

DOWN AMONG THE DEAD

"This can't be."

The werewolf ran his hands across the basement wall, feeling his skin tingle at the rough stone under his palm. He brushed his fingertips across the images that looked so much like cave paintings: the cavorting wolves and men, the hundreds of spirit-figures and the howling wolves.

The nine howling wolves.

"This can't be," he said again, narrowing his eyes in the darkness and peering hard to make out additional details. He knew his packmate was behind him — he heard her breathing — but he still felt an uncomfortable pulse of shock as she pressed her hand lightly on his shoulder.

"What is it?" she whispered. "You keep saying 'it can't be' as if I should be seeing something unusual here."

The Cahalith trailed his fingertips across the wall once more, roughly circling the howling wolf pack. "Here." He tapped the ninth wolf, which was slightly separated from the others.

"I still don't see whatever I'm supposed to be seeing."

The Cahalith swallowed what would have been a threatening growl. "There are nine wolves here. This looks like the legend of the Firstborn, when *Urfarah's* spirit-children chose the eight tribes. Five Forsaken, three Pure."

"So what's this ninth one there for?" She absently ran her fingertips through her hair to keep a few stray locks from tickling her cheeks as she peered at the wall. "I'm thinking the artist actually knew his math and that there's something significant in all this, right?"

The Cahalith nodded and gestured to another part of the wall. "Look here. Werewolves — in Gauru form no less — killing Lunes. And here, in the sky, is a lunar eclipse. So this massacre was occurring while Mother Moon was blind to the world below."

"How does that tie in with..."

"Look, look *here*. The same wolf that was apart from the Firstborn in the other piece. He's right here, watching the slaughter of the Lunes." The Cahalith took note of the faint trails of blue paint that stretched out from the lone wolf and into a large patch of blackness. Whatever picture was once on the wall was now obscured by an old scrubbing of charcoal. "It looks like this wolf — this ninth Firstborn — isn't tied to the other totem spirits. I don't know if that means he's a false Firstborn or — or maybe

he's just linked to whatever is under the black patch instead. Maybe it means both."

"You're smart, boss." The woman yawned lazily. She had better things to do, and wasn't afraid to let it show. The Cahalith was gripped, and paid her words no heed.

"I think I've got it," he said after a few moments of awkward silence.

"Got what?"

"This black patch." He traced a single fingertip over the blackness, as if he could feel the shapes under the dark cloud. "This isn't a corruption of the original piece. It's intentional. This Firstborn is false, because he's got no connection to the rest of *Urfarah's* children. What he is connected to is the black patch."

"Wow. You sure know your stuff." The distracted Cahalith heard his packmate's words, but his own rushing heartbeat drowned out the soft hiss of a knife being drawn. "And what's the black patch, boss?"

The Cahalith leaned closer to the wall, close enough to smell the charcoal if it had had any smell left after so many years. "This blackness — it's got to be the Maeljin." He relaxed back a little, shaking his head. "Shit, it's so obvious now."

"Is it really?" she asked without a smile. The Cahalith missed the edgy inflection in her words, and thought nothing of her stepping a little closer. His wolf senses would have smelled the silver blade clutched in her hand behind her back. His human senses were still overwhelmed by the stench of the basement.

"Yeah, don't you see? This isn't just some Pure graffiti like we thought. This is a Bale Hound myth. Some kind of false Firstborn that was created by the Maeljin, probably to interact with the *Asah Gadar* as a middleman or something."

"Is that a fact?" She took another step closer. "And you're sure?"

Now the Cahalith did notice something strange, something threatening and predatory in his packmate's expression.

"Are you okay? This isn't freaking you out, is it?" He made the last mistake of his life by turning back to the painted images on the wall. "Damn it — if only there was some way of discovering just who this false Firstborn is."

"His name..." her words came out as a sticky growl as she grew and changed and her blood heated with Rage, "...is Soulless Wolf."

The Cahalith turned, wide-eyed, into the lengthening, almost-Gauru face of his packmate.

"How do you know? What the *hell*?" His reactions were fast, but not fast enough. He was changing, shifting, when the shrieking blows struck, but they struck too hard and too fast, and the Cahalith hit the filthy floor with his lifespan now numbering in seconds. Stab wounds gushed in sick rhythm to his pounding heartbeat. She had taken chunks out of his body with her slender klaive.

"I paint this." The Gauru drooled as it spoke through trembling jaws. "My work. My art."

Moments later, the Cahalith's body was finally motionless among the others in the stinking cellar. The Gauru shrank back to Hishu, panting and bloody all over.

"Everyone's a fucking critic." She spat on the still figure of the Cahalith and made her way up the stairs, wondering just what she was going to say at the pack muster tonight. In the silent darkness of the basement, her voice could be heard above, jokingly trying out excuses to see how the lies sounded out loud.

...

