumatic background or Change left him scarred but savvy . . . and a bit closer to the edge.

For more about Harmony, see **p. 100-104**.

Respect

Social or not, werebeasts radiate a certain degree of presence. Smart creatures give them some Respect. To measure the esteem (or lack of it) your character has in the greater world, the Respect trait measures his impression. Is he seen as Clever, Ferocious, Insightful, Loyal or Passionate? That depends on his accord and overall behavior.

Each feral character has a bit of Respect. He can have dots in any or all of the Respect categories. For example, he might have Cleverness 1 and Ferocity 2. The highest Respect rating is then *added to or subtracted from* that character's Social dice pools, depending on the situation. If he's trying to scare someone, for example, his Ferocity would be added to the dice pool; if he wants to get that someone to trust him, his Ferocity is subtracted from that attempt. In story terms, the character's impression precedes him. Other people, animals and even night-folk will judge him by the reputation or "vibe" he has achieved for himself.

A feral character begins with three dots in Respect. The first dot is assigned by the character's accord; the other two can be assigned anywhere. We suggest leaving those two dots "open" until the events of the prelude or chronicle suggest where they should be placed. The feral may have suffered an especially bloody First Change, and his player may place all three Respect dots in Ferocity . . . if he *really* wants to start things out poorly.

The different types and effects of Respect are explained on **p. 104-106**.

Crafty Old Beasts

If your Storyteller allows, you might begin play with a feral who's been around for a while. We don't recommend this method for new players, but experienced World of Darkness troupes may wish to add a beast who's lived a little and seen a lot.

Freshly Changed	0 experience points
Experienced Beast	35 experience points
Canny Survivor	75 experience points
Elder Beast	120+ experience points

Step Eight: Spark of Life

The beast is nearly born. What does he look like? How does he act? Was his fondness for the soul-animal obvious from the moment of birth, did it creep in over time or was it revealed in a uncanny flash? This is where your imagination turns a list of traits and numbers into a feral reflection of yourself.

Every roleplaying character reveals things about its creator. What will your werebeast reveal about you? The beast you choose, the accord you give him, the little details that set him apart — height, build, eye color, speech patterns, hobbies, fears and so on — all of them present a "living revelation" about you, the player. As you bring your beast to the table, let him be worthy of that honor. *You are your beast.* And your beast is *you.*



Feral Template Quick Reference

Feral werebeasts are humans plus a bit extra. Use this quick reference sheet to add the feral template to the usual **World of Darkness Rulebook's** character creation summary (p. 34).

Breed and Species

Choose the creature you want to play from among the available breeds.

Bastet: Werecats of all sizes.

Land Titans: Elephants and the elusive rhino-folk.

Laughing Strangers: Foxes, hares, coyotes, raccoons and possum.

The Pack: Wolfkin, dog-folk, hyenas and wolverines.

Royal Apes: Monkeys, gorillas and man-like mysteries.

Spinner-Kin: Spider-people.

Ursara: Werebears.

Wind-Runners: Horses, elk, deer and other lean, fast creatures.

Wing-Folk: Bird- and bat-people.

Accord

Choose the area where human nature and animal instinct meet.

Den-Warder: Loyal, nurturing, protective.

Heart-Ripper: Ferocious, voracious, implacable.

Root-Weaver: Clever, inventive, imaginative.

Sun-Chaser: Devious, passionate, tricky.

Wind-Dancer: Flighty, inquisitive, uncanny.

Specialty Skills

Each accord includes one free Specialty (plus the usual three) in one of the following Skills, assuming the character has that Skill at the time.

Den-Warder: Empathy, Medicine, Survival.

Heart-Ripper: Brawl, Intimidation, Subterfuge.

Root-Weaver: Academics, Crafts, Science.

Sun-Chaser: Athletics, Expression, Socialize.

Wind-Dancer: Investigation, Occult, Stealth.

Favors

Each breed has a selection of Favors for which the breed is known. A starting character has three Favors for free, assigned by his breed and species.

Aspects

A beginning feral has seven points with which to buy Aspects — unusual abilities given to werebeasts by Nature.

Merits

During character creation, a shapechanger starts with seven points with which to buy Merits.

Essence

The character's beginning Essence is equal to his beginning Harmony trait.

Feral Heart

Your character's Feral Heart begins at 1, but may be raised higher with Merit points.

Harmony

A feral's Harmony begins at 7, but may be "traded down" for experience points. (This reduces starting Essence as well.)

Respect

Select the qualities for which your character is known. Each accord has a quality of Respect; the other two qualities are yours to assign.

Cleverness: (Root-Weavers) Quick wits.

Ferocity: (Heart-Rippers) Killer instinct.

Insight: (Wind-Dancers) Sharp intuition.

Loyalty: (Den-Warders) Steadfast devotion.

Passion: (Sun-Chasers) Compelling emotion.

Experience Point Costs

Trait	Cost
Attribute	New dots x 5
Skill	New dots x 3
Skill Specialty	3
Breed Favor	New dots x 5
Other Favor	New dots x 7
Aspect	New dots x 5
Merit	New dots x 2
Feral Heart	New dots x 8
Respect	New dots x 6
Harmony	New dots x 3
Willpower	8 experience points

Favors, Aspects and Merits

Favors

Aquatic (•• or •••)
Bioluminescence (•)
Darksight (•)
Echolocation (•• or •••)
Extra Limbs (•+)
Fang and Claw (• to •••••)
Limbless (-•)
Many-Legged (••••)
Musk (•••)
Natural Armor (• to •••••)
Needleteeth (•••)
Quills (•• to •••••)
Razorskin (••• or ••••)
Size (••••)
Speed N/A
Water Breath (•)
Webbing (••••)
Wings (••••)

Aspects

Alarming Alacrity (• to •••••)
Asthmatic Reaction (•••)
Aww!!! (• to •••••)
Bare Necessities (• or •••)
Beast Magic (• to •••)
Beast Surge (•••)
Birth Blessing (•)
Blank Burrow (••••) *
Blend In (•)
Brave Escape (•••) *
Burrowing (•• or •••)
Carnivore's Puissance (••)
Catwalk (• to •••••)
Clamber (• to •••••)
Clever Monkey (• to •••••)
Culling the Weak (••)
Durga's Blessing (•• or •••)
Earthbond (••)
Exoskeleton (••)
Extraordinary Specimen (•)
Foretelling (••)
Fortune's Favor (•• or •••)
Grave Misfortune (••)
Gross Eater (• or ••)
Hare Heart (-•)
Hound's Honor (• to •••••)
Hybrid Forms (••••)
Hypnotic Allure (•••)
Invisible Marking (•)
Keen Sense (• or ••)
Leap (• to •••)
Long Life (• or ••)
Magnificence (••)
Mercy's Touch (•••)
Mimic (• or •••)
Mindmap (•••)
Mindspeech (••)
Mother's Fury (• to •••••)
Nine Lives (•••••)
Pack Bond (•••)
Partial Change (••)
Pearl of Great Price (••) *
Piggyback Passenger (•••)
Resilient Form (•+)
Righting Reflex (• to •••)
Sense of Familiarity (••)
Sexual Dimorphism (••)
Shadow Bond (•••)
Skin Double (••••)
Slumber's Touch (•••)
Snatch and Carry (••)
Spinebite (•••••)
Spirit Animal (•+)
Spirit Gift (• +)
Spirit Secrets (•••)
Spirit Sight (••)
Spook the Herd (•••)
Stampede Rush (•• or •••)
Stash (• to •••••)
Swarm/ Flock Form (••••)
Sweet-Voiced Fiend (•)
Swift Wing (•••)
Tar Baby (•••) *
Tell (-•)
Territory Bond (••• to •••••)
Tiger Heart (•)
Toss the Scent (•) *
Totem Guardian (••+)
Truth Sense (• to •••••)
Twisted Tongue (•)
Unnerving Cry (••)
Unsettling Eye (•)
Unspeakable (••• or •••••)
Venomous (••• or ••••)
Wallwalking (••)
War Heart (•••••)
Warrior's Restoration (••)
Weatherskin (•)
Weaver's Wisdom (• to •••••)
The Wild Cry (• to •••••)
* Trickster ferals only.

Merits

Animal Companion (• to ••••)
Beast-Kin (••••; normal humans only)
Den (•••)
Pack (• to •••••)
Predator's Bearing (••)
Socially Small (••)
True Breed (••)

The Prelude

You always dreamed of horses. Even as a kid, you could feel the wind in their manes. After many tantrums and a year of chores, your parents got you riding lessons. You took to them naturally, and by high school, you'd won all the awards a local kid could win. You were on your way to the big time until . . .

It's cold and muddy. Horse-sweat fills your nose, but there's no horse in sight. Your feet and hands throb like they've been beaten with a hammer. Your sides ache, too, as if you've been running for hours without rest. Spattered with muck and gravel, you push yourself up from the roadside, brushing gravel and twigs from your chest. You're stark naked, bruised and chilly . . . yet you feel more alive than you could have imagined.

Until you look around.

It's a dirt road in the middle of nowhere. You've never seen this place before. Mist shrouds every detail — all you can see are vague forms in the distance. Beneath the muck, the sticky sensation on your hands and feet is blood. Oh, shit! *Panicked, you search for the wounds. There are none. So where'd the blood come from? Whose* is *it, and how are you gonna get home?*

No matter how attuned you are to Nature, turning into an animal is *scary*. You might love kitties with all your heart, but the night your skin turns inside out and your senses explode and you *become* a cat is more intense than the wildest acid trip. And yet, within that terror comes *release* — a dazzling surge of freedom. The First Change is the moment when human imagination rips apart under the reality of turning *in*human. It's literally "the first night of the rest of your life." Everything a shapechanger is or becomes draws influence from that moment. From a roleplaying context, how could you *not* play it out?

In the prelude, a Storyteller takes the player on a journey of that watershed moment. It might occur months or years before the chronicle itself, but that prelude sets the stage for the rest of the tale. For a player, this "solo adventure" gives you a chance to get into your werebeast's skin; for a Storyteller, the prelude presents an opportunity to see who you're dealing with and set the stage for the full-fledged chronicle.

We suggest that the prelude take place before the actual chronicle begins. That way, both the player and Storyteller establish the setting's tone and the feral's personality. That "prequel" might be set years, months or even hours before the other players get involved, but it should be played out just before the larger game starts. That way, those events are fresh in everyone's mind even if, for the characters, they occurred years ago.

Sometimes, the traits that look good on paper don't "speak to" that character when roleplaying begins. Once the game starts, though, it's too late for buyer's remorse. And so, the prelude offers the player and Storyteller a final chance to set the character to rights. You bought Composure 3, and your feral comes out hot-headed? You might work out a deal with the Storyteller to shift two of those dots into Presence instead. If you do that, though, make sure that all figured traits match the final post-prelude Attributes, not the original ones. If you need to justify the changes to yourself, just say that the time between the prelude and the chronicle taught that feral who he truly was.

Elements of the Prelude

Every prelude is different. Still, certain elements ought to be present to some degree in each **Changing Breeds** prequel:

• **Life Before:** Who was this person before the beast took hold? How did he grow up? What did he enjoy? Although you don't need to go in-depth, both the player and his Storyteller should work in little details about that life: the football jacket he wears on that last night, the girlfriend on the phone when he snaps, the car he totals when the beast explodes — the more detail you can provide, the richer your character and prelude will become.

• **The Storm:** Before the night of his First Change, a feral suffers physical, emotional and spiritual upheavals. This Storm whirls through everything he thought he was and whips it all away. So how does the Storm affect this character? Is he depressed? Furious? Hallucinating wildly? Running away from home? As a Storyteller, use this element to introduce mood, symbols and foreshadowing. Keep your player as well as the character guessing. In the Storm, after all, nothing is clear.

• **The Snap:** It's been building: the sullen moods, the arguments, the slammed doors and fists through the wall. Now it hits, driving all before it. The Storm rises to hurricane force, and the biggest question left is who's going to pick up the pieces. This could erupt in violence or burn in silence. Whether the character tears his best friend's throat out or throws himself off a bridge depends on the character. Either way, though, something snaps, leading to . . .

• **Release:** The feral shreds his human skin and runs. As a Storyteller, play this scene for all it's worth: driving rain, honking horns, screaming bystanders and so on. Don't be afraid to go *BIG* — this moment *should* be BIG. As a roleplayer, enjoy the drama. The wilder *it* is, the more your character seems *wild*.

• **Aftermath:** Who's gonna clean up the mess? *Can* it be cleaned up? How does your feral get home when he wakes up naked 20 miles from nowhere? Play this part out as well — it'll show you both how this feral solves problems. The aftermath may lead to other complications, too. If your feral loses his job or gets kicked out of the house, those events will set the stage for his later adventures.

• **Now What?:** What happens in between the prelude and the chronicle's beginning? This is the Storyteller's department, although she may want to ask the player how much time he'd like to see pass between the prelude and the chronicle. Using the aftermath as a basis, hash out the path your feral has marked since then. Has he become a wanderer? Did he get a new job? Is he living under his old name, or did he adopt a new identity? By answering these questions (with or without roleplaying) after a prelude, you

give emotional weight to the time between and start the chronicle with a sense of purpose.

Questions for the Player

Whether you play out the prelude or not, answer the following questions. Evocative answers can turn your character from a list of traits to a reflection of your feral self:

• How old are you?

Are you a kid? Teen? Young adult? Elder? Have you been feral for a while, or are you on the cusp of Change? How old were you when the Storm hit? What have you done since then? Are you established in your life, or is the future one big possibility?

• How do you appear?

So what do you look like — your hair, skin, features, clothes? Are you tall, stout, muscular, thin? Do you have style, or does fashion escape you? Are you Granola or McDonald's? Bare feet or Manolo Blahniks? What's the impression you give, and how much of it is intentional?

• What do you *want*?

What motivates you? Why? Do you have drive, or simply follow events? What causes or activities do you feel passionate about? Do you have hobbies? Vocations? Ambitions? Are you in love, or is there anything you have sworn to do before you die?

• What keeps you from getting it?

What stops you in your tracks? Fear? Addiction? Self-doubt? Peer pressure? Have you suffered physical or emotional injury? What steps (if any) have you taken to recover? Are you too poor or too rich to be truly free? And how do you get around life's obstacles?

• What's your name?

Do you still go by your given name? Or have you chosen a new moniker that suits your feral nature? Is your name "normal," or were you raised by . . . creative *parents? Do you have two names, one for each aspect of your personality? Or do you hold onto your old life by every shred, including your birth name?*

• When and how did you cross paths with the mystical world?

Have you had visions? Odd experiences? Did your parents wonder what was wrong with you when you were a child? Were you bitten by a mysterious beast, or lured into the woods by a ghostly stranger? Were you raised among pagans or tribal mystics, or is this whole "were-thing" deal a new experience for you?

• How did you meet your animal soul?

Was your first impression of that beast a nature program? Stuffed animal? Nickname? Have you always been wild, or did you clamp down on those feelings into adulthood? Do you dream of your Nahual? Did you meet the beast in a zoo? When and how was your kinship forged, and what have you done to sustain it till now?

• Do you like animals?

The answer isn't always "yes." Do you perhaps fear your inner beast? Were you attacked by animals? Do you know someone who was hurt or killed by one? Do you have pets? If so, what kind . . . and are they related to your soul-beast? Do you feel more comfortable around animals than people, or vice versa? And what would you do if you saw someone being cruel to an animal . . . especially if that "someone" was a person you cared about?

• Do you like *humanity*?

Do people suck? Or do you truly like people and their ways? Does Man's world entice you, disgust you or leave you wanting more? Do folks find you friendly, or would rather just kill 'em all?

For roleplayers and Storytellers alike, the prelude is high drama. As the defining moment in your character's life, the prelude can and should be huge. So have a ball with it. The wilder your prelude, the deeper its impression.



Den-Warder: The Keeper



The den is the heart of safety in the wild. Therefore, the den must be nurtured and protected. Just as the mother bear watches over her cubs, the Den-Warder guards his protectorate. He may be devoted to friends, family, animal kin or even complete strangers; in any case, his devotion keeps them alive.

In an uncertain world, this accord reflects stability. He's the bulwark against chaos, whose strength safeguards the weak. Both provider and protector, he feeds others with his labor and wards their future with his life. Honor is his birthright in human and bestial forms. If a Warder offers you his word, he may die to keep that oath.

That's the ideal. Here's the reality: Den-Warders are people embodying animals. Den-Warders are as fallible and weak as anyone else. The principles of a Warder echo through his heart, but that heart — just as all others — is flawed. He may mean every word he says, but his ability to live up to it may or may not last. Still, he *means* well, and that sense of purpose exalts him. A Warder may seem stuffy and priggish by certain standards, but without him the world would be a crueler place.

A common accord among bears, horses, lions, canids and herd animals, this feral is extremely social. Without someone or something to protect, he feels like nothing. He may step into an Alpha role, or support the one who does. At heart, a Warder is often temperate, not flashy or extreme. Don't piss him off, though — that's dangerous. No beast, save perhaps a predator, kills more often to make a point.

Every Warder has an oath: a promise he's made, if only to himself. This oath might involve being a loving parent, neighborhood protector, poacher-killer or tough provider. That oath becomes his "den," a protectorate even if there's no physical territory involved. A Den-Warder bull, for example, may guard his herd as they wander; a Warder dolphin may rescue human swimmers. The oath's particulars are rooted in personal experience: the dolphin might have been a surfer whose lover drowned beyond the reefs; the bull may have seen his family gunned down in the barrio. For whatever reason, the Warder feels he can make things *better*. His loyalty serves greater purposes. That sense of purpose drives him, too . . . sometimes even to destruction.

Similar to the Knight who inspires his human element, the Warder bears an armored burden. Sometimes that burden sits heavy on his back, leaving him snappish or tyrannical. At his best, this werebeast is brave company, hoisting a beer or chasing a meal with gusto. If he falters, though, this beast can be a martyr . . . or a demon. "Am I good enough?" is a constant question with such a person, and sometimes the answer sounds like "no."

In his bestial form, the Den-Warder can be prickly and fierce. Disobeyed, he can turn brutal. Like an angry lion, he may swat a "cub" into line and break her without meaning to. Or he might corral his "herd" — for their own good, of course — then wonder why they hate his guts. He's

strict, perhaps *too* strict, but *loyal*, too. A Warder who breaks his oath or lets his family down is a miserable beast indeed.

Appearance: In his human form, a Warder tends toward conservatism. He may wear business suits, cowboy clothes, a uniform or rugged blue-collar gear. Direct sometimes to a fault, he could be kind, curt or callous. This guy's often bulky and strong, with a watchful eye and careful speech. As an animal, he's often the biggest one in his band, with the same wary eyes and earthy personality of his human side.

Background: People who assume this accord are often sociable from childhood onward. Many times, they genuinely *like* people, and feel deep affection for their friends and families. Even as kids, Warders protect smaller things, and can be aggressively territorial about their toys and playmates. During the First Change, a Warder often grasps onto a sense of purpose to assert stability in his life. As his beast-life deepens, he believes in that sense of purpose to keep him sane.

Character Creation: Resolve, Strength and especially Composure are dominant traits among Den-Warders. Empathy and Socialize are almost essential, though some Den-Warders can be painfully shy. Animal Ken and Medicine are common Skills among this accord. Because so many cops follow this Heart-Path, Investigation, Firearms and Streetwise come up frequently as well.

Human Archetype: The Knight
Archetypal Beast: The Hound
Respect: Loyalty
Musical Tone: Harmonious
Skill Specialties: Empathy, Medicine, Survival
Harmony: –1 die rolled for degeneration checks
Berserk: Defaults to a tiger storm
Common Beast-Souls: Bear, elephant, lion, dog, eagle, bat, horse, dolphin, stag, ox, cattle/bull, bison, wolf, goat, boar

Concepts: Honest cop, proud parent, class president, hopeless romantic, teacher, soldier, cook, game warden, paramedic, construction worker, firefighter, idealistic lawyer, political activist, crusading reporter

Stereotypes

Heart-Rippers: Their bones are good for games of catch and not much else.

Root-Weavers: Strong minds and strong backs build solid dens for both.

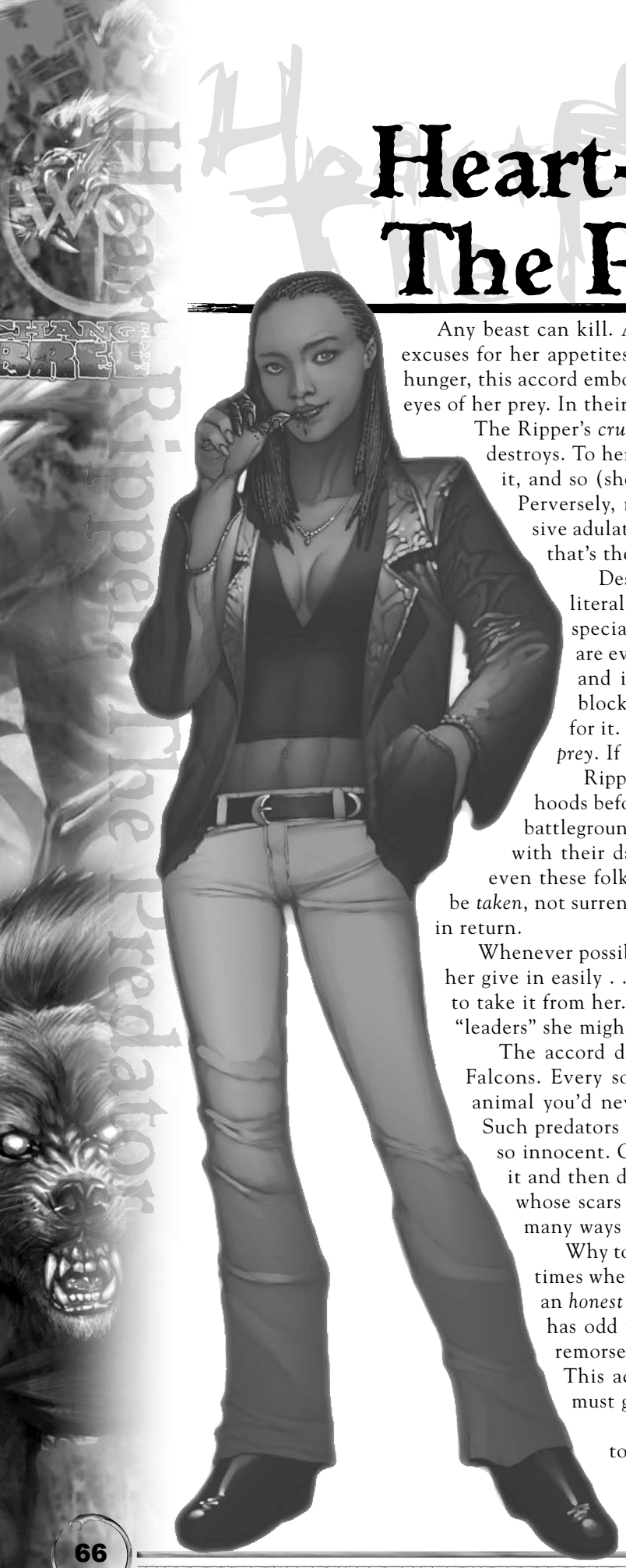
Sun-Chasers: Bullshit served on a gold tray doesn't become caviar.

Wind-Dancers: Fine — you read the stars, and I'll watch the shadows. Guess which one of us sees something first?



Place your feet carefully if you walk along the edge.

Heart-Ripper: The Predator



Any beast can kill. A Ripper *enjoys* it. A predator to the teeth, she makes no excuses for her appetites. Born from the cauldron of human bloodlust and bestial hunger, this accord embodies challenge. The Heart-Ripper lives for the look in the eyes of her prey. In their pain, she finds peace with her beasts.

The Ripper's *cruel* but not always *evil*. The distinction is lost on those she destroys. To her, life is a garden of pain; you've got to be tough to survive it, and so (she insists) her predatory nature helps other people endure. Perversely, many victims agree. They shower this beast with submissive adulation. She's compelling in a predatory way, and to some folks that's the ultimate allure.

Despite her bloody reputation, the Ripper doesn't always kill literally. She couldn't survive long in Man's world if she did. Her specialties are fear, pain and challenge, and her hunting grounds are everywhere. From boardrooms to bedrooms to distant jungles and island depths, her shadow falls on the weak. She mocks, blocks, frustrates and enslaves — and often makes folks love her for it. This beast dares people and animals alike to be *strong* or be *prey*. If they can't stand up to her, they're not worth her respect.

Rippers come by this accord honestly. Most endure hellish childhoods before the eventual Change. Crime zones, war zones, domestic battlegrounds and the gangrenous underclass teach such people to bond with their darkest sides. A handful come from privileged society, but even these folks grow up by the law of the claw. Power, they learn, must be *taken*, not surrendered. Those who can't claim power deserve to be claimed in return.

Whenever possible, this accord Alphas her band. Her personality won't let her give in easily . . . if at all. She grants respect only to those strong enough to take it from her. Dominance fights, in her world, are bloody affairs. Other "leaders" she might tolerate but never submit to.

The accord draws the ultimate predators: Tigers. Sharks. Wolverines. Falcons. Every so often, though, the accord manifests capriciously in an animal you'd never tag as vicious: A horse. A hare. A dolphin. A dove. Such predators can be more dangerous than the others because they seem so innocent. Given trust, this Ripper betrays it; given love, she exploits it and then demands more. She's a sweet killer, the walking heartbreak whose scars burn on the inside but leave the outside clean. There are many ways to rip one's heart, and this beast knows them all.

Why tolerate such a creature? Because Nature isn't kind. There are times when it's good to have a demon at your back, and the Ripper is an *honest* demon. She's not without love or compassion, though she has odd ways of showing them. Deep down, she might even know remorse. Don't expect that from her, however — expect defiance. This accord lives to challenge you. To survive her, companions must get tough or die.

Appearance: Heart-Rippers range from imposing monsters to beautiful killers. In human form, Rippers prefer fashions and hairstyles that make bold impressions: power suits, biker leathers, fetish gear, *haute couture* or ragged rock-star

flash combined with mohawks, shaved heads, stylish coifs or cascades of brightly colored hair — often in startling combinations. Not all Rippers are so distinctive, though. Some prefer a subtle buttoned-down approach, or a painfully innocent guise. In fact, the most effective Rippers are the ones you'd *least* expect to be dangerous.

Background: As embodiments of challenge, Rippers tend to be survivors. Many grew up among abusive or dysfunctional homes, or in bastions of wealth and privilege where superiority over others was assumed. As children, Rippers tended to be popular or outcasts, rarely anything in between. No matter where or how the Heart-Ripper grew up, she stood out from an early age, and has only strengthened that impression with experience.

Character Creation: However Rippers look, they are tough customers. Intimidation is essential, and Brawl is common. Most predators have high Social traits — sometimes higher than the Physical Attributes you'd expect. Subterfuge is common among urban Rippers, who get their fixes breaking hearts rather than bones. Even so, each predator has claws of several different kinds: real ones, Social ones and weaponry, too. And yes, Rippers know how to use them all.

Human Archetype: The Predator

Archetypal Beast: The Big Bad Wolf

Respect: Ferocity

Musical Tone: Sharp or ominous

Skill Specialties: Brawl, Intimidation, Subterfuge

Harmony: +1 die rolled for degeneration checks

Berserk: Defaults to tiger storm; must spend one Willpower point to flee a fight

Common Beast-Souls: Panther, wolf, shark, tiger, hare, rat, spider, serpent, owl, hawk, scorpion, bull

Concepts: Evil prom queen, gun-nut, mercenary, sexy seducer, media pundit, shock jock, bully, gang enforcer, secretary, corrupt cop, contract killer, sadistic kid, militant fanatic, dominatrix, murderous psycho

Stereotypes

Den-Warders: Oaks crack loudest when the storm blows in.

Root-Weavers: Industrious little buggers. Their toys break almost as easily as their hearts.

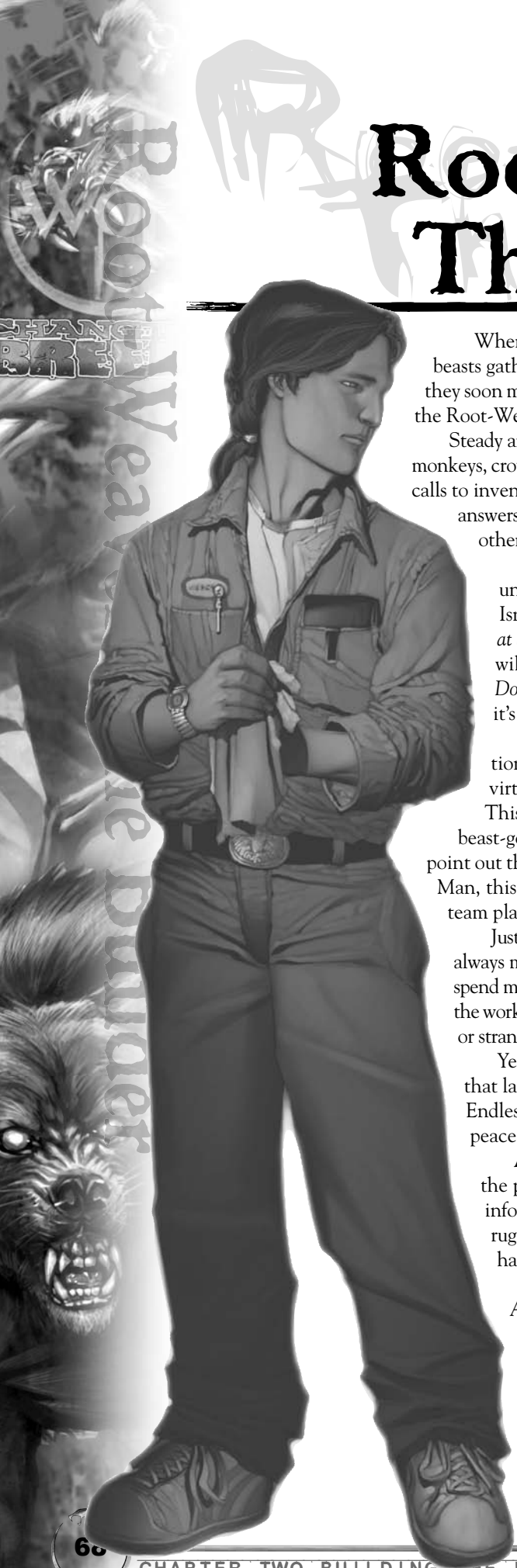
Sun-Chasers: Fun to run in circles. They depend on the kindness of strangers, and I just don't have much to offer.

Wind-Dancers: Be careful with these folks. They're as apt to blow you over as drift away.



Life's a thorn thicket. You move, you bleed.

Root-Weaver: The Builder



When Man conquered fire, most beasts ran and hid. Most, but not all. The curious beasts gathered close, hoping to discover this strange new secret. Clever and industrious, they soon mastered secrets of their own. Their inheritors carry on that tradition. Like them, the Root-Weaver pursues his craft without fear of shadows or flame.

Steady and methodical, this accord appeals to beasts with calmer temperaments. Beavers, monkeys, crows, even rats are drawn by this path's restless curiosity. Among people, this accord calls to inventors, artisans, designers and construction workers. The Weaver asks *Why?*, then answers his own question with hard work and a ready mind. Sometimes imaginative, other times industrious, this beast dares the fire to this day.

Other ferals seem puzzled by the Weaver's work. Although the human side understands its value, to the animal side, the Weaver's work just feels . . . *wrong*. Isn't the whole point of shapechanging to get away from the trappings of Man? *Not at all*, this accord answers. *We are the best of* both *our breeds*. If pressed, a Weaver will point to ants, birds, beavers and spiders. *Aren't they building? Don't they invent? Don't you think that deep inside they might take* pride *in the work they do?* To this accord, it's self-evident. Man doesn't own the patent, so to speak, on industry.

A Root-Weaver could be cool and assured, or fraught with endless imagination. He might work with his hands the old-fashioned way, or spin networks of virtual webbing. It's not the tools or materials that matter so much as the building. This beast likes things that last. He'll point to the pyramids and wonder if Egypt's beast-gods were architects as well as avatars of that age. Gazing at a beaver dam, he'll point out the brilliance of the construction. Endlessly entranced by the works of Beast and Man, this artisan works fluently with both. Similar to the Warder, the Weaver's often a team player — not in *charge*, perhaps, but an asset nonetheless.

Just as another Clever Monkey, this beast sometimes goes too far. His insight doesn't always match his imagination. He'll whip up a device, then ponder what to do with it; or spend months building a house, then go live in the woods instead. To many Root-Weavers, the work matters more than the result. The fact that a Weaver's inventions can be dangerous or strange doesn't matter nearly as much as the challenge involved in making them.

Yet for all a Weaver's flights of fancy, he's often a grounded beast. He favors things that last. Whether he's a wandering ox or a dedicated ape, this feral's rather practical. Endlessly searching for material and projects, he bores easily. Perhaps he finds more peace in Man's restlessness than in the Zen perfection of his Beast.

Appearance: There's no real "fashion" for this accord. Many Weavers favor the practical clothes of paint-spattered artisans, while others revel in cutting-edge infotech gear. A Root-Weaver whose specialty is design might wear Armani while a rugged crafter hammers in her overalls. Behind those fashions, though, all Weavers have the same restless eyes — always searching to perfect their imperfections.

Background: Weavers are curious folk, problem-solvers with skillful hands. As kids, they share an aptitude for putting things together or taking them apart. Excellent spatial relationship perceptions often overtake their social acumen, though. A few might feel easy in good company, but others balk at the constraints of human frailties. That same impatience rarely translates to animals, though. A Root-Weaver can be entranced by the artistry of a garden spider or the labors of a tribe of ants.

Character Creation: Physical Attributes and practical Skills form the foundation for this accord. Those Skills almost always include Crafts and a touch of Science, but range from Computer to Drive to Weaponry. As keen



observers of Nature, Root-Weavers often have Survival and Animal Ken as backup Skills. And given their handy reputations, such ferals have Contacts and Allies to spare.

Human Archetype: The Builder
Archetypal Beast: The Beaver
Respect: Cleverness
Musical Tone: Fugues and complex harmonic patterns
Skill Specialties: Academics, Crafts, Science
Harmony: As normal
Berserk: Defaults to rabbit run
Common Beast-Souls: Spider, monkey, beaver, bee, rat, parrot, ape, mole, possum, raven, ant, bear, deer, seal, dolphin
Concepts: Mechanic, computer geek, architect, carpenter, sculptor, politician, scholar, inventor, experimental artist, manager, editor, crazy scientist, wandering handyman, CEO

Stereotypes

Den-Warders: The foundation of any tribe lies in the strength of parents and protectors.

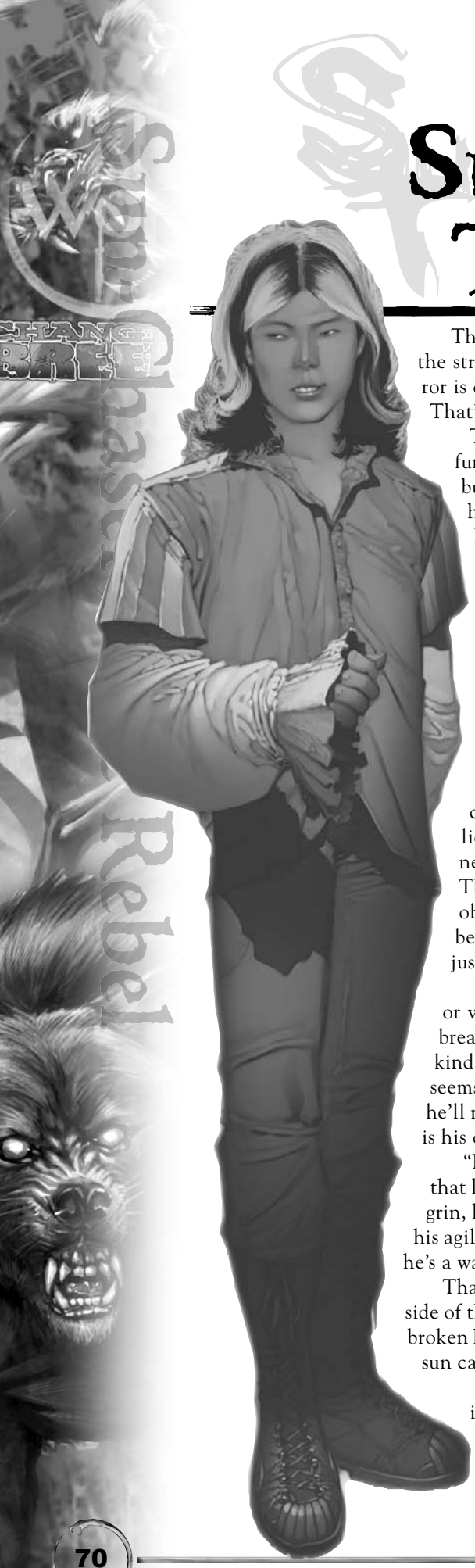
Heart-Rippers: Entropy walking with a smile on its face.

Sun-Chasers: Did somebody miss that whole "ant and grasshopper" thing?

Wind-Dancers: Each city begins with a vision. These folks see forests that once were, and cities that have yet to be.



The artistry of Nature is the purest proof of God.



Sun-Chaser: The Rebel

There's a feather on your bed in the morning. Your best jewelry's gone, along with the stranger who charmed his way home with you last night. On the bathroom mirror is one word, written there in toothpaste: *Sorry*. He's off the chase the sun again. That's his way — and your regret.

This beast is beautiful wreckage, a fox who keeps chasing his tail long after his fur's gone gray. In his prime, he's the coal-black slickster whose kisses warm like burnt brandy. Later, when the petals have fallen and dried from long-dead stems, he's still out there ranging, casting what he swears is the final crap-shoot of a lifelong game. His beast-side is the vulpine grin in a thicket, the kitten whose whiskers drip with cream. Let the hounds yowl as they search for him — he's long gone. Again.

The sun never stops moving, and neither does this feral. Of course, the sun does *not* move — the rest of the world moves around it. This could *also* be said of a Chaser, who's dedicated to the passionate exploration of pretty much everything. He spins the world on its axis with a smile, hoping you won't feel the vertigo. That laughing blur is the Chaser's element, and in it, he's a master. Later, when the queasiness sets in, he's nowhere to be found. Unreliable? Probably. Predictable? In his own way, yes.

As an accord, this path blends Man's rebel nature with the Trickster's cleverness. The Chaser's a crow picking at the carcass on the roadway or a jackal licking lion-blood from his chops. To him, rules weren't meant to apply. Gravity never seems to bind his wings. His wit will see him through . . . or so he thinks. The Chaser's tricks hold the bent wisdom of a soul sharing a mirror with you, yet oblivious to his own reflection. Though he's never half as clever as he seems to believe he is, he manages to get by. The endless bloody noses and five AM fights just convince him to try harder next time.

There's wisdom in a pair of spinning dice, a reckless disregard for mortality or virtue. That intoxicating moment of endless potential is the air a Sun-Chaser breathes. For a time, he can share it, too, and this makes him the most charming kind of beast. That which is arduous seems like ecstasy when he's around. He always seems three steps ahead of the pack, and if they're baying at his heels, it just means he'll run faster and take you with him. In the end, though, the only sun he's chasing is his own.

"Better that you had some fun." That's the Sun-Chaser's motto. This beast knows that life is temporary, and he savors it like fresh honey. With keen teeth and an eager grin, he smiles and snaps at his own shadow. All his playfulness, however, can't hide his agile mind. He thinks around corners like the wall's not even there, and for a time, he's a walking good luck charm.

That one word, *Sorry*, is his epitaph. So many of his kind end up in ditches at the side of the road, their fur matted by the one car they couldn't dodge. Bullets, teeth and broken hearts are his final legacy. But before that last run with eternity, you can see the sun catch every perfect grin. Long after he's gone, the smiles still remain.

Appearance: Like a kitten with string, the Chaser seems adorable. He's cute in ways that makes common sense melt. A raven's strut and Byronic intensity mark the ferals of this accord. They're the beautiful losers who look at winning in the proper light. Most complement their waywardness with rakish clothes and roguish charm. Yet even when the edges fray, these beasts keep on grinning. Defiance of fate is the peace they embrace.

Background: People drawn to this accord have depended on fortune all their lives. As children, they took dares and always collected on the outcome. They're often the first kids to chance a kiss or cop a feel, and the teachers knew better than to turn their backs on 'em. For all the Chasers' bravado, there's a sadness about most Chasers. It's as if they've known from birth they'd never catch the sun, but that certainty never stopped them from trying.

Character Creation: Social traits are this fellow's backbone. Without 'em, he'd never survive. Expression, Persuasion, Socialize and Streetwise — he's rarely good at Empathy, but who can tell? The Chaser can handle himself in a fight, but studying's not his strong suit. He's tricky and sly, and amoral by most standards, yet such a charming rogue that you can't help but love him as he makes off with the silverware.

Human Archetype: The Trickster

Archetypal Beast: The Fox

Respect: Passion

Musical Tone: Light and airy, or low and seductive

Skill Specialties: Athletics, Expression, Socialize

Harmony: +1 die rolled for degeneration checks

Berserk: Defaults to rabbit run

Common Beast-Souls: Fox, crow, magpie, hare, peacock, wolf, goat, weasel, coyote, cat, monkey, serpent, otter, shark

Concepts: Con artist, street kid, biker, schemer, skateboarder, thrill-seeker, bed-hopper, hitchhiker, scen-ester, rock musician, actor, model, terminally unemployed wannabe, beautiful wreckage

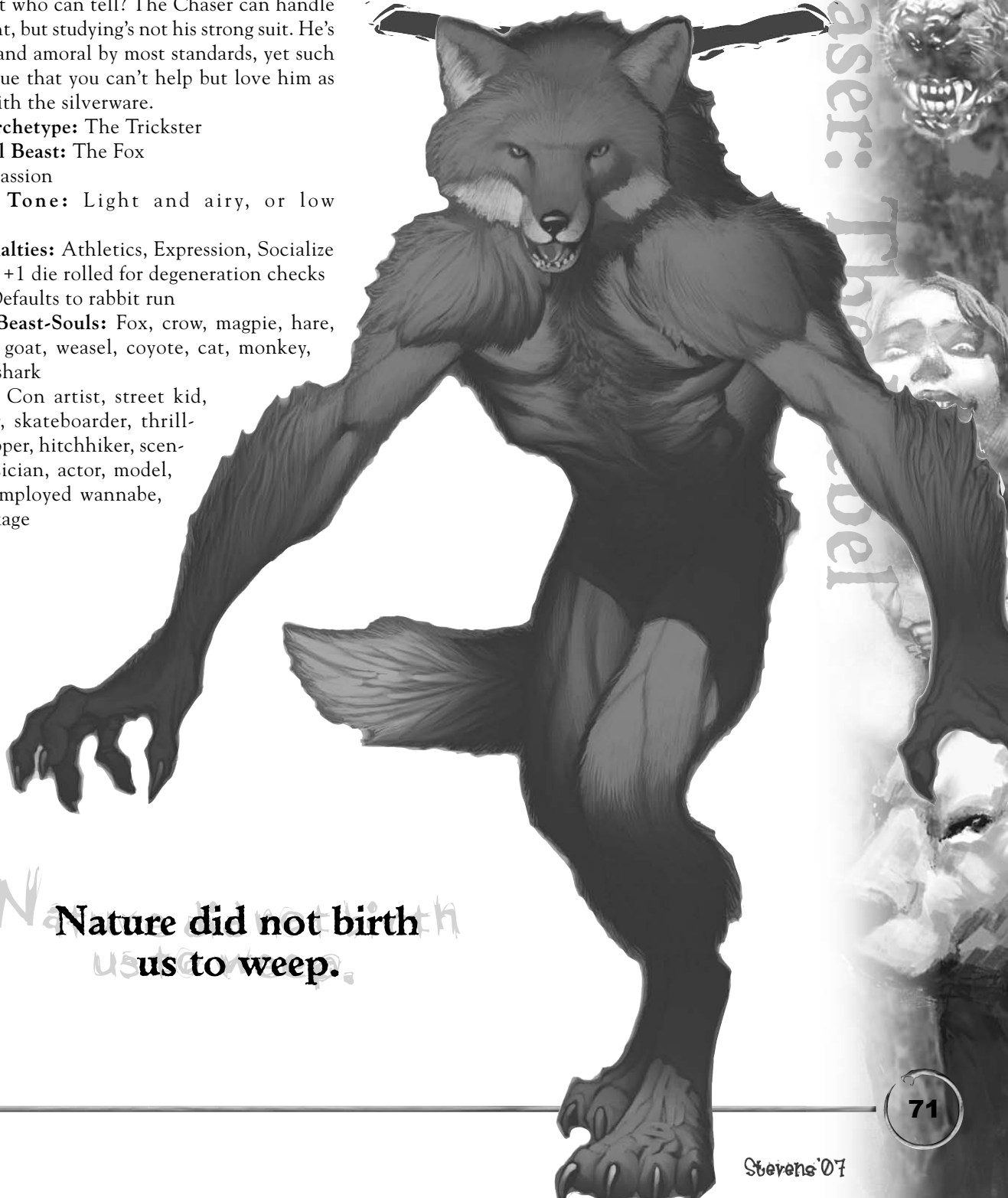
Stereotypes

Den-Warders: Loosen up before your bones crack, dude!

Heart-Rippers: All that beautiful passion, all those ugly wounds.

Root-Weavers: Cool! Can I take it for a spin when you're done?

Wind-Dancers: Real wisdom dances at the crossroads at dusk.



Nature did not birth us to weep.

Sun-Chaser: Thoseabel

Stevens '07

Wind-Dancer: The Seer



The gnarled hands and calloused feet of this mystic bespeak a wandering life. Beneath boots or hooves or leathered soles, she's trod a thousand paths to Nowhere. She knows her way around a whittling knife or the soft smoke of a tobacco kiss. Beneath her skin, owl feathers sprout and bison run thick on the plains again. She's been named for the wind, and with good cause. The breeze speaks her name, but only gods know what it means.

As a point of pride, each Dancer takes a new name when she embarks upon her road. She might have been wandering before her First Change began — may have come to it, in fact, through a vision on the road. One and all, Dancers ramble. No glade or doorway knows their shadow for long.

A walking crossroads with a devil in the distance, the Wind-Dancer sees more than should perhaps be seen. With keen senses and eyes that look right through you, she seems eerily alert. Folks with secrets to hide feel disturbed by a Dancer's presence, as if at any moment every skeleton in their closets could spill out in a heap. Most folks blow right past omens, but Dancer lives among them. To her, each broken twig or passing bird has significance. Fortunately, her perspective often includes a rough sense of humor, too. Without it, she'd drive herself and others near her *nuts*.

If the drifting life bothers her, you probably won't hear complaints. A Dancer keeps most thoughts to herself. A stoic path, this accord blends lone-wolf courage with human restlessness. She might join a band or teach a newblood, true, but only on her terms and at her convenience. Her fellowship may be brief, but it's memorable. For better and worse, she sees through drama and scrapes off bullshit.

Present yet always faraway, this path calls to harbinger beasts: ravens, horses, owls, wolves. Such creatures have fabled ties to the Otherworld, and for the Dancer, those tales may be true. More than any other path, these seers deal with ghosts or cross over into the weird spirit realm. Chances are good that our Dancer bears a pouch of pure tobacco and a flute to whistle up some company.

Company may be hard to come by for this feral. Her constant visions and otherworldly sight make her a bit crazy. She could be charmingly eccentric or flat-out bizarre. Maybe she hands out candles to everyone she meets, or whispers fortunes to the birds. Every so often, she seems delusional, talking or lashing out at things no one else can see. Are these visitations real, or just products of a half-mad animal? Not even the Dancer knows for sure.

Despite her eccentric ways, a Dancer *can* be social. She's got a knack for *seeing* people, and folks often like being noticed. To the waitress at the cold café or the clerk in the stock-it-all store, a Dancer's soft words and firm handshake can make a person's day. It's a survival trait, of course, for a beast in a world of strangers. But more often than not, a Dancer's praise is honest. She can see the bad folks and steer clear long before they cross her steps.

Weatherworn even in youth, the Dancer knows the elements. She's no fool for comfort, and often pits herself against the wind with little more than a rucksack and some spine. Her brave spirit and keen insight make friends and foes alike; from necessity, she'll ask for help but can "go it alone" when need be. Authorities of all kinds distrust her. Winds blow across all sorts of little secrets, and their freedom makes certain folks nervous. Sometimes, there's good reason for that, too: a Dancer who goes bad

is a dangerous breed. She'll play with your head, open your heart and leave your life an open book before heading off again.

Appearance: Rangy, often-handmade clothes are signatures for this accord. No matter what she wears, it's rugged and broken-in. She could be a grad student buzzing on acid and Hindu metaphysics, a barefoot street weirdo in half-legal tatters or a smiling carpenter with a backpack full of proverbs and tools. In all cases, she's lean and confident, with a far-off gaze that can focus, in a breath, to heartrending clarity.

Background: This accord calls up the wanderer in Everyman. A person drawn to this path has been a loner since childhood — not unfriendly, but just . . . *different*. By adulthood, she's probably calm even under stress, although her insights may make her seem eccentric. Then again, she might be downright mad. A Dancer could come from *any* social background. Whoever she once was, she's her own person now.

Character Creation: By old tradition, a Dancer works with her hands whenever possible. Many of her clothes and tools are crafted personally, and she likes to hunt or harvest her own food whenever her rambling life allows. Crafts and Survival are essential Skills, and Physical Attributes are secondary if not primary. Still, perception is the hallmark of this accord, so Empathy, Expression and Occult are important Skills as well.

Human Archetype: The Mystic

Archetypal Beast: The Owl

Respect: Insight

Musical Tone: Low and lonesome

Skill Specialties: Investigation, Occult, Stealth

Harmony: As normal

Berserk: Could go either way, depending on the provocation for the fit

Common Beast-Souls: Owl, buffalo, deer, salmon, horse, lark, bear, lizard, serpent, goat, jaguar, gazelle, raven, lynx, wolf

Concepts: Artist, occultist, street shaman, dreamer, autistic, hunter, spy, athlete, backpacker, travel writer, photographer, explorer, dancer, grad student, flight attendant, The Coolest Teacher Ever

Stereotypes

Den-Warders: Fine walls, fine doors, but still a trap when life is burning.

Heart-Rippers: Harsh winds full of sand and fire.

Root-Weavers: Pretty bars still form a cage.

Sun-Chasers: All the grace of a bee with one wing missing.

To know Man's future, ask a beast.



Favors and Aspects

And so, we build the perfect beast: an imaginary creature invested with elements of your imagination and abstract game mechanics. In the following sections, we'll explore those game mechanics. The imagination comes from you.

To reflect the tricks and innate abilities of shapechanging beasts, feral characters have Favors and Aspects. Favors are essential traits that every member of this breed possesses. Aspects are unusual powers, tricks or talents that some beasts possess, but others do not. In any case, these traits are beyond normal human capacity. A human being can be many things, but if he grows wings, he's no longer what you'd call "normal."

As we saw earlier, Favor traits come free with the character's breed. Some Favors — those marked with a • cost — can also be purchased as Aspects for a character who doesn't get such Favors as part of his breed's "package deal."

The Aspects themselves are purchased with points, although a few of them — those marked with a -• cost — cost nothing. You don't pay for that Aspect, but it still provides an unusual (if hindering) element for your shapechanger's life.

Creating New Favors and Aspects

The animal kingdom boasts hundreds if not thousands of unusual abilities. No book could describe them all. Therefore, a Storyteller should feel free to create abilities beyond the ones listed here.

For the sake of your game, however, we suggest that *only the Storyteller* be allowed to create new Favors and Traits. A player might suggest them, but it's up to the Storyteller to decide if and how a suggested trait affects the game. The potential for outrageous or nonsensical traits is such that you may decide not to allow them at all. The final call belongs to the Storyteller, not to the troupe.

If a Storyteller wants to create new Favors or Aspects, use the following guidelines:

• **Base it on a real animal ability:** Save laser eye-beams for comic-book settings.

• **Keep it balanced:** Use the traits listed here as benchmarks for the power of the trait you're creating. Base the cost of the trait on its potential utility and its rareness in the setting.

• **Keep it serious:** Radioactive mutant hamsters are right out.

Favors

Inborn aspects of a creature's breed, these traits reflect the obvious characteristics of that breed. Certain World of Darkness books refer to these inborn abilities as "Innate Aspects." In game terms, though, they work differently from other Aspects. And so, for clarity's sake, we refer to them here as "Favors." As a general rule, a werebeast's Favor traits show what her breed *has*, and Aspects reflect what that individual *can do*.

Each breed or species starts with three free Favors. With permission from the Storyteller, a player may purchase additional Favors as Aspects. However, unless a bizarre mutation affects that werebeast, this may be done *only* if that trait could exist in normal animals of that species. A bear, for example, may have Darksight but not Extra Limbs. This optional rule allows you to build formidable beasts, not weird animal mutants.

Raising or Acquiring Favors

For the most part, Favors are based in your character's animal species. If your Storyteller allows his players to purchase or raise Favors, though, the cost is five experience points per dot *if that Favor is affiliated with an animal from your breed* and *seven points per dot* if it's not listed among the Breed Favors or Common Aspects in Chapter Three. A player needs to have a really compelling reason to acquire a Favor that runs outside her species, too. For details about buying and raising Aspects, see **p. 60 & 79**.

Unless noted in the description, all Favors apply only to Primal, Dire or War-Beast shapes.

Aquatic (•• to •••)

Born for water, a creature with this Favor has fins, sleek skin or scales, and the breathing and muscular development that makes him native to water. He can dive and swim as naturally as a land-based beast walks. In water, his Movement trait reflects swimming, not walking; in fact, his land-based Move may be half of the normal trait . . . assuming he can move on land at all in anything but his human form.

This trait is free for water-based creatures; for a character whose animal species is normally a land-dweller, the player must purchase the ability to swim and dive with such ease. For two dots, the character can swim like a fish in his animal forms; for three, he can dive in human form as well. Even with this Favor, though, pressure and temperature limit diving ability. Assume that a character with this Favor can dive 100 feet for each point of Stamina he possesses (in that form) if his Nahual is native to land, 1,000 feet per point if his Nahual is native to water.

Bioluminescence (•)

In the deep canyons of the ocean, sunlight never goes. Nevertheless, weird constellations of light drift and circulate in the darkness, as bioluminescent fish live out their lives in the abyss. Likewise, lightning bugs pulse with incandescent glows. Their gift is rare among the Changing Folk, but a few ferals share this talent, too.

A character with this Favor emits light from some portion of his body — or perhaps all of it. The light is roughly

equal to that of a powerful flashlight; in game terms, the light eliminates up to two points of dice penalties for acting in darkness. The character can turn this Favor on or off at will, as a reflexive action, and the Favor costs no Essence to employ. The store of luminescent chemicals must "recharge" after each usage, however; this process takes 10 minutes. The effect lasts for one scene and then fades. In darkness, other characters gain a +2 bonus to attack the feral while he glows.

For creatures with natural bioluminescence, this Favor is free. Other characters must pay points and have an interesting explanation for this odd talent. (That said, it makes an excellent prank for trickster ferals to employ . . .)

Darksight (•)

Many werebeasts see in the dark as easily as humans see on a bright, cloudless day. They never receive penalties for operating in darkness; in fact, this ability gives them the additional advantage of a +2 bonus to all Stealth rolls when they move through darkness. This perception in always "on" in any form, and costs no Essence to employ.

Darksight also helps a character in visually-adverse conditions, such as dense fog, smoke or a heavy downpour, by halving all of her sight-based penalties (rounding down). Thanks to this ability, darkness is the preferred venue of night-seeing ferals. When the lights are out, such beasts always have the upper hand.

Echolocation (• or •••)

A character with Echolocation can use sonic echoes to "read" his immediate surroundings without actually having to see them. He can ignore all visually-based penalties such as darkness, fog, smoke or blindness (see "Fighting Blind" in the **World of Darkness Rulebook,** p. 166).

If the player elects to buy the three-dot version, he'll enjoy two additional benefits: The character cannot be surprised unless asleep (see "Surprise," pp. 151–152 in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). Also, she has a permanent +1 bonus to her Defense, because the echolocation allows her to be more acutely aware of incoming attacks. This Favor is free for dolphins and bats; other beasts, however, may buy it . . . including, most surprisingly, elephants, who employ sensitive feet and subsonic vibrations to navigate and communicate.

Extra Limbs (• for first limb, • per set of two afterward)

Trunks. Tentacles. Tails. Animals have the strangest ways of making up for opposable thumbs. With the basic level of this Favor, the character gets a limb that's capable of acting as a "hand" without fingers. Obviously, this limb can't perform fine manipulation, although the limb may reach longer than a "normal" arm. Anyone who's watched elephants or octopuses knows how agile they can be. . . .

In combat, a character with multiple limbs can get one extra action that can be performed with that limb only (no movement or dodging, for example) for every two limbs after the first. For example, an octopus would get three actions — one for the first three limbs, a second for limbs four and five and a third for limbs six and seven. A multi-armed feral can use his limbs to block and parry, adding +1 to his Defense for every limb after the third (our octopus would be +3 Defense). He could also attack multiple opponents on the same basis — for the octopus, three opponents per turn so long as they're all within his reach. For obvious reasons, this creature does not suffer off-hand penalties.

This trait is free for animals that normally possess multiple limbs. Except in the case of bizarre mutations, this Favor cannot be "used" in Man-Guise.

Fang and Claw (• to •••••)

Sharp talons, claws, teeth, horns, hooves, antlers, stingers or other "primary weapons" allow this creature to inflict lethal damage with her hand-to-hand attacks. The amount of that damage depends on the nature of the Favor:

When this trait's considered a free breed Favor, claws and teeth add one extra die to hand-to-hand attacks. Horns and antlers add two dice.

For •, you can add an additional die to the attack, buy the attack for a beast that doesn't usually get it free *or* allow the character to use her claws in Man-Guise as well. Buying two Abilities costs two dots, not one, while buying all three costs three dots, total.

For ••, allow the character to sheathe her claws even if her animal species cannot normally do so.

For •••, the character can sheathe her claws in human form and add +1 to her attacks when she employs them.

This Favor is free to creatures that have formidable natural weapons. For beasts without effective natural weaponry (such as hares, salmon or female deer), this Favor must be purchased.

Limbless (—•)

For serpents, fish and other limbless creatures, the world can be a challenging place. This Favor reflects an animal form that lacks arms, legs or other appendages that can manipulate the character's surroundings outside of basic movement. In her beast-form, this character is either waterbound or reduced to slithering for movement. Of course, in the right environment, this feral may be very fast indeed. . . .

Many-Legged (••••)

The scutter of dozens, if not hundreds, of not-so-tiny feet alerts a potential victim of this shapechanger that he's playing Fly to a nightmarish Spider. . . . This Favor grants a shudderish multiplicity of limbs, suitable only for walking. With those limbs, however, an insectine shapechanger can pick her way across almost any surface — often with frightening speed.



In game terms, this Favor adds +4 to the character's normal Species Factor when figuring its Speed trait, and allows the character to walk on sheer surfaces, per the Wallwalking Favor. This Favor is free to creatures that have many sets of legs. We suggest that it be restricted to insectine or arachnid beings. For bizarre hybrids, use the listed cost. The sight of a man-sized (or larger) creature with so many legs is enough to invoke the Delusion, subtracting two dice from a witness's attempt to resist the Delusion's worst effects just before his shrieking demise.

Musk (●●●)

Similar to skunks and polecats, certain ferals can spray blasts of revolting musk or urine. All characters within the vicinity of such foulness (roughly 300 feet) must make Composure rolls or suffer dizziness and nausea almost immediately. (Ferals use Composure + Feral Heart to combat the effects, while other supernatural creatures use their usual Resistance trait for physical attacks.)

The feral character can hose down several other characters with this sickening attack. To hit them, the player rolls Dexterity + Feral Heart; the number of successes is the number of characters within a 15-foot-by-15-foot area hit by the spray. To be hit, those character must *all* be standing within that blast area. Characters who get sprayed directly take a –3 penalty to the Composure roll, and become carriers for the musk's effects.

Each character within 300 feet of the musk suffers a –3 penalty to his dice pools, and his Defense, Speed and Initiative have one level subtracted from their scores. A werebeast must spend an Essence point to activate this power. Its most serious effects last for one scene, but the stench lingers for days.

Natural Armor (● to ●●●●●)

Thick skin, scales, a shell or a carapace protect this feral from many forms of harm. Depending on the beast, this armor could be all-encompassing (for example, a shark's skin) or limited to certain areas (for example, a tortoise shell). Either way, natural armor does not protect the creature's eyes or the insides of his mouth, ears and other orifices.

The "free" version of this Favor offers an armor rating of 1/1, and is not bulletproof — *unless the breed listing says otherwise*; in that case, the listed rating is free. To "upgrade" that protection, points must be spent:

For ●, the armor becomes bulletproof.

For ●●●, the armor is 2/1.

For ●●●●, the armor is 3/2.

For ●●●●●, the armor is 4/3.

Generally, the armor applies only to the character's Primal, Dire and War forms. The player, however, may choose to have it apply to the human form as well. Note that a person with this Favor seems unnervingly scaly, rough or weathered; such a character suffers a –2 penalty to all Social rolls for which a normal or pleasant appearance would help.

Needleteeth (●●●)

The shapechanger has strong, sharp teeth capable of biting through very tough materials. When using his teeth to damage an object, he can ignore up to two points of that object's Durability while he's in Primal, Dire or War forms. No additional damage is done to living creatures, although the visual is pretty terrifying.

Quills (●● to ●●●●●)

Sharp spines jut from the shapechanger's skin. This Favor reflects their effects when those spines meet an opponent's flesh.

In game terms, an opponent struck by the quills (either from hitting the feral with a hand-to-hand attack, or from being hit by her) makes a contested roll against the feral's player. The opponent rolls his Stamina; the feral's player rolls Dexterity + Feral Heart. If the opponent wins, the quills brush that character's skin but do not pierce it; if the feral's player wins, the opponent's armor rating (if any) gets subtracted from that total. The remainder is the amount of damage the opponent takes.

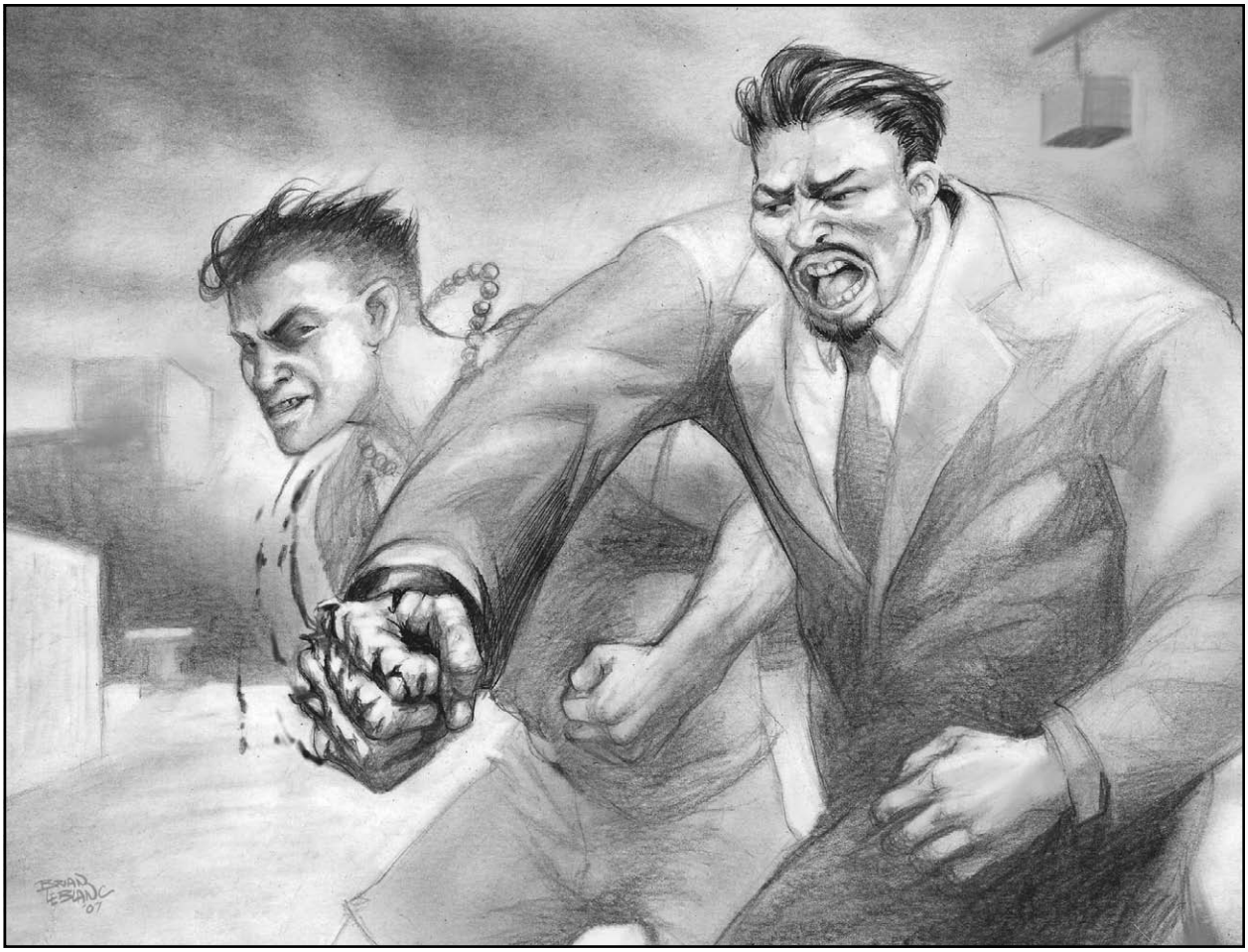
The quill damage is bashing, not lethal. Yet until those quills are removed, that damage doesn't heal. The spines remain in place, painful but not fatal. Removing those spines requires plenty of time and discomfort. A quill-removal session involves at least one minute per Health point inflicted, and inflicts a single point of lethal damage in addition to the bashing damage.

This Favor is free to a beast whose animal species normally has quills — porcupine, hedgehog, jellyfish, etc. Other characters must buy this Favor with points . . . and have a good reason for sharing such an odd feature. For two points, the character has bristling quills; for three points, she can fire than up to 15 feet with a successful Dexterity + Feral Heart roll. For each additional point, she can make the spines larger and add another die to her quill-based dice pool, up to a maximum of +3. The quills can also be poisoned with the addition of the Venomous Favor. As a weapon, these spines have no effect whatsoever on opponents who feel no pain, wear thick or solid armor or have skin that cannot be pierced by thin, sharp objects.

Razorskin (●●● or ●●●●)

Of the many frightening aspects of sharks, perhaps the most overlooked is their rough, sandpapery scales. Rubbing against these surfaces can tear tender skin, filling the water with blood. A shapeshifter with Razorskin has this quality in spades. Her skin can tear someone to ribbons.

When an enemy makes a successful Brawl attack against this feral (or is grabbed and pressed against her skin), he automatically takes one point of lethal damage. If he's using a weapon, that weapon sustains two points of damage to its Structure. The character must spend a point of Essence to activate this power for one scene. If the player



buys the four-dot version, however, the power is always on. This Favor works in all forms except Man-Guise. This Favor might also reflect some other damaging skin surface, such as barbs or hot coals, if such a Favor makes sense.

Size (●●●●)

Many animals dwarf human beings. Others scurry in Man's shadow. Per the systems given in the **World of Darkness Rulebook** (pp. 94, 171), a creature's Size trait determines that character's Health dots.

Shapechangers often become unusually large animals. Although most werebeasts remain within the overall Size range for their species (in Primal Beast form, anyway), shapechangers from really small species become unusually large beasts. Rats, for instance, are normally Size 1, but a wererat's beast form is Size 2. Smaller shapechangers often become colonies of tiny creatures . . . an unnerving sight, to be sure. (See also the Swarm Form Aspect.)

The base Size for a character's species is free. Upgrading one additional level above the base Size costs ●●●●. This trait cannot be raised further than that without the Storyteller's approval. A general Size range for animal species would be as follows:

Size	Primal Beast Form
1	Toad, sparrow, bat
2	Cat, hare, crow, rat
3	Fox, owl, hawk, coyote
4	Dog, wolf, goat, eagle
5	Human, large dog, leopard, hyena, python
6	Deer, jaguar, dolphin
7	Bear, horse, lion, alligator
8	Tiger, grizzly bear
9	Cattle, boar
10	Moose, giant swine
11	Wildebeast
12	Bison, tiger shark
13	Rhino, hippopotamus
14	Asian elephant, great white shark
15	African elephant, orca

This Size reflects the character's Primal or War-Beast form. A human form of unusual Size requires the Giant Merit.

Speed

Most animals are either painfully slow or incredibly fast. People fall in the middle. A feral character favors her animal species when she's in beast-form, but uses her human speed otherwise. Unless otherwise specified, the War-Beast's Speed is based on the human form, not the animal species.

A range of animals and their Speed ratings includes the following:

Factor	Species
1	Tortoise, insect
3	Hare, rat
5	Human, bear
8	Wolf, dog, cat
10	Hawk, tiger
12	Horse, leopard
15	Cheetah, gazelle

For more details about Speed, see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 95.

Water Breath (•)

The character can hold her breath or breathe underwater for as many hours as she has Feral Heart dots. This power costs one point of Willpower to use.

Webbing (• • • •)

Silky in texture and steely in toughness, these strands can support hundreds of pounds of weight. In story terms, a creature with this Favor can spin massive webs involving hundreds of feet of complex material. In game terms, that silk can be spun at a frightening rate — several dozen feet per turn. Given time, the werespider can lay out a massive web in less than an hour; rushed, she can spit out strands that immobilize a target in seconds.

A feral with this talent cannot simply fire web at her target; if he's stuck in her webbing already or pinned in some other fashion, however, the werespider can spin a sticky cocoon around him in two or three turns.

The Durability of this form of webbing is always 3. To weave a web, the Spinner-Kin's player rolls Dexterity + Crafts + Feral Heart. The total of her successes is the Structure of her webbing. The Size of the web itself isn't important — it's the craftsmanship that goes into it. For large, thick or elaborate webs, the weaving roll may be an extended action.

If the spider's trying to weave another character into that web while she works, that character can make a contested Strength + Athletics roll against her efforts. If he's agile instead of strong, he could use Dexterity in place of Strength, and if he's a supernatural being, he adds the appropriate Resistance trait to his dice pool as well. The trapped victim gets two attempts to pull free before the webbing dries. If the werespider gets more successes than her prey, that creature is bound in place and must overcome double the web's Structure before he can break free.

An unbound character, meanwhile, can cut or burn through the web by overcoming its Structure rating. Blunt weapons have no effect at all on webbing; edged ones add a single die to the character's Strength dice pool, and edged leverage tools (bolt cutters and such) add three dice. Fire inflicts double its normal damage in a 10-foot-by-10-foot area per turn; sadly, anyone tangled up in the webbing takes suffers normal damage from the fire as well. (See the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 180, for details about fire damage.)

Wings (• • • •)

This Favor's self-explanatory: if you have wings, you can fly. Most often, this Favor reflects full bone-and-muscle wings. Certain animals, though, have loose skin that catches the air, allowing for limited flight.

It's not necessary for a character to make a roll to succeed as long as she's in her Primal Beast form, unless she's attempting a difficult maneuver, is hindered somehow or must contend with severe weather conditions. In these cases, the character must make a successful Dexterity + Athletics roll.

A shapechanger in War-Beast form must make a successful Dexterity + Athletics roll every turn if she chooses to fly or glide. The character cannot fly at all while in human form. Even then, though, she derives some benefits from the Aspect. Thanks to her light bone structure and aerodynamic familiarity, this feral can jump twice as far as a normal person. (See "Jumping" in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, pp. 66–67.) This Favor is free to creatures that normally have wings, and costs four dots for ones that don't. The wings work in any form in which the character possesses them.

Aspects

As highly diverse creatures, ferals enjoy a wide range of unusual abilities. Some of these Aspects begin with an innate ability writ large, while others are personal quirks or learned tricks. All Aspects set the character apart from normal human beings, yet most Aspects are individualized enough to be accessible to any werebeast while being innate to none of them.

In shapechanger lore, many of these abilities are considered "tricks." Chameleon, for example, kept the secret of blending all to himself until Young March Hare came along and tricked Chameleon out of it. Although such magical thinking is considered more *legend* than *fact*, feral tricksters often prove otherwise.

Learning New Tricks

A werebeast can still gain Aspects after creation. In story terms, he might learn a trick from some elder beast, steal the secret from another shapechanger or study old books for ancient, forbidden lore . . . something the Bubasti are infamous for doing.

In story terms, the player must explain how her werebeast is earning or learning her new ability. Perhaps she roleplays out a bargain with another shapeshifter, or journeys into the spirit world in search of advice. Together, that player and her Storyteller work out the acquisition process and eventual discovery. The first time the new Aspect manifests ought to be played out for all it's worth.

In game terms, the player buys the Favor or Aspect with experience points. That Favor or Aspect *must be a trait her feral could acquire without physically mutating* — that is, she could learn Darksight (which might be a really good trick) but not Natural Armor (which she would have to grow). As always, naturally, there are several exceptions to that rule; those exceptions have been noted in the trait descriptions.

Each new Aspect point can be bought for five experience points times the dots in that Aspect. These dots, however, must be purchased sequentially. A three-point Aspect, for example, would cost 30 experience points — five for the first dot, 10 for the second and 15 for the third (5 + 10 + 15). Raising an existing Aspect to a new level works the same way; raising Bare Necessities 1 to Bare Necessities 3 costs 25 experience points.

As ever, the Storyteller maintains veto power over any new Favor or Aspect. We suggest limiting those new Aspects to ones that seem well-suited to the shapechanger and her inner beast.

Alarming Alacrity (• to •••••)

With the expenditure of a Willpower point, the werebeast can double his Speed for as many turns as he has points in this Aspect. This trait can be used in any form.

Asthmatic Reaction (•••)

Many folks are allergic to animals . . . or, more often, to animal saliva. This trick takes advantage of that reaction. By spending an Essence point, a character with this Aspect can spit at an opponent by making an attack roll with Dexterity + Athletics. The opponent's Defense is counted against this roll.

If the spit hits the target, there's no immediate damage. On the next turn, though, the target gets overwhelmed by a powerful coughing fit. It feels as though his throat is closing, although this is not actually the case. The target suffers a –3 penalty to *all* rolls during this turn. The second turn, he suffers a –2 penalty, and the third a –1 penalty. The fourth turn, the penalty vanishes — but he then takes two points of bashing damage from his wracking coughs. Good times!

Awww!!! (• to •••••)

Some critters are too cute for words, even if they can rip your arm off. A feral with this talent can cute her way out of most kinds of trouble, adding a +1 bonus per dot to all Social rolls that emphasize her adorable qualities. This trick can be used in any form, but grants only half of the usual bonus to attempts made in human shape.

Bare Necessities (• or •••)

Shapeshifters can't afford to be modest. Most cannot change into their animal form unless they're naked or wearing full leather or fur garments. Sometimes, though, there's just not enough time to strip before you change. A character who knows this secret, though, doesn't have to worry about it.

With this Aspect, a character's clothes, pocketed possessions and anything else that's touching her skin effectively transforms with her. None of those things, however, are accessible until her human form is resumed. For the three-dot version, Bare Necessities allows the shapechanger to take additional items, such as weapons or backpacks, along for the ride.

A snatched-up item must be Size 1 or 2 — small enough to carry easily in one hand or wear without difficulty. The item neither encumbers nor aids the feral in any way while it's carried, and it cannot be taken away until it "reappears" when she changes back. A complex mechanical item (being an artifact of Man) may malfunction after the shift; to successfully carry an object more complicated than a watch, the player rolls her character's Stamina + Feral Heart, and the item still works if she *fails* that roll. If the item is a garment, purse or backpack, up to four small items (Size 1) can be carried inside. Commonly carried objects include coats, purses, wallets, small weapons, and — of course — shiny pretty things.

Beast Magic (• to •••)

Select werebeasts pursue forbidden arts of magic. These formidable creatures employ arcane secrets and ominous tools to mimic the spells of human wizards. In return, though, they impose limits upon their wild hearts. Still, it's an impressive trade. While most ferals shun these strange arts, certain beasts — cats, baboons, goats, foxes, cranes, spiders, frogs, ravens, even bison — are strongly attuned to magic. In human form, these creatures are often drawn to occult practices. And after the First Change, these practices come to fruition through the odd talent of Beast Magic.

In game terms, this Aspect allows a werebeast to purchase specific mage spells — not *Arcana*, but *spells* — to duplicate the effects of arcane beast-magic. *These spells are not Supernal magic as mages practice it.* Werebeasts cannot be mages, and cannot master those esoteric arts. We simply suggest using those particular spells to duplicate the effects of a more limited form of magic. If Sovah Volente, for example, wants to employ a spell that fakes a corpse's





cause of death, her player could buy the Death •• spell called "Corpse Mask." Sovah could not, however, use other Death •• spells; if the owl-kin also wants to command the shadows, her player could buy "Animate Shadows" as a separate spell. She *could not* simply buy or use Death •• itself. That power is beyond her control.

Each spell selected counts as a distinct Aspect, and must be purchased separately. Sovah, for example, would have Beast Magic: Corpse Mask •• and Beast Magic: Animate Shadows ••. The cost of buying spells ranges from five to 30 experience points: • = five points, •• = 15 points, ••• = 30 points. A werebeast *may* select one or two spells during character creation, but only if the player also buys the Occult Skill and presents a very good reason for that knowledge. These enchantments can be found in **Mage: The Awakening**, pp. 133–267, and have the following parameters when cast by a werebeast:

• The werebeast player rolls Wits + Occult to cast a spell, rather than the traits that a mage would use. The werebeast must also spend one point of Essence to complete the spell.

• That werebeast cannot buy a spell with more dots in it than her rating in the Occult Skill.

• A werebeast cannot combine spells, or have more than one operating at a time. The single effect is all a werebeast can achieve.

• Multiple werebeasts can cast a ritual if all have the Beast Magic Aspect. (See **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 121.)

• A werebeast cannot purchase a spell of a higher level than •••. The upper reaches of magic are closed to werebeasts.

• A shapechanger with the Beast Magic Aspect cannot have a Feral Heart rating higher than 3 — his maximum rating in Beast Magic. In pursuing those studies, he gives too great a portion of his life over to the arts of Man to fully embrace his beast. Likewise, he *cannot* select the Spirit Gifts Aspect. A beast may pursue magic or spiritual communion, but not both.

To cast a spell, the feral prepares a ritual with tools, incantations and gestures that suit the character and story. A Tothian baboon, for example, may call upon ancient Egyptian secrets, employing tools and words drawn from esoteric papyri; a Klinkerash werecat, in contrast, would employ trappings from medieval Germany to invoke his witch-spell. In game terms, the player spends a point of Essence, rolls for success and the spell's effects (hopefully) take form.

As the name implies, this is a very sketchy Aspect to master. Beast-magicians have a discomforting smell, especially those who pursue the arts of Death, Fate, Space and Spirit. Other shapechangers distrust Bubasti and Tothians . . . and for good reason. Magic is one of Man's more chaotic arts, and while an honest beast may appreciate the skill and dedication involved in mimicking the secrets of clannish wizards, he'll be rightfully skeptical that an *animal* (even a human one) could deal with such things and still remain true to what she is.

Beast Surge (•••)

By staring into another shapeshifter's eyes, the werebeast with this trick can try to "surge the beast" and drive the other feral into one of his animal forms. This often comes into play when one werebeast wants to assert dominance, unmask a person who's hiding his true animal nature or remind a shapechanger who he really is at heart.

Both characters engage in a staring contest; in game terms, the players make contested rolls of each shapeshifter's Composure + Feral Heart dice pool. Each roll covers about 30 seconds of ferocious staring. The contest lasts until either the challenger backs down or the defender shifts slowly (another 30–60 seconds) but distinctly into his Primal form. Each rival can spend a Willpower point to keep going and resist the efforts of the other beast. The challenger can break off at any time, but if the defender loses, he transforms. He probably won't be happy about doing so, but after that display of dominance, the defender will most likely listen to what the challenger has to say.

Birth Blessing (•)

A fabled gift of magical beasts, this Aspect allows a feral to help a would-be mother (animal or human) bear healthy children. The shapechanger kisses the mother on her belly or kneels in animal form at the foot of her bed; in game terms, the player spends a point of Essence, and the Storyteller takes that as a cue to give the blessed character an extraordinarily healthy pregnancy and offspring. The child's later birth and health are plot developments, not immediate concerns; still, the Blessing may prove significant in a long-term chronicle where friends and kin become vital.

