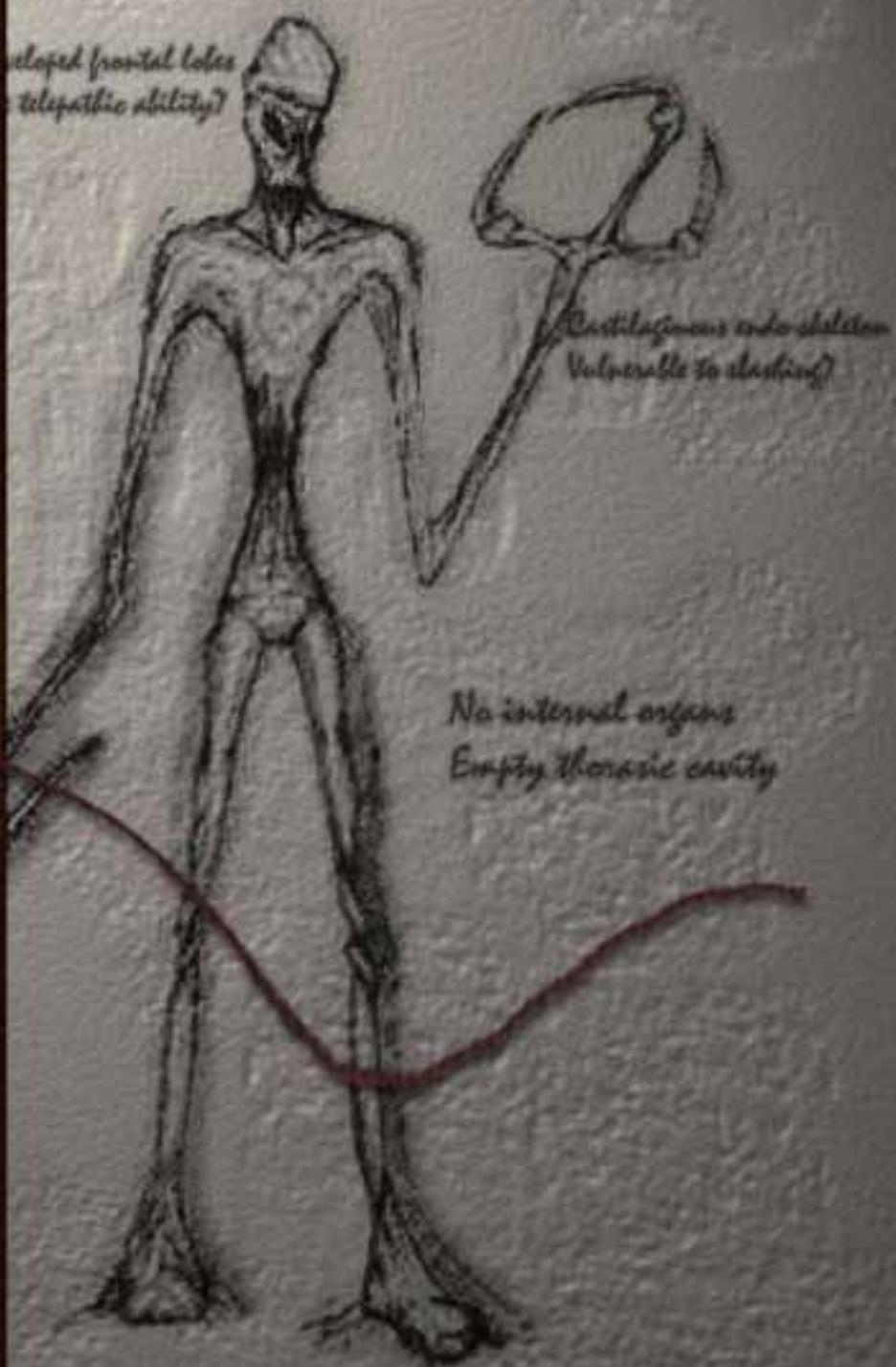




Developed frontal lobes
(telepathic ability?)



Cartilaginous endoskeleton
Vulnerable to crushing?

No internal organs
Empty thoracic cavity

Van Richten Society Research Files:

Doppelgangers



Lead Writers and Editors

Sharon "Rotipher of the FoS" Dornhoff
Mikhail S. "NeoTiamat" Rekun

Contributing Writers

Leyshon "DeepShadow" Campbell
Fabrizio "Sorti" Biondi
Nicholas "Undead Cabbage" Burke
Felix "CorvusCornix" Geefcke
Nathan "Nathan of the FoS" Okerlund

Layout

Stephen "ScS" Sutton

Additional Concepts & Editing

Rachel "Dominique" Kalor
Pamela "Llana" Rose
Matt White

Interior Artwork

Nicholas "Undead Cabbage" Burke
Ed Davenport
Eleanor "Isabella" Ferron

Final Review

The Fraternity of Shadows

In May-June 2007, the VRF Research Challenge at the Fraternity of Shadows forums welcomed submissions of doppelganger- or deceit-related quotes and reference material (books, films, etc) for inclusion in this netbook. First prize of a WotC D&D sourcebook went to 'cure', with a second-place honorable mention to 'gonzoron'. Kudos and thanks to all of those who submitted ideas, many of which appear in the text to follow!

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Van Richten Society Research Files: Doppelgangers

Oct 1st, 2007

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Introduction

The vision reached across and touched Gavin's jaw, lightly, running its crudely carved fingers along the lips of the wound Preetorius had made. A ring on its smallest finger caught the light: a ring identical to his own.

"We're going to have a scar," it said.

- Clive Barker, "Human Remains"



Introduction

My dear Ladies,

Not all fears carry equal weight to all who confront them. Dark-blinded humans deem an elven vampire's enforced daylight habits a far milder affliction than do its stargazing elfin kin. Children believe bogeymen - beings we adults know for fantasy - so very real that some have run away, never to be seen again, rather than passively endure their visitations. To parents, loss of a child is a horror whose devastation none, save another bereft parent, can possibly comprehend.

By this treatise, I am entrusting you with knowledge of a terror which you, Laurie and Gennifer, may (to your mutual good fortune) find profoundly difficult to grasp. To you sisters - twin sisters, distinct in character yet nigh-identical in appearance - the sight of a face that mirrors your own signifies only companionship, closeness and trust. By circumstance of birth, similarity harbors no inherent dread for you, nor need the mere corporeal existence of a "double" pose any threat to your respective feelings of uniqueness and selfhood.

But not all eyes are accustomed to that which Miladies behold, each time you gaze at one another. And if you would but imagine the dismay you might feel, as you sit side by side and peruse this missive, if a third identical figure - perhaps a false Gennifer, perhaps a counterfeit Laurie; in truth, a faux-sister outwardly indistinguishable from either - were to step softly into the room, and hover, unnoticed, reading over your shoulders ... maybe then, as you contemplate the myriad uncertainties such an occurrence would evoke, some inkling of the doubts and paranoia that doppelgangers kindle, in we who are not twins, may yet be made clear to you.

If not, dear ladies, my advice is to be thankful for it. First, because it forearms you both against one of these parasitic impostors' most insidious psychological weapons: the fear of losing one's identity, an attribute which most of mankind equates (erroneously, as you and I well know) with superficial appearances, rather than intangible qualities of character. And second, because I have seen what a pall of anxiety and mistrust doppelgangers' presence has cast upon their native city, and other communities plagued by them. (Rather, known to be thus-plagued: who can guess how far their covert threat has penetrated, in lands beyond Zherisia?) And that fear is one which I hope never to see casting its shadow upon your lives, as it has, upon Paridon's.

Picture "her" now, Miladies, leaning closer to read these words as you do. Picture a face that, until this moment, you twins alone have shared; picture it stolen - usurped - by one whose hidden nature is far from sisterly, but exploitative, opportunistic, contemptuous. Feel its protean ambiguity, its alien inhumanity, its insinuating evil ... evil, not because it is alien or inhuman, but because it fully understands human principles and obligations and sentiments - knows these by direct experience, for it heeded them in youth and feigns to share them still, in its present guise as one of us - yet it simply does not care.

Imagine it looming nearer, reading these words in perfect, reflection-like synchrony with yourselves ... and reading your very thoughts, unsettled by these words, as well.

Imagine its laughter.

And pray that we hunters might use this information to silence its mockery.

Cory J. Rookhausen, Esq.

"Teacher, Leader, Friend"

October of 760

On Doppelgangers

We are, I know not how, double within ourselves, with the result that we do not believe what we believe, and we cannot rid ourselves of what we condemn.

- Michel de Montaigne, *Les Essais*

Why doppelgangers?

Some might question - correction: many might question - the appropriateness of granting such extensive analysis to a monstrous threat which, on the face of it (if Miladies will pardon the pun), seems significantly less ghastly or horrific than others which you or the worthy doctor have detailed in the past. By even the most cursory comparison, the doppelganger is a less formidable opponent than any lich, golem or vampire; it lacks the carnivorous habits of the werebeast, hag or ghoul; it in no way demonstrates supernatural powers of a league with the ancient dead, shadow fey, or even the frailest of ghosts.

Moreover, the doppelganger is but one of a variety of imitative monsters - beings which, you'll recall from our past correspondence, we lumped together by the term 'imposters' - which adopt a human guise (or elven, goblin, et cetera) for the purposes of camouflage and deceit. Even weighed against its mimicry-inclined fellow deceivers, the doppelganger seems relatively benign. Murder is not a biological need for its kind: it does not feast upon humans like a wolfwere, nor kill for purposes of reproduction like a red widow, nor slay to obtain fresh 'garments' like a skin-thief. Rather, killing is a tactic it employs strategically, to ensure the individuals whose identity, property or station it seeks to usurp can never re-appear and expose its façade.

In short, while doppelgangers may be monstrous creatures, they do not kill for monstrous purposes. Rather, their motives for murder are - disturbingly - the same ones that tempt wicked members of our own species to murder their fellow-men, whether for profit, passion, or social or political advantage. Doppelgangers, so profoundly inhuman beneath their disguises, nonetheless tend to slay for wholly human reasons, albeit evil ones.

Knowing this, can we hunters undertake the self-righteous pursuit of doppelgangers, with the same forthright certainty with which we stalk a vampire, lycanthrope, or hag? Does hounding their kind not make us hypocrites, for condemning, in them, those base motives which so often undermine and corrupt our own principles...? Moreover, would it not better-serve the collective welfare of humanity to turn our attentions to those monsters of an overtly destructive bent - to the aberrant abominations of Bluetspur, perhaps, or the murk-shrouded perils of the tempestuous seas - rather than squandering effort and resources to ferret out beings whose presence, were they but left to pass unchallenged, would go unnoticed by a calmer, happier world?

Do not be taken in by these fallacies, dear ladies ... indeed, should such questions arise during a doppelganger-hunt, you would be well-served to keep a close eye on whomsoever asks them! Human society condemns and punishes those among us, who let ambition or desire tempt them into murder; doppelgangers' society endorses such conduct, and actively inculcates these practices in their young. Humans pursue status and wealth as active and constructive participants in a wider community, that benefits from their contributions; doppelgangers pirate what others' labors legitimately earn, even as they shatter the bonds of trust and interdependence required for both civic and economic prosperity to thrive.

As humans, we accept that privilege and leadership impose moral responsibilities, toward others of humbler station; as doppelgangers - or, as they style themselves, 'Masters' - they believe acclamation and authority to be their natural birthright, even as they bleed dry those

Introduction

circles they have infiltrated, then slip away to greener pastures as the subverted household, business or government collapses in ruins. Their deceits and self-serving machinations, therefore, wound and destabilize entire communities, not just individuals, and more gravely than any overt brute's isolated feats of savagery.

During a recent business trip to Paridon, I observed first-hand how an entire city's spirit could be traumatized by doppelgangers, and was moved to investigate the creatures' powers and habits. Judicious queries elicited a wealth of information, which I now entrust to you. Be aware, dear ladies, that circumstance forbids me to name many of my primary sources - doppelgangers do not deal gently with 'cattle' who spill their secrets - but I am deeply indebted to them for their generosity and courage, in contributing to this text.

Terminology: Dread vs. Standard Doppelgangers

Unless otherwise stated, all references to "doppelgangers" in this netbook actually refer to dread doppelgangers, described in 3E Ravenloft game products. The glamor-less beings in the Monster Manual, which are rare in the Land of Mists, will be referred to as "standard doppelgangers" in out-of-character sidebars. "Doppelganger (any)" broadly includes all published variants of this race (standard, dread, greater or ethereal), plus the half-doppelganger template (Dragon #313).

For purposes of this text, "changeling" refers to the race of doppelganger-offshoots from Monster Manual III and the Eberron setting, not the shadow-construct Kin of Arak. Changelings should be considered a race in their own right, for game-mechanical purposes, not doppelganger variants.

Other native Ravenloft monsters with "doppelganger" in their names, such as the doppelganger plant from Denizens of Darkness/Dread or mask doppelgangers from the Book of Souls, are not biologically related to true doppelgangers, and such creatures will not be addressed here.

Dungeon Master's Tips: Running Doppelgangers in Ravenloft

When applying Ravenloft's setting-specific rules to scenarios which include doppelgangers, their powers can impact many PC saves and modifiers. These changes may also, if the DM wishes, be applied to other imitative or thought-reading monsters, such as rakshasas or mind flayers.

Fear Saves

So long as a doppelganger's disguise goes unquestioned, its presence modifies Fear saves as if its identity were valid. A doppelganger which infiltrates a group might stage its own death to incite terror (and saves) in those it deceives, or run away "panicked" so that concerned companions will follow it ... straight into a trap. Using detect thoughts, malicious doppelgangers might discern a subject's hidden fears, then deliberately engineer an encounter with the object of terror, thus forcing a Fear save.

Horror Saves

Again, doppelgangers whose disguises are not questioned are treated as if they are who they appear to be, for purposes of Horror saves.

Being suddenly confronted by a duplicate of yourself may merit a Horror save, if the presence of doppelgangers or other imposters was not previously suspected. Identical twins raised in each others' company gain a +6 bonus on this save, and a subject ignorant of her own appearance (e.g. a caliban shut-in who has never seen a mirror) is immune to this effect. Such Horror saves don't apply if the doppelganger unwittingly imitates a person who is, herself, disguised at the time.

If a character witnesses himself - or rather, a doppelganger wearing his form - participating in a scene of horror, a -4 penalty applies to his Horror save. If the witness sees "himself" harming a loved one, the total penalty for both doppelganger and loved one becomes -10... or possibly even worse, if the loved one clearly believes the doppelganger to be the person it impersonates.

If the corpse of a doppelganger-replaced victim is discovered, and recognized as someone whom the witness has "met" since its death, the usual Horror DC for finding a dead body rises by +3. If the doppelganger is with the unsuspecting witness when such a corpse is discovered, in the guise of the person whose body it is, this DC modifier rises to +6. Doppelgangers usually disfigure or dispose of slain victims to hinder identification, but may deliberately exploit the "shock value" of such unsettling discoveries as a demoralizing tactic.

Madness Saves

In addition to invoking Horror checks, particularly malignant doppelgangers are known to employ "gaslighting" as a form of psychological warfare against their enemies. Groups of doppelgangers might engineer a fake 'total catastrophe' to dishearten a bothersome foe, should they learn enough about their opponent to guess what scene will deal such a shattering blow.

Paranoia is by far the most common affliction among those driven insane by doppelgangers. DMs may wish to forego rolling the dice for type of effect, should harassment by the imposters result in a PC's lasting (Moderate or Major) Madness, by defaulting to Paranoia instead. Game effects of Paranoia are as described in the RLPHB, whatever its severity; a Major effect simply entails a greater loss of mental abilities, making it more debilitating and harder to recover from.

Outcast Ratings

A doppelganger takes on the OR modifier of the race it imitates. If exposed, its OR becomes 6 for those who know its true nature, whether or not its natural form is revealed. Its OR reverts to that of its apparent race, if the imposter bluffs its way out of the accusation. A person falsely believed to be a doppelganger also suffers an OR modifier of 6, until such time as she can convince her accusers that she isn't one.


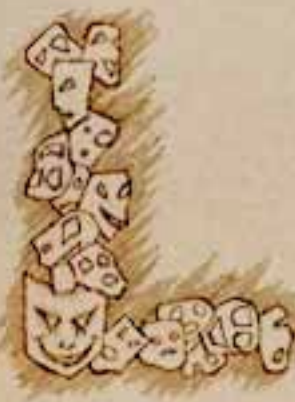
Research Notes





On the Origin of Doppelgangers

*Suspicion all our lives shall be stuck
full of eyes;
Treason is but trusted like the fox,
Who never so tame, so cherished and
locked up,
Will have a wild trick of his ancestors.
- William Shakespeare, "Henry IV"*



On the Origin of Doppelgangers

Whereas many unnatural creatures, particularly the undead, may be traced to one distinct event (e.g. the un-avenged murder that gives rise to a ghost), or to the perverse misapplication of magic or science (zombies, liches, flesh golems), those menaces which claim the status of living races - natural lycanthropes, hags, shadow fey - are trickier to account for. Are they humanity's degenerated offshoots? Its predators, set to stalk us by a Nature less benign than we care to think her? Its nightmares and fancies given tangible form? Or are such anthropocentric musings mere hubris, as such entities are wont to attest: might it be to sustain *their* fancies and appetites, that *we* were created?

Philosophical musings aside, the question of doppelganger origins is rendered still more problematic by the deceptive, concealed nature of the beings in question. Merely determining if doppelgangers are present now, in a given community, can be troublesome in the extreme; how much thornier a task, to trace their genus to its inception? At best, the proposed origins I present below may be deemed hypothetical. True proof may depend on either the expertise of one better-informed in the sciences than myself - no alchemist, I - or on some revelation proffered or wrested from the doppelgangers' own lips.

(That is, if even they are aware of their own beginnings.)

While the mechanism underlying doppelgangers' genesis is debatable, little doubt now exists that the geographic origin-point of their kind lies in Zherisia: that Mist-bound enclave of innovation and urban culture. Historical and oral accounts of such imposters in the Core virtually all post-date Zherisia's first documented contact with the Vistani, in 551. The singular alleged exception, a Barovian anecdote tentatively dated to the 5th century, exhibits the same telltale incongruities and errors that appear in outlanders' tales (see below). Most likely, the narrative of "Nicoletu and the Face-Stealer" initially pertained to some other deceitful byblow of Evil - by context, likely a skin-thief - and its account was later



contaminated by outlanders' misconceptions about doppelgangers. Only in the years after trans-Mist trade between Paridon and the Core became a routine mercantile practice do accurate reports of doppelganger abilities emerge, supporting the conclusion that Zherisia is the homeland of these monsters.

As to how these bizarre creatures arose, several theories have risen to prominence.

Flawed Alchemical Life

The most straightforward hypothesis explaining doppelganger origins and abilities is that they are "products of Zherisia" in a literal sense, as well as an ethnographic one: to wit, that the first of their kind was born in some botched experiment in the creation of synthetic life.

Zherisian alchemical lodges stand on the cutting edge of their discipline, and their philosophical traditions date back centuries before residents of the Core heard tell of Paridon's existence. It is possible - indeed, perhaps even likely - that misbegotten lab-spawn of some stripe have crawled forth

The uses of High Alchemy, and the creation and enhancement of alchemical children (a type of sentient construct), are discussed in Chapter 4 of Van Richten's Arsenal.

On the Origin of Doppelgangers

from the brew-vats of Zherisian alchemists. But could such an abortion of science have given rise to doppelgangers, as we tentatively understand these creatures?

Like Celebrant Clairmont - who, it should please you both to learn, yet remains alive and well, albeit more reticent than ever! - I shall refrain from expounding at length upon "High Alchemy". Her concerns about these Guides' unintended potential to inspire

copycat-creators are not baseless, in my humble estimation. (Please, do try to respect my stance in this, Miladies: a re-hash of our old dragon-pack debate can achieve nothing of value!) I will, however, attest that certain facts I have gathered as to the manner in which alchemically-birthing constructs - so-called 'alchemical children' - can be "refined" and enhanced by masters of that craft, do exhibit curious parallels to doppelgangers' known or suspected traits.

Dread Possibility: Hellinken's Heirs

Standard doppelgangers, as depicted in the Monster Manual, are nearly unheard-of in the Land of Mists, mainly due to fierce competition from so many native monsters that also stalk their victims in a human guise. An "outlander" doppelganger brought in by the Mists is unlikely to survive for long, as it lacks the Glamer special ability of dread doppelgangers, and monsters with the Scent ability (such as wolfweres or lycanthropes) can easily tell that standard doppelgangers aren't as human as they appear to be.

Centuries ago, however, one standard doppelganger did succeed in adapting to a life in Ravenloft: Hellinken, a conniving loner who'd resided in Mordent at the time that realm was incorporated into the Land of Mists. It survived by virtue of Mordent's relative tranquility and few corporeal competitors, and sired a few offspring on human women during its lifetime. Hellinken's various descendents - who may be standard doppelgangers, changelings, half-doppelgangers, or even a mixed assortment of these, as the DM prefers - wisely kept their heads down, using mimicry to survive by blackmail and deception, but refraining as best they could from murder or mayhem. Their clan presently numbers less than a dozen, having kept itself tiny for secrecy's sake.

When Hellinken passed away, unfortunately, it did so too close to Gryphon Manor, and its spirit soon became a captive of Lord Godefroy. Disgusted by this bizarre ghost's alien appearance, the darklord banished Hellinken to the foulest, dampest corner of the cellars and forgot about it for more than a century. However, when he later discovered that other shapechangers lived secretly within his domain, Godefroy lost no time in impressing their clan into service. By acting as his corporeal "hands" at home and his agents beyond Mordent's borders, the doppelkin earn clues to lost caches of wealth hidden in his domain's many abandoned estates. Should they disappoint or defy Godefroy, conversely, they incur fresh torments for the spirit of their clan's revered founder ... torments, which its heirs directly experience, via a psychic link Hellinken's ghost maintains as an involuntary salient ability.

Neither Hellinken nor its descendents are as malicious as their Zherisian counterparts, and they long for freedom from the darklord's control. They realize that humans would exterminate their clan as monsters if their true nature were exposed, however, so dare not openly request aid in breaking away from Godefroy: tricking people into helping them (on their own behalf or when running errands for the darklord) is more their style.

On the Origin of Doppelgangers

Major correlations between known examples of 'enlightened' alchemical children and doppelgangers include: a protean physiognomy, psychic sensitivity, and a motility of bodily fluid not found in mundane creatures. An alchemical child's "blood" is comprised of a modified quintessence - "liquid life force", in a sense - while doppelgangers' blood (as I have seen for myself) exhibits much of the same irritability and responsiveness as does a complete and living organism, if freshly drawn. Creators of alchemical children share a telepathic bond with their creations, comparable to that between an arcane familiar and its master; the imposters peer freely into the thoughts of those around them, discerning how best to deceive and manipulate others. Certain alchemical children are capable of altering their facial features, in the manner of lesser arcane self-transmutation spells; doppelgangers, it is needless to point out, survive by this tactic.

This hypothesis is a concise and philosophically-convenient one, that many Zherisians of limited education take as a given. It allows the common people to brand the imposters that infest their city as unnatural mistakes - as things "never meant to be" - and hence, to look hopefully to a future in which these creatures will cease to be, thus restoring the perceived 'natural order' of their world. It is also a comforting notion, in that it attributes doppelgangers' presence to mishap rather than deliberate malice, either on the doppelgangers' own part or that of their presumptive (and presumably human) creators. To believe their city threatened by mischance, rather than by malign intent, surely helps advocates of this scenario to sleep more soundly.

Unfortunately, the Flawed Alchemical Life model does not endure closer scrutiny. While doppelgangers do share some traits with alchemy-brewed constructs, they lack many features that distinguish alchemical animation from true biological life. Such imposters can and do succumb to hazards - suffocation, corrosives, or starvation - to which alchemical creations are immune.

Secret Society: Brothers of the Open Hand

While most people who enlist in the Zherisian Brothers of the Land are concerned merely with opposing those technologies that condemn laborers to a miserable life of drudgery in dangerous, mechanized factories, a paranoid minority see such increased use of machinery as the first step in a larger agenda. Noting how gadgetry has begun replacing human workers in service roles as well, and taking the widespread belief that doppelgangers are alchemically-created creatures to heart, these hyper-Luddites have concluded that a monolithic conspiracy is at work: one intended to replace the working classes with machines and the upper classes with doppelgangers, all under the command of an all-powerful cabal of evil alchemists and engineers.

Only a small fraction of Zherisia's saboteurs give credence to this overblown conspiracy-theory, but enough of them accept the idea to comprise their own faction-within-a-faction. Unsatisfied by the King of the Slums' leadership, particularly his refusal to target the inventors of machinery for assassination as enemy conspirators, these self-titled "Brothers of the Open Hand" encourage fellow-saboteurs to ramp up the violence they direct against factory loyalists ("collaborators").

Worse, the Open Hand lack their moderate counterparts' aversion to gunpowder and explosives - to them, technology isn't the enemy, the villains controlling it are - and have recently bombed an alchemical Lodge: a disaster which Paridon's authorities passed off as a laboratory accident, to conceal the fact that half the Lodge-members killed or injured were doppelgangers. Needless to say, the slain imposters' clans are furious about this attack, and are now infiltrating the Zherisian Brothers of the Land in order to root out the culprits.

Doppelgangers' capacity to read thoughts is not restricted to any one individual, nor is mental contact two-way in the vast majority of their kind. Even a 'malleable' alchemical child's ability to ape the facial features of others is not a valid comparison: such plasticity may only be conferred (as Celebrant Clairmont's Lodge-brethren attest) if the blood of a doppelganger is an active ingredient in the construct's formulation!

On the Origin of Doppelgangers

While one might posit the first doppelganger was brewed up using blood from some other unnatural shape-changer (perhaps a mimic), to insist that a doppelganger-derived child's polymorphous powers "prove" a close relationship between such exotic creations and the imposters is plainly putting the cart before the horse.

And finally, and most tellingly of all, alchemical children - even aberrant ones - remain constructs, first and foremost. Like golems, even the most lifelike of such artificial creations are incapable, by definition, of biological reproduction. Yet doppelgangers can and do breed, albeit in an unorthodox (and disquieting) manner, solidly disproving this hypothesis.

Stillborn Ascension

The accidental creation of doppelgangers through alchemy may not withstand critical analysis, but a related - and far darker - proposition cannot be easily dismissed. Brewing a new, biologically-viable species through a chance admixture of laboratory chemicals is infeasible; however, the deliberate alteration of an existing race - often, ghastly though it is to contemplate, the human race - to endow abnormal and grotesque traits on living persons, has ample and tragic historical precedent. From the ceremonial disfigurement of excommunicants in G'Henna or the heinous conversion of man into beast (or vice versa) observed in goblins or "broken ones", to whispered rumors surrounding certain favored courtiers in Levkarest, many treacherous pathways exist in our Land, on which one's human nature may be knowingly or forcibly forfeited in transit.

Could doppelgangers' creation have taken place in a comparable fashion, through some unconscionable alteration of human flesh? Magically? Alchemically? Surgically? It is we humans who predominate in Zherisia, even more so than in the Core; it is humans whom these creatures duplicate with greatest frequency, and amongst humans that their lives most commonly begin, as well. Scholars of biology may even argue, on the grounds of their curious procreative habits,

that doppelgangers *are* humans, by conservative definitions - a semantic quibble I find over-finicky - but I'll leave that argument for another day and more pedantic audiences.

Based on my understanding of the Zherisian belief-system - owed entirely to a most charming and erudite lady, whose gracious assistance I regret I cannot duly credit to her name - it is extremely unlikely that doppelgangers, if Zherisian in derivation, would have been produced as mere slaves of human masters, like goblins. While their imitative abilities suggest they might have been augmented to serve as covert assassins, or perhaps spies (a prospect substantiated by their mind-reading abilities), any such modified men could not have been acknowledged publicly, even long after their intended tasks were complete. By Zherisian standards, such base distortion of the human condition - even for tasks as crucial to the nation's security as espionage - would constitute a blasphemy of the vilest order imaginable. Unless their need was desperate (which Zherisia's tranquil pre-Upheaval history does not bear out), or the presumptive creator's psyche was debased and impious beyond measure, a secular motive for converting human subjects into doppelgangers seems vanishingly implausible.

But a philosophical motive - a misguided quest for divine transcendence in-the-flesh - might well be another story, Miladies.

Zherisian spiritualism deifies the essential purity of tri-part human nature - body, mind and soul - and propounds that renouncing all that is flawed, base or inhuman (some say by its moral definition, some its racial) in oneself is the "path to divinity". While more traditional adherents of this philosophy advocate discipline and exercise - physical, mental, contemplative - as a means of achieving that end, splinter-sects of the creed

The philosophy and beliefs of the Divinity of Mankind, Paridon's indigenous belief system, are detailed in the Zherisia Survey.

On the Origin of Doppelgangers

have been known to use alchemical purifiers as a short-cut to incorruptibility ... or to seek the means to render monstrous creatures - or even civilized near-humans, such as dwarves or calibans - fully human, "for their own good". Doppelgangers, themselves, have become targets for such "conversion" attempts, and the fact that such efforts had met with modest success, ritually fixing their specimens in a single human guise, before retaliatory attacks by nonhumans exterminated those responsible, give credence to the idea that at least some vestige or approximation of 'humanity' yet resided in these test subjects.

Could a past sub-sect of the Divinity of Mankind - perhaps an apocalyptic cult, of similar stripe to the present-day "7th Order"- have once taken their aspiration to become the epitome of 'human-ness' literally, and used alchemical permutations to incorporate the thoughts and likeness of all humankind, not solely their individual identities, into their very beings? Holistic purifiers or curatives can alter a body's structure, as your own criminal investigations in Morfenzi showed, Miladies; the judicious applications of purgatives or coagulants might approximate the effects of telepathy, via recollection or the secondary ingestion of purged emotion. Doppelgangers may not descend from alchemical children, but the self-evident similarities between the two need not be wholly coincidental.

If, indeed, the origins of doppelgangers lie in this direction - with a past, wrong-headed attempt to integrate the physical and mental aspects of all Mankind into adherents of a forgotten, heretical Divinity offshoot - then I can only conclude that this foolish endeavor went horribly wrong, divorcing its instigators from humanity rather than 'purifying' their inherent human spirit. Should that be true, it is hardly surprising that the doppelgangers obliterated all traces of a recent sect which aspired to "raise" them to a human condition: unknowingly, agents of the Philosophy of Humanity threatened to reverse the transformation which severed their race from humankind, in the first place! Such an outcome would have revealed the

truth - and shame - of their hidden origin, in a monumental act of hubris and failure.

Or perhaps it is my own humanity which leads me to deem their effort a failed one, and their present, mutable state is precisely what their ancestral sect had desired, all along.

Evolved Parasites

In sharp contrast to the preceding, alchemically-based theories of doppelgangers' origin, another, more naturalistic hypothesis is also promulgated among Paridon's scholars. It dispenses with human incompetence or collusion in the birth of this imposter-race - though it, like the last, traces doppelgangers' man-like physique to a human source - instead attributing their origins to a symbiotic fusion between an erstwhile parasite and its host, purely through organic adaptation.

As previously mentioned, fresh-drawn doppelganger blood exhibits curiously "life-like" behavior. Until coagulation sets in, it ripples gently rather than stagnates; upon touching a hazard (such as an open flame), it 'oozes' away from the threat, even flowing uphill for short distances against the pull of gravity. In some experts' reckoning, this quality links it with the quintessence-blood of alchemical children, but its behavior is still more evocative of another man-mimicking predator: those semi-liquid, blood-feeding aberrations known as "impersonators".

In its natural state, an impersonator is as unlike a doppelganger as any two creatures one could name: it is ooze-like, voiceless, driven solely by appetite, and functions with no more perceptible intelligence than a monkey or clever canine. Its capacity to imitate is not restricted to humanoid forms,

The impersonator was introduced as a 2nd Edition AD&D creature in *Monstrous Compendium: Ravenloft* Appendix I. Its updated statistics appear in the *Denizens of Dread*/ *Darkness* books.

On the Origin of Doppelgangers

but it must siphon off a portion of a victim's blood before it can even attempt to adopt their semblance. When it does mimic its previous prey, it can maintain that imposture for only a matter of hours, before deliquescing into a pool of dense, clot-colored fluid. In this state, it moves only if it

is threatened or starving, or to enfold and paralyze a victim within easy reach.

When an impersonator in its native form moves, the manner of its near-fluidic locomotion is startlingly similar to the way a doppelganger's spilt blood will stream away from a dropped torch or heated metal surface. Also, the mechanism of its feeding -

Dread Possibility: Power of the Blood

Doppelganger blood - called "plasm" in scientific circles - is an extremely peculiar substance. Depending on which origin theory applies in a given campaign, it may even be the source of the doppelganger's shape-shifting powers. Given the recent invention of the sanguine pump (from Van Richten's Arsenal) and Ravenloft's long history of mortals meddling where they should not, it comes as no surprise that one man is trying to use such plasm to attain the powers of a Master.

Philip Weaver (LE male human wizard 5/alchemical philosopher 4) was the child of successful merchants in Mordentshire. Weaver was educated by Lamordian tutors, attended the University of Dementlieu, and finished with an apprenticeship among the alchemists of Zherisia. While in Paridon he learned of the Divinity of Mankind and its philosophy of 'self-improvement', but he decided to take this ideology in a radical new direction. Weaver began using his arcane tricks and alchemical training to physically improve his own body, hoping to become "more than human".

Weaver's most recent, and most difficult, quest is to gain the abilities of a doppelganger. Working in secrecy from a warehouse in the Blackchapel district, Weaver has been kidnapping and holding low-ranking doppelgangers captive. His goal is to eventually transplant their blood into himself, theoretically becoming a doppelganger himself in the process, or at least acquiring a measure of their shape-changing powers.

At the moment, he has four captives - sufficient for the experiment - but small injections of their plasm into his own veins has failed to achieve the desired outcome. Weaver now believes that in order to gain the benefits of shape-changing, he needs to drain all of his own blood so the human and doppelganger humors will not war against one another. To survive this, he's been working on a kind of freezing device, thinking that if he can lower his body temperature far enough without killing himself, he can survive the minute or so necessary to extract his own blood and infuse his vessels with doppelganger plasm.

Of course, he needs to test the process first.

Weaver is a handsome, distinguished man in his mid-forties, dressed like a Zherisian gentleman. He is always accompanied by two bodyguards, actually enlightened alchemical children which he created. His warehouse is guarded by additional enlightened children, as well as a few human and caliban thugs. Previous experiments with troll blood has given Weaver regeneration 5 (pierced by fire or acid), and grafts of golem muscle have given him Strength 21. What happens should he actually succeed at his plasm-transfusion is left up to the DM. It might simply be a horrible death, or the subject may become a changeling, a doppelganger, or something even more eclectic.

On the Origin of Doppelgangers

paralysis of its intended prey, followed by a painless extraction of blood that kills only gradually - is likewise similar to the mode of predation practiced by the larval sea spawn: a parasitic life form that invades and seizes control over its prey, enslaving its victims' bodies even as it devours their tissues.

Might a Zherisian strain of impersonator, in the course of adapting to feed upon humans, have developed the ability to invade its victim's circulatory vessels, much as the sea spawn larva penetrates and occupies a host-victim's cranial vault?

Impersonators are not large creatures, in their undisguised state. Such an "endoparasite" (as a science-savvy contact of mine calls such life forms) could physically inhabit the blood vessels and other fluidic spaces within the body of its victim, feeding on newly-formed blood corpuscles as they issue forth from the bone marrow. Provided the impersonator-parasite can duplicate the vital transport-functions performed by blood - Mordenheim's *Enigma Vitae* makes this sound feasible to me, but perhaps consultation with Dr. Van Richten's old medical colleagues could confirm it? - the host's other life processes could still be maintained over the long term, its disease-fighting white corpuscles being consumed too quickly to inhibit or expel the intruder.

Such a case of parasitic adaptation benefits the impersonator, as it need no longer revert to a liquefied state after feeding, having secured a permanent disguise in the form of its inhabited host. As the host's nervous system need not be disabled by its occupancy, the impersonator may "ride along" inside a thinking, speaking vessel, safely carried past obstacles its dim-witted, non-parasitic counterparts would find insurmountable. Oddly, the victim-cum-host would likewise gain certain advantages from this outcome. Not only will the impersonator-parasite refrain from fatally draining its host, but the internal aberration's mimicry-power could potentially be shared with its carrier.

A free-living impersonator extracts blood from prey by extending minute tendrils of its substance into the pores of its victims' skin.

An internally-living impersonator, taking cues from its host's brain, could invert this process, protruding such tendrils through the skin to coat its host's surface, then altering the appearance of those extrusions (within the structural limitations of the host's humanoid frame) to copy other creatures.

Although radically different from both alchemical theories, this scenario accounts for the vast majority of biological traits which doppelgangers exhibit: their shape-changing; the bizarre behavior of their blood; the curious, rubbery consistency of their flesh, transfigured by prolonged melding with a liquefied life form.

The chief failing of this hypothesis is that the supernatural traits of their species are not explained by such a symbiosis. It tells us nothing of doppelgangers' mind-reading, nor of their curious "glamer", nor of why - if, indeed, their bodies are camouflage for parasitic impersonators - their true shapes in adulthood should deviate so markedly from their human-like appearance in childhood.

(Granted, the Stillborn Ascension theory fails to reconcile that little detail, as well!)

Among Zherisians, the Evolved Parasite model is favored by scholars of a skeptical bent, who prefer to attribute doppelgangers' thought-reading abilities to a mundane knack for interpreting body language and anticipating others' trains of logic, rather than genuine supernatural power. Other adherents of this theory believe the creatures' ability to be psychic in nature - the obscure Thaani word "psionic" often arises in discussions of this topic - and attribute their power to a stimulatory effect upon psychically-sensitive regions of the human brain, when normal blood's life-sustaining functions are supplanted by the parasite's.

As an addendum, it perhaps bears mention that there is a standing municipal bounty in Paridon for the destruction of free-living impersonators, and has been for the past two centuries. Either the doppelgangers are aware of this theory, and wish to expunge any possible link to such an ignominious origin, or they simply will not abide competition from what are really little more than well-camouflaged oozes.

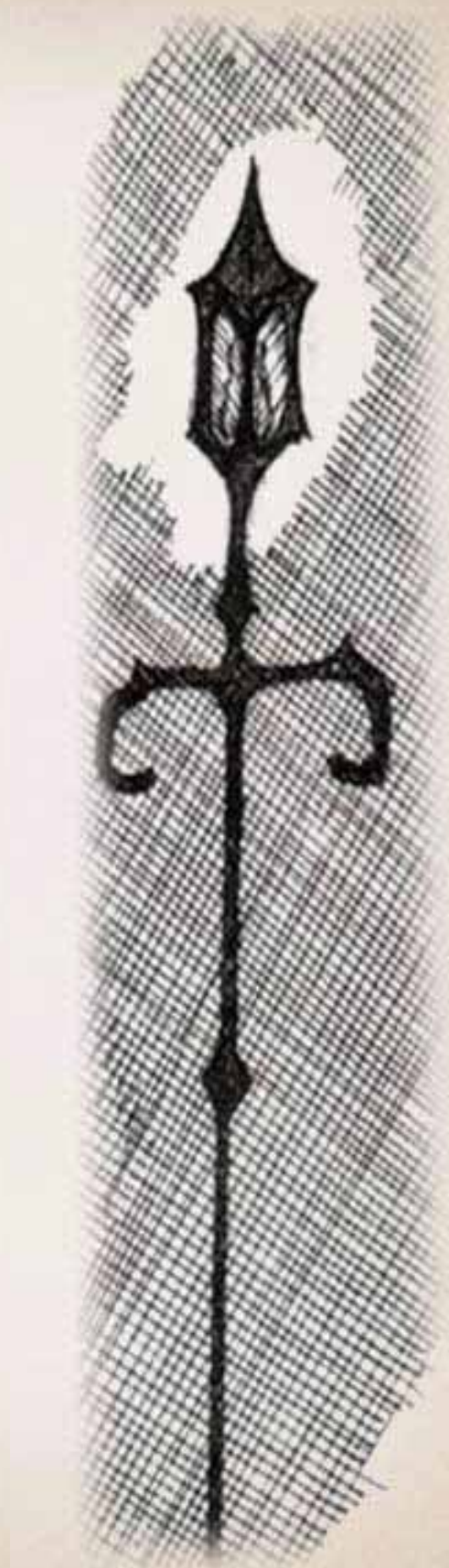
On the Origin of Doppelgangers

Outlander Origins

As with fiends or the shadow fey, a strident minority attest that doppelgangers - if not the vast majority of creatures in our world, natural and supernatural - may be traced to some obscure realm or reality "outside" the Mists' expanse. So-called "outlanders", of whom your own work took note, speak of regions unlike our familiar Land, yet beset by threats easily recognized by hunters. Save for the odd absurdity (such as ravening ghouls reduced to dust by the wave of a clergyman's hand), these tales plainly depict the same monsters we know, despite their dubious beyond-the-mists context.

However, such "outlandish" accounts of doppelgangers may easily be discredited by any informed listener. Misleadingly, most outlanders will routinely profess that doppelgangers mimic a person's guise including all clothing and equipment. Supposedly, such beings can neither hand over items in their possession while so-disguised, nor even remove their garb, for both are alleged to be physical extensions of their bodies! This dangerous fallacy has led many an outlander - and not a few natives of our own Land, who naïvely took such poppycock for truth - to a sticky end, so these fallacious tales must be debunked when overheard, for the sake of all. Likewise, those outlanders professing that doppelgangers are not so malign as generations of their grisly misdeeds attest - usually, the same overly-trusting souls who ludicrously insist werebears are benevolent! - must be relieved of these callow misconceptions, for their own safety and the protection of all others who might heed their folly.

As Van Richten ever avowed, it is by discerning the truth, however hidden amidst error and superstition, that we restore light - and hope - to a benighted world.



Excerpts from the Diary of Deborah Creede

November 21st, 732 BC 12:30am

It feels like hours since the screams started. I could barely hear them at first, as if they were coming from far away, or as if the sounds were muffled, like light barely permeating a thick fog. When the shrieks grew louder, little doubt remained of what it was: somewhere, and not far off, a woman was screaming in panic and pain.

Something horrible - unthinkable - had to be happening.

I tried to tell myself that the police must already have been alerted, or that one of the neighbors would help the poor woman. But now that the screams have faded to weak, wordless sobs and whimpers, I've listened, and the house and streets remain eerily still. Surely I cannot be the only one to have heard her anguish?

I know that I should get help, but I am too afraid to leave the sanctuary of my flat, afraid that whatever dire creature is out there will seize me as well, the second I open the door.


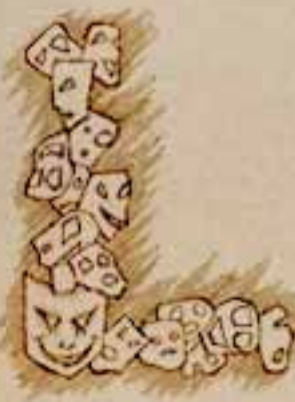
I tried to muffle the horrible screams with my pillows as I lay cringing on my bed, but to no avail; it almost seemed as if the sounds reverberated directly inside my head. Then, when the screams echoed so loudly it felt as if my head would break apart, I began to feel it. I felt completely helpless, powerless to move. My limbs would not respond to me any more, as if invisible bonds held me down. And I felt pain - nearly unbearable pain - as if something sharp were tearing its way through my skin, all over my body. Unable to bear the agony, I shrieked aloud, and heard my own screams echoed by the piercing wails redounding in my head.



On Doppelganger Physique

*Thus it appeared, I say, but it was not.
It was my antagonist - it was Wilson,
who then stood before me in the
agonies of his dissolution. His mask
and cloak lay, where he had thrown
then, upon the floor. Not a thread in all
his raiment - not a line in all the
marked and singular lineaments of his
face which was not, even in the most
absolute identity, mine own!*

- Edgar Allan Poe, "William Wilson"



On Doppelganger Physique

Though seldom seen - not even, evidently, by their own kind: in not one case I could find has a private gathering of these imposters ever been caught unawares, in their natural state, even by such discreet observation-methods as scrying or ethereal reconnaissance - doppelgangers do possess a "true form", in addition to the innumerable false guises they adopt over the course of a lifetime. Most often this form is witnessed in the aftermath of the doppelganger's death, for such imposters, much like werebeasts, revert to their natural appearance if slain. The prudent hunter will always watch for such a shift of forms, before trusting that a fallen imposter's "death" is not a ruse. Likewise, **confirm your kill** before leaving a doppelganger "corpse" unwatched, Miladies, even if such a reversion does take place: these creatures are both treacherous and resilient, so if gravely wounded may feign collapse and transformation prematurely, thus buying time to crawl to safety ... or strike you down from behind.

Playing Dead

A doppelganger reduced to less than 1 hp / HD by an opponent may opt to "play dead", collapsing with the blow and assuming a superficially-lifeless appearance. Such a trick is adjudicated like a feint attempt against its "killer", if performed in melee, or like a standard Bluff if the "killing" stroke came from a ranged attack. If a spell is the pretended cause of "death", witnesses oppose the doppelganger's Bluff check with either Sense Motive or Spellcraft checks, whichever skill is most favorable to them.

A mature doppelganger automatically reverts to its natural shape at -10 hit points. It sometimes passes through 1d6 other false guises it has recently worn, in the process of expiring; this happens about 25% of the time, or whenever the DM wishes to drop clues and/or give dramatic closure to a scenario in this way.

Unconscious Shapechange

A doppelganger which is rendered unconscious must make a Fort save to maintain its disguise. If unconsciousness results from a non-lethal attack, or being reduced to negative hit points, the save DC equals the number of hit points of damage delivered by the felling blow. If unconsciousness results from a poison or disease - whether as a direct consequence of the toxin or illness, or due to hp loss or ability damage - the standard Fort DC for the poison or disease applies.

Most doppelgangers are well aware of their susceptibility to these effects, and take extreme pains to conceal themselves from witnesses if they fall seriously ill, even to the extent of pretending to "die" from their ailment, then stealing a new identity once they have recovered.

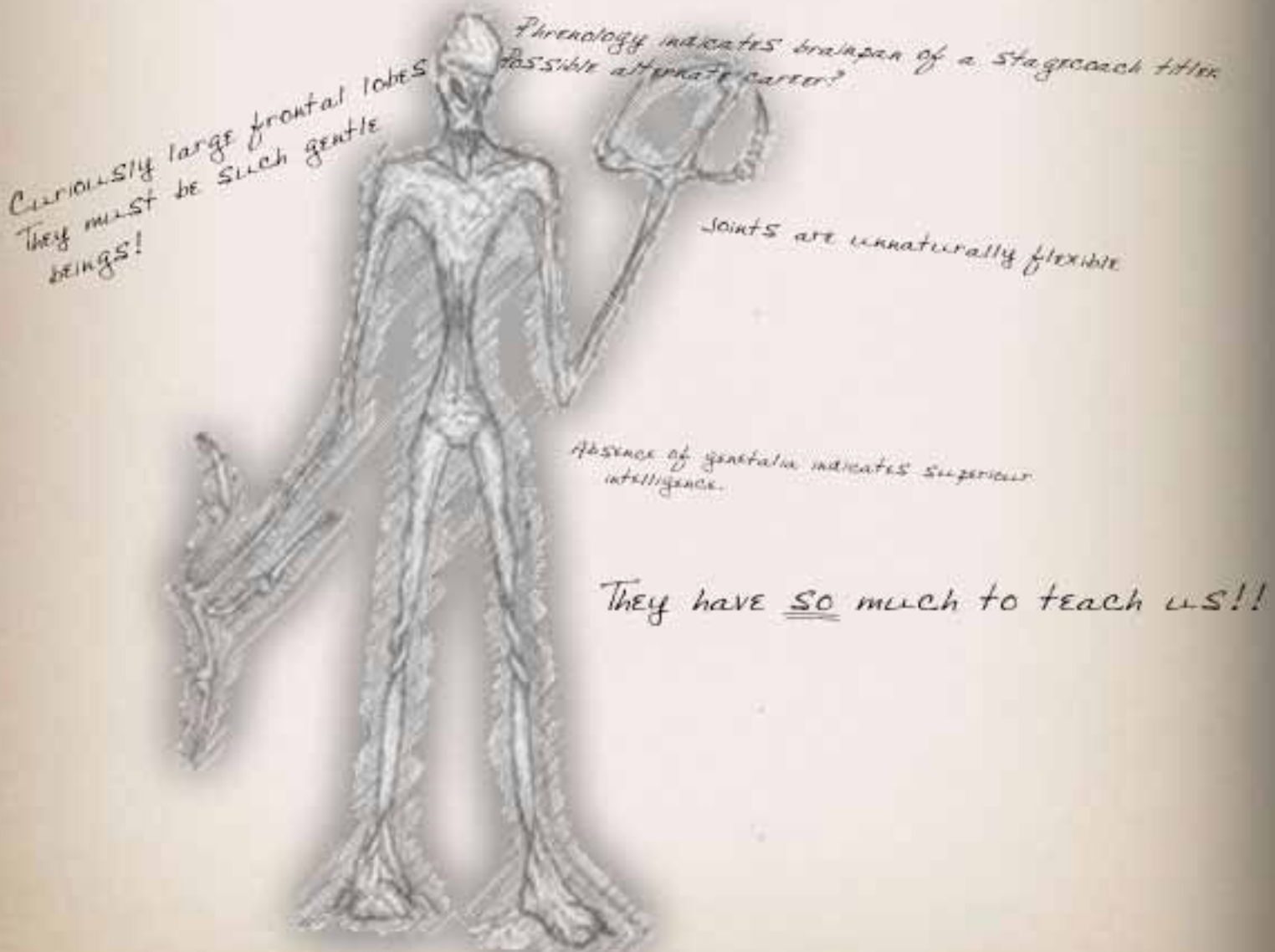
Its true form may also be exposed, in the event an imposter succumbs to an incapacitating toxin, such as Borcan coma spores, oil of taggit, or those soporific bolt-venoms favored by certain outcast arachnophiles among the shadow fey. More violent causes of unconsciousness, such as cranial blows from a sap or a near-fatal brush with drowning, are only rarely sufficient to disrupt a doppelganger's existing disguise. Spells designed specifically to force shapechanged creatures' transformations are much more dependable, for this purpose, than spells that merely render their targets senseless. Effects which dazzle or stun their targets, rather than induce unconsciousness, are inadequate to disrupt a doppelganger's façade.

Once revealed, a doppelganger's physique is externally unnerving and internally bizarre. Going through conventional channels, few descriptions of their anatomy are available, as academic study of the imposters is as yet an emergent science, and a saboteur systematically destroyed all pertinent records kept by the Paridon coroner's office, some five years back.

By a rare stroke of luck, however, the opportunity to stand as witness to the postmortem examination of a freshly-slain specimen came about on my recent Zherisian sojourn: quite an extraordinary event, given that these creatures routinely and discreetly dispose of their own dead.

Thus, the brief forensic report to follow (as compiled by my ever-obliging local contacts) is corroborated by my personal observations and sketches.

Please, pardon the lamentable quality of the latter, dear ladies: I fear that such meager artistic leanings as I might lay claim to lie in another direction entirely.



[Anatomical sketch (clearly not a normal doppelganger; possibly a related species?) and comments by anthropologist Gordon W. Pettigrew, committed to Paridon Sanitarium in 738; private journals recently sold at auction - Rookhausen]

On Doppelganger Physique

Necropsy Report (summation)

Specimen #01-7-4D/Xeno

June 4, 760 BC

The specimen's frame is humanoid, measuring five feet, six inches from soles to crown - in every example ever documented, total height is within ½ inch of this - and weighs in at 132 lbs. Postmortem muscle-contraction had contorted its limbs into a pugilistic pose, similar to what is seen in deaths from fire or intense heat. Cadaveric liver-temperature is 9° higher than predicted by its time of expiration, implying either a higher-than-usual living body temperature or a slower rate of cooling due to its dense integument. Livor mortis - postmortem descent of blood to lower body regions under force of gravity - is absent, implying that circulatory activity did not wholly cease until its body fluids coagulated in situ, rather than at death.

At the time of its apprehension, Specimen #01-7-4D had been dressed in the outerwear of a human day-laborer, threadbare and three sizes too large for its untransformed physique. (When alive, its garments appeared to be of far better fit, quality, and repair than was actually the case.) Although shoddy, its clothing was meticulously clean, bearing no trace of sweat or body-soil. Cheaply-made slippers adorned its feet; crude lacings bound these loosely to its ankles, perhaps to ensure that a sudden shift to a smaller form would not inadvertently leave its footwear behind. A search of its many pockets revealed a bewildering accumulation of rubbish - string, chunks of wood, handkerchiefs, small tools, scraps of blank paper and outdated newsprint, costume jewelry, etc - in addition to a few dozen copper pence, several concealed blades (knife and razor), a wire strangling-cord, and a tin replica of a constable's badge.

The cadaver is tautly sheathed by an ash-gray, smooth hide, which glistens as if coated with grease, yet feels like supple, dry leather. Musculature and blood vessels are starkly defined by the snugness of its skin, which exhibits slight wrinkling (indicative of age, in we humans; its significance, if any, in doppelgangers is undetermined) around the joints, the lips, and especially the eyes. A number of fist- and palm-shaped bruises, inflicted in the course of the specimen's apprehension, show up as blue-green splotches amidst the surrounding grayness. No hairs of any sort - not even eyelashes - are evident, nor moles, freckles or scars. Its

Clothing and Glamer

Thanks to their Glamer ability, dread doppelgangers seldom need to concern themselves with the true appearance of their clothing, favoring garments that are loose-fitting enough to accommodate a wide range of body proportions. Laces are frequently used to ensure they don't lose or become entangled in their garb, should they need to change in haste to a smaller form. A doppelganger's pockets are typically stuffed with a variety of items to which it can apply its glamer, replicating whatever equipment, documents, or trinkets it might find useful in its various roles. Zherisian doppelgangers typically go armed, using glamer to disguise their weaponry as harmless knick-knacks when they enter locales where these are not allowed.

Doppelganger skin has no sweat or oil glands, and they quickly replace any clothing which grows soiled or stained, thus ensuring that lingering odors will not betray their impostures. Attempts to track a doppelganger by using the Scent ability suffer a -4 circumstance penalty, if the creature attempting to pick up its trail has nothing but discarded (sweat-free) clothing from which to learn its aroma. This penalty does not apply if the tracker has directly smelled the imposter itself (e.g. if a watchdog catches the doppelganger trespassing in her home).

On Doppelganger Physique

tapered fingers and toes lack nails, but its hide grows thickened and coarse on its digits and joints, and is heavily-callused - suited to the fisticuffs these beings resort to, fighting weaponless - on its gnarled knuckles.

Both arms, the region of the face between its eyes and mouth, and its hands and feet are disproportionately elongated, such that its fingertips are of a level with its knees, and the tip of its chin descends to the neckline. Dissection of the limbs and scalp reveals that its skeletal structure is not wholly mineralized, as with human adults, but retains infantile "soft spots" where its cranial and facial bones attach, as well as juvenile growth plates of cartilage in the long bones of all four appendages. These may assist in extending or compressing its frame, while imitating subjects of varied heights and postures; it likely accounts for the marked elongation of its arms and face also, as the weight of such dependent body parts has apparently stretched these softened areas of its skeleton over time.

In one of doppelgangers' most notorious anatomical oddities, no external sign of gender is apparent, nor has the dissection of the pelvic cavity revealed any corresponding internal organs. Additional features associated with procreation's outcome are likewise wanting: in its native state, Specimen #01-7-4D possesses neither nipples nor navel. Its overall proportions are androgynous, more muscular in its physique than a woman, yet less rugged and angular of frame than a man. Pelvic architecture adheres to the non-childbearing, masculine design - optimized for efficient locomotion - while its urinary tract is feminine by default. Dissected, its lungs and larynx lie at the midpoint between human male and female proportions. As this specimen (like most others of its kind witnessed by humans) did not assume its natural shape until its death, it is undetermined whether its undisguised voice would better approximate a man's speech, or a woman's.

Appearance

As a minor side-effect of their bodies' plasticity, doppelgangers' hide never suffers lasting scars. Tattoos, brands, and other markings that would be permanent on humanoid flesh likewise do not leave any lingering impression on the imposter's real skin. Drastic injuries such as severed digits or limbs do not grow back, but heal over flawlessly, leaving smooth skin in place of scar-tissue, just as if the lost appendage had been absent since birth.

Doppelgangers' skin wrinkles with age, but only at joints, lips and eyes. Prior to Sodo's rise to power, elder doppelgangers in Zherisia would prove their seniority by exposing their eyes and the dense furrows of age which surrounded them.

Flexability

Due to the extreme flexibility of its skeletal structure, a doppelganger receives a +4 racial bonus on Escape Artist checks whenever it is in its natural form.

Vocal Organs

A doppelganger's larynx can replicate the complete range of vocal tones achievable by humanoid races, from a halfling child's piping squeal to the deepest menacing rumble of a hulking bugbear he-warrior. Doppelgangers need not change forms to take advantage of this versatility, but may mimic voices that differ from their current (false or natural) shape with a Disguise check, opposed by the hearer's Listen skill. Mimicking the voice of a false identity it is presently 'wearing' does not require a separate check, as both tone and manner of speech are already incorporated into the Disguise check for its impersonation as a whole.

A doppelganger that speaks in its natural form's undisguised vocal tones sounds androgynous and plainly nonhuman. Its voice is very nasal, owing to the elongation of facial bones and sinuses.

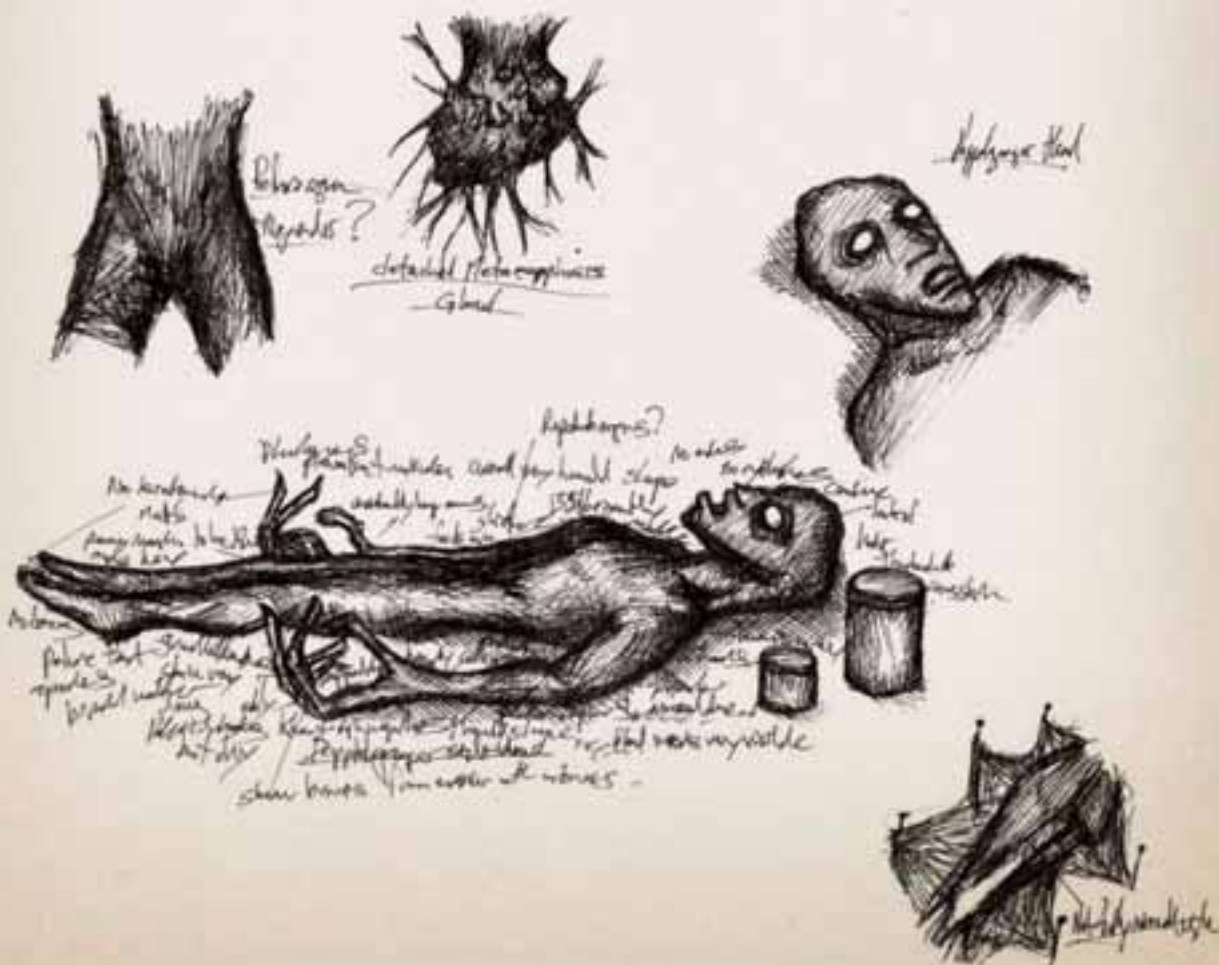
Digestion

Dread doppelgangers' digestion is so inefficient in their natural state that malnutrition is a real concern, should their shape-changing ability be impaired while they are in their true forms. Solid food can be chewed only with discomfort, and provides negligible nutrition to a doppelganger in its true form; if eaten, such fare causes nausea for 1d4 hours, followed by a prolonged bout of vomiting. An imposter trapped in its natural shape for the long term will succumb to starvation, as per the DMG, if it receives nothing but solid food to eat.

If a dread doppelganger eats solid food in its humanoid guise, then reverts to its true form without waiting at least ten minutes for the meal to settle, it immediately suffers the nauseated condition. This nausea lasts for one hour if the creature remains in its natural form, but ends immediately if the doppelganger assumes a guise that is equipped to digest such victuals.

A liquid diet of beverages and soups can sustain a dread doppelganger in its natural form, and an imposter unable to take on a humanoid shape can still make use of potions, alchemical mixtures, and other ingested fluids normally.

A doppelganger's teeth are far too small and loose-rooted for bite attacks. Nevertheless, captive imposters forced into their natural shape have been known to bare their teeth like wild animals, spewing vicious threats to "eat" their captors. This ruse is intended to make them seem so savage that their jailers will underestimate their ingenuity, giving them an opportunity to escape.



On Doppelganger Physique

Oral and digestive anatomy are surprisingly simplified, even regressive. The gut itself is barely three-quarters the length of a human's, the stomach's volume just over a quart at maximum distension, and the wall of the alimentary canal is less muscular throughout. With its internal digestive apparatus so diminished, the caved-in, starveling outward appearance of the specimen's abdomen is accounted for. Its teeth are reduced to 20 in number, with a simple, peg-like shape. Though superficially pointed like a carnivore's, dissection reveals their dental roots are far too shallow to permit such a diet. No differentiation into specialized tooth types (incisors, molars, et cetera) is evident, and its upper and lower dentition fail to interlock efficiently when the jaw is closed. All this indicates that the doppelganger's natural form is poorly equipped to consume and extract nutrients from common foodstuffs, possibly obliging it to eat in human shape.

Examination of the thoracic organs reveals additional, although subtler, anomalies. The doppelganger's lungs appear normal, but its heart is unusually compact - roughly half the mass of an equivalently-sized human's - mainly due to reduced myocardial muscle in the ventricle walls. Where a human heart has four internal valves, the specimen's heart has but two: the tricuspid and mitral valves, that prevent its contractions from driving the blood backwards rather than forward. Semilunar valves - those which, in humans, stop suction from dragging blood back into the heart between its contractions - are absent, and veins

Distinguishing Heartbeat

A doppelganger's heartbeat can be distinguished from that of a normal humanoid with a DC 15 Profession (medicine) check or DC 20 Heal check. A DC 20 Listen check, made while resting an ear against the doppelganger's bare chest or back, is needed as well; proper use of a stethoscope (detailed below) reduces the Listen check's DC to 10. Failure on the Heal or Profession skill check indicates the creature's strange heartbeat is mistaken for a heart murmur, stenosis, or other heart-valve abnormality. Some doppelgangers intentionally let a doctor "diagnose" a false guise as suffering from heart problems, shortly before staging the adopted persona's death from cardiac arrest and moving on to another identity.

Stethoscope: CL 9, 15 gp, Craft (jewelry or metalwork) DC 20, Weight ¼ lb.

If used to listen to sounds from within the body, this medical device provides a +2 circumstance bonus on Profession (medicine) checks to diagnose most cardiovascular, respiratory, or digestive ailments. It also gives a +2 competence bonus to Open Lock checks when working locks of Good or Amazing quality, and Disable Device checks that involve complex clockwork mechanisms (DM's choice). Applied to a door or wall, it halves the barrier's increase to the DC of a Listen check made to hear what is happening beyond.

In addition to detecting a doppelganger's unusual heartbeat, stethoscopes permit Listen checks to locate parasites such as grave scarabs, carrion stalker larvae, death's head seedlings or sea spawn minions inside a person's body. Pinpointing such an infestation provides a +3 bonus on Heal checks to extract, or a +3 attack bonus to strike at, the parasite, whichever means of destruction is necessary. This Listen check is opposed by the parasite's Move Silently check.

Listening with a stethoscope is a standard action. If used on a living subject, the patient must be cooperative, immobile (bound, unconscious, etc), or pinned.

On Doppelganger Physique

Circulatory System

Because their hearts are not the only driving force to keep blood flowing, doppelgangers are able to temporarily halt their heartbeat and pulse, relying on their blood's ability to move itself, for up to 1 minute per point of Constitution they possess. Breathing does not stop, but an imposter that "plays dead" can hold its breath for up to 2 rounds per point of Constitution, as per DMG rules for suffocation.

A doppelganger can only stop its heart when it is lying down or seated, and it may only engage in purely mental actions (listening, reading minds, concentrating) if its heart is stopped. Any action that requires moving under its own power - even lifting a finger - instantly starts both pulse and heartbeat up again. Voluntarily stopping its heart is a move action. If a doppelganger has no heartbeat or pulse and is not breathing, a DC 25 Heal check or DC 20 Profession (medicine) check is needed to detect that it still lives. A badly wounded doppelganger ($\frac{1}{2}$ hp or less) continues to bleed, giving a +4 circumstance bonus on such checks.

A dying doppelganger will reflexively stop its heart (although not its breathing), causing itself to automatically become stable, when at -1 to -9 hit points. It is still unconscious, and will die after a number of minutes equal to its Constitution score, when its moving blood's ability to sustain it is exhausted. This reflex does, however, buy more time for its clan-mates or other help to arrive.

throughout the body also lack the valves which normally ensure blood's journey cannot become stalled along the way.

This curious design has the effect of giving doppelgangers a distinctly different heartbeat from that of healthy humans: a difference which can seldom be discerned without a stethoscope, yet is quite distinctive to the trained ear, if so-equipped.

The curious motility of doppelganger blood likely accounts for all these discrepancies, as contractions of the heart are not the only force which propels circulation in these beings. Rather, a doppelganger's heart only drives fluid through the arteries; from there, its blood propels itself onward through the capillaries and veins, under its own power. No backflow is possible in such a system, so semilunar or venous valves are not needed.

Self-propelled blood may likewise help to explain doppelgangers' rumored resistance to precision strikes aimed at vital organs, if their circulatory fluid actively holds itself within the bloodstream to curtail bleeding. Certainly, these cardiovascular oddities must assist their proven ability to mimic, not only the living, but lifeless corpses as well, often so completely as to deceive Zherisia's best medical professionals.

In a well-documented deviation from human norms, the facial bones of Specimen #O1-7-4D are greatly elongated, increasing the span between eyes and mouth to nearly five inches. As the zygomatic arches and mandibular angles are not displaced from their usual sites, this stretches its lower face into a triangular configuration, drawing the lips (individually thin, yet wider side-to-side than a human's) into a rather unsettling rictus grimace. It lacks actual eyebrows, but well-defined bony ridges are situated in their place above the orbits. The dependent chin is squared off at the bottom. Nasal elongation is confined to the bridge only, so both nostrils and alae lie within normal human ranges of variance; the distance between nasal septum and upper lip is particularly marked. The forehead is rather low and

On Doppelganger Physique

A Foreign Anatomy Re-Visited

Due to these creatures' exotic physiology, non-doppelgangers' attempts to use Heal or Profession (medicine) to treat a doppelganger they believe to be humanoid suffer a -8 circumstance penalty (applied secretly by the DM). If the imposter's true nature is known to them, the penalty drops to -6. Doppelgangers using these skills to treat their own kind suffer no penalty.

If a humanoid providing care has 8 or more ranks in Knowledge (dungeoneering) or Knowledge (nature), has monstrous humanoids for a favored enemy, or knowingly has a doppelganger for a nemesis (as per the avenger PrC of Van Richten's Arsenal), the penalty on medical treatment is halved. If more than one of these qualities is true of the caregiver, no penalty applies.

This information updates and replaces information from the "A Foreign Anatomy" sidebar on p. 33 of the Zherisia Survey.

narrow, though the skull broadens at the back to a width slightly greater than those of the most dolichocephalic humans¹.

Here, as elsewhere on its body, the specimen's skin hugs the underlying musculature very tightly, and removal of facial integument reveals that said musculature is far more intricate than in true men. This likely allowed the creature, in life, to manipulate its facial features to a greater extent than ourselves; indeed, even the smaller facial bones (not fused, as recorded above) were evidently subject to modest shifts of position, changing length of nose, breadth of cheekbones, et cetera. Examined under magnification using imported Lamordian optics, a minute slice of skin taken from the left cheek of #01-7-4D contains a superabundance of minute muscles - similar to, but many times more plentiful than, the human arrector pili muscles responsible for goosebumps - that anchor the epidermis to deeper tissue layers, possibly to assist its generation of feigned wrinkles, blemishes and scars.

The specimen's eyes are deeply-recessed, smaller than is average for a human, and eerily monochromatic: neither iris nor pupil are distinguishable, and what seems at first glance to be the white of sclera is revealed, upon dissection, to be a milky discoloration of ocular fluid. In truth, the entire exterior surface of the eyeball appears to be transparent, save its posterior wall, which is lined by reflective pigment behind the retina, a feature quite often seen in calibans and other dark-sighted species. Curiously, on preliminary examination soon after its demise, the doppelganger's eyes reportedly retained their superficial semblance of humanity, though other features reverted to type immediately after death. With the passage of time, this outward veneer faded, leaving its eyes as transparent globes of pallid humors.

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1. Craniometric analysis associates skull proportions exhibited by Specimen #01-7-4D with a high degree of mental function, whereas its facial features are, by the classification system presented by L. M. Broso's *The Criminal Type* (pub. 748), indicative of an atavistic character incompatible with rational thought. This seeming contradiction between such well-respected anthropometric sciences can easily be reconciled, when one recalls the bestial cunning this creature routinely applied, in acting out its race's inherent criminality: a fact which - as in comparable studies of goblin or halfling skull conformation - decisively proves its innate inferiority to Man. - R. K. [*Ah, Zherisians!* - Rookhausen]

On Doppelganger Physique

Shapechange in Natural Form

A doppelganger's shapechanging ability is primarily magical, but its physiognomy can be highly plastic even if its Change Shape power is unavailable to it (e.g. in an antimagic field). If one of the imposters is trapped in its natural form, it can use facial and skin muscles to shape its features to resemble a person it has previously imitated via Change Shape. This is not enough to allow it a Disguise check - its features remain hairless and gray, and its eyes and ears do not change along with the rest of its face - but it can be used to help it plead for mercy by adopting a childlike or otherwise inoffensive appearance, or to quickly show allies what the heroes who exposed its true form looked like. To adopt an appearance by muscle-power, alone, is tiring for the imposters, so a doppelganger that takes on a resemblance in this manner can do so for no more than one minute at a stretch, before it has to rest its face for at least ten minutes.

If a doppelganger makes its face appear less menacing, then successfully conveys the impression it is truly pathetic (Bluff check, modified for listeners' level of wariness as per the PHB), it can reduce its OR by 3 for Innocents, or by 1 for non-Innocents who know nothing of doppelgangers' treacherous conduct and/or are inclined to give it the benefit of the doubt (DM's call).

Changing Colors

Doppelgangers' eyes and skin contain pigment-sacs called chromatophores, similar to those of an octopus or cuttlefish. In life, consciously manipulating these sacs and the muscles embedded in their skins lets the imposters control which forms they adopt when their Change Self ability is put to use. Adolescent doppelgangers need about a year of practice to achieve a reliable degree of control over these structures, and Sodo's inability to maintain a single form arose because he can no longer direct these muscles and pigment-sacs for more than a few seconds at a time.

When a doppelganger reverts to its true form, the chromatophores in its skin automatically shift to an even, matte gray color, but those of its eyes remain subject to its unconscious influence, even in its natural shape. This means that a living doppelganger in its native state will have the same eye color as does one of its false guises: its chosen favorite, if it has one (as per the Psychology chapter), or else the last such shape it wore before shifting into its true form. Indeed, eye color is - along with age-wrinkles or ears - one of the few means by which doppelgangers in their true forms can tell one another apart, in the absence of mental cues or spoken names.

Upon death, doppelgangers' ocular chromatophores begin leaking pigment into the interior of the eyeball. Within ten minutes of dying, their former eye color becomes unrecognizable, and within an hour each eye's tissue has turned transparent; thus, the eyeball appears milky from the fading pigments trapped inside. Hunters wishing to use eye color as a clue to figure out whom a slain doppelganger has been impersonating must take note of this trait quickly after its death.

Doppelgangers whose Change Shape ability is suppressed cannot control their chromatophores, only their muscles. Therefore they are stuck with gray skin, and the eye color of their favorite or most recent guise.

On Doppelganger Physique

The pointed, out-jutting ears of Specimen #O1-7-4D are of particular interest, as tracings of their auricles' configuration show clear deviations from elven pinnae, and several elements of their adhesion to the temporal bone likewise call into question the Chadswick/Weaver hypothesis that the two species are, in fact, biologically akin. Comparison with the ear-tracings of four other doppelganger specimens - the entirety of our branch's archive, given how seldom their remains can be salvaged for study - reveals #O1-7-4D's ears to be virtually indistinguishable from those of #O6-2-1D, killed by foreign adventurers in September of 742. This finding is potentially of great importance, as none of the other specimens collected to date have exhibited such similarity. While elves and doppelgangers may not, in truth, be related, it is entirely possible that O1-7-4D is an actual lineal descendent of O6-2-1D.

Internal ear structures of #O1-7-4D show distinct deviations from those of humans, such as an absence of wax-producing glands, and semicircular canals configured more like a squirrel's or monkey's. The latter may, in part, account for these creatures' agility, if their sense of balance is more precisely-defined than that of Man. The cochlea better approximates the human norm.

Extracting the brain of Specimen #O1-7-4D proved to be laborious, as its cranium is not so loosely-fused as its facial bones, and cranial plates are exceptionally thick. Once revealed, it is of a size with Zherisian brains, yet conspicuously unlike them in arrangement. The prefrontal cortex - site of maturity, persistence, and self-discipline - is drastically reduced, save in the upper portions associated with tactical reasoning and social functioning. The primary motor cortex, out of which commands to muscles arise, is not smooth as in we humans, but textured with tiny folds that drastically increase its surface area; this most likely provides for manipulation of thousands of extra micro-muscles in its face and skin. Further back, the visual cortex and association area are quite extensive, implying keen discernment of fine detail in whatever the eyes detect. Oddly, the somatosensory areas are reduced - indeed, a portion that should lie superior to the cingulate gyrus is entirely absent - in favor of a sharply-demarcated rear portion of the parietal lobe, which almost constitutes a separate lobe in itself. As its position is tightly integrated with other sensory regions, it is most likely associated with psychic perception and interpretation.

Internal brain features are considerably more human-like, although some areas known to be associated with sleep - the pineal gland and preoptic nucleus - are shrunken and discolored, in a manner which (oddly) suggests these regions have degenerated over time, rather than failed to develop at all. The cerebellum is also an anomaly, being partitioned

Ear Shape

Ear shape is one of doppelgangers' few physical features that vary, in that each clan's ears have a different appearance from those of other clans. Mostly this is limited to the pattern of curves in the ear itself - unique to each clan's bloodline - but a few clans also have ears positioned further back on the head, or sticking out farther than is usual for most doppelgangers. As doppelganger clans do not, and indeed cannot, interbreed, ear shapes remain consistent within each clan across any number of generations. If a doppelganger's clan affinity is called into question, it need only reveal (or be forced to reveal) its true form's ears to establish its pedigree.

Note that a doppelganger whose external ears have been damaged or severed always falls under its fellows' close scrutiny in Zherisia, as it is invariably suspected of concealing its membership in an outlawed clan, such as the Mulor or that of the House of Sagee's fugitive founders.

On Doppelganger Physique

The Metamorphosis Gland Revisited

The Zherisia Survey (p. 31) introduced the idea of a "metamorphosis gland", and discusses its use as a means of conferring temporary shapechanging effects on others.

In addition to the methods discussed in the Survey, a freshly-extracted metamorphosis gland may be permanently implanted into a humanoid recipient, or a doppelganger whose own gland is lost, using the Graft Flesh feat (Fiend Folio/Lords of Madness). For a doppelganger recipient, giving it a new gland restores its lost Change Shape power. For a humanoid, it bestows three daily uses of alter self as a supernatural ability. Unlike most grafts, a metamorphosis gland is installed deep inside the recipient's skull, resulting in no external deformities save a scar on the back of the head (OR +1 if not concealed).

Installing a metamorphosis gland in someone requires the Graft Flesh feat for any graft type except undead, ten ranks in Knowledge (dungeoneering or nature), a successfully-extracted gland no more than twenty minutes old, and the expenditure of 13,000 gp.

into several distinct sections, each one heavily convoluted. Such an arrangement is found in no other sapient race known, and yet remains unaccounted for, although the prevailing hypothesis suggests it allows for a smoother coordination of movement when the creature's body changes drastically in size or build.

The inferior surface of the brain reveals the cranial nerve roots - twelve pairs as in human anatomy, but the trigeminal and facial nerves are more than double the diameter seen in Man - as well as that renowned seat of hormonal control, the hypophysis. Unlike a normal pituitary, this specimen's "metamorphosis gland" is covered with irregular, asymmetric lumps, suggestive of aberrant or even cancerous growth. Biopsies of these lumps subsequently revealed them to be rich in a chemical compound - believed unique to doppelgangers, though a similar compound has recently been isolated in mimics - which has proven efficacious in the manufacture of potions of self-transmutation. Samples from the less distorted areas of glandular tissue contained only traces of this compound, but were rich in all other pituitary hormones (save those associated with the reproductive process) required for conventional body functions.

Addendum

While maintaining Specimen #01-7-4D in a viable condition for questioning was desirable, cause of death seems to have been splenic rupture due to the defensive response of the gentleman whom it had initially attacked. As this generated such severe internal bleeding as to overwhelm even its own capacity to retain its motile blood in situ, it is unlikely that any form of medical care could have preserved its life, even before it was subjected to aggressive interrogation techniques by Brother Kingsley, to whom no blame accrues.

On Doppelganger Physique

Doppelganger Plasm

Fire or electricity damage provoke visible responses from fresh doppelganger plasm, "killing" the sample after a total of 5 rounds' exposure. Direct contact with negative energy (including inflict wound spells or the touch of an energy-draining creature) causes "live" plasm to roil sickly for 1 round, then blacken and die.

Doppelganger plasm remains "alive" and capable of independent movement for one hour after it is exposed to air, at which point it clots and becomes immobile. If extracted into an air-tight space, such as with a syringe or sanguine pump, it lasts up to four hours before losing its motility. Plasm shed directly onto icy or corrosive surfaces, or hot or electrified surfaces it cannot escape from, "dies" after five rounds' exposure.

Deathwatch

The deathwatch spell can distinguish blood from a doppelganger from that of other races, so long as its "living" properties linger. Where other blood appears as inanimate matter to one using this spell, doppelganger blood registers as "fragile" until exposure to air renders it inert.

Blood Drain

Monsters with a Drain Blood special attack can consume doppelgangers' plasm normally, except for vampires and other undead, which find its excessive positive energy content unpalatable in the extreme. A vampire or similar undead can drain a doppelganger's Constitution in a pinch, but it does not derive any actual sustenance by doing so, nor does it receive temporary hit points for the ingestion of doppelganger plasm.

You see, Miladies? As I said, unnerving without and bizarre within! Flexible, agile, and biologically obligated to feed and breed in our image, as well as devilishly slow to bleed. (Pray disregard that last omission, by the by: I did not think its content pertinent to the topic at hand.)

Alas, in future, I must beg you ladies to forgive me if I leave such distasteful studies up to other investigators. Though I did manage to curtail my breakfast's break for freedom, during the above specimen's examination, it was a narrow squeak. That the pair of you were able to inspect those ether-drugged mistlings' innards with such aplomb is, perforce, a marvel to me!

Imposters' Blood and Other Tissue

Of special interest to hunters, doppelganger blood - frequently referred to as "plasm" in scientific circles - exhibits several remarkable properties, whether extracted from an unconscious imposter in its native form or spilled from a still-disguised individual. Collected in the aftermath of a skirmish with a human-seeming opponent, such blood can be tested to determine if one's foe is such a counterfeit; drawn from a suspect via syringe or blade, it can either expose an infiltrator or exonerate an innocent party. Even a single drop of plasm may provide invaluable evidence in a pinch, but conclusive testing generally requires the collection of one fluid dram or more.

The strongest blood-based proof of a doppelganger's nature is its plasm's aforementioned ability to move. If threatened with intense heat - open flame, a heated needle, molten wax, or the like - uncongealed plasm will draw away from the threat, "flowing" as if it were a living ooze or comparable semi-liquid life form. Exposure to an electric charge does not cause the blood to pull away, but it becomes violently agitated, roiling and churning like thick, boiled syrup. Other kinds of damaging energy - freezing temperatures, corrosives, sonic vibration or mechanical force - are not known to provoke a reaction from living plasm, though the baneful force of raw necromantic magic might theoretically have

On Doppelganger Physique

some effect. (Naturally, such unwholesome "negative energy" is not a stimulus I felt it prudent to try.) Furthermore, if larger amounts of blood are present - say, a pool where such a creature has bled out, its corpse carried off by its fellows - the liquid's surface will not remain still, but moves very slightly, rippling due to no apparent cause.