In the near-darkness of the room, the Bale Hound sliced open her wrists with a steak knife and wept at the pain. Sticky gouts of blood spurted from her wounds in time to her heartbeat, and her uncontrollable shivers sent the hot fluid spraying at every angle imaginable. With the creeping, tightening sensation in her palms and wrists, the slashes in her forearms sealed closed.

She didn't stop crying when the pain in her arms stopped. Instead, she crawled around the floor of the basement, sobbing and drooling and near-blind in the darkness, crawling on her hands and knees over bodies that had been dead for weeks in some cases, months in others. Her senses would have served her better in wolf form, but she knew she'd never be able to stand the smell if she shapeshifted in her hovel.

Finally, she reached the corpse of the packmate she had murdered a week ago, and her hands moved over his clothes and skin. He was already sticky with rot, and her hands moved over ruptured flesh that showed signs of the rats getting to him. As she rolled the decomposing body onto its front, the smell was bearable no longer, and she threw up sickening red-brown mush seasoned with nuggets of cracked bone. Even in the semi-light cast by the candle in her right hand, she clearly saw an undigested finger in the pool of vomit.

That did stop her crying, if only for a while. She spent the next few moments laughing drunkenly as she searched the corpse of the Cahalith. She was too rushed, too keen, and —

Burning.

Silver.

"Ow, fuck it!"

— she cut her hand on her silver klaive dagger as she tried to pull it from the corpse's spine.

It came free with slick ease, having been left there since the final stabbing blow seven days before. Now she needed her ritual knife, and had crawled around in the darkness of the basement for five minutes trying to find it. No longer crying or laughing, the Bale Hound crawled back to her makeshift altar by the stairs. Her knees dragged through the cooling vomit, but she didn't notice. Her trembling hand set the lone candle in place in a small beer bottle by her knee.

Kneeling in front of the suitcase of bones she had been saving for just this occasion, she cut crazy, meaningless lines all over her left arm. The knife —

Burning.

Silver.

— sliced through her skin leaving a hissing trail of tiny blood bubbles in the cracks of the thin wounds. It didn't cross her mind that she should have washed the knife first; the infections of a week-dead body meant nothing to her.

Blood pissed out in graceless arcs, spattering on the wall. Bones jumbled together in the suitcase.

"Come to me, come now, and hide the sins of my soul." She talked without really hearing herself, and without noticing the sick pleading of her voice. It would have horrified her to have seen just how pathetic she looked and sounded at this moment. "I beg of you, you who I have served since my eyes were opened, I beg that you will send the one who will eat my sins."

More of her blood spurted out onto the bag of old bones, and she felt herself growing faint. For endless minutes, she sat in silence, counting each second in her mind, never realizing how she was just as often counting the furious thunder of her heartbeat.

Then the room shifted somehow. The still and rank air moved for a moment, and a new smell, a smell of power and sweat and filthy animal skin, washed over her senses.

"I have come." The voice was octaves below a mere growl. There was no word for how it registered in her mind. More than a vibration, less than a tremor — the voice was as unexplainable as the creature itself.

She did not turn to see the creature behind her. Instead, she tore strips from her sweater and used them to bind the wounds in her arm. As she tied off the last strip of her cheap and dirty tourniquet, the skin on the back of her neck prickled at the touch of cold breath and scratchy fur.

"Thank you for coming. Thank you so much." Her own voice was now a grateful child's. She was dizzy from blood loss and the gravity of the situation.

"I will eat your sins." The wolf-thing growled as it stepped past her. Their eyes met then, and she recoiled slightly as she always did. The wolf's eyes were dead,

emotionless, like those of a shark. Even his expression was that of a dead thing, for this wolf never sniffed the ground or twitched his ears. It was pure economy of movement, but not out of any grace — this was economy of *life*; the creature showed no more life than it had to. The wolf-thing was simply not that good at emulating something so alien to its nature.

The woman started crying again, this time from relief, and the wolf began to lick the blood from the bones in the suitcase and crack them into pieces with its jaws. As the first mouthful of various human bones slid down its throat, the wolf-spirit drew a shallow, shivering breath. The wolf seemed to be enjoying the taste of its meal.

“You have killed many of your own kind,” the wolf growled, and somehow, the Bale Hound detected amusement in its voice.

“Yes.” Her voice was barely above a whisper. “The pack I was hiding in. I attacked them this evening.”

The wolf spoke even through a mouthful of bloody bones. It sounded like a bear vomiting gravel. “Yes, I taste it in your blood that coats the offering. And you killed them all?”

The Bale Hound narrowed her eyes and shook her head without saying a word.

• • •

Christopher was alone for the first time in seven years. Not literally, for there were other people in the room with him, but alone in the sense that he was now packless, without a totem and with no way to defend his hunting ground.

The one thing he was certain he could do — or, at least, certain he could give his best shot — was exact a little revenge.