Blend In (•)

Like a hare in winter, this character can shift her skin or fur to blend in with the dominant surroundings. For a gradual change (requiring a day or so), this talent costs nothing to use; for an almost-instant shift (one or two turns), the player must spend a point of Essence. Either way, this Favor adds +2 to all dice pools that involve sneaking or hiding in the surroundings to which the feral has blended. For breeds whose natural counterparts shift colors to match the season, this Favor is free.

Burrowing (•• or •••)

With thick claws or teeth, this beast may dig through barriers, packing the displaced earth so tightly that it forms a tunnel around her as she goes. This digging can be surprisingly fast; a character with this Favor can burrow at half her normal Move through soft earth, a quarter of her normal Move through thick or difficult terrain.

Typically, this Favor works only in ground that's soft enough to dig through; for three dots, the burrowing can be done through stone (at half Move) and even (at a rate



of one Structure point per turn) metal. While digging, the character gets no Defense and is unable to move anywhere except forward. This Favor cannot be used in Man-Guise; if the character has Throwback form, she can burrow at a rate of 2 (soft earth) or 1 (difficult substance) per turn. This digging, however, inflicts one point of bashing damage per turn as her nails and teeth break from the strain.

Carnivore's Puissance (●●)

In the World of Darkness, many ancient myths are grounded in brutal truth. Nowhere is this more clear than in the Carnivore's Puissance Aspect, which allows a werebeast to regain Essence by devouring hearts.

The bigger the animal, the larger the draw. Essence regained is calculated by taking half of the prey's Size and rounding up. (See the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, pp. 94–95.) A dog's heart would provide two points of Essence, for example, while a bear's heart would provide four. The heart must be eaten raw and fresh to gain any benefit. There is *no* benefit gained from consuming the heart of another shapechanger, aside from the usual Essence taken as food (see the Essence listing for details). Devouring the heart of a human being or a member of the character's "own kind" is a Harmony violation, with all attendant consequences. This Aspect can be used once per game session, and gets all the wrong kinds of attention from human authorities. . . .

Catwalk (● to ●●●●●)

Padding softly on bare feet, the feral moves with hardly a sound. For each dot in this Aspect, the player adds +1 to her character's dice pools for stealth and balance so long as she's moving about on her feet (as opposed to climbing, swinging or swimming). This Aspect costs nothing to employ, is always on and works in any form. In human shape, Catwalk also provides an animal-like toughness to the feral's soles.

Clamber (● to ●●●●●)

Like a monkey, this character climbs and clambers about with surety and grace. For each dot, the player adds +1 to his feral's dice pools for climbing, grasping and swinging around. Similar to Catwalk, this Aspect is always on, costs no Essence and functions in any form. Obviously, the shapechanger must have strong, flexible fingers, toes and possibly a tail as well. Beasts with hooves or "walking paws" cannot learn this trick, though beasts with talons can do so as long as those extremities can grip and hold a climbing surface.

Clever Monkey (● to ●●●●●)

The agile mind of this shapechanger can assess a situation and fit together (literally or otherwise) the pieces



involved. As an Aspect, this trait confers a +1 bonus per dot to Intelligence dice pools involved in solving puzzles, navigating mazes and problem-solving dilemmas. The problem involved must have obvious "pieces" and a clear and achievable goal — this trick can't puzzle out peace in the Middle East. This Aspect helps a feral repair an engine, master sudoku or solve a logical mystery. The Aspect works in all forms, and (contrary to its name) applies to all shapechanging animals.

Culling the Weak (••)

Carnivorous beasts fill their bellies by picking off the weak and infirm when stalking prey; this is known as culling the herd. A shapeshifter with this Aspect is able to bring that instinct to bear in her own life. She can take stock of a situation and determine the weakest character involved when her player spends an Essence point and rolls Wits + Empathy. If she succeeds particularly well, your predator might also be able to detect whether or not anyone in the area is suffering from an illness (which is not the same as being able to *diagnose* that illness . . .).

A feral can use this ability on only one group at a time. If, for example, she faces several humans and several vampires at once, she'll have to decide which group she wants to assess. This predator can also be fooled: a successful Strength + Subterfuge roll allows a healthy character to convincingly feign weakness. Also, because "weakness" is subjective (taking into account wounds, Physical stats and possibly other variables), the werebeast may discover that the target who appears weakest at *present* is *quite* powerful when healed.

Durga's Blessing (•• or •••)

When the goddess Durga rode into battle on her tiger, she conferred her immortal ferocity upon his descendants. Ages later, this Aspect lets a character heal aggravated damage to himself. For one Essence point, the feral can regenerate a single Health point lost to aggravated damage. If the feral can spend more than one Essence per turn, he may do so and heal that number of Health points. This healing, however, is limited by the character's Feral Heart dots; the points of damage healed in one battle cannot exceed his Feral Heart trait. Bashing and lethal damage remain unaffected by this Aspect.

Weretigers, thanks to their ancestral legacy, pay only two dots for this Aspect; all other characters (werecats included) pay three dots. This healing works in any form, and manifests as a glow of bright orange light around the wounds as they heal.

Earthbond (••)

Animals are extremely attuned to their surroundings. This Aspect allows a feral to be even more attuned than usual. Scenting the wind or feeling the trembles of the earth, he can "scan" his surroundings for trouble. In game terms, the player takes a half action to get a feel for the territory, and then makes a Wits + Composure roll to spot potential threats, trespassers or meals within 500 feet or so of the character.

The Earthbond roll enjoys a bonus, depending on the feral's surroundings and circumstances. In natural surroundings, the player gets a +3 bonus; in urban settings, the bonus drops to +2. If the feral knows his surroundings well, the dice pool receives an additional +1 bonus; if not, no further bonus applies. Other perception-based modifiers also apply, however, up to a maximum bonus or penalty of +5/–5. This Aspect works in any form, and costs no Essence to employ.

Exoskeleton (••)

Bugs crunch when you step on them because they wear their skeletons on the outside, like chocolate-covered cherries. With the expenditure of a single Essence point, a character can cause his skin to harden with a waxy, brown residue, thereby gaining an additional armor equivalent to 1/1. There's a tradeoff, however: the exoskeleton lowers the character's Defense and Speed by –1 each. This Aspect is available in any form, and stacks with the natural armor of the hybrid form. The Aspect lasts for one scene, and looks (and feels) utterly disgusting.

Extraordinary Specimen (•)

A feral with this Aspect embodies her totem animal: one of the biggest and strongest representatives of her race. She reflects the maximization of her breed potential, and in game terms her Primal form (and her Dire form, if she has one) increases its Strength and Size by one.

Foretelling (••)

Looking into a possible future, this creature receives visions of what might transpire. These visions are vague and unreliable, but somewhat accurate regardless.

In game terms, the Storyteller describes vivid impressions that the character receives in connection with a certain character, setting or event. In the process, the Storyteller silently decides how accurate those visions are, and then makes a point of having some element of them come true later.

For guidance, the Storyteller might make a secret roll on the player's behalf. Using Wits + Empathy + Feral Heart as a dice pool, he determines whether or not the character saw a true vision of the future; the more successes he rolls, the more accurate the Foretelling will be. This is a free, reflexive action on behalf of the character. Naturally, the Storyteller is under no obligation to tell the player whether or not the vision was accurate, and he is not compelled to make the Foretelling come true a certain way. Prophecy is notoriously uncertain, open more to interpretation than to literal fulfillment.

Fortune's Favor (•• or •••)

A famous boon for hares and crows, this Aspect confers good luck. The feral concentrates on a person or animal and

deeply wishes that party well; in game terms, the player spends a point of Willpower to make something good happen for the favored character. That stroke of luck occurs as a dramatic event of the Storyteller's choice, but it *will* occur. Examples include a winning lottery ticket (even if the character never plays the lottery), a bank error in his favor, a new job or promotion or simply a +4 bonus to a critical roll in the near future. The two-dot version of this Aspect bestows that luck only upon another character; the three-dot version allows the feral to use the luck himself. Regardless, the player does not have any influence over the stroke of luck.

Grave Misfortune (••)

A reversal of Fortune's Favor, this Aspect lets the werebeast grant *bad* luck instead. The game mechanics are the same, except that the werebeast experiences a smaller yet significant stroke of bad luck as well. Examples of misfortune include an expensive bank error, a visit from the police (which may or may not be deserved) or a –4 penalty to one very important roll.

Gross Eater (• or ••)

This character will never starve to death. She can eat anything organic, living or dead. From a shrieking rodent to bio-hazardous waste, a moldering corpse dug from its grave — it's all nourishment to her. Even fecal matter is within bounds. She gains as much benefit from these meals as she would from lunch at the local health-food store.

The two-dot version further opens the possibilities to inorganic matter as well. With this trick, the character can derive sustenance from almost anything as long as she's physically able to get into her mouth and down her throat. The ability to consume this stuff, however, does not protect her from the damage eating such stuff may cause. For example, while eating beer bottles may keep her from starving, doing so will still cause major trauma to her digestive system. . . .

Hare Heart (–•)

Timid or easily upset, this character risks going Berserk under stress. When rolling Resolve + Composure to avoid a Berserk fit, the player reduces her dice pool by –1. This feral is also far more likely to make a rabbit run than fly into a tiger storm. To stand and fight instead, that player spends one point of Willpower to enter that tiger storm. (See also the Tiger Heart Aspect.)

Hound's Honor (• to •••••)

Many animals have incredibly fine senses of smell. With this Aspect, the werebeast (who may or may not be canine) can identify, recognize or track a particular scent. In game terms, this trait adds a bonus of +1 per dot to perception, tracking or identification dice pools in which the character literally follows his nose. Strong odors, pollution, smoke or perfume negative this bonus, and may send the feral into fits of nausea.

Hybrid Forms (••••)

Most ferals have only three shapes: Man-Guise, War-Beast and Primal Beast. This Aspect, however, grants two additional forms: the Throwback and the Dire Beast. See "Hybrid Forms," **p. 110-11**, for details about these manifestations of the Changing Gift.

Hypnotic Allure (•••)

Some people can captivate crowds with the strength of their personalities, physical magnetism or simply the fluid motions of their bodies or minds. While some of these people may simply be gifted, others may be shapechangers with the Hypnotic Allure Aspect.

This Aspect allows a character to access some of her feral nature while still in human form, essentially beguiling a crowd of people with "animal magnetism." The player rolls her Presence + Persuasion. The Storyteller counters with a Resolve + Composure roll for any affected people — or, for a crowd, with the highest Resolve + Composure roll within an affected group or an overall "impression dice pool" for that group. If the character's successes beat those of the crowd, she has won them over with some aspect of her primal nature. All Social rolls made to sway the affected people are given a bonus equal to the success gathered on activating this Aspect; two successes, for instance, would allow for a +2 bonus.

To be within this trick's effective range, people must be within a number of yards equal to the character's Feral Heart score. Once active, this talent cannot be "turned off." It lasts for one full scene, and affects supernatural beings as well as mortals. (Night-folk use their Composure + appropriate trait as a dice pool.)

Invisible Marking (•)

Many animals mark their territory or the places they've been, whether with urine, musk or pheromone trails. Feral shapechangers do this as well. A character with this Aspect, however, can also mark places with a mystical connection — a bit of his essence left behind for others to read.

To employ this trick, the character presses his fingers or rubs his cheek against a particular surface, leaving behind an almost undetectable excretion. Only other members of that shapechanger's breed or band will be able to detect the mark, and to do so the player or Storyteller running the reader must make a successful Wits + Survival roll.

The "messenger" can elect to leave behind a simple mark (which simply documents his presence), or he can customize it with a single word or name. Any characters who can detect the mark are also able to read the message. This marking is a reflexive action, and costs no Essence to employ.

Keen Sense (• or ••)

Animals live and die by their senses. With this Aspect, a single sense becomes incredibly acute.





The one-dot version of this Aspect provides a +2 bonus to any roll for reflexive perception roll (Wits + Composure only). The second dot confers that advantage, plus the virtue of perceiving at greater distances; for the senses of sight, smell and hearing *only*, the character can ignore up to three dice of distance-related penalties to any perception roll. This Aspect is always active; it costs no Essence to use, and must be bought separately for each sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch and energy awareness (the hunch for "vibes").

Leap (• to •••)

Certain animals can leap great distances. This Aspect allows a character to double, triple or quadruple her usual jumping distance. For one dot, that distance is doubled, for two it's tripled and for three, it's quadrupled. In human form, the leaping distance becomes half of the distance a beast-form can jump; for example, a feral who leaps 10 yards in Primal form can jump five yards in her human form. See "Jumping" in the **World of Darkness Rulebook,** pp. 66–67, for details and distances about leaping.

Long Life (• or ••)

Like Old Man Possum, this character should enjoy an especially long lifespan. How this manifests can be tailored to the story. Perhaps the character appears to age normally but simply refuses to succumb to old age. Or perhaps she doesn't appear to age a day despite her advancing age. Regardless, this Aspect adds 50% to a feral's usual lifespan, which translates to about 40 years for most people. The two-point version, meanwhile, effectively doubles her natural lifespan . . . assuming nobody cuts it short for her.

Magnificence (••)

A staggering example of his breed, this feral seems more like a totem spirit than an actual beast. His fur or scales shine, his eyes glow; an aura of sublime *presence* surrounds him at all times. Even in still air, the breeze seems to caress this marvelous creature. People and animals instinctively revere the character when he's in his beast-forms. In game terms, the player adds a +4 bonus to Social rolls in which the werebeast stands to make a powerful impression — but *only* when he's in one of the animal shapes.

Mercy's Touch (•••)

Although mercy is in short supply in the feral world, certain animals — cattle, hares, dogs, frogs, bears and especially serpents — are renowned for healing powers. With this Aspect, a feral licks, lays his paw upon or wraps himself around a sick or wounded friend. The player spends an Essence point and rolls Composure + Medicine. The result is the number of Health points restored from lethal damage, healed at a rate of one point for every five minutes of interrupted consolation. This Aspect does nothing to heal bashing or aggravated damage; the Aspect can, however, heal damage caused by poison or disease if the healer takes twice the usual time to do so. This Aspect works in all forms, but can heal only as many Health points as there are dots in the character's Feral Heart trait.

Mimic (• or •••)

Nature's imposters can impersonate another creature's voice, coloration or scent. Using this trick, a feral can do the same.

In story terms, the feral can sound like another animal, simulate another animal's basic appearance under loose observation or change her scent to match a different beast. The one-dot version allows her to mimic a single element (appearance, sound or scent), two dots lets her mimic two and three dots lets her imitate them all. Either application, in game terms, requires a successful Wits + Animal Ken + Feral Heart roll. "Another animal" *can* be a human being, although a specific impersonation would demand an additional Wits + Subterfuge + Feral Heart roll.

In any case, this deception is short-lived — at best, it lasts two turns for each Feral Heart dot the werebeast possesses. To uncover the deception, a character can make a contested Wits + Subterfuge roll. In good light, the observer gets a +3 bonus to spot a mimicked appearance. And if that player wins the contest, the gig is up.

To mimic sounds or scents, this trick works in any form. However, the feral *cannot* mimic the appearance of a drastically different creature — that is, he could pass for a dog while in his hyena shape, but couldn't look like a person, bird or lizard. To impersonate a human being, the feral must shift to his human form first.

Mindmap (•••)

This feral is never truly lost. No matter where she is, she can find familiar ground eventually. As a story element, this Aspect leads a character back home from anywhere *eventually*; if she wants to speed the process along, the player can roll Intelligence + Composure + Feral Heart to remember a certain location or find a path back to a place she recognizes; the more successes she scores, the quicker that path appears. Granted, this process could take hours or even days if she's lost in the Australian Outback or Amazon rainforest. Still, so long as she's able to follow her instincts, this beast will always find her way home.

Mindspeech (••)

Reaching across space and language, a feral with this Aspect can "talk" and "listen" without saying or hearing a word. An instinctive telepathy allows him to speak within a single character's head. This speech is as intelligible as it would be if the two characters were speaking aloud — that is, if the feral spoke only French and the recipient didn't understand French, the two parties could "speak" but not really communicate.

This talent is reflexive, costs no Essence, works in any form and requires no roll beyond a roll that might be needed for the characters to understand one another. When in use,

this Aspect also grants a +2 bonus to dice rolls involving Empathy. The two characters must make eye contact to begin the "conversation," and may retain it only as long as both of them are within 100 feet or so of one another. At greater distances, the "voices in their heads" begin to fade until they're lost completely.

Mother's Fury (• to •••••)

Nothing is more dangerous than a mother bear defending her cubs. This Aspect— a specialty of the Den-Warder accord — channels that ferocity to defend a feral's kin or other innocents.

For each dot in the Aspect, the player adds a +1 bonus to her hand-to-hand dice pools when defending her character's family, her lover or children in general. This bonus lasts for one turn for each dot in her Feral Heart score, then reverts to the normal dice pools. Despite the Aspect's name, the character need not be female or a mother in order to employ this Aspect. The defended character, however, must be more or less helpless against the impending attack, and *cannot* be another werebeast or supernatural creature, unless that creature is the character's own child.

Nine Lives (•••••)

With this Aspect, a character can survive death. When the shapechanger receives an aggravated level of damage in her last Health box, and would normally die as a result, she *does* in fact die . . . but only briefly.

To find out how long she's dead, subtract the character's Harmony score from 10; the result is the number of hours the character remains deceased. After the required number of hours have elapsed (and provided the body remains relatively unmolested), she reawakens. This costs one Feral Heart dot. If the werebeast had only had one Feral Heart dot at the time of death, resurrection will not be possible.

A character with this Aspect can revive one time without a roll. Each resurrection after that requires a Resolve + Composure roll in order to be successful. A cumulative –1 die penalty is also in effect; this means that the second time a player wants her character to return to life, she'll have to roll with a one-die penalty. The third time, she'll have a two-dice penalty, and so on. (The character must always be able to lose a Feral Heart dot regardless, or death is permanent.)

Between death and resurrection, the body has a number of Structure points equal to the character's Stamina in her human form. For example, an Azubuike with Stamina 4 in Man-Guise has a Structure of 4 until she revives. Any damage to those Structure points prevents the body from resurrecting.

Once resurrection is achieved, all aggravated damage becomes lethal damage, and the shapechanger begins healing normally.

This Aspect is ideally suited to animals that are particularly tough or hard to kill. Certain types of insects (cockroaches, flies) are notorious for it, as are rhinos, bears and boars. Perhaps the best example of this Aspect, however, is the cat and her legendary nine lives. . . .

Pack Bond (•••)

Many creatures move and think as though they're a single unit when they're gathered in a group. This Aspect provides bonuses that are then shared by all members of a particular feral species or their intimate companions.

A character with this Aspect can transfer either one point of Essence or one point of Willpower as a reflexive action to another creature of her animal species (not including humans), so long as both shapechangers share a common band. That character can transfer only one point per turn, and the target creature must be within her line of sight. If these conditions are not met, no point transfer is possible.

Shapechangers with a Pack Bond may also communicate with each other through an empathic bond. The character who initiates the communication can speak to a companion within that band without restriction for 10 seconds. To do this successfully, both creatures must be within one mile of each other, and share some form of previous contact. This action costs one Willpower point from both parties.

Pack Bond also grants the shapechanger the ability to send out a powerful distress signal, which resounds in the minds of all creatures (not just shapechangers) of the same species within a 10-mile radius. The character cannot pick and choose which members of his species receive the signal. Affected creatures immediately know the precise location of the werebeast in trouble. The signal continues to "sound" until the sending character shuts it off or dies. This function costs one Willpower point.

This Aspect is available to any shapechanger who bonds deeply with members of his species. It's not necessarily restricted to positive bonds; in the case of lovers, former lovers, best friends, parents or children, however, this Aspect can and does cross between species. Outside of such intimate connections, however, this Aspect is most appropriate for ferals of deeply communal breeds: wolves, fish, roaches, crows, ants and so on.

Partial Change (••)

If you can shapechange, it's often helpful to change a small *portion* of your shape rather than your entire body. And so, this trick lets a feral adjust a single feature of her current form into a single feature from one of her other shapes. A woman, for example, could change one hand into the talon of her hawk-self, or a dog could adopt her human face to speak with. Obviously, this is a *really* weird sight; normal human witnesses fall under the Delusion, while normal animals freak out. Still, that partial change could be helpful if the character needs to open a door or rip someone's heart out.





In game terms, the player rolls her Stamina + Survival + Feral Heart. A successful roll transforms the character in the desired way for the duration of the scene; changing back requires another successful roll. Alternately, the player could spend a point of Essence and transform automatically without a roll; again, though, each shift requires a point of Essence. A failed roll changes the wrong body part — the feral could want to change her hand and shift her leg instead. This is a common Aspect among tricksters or predators, who use their altered shapes for vastly different things.

Piggyback Passenger (●●●)

Some shapechangers are able to tap into their connection with the animal world a little more deeply than most. These creatures can reach out with their minds and plug into the neural network of animals within a square mile. This allows shapechangers to sense the presence of every animal of less-than-human intelligence within that area. (Curiously, this excludes insects. There is a belief that connecting with insect intelligence is too jarring and alien, and results in madness. Some authorities point to insectoid shapeshifters as evidence that this is a flawed theory; others point to those same creatures as proof of its truth.)

A character with this Aspect (also known as Feral Collective) can spend a Willpower point to piggyback on the senses of one of any bird or mammal within range, essentially becoming a passenger in the animal's mind. Piggybacking on the senses of a fish requires a Willpower point and an Essence point, as their minds are different enough that a human mind requires a special effort to align with one. While piggybacking like this, the character experiences everything the animal does, from pain to fear to instinctive impulses. He cannot control the animal in any way, however. This power lasts for an hour, and may be "tuned out" at any time.

Resilient Form (●+)

Shapeshifters whose beast-forms are small and fragile (birds, rats, lizards) may take this Aspect to toughen themselves up while in animal form. Each point taken allows a character to add one point to Health while he's in his animal shapes (Primal, Dire and War-Beast), up to a maximum of his human Health trait. Obviously, this Aspect is useless to characters with a higher animal-form Health ratings.

Righting Reflex (● to ●●●)

A common belief states that a falling cat always lands on his feet. This trick reflects that talent. If a werecat with this Aspect suffers damage from a fall, that damage is halved (round up). This is true even if he falls at terminal velocity.

The two-point version functions in the same way, but with the added advantage of a +2 to Defense while he's in his Primal or Dire form. The three-point version allows the feral to use this trick in human form as well. Generally, though, this Aspect takes into account the natural grace and balance of cats, which allows them to avoid blows or grabs with remarkable (sometimes frustrating) ease. This Aspect can be taken by equally graceful creatures, or by magical thieves (such as crows) who steal the trick from another cat. Bulky creatures, however, cannot employ this trick. No matter how clever a bull is, he still falls and lands like a bull.

Sense of Familiarity (●●)

We live in the Information Age. Cameras are everywhere, whether mounted on a wall for security or gripped in some voyeur's hand, looking to make the big score. Privacy is all but extinct. Despite that — or maybe because of it — people pay less and less attention to the details around them. This Aspect plays off that effect.

By employing this trick — an extension of the Delusion — a feral can engage in strange, even supernatural, activity without drawing unwanted attention to himself. Potential witnesses either don't notice what's going on or convince themselves that what they are seeing fits into the natural order of things.

If the feral's running around in his animal form through a place he might be noticed, the player should roll Wits + Subterfuge – the bystander's Resolve. (For crowds, subtract the highest Resolve trait belonging to a character from that group.) If the roll is successful, nobody detects anything strange. The character may not even be noticed at all.

This sneaky character can even act in an overtly supernatural fashion (leaping over walls, jumping off buildings), yet may remain unseen. If he does something that's clearly impossible for an animal, the player makes the same roll. He then subtracts the highest Resolve from anyone who might witness or be affected by the feral's behavior. (The character cannot choose his targets.) If the roll succeeds, the feral doesn't provoke a strong or fearful reaction. He may become the subject of a dreamlike fascination, or wind up rationalized into something completely mundane. Circumstances will dictate the specifics. Note that violent or extreme actions — such as attacking someone or devouring a corpse — *cannot* be obscured by this Aspect. This talent is a gift for tricksters, not a cloak for murderers.

In either case, this trick is *not* a reflexive action. The Aspect must be activated. If the character's presence would damage his physical environment (such as a rhino in a shopping mall), the player must spend one point of Essence to activate this power. If the beast is stealthy, though (for example, a crow or cat), there is no Essence cost. Witnesses who succumb to the Sense of Familiarity might never know they encountered anything supernatural at all. At best, the event will become an interesting story they tell at the bar; at worst, the event will be forgotten altogether.

Sexual Dimorphism (●●)

This Aspect reflects the way some animals use physical appearance to successfully attract mating partners. A character with Sexual Dimorphism retains some of those

traits in all of its forms. For example, if his soul-beast is a bird with extravagant plumage, the character may take particular care in his dress and appearance while in human form. Another may like to sing, preen or display physical prowess. Whatever the case, the character gains a +2 to any Social roll when dealing with the opposite sex . . . including Intimidation rolls.

Shadow Bond (●●●)

Most ferals, unlike their cousins the Uratha, are creatures of this world. Most . . . but not *all*. This Aspect allows a werebeast to cross through the spiritual Gauntlet, reaching that otherworld often called the Shadow.

To "step sideways," the feral must be at a spiritual locus — a place of mystical power. Entering a trance or gazing into a reflective surface (such as a mirror or pool of water), he fades from this world into the next. In about 30 seconds, he manifests fully in the Shadow. From there, his life gets far more . . . surreal. When he returns, he often smells *odd* to other ferals. The weird world beyond the Gauntlet leaves its scent on him, and that scent lingers for some time to come. (Ferals who know the Uratha recognize that scent as part of the werewolf aroma, and may judge the spirit-walking werebeast accordingly, for good or ill.)

System-wise, this Aspect grants the character an ability to cross over. To do so, the player rolls Intelligence + Presence + Feral Heart. If he spends a point of Essence, he can make that trip instantly; otherwise, it takes about 10 turns to cross over. During that time, he's immune to attacks from either side of the Gauntlet. Certain circumstances modify that dice roll, in both positive and negative ways:

Location	Dice Pool Modifier
Dense urban area	–3
City suburb and town	–2
Small town, village, outpost	–1
Wilderness	+0
Daylight	–2
Rating •• or ••• locus	+1
Rating ••••+ locus	+2
Staring into reflective surface	+1

The Shadow itself is vast and complex. Its mysteries reach beyond the scope of this book, but can be explored in greater detail in **Werewolf: The Forsaken**, pp. 250–285.

Skin Double (●●●●)

An infamous trick among hyenas, cats and foxes, this dreadful gift allows a shapechanger to kill a person and assume his identity. First, the feral stalks and downs her prey, harming his skin as little as possible in the process. Using terrible rites, she skins the body (sometimes while her victim still lives), then prepares the hide with her own blood, urine, tears, saliva and sweat. Donning the skin, she becomes an almost-perfect likeness of that person. Little quirks — memory gaps, strange mannerisms, a slight scent of animal — remain behind as clues to the deception; a clever beast, however, can convince people that she's still who she seems to be. Unless someone's able to unveil the shapechanger, she can pass as her dead prey.

In game terms, the player plans and executes the skin-theft. This is probably a Harmony violation, and the Storyteller should treat it as such. Spending a point of Essence, the character adopts the persona of the slain victim. By spending another point each time she removes and replaces the skin (two points per shift), she can maintain the charade indefinitely, even when there are significant physical differences (height, weight, age, etc.) between the feral and her impersonated prey. All disguise rolls receive four bonus successes, but there's a hitch: some flaw in that disguise — a foot that's still a paw, a sheen in the eyes, a tendency to eat meat raw — reveals the animal part of the feral's nature. A character who spots that flaw (a perception roll based on the circumstances of the story) may notice that something's *wrong* with his old friend. Up until then, though, the masquerade lasts for as long as the feral wants to play dress-up.

An eerie and very powerful Aspect, Skin Double presents many opportunities for dramatic Storytelling. Even so, it should *never* be used to displace and impersonate player characters, except perhaps with that player's covert agreement — in which case, the deception could be a *lot* of fun to roleplay. . . .

Slumber's Touch (●●●)

A favorite trickster secret, this power lets the shapechanger put people to sleep. Spending an Essence point and rolling the shapechanger's Resolve + Stamina + Feral Heart, the player can send one character into slumber for each success he scores.

All affected characters must be within roughly 100 feet of one another and within 300 feet of the werebeast when the sleep descends. If the targets would be inclined to sleep anyway, this slumber is automatic. If someone wants to resist its effects, that player (or the Storyteller) makes a contested roll against the feral, using her character's Resolve + Stamina (+ the mystical Resistance trait if that character is one of the night-folk). Aside from the strong, sudden effect, this sleep is natural. Characters awaken from it an hour or so afterward, feeling refreshed . . . until, perhaps, they discover what the shapechanger had done while they were sleeping. . . .

Snatch and Carry (●●)

Normally, a feral in beast-form has to leave her human possessions behind. This trick, however, lets her take a single item along with for the run. This item must be "pre-



pared" in advance by the shapechanger (often with blood, urine or saliva) at the cost of one Essence point. She holds the object in her hand or wears it while she transforms. The item then blends in with her body, reappearing when she returns to the form in which she snatched that item up.

Spinebite (●●●●●)

Cats are brutally efficient killers — among the best in the natural world. When going for the kill, cats often go for the neck in an effort to sever the spinal cord or tear out the windpipe. This trick works for other werebeasts, too. A predator with this Aspect can spend a Willpower point and make an attack roll at a target's exposed neck, suffering a –3 dice penalty for a targeted attack. A success indicates that all damage done to the neck is *aggravated*. The neck is torn open, and arteries have likely been cut. This is a powerful, nasty attack that can be done only once per scene. To employ this Aspect, a feral *must* have long sharp claws, teeth or talons.

Spirit Animal (●+)

Sometimes a shapeshifter attracts the favor of an animal or spirit outside her Nahual breed. Or she may have an affinity for more than one kind of species — someone who changes into a Komodo dragon, for example, may also share an affinity with salamanders or chameleons. In these cases, the secondary animal confers its favor to the shapechanger in the form of dice added to a single Skill.

This favored Skill must be chosen when the Aspect is purchased, and needs to reflect some aspect of the animal's nature; a salamander, for example, might add the character's Athletics dice pool when she's climbing or swimming. The shapeshifter must call upon the favor of his spirit animal; meanwhile, the player spends one Essence point to gain the bonus to that Skill for one scene.

Each dot in this Aspect confers a +1 bonus to the dice pool. A Klinkerash werecat, for instance, might have Aspect: Spirit Animal (Lion, Intimidation) 3, which provides +3 to his intimidation rolls when the Essence point is spent.

Spirit Gift (●+)

Feral werebeasts are creatures of the mortal realm; even so, a handful of them (usually Wind-Dancers or other shapeshifter mystics) interact with the spirits of Nature. At times, these entities offer Gifts, arcane blessings that confer otherworldly powers on the werebeast in question. Though rare, these blessings epitomize the faraway world of the Dancers and their kind.

In game terms, a feral with this Aspect can select Gifts from **Werewolf: The Forsaken**, provided that character has at least one dot in Language (First Tongue) and a working (and often high-maintenance) relationship with the spirit realm. Each dot in this Aspect purchases a single Gift of that rating; Gifts over the ••• level cost two dots each instead of one.

Suggested feral Gifts include Corpse Witness, Warning Growl, Loose Tongue, Sand in the Eyes, Playing Possum, Sense Malice, Omen Gazing, The Right Words, Know Name, Traveler's Blessing, Know the Path, Sense Weakness, Slip Away, Feet of Mist, Running Shadows and Mighty Bound. Details about these Gifts can be found in Chapter 2 of **Werewolf: The Forsaken**. Note that characters with the Beast Magic Aspect *cannot* purchase Spirit Gifts, too. The spirits are jealous folk, and do not bestow Gifts on beasts who pursue the arts of Man as well.

Spirit Secrets (●●●)

Some tricksters can mimic the power of spirit powers — in game terms, Numina. (See the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, pp. 210–212, as well as **Werewolf: The Forsaken**, pp. 276–278, and **The Book of Spirits**.) Crows, spiders and hares love to steal such secrets; indeed, several creation myths are based on such thefts in ancient times.

Obviously, the character must find, stalk and trick a spirit into giving up the secret. In game terms, the player must pay a Willpower or Essence cost just as the Numen would, and he make a successful Wits + Intelligence roll in order to understand the trick. Clearly, not all Numina powers would make sense for a shapechanger, and we encourage the Storyteller to use his discretion when deciding which ones are available. Possibilities include Animal Control, Blast (as an elemental surge of fire, wind, water, plants or earth), Harrow, Gauntlet Breach and Materialize (both used to conjure spirits), Phantasm, Terrify and Wilds Sense. Each Numen purchased this way costs three Aspect dots.

Spirit Sight (●●)

Tradition holds that certain animals — often crows, larks, hares and horses — guard the passage to the Otherworld. Wind-Dancer mystics continue that tradition, and this Aspect helps them do it.

With a successful Intelligence + Occult + Feral Heart roll, a player can use this Aspect to spot an area of spiritual power or disturbance. Generally, this will be an area haunted by ghosts (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, pp. 208–216), although malignant spirits may be involved as well (see **Werewolf: The Forsaken**, pp. 265–285). Certain circumstances can modify that roll, per the chart listed under the Shadow Bond Aspect. Success means the werebeast can peer past the Gauntlet and recognize the heart of the matter; from there, he can assess the threat and his own abilities and then decide what must be done. . . .

Spook the Herd (●●●)

A beast using this Aspect moves people the way a bulldozer moves earth. With a series of aggressive movements, he can drive crowds before him in a frenzy of terror. To do this, the player makes a Presence + Intimidation roll versus the highest Composure score of any character with 100 yards. If the roll is successful, the crowd flees his

presence, using any means necessary to do so. These people flee for a number of turns equal to the beast's Strength + Intimidation pool.

(Night-folk and other shapechangers *are not* immune to this Aspect; to withstand it, supernatural characters use their Composure + the appropriate Resistance trait for emotion-based attacks — see "Supernatural Conflict," **p. 99**.

Stampede Rush (•• or •••)

Bulls and elk appear to be massive, unwieldy creatures. However, they're capable of sudden, astonishing bursts of devastating speed. Some people discover this the hard way. Against these people, the werebeast making an all-out attack gains a +4 bonus instead of the usual +2. (The three-dot bonus gains +6.)

The beast can also use this power against inanimate objects, such as heavy doors or walls. When making his Strength + Stamina roll, a charging feral with this Aspect gains a +1 bonus to the roll. The three-dot version grants a +3 bonus instead.

Whenever this Aspect is in use, the charging character loses his Defense for the duration of the turn. The two-dot version costs nothing to use, but the three-dot version costs one Essence per attack. Unless Essence is being spent for the bonus, this Aspect is always on. To stampede this way, the feral must be in one of his animal forms — one with either hooves, horns, antlers or a *very* thick skull.

Stash (• to •••••)

Whether she's a squirrel stashing nuts or a dog hiding a bone, the average animal has a gift for hiding things. This Aspect reflects that talent. For each dot in the Aspect, the feral adds +1 to her dice pools when hiding something, including herself. The hidden item (or person) must remain silent and motionless, and a reasonable hiding place has to exist. Generally, this Aspect works only for objects of Size 5 or smaller — it's hard to hide a car unless you're in a parking lot. Given enough space and cover, however, the bonus still applies.

Swarm/Flock Form (••••)

In a hideous spill of legs and bodies, the feral breaks apart into dozens or hundreds of tiny bats, rats or, worst of all, insects. . . . In game terms, this explosion of little ferals shares a hive mind and a common Health trait. An attack that can hit most or all of the tiny creatures still affects the feral normally. Trouble, is, it's almost impossible to hit all of them at once with anything less than an explosion, flood or collapse. By instinct, the swarm or flock scatters, each taking a little bit of the whole being with it.





This Aspect requires a Composure + Feral Heart roll to employ, and is almost instantaneous — indeed, scattering just before an attack hits is a hallmark of this sort of creature. It costs a point of Essence to scatter, another to re-form; if the shapechanger has too little Essence left to re-form, she's trapped in that scattered state until she can recover enough to do so.

The swarm offers no defense against mental or spiritual assaults, but most people are too startled by this trick to do anything until the tiny beasts have run. Normal humans or animals suffer the Delusion, with a –2 penalty to the Resolve + Composure dice pool. Supernatural characters must roll their Composure + the appropriate mystical defense trait; otherwise, even *they* get rattled and cannot act until after the next turn. With this trick, though, familiarity breeds contempt — its startling power works only once on a given victim.

Sweet-Voiced Fiend (•)

This shapechanger is as dangerous with his words as he is with his claws. He always thinks of *just* the right thing to say, and his voice goes down like wine. He's almost impossible to resist, the beautiful bastard. Reduce any penalties this character has with Persuasion and Subterfuge attempts, as well as appropriate Expression rolls, by -2. This trick doesn't *add* anything extra, but it helps compensate for a ferocious disposition.

Swift Wing (•••)

At the cost of one Willpower point, a winged shapechanger can move at up to three times her normal speed when making a Brawl or Weaponry attack (see "Charging," p. 164, the **World of Darkness Rulebook**) from the air. She can still apply a single die of Defense against the first incoming attack. This Aspect reflects the devastating speed predatory birds bring to an attack as they drop like missiles from the sky onto often-oblivious prey.

Tell (–•)

You know that poker player who always perspires on his upper lip when he's got a killer hand? Well, he has a *tell*. And a few unlucky shapeshifters have tells, too.

A tell is an identifying characteristic — it can be physical or psychological — that betrays a feral's identity to anyone perceptive enough to pick up on it. For a shapeshifter, this could come in the form of a lazy eye that manifests in human and animal forms, or a tendency to sneeze when nervous. A tell can also come in more sinister forms, such as a heavy musk or a stink of offal that hangs off him like a coat.

A character meeting the werebeast for the first time gets a reflexive Wits + Composure roll (–2 dice). A successful roll means she notices the distinguishing characteristic. If she meets him again when he's in an altered form, she gets another Wits + Composure roll to notice the tell again. If *that* roll is also successful, she may begin to make the connection between that lazy-eyed dude in the corner and that lazy-eyed bear on the trail. Should her player fail the second roll, she is allowed to make it again if someone else calls her attention to it.

The tell is an immediate perception, and does not linger after the shapechanger has gone. Even distinctive smells dissipate very quickly. They're useless as tools for trackers, although a hunter might recognize the scent if he crosses paths with the feral again under different circumstances.

Territory Bond (••• to •••••)

A wise beast knows her territory. With this Aspect, a werebeast becomes so attuned to her homelands that she can literally move her world.

The basic three-dot version of this trait gives the feral an intuitive sense of her home. She can recognize it by scent or taste, find her way back to it from a great distance and sense when something's *wrong* there simply by scenting the air or listening to the wind if she's within 100 miles of her home. (Wits + Composure + Feral Heart to spot a warning or realize what it might be.) These connections are reflexive, cost no Essence and apply in any form.

From there, the connection deepens:

For ••••, the werebeast can spy on her domain. As long as she's within 10 miles of the territory, impressions filter back to her from scents or sounds on the wind, psychic visions or bird-, bug- or beast-messengers. By expending a Willpower point and making a successful Wits + Composure + Feral Heart roll, the player can obtain flashes of information for her character. This information is extremely unclear — a group of men, say, in hunter's garb moving through her domain. Still, it can give a good "heads-up" to the beast.

For •••••, that beast can turn the land to her purpose. By expending two Willpower points and making the usual roll, the player can alter the landscape: mists rise to obscure vision, odd sounds echo through the area, trails disappear or shift direction, winds and weather shift in distracting ways, roots trip trespassers and do forth. Although these shifts remain subtle, they're enough to give trespassers a *very* hard time.

A contested roll between the feral's player and the trespasser's player (most likely the Storyteller) can determine whether the invaders wind up lost. In this case, pit the feral's Wits + Composure + Feral Heart against the trespasser's Wits + Composure + Survival. If the intruders have come in a group, use the traits for the leader or tracker of that group . . . which may *not* be the highest dice pool in that group, but will determine who's giving the orders.

For details about feral territory, see Chapter One.

Tiger Heart (•)

When this feral goes Berserk, people die. A player who rolls this character's Resolve + Composure to avoid a Berserk fit first reduces his dice pool by –1. This feral won't

make a rabbit run unless he's about to die . . . and maybe not even then. To run away before that point, the player must spend one point of Willpower to overcome the urge to kill. (See also the Hare Heart Aspect.)

Totem Guardian (●●+)

Most ferals view their Nahual as their inner totem spirit. Some, however, look outside as well as inside for spiritual guidance. This Aspect allows a werebeast (and perhaps her band) to bond with a spirit-beast totem — Crow, Fox and so forth — and reap the benefits and responsibilities of patronage.

Such totems rarely materialize; in fact, most lack the power for it. They're present in the material world, however, often watching over those they've bonded with and sometimes even spying for them. The Storyteller can use the totem to teach new Aspects when appropriate, or to relay some obscure bit of knowledge that will help move the chronicle along.

A totem spirit *always* chooses its feral followers — it's never the other way around. The totem spirit may chase the werebeast through dreams, appear in a vision quest or manifest in the form of a real animal to lead the werebeast into some mysterious adventure. The specifics are the Storyteller's decision, but they ought to be mysterious.

With *very* rare exceptions, this totem spirit matches the animal half of the shapechanger. A werebear, for example, would interact with a grizzly or a polar bear, depending on its own species. That totem usually has a proper name that provides a clue about its personality or essence: Raging Bear, Sleeping Bear, Mother Bear and so forth.

From a rules perspective, this Aspect allows non-Uratha shapechangers to purchase the Totem Merit from **Werewolf: The Forsaken**. The point cost, however, is double the cost a werewolf player would pay; each dot in the Totem rating costs *two* points rather than one. Why? Because werewolves are far more attuned to the spirit world than any other changing breed, aside from the Ursara. Since details about totem spirits and their complex relationships range outside the scope of **The Changing Breeds**, we refer troupes who wish to employ totem spirits to **Werewolf: The Forsaken**. Such bonds are rare among the changing breeds, whose normal dominion is the material world, but they *do* occur.

Truth Sense (● to ●●●●●)

With a profoundly disconcerting gaze, some werebeasts can look directly at (or worse, utterly *away from*) a person and discern the truth in his words or intentions. A specialty of Wind-Dancer seers, this Aspect grants a +1 bonus (per dot) to dice pools when the feral tries to catch a lie, spot a con, debunk a tall tale or look through an illusion in his immediate vicinity (roughly 200 feet or so). This trick works only when the feral and her prey are in direct personal contact. To spot a lie in pre-recorded conversations or video feeds, the bonus is only +1 unless the character watches the video repeatedly, at which point the bonus provides half its usual benefit.

Twisted Tongue (●)

Truly ambitious shapechangers may feel that, despite other advantages, the inability to speak while in animal form is too limiting. These characters might invest in the Twisted Tongue Aspect, which affords them the ability to speak in animal form any language they know in human form. Even so, only basic speech is possible (animals don't "have words" for complex or uniquely human concepts such as "accelerator"), and the animal language remains bound by that species' perspective on reality — a bird, for example, may have many words for "high" but none for "deep."

Unnerving Cry (●●)

A wolf's howl carries across the city, echoing through the alleyways and shredding itself over the fire escapes and streetlamps. Everyone who hears it falters in their tracks, pauses in their conversations. Someone drops a bottle on the street and curses. Paces quicken; people hasten into their cars or into the nearest building.

With the expenditure of a Willpower point and a successful Presence + Feral Heart (an instant action) roll, your shapeshifter can release a piercing sound — perhaps related to his Nahual beast, perhaps unrelated to anything natural on earth. Whatever this cry sounds like, a successful roll means that anyone within 200 yards must resist the effects with a Resolve roll. (Supernatural creatures add their Feral Heart or other appropriate roll to resist magical influence.) Failure means that the victim's next action will suffer a –2 dice penalty. An exceptional success on behalf of the shapeshifter increases that penalty to –4 dice.

Unsettling Eye (●)

Two men stand out on the street after a minor traffic accident, each trying to stare the other down. One of them feels, just for a moment, that he's staring into the soulless eye of a great white shark. Unnerved, he mutters something under his breath and retreats to his car. . . . It's an old trick, but it still works.

Characters with Unsettling Eye can use this Aspect reflexively whenever the player makes an Intimidation roll. Essentially, the character (often a predator or other uncanny beast) looks into his opponent's soul with the full strength of his inner beast. Suddenly, the person has a subconscious vision of being started down by a spider, wolf, shark or other terror, not a mere *man*.

This trick effectively doubles the character's Intimidation dice pool. Activation is free, but the Eye lasts for only one scene.

Unspeakable (●●● or ●●●●●)

Hideous beyond description, this creature drives people screaming with her mere presence. She might be a shambling



mockery of a beast, or an animal so ferocious that even the most strong-hearted mortals flee. In game terms, the beast character adds automatic successes to all attempts to intimidate or frighten other characters, and also subtracts dice from an opposing character's Resolve + Composure roll when he's resisting the Delusion. For three dots, the beast gets one automatic success and lowers the dice pool by one die; for five dots, the beast adds two successes and lowers the Delusion pool by two dice. This Aspect applies only to the beast's War and animal forms; even so, she's probably no beauty queen in human form, either.

Venomous (••• or ••••)

This deadly talent makes a feral's claws, fangs, spines or stinger venomous for a brief period of time. The effects on the victim can range from a burning itch to convulsions and death. The player must decide which attack — fangs or claws — carries the venom at the time she selects this Aspect, although she may buy it twice and cover both bases.

With the three-dot Aspect, a shapeshifter can expend one Essence point and gain the advantage for one turn. This is a reflexive action. The Toxicity level of the venom is 5, and its effects are delivered as lethal damage on top of any successes gained on the attack roll. The attack roll *must* be successful for the venom to work; if not, the venom is wasted. Furthermore, the venom will remain in the victim's bloodstream for a number of hours equal to the attacker's Feral Heart score. The toxin's effects will persist every hour unless the victim succeeds at a Stamina + Resolve roll. (For the rules on persistent damage from venom, see pp. 180–181 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**.)

The rules for the four-dot Aspect are largely the same, with the following differences: the damage is only done once, with no chance of an hourly recurrence; and the damage is aggravated rather than lethal.

Wallwalking (••)

With hooked toes or sticky pads, a feral with this Aspect can walk up and across sheer surfaces. In game terms, the trick adds a +2 bonus to dice pools related to climbing, and allows the character to hang on to surfaces that should be too steep or smooth to climb. This Aspect is always on, costs no Essence and can be used in any form.

War Heart (•••••)

This shapeshifter is in his natural element when in battle. The anger he carries around inside him flourishes in combat; all other times, though, he's like a chained dog. This character actually gains strength from the damage he receives. For every point of lethal damage the character takes in one turn, he gains +1 Strength the *following* turn, up to a maximum of +5. After that turn, though, the Strength point is lost. The feral's Speed trait is affected accordingly. This Aspect (a natural for Heart-Rippers) is always activated, and the Strength gain is a reflexive action. War Heart does not in any way protect the character from damage, but he regenerates as normal.

Warrior's Restoration (••)

For predatory breeds who fight a lot, or clever creatures whose recovery powers keep 'em kicking in a hostile world, this Aspect is essential. In game terms, this Aspect doubles the usual rate of healing for a werebeast and lets her heal one point of bashing damage *per turn*, rather than for every two turns. This Aspect also heals one point of lethal damage every 15 minutes unless Essence has been spent. The abilities to spend Essence and heal aggravated damage remain unaffected.

Combined with the Quick Healer Merit (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 113), this Aspect allows a feral to regenerate lethal damage at the rate of one point every eight minutes, and one point of aggravated damage every four days.

For details about feral healing, see **p. 114-115**.

Weatherskin (•)

Through acclimation, fur or sheer toughness, a feral with this Aspect resists the effects of extreme temperatures. He *feels* the weather, of course, but short of fire or ice, harsh climates do him no harm. In game terms, he's essentially immune to debilitation through heat or cold — see "Temperature Extremes" in the **World of Darkness Rulebook** (p. 181) for more details.

Weaver's Wisdom (• to •••••)

Like a beaver with prime woodland, a shapechanger with this Aspect excels at building and designing things. A staple of the Root-Weaver accord, this Aspect adds a +1 bonus to dice pools based on construction, craftwork or architectural design. This talent does not, however, offer bonuses to advanced or abstract technology (i.e., computer networks, astrophysics, biotech and so forth). To employ this Wisdom, the feral must get her hands dirty with something she can take apart or put together.

The Wild Cry (• to •••••)

Animals don't "speak" as humans do, but animals communicate rather eloquently. With this Aspect, a werebeast communicates with other animals in ways they understand. Through a combination of body language, stance, scent, gaze, vocalizations and other methods, the feral establishes a bond with nearby beasts. That bond deepens as the Aspect advances:

For •, the werebeast shares an empathic bond with creatures of one animal kingdom (mammals, reptiles, insects, fish, birds). This bond allows for a neutral attitude and basic communication. These animals won't be disposed to be the character's *friends*, exactly, but they won't flee when she approaches if she employs this Aspect around them.

For ••, the character can communicate with one general type of animal (cats, corvids, cattle, etc.). The impres-

sion she makes from there is up to her. In story terms, she "speaks" their language. Note that animals perceive their world in fairly basic terms, and have a perspective that is *vastly* different from humans'.

For •••, the feral can communicate with large numbers of those animals — herds of deer, flocks of geese, schools of fish, etc. The same roll and rules apply, although these animals will be friendly unless treated otherwise.

For ••••, the shapechanger can call these animals to her aid. Those animals must be within a reasonable distance for communication and arrival. Once there, the animal "helpers" will perform a minor service for the character, assuming the player makes the roll. If that task starts to kill them, however, the rest will flee within a turn or two, unless they're fighters by nature (wolves, tigers, etc.). Even then, though, the animals won't fight to their deaths.

For •••••, those animals will perform that task until either the deed is completed, the feral dismisses them or they're all dead. If the feral *herself* attacks them, though, the bond is immediately broken. The animals flee, and the werebeast will have a much harder time getting such aid again in the future. (In game terms, she'll suffer a penalty on future uses of this Aspect.)

To employ The Wild Cry, the player uses her Wits + Presence + Feral Heart as a dice pool. For the purposes of this Aspect, each animal kingdom or type counts as a separate Aspect. A character with Wild Cry (Mammals) 1 can share an empathic bond with all kinds of mammals, but not with reptiles unless she buys that as a distinct Aspect. Likewise, she could call upon cats but not dogs unless she had both Wild Cry (Cats) 4 and Wild Cry (Dogs) 4.

When this Aspect deals with "large numbers" of animals, that number depends on the character's Feral Heart rating and the size of the animals in question:

Animal Size	Number Affected
1	Feral Heart x 100
2–3	Feral Heart x 10
4–5	Feral Heart x 5
6–8	Feral Heart x 2
7+	Feral Heart x 1

Of course, the number of beasts in the feral's vicinity will depend on where she is and how social the animal in question might be. Theoretically, a weretiger with Wild Cry (Cats) and a Feral Heart of 5 could call 50 cats or five tigers; the possibility of there *being* 50 cats or five tigers nearby, though, is pretty remote.

This Aspect works in all forms, and costs no Essence to employ. Note that using this Aspect to hunt food or recruit cannon fodder is *extremely* bad form. Both would count as Harmony violations . . . and even in the animal kingdom, word gets around.

Bag of Tricks

The following Aspects are available only to "trickster" ferals: Corvians, Sun-Chasers, Celican werecats and beasts from the Laughing Strangers breed. The sneaky nature of these Aspects — and the ways in which they're learned, stolen or inherited — keep these secrets in the exclusive province of these wily creatures. Tricksters guard their best stratagems jealously, so these Aspects probably won't be taught freely. Most ferals with these traits learn 'em the old-fashioned way: by tricking them out of someone else.

Blank Burrow (••••)

Ducking into a hole, niche or other hiding place, a trickster literally disappears from there and reappears in another niche nearby. The new hiding-place must be within 50 feet of the original one, and has to be large and dark enough to reasonably accommodate the shapechanger in his current form. The player spends one point of Essence to "skip" the space between the two locations. This Aspect works in any shape other than War-Beast, and is damned confusing to the trickster's enemies.

Brave Escape (•••)

A common trick among foxes and hares on the run, this Aspect grants the werebeast a sudden burst of bravado. He seems to swell with power. For a few seconds, he seems like the slickest, coolest or most dangerous creature around. Then, while his pursuers reel from the shock, the trickster disappears.

In game terms, the player rolls Wits + Intimidation + Feral Heart, then adds three automatic successes to that roll. The next turn, he doubles his character's Move for each dot in his Feral Heart, and either runs away or hides. This Aspect requires no Essence, and can be performed in any shape.

Pearl of Great Price (••)

The classic bait-and-switch trick has a con artist swapping worthless junk for an apparently precious item. This trick does the same thing, projecting an illusion of value onto something worth nothing at all.

To pull this off, the trickster takes a worthless item or collection of items — a stone, sheaf of papers, laptop-sized board, ratty bathrobe and so forth. Weaving an enchantment around that item, the trickster finds a "mark" and pretends that the item is somehow valuable. A combination of magic and eloquence bamboozles the target, and the trickster eventually convinces the target to take the item in exchange for a more valuable treasure. The illusion wears off in an hour or so; by that point, the trickster is long gone.

In game terms, the feral's player rolls his Intelligence + Subterfuge + Feral Heart while instilling the "pearl" with illusionary value. From there, the player either rolls or roleplays the con. Unless the mark can win a contested roll of her own Intelligence + Subterfuge (+ Feral Heart or other appropriate

Common Feral Merits

The following Merits from the **World of Darkness Rulebook** make perfect additions to your feral character. Here's why:

Mental Merits

Danger Sense: Many animals have this Merit almost by default.

Holistic Awareness: Natural healing seems . . . well, *natural* for folks who're part animal, especially considering how many of them come from tribal cultures or progressive subcultures.

Language: Essential for foreign shapechangers.

Unseen Sense: Another sense common among animals.

Physical Merits

Brawling Dodge: A must for predators and prey.

Direction Sense: Birds and dogs display uncanny gifts for direction.

Fast Reflexes: Essential for feline ferals.

Fighting Finesse: Many werebeasts specialize in their primary natural weaponry: claws, teeth, antlers or tails.

Giant: Essential for Land Titans and other large-species ferals in human form.

Iron Stamina and Iron Stomach: Useful adaptations for survival.

Strong Back: A natural for equine changers.

Strong Lungs: Obligatory for aquatic mammal shapechangers.

Social Merits

Allies and Contacts: The wandering nature of many ferals makes these Merits essential. See Chapter One for a range of possibilities.

Mentor, Resources, Retainer and Status: Among the Regencies, these Merits are common but come with strings.

Striking Looks: A must for werecats and other beautiful species!

Naturally, your feral can't have *every* Merit listed here. Still, these suggestions can help you find the Merits that suit your concept best.

trait, if she's a supernatural being), she'll be utterly convinced that the "pearl" is whatever the trickster says it is. When the enchantment wears off, however, she'll realize that you always have to watch out for Coyote and his ilk.

Tar Baby (●●●)

With a few found objects, a bit of sticky stuff and a heart full of spite, the trickster whips up a semi-convincing simulacrum of a person or animal. This requires a successful Wits + Crafts + Feral Heart roll, a point of Essence and at least five minutes of work with the materials at hand. In the end, the trickster exhales a deep breath into the face of her creation, then leaves the scene. The resulting "tar baby" will pass for a living thing in very dim light. And even though the tar baby cannot move in any way, it exudes a faint aura of mockery. This aura is the tar baby's biggest trap.

At the most basic level, the tar baby is a decoy for a trickster's prank. The tar baby captures a character's attention and diverts scrutiny away from the feral herself. That decoy's allure, however, is more subtle than it first appears to be. Goaded by the aura of contempt, the mock-ee focuses his attention on the tar baby. In game terms, his player (or the Storyteller) rolls that character's Wits + Composure at a –2 penalty. Failure drives

him to a state of agitation bordering on fury. If he fails that first roll, he must make a second roll at a –3 penalty; if he fails *that* one, the character lapses into absurd theatrics of rage. Each failure drives the character deeper into apoplexy, necessitating another roll at an increasing penalty. By the third attempt to resist its influence, he notices nothing except the mocking presence of the tar baby. Meanwhile, the trickster moves into position for a bigger jest, or flees the area in safety.

Traditionally, the tar baby snares a target with its adhesive surface. The tar baby of this trickster invention, on the other hand, sticks to its victim *emotionally*. If (or when) the victim strikes the decoy, the tar baby collapses into a puddle of vile goo . . . the psychic embodiment of the toxic thoughts running through the victim's mind.

Unless the animal-form has hands with jointed fingers, the tar baby must be constructed in either Man-Guise or Throwback form. The tar baby lasts for roughly a day, then degenerates into a shapeless, odious mess.

Toss the Scent (•)

This simple yet effective trick casts the feral's innate scent in another direction, thus throwing a hunter off her trail. The player rolls her Wits + Subterfuge + Feral Heart as a dice pool; the result is the distance in yards the scent travels away from the feral herself. An especially crafty trickster can set her scent on another character; by the time the pursuer and the new "target" get things hashed out, the trickster will be long gone.

Merits

Sharp senses, loyal kin and a talent for fang-and-claw combat round out your feral character. These gifts of birth or circumstance give a werebeast the upper hand in life's adventures — and considering how many ferals live on the edge, your feral can use all the "edges" he can get.

At character creation, you get seven points to spend on Merits. As your shapechanger grows "into his skin" so to speak, you can add more Merits to his original traits, or raise the ones he already has to higher levels. As the **World of Darkness Rulebook** points out, raised Merits must be purchased dot by dot with experience points. Because certain Merits (Danger Sense, Fast Reflexes, Giant, Predator's Bearing and Striking Looks among them) are more or less innate, we suggest buying them first. Other Merits can add up over time, but these edges should be part of the character from the prelude onward.

Animal Companion (• to ••••)

Effect: A feral's affinity for Nature runs deep. Sometimes, that affinity returns his affection. Similar to the Retainer Merit, Animal Companion reflects a single beast who loyally follows your character. This creature could be your breed-kin, but she doesn't *have* to be. It's possible she's an old pet or new partner who's not spooked by the beast-blood's changing skin.

To purchase the Merit, you must decide the backstory between your feral and his friend. Does their bond predate the First Change? If so, how old is the animal now, and how did their affinity survive her "master's" new life? Is this a new companion, and if so, how did the normal animal bond with the shapechanging beast? Whatever their tale might be, this companion is smart, useful and independent. A rat in a cage or a dog in the yard isn't a Merit — she's a pet.

The dots in this Merit reflect the animal's power, intellect and often size. The higher the trait, the more capable the companion. A one-dot beast could be a smart rat or clever bird, a two-dot Merit might reflect a loyal (if finicky) cat, three points could buy a common-looking but brilliant companion such as Lassie or Trigger; at the top of the scale, the companion stands out in any setting — a tiger, bear, dolphin or chimpanzee whose physical and mental capacity would be impressive even if she weren't devoted to her apparent "master."

Unless the Animal Companion is driven off by poor treatment or otherwise killed, she remains a loyal element in the character's life. She will do whatever she can to assist him, and regard him with the ultimate affection. The details, naturally, depend on her species — a devoted cat or loyal snake won't show devotion the way a dog might. Still, unless that bond is severed by death or abuse, the Animal Companion is yours for life. (If this "Merit" *is* killed off, all points regarding her are lost.)

Drawback: Unlike the Retainer Merit, an Animal Companion is just that: an animal. She won't have free access to Man's world, and remains limited by manual dexterity, mental perspective and social rules. Lassie may be a great dog, but she still can't drive to the bank and cash a check.

Powerful animals are often exotic, too, and they stand out on a city street. Most places have laws against horses in public, and almost all human societies regulate private "ownership" of tigers, bears and so forth. The beast may spook other animals, and will probably follow her instincts if prey happens to be nearby. Loyal as she might be, this friend retains her bestial habits and needs; she might trash an office, eat a garden or throw feces at the cops if that's what seems natural. Your feral might adore his companion, but a smart, powerful animal remains a high-maintenance friend.

Beast-Kin (●●●●)

Effect: Not everyone affiliated with the changing breeds actually transforms. This Merit reflects a character whose First Change has not yet arrived, and might *never* arrive. Kin to the feral folk, this person lives in the shadow of their world. He hears odd stirrings in the back bedroom, sees fur or feathers too thick for normal explanations. Perhaps he serves one of the Regencies, surrounded by hopeful relatives. Or languishes in a backwater swamp, tending the gator that just happens to be his sister, too.

The upside? This character is immune to the Delusion and the primal terror associated with werewolves. He understands how far back the curtain of "reality" can be drawn, and sees at least a glimpse of the parties behind it. Chances are, he's *very* good with animals; although the breed of his associated beast might terrify him, he shares a deep affinity with it. He can understand animals through body language and vocal cues, and while he's no Dr. Doolittle, they often understand him, too. For now, this character exists on the cusp of a world that may or may not take him in completely. Even so, he knows more about that world than most.

Drawback: That world is no gentle playground. Despite the New Age fascination with "spirit totems" and such, the animal realm is harsh by human standards and the feral one even more so. Enemies of the shapeshifter or her clan often target the kin when they want to make their presence known. Meanwhile, that shapeshifter in her clan might abuse, neglect or despise the "weakling" among them. Feral clans, even the wealthy ones, are notoriously hard on their members, and all it takes is one bad day to turn Mommy or Big Brother into the lion at the door.

(Note: If the First Change finally overtakes this character, the Merit gets "traded" for the feral supernatural template.)

Den (●●●)

Effect: It's hard, in today's world, to find privacy. This Merit, however, reflects a hidden space where a feral can be himself. It might be a secluded meadow, rambling old farm or warehouse in the bad side of town. Wherever it is, your character can transform into his animal aspect without drawing undue attention, then run or fly away with some measure of freedom.

Obviously, this "den" must suit the feral's species. A dolphin might work at an aquarium, a hawk could own a penthouse and a horse might have a ranch in the middle of nowhere. Secrecy, though, is vital — no one wants blurry pictures of himself in mid-change posted on thisisweird.com.

Drawback: In game terms, this hideaway provides a place for the character to slip in and out of his feral identity. It's probably covered in evidence of that nature, too — hair, scratch-marks, possibly droppings or urine marks to identify the place as "*MINE*!" Even so, the Den is remote enough to escape easy detection, even if it's in the middle of a city. Hunters trying to track a character home will suffer a –2 penalty to the relevant tracking or investigation rolls. Still, the signs *are* there, and if you're not careful, the secret might not last.

Pack (● to ●●●●●)

Effect: See that flock of ravens following the chick next door? The yard full of dogs down the street? That person might be a real animal lover . . . or she could be a feral with a "pack" of associated kin.

Similar to the Animal Companion Merit, Pack gives your character some bestial company. In this case, though, that company is a bit more numerous and bit less loyal. A Pack (which could actually be a herd, flock, pride or what-have-you) includes a number of animals that remain

close to your shapechanger. They're probably members of the feral's species, but might be something else instead if there's a good explanation for their presence.

The dots in this trait measure the number and relative power of the Pack. For one dot, the character has two or three small beasts — a handful of rats, bats or small birds. Two dots reflect 10 or 12 smaller animals or a couple of larger ones — cats, small dogs, owls, falcons. Three dots allow for a much larger group of small beasts (30 or more), about a half-dozen larger animals or two or three strong, competent ones — wolves, monkeys, falcons, cheetahs. At this level, the Pack might include a few different animals — say a wolf, a hawk and a ferret. For four dots, the feral gets a regular menagerie — 40 or more small animals, 10 larger ones, five powerful ones, two or three really impressive ones (tigers, sharks, oxen) or three powerful ones of different species. These beasts aren't as devoted as a single Animal Companion, but their numbers make up for that reduced loyalty.

Drawback: Where do you *keep* those animals, Tarzan? What can you feed them? What have they *not* destroyed yet in your home? A Pack is a horde of wild animals, not a collection of tame pets. Their presence in human settlements is disruptive, destructive and very often dangerous. Unless your feral lives in the wilderness, a large Pack is chaos . . . and even there, it makes its presence known.

Through devotion to their shapechanging friend, these beasts avoid eating one another. That doesn't mean they won't eat anything else. Animals in a pack need to hunt, run free and generally be themselves. If they don't get that — or worse yet, if they're treated badly or sent off on suicide missions — these creatures abandon their so-called master. Affection is not blind loyalty, and a feral who considers herself Lord or Lady of the Beasts soon winds up with an empty kingdom.

Predator's Bearing (••)

Effect: The scary vibe emanating from a natural predator can be frightening yet intoxicating to her prey. In the case of this Merit, your character radiates that primal sense of excitement. Being near her makes hearts pound, adrenaline flow and hairs prickle up the backs of necks. Chances are, she's had this effect on people and animals all her life, and it just gets stronger with time.

As a trait, this Merit adds +1 to any Social dice pool that might benefit from raising someone's hackles. That heart-eating grin of hers comes in handy in all sorts of situations, from seduction (there's a reason so many sex symbols are compared to wild animals) to pants-crapping terror. For a Heart-Ripper feral, this is part of her natural arsenal. Without a word, she can make people and animals profoundly uncomfortable.

Drawback: This predator *does* make people and animals profoundly uncomfortable, whether she wants to or not. Whenever she wants to appear innocuous, her Social actions suffer a –1 penalty. She might be totally innocent or utterly helpless, but folks still smell blood in the water around her.

Fellow predators, however, remain unimpressed. Although a lion, rottweiler or vampire may *respect* the presence of a fellow badass, such creatures aren't frightened by this Merit. Many, in fact, might see it as a challenge, and decide to take this up with an interloper personally. . . .

Socially Small (••)

Effect: For many beasts, blending into the scenery is a survival trait. This Merit helps a character do likewise. No matter where he is or what he's doing, this guy's likely to be overlooked, unnoticed and discounted as a threat . . . which, of course, can make him much more effective if he *is* one. As they say, no one ever watches the quiet ones. . . .

A common Merit among small breeds, this trait offers a +1 modifier to rolls that involve getting lost in a crowd (stealth and hiding) or looking harmless (subterfuge and some forms of seduction). Animals remain calm around your character unless given a reason to fear him, and people have a hard time even remembering his face (a –1 penalty to rolls involving details or recollection). Cops breeze past him, kids trust him and folks want to take care of him — assuming they even notice him at all.

Drawback: As the old joke says, this character don't get no respect. He's the last one picked and the first one forgotten. Rolls to be taken seriously suffer a –1 penalty, and folks generally discount the feral and all he has to say. Enemies may laugh at him in a fight (to their sorrow, naturally), and would-be lovers might forsake him for more dangerous playmates.

True Breed (••)

Effect: The Changing Gift runs in this character's family. Dad or Mom might have been feral; maybe Grandma or weird Uncle Martin. Someone in recent memory was a shapechanger, and at least a few folks (in or outside the family) know about it. Odds are good that the werebeast's kid or grandkid will be feral, too.

Drawback: This knowledge makes certain things easier (there'll probably be a support network for First Changes) but not necessarily (that "network" might involve a prayer group that tries to "beat the devil" out of a shapechanger). In any case, we suggest that the player and Storyteller collaborate on the backstory for a character with this Merit. Whether the connection is an open secret or a hated mystery depends on the player's vision and his Storyteller's whims.

Feral Advantages

The superhuman aspects of a werebeast character come through in several distinct traits. Some mark her spiritual reserves while others help or hinder sanity. Expanding on the human advantages described in the **World of Darkness Rulebook** (Chapter 4), these traits reflect your character's place amid the strange feral world.

New Advantage: Feral Heart

In the breast of every feral, there's a wild heart calling. This pulse keeps the werebeast restless in her human skin. In story terms, the Feral Heart Advantage reflects the cry of Nature in a character's soul; in game terms, it measures her ability to sense things outside the human range, affect folks with her "animal magnetism" and perform supernatural feats. A high rating reflects a potent connection to the inner beast; a low one shows how far she's mired in Man's world . . . at least for now.

In game terms, the Feral Heart works like this:

• The Feral Heart rating measures a feral's ability to stay in the War-Beast form. The maximum length of time he can remain in that devastating shape equals his human Stamina + Feral Heart. Thus, a Jhaa with a human Stamina of 3 and a Feral Heart of 2 can assume the War-Beast form for up to five turns.

• By focusing his shapechanger's senses, the player can add the Feral Heart rating to his Wits + Composure dice pool when he's trying to perceive something. This enhancement lasts one minute for every dot in the character's Feral Heart. (Feral Heart 1 = + 1 for one minute, Feral Heart 2 = +2 for two minutes, etc.) Sharpening his senses this way "brings out the beast" in the feral character; people nearby note a disturbing "difference" in his behavior as he sniffs, growls, darts his head around like a bird and so on. Focusing senses this way is a deliberate action, and must be announced before the roll is made.

• Animals excel at manipulating people. By focusing his werebeast's Feral Heart, a player can add that rating to his Social-based dice pool. This "animal magnetism" lasts for one turn per dot in Feral Heart (Feral Heart 1 = +1 for one turn, Feral Heart 2 = +2 for two turns, etc.), and may be used to manipulate other night-folk, or animals of that character's breed. *This bonus does not "stack" on top of Respect*; when you're figuring a Social dice pool bonus, use either Feral Heart or Respect, not both. (Aspects or Merits, however, *do* add to this bonus — or subtract from it, if need be.)

• The higher a character's Feral Heart is, the higher his Attributes and Skills can go. Note that most beast-forms raise those Attributes anyway; this bonus allows him to raise those traits above 5 in his human birth-form.

• If the character can use spirit magic Gifts, his Feral Heart determines how many Essence points he may spend per turn. If he winds up on the receiving end of them, his Feral Heart dots add to his dice pool for contested rolls against those effects. (See the "Supernatural Conflicts" sidebar.)

Downsides to Being Feral

Every beast-blooded shapechanger is feral at heart. The higher his rating, the louder that wild heart pounds. A slightly feral person seems a little edgy, while a high-rated character radiates *BEAST*. In story terms, a shapechanger with a strong Feral Heart stinks of musk and wilderness; his eyes have a disconcerting sheen, and his body moves with animal assurance. Some folks find him compelling while others retreat.

Under normal circumstances, humans find shapechangers a trifle odd. In game terms, this feeling comes through as a penalty on Social dice pools. Predators strike an instinctive chord in other species, so this penalty is higher for beasts who hunt and eat other animals (and people) than it is for beasts who don't.

The "animal magnetism" effect can counter this penalty by turning those instincts to their advantage. A beast who exerts his innate charm can go from "scary predator" to "cool bad dude" in an instant. This change of heart is

Feral Heart and Essence Use

Feral Heart	Attribute /Skill Max	Max Essence/ Max Essence per Turn	Social Penalty*	Essence Bleed
1	5	10/1	0/–1	—
2	5	11/1	–1	—
3	6	12/1	–1/–2	—
4	6	13/2	–2	—
5	7	14/2	–2/–3	—
6	7	15/3	–3	1/day
7	8	20/5	–3/–4	1/12 hours
8	8	30/7	–4	1/10 hours
9	9	50/10	–4/–5	1/8 hours
10	10	100/15	–5	1/4 hours

* Second number is for predatory breeds.

Supernatural Conflicts

The night is filled with sorcerers, undead bastards and Gift-slinging werewolves. What defense does a poor feral have against their powers? The gift of his wild heart.

When other night-folk try to exert magical influence over one of the Changing Folk, that character gets to use his Feral Heart as a mystical *Resistance trait* — a bonus to his dice pool. It works this way . . .

The werebeast's player uses two Resistance traits to oppose a magical effect: a normal one and her mystical one, Feral Heart. The player employs an appropriate "normal" trait as his base to resist the effects of the enchantment, adds the character's Feral Heart to that dice pool and then rolls to resist.

The normal resisting trait depends on what the attacker is trying to do: Stamina resists attacks with a physical effect, Resolve resists attacks with a mental effect and Composure resists attacks with an emotional effect. If, for example, a witch tries to turn the feral into a more innocuous shape, you'd roll Stamina + Feral Heart. If a vampire tries to rule the feral's mind, roll Resolve + Feral Heart. And if a ghost tries to terrify the feral, roll Composure + Feral Heart.

No bonus applies when there's no Resistance roll allowed for that effect. In other cases — such as powers that effect the *environment*, not the feral himself — the usual rules for those powers apply. The werebeast isn't immune, after all, to large-scale magic. He simply has an innate resistance to other mystical phenomena.

What's good for the werebeast is good for the wizard. A supernatural character who's resisting the effects of a shapechanger's magic or Aspects gets to use a Resistance trait of his own in place of Feral Heart. Vampires use Blood Potency, mages employ Gnosis and werewolves and other shapeshifters add Primal Urge. See the rulebooks dealing with those creatures for further details.

often temporary . . . but then, a tiger doesn't have to play "nice kitty" for long to get what he wants.

(Again, this Social dice pool adjustment does *not* counter or stack on top of the Social effects of Respect. In all cases, the highest rating is used.)

New Advantage: Essence

Nature's power surges through her werebeasts. Called Essence, this power helps them bend those polite suggestions Man calls "physics." As a game trait, Essence can be spent or earned in a multitude of ways. And as a story element, this energy courses through a feral's being, fueling miraculous things.

Using Essence

In game terms, Essence is measured in points, similar to Willpower or Health. Your character's Essence is based on his Harmony rating, but can go radically up or down. You can spend a point of Essence to perform the following feats:

• Change form automatically, as a reflexive action. Normally, a feral's player must roll Stamina + Survival + Feral Heart in order to shift. For rules about changing form, see **p. 106-109**.

• Regenerate a lethal wound with a reflexive action. For rules about regeneration, see **p. 114-115**.

• Project a temporary impression of Respect. One Essence point raises the appropriate form of Respect by one point for the duration of that scene. This impression lasts one scene only, and may involve the player's choice of Respect (Ferocity, Loyalty, etc.). This "enhanced Respect" should be roleplayed out; the player must specify what she's doing in order to project that impression. For rules about Respect, see **p. 104-106**.

• If the character can enter the spirit world, he may cross over without making a roll if he's near a place of spiritual power. For rules about spirit-walking, see **p. 87**.

• If the character can use Gifts or fetishes, she may spend a point of Essence and activate that magical spell or item.

Recovering Essence

Spent Essence can be restored through various methods, most of which involve pristine wilderness or a savage hunt. Your character's Feral Heart rating determines the maximum amount of essence points your shapechanger can have or spend at once. (See the chart above.)

Your feral can regain spent Essence the following ways:

• Meditating or running free in a place of spiritual power (in **Werewolf: The Forsaken** terms, a locus) restores Essence. The player rolls the shapechanger's Harmony, possibly with a penalty inflicted by the location of that place (see **p. 87**). For each success, the werebeast gains one point of Essence. This takes roughly one minute per point to occur.

• Resting and running in the wilderness preferred by her breed. Two days of uninterrupted "beast-running" restores one point, five days restores three and a month restores them all.

• Saving Nature from rampaging humans or humans from rampaging Nature can heal spent Essence. A minor deed (saving an animal from hunters, or rescuing hikers lost in the woods) restores one point. A serious effort (sparing a grove

from tractors, or helping people face down angry bears) restores two points. And a major sacrifice (successfully protecting a forest, or saving people from a flood) earns back three. Such tasks balance the human and animal parts of a feral soul. Of course, they can also bring a werebeast into conflict with herself . . . but then, nobody said being feral was easy.

• A carnivorous or omnivorous feral can regain Essence by turning cannibal. This is a *major* sin for beast-blooded humans, who can reconcile the idea of eating animals easier than eating their fellow man. For each point of damage inflicted with the intention of eating flesh, the character gains one point of Essence. This Essence can come from human beings, other ferals, or animals of that character's breed. (Thus, a weretiger gains Essence from eating a tiger but not a lamb.) Yes, this makes some ferals amazingly dangerous to one another. Folks don't call it "Nature red in tooth and claw" for nothing.

New Advantage: Harmony

To balance out the vicious tendencies of Beast and Man, a shapechanger needs Harmony. As a game trait, Harmony replaces Morality and measures a character's balance of humanity and animalism. As a way of life, Harmony stresses balance between the extremes of "wild" and "civilized" behavior. A feral who goes too far in either direction is lost.

To walk in both worlds, a person must have strong convictions and implacable self-awareness. Since those aren't common traits, most ferals drift between Harmony 7 and Harmony 5. Those at the higher end are the proverbial "wise beasts," while those who fall much further enter the realm of the Lost Folk — ferals who become so fixated on either their human or bestial side that they risk losing the Changing Gift forever.

How Harmony Works

Similar to Morality, Harmony is checked when a character commits a certain sin. The player rolls dice based on that sin's level. If she succeeds, the character feels guilty and tries to make amends; her Harmony remains intact. If she fails, the feral slips a little further away from balance and heads toward the realm of the Lost Folk. (For rules about Morality, see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, pp. 91–105.)

For certain accords, though, "sins" matter less than they do to others. A Heart-Ripper doesn't think hurting people is *that* bad, while a Sun-Chaser justifies her dishonesty with expedience. In both cases, a player of either accord rolls one die *more* than usual when checking for degeneration. The Den-Warder, on the other hand, has a greater sense of connection to his world; a player of that accord rolls one die *less* for degeneration checks. Meanwhile, the Root-Weaver and Wind-Dancer accept that in life, things *happen*. Their grasp of Harmony becomes the baseline the other accords follow.

Berserking and the Fury

At a certain point, a werebeast stops giving a fuck. His self-control degenerates to a point where the irrational urges of Berserking and the Fury become easy to embrace. In story terms, he stops caring about restraint. In game terms, he suffers a penalty to his rolls to resist these urges.

Generally, a player rolls his shapechanger's Resolve + Composure to avoid giving in to the urge. At the lower levels of Harmony, he subtracts one, two or even three dice from that pool. This, in turn, leads to more irrational behavior, which leads to more sin, which leads to . . . you get the idea.

Aiaetha

As either Man or Beast takes over, the feral's reflection shows her inner nature regardless of her form. This *aiaetha* displays either a human reflection (if she's sliding toward that extreme) or the animal form (if she's going utterly feral). If the reflection shows something different than the physical appearance, there may be hard questions in store. . . .

At first, this phenomenon remains invisible to others. Only the shapechanger sees her true face. At the lower levels of Harmony, though, bystanders can see it, too; a murderous tiger might cast a woman's shadow, while a grinning barfly seems crow like in the mirror. Thanks to the Delusion, this shadow or reflection remains indistinct to cameras or videotape; still it *is* there, and many investigations begin when a suspicious character shows up strangely on a security camera's log.

Generally, the *aiaetha* shows either a human or animal shape. That's odd enough. If the character trembles on the edge of rage, however, the reflection might show her War-Beast instead. This manifestation can send people into the Delusion. After all, how would *you* feel if the guy who was about to kick your ass looked like a huge bear-man in the mirror?

Losing the Gift

At the utter end of Harmony, a shapechanger loses the ability to change shape. First, he must spend Essence in order to shift forms, then he must spend Willpower; at Harmony 0, he cannot shift at all. Until he regains Harmony (unlikely), Nature takes back her Gift, and he has lost the Change for good.

Feral Sins

Animals are not people, and folks who are a bit of both have different ideas about what is and isn't "right." And so, the hierarchy of sins differs considerably from those feared by normal humans. "Sin," by the way, means "guilt." A feral doesn't need to be religious in order to feel sinful.

• **Accidental disregard for property or wilderness** — Breaking a vase or tossing a cigarette butt out a window can make a high-Harmony character feel guilty. If only he'd thought more about his actions.

• **Not shapeshifting for more than a week; disrespect toward people** — Beast-bloods are creatures of both worlds. To deny what they are once they know about it causes psychological stress. Causing pain through deliberate action

Harmony	Sin	Dice Rolled	Composure Penalty
10	Accidental disregard for property or wilderness.	Five	/
9	Not shapeshifting for more than a week; disrespect toward people.	Five	/
8	Gross misbehavior; carelessness resulting in harm to Man, Beast or Nature.	Four	/
7	Intentional theft or injury; disrespect toward Nature; eating your animal species.	Four	/
6	Killing "important" living thing if you're a hunter.	Three	/
5	Killing another "important" living thing if you're *not* a hunter.	Three	/
4	Killing your own kind; using silver against other shapechangers.	Three	–1
3	Torture; intentionally killing your own kind.	Two	–1
2	Betraying Beast to Man or Man to Beast.	Two	–2
1	Sadistic murder/ cannibalism of your own kind.	Two	–3

feels wrong, too. Even if people can handle such disrespect, this feral knows she can do better.