Alas, plasm's capacity for movement is short-lived, such that it must be freshly-drawn or shed for this test to be informative. If exposed to air for longer than an hour or spoiled in other ways, the plasm ceases to respond to stimuli, becoming clotted and inert. A minimum one-dram sample is also needed for this type of motility-test: any less, and the plasm is "killed" by the heat or shock too fast to make a clear determination. If the blood-sample under consideration is kept isolated from open air, its liveliness can be prolonged considerably, albeit not indefinitely.

If plasm samples are too sparse or too old for motility-tests, recent advancements in the sciences of optics and biology have provided us with another option: the microscopic inspection of tissue. Even after it loses its capacity to move and begins to clot, a tiny quantity of suspected blood can be examined via this remarkable Lamordian device, revealing the miniscule pigmented discs - "red corpuscles", they are called - now known to hang suspended within life's sanguine fluid. In the blood of humans or near-humans, these tiny discs are noticeably pale in their centers, and (when viewed in profile) their opposing surfaces are smoothly concave. The blood of furred beasts is similarly-comprised, whereas the corpuscles of fowl, fish, or other lower vertebrates are spherical in shape, and house darker, oblong internal masses within them. Far smaller quantities of colorless, amorphous blobs - white corpuscles - are similarly-equipped with inner masses - "nuclei" of assorted shapes - and are known to appear with a far greater abundance in times of illness. In fresh blood samples, all of these minute objects are dispersed within clear fluid, while clotted blood's corpuscles are tightly bound to one another by threads of coarse, lumpy substance, appearing as if by

Collecting Samples

Collecting samples of blood at the site of a battle with suspected doppelgangers requires a Search check at a base DC of 30. For each hit point of damage inflicted by slashing or piercing weapons against the imposter(s), or every two hp inflicted by bludgeoning weapons, the Search DC drops by 1. Energy or nonlethal damage do not leave useable amounts of blood at the scene. At least 20 hp worth of wounds' blood-spatter must be gathered to produce a fluid dram of testable plasm; bludgeoning wounds' damage counts half as much toward this total.

Blood may also be collected directly off the surfaces of weapons that have wounded a suspected doppelganger. Slashing or piercing weapons must have inflicted at least 3 hit points of damage against an imposter, or 5 hp minimum for bludgeoning weapons, to bear sufficient blood for any testing procedure; for a full dram's sample, at least five times that much (total) is needed.

If a sample of doppelganger plasm is mixed with human or other blood, all tests of the sample are compromised and automatically fail. If doppelgangers learn that such samples exist, they may try to gain access to them in and secretly add human or animal blood to spoil the results.

A "fluid dram" is a little more than 3½ cc, in real-life medical terms.

conjunction when fresh droplets congeal beneath the observer's lens.

(Beg pardon my clinical digression, Miladies; it is a topic as to which I must confess a certain vested - morbid - curiosity of my own.)

On Doppelganger Physique

A doppelganger's plasm, in contrast, draws no sharp distinction between the three styles of blood corpuscle found in Nature. Collected when the creature wears a human guise, it exhibits the same doubly-concave shapes of animalcules as our own vital fluid, but dark flecks in the outer ring of each disc are discernable to the keen eye. Amorphous bodies similar to white corpuscles are likewise present, but strong illumination reveals their internal substance to be slightly pink, rather than blue-tinted as in human samples. Most strangely of all, when kept under observation as it clots, doppelganger plasm's two forms of corpuscle grow progressively more similar, as the red variety lose their concavity and the white turn darker in hue. By the time the binding threads manifest, all of an imposter's corpuscles will look the same - reddish and disc-shaped, yet with granules of darker nucleus - having lost their previous distinguishing features. Blood drawn from an undisguised doppelganger displays this same undifferentiated state, even when fresh.

These telltale features are detectable to the skilled observer, provided the assemblage of lenses that magnify one's sample is properly arranged and strong illumination is available. Alas, such complex optical instruments are extremely delicate, and no readily-portable microscope for field use has yet (to my knowledge) been invented; hence, this procedure is of value only if one is within close proximity of a suitably-equipped laboratory, a rare thing outside Lamordia.

As for other means of distinguishing doppelganger blood from human, I am uncertain as to what methods would be effective. Hypothetically, magic might distinguish the "living" blood of an imposter from the placid blood of a true human; however, any spells used to discern the presence of lifeforce within such a sample must be approached with due trepidation, as invoking such effects could tread perilously close to the path of darkness. Likewise, the abnormal qualities of plasm might well render it unpalatable to blood-feeding insects and such natural oddities as the crawling ivy. (Of course, the ethical implications of cultivating such injurious organisms merely

Microscopes

Use of a microscope to distinguish humanoid blood from that of a doppelganger requires a DC 10 Spot check, or DC 15 for samples which have become inert; knowing what to look for requires a Knowledge (medicine) check at DC 15. Members of the scientist PrC (from Legacy of the Blood) gain a bonus on both of these checks equal to their class level if their chosen discipline is biology, or a bonus of half their class level to the Spot check, if they specialize in physics and are familiar with optical devices.

As of 760 BC, microscopes are crafted only in Lamordia. The optical technology to produce these instruments also exists in Paridon, but the doppelgangers there have subtly stymied efforts to manufacture such devices. Microscopes powerful enough to view blood cells must be custom-made at a cost of many, many thousands of gold pieces, so prices are left to DMs' discretion.

as doppelganger-detectors make this option dubious at best.)

On a final and related note, I should point out that blood is not the only material by which a hunter might think to distinguish human from doppelganger. Hair, nail-clippings, and scraps of skin (left behind by a fleeing imposter that scraped its knee on a cement pavement) have all been subjected to similar microscopic examination, in an attempt to tell real from counterfeit. Out of these three, only the skin-sample proved useful. Perhaps because they have no equivalents in the doppelganger's natural form, both hair and nail-cuttings are evidently a perfect imitation of those of human beings, even down to the most minute detail.

Chemical analysis could possibly be forthcoming in regards to such samples, but I am uncertain as to how conclusive such tests

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might be: again, alchemy is not my forte, and scientific chemistry even less so. My attempt at tracking down an actual sample of doppelganger faux-hair or nail-clippings for inclusion in this very parcel came to naught, else I'd have entrusted such a final determination to Gennifer's capable hands.

As for the sample of skin - proceeds of a rather dramatic 'hot pursuit' by Paridon police; regrettably, the culprit ultimately eluded capture - it required no special instrumentation or analysis to distinguish, having reverted to its native state (gray) as soon as the creature ran on, leaving its abraded tissue as a telltale clue. Would that every hunter's quarry were so careless, and that its ill luck had continued long enough to assure its apprehension!

Hair, Nails and Discarded Tissues

Hair and nails (or scales, fur or feathers) of a doppelganger's assumed form are indistinguishable from those of a genuine humanoid, even at a microscopic level. A Profession (chemist) check or Craft (alchemy) check at DC 20 can distinguish such substances from the genuine article; such testing takes 30 minutes per sample, and requires an alchemical field kit or a full alchemist's lab. A sample of plasm may also be distinguished from blood by chemical analysis.

If a doppelganger loses a part of its body which is also part of its true form, the part reverts to its natural state three rounds after being severed. Thus, if an imposter's hand is cut off by a mad torturer, the amputated hand will revert to its gray-skinned, callused state within seconds. Body parts that have no counterpart in doppelganger anatomy will remain as they are if their tissues are dead (as are hair or fingernails), but living parts that sprouted when the imposter assumed its false guise (e.g. a kobold's tail) shrivel into dry, crumbling husks ten minutes after removal. Note that a doppelganger may use Glamour to maintain a severed part's appearance and physical integrity, so long as the creature is near enough.

Needless to say, cutting pieces off of someone to determine if they are a doppelganger or not is grounds for a Powers check (routine torture). Drawing sufficient blood for testing does not merit a Powers check unless a subject is both unwilling and terrified (and not a doppelganger), in which case this procedure might incur a Powers check (extortion), depending on how brutally they are subdued so that the sample can be taken by force.

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Dread Possibility: Strahd's Servitor

The dread master of Castle Ravenloft has many servants, ranging from the human boyars and burgomasters that actually manage Barovia, to the Vistani who are his eyes and ears, to the foul undead that enforce his will. Amongst the latter, few are more unusual, or more insidious, than Besczu (LE doppel-vampire spawn Rog2/Assassin 4).

In life, Besczu was one of the first doppelgangers to flee from Paridon through the Mists, ending up in Barovia. There, the creature made a foolish mistake, stealing funds the burgomaster of Immol had collected for the levy. The story went as could be expected: Count Strahd learned of this, closed the borders, and tracked Besczu down. The deceiver, however, managed to elude Von Zarovich for nearly a week, and when Strahd finally caught this strange new creature, he decided to make it 'useful' instead of slaying it.

Though its "living" plasm was tainted by an unpalatable excess of positive energy, its life force was fair game. Besczu became the first (and likely the only) 'doppel-vampire spawn' in the Land of Mists, and one of the more subtle of Strahd's servants.

Besczu has adjusted well to unlife, considering. Its Change Shape and Detect Thoughts survived its transition to undeath, allowing it to hunt effectively while acting as a spy and executioner for Strahd. Over the years, it has infiltrated and executed Barovian criminals, Kargat agents, pesky adventuring-parties and, more recently, Invidian mercenaries and Gundarakite rebels. In the last few years, Besczu has been scouting out Castle Hunadora, learning its layout and schedules, and biding its time. Once Strahd decides the rebels have become more of a bother to him than to Invidia's tyrant, Malocchio, Besczu will attempt to slay Ardonk Szerieza, Matton Blanchard, and Gabrielle Aderre, thus breaking the back of the resistance. Until then, Besczu waits.

In person, Besczu is a grim, embittered creature still enraged by the loss of its favorite human identity, which was "executed" by the Grandmaster's order in a public accident in Paridon after it fled Sodo's wrath. Its nocturnal habits have made maintaining any kind of long-term impersonation impractical at best, so Besczu specializes in short-term impostures and stealth.

Its unstable blend of vampirism and doppelganger abilities have granted Besczu some unusual traits. Although technically only a vampire spawn, it has the ability to assume the shapes of any Tiny to Medium nocturnal animal it has seen, under the same terms as a full vampire's Alternate Form power; it can also assume the shapes (though none of the powers) of humanoid corporeal undead with its Change Shape ability. Its mind-reading prowess has reinforced its domination, to grant it the vampiric salient ability of Improved Domination. As dread doppelgangers never bury their own dead, Besczu's 'sleeping arrangements' are also unusual: rather than needing grave-soil or some item from its mortal life nearby, Besczu can only rest in the tombs or graves of dead humans, stealing the use of their resting-places in death as it once stole Zherisians' identities in life. This usually means it must sleep in unsanctified graves of apostates or criminals, or graves that have been defiled, properly-blessed tombs being inaccessible to vampires (VRGtV).

Excerpts from the Diary of Deborah Creede

November 21st, 8:00am

Though terribly shaken, I finally dropped off to sleep when the sobs ceased in the middle of the night, expiring with an anguished, despairing moan, after what seemed an eternity. Even in the quiet, a restful sleep was once again denied to me, for dark and perplexing nightmares plagued my dreams. I know this should not surprise me after those horrific, wrenching hours, but the visions were so vivid, I still can recall them in terrible detail. At first, beautiful music seemed to soothe me, calming my pounding heart and easing my night's anxiety. But all of a sudden, the music ceased with a loud crash, and then I saw her: a beautiful young girl with skin as smooth and pale as marble, supine upon the floor, between a grand piano and its overturned bench. Her graceful neck was hideously marred, by a slender, sharp cut round her neck, and fresh blood still seeped from the open wound. And then the piano's keys sounded again. But this time, while the rhythm of notes struck seemed nearly the same, the grating, off-key clanks of their tuneless clamor made my blood freeze.

When I finally arose this morning, I felt like I had not slept at all; it was all I could do to pry my weary eyes open. I had almost decided to stay in bed, when I noticed a strange rash on my arms. The skin seemed coarser and redder than it should be, and the fine hair on the backs of both forearms was embarrassingly evident. As they aren't itching, I hope these anomalies will disappear again shortly.

I settled down to resume work on my book, but as has happened time and again these past few weeks, inspiration eluded me. As always happens, since Daniel vanished. The words sounded flat, almost childish, when compared to the fluency and beauty of my prior, successful works. Works, which had opened the doors for me to any and all social events. It felt as if his love had set free my imagination - caused the quill to float ever so lightly and swiftly o'er the page - creating magnificent poems that touched upon the innermost feelings of the reader. But no longer will the words come, not now, try though I might to voice my sorrow, my confusion, my loss.

Strange, that such frustration should strike me as so very familiar.



On Common Doppelganger Powers

The plump man's features seemed to dislimn, and form again, as I looked at them. He hadn't a face, only a hundred masks that he could assume when he pleased. That chap must have been a superb actor. Perhaps he had been Lord Alloa of the night before; perhaps not; it didn't matter. I wondered if he was the fellow who had first tracked Scudder, and left his card on him. Scudder had said he lisped, and I could imagine how the adoption of a lisp might add terror.

- James Buchan, "The Thirty-Nine Steps"



On Common Doppelganger Powers

As in every ground-breaking past treatise by your revered "Uncle Rudolph", it is vitally important that a future discourse on doppelgangers should clarify (to the questionable extent that 'clarity' is possible, examining such deceivers) the functions and limits of their unnatural powers. To this end, I have correlated reports from many sources - reporters, gendarmes, adventurers and academics - as well as several of our Society allies' accounts of these imposters, and my limited personal confrontations with such. In particular, records procured from archives of the Divinity of Mankind - specifically, those of a defunct splinter-group within that faith, and its well-meant efforts to "elevate" doppelgangers to a higher state (i.e. humanity) through divine ritual - provide a sturdy foundation for the information to follow. May these insights serve our fellow hunters well, so the late Celebrant Chaswick and his brethren will not have labored in vain!

Whenever possible, I have forsworn using secondhand sources, rumors or un-attributable legends as references in this section. Appreciative though I am of a rousing tale, Miladies, we all know how susceptible to embellishment such popular accounts are, and I'm sure you'd agree that a subject central to our fellow-hunters' survival should depend neither on the accuracy of hearsay, nor the honesty of prattling bards.

Shapechanging

The infamous "signature power" of doppelgangers, the ability to mimic a human or near-human appearance is their most critical survival tactic, both as their means of eluding discovery as they pursue their schemes, and as the sole avenue by which they reproduce their own kind. No mere illusion, a doppelganger's transformations are physical and tangible; more persistent than spells of self-transmutation, their shapechanges defy conventional spellcasters' efforts to dispel or counter them. Doppelgangers seem loath to remain in their

A doppelganger's Change Shape special quality is a supernatural ability, so it cannot be impeded by dispelling or counterspells. An antimagic field or "dead magic" zone negates its shapechange for as long as the doppelganger remains within the area of effect, at which time it instantaneously reverts to whichever form it had worn prior to entering the area of suppressed magic.

natural state, invariably hiding behind a false guise, unless they are knocked senseless or left with no other alternative but death.

With rare exceptions (addressed in the next file), a doppelganger's repertoire of adopted forms is restricted to humanoid morphology. Of the various sentient folk known to our world, all the "civilized" peoples - humans of any ethnic derivation, their caliban or elf-blooded relations, full-blooded elvenkind, dwarves, halflings, and gnomes - can be duplicated by the imposters. Mimicry of the savage races - goblins and their oversized offshoots; kobolds - is, as yet, poorly documented, but I have reason to believe a colony of such creatures lives amongst the goblins of Wormwood, in Tepest. Indeed, one such imposter reputedly became homicidally insane in 756, causing considerable mayhem. I am unsure how many remain there, but have uncovered two reports of "goblins" slain near Kellee - one before, and one after that tragedy - which reverted to a gray, hairless form in death. Immense brutes such as ogres, at one extreme, and gnomish or halfling children, at the other, lie outside their range of size-variance. Otherwise, doppelgangers seem to be adept at aping all human-like races, of either sex and any age.

While doppelgangers are physically capable of mimicking their forms, I should add that some folk are copied by them only rarely. Elitists by nature, these self-proclaimed "Masters" are reluctant to appropriate lives of servitude and

On Common Doppelganger Powers

Doppelgangers' transformations are very thorough, leaving no vestige of their natural appearance to betray their ruse. A doppelganger does not suffer the usual -2 penalties to Disguise checks for impersonation of a different race or sex, and incurs only half the usual penalty for mimicking a different age category (PHB p. 73). Nor does it receive a +5 bonus for "minor changes only", its natural appearance being too unlike any other sentient species to provide such a benefit.

For convenience, DMs may roll a single Disguise check for all of a doppelganger's guises, rather than re-rolling its checks each time it changes form. For major doppelganger NPCs, roll once for every identity the creature will be adopting in the course of your scenario; then assign a d20 result to each guise, with the highest scores going to the role(s) it has put the most effort into refining.

Note that, because its bodily transformations makes the use of cosmetics redundant, a masterwork disguise kit provides no bonus to a doppelganger's Disguise skill checks. Likewise, spell effects such as *alter self* or *disguise self* do not stack with the +10 Disguise circumstance bonus provided by a doppelganger's *Change Shape* ability. Illusions' Disguise bonus might supercede this bonus, if the illusion should overlap a doppelganger's current form (e.g. if a disguised doppelganger that infiltrates a group of adventurers is included in a party member's seeming spell).

discomfort, hence calibans or other repressed social castes are comparatively safe from their depredations. Gnomes, with their inherent gift for petty illusions, can be problematic for a doppelganger lacking arcane talents to imitate, so are likewise replaced but seldom.

Lastly, while the imposters can and do adopt the outward appearance of the Vistani, including darklings, to deceive or manipulate non-Vistani (often via false "prophecies"), they cannot truly duplicate the mysterious powers of these folk. Nor can they, evidently, deceive a true Vistani into believing them other than giorgio.

Transforming its body into the shape of another is a fairly quick process, and evidently a painless one; the doppelganger need not revert to its natural state between guises, but smoothly flows from one false appearance to the next. While most notorious for duplicating and replacing living, breathing persons, its repertoire is not restricted solely to copying those faces it has seen: a doppelganger is free to invent as many new 'looks' as its imagination affords.

By the letter of the rules, a doppelganger's capacity to mimic other races is limited to creatures of the humanoid type (either Small or Medium), barring salient abilities which expand its repertoire. In Ravenloft, if a being outwardly appears humanoid, like a werewolf in human form, a vampire which keeps its undead nature hidden, or a hag employing her disguise self ability, doppelgangers can also mimic the human-like appearance of such beings. They can likewise copy one another's false guises (although doing so without permission is considered 'trespassing' among their kind), and can simulate the appearance of intact, freshly-dead corpses as well as living individuals.

Curiously, even if they acquire the ability to duplicate other monstrous humanoids, doppelgangers seem physically and psychologically incapable of mimicking one another's true forms. This even applies to the use of magic: a doppelganger spellcaster cannot use *disguise self*, *alter self*, or other magical effects to duplicate another imposter's natural shape. Only by using a magical item to activate such an effect for him was Sodo, himself, able to circumvent this limitation.

Both Vistani and lycanthropes automatically sense that a doppelganger is not really one of their kind ... unless it can use the Hybrid salient ability (next chapter) to imitate a werebeast's tertiary aspect, in which case it can fool lycanthropes as well.

A doppelganger's shapechanges cannot eliminate or conceal the effects of a curse of vengeance, such as the blackened hands imposed by Vistani on giorgios who rob or cheat them.

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They often create such non-existent "masks" as temporary costumes, in which to commit crimes they prefer not to have linked to a stolen identity. A doppelganger may likewise modify the aspect of a guise it has copied from a real person, such as to simulate gradual aging of a figure it replaces over the long term, or create false "bruises" to back up fictitious assault-charges levied against an enemy.

Target Acquired

Before it can attempt to accurately duplicate a person's appearance, a doppelganger must succeed on at least one DC 20 Spot check, while observing that person. It may make Spot checks once per round as a free action, if it directly interacts with its subject, or as a move action if it observes them from a distance (all range penalties apply). A doppelganger may Take 20 on this check, if it can engage the subject in a conversation lasting two minutes or more.

While a single success on a Spot check permits the doppelganger to assume the desired form, its guise will not be very precise. A shape it assumes after one success provides a +6 circumstance bonus on its Disguise check to pass for the imitated person, not +10. Another Spot success raises this to +8, as its veneer takes on further detail and subtlety, and a third success renders its façade as accurate (+10 bonus) as its shapechanging power can physically manage.

If a doppelganger is to convincingly impersonate its subject's voice, it must also pass a single DC 20 Listen check while conversing with, or eavesdropping upon, the subject. Otherwise, witnesses who know that person's real voice will receive a +4 bonus on all opposed checks to penetrate its disguise, in the event its pretense requires it to speak.

Note that failure to pass these Spot and Listen checks before assuming a guise does not mean the doppelganger's real nature is exposed. It still appears convincingly humanoid; it just doesn't look or sound sufficiently like the subject in question to take that person's place.

A doppelganger can usually activate its Change Shape ability as a standard action. If it is forced to imagine an invented guise on the spot, or when it duplicates a specific person's appearance for the first time, its transformation requires a bit more thought and is a full-round action. Minor modifications to an assumed guise, such as feigned injuries or an altered hairstyle, may be applied as a free action.

Nearly all doppelgangers have a repertoire of invented or previously-copied appearances they can assume in a pinch, such as to shake off pursuit. Only if a doppelganger is newly-Wakened, or has never had cause to develop "masks" (e.g. if the community it preys on is so isolated that strange faces have no place in it), will it lack such a broad 'collection' of forms to choose from.

When a doppelganger does set out to duplicate a specific individual, it must first become familiar with its chosen subject's semblance and voice. First-hand observation is preferred, as verbal descriptions provided by others - even other doppelgangers, complicit in its plans - do not convey the subtle nuances of physiognomy, posture, gait, speech, or other qualities so essential to replicating a subject convincingly. Few of these imposters are satisfied with but a single bout of preliminary observation; most will engineer several "chance encounters" with an intended victim, in a number of guises and under various pretenses, until they are sure to emulate the mannerisms and behavior patterns of their prey without fail. Cautious and experienced doppelgangers arrange these encounters with particular cunning, so as to provoke responses from their chosen target that will close all possible gaps in their reconnaissance ... for instance, by having a subordinate "fail" to pick the subject's pocket, then observing the outraged subject's running stride, as the thief flees and the

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Pictures Of You

A doppelganger that successfully gleans images from a subject's thoughts (see below) can make a Will save (DC 25 + subject's Wis modifier) to try to capture an impression, visual or audible as it prefers, of someone known to that subject. Only extremely well-known individuals' images may be gleaned from someone's thoughts in this way, and the subject must be thinking of them (or be goaded into doing so) at the time. In other respects, a successful Will save counts as a successful Spot or Listen check to observe the person of whom the subject is thinking.

By studying a high-quality daguerreotype portrait of a person for twenty minutes, a doppelganger which has achieved one or two successful Spot checks to observe that person can improve on its impersonation slightly, gaining another +1 circumstance bonus to its Disguise check. This cannot raise its total circumstance bonus above +10, nor does it allow impersonation in the absence of at least one successful Spot check. At the DM's discretion, a similar bonus may be obtained via the study of a realistic, masterwork-quality statue or painting.

victim-to-be gives chase. If the imposter's target is a fencer, a gendarme, or otherwise a wielder of arms, the doppelganger also endeavors to watch its target taking part in a duel or sport-shooting competition, or at least to spy on its designated victim's weapons practice.

If first-hand observation is unsuccessful, there is evidence that doppelgangers - at least, some doppelgangers - have indirect methods of familiarizing themselves with whomsoever they wish to duplicate. In rare cases, the imposters have reputedly pulled critical information on the subjects to be duplicated directly from the minds of folk

whose thoughts they had accessed ... an alarming prospect, given that it lets them "observe" subjects otherwise inaccessible, perhaps even deceased. (I shudder to think how doppelgangers disguised as your beloved Uncles - either one - might be able to despoil the good name and trustworthy reputation of we hunters, in vengeance or caprice!) Mercifully, this seems to be an unreliable tactic, used only to fool witnesses whose wits are limited or impaired, or who know the duplicated person only slightly.

Just as disturbingly, one doppelganger recently exposed at a prominent banking house in Paridon was found, when its residence was searched, to have been an avid daguerreotypist. (You do recall my last

Copies of Copies

When a mundane, magical or supernatural disguise is based on a specific individual, the Disguise check to impersonate that individual functions normally. If a disguise should be based on another disguise, however, the accuracy of this secondhand disguise cannot exceed that of the disguise it was based upon. The DC to detect a secondhand disguise is equal to that of the original disguise, or the skill check of the secondhand disguise's creator, whichever is lower.

For example, if Valic, a Zherisian doppelganger, mimics Lady Arden with a Disguise check result of 28, then another doppelganger which impersonates Valic's 'Lady Arden' guise cannot achieve a result higher than 28. If the second doppelganger, Rebri, only rolled a 23 on its Disguise check, then a third doppelganger - or a spellcaster using alter self, a rogue using a mundane disguise kit, etc - mimicking Rebri's 'Lady Arden' guise cannot achieve a result greater than 23, and so on.

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letter's commentary on that curious new art form, do you not, Miladies?) It had collected dozens of plate-captured portraits, each carefully labeled with the name, address, and estimated income per annum of the person thereon depicted. While such stiff, monochromatic images are unlikely to permit any doppelganger to replicate someone's appearance in the vibrant colors of life, this incident worries me, nevertheless. Five years ago, there were no such things as daguerreotypes; dare we assume their images will not be improved upon, so much that imposters might utilize them in lieu of reconnaissance, in another five, fifteen, fifty years?

As its transformation is largely superficial, a disguised doppelganger forfeits only some of the physical properties inherent in its natural state. Most conspicuously, it yields up the dense array of calluses which adorn its natural form's knuckles, diminishing the lethality of its blows; it also sacrifices a certain pliability of frame conferred by its partly-cartilaginous skeletal structure. If it impersonates a subject of small proportions - a mature halfling for example, or a human child of comparable height - then its strength and speed of locomotion are consequently reduced, with an attendant increase in agility and precision. Despite outward appearances, the doppelganger's hide remains far thicker and more resilient than that of humans; however, it feels as delicate as true skin to the touch. If necessary, the imposter can simulate scrapes and cuts, to substantiate its ruse of human-like vulnerability.

Of abilities a doppelganger might gain through its mimicry, I fear I have little solid data to offer. There are few species in our world that are man-like enough in form for a doppelganger - rather, an ordinary doppelganger - to duplicate, that yet possess physical advantages (such as claws, wings, or gills) which it might acquire through changes in its physique. Reports of these creatures transforming into half-animal shapes of werebeasts in the throes of combat, or taking wing to escape as gargoyles or ravenkin, do crop up with startling frequency, but just as common are tales in which doppelgangers are cornered and

destroyed, never having taken advantage of the escape opportunities such forms might offer them. Thus, I must conclude that such extremes of shape-changing - though they can grant physical advantages - lie outside the average imposter's repertoire. Reports of such exotic shapes, I suspect, are usually (but not always!) fabricated, or else re-told with a disproportionate enthusiasm simply because their outcome is so dramatic.

As detailed as doppelganger guises can be - easily a match for the illusory or transmuting effects achieved by spells, given adequate preparatory observation - they are limited by what the imitating creature knows of the subject's viewpoints and behavior. If a doppelganger never has a chance to familiarize itself with a particular trait or habit, it will default to a generic average in its stead: right-handedness; baritone or contralto vocal tones; mannerisms or political views apropos to a subject's culture and socioeconomic class, et cetera. Such "default" traits are downplayed as much as is feasible, as the doppelganger's goal is to replace them with conduct typical of the one it impersonates, once it gleans further details from others' thoughts. Hence, the fewer people who observe it before it makes those corrections, the better.

(Dear ladies, take note! Of such trivial discrepancies are a successful doppelganger-hunt made. If a suspect's speech, manners, or professed attitudes seem more stereotyped among those he or she first met briefly and recently, than among those whom the suspect "knows well", it may be an indication that the "person" is neither he nor she. This is especially likely if attitudes one's suspect displays to casual acquaintances are different from those of said acquaintances, i.e. if it is not merely parroting others' attitudes back to them, as "social chameleons" of conventional races are wont to do.)

Likewise, a doppelganger's guise may lack accuracy in those physical details which had not come to light during its initial observations. Tattoos, birthmarks, scars or blemishes - even as absurd an anatomical quirk as the configuration of a navel - can help distinguish the real from the counterfeit.

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Other Traits in Other Shapes

As in other beings with the Change Shape ability, doppelgangers do not take on all the statistics of forms they assume. In general, abilities and qualities deriving from the mundane anatomy of a mimicked creature's body are gained, but not sensory modes, supernatural qualities, or abilities obtained from training, culture, and/or experience.

Doppelganger characteristics which are lost, upon assuming a shape other than their natural one:

- Slam attacks are replaced with natural or unarmed attacks of the new form
- Racial bonus to Escape Artist checks due to flexible skeletal structure is lost
- Natural form's Outcast Rating of 6 is replaced with that of its new guise

Characteristics acquired by shapechanged doppelgangers (if applicable to the new form):

- Small size, including ability modifiers (+2 Dex, -2 Str) as per the reduce person spell, plus all corresponding size modifiers to AC, attack rolls, grappling and skills
- Speed and non-magical movement mode(s)
- Natural weapons and/or unarmed attacks
- Extraordinary special attacks, on the same terms as the new form. A doppelganger in the guise of a quevari, for example, would gain the benefit of the Bloodmoon special attack, but only during the three nights of the full moon.
- Racial traits derived entirely from a mimicked form's physique, such as the Stability trait of dwarves or the Powerful Build trait of goliaths (Races of Stone)
- Proficiency with armor and weapons - and only those armor and weapons - carried by a specific individual it imitates, at a time when it successfully passed a DC 20 Spot check to observe that individual (see above). Only very basic use of such equipment is gained this way, not fringe benefits; for example, a doppelganger that copies a victim in spiked armor can wear the victim's armor proficiently, but is still considered non-proficient with armor spikes. If the victim carried a heavy flail, the doppelganger could make normal attacks with that specific weapon, but not trip attacks.

Note that some of these characteristics are unique to doppelgangers, and should not be applied to other creatures that possess the Change Shape special quality.

A doppelganger's type and subtype are not altered, when it assumes a new form. For instance, adopting a form with the aquatic subtype does not grant the imposter the ability to breathe water: its gills are ornamental, not functional. Adopting a different anatomy does not alter the creature's underlying physiology in most respects, so an imposter which assumes the shape of a neanderthal (Frostburn) gains no special tolerance for arctic weather conditions.

Changing from Medium to Small size provides a +6 bonus to Escape Artist checks to slip free of ropes or manacles, but not from grapples, pins, or mobile bindings such as an entangle spell. If a doppelganger is already Small when it is bound, it can't assume a Medium form until it gets free.

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...if, that is, these details remain unknown to the imposter in question, yet are known to at least one trustworthy witness (ah, there's the impasse!). I cannot help but suspect, Miladies, that Zherisian culture's well-known objection to exposure of human skin - a primness that greatly impacts both their manner of dress and social mores, whilst fostering a curious ambivalence in the visual arts vis-à-vis the unclad mortal tenement - may be the result of doppelgangers' deliberate social engineering. The smaller a fraction of the human body that may acceptably be revealed in polite (or even intimate) company, the smaller the chance that discrepancies in a doppelganger's guise will be noted by witnesses, and the fewer such potential witnesses will exist, who know the original person's anatomy well enough to recognize such an oversight.

I might note that this facet of Zherisian culture offers a corresponding advantage to the hunter: a doppelganger which had lived all its life among Paridoners may, with the characteristic laziness of its kind, neglect to concern itself with a form's details beyond head and hands. Such a creature might hypothetically be exposed through tactful consultation with the childhood nanny of its present guise, followed by a word with its present physician or tailor!

Alas, the shrewdest of doppelgangers have long since grown leery of this hunters' tactic, and take care to study each chosen victim's physique in intimate detail - via seduction if the target is susceptible, or by the postmortem inspection of the corpse if not - as a precaution against such lapses. Nor is this an effective tactic in lands more at ease with the body au naturel than most, like Vorostokov with its saunas or the isles of the Rokuma with their communal bathhouses; there, the imposters can find ample opportunity to observe their selected forms-to-be in their entirety.

Distinguishing Marks

A doppelganger which impersonates a specific individual cannot accurately depict proportions or features it has not seen, which usually equates to those concealed by clothing. If a doppelganger that had never seen its current guise's unclad form is caused to disrobe, any witness familiar with the exposed physique of the person it has duplicated is allowed a base +4 circumstance bonus on Spot checks to penetrate the creature's disguise. A further +2 bonus applies, per distinguishing mark (scar, birthmark, etc) whose absence is thus revealed; particularly large or vivid marks (e.g. elaborate tattoos) increase this bonus even further, if the doppelganger has omitted them.

This assumes the doppelganger is unable to glean appropriate details from the minds of witnesses in time to feign the corresponding traits. If it can extract visual clues from a person who has seen the original subject's bare flesh in time to adjust its guise, the circumstance bonus detailed above does not apply. If it extracts thoughts, but not a visual impression, the bonus is halved.

If a known distinguishing mark is specifically searched for, and not found, no Spot roll is needed to realize that discrepancy. Spot checks are only appropriate if a witness is unsure what he should check for, and merely looks for discrepancies of any kind.

Such minutia do not become an issue if the imposter invents its guise, rather than copies an existing person. Invented "masks" of this sort are created as an amalgamation of the facial features and body-types a doppelganger has witnessed in people around it, duplicating the eyes of one subject, the mouth of another, the shoulders of a third, et cetera.

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Pre-designed or improvised guises of this sort are often assigned a single, sharply-memorable quirk of feature, dress or habit: something which, if displayed to witnesses, will distract their attention from any other details the creature prefers not be noticed (such as the appearance of a companion). Said memorable feature may then be hidden or eliminated when anonymity is necessary.

Once a form (be it stolen or invented) has been achieved, it is nigh-impossible for outside forces to disrupt the result. Not only is a doppelganger's ability to alter its appearance impervious to standard dispelling or counter-spelling procedures, but it is also capable of negating the effects of forced transformations induced through magic.

Transmutation's Effects

Because it has the shapechanger subtype, a doppelganger can overcome any transmutation effect which alters its body's structure or composition, provided it retains the use of its ability to change shape. A petrified imposter is inert and unconscious in statue-form, hence is unable to spend a standard action changing itself back to flesh. A doppelganger that succumbs to a foe's baleful polymorph spell, then fails the Will save to retain its conscious mind, likewise cannot reverse the spell's effect in this way, as it has forgotten its own powers.

When shedding a shape which was forced upon it by a polymorph effect, a doppelganger can only change into its natural form, not a false guise of any kind.

Doppelgangers need not recover immediately from a polymorph effect, but may choose to remain in the shape that was imposed upon them, changing back only when they think it prudent. Once a doppelganger reverts to its natural form in this manner, the transmutation effect is considered to have expired: the imposter cannot regain the polymorph-imposed shape again, unless that shape is within its normal repertoire of assumed forms.

Because their bodies are equipped to endure such drastic morphological shifts, doppelgangers do not experience the agony usually associated with involuntary transformations in Ravenloft. They need not make a Fortitude save to avoid dropping held objects (assuming the shape being forced upon them is equipped to hold things at all!).

As a side effect of their protean nature, doppelganger bodies tend to reject attempts to artificially modify their structure by surgical or arcane means. Grafts, symbionts or prosthetics attached to a doppelganger's tissues usually drop off and cease to function, leaving only smooth skin where they joined its flesh, next time the imposter shifts its shape. If such an outcome would prove fatal for the doppelganger - i.e. if an implanted graft or creature is what's keeping it alive - its attempt to change shape results only in crippling pain (stunned 1d4 rounds), instead of transformation. A doppelganger thus robbed of its ability to transform is bound to suffer progressive physical and psychological harm.

Against more 'organic' alterations of a doppelganger's form, such as effects of an aboleth's slime or a marikith queen's sting, a doppelganger's shapechanging power provides a +4 bonus to saving throws. The Hive Queen of Timor makes sure captive doppelgangers she stings are either under her mental control or else driven catatonically insane beforehand, which renders them too passive to resist the transfiguring venom.

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Surely Miladies recall the druidess Fiona, and the timely assistance she provided to my queries in Verbrek? She once spoke of how, on a visit to the "clamoring metropolis" of Ungrad, she fended off attack by what she initially presumed to be a thief, transforming her assailant into a rabbit ... only to watch it change again, from hare to a gray-skinned grotesquery, then once more into the semblance of a man. Furious with outrage, yet plainly judging itself overmatched, it fled before Fiona could recover from astonishment at this reversal, with an alacrity suggesting it felt none of the pain normally attendant upon that staunch wild-warden's chastising polymorph-spells.

Piercing the Ruse

In most day-to-day situations, a shapechanged doppelganger's camouflage is too perfect to incite Spot checks from those it encounters. Upon meeting someone who is suspicious of deception in general, but not specifically of imposters, an initial opposed Spot check is permitted to penetrate its guise, with additional checks allowed if circumstance or the doppelganger's own actions rouse further suspicion. Only if those it is deceiving specifically watch out for imposters (doppelganger or otherwise) are hourly Spot checks permitted.

Once a witness has seen through a particular doppelganger's guise with a Spot check, they receive a +1 bonus to any future opposed Spot checks against that particular doppelganger's Disguise skill. This bonus lasts for 48 hours, by which point the doppelganger will have noticed its error and corrected it.

Note that if a witness did not meet a person until after their replacement by a doppelganger, that witness never receives a Spot check bonus for familiarity (PHB p.73) to penetrate that particular disguise. So far as such a witness knows, the doppelganger's false guise is the accurate one.

Fooling Spells

Spells that affect a specific creature-type are not usually fooled by shapechanging, including that of a doppelganger. If the spell's description specifically states it is deceived by polymorph-style effects (glyph of warding), or that its means of identifying targets is based on physical appearance (helping hand), the spell responds to a doppelganger as if it were the one it currently resembles.

If a scrying effect is used to locate a person being imitated by a doppelganger, it will gravitate to the real person if the caster is using valid points of reference (encounters with the actual person or a likeness/possession/body part taken from them). If the scryer unwittingly uses information or a physical link to the doppelganger, the scrying spell will gravitate to the doppelganger instead. If a combination of valid and false reference-points are used - for example, if a caster has samples of a real person's hair, but has unknowingly met only their doppelganger killer - the spell fails.

Because their forms are physical rather than illusory - hence, tangible to the touch - and impervious to moisture, heat or other banes of mundane cosmetics, distinguishing a doppelganger from legitimate folk is quite challenging, even for trained eyes. Lacking intimate familiarity with the duplicated subject, ordinary senses are often insufficient to spot discrepancies; a microscopic examination of blood does serve to distinguish between man and faux-man, but this method is highly problematic to apply in-the-field. In the event one does successfully discern tiny flaws in a given doppelganger's disguise - fingernails too narrow, hair too glossy, teeth too symmetrical - such subtle clues are only of value for identifying that particular doppelganger, once it dons some other guise in its place, and only for a limited time.

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When magic is added to a hunter's slate of resources, new possibilities open up. While I, myself, have confirmed that doppelgangers' shapechanging does not generate a lingering aura of transmutation, indirect detection can be effective. The discern location spell is never deceived by impostures, nor are powerful warding-spells (e.g. antipathy) keyed to particular types of creature.

Magical effects which function solely on "persons" do not affect the imposters, and may be useful in distinguishing them. I recommend this be attempted only with spells that have a visible result - one to enlarge or shrink its subject beyond the range a doppelganger's power can achieve is ideal - as these creatures' facility as liars easily extends to acting out the role of one who has succumbed to a charm or similar spell.

Naturally, as with any adversary, it is the hunter's cunning and strategy which provide

the best tools by which to penetrate a doppelganger's deceptions.

Mind-Reading

Not - quite - so infamous as their capacity to change shape, yet equally critical to their despicable way of life, the doppelgangers' sensitivity to other sapient creatures' thoughts is often the greatest obstacle to their defeat. Winnowing out a doppelganger concealed amongst humans might otherwise, as with lycanthropes or murderous mortals, come down to the simple process of elimination!

To these master imposters, however, is given the power to glean from others' minds their thoughts, fears, desires and intentions ... including those plans we hunters devise, by which to seek them out. Moreover, this capacity to peer beneath the outward veneer of nearly everyone they meet, discerning their hidden nature and motives, provides

Recognition Signals

As doppelgangers' mind-reading power has a limited range and can probe only one subject at a time, Zherisia's imposters must often coordinate their covert actions using signals - special turns of phrase, innocuous gestures, details of dress and posture - that secretly convey messages under the very noses of unsuspecting humans. Most doppelganger clans create their own unique system of signals, thus hiding their communications from rivals as well as 'cattle'. A few signals - most importantly, cues by which they identify themselves as "Masters" and establish territorial claims - are universally taught to all dread doppelgangers in Paridon.

Some sample recognition-signals employed by various Zherisian clans, rich or poor:

Message

"I am a Master."
"I am Frebo clan."
"Meet in private."
"Read my mind now."
"Watch that one."
"That's *my* human: hands off."
"This is a quisling."
"Distract them."
"Leave no witnesses."

Gesture

Turn right foot outward and wipe brow (male) or adjust bonnet (female)
Left shirt-cuff folded under at edge, plus green worn somewhere
Check watch (male) or hair (female), then shrug shoulders and cough
Tilt head to left and tap right foot as if thinking, then chuckle
Adjust cravat (male) or collar (female), tilting wrist toward one to watch
Brush imaginary lint off human's clothing, then blink rapidly three times
Refer to quisling as "a close friend of the family" (dear for jackalweres)
Doff cap and ruffle hair (male) or loosen and re-tie kerchief (female)
Twist ring on left hand or grasp right index finger in left hand

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doppelgangers - especially teams of them, working together - with a decisive advantage in social discourse and the manipulation or coercion of those they deceive.

The typical doppelganger's psychic acuity is analogous, albeit not identical, to that of the divinatory spell detect thoughts. (Should your own repertoire yet lack this spell, Gennifer, I'd be happy to act as middleman between yourself and Perseyus Lathenna, to procure a copy for your edification. That scholar's library includes that very spell, as I know for a fact ... and Perseyus's stubborn disdain for you sisters' level of commitment has persisted, for far too long!) Its power extends about 20 paces from the creature - the distance at which the doppelganger often positions itself, as it unobtrusively spies on someone - to encompass a conical space it may "aim" in any horizontal or vertical direction it chooses.

As a doppelganger need not see those whose minds it probes, the imposter has no need to physically face its targets; it can "aim" its mental attention at subjects who stand behind it, who occupy separate rooms and/or adjacent floors of a building, et

cetera. The angle at which a doppelganger directs its mind-reading sense is under its conscious control, making only a momentary act of will necessary to adjust its orientation.

Powerful as it is, the doppelganger's mind-sense is not infallible. Like normal divinatory effects, this ability can be blocked by one yard of wood or soil, one foot of stone (including such inorganic substances as clay, Zherisian concrete, packed sand or gravel), or one inch of everyday metals, such as iron. Such barricades must be of a single piece, any holes being smaller than one foot square; two six-inch stone walls do not combine their mass, as each is separately pierced by the doppelganger's sensory power.

Barriers that combine two or more obstructing substances can be effective, provided their net impenetrability is adequate - two feet of soil sandwiched between two six-inch-thick wooden planks, for instance, or nine inches of cement plated with quarter-inch tin - but only if layers of material are contiguous.

Psychic Area of Effect

The area of a doppelganger's detect thoughts power is a 60' conical emanation, arising from the imposter's head. Whereas non-divinatory emanations usually require line of effect, this power penetrates most non-magical obstacles in its path, being blocked only by magical methods of protection, or by sufficient quantities of substances detailed above. A doppelganger may initiate its detect thoughts ability, discontinue use of it, or redirect the power's angle of orientation as free actions (up to 2 per round). Changing the mode of its mind-reading (see below) is a swift action.

As with attack-spells like cone of cold, a doppelganger's mental "view" of an area can be laid out horizontally on a combat grid, as illustrated by the 60-foot cone silhouettes on p. 307 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. Should the imposter re-direct its mental sense to point up or down, the "X' radius" silhouettes may be used to map out the area it monitors, on other vertical levels within a building. If its attention is directed at creatures 10' above or below - one floor away, in a typical (Medium-scale) home - the 10'-radius silhouette is suitable. For subjects 20' above or below the imposter, the 20'-radius silhouette is appropriate for that vertical distance away, and so on. Such radial silhouettes are centered on the doppelganger.

As a supernatural ability, the use of a doppelganger's mind-reading power cannot be dispelled or counterspelled. Detect magic does not reveal its ability at work.

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Doppelgangers' power to read minds can freely penetrate barriers of insufficient density to block them, without any loss of range or potency. Separate barriers' thickness is not added together. If a barrier has a hole 1' square or larger, the doppelganger's awareness penetrates the space where the hole is located, and a "line of effect" beyond it, to its maximum range of detect thoughts.

Gold is, indeed, a barrier to doppelgangers' mind-reading. Adamantine might work, at the DM's discretion: rare as this exotic metal is in Ravenloft, even the doppelgangers themselves have yet to determine its efficacy!

Additionally, a doppelganger's psychic acuity is balked by all but the thinnest unbroken veneers of denser metals: not only of lead, as with conventional detect-spells, but of pure gold or (reputedly ... though I've

no idea how one might acquire enough to test its efficacy!) adamantite, as well.

Much like the detect thoughts spell, a doppelganger's ability to discern others' thoughts provides varied degrees of perceptiveness, depending upon how long and how intensely it probes a particular area, or specific minds within an area. If engaged in solitary activities, doppelgangers tend to leave their psychic sensitivity in a relaxed, default state I have termed "skimming mode": a supernatural awareness of the presence or absence, but not the precise location or content, of conscious sapient minds. ("Sapient minds", I should point out, is not confined to sentient minds, but encompasses all organisms capable of learning through experience, i.e. fishes and life forms higher on naturalists' "ladder of perfection" than they.)

Doppelgangers often use this mode of mental sensitivity much as a wizard uses an alarm spell, "pointing" their awareness in whatever direction they suspect threats or interruptions might approach from. They also use it to confirm whether or not they are alone and unobserved, when acting in secret.

Skimming Mode

A doppelganger's "skimming mode" is comparable to a detect thoughts spell in its first round of operation. The doppelganger may opt to stay in skimming mode indefinitely, and it must remain in this mode for at least one round, when it initially activates its mind-reading power. Skimming mode only reveals if other minds (minimum Intelligence of 1) exist inside its extrasensory area of effect; it tells the creature nothing of their number, nature, or intentions.

The cursory awareness afforded by skimming mode is too slight to endanger a doppelganger's sanity, should it sense a mind that would otherwise incur a Madness check for mental contact. If an imposter suspects that such mentally-hazardous beings are nearby, it usually stays in this mode to protect its own psyche from harm.

Skimming mode doesn't reveal the actual location of a detected mind; for example, it could only tell that one or more of a group of apparent sleepers is actually awake, not which one(s). Nor can it distinguish what direction a mind approaches from, should one move into the area of effect.

A doppelganger's skimming mode does not require concentration to maintain, any more than a human's ability to see or hear. Thus, distractions cannot "disrupt" its psychic sense. Detecting a mind's presence with skimming mode is instantaneous and does not require an action.

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If an imposter terminates its mind-reading power - voluntarily or otherwise - it initially enters skimming mode when it reawakens its psychic acuity. Sleeping or unconscious beings are not detected, in this or other modes.

When it needs to know more than the mere presence of nearby minds, a doppelganger can amplify its mind-reading abilities to distinguish greater detail. In "gauging mode", the imposter becomes aware of how many conscious, sapient minds the conical area encloses, and can estimate the analytical capacities of each such presence. It is the latter aspect of gauging mode that is most

useful to doppelgangers, as it allows them to distinguish which humans may draw dangerously-accurate conclusions from gaffes in their 'performance', and conversely, which ones can be easily duped. Interestingly, a doppelganger's gauging mode seems sensitive not only to the intellectual strength of each detected mind, but also to how observant or gullible a mind is temperamentally inclined to be: a handy adaptation to its treacherous way of life! (I do hope, dear Laurie, you'll pardon my taking Gennifer's side - in this instance, at least - in you sisters' ongoing debate, re. adaptive modification versus calculated design.)

Gauging Mode

"Gauging mode" is functionally similar to the second round of a detect thoughts spell's operation, with the additional benefit that the doppelganger discerns not only the exact Intelligence scores of the minds it senses, but their approximate Wisdom also. Wisdom being the key ability for both Spot and Sense Motive, knowing a person's Wisdom is often more useful to these imposters than knowing their Intelligence. A doppelganger's estimate of a mind's Wisdom can be calculated by the formula: (subject's Wisdom - 5) + 2d4. Detecting a mind and sensing its Intelligence does not require an action, but assessing an individual mind's Wisdom is a swift action.

Doppelgangers that detect the minds of beings whose Intelligence is 26 or higher, and at least 10 points higher than their own, are vulnerable to stunning as per the detect thoughts spell. They are also susceptible to potential Madness checks for mental contact, when they use gauging mode. If a doppelganger is stunned by contact with a greater Intelligence or it succumbs to any Madness effect due to its mind-reading, its thought-detecting power automatically shuts off in self-defense and cannot be reactivated for 10 minutes.

Doppelgangers are acclimated to sensing human distress via their detect thoughts ability, so need not make Madness saves if they contact the minds of humanoids suffering from Madness effects. They receive a +4 bonus to Madness saves for mental contact with doppelgangers suffering from Madness effects, as well as for psychic contact with Sodo (but not other darklords), elementals, oozes, outsiders or plants. This racial save bonus does not apply if doppelgangers read or contact the minds of aberrations; hence, Zherisian doppelgangers find the marikith every bit as terrifying as humans do ... if not worse!

A doppelganger cannot pinpoint the exact location of a mind by gauging mode alone, hence can't use this mode to track an invisible foe's movements. Gauging mode does allow it to distinguish which of a group of "sleepers" is faking, as the imposter can intuit which of the bodies it looks at houses a conscious (detectable) mind. If two are awake, it senses which mind goes with which.

Like skimming mode, gauging mode does not require concentration.

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Doppelgangers may use only one mode of mind-reading at a time. A doppelganger which reads a particular subject's thoughts, using probing mode, therefore ceases to perceive any other minds it had previously sensed while in skimming or gauging mode.

Unless it has good cause to select a different subject, a doppelganger using probing mode "blind" on a group of potential enemies will target the subject it estimates to have the lowest Wisdom. If two candidates are tied for lowest Wisdom, it chooses whichever one has the higher Intelligence, as a smart subject's thoughts are likely to reveal more of its enemies' plans.

Whereas skimming mode seems, perforce, too shallow and unlocalized to pose any threat to its user's mental stability, I have reason to believe that doppelgangers can fall prey to the same distress and fragility of nerves as we humans, should they contact a truly alien and/or superhuman intelligence while in gauging mode. Such a vulnerability may, in fact, be a contributing factor to their covert, ongoing feud with the so-called "Shadow Killers" plaguing their home city: creatures which, judging by their ghastly

morphology and highly-coordinated attacks, fall into at least one of these two categories.

As with skimming mode, this manifestation of a doppelganger's power does not allow it to pinpoint the exact locations of the minds it senses. It does, however, let the creature determine which minds are situated inside which visible bodies, should it view a group of people of varied intelligence. It can likewise serve the purposes of an alarm-spell, under circumstances when a doppelganger finds it necessary to distinguish sentient intruders from the lesser minds of animals (such as whilst hiding a corpse in the stables).

A doppelganger can shift into gauging mode from either of its other modes, but it cannot immediately enter this mode if it has shut down its mind-reading power altogether, and is starting it up afresh.

Last and most focused of doppelgangers' grades of mental awareness is "probing mode", in which a chosen subject's actual thoughts may be accessed. Unlike the preceding modes, which survey a broad area all at once, a doppelganger that employs probing mode concentrates on a lone subject, losing track of other minds within its area of awareness. (I can attest to this personally, Miladies. I once found it necessary to decoy just such a creature's mental attention - luring it to strive, in vain, to circumvent the

Probing Mode

Subjects targeted by a doppelganger's probing mode may resist its attempt to read their thoughts with a Will save (DC is Charisma-based). A successful save prevents the doppelganger from reading that subject's thoughts for 1 minute; the subject's mind can still be detected in skimming or gauging mode, and the creature's power remains in probing mode, ready to read the thoughts of other targets.

As doppelgangers get little practice at reading non-sentient minds, creatures with Intelligence of 1 or 2 have a +4 on their Will saves to stop such imposters from probing their primitive, instinctual thoughts. This does not apply to doppelgangers with the Wild Empathy class ability.

Should a doppelganger avoid going mad from initial (gauging mode) contact with an alien mind, it must make a second Madness save if it successfully probes that mind. Marikith know to forego their own Will saves if an imposter attempts to do this, the better to drive it insane.

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protections that guarded my thoughts - thereby allowing several associates to ghost past it, their minds as unnoticed as their footsteps!) The chosen subject must lie within its area of sensitivity, but need not be visible or audible to the doppelganger: it can use gauging mode to detect minds behind a wall or other concealment, then select a suitable target - usually, whichever one it deems easiest to penetrate - and subject that mind to probing mode, all without ever setting eyes on the ones it is spying upon. (Unsporting, is it not?)

Other modes' perusal of minds is too superficial to constitute actual violation of subjects' mental integrity, but probing mode is a direct trespass on the inner workings of one's psyche. A probed mind rebels against this encroachment, subconsciously struggling to fend off the psychic intrusion. Should it successfully resist penetration, the subject is safe for the nonce: having once failed, the imposter will typically wait a short time before repeating its attempt. Unlike the detect thoughts spell, a failed effort by a doppelganger to utilize probing mode does not abort its use of its mental ability. Nor does the subject experience that distinctive "tingling" sensation which a botched thought-reading spell normally generates, in its resisting target.

Rookhausen is incorrect in saying that the failed use of probing mode never results in any telltale sensation, on the part of its subject. Rather, a sensation may or may not occur, as a doppelganger which fails to read a subject's mind may psychically withdraw, undetected, on a successful Bluff check. If it does give away its probing attempt, the resulting sensation will be different for each individual doppelganger (a tingle for one, dizziness for another, an impulse to giggle for a third, etc), providing a possible clue as to which imposter is to blame for a given mental intrusion. The narrator's confusion on this issue stems from the fact that accounts by mind-probed subjects often neglect to mention any unusual sensation, and from the inconsistency in those sensations reported by people who did sense they were being probed ... by different doppelgangers.

Thoughts Revealed

Successful use of probing mode always gives a doppelganger access to the thoughts of a subject. As detect thoughts is not language-dependent, it need not speak the same tongue as the one whose mind it reads. Slang terms, euphemisms, and other culture-specific terms are translated as aspects of the thinker's language, but personal or professional references aren't (e.g. a physician's clinical jargon would make little sense to a doppelganger without medical training).

If the subject of a doppelganger's probing mode misses her Will save by more than 3 points, the imposter also perceives the negative or self-serving emotions (if any) which underlie the subject's thoughts. If the Will save is missed by 5 or more points, positive emotions are also discerned. A doppelganger does not gain any special insight into the underlying cause of emotions it detects, apart from what the subject's thoughts might chance to reveal.

If a doppelganger attempts to wrest visual or auditory information from a subject - a somewhat more difficult procedure - the DC to resist its probing mode is reduced by 2. If the subject's Will save fails by 4 or more, either visual or auditory information (doppelganger's choice) is obtained, in addition to thoughts and negative emotions; if a subject fails by 8 or more, both are perceived. The information in question will be pertinent to what a subject is thinking, but not necessarily of any use to the doppelganger. Sensory impressions of memories, desires, fears, expectations or sheer fantasies are all possibilities.

Should an imposter's subject receive a telepathic message whilst being probed, as with fiendish telepathy or a Rary's telepathic bond effect, the doppelganger automatically "eavesdrops" on the incoming message. It does not glean emotional or other information from such messages picked up 'second-hand', only their bare word-for-word content.

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Perhaps because it requires effort to pierce the mind's defenses, doppelgangers do not use this mode for prolonged periods. Exhaustive research by Celebrant Chaswick and his brethren, involving thought-warding enchanted rings and the judicious seeding of disinformation, revealed that a doppelganger can monitor a given target's thoughts for 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ minutes at a stretch - extensive research, indeed! - before it must revert to another mode. It can resume its perusal of the same subject after a few seconds; the mind it had been reading has a second opportunity to fight off the imposter's psychic intrusion, if so. Maintaining access to a mind's thoughts

The probing mode of a doppelganger's detect thoughts can be used for 18 consecutive rounds on a given subject. At the end of this period it must revert to another mode, or deactivate its power, for one round or more. If it then resumes reading the same mind, a new Will save is permitted.

A doppelganger's probing mode can be aborted by external distractions, just like a PC's control over an active spell. If a probing imposter fails its Concentration check when it is disturbed, it immediately revert to gauging mode. Feats which provide bonuses to Concentration checks when using spells, such as Combat Casting, also apply to doppelgangers' maintaining a mental probe.

A doppelganger can only enter probing mode from its gauging mode. It can enter gauging mode from either probing or skimming modes, and can enter skimming mode from any other mode, as well as when it first activates its mind-reading power. Most doppelgangers spend the majority of the time in gauging mode, shifting to skimming mode if alone or if they fear a dangerously-alien mind is nearby, or to probing mode as needed. They virtually never leave their power 'off'.

while its power lasts is neither strenuous nor distracting to a doppelganger, but other events can disrupt its focus and so discontinue the probe prematurely.

To the best of my knowledge, a doppelganger can never direct its mental power's probing mode at a subject, without first discerning that subject's mind via gauging mode. It cannot enter probing mode immediately upon activating its mind-reading power - thus, if it activates its power to read someone's mind, it must briefly engage in skimming, then gauging, before it can impose its probing mode on them - but it can instantly deactivate its power from that mode.

Once it accesses a subject's mind, the doppelganger perceives his or her thoughts as they are formulated, without apparent hindrance from language-barriers or cultural differences. At a minimum, a subject's conscious, linear thoughts are detected; in many cases - perhaps with more effort or concentration on the doppelganger's part, perhaps due to some lapse in the subject's own subconscious defenses - the emotional subtext of these thoughts are also discerned. Most rarely, as previously mentioned, a doppelganger extracts visual or auditory information corresponding to a subject's thoughts, such as the actual voice of someone whose past remarks the subject might be recollecting, or the layout of the bedroom a tired subject is longing to retire to.

While I have no means of proving this, Miladies, the anecdotes and testimony that I have gathered from actual doppelgangers give me a consistent impression that, when their power gives them insight into others' emotions or motivations, it is invariably the darker hues of the emotional spectrum which they perceive most clearly. It is far more common, in these imposters' words or writings, to find reference to other beings' selfishness, cowardice, mendacity or willful ignorance than to any laudable quality. Whether this bias is inherent in their psychic abilities, or a result of such contempt-ridden creatures' low expectations about everyone around them, I cannot say.

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Having once penetrated the thoughts of a subject, the imposter takes full advantage of the insight such a window into that subject's psyche affords. It exploits any vulnerabilities revealed, whether physical or psychological, and turns any plans averse to its well-being or comfort against their instigators. Closer to hand, it models its own false performance, as a "fellow man", to meet the expectations of subjects whose minds it has recently probed, and artfully chooses its words so as to engage others' trust and fascination, while deluding the credulous with its lies.

As for methods by which such imposters' psychic sense can be blocked or eluded, there are really two separate concerns here: concealing one's presence, and shielding one's thoughts. If a doppelganger is to be ambushed, its sensitivity to minds in near proximity must be foiled, either by deflection or distraction. To mask one's mind from notice by a doppelganger's skimming or gauging mode, it is simplest to take advantage of mundane materials which obstruct the creature's mental powers: sturdy stone walls, metal-reinforced security doors, or the earthen bulwarks of fortifications or bridges. So long as such barriers lie between you and the doppelganger, you are safely within its psychic "blind spot", hidden from mental view.

Metallic tower shields, although uncommon on the battlefield due to their weightiness, can provide a portable shelter from an imposter's extrasensory powers. If you use such a device, dear ladies, be certain you do not get between the creature and other people it has already sensed, lest the shield's "cover" obscure them as well! Conventional helmets are far too thin to ward off doppelgangers' mental perusal, but a full helm plated with sufficient gold or lead can seal away its wearer's mind from detection.

If no such cover is available, more drastic measures may be necessary. Simply giving the suspected doppelganger cause to switch to probing mode may suffice, provided one can do so in a way that won't betray one's intentions. Lacking protective magics, this usually means beguiling some unsuspecting

Mind-Reading and Deceit

A doppelganger's Disguise and Bluff checks benefit in two ways from its mind-reading. First of all, through its use of gauging mode, the imposter can determine the Intelligence and approximate Wisdom of the humanoids around it. This allows it to avoid confrontations with individuals who are quick-witted enough to deduce the creature's nature, as well as those with a high Wis bonus, whose Spot and Sense Motive skills are naturally more acute.

Secondly, if a doppelganger has successfully read a sentient being's thoughts in probing mode, it receives a +4 circumstance bonus on its Disguise and Bluff checks to deceive that being for the next 30 minutes. If the thoughts it detects should happen to reveal useful, accurate information about another person's intentions or attitudes - for example, if a subject it 'reads' is thinking that a companion is strongly attracted to the imposter's false guise - then the doppelganger receives a +2 circumstance bonus on its Disguise and Bluff checks to fool that person as well, for the next 10 minutes. These circumstance bonuses do not stack.

A doppelganger using its mind-reading power also receives a +4 circumstance bonus on Gather Information checks, as it can pick withheld facts directly from reluctant informants' own heads. Depending on what thoughts it uncovers, DMs may also allow a bonus to other social interaction skills, such as Intimidate (if it learns a person's fears), or omit skill checks altogether (e.g. reading someone's intent to lie makes Sense Motive unnecessary).

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soul into conversing with the creature about an issue sure to spur its curiosity. (Money or scandal are trustworthy topics of discourse, for this purpose.)

With warding magics - the anti-divinatory abjuration nondetection is ideal, as are certain enchanted items - no such ploy is required to deflect all permutations of an imposter's mental power from one's self ... though one should, naturally, avoid the creature's mundane senses as well, and those of nearby witnesses whose thoughts it might peruse.

As magical protections are too often hard to come by, other discreet alternatives may be needed to defeat the probing mode of doppelgangers. (Lead- or gold-plated helmets are effective for this purpose, but are counterproductive if one prefers to conceal one's investigation from the quarry!) Both inherent willpower and applied mental discipline, such as any trained spellcaster develops, can fortify a subject's mind against a doppelganger's probing mode.

Any spell or magical item which protects against detect spells also foils all of a doppelganger's extrasensory modes. If the protective magic shields a single individual, that creature is treated as if it were unconscious for purposes of the imposter's detect thoughts ability, or feats and salient abilities deriving from that power.

Most doppelgangers in Zherisia will enthusiastically destroy any mind-warding items they come across, as well as spellbooks that house such secrets. Conversely, outcasts residing in the Core or Zherisian clan leaders plotting rebellion may seek such items out for their own use, to shield their presence or scheming from their own kind.

If a spell or effect screens an area, such as Mordenkainen's private sanctum, the doppelganger perceives the affected area as if it were obscured by a physical barrier of stone, lead, etc. Such an area can provide cover for the Hide skill, if it lies between the imposter and the one hiding.

If a doppelganger's detect thoughts emanation is blocked by an effective barrier, that barrier may be used as cover for Hide checks against its skimming or gauging modes. A metallic tower shield may also be used as cover for Hide checks, with the same consequences (loss of attacks & shield bonus) as if it were used that way in combat. A lead- or gold-plated full helmet acts as portable concealment from all modes of a doppelganger's detect thoughts power, provided the plating is thick enough (which normal ornamental gilding is not).

A metallic tower shield's statistics are identical to those of a normal (wooden) tower shield, with the following changes: 55 gp, armor check penalty -12, weight 60 lb., hardness 10, hp 25

Lead- and gold-shielded helmets are described in the Hunting chapter.

In the absence of mental shielding-spells, more general-purpose magics like owl's wisdom or resistance can bolster one's defenses indirectly. Some reports hold that Thaani mental sciences - practices of which, I must confess, sound more like fancy than fact to me - can duplicate the imposters' own abilities, and ward off their intrusions as well. Simple tricks that fill the mind with innocuous thoughts, such as the mental recitation of nursery rhymes, occasionally prove helpful, provided the subject knows when to take such precautions and maintains focus. Lastly, keeping suspected imposters' own focus disrupted, with constant distractions and nagging discomforts, may prevent it from achieving the successful penetration of any mind's secrets.

On Common Doppelganger Powers

Psionics and Doppelgangers

Psionics and doppelgangers are a natural combination. The "mental power" flavor of psionics nicely complements the doppelganger's inherent bent for mind-twisting adventures, and many psionic powers are similar to the shape-shifting and mind-reading powers inherent to the imposters. If your campaign uses psionics, or you want to make doppelgangers psionic monsters in an otherwise non-psionic campaign, the easiest way to introduce these powers is the "Psionics Equals Magic" ruling: spell resistance is exactly equivalent to power resistance, saving throws are adjudicated in the same way, "magical" and "psionic" auras are indistinguishable (or nearly so) and so forth. All necessary information for a psionics campaign is available through the SRD and also in the Expanded Psionics Handbook.

Psionic powers can easily be explained as a further result of the same process (alchemical or otherwise) which created doppelgangers in the first place, and is credited for giving them their unique abilities. Doppelgangers make natural telepaths and egoists (subclasses of the psion class, just as necromancer or transmuter are subclasses within the wizard class), and also make good psychic warriors and soulknives, using psionics to enhance their fighting abilities.

Glamer

This is the most obscure of doppelgangers' powers, and one but little understood. Until I undertook to research the imposters' methods in depth, I myself - and though I am loath to boast, I count myself better-informed in matters of guile than the average man - believed their alleged ability to alter the semblance of objects to be sheer fiction, or at most, such petty prestidigitation as a

Glamer 101

As a supernatural ability, use of the Glamer power cannot be dispelled or counterspelled, and it doesn't produce lingering auras at the site of its activation.

True seeing does not detect an overlapping image of a glamered object the doppelganger is holding or carrying, but it will detect one if the creature sets the item down.

Items altered by this doppelganger power will temporarily give off either faint illusion, if only their appearance has been changed, or moderate transmutation, if physical properties have also been altered. This aura doesn't persist for long, but fades to become undetectable in 1d6 rounds (faint) or minutes (moderate).

An antimagic field negates Glamer. Leaving the field restores items to their glamer-altered state, provided they are still within the radius of the doppelganger's power and the creature itself is not inside the antimagic field.

dabbling gnome might invoke. But mounting evidence of signet rings, manacles, concealed weapons and other items being altered by these creatures - altered not solely as camouflage, but in a manner affecting their functionality - has convinced me that "glamer" is, in truth, far more than just a superficial party trick.

Rather, doppelganger-glamer incorporates elements of both illusion - superficial changes in the sensory qualities of objects -

No other variety of doppelganger, aside from those indigenous to Zherisia, is known to possess the Glamer special ability. To date, the glamer-using "dread doppelganger" has only appeared in Ravenloft game products; beyond the Land of Mists, it is likely that these beings still exist on Sodo's Material Plane world of origin.

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Doppelgangers' glamer may only be used upon objects which are currently in the doppelganger's possession, and which, considered separately, constitute no greater than a light load (PHB Table 9.1: Carrying Capacity). An average specimen (Strength 14) can therefore apply its glamer to an item weighing a maximum of 58 pounds.

The farthest that a typical doppelganger can extend its glamer is a 5' radius centered on itself. An object that sticks out beyond this boundary-line cannot be altered by the Glamer special ability.

and transmutation - alteration of objects' physical properties, independent of observer's senses - in the same deceptive power. (The creatures evidently refer to this aptitude as 'glamer' before their human quislings, but I suspect that this is disinformation, to mislead arcana-savvy underlings into thinking it entirely illusory in nature.)

The external veneer of an affected item is cloaked by illusion, encompassing all five human senses in the manner of a true glamer-spell; the object's physical structure, however, may also be reconfigured to a limited extent, although its general function and composition are unchanged, and its

Dressed to Kill

Doppelgangers' glamer lets them adjust the cut of their clothes, footwear and related accessories, much as many wondrous items adjust their size to suit their wearers. Imposters can change the style, condition, and quality of garments also, as a disguise self spell does; changes which "tailor" clothes to fit are transmutation-based, but changes in quality, style, or state of repair are illusions.

Applying glamer to a single item is a standard action. With practice, mature doppelgangers learn to use Glamer on an entire set of clothing as a full-round action; they must be wearing the outfit in order to do this successfully.

Glamer may be dismissed as a free action; a single such action may affect any or all of the items an imposter is currently disguising. A cunning doppelganger might dress up in one guise's outfit, then use its Change Shape and Glamer abilities to assume a second role. It can shift back to the first guise while dismissing its Glamer, switching identities in one round, and still have a move action left over.

Wealthy or elite doppelgangers, although capable of using their Glamer special ability to generate all the finery they could wish for, usually maintain a genuine wardrobe for their preferred false identities. Not having to resort to glamer to upgrade one's attire is regarded as an important status symbol by Paridon's more-eminent doppelganger clans; most imposters take narcissistic pride in their (stolen) good looks, so those that can afford to indulge their vanity tend to be clotheshorses.

When not "dressed for a part" in the clothing of their apparent professions, poor and low-ranking doppelgangers in Zherisia customarily clothe themselves in cast-off or stolen garments of their homeland's monks, stripped of insignia and dyed a dingy, undistinguished gray. The same assets that make such outfits desirable for monks - freedom of movement, hidden pockets, and lashings or sashes that bind them in place - also make them ideal for the imposters' needs. The anonymity afforded by this utilitarian garb also ensures that, if an underling should be killed while embarked on some act of internal treachery, it cannot easily be traced to the superior who'd sent it. Lastly, utilizing the same clothing as the most revered devotees of the Divinity of Mankind - a faith that denigrates their race as "perverse mockeries of sacred humanity" - strikes most doppelgangers as a grand joke.

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weight and relative value can only be increased slightly. Tellingly, when viewed with eyes able to pierce the veil of illusions, I am informed many doppelgangers' glamered possessions look far less ornate and expensive-looking, yet the structural changes they apply to such objects remain quite visible.

Whatever its name or mechanism of operation, a doppelganger's glamer ability allows it to work changes upon its worn or carried personal possessions. Items it is merely close to are not susceptible; nor are items in another being's keeping. Legal ownership is not the criterion here - if it were, the kleptomaniacal imposters would seldom have anything to work with! - but rather, whether the item is subject to handling, manipulation and transport at the creature's discretion.

In a classic case in Hazlan, a doppelganger captured alive by the local vraylok's enforcers was kept manacled so heavily that shapechanging could not free it; in an unguarded moment, it rendered the manacles - not truly its property, but something it could carry about within its prison cell, nevertheless - thin and brittle with its glamer, then shattered them on the cell's stone walls. A similar apprehension in Nartok ended in the creature's timely execution, for its shackles - unlike the Hazlani captive's - were stoutly bolted to the dungeon floor: a situation which, if anything, made the doppelganger more the manacles' possession than vice versa.

Aside from being in the doppelganger's keeping, an affected item must lie wholly within the rather narrow range of the creature's glamer ability. Objects that protrude beyond this range - a radius of five feet, for nearly all doppelgangers - cannot be affected by this power, and items too heavy or unwieldy for the imposter to carry easily are also exempt.

When a doppelganger uses glamer to physically modify any item, the outcome is limited by the object's composition and fundamental nature. At its most basic, the imposters use glamer as a means of instantaneously re-tailoring clothing and

An item affected by the Glamer special ability always retains its original material - same metal, same fabric, same wood, etc - although its illusionary overlay can change its appearance within a given category. Linen can resemble silk in texture and luster, yet remains easier to tear than true silk; steel can be made to look like silver, but will not bypass DR/silver. Metal must still appear to be metal, ceramic as ceramic, etc. A material's quality or condition may vary within the range of conditions possible in mundane nature; magical properties cannot be added or suppressed.

Just as it can reduce its body's bulk when shapechanging from Medium to Small, an imposter's Glamer can diminish its possessions' volume by one size category, and their weight to as little as 1/8 their starting mass. Doppelgangers use this application of glamer to conceal weapons, stolen property, or the like on their persons, as well as to adjust equipment to fit their current forms.

Glamer can only increase the mass of items by 10% at most. Most doppelgangers carry clothing and gear sized for their larger forms, as they can shrink their equipment for smaller guises more easily than they can expand it for big ones.

equipment to the bodily proportions of the shapes that they adopt: expanding waistlines, shortening trouser legs, loosening cuffs, etc.

This preserves their outward decorum, ensuring their garments fit properly, and allows them to assume child- or halfling-sized guises without becoming swamped by their own garb. If that creature to whose postmortem I stood witness was typical, doppelgangers are inclined to wear loose-fitting outfits sized for quite a large human's frame, "adjusting" these garments via glamer as their own proportions change. (Might this preference be intended to avert being constricted by undersized clothes, should

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their power abruptly fail them?) Atop these physical modifications, an illusionary façade overlays such clothing, swiftly generating the appropriate "look" for their roles' age, sex, social position, career and demeanor.

As in such conventional transmutations as fabricate, a doppelganger's glamer does not let it change the basic material of an item, but only its physical configuration, structural integrity, and superficial sensory qualities. The doppelganger captured in Hazlan broke loose by causing its manacles to become thin and brittle, but it evidently could not transform its shackles' iron into some other substance - water, soft clay, custard, et cetera - from which it might have wrested free silently, without striking its bonds against the cell's walls. Nor could it transform the fragments of its shattered manacles into bogus weapons or armor, and thereby impersonate a prison guard; instead, it murdered one of the vraylok's men to obtain the accessories for such a disguise. Given that such innovative uses of glamer would have significantly aided the creature's escape from dire peril, had it been capable of them, I must conclude that glamer cannot drastically alter an object's material, nor (by testament



The illusionary component of Glamer affects the visual, audible, and tactile sensory qualities of affected items. It does not change the smell or taste of the objects affected. If circumstances put someone in a position to notice an incongruous odor or flavor (e.g. if the doppelganger's clothes look spotless, yet smell of recent bloodstains), a Will save is permitted to penetrate the illusionary aspect of its glamer's effect. The saving throw's DC is Intelligence-based.

of the manacle-shards' non-usage) increase its physical mass.

Note that, when I speak of Glamer's transmuting effects, I refer solely to what an affected item is actually useful for. This is not to be confused with the evident appearance of an item. A doppelganger's power to change the sensory characteristics of glamer-affected objects - the way they look, sound, and feel to the touch - is limited only by the objects' size and broad category of material, and by the imagination of the creature itself. Nevertheless, such changes do not make the item function as what it appears to be: a thin tunic made to resemble a heavy fur coat will not keep the doppelganger warm in winter, nor would it guard the creature's life, if overlaid with the illusory veneer of padded armor.

If a doppelganger wishes to make hands-on use of an object, as opposed to merely show off its fancy accoutrements, it needs appropriate materials to start with. In accordance with that classic transmutational principle of "Like in Nature, Like in Form", doppelgangers cannot bestow a function on an item useless for that task; rather, they must start with an article that is similar in purpose - a war-ax, a fork, a padlock - before they can modify it to fulfill a similar job: a sword, a spoon, a buckle. While hard proof one way or the other is sparse, these imposters' power may also be ill-suited to work with raw, unformed materials; making a clump of mud into a brick, for example, or a wad of fleece into thread, may well be beyond their skill or magic. (On the other

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hand, a lack of such reports might merely indicate that they dislike squandering their abilities on menial chores - these self-dubbed "Masters'" elitism is, after all, exceeded only by their laziness - so I hesitate to declare this inability to refine crude materials as sure fact.) Doppelgangers have also been known to use glamer to temporarily restore damaged or worn implements to a useable condition, such as converting a dull, pitted sword-blade to a sharp, sound one; indeed, a defeated imposter's "equipment" is often revealed to be naught but rubbish and bric-a-brac, once the creature's power ceases to gloss over flaws.

The exception to the rule that a successfully glamer-transmuted item functions as per the specifications of its new form, I am relieved to say, is magic. A doppelganger can cause an item to resemble an object of enchantment with its glamer's illusionary aspect, but it cannot actually transfigure mundane material into a dweomercrafted state. Indeed, objects which genuinely are enchanted temporarily lose their arcane properties, should they be transmuted into new shapes by the imposter's ability. The rare doppelganger with conventional spellcasting talent cannot create material or focal spell components with glamer, but must carry a spell

Glamered Objects: Functional or Not?

An object which is to function as a weapon, tool, or other hands-on implement after transmutation must have had a similar function before Glamer is applied. Any attempt to change an item so as to fulfill an unrelated purpose - to change a fireplace poker into a sword, for example - results in an unwieldy object that is effective for neither its former, nor its intended purpose (e.g. a "sword" so badly balanced it can't hit an opponent, and which is the wrong shape to stir coals). Changing one object into another with the same function does work, even if their mechanism of operation is different: a slashing scimitar could become a stabbing rapier, or a pistol be reconfigured as a hand crossbow. Where "function" is ambiguous, the doppelganger's own viewpoint prevails: a syringe is a medical implement to most humans, but if the imposter in question thinks of it as a means of stealthily incapacitating victims, it could transform it into a shuriken or garrote.

Cost is also a factor in determining what a given object can be transformed into. Glamer cannot increase an existing item's value by more than a factor of three, when it changes the item's form via transmutation. A handaxe (6 gp, 3 lb.) is heavy enough to turn into a rapier (20 gp, 2 lb.) but its price - and hence, quality of manufacture - is too low; the handaxe could, however, become a club (0 gp, 3 lb.) if the doppelganger has need for a bludgeoning weapon. The apparent value of an item can increase much more than this (e.g. a handaxe could be made to look ornately-gilded and worth far more than 18 gp), but such changes are purely decorative and don't affect its actual function (e.g. the "gilded" handaxe would not bypass a mountain loup-garou's DR/gold). Glamer can restore sharpness to a dulled blade and sturdiness to a worn-out item, but it cannot convert a common item into a masterwork-quality one.

There is no limit to how far a doppelganger can "devalue" an item with its glamer. The imposters often disguise their weapons or other suspicious gear as innocuous personal items, to sneak them past security guards. Such items do not trigger alarm-spells that watch out for weaponry, if they are transmuted into the (non-functional) shapes of non-weapons when they pass through such wards' monitored area.

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component pouch much as you do, Gennifer. (It can, however, disguise its spell components as innocuous things via glamer, dismissing the effect as said components are needed.)

Useful though it is for a doppelganger, glamer has a critical weakness which hunters can exploit: a restricted range of effect. Alterations to items, whether by illusion or transmutation, are instantly negated if they should move out of range of doppelgangers' glamer-power.

Notice that I do not say *the* doppelganger's glamer-power: a disguised item may be passed from one imposter to another - hence, from one doppelganger's glamer-range to another's - without disrupting its disguise at the moment of transfer.

Removal of glamer's illusionary component restores an object's proper appearance, while negation of the transmuting effect returns it to its former

state (and revives its magic, if any). If an altered item had been serving some function when its true shape returned, it ceases to perform that function; for example, a dog-leash converted into leather bindings to tie up a prisoner would revert to a leash, instantly and harmlessly releasing the captive. Items returning to their original state under the wrong circumstance - say, a fragile crystal chalice that reverts to full size, having been shrunk down to fit inside a cigar-case - may be damaged in the process.

Note that although doppelgangers use their power of glamer primarily to reinforce their bodily transformations, by altering their clothes and equipment to suit their roles, these are hardly the only applications which come to mind. Potential underhanded uses of glamer range widely, from paying with copper in gold's stead, to crafting fraudulent invitations to exclusive soirees, to subtle acts of sabotage that leave no clues behind.

Instant Forgery and Do-It-Yourself Skeleton Keys

By using its Glamer special ability, any literate dread doppelganger can employ the Forgery skill without need of pen or ink. It does require paper, fluency at the language in which the document is to be written, and a few seconds (2 rounds for a short and simple document, 2d4 rounds/page for long or complex ones) to decide precisely what to 'write' with its power. The forged writing will vanish as soon as it passes out of range of the doppelganger's glamer-power, so its usefulness is limited to documents which will only be examined in its presence.

Because Glamer allows them to flawlessly correct any mistakes they might make as they go, and owing to their sharp eye for others' distinguishing traits - penmanship included - doppelgangers receive a +4 racial bonus on Forgery checks whenever they forge a document by means of this special ability. This bonus does not apply if a doppelganger writes out a forgery by hand. The +2 bonus for the Deceitful feat applies to forgeries created using Glamer, as do all other modifiers described in the PHB description of the Forgery skill.

A doppelganger with a signet ring or seal may alter its insignia via Glamer. Altering a signet to show a different emblem, then using it to set a distinctive mark in wax, is considered a separate use of the Forgery skill, of similar difficulty to forging someone's signature. As the sealing-wax impression is not, itself, glamer-generated, such a mark does not vanish outside of Glamer range.

If a doppelganger has a key of the appropriate size, it can use Glamer to change that key's shape to fit a different lock than the one it was designed for. In effect, it can use a single key to do the work of a complete set of thieves' tools. The doppelganger must still pass its Open Lock check to successfully pick the lock.

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Limits of Glamer

Magical items transmuted by Glamer do not demonstrate any magical properties (including auras) for as long as their shapes remain changed. Cursed items and artifacts are exceptions to this rule, as Glamer is too weak to suppress the malign effects of curses or the sheer potency of artifacts. A magic weapon transmuted into a different, but functionally-related form (such as a longspear into a shortspear) retains its masterwork bonus to attack rolls. Objects merely cloaked in illusion, but unchanged in their actual form, remain fully functional as magic items and retain their auras.