He considered this fact as he lay on the basement floor. Once Maryann’s betrayal had been revealed and she and all her crazy-ass spirit allies had struck the pack, Christopher had done his level best not to freak out, but the truth of the matter is that Chris Roof-Runner was a coward. He’d seen the overwhelming odds, seen Eric and Jojo go down like twin sacks of kicked shit, and Christopher had decided that it was time to get going from there. He could have (perhaps, he admitted, even *should* have) stayed and tried to fight, but he was certain that the last sun had set on the Inner City Gurus, and his pack was mighty fucked. First she took out Johnny the Blue (and a better singer you ain’t *ever* heard), and then a week later she’s flipping out and handing the rest of the Gurus their own guts.

That bitch was going to get it. Coward or not, Chris wasn’t going to let this go by unchallenged, even if it meant beating the Bale Whore back to her “hidden” crash pad, sneaking into the body-filled basement and hiding under a pile of corpses.

The corpse he was laying under was none too fresh, and the smell of the basement itself was more than

enough to make a guy throw up more than once. But abject cowardice had its own virtues, and being too scared to open your mouth is an advantage that Chris was relatively happy with right then. Breathing slowly and softly through his nose, he swallowed tiny chunks of the puke in his mouth, and as Maryann chatted about sins and sacrifices, he licked his teeth clean of any residue.

The spirit-wolf-thing crunched its way through whatever was in the suitcase. Chris had nearly panicked when that beast had come along and turned things to an ominous bent, but again, Chris’ cowardice kept him rooted and immobile, half-hidden under the body of one guy and half-lying on top of another corpse’s legs. His eyes had adjusted to the darkness a little, and he could see Johnny the Blue’s vacant, rotting face turned toward him a little way away.

Christopher had a hard time swallowing his Rage but managed by letting his fear come back to the fore.

He had to wait for the spirit to leave, because there was no way he was leaping out of a small pile of bodies in order to fight a Bale Hound and her freaky sin-fucking totem. If Chris had known the expression about “discretion being the better part of valor,” he’d have congratulated himself on his caution. As it was, he just lay still, trying not to tremble or twitch or even breathe too loud. He needed a piss, too, and that was hardly helping matters.

Finally, the wolf-thing began to dissolve and vanish, as if it were turning into smoke and dissipating. The mist coiled around Maryann, and seemed to be whispering. Chris didn’t even want to know what the spirit was saying as a parting note, but he hoped to God that it wasn’t anything like, “There’s a guy hiding in here.”

• • •

“Another heart beats in this room, *Asah Gadar*. You have earned this warning because of your gracious offering. Until next time, then...”

The whispering died down as the spirit dissolved before her eyes completely. The Bale Hound, still feeling the ache in her brain from the emotional and spiritual trauma she had suffered this night, was instantly alert.

“Who’s there?” she hissed, reaching for her silver knife. She believed she knew who was down here with her, laying somewhere in the darkness. Slowly, again on her hands and knees, she crawled along the floor. Every time her hand brushed a motionless body, she rammed down with the knife.

• • •

Chris was far beyond simple panic now. He could hear her somewhere in the basement, scrabbling around on her hands and knees, and giggling like a clown as she stabbed into the dead bodies all around. *It was time*, he figured, *to make a scene*.

A scuffle from nearby — very nearby — galvanized Chris into action. He tensed his muscles, ready to leap up to his feet.

At that moment, like a sledgehammer to the spine, a silver dagger rammed into his back.

"Got you, little Chris." The Bale Hound pulled the knife out and rammed it in again, and again. Blood made her hands slick almost immediately, and she struggled to keep her grip on the little dagger.

Chris was up in a stumbling scramble, teeth clenched and tears running down his face. His feet knocked against the bodies on the floor, and he couldn't find his balance. He only made it 10 feet before he crashed down to the floor with his legs spasming. He knew something was wrong with the muscles in his back, but had no idea exactly what.

"That's it, Chris. You lay there and think things over."

He looked up at her, his packmate, and swallowed the taste of his own blood.

"Chris, you're so predictable. I knew you'd run away and try to come back with some infantile notion of vengeance." She smiled, and waved the silver knife in the candlelight. "I'll going to peel your skin off and use it as a blanket. As for your bones, well, I can use them the next time I —"

Gunfire rang out, and the darkness lifted for seven momentary flashes. Maryann collapsed to the floor, another corpse in a basement full of them. Chris was a good shot, and at least three of the rounds had taken the Bale Hound in the head.

Christopher Roof-Runner closed his eyes and took a deep breath. It was enough to unbalance his stomach, and he finally threw up properly. It felt like part of his soul was throwing up, too. After he had wiped his mouth on his sleeve, emptier in more than one way, he wasted no time in making his escape.

As he crawled to the stairs, he paused only to spit on Maryann's body, and throw the gun into a corner.

"Predictable, my ass."

An injured wolf limped from the house in the suburbs. He knew he'd have to go back to clean up, soon — to do what he could to make the inevitable discovery look like "cult killings" and "Satanist worship in the 'burbs." But for now, all he could think of was the lonely ache of a wolf without a pack and the need to find someone wise who would listen to his story.