• **Gross misbehavior; carelessness resulting in harm to Man, Beast or Nature** — The feral who shits in a corner, accidentally breaks a person's arm or runs over a raccoon feels genuine regret. If that harm is serious (major injury, dead raccoon babies, brush fire started by a cigarette), that guilt may feel more like killing (sin level 5 or 6).

• **Intentional theft or injury; disrespect toward Nature; eating your own animal species** — Aware of greater consequences, a thoughtful werebeast realizes that all things are intertwined. What he does to one, he does to himself. Although he may eat meat, he probably won't eat the flesh of his animal kin. And as for Nature, he realizes that by using Nature as his personal dump, he's acting . . . well, *human*.

• **Killing "important" living thing if you're a hunter** — A feral knows all things are alive. An "important" living thing, though, is either a higher animal (mammal, human) or a member of his breed species (if his soul-beast is reptilian or insectine). A hunter feels less guilt about killing, but a harmonious one respects his prey and does not kill recklessly. Note that a Heart-Ripper counts as a "hunter" no matter what breed she is.

• **Killing another "important" living thing if you're *not* a hunter** — This feels *bad*.

• **Killing your own kind; using silver against other shapechangers** — "Your own kind" means a human being or member of your breed species. This smacks of murder even if it's accidental. Meanwhile, the scourge of Moonbane is infamous; a feral who uses it as a weapon is playing dirty, and he knows it.

• **Torture; intentionally killing your own kind** — Lack of compassion, respect or awareness marks a feral who's gone too far. Even a killer has limits, but this sin level doesn't leave many limits to surpass.

• **Betraying Beast to Man or Man to Beast** — Selling out your own kind to hunters of another species feels treacherous . . . and it *is*.

• **Sadistic murder; cannibalism of your own kind** — By this point, even Heart-Rippers feel queasy. A monster at this level has lost all sense of compassion and lives for extreme selfishness.

States of Harmony

Assuming he can navigate the tricky ground between Man's world and Nature's realm, the shapechanger maintains a mental and spiritual balance. If he starts sliding, though, a cascade of greater sins may send him to the bottom with several derangements in tow. But what *is* Harmony to a human beast? It's got a range all its own. . . .

Harmony 10: A veritable bodhisattva of primal calm, this creature could be an incarnation of some shamanic totem. Instinct and cultivation find an ideal state in him. Obviously, this is a rare beast indeed. Ferocious yet compassionate, measured in all ways, this is the ideal of shapechangers who seek enlightenment.

Harmony 9: Civilized in her wildness, this beast steps easily between both worlds without upsetting either very much. If she's a carnivore, she kills cleanly and with respect; if an herbivore, she eats only where she can do so without harm. Every so often, she slips, but it's a rare thing and she feels badly afterward.

Harmony 8: Human laws and animal needs walk a tightrope with this feral. He lets little things slide, but tries to do right by both elements of his nature. Compassion for everyone is his goal. He can be preachy, but his feelings are sincere.

Harmony 7: This feral makes a place for each side of her life, and tries to keep them from overlapping too often. She may own an apartment and drive far out in the country to exercise her "secret life." Still, she knows what she is and strives to respect the middle ground. Deceit and



violence come easily to her now, but that's just the price of freedom.

Harmony 6: Ah, for the freedom of a beast or the comfort of a human home. This feral seems divided and uncertain about his true desires. He favors one side over the other, and longs for one when he's in the other realm. As a human, this feral probably feels guilty about the ruin Man has made of his world; as a beast, this feral's abashed by his baser urges. Still, he knows that you can't make omelets without . . . well, you know. And eggs taste *good*. . . .

Harmony 5: Ambivalence is this creature's lot. Either she feels trapped in her human form, or she can't wait to get back home from the wild. She justifies all kinds of sketchy behavior — life is *compromise*, y'know. Still, she gets itchy in the "wrong" skin, and acts erratically without really knowing why. At this point, the *aiaetha* resembles the werebeast's dominant aspect regardless of her actual form. Only she can see the signs, but they point toward trouble.

Harmony 4: Selfish and tricky, a feral at this level plays by his own rules. An outlaw and proud of it, he still feels responsibility for his actions. Even so, Nature can be cruel, and so can this beast.

Harmony 3: Quit making excuses — you're a *monster*. This feral grows impatient with guilt and ethics. A little blood on the ground is Nature's way, and if others can't handle that fact, they might be too weak to survive. By now, other people start to notice something *odd* about the werebeast, too. That reflection or shadow looks strangely . . . *wrong*.

Harmony 2: Regardless of his breed, there's a killer behind this feral's eyes. "The law of fang and claw" is his gospel, preferably when it's his fangs and claws marking that law. By this point, the shapechanger is skewed toward one extreme of the other; he's either proudly *human* or a ravening *beast*, and no matter what form he wears, that dominant shape is the one people see in the mirror or on the ground. The feral rarely changes form except to satisfy a craving or save his life, and cannot function in normal surroundings for long. (Costs one Essence point to change forms.)

Harmony 1: Brutish and sadistic, this creature enjoys causing pain. She might be painfully remote or sickeningly feral — either way she's *scary*. Few things cross her boundaries, and what most folks call "atrocity" she calls "a good start." (Costs one Willpower point to change forms.)

Harmony 0: At this point, the feral becomes one of the Lost Folk. Depending on his slide toward monstrosity, he grows either utterly bestial or coldly human. In either case, he loses the Changing Gift and passes into the Storyteller's command — most likely as a savage killer of men or beasts. (No change possible.)

Feral or Humanocentric Derangements

When a feral character slides down the Harmony scale, his player rolls the new Harmony trait as a dice pool. If the roll succeeds, he keeps his soul balanced; if the roll fails, he gains a derangement.

Ferals manifest their madness a bit differently from other folks. Although the usual neuroses and dementias can suffice, a Storyteller might instead show a slide toward extremely animalist or fanatically "humanocentric" behavior. Based on the character's personality, the new derangement urges him further from the human world or drives him to hate animals with a passion.

The following derangements feature a mild state and a severe manifestation:

Beast-Folk Derangements

Extreme Feralism

Mild	Severe
Cage Shock	Feral Frenzy
Neoprimitivism	Feral Antics
One with the Bears	Hate of Man

Fanatical Humanity

Mild	Severe
Beast Fears	Obsessive Humanity
Filthy Brutes!	Hunter King
I'm No Animal	Banish the Beast

Cage Shock (mild): Similar to a caged beast, your feral grows distressed. Pacing back and forth, he whines or snarls. Enclosed spaces feel constricting; clothes feel too tight. Anything less than open sky seems like a cage, and if forced to remain indoors, clothed, or otherwise confined, your beast gets restless.

Effect: On a failed Resolve + Composure roll, your character acts out and complains loudly about his "imprisonment." He may strip or bang around his "cage." For the rest of that scene, all that character's Social rolls suffer a –3 penalty from his extremely annoying behavior.

Feral Frenzy (severe): It's all a trap. The beast must be *free*. Tearing at any barrier between himself and freedom, this werebeast acts . . . well, feral. Pissing and shitting, he abandons human speech and restraint. Anyone who sees him will assume he's insane, and they're not really wrong.

Effect: On a failed Resolve + Composure roll, your werebeast goes utterly wild. Until he escapes "confinement," he'll act like a trapped and wounded animal. You can spend a point of Willpower to bring him out of it, but until then he's dangerous to himself and anyone who comes too close.

Neoprimitivism (mild): The modern age is bullshit to your character. She affects tribal fashions, sports tattoos, goes barefoot everywhere and yammers about "the Pure Ones" — ancient people who supposedly lived in perfect harmony with Nature.

Effect: This feral misses no opportunity to criticize everything about the modern world and people in general. Unless she stays cool (a Resolve + Composure roll), objections to her attitude may drive her to say the wrong thing to the wrong person, inciting a loud and potentially violent confrontation.

Feral Antics (severe): Like a wild animal, your feral bites, scratches, shits on the floor and generally behaves in counter-civilized fashion. She sheds as much clothing as her companions will tolerate, and speaks as little human speech as possible.

Effect: Isn't it obvious? Unless she controls herself (the usual roll), this character will be utterly unable to deal with most people.

One with the Bears (mild): He's not half-animal — he's *all* animal. Trouble is, this feral's view of animals is extremely idealistic. He talks with them as if they're fellow humans, yet holds real humans in contempt. He might be a furry or therian with elaborate garb and mythic history; or he's renounced the human world and lives sort of a New Age dream in the deep wilderness. Either way, he's disconnected from the truth of his situation.

Effect: Aside from neurotic and often unsociable behavior, this feral can function in Man's world. He *hates* Man's world, though, and prefers to spend time in the wild . . . where he may or may not know what he's doing. In bad situations, the player might need to make a Composure + Survival roll; failure means he's in over his head and may not be able to get back out without help.

Hate of Man (severe): People suck. *All* of 'em. Overwhelmed by the stench and disregard of modern Man, the feral avoids people as much as possible. When forced to confront human company, he shivers with hate, spews insults and might even attack for little or no apparent reason.

Effect: In human company (including, perhaps, his friends), this feral trembles with loathing. He trusts no one who's not a beast at heart. His Social rolls suffer a –3 penalty from his undisguised hatred, and he could get violent if provoked. A spent Willpower point might keep him in check, but his disgust for humanity is clear. Unless circumstances demand, he remains in Primal form. Odds are good that he'll soon lose the ability to change back . . . ever.

Beast Fears (mild): This person's afraid of animals, including the one in the mirror. Around beasts or fellow shapechangers, he seems agitated; if one confronts him, he may panic. This derangement is common among "little animal" ferals such as foxes or hares. It's workable, but highly inconvenient.

Effect: Essentially, this is a phobia of animals — see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 97. Without a reflexive Resolve + Composure roll, the character trembles fearfully around other beasts, even sometimes himself.



Obsessive Humanity (severe): Conflicted about his own nature, this werebeast dresses expensively, uses big words and refuses to look in the mirror except to groom his perfect hair. It'd be funny if he wasn't so obsessed about his humanity. Even the slightest challenge to it makes him sick with nerves.

Effect: Your character is obsessive compulsive (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 98), "managing" his conflicted nature by controlling his environment as much as he can and freaking out when he cannot.

Filthy Brutes! (mild): Your character doesn't fear animals — she *hates* 'em. Lashing out subconsciously at the beast within herself, she teases and torments animals whenever possible. Flicking cigarettes at zoo beasts, kicking dogs and throwing water at kitties is normal fun for her. Naturally, this slides her further down the scale of sins.

Effect: Unless the player makes a Resolve + Composure roll when given an opportunity to abuse a helpless animal, she'll inflict some *probably* non-fatal punishment on it. Even though she'll often be excused because "they're just dumb animals," the fallout from this sort of thing can get *really* messy . . .

Hunter King (severe): The worst hunter of all is the one who's killing her own reflection. This shapechanger murders animals with extreme cruelty. Only rarely does she assume beast-form to do it. Proud of her bloodlust, she becomes a warped reflection of Man the Conqueror. She kills because she *can*, and may be highly acclaimed among humans who don't know her true nature.

Effect: This character is a serial killer of animals. Given a chance, she'll hunt, torture and murder as many animals as she can manage. She'll often take a career that requires her to kill often and messily — a seal-clubber, vivisectionist or big-game hunter whose appetites astonish even her human companions. Yes Storyteller, this type makes an excellent villain for a changing breeds chronicle.

I'm No Animal (mild): In a constant state of denial, this shapechanger refuses to . . . well, change shape. Unless extremely stressed, he won't assume an animal form — and if he does, he immediately regrets it. In human form, he does everything he can to distance himself from his true nature. All traces of his double life are hidden with obsessive zeal.

Effect: In addition to compulsive behavior with regard to his animal self, your character resists all but the most extreme motivations to change shape. To force himself to assume that hated form, he must make a Resolve + Composure roll; failure means he'll face his death like a man.

Banish the Beast (severe): He *won't* Change. At all. Obsessive to the point of insanity about his role as *a man, goddammit*, your shapechanger utterly forsakes his true nature. Suggestions that he embrace his wild self make him violent; he smashes or withdraws from every trace of his feral life, including the people he once held dear.

Effect: This character won't change unless forced to do so; even then, he must make the usual roll and spend a Willpower point to assume beast-form. Anyone who tries to remind him of what he is will probably be attacked — first non-fatally, possibly with lethal intent if that doesn't shut them up.

Regaining Harmony

In game terms, it's easy to restore lost Harmony: buy it back with experience points. Stories, though, demand drama and sacrifice. A feral who falls from the level of a wise beast to the degenerate state of a *thing* has a long, hard climb ahead of her. Still, isn't that what myths are for? To showcase the crash and restoration of a struggling soul? Werebeasts are creatures of passion and commitment. The balance in their hearts offers great material for dramatic roleplaying.

New Advantage: Respect

You can tell the difference between a fresh young cub and a grizzled old bear. There's a certain *presence* experienced beasts possess. Most creatures instinctively offer more respect to an elder beast, and the trait of that name reflects that sense of presence, combined with social reputation. In game terms, this comes through as a bonus — or a *penalty* — to your character's Social dice pool.

The Respect Advantage isn't a measure of *fame*, although fame can figure into it. Rather, Respect is a combination of rumors, bearing and the impression a werebeast projects. A Clever beast, for example, comes across smart and devious, while a Ferocious one is scary even when he's calm. Rightly or wrongly, other characters judge a feral character by that impression, which may be helpful in some situations and devastating in others. To understand Respect, think of the wily coyote, loyal hound or sagacious old bear. The animal might not actually *be* any of those things, but those impressions count.

Respect comes across in certain cues: the look in a feral's eye, the way he stands, the scars on his body or the tone of his voice. A high-Respect werebeast seems formidable. He radiates supremacy. Imagine the sleek young cub, then contrast him with the grizzled veteran. A high-Respect character has *lived*, and that experience is apparent whether anyone knows him or not.

This quality has mystic effects, too. A high-Respect character literally throws a larger shadow. The wind seems to whisper his name. For characters who see auras, this creature blazes; those with keen senses can literally *smell* his ferocity or passion. Animals and other beast-folk instinctively bow or bristle in the presence of a high-Respect feral. In the spirit world, his voice sounds deeper, and his body seems marked with strange glyphs and vivid luminescence.

In game terms, the Respect trait has the following uses and effects:

• In certain circumstances, a character's highest Respect can be used as a bonus to her Social dice pools. (For this purpose, use either the character's Respect or Feral Heart, whichever is highest.)

• In other circumstances, the highest Respect subtracts from her Social dice pools.

• A player can also choose to "play up another side of herself" by substituting a different form of Respect for the highest-rated one. This, however, must be a deliberate and declared choice before the dice pool is employed, and roleplaying must support that impression while it's being made.

• If the werebeast employs spirit-given Gifts, Respect is treated as a werewolf's Renown for the purposes of learning that Gift. If he deals with Uratha, his highest Respect is considered a form of Renown for the purpose of social admiration.

As a trait, Respect is based on your character's accord. One dot automatically goes into the appropriate form of Respect. People, however, are not bound by stereotypes; a player can adjust his character's impression by putting other dots into different forms of Respect. A Heart-Ripper Corvian player, for example, can play up the tricky impression people have of crows and put the majority of his dots into Cleverness. His character still gives a fierce impression, but it's not the first thing people notice.

Respect offers roleplaying hints for the beast's player, and suggests things about her overall appearance and behavior. For the Storyteller, Respect reflects the things other characters believe about that beast. Whether or not those things are *true* doesn't matter — people will trust those impressions unless they're given a reason not to. Respect also provides a social meter for the feral's accomplishments. That meter might not be *accurate*, but it offers clues about that werebeast's personality and experience.

Respect comes in five different varieties, each with benefits and drawbacks:

• **Cleverness:** (Root-Weaver) — Whether she's a cunning crow or simply smarter than the average bear, the werebeast known for Cleverness seems ingenious. She always appears to be one or two steps ahead of everyone else, even when she's truly *not*. Folks value her intellect and perceptiveness, yet distrust her agile mind. Clever beasts are often tricky, and tend to be too smart for their own good. Cats, crows and coyotes are (in)famous for this trait, as folktales all agree. In game terms, this form of Respect offers Social bonuses when the character tries to impress others with her intellect or awareness; this form subtracts from her Social dice pools if she's trying to gain their trust.

• **Ferocity:** (Heart-Ripper) — This beast doesn't need blood dripping from his jaws to project a killer instinct. He exudes Predator just by leaning against a wall. "Mad, bad and dangerous to know," the Ferocious feral can chill marrow with a grin. He adds his Respect to Intimidation rolls, but subtracts it from attempts to seem likeable or safe. In certain situations, the Storyteller could apply a Ferocious impression as a bonus or penalty to a beast's seduction attempts as well. Whether your Big Bad Wolf comes across as a sexy rogue or a serial killer depends on his innate charm and the tastes of his prey. . . .

• **Insight:** (Wind-Dancer) — This wise beast can size folks up in a glance or read omens in the sky. People look to her for sagacious counsel even when she has none to offer. Her eyes always seem to be *elsewhere*, yet pierce through all illusions. Such souls are inspiring yet unnerving to be around. The Insightful beast gains a bonus when she offers advice, asserts wisdom or cuts through the crap; that bonus becomes a penalty, though, when folks nearby would rather not hear the truth. If things go poorly, she might be blamed for things that come to pass, or condemned because she should have *known* what was happening before it struck.

• **Loyalty:** (Den-Warder) — You can count on this beast. He's steadfast and honest, hard-working even while he's sitting on his ass. Folks trust his integrity and feel inspired by his courage. Like a hound dog, this character projects an air of stability. His dice pools receive a bonus when he's trying to get folks to trust him — or wants to deceive them with his so-called loyalty. Still, he comes across as a gullible sap, and his attempts to appear streetwise or cool suffer a penalty even when he knows what he's talking about.

• **Passion:** (Sun-Chaser) — Life's fire burns in this feral's breast. Whether she's laughing with joy or sobbing with heartbreak, folks feel drawn to her. The sheer vitality of her emotion is infectious. Cute one moment, stricken the next, this beast wears her heart on her sleeve even when her shirt's at the other end of the room. In game terms, this character adds her Respect to attempts to seduce, entice or inspire people. Attempts to seem sober, wise or clear-headed, however, suffer a penalty even when she's absolutely calm. After all, how can such a volatile creature be taken *seriously*?

Gaining and Losing Respect

Each beginning character starts with three dots in Respect. The first is assigned by his accord, while the other two should be left "in reserve" until the character has accomplished a few things and shown his true colors. If you like, you can assign those last two points wherever you please during character creation — just support those choices with roleplaying so they seem "right" for that character. As the character progresses, you can buy new points of Respect with experience points. However, *you don't have to*. A werebeast with low Respect isn't necessarily inexperienced, just subtle in his impressions.

Occasionally, a werebeast does something so out of character that he literally loses Respect. A Loyal stallion, for instance, tramples his best friend and abandons his band. In that case, a Storyteller may demand that the player exchange his highest Respect rating to one of a more fitting category — perhaps Ferocity or Passion for that stallion. In this case, the stallion's Loyalty 3 and Ferocity 1 become Loyalty 1 and Ferocity 3. This option should be reserved for extreme cases, though, and even then it doesn't so much *remove* Respect as assign it to a more appropriate role.



Werewolves, Respect and Renown

The tiresomely social werewolves have their own form of Respect: *Renown*. Although that Advantage has significant differences in game terms, the Uratha offer grudging admiration to a werebeast with significant Respect levels. As social hunters, werewolves and their spirit allies can recognize a wise or ferocious cousin. And so, in game terms, the werebeast's highest Respect rating can be considered his default Renown when dealing with them.

Don't be mistaken: an Uratha won't *ever* consider a werecat "one of her own." Still, there's a bond of kinship that beast-folk acknowledge even when they're trying to kill each other. No mage or vampire could *possibly* understand what it is to run by Nature's side, and so that Respect runs both ways. All werewolves add their highest Renown to Social interactions with other changing breed characters — or *subtract* them if the relationship isn't cordial. After all, a Blood Talon can seem like your best bud if he's on your side, and a psychotic monster if he's not.

Of Beast and Man: The Forms

The Changing Gift turns a human being into an impossible blend of Beast and Man. Rearranging bones, sinew and often more, the Changing Gift commits atrocities against scientific law and reaffirms Nature as the ultimate — and ultimately unknowable — authority.

So how, in game terms, does it work?

Your character has three to five separate forms, each with distinct abilities and characteristics. In shifting between them, he'll gain some advantages at the cost of others. Yet it's his birthright to transform. The restless nature of such characters makes them perfect heroes for a dark adventure. They call up familiar elements, then change them into something *more*.

Transformation

A feral character begins with her human form and then adds or subtracts modifiers to adjust her traits. Certain actions are possible in some forms but not in others. In story terms, the character shifts across a spectrum: human, half-human and beast. In game terms, her player makes a roll to see if the transformation is fast and easy or difficult and messy. If she's got some Essence points to spend, the player could decide to spend one of them to reflect an easy, instant change. Each time the character changes shape, however, the player must either spend Essence or roll the dice.

Game Systems

Roll: (human base) Stamina + Survival + Feral Heart
Action: Instant to turn into a form other than human. Reflexive with an exceptional success on roll. Reflexive with the expenditure of an Essence point — no roll required.

Essence Cost: None, except if the player wants to change her character's shape immediately and yet did not roll an exceptional success.

Time Required: A handful of seconds (one turn or less).

Dramatic Failure: The character winds up in a disturbing misshape, suffers three points of bashing damage and remains trapped in that shape until she can transform successfully.

Failure: The character cannot shift this turn; her next attempt receives a –1 penalty to the roll. Failures after the second try reduce the dice pool by cumulative –1 penalties.

Success: Instant-action change.

Exceptional Success: Reflexive change.

Trait Modifiers: Varies by breed or species — see Chapter Three.

Trait Modifiers

Trait modifiers add or subtract from the character's normal human base Attributes. Trait modifiers do not "stack" on top of one another. A War-Beast's traits, for example, are measured in bonuses and penalties to the Man-Guise traits, not as additions to the Primal Beast form. Also, modified traits cannot fall to or below 0. The minimum Attribute possible is 1.

The Advantages that depend on Physical Attributes — Defense, Health, Initiative and Speed — have their bonuses and penalties already worked in under their breed listings. For example, Kofi Dekote of the Mholé-Rho elephant-folk adds +5 to his Strength and Stamina, +10 to his Size, +15 to his Health and +3 to his Speed. These bonuses can be found on the listing for the Mholé-Rho in Chapter Three. (Yes, he's impressive. Most ferals have far more humble abilities.)

Defense is always the *lowest* trait out of either the character's Dexterity or Wits. An animal may be fast, but without brainpower behind his momentum, he's not very quick on the uptake. This is one of those places where the human element comes into its own; real animals rarely have a person's sharp wits, and the combination of bestial might with human thought is truly formidable.

Many werebeasts add extra Health dots when they shift into their animal forms. As long as the character remains in one of those non-human forms, you add those extra Health dots to the right end of your character's Health chart. Changing back while injured, however, can be deadly. Wounds suffered in corresponding Health boxes cycle back onto his Health chart, "pushing out" less-severe wounds to accommodate the greater wounds. See the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, pp. 172–173, for more information.

Although some animals can use basic tools, human items are made for human hands. A character in one of the beast forms cannot use small or sophisticated technology — cars, cell phones, even scissors are beyond even the most dexterous animals unless such items have been made specifically for the beast in question . . . and often not even then. No matter how smart he may be, an elephant cannot use a computer — an axe, maybe, but not a keyboard.

And no, he can't *talk*, either. In some ways, this is the biggest challenge a shapechanger knows.

So what *are* the forms, and what makes them what they are?

Man-Guise — The Human Shape

The default birth-form of a feral person, the human shape is obviously the most familiar one to assume. Sometimes called "Man-Guise" by ferals who favor portentous honorifics, this shape looks more or less like a normal human being. Even then, though, the inner beast shines through in subtle ways. A fox-changer enjoys luxuriant red hair and vulpine features. A gaunt crane-man stands tall and moves with bird-like angularity. A white bison woman shakes out her dazzling mane while squaring broad, muscular shoulders. The Man-Guise may be human in most respects, but you can still see a Beast inside if you know how to look.

Many ferals have an ambivalent attitude regarding their humanity. On one hand (literally), the human form is good for plenty of things, from discussing Shakespeare to playing Nintendo. Seeing the world from a wild perspective, however, reveals just how selfish, cruel and just plain *stupid* humans often are. The "Man-Guise" moniker is more than a little bit sarcastic. Many ferals consider their human form a façade — a bit of play-acting behind which they embrace a greater identity.

War-Beast — The Monster Made Manifest

An incarnation of Nature's fury, the War-Beast is the shape a feral assumes when the time for peace has passed. Standing anywhere between seven and 15 feet in height, this creature embodies a primal sense of Beast wrapped in the limber form of Man. More or less bipedal, the War-Beast channels implacable power with ferocious intellect.

Among the Uratha, this form is one long scream for blood. Many other predator species share that urge to destroy as well. Some, though, are more circumspect in their ferocity; among them, the War-Beast is a godlike incarnation of elemental wrath. There's a righteous spirit behind the eyes of this monster — a promise of holy terror walking. Such things are truly the terror of Man.



War-Form Weaponry

The largest, smartest werebeasts carry huge weapons specially crafted for their Throwback and War-Form shapes. These massive blades, axes and spears are too awkward and heavy to be used by humans under Size 6; in the hands of a raging Land Titan, however, these weapons are brutally effective.

Type	Damage	Size	Cost	Special	Description
Bull Spear	4 (L)	5	•	+2 Defense vs. unarmed	Long spear
Great Ax	6 (L)	5	••	9 again	Gargantuan 2-head ax
Hakar	5 (L)	4	•••	9 again	Huge jagged blade
Maul	5 (B)	5	•••	9 again	Gigantic hammer
Shiva's Trident	5 (L)	5	•••	9 again, +2 Defense	Huge barbed trident

Urge to Destroy

A War-Beast feral conjures the Delusion in many human beings and sends most animals scrambling for cover. It's not just the physical might of the creature, though that's usually bad enough. There's often a fierce radiance surrounding this monster, too — a promise of retribution. The War-Beast incarnates the thinking fury of Man, the ferocity of the Beast and the ruthless surge of Nature herself. In the face of that entity, most creatures instinctually flee.

Each species has a different War-Beast. Some rage like huge brutes while others blaze like mad gods. In each case, the War-Beast adds massive bonuses to the character's Physical Attributes. In exchange, the War-Beast limits a feral's ability to do much else but destroy.

Systems: How Do You Rage?

The War-Beast exists for one purpose: *violence*. How it goes about that violence, though, depends on the species of the werebeast in question.

• Predatory werebeasts mutate into giant killing machines. Few things on Earth are more frightening than a War-Beast weretiger. Still, the smaller predators — foxes, coyotes, smaller werecats — prefer stalk-and-kill tactics over total rage, even when they're in War-Beast form.

• Herbivorous ferals favor the personality of their breed over raw destruction. Belligerent ones — bulls, rhinos, goats — tend to rampage, while more timid creatures — hares, deer, gazelle — invert their usual natures to become trap-and-torture killers.

• Scavengers — vultures, raccoons, hyenas, rats — grow more ferocious, yet maintain their cunning bent. These War-Beasts play mind games, taunting prey from the shadows, herding them into traps and then striking from ambushes to tear that prey apart.

• Tigers aside, the largest land-beasts — bears, horses, gorillas, elephants — become the most remote. In War-Beast form, these entities assume god-like detachment. Swatting enemies aside with distain, these beasts move as landslides or hurricanes: raw, relentless and utterly implacable.

Whenever a shapechanger is in his War-Beast, that shapechanger will want to attack *something*. If there's no enemy in sight, he'll vent his fury on some object — preferably a creation of Man. Monuments to Man's pride (cars, billboards, statues, buildings) make the best targets for destruction. Again, though, the War-Beast favors his breed. A werebear might demolish a car, while a werecrane stands with perfect stillness until a target steps too close — then kicks its spine in half.

Keeping Control

Generally, the human mind remains in control of this rampage. The control, though, is tenuous. Each time a War-Beast werecreature tries to do anything that doesn't involve collateral damage, the player must roll Resolve + Composure as a reflexive action. Success means that the rational mind wins out; failure means that something's getting smashed . . . and that the feral risks a full-blown tiger storm.

Any time a feral attains War-Beast, the player rolls at once to see if he goes into a tiger storm as well. If that roll *succeeds*, the beast is violent but can still discern friend from foe, functioning with a certain amount of control. If that roll *fails* — regardless of species — the beast whips into a tiger storm. At that point, everyone within reach should run for his life.

In War-Beast, a feral takes no wound penalties until he reaches the last two Health boxes. Up till then, he simply feels no pain. Speech, for the most part, is beyond him, although he can bark short words such as, "*No*" and "*DIE!*" Otherwise, he bellows with rage or remains eerily silent.

A character in War-Beast form loses all subtlety. He may be cunning but not devious. In game terms, he cannot attempt

Mental or Social tasks beyond intimidation and very simple activity (herding a victim into a thicket, hiding in ambush, pushing down a tree to block her path and so on). Tools more sophisticated than swords, spears or boulders are too complex for a War-Beast feral to employ — not that he'd want to, anyway. Although certain godlike beasts wield huge swords or tridents in War-Beast form, most ferals want nothing to do with Man's toys at this stage of fury.

In War-Beast form, the character's fingers, teeth or other natural weapons inflict lethal damage, per the Fang and Claw Favor. Claws often add one bonus die to the character's attack, while teeth, antlers, horns or beaks add two. The character can bite his prey without grappling it first, and he'll often favor biting and raking his prey over any other form of attack.

Furious yet Brief

Fortunately, the War-Beast is short-lived. Its fury is too strong to maintain. A character can remain in War-Beast shape for a number of turns equal to his human Stamina + Feral Heart. After that, his player must make a shapeshifting roll or spend an Essence point to change to a different form under his own control. Otherwise, the beast runs out of steam and shifts back to his original human shape . . . a potentially deadly event if he's taken a lot of damage or entered a tough fight.

When the War-Form shifts to a different shape, the additional Health points go away. The injuries, however, do not. Instead, the remaining lethal damage replaces any remaining bashing damage or "unharmed" Health boxes. If the werebeast belongs to an especially large breed, such as the Land Titans, this shift could easily drop that character to negative Health. (See above.)

In the aftermath of a War-Beast rampage, the feral feels shaken. He's gone into the deepest shadows of his spirit, and may need some time to recover his senses. Yet that descent carries with it a profound rush. Nothing's more exhilarating than bursting all restraint, and the War-Beast doesn't know the meaning of that word.

Primal Beast — The Animal Self

The ultimate expression of a feral's wild heart, this form resembles a large but otherwise normal animal of her species. Unless the shapechanger grows too furious for reason, this is the preferred beast-form she'll attain. In Primal shape, the feral is essentially a very smart animal. She can think normally, use most of her Aspects and communicate in very basic fashion, but is in all other respects a beast.

For humans, this transformation is dazzling. The wash of freedom and fresh sensations becomes the ultimate intoxicant. Addicts have been cured of their cravings by the staggering purity of the animal self: smells so vivid they're almost colorful, sights so clear they're almost surreal, sounds with unspeakable subtlety and dizzying range. Although most beast-forms lose some of our human color perception, the clarity of the impressions compensates for that loss. The feral's physical perspective shifts as well — after all, a horse, bird and dog all see a living room differently, and none of them experience it the way a woman does.

Yet this form also bears sorrows that few humans could ever imagine. For to experience Nature in raw purity is to sense what Man has done with it. Smog, trash, noise . . . the overwhelming sensory explosion of stimuli that humans take for granted in this age can be devastating to a feral beast, especially when she first attains that state. Worst of all is the vast indifferent carelessness with which so many people regard their world. Most ferals retreat after their First Change because their old world feels so crassly *alien*, yet so revoltingly *familiar*.

Systems: Power and Perception

Inhuman Favors and vastly expanded perceptions provide the Primal form's greatest gifts. A person in this shape can fly if she has wings, burrow if she can dig and dive deep if she grows fins. She's no longer shackled by her human form. Whatever an animal of her breed can do, she can do.

In game terms, the character assumes the Favors of her breed, along with whatever benefits or costs they involve. More often than not, these benefits also expand her sensory awareness, grant her extra dice for certain tasks or provide powers that humans rarely enjoy.

The tradeoff is simple: she's an *animal*. Although she retains her human intellect, Mental Attributes and Skills, the character is bound by the physical and social limitations of her breed. A fox cannot drive no matter how well she understands the controls. A shark must keep moving through the water. Worse, the feral becomes a beast in the eyes of other people — an escaped panther, wild bear, stray cat or unleashed dog. Animal Control may be called on her; folks might try to adopt her or run her over. She won't be able to open doors or manipulate technology. Worst of all, she can't *speak*. Although a werebeast can communicate with other animals, ferals and the occasional person, the feral lacks the physical ability to form and speak human words. For most shapechangers, this is the most jarring change . . . until they see their fellow humans through animal eyes.

Ferals, most often, love animals or at least feel kinship with them. Many humans don't share that affection, and even those who do rarely take animals *seriously*. At best, they speak in baby-talk and treat animals like children; at worst, they torture and kill them for fun. To a person who's used to being human, being treated like a dog can be unnerving . . . and *infuriating*, too. In Primal form, a werebeast has a hard time being taken seriously unless she's tearing someone's throat out — at which time she becomes a menace.

For a player, the perspective of *being an animal* becomes more important than the traits involved. For raw game statistics, each breed listing has the Favors and modifiers for those Primal forms. The real trick, though, is balancing the human with the beast. And for ferals, that task becomes most difficult when they're in the Primal form.



Running Away with the Beast

Unlike the War-Form, the Primal Beast isn't limited in duration. A feral can stay in it as long as she likes. Trouble is, she might like it *too much* and risk losing herself in it. This, also, is imbalance — after all, humanity is part of her birthright as well. Unless she remembers the good things about being human, she might never return to that life.

For each week a shapechanger remains in her Primal shape, her player makes a Harmony roll. The sin in question is, "Not shapeshifting for a week (Harmony 9)," unless she's done something worse during that time. Success means that she misses her old life, changes back to human form and returns to piece her life back together or build a new one. Failure means she stays in her Primal form and loses one point of Harmony; the beast seems far more pure than the person, and she pulls further away from humanity. This continues each week or so until she either comes to her senses, she becomes utterly feral or someone else intervenes and convinces her to embrace all aspects of her nature.

The temptation to forsake Man or reject the Beast is often strongest just after the First Change. At that point, a new feral makes her Harmony check at Harmony level 7, "Disrespect for Nature" — unless she's done something even worse, such as killing a person or other prey. If she fails the check at that point, the new shapechanger might react one of two ways: either run away in bestial freedom or rip herself out of beast-form in total revulsion for what she's become. Either way, she'll need to come to terms with what she is eventually. For that moment, though, she loses a temporary point of Harmony, to be regained when she has a breakthrough about her new identity. Success, of course, means she comes through shaken but exhilarated, ready to be human yet run with her wild heart.



Hybrid Forms

Some ferals (usually ones who've lived long enough to master the gift) can assume other forms by way of the Hybrid Forms Aspect. These additional shapes are as follows:

The Throwback

Between Man-Guise and the War-Beast stands the disturbing Throwback. Looking like a cross between a caveman and a monster, this form can pass for human in dim light yet bears bestial features, like a person wearing an especially fearsome mask. A goatish Throwback has noticeable horns, a bristling beard, thick hair and Baphometian features; a Corvian sprouts feathers from her skin and possesses solid black eyes. In strong light, a Throwback resembles some refugee from a Hieronymus Bosch painting, and can be quite terrifying. This form invokes the Delusion in normal humans, and often has claws, sharp teeth or a small yet effective beak.

Traits: (based on human form) Strength +1, Stamina +1, Manipulation –2, Health +1, Speed +1, +2 to perception rolls, Strength inflicts lethal damage

For large-breed beasts (tigers, elephants, bears, oxen, etc.): Strength +2, Stamina +2, Manipulation –3, Size +1, Health +3, Speed +3, +1 to perception rolls, Fang and Claw Favor

The Dire Beast

Long ago, Man shared his world with the First Beasts. The early bonds of

shape and soul may have been cast back then, when animals were larger and more ferocious than they are today. The Dire Beast form recalls those days; it's much bigger than a normal animal of that species, and sports wicked fangs or claws. Poised between the War-Beast and the Primal Beast, this form is faster, stronger and far more temperamental than any modern specimen. Ferals who need ferocity and speed assume this guise, which can pass at a quick glimpse for a "normal" animal — a very *large* one. Similar to the Throwback, this form invokes the Delusion, but with a +2 bonus to the witnesses' dice pool. After all, it's just a big *animal* . . . isn't it . . .? (This bonus does not apply if the "big animal" in question is a bat, rat, bug or other hideous thing; in that case, the bonus becomes a *penalty* of –2 dice instead.)

Note: This form's trait adjustments are based on the *animal* form, rather than the human form, to reflect the differences between species.

Traits: (based on Primal form): Strength +1, Stamina +1, Size +1, Health +2, Speed +2

Other Aspects of Feral Life

There's more to a werebeast than the traits on his character sheet. His very existence begs many questions. *How does he speak to animals? Can he heal like a werewolf? What happens when his human side gets lost in the woods? And why doesn't everyone on Earth know these things are running around out there?* The World of Darkness is filled with questions; your chronicle, though, needs answers.

Communication

Animals don't *speak*, but they *communicate*. The difference is sometimes hard for humans to grasp. Although we employ hundreds of nonverbal cues in the average conversation, people pay most attention to the abstract construction of words.

But ferals know better.

Animals employ sophisticated patterns of scent, touch, stance, gesture, vocalization, movement and even execration in order to express themselves. On an even deeper level, there's also *energy awareness* — the subtle sense of "vibe" that humans share but don't truly understand. Through these cues, animals have "conversations" that offer in directness what they lack in abstract content. To some degree, most animals understand at least a little bit of one another's "language." And ferals, being part animal, understand it, too.

This isn't Disneyland. Animals don't crack jokes or discuss quantum physics. Even so, they're remarkably eloquent. A bear can get across more with a stare than some people express with endless chatter. Most creatures, noting that stare, find someplace else to be. The subtleties that one species uses within its own kind may not translate well, but strong messages often come across just fine.

Among their own kind, animals achieve complex "conversations." The methods vary from species to species, even region to region, but can be easily understood by other animals of that type. Anyone who's ever seen two birds squabble knows *something's* being said. And when it comes to "higher" beasts — dogs, cats, apes, dolphins, horses and so on — that "something" ranges across the emotional spectrum.

People can often puzzle out the most obvious animal expressions: alarm, affection, rage, fear. Folks who spend lots of time around animals learn to pick up more subtle cues, even manage to "talk back" to some degree. Among human beings, that capacity is limited. Ferals are human beings, true, but they're something more as well.

Speaking Their Language

In the World of Darkness, a werebeast in any form can share basic communication with others of her kind. A wereraven, for example, can caw at crows and make herself understood. That talent, though, doesn't run too deep; our crow-girl may chat with sparrows or owls, but a cow will gaze at her, oblivious. Among birds, she'll share a limited understanding of body language, chirps, calls and other displays. She won't be able to get much across to the birds herself, but they'll pay more attention to her and be less likely to take flight when she approaches.

In her animal forms, a shapechanger's real gift comes into play. As either the Primal or Dire Beast, she can communicate instinctually with animals of her kind, and express and understand "big messages" more intuitively than most humans could grasp. Although their conversations will remain limited by viewpoint and physicality, a feral in animal form shares a rapport with beasts that few humans could ever match.

The First Tongue

According to legend, the First Ones spoke a common language that all things understood. This *First Tongue* survives in a debased form as the speech of spirits and many werewolves. Certain ferals — often from the Root-Weaver, Sun-Chaser and Wind-Dancer accords — pick up bits of this language as well. A handful of elders and mystics even speak it fluently. This talent, though, is not universal among the Changing Folk. Most werebeasts live in the here and now, not for some legendary past. If the average feral even hears of it at all, he would rather chase winds (or loggers) than puzzle over ghostly myths.

For those who study the First Tongue, though, a whole world opens up. The bizarre spirit realm is filled with entities that understand little else. Elder beasts and certain animals understand the First Tongue, too, and measure respect by those who know its idioms. Werewolves, who often regard their cousins with disdain, grant fresh respect for a feral who knows the First Tongue.

In game terms, a character with at least a dot in Language (First Tongue) gains an extra +1 on Social roles with



Uratha, spirits or mages who deal with the spirit world. If the character is especially fluent, he might gain +1 for every dot he has in that language. These bonuses, however, apply only to the opening words of a new conversation. Once a talent with the First Tongue is displayed, respect is given, and things proceed as usual.

For the most part, though, a feral talks as a person with people and an animal with beasts. He knows how to read the pitch of a crow's cry or a horse's snort. With focus, he can project the "vibe" that tells an animal more than human words can convey. He may look strange doing it, but when in the wild, he knows how to speak the language.

Sensations

The sensory world of the changing breeds expands far beyond the scope of human capabilities. Every smell, taste, touch, sound and sight contains a wealth of encoded information.

Smell, for example, doesn't just tell a shapechanger that something stinks on the second floor of the building, or that someone is wearing expensive perfume. Smell tells her that the stink comes from a mouse with an open wound who crawled into the ventilation system to die, or that the woman with the lovely scent is masking sickness beneath her perfume. Smell tells the shapechanger that the man sitting across from her on the subway is nervous, or the child who strayed from his parent's campsite and encountered her in the woods is completely at ease; that her lover's in heat . . . or that someone else has been in their bed.

Similarly, shapechangers can hear distress in the timbre of someone's speech, when other folks might not notice it at all, or take an immediate dislike to humans with particularly loud or shrill voices. Certain synthetic fabrics may feel unbearably suffocating or repellent to the touch. A feral may catch sight of someone moving within a darkened house across the street, or tell you that the chicken you've served him is spoiled, even though it tastes fine to you. Their senses are attuned to such a degree that, if they were to experience ordinary human sensations again, they would feel as if they had been stuck blind or burned their tongues.

Because of the intensity of sensations in a shapechanger's life, such beings frequently earn a reputation for hedonism: eating, drinking and copulating to excess. Food has never tasted so rich. Smells never cease to be intoxicating. These folks often fall prey to compulsions, leaning over to sniff a neighbor on a train or biting a lover till blood flows, simply because they want to feel what such things are like. Though these eccentricities are merely demonstrations of curiosity or even affection, the recipient of their attentions might not be thrilled to be smelled by a stranger or bitten unexpectedly. This obliviousness to human social decorum often leads to that "feral" reputation, diagnosis of autism or accusations of retardation. For people who don't share those heightened perceptions and animal instincts, a feral seems disturbingly weird.

In game terms, a feral has bonuses to her perception rolls, as well as Favors, Aspects and Merits to reflect her heightened awareness. Still, that awareness involves more than simple dice pools. If you're a player, have your character revel in phenomenal perceptions. And if you're a Storyteller, emphasize the raw sensuality of a feral's world by describing it in vivid, often revealing, impressions.

Ah, Wilderness!

People are used to urban areas; beasts prefer the wilderness, and *were*beasts spend time in both. So what happens when a city-bred person becomes a wild-ranging werecreature?

For all of Man's best efforts, the wilderness remains a very big place. Once you get beyond the roads and streetlights that define our world for so many folks, the landscape changes radically. Trees and vegetation loom; mountains beckon from a distance, yet disappear beneath your feet as you ascend. The ground rises or falls away with little warning, and your whole sense of balance shifts. There are few flat surfaces in Nature — everything flows at irregular degrees. Scents surround you; twigs and cobwebs catch. What looks straightforward from afar becomes a jumble of impressions when you're *there*. Even in a wasteland, the whole world crackles with life.

That element of life makes the wilderness unpredictable. Without human intervention, trails get overgrown or washed away. Storms flood landmarks or knock down trees. Rains or winds whisk away the faint marks of passage . . . and that's not even bringing in the possibility of human or supernatural tampering. The living world is always changing, especially in intense climates. A desert looks pretty much the same each year, but a rainforest can shift overnight.

For people bred in air-conditioned comfort, the raw vitality of the wilderness is hard to understand. Nevertheless, this is where the werefolk live. Even the most urbanized feral knows the feel of rocky dirt beneath her feet, the catch of wind and the pitch of land. She knows what it is to find your way without a map, and can taste the warm snap of bones in a mouthful of raw meat. To most ferals, this is home. Even when they live in cities, Nature remains a part of them.

Talk About the Weather

Nature lacks a thermostat. You can't turn it on and off. A person or animal in the wild is subject to Nature's whims. He may spend days soaked by rain, or shiver in night's chill while sweating freely during the day. Funny thing is, you get used to it. Like a beast, you adapt. A feral knows this — or learns it quickly. An animal doesn't bitch about humidity. He simply finds a spot of shade and deals with it.

In harsh weather, animals hide. A handful hunt or move about, but for the most part, beasts find a comfortable place and nest there until the storm passes. Any place can provide shelter for an animal: a hollow tree, rock outcrop-

ping or tangled thicket offers as much protection as one could want. A few beasts construct their own homes, but most make do with what they find. Packed down by paws or spun with silken webs, a hole in the ground makes a warm, secure place to sleep.

Security is vital for an animal. Without walls, their senses must serve. A wild animal is always wary, his ears taking in each sound. Yet despite this alertness, wild animals don't *stress*. They process impressions, filter out the ones that seem harmless and remain ready to run if necessary.

A feral human being learns to live with weather. He's alert without being wired, and moves with little sound. He knows how to find shelter and when to keep moving. In game terms, he understands Survival — in fact, he lives by it. As a player, you should buy at least one dot in this Skill if your character has spent any time at all in his habitat. Beasts know how to survive. Your werebeast should, as well.

Lost and Found

There are no streets signs in the wilderness. One tree looks pretty much like all the others, even when you can tell trees apart. The abstract comfort of maps means nothing when you're running free. A feral can wake up after a ramble and find herself hopelessly lost. What then?

In game terms, a lost character needs either Survival, Athletics with a Specialty in hiking or camping or a working knowledge of her area in order to puzzle out her location. (If she can see the sun or stars, she can navigate by them — assuming she even *knows* how to find north by looking at the sky. A little Science would helpful there. . . .) If she has a Survival Specialty with tracking, she might try to retrace her own steps. This, however, is hard to do in a living environment — the tracks keep getting brushed away. If she has an Aspect or Merit such as Direction Sense or Mindmap, that helps immeasurably. Combined with Intelligence + Feral Heart + the relevant Skill, these traits provide the dice pool for your character. With them, she might find her way home, or at least locate some familiar location. Without them? Well . . .

Pathfinding is an extended action. The necessary successes depend on the distance involved and the density of the wilderness. If she lacks the proper Skills, your character *could* wander aimlessly, looking for roads or houses. Again, though, the wilderness is vast and people are small. If you don't know where you are, it's easy to walk in circles. And that — especially if you're naked and alone — can be deadly.

(Note: For details about the effects of weather, exposure, starvation and other hazards, see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, pp. 175–181.)

The Urban Wilderness

Not all "wilderness" lies beyond the cities. In every human settlement, there are niches and basements, tunnels and secrets. The abandoned house falling to ruin, the ratty crackhouse or bankrupt theatre, the construction project that never got finished and, of course, the sewers running beneath almost every human neighborhood — these places, and more, form an urban wilderness of amazing proportions.

For animals, this wilderness is even greater: Bats nestle in church towers. Cats sleep under porches. Hares burrow in a garden where no non-animal can see them. There are trees and trash piles, the shade of cars and the skies above them. The most urban environments are still crawling with animals. They're *smaller* for the most part, but very much *there*.

The urban wilderness is filled with food, too. Trashcans, roadkill, small beasts and fast-food containers provide plenty of sustenance for animals. A cute or pathetic beast can find people to take care of him, and restaurants have trash to spare. The food's not often healthy, but it's edible. For werebeasts of a bloodier bent, there are plenty of people who *probably* won't be missed. So long as a feral eludes Animal Control, he'll have no problem staying fed. In game terms, a successful Intelligence + Streetwise roll can help score food or shelter, although a variety of Aspects (especially *Aww!!!*) can help that search as well.

The real challenge of an urban environment is sensory overload. The constant noise and light, reeking trash and vile fumes — it's enough to literally drive a werebeast crazy. A really wild event (say Mardi Gras) might force a feral's player to roll his Wits + Composure, with Feral Heart *subtracting from* the dice pool. Success means the feral is annoyed but steady; failure indicates sensory overload . . . and possibly even a Berserk.

In an urban setting, the human form has the advantage. That environment's made for people, after all. But don't forget the possibilities when your character hits beast form. Animals excel at finding places to hide and eat, even in the middle of a city.

The Delusion

Man, however, excels at deluding himself. Confronted with something beyond his world-view, he adjusts the mental picture until it seems to make sense. With a little help from Mother Nature, the Changing Folk enjoy a certain degree of protection from this Delusion. Similar to camouflaged chameleons, the Changing Folk can hide to some degree in plain sight.

A combination of mental gymnastics, mystical obfuscation and an instinctual fear of shapechanging creatures, the Delusion works on humans and their observatory technology. The Delusion does *not* work against night-folk or their acolytes, whose eyes have been opened to a wider reality. Regular animals can sense werecreatures for what they are, and often react to these "dominant beasts" with submission or alarm. On various observers, the Delusion can have different effects at once. Thus, a man could hear his dog barking at the werecat in his yard, grab his video camera and film her changing shape. Fido will know what's going on, but the video winds up blurry, and after a few stiff drinks, the shaken man convinces himself that his neighbor has some weird fetish going on.





The Delusion kicks in when a feral assumes a hybrid or War-Beast form, or shifts from one shape to the other in front of human witnesses. (Her Primal form simply looks like an unusually large animal.) The Delusion affects everyone who can see the creature, and may affect certain people differently.

A human who sees a feral change shape or assume an "impossible" or horrifying form must have a successful Resolve + Composure made for him, with a penalty equal to the shapeshifter's Feral Heart score. Certain beasts reduce that dice pool even further (see the Unspeakable Aspect), and a sudden appearance by the War-Beast reduces the dice pool by two dice more. So if the man next door watches his werecat neighbor with a Feral Heart of 3, his player rolls Resolve + Composure – 3. If he sees her assume War-Beast form, his penalty is –5 instead.

The usual reactions to the Delusion are the following:

• **Dramatic Failure:** (*incoherent screaming)* The witness has a breakdown or flees in abject terror. At the moment of encounter, he cowers and weeps, goes catatonic or runs as fast as his legs will carry him. Any action that character takes suffers a –5 penalty from sheer fright. Afterward, he'll refuse to believe what he saw, forget he saw it or obsess over what he knows he witnessed but can't bear to accept. For at least a week, that character suffers a derangement related to that terrifying encounter.

• **Failure:** *No . . .* NO*, stay back!* Confronted by a nightmare, the witness flees like a gazelle before a lion. Although that terror isn't as debilitating as a total breakdown, the terror inflicts a –3 penalty on a bystander's actions as long as the panic lasts. Later, a witness sorts her impressions out by the most "rational" explanation she can come up with. Her memories remain hazy and troubling — if she remembers the event at all.

• **Success:** *That* can't *be what I think it is . . .* With above-average composure, a witness struggles in the face of nameless dread. His rational mind rejects the uncanny nature of the werebeast in his midst, or the ancestral memory of his people tells him to flee its presence. Although he'll avoid blind panic, the witness trembles at the edge of madness like the hero of an H.P. Lovecraft tale. The witness's actions suffer a –2 penalty, and his recollections of the event fade with time and rationalization.

• **Exceptional Success:** *You've* got *to be kidding. . . .* The steadfast Iron Man of the modern world can face a werebeast head-on, understand what he sees and act without penalty. This doesn't mean he's *calm* about things, but he grasps the situation and later recalls the event with perfect clarity. Whether or not anyone else *believes* him is another story. . . .

Facing the Beast

Some folks are less shaken by the Delusion, while others are more frightened by what they refuse to see. Folks who *believe in* werecreatures, for example, may still be terrified by the idea of a werebear in the local forest, but they're more likely to see it for what it is.

As a general rule, children, deeply religious people or folks from cultures or subcultures that accept the existence of feral shapechangers subtract one die from the Feral Heart penalty. (For example, a character who would normally subtract four dice for a Feral Heart 4 creature subtracts three instead.) Such cultures include urban tribes such as neo-pagans, therians and occultists, whose worldview is more . . . *accommodating* of people who turn into beasts. Folks from such cultures will probably be *frightened* by what they see, but are less likely to deny or forget the truth.

On the other hand, exceedingly *rational* people who consider the material world to be an open-and-shut case (scientists, academics, hard-core atheists) suffer a "Scully effect"; they don't see it, won't believe it and rationalize it when it's right in front of them. These folks are thus far more susceptible to the Delusion, and subtract one die *more* from their dice pools (the Feral Heart 4 beast makes a rationalist subtract *five* dice instead of four).

Supernatural creatures and their kin remain utterly unaffected by the Delusion. A mage's acolyte may be terrified by the wereserpent in her room, but she can face that fear rationally. Her camera has no suck luck; no matter who's taking the picture, a technological device still records a disturbingly unclear impression.

Primal Fear

Certain beasts, such as weretigers, are fearsome or bizarre enough to shatter *anyone's* composure. The Aspect trait Unspeakable inflicts a penalty on rolls made to resist the effects of the Delusion, traumatizing almost everyone who witnesses the beast, excluding characters who remain immune to its effects.

Other ferals, meanwhile, can assume five forms rather than the usual three. (See sidebar, **p. 110-111**.) For them, the Delusion *works*, but not as powerfully. A character viewing the Throwback form gets his full Resolve + Composure dice pool, while a witness to the Dire Beast form gets that dice pool +2 (unless the Dire Form is hideous) and probably resists the Delusion's effects. This accounts for the tales of monstrously deformed people and animals prowling the night . . . or at least accounts for *some* of them, anyway. . . .

Regeneration

Nature takes care of her own. Although death is an inevitable part of her cycle, her Changing Gift combines the strengths of human, animal and spiritual resilience into a potent healing legacy.

In story terms, a werebeast heals *very* quickly. A hunter might think he's taken down his prey with a few gunshots only to find the beast rising to its feet, healthy as ever and madder than hell. Although animals shy away from pain, a feral soon becomes aware of just how potent her healing powers have become . . . which, in turn, dares her to challenge the world even more than she once did.

Healing Fast



Although most ferals lack the staggering regenerative gift of their Uratha kin (for those who share that level of healing, see the Warrior's Restoration Aspect), they still heal at an amazing rate.

• All feral shapechangers regenerate one point of bashing damage *every other turn*. (Ferals with Warrior's Restoration heal at one point *per turn*.) This healing occurs whether or not the beast is resting, fighting or running. This healing is a reflexive action, and works in any form.

• Werebeasts heal one point of lethal damage every half-hour, reflexively. (A character with Warrior's Restoration heals one point every 15 minutes.)

• By spending a point of Essence, a player can heal one point of lethal damage *immediately*. Again, this is a reflexive action, and can be done even when the character is unconscious or dying. A character with a Feral Heart rating of 4 or higher can have several points of lethal injury healed at once, since her player can spend several points of Essence to do so.

• Lethal and bashing damage cannot be healed within the same turn. The lethal damage regenerates first, followed by the bashing damage when the lethal damage is all healed.

• A shapechanger cannot regenerate aggravated damage unless he has the Durga's Blessing Aspect or some other magical aid. Aggravated damage heals at the same rate for ferals as for normal human beings

• A feral who's knocked unconscious or killed immediately reverts to human form. A severed limb likewise returns to its original human shape, hence the tale of the man who chops off a cat's paw and finds his mother's hand on the ground.

• If the character has the Quick Healer Merit, she heals as one with the Warrior's Restoration Aspect. If she has *both* traits, she heals even faster — see the listing for Warrior's Restoration, under Aspects.

In all forms, ferals remain immune to conventional infections, diseases and internal parasites. Although certain werebeasts may act rabid, they're not sick in the usual way. Certain magical or spiritual illnesses can affect a werebeast, but normal sickness does not.

Although these healing powers don't manifest until the First Change, werebeasts tend to remain unusually healthy all their lives. Once Nature's gift *does* manifest, though, few normal things can harm them. Consequently, many ferals avoid long-term human contact. When nothing *ever* seems to make a person sick or hurt her badly, doesn't that seem a little . . . *suspicious* . . . ?

Moonbane: The Silver Curse

One thing, though, seems to harm *all* changing breeds: *silver*. Why this is, remains a mystery. Did Nature want to give her human cubs an edge against beast-folk? Or was there some grave sin committed by the First Beasts against the First Men? Legends speak of Father Wolf, the progenitor of werewolves who brought down the fury of the Moon upon his kin. Did that sin include other werefolk, too? Or is the whole thing a product of Coyote and his endless screwing with the world? For whatever reason, the mere touch of silver makes ferals itch.

Even before the First Change, a beast-blood would find silver jewelry distracting. A minor rash or other allergic reaction may have troubled her from childhood. With the Change, however, that allergy grows more severe. A full-fledged werebeast feels her skin tingle at the touch of "Moonbane," no matter which shape she might be wearing at the time. In game terms, this tingling doesn't inflict *damage*, just discomfort. A minor rash or itching might betray the curse. A smart feral can recognize silver's presence from the prickle on her skin. This reaction may offer clues when someone's out to hurt her.

A weapon made of silver is another thing entirely. Crafted into blades or bullets, silver inflicts aggravated damage on feral characters. This silver must be *pure*, however — electroplating or silver nitrate might sting a bit but won't have the same effect. The silver doesn't add extra damage to an attack, but the effects take forever to heal. In story terms, a silver wound keeps bleeding, stings badly and will not close for days.

Silver weapons are expensive, hard to craft and easy to destroy. A weapon of more-or-less pure silver suffers a –1 penalty on its damage rating. A knife, for example, forged from silver would add nothing to an attacker's roll. The knife would, however, inflict aggravated cutting damage, and that's literally a very nasty edge.

The Berserk

Self-preservation ranks high on a beast's priorities. When faced with a threat that can't be pacified, most animals fight or flee. This instinct runs strong in ferals, too. Although the human mind exerts a certain amount of self-control, when the dung gets deep a shapechanger may go Berserk. Shifting into a suitable form, he runs off full-tilt or tears into everything in sight.

Named for the "bear-armored" warriors of Nordic myth, the Berserk state takes two forms:

The Rabbit Run

Most beasts would rather run than fight. That's especially true for herbivorous creatures, small animals, or beasts with large bodies but skittish temperaments. Confronted with a serious threat, this survival instinct kicks in. The feral shifts to his Primal Beast form and bolts off as fast as he can. Anything in his way will be bitten, trampled or bowled over until it's no longer an obstacle. If that obstacle will not move and the beast sees no way to escape, the run becomes . . .

The Tiger Storm

Lashing out full-strength, the beast shreds everything in sight. Until no one's left standing, the feral whips from target to target. Friend, foe, innocent — everything's an obstruction to his ultimate escape. Inanimate objects are likewise trashed; in the wake of a tiger storm, anything that *can* be damaged, *will* be damaged.

If things get *really* bad, the feral shifts to War-Beast form. Embodying the most fatal qualities of Man and Beast, this creature lays waste to anyone who dares its presence. Soothing magic aside, this manifestation is beyond reason. Until his fury runs its course, nothing but blood will satisfy him.

A werebeast in a tiger storm is not subject to wound penalties. He fights at full power, even when injured. If he's close to death, though, he runs away. In game terms, that character fights until he suffers a wound in one of his last three Health boxes. At that point, self-preservation kicks in; he shifts into his most expedient form (which might be Man-Guise) and escapes by any means available.

Resisting the Urge

A character goes Berserk when she's threatened, confused or infuriated past her ability to cope. This threat isn't always physical, though: emotional trauma, abuse, betrayal and sudden bursts of light, sound or movement might drive her to run or strike. In this state, the character cannot think rationally, use technology, plan strategy, employ magic or speak in anything other than incoherent screams. Her human mind shuts down. Only a scared beast remains.

To resist Berserking, the player rolls her shapechanger's Resolve + Composure. Certain Aspects (Hare Heart and Tiger Heart) subtract from or add to that dice pool. Failure means that character either runs or frenzies, although you can spend a point of Willpower to resist the urge and remain calm.

A feral's chance to go Berserk depends on her Harmony and the threat she perceives:

Harmony	Threat
9–10	Loved one slain, tortured or betrayed; betrayal by loved or trusted kin
7–8	Unstoppable threat; betrayal by trusted friend
5–6	Sudden or terrifying threat; serious injury; cruelty toward animals or Nature
3–4	Dangerous threat; painful injury; humiliation; carelessly toward beasts or Nature; loud, chaotic surroundings
1–2	Taunts or insults; perceived disrespect; startling movement, loud sounds or bright lights

The Storyteller ought to decide whether or not a roll is necessary. If you're checking for a Berserk fit every time a truck backfires, the tale gets bogged down in endless chaos.

Changing Form

When the character goes Berserk, she immediately shifts into her Primal form, assuming she's not already in it at the time. This change is reflexive, and although it costs one point of Essence, the change happens in a single turn. If the character is out of Essence, the change happens anyway, but the character takes one point of bashing damage instead.

If the player wants to go for broke, the werebeast assumes War-Beast shape and instantly flies into a tiger storm. This costs one point of Essence, and is likewise instantaneous. The character can hold this form for twice the usual duration — that is, his human Stamina + Feral Heart x 2 turns — or until the end of the fight. For example, a Balam goes Berserk. His human Stamina and Feral Heart are both 3; therefore, he can stay in War-Beast for 12 turns or until the end of the fight, whichever comes first. If he falls out of War-Beast before the fight ends, he reverts to human shape, passes out and very likely dies.

Flee or Fight?

Some animals are more disposed to run than others. Generally, herbivorous creatures would sooner flee, while meat-eaters feel more willing to fight. That urge depends on the threat in question, though; even a tiger runs when a tsunami's bearing down.

Certain accords are more likely to run; the Sun-Chaser and Root-Weaver like their skins intact and avoid tiger storms instinctively. Others, though, would rather fight — the Heart-Ripper, obviously, but also the Den-Warder, who goes down bloody rather than abandon her protectorate. The Wind-Dancer can turn either way. As always, he remains unpredictable to everyone but himself.

For most ferals, the rabbit run is the default instinct. If the player wants to make a stand, though, she can decide to ride the urge into a tiger storm instead. This is a dangerous choice — not only will the werebeast attack everyone in sight, she also risks serious injury or death. Again, the tiger storm is *irrational*. No weapon, tactic or martial art can be used beyond fang and claw.

End of the Frenzy

The Berserk fit lasts until one of five things happen:

- The beast escapes and runs free for at least five minutes.
- All threats are dead or gone.
- Some other party uses calming magic, knocks the feral unconscious or restrains him past escaping (at which point he'll frenzy until he passes out).
- The feral runs out of energy, reverts to human form and falls into unconsciousness.
- The feral dies.

Although a Willpower point can be spent to resist the effects of a Berserk fit, the instinct to survive is strong. Should the roll result in a dramatic failure, the werebeast goes rabbit-running regardless of his breed, accord or inclinations.

The Fury

Man is careless, and beasts are direct. When a person pisses off an animal, he's liable to get pissed *on* in response. Welcome to the Fury, an innate indignation at the carelessness of Man. Unlike the Berserk state, this Fury isn't mindless rage — it's a deliberate urge for revenge. The feral wants to settle the score, and does so in ways that a person would find "irrational."

Unleashing the Fury

Animals aren't shy. When they send a message, they use direct methods: biting, scratching, spraying musk or defecating where someone will see it. Humans find such behavior revolting. Beast-folk understand both sides. When annoyed, they use an animal's instinctive behavior to offend human sensibilities in return.

The Fury's response is as immediate as the feral can make it. That response might demand cunning, but it comes from the gut, not the head. Most often, the "message" arrives without words, threat or context. The feral simply responds as an animal might . . . if that animal could rake paint from a brand-new Lexus.

The response often depends on the offense:

Minor Offenses: Arrogant or careless behavior; tossing cigarette; reckless driving; dumping trash in wilderness; teasing helpless animal

Minor Responses: Sudden snap or snarl; leaving claw marks, scat or urine; "liberating" pets; loud cries in middle of the night

Significant Offenses: Deliberate insult; starting small fire; hitting animals with car; dumping dangerous trash (broken glass, sharp metal, nail-studded junk, rotting biomass); abusing helpless animal

Significant Responses: "Returning" trash to "owner"; inflicting major property damage with claws or bodily waste; chasing offender in beast form

Intolerable Offenses: Slaughter-hunt; burning woodlands; deliberate attacks with car; toxic waste spill; animal cruelty or blood sport

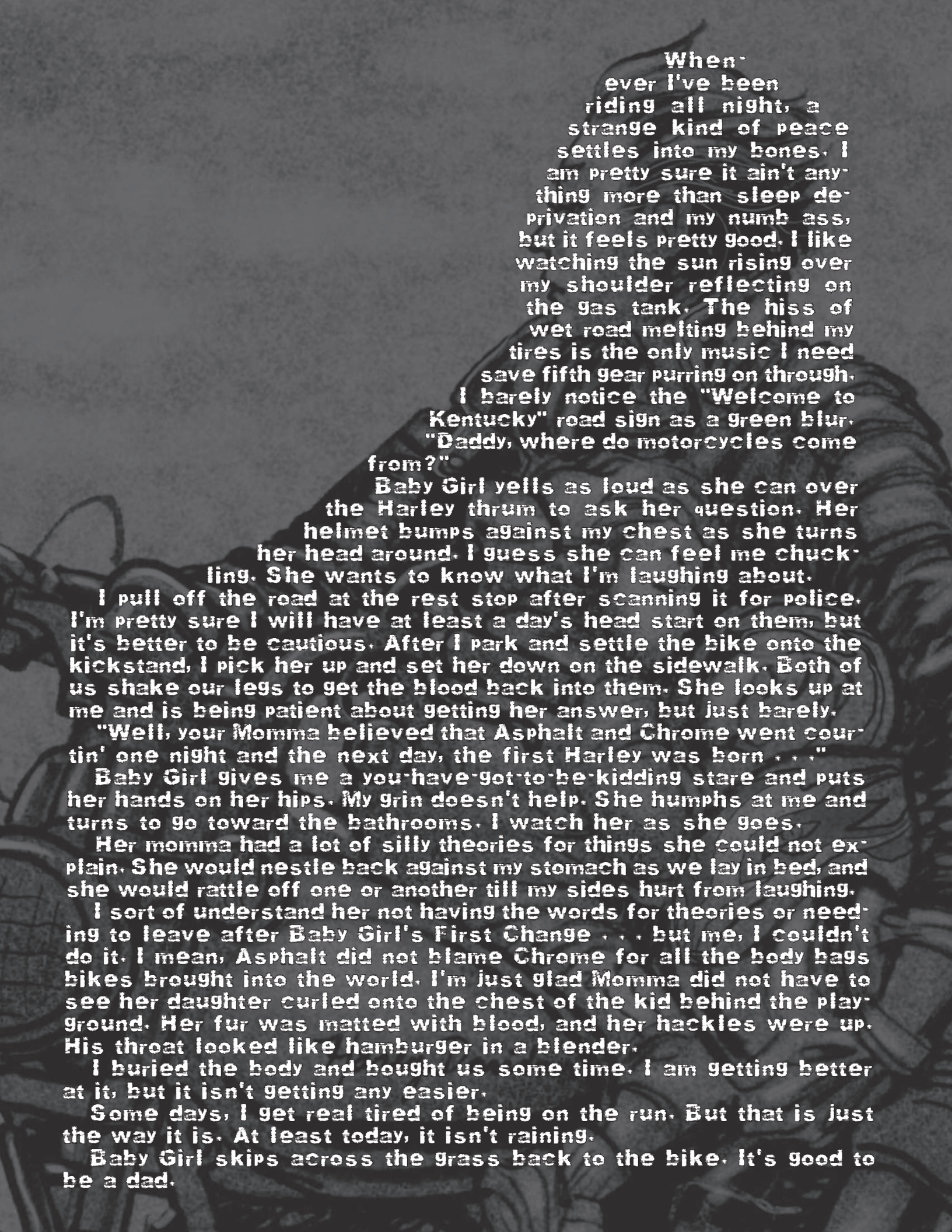
Severe Responses: Mauling offender in beast form; extensive fouling of property; long-term "beast-siege" on offender's home; chasing offender into hazards; wounding or killing offender's loved one(s)

Resisting the Urge

As most werefolk know, the Fury can make things worse than they already were. To resist the urge to "go feral" on a person, roll Resolve + Composure, then *subtract* the character's Feral Heart dots. Minor offenses add one die to the pool. Significant offenses leave it as is; intolerable offenses subtract one die from the pool. Even if the shapechanger restrains herself from acting out with the Fury, of course, she can still take revenge later on. This time, though, she might be more . . . *rational* about it — if no less justified.




Harley-Davidson



Whenever I've been riding all night, a strange kind of peace settles into my bones. I am pretty sure it ain't anything more than sleep deprivation and my numb ass, but it feels pretty good. I like watching the sun rising over my shoulder reflecting on the gas tank. The hiss of wet road melting behind my tires is the only music I need save fifth gear purring on through. I barely notice the "Welcome to Kentucky" road sign as a green blur.

"Daddy, where do motorcycles come from?"

Baby Girl yells as loud as she can over the Harley thrum to ask her question. Her helmet bumps against my chest as she turns her head around. I guess she can feel me chuckling. She wants to know what I'm laughing about.

I pull off the road at the rest stop after scanning it for police. I'm pretty sure I will have at least a day's head start on them, but it's better to be cautious. After I park and settle the bike onto the kickstand, I pick her up and set her down on the sidewalk. Both of us shake our legs to get the blood back into them. She looks up at me and is being patient about getting her answer, but just barely.

"Well, your Momma believed that Asphalt and Chrome went courtin' one night and the next day, the first Harley was born . . ."

Baby Girl gives me a you-have-got-to-be-kidding stare and puts her hands on her hips. My grin doesn't help. She humphs at me and turns to go toward the bathrooms. I watch her as she goes.

Her momma had a lot of silly theories for things she could not explain. She would nestle back against my stomach as we lay in bed, and she would rattle off one or another till my sides hurt from laughing.

I sort of understand her not having the words for theories or needing to leave after Baby Girl's First Change . . . but me, I couldn't do it. I mean, Asphalt did not blame Chrome for all the body bags bikes brought into the world. I'm just glad Momma did not have to see her daughter curled onto the chest of the kid behind the playground. Her fur was matted with blood, and her hackles were up. His throat looked like hamburger in a blender.

I buried the body and bought us some time. I am getting better at it, but it isn't getting any easier.

Some days, I get real tired of being on the run. But that is just the way it is. At least today, it isn't raining.

Baby Girl skips across the grass back to the bike. It's good to be a dad.



Chapter Three: The Breeds Beneath Our Skins

**They do not sweat and whine about their condition,
They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins,
They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God,
Not one is dissatisfied, not one is demented with the mania of owning things,
Not one kneels to another, nor to his kind that lived thousands of years ago.
– Walt Whitman**

A werebeast is just that: a *beast*. Not a New Age totem spirit exemplar for humanity, but an implacable incarnation of wild Nature. He may be kindly or cruel, loyal, insightful, or none of those things at all. What he *is*, beyond species or inclination, is a complex blend of intellect and instinct. In the end, he's an animal wrapped in human skin, with all the sophisticated savagery that implies.

The following chapter contains dozens of werecreatures, ranging from virtually extinct Azubuike to common Corvians. Given this array, you might expect the world to be teeming with werecreatures. That's not the case; feral folk are *rare*. Some breeds number in the thousands worldwide, but others number a few dozen or even less. Even the most common, though, are hard to come by. In a world containing billions of people, animals and square miles of potential territory, a few thousand shapechangers can easily get lost and stay that way. Even so, the hidden world has a distorted sense of probability. One person could live lifetimes without ever encountering a single werebeast, while another could meet a dozen of them in one night. What this means, essentially, is that werebeasts are as rare or as frequent as your Storyteller wants to make them.

A Storyteller's Prerogative

If you happen to be the Storyteller for your troupe, keep this in mind: *the World of Darkness is yours to determine*. The following breeds may be "official," but they're not required. You don't have to use all, or even *one*, of them in your chronicle. If you love the Corvians, they could become a fixture in your world; if not, feel free to ignore them.

This goes double for potential player character breeds. You are under no obligation to let players run any feral species. Some of the following breeds are incredibly rare, absurdly powerful or potentially ridiculous in the wrong hands. If you as the Storyteller feel that a breed would ruin your world, then leave that breed out of it entirely or restrict it to non-player status. Ultimately, you are the finial arbiter of what your players can and cannot play. If you don't want were-elephants in your chronicle, don't allow players to have them. Leave the Land Titans as vague rumors or thundering shadows, and keep your sense of mystery intact.

What Is a Breed?

The Changing Gift moves in mysterious ways. It makes a white girl from Idaho into the blackest of panthers, or spins a Beijing businesswoman into an arachnid terror. At times, the Changing Gift appears to favor genetic patterns, yet suddenly hops bloodlines to manifest in unlikely places. A clan can nurture the Gift among its generations, but Nature has the final say about when, how or to whom the Gift manifests. So what does the term "breed" mean, anyway?

The changing breeds are not actually breeds in the usual sense of that word. Although many of the shapechanging species called "breeds" are biologically related, many others are not. Instead, they're groupings of convenience based on similar features or behavior patterns. These groupings are more symbolic than scientific, and reflect a combination of archetypal

roles and distinguishing characteristics. Compared to the recent hubris of scientific classification, these rough categories go back ages. The fables of Arabian tale-weavers or Germanic crones would sooner place a bat in the company of birds than mice, based on his wings and proximity to heaven — even if the bat himself flew out of Hell!

And yet, each breed contains dozens of sub-breeds, often called *species* ("form," from *specere*, "to look or regard"). Sometimes, these sub-categories are often called breeds as well: a Corvian, for example, could be thought of as a breed within the larger breed of the Wing-Folk. In the uncertain realm of the World of Darkness, these species overlap, fade into one another, claim contradictory legacies or simply refuse to acknowledge one another's existence. It's often hard to tell where one species or breed ends and another begins. Some species share tight fellowships and elaborate legendry, while others hardly realize that others of their kind exist. Lacking a common authority or society, werecreatures define themselves as they please. A weretiger born in Brooklyn may have no idea the Rajanya exist at all . . . and she may not care if they do.

So what does this mean for your chronicle? Just this: the rare but diverse changing breeds boast hundreds of creation myths, bloodlines, godly claims and cultural affiliations. Those could mean everything, or they could mean nothing. If fractious humans have such a hard time defining their own creation myths, cultures and supreme powers, why should singular and often solitary creatures scattered all over the world be more cohesive? Use the backgrounds that appeal to you and leave the rest in doubt. After all, that which is unknown is far more threatening than that which is clearly defined. And a shapeshifting man-beast is nothing if not *threatening*.

Which brings up a vital point: Ferals should be both *mysterious* and *scary*. It might seem cool to change into a panther, but panthers eat small things (including children), bristle at sudden sounds and regard the human world with confused apprehension. Likewise, a person who turns into that panther is more than a little creepy. Would you *really* want a 200-pound wildcat in your living room? Would you want it *mad* at you? As you browse the following entries, think of them as enigmatic and often hostile creatures. The fact that they may resonate with something inside of *you* just serves to make them more intriguing. If and when you work them into your chronicle, either as player characters or occasional strangers, keep that sense of wild mystery alive.

The Breed Entries

The following entries offer an array of feral species. A few reside in their lands of origin, but most range across the globe. These creatures are not the only beast-folk in the World of Darkness — in fact, they're not even the only ones of their type. Each feral shapechanger is a little bit different, and the lines between "breeds" are hazy at best.

Each breed entry has the following elements:

Behold the Beast: An overview of the breed's most common elements.

Breed Traits: General characteristics of the breed.

Habitats: The places where creatures of this breed often live or originate.

Predators and Prey: A look at the group's predation dynamic.

Spirit-Ties: The overall connection of this type with the spirit world.

Kin: The breed's closest companions and their usual relationships with same.

Society: How these werefolk act when and if they congregate.

Alphas: How they assert (or *don't* assert) dominance in groups.

Character Creation: The essential traits involved when using them as characters.

Accords: How the various accords come through in ferals of this breed.

Stereotypes: Snarky impressions of other creatures.

Species: A range of breeds-within-the-breed, including their general temperament, breed Favors, affiliated Aspects, adjustments for their various beast-forms and other notes or bonuses regarding creatures of this kind.

Other Species: Brief glimpses of other breeds within this family. Again, these are *not* the only breeds of this type in existence. Just as people constantly discover new animal species, so do characters in the World of Darkness run across previously unknown species of supernatural beasts. There could be a dozen kinds of werefox in addition to the Reynardi. There simply isn't room to expand upon them all — and besides, foxes are *experts* at hiding their affairs.

Creating New Breeds and Species

Our world is home to several *million* land-animal species, to say nothing of insects, birds and fish. And wherever you go, there's folklore linking one of those species to human shapechangers. Since a book dealing with even a fraction of those numbers would be impossibly huge, we suggest that troupes that wish to integrate shapechangers from other species use the following guidelines to create their own feral breeds:

• **The Storyteller creates the breeds:** Because the Storyteller is responsible for the balance and direction of his chronicle, we advise (rather firmly) that *only* the

Tiny (Mouse, Frog, Sparrow, Lizard)

Physical Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 1–3, Stamina 1
Speed Factor: 1–2
Size: 1
Health: 2
Attacks: Inflict no damage, except perhaps venom.

Small (Cat, Crow, Snake, Iguana)

Physical Attributes: Strength 1–2, Dexterity 2–3, Stamina 1–2
Speed Factor: 2–7
Size: 2–3
Health: 3–5
Attacks: Inflict Strength as lethal damage.

Medium (Wolf, Cobra, Vulture, Monkey, Eagle)

Physical Attributes: Strength 2–4, Dexterity 2–5, Stamina 2–4
Speed Factor: 5–9
Size: 4
Health: 6–8
Attacks: Inflicts Strength to Strength +1 (L), depending on species.

Man-Sized (Cougar, Ape, Condor, Deer)

Physical Attributes: Strength 3–6, Dexterity 3–6, Stamina 3–6
Speed Factor: 5–10
Size: 5–6
Health: 8–12
Attacks: Inflicts Strength +1 to Strength +2 (L), depending on species.

Large (Horse, Bear, Dolphin, Komodo Dragon)

Physical Attributes: Strength 4–6, Dexterity 3–5, Stamina 4–7
Speed Factor: 5–12
Size: 6–8
Health: 10–15
Attacks: Inflicts Strength +1 to Strength +3 (L); may kick or trample for Strength +3 (B)

Heavy (Cattle, Moose, Bull Seal)

Physical Attributes: Strength 4–8, Dexterity 2–4, Stamina 5–8
Speed Factor: 5–10
Size: 9–13
Health: 14–21
Attacks: Inflicts Strength +1 to Strength +3 (L); may kick or trample for Strength +3 (B)

Huge Animal (Elephant, Hippopotamus, Sea Lion, Orca)

Physical Attributes: Strength 7–10, Dexterity 2–4, Stamina 7–10
Speed Factor: 4–6
Size: 11–15
Health: 18–25
Attacks: Inflicts Strength +1 to Strength +2 (L); may trample for Strength +2 (B)

Storyteller be allowed to create new changing breeds. Even then, he should bear the long-term effects of new breeds in mind when he crafts these novel creatures. Given the unpredictable nature of Storytelling games, this week's lark can become next week's headache.

• **Provide a firm foundation for the breed:** What Nature creates, she creates with a purpose. If people are born with a Changing Gift connected to a certain animal, there must be a compelling reason for that affinity. Figure out what that reason might be: the impending extinction of that beast, a visionary quality in the animal's nature, a powerful mythology connected to that totem spirit and so forth. Ask yourself, *Why would Nature take such drastic measures with her established order?* Then answer that question with a powerful mythology of your own invention.

• **Make sure that creature suits a need:** It's been said that God doesn't play at dice with the cosmos. Don't be random with your own. If you add a new changing breed, make sure it fits a pressing need within your setting. In Nature, animals evolve (or are created, depending on your beliefs) to suit an environment, climate or ecological niche. And really — what more radical form of evolution could there be than a breed of creatures that shapeshift between forms depending on their situation? So it should go with other changing breeds. Before playing God/dess with your world, make sure there's a niche for your new species to fill.

• **Stick to "power animals":** The Changing Gift manifests out of a powerful connection between an animal species and humanity. "Power" in this sense doesn't necessarily mean "badass," but it implies a potent synergy with benefits for both species. People become the animals that have significance to them. An animal without deep significance won't be vital enough to rewrite the laws of Nature.