Glamer cannot normally be used to create functional material components or foci for spellcasting. A DM may rule that a doppelganger with the Eschew Materials feat creates its components out of dust, pebbles, or other debris as an alternative to simply dispensing with such materials; in game-mechanical terms, it is no different from any other caster using Eschew Materials.

Altered items which pass beyond the radius of a doppelganger's Glamer special ability instantly revert to their original shape and appearance, unless another dread doppelganger is in position to sustain their glamer-effect (and is willing and able to do so!). If the receiving doppelganger isn't previously aware that it must "take over" keeping the glamer-altered object in its current shape, it must make a DC 18 Reflex save in order to do so in time, before the item reverts.

Minor Advantages of Form

Though not nearly so infamous as their power to mimic the forms of their victims, there are other unusual qualities of these creatures which merit due consideration from those who seek to force them out of

hiding. Several of these qualities derive from doppelganger's physical forms - things that, for the most part, lie beneath the surface and do not change with their façade - and can potentially distinguish them from true folk ... even as they make them more dangerous.

Aside from their mental sensitivity, doppelgangers possess the same five mundane senses as we humans. Their vision and hearing are keen, but not extraordinarily

Sensory Abilities

Dread doppelgangers typically invest many skill ranks in Spot (+8) and Listen (+11), as these are essential to their preliminary observation of potential victims. However, their practice with these skills takes place exclusively in a social and/or urban setting, not in natural surroundings. When rolling to notice hidden creatures or determine encounter distance in a wilderness environment, doppelgangers take a -2 circumstance penalty on their Spot checks. Likewise, to detect creatures by sound in a wilderness setting, they must take a -2 circumstance penalty to their Listen rolls. A doppelganger with class levels as a ranger or scout (Complete Adventurer) is exempt from both of these penalties.

Attuned as they are to subtle details in others' appearance, doppelgangers get a +2 circumstance bonus on Spot checks to notice if someone is disguised. If they succeed on this check, a second successful check at the same DC allows them to tell if the other is, or isn't, another doppelganger, although not necessarily which variety (dread, standard, etc).

As monstrous humanoids, doppelgangers have darkvision to a distance of 60'. A doppelganger that pretends to be blinded by darkness must make an opposed Bluff check to do so convincingly; only witnesses with darkvision of their own may make Sense Motive checks against it.

Imposters do not have low-light vision.

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so; one might compare their acuity and alertness to that of a ranger with several years' wilderness experience. Of course, a doppelganger's affinity is not with the untamed wilds, but the high-speed bustle of urban living, and specifically with the social milieu in which its deceptive talents can excel.

Along with the keen eyes of a practiced observer, doppelgangers can also boast - at least, among themselves - of the capacity to see in total darkness, in much the same manner as calibans or dwarf-kind. It was, in fact, pursuit of an elusive assassin into the unlit bowels of the spires of Corvia that brought your Uncle Rudolph one of his few direct encounters with the imposters ... a pursuit, in which the quarry proved itself as unimpeded by the pitch blackness as Van Richten's doughty escort, Geddar Ironheart! Were they unable to navigate in lightless conditions, I suspect they would prey even more exclusively on humans than they

already do; as it is, our own species is not alone in enduring their parasitism. Regarding the acuity of their night-vision at a distance, reports are inconclusive, so I cannot state with certainty whether doppelganger eyesight meets the criteria for "low-light" vision, as it is defined in Joonker and Greenleaf's *Heightened Reality*.

A doppelganger's natural form is unusually resilient, with dense leathery hide and muscle that turns aside blows as effectively as all but the sturdiest forms of armor. Upon changing form to a thin-skinned human's, it does not forfeit this protective hide, but rather submerges its built-in "armor" beneath a veneer of soft, expendable tissues. This exterior surface, if struck, will bleed or bruise as if from a superficial wound, yet the attack's true killing force is absorbed or dispersed by the hardened underlying flesh. Canny opponents engaged in hand-to-hand melee with such imposters garrote may, by paying close attention to how their blows are received, be able to feel how the doppelganger's flesh fails to yield normally under impact: a useful clue, Laurie, for choosing the best target to receive your rapier's little "surprise"!

Should a blow penetrate a doppelganger's hardened tissues, it may still fail to inflict as much physical trauma as expected. Between their anatomical oddities and the bizarre mobility of their blood, doppelgangers are markedly less susceptible to precision attacks - the deft strike of a stealthy hand; the dead-on blow delivered at just the right moment - than those they impersonate. Indeed, some magics which physically impair or incapacitate a human target's body parts may be shaken off by doppelgangers with no ill effects, just as they may shed a forced polymorphing.

Measured against their physical resilience, doppelgangers' offensive capabilities - though hardly negligible - seem a bit of an afterthought. Lacking the claws and fangs of lycanthropes or the astounding strength of golems, a doppelganger in its true shape resorts either to pummeling with its callused knuckles - which, Miladies, are more than capable of beating a strong man into unconsciousness or bloody ruin - or to

Natural Armor

If a disguised doppelganger's natural armor (+6 if dread, +4 if standard) deflects an opponent's melee attack (i.e. if the attack roll missed it by less than that margin), the opponent can make a Sense Motive check against its Bluff check. If the opponent beats the doppelganger's Bluff, she realizes that the imposter's tissues are unnaturally hard, although not necessarily that her enemy is a doppelganger.

If the opponent scores a critical hit against the doppelganger (whether or not it is nullified by the creature's fortification; see next page), she may also make a Sense Motive check against its Bluff. In this case, she may add her base attack bonus to her check, much as she would if the doppelganger had fainted in combat. Success means she notices the creature's hard tissues, as above.

A doppelganger that assumes a Small form retains its full natural armor bonus.

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strangling the life out of their foes: a tactic they also favor whilst disguised, with or without the assistance of a garrote. (Ghastly, I know.) Interestingly, no report I have found of doppelgangers doing battle in their true forms - a rarity, but possible in the case of an antimagic field or their own extreme exhaustion - has mentioned their use of weapons or armor, whilst in their native state.

When it adopts a false guise, a doppelganger's skeleton stiffens to a human-like solidity, but its true form is astonishingly flexible. If wrestled to the ground by main force or held captive under circumstances where it cannot assume any shape but its own, a doppelganger may revert to its natural shape as a last resort, then utilize this extraordinary limberness to wrest free of others' grasp or squeeze between close-set cell bars. Averse though they are to their natural appearance, cowardice ultimately trumps vanity, when a doppelganger's back is to the wall ... though it may later seek revenge on those who'd forced it to such disgraceful recourse.

More Foreign Anatomy

Doppelgangers' vital organs, such as the heart, are stoutly protected by dense tissues and also a bit smaller than those of humans. Together with their plasm's motility, which minimizes internal bleeding, the imposters have a flat 50% chance to ignore extra hit point damage from critical hits or sneak attacks. They still suffer the full base damage from such attacks, as well as side-effects such as energy damage from a Burst-type magical weapon or impairment by "ambush feats" like Staggering Strike.

Transmutation effects that specifically impair their target's anatomy, such as the rheumatism spell (VRA), may automatically be shed by doppelgangers if they revert to their natural form, and have a 25% chance of being shed if they assume a different false guise. A doppelganger may attempt to shed an impairing effect by switching disguises as many times as it wishes.

Note: This information replaces that which was presented in the "A Foreign Anatomy" sidebar on p. 33 of the Zherisia Survey.

Armed and Unarmed Attacks

Doppelgangers' slam attacks inflict 1d6 points of damage, plus Strength modifiers. They can opt to inflict either lethal or non-lethal damage with their blows, with no modifier to their attack rolls.

Complete rules for strangling attacks are presented in Song and Silence for 3E, and in the Dragon #355 "Class Acts: Adventurer" article for 3.5. In short, strangling an opponent is a special form of grapple attack. The attacker must win an opposed grapple check every round to establish and maintain a stranglehold; the defender must hold his breath or else succumb to suffocation, as per the DMG rules. Use of a garrote provides a bonus to the attacker's grapple checks, ranging from +1 (rope or cord) to +3 (wire or whip). A victim being strangled cannot speak or cry out, which is the main reason so many doppelgangers favor this method of murder.

A doppelganger in its true form that strangles someone bare-handed receives a +1 racial bonus to its grapple checks, as its long flexible fingers interlace around the victim's throat like inextricable knots. The toughened hide of its fingers protects it from suffering damage, if it uses a bare wire without handles as a garrote.

Unless they are imitating an armed or armored person, doppelgangers are not innately proficient with any sort of weapon or armor. Those that gain class levels generally do so exclusively while disguised in humanoid forms, so still suffer a -2 attack penalty in their unpracticed true forms, if they attempt to wield weapons made available to them by their character class.

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Minor Advantages of Psyche

Doppelganger mentality differs markedly from that of the humans they imitate with such meticulous care, a difference considered at length in a later file. For the nonce, I shall address the psychological factors which contribute directly to a doppelganger's elusiveness and ability to pass unnoticed, unhindered by those vulnerabilities to which we fall prey.

Of these mortal frailties from which doppelgangers are exempt, the most obvious is sleep. The imposters are, by all accounts,

strictly immune to sleep-inducing effects, and to any corollary phenomena of sleep (such as dreams). Their immunity surpasses that of elven-folk, for soporific drugs are as ineffectual against these creatures as magic. Moreover, they have no apparent need for either sleep or elves' meditative trance, to maintain a clear head and vigorous health. Save for spellcasters refreshing their arcane resources, or in the wake of injury or heavy physical exertion, doppelgangers do not even require rest, but can remain fully active and alert round-the-clock for indefinite periods, with no evident ill effects.

Sleepless

Doppelgangers have immunity to sleep effects (magical or otherwise) and by extension, to effects that require a sleeping subject (such as the nightmare spell). They do not require rest, but can do so - lying still with eyes shut, feigning sleep, with their mind-reading power either deactivated or in skimming mode - if necessary to refresh spells, benefit from natural healing, or regain strength after acquiring the fatigued or exhausted conditions due to exertion or magical effects.

After eight hours spent in the same form, a doppelganger must make a Fortitude save (DC 15) or become fatigued. It continues to save every hour, with a +1 cumulative increase to the DC, until fatigue sets in. From that point until such time as the fatigued condition is removed, it cannot rest to recover hit points or spells.

Additional hours in the same form bring additional Fortitude saves, and the DC continues to rise each hour. After a second failed save, the imposter becomes exhausted. After three, it reverts to its true form involuntarily (if not already in it), and cannot successfully activate its Change Shape ability for 1d10+10 hours. Trying in vain to change its shape during this period only prolongs its incapacity, by 10 minutes per failed attempt.

Once it regains the use of its Change Shape ability, the doppelganger can remove the "exhausted" condition immediately by adopting a false guise, and the "fatigued" condition by changing again, one hour later. If it voluntarily changes shape before it is forced into its native form by fatigue, it need only transform once to remove both of these conditions.

If the creature physically cannot change form (e.g. if its metamorphosis gland has been removed), the doppelganger suffers from progressive fatigue and exhaustion, as described above, until it fails its third Fort save. Rather than being stuck in its true form, it then begins making Madness checks, once an hour at the same cumulative DC, until it either recovers use of its Change Shape power or acquires a Madness effect. Additional Madness checks are then made once per week at the final DC, until the unfortunate imposter becomes a lost one.

Any doppelganger permanently stripped of its transformation ability is guaranteed to go insane from exhaustion, sooner or later. The Philosophy of Humanity's attempts to "save" them in this fashion truly were in vain, and the imposters were (ironically) perfectly justified in opposing the sect's well-meaning plans to trap them in human form.

On Common Doppelganger Powers

(This is not to say, by the by, that a doppelganger *will not* rest, given that choice. I know of few beings more constitutionally-inclined to leisure than the imposters; indeed, most of their biology and behavior is geared expressly towards securing ample opportunity to relax and indulge themselves, without exertion! But when necessity - most often, a necessity to save its own skin - spurs it to apply itself, a doppelganger can pursue its aims with nearly the same driven, relentless intensity as a lich or Craving-hounded Restless: never sleeping, never faltering, ever-scheming.)

Where elves avoid need for sleep by focused meditation, the imposters' immunity stems from a unique source: the selfsame shapechanging power with which they camouflage themselves as men. It is well-known to occultists that potent transmuting magics (polymorphing or druidic beast-shifting) not only transfigure a body, but also serve to rejuvenate it - repairing injuries and alleviating battle-strain - in the process.

A doppelganger's transformations are not so extreme as this - as previously mentioned, many of their internal organs retain their natural configuration - and so cannot repair wounds to its flesh, but they do suffice to mend the bodily wear and mental weariness

that, for other species, accumulate if sleep is withheld.

In effect, a doppelganger needs only change its shape periodically (once every four hours seems typical), to refresh itself for the day. It need not remain in the new shape for more than a few seconds; drastic changes - different height, different gender, different ethnicity or species - are evidently more "restful" than subtle ones, as doppelgangers kept secretly under observation by Celebrant Chaswick's sect changed in rather more extreme ways, if they went longer between shifts of form.

Conversely, doppelgangers which knew they were being watched, and clung to the hope their ruse had not yet been pierced, remained in a single guise longer than they otherwise would have. Signs of fatigue emerged within eight to twelve hours, swiftly advancing to the point of physical exhaustion. In the end, most imposters admitted to the realities of their situation and transformed despite being monitored, which evidently restored their vigor at a stroke. For those which held on to the bitter end, their own transformation-power eventually failed them: unable to stave off exhaustion, they reverted to their natural shapes and seemed helpless to reclaim a false guise of any sort for the better part of a day, thereafter.

Charm Resistance

Doppelgangers are immune to charm spells under normal circumstances. If the caster of a charm is protected from mind-reading by a mind blank spell or equivalent magics (7th level or greater), the creature's usual defense against such effects fails to work and it can be charmed.

In addition to immunity to charms, a doppelganger's ability to sense the thoughts of others gives it a slight edge at defying suggestion, dominate monster, or similar compulsions. If it discerns an order's self-destructive nature in the thoughts of the one who commands it (e.g. if a dominated doppelganger is sent to attack a "victim" the caster knows to be a terrible demon in disguise), this information can provide grounds for disobeying the order as "self-destructive".

While individually-targeted spells normally let their casters know if they have succeeded or not, a doppelganger's deceptive talents are so practiced that it can actually pretend to be enchanted even if it makes its saving throw. It does suffer a -8 penalty on its Bluff check, to feign initially falling under to a compulsion or charm which specifically targets it. Later checks, to Bluff that it is still subject to the will of the enchantment-caster, do not suffer such a penalty.

Lacking magic to reinforce its impact, the Hypnosis skill is also ineffective on doppelgangers.

On Common Doppelganger Powers

If immunity to sleep comes from doppelgangers' shapechanging power, their immunity to magical persuasion - charm spells and equivalent abilities - may derive, at least in part, from the mind-reading power by which they sense others' motives. Victims of spells that forcibly compel

obedience do not retain sufficient autonomy to realize their controller's intentions for them, but a charm victim remains obedient only so long as their induced delusion that the caster is "a friend" goes unchallenged.

As the act of imposing this false "friendship" on the victim's mind requires a

Doppelgangers With Character Classes

Because their entire adult lives are spent in life-and-death games of deception, doppelgangers that survive this masquerade long enough tend to acquire levels almost as quickly as adventurers do. Compared to most monsters of Ravenloft, the imposters live fast and die young.

The doppelganger's favored class is rogue. Most doppelgangers in Ravenloft that acquire levels do so as rogues, aristocrats, warriors, fighters, or monks, in that order of frequency. Spellcasters are rare among doppelgangers, as most lack the necessary self-discipline to apply themselves to it; most doppelganger arcanists are bards or sorcerer/rogues. Wilderness-oriented classes (save urban rangers) are virtually unknown among imposters, and clerics - adherents of their own smug offshoot of the Zherisian faith, the "Divinity of Masters" - are few and far between.

Most doppelgangers don't take prestige classes, as extreme specialization runs counter to their need for flexibility. PrCs they occasionally do pursue - either for their own purposes, or because it suits their favorite stolen identity - include the alchemical philosopher^{VRA}, analyst^{LotB}, assassin, charlatan^{CoD}, court poisoner^{Ga4}, courtier^{LotB}, deceiver^{LotB}, detective^{HoL}, dilettante^{HoL}, duelist, manipulator^{CoD}, mesmerist^{CoD}, propagandist^{CoD}, scholar^{HoL}, scientist^{LotB}, shadowdancer, recruiter^{LotB}, and rumormonger^{LotB}.

Doppelgangers receive a +4 racial bonus on Bluff and Disguise checks, independent of bonuses provided by their supernatural abilities. Its racial Bluff bonus applies even when the creature is in its natural form; its Disguise bonus does not, offset by doppelgangers' extreme discomfort with their true appearance.

The following skills should be considered class skills for dread doppelgangers: Bluff, Diplomacy, Disguise, Gather Information, Intimidate, Listen, Perform (act), Sense Motive, and Spot. Note that only some of these skills are listed in their Denizens of Dread/Darkness entry; this is because most doppelgangers are too lazy to bother developing the full range of skills for which their race has a natural talent, confining their efforts to those most vital for stealing an identity.

A doppelganger that successfully impersonates a member of a particular race may be able to fake its way into a race-specific prestige class, provided the PrC does not depend on a racial trait the imposter cannot emulate. For example, an imposter disguised as an elf might acquire training as an arcane archer from an elven teacher, but one disguised as a half-Vistani can't acquire levels as a Captain of the Mists (Zherisia Survey), as it has no eldritch connection to the Mistways.

caster to momentarily drop those very mental defenses which ward his or her own mind against thought-detection, to impress feelings of "friendliness" upon the spell-target, an imposter receives a flash of intuitive warning that the charm's originator is, in truth, no friend at all. Hence, the charm is sabotaged even as it is cast.

Lastly, a doppelganger's curious mindset - in particular, its proclivity for "playing a role" to a point of self-immersion - grants it an aptitude and enthusiasm for imposture which might, to human charlatans, be

Adult doppelgangers receive a +4 racial bonus to Disguise and Bluff checks.

accounted an unfair advantage! Prevarication, enticement, misdirection and insinuation all come naturally to doppelgangers: a propensity stemming as much from the internal dialogue of their multi-layered identities as from constant practice in the outer world.

Excerpts from the Diary of Deborah Creede

November 22nd 6:30am

Last evening's nightmare has come again. It seemed as if I had barely shut my eyes when the ghastly images began flashing within my mind. I was in a large, ornate parlor, its walls hung with paintings - abstract, evocative paintings - and even though I could not understand their meaning, or what it is they depicted, I still marveled at the beautiful arrangement of the forms and colors. However, some of the paintings had been splattered with red-brown fluid ... blood. Another woman was sprawled on the floor, this one older than the first, and petite, with long, flowing hair. Her white smock was torn, and its paint-flecked surface was smeared with blood, stemming again from a circular cut around her neck. The floor was strewn with torn canvases, painted with colors and blood.

This morning, the rashes have grown worse. By now, both my arms are covered with them, and some have appeared on my face. The skin no longer seems reddened, but paler than usual, with a fragility and looseness reminiscent of the elderly. Also, though it is surely but a trick of the light, it seems to me as if my hair has acquired a darker hue. It may be prudent to visit Dr. Johanson: the thought of leaving the safety of home still makes me anxious, but perhaps he can give me something to help ease my nights' rest.



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Among the men of the Younger Earth stole the frightful monsters of the Elder Planet, safeguarded by their horrid wisdom and mysticisms, taking all forms and shapes, doing deeds of horror secretly. No man knew who was true man and who false. No man could trust any man.

- Robert E. Howard, "The Shadow Kingdom"



On Atypical Powers and Strains

The deeper we peer into the fog of misinformation, superstition and ignorance that clouds our understanding of Evil, the more we find Dr. Van Richten's warning rings true: no unnatural threat haunting our world, however familiar to veterans of the hunt, should ever be complacently presumed "typical" of its kind. You yourselves, Miladies, referenced dozens of instances when animated dead - seemingly-predictable automata - had revealed unorthodox powers or properties, making them much more dangerous than expected. If even threats as devoid of will or learning as the common zombie can display such diverse abilities, what then of creatures boasting the ingenuity of a clever man, combined with innate plasticity of form and an opportunist's drive to seize every conceivable advantage?

Difficult as it was to track down first-hand reports of doppelgangers' presence, let alone their signature powers of impersonation and mind-reading, I must confess no trustworthy witness to their salient abilities has come forth to assist my inquiries. I shudder to guess if this dearth of testimony is indicative of these powers' rarity, of the secretiveness of doppelgangers possessed of said gifts, or of a frighteningly-efficient practice of eliminating such witnesses. Indeed, I cannot even be sure if the encounters I did uncover were with 'normal' doppelgangers, or gifted rarities that kept their idiosyncrasies as masked as their physiognomy.

Where trustworthy sources proved ephemeral, however, an equally-traitorous voice has emerged, to offer unintended - and possibly posthumous - insight. The following is a decrypted précis of a journal kept by a self-confessed "quisling" (i.e. a non-doppelganger collaborator), who once resided in Paridon's Shadewell district under the alias "Dr. Thomas Cream". A coroner by vocation, "Dr. Cream" vanished mysteriously in 755 BC, leaving his city offices stripped of numerous records and several months' back rent unpaid for his apartments. When his landlord set to sell off the missing tenant's possessions, "Dr. Cream's" private papers were found to have been burnt to ashes in the flat's fireplace, most likely after he disappeared.

By chance, this particular journal - its sodden pages reeking of spilt formaldehyde - had evidently been discarded beforehand due to a noxious mishap, and so was overlooked by whomsoever destroyed the man's writings. Most of its contents were ruined by the chemicals, but their final summation remained unscathed.

Following its retrieval from the flat's rubbish-bin, the malodorous journal was brought to a certain Mr. L_____, who translated its contents. (Like other Zherisians who have contributed to this compilation of facts, I shall refrain from revealing his name.) Once deciphered, the notes provide an unprecedented glimpse into doppelgangers' salient abilities. They also hint at "Dr. Cream's" true agenda in Paridon: to undertake a project on behalf of a doppelganger (name unstated) with a use for his anatomical and surgical skills.

Having an interest in High Alchemy, to which the text makes several references, Mr. L_____ has transcribed and annotated (in italicized footnotes) the principle revelations to be found in the journal's closing synopsis. Perusing the results, I noted sufficient points of consistency with independent sources to accept "Dr. Cream's" words as credible, albeit manifestly despicable.

Of the nature of the "project" for which the notes' writer had been retained, both Mr. L_____ and myself are hesitant to speculate. Nor will I be hasty in broaching my hypothesis as to "Dr. Cream's" identity ... gratifying though that would be, if my suspicion is valid. Rather, I shall relate but two more facts, from which Miladies may draw your own conclusions as to whether an old enemy of your Uncle's has sought, and *found*, the fate he richly deserved.

First, "Dr. Cream's" appointment as Paridon's city coroner preceded, by some years, the 14th string of Bloody Jack killings: a tragedy heralded, amidst the expected hysterical suppositions, by the rumor that 'Bloody Jack' was a golem. And second, having first broken its concealing cipher, Mr. L_____ was then obliged to translate the journal's words... from *Lamordian*.

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Corollary Study: Anomalous Doppelganger Capabilities

Notebook #D-26

743-755 BC

Concluding summary of observations, from the notes of Dr. Thomas Cream

The nature of my assignment has given me any number of opportunities to learn about the physiology of the doppelganger race, and the position of my employer has provided me an unusual window on doppelganger culture. I am, of course, not the only person - the only human, I should say - who knows something of the true nature of the Masters of Paridon, nor the only man to have deemed it the better part of valor to co-operate in full with said Masters; however, the doppelgangers discourage intercommunication among "quislings" (a doppelganger term for a human collaborator; I have yet to learn its derivation). The preceding notes on this topic hence comprise largely my own observations and suppositions, plus anecdotes gleaned in conversation with my employer, my assigned aide, and others.

Under the pretext of medical research intended to further my assigned task (which has progressed nicely, and should be complete well before my employer's deadline), I have learned a great deal about uncommon abilities manifested naturally by doppelgangers, and something of the powers they cultivate in themselves, via their own unique Paths of alchemical study. To the best of my knowledge, much of what I have discovered is wholly undocumented - at least, amongst true men - and by recording all that I have learned, I hope to one day reclaim my rightful stature as a legitimate scientist, once my fast-evolving prodigy's triumphs have redeemed my handiwork and my sanctimonious detractors have seen the light.

I. Inborn And/Or Cultivated Aptitudes

The two most striking characteristics of the doppelganger race in comparison to a human norm, and their two greatest advantages over their human chattel, are extreme physical mutability and a capacity for psychic penetration into the thought processes of others. It is to be understood that, like those variable characteristics (e.g. height, strength, intelligence) which may be observed within a human population, the degree to which each of these characteristics is developed in any particular doppelganger can vary widely. This leads to a spectrum of abilities whose extremes - a delayed rate of morphological shifting, for example, or superior aptitude for penetrating others' thoughts - are found in only a few specimens.

Possession of superior abilities can be a great boon to the doppelganger fortunate enough to develop such, and by rigorous practice and experimentation, many of these fortuitous abilities can be augmented to awe-inspiring heights. I have acquired only a very hazy idea of the physical limits of doppelganger mutability, but the manifestations I have witnessed personally have always been intriguing, often dramatic, and occasionally stupefying¹. I well remember one doppelganger demonstrating its ability to turn its "hand" into a sort of knife or sword-blade of bone. (At least, it was something analogous to bone; it seemed far denser and more resistant to breakage than the bones of humans). Another doppelganger, which I

1. The reader may be astounded by some of the physical manifestations mentioned here. It may be useful to keep in mind that the doppelganger body (like the human body) is best viewed as a composite structure, built up of many individual "cells" or animalcules that work in concert for a joint purpose. Although the cells of doppelganger bodies are specialized, they are much more capable of altering their functions than are their human cognates; they also retain an individual "life-sense", and will, generally speaking, act to preserve themselves, insofar as they are capable of so doing, when separated from the parent organism. Extracted doppelganger plasm - I use the word advisedly, as both "blood" and "ichor" convey far too static a notion of its composition - retains for up to four hours its vis viva or vital principle: much longer than human blood, which clots and 'dies' in minutes. - L.

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had employed for the procurement of certain raw materials prior to my relocation to Paridon, could greatly expand the diameter of its eyes, to proportions more reminiscent of an eagle than a near-humanoid: a decisive advantage, when on the lookout for danger. Still another (quite literally) narrowly eluded its fellows engaged in said supply-procurement, compressing its body so as to force passage via a drainpipe barely six inches in diameter: a route which even my retainers' halfling guises could not traverse.

Dread Possibility: The Fierce Vengeance of my Arm

Once, Joshil was a well-respected member of a Shadewell doppelganger clan, a talented sorcerer and possible candidate for the Vanguard. More importantly, it served Sodo as liaison to 'Dr. Thomas Cream', better known to heroes of the Core as fugitive golem-creator Emil Bollenbach. Joshil was tasked to ensure that Bollenbach, a quisling employed by Sodo, had all of the requisite materials for the programming and improvement of his "doppelganger golem": a construct the Lamordian was re-fitting to act as the 14th Bloody Jack.

When the Bloody Jack killings of 755 ended in another debacle, Joshil found itself in disgrace, its quisling associate missing and Sodo infuriated by the golem's poor performance. Desperate to shield its reputation from Bollenbach's mistakes, the sorcerer tried to stave off the accusations of incompetence by improving upon the vanished Lamordian's work. As it blamed the Bloody Jack golem's malfunction on its unreliable organic brain - gleaned from the carcass of an alien strain of doppelganger already deemed hostile - Joshil set out to build a construct of iron instead, never stopping to think that this task might lie beyond its own skills. Perhaps its hubris caught the Dark Powers' interest, or perhaps it was simply stubborn, but it gradually pieced together components for its own golem: a mannequin of gleaming metal, like the serving-automata popular among the city's well-to-do, but far more powerful.

Stubbornness could not compensate for carelessness. Several months after Bollenbach vanished, Joshil accidentally allowed a section of its creation's chassis to grow brittle on the forge, causing the iron to shatter. A razor-edged fragment of metal struck the doppelganger's left arm above the elbow, severing the limb at a stroke. Its motile plasm spared Joshil from bleeding to death, but only just. Delirious with pain and fear, Bollenbach's would-be successor madly tried to set its lost arm back in place. No good; its limb had reverted to its true form, no longer fitting Joshil's short, portly human guise. Too disoriented to know its efforts were folly, it groped its way along the workbench, felt the metallic curve of an elbow, dragged it near and set the iron limb in its arm's place. Whether by reason of its desperation or its obsessive blindness to consequences, Joshil's frantic wish to be whole again was honored: the metal arm fused to its flesh, making it an unholy hybrid of dread doppelganger and dread golem.

The psychic shock of its mind's rewiring to accommodate a new limb was devastating, although Joshil did not become a construct. The demoralizing blow to its self-worth stripped it of most of its sorcerous power, and the arm proved incapable of changing shape along with the rest of it. No longer capable of living an imposter's life, it was cast out of doppelganger society. Today, Joshil (CE dread doppelganger half-iron golem Sor9/Ftr2, Str 27, Cha 11) is a shattered, bitter husk of a creature living in abject poverty in Blackchapel. Reduced to muggings for survival, it has grown to hate the clans that deserted it, but doesn't know what to do about this hatred. Nearly as much, it despises the mechanized factories and automata which are increasingly common in Paridon, as Joshil fears its arm's mechanical nature will inevitably supplant its own.

Joshil takes out its frustration by destroying any machinery it comes across: a fact that has drawn interest - and whole-hearted approval for this "mystery saboteur" - from the Zherisian Brothers of the Land. Meanwhile, tales of a ferociously powerful criminal, "The Clubber of Blackchapel", grow with every retelling.

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Shapechanging Feats

The following monstrous feats are available to doppelgangers, as well as to other shapechanging creatures that meet the prerequisites. A doppelganger whose Change Shape power is impaired, as by the reveal true form spell (as described in the Zherisia Survey), loses all benefits of the feats presented here, until its free use of that power has been restored.

Additional feats from other sourcebooks which doppelgangers may use, to exploit and/or enhance their shapechanging and impersonations, include: Assume Supernatural Ability, Extended Reach, Improved Assume Supernatural Ability (Savage Species); Altitude Adaptation*, Snowrunner* (Frostburn); Sandskimmer (Sandstorm); Expert Swimmer*, Toothed Blow (Stormwrack); Able Learner (Races of Destiny); Mutable Body, Persona Immersion*, Quick Change*, Racial Emulation* (Races of Eberron). For feats marked *, doppelgangers may be considered exempt from the listed prerequisites, due either to natural aptitudes or their versatility of form.

Many shifter feats and/or traits from the Eberron books may also be converted to doppelganger monstrous feats, at the DM's discretion.

Bladehand

[Monstrous]

The doppelganger may shape its hand into a "blade" of bone.

Prerequisite: Doppelganger (any kind)

Benefit: The doppelganger may also do slashing damage instead of bludgeoning damage with its slam attack, by modifying its hand into a bladed weapon. A Bladehand functions as a natural weapon with a critical range of 19-20; it causes damage as a longsword sized for the creature's current form. A doppelganger with a transformed hand still treats both its natural attacks as primary weapons, not secondary. Transforming its hand into a blade or back is a move action.

Special: Bladehand may be selected as one of a fighter's bonus feats.

Fright Mask

[Monstrous]

The shapechanger can alter its facial features to appear horrifically frightening.

Prerequisite: Shapechanger subtype; ability to take humanoid form

Benefit: As a free action, the shapechanger can warp its features to produce a nightmarish, twisted mockery of a face. All who witness this face must make a Fear save at DC 14, or 16 if they actually watch the Fright Mask displace the creature's "normal" features. Beings which are accustomed to viewing severely-distorted faces, such as broken ones or calibans, receive a +2 morale bonus to their Fear save.

In addition, the shapechanger gains a +4 circumstance bonus on any Intimidate checks made against those who saw the Fright Mask, whether they succeeded at their Fear saves or not. This bonus is available for one minute, after which a person who succeeded on the Fear save cannot be affected by this ability (either through Fear or the Intimidate bonus) for the next 24 hours. Such a resisting subject may still be intimidated with the creature's unmodified Intimidate skill.

This feat is actually more popular among araneas, paka, and the less-subtle sort of werebeast than doppelgangers, most of whom prefer to be more coy in their tactics.

Puglistic Imposter

[Monstrous]

Its intimate knowledge of the body's anatomy and weak points makes the doppelganger's unarmed attacks more formidable.

Prerequisite: Doppelganger (any kind); Improved Unarmed Strike.

Benefit: The doppelganger deals damage as a monk of a class level equal to its total Hit Dice when it makes a slam attack (in its natural form) or an unarmed attack (in humanoid form). Used against opponents of a creature-type it cannot impersonate, this feat deals damage as per a monk of a class level equal to ½ its total Hit Dice instead, as its expertise is largely aimed at fighting opponents whose anatomy it can mimic.

This ability does not stack with increases in unarmed attack damage due to actual monk levels, and its benefit does not combine with that

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of the Bladehand feat. Damage inflicted varies according to the doppelganger's current size.

Special: Pugilistic Imposter may be selected as a fighter bonus feat.

Size Shift: Large [Monstrous]

The doppelganger may assume larger forms than normal for its kind.

Prerequisite: Stretch.

Benefit: The doppelganger may also assume the forms of Large humanoids and Large giants.

Normal: A doppelganger may assume the forms of Small or Medium humanoids.

Size Shift: Tiny [Monstrous]

The doppelganger may assume smaller forms than normal for its kind.

Prerequisite: Squeeze.

Benefit: The doppelganger may also assume the forms of Tiny humanoids, such as infants.

Normal: A doppelganger may assume the forms of Small or Medium humanoids.

Specialized Anatomy [Monstrous]

The doppelganger may alter its sense organs or appendages for superior performance at a skill.

Prerequisite: Doppelganger (any kind)

Benefit: The doppelganger may also receive a +5 competence bonus to any one chosen skill, by altering its anatomy in a relevant way: immense ears for Listen, webbed hands for Swim, slender sensitive fingers for Open Lock, etc. Modified anatomy must be relevant to the skill to which this feat is applied. Skills that are modified by Intelligence, Charisma or Constitution cannot be enhanced in this fashion, unless they have a "hands-on" aspect (e.g. Perform [instrument]).

The new form is rather eerie in appearance due to its alteration, and the doppelganger suffers OR +1 while using this ability. The difference is subtle enough not to blatantly identify it as non-human, but is distinct enough to cause unease. Altering its physique to obtain the skill bonus is a standard action, but "relaxing" into a conventional appearance is a move action.

Special: This feat may be taken more than once. Its effects do not stack; each time it is

selected, the skill bonus is applied to a different skill. OR rating increases are cumulative, for the simultaneous use of more than one skill-enhancing alteration of this sort.

Squeeze [Monstrous]

The doppelganger can compress its form and compact its limbs to take up less space.

Prerequisite: Doppelganger (any type)

Benefit: By taking full advantage of its flexible skeleton and pliable flesh, the doppelganger can move and maneuver in combat as if it occupies a smaller space than it actually does. It can squeeze through narrow openings, move into or through occupied spaces during combat, and seek cover or concealment behind low or narrow obstacles, as if its space were only 1/2 as big. It does not, however, suffer the corresponding penalties that come with occupying a smaller space, such as lack of Reach or inability to flank.

A dread doppelganger with this feat always benefits from its racial bonus to Escape Artist checks, even if it is not in its natural form.

Stretch [Monstrous]

The doppelganger can stretch to unusual lengths.

Prerequisite: Doppelganger (any type)

Benefit: The doppelganger may also extend its arms and legs well out of proportion to the rest of its body. It receives a +10 foot bonus to its base speed when it elongates its legs. When its arms are "stretched", it is treated as Large for purposes of how high it can reach or jump to grab something. It can extend its arms' length by 3' in Medium form or 1'6" in Small form, when reaching into openings.. Finally, it can make itself up to 10' tall, in its natural shape or an assumed Medium form, to peer in windows, keep its head above water, or for whatever purpose it desires.

Normal: The maximum height for a Medium creature is 8 feet.

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In addition to an enhanced control of their physical mutability, I have met doppelgangers whose inherent ability to read minds is superior to that of others, either by accident of birth or by rigorous practice. In some, this enhanced talent manifests as a greater ability to peer beyond the normal psychological barriers which (so I am told) veil the minds of men; in others, their ability readily penetrates tangible obstacles, such as walls or helmets. In still others, particularly here in Paridon, their psychic sensitivity becomes attuned to the world around them - to the near proximity of minds, of hidden passages, etc - or evolves a capacity for two-way communication with others. Finally, I gather that some doppelgangers, independent of formal study or of any alchemical Path (see below), learn to apply their thought-reading prowess to the arts of battle, discerning enemies' intended maneuvers and reacting appropriately to elude or counter incoming attacks. Such individuals can be almost impossible for thinking foes to catch off-guard.

Dread Possibility: We Shifters Three

In the back alleys of a city (DM's choice), nestled on a side street between a brothel and a tenement, one can find the enigmatically named "We Sisters Three", a two-story building with a surprisingly benign reputation. "We Sisters Three" is an occult shop, the kind that sells potions, wands, and scrolls, alongside goods as varied as genuine magic grimoires and crystal balls supposedly enchanted by Madame Eva. The shop is run by the Sisters Meleyan: the bookish and mousy-haired Katerina, the ravishingly-beautiful redhead Natasha, and witty, streak-haired Tanya. The shop of "We Sisters Three" has a good reputation amongst adventurers and monster-hunters, being one of the few businesses that sells and buys genuine magic, no questions asked.

Of course, no one ever seems to ask how three young women manage to run a store in one of the nastiest slums in the city, nor to notice that some adventurers 'disappear' not long after visiting "We Sisters Three". After all, an adventurer's life is a dangerous one. In truth, the fiction of the sisters Meleyan conceals a sinister reality, as well as one of the strangest alliances in Ravenloft.

Three creatures' paths chanced to cross in a tiny village a decade ago. The red widow, Natasha, had hatched recently and was hunting. The doppelganger, Marelb, was an outcast alchemist from Paridon, knocking about the Core, looking for something it couldn't define. The paka, Tanya, was just passing through, causing havoc with feline enjoyment. Of course, such a small community couldn't hide one supernatural menace, let alone three, and Marelb - recognizing the others for what they were - hastened to assure Natasha she was welcome to feed on any victims it chose to replace. Tanya saw the opportunity to cause greater mischief through such cooperation, proposed a long-term alliance, and thus were the "Sisters Meleyan" born.

Marelb, a.k.a. Katerina (LE dread doppelganger Wiz6; Piercing Senses & Piercing Mind feats), is a pensive sort who crafts most of the potions and scrolls the shop sells. For it, the shop allows it more magic and stability than a normal imposter's life would ever allow, plus the protection of more physically-formidable monsters. For Natasha (NE red widow Ftr3), the shop allows her to feed regularly, on people who are seldom missed, and Marelb's potions allow Natasha to derive more nourishment from her prey, and perhaps, one day, extend her race's brief lifespan. As for Tanya (CE female paka Rog4), the mastermind of their deception, the shop is a game, a venue from which she can torment humans in ever more inventive ways.

Over the years, all three 'sisters' have grown close, and find each other comfortable allies and possibly even friends. By slaying lone adventurers and monster hunters as they leave the city, the 'sisters' have managed to avoid anyone tracking the deaths back to them, and the magical gear of such victims is sold in the store, provided it isn't particularly recognizable. It's a risky strategy, as hunters are singularly capable of taking care of themselves, but so far, it's worked well.

On Atypical Powers and Strains

Mind-Reading & Psychic Feats

The following monstrous feats are available to doppelgangers, as well as to other mind-reading beings that meet the prerequisites. A doppelganger whose power to detect thoughts is impaired, such as one confined inside an antimagic field, loses all benefits of the feats presented here, until its free use of that power has been restored.

Additional feats from other game-products which doppelgangers often select, to enhance or take greater advantage of their detect thoughts power, include: Ability Focus (Monster Manual), Combat Intuition*, Force of Personality (Complete Adventurer), Unnatural Will (Heroes of Horror), Strong Mind (Eberron Campaign Setting). Doppelgangers' psychic gifts exempt them from the prerequisites for the Combat Intuition feat.

The doppelganger salient abilities presented in the FoS Zherisia Survey may also be selected as feats, in which case they do not increase the doppelganger's CR. Prerequisites for four of these abilities/feats are listed below; for their game effects, check the indicated Survey pages.

Several psionic feats may be convertible to doppelganger monstrous feats, if the DM sees fit.

A Thousand Voices [Monstrous]

p. 125 Zherisia Survey

Prerequisite: Thought Projection.

Deep Insight [Monstrous]

The doppelganger may also mentally probe for "deep" memories as well as current surface thoughts.

Prerequisites: Invasive Insight, Piercing Mind

Benefit: The doppelganger may also use its Detect Thoughts ability's probing mode to gather "deep" memories, similar to the psionic power mind probe. The doppelganger may mentally pose one question per round, as a standard action. If the target of this power succeeds on the Will save to resist probing mode, no information is revealed, but if the save fails the doppelganger learns the answer to its question, as the subject understands it. The subject of this ability always senses the psychic intrusion is happening, in whatever manner is unique to the doppelganger responsible, but does not automatically identify the origin or significance of the contact.

This process is mentally taxing, and the doppelganger must make a Concentration check at DC (10 + number of questions asked) to continue using this ability, for each question after the first. This is cumulative

across subjects: if the doppelganger asks four questions of one target, it must then make a Concentration check at DC 14 to ask a first question of another subject. Once the doppelganger fails a Concentration check in this way, it may not use this ability again for 8 hours. Each hour it refrains from using its probing mode (with or without Deep Insight) reduces its Concentration check DC by 1, as it recuperates from the effort, to the starting minimum of 10.

The doppelganger applies the +2 increase to its detect thoughts DC from the Invasive Insight feat to this ability, but the subject of this power always gets a +4 circumstance bonus on the same saving throw. A doppelganger must examine the subject's thoughts in probing mode for at least one full round, before it can begin seeking answers to specific questions.

Improved Premonition of Violence [Monstrous]

The doppelganger's ability to psychically anticipate and elude threats improves.

Prerequisites: Premonition of Violence, Warrior Mind-Sense; Dex 17+.

Benefit: The doppelganger gets the improved uncanny dodge ability, at an effective rogue level equal to its total Hit Dice.

On Atypical Powers and Strains

Special: Improved Premonition Of Violence may be selected as a fighter bonus feat.

Invasive Insight [Monstrous]

The doppelganger's detect thoughts power becomes harder for subjects to block out.

Prerequisite: Doppelganger (any kind) or other natural mind-reader

Benefit: The DC to resist the doppelganger's probing mode increases by 2. This benefit stacks with that of the Ability Focus (detect thoughts) feat.

Mislead the Curious [Monstrous]

p. 126 Zherisia Survey

Prerequisite: Deep Insight, Thought Projection.

Piercing Mind [Monstrous]

The doppelganger can penetrate barriers which would otherwise obstruct detect thoughts.

Prerequisites: Doppelganger (any kind) or other natural mind-reader; Int 13+.

Benefit: The doppelganger's detect thoughts ability (any mode) is not impeded by common physical barriers. It can automatically sense, assess, or read minds through any thickness of wood, stone, brick, or other mundane substances, to the limits of its range of detection. Its power can penetrate a layer of lead or gold with a successful Will save, at a DC of 22 (lead) or 25 (gold); each quarter-inch of thickness of either material requires a separate saving throw.

The detect thoughts power of a doppelganger with this feat is still blocked by magical means of warding off mind-reading, and remains subject to Ravenloft's usual limits on such abilities.

Piercing Senses [Monstrous]

The doppelganger's detection-power is sensitive to tangible, as well as mental, impressions.

Prerequisites: Piercing Mind, Int 15+.

Benefit: The doppelganger may opt to sense real visual or auditory impressions directly, in lieu of others' thoughts, while using its detect thoughts power. All usual limits and restrictions as to area of effect, obstacles, and so forth apply to this alternative usage of its mental abilities. The doppelganger can only discern one kind of impression - either sight, sound, or minds - at a time. Switching from one of these three types of psychic perception to another is a move action. Upon resuming its sensing of minds, the doppelganger always starts out in skimming mode.

Sensory information obtained with this power is identical to that which might be revealed by clairaudience/clairvoyance. However, as the effect remains centered on the doppelganger, no 'ghostly sense organ' is produced at the locale being observed, to betray its presence.

Premonition of Violence [Monstrous]

The doppelganger's keen awareness of hostile intent lets it avoid being caught off-guard.

Prerequisite: Warrior Mind-Sense, Dex 15+.

Benefit: The doppelganger receives the uncanny dodge ability. If it already possesses such an ability due to class levels, its class ability and this feat will stack, for purposes of acquiring the improved uncanny dodge ability.

Special: Premonition Of Violence may be selected as a fighter bonus feat.

Sense a Desired Object [Monstrous]

p. 125-126 Zherisia Survey

Prerequisite: Piercing Senses.

On Atypical Powers and Strains

Sense Minds

[Monstrous]

The doppelganger is so sensitive to thoughts that it can pinpoint thinkers' location precisely.

Prerequisite: Premonition of Violence, Warrior Mind-Sense; Wis 15+.

Benefit: The doppelganger can automatically sense the presence, within 30', of any creature with an Intelligence score of 1 or higher, by picking up on its mental activity. Unlike the use of skimming mode, the doppelganger need not direct its mental attention toward a creature to sense it. Sense Minds remains active even if the imposter has deactivated its detect thoughts power, but the feat provides no benefit inside an antimagic field.

This sensitivity to other minds functions like the Blindsense special quality, except that it does detect incorporeal creatures with Intelligence scores, but fails to detect mindless creatures (e.g. vermin, many plants or constructs, and some undead).

Sense the Secret Doors [Monstrous]

p. 125 Zherisia Survey

Prerequisite: Piercing Mind.

Thought Projection [Monstrous]

The doppelganger's mental contact becomes two-way, allowing it to send messages to others.

Prerequisites: Invasive Insight, Piercing Mind.

Benefit: The doppelganger may communicate telepathically with any creature on which it successfully uses its detect thoughts power's probing mode. A successful Will save against its detect thoughts DC will block out a telepathic message which the doppelganger seeks to transmit. Messages sent and received are verbally-based, so the doppelganger and the subject must share a common language for their communication to be effective. All limits applicable to the feat-user's detect thoughts power (range, barriers, etc) also apply to Thought Projection.

Warrior Mind-Sense [Monstrous]

The doppelganger's mind-reading ability allows it to anticipate opponents' moves in combat.

Prerequisite: Doppelganger or other natural mind-reader; Wis 13+, Dex 13+.

Benefit: By reading a melee opponent's intentions as they form, the doppelganger may give itself either a +1 insight bonus on attack rolls or a +1 dodge bonus to its Armor Class against any one attacker. Due to the intensity of mental focus and emotion experienced during combat, there is no saving throw to block this specialized usage of detect thoughts; however, only clues to the opponent's intended combat moves can be obtained, not other information. A doppelganger may employ this ability as a free action. It cannot use probing mode and benefit from this feat at the same time.

The use of Warrior Mind-Sense offers no benefit against opponents whose minds cannot be read, such as vermin, or whose minds are shielded by mind blank or comparable effects. Due to the superficial nature of the hostile intent discerned, using Warrior Mind-Sense (or those feats for which it is a prerequisite) against foes such as aberrations does not require a Madness save. The ability of sentient undead to disguise their thoughts does not hinder a doppelganger's use of this power against them in combat.

Special: Warrior Mind-Sense may be selected as a fighter bonus feat.

On Atypical Powers and Strains

Of their race's typical inherent powers, Zherisia's doppelgangers appear to take the least satisfaction or pride in their ability to alter the appearances and forms of objects ("glamer"), and I have heard relatively little of this knack from my employer or his fellows. To craft or modify objects in any more than a cursory fashion is widely regarded, it would seem, as "human's work"; hence, it is beneath the Masters' dignity to engage heavily in such practices or exert much effort in fostering this ability. While a few doppelgangers do possess an enhanced capacity to apply glamer to the inanimate matter around them, either as a honed talent or an inborn knack, most who take a serious interest in "glamer-craft" choose to pursue its development in a less practical (or, as they would describe it, less menial) and more esoteric fashion, by devoting themselves to the corresponding alchemical Path of Silver.

Glamer-craft Feats

The following monstrous feats are unique to dread doppelgangers, they being the only breed of doppelganger which possess the Glamer special quality. A doppelganger whose use of glamer is impaired, such as one confined inside an antimagic field, loses all benefits of the feats presented here, until its free use of that power has been restored.

The Master of Unlocking feat was originally described as a salient ability in the Zherisia Survey. Game-statistics for this application of glamer may be found there. If a doppelganger selects this power as a feat rather than a salient ability, its CR does not change.

Barbed Glamer [Monstrous]

The doppelganger can cause an existing melee weapon to sprout barbs after hitting a target.

Prerequisites: Dread doppelganger, Weapon Focus (piercing melee weapon)

Benefit: The doppelganger can use its glamer power to cause its piercing melee weapon to sprout dangerous barbs, increasing the damage it inflicts by 1 hp if light, 1d3 hp if one-handed, or 1d4 hp if two-handed. This additional damage is multiplied along with the base damage, in the event of a critical hit. Weapons that are already barbed (as per VRA) do not benefit from this feat. Creating or retracting barbs is a swift action. Only a weapon the doppelganger itself is wielding or carrying can be affected; allies' or enemies' weapons cannot be.

This feat is favored by doppelgangers who fancy themselves fencers in their false guises, who often activate it after they have run their opponent through. Doing this to an opponent who was reduced to 0 or fewer hit points by the doppelganger's weapon constitutes a coup de grace.

Special: Barbed Glamer may be selected as a fighter bonus feat.

Enlarged Glamer [Monstrous]

The doppelganger's glamer has a wider range of effect than usual.

Prerequisites: Dread doppelganger

Benefit: The doppelganger's glamer extends outward to a distance of 10' rather than 5'. So long as an object remains within this range, the doppelganger can maintain any changes it has worked upon that object's appearance or texture. Objects extending up to 10' from the imposter's body may be glamered, so long as they are in its possession and do not exceed its weight limit.

Special: Enlarged Glamer may be selected more than once. Each time this feat is taken, it increases the radius of the dread doppelganger's glamer by 5'.

Forger's Glamer [Monstrous]

The doppelganger's ability to change the contents of written documents is enhanced.

Prerequisites: Dread doppelganger, Int 13+

Benefit: The doppelganger receives a +4 enhancement bonus to Forgery checks when using its Glamer special quality to create or alter written documents. Writing created or altered in this way does not revert to its prior state upon leaving the radius of the doppelganger's glamer, but lingers for up to 10 minutes per HD the creature possesses.

Twice a day, the doppelganger can opt to make its changes to documents permanent; on creating a second permanent forgery, it loses the benefits of this feat for 24 hours. Already-glamered items do not revert until their time expires.)

On Atypical Powers and Strains

It can still use its Glamer special quality to alter or create text, but it does not benefit from the +4 enhancement bonus for this feat, and documents altered during those 24 hours will revert normally, if out of glamer-range. (Previously-created documents do not expire.).

A doppelganger with this feat can use it to temporarily erase magical writings or symbols as per the erase spell. The doppelganger's caster level for this purpose is equal to its Hit Dice. Unlike erase, the deleted markings reappear as soon as the doppelganger is out of glamer range. This use of Forger's Glamer may be employed twice a day, after which the imposter loses the feat's benefits for 24 hours, as described above. Erasing magical writing is a standard action.

Normal: Dread doppelgangers which use their glamer to alter the appearance of written documents receive only their racial bonus to Forgery checks, and must remain within range of the resulting writing to prevent the document from reverting to its original state.

Keen Glamer [Monstrous]

The doppelganger can use its glamer ability to hone an edged weapon.

Prerequisites: Dread doppelganger.

Benefit: As a swift action, the doppelganger may cause an edged (slashing or piercing) weapon it uses to gain the Keen special quality. This effect lasts only so long as the doppelganger personally holds the weapon.

Special: Keen Glamer may be selected as a fighter bonus feat.

Master of Unlocking [Monstrous]

p. 126 Zherisia Survey

Prerequisite: Piercing Senses, Sense the Secret Doors.

Mending Glamer [Monstrous]

The doppelganger can repair damage to small objects, temporarily or permanently.

Prerequisites: Dread doppelganger

Benefit: The doppelganger can use its Glamer power as a temporary (10 minutes/HD) mending effect at will. Alternately, it can concentrate its glamer to achieve a permanent repair, 3/day; after the third use in a day, it loses the use of this feat for 24 hours. Permanent mending effected by this feat does not lapse if the object is more than 5' from the doppelganger. Mending an object is a move action.

Shaping Glamer [Monstrous]

The doppelganger can use its glamer ability to make permanent changes to objects.

Prerequisites: Dread doppelganger, Mending Glamer, Int 15+

Benefit: The doppelganger can use its Glamer special ability to effect lasting changes in raw materials or other items. The doppelganger may use its glamer to duplicate the effects of the spell fabricate, once per day. Use of this ability is taxing, and the doppelganger must make a Fortitude saving throw at DC 16 or become fatigued after using it.

Transmuting Glamer [Monstrous]

The doppelganger can use its glamer ability to effect dramatic and permanent changes in matter.

Prerequisites: Dread doppelganger, Mending Glamer, Shaping Glamer, Int 17+

Benefit: The dread doppelganger can use its Glamer ability to make permanent changes to an object. Once per day the doppelganger may cause one non-magical and non-living object to become a different non-magical, non-living object. Both the starting item and the desired product must be contained entirely within the effective area of the doppelganger's glamer ability (usually a 5 foot radius), and they must have the same mass. The doppelganger may opt to transmute only part of a large object, if desired.

This ability cannot produce items of great intrinsic value (gemstones, art objects and so forth), nor can it convert one type of metal to another. Creating a complex item such as a clock, or any item of masterwork quality, requires a DC 20 Craft check. Use of Transmuting Glamer is a full-round action.

On Atypical Powers and Strains

Unfortunately, applying these abilities to my own project has proven to be unfeasible, as it appears that the physical and/or mental control of such powers is largely learned and conscious, rather than an intrinsic, conferrable property within the flesh. Still, I have documented interesting examples as they became known to me, these past twelve years, in hope that this obstacle would not be insuperable.

II. Alchemically-Derived Abilities

The distinction most commonly drawn between their anomalous abilities, among the doppelgangers themselves, is between those which are mere flukes of talent and/or birthright, and those derived from active pursuit of that most Zherisian of sciences: High Alchemy. Here I must interject a synopsis of a very unusual, and, I think, valuable book which fell into my hands in a way I will not describe here, and which bears strongly on the latter class of doppelganger talents. The copy which I have bears neither title nor title page, but I have made a habit of referring to it as "Via Aurum²", for reasons soon to become clear.

There are, according to the principles of Alchemy, seven pure metals: Lead, Tin, Iron, Copper, Silver, Quicksilver [i.e. Mercury], and Gold. As attested in Via Aurum, a doppelganger may (and many, though not all, high-ranking doppelgangers do) explore and augment its own capabilities along any of six pathways. Each focuses upon a different aspect of a doppelganger's unnatural power - plasticity of form, penetration of minds, imposition of glamor over objects - and is named for one of these pure metals. Each of these Paths to power is also associated with a physical or mental characteristic, and likewise with a defining defect of personality, the latter of which correspond to the classical concept of the "Seven Deadly Sins".

The abilities obtainable by these pathways are subdivided into four "circles", or levels of power. As with conventional (human) practices of High Alchemy, such abilities must be gained sequentially, such that one must master a power of the first level before seeking to gain one of the second, one of the second before mastering one of the third, and so on. A great deal of technical jargon accompanies Via Aurum's description of these powers, of which I will relate only the most pertinent here: powers of first rank are often referred to as Devotions, of the second Dedications, of the third Dominions, and of the fourth Apogees. Doppelgangers able to manifest powers of the first rank are called Apprentices, of the second Journeymen, of the third Smiths, and of the fourth Masters³: specifically, "Master of [metal]" or "Master of [descriptive honorific]".

The various alchemical pathways pursued by doppelgangers are as follows:

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2. *The book entitled by Dr. Cream Via Aurum, whose significance will be made plain in the text, was not found among the possessions recovered after his disappearance. However this book came into Cream's hands, it appears to have been retrieved by the same party as destroyed his paperwork. While the loss of so great a source of knowledge is lamentable, the hints preserved in his notes are valuable, and suggest novel avenues of research in this field which may yet prove most fruitful - L.*
 3. This resolved for me a minor puzzlement: doppelgangers do not, among themselves, employ surnames, and few are involved in trade, yet I occasionally overheard one being referred to as "A_____ Silversmith" or "B_____ Apprentice". Even more rarely, often in an anecdotal context, I would hear tell of "Master C_____", and since all doppelgangers refer to themselves as Masters (at least in relation to humans), I had been at a loss to explain the significance of the title.

Alchemical Paths: Doppelganger Salient Abilities

Each Path represents one possible course of development for a doppelganger's alchemically-enhanced powers. Each is keyed to one of six symbolic metals, one of six deadly sins, and one of the six abilities of the D&D/d20 system; the last is always the key ability for that Path. Advancement along a Path represents assiduous effort expended to amass a specific slate of doppelganger salient powers. As the deadly sin associated with the Path comes to dominate the doppelganger's personality, it becomes progressively more difficult for the doppelganger to overcome the destructive effect it has on the doppelganger's psyche; this more than anything impedes most doppelganger-alchemists from becoming Masters.

Pursuit of any Path demands a level of discipline which only the most resolute and focused of these imposters can attain. Successful progression also requires the ritualized use of emotional purgatives (see Van Richten's Arsenal) to amplify the Path's requisite sin, while quashing any residual trace of the opposing virtue which might yet linger from the doppelganger's faux-human childhood identity. As production of the necessary draughts is, itself, an advanced skill - one that most "Masters" find insufferably tedious - Zherisia's doppelgangers normally recruit or coerce quislings from Paridon's alchemical Lodges into concocting the mixtures for them, by extracting the requisite sins from unsuspecting human volunteers eager to purge their own wickedness.

Path-based abilities are divided into four ranks. Abilities of the 1st rank (Devotions) add to the doppelganger's Challenge Rating by +1/4, those of the 2nd rank (Dedications) are CR +1/2, the 3rd rank (Dominions) are CR +3/4, and the 4th rank (Apogees) are CR +1. Doppelgangers' pursuit of such abilities is not unrestricted or random: like the alchemical feats pursued by human devotees of High Alchemy, higher-level powers require prerequisites to attain. To gain

abilities beyond 1st rank, the doppelganger must first master one or more lesser abilities on its Path, as listed in the salient power's description. Its corresponding ability modifier must also equal or exceed the rank of the desired salient ability (e.g. a minimum Strength of 18 is needed to master Iron Body, the 4th rank power of the Path of Iron), and it needs at least four Hit Dice per rank. Any doppelganger may thus attain 1st rank abilities, given sufficient time and effort, but only a doppelganger which earns at least 12 class levels, for 16 total hit dice, may acquire a 4th rank ability.

No doppelganger may become a Smith or Master of its Path (acquiring 3rd or 4th rank abilities), unless it pursues that Path exclusively. A doppelganger may become a Journeyman, with abilities up to the 2nd rank, in two Paths, or an Apprentice, with 1st rank powers only, in three. Any dread doppelganger with a Path ability is barred from abilities on its opposite Path; the opposing pairs are Quicksilver / Lead, Copper / Iron, and Tin / Silver.

Unless otherwise noted, the save DC (where appropriate) against alchemical-Path salient abilities is $(8 + \frac{1}{2} \text{ doppelganger's Hit Dice} + \text{ability modifier})$ for 1st and 2nd rank powers, and $(10 + \frac{1}{2} \text{ HD} + \text{ability modifier})$ for 3rd or 4th ranks. Unless otherwise noted, abilities are activated as standard actions. For spell-like salient abilities, caster level is equal to the doppelganger's total Hit Dice. Note that some spell-like salient abilities resemble psionic powers rather than spell effects; details on all such powers may be found in the System Reference Document (SRD).

Salient abilities marked by an asterisk (*) cause visible changes in a doppelganger's appearance when used, potentially betraying its nature to witnesses. Abilities that broaden the spectrum of possible forms it can assume are not so marked, unless the new form assumed is not necessarily an imitation of an existing sort of creature.

Via Plubum

Via Plubum, or the Path of Lead, is associated with Will - the drive to mastery - and with Avarice: the desire to own, and hence to dominate, one's surroundings. To follow the Path of Lead is to become the master of others' minds and souls; it is an inversion of the innate ability to read minds, employed offensively to manipulate other's thoughts. In its lesser manifestations, this is merely the ability to confuse or intimidate, but it develops into the capacity to alter others' personalities and memories to a shocking degree; some Leadsmiths are supposedly able to kill or induce insanity with a thought, and the Apogee of this Path is the ability to appropriate another's psyche entirely, stripping a victim of all memories and skills and claiming them for one's self⁴.



4. While the potential application of this ability is obvious, regrettably no suitable materials were available for my work, and my employer (after due consideration) deemed their cultivation and acquisition to be too politically hazardous at the present time. Fortunately, a parallel avenue later revealed itself.

On Atypical Powers and Strains

Lead

(Avarice, Wisdom; opposes Quicksilver)

Hold Person (Sp): The doppelganger may use hold person, as the spell, 2/day.

Devotion; CR +1/4

Suggestion (Sp): The doppelganger may use suggestion, as the spell, 2/day.

Devotion; CR +1/4

Modify Memory (Sp): The doppelganger may use modify memory, as the spell, 2/day.

Devotion; CR +1/4

Hideous Jest (Sp): The doppelganger may use hideous laughter, as the spell, 2/day. Note that a humanoid subject does not receive the usual +4 to their Will save that targets of a different base type than the caster usually receive: doppelgangers know perfectly well what their victims find amusing, even if their own tastes tend to run along crueler lines.

Devotion; CR +1/4

Mind's Eye (Ex): The doppelganger may use any spell or spell-like ability it has (including, but not limited to, abilities of this Path) from the school of Enchantment as a gaze attack. Spells cast using this ability require no verbal, material or somatic components, but are subject to the usual limits on gaze attacks. Note that such effects cannot be reflected back on the doppelganger.

This ability also allows the doppelganger to use spells which ordinarily require the ability to communicate verbally (such as command and suggestion) without sharing a common language with the target. The doppelganger communicates its desires directly to the target's psyche.

Prerequisite: Suggestion or Hold Person ability. Dedication; CR +1/2

Dominate Person (Sp): The doppelganger may use dominate person, as the spell, 1/day.

Prerequisite: Suggestion or Modify Memory ability. Dedication; CR +1/2

Alternate Identity (Ex): The doppelganger may force a new identity on one unwilling subject per day. It implants the new personality and as many memories as it sees fit into the subject. Use of this ability requires one full minute of uninterrupted use of probing mode on the intended victim; a Will save negates the effect. The victim takes on the new personality traits and acts in accordance with the implanted memories, but is otherwise free-willed.

Having an alternate identity counts as a Moderate Madness effect. It is similar to the Major effect 'Multiple Personalities', except that only one alter-ego and no personality fragments are present. The alternate identity lasts for 1d4 days, although the doppelganger can, if desired, use this ability repeatedly to maintain the personality for longer periods.

Prerequisite: Modify Memory or Hideous Jest ability. Dedication; CR +1/2

Spellbinder (Sp): The doppelganger may use either mass suggestion or mass hold person (one or the other), 1/day. Whichever spell it chooses functions as the spell selected.

Prerequisite: Dominate Person or Mind's Eye ability. Dominion; CR +3/4

Mindbreaker (Sp): By concentrating the malevolent force of its mind on another's psyche, the doppelganger may either cause insanity (as the spell), or use psychic crush to reduce a target to -1 hp (as the psionic power; Will save at +4 reduces effect to 3d6 hp damage), 1/day. Applying the chosen effect requires no gaze attack and no spell components; it is purely an act of will.

Prerequisite: Alternate Identity or Dominate Person ability. Dominion; CR +3/4

Legion (Master of Souls) (Su): The Master of Souls may strip a target's abilities and memories, leaving its victim as an amnesiac husk, and then use the stolen abilities itself. Once per day, the doppelganger may target one creature within 30 feet with this ability.

If the target fails on a Will save, all of that victim's levels and memories are lost, as if affected by the Major Madness effect 'Amnesia' with 100% memory loss. Victims of this power do not suffer the usual ability loss of Madness, and may recover as per the RLPHB rules for recovery from Madness effects.

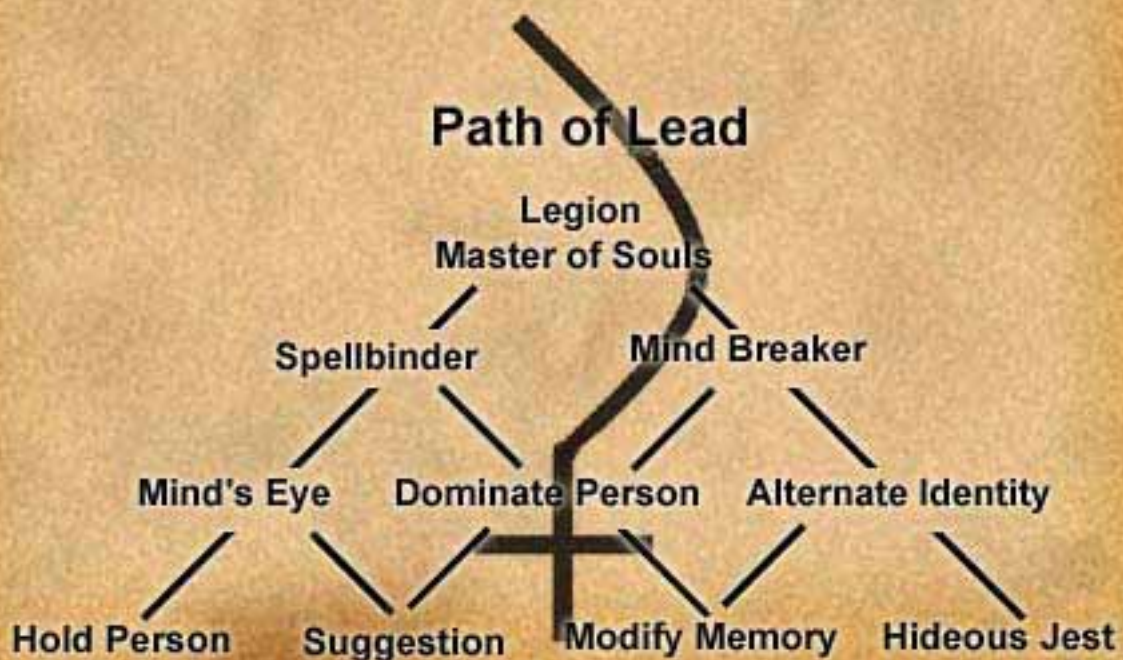
Having stripped a victim's memories and abilities, the doppelganger may use these things for itself. A Master of Lead may consult stolen memories to study its victim's past in exhaustive detail, and may use the learned abilities, feats and skills of its victim. These abilities do not stack with its own. For example, if it strips an 11th level rogue of her memory, it may choose to act as an 11th level rogue with the skill ranks, feats, and learned abilities which that character formerly knew, temporarily forfeiting its own skills, feats, and learned abilities. The doppelganger retains its own ability modifiers, so total skill modifiers may differ from a victim's; if the doppelganger's abilities are insufficient to meet the prerequisites for a feat, it may not use that feat or any other feat requiring it as a prerequisite.

Note that special qualities or attacks which are inherent to the creature, rather than being

learned, are not transferred. Supernatural or spell-like abilities are likewise not acquired, and any spells transferred cannot be replaced by the doppelganger via study, prayer or rest, once used. A doppelganger cannot cast a stolen spell if its score in the key ability for the stolen spell is too low (e.g. a Leadmaster with a 15 Charisma cannot cast a 6th level spell stolen from a sorcerer).

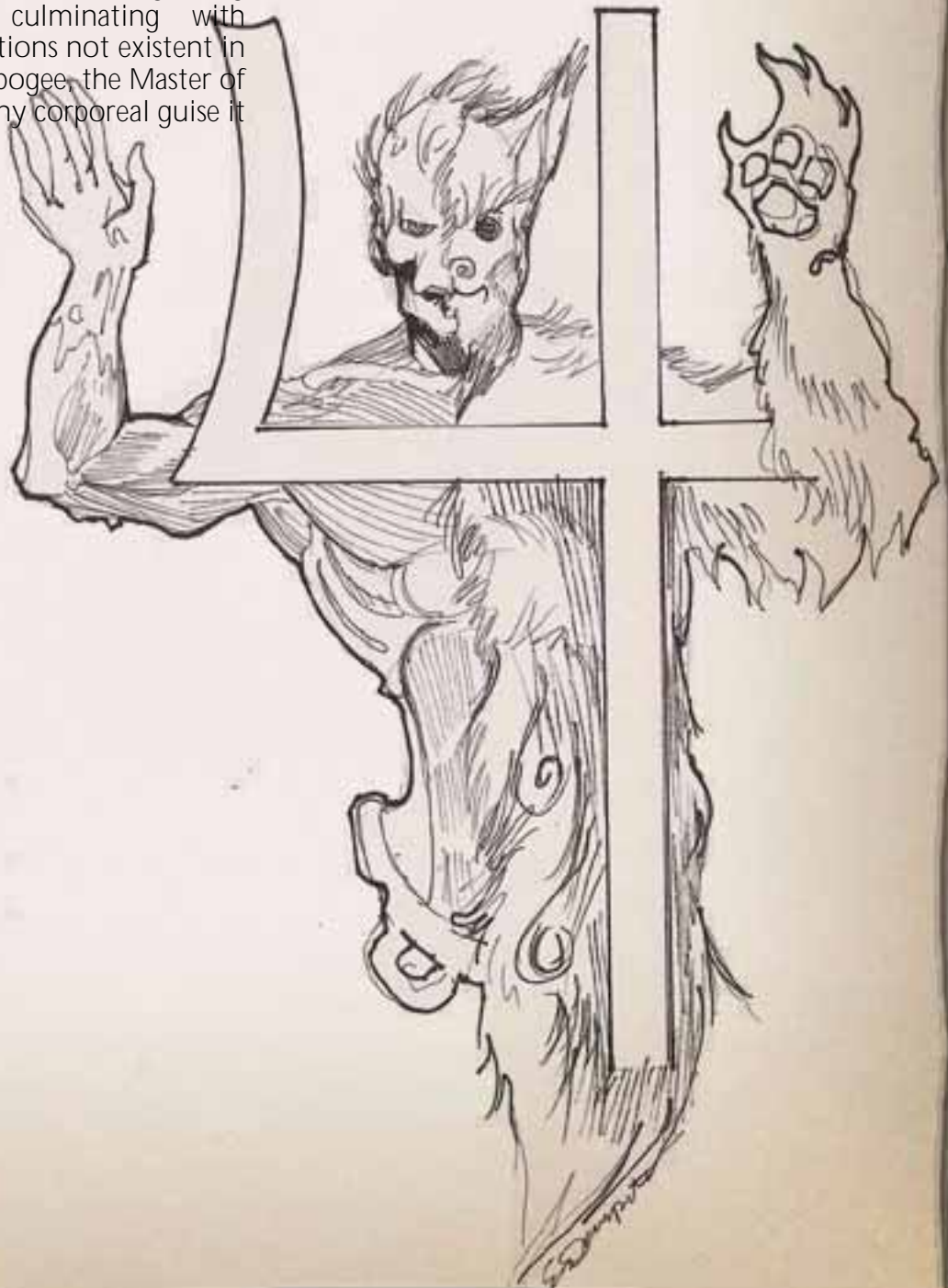
The doppelganger can maintain a total number of stolen personas equal to its Wisdom modifier. Switching between personas is a standard action. If it exceeds this limit, it loses one of its accumulated personas at random; a persona currently being used is never lost in this way.

Prerequisite: Mindbreaker or Spellbinder ability. Apogee; CR +1



Via Stannum

Via Stannum, or the Path of Tin, is associated with Agility - a trait herein pertaining to mimicry, or the ability to imitate - and with Envy: the desire to be what others are. This ability is an outgrowth of the doppelganger's physical mutability. A doppelganger of the ordinary sort can imitate only creatures more or less human in anatomical configuration, but the devotee of Tin gains the flexibility to imitate progressively-more-outlandish creatures (beginning with animals, and culminating with nightmarish amalgamations not existent in Nature), until, in its Apogee, the Master of Tin is able to take on any corporeal guise it can imagine.



Tin

(Envy, Dexterity; opposes Silver)

Labile (Ex): The doppelganger can shift forms as a swift action rather than as a standard action.

Devotion; CR +1/4

Animal Form (Ex): The doppelganger may assume the form of any Tiny to Medium animal via its Change Shape special quality.

Devotion; CR +1/4

Inhuman Form (Ex): The doppelganger may take on the forms of other monstrous humanoids of Small, Medium or Large size via its Change Shape special quality. This salient ability does not confer an ability to successfully mimic the natural form of another doppelganger.

Devotion; CR +1/4

Almost Human (Ex): The doppelganger is indistinguishable from a humanoid when using its Change Shape special quality; no means of magical, alchemical, or scientific analysis can detect its imposture. Those who encounter the doppelganger automatically fail any opposed Spot check to penetrate its guise. Only actually seeing the

doppelganger shift forms reveals its true nature.

Devotion; CR +1/4

Fey Form (Ex): The doppelganger may imitate the form of Tiny, Small, or Medium fey via its Change Shape special quality. It also gains DR 5/cold iron.

Prerequisite: Labile or Animal Form ability. Dedication; CR +1/2

Hybrid * (Ex): The doppelganger may take a form combining animal and human features via its Change Shape special quality, appearing much like a lycanthrope in hybrid form. The animal to be mimicked must be Small or Medium in size. For example, boars or wolves are acceptable, but ravens, bats and rats are too small, and tigers or brown bears are too large. Dire animals of appropriate size may also serve as the basis for a hybrid form, but only if the imposter has seen such exotic creatures in the past. The resulting hybrid is always Medium in size.

Usually, a doppelganger picks one lycanthropic phenotype to imitate and always takes that form; rarely, it will concoct an entirely new hybrid "phenotype" of its own invention, the better to confuse its pursuers. A doppelganger with this feat may copy a specific lycanthrope's tertiary aspect, if it has seen that creature's hybrid form.

Path of Tin



On Atypical Powers and Strains

When in hybrid form, a doppelganger acquires the movement, natural attacks and ability adjustments of a werebeast of the appropriate phenotype (or a similarly-proportioned werebeast in hybrid form, if it invents a new "phenotype"). It does not gain the other special qualities, such as damage resistance, which a lycanthrope in hybrid form gets.

Prerequisite: Animal Form or Inhuman Form ability. Dedication; CR +1/2

Death Mask (Ex): The doppelganger may imitate Small or Medium humanoid undead forms, including template undead such as vampires or liches, but not incorporeal undead such as ghosts. The doppelganger acquires the Cold One feat as a bonus, and cold resistance 10.

Prerequisite: Almost Human or Inhuman Form ability. Dedication; CR + 1/2

Daimon (Ex): The doppelganger may imitate the forms of outsiders of Tiny to Large size using its Change Shape special quality. It acquires SR of (5 + its total Hit Dice); it also receives either DR 5/magic *or* fire resistance 10 and acid resistance 10. When it first acquires this salient ability, the doppelganger must choose one of Daimon's two immunity options; its choice cannot be changed thereafter.

Prerequisite: Hybrid or Fey Form ability. Dominion; CR +3/4

Soulless (Ex): The doppelganger may imitate the form of constructs of Tiny to Large size using its Change Shape special quality. It also acquires either immunity to mind-affecting effects and energy drain, *or* fast healing 5. When it first attains this salient ability, the doppelganger chooses one of these two benefits to acquire; its choice cannot be changed thereafter.

Prerequisites: Death Mask or Hybrid ability. Dominion; CR +3/4

Chimera (Master of Forms) * (Ex): The Master of Forms' capacity to imitate other creatures is now virtually unlimited. It may create a synthetic form of Small or Medium size, possessing any four of the following traits (all of which are considered extraordinary abilities):

Flying: The doppelganger grows wings and gains a flight speed of 60 ft. Its maneuverability is Average if Medium, Good if Small.

Natural Attacks: The doppelganger gains 2 primary claw attacks dealing 1d8 base damage and 1 secondary bite attack dealing 2d6 base damage.

Poison: Any one natural attack form of the doppelganger does poison damage. The poison affects any one physical ability of its choice; initial and secondary ability damage are 1d6 each.

Natural Armor: The doppelganger receives a +12 natural armor bonus, replacing its own +6.

Inherent Aptitude: The doppelganger gets a +10 bonus to any two of the following skills: Balance, Climb, Hide, Jump, Listen, Move Silently, Swim, Spot, or Tumble. The doppelganger's form should visibly reflect these skills in some way (e.g. a Swim bonus should be associated with fins and webbed digits). It may choose the same skill twice, for a +20 bonus.

Damage Reduction: The doppelganger receives DR 10/magic. This stacks with DR from the Daimon ability (if any), for a total DR of 15/magic.

Resistance: The doppelganger gains resistance 20 against any one type of energy damage.

The doppelganger also gets one supernatural attack from the following list:

Shriek: A sonic attack with the effect of the spell shout, usable once every three rounds.

Breath Weapon: A 40' line or 20' cone dealing 6d6 points of energy damage, usable once every three rounds. Type of energy may be either fire, electricity, cold, or acid.

Uncanny Gaze: A gaze attack that acts as a confusion spell, usable once every three rounds.

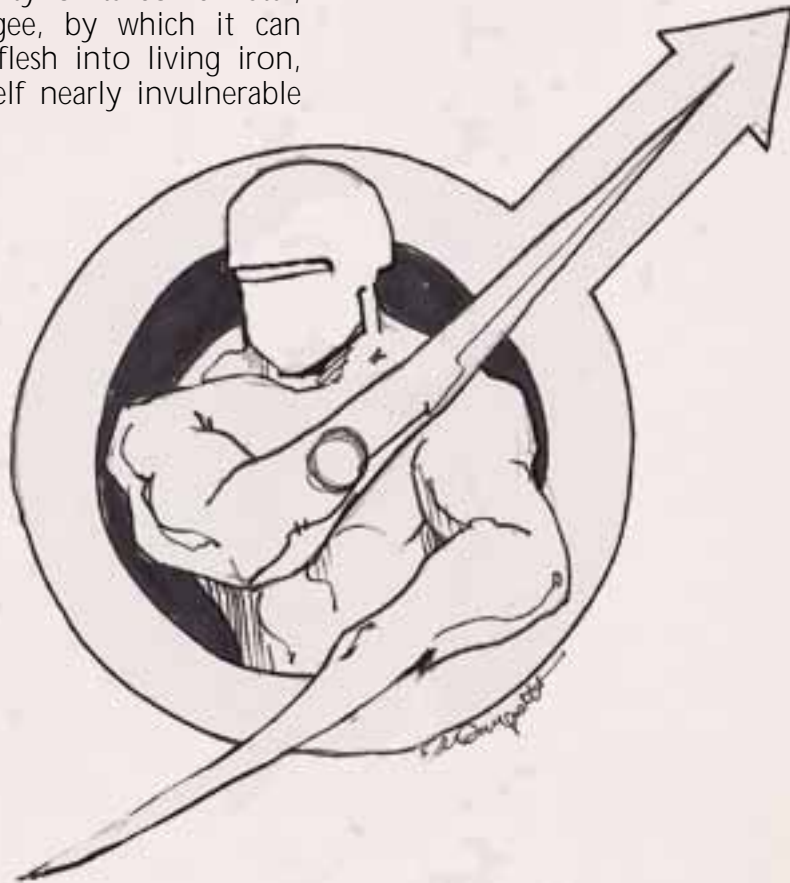
Chimerae also gain the Frightful Presence special attack (DC 10 + ½ Hit Dice + Dex modifier), when in its chimeric form..

A doppelganger with this ability chooses a form which it considers expressive of its own psyche, and rarely deviates from it ... although it can, in extraordinary circumstances.

Prerequisite: Daimon or Soulless ability. Apogee; CR +1

Via Ferrum

Via Ferrum, or the Path of Iron, is associated with Fortitude - that is, physical strength - and with Wrath: the desire to destroy. The devotee of Iron is perforce a master of battlecraft, able to form its very flesh and blood into weapons and armor, and possessed of abilities reminiscent of the legendary bersarkurs of the Grabenite eddas, whose rage supposedly made them unable to die on the field of battle until the fight was ended. As the Master of Iron gains ever more affinity for its iconic metal, it reaches its Apogee, by which it can transmute its very flesh into living iron, and thus render itself nearly invulnerable to its foes.



On Atypical Powers and Strains

Iron

(Wrath, Strength; opposes Copper)

Leatherback (Ex): If the doppelganger is not flat-footed at the start of a round, it acquires a +3 natural armor bonus by stiffening its skin to present a more durable surface to any attack against it. This is in addition to the doppelganger's base +6 natural armor bonus, for a total bonus of +9.

Devotion; CR +1/4

Massive (Ex): The doppelganger can increase its bulk as a free action. When using this ability, the doppelganger's mass doubles, and it is treated as a Large creature for the purpose of combat actions in which large size is an advantage, such as grapple checks and bull rushes.

Devotion; CR +1/4

Body Weaponry * (Ex): The doppelganger can create a one-handed masterwork melee weapon by extruding and condensing some of its own plasm, as a free action. Due to the presence of iron in blood, the doppelganger can have its weapon count as either cold iron or steel for purposes of overcoming DR. The doppelganger receives a +2 bonus on attack rolls and a +1 to damage with the weapon, which is treated as either a melee or natural weapon, whichever is to the creature's advantage.

If the weapon is sundered, it shatters into a spray of inert plasm. This ability is in other respects similar to the graft weapon psionic power.

Devotion; CR +1/4

Strength of Wrath (Ex): The doppelganger may thicken its musculature to gain a +4 bonus to Strength, 2/day. This effect lasts for a number of minutes equal to the doppelganger's Hit Dice.

Devotion; CR +1/4

Oak Body * (Ex): The doppelganger can use a standard action to transform its body into living oak, as the psionic ability oak body.