Sample file

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Sample file



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BLASPHEMIES™

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INTRODUCTION

WE DANCE ROUND IN A RING AND SUPPOSE,
BUT THE SECRET SITS IN THE MIDDLE AND KNOWS.
— ROBERT FROST, "THE SECRET SITS"

The tale of Father Wolf is, for various reasons, the most dominant myth told to explain the origins of the Uratha and their struggle.

This is a book about the rest of the story.

Blasphemies is a book about the strange and heretical, the tales that are told further out. Some of the beliefs presented here provide no greater threat than doubt, dangerous though that can sometimes be. Some are nothing short of poison, wooing the Uratha into acts and rituals that hasten the world's decay rather than preventing it. Here you'll find secret lodges that tell stories other than that of the Fall and Father Wolf and codes of honor that violate the Oath of the Moon.

And yes, this book details the worst and most destructive of the faithful — the Bale Hounds, servants of the Maeljin. Here you'll see their cancerous cult dragged out of the concealing darkness for a long, hard look at the rot within Forsaken society.

The secrets within **Blasphemies** are designed to help Storytellers flavor their games with a hint of the unknown and mysterious, ranging to the obscene, sinister and blasphemous. It is not necessarily a book of adversaries — your troupe may want to explore some of the beliefs and lodges presented as protagonists rather than "subversive elements." On the other hand, adversaries can certainly be found here. From the cults that grow around the denizens of Shadow and the Uratha themselves to the malignant presence of the Bale Hounds, the Forsaken will find some truths that aren't meant to be brought to light.

TO FIGHT OR TO FOLLOW

It should be noted that although **Blasphemies** presents a wealth of information on the various heresies and treacheries that spread through hunting grounds across the world, the intent of the book is to present credible, interesting lore that players discover, and contend with, rather than simply "sign up" for new powers and get in bed with the enemy. Many of the ideas presented are technically *antagonistic* secrets, treasure troves of hidden lore that will mess with the characters' heads as they try to reason and clear everything up. This book also highlights the notion that not all antagonistic features within a story are black-and-white. While right and wrong exist, they are mutable concepts often smudged by shades of gray. Evil is pure evil to some, and necessary evil to others. To others still, the deluded and the fanatical, evil becomes good and even virtuous.

Some of the secrets presented here could well change the course of a chronicle. If the pack decides that the "truth" told by one of the lodges suits the pack's own vision of the world better than the lore of the Forsaken, the pack's shift in allegiance is sure to affect their relations with their fellow werewolves. The pack's allies might become rivals — and then perhaps allies again if the pack successfully brings the word of "truth" to them, or perhaps blood enemies. Though the concept of a shift away from Forsaken culture might be daunting, this shift might be the right thing for the chronicle. Many exciting stories could result, if players and Storyteller are interested in exploring the possibilities.

In fact, the beliefs presented here could serve as the basis for an entirely new chronicle. What if the Lodge of Nekkadia's beliefs were dominant in a region, and the Forsaken and Pure were in a distinct minority? What of a medieval-era chronicle set in northern Europe, with the pack all scions of one of the Mots? If the Storyteller is interested in tweaking the base assumptions of **Werewolf: The Forsaken** to promote a new way of looking at the werewolves of the World of Darkness, and the players are intrigued by the possibility, there's no reason not to try something different. Whether as a short affair planned to last only a few stories or as an ongoing game with no end in sight, a variant chronicle has quite a bit to offer.

THE DARK HEART

Werewolves are a scattered, segmented race. The People make allowances for meeting by occasional gatherings on tribal, lodge and regional matters of importance, but, generally, a pack is on its own on a night-by-night basis. That relative isolation is important to the setting, and is a powerful complement to the themes of dark secrets and forbidden knowledge. The darkness revealed in this book frequently emerges within a pack's hunting ground, and that makes the horror of the situation a great deal more personal than a threat that could have popped up anywhere. The dangers that the Storyteller will create with this book as a guide can be easily customized or used wholesale as a pack-specific threat geared toward tantalizing the players' tastes. In short, there is something in **Blasphemies** for every group, from advice on a Bale Hound infiltrator who seems unusually skilled at piercing the pack's weak points to an alternate version of the Father Wolf creation myth that stirs the players' imaginations.

The idea of mystery in horror is a staple of the genre. The fear of the unknown, the tension of discovery, the thrill of uncovering a dark secret that has lain hidden for so long — all of it is very appropriate in games of **Werewolf**, and doubly so regarding the material within this book. These are the terrible truths that few werewolves ever learn, and this is your chance to run with them.

Dealing with these heretical ideas is a key part of the story, too. The concepts herein represent challenges that cannot easily be overcome by simple combat — at least not from the start. Investigation is implied where a lot of this material is concerned, and slow reveals will be more likely to work well than climactic declarations. Certainly, in most games of **Werewolf**, there is a level of tension that threatens bloodshed in the future, and, again, that's perfectly in-theme with the content of **Blasphemies**. These are terrible truths to learn, and it's reasonable that they would trigger a character's Rage.