• **Be balanced:** Certain players, of course, would love to play a cloned weretyrannosaur. And of course, such a creature would wreck the balance of your chronicle. Don't go there unless you want your tale to collapse under the weight of its own beasties.

• ***Be serious:*** Really. The Dreaded Weresugar Glider might sound like fun, but there's no quicker way to kill the atmosphere or dramatic tension in your World of Darkness than to throw in silly werebeasts just because you can.

• **Use "official" breeds as guidelines for new ones:** Referring to the templates and rules provided in Chapters Two and Three of this book (and possibly the **Werewolf** supplements **War Against the Pure** and **Skinchangers**), create ferals that fit in well with the established World of Darkness. That said, have fun.

Shall we go hunting, then . . . ?

Bastet

Art with Fatal Grace

You could see the notches on his ears through the barroom haze. The smoke didn't seem to bother him at all. An LED cast lit his pantherish features, its green glow accentuating his mahogany skin. He smiled as Race stretched toward the deejay booth, up on her toes like a curious mouse. "Emile Autumn?!?" she shrilled through the thumping roar. Ghost nodded, still smiling, but said nothing. His eyes held hers like destiny fulfilled. She took the bait, a goner. I knew then where she'd sleep it off tonight.

I shook my head. Another one. Lucky bastard! Ghost didn't have to say a word, and they came to him like catnip. It wasn't just the deejay aura — it was him. I grimaced ruefully, half-amused, half-jealous. I'd lost the Race, so to speak. Time for another beer . . .

Behold the Beast: When Cat embodied herself on earth, so magnificent was she that it took not one godhead to contain her glory, but many. Ra took cat-form to slay the serpent of night; Lilith yowled like a cat in heat. Sekhmet roared with the fury of a lioness, but it was Bast, precious Lady Bastet, who epitomized Cat best. Goddess of the home, marriage and sexuality, she purred with satisfaction and spat with rage. Temples filled with earthly cats were her sanctums, and a city — Per-Bast, called Bubastis — was raised to her earthly name. In its streets, cats and people mingled. Spirits met and blood flowed freely. Perhaps the Changing Gift had been there all along. In Bubastis, though, it became sacrament. The souls of Man and Cat merged as one.

It's been said that there are two kinds of people: dog people and cat people. While this is nonsense, it has a ring of truth. Of all the changing breeds, the most numerous are either felines (the Bastet) or canines (the Uratha included). But while werewolves share a vast community, each werecat is a walking work of art. Individual in her beauty, she strikes out on her own.

And yet there are breeds, colloquially named for the Goddess to whom Egypt bent its knee. In more than a dozen bloodlines, Cat spreads her influence across the world. There are cat-folk who shift into house-sized bundles, and cat-folk who become the greatest predators on earth. Some trace their ancestry to the hot shadows of Bubastis, while others wake up in alleys, reeking of fish and wondering where their whiskers went. Clearly, humanity senses an accord with Cat, and if that presence seems more "feminine" than "masculine," perhaps Man needs to re-evaluate his reflection.

Cat provides graceful counterpart to the loyalty of Dog. Where he curls at his master's feet, she stretches out near his head. Male or female, Cat speaks of sleek independence and spirits only lightly bound in skin. People who become cats seem otherworldly; sensual and fierce, they balance affection with a deeply feral hiss. Often smaller than their canine counterparts, cats and cat-people make up the difference in grace. In any form, they're light on their feet, agile of mind, body and spirit. If they seem too carnal for their own good, it's because each sensation is too precious to waste.

Breed Traits: With very few exceptions, Bastet are lean and lovely. In either sex, they're smooth and elegant. A few "fat cats" betray their heritage, but by and large the cat-folk are strikingly attractive. Their physical agility outweighs sheer strength, but it's the *eyes* that catch your attention. Large and curious, they see all yet give nothing away. One could read affection, mockery or *nothing* in those eyes. Even in human form, they always seem to shine.

Whether the Bastet moves on little cat feet or with the poise of a massive predator, she embodies the fierce beauty of Nature. Her breed-mates roam from Chinese peaks to American gutters. People born into Cat's pride share a common lithe form, regardless of size; similar to their animal kin, werecat bodies have subtle differences but share a common ferocious beauty. A small Klinkerash boasts the same anatomy as a bulky Rajanya — size varies, but the essentials are the same. The housecat and the tiger share the same design, one of the most perfect in all Nature.

Curious and tactile, Bastet are creatures of sensation. They see, hear, taste, smell and feel more deeply than most humans can imagine . . . and Bastet *enjoy* it. This openness to experience often seems rude by human standards; Bastet acquire "reputations" regardless of their morality. Brazen in her physicality, a werecat sizes up anything (or anyone) of interest. Still, she's a capricious soul, and if that object of her attentions or affections bores her, she'll be searching for another one in no time.

Habitats: Just as their feline kin, werecats range across the globe. No land is a stranger to their feet. Certain breeds, such as jaguars or tigers, have ancestral bonds to certain regions. Even then, though, a Bastet wanders when she can.

Feline shapechangers prefer comfortable, pleasant surroundings. A human home might be draped with wallhangings and suffused with incense, or could display the Spartan grace of a single futon and a plain low-slung table. The werecat's "den" should suit the size of the feral form; a small cat won't mind a cluttered apartment, but a jaguar needs room to stretch. Cats excel at making almost anything seem comfy; still, a shapechanger will want someplace to run free in her feline guise. In no form do cats enjoy confinement.

Predators and Prey: Cats are the perfect land-based predators, and cannot survive without at least a bit of meat in their diets. Most werecats prefer *much* more than just "a bit." Although Bastet are among the most refined beast-folk around, predators are predators, and instincts



"Arrogance" sounds like confidence to me!

are instincts. Prey animals (human and otherwise) feel a trembling fascination in a Bastet's presence. Even if they're "on the same side," the beasts still eye one another with blood in their thoughts.

The rift between cats and dogs runs deep. Instincts ripple red between them. Yet just as dogs and kittens can bond in a home, so Bastet and Canidae and even Uratha can share a "pack" of sorts. In any form, there'll be tension and an underlying rivalry. But in their way, each breed is loyal to its loved ones. A feral tiger will fight just a savagely for a close lupine comrade as she will for a feline one.

Spirit-Ties: Earthy yet perceptive, Bastet remain curious about almost everything. As a breed, they lack the deep spiritual connection of their werewolf cousins. Individual werecats, though, can master the spirit ways, pursue beast-magic or ignore both in favor of more carnal pursuits.

Kin: Kinship matters dearly to Bastet. Although promiscuous, they rarely breed true. The Changing Gift may skip generations, even centuries, within a bloodline, and so when a child is born to a werecat parent, that child receives a ferocious guardian. Often, that guardian watches from afar — cats are notorious for hooking up and moving on. Still, a Bastet's child sees shadows on his wall at night and hear deep purring from the corner of a room. He may not meet Dad or Mom till later (feline ferals often leave their children with human kin), but he'll feel their presence even when the cat remains unseen.

Sadly, most big cats are endangered. Man's influence cuts deeply into their territories and prey, and his instinctive fear of predation keeps his finger very tense on the trigger when they're around. The mutual fascination between humanity and cats keeps them nosing around one another's dens, and although many ferals feel protective of their animal kin, they'd rather see the breeds die free than live encaged.

The reverse is true of their smaller cousins. Domestic cats are among the most common animals in Man's acquaintance. This has been a boon to the smaller Bastet species, who are far more numerous than their venerable kin. The Bubasti, Klinkerash, Ceilican and other petite species require much less food and space, and enjoy closer contact with humans as a whole. In the modern age, these werecats are far more adaptable to urban settings than their regal yet imposing breed-mates. A black cat might not have the glamorous power of a panther, but she'll have an easier time finding shelter and meals.

Society: A cat chooses her own company. Unlike her canine cousins, she is not bound by pack or protocol. Most werecats keep a small yet dedicated pride of kin beside them. Real cats and "mere" humans alike, these kin enjoy the feral's trust. Although some werecats (notably Bubasti and Hatara) share company with others of their kind, the majority do not. Bastet can be quite territorial, and have loud and bloody ways of securing their private space.

Cats are infamous for being selfish. To an extent, the stereotype is true. A Bastet often looks to her own needs and comfort above all else. Still, her feelings run deeper than you might expect, and she'll risk everything for a person or cause that suits her.

Alphas: Notoriously independent, Bastet listen to whomever they please — which often means "no one." The regal presence of a cat inspires devotion or fear in other creatures, and many felines enjoy that allure.

In groups, feline shapechangers resist all attempts at authority, except those coming from other Bastet. Between one another, werecats have sharp ways of working things out; loud, unnerving cries and a few quick swats usually settle dominance issues . . . for the moment, at least. Social "caterwauling" is common, too, especially in human guise. Most cats take verbal swipes at rivals whenever the opportunity appears.

Character Creation: As a breed, werecats are agile and attractive. The Striking Looks and Fast Reflexes Merits are almost essential. Social and Physical Attributes usually dominate — cats are smart but often impulsive. Meanwhile, the wide range of feline interests can manifest in any Skill set. Most feline ferals have a dot or two in Athletics, Survival and Investigation, but as always, each cat is her own master.

Concepts: Witch, martial artist, healer, spy, artist, acrobat, street kid, socialite, model, lobbyist, detective, reporter, dancer, sharp executive, con artist, stranger with beautiful eyes

Stereotypes

Man: "You might be lord of half the world/ You'll not own me as well."

Mages: Such lovely tricks. I wonder how they do it.

Vampires: *purring* Everything that's bad about creation, wrapped up in the prettiest packages. Even the most revolting of them is worth the price of his acquaintance.

Werewolves: If they keep to their side of the rug, I'll keep to mine. If not, someone's gonna bleed.

Accords

Den-Warder: Fierce as she might be, few beasts are as affectionate or nurturing as a mother cat. Even males among the Bastet are family-oriented, and while they've been known to abuse or kill a rival's offspring (a bad thing if the feral gets involved with someone's ex), they're loyal to their own blood. Ferociously protective, these werecats guard loved ones with deep devotion. Knowing that survival depends on stability, these Warders set watch over their kin and territories, challenging (and often eating) anyone who would threaten their existence.

Heart-Ripper: Imagine a cat with a mouse. Now you've got the general idea.

Root-Weaver: Cats are clever, but rarely industrious. Bastet temperament is usually too fleeting to resonate with this accord. Every so often, though, a bright werecat takes a liking to cars or computers, and then dedicates herself to making them work better. Still, she'll pursue that goal with style; vintage cars, pimped-out rides, dirt bikes or classic Harleys suit a werecat's fancy more than a job at Jiffy Lube.

Sun-Dancer: The obvious choice for a budding werecat, this accord lives on its own terms. The rootless state of a feral Dancer suits the young felines like a second skin. In time, though, this chase for the sun grows boring to many Bastet. While many "kittens" begin their feral lives under this accord, most soon forsake it in favor of more dedicated paths.

Wind-Chaser: On many levels, this is a werecat's perfect accord: he can be solitary except when he chooses not to be, visionary on his own terms and aspire to more than simple indulgence. This path calls to many Bastet throughout their lives. Endlessly curious, the average cat loves exploring mysteries. With open eyes and an open road, the Chaser seeks inspiration yet refuses to settle down.

Rajanya

The Ghosts Next Door

To be Rajan is to be blessed by the bloody side of Heaven. Regal as the gods themselves, these beasts embody majesty. Tales claim Tiger's breed sprang up from the blood of Durga as she battled demons at the beginning of time. Other versions have the Rajanya sired by the union of a great hero and his former enemy, a tiger, or spilled from the eyes of Kali as she beheld Shiva's broken bones. No version of their myth shows the Rajanya as anything less than the offspring of gods. It's an attitude they carry even now.

That attitude may be misplaced. Today, big cats struggle to survive. For all his glory, Tiger is a dying breed. His wild children number in mere thousands, and his face adorns toys and cereal boxes, not the shadows of his rightful home. Through strong enough to kill a grizzly bear, he can't shake the shackles placed by Man. As a symbol, Tiger reins supreme, but as an animal, he's dying fast.

That said, weretigers refuse submission. *Rajan* means "ruler," and no authority can make one kneel. Confident to the point of arrogance, a Rajan masters his domain through force of will and personality. He doesn't need claws to get what he wants. People naturally defer to such a beast. They can see the tiger in his gaze. He's used to having his own way and is quite capable of getting it. In Man's world, this tiger still commands dominion. He may be a champion or bully, but never is he a victim.

This breed hails from the Indian subcontinent, lower Asia and the mountains of Tibet. Several other breeds, related but distinct, come from Chinese and Russian wilderness, and a few emerge sometimes from western Europe and North America. Contrary to misconception, there are no wild tigers in Africa. Shapeshifters, however, go places wild beasts cannot, and during the last century, this breed has spread worldwide.

Ironically, the Rajanya grow more numerous just as their animal kin falter. More tigers exist in captivity than are living in the wild. Humanity, it seems, prefers tigers in their *tanks*, not their backyards. A Rajan, however, is the tiger right next door. Just as a tiger, a Rajan hides well. You won't see his true colors unless he wants you to.

As a breed, the Rajanya are loyal, tenacious, imperious and brave. Other breeds are treated with faint contempt by even the best of their kind. To a Rajan, all living things are either protectorates, playthings, distractions or food. This isn't personal — it's just the order of things. In the East, after all, it is the tiger, not the lion, who is truly King of Beasts.

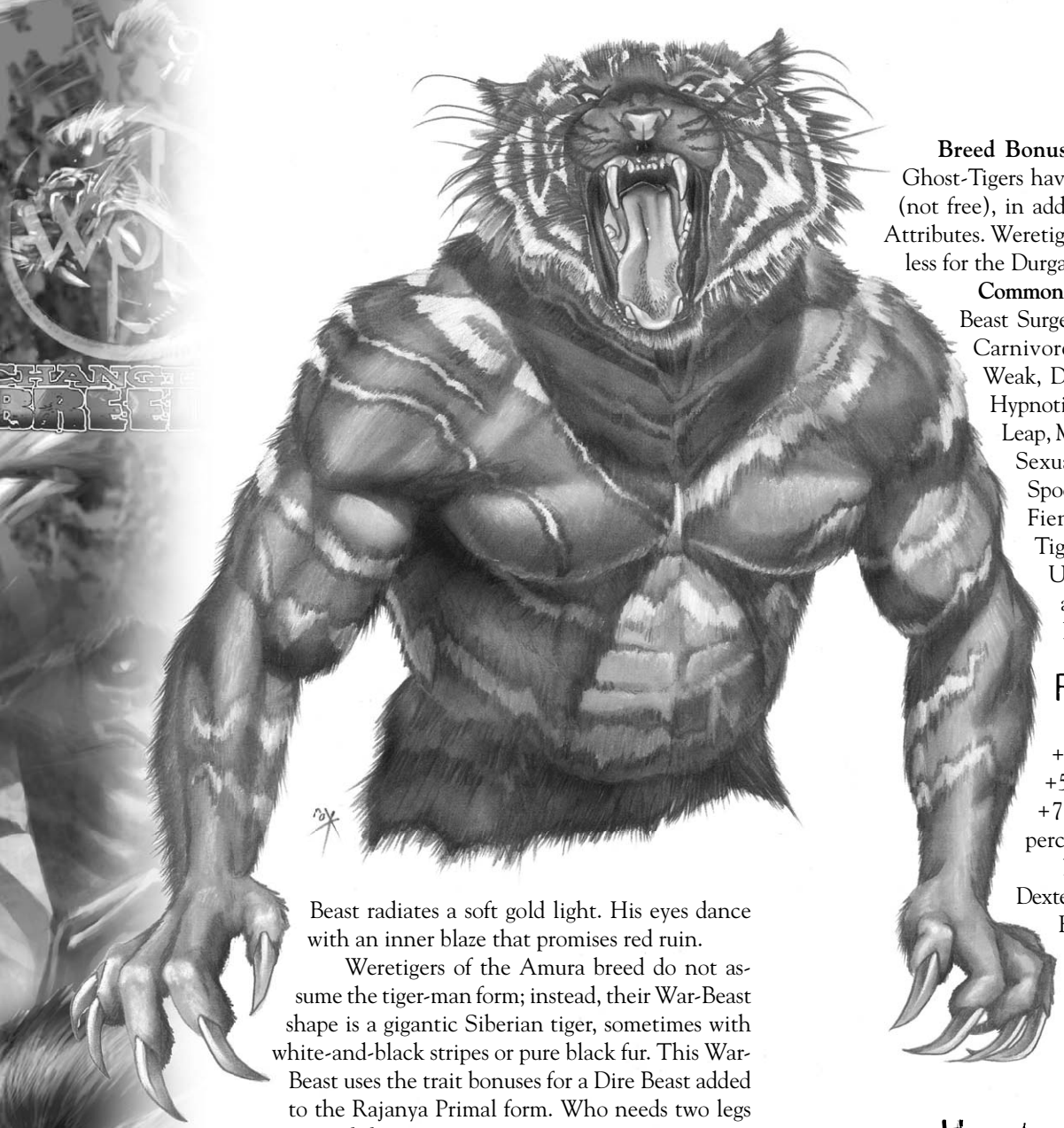
Slow and bulky by cat standards, these Bastet make up for it with strength. Durga's blood is their blessing, and her crusade is still their own. Despite their arrogant and often cruel natures, tiger-bloods have no patience with corruption or deceit. Unhallowed things fall beneath their claws. Stubborn as the Himalayan peaks, this breed refuses to die out. Rajanya defy all obstacles. Opposition is merely inconvenience.

Appearance: The largest and heaviest of the big cats, tigers boast between 400 pounds and 700 pounds of sheer power. Rajanya humans are likewise muscular, with the strong features and broad shoulders of their feline breed. Although most tiger-bloods come from Indian, Chinese or South Asian stock, a handful of Russian, English and American tiger-bloods exist as well. These sub-breeds go by the names Amura, Hu and Khan, although their characteristics mirror the Rajanya temperament.

In Primal form, tiger-bloods range from 500 to 800 pounds in weight and eight to 12 feet in length. Females are markedly smaller than males, but both grow larger than a pureblood tiger. With huge teeth and slashing claws, these cats make bloody ruin of almost anything they dislike. Similar to lions, leopards and jaguars, a tiger can roar to gut-clenching effect.

The Rajanya War-Form may be the most terrifying beast on two legs. Standing almost 10 feet high, this striped monstrosity hefts six-inch claws and nearly 1,000 pounds of muscle. A tiger-man of legendary grace, the Rajan War-





Beast radiates a soft gold light. His eyes dance with an inner blaze that promises red ruin.

Weretigers of the Amura breed do not assume the tiger-man form; instead, their War-Beast shape is a gigantic Siberian tiger, sometimes with white-and-black stripes or pure black fur. This War-Beast uses the trait bonuses for a Dire Beast added to the Rajanya Primal form. Who needs two legs anyway, *tovarishch*?

A very rare Chinese sub-breed, the Fujian Ghost-Tigers, have bluish-white fur and black stripes. Similar to the Amura, these ferals do not assume the tiger-man form, but simply become gigantic tigers when enraged. Ironically, these tiger-bloods are unusually small people in their human guise, though they share the broad shoulders and thick muscles of most Rajanya. Fewer than a dozen Ghost-Tigers exist, but each one is extraordinarily beautiful.

Background: The Tiger's Gift does not follow the laws of Man. Rajanya may be born poor, outcasts in the lands that fear them. Regardless of their station in life, these folk feel blessed. The Tiger's strength bears them through every circumstance. Most tiger-bloods are born in rural villages, where their regal kin survive nearby. A scattering, though, appear in cities where the closest tigers appear on TV. Similar to many ferals on the edge of extinction, the Rajanya seem disproportionate to the numbers of their animal kin. Perhaps these werebeasts are the answer to the dying Tiger's prayers.

Breed Favors: Fang and Claw 2 (L), Keen Senses (all), Size 7

Breed Bonus: All Rajanya and Fujian Ghost-Tigers have the Striking Looks Merit (not free), in addition to excellent Physical Attributes. Weretigers of all breeds pay one dot less for the Durga's Blessing Aspect.

Common Aspects: Alarming Alacrity, Beast Surge, Birth Blessing, Blend In, Carnivore's Puissance, Culling the Weak, Durga's Blessing, Earthbond, Hypnotic Allure, Invisible Marking, Leap, Magnificence, Mother's Fury, Sexual Dimorphism, Spinebite, Spook the Herd, Sweet-Voiced Fiend, Tell (powerful frame), Tiger Heart, Unnerving Cry, Unsettling Eye, Unspeakable, War Heart, Warrior's Restoration

Form Adjustments

War-Beast: Strength +5, Dexterity +2, Stamina +5, Size 8, Health +8, Speed +7 (species factor 5), +2 to perception rolls

Primal Beast: Strength +3, Dexterity +2, Stamina +3, Size +2, Health +5, Speed +8 (species factor 8), +3 to perception rolls

Bubasti

Hungry Ghosts

Endless hunger. That's the lot of these Bastet. Ruthlessly thin and constantly voracious, the werecats named for Bast's home city remain enigmas even to themselves.

In the Nile Kingdom's golden age, the city of Per-Bast played host to hordes of cats. None, however, were as venerated as the huge yet graceful Kyphur. Bred, perhaps, from some prehistoric stock, these magnificent felines accompanied the highest priests and priestesses. The Bubasti claim their lineage from these cats and the people they adored. Love, after all, is one of Bast's dominions, as is fertility. On pleasure-barges or in lush gardens, Bast's chosen paid her tribute. When the Persians sacked the city, though, the magnificence of Per-Bast was lost. Worst of all, the Kyphur cats were slaughtered. For those affronts, and the sacrilege incurred when the Persians tied cats to their shields, Bast withdrew her favor and cursed the city. Its chosen — those who were left — were cursed as well with endless hunger. Whether that curse came from Lady Bast, from the Persians or through some inner guilt remains unknown . . . but to this day, the curse lingers in all descendants of that breed.

For 5,000 years, the descendants of this breed have kept that ancient hate alive. Perhaps they could move forward if it weren't for the hollow-bellied curse they share. However, they are no longer bound to the land of Bast; children who have never known the kiss of Egypt cry restless in their cribs, starving from infancy from a birthright they cannot understand. So when the Gift of Bast descends and a hungry boy or girl sees visions of their goddess . . . well, she could be excused a bit of fanaticism. If only it made the hunger fade. . . .

Appearance: The chosen of Bubastis may come from any culture. Perhaps the restless souls of cats or priests from those bygone days are reborn in the Bubasti's skins. All Bubasti, though, are painfully thin and share a weirdly feral beauty. In the modern world, this look earns them spots of honor in the worlds of high fashion, club-hopping and mass celebriculture. The exotic cast of their features plus their exquisite thinness and temperamental ways make these folk irresistible. Although some Bubasti crave solitude, others flash their concealed claws for paparazzi and fashionistas.

Bast's chosen, in their Primal forms, are huge but whip-thin felines — echoes of the Kyphur cats. Their faces have the same sharp-planed look about them. All Bubasti are a shiny black, save for green or yellow eyes and the milky paleness of their claws.

The Hungry Ghosts have no War-Beast form as such. Instead, they become nightmarish cat-people. The same sharp features and luminous eyes define their feline heads. Dangerously thin and eerily compelling, these graceful fiends favor the robes of old Egypt if they wear anything at all.

Background: One and all, the Bubasti favor intelligence. Physically, they're the weakest of their kind — agile but not strong. As befits the offspring of an ancient grudge, however, they have keen wits and long memories. The hunger in their bellies mirrors their voracious intellects.

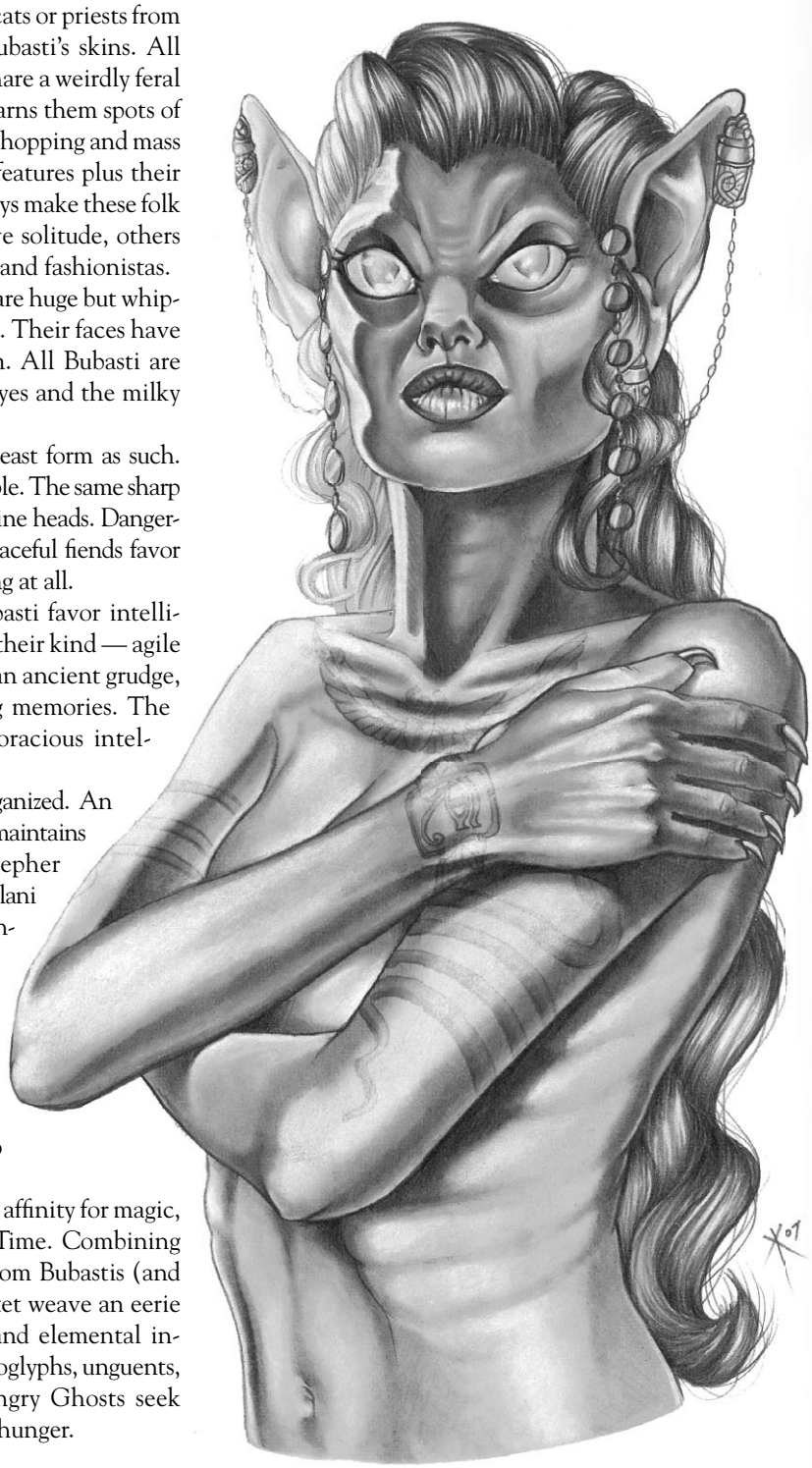
As cats go, the Bubasti are quite organized. An arcane hierarchy of six Khepher ("sires") maintains sanctuaries across the world. Each Khepher watches over two Bon Bhat ("elders"), four Ilani ("wonder-favored"), a handful of Akas ("truth-chasers") and a scattering of Tekhmet ("little ones"), or newly Changed Bubasti. If these numbers are correct, it would make the Bubasti one of the most numerous breeds — and certainly the most organized. Twice a year, initiated Ghosts meet in deeply secret spots for ornate rituals. Any Bubast who can afford the trip is expected to attend.

The calling card of this breed is their affinity for magic, especially the arts of Death, Fate and Time. Combining bestial variations with secrets rescued from Bubastis (and a vast archive outside Tanta), these Bastet weave an eerie syncretism of ancient Egyptian magic and elemental instinct. Using statues, scrolls, amulets, hieroglyphs, unguents, incense and elaborate rituals, the Hungry Ghosts seek wealth, revenge and an end to gnawing hunger.

Breed Favors: Beast Magic (five dots of spells), Clever Monkey, Fang and Claw 1 (L)

Breed Bonus: All Bubasti share the Striking Looks Merit (not free). They get three free Specialties in Academics, and share a curse of constant hunger. Instead of a War-Beast form, Bubasti have an eerie Throwback shape.

Common Aspects: Alarming Alacrity, Bare Necessities, Carnivore's Puissance, Catwalk, Culling the Weak, Earthbond, Hypnotic Allure, Invisible Marking, Keen Senses, Mother's Fury, Righting Reflex, Slumber's Touch, Spinebite, Spirit Sight, Spook



the Herd, Sweet-Voiced Fiend, Tell (Sharp, Gaunt Features), Territory Bond, The Wild Cry (Cats, Hawks or Serpents), Tiger Heart, Truth Sense, Twisted Tongue, Unnerving Cry, Unsettling Eye, Unspeakable, Warrior's Restoration

Form Adjustments

Throwback: Strength +1, Dexterity +3, Stamina +1, Health +1, Speed +4 (species factor 5), +5 to perception rolls

Primal Beast: Strength –1, Dexterity +3, Stamina –1, Size 4, Health –2, Speed +6 (species factor 9), +4 to perception rolls

Hatara

Please to See the King

When the Sun came to earth, he chose the form of a lion. Radiant in his fire, he scorched the land as he walked. His roar was the thunder to which all beasts bowed their heads. Only one beast challenged him, and that beast was Man. These days, as usual, Man seems to be winning. Yet the Hatara bear the sun in their hearts. So long as they stand proud, it will not set on them.

Called "the Golden Dangers," these ferals trace their ancestry to the sun itself. Long ago, the Great Creator called together the chiefs of Man and Beast. To force an accord between them, He took blood from each king, stirred them up in a calabash and invited each one to drink. So the spirits of one entered the other and sired children of both within their queens. In the desert where this took place, lions and humans live in harmony to this day. Elsewhere, though, the lineage went sour. Brothers fought as brothers will, and they're still fighting even now.

The Golden Dangers are well-bred for fighting. Smart and strong, they range from 300 to 700 pounds of tooth, mane and muscle. Similar to most cats, the males are far larger than the females, and just as most women, their females are more deadly than the males.

Alone among the big cats, Hatara hunt together. Feral humans and lion kin share prides and territory. A Hatar pride may have one to three shapechangers, plus two to four big cats and kittens from each breed. Human children are raised within the pride, or fostered off with trusted relatives. Given this community, most Hatara grow up social. Unlike their distant tiger-kin, these ferals function well together. In numbers they find greater strength.

Appearance: The Golden Dangers have a royal look even in their human forms. Broad-shouldered and strong-featured, they resemble the kings they once were. Most come from African native stock, although a few "white lions" hail from English or German ancestry. Taller than the average person, these ferals boast lean muscles and thick heads of hair. Since hair is regarded by many black Africans as a sign of animalism, Hatara often shave their heads clean; some, however, grow dreadlocks in the modern age, and honor their feline ancestry with a sacred fashion statement.

In animal form, Hatara grow to tiger-sized lions. Males range from 400 to 700 pounds, while females range from 300 to 400 pounds. Most display the common tan-brown-white coloration, but a fair number shade toward black or lighten to near-white with darker stripes and manes. An unspeakable intellect shines in the eyes of such cats. More than one hunter has dropped his gun and run after meeting a Hatar's gaze.

In War-Beast form, these ferals invoke the sun's great fury. Blazing with heat and inner light, they rise up on their back legs and stand erect. A godlike fusion of Beast and Man bellows with regal rage. Anyone not fleeing at that point is struck down and bitten to pieces.

Background: Hatara bear the blood of kings, and not one forgets it. No matter where or how they're born, they wield charisma like heavy blades. Humans and animals defer to the Hatara's dominion, almost by default. It's said that a lion rules best when he need not roar at all. Still, lions *do* roar occasionally, and the Hatara are no exceptions. They reward insolence with violence and drive weakness before them like deer in a storm.

Kings, however, make grand fools. Here, too, the Hatara are notorious. Literal, stubborn and set in their ways, they provide excellent fun for tricksters who are brave enough to tweak their manes. Hatara trust too much and question too little, and are often led astray. The sun may have left its mark in them, but in the process the sun might have also struck them blind.

Breed Favors: Fang (bite) 3 (L) and Claw 2 (L), Keen Senses (all), Size 6

Breed Bonus: All Hatara get a free Specialty in a Social Skill. They also subtract –1 from dice pools to spot a con job, lie or illusion.

Common Aspects: Alarming Alacrity, Beast Surge, Birth Blessing, Carnivore's Puissance, Catwalk, Culling the Weak, Durga's Blessing, Earthbond, Hypnotic Allure, Leap, Magnificence, Mercy's Touch, Mother's Fury, Pack Bond, Sexual Dimorphism, Spinebite, Spook the Herd, Sweet-Voiced Fiend, Tell (Thick, Wild Hair), Territory Bond, The Wild Cry (Lions), Tiger Heart, Unnerving Cry, Unsettling Eye, War Heart, Warrior's Restoration

Form Adjustments

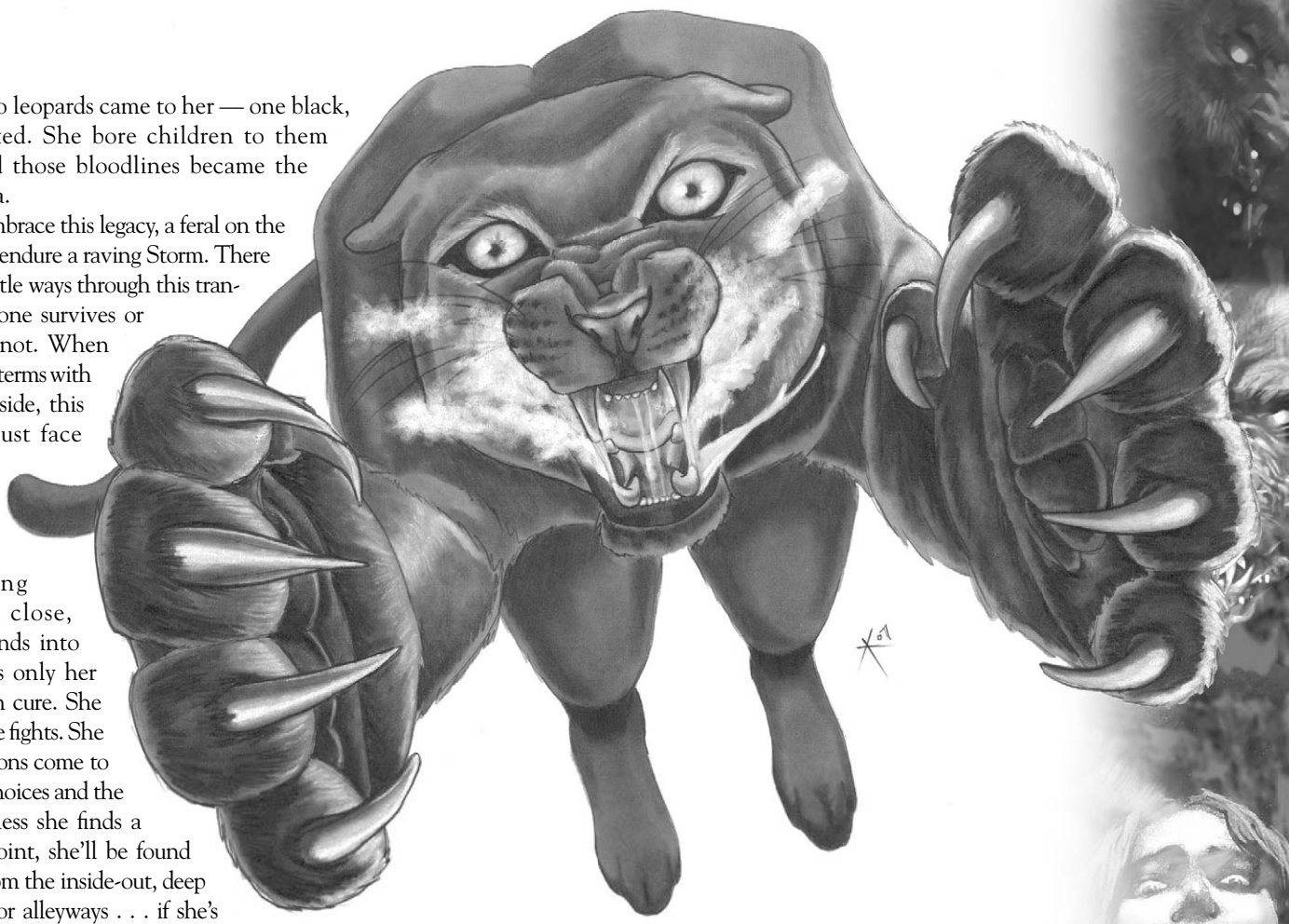
War-Beast: Strength +4, Dexterity +1, Stamina +5, Size 8, Health +8, Speed +5 (species factor 5), +2 to perception rolls

Primal Beast: Strength +2, Dexterity +2, Stamina +2, Size +1, Health +3, Speed +7 (species factor 8), +3 to perception rolls

Bahgrasha

Hidden Fears

Say "panther" if you will, but these folk prefer Bahgrasha (bog-ROSH-uh). When serpent-demons stalked the land, a human woman dared the love of beasts to stop



them. Two leopards came to her — one black, one spotted. She bore children to them both, and those bloodlines became the Bahgrasha.

To embrace this legacy, a feral on the cusp must endure a raving Storm. There are no gentle ways through this transition — one survives or one does not. When coming to terms with the cat inside, this person must face her deepest fears. Abandoning everything she held close, she descends into a madness only her accord can cure. She drinks. She fights. She fucks. Visions come to her, and choices and the hunt. Unless she finds a balance point, she'll be found mauled from the inside-out, deep in woods or alleyways . . . if she's ever found at all.

In coming to terms with her fears and taboos, a Bahgrash becomes one of the most balanced predators on earth. She doles out kindness and atrocity with the grace of paws on silk. Possessed by a curiosity that's acute even by cat standards, she delves into the hidden spaces of her world. In a city, the panther explores penthouses and dungeons with equal ease; in the jungle, she finds the paths or burrows that other hunters miss. She may even dare the spirit world, passing through the Gauntlet on solitary errands. Nocturnal by nature, she climbs trees both real and metaphorical, watching for prey then dropping down to catch it from above. . . .

Appearance: The most common of the large Bastet, Bahgrasha go by many names and colors. Snowcats display the white-and-black coloration of beautiful snow leopards; Cloud-Seers match the stormy skies in their gorgeous "cloudy" coats. The famous yellow-, white- and dark-spotted coats associated with the leopard come in a wide array, while the dark "black panther" coloration is perhaps the most glamorous type of all.

The human face of the Bahgrash breed is as varied as its coats. Most leopard-bloods share African or Indian origins, but millennia of cross-cultural blending have made this the most diverse tribe of cats as well.

In War-Beast form, these ferals recall the leopard-steed of Dionysus: quadrupedal, with huge, mad eyes, hooked claws and slavering fangs, the beast seems to go berserk even if she resists the tiger storm. Her demons seem to run loose under her skin. Foam seethes from her muzzle as every shred of her balanced self is lost.

As a rule, leopard-people share the lean lines and athletic builds of their feline counterparts. Some, however, tend toward fat, especially once they grow old. Leopard-bloods dress in whatever makes them happy. From ethnic clothing to current trends, anything that looks good on a person looks better on a Bahgrash.

Background: The panther Gift manifests anywhere on earth. It slinks in through the mind's back door and pounces unexpectedly. Leopard-people tend to be very good at hiding, however. Unlike their flamboyant cousins, these Bastet excel at making themselves unseen.

Breed Favors: Catwalk, Fang and Claw 2 (L), Keen Senses (all)

Breed Bonus: A Bahgrash character begins with one free point of Harmony, unless her player plans to trade Harmony for experience during the creation process. She may well have one or more Spirit-based Aspects as well, though they'll cost the usual amount.

Common Aspects: Alarming Alacrity, Beast Surge, Blend In, Carnivore's Puissance, Clamber, Culling the Weak, Durga's Blessing, Earthbond, Invisible Marking, Leap, Magnificence, Righting Reflex, Sexual Dimorphism, Spinebite, Spirit Gift, Spirit Secrets, Spirit Sight, Spook the Herd, Stash, Sweet-Voiced Fiend, Tiger Heart, Truth Sense, Unsettling Eye, War Heart, Warrior's Restoration

Form Adjustments

War-Beast: Strength +3, Dexterity +5, Stamina +3, Size 7, Health +5, Speed +8 (species factor 5), +1 to perception rolls

Primal Beast: Strength +2, Dexterity +3, Stamina +2, Size 5, Health +2, Speed +8 (species factor 8), +2 to perception rolls

Other Species

Balam: The Obsidian Echoes

Shortly after the gods created Man, they took white and yellow corn from the place where the waters divided. They mixed the corn together, ground it up and brewed it with nine broths. From that broth came four jaguars, and such was their intellect that the gods grew frightened. The god Hurakan breathed on the four brothers and clouded their vision. Each brother was given a human wife, and from them came the Balam.

Despite the breath of gods (or perhaps because of it), these cat-folk still see glimpses of the future. Such foresight drove their kind into the jungles and mountains when the horse-men from across the sea raped and slaughtered their way across the jaguar lands. Centuries later, these folk have neither forgiven the past nor escaped the future. Even now, they see jungles falling to the machines of Man. What can lone jaguar-people do against such devastation? Plenty . . .

Each Balam is a solitary killer. Her strong jaws crack through machines and armor with ease. Born from *indio* or Latino blood, these ferals refuse to be associated with some cat-goddess from across the seas. Similar to their progenitors, Balam bear four different shades of fur: black, cloudy gray and black, pale yellow and white with black spots and dark orange with white bellies and black spots. All four shades are beautiful, sleek and deadly as sin. Though the jaguar-people lack the mass and power of lions or tigers, the jaguar-blooded ones are formidable in any shape.

Balam, masters of their home terrain, follow the ways of the "New World's" Old Gods — chief among them Tepeyollotl, "the Mountainheart," lord of echoes, earthquakes and the stalking cats. Also known as Tezcatlipoca, "the Smoking Mirror," this god demands sacrifice so that his people might once again grow strong. The Balam, as predators in an endangered world, aren't shy about obliging him; logging crews and well-intentioned activists fall to earth with red caves where their hearts had been. With elemental might, the Balam wrest rain and lightning from the skies. In human or animal forms, the jaguar-people wage a one-sided guerilla war with the greedy ways of Man. It might be futile, but it beats surrender. Slipping into camps and cities in human guise, the Balam plan their strikes and spill their blood in a doomed effort to stop the future.

Breed Favors: Fang and Claw 2 (L), Keen Senses (all), Needleteeth

Breed Bonus: Balam characters get one free Skill Specialty each with Stealth and Survival.

Common Aspects: Alarming Alacrity, Blend In, Carnivore's Puissance, Catwalk, Culling the Weak, Durga's Blessing, Earthbond, Foretelling, Invisible Marking, Leap, Magnificence, Righting Reflex, Spinebite, Spook the Herd, Territory Bond, The Wild Cry (Jaguars, Serpents or Jungle Birds), Tiger Heart, Unnerving Cry, Unsettling Eye, War Heart, Warrior's Restoration

Form Adjustments

War-Beast: Strength +3, Dexterity +2, Stamina +3, Size 6, Health +4, Speed +5 (species factor 5), +2 to perception rolls

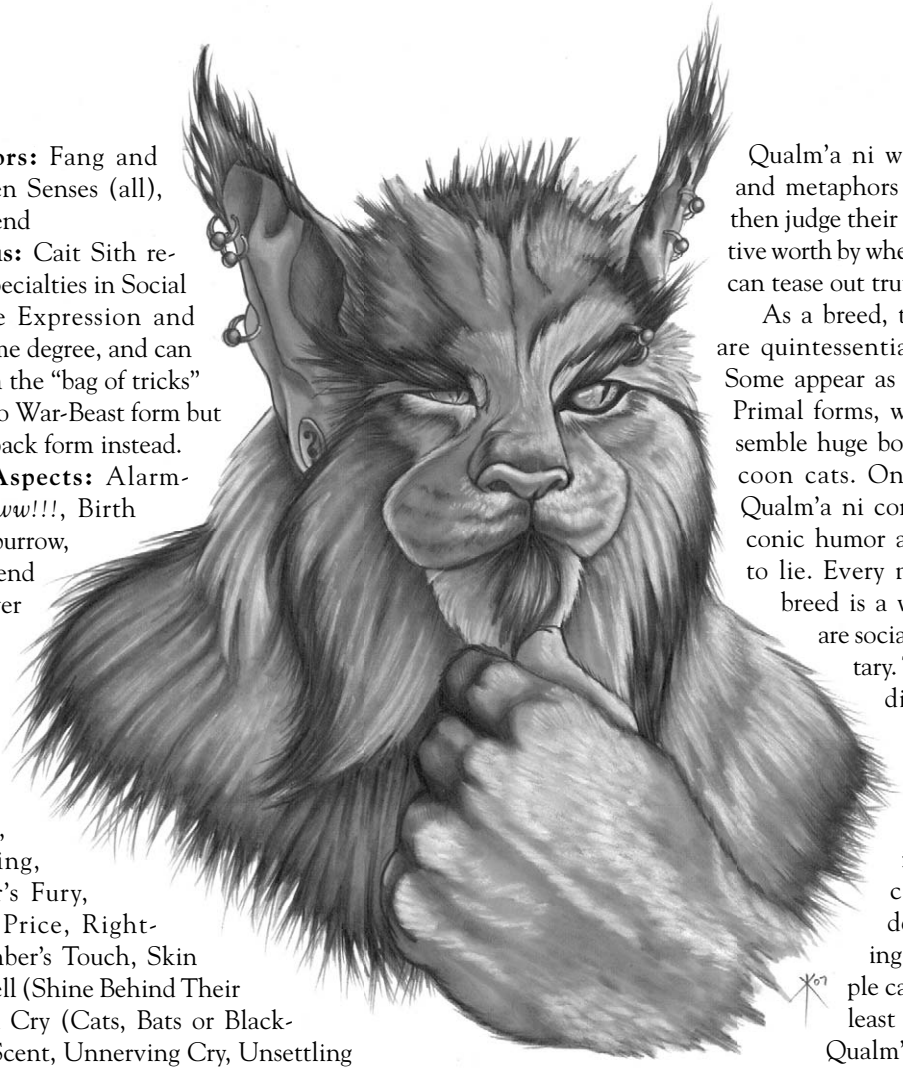
Primal Beast: Strength +2, Dexterity +2, Stamina +3, Health +3, Speed +6 (species factor 9), +4 to perception rolls

Cait Sith: The Noble Rogues

When the lions of Old Europe went the way of ancient Rome, their kin were left clinging to the ruins. Adapting with outlaw acumen, they wove themselves into noble families, Gypsy bands, rural tribes and holdouts from the pagan age. Immortalized as Cait Sith (caught-SHEE), Dinsele (DIN-sell-ee), Lionhearts and Ceilican (SEE-leh-kan), these cat-folk hid in plain sight and held back extinction through force of will. Seducing and raping their way through a long Dark Age, these dapper devils appear in gruesome tales that were not told to children. Inquisitors raised their pyres, but the Cait Sith endured. These days, the bloodline still holds strong.

While the European lion is gone since vanished, the Changing Gift adapts. The spirited Cait Sith breed lives on in huge "housecats" the size of terriers and larger "devilcats" (their Throwback shape) that look like Puss-in-Boots gone mad. Related closely to the Klinkerash Bastet, the Cait Sith disdain magic in favor of charm and force. Noted tricksters, these cat-folk make excellent con artists, thieves and (amusingly enough) politicians. The Den-Warder and Sun-Chaser accords run strong in this breed, which transitioned to America during the Age of Exploration. Killing rats in the holds of ships earned strategically turned backs from the crews of many vessels; today, Cait Sith still "kill rats" by making themselves *valued* and then making themselves at *home* wherever they wish to be.

Unusually charming even for cats, Cait Sith come from European bloodlines but make friends (or at least associates) with everyone. Of all Bastet, these ferals are most likely to stick their whiskers into night-folk affairs. Possessed by incurable curiosity and amoral cleverness, these ferals love to talk but rarely give anything away. It's been said that Cait Sith have three distinct personalities: the one they show, the one they're born with and the one they run to when something goes wrong. Perhaps it's a survival trait, but ferals of this breed always maintain separate identities, into which they disappear without warning for months at a time. Perhaps, just as the Balam, the Cait Sith know something we don't. . . .



Breed Favors: Fang and Claw 1 (L), Keen Senses (all), Sweet-Voiced Fiend

Breed Bonus: Cait Sith receive four free Specialties in Social Skills. All have Expression and Subterfuge to some degree, and can buy Aspects from the "bag of tricks" list. They have no War-Beast form but assume a Throwback form instead.

Common Aspects: Alarming Alacrity, *Aww!!!*, Birth Blessing, Blank burrow, Brave Escape, Blend In, Catwalk, Clever Monkey, Culling the Weak, Earthbond, Foretelling, Fortune's Favor, Grave Misfortune, Hypnotic Allure, Invisible Marking, Mimic, Mother's Fury, Pearl of Great Price, Righting Reflex, Slumber's Touch, Skin Double, Stash, Tell (Shine Behind Their Eyes), The Wild Cry (Cats, Bats or Blackbirds), Toss the Scent, Unnerving Cry, Unsettling Eye, Warrior's Restoration

Form Adjustments

Throwback: Strength +1, Dexterity +5, Stamina +1, Size 4, Health +0, Speed +6 (species factor 5), +3 to perception rolls

Primal Beast: Strength 2, Dexterity +3, Stamina 3, Size 3, Health 6, Speed +4 (species factor 7), +3 to perception rolls

Qualm'a ni: Riddlers of Dust

Thunderbird struck his wings four times across the mountains: once to the east, once to the west, once to the north, once to the south. Boulders tumbled, and the winds rose high. Those winds drew the dust from the land into a column, and as the column raged across the land, the column swept up people, cats and other things. In the swamps and on the plains and throughout the forests and mountains, Thunderbird's storm dropped debris. Some of the things that had been spun up in that tornado were so scrambled up they forgot what they had been. Still dizzy, they began walking. And some of them are wandering still. . . .

The Qualm'a ni have many stories. Some make more sense than others, but few make much sense at all. Or do they? These riddling cats love to test their companions and impart subtle clues about life in the stories they tell. So the Qualm'a ni weave allegories and metaphors into tall tales, then judge their company's relative worth by whether or not they can tease out truth from fantasy.

As a breed, the Qualm'a ni are quintessentially American. Some appear as pumas in their Primal forms, while others resemble huge bobcats or Maine coon cats. One and all, the Qualm'a ni contrary, with laconic humor and a tendency to lie. Every member of this breed is a wanderer; some are sociable, others solitary. The Qualm'a ni display a knack for getting into trouble, and often draw other people into their circumstances by default. Assuming that those people can answer (or at least put up with) a Qualm'a ni's constant riddling, they might make themselves a loyal friend. This breed prizes cleverness, and chooses companions accordingly.

Breed Favors: Clever Monkey, Earthbond, Fang and Claw 2 (L)

Breed Bonus: Qualm'a ni have strong Physical and Social Attributes, and receive two free Specialties in each. Through the Qualm'a ni's bond with the elements, these ferals add +1 to dice pools involving Earthbond or Territory Bond (assuming the character has one or both of those Aspects). For a Qualm'a ni, anywhere in rural or wilderness Americas is considered "territory" for that Aspect's Bond.

Common Aspects: Alarming Alacrity, *Aww!!!*, Bare Necessities, Blend In, Carnivore's Puissance, Catwalk, Clamber, Culling the Weak, Durga's Blessing, Earthbond, Hypnotic Allure, Fortune's Favor, Invisible Marking, Keen Senses, Magnificence, Mindmap, Mother's Fury, Righting Reflex, Spirit Animal, Spirit Sight, Spook the Herd, Sweet-Voiced Fiend, Territory Bond, The Wild Cry (Cats, Puma, Crows or Hawks), Truth Sense, Unnerving Cry, Warrior's Restoration, Weatherskin

Form Adjustments

War-Beast: Strength +2, Dexterity +3, Stamina +2, Health +2, Speed +5 (species factor 5), +2 to perception rolls

Primal Beast: Strength +1, Dexterity +3, Stamina +3, Health +3, Speed +7 (species factor 8), +2 to perception rolls

Klinkerash: The Devil-Fire Breed

In Old Europe, people feared that cats — especially black ones — were the demonic counterparts of witches. People weren't always wrong. The Klinkerash breed of shapechanging cats has a decidedly sinister reputation — one that's often well deserved. Hailing from the darker recesses of the human-feline bond, these ferals prefer deep woods and twisted streets over the comfortable environments of other Bastet. There's a nightmare cast about them — a sense of madness walking. Other ferals call them Hellcats, and that may be a fitting name.

Similar to the Bubasti the Klinkerash resemble, Klinkerash have an affinity for magic. Their art, however, is elemental: trees and blood and scattered body parts. It's been said this bloodline drew Freyja's chariot, or forged blood-pacts with Nordic *vikti*. Favoring Teutonic/Slavic stock, these cats have been seen from Eurasia to the American West Coast. They favor fire-magics, and smells of wood smoke and cold wind follow in their wake, even in human guise.

To a one, Klinkerash cats have black or ash-gray fur. Their eyes glow luminous yellow or ember red. These ferals have no humanoid War-Beast form, but turn into wolf-sized cats when provoked. Otherwise, they scuttle about like dark wildcats, or move in graceful human form. By inclination, they're not all *evil*, but selfishness seems to define them. Favoring the company of pagans, Satanists and urban tribals, these ferals enjoy dark corners, hedonism and the glow of open fires.

Breed Favors: Beast Magic (five dots of spells), Fang and Claw 1 (L), Keen Senses (all)

Breed Bonus: The Klinerash affinity for magic grants a character two free Skill Specialties in Occult. In Primal form, the small black cats gain a +2 bonus to hide from characters of Size 5 or larger.**Common Aspects:** Alarming Alacrity, Beast Surge, Blend In, Carnivore's Puissance, Catwalk, Clever Monkey, Earthbond, Grave Misfortune, Hypnotic Allure, Invisible Marking, Leap, Nine Lives, Partial Change, Sense of Familiarity, Slumber's Touch, Spook the Herd, Sweet-Voiced Fiend, Tell (Black Fur or Hair, with Smoky Scent), The Wild Cry (Cats or Blackbirds), Tiger Heart, Unnerving Cry, Unsettling Eye, Unspeakable, War Heart

Form Adjustments

Dire Beast: Strength +2, Dexterity +4, Stamina +2, Size 4, Health +1, Speed +9 (species factor 5), +2 to perception rolls

Primal Beast: Strength 2, Dexterity 5, Stamina 3, Size 2, Health 5, Speed 12 (species factor 7), +4 to perception rolls



The Land Titans

Thunder Walks on Royal Feet

It seemed impossible. How could such a body support such a head? In dim light the man turned, his tusks glowing like things afire. Bright robes shimmered as his bulk moved with silent grace. All thoughts of laughter fled Sir William's mind. It was clear that the rumors had not lied. He raised his Martini-Henry, but before Sir William could sight down the barrel, the god-man huffed. The torches guttered and the very air swirled. "Think not," a thick voice rumbled in Punjabi-accented English, just before the beast's trunk flashed across the space between them and snatched the Englishman's gun away. . . .

Behold the Beast: More god-man than beast-man, the Land Titan faces an uncertain future. Always rare and now practically extinct, this massive breed melds human forms with elephants and rhinoceroses. Despite those ungainly combinations, these ferals are among the most regal of their kind. In legendary times, such beings were seen as gods, and even now they bear a quiet grace.

Traditionally, the Walking Thunder People have been associated with wealth, health, luck and power. Their soul-kin decorate banners from Thailand, India and Burma. Sadly, their magnificence has exposed elephants and rhinos to wholesale murder. Big-game hunters still pit their weapons against the largest land-based beasts, while poachers kill the animals for their tusks. Even when Man hasn't pulled the trigger, he still ravages the fragile landscapes that maintain these massive beasts. Caught between slaughter and starvation, the animals have dwindled rapidly, from millions in the last century to a few hundred thousand now. The Land Titans are not pleased, and their beneficent natures have recently turned deadly.

In War-Beast form, Land Titans seem profoundly *strange*. The awkward combination of huge tusked heads and human bodies lend them an uncanny presence. As their bodies swell, their skins thicken while horns or tusks jut from changing faces. Long ago, humans considered it a miracle or curse to see Walking Thunder assume such forms. Now it's almost always a death sentence. These folk have had enough of human cruelty, and when one attains War-Beast form, it's too late for mercy.

Breed Traits: Even in their human forms, Land Titans are huge — typically over six feet tall and weighing over 300 pounds. The slender Jhaa are shorter and lighter but still powerfully built. Primal Titan forms resemble elephants or rhinos of unusual size and vigor. Land Titans always seem to feel hot, and favor fans or air-conditioning when in their human forms, water and mud otherwise.

Among the breeds, the Walking Thunder seem most sociable. Their scarcity keeps them from associating in large numbers, but each Titan has animal kin nearby. These companions are regarded as beloved family, and no harm against them is allowed. As people, Land Titans are gregarious almost to a fault. They'll talk your ear off in several languages, and seem incorrigibly curious.

Land Titans speak in deep, fluid voices, and the elephant-folk tend to talk a *lot*. Surprisingly, they're light on their feet, and can be almost silent when they walk. When angry or aroused, a Titan rumbles in an almost subsonic voice; when happy, he purrs.

To a one, Land Titans are zealous about their kin. There are simply too few left to ignore. Almost always active in tribal or national politics, a Walking Thunder uses her human shape for diplomacy and her Primal shape for power. When possible, a Titan wanders with her kin, often as the leader of her herd. If something threatens that herd, the feral takes whatever measures seem wise — from stealth in the human form to a slashing tusk in Primal or War-Beast.

When shown respect or kindness, Walking Thunders are often generous. Although the rhino-folk retain the fractious nature of their kin, elephant-people love children, fine food and good company. Offering *zawadi* (gifts) to their friends, they provide favors and comfort for their favored people. A sense of magnanimity surrounds a happy Titan, as if his sheer size extended to his goodwill. *Nothing*, however, earned greater enmity than a broken or abused promise. These folk have seen enough treachery to last millennia . . . and yes, their memories are long.

Habitats: Native to Africa, India and South Asia, Land Titans rarely leave their homelands. So endangered are their animal kin that it takes a true threat to convince one of the Walking Thunder People to move even temporarily. Most favor rural settlements, although a few enjoy the luxuries of human wealth. Every so often, one of these gargantuan folk winds up captured for a menagerie, zoo or work camp. Fortunately, the enormous shift between the Titan's beast form and her human one often allows such captives to slip their chains and escape. Would-be captors — or worse, ivory poachers — soon meet gruesome deaths. Although elephants are renowned for gracious temperaments, rhinos are not . . . and *everyone* has a breaking point.

Predators and Prey: Despite their size and occasional ferocity, Land Titans do not eat meat in any form. Even their human bodies seem sickened by the taste. Legend has it that the gods forbade the Titans to eat meat after the first elephant made all Earth his hunting ground. Some individuals use their mouths as weapons, but spit the meat out immediately. Some stories even claim that flesh kills Land Titans if it hits their stomachs.



You grin like a monkey with his tail an inch from a threshing-machine.

Very few animals dare to fight a Land Titan. Lions, cheetahs and hyenas sometimes hunt elephants, but the huge size of the larger beasts makes them difficult prey. For the most part, Man is the greatest threat to the Walking Thunders. Most other animals just get out of the way.

Spirit-Ties: The great respect such beasts hold for the dead makes the Land Titans excellent spiritualists. Although they rarely deal with nature- or animal-spirits beyond their own kind, the Mholé-Rho and Iravati are notably good with human and animal ghosts.

Kin: The Walking Thunders inspire great loyalty from their human and animal kin. Long ago, those bonds were proudly spoken among the people of India, Africa and lower Asia; today, though, such ties are rarely spoken of at all except among members of royal families or remote clans. Hunters and beast-slavers bribe, torture or ransom the elephant kin, and the proud bonds have become manacles instead.

As beasts, all elephants and rhinos are endangered. As kin, they recognize the power of the Walking Thunders and often congregate with them for protection. With their soul-kin, female Iravati, Jhaa and Mholé-Rho are intensely social, gathering with one to 20 normal elephants. These kin are rarely more than a few hundred yards away, and share an empathic bond with the feral, regardless of her shape. Males often prefer to be left alone, but can be ferociously aggressive (especially the rhino-folk) when they're young.

Society: Despite the Thunders' masculine impression, they are matriarchal. When more than one of them gather, their leaders are almost always female. Among this breed, the Changing Gift often seems to pass through blood. Clan Natolo of the Regencies shares a long history with the Mholé-Rho.

Gift-giving plays a major role in Titan social behavior. Even in beast forms, these ferals exchange gifts with people or animals the Titans favor. Sometimes called *zawadi-waru* — "gift-bonding" — this custom creates an informal extended family around the exchange. Dozens of families throughout Africa, Asia and India claim to be related to elephants, rhinos or both this way. In times of war or famine, their gift-cousins have come thundering in to save or avenge their people; the people, meanwhile, sometimes come howling to the aid of Titans who face death or abduction. Guns blazing or spears flashing, the people uphold the honor of their *zawadi-waru*.

Alphas: Despite their size and power, Land Titans seldom seek leadership among the Changing Folk. So long as something benefits the Titans' kin, these ferals seem content to take secondary positions in a band. Among the Land Titans' own kind, Alphas are usually female and nearly always elders — practical in manner, implacable in rage.

Character Creation: Most Titans favor Physical traits, although Jhaa often have Social Attributes in their dominant position and Mholé-Rho almost always have Empathy and often Socializing Skills.

Stereotypes

Man: I have to ask myself why I should bear any goodwill at all toward those who've driven our kin to the edge of the Long Sleep. Then I walk among our palaces and towns and recall that not all men are mad.

Mages: Look darkly on the would-be king whose throne rests on ancient secrets . . .

Vampires: When a corpse will not stop moving, step on it until it does.

Werewolves: Majestic dogs, in their way. I honor their nobility from a very safe distance.

Concepts: Blind healer, serial killer, guerilla, wandering laborer, diamond merchant, black-market dealer, Doctor Without Borders, bodyguard, assassin, laborer, temple keeper, diplomatic attaché, game warden, crime kingpin, loyal retainer, bodyguard, hunter of hunters, vengeful ex-slave

Accords

Den-Warder: As keepers of harmony, these loyal Titans protect their kin, offer fortune and prosperity to their friends and utterly destroy those who hunt the Titans' cousins or despoil their lands. Den-Ward Titans have aligned themselves with royalty since ancient times, advising and protecting kings of Siam in particular. Oddly, these Titans have either very light or very dark hides in their animal forms. Likewise, they favor rural villages or lavish human courts.

Heart-Ripper: Sickened by human degradation, Heart-Ripper Thunders use their enormous strength to crush their foes. Sadly, this leads to *very* short lives among this accord. Smart Rippers shift quickly between forms, rampaging in War-Beast or Primal shapes while sneaking in and out of the area in human guise.

Root-Weaver: Bright and clever, these Walking Thunders enjoy human technology. Although high tech remains rare in their native lands, ferals from this accord can lose whole days on the Internet or digging through the guts of a good car.

Sun-Dancer: A rare accord among this breed, the Rebel favors her own company. Roguish and often ultra-civilized in demeanor, this Thunder shuns the "primitive" ways of her people in favor of high-fashion gloss. She usually prefers her lighter, flexible human form, and often diets and exercises to shed her "extra weight." Still, she *is* a Titan, and can be rather prankish about when and where she manifests her Changing Gift.

Wind-Chaser: Sometimes called "ghost elephants" and "horned phantoms," the eerie Thunder Wind People move silently through savannahs. These are the spiritualists of their kind, ghost-talking wanderers with luminescent skin. Without exception, these ferals have pearly white hides in their animal forms, and seem light-skinned even in their human guise. Many possess telepathy, and can seem frighteningly emotional or unnervingly remote.

Azubuike

The Burnt Horn People

The rarest of a vanishing people, the rhino-bloods of the Azubuike number perhaps two or three dozen worldwide. Once, they rumbled across Asia and Africa with their kin. Now, though, they cluster in remote African, Indian and Nepalese wildernesses, assuming their proud forms only at night. When these Titans unleash their true power, they are the strongest beast-folk on land. Sadly, that power pales in comparison to the high-powered rifles and occasional explosives used to hunt the rhinoceros — especially if the canny hunters have stocked their guns with silver.



Often accompanied by bird-folk or true pilot birds, the Burnt Horn People often seem taciturn and irritable. Born, as legend has it, from orphan twins who were burned in a fire and restored to life as a single black rhinoceros, this species has known sadness since its beginning. The notoriously bad eyesight that seems to plague these ferals may have something to do with their terse manner, too. It's been said that an Azubuike (a colloquial though not technically correct name meaning "Your past is your strength") snaps at the present because he still smells the embers of the past. Despite their sorrows, these Titans are a proud breed. Even with their decimated numbers, they retain a formidable presence to those who truly know them.

Unlike their fellow Titans, these ferals are solitary, not social or matriarchal. To a one, they share a marked dislike for fire. They make few friends and seem eternally annoyed. Is it the annihilation of their kin that makes them so irascible? Or does the fire on their War-Beast hides burn inside them always?

Appearance: Bulky and often slow, a typical Azubuike favors South Asian or sub-Saharan African descent. He has an unusually large nose, which lengthens into his horn when he Changes. He probably has tiny eyes, and may be nearsighted or even blind — bad eyesight seems to be a congenital flaw in the breed. Nevertheless, in every form he's fast when he needs to be.

An Azubuike's Primal form resembles a huge African or Indian rhinoceros, six to seven feet tall at the shoulder and 12 to 16 feet long. This form weighs more than 6,000 pounds, and can collapse floors or dent asphalt streets when it charges. Most Azubuike bear a single horn, but a scattering have two. This beast is fast, and can run up to 35 miles per hour at a charge. Once enraged, he can upend cars or tear through buildings easily. Before attacking, an Azubuike rubs his horn along the ground and stares with blank fury at its foe. After he charges, anyone in his way is either fast, nimble or dead.

The Azubuike War-Beast presents an awesome spectacle. The feral's body swells to a ton or more in bulk; his horn juts from a rhino-like face surmounting a thick humanoid form. As his skin thickens to armor-like plates, the Azubuike grows to nearly 10 feet in height. Bipedal, he begins to seethe with smoke as his black skin turns to embers. A furious Azubuike burns with the fire of his ancestors, and anyone who touches it bare-skinned will feel their pain as well.

Background: Azubuike are always born to African or South Asian families. No Caucasian Azubuike has ever been known. Almost always found in their homelands, these Titans are solitary by nature. They tend to specialize in physical vocations, but have a reputed gift for medicine as well.

Although the rumors of rhino horn as a cure-all are utterly false, the Azubuike *do* appear to make good healers. In the ravaged countryside where medicine, food and stability are scarce, these people sometimes wander as itinerant doctors or gruff miracle-workers. Others, though, take out their loneliness on poachers or innocent villagers. Throughout South Asia and Central Africa, "demon rhinos" devastate small towns or outposts in a single night. In human form, these Heart-Rippers live as soldiers in the brutal wars of Africa, or wander as lone killers beneath the open sky.

Azubuike almost never initiate their own kind; instead, a rhino-blood assumes her First Change alone, often after a traumatic event involving fire. A rhino-blood who takes another of her kind to initiate may be either gentle or cruel. Kind elders use their healing skills to comfort and guide the newblood; brutal ones break the youngster in with beatings, sometimes subjecting him to the grotesque worlds of the child-soldier or war-slave until bestial fury wins through.

Even among natural rhinos, Azubuike are almost always loners. Occasionally, a Burnt Horn may hire on with a group or feral band, but only if she can pursue her personal agenda. Males almost always seek Alpha roles (even if they're not suited for one), while females often remain vocal champions for a leader they respect.

Breed Favors: Fang and Claw (horn) 3 (L), Natural Armor 3/2, Size 12

Breed Bonus: Huge size, horn and strength

Common Aspects: Earthbond, Mercy's Touch, Razorskin (embers), Stampede Rush, Tiger Heart, Unspeakable, War Heart, Warrior's Restoration

Form Adjustments

War-Beast: Strength +5, Stamina +5, Manipulation –4, Size 10, Health +15, Speed +7 (species factor 7)

Primal Beast: Strength +6, Stamina +5, Manipulation –5, Size 12, Health +17, Speed +8 (species factor 7)

Jhaa

The Swift and Brave

The most robust and numerous of the Titan breeds, the South Asian Jhaa trace their proud lineage to the god-kings of old empires. Even now, the Jhaa favor the best and brightest cities or most peaceful provinces in Burma, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia. During the bloody wars of the last century, these ferals served with distinction; although the U.S. military dismissed such tales, some soldiers claimed that white elephants or ghostly elephant-men crushed whole platoons in wild mountain fights.

Fond of good living, this breed lives close to both its human and animal kin. Jhaa offspring rise among people of South Asian birth — never any other race. Each one seems to be a thoroughbred, born under auspicious signs. To non-Asians, the Jhaa seem haughty and unnervingly direct, as if they're dealing with lesser beings. In the case of the Jhaa, that might not be far off. No other Titan species shares the sheer vitality of this noble changing breed.

Nobility has it price, however, and the raw fortunes of South Asia have not been kind to the Jhaa. Between secular corruption, Western influences, criminal exploitation, economic hardships, urban expansion and the scars of the Vietnam War, the numbers of these proud folk — and their elephants — have drastically declined. Today, the royal beast has become a tourist attraction . . . or worse, a poacher's bounty. Once the toast of Siamese kings, Jhaa shapechangers have moved into the realm of myth.

Appearance: Lithe in build (especially for Land Titans), Jhaa people boast powerful muscles among both sexes. Beauty is a hallmark in this clan, but it's a rugged sort of grace. Both men and women tend to wear their hair long and favor shockingly immodest garb unless formality demands otherwise. Most Jhaa like good food and bright colors. On the whole, they're friendly, vital people. Even so, a feral quality shivers through them. No matter where she is, a Jhaa seems restless, ready for action.

In her elephant form, a Jhaa is smaller and more compact than most of her kind. Standing just six to eight feet at the shoulder and 12 to 15 feet long, this feral breed seems far slimmer than most elephants. The females rarely

have tusks, and male tusks are smaller than the ones borne by their cousins. Still, an elephant *is* an elephant, and the Jhaa retain their Land Titan power.

The Jhaa War-Beast dazzles with its radiance. Similar to a royal retainer of the Khmer age, the Jhaa blazes with prenatural fury. Her skin glows with silver light while diamond-like facets glitter on her head and flanks. If she has tusks, they assume a rich gold luster and shimmer with jeweled spikes. Her body cords with tight muscles as she grows to roughly eight feet in height. Even then, however, she retains the grace of her courtly origins.

Background: The Jhaa Gift breeds true among several families in Burma, Thailand and Cambodia. If they chose to participate in the vulgar spectacle of the Regencies, these ferals might muster three or four families with living Jhaa relations. Unlike the scions of the dynasties, though, Jhaa people are rarely spoiled. Even those from wealthy families are schooled and disciplined rigorously.

Among families that favor the Gift, a mentor (who may or may not be a shapechanger herself) takes on a child of the same sex before the First Change; that elder remains the pair's Alpha until she either dies or concedes the position willingly. For Jhaa who assume the Change alone, no Alpha will suffice. It takes a lot to win the respect and trust of such a person, especially if he's either born to privilege or raised on the streets. Either way, the Jhaa enjoys the presence of true elephants. Whenever possible, he'll have a herd nearby at all times.

Children who seem to possess the Gift are sent off to live with rural elders — inevitably elephant-tenders with a rich sense of history. There, the youngsters are raised with strong morals, family legends, spiritual reverence, constant exercise and very close contact with their animal kin. Disobedience is not tolerated, and physical punishment is a daily reality. Boys and girls are raised outdoors with little clothing and no luxuries. If the Gift breeds true, the newbloods are celebrated as heirs to a sacred lineage; if not, they're still honored as keepers of a royal tradition.

Occasionally, the Gift appears among the desperate folk — the slaves, beggars and refugees who populate so much of Southeast Asia. To them, the Jhaa legacy brings power they never had before. Some accept the Gift with reverence; others turn it into an instrument of revenge. . . .

Breed Favors: Extra Limb (trunk), Fang and Claw (tusks) 2 (L), Size 13

Breed Bonus: Enormous strength and power

Common Aspects: Birth Blessing, Durga's Blessing, Earthbond, Magnificence, Mother's Fury, Natural Armor, Pack Bond, Stampede Rush, War Heart, Warrior's Restoration

Form Adjustments

War-Beast: Strength +4, Dexterity +1, Stamina +3, Manipulation –3, Size 8, Health +11, Speed +7 (species factor 6)

Primal Beast: Strength +4, Stamina + 4, Manipulation –1, Size 13, Health +17, Speed +5 (species factor 6), +1 to perception rolls

Mholé-Rho

Mountains That Walk

Rising like their namesakes from the African plains, the Walking Mountain People seem like ghosts of a not-so-distant age. Trailing the dust of their arid homelands or crackled with mud from a healthy wallow, these beasts are perhaps the largest of the land-born Changing Folk. The Walking Mountain People's bellows echo across the wide skies; their footsteps shake the earth. In human, beast or War-Beast, the Mholé-Rho span astonishing proportions. Man's world, perhaps, is too small for them. These ferals need the vastness of the open plains.

Ranging with herds of elephant kin, the Mholé-Rho (Muh-HO-leh Row) retain a distance from the human world. Although some set themselves in urban areas (often as tradesmen of uncommon wealth or influence), these folk were born to roam. Those few who settle in Man's realm adjust their settings to suit their size. Expansive in size, personality and appetites, such people fill any room they enter. Some are kindly, others wise and quite are few have bitter moods. Any Mholé-Rho, however, dominates his space, even among his kin.

When Mholé-Rho choose to play the game, they excel at business and politics. Empathy is their strong suit. Traditionally, these folk bring prosperity in their wake. Sadly, the last century has turned that myth into a cruel joke. Torn by wars, famines and disease, Africa suffers as it never has before. Some Walking Mountains try to live out their ancient bargain, while others turn their backs on the human stain. A scattering of Mountain-Folk have gone into politics; several have gone to war. Soldiers speak of elephant herds that thunder through compounds at night, killing dozens of men at a time. Such victories, though, are pyrrhic; each attack kills elephants as well as men, and the pachyderms have more to lose.

Still, the Mountain-Folk endure. You can see them deal in Kenyan boardrooms or Nigerian bazaars. They trumpet to the sky in Cameroon or weep over Sudan dead. Restlessness is their birthright and perhaps their ancient curse. Though some settle into human roles, most prefer to wander free.

Appearance: Huge in all aspects, Mholé-Rho come from African ethnicities. While a handful of white ones have been born, most Walking Mountains are of black ancestry. Among humans, these Changing Folk favor bright and flowing clothes — huge white *jellabiyas*, embroidered *boubous* and bright-colored *dashiki* shirts. A few adopt European-styled business suits, but most prefer the garments of their people. In her human form, a Mholé-Rho stands at least six feet tall, and may reach seven feet or more. Male or female, she'll weigh at least 300 pounds, and very probably more.

The Mountain's Primal shape is a giant even among elephants. Standing 10 at 14 feet high, she can be 20 to 30 feet long and weigh two to three tons. Her huge head seems even larger when she fans her giant ears and reaches with her trunk. Docile or furious, she's an imposing sight.

The trumpeting cry of a War-Beast Mholé-Rho is enough to send a Uratha pack scurrying. Ballooning to a massive ton or



more, the Mountain packs a huge head on its thickly muscled body. Flexing, she can fill a room and reach nearly 15 feet in height. Few human-made surfaces can bear the mass of this beast without cracking. Streets tremble and floors break beneath her weight. Her trunk whips out, and her tusks jut four feet or more from her face. Lightening to ghost-like pallor, she invokes the demons of Man's fear.

Breed Favors: Extra Limb (trunk), Fang and Claw (tusks) 3 (L), Size 15

Breed Bonus: Enormous size and strength

Common Aspects: Birth Blessing, Earthbond, Fortune's Favor, Magnificence, Mercy's Touch, Natural Armor, Pack Bond, Spirit Gift, Spirit Sight, Stampede Rush, Unnerving Cry, War Heart

Form Adjustments

War-Beast: Strength +4, Stamina +4, Manipulation –3, Size 8, Health +12, Speed +5 (species factor 6)

Primal Beast: Strength +5, Stamina + 5, Manipulation –1, Size 15, Health +20, Speed +6 (species factor 6), +1 to perception rolls

Other Species

Iravati: The Holy Thunders

Elephant-folk of South Asian descent, these ferals seem humble and practical. Nevertheless, there's a weird air about them. In any shape, the Iravati (EER-ah-va-tee) seem uncannily vital and have gold shimmers highlighting their brown eyes. Of all Land Titans, these folk seem the most reserved, as if they hold a common secret. They're also the least social species of their kind. When they bond with lovers, friends or kin, though, the Iravati's passions run loyal and deep.

Generally, an Iravat remains sober and hard-working. If he agrees to a task or swears an oath, he'll follow it to death. For some reason, though, this species seems unusually greedy. In the modern age, Iravati sometimes hire on as bodyguards or mercenaries (at sickeningly high prices) for radical political factions or magic-wielding masters. These ferals tend

to be implacable in their pursuits, and have been known to chase enemies to the other side of the world. A handful jet around the world, searching for something that no one will name.

In Primal form, Iravati assume massive proportions. Only the Mholé-Rho grow larger. Typically, a Primal Iravat stands 10 to 12 feet tall at the shoulder, extends 20 to 25 feet from trunk to tail and weighs seven to eight tons. Meanwhile, the Iravati War-Beast looks like Ganesha in a very bad mood. An elephantine head rises from thick shoulders and solid limbs. The feral's hide darkens or grows bone-white. His tusks burn with inner fire. Slow yet powerful, he lashes out with his trunk and tusks. This form can barely speak, but rumbles in a soft and deadly tone.

Breed Favors: Extra Limb (trunk), Fang and Claw (tusks) 2 (L), Size 14

Breed Bonus: Enormous size and strength

Common Aspects: Durga's Blessing, Earthbond, Magnificence, Natural Armor, Pack Bond, Spirit Secrets, Spirit Sight, Stampede Rush, Tiger Heart, War Heart

Form Adjustments

War-Beast: Strength +4, Stamina +4, Dexterity +1, Manipulation –4, Size 8, Health +12, Speed +5 (species factor 6)

Primal Beast: Strength +5, Stamina +5, Manipulation –4, Size 14, Health +19, Speed +6 (species factor 6), +1 to perception rolls

The Laughing Strangers

Dancing at the Crossroads

Well, good morning, Mr. Congressman! By my ears, I am bettin' you got just a ceiling full of thoughts right now, all tied up like you are. I swear you look like a denim full of concern! It is almost memorizing how sweat and worry just seem to just fall out of you like penny candy stolen from the five and dime. I bet you hadn't even felt the dangers coming on, since you were sleepin' all deep. It was like they had walked up a dusty road from a long way away and now are tracking fret across your bedroom floor. Of course, I can understand wakin' up knowin' you tried to cheat me might be a bit of a jangle on the nerves. Ain't that just the thing about makin' deals ya got no intention of keepin', though?

When you up and forget to pay the piper, the piper ain't gonna ever forget about you.

Behold the Beast: Laughing Strangers believe they are the living souls of Tales. The Laughing Strangers are questions that lead to more questions, trials of faith challenged and bright days in epiphany. To Laughing Strangers, all life is a story, and the spicier it is, the more it settles like warm sun across your belly when it's done. This flair for the dramatic may bring the human and animal souls together within this diverse and contentious breed. Of all the breeds, Laughing Strangers are the ones most likely to drag a soul kicking and screaming down the road less traveled. Tricksters, thieves or creatures of your worst and best intentions, Laughing Strangers will always be more than you bargained for.

If you choose to scuff through the gravel disturbing quiet roads, sparkling red eyes will glint away your expectations and peace of mind. Hare, Rat, Raccoon, Fox or Coyote all have twinkling agendas hidden here. Traditionally, Crossroad Riders (Laughing Strangers by any other name) have been associated with wisdom, courage and the price of desire. To keep counsel with them is to finally breathe the air of lessons well learned.

When Laughing Strangers are in War-Beast form, any breath of softness mistakenly associated with Laughing Strangers is choked away. These are not the ferals who deal death mercifully and quickly with sheer brute strength. No compassion will be found in a quickly snapped spine. No, Strangers offer their wrath with different teeth. They will bring it in razor cuts of forever . . . switchblade knives of please-let-me-die.