This grants it DR 10/slashing for a total number of minutes per day equal to its Hit Dice plus its Strength modifier (minimum 1 minute per change). It also acquires immunity to ability damage, blindness, deafness, disease, drowning, poison, stunning, or other effects targeting its physiology or respiration. Cold inflicts half damage on its oaken form, which has fire vulnerability. It cannot consume potions in this state.

While transformed to oak, the doppelganger receives +4 Str and -2 Dex, moves at half its speed, and has an armor check penalty of -4 and a 25% chance of arcane spell failure. Its slam attack damage is doubled when making a full attack.

The doppelganger may use this ability in conjunction with Body Weaponry abilities, provided it bleeds to create the weapon before activating Oak Body.

Prerequisite: Massive or Leatherback ability. Dedication; CR +1/2

Greater Body Weaponry * (Ex):

The doppelganger can create any two-handed melee weapon or two one-handed melee weapons as a move action. The weapon(s) are considered +1 enchanted weapons; the doppelganger may take 2 hit points of damage to give a single weapon a additional +1 enhancement bonus, up to a maximum +5 per weapon. These expended hit points cannot be restored by magical or mundane healing, but the doppelganger may recoup them by re-absorbing the weapon. If an enhanced weapon is sundered, it falls apart in a shower of inert blood and the loss of hit points expended for that weapon (if any) becomes permanent. In all other respects, this salient ability functions as does the Body Weaponry ability.

Prerequisite: Massive or Body Weaponry ability. Dedication; CR +1/2

Crushing Blow (Ex): The doppelganger can deliver a crushing blow attack - similar to a smite attack, but powered by its own fury

rather than divine power - once per day for every 5 hit dice it has. By increasing the density of the attacking limb as it strikes, the doppelganger adds double its Strength bonus to the attack roll, and deals 1 extra hit point of damage per HD. Its crushing blow attempt is expended for the day, whether or not the attack succeeds.

Prerequisite: Body Weaponry or Strength of Wrath ability. Dedication; CR +1/2

Ironback * (Ex): By forming plates of unbreachable plating beneath its skin, the doppelganger gains DR 10/adamantine. If the doppelganger later gains the Iron Body ability, these two abilities stack to grant DR 25/adamantine while in Iron Body form.

Prerequisite: Oak Body or Greater Body Weaponry ability. Dominion; CR +3/4

Rage (Ex): The doppelganger receives the raging ability of a barbarian, of a level equal to its total Hit Dice. Thus, a doppelganger with 11 class levels may use Rage as a 15th level barbarian, including the benefits of Greater Rage, 4/day.

If a doppelganger has barbarian levels, its rage as a barbarian counts separately from that of its salient ability. Thus, an 11th level barbarian doppelganger with this salient ability may rage 4 times per day as a 15th level barbarian, plus 3 times per day as an 11th level barbarian.

Prerequisite: Greater Body Weaponry or Crushing Blow ability. Dominion; CR +3/4

Iron Body (Master of War) * (Ex):

The Master of War can use a standard action to cause its body to become living iron, as the iron body spell, except that the doppelganger takes no Dex or speed penalty while in iron form. The doppelganger can remain in its iron-bodied form for a number of minutes per day equal to its total HD plus its Strength modifier (minimum 1 minute per change). The doppelganger may use this ability in conjunction with Body Weaponry abilities, as per Oak Body.

Prerequisite: Ironback or Rage ability. Apogee; CR +1



Via Cuprum

Via Cuprum, or the Path of Copper, is associated with Charisma - the ability to beguile - and its corollary sin, Lust: self-gratification through others' fawning attentions. Like the Path of Lead, this Path is based on doppelgangers' invasive penetration into the thoughts and desires of others; however, whereas Lead strives to dominate and pillage, Copper seeks to deceive and entrance. The doppelganger refines its expertise in the art of seduction, commencing first with minor enchantments of short duration; further along its Path, its ability grows to encompass ever more powerful controls over others' actions, including use of its plasm as the vector of a sort of contagious charm⁵. At its Apogee, the Master of Copper draws a coterie of "true believers" around it who are fanatically devoted to its service; apparently these willing slaves often number in the dozens, and may run to several score.



5. A garbled version of this power might explain an odd conversation I once had with Gen. John Ripper, ret., in which he claimed he only drank water and pure grain alcohol "to prevent the shifters from defiling my precious bodily fluids"... as if ingesting the doppelganger's plasm were the key to this ability to charm!

Copper

(Lust, Charisma; opposes Iron)

Empathy (Ex): While using its detect thoughts ability's gauging mode, the doppelganger also receives the benefits of the psionic power empathy, including a +2 bonus to Bluff, Diplomacy, Intimidate or Sense Motive checks. This stacks with the creature's usual +4 racial Bluff bonus or its +4 circumstance Bluff bonus for reading thoughts. The doppelganger automatically receives emotional information, both positive and negative, if it successfully uses probing mode.

Devotion; CR +1/4

Telepathic Projection (Sp):

The doppelganger may use telepathic projection, as the psion power, 3/day. Creatures it targets with this ability become one step more friendly to the imposter (unfriendly to indifferent, etc). Any being using Bluff, Diplomacy, Intimidate, Perform, or Sense Motive on the affected creature gains a +4 bonus to such checks for 1 round/doppelganger's HD.

Devotion; CR +1/4

Charm Person (Sp): The doppelganger may use charm person, as the spell, 3/day.

Devotion; CR +1/4

Seductive (Ex): The doppelganger gets a +4 circumstance bonus when making a Diplomacy or Bluff check to influence persons of the opposite (apparent) sex.

Devotion; CR +1/4

Hostile Empathic Transfer (Sp):

The doppelganger may use hostile empathic transfer, as the psionic power, 1/day. Up to 70 hit points of damage which it currently suffers may be conferred to a target with a successful touch attack; this transferred, non-typed damage is halved on a Will save. The doppelganger is healed of as many hit points as it successfully transferred, up to its usual maximum. Thus, if it attempts to transfer the maximum damage to an enemy which saves successfully, it is cured of 35 hp damage; if that enemy only had 10 hp left, the enemy is reduced instantly to -10 hp and the doppelganger is cured of 20 points of damage.

Prerequisite: Telepathic Projection or Empathy ability. Dedication; CR +1/2



On Atypical Powers and Strains

Charm Monster (Sp): The doppelganger may use charm monster, as the spell, once per day. (From the doppelganger's point of view, the chief advantage of this ability over the first-rank charm person ability is that it works on other doppelgangers; other doppelgangers are NOT immune to this effect, even though they are immune to normal charms.)

Prerequisites: Charm Person or Telepathic Projection ability. Dedication; CR +1/2

Chained Charm (Su): By tricking or charming a subject into ingesting a few drops of its plasm, the doppelganger can implant a fraction of its uncanny charisma into that subject. Once per day, it may imbue a sample of its own plasm with a specialized version of charm person, which not only charms any subject which imbibes the fluid, but also imbues that person with the power to use suggestion on a third party. The charmed subject may then be ordered to use this suggestion effect to convince someone else to do something. If not utilized, the imbued suggestion expires at the same time as the charm effect.

If not used, the plasm becomes inert within ten minutes after being prepared (a standard action). During those ten minutes, the doppelganger's plasm bears a faint aura of Enchantment. The prepared plasm can be mixed into any beverage undetectably, as it has no taste or odor and it takes on the appearance of whatever fluid it is blended into.

The Will save DC to resist the first charm is $(8 + \frac{1}{2} \text{ doppelganger's HD} + \text{Cha modifier})$, while that of the suggestion is 2 less than that. If the first subject is already under the effect of the doppelganger's charm person at the time the plasm is ingested, drinking the plasm automatically extends the charm's duration, with no saving throw.

Prerequisite: Charm Person or Seductive ability. Dedication; CR +1/2

Geas (Sp): The doppelganger may use geas, as the spell, 1/day.

Prerequisites: Hostile Empathic Transfer or Charm Monster ability. Dominion; CR +3/4

Symbol of Persuasion (Sp): The imposter may use symbol of persuasion, as the spell, once a day, using its own plasm to write the symbol. This does 1 hit point of damage to the doppelganger, but it needs no other material components to activate the symbol.

Prerequisite: Charm Monster or Chained Charm ability. Dominion; CR +3/4

Soulthief (Master of Beguiling) (Ex):

The Master of Beguiling is now so deft at manipulation that it attracts a coterie of true believers, dedicated to its service. The doppelganger attracts two thralls plus a number of lesser believers, as given on the table to follow. Its leadership score is equal to its total HD plus its Charisma modifier. (Thus, it is normally at least 20, 16 HD and a +4 Cha modifier being the minimum for this ability.)

Regardless of the doppelganger's leadership score, its thralls' maximum character level is one less than its total Hit Dice. A doppelganger whose leadership score drops below 10 (i.e. half of the salient ability's minimum) loses the benefit of this power; its believers leave, and new ones may not be acquired until its leadership score rises to 20 or more.

This salient ability's benefits do not stack with those of the Leadership feat. Should a doppelganger with the Leadership feat gain this ability, its cohort and followers leave it within 24 hours and are replaced by thralls and believers on the same day. If a thrall or believer is killed or otherwise lost, it is likewise replaced within 24 hours, in accordance with the doppelganger's current leadership score.

Prerequisite: Geas or Symbol of Persuasion ability. Apogee; CR +1

On Atypical Powers and Strains

Leadership Score	Thrall Level	Believers by Level					
		1	2	3	4	5	6
10	7 th	5					
11	7 th	6					
12	8 th	8					
13	9 th	10	1				
14	10 th	15	1				
15	10 th	20	2	1			
16	11 th	25	2	1			
17	12 th	30	3	1	1		
18	12 th	35	3	1	1		
19	13 th	40	4	2	1	1	
20	14 th	50	5	3	2	1	
21	15 th	60	6	3	2	1	1
22	15 th	75	7	4	2	2	1
23	16 th	90	9	5	3	2	1
24	17 th	110	11	6	3	2	1
25 or Higher	17 th	135	13	7	4	2	2

Via Hydrargyrum

Via Hydrargyrum, the Path of Quicksilver, is associated with Vitality - physical and mental energy - and its cognate sin, Gluttony: the yearning to consume, far beyond that which is actually necessary to sustain life. Like Tin and Iron, this is an extension or intensification of the doppelganger's inherent power to shift its form, but in the direction of greater fluidity rather than solidity; its pursuit is occasionally referred to as the "Water Path", and its advanced adherents as "Watersmiths". It begins with an increase in the overall plasticity of a doppelganger's tissues, continuing through an ability to generate energy through fine adjustments of internal chemistry or to swiftly heal such harms as might be done to it, and culminating at its Apogee with the ability to divide its consciousness between two or more independent "selves".



On Atypical Powers and Strains

Quicksilver

(Gluttony, Constitution; opposes Lead)

Energy Discharge (Ex): The doppelganger controls its body's metabolism to generate a wave of energy - either fire, electricity or acid - usable 2/day as a touch attack. Activating this salient ability is a free action; a melee attack must be made to deliver its effects. There is no saving throw against this attack, which causes 1d6 hit points of damage per point of Constitution bonus the doppelganger has (e.g. one with a 16 Con inflicts 3d6 hp of energy damage).

Devotion; CR +1/4

Fast Healing (Ex): The doppelganger can accelerate its metabolism as a free action, to gain fast healing 5, 1/day, for a number of minutes equal to its Constitution modifier.

Devotion; CR +1/4

Fluid Form * (Ex): The doppelganger gains the ability to soften its tissues to the consistency of syrup, enabling it to flow through spaces as narrow as 1 inch in diameter. Its speed is 10 when moving in its semi-liquid condition. While in fluid form, a doppelganger cannot attack, speak, or handle objects, but it temporarily becomes immune to critical hits in the manner of an ooze.

Devotion; CR +1/4

Live Blood (Ex): The doppelganger's plasm remains under its mental control after being shed ... usually by an attacker, although the doppelganger can opt to bleed itself. The doppelganger can cause its plasm to stay inert and motionless - thus, foiling some of the simpler tests to identify its kind - or to move (speed 5), split or join, etc. Directing plasm is a free action.

The shed plasm has no attack form, but seeing it flow in violation of physics is grounds for a Horror check, at DC (8 + doppelganger's Con modifier). The animated plasm can also be directed to cover a surface or an object, with an effect equivalent to the grease spell; 1 square foot

of surface may be coated, per hit point of damage the creature had taken. Canny doppelgangers often use this ability to grease a weapon from which they have just taken damage.

Whether controlled or not, plasm becomes inert after one hour, or four hours if kept out of contact with air, as per normal doppelganger plasm.

Devotion; CR +1/4

Energy Font (Ex): The doppelganger can generate a steady flow of energy - fire, electricity, or acid - by altering its metabolism, then channel that energy into its natural attacks. Any natural weapon used by the doppelganger (including those created by Bladehand or Body Weaponry) deals 1d6 hp of energy damage plus its usual damage, or 2d6 hp per round that the doppelganger grapples an opponent. Activating this ability is a move action; ending it is a free action.

Prerequisites: Energy Discharge or Fast Healing ability. Dedication; CR +1/2

Stypsis (Ex): The doppelganger gains DR 3/- in all its forms. The doppelganger's plasm seals its wounds so quickly that it ignores minor injuries and takes less damage from serious ones. The doppelganger is also immune to the Wounding effect of magical weapons or special attacks, and always takes the minimum Constitution damage from blood-draining attacks.

Prerequisites: Fluid Form or Fast Healing ability. Dedication; CR +1/2

Blood Homunculus (Ex): By taking 2 points of hit point damage, the doppelganger can form a 2 HD homunculus (as per the Monster Manual) that obeys its every command. This is not an elaborate alchemical process, as it is for a human wizard: the doppelganger simply bleeds itself until it has enough plasm to form a functional servitor, a process taking ten minutes. So long as its blood homunculus operates as an independent creature, the

On Atypical Powers and Strains

doppelganger cannot recover the expended hit points by any means. The number of homunculi that can potentially be formed is limited only by the doppelganger's hit points, although it is highly unusual for a doppelganger to create more than one homunculus at a time. Once incorporated into a blood homunculus, the creator's plasm remains "living" until the homunculus is destroyed or recalled; exposure to air does it no harm.

The doppelganger can recoup its lost hit points by re-absorbing the homunculus; doing so is a standard action. The doppelganger instantly gains all the sensory information acquired by the absorbed homunculus, as if it had experienced the events in question itself. Should a homunculus created in this way be slain, its body collapses into a pool of inert plasm and the doppelganger's hit point loss becomes permanent.

Prerequisite: Live Blood or Fluid Form ability. Dedication; CR +1/2

Regeneration (Ex): The doppelganger gains regeneration 5 in all of its forms. Only fire or acid damage counts as lethal to a doppelganger with this salient ability.

Prerequisite: Stypsis or Energy Font ability. Dominion; CR +3/4

Fungible Anatomy * (Ex): The doppelganger can sculpt a functional extra extremity - arm, leg, or head - from its plasm. If the doppelganger generates an extra arm, it gains an extra slam attack per round, +4 to grapple checks, and +8 to Climb checks. Adding an extra leg gives it a 10 foot increase to its speed, +4 to Jump checks (plus its speed's benefit), and +10 to Balance checks. If it gains an extra head, it gains a +8 bonus to Spot and Listen checks, cannot be flanked, and may cast one spell per round through the extra head. The doppelganger may not cast more than one Quickened spell per round, even with two heads.

Forming the additional limb, or changing between extra limbs (e.g. absorbing a head and growing an arm) is a move action. If the doppelganger's clothes will not allow easy

access for the new limb, this becomes a standard action. Seeing this ability manifested is cause for a Horror check at DC 16, or 18 if the actual (grisly) process of molding the new extremity is witnessed.

Should a sculpted extremity be severed (e.g. by a vorpal weapon), it ruptures in a spray of inert plasm and the doppelganger loses 1/6 of its hit points permanently.

Prerequisite: Stypsis or Blood Homunculus ability. Dominion; CR +3/4

Soul Split (Master of Self) (Ex): The Master of Self can split itself into two or more physically-separated entities, each of which shares the "parent" doppelganger's memories and abilities. The two "offspring" created by this equal division are somewhat smaller than their parent, and have 2 fewer Hit Dice apiece (i.e. they are 2 HD rather than 4 HD monsters), but are otherwise identical to the parent. Each offspring possesses all of its parent's class levels and special abilities, half of the parent's prepared spells (if any), and half as many hit points of damage as the parent might have suffered at the time of separation. Thus, if a Master of Quicksilver which had suffered 33 hp of damage splits itself in halves, each "offspring" will be wounded for 16 hp of damage at the time it is initially created. Specific prepared spells are allotted to whichever offspring the parent chose to receive them; if the doppelganger has an odd number of spells of a given level, each offspring gets half that many (round down) and the extra prepared spell is lost.

Either or both 2-HD offspring can potentially subdivide still further, into a pair of 1-HD offspring, each of which gains two negative levels but is otherwise identical to the original parent. The same rules apply, for apportioning spells and damage between 1-HD offspring (the weakest such offspring which can be produced). The original "parent" may also opt to split into a 3 HD offspring, which retains all its class levels and $\frac{3}{4}$ of its spells and damage, and a 1 HD offspring with two negative levels and $\frac{1}{4}$ as much.

Because of the psychic strains of separation, each offspring must make a daily

Madness save at DC (5 + number of days spent apart). Should a Major Madness effect be indicated, the "offspring" which fails the save immediately conceives a paranoid fear of, and hatred for, its "siblings". Once this occurs, the afflicted offspring will do everything in its power to dispose of the other(s), and will not willingly rejoin for any reason. Minor and Moderate Madness effects do not have this effect, though they may make it difficult for these offspring, once dispersed, to re-establish contact with their "siblings".

If any offspring suffers a Fear, Horror or Madness effect, the parent will suffer from this same effect for the remainder of its duration, after re-joining. The exception is if an offspring is re-integrated after succumbing to a Major Madness effect; once it has been (forcibly) merged into the whole, its rebelliousness is purged from the re-formed "parent" within 24 hours.

Re-joining heals the various joining offspring of 2d8 points of damage, with any damage beyond this being applied to the

parent. Thus, if an offspring which has taken 24 hp of damage is merged with the whole, and its 2d8 hp of healing only restores 5 hit points, the recreated parent will be down 19 hp (or more, if other offspring were wounded). If incorporating a wounded offspring could potentially kill the 'parent', that offspring cannot be reabsorbed into the whole until it and/or the parent have recovered sufficient hp to survive the joining. Unused prepared spells become available to the parent; if the offspring collectively have more spells prepared than the parent is entitled to cast per day (i.e. they prepared new ones while they were separated), the parent may choose which ones to fill its daily allotment from. If an offspring was slain or went mad and fled its sibling(s), the 'parent' permanently loses the Hit Dice allotted to that offspring.

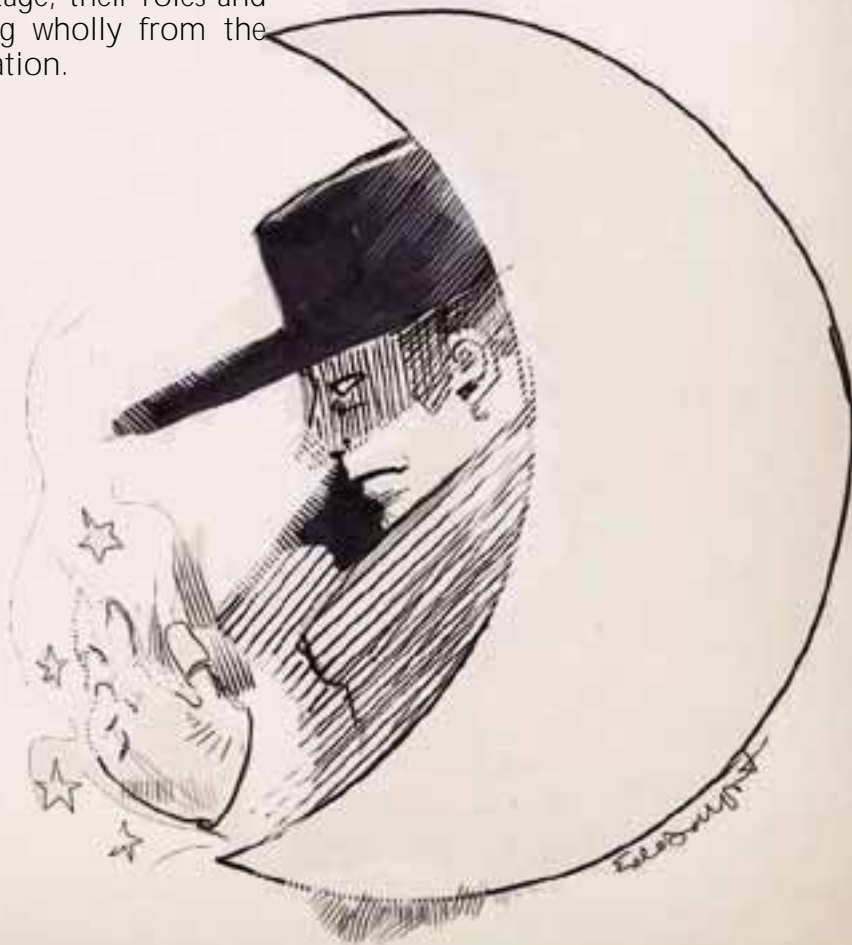
The processes of splitting and re-joining are both full-round actions. Witnessing either is cause for a Horror check at DC 18.

Prerequisite: Fungible Anatomy or Regeneration ability. Apogee; CR +1



Via Argentum

Via Argentum, the Path of Silver, is associated with Intellect - quickness of wit - and with Sloth: the desire to get something for nothing. Unlike other Paths, the Path of Silver makes its roots in the innate power of doppelganger glamor: the power to warp, not its own shape, but that of nearby objects, and to make things seem other than what they are. The Path of Silver thus confers the ability to distort reality, beginning with a refinement of the doppelganger's natural talent for making its accoutrements appear as it chooses to, then progressing through powers of supernatural illusion - the making of an illusionary duplicate, an illusionary home, or illusionary servants - and finally, to the imposition of its own fancies on the fabric of reality, forcing others to take their places as actors on a stage, their roles and circumstances springing wholly from the doppelganger's imagination.



Silver

(Sloth, Intelligence; opposes Tin)

Ghost Sound (Sp): The doppelganger may use ghost sound at will, as the spell.

Devotion; CR +1/4

Minor Image (Sp): The doppelganger may use minor image, as the spell, 3/day.

Devotion; CR +1/4

Mirror Image (Sp): The doppelganger may use mirror image, as the spell, 2/day.

Devotion; CR +1/4

Enduring Glamer (Su): An object glamered by the doppelganger retains its glamered state for five minutes if it passes more than 5' from the creature. (Normally, a glamer is negated as soon as the object moves more than five feet from the glamering doppelganger.) If the object should again come within 5' of the doppelganger during those five minutes, the creature may renew its glamer as a free action, or it may allow the glamer to expire normally.

Devotion; CR +1/4

House of Air (Su): The doppelganger may use a variant of mirage arcana as a spell-like ability, 1/day. It may create illusory

artificial structures, or transmute the appearance of existing ones, to a similar degree to mirage arcana; unlike that spell, this effect cannot imitate natural terrain, only man-made structures or settings. The structures revert to normal if the imposter that altered them dismisses the effect, moves more than 1 mile away, or dies.

This ability's duration is 24 hours, so may be used to continually cloak a doppelganger's home. It is routinely employed to make doppelgangers' homes appear palatial, but may also be applied practically, to confuse and mislead unwanted intruders.

Prerequisite: Minor Image or Ghost Sound ability. **Dedication;** CR +1/2

Permanent Glamer (Su): An object glamered by the doppelganger retains its altered state until the glamer is negated. Striking the glamered object with something made of cold iron or of tin cancels the effect instantly. This ability has many applications, but by far its most common is to generate "money" for the doppelganger employing it.

Prerequisite: Enduring Glamer or Minor Image ability. **Dedication;** CR +1/2

Shadow Self (Su): The doppelganger can create one quasi-real duplicate of itself per

Path of Silver



On Atypical Powers and Strains

day, which it can send forth to reconnoiter or to confuse an enemy. The duplicate is a figment constructed of glamer-imbued vapors and is 20% real if disbelieved (as per the spell shadow conjuration). The doppelganger can, if desired, see and hear (but not read minds) through the Shadow Self's senses. Unlike simulacra created by the spell project image, a doppelganger may not cast spells through its Shadow Self, and it need not maintain line of sight with its duplicate. The Shadow Self is not solid and it cannot attack creatures or manipulate objects in any way.

The Shadow Self can endure for a number of minutes equal to the doppelganger's Hit Dice, and the Will saving throw to disbelieve it is $(8 + \frac{1}{2} \text{ doppelganger's Hit Dice} + \text{Int modifier})$.

Prerequisite: Mirror Image or Enduring Glamer ability. Dedication; CR +1/2

Grand Glamer (Sp): The doppelganger may use either programmed image or permanent image (its choice) once a day, as the spell.

Prerequisite: Permanent Glamer or House of Air ability. Dominion; CR +3/4

Nightmare Servants (Su): The doppelganger can summon up creatures out of the subconscious fears of its opponents to do battle with them, 1/day. This ability is similar to the spell greater shadow conjuration, except the generated monsters have the Frightful Presence quality (save DC = $8 + \frac{1}{2} \text{ doppelganger's Hit Dice} + \text{Int modifier}$) against the person or persons from whose minds the doppelganger drew them. The doppelganger must use its detect thoughts ability's probing mode on the ones it intends its creations to terrify; if it is unable to read the thoughts of those it confronts, its monsters will lack the benefits of Frightful Presence.

Prerequisite: Shadow Self or Permanent Glamer ability. Dominion; CR +3/4

Phantom Shift (Master of Seemings) (Su):

Once per day the Master of Seemings may trigger a phantom shift, lasting for a number of minutes up to the doppelganger's HD (or

less, should it opt to dismiss the effect sooner). The doppelganger and any other creature within 20' of it that has an Intelligence score is drawn into a subjective reality, the nature of which is dictated by the doppelganger's whim.

While the Shift is in effect, the doppelganger and others affected enter the Near Ethereal, where they can only be perceived by ethereal beings or those capable of seeing into that plane. They are not, however, exposed to the hazards of the Ethereal, but are confined within a "twilight space" that ghosts and other ether-dwellers instinctively veer away from. The Silver Master may populate this transitional space with "people" or other creatures, as if it were using the Nightmare Servants ability described above; creatures thus created are only semi-real and can be disbelieved, but real beings affected by the shift can interact with each other normally.

The bizarre environment within the Phantom Shift's "twilight space" means that all who are drawn into the effect must make Will saves or be shaken (save DC $10 + \frac{1}{2} \text{ doppelganger's Hit Dice} + \text{Int modifier}$), for the duration of their time within. This does not apply to the creating doppelganger, and at the DM's discretion, it may also not apply to associates of the doppelganger who have experienced its effects before. In addition, the phantom shift adds 1 to the immediate area's Sinkhole of Evil rating (to a maximum of 5).

This ability is often used as an elaborate and extremely effective gaslighting prop, but it can also be employed to arrange an ambush on favorable ground. Note that the doppelganger must enter the Shift; that it cannot choose to exclude creatures within the area of effect; and that, while passing ghosts and similar entities will refrain from entering an existing "twilight space", any such being in range at the time the power is activated is also drawn in ... all of which means the doppelganger may not be aware of exactly who it has included in the Shift!

Prerequisite: Grand Glamer or Nightmare Servants ability. Apogee; CR +1

On Atypical Powers and Strains

Via Aurum

Via Aurum, the Path of Gold, is associated with the sin of Pride: the turning of all desires to serve the ego. It seems to be a special case, both in that it has no cognate characteristic and because (so Via Aurum's text implies throughout) apparently no doppelganger has ever actually achieved this vaunted state. It seems from my reading that the archetypal 'Philosopher's Stone', which figures so prominently in the imagination of Zherisian alchemists, is desired even more intensely by the doppelgangers who seek it, than it is by humans. The Divinity of Mankind advocates an ideal of human perfection, but in essentially mystical terms; the unknown author of Via Aurum⁶, conversely, speaks of doppelganger perfection as real, concrete, and even practicable. Mastery of the Path of Gold is described as a logical culmination of any and all lesser Paths, combining all these disciplines' characteristics into a unity which vastly enhances the power of each.

This concept is particularly striking, even paradoxical, given that the book also speaks throughout of an inherent opposition between metals: Lead in opposition to Quicksilver, Copper to Iron, and Tin to Silver.

A doppelganger which acquires even the least of abilities from a given Path may never, thereafter, learn abilities from its opposite, much as a wizard who has focused upon a particular arcane sub-discipline must forever forfeit knowledge of prohibited branches of magic. Furthermore, a doppelganger which acquires abilities from three Paths will never become more than an Apprentice in any of the three, while one that learns from two Paths will never rise above Journeyman⁷. Thus, the prospect of any doppelganger mastering all six of the Paths seems preposterous, making the Path of Gold an unattainable ideal.

It is in the Via Aurum text that I found corroboration and explanation for certain bizarre abilities I have seen here in Paridon, which no reference I had consulted, prior to undertaking my present research, so much as made mention of. (I attribute this shortage to the general ignorance of doppelgangers which obtains throughout the Core, and beyond, due to their relative rarity outside Zherisia.) I have heard of doppelgangers who can make their skins hard as boiled leather, the better to turn aside the blows of others: a manifestation of the Path of Iron⁸. Some among those Masters I have personally met took pride in their astonishing rapidity of shifting, changing from adult to child, human to elf, in the space between two heartbeats: a mark of their progression along the Path of Tin. Others are blessed with the ability to reconstitute injured flesh with an extraordinary speed, an ability which would belong to the Path of Quicksilver⁹.

In another instance, I met a doppelganger, presumably acquainted with the Path of Tin, with sufficient plasticity of self to be able to assume the form of animals: usually dogs and cats, these being the least conspicuous in Paridon, though presumably a doppelganger possessed of broader zoological knowledge could imitate any beast of comparable size.

6. *This appears to suggest that the "Via Aurum" is some kind of dilution or even a perversion of our own philosophical system ... although to say which alchemical creed is the chicken, which the egg, is probably impossible at this late date! - L.*

7. This may be the source of the Zherisian saying, "Jack of all trades shall be master of none."

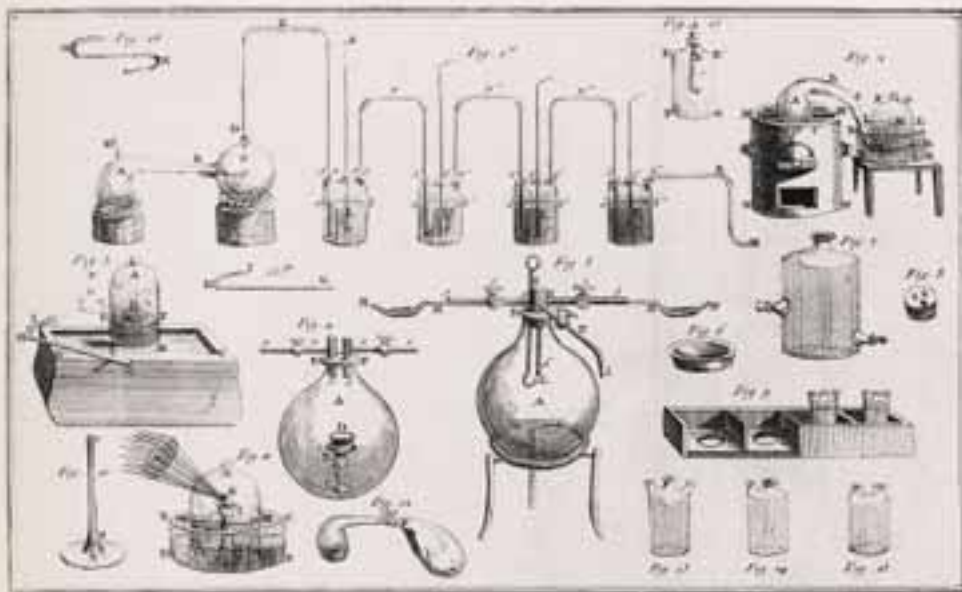
8. These abilities, like many others mentioned above, are useful in the right circumstances, but I suspect that most doppelgangers who possess such use them as a last resort. It can hardly be easy to maintain a human façade when one has revealed a capacity to shift the physical architecture of one's body with such facility!

9. It is a matter of some amusement to me that many doppelgangers, when in the company of a human who knows their monstrous identity, take an almost childish pleasure in exhibiting their more outré abilities: as if the one thing inhibiting their enjoyment of said abilities was lack of a suitably-impressionable audience.

Development of this ability is not, as far as I could learn, much respected; those who can imitate animals apparently do so only under extreme duress, as taking an animal form is perceived as indescribably vulgar and debasing by many of their fellows. In this, I suspect that the doppelgangers have absorbed the prejudices of the wider human society into which their own is amalgamated, as the ability seems to me to be both useful and striking.

I have seen few clear examples of the Paths of Lead, Copper or Silver: in part, I am sure, because many of these abilities display no visible manifestation, but also (I suspect) because my employer deems individuals with such abilities threatening, and endeavors to do away with such, or prevent their rise in society. He himself is not a devotee of Alchemy, as far as I can discover, and seems to consider the whole business silly and (for some reason) dangerous; however, this might simply be "sour grapes" stemming from his peculiar handicap, which I suspect bars him from making practicable use of any such Path.

However, I have interviewed at some length a Zherisian matron who believed herself to be a young man of about sixteen. The doppelganger who introduced us informed me that she had had a "psychic transplant", for reasons which it did not see fit to elucidate. (Surely an example of the Path of Lead at work!). At the time of this writing, the finest alienists of Paridon despaired of determining the cause or the cure for this unfortunate woman's madness. Knowing - all too well - on which side my bread is buttered, I have declined to enlighten them.



Path of Gold

There is, of course, one alchemical metal and one deadly sin lacking: the Path of Gold, associated with Pride, is supposedly the result of bringing the six base metals into a harmonious and perfect union. Fortunately, no Aureate or Quintessential Master has ever emerged from the ranks of Sodo's underlings ... yet.

On Atypical Powers and Strains

I have also heard accounts of doppelgangers exerting mental control over a subject's actions, or projecting their consciousness to some distant location in order to see or hear what transpired there. Fantastic though these accounts may seem, all that I have seen of doppelganger powers leads me to conclude that such applications are feasible, for all that I have witnessed no hard evidence of their use.

Dread Possibilities: Via Aurum

There are two opposing possibilities for the true nature of the Path of Gold, between which DMs may choose. Does it represent a final perversion of High Alchemy and submission to the desires of the ego, or is it actually the purification of self and a return to lost humanity?

The Quintessential Master

The Philosopher's Stone is reputed to purify all things, transmuting base metals into gold and purifying the body of the degenerate humors which lead to old age and death. The lure of infinite wealth and eternal youth have driven the quest for the Stone for many centuries, if not millennia, among human alchemists ... but doppelgangers have even higher hopes for what they may expect from the Stone. It is whispered that the Aureate Master would be a perfect being: able to convert its flesh to pure adamantite, to replicate itself indefinitely, to mold the fabric of space around it, to assimilate other creatures' aspects so as to replicate their every trait or power flawlessly, and to impose its will over others with a glance or entice their worship with a nod.

There are rumors among alchemists in the Land of Mists that someone, somewhere, is attempting to build an improved Apparatus, to be capable of even more marvelous and dreadful feats of purification, transmutation, and transmigration of souls than the original. Many of these rumors place the creation of this new Apparatus in the birthplace of High Alchemy: the Mist-shrouded city of Paridon. Could Sodo or another doppelganger be making an attempt to use the Apparatus to attain the coveted Philosopher's Stone, in a bid to become the Quintessential Master? Someone with so lofty a goal might do anything to achieve it....

The Path of Purity

The true alchemist is a searcher for spiritual, as well as physical, perfection, and the true path of High Alchemy is one of virtue as well as knowledge. Some say that doppelgangers were once human, but that their attempt to perfect themselves through alchemy ignored this basic fact, and their efforts therefore made them monsters instead of demigods.

The doppelgangers who model themselves upon lesser metals develop their powers at the expense of spiritual corruption, becoming ever more entangled in the sin which is the cognate to their chosen Path. Thus, this perversion of High Alchemy can never lead to the perfection they aspire to attain. The true Path of Gold can only be achieved by an alchemist who achieves pure spiritual virtue before seeking power; power then flows to that alchemist of its own accord.

The original Via Aurum text (since corrupted by doppelgangers, who preserved its knowledge of the lesser metals but expunged its dangerous secret) was written by an imposter who succeeded in following the Path of Gold to its conclusion, purifying its spirit and reclaiming its humanity. This individual went on to become the spiritual leader of the Divinity of Mankind.

The doppelgangers of Paridon, past and present, have taken great pains to expunge every hint of the true nature of the Path of Gold, and so conceal the actual relationship between humans and doppelgangers. They have been so successful that only Sodo, with hundreds of years of memory to call upon, still knows the full truth. Yet the original Via Aurum text still exists, and if it were found and its knowledge dispersed among the inhabitants of Paridon, it would shake the domain's society - human and doppelganger - to the core.

It is even possible that the original Aureate Master may still be alive: the Philosopher's Stone and its promised eternal youth might not lie beyond the grasp of so great an alchemist. The Time of Ultimate Darkness will bring many revelations, both good and evil; could its approach signal his or her return...?

On Atypical Powers and Strains

III. Deviant Inheritance

As conducive to individual doppelgangers' self-improvement as the Paths have proven to be, such profound and pervasive alterations of its earthly tenement can strain even the boundaries of a doppelganger's plasticity. As a corollary to my primary services, my employer has bidden me to provide occasional medical assistance to his fellows, there being few trained physicians or healers among his kind, and even fewer human doctors who can be trusted to tend their injuries. Although most of these duties were comparatively routine - doppelgangers are not impervious to illness, and most do not share the invulnerability of Iron's Path - a handful of individuals sought me out for more chronic "problems" which had impaired their functioning in some manner. Such abilities were not without fringe benefits, yet most were sufficiently troubled to seek a solution to their concomitant liabilities.

While the connection is circumstantial, the one common thread my questioning of these patients uncovered is this: each individual was, by its own admission, the scion of a practitioner of a particular alchemical Path ... and an advanced practitioner, at that. (Such heritage was not, I should note, a source of familial pride; rather, it was their shared bitterness at living in a famed progenitor's shadow, which brought this point of commonality to my attention!) The details of their complaints' manifestations varied so widely as to appear unrelated, yet I soon realized they correlated remarkably with their respective progenitors' Paths.

Based upon this consistency between ancestry and ailment, I can only conclude that the pursuit of alchemically-derived advantage has generated such congenital ailments in the offspring of the Paths' most proficient adherents. Such defects do not appear to be universal - I have made the acquaintance of two offspring of Smiths, neither of whom exhibited the syndromes I observed in my patients - but the incidence is high enough to give proof to a pattern of cause and effect. If the alchemical Paths are a boon to the doppelgangers now extant, it is not without consequence to their posterity: a consequence, which their deficiency of parental instinct or familial associations has apparently led them to overlook.

Needless to say, I have kept this line of investigation from my employer and his kind.

Inherited Alchemical Side-Effects

The following feats are unique to dread doppelgangers, being passed on to one in five offspring of parents which have acquired 3rd rank alchemical Path abilities, and one-half of the offspring of those with 4th rank powers. DMs may also assign these feats to dread doppelgangers as salient abilities, with a CR adjustment of + ¼ .

Dead Blood [Monstrous]

The doppelganger's plasm does not retain its motility when it is shed.

Prerequisite: Dread doppelganger

Benefit: The doppelganger's plasm becomes inert outside its body; it will not, for example, move to escape a heated needle. Microscopic examination still reveals it is not human blood. A doppelganger with Dead

Blood cannot stop its heartbeat to simulate death, and the 'fortification' provided by its alien physiology is 25%, not 50%.

The veins of a doppelganger which has this feat are not clearly defined beneath its taut skin, unlike those of others of its kind. Dead Blood is only found in doppelgangers whose progenitors pursued the Path of Lead to Smith ranking or higher.

On Atypical Powers and Strains

Special: This feat must be selected at the 1st character level. A doppelganger which chooses this feat cannot pursue the alchemical Path of Quicksilver.

Fine-Boned

[Monstrous]

The doppelganger's delicate frame means it is treated as a Small creature in most respects.

Prerequisite: Dread doppelganger

Benefit: The doppelganger gets some of the benefits and penalties of being a Small creature, even when in the form of a Medium creature. It receives a +1 size bonus to attacks and AC and a -4 penalty to grapple checks, in either Small or Medium guises, and also in its natural form.

Should it assume a form larger than Medium (e.g. by use of Size Shift: Large), a Fine-Boned doppelganger is likewise treated as if it is one size smaller than it truly is, for purposes of attack rolls, armor class, and grapple modifiers.

Abnormally for its kind, a dread doppelganger which possesses this feat may be as much as two inches shorter than the five-and-a-half feet that is otherwise universal for its species. Fine-Boned is only found in doppelgangers whose progenitors pursued the Path of Copper to Smith ranking or higher.

Special: This feat must be selected at the 1st character level. A dread doppelganger which chooses this feat cannot pursue the alchemical Path of Iron.

Inflexible Form

[Monstrous]

The doppelganger's flesh is less pliable than most, making its assumed forms more stable.

Prerequisite: Dread doppelganger

Benefit: The doppelganger is slow to change forms, requiring a full-round action rather than a standard action to use its Change Shape ability. However, the shapes it assumes are more stable than usual. A doppelganger with this feat cannot be forced into its natural form by mortal magic; it maintains its humanoid guise when knocked

unconscious, ill, or drugged, and will not revert to its true shape after being killed until 24 hours have passed.

A doppelganger with this feat has arms and facial features which are somewhat less elongated than is usual for its species. Inflexible Form is only found in doppelgangers whose progenitors pursued the Path of Silver to Smith ranking or higher.

Special: This feat must be selected at the 1st character level. A doppelganger which chooses this feat cannot pursue the alchemical Path of Tin.

Morphic Misfit

[Monstrous]

The doppelganger fails to fully socialize and seems somewhat uncanny, even in human form.

Prerequisite: Dread doppelganger

Benefit: While the doppelganger's disguises are structurally accurate, its failure to suppress its Clay-persona's simmering contempt and hostility towards humanoids makes its impostures come across as subtly "wrong". It has a permanent +1 to its OR in all assumed forms.

The doppelganger can use this psychological aversion to its advantage. Three times per day, it may use the psionic power cloud mind as a spell-like ability, rendering a single subject unable to notice its presence or actions unless it attacks them. Its caster level is equal to $\frac{1}{2}$ of its total Hit Dice. The save DC against cloud mind is $(8 + \frac{1}{2} \text{ Hit Dice} + \text{Wisdom modifier})$.

The inhuman features of a doppelganger that has this feat - shape of ears, tapering digits, etc - are even more markedly "inhuman" than is typical of its kind. Morphic Misfit is only found in doppelgangers whose progenitors pursued the Path of Iron to Smith ranking or higher.

Special: This feat must be selected at the 1st character level. A doppelganger which chooses this feat cannot pursue the alchemical Path of Copper.

On Atypical Powers and Strains

Realistic Perceptions [Monstrous]

The doppelganger's psychic prowess and skepticism makes it sensitive to what is or is not there.

Prerequisite: Dread doppelganger

Benefit: The doppelganger receives a +4 bonus to its saving throws against spells from the school of Illusion. In addition, by concentrating for one round with its detect thoughts power in gauging mode, it can see invisible and/or ethereal objects and creatures for as long as it maintains its concentration, and for 3 rounds afterwards. While using its power to discern such presences, it cannot estimate minds' mental abilities or use its detect thoughts ability's other modes.

As a side effect, the skeptical doppelganger's Glamer special ability can only be used when it is physically touching some part of the object to be transformed. Among other things, this means that it cannot apply glamer to its entire outfit as a full-round action, as the outer components of its garb (like belts) must be touched individually.

The skin of a doppelganger which has this feat does not glisten like that of others of its sort, but is a dull matte gray. Realistic Perceptions is only found in doppelgangers whose progenitors pursued the Path of Tin to Smith ranking or higher.

Special: This feat must be selected at the 1st character level. A doppelganger which chooses this feat cannot pursue the alchemical path of Silver.

Weak Mind [Monstrous]

The doppelganger is insane, albeit high-functioning, and contacting its mind is dangerous.

Prerequisite: Dread doppelganger

Benefit: The doppelganger labors under the burden of a Madness effect typical of its race, as detailed in this netbook's Psychology section (page 150), and its illness cannot be cured by time, therapy or magic. A specific minor or moderate Madness effect may be selected from among the options available to

its kind; major Madness effects are possible, but pose a far greater challenge for the Weak-Minded doppelganger to live with.

The doppelganger takes no additional ability damage due to its insanity (i.e. its statistics are assumed to already take this loss into account), and it functions moderately well in both human and doppelganger society, although it will have a reputation for "eccentricity". Any humanoid making active mental contact with the creature must make a Madness check. Doppelgangers are able to contact its mind without risk, as its thoughts (although insane) are not of a kind which distress them unduly ... else, its own kind would have long since exiled or done away with it.

A doppelganger that selects this feat is immune to Fear, Horror and Madness saves for any reason, except in response to delusions conjured by its innate madness or direct contact with the mind of a darklord. Undead creatures cannot use their "false thoughts" ability to block the detect thoughts power of a doppelganger with this feat, perhaps because it must routinely distinguish its own false fancies from the genuine thoughts of others and itself.

A doppelganger with this feat looks perfectly normal for its species, but the tenor of its true-form speech and thoughts is frighteningly intense, almost feverish. Weak Mind is only found in doppelgangers whose progenitors pursued the Path of Quicksilver to Smith ranking or higher.

Special: This feat must be selected at the 1st character level. A doppelganger which chooses this feat cannot pursue the alchemical path of Lead.

Normal: Doppelgangers that succumb to Madness are affected as detailed in the Psychology section of this netbook, and acquire no special immunity to Fear, Horror or Madness saves or the effect of undead "false thoughts".

On Atypical Powers and Strains

In addition to these Path-related abnormalities - which, at the very least, did not prevent my patients from functioning - I have overheard certain veiled statements that suggest that other, more drastic defects occasionally afflict doppelgangers' offspring. As these deficiencies manifest at birth, those of their kind who choose to reproduce in a female mode (a distinct minority among them, and one which made occasional use of my medical advice) are loath to engage the services of a human midwife. Of the three actual confinements I was summoned for, to wait outside the birthing-chamber in the event that my skills should prove necessary, two birth-cries ended in the presentment of healthy (and wholly human-seeming) infants to the natal clan, and the third cry ... simply ended.

Granted, I owe these creatures no loyalty. They have little more place in this world than those abominations my prodigy will expunge from it! But it is on recalling this event, above all others, that I am most relieved that my time among them is drawing to a close.

Dread Possibility: Zherisia's Changelings

Changelings - not to be confused with the Arak-altered humanoids known by the same name - are presented as monsters in *Monster Manual III*, and as a player character race in the *Eberron Campaign Setting* book and *Races of Eberron*. In Ravenloft, they are not the result of biological crossbreeding with humans (which is how normal dread doppelgangers are produced), but rather, are the dread doppelgangers' equivalent of calibans. Though highly unusual, changeling births occurred in Zherisia even before that realm became a part of the Land of Mists; its passage into Ravenloft saw an increase in the frequency of such births, and the Grand Conjunction has since magnified the incidence of both changeling and caliban children conceived in Paridon.

Born with obviously inhuman features, Zherisian changelings were routinely killed in infancy for centuries: by their doppelganger parent if not their human surrogate, to preserve the imposter-race's secrecy and 'racial purity'. However, the chaos that beset Paridon in the wake of the Great Upheaval allowed several newborn changelings to slip beneath the notice of their infanticidal kin. Mistaken for calibans by human caregivers, the surviving changelings are now of an age to begin gaining control of their own (limited) impersonation abilities. Even so, their lack of mind-reading or glamor brands changelings as useless cripples by doppelganger standards, making it unlikely that any could earn a place within their forbearers' society.

Without contact from their inhuman progenitors, most of these young shapechangers have grown up thinking of themselves as "calibans", not doppelganger-kin, and those who have survived to adulthood generally have foster-familial ties in Paridon's caliban community. Sadly, these ties are likely to be sorely tested, once their Freak Street peers begin to realize their fellow-outcasts don't have to remain disfigured and ugly, as they do.

On Atypical Powers and Strains

IV. Variant Subspecies

Even more startling (and far more useful, at least for my own purpose) than the primarily cultural and educational differences among Zherisia's resident doppelgangers is the fact that there are actually several different varieties of doppelganger. I cannot decide whether the biological distinction of "different species" is applicable here, as their life cycle perforce makes the question of their capacity to interbreed moot. That being said, my employer (who, probably rightly, considers himself an expert on the subject) believes that the distinction between these "foreign" breeds and his own is significantly greater than that between the varied ethnicities of humankind.

Most of these non-Zherisian doppelgangers are quite similar to the doppelgangers native to Paridon, save that they are perhaps slightly less aggressive in their methods, and their ability to modify the appearance of objects is either suppressed or absent. When found in Zherisia, they are usually exterminated by native doppelgangers: they are allegedly too troublesome to be consigned to life as "cattle" (an epithet regularly applied to humans), but neither is there any place for them as "Masters", as they have no formal standing or obligations within an established clan - the basis of native doppelganger society - and hence, cannot be relied on to comply with superiors' orders. I do not know how intra-species interactions are managed in other realms, but I presume that in such a case, where neither breed has the advantage of "home ground", it is plausible that such "lesser" doppelgangers and emigrants from Zherisia could come to an accommodation that serves both their interests, most likely at humans' expense.

More exotic specimens of their race also appear periodically. My employer has furnished me with a pair of specimens of a particularly intriguing kind, which he claims came to this island from "beyond the Mists". Certainly, their physiology is different and more sophisticated than that of our native sort, with less degeneracy of digestive function and a physiognomy far closer to the human norm. These exotic creatures are reportedly endowed with the ability to take on the memories and even the abilities of an imitated victim - a practice otherwise achieved only by the most advanced disciples of the Path of Lead - by the rather crude expedient of eating a victim's brain. This argues for unique assimilative capacities within their own brains, and it furnished a prime opportunity to further my own project, as this should confer the requisite adaptability to my prodigy. (Whether it will be any more tractable when directed by such a brain is another issue, but one which is of concern principally to my employer.)

A closing, and related note: when discussing the requisite characteristics of my creation, my employer initially broached the possibility of integrating tissue from a type of doppelganger inhabiting the Near Ethereal, should any be procured in time. (Apparently, he has heard of and even met one of these creatures, although he could not - or would not - tell me whether they are a separate species within the wider doppelganger genus, or the ghosts of deceased doppelgangers.) The logistical challenge of incorporating - literally, in this case - ethereal tissue into a corporeal framework is, of course, intriguing, and probably fiendishly difficult. Alas, it is not one I will be taxed with, as no doppelganger of this sort has appeared (or, at least, been detected) in Paridon for decades, nor is such an elaborate, time-consuming alteration of our final product's specifications feasible before the deadline. Such an endeavor may not be advisable, in any case, as these beings are said to be fantastically dangerous.

Overall, I am pleased with my prodigy's design as it now stands, and expect that it will require no such last-minute elaborations to satisfy my employer's requirements.

On Atypical Powers and Strains

Alien Doppelganger Strains

All native (i.e. Zherisian) doppelgangers referred to herein are dread doppelgangers, as described in *Denizens of Dread/Darkness*. Other varieties of doppelganger that appear in D&D 3E/3.5 products, and are mentioned in Dr. Cream's notes, are as follows:

"Standard" doppelgangers can be found in both the *Monster Manual* and the *System Reference Document*, and are Open Gaming License material. They are similar to dread doppelgangers, but are not necessarily Evil-aligned; they lack the Glamer special quality unique to Ravenloft's dread doppelgangers, who typically regard such outlanders as their racial inferiors. Sodo does not allow "primitives" of their sort to reside in Zherisia, although an exiled dread doppelganger in another domain might recruit standard doppelgangers as its toadies.

Greater doppelgangers appear in *Monsters of Faerun*. Like other doppelgangers, they are able to shift forms and read minds, but they are considerably more powerful and have additional mimicry abilities. By eating a victim's brain, they gain access to all of that person's memories, skills, and class or other abilities, and are therefore able to make themselves even more perfect duplicates of a person whom they "replace". Greater doppelgangers' habits are solitary, and they are regarded as both competitors and threats by Sodo's kind. Should one of their sort appear in Ravenloft, any dread doppelganger which learns of its presence is liable to try to kill it, or (more likely) to trick human heroes into doing so.

Ethereal doppelgangers are in *Monster Manual II*. Like Faerun's greater doppelgangers, they can steal the memories and abilities of others, but they need not eat the subject's brain to do so. They can also use the psionic power brain lock, and have the supernatural ability to cause others to forget about them with a touch. Dread doppelgangers are unsure about these rarely-encountered beings' origins, frequently confusing them with ghosts of their own kind. Ethereal doppelgangers are not indigenous to Ravenloft, and any that find themselves there are likely to be far more concerned with escaping from its claustrophobic confines than in their usual pursuit of collecting exotic magic items.

Conspicuously absent from Dr. Cream's research notes are any references to half-doppelgangers, a template described in Wade Nudson's article "Strange Bedfellows" in *Dragon* #313. Dread doppelgangers' mating with humanoids produces only full-fledged doppelgangers or (rarely) changelings, never a true "hybrid" as described in that article. A standard doppelganger, arrived in the Land of Mists as an outlander, could potentially produce such offspring if the DM desires. The "half-doppelganger" is an inherited template that confers both limited empathic ability and shapechanging to a humanoid base creature.

Excerpts from the Diary of Deborah Creede

November 22nd, 5:00 am

When I showed the rash to Dr. Johanson, the surprise on his face was all too evident. (Mine as well, in truth: the appearance of the markings had changed again, in but a few hours' time, its aged thinness giving way to unsightly pock-marks.) He seemed extremely eager to study it, a look of fascination on his face. He told me that he recently had a patient with similar scars. In her case, they were the relics of a severe bout of smallpox: a disease for which no remedy is known. To this day he said he was still uncertain how she had survived that terrible illness; all medical wisdom said she would surely have died, having reached its terminal stage. Her body must have possessed some hidden reserve of vitality that saved her.

He could not explain where my own scars had come from, or how they could have undergone such varied changes as I reported. He said that with further observations he might learn more, but as the markings had yet to prove painful or even uncomfortable I courteously declined, even though his pleas that I should remain in his care overnight grew quite vehement. I left with a prescription for a mild sleeping-draught. The doctor was completely at a loss to treat the rashes, but insisted that I should see him at once if any further alterations took place.

Curiously, when I tried to pay the apothecary, suddenly part of the money seemed to be gone from my purse. Those horrible nightmares seem even to distort my perception of the waking world: I could have sworn that when I counted out the payment, all the coins seemed perfectly normal. But when I saw the questioning look on the apothecary's face, I realized that half the supposed "coins" I had laid on the countertop were instead buttons, a thimble, and other cheap metal oddments of similar size. No pickpocket would return a purse filled with useless trinkets after stealing its contents! I must have put them there myself.

What is happening to me? I fear that I am losing my grip upon reality! I cannot take all these strange incidents any more: I feel I am going mad!



On the Doppelganger Life Cycle

"And God said," quoted Mr. Leebody, "'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.' Very well then, what are these Children? What are they? The image does not mean the outer image, or every statue would be man. It means the inner image, the spirit and the soul They have the look of the genus homo, but not the nature. Murder is, by definition, the killing of one's own kind. But if we kill one of them, or they kill one of us is it in fact, murder?"

- John Wyndham, "The Midwich Cuckoos"



On the Doppelganger Life Cycle

In addressing this next topic, I must admit to great hesitancy on my part. This is not due to its necessary indelicacy; rest assured, Miladies, I do not align myself with those who would condescendingly shuffle gentlewomen like yourselves from the room, rather than sully ladylike ears with coarseness. Indeed, if such prudish habits of 'discretion' were less endemic in this Land - and in Paridon particularly - human efforts to evict the imposters from our midst would meet with fewer obstacles: it is, after all, women who bear the brunt of their outrages in this matter, and who are better positioned to track down such rumors as might betray the creatures' vilest means of parasitism! I don't wish to give offense, dear ladies, but circumspection as to doppelgangers' breeding habits for propriety's sake will only facilitate their foul abuses, and that, I will not do.

Rather, my concern - as with Van Richten's worries, in writing of werebeasts' physical traits in human form or the habitual lifestyles of as-yet-unChanged hags - is that the information I now submit to our Society might, if applied out of context and too aggressively, bring harm to innocent parties ... and the most innocent, at that. The presence of doppelgangers, by their very nature, fosters suspicion, to a point of paranoia; and paranoia, once unleashed, can drive even the noblest of souls to desperate, unspeakable measures. It is bad enough, when such suspicion turns those beset by it against their co-workers, their neighbors, their friends, lest they be manipulated and betrayed by a trusted face or beloved voice!

But it is *children* who would be placed at risk, should the sordid details of the imposters' procreative habits be seized upon by those - hag-ridden by paranoia - in whom terror supercedes moral scruples. In the cruelties of Tepest's Inquisition or the desperate actions of Vistani fearful of their dread 'Dukkar', to say naught of the worldwide abuse of calibans, we find tragic evidence that such outcomes are all too common, when the young are perceived as sinister or alien. Even in the absence of doppelgangers, the very idea that a child may not, in truth, be his own flesh and blood has

unleashed many a cuckold's brutality upon the vulnerable. How much restraint would such abusers show, when pushed to their tempers' limit, if a convenient excuse of "This must be a doppelganger's child, not even human!" became freely available?

How, then, can I reconcile such bitter consequences, if I pass on the unsavory insights my investigations have uncovered? How can I justify drawing attention to juvenile doppelgangers, living undetected alongside the legitimate children of our human communities, knowing that such neonates have (as yet) committed no crime ... and that their human peers - a precious reservoir of innocence, in a world so dark as ours - might well be subjected, in error or acrimony, to the same paranoid accusations and pre-emptive redress as they? How can I choose - why have I chosen - to reveal these ugly facts, despite my own better conscience's warnings?

Because all those children, Miladies, had mothers who bore them, be they doppelganger or human. And the girls among them do not deserve to suffer as a doppelganger's birth-surrogate does; nor the lads, to stand helplessly by as their mothers, sisters, wives or daughters endure such ignominious exploitation.

For love of the mothers neither you nor I can remember, dear sisters, I trust my discovery to you, knowing that you - that women - are ultimately the ones who can best appreciate its full, unwholesome import. And, so doing, I trust you will not disseminate its content recklessly, but will ensure that only those who emulate your late Uncle in spirit, as well as in practice, will learn of the insidious manner by which doppelgangers procreate their treacherous kind.

Let not the memory of *Erasmus* Van Richten be sullied by other innocents' sorrow, in the name of his father's just works, Miladies. But, true in conviction, read on.

On the Doppelganger Life Cycle

Desire as a Weapon

Previously, I have alluded to doppelgangers' proclivity for exploiting humanity's vices - indiscretions either exposed with their mind-reading, or engineered through the imposters' own deviousness - as a means to exert pressure. Nor are these manipulations confined to those ethical transgressions we humans are wont to commit, with one another: should others' licentious lapses serve its agenda, any doppelganger is capable of crafting a suitably-attractive guise, acting out the part of a willing paramour, and itself luring a libidinous subject into an erotic encounter. Success being most likely if its appearance is sculpted to suit the intended bedmate's tastes, an imposter planning such a tryst often probes its subject's thoughts or consults other sources (such as diaries or confidantes) in the course of preparation, the better to present itself as said subject's "dream lover". Whether its intended is male or female - indeed, whether or not the gulled party's tastes lie within the usual bounds of convention - is of no matter to it whatsoever.

Such a stratagem is often employed for purposes of blackmail or emotional coercion. In cases where a doppelganger's illicit partner is also its intended replacement-victim, it may resort to seduction to obtain a closer familiarity with said subject's physique, or merely tempt them into vulnerability. (I can attest - although not, I hasten to assure Miladies, from first-hand experience! - that there are few instances in which a gentleman is more susceptible to discreet dispatch, than if caught weaponless and unclad, in a place of privacy.) A brief tryst may serve as anything from a diversionary tactic to a means of sowing discord amongst its enemies; with a long-term feigned "relationship", a doppelganger can wrest secrets from a politically-influential dupe's wantonness, or destabilize a marital alliance to turn prominent households against one another. What a dozen stealthy murders would fail to achieve, the timely exposure of infidelity may yet accomplish.

Utilitarian aims seem to motivate every doppelganger's participation in affaires de amour. In no unfeigned imposter-written

Sex and the Single Doppelganger

A doppelganger that uses mind-reading or other methods to determine a subject's ideal fantasy-mate, then adopts a guise and mannerisms corresponding to his or her "dream lover", receives a +2 circumstance bonus on Bluff checks to seduce that particular subject, as per the 'Seduction' usage of Bluff, discussed in RLPHB. (This is, in effect, an application of the "perfect tool for the job" skill check bonus.) As with every use of Bluff to entice someone, appearing as their ideal mate can't rob them of free will or negate their moral or personal inhibitions, if any.

Doppelgangers, themselves, lack innate sex-drive and are unmoved by seduction attempts, though they may pretend otherwise. Physical control over their bodies makes actual interest unnecessary for a convincing performance at what, to them, is little more than a massage. Adherents of the Path of Copper are notable exceptions: their usage of emotional purgatives in pursuit of the Via Cuprum allows them to partake of human lustfulness secondhand, and most such adherents spend the half-hour after imbibing such a purgative in hurried assignations with charmed humans.

Barring exceptional circumstances, such as emotional purgatives, or Madness that subsumes their true, monstrous identity beneath that of a false guise, doppelgangers can feel neither romantic love nor sexual desire. Feats such as Smitten (Van Richten's Arsenal) or Tantric Ability (Champions of Darkness) are prohibited to the imposters, who virtually never apply "loved one" modifiers to Fear or Horror saves.

On the Doppelganger Life Cycle

reference have I come upon a single *first person* avowal of love or affection, nor even of desire in a risqué mode. Sincere feelings of romantic tenderness on doppelgangers' part - so all of my evidence attests - can be found solely in the pages of puerile fictions in the motif of Madame Howarth's "Union of Opposites", or (rarely) in the writings of creatures so given over to madness as to lose sight of their own nature. Even the Path of Copper - referenced in Dr. Cream's notes, and nominally associated with the human sin of Lust - serves the ultimate function of winning others' slavish and doting obedience, not the physical pleasure to be had in their attentions.

To be scandalously blunt, Miladies, these imposters' overall view of eros may be neatly encapsulated by the following quotation:

"I was clad in the form of a fishmonger, a filthy thing that reeked of fish and dirt ... I could feel its lusts and vices and what it wanted to do to my youthful frame, what it felt towards my female mask. I t was weak and easy prey..."

Contemptuous, jaded, dispassionate, and every bit as charmlessly-pragmatic as a Borcan marriage contract, Miladies. That is the attitude with which doppelgangers approach love-play, however artful their seductions. Were desire not an expected facet of the roles they assume, or so trusty a tool by which to manipulate our weaknesses, most would likely not partake at all in what is, to them, a joyless mechanical exercise! As it is, they dally quite routinely with we humans, for purposes of extortion, distraction, camouflage, ambush and persuasion.

And sometimes - disturbing though it is to contemplate - for procreation, as well.

Breeding Practices

That doppelgangers, like hags, reproduce their kind by out-of-species relations is an ugly truth known to very few. Most Zherisians presume that these creatures breed among themselves, as do most living organisms; they blame tales of adolescents' exposure as imposters on juvenile

doppelgangers' having killed and replaced their human peers, in the same fashion as their elders prey on human adults. However plausible such tales may be in their heavily-infested homeland, alas, several incidents in the Core - cases in which a lone doppelganger had been incontrovertibly driven out of a community or slain, only to have some innocuous local youth undergo shocking transfiguration into another of its kind, over a decade later - quite soundly debunk the prevailing Zherisian hypothesis.

So far as I can determine, only a meager handful of Paridon's human citizens even begin to suspect these imposters' true breeding methods, and those few who do know have gleaned this information - evidently under some duress - from the doppelgangers themselves. And, until the means to reliably and painlessly distinguish a true human child from that of an imposter becomes available, I must concur with their decision (albeit not necessarily their motives) to hide that fact from public awareness.

Common Knowledge

While doppelgangers' *existence* was exposed to all of Paridon in September of 742, the imposters have gone to tremendous lengths to ensure that their breeding methods still remain a secret. The doppelgangers are well aware that their entire race could become extinct in a single generation, if Zherisians began systematically policing their children for signs of being imposters, so they hold nothing back in their efforts to suppress or misrepresent the truth.

Non-doppelgangers which *are* aware of the facts include the Zherisian branch of the Fraternity of Shadows, Paridon's resident jackalweres, and a handful of human quislings compelled to silence by Lead-practitioners' mental bindings or Sodo's *Timed Scarabs of Death*. That the doppelgangers have not yet moved to silence the FoS, as well, suggests that either the have yet to realize Alfred Lerner's cell possesses such knowledge, or (more likely) that Sodo has some ulterior motive for leaving the secret society in peace.

On the Doppelganger Life Cycle

In the case of hags or certain varieties of fey, out-breeding with humanoids is their only procreative option, as males of their own race simply do not exist. By contrast, doppelgangers' mating with humans serves primarily their own personal convenience: beings that so shamelessly appropriate others' wealth and position, it is clear, can see no wrong in exploiting humans' child-rearing aptitudes, as well. Rather than tend or educate their young - a long-term responsibility which, I must admit, is not very compatible with the unpredictable lives of play-acting they lead - doppelgangers unsentimentally leave their offspring's care, feeding and instruction to we humans, much as the cuckoo abandons its eggs in the nests of warblers.

Of course, a human mother is not so readily fooled as a nesting warbler ... but then, the imposters' biology is such that they need not merely set an infant in our paths and hope we accept it. In a role-reversal of haggish breeding patterns, doppelgangers far prefer to reproduce in the guise of human males, impregnating innocent women with

their own strange seed, such that the burden of gestation and perils of childbirth are inflicted upon these unwitting partners. At times, these creatures seduce their way into the arms of unsuspecting lasses, for that dastardly purpose; even more frequently, a doppelganger will deceive some upright, blameless matron into thinking it her lawful husband whom she embraces! Seldom do such "birth-surrogates" realize the truth of their violation, save if the resulting child's hidden nature should be summoned to the fore before their eyes. Even then, most women (at least in Paridon) are strongly predisposed to believe their real child has been slain - replaced by the facsimile thus revealed to them - rather than admit that they have birthed a monster and loved it in vain.

These imposters are born of rape-by-deception, aping and making mock of our humanity from the womb. And if their iniquitous unions with unsuspecting victims prove fecund - as they almost invariably do, if the doppelganger wishes it so - their offspring likewise grow up amongst, and resembling, we humans: cuckoos in the nest.

Fertility Options

Though sexless in their natural state, dread doppelgangers that assume a humanoid form take on the gender of that form, including all appropriate reproductive structures. Whether these organs are fertile or sterile is under their conscious control: the imposters never become parents, either as males or females, unless they deliberately choose to procreate. When they do decide to breed, it is a calculated choice on their own or a clan superior's part, never an impulsive one; their usual motives for reproduction are to bolster their clans' numbers or cultivate a pliable accomplice.

Rookhausen's case-studies all happen to have involved human women, so he has overlooked the possibility of nonhuman birth-surrogates. A doppelganger in a corresponding (fertile) male guise can impregnate females of child-bearing age from most humanoid races, except for those with the reptilian subtype or otherwise unequipped to give "live" birth. Fertility rates of such pairings are >95% - much higher than between true members of conventional humanoid species - as the doppelganger's "seed" is actually a self-germinating spore: it need not encounter a viable egg to begin its development. Hence, even women otherwise barren can potentially be impregnated by a doppelganger, and repeated attempts are seldom necessary.

As the apparent race of a doppelganger child always matches its humanoid parent's, an imposter wishing to sire offspring will do so in a form similar to that of the chosen birth-surrogate. This averts awkward questions which might arise if, for example, an "elf" fathered a child on a human woman, only to have it resemble a full-blooded human at birth, rather than a half-elf.

On the Doppelganger Life Cycle

Birth-Surrogates

Given the chance, doppelgangers select their future offspring's faux "mothers" with care. Their foremost consideration is deniability: if a woman is married to (or otherwise romantically linked with) a doppelganger's long-standing false identity, in the popular eye, it will strictly avoid breeding with her. Juvenile imposters undergo drastic emotional and physiological disturbances, when their hidden nature begins to assert itself - a process known as "Wakening", among their elders - and trauma and inexperience place these younglings at considerable risk of exposure ... so much so, that adult doppelgangers want no part of it.

Unless an imposter has no intention of playing out a particular husband's role long enough for its heirs to reach this stage of maturation - and hence, will be safely gone before its child's transition can draw suspicious eyes toward its appropriated "family" - it foregoes procreating so close to home, the better to ensure that its own façade remains unchallenged. (Cowardice, again.)

Dread Possibility: Forbidden Fruit

Most humans, both in Zherisia and elsewhere, assume that doppelgangers breed among their own kind, as other races do. Most dread doppelgangers, upon Wakening, are taught that they cannot do so, because a mating between imposters is non-viable, resulting only in miscarriage. Between their bored indifference to sexuality, their constant (justified) suspicion of one another's motives, and the fact that most associate regularly only with clan-mates (blood relatives), Paridon's dread doppelgangers find the notion of mating within their own race to be utterly revolting.

This is an attitude that Sodo - like the doppelganger chieftains who came before him - carefully fosters, for the truth of the matter is far, far uglier. Whatever perversion of nature or alchemy had given birth to the race of dread doppelgangers, compounding that abnormality by breeding within their own ranks appears to concentrate it, stripping away all the human-like aspects of imposters' physiology and mindset, and leaving only their most monstrous attributes. The unsavory result - an aberrant horror known as a "gaunt" - is a malicious and voracious predator upon humans and doppelgangers, alike. Though seldom long-lived, its furious quest for blood, plasm, and revenge for its own misbegotten birth invariably creates tremendous mayhem and suffering, as the gaunt spreads madness in its parent-race and terror in all.

Sodo and a select handful of Clan Leaders know of the threat posed by gaunts, and they do their best to foster the doppelgangers' aversion for within-species breeding. They also have a private agreement to kill any gravid doppelganger refusing to name the (humanoid) "father" of its child, lest one imposter chance to impregnate another out of malice, madness, or simple ignorance.

Gaunt statistics may be found in the DM Appendix.

On the Doppelganger Life Cycle

Only after personal safety has been assured do doppelgangers consider the future welfare of their cuckoo-born offspring, in selection of "birth-surrogates". Based on those case-histories I have uncovered, of adolescents who displayed symptoms of Wakening prior to their vanishings, I believe Paridon's doppelgangers favor middle-class households as "nests" for their heirs. Upper-class mothers are avoided, both because well-born children are so closely supervised by tutors or governesses as to be placed at great risk of exposure, and because such families are preferentially reserved for the adult imposters' own depredations and amusements. Likewise, households beset by true poverty are considered unsuitable, not only owing to a high incidence of malnutrition and illness in such families, but also because humble surroundings are deemed an affront to a future "Master's"

dignity. Thus, most doppelgangers choose to sow their inhuman seed amongst the bourgeoisie - families well-off enough to meet the basic needs of the future offspring, yet unable to monitor 'their' child so intensely as the wealthy - assuming their stature within the pecking order of doppelganger clans permits them access to middle-class victims, at all.

Lastly, within the range of professions found among the bourgeoisie, there seems to be a preference (albeit not a decisive one) for households that will foster what, for lack of any better term, I might call "appropriate talents". Of nearly two dozen families to which I've traced rumors consistent with their having harbored a doppelganger's offspring, an apothecary, the proprietor of a butcher shop, a Newsbill reporter, a retired boxing champion, the widow of a man hanged for thievery, a husband-and-wife

False "Families"

As doppelgangers don't normally raise their own offspring, those which establish themselves as figures of wealth and influence for long periods need to disguise their childlessness to maintain a proper façade. This is particularly true if they take the place of nobles, whom society expects to perpetuate their family bloodlines. If the person replaced has already had children, this obligation isn't a problem - the victim's heirs are brought up in the doppelganger's household, or sent off to school if they know their original parent's traits too well for safety - but if not, the imposter will have to cover for this lack.

Simply eliminating the spouse and not re-marrying may suffice, but this is hardly the only option. If an imposter has replaced a noblewoman, it can feign pregnancy, then "give birth" in the care of a doppelganger "midwife". The child may be reported stillborn, or a human infant - abandoned, stolen, or orphaned in some other doppelgangers' atrocity - might be acquired, to play the part of its new son or daughter. An imposter in the role of a gentleman could enlist its unwitting human bride in a deception to conceal her spouse's embarrassing 'infertility', adopting a child in secret. It may turn a deliberate blind eye to a wife's own love-affairs - a tactic that also increases its hold upon her obedience, should it later prove convenient to threaten her with divorce and ruin - and raise the resulting illegitimate child as its own ... or simply have the wife drugged unconscious and ravished by a human lackey.

Human children raised in doppelgangers' custody are normally considered expendable, and are unceremoniously replaced or eliminated if they grow suspicious. If such a child was very young at the time the imposter supplanted its original parent, it receives no bonus to Spot checks to see through the creature's Disguise, having grown up believing the doppelganger's mannerisms to be normal behavior for its parent. On the other hand, children whose thoughts betray an Evil nature may eventually be let in on their doppelganger 'parent's' secret, and brought up as quislings.

On the Doppelganger Life Cycle

team of music hall performers, and the operator of a crematorium numbered among their professions. It may seem a random mix at first glance, but all of these vocations pertain to one or more facets of a doppelganger's true "profession" - everything from winning victims' confidence to disposal of human remains - and most carry the fringe benefit of acquainting the child with death, violence, and/or skullduggery, potentially inuring it in advance to its future predatory role.

Having selected a suitable birth-surrogate, the doppelganger plans its rendezvous so as to incite the least subsequent suspicion as to the nascent child's parentage. It will often impersonate a female friend of the victim, and approach her to share some licentious (and leading) gossip; by reading her mind as it does so, it discerns the tenor of her amorous exchanges with her spouse. It might also mimic some coarse-spoken acquaintance of the cuckold-to-be, verbally provoking the husband to thoughts of his marital relations with crude jests and innuendo. Such reconnaissance prepares it to execute its planned consummation, in accordance with the true spouse's manner. Should it learn, instead, that the couple are physically estranged from one another, it typically abandons them for some other birth-surrogate - poor compensation for a failed marriage, but true even so - unless it believes it can plausibly engineer a rapprochement between the pair, at least long enough to account for the child's conception.

Once set upon its course, the doppelganger ensures the woman's rightful mate will not interfere, most often by the simple expedient of getting him so drunk he'll not remember his own whereabouts or actions. Should the fellow be a teetotaler or otherwise disinclined to such lapses, administration of a mild soporific can achieve a like effect: the suddenly-drowsy husband dozes off in the parlor, dead to the world, even as the doppelganger assumes his guise and joins the wife in the bedchamber. Having already gathered considerable details as to the couple's private habits, and gleaning further guidance from the birth-surrogate's thoughts,

Raising Cain

Doppelgangers prefer for middle-class households to raise their young, particularly those where the child will be exposed to death, encouraged to engage in spying and unscrupulous behavior, or (ideally) both. Low-ranking doppelgangers who aren't authorized to exploit the middle class will often place their offspring in the households of robbers, con artists, or other criminals, as learning such skills' rudiments from their surrogate parents means the recruits will be of immediate use to their clans, after Wakening, and more likely to survive their first few years of adult life.

Note that, while doppelgangers avoid placing their offspring in families that will let them starve, they see no need for their young to be coddled by the 'cattle' they'll only have to learn to prey on in the end. Dark Tales & Disturbing Legends contains a poignant example of one doppelganger's callous choice of a 'suitable home' for its heir ... albeit a home that proved even more brutal than its mind-readings had led it to expect.

such creatures' impersonations evidently remain alarmingly accurate, even under such intimate circumstances as these. (Again, I cannot help but suspect social engineering, when I recall the staid, stoic primness that is expected of respectable Zherisians. Have doppelgangers intentionally promoted such prudishness, merely to ensure married couples are seldom so "coarse" as to discuss their marital liaisons after-the-fact, and will take no notice of discrepancies in their respective accounts?)

Should events not unfold as intended - for example, if it should be caught in flagrante by the husband, awoken too soon from his stupor - the doppelganger resorts to contingency methods of salvaging a situation gone awry, such as drugging both spouses

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and leaving them to recover in each others' arms ... or dispatching the cuckold into unconsciousness and then stepping out to "alert the police" about the "horrible doppelganger" which tried to invade "their" home! Unless the creature is certain it can head off any suspicions as to its offspring's ancestry, it will not carry on with its original purpose, in the event of such interruption. If utterly exposed, it may even take steps to terminate a pregnancy that might otherwise betray its species' true breeding methods, by killing the birth-surrogate or dosing her with silphium resin - Dr. Van Richten's old herbalism notes should have details, if this medicament is unknown to Miladies - to erase that which it had briefly engendered.

Parasitic Pregnancies

Once a surrogate is impregnated, the doppelganger withdraws from the picture, although it may check up on the woman from time to time, to confirm its effort was indeed fruitful. After the birth, it visits once more, in some innocuous guise, to spy on the infant and learn its name for future reference. Save for this, it will have no direct exposure to its offspring until Wakening. If its false identity happens to be in a position to ensure the surrogate-family's safety and prosperity, it may do so - if such behavior isn't inconsistent with its own role, that is to say - but only in an indirect manner, that will draw no attention to its interest in their particular welfare. The banker recently exposed in Paridon, for example, delayed calling in the debts of several Bowels food shops in the

Lethe's K iss

Zherisia's doppelgangers have taken full advantage of their homeland's medical and alchemical advances, and employ a variety of drugs and toxins to incapacitate victims. Of special interest for their procreative purposes are silphium resin (a garden-herb imported from Borca soon after that domain's emergence; see Gaz IV for details) and Lethe's kiss. Silphium resin is used to terminate human pregnancies that might expose doppelgangers' breeding habits or otherwise pose obstacles to their plans. Lethe's kiss serves as both a soporific and a memory-disrupting "date rape" drug, used to incapacitate human couples and to ensure they won't recall the precise circumstances of a doppelganger child's conception.

Poison	Type	DC	Initial Damage	Secondary Damage
Lethe's kiss	Contact	18	Sleep 1d3 hours	Memory loss ^a

- a. A victim that succumbs to this effect becomes so groggy that she will remember nothing that happened to her in the 10 minutes prior to being drugged, or the 30 minutes afterward. *Modify Memory* or the *Hypnosis* skill can retrieve memories suppressed by Lethe's kiss.

Being immune to sleep or grogginess, doppelgangers are unaffected by Lethe's kiss, so often coat their hands with this colorless, odorless poison and administer it by touch. They avoid using it in other circumstances, as it is extremely expensive to manufacture; for procreation, however, it is ideal, as a newly-conceived doppelganger isn't harmed if the drug is used on the birth-surrogate.

Lethe's kiss is never sold to non-doppelgangers, and its formula is a closely guarded secret.

wake of the Upheaval. At the time, it claimed to have done this magnanimously, in consideration for the city's prevailing food crisis ... but eight years later, the supposed son of one of these debtors - the aforementioned butcher - "ran away from home", leaving behind several telltale clues to "his" true fate. (I cannot help but wonder if it would have shown such largesse, even on its child's behalf, had foreclosing on so many empty-shelved groceries not been a poor financial proposition to begin with.)

As for the gestation itself, it is of a similar duration and arduousness to that of any other the same woman may have undergone; if she has experienced dizzy spells or nausea during past pregnancies, for example, such symptoms will recur. Of those few women who consented to talk of their experiences, awaiting the "runaway" or "tragically murdered and replaced" child's birth - as I said, the truth is not something most women can bear to credence - the only anomalies noted by Madame B_____, a veteran midwife whose expertise I consulted, were dietary.



Compared to most expectant mothers, these birth-surrogates' craving for dairy products seems to have been less severe than is usual, and that for eggs and meat, rather more. Interestingly, the two birth-surrogates I conferred with who had borne no other children in their lives were not missing any of their teeth: a condition which is quite unusual for even well-fed mothers, in this city of nutritional deficiencies.

Gestation

Gestation of a doppelganger child takes about 270 days - just slightly longer than a human one - but it may be reduced or extended by as much as 20%, if the birth-surrogate's race has unusually brief or prolonged pregnancies. If a humanoid with a gestation period of less than seven months becomes impregnated by a doppelganger, the infant will be born too prematurely to survive, but otherwise it is able to adapt to its birth-surrogate's physiology.

As Small races' pregnancies are usually too short to carry their young to term, doppelgangers will seldom impregnate Small humanoids if Medium females are available. If only Small mates are to be had, they either dispense with procreation altogether, or resort to breeding in a female mode, initially concealing their pregnancies so the longer duration won't invite comment.

A fetal doppelganger develops in its natural form for the first five months, then begins to take on the superficial appearance of its humanoid parent's race. Should the pregnancy end naturally or be terminated between the second and fifth month, its inhuman appearance is visibly evident, but ambiguous, such that it might be mistaken for a caliban by those unfamiliar with doppelgangers. A Profession (medicine) check at DC 25, minus the number of months that it has developed, can discern the distinctive traits of a two-to-five-month imposter fetus via postmortem examination; those with 5 or more ranks in Knowledge (dungeoneering) and/or Knowledge (nature) receive a +2 bonus on this check.

A developing doppelganger fetus requires less calcium and more protein to construct its cartilage-heavy skeleton, so the nutritional needs of its "mother" are slanted differently than usual.

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Motherhood

Doppelgangers which choose to procreate in female form can be impregnated by fertile humanoid males of any race that gives live birth. They need not always mate in the guise of their unwitting partner's race, as a "mother" doppelganger can alter its guise to match its child's expected natal form. As with male-mode reproduction, fertility rates are exceptionally high (>90%) compared to the couplings of ordinary humanoids, provided the imposter chooses to be fruitful.