As always with World of Darkness sourcebooks, the material presented here is designed to be taken apart and reassembled, combined with as many or as few other chronicle options as seems suitable. Everything here is as ironclad or as mutable as the Storyteller requires for his or her chronicle, and the variation from game to game will likely be pronounced. One chronicle could feature the Bale Hounds as the hidden "ninth tribe," while another features the *Asah Gadar* existing as a small lodge or scattered cults with little in common but a synchronous goal.

REVELATION

Naturally, there's no point to a secret without eventual revelation. A story nobody ever tells isn't a secret; a rumor that dies before spreading isn't a rumor. The moment of revelation — when a character first hears a tale that contradicts the myth of Father Wolf, the discovery of a Bale Hound's true loyalties, the uncovering of a mortal cult — is a key moment in the sort of stories **Blasphemies** posits. That doesn't mean that revelation should be the only dramatic moment in such a story, though. The initial investigation is a perfect time of rising tension, with the characters' rising suspicions counterbalanced (at least behind the scenes) by their prey's increasing fear of discovery. Once a revelation is made, a new conflict should certainly begin. Are the players confronted with temptation that will trigger a conflict of faith? If they've discovered something foul that clearly needs to be put down, how will they manage to do so? Will their actions endanger the Oath, and therefore their spiritual health? The moment of revelation is a climax of the story, but doesn't necessarily have to be the only one, and certainly the rest of the story shouldn't feel anticlimactic.

One revelation after another can also make players jaded. The contents of this book are best used judiciously, interwoven with the more forthright and familiar aspects of werewolf existence. When properly paced, the material presented here can carry a troupe for years upon years of Storytelling.

CHAPTER BREAKDOWN

Chapter One: Heresies — The opening chapter deals with the potential for reinterpretation (or outright abandonment) of the legend of Father Wolf. What if werewolves were mistaken or somehow deceived as to their true origins? What if their nature really was brought about by a lycanthropic curse? So much of history is fact mixed with fable, and the potential for time to have swallowed the truths of an ancient past are not so unbelievable. This chapter presents these heretical ideas, and explains ways in which to insert them into your chronicle. You may even find one that you feel should be true.

• **Chapter Two: Brotherhoods** — Humans can be easily influenced if the manipulations take the right form. Chapter Two deals with the establishment and maintenance of cults and how they fit into the **Werewolf: The Forsaken** setting specifically. On a broader scale, the information provided also explains the many ways that humans interact with the supernatural creatures in the game, ranging from cults of worship to groups that are aware of the hidden world and seek only to appease the alien beings encountered. The Ridden, spirit Hosts and even the Uratha themselves have been known to create cults, and this chapter provides ideas how to fit such a group into your game.

• **Chapter Three: Hidden Lodges** — Chapter Three presents a variety of factions within Uratha society, some antagonistic in nature, others designed to be open to player characters to join if they pass the entrance trials. Lodges are paths to power and paths to understanding, but lodges can also be used as a mechanic to represent a variety of social constructions. Some of these groups are among the most secretive and exclusive lodges in the setting — others may be surprisingly open and powerful on their home ground. A few are related, as well; the Brotherhood of Crossed Swords and the Lodge of Quetzal oppose one another, while the concept of the "mot" introduces a new take on the lodge construct.

• **Chapter Four: The Bale Hounds** — Among the gravest threats to any hunting ground is the presence of a Bale Hound within the domain. In the final chapter, **Blasphemies** reveals the inner workings of these insidious traitors, peeling back the mysteries and detailing just how the *Asah Gadar* serve the Maeljin Incarna, how the Bale Hounds seek to work their influence through a pack's territory and the secrets that must never be shared with the Forsaken. Whether used as solitary rogue agents or as sprawling brotherhoods of vice and violence, the Bale Hounds are the epitome of the enemy within.

There are answers to every question — a pack just needs to know which shadows in which to look, and to be careful about disturbing anything down there.

The door has just been unlocked. See for yourself.

Sample file



CHAPTER I

HERESIES

Listen not to the lies of those who call themselves the People. What they call "the First Tongue" is the tongue of the devil world, the language of the Shadow. The First Tongue is given to us to understand it for we are all Ridden by demons, and yet we have forgotten the path of our salvation.

We are humans above all. The skin of the wolf was a curse levied on the first of us in Rome, on those men cruel enough to torment Christians for sport. By the will of God, their skins became as their hearts, and they were revealed for the wild animals they were. And the sins of the father were visited upon the child.