Breed Traits: Comparatively small and legendarily fast, these ferals are the distant laughing hoots of the-one-that-got-away. Some are carnivores, some are omnivores and some are vegetarians: Laughing Strangers as a breed have many appetites. They're social when it suits them, yet still none are easily approachable. Gauging worthiness from across the room, Laughing Strangers judge prey or predator with equal curiosity.

Habitats: No longer strictly nested in the brambles of rural environs, Crossroad Riders now bed down in suburbia and alleyways as well. Raccoon and coyote used to be limited to the boundaries of North America. But now, thanks to zoos and strange collectors, these ferals scratch out their lessons all over the world. Hare has twitched its ears on every continent. Fox tracks are found padding softly through many cultures. Rat travels widely in mythology and even graces a ship or two. If mischief is sought, so are the Laughing Strangers found.

Predators and Prey: Know that in one way or another, Laughing Strangers are both prey and predator. Larger than some and smaller than others, Crossroad Riders are the middle way on the food chain. Man and his multitude of destructive toys and varying appetites usually wind up at the top, but when he relies on them too much and gets cocky, these beast-bloods remind him that he is not without an Achilles heel.

Raccoon and rat are omnivores . . . if it is edible, they will try it. Fox is a carnivore, yet is also so famous a token of prey there's a sport tied around that hunt. Hare is a vegetarian, yet for the changing breeds, he has no compunction against killing as long as it's creative and makes his point.

Spirit-Ties: These are the twitching tails of legends, the story-based professors lecturing with stinging claws and too-bright teeth. Proud to a fault of their own mythologies, it's sometimes believed that when the tales are no longer told, the Laughing Strangers will become as extinct as dragons at the edge of the world. Some ferals claim that's the real reason these Crossroad Riders test Man constantly: it's impossible to live through an encounter with one and not talk about it. Maybe the challenges Laughing Strangers offer humanity simply come from enlightened self-interest. In the words of Lewis Carroll spoken through the unicorn, "If you believe in me, I will believe in you."

Kin: Each of the separate sub-breeds has some differing characteristics in their relationships with their animal and human kin. Those relationships are addressed more fully within the species entry itself. As a whole breed, however, one

overriding similarity unites the Laughing Strangers: they are rarely viewed as either completely good or completely evil. Many different cultures revere these creatures . . . and just as many hate them. The Laughing Strangers are vermin. They are totems. They are devils. They are teachers. If there's an opinion about these creatures, it's always a strong one.

Society: Despite the air of lone travelers most Laughing Strangers wish to exude, almost all crave companions and fellowship. Equally interested in animal and human company (to terrorize and to cherish), these werebeasts yearn to be in the midst of the experience. Fairly caring parents, they either raise their young themselves or watch carefully from a distance as hand-picked guardians begin the process that they, the Changers, wish to finish.

Character Creation: Most Laughing Strangers prefer Social traits, although all have higher than average Dexterity and Athletics. (If they did not, they would have been removed from the evolutionary ladder long ago.) Achunem is probably the only species that emphasizes Physical Attributes over Social ones.

Unlike most other ferals, Laughing Strangers grow smaller and weaker when they assume their beast-forms. To counterbalance this cruel trick of Nature, Nature gives them several edges: a "bag of tricks" Aspects that only tricksters know, two extra dots to spend on Aspects during character creation and a wide array of Aspects associated with their species. These edges help Laughing Strangers survive alone in a large world that rarely finds their jokes amusing.

Accords

Den-Warder: As warmth from a hearth, these vibrant Strangers protect their own, offer laughter during life's thunderstorms, and completely mangle those who harm their heart-charges and friends. These ferals take the responsibilities found in loyalty deathly seriously. Charming right up until the moment they feel they no longer can be, Den-Warders of this breed know the true legacy of fealty.

Heart-Ripper: Tearing and mauling while grinning all the while, this is the Heart-Ripper soul. They are the razor-wire that shreds and binds. Such ferals treat pain as an art form, a lesson in screams. Impishly wicked, Laughing Strangers of this accord have an unlimited sack of retribution.

Root-Weaver: In the firing of a story, the knot-tying of a tale, there must be craftsmanship and patient tending of the whole. To bring together that conglomeration of fate and faith and humor and fear, to strengthen the future with the muscles of the past, this is the never-ending task of the Stranger who clangs his bell against the Root-Weaver accord. He will always have it all in place . . . the actors, the plot, the climax and the lessons to be learned. He'll add it to the volumes of tales he has directed before, and in those tales, he'll create immortality.

Sun-Dancer: The spinning penny on the sidewalk has more worries than the Laughing Stranger basking in the Sun-Dancer accord. Vertigo delirium paints itself sky-bright over all the lives she wriggles through. Nipping at heels till the blood stains her lips, she keeps those around her jumping — and aching for a moment of predictability.

Wind-Chaser: If you hear the yipping howl, the growling sadness, the gasping yawn of silence, the Wind-Chaser's call will pull at your soul. Darker than rain, these Crossroad Riders bring frightful destiny into those whom they weave into their tales. Lone moments in lonesome walks, Wind-Chasers are the lightning that clarifies the shades of gray. Be wary of them. Their shadows are too long to see the knives of their teeth.

Stereotypes

Man: Have you ever noticed that they all taste like chicken?

Mages: You have to admire the kumquat-shaped balls of those crackpots. You would think they don't realize that the Universe is keeping score.

Vampires: Two words: road kill.

Werewolves: Hard to respect a critter whose big claim to fame is getting down with his mangy trans-gendered self in Granny's old flannel pajamas. . . .

Minjur

Charan's Children

Rats! People all over the globe have rather knee-jerk responses when they know a rat is about. Generally viewed as vermin, rats have a rather ignominious legacy. Disney notwithstanding, most rats are not viewed in a favorable light. This is not always true in India, however, and so India is the ancestral home of the Minjur. Believed to be the reincarnated souls of children, humans who become Minjur are held in the highest esteem. Treated as royalty to a one, they are educated and guided, wealthy and pampered till they decide to make their own way in the world.

Neither wine nor best guesses are goin' to get you out of that tar-baby . . .



Legend has it that Charan's Children will never descend into the kingdom of the god of Death. This is the only place that Minjur cannot go. All the places where life exists remain open doors for the Minjur. They are the travelers, the map-testers, the knowers of all roads and ways. In the palest form of that gift, they never get lost. In the highest, they may skip between places without traveling the distance.

Arrogant, articulate and headstrong, these vain yet good-natured Laughing Strangers have no doubts about their station. Having been raised as royalty, they are often mildly baffled when others do not view them the same way. Surprisingly, Minjur don't seem to mind the distaste most folks have for the Minjur animal kin. To Minjur, rodents that are simply rodents are a lower incarnation of their breed. Of *course* they're not worthy of appreciation. When they've risen through the cycles of life to the height Minjur themselves believe themselves to be, only then will rats have earned the respect of others.

Appearance: Indian to a one, Minjur are dark of eye and brown of skin. Slender, elegant and yet still too angled and sharp to ever be considered classically handsome, Minjur have a constant air of adventure to them. Intriguing to some and disturbing to others, this energy makes those around them understand the itching delight of wanderlust.

In Primal form, Charan's Children are sleek brown rats. About a foot long and weighing less than three pounds, they are agile dodgers and climbers.

In War-Beast form, Minjur are still relatively small in comparison with other werefolk. Resembling the build of a full-grown Chow dog with a long delicate tail and rodent facial features, Minjur at first may appear to be easy targets. However, in War-Beast form, they're quite deadly. Only in form for battle are Minjur plague carriers. If an enemy is bitten or scratched, toxic vengeance is swift.

Breed Favors: Darksight, Fang and Claw (bite) 1 (L), Needleteeth

Breed Bonus: Rats duck into small places, but aren't physically tough. In return, Minjur receive nine dots for Aspects instead of the usual seven, and may purchase Aspects from the "bag of tricks." Minjur also gain a +2 bonus when trying to hide from Size 5 or larger creatures.

Common Aspects: Alarming Alacrity, Beast Magic, Blank Burrow, Blend In, Brave Escape, Burrowing, Catwalk, Darksight, Earthbond, Fortune's Favor, Grave Misfortune, Invisible Marking, Keen Senses, Mercy's Touch, Mimic, Mindspeech, Nine Lives, Pearl of Great Price, Resilient Form, Slumber's Touch, Sweet-Voiced Fiend, Toss the Scent, Truth Sense, Unspeakable, Weatherskin

Form Adjustments

War-Form: Strength +1, Dexterity +2, Stamina +1, Manipulation –5, Size 5, Health +1, Speed +2 (species factor 5), +2 to perception rolls

Primal Beast: Strength 2, Dexterity +3, Stamina 2, Size 3, Health 5, Speed +15 (species factor 10), +4 to perception rolls

Baitu

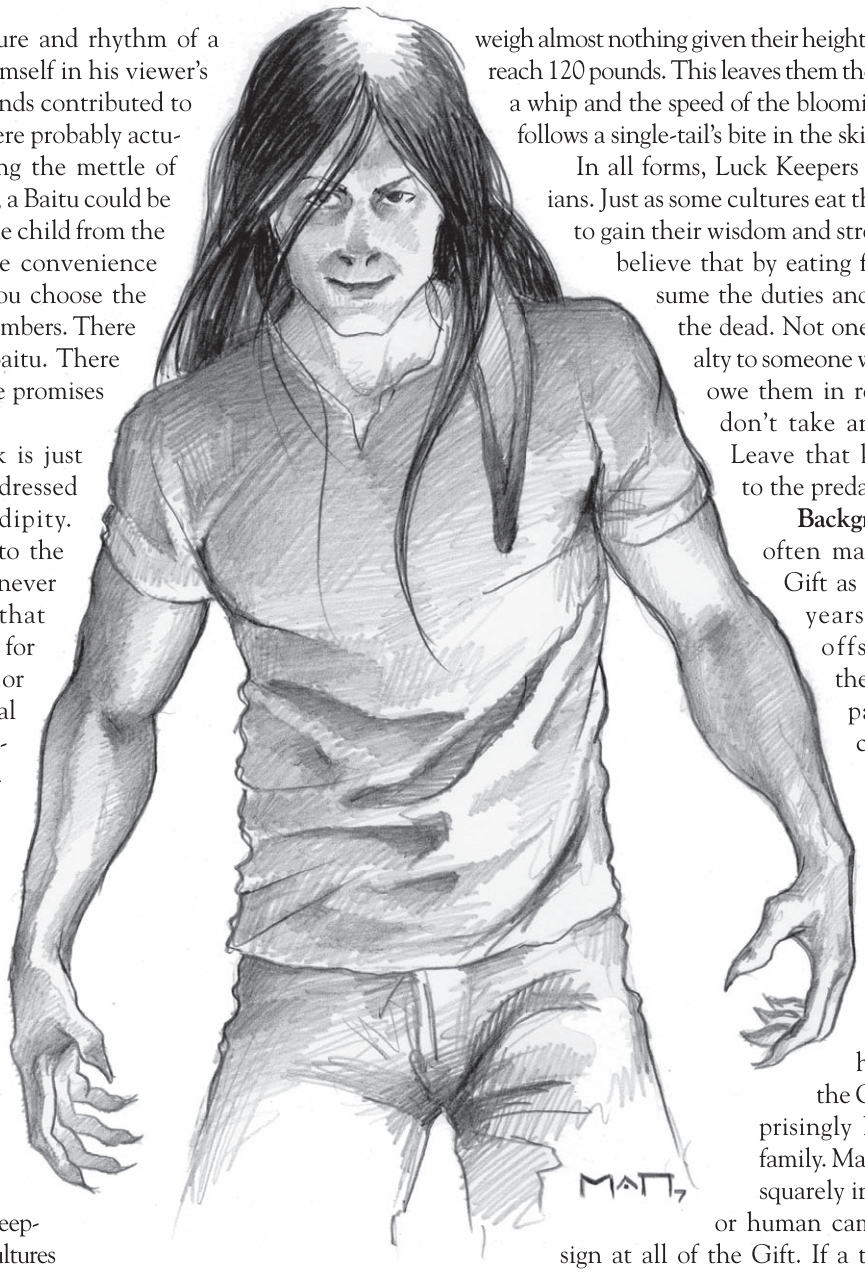
The Luck Keepers

Wherever there is temptation, so are there the Baitu (by-TOO). Laughing Strangers born from Man and Hare, the Baitu are the keepers of crossroads and the watchers of time. Though their animal kin are disturbingly numerous all over the world, the Baitu themselves seem as unusual as the last perfect, desperate moment. Rarely appearing when you still feel you have other choices, they're deal-makers, luck-changers, birth-blessers and devilish agents of fortune. Powerful allies and fatal enemies, Baitu bring legend into the lives they run past.

Generally, Baitu are charmingly social. Whether you meet one at an amusement park or the middle of a field, he's glib and charismatic. Unerringly capable

of adopting to the culture and rhythm of a place, he camouflages himself in his viewer's expectations. Some legends contributed to Loki and Old Scratch were probably actually Luck Keepers testing the mettle of Man. On that same note, a Baitu could be the stranger who pulls the child from the flooded basement or the convenience store clerk who helps you choose the winning lottery ticket numbers. There is no good and bad to Baitu. There is only gray. Oh, and the promises you make in the deal.

For the Baitu, luck is just sweat and inspiration dressed up to look like serendipity. Honoring a deal made to the world, Baitu themselves never violate the tradition that Hare is prey. So, never for their own personal goal or defense, only for the deal on the table, Luck Keepers can pull off miracles. It's almost as if they can glimpse the future or step back just a moment before. The man behind the curtain, a Baitu pulls off the impossible and makes his patron look as if the credit goes to her. Of course, there's always a price for the miraculous . . . and the Baitu will *always* collect.



Appearance: Luck Keepers can be found in many cultures and descents. There are tales in all of the histories on all continents. That being said, Baitu are almost always very, very dark or albino. Ebony towers of grace or ghostly shining white, these ferals stand out in a crowd when they wish to be noticed, but blend away like smoke when they want to disappear. Choosing clothing that best suits the environment, they are as dapper as the moment requires and as fleeting as the last second ticking by.

In Primal form, Baitu are quite small. The largest can grow to almost 20 inches in height and weigh less than 30 pounds. They are blisteringly fast, though; running low to the ground, they average about 40 miles per hour.

In War-Beast form, Baitu are all that wingless devils should be. Long, lean and knife-like, they appear as convivial as a syringe. Their ears lengthen and grow sharply pointed. This often gives the impression that they wear horns . . . a misconception most of the Luck Keepers find humorous. Bipedal, these creatures stand about six-and-half feet tall. Still, they weigh almost nothing given their height; most do not reach 120 pounds. This leaves them the dexterity of a whip and the speed of the blooming pain that follows a single-tail's bite in the skin.

In all forms, Luck Keepers are vegetarians. Just as some cultures eat their enemies to gain their wisdom and strength, Baitu believe that by eating flesh you assume the duties and bad joss of the dead. Not ones to owe fealty to someone who does not owe them in return, Baitu don't take any chances. Leave that karmic kick to the predators.

Background: Baitu often manifest their Gift as early as five years old. Most offspring are the children of parents who cut a deal with some mysterious patron and paid off that debt in bed. Considering how fertile hares can be, the Gift runs surprisingly light in the family. Many births fall squarely in the animal or human camp, with no sign at all of the Gift. If a true Baitu is born, however, the attentions of the Laughing Stranger who sired the Baitu is immediately drawn. Often pointedly aware of the paternity situation, the human guardian parents are usually too skittish to harm the child, for fear of retribution. Oftentimes, this leads to the young Luck ruling the household. When the Baitu who sired the youngling believes the offspring is ready, he takes it from the guardians' care. Superior mentors, Baitu make time throughout their lives to stay in touch with their children.

Romantically, Lucks are lusty rogues who never settle with one heart. Forever the wandering spirits, they come and go as easily as a gambler's hope. They never assume a leadership role because they believe there's more power to be gained by being the manipulator behind the throne.

Breed Favors: Keen Senses (all), Nine Lives, Speed 10

Breed Bonus: Hares are fast, but they're not fighters. In Primal form, these ferals lose a good deal of their human

constitution. However, they gain a lot of speed, perception and a vast bag of tricks. Lucks begin play with nine dots, not seven, to spend on Aspects, and may purchase Aspects from the "bag of tricks." They also gain a +2 bonus when trying to hide from Size 5 or larger creatures.

Common Aspects: Alarming Alacrity, *Aww!!!*, Bare Necessities, Beast Magic, Birth Blessing, Blank Burrow, Blend In, Brave Escape, Burrowing, Catwalk, Clever Monkey, Darksight, Earthbond, Fortune's Favor, Grave Misfortune, Hare Heart, Hypnotic Allure, Invisible Marking, Keen Senses, Mercy's Touch, Mimic, Mindspeech, Pearl of Great Price, Resilient Form, Sense of Familiarity, Slumber's Touch, Sweet-Voiced Fiend, Toss the Scent, Truth Sense, Weatherskin, Weaver's Wisdom

Form Adjustments

War-Form: Strength +1, Dexterity +4, Stamina +1, Manipulation –2, Size 5, Health +1, Speed +2 (species factor 5), +4 to perception rolls, Fang ands Claw (bite) 1 (L)

Primal Beast: Strength 2, Dexterity +5, Stamina 2, Size 3, Health 5, Speed +15 (species factor 10), +4 to perception rolls, bite inflicts lethal damage

Archunem

Moon's Masked Children

Among the more romantic Laughing Strangers, raccoon-bloods are the most adaptable of their breed. Though their paws have now reached Asia, Russia and European captivity, the natural range of these "Scratching Hands" runs from northern Mexico to southern Canada. These nights, their curiosities tease them through the urban and rural landscapes mostly found in North America. When Hands assume their fearful War-Beast form, they more resemble bears enraged. Most reports of grizzlies near the borders of cities are Archunem bearing lessons for the unwise.

Archunem are never where they're expected. Born usually to North American ancestry, they sometimes decide that that their lessons are best taught elsewhere. Those cultures that do not know the spirit of raccoon soon know what it is to reevaluate their sense of security. Social to a fault, Scratching Hands rarely travel alone. Although they prefer the company of another Archunem, if that is not available they adapt. Some travel with one or two of their animal kin. Some simply gather and discard groupies as they range throughout the night. If other breeds feel cocky enough to have a Hand in their midst, the Archunem will gladly share their experiences, test the breeds' patience and teach them lessons they probably need, yet don't really want.

Witty, inquisitive and — plainly said — *snarky*, Archunem call a wily trickster tune. Humans flock to Archunem for as long as their skin lasts. There's something intrinsically desirable about the ones your mother warned you about.

Appearance: Rugged and silver-haired, Hands amble easily through their nights. Preferring the evening to the day, they like to appear after the first few shots have taken effect. Favoring the lines and features of Native Americans, the hollows beneath an Archunem's eyes darken toward black when she chooses to Change.

In Archunem Primal form, Hands resemble unusually large northern raccoons. Standing comfortably at about three feet and weighing in at almost 100 pounds, even this beast can be a daunting adversary. Surprisingly fast both in speed and thought, the raccoon-blood leads her enemies into traps, off cliffs or in circles until they tire. Those who underestimate Scratching Hands usually do not live long enough to realize their mistake.

The Archunem War-Beast form is a silvered ursine fury. Distantly related to the bear, furious Hands grow into their heritage. Bipedal, most stand at almost seven feet in height and weigh close to 450 pounds. Their needle-sharp teeth lengthen; their dark masks stretch back and flow into their hairlines. Leaving most of their humanity behind, Hands in War-Beast form look as though they have forgotten their duel nature. Their hides toughen, their muscles become granite and their limited manners disappear.

Background: As with the rest of the Laughing Strangers, Archunem have their Tale: *When the Moon was not yet old enough to chose her Heartmate, her gaze fell upon the Earth and all the jewels of Life He wore within his fur. He was strong and solid and already wed to the Sky. Moon was still intrigued. She watched and teased and lit His mountains with Her impish intentions. She stole away Sky's eyes by outshining Her stars, and then she went to Him. She was too young and he was too merciful. He held her wrists and took Her hands from his face when She approached him. His displeasure was a low rumbling, a warning, a voice low in tone and rich with threat. From the sound of Earth's growl, Bear Became. From her reply, she laced Bear's Becoming with Her curiosities and fevered needs to test the boundaries of Earth.*

Displeased with her rejection, Moon still returned to her place in the Sky. Her fickle eyes turned to Ocean, but She waited to approach till She was older. When She did, she knew Her match. In Her wisdom, she turned Her eye back to Earth and Bear. Still burned with His rejection, She stole part of His creation and made it Her own. Raccoon is Moon's desires torn from Bear. Yet just as once two lives meet, they cannot undo the meeting; neither could Bear be completely free of her rage nor could Raccoon be completely free of Bear's nobility. Bear will always find wrath within himself when pushed too far. Raccoon will always love his own bloodlines too deeply.

This is the Telling, and so it is so.

Scratching Hands are aware of their weakness for love. They tread very, very carefully into genuine affection. Moving quickly from one place to another, one motel to the next, they strive to never let their masks come down. If, however, the waters of Fate cool the Hands' paws long enough for them to feel, they do so with no reservation. They choose one mate and remain loyal to him for life. Kits from the union, whether they have the Gift or not, find the Scratching Hand

a devoted parent and ardent defender. Friends who become fellowships are life-long. From that moment on, Scratching Hands follow the path of their heart, even if the path leads off the edge into the abyss.

Breed Favors: Fang and Claw (bite) 1 (L), Size 3, Nine Lives

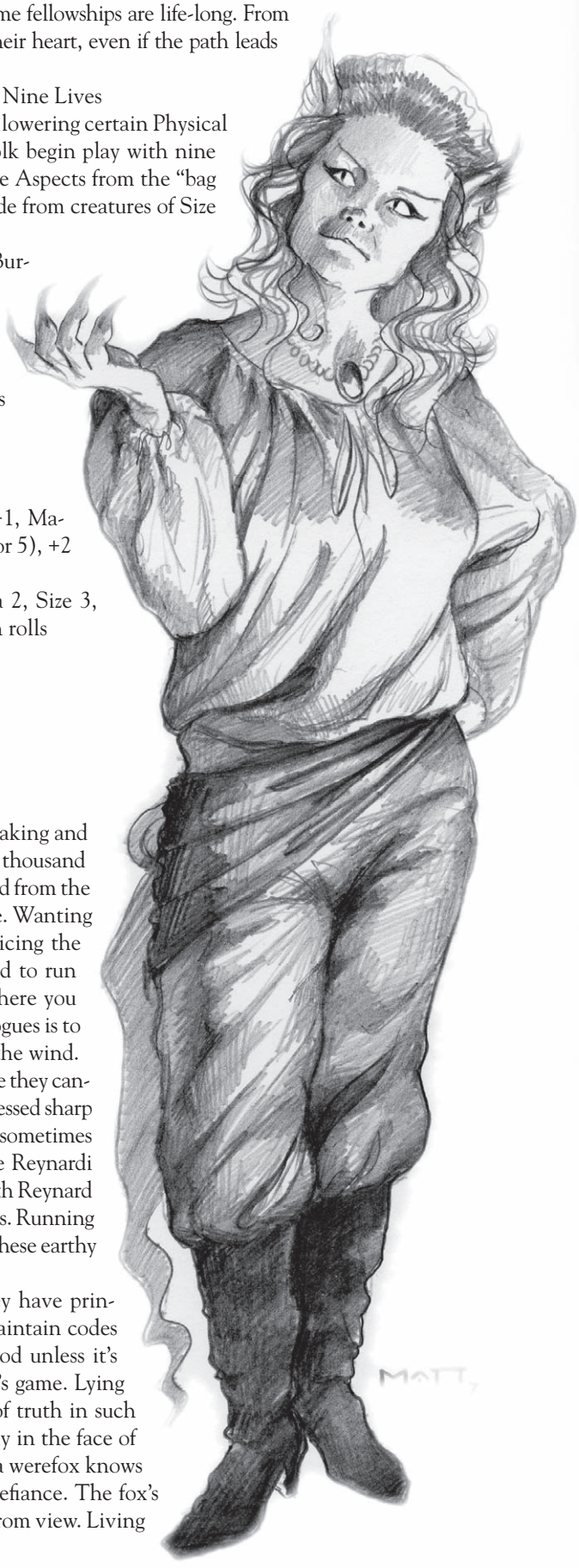
Breed Bonus: These ferals shrink to smaller forms, lowering certain Physical Attributes in the process. In exchange, the raccoon-folk begin play with nine dots, not seven, to spend on Aspects, and may purchase Aspects from the "bag of tricks." They also gain a +2 bonus when trying to hide from creatures of Size 5 or larger.

Common Aspects: Alarming Alacrity, Blank Burrow, Brave Escape, Burrow, Clamber, Clever Monkey, Darksight, Earthbond, Gross Eater, Invisible Marking, Keen Senses, Mimic, Mindspeech, Pearl of Great Price, Piggyback Passenger, Resilient Form, Righting Reflex, Truth Sense, Unnerving Cry, Unsettling Eye, Weaver's Wisdom

Form Adjustments

War-Form: Strength +1, Dexterity +2, Stamina +1, Manipulation –2, Size 5, Health +3, Speed +2 (species factor 5), +2 to perception rolls

Primal Beast: Strength 3, Dexterity +2, Stamina 2, Size 3, Health 5, Speed +7 (species factor 6), +2 to perception rolls



Reynardi

The Beautiful Rogues

Oh, the merry trials of Fox! Of light, of breath, of taking and knowing, these are the children with souls as bright as a thousand new penny-whistles. They are Lazarus's first chuckle freed from the grave. They are Lucifer's last sigh of resigned acceptance. Wanting to know the Truth is wishful thinking. No longer noticing the blood on your legs from the thorned brambles you had to run through to find it is the ecstasy of Answers. This is where you come to know the Reynardi. To learn from these rusty rogues is to hear the first sweet notes of wisdom in the laughter of the wind.

For all of that there is light in their eyes, do not believe they cannot turn fang to bite. They are also the silvered stiletto pressed sharp against the jaw. When subtlety and logic fail, pain can sometimes make the lessons clear. Messengers of sharp delight, the Reynardi refuse to be caught by mundanity. Just as their patron myth Reynard the Fox, these ferals topple the haughty from their thrones. Running rich, imperious folk through real or imaginary brambles, these earthy foxes become the antithesis to the thesis of power.

Yet despite the Reynardi's fanciful demeanor, they have principles. Unlike their fabled *kitsune* kin, the Reynardi maintain codes of decorum and honor. A trick, for instance, is no good unless it's performed with style; preying on the weak is a coward's game. Lying is always acceptable, but there must always be grains of truth in such deceits. Finally, there must be courage shown, especially in the face of dire threat. Do not mistake that bravery for suicide — a werefox knows her limits. But before a duck-and-flee, there must be defiance. The fox's coat is red so you can see her run just as she disappears from view. Living

at a fast clip, she maintains a strict sense of integrity that's not immediately apparent to anyone else. Living by Dylan's dictum, "To live outside the law, you must be honest," a child of Reynard rarely violates her own code of ethics. The principles of *other* folk, however, are up for grabs.

A scoundrel, seducer and all-around rogue, the fox-man or woman is a living challenge to morality. Among themselves, these folk can be formal, even rigid in their manners; to non-foxes, however, the Reynardi seem stylishly anarchistic. Clever to a fault and then some, the fox-folk enjoy a meal more if it's obtained at some stuffed shirt's expense. Truly, these Reynardi enjoy tweaking the whiskers of pious and self-important folk. The Reynardi's tricks, however, bear a vengeful edge; as hunters and the hunted in many lands, werefoxes appreciate the high stakes of life — and stand ready to balance the scales when need be.

Appearance: Reynardi are a vagabond lot. The fox Gift manifests most often among people who have been pushed too far too long. Monetary health notwithstanding, they tend to dress and behave as bohemian ne'er-do-wells. With red or white-blond hair, they present a handsome countenance. Of average height and build, these ferals can blend in almost anywhere if they wish . . . so long as no one's looking too closely. Any fox worth the name has a ready bag of tricks that includes mimicry, disguise, flattery and a quick exit. In all forms, though, their eyes — always mismatched and sparkling with mischief — give them away as the rogues that they are. Of two different colors, the pupils sparkle.

In Primal form, these werefolk are either sunshine white, smoke gray or a dark and rusty red. Elegant representations of their animal kin, Reynardi are about three feet in length and weigh no more than 30 or 40 pounds. They are also unspeakably fast. When given enough reason, a Reynardi can run 30 miles an hour or more.

Among this breed, the War-Beast form is rare. Instead, Reynardi often assume a lean, fox-headed shape. In this form, they look like agile flames. Ardent defenders of their loved ones and freedom (not always in that order), Reynardi shine and strike with frightening precision. These fox-folk stand between five and six-and-half feet tall, yet weigh deceptively little. All lightness, grace and speed, their ancestors may have educated the finest swords to glow dangerously as they slide from the scabbard.

Background: Among the several breeds of fox, Reynardi personify the grace of European folklore. This breed favors a Caucasian blend, although some Reynardi have distinctly Asian features. Noble even when in rags, Reynardi are the sort who would crap on a king's throne while he stood for applause. Would-be Robin Hoods and Marians, Reynardi are incurable romantics. The flamboyant air these Laughing Strangers present often masks a tender, guarded heart . . . or perhaps that's just another ruse.

Breed Favors: Fang and Claw (bite) 1 (L), Nine Lives, Speed 9

Breed Bonus: Similar to most small werefolk, these ferals lose some of their physical hardiness as they shrink to smaller forms. In exchange, these fox-tricksters begin play with nine dots, not seven, to spend on Aspects, and may purchase Aspects from the "bag of tricks." Reynardi also gain a +2 bonus when trying to hide from larger creatures, and have the Tell Aspect (no cost), which reflects their distinctive eyes.

Common Aspects: Alarming Alacrity, Blank Burrow, Brave Escape, Clever Monkey, Darksight, Earthbond, Fortune's Favor, Grave Misfortune, Invisible Marking, Keen Senses, Mimic, Mindspeech, Pearl of Great Price, Tell (Eye Color), Toss the Scent, Truth Sense, Unnerving Cry, Unsettling Eye, Weaver's Wisdom

Form Adjustments

War Form: Strength +1, Dexterity +2, Stamina +1, Manipulation –2, Size 5, Health +1, Speed +2 (species factor 5), +2 to perception rolls

Primal Beast: Strength 3, Dexterity +3, Stamina 3, Size 3, Health 6, Speed +7 (species factor 9), +2 to perception rolls

Mistai

Coyote's Children

Karma strides on four paws, often but not always alone. Grassland demon or city street prophet, Coyote is the spirit of the best and worst in human nature. As other beasts fall back further into a disappearing wilderness, Coyote's brood advances. In trashcans, parks and back yards, they creep through the night, facing down dogs and mocking humans at every turn. Is it any wonder that Coyote's get appear so frequently in folk tales? The Changing Gift embraces him . . . or perhaps it is Coyote who has embraced the Gift? He's randy enough to have done it, to be sure.

While wolves slink through their dying forests, Coyote's people laugh. They hide like true survivors in plain sight. When night comes, they push aside the Everyday World, stash their clothing in neat hidey-holes and go out to greet the night with yipping howls of remembrance. For them, Nature is no longer in retreat.

It's easy to read a grin on a coyote's face. Easy, and deceptive. Called Mistai among many other names, these lonesome folk share survivor morality, not guilt. Just as so many tricksters, Mistai know what it is to live between glitter and gulch. They eat better than most scavengers, but always look hungry no matter how prosperous they might be. Blue-collar almost by definition, these are working-class ferals. Male or female, native or more recently arrived, coyote-folk are wiry, smart and resourceful. Just as all Laughing Strangers, Mistai make up for small stature and solitary habits with a seemingly bottomless bag of tricks. In old tales (and old cartoons), Coyote often wound up on the receiving end of his own pranks. These latter-day tricksters strive to learn from his example.

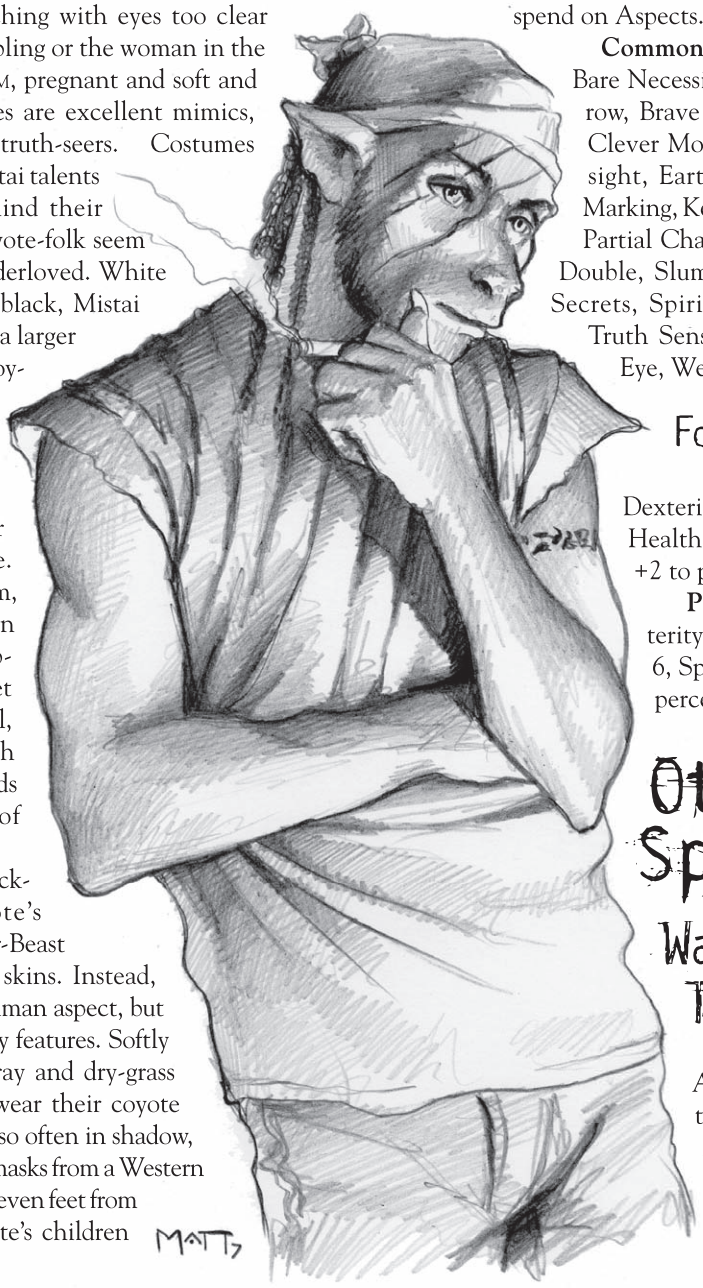
Some folks claim that Coyote's brood reincarnates the souls of America's First People. Picking hungry through the ruins of their old land, they have no great love for their conquerors. Whether those claims are true or not, these

tricksters hone their jests with a cruel, symbolic edge. Mistai pranks inspire bitter lessons for those who care to read past the bloodstains. Occasionally, these ferals bring a child down and feast — whether out of revenge, hunger or some combination of the two is left, as usual, for other folk to answer. Coyote's folk are not in the habit of giving answers to the ignorant. The Navajo say Coyote brought mortality with him to this world; to his mind, you can't enjoy life without knowing that it soon ends. Playful one moment and foreboding the next, Coyote's Children force you to reckon with your past. They're the ghosts that float your misdeeds back to you in the middle of the night. Mistai are your conscience and your guilt. To meet a coyote on the path is to know it is time for reckoning.

Appearance: In human form, Mistai tend to be just a little bit darker than most folks find comfortable to be around. Mistai might be the street person sitting on the brick wall watching with eyes too clear and hands too trembling or the woman in the grocery store at 4 AM, pregnant and soft and hungry still. Coyotes are excellent mimics, mind-skimmers and truth-seers. Costumes and illusions are Mistai talents and their gift. Behind their masks, however, coyote-folk seem rangy, underfed, underloved. White or native, Latin or black, Mistai live off the scraps of a larger world even before Coyote's gift transforms them.

In Primal form, coyote-bloods are always slender and generally alone. As smiling as a totem, they bandy about on long, thin legs. Approximately five feet long from nose to tail, Mistai rarely weigh much. Eighty pounds is heavy for one of their kind.

Just as other trickster breeds, Coyote's brood have no War-Beast form beneath their skins. Instead, Mistai favor their human aspect, but with lean and beastly features. Softly furred with silver-gray and dry-grass brown fuzz, Mistai wear their coyote heads proudly. Seen so often in shadow, these faces look like masks from a Western fever dream. Tall — seven feet from soil to hat — Coyote's children remain slim. They are never idle chatterers; their silences let other tell too much.



Background: Just as their fabled progenitor, Coyote's brood are fiercely carnal. Folklore professors scrubbed those legends clean, but the truth's still walking and fucking its way across America. Like so many tarnished dreamers, these ferals are often gone by daylight, leaving behind regret, perhaps a musky smell and the occasional baby to raise. That child, born on the wandering side of a sheet, may inherit his sire's Changing Gift more often than not. This venereal prolificacy could be the key to the Mistai's survival.

Breed Favors: Alarming Alacrity, Fang and Claw (bite) 1 (L)

Breed Bonus: Mistai have no War-Beast form; instead, they have a Throwback coyote-human guise that walks with quiet confidence. Similar to other Laughing Strangers, Coyote's children begin play with nine dots, not seven, to spend on Aspects.

Common Aspects: Alarming Alacrity, Bare Necessities, Birth Blessing, Blank Burrow, Brave Escape, Carnivore's Puissance, Clever Monkey, Culling the Weak, Darksight, Earthbond, Gross Eater, Invisible Marking, Keen Senses, Mimic, Mindspeech, Partial Change, Pearl of Great Price, Skin Double, Slumber's Touch, Spinebite, Spirit Secrets, Spirit Sight, Sweet-Voiced Fiend, Truth Sense, Unnerving Cry, Unsettling Eye, Weatherskin

Form Adjustments

Throwback: Strength +1, Dexterity +2, Manipulation –2, Size 6, Health +1, Speed +2 (species factor 5), +2 to perception rolls

Primal Beast: Strength –1, Dexterity +4, Stamina 3, Size 3, Health 6, Speed +7 (species factor 8), +2 to perception rolls

Other Species

Wapathemwa: The White Beast

The possum-folk of North America share the blood-line of the only marsupial native to the American continent. Crafty, canny survivors, the Wapathemwa (WOP-uh-them-WA) survive on whatever the world

throws in their direction. They often live in the corners of human society, getting by on discarded food, cast-off clothing and abandoned buildings. Those who live in the country fare little better, except that food is easier to steal, clothes last longer and conditions are better for living between the lines.

Primarily concerned with their own survival in a world where few people want them, the White Beasts have developed a scrappy kinfolk network made up of possum-folk who understand safety in numbers. Though they often prefer to live by themselves (except when they have children to raise), the Wapathemwa recognize the need for help from time to time. Their cobbled-together grapevine of email groups, telephone lists, community bulletin boards and handmade "business cards" keeps them up on the latest happenings in the possum-folk community. The older possum-folk tend to gravitate to the mountains, where they live in splendid, dirt-poor isolation and make their own rounds, going about whatever business suits their fancy, whether it's cleaning up road kill left by careless (or murderous) drivers or taking in a passel of foster kids no one else wants.

A Wapathemwa's human form can resemble almost any American ethnic group, though Anglo and Scottish-Irish predominate, with a significant African American presence as well. Both sexes tend to be barbwire thin, with beady eyes that often become their most attractive features. In Primal form, White Beasts grow to many times their size. Their beady eyes grow darker and rounder, and they develop the characteristic possum "waddle." The War-Beast form stands close to six feet tall (for males) and nearly that for females, with weight proportionate to their size. The possum head on a human-like frame — especially when it's giving that ragged possum hiss — is as disturbing as a backwoods nightmare. White Beasts only assume this form when they're angry enough to kill; that condition, sadly, grows more frequent each day.

Breed Favors: Extra Limb (Tail), Fang and Claw (Bite) 1 (L), Nine Lives

Breed Bonus: All Wapathemwa have at least one dot in Survival, and receive a free Skill Specialty in that trait. Similar to other Laughing Strangers, White Beasts begin play with nine dots, not seven, to spend on Aspects.

Common Aspects: Alarming Alacrity, Blank Burrow, Brave Escape, Clamber, Clever Monkey, Darksight, Earthbond, Grave Misfortune, Gross Eater, Invisible Marking, Keen Senses, Mindspeech, Musk, Pearl of Great Price, Truth Sense, Unnerving Cry, Unsettling Eye, Weatherskin, Weaver's Wisdom

Form Adjustments

War-Beast: Strength +1, Dexterity +2, Stamina +1, Manipulation –4, Size 5, Health +1, Speed +2 (species factor 5), +2 to perception rolls

Primal Beast: Strength 3, Dexterity +3, Stamina 2, Size 3, Health 5, Speed +4 (species factor 6), +2 to perception rolls

The Pack

Loyalty Asks No Questions

Inside the abandoned warehouse, a babble of cheers and hisses competed with the snarling of the dogs. Smoke hung heavy in the air, mixing with the smell of man-sweat and dog-blood.

Cord Chambers turned away in disgust, dragging his defeated bulldog by a loop of chain toward the back door, leaving a trail of blood from the animal's many wounds. "Fuckin' loser," he swore, knowing and uncaring that the wounded animal couldn't understand his words. The dog's eyes hadn't opened since he went down; the lids had swollen into two puffy lumps, oozing red. Cord kicked open the door to the alley and spotted the Dumpster, halfway up the alley on the opposite side. Brutus had fought his last fight. Now all he was good for was taking up Dumpster space.

"I lost four hundred goddamn dollars on you, you fucking blood bag —" His voice stopped abruptly as something coalesced out of the shadows and stood between him and the Dumpster.

"Drop that chain," a voice growled from within the inky blackness. Cord sensed a physical presence looming over him. For an instant, a flash of heat lightning flared, illuminating what looked like . . . like nothing he could name. The massive body, covered in patchy fur and marked with heavy scarring, advanced toward Cord, its clawed forearms outstretched, fangs dripping hot saliva from a bull mastiff's face. "Your turn to fight," the creature said, and Cord felt the world grow very small and hot and dark. . . .

Behold the Beast: Bound by ties of blood and loyalty, these ferals live in groups and share their lives with others of their kind to whom they give their trust and obey without question. They embody the phrase "to protect and to serve" with every fiber of their being, for they know that few enemies can stand up to these ferals' united strength. These are the ferals of the Pack, whose strength swells in proportion to their kin.

To a degree, these canid shapeshifters resemble werewolves. Wolf blood does indeed run in their veins, but these wolfkin emerge from a lost time and place, bearing no curses other than those they place upon themselves. Other canids combine the traits of dogs and humans. These "dog-bloods" come from many cultures and places. Unlike their canine cousins, though, the Canidae do not come to human commands, and they do not fetch or sit or stay. Instead, they run with their packs and embrace their natures as predators and protectors.

So dog-bloods and wolflings meet — sometimes shoulder to shoulder, at other times face-to-face with hackles raised. In the background, wild cackling laughter signals the approach of another member of the Pack. These hyena-people, insinuative, elusive, slippery and — let's fact it — sinister, hover always in the background, behind the shadows waiting for the drama to end, the blood to congeal, the victors and vanquished to leave to field. The aftermath of conflict belongs to them, the scavengers of the Pack. Their task lies in cleaning up the field of battle, consuming the slain and passing their souls on to the next world.

Legends say that the dog-folk first arose when humans domesticated the wolf and created from *Canis lupus* a different creature, *Canis familiaris*, the domestic dog. Other, deeper legends claim that the dog-folk always walked the world; supposedly, Man created dogs to mimic what he saw out of the corner of his eye.

Whatever their origins, Pack ferals have kept track of their human and animal kin throughout the long centuries. Lately, though, these ferals have had cause for concern with the growing instability of Man. As environmental ruin shrinks the habitats of wolves and hyenas, draconian legislations seek to "neuter" the warrior blood in canine species by making certain "gladiator dogs" illegal even to breed. As always, Man seeks to remake the world in his image. And now, even his deepest companions wonder if the time has come for Man to fall. . . .

For this changing breed, such thoughts show how far things have declined. Within the Pack, after all, loyalty claims the highest seat of virtue. Held together by bonds stronger than oaths and thicker than blood, Pack ferals look to their leaders — their Alpha or Alpha pair — for guidance as the world around them grows smaller and darker. Once a potential ally, Man has shifted into adversarial mode as his numbers grow and his wisdom dwindles. *If Man's so quick to spay and neuter his territorial competition*, some ferals snarl, *why can't Man spay and neuter his own kind?*

Breed Traits: Members of the Pack project very different emotional impressions depending on their pedigrees:

Vargr wolfkin possess a barely-suppressed wildness that filters through their interactions with humans and animals. People recognize that they stand in the presence of a predator, while animals that fall under the category of "prey" display a distinct unease around a Vargr in any form.

In contrast, the dog-blooded Maerans radiate loyalty and trust. Dig deeper, however, and the predator awakens, ready to combat any threat, hunt any meal or defend his chosen Pack. Some Maerans dispense with the calm outer façade entirely; people nearby slowly edge away from these hunters and gladiators, realizing they're not in the presence of a "good dog."

The hyena-blooded Riantes (the least-numerous breed within the Pack) arouse the strongest sensations in both

Dog Breeds and Human Ferals

The mysterious nature of the changing Gift becomes even more puzzling when applied to domestic breeds of an animal. It's one thing if a person turns into a wild animal that has existed for thousands or even millions of years . . . but what about if she changes into a domestic dog breed with a century or two of man-made history? How is this possible? Does a person transform into an animal that she identifies with, or is something more sinister at work?

In Japan, an *inugami* dog-spirit can possess a human being. Is a shapechanger who assumes the form of a German shepherd (a breed dating from the 1890s) possessed by a ghost-dog? Or does she identify so strongly with the breed that she carries its essence within her soul from birth? Where does such a connection even begin? Like so many things in the World of Darkness, the answers seem lost in the night.

Man and Beast. Most project an alien, cynical attitude, disdaining anyone not of their kin or kind. Yet they, too, possess a fierce intelligence and an acute sense of strategy — a lure to the hapless men and women who don't see their traps until it's too late.

Among these breeds, a feral's physical appearance (including ethnic traits and body types) in human form reflects her parent species as well as her ancestral culture. A Maeran shapeshifter may be tall and rangy with a prominent nose and soulful eyes if her beast-soul is an Irish wolfhound; if she assumes the form of an Alaskan malamute or Siberian husky, she could have a powerful upper body and strong musculature combined with high cheekbones and pale or slanted eyes. Hyena-people usually come from Asian, African, Arabian or Indian regions where the animals originated, and share a ragged leanness. Wolfkin, similar to dog-folk, vary greatly in physical attributes depending on whether they stem originally from Europe, the Siberian tundra or the Pacific Northwest (to name a few regions where wolves once prospered). Just as the Uratha, these people lack the usual "stigmata" associated with werewolves in folklore. The weakness to silver, though, is as potent as ever.

Members of this breed, regardless of their species, all exhibit a strong social instinct. The very moniker of "the Pack" reflects the inner nature of its members. They are not content simply to *be* — they must *belong* to something larger than themselves. Whether they're nurturing newbloods or training a fresh crop of Marine recruits, Pack ferals impart their understanding of group dynamics and peer group loyalty to their charges, whether the youngsters are human kin, animal cousins or simply normal individuals.

Habitats: The Pack comes from all around the world. Wolfkin reside in most of the major continents, while hyena-people primarily inhabit the lands of their origins: Asia, Africa, India and Arabia. Maerans travel extensively, and dwell in all climates and all countries.

In general, although many members of the Pack remain in one place for most of their lives, others travel from place to place. Pack animals are often migratory animals, and the changing breeds related to these animals are no different in their love for travel and their need to continually search out new territory.

Wherever a Pack breed claims its territory, the Pack's lands and dwelling-places are always well defended, whether a fortified cabin in the Catskills or an antiquated village in Siberia. Groups of non-changing kin (animal and human) watch over such territory, accepting their role as Omegas to the shapeshifting Alphas. These kin often become informal "greeting parties" to trespassers; indeed, most folks looking for the "werebeasts" in their midst never get further than the packs of normal beasts and loyal humans.

Predators and Prey: Similar to their animal kin, Pack ferals are primarily carnivores. They do, however, enjoy supplemental amounts of grains, vegetables and fruits. The Riantes tend to have stronger digestive systems than either wolfkin or dog-folk, and can eat meat that other Pack species would ignore. Similar to normal hyenas, Riantes scavenge for most of their food, coming as they do from regions of less wealth and greater social upheaval.

Predators by nature, members of the Pack breed regard many types of animals as prey. In any form, Pack ferals make superb hunters, able to track and bring to ground their quarry with gun or fang. Even so, the modern world frowns on uncontrolled hunting behavior, so Pack ferals try to control their predatory drives — not always successfully. When Pack ferals wind up among other shapechangers who transform into prey species (especially Wind-Runners, Horned Ones and Laughing Strangers), things can grow . . . *complicated* for everyone concerned. Although a Riante or Maeran can cooperate with these breeds to achieve a common goal, he must overcome internal hardwiring on both sides to do so.

Very few changing breeds view Pack ferals as potential prey. Even so, weredogs walk quietly and with deference around Land Titans and Ursara, whose sheer size demands that they be taken seriously. Meetings between canid ferals and Bastet nearly always carry the potential for open war, though even this urge fades when the ferals face a mutual foe. As with many other changing breeds, the Pack considers Man their most dangerous — and seductive — enemy.

Spirit-Ties: Canines are said to possess an innate tie to the dead. In many traditions, dogs howl when someone is about to die — and may help that process along if need be. Wolfkin retain close ties to the land, and while they lack the strong spiritual ties of their Uratha cousins, these ferals can commune with the Nature spirits of a place.

Hyenas, meanwhile, can supposedly shift their sexes as well as their shapes, and often serve as guides or escorts for souls crossing over into death. The Wind-Dancers and Sun-Chasers among this breed also relate to trickster beings and, at their worst, consort with demonic spirits, only too happy to assist those whom everyone else rejects.

Kin: For the most part, Pack ferals attract both human and animal kin to them through their obvious understanding of pack or group dynamics. Within the different species, however, relations vary. Some wolfkin remain part of their human families, bringing their unique talents to bear in support of family aims; others, though, flee from human contact, shunned by parents and siblings for their monstrous, "demon-spawned" affliction. Strangely, some of the wolfkin rejected by their human families find companionship among wolves, who often display a surprising tolerance for the "other."

Hyena-people usually live very separate lives from both their human and animal kin. Though the pack instinct runs strong in hyena-people, they tend to seek each other out, rather than integrate themselves into either their human or hyena blood-kin. Small enclaves of Riante grow up on the outskirts of human cities in their native lands, or tuck themselves away in the savannahs or deserts of Africa and Asia, and the Indian jungle. In some parts of the world, hyena-bloods find sporadic employment as diviners — and they're not above using any farseeing abilities they might have to benefit their "pack." At heart, hyena-folk are scavengers who take more than just food from wherever they can find it.

Though some Maerans gravitate toward the dog-oriented community as breeders, veterinarians, animal-shelter managers, groomers or other ancillary positions, their involvement is not always benevolent. In the brutal, often lucrative and usually illegal world of dog-fighting, some Canidae rank among the top trainers of fighting dogs, which respond obediently to their obvious "pack leader" despite the cruel methods used to bring a dog to fighting pitch.

The human kin of dog-bloods usually welcome their changing cousin into the larger family, whether or not they understand what she is. They sense, at the very least, her tremendous dedication to family and a great potential for leadership that brings out their own "pack" mentality. Sometimes, the presence of a single member of the Pack is enough to weld a disparate group of humans into a unified group — a power most Maerans and wolfkin do not use lightly. Despite this sense of loyalty, there's an edge that people feel. A Canidae is no gentle pup; even in his human form, he's got a wild streak.

Society: Pack ferals, obviously, remain committed to a group identity or pack mentality. While individuals all play vital roles in the life of a Pack, all look toward their Alpha for important decisions. This aspect of Pack society gives them a cohesiveness lacking in many other groups of normal humans. Indeed, it's often a "recruiting tool" for non-shapeshifters, who seek and find someplace to belong.

Within Pack society, whether among dog-folk, wolfkin or hyena-people, individuals pay close attention to the forms of respect due to their elders or to those who outrank them. Deferential behavior — such as leaving the best seat in the house or the head table at a restaurant to a pack leader — is second nature to these group-oriented werebeasts.

Jockeying for position also forms a good part of group activity within a healthy Pack community, as each member strives to earn a better position within the group. Regardless of species, however, threats from outside bring all internal sparring to an end. All members of a Pack stand together to face their common enemies.

Alphas: Position is foremost within the Pack. Wolfkin display the most prominent Alpha behavior, with either an Alpha male or mated Alpha male/Alpha female pair calling most of the shots. Among hyena-people, an Alpha female makes the decisions for her pack.

Among Maerans, as usual, variety is the order of the day. While strong Alpha males and females are recognized and given their due, smart Alphas often "rule" with an easy hand (or easy jaws), realizing that their strength lies in developing strong, independent thinking followers as well.

Character Creation: Social or Physical traits hold primary importance among Pack shapechangers, who value strength and group loyalty above mental prowess in most cases. Pack ferals usually display good Physical Skills as well as high marks in Social Skills such as Empathy, Socialize and Intimidation. Hyena-people also value good Streetwise, Subterfuge and Larceny Skills, and are often very knowledgeable about the Occult.

Concepts: Private detective, scout leader, cop, bounty hunter, SWAT officer, dog trainer, zookeeper, professional soldier, veterinarian, teacher, group psychologist, wildlife field expert, search-and-rescue specialist, politician, wilderness guide, pediatrician, dog-fighter, retirement home security guard

Accords

Den-Ward: This accord appeals to many members of the Pack. In these ferals, the urge to protect and nurture runs strong. Creating a stable home life, teaching young and old members and defending the home territory become primary drives among Pack ferals with this accord. Individuals with martial tendencies choose branches of service with strong home ties, such as



If you don't know what "loyal unto death" means, you're going to find out . . .

Stereotypes

Man: Loyalty should bind both ways.

Mages: Big dogs looking for bigger bones, digging up everyone else's yard.

Vampires: Just as Alphas without a pack, they suck the life out of everything they touch.

Werewolves: Truly a breed apart, for all the best and worst that this implies.

the National Guard, Coast Guard or local police departments. Nurturing does not always have to be gentle, and comfort can be delivered in a gruff but decisive manner.

Heart-Ripper: The predator's heart beats within every member of the Pack. Killing for food comes naturally, and that honesty sweetens the flavor of a hard-earned meal. Heart-Rippers take the next step beyond the hunt. Predation overwhelms their nature, bringing a taste for blood and a desire for destruction. Wolfkin and dog-bloods literally go for the throat. Some of these ferals target dogfight promoters, habitual abusers, cruel zookeepers and other inhabitants of the moral gutters. Other ferals don't pretend to dignify a killing spree — their hearts point them in a direction and, like an arrow launched from a bow, they strike what lies in their path. Hyena-people who embrace this accord become silent assassins, dedicated daggers or slashers in the shadows.

Root-Weaver: These brilliant Canids seek to leave behind something lasting, whether it's a strong family organization or business, a new discovery or a new sanctuary for abandoned animals. As scientists, Root-Weavers relentlessly pursue new pathways of experimentation and theorizing. As group organizers, Root-Weavers bring all their pack-oriented skills into play. On a less altruistic front, "money hounds" have an uncanny "nose" for business if they put their minds to economics, investment or "go for the throat" acquisitions.

Sun-Dancer: Lone wolf or lucky dog, the Pack feral who follows this accord finds her path leading away from the group and their familiar ways. Sometimes, she faces a life of loneliness and personal disappointment in search of a larger goal, such as business or social justice. Forsaking the comfort of home, friends or family, she runs against her grain in a search for a deeper sort of loyalty. Conversely, she might also be a "lazy dog," couch-surfing her way through a rambling, fun-filled life.

Wind-Chaser: A rare accord among ferals who are as bound to group instincts as Pack shapechangers are, this path inspires the hardiest sort of loyalty. Those who feel the call of the wind and follow their passions become prophets and visionaries among their own kind. Wolfkin fulfill the image of the "lone wolf," driven by some inner demon to penetrate the veil between today and tomorrow through vision quests and drum circles, opium dreams and self-inflicted ordeals. Maerans feel the need to migrate, assuming the role of the drifter or migrant worker, truck-driving preacher or itinerant philosopher, always feeling the desire for a pack but never able to stay anywhere long enough to put down roots. Hyena-bloods, meanwhile, sometimes become wandering witches or street-corner doomsayers, their bitter observations and predictions clothed in scathing laughter.

Maerans

The Faithful

Probably the most numerous Pack changers, Maerans have lived side by side with humans for as long as humans have owned and tamed their canine brothers. While most Maerans never reveal their other forms to anyone other than their close companions, people tend to sense something *different* about these dogs. Maerans imbue their "family" with a feeling of trust, community and interdependence. At the same time, many Maera possess an inner strength that catapults them to positions of leadership and inspires others to follow them.

Named for the dog placed by Dionysus in the sky as Sirius, the Dog Star, Maerans tend to attach themselves to a person or group. Those parties become the dog-blood's pack, and receive the Maeran's loyalty whether they realize it or not. No Maeran feels truly complete without an object of loyalty. These ferals are, in fact, the Faithful for better and worse.

Maerans detest being totally alone, and need at least one other person or animal around them at all times, even in a passive capacity. While some Maerans can overcome their inborn dislike of cats (and even keep a few as pets), most dog-bloods feel uncomfortable around cats and arouse similar feelings in felines. Felines instinctually bristle around the Canidae, and although a Maeran can overcome this dislike with a good Manipulation + Animal Ken roll (or good roleplaying), cats — Bastet included — shy away from dog-blooded ferals.

That canine blood manifests through a "pedigree" — as the breed of dog a person becomes. This pedigree reveals a deep connection between the shapechanging human and the dog-shape he attains. While Maerans don't usually arise from bestial couplings between humans and dogs (though there *are* rumors to that effect . . .), this connection does appear to follow family lines. A person whose great-grandfather became a mastiff will probably become one, too. Obviously, this makes old breeds more common among the dog-bloods than younger breeds are; in fact, the Changing Gift skips most new breeds, and manifests almost exclusively through large and venerable breeds: elkhounds, wolfhounds, African wild dogs, basenji, dingos, mastiffs, Great Danes, Pharaoh dogs and other feral or "pariah" dog breeds. Even so, certain recent breeds crop up among dog-blooded shapeshifters, perhaps due to their

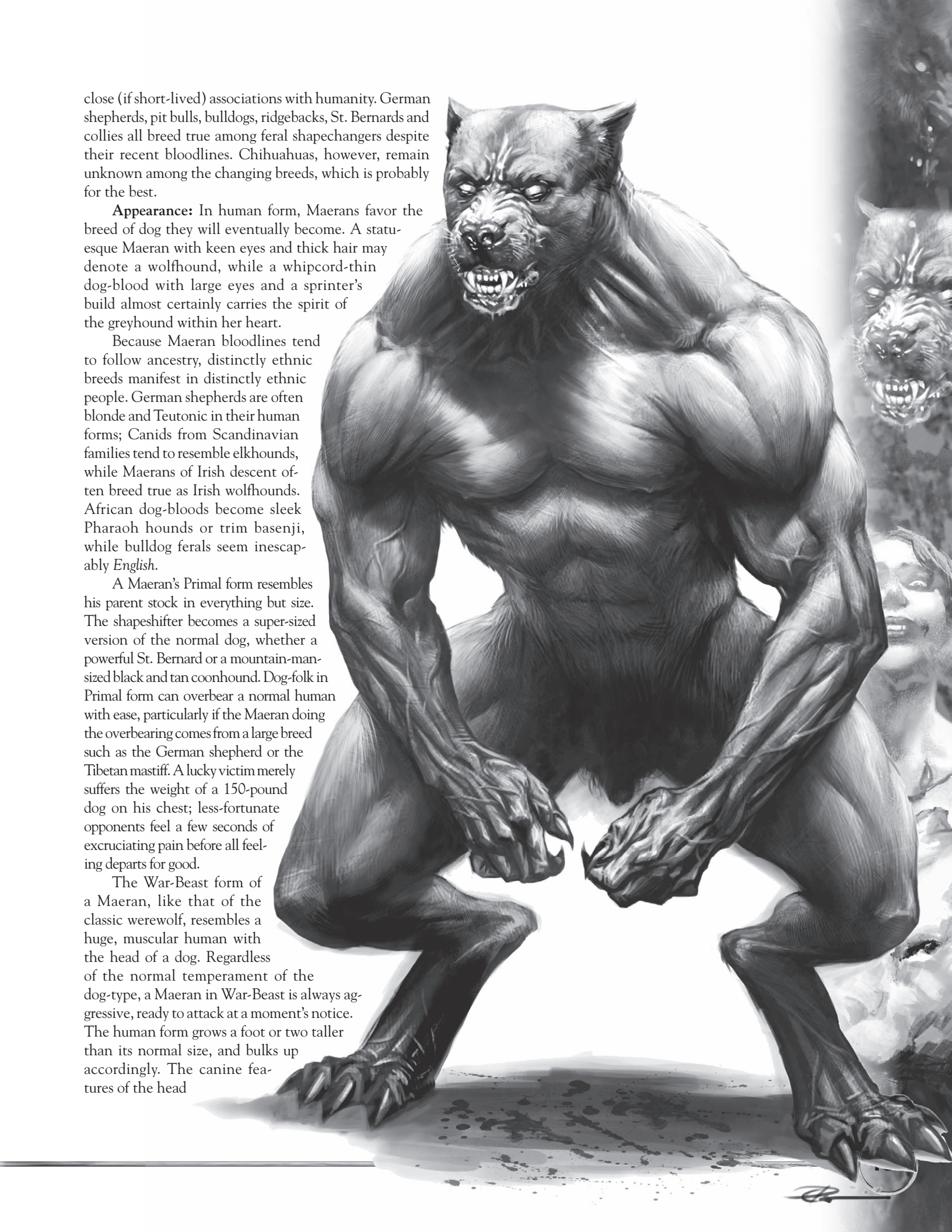
close (if short-lived) associations with humanity. German shepherds, pit bulls, bulldogs, ridgebacks, St. Bernards and collies all breed true among feral shapechangers despite their recent bloodlines. Chihuahuas, however, remain unknown among the changing breeds, which is probably for the best.

Appearance: In human form, Maerans favor the breed of dog they will eventually become. A statuesque Maeran with keen eyes and thick hair may denote a wolfhound, while a whipcord-thin dog-blood with large eyes and a sprinter's build almost certainly carries the spirit of the greyhound within her heart.

Because Maeran bloodlines tend to follow ancestry, distinctly ethnic breeds manifest in distinctly ethnic people. German shepherds are often blonde and Teutonic in their human forms; Canids from Scandinavian families tend to resemble elkhounds, while Maerans of Irish descent often breed true as Irish wolfhounds. African dog-bloods become sleek Pharaoh hounds or trim basenji, while bulldog ferals seem inescapably *English*.

A Maeran's Primal form resembles his parent stock in everything but size. The shapeshifter becomes a super-sized version of the normal dog, whether a powerful St. Bernard or a mountain-man-sized black and tan coonhound. Dog-folk in Primal form can overbear a normal human with ease, particularly if the Maeran doing the overbearing comes from a large breed such as the German shepherd or the Tibetan mastiff. A lucky victim merely suffers the weight of a 150-pound dog on his chest; less-fortunate opponents feel a few seconds of excruciating pain before all feeling departs for good.

The War-Beast form of a Maeran, like that of the classic werewolf, resembles a huge, muscular human with the head of a dog. Regardless of the normal temperament of the dog-type, a Maeran in War-Beast is always aggressive, ready to attack at a moment's notice. The human form grows a foot or two taller than its normal size, and bulks up accordingly. The canine features of the head



expand to nightmarish proportions, complete with slavering jaws and eyes that gleam a bloodthirsty red. There are no "nice dogs" in this form.

Background: Most Maerans pursue vocations that place them in the company of others. These ferals make good teachers and even better protectors, working as security guards, policemen or soldiers. Some are drawn inexorably to the hunt, and make excellent procurers of game birds for the family dinner table. Others use their talents for leadership and their understanding of group psychology to form gangs, political action groups, private armies and survivalist enclaves.

Maeran society tends to revolve around social gatherings. When something worthy of a group's attention arises, the matter is discussed by the group; the current Alpha decides whether or not the group should get involved, and the ferals assume canine form for some rough-and-tumble play before a hunt or battle begins.

Dog-bloods are quite territorial in any form. Even in their human guise, they secure their homes with great care. Trespassers trigger an instinctive rage in Canidae, and an unwelcome guest may find herself staring into a predator's gaze even if the feral never changes form.

Breed Favors: Fang and Claw (bite) 2 (L), Keen Senses, Speed 8

Breed Bonus: Dog-bloods have sight, hearing and smell as a single free Keen Sense Aspect. Of all feral breeds (save perhaps for cats), these shapeshifters have the easiest time getting along in Man's world while in their Primal form.

Common Aspects: Alarming Alacrity, Asthmatic Reaction, *Aww!!!*, Beast Surge, Carnivore's Puissance, Culling the Weak, Darksight, Fortune's Favor, Hound's Honor, Invisible Marking, Magnificence, Mindmap, Pack Bond, Sense of Familiarity, Spinebite, Spirit Sight, Spook the Herd, Territory Bond, The Wild Cry (Canines), Tiger Heart, Toss the Scent, Unnerving Cry, Unsettling Eye, War Heart

Form Adjustments

War-Beast: Strength +2, Dexterity +1, Stamina +1, Size 6, Health +2, Speed +3 (species factor 5), +2 to perception rolls

Primal Beast: Dexterity +1, Stamina +1, Size 4, Speed +4 (species factor 8), +4 to perception rolls, inflict lethal damage with bite attack

Riantes

The Laughing Ones

Similar to the animal whose blood they share, Riantes often live as scavengers, eking a living from the gleanings of more prosperous folk. Riantes tend to keep to themselves, dwelling in their enclaves and dealing primarily with their own animal and human kin except when out scavenging. These ferals hide their bitterness in caustic laughter and bury their tears in scorn and disdain for what they cannot have. Outcasts by inheritance, Riantes often hate the outside world, and return that feeling many times over.

Within their own bands, however, these hyena-folk are gentle child-rearers and fearsome protectors of their young. While most project a furtive, hungry aura that keeps strangers at a distance, others burn with the light of inner passion, drawing people to them like the proverbial moths. These ferals can be charismatic and witty, or harsh and scathing.

As human beings, most Riantes live just above the poverty line, and sometimes far below it. A few, however, have proved both successful and ambitious, carving out desert palaces that rival those of human sheikhs. There, the Riantes hold court and indulge themselves, sometimes gaining a reputation as local princes or queens of thieves.

In Africa, the hyena has deep associations with witchcraft. Rightly or otherwise, most African cultures regard the hyena much as medieval Europeans regarded the cat. Some secret cults, most notably the hyena-men of old Bornu, revered the hyena and provided kin for the Riante breed. Today, however, an association with hyenas can be fatal. Lynch mobs and skilled hunters put swift ends to boasts of hyena blood.

Appearance: Most Riantes, in their human shapes, appear lean to the point of boniness, with rail-thin arms and legs and large, deep-set eyes. Males tend to be only slightly larger than females and give the impression of wiry strength. Females are lithe and graceful (if a little skinny), and project a sensuousness that makes them attractive to humans of both sexes. Almost without exception, hyena-folk have skin that varies from light olive to dark chocolate, and features that mimic their Asian, North African or Indian ancestry. Oddly, many have luxurious manes of hair that range from dark gold to rusty red, instead of the expected dark hair of their typical ancestry. In Western Africa, red hair often considered a sign of hyena blood, and in this case, the belief is often true.

The Riante Primal form resembles a giant hyena. Despite the Riantes' increased size, these creatures retain their quickness of movement and gain a formidable bite. They prefer avoiding fights when possible, but if cornered, Riantes use their wickedly sharp claws and massive jaws to good advantage. No other mammal has a stronger jaw than the hyena, and that power grows when a feral assumes War-Beast form.

The War-Beast Riante has undoubtedly inspired some of the myths that associate Riantes with demons and other monstrous beings. Enraged, a Riante grows to almost six feet in height, and bulks up in the upper body while the legs become as strong as steel cables. The hyena head enlarges, and the eyes turn a deep, glowing red, sinking even further back into the Riante's head. Claws and teeth lengthen, and the mane of hair around the creature's neck stands on end. Despite the horrific appearance, the Riante War-Beast impels a sick fascination on those who see it. Some folks cannot take their eyes off the hyena-man, even as it brings them down. . . .

Background: Riantes tend to undergo their First Change in late adolescence, though they may manifest inklings of the Gift beforehand — a partial change for just an instant or a hyena's characteristic laughter barking from a toddler's mouth. Some pariah families who knowingly carry the Gift welcome a new Riante's birth, feeling that they now have a protector. Other families, though, drive out the "demon-blooded" son or daughter, or simply try to kill the child themselves. Fortunately, hyena-bloods are tough folk, and there's often a mentor in the wastelands waiting to foster an exile.

Very occasionally, families with Riante offspring strike deals with shamans or witches, offering to bind the hyena to them in exchange for bribes or services. If and when other hyena-folk discover such transactions, judgment is swift, and other local scavengers dine well. Even so, these folk have an affinity for beast-magic. Their reputation as witch-demons is slanderous, but not entirely unearned.

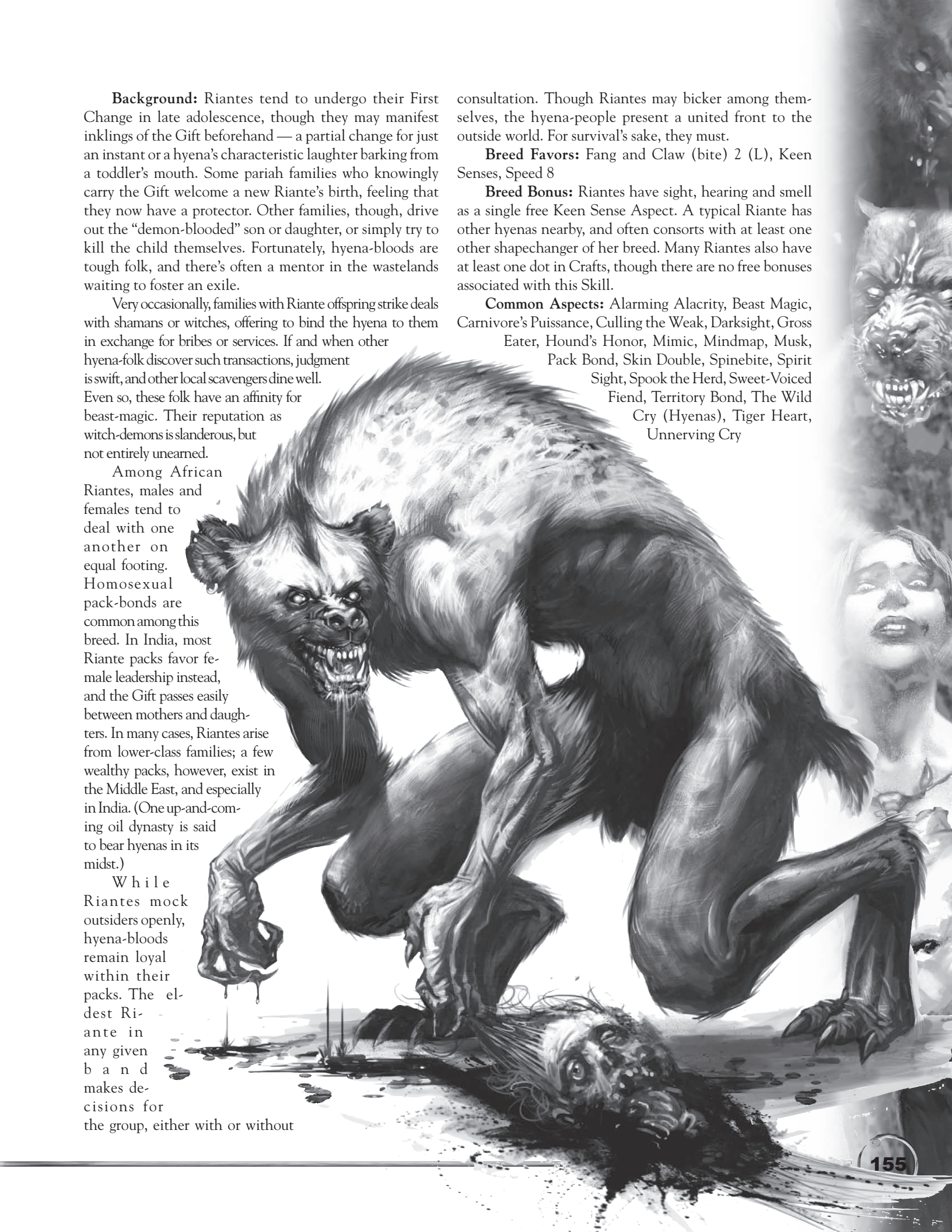
Among African Riantes, males and females tend to deal with one another on equal footing. Homosexual pack-bonds are common among this breed. In India, most Riante packs favor female leadership instead, and the Gift passes easily between mothers and daughters. In many cases, Riantes arise from lower-class families; a few wealthy packs, however, exist in the Middle East, and especially in India. (One up-and-coming oil dynasty is said to bear hyenas in its midst.)

While Riantes mock outsiders openly, hyena-bloods remain loyal within their packs. The eldest Riante in any given band makes decisions for the group, either with or without consultation. Though Riantes may bicker among themselves, the hyena-people present a united front to the outside world. For survival's sake, they must.

Breed Favors: Fang and Claw (bite) 2 (L), Keen Senses, Speed 8

Breed Bonus: Riantes have sight, hearing and smell as a single free Keen Sense Aspect. A typical Riante has other hyenas nearby, and often consorts with at least one other shapechanger of her breed. Many Riantes also have at least one dot in Crafts, though there are no free bonuses associated with this Skill.

Common Aspects: Alarming Alacrity, Beast Magic, Carnivore's Puissance, Culling the Weak, Darksight, Gross Eater, Hound's Honor, Mimic, Mindmap, Musk, Pack Bond, Skin Double, Spinebite, Spirit Sight, Spook the Herd, Sweet-Voiced Fiend, Territory Bond, The Wild Cry (Hyenas), Tiger Heart, Unnerving Cry



Form Adjustments

War-Beast: Strength +2, Dexterity +1, Stamina +3, Size 6, Health +4, Speed +3 (species factor 5), +2 to perception rolls

Primal Beast: Strength +1, Dexterity +1, Stamina +2, Size 4, Health +1, Speed +4 (species factor 8), +3 to perception rolls

Vargr

The Forgotten

Time and mystery obscure the origin of the Vargr. They have no ties with Father Wolf, and claim none. Some speak of a time when sound became form and a great howl spread throughout the young world and coalesced into the first werewolves. Others claim descent from Fenris Wolf (particularly if they favor Germanic or Scandinavian descent), while still others cite the legend of Asena, the small blue-maned wolf who nurtured a lost baby and then birthed a half-human/half-wolf cub that founded the Turkish people. Others simply shake their heads as if to say, "I'm here, and that's all I know." The Uratha call themselves the Forsaken; the Vargr claim their legacy as the Forgotten.

Just as wolves and the Uratha, wolfkin are ferocious warriors, intensely loyal to their packs or family and to their young. These hunters project a feral aura that attracts and repels normal humans, who sense the predator just beneath the often-beautiful exterior. Certain lupines call themselves Vargrs — "the Outlaw Wolves" — and prefer solitude to packhood. While some Vargrs actively seek out friends and allies, others remain apart from the world, lest they become the hunted rather than the hunter. Of all Pack ferals, this breed favors the Sun-Chaser accord the most.

Appearance: A Vargr in human form is almost indistinguishable from other humans, at least at first impression. Soon, though, slight differences rise to the fore: the preternatural grace, the cold, almost inhuman eyes, the feral strangeness that displays itself in an uncanny alertness. Vargr may come from almost any ethnic stock, but favor Slavic, Norse-Germanic and northern Native American blood the most.

A quirk of the breed renders the wolf-shape as the only other form a Vargr can attain. The raging wolf-man form seems to be a legacy of the Forsaken, not the Forgotten. That said, the Primal form is *huge* — more Dire Wolf than normal one. Almost always black or deep gray with black markings, the form's fur runs thick and matted. Huge teeth gleam from within unusually large jaws. Roughly five feet tall at the shoulder and weighing more than 200 pounds, this beast is truly a Big Bad Wolf.

Background: Unlike many other changing breeds, Vargr do not share a common background. Some come from families that welcome them; others are throwbacks whose First Change startles themselves and their families. Some have no inkling that they're anything other than human, while others seem unsurprised when the wolf-self emerges.

For a Vargr, the First Change can occur at almost any time in life. Children as young as five and adults in their twilight years can undergo the Change given the proper circumstances. Some even claim that they were bitten by a "werewolf" whose bite passed on the Change. And then there are those who feel a spiritual kinship with the totem Wolf, and embrace the Change as his blessing on them.

For many Vargr, their First Change spells the end of all they have known. Their families cast them out, their former friends deny them (if they discover the bestial legacy), and their old lives seem suddenly unimportant. An implacable urge drives a wolfkin to seek out freedom among his own kind. Occasionally, he finds refuge among other Vargr, their friendly kin or other rambling loners. Many wolfkin, though, favor solitude, working as bounty hunters, trappers, vagabonds, mercenaries or missionaries. Others channel their inner aggression and natural grace into art, activism or extreme athletics. A wolfkin, by nature, is restless. Whether he howls at the moon alone or in good company, he does it on his own terms.

Breed Favors: Fang and Claw (bite) 2 (L) (claw) 1 (L), Keen Senses, Speed 8

Breed Bonus: Wolfkin have sight, hearing and smell as a single free Keen Sense Aspect. This breed does not have a War-Beast form — perhaps Father Wolf's "favored" children received that inheritance alone.

Common Aspects: Alarming Alacrity, Beast Surge, Carnivore's Puissance, Culling the Weak, Darksight, Hound's Honor, Invisible Marking, Magnificence, Spinebite, Spirit Sight, Spook the Herd, Sweet-Voiced Fiend, Territory Bond, The Wild Cry (Wolves), Tiger Heart, Unnerving Cry, Unsettling Eye, War Heart

Form Adjustments

War-Beast: N/A

Primal/Dire Beast: Strength +2, Dexterity +2, Stamina +2, Size 5, Health +2, Speed +5 (species factor 8), +4 to perception rolls

Other Species

Warrigal: The Singing Ones

Born in the Dreamtime, where forms shift and change, where human spirit and animal spirit meet and consume one another, the dog-headed children crept into the world in the shadow of the red rock. They sang, and their songs drew forth dog from human and human from dog. Seeing this as a sign from beyond, the people raised them as their own. The Warrigal, or dingo-people claim the Australian outback as their birthright. Companions at times to the

Aborigine hunters, predators who hunt anything that moves, (including the human animal), travelers with their far-ranging animal kin, the Warrigal seek two things: to be left alone and to be left alive.

Mysterious and utterly wild, dingo-people shun civilization whenever they can, preferring the tribal customs of the Aboriginals, exulting in the song and dance ceremonies, carving their history into their skin and howling their stories to the winds. Males and females court one another in all their forms, in the belief that this practice will ensure the birth of a feral child. The sign of the dingo reveals itself early in a child's life, though the First Change happens many years later. What happens to an infant who bears no mark is a close-kept secret of the Warrigal. Some believe humans take them away to rear; others have a darker view of the non-feral's fate.

In human form, a Warrigal may possess the dark skin, wiry build and tight curls of her Aboriginal kin, though a scattered few display hair colors ranging from dusty brown to sandy blond. A Warrigal's Primal form takes the shape of the quintessential dingo: a ginger-colored dog with broad head, tapered muzzle and a short, stocky body. In War-Beast form, the dingo-people grow to six feet in height and in weight to 200 pounds and take the shape of a dog-headed biped covered in a thick pelt of short fur, their love of song replaced by savage howls of war.

Breed Favors: Fang and Claw (bite) 2 (L), Keen Senses, Speed 8

Breed Bonus: Dog-bloods have sight, hearing and smell as a single free Keen Sense Aspect. Warrigal characters also have at least one dot in Survival, and often more.