For the first two months of its pregnancy, a dread doppelganger retains limited use of its Change Shape ability. It can freely shift between the forms of women of childbearing age, without doing harm to its developing offspring. Assuming the form of a male, a humanoid that doesn't give live birth (such as a kobold), a female too young or old for pregnancy, or its natural state immediately and painlessly ends the gestation, as the embryo is reabsorbed into the imposter's tissues.

After the two-month mark, self-preservation hormones released by the embryo suppress activity in its parent's metamorphosis gland, shutting down the pregnant doppelganger's Change Shape ability for the remainder of the 270-day gestation. During this period, the "mother" temporarily reacquires its childhood ability to sleep - albeit dreamlessly and sparingly, dozing off for no more than an hour at a stretch - allowing it to stave off exhaustion and Madness (although not fatigue). A gravid imposter temporarily loses its immunity to sleep effects at this stage, though it has a +6 racial bonus on its Will or Fortitude saves against them.

Due to the chronic fatigue and loss of powers that doppelgangers undergo during pregnancy, most Zherisian clans remove their gravid fellows from the public eye, lest weariness and mood swings cause them to make a mistake. Another doppelganger fills their role (including a feigned display of being 'pregnant') in the interim. Imposters in the Core, if they choose to become pregnant at all, take care to isolate themselves from humans as birth draws near, knowing that parturition will render them helpless and exposed.

When labor comes, a doppelganger's risk of dying in childbirth is quite low, as its body is much more elastic and resistant to blood loss than any humanoid woman's. Should it be forced to give birth among well-meaning humans - something extremely uncommon in Paridon, where the clans attend to such matters in strict privacy, yet not unprecedented in the Core - and hence, to endure ignorant doctors' or midwives' inappropriate care (-8 penalty to all medical skill checks), its risk approaches that of human mothers.

Within ten minutes of giving birth, a doppelganger falls into an unconscious stupor for 2d4 hours, automatically reverting to its natural form 1 hour into this period. Assuming it is not harmed as it lies helpless, it will be fully rested and fit for normal activity when it revives, having regained the use of Change Shape and its sleep-immunity.

Note that doppelganger "mothers" can't produce milk for their infants' needs, lacking functional skin glands of any sort. They must therefore rely on human wet-nurses or milk from livestock. A wet-nurse is far preferred over animals' milk ... so much so, that imposters have murdered human newborns, simply to leave their mothers' milk available for their own young.

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Miladies will have noted, no doubt, that I have yet to write of doppelgangers that opt to breed in a faux-feminine mode, rather than as pseudo-males. This is partly on account of a dearth of references on this subject - as even human pregnancy is but poorly understood by physicians, is any better to be expected for monsters so little known? - but primarily because the imposters, themselves, seem extremely reluctant to carry and birth their own offspring. Whether this is due to the physical inconveniences of being with child (which, at the very least, would force a gravid doppelganger to adopt only the forms of females for the duration); the day-to-day discomforts and moodiness pregnancy brings to women of all races; or the inherent perils of childbirth - the sting of which, alas, has not spared Miladies' own family - I shall refrain from guessing.

That imposters can breed as females is substantiated by Dr. Cream's notes, as well as by a certain incident at a Blackchapel street-clinic, of which I shall write further momentarily. That Dr. Cream writes of only three doppelganger accouchements he had been summoned to attend upon, during a dozen years of service to his mysterious "employer", likewise sustains the notion that they birth their own young only rarely. As to why such selfish creatures should breed thusly at all, given how a less-onerous alternative (less onerous for them, that is) exists, I confess myself stumped. Is it to ensure their nonhuman nature is not diluted by repeated admixtures of humans' blood? To breed an honored elite among themselves, with Masters' blood on both sides, much as human nobility (like it or not) are obliged to wed other nobles? Whatever their impetus, it must be one that arises only rarely, else "Dr. Cream's" obstetric duties would surely have been more demanding than this.

Genetics and Appearance

Rookhausen's appetite for drama has led him to give doppelgangers too much credit. Breeding as females serves no greater purpose than to provide leverage upon human males, as the young child of an imposter and a human always bears a superficial family resemblance to the latter. This makes conceiving an offspring by a human father, then threatening to show its telltale features to the man's spouse and social peers, an excellent method of blackmail. Roja, former leader of the outlawed Mulor clan and 13th Bloody Jack, was itself the product of such a calculated union (see Hour of the Knife).

Despite the narrator's speculations, dread doppelgangers are actually at no risk of "diluting" their race's characteristics by mating with humanoids. This is because genetic material from the non-doppelganger parent doesn't mix with the doppelganger's, at all: rather, it provides a template on which the infant reflexively bases its appearance at birth. These traits are merely a first disguise, not a heritable trait, so cannot be passed down over successive generations of imposters; a dread doppelganger born to a Valachani birth-surrogate won't pass its dark complexion to its heirs, one "fathered" by an elf won't produce offspring with elven features, etc.

In effect, each Zherisian clan of doppelgangers constitutes its own genetically-distinct lineage of clones, with variations arising only as a result of environmental effects, mutation or alchemical tampering. As they do not truly inherit any genes from their non-doppelganger "parent", dread doppelgangers cannot inherit templates from their humanoid faux-ancestry, nor family traits a la Legacy of the Blood. Feats that depend on heredity, such as the fey-descended feats of VRGtSF, are likewise unavailable to doppelgangers.

Exposure to dangerous conditions in utero can and does affect fetal doppelgangers. If exposed to caliban-inducing effects in the first five months of gestation, an unborn imposter will become a changeling ("Dread Possibility: Zherisia's Changelings" on page 112). Exposed in its sixth or later month, it remains a dread doppelganger, but is born with the superficial appearance of an altered offshoot of its humanoid parent's race (caliban for a human, hobgoblin for a goblin, etc)

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Dread Possibility: Hideous With Infamies

Few hags outside Tepest have spawned so many ghastly tales as the annis Black Avlyhn. Stories suggest that she was once a Vistana, transformed into a creature of horror by the vile magic of a haggish covey. Darklings are reputed to have been her allies on many past occasions, and she is oddly unafraid to frame the Vistani for her vile misdeeds ... indeed, one sensationalistic account even claims that Black Avlyhn once dared to impersonate Madame Eva, herself!

Almost two decades ago, in seeking a suitably-handsome victim to feast on, Black Avlyhn caught herself a creature even more deceitful than she: the "dashing youth" she seized turned out to be nothing of the kind, but a doppelganger Exile fleeing Sodo's wrath. Its entire clan had been exterminated for conspiring against the Zherisian darklord, forcing it to escape into the Mists, the sole survivor.

Once revealed, the imposter's woeful tale could not touch Avlyhn's heartlessness, yet something it said - that it, alone, still remained to perpetuate its clan's bloodline - caught the hag's interest, reminiscent as it was of her own species' illicit breeding methods. If there was one thing Black Avlyhn had long found displeasing about haggish reproductive cycles, it was that she could only afflict the world with her own daughters' evil once in a century...

Today, Black Avlyhn (CE annis Clr9; salient dread hag abilities of Evil Eye & Soothing Song) is the feared and venerated 'Grandmother' to an extended tribe of more than thirty doppelgangers - daughters sired by the Zherisian fugitive she battered into abject submission, then killed (as were its infant sons) as soon as its task of mass procreation was done - who've never even heard of Paridon.

These imposters roam the most backward corners of the Core as cutthroats and cannibals, brainwashed by the annis into believing they are juvenile hags, switched in utero for human infants, then retrieved from their peasant surrogates by 'Grandmother' to be trained in the craft of murder and treachery.

Woefully ignorant of their true kind, they are coarse and savage as their Zherisian counterparts are, subtle and urbane. None have salient abilities, but in their efforts to emulate 'mature' hags, they have independently discovered the Fright Mask, Stretch, and Size Shift: Large monstrous feats.

Masquerading as a caravan of Vistani - men, women, and children - they feign prophetic abilities via detect thoughts to lure unwitting giorgios into their clutches, and defend their annis 'raunie' like loyal attack dogs.

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Doppelganger Childhood

Naturally, I could not observe doppelganger juveniles first-hand - at least, not knowingly - but by correlating the accounts of families I believe once harbored them, I have formed a rough picture of the creatures' childhood experiences and habits. Unfortunately, none of the physical or behavioral traits reported herein are unique to young imposters, so they cannot and should not be considered diagnostic of "doppelganger-hood": all are commonplace in human children, too. At most, an absence of such qualities might indicate a child is not an imposter, but the reverse is not valid proof of one's suspicions.

Physically a doppelganger newborn is indistinguishable from a human one, and this holds true throughout its youth. Unlike adult imposters', its camouflage is physiological as well as anatomical, defeating all tests for blood-motility, abnormal heartbeat, vision in darkness, etc. Its likeness to its human parent is very strong, even to a point of replicating nearsightedness or other minor hereditary ailments; should a condition inherited through the birth-surrogate be potentially hazardous (such as asthmatic lungs) or crippling (like scoliosis), the impairments "miraculously" pass the doppelganger child by. Twinning, thankfully, is not amongst those familial conditions which doppelgangers are prone to mimic from their human ancestry: even if a birth-surrogate is from a bloodline well-known for producing twins, such as the Reniers or Miladies' own Foxgrove forbearers, the imposters are always born singly.

Instances of inherited myopia aside, young doppelgangers are typically healthy, agile and vigorous as children. While they contract the same array of diseases as human children, they tend to recover from these more easily than is usual. Notably, a juvenile imposter's joints are always highly flexible: those which grow up as boys (or tomboys like Laurie) may be renowned amongst their peers for feats of 'double-jointed' stretching and contortion - not so extreme, I should attest, that such acts cannot

Cuckoos

Rookhausen is almost right here. Doppelgangers never sire or birth twins of their own kind. If a birth-surrogate is already newly-pregnant at the time an imposter inseminates her, however, she carries both infants to term and gives birth to fraternal twins: one human, the other doppelganger.

If a doppelganger's humanoid parent has darkvision, it exhibits this special quality from birth. If not, its darkvision remains latent until it assumes its natural shape for the first time. Likewise, a doppelganger child with an elven parent acquires its immunity to sleep effects (all kinds, not just magic) at birth, and engages in trance rather than sleep, in its pre-Wakening years. Save for these precocious traits that help it to blend in, a doppelganger child's apparent race is superficial and has no influence upon its game-stats. Doppelgangers born to human mothers, for example, do not receive a bonus feat or skill points.

None of the diagnostic tests this netbook introduces for identifying imposters is effective on child doppelgangers. Humanoids' Heal or Profession (medicine) checks to treat them do not suffer the usual -8 penalty. If a doppelganger dies in childhood, its corpse retains a humanoid shape. Even spells such as locate creature cannot distinguish an un-Wakened imposter from a true humanoid, and spells which affect only humanoids, such as hold person, also affect doppelganger children.

be performed by a nimble minority of human lads - and may have a history of dislocated shoulders, thumbs, et cetera. Their physical strength also often exceeds that of the human children around them; many nascent imposters acquire a distasteful reputation as bullies early in life (five to eight is typical), though brute force gives way to subtler means of dominating others, as they grow older.

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If juvenile imposters of boyish aspect are often remembered for their vigor, those born as girls are most often looked back upon as shrewd, strong-willed and persuasive. (This is not to say that doppelgangers born male are foolish, nor that those born female are frail. On the contrary, as their natal "gender" is merely a cursory display of camouflage, I fail to see how there could be a difference! But a bereft parent, remembering a vanished child's strong points, is more likely to praise a son's athleticism than a daughter's.) Observant habits and an inquisitive fascination with other people's lives - sometimes to the point of ill-mannered nosiness - are typical of a growing doppelganger. This deep interest is often interpreted as genuine admiration or affection for those others ... at least, by onlookers not presently under their oft-intrusive scrutiny.

In most cases, a young imposter's intellect is recognized as an asset - despite a tendency, in both (apparent) sexes, for them to regard their own perceptiveness as an excuse for arrogance - but occasionally one will be born as "daughter" to a father-figure so conservative as to consider females' education a frivolous waste. This stance seldom goes over well with the doppelganger in question, it being as willful as it is manipulative. In at least one such

case, I know for fact that the narrow-minded patriarch suffered a terminal 'accident', not long after soundly denouncing his "daughter's" impertinent cleverness. (Strong-willed, yes ... but not empathetic.)

While that incident was perhaps extreme, it is not atypical of such cuckoos' relationships with the men whom human society deems to be their fathers. It seems, in fact, quite normal for a juvenile doppelganger to build an adversarial relationship with one or the other of its caregivers, and the father-figure is the usual target of hostility. Often, this arises because the surrogate father develops the suspicion - if only on a subconscious level - that the child in question is not really his own. (Its true alienness is rarely inferred, but insinuations of bastardry are common.) Absent such allegations, the young imposter's own desire to dominate and control those around it still sets it at odds with its "father", as Zherisia's social order casts men - deservedly or not - in the role of head-of-household. Unless the father-of-record and young doppelganger chance to have a great deal in common (as when its male caregiver is nearer to an intellectual equal than its birth-surrogate), verbal or physical conflict between 'sire' and 'heir' is virtually inevitable, and starts at an earlier age than one expects for squabbles between parent and child.

Early Racial Traits

Racial ability modifiers for dread doppelgangers apply to their children, even before Wakening. Their physical modifiers (Str +4, Dex +2, Con +2) mean they tend to be more athletic and hardy than true human children, and recover from illnesses slightly faster.

Juvenile doppelgangers receive a +2 racial bonus to Escape Artist checks, as their bodies are very limber. This is an adaptation which lets them practice contorting their bodies in curious ways, as a rehearsal for future transformations.

Mental ability modifiers for dread doppelgangers (+2 Int, +4 Wis, +4 Cha) put their offspring at a distinct advantage over most of the humans around them. Even at a tender age, long before they suspect their true nature, their own superior guile, determination and wit cause most to conclude that nearly everyone around them is slow on the uptake, irresolute, and boring.

Young doppelgangers do not gain an immunity to charm until their true nature emerges, and only those born in elven form gain their sleep immunity sooner than that.

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If one parent - or other presumptive "relation", if other adults take part in the imposter's upbringing - is perceived as its adversary, the other is the object of its novice manipulations and clinging (cloying?) possessiveness. Barring her absence or an intense personality-clash with its birth-surrogate, this will always be the "mother" who bore it. In conversation with such women, I never doubted their genuine affection and concern for 'lost' children which, in their eyes, could not possibly have been monsters. (A heartbreaking thing, Miladies, to see their grief, and know it predicated upon a lie: that they mourned a child which, in truth, had never been so innocent or loving as they imagined.)

Yet, I also found signs that these women's feelings had been carefully cultivated and exploited by their counterfeit offspring, nurtured into a compulsive yearning to please the cuckoo-child, even if this meant neglecting its presumptive siblings. This reverses the normal scenario of juvenile dependency upon the parent: a concept outlined in Dr. Wilhelm Kohl's Foundations of Morality, and applied in turn to golems by Dr. Van Richten. I was unable to tell if some innate biological drive - perhaps a chemically-based compulsion akin to that of vampyre venom, passed between offspring and surrogate before or after birth - is to blame for this favoritism toward their doppelganger children, or if it is merely testament to how early the imposters' manipulative gifts emerge. Whatever the case, young doppelgangers are very jealous of their maternal caregivers' affection, a trait which feeds their corresponding enmity for their false fathers.

A similar jealousy dominates relations with the supposed "siblings" many doppelgangers share their early lives with. Most of those I spoke with were more forthcoming than their parents, invariably complaining at length about their vanished sibs (at least, when interviewed out of their mothers' earshot). Many were convinced that their presumed brother or sister was the parental favorite - yes, even their father's favorite, despite their power-struggles - and able to get away with devilry of every kind,

without threat of punishment. Some even broke out into arguments, upon being asked, as to which of them had most often taken blame for their "sibling's" mischief! While this might be no more than the routine nattering of brothers and sisters, it suggests a history of being played off of one another, likely at the "runaway's" behest.

In larger families, an even more disturbing pattern is evident: younger siblings' having died while the imposter-child was resident in the household. Though the nascent doppelganger is seldom suspected of instigating such tragedies - indeed, in some cases they were demonstrably elsewhere at the time - an element of willful negligence is frequently involved, as when a toddler is left unwatched by its presumed "big brother" and wanders into peril. This pattern suggests that the imposter-to-be is, at best, indifferent to siblings, and prone to regard them primarily as rivals for maternal affection and control ... either that, or its true sire might be taking a hand in the child's fate - narrowing the field of competitors for parental resources - to ensure the risks it took to father its future protégé were not wasted.

In short, a doppelganger's human foster-family seems less a loving home than a venue in which to refine its proficiency at manipulation, enticement, deceit and circumvention of authority. Of course, the relationships I've described are stereotypical; as your Uncle so often attested, all monsters are individuals, so these patterns need not bear out in every case.

Out of the Mouths of Babes

Juvenile doppelgangers receive a +4 racial bonus on their Bluff checks. They have no unnatural influence over their human foster-families; however, their high Charisma and inherent knack for lying helps them to get their own way or shift blame onto others, more often than not.

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Secret Society: Paridon Responsible Parents

Officially a civic organization promoting smaller families and female reproductive rights (with overtones of eugenics), the P.R.P. has grown more vocal and active in the past 20 years, as many overcrowded Zherisians throw support behind its population-control agenda. Nevertheless, as an organization dominated by middle-class housewives, plus the occasional well-born busybody, it is seldom taken seriously by city officials or nobles ... let alone, by doppelgangers.

Beneath its public good-parenting seminars and prison-inmate vasectomy program, however, the P.R.P. has taken up a more ambitious cause: identifying juvenile doppelgangers before they are fully mature and able to cause harm. Correlating reports from family counselors, midwives, and physicians associated with their organization, several P.R.P. officers have begun to piece together many of the same clues that Rookhausen discusses, and are now paying close attention to children known to exhibit such behaviors.

While the organization's officers are still hotly divided over the issue of what fate should befall young imposters, once identified - exile to the Mists, reeducation, or a humane death all have their advocates - they are united in their intention to root out Paridon's doppelganger infestation from the ground up, by preventing future generations of monsters from joining their elders' clans.

Realizing that this agenda puts them squarely at odds with the shapechangers, senior officers of the P.R.P. keep their objective a secret from the majority of their organization's membership, and guard their own thoughts with rings of mind shielding obtained through their husbands' political connections with the Temple of Divine Form.

Note that Paridon Responsible Parents is not aware that doppelgangers interbreed with humans; rather, the organization's inner circle thinks the doppelgangers procreate among themselves, then switch their infants with human babies to spare themselves the inconvenience of child-rearing.

This assumption may have arisen, in part, because several of the P.R.P. officers - including their current vice-president and head midwife, Mrs. Millicent Bowder (NG human female Ench 3 / Clr 3 / Hallowed Witch 2) - are also converts to the Halan faith: a creed that appeals to their feminist ideals, in refreshing contrast to the Divinity of Mankind's male-oriented theology. The Halans believe doppelganger maturation is similar to that of hags, and have applied several tried and true hag-hunting techniques to their own mission, with partial success.

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Other telltale patterns of behavior by nascent doppelgangers also became clear during my interviews. Odd sleeping habits seemed nigh-universal: very deep and heavy - almost impossible to rouse - in their first few years (compensating for future sleeplessness, perhaps?), followed by ever-more-restless nights and identity-blurring dreams as they mature, and culminating in chronic insomnia. Incessant, intrusive curiosity about others' private lives seems equally typical of young imposters, as previously mentioned. The younger child's habit of parroting others' words back to them - a common method of teasing - takes on potentially-sinister significance when it persists even on the verge of adolescence.

In older juveniles, far closer to their Wakening, a sullen disinterest in, and discomfort regarding, their human peers' emerging romantic aspirations likewise sets them apart. (There is, amongst Zherisian youngsters, a humorous fable that physical contact with children of opposite gender transmits a most insidious and disgraceful curse. When belief in this mythical contagion of "cooties" lingers past the age of ten or thereabouts, Miladies, the credulous child's provenance may be considered doubtful!) Likewise, a nascent doppelganger virtually never sets its sights on a specific course in life: whereas a human child may aspire - realistically or in vain - to become a ship captain, a nobleman's bride, a revered monk or even a vagabond adventurer, the imposter flits incessantly from one ambition to the next, unable to settle its mind as to whom it desires to be when it grows up.

All this information is, of course, primarily of use in backtracking a doppelganger to its childhood - and hence, to clues about its adult behavior and motives - rather than singling out an imposter's by-blow from a crowd of human innocents. The latter ability, as yet, eludes us ... and even were it in our power to do so, knowing a child's ultimate fate is to Waken would do no more than burden us with the question of what to do next! Strip it of its nascent transformation power, as Celebrant Chaswick's sect dreamed of doing? Try our best to inculcate it with a moral code that

values human life? Bind it to those morals with magic, lest it revert to type? Or just slay it out of hand, consoling ourselves with the self-exonerating claim that it was "born evil"?

As convenient as it might be to brand all doppelgangers as innately malign from birth, as Dr. Van Richten reluctantly conceded to be true of natural lycanthropes and hags, I cannot myself accept this premise. In part, this is on account of my personal convictions - no creature capable of comprehending moral principles is predestined to Evil by its blood or nature, in my view, just as blood or nature can exempt no one from moral responsibility - but also on the basis of another anecdote I chanced upon in Paridon. Not long after the doppelgangers' existence was exposed to the public in 742, a pregnant woman (or so it appeared) collapsed in the streets of Blackchapel, and was delivered to the charity-clinic of one Dr. _____, in defiance of her hysterical and ridiculous pleas she was "perfectly all right". The cause for "her" objections became clear when all Dr. M_____ 's skills proved inadequate to bring his patient through the difficult labor safely, for no sooner had "she" expired, delivered of a healthy infant, than "her" lifeless clay warped into its inhuman, gray-skinned configuration. The orphaned newborn appeared to be a normal girl-child, yet such was plainly impossible: not born from such a mother.

For Zherisian tellers, this story is purely salacious; no evidence remains of the incident, as the physician disappeared mere hours after his nurse witnessed these events, and the body itself went missing from the city morgue. Nor has another soul in Paridon reported seeing this alleged "doppelganger baby". Yet, to me, this tale solved a quandary I'd been puzzled by for some time, Miladies ... for I know of a philanthropic physician, now resident in Darkon, who conforms to the missing Dr. M_____ 's description in every respect. And this gentleman's teenaged daughter (or so he names her) is as gentle-hearted and considerate a spirit as any father could wish for ... and is oddly disinclined to sleep, even for the briefest of moments.

On the Doppelganger Life Cycle

Alignment

Ravenloft's dread doppelgangers have a clear predisposition to Neutral Evil alignment, but this is more a product of their arrogance and manipulative tendencies than of actual pleasure taken in others' suffering. Genuinely-sadistic exceptions certainly exist, but most doppelgangers don't actually act upon their worst impulses until they Waken, at which point they lash out at humanity in jealous resentment for all that they have lost.

Mentally prepared in advance for the trauma of Wakening, and given unconditional acceptance and support by its caregivers, a young imposter might indeed be saved from Evil's lure ... but only if its guardians' concerns for its welfare are legitimate, not feigned. Should its emerging detect thoughts power reveal the slightest hint of an ulterior motive on its caregivers' part, it is sure to think the worst, and turn against them and (by extension) their society.

Any mature doppelganger in Paridon that exhibits persistent signs or thoughts of moral scruples is soon eliminated by its fellows: either taken fatal advantage of by a rival, or slain to guard their race's secrecy from its squeamishness.

Some might think my hope that some doppelgangers are not beyond salvation to be naïve or an unconscionable risk. To them, I reply that to admit the possibility of Evil's redemption is, if anything, a darker worldview than the alternative - darker, for it means that every doppelganger that does turn to murder and exploitation is doing so by conscious choice, not mere "instinct" for which it cannot be held to blame - and that our own capacity to extend forgiveness is the primary asset that sets us apart from the monstrosities we strive against! And when, Miladies, is drawing that distinction ever more vital than when one is confronting doppelgangers: beings which steal away all other qualities, by which we define who and what we are?

Wakening

For doppelgangers, the realization of who and what they really are occurs only gradually, in a progressive transition known to those which have endured it as "Wakening". The name, I gather, refers both to their kind's lifelong reprieve from sleep, and their release from the 'dream' of humanity they never truly possessed. (While their breed do not, all my research indicates, lay claim to any distinct 'racial language' in the fashion of elves and so forth, much of the imposters' private jargon about themselves carries multiple meanings.)

Based on reports from interviewed families, and on letters or private writings the affected youths left behind them, doppelgangers begin to Waken between the ages of eleven and fourteen years, or occasionally as late as sixteen. How long the process takes to run its full course, I am uncertain - there may well be phases of maturation that were not addressed by my sources - but in most case-studies I investigated, subjects departed their natal homes within two to four months of exhibiting their first symptoms. I am certain that the transition is a traumatic one,

As the shock of learning the truth helps spur their offspring to the ruthlessness necessary for their way of life, doppelgangers that breed in female mode usually conceal the "facts of life" from their children until the Wakening comes over them naturally. (Misery loves company, so if they had to find out the hard way, then so do their heirs.) Only if a juvenile imposter's thoughts show that it is already inclined to ruthless and malicious behavior will its mother broach the issue, in advance of its natural transition to adulthood.

Prior to the onset of Wakening, a female-breeding doppelganger takes little interest in the rearing of offspring it has birthed, foisting responsibility for child-care off on servants or relatives of its false human identity. The imposters possess no innate parenting instincts whatsoever, and tend to regard the care, feeding, and early education of their young as strictly "humans' work".

disorienting and frightening at the very least ... and far worse for those who have Wakened since 742, having been brought up by their guardians to dread the shapechangers as veritable boogeymen.

(The prospect of discussing the ordeals they face with their human caregivers - a reaction that seems obvious to us - never seems to cross such confused younglings' minds. Even the most forthcoming imposter-child shies away from bringing its distress to the attention of true humans around it: an instinctual reticence similar to an infected lycanthrope's compulsive state of denial, reinforced by an escalating love of - indeed, a virtual craving for - secrecy.)

In every first-hand account of a Wakening doppelganger's experiences I have found, the juvenile creature's psychic sensitivity emerged before any tangible change in, or control over, its

Age of Onset

A young doppelganger's nature begins to emerge at an age when a true humanoid of its apparent race would undergo puberty, or at twenty-two years old, whichever comes first. In the case of an imposter that Wakens at age ten or less, as may happen to those disguised as short-lived beings, its natural form will still have a few inches of growing left to do afterward, but it has the same game-statistics as does any other adolescent doppelganger. A young doppelganger which grew up in the guise of a Small race will still be Medium in its natural form, once it matures enough to adopt that shape.

Curiously, the offspring of a doppelganger that bred in female mode is two to four years slower to Waken than one with a humanoid birth-surrogate. When its Wakening comes, however, it takes only half as long to go through each stage of this process as its surrogate-birthered peers.

Regardless of how old a doppelganger appears to be at the time of its Wakening, it remains sterile until it has assumed its true form at least once, at which point its fertility in humanoid guises falls under its conscious control.

body. (Hardly surprising, that: as with Changing hags' initial boost in strength, it's an alteration not immediately discernable by those who might slay the creature out-of-hand, before it can offer any significant resistance.) At first, the young imposter merely develops an acute sensitivity to the presence of others nearby - a crude, early manifestation of skimming mode - that it is likely to dismiss as intuition or coincidence. Not long thereafter, it begins to experience random flashes of sudden insight into others' intellectual capacities (gauging mode), or of their hidden thoughts (probing mode). The latter impressions in particular are disturbing to the Wakening creature, as they often expose secret failings or duplicities in those it has trusted to protect and support it. The fact it seldom realizes where the thoughts are coming from only exacerbates its doubts:

Septement 7 - I don't understand what's happening. How could Papa say such things? Filthy, foul words, that he'd thrash me soundly for speaking! And Mama, pretending not to hear, or to mind, his speaking like that: how can that be? And with my little sisters right there in the kitchen ... and them, pretending not to hear him, either!

I s my family going deaf, or mad? Am I going mad?



On the Doppelganger Life Cycle

Cacophony of Thought

A Wakening doppelganger has no conscious control over its emerging detect thoughts power at first. Skimming mode is initially this power's only manifestation, switching on and off at random for two to six weeks' time. After this warm-up period, its ability randomly shifts among the three modes and deactivation, with only brief (1d4 rounds) interludes of gauging or probing. So long as its power operates at random, it can only direct its psychic attention forward, and it can't sense positive or approving emotions from humanoids, but only from other doppelgangers.

True voluntary control of a young imposter's mind-reading ability comes two to four months after its first use of probing mode, as it learns to focus its covetous yearnings at other minds, greedy for their secrets. Mentoring by an adult doppelganger reduces this to six weeks. When it gains full control of its psychic ability, a novice imposter also gains immunity to charm effects.

Needless to say, the tenor of the thoughts it discerns can have a marked influence on how quickly a doppelganger acquires the bitter hostility and contempt which spur it to forsake, and prey upon, the humans which once raised it. Alas - like a golem mentally linked to the madman that crafted it, sharing only in obsessive thoughts - a nascent imposter evidently perceives only the base impulses of others, badly skewing its perspective on human worthiness, and preventing it from trusting in any sympathetic human voice ... this, while at an age when (in its human peers) social responsibility and conscience would rightly be developing.

Miladies should note, by-the-by, that such uncanny experiences are not exclusive to the process of Wakening. Adolescence is also a time at which the inborn magical proclivities of sorcerers are likely to express themselves, and not every individual with psychic aptitudes is a doppelganger! Learning of

mental sensitivities in a young person is grounds to observe and, perhaps, counsel them - in time, they might well become one's formidable ally rather than a foe - before slinging unsubstantiated accusations of concealed monstrosity.

Other events to follow are unique to doppelgangers' development. At the outset, changes of appearance occur spontaneously and seldom, and last for only a few seconds; the child's natal physiognomy asserts itself between incidents. Such preliminary transformations affect its body's configuration in fairly minor ways, most of which can be easily written off as a trick of the light or of perspective, if noticed at all:

Millie S_____: Toby's tale-telling got right silly that year, and no mistake. I recall how he came rushing downstairs in a tizzy on his birthday, crowin' of how he'd growed two hands' span taller, since his last 'un... as if we couldn't see, plain as day, it weren't true! Coo, and when Mum stood him up alongside the doorframe, Toby wasn't more than a half-inch over the line what'd marked his height a year afore. But he didn't own up to fibbing: he just stood blinking at the marks like he couldn't believe what he was seein', and glaring at the lines, like 'twas them as lied.

Once such physical changes commence - roughly five weeks after emergence of psychic sensitivity is typical - the young imposter cannot remain blind to its own abnormality, for long. Even in those cases I investigated which pre-date 742, concerning Wakening adolescents who had never heard of doppelgangers, a realization that they are (or are becoming) something unnatural settles over them as a repellant truth: one which shatters their youthful egotism, driving some to despair, others to panic, and all to an outraged, vindictive envy of the people around them, who can rightfully lay claim to the conformity and humanity Zherisians idealize so much.

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It is, I am quite convinced, that very envy which catalyzes the subsequent development of the novice creature's shapechanging power. When first a doppelganger adopts the complete form of another individual, it is always that of someone - a relative, a wealthier neighbor, an authority-figure - towards whom the Wakening imposter feels a deep and festering jealousy, and it nearly always comes over them in a solitary moment of brooding resentment and insecurity. From that point on, its power to change can evidently be triggered voluntarily; maintaining a given assumed guise longer than a few minutes, or controlling which particular shape it adopts, remain beyond a young imposter's control.

I am uncertain when full mastery of this ability emerges, as nascent doppelgangers whose families I contacted all deserted their childhood homes before attaining such firm control.

Of the power of glamor, I have found no reference to its usage by juvenile imposters, and few of the persons I interviewed had any idea that such an ability exists. The simplest conclusion is that glamor does not manifest until the Wakening process has advanced further than I was able to document it; alternately, it may remain latent until a mature doppelganger trains the youngster in its use. If the latter is true, then the "foreign" imposters to which Dr. Cream refers, at the close of his journal, may be missing this

Novice Shapechanging

Minor transformations begin affecting a young doppelganger three to eight weeks after its detect thoughts starts to manifest. Stressful experiences, good or bad, tend to trigger these changes; if a novice imposter becomes excited or upset, at this stage of Wakening, it can fight off the writhing rebellion of its flesh with a DC 10 Reflex save. Such minor changes affect only a single cosmetic physical characteristic - height, weight, hair color, eye color, shape of nose, length of hair, etc - at a time, and last only 1d4 rounds.

Until a Wakening doppelganger succumbs to envy - usually of someone it knows, but sometimes of a stranger or even a nonexistent story-book hero - its Change Shape power remains latent. In theory, an imposter which never feels envious might live out its entire life without experiencing a full-body transformation; in practice, most undergo their first complete change within two weeks of their first minor shift. A doppelganger's +4 racial Disguise bonus also emerges at this time.

Following its first, involuntary full-body shapechange, the Wakening doppelganger continues to undergo spontaneous transformations under stress (as above, but changes are complete instead of partial). It can also activate this power deliberately, by tapping into its jealousy and wishing to be someone else. It cannot yet choose a specific form; instead, the DM may freely select any of the people of whom the young creature is envious. Each transformation lasts a minimum of 5 minutes, after which the adolescent may prolong its change another minute with a DC 10 Concentration check, and longer with additional checks (DC = 10 + number of minutes change has already been extended). An adult doppelganger can use the "Aid Another" action to help the younger one to maintain its focus, but only if the pair are in verbal and/or psychic communication at the time.

At the end of its shapechange, voluntary or spontaneous, a Wakening doppelganger reverts to the false guise it was born into. It must rest for an hour before it can change its appearance again.

Zherisian changelings (see Dread Possibility) acquire their Minor Change Shape powers in much the same fashion as dread doppelgangers do, although in their case it is a desperate desire to "fit in", rather than envy, which incites their transformations. Changelings take about six months to gain full voluntary control over their limited shapechanging powers.

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power due to a simple lack of training, rather than a congenital impairment of their object-altering abilities.

From the moment of its first voluntary full-body transformation into another individual's guise, the Wakened imposter loses both its ability to sleep, and its need to do so. This concludes a gradual decline in its number of hours spent sleeping: one which began in its infancy, and never entirely ceases until sleep becomes a thing of the past. Note that, like most human insomniacs, a nascent doppelganger will typically be unaware of how large a fraction of its nights it spends in restless wakefulness, so it is most often siblings with whom it shared a bedchamber who report these odd sleeping patterns.

Whether from fear of discovery, or because it can no longer tolerate its surrogate family's company and thoughts, a maturing doppelganger invariably abandons its childhood home, shortly after attaining the voluntary use of temporary full-body transformations. If its home life has been comparatively favorable - its physical needs met, its ego regularly stoked by pliable caregivers and deferential siblings and friends - it may simply slip off in the night, taking with it whatever monies and personal belongings (particularly relatives' possessions that it coveted in childhood) it can abscond with. Were its upbringing less satisfactory, it may first utilize its power of

mimicry to cause trouble for its less-favored relatives, transforming repeatedly until it chances upon the disliked relation's guise, then quickly committing some minor offense in front of witnesses, thus incriminating that person. In severe cases, where abuse and open hatred played a part, the newly-Wakened doppelganger may leave some (or all!) of its foster-relatives dead in its wake.

For some, breaking the ties with home leads them into a life of wandering, anonymously hidden in the crowd, and stealing to survive, as they gradually master their abilities and build up sufficient resentment to commit their first predatory murders. For others, such aimless roving and self-instruction is not necessary, for they have already been approached by an adult of their own kind, and are knowingly passing into its custody and mentorship.

And some tragic and honorable few - to the eternal credit of their not-wholly-inhuman spirits - seek another destination entirely, Miladies.

they won't stop. i can't stop them. not the changes, not the voices in others' heads, that echo in mine.

i don't want this. i don't! the changes promise much. that i don't have to be this, that i can be anything, anyone. they promise i won't have to remember the terrible price they ask.

they lie. they can't make me normal, make me forget. they can only make me into a lie.

i can't stop the changes, but i can stop the lies. stop the skin they write such lies upon.

i'm so, so sorry, Mother. please, please, by Divinity's grace, let me be buried as a human.

Mentoring

Of the post-Wakened lives of doppelgangers born in the Core, or other distant realms, I can tell you little, Miladies. Most imposters outside Paridon are nomadic in their habits, and their way of life is precarious at best, so I

Other Powers

The Glamer special quality is the last innate power of dread doppelgangers to manifest itself, as it acts upon external objects rather than the creature's own mind or body, so cannot be initiated for the first time by reflex, like its other abilities. It can only draw upon this power with the proper mindset - not greed or jealousy, but just a lazy wish that it needn't take the trouble of swapping one item for another - so some may take months or even years to access it, if an older imposter doesn't coach them on the correct approach. Once accessed, its Glamer functions normally.

A doppelganger which has ceased to sleep becomes immune to sleep effects.

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Final Stages

Despite their dangerous way of life, their constant infighting, the determined efforts of heroes and the vicious counterstrikes of rival monsters like the marikith, the leading cause of death for dread doppelgangers is, and always has been, juveniles' suicide. Lacking in parental instincts to protect their young, adult imposters do nothing to stop this, believing that it eliminates the weak-willed and overly-"humanized" among their offspring.

Not until a young doppelganger embraces its true nature, by envying its elders' easy and guiltless inhumanity, does it assume its natural shape for the first time. From that point - the final step in its "Wakening" - it no longer retains a humanoid guise in death or (sometimes) unconsciousness, and spells and medical skills affect it as a doppelganger rather than as a humanoid.

surmise that their offspring are often self-educated, without guidance or support. If their sires do return to claim them, such novices are more likely to live to master their abilities; orphaned or abandoned, their lack of experience and poor control over their powers soon brings them to a sticky end, often without even realizing they are doppelgangers (as opposed to "cursed" or "bewitched").

For young imposters in Zherisia, and (presumably) those in the Core whose progenitors are on hand to educate them, severing ties with their human families - and, in the process, with the human race itself - need not leave them entirely isolated. When a Wakening youngster is at its most vulnerable - betrayed by the revealed thoughts of those it most trusted, and stricken with confusion, outrage and shame by its very body's rebellion - then that is when an adult of its true kind is liable to step into its life. Bearing promises of guidance and goodwill, commiseration and

Doppelganger Adolescents

Even after it has accepted its nature, a doppelganger's shapechanging power remains erratic for a period of ten to fifteen months. Stress continues to trigger random involuntary shapechanges (DC 10 Reflex save to suppress), and it must continue to wait an hour between transformations. When it does change its shape, it must remain in the new form at least five minutes; prolonging its guise beyond that point requires minute-by-minute Concentration checks (DC 10 + number of minutes the change has been extended). Once the young imposter has assumed its natural shape for the first time, it acquires the ability to choose the shapes it voluntarily adopts, as well as a +2 bonus on these Reflex saves and Concentration checks to control its power. Between changes, it reverts to its childhood form, not its natural one.

Along with their imperfect control of their own shapes, doppelgangers in their first year of adult life are often ignorant of their powers' limitations (e.g. what sort of barriers detect thoughts can or cannot "read" through) and tactically inept at applying them. If self-taught, a teenaged imposter may not even realize its Glamer ability exists, forcing it to physically change its clothing when it adopts a disguise.

Due to this lack of skill, a poorly-trained young doppelganger can be easy pickings for hunters. If a DM wants to include a doppelganger in a scenario for 1st or 2nd level PCs, or for players who are themselves novices at mystery-adventures, using a self-trained adolescent rather than an adult in full command of its powers can be a handy excuse for it to make mistakes and drop clues.

Adult doppelgangers cannot shorten an adolescent's period of imperfect shape-control, but they can "Aid Another" to help such novices maintain an adopted guise for longer intervals.

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camaraderie, and the all-important answers to the novice's manifold questions, this savior-figure is seized upon as a man drowning at sea clings to a protruding rock: desperately, gratefully, and unmindful of the rough stone's abrasiveness.

A lie, of course. Doppelgangers cannot love their offspring, else they would not abandon them to others' unpredictable custody! As with non-procreative intimacies, the imposters sire and teach their heirs for utilitarian reasons, to preserve their clans' and race's strength, and to acquire accomplices which share their imitative

abilities, yet will not lightly betray them. The only 'love' to be had in such a relationship is that which the offspring - yet accustomed to human ways and parental favoritism - imagines there to be. Still, the longer a young doppelganger's mentor keeps up a façade that it cares for its scion, the longer it can draw upon its protégé's personal loyalty and obedience; hence, the elder humors the preconceptions of its heir, so long as maintaining the sham of affection poses no undue inconvenience.

Gracebridge and St. Simone's

While most Zherisian doppelganger-clans rely on mentorship, alone, to train their recruits, elite clans authorized by Sodo to infiltrate Paridon's nobility are obliged to do more. As imposters are seldom reared among the "upper crust", their novices are unprepared to blend into High Society, having lacked young human aristocrats' educational advantages.

Until the Great Upheaval, privileged clans such as the Mulor or Stawey resolved this dilemma by sending their offspring to exclusive boarding schools in the countryside. New imposters went to Gracebridge (boys) or St. Simone's (girls), alongside unsuspecting human students, for remedial lessons in aristocratic deportment and the classical disciplines expected of nobles. Assigned to the same soundproofed dormitories, doppelganger students also received nightly instruction from adult imposters, on the use of their powers and their race's laws, customs, and history, while their schoolmates slept. Following a year's education as their natal sex, each then swapped guises with a counterpart at the other school, for more lessons and for practice at playing the other gender.

As the Upheaval struck during the summer holidays, students (human and doppelganger) were at home when the countryside faded into the Mists, so few vanished with the schools themselves; however, the clans have been hard put to replace these institutions. Land is at such a premium in Paridon, few sites exist on which to build new schools - at least, few that offer enough security or privacy to hush up students' involuntary transformations - and cramming their young into tight quarters will only magnify their stress and provoke more spontaneous changes. Private tutoring, with which clans have made do for two decades, consumes a great deal of manpower and breeds unnecessary dissent among the quislings drafted to provide mundane lessons. Even sending their young "across the Fog" for an education - an increasingly-popular choice for the human nobility - is out of the question: the only academic institution in the Core that welcomes foreign-run prep schools as affiliates is the University of Dementlieu, and doppelgangers that set foot in Port-a-Lucine have a habit of vanishing for days or weeks, then turning up decapitated.

Nevertheless, after nearly fifteen years of planning and real-estate negotiation - to say nothing of the covert replacement of three landowners who'd refused to sell - a groundbreaking ceremony for New Gracebridge took place in March of 759, and teaching staff and students are now being signed up for the 761 Fall term. Surveying for St. Bernadette's, New Gracebridge's sister school, is nearing completion, with the first girls' enrollments scheduled for Spring 763.

On the Doppelganger Life Cycle

Natural Selection

Knowing many of their offspring are unable to cope with Wakening, or will lack the innate talent to succeed as imposters (i.e. ability scores too low), high-ranking doppelgangers in Zherisia tend to sire more young than they ever intend to train, then select only the most naturally-talented to acknowledge as "their" offspring. Training of recruits with only average aptitude is delegated to underlings; for convenience, these subordinates generally claim to be their protégés' real sires. The utterly inept are written off as cannon-fodder: given cursory training only, and slated to die in secret battles with marikith, rival clans' own expendables, or bothersome adventurers.

Upon first approaching its offspring, a new-Wakened imposter's mentor - a fitter term than "parent", given their negligence in every aspect of true parental responsibility - observes the youngling as it might survey an intended victim, evaluating its state of emotional turmoil and its proficiency at hiding the changes it has undergone. Should it deem the potential recruit too guilt-ridden and "human" to be trained, it withdraws without contact and washes its hands of the affair, leaving its child to stumble into (or to seek) its own death. If it judges the novice to be clumsy or stupid, it may foist its offspring's education onto a subordinate clan member, not caring to waste its time on progeny unlikely to prove useful. Only if the adolescent meets its narrow expectations will a high-ranking imposter oversee its education - and indoctrination - in person.

To meet its protégé, the mentor generally takes on a guise from the young doppelganger's own fantasies. This is often an idealized father-figure: one which the novice, itself, imagined and longed for, at times of conflict within the surrogate family. Such an approach has the immediate effect of engaging the novice's interest and - to the

limited extent a creature so embittered by its Wakening can offer any - its trust. It also demonstrates the mentor's own supernatural abilities - mirror to the protégé's own, yet enormously more practiced and controlled - in a way that does not place the mentor at risk of exposure (as changing shape in a panicky youth's presence might). With a thespian's flair for drama, it permits the juvenile to glimpse its 'father-figure' several times, building up its curiosity and longing for companionship, before allowing its apprentice-to-be to capture a taste of its thoughts:

Octoment 4 - I saw him again, in the market this time. As plain as day, even though it couldn't be. Grandpa Lawrence died when I was six. I f he'd been there - been alive - Papa would never have said such things, never have done such things. But he died, and part of Papa died, and now part of me is dying - the human part, the part I thought was real - and I still don't know if it's sickness or madness that's killing it.

But maybe he'll know. Maybe he can save the real part, the me part. Save it, or find it, if it's not what I thought it was; I don't care which anymore, as long as it's something I can hold. Something that doesn't grow strange, like my face and my body.

Something this illness can make strong, not weak.

I heard him there, in the market. Heard him in my head, like Papa's curses, like Mama's tears. But not cursing, not crying. Grandpa's thoughts: promising.

Promising to make me whole.

In such extremity of confusion and alienation, is it any surprise that a lonely imposter (for even the most malignant doppelganger is, at heart, a sociable creature) should desperately reach out to such an elegantly-set lure...? Deeply though these self-serving, murderous mockeries may repulse me, dear sisters, in all candor I cannot help but admire their acute instinct for choosing an ideal "persona" for the task at hand.



Having won the protégé's trust, the mentor does not hesitate for long, enticing its child to set aside human ties and join its true people. It promises to guide the novice in accessing and applying its newfound powers, in eluding the threat of discovery (a danger often exaggerated by the mentor), and in gaining the upper hand over whomsoever its protégé most resents. Should the youngling's jilted anger at humanity burn hot enough, it may speak of violence at this time, to see if the trainee is psychologically prepared to do murder; if not, the mentor arranges disillusioning experiences for the protégé, to push its feelings of alienation and betrayal over the brink. It also bestows a new name

on the young one: ostensibly a mark of its maturity, in truth a psychological maneuver to further disentangle its sense of "self" from human experience and culture.

The ultimate goal of the mentor is to wrest its protégé away from its childhood identity - its "child-face" - and into a way of life in which humans' lives hold next to no value. Unlike a newly-turned vampire or an infected lycanthrope, a novice doppelganger has no innate appetites that drive it to kill; it is by fostering its envy and spite, towards a human race it can no longer be a true part of, that a mentor nurtures its protégé's ruthlessness. Again, an analogy with hags stands us in good stead... yet the doppelganger mentor faces another challenge, that no hag's teacher is forced to contend with: its protégé is weak. Too weak, by far, to hold its own against the humans it will spend the remainder of its life deceiving. Most doppelgangers are cagey creatures, forever conscious of their fragility before a raging lynch-mob's wrath. Thus, crimes that guilt no longer forbids, plain and simple fear may prohibit, unless the mentor fosters the youngling's conceits along with its callousness.

Therefore, as an "initiation" of sorts, the mentor sets tasks for the protégé to perform with its new abilities - an unsuspecting mind to read, a theft or deception to execute whilst disguised, a game of cards to win by psychic cheating and glamor - thus proving its competence and restoring its self-

Doppelganger Names

Zherisian doppelgangers do not have an independent naming tradition of their own. Instead, the personal name given to a newly-Wakened doppelganger is a contraction of its childhood (human) name. Most imposters' names have two syllables - the first from the given name and the second from the surname - as with "Roja" (birth name: Rodney James). A few doppelgangers' names incorporate initials of middle names also; "Sudji" (birth name: Susan Dolores Jiles) is an example of this style. If its surname began with the same vowel as ends its given name's first syllable, the imposter condenses them into a one-syllable name, e.g. "Brem" (birth name: Brenda Emory).

Sodo himself (birth name: Solomon Downing) follows the two-syllable convention.

confidence, which Wakening's trauma had grievously wounded. Sometimes these tasks serve an ulterior purpose for the mentor, profiting the teacher whilst placing only the student at risk. Other times, they are mere busy-work, to puff up a timorous youngster's pride. Many such initiatory challenges are portrayed as wry, prankish sport, as the mentor uses mean-spirited humor and jeering at humanity to quell its apprentice's native cowardice.

And at times, when other means of severing a protégé from childhood's ties have failed, initiation takes a darker turn, to snap that final thread:

Decement 20 - She's dead. Papa's woman, Papa's whore. Lillock didn't tell me she was still awake, or would scream when I broke in to take back the pocket-watch Papa gave her: the watch that should've been mine. I t never told me I would have to kill her, but its eyes - Grandpa's eyes - were sly and knowing, when we met again in the alley.

No, not my Grandpa. Nor my Papa. Lillock was right. Kissing her with Papa's lips, touching her with his hands, when it sent me to read her mind, I'd felt nothing. Tonight, choking her, stilling her screams, I felt nothing more. She was empty - brittle - a paper doll with stiff, dull features. Not worth knowing. Not worth caring.

Not my kind.

I'd hated her once, for taking Papa away. Before Lillock, before I knew. But now it will take me forever away from him, and the brittle shell it found me squeezed into. And I feel only the relief of liberation.

Lillock would want me to burn these pages, before it comes for me tonight. But I will not. I will not spare the shell's things, or life, another thought, once I set this pen down. I've wasted too much sentiment on its whinings already.

And I long to gaze at Lillock with sly and knowing eyes, behind its back.

Whatever duplicitous measures it need take, to ensure that initiation stimulates the proper mindset in its protégé - giving it, if not true courage, then a spark of showman's boldness that can serve in bravery's place - the mentor will take. And with that, having convinced its offspring to derive not only confidence, but joy from its deceptive and inhuman nature, it abducts its heir from the surrogate-family's milieu, and inducts it into the masques and machinations of its true kin.

Of the nearly two dozen case-studies I compiled for my investigation, Miladies, none but the suicides so much as left a note, to bid those foster families adieu.



On the Doppelganger Life Cycle

Dread Possibility: The Penitent

Early in its adult life, Linat (LG dread doppelganger Rog1/Clr5 [Ezra]) was a normal imposter, if a bit more restless and unsure of itself than most. Not long after it had reached maturity, it was betrayed by its mentor and nearly killed by adventurers it had been set up to decoy. Narrowly escaping with its life, Linat fled from Zherisia and the memory of its sire's betrayal, never having claimed a proper identity among humans.

Aimless, lonely, and vulnerable to the pressures of others' thoughts with no favored identity to anchor its personality, Linat shied away from the mental clamor of the Core's cities, wandering the countryside from Darkon to Nova Vaasa, Hazlan, and eventually Barovia. It was there that Linat would experience something no one - certainly not its mentor - had shown it since its own monstrous nature had asserted itself: kindness.

While crossing the Balinoks, Linat was caught in a raging blizzard. The creature stumbled along, hoping to find some shelter, perhaps a cave. Just when Linat believed it would end up a frozen corpse, it stumbled upon a cottage. Fumbling at the door, the doppelganger entered a modest home, where an old man in robes sat in a chair by a fireplace. He had a rag tied across his eyes, and seemed to be blind. Just as Linat was thinking it seemed almost too easy, to kill the old man and live out the winter here, it received the shock of its life, as the cottager turned to the new arrival and spoke: "Welcome, Linat."

Curious despite its native suspicion, the young doppelganger talked to him at length. The human was a hermit, an anchorite of the Mordentish sect of the Church of Ezra, and no mean diviner as well. He had been waiting for Linat. Over the course of that winter, he taught Linat a great deal, but more importantly, he was kind to the doppelganger. He gave it food, shelter, and seemed genuinely pleased for its company. Never having dared to think a human would be capable of accepting it as itself, Linat was dreadfully confused at first. Gradually, as the elderly priest's own revealed thoughts proved his compassion to be genuine, it came to realize how unfair and shallow its elders' self-exonerating scorn for humanity had been.

When the long Barovian winter was over, Linat left a changed creature. Its wanderlust was given a purpose, to heal the damage caused by its evil fellows. Since then, Linat has kept ever on the move, a wandering healer and mendicant, wishing only to do good, and thus make amends for the callous views it'd once unthinkingly taken for truth. Though still very suspicious and reticent by nature, it struggles to suppress its instinctive wariness and give others the benefit of the doubt.

Linat takes the form of a middle-aged Barovian anchorite, blandly generic in appearance and of whichever gender it thinks those it meets will find most calming. Still without a favored identity, it keeps a "private journal" as a means to shed the heavy burden of others' thoughts. Sworn to poverty and nonviolence, it seeks out towns where doppelgangers have been uncovered and tries to heal the distrust roused by its kin. Deeply ashamed of its origins, Linat still cannot bring itself to admit its nature to its Church superiors, though Bastion Sarlota Otrava has guessed. Herself an ermordenung, the Bastion is all for giving a fellow convert from the Legions of the Night a fresh start.

If attacked, Linat responds with hold person, deeper darkness, or other non-violent spells while it escapes. Should it need to protect innocents, it uses its shapechanging and Glamour to lure threats away from those unable to defend themselves, such as by turning its simple robe into an ornate dress and posing as an unarmed woman draped in rich jewelry.

On the Doppelganger Life Cycle

Aging and Death

As the imposters have a tendency (discussed in the next file) to grow old along with their roles - one favorite among roles, in particular - I am fairly certain that their lifespan is similar to our own, or possibly a bit less. They experience much the same decrease in vigor and strength in their golden years; their suppleness, conversely, doesn't decline as sorely as ours, as their tissues' plasticity evidently staves off the development of arthritis and similar joint disorders.

As their Wakening is far more abrupt than a human's gradual transition from puberty to adulthood, hurling them forcibly into their lives of covert murder and malice, it is not unusual for a doppelganger which is chronologically a teenager to usurp the life of someone in their twilight years; likewise, an elder among their kind might see fit to replace the youthful heir to some great fortune. Miladies should never evaluate the potential threat which is posed by a doppelganger, on the basis of the youth or decrepitude of its guises ... although age, and the inherent difficulties of feigning stolid maturity or youthful vigor it does not possess, might cause subtle, telltale lapses in an imposter's charade.

Aged doppelgangers are accorded considerable respect by their fellows, both by virtue of their shrewdness and experience, and owing to their rarity. Attrition is a fact of life for their kind, and merely having lived long enough to grow old is viewed as testament to an elder's proficiency. In centuries past, before Zherisia's presence within the Mists became known, the imposters' own history casts such veterans as filling leadership roles within the clans: advising and riding herd upon their descendents, to ensure their clans' collective safety, secrecy and prosperity.

While clan leadership today is based more on infighting and power-plays than seniority - an issue to which we shall return - a great deal of weight is given to elders' views, sometimes even in open defiance of Clan Leaders' avowed opinions. The fact that aged doppelgangers can evidently criticize the more hare-brained schemes of their nominal superiors, yet not be punished for their impertinence, demonstrates how valuable the imposters consider such veteran deceivers' prudent guidance to be. (With good reason: I gather that clans which lack such advisors tend to fail spectacularly, their leaders having overreached their authority or capabilities.)

Aging

Doppelgangers use the same age categories as humans (PHB Table 6-5). They are considered "Adult", not following puberty (which never happens in the biological sense), but when they first use their Change Shape ability voluntarily. The imposters experience aging effects for mental abilities, Constitution, and Strength normally, but suffer only a -1 penalty to Dexterity for each age threshold they cross.

Although the imposters' Change Shape ability can accurately depict the physical features of age, feigning the demeanor of age is one of the few areas where their mimicry can fall short. For each age-bracket of difference between a doppelganger's real age and that of its guise, it suffers a -1 circumstance penalty to its Disguise check. For this purpose, categories of age include Child (i.e. younger than Adult as per Table 6-4), as well as Adult, Middle-age, Old, and Venerable.

The vast majority of doppelgangers die by violence before reaching the 'Middle-age' bracket, and DMs can treat Adult as the default age category for imposters whose ages are unspecified.

On the Doppelganger Life Cycle

Seniority Rules

When Sodo rose to power, he overturned the traditional, seniority-based social order of Zherisia's dread doppelganger community. Despite his attempts to expunge all trace of the previous system, most imposters still feel an instinctive reverence for their older and more experienced fellows. If two or more doppelgangers of similar rank and intelligence must work together, the one which has been leading its life of impersonation the longest will usually take command.

The Mulor clan, featured in *Hour of the Knife*, lost every one of its elders in the Great Upheaval, leaving Roja (a.k.a. Sir Edmund Bloodsworth) as both its oldest surviving member and its Clan Leader. Hence, no cooler heads were around to rein in the ambitions of the new Mulor chieftain, whereupon its scheme to supplant Sodo resulted in its own downfall and its clan's outlawing.

Unusually for a darklord, Sodo makes no effort to deny or conceal his own agelessness, as being regarded as the oldest doppelganger in Zherisia greatly enhances his mystique in his underlings' eyes. His fellows presume the Grandmaster's seeming immortality comes from secret alchemical elixirs and/or the Fang of the Nosferatu, not a connection to the domain itself.

Very, very few doppelgangers die natural deaths. Many perish at the hands of hunters or enraged mobs, when their deceptions fail them; many more fall at the hands of political rivals, whether slain directly, or maneuvered into a position rendering them vulnerable to other threats. Recent years have seen an upsurge in the killing of imposters by other varieties of monster, as the enigmatic "Shadow Killers" take their toll in Paridon, and increasing numbers of Zherisia-born doppelgangers migrate to the

Core, only to be picked off by our native menaces, jealous of their territories.

Until recently, every doppelganger's death ran the risk of exposing the imposters' most precious asset - the secret of their existence - thus necessitating crucial cover-ups and a discreet disposal of the body. Since 742, when the truth came out, their need for suppression of facts has been less desperate - when the horse is already well into the next valley, Miladies, undue haste in shutting the barn door seems rather tacky - but the desire for 'damage control' yet remains, so such procedures are still followed in the creatures' homeland.

On learning, by way of agents within the police, coroner's office, mortuary services and so forth, that an imposter's false identity has died, a flurry of activity is unleashed. If the death took place in public, with witnesses to the doppelganger's postmortem reversion from human to inhuman, the clan-mates of the deceased scramble to seize as much of its human identity's assets as possible before the news of its exposure spreads, while disassociating their own false personas from the individual, or abandoning identities too close-linked to be salvaged. If death of the faux-identity is undisputed - for example, if the late doppelganger was seen to enter a building, which promptly collapsed on top of it - but its demise did not expose the creature's imposture, they tamper with the death-scene to posthumously substantiate its ruse (e.g. by dressing up a facially-disfigured human corpse in their deceased clan-mate's garments). Thus, the fiction that the dead individual had truly been human will remain unchallenged, and its surviving clan-mates' façades are not compromised.

If a doppelganger's death occurs without any human witnesses at all - or if a lone witness can be drugged, discredited, or quietly disposed of - then a false identity need not expire with its original actor. On the contrary, it is promptly assigned to another clan member, either bequeathed by the decedent itself - yes, Miladies, some of these creatures actually keep a will! - or at its Clan Leader's behest. Such an inherited identity could well "live on" for decades after its originator's death, if the clan's

On the Doppelganger Life Cycle

manpower (doppelpower?) will stretch to fill it. If not, the deceased's persona is maintained just long enough to engineer its plausible "accidental" demise, in the eyes of the human world ... and, of course, to steal any property of value in said stolen identity's name.

As for the corpse itself, doppelgangers spare it no sentiment. It is clear that the imposters find their natural forms repellant in life; in death, their inhuman forms remain an embarrassment, best disposed of swiftly and thoroughly. Carcasses of dead doppelgangers are neither buried nor honored with funerary rites, but are thoroughly and expediently destroyed, by whatever means is near to hand: burned, dissolved in acid, devoured by vermin, animals or oozes, disintegrated, etc. If time permits, a found cadaver's cerebral fluids may be drained by a quisling Lodge-member, to brew an alchemical coagulant that reveals events leading up to its demise: a possibility hunters should take into

consideration, before leaving a slain imposter's body as it lies. Ghastly but true, jackalweres may even be called on in a pinch, to dispose of an inconvenient corpse in the manner accorded their bestial aspects' ecological niche! Indeed, the one indignity it seems doppelgangers will never consent to inflict on their own dead is abandonment to ignorant humans' dissection and gawking ... one of the few fates which, in their view, can yet bring shame to the deceased, to be carved up and posed for the edification and amusement of 'cattle'.

(Which means, by-the-by, that if your travels should chance to bear you off to Paridon in future, Miladies should not give undue credence to certain handbill advertisements promoting the Elucidating Museum of Anthropological Curiosities. I've seen the Ellie-Mack's 'doppelganger' display in all its foreboding menace, dear ladies, and it's as phony as a werebear-fur coat.)

On the Doppelganger Life Cycle

Dread Possibility: Plasm of my Plasm

The tale of Sodo's fall from grace has been recounted many times: how the imposter-darklord betrayed his fellow doppelgangers, redirecting his race's customary kill-and-replace tactics on his own kind. Using a hat of disguise to circumvent imposters' usual inability to copy one another, Sodo slew his way to the pinnacle of dread doppelganger society, to ultimately kill and supplant their then-reigning chieftain, the Speaker of the Council of Elders.

What has not been told is the real reason for Sodo's unequaled frustration with his lowly status - something which generations of imposters before him had endured in bitter silence - and the true fate of Eidaw: feared and respected Speaker before Sodo's coup d'état. Paranoid that he is, Sodo would never have had the nerve to go through with his plans, had he not learned a shocking truth, while casually reading the mind of his (low-ranked) mentor: Sodo was not his mentor's scion, as he'd been told upon Wakening, but an offspring of the Speaker itself!

As is common for high-ranking doppelgangers, Eidaw had sired several young on human women, selecting only the one it judged most promising to claim as protégé. The Speaker then handed off responsibility for its other offspring - Sodo included - to various clans, and the Clan Leader to whom young Solomon Downing was entrusted (purely at random) foisted the Speaker's brat off on one of its underlings, irked to be saddled with Eidaw's spare scion. It was knowing he could have been one of the elite, were it not for doppelganger society's archaic power-structure and the Speaker's caprice, that goaded the nascent darklord into action.

When Sodo secretly murdered Eidaw - his sole biological parent, deny it though both might - he hid its corpse, but refrained from destroying it. The chance to mock the bones of the elder who'd sired him, only to cast him aside into a life of subservience, was too tempting. But after assuming darklordship of Zherisia, his burgeoning paranoia and terror of being ousted from power led Sodo to turn to the one source of guidance he most despised: Eidaw. Sodo used his resurrecting touch to bring his victim back to life - a bound, helpless, anguished life, with all four limbs nailed to the table it lay upon - and mercilessly interrogated his sire, bringing the former Speaker up to speed on current events and then demanding his predecessor give him instant, foolproof solutions to his quandaries. Once satisfied he'd wrested all the advice it could give from the elder's bleeding lips, Sodo killed Eidaw once more.

Ever since, whenever Sodo's life of power-games and plotting becomes too much for the sociable doppelganger mind to bear in solitude, the darklord resurrects his father's carcass, and tortures it until Eidaw tells him what he wants to hear. Ostensibly, Sodo seeks answers or advice from the old Speaker; in truth, repeatedly mutilating and killing his forbearer is the one salve that soothes his insecurities, allowing him to re-live old glories and vent his spleen at one he knows is helpless to betray him. Afterward, the Zherisian darklord realizes such cathartic respites are hollow, doing nothing to solve his problems; if anything, the torture-sessions render the darklord less secure in their aftermath, nagged by fears Eidaw had been correct to judge Solomon Downing undeserving of power or privilege, so long ago. The Dark Powers know this, and obligingly let Sodo's touch restore Eidaw to life as often as the darklord sees fit.

As for Eidaw, the Speaker itself went mad from its repeated deaths, and resurrections into agony, generations ago. It believes that Sodo's accounts of weird Mists, bloodthirsty daggers and sewer-lurking terrors are its own fantasies, cast up by its mind as a welcome lull between delusions of being garroted or skinned by inches. Yet even in the depths of madness, Eidaw - ironically, the one and only confidante the darklord of Paridon has - knows more of Sodo's plans, hopes, doubts and fears than anyone in the Land of Mists. Should it ever break loose, or be found by Sodo's enemies at a time when its traitorous scion is keeping it alive, the darklord's deepest secrets will be available to whomever can decrypt Eidaw's deranged ramblings first.

Excerpts from the Diary of Deborah Creede

November 22nd, 6:30 am

The medication helped but little, to relieve the nightmares. Yet again, I spent a restless night drifting between the waking world and blood-soaked dreams. I do not recollect them all, but I know I caught several brief glimpses of a wooded hill overlooking the city. I had tried to mentally brace myself for further grisly sights, but no corpse was in evidence, and it seemed a peaceful scene ... until I realized the soil beneath my feet was saturated with blood. This time, waking, I realized that I had recognized the location, on the far outskirts of Shadewell. It was a secluded spot, to which I once came often for inspiration, to savor the marvelous view.

The very spot where last I had met Daniel. Dearest Daniel, who always knew just what to say, always did just the right thing to please or comfort me. If only I knew what had happened to him - to both of us - that evening! Yet all I remember is finding myself in my bed alone, covered in mud, with a terrible sore bruise on my forehead and no knowledge of having been struck...

This morning, when looking in the mirror, I could not deny that my hair was indeed turning a darker shade of brown; indeed, it was nearly black already. Furthermore, the stress and fatigue of these past nights has begun to set its mark upon me: inspecting my lingering pock-marks in the mirror, I was shocked to find more than a few wrinkles had appeared at the corners of my eyes. As the rashes have spread alarmingly far across my body, I fear I must pay another visit to Dr. Johanson.



On the Doppelganger Mind

*"You can't condone me," it prompted,
"it's not in your nature is it? Soon it
won't be in mine either. I'll reject my life
as a tormentor of children, because I'll
see through your eyes, share your
humanity..."*

*It stood up, its movements still lacking
flexibility.*

*"Meanwhile, I must behave as I think
fit."*

- Clive Barker, "Human Remains"



On the Doppelganger Mind

Throughout his works, Dr. Van Richten firmly entreated his fellow hunters to study the psychological proclivities and weaknesses of their quarry, as well as their physical abilities and limitations. To anticipate and counter the strategies of an intelligent adversary, an understanding of the foe's motivations and agenda is essential; this is true, even if the enemy one confronts is conspicuous and clear. How much more vital, then, to look beyond your opponent's superficial semblance to confront the mind beneath it, when that very appearance can fluctuate at will? A doppelganger's external visage can be re-made in seconds, but its underlying drives and outlook regarding the world remain fixed and quantifiable.

What, then, motivates these creatures in their mimicry of humanity? How would such a protean creature's perspective differ from our own? What quirks or anomalies of character serve to set their kind apart from legitimate humanity, despite their bodily gift for camouflage? If there is any flaw in doppelgangers' impersonation-skills, experience tells me, it will lie here, where the discrepancies in their "humanity" cannot be cloaked by mere appearances. Let us therefore focus, Miladies, on how the doppelganger mindset deviates from our own, and might hence betray these imposters for what they really are.

The following information was culled from a variety of sources, including hunters' notes, the private writings of known or suspected doppelgangers, and my personal consultation with a most genteel and observant, albeit congenitally disadvantaged Zherisian I'll name only as "Miss P.", whom fortune once granted a remarkable opportunity to observe these creatures' behavior under stress. Due to the exigencies of her situation and her general unease with speaking even to myself, I would be most grateful if any mention of Miss P.'s contribution to this treatise - indeed, of her very existence - were kept confidential from our Society colleagues, as well as any future publication on doppelgangers' powers and habits. (Although eager to help us, dear ladies, I fear her fragile nerves would be hard put to cope

with the strains of an in-depth involvement with our wider circle of allies.)

Self-Identity: Child-face, Clay, and I mago

For we humans - or at least, for that vast and fortunate majority whom circumstances or sickness of mind have not denied such forthright simplicity - a single name, personality and background is all that their lives provide or require. While the identities we are born into may be distasteful or even detestable to us, re-inventing our natures to divorce ourselves from the past is an onerous task, and one never so complete as we may wish. We can veil our origins with poses, with nicknames, with education, with masks, yet cannot wholly leave our "selves" behind.

By comparison, a doppelganger's essence of "self" is fragmented and plastic, even in the creature's own experience. What would seem pathological in a human psyche is commonplace and routine, among their kind ... perhaps even necessary, if they are to preserve any coherent sense of identity beneath their myriad external disguises. Typically, a doppelganger sports three identities, over a lifetime, which it regards as "itself", and its self-esteem, security, and emotional investments are rooted in each of these roles. Other personas it chances to assume are disposable and temporary, but its core trio of "selves" can all evoke genuine feelings, concerns, enmities and loyalties in the divided consciousness of such an imposter.

As discussed earlier, a doppelganger's first identity is a human one: the one into which it was initially born, before its Wakening into unsleeping, mutable adulthood. Even if it should be informed of its hidden nature prior to maturity, a doppelganger's experiences in childhood can be little different from a true human being's, and its "child-face" (as adult imposters oft refer to their natal guises, once they have shed them) is as close to truly human as the creature will ever come. Like the human children it mimics so perfectly, it plays, it learns, it laughs and cries and fears as any child will.



Child-Face

If those childish writings I have been shown in the course of familial interviews can be taken at face value, it even loves - the only genuine affection it will likely ever extend to others, albeit in a clinging, intensely possessive mode - so long as those by whom it is raised treat the creature with the steadfast nurturing and patience its early welfare depends on. Some actually acquire a modicum of ethical sensibility from their fosterage: a common element of those case-studies I uncovered that culminated in despair and suicide, rather than desertion.

When it inevitably discovers it is not human, this realization is traumatic - far more so, if no adult of its kind is on hand, encouraging it to renounce its faux-humanity - and disorienting, such that an adolescent doppelganger often pines for the loss of childhood's sheltered simplicity. The psychic revelation of its caregivers' basest thoughts and failings leave it disillusioned with those it previously dared to trust, even as it comes to despise Mankind as a whole for its unsought eviction from the company of normal folk.

Were doppelgangers nobler creatures than they are, such snubbed outrage would perhaps be turned inward, resulting in self-chastisement and the renunciation of their monstrous heritage.

Alas, most vindictively direct their bereavement outward, lashing out in acts of petty theft and petulant vandalism or violence, often aimed at those whom they envied or despised in childhood. The resentment the Wakened creature directs at its former pseudo-kin or peers quickly sours its prior feelings of affiliation with them, making the rift permanent. When a doppelganger thinks back to its former "child-face", its memories are troubled, and distorted by its narcissistic, post-Wakening cynicism; folk it had feared or resented in youth - even in the slightest - are perceived as corrupted beyond the pale, while those to whom it was once well-disposed are idealized to the point of caricature ... and turbulent jealousy.

Forsaken Lives

Although doppelgangers abandon their childhood identities, they often harbor old grudges beyond that time, and act out their past resentments on humans who remind them of those they disliked as children. For instance, an imposter that was forced to perform child labor in a factory sweatshop might nurse a lifelong grudge against the sweatshop's foreman, and take out its lingering anger by tormenting its own foremen - or their families - upon assuming the identity of a factory owner.

More rarely, a doppelganger will retain a nagging sense of loyalty toward someone who treated it well in childhood. If so, it will often try to anonymously "pay back" its benefactor, in order to balance the scales and thus, shed this uncomfortable feeling of indebtedness to an inferior human. Often this "repayment" entails making life utterly miserable for those whom it believes (rightly or not) are taking advantage of its benefactor or impeding his or her success.

On the Doppelganger Mind

In no case my research uncovered has a doppelganger retained the active use of its natal identity beyond the trauma of its Wakening, nor attempted to re-establish itself in its former role. The emotional distress such a resumption would evoke seems too great to contemplate, even if its "child-face" was not shed in a manner (such as accidental exposure or a faked death) that makes this impossible.

Still, a doppelganger's childhood identity is never forgotten, and residual likes or dislikes

from its first human guise tend to carry over into its future impostures: a telltale clue to its nature, if these preferences fail to match the established habits of a person it has replaced.

A shrewd hunter will keep alert for such "tells" (to borrow a term from gamblers), when pursuing doppelgangers, and a cunning one then uses this knowledge to coyly test a suspected imposter's behavior.

Tells

A doppelganger's human childhood typically leaves it with at least one betraying quirk - a habit, phobia, affectation or fondness - that it suppresses only with conscious effort and can't conceal for long. The more stressful and/or unsettled its human childhood had been, the more "tells" it is likely to have; all imposters have at least one "tell", and those having more than three tend not to survive for long. Like a golem's zeitgeber, a doppelganger's "tells" are unique to the individual creature, and must be discerned through careful observation.

Unlike a zeitgeber or allergen, a tell is not directly harmful or hindering to the imposter: it poses a threat only to its disguise, not its health or ability to take action. A tell is best used to discern temporary replacements, as a doppelganger invariably integrates its tell into the daily habits of its imago (see below), soon after appropriating that role. That way, if an established imago comes under scrutiny, acquaintances can truthfully testify that the person in question has had the habit, fear, interest, or other quirk for some time.

Noticing the physical tell of a doppelganger (such as a facial tic, a nervous habit, etc) requires a Spot check against a DC of 10 + the creature's Disguise bonus, made at a time when the creature is visibly engaged in the telltale behavior. Verbal tells, such as distinctive turns of phrase, are detectable with a Listen check at the same DC. Because an imposter's tells are a direct result of its doppelganger nature, rather than something its native instincts can help it to mask, its usual +4 racial bonus on Disguise checks does not apply to the DC to detect these quirks. Nor does its +10 circumstance bonus for its Change Shape ability apply, as the tell is a form of behavior rather than a flaw in its appearance. The DC to notice a typical dread doppelganger's tell is 18.

If a doppelganger becomes aware that its tell is known to its enemies, it may resist acting out its habit with a Bluff check, opposing the observer's Spot or Listen attempt. Its +4 racial bonus does apply to this check, as it is consciously applying its natural gift for deception to hiding the tell.

Alternatively, the DM may forego dice-rolling for detecting tells, presenting such clues through description. This is especially appropriate for tells which take the form of phobias or unusual hobbies and mannerisms, rather than reflexive habits and turns-of-phrase.

On the Doppelganger Mind

At the climax of its Wakening, a doppelganger's natural form appears, and with it arises an emergent second nature: the coldly-calculating, smugly inhuman, jeeringly-vindictive parasite beneath the false veneer. This new identity regards "humanity" - the very quality for which the doppelganger's child-face pines - as a condition to be renounced, for it considers our kind both individually inferior and collectively corrupt. In sensing our thoughts, it seizes on the weaknesses and flaws which all we fallible mortals possess, citing these as proof of our innate unworthiness, whilst dismissing any nobler impulse it might discern as a passing fluke. Observing our society from an outsider's perspective, it harshly condemns us for every perceived imbalance or injustice it discerns ... never mind how the depredations of its own kind drain away resources and cut short lives that might, if spared, have served to ameliorate the very faults it holds us to account for.

Called "the Clay" by their kind, in reference to the mutable (i.e. moldable)

nature of their adult forms, a doppelganger's "monstrous side" is concerned with its survival first and foremost, followed by the improvement of its status among its fellow-imposters. Prestige in the eyes of humans holds no inherent value to a doppelganger's Clay - if humanity is indeed inferior, then no amount of respect from us can be counted to the doppelganger's credit, any more than a hound-keeper's high stature in the reckoning of his dogs can elevate his social standing amongst men - although superior rank within the Zherisian clans does correlate with access to more distinguished victims, in Paridon's wider (human) social order.

Whatever its status among its own kind, the Clay invariably disregards human welfare with the same dismissive contempt as it brushes off our accomplishments: we are ignorant draft-animals and incubators for their young, never equals or even vassals. While they don't prey upon us as literally as wolfweres, they acknowledge no impropriety in farming our communities for our labor and their own entertainment.

Dungeon Master's Tip: Role-Playing "Tells"

DMs who routinely act out the gestures and expressions of NPCs should consider using "tells" as visual aids for players, inventing distinctive gestures (touching your temple, drumming fingers on the tabletop, twirling a pencil, etc) which can be performed at the gaming table. Each time the doppelganger appears in the role of a new character, change your expression, posture, and manner of speaking to act out its new identity, but keep performing the "tell". The greater the Disguise skill of the doppelganger in question, the less conspicuous the gesture should be.

Once players have caught on to visual "tells", shift gears and use verbal ones, such as odd phrases or a distinctive laugh. Posture and props (e.g. scooping up a huge handful of corn chips from the bowl on your gaming table) can also be useful "tells" under the right circumstances (e.g. when the imposter chats with them at the buffet table during a soiree). For extremely subtle doppelganger villains, a "tell" might even vary in response to the players' own actions; it's amazing how long it can take for players to catch on that the NPC with whom they are conversing in-character has been mimicking the facial expressions of whoever addresses them!

The in-joke about this method is that even if you make a mistake, using a "tell" for the wrong NPC, you can always argue that the doppelganger successfully concealed its habit ... or an NPC who isn't the imposter behaved in the same way, as a coincidental "red herring". Such instances of doubt and confusion are entirely in keeping with the atmosphere of a doppelganger scenario.

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Nor does a doppelganger's Clay-aspect feel any qualms about slaughtering us - not sadistically, and seldom out of hatred or even in pique, but with a butcher's practiced efficiency and an assassin's blithe dispassion - if need or convenience should make it desirable that we no longer exist.

Should a doppelganger seek your lives, Miladies, your best hope is that it is its human identity that pursues you, that might deign to make a game of mutual pursuit. To its Clay, you *do not matter* enough to bother toying with or gloating over, once marked for death.

Is this sociopathic alter-ego an automatic, invariable result of doppelgangers' biology, in the same fashion as Changed hags or a golem's catastrophic psychological progression? Certain parallels between doppelgangers and these other monstrosities are indeed evident: like a hag, a doppelganger is raised as a human, yet undergoes a repellent transformation which

unleashes a spiteful contempt for those it once called kin. Like a golem, it perceives the unveiled thoughts of those it formerly trusted as guardians, and feels betrayed by the unvoiced criticisms and hidden flaws such thoughts reveal. Does this, then, indicate post-Wakened doppelgangers are likewise possessed of an inherently-evil nature, compelled to malevolence and powerless to choose?

I do not believe this to be so.

Rather, a close reading of those few samples of mature doppelgangers' private writings I collected - documents which are scarce indeed, given their penchant for destroying any possible clues that might betray their nature - paints a different picture. I believe that, like Uncle Fox's grumbling in the Kartakan mora, doppelgangers' monstrous identities arise from a feeling of "sour grapes": an unacknowledged need to diminish their own sense of loss, on forfeiting their juvenile

Doppelganger Alter-Egos

The mood of a doppelganger-themed adventure will depend strongly on whether the creature is acting under the guidance of its self-indulgent human side, or its cold-blooded monstrous one. So long as it believes it has the strategic advantage, a doppelganger can make sport of its dealings with PCs: taunting them, playing off their fears and insecurities, and manipulating them to serve its own hidden agenda.

A doppelganger might encounter the same group of heroes repeatedly, clad in a different guise each time, to manipulate them into doing its bidding. After several such encounters, the cocksure creature might send a letter to its "playthings", fondly praising them for being such fine pawns, so easily-deceived. Such taunting can persist as long as it takes to establish the NPC doppelganger as a coy, smart-aleck adversary: one who enjoys teasing and deceiving the heroes far too much to actually kill them. Indeed, the creature might pass them vital information on a mutual enemy, or even rescue them so that it can continue taking advantage of their gullibility!

However, the moment the PCs succeed in catching it at a disadvantage, the doppelganger's Clay steps to the fore, and instantly the gloves come off. It abandons its jokes, its charming façade, and its human veneer's smirking affectation of "liking" them, and does its best to exterminate the threat, without any pretense of honor or concern for collateral fatalities. Such a jarring shift of demeanor should shock and appall players who've grown complacent about how they well they can predict their adversaries' attitudes ... or their DM's game-style, for that matter.

Doppelganger Adventures

The classic "doppelganger adventure" involves an imposter's attempt to replace a specific human victim, either its own behalf or as the agent of a wider conspiracy. However, not every scenario which utilizes these creatures needs to hinge on their supplanting a set target. A doppelganger, egged on by its Clay's sneering contempt for humans, may plot to destroy an NPC - or a PC - by sullyng the target's reputation, committing crimes or grievous social faux pas while disguised in the target's form, or reading the thoughts of a target and her loved ones and engineering family strife based on what its powers reveal. The imposter's motive for these malicious acts could be revenge, cruelty, arrogance, jealousy, competitiveness or even boredom.

pseudo-humanity, by retroactively proclaiming that "humanity" is a state neither to be desired nor mourned. It is petulance, not predestination, that makes doppelgangers reject and downplay their natal ties with humankind: sensing we would inevitably cast them out, in fear of their revealed nature, they preemptively renounce us before they can, themselves, be outcast and reviled. Petulance, too, motivates their acts of malicious sabotage against humans who insult or embarrass them, however-unwittingly. For a doppelganger to slowly and methodically ruin the life of a person it takes a petty dislike to, merely because it can, is no rare event.

Whatever its pretense in human guise, a doppelganger's Clay is generally the facet of its nature which dominates the others: it suppresses the "tells" and latent conscience (if any) of its child-face, and it reigns in the self-indulgent behavior of the imago (see below) if its misconduct threatens to compromise its charade. When it is physically endangered, engaged in a routine replacement or mass infiltration, or dealing with others of its kind, its callous, monstrous

identity - the one which answers to the name which its mentor bestowed upon it - directs its actions. In its various human guises other than its favorite, the Clay also has control. An imposter can't be bothered to "live out" such lesser roles, as a thespian of the 'immersion' tradition might; it merely wears the form and recites the lines, while its unseen Clay sneers at the human buffoons taken in by its play-acting.