But even then, we were not wholly forsaken. Yes, the demons of Shadow revile us and attempt to sear us, for they know that we can yet achieve grace — and they are jealous. Many of us have been saved through the years. The stories are myriad. A wolf guarded the path of St. Anthony, and took him to the dwelling of St. Paul. A wolf guarded the head of St. Edmund so that it could be properly buried. St. Francis took away the Rage in the heart of the wolf of Gubbio, and he was at peace.

But now we have forgotten. Our own fathers and grandfathers tell us tales of a wolf-god and a pagan moon goddess, but do not understand that the temptations of the Shadow's power lead us farther from salvation. We still bear the curse of the 30 pieces of silver, just as those others do who have betrayed our Lord.

Do not walk astray. Look within you, and see the beauty of a soul that may yet achieve grace. Reject those who tell you that the Wolf is the Father, and that no power can take away the Rage. The truth waits for those who are willing to seek it.

BEWARE OF FALSE PROPHETS, WHICH COME TO YOU IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING,
BUT INWARDLY THEY ARE RAVENING WOLVES.

— MATTHEW 7:15

The Tale of Pangaea begins with the assertion that “everything we are and everything we were began in Pangaea.” It’s hard to know how true that saying is. Even the oldest spirits, those who claim to be old enough to have been extant in Pangaea, might not fully remember the whole story — if they’re telling to truth at all. The Forsaken may take on faith that the legend is truth — or at least, as close to the whole truth as any tale can come — or they might ask questions, wondering if somewhere out there is a story that tells things differently. One that might hint at an unspoken truth.

This chapter is about providing your chronicle with such stories. Here you will find some guidelines and discussion of the options you have with fundamental building blocks of **Werewolf: The Forsaken**, the creation myth itself. We will look at sources of possible inspiration, some practical advice about incorporating heresies into a chronicle and the ramifications of these changes. Within this context, we are using the word *heresy* as a shorthand for “alternate werewolf creation myth.” In your game, these myths, or ones of your own devising, may lead to heretical groups of werewolves within Uratha society. You may choose simply to replace the Pangaea myth altogether with a new one — in that case, the myth isn’t really a heresy any more.

HERESY IS FUN

Players shouldn’t be encouraged to believe that the Pangaea story is historical fact “just because it’s in the book.” The same is true for their characters; although their peers may claim that the legend is, in all likelihood, the best accounting of the People’s origin, it’s up to each character to decide how much he or she believes or disbelieves, or even whether the character cares at all.

So, what do players learn from the myth? The most common assumption is that the Forsaken, while certainly not without fault, essentially made the correct choice when they decided to kill Father Wolf. While the Pure see themselves as the true inheritors of Father Wolf’s legacy, in truth, they are cowards who have turned their backs on their duties and now blame all the world’s ills on the Forsaken’s crime. In doing so, the Pure have reduced all the complexities of their situation down to one simple solution — kill the Forsaken and everything will be fine — echoing fascism’s use of racial scapegoats.

Now, this does not mean that **Werewolf: The Forsaken**’s default style of play is filled with moral absolutes.

Several layers of gray are already implicit in this simplistic interpretation of the Uratha’s worldview. For example, the Pure’s monomaniacal cause might have its roots in a very real grievance, the Forsaken’s self-sacrifice can be called into question and so on. But the Legend of Pangaea supports each side’s views. Incorporating heresies into your game gives you new ways to broaden the game. What if both sides are wrong? What if the tale of Pangaea is false? That can be a thunderclap in your game — suddenly everything gets called into question.

What if the Uratha’s world is not built on a mono myth, but upon two or more competing legends, ones regarded by most Forsaken (and possibly the Pure) as heresies? That throws a whole new wrinkle into the argument and calls all kinds of assumptions about Uratha society into question. Instead of the basic dualism of the Pure versus Forsaken, there can exist within your chronicle a panoply of competing religions and cultures for the Uratha — perhaps even provide the impetus for having the elders from the Pure and Forsaken cooperate against a heretical group of Uratha.

The basic decision about the inclusion of heresies in a Storyteller’s campaign is whether the players want to play in a setting where the fundamental assumptions about the Uratha, and what they do, are called into question. Do the players want a chronicle in which the creation story becomes something more than history, such as an article of faith — a faith that will be tested?

LAYING THE HERETICAL GROUNDWORK

Storytellers who want to use heresies need to create room in their chronicles for the heresies’ existence. Not every encounter with another supernatural should support the Legend of Pangaea in the player’s minds. Incorporating heresies into the campaign will have a lot more weight if the standard (and implied) history is reflected or referenced by everything the characters interact with, from the lowliest Gaffling to the most powerful Lune. In other words, leave room for doubt in the players’ minds. Whether through encounters with quirky Storyteller characters, finding “heretical fetishes” or hearing spirits scornfully refuting the Pangaea tale, add bits here and there that make the players suspect that all that they’ve heard and been taught over the years just may not be the whole truth.

Don’t assume that spirits have any knowledge of Uratha culture or history. It’s important not to have spirits talking about Father Wolf, at least if they aren’t part of the story, like the Firstborn. Why should spirits care enough to learn? This is especially true given that Father Wolf was a

predator that also kept the spirits in line; he's not particularly loved (or missed) among most spirits, save his kin.