Common Aspects: Alarming Alacrity, Carnivore's Puissance, Culling the Weak, Darksight, Foretelling, Hound's Honor, Invisible Marking, Magnificence, Mindmap, Pack Bond, Shadowbond, Spinebite, Spirit Sight, Spook the Herd, Territory Bond, The Wild Cry (Canines), Tiger Heart, Unnerving Cry, War Heart

Form Adjustments

War-Beast: Strength +1, Dexterity +1, Stamina +1, Size 5, Health +2, Speed +3 (species factor 5), +2 to perception rolls

Primal Beast: Dexterity +1, Stamina +1, Size 3, Speed +4 (species factor 8), +4 to perception rolls, inflict lethal damage with bite attack



Royal Apes

Man's Shadow, Man's Mirror

The aye-aye crooked its spindle-thin black finger toward us from its perch in the tree 10 yards away. We all stopped to stare. It gazed back at us through bulging eyes and a mat of stringy hair.

"He's pointing at the doctor," Josoa, our guide, murmured. He shouldered his rifle and took aim at the creature.

"Wait," I said, but it was too late. The aye-aye fell dead from its tree, and the forest went quiet in the aftershock of Josoa's rifle shot.

"He was pointing at you, sir," Josoa said, seeing the stricken look on my face. "Don't pity it. That devil bears the mark of death." He tramped through the underbrush and pulled out the lemur's carcass by its hair. "For your studies," he said.

Late that night, I awoke to the rattle of overturned trays and broken glass. I hurried to my temporary lab, a military surplus tent with a single folding table and all the equipment my assistant and I could carry. We had left the aye-aye's body there, meaning to take measurements and bury it in the morning.

I don't remember clearly what I saw: A small dark form crouched over the aye-aye's body. The gold lanterns of its eyes as it turned toward me. A look of grief and rage.

I told the others a monkey had stolen into our tent and destroyed our equipment. Random mischief. It was to be expected. But I dreamed of a flame-eyed beast with golden fur and gold scale armor, cradling the broken aye-aye to its chest, its outstretched finger pointed at me.

Behold the Beast: Wizened sage and trickster god. Scampering imp and childlike innocent. Ancient horror and missing link. Beast and man. More than any other creature, our simian cousins embody the dichotomy of Man and Beast in a single form. Stripped of human social mores, they are Man at his most tender — and his most rapacious. From the peaceful yet promiscuous bonobo to the warlike chimpanzee, the powerful silverback giant to the dexterous tamarin, primates run the same gamut of physical capabilities and mental dispositions as humans, and much more. When we look into the face of the ape, we see ourselves reflected there. But whether that reflection inspires compassion or horror is another matter.

An ape's closest cousin, Man is also the ape's most deadly predator. Whether the purpose of the hunt is the butcher of apes for bush meat or the splitting of skulls in the name of scientific inquiry, many apes die at the hands of their human relatives. Even when Man isn't consuming ape flesh, Man's rapidly-expanding civilizations eat away at the borders of the simian's native lands. The fact that humans recognize their close relation only makes the slaughter more horrifying to the simian feral . . . and the fact that he might be complicit in it, unbearable.

Legends from India to Vietnam speak of the monkey as a trickster god and warrior king, at once given to fits of violence and deceit, but also capable of great wisdom and loyalty. These are the virtues and sins of the Royal Ape. Yet their kind also embodies the unknown: bestial shadows that evoke both humans and apes are rumored to walk the high passes of the Himalayas and the dense forests of North America. Across the world, humans whisper of a horror living beyond the reach of our electric lights and reason. Anywhere the tale of a yeti or "hairy man" passes from mother to son, the Royal Ape isn't far behind.

Legends of these shadow-men may stem simply from humans catching sight of ferals in War-Beast form, swollen larger than any man or beast humans have ever encountered, all trace of humanity scoured from the shadow-men's features by rage. Yet even ferals argue among themselves about whether the shadow-men are a product of simple misunderstanding, or a breed all their own. Some ferals claim to have met shadow-men in dark places and untraceable mountain paths, and bring back word that the shadow-men prefer to be left out of all the world's affairs — human and feral alike.

Breed Traits: At first glance, nothing in the Royal Ape's human form or bearing betrays his feral nature. Though arboreal shapechangers of this breed have a slighter build than their land-dwelling cousins, and gorilla ferals boast broad shoulders and heavy frames, none are so large or small as to draw attention to themselves. The clues to their nature are more subtle: something in a person's grim smile that conveys more menace than amusement, his penchant for going barefoot, the way he hurls paperweights and crockery when something displeases him or his uncannily long, limber arms and legs . . .

The Royal Ape's flexible hands and his ability to use tools in his primal form provides a unique talent among feral shapechangers. This has given rise to honorifics such as "the Fast-Handed Ones" or the rather insulting "Man-Kin." Regardless of his name, the Royal Ape makes no bones about the pride he feels over his opposable thumbs. Every animal must make the most of his strengths to survive, even if those edges include quick wits and a facility with tools and weapons, rather than razor-sharp claws and lightening speed. Similar to his human counterpart, the ape is at his most formidable as a member of a pack, so he will ally himself with others as convenience allows. Even so, Royal Apes don't forge alliances lightly. An oath of brotherhood with a Royal Ape is a bond you can trust.

As Herman Melville said, who has not tasted the flesh of his kind?

If you know to look, the shadow of his feral self also surfaces in a Royal Ape's physical appearance. An orangutan or red-ruffed lemur feral may have a shock of orange hair in his Man-Guise. An emperor tamarind may cultivate a long and lustrous mustache, or the bonobo a thick head of perfectly-coiffed hair. Ape ferals in human form are very conscious of their relative lack of hair, and similar to a balding man with a thin comb-over, they take great care grooming what "little" they have, even combing and styling the hair on their arms and legs.

Likewise, those whose primal forms feature brightly colored fur often feel shabby and under-dressed in anything but the most flamboyant clothes. Males are especially vain when it comes to dress. A folktale circulates among the surviving Hanumani Brahman about a decade-long war that resulted from a competition to see which of the males from two high-born families could procure the purest spool of silk thread for his wedding finery.

Habitats: Simian ferals appear throughout the globe, from the dense forests of the Indian subcontinent to the frozen reaches of Siberia. Though primates aren't native to Los Angeles or St. Petersburg, simian ferals tend to pop up where you least expect them. Some suggest this anomaly is a result of Man's affinity with apes: that anywhere Man lives, the ape travels in his breast. In fact, tree-dwelling ferals thrive is cities, where they feel at ease among the high-rises and scaffolding.

Nevertheless, simian ferals tend to congregate in the native territories of their animal brethren, where their beast-forms will seem most innocuous: Africa, Asia and Central and South America. These are the lands once ruled by the Royal Ape dynasty, the children of Hanuman and Sun Wukong, the Monkey King. Even if a Royal Ape emerges in Canada or Finland, he will likely travel to one of these other continents to seek out his heritage or others like himself.

Predators and Prey: Aside from Man, the Royal Ape has few beasts to fear. If caught alone, he may fall prey to one of the Bastet or their more mundane, yet fearsome feline cousins; and he would do best not to earn the ire of the Serpentines or the Land Titans. His ability to wield weapons, even in beast form, makes him a formidable foe, so few creatures trouble themselves with such troublesome prey.

Just as humans, simians are omnivores. Most days, they forage for plants and the occasional bird's egg. But those incisors aren't for nothing. Sometimes a Royal Ape craves meat. If he's lucky, he can walk into a restaurant and order plate after plate of ribs and steaks, or pick up an antelope carcass where a pack of lionesses left off. Other times, eating the meat isn't enough: he has to catch it with his own hands. Even the most civilized of baboons simply can't help himself from feasting on a tender, succulent baby chimpanzee every once in a while. He may feel remorse later, but at the time it feels so *right*. . . .

Spirit-Ties: Certain sects within the fellowship of Royal Apes encourage contact with the spirit world, particularly the monastic order of the Luminous Way of Sun Wukong or the wandering witches of the Abathakathi. The former seek enlightenment through their own brand of Buddhism, while the latter are up to their elbows in more chaotic, earthy practices.

Kin: The ape's bond with modern Man is tenuous at best, largely because of the history of human violence against apes and their kin. On the other hand, the Royal Ape's human side recognizes that not all humans actively mean his people harm. Some merely want to study his simian brothers from afar, while others have found a way to coexist with their fellow primates in relative peace.

Ape ferals raised among a group of their own kind will grow up hearing stories of the old time, when humans revered the monkey as a god and paid him homage. For some Fast-Handed folk, this is merely a painful reminder of Man's lack of reverence for Nature, but others ally themselves with groups that cling to the old ways. From Sri Lanka to Mumbai, human family members of the Hanumani Brahman honor their shapeshifting brothers and sisters by caring for temples dedicated to the Hindu god Hanuman, along with all the mundane monkeys who gather within their gates to be fed and sheltered.

Despite small numbers, most groups of Royal Apes remain exclusive of outsiders. Initiation rites can be particularly arduous, due in part to a Royal Ape's mistrust of strangers, and in part to the deep simian sense of pride. Wanting to be part of a tribe isn't enough: a stranger must prove himself worthy of the group's love and protection. Once accepted, the new member takes on the responsibility of defending a providing for his family, whether human or simian. Only the most heinous of crimes, such as treason or infanticide within the Royal Ape's own tribe, will cause a group of Royal Apes to turn against one of their own or expel him from their society altogether.

Society: Royal Apes prefer to roam alone, especially as young men and women. However, solitude is a dangerous and vulnerable position for people and apes. Given the relative scarcity of their kind throughout the world, most Fast-Hands spend their adolescence and early adulthood seeking out a society of other apes or ferals that will welcome them. Once integrated into a group, protecting his territory and the other creatures within it is as natural to an ape feral as his mistrust of strangers. Whether his family is composed of normal simians, human devotees or other ferals, he'll defend them with a wild fury if he thinks they're in danger. In a tribe of other apes, the moment an outsider



Stereotypes

Man: Poor cousin! He fancies himself the ruler of the world, yet all the while the ground crumbles beneath his feet.

Mages: Parlor tricks bore me. Our own witches are far more fearsome.

Vampires: What the undead do is their business, as long as they keep out of my house.

Werewolves: Any fight between us would leave each side too bloody to be worthwhile

threatens any member of the group, the tribe quickly closes ranks. Woe betide the stranger in their midst. He had better be ready to take flight.

Alphas: Where Royal Apes gather in groups, they hold to a rigid hierarchy, with the Alpha keeping his — or, in the case of bonobos, *her* — subordinates in check. The Alpha is almost always a single, powerful feral, and almost never an Alpha pair. In some groups, such as baboon tribes, the Alpha keeps a harem of females — humans, animals or other ferals — for his pleasure and use. Normal baboons will bite a member of their harem if she strays too far from the group, and ferals are not above doing the same, or worse, if they find a lover's affection wandering. Other groups operate as a matriarchy, with members congregating around a mother figure in the tribe, or as a monastic order, in which religious discipline tempers the ape's natural inclination toward violence.

Character Creation: Royal Apes are no weaklings, but they depend more on cunning and dexterity than brute force. Their strengths lie in their Social and Mental Attributes, rather than their Physical ones.

Concepts: Poet, monk, drifter, wandering naturalist, middle management, union leader, witch doctor, band groupie, Mafioso, temple-keeper, politician, bouncer, fire lookout, missionary, yoga instructor, con artist, real estate magnate, environmental activist, fortune teller, midwife, West African *jali* (a bard or storyteller)

Accords

Den-Warder: Fierce protectors of their lands and kin, unmoving in their loyalty to those they consider family, Den-Warders provide a common accord among Royal Apes. A threat to any member of the family is a threat to the entire family, and in the Royal Ape's world, *nothing* trumps family.

Heart-Ripper: Ferals of this accord become so disgusted and ashamed of their human side that they dedicate their lives to eradicating Man and his conceits. Why should Royal Apes call Man their kin, when Man refuses apes the same courtesy? Instead of honoring apes and monkeys as his brethren, Man treats them with the same disdain he shows all of Nature. A Royal Ape's human guise allows him to infiltrate human institutions with ease and dismantle them from the inside, so long as his passion doesn't betray his intentions. It's time to fight fire with fire.

Root-Weaver: This accord resonates clearly with the Royal Ape's analytical mind. Puzzles and ciphers enthrall him. Tools of all sorts fascinate him — the more complex, the better. Not only does he love using human technology, he constantly searches for ways to improve upon it for his benefit. Many Weaver Apes congregate in Japan, the forefront of technology in the modern world . . . which is also convenient for its proximity to feral ape sanctuaries and Wukong Warrior monasteries.

Sun-Dancer: A trickster through and through, the Fast-Hand seems to be a textbook example of this accord, at least on the surface. Though the Royal Ape is always on the lookout for a clever angle (and ready to try the most devious means necessary to get what he wants), at his core, he dislikes alienating his tribe. Shame from having displeased his family can sober even the wiliest trickster.

Wind-Chaser: Though Royal Apes are inquisitive by nature, their feet are often kept firmly on the ground (or at least have a good grip on a tree branch). These ferals are an earthy folk, not given to flights of fancy or esoteric musings. Unless something has a practical application, they don't have much use for it. Even among the Abathakathi witches, magic is a *tool*, not an end unto itself.

Hanumani Brahman

The Golden Lords

A loose confederation of hereditary feral families, the Hanumani Brahman range throughout the Indian subcontinent and the former British Empire. Ferals within the families manifest almost exclusively simian forms, and the families claim to be descended from Hanuman, the monkey god of Hindu myth. Their human members serve as patrons or caretakers of temples dedicated to the god, passing their people's traditions and folklore down through the generations.

When a monkey or ape feral is born into one of the families, he is feted and held up as proof of their divine heritage. When he comes of age, the feral immediately ascends to a position at the head of the family, unless another feral family member already occupies the post. Marriage between two Hanumani ferals is an auspicious event, celebrated with a lavish, week-long ceremony and feast.

It's fortunate, then, that the Hanumani Brahman have wealth to match their divine ancestry, or such celebrations would ruin them. Even with their immense fortunes, the ranks of the Hanumani are declining because they do not admit new families to their caste. In recent years, some of

the younger Hanumani have lobbied their elders to admit less prestigious families with a history of producing ape ferals. The younger generations speak of integrating new families under the auspices of discovering "lost" descendants of the god, but as yet, their elders have yet to approve of the youngsters' "promiscuous fraternization." As a result, at least one of these families, Kumar, has approached the Regency clans for acceptance into their fraternity — an appeal that, as of yet, has gone unanswered.

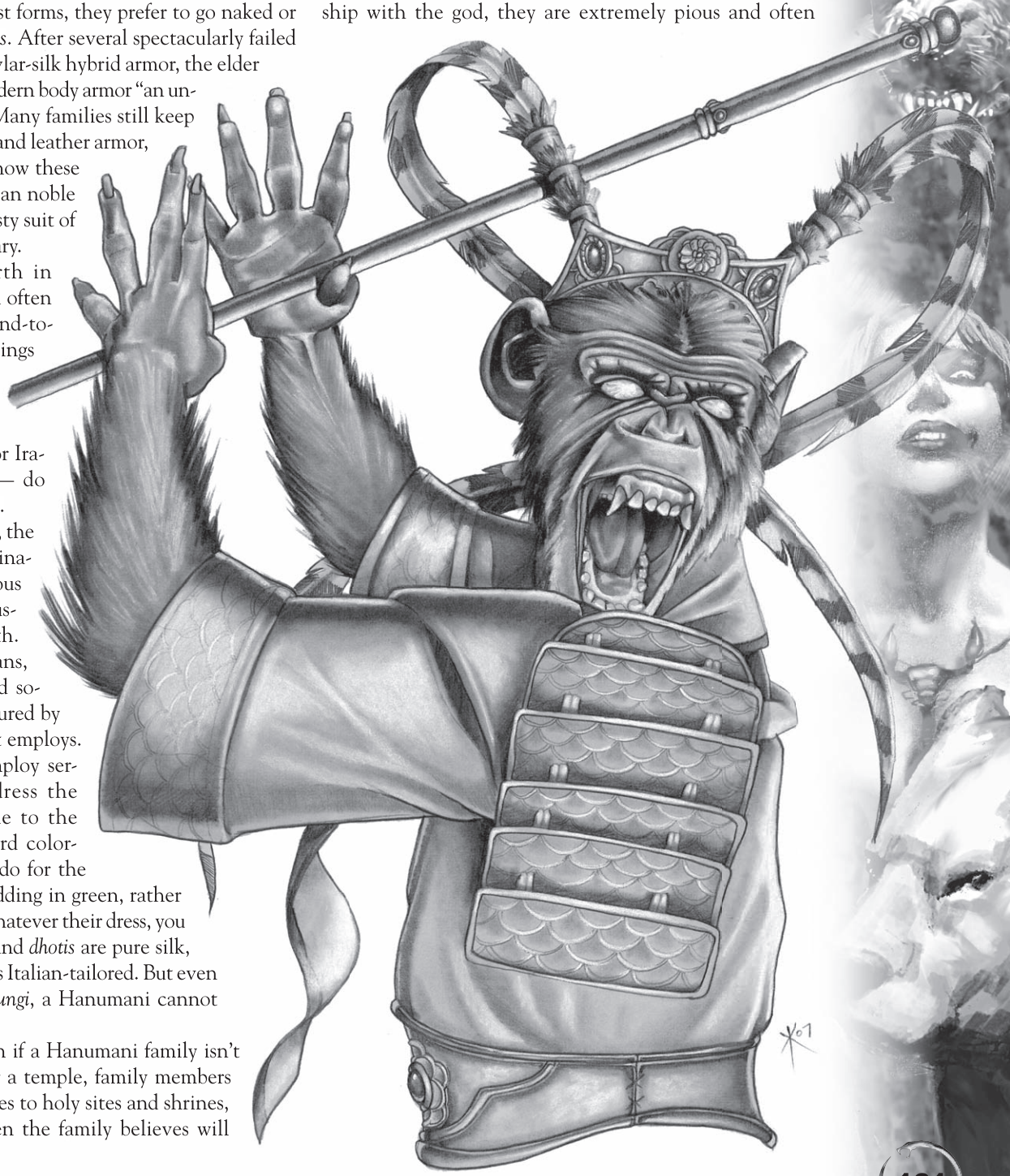
Appearance: A Hanumani Brahman's Primal Beast self may take the form any number of apes or monkeys native to India, particularly the macaque or the gibbon. In their wiry and ferocious War-Beast forms, they prefer to go naked or wear silk *lungis* or *kurtas*. After several spectacularly failed experiments with a Kevlar-silk hybrid armor, the elder Hanumani declared modern body armor "an unnatural contrivance." Many families still keep traditional quilted silk and leather armor, but this is mostly for show these days, much as a European noble family might keep a dusty suit of plate armor in the library.

Trained from birth in archery, the Hanumani often have little need of hand-to-hand combat. When things get sticky, they prefer to let their hired bodyguards — either non-Hanumani Apes or Iravati elephant ferals — do much of the dirty work.

In his human form, the ape feral's natural inclination toward ostentatious dress collides fortuitously with his vast wealth. Among Hanumani clans, a family's affluence and social status can be measured by the number of tailors it employs. Many families also employ servants especially to dress the Brahman, perhaps due to the simian tendency toward color-blindness. It wouldn't do for the bride to attend her wedding in green, rather than traditional red. Whatever their dress, you can be sure their *saris* and *dhotis* are pure silk, their Western-style suits Italian-tailored. But even in a common cotton *lungi*, a Hanumani cannot hide his regal bearing.

Background: Even if a Hanumani family isn't directly responsible for a temple, family members make regular pilgrimages to holy sites and shrines, especially with children the family believes will develop the ability to change shape later in life. Parents believe that such pilgrimages encourage the Gift to emerge. They may be right: while the Gift doesn't appear more frequently in Hanumani families than in other hereditary feral families, Hanumani children *do* tend to Change at an earlier age than most ferals.

Though the First Change is still a life-changing Storm, Hanumani children have been schooled from an early age to accept the transition as a divine gift, rather than a curse. This consideration, and the supportive, near-worshipful attitudes of other family members, makes the transition easier to accept. Due to the Hanumani's close relationship with the god, they are extremely pious and often



very conservative. It's difficult for a Hanumani feral to break with tradition and join another group of apes or beast-bloods, although it's been known to happen, especially in the fast-paced world of modern India. The elders tolerate a certain degree of "slumming," so long as the young Hanumani is discreet. However, as young Hanumani assert their growing independence by allying with other feral beast-folk, the elders begin to keep tighter reins on their offspring.

Breed Favors: Clamber, Size 4, Speed 6

Breed Bonus: All Hanumani Brahmans also have the Magnificence Aspect for free.

Common Aspects: Alarming Alacrity, Bare Necessities, Clever Monkey, Durga's Blessing, Fortune's Favor, Hybrid Forms, Magnificence, Righting Reflex, Sexual Dimorphism, Unsettling Eye, Weaver's Wisdom

Form Adjustments

War-Beast: Strength +2, Dexterity +3, Stamina +2, Manipulation –1, Size 5, Health +7, Speed +6 (species factor 6), +1 to perception rolls

Primal Beast: Strength +1, Dexterity +3, Stamina +1, Manipulation –2, Size 4, Health +0, Speed +5 (species factor 6), +1 to perception rolls

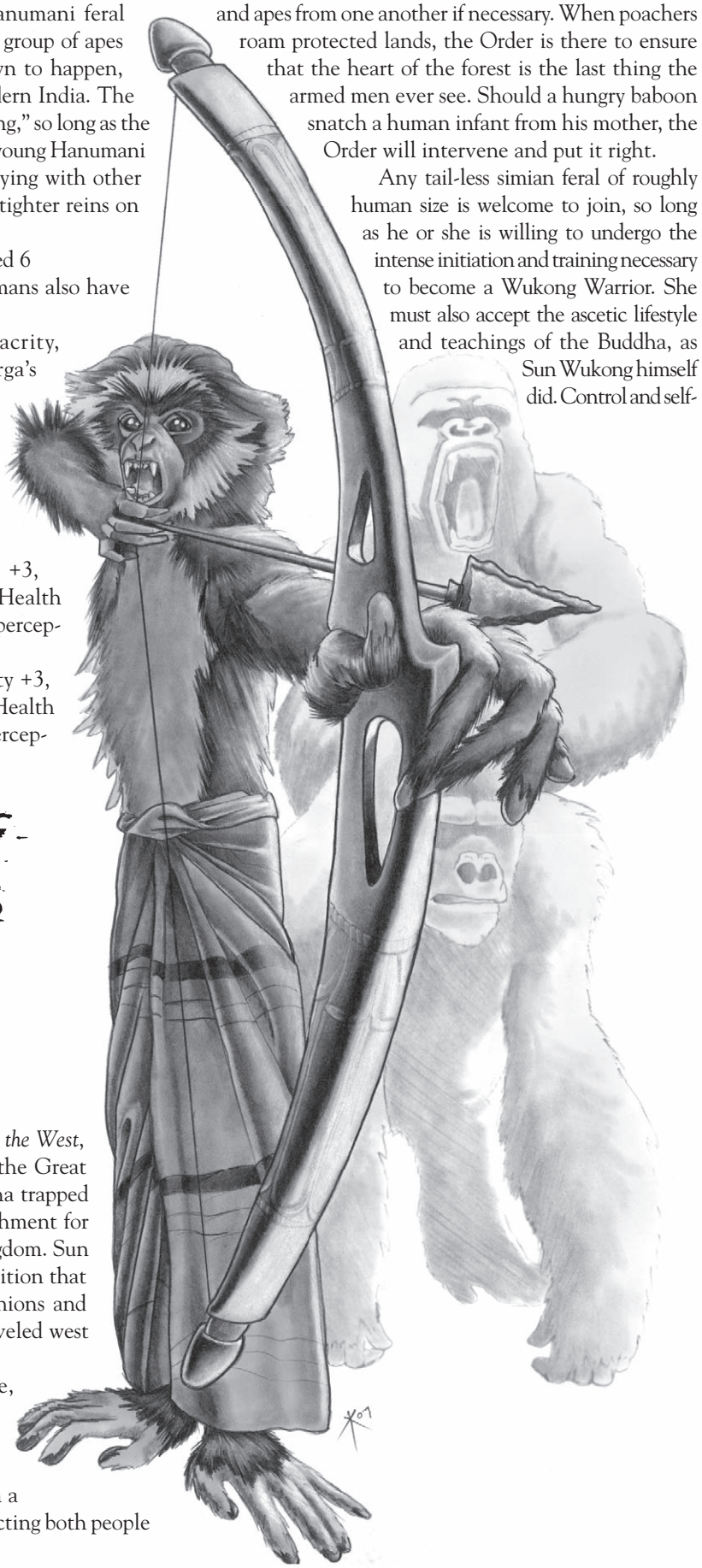
The Order of the Luminous Way of Sun Wukong

Turned Tricksters

The Chinese folk legend, *Journey to the West*, tells of the monkey king Sun Wukong, the Great Sage Equal to Heaven, whom the Buddha trapped under a mountain for 500 years as punishment for inciting a rebellion in the Heavenly Kingdom. Sun Wukong was finally released on the condition that he serve as one of the traveling companions and protectors of Xuanzang, a monk who traveled west to India retrieve the Buddhist sutras.

In the tradition of their namesake, the Order of the Luminous Way of Sun Wukong has taken it upon itself to serve as an intermediary between the worlds of Beast and Man. More a vocation than a breed in the usual sense, these ferals protecting both people and apes from one another if necessary. When poachers roam protected lands, the Order is there to ensure that the heart of the forest is the last thing the armed men ever see. Should a hungry baboon snatch a human infant from his mother, the Order will intervene and put it right.

Any tail-less simian feral of roughly human size is welcome to join, so long as he or she is willing to undergo the intense initiation and training necessary to become a Wukong Warrior. She must also accept the ascetic lifestyle and teachings of the Buddha, as Sun Wukong himself did. Control and self-



knowledge are difficult for a feral to master, but the teachings of the Luminous Way of Sun Wukong help many a feral ape to keep from spiraling into a destructive cycle of sin and loss of Harmony.

When that loss occurs, however, the effect is staggering. Similar to Sun Wukong himself, a "fallen" feral ape becomes a living engine of chaos. Her speed and destructive capabilities assume awe-inspiring proportions, her feral cunning undiminished by her rampaging state. At the lower levels of Harmony (4 and below), a fallen member of the Order embodies the worst aspects of Man and Beast combined.

Appearance: A Wukong Warrior's primal form is fairly mundane, taking after whichever animal he resembles. In his human guise, he favors simple, colorful robes. His War-Beast form is another matter altogether: Legend says the Monkey King possessed a suit of golden armor, as well as a golden staff that could shrink to the size of a pin or expand into an immense pillar. His fur was tinged with gold, and his eyes burned bright with it. An actual suit of armor made from gold would be impractical for the Wukong Warriors, who prefer to think of their namesake's golden armor in metaphorical terms: an outer shell of calm that protects them from the chaos of the world.

Nevertheless, to those who are attuned to such things, ape ferals who have mastered the Luminous Way exude an aura of burnished gold in battle. In War-Beast form, their fur takes on a gilded sheen and tongues of flame swell in others' eyes. A Wukong Warrior's countenance is fearsome to behold in battle, but even more so alone in a darkened room, or at the dense epicenter of a bamboo forest.

Background: In earlier days, the Order kept separate retreats for its male and female novices, but the dwindling number of ferals in the world has led many monasteries and convents to accept ape ferals of both sexes for training. The closed nature of most other Royal Ape sects and the intense simian desire to bond with a group leads primates from every corner of the world to the Order's doors. Some abandon their training after only a few days or weeks, but those who remain emerge from their training Zen-like in composure, but deadly as warriors.

In addition to the internal discipline of Buddhism, Wukong Warriors practice a form of martial arts similar to Shaolin kung-fu. In happier times, a master of the Luminous Way would instruct a handful of students at a time, but now she is lucky to find a single feral ape to carry on the Order's mission. Despite their diminished ranks, master warriors demand the same dedication and precision from their students as ever. If a student is lazy or disrespectful, his master will not hesitate to put him out in the cold. A student defers to his teacher in all matters until he himself has mastered the discipline. Even then, he will honor his master, even if the two disagree.

Breed Favors: Clamber, Fang and Claw 1 (L), Speed 6

Breed Bonus: Members of the Wukong Order can use the Fighting Style: Kung Fu Merit in their beast forms — something no other feral shapechanger can do.

Common Aspects: Alarming Alacrity, Catwalk, Hybrid Forms, Keen Sense, Magnificence, Pack Bond, Resilient Form, Unnerving Cry, Warrior's Restoration, Weaver's Wisdom

Form Adjustments

War-Beast: Strength +2, Dexterity +3, Stamina +2, Manipulation –1, Size 5, Health +7, Speed +6 (species factor 6), +1 to perception rolls

Primal Beast: Strength +1, Dexterity +3, Stamina +1, Manipulation –2, Size 4, Health +0, Speed +5 (species factor 6), +1 to perception rolls

Abathakathi

The Witch-Apes

Shapeshifters in West Africa have a hard lot. Between the belief among some Muslims that monkeys were once humans transmuted into animal form as punishment for theirs sins, and local superstition mixed with Christianity, any being with the Changing Gift lives in constant fear of persecution. Remote villages employ the most brutal means of driving shapeshifters and other anomalies from their midst.

Villagers saddle odd or uncanny children with the name Abathakathi (Ah-buh-tha-kath-ee; singular, *umthakathi*), which literally means "a mixer of medicines" but connotes an evil sorcerer or malicious being intent on harm. Cancers, AIDS, all manner of blight: Man lays blame for these at the Abathakathi's feet. Those accused are almost exclusively girl-children. Such evil is inborn, men say, and must be snuffed out as quickly as possible. What better time than when the *umthakathi* is a child, when she has little defense against fire and crowds?

For some, the name is a death sentence; for others, it's a self-fulfilling prophecy. Many a feral's true nature emerges under the threat of burning. Savaging her attackers in a bristling blur of fang, fur and blood, she then flees into the wilderness.

While the transformation may save her life, it also perpetuates the myth about her people. *If that is what they say I am*, she thinks, *then that is what I will become*. Her own people have betrayed and disowned her, so she feels no scruples about striking back at them from her sanctuary in the forest. Alone in the woods or under the tutelage of another such as herself, the feral learns the art of mixing draughts and conjuring spirits whose names she would not have dared speak in her childhood. If left alone, she might have grown up to become an *inyanga* (ee-nah-yang-guh), plural *inzinyanga* (iz-nah-yang-guh]) or *sangoma*, plural, *izangoma* (iz-ang-goma]), a diviner or a healer of natural and supernatural ills. Sadly, Man's fear and hatred often drive her to turn her considerable talents against him.

The Abathakathi specialize in poisons. Their reputation for man-killing drugs draws jealous lovers and angry fathers of all kinds deep into the forest. In some areas, these ferals offer their services as abortionists to the desperate and the violated. The mandrill witch Izula Mamawa was said to keep such girls as her disciples, training them to execute vengeance against the men who had wronged them. Unscrupulous witches use these same skills for darker means, leaving miscarriages and hemorrhages in their wake. Thus, the witch-ferals and the men who abhor them are locked in a deadly spiral. Each perceives the harm done to him or her as the greater offense, and each continues his or her campaign of violence against the other.

Appearance: Far from human society, the *umthakathi* cares little for the conventions of human dress. The clothes she wore when she fled quickly become a patchwork of torn cloth, bloodstains, bone and woven plant fiber. Her hair becomes a matted nest of fleas and other insects, and she paints her skin with gray mud to disguise its natural tone. She prefers to wander the forest in her Primal form, which often takes the shape of a mandrill.

Her War-Beast form is a terrifying mixture of the Primal form and human guise. From afar, she gives the impression of an unusually tall man, but aside from her human eyes, her face is that of a mandrill: a long red stripe of nose flanked by blue flesh, and below it, a maw of saber-like incisors.

Background: The lives of the Abathakathi are secretive by necessity. They rarely gather in large groups. In fact, most live alone or in pairs in the remote jungles of West Africa. Their nomadic nature has earned them the name "wandering witches." Sometimes, a lucky *umthakathi* joins a tribe of mandrills — but in doing so, she knows she's putting their lives at risk. Man always seeks to destroy her, no matter where she roams. If he finds her, he won't take the chance of sparing any of her companions.

The most common grouping among the Abathakathi is a master-student pairing, in which a young refugee from human society learns the apothecary arts and the binding of spirits from an elder witch. Few Abathakathi are males, and men who travel with this dark sorority are seldom feral refugees. They are more likely the sons of female Abathakathi, or other outcasts seeking vengeance against human society through an alliance with the wandering witches.

Breed Favors: Clamber, Darksight, Fang and Claw 1 (L)

Breed Bonus: Although the player must pay points for it, all members of this breed have an innate faculty for Beast Magic.

Common Aspects: Alarming Alacrity, Beast Magic, Beast Surge, Blend In, Clamber, Clever Monkey, Earthbond, Keen Sense, Nine Lives, Righting Reflex, Territory Bond, Unnerving Cry, Unsettling Eye, Weaver's Wisdom

Form Adjustments

War-Beast: Strength +2, Dexterity +4, Stamina +2, Manipulation 2, Size 5, Health +7, Speed +7 (species factor 6), +2 to perception rolls

Primal Beast: Strength +1, Dexterity +3, Stamina +1, Manipulation –1, Size 4, Health +0, Speed +5 (species factor 6), +1 to perception rolls



Other Species

Tothians and Babi-Ahsh: The Mane and the Stone

It was not Man who discovered magic, but the baboon. One of the first children of the sky, the first baboon Ahnkan-Ka mated with a falling star and produced two brothers: Aki-Toth of the Brightfire Mane and Babi-Ya the Hooded Stone. All three baboons understood instinctually the secrets of the universe, and their descendants have used those arts ever since.

Ages later, two baboon breeds carry on that legacy. The scholarly Tothians draw inspiration from Thoth, the Egyptian god of magic and wisdom; steeped in ritual and finery, they preserve ancient rituals in the hidden heart of the Old Land. Babi-Ahsh, in contrast, run naked and screaming under an open sky; their sorcery writhes with entrails and raw meat. The eerie tales of wizard-apes beneath Cairo or rampant witch-apes in Mpumalanga may find their truth in these related breeds. Although the cousins approach their magic differently, each boasts an innate talent for the art.

Descendants of the Brightfire Mane pursue a studious path. Collectors and antiquarians, these "ferals" are among the most sophisticated changing breeds. Tending shops in El Qahira or offices in London, these loquacious apes conceal a deep fascination for occult secrets behind their outgoing ways. Their earthy cousins are more direct; howling up storms or snatching baby animals (and humans) for bloody feasts, the Hooded Stones forsake settlements for the savage wilderness. Where the Hooded Stones prefer spirit-craft (in game terms, the Spirit Gift Aspect), their cousins perfect an arcane beast magic (as the Aspect of that name). Both, however, boast fierce reputations. A person who crosses a shapeshifting baboon is asking for many kinds of trouble.

Breed Favors: Clamber, Darksight, Fang and Claw 1 (L)

Breed Bonus: Again, these breeds have innate talents for Beast Magic or Spirit Gifts. Both species can buy the Shadow Bond Aspect, and have other Aspect tricks as well.

Common Aspects: Bare Necessities, Beast Magic, Blend In, Earthbond, Hybrid Forms, Keen Sense, Nine Lives, Shadow Bond, Truth Sense, Unsettling Eye (Tothians), Alarming Alacrity, Blend In, Catwalk, Clamber, Culling the Weak, Earthbond, Skin Double, Spirit Gift, Spirit Secrets, Spirit Sight, Territory Bond, Unnerving Cry (Babi-Ahsh)

Form Adjustments

War-Beast: Strength +2, Dexterity +3, Stamina +2, Manipulation –2, Size 5, Health +7, Speed +6 (species factor 6), +2 to perception rolls

Primal Beast: Strength +1, Dexterity +3, Stamina +1, Manipulation –1, Size 4, Health +0, Speed +5 (species factor 6), +1 to perception rolls

Hugranjah: The Hairy Men

He shambles across folklore from the Himalayans to the Rocky Mountains, flashing shadows across camera viewfinders since the invention of photography. Whether or not he's an "ape" by most definitions is beside the point: call him Sasquatch, yeti, Hugranjah or simply "the Hairy Man," this Man-Kin remains a mystery.

Unlike other beasts, the Hugranjah (HOO-gron-jaa) have yet to leave behind definitive evidence of their existence. Perhaps it's their canny knowledge of the human condition. Rumor has it that men and women of this breed live on the outskirts of civilization, packing up their meager belongings and abandoning the caves and abandoned houses where they lair as soon as people come too close. Monster-hunters who find themselves confounded by the blurry effects of the Delusion still run across shacks and crevices where someone *human* lived until just before their arrival. Occasionally, the ashes of the beasts' fires are still warm. Yet the hair and footprints found nearby indicate that those "people" boast unusual size, bulk and hairiness . . . except when other footprints and remains suggest people of average proportions. Do the so-called Bigfoot people manage to elude detection by shapeshifting into human form? If so, it would explain a lot.

To native folklore, the Hugranjah are border-walkers, solitary shamans who live naked at the very edges of wilderness and human habitation. Expert herbalists and hunters, the Hugranjah have been known to leave gifts or aid for struggling humans near their homes. Yet those same enigmas also claim "tolls" of animals or occasional human life. More spirit, it seems, than beast or man, the Hugranjah appears to slip between skins, between worlds, and always between the shadows of what is *seen* and what is *not*.

Breed Favors: Darksight, Fang and Claw 1 (L), Size 7

Breed Bonus: These folk are adept at Stealth, and receive an extra two successes to any attempt at hiding, moving silently or otherwise evading detection.

Common Aspects: Blend In, Catwalk, Earthbond, Hybrid Forms, Keen Sense, Nine Lives, Shadow Bond, Spirit Sight, Territory Bond, Weatherskin

Form Adjustments

A Hugranjah's Primal form is the ape-like Sasquatch, which triggers the Delusion unless the witness makes a normal Resolve + Composure roll. The War-Beast is a larger, more ferocious variety of the same form, with glowing eyes, huge fangs and a matted hide that exudes mist or smoke.

War-Beast: Strength +4, Stamina +3, Manipulation –2, Size 8, Health +6, Speed +4 (species factor 5), +1 to perception rolls

Primal Beast: Strength +3, Stamina +2, Manipulation –2, Size 7, Health +4, Speed +3 (species factor 5), +1 to perception rolls



The Spinner-Kin

Eight in Infinity for the Tying of the Web

Reinventing physics is not as difficult as one might think. Darkness is a crutch for those that cannot hide. Today I am feeling indulgent. I dangle in plain view, if my victim would merely look.

He pays no attention as he sighs through the boredom of his money. My contract states that he must be identifiable when I bring him in. My legs extend, and I become the poisonous compass to his well-deserved judgment. When one shops little girls out for sex and profit, it is wise to know all of your enemies . . . and potential enemies.

Some of us might be amused to liquefy you from the inside out.

I have heard he is afraid of spiders. If he wasn't before, he will be when I am done.

Behold the Beast: Elegant yet chillingly dispassionate, the Spinner-Kin are the poetry of enigma. Because of their relatively short lives, Arnae (the arcane title for Spinners) are devout believers in seizing the day. Instinctively aware of the vibration the perfect moment offers, Arnae have no use for wasting opportunity.

That being said, they also painstakingly nurture the potential futures their actions provoke. Life is viewed as through the eyes of one aware that time is not a friend. If something needs to be done, Spinners prefer to do it now. They simply strive to be certain of the consequences for the generations that follow.

Arnae have often been associated with the stuff of nightmares and phobias. Rightly so, the very symbol of the weaving Fate has long belonged to their eight-legged siblings, and it's an intimidating legacy. Of threads, cuts and twisted entanglements, these ferals galvanize the very image of powerlessness in the face of predestination. As graceful and predatory as their spider brethren, Spinners, if not waylaid quickly, can evoke unease for those around these ferals.

Fear begets hatred, and hatred begets violence. Shoes against walls have moved to zealous slaughter of all that creeps with too many legs. Pesticides in the urban landscapes and deforestation in the dwindling jungles have forced the Arnae to reevaluate the necessity of humanity. At present, humanity has been found sadly wanting.

Breed Traits: In human form, Arnae are eerily beautiful. Lithe of limb and dastardly graceful, they ease through life as if gravity was never meant for them. Deathly still at times and then gut-wrenchingly fast without much transition — this is their trademark. Males are generally significantly smaller than their female counterparts. Most top out at approximately five feet tall and generally weigh no more than 90 pounds. Females can reach six feet, but are usually slender as well. Most never weigh more than 130 pounds. They come from any culture or ethnicity. Spider is a patient weaver, and her children — insect and human alike — are legion.

As for the Spinners' animal counterparts, they are generally quite small. Most Arnae scatter into scurrying pools of motion, but a few shrink down to singular cat-sized nightmares. All Arnae produce silk — a thin, strong protein strand extruded from spinnerets most commonly found on the end of the abdomen. These spinnerets are present in all forms.

In War-Beast form, these folk appear as luminous spiders standing nearly six feet tall at the shoulder. There are more than 40,000 species of spider, so the possible colorations, shapes and patterns are endless.

Among all the changing breeds, Spinner-Kin are the shortest lived. Maturing with hair-raising speed, they seldom live for more than five years past the First Change. *Carpe diem* is not a gentle prodding for them — it is their only choice. This rabid mortality either makes them appear bountifully social with those that wander within their awareness . . . or it makes them almost skulkingly silent. They believe time should be never be wasted. There will never be enough of it.

For the most part, Spinner-Kin have to make a concerted effort to be anything other than terrible parents. They do not so much abandon their children as get on about their own weavings, but the young are often left to learn the circles with little guidance, if any at all. This forces self-reliance, and also fosters a natural distrust. It takes a great deal to earn the friendship and love of a Spinner. If friendship and love are won, they must be nurtured regularly or fall to the wayside like a web torn from the wall.

Habitats: Spiders are everywhere, as are their Arnae brethren. They hunt, breed, build webs and explore throughout the seven continents. Spiders are found all over the world, from the sweatiest tropics to the glacial Arctic. Some have learned to live underwater in silken domes they supply with air. Some prefer the thin air on the tops of mountains. These ferals thrive on the diversity of options available to them. Adapting to an infinite array of environments is a quietly gloated-upon point of pride. Jungles, mountains, sewers and more than a few high-rise apartments . . . these creatures know the world in the webs they create through it. As omnipresent as unexpected trepidation, there are painfully few places on land that Spinners cannot call home.

Predators and Prey: Make no mistake, Spinner-Kin are predators. Carnivores all, the thrill is in the nature of the killing. Some trap their dinner in webs and let them hang quietly till the Spinners can suck out the prey's organs at the ferals' leisure. Some chase down unlucky prey and poison them into submission. Similar to the Spinners' smaller kin, if the Spinners can subdue it, they will try to eat it. They consume only liquid foods. Digestive fluid is injected into victims and begins the process. Some Spinners are strictly cannibals and can only feast on their own. It all sounds evil, but such is Nature's way.

In animal form, Arnae (and their animal kin) are hunted by many. Birds, fish, small mammals, insects, other spiders — all dine on Arnae. Man, naturally, is the greatest murderer. Insecticides and fear-fed intolerance are Man's weapons of choice, and his primal horror at spiders and their kind make him a fearsome adversary. Worst of all are the thrice-cursed werewolves; babbling nonsense about "Hosts" and Wolf-Fathers, werewolves torch webs and spill viscera with canine abandon. Out of necessity, the true children of Grandmother Spider must needs strike first . . .

Spirit-Ties: Arnae have been the symbol of Fate for as long as tapestry has been woven. They are the embodiment of destiny. Worshiped as spirit-guides in African and Native American cultures, the Spinners carry on the proud work of Iktomi and Arachne. Spiritually, many Spinners wish to see the Spider Woman return with her webs to re-invent the world. Still, there are darker predatory shades. Though she may have been a spirit of light, Grandmother's brood has cousins who would turn her grace to toxin. Washing all eight hands of the joke called Man, several deadly cults within the breed have begun rituals to see the poisoning to fruition.

(It's worth repeating that the Spider Hosts called Azlu are *not* the get of Grandma Spider. Possessed mockeries of the Arnae, these virulent creatures make life more difficult than it needs to be for the rightful heirs of her eight legs. Feral spider-kin are people born to weave; Azlu are corpses driven by spirit infestation. The difference may matter only to the Children of the Web, but to them it matters *much*.)

Kin: To the Spinners, Arnae kin (both animal and human) are viewed more as social network ties rather than friends and family. Great tangling interconnections in business, science, literature and political manipulation are decidedly *natural*, yet interpersonal relations are not. Individuals are fragile; developments that bend cultures endure.

If spider-kin appear cold, it's only natural. How could a masterpiece love lesser works of art? Certainly, the other beings that shamble and stumble through the night are worthy in their way. Sentiment, though, for such things is unseeingly. Best to discard it, as a man would put cows from his mind as he unwraps a cheeseburger.

It takes a great deal to impress an Arnae. Most beings that *do* catch the attentions of Spinners are generally viewed as competition for food, information or life-experience. If a person wishes to stay in the presence of an Arnae for any real length of time, she must prove herself useful, independent and intrinsically *aware*. Grandmother's brood are not a forgiving lot. Forgiveness takes time and long-term patience. It is easier and more efficient to dismiss (or disembowel) problems as necessary.

Society: Arnae are social only as a means to an ends. Preferring to focus their energies into their own plots and perils, these loners must find a purpose in sharing time and resources, or they'll choose to do otherwise.

If, however, a common goal must be reached before the Spinner can weave more knots in his own webs, he will act accordingly. Arnae are not so driven to be in isolation that they sacrifice potential gain for the future. Opportunity knocks with many different knuckles, and spider-kin are nothing if not opportunistic.

Alphas: There are two very different protocols within Arnae culture. One is for gatherings of single-sex groupings, and the other is for coed groupings. When two or more Arnae of the same gender (either male or female) meet, a social ranking is established in order of oldest to youngest. If it is a meeting of two or more of the same age and experience, and leadership needs to be declared then a formal challenge is offered. The challenger must accept the battlefield chosen by his opponent. Usually, this "battle" is a simple test of strength or agility. However, on occasions, the challenges are much more interesting. Combatants must decide before the challenge is undertaken, how victory will be judged and whether or not both competitors are to leave that space alive. If, however, the gathering is a mixed group, the female always has alpha status. Her natural leadership is understood and strictly respected.

Character Creation: For Arnae females, Physical traits assume the highest priority; their male counterparts favor Mental and Social traits with equal respect. Almost all Spinners have Subterfuge and Athletics among their Skills. And, of course, Crafts and Expression are essential — one for the ability to weave webs, the other for having a fine sense of aesthetics.

Concepts: International spy, bike messenger, hired gun, botanist, eco-terrorist, librarian, hacker, New Age psychic advisor, accountant, investment coach, politician, socialite, dominatrix, crime boss, slave trader, medicine woman, psychologist

Accords

Den-Warder: *Preserve our offspring and the future will be sustained.* This is the quietly understood faith of these Arnae. Naturalists and botanists by leanings, Den-Warders look toward their animal kin for the answers. Unfortunately, though Den-Warders may be quite determined to combat the indiscriminate slaughter of kin by outside forces, they have not yet completely overcome their own instincts to abandon their young themselves. Warring not simply with the world outside but with the very essence of their Nahual, Den-Warders struggle constantly to maintain balance and a sustained purpose.

Heart-Ripper: There's bliss in getting all your legs dirty. Prey is sweeter when stewed in sweat and pain. Arnae shrouded



in the Ripper accord believe that if it's worth killing, it is worth killing in a manner that will make an unholy mess. Newspapers don't take pictures where there is no savagery. Besides, neurotoxins take too long . . . and are not as much fun.

Root-Weaver: Pay attention to the tangles in the Web, and the future is easy to predict . . . and manipulate. Sensitive to the most trivial change in political intrigue or social veering, Weavers are the quintessential intelligence agents. If it's going on, Root-Weavers know about it and are driven to control it. God-like masters of the Internet and information-gathering, this accord knows too much for anybody's comfort.

Sun-Dancer: Revolutions are won or lost in the art that the time inspired. The very tremblings of beauty stay the soul. Arnae sparked deep in this accord relish reminding the world of this fact. Believing that Fate is woven around individual destiny, Dancers leave traps of beauty for hearts to fall into. Drum rifts that reverberate and then fade down Avenue A, impromptu performance art or Baroque graffiti appeal to the aesthetic senses of these Arnae. Of course, they're usually long gone before the paint dries. Their designs, however, inspire long after the spiders themselves have died.

Wind-Chaser: *Stillness within, movement without* — this is the circle Arnae Wind-Chasers walk. It is believed these haunting souls tie the cords of the seven layers of silence. The first of those layers is simple contemplation. The last is death. In-between them, there are circles within circles that offer breathtaking power to the spirit. These are the holy teachers, heirs to the lessons of Kwaku Ananse, wise trickster supreme. In most ways, these are the purest heirs to Grandma's legacy. They're also the most poisonous of all of the Spinner-Kin.

Stereotypes

Man: Bulbous and deaf are these. They could not hear the sound of the Web singing from their actions if it was as loud as the Bells of Saint Michael's. However, they *are* fun to watch.

Mages: Invest your days toward the Fates, or do not. Dabbling in the sticky oil of the Universe is a game only for children and suicidal flies.

Vampires: For all that they have a delicious sense of style, they completely lack the manners to know when they should leave the party.

Werewolves: Does doggie want to play in the big sticky net? Good *boy*!

Nanekisu

The Eight Knives

As rare as truth, the Nanekisu are *called* rather than *born*. Warrior scholars all, these single-minded Arnae define their purpose in the defense of genuine knowledge. Found in every major center of faith and learning throughout the world, the Nanekisu are the knives that cut away the gangrene spread of propaganda and misinformation.

No single genus now claims the spear of the Nanekisu. In the beginning, all these spiders were native only to the Mediterranean regions. When their Gift manifested, they were revered as gods, monsters or both. It was a glorious time, but time has always quarreled with Spinners. As all things do, that period passed. When exploration became more and more possible for normal man, the Nanekisu bloodlines stretched across the globe. False teachings and ignorance flayed hot the souls that bore the blood and brought the Eight Knives up into every land. For those that call themselves Nanekisu (Non-eh-kee-SU), the word "calling" is too tame a word. Their vocation is more of an epiphany or divine order. Their souls demand they follow. Their skins melt to meet the needs required to do so.

Simply put, these Spinners gather information, root out falsehood and preserve what passes for "truth" as best they can. Their short lives are dedicated to this greater goal. Some enrich themselves through this calling (*information* may want to be free, but access *to* it can be quite expensive), filling huge penthouses with elaborate webs of computer networking and sticky webs; others assemble archives and place them under the keeping of human kin. A few erase the distinctions of mortal morality, becoming syndicate bosses extraordinaire. These spiders hide their true natures in catacombs deep below their chosen cities, or fill warehouses to brimming with sparkling masterpieces. Their underlings learn quickly that finger-joints are *small* prices to pay for failure, compared to others that might be required. Informants and crusading cops wind up as desiccated husks or incubators for fresh generations. And then there are the gatherers themselves — restless artisans of the silent kill. Venturing out in human guise or picking their way through skyscraper landscapes, these Arne find the answers they seek. If screams are not easily understood, then such is the cost of a job well-done.

Nanekisu have long proved themselves zealots of education and dauntless defenders of the intellectual arts. Often versed in the hard sciences, history, theology or sociology, these Spinners aim to be definitive experts in their fields of

Life is short, so we are blessed with more hands with which to touch it . . .

choice. As warriors, they are dispassionate assassins. Just as panic murders rationality, Nanekisu kill just as quickly.

Appearance: As mentioned previously, there is no set racial or animal stock among the Nanekisu. All races, nationalities and arachnid species have equal chance of serving. Continuity between their generations comes through *listening*, not *seeing*. Nanekisu believe that wisdom is found in limited speech. When one is not talking, after all one may hear. These Spinners rarely, if ever, speak . . . and if they do, it is *never* idle conversation.

Only in animal form is there a sign of affiliation. A scar shaped like a hand (usually in silvery white) appears on the Nanekisu cephalothorax undercarriage. This is the sign of the poisoning and the death that followed.

In War-Beast form, Nanekisu take on the appearance of information itself. So many voices, so many theories, so many arguments have made up what is now seen as the truth. So it is with the wrathful shape of its protectors. Becoming a skittering, twitching, climbing jumbled mass of arachnids, the overall shape mimics a single massive spider. Thinking as one, acting as one, the millions of tiny bodies redefine ghoulish retribution as they strike venomously against those who oppose them. The Arnae appreciate the symbolism of many lives weaving into the actions of one and the actions of one weaving into many. Those who face the horror of that War-Beast rarely do. . . .

(It's important to note that the individual arachnids in this body are not independent. Similar to the millions of cells in the human body, one spider cannot crawl off and act in a solo capacity, and the mass cannot alter its shape. This form is, for all purposes, a single massive entity.)

Background: People who seek information and feel ready to deal with its dearer price must face the Nanekisu who acquire said information. The more potent the information in those archives, the stronger a warrior the supplicant must face.

If that supplicant is a fellow Arne who wishes to join or serve the Nanekisu, he'll be greeted by one who has proved her worth to the group. Ritual combat begins, and if the challenger fails, he is soundly punished for his insolence and sent scurrying away. If he wins, he must then face another challenge: to allow himself to be poisoned to death ritualistically and then trust that the current defender will bring him back again in a new and very different form. To allow this test is to prove loyalty. No Nanekisu has *not* seen the other side. Knowledge is power.

Breed Favors: Fang and Claw, Many-Legged (adds +4 to Speed), Nine Lives

Breed Bonus: Nanekisu surrender their individuality when they join this hive-minded collective "breed." Although a single mind guides them and a single human flesh-bag holds their souls, each one is truly many; therefore, this breed has no Primal form, just the Man-Guise and a War-Form shape composed of millions of spiders united into a single giant arachnid. When something "kills" this entity, its component spiders scurry off, attempt to regroup, and "resurrect" the original body via the Nine Lives Aspect.

Common Aspects: Alarming Alacrity, Blend In, Catwalk, Clever Monkey, Darksight, Earthbond, Invisible Marking, Keen Senses, Mindspeech, Natural Armor, Sense of Familiarity, Skin Double, Slumber's Touch, Spook the Herd, Swarm Form, Truth Sense, Unsettling Eye, Unspeakable, Venomous, Wallwalking, Weaver's Wisdom, Webbing

Form Adjustments

War-Beast: Strength +3, Dexterity +4, Stamina +3, Manipulation –5, Size 6, Health +4, Speed +13 (species factor 9), +2 to perception rolls, Fang and Claw (bite) 1 (L)

Carapaché

The Hidden Children

Before the World writhed out of its laying silks, there was Fate, waiting. As always as beginnings and as never as the ends, she watched the World struggle onto the threads of the Sky. She watched the infant World seize and devour space so it could have a place to set its traps. World wove beauty onto its face with webs of light pulled from within its own innocence. She considered her circular intentions and understood that World did not worry about consequences because it had no fear. All that it needed had been provided for it. Fate knew this should not be the way of things.

She turned upon it jealousy because jealousy takes, but does not give. She told the webs of Light that Darkness was better because it was never-ending, not trapped within the virtue of the World. She told Darkness that Light was better because it was not heavy with cold. Both Darkness and Light looked upon the other with hatred because it is easy to hate those who have what you cannot. The war began, as it had been fated before the always of beginnings and the nevers of ends.

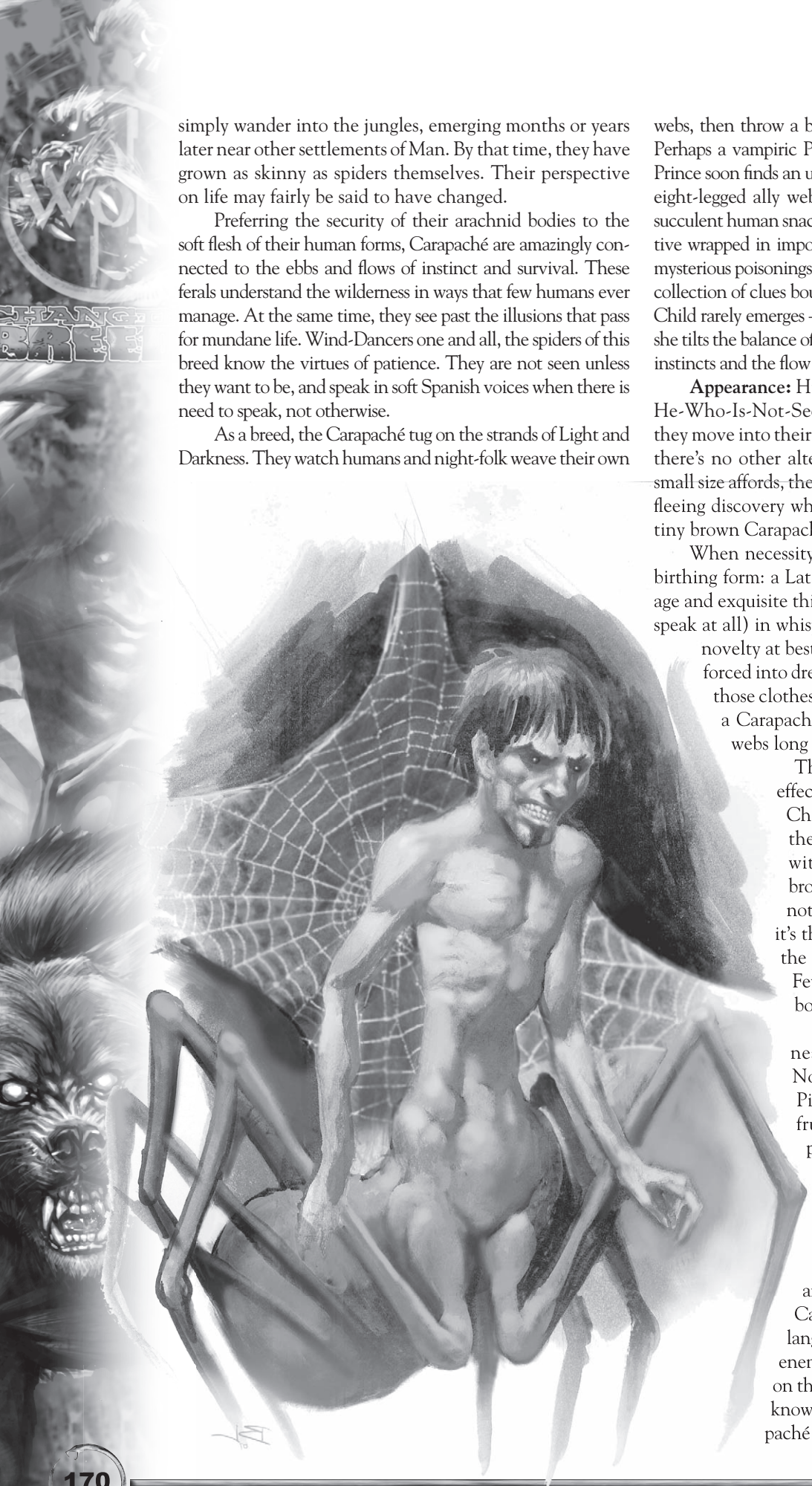
Vibrations of war between Light and Dark sang through the web. No longer did World's threads feel strong or its traps hidden. No longer did World feel alone and peaceful in its own self-reliance. Fear came soon after, and Fate smiled. World offered up humanity and spiders to appease the war between Light and Dark. No one knows which gift was meant for whom. Light and Dark took World's gifts, but left Fear to lay her eggs in World's paralyzed belly. This was the way of things, and remains so even now.

The Carapaché (cod-ah-PACH-ay) believe that they're the direct descendents of the spiders World offered to Light and Darkness. Beginning their short lives almost exclusively in the depths of canopied South American jungles, these ferals tread lightly on the greens of the world. Undergoing their First Changes caught within the massive webs of jungle spiders, these children return to their villages with steady, unblinking stares if they return at all. Many

simply wander into the jungles, emerging months or years later near other settlements of Man. By that time, they have grown as skinny as spiders themselves. Their perspective on life may fairly be said to have changed.

Preferring the security of their arachnid bodies to the soft flesh of their human forms, Carapaché are amazingly connected to the ebbs and flows of instinct and survival. These ferals understand the wilderness in ways that few humans ever manage. At the same time, they see past the illusions that pass for mundane life. Wind-Dancers one and all, the spiders of this breed know the virtues of patience. They are not seen unless they want to be, and speak in soft Spanish voices when there is need to speak, not otherwise.

As a breed, the Carapaché tug on the strands of Light and Darkness. They watch humans and night-folk weave their own webs, then throw a bit of weight behind one party or other. Perhaps a vampiric Prince struggles to keep his throne; that Prince soon finds an unexpected (and sometimes unwelcome) eight-legged ally webbing up the Prince's rivals or leaving succulent human snacks in his parlor before nightfall. A detective wrapped in impossible red tape finds her way cleared by mysterious poisonings, while the crusading reporter discovers a collection of clues bound to his car by steely silk. The Hidden Child rarely emerges — that would not be Fate's way. Instead, she tilts the balance of the struggle in curious ways, trusting her instincts and the flow of Nature to guide her strands.



Appearance: Hidden Children are the get of Recluse, He-Who-Is-Not-Seen. Masters of survival and stealth, they move into their human or War-Beast forms only when there's no other alternative. Preferring the freedom that small size affords, these stealthy ferals move in the shadows, fleeing discovery when they can. Most folk never see the tiny brown Carapach unless he wishes to be seen.

When necessity demands, a Carapach returns to her birthing form: a Latino or *nativo* person of indeterminate age and exquisite thinness. Such people speak (when they speak at all) in whisper-thin voices. English, to them, is a novelty at best. To a one, these folk go naked unless forced into dress for some specific errand. Even then, those clothes are soon shed. The feeling of cloth on a Carapach's body remind her too deeply of the webs long ago.

The Carapaché War-Form is simple yet effective: a man-sized spider, either of the Chilean recluse species or a tarantula of the Goliath bird eater variety, banded with yellow-brown stripes and a dark brown fur. Although natural tarantulas do not spin webs, the Carapaché *do*. Perhaps it's the influence of their spinning sires, or the legacy of that long-ago cosmic web. Few folk who see a Carapaché War-Beast bother to argue arachnology.

Once, the Carapaché moved only near the jungles of their homelands. Now, though, they travel extensively. Piggybacking on shipments of lumber, fruit or artifacts, the spider-folk find plenty of places to hide. Being brought (willingly or not) to the lands of Man has taught the Carapaché how badly things have gone since the old days. Man builds terrible webs of pestilence and noise. He breathes in his own filth and does not die nearly quickly enough. Carapaché struggle to learn the scratchy languages the enemy speaks because the enemy is stupid and talks too much. To tug on the web of Light and Darkness, one must know which way to pull. And so the Carapaché watch. And learn. And pull.

Background: Living as arachnids whenever possible, Carapaché learn very few human Skills. What they know, they learn through action, instinct and necessity. Yet feral as they are (and few "ferals" are as *truly* animalistic as these quiet folk), the Carapaché are not in any way *stupido*. Quite the opposite; to catch subtleties like flies without knowing the language is a tribute to perception.

Shy to an almost pathological degree, a Carapach still seeks occasional human comfort. For all that the Carapaché might wish otherwise, they *are* human beings tucked into arachnid bodies. Their skittish ways inspire nurturance or occasional contempt among the humans they approach. The nurturing ones find firm, if quiet friendship; the contemptuous ones find spiders in their beds.

Breed Favors: Many-Legged (adds +4 to Speed), Venomous, Webbing

Breed Bonus: As for most small shapechangers, the Carapaché Primal form has set Health, Size and Speed traits. This gives the feral a +2 bonus when hiding from larger creatures. All Carapaché characters have Survival and Stealth, and receive free Skill Specialties in Hiding and Jungle Survival.

Common Aspects: Alarming Alacrity, Blend In, Catwalk, Clamber, Culling the Weak, Darksight, Invisible Marking, Keen Senses, Natural Armor, Nine Lives, Resilient Form, Spook the Herd, Truth Sense, Unsettling Eye, Unspeakable, Wallwalking

Form Adjustments

War-Beast: Dexterity +4, Manipulation –5, Size 5, Speed +12 (species factor 5 + legs), +2 to perception rolls, Fang and Claw (bite) 1 (L) plus venom

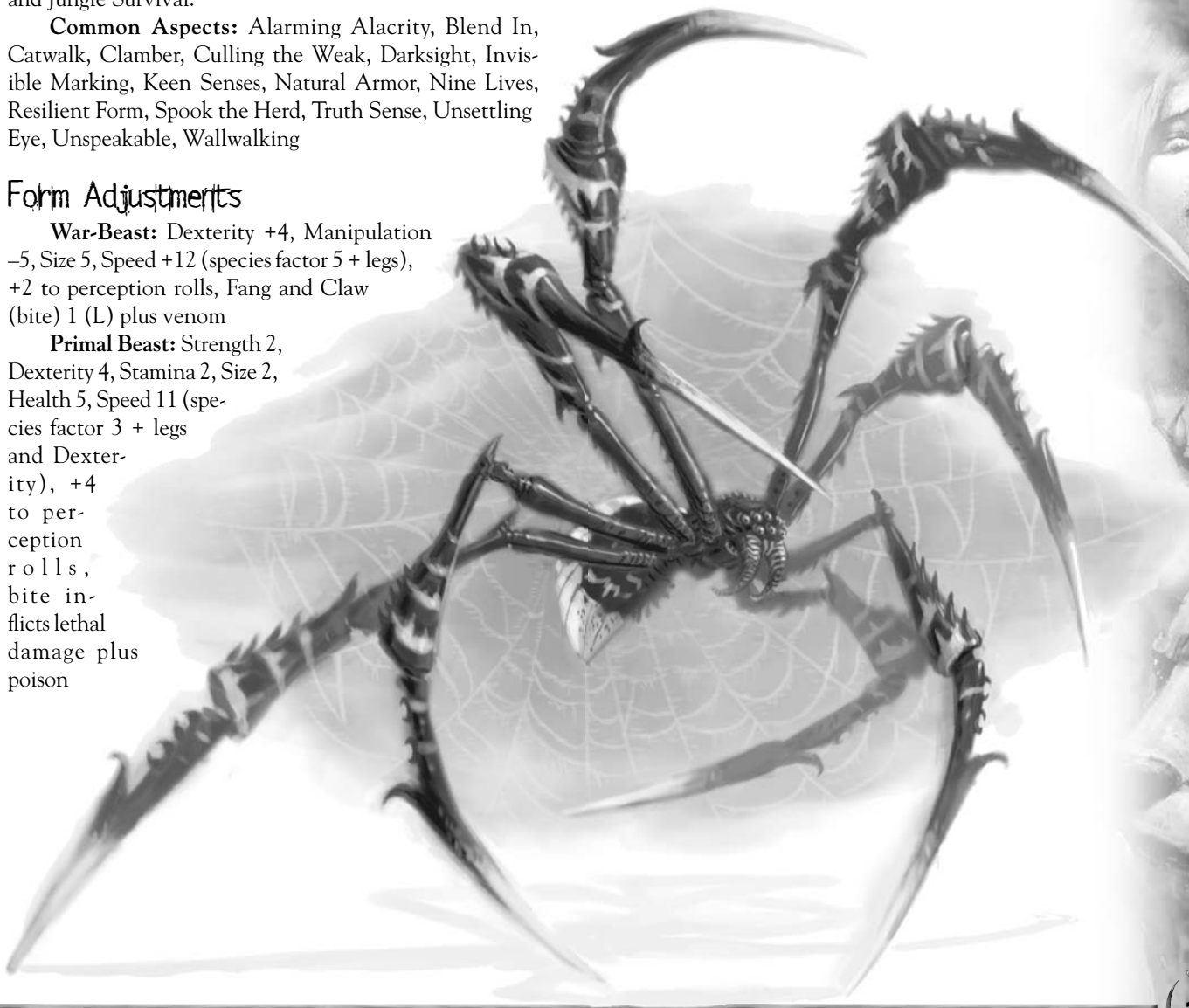
Primal Beast: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2, Size 2, Health 5, Speed 11 (species factor 3 + legs and Dexterity), +4 to perception rolls, bite inflicts lethal damage plus poison

Other Species

C'hi Hsu: Mystic Webs

In the grand towers above Hong Kong and the vaults below Singapore, a fatal game of Go has been waging for nearly 1,300 years. Open the wrong door in Beijing or turn your head in San Francisco just a moment too soon, and you may see one of the 10,000 secrets of old Qin. Neither Communists nor emperors nor Western oafs could untangle the web of the C'hi Hsu, a venerable breed whose alchemies stop the tread of time. In the centers of those webs sit vampiric spider-witches whose arts stave off the frailty of their kind.

Not all C'hi Hsu are so blessed, of course. To reach the exalted thrones of the Great Hakka, an Arne must pass 1,000 tests as presented by a master of the breed. Given the short lifespan of spider-kin, this requirement is even more arduous than it seems. Yet some few succeed; learning the sacred alchemies of Five-Web Magic (a uniquely arachnid take on Taoist alchemy), they prolong their years and powers to impossible lengths. So



doing, these "Jeweled Queens" command other, lesser C'hi Hsu to carry out mundane tasks, secure cooperation from the local communities and bind rivals in webs both symbolic and real. When an outsider meets a C'hi Hsu, it is almost certainly one of these "Young Silks." Their elders are far too elevated to sully their feet in the gutters of Man; to even enter the presence of a Jeweled Queen's web, a visitor must fast for three days and be perfumed in seven kinds of smoke.

Young Silks and Jeweled Queens alike, the C'hi Hsu love conspiracy. Their long lives give them much to remember and much to avenge. This may be the reason Spinner-Kin are so short-lived. Perhaps their webs were not meant to last, their poisons meant to boil in mortal frames. The Great Hakka weave a web of insult and intrigue that reaches back to the Qing Dynasty and spans from the boarders of Russia to the shores of the United States. The venerable House of Zhî even counts itself among the so-called Regencies. Yet so subtle are these designs that the flies trembling at its corners never see the spiders in the strands. The Jewel Queens have no need for haste, after all. Unlike their kin, the Jewel Queens have time.

Bright spiders in iridescent hues, these Arne pick their way along rooftops in silence. The moon shines on their slick limbs as they pass. Spinning grand peacock-colored webs, the Jewel Queens lay each strand with practiced perfection. In their pale human forms, the Young Silks of the C'hi Hsu are unfailingly polite. They know how passion stirs a web. Yet that calm resolve becomes cruelty when some unfortunate steps too near the grand design. Such fools must become examples to the greater herd. Scissored into pieces and boiled from the inside-out, their corpses are hung by iridescent threads at dawn. The mortals know not to ask why.

Breed Favors: Many-Legged (adds +4 to Speed), Venomous, Webbing

Breed Bonus: C'hi Hsu have no War-Beast forms, only a single large spider and a small human being. Both shapes are the same Size, if different dimensions. All C'hi Hsu have Occult Skill, and have Allies and Contacts among corporations and criminal syndicates.

Common Aspects: Alarming Alacrity, Beast Magic, Carnivore's Puissance, Blend In, Catwalk, Clamber, Culling the Weak, Darksight, Earthbond, Invisible Marking, Keen Senses, Mercy's Touch, Natural Armor, Nine Lives, Truth Sense, Unsettling Eye, Unspeakable, Wallwalking

Form Adjustments

Dire Beast: Dexterity +3, Manipulation –5, Size 4, Speed +16 (species factor 5 + legs), +2 to perception rolls, Fang and Claw (bite) 1 (L) plus venom

Sicarius: Poison's Voice

Legends claim that Poison was once the concubine of Sleep. Dressed richly in the fever dreams and delusions of early Man, she wooed Him into a false peace. She brought wakeful dreamers into states that mimicked dreaming and death. Sleep had more territory with which to travel due to her ministrations. He fell for Poison's affections. Unfortunately, this is a legend for spiders. Poison acted as a female should. Sleep has never forgiven Her. He sent dreams from beyond the Web to his children to bind her in the hatred and death of Man. Forever in the darkness, She has grown mad. The Sicarius are Her voice. How organized madness can be if hate leads the way.

Sicarius have worked for centuries to prefect the magic of toxins. From herbalists to pharmaceutical chemists to the lethal red back spiders, these Spinners hone painlessness into pain. Understanding the power of sex as well, they are hauntingly alluring. In their bravest shape, these "spider queens" arch a full eight feet in their slender yet formidable arachnid forms. To see a Sicarius in her full glory is to finally understand hopelessness in love.

Until the turn of the 19th century, no males were born under the venom of Sicarius. Now still rare, males who are so blessed must constantly prove themselves useful and keep a watchful eye on the affairs of their betters. Some Sicarians believe that the breed's toxins had grown too weak to pass on without the male counterpart. Many others still resent that implication. . . .

Breed Favors: Many-Legged (adds +4 to Speed), Venomous, Webbing

Breed Bonus: The Sicarians are too well tempered for war. Instead, they have a single vast spider-form, a "Dire Beast" that spans more than eight feet from tip to tip. All Sicarians have Science, with a free Skill Specialty in Toxology. Their venom is the most virulent sort.

Common Aspects: Alarming Alacrity, Blend In, Catwalk, Clever Monkey, Culling the Weak, Darksight, Exoskeleton, Grave Misfortune, Hypnotic Allure, Invisible Marking, Keen Senses, Natural Armor, Partial Change, Sexual Dimorphism, Spook the Herd, Sweet-Voiced Fiend, Unsettling Eye, Unspeakable, Wallwalking

Form Adjustments

Dire Beast: Dexterity +4, Manipulation –5, Size 6, Speed +8 (species factor 5 + legs), +2 to perception rolls, Fang and Claw (bite) 1 (L) plus venom

Ursara

Be Still! A Mountain Passes By

Denny cursed as he felt his legs go out from under him, pitching his body into the 12-foot-deep pit trap he'd set up early last evening. He landed hard on his ass, the wind knocked out of him but not much the worse for wear — other than a seriously turned ankle. He'd have to have Marva fix him up a soak when he got home after checking all his bear traps.

"Need a hand up?" a gruff voice called down to him from the forest floor.

"Yeah," he said, extending his arm toward the proffered hand, a broad, firm-gripping appendage that hoisted him out of the pit with no apparent effort.

"Thanks," he said, once he stood on his feet again. "My name's Denny Gorvis," he said. "What's y'orn?"

"You don't need to know that," the big stranger replied. "I moved the deadfall to the pit," he said, "just so you'd land in your own trap. I figured I'd give you a little taste of your own medicine before I give you a good dose of mine." His broad face broke out into a smile that somehow wasn't happy and cheerful but grim and justified.

To Denny's horror, the man grew in size until he lowered over Denny like an avenging mountain. The trapper tried to scream, but no sound came out except a tiny, mewling plea for mercy.

"Sorry," a voice growled in his mind. "Sorry was yesterday. Today it's goodbye."

Behold the Beast: Sometimes gods, sometimes ancestor-spirits, always formidable forces of nature, the Ursara have watched as their human kin fought their way from cave to castle and their animal kin have fought to survive. At times, these Mountain Claws have come to the aid of human or bears; then again, few other beasts have proved as implacable in their resistance to Man's ways than the bears he has occasionally "displaced."

Bear-bloods draw their inspiration to the caves where Man and Bear first met, battled, and sometimes came to terms. By the flickering of grease-fed fires, shamans cast rituals to placate the awesome beasts inside. In those times, the bears seemed like guardians of some older, deeper place. To face a bear and live marked a man or woman as divine. And so it was with those who displayed the Bear Gift. From fur-clad shamans to the Nordic *bear-sarks*, people who walked closely with Bear were considered the bravest of the brave. Is it any wonder, then, that the Changing Gift would manifest so powerfully as it does in the bear-blooded folk? Few blessings are as rich . . . or as dangerous.

To be Ursara is to accept a mantle of great responsibility along with fantastic might. Guardians of the hearth, towering killers, deadly clowns, consummate hunters, seers at the gates of death — all accords find their greatest manifestations in the bear-kin. In all guises, Bear is a powerful totem. Only Lion, Wolf, Tiger and Raven can match Bear's hold on Man's imagination. And yet, to become a bear in flesh as well as name is to accept a precarious existence. Man's respect is a double-headed ax, always aimed straight at your throat. A feral born into the tribe of the Bear earns insight and strength, at the cost of tranquil solitude.

Well-known but not widespread, bear-folk often stay close to their native lands. North America, upper Europe, northern Asia and deep Eurasia provide the greatest habitat for bears, although members of the breed travel worldwide. As their animal kin grow more and more endangered, Ursara have fought with claw and law to protect the animals.

Despite the odds, these beasts are excellent survivors. Shapechanged and otherwise, bears have battled the fiercest predators — mountain lion, wolf, boar and the most ruthless predator of all, Man. Survival is not a fight the bear-folk plan to lose. However, the shocks of pollution, deforestation and surging climate change make the fight harder than ever. These are not things that can be fought with a firm claw strike. To win, the bear-folk must use other means.

Above all things, the Ursara value their homes and the land that sustains them. The despoilment of their surroundings cuts deeply, driving a wedge between the Ursara and the humans the Ursara looked upon with fonder eyes long ago. Once upon a time (or so the stories begin), attacks by bears upon unsuspecting humans were few and far between. Now the days of Gentle Ben are over. The warnings have gone unheeded. In all forms, the Ursara are ready for war.

Breed Traits: Even in human shape, Ursara tend to tower over their man-kin. Even the smaller Mountain Claws (those of black bear stock), make up in mass and presence what they lack in height. Exceptionally strong and slow in their movements, Ursara nevertheless exhibit great manual dexterity, and can be unexpectedly fast when necessary.

Though reputedly placid and long suffering by nature, ursines tend to explode in a fury of powerful paws and merciless crushing grapples when something or someone rouses the bears to anger. Once they've declared someone an enemy, bears seldom change their minds. The human-born among the bears will pursue enemy to the ends of the Earth if necessary to exact vengeance — or justice.

As parents and mates, Ursara excel in supporting and nurturing their children and lovers. They make excellent teachers and doctors, especially in herbal medicines and midwifery. Still, their patience has an edge — one that other folk learn not to push.



No bitch is bigger than Nature, and I'm her little brother!

Ursara tend to have deep voices. Males often seem to be growling when they're simply speaking. Females speak in warm, rich tones that suggest the vocal range of a coloratura soprano and the carrying power of an Amtrak special. Though their voices are memorable, most bear-bloods dislike idle chatter and save words for important occasions. Their slow, deliberate motions beg the patience of quicker folk, but unless an Ursara sees a need for swiftness, he'll move on his own time, thank you muchly.

When speed is essential, a bear-blood reacts with surprising speed. Propelled by her strength, she can match paces with some of the quicker breeds, though she may not last as long as she would like. In her War-Beast form, whether undertaking a ritual battle with a rival or taking on an unlucky group of human hunters, the Ursara becomes a literal moving mountain — or an exploding volcano.

Habitats: Just as their animal kin, Ursara are native to many continents and climes, from the mountains of the southeastern United States to the frozen tundra of Siberia and the Arctic cold of the extreme north. A concerned bear-blood may set up a log cabin in the center of a forest slated for clear-cutting in order to establish a few ground rules, while a Mountain Claw with polar bear kin may volunteer for a scientific observation mission, dwelling alone in an insulated hut and watching her cousins cavort on the ice as they search for food . . . or, in the current warming trend, as they seek the receding ice fields they once called home. Even in places where bears are extinct (or near extinction), a mated Ursara pair may settle down in hopes of doing something to revive a lost line of bears.

Predators and Prey: Similar to both their animal and human kin, Ursara have omnivorous tastes, eating anything from vegetables and grains, to milk and meat. They find salmon and other kinds of fish particularly tasty, and favor honey-soaked berries over almost any other dessert.

Technically classified as predators, bears prey primarily on fish. Unless annoyed beyond endurance, Ursara seldom pick fights with other changing breeds. On the other hand, a few skinchangers — often wolves or big cats — challenge bear-bloods in their own territories. Even in the most evenly matched challenges, Ursara stand their ground, rarely giving way and more often than not disabling an opponent with a solid backhand or suffocating grapple.

Spirit-Ties: From the earliest days, bears have been identified with the spirit world, most especially the realm of Death. As deep-dwelling cave beasts who appeared to "die" each winter and rise again in spring, natural bears seem like perfect intermediates to that realm, and have been regarded that way since the First Days. Consequently, many bear-bloods share the spiritual connections of the Uratha, down to the similar names by which their breeds are known.