Still, while a doppelganger depends on its Clay for its ruthlessness in a pinch and its self-vindicating faith in the "Masters" superiority over men, the preponderance of evidence suggests very few of these imposters actually *like* their monstrous, pitiless sides. The human standards of beauty, respectability, virility/femininity and normality with which their young are inculcated in childhood are too deeply-ingrained to relinquish entirely: even among themselves, the creatures seem loath to be seen in their natural forms. While this could be interpreted as excessive caution by a race of chronic paranoids, I am driven to conclude that they find their natural appearances every bit as discomfiting and abnormal as humans do!

Clay



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Indeed, a captive doppelganger, even after its nature is conclusively proven, nevertheless resists shifting to its true form, unless threatened with the ghastliest of punishments for refusal. (I will not relate the sordid details here, Miladies, save to assure you that I had no direct hand in this particular line of "research".) In the event that their slain clan-mates revert to their native state in death, elite doppelgangers find it distasteful to personally attend to their remains' disposal - even though they routinely rid themselves of human corpses without squeamishness - foisting the handling of such carcasses off upon jackalweres, human lackeys, unwitting constables, or lower-ranking clan members. When Fiona's polymorph-spell briefly forced her assailant to revert to its natural form, during her brief encounter in Ungrad, the creature's instant reaction - even before fleeing - was to throw up its arms to conceal its revealed features from her sight and shift at once to another guise.

This being the case, it is not from their true forms or natures that doppelgangers derive the greatest pride, comfort or gratification, but from stolen human identities ... specifically, from one particular identity, singled out by the imposter as its personal favorite. It is this persona with which the doppelganger is most pleased to identify itself, rather than its Clay; it is this role that it feels most relaxed and comfortable occupying, and to which it eagerly funnels the varied profits - financial, political, social, sensual - of its subsidiary roles' underhanded schemes. If its Clay is an imposter's post-Wakened self as it truly is, then this favored false identity is itself, as it would most like to be: the "role of a lifetime" every thespian dreams of, that fits the creature like a glove and is regarded in a positive light - at least, by doppelgangers' uncharitable notions of what is "positive" - by the world at large.

Given the number of forms which a doppelganger may assume - and given that writing out "positively-perceived, favored false identity" over and over is a wrist-cramping waste of ink - I'll seize the opportunity to introduce another new term to the monster-hunter's lexicon: imago.

In the emerging field of psychoanalysis, an "imago" is an ingrained, idealized concept of something or someone as being 'perfect', that may persist even in defiance of contrary evidence. In the jargon of natural philosophers, conversely, it designates the mature, fully-developed stage of life which most winged insects attain after metamorphosis. As both these concepts are evocative of doppelgangers, I shall follow in the good Doctor's footsteps as a contributor to hunters' vocabulary, and put forward a third usage for this word: an "imago" is the false identity a doppelganger has singled out as favorite, adopting said persona as its preferred guise to occupy from day to day, and attending meticulously to this chosen "self's" prosperity, security, contentment, and stature amongst humans.

Self Image

Because they grow up among humans - exposed to humanoids' concepts of what is normal and attractive - and because they mate with humanoids rather than one another, dread doppelgangers have neither the need nor the opportunity to shed the notion that their natural forms are alien and ugly. Even if it wishes to horrify a victim by revealing its nature, a doppelganger never willingly exposes its true appearance; rather, it changes from one false guise into another, demonstrating its race's signature special ability, and lets the witness draw his or her own conclusions.

Though loath to admit it, most doppelgangers feel deeply ashamed of their natural forms. Before Sodo reordered their society, elders proved their seniority by exposing their wrinkle-marked faces - and only their faces - keeping the rest of their bodies draped under heavy cloaks. An imposter whose native shape is seen by witnesses, and particularly by human witnesses, feels dreadfully violated, and may seek to punish those who'd dared to gawk at its revealed ugliness.

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That doppelgangers should have a "favorite" identity is hardly a surprise, nor does this proclivity necessarily mark them as alien. How many of us would not welcome a chance to shed our imperfections of body or of character, lay the ghosts and demons of our past to rest, and re-invent ourselves as the people we most wish to be? How much of the effort we exert in this life, to whatever end, constitutes precisely such an attempt to re-make what we are, by those limited means as we non-doppelgangers have available to us? Were the imposters to create their imago-identities in a more conventional manner, by working to overcome flaws and weaknesses in their existing selves, then the prospect of redemption for past unworthiness might yet lie within their reach, as we humans sorely hope it does in ours.

To a doppelganger, however, stealing an identity - even an idealized one - is far easier than constructing one out of whole cloth ... let alone, earning one by dint of honest effort! And even if second thoughts should cross its mind, the betrayed resentment of its child-face and the self-exonerating contempt for human life advocated by its Clay combine to override any lingering doubts it might yet feel, about killing someone whose qualities it admires rather than despises. Within its first four years post-Wakening, and often far less, a young adult doppelganger will fixate upon a person whose life it perceives as enviable: healthy, attractive, respected - or feared - by associates, and possessed of as much wealth and influence as the creature's status among its own kind permits it to aspire to. Sometimes, the chosen victim will be someone the imposter had known (and had sorely longed to be) before its Wakening, but most will gravitate to the friend or colleague of a temporary guise, a human adversary who has successfully outsmarted it so often as to win its respect - hunters, be warned! - or some unsuspecting passerby glimpsed by chance on the street.

A doppelganger's reconnaissance of conventional replacement-victims is methodical and cautious, but its approach to a chosen imago's rightful actor may be

unpracticed - even clumsy - caught up in fixation as it is. The creature contrives an excuse to meet the object of its obsession, dons a form which it hopes will stir the target's approval and interest, then acts out the part so as to ensure it can linger in the chosen victim's company. In the throes of an infatuation I would - grudgingly - characterize as a "crush" (although its true objective is betrayal and usurpation, not romance ... though such will often play a role in its pretense), an imago-obsessed doppelganger will, if necessary, subject itself to humiliations and risks it would never contemplate otherwise, even at the behest of its mentor or clan superiors.

Catering to its chosen victim's needs and preferences, the imago-seeking doppelganger will adopt whatever guise brings it closest - both physically and emotionally - to its prey, be it as servant or client, boon companion or bedfellow, tagalong child or sage elder. Should accessing its intended target prove especially difficult, it may replace a member of the victim's household, the better to draw closer to its chosen future "self"; however, unlike conventional (profit-driven) role assumptions, this course is taken only as a last resort, as doing so disrupts a life which the creature yearns to appropriate in its entirety, household-members and all. If one façade does not immerse it sufficiently into the chosen one's life, multiple guises may be employed: for example, it may poison a gentleman's valet so it can hire on as a substitute by day, then charm its way into the same intended's embrace as a flirtatious lady by night, 'slipping away' before dawn to resume acting the part of the unsuspecting victim's servant.

The purpose of such single-minded stalking-behavior is, of course, to scrutinize every last nuance of the coveted identity's thoughts, beliefs, abilities, history and habits. In part this ensures that the chosen imago, once claimed, will be played to perfection. Beyond simple information-gathering, I suspect that this also grants the doppelganger the chance to acclimate emotionally to the role it will (should events transpire as it plans) be occupying, on and

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off, for the rest of its life. Perusing its intended victim's every thought, trailing along through all of his or her day-to-day experiences, it learns to feel as the imago feels, think like the imago thinks, desire what the imago desires, deliberately submerging its Clay beneath a façade which will become its pride, its solace, and its shield of self-deception against the bitter truth of its own abnormality.

I do not know what ultimately triggers a doppelganger's fatal attack upon the object of its captivation, Miladies. Even in writings they believe no human eye will ever see, these creatures scrupulously avoid the topic of an imago's actual murder. Perhaps they feel vestiges of guilt, for callously slaughtering the one being for whom they will ever feel such an intense admiration and attachment: the nearest thing (though

Behind The Curtain: "I Want You..."

While many Ravenloft monsters owe their origins to real-world mythology or Gothic literature, doppelgangers - at least as they are portrayed in game products - originated with the D&D game itself. As such, their seminal "mythology" primarily comes from early and contemporary science fiction, suspense films, post-Gothic horror, and even comic book supervillains.

Of these sources, the genera of suspense - everything from Hitchcock to Thomas Harris to (too) many TV-miniseries - has granted us a particularly Ravenloft-compatible archetype for villainy: the obsessed stalker. This isn't a concept exclusive to recent fiction, of course; both Dracula and Frankenstein's monster pursued their prey with stalker-like obsession, and Ravenloft itself was born from Strahd von Zarovich's own descent into stalkers' homicidal jealousy. Obsessive desire is a frightening prospect, precisely because it happens in reality and is so very true-to-life.

In a D&D game, however, the usual "stalker storyline" - an unknown, obsessed pursuer hounds his (rarely her) victim, killing whoever gets in his way - can be hampered by PCs' tendency to take a 'monster-slaying' approach to mundane foes. Would the villains of films like *Single White Female* have lasted long enough to incite much suspense, if confronted by a band of PCs with swords and magic? Not likely, as game-heroes seldom hold anything back once the bad guy shows himself, unless a clear reason to keep the enemy alive has been presented to them.

Although vampirism provide a handy avenue for making stalkers more durable, vampires carry their own slate of archetypal elements, and tend to be more frightening for their unnatural powers and nature than for their single-minded obsession, itself. Doppelgangers, conversely, evoke the very heart of stalkers' controlling psychosis - the desire to possess, to dominate, to script out and direct every facet of their chosen victim's life - yet they take this monomania a step farther: they can literally become the person with whom they are infatuated. Furthermore, their ability to turn up again in a different guise, each time their attempts to observe and supplant a chosen victim are interrupted by PC heroes, means that unmasking such a villain once doesn't mean the PCs will know whom they should watch for, next time: a potentially limitless source of the "twist endings" which are a classic feature of stalker-oriented scenarios.

The concept of an "imago" not only gives doppelganger villains an Achilles heel - an identity they value too much to abandon at the first hint of trouble - but it allows DMs to fully exploit the "obsessed stalker" archetype in a Ravenloft context ... with the unique twist that, should PCs' vigilance fail, the very victim they've been protecting may well become their adversary!



I mago

"nearness" is only relative, and still very far, indeed) these asexual beings ever experience, to what we humans might call falling in love. More likely, they simply repress all memory of this pivotal event, the better to immerse themselves in their chosen role and forget that another individual ever laid rightful claim to it.

Whatever the triggering event, the end result is the same. The doppelganger eagerly steps into the role of its murdered imago, and henceforth pursues its own satisfaction and pleasure, by way of that identity, for the remainder of its existence. It is to the imago's profit that it directs the profits of its misdeeds - funneling stolen wealth into the imago's pockets, killing or discrediting enemies of the favorite, and securing the imago's stellar reputation and fame - and in imago-form that it meets covertly with its fellow doppelgangers, or claims such honors as clan leadership or other accolades coveted by its Clay. Clan-imposed duties prevent all but the highest-ranking of individuals from occupying their imago's identity continuously, yet even the least of their kind have such beloved disguises to return to whilst "off duty", just as human laborers fondly return to their homes and families after a day's work is done.

Once it has usurped the imago's life, of course, it will tailor that life in such ways as are necessary to prolong a successful ruse - adding its "tells" to its new identity's demeanor; deftly divesting itself of astute acquaintances, lest they sense something is amiss; explaining away the absence of the reconnaissance-persona(s) it used to approach its prey - thus securing itself in its newfound position. Any moral compunctions which may once have barred the imago's original, human actor from those decadent activities the creature enjoys participating in are conveniently "discarded" or "outgrown". (Rich foods, fine drink, lavish wardrobes, gambling, opiates and other stimulants, raucous parties, an entourage of flatterers, scandalmongery, and duels or blood-sports are all common doppelganger vices; carnal excesses and deviances are conspicuous by their absence, unless the imposter deliberately fosters a lustful reputation as a ruse.)

Other doppelgangers, always up for a spot of character-assassination - another common vice for the list - often lend a hand in staging its newfound alter-ego's "disillusionment" with propriety. Yet this shift in moral precepts is an internal process, as well as a public display: a psychological self-culling that may stretch over several years - particularly if its chosen victim had been strong-willed, and had adhered to strict or passionate principles - as the imposter strives to reconcile its new persona's own demeanor with its native bent toward ruthlessness, pleasure-seeking, and indolence. Until it arrives at a consensus between the two, it may periodically find that its imago is at odds with its Clay, a circumstance which is psychologically stressful to the creature.

Should it be a participant in a wider doppelganger society, as is found in Paridon, the triumphant creature circulates word to its own kind that the imago has been claimed as a fellow-doppelganger's favorite. This is partly a boastful declaration of its maturity, in the reckoning of its fellows - not unlike a human youth's swagger upon stealing his first kiss - but it also carries weight as an assertion of its "property rights": once claimed, the imago-identity is acknowledged

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as its rightful "possession", and hence is not to be harmed, coveted, or impeded by others. Most doppelgangers practice an etiquette of strict non-interference with one another's favorites, such that disputes over "ownership" of a coveted imago are one of the few things that can (and do) turn these creatures against one another in open violence, as opposed to covert schemes to disgrace or eliminate rivals. Tellingly,

confiscation of an imago is a punishment inflicted upon - and sorely dreaded by - doppelganger criminals, and the grievous offense of treachery against the Zherisian clans' tyrannical Grandmaster incurs a death sentence for the culprit's imago, as well as for the offender itself. In effect, such a traitor is condemned to suffer two ignominious ends, not one.

Imagoes and Alignment

A dread doppelganger's default alignment is Neutral Evil - a stance illustrating its selfishness, its lazy disregard for sentient life, and its disillusioned contempt for human morality - but upon first adopting its imago's personality, its alignment shifts to approach that of the assumed identity. In effect, its Clay-persona is Neutral Evil, but its alignment as the imago is initially one step closer to Neutral Evil than that of the replaced victim, with its tendency toward Evil shifting before its tendency toward ethical neutrality. For example, a doppelganger which replaces a Lawful Good woman, adopting her personality for its imago, initially conducts itself as if it is Lawful Neutral when it is living out her role. If its chosen victim is a Chaotic Neutral man, it would behave in a Chaotic Evil fashion while acting "in character" as that man, instead.

Alignment shifts of this type do not impose Madness saves upon the doppelganger, as its highly-compartmentalized psyche is pre-adapted to weather such transitions without damage. For other practical purposes, the creature's alignment-shift is genuine for as long as the imago's persona is being played out. In the example above, the LN imago reads as "Lawful" to alignment-detection spells, is unharmed by Smite Evil and related effects, and could advance in the monk character class. This alternative alignment only applies when the doppelganger stays "in character" as the imago; should its façade be shattered or its sociopathic Clay-identity seize control in a crisis, its alignment defaults to Neutral Evil, whether or not its physical appearance has changed. Only an imago's identity induces such shifts; other roles a doppelganger might adopt for lesser purposes have no effect on its actual alignment, whatever its apparent conduct.

Once it has secured its new identity, a doppelganger's disparate alignments gradually reconcile with one another, as its imago becomes more ruthless and its Clay, more accommodating to the imago's ethical (but not moral) standards. Thus, the LN female imago and NE Clay of the above example would eventually gravitate to Lawful Evil as a compromise. In the case of the Chaotic Neutral victim, either Neutral Evil or Chaotic Evil may prevail ... most likely, whichever attitude has provided the creature with greater contentment and success, in the interim.

Doppelgangers whose imagoes differ greatly in alignment from their Clay are especially prone to Subsumption, an insanity unique to their kind. Should an imposter whose imago's behavior is either Lawful Neutral or Chaotic Neutral succumb to a moderate Madness effect before its alter-egos can reconcile their differences, Subsumption is the automatic result.

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In a last (morbid) note on the subject of doppelgangers' imagoes, I would cite a case that demonstrates the contradictory feelings of admiration and covetousness which the imposters feel toward their favored, stolen human "selves". When the estate of Sir Edmund Bloodsworth - that Zherisian nobleman infamously exposed as a doppelganger in 742, thus revealing the creatures' presence to the populace at large - was burnt to the ground by an arsonist, three weeks after the faux-noble's disappearance, a search of the ruins revealed two long-concealed graves, beneath the cellar flagstones.

Skeletal remains of two human males were unearthed therein, one of the estimated age of 15, the other in the prime of adult life. The younger body's right wrist had been broken and only partially healed - an injury Sir Edmund's younger son, Charles, had suffered a month before he'd reportedly deserted the household after a furious argument with his father - while the index finger on the mature skeleton's right hand (the same digit on which Sir Edmund had worn his familial signet) had been cleanly severed at the first joint. Crushed vertebrae indicated both victims had been manually strangled, in identical fashion. Yet, while the lad's remains had been stripped bare and coarsely dumped into his burial-place, the elder's body - despite the amputation of its finger - had been laid out with meticulous care, as if composed for sleep, with clothing intact and none of its other possessions disturbed.

The basic pattern is hardly unusual, where doppelgangers are at work - replace the son to access the father, then replace the father and explain away the son's disappearance - and it grows all the more recognizable, when two other "departures" from that same household (chambermaid Margaret James and her teenage son Rodney) are known to have occurred at roughly the same time. But if the care with which this otherwise-callous creature had laid its adult victim to rest - a respectful gesture which, in human killers, is strongly indicative of a belated affection for the slain - was not a deliberate ruse, then even their murderer may not long have

recollected its own misdeeds. Whatever name it may have been born with or whence it fled to, in its own reckoning it *was* "Sir Edmund Bloodsworth", up until the instant its true nature was exposed.

Stolen Identities:

Masks, Niches, and Shared Roles

While doppelgangers' attachments to their imagoes are possessive, permanent and (so far as I can determine) passionately sincere, even the most privileged of their kind also maintain a wide repertoire of lesser identities, both for practical purposes and for the pursuit of spontaneous, wicked mischief. The functions of these minor personas are many, but may be classified by their means of acquisition, and by the lengths to which the creatures go to ensure such identities are consistently sustained, in the eyes of human witnesses.

Most fleeting and expendable are those guises which a doppelganger acquires, not by replacing an existing human victim, but by improvising a face and form to conform to a specific motif: "businessman", "beggar-woman", "bon vivant", "ruffian", etc. Blending the physiognomy of real folk whose features convey a desired impression, doppelgangers concoct such "masks" for temporary deceptions to acquire wealth, for anonymity during reconnaissance-work or to throw off pursuit, or to engage in debaucheries or crimes with which they don't want other identities linked. While a mask may be worn repeatedly by a given doppelganger - for example, to execute a series of robberies and thus, set law enforcement on the trail of a face that does not exist - no effort is made to substantiate a mask's legitimacy in the public record. Depending on its function, a mask's background, profession, place of residence, or even name may be deemed unnecessary and hence, left a blank by these slothful creatures. The less often a doppelganger thinks a mask's identity will be challenged, the fewer personal details it is likely to have devised for it: a key line of inquiry by which to expose such thinly-crafted façades.

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Improvising on the Fly

If a doppelganger is confronted while occupying a mask-identity it has never invented a proper background for, it must make a separate opposed Bluff check to improvise a plausible answer to any direct question it is asked about "itself". As it must concoct these lies on the spot rather than pulling answers from the mind of whoever questions it, it doesn't receive its usual +4 bonus to Bluff rolls for the use of detect thoughts ... unless its interrogator already has fixed expectations about its mask-persona's identity, which it can feed back as responses.

(If you forgive me this digression, Miladies, I must confess that doppelgangers' casual and indiscriminate use of "masks" is particularly distasteful to me. While the adoption of such a fictitious guise is a far lesser atrocity than murdering some hapless soul in order to supplant them, this use of so many slipshod identities by doppelgangers vastly expands the scope of Zherisian paranoia, far beyond those segments of Paridon society - wealthy merchants, key civil servants, and the nobility and government - to which the imposters' depredations naturally gravitate. Were doppelgangers to confine their play-acting solely to these classes, the common working-folk of that sorrowful city might be exempt from suspicion! Instead, masks of penniless factory workers, social pariahs, or even children as young as six have been utilized by doppelgangers from time to time, ensuring that even folk who would never be impersonated on a lasting basis are not spared from the fears that beset their city. Furthermore, many masks are grounded in gauche and bigoted popular stereotypes - a mask employed for physical intimidation is almost invariably caliban, that of a lothario or card-cheat is most likely half-Vistani, et cetera - and such shoddy tradecraft on the shapeshifters' part exacerbates cultural

injustices for which humans must legitimately accept a due ration of blame.)

Masks, to doppelgangers, are eminently disposable roles, invented by the dozen as a kind of mental exercise and amusement, then abandoned without hesitation as soon as their usefulness is spent or compromised. By contrast, other roles adopted by these creatures are maintained for months or years, and usually not at the whims of their physical occupants, but under the orders of superiors within the covert social hierarchy of their kind. Such allotted identities, or "niches", are dictated by the strategic needs of the doppelganger's clan, by its personal status and competency in the judgment of its superiors, and by the wish of said superiors to reward a capable subordinate with a desirable imposture ... or, quite often, to punish one who has erred or offended, with some humiliating or strenuous role. Most commonly, a niche is obtained via murder and replacement, rather than invented from scratch. Rarely, the preexistent identity of someone who vanished for less sinister cause is adopted, such as when a "prodigal son" turns up on a noble's doorstep as the opening ploy in a mass infiltration of the household.

Doppelgangers' appreciation (or lack thereof) for a given niche hinges on several factors. Foremost of these are the physical demands of the designated victim's profession (no "Master" is content to dig ditches or scrub floors for a living), and the amount of mental effort the niche's "maintenance" entails - again, these creatures can be shamefully lackadaisical about their lesser personas' upkeep - as well as whether their assigned position affords them the liberty to revert to their imagoes, from time to time, as a respite from their duties. The perceived social status of the allotted identity, in human eyes, is less important than one might expect, as such routine play-acting is directed by the creature's contemptuous Clay-self, to whom the high or low opinion of we 'cattle' matters not a whit. A lowly servant whose public appearances and tasks are few and far between - for instance, a coachman who need only tend his horses briefly each morning, then return at dusk to drive his

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employer to the opera - may constitute a more desirable niche than a revered high-society lady whose days are filled from dawn to dusk with correspondence, visits to friends, the planning of parties and weddings, attendance at cultural events and other activities the doppelganger in question has no personal taste for.

Conversely, if a niche's low station is perceived by the creature to be a chastisement, or a sign that its superiors do not appreciate its talents, its Clay-self's ire may be roused. No matter how unmoved it is by humans' deference or disdain, being treated shabbily by its own kind is an entirely different story. Not for nothing does even the lowest-ranking doppelganger style itself a "Master": these self-centered creatures' egotism knows no bounds! Reading between the lines of two key sources to follow, it appears quite a few doppelgangers voluntarily leave Zherisia due to grudges that arise over having been assigned to "disgraceful" niches by their betters.

Ironically, these outcasts (and their clanless descendents) apply much the same standards, when choosing niches to occupy, as their superiors once imposed upon them. However, because most operate as lone predators rather than as members of a conspiracy, they self-select their roles to placate their Clay's snubbed egos, as well as to deliver maximum amusement and profit for their imagoes, with minimum exertion and (usually) personal risk. Many end up biting off more than they can chew; scandalous incidents such as that which struck the isolated Dementlieuse community of C_____, a dozen years back, ably demonstrate just how ambitious - and aggressive - a headstrong, exiled imposter can become, once tempted by the prestige and power it might well have been denied, in it's homeland.

Of special interest to hunters as a "wild card" that may complicate pursuit - especially if you think you've compiled a complete dossier of your quarry's tells, aptitudes and disguises - is doppelgangers' occasional practice of sharing an identity among two or more individuals. Few things

Hunting Grounds

Most doppelgangers encountered in the Core and in other realms outside Zherisia are either low-ranking runaways who departed voluntarily, fed up with the rotten niches they'd been given, or high-ranking aristocrats fleeing Sodo's retribution after some real or imagined offense against the Grandmaster. Either way, they tend to aim high in their selection of victims - the wealthier and more influential, the better - either to seize a taste of the "good life" they had previously been denied, or reclaim the decadent lifestyle to which they'd grown accustomed.

This preference has given the imposters a widespread reputation as being exclusively a menace to the well-to-do ... a reputation that does not bear out in their home city, where the clans' numbers are too great to confine their depredations solely to the upper crust. While King's Quarters and nearby neighborhoods are virtually infested with doppelgangers, all but the slums of Blackchapel and the ethnic ghettos of Southshore have been divvied up among various clans, and even those neighborhoods no clan has deigned to claim are occasionally preyed on by doppelganger outcasts, misfits, fugitives, or wretched survivors of functionally-extinct clans.

can disrupt one's effort to penetrate a deceiver's façade, by discerning the true personality hidden underneath, more thoroughly than a sudden shift in that hard-sought personality. This is especially true when doppelgangers - whose "real" personalities are multifaceted to begin with - see fit to trade off a given role to another of their kind ... one which comes equipped with entirely different tells, preferences and talents! Were doppelgangers not so very possessive in regards to their imagoes, as well as any favorable niches to which they are assigned, this practice might well render these creatures' identification by mundane surveillance an exercise in futility.

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Instead, doppelgangers confine the sharing of roles to instances when such cooperative role-play serves either of two key purposes: to round out their (apparent) numbers for the large-scale subversive schemes they undertake, and to make skills mastered by very few of their kind available to niches that occasionally demand them. As yet, the prospective benefits of switching roles purely to confuse their pursuers don't seem sufficient to override these creatures' territorial jealousy of highly-desirable niches, let alone their imagoes. (Admittedly, such reluctance to share may speak more of how little they fear we "inferior" humans' attempts to root them out of hiding, than of any legitimate devotion to their allotted niches!)

Doppelgangers each claim a multitude of identities, but their actual numbers tend to be small, relative to the size of those communities they infiltrate. The higher the

ratio of humans to imposters in a subverted community, the more labor they can foist off on we "cattle". Restricting their own numbers also widens the pool of stolen fortunes - and lives - available to each, and eases their task of remaining hidden in plain sight. Keeping their ranks thin is thus beneficial in most respects ... but it can also be an obstacle to the systematic takeover of human organizations - government bureaus, businesses, prolific noble families with their servants - whose personnel greatly exceed their own numbers. Most often, the imposters simply leave the rank-and-file of such institutions in place, none the wiser for their superiors' replacement; however, if a human subordinate grows suspicious, simply eliminating the security-risk without explanation is not the most prudent of options, as it draws unwanted attention to the subverted faction and may damage other human workers' morale.

Role-Sharing

Most doppelgangers will not object to sharing a niche (even a desirable one) with another of its kind, so long as the assigned occupant's priority claim on the role is acknowledged and respected by the temporary stand-in. Should the stand-in develop an attachment to a borrowed role, or fail to express gratitude for the "generous loan" of the niche - even one which the assigned occupant could not fill at all, without the stand-in's help - an enmity between the two imposters frequently results, particularly if the stand-in's rank in doppelganger society is lower than that of the niche's official inhabitant. Roles shared to round out an infiltration's numbers are not regarded with such possessiveness by their various play-actors, and never give rise to such territorial strife.

Imagoes are never lightly shared by their owners. Should a doppelganger mimic the imago of another of its kind, except when it is acts on the owner's explicit instructions (e.g. to act as decoy while the owner escapes), lifelong hostilities and feuds may well result from such "trespassing". Indeed, a doppelganger that repeatedly mimics another's imago-identity without permission may be brought up on charges before the Clan Leader, or (if of different clans) before Sodo himself.

A doppelganger which is found guilty of an offense against its fellows that does not warrant death or confiscation of its imago is often forced to assume its natural form - a disgrace in itself - while all other doppelgangers present adopt the guise and the mannerisms of its imago. (This is roughly equivalent to a human male watching his girlfriend vigorously kissed by every other male in the courtroom!) This is the only social circumstance under which multiple doppelgangers will intentionally take on the shape of a given individual at the same time; all other identity-sharings are serial, not simultaneous.

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Under such circumstances, the subordinate will be killed in secret, and his or her role, assigned to two or more low-ranking clan members. The tag-team impersonators jointly maintain a pretense that the witness is still alive, until the security-risk's public "retirement" or "dismissal" can be arranged in a manner that preserves the wider conspiracy's cover. At no time will the ruse be maintained for longer than is strictly necessary, as it distracts the ones who share the role from their proper niches and duties. Sharing of identities as a temporary cover-up is fairly simple for these creatures to execute, as victims replaced in this manner are typically unskilled laborers, servants, common security-guards or the like: callings which, though onerous, are straightforward for a being of doppelganger-like guile to feign over the short term.

Where such erudite proficiencies as advanced education, fine craftsmanship, professional skills or the performing arts (save acting, easily simulated by their innate talents) are concerned, these sophisticated aptitudes lie beyond most imposters' expertise. In Zherisia, the conventional wisdom holds that doppelgangers will never adopt personas possessed of such skills for long; indeed, many natives of Paridon regard "professionals" as the only ones in their realm they can trust to be human! Yet the imposters' practice of sharing their roles makes me question whether their faith is justified. If even one doppelganger in a clan possesses training as (for instance) a doctor, it is theoretically possible for that lone individual to step into the role of several different physicians in sequence, at the request of unskilled clan-mates who normally fill these roles, and treat patients in its clan-mates' stead. As ever, "conventional wisdom" may well prove no more than a convention of naivety, that sells these creatures' deadly duplicity short.

My perusal of old Newsbill archives turned up one incident that suggests such handovers are not merely my own overcautious fantasy, Miladies. When renowned soprano Dame Agatha Collins perished in a carriage-accident in the summer of 746, no less than four other eminent or rising singers

subsequently vanished from the public stages, never to perform again: one fatally mugged in Blackchapel, another forcibly retired by a strained larynx, and the remaining baritone-alto duo scandalously running off to the Core ... even though the alleged "lovers" had never actually sung together. Might a single doppelganger, uniquely gifted in vocal performance, have been playing all five of these roles, divvying their personas up with others of its kind? If so, its unexpected demise clearly necessitated several hasty cover-ups!

Whatever the case, doppelgangers' opinion vis-à-vis such transient roles is that they are fleeting, superficial, and expendable, worthy of no greater emotional regard than a human might feel for a hand-me-down suit of clothing. Indeed, if its imago is equivalent to an actor's "role of a lifetime", then all these lesser personas - temporary masks, allotted niches, or identities shared with fellows - are mere "supporting roles", stock characters, and uncredited cameos, respectively. If there is any personal satisfaction to be had in playing such parts, it is in the smugness that these creatures feel at deceiving witnesses and in the calculated techniques of deception that their Clay musters for their emulation.

Life Swapping

When a particular role is swapped between one doppelganger and another, it may take some time for the two to work out that role's shared mannerisms. If one bases its performance on the human original, and the other on the first doppelganger, the imposter that has never met the original takes a -2 circumstance penalty on its Disguise check, in addition to being unable to exceed the first doppelganger's Disguise check result (see "Copies of Copies", page 44). If the shared role is a 'mask' rather than based upon a real person, each doppelganger takes a -2 Disguise check penalty to fool a witness who is used to the other's 'interpretation' of that particular façade.

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The role's in-character feelings of pride, affection or pleasure are irrelevant. The imposters merely fill such personas; they neither immerse nor invest themselves emotionally in them.

Gender:

Lost, Despised, Assumed

It can hardly be necessary, Miladies, for me to relate to you how very weighty of an impact one's sex has on one's status and life-opportunities, within our own human society. I well recollect the baseless skepticism and scorn with which your debut attempts to establish your own credentials as hunters of the night-legions were greeted. Know that I sympathize, and return your critics' scorn to them tenfold, for I have personally beheld ample proof of feminine strength and courage, on both sides of the struggle between light and darkness. Nor need such ingrained biases and preconceptions be, in all cases, advantageous to the male: there are those who have doubted my own capacity for such "manly virtues", merely because my stature is not so towering, nor my physiognomy so rugged, as burlier men's! However many staunch warrior-heroines or sprightly, soft-spoken statesmen history may accredit for their victories, stereotypes as to what is "gender-appropriate" are engraved so deeply into human cultures as to be nigh-ineradicable, persisting beneath the surface even in such ostensibly-matriarchal realms as Valachan or Nidala.

For all their objectionable implications, however, such expectations do serve at least one needed purpose, for they assure that every soul among us - pleased by it or not - at least has a "proper place" to fill within the broader cultural milieu. Distasteful as the notion of setting aside your musket and rapier might be, dear Laurie, you know that there are many Mordentish ladies of breeding who would welcome such a "return to your senses", and eagerly embrace your reversion to "ladylike" ways. Even though such would be an unconscionable waste of your talents - and even though all three of us know you'd go mad in a month, forced to

Pushing Boundaries

Most doppelgangers have no problem with catering to human gender-clichés, knowing they can emulate the other sex any time they wish to do things society considers "inappropriate" for their present false identity. A few imposters - those who'd resisted their socially-imposed gender roles as juveniles - do rebel against conforming to stereotypes they find still more ridiculous, now that they lack gender entirely; such defiant behavior constitutes an uncommon form of "tell".

play the role of just another vapid debutante - the fact remains that you have that option: to give in to society's pressures, and yield up your pride to become the over-delicate caricature you have striven all your life to divorce yourself from. It is not a position you desire in the least, nor one I daresay wild horses could drag you back to occupy, against your will ... but it *is* an alternative.

Nor are such expectations unique to humanity and its near kin. For all the horrid qualities and habits that alienate them from mankind, virtually none of the vile creatures described by Van Richten or yourselves - not undead, not lycanthropes, not hags, not even fiends or the majority of golems - are so divorced from mundane nature as to lack a gender, by which they may identify with (if in no other respect) one half or the other of the human race. Hags are 'out-breeders' even as are the imposters, yet they fixate on their feminine physiques as both avenue and excuse to turn their viciousness on male victims. Vampires are equally capable of feeding on men and women, yet it is nigh-unheard of for such monsters not to prey preferentially upon the gender to which their passions gravitated in life. Even the shadow fey, alien in outlook and bewilderingly diverse in physical appearance, still subdivide their number into the same two all-pervasive categories: male and female, each with its expected "proper place" to occupy.

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Equally Inferior

Doppelgangers find Wakening's loss of gender to be disorienting, but it is far less traumatic than such a shift would be for most humans. Prior to acquiring an imago, they reject the notion that gender has any importance, rejecting the chauvinism common to most human Zherisians; they see no point in raising a fuss over human gender-prejudice after-the-fact, however, as they consider their own state of "neither" to be vastly superior to either "male" or "female".

For Sodo, Zherisian doppelgangers' ruling Grandmaster, its out-of-control shapechanging powers have left it so much adrift - unable to maintain an imago, occupy a niche, or even wear the same mask longer than a few minutes - that "it" has reverted to "he", psychologically. Gender is the one facet of an identity that Sodo can latch onto from day to day, left over from the darklord's child-face as Solomon Downing. Other doppelgangers consider Sodo's insistence on being referred to as "he" eccentric and rather childish, but have learned by painful experience that it is far safer to humor the Zherisian darklord in this matter.

For doppelgangers, there is no such "proper place". A doppelganger's child-face is either male or female, and familiar with what is expected of its apparent sex by virtue of its upbringing by humans, yet from the moment of its Wakening, such grounding in a single gender becomes both inapplicable and meaningless. At the very age when its human peers are experiencing the tribulations and rewards of adolescence, and begin to grasp the meaning of man- or womanhood, a doppelganger is abruptly cut off from that journey, even as from humanity itself. A male-born imposter finds itself physically and emotionally emasculated, just as its human peers commence to brag of deepening voices or a maturing attraction to

young ladies; a female-born doppelganger discovers that "she" is now ugly beyond belief, and her girlish daydreams of handsome princes or adoring children will never be achieved by any means save treachery. This bitter disillusionment is part and parcel of the more general loss of identity which accompanies its Wakening, as the juvenile doppelganger realizes that it can never again think of itself as a valid part of the human race. It is a final, scathing stroke to its crushed self-esteem, that denies it even the refuge of naming itself as "he" or "she" any longer, but only "it": a designation befitting animals, inanimate objects and monsters - monsters like itself - rather than people.

How do young doppelgangers cope with this telling blow - loss of their presumed gender - on top of all else which their Wakening strips away? As with natal identity overall, I surmise that they retaliate by branding their asexuality a boon, rather than a deficiency. As the Clay-self emerges, resentful and contemptuous of all things "human", it includes human gender on the list of "inferior" or "base" traits it takes such indignant pride in having "outgrown". In their first few years of adult life, doppelgangers refer to themselves as "it" in the defiant tones of conceit, denigrating gender as an animalistic atavism of "primitive" human anatomy. Some even desist in speaking of humans as "he" or "she": a gaffe, which the most inexperienced and hot-tempered of their number will occasionally even commit in the presence of human witnesses. (Hunters, take note!) If they cannot be spared even this final fragment of their lost identity, it would seem, they certainly will not bestow that designation upon anyone else. Again, sour grapes.

Doppelgangers at this stage of their maturation tend to avoid impersonations in which amorous association with the (apparent) opposite sex seems likely, for they evidently despise the workings of gender as thoroughly as the concept. It is, I suspect, exceedingly rare for a recently-Wakened imposter to breed: in one fragmentary document recovered from the

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burned-out ruins of the Bloodsworth estate, a veiled reference to a clan neophyte's being assigned procreative duties as a punishment was cited. (Even by prim Zherisian standards, that degree of aversion is plainly extreme!) How much of this distaste is bitterness, and how much, the psyche-warping insecurity of adolescents who failed to mature in synchrony with peers, I hesitate to speculate. Should one of the imposters exhibit such prudishness, chances are good that it is comparatively young, and hence both less formidable than its elders, and of low rank in its clan's social order.

Only the doppelganger's appropriation of an imago - and with it, a renewal of gender's applicability to itself - breaks the creature out of this spiteful abstinence. Doppelgangers in their imago-roles swiftly acclimate to that identity's gender, any time they adopt the semblance of the favorite. Imposters who have claimed an imago lack the chaste habits of their newly-Wakened counterparts ... although, as previously discussed, intimacy grants far more pleasure to their egos, as they savor their partner's attentiveness, aesthetics, and admiring thoughts, than to their bodies. A doppelganger that has matured to this stage can and will exploit human wantonness as a tool and weapon: it still regards gender as an atavistic flaw, but one that it is entitled to take strategic advantage of, not merely shy away from in distaste. Punishment-duties aside, it is these gender-reconciled individuals who perpetuate their kind, siring young upon the unsuspecting.

Be aware, Miladies, that even after it regains a propensity to think of itself as either male or female, a doppelganger's gender is still a role which it acts out (albeit with great sincerity, as if seeking to convince itself), not truth. Its self-esteem is not derived from either cultural standards or self-imposed notions of "masculinity" or "ladylike conduct". An imposter whose imago is that of a hulking, hairy-chested boor will unhesitatingly adopt the semblance of a simpering lass when necessity dictates, and one whose imago is a refined, genteel matron is just as prepared to shift its shape to a coarse caliban laborer's if convenient.

However deeply a doppelganger may immerse itself in its imago, the vexing awareness that it is not truly part of human society or bound by our conventions is a constant - and self-exonerating - reminder that its stolen identity and all things that define it is a lie, to be cast aside if the sexless, ruthless Clay demands it.

Secrets:

Shield, Game, Burden

Greatly as doppelgangers' tri-part personalities may differ in their view regarding gender, moral and/or ethical standards, and humanity itself, one trait that all three - in all doppelgangers - invariably share is an all-pervasive fascination with, and compulsive craving for, secrets. To the imposters, no achievement is more gratifying than to acquire inside knowledge of other beings' activities, feelings, and plans, and nothing is more critical to their sense of security than keeping such knowledge - of the humans around them, of their clan-mates and rivals, and especially of themselves - a secret from others.

In childhood, doppelgangers are nosy, inquisitive beings, insatiably curious about others' private affairs; misinterpreted as friendly interest by birth-surrogates and neighbors, their constant probing inquiries quickly grow tiresome to siblings and other family members. While pestering their elders with questions is hardly unique to young imposters, the intense satisfaction they take in hoarding those secrets - never tattling or letting the truth slip, as human children are wont to, yet brimming with wry smugness to possess such knowledge - evidently provides them a potent emotional charge. Indeed, I would strongly suspect that ubiquitous childhood taunt, "*Nyah, nyah, I know something you don't know!*", of being the product of a young doppelganger's wit... would suspect it, were it not that such a creature would not openly admit to holding such knowledge! And this attitude of cherishing every secret it ferrets out, like some glorious prize that it has won, persists throughout its life - both as faux-human

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child and after - as one of the few proclivities shared in common by all its myriad identities and poses.

From the moment a nascent doppelganger begins to suspect its abnormality, the keeping of secrets is its sole defense against others' suspicion, abhorrence and enmity. These creatures can hardly be ignorant of the terror and hostility which their very existence arouses, in the wary human mind; indeed, their capacity to discern thoughts gives them a singular appreciation for the enmity their deceptions incur, such that the prospect of a lynch-mob's vengeful onslaught can never be far from their own thoughts. To be exposed for what it is, even to those who once knew it as family, is a far more deadly threat to an imposter than to, say, a lycanthrope. Not only is hope of a 'cure' denied to it, but its former friends and loved ones are more likely to believe the youth or lass they knew has been replaced by a monster, not grown up to become one! (Spare a moment to appreciate its quandary, Miladies: what could a newly-Wakened doppelganger - of a species known to read minds - ever possibly say, to prove to others it is still the same individual?)

At first for self-preservation, and later to mask its own or its elders' efforts to manipulate and exploit us, keeping its secrets from humankind is a doppelganger's first practical application for the natural reticent streak which had previously delivered amusement. Now, in recognizing the true, life-and-death stakes of the deceptive game its life has become, secretiveness becomes as paramount to its sense of safety as are a breastplate to a soldier or spellbook-wards to a wizard. To have any of its secrets found out - even a wholly trivial one - incites feelings of vulnerability and anxiety in a doppelganger: a reminder of just how fragile its existence is, and forever will be, depending as it does on lies, and lies alone, to shield it from human retribution. The greater the number of its own secrets which are uncovered, the stronger is its instinctive urge to flee, either by forsaking its current identity for one free of suspicion, or by leaving the vicinity altogether.

Knowing When to Run

An imposter that is seriously threatened with exposure will generally forfeit a non-imago identity, rather than wait to be confronted directly. So long as the belief there is a doppelganger about is confined to a credulous minority, most would far rather keep the human population at large from catching on - and hence, lynching any suspected 'doppelganger' they come across - than cling to an identity in which they have no real emotional investment.

Should its imago's secrecy be at risk, a doppelganger goes to much greater lengths to shield this favorite role from suspicion, up to and including stealing another (temporary) identity in which to stage its own exposure and "flight" from the region. Even betraying fellow doppelgangers to the hunters is not beyond them, if driven to choose between imago and clan-mates, although shifting blame to some other local shapechanger, such as a werewere, is an even better option.

Any doppelganger that seeks to maintain a persona for the long term, and particularly an imago, will guard its secrets assiduously, constructing and maintaining its façade with a keen eye for detail, and surveying humans' thoughts with care, lest it make an error and need to ensure its gaffe is duly rationalized away. Some even go so far as to concoct purely fictitious scandals for their human alter-egos to be implicated in, so these bogus "skeletons in the closet" can decoy the inquisitive from their true nature and agenda! (This is a classic charlatan's ploy, Miladies, and one which humans versed in duplicity know well: never attempt to convince someone that you are innocent, but rather, that you are guilty of something more forgivable.)

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Of course, aggressive personalities such as a doppelganger's seldom settle for a defensive posture, alone. If having its secrets exposed rouses such anxiety on its own part, then uncovering others' dirty laundry seems, to it, to be the ideal means of placing others at its mercy! Its mind-reading power gives it so decisive an advantage in its fact-finding endeavors, an imposter rarely has to exert its talents to their utmost: simply engaging in (leading) social banter or taking part in (unsavory) entertainments alongside human associates is sufficient to fill its mind with a treasure-trove of sordid intimations. Ferreting out revelations becomes a contest - indeed, a sport - to the creature, much as for rumormongers or Zherisian newspaper reporters. Learning what someone has to hide provides a thrill of satisfaction, reinforcing its Clay's conceit of inborn superiority.

Most of these creatures routinely probe the thoughts of any human whom they associate with regularly, and many will probe the minds of their doppelganger fellows as well ... preferably without the other realizing that its thoughts are under surveillance. (Their drive to keep secrets is not confined to hiding said secrets from humans.) In the event that it encounters a mind it cannot read, a chary doppelganger might fall back, leery of challenging such a stalwart will ... or it may tirelessly pursue the probe-resistant individual, its curiosity and its pride in its investigative skills spurred on by the challenge! No imposter of which I have heard tell seems entirely exempt from this temptation to snoop, for all that it might be wiser for them to maintain a prudent distance

Probing for Information

Successful use of the probing mode of a doppelganger's detect thoughts power grants it a +4 circumstance bonus to its Gather Information checks. Furthermore, the imposters' Change Shape ability allows them to utilize this skill practically anywhere, without fear of being snubbed as too poor, too posh, too foreign, too human, etc.

at times: the pressing urge to *know* is simply too relentless, too engrossing, too stimulating for these creatures to ignore.

(This is not, I confess, a yearning experienced exclusively by doppelgangers. But not all such compulsively-inquisitive habits needs must serve a malignant end: I must believe this.)

It is in this regard that a doppelganger's proclivity for unearthing others' secrets can be exploited as a weakness, rather than handing it the advantage over us. An imposter's compulsion to pursue hidden knowledge can, in fact, be used as bait for a trap, much as a lich might be drawn out of hiding to seek an unusual spell or enchanted item. I previously mentioned how I distracted such a shapechanger's psychic attention with the tempting lure of my warded thoughts: a lure I'd sweetened by hinting I knew the full story behind a certain financial scandal which had recently come to light within the community. The fact it was bored by its surveillance-duty at the time, of course, was also helpful; accustomed to living on the razor's edge of discovery, doppelgangers swiftly grow fed up by a prolonged dearth of stirring revelations or excitement. The longer that it has lived in placid security, its persona's accuracy untested and its existence blandly-uneventful and drab, the more readily most doppelgangers will succumb to curiosity and impatience.

I should caution Miladies that not just any little-known information will suffice to attract one of these creatures; though clever at improvisation and sly in their machinations, their affinity for applied study is all but nonexistent. Unless an imposter is exceptionally well-disciplined for its breed, or has a wider agenda to pursue which requires it to exert its intellect, most are content to leave "book learning" to human lackeys and quislings.

Rather, it is knowledge of people - their desires, their fears, their histories, their cultural dynamics - which most intrigue and fascinate these most sociable of monstrous creatures. Even a doppelganger with a well-established, prestigious imago will step out

On the Doppelganger Mind

Keeping an Ear to the Ground

Unless a doppelganger has too much vital business to attend to, or is otherwise prevented from doing so, it will take time out to make a Gather Information check every day or two. Most find it convenient to do this late at night, when their current false identity is allegedly sleeping.

The nature of the information sought varies with the creature's needs and circumstances, but DMs may safely assume that if a party of PC heroes has been attracting popular interest for two days or more, any doppelganger in the community will have made at least one Gather Information check, to determine who they are. Likewise, if there are other predators or villains operating in the same community, it is likely that the imposter already knows of their presence, or at least harbors its own suspicions about them. Knowing of competitors' locations and natures lets it avoid falling prey to them when posing as a human, and provides convenient scapegoats toward which it can detour its own pursuers, in the event local fear of monsters grows dangerously intense.

of its pampered role to troll taverns and salons, liaise with rumormongers and snitches, and otherwise keep up to date on all manner of news, gossip and scandal. In part, this voyeuristic attentiveness to the course of human events serves a practical purpose, alerting it to opportunities for profit or amusement, as well as potential threats to its subterfuge. Beyond this, however, it also provides the doppelganger with a sense of personal accomplishment - a reward these slothful beings seem loath to obtain via actual work - in knowing it is well caught up on events in the community it parasitizes.

The most ambitious and ardent doppelgangers take the "game" of prying out secrets to a higher level, actively soliciting the company of the most informed and

influential people whose confidences they can worm their way into. This is a daring move, and one which only the most experienced and savvy imposters ever choose to risk. Many years of practice at its deceptive craft are necessary, before a doppelganger will grow so bold ... to say nothing of a fair amount of boredom, as routine deceptions become too easy to provide the stimulation their cunning craves.

Once a creature so adept has set its sights this high, it uses its formidable combination of cunning, persuasiveness, knowledge (gleaned from other minds), fast-talk, and simulated beauty to win access to those it chooses to milk for information. Note that, as its purpose is to cultivate a source of further revelations - and, perhaps, to savor the thrill of fooling the well-informed - a doppelganger will not actually replace its target in such cases, though much the same tactics are utilized to reconnoiter an intended contact as intended victims. The more prestigious a potential contact, and the more confident in his or her ability to avoid being taken advantage of, the greater the imposter's amusement in duping its new informant.

If the doppelganger you seek should be that skillful, Miladies, it is entirely likely that it will seek you sisters out itself ... not to murder or sabotage, but to observe your activities beneath a veneer of helpfulness, and hence, relish the thrill of its own close proximity to the very hunters - and world-famous hunters, no less - who pursue it!

On the Doppelganger Mind

Dread Possibility: Date With A Darklord

Not many beings can equal doppelgangers in their appetite for rooting out secrets, manipulating others' perceptions, or exploiting hidden weaknesses. One of the few places in the Land of Mists where such a creature is sure to find a worthy challenger in its duels of wit is Richemulot: a realm awash in secrets and veiled menaces of its own. An increasing number of imposters exiled or emigrated from Zherisia have made homes for themselves in the wererats' domain, playing out coy games of cunning with the local Skin Twisters. More than one imposter has taken advantage of these lycanthropes' temperamental natures to extract valuable information, and more than one wererat has discovered a taste for doppelganger flesh.

What not even the wererats' own leader, Jacqueline Renier, suspects is that she herself is one of them. Nearly three decades ago, the darklord of Richemulot developed a powerful attraction to a dashing young aristocrat, one Henri DuBois, recently arrived in Pont-a-Museau from his family's country estate. Though remembered as a straightforward, honest and upright youth by his kin (as per *Legacy of the Blood*), in Pont-a-Museau a far different side to his character emerged: cunning, unscrupulous, and ambitious enough to become the wererat queen's favored lover (as per *Scholar of Decay*). To Jacqueline, Henri was a revelation - a human every bit as enthusiastic and shrewd an intriguer as herself - and it was not solely the Dark Powers' will, but also her fascination with this man who acted more like a fellow predator than prey, that led the mistress of Richemulot to fall in love and hence, destroy the playful rapport they'd shared, by her darklord's curse.

In truth, Jacqueline Renier has never met Henri DuBois. The forthright young man remembered by the DuBois family - a naïve stick-in-the-mud the darklord could never have taken the slightest interest in except as food - was murdered en route to Pont-a-Museau, more than a year before she met his killer. The familial resistance to lycanthropy on which she'd blamed her failure to infect him was just a coincidence: in truth, the wry, beautiful scoundrel with whom she grew infatuated was no man at all, but an intrigue-addicted doppelganger known as Mardu the Bronze.

Born in Zherisia to an aristocratic clan, Mardu found the staid social environment of its homeland stifling, and left Paridon in its teens to seek mental stimulation. Delighted by Richemulot's more relaxed standards of propriety, and using its mind-reading power to stay a step ahead of the rats, it charmed and connived its way into Pont-a-Museau high society ... and all the way to Jacqueline Renier's bed. Unable to read her thoughts - or be driven mad by them - owing to the ring of mind shielding she'd taken from her grandfather Claude's corpse, Mardu nevertheless found the one the wererats call "Herself" to be a treasure: a window into the heart of Richemulouise drama and scandal; a fellow 'born monster', gloriously liberated from human trappings of conscience; and an engaging intellectual puzzle as well, thanks to the ring's thought-warding effects.

Had Jacqueline's attraction not grown into love, Mardu would gladly have lived out its life at her side; indeed, its more-devilish reinvention of the once-callow 'Henri DuBois' identity fit the wily doppelganger gigolo like a glove. But when the darklord's own curse forced her to transform before its very eyes, Mardu realized its game was up: emulate humanity though it might, it was a monstrous humanoid, and knew it could not possibly contract lycanthropy. Its attempt to warn her off, to buy time to explain, only enraged Jacqueline; too infuriated to notice the curious tang to the flesh her rodent teeth sank into, she nearly killed her lover in a futile attempt to confer the dread disease upon "Henri". Realizing she'd tear it to bits in her outrage, if she realized she'd been lied to from the start, Mardu pretended to "fight off" the malign infection until Jacqueline stormed off in a fury, then made Henri DuBois vanish from the face of the Land as completely and inexplicably as only a doppelganger could.

On the Doppelganger Mind

In the decades since its escape, Mardu (CE dread doppelganger rogue 8) has tried to forget about its close call; it is well aware how lucky it was, the first time around, to get away from Jacqueline with its life. However, its caution had come too late: caught up in its game, it had already fixated on Henri DuBois as an imago, and no identity it has worn since has proven as satisfying. Pining for its former persona, Mardu has repeatedly tried to settle elsewhere in the DuBois identity, yet Jacqueline's agents always seem to root "Henri" out in a matter of months, forcing the creature to forfeit its imago yet again and flee the Grande Dame's efforts to have her lover dragged back to Richemulot in chains. The only lands beyond her spies' reach are all too primitive for Mardu's sophisticated tastes, save its home city of Paridon where it is decidedly unwelcome.

Though it certainly does not, and likely cannot, love Jacqueline, the fugitive imposter has come to see her obsessive pursuit as flattering in a way. Now, fed up with being forced out of the loop of high society and feeling the weight of five decades on its bones, Mardu is preparing to gamble its remaining years on the most audacious performance of its duplicitous career: the reunion of Jacqueline Renier and an older, more dissipated Henri DuBois, now willing to embrace the dread disease in hopes it might rekindle the passions of his youth. As a "Bronze" - an adherent of the Paths of Tin and Copper - Mardu has recently added the Hybrid salient ability to its repertoire, building upon its other powers of Almost Human, Animal Form, Empathy, Labile, Seductive and Chained Charm. It has studied both dire rats and wererats in exhaustive detail, and meticulously rehearsed its feigned "lycanthropic" transformations. Should its subterfuge succeed, Mardu will be back in Richemulot's elite inner circle for as long as it can stomach the company of the rat queen's hybrid form. Even if it fails, it will have lived and died as "Henri DuBois" in the end ... and it will have had one last, cruel laugh on its lover-cum-stalker, when its rodent-ravaged body reverts to its natural form in death and Jacqueline realizes how completely she's been had.

The irony is that, beneath all their respective lies, ulterior motives, and twisted secrets, Jacqueline and Mardu really are kindred spirits: conniving, narcissistic, spitefully vindictive, famished for adulation and attention, and profoundly vain. Hence, the pair are both absolutely perfect for one another, and absolutely incapable of seeing beyond their own egos to admit it.

On the Doppelganger Mind

Without an Anchor

A doppelganger that has never claimed an imago can safely use its detect thoughts probing mode for a total of 5 rounds per Hit Die without limitations. Further activation of this mode requires a Will save, with a base DC of 14. Each hour it foregoes using its probing mode reduces the DC by 2, while each time it activates this mode by a successful Will save increases the DC by 2. When the save DC reaches zero, it can once again use probing mode freely for 5 X HD rounds.

An imposter that outlives its imago will have similar troubles, but the base DC of its Will save is only 10. A doppelganger which currently has an imago to help anchor its personality may utilize its probing mode without restriction, regardless of what form it actually wears at the moment.

To their own sorrow and we hunters' good fortune, not all doppelgangers attain the level of skill - or comfort - with their powers that is exhibited by such ambitious high-rollers. In their early post-Wakening years, the compulsion to unearth precious secrets and probe others' thoughts can actually become self-destructive in the sheer magnitude of information it reveals. Particularly for those not yet possessing an imago, to securely anchor their self-image, the perusal of others' thoughts can breed confusion in a doppelganger: are the voices that echo in its head the creature's own thoughts, or those of someone else? This cognitive ambiguity can grow so stressful that the imposter must forego the use of its probing mode for hours at a time, mentally exhausted by the constant yammering of thoughts not its own.

As they adjust to their new lives, many younger doppelgangers hit upon similar coping mechanisms to deal with the flood of information they yearn for, yet find so hard to assimilate, once accessed. By far the most

common defense is hypergraphia - compulsive writing - as a way to expel the excess thoughts from their minds onto a tangible medium. In some, it is the thoughts of others - wild, disjointed, stream-of-consciousness rambling, rather than orderly linear accounts - that they transcribe haphazardly upon any or all surfaces near to hand. One of the most reliable signs I know of, that a novice doppelganger has been a resident at an inn or boarding-house, is the graffiti scribbled on or around the bedstead, as the inexperienced creature strives to simulate sleep for the sake of its pretense, yet cannot wholly resist the urge to divest itself of the day's overload of stolen thoughts, repeatedly interrupting its feigned doze to scrawl fragmentary musings on the nearest surface available.

In other, better-organized individuals, keeping a diary or journal can provide an outlet by which such a creature may disentangle its own thoughts - its internal perspective on its life, its victims, and/or its fellow-imposters, that it dares not speak aloud - from the teeming impressions it gleans from other minds. Such commentaries are little more than narcissistic exercises in self-pity, self-justification, and petty vindictiveness, as the imposter whines about its predicament and flatters its own fragile ego. They make for dreadful reading, alas, yet the rewards of hunters' persistence can be great, as perusing these documents may offer vital insights into the imposter's goals and activities. If one comes upon any such chronicle here in the Core - most especially, if it is written in Zherisian - it is tantamount to an open confession on the writer's part.

Other doppelgangers find sketching, painting, sculpture or other visual media to be more helpful than written script, as a means to shed the burden of alien thoughts and the confusion they can breed. Such works are usually inexpert, and even those with pleasant motifs invariably seem a bit "off", by the standards of human aesthetics; some are downright unnerving, though evidently not by any deliberate intention on their makers' part.

On the Doppelganger Mind

Killing Time

A doppelganger without an imago can reduce its "down time" between uses of probing mode by transcribing the foreign thoughts which crowd its mind, or by laying its own thoughts out where it can peruse them in writing, sketches, paintings, etc. After it has exhausted its 5 rounds/HD of probing mode, it can reduce the Will save DC to reactivate this mode by 2, for every minute (one page of text or equivalent) of compulsive self-expression it engages in.

An individual doppelganger's coping mechanism - for instance, a Southshore-born imposter's habit of folding its scribbles into origami, as taught by its Rokuman-immigrant surrogate parents - may also constitute a tell.

Naturally, prudence dictates that doppelgangers should destroy such incriminating text or artwork, as soon as they have derived a psychological benefit from its production. Many cannot bring themselves to burn such cathartic writings immediately, however, meaning they may leave such useful clues behind - either to their plans, or to the minds they have lately been probing - if forced to flee in haste. (Thank providence this is so, Miladies ... else, a sizable fraction of this parcel's contents would either be absent, or lacking corroboration!)

Even as mature individuals, secure in their divided identities as imago and Clay, many imposters continue to transcribe their thoughts and feelings as a force of habit, or a means of self-critiquing their performances: further proof that such self-analytical writing can be difficult to set aside. Indeed, doppelgangers suffering from mental stress later in life will often fall back upon their old coping-mechanisms, transcribing their fears and uncertainties in an effort to contain their distress and resolve their confusion. If either of you sisters has read the period novel "The Fall of Lady Owen", translated from the Zherisian not long after our mutual correspondence began, I suspect you will entertain the same suspicions as myself as to the book's true provenance.

Lastly, I must admit that it is possible that a truly world-wise imposter might plant such scrawlings as a deliberate ruse, to cast suspicion on some other individual. However, such would be an extremely rare event. And in all candor, dear ladies, a doppelganger which is that forward-thinking and competent at its tradecraft is more than likely beyond either your power or mine to run to ground, whether we credence its false writings or not.

Insanity and Doppelgangers

As demonstrated by their writing-compulsion, it seems that doppelgangers spend much of their time dancing on the edge of what, in humans, would be madness. Of course, this perforce assumes there is a clear line of demarcation between "crazy" and "sane": a boundary which can be unclear for most sentient beings. For the imposters - plural in their identities and drowning in others' appropriated thoughts - it becomes positively blurred. The plasticity of doppelgangers' minds makes them resistant to certain types of madness, yet more susceptible to others. Worse, their human guises' psyches can be as varied in mental stability as in appearance, adding another layer of complexity to their corkscrew-twisted psychology! Self-indulgent by nature, they seldom deign to hold back those extremes of behavior to which their erratic minds are prone, so long as secrecy is not imperiled. Indeed, a large portion of the imposters' own culture is cobbled together from the collective quirks of individual doppelgangers, and the compensations they make for one another's eccentricities.

Therefore, Miladies, when one speaks of doppelganger "insanity", one speaks of a dearth of mental coherence relative to other doppelgangers, not to humankind. By any human alienist's standards, the most rational doppelganger's psyche is a hopeless tangle of contradictory motives, repressed insecurities, vacuous self-exoneration and egotism, and festering, malignant venom.



During its Wakening, the foundations of a doppelganger's future mental resilience are laid in the inhuman facet of the creature's unsleeping mind: the survival-oriented part that, as its true nature asserts itself, gives rise to its Clay. By emerging gradually while its juvenile "self" drowns, and inoculating that faux-human aspect of its nature against despair with a conceit that it is superior to humanity, this proto-mind stretches the overall psyche to accommodate the traumas to follow, while heading off its collapse into madness. For many newly-Wakened doppelgangers, the strain proves too great, but those who survive this torturously-slow "stretching" of what their wits can bear to endure emerge with a greater mental elasticity - an ability to compartmentalize their myriad personas' disparate urges and preferences, without internal conflict - that forms the backbone of their defense against assaults upon their sanity ... not to mention the stresses and insecurities inherent to such a precarious, parasitic, and alienated existence.

Madness

On the whole, doppelgangers are subject to the same categories of mental trauma - Fear, Horror, or Madness - listed in the RLPHB, but they suffer the effects differently in the case of Madness. A doppelganger that succumbs to a mild Madness effect does not suffer penalties to its ability scores, although the DM should still roll to determine the duration of its affliction. Likewise, moderate or major Madness effects last for their usual duration, but ability damage is rolled as if the effect were mild or moderate, respectively. Compared to the drastic personality-shifts their own nature imposes, external strains on their minds inflict lesser mental scars on imposter.

Barring magical cures, doppelgangers succumbing to lingering Madness have little option but to recover on their own. Hypnosis is ineffective on them, and even the best psychiatric care human doctors can offer does no good to their bizarre psyches. Zherisian doppelgangers whose Madness poses a security-risk to their clans are exiled or killed by their fellows, not treated.

On the Doppelganger Mind

Orphans

A doppelganger that survives Wakening without contact from its kind can never totally discard its child-face. Such "orphans" usually retain their ingrained gender roles and are bent upon rebelling against the habits and/or values of their surrogate family. These self-loathing outcasts seldom acquire proper imagoes, but merely flit discontentedly from mask to mask, petulantly seeking to inflict their misery upon others, rather than accumulate wealth and power for themselves. Many harbor a near-psychotic hatred for other doppelgangers, blaming their sires for deserting them.

Nevertheless, mental resilience is not the same as sanity. To borrow a concept from Dr. Wilhelm Kohl's works on developmental psychology, the trauma of Wakening can be likened to being threaded forcibly through a keyhole: a horrifying experience, even if one can be guaranteed a safe trip. Contact with mature doppelgangers provides a social and psychological lifeline - a slim thread of reassurance that the juvenile is neither alone, nor unique, in its present distress - which a novice imposter desperately needs, if it is to retain even a tenuous grip upon reason. If adult contact and mentoring fails to take place before its Wakening has run its course, I suspect a young doppelganger's mental development is likely to be stunted - perhaps irreversibly ... and possibly to the detriment of the other doppelgangers who "abandoned" it, as well as to human innocents - should it survive the process at all.

As for adult doppelgangers' mindset, it is sufficiently alien to our own (in ways I have described above) that, while they are far from immune to trauma, what horrifies their kind can differ markedly from what we, ourselves, might deem distressing. Brutal violence and grisliness sufficient to disgust the most jaded of humans, for example, only moves an imposter to sneer at their brutality's artlessness. It thus bears considering which circumstances doppelgangers would consider uniquely calamitous or alarming, that humans do not.

In addition to causing the effects listed, any of the following circumstances which invoke Horror or Madness saves will also prevent the doppelganger from healing points to mental ability scores for as long as the stimulus persists.

Exposure of one of its secrets: As previously mentioned, a doppelganger's sense of security is shaken any time one of its personal secrets is uncovered, be it by lone individuals or whole communities. Such secrets need not be those it keeps as a monster masquerading as a human; revelation of a secret kept by its imago can also be traumatic, albeit usually less so. Even the false insinuation that one knows such a creature's secrets is sometimes enough to coerce a doppelganger's compliance, provided one's performance is convincing.

A doppelganger which realizes one of its secrets has been exposed must make a Fear save. The DC is 10 if the secret is a mundane one kept by its imago (e.g. if its favored identity is caught in the act of embezzlement), or 15 if the secret imperils its imposture (e.g. if a non-doppelganger witness sees it change shape). If its secret is exposed to the community at large, as opposed to a single person or small group it might still be able to silence, an additional +5 modifier is applied to the DC of its Fear save. DMs may apply bonuses or penalties based on the magnitude of the secret, as well as relevant Fear save modifiers from the RLPHB p. 79 (e.g. a doppelganger with juicy blackmail information on the one who uncovers its secret would receive a bonus for having a resource 'useful against the threat').

The exposure of secrets which betray a non-imago identity's mundane offenses, or which the doppelganger deliberately planted as a ruse, never incurs a Fear save.

Threatening a doppelganger with real or successfully-implied (via Bluff) knowledge of its secrets provides a +3 bonus to Intimidate checks against it. The Intimidate-user need not be humanoid; a great deal of power-jockeying among the imposters takes the form of overt or implicit blackmail.

On the Doppelganger Mind

Loss of the ability to read minds:

Being deprived of this "ace in the hole" power seems to leave doppelgangers stricken with terror, as it both denies them the use of a primary sensory mode, and impairs their capacity to maintain a convincing façade.

Either lead-lined helmets or elixirs of chelated lead can deprive a doppelganger of its psychic sensitivity, and covert dispensing of the latter into a suspected imposter's drink may provoke a telltale response, as it takes effect.

Extended shapechanges: Retaining one form for a long time appears to make doppelgangers uncomfortable, to say the least. Holding a shape for more than about ten hours at a stretch causes them to exhibit many of the symptoms of human sleep deprivation, potentially culminating (after many hours) in an involuntary shift to their natural forms. If a doppelganger is rendered physically incapable of altering its shape, even briefly (as with the reveal true form spell), its distress grows more acute, and a permanent impairment of its shapechanging powers can become so traumatic as to shatter its mind. Tellingly, when the Philosophy of Humanity sect tried to "purify" captive doppelgangers by trapping them in a single

To a mature doppelganger, detect thoughts is as crucial a sense as is vision to a human or scent to a dog. Its loss is usually grounds for a Fear save, as if a human were suddenly struck blind. The doppelganger must be aware of its loss to suffer the Fear effect; in the absence of minds to read, an imposter may not realize its lack, just as a human won't notice going blind in pitch darkness.

If threatened by foes against which mind-reading is useless, such as vermin or the Obedient Dead, doppelgangers suffer a -2 circumstance penalty on Fear saves incited by the unreadable enemies' attacks. The penalty is -4 if the foes are aberrations, whose unearthly minds they don't dare read.

Lead-lined helmets and chelated lead elixirs are described in the Hunting chapter.

human guise, none of the subjects on which the ritual achieved this intended effect emerged with their sanity intact.

Simply keeping suspected doppelgangers under constant observation, of which one's suspects are aware, can potentially provoke anxiety or fear. Of course, most humans will also display outrage or nervousness if they are held captive, so this stratagem is in no sense a sure means of identification, unless the surveillance is kept up until the imposter can no longer suppress the urge to change its shape.

Entering a situation that compels it to hold the same shape continuously for more than five hours without respite may be grounds for a doppelganger to make a Fear save (DC 5 + expected # of hours). If the duration of its enforced stasis should increase (e.g. if it impersonates a policeman whose duty-shift is then extended), the doppelganger must make a new save, at a DC recalculated for the new expected duration. Provided it is confident of its chance for an occasional moment's privacy, an imposter need not make such Fear saves for prolonged impostures.

A doppelganger that loses its ability to change form must make a Horror save (DC 15) upon first realizing its impairment, or immediately (DC 22) if its power is negated so completely as to cause its instant reversion to natural form (e.g. by an antimagic field). If and when it learns the effect is permanent, it must make a Madness (total catastrophe) save immediately, and additional saves as exhaustion takes its toll, until its power is restored or it sinks into raving insanity.

The Reveal True Form spell is described in the Zherisia Survey. Note that that netbook's NPC Roja - a.k.a. the "Invisible Man" - is not subject to Madness or fatigue from its present condition, as it actually changes forms non-stop to blend in with its surroundings.

On the Doppelganger Mind

Successful deception by a humanoid:

A doppelganger's faith in its own inherent superiority is crucial to both its pride, and its self-justification for misdeeds that its latent child-face considered terrible crimes. A human who beats one of the imposters at its own game of impersonation, then reveals how the creature has been deceived, shatters this comforting delusion of grandeur, forcing it to acknowledge that it is no cleverer than those it has preyed upon. For a creature as egotistical as a doppelganger, this realization is painfully humiliating at best, and may evoke long-buried (human) guilt and shame from its childhood.

In my experience, Miladies, the most practical avenue by which to exploit this weakness is impersonation of a human servant: one whose subservience and/or ignorance is so abject and unquestioned that the "Master" no longer deigns to probe its lackey's mind on a regular basis. Far riskier - but potentially more effective, if successful - is the impersonation of another doppelganger's imago: a taunting role-reversal which is all but guaranteed to shock!

Destruction of a doppelganger's imago:

The imago-identity is so much a part of a mature doppelganger that the death of this "self" is literally the worst emotional blow it can suffer. To inflict such trauma, the imago must "die" in a manner that leaves human society without the slightest of doubts as to its imago's fate. A traitorous Zherisian doppelganger, sentenced to the twin deaths of its "selves" for its crimes, is evidently kept alive long enough to witness its imago - played by another imposter with a knack for feigning death - "perishing" in some ghastly public incident, then being proclaimed dead on the scene by a gulled or impersonated physician.

Note that, while it is possible for hunters to engineer the public "death" and denunciation of a doppelganger's false identity, this is not a very reliable tactic by which to flush such creatures out of a community. The tenacity of these creatures' attachment to their imagoes is not to be underestimated. Public exposure of a doppelganger's ruse may only cause it to stay in hiding until its accusers depart from town, after which it returns and claims to be the genuine article, escaped from imprisonment in the wake of its monstrous "kidnapper's" death!

Between their detect thoughts ability, Spot bonus to discern others' disguises, and Sense Motive ranks, doppelgangers are quite difficult to deceive for long. Paridon's high-ranking imposters are usually alert for the replacement of their human servants - more by rival doppelgangers than by upstart 'cattle' - but young or Core-dwelling doppelgangers are often blind to such ringers.

Difficult though it is, successfully tricking a doppelganger via mundane impersonation subjects it to a Horror save (malign paradigm shift) once it catches on. An impersonation that has continued unchallenged for over a week warrants a Madness save (gaslighting) instead. Overt use of magic to execute such a deceit grants the creature a +4 bonus to its saving throw, as it can then excuse its lapse by blaming the "unfair advantage" that magic had provided to its deceiver.

The very concept that anyone (even one of their own race) might mislead them by impersonating a doppelganger is both foreign and repugnant to virtually all their kind. To be played for a fool in this way is to be demoted to 'cattle' status, so is a grievous insult as well as potential grounds for a Horror or Madness save. Add +5 to the DC of either save (as above), should the realization that it has fallen for the impersonation of its own kind strike any doppelganger ... any, that is, save for Sodo, whose own calculated breach of this racial taboo contributed to his darklordship.

On the Doppelganger Mind

Types of Doppelganger Madness

The sudden, public death of a doppelganger's imago is always grounds for a Madness save (total catastrophe). Even bereft doppelgangers who succeed on this save may exhibit the symptoms of Horror effects - depression, obsession, etc - until they find a new guise sufficiently like the lost imago to provide some consolation in their grief.

As doppelgangers usually claim their imagoes while still chronologically quite young (13-15), it is common for these creatures to outlive the adult human identities they appropriate, by a decade or more. A doppelganger forced to "retire" its imago due to old age, or some other foreseeable cause (e.g. an imago charged with treason and slated to be executed), must still make a Madness save, but with a +1 bonus per day it has to mentally prepare for the loss of its favored "self" and, figuratively, lay its imago to rest in its mind.

Just as doppelgangers do not succumb to mental trauma for the same reasons we humans do, so their acute or chronic derangements need not express themselves in the same way. They are prone to unique maladies of the mind, in addition to more familiar breakdowns such as denial, amnesia or delusions. Ironically, the behaviors of insane doppelgangers are considerably better-documented than those of sane ones: after all, any rational doppelganger puts its comparatively-stable intellect to work, ensuring that such accounts of its activities do not exist! It is the crazed or deluded among the imposters which tend to invite the most attention from humans, by their heedless extremes of conduct, so it is by these eccentric representatives of their breed which we know the species best.

Compulsive: The doppelganger's horror manifests as a binding physical compulsion ... in effect, it acquires a new, stress-provoked "tell". The only way for the creature to cope with uncertainty or distress is to perform some personalized and distinctive ritual: burning paper, tracing wood-grain lines, dropping small articles and retrieving them, hand-washing, checking its reflection in a mirror, lining up objects, etc. The creature can delay its compulsion at the cost of living in terror, but for only so long.

Doppelgangers' Fear, Horror, and Madness Saves

Monsters in Ravenloft games are usually exempt from Fear, Horror and Madness by default, and a DM may choose to apply this to doppelgangers for simplicity's sake. The imposters' penchant for infiltrating human groups - including PC adventuring bands! - will sometimes make applying such saves necessary, however, if only to maintain players' belief that the doppelganger lurking among their characters is still the same PC as always, and susceptible to such hazards.

The following Horror and Madness effects are each unique to doppelgangers. Unless otherwise stated, they replace existing entries on the RLPHB Horror and Madness Effect tables, in the event a DM chooses to roll such effects for doppelgangers rather than assign appropriate results.

On the Doppelganger Mind

If the doppelganger experiences sudden uncertainty or emotional upset, it must succeed at a Will save (DC 15) or become shaken. A compulsive doppelganger that is shaken (by this or any other means) must perform its ritual to remove the shaken effect. For each full minute it engages in its ritual, the creature may re-roll the saving throw that incurred the shaken effect (Will DC 15, if the effect arose without a saving throw). It may keep repeating this ritual until it succeeds. If its ritual is interrupted and then resumed later, the doppelganger must succeed at two saving throws in order to remove the shaken effect.

This effect replaces Fascination as an outcome for doppelgangers' failed Horror saves.

Fragmentation: Often seen in doppelgangers which search in vain for an imago that meets their unrealistically-high standards, this condition is marked by the creature's tendency to "lose itself" in its roles. Its delusions are not limited to a single identity: it can get caught up in any assumed guise, even temporary or not-very-desirable ones. As this illness tends to hamper the afflicted doppelganger's activities, rendering it unable to pursue even the most critical of schemes for long, its sufferers are comparatively easy to identify and track.

A fragmented doppelganger which assumes a pre-existing humanoid guise must succeed at a Will save (DC 12) or lose track of its objective in adopting that guise, instead pursuing the aims and goals of the stolen identity. It does not forget that it is a doppelganger; it merely comes to regard its humanoid persona's motivations as paramount, overriding or ignoring its Clay-self's inhuman urgings or its clan responsibilities. The creature's use of wholly-invented masks, which lack true personalities for it to become ensnared in, is not impaired by Fragmentation.

This replaces Multiple Personalities as an outcome for doppelgangers' failed Madness saves. An extreme example of this condition appears in *Dark Tales & Disturbing Legends*.

Psychic Paranoia: The doppelganger's need to probe the minds of those around it, lest humans suspect its true nature or its fellows plot against it, becomes all-consuming. The creature suspects anyone it cannot read is planning to do it ill, even if it has read the suspect's mind mere minutes before. As doppelgangers can only read one mind at a time, the net effect is that the creature only trusts other beings for as long as it is actively probing their thoughts, instantly ceasing to trust all others around it.

Psychic Sadism: The doppelganger is psychically attuned to emotions (normally a rather cursory element of the mind-reading experience), and particularly to those negative feelings to which its own brain is most sensitive. Merely asserting its intellectual superiority through feats of cunning is no longer enough to slake its twisted egotism;

The paranoid doppelganger's reaction toward those within range of its detect thoughts power cannot be changed by the Diplomacy skill; instead, it is a direct function of how recently it read a given subject's mind. For every minute that has passed since the doppelganger read a given mind, the creature must make a Will save (DC 15, +1 per minute) or move one step toward "Hostile" in its reactions to that being. Its growing aversion to, and fear of, the suspected party can be concealed with a successful Bluff check.

When its reaction turns "Hostile," the paranoid doppelganger is automatically compelled to read the subject's mind. If successful, the creature's reaction changes as appropriate to the thoughts it reads (usually "Indifferent"). If unsuccessful, this "confirms" its fantasies of malign intent on the part of the subject, and the imposter behaves accordingly.

Should the paranoid doppelganger encounter a sentient creature which seems immune to its detect thoughts power, it must make an immediate Fear save.

This is how Paranoia manifests in response to doppelgangers' failed Madness saves. Aspects of Paranoia detailed in the RLPHB (imagined conspiracies, inability to trust, Horror saves on finding corroborating evidence) also apply to imposters.

On the Doppelganger Mind

To feel content, a sadistic doppelganger must read the thoughts of victimized sentient beings each day, for a minimum number of minutes equal to its HD times its Wisdom modifier. To qualify, a victim must either be suffering physical pain, or be subjected to a Fear, Horror, or Madness save. If the doppelganger is responsible for inflicting and/or directing the source of a victim's distress, each minute of mind-reading counts double, for purposes of sating its cruel addiction. If a victim is also a personal enemy (whether of the imposter's Clay, its imago, or even its forsaken child-face), each minute of suffering counts double too; thus, a sadistic doppelganger need only torment a personal enemy for $\frac{1}{4}$ the usual time, to satisfy its craving for dominion.

If a doppelganger sadist fails to sate its addiction to others' suffering for five or more consecutive days, it gains a negative level until it meets its need again. If it experiences severe frustration, humiliation, and/or helplessness, it must succeed at a Will save (DC 15) or become shaken until it reads the mind of a victimized person for at least one minute.

This effect replaces Suicidal Thoughts as an outcome for doppelgangers' failed Madness saves.

in order to maintain its sense of dominance, the creature must sense extraordinary emotional trauma from "lesser" creatures on a regular basis.

Psychic Voyeurism: The superiority-complex typical of doppelgangers takes a radical turn with this ailment, as the afflicted creature seeks to distract itself from the horror it recently experienced by observing - and directing - the lives of others. A voyeuristic doppelganger immerses itself in the thoughts of intriguing passersby, much as a human might peruse an engaging book or attend a captivating play, and it manipulates the fates of those whom it observes to achieve a dramatically-satisfying outcome. Direct interaction with its "entertainment" will spoil the creature's escapism, being too much of a *deus ex machina*; nevertheless, many doppelgangers with this affliction go to elaborate lengths to goad desired reactions from their favorite "characters", often by

In any busy public setting, a doppelganger voyeur must pass a Concentration check (DC 5 + # of people in thought-reading range) or be fascinated by the mental narratives going on around it. If not fascinated within a 24-hour period, the creature must make a Will save (DC 15) or actively seek out such stimulation. For every day without stimulation, the save's DC increases by 1.

Once a doppelganger voyeur has found a particular individual or group to fixate on, it may satisfy its yearning for amusement by reading its chosen subject(s) once per day. If a subject's thoughts remain similar for three or more days in a row, the doppelganger must make a Will save (DC 15, +1 per day) or be compelled to provoke a novel reaction or emotion - positive or negative makes no difference - on the part of its "favorite", often by provoking or hurting those near the subject.

This effect replaces Nightmares as a possible outcome for doppelgangers' failed Horror saves.

influencing, harming or eliminating the associates of these unwitting performers.

Renunciation: The doppelganger is so distressed by a specific, awful experience that it no longer feels comfortable in the false identity that lived it. At the first safe opportunity, it sheds the guise that witnessed the distressing event, either permanently (for temporary identities) or for a period of months (for its imago). Such hurried forfeiture may leave tracks - half-completed business transactions, missed appointments, etc - that shrewd investigators can seize upon to learn more of their quarry's habits ... provided the renounced role isn't taken up by some other doppelganger, in the interim.

On the Doppelganger Mind

A doppelganger driven to renounce a temporary identity abandons its guise as soon as it is out of view, and never returns to it, although it may pass the role on to another of its kind. Deserting a persona this abruptly usually forces it to abandon the identity's finances, home, and other assets.

If a renounced identity is its imago, the doppelganger will be unwilling to forfeit its favorite role permanently. It must cease to physically occupy that role until it recovers from the Renunciation effect, but can delay its departure for up to 8 hours, buying time to account for its imago's abrupt "departure" (often by claiming illness or sudden family obligations out-of-town). Although they must live in other guises while recuperating, wealthy doppelgangers may continue to direct their imagoes' business affairs by impersonating their secretaries, solicitors or other intermediaries.

This effect replaces System Shock as a possible outcome for doppelgangers' failed Horror saves.

Shapechangers' Schizophrenia:

The imposter's capacity to concentrate on a given identity becomes severely impaired, causing it to grow weary of fulfilling any one persona too rapidly. Its combination of stifled artistry and boredom compels it to shift to some other identity, even if this means forsaking some ongoing scheme at an inconvenient moment. It need not discard its plans entirely, but must proceed with them in whatever role it has adopted in its former identity's stead. On the one hand, this can prove problematic for the creature, if its new role is ill-suited to its purposes; on the other, it makes the schizophrenic doppelganger extremely difficult to hunt, as it shifts

identities far more frequently than is usual for its breed.

Subsumption: The imago's comforting appeal grows so enticing that the creature blots its own monstrous nature from its consciousness. This relegates its Clay to a suppressed, servile function, to be called on only if the imago faces death or exposure. Subsumed doppelgangers have come to believe their own lies, and refuse to accept they are imposters even in the face of hard evidence. It is precisely such a case which I suspect the aforementioned 'historical novel' "The Fall of Lady Owen" was inspired (if not directly transcribed) from.