Most spirits do not need to know about the Forsaken's legendary spiritual patricide to dislike them. There are enough reasons to hate the Uratha without quoting the Legend of Pangaea. Most spirits distrust the Uratha's rather freakish makeup as creatures of half-flesh and half-ephemera. Some spirits, seeking to become one of the Claimed, are eaten up with envy and fear of what would happen to them if the hypocritical flesh-spirit Uratha discover them.

Even the less prejudicial spirits dislike the fact that most Uratha (especially the Forsaken) think it's their job to tell spirits what to do. They hated Father Wolf for pushing them around, and now they hate his murderous children for doing the same thing. Uratha also bind and summon spirits, typically against their will. Again, mostly the Forsaken tend to deny spirits the ability to experience the pleasures of reality — even the Pure likely control this in their territory, at least for those spirits who can't deal with the Pure from a position of strength. Finally, Uratha take loci away from spirits. Werewolves come off to most spirits as half-breed bullies, even to those spirits that don't know about the werewolves' crimes. What's to like?

Have authority figures in the chronicle introduce heresies. Powerful and knowledgeable spirits that know the *Legend of Pangaea* are just as likely to have heard of other myths. Having some spirits in authority within your chronicle lets the characters in on the existence of heresies; this makes them more believable. That authority figure could be a more experienced Uratha, a respected enemy, a totem spirit or even some other supernatural being. Use someone whose words the pack is likely to trust — even if the packmembers don't want to.

Having the characters catch an authority, such as a pack leader or a fellow lodge member, trying to suppress the knowledge of a particular heresy can push a lot of buttons with packmembers. One, the mere act of suppression lends credence to the heresy: "If it's not true, then why hide?" Second, suppression emphasizes the secretive existence of heresies in general. And, of course, finding out the secret gives the impetus to the player characters. It's their choice whether to trust their colleague or doubt him, to assist him or to try to learn more behind his back. The story focuses on their reaction to this revelation.

Show them that the Legend of Pangaea serves other purposes. All myths explain things, but myths also model behavior to their adherents. Revealing this sows a seed of doubt in the players' minds. Perhaps the legend is a story cooked up by — or at least taken advantage of by the Pure and Forsaken ancestors to establish their hegemony over the Uratha — to further the agenda of the leaders of those societies. Perhaps the legend is a falsehood put forth by clever and alien intellects of the Shadow to keep werewolf society weak and divided, to prevent the truth from getting out, an opiate for the Uratha tribes. Maybe the story of Pangaea is

just a story to cover up a gaping hole in the Uratha psyche, a white lie to make the cubs' dreams a bit more bearable. Ghost Wolves are a great conduit for these ideas in most chronicles.

CREATING YOUR OWN MYTHS

Inspiration for a creation myth can come from popular movies, myth or even historical tales of werewolves. Of course, you do not have to base anything on myth at all; perhaps all you need is your imagination. Maybe there is an element of the Pangaea myth that you'd like to exaggerate as an impetus for a heretical group of Uratha.

MYTH, LANGUAGE AND THE FIRST TONGUE

The First Tongue itself becomes an issue if you try to construct a myth using elements, themes and especially *names* from some mythologies since the distinctive sounds of the First Tongue will likely clash with other languages. "Yen-Lo-Wang the Uratha" or "Cuchulainn the Suthar Anzuth" creates a strong ethnic dissonance, for example. They just sound funny. Of course, a lot of the ethnic flavor you might be trying to capture is found in the names and their sounds. So, you have choices to make.

Now, in the history of the World of Darkness, at least **Werewolf's** view of it, the First Tongue came, well, *first* — before human languages. It has its closest relative in the Sumerian language, though certainly there are differences. Still, you could change the First Tongue in your chronicle to reflect the ethnic feel you are going for, but that's a huge task. (One you are likely to repeat with each new **Werewolf** supplement you choose to integrate into your chronicle.) You could instead come up with names that are some form of compromise between the two — rationalizing that later human languages echoed the First Tongue. Look at the similarities between "garou" and "Gauru," as an example. Yet another option is to use First Tongue-sounding names and trust to the themes and elements of your myth to carry its ethnic weight. Finally, you could try dropping both ethnic and First Tongue names entirely and use the name's English translation or the deed name of the mythic figure, if it has one. Using one of the examples above, "Cuchulainn," translates as "the Hound of Culain" and was known as "the Hound of Ulster," his deed name.

MYTHIC WOLVES

One place to start looking for inspiration for your origin story is the foundations of werewolf myth — the traits that cultures of the world have come to associate with wolves. Wolves once ranged throughout Europe, Asia,

Japan and all of North America, except southwest California. They lived in lands as divergent as arctic tundra, plains, prairies, deserts, mountains and forests. Just about everywhere humans have lived, so, too, have wolves. Their strong physical presence and their direct competition with hunter-gatherer and shepherding cultures ensured that wolves entered into many societies' lore and myth.