Whether a Mountain Claw feels attuned to the spirit realm or not, a Mountain Claw becomes a magnet for spiritual energies. Entities seem drawn to her, while humans sense a "quality" about her even when they never meet her ursine self. Bear-bloods of Native American, Nordic or Finno-Ugric descent sometimes lead cults devoted to ancestor-worship, while individual ursines often invoke their "fore-bears" in crucial situations. Responding to this connection, Nature-spirits often share their Gifts with bear-bloods. No other changing breed, outside the werewolves themselves, has such a rich connection to the spirit world.

Kin: Ursara prefer solitary life over life in a group, except when two raise a young one. As soon as a new Mountain Claw reaches self-sufficiency, she strikes out on her own. Her animal kin understand — it's the way things are. Human kin may rage or weep at this departure, but the Ursara remains unmoved. Her path lies ahead of her, not behind. She may visit her relations or otherwise keep in touch, but her home forever lies *elsewhere*, in a place of her own choosing.

Bear-kin accept the presence of a Mountain Claw among them, provided she doesn't overstay her welcome or overtax their food supply. Communication through scent and body language soon determines whether or not the bear-kin needs a human "edge" among them . . . which, in turn, affects the length of the Ursara's stay in true bears' territory. Only among the more social polar bears do bear-folk settle down among their kin. Otherwise, bear-folk keep moving on. Still, a few events draw the bear-bloods' company. Each year, when the brown bears gather in Alaska for the annual salmon run, a few Ursara show up to take the measure of their animal cousins and enjoy catching a few fish for themselves.

Human kin generally welcome a visit from their Mountain Claw kin, even if the humans don't fully understand just how different Aunt Thedra truly *is*. Despite their fascination, these kin are usually relieved to see her go. Ursara are not "tame" by any means, and those kin may sense something wild and feral in her presence.

Society: Generally, bear-bloods live in out-of-the-way places, frequently high in mountain hollers or in cabins deep within the old-growth forests. Some inhabit rickety shacks on the edge of the bayou or occasional key-card suites in luxury hotels or crafter's lofts among fellow artisans. A good many can be met on hiking trails or roadsides, wandering with small packs on their large backs. In general, though, Ursara do not socialize with one another in family groups or kin enclaves. The Mountain Claws prefer their own company over all others, and spend much of their time traveling throughout their territory like a circuit preacher making his rounds. When bear-bloods *do* get together with their kind, they call a feast, complete with storytelling, gossip, gift-giving and ritual dances that explore the many legends of their origins.

Stereotypes

Man: Long ago, Man looked to us as gatekeepers to the lands of Death. Perhaps he needs to be shown the way there more often.

Mages: Too much power in such a small vessel. Who picks up the pieces when it explodes?

Vampires: Only Man refuses to die. We can fix that.

Werewolves: The bond between us is as ancient as the hills. Their teeth are sharp, but I will not "forsake" them.

In this era, wireless Internet, cell phones and other technological milestones make long-distance communication easier. In emergencies, a number of Ursara can answer a summons at a moment's notice. The Mountain Claws prefer to live simply, but do not hesitate to avail themselves of rapid communication and response. In an age where Creation changes rapidly, an adaptable shapechanger is truly "smarter than the average bear."

Alphas: Among the Mountain Claws, leaders emerge when necessity demands cooperation. Normally, any Ursara — male or female — can assume the role of Alpha; most often, though, the oldest individual in the group takes charge. Respect for elders burns true within the hearts of the bear-folk. Sometimes a younger, stronger Claw challenges the newly sanctioned leader; in times of war, a bloody battle to the death (or close to it) determines the outcome. In calmer times, a challenge may involve other tests: feats of strength, cunning or patience, riddle-games or the solving of some grand and urgent puzzle (such as how to drive off an oil company without drawing down dozens of government-sanctioned hunters . . .).

When the need for leadership passes, the Alpha steps down, and the Ursara depart for their homes. As simple as that, the role of "leader" is given back to the wind.

Character Creation: Physical and Mental Attributes make up the bulk of a Mountain Claw's character, with Social Attributes a poor third. Loners tend not to care for social niceties. Bear-blood Skills include Survival, Brawl, Intimidate, Medicine and Science. Ursara spend so much time apart from others that they often have to be their own doctors and herbalists. As wanderers, most gather stories like fresh honey, and enjoy sharing it with others far more.

Accords

Den-Ward: A favored accord for Ursara, these Mountain Claws wrote the book on protecting home and family. Frequently calm and imperturbable in temperament, bear-folk of this accord can explode into a killing frenzy to protect their children, or anyone else they hold dear. Even when no threat is imminent, Ursara Warders make sure their homes and lands have every possible protection. Often, they take political action when claws would do more harm than good.

Heart-Ripper: Harbingers of "mountain justice," these ferals reclaim what is rightfully theirs: the legacy of the biggest badass on land. As Man finds new ways to ruin Nature, this accord calls to more and more Ursara. In the past, bear attacks were rare things. "Red Claw" bear-bloods aim to change that impression. Innocent or guilty, it makes no difference to these predators. There are too many humans anyway. It's culling season now.

Root-Weaver: Ursara prefer simple, uncluttered lives. At the same time, they enjoy making things and building structures that last. Ursara of this accord take their place at the center of workshops, saw mills, craft guilds and rural auto shops. Many ursine Weavers build houses of lumber and stone, or craft earth-sheltered homes that serve as dens during the long winters. A rare few enjoy high-tech building and sustainable design; others prefer to create networks that allow bear-bloods to keep in touch with one another.

Sun-Dancer: Most Mountain Claws live solitary lives; those who embrace this accord not only travel alone but also rarely settle anywhere. For them, the road knows no ending. They climb mountain after mountain just to stand at the peak and gaze at the next horizon. Occasionally, these wanderers gather like-minded souls around them and travel in motley packs until some inner urgings draw their paths apart. Ever moving, never satisfied, these bear-folk pursue unreachable, indefinable goals with desperate longing. This is the trail of the Wandering Bear, and it's not an easy path to follow.

Wind-Chaser: Some folks believe that *every* Ursara knows the flash of true visions; only a few, though, live the life demanded by this accord. The seer's path draws a Mountain Claw away from familiar surroundings and plunges her into the uncanny spirit realm. Ursara Chasers follow ancestor spirits and restless ghosts. Sometimes Chasers lay these hungry spirits to rest; other times, Chasers help the spirits fulfill their angry wishes. The old backwoods woman brewing potions (and possibly some *extremely* potent moonshine) embodies this accord.

Yonah

The Black Neighbors

Native to the North American continent, the Yonah live close to the land. Sometimes they make their homes in earth-sheltered houses or rustic cabins, or choose to stay near their Native American kin; occasionally, the Yonah make the difficult decision to adopt the fast-paced world of Man in order to fulfill a greater purpose. Of all Ursara, the Yonah seem the most even-tempered. As children, the Yonah display an



uncanny sense of wonder and play, almost as if they need to crowd as much youthful joy into their childhoods as possible and make it last till the end of their days.

As these bear-bloods grow older, seriousness and sadness overtake them. With their First Change, the weight of the world falls onto their shoulders, and the first inklings of "purpose" arise in their minds. Some Yonah adopt the cause of their bear-kin, the black bear, looking after the species' survival and cracking down on those who would over-hunt and exploit them. Others plunge into environmental issues, pointing up their own "inconvenient truths" to all who will hear them. Others, less civic-minded, retreat to the wilderness to reclaim the name of Bear from such over-coddled ninnies. Each extreme tries, in its way, to balance the scales in an unbalanced world. Although this breed prefers to keep its claws unbloodied, a Yonah will, when forced, remind folks that Nature *does*, in fact, still have those claws at her command.

Appearance: The human form of a Yonah bear-blood recalls its rural pedigree. Often based in Native American stock with saltings of European settler, these burly folk tend to be more personable than most of their kind. For better and worse, this is a charismatic breed. When a Yonah speaks, people cock an ear and listen.

Yonah bear-folk prefer clothes made from natural fibers, often brightly-dyed and sometimes quite fashionable, though always serviceable. Males with enough European blood to grow them cultivate thick beards, while women tend to let their hair grow long and wear it either loose or in elaborate braids.

A Yonah's Primal form appears as a large black bear, standing four feet tall or so at the shoulders and weighing nearly 500 pounds for females and 700 pounds for males. The Yonah War-Beast form, however, exterminates thoughts of teddy-bear cuteness. This man-bear stands more than seven feet tall and weighs nearly a half a ton. His eyes become bottomless pits of cold-black fury while his claws grow to nearly five inches in length. Yonah never assume War-Beast form unless a fight is imminent. By this time, all hints of "even temper" run screaming for the hills.

Background: Bear-kin tend to accept these ferals among them more often than most bears accept their human cousins. Perhaps this harkens back to long-standing respect between them. Many Native bear-legends show them as protectors of "the people" — teachers and shamans, if sometimes-surly neighbors. To have a Yonah born into a "traditional" tribal family constitutes a great honor; from birth, the parents recognize that their feral child does not belong only to them.

A Yonah's First Change sparks a celebration among families who know and respect the Old Ways. This festivity

soon gives way to a period of mourning as the new Yonah leaves her human family to seek her life away. Some Yonah, though, do not receive such support from their human kin. Driven out after their First Change, they become bitter, violent recluses, often biding their time until some human target presents itself for their bloody amusement.

Breed Favors: Fang (bite) 3 (L) and Claw 2 (L), Natural Armor 2/1, Size 6

Breed Bonus: The most personable of the breed, Yonah get one free Specialty with a Social Skill.

Common Aspects: Beast Surge, Birth Blessing, Culling the Weak, Durga's Blessing, Earthbond, Hound's Honor, Magnificence, Mother's Fury, Sexual Dimorphism, Shadow Bond, Spirit Animal, Spirit Gift, Spirit Secrets, Spook the Herd, Tell (Powerful Frame), Territory Bond, Twisted Tongue, War Heart, Warrior's Restoration, Weatherskin

Form Adjustments

War-Beast: Strength +4, Stamina +4, Size 7, Health +6, Speed +7 (species factor 5), +1 to perception rolls

Primal Beast: Strength +2, Stamina +2, Size +1, Health +3, Speed +3 (species factor 6), +2 to perception rolls

Nanuq

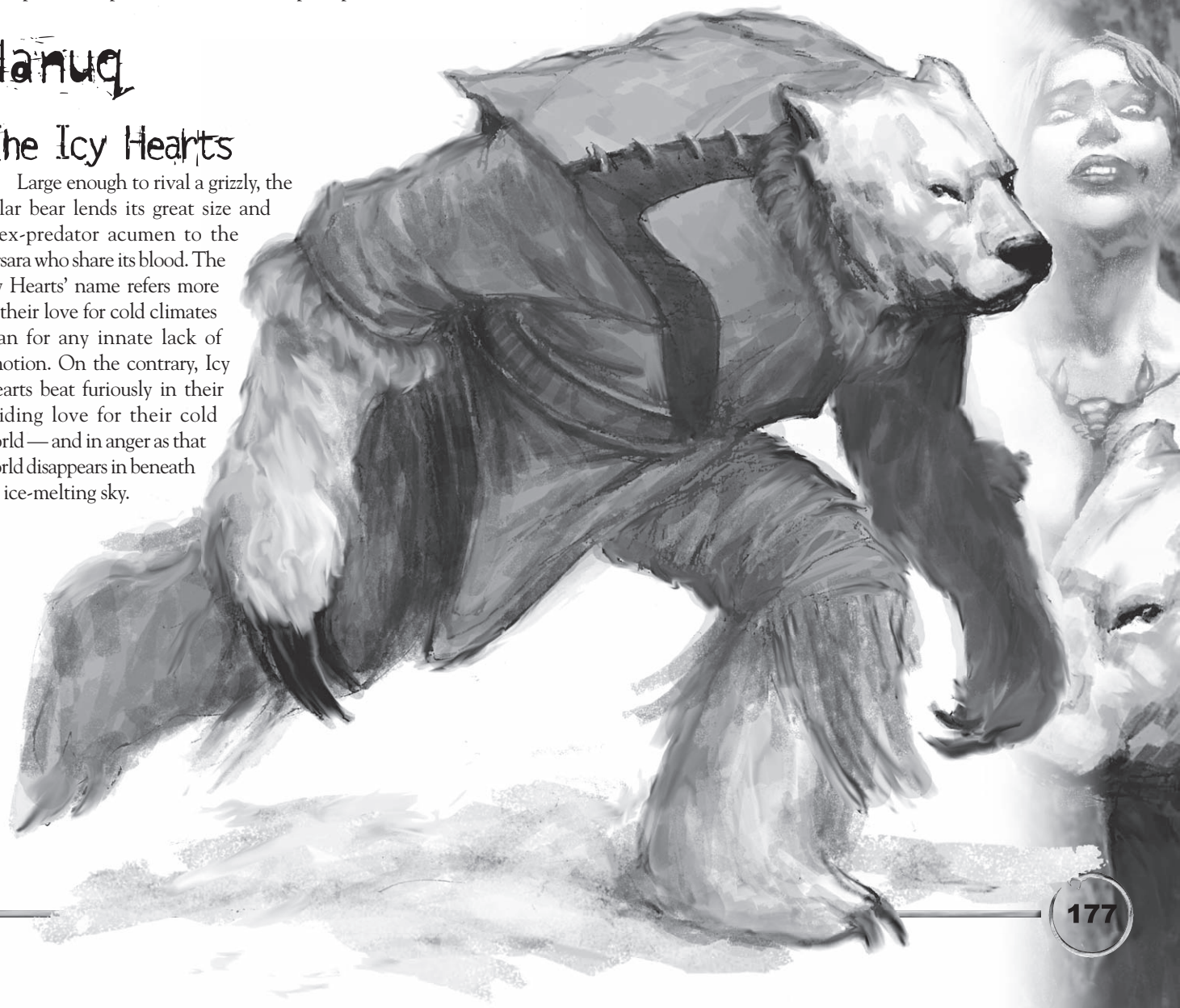
The Icy Hearts

Large enough to rival a grizzly, the polar bear lends its great size and apex-predator acumen to the Ursara who share its blood. The Icy Hearts' name refers more to their love for cold climates than for any innate lack of emotion. On the contrary, Icy Hearts beat furiously in their abiding love for their cold world — and in anger as that world disappears in beneath an ice-melting sky.

Playful when young, similar to their polar bear kin, Nanuq never quite lose that sense of play as adults. Their idea of play, however, becomes distinctly detrimental to their "toys." Harsh living conditions have turned this breed almost totally carnivorous. Their high metabolism demands great concentrations of meat proteins and fats. In difficult conditions, Nanuq aren't shy about adding humans to their diet of seals and walrus. Given recent events, humans may, in fact, be the first items on a Nanuq's menu.

Always scarce, this species finds itself literally in deep water — the water of a melting world. Ideal swimmers, the true bears have been drowning as their icy homes recede. Bear-folk shamans speak of a smoking beast far away, feeding on the souls of ghosts and sending them howling into the skies to burn. Those who understand the situation have grown deeply angry at the selfish folk to the south. As desolate as the Icy Hearts' icy home might seem, it seems a deep insult to watch it melt away. These days, more than ever, there is red on the whiteness of the land.

Despite the popular appeal of polar bears, these shapechangers are extremely rare. Born almost always to



Inuit or Yupik people, the distinct gift of a thick white pelt seems reserved for the people who have lived in these lands for ages. A scattering of "white-white bears" have been born in recent years, but these Nanuq face scorn from their "pure-blood" cousins. Considered at best interlopers and at worst spiritual opportunists, these European bear-folk find themselves unwanted in the often-social circles of the Nanuq. Perhaps, it's been whispered, the white-white bears are the harbingers of a final age. As the ice recedes and the true bears falter, these "ghost bears" may be the last warning of a dying breed.

Appearance: A Nanuq's human form comes from native blood; short but stocky, these folk prefer the clothes of the tribal past over the high-tech gear of the modern age. Icy Hearts tend to dress in oilskin clothing, parkas and windbreakers made from sealskin and dog fur. Consummate artists and excellent survivors, these people smile easily but hold resentment deep when it is justified.

Though not the tallest of the Ursara, the Nanuq bear-forms are the most massive in the breed. Topping the scales at more than 1,300 pounds and measuring from seven to 10 feet in length, they're formidable beasts. In Primal shape, Nanuqs resemble polar bears in both size and form; their eyes, however, shine with deadly mischief and righteous indignation. When attacking, Nanuqs move with lethal grace and thundering silence. A single paw-swipe can drop a caribou in its tracks.

The War-Beast form of a Nanuq, similar to that of the grizzly-folk, adds more weight to the legends of the yeti and the abominable snowman. Rising more than 10 feet in height, doubling the Nanuq's weight and focusing its rage to storm-like proportions, the War-Nanuq inspires more than fear in its viewers. Some folks drop dead from sudden heart attacks, while others react with hysterical aggression — only to be stopped short by a huge paw in their faces.

Background: Unlike other species of Ursara, Nanuq live and travel in small groups for at least part of their early years. Born into local human families, Nanuq undergo the First Change between their 12th and 16th years. Shortly thereafter, they either seek out or are found by a "foster family" consisting of a mated pair of Nanuqs and

perhaps one or two other "foster children." These ferals spend the next several years traveling with their new family, learning the lore of the Nanuq as well as that of their human tribes.

Unfortunately, the news they learn these days is not good. They see it every day as the ice shrinks and large bergs crack off the glacier walls to float out into sea. They also see their ancestral cultures melt away as well, drawn by the lures of technology and deceptively easy living . . . or dragged off by the forces of Man the Conqueror. The Icy Hearts may beat warm, but their rage remains cold. Should the Ursara ever go to war as a breed, the Nanuq may lead the charge.

Breed Favors: Fang (bite) 3 (L) and Claw 1 (L), Natural Armor 2/1, Size 7

Breed Bonus: Nanuq get a free Survival Specialty in Arctic Surroundings.

Common Aspects: *Aww!!!*, Beast Surge, Birth Blessing, Blend In, Culling the Weak, Durga's Blessing, Earthbond, Keen Senses, Magnificence, Mother's Fury, Sexual Dimorphism, Shadow Bond, Spirit Gift, Spirit Secrets, Tell (Silver-white Hair), Territory Bond, Twisted Tongue, Unspeakable, War Heart, Warrior's Restoration, Weatherskin

Form Adjustments

War-Beast: Strength +5, Stamina +5, Size 8, Health +8, Speed +6 (species factor 5), +1 to perception rolls

Primal Beast: Strength +4, Stamina +4, Size +2, Health +6, Speed +6 (species factor 6), +1 to perception rolls

Other Species

Storm Bears: The Howling Heart

When the Romans fled marauding Germanic tribes, they brought with them tales of bears who fought like men. Wielding axes and ripping men in two, these "Storm Bears" recalled some distant nightmare of fire-lit battles for survival. Far later, the Norse berserkers brought similar kinds of fury to upper Europe and the lower coasts. Still later, the Germans themselves caught the hard edge of the claw from the Russian Bear. In many times and languages, these Storm Bears epitomized the primal might of bears mixed in with human bloodlust.

They still live. Not only as the Heart-Ripper accord (which thrives among the Ursara), but as a breed unto themselves. More than a grizzly, more than a Kodiak, a Storm Bear embodies the wildest spirit of the cold and wild North. And yet, when the battle's over (and in the times between the fights), this mammoth bear can be as placid as any other force of Nature.

What kind of bear *is* this? In a way, it's all of them.

Similar to the Bubasti werecats, the Storm Bears draw their Nahual from an extinct animal — a long-dead *ur*-Bear that may have been the ancestor of grizzlies and Kodiaks. Perhaps the *Ursus spelaeus* passed its spirit on to warriors it respected long ago. Perhaps it's even making a comeback now, boiling up through human veins to take one last swipe at Man's arrogance as a final era calls. . . .

Standing more than 10 feet tall in Primal form and nearly 15 in War-Beast guise, the Storm Bear can rip a truck apart with claws and teeth alone. Even in his human form, this beast is huge and irritable. Although he may indeed by a loving parent and boon companion, the urge to kill runs close beneath his skin. Even the old Norse stayed wary of a bear-changer's temper, and the Slavs revered him but kept their distance, too. Such a bear wears no man's chains, and suffers his flesh as a fragile kind of cage. Eventually, the storm within him rises. The best thing to do then is point him at an enemy and run.

Breed Favors: Fang (Bite) 3 (L) and Claw 2 (L), Natural Armor 3/2, Size 8

Breed Bonus: Does he really need one?

Common Aspects: Beast Surge, Culling the Weak, Durga's Blessing, Earthbond, Keen Senses, Magnificence, Mother's Fury, Needleteeth, Nine Lives, Sexual Dimorphism, Shadow Bond, Spirit Secrets, Spook the Herd, Tell (Burly and Surly), Territory Bond, Tiger Heart, Unnerving Cry, Unspeakable, War Heart, Warrior's Restoration, Weatherskin

Form Adjustments

War-Beast: Strength +6 Stamina +5, Size 8, Health +8, Speed +6 (species factor 5), +1 to perception rolls

Primal Beast: Strength +4, Stamina +4, Size +2, Health +6, Speed +6 (species factor 6), +2 to perception rolls

Wind-Runners

Who Can Tame the Wind?

"His leg is shattered beyond repair," Marcannon told the attending veterinarian. "I brought him home, but you need to put him down. He's no good to himself or to me."

Dr. Steed looked down at the injured horse, its flanks heaving in pain, then at the stable owner. "I think I can save him," she said, her voice steady though her eyes misted over.

Marcannon shook his head. "It would cost more than he's worth. Now do what I'm paying you for."

Epona Steed rose to her full height, facing a man whose judgment she had occasion to question more than once. "No," she said. Before the stable owner's eyes, the slim animal doctor grew taller and bulkier, sprouting a second pair of legs along a lengthening backbone.

Marcannon's eyes widened in fear. A creature out of myth stood before him. "My friends are coming to take him off your hands," she said, using her physical bulk to back the cowering man into a corner of the stall. She reared up on her hind legs and tapped the man with a hoof, sending him down to the ground in a groaning heap. "I'll bill you for the cost of his death," she said. "Now he belongs to me."

Behold the Beast: They speak to us of a swiftness we can never know except through them, a speed that comes from surging muscles, powerful hindquarters and relentlessly pounding hooves. They endow the role of *quarry* with nobility. Within their blood courses the essence of the Hunt — but from the view of the Hunted. In their feral forms, they appear as horses, stags or deer, elk, zebra and other species that reach perfection of form only when they run. Yet they also stand for freedom, the reward for surviving a hunt or the sheer joy of galloping far and wide, either alone or with a group.

The Wind-Runners' association with human beings features elements of trust and betrayal, love and abandonment, partnership and rivalry. An early legend tells of a council of Wind-Runners who met to discuss the question of Man and what to do with him. Some said, "This naked creature has the favor of the Gods but has no duty to anyone but himself. We must make him care for others by proving our usefulness to him." These Wind-Runners and their animal kin are said to have became horses — Equestri, companions to humans, beasts of burden and sources of recreation and entertainment.

Another group replied, "What have *we* to gain from this creature who kills our kin for meat and pelts? We are better off without them, and must learn to run from them using gifts from our sister the West Wind." These cervine spirits, along with their beast-kin, became deer and gazelle, okapi and elk, reindeer and caribou.

A very few others placed themselves in the hands of the Wind Daughters, their patrons. "Let those who we honor most choose our position in the lives of fearful men." The Daughters turned these Wind-Runners over to Lightning, who called them *Sukuku* after himself, and then set them in the heart of Africa with instructions to remind the people that life consists of constant changes, that drought gives way to sudden rains, to recall that prosperity spirals downward into failure, and attest that no one can ever rest totally without fear. These few gave rise to the zebras, whose black-and-white coats are constant testimonies to the duality of existence.

Unlike many other feral breeds, whose War-Beast stands upright (or nearly so), Wind-Runners often retain the quadruped form that seems to flow from the torso of their human form. These are the centaurs of myth, part-man and part-horse, wise in the ways of learning and war. In wilder and sometimes two-legged guise, they become the Master of the Wild Hunt or the Horned Man with the body of a giant stag and the head and torso of an antlered man. The Greeks spoke of Chiron, the centaur scholar who taught Achilles, and his ravaging kin Nessus, treacherous slayer of Heracles.

Unfortunately for the Wind-Runners, their fabled vocation as teachers of Man has faded into obscurity. Humans turned to other teachers and designed a world of mechanical transports and processed foods, destroying the old bonds that had humans using horses for speedy travel and hunting deer to ensure enough meat to last during the winter. These days, the horse is a figure of sport and sometimes cruelty. That Man regards horses so lightly does not sit well with feral horse-bloods. . . .

Breed Traits: In all their forms, Wind-Runners stand out in their surroundings. Attractive sometimes to a fault, they project an aura of tightly coiled power, like the essence of a racehorse just before he bolts through the gate at the starter's signal, or a deer alerted to the presence of danger and exploding into flight.

Graceful in build, with delicate yet strong bone-structures, male and female Wind Scions give an impression of lightness, as if they could walk on the very wind that gives them their breed name. Even the Equestri, whose lineage runs through the Percherons, Clydesdales, Friesians and other draft and war horses, step with a graceful deliberation that can erupt into power at a moment's notice. The Stag Men, Elken-volk and other *Cervidae* combine this aura of caged power with a nervous energy. This combination provides a hyper-awareness that grounds a Runner in her immediate present.

Wind-Runners, whether horse or deer in origin, possess keen intelligence and quick minds. Though not always contemplative or philosophical, these folk excel in strategy and tactics, intuitive flashes of brilliance and associative leaps of

thought and practical (if sometimes *unusual*) applications of theory. Unfortunately, these ferals often rush to conclusions, too, or let their thoughts literally run away with them.

The herd instinct holds strong in all Wind-Runners, regardless of lineage, and they form strong ties with family, friends and kin both animal and human. Kentucky horse farms managed by Wind-Runners and their human companions rarely sell their stock to other humans, but work instead through careful breeding to improve and strengthen the blood. The idea of strength and safety in numbers maintains a strong hold among Runner families; throughout their history, the Regencies have always boasted at least one clan of noble horse-changers.

Most Runners possess a warm and intimate speaking voice during normal conversations. Yet an angry Runner literally bugles her challenge in a strident voice that travels the length of a long hall or across a football field. Cervine Runners tend to speak less often, but no less effectively. When need be, a deer-kin's scream can awaken half a forest.

Habitats: Along with their animal kin, Wind-Runners have adapted to life in many different climates, from the harsh deserts that gave birth to the finely etched Arabians, to the craggy mountains and deserted islands that served as homes for some of the hardiest and smallest of the Wind Scions, the Eohipans. The forests and temperate lands house the deer-folk and their kin, while caribou and reindeer-people claim the frozen tundra and steppes as prime running ground.

Fearing for the well-being of their animal kin, many Wind-Runners spend long periods of time in their Beast-forms, acting as protectors to herds of their cousins. In the far North, reindeer-folk sometimes live with human clans and tribes that recall the Old Ways of mutual dependence and maintain the health of their herd. As civilization eats away at the wild habitats of the Wind Dancers, however, these often-peaceful ferals remind Man just how sharp their hooves are and how effective a horned and charging beast can be.

Predators and Prey: Similar to many breeds that fall within the realm of "prey," Wind-Runners rarely, if ever, eat meat. Instead, they prefer diets rich in whole grains and fruits, generally losing their taste for milk as they grow older. Many prefer their food bland, insisting that it's merely fuel to keep themselves in "running trim."

Wolves and many of the big cats that prey on horses, deer and gazelle sometimes find themselves face-to-face with an angry Wind-Runner instead. Sometimes speed wins out over tooth and claw; at other times, though, a lone feral, too young for speed or old to run anymore, loses the fight for survival. Even so, Wind-Runners often out-run or out-fight their natural predators . . . unless, of course, the predator in question happens to be a shapechanger himself.

For this breed, as with so many others, the greatest danger comes from Man. The allure of trophy-hunting and the rituals of "manhood" — survival traits turned to vanity — have turned the forests into slaughterhouses. The vast difference between one man with a bow and five men with submachine guns sets a hostile edge to the hunter-hunted equation. In recent years, Wind-Runners have begun to settle that score with increasing ruthlessness. Traps, ambushes and the popular "helpless-human-becomes-trampling-monster" ploy make up for the breed's traditional lack of aggression.

Spirit-Ties: Wind-Runners honor spirits of swiftness, fellowship and power. Cervine Wind-Runners act as harbingers, prophets and soul-guides, while equine Scions honor their extensive bloodlines by venerating and sometimes summoning their ancestral spirits.

Kin: Since their animal forms carry the blood of herd animals, Wind-Runners are deeply loyal to their groups. Those who live primarily in their human state generally involve themselves with the welfare of their animal kin. Cervine Wind-Runners often take jobs with wildlife management organizations to preserve the habitat of deer, elk, gazelles and other beasts. Reindeer and caribou kin often live with the tribes that travel with their herds, or else remain within those herds, sometimes with the acceptance of human "caretakers" who know exactly what the kin are. Equestri gravitate to one of several societal groups: the "horsy" set, whose lives revolve around dressage competitions, equestrian competitive events and hunting or steeplechases, the racing world of breeders and competitors, grooms and trainers and the "ranchero" societies, who keep alive the spirit of a bygone century.

Sadly, several wind-borne species, such as the wild mustang and the gazelle, are endangered by Man's carelessness. Whenever possible, Wind-Runners of all kinds work to secure protections for their endangered kin.

Society: More than any other changing breed, Runners tend to group together. Aside from the equine lineages, it's rare to find a lone feral from this breed. Most bands gather into enclaves or herds of two to five shapechangers. These groups often share the same species, but have been known to intermingle, too.

Enclaves of Runner families tend to keep the customs of their surrounding culture, whether European, American or Arctic. While the females of equine and cervine lines tend to form cooperative groups, males seek out one or two close friends but consider other males to be potential rivals. Competitive games and challenges are often issued when Runner families meet; these contests feature races in both human and animal forms, as well as other games of skill



Run, if you think you can escape me.
I have the wind at my back wherever I turn.

Stereotypes

Man: For better or worse, our fates are intertwined. Yet until they learn better respect than what they have shown, we rush toward an abyss.

Mages: Capable of greatness, yet often blinded by their own splendor.

Vampires: Their death-stink sticks like shit to ragged hooves.

Werewolves: Wolves are wolves. We may share a fated dance, but they don't always have to lead it.

and intellect. The Bandaris family of the current Regency roster stages spectacular weekend events at the palatial clan holdings in Andalusia; there, other Wind-Runner kin are invited . . . and sometimes even treated as near-equals.

The lives of the reindeer-folk and Caribou People center on the tribal lives of the people who follow the herds. As some herds dwindle from environmental change, their keepers succumb to the temptation to prey on other herds, thus sparking intertribal wars among the indigenous tribes of Canada, such as the Dene and the Inuvialuit. In Russia, the Nymylans and Chavehuvans of the Koryak region depend on their herds of reindeer for sustenance. Although pressed by profiteers and well-intentioned folk alike, these people resist the efforts to integrate them into mainstream culture . . . at least for now.

While a strong masculine presence marks most of the Wind-Runner families, females retain leadership roles in the shadows of their mates. Although a splendid buck or stallion may appear to "set the pace" for his Runner band, his dominance means little without the support and consent of his mares.

Alphas: Within a group of Wind-Runners, one male usually outranks the others. Outsiders must contend with him before gaining access to members of his extended family. Inside the family circle, the wisest and strongest female — often, but not always, the oldest — makes most necessary decisions and exercises her leadership over the other females and young males. This division of duties between the Alpha male and female is more distinct in species that have less direct contact with human society.

Character Creation: Physical Attributes tend to dominate among Wind-Runners, with Social traits figuring more heavily among equine members. Skills tend to favor Physical and Social sets, with Athletics, Survival, Empathy and Intimidation as the most commonly acquired traits. Most Runners have the Striking Looks Merit in their human forms, and seem remarkably healthy regardless of their age.

Concepts: Veterinarian, horse trainer, professional equestrian, wilderness guide, race-car driver, mercenary soldier, cowboy, historical recreationist (knight or cavalry officer), trick rider, horse breeder, rancher, world traveler, game warden, captain of the track team

Accords

Den-Warder: Wind-Runners have a strong sense of family, and with that kinship comes a strong drive to protect and nurture. Home means a great deal to these Runners, and they become fierce defenders of land as well as kin, whether human or beast. At the heart of most prosperous horse farms, wildlife preserves or reindeer herds resides a protector whose skill in battle is formidable and whose instinct for preserving the breed is nearly infallible.

Heart-Ripper: Despite their generally non-violent natures, equine and cervine Wind-Runners can inflict massive amounts of damage with their powerful hooves and (in the case of deer) piercing antlers. Rippers, though few in number among the Wind-Runners, appoint themselves as avengers of the wrongs committed against Nature in general and their breed in particular. Targeting wrongdoers from slaughterhouse managers to callous hunters and environmental despoilers, predacious Runners use their Social skills to get close to their quarry (usually in human form), then unleash the fury of their Primal or War-Beast forms.

Root-Weaver: Among Wind-Runners, these builders use modern tools, such as the Internet and video conferencing, to build networks between breed members and their human kin. Some Wind-Runners of this accord find their niche in architecture, while others gravitate toward speed-oriented technologies and recreational outlets — building, promoting and even occasionally driving race cars or fast planes. Cervine builders are less inclined to take risks than their equine counterparts; though there are always exceptions, these folk tend to be carpenters, handymen or builders of odd shrines or huts deep in the woods.

Sun-Dancer: Every now and then, a Wind-Runner decides to buck the crowd and run her own path, turning her back upon group identity and seeking her fortune in unlikely places. Sometimes she uses her skills to lead curious humans into the wilderness where they can pit their survival skills against Mother Nature; those with dark hearts sometimes manage to "lose" a customer or two, always due to their own "carelessness." Other Sun-Dancers submerge themselves in intellectual studies, indulging their personal demons and expanding their wind-driven curiosity.

Wind-Chaser: The white stag that leads a questing traveler to fame or death, the Horned Man who leads a coven of witches, the spirit-horse that shows itself in times of crisis to those who know where and how to look — these roles fall to the rarest of all Wind-Runner accords, the path of the seer. Compelled to seek their own company by dream-choked nights and vision-haunted days, these "running clouds" still step lightly around the edges of Scion society, unwilling or unable to sever all connections with the "normal" life of their kind.

Uchchaihshravi

The Sharp-Eared Ones

Hindu legends tell of the first horse, a winged creature named Uchchaihshravas (Ush-SHY-shrah-VAS), that emerged from the sea. The god Indra took the horse to his celestial palace. Later, Indra severed the horse's wings and gave him to humans. Unable to fly, horses have since remained on earth. Yet sometimes, when the wind is at their back, their hooves seem to find footing in the air and they fly on ghostly wings over the ground until the wind grows still and they are simply horses once again.

Wind-Runners of this Equestri species claim they've inherited the wings Indra ripped from Horse's ancestor and that their ultimate purpose lies in finding a way to give their horse-kin the freedom that once was theirs. To this end, Sharp-Ears do all they can to protect their animal kin and assist their human families to ensure their prosperity. Within the privacy of family and kin, or among others of the changing breeds, these Runners feel free to assume either their Primal Beast or a hybrid centaur form.

Proud sometimes to a fault, Uchchaihshravi also carry within them a primal sadness and longing for a life without constraint. Yet a great joy exists alongside the sorrow — a joy found in swiftness and motion, in reveling at the feel of the wind and the smell of sharp, sweet grass. Competition runs in the blood of the Sharp-Eared Folk. In all their forms, they rarely turn down a chance to test themselves against their peers. In human form, they often compete in equestrian events, bringing a greater degree of intensity to the horse/rider bond than purely human riders can establish.

Appearance: Excellently proportioned, usually muscular and fit, these Equestri favor an Indian or Semitic cast to their skin and features. Those related to the Arabian horse most often have the dark, curly hair and olive skin of the Middle East, though occasionally their hair color ranges lighter than that of most Semitic people.

In the Primal form, an Uchchaihshravas appears as a larger version of his breed of horse. Sometimes the size differential is less apparent than the sheer presence of the Primal horse. Energy radiates from his being and a fierce intelligence — far beyond that of his animal kin — imparts a gleam to his eyes. Anyone who knows horses (and many people who don't) can understand that a sharp-spur dig at such a creature would be suicide.

The War-Beast form of the Uchchaihshravas harkens back to the Greek myths of the half-human,

half-horse creatures called centaurs. As he transforms, the Equestri's head and torso rise to almost eight feet in height; meanwhile, below his waist, a stranger transformation takes place as his lower back and legs lengthen horizontally and a second pair of hoofed legs jut out directly beneath the torso. While the War-Beast form retains both its animal instinct and its human intelligence, the creature's mind becomes hyper-alert. In this form, the Sharp-Ears can attack with his hooves as well as weapons held in his human hands, making him an impressive opponent for almost any adversary.

Background: Similar to most Equestri, the Sharp-Eared Ones are gregarious folk, forming their own societies within larger human communities. Concerned with all things equestrian, they gravitate toward riding or healing professions even before the First Change manifests. Among the Indian and Arabian lineages, men almost always assume leadership roles; in less patriarchal societies, however (such as Europe or North America), female Uchchaihshravi press their advantage, often becoming champion riders or trainers by early adolescence.

For most horse-folk, the First Change occurs around the onset of adolescence, though a few manifest their shapechanging abilities early or late. The Change often takes place as part of a fever-dream, during some moment of crisis or personal trauma. In some instances, an elder of the breed may take it upon himself to provoke the Change — a risky undertaking that nevertheless works more often than not.

Breed Favors: Fang and Claw (bite) 1 (L), Size 7, Speed 12

Breed Bonus: Hooves inflict three bashing damage, and can knock down an opponent — see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 168. The Speed species factor is based on a four-legged War-Beast, not the two-legged human norm.

Common Aspects: Alarming Alacrity, *Aww!!!*, Durga's Blessing, Fortune's Favor, Magnificence, Pack Bond, Shadow Bond, Spirit Sight, Stampede Rush, The Wild Cry (Equines), Unsettling Eye, War Heart

Form Adjustments

War-Beast: Strength +3, Dexterity +1, Stamina +3, Manipulation –1, Size 8, Health +6, Speed +11 (species factor 12), +1 to perception rolls

Primal Beast: Strength +2, Stamina +3, Manipulation –1, Size 7, Health +5, Speed +9 (species factor 12), +1 to perception rolls

Alces

The Horned Harbingers

Known in North America as moose and in Europe as elks, these Elken-volk share a long, tortuous relationship with humans. Rock paintings in Finland and other parts of northern Europe show humans hunting these great-horned creatures as far back as the Stone Age. Yet for all his associations with prey, this magnificent creature embodies (among humans) the challenge and mastery of the hunt.

Long ago, it's been said, the Horned God lay with the Great Earth Mother. Where his seed scattered, beasts sprang up with vast antlers like the Lord himself. Although their antlers could not span the sky as his did, they nevertheless challenged the trees to grow to ever-more luxuriant size. The hooves of these mighty beasts shook the grown, and where they struck, springs flowed and flowers grew. Such was the creative power of the Elken-volk that Man himself was both humbled and aroused. To capture some of that virility for himself, the bravest hunter stalked the largest elk. They fought until sunrise, shattering the forest as they fought, and when the Great Mother saw what had been done, she turned them both into a single beast and charged him to watch over Nature's restoration. In time, as dying souls lost their way to the Otherworld, the elk's descendants took that duty on as well. In the process, some Harbingers became heralds of prophecy. To this day, the Alces roam the forests and hidden places, guarding Nature's secrets and helping those forests bloom again.

Male or female, Alces share affinities for the elements, fertility and the spirit world. Their massive crests reflect the trees that reach to the sky and the lightning that reaches toward earth. Impressively huge, these ferals prefer the wilderness, but sometimes venture in toward rural settlements to keep an eye on Man. Very rarely, an Alce braves the concrete wilderness of an inner city; even there, his majestic statue recalls his supposedly divine origins.

Thoughtful and reflective, Alces tend to think things over carefully before they take action . . . unless something enrages one so much that he assumes the War-Beast form. Though he may take his time pondering a course of action, a Horned Harbinger who makes up his mind cannot be dissuaded by anything less than a bolt from the blue.

Elken-volk do not give their loyalty lightly, particularly not to outside species. Once given, however, the oath of an Alces forms an unbreakable bond. These huge ferals make excellent bodyguards . . . provided the employer deserves their protection.

Appearance: In human form, Elken-volk tend to be tall and lanky, with large bones and handsome faces. Strong jaws and prominent cheekbones with large, soft, dark brown eyes prevail. Elk people often have high brows as well, giving them a thoughtful appearance. Their movements, though graceful, are deceptively slow until circumstances demand action — at which time the beast bolts with impressive speed and fury.

The Primal form of an Alce resembles a larger form of the natural animal. Roughly seven feet at the shoulder and nine to 12 feet long, the male beast has antlers that reach over six feet from tip to tip. (The female is slightly smaller, and has no antlers.) Even in his Primal shape, an Alce bears a preternaturally intelligent expression, appearing at once thoughtful and menacing.

In War-Beast form, this beast displays his lineage to the Horned God. Growing to eight feet or more in height, the beast bulks up to monumental proportions. Unlike

many other Wind-Runners, this beast remains bipedal but bristles with muscles and fur. Both male and female Elken-volk sprout tremendous antlers in the War-Beast shape, and these horns crackle with tiny bolts of lightning across their surfaces. All impressions of thoughtfulness depart from the Alce's face in this form. All that remains are menace and imminent attack.

Background: Elk people, while less gregarious than other Wind-Runners, occasionally gather in groups — usually of the same sex — for common company and mutual protection. Mating, for Alces, is a formal affair, wrapped in rituals of age-old tribal custom. Pair bonds, however, are often short-lived. The two Elken-volk team up long enough to sire a child or two, and then go their separate ways. For this reason, unmarried mothers (feral and otherwise) were often called "Sky-Bearers" by the Scandinavian and Slavic tribesmen who knew the Alces well.

An Elken-volk's First Change is usually overseen by an older Alce, who then becomes the new Harbinger's mentor until the young one earns his (or her) independence in a clash of horns or hooves.

Breed Favors: Fang and Claw (antlers) 3 (L) Size 10, Speed 10

Breed Bonus: Astonishing size and speed, plus an affinity for the spirit world. Hooves inflict three bashing damage, and can knock down an opponent — see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 168. The Speed species factor is based on a four-legged War-Beast, not the two-legged human norm.

Common Aspects: Beast Surge, Birth Blessing, Blend In, Earthbond, Keen Sense, Magnificence, Shadow Bond, Slumber's Touch, Spirit Gift, Spirit Secrets, Spirit Sight, Stampede Rush, Territory Bond

Form Adjustments

War-Beast: Strength +4, Stamina +4, Manipulation –2, Size 10, Health +9, Speed +9 (species factor 10), +1 to perception rolls

Primal Beast: Strength +3, Stamina +3, Manipulation –3, Size 10, Health +8, Speed +8 (species factor 10), +1 to perception rolls

Flidaisin

The Wild Watch

Although many different species of deer exist throughout the world, the Flidaisin claim all of these as their animal kin. Tall, though not overly so, and graceful, with an elegant carriage and

a fragile strength, these ferals exemplify the courage of the hunted in a world filled with hunters. Deer have long been associated with gods and goddesses in many cultures, and lines have blurred between predator and prey where legends are concerned. The Irish god of the Wild Hunt, Cernunnos, appears as a man with the head of a mighty stag, while the Greek Goddess Artemis and her Roman counterpart Diana are both consummate huntresses whose symbol is the deer.

The deer of the Wild Watch exemplify this contradictory state of being. Their closest animal kin thrive in lands where they are most hunted; yet to ensure the balance and health of their cousins, the Flidaisin must hunt those who threaten their kin. In Europe, this far-ranging species observes the tumultuous boarders of Man's realm; Asian deer keep to the wilder reaches, but the North American Watch do just the opposite. Enraged by "weekend warriors" whose love for guns outstrips their respect for Nature, these ferals sometimes turn tables on their human prey, reminding him that even the mildest beasts have limits. . . .

Where the Alces watch over the spirit borders, the Flidaisin range across the living realm. Females among the breed weave Nature-magic deep in the woods, while the males tend the beasts and inspire Man's longing for the wilderness. Both sexes possess disconcerting powers of insight and inspiration. The Wind-Dancer accord runs heavily through this species, and those gifts of truth-seeing challenge hunters and prey alike.

Appearance: North American Flidaisin come from many ethnic backgrounds — from typically "American mutt" lineage to distinctly Native American, European or Asian bloodlines. Regardless of their physical appearance, all deer-folk have large eyes, alert expressions and placid-seeming natures that can suddenly erupt into rapid action.

A Primal Beast from the Flidaisin species resembles a larger, more elegant version of the normal deer. Males boast massive 12- or 14-point antlers, while females have prominent nubs on their foreheads. Many retain the natural tan, brown and white markings of their cervid kin, but a few run from a solid black to a luminescent white. The latter two colors betray a remarkable faculty for natural beast-magic.

The War-Beast (or Cernunnian) form resembles a naked human with the head of a deer. As with the Elken-volk, both male and female Flidaisin exhibit formidable antlers, which form their most effective physical weapons. The more impressive armaments of this breed, however, come from inside their heads. Such beasts are fabulously cunning, and despite their "meek and mild" image, there's nothing gentle about a Flidaisin in her War-Beast form.

Perhaps it's their affinity for human beings, but for some reason many Flidaisins attain intermediary forms in addition to the usual three. Throwback deer-folk resemble slender, graceful humans with large eyes, thick hair, elfin features and a deeply feral scent. Meanwhile, the Dire Beast form resembles a gargantuan deer with exceedingly large, thick antlers.

Background: Flidaisin are generally excellent athletes, excelling in running, hurdling and other contests of grace, endurance and skill. Just as most runners, these ferals are gregarious but often take secondary roles outside the center of attention.

A Flidaisin's First Change usually occurs either immediately before or after puberty, often attended by the nearest deer-blood female relative (if there *is* one). Often, the Gift travels laterally through the generations. A female Flidaisin's apparently normal sister may have a child with the Gift. The oldest and (usually) strongest male in any Flidaisin social group serves as their *de facto* leader, and each new deer-blood in a group must meet this elder and receive his acceptance before running with the local Flidaisin.

Breed Favors: Keen Sense 2, Size 6, Speed 10

Breed Bonus: Males only have Fang and Claw (Antlers) 3 (L). All Flidaisins also have the Striking Looks Merit in human form. Hooves inflict two bashing damage, and can knock down an opponent — again, see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**.

Common Aspects: *Aww!!!*, Beast Magic (black deer tend toward Death, Fate and Time; white deer have Life, Spaces and Spirit), Birth Blessing, Blend In, Catwalk, Earthbond, Hare Heart, Mercy's Touch, Pack Bond, Spirit Secrets, The Wild Cry (Deer), Toss the Scent, Truth Sense, Unnerving Cry, Unsettling Eye

Form Adjustments

War-Beast: Strength +2, Dexterity +3, Stamina +2, Manipulation –1, Size 6, Health +3, Speed +5 (species factor 5), +3 to perception rolls

Primal Beast: Strength +2, Dexterity +3, Stamina +3, Manipulation –1, Size 6, Health +4, Speed +10 (species factor 10), +3 to perception rolls

Other Species

Takuskansa: The Racing Storm

When horses escaped the conquistadors and ran wild up the heart of North America, it was said that they had been blown in upon the winds. Legends of Sky Horse and his empathic gifts may be linked to this breed, a gray to white species of Equestri native to the North American plains and mountains. Like their cousins, these house-bloods run fast and free. Their travels, however, take them to the Otherworld, and their affinity for emotions is legendary.

Known also as "ghost horses" and "the racing storms," the Takuskansa (tak-OO-skanz-za) favor Native American ancestry from the Plains nations. A handful, though, are decidedly European in descent instead. Regardless of their genetics, these Equestri share very light coloration in their animal forms, and run at incredible speed even for their kind. The true distinction of the breed, however, is their bond with the spirit realm. This appears to be an innate inheritance, transcending ethnicity or culture. To "run between," these horses charge at top speed and fade gradually

through the local Gauntlet. Although a Takuskansa can carry a single human rider, they tend to be *very* picky about the company they keep. An equally innate gift for empathy makes these ferals into shrewd judges of character, and they often avoid humans and beast-folk alike unless they discern an honorable (not necessarily pure) heart within a would-be friend. Given the dishonesty all around them, these ferals often prefer their own company unless some greater need forces them to be social. Even then, they'd rather run with the wind than walk beside Man.

Breed Favors: Fang and Claw (bite) 1 (L), Size 7, Speed 12

Breed Bonus: All Takuskansa have Empathy ratings of 3 or more. Hooves inflict three bashing damage, and can knock opponents down. The Speed species factor is based on a four-legged War-Beast, not the two-legged human norm.

Common Aspects: Alarming Alacrity, Earthbond, Leap, Magnificence, Mercy's Touch, Shadow Bond, Spirit Sight, Stampede Rush, Unsettling Eye, War Heart, Warrior's Restoration

Form Adjustments

War-Beast: Strength +3, Dexterity +2, Stamina +3, Manipulation –1, Size 8, Health +6, Speed +12 (species factor 12), +1 to perception rolls

Primal Beast: Strength +2, Dexterity +3, Stamina +3, Manipulation –1, Size 7, Health +5, Speed +12 (species factor 12), +1 to perception rolls



Wing-Folk

Thieves and Tricksters, All

Mickey Frank woke on a metal cot in the field hospital. He looked down in fascination at the band of cotton dressing wrapped around his middle, darkened in the middle where blood was beginning to seep through. He could feel the morphine coursing through his bloodstream. Adele, the nurse he had taken to the USO show not a few days ago, stood at the foot of his bed, watching him sleep. But wait, no, the woman at his side wasn't a nurse. His watcher was clothed in white, like Florence Nightingale from his boyhood history books, not in the dull army green he knew so well. And yet, something in her reminded him of Adele. The sharpness of her dark eyes, the downy skin of her long neck as she bent over him, tender and powerful. "You," he whispered against her skin.

She spread her arm as if waiting for his embrace, and here her limbs multiplied into hundreds of pale arms, ending in fingers shapely as feathers. Beyond her head, the field hospital was gone, transformed into the eternal twilight at the end of the world, shot through with magnetic bands of shifting color. "Come," she said. Not-Adele twined her neck around his throat, enfolded his body in her million-fingered arms, pressing him to her breast. "No, wait," he said, but the muscles of her neck and wings tightened further, until he saw only blackness and stars, and the beat of wings bore him away.

Behold the Beast: Since the birth of human civilization, man has looked to the beasts of the air for signs and portents of what was to come. Man does not govern the flight of birds and bats, so he looks to them to divine his lot, whether it be imminent death or prosperity. Because he believes his fate is tied to these beasts, he rarely seeks to do them harm.

At the dawn of civilization, Man believed birds carried the souls of the dead to the afterlife. Some men gave their gods the head of a bird, such as falcon-headed Horus, Egyptian god of the sky and protector of the land, or Huitzilopochtli, the hummingbird-headed Aztec warrior god. For other gods, birds became their companions or heralds: the cockerel for Hermes, the owl for Athena, ravens for Odin. Bats, though not true birds, assumed a similar vaulting status; their portents, though, were more ambiguous. In Africa, bats symbolized wisdom; in China, prosperity, and among certain Native American cultures, immortality. Yet to the People of the Book — Christians, Jews and Muslims — the bat became an agent of darkness, a night-borne parasite flown from the Devil himself.

The Wing-Folk, who live in the juncture between sky and earth, walking Man and flying Beast, recognize such significance, yet refuse to be bound to it. If gravity cannot hold them, why then should the conceits of men?

Unhindered by the rules that bind men to the earth, winged shapechangers have the ability to touch the heavens, inciting wonder and jealousy in men's hearts. Everywhere Man walks, birds fly, and everywhere they are to be feared and respected. Man's prohibitions against killing birds are as ancient as his upright gait. For many people, even now, to kill a bird is not merely a crime but a sin. True, sometimes birds grace man's supper table, but for the most part, these are flightless fowl, and in the hierarchy of the Wing-Folk's world, little more than food for greater raptors.

A man who violates the ancient sanction against harming wild birds in the presence of one of the Wing-Folk will soon repent of his misdeed. Whether a primal cloud of angry sparrows or the terrible, disjointed War-Beast form of the Owl Woman, the winged ferals' methods of dispatching a foe are brutal: talons shred, beaks rend and peck, until all that remains is a bloody mass of flesh.

Wing-Folk scoff at man's claim that he rules the earth. Are avians not more numerous and free? Winged ferals' ability to fly makes it easier for them to congregate or traverse the globe as they please. Because of the lingering respect that humans hold for them, and also because of their ability to flee where terrestrial enemies can't follow, winged ferals are slightly more numerous than some of their earthbound kin. They would be the most cohesive and powerful breed of ferals in existence if they could ever *agree* on anything. As it is, most of the Wing-Folk are quarrelsome and warlike. For all their excellent eyesight, they fail to look beyond their immediate territorial squabbles and disagreements to the terrible power they could wield if they banded together.

Breed Traits: Whether a cavernous country house or a sky-high lovers' bower in the heart of the city, the nesting place is central to the lives of the Wing-Folk. The abodes of Vagahuir bat-folk tend to be large and spacious, full of soft nesting surfaces, where all members of the family — human, animal and feral — can bed down together and share warmth. Meanwhile, mated pairs of avian ferals fill their nests with "treasures" of all kinds. Whatever catches their fancy, from diamonds to tin foil, they bring back to decorate their homes. Unfortunately, avians often don't distinguish between what they *want* and what they actually *own*, which has given them a reputation as kleptomaniacs and pack rats.

Most Wing-Folk are aloof, both physically and metaphorically. Each species believes their own people to be the most noble and clever of all Wing-Folk, which only leads to more bickering and infighting wherever winged ferals gather. While they are intelligent as a rule, in truth, they are more clever than wise, human folklore aside. Excellent mimics and natural polyglots, Wing-Folk find a way to ingratiate themselves in any social setting.

Humans might not consider avians a threat because of their relatively small size. But don't underestimate the Wing-Folk: most flocks of winged ferals have a rich history as warriors, especially the Gente Alada, the quetzal and hummingbird people of Central America, and the fraternal order of Horus, an international brotherhood of falcons who enjoy a reputation as ancient and shadowy as that of human Freemasons. Those who are not warriors are often thieves, messengers or spies. Whatever their profession, they are sure to put their quick wits and haughty bearing to good use.

Habitats: Winged ferals inhabit every corner of the world, though they mark their territory by traditional migratory routes and climate more than land mass. The Wing-Folk scoff at human notions of national boundaries, though they are just as rabid as humans when it comes to defending "their" territory. The eastern seaboard of North America is just as much theirs as the Galapagos Islands, human law be damned.

However, different species of winged ferals tend to congregate where they are most revered and welcomed by human society. Corvidae, therefore, prefer the tower of London, where humans consider it bad luck to kill them, bats fly freely in China, West Africa and Poland, cranes retreat to Japan and swan ferals live in relative peace throughout Europe, where humans appreciate them for their rare beauty and would not consider them game.

Predators and Prey: Forget folk wisdom about "eating like a bird." As a whole, winged ferals are gourmands and insatiable gluttons. Their dishes are as varied as those of humans, though many Wing-Folk prefer a diet heavy in meat. Most Westerners would consider their specialties "weird": poached mouse, live ants wrapped in succulent leaves, fricassee of rattlesnake. However, Wing-Folk also enjoy fresh fish and eel, making sushi and sashimi restaurants popular gathering places for Wing-Folk worldwide.

Naturally, the Spinner-Kin and smaller specimens of the Riverkin and Serpentine breeds feel uneasy around the Wing-Folk. Although it's unlikely that a winged feral would eat another feral of a different breed out of mere hunger, they do feed on ferals' animal kin. Larger Wing-Folk, such as falcons, bats and owls, have been known to cannibalize smaller winged ferals in fits of rage. The Gente Alada also eat the hearts of their adversaries after battle to consume their strength. Wing-Folk as a whole spend too much time fighting among themselves to cultivate any real rivalries with other breeds, though they are wary of the Bastet and the Laughing Strangers, the Wing-Folk's natural predators.

Spirit-Ties: Several sects, such as the Strigidae shamans and the priests of Horus and Thoth, claim direct contact with the godhead. However, each cannot abide the other. Where their iconography and theology diverge, they see only a reason for more conflict. The time they once spent seeking contact or unity with the gods, they now devote to condemning one another.

Others take to heart the role humans have given them as bearers of the dead into the afterlife. The Gente Alada and Brythian swan maidens, especially, are known to pursue their calling with Kevorkian-like devotion. They known the suffering of the bird with the broken wing or the soldier writhing on the battlefield. They bring the peace of death, even as the creatures these ferals seek to comfort cling to life.

Kin: Wing-Folk try to keep as much distance between themselves and human "groundlings" as possible. When Wing-Folk *do* appear in public, they give off the air of an effete intellectual or self-made millionaire. Why should they associate with humans unless those "weighty" people are as well-bred and intelligent as birds?

The human belief that Wing-Folk are wise beings in communion with the gods serves the purposes of many winged ferals, who would hate to disabuse Man of that notion. An avian or bat feral changing shape is a fearsome sight to behold, and they use this to their advantage if caught in a compromising situation. Even if a human who watches one of the Wing-Folk change doesn't remember the specifics of his encounter, the image of a man sprouting wings and black, glossy eyes takes root in the witness's psyche. The next time crows are in his garden, he'll think twice before shooting.

In mundane animals of these ferals' species, the Wing-Folk inspire wild loyalty. They become the undisputed leaders of their flock, and their animal followers attack with abandon should anyone threaten their feral master. Unfortunately for the followers, this overwhelming loyalty does not go both ways. Avian ferals often consider their followers disposable, with the exception of the Wing-Folk's own children. Anything short of wholesale slaughter of their kind is unlikely to spur them to action. Bat-folk are more egalitarian; they defend their animal kin with vigor, and share in the responsibilities of their colony wholeheartedly.

Society: Winged ferals make pacts with various bird- and bat-folk of their kind but frequently break and shift these alliances as convenience allows. The Wing-Folk are constantly scheming and moving. A winged feral who allows complacency to overtake him isn't long for this world. Sensing his weakness, his fellow ferals won't hesitate to move in on his territory and take his mate or property.

Most Wing-Folk prefer the society of their own kind to solitude. With the exception of bat-folk, winged ferals group themselves in mated pairs. For some, this is a lifelong bond, broken only by one or the other's death. After their mates' deaths, these ferals either commit ritual suicide or live out their lives in celibacy, sometimes taking holy orders that emphasize the sacred sky. Others are "serial monogamists," attaching themselves exclusively to another feral for a time, then moving on to a new, more interesting mate.

The bat-folk travel in large, mixed bands of ferals and human relatives wherever they go. They depend on their collective mass for strength, though this is somewhat limited by the scarcity of their kind. For them, raising children is a communal effort, as is feeding and otherwise nurturing each other. Among all the Wing-Folk, children are precious and rare, but nowhere more so than among the bat-folk. While avian ferals hatch twins or triplets, bat-folk never give birth to more than



one child at a time, and even these offspring rarely bear the Changing Gift. Because these children are so rare, bat mothers defend their offspring with their lives. Nothing is so sure to earn the animosity of a winged mother as threatening her young, Gifted or otherwise.

Alphas: Female Wing-Folk dominate their flocks as a rule, though mated Alpha pairs are common as well. Their inborn pride leads winged ferals to believe themselves the most worthy and capable of leading among the Changing Folk. In many cases, their wits and alacrity *do* serve them well as leaders . . . but not always. An avian Alpha blames any failure on her subordinates, so the group quickly becomes fed up with her pride. Even if an Ursara takes an avian feral down a peg in a battle for dominance, it won't take the avian long to forget the lesson and try to take control again.

Character Creation: The Winged Ones come from all corners of the world. No culture or creed lacks for feathered counterparts. The most common avian shapechangers — crows, owls, hawks, eagles and so on — fly worldwide, and although each culture has its own legends about such creatures, every human ethnicity has Wing-Folk among it.

These ferals are a diverse lot; from killer to engineers, they span the human condition. Most, however, have high Mental Attributes, with Physical traits being secondary. Corvians, as usual, prove the exception to the rule; crow characters often have Social traits as their Primary area. Skill-wise, winged ferals often focus on mental pursuits on and off the ground. Being "airy: types, they excel at Investigation, Academics, Politics and the Occult. Social Skills tend to be stronger than Social Attributes, perhaps making up in learning what they often lack in talent. Expression, Intimidation, Socialize and Streetwise become common Skills among the flying set.

Concepts: Thief, soldier, rainforest guide, priest, Freemason, sushi chef, scholar, guerrilla warrior, spy, poet, messenger, prophetic weirdo, college professor, cute guy/girl in the park, traveling salesman, serial killer

Accords

Den-Warder: The nest is the center of a winged feral's universe. She may be deaf to the everyday sorrows of men and beasts, but any harm done to her nest or those in it lights a fury in her breast. She maims and sacrifices her own children with impunity, but she'll be damned if anyone else harms a feather on their heads. Her questionable ethics and fiery temper make her a somewhat unsuitable Den-Ward, but she guards her abode with the devotion of one.

Heart-Ripper: From the smallest jay to the broad-tailed eagle, all Wing-Folk are predators at heart. They differ only in their choice of prey. Flying high above her target, whether it be a meal or newspaper reporter who's been poking his nose where he shouldn't, the Ripper strikes with precision and force. When wronged, her fury and bloodlust leave her enemies trembling or dead.

Stereotypes

Man: Man is a mere page in the vast tome or our people's history.

Mages: They could achieve more if they weren't afraid to get their hands messy. True magic requires sacrifice.

Vampires: No good for food, no use as servants. What use is something undead?

Werewolves: What have we to fear from creatures bound to the earth?

Root-Weaver: While the Wing-Folk appreciate anything well-made, as a people they fail to grasp the fundamentals involved in making something themselves. They craft, decorate and accumulate, but they rarely create.

Sun-Dancer: A new and brighter horizon always lies ahead of the Wing-Folk. New lands to see. New mates to try. New shinies to take. Unbound by the forces that tie other creatures to the earth, the Wing-Folk feel neither the laws of men nor beasts apply to them. They answer only to those more powerful than themselves. This accord manifests most violently in families or tribes where elder ferals attempt to suppress their offspring's natural inclination toward freedom.

Wind-Chaser: Wing-Folk are a secretive, insular people by nature, but the Wind-Chasers seclude themselves from society even more than the average winged feral. Perhaps that's best for the rest of the world, though. Winged Wind-Chasers are the most natural and talented at touching the land of the dead: Strigoi speak through the veil, while the followers of Mictlantecuhtli lead the living there by their own hands.

Gente Alada

The Bright Assassins

The people of Guatemala say the quetzal bird once sang more sweetly than any other beast in creation. But when the Spanish conquered the Americas, the quetzal ceased to sing, its melodies replaced by a harsh cry. Men say the quetzal will regain its beautiful voice only when its people are free from bondage. The Gente Alada, literally "winged folk," are echoes of the quetzal's promise. Warriors in the form of quetzal and hummingbird ferals, this "breed" (really a sect united

by common origin) fights under the banner of ancient Aztec deities: Huitzilopochtli, god of war and the sun; Quetzalcoatl, the feathered serpent, who embodies both heaven and earth in his form; and Mictlantecuhtli, lord of the dead.

The Aztecs believed Huitzilopochtli called the souls of warriors killed in battle and women who died in childbirth to serve him. These souls could later return to earth for a brief time as hummingbirds or butterflies. Hummingbird warriors among the Gente Alada believe themselves to be these spirits, returned to earth for a brief tenure and charged with bringing about an end to Man's dominion over Nature. When the regional headquarters of a multinational corporation poised to clear-cut a forest mysteriously catches fire, or explosives rock a mile-high dam, devotees of Huitzilopochtli are certain to have had a hand in the destruction.

Hummingbird warrior ferals have formed a close alliance with the few, but fearsome quetzal warriors left in existence. As quetzal ferals watch their kind diminish daily, they grow ever more desperate to stem the tide of Man's dominance. These members of the Gente Alada are the assassins and terrorists of their kind, driven to meet violence with violence. They prefer the satisfaction and intimacy of an assassination to a bombing, though, in part because an assassination allows the Gente Alada the opportunity to eat their victims' hearts, thereby consuming their strength and life force.

Mictlantecuhtli also attracts his share of followers from the ranks of the quetzal and hummingbirds, as well as some owls. Devotees of the lord of the dead have gone beyond the ritual cardiophagy popular among the quetzal to full-out cannibalism of their human kin. Unlike the quetzals, the devotees of the lord of the dead don't confine themselves to strategic murders of powerful men. To these hummingbird warriors, all humans are a threat to the devotees' kind. They move in darkness, picking off members of the human race at random. Often, the victims are the poor and vagrant, whose deaths are unlikely to attract attention to their murderers. The more the devotees of the lord of the dead kill, the more souls they have delivered to serve the lord of the dead.

Appearance: When Tecún Umán, the warrior prince of the Maya Quiché was slain by the Spanish, his Nahual, a quetzal, flew down and dipped its chest feathers in the prince's blood, marking its kind with blood-red chests for all time. In honor of their Primal Beast form, quetzal warriors in human guise wear red shirts or vests to identify themselves to one another. In War-Beast shape, they remain man-sized but sprout verdant green wings and a spiked crest of feathers on their heads, along with a trailing tail of bright green feathers. They retain the chest and legs of humans, but rows of feathers line their backs of their legs. Males and female warriors alike paint their breasts vermilion in preparation for battle.

Though smaller and less spectacularly colored in War-Beast form, hummingbird warriors sprout a thin, needle-like beak, which they use to spear the hearts of their enemies in battle. Devotees of Mictlantecuhtli clothe themselves in drab colors so as not to attract attention to themselves in human form. Among this breed, quetzal warriors paint themselves white or gray to hide their bright colors. They are savage ghosts among the Gente Alada, not warriors.

Background: Ferals who take hummingbird form populate all of Central America. They are the most numerous among the Gente Alada. Meanwhile, the heart of quetzal culture radiates from Guatemala, where people regard the bird highly. The cult of Mictlantecuhtli has followers throughout the world, and though they are less numerous outside of Central America, their doctrine is beginning to catch on among young ferals of other nationalities and species. Followers of Mictlantecuhtli may be rare in Poland or Japan, for example, but thanks to the "virtual wings" of Internet culture, they're beginning to make their presence known.

The Gente Alada train their children from infancy in the art of war. While feral children receive special training in hand-to-hand combat, elders among the Gente Alada don't neglect to teach their human kin as well. In addition to various forms of physical conditioning, all children receive religious training in Aztec lore and history. However, elders teach demolitions almost exclusively to human offspring because quetzal and hummingbird ferals lack hands in their Primal and War forms.

Unlike other Gente Alada, Mictlantecuhtli's followers kill their human progeny at birth, delivering them directly into the hands of their god. Thus the world is rid of Man's evil, and Mictlantecuhtli's kingdom prospers. Initiates into the cult of the death god often must kill a human relative in order to be accepted into the fellowship of Mictlantecuhtli's followers. Devotees of Huitzilopochtle and Quetzalcoatl regard these practices as barbaric. In fact, most Wing-Folk would consider the murder or ritual sacrifice of their own relatives, especially their young, a sacrilege.

Breed Favors: Fang and Claw (beak) 1 (L) (talons) 2 (L), Speed 10, Wings

Breed Bonus: All ferals of the Gente Alada have Brawl, Weaponry and Academics Skills (not free), with free Skill Specialties in Close Combat, Silent Kills and Aztec History, respectively. Most, if not all, characters from this lineage have Stealth as well. Just as many birds and small animals, this breed's Primal form has a specific Size and Health, which are both smaller than those traits in human shape. However, this smallness grants the character a +2 bonus for dice pools related to hiding or concealment.

Common Aspects: Alarming Alacrity, Carnivore's Puissance, Earthbond, Grave Misfortune, Keen Sense (Sight), Mindmap, Resilient Form, Size 3, Swift Wing, Tell (Bright Colors), Territory Bond, The Wild Cry (Birds), Totem Guardian (Hummingbird), Truth Sense, Unsettling Eye

Form Adjustments

War-Beast: Strength +2, Dexterity +4, Speed +7 (species factor 8), +2 to sight perception rolls

Primal Beast: Dexterity +5, Size 3, Health 4, Speed 12 (species factor 5), +2 to sight perception rolls

Corvians

Dark and Pretty Things

In the days before Creation, when all was black and void, a part of that black void detached itself from the rest and began to fly. Its first caw cracked the Nothingness, and all other things began. So goes the tale the crow-folk cackle to themselves. Whether or not they believe the story or consider it one more raucous joke at Man's expense remains a mystery.

Man himself has many tales of Crow and Raven. It's said that the great black bird was one of the original creator entities — indeed, that he *was* the original Creator. He's attributed with the discovery of human beings, the stealing of the sun from its original jealous keeper, the cracking of the egg that held our world, or the dropping of the great earth-stone in the sea of Eternity. Other stories have him flying out of Hell as the Devil's wingman, or comforting Lilith after her flight from Eden. Raven is a demon, a god, a stealer of souls and a guide to the Otherworld. All or none of these tales may be true. The Corvians just nod and smile. Why spoil a good joke?

The children of Crow, Raven or both, Corvians are born with laughing black hearts. Unable to take life too seriously, yet unwilling to dismiss its seriousness, these ferals make maddening companions. Not even *they* know exactly what their story is, and that paradox of being sagaciously ignorant seems to suit them as a breed. Endlessly curious, these bird-folk command a bewildering array of tricks. Some turn into giant ravens, while other explode into flocks of night-black birds. Notorious soul-guides, certain werecrows fly into the spirit realm or eat the hearts of their prey. These remarkably perceptive folk can spot flaws, solve puzzles or mimic the words or even appearances of others. Yet despite their endless bag of tricks, they're fragile folk, easily hurt by words or violence. The endless jeers with which they greet the world may be a way of coping with its tragedies.

Corvians make it their business to know everyone else's business. In this respect, they're excellent spies. Yet despite their obvious intelligence, the Laughing Wings are impatient. Everything intrigues them, so nothing interests them for long. Among all the bird-folk, they may be the most compassionate — or the most cruel. All-Father Odin dispatched his ravens Thought and Memory out each day to learn the secrets of the world, and their descendants seem intent on keeping that promise. What they do with that knowledge is anybody's guess. Corvians share *what* they want, *when* they want and appear to share nothing at all.

Appearance: To a one, Corvians are black and lovely birds. Some appear as ravens, others as crows and a handful as magpies, rooks and jackdaws. Corvians don't seem to notice the distinction unless there's something to be gained from more confusion. Birds of great portent, these ferals love to appear significant, preening and mocking in any form that suits them.

In human shape, Corvians *always* have something black. Black clothing, black hair, a feather or two from their avian forms, even onyx or obsidian jewelry. Many leave glossy dark feathers in their wake, and snatch trinkets up when they think no

one's looking. Young ones sometimes affect Gothic clothing (often, perhaps, as a joke on their image), but others dress in stylish formality. Whatever their fashion, Corvians often look *good*; even the ragged ones who favor the carrion-crow look seem magnificent in their way. Just as many Wing-Folk, Corvians stare intently at anyone who captures their interest, and betray small but noticeable quirks when they move. Corvians may be born into any human culture, and share a sardonic take on life.

It's been said that Raven never loses his temper. That saying may explain why Corvians have no War-Beast form. Instead, they shift into large yet normal-looking birds, gigantic man-sized ravens, flocks of blackbirds or eerie bird-men like something out of Bosch. In the latter guise, a Corvian sprouts feathered wings, a beak and glossy black eyes. This form evokes the Delusion in all but the bravest mortals. The form seems, in a way, like some agent of Death whose voice tolls the summons of hell.

Background: Crow's children are smart as blades. Even before the Change, they distinguish themselves for restless, often irreverent, intellect. Most are rebels from birth, breaking every rule and mocking each convention. Yet beneath that mockery lies a deep sincerity. The average crow is a frustrated idealist who wouldn't dare reveal how much she truly cares about her world.

Despite that idealism, corvids have a mean streak. Their ruthless disregard for facades often manifests as cruel humor. Don't leave your illusions laying around when a crow's nearby — she'll smash them, laugh and cut your with the shards. It's said that Crow's children are all teachers, and Lesson #1 seems to be this: *Live like you know you're dying*. Because, as any crow can tell you, we all *are*. And in the end, it will be Raven's wings that enfold Creation's finale, just as they did in its beginning.

Breed Favors: Fang and Claw (beak and talons) 1 (L), Speed 10, Wings

Breed Bonus: Corvians do not have a War-Beast form; instead, they can assume a modified Throwback form with sharp talons, a beak and small yet powerful wings. Some can assume the Dire Beast form of a gigantic crow (seven-foot wingspan), while others can take Flock form and fly away in all directions. A single Corvian, however, cannot do both. As supreme tricksters, Corvians can use the "bag of tricks" Aspects; however, because Corvians have Throwback and Dire Raven forms, Corvian characters receive the usual seven dots to spend on Aspects, not nine as the Laughing Strangers. Due to this breed's small size, this breed receives a +2 bonus to hide in its Primal form (which assumes, of course, that the character's not moving).

Common Aspects: Alarming Alacrity, Bare Necessities, Blind Burrow, Brave Escape, Carnivore's Puissance, Clever Monkey, Culling the Weak, Earthbond, Fortune's Favor, Grave Misfortune, Keen Sense (Sight), Magnificence, Mimic, Mindmap, Mindspeech, Nine Lives, Pearl of Great Price, Resilient Form, Size 2, Shadow Bond, Spinebite, Spirit Sight, Spook the Herd, Stash, Swarm/Flock Form, Swift Wing, Tell (Black Feathers or Eyes), The Wild Cry (Corvids), Truth Sense, Twisted Tongue, Unnerving Cry, Unsettling Eye

Form Adjustments

Throwback: Strength +1, Dexterity +2, Stamina +1, Manipulation –2, Health +1, Speed +8 (species factor 10), +2 to sight perception rolls, has beak, talons and wings

Dire Beast: Dexterity +1, Stamina +1, Size 6, Health +2, Speed +6 (species factor 10), +2 to sight perception rolls

Primal Beast: Strength 2, Dexterity +1, Stamina 2, Size 2, Health 4, Speed 14 (species factor 10), +2 to sight perception rolls

Chevaliers Rapace

Ministers of War

From the Byzantine Empire and the Ptolemaic kings of Egypt to Napoleonic France and the modern nations of Mexico and the United States, men have used the image of the eagle to herald their countries' power and military might. By hoisting the eagle's likeness above their armies, they mean to strike fear and awe into the hearts of their enemies. By that sigil, men will be as merciless and swift in battle as the eagle itself.

Chivalry and brutality walk hand in hand in the heart of the Chevalier Rapace. These falcon and eagle ferals were once warrior-kings and knights of the ancient world, hailing from the dark corners of Europe. They haunted the ranks of armies since men first began smelting bronze, whispering stolen secrets to their generals and calling down terrible swarms of birds on their enemies' heads. But where once they rose up as woad-smeared witch queens and spies of wolf-pelted warlords, these ferals now direct matters of war from the comfort of leather-backed chairs and impenetrable bunkers.

Though the fraternity admits ferals from all species who have the ability to Change into birds of prey, eagles and some falcon ferals populate the upper echelons of power. Aristocratic in their bearing, the Chevaliers Rapace and their families have the smell of old money about them. Centuries of human warfare have given these ferals ample opportunity for plundering and profiteering. They live comfortably, yet discreetly, throughout Europe, Australia, the Americas and the Middle East.

As warlike and pompous as their name suggests, the Chevaliers Rapace have constructed an elaborate history around themselves. They claim to have formed their order under the reign of Charlemagne, a handful of shapeshifting warriors pitted

against the might of the Lombards, Saracens and Saxons. The bonds of their brotherhood strengthened over the following centuries as all of Christian Europe set its sight on the promise of wealth and salvation to be found through conquering the Holy Land. The Chevaliers Rapace crossed the sea on wings and wooden vessels, and found their lost brothers in Australia and the Americas. The ferals welcomed those from the newfound lands who wished to join their ranks, and drove those who refused to benefit from the civilizing influence of their society to the far, barren reaches of the continents.

The modern order is not so much a species or formal organization as a loose understanding between powerful men and women. Winged ferals who cannot gain admittance into the Chevaliers Rapace often form small-time gangs or work as lackeys for those in power, hoping to earn a spot by the Chevaliers' flock in time. Chevaliers are quick to anger, even if their expressions remain impassive as they watch an informant tortured or order an enemy executed. They are also notoriously litigious in disputes with human organizations and each other. All Chevalier families employ their own in-house lawyers, often sending non-feral members of the family off to law school to serve this purpose. Chevalier lawyers are well rewarded, but short-lived, as they have little defense against an irate eagle feral in primal or War-Beast. Over the years, the Chevaliers Rapace have developed a bad habit of shooting messengers.

Appearance: Moneyed yet demure, the Chevaliers Rapace are all cuff links and silk ties, high collars and cashmere. Dark, keen eyes, aquiline noses and powerful hands define both eagle and falcon ferals in human guise, though eagles often have thick necks and powerful legs to match their grip. Kestrels and falcons are more slight of build than eagles, but still formidable in a fight. In the company of humans or other ferals, the Chevaliers Rapace often forget themselves and stare intently at another being without blinking.

Primal Chevaliers take on the natural form of a single, unusually large bird, never a flock or swarm. In War-Beast form, a Chevalier's feet curl up and split into massive black talons. Her eyes rounds to unblinking, predatory circles, and her pupils dilate to fill them. Her nose and lips fuse into a curved beak. Dark wings, usually black or brown, unfurl from her back, taking the place of her arms. Women retain their human hair and breasts, but these are covered in a lighter, softer layer of feathers than their wings.

Background: Women play an important role in the First Change among members of the species. Though the Chevaliers don't consider the Gift a curse or a manifestation of evil, the act of transformation remains a private, messy affair, best kept to closed rooms and country houses. For a male Chevalier, watching another male change shape would be deeply embarrassing. Women, therefore, are tasked with shepherding a youth through the First Change and explaining to him the true nature of his people.

Members of the Chevaliers Rapace rarely meet in person. Each administers the affairs of war in his own territory: selling arms, buying politicians, ordering executions and orchestrating smear campaigns. To meddle in the affairs of another Chevalier's territory is a serious breach of etiquette, but powerful ferals do collude with each other when the situation benefits both interests. On rare occasion, two Chevaliers may consolidate their territories by arranging a marriage between their children. Neither child has a say in such a union, but if either the bride or groom refuses the engagement, the child's parents have every right to tear the offender limb from limb as punishment for betraying the family. The young feral who bucks tradition will find herself on the run from her family for the rest of her days.

Breed Favors: Fang and Claw (beak) 1 (L) (talons) 2 (L), Speed 15, Wings

Breed Bonus: Although members of this "flock" range in species, all are raptor-people with similar game statistics. All have Academics with a free Skill Specialty in Military History, as well as Brawl and Weaponry Skills (no free Specialties) and the Fighting Finesse Merit (Dive and Claw — not free).

Common Aspects: Alarming Alacrity, Keen Sense (Sight), Magnificence, Mindmap, Sexual Dimorphism, Size 6, Spinebite, Spook the Herd, Swift Wing, The Wild Cry (Birds), Truth Sense, Unnerving Cry, Unsettling Eye

Form Adjustments

War-Beast: Strength +4, Dexterity +1, Stamina +5, Size 6, Health +6, Speed +11 (species factor 5), +2 to sight perception rolls

Primal Beast: Strength 4, Dexterity +1, Stamina 5, Size 4, Health 8, Speed 20 (species factor 15), +2 to sight perception rolls

Vagahuir

Songs of the Sky

Of all the Wing-Folk, the Vagahuir have most to fear from Man. Across much of the world, men shudder at the leathery beat of the Vagahuir's wings on the night air, the teeming mass of their bodies as they huddle together with their animal kin for warmth, their needle teeth and blind eyes. Popular Western literature and cinema has long demonized the bat, causing men to see her as a bearer of evil magics and disease.

In truth, the Vagahuir (Vah-gah-HUR) want nothing to do with the mage's art . . . beyond a little sympathetic magic when the situation calls for it, of course. Despite men's prejudices, the Vagahuir mean humans no real harm, though from time to time these ferals "skim the cream" from an unsuspecting businessman's pocket. They avoid Man and his gathering places whenever possible, preferring the open road (or sky) to cities. If they traverse into Man's territory, it is out of sheer desperation — a family member fallen gravely ill or a streak of bad luck that leaves their children starving — or by pure accident.

When the Vagahuir *do* show their faces, either in Primal or human form, the Vagahuir often find themselves run out of town by exterminators or angry mobs. Moving from

small town to small town, sleeping in rented campsites and abandoned houses, these ferals seldom find a place unsullied by the ancient and unfounded hatred humans bear for their kind. "Rest your weary bones by day," the old Vagahuir proverb goes. "For by night, we fly this place."