Once a day, the schizophrenic imposter must succeed at a Will save (DC 15 + its Wisdom modifier) or forfeit its current identity for another in its repertoire. A doppelganger succumbing to this urge must switch roles at the first opportunity; it need not transform in public, but must immediately withdraw from any conversation or encounter in progress and seek privacy in which to transform. Once it has been compelled to swap identities by this Madness effect, a doppelganger must make a new Will save each time it transforms (e.g. to stave off fatigue) in order to resume the role its plans and/or superiors currently require it to play.

The new shape can be selected from among the doppelganger's roster of typical forms (if known), invented on the spot by the DM, or rolled up using an appropriate urban encounter table or the "One Hundred Traits" table from p. 128 of the DMG. The adopted guise is usually of a radically-different age, sex, race and/or social class from the previous one.

This is how Schizophrenia manifests in response to doppelgangers' failed Madness saves. The afflicted doppelganger's ethical alignment (Law/Chaos axis) is also susceptible to shifts, when it is compelled to change its form, as detailed in the RLPHB (p. 86). Its moral alignment does not change unless the dread doppelganger in question is usually non-Evil, in which case its alignment on the Good/Evil axis may also shift, as per humanoids' Schizophrenia.

Subsumption

Subsumption functions just like the RLPHB Madness effect of Delusions, only an imposter's mad belief appears consistent with physical evidence: it looks human, ergo it is human. A subsumed doppelganger that sees its blood move, hears thoughts irrefutably arising in someone else's mind, or is otherwise confronted by clear proof of its nature must make an immediate Horror save (DC 15). A major failure on this save indicates that its Clay seizes control for 1d4 hours, infuriated by its long burial.

Subsumed doppelgangers still change shape when physical weariness demands it, but only when alone, and without being consciously aware of doing so. They usually shapeshift while feigning sleep, believing the changes to be dreams.

This insanity replaces Hallucinations as an outcome for doppelgangers' failed Madness saves.

Excerpts from the Diary of Deborah Creede

November 22nd, 3:00 pm

On my way to Dr. Johanson I noticed several constables closing off an alley. Though I was not very near, and would have expected greater discretion from policemen, I could overhear their repelled musings quite plainly. Apparently a woman had been found dead, her flesh torn by wounds all over her body. From what I gathered from their disjointed mutterings, she had been dead perhaps two days. Rope-welts on her wrists gave testament that she had been bound, and her tongue first cut out, then her body literally dissected while she yet lived. When the coroner's wagon drew up and the constables bore the victim's remains out, I caught a brief glimpse of her arm dangling over the edge of the stretcher, and was startled to see it pocked by plague-scarring, not unlike my own rashes. Her hand bore the calluses and wrinkles of a long and arduous life, although the long hair that protruded from under the stretcher's shroud was still raven black.

When I told Dr. Johanson how little the medications had helped against the nightmares, he asked me to recount the details of my dreams to him. Afterward, he explained to me that - as the dreams seemed so vivid - they might be rooted in memories of which I was consciously unaware. To trigger a clearer recollection, it might be helpful to visit one of the locations from my dreams. Although the shock of remembering might be traumatic, he explained that he saw no better alternative to overcome these nightmares. He offered to accompany me to the hill outside Shadewell tonight, where my last dream had taken place.

Part of me is uneasy, even fearful, about this recourse. Dr. Johanson surely knows best, yet there is an eagerness in his eyes that disturbs me... and perhaps it is more than this, which makes me wary. Yet I yearn also to know from whence these terrible visions have come upon me. And more, it may be my only chance of sleeping easily, or (dare I hope?) of finding my Daniel again.



On Doppelganger Tactics

*"Will you walk into my parlor?" said the
spider to the fly;*

*"'Tis the prettiest little parlor that ever you
may spy.*

*The way into my parlor is up a winding
stair;*

*And I have many curious things to show
when you are there."*

- Mary Howitt, "The Spider and the Fly"



On Doppelganger Tactics

We now proceed to a series of documents which I pass along with considerable regret. The account to follow is a ghastly and galling one, both in that it relates the misfortunes of one of the good Doctor's few surviving former allies, and in that the creature which wrought his undoing - a being that said ally, Dementlieuse gendarme Alphonse Vignes, perceptively dubs "the Fiend" - remains at large. In all candor, given the creature's professed agenda, I was hesitant to enclose its letters at all: in a sense, passing this information over to the Society's keeping may please the very monster which had scribed them! Yet I hold out hope that, in time, disseminating its actual words may spark recognition in fellow-hunters' minds, by which this "Adramelech's" façade may yet be uncovered.

In that spirit - and likewise in hope that some among the Society may possess the means to alleviate M. Vignes' present grief, by spell or by science - allow me to relate how the journal-excerpts and letters to follow passed into my custody.

I do not know if your "Uncle Rudolph" ever spoke of his work with Lieutenant (and later Captain, on his retirement) Vignes. The doctor consulted with many agents of law enforcement over the years, and his association with Alphonse Vignes was a brief one: the singular pursuit of a werebeast, a boar by phenotype, in the Quartier Ouvrier. A strapping man of action in his prime, renowned in the Port-a-Lucine Gendarmerie for his wrestling prowess, Lt. Vignes' strength served its pursuers' common purpose admirably. When the lycanthrope in question was rightly identified as a Falkovnian ox-drover from a visiting caravan, Vignes boldly grappled the raging creature, restraining its fury even as it assumed its hybrid aspect, until Dr. Van Richten's prepared extract of camphor could be brought into play.

As I learned in gathering information on Vignes' background, the Gendarmerie of Port-a-Lucine had been his life. Upon the deaths of his parents, Bertrand and Charlotte

Vignes, in a suspicious blaze that consumed the inn where he had been born (the Golden Candle), young Alphonse exaggerated his true age of 15 to join the city's constabulary in 724. A husky youth with an insatiable thirst for justice, his empathy for the downtrodden of Quartier Ouvrier made him one of the very few police officers to whom the neglected residents of that district would speak freely.

Even after he had retired with full military honors in 757, following a fierce scuffle with smugglers which left him with a number of broken bones - not that his assailants fared any better, mind - M. Vignes continued to advise his old protégés in the Gendarmerie, and his exhaustive knowledge of the Quartier Ouvrier allowed him to assist the detective Alanik Ray on several minor cases.

In passing through the city of his birth following my return to the Core, I heard rumors of the Captain's recent confinement. Recognizing his name from the Doctor's records, I naturally saw fit to investigate his predicament for myself. A few words and a sprinkling of coin brought me to M. Vignes' side, where his rambling, half-coherent references to "Masters" struck an all-too-familiar chord, resonating as it did with my own recent discoveries in Paridon. Realizing that only a genuine encounter with doppelgangers could account for his use of that term, I "invited" myself into the retired gendarme's residence, seeking any clues to his troubles which the man's former colleagues in the constabulary may have missed.

Would that there had been nothing to find, Miladies, but the entwined narratives which follow, from Captain Vignes and the "Fiend" he sought in vain to apprehend, tell the tale. Let us hope that these documents betray even more of doppelgangers' methods - and mindset - than the latter author had intended.

On Doppelganger Tactics

Personal Journal of Capt. Alphonse Vignes, Port-a-Lucine Gendarmerie (retired):

June 19th, 760

I was returning home this evening, having finished helping the Widow deLanne with the awning, when something rather odd happened. It was a brisk day, with a whiff of rain in the offing. As I turned the corner to my house, I was a bit surprised to see a stranger standing in front of my door. The man was elderly, that much was apparent, with an elongated, sharp nose and out-jutting chin, and a striking set of piercing, ice-blue eyes. His hair was snow-white, and combed to the sides of his head in a scraggly fashion. He wore a brown greatcoat, and a pair of pince-nez perched atop his nose. He seemed to be well-scrubbed, with a manner of intellectual arrogance I have sometimes seen among the professors of the University of Dementlieu. Indeed, I would have taken him to be one of those rarified types, were it not for a startling, feral gleam in his eye.

I called out in greeting to this stranger, and was about to ask as to his business when he interjected, quite urbanely:

"You are Captain Alphonse Vignes, I believe? Of course you are. Good to finally meet you in this flesh, as it were. I've learned a great deal about you, and I believe I have something for you that a man of your, shall we say, talents, would find most fascinating. Most fascinating indeed."

With those strange words, he drew a sealed letter from the pocket of his greatcoat and handed it to me with tremendous formality, as if I were a member of the Council of Brilliance, not a retired gendarme. I began uttering a perplexed thank you, but he spoke in interruption again.

"No, no need. In fact, I suspect you may have second thoughts as to thanking me, and quite shortly. Until then, I bid thee adieu."

He strode off at once, heedless of my queries, and vanished from sight around the very corner I had arrived from. Very strange, indeed. I entered my home, placed the vegetables from Madame deLanne on the table, and lit a candle before sitting down to read this odd letter.

On Doppelganger Tactics

"Adramelech" Letter #1, dated June 19th, 760¹

My Dear Captain Alphonse,

Greetings, my as-yet-unwitting friend! You will pardon the intimacy, I trust...? For reasons which shall momentarily become clear, I feel I might take the liberty of the use of your given name. I have, after all, enjoyed an intimate closeness with your private thoughts, these past weeks. (Still feeling those twinges in your lower back? You really should mention those to your doctor, Alphonse: admitting those broken ribs of yours weren't properly set at the Gendarmerie's infirmary is nothing to be ashamed of!) I hope you will not hold such a minor indulgence against me. Let me assure you, you'll soon have far more fertile cause for outrage towards me than any trivial breach of etiquette.²

I have heard a great deal about your past exploits during my time in this city, and have perused the Gendarmerie records in the Palace of Justice. Quite a distinguished career you've had, sir! A long life battling all the scum of the earth, or at least, those whom your government defines as scum. You've even helped the celebrated Dr. Van Richten against the "Legions of the Night", to borrow the Ezran phrase. Being a "legionnaire" myself, I find the term a tad offensive, but it does evoke some rather romantic imagery. In short, my dear Alphonse, your background has prepared you well, equipping you with the ideal credentials for my little experiment.

"Experiment?" I can all but hear you ask. Yes, my dear Alphonse, experiment. You see, I am an educator and a scientist. I believe that one must practice one's teaching techniques on a smaller scale, before moving on to bigger and greater things. There are so many 'heroes' and 'monster-hunters' out there, I could've had my pick of hundreds of potential candidates. (Such glory-hound do-gooders seem to crawl out of the woodwork, like so many insects, do they not?) But, no: I've chosen you, my dear Alphonse, to help me on this glorious endeavor.

You see, you are to be the star student at my series of lectures on the Methods of Masters (I always was fond of alliteration). You may have heard of us: those incredibly elusive, fiendishly intelligent, and rakishly charming (if I do say so myself) monstrosities that have long plagued the fair (well, not really) city of Paridon, and recently have been spreading to the virgin territories of the Core. Assuming you survive the instruction, you will become the worst nightmare which we Masters - speaking proverbially, of course; sleep, and hence dreams of any character, aren't in our nature - have ever faced.

You will travel the Core, slaying vile shape-shifters wheresoever they may lair, rooting them out of their comfortable abodes as a terrier beards the fox in his den. And then, when you are ready, to Paridon you will go, armed with that most powerful of all weapons: Knowledge. I expect our populations to drop quite precipitously ... and nothing could please me more. You see, I have a grudge against those self-indulgent fools that lead the clans; likewise, of the hatred I bear for the Flickerfool, volumes can be written. To see those indolent

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1. The content of "Adramelech's" missives is consistent in its formalized layout and florid penmanship, implying a common hand scribed all four of them. Elements of the script suggest a secondary, yet detailed acquaintance with the Mordentish alphabet; the placement of serifs and angle of backstrokes are reminiscent of Zherisian, and certain turns of phrase employed by the author appear to substantiate such origin. Furthermore, a number of subtle interruptions in the flow of ink suggest that at least a token effort was made to disguise the writer's hand, albeit more in the manner of a talented novice than an expert in the craft of forgery.
 2. Observe, Miladies, how "Adramelech" wastes no time in flaunting its awareness of M. Vignes' innermost thoughts and secrets. Such smugness is typical of doppelgangers who see fit to reveal themselves; while its intimidation-value is significant, I suspect their gloating is as much a product of taunting childishness as strategy. When one survives by artifice and deception, the opportunity to trumpet one's cunning to the deceived is a rare and tempting thing: a temptation which might yet be turned against them, should the chance to brag freely to a seemingly-helpless audience be presented to one such. - Rookhausen

On Doppelganger Tactics

slugs' complacency shattered is my fondest dream, and you shall be the hurtled stone that fragments it.

Ach, but where are my manners? Old boy, you really are slipping in your old age! A part of me quails from this most public of betrayals, but there is a sense of perversity within my spirit that all but calls out for a name. And, since never was I one to shrink back from outrage, I proclaim myself. You may call me 'Adramelech', late of the Pomath Clan of Paridon: outcast, expatriate and aggrieved avenger.

Of course, you have surely deduced my secret by now, and so must be wondering: "Why ever would a doppelganger [to use that ungainly Falkovnian term you humans mulishly insist on applying to us] betray its own kind?" To a race that lives in secrecy, knowledge is the deadliest menace of all, yet here am I, exiled and alone, handing over the ax to cleave my race's throat, and all for my hatred and pride! It's really quite petty of me, isn't it? Of course, one could say I have ulterior motives. You see, in addition to being the horrifically venom-filled creature I am, seething with injustice and rage, I am also quite the patriot. You will go forth upon the hidebound ingrates in Paridon like a scythe through the fields. The weak, the old, the infirm and the foolish will be destroyed in the holocaust you will unleash. The death toll will be magnificent, and I'll have my revenge. More importantly, however, our race will be all the better for it.³

You see, I am, among other things, a keen theologian, and in one of my guises even became a Celebrant of Mankind. It is an interesting philosophy, based on unlocking the hidden potential of every member. Of course, they have it badly wrong in one respect: evolution has already advanced to the next step. We, the Masters, are the next rung on the ladder of ascent, as far above the common caste of men as men are above goblins or apes. We are stronger, shrewder, faster, wiser: we are, indeed, your superiors in any way imaginable.

The Divinity of Mankind teaches that within each person lies an inner core of divinity, a blazing spark of higher essence that inhabits even the humblest. What they fail to grasp is that inside each Master is the depth and breadth of humanity. A single human of the mundane variety has but one form, and remains forever affixed in but one life and perspective. To us, no such boundaries exist: every shape and form that mankind possesses, we may emulate, and partake of that fragment of superiority - of divinity, as it were - that each individual guise and life touches upon. Likewise, whereas common men experience only their own solitary minds, touching one another's but rarely and indirectly (as through the wonders of literature), we Masters read minds as easily as you might read a broadsheet. Each Master contains within itself the entire scope of humanity's body, mind, and thus, soul. It is thus that we are deserving of our rightful name of "Masters"; it is thus that we, not you, are more truly akin to the divine.

But we are not perfect! We have our flaws, our indolence, our furious back-biting, our conservative ways. For too long have we rested on our laurels. We have been given such great gifts, yet we squander them! We huddle in one tiny land and content ourselves with lordship of a single city, when there is a virgin continent out there, of size and scope unimaginable, its nations and peoples rich and ripe for the taking. Our homeland's very fabric is torn away by catastrophe, our primacy imperiled by foul abominations that strike at its underbelly, and yet we sit! It is an outrage, and an ungrateful denigration of

3. Both in "Adramelech's" writing and in the chapter to follow, such interludes of cynical self-analysis appear to be a characteristic of doppelgangers' thought-patterns. When one's life depends upon keeping track of numerous alternate identities, scrutinizing one's mannerisms and motives easily becomes a habit - even a compulsion - and one that can potentially "bleed" over into one's legitimate persona, as well as various feigned guises. That Adramelech experiences this same tendency which human actors, charlatans, and certain other professions are also prone to, shows that doppelganger psychology is not wholly divorced from that of men, for all that the creature does not deign to correct those lapses of character it rightly discerns within itself, but rather, finds or invents excuses to foster and indulge them. - Rookhausen



While most doppelgangers are too secular-minded to waste time on philosophical musings, and they share the Zherisian disdain for belief in "gods", a small but growing minority of them adhere to their own corrupted, self-serving version of Paridon's native theology: the Divinity of Masters. Being one of its staunchest adherents, Adramelech's words here have neatly encapsulated its tenets as an arrogant offshoot of the Divinity of Mankind.

our gifts, for those who would deem themselves our leaders to condone such lassitude.

But this is where you come in, my dear Alphonse. Very soon, very soon indeed, a new threat will, at last, force we Masters to bestir ourselves. The thought of imminent destruction does wonders for one's cognitive abilities, as the aphorism goes, and the prospect of being wiped out will spur those who would do naught but lounge to action! Once you and others like you have wiped out some nine out of ten Masters, then the survivors - those that are the strongest, the quickest, and the most cunning - will break out of this disgraceful lethargy, and as a race, we will move onwards to new heights of achievement and ambition.

But I really am rambling on now. You must forgive me these digressions! The mind of a genius is, perforce, one that is not by all dimensions connected, and if I grow too abstruse in my philosophical discourses, you have my full permission to rebuke me.

Getting back to the main goal of our impromptu lesson, my intention is to teach you the tricks and tactics of the Masters, so that you may hunt down and destroy all those too foolish or complacent to resist. Though no longer young, your health is more than adequate to let you carry forth this crusade, especially with a few minor 'improvements' of my art. Your reputation will serve you well, when the time comes to recruit others to our mutual purpose. And you will have the most valuable tool of all: truthful knowledge of our tactics and techniques, such as only one of your future quarry can provide.

And the best conveyor of Knowledge, as they say, is experience. While I fear that giving you direct experience is impractical, I can still demonstrate, for your benefit, the tried-and-true methods of the Masters. To that end, I enjoin you to travel to the Quartier Savant, to the home of Dr. Alfred Kinnaird: a Mordentish expatriate and rather successful treater of the ills of the rich and delusional.

His wife is probably getting worried about him by now. I would advise that you check the cellar. In the far left corner you will find a barrel, and atop it another letter. Until then,

Your most humble servant,

Adramelech



On Doppelganger Tactics

Personal Journal of Capt. Alphonse Vignes:

June 19th, 760 (continued)

I set the letter down with a shiver. This was something that needed to be handled with care. Somehow, I couldn't quite bring myself to go straight to the Gendarmerie: I'd served among them, after all, and knew how difficult it would be to convince my former colleagues of such allegations, even if it were true. 'Masters'? Doppelgangers? Of all the monstrous oddities one hears of, in foreign parts, such creatures were a rumor I had next to no experience with.

I re-read the last paragraph. Doctor Alfred Kinnaird. I knew the man: very little, I'll admit, but I recalled working with him on a poisoning investigation nearly a decade ago. A neat, dedicated man, and a gifted doctor as well. Something was seriously amiss here. I dressed for the walk across town, pocketing the ceremonial captain's badge they gave me when I retired. Somehow, I had a feeling I might need the authority.

I arrived at the Kinnaird residence, and was promptly invited in by the downstairs maid. When I asked if the master of the house was in, I was informed he had left early in the morning, and that 'madame' was growing worried. On asking if I might speak with Madame Kinnaird, I was quickly hustled up to a sitting room on the second floor of the townhouse.

Madame Kinnaird was a portly woman of late middle years, and given to constant nervous hand-wringing, which the presence of a gendarme did little to quell. I introduced myself as a Captain of the Gendarmerie (tactfully neglecting to mention my retirement), and asked if I might inspect the cellar, evading the question of why with the trusty non-answer of 'police business'.

The cellar was a fairly narrow stone room with paved floors and numerous barrels therein. Apparently Dr. Kinnaird was a collector of fine wines. In the far end, however, in the left corner, was a lone barrel that rested a little apart from its fellows. Moving closer and raising the candle Madame Kinnaird had provided, I retrieved a letter, addressed to myself in the same ostentatious handwriting as the first. I opened it then and there, first making sure that neither Madame Kinnaird nor the servants were around to observe.

"Adramelech" Letter #2, undated

My Dear Captain Alphonse,

For the first of our lecture series, I will be discussing the art of Assumption: the process by which a Master singles out some soul, and assumes his form, taking on his appearance, manner, and very identity. I'd advise you to read carefully, and take notes. There will be an examination at the end of this series; if you do well, you get to keep breathing. Shall we begin?

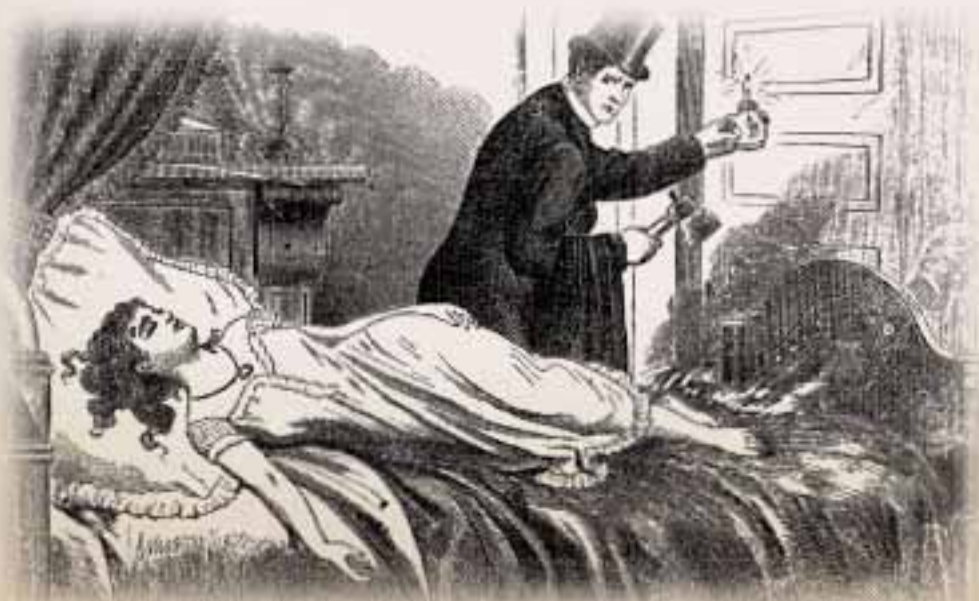
Now, before we explore the precise methodology of Assumption, we must define our terms. For the purpose of this section, we address the prolonged and total assumption of a pre-existent human identity. Typically, even a novice Master can change form at a moment's notice, and possesses dozens, if not hundreds, of potential guises suitable for every occasion. (I am personally fond of playing the housekeeper when unwanted guests come calling. Few people ever suspect a servant of hiding true knowledge!) However, most are purely fabricated creations, and while we may touch upon this related subject, they are not the focus of our discussion.

Rather, the procedure of interest is taking over the identity of an existing human. This is a complex task, requiring great attention to detail and such logistic inconveniences as the disposal of a body; however, such second-hand identities have the advantage of providing a history and credentials that can be examined by authorities, as well as such belongings and assets of their own as might prove useful to the Assuming Master. (There was a certain scholar in Darkon, an alienist at the Brautslava Institute, who had the most fascinating and diverse collection of works on Psychology, a quite enthralling discipline. When he refused to sell it... well, let us say that the collection looks quite pleasant upon my mantelpiece).

Generally, Assumptions may be subdivided into three varieties: the short-term, the long-term, and the true assumption.

The Short-Term Assumption is a method used to acquire money or other assets, and can easily be run to completion in the course of a month, two at the outside. Essentially, the Master Assumes the identity of a given human, then moves all the money or goods of said human to a hidden location in secret, before staging the death or disappearance of the assumed individual and going to collect the imposture's proceeds.

The Long-Term Assumption, by contrast, may have the Master Assume an identity for years on end. In this case, the Master takes the form of some well-off human, and proceeds to live off the person's wealth until it runs out, at which point the process is repeated again. Most Masters practice such long-term Assumptions as a default lifestyle, supplementing their income with short-term exercises as necessary.



On Doppelganger Tactics

*The True Form is not an Assumption per se. Rather, virtually all Masters (with the exception, I note gloatingly, of the Flickerfool), have a single preferred guise, which they use for discourse with other Masters, clan meetings, and the like. Many choose to live under this identity as well, although only the elite have the luxury of doing so to the exclusion of Assuming other guises. One's True Form is usually acquired early in a Master's adult life, and is never changed. I mention the True Form mostly for the sake of completeness, and will not discuss it further.*⁴

And now, on to the methodology of the Assumption! (This is the part that you have been waiting for, is it not?)

Generally, an Assumption begins with the process known as Selection, the choosing of a form we deem fit to assume. Sometimes a Master begins the Assumption with an individual in mind, or is assigned a particular role by clan seniors, in which case this stage is unnecessary. Else, both those that practice the Short and the Long forms of Assumption spend considerable time on this crucial decision-making process.

When seeking to conduct an Assumption for profit or to secure a comfortable role in life, the subject Selected will be quite wealthy (for obvious reasons), generally fairly sequestered (the fewer close acquaintances a person has, the less likely one's ruse will be detected), and preferably a bachelor or widower, with no close relative in residence (because intimate family members can quickly raise the challenge of an Assumption to precarious heights). An elderly or sickly subject is preferable for Short-Term Assumptions, as feigned illness offers an ideal excuse for the Master to drastically reduce both workload and contact with visitors; for Long-Term Assumptions, a subject whose household experiences a high rate of turnover among servants is favored, as there is less risk of one's valet or companion noting any discrepancies of behavior if one's servants are newly-hired. Beyond these few guidelines, Selection is largely a question of personal taste on the Master's part, though subject to biases suited to the local culture (e.g. male subjects are favored over female in most realms, due to men's greater control of their finances; in Valachan, gender roles are reversed in regards to property-law, so female identities are Assumed accordingly).

Of course, these are only guidelines, and describe a rarely-found ideal. Masters may opt to Assume the identity of nearly any well-off individual in a given area, trusting our skills and intellect to see us through. All of the above advantages merely make the Assumption easier. As a general rule, Masters engaged in a Long-Term Assumption are more careful about the persons they select than those undertaking the Short-Term variant, as they will have to live with (and as) their chosen subject for much longer.

Precise techniques of Selection vary, but aristocratic gossip tends to serve as the best source of prospective targets, followed by publications such as Paridon's Newsbill or the Dementlieuse Register of Nobility. City records are also useful. Most often, Masters keep a list of several potential candidates in

4. Adramelech's "True Form" is nothing of the kind, as anyone who has witnessed a slain doppelganger's reversion to its genderless, inhuman native state can attest. By its description, as well as its *prim reticence* regarding the subject, Vignes' 'Fiend' clearly refers to the favored false persona each doppelganger maintains: that which I designate as an "imago", to avert confusion with its true (i.e. undisguised) "true form".

The writer's remark about the "Flickerfool" - clearly a reference to an enigmatic entity (the Flickerflame) which Paridon's Newsbill has sporadically reported upon for years - is of interest, as it implies that this being not only exists, but is a doppelganger devoid of a chosen form. This may indicate that its imago 'died' in the eyes of the human world, forcing it to survive without a favored guise, or perhaps that this individual has suffered some physical or mental impairment (such as loss of a limb) impeding adoption of its former imago's semblance. Either way, such a bereft creature would most likely seethe with frustrated envy of its fellows' imagoes, making it doubly embittered and aggressive ... even (and perhaps especially) toward others of its own kind. - Rookhausen

On Doppelganger Tactics

their minds at all time, Selecting viable subjects as they learn of or encounter them, and remembering their identities for future use.

I Selected the good Dr. Kinnaird for several reasons. He was married, but his wife was not the most attentive of persons, and the doctor was given to eccentric hobbies that made his behavior unpredictable even to his closest of associates. He was also fairly well off, although I daresay his widow is no longer. (Still, I am sure she will like the Quartier Ouvrier just fine, for however many months she survives there.)⁵

One the Selection has been made, we begin the Observation. After a Master has decided upon a specific individual, acquiring relevant information on that target becomes paramount, as does learning about those persons who interact frequently with them. This stage's duration may last for several weeks. While the mind-reading abilities of Masters serve us in great stead here, we cannot pry deeply into the thoughts of those around us, necessitating physical reconnaissance of the target to ensure that when the next stage is carried out, it is seamless.

Generally, the information we seek is fairly mundane: such routine minutia as speech patterns, personal views and opinions, and distinctive personality traits or quirks the subject might exhibit. Likewise, having a close understanding of a subject's business affairs is also invaluable, as is an

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5. While Adramelech does not state this outright, it is clear the unfortunate Dr. Kinnaird was Selected for a 'Short-term Assumption', to use his assailant's own terms. For a longer-lasting substitution, a trained physician such as he is unlikely to be deemed a desirable victim, as doppelgangers' expertise in advanced professional skills is usually insufficient to maintain such an imposture for long, barring collusion with a properly-skilled "stand-in". Alone in its exile, Adramelech has no such recourse, so could not plausibly have mimicked Dr. Kinnaird for more than a few days' time. - Rookhausen

Faking Skills

When a doppelganger or other impersonator must feign the use of "Trained Only" skills it does not possess any ranks in, it must make a Bluff check against the DC of the check it is pretending to make, +10. Success does not indicate that the imposter has successfully carried out the feigned action, only that it has deceived observers into believing it succeeded. If it fails its Bluff roll by 5 or less, it successfully pretends to have failed at the "Trained Only" skill check after an honest, educated effort. Each such failure raises the DC of its next Bluff check to fake that same skill by +3. A failure by more than 5 indicates that observers catch on to the fact that the creature is not actually competent at the "Trained Only" skill in question.

For example, a doppelganger which has replaced a ship's navigator might be called on to plot a course to a distant, well-studied port: a task usually requiring a DC 15 Knowledge (geography) check (as per Stormwrack). As this particular imposter has no Knowledge (geography) ranks, and the check's DC is too high for untrained use of a Knowledge skill (i.e. greater than 10), it must fake its effort to do so. If the doppelganger succeeds on a DC 25 Bluff check, it can pretend to direct the vessel toward that destination, fooling its captain and crew; however, it secretly has no idea where the ship is sailing to, and the vessel's course is determined randomly by the DM. If it fails in its Bluff check, but its roll is 20 or higher, its shipmates realize their "navigator" bungled the course, but believe this to be an honest mistake by a man who tried his best. A roll of 19 or less means the others realize their "navigator" has no clue how to navigate, leaving the doppelganger with a great deal of explaining to do...

"Trained Only" skills with a visible and obvious outcome, such as Open Lock, cannot be feigned via Bluff checks. Conversely, those which give witnesses no tangible basis for suspicion (such as Decipher Script) may be faked using a normal opposed Bluff check, rather than a Bluff against the DC of the skill check in question. Skills which sometimes have visible results, and sometimes don't, can be feigned if appropriate; for instance, a doppelganger could pretend to activate a scroll via Use Magic Device, but only if the spell it contains is intangible in its effect.

On Doppelganger Tactics

assessment of the minds of any other members of the household, and particularly of their observational and deductive abilities. Anyone deemed likely to notice small changes in behavior is noted at this time, as is any conduct or quirk on the part of one's subject which might suggest they are not entirely as they seem. (Far better to learn one's Selected target is, for example, a disguised hag, before one moves on to her actual elimination!)

The methods of Observation are simple. Thought-reading is of course invaluable, but only if those being Observed can be led to ponder the relevant subjects. To that end, most Masters assume numerous forms during the Observation period, the better to engage the subject in conversation without creating an obvious pattern of nosiness. Most Masters are skilled interrogators, leading conversations toward topics of interest, and gleaning the answers from the words - and minds - of those they converse with.

Every Master has a preferred method of approaching subjects. I have always had great success posing as a man of the cloth, as it is truly amazing the sort of things people will reveal to a priest. Other guises I have used have been those of medical professionals, policemen, or even the humble peddler. With Dr. Kinnaird, I adopted the form of a series of patients, substituting myself several times into his appointment rolls. Simple sleeping draughts ensured that the original patients failed to attend. (I could, of course, have taken on the form of Dr. Kinnaird's secretary and booked several legitimate appointments, but what fun would that be?)

Finally, once the Selection and Observation stages are complete, one moves on to the Substitution. This is a fundamentally simple act. One physically isolates the subject, murders him, and takes on his form: a sequence which experienced Masters can execute (if you'll pardon the pun) in less than a quarter of an hour. Overall, the key to a success in Substitution - and, indeed, of Assumption overall - is to kill the subject in such a way that no one else knows or suspects that the subject is, in fact, dead. One should be careful to waylay the subject in a remote or hidden location, so the body will not be discovered until the Master may attend to it.

Now, the methods of Substitution are as varied as the Masters that practice it, but certain means are used most commonly. A fair subset of Masters prefer the humble hand crossbow, a weapon that allows murder at a range, yet is both easily concealed and silent. Some favor pistols, but the sharp report of firearms tends to attract attention (which is not something that is desirable, now is it?) and the aroma of gun-smoke is likewise a possible giveaway. More physically adept Masters prefer the dagger or strangling-cord, weapons relying on stealth and precision rather than brute force; a few who show less delicacy of technique even kill with their bare hands, or adapt their bodies as weaponry via honed shape-changing talents or monkish battle-arts. Still others favor the aesthetic simplicity of smothering the sleeping subject with a pillow; though classic, this risks the subject waking prematurely, and can be impractical if they have a spouse or mistress.

As an alternative to direct physical assault, the subtlest of Masters employ poison (arsenic is a perennial favorite; personally, I prefer the more costly but effective extract of the black lotus). It is a fairly simple process to administer poison - particularly if one takes the liberty of incapacitating the cook and adopting her guise - but the timing can be problematic with regards to keeping the death unobserved, as few people take their meals in utter solitude. Drugging the subject to cause drowsiness, then completing one's task a few hours later with the aforementioned pillow, provides a handy compromise without running the risk of one's subject waking too soon.

Of course, a simple application of magic can work wonders. Sound-muting spells free the Master to utilize the full gamut of weapons with a more 'strident' sound, firearms included. The utility of spells inducing sleep or paralysis is unquestionable in this, and True Strike can also be of great value, particularly if employed by a Master already skilled at striking a subject's vital organs. Spell-delivered poison is even deadlier than mundane toxins, and offers the fringe benefit that no toxic residue remains behind, to be detected by future investigators.

On Doppelganger Tactics

Still, my personal preference has always been for lethal spells of the necromantic school: they leave no physical trace of the cause of death, kill silently, and need not give rise to pesky avenging undead so long as the body is properly disposed of. (One should be certain, of course, to ascertain one's subject is not undead before employing such, as casting Harm on a vampire can have, shall we say, unpleasant consequences!) Such magic certainly worked nicely on Dr. Kinnaird: the look of shock on his face when his trusted servant reached out to help him down the cellar stairs, only to wrack his body with negative energy on contact, was quite delicious.⁶

On a more pedestrian note, recruiting minions may prove useful if one's chosen subject is physically formidable, guarded, or merely quick on his feet. While other Masters can provide assistance, I find that human thugs are readily available for a minimum expenditure of coin, and rarely ask questions about such niggling little details as one's species. The use of minions to remove the body and to aid in the Substitution is obvious. Of course, I need hardly remind a seasoned police veteran that any such co-conspirators must be kept in the dark as to one's true motives and objective! Even so, having served their purpose, it is generally prudent to silence such "associates" decisively: the admixture of human lackeys and ale has been the downfall of more than one careless Master, and blackmail is a far more entertaining sport when one is its practitioner, rather than its victim.

Once one has Assumed a subject's form, the job is mostly done. Any suspicion by those around the Assuming Master can be quickly detected via our mental perceptions, and then mitigated by acting in whatever manner the suspicious parties deem to be normal. In extreme situations, it might become necessary to permanently remove someone near the Master who grows suspicious, but it should be a tactic of last resort unless the Master wishes to spread more doubt. Masters who practice Long-Term Assumption are usually well-advised to gently ease those people who knew the subject before the Assumption out of their lives: firing old servants, sending (or driving) away relatives, or simply packing up and moving to a different city. It is wisest to replace any dismissed servants with loyal successors, who are either in active collusion with the Master or simply incurious.

*In some instances, more than one Master will participate in an Assumption. These **Mass Assumptions** are most often carried out to take over strategic power-blocs or factions of society. In Paridon, the homeland of my kind, Masters have subverted virtually every branch of the city government. Obviously, this practice has numerous advantages, granting us an unprecedented level of control over human society. The labor-intensive nature of most Mass Assumptions does generate a certain amount of social stress in our own ranks, but that is neither here nor there.*

These Mass Assumptions commonly begin from the top down, and the use of multiple (sometimes dozens of) Masters ensures each is carried out swiftly and discreetly. Typically, the highest-ranking people are our primary targets, preceded in their Assumption only by such aides or assistants as will give us access to these prominent personages. Teamwork eases the process, several lower-status Masters being set to perform the Observation and Substitution phases of each Mass Assumption. Low-ranking Masters monitor the targets, carry out executions, and otherwise shoulder the grunt-work, while senior Masters handle the Selection process, plan and coordinate the operation, and (of course!) claim the privilege of actually stepping into the vacated roles of a targeted organization's leadership.

6. As best I have ascertained, proficiency with conventional spellcasting of any kind is rare among doppelgangers, possibly even more so than among we humans. This is more than likely a consequence of their race's Zherisian origins - save for alchemy, magic has comparatively few advocates in Paridon - and is doubtless exacerbated by the imposters' tendency to laziness: such mental or spiritual self-discipline as the occult Arts demand are foreign to beings so accustomed to appropriating what they have not labored to earn. Nevertheless, Adramelech's own claim of spellcasting ability is clearly no idle boast or misdirection; read on. - Rookhausen

Once the high-status Masters have insinuated themselves fully into the subverted organization, they take the lead in arranging for a second wave of Masters to be inserted, this time in the guise of security-guards, file clerks, and other petty subordinates. This is usually done by the straightforward expedient of firing the existing staff and hiring new ones. Especially if these common workers already have a high turnover-rate, this can be done fairly rapidly and without arousing any suspicion. Unlike the leadership, personnel of this kind aren't replaced en masse; rather, a handful of lesser Masters will be scattered among the humans' ranks, where they serve as observers, saboteurs, and spies upon their alleged "co-workers". If it suits our interests that a document be misfiled, a bothersome human politician left unguarded by a careless constable, or a piece of damning evidence vanish from police custody, it is these Masters who will carry out the deed, and possibly play the scapegoat, to ensure their betters' hands appear unsullied.⁷

Once that is done, then the middle-level in the organization - managers, departmental secretaries, and such - are hemmed in by Masters on all sides. Observation and Substitution of such becomes exceedingly easy, when one controls the subject's environment so completely; mid-ranking humans may be Assumed if appropriate, or simply left to labor on in their ignorance, if subversion of their specific position is unnecessary or too few Masters are available to occupy their roles.

Granted, this system is not perfect, largely due to certain class issues that divide my kind. High-ranking Masters, rather than acting out their impostures to the fullest, are all too prone to foist the practical duties of a subverted organization's leadership onto their subordinates, thus savoring the power and prestige of their own Assumed identities, yet leaving the actual work to others. As the low-status Masters in the organization's lesser ranks already have their own roles' workload to shoulder, this leaves such subordinates with a double burden of uncompensated, unasked-for chores to carry out, which even our unsleeping, superior brains cannot help but feel sorely taxed by! On the other hand, this system does provide far greater security (to say nothing of deniability) for high-ranking Masters, and frees their attentions to focus upon maintaining the finest nuances of their own masquerade, while turning the subverted organization's resources to our race's collective advantage.

7. In addition to natural turnover of employees, I should point out that ever since the folk of Paridon became aware of the monsters in their midst, those government branches suspected of suffering heavy doppelganger infestations have undergone crushing declines in worker morale and retention, to a point where recruitment of personnel has become next to impossible without drastic increases in pay. Such is an inevitable outcome of the pervasive suspicion and paranoia which doppelgangers' presence in a community fosters; alas, it only makes their task of replacing human staff with their own kind easier. - Rookhausen



Ach, but I forgot the concluding part of the Assumption process, the Disposal. For obvious reasons, having someone find the carcass of a person one has Assumed tends to rather spoil the game for the Master, as explaining how a person who looks exactly like one's "self" happened to turn up dead can be a stretch, even for our guileful tongues! To this end, we Masters have developed a number of methods of removing the body.

Dropping a weighted corpse into deep water has a certain classic appeal, but one must first get it into the water without being noticed, and hope that enterprising sea-going vermin don't eat through the ropes (chains are better). If one can arrange to rendezvous with one's subject along a deserted waterfront, for purposes of Substitution, this handily eliminates the problem of hauling a body to the water's edge. A deserted field and shovel were popular tools for rural Disposals in days past, when Zherisia still boasted such open spaces, and this method is still perfectly viable here in the Core. Some Masters see fit to bury bodies in the cellar, but this lends an unpleasant aroma if one resides at the address in question, and the stench of decomposition or the delivery of quicklime in sufficient bulk to avert it can invite questions better avoided.

A few Masters have found that having the body eaten can remove the evidence quite nicely. Carnivores such as wolves or mastiffs can savage a body beyond recognition in minutes, as can hogs if kept hungry enough. Maintaining such large animals, however, tends to be problematic, so a number of Masters have turned to the use of either fish or vermin. A school of piranhas from the land of Valachan can strip the flesh from a body in minutes - good for inconvenient witnesses as well as Assumptions - and can serve a dual purpose as a booby-trap, with a little applied engineering know-how. While I have no direct experience with the likes of them, I gather that some of my kind have turned the amorphous "oozes" which currently infest Paridon's subterranean depths into handy disposal-tools as well.

Personally, I prefer the marvelous common scarab beetle of Sebuia. A joyous little insect, nearly two inches in length, these flightless creatures are a glossy greenish-black color, with the ability to eat everything. They devour flesh, bones, cloth, and wood. Only metal, glass, and stone are spared by their voracious appetites. Unlike the more infamous grave scarab, these insects are scavengers by preference, and are the perfect eliminators of bodies. One must be careful to feed them regularly, but so long as they receive meat on a daily basis, they remain quite docile. After being fed, they'll even consent to being handled. I keep a swarm of a few thousand in a stone pit, from which they cannot escape, in the basement of my home, as well as a single specimen in a glass case in my study. Lovely creatures.

Unfortunately, such beetles can be expensive to acquire and transport, and are not the most, shall we say, unobtrusive of creatures. (They also cost a small fortune in meat, but alas, such is life.) For those times when bringing a subject to my home is impractical, I more often put my alchemical expertise to use. Acidium Salis, the chemical sometimes known as Sulfuric Acid, has a number of useful properties, and a copper-lined barrel of it serves as an excellent disposal system for most organic material. Quite convenient, and no one thinks it odd to have a barrel delivered to the house of a noted wine collector.

*Your closest friend,
Adramelech*

Personal Journal of Capt. Alphonse Vignes:

June 19th, 760 (conclusion)

I lowered the letter, and stared with dawning horror at the barrel by my side.



On Doppelganger Tactics

Personal Journal of Capt. Alphonse Vignes:

July 30th, 760 (early afternoon)

The investigation into Dr. Alfred Kinnaird's murder took more than a month, and I was interrogated by the Gendarmerie more than once during the process. I didn't show them the letters this 'Adramelech' had given me, partly for fear they wouldn't believe me (a doppelganger?), and partly out of pride. This fiend had approached me, and so I will be one to bring the creature to justice! Thankfully, my reputation with the Gendarmerie was honorable enough for them to take my word as to my innocence ... and, in any case, their forensic evidence proved even more controversial than my report. According to the chemist brought in from the University of Dementlieu, the body had been submerged in acid for at least two days before I arrived on the scene, yet people had seen Dr. Kinnaird just that morning. I kept silent, awaiting my chance to settle affairs with the devil that claims the name "Adramelech".

I'm afraid my pride took a drubbing, however, when I came home this afternoon from my daily constitutional. I opened the door, scraping the dirt from my boot-soles on the mat, and entered ... only to come face to face with the strange scholar of before, now standing within my very home! His physical appearance was the same - snow-white hair and ice-blue eyes - though he now wore an academician's black robe.

I make no apology for being a man of action, and at the first sight of the villain I charged him, hoping to seize the creature and bring him (it?) to justice. Alas, this was not to be. Halfway across my entry-hall, my body froze with paralysis as the fiend uttered an unearthly-sounding syllable, fingers deftly caressing a medallion at its breast. And when I say that I was paralyzed, I mean it in the most literal way: my legs locked in place, and I fell like a rigid statue to the floor, able neither to move nor speak. Powerless even to turn my gaze toward the intruder, I heard the fiend's footsteps draw near, felt the intruder nudge me with its foot, then watched floor and walls reeling as it turned my stiffened body over, so I could look into its cold, falsely-'human' eyes.

"My dear Alphonse, this really won't do. The goal here is to teach you how to hunt my kind! Running us down like a clumsy bullock is not the best way to go about it. You must be subtle, Captain. The mind is the seat of sapience, and what separates us from mere beasts; thus, we should use it to the utmost, correct?"

I strained to utter some sound, but it was useless: my chest and throat could move no more than to breathe, and that barely. Seemingly oblivious to my effort, the scoundrel continued.

Scarab Beetles and Other Flesh-Eaters

A swarm of common scarab beetles has the statistics of a locust swarm (Monster Manual), but it has a ground speed of 20 ft. and cannot fly. A dead body surrounded by a common scarab swarm will be rendered unidentifiable in 5 rounds, stripped to a skeleton in 5 minutes, and completely devoured (including all possessions not of stone, metal, or glass) in 5 hours. Other swarms (rats, piranha, etc) take twice as long to strip a body to a skeleton, and do not eat bones.

Individual meat-eaters can consume as much of a body as would a lycanthrope of similar size (see RLPHB p. 213). Thus, it would take four swine (Medium) to dispose of a 100-lb corpse in a day. Bones are usually left behind, unless the meat-eaters in question (such as hyenas) are capable of consuming these as well.

A single common scarab beetle deals 1d2 hit points of damage each round that it feeds, and grants a +6 circumstance bonus to a torturer's Intimidate check (as per Book of Vile Darkness). Use of this technique requires a helpless target; depending on locale, beetles may cost anywhere from a few silvers each to 100 gp or more. Such insects must be cared for and fed daily.

On Doppelganger Tactics

"Now, it's about time for your next lesson." The monster drew a pocket-watch from the baggy sleeve of its scholar's robe, opening it and checking the time.

"You are familiar with Monsieur Donatien d'Alber? Yes, the recognition in your mind is clear. Once this effect wears off - in oh, say, two minutes' time - you will proceed to the Chateau d'Alber across the bay in the Domaines de la Vie Eclairée." The fiend closed its watch.

"It's a large mansion, not far from the d'Honaire residence, surrounded by birch trees. Can't miss it. Once there, you will request an appointment with M. d'Alber from the majordomo. Tell him that you come on the request of The Scholar, and I daresay he will let you in promptly. You will deliver this letter, sealed and unread, to M. d'Alber."

The intruder slid an envelope from its other sleeve, propped it against my stiffened arm.

"He should give you a letter in return. I would advise you read it quite carefully. And that covers everything, I do believe."

The monster looked around my residence for a moment, then its eyes slid back to me, bent in an unnatural shape, lying on the floor. Making a tsking noise, it walked out of my line of sight, then reappeared holding a cushion from my parlor sofa. Smiling slightly as if savoring the fear this sight roused - in my helpless state, it could easily smother me on the spot, and we both knew it - the faux-man stooped beside me. Grunting a little, it tilted my body so my head rose from the hall's threadbare carpet, and tucked the cushion beneath my pate, then rocked my rigid frame back into place. The fiend propped the envelope against my arm once more, then stood and brushed the dust from its knees.

"There now, that's better. Adieu, my dear Alphonse, adieu."

And with that, the creature brushed the medallion at its neck and uttered its occult phrase once more, then turned and left, shutting the door behind it.

July 30th, 760 (as continued that evening)

In one respect, the monster spoke truly. The spell did wear off no more than two minutes after its mocking departure ... more than enough time, alas, for so elusive of a devil to cover its tracks. I had numerous lingering cramps from the paralysis, but thanks to the cushion I could at least turn my head freely. Having documented my encounter in this journal, to enlighten my former colleagues in the event I might fail to return, I gathered up my pistol and my old gendarme's rapier, as well as that exquisitely-useful blackjack I'd pulled off old Remy the Knife, some years by. I also retrieved my old dress uniform, last worn for my retirement. Feeling as ready to meet my fate as I could be, I set out.

The Domaines de la Vie Eclairée is not a place for the average gendarme. There, the highborn reign unchecked over their estates and servants, including the bone-breakers and thugs who make the work of the Gendarmerie so unnecessarily difficult. The Chateau d'Alber was where the fiend Adramelech had said it would be, a mansion perhaps three stories tall, surrounded by birch trees.

Thankfully, I still carry myself like a proper Gendarmerie officer, and my uniform made me look suitably official, even if I have put on a few pounds since last I wore it. I made use of the ornate brass doorknocker, and with commendable speed the door was opened by a butler.

"I'm here to see M. Donatien d'Alber on behalf of the Scholar. I was told the gentleman will see me."

That he did. I was ushered into a ground-floor sitting room, a sedate and well-furnished chamber, with cream-colored walls and a pair of sofas in a style popular some thirty years past, evidently now once more coming into vogue. The gentleman seated on one of the sofas was in his middle years, likely only a little younger than myself. But whereas I (I flatter myself) still looked much like the gendarme lieutenant of my youth, if a bit blockier, heftier, and with greyer hair, M. d'Alber looked decidedly unhealthy. He was sallow, with a yellow tinge to his skin. He was fat as well, a fact his tight sashes and girdle could do little to conceal, and seemed to sweat profusely.

Moreover, his was the bearing of an exceedingly nervous man. His wide eyes darted everywhere, and he had a tic in his cheek and a dreadful stammer in his voice.

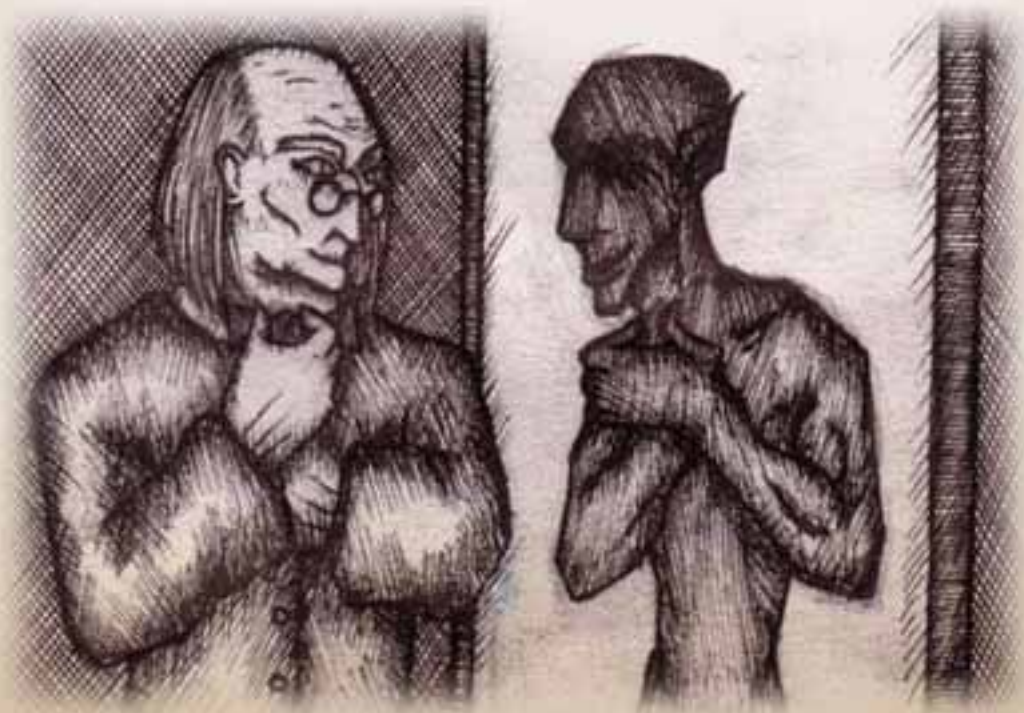
"Y-y-you are the agent of The Scholar, yes? H-h-he told me to expect someone."

"Well... yes. You have a letter for me, I believe, and I have one for you as well."

"C-c-certainly, one moment."

He drew an envelope from his waistcoat and passed it to me. I, in turn, gave him the letter which the fiend Adramelech had left with me.

M. d'Alber all but snatched the proffered letter from my hands and tore it open, began reading in haste. Opting to do the same, I opened my own with somewhat greater care, and began to read, examining it by the waning light of the afternoon.



On Doppelganger Tactics

"Adramelech" Letter #3, dated July 30th 760

My Dear Captain Alphonse,

For the second of my pedagogical discourses, I will expound upon a subject I know is near and dear to your own heart. Specifically, I will be speaking of covert or criminal activities. You see, Assumption, while being the classic method of gaining funds or power among my kind, is also a rather involved process. As such, over the years we Masters have developed a number of methods to swiftly procure wealth or other assets, without the necessary elaboration of stealing someone's identity. (Such endeavors can be rather a chore at times). Unlike Assumption, this isn't a precise, detailed, step-by-step procedure, but rather a multitude of loosely-connected tricks and tactics used by Masters to acquire funds, and occasionally power or influence. So, knowing your professional interest, why don't we just jump right in? Pay attention, because as I mentioned before, there will be a quiz later.

But before I get into the specifics of the various and sundry criminal activities of Masters, I'll detail a little technique I call Mental Guidance. Save rare individuals whose knack for such probing is exceptionally keen, we Masters can only read the superficial thoughts of an individual. This can be problematic when more obscured information is needed. As such, we Masters have devised methods of drawing forth the requisite thoughts from our subjects.

Now, each of the two applications of Mental Guidance revolve around a basic principle of cognitive psychology. In layman's terms: it is extremely hard to not think about a topic that is mentioned, and when a subject is prodded, their mind automatically brings up relevant memories or facts. This is a property of sentient minds which is widely known, among even fairly primitive peoples. (I gather that natives of Vorostokov call it the "Principle of the White Bull", and have enshrined it in their folklore as a rather off-color joke.) Put simply, if you tell someone that you know their darkest secret, they will immediately start thinking about that very secret, allowing one such as I to read them like an open book. There is no need for the Master to know the secret beforehand, although some background clue as to its general nature can be helpful, especially if the victim suffers from a guilty conscience (as virtually everyone does).⁸

Two methods of Mental Guidance are traditionally practiced by my kind. The first is in conversation. As a dialogue progresses in some genteel setting, the Master slowly turns the conversation to some topic which is relevant to the secret it wishes to extract. As an exchange moves along to, say, the marital indiscretions of M. G_____, then Mme. B_____ will start thinking, if only fleetingly, about her own affair. And thus the Master has the information it needs. This usually takes some time, and works best if one has an idea of the general nature of the subject's sin, but when done well can be undetectable.⁹

The second method is somewhat more direct, and requires the Master to simply spring the question upon the subject at an unexpected time. Quite often, shock and dismay will cause a victim to mentally answer the question, and perhaps even mumble a reply aloud, before conscious thought fully reasserts itself. This method is actually practiced by your own Gendarmerie interrogators, but Masters' mental prowess provides us with a distinct advantage: the subject need only think the answer, not carelessly speak it aloud.

8. This stratagem of manipulating the direction of others' thought processes - of "steering", as it is sometimes called - is well known to charlatans, politicians, and even vendors with a knack for the 'tough sale'. For human manipulators, such redirecting of others' thoughts must perforce culminate in actual changes in behavior on the part of their subjects, to constitute a success. For doppelgangers, merely evoking the desired thoughts suffices to procure information, even if the subject chooses not to heed its leading words. (Hardly sporting, is it?)

Nevertheless, any doppelganger skilled in Adramelech's 'Mental Guidance' is also likely to be able to goad its subjects into a course of action it desires, given sufficient time to persuade them: a fair cause to be doubly wary of persons who seem always to 'know just what to say', Miladies.

9. By 'Adramelech's' own admission, this method is oft employed during the observation of a victim to be replaced. My own investigations suggest it is likewise employed in preparation for a subject's seduction and/or as a precursor to proactive deceit, and the chapter to follow implies it is also directed towards non-doppelganger accomplices, as a discreet technique of loyalty-testing. - Rookhausen

On Doppelganger Tactics

Diplomacy

While doppelgangers' detect thoughts power does not give them a bonus to Diplomacy checks, it frequently does allow them to determine what interests, worries, desires or prejudices a subject is harboring. By exposing a person's underlying motives, a successful use of detect thoughts could potentially give a doppelganger a +3 circumstance bonus on Diplomacy checks to influence that subject, provided it succeeds in mentally guiding said subject (see below).

Note that this bonus does not stack with the +2 Diplomacy bonus potentially derived via synergy with Sense Motive: a skill that discerns the same information through non-magical means. Most dread doppelgangers (standard DoD statistics) don't benefit from such synergy, as they have only four Sense Motive ranks, but many NPC imposters are likely to.

Mental Guidance

Mental guidance is a basic, yet practical technique. (Close your eyes and try not to think of your most embarrassing past experience. Unless you've been trained in meditation techniques, you probably won't be able to avoid it, or at least not instantly.) Each time it is employed, the subject must make a DC 20 Will save or accidentally think a response to the doppelganger's prompt. If the person is expecting it and attempts to shield his or her thoughts (e.g. by mentally reciting poetry in their head), the Will save's DC drops to 15. While this technique is a specialty of doppelgangers, anyone with access to the detect thoughts spell or effect can employ it. In fact, the individual detecting thoughts need not be the one prompting the victim.

If utilized in a social setting, this technique requires at least five minutes per attempt, and can be done for as long as the doppelganger stays in the conversation (or at least so long as the subject is listening to its words). Accompanying the attempt, the doppelganger makes a Bluff check against the victim's Sense Motive check to determine whether its victim notices that he or she is being conversationally led.

Alternatively, the doppelganger can try and surprise the victim with a question. In this case, the DC for the Will save rises by 4 (to 19 or 24, as appropriate). This only works a maximum of once per 10 minutes - assuming an imposter can keep the conversation going so long - and subsequent attempts suffer a cumulative -2 penalty to the DC for each previous such attempt. A Bluff check is allowed to pass off the creature's interjection as a fluke, but at a -8 penalty, with an additional -4 for each previous attempt; failure indicates the subject deduces the doppelganger's intent is to provoke a careless (verbal) admission.

Torture

In a pinch, a doppelganger can torture its victim, as per the Book of Vile Darkness rules. Detect thoughts is used primarily to determine if a victim is speaking the truth, or merely saying what their interrogator wants to hear, rather than to ferret out information directly. In this case, apply half of the circumstance bonus for the torture implement to the victim's Will save against the doppelganger's detect thoughts power. This is because the agony and terror of torture saturate the subject's thoughts and make mind-reading difficult - even painful - for the doppelganger. Most doppelgangers therefore disdain physical torture as a means of questioning others, relying on Intimidate checks (often aided by the adoption of a menacing form) to extract verbal confessions, with frequent pauses to verify any revealed facts with detect thoughts.

Doppelgangers - including Sodo and Adramelech - who suffer from Psychic Sadism, a type of insanity, are in no way impaired by such secondhand pain, nor are evil outsiders' detect thoughts abilities so impeded. Victims' Will saves to resist such an interrogator's mind-reading are not modified according to the torture implement used, and the use of detect thoughts during the actual torture process grants a +4 bonus to Intimidate checks to extract the information desired.

On Doppelganger Tactics

Of course, should Mental Guidance fail us, cruder methods of interrogation are an option. When someone is **Tortured** and asked questions repeatedly, then any mind, even the strongest, soon gives up its secrets. This technique is virtually foolproof, although for obvious reasons it is difficult to engineer, time-consuming, and requires the disposal of a body afterwards. (Nor is it popular with the more hidebound members of my breed, for reasons I, myself, find unfathomable... fools!) Will-breaking spells or drugs are of great help here. Moreover, I have had great success breaking even very difficult subjects with the application of flesh-eating beetles to, shall we say, sensitive areas of anatomy. It is amusing how quickly battle-hardened sailors will give in to the ministrations of a simple insect. Of course, one is not obliged to actually remove said insect after the information has been acquired.¹⁰

Once we are capable of discerning a victim's greatest secrets, their fears and their desires, Masters can do all sorts of interesting things. (Interesting for us that is; victims rarely find the experience so entertaining.) For instance, once you know the greatest and most hidden desires of a person, **Bribery** becomes remarkably easy.

Especially around a Master's home, comfort demands a reasonable expectation of security, and one of the best ways to ensure this is to make certain that the local enforcers of the law enforce it according to your wishes. For example, once I learned that the local Gendarmerie commander was extremely fond of Hazlani opium, arranging to become his supplier proved convenient, as well as fairly cheap (I even make a slight profit). Now, if ever some busybodies decide to try to invade my residence, the Gendarmerie will arrive quickly and haul them to gaol. It also helps when my neighbors complain about late-night screaming from the cellar. (Sometimes I do get a bit carried away...)

Alternatively, some Masters turn to the most time-honored of professions (no, the other one) and engage in **Espionage**. Information is among the most valuable of all commodities, so even if a Master has no immediate need to use a piece of information for either bribery or blackmail, it can always be sold to those who do. Actively carrying out missions of espionage is somewhat more difficult, but between the mental examination of relevant participants and the ability to take the form of authorized persons, only the most rigorous of physical and magical defenses can protect against a Master.

That said, relatively few Masters engage in high-level espionage. Simply put, it is far too dangerous. Heads of state typically have large numbers of troops and powerful magical assets at their disposal, such that only the most experienced of deceivers among us are willing to place their abilities (for a hefty price) at the disposal of governments. Of course, infiltrating the ranks of dissidents and betraying them to the state is much safer - it's not for nothing, that Zherisia's government has stood unchallenged for hundreds of years - and snooping around a merchant consortium's headquarters can be both fun and profitable.¹¹

A simpler method of making (off with) money is via straightforward Robbery. Again, Mental Guidance can provide a Master with near-perfect knowledge of the layout and defenses of a "secure" location, while the ability to mimic authorized persons permits said Master to circumvent most, if not all, mundane guards. Watchdogs and the like can admittedly pose a nuisance, but

10. Horrific, indeed ... yet not very typical of doppelganger mindsets, as I have so far come to understand them. Though both callous and ruthless, most do not appear as needlessly cruel as Adramelech boasts of being: burdened with a captive of no further use, I gather that the average doppelganger will simply snap the prisoner's neck and have done with the matter. This specific creature's sadism may well derive from mental disturbance or displaced vindictiveness towards its fellows; indeed, if it has a long history of wanton acts of viciousness, it might well have been outcast due to the unacceptable security-risks posed by its malicious 'sport'. - Rookhausen

On Doppelganger Tactics

with a little forward planning, one can first arrange to be introduced to the animals as a friend in one false identity, then return in another guise confident that they know one's scent to be "friendly". Poisoned or soporific-laced meat also works wonders, as countless thieves have found, though it is a bit crude.¹²

While some Masters restrict themselves to burglarizing the residences of various nobles, I have always preferred museums or art galleries. I have spent many a pleasant evening at the Musee du Port-a-Lucine. On occasion, I even take select works home with me. Aesthetics aside, a good **Robbery**, while profitable, may take as much preparation as does a properly-executed Assumption, so I generally only resort to it if there is a specific object I intend to have.

For the direct acquisition of funds, I prefer the time-tested method of **Cheating at Cards**. High-stakes gambling is an extremely simple thing to manipulate for the Master with even a modicum of manual dexterity. Generally I attend only skill-based games, chance being somewhat harder to tamper with. Once there, the ability to read the minds of others is invaluable. Seated at a card table, I can know the cards of every other player, and combined with the perfect poker face, this makes me a formidable gamesman indeed!

Moreover, the ability of Masters to change the appearance of objects also comes into play, to excellent effect. Once I know every card presently in others' hands, I can change my own hand via the Glamer all Masters extend about themselves, into whatever spread I desire. So long as the cards remain within five feet of my body, they retain their assigned façade, and thus even after being placed on the table will appear as I wish them to, until reshuffled. So long as no one behind you can view your cards, it is almost too easy, though most Masters who specialize in card-cheating make a point of losing quite often, sometimes disastrously, to avoid inviting suspicion. (Granted, venues in which professional gambling is carried out often have methods of detecting magical cheating, and Masters must be cautious there. The personnel such gaming-halls employ to discourage cheaters tend to be rather brusque. Private games in gentlemen's clubs or the back rooms of parties are less alert to such shenanigans, and a better option for a quick profit.)¹³

Of course, sometimes winning can be as large a problem as losing. There was one game a number of years back, in which I played against a merchant who owned nearly a dozen ships, and decided to place the title to one of his fleet as his ante. I had a deuce of a time finding buyers for my very own trading caravel!

11. Here, Adramelech speaks only of profit-motivated espionage. Be aware, Miladies, that despite this creature's assertions, doppelgangers can and have become affiliated with political or social factions - criminal conspiracies or secret societies in particular - and placed their abilities at such organizations' disposal. Seldom though doppelgangers devote themselves to a cause with sincerity, the rare exception can be as formidable an opponent as an undercover operative is likely to confront, whether it functions as a field-agent and infiltrator, or a counter-infiltration security expert endowed with mind-reading and a lifetime's honed expertise at skills of "the trade".

12. A possible slip on Adramelech's part, here...? While I am not personally in a position to test its efficacy - no ranger, I, to train and properly tend to animals - the possibility of using dogs' acute senses to distinguish humans from doppelgangers is an intriguing prospect, and one revisited in a subsequent field-report I have enclosed.

13. Over the years, I myself have visited more than a few gaming tables of the sort to which Adramelech refers. Until the moment I'd perused these paragraphs, I had permitted myself the vanity of thinking those gentlemen who retired from the table at my approach were driven off, one and all, by my formidable reputation with the cards! Now, looking back, I wonder how many retreated when they became aware that my thoughts are not so easily perused as are most men's, owing to the protective trinket kept always on my person. Next time, make no mistake, I will keep a sharper eye on such drop-out players' doings!

- Rookhausen

On Doppelganger Tactics

*In addition to gaining wealth, a Master's unique abilities can also serve to destroy or punish others. My own preferred method for this is the ever-popular **Character Assassination**. Once a group of adventurers or other troublemakers have become social pariahs, most of them get the hint and leave. Even if this doesn't occur, they are usually severely hampered by loss of allies and their own ostracism by the masses.*

In undertaking a proper Character Assassination, the Master must first decide what social faux pas or negative character trait is best assigned to the snoopers. For this, two considerations are important: the prevailing social mores of one's location, and an impression (not necessarily a deep one) of what the snoops are actually like. The first is important for obvious reasons, as not all deeds are considered equally abhorrent in all milieus: accusing someone of being a magic-user produces pitchforks in Tepest and shrugs in Hazlan. The second is vital because, while it is quite possible to convince people of virtually anything, it is far easier if the snoops appear to fit the popular conception of the "villains" you intend to portray them as. Of course, if the allegation is true, one's task is all too easy, but even a complete fabrication should seem plausible. Accusing a monk sworn to poverty of extreme avarice can be problematic even for an expert liar.

Once an offense has been decided on, there are two methods of spreading the idea of the subjects' guilt, either from within or from without. Ideally, both means can, and should, be used together, ensuring maximum impact and allowing the two techniques to reinforce one another.

Spreading a rumor from within (that is, from within the victims' own number), is easy enough. When the Master is certain that one of the subjects is elsewhere, it takes on the guise of that subject and commits an egregious social faux pas, preferably in public. Of course, the subject should be unable to account for his or her whereabouts at the time of the embarrassment. One of my favorite methods is, at some high-society ball or the like, to slip a strong laxative into the drink of the subject. Once the subject makes for the privy, I ambush them, either incapacitating them by magic or simply coshing them with a blackjack (always pleasant). Then, while they are out of commission, I adopt their form and go insult the hostess. The most deliciously-fiendish result of this approach is that the victim's story is both humiliating and unbelievable. ("You were ambushed in the privy?... Uh-huh, I see, do go on...")

Once the spark has been ignited, one must then fan the flames, as it were. To that end, the simplest method is to take the forms of people trusted within society, and spread rumors to the appropriate ears. For example, I am aware that the Countess L_____ is a notorious rumormonger. As such, I take the form of one of her friends, the Lady K_____, and then tell her a most amusing story about those people snooping around. I can then retire from the field, in full confidence that the Countess will see to the dispersal of the rumor faster than I, myself, ever could. Moreover, the erratic nature of rumors and how they spread assures that anyone tracing it back to its "source" will wind up accusing Lady K_____, who will flatly deny initiating such a piece of nonsense, precisely as she would if she had, in fact, done so! If I have cause to be annoyed at Lady K_____ herself, as well as the snoops in question, her vain protests of innocence and loss of face offer a savory fringe benefit.

In most cases, being shut out of society, branded as fools, perverts, or worse, and having mothers pull children into homes when the subjects walk by is enough to see off most busybodies who've been making pests of themselves. In extreme cases, this may even cause the snoops to be forcibly ejected from the town as 'undesirables'. Should that fail to discourage a bothersome individual or group, more extreme measures are required.

*The **False Accusation** can serve such a purpose admirably. Fundamentally, the principle is the same, except that instead of simply making troublemakers social pariahs, the Master sees to it that they are accused of a crime, captured, convicted, and ultimately either tossed into the dungeons of the Gendarmerie, or delivered to a cheery rendezvous with Madame Guillotine.*

The first step is to commit a crime. (This is the part I personally enjoy the most.) As before, one must ensure that one's targets are incapable of

On Doppelganger Tactics

interfering, or of accounting for their movements. Sleep spells are effective, although for those like myself without access to arcane magic, some narcotics can serve the purpose as well. A refined version of Oil of Taggit known as Bleak Oil is my personal favorite. Alternately, laying a false trail that takes them out of town for a day or two, and away from witnesses, is always an option. ("Oh, please, you must find my dear Rene, due back from Chateaufaux ten days past! And, if you pity us, do so in secrecy, lest my father learn of our romance before our plans to flee Port-a-Lucine can be carried out") Stealing a weapon or other identifiable item from one's intended targets is also a good idea.

Afterwards, one may proceed with the crime: ideally, something fairly horrific, and preferably carrying a death penalty. Mass murder is generally sufficient, as is torture of one sort or another. I generally leave a witness or two alive, and capable of identifying the (apparent) culprits. Ensuring that they catch a glimpse of more than one of the group you are framing is, of course, desirable; for example, one can tie the intended survivor up and set them aside in a closet, then stride past the door ("accidentally" left ajar) in one guise after another. Likewise, either leave the stolen weapon at the scene of the crime, or make sure it is well covered in blood and then secretly return it to the snoops.

Then go to the Gendarmerie.

In an ideal world, the "culprits" will be regaining consciousness or returning to their quarters just as the Gendarmes arrive. Hopefully they are still too groggy or puzzled to resist, and will be bundled up and delivered to gaol. Afterwards, it is imperative for the Master to expedite the process of justice, since every hour runs the risk that one's deceit may be uncovered. If well done, the fraud should be impenetrable, but one can never be too careful! That said, the Master may need to do nothing more. The forces of justice will play out, and the snoops will be executed or incarcerated as necessary, without any further intervention on the Master's part. In fact, it is quite possible for a Master's efforts to reinforce such a framing to backfire, drawing undue attention to the Master itself. On the other hand, especially if judicial officers are annoyingly conscientious or if the staged crime scene has flaws, a Master may be forced to act, lest its entire fraud unravel. A pretty conundrum, is it not?

I personally prefer a fairly hands-off method. In a pinch, I might assume the form of the Mayor's personal aide or some other bureaucratic official, and so pressure the Gendarmerie to "punish the instigators of this horrific crime in our fair city". More often than not, this is enough to ensure that the troublemakers are put out of the way in a swift and suitably judicial fashion. If not, intimations as to their possession of politically-embarrassing facts about the Gendarmerie officers, themselves, may lead to an "unfortunate accident" in police custody. (A handy recourse for many occasions, that Mental Guidance; would you not agree, Alphonse?)

Bleak Oil

Bleak oil is a concentrated form of oil of taggit first developed in Lamordia, the formula of which has since spread to Dementlieu, Mordent, Darkon and Borca, as well as to Paridon. It is a potent soporific, although it has lingering side-effects that weaken the target. It has a very mild taste, like that of olive oil, and is often used in sanitariums to keep violent inmates under control.

Poison	Type	Initial Damage	Secondary Damage	Craft DC	Market Price
Bleak Oil	Ingested DC 18	Sleep	1D4	20	300 gp

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*But here, again, I have proven myself the absent-minded academic, for I have forgotten the most important and widespread stratagem of the Masters: one used to acquire both power and wealth! Specifically, I refer to **Blackmail**. Once a Master has ascertained some deep secret about a subject, via Mental Guidance, the age-old art of extortion can provide substantial funds, as well as long-term influence over said subject and hence, by extension, control over his business, his civil-service offices, his vote in Parliament, etc. It does have a tendency to occasionally backfire, if one chooses a particularly stubborn or self-righteous victim, but is still an extremely effective and proven method of coercion.*

*Take, for example, M. d'Alber. In many ways, he is the archetypal victim of blackmail. His wealth is quite impressive (or it *was*, to be precise), he is overly fond of his public image, and he lacks the backbone which nature granted to the common gray ooze.*

And he has a secret. It seems that in his youth, dear Donatien had been something of a philanderer, as well as rather handsome. (Age does not improve some people.) In fact, he once indulged in a rather tumultuous and extended affair, that resulted in a child. Now, in and of itself, this is hardly unusual; I sometimes think there is not a man in Dementlieu that sleeps in his own bed. The catch is that this affair was with a Sithican expatriate, an elf! What makes it all the more delicious is that M. d'Alber is wedded to the daughter of an extremely staid, conservative family. Should his affair ever be found out, his wife will leave him, taking her dowry with her, which will utterly ruin her wayward spouse's sterling reputation, while severely damaging his finances.

It is now that I will provide you, my dear Alphonse, with an object lesson of why we are the Masters. Over the past few weeks, I have steadily bled M. d'Alber of most of his fortune, to the extent of forcing him to sell off several family heirlooms. He is quite deeply in debt now. As I have now received everything I coveted from this man, I am sending proof of his indiscretions to his wife, to her family, and to several of the more prominent and gossip-loving society matrons of Port-a-Lucine. By this time tomorrow, M. Donatien d'Alber will be ruined entirely, his good name sullied, his finances shattered, and his health devastated by worry.

And I can do this freely. I can do this without incurring any consequences, without the least fear of reprisals. At a whim, I can and I will ruin a man's life. And no one can stop me.

Because I am a Master.

Your Dearest Correspondent,

Adramelech

On Doppelganger Tactics

Personal Journal of Capt. Alphonse Vignes:

July 30th, 760 (concluded that evening)

My hand shaking, I put down the letter and looked up. M. d'Alber was nowhere to be found. He'd apparently left while I was still engrossed in the correspondence.

As I looked round to see where M. d'Alber had gone, the crack of a pistol broke the silence.

August 1st, 760

No Gendarme is a stranger to death. When one patrols the wretched slums of the Quartier Ouvrier or tracks a murderer by the docks, death becomes, if not close, then at least accepted. But the knowledge that you have been the unwitting instrument of death is never an easy burden to bear. And by delivering him that accursed letter, I slew M. Donatien d'Alber as surely as if I had wielded the pistol myself.

But the true blame must be ascribed to the devil Adramelech, and that creature I will hunt down through eternity.

August 12th, 760¹⁴

I've just returned from yet another interrogation at the Palace of Justice. I've told the young officers everything I knew about the Fiend, but I can tell they don't believe me. There is one in particular who all but scoffs openly at me, and the others believe him. They are coming to think me nothing more than an old fool, a decrepit, doddering relic who should carry himself off to the knackers.

And yet...recently I've begun to fear that perhaps they are not wholly wrong. I've been feeling more tired recently, and it takes greater effort for me to rise from my bed in the mornings. I've neither seen nor heard from the Fiend for some time now. *Helas!* Am I getting old?

August 29th, 760

I must in truth be getting old, because I am starting to forget things. I wake, and find my glass of water on the nightstand moved, or filled when I recall emptying it in the night. I cannot find my reading glasses, though I search for hours. And sometimes I feel unnaturally tired, as if my very bones were like jelly, so much so that I must sit down and rest, no matter what I am doing. And to think, a few months ago I thought myself as strong as when I was a young man...

September 9th, 760

The strangest thing happened today. I had the idea of gathering up the letters that the Fiend has sent me, and presenting them to the current head of the Gendarmerie for the Quartier Marchand, Commandant Jacques Sautet, an old friend and superior from years gone by. It took me some time, but I managed to find the three mocking missives with which Adramelech had taunted me. It wasn't easy to secure an appointment with Jacques, but my rank still has some uses. But what was strange was that when I passed him the sheets of Rajian paper, he read them through very carefully, then handed them back and asked me to read them to him.

14. Despite the increasingly private nature of their contents, I feel I must pass on this final series of excerpts from M. Vignes' journal. The critical value of its testament as to the effects of Adramelech's crowning atrocity against a valiant and honorable man - effects, that hunters must be prepared to recognize in themselves, if and when fortune grants us the opportunity to bring Vignes' Fiend to justice - outweighs the remorse I feel at exposing that worthy man's sorrows, both past and present, to other eyes. I leave it to you, dear sisters, to choose how much of what follows should ultimately be disseminated to the Society at large, knowing that your judgment will be sound as to which details might safely be kept confidential, for the sake of the afflicted Captain's dignity. - Rookhausen

On Doppelganger Tactics

Ezra help me, if I was not reading my old retirement papers! But I had read the letters again, just before I came... I was very confused. Jacques, Ezra bless his soul, was kind to me, and suggested that I draw upon the services of a good alienist, a Doctor Jean Braudel.

I do not need to see an alienist. I am possessed of all of my wits...aren't I?

September 12th, 760

I am starting to hear things. I hear screams for help, or some villainous thug's swearing, always just in the next room. The first time it happened, I grabbed my pistol and rushed outside. I believe I scared the Widow deLanne out of a year's growth.

September 16th, 760

I do not understand! I've been suffering blackouts recently. I will be minding my home, and then I will lose all memory for hours. I wake up somewhere in my house most times, but recently I awakened in an alleyway gutter, several blocks from my residence. I begin to fear for myself, for my nerves.

Just this morning, the Widow deLanne said that I had been rampaging about the house and yelling loud enough to wake her during the night, but I remember nothing.

It is the last straw. Tomorrow I go and see this alienist, Dr. Braudel.

September 17th, 760

Dr. Braudel has been kind, but I am still afraid for myself. We spoke at length, and I found myself telling him of my life: how my parents died in a fire, how I joined the Gendarmerie, how I retired, and how the Fiend Adramelech had been persecuting me. When I told him of the deaths of Dr. Kinnaird and M. Donatien, he looked at me very strangely, and said that Dr. Kinnaird was quite alive. He had spoken with the man but yesterday. Did I imagine Adramelech? Has all this been nothing more than some feverish imaginings of a mind going mad?

Dr. Braudel has prescribed me some herbs and drugs, which he mixed up himself.

September 21st, 760

The medicine is not helping. The voices are growing louder and more insistent, and I am starting to see things. I fear that I have begun to recognize the voices, and they are not ones that Adramelech could know of.

How could the Fiend possibly know? Such memories, I've held at bay for so long! I'd not thought of such things in years; I know I have not.

September 23rd, 760

Perhaps my grim worrying explains what happened next. Perhaps it was a dream, like so much of my life seems to have become. Please, Ezra, let it have been a dream....

I remember entering my home, troubled by morbid thoughts of death, and sensing something subtly wrong in the air. My words cannot describe it, but a miasma of fear or uneasiness seemed to pervade the atmosphere of the house. Wary, I drew my sidearm, and moved through rooms grown unfamiliar, poised to face whatever threat I had sensed. Suddenly, as I entered my somewhat austere kitchen, I was transfixed.

"Frère Jacques, Frère Jacques,

Dormez-vous? Dormez-vous?

Sonnez les matines! Sonnez les matines!

Din, dan, don. Din, dan, don."

A soft, gentle woman's voice - one I'd not heard in so many years, yet knew like I know my own name - was singing. It had been my mother's favorite nursery-song, that she sang to me as a lad. I

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knew it could not be true, yet my lips moved silently with the words. Just once, the verse ghosted through the air, then was gone.

After the song died down, I searched the rest of the house in a frantic haste. Yet, though I found nothing, the unpleasant feeling did not abate. In the end, I retreated to my bed, accompanied by a bottle of wine to drown the painful memories.

September 26th, 760

I have had the most horrible nightmare. I had spent the day helping the Widow deLanne with her home repairs, but could not seem to concentrate. My thoughts drifted to grim and dusty memories, and my hands shook; I downed cup after cup of the herbal tea she provided, to soothe my nerves, yet my mouth seemed always parched. I grow tired far too easily these days. I try to blame it on the stress of the last months, but cannot long believe it. Regardless, I returned to my home as soon as courtesy allowed, and retired straight to bed.

In my dream, I awoke to singing. "*Frere Jacques, Frere Jacques...*" I bolted upright in my bed, taking in the darkened room, the old wardrobe, the tattered curtains, the single chipped vase of flowers. Dementlieu does not treat her old gendarmes well. I thought the singing was coming from the window, so cautiously, carefully, I rose from my bed and opened the dusty shutter. What I saw, I will remember till my dying day.

Standing in the alleyway behind my home, I saw a figure draped in black. She sang out into the night, a song drawn from the haunting depths of my memory. As my eyes adjusted to the dark, I saw it was my own mother, dead these many years, standing outside, her skin and clothing burnt black from the flames of that Ezra-forsaken fire. She turned to me, and with the sweet voice I had mourned for decades, called to me.

She called to me, but I was already in shock. I collapsed backwards, and awoke, pale and sweating, in my bed. It must have been a nightmare. It must have!

Then why is my window open?

September 30th, 760

When I took up writing in a journal, I was told that it would calm the mind. And, Ezra help me, I need such calm right now. I was in the kitchen, cleaning up after dinner, when I heard that song again. How I wish I had stopped my ears to it! But no, I was determined to find out what was happening. I took hold of a kitchen knife, and entered the living room.