In the common folklore of Europe and the West, the wolf's characterization is mostly negative. Wolves are seen as perhaps devilishly clever, but most often as ravenous, gluttonous beasts. Wolves themselves profited little from this depiction, being thought of as creatures best killed for preying upon domestic animals and even humans. Of late, a progression of popular environmental films and stories has mollified this image somewhat, but too late for most of the wolf populations, especially in Europe and places like Japan.

The wolf had a much better reputation in most Native American cultures, who respected the wolf's abilities as a hunter and its dedication to its family. The wolf appears prominently in Native American legends — especially in the Central Woodlands, Great Basin and certain Southwestern and Northwestern tribes. Wolf clans, lodges, and societies are living parts of these cultures — spending some time learning about these traditions is a great way to increase your own appreciation of them as well as draw upon a wealth of inspiration for your stories.

For example, the Wolf Society of the Quileute and Makah Indians of the Northwest owes its founding to a great hero named Changer, who killed the Wolf Chief and danced in his skin to gain the power to heal. The correlations between this story and the conditions and powers of the Uratha are profound and obvious. Shapeshifting and anthropomorphism in general are popular motifs of Amerindian myths and legends. Many animals such as wolves “naturally” change into humans over time, keeping many of their connections and powers of their animal brethren.

The Greeks gave us some of the earliest written stories of a man being turned into a wolf, such as the story of Lykaon from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Wolves appear often in Greek myths, including the origin of one of their greatest gods, Apollo. His pregnant mother was turned into a wolf to protect her from Hera's wrath. So he and his sister Artemis were born to a female wolf — and wolves became one of Apollo's holy animals. He was both the wolves' protector, and the protector of shepherds' flocks from wolf predation.

Romans regarded wolves as symbols of valor, honor and power. The mythic founders of Rome, Romulus and Remus, were suckled by a she-wolf. The wolfskin was a mark of honor, worn by the standard bearers of some Imperial legions. Lupercali, one of Rome's great fertility holidays, was celebrated by male youths dressed in wolf-skin. In fact, the werewolf myth survived in southern Italy into modern times — there was a common folk saying, “A woman born on the Christmas Night will be a witch; a man born on Christmas Night will be either a warlock or

a werewolf.” It was thought of as just punishment for having the gall to be born the same day as the deity.

The Norse regarded wolves with the same kind of awe, but that regard was mixed with fear of chaos and destruction. Freke and Gere were wolf pets of Odin — guardians of his throne, in some stories. Thus, they were the inspiration for warriors, but the greatest wolf, Fenrir, was also a ravenous monster chained beneath the earth — destined to kill and destroy at the end of time, Ragnarok. The motif of a human that could take the form of a wolf is found all over Norse and Teutonic myths. Sometimes this shapechanging is voluntary, such as the berserks; other times, shapeshifting is a curse delivered by a sorcerer.

In Egyptian myth, there are several canine-headed deities one may study for ideas. The famous jackal-headed Anubis is also joined by another deity, Upuaut, who is often described as wolf-headed. Both of these deities are associated with guarding or guiding the dead, and with war. Upuaut is also known as something of a pathfinder, under his appellation as the “Opener of Ways.” But this sobriquet also connotes him being in the vanguard of the mythic host of battle, “opening” the front lines of the enemy. Perhaps this may inspire creation myths that may feature *Stone Shadows* and/or the *Irraka*?

As with the rest of the world, within Asia there are a lot of stories of magical animals that can take on human form, and sometimes even take human mates. But direct correlations between wolf or werewolf myth become more tenuous. There are some intriguing myths in Chinese and Japanese myth, and within the huge array of equally rich societies, there are undoubtedly more.

The incredibly cool and influential *Journey to the West* — the story of the Monkey King written by Wu Cheng-en in the 16th century (based on older tales) — contains references to ravaging wolf-spirits (among other animals) banished from Heaven and turning to prey on humans in their exile. It's pretty easy to see how one might base a larger Uratha myth around that alone.

In Japan, wolves had much more competition for territory and were eliminated much earlier than in many other parts of the world. Still, there are some interesting stories and mythic attributions that could inspire Storytellers who want to incorporate these into a Japanese Uratha creation myth. In the mountainous areas of Hokkaido, the wolf had the reputation as a guardian of the roads — there are even stories of wolves helping lost or disabled travelers find their way to shelter or civilization. There are also several stories of wolves warning of natural disasters — howling before earthquakes or storms. In general, wolves were regarded as beneficial or even benign creatures. They kept wild boar populations in check, and some farming villages gifted food to local packs upon the birth of cubs as a sign of respect — many villagers believed that “good” wolves might return the favor by leaving deer for villagers with newborns. There's an certain temptation to extend “wolf” to cover foxes when dealing with the