In certain areas of the world, such as China and West Africa, humans still regard bats as symbols of prosperity, industriousness and good fortune. There, men welcome the Vagahuir with open arms and larders. For a long while, many bands of Vagahuir lived comfortably in China, traveling across the countryside on horseback or by wagon, as they chose. However since the late 1970s, the Vagahuir, for whom offspring are a most precious gift, have run into trouble with the Chinese "one child" fertility policy. Also, as Westernization spreads to the furthest corners of the globe, even these pockets of human civilization friendly to the Vagahuir shrink daily. A modern Chinese youth might have misgivings about bedding a Vagahuir girl, where his grandfather would have considered her favors an honor and a blessing.

Appearance: By human standards, the Vagahuir are not a beautiful people. In primal form, they take the shape of all manner of bats, from the golden-crowned flying fox to the common pipistrelle. In War-Beast form, some Vagahuir break into a feral cloud, while larger species' fingers lengthen and grow a sheaf of leathery membrane between dactyls. Their faces seem horrifying in either form, calling up the image of demons and vicious-toothed demigods, which may explain why Man constantly drives angry Vagahuir from his lands.

A Vagahuir in human guise prefers to dress in leather, which feels like a second skin to her. This doesn't mean that her wardrobe is drab, though. Leather can be dyed or embroidered, a highly prized Vagahuir folk craft. Mother ferals teach their daughters a wide variety of stylized embroidery patterns, each with a particular significance known only among their people. A curved arc facing downward symbolizes the bat herself, for example. A line of circles under the arc's outstretched "wings" signifies that the feral has children, one circle for each of her offspring. This is a symbol of pride and prestige among the Vagahuir. "I am a great mother of many daughters," it tells their kin. "I deserve respect." Tattooing is also popular among both sexes. Vagahuir call it "embroidery of the skin," and their tattoo artists employ the same language of symbols stitched into clothing. The art on a feral's skin and clothing is a lifetime work, evolving with each joy and heartbreak that befalls her.

Background: Mothers are the center of Vagahuir culture. All members of the tribe, human, bat and feral, share in caring for the young, whether the child is their genetic offspring or not. Everyone is of the same blood. Even so, the Vagahuir recognize each individual's contributions to her family's ranks. Childbearing affords the mother the highest honor in Vagahuir society.

Because children are relatively rare among their kind and are a mark of prestige, Vagahuir girls begin trying to conceive early in life. As a means of increasing reproduction, their culture also encourages polyandry. A Vagahuir woman will bed many men in her life, both human and feral, leaving a trail of broken hearts behind her. While she may fall in love from time to time, her people won't encourage her to mate with the same man for long. To do so would be unlucky, they say, and might even make her infertile.

Song is also important to the Vagahuir. Normal bats may shriek, but human and feral Vagahuir alike raise their voices in pure melodies. Music helps pass the time on the long road between safe nesting places, but music is more than mere entertainment. The songs of the Vagahuir tell the story of their history, rolling along to the steady hum of tires on pavement, or beating out in time to the sound of footsteps in the rain. The Vagahuir teach these songs to each new child, in the hope of "singing out the Gift," causing the feral form to blossom in their young. Whether or not this works, singing out the Gift leaves the child with a rich sense of her family's history, binding her to them through clear nights and bad days. Even if she feels any misgivings about her family's traditions ask of her, she will never leave them for a life among other ferals or humans.

The Vagahuir's sensitivity to the variegated sounds of the world opens her up not only to pleasure but to intense pain. With their piercing sirens, electric buzz and cacophony of human voices, the roar of modern city streets overwhelms and disorients her. She may literally become lost or physically ill in the face of wildly discordant sounds. Along with human dislike for her kind, her sensitivity gives her another good reason to avoid Man's most populous centers.

Breed Favors: Echolocation, Speed 10, Wings

Breed Bonus: Most Vagahuir have Expression; all who have that Skill receive a free Specialty in Song. Just as many birds and small animals, this breed's Primal form has a specific Size and Health, which are both smaller than those traits in human shape. However, this smallness grants the character a +2 bonus for dice pools related to hiding or concealment.

Common Aspects: Clamber, Culling the Weak, Darksight, Fang and Claw (Bite, Claws) 1, Fortune's Favor, Grave Misfortune, Gross Eater, Keen Sense, Mercy's Touch, Mindmap, Size 6, Spook the Herd, Swarm/Flock Form, Swift Wing, The Wild Cry (Bats), Unnerving Cry, Unsettling Eye, Unspeakable

Form Adjustments

War-Beast: Strength +3, Stamina +4, Size 6, Health +5, Speed +10 (species factor 5), +2 to perception rolls

Primal Beast: Stamina +1, Size 3, Health 5, Speed +5 (species factor 10), +2 to perception rolls

The Strigoi

Splendid Isolation

From Babylon to the Pacific Northwest, Man has marked owls for spirits of the dead and the preferred form of predatory

night-hags. Lilith, Mother of Demons, is named for the screech owl, and the children of Israel clutched at copper amulets to keep her at bay. The Greeks made her the noble companion of Gray-Eyed Athene, goddess of Wisdom and War, but her reputation had already been made. Mysterious and aloof, the Strigoi, Children of the Screech Owl, inspire both awe and mistrust. They squat in their solitary lairs, feathering their nests with jealously-hoarded secrets.

The greatest secrets, however, cannot be found in the vaults and archives of the world, but in the whispers of the long-departed. The Strigoi have refined the art of necromancy, piercing the veil to drag each mystery from the grave. Millennia of intimate contact have produced an almost weary familiarity with the dead, and the Strigoi are not above hurling abuse at a recalcitrant shade. That this practice so disturbs their supplicants amuses the Screech Owls to no end, and they often make the process as unpleasant as possible for their own perverse enjoyment. Insatiable collectors, they lavishly decorate their "conjuring rooms" with the products of death: jars of preserved organs, elaborate sculptures of wire, bones and teeth and wall-hangings of cured skin. The Strigoi can sense the lingering remnants of their former owners, and in this way are never wholly without company.

Strigoi function as information-brokers and consultants for human and supernatural clients. Screech Owls tend to be shut-ins, rarely leaving the confines of their lairs and communicating solely by telephone, mail or email. The lairs themselves are unpleasant and bewildering in the extreme. Stacks of yellowing books, magazines and newspapers tower over unmade beds and lean against groaning bookshelves. Index cards, CDs and flash drives line the walls like protective talismans. The floor is littered with the remains of their meals. Bones and greasy takeout boxes mingle with cigarette butts and unopened mail.

Appearance: In human form, Strigoi of both sexes care little for personal appearance, often wearing the same clothes until they become thoroughly stained and threadbare. This, and the Strigoi's general disinterest in hygiene, makes them decidedly unwelcome in public places. Generally, Strigoi are stocky, tending toward obesity due to their largely sedentary lifestyles. However, they are surprisingly flexible.

In their Primal form, Strigoi appear as larger versions of their avian cousins, with bristling, unkempt feathers and eyes glimmering with fierce intelligence. It is in their War-Form that the Strigoi are truly terrifying to behold. A ragged mass of feathers erupts from all angles, making an owl-blood appear even larger to his victim. His nose and mouth disappear, replaced by a wicked meat hook of a beak, and his hands and feet thicken into gnarled, grasping talons. His eyes glow with a baleful yellow light, and his powerful wings beat the air soundlessly.

Background: The Strigoi have always preferred solitude to the companionship of their own kind. Thus, they are thinly spread across the globe. No matter where they live, their reclusive ways shut them off from their communities, and, consequently, individual Strigoi rarely assume any particular ethnic, national or religious identity. When the Strigoi *do* take a mate, it's always with one of their own kind, and the bond lasts until death. This isn't due to any extraordinary sense of fidelity on the owl-blood's part, but rather the



fear of an unknown quantity living in such close proximity. These pairings eventually evolve into a sort of grudging affection.

Children who show signs of the Gift are sent away to these "Aunts" and "Uncles." There, they are instructed in the lore of their kind, and in the disciplines of research and (for those in rural areas) hunting. Guardians initiate those who manifest the Gift into the necromantic mysteries, then send the ferals away to start their own roosts as soon as their "apprenticeship" ends. For those unfortunates who don't bear the Gift, their lives are never again wholly their own. From then on, these kin act as buffers between their guardians and the outside world. They set out on research trips, go on late-night grocery runs or hunting expeditions and act as their parents' proxies in matters of business. When, in 1957, a secret auction was held of the "evidence" found at Ed Gein's Wisconsin farmhouse, the mortal children of the Strigoi were waiting, briefcases in hand.

Breed Favors: Darksight, Fang and Claw (beak) 2 (L) (wings) 3 (B), Wings

Breed Bonus: These ferals specialize in information, and receive two free Skill Specialties to either Academics, Investigation or Occult.

Common Aspects: Beast Magic (Death Spells), Carnivore's Puissance, Clever Monkey, Culling the Weak, Earthbond, Grave Misfortune, Gross Eater, Hypnotic Allure, Keen Sense (Sight), Skin Double, Speed 8, Spook the Herd, Spirit Sight, Sweet-Voiced Fiend, Swift Wing, The Wild Cry (Owls), Truth Sense, Unnerving Cry, Unsettling Eye, Unspeakable

Form Adjustments

War-Beast: Strength +2, Dexterity +3, Manipulation –4, Size 6, Speed +8 (species factor 8), Health +1, Speed +3 (species factor 5), +2 to sight perception rolls

Primal Beast: Dexterity +4, Size 4, Health 5, Speed +7 (species factor 8), +2 to sight perception rolls

Other Species

Brythians: Wings Heavy with Grace

Norse legend tells of the Valkyrie, beautiful shield maidens who circled above the battlefields of men, waiting to pluck the worthy fallen from the fray and bear them off to Valhalla. There, the valiant dead would serve the god Odin in the battle of Ragnarok at the end of the world. In the likeness of these Choosers of the Slain, Brythian swan maidens offer relief to wounded and dying warriors of all stripes. Despite knowing themselves to be superior to their human companions, swan maidens are warriors themselves, and so take pity their human and feral brothers in arms, honoring them with a quick death.

Brythians have no formal order or code. Rumor of their existence passes from ear to ear in foxholes and field hospitals, fanned by glimpses of snowy wings in the heat of battle and talk of angels from dying men's lips. Sometimes doctors or medics, sometimes fellow soldiers, Brythians offer succor in whatever way they can: a drink of cold water, a hand to grip, a night in their beds or the final release of death. Always watchful, the Brythian maiden assures the worthy that they will never die alone. She is the one who gives their necks a merciful twist or pushes the syringe when no one else dares, who beats her breast in mourning when all others have fled. She is the lover, warrior and nurse in one. Though she cannot carry men to Valhalla as her sisters of legend did, she lifts men's pains long enough for their souls to fly free to whatever land they choose. Then, in her soul-form as a blinding-white graceful swan, she heads back toward the heavens, and new souls to choose or leave behind.

Breed Favors: Fang and Claw (beak) 1 (L) (wings) 3 (B), Speed 13, Wings

Breed Bonus:

Common Aspects: Culling the Weak, Earthbond, Foretelling, Keen Sense (Sight), Magnificence, Mercy's Touch, Mindmap, Size 7, Spirit Bond, Spirit Sight, Swift Wing, The Wild Cry (Birds), Truth Sense, Unnerving Cry, Unsettling Eye

Form Adjustments

War-Beast: Strength +2, Dexterity +1, Stamina +5, Size 7, Health +6, Speed +15 (species factor 5), +2 to sight perception rolls

Primal Beast: Strength +2, Dexterity +1, Stamina +3, Size 5, Health +2, Speed +11 (species factor 15), +2 to sight perception rolls

Shadow Breeds

In a world filled with oddities, the changing breeds pack the margins. For scholars of the occult, documenting all the changing breeds has been an exercise in futility. Where are the lines drawn between a selkie, a feral orca and a shapechanging sea lion? Each authority has a different answer, and none cover all the bases. Nature exists, at times, to defy Man's expectations of an orderly world.

Although most feral folk manifest the Changing Gift among the most famous breeds, tales exist of people who assume snake-form, swim with salmon or scatter into swarms of roaches. These "shadow breeds" inhabit the most hidden corners of an already-hidden world, and although there's not enough room in this book to explore them in detail, they're worth noting as we pass:

The Cold Kings: Primal Legacy

Man forgets, but Earth remembers. Deep in the folds of every human brain lays a nugget of remembrance. Courtesy of Nature, the "reptile brain" of the cerebellum commands gross motor functions but leaves emotions alone. Perhaps some trick of Nature rests something else there, too — a memory of what life was before the mammals came. Eons later, the Cold Kings carry that legacy forward. Born beneath the skins of warm-blooded humans, this inheritance turns men and women into alligators, chameleons, Komodo dragons and other uncanny things. Is this the legacy of brains that recall the past more vividly than most? Or does Nature have surprises waiting that only Cold Kings can survive?

Despite rumors to the contrary, the Cold Kings *probably* don't control world affairs. Still, the specter of manipulative shapechangers of reptilian aspect dominates several popular conspiracy theories. Meanwhile, in bayous, deserts and ancient jungle wreckage, several rare but pervasive breeds combine cold-blooded memory with warm-blooded intellect. As Man's influence reaches further into the hidden places of our world, more walking memories stir and rise. . . .

Whiskey Croc: The Beast in Your Belly

Soused by the slow burn of liquid fire, the undercities crawl with forgotten souls. These castoff people meet and breed. Sometimes their children, born with Night Train cries, scuttle off during childhood to hide in places where no light falls. Swimming in sewage and feeding off scraps, these ferals manifest the Changing Gift in its most primal form. Urban legends speak of abandoned pets, but the Whiskey Crocs are something more.

Warmed by alcohol's kiss and human metabolism, these shapechangers fear the sun but emerge at times to join the night-hunt up above. . . . In human form, they appear degenerate, like the castoff parents who bore them. In Primal form, they're sewer-sized crocs with smarts to spare. And in War-Beast form, they swell like DTs into man-like shapes with gaping mouths, short claws and scales sheened with whiskey and shattered glass. Though they almost never speak in any form, these ferals recall what the cities have forgotten.

Breed Favors: Darksight, Fang and Claw (bite) 3 (L)/(rake) 1 (L), Natural Armor 4/3

Breed Bonus: As a breed trait, these ferals also receive the Eidetic Memory Merit during character creation. In all forms, they stink heavily of alcohol and sewage.

Common Aspects: Blend In, Carnivore's Puissance, Culling the Weak, Earthbond, Extra Limb (Tail — attacks only), Gross Eater, Mercy's Touch, Nine Lives, Razorskin (Broken Glass Shards), Size 6, Spinebite, Stash, Tell (Alcohol Stench, Drunken Mannerisms), Truth Sense, Unsettling Eye

Form Adjustments

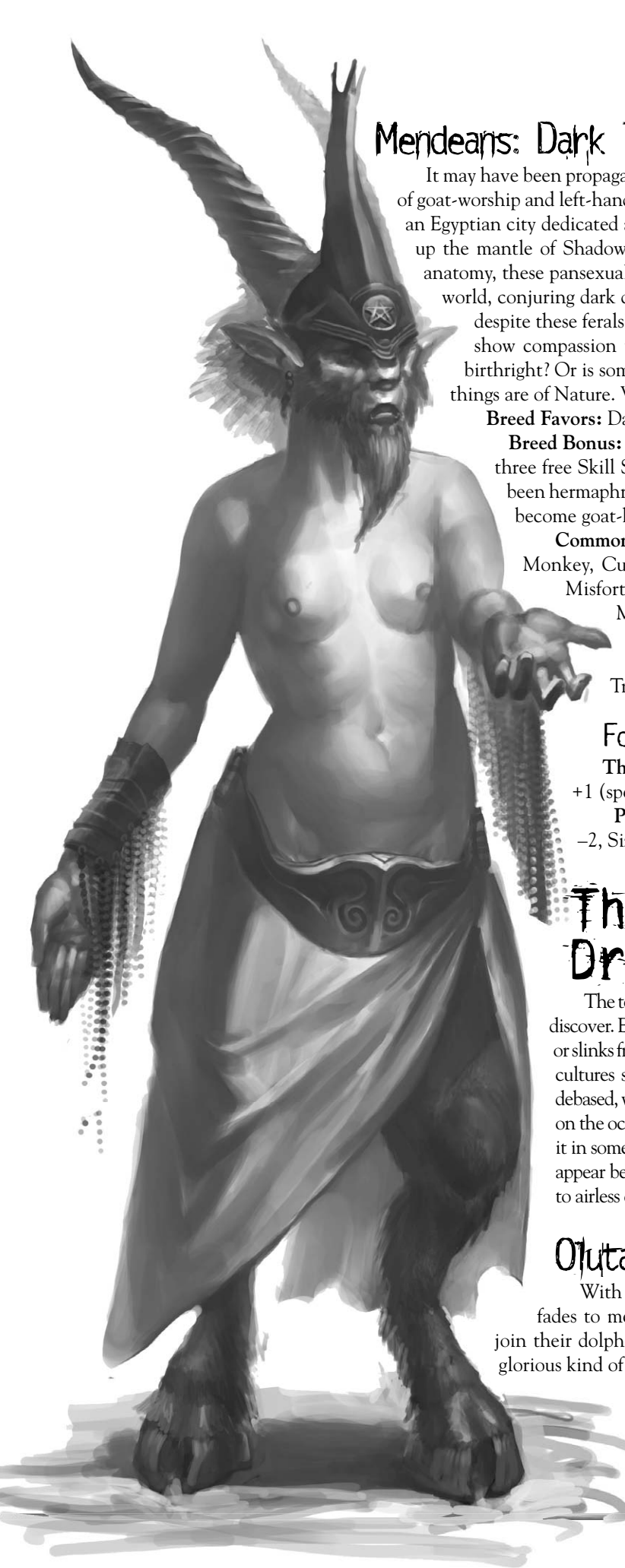
War-Beast: Strength +4, Stamina +4, Manipulation –4, Size 7, Health 6, Speed +3 (species factor 4)

Primal Beast: Strength +3, Stamina +4, Manipulation –4, Size 6, Health +5, Speed +3 (species factor 4)

The Horned Folk: Saints and Satyrs

From golden fleece to black sheep, the Horned Folk garner a mixed reputation. Stubborn as hell yet offered up to heaven, their sardonic ways mock the sanctity of Man. He cannot deal with them easily, yet finds he can't do without them fully. Their bleating grates upon his nerves, yet when the wind turns cold, it's their warmth and wool that he seeks.

Ferals gifted with ram's horns or a goat's face assume a certain ambivalence. There's sinister appeal in their ribald ways — a devilish refusal to do what is right and proper. Still, no one wants to be a "sheep," even if the color in question *is* black. So what's an old goat to do? Perhaps follow Pan's trip-trapping hooves toward passionate chaos? Or walk in the light of the Lord and trust that the journey leads upwards? Of all feral breeds, the Horned Folk find themselves most torn between spiritual extremes. Their souls, quite often, step precariously along the cliffs of enlightenment, with the promise of broken souls below.



Mendeans: Dark Teachers of Desire

It may have been propaganda that burned the Templars alive, but the conflation of goat-worship and left-hand mysticism bore fruit around later infernos. Named for an Egyptian city dedicated a ram-headed god, the infamous Mendean breed takes up the mantle of Shadow-Teachers. Bearing satanic horns and hermaphrodite anatomy, these pansexual shapechangers lead sabbats on the outskirts of Man's world, conjuring dark dreams of forbidden knowledge and carnal ecstasy. Yet despite these ferals' sinister allure, the Mendean excel at healing arts and show compassion to life's outcasts. Does human perversity guide their birthright? Or is something deeper at work? To Baphometian goat-folk, *all* things are of Nature. Wisdom comes with embracing fear.

Breed Favors: Darksight, Fang and Claw (horns) 3 (L), Territory Bond

Breed Bonus: Mendeans all have several dots in Occult, and receive three free Skill Specialties with that trait. All known Mendeans have been hermaphrodites. This breed has no War-Beast form; instead, they become goat-headed people and huge, shaggy black goats.

Common Aspects: Beast Magic, Carnivore's Puissance, Clever Monkey, Culling the Weak, Earthbond, Fortune's Favor, Grave Misfortune, Gross Eater, Hypnotic Allure, Mercy's Touch, Mimic, Needleteeth, Shadow Bond, Slumber's Touch, Spirit Sight, Spook the Herd, Sweet-Voiced Fiend, Tell (Goatish Smell), The Wild Cry (Goats and Sheep), Truth Sense, Unsettling Eye, Unspeakable

Form Adjustments

Throwback: Strength +1, Stamina +3, Health +3, Speed +1 (species factor 5)

Primal Beast: Strength +2, Stamina +3, Manipulation –2, Size 5, Health +3, Speed +4 (species factor 7)

The Oceanborn: Drawn Below

The teeming depths host creatures that Man has only just begun to discover. Every so often, though, a clan of fish-folk boils to the surface or slinks from a rambling ruin out where the tourists never go. Coastal cultures speak of shark-men, dolphin-girls, tentacled horrors and debased, wall-eyed *things*. Considering that Man has always depended on the ocean for sustenance — perhaps, even, that he emerged from it in some form long ago — is it surprising to see the Changing Gift appear beneath the sea? The so-called Oceanborn draw Man down to airless depths and question where his true heart lies. . . .

Olutakami: The Delvers

With a single deep breath, some folks can dive until the light fades to memories above. Shifting legs into fins, the Olutakami join their dolphin kin in the shifting realm beneath the waves. It's a glorious kind of freedom, but not without its price. The "gifts" of foresight and empathy are not kind to those cursed with insight. When you've got the choice between fighting the future and swimming away from it, which way would you go?

Assuming the forms of slender dolphins in Primal guise, the Olutakami favor their Asian/Polynesian ancestry in human shape; even so, a remarkable number of Anglo European dolphin-kin have been born in recent decades. In War-Beast form, these ferals thicken into orca-like killing machines rather than human-cetacean hybrids. In this shape, their legendary kindness ends.

Breed Favors: Aquatic, Echolocation, Fang and Claw (Bite) 1 (L), Waterbreath

Breed Bonus: Dolphins can ram opponents, inflicting an additional three bashing damage. This breed also has the Limbless Aspect — a deficit that is worth no points.

Common Aspects: *Aww!!!*, Birth Blessing, Culling the Weak, Foretelling, Fortune's Favor, Keen Senses, Magnificence, Mercy's Touch, Mindmap, Mindspeech, Pack Bond, Shadow Bond, Size 6, Speed 8, Spirit Sight, Stampede Rush (Water Only), The Wild Cry (Dolphins), Truth Sense, Unsettling Eye

Form Adjustments

War-Beast: Strength +3, Stamina +3, Manipulation –2, Size 7, Health +5, Speed +6 (species factor 8), +2 to perception rolls

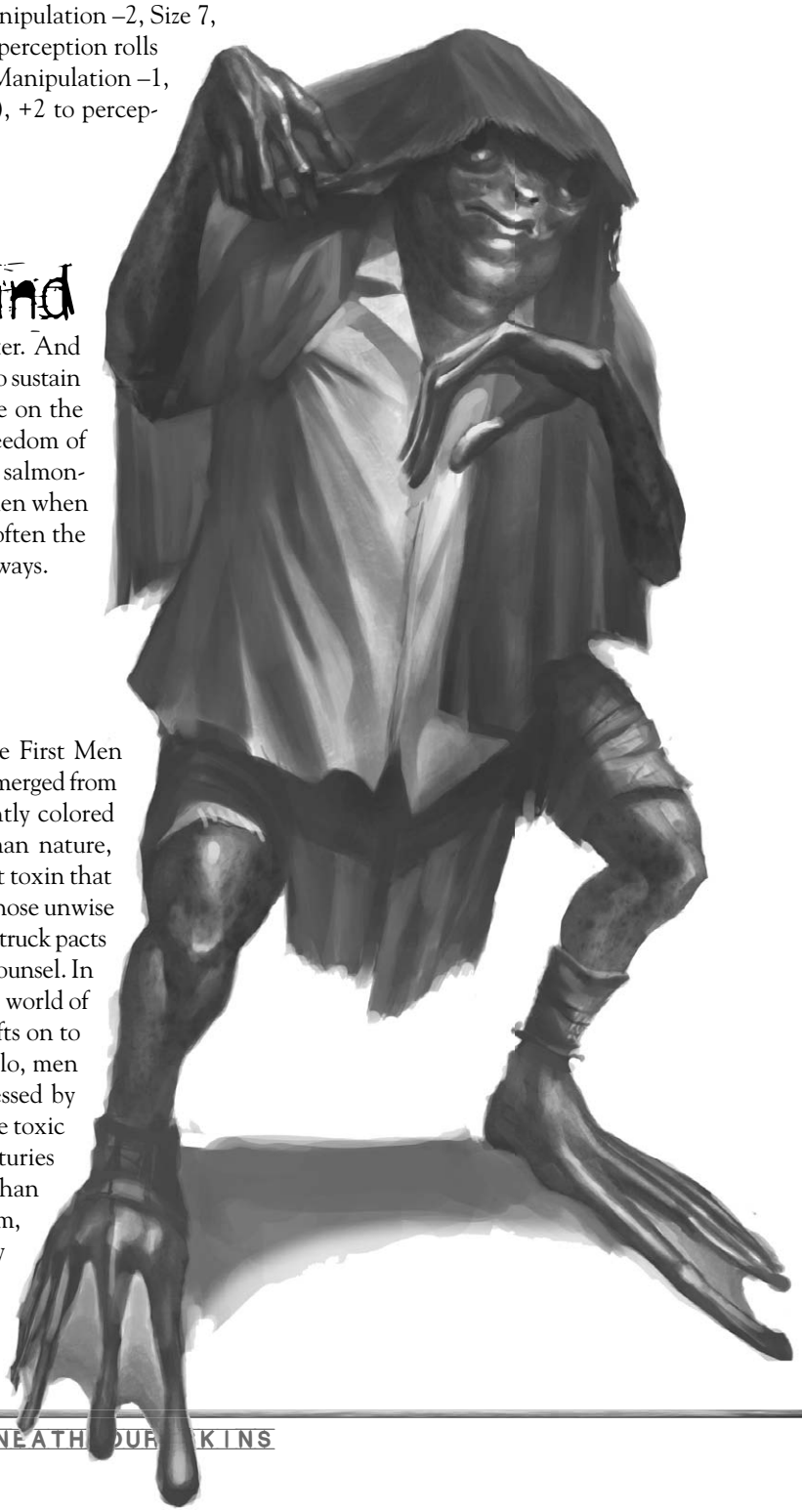
Primal Beast: Strength +2, Stamina +2, Manipulation –1, Size 6, Health +3, Speed +5 (species factor 8), +2 to perception rolls

The Riverkin: Forsaking the Land

No human culture lasts long without water. And when those people depend on rivers and ponds to sustain them, it's inevitable that some folk would take on the Changing Gift and forsake dry land for the freedom of rushing water. Legends speak of frog-warriors, salmon-runners and catfish that become beautiful women when the moment is right. Of course, such tales are often the result of wishful thinking . . . often, but not always.

Kinno'balo: Bright-Colored Pain

Left behind in the Underworld when the First Men scrambled to the surface, the Kinno'tah spirits emerged from riverside mud and deep swamps as large, brightly colored frogs. Given to raucous observations on human nature, these small yet deadly creatures exuded a potent toxin that caused wild hallucinations and often death to those unwise enough to disturb them. In time, the Kinno'tah struck pacts with shamans and fools who sought the spirits' counsel. In return for respect and special offerings from the world of Man, these "hopping prophets" passed their gifts on to their allies' descendants. But are the Kinno'balo, men and women born with the Burning Sight, blessed by this association, or cursed? Their touch bears the toxic legacy of the original Kinno'tah, and for centuries these ferals' visions have revealed more bad than good about the human race. . . . In Primal form, these acerbic folk shrink to the size of skinny bullfrogs; in War-Beast form, however, they swell with poison to become eerie, man-sized



creatures with froggish heads, huge glassy eyes and the brightly poisoned skin of their amphibious forebears. These ferals' venom induces wild nightmare visions that expose the victim's worst and most crippling insecurities; even if he survives the experience, a person who suffers the poison of a Kinno'balo stays shaken for weeks or months to come.

Breed Favors: Size 2, Venomous, Truthsight

Breed Bonus: These tiny creatures receive an additional +4 bonus to dice pools when hiding from enemies of Size 4 or larger.

Common Aspects: Aquatic, Darksight, Earthbond, Foretelling, Mimic, Mindspeech, Spirit Animal, Spirit Gift, Spirit Secrets, Spirit Sight, Sweet-Voiced Fiend, Territory Bond, Unsettling Eye, Unspeakable

Form Adjustments

War-Beast: Dexterity +2, Stamina +1, Manipulation –5, Size 5, Health +1, Speed +1 (species factor 4), +1 to perception rolls

Primal Beast: Strength –2, Stamina –2, Manipulation –2, Size 2, Health 4, Speed –2 (species factor 3), +2 to perception rolls

Serpentines: Wisdom with Teeth

From the curse of Eden to the staff of eternal life, the serpent has borne unspeakable significance for humankind. At once awful and fascinating, the limbless seers and poisoned assassins of the serpentine realm strike a primal chord in Man's consciousness. Is it any wonder that a creature so deeply associated with magic and immortality would slither into the human soul, wrapping itself in feral skin as, perhaps, it did long before humanity as we know it existed?

Mélusinae: The Singing Serpents

The sweet song of the serpent is reputed to have drawn Eve to the fatal tree. This bittersweet legacy underscores the seductive appeal of the Mélusinae (Mel-oo-seen-ayy). Sleekly compelling, a "singing serpent" appears at first glance to be an especially charismatic young man or woman with a gift for song and an unsettling gaze. Such people have a liquid grace and sibilant tone of speech that emphasize their odd allure. Even for feral folk, these shapechangers seem intense; their songs spill over with carnal passion or religious fervor. Are the descendants of Eve's serpent trying to atone for their progenitor's misdeeds? Or does a golden road to Hell follow their enchanting song?

As people, the Mélusinae bear a Northern European look about them. If these truly *are* refugees from Eden, you can't read that ancestry on their features. Many boast bright blond shocks of hair, or go slickly bald at birth. Their voices carry a slight echo, as if some unseen sound board had added an effect. No matter what the lyrics of the song might be, this breed imbues them with a melancholy tone . . . which, of course, makes them that much more appealing. In Primal form, a Mélusina blends his arms and legs into a single undulating form — an eight-foot snake with a golden-yellow sheen. Between those forms, an awful War-Beast form combines serpentine fangs, scales and eyes with a slender, tailed bipedal shape. Even then, the serpent never stops singing; its voice recalls the wordless keen of fallen angels.

Breed Favors: Alarming Alacrity, Fang and Claw (bite) 2 (L), Hypnotic Allure

Breed Bonus: All Mélusinae characters must buy at least two dots in Expression, but receive a free Skill Specialty in song. In beast-form, this breed also has the Limbless Aspect — a deficit that is worth no points.

Common Aspects: Darksight, Earthbond, Keen Sense, Size 6, Speed 8, Spinebite, Spook the Herd, Sweet-Voiced Fiend, Truth Sense, Unnerving Cry, Unsettling Eye, Unspeakable

Form Adjustments

War-Beast: Strength +2, Dexterity +3, Manipulation –4, Size 6, Health +1, Speed +5 (species factor 5), +1 to perception rolls

Primal Beast: Strength +2, Dexterity +4, Manipulation –5, Size 6, Health +1, Speed +9 (species factor 8), +2 to perception rolls

The Swarm: Survivor Types

When the first creatures on dry land still scuttle through its hidden places now, there's something about the design that *works*. For fragile human beings, the sturdy bodies and perseverance of our insectine neighbors exert a perverse appeal. Is it the rapid grace of a centipede that shocks us to amazement? Or does some odd glint of envy pick its way across our consciousness when the small survivor darts off to a crevice and disappears? If only *human* life could be so simple. . . .

Mimma Lemnua: The Hungry Darkness

There is crime, and there is punishment. When a now-forgotten king of old Akkad withheld his blessing from the crops, the people starved in droves. Children perished, and elders withered in the beds. Meanwhile, the king and his court gorged themselves on fine wines and honeyed wheat cakes. They never noticed the clicking and skittering of 10,000 little



legs, or the hard eyes that gathered until the sun had passed. Nor did the king and his court note the serving girl with equally hard eyes noting each one of them as she fed them succulent dates. When two-score skeletons, stripped as clean as bleached reeds, awaited the morning servants, no one thought to search the darkest corners of the rooms, or find the hard-eyed serving girl whose name no one recalled. And if those servants had, the previous night, heard muffled coughs, as if a fat man or woman were choking on some thick morsel, the servants thought no more about such things. For there is crime, and there is punishment. And sometimes Justice crawls.

Quiet and so *very* often cold, a Mimma Lemnu shapechanger moves with a certain stiffness in her joints. Her dark eyes miss little, and her fingers twitch and crackle as she moves. If you look closely (which few people do), you might notice bumps that seem to slide beneath her skin. When the time has come to act, however, she throws aside her clothes and spills into a scuttling mass of beetles, each governed by a single mind. Her Primal form consists of this surging mass of hungry arthropods. There is no War-Beast form for this breed, however — they don't need one. In human guise, a feral of the Hungry Darkness looks lean and bitter. She's never moved to emotional displays. If and when she's angry enough, you'll know. The scuttling of her tiny feet sounds eloquent enough.

Breed Favors: Fang and Claw, Pack Bond, Swarm Form

Breed Bonus: In Primal form, this feral is smaller than Size 1, and can scatter in all directions yet stay connected through her hive-mind bond. The swarm cannot use human manual skills, but ignores Defense when attacking. To attack, the swarm must surge over the opponent and remain in place for at least one turn. Once in place, the shapechanger inflicts one lethal Health point per turn until the shapechanger retreats or is harmed by fire, electricity or some other attack that inflicts equal damage on the target.

Common Aspects: Catwalk, Clamber, Culling the Weak, Darksight, Exoskeleton, Gross Eater, Invisible Marking, Many-Legged, Nine Lives, Pack Bond, Resilient Form, Skin Double, Unspeakable, Venomous, Wallwalking

Form Adjustments

Primal Beast (swarm form):
Mental Attributes: Per character
Physical Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 5, Stamina 4
Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 0, Composure per character
Size 5 (of swarm itself), Health 8, Speed 9 (species factor 4 + Dexterity)

The Taurae: Bearers of Time

Upon the backs of cattle, civilization was made. From the holy zebu of India to the bison storms of the Great Plains, from Africa's inyambo to the bulls of ancient Crete, the blend of nurture and ferocity has made these huge beasts significant in almost every human land. True, they're not

regarded as the *brightest* of animals; still, the sheer strength and life-giving powers of cattle draw the Changing Gift in strange and sometimes frightening ways.

It was no accident that Zeus took the form of a huge white bull to satisfy his lusts with Europa. And it was Ptesan'Wi, the White Buffalo Woman, who offered peace and prosperity to the Lakota and promised to return. A bison with a staggered hunter are among the first images depicted in Man's art, and the death-defying bull dance echoes from Knossos to Kentucky as a dare of immortality. It is any wonder, then, that shapeshifting folk assume bull-form, or walk unhindered in the shadow of Krishna? Taurae embody male and female principles, and shoulder on their strong backs the mantle of time.

Yumni: Tornado Walkers

Loud is the drum that brings passion. Humbling is the dance that challenges fire. So it is with the Yumni. Native Americans all, they are Bison's blood-inheritance. By heritage, Tornado Walkers are usually only born to Kiowa, Aisca or Dakota tribe; by legend, Yumni shoulder the weight of the wind. Theirs are the hooves that pound down the rock so it can be carved into rivers by the floods. Given sacred purpose to serve both the land and the air, Yumni balance carefully the mysteries bestowed on them.

Yumni are often handsome, but never classically beautiful. Male or female, human- or sometimes animal-born, these folk are all treated as holy protectors. When a child or calf is born with the mark — a white streak down the left side — she is taken from her birth-parents and reared by a shaman until it is known whether or not the Changing Gift will manifest. This white streak stays with her in all forms. It is believed to be smoke that rose when the White Calf Woman brought magic to her people. Writhing silver white toward the stars, it is the very breath of Grandfather Mystery.

Breed Favors: Fang and Claw (horns) 3 (L), (trample) 3 (B), Natural Armor 3/2

Breed Bonus: Yumni project a sacred aura; breeze and mist seem to follow them in any form. With American mystics (especially Native ones), this breed receives two automatic successes with Social rolls. Most Yumni have hybrid forms as well as the usual three.

Common Aspects: Alarming Alacrity, Birth Blessing, Culling the Weak, Earthbond, Foretelling, Hybrid Forms, Leap, Magnificence, Mercy's Touch, Nine Lives, Pack Bond, Size 10, Spirit Animal, Spirit Gift, Spirit Sight, Spook the Herd, Stampede Rush, Territory Bond, Tell (white hair or fur), Totem Guardian (Buffalo or White-Bison Woman), Truth Sense, Unsettling Eye, Warrior's Restoration

Form Adjustments

War-Beast: Strength +3, Stamina +4, Manipulation –2, Size 6, Health +5, Speed +3 (species factor 5)

Primal Beast: Strength +3, Stamina +4, Size 10, Health +9, Speed +6 (species factor 8)





When I wore youth, Gold Crow explained the sacred season of fire. He looked out across the wide expanses of brown winter grass and pointed to the osage tree sitting in the field. He would say that tree was praying for lightning to come. When I asked him why, he softly explained. The tree prayed to give the land fire. It was the way of things. When the sky is too busy dancing life into wind and it does not hear tree s prayers, we must be the servants of the land. We must burn the hills and respect the agony of the doors we open. Pain, he said, is the house where healing lives.

In the springs that followed, the county would join together to clear the fields. Trucks like herds would stand together and offer fire and water both to the land. All that was necessary back then was to blacken away the choking weeds and the scrub oaks. By our brandings, only sweet grass would return.

When the work was done, we danced and offered the beauty of the orange bright ribbons of flame to the dark sky. Father Midnight would gather up the colors and paint them across the dusks of the coming year. Sunsets remember the sacrifice of the land.

Last Friday, Hank brought the groceries and bad news home. The refinery, he said, is expanding and going to eat up another thousand acres up the spine of the Flint Hills. He wonders if we should move out to Colorado after he gets the fields straight. He hopes they will fetch a better price when the greening sets in.

Last night, I ran across the tall grass. I have ached to ride deep within my hide again. I had almost forgotten the way. Too long have I braided back the gray of my hair. Too long have I traded wisdom and power for apron strings and telephone bills. The hills do not know what is coming. They do not quake for fear of the roads and the drilling pumps. High into the bowl of the sky, the cooling stations towers stab the moon. It reminded me of the osage tree and that I was once a servant of the land. Spring has melted into the ground. By my hooves, it is time again for the burning.

Tonight I brought the guns up from the tornado shelter. The bottles were filled at my kitchen table, the kerosene settled oily up into the rags. When you are an old woman, the only thing they think you know to do with dynamite is blow out stumps in the yard. Youth is so blind. Tying each one to the crates of bottles, I hope that Father Midnight will use the beauty of the explosions for the most spectacular sunsets next year.

Chapter Four: Faces in the Smoke

And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your hand are they delivered.

Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you . . . and surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of Man.

– God to Noah, Genesis, 9:2-5

Turning generalities into individuals has always been a tricky affair. And when those individuals are characters in a story, the thoughts behind the individuals often matter more than the traits that define them. Even so, when you need to take an idea and run with it, a little guidance always helps. The following feral beast-folk show what the changing breeds can do.

These characters employ the rules laid out in the preceding chapters and the **World of Darkness Rulebook**. The first sets of traits listed are the character's human characteristics; the second sets (in parentheses) reflect the Primal Beast shape, and the third sets reflect the War-Beast form.

Felipe Miguel Santiago Bandaris, "Keeper of the Family Crest"

Growing up on the family horse farm in the Spanish province of Andalusia, Felipe enjoyed the indulgences common to wealthy children. Nurturers and protectors shielded him from the grittiness of the "real world," and, above all, taught Felipe that he came from a line of kings. While he bypassed regular schooling in favor of a series of tutors, his true lessons came in the form of learning how to breed and train the elegant Andalusian horses raised on the farm. For many years (some say centuries), the Bandaris family bred the best and most beautiful horses. And from the time he was old enough to sit a horse, Felipe understood that his future belonged with the family trade.

At first, the young Felipe believed that his ancestors shared the blood of the old Spanish royal family. On his 16th birthday, his grandfather awoke in Felipe the dormant potential of his kingly blood. On the pretext of having the boy assist with the midnight birth of a foal, the elder Bandaris summoned Felipe to the birthing stable. Once the boy arrived, the old man shoved him into a stall and followed him inside, a heavy training whip coiled in his hand. Without a word of explanation, Felipe's once-kindly grandfather lashed him with the whip, driving the panicked boy from one end of the large stall to the other, giving him no rest from the relentless swish and crack of the whip.

Felipe tried to protect himself. His grandfather (who had obviously gone mad) only directed the whip to areas the boy could not protect. Then Felipe felt a stinging slash sharper than the others: he felt hot sticky wetness trickle down his arm from where the whip had broken the skin. A voice within him said, *This is the blood of kings. Be now a king*, and Felipe felt something inside give way as his battered body twisted and swelled, his hands hardening into hooves, his body growing larger and more powerful. With an angry snort, he reared up on his hind legs and batted the air just inches from his grandfather's face with his fore hooves. His grandfather dropped the whip and fell to his knees.

"The blood of the Bandaris Andalusians runs true. We have an heir!"

Today, Felipe, now in his early 20s, helps his father and his grandfather run the family business. Felipe has recently begun participating in Regency gatherings, attending policy meetings as an observer and developing contacts among his beast-blood peers. In a very short time, he has demonstrated his excellence in all forms and now seeks to secure a place for himself in the Machiavellian

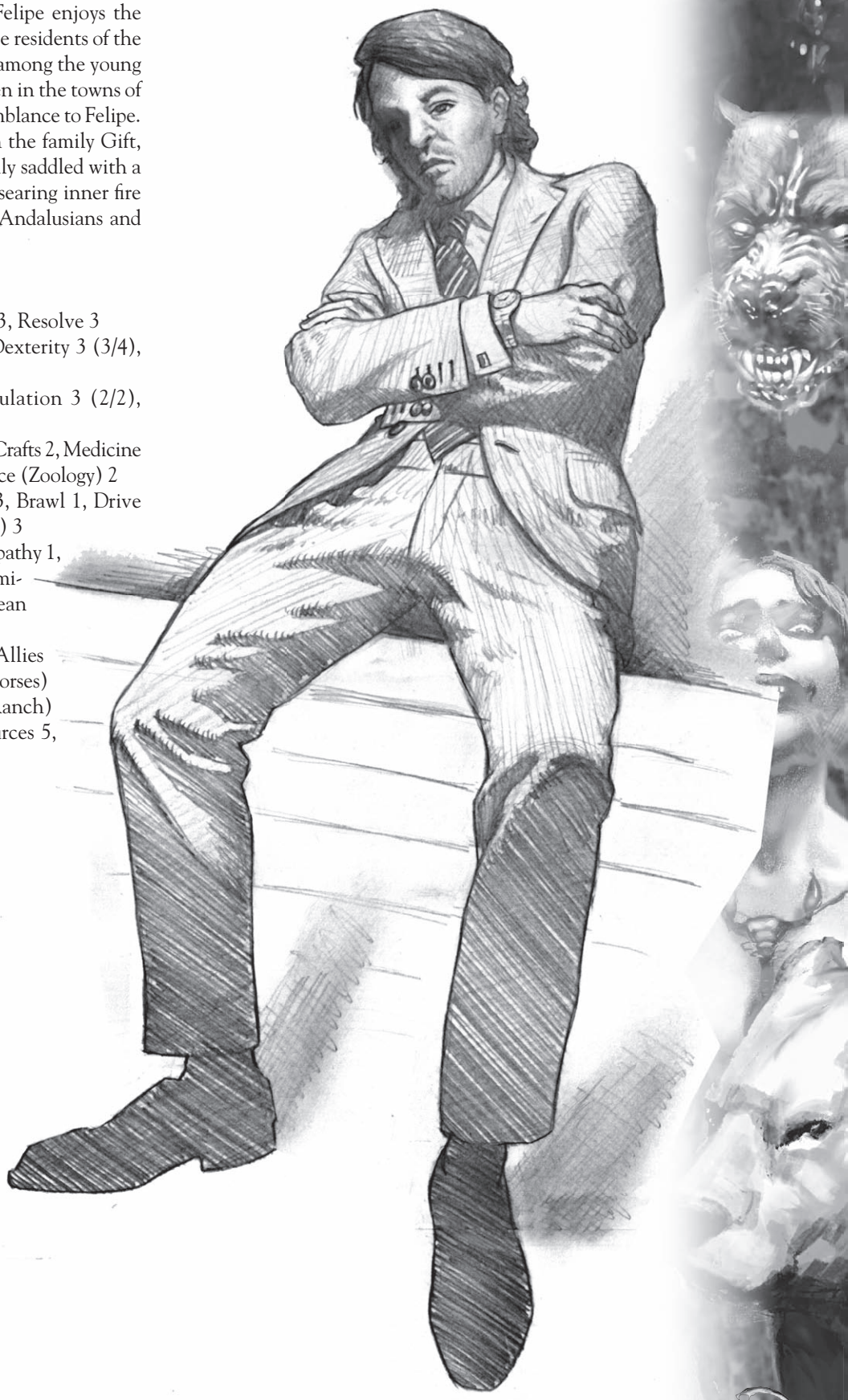
politics of the Regencies. His sleek black stallion form is the envy of the other clans . . . or so he tells himself, at least.

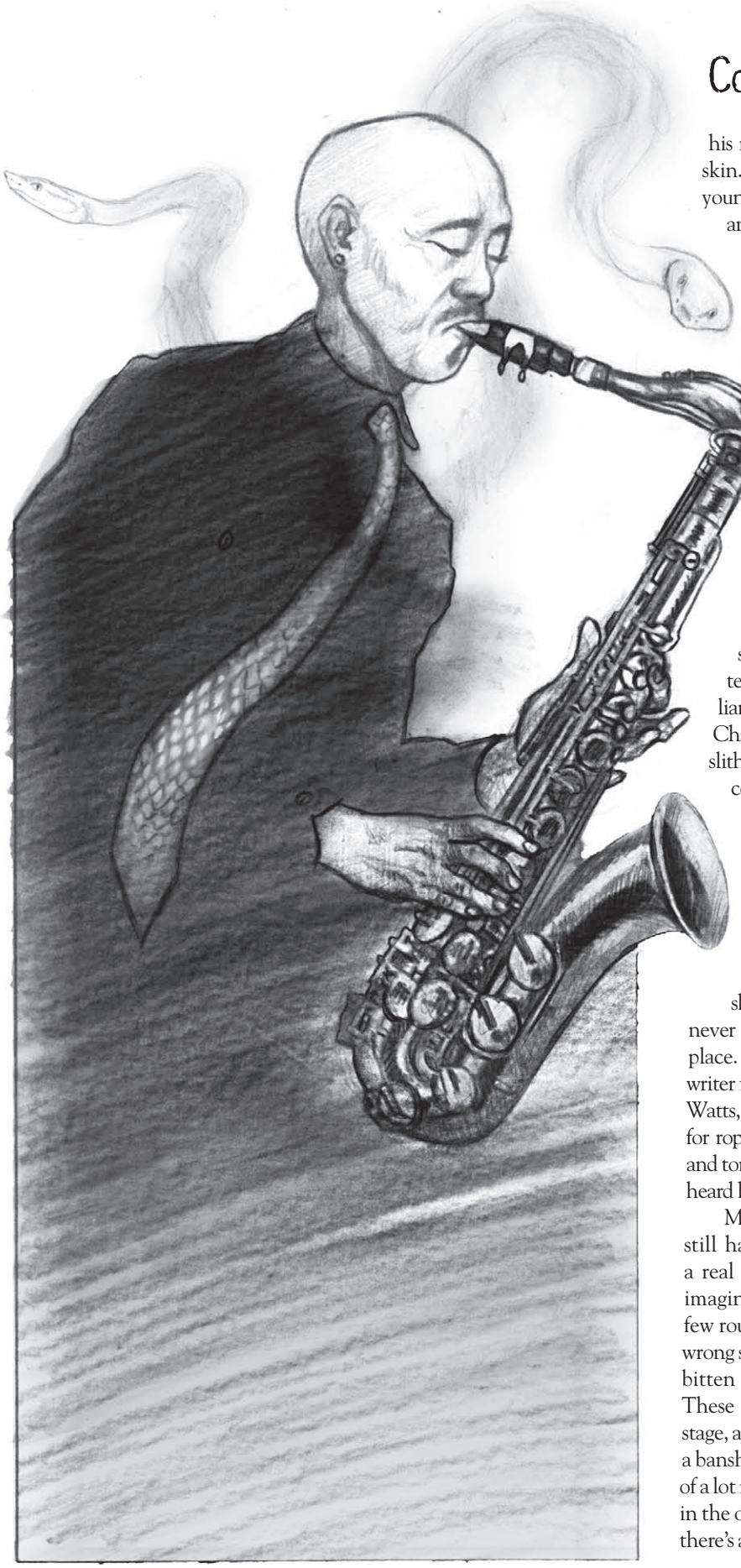
As an added perk to his position, Felipe enjoys the *droit de seigneur*, or "lord's right" among the residents of the villages adjoining the Bandaris farm and among the young mares in the family's herd. Several children in the towns of La Palla and Sangrillo bear a distinct resemblance to Felipe. Should any of them show a kinship with the family Gift, the lucky ones will find themselves literally saddled with a new family, new responsibilities and the searing inner fire that marks the bloodline of the mighty Andalusians and their human counterparts.

Accord: Root-Weaver
Breed: Wind-Runners (Equestri)
Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 3
Physical Attributes: Strength 4 (6/7), Dexterity 3 (3/4), Stamina 4 (7/7)
Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 3 (2/2), Composure 4
Mental Skills: Academics 3, Computer 1, Crafts 2, Medicine (Veterinary) 3, Occult 1, Politics 2, Science (Zoology) 2
Physical Skills: Athletics (Equestrian) 3, Brawl 1, Drive 1, Survival 2, Weaponry (Whip, Fencing) 3
Social Skills: Animal Ken (Horses) 4, Empathy 1, Expression (Eloquence, Seduction) 2, Intimidation 2 , Persuasion 1, Socialize (European High Society) 3, Subterfuge 3
Merits: Allies (Equestrian Societies) 3, Allies (Regencies) 3, Animal Companions (Horses) 4, Contacts (Family Friends) 4, Den (Ranch) 3, Language (Spanish, English) 2, Resources 5, Striking Looks 4, True Breed
Favors: Fang and Claw, Size 7, Speed 12
Aspects: Magnificence, Stampede Rush
Feral Heart: 2
Willpower: 7
Harmony: 6
Max Essence/per Turn: 11/1
Virtue: Fortitude
Vice: Pride
Initiative: 7 (7/8)
Defense: 3 (3/3)
Speed: 12 (21/22)
Size: 5 (7/8)
Respect: Loyalty 3, Passion 3
Weapons/Attacks

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Bite	1 (L)	8/9
Hoof	3 (B)	10/12
Whip	3 (B)	9
Rapier	2 (L)	6

Health: 9 (14/15)





Copperhead McCain

Everyone thinks Copperhead got his name from the shiny teak color of his skin. They're wrong. Back in the 1970s, young William Martin McCain lived in an especially wooded section of Reston, Virginia. The day he fell into the nest of copperheads, the boy thought he was dead gone. He was wrong. The snakes coiled about him as if he were one of their own. Turns out he *was*; years later, William had just begun to learn to play the saxophone that became his signature when an especially nasty schoolyard fight revealed his literally venomous nature. He bit a boy, who later died. Just before the cops picked William up, his inventive schoolmates nicknamed him "Copperhead" for the deed, his skin tone and the unusually long canine teeth he'd bitten the boy with. On William's way to prison, he suffered his First Change in a cell, turned into a snake and slithered free. His parents never heard him come home, but they noticed the missing clothes and sax. Wisely, Mom and Pop McCain didn't say a word.

Years passed in a blur of blues. Young William worked hard, shook out some rough deals and earned a place in the traveling blues scene. Folks commented often on his pearly skin and prominent teeth. He learned never to smile, and let the sax speak in his place. Women came and went: the Jewish writer from the Bronx, the radical sistah from Watts, the slinky Asian chick with a fondness for ropes . . . Copperhead let his fingers, sax and tongue do the talking, then split when he heard hissing in the back of his mind.

More than 20 years later, the dead boy still haunts McCain. Whether the boy is a real ghost or a figment of Copperhead's imagination is neither here nor there. A few rough customers have wound up on the wrong side of Copperhead's fists, but he hasn't bitten anyone since . . . at least, not yet. These days, he's a regular on Blind Willie's stage, a lanky black man with distant eyes and a banshee sax. Copperhead's seen the insides of a lot recording studios but lives off the radar in the outskirts of town. The local kids claim there's a copperhead snake out there that's big

enough to eat a car. Copperhead says nothing to such rumors, but his smile, like his sax, speaks for itself.

Accord: Wind-Dancer

Breed: Serpentines (Mélusinae)

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 4, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 2 (4/4), Dexterity 3 (7/6), Stamina 3 (3/3)

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 4 (1/1), Composure 4

Mental Skills: Academics 2, Crafts 1, Occult (Ghosts) 3

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl (Barrooms) 2, Drive 1, Firearms 1, Larceny 2, Stealth (Slithering) 4, Survival 2, Weaponry (Knife) 2

Social Skills: Animal Ken (Snakes) 2, Empathy 4, Expression (Sax, Song, Seduction) 4, Intimidation (Snake-Eyes) 2, Persuasion (Getting Laid) 2, Socialize (Bars) 4, Streetwise (Blues Scene) 3, Subterfuge 2

Merits: Barfly, Contacts (Blues Scene, Old Girlfriends) 3, Status (Blues Scene) 2, Toxin Resistance

Favors: Alarming Alacrity, Fang and Claw, Hypnotic Allure

Aspects: Keen Senses (Smell, Taste, Touch), Limbless, Size 6, Speed 8, Sweet-Voiced Fiend, Unsettling Eye, Unspeakable, Venomous (4)

Feral Heart: 3 (–2 Social)

Willpower: 7

Harmony: 5

Max Essence/per Turn: 12/1

Virtue: Charity

Vice: Lust

Initiative: 7 (14/13)

Defense: 3 (4/4)

Speed: 10 (19/15)

Size: 5 (6/6)

Respect: Cleverness 1, Ferocity 2, Insight 4, Passion 4

Weapons/Attacks

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Bite	2 (L)	6/6

Health: 8 (9/9)

Fawn Richards

No one fears the quiet ones. Fawn Richards was always one of those — the kids you never recall. Shunted to the back of the room from the time she hit first grade, the skinny little girl with great big eyes always seemed too skittish to survive. Among her peers, she wasn't even accorded the status of pariah; rather, she was one of the invisibles: those kids who are simply forgotten. And that was just the way Fawn liked it.

Never an exceptional student, Fawn preferred the fertile woods around her home to the sterile comfort of books or TV. She'd always had a thing for animals, though. The biggest, meanest dogs on the block wagged their tails when Fawn reached out, and birds that bolted at the nearest sound perched instead on Fawn's outstretched hand. That talent, combined with her constant silence and eerie gaze, made Fawn uneasy company. Even her parents and siblings seemed content to leave her alone.

She'd planned to be a vet. That seemed to be the only dream Fawn had: to help and heal the animals she loved. To that end, and to the study of endangered species and local wildlife, Fawn turned her attention as high school began. She'd hike to and from school each day, sitting with books or a small sack-lunch deep in the woods until long after dark. During hunting season, she learned early on to hide. The yearly ritual made her sick, but Fawn's instincts and observations showed that killing was part and parcel of life. She accepted it all . . . until Rennie Thorpe and his gang hit the woods.

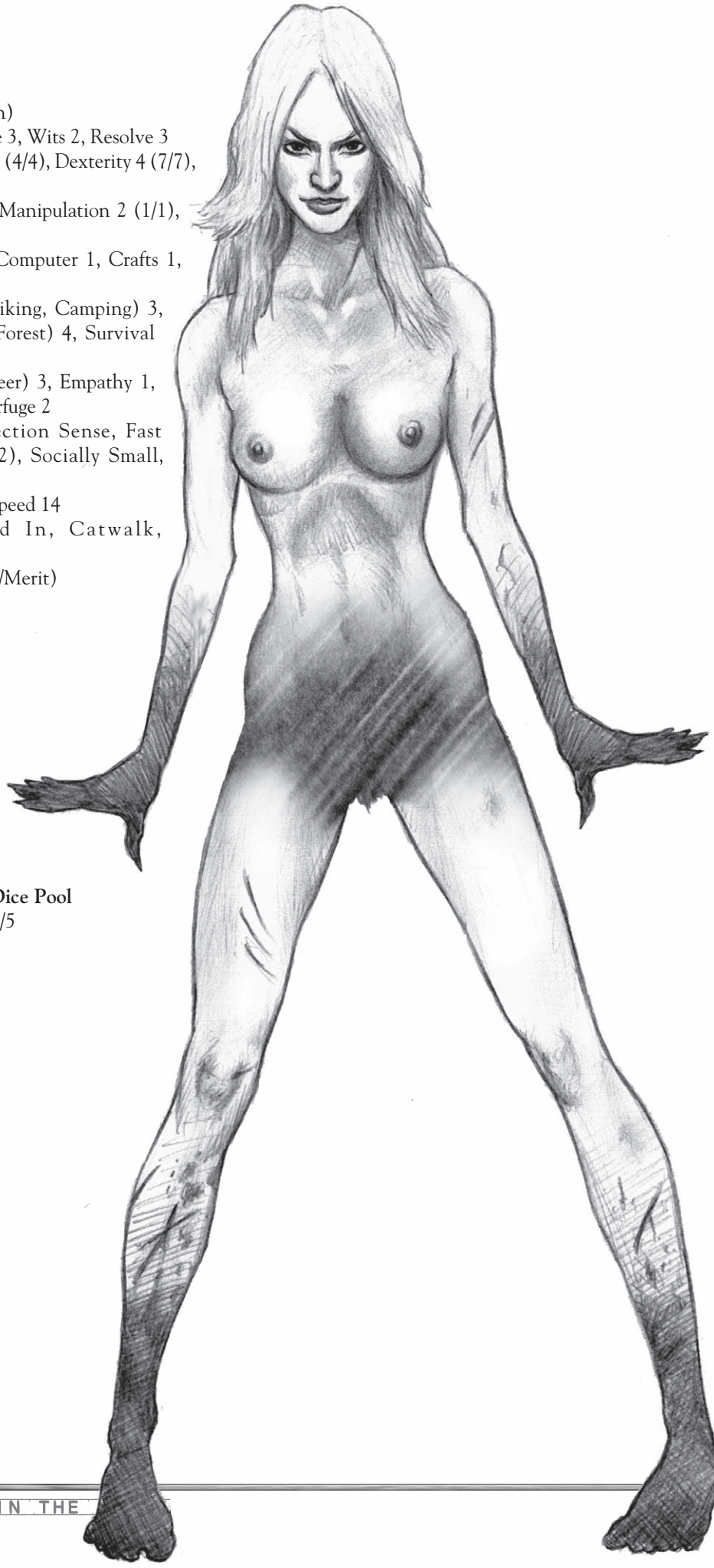
Rennie and his boys were the same age as Fawn. She'd known them since childhood, and detested them entirely. When Rennie got his first gun, he took it to the woods and . . . well, the carnage spoke for itself. No huntsman, Rennie liked to kill shit. One evening, Fawn found their handiwork, still alive and badly suffering. A deer — a large female, rich with child. She'd been an illegal target, but that hadn't stopped the boys. When Fawn found the doe, she hung tangled in barbed wire, shot to bits but still alive. The girl's hands tattered as she worked to free the deer. Sure, it was heroic, but the effort was wasted. Before the deer died, though, she locked eyes with the girl and breathed her wild breath into Fawn's face. Something passed between them then. Even now, Fawn couldn't tell you what or why, and she wouldn't if you asked her. In blood and breath, they'd shared a secret.

A day later, Fawn awoke deep in the woods, naked and covered in scratches and dirt. It took her another day to get home, with clever efforts to remain unseen. The skills she'd sharpened as a childhood sneak served her well from that point onward. It didn't take long to discover her new talents; who could resist a cute little fawn like her? It didn't take long, either, for her to lead poor Rennie off the edge of a cliff. Now she's after the other boys, too . . . and any hunter she can find. Girls are clever, and deer are quick. Fawn is both — and bloody-minded, too. These days, she's a predator who looks like prey. For fun, she hunts the sportsmen. With traps, deceptions, fast kicks and other "accidents," she sends them to slow and nasty deaths. No, no one ever fears the quiet ones. But in Fawn's case, perhaps they should.

Accord: Heart-Ripper
Breed: Wind-Runners (Flidaisin)
Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 2, Resolve 3
Physical Attributes: Strength 2 (4/4), Dexterity 4 (7/7), Stamina 4 (6/7)
Social Attributes: Presence 1, Manipulation 2 (1/1), Composure 3
Mental Skills: Academics 3, Computer 1, Crafts 1, Investigation 2, Medicine 1
Physical Skills: Athletics (Hiking, Camping) 3, Brawl 1, Larceny 1, Stealth (Forest) 4, Survival (Woods) 3
Social Skills: Animal Ken (Deer) 3, Empathy 1, Intimidation (Creepy) 3, Subterfuge 2
Merits: Danger Sense, Direction Sense, Fast Reflexes (2), Fleet of Foot (2), Socially Small, Striking Looks (2)
Favors: Keen Sense 2, Size 6, Speed 14
Aspects: *Aww!!!*, Blend In, Catwalk, Toss the Scent
Feral Heart: 4 (–2 Social/ –1 w/Merit)
Willpower: 6
Harmony: 5
Max Essence/per Turn: 13/2
Virtue: Fortitude
Vice: Wrath
Initiative: 9 (12/12)
Defense: 2 (2/2)
Speed: 13 (23/18)
Size: 5 (7/8)
Respect: Cleverness 2, Ferocity 3
Weapons/Attacks

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Hooves	2 (B)	5/5

Health: 9 (13/15)



Sovah Volente

Sovah grew up around birds. The Volente Bird Sanctuary, operated by Sovah's family, housed avians of all kinds, many of them raptors with gunshot wounds or victims of human cruelty. Almost before she could read, the big-eyed little girl with pale blonde hair and quick, birdlike movements knew the scientific names for all the birds in the sanctuary.

As she grew older, Sovah took a larger part in the sanctuary's work, since her family assumed that she, too, would spend her life working there. Sovah, however, longed to experience more than just life in the rural Midwest. A natural student, she set her heart on going to college in one of the big metropolitan cities — New York, Los Angeles, Boston — she didn't care. She also didn't understand why her otherwise loving and supportive family opposed her. When she asked her parents why they, her father refused to answer. Her mother said only, "Someday, you'll understand."

Sovah applied to Boston University anyway, keeping her actions secret from her family. Secrets have a way of slipping out, however, and her mother confronted her one day with a piece of mail she had intercepted from the Admissions Office at BU.

"Before you accuse me of being unfair," her mother said, "I have something to show you." She led Sovah to a private part of the sanctuary, where Sovah's father worked with the most difficult of the sanctuary's inhabitants — birds that had come to them so battered most shelters would see euthanasia as a necessary mercy.

Sovah followed her mother to a tall, walk-in enclosure. "We'll have to wait a few minutes before he shows himself," her mother said. "He's probably seen you from a distance, but he's not used to your closeness." She sat on the ground and motioned Sovah to take a place at her side. Mystified and still resentful, the girl obeyed.

"You know, you weren't always an only child," Sovah's mother said. "Your brother Kyle was eight years older than you. Like you, he was smart and dreamed of big things. We took him with us on a trip to Chicago when he was ten because he begged us to take him to see the

Sears Tower and the other skyscrapers. He loved heights . . ." She fell silent.

"That night, as we crossed the hotel lobby on the way to our room, Kyle discovered the family gift early, and suddenly," she said. "It frightened him so much that he got away from your father and me. Kyle made it as far as the revolving doors and got trapped inside . . ." She paused, looked over her shoulder and smiled, holding out her arm, where a leather arm-guard shielded her skin.

"Here he is now," she said, as a large golden eagle zigzagged crazily down from a foliage-filled corner of the enclosure to rest on the woman's forearm.

Sovah had seen many eagles at the habitat, but this one was . . . *different*.

"Sovah," her mother said, "this is Kyle, your brother. One day, probably soon, you will discover our gift for yourself."

A few nights later, Sovah took her maiden flight as a great snowy owl. Later, she met her mother in her falcon form and her father as a great horned owl.

Sovah studied at a local college and got a degree in ornithology. Now she joins her father in working with the problem birds, and shows a real talent for bird rehabilitation. She has grown close to her brother, though he rarely flies at night and she is exclusively nocturnal. Once she asked him to show her his human shape, and he agreed.

She never asked him again.

Accord: Wind-Dancer
Breed: Wing-Folk (Strigoi)
Mental Attributes: Intelligence 5, Wits 4, Resolve 4
Physical Attributes: Strength 2 (2/4), Dexterity 3 (7/6), Stamina 2 (2/2)
Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 3 (3/0), Composure 4
Mental Skills: Academics (English, History) 5, Computer 3, Crafts (Repair) 2, Investigation 2, Medicine (Veterinary) 3, Occult 1, Politics 1, Science (Botany, Zoology) 3
Physical Skills: Athletics (Flight) 2, Brawl 1, Drive 1, Stealth 2, Survival 1
Social Skills: Animal Ken (Birds) 4, Empathy 3, Expression 3, Persuasion 1, Socialize 1, Subterfuge (Sneak) 2
Merits: Common Sense, Den, Direction Sense, Encyclopedic Knowledge, Fighting Finesse (Talons), Language (Latin) 1, Pack (Birds) 3, Resources 3, True Breed
Favors: Darksight, Fang and Claw, Wings
Aspects: Clever Monkey 3, Speed 8, Unsettling Eye, The Wild Cry (Owls) 3
Feral Heart: 2
Willpower: 8
Harmony: 7
Max Essence/per Turn: 11/1 (–1 Social)
Virtue: Charity
Vice: Envy
Initiative: 7 (11/10)
Defense: 3 (4/4)
Speed: 10 (17/18)
Size: 5 (4/8)
Respect: Cleverness 3, Ferocity 2, Insight 2
Weapons/Attacks

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Beak/Talons	2 (L)	4/8/6
Wings	3 (B)	4/8/6

Health: 7 (5/8)

Old Man Possum

Most people who stop to think about it hold that few critters are uglier, meaner, nastier or more of a nuisance than a possum — and the older they are, the worse they get. Sometimes you can catch a glimpse of one late at night, the red pinpoints of its beady eyes glinting in the moonlight as the possum waddles through the tall grasses or creeps along beneath the bushes either on its way from your house to its lair or from its lair to your garbage.

Cornered possums make vicious opponents. If defeat seems certain, however, a possum plays dead. Its body stiffens, its face draws back in a death-rictus and it seems to stop breathing. And sometimes whatever had threatened the possum just . . . walks away. Of course, a little while later, the possum unstiffens, gets up, shakes himself and waddles off in another direction.

Possums excel at survival. But one great enemy devours many possum lives: the car. Few drivers even brake for a possum; many folks go out of their way to hit one, taking great delight in ridding the world of one more mangy, no-count "varmint."

And that's where Old Man Possum comes in. Some people in Logan's Holler, West Virginia, think he was once called "Jonas" a long time ago. Others say he never had a name other than the one he carries now. He stands just a hair over five-five, wears baggy, stained overalls over a long-sleeved undershirt, wrecked-up work boots and sometimes a straw hat or shapeless baseball cap. His pointed chin usually has at least a three-day growth of beard, and his gray hair has probably never seen a comb or scissors. His eyes, dark and disturbingly intense, shine with cunning.

He comes into town once or twice a month to buy a few supplies from the general store, usually some staples: a little candy, a jar of instant coffee and an assortment of canned foods. He claims to have a cabin up in the hills, but no one's ever been there.

You can see him at night more often, walking down the highway with a large sack in one hand and a forked stick in the other. Whenever he spots possum road kill, he uses the stick to pry the body up from the road and put it in his sack. Then he's off to the next flattened corpse.

As he goes about his grisly task, you can hear him muttering soft words, rhythmic like a litany. Sometimes, if you listen, you can actually make out what he's saying, and it sounds like this: *"Brighteyes, born in the spring, curious, smart, go back to your beginnings; Waddler, older than you were smart, rest your bones. Old Man Possum will make it right."*

And he does. People whisper that the death of one too many baby possums set him off many years ago. Possums may be ugly as adults, but as babies, they rank right next to kittens and puppies on the cute scale, with big, bright eyes, tiny faces, pointed pixie noses and round chubby bodies. The people who run possums down with their cars don't care about that, though. Big or little, the critter's a possum, and no one brakes for possum.

That's what the man from Richmond in his fancy canary yellow Passat thought as his headlights caught the familiar outline of a possum — a half-grown one — making its way slowly across the road. He lined the critter up and gunned his engine. He felt the slight bump under his left front tire that told him he'd gotten the creature square. He smiled in his rearview mirror, complimented himself on his deadly aim and focused again on the road ahead — and tried to swerve out of the way of what must have been the biggest possum in the world, standing more than five feet tall and as broad as a brick wall.

He doesn't remember much after that except that his car careened over the side of the twisty mountain road, leaving him behind about halfway down the slope. The car landed in the gorge, one more scrap for trees to grow on; he lay where he fell, unable to move, for what seemed like days until help came. Now, confined to a wheelchair, he no longer drives. Instead, he sits outside the general store in Logan's Holler, not far from the crash site, and tells his story to anyone who'll listen. Some people do, and nothing happens to 'em. Some people don't, and they invariably meet up with Old Man Possum. Few of 'em walk away.

Accord: Den-Warder

Breed: Laughing Strangers (Wapathemwa)

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 5, Resolve 6

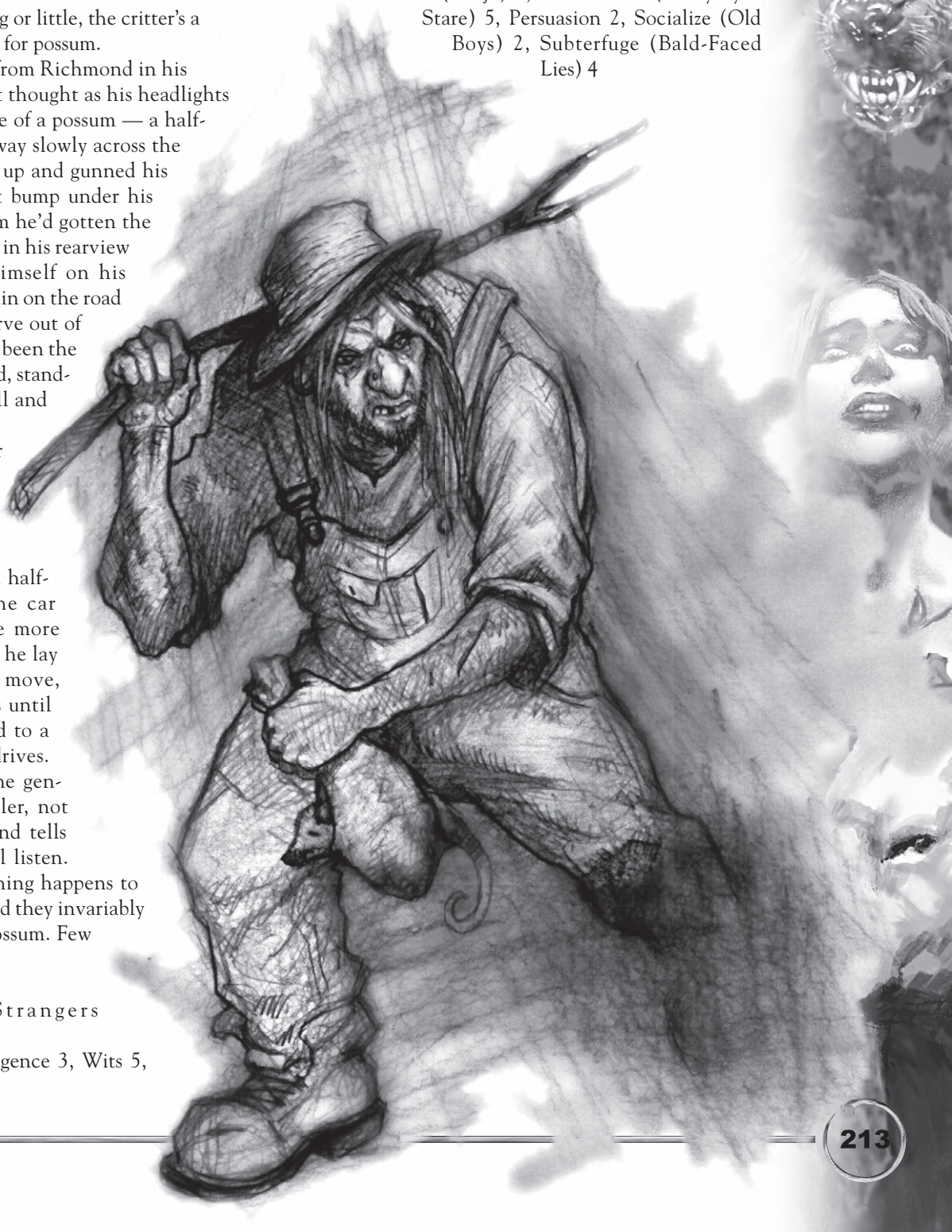
Physical Attributes: Strength 2 (3/3), Dexterity 3 (6/3), Stamina 6 (2/7)

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 3 (3/1), Composure 7

Mental Skills: Academics 1, Crafts (Repair, Woodwork, Taxidermy) 5, Investigation (Tracking), Medicine (Critters) 4, Occult (Death Hoodoo) 4

Physical Skills: Athletics (Hiking, Camping, Climbing) 4, Brawl (Claws) 3, Drive 1, Firearms 2, Stealth (Sneaking, Woods) 6, Survival (Hunting, Scrounging, Trash) 6, Weaponry (Knife) 3

Social Skills: Animal Ken (Critters) 6, Empathy 3, Expression (Banjo) 3, Intimidation (Beady-Eyed Stare) 5, Persuasion 2, Socialize (Old Boys) 2, Subterfuge (Bald-Faced Lies) 4



Merits: Brawling Dodge, Common Sense, Danger Sense, Encyclopedic Knowledge, Den, Fighting Finesse (Claws), Holistic Awareness, Iron Stamina 2, Iron Stomach, Natural Immunity, Pack (Local Critters) 4, Quick Healer, Toxin Resistance, Unseen Sense
Favors: Extra Limb (Tail), Fang and Claw, Nine Lives
Aspects: Alarming Alacrity, Beast Magic (Death Spells — 16 dots), Bare Necessities 3, Blank Burrow, Brave Escape, Clamber, Darksight, Earthbond 5, Grave Misfortune, Gross Eater, Invisible Marking, Keen Senses (Smell, Hearing), Musk, Pearl of Great Price, Truth Sense, Unsettling Eye, Weatherskin, Weaver's Wisdom
Feral Heart: 6 (–3 Social)

Willpower: 13
Harmony: 6
Max Essence/per Turn: 15/3
Virtue: Charity
Vice: Wrath
Initiative: 10 (13/10)
Defense: 3 (5/3)
Speed: 10 (14/12)
Size: 5 (3/5)
Respect: Cleverness 4, Ferocity 4, Insight 2, Loyalty 3
Weapons/Attacks

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Bite	1 (L)	7/7

Health: 11 (5/12)

Rucksack Mary

On the road, good company is a blessing — especially for folks with the Changing Blood. And so, when a ragged assortment of backpackers appears deep in the mountains or forests, full of song and shots of good booze, who's gonna complain? Rucksack Mary's band of rovers has been wandering in various configurations for the better part of a decade. Folks who give 'em a ride or grab a spot by their fire are treated to raucous stories and a noseful of hiker-musk. Those who meet 'em in emergencies find a helpful bunch of hands. And those who meet 'em doing something wrong or stupid . . . well, those folks don't often meet anyone else again.

A freckle-faced malcontent with bare feet and elfin smiles, Rucksack Mary is the heart of this motley bunch. She hit the road last decade and hasn't called anywhere "home" since. Driven by a restless itch, she left home at 16 with the rucksack she still wears. Hiking on the Appalachian Trail, she met up with a dude called "Bear." That name held more truth than poetry, and the two became fast friends. Later, when her own Change overtook her, Bear helped her through the Storm and set her right about the Gift. Her new feline temperament, however, clashed with Bear's breed. The two fought bitterly one night, and he left her in the woods. She hasn't seen him since then, but Mary's never stopped looking, or wanting to apologize for the scars she left across his face.

In the years since, Mary's been wandering: Europe, Asia, India, all Americas, even parts of Africa. A year in Australia brought her some new mates. Two of 'em roam with her to this day. Mary's infectious laugh, good looks and head full of tales make her a natural hiking buddy, and she grows a tribe of "protectors" wherever she goes. These days, that band counts Hyper, Mandrill, Crash and Steve-Steve as its core. Each one bears the Changing Gift, and they're not shy about sharing it when they must. Mary and her bunch are wanderers, not warriors. Even so, there's times when a set of claws or a sharp beak sets things right.

Restless in the ways a cougar gets, Mary never sets down roots. She'll snuggle close to anyone who smells right, but deep down she misses Bear. Every so often, she'll catch his scent, or find a footprint in moist ground. He's there, she knows, but won't come out. Is it love he's after, or revenge? In either case, Mary wishes he'd just get it over with. Her Aussie lover Crash (a falcon with a curious taste for walking) has seen Bear himself, but isn't talking. It's hard to keep secrets by firelight, but birds are better than most folks at such things. In the meantime, Mary's walking, making friends wherever she goes. There's a stone in her heart that won't dislodge, but maybe that's just the price of the road.

So if you're hiking across the great Pacific Northwest, wintering in Würzburg or sitting out a stormy night in Bankok, you might meet a pack of hikers with animals in their gaze. Have a drink, share a song and enjoy their friendship while it lasts. Mary's a fairly restless cat, and by dawn they'll be gone again.

Accord: Sun-Chaser
Breed: Bastet (Qualm'a ni)
Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 4, Resolve 5
Physical Attributes: Strength 3 (4/5), Dexterity 4 (7/7), Stamina 4 (7/6)
Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 3, Composure 3
Mental Skills: Academics 2, Computer 1, Crafts (Woodcraft, Camping Gear) 4, Medicine (Patching Up) 2, Occult (Seen a Lotta Stuff) 3, Politics (World Traveler) 3
Physical Skills: Athletics (Hiking, Climbing, Camping, Swimming) 4, Brawl (Dirty Fighting) 3, Drive 1, Larceny 2, Stealth (Barefoot, Woods) 4, Survival (Bad Weather, Camping, Hiking, Scrounging) 4, Weaponry (Knife) 2
Social Skills: Animal Ken 1, Empathy (Shoulder to Cry On) 4, Expression (Fire-Spinning, Jokes, Story-Telling) 3, Intimidation (Tough) 2, Persuasion (Ingratiating) 3, Socialize (Making Friends) 4, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge (Innocent Face) 3
Favors: Clever Monkey 2, Earthbond 3, Fang and Claw
Aspects: Alarming Alacrity 3, *Aww!!!* 4, Bare Necessities 3, Blend In, Catwalk 3, Clamber 2, Fortune's Favor 3, Keen Senses (Sight, Hearing) 2, Mindmap, Righting

Reflex 3, Sweet-Voiced Fiend, Territory Bond 2, Warrior's Restoration, Weatherskin

Merits: Contacts (Buddies Everywhere) 5, Inspiring, Iron Stamina 2, Language (French, German, Spanish, Russian, Mandarin) 1, Natural Immunity, Striking Looks 4, Strong Back, Toxin Resistance

Feral Heart: 3 (–2 Social/ –0 with Merit)

Willpower: 8

Harmony: 7

Max Essence/per Turn: 12/1

Virtue: Hope

Vice: Lust

Initiative: 7 (10/10)

Defense: 4 (4/4)

Speed: 12 (19/17)

Size: 5 (5/5)

Respect: Cleverness 1, Insight 3, Loyalty 3, Passion 3

Weapons/Attacks

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Bite	2 (L)	9/10
Claws	2 (L)	9/10
Knife	1 (L)	7

Health: 9 (12/11)



**You must not love animals,
they don't last long enough.
You must not love humans,
they last too long.**

–Anonymous