Standing there was an image to turn my hair white. In the center of the room, my mother stood, her skin charred and blackened, her dress bloodstained and burnt, and with a ghastly, raw wound in her neck. Her eyes were just as blue as I remembered.

I dropped the knife before this, this apparition, and yearned to flee. But I could not. My limbs were frozen as surely as if I were in chains. Then she spoke, in the sweet, melodious voice of my dreams.

"Trying to run away again, Alphonse? Just like you did so long ago?"

I tried to shake my head, but no movement was possible. Not a spell, not this time, but the weight of her accusations' truth.

"You left us, Alphonse, left us to go rollicking with your friends. Left us alone, that night, unprotected. You weren't there when I was killed. You weren't there when your father was killed. You weren't there when our lives were burned down. Burned to ashes."

Her hand seemed to fall to soot, only to reform itself from the crumbling cinders. I was horrorstruck, riveted by the image.

"You weren't there when Remy was shot. You weren't there when Pierre was knifed on the docks. You weren't there when Villau was ripped apart. You weren't there when Kinnaird was killed. You weren't there when d'Alber killed himself. You weren't there."

(I tried to deny it. Ezra help me, I tried.)

"You weren't there, Alphonse. All your life, you're not there. You never were. I have watched, and I have waited, and still, you aren't there. Well, no more. Tomorrow, I'll come back, and make sure that for once in your life, Alphonse, you are there."

And with that, the apparition was gone. But she'll be back. Yes, she'll be back. And she's right. I'm not there. I never am. I'm never there. But tomorrow I will be. Yes. Tomorrow I'll be there. I'll be there.

October 1st, 760

She's here! I can hear the singing!



GOING OUT TO TEA IN THE SUBURBS
A Pretty State of Things

On Doppelganger Tactics

"Adramelech" Letter #4, dated October 2nd, 760

My Dear Captain Alphonse Vignes,

Doubt. I have long been of the view, personally, that Doubt is the most powerful of all emotions. There are many who consider Piety the greater, while other deluded fools hold Love in highest regard. A few outlanders even speak of Pain as the greatest emotion. And yet, Doubt can undermine Faith and destroy Love, and while the Pain of one's body lasts for but a brief moment, Doubt can devour one's soul for eternity.

It is also the deadliest weapon we Masters possess. Think of it objectively. For all of our inherent advantages, my kind are yet physically vulnerable. The ability to change one's shape at will is of decidedly-limited use when confronted with swords. But it is our ability to spread Doubt that gives us our power. Even the greatest of heroes are but men when Doubt gnaws at their minds. For years, there was even Doubt of our very existence, until the Flickerfool managed to successfully ruin our greatest advantage (and one wonders why I hate him so?). But I digress. In concrete terms, Doubt comes in two primary forms that can be used by Masters: Doubt of the Will and Doubt of the Mind.

Doubt of the Will is that which is more commonly exploited by Masters, being far easier to undermine. Essentially, the goal when inciting this form of Doubt is to erode the confidence, determination and unity of a group of adversaries... most often do-gooder adventurers, such being frustratingly-commonplace irritants faced by Masters these days. (One can hardly commit a simple mass murder lately, without would-be heroes barging in! What is the world coming to?) A team of would-be "monster-slayers", united in their purpose, confident of their aims, and with the full backing of local authorities is a potent threat, whereas a disjointed and paranoid mob of individuals, unsure of their abilities and distrustful of their allies, and cut off from outside help, is just another slate of victims for one's entertainment.

The first step in seeding Doubt is, as always, Observation. As in the early steps of Assumption, any prudent Master first spends some time in reconnaissance. Simply following the snoops around is often useful, as is an inspection of their belongings and some delicate sifting of their minds. I often use Mental Guidance toward this end. The facts that are being searched for are manifold, but one's key points of interest include the snoops' fears, the names and locations of their allies, and the amount of trust (or, more to the point, distrust) present between members of the group. It is always easier to exploit existing animosity than it is to create it from scratch.

The next step is almost always External Isolation of the troublemakers from any help. The feeling of separation almost always impairs the confidence levels of enemies, and not having access to allies always degrades the effectiveness of those operating in an unfamiliar area. In some instances, when the snoops are themselves newcomers, nothing more need be done, but if they have friends, the first active step must be to remove them.

Of course, the most direct method of removing said friends is to murder them in some amusingly-violent fashion. If the snoops consult a sage, and later hear that he has been chopped into numerous pieces, even the dullest adventurer will experience a glimmer of fear. And after the fourth or fifth person they consult has been slaughtered, even the dimmest will notice a pattern.

This has two main effects. First off, the feeling of being hunted like an animal evokes a certain primal fear in even the most battle-hardened heroes, and watching their allies drop like proverbial flies can generate a feeling of terror, and perhaps guilt, like no other. Secondly, especially in small towns or villages, the knowledge that the snoops are "carriers of death" soon turns them into social pariahs, since no one wishes to be the next victims. In extreme situations, the snoops themselves may well be blamed for the deaths, letting agents of justice step in to expediently solve the Master's problem (as per False Accusations). Should the do-gooders truly believe their own self-righteous conceits, they may even voluntarily refrain from seeking further assistance -

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even when they sorely need it - rather than subject further potential allies to the danger of contact with them.

As a side note, most Masters refrain from destroying everyone the pests are allied with, but strike at just enough of their contacts to put the troublemakers in fear. Having a few allies of the snoops left over can be quite useful for later tactics, and an excess of unconcealed deaths in a given community may foment such paranoia amongst the populace as to place the Master's own façade in jeopardy. (Even rampaging lynch-mobs can chance to stumble upon the right target on occasion.)

Yet another layer of subtlety can be added, by using the murders to convince the snoops that they are not facing a Master at all, but some other member of the "Legions of the Night", as the Ezrans persist in calling us. (I take offense at this term. Though I may not squander my nights in sleep as humans do, I am decidedly diurnal in my habits.) The implement known as the "catspaw" can be useful, leading one's pursuers to believe that some sort of lycanthrope is responsible for the murders. I have a rather lovely set of wererat catspaws which are quite useful for a city setting, although I fear I am no longer welcomed in Richemulot. (How was I to know that Mme. R_____ was a wererat? I'd never met the worthy in question!) Another trick is to convince the snoops that a vampire is at large, through application of a device called a vampiric pump, invented by a fellow in Valachan, I believe.

Tools of the Trade

Catpaws are detailed in Van Richten's Arsenal.

A vampiric pump is a device based on a sanguine pump (also in VRA). Essentially, it is a hand-powered pump that transfers blood from a target into a large glass jar or leather pouch. It can be used as a normal sanguine pump at need. The primary difference is that the head of the main tube, where needles would be located on a sanguine pump, is topped by a special hinged construction resembling a vampire's jaws, complete with fangs, through which the actual blood is removed.

When examining the wounds produced by a vampiric pump, a character may make a Knowledge (religion) check to distinguish the result from the bite of a genuine vampire. The base DC for such a check is 18. If the pump's maker designed the device after seeing a genuine vampire-bite, the DC to distinguish the fang-marks' source is 20, and if the maker actually incorporates teeth of a slain vampire into the device, the DC becomes 25. If the character making the check has a copy of Van Richten's Guide to Vampires on hand, or has seen genuine vampire-bites at some time in the past, he or she receives a +2 circumstance bonus on the Knowledge (religion) check for each of these advantages that apply.

In order for a vampiric pump to be used, the target must be willing, helpless, or dead.

Item	CL	Cost	Craft (DC)	Weight
Vampiric Pump	9	100 gp	Glassblowing (25)	2 lb.

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Dread Possibility: The Doppelganger in Wolf's Clothing

People are stupid. Perac (NE dread doppelganger) had believed this its entire life, evidence to the contrary notwithstanding. Humans were fundamentally gullible, ignorant creatures, and Masters had a tendency to be the same. The fact that it was exiled from Paridon as a security risk after nearly leading a trio of police officers to a clan meeting was merely a freak accident.

Once in the Core, Perac moved south, looking for greener pastures, discarding Ludendorf as too cold, Port-a-Lucine as too dangerous, Lekar as too crowded. It tried to settle in Chateaufaux, but was chased out by local doppelgangers when Alanik Ray came inland to investigate its crimes. Levkarest was considered and promptly discarded after a close call with an ermordenung.

Eventually, Perac arrived in Verbrek, and it was there that it hit upon a scheme that would keep it in warm inns and cold ale for life: Perac became a "lycanthrope hunter". Using its sole salient ability, Animal Form from the Path of Tin, it would terrorize a village for a week or two, showing the residents huge wolves and rampaging boars, or perhaps a ferocious bear - black not brown, but Perac (an urban monster) didn't see how its color could make a difference - all of them with unnatural cunning. Then, Perac could arrive in werhunter's guise and "slay the beast", invariably using explosives or drowning or other means that left no body. Pocketing the pay, it would then run off to the next village.

In person, Perac is a flamboyant narcissist with a highly inflated notion of its own intelligence. A compulsive show-off and hustler, it is also almost laughably bad at maintaining its pretense as a competent monster-slayer (though the "hunter's" odd habits seem to lend it an air of authenticity, to the ignorant peasants whom Perac scams). Any skeptic can tell it's a fraud, though the fact that it's a monster itself isn't nearly as obvious. Like most dread doppelgangers, Perac turns vicious at the drop of a hat, preferring to adopt the shapes of leopards or wild boars to fight. It wanders the southeastern Core from one tiny hamlet to the next, advertising its "lycanthrope-slaying" skill under the name 'Piotr Draceszcu'.

Unfortunately for Perac, some others have also taken an interest in it. Recently, several genuine werewolves have noticed that this hunter is boasting a great many werewolf-kills, yet not a single lycanthrope actually knows anyone slain by the newcomer. Rumor has it that Alfred Timothy wishes to have a 'chat' with this interloper, who dares to defame the Wolf God and His followers with empty boasts. It may be only a matter of time before Perac attempts its scam in a village that has an actual werewolf in residence....

Between its dearth of character levels and its lack of competence, Perac offers a handy way for DMs to introduce dread doppelgangers, and their salient abilities, to fairly low-level PCs ... and to do so without rendering their players too paranoid, early in their characters' careers. Having bested an imposter as inept as this one is, the gradual realization of how sly and elusive these foes can potentially be, when a doppelganger actually knows what it's doing, can then come as even more of a shock.

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In some cases, the troublemakers may already suspect they are facing a Master, in which case, the Master may instead set out to convince them that the humans around them are Masters as well. Thus, would-be hunters will isolate themselves from perfectly valid sources of aid, for fear that those sources are not what they seem! As a rule, snoops who realize what they are truly facing quickly grow rather paranoid without such prompting, but it never hurts to remind them.

The quickest method to instill this suspicion is to permit them to see the Master change shape, preferably from the guise of one ally to that of another. This generally puts a damper on any feelings of trust or cooperation the busybodies harbor, as they're left unsure whom they are dealing with. The best part, by the way, is that even if the heroes fully realize they are being toyed with, they still cannot be sure their allies aren't Masters! It is really a quite delicious irony.

Regardless of whether the initial result is achieved by murder or manipulation, the next step is Internal Isolation. Once a group of adventurers (and like most vermin, they always travel in groups) has been sufficiently isolated from outside help, they must be broken apart, so that each is stranded in a state of personal isolation, devoid of comfort or aid, even from one another. In truth, this is the most difficult task a Master can set for himself, since a band of "slayers" who share a long history and bonds of camaraderie can prove impossible to divide, especially if they are already alert to the presence of Masters. Nevertheless, if this objective can be achieved, the effectiveness of their pursuit decreases drastically.

Frankly, the best and most reliable method of separating one's adversaries is to exploit existing hostilities. There are few groups so monolithic that there is not some hidden grievance or unvoiced suspicion between them. Mental Guidance can bring these to the fore, and then it is up to the Master to drive the wedge in (an appropriate metaphor, since this cleaving of ties can be a tedious process). Exact methods can vary, but by and large, most Masters prefer to temporarily remove a specific target - again, Bleak Oil can be useful - and adopt their form, to quickly make "true" whatever suspicions the rest might harbor against that target. Less daring Masters may forge incriminating documents and place them where they will be found, filch items from one member of the group and arrange for their discovery in the custody of another, or spread rumors about the target and ensure those rumors reach the ears of the others. It depends largely on the level and type of suspicions present.

Sometimes, members of a group of pests might be lovers, in which case I always feel as if I've been granted an unfair advantage. (Not that this stops me from taking said advantage, I should note!) Man is a jealous creature, intensely suspicious of betrayal, and disinclined to listen to reason, in matters of the heart. My personal favorite ploy in such situations is to take the form of some heart-breakingly attractive human, and then to greet one of the two targets in a manner bespeaking great intimacy. Afterwards, I retreat to a safe distance and watch the fireworks. It is really quite amusing what your human glandular urges can drive your kind to say and to do.

Finally, whether or not a Master is successful at breaking apart the targets' unity, the concluding step is usually that of Instilling Terror. Simply put, the idea is to frighten one's adversaries past the point of endurance, so they will either flee for their lives, start acting irrationally, or at the very least become excessively wary, jumpy, and exhausted by their vigilance. This is another of my favorite past-times: never doubt that mental torture is nonetheless torture, and hence, entertaining to no end.

One of the simplest, yet most reliable methods to foster terror is to Exploit the Fears of the snoops. The principle is basic. Everyone, regardless of their age, gender or species, is afraid of something. Some may be terrified to death of spiders, whereas others suffer from a distinct dread of heights. Being directly confronted with these fears often results in extreme terror on the part of the snoop, often far out of proportion to the actual danger (if any) of the situation.

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The variety of phobias is nearly endless, but a few common and easily-exploitable ones follow:

Exploiting Arachnophobia (fear of spiders) or Ophidiophobia (fear of snakes), is almost ridiculously easy. All one needs to do is to acquire a few living specimens and release them into the room of the subject during the night. A Cliché, yet effective, and as an added bonus, the specimens can be venomous, possibly crippling one's target in body as well as in confidence. Such creatures also make excellent traps for one's own residence, in the event that the troublemakers' pursuit should draw uncomfortably close.

Exploiting Claustrophobia, or fear of confined spaces, can be more difficult, but a fairly good method is to engineer the collapse of the roof in a building where one's target is currently located. In addition to the hope one might simply kill the snoop - and in a manner likely to be dismissed as accidental, no less! - being trapped beneath a mound of rubble is likely to trigger a severe attack of claustrophobia, as well as morbid thoughts of mortality. Alternatively, drugging the pest and confining them in a tiny cage is always entertaining, especially if one already has cause to remove one of the hunters' number (e.g. to take the target's place).

Agoraphobia is a fear about which there are several misconceptions, and in its classic sense (fear of crowds) it is generally impossible for Masters to replicate: our own numbers, even in Paridon, are seldom so great as to constitute a "crowd". But underlying this phobia is the fear of being in a situation without any escape, or to put it bluntly, of being trapped. Not such an unreasonable fear, but one that can be manipulated easily, if one controls the environment. Doors that lock on their own, mazes, and other such methods of preventing egress can provide excellent triggers of agoraphobia, in addition to being useful for other purposes.

*There are two additional factors about the nature of fear that can be exploited by savvy Masters. The first is a phenomenon known as *Cultural Fear*. Quite simply, people are usually conditioned to scoff at certain things, and be deathly afraid of others. As an example, consider Barovians and their near-pathologic fear of darkness and vampires. For their entire lives, they are conditioned to be inside before sundown, and are terrified of horrible creatures that lurk at night. As such, if the group of pursuers I am dealing with contains a Barovian, my vampiric pump tends to see a great deal of use.¹⁵*

*The second is what may be termed *Fear of the Unknown*. Again, simply put, it means that terror is greatest if the cause and intentions of a threat are utterly unknown and mysterious. Quite often, the simple expedient of letting one's pursuers theorize about what they may be facing allows them to frighten themselves more than the Master could ever manage... indeed, if they come up with a theory that distresses them sufficiently, a wise Master can glean that*

15. While Adramelech's knowledge of human psychological weaknesses is quite frightening in itself, it is not fully human, and appears to underestimate humans' resiliency. One need look no further than our own Society colleagues to see that such natal fears give way, as one's courage is tested, and proven, by adversity. Hence, the 'Fiend' is wrong to claim that such ingrained terrors need must haunt our "entire lives".
- Rookhausen

Preying on Fear

Exploiting the fear of a specific character is ground for a Horror save with a DC between 10 and 25, depending on severity. Thus, an ophidiophobe that finds a tiny, non-venomous snake in his bed may make a DC 10 Horror save, whereas one who is suspended over a pit of snakes may have to make a DC 25 Horror save. In extreme, prolonged situations (such as if the ophidiophobe were dropped into the snake pit and left there), a Madness save may be warranted.

In general, the DC of a Horror save is raised by 10 if the character is specifically phobic about the source (so a normal PC suffers a DC 15 save if suspended over a snake pit).

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very notion from their minds, then adapt any future killings to seemingly bear it out!

This is why I do not always employ catspaws, pumps, or related gimmicks to disguise my own handiwork as that of some specific agency: leaving the cause of death a mystery can be more disturbing than assigning it to some quantifiable source. Particularly clever Masters change their methods on a regular basis, thus undermining the confidence of their enemies as first one theory, then another, falls by the wayside. If I have used my wererat 'paws for several murders now, I might use the vampiric pump for the next, or perhaps a necromantic spell. It is always useful to keep one's would-be attackers guessing... although if they have decided upon a specific course of action beneficial to me (such as loading up on garlic and holy water), then I happily let them persist in their delusion.

But, alas, there are some troublemakers that just don't scare. They shrug off the artful spurring of their fears, draw only increased determination from an accumulation of murders, and are completely unfazed by the unknown. In these circumstances, the Master brings to bear a more insidious weapon: the power to instill Doubt of the Mind. Even the greatest and most fearless of heroes can fall prey to insanity.

Now, insanity is a complex subject, and one that has seen a great deal of research by such leading lights as Gregorian Illhousen, James Mousel, Daclaud Heinfroth and Vilhelm Mikki. I am an enthusiastic reader of their medical treatises, so let me try and explain this scientific field very briefly, and from the point of view of one who is trying to instill insanity, as opposed to cure it.

Insanity requires a convergence of two factors, heredity and environment. Very, very few people can be considered utterly and perfectly sane by heredity. Nevertheless, in most minds, latent madness lies dormant, if you will, until great stress cracks the façade of sanity and lets derangement grow into the kind seen in sanitariums throughout the land. Of course, Masters can do nothing to alter our subjects' heredity, but we are masters (pardon the pun) at applying stress.

*There are three means by which to render someone mad. The first and simplest is through the use of **Magic**. The specialized spells *Insanity* and *Symbol of Insanity* impose extreme stress upon a person's mind, snapping it.*

Culture Shock

Any character forced to confront some deep-seated cultural fear (such as Vistani fear of Dukkars, Richemulose fear of wererats, or Darkonian fears of undead) takes a -3 morale penalty to Fear, Horror, and Madness saves arising from such a source. This penalty diminishes by one for every three character levels the subject earns after their first (-2 at 4th, -1 at 7th, and no penalty at 10th or higher level), as prolonged adventuring experience and exposure to legitimate dangers chips away at the preconceived terrors of one's upbringing.

NPC class levels (commoner, aristocrat, etc) do not count toward this acclimation to cultural fear.

The Great Unknown

A character who is confronted by the unknown, such as a particularly-cryptic method of murder or a monster that seems to violate "the rules" as the character understands them (e.g. a Barovian encountering a diurnal elven vampire), takes a -2 morale penalty to Fear, Horror, and Madness saves from that specific source, until such time as the threat has been identified and its nature or abilities can be quantified.

Should players become caught up in intense, anxious speculation as to a threat's true nature at the gaming table, DMs may even choose to apply this penalty to their next Fear save - no matter what the fear's source might be - due to their having "spooked" themselves!

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The versatile spells Miracle, Wish and Limited Wish can alter reality in such a way as to bring whatever hereditary madness lies within a person to the fore, while Bestow Curse and stronger spells of its kind can set an overarching set of conditions on a person which, although not true insanity, may function like a mild form of it.

The difficulty with magical methods is that, with the exception of Bestow Curse, all are extremely difficult and demanding spells, such that only the greatest of spellcasters are capable of using them. And Bestow Curse, though a useful tool, is not an especially efficient method for bringing madness.

(On a related note, the imposition of curses as an expression of outrage at injustice may result in conferral of insanity, particularly if the offense for which retribution is sought is severe. Unfortunately, this method has never, to my knowledge, proven particularly effectual or reliable for Masters: best to leave such techniques to the Vistani, if you ask me.)

The second, and more readily-accessible method of causing insanity is through a single sharp Shock to the subject's mental system. Such an individual instance of intense surprise, menace and horror, properly applied, can cause an undisciplined mind to snap under the pressure, reducing the person to a lunatic.

This method is most commonly used by Masters with time constraints. The means of delivering a Shock are simple to describe, but often tricky execute. Generally this is done by exploiting Phobias, but to a more drastic degree than previously described: one must confront a subject with circumstances so horrific that the mind retreats into insanity rather than face them. Usually, the Master learns the specific phobia of an individual, and then engineers their direct exposure to the phobia's cause for hours on end. I once had in my possession a young gendarme, perhaps twenty years of age, who suffered from acute claustrophobia. In the spirit of scientific inquiry, I sealed him in a small box, three feet to a side, and kept him confined there for two days. He lapsed into catatonia. (He currently resides at the Mikki Sanitarium. I gather the lad has once more learned to feed himself, though he as yet refuses to speak.) Such are the sacrifices that science demands.

Another means I have found effective is that of the Mental Shift. Essentially, the Master creates an inherently and dramatically paradoxical situation revolving around a scene of abject horror, the stress of which drives the victim mad. Most often this involves taking the form of someone close to the victim, and then committing some brutal murder or what-not in public. For example, a few years ago I was returning from an expedition in Hazlan, when I was pursued by a brace of particularly determined Rashemani hunters. (Some matter regarding the slaughter of an entire village, or some such rubbish.) The pair were, in fact, brother and sister, and they eventually tracked me to a village inn in the Barovian backwoods. I ambushed the sister alone, slew her with a Destruction spell, then took her form and returned to the inn. There, I butchered the innkeeper and his family, hanging their bodies on hooks I took

Cursing

Doppelgangers - and, indeed, many monsters - are seldom successful in invoking curses of vengeance on those who transgress against them. Whatever sense of poetic justice or cruel irony might motivate the Dark Powers to empower such curses, they seem disinclined to back up such declarations by creatures which are not, and never were, 'people'. In game-mechanical terms, intelligent beings that are not of the humanoid type (or the augmented humanoid subtype) suffer a -6 penalty on Curse checks, representing the Dark Powers' relative disinterest in the vengeful urges of non-humanoids.

An exception is made for non-humanoid monsters who honestly believe themselves humanoids, such as juvenile doppelgangers unaware of their nature, or those suffering from the Subsumption form of doppelganger insanity. In their case, no such Curse check penalty is applied. Other non-humanoid monsters who believe themselves "normal", such as hags who have yet to undergo the Change, are also exempt from this penalty.

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from the village smokehouse, and was carrying on a delightful conversation with the bloody corpses when the brother came in. He took one look at his "sister", cheerfully sitting amidst the carnage, and ran screaming into the dark. I presume the wolves found him quite delicious.

Unfortunately, such lurid violence and melodrama can be problematic, especially in places like Port-a-Lucine, where bloody massacres tend to invite comment. In those circumstances, a slow and steady subversion of reality, that gradually applies increasing levels of mental stress, must replace the hasty mental shock of the above method. I gather the process has acquired the nickname of "Gaslighting" among non-clinicians.

To begin with, proper Gaslighting usually requires the Master to Assume the form of one or more trusted associates of the target. It is vital that the victim remain unsuspecting, as many methods of Gaslighting (though certainly not all!) are rendered ineffectual if the target is aware of a Master's proximity. Someone whom the target regards as a confidante is ideal.

Once the Master is in position, the next step is to progressively wear away at the targeted mind, convincing one's subject that they are slipping into madness. The actual methods used are, again, highly individualistic, but in general the goal is to create effects that seemingly violate perceived reality. In other words, convince a target that they are going insane, and they will very likely comply. Some of my preferred Gaslighting techniques include: Voices, Blackouts, False Memories, Hallucinations, Blindness, and Weakness.

Voices are one of the simpler, yet tried-and-true methods of Gaslighting. (Well, simple if one happens to be able to change one's shape - and vocal tones - at will!) Whenever my target is alone, I go into another room, likewise empty, and alter my voice to suit my needs, uttering such sounds so that the target can just barely hear them. I usually employ high-pitched female wails and low menacing whispers, though other options may suggest themselves as I learn more of a given subject's history and fears. For added amusement, I may employ the voices of loved ones of the target, particularly if said loved ones have recently or violently passed away. Of course, when a target asks me if I heard anything, a bewildered look is all that is necessary to start them doubting both their ears and sanity. Certain audible spells may also prove useful for this.

Blackouts are another effective approach. The objective is to ensure that a target will be unable to account for long stretches of the day. A handy means

Gaslighting

Both shape-changing and mind-reading are ideal tools for "gaslighting". Doppelgangers receive a +3 circumstance bonus on Bluff checks made for this purpose, in addition to their usual racial Bluff bonus. As Paridon's population began to plummet after the Great Upheaval, Sodo actively encouraged this practice as an alternative to murdering witnesses.

New Feat

A popular feat with doppelgangers, Gaslighter is also quite common among rakshasas, succubi, and villainous psychiatrists in the motif of Daclaud Heinfroth.

Gaslighter

An intimate familiarity with the mind's workings allows the feat-user to shatter it with precision.

Prerequisites: Innate detect thoughts power or Hypnosis (6 ranks); Wis 15+.

Benefit: When a victim must roll a Fear, Horror or Madness save due to the calculated effort of someone possessing this feat, the DC of their saving throw increases by 4. This applies only if the saving throw was intentionally provoked by the feat-user, not if the save was inadvertent.

Special: Intentionally driving somebody insane constitutes "Assault, Grievous" for purposes of Powers checks. Likewise, scaring or horrifying them may constitute "Assault, Unprovoked".

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to accomplish this is to simply drug one's subject with Bleak Oil. Alternatively, a Sleep spell or something similar may work. In extreme cases, a blackjack is a possibility, but one must take care to knock the target out utterly in one blow, lest they recall enough of the ambush to grow suspicious. Use of sand in the blackjack rather than lead shot ensures that the resulting headache will be a diffuse one, leaving no telltale lump on the scalp to betray one's intervention.

Once the subject is unconscious, I move them somewhere else, at very least to a different room, although late in the Gaslighting process I may leave them outside. Minor changes to their environment, such as moving furniture or hiding personal possessions, can also be engaged in at this time, to magnify their uncertainty as to what they did in the interim.

False Memories, so termed because others are left with memories of the target's alleged actions, is a variant and elaboration upon Blackouts. While a target is comatose, the Master takes their form and proceeds to conduct business, doing things in a disquieting and out-of-character manner. When tales of these doings come back to the groggy victim (and a clever Master ensures that they do), the target may well start to fear that he has a multiple personality disorder. Or, for a novel twist to this ploy, I once employed my catspaws and a "chance" eyewitness in, combination back in Paridon, and successfully convinced an annoying Monograph reporter that he suffered from lycanthropy! Quite amusing, really, especially when he sought a "cure" in vain.

Hypnosis, or spells affecting memory, may be used to revise a weak mind's recollections, suppressing all recall of real events, while seeding memories that seem to corroborate the victim's reported (strange) behavior. Likewise, the power of glamor which all Masters possess can come in handy for changing letters or documents, thus hinting that a target has penned or signed things during the Blackout, to which the subject would normally be averse. Such discrepancies cause said subject to doubt his or her sanity even further, particularly if the glamor is later dropped. The assumed and trusted guise may also be used to relate further, wholly-fictitious actions of the part of the target, in addition to those the Master performs while clad in the subject's form.

Hallucinations are tough to achieve, but can be rewarding. There are two means of causing the target to hallucinate. In the first, narcotics such as opium or ergot may be slipped into the food of the target, causing them to genuinely see things that aren't there. Care should be taken to do this very infrequently, as an addiction can easily spiral out of the Master's control, and may also be diagnosed by a physician, thus giving one's game away. I tend to use large doses of belladonna, sometimes called deadly nightshade, for induction of hallucinations. While it has its own negative side-effects, it is not addictive like most hallucinogenic poisons.

Alternatively, one can merely convince the subject he or she is hallucinating, by exposing them to real sensory experiences which appear to violate the bounds of reality. Illusions can be readily applied to such a purpose. More commonly, hallucinatory experiences can be feigned by using glamor and our native shape-changing powers, such that the subject begins "imagining" impossible sights, or encountering others known to be deceased or otherwise inaccessible. The more stressful a Master's choice of guises to adopt, in staging such "hallucinations", the better: figures gleaned from a subject's fears are ideal, as are personages whose presence is sure to elicit feelings of guilt, shame, self-doubt or grief on the subject's part.

Temporary Blindness can cause a flood of mental stress. A target who wakes up and finds that he cannot see is likely to panic, particularly as he has no way to know that the effects are not permanent. A Blindness/Deafness spell can work wonders here, as can the poison known as sightrot, among others. I do make a point of removing the blindness before the target can get medical attention, or after they have been sufficiently terrified and confused; after all, it limits a Master's future options for intimidation, if the subject cannot view them.

Lastly, Weakness is a common tactic of mine, to convince the target that he is losing self-control and to magnify his sense of helplessness. Again, spells are

On Doppelganger Tactics

extremely useful here, but I personally prefer drugs again. Many toxins are fairly effective in small doses at weakening a target, as is the spell Poison. I tend to use sub-lethal dosages of arsenic, which gives the appearance of debilitation without any uncontrollable disease or addiction. One must be careful, I'll admit, to avoid actually killing one's target.

Above all, and in conclusion, the key to a proper Gaslighting is understanding that each individual psyche is unique, and one must tailor the process to every individual's unique fears, flaws and self-doubts. Even the most stable of personalities has a network of tiny cracks, and the Master who is a master of the craft will hit those faults precisely, shattering the mind at its points of greatest fragility.

And that, as they say, is that. I am somewhat surprised that it should end this way, so near and yet so far, my dear Alphonse. You almost succeeded, and if you had, you would have been hailed as a hero of renown. But it was not to be. The cracks of your mind were too deep, your sanity too fragile. It takes a fit body and agile wit to hunt my kind, but above all, such a purpose demands a hardy psyche which can withstand the assaults of Doubt. Your fears of age and of weakness, your horror at the thought of your own impotence or senility, provided the target, and I fear that it took an all-too-modest amount of effort - with the right weapon, gleaned from buried memories and regrets your own morose thoughts placed in my hands - to hit it dead-on.

You could have been great. But in the end, like all humans and most Masters, you let your frailties overcome you. And though I yearn to see the weaklings of my kind culled from our ranks, that our race might emerge the stronger, I cannot forsake those same principles to coddle a would-be hunter who is, himself, unfit. Goodbye, Alphonse.

Your Sorrowing Teacher,
Adramelech

Mikki Sanitarium Background Notes for Patient #487 ¹⁶

October 9th, 760

Alphonse Vignes was discovered in a comatose state early on October 2nd by a Madame Stephanie deLanne, a neighbor of his. In her own words, she had gone to check up on the retired gendarmerie captain after "an elderly gentleman in a jacket" told her that M. Vignes was feeling ill. The Gendarmerie has been unable to locate this gentleman, though their inquiries continue.

Alphonse was conveyed to the Mikki Sanitarium, where Dr. Mikki diagnosed him with schizophrenia. To date, he has been a fairly placid, if unresponsive, patient. He is generally quiet, spending most days staring into space, as he mutters of invincible 'Masters' controlling the world, and how one in particular (the 'Fiend') systematically destroyed his life. The patient also seems haunted by guilt he refuses to articulate, and shivers with night terrors in his sleep. At times, he evidently considers the sanitarium staff to be 'Masters', and reacts violently if anyone so much as offers him water or a sleeping-tablet. Hypnotherapy has so far proven of limited use in sorting out Alphonse's madness, although Dr. Mikki insists that there is still hope.

- Celeste d'Honaire-Loverde

¹⁶. Obtained (by necessary pretext of being the Captain's distant cousin) from a polite and calmly-competent, albeit somewhat disquieting medical student at the Mikki Sanitarium. Her prognosis re. M. Vignes' condition, alas, was not encouraging. - Rookhausen

On Doppelganger Tactics

Miladies,

Having learned of M. Vignes' commitment to the Mikki Sanitarium's care, and realized the likely truth of the matter from my meeting with the semi-coherent patient, I covertly entered the retired gendarme's residence and searched it for clues as to his alleged "Fiend". Recollecting what Paridon had taught me of the doppelganger mindset, I found the Captain's journal hidden in plain sight on a bookshelf, anonymous amongst other texts of similar size and binding. The first two letters from "Adramelech" were tucked inside the journal; the third, concealed between the pages of a novel - *The Housekeeper's Tale* - sitting on the same shelf.

While the journal's camouflaged presence alongside similar books might plausibly have been coincidence, the letter's placement was clearly contrived, such that only a discerning reader of the prior two missives could retrieve it ("true knowledge" hidden by a "servant"). This was confirmed when the final letter - apparently placed in the house after M. Vignes had been taken away - turned up in that very envelope, tucked away in the Captain's writing-desk, in which his retirement papers (still missing) had previously been filed. While its "experiment" had evidently failed, the creature which had shattered the old gendarme had not wholly finished its games; it had placed these clues deliberately. Perhaps it had intended to ensnare whomsoever investigated the sufferer's misfortunes in its next twisted "lesson" ... or perhaps it was just being mockingly cruel. Whichever is the case, I surmise it likely had not counted on my thought-guarding bauble's protection: the most plausible explanation I can think of, as to why it did not deign to manipulate or harass me, as it had, Alphonse Vignes.

Regretfully, my own efforts to track down "Adramelech" have as yet proven fruitless. A discreet series of inquiries revealed a number of viable candidates for the elusive Fiend's imago: some subtle, others less so, and a few quite laughably obvious. However, before I could narrow down the possibilities, one of my lines of investigation - queries as to the rumored drug habits of a certain Gendarmerie commander - roused the ire of some of M. Vignes' less-reputable former associates, to such a degree that escape necessarily became a higher priority than investigation.

Rather than tempt fate (or imprisonment) further, I turned to other pressing pursuits, but not without first compiling a dossier about Vignes' nemesis (enclosed) for the Society's perusal. Rest assured, my own skills will be at the disposal of any of our number who endeavor to put an end to this malevolent counterfeit! And, likewise, rest assured that I will not yield the battlefield a second time, when the time comes to beard this sneering mockery in its den ... not having seen, with my own eyes, proof of *how* it had acquired the intimate information which broke Captain Vignes' sanity, in the end.

Perhaps it was the creature's desire to betray its species' secrets at work, or perhaps that boastful impulse to which doppelgangers, once revealed, are so prone had seized it unwittingly, but Adramelech's final letter had revealed even more than it intended. (At least, I surmise its oversight to have been unintentional: else, I'd have surely discovered a *fifth* message awaiting me at my next destination!) The creature's own words made it clear that Alphonse - poor soul - had been painfully close to the truth, all along.

It took me but a quarter of an hour to find the correct house - the exterior repairs to its awnings were still incomplete - from my starting-point at M. Vignes' residence, and as long to confirm that said house had not been lived in for weeks. The vegetable garden's fresh produce had been left to rot upon the stalks, unharvested; the houseplants had withered and the pantry's contents were spoilt. The only remaining evidence of Madame Stephanie deLanne's presence - indeed, of her very existence - from the prior four months were a mound of discarded, matronly garments, cast carelessly aside, in a dusty upstairs bedroom ... and a silver wedding ring, loose and overlooked amidst a scattering of dried beetle husks, in the basement coal-bin.

Excerpts from the Diary of Deborah Creede

November 23rd, 1:30 am

I don't know what to do, what to think. I have to calm down! I am a writer; I must write it down, to calm myself, to make sense of it all.

Dr. Johanson is dead. I killed him! I had to! I saw it, saw what he intended to do to me! He told me the syringe was to calm my nerves, to ease the shock that might come when I came to the hilltop. But I didn't believe him: I saw it so clearly. It must have been real; I wasn't only imagining it; I saw it as clearly as I see these pages I write upon right now.

By all Divinity, I cannot be going mad: it must have been real, it could not just have been a phantom of these horrible nightmares, now beginning to haunt my waking hours! When I resisted, he grabbed my arm and tried to force the needle into my skin, but I tore free and backed away. Despite his years, he was quicker than I would have suspected, as he managed to trip me and pinned me to the ground, all the time saying that it was all to the good: that sickness must be excised, vitality brought to light and explored. Again, I saw it: saw myself lying bound, bleeding from countless wounds. With all my strength I managed to wrest an arm free and grab his wrist before he could drive the colorless infusion into my veins. In panic, I fought to tear the syringe from his grip. And then, in a flash, I saw her in my mind - the dead woman whose arm I had seen dangling from the stretcher earlier that day, its pattern of pock-marks too distinctive to be any other - but she was alive, in agony, and she too was bound!

Stunned, I barely felt how my body writhed in response. I cannot explain what happened, I just don't know: it felt as if my skin and bones were moving, twisting with revulsion at the murderous doctor's touch. I suddenly felt his grip lessen, and he gawped directly at me, a look of utter horror on his face. He stammered, "No, it c-can't be! You are dead, you died days ago!"

And that was when it happened, when dreams and reality merged entirely. The metal of the syringe in my hand became alive: I felt it move beneath my fingers! Suddenly a long wire coiled in the syringe's place, sliding into my grasp with an eerie familiarity. Just as suddenly, the wire looped itself around his neck, biting into the flesh. I felt my arms' muscles tense, and blood gushed from the doctor's neck, spattering me with its dreadful warmth.

I barely heard his gurgled scream; in a panic, I pushed him off me and fled deep into the woods. I do not recall what path I took, but only that I spent hours walking between the dark trees, dazed with horror and disbelief - I'd killed him! He'd killed her! And I had known! - before I finally got a grip on myself, and cleaned myself up as best I could, before returning home under cover of nightfall.



On Doppelganger Society

Men are inconsolable concerning the treachery of their friends or the deceptions of their enemies; and yet they are often very highly satisfied to be both deceived and betrayed by their own selves.

*- François, Duc De La Rochefoucauld,
"Moral Maxims and Reflections"*



On Doppelganger Society

For the majority of our Land's creatures of darkness, social interaction is purely a means to an end: a stratagem of camouflage, of comfort and convenience, and of - to be blunt - hunting more efficiently. Predators in Nature are notoriously territorial, and the unnatural predators upon Mankind are likewise prone to compete with one another, coexisting only when one is clearly too powerful for its rivals to do aught but submit to its supremacy. If rare alliances of near-equals do arise within the ranks of such beings, such are typically either short-lived on account of infighting (as with vampire "colleagues"), or else kept unified by a pragmatic need for strength in numbers, often against a common enemy (as with wererat packs or hag coveys).

In doppelgangers, however, this competitive tendency is more than counterbalanced by a genuine yearning - even a need - for social acclaim, the reinforcement of self-esteem, and the opportunity to be lauded for their artfulness and cunning. Paradoxically, these creatures so suited to lead their lives in secrecy - creatures that, uniquely, need not even associate with one another to perpetuate their kind - nevertheless exhibit a compulsive desire to show off those deceptions they execute: to claim credit, if solely before their fellows, for the cleverness of their scheming and the precision of their impersonations.

On the face of it, such a drive seems self-destructive, given how a doppelganger's very survival hangs suspended by a fragile skein of deceptions! Though not as suicidal in its potency as the Cravings of the Walking Dead, this counterproductive urge to reveal themselves has indeed spelt the downfall of many an imposter, when it tauntingly whispered the awful truth in the wrong ear, or discharged its private musings in a document too poorly-guarded. It is this drive to share the truth of their impostures - to let others in on the cruel joke of their lives as mockeries of men - that draws doppelgangers to one another's company.

Why should these parasites on human society suffer these urges, that run so contrary to their inborn love of secrecy?

Even - perhaps especially, given predators' natural rivalries - to others of their own kind? Cooperation cannot be Nature's primary aim, in instilling this need to mislead us in company. As I chance to be in some position to know, a solitary infiltrator enjoys a greater assurance of adaptability, subtlety and inconspicuousness than a gathering of same, and the effectiveness of any team of charlatans is as lax as the least-capable liar in its ranks. Mere numerical advantage is rapidly overtaken by the logistical nightmare of maintaining many roles simultaneously; of facilitating covert contact between conspirators; and of satisfying the individual agendas of group members and smoothing the ruffled feathers of those dissatisfied with a given operation's outcome. Tales of doppelgangers from so-called "outlander" realms, or of unusual variants of the species, usually portray their kind as introverted creatures that prefer 'performing' solo, each focusing on its own self-interest and a single impersonation's challenges.

So why are the doppelgangers of Paridon *not* solitary, as expediency and competitiveness would have it? From what I have learned of their ways and mindset, I can surmise but one answer: that their desire for interaction with one another, to boast of their skills and trumpet their achievements, is not a product of doppelganger nature, but a wholly **human** trait retained from their upbringing among us. Were their pragmatic "Clay" the sole facet in imposter personalities, doppelgangers would likely either avoid their fellows like the plague, or kill each other on sight, as other monsters with no biological or practical reason to socialize (e.g. lichs) are known to do. Yet a persistent need to slake their egotism with others' praises, the yearning to be respected and approved of by peers, even (if I might speculate) the loneliness that a human consigned to utter isolation can go mad from, are a lasting legacy of their childhood faux-humanity: one which even the most proudly-inhuman and contemptuous of their breed are not wholly exempt from. It is, in a way, the most universal of those "tells" which beset their kind, as a consequence of their

human upbringing, and a telling flaw in their perpetual masquerade, by which we who seek to put an end to that pretense can readily profit.

The transcript to follow, obtained through channels I had best not recount to Miladies at present, offers a case in point. Its contents are, of course, extremely suspect, owing to the nature of its professed author: an individual, regarding whose erstwhile false identity I have formed an hypothesis of my own, and whose grievance against his (or rather, its) onetime associates is well-founded, if I am right. Nonetheless, I can attest that the original recipient verified its accuracy with extreme thoroughness, when this missive passed into his keeping. While I am no staunch admirer of the person (better left anonymous) to whom this letter was addressed, I do respect his competence - if not his methods - as a researcher. Together with my own analysis of the letter's content,

this leads me to take "Eddy's" comments at face value, pending the discovery of contrary evidence.

That "Eddy" should communicate with humans at all - and do so, not under the pretense of some human alias, but with a transparency tantamount to an open confession of its monstrous nature - only confirms that doppelgangers' drive to "show off" is a persistent and powerful one. It is a compulsion that those who are exiled from the ranks of their fellows still possess, and must satiate by bragging to proxies - yes, even to humans - in the absence of other "Masters" before whom to parade their wit. May this boastful urge yet prove their undoing, both in exposing these creatures' impostures in-the-field, and in prompting such revelatory admissions as Eddy offers to Mr. _____ (and hence, indirectly, to our Society), as we strive to extirpate their evil from this Land!



"Eddy" letter, dated March 6th, 756¹

Mister _____,

Salutations, and all that what-not. My name's Eddy. I'd say it's a pleasure to meet you, but I'm not really there now, am I...? So let's cut the turkey talk and run to the chase. You want information on the Masters of this city. I happen to have said information on said Masters of said city. You are a bright individual looking for answers about Paridon's deepest, darkest secret. I am a bright individual who has answers about Paridon's deepest, darkest secret. You need, I have. I also, surprisingly enough, have in my sweet possession sufficient quills, ink, and paper to deliver such desired trinkets. I sn't life swell?

And right about now, you're probably asking yourself, "Who the bloody devil is this chummy?" I'm afraid, my inquiring friend, that that is the one question that I cannot answer. So please, save us both some wasted time, and call me Eddy.²

Mister _____, it would be my humble honour to aid in your little dinner-club's queries about the truth behind the city of a thousand faces. But first, let me take a tick now to emphasize that the Masters DO NOT want the likes of you to have this kind of information, and that many nasty and unsanitary events await you, if you up and get yourself nicked with it. So, unless you happen to like nasty and unsanitary things, you'll be unquestionably discreet with what I tell you.

You are most definitely not the first to delve into such secrets, my friend. Around the time of the 14th Bloody Jack killing, the Celebrants at the Temple of Divine Form got their lily-white mitts on the cadaver of a Master silly enough to get itself spiked. Intrigued by its inhumanity, they conducted several experiments on it, searching for a way to turn it and its kind into humans. Wonder of wonders, everyone involved in their little project met with "accidents" on their way to breakfast, and all the information was lost in a fire. These events of chance were staged by the Masters in order to cover their own arses. As a former member of that same mixed bag of preacher-men, you've got double the eyes on you any other stargazer would. So in short, keep your bloody mouth shut. Thank you.³

The following information is my gift to you. No strings, no bullocks, no back-stabbing. And if you like what you see, feel free to...

Well, let's just say I'll know if you want more.

1. The transcript to follow was copied by arcane means from a document I viewed under conditions of some time-pressure, and was hence unable to procure for the Society's files. The original missive's handwriting was legible enough, but skewed and haphazardly ink-spattered, as if the writer experienced occasional difficulty in controlling the pen's course. Oddly, these lapses grew less frequent as the text progressed, suggesting the writer's difficulties stemmed from a lack of practice or coordination, not growing weariness or bodily injury.

The script, itself, was classic boarding-school Zherisian - the formal hand of the 'upper crust' - despite the author's abundant use of street-slang. Due to my limited familiarity with this tongue, I cannot posit a reliable hypothesis based on penmanship as to the writer's personality or state of mind.

Additional thanks are due to "Miss P." of Paridon, for her assistance in translating the transcript's text and interpreting its more obscure regional colloquialisms.

2. While "Eddy" is not so overt as to boast its nature openly, as did "Adramelech", the fact that Eddy is likewise a doppelganger Exile is self-evident from its own comments, particularly its insider knowledge of the imposters' mental communication practices. Whereas Adramelech's revelations about its kind were components in its elaborate, sadistic game at M. Vignes' expense, Eddy seems motivated largely by spite, in its own betrayal of doppelganger secrets. This is an understandable motive (even for so alien a creature), if my deductions as to Eddy's former false identity are correct: it has an imago to "avenge". - Rookhausen

On Doppelganger Society

Society

Having lived in the Great Capital all my life, I can tell you ups and downs about the workings of the Masters' society in Paridon. There's no doubt in my mind that the Grandmaster has sent his little minions out of the city, too. Personally, I don't see much call for them to still serve the Grandmaster once they're out of his reach, and I think some of the offshore Masters have likely caught wise to this. Nevertheless, I can only imagine that their society generally follows the same formula and what-not as here in Paridon. Is this to say there couldn't be deviations in different areas? The hell would I know: I've never been to the Core! ⁴

So in the meantime, Mr. _____, how's about I enlighten your little brain upon the deadly and debonair dance of delicacy that you might call 'Doppelganger Society'. It's a bureaucratically-choked tangle of obligations and privileges that exists by sucking all the life it can out of anyone it touches, and I don't mean just humans now. Nothing is more dangerous to a Master than another Master.

Status-Seeking

Where any given Master stands in relevance to all of the other Masters is known as its Rank. Acting outside of one's rank, be it by forming conspiracies with other Masters, or simply talking to a Master you're not supposed to, will get you nicked by the Masters higher-up. There's only one of the whole lot that's got a right to speak with any Master he bloody well wants, and that's the Grandmaster himself. He makes it this way, keeping the other Masters in fear. And I can tell you personally, Mr. _____, there's nothing in this pretty little world that the Grandmaster loathes more than someone talking behind his back. If you can weasel your way to the Grandmaster's good side, you'll go far. Badmouth the Grandmaster, and you'll find yourself with the life expectancy of a Zherisian caliban baby.

And so, we have the law of the jungle in Masters' society: status-seeking beats all. It isn't about order or anarchy, it isn't about morals or causes; it's all about that drive to make yourself better than the rest. Every Master, I don't care what they say or who they are, dreams of being top doggie among the other Masters.

3. Given that Eddy's later revelations regarding doppelganger society have withstood the test of Mr. _____'s investigations and my own, its professed belief that none of the data collected by the ill-fated Philosophy of Humanity survived their splinter-sect's destruction is puzzling. In truth, partial records of the sect's discoveries did survive, as Miladies have already seen in the foregoing treatise on common doppelganger abilities. Either Eddy is deliberately concealing the fact that not all of Celebrant Chaswick's work was successfully expunged by the Grandmaster's agents in 755, or else it was out of the loop of internal doppelganger politics for at least six months prior to its letter's dispatch.

4. Doppelganger-related anecdotes I have collected from non-Zherisian sources are most often accounts of solitary individuals, most likely lone Exiles or Mist-led wanderers from their homeland. When multiple doppelgangers do work together in other corners of our Land, reports typically depict them either as loose mobs cooperating as temporary allies for a mass assumption or other collective task, or as bands of younger individuals led by a skilled and experienced elder, as one might expect if a single outcast procreated repeatedly in order to found and lead a nascent "clan" of its own. - Rookhausen

Doppelganger Law

Clean up your own mess.

Don't take others' toys without permission.

No talking back to grown-ups.

- Graffiti scribbled on a dormitory bedstead at Gracebridge, 739 BC

Like human Zherisians, doppelgangers adhere to many formalities in their social order. Though most of these unwritten laws are conveniently "overlooked" if there's personal profit to be had, their culture does impose a few overarching rules upon all their hidden community, the violation of which will - if found out - incur stiff penalties from clan superiors or Sodo himself. These laws are never written down save in veiled terms (as above), yet breaking such strictures invites punishment ranging from menial chores or canings, to the death of one's imago and repeated fatal tortures at the darklord's hands. These governing rules of dread doppelganger society may be summed up as follows:

1) Every Master is responsible for its own secrecy

Any time a doppelganger takes an action that endangers the camouflage of itself, its fellows, its clan and/or its race, it is duty-bound to hide its activities from the eyes of the 'cattle'. This includes discreetly disposing of evidence, silencing witnesses, reporting possible security-leaks to superiors, and policing its own fellows for signs of incompetence or insanity that might pose a risk. If any doppelganger inducts a human into the ranks of quislings, it accepts personal responsibility for keeping that quisling bound to secrecy, as well as for killing the quisling if and when he or she becomes a liability.

This stricture is seldom intentionally violated, as the imposters' natural secretiveness makes them loath to breach its ruling on purpose. It exists, rather, as legal grounds for their kind to exile or kill any doppelganger whose chronic incompetence, recklessness, or insanity places their mutual security at risk ... or for Sodo to openly sentence anyone he sees fit on trumped-up charges.

2) Respect other Masters' property-rights

Doppelgangers compete fiercely for chances to gain rank, steal wealth or identities, or indulge their imagoes, but a strict policy of "finders, keepers" is also observed. Once an imposter has claimed a role, a fortune, etc., other doppelgangers must acknowledge its right to possess these things: to "poach" an identity or other commodity from a fellow Master is both illegal and extremely rude. This extends to quislings or duped humans - both classified as "property" of the Master that manipulates them, under doppelganger law - and the intended victims of imago-seekers. Unofficially, it also applies to human caregivers of young imposters - so long as a doppelganger child lives with them, and for four years after it Wakens and deserts its home, other Masters will leave its "relatives" unharmed - but only as a courtesy, not a formal law. As applied collectively, this stricture also mandates that clans cannot trespass on the designated social "territories" of other clans.

Violations of this rule are by far the most common offenses of which doppelgangers accuse one another, both within and between clans. Most are resolved expeditiously, but disputes over the possession of an imago tend to be both hard-fought and bitter, and may draw out for years.

3) Questions are a privilege, answers a reward

Imposters have no legal right to question their authorized superiors, either by word or by deed (i.e. they have no right to disobey), and may be punished for insubordination if they do so. Conversely, elite doppelgangers are fully entitled to question and mentally probe subordinates under their command, albeit not those who serve other Masters (a breach of property-rights). Sodo or his appointed agents have the unfettered authority to interrogate and mind-probe any doppelganger they see fit. Curiously, this stricture does not wholly restrict the right to snoop into higher-ranking Masters' business - an impossible goal, given how nosy these creatures are - but only the means by which underlings may do so: if an imposter can uncover a superior's private doings via mundane spying, rather than by openly asking questions or defying orders, it is considered to have earned its knowledge fair and square.

As formally pressing charges under this stricture is liable to expose any facts an uppity underling has uncovered, nearly all violations of this rule are handled privately by individual Clan Leaders, or (if Sodo is the complainant) simply end in the wayward subordinate's "disappearance".

On Doppelganger Society

All of the Masters wallow like happy piggies in something I like to call 'The Pool of Communication'. If a Master stands in the shallow end of the Pool, it only ever gets what word trickles down from the deep end. Should it have the sand to take a step forward, and dip a toe in deeper, it'll get more communication - more news, more insider secrets, more idea what's afoot in the higher-up ranks - but the waves around it also get deadlier. Some Masters prefer to tread water at a comfy point to bide their time, but others are constantly pushing out to get more. There comes a time when if a Master shows even the slightest crumb of weakness, the collecting waves will sharply take away everything it has, for being a pushy little git too nosy for its own good. Yet always, always, Mr. _____, there is the rip-tide of ambition that draws them forward, that makes them into the selfish, short-sighted blockheads that they are.⁵

If the deepest point in that pool is the Grandmaster, floating just a step shallower are the Vanguard. Lethal as the Grandmaster can be, he doesn't fancy getting his paws grubby over every itty-bitsy infraction, so he's got his personal bully-boys, the Vanguard, for that. Chappies in the Vanguard love their positions very well, Mr. _____, so they don't hesitate to knock off cocky gits beneath them, in order to keep their seats. Not by spiking the beggars, mind you - even for the Grandmaster's dearest pets, that's a naughty no-no if it's without his say-so - but by arranging little "accidents", suicide missions, or brawls between the lower ranks, that just happen to leave the right potential troublemakers dead or outcast.

I could tell you lovely stories about the fun and games that come to pass, whenever a spot in the Vanguard opens up, and every lesser Master with the sand to dare it tries to impress the Grandmaster into granting it a fancy-dancy promotion; even tastier tales, as well, about when a Vanguard feels its own status slipping away, and scrambles to win back the big boss's favour. I could even tell you a special something that the Grandmaster picks out one of his Vanguard to do, every thirteen years ... but then again, I'll bet a Paridoner, let alone a celebrant-drummer, would be pretty dead-set that Bloody Jack was a golem, these days! Please yourself.⁶

It's the Vanguard who deliver the Grandmaster's orders to the masses, laying down his law as to who's next to be culled out of the human herd, who's to be bought, who's to be silenced and who's to be left alone. Supposedly that's because he knows more than anyone else, being in the deepest part of the Pool, and can decide what's necessary. Load of bullocks of course, and all Masters know it ... but try telling the Vanguard that, and you'll be up on charges - dragged off to be tried in Conclave, your mind's every corner reamed out, your every identity confiscated - as an example to the rest. That's if you're lucky, and the Vanguard in question's on the stable side, disinclined to gut you on the spot for "resisting arrest". It's odd, but most of that lot seem to wind up half-cracked. (Can't take the pressure I suppose, the namby gits.)

5. This meshes neatly with the psychology-file's information, provided by Miss P., that these creatures are perpetually fascinated by secrets. Material wealth, for doppelgangers, is far more exemplary of birth-right than achievement: merely being what they are gives them the right to take whatever property they see fit from us, a privilege subject only to the limits of a clan heritage they cannot change. It is, rather, being informed that most sets a high-ranking imposter above its peers and lessers, and being "in the loop" is what they find most gratifying about achieving high status.

6. Eddy claims here that doppelgangers in Paridon are prohibited from killing one another without the Grandmaster's approval, yet it is clear from the creature's own later remarks that such strictures are honored far more in word than in deed. Doppelgangers are, after all, experts at discreet acts of murder; and I myself have witnessed proof that at least some can, and do, conspire with others - exiled doppelgangers, human and jackalwere quislings, or even unrelated monstrous beings and scoundrels - without their superiors' knowledge. It is, thus, more truthful to say that any doppelganger which gets caught murdering another of its kind without formal authorization will face punishment for its temerity, in usurping a prerogative of their ruling Grandmaster. - Rookhausen

Conclaves

As Grandmaster, Sodo sometimes finds it politically useful to make examples of doppelgangers who are caught violating the unwritten laws that govern all Masters. When he chooses to let his judgement be known to the clans, as opposed to simply having a culprit "disappear", the darklord summons every available Master to attend a Conclave: a show-trial, held in a secret assembly hall underneath the Parliament building in King's Quarters. Loosely based on Paridon's enlightened court procedures, a Conclave is a snide mockery of Zherisian justice, at which the accused is systematically humiliated before its fellows, subjected to intensive mental probes and grueling interrogation, slandered by any rival which sees fit to join in the abusive proceedings, and finally condemned by the Grandmaster's sole decision. As Sodo only ever calls a Conclave if he wants the accused Master's head, no such twisted excuse for a "trial" has ever resulted in acquittal.

In addition to passing sentence on whichever doppelganger (or rarely a jackalwere) has irked him, the darklord often settles disputes between clans at this time. Technically, any Clan Leader may appeal to the Grandmaster for redress, if its clan's prerogatives have been breached by some other clan: a catch-all category of offenses, encompassing anything from defrauding victims of pocket change on another clan's territory to slaughtering its members en masse. As the darklord is often too busy with his own plots and paranoid ruminations to bother resolving such issues when first reported, a backlog of cases tends to accumulate between Conclaves, which he settles in the most expedient manner before the main *faux*-trial begins.

And yet, for all their privileges, for all of their fancy-dancy policies that keep the other Masters in line, the Vanguard still feel that pull to something greater than they've got. Every Vanguard dreams of being the Grandmaster one day. But you see, since every Vanguard wants that position for itself, they're generally too busy nipping at each others' heels to break out of the scrum and try for the real prize. It also doesn't help that no two Vanguard are permitted direct communication with one another, having to use their own nastily-treacherous underlings to carry messages. Of course, the best way for a Vanguard to knock off another Vanguard is to brand it as an enemy of the Grandmaster. Once that cat's out of the bag, the rival's hide is fair game for all the others.

It is generally true, Mr. _____, that the Vanguard and their closest followers occupy the highest of the high in human society. What that means in other realms, I couldn't care less, chummy, but in Paridon that makes their nest King's Quarters.



On Doppelganger Society

That's right: your bright and shining heart of liberty, Mr. _____, is nothing but a cesspool of lies, conspiracy and corruption! Well, it'd be that anyway - politics is politics, true? - but hereabouts, it's not even humans who are doing the conspiring. And the biggest punch line is: you elected them! I sn't it swell to be Zherisian?

And why doesn't the Grandmaster rest on his laurels in King's Quarters as well? Because the Grandmaster survives by being nowhere and everywhere at the same time, friend. Even the Vanguard aren't often sure where or what their fearless (feckless?) leader is! I, on the other hand, happen to know his dirty little secrets...⁷

Out of the deep end and heading back into the shallows, the Vanguard send their own little gofers, known as the Sentinels, to direct the multitude of Clans running at any one time. And it is at this point, Mr. _____, that I address the next topic.

Clans

The pieces of pie that fit around the middle, clans make up the rest of the Masters, who haven't worked their way up to be either Grandmaster, Vanguard, or Sentinel. (There are a few exceptions, but I'll be telling you about the Exiles later.) Whatever way you cut it, if you've bagged yourself a Master, odds are good it was a clan member; if it were a higher-up, it like as not would've bagged you instead, chummy.

Clans are always united by some sort of name. (Well, that and blood - each clan breeds its own rookies - but that's no business worth fussing over, for the Masters: sprogs too young to change are nothing but headaches. Let the humans raise them till they wake up and might have something to say that's worth hearing, that's the ticket!) In theory, it's the name of the clan's founding ancestor, from way back; in practice, it's usually the moniker of the last Clan Leader to browbeat its crew into adopting its name, instead. I use the term 'united' about clans very lightly, of course, since when you get down to it, it's only that name that stops a clan's Masters from gutting each other wholesale. Even with a title saying they're on the same team, tension's still brewing, as one less Master means more territory-rights for the rest. Of course, a novice Master's more gullible - and expendable - than one that knows what it's doing, so new recruits get stuck with the dangerous work, and nicked if they aren't savvy.

7. While I have yet to compile enough facts about this so-called "Grandmaster" to submit a proper dossier for the Society's examination, it is noteworthy that both the doppelganger-exiles whose writings I am passing on to you refer to but one individual among their kind consistently as "he", rather than "it". Might Eddy's "Grandmaster", in truth, be the same creature which Adramelech styles "the Flickerfool"? If so, Eddy's account of this reigning Master's elusiveness and nomadic living-habits takes on added significance, given the Adramelech letters' implication that this entity's mimicry is in some manner impaired ... to say nothing of the Newsbill's graphic accounts of the "Flickerflame's" unstable appearance! And what of Dr. Cream's mysterious "employer", who hired him to complete a task with which Eddy's reference to Bloody Jack as a golem resonates, all too clearly? The quisling's research notes, too, made mention of his employer's "peculiar handicap". Alas, that more of the renegade surgeon's records did not survive, to teach us more of this skulking imposter-supreme's nature and objectives! - Rookhausen

On Doppelganger Society

Clan Demographics

A typical Zherisian doppelganger clan, at full strength, boasts about a dozen members, including its Clan Leader. Larger clans can and do exist - the Mulor, for example, numbered nearly twice that many in 742, at the time of its outlawing - but only the most favored of clans are permitted to maintain such inflated numbers for long. As a rule, doppelgangers prefer to keep their population small, to ensure there are plenty of humans to hide among and to perform the hands-on work of the community. As dread doppelgangers' breeding is always deliberate, a clan that outgrows its desired size can easily trim its numbers by ceasing all procreative activity until attrition brings its population back down, and/or by expending excess "recruits" on suicide errands.

Due to losses incurred by infighting, marikith attacks, and human monster-slayers, not all clans are necessarily at full strength. It is extremely difficult to completely eradicate the bloodline of a dread doppelganger clan, as even a lone survivor has the potential to breed its clan back from the brink of extinction; however, clans whose numbers drop to just one or two individuals cease to be acknowledged by Sodo or others. Such a failed clan's territory is divvied up among its neighbors, leaving the survivor(s) to eke out a living infiltrating the dregs of Paridon society - beggars and ghetto-dwellers no acknowledged clan will deign to touch - or to depart Zherisia for good. Clans outlawed for collective offenses against the Grandmaster or his rule are likewise deprived of their territories, but the survivors become fair game for any doppelganger that finds them: most die at the hands of old rivals, even before Sodo's agents can root out what's left.

While doppelganger clans' numbers do not contain children, most clans' rosters of adults include from 10% to 40% "recruits": recently-Wakened individuals who are still adjusting to their life as Masters and aren't yet prepared to undertake truly difficult infiltrations. The actual percentage of recruits varies, depending on whether the clan has been at full strength for some time, or is still breeding at an increased rate to recover from prior losses.

In addition, each Zherisian clan usually has three to six offspring seeded within human surrogate-families, not yet Wakened, at any given time. This is far more than will ever become permanent members of the clan, as more than half of these will either prove fatally-inept within their first few months of adult life, or else commit suicide when their Wakening comes over them, their true forms never revealed and their human caregivers none the wiser.

What enforces what-little unity a clan has, and keeps its members' squabbling in check, is the Clan Leader. Back at the dawn of time or thereabouts, a Clan Leader would be picked on the basis of age and experience - even wisdom, if that's not too lovey-dovey to believe - but these days it's all raw nerve and ruthlessness that let a Master muscle its way into the drover's seat. And let me tell you, Mr. _____, it takes a lot of sand to be a Clan Leader. They sit at the tip of the bottleneck: on one hand, you're receiving daft orders from the high-and-mighty via the Sentinels; on the other, you've got a whole crate of hooligans to prod along, every one mad-dog-jealous of your position. However, a Clan Leader's got its favourites (and see my next little section on Niches, to see how favourites are recruited), so a Clan's hierarchy breaks down to a leader and its gooneys, riding herd over a mob of rowdy underlings, and trying to get something useful done while keeping said rowdies' bungling and backbiting from demolishing the whole crew's façade.⁸

As long as a Clan Leader is still alive, its word is grand and spanking law. I t's the Leader who makes sure humans and rivals are kept in the dark about the clan's doings, and who sees that recruits too addled to stick to the rules are taken permanently off the duty-roster. I t's the Leader who plans out the agenda of the clan as a whole, who negotiates with other clans' Leaders over territories, and who lays down the rules for things like keeping in contact, scouting out targets, or

8. By its tone, Eddy speaks from firsthand experience. Given how deeply into the hierarchy of "Masters" its information penetrates, this is only to be expected: one dabbling at the shallow end of its "Pool of Communication" would hardly possess such knowledge ... or harbor a grudge against its chieftain as intense or personal as this. - Rookhausen

On Doppelganger Society

breeding fresh meat for the grunt-jobs. If two clans get to butting heads, it's as much about their Clan Leaders' getting on each others' nerves as anything, even if they claim it's about territory or honour or who's been poaching off whose cattle.

Of course, Masters are always twisting a Clan Leader's words into something that'll be a tad more personally beneficial. For instance, say a Master is told to have a certain someone meet with a tidy little accident. There's nothing stopping that Master from taking everything said chummy has for itself, before said accident, or replacing the accident-prone chappie after, unless the Clan Leader specifically forbids it.

Naturally, there's one even bigger loophole to a Clan Leader's word: rubbing it out. If you can knock off the Leader without the other clan members finding out, and then slip yourself into place as the new Leader, then all policies set by said previous Leader become nice and void. Seeing as the previous Leader will have made itself plenty of enemies during its tenure, the only remorse that most other clan members will have is that they weren't the ones to step into the dead chummy's shoes. The old chief's goons may mope a bit at their own loss of status, but that's an easy fix if the new Leader has the sense to get rid of them, too. No need to spike them yourself, mind: once you're in charge, sending them to play tag with your clan's worst rivals - or, these days, the Boogies down Below - ties up those loose ends, well and tidy.

Hierarchy and Leadership

At the dawn of their species, dread doppelganger society was loosely organized at best, with each individual and its offspring (seldom more than one in a lifetime) constituting a "clan" in its own right. As attrition eliminated many of these miniscule lineages, surviving bloodlines' members reproduced more frequently, to fill up the "territories" left vacant within the human population. In memory of days when "clans" had but two members - ruling parent/mentor and subordinate offspring/protégé - the oldest member of each extended family retained a literal power of life and death over its younger relations. By mutual agreement between various clans' elders, it was this leader's task to educate and supervise its descendents to ensure their race's collective secrecy, or to discreetly dispose of novices too reckless or inept to preserve that all-important veil.

While Sodo now claims the privilege of judging all disputes between clans, and may declare any doppelganger he chooses - of any age and without any need for proof - to be a "security-risk", modern Clan Leaders retain the authority to command, punish, imprison or disown their clan underlings without restraint. They may exile or execute these subordinates as well, but Sodo's agents often demand an explanation for why a Clan Leader saw fit to banish or slay an underling. (This is not because the darklord cares in the least about junior members' welfare, but because Clan Leaders who dare to plot against the Grandmaster tend to first eliminate any subordinates they suspect might have the nerve to report their superiors' treachery.) All Clan Leaders detest having the Vanguard pry into their business, so usually settle for less terminal punishments, such as beatings or humiliating niche-assignments (see below), or else dispatch members they wish to get rid of on suicide missions, rather than directly ordering their deaths.

Beneath the Clan Leader, status within a clan is largely based upon seniority and experience, with new recruits occupying the lowest ranks and proven veterans, the highest. Imposters who possess unusual talents (e.g. spellcasting) tend to remain stuck in the middle ranks of a clan, both due to their other pursuits' distracting them from political affairs and to Clan Leaders' reluctance to trust such gifted underlings too near themselves. Non-spellcasters who demonstrate both competence and obedience are far more likely to become a Clan Leader's favored cronies.

On Doppelganger Society

Dread Possibility: The Eldest

Deep in the tunnels of Timor, where the marikith creep through dank crawl-ways, a passage to the surface had been under construction for many months. Intended as a secret route by which the Hive might raid the city above, those months of effort were wasted when the diggers broke into a rubble-clogged, abandoned branch of Paridon's sewer network. The resulting collapse crushed a dozen marikith hunters, but it unleashed something even deadlier.

Seven hundred years ago, Pomath (LE dread doppelganger rank four Ancient Dead Mnk7) was a powerful and respected Clan Leader, a Machiavellian politician in whose honor its bloodline was re-named. Its brilliant career was destined to end in an anticlimax, for Pomath and its entourage were caught in a cave-in on their way to a Conclave below the city. Beyond reach of recovery, Pomath's remains weren't destroyed as per custom, yet its people still revered its shrewdness and fearsome authority, and natural desiccation amidst the rubble achieved what doppelgangers' lack of burial rites had never before made possible: an imposter mummy.

For centuries, Pomath lay quiescent beneath its homeland. Then the debris which entombed it was disturbed by the marikith, and Pomath woke from its deathly slumber. The Ancient dispatched the surviving aberrations with ease, but it found their presence profoundly puzzling. What were these creatures that brazenly interrupted its rest? Irritated, Pomath took on a living guise and made its way above, perplexed by how the tunnels had changed during its centuries of torpor.

If the presence of marikith below had disturbed the Ancient, what Pomath found above provoked open-mouthed shock and outrage. Paridon was barely recognizable, crowded, sprawling and dirty beyond belief; the Zherisian horizons had vanished, supplanted by an eerie mist the human cattle feared to enter. The long-standing façade of its kind had failed them; humans spoke openly of doppelgangers, even presuming to hunt their rightful superiors! Worst of all, when Pomath at last tracked down its mortal descendents, it found the cooperative and equitable social order it'd once upheld had been destroyed, its own communal ideals supplanted by rampant competition and self-gratification. Aghast, the undead Eldest withdrew to the sane familiarity of the timeless tunnels, as it struggled to make sense of this topsy-turvy world.

For a year, Pomath took shelter in the half-collapsed tunnel where it died, destroying all invaders, mummifying any marikith it caught, and using rats as spies to investigate what had happened. Eventually, having found someone to blame, it adopted a two-pronged approach. It would create more Ancient Dead, using the marikith and "cattle" stolen from the surface, to keep the strange aberrations at bay. Meanwhile, Pomath would study the ways of this new age, learning what it must in order to infiltrate the ranks of its own former kind. Its eventual goal is to overthrow this upstart 'Grandmaster' and restore the doppelgangers' culture to what it had been.

At present, Pomath controls some two dozen Rank Two and Three Ancients, evenly split between humans or calibans, and various marikith strains (as per the Zherisia Survey). Its minions have rearranged the collapsed tunnel's rubble into a crude fortress, from which they stage sudden raids on the Hive or the city above to capture prisoners for mummification. The Hive Queen is aware of the growing undead force within the fortified tunnel, but has not opted to destroy them: the loss of a few hunters is a price she's more than willing to pay, for another weapon against Sodo. As yet, Sodo and the Clans are unaware that more than one potential menace lurks beneath the city, and human residents have confused these new abductions with the "Shadow Killers" handiwork.

Pomath's own attention is focused on the surface world, and living doppelgangers specifically; it is used to humans knowing nothing of Masters, so pays scant attention to "cattle". In person, it is a sly and insinuating creature, utterly remorseless and ruthless even for one of the Masters, yet oddly lacking in the self-indulgence or vanity so abundant in doppelgangers of today. Despite its cunning, the Eldest feels bewildered by this new world, often expecting others to honor customs long extinct and using archaic phrases or mannerisms. Pomath has the Mummify, Weightlessness, Spell Resistance, and Animal Command (rats) Ancient Dead salient abilities.

On Doppelganger Society

There is one other significant duty - and power - that Clan Leaders have got: the right to distribute the Niches to other clan members. And, what do you know, my section on Niches just happens to be coming up... right... about... now.

Niches

Whee, look at my pretty little pen go! I t's this fun?⁹

Where its "rank" tells us how a Master stands in its own society, a Master's Niche is where it stands among the hopeless, victimized human society of oh-so-modern today. Now, the shape that a Master casually flips into, just to keep from getting nicked, is not its Niche. Instead, a Master's Niche is what it returns to after said clean getaway. I t's the form it wears when it pretends to be sleeping at night, and that it stretches and yawns in, first thing in the morning. I t's the form it eats and (if it's a low-ranking cove) works in; it's the form that it lives in, like a human lives in a house. I f it's lucky, it may even be the form it likes to go back to - the shape it feels most comfortable wearing, and whose name it gets a kick out of calling itself by - but if it's not a big player in the clan, it's more likely a role its Clan Leader up and saddled the sorry sod with, like it or not.

See, a Master's got one persona that it favours over all the others, and studies for months before acquiring. I ts first Niche usually isn't the same persona as a rookie Master wants to adopt: until they've proven they're worth a brass tack, novice clan members take whatever degrading Niches their Clan Leader sticks them with, and bloody well deal with it. Most rookies won't ever rise any farther, not having the sand or the knack to impress their superiors; as the long years of donkey-work wear them down, they give up and settle for whatever lower-grade personas they can pick up on the sly, to 'go home' to whenever they're off-duty. But a Master which proves its skills enough to get noticed by the Clan Leader, and who works like the dickens to make itself a useful little gooney, might just get rewarded with a Niche that matches up to the persona of its daydreams.¹⁰

The Sentinels inform the Clan Leaders what sort of Niches each clan is authorized to take. Most often, clans get assigned to a clutch of Niches that follow some handy sort of theme. For example, these days the Juthad clan mostly occupies Niches which are coppers. Their leader claims the position of chief constable, while its underlings get less luxurious posts. Another clan might get latched onto a nobleman's household, with rookies playing at servants and guards and the like. The whole slate of Niches assigned to a clan, together with the humans it's expected to keep tabs on and live off of, is its "territory"; for the Juthad, that means the coppers they replace, the human coppers that take orders from the Juthad leader, and the replaced coppers' families. I f one of the noble's clan replaces a copper on the sly, it better make sure the Juthad never find out about it, or the silly sod'll get itself nicked for poaching on Juthad turf.

Certain Niches, particularly those with a lot of active human contact, require more talent to occupy than others. When that's so, the Clan Leader needs to pick and choose who gets what, when, where, and who very carefully ... this, of course, after reserving the best Niche for its high-and-mighty self. Most Niches aren't as demanding as this, in which case a Clan Leader might

9. An odd way to put it. This phrase puzzles me...

10. Being assigned to occupy one's favored persona, i.e. *imago*, as opposed to some other identity of practical value to the clan, seems to be accounted a great reward - indeed, a bribe - by these creatures. This implies that to be denied regular access to the identity of one's choice is, perforce, a penalty or demotion, and a potential basis for intra-clan resentment. Likely, this is a major source of the "social stress" to which the second *Adramelech* letter referred, which arises from the creatures' practice of mass assumption. The more roles that must be assigned to underlings against their own preferences, the greater the unrest such collective infiltrations will stir up among them. Such dissension in the rank-and-file could be used. - Rookhausen

On Doppelganger Society

Classes and Salients in Doppelganger Society

Most doppelganger clan members are standard DoD dread doppelgangers without salient abilities or class levels. The few common members which do possess salient abilities (anywhere from none to 25% of their number) tend to dabble as Apprentices of the Path of Tin if the clan is a poor one, Iron, Quicksilver, or Lead if it is middle class, or Copper or Silver in the wealthy clans. Clan Leaders typically have 3-5 character levels as rogues, experts, aristocrats and/or (rarely) monks, and a Leader's personal goon-squad commonly boast 1-3 levels apiece as fighters, rogues, and/or warriors, plus an occasional combat-related racial feat or salient ability of the Path of Iron.

Doppelgangers of Sentinel rank usually possess 4-6 levels as per Clan Leaders, combined with two or more salient abilities from the Paths of Tin, Copper, or Silver. Members of the Vanguard will boast at least 8 levels in adventuring classes, are often multiclassed, and may pursue any Path except Lead, whose adherents' domineering tendencies Sodo does not trust so close to him. Due to frequent mental contact which they share with the sadistic, paranoia-ridden darklord, all long-standing members of the Vanguard are afflicted with moderate to major Madness effects, albeit of kinds that do not directly impede their service to Sodo. Once a Vanguard's insanity advances to a point where it becomes a liability, the Grandmaster engineers its death and replacement; thus, the rate of turnover within the Vanguard is swift.

Note that many Vanguard, and even some Sentinels, would actually be more formidable in a face-to-face fight than Sodo, himself! However, thanks to his carefully-cultivated, ruthless reputation and aggressive demeanor, none of his immediate underlings actually realize this is the case. That the darklord of Paridon has successfully tricked his followers into believing him more dangerous than he actually is, for more than two centuries, gives testament to the Grandmaster's malignant cunning and honed expertise at manipulating others' perceptions.

Individual doppelgangers with unusual talents, such as spellcasting ability, are technically part of their bloodline's clan, but seldom aspire to rise to a Clan Leader's position. For one thing, many are too preoccupied by other tasks, hiring out their talents to other doppelgangers or participating in Lodge activities, to manage the day-to-day business of a clan; for another, they usually lack the patience to climb the social hierarchy in conventional fashion, preferring to take a short-cut to prestige as specialists contracted for their superiors' - perhaps even Sodo's - personal projects.

just leave it up to its underlings' wits to decide who gets the tastier roles: a first come, first serve free-for-all. Gives the members' skills and competitive instincts a workout, to decide things that way, plus it helps the Clan Leader pick out who's capable enough to deserve the status of a pet gooney ... or who's a little too good for comfort, so might need knocking off.

Reflecting back, I bet you're thinking to your funny little self something along the lines of: "Cripes! These messed up pinheads are chock full of resentment for each other! How do any of them manage to stand one another, long enough to work together?" Well, my friend, the answer to your question relates back to the topic of this section: the Niches Masters fill, and the roles they play to do so ... and play them right neatly, too.

A Master can hate some other Master with everything it's got, but still adore how lovely-well that other cove fills its Niche. See, a Master's Niche is by far the most romantic, challenging, stimulating part of its existence, and other Masters empathize with the rush that comes from playing it rightly. Masters are always interested in other Masters' Niches ... not for their own taking, mind you, but just to see what tricks they've devised for their roles, and how well they're "performing".

On Doppelganger Society

Persausive Disguise

In addition to the usual bonuses to Diplomacy checks which a doppelganger may receive from its ranks in Bluff, Knowledge (nobility & royalty), or Sense Motive, a doppelganger with 5 or more Disguise ranks receives a +2 bonus from synergy to Diplomacy checks when it is playing out a stolen identity (not a temporary mask) in front of "cattle". This bonus only applies to Diplomacy checks made to improve other Masters' basic attitudes, as per PHB p. 71-72, not to influence non-doppelgangers or to exercise the Diplomacy skill in other ways (negotiation, hagglng, etc).

Should the doppelganger in question fail a Disguise check to deceive its humanoid audience, this +2 bonus for synergy is lost, and all Diplomacy checks it makes to influence a fellow-imposter which witnessed its failure suffer a -4 circumstance penalty. Doppelgangers respect an effective performance, but are scathing critics of inept ones.

Actors can get a thrill from how other actors interpret their parts, see? When it comes to the grand stage that is a Master's life, just because the other Masters know it's all a show, that doesn't mean that they aren't part of its audience! A Master comes to admire another Master for how artfully it falls into character, and how deftly-smooth it gulls the human nitwits around it. Communicating by unspoken thoughts so the humans haven't a clue, they'll show off their talents in fancy-dancy ways, strutting and preening over how well they play their parts. Masters'll even offer one another sincere suggestions on how to polish a performance, or politely seek council with each other if they need advice.

I'd even go so far as to say there's a measure of honour and pride to be had in a Master's well-played Niche, that other Masters appreciate. Fact is, other Masters are usually its preferred fans; any human witnesses are simply its undiscerning and reluctant critics. And so, if a Master wants to become a favourite in the eyes of its Clan Leader and a star in the judgment of its peers, it gets bloody good at filling its Niche. And never, EVER, does a Master try to take some other Master's Niche, except with its express permission or as a sentence handed down from On High.

Silly, you say: that these creatures would seethe with jealousy when they're off-stage, yet go lovey-dovey and goggle-eyed over the shapes they adopt to bamboozle the rubes? Hate to break it to you, friend, but it's what humans do, too. Humanity doesn't actually like humans, so much as the shape that humans happen to wear, the words they choose to say, the veneer of manners they present. It doesn't matter who you were really born, what you actually do, or where you truly came from: what folks like yourself judge people on is what you can observe through two tiny pinholes, and the rest is just so much blather and pretence. Why do you think that calibans - born to ordinary human parents, just like the rest of you - get knocked off as something different, while a Master who's nothing of the kind is taken for one of you, and raised up like a proper little human brat?

It's your eyes that you lot trust, to tell what's what - and what's worthy - no matter how readily those fallible, fool-able eyes might see fit to lie to you. And it's due to that excess of trust in what the eyes have to say, Mr. _____, that I'm still breathing today ... no thanks to the bloody Grandmaster, of course.¹¹

But, oops! Silly Eddy, it looks like I'm saying that the Masters can't fall victim to fancy dress and foolishness, as easy as human-types. Maybe not as easy, mind you, but some of them get caught up in the most hare-brained nonsense you could imagine. But, wait a tick: maybe you can imagine it ... after all, most of your club-mates are caught up in said hare-brained nonsense too, Mr. _____.

Lodges

You've been to a Lodge meeting or three, haven't you, chummy? Not as a participant, mind you - why else do you think it's you I'm writing to, out of all your daft lot? - but as a guest-speaker, or

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an honoured celebrity, or whatever the pretentious twits who putter about with stinky chemicals for kicks and giggles might call it. Bunch of overeducated wankers, most of them, sure the key to making themselves immortal and all-powerful will get brewed up in the next test tube they try. Of course, those stories aren't completely bullocks; quite the contrary, my friend. It just doesn't apply to humans.

See, quite a ways back, some of the Masters who hadn't found enough ways to piss away their hard-stolen lucre got it into their heads that alchemy was the key to power. Turns out they were right, in a way: bolting down those revolting concoctions, like they don't know what they're made from, really does add a new trick or two to their inventory. As if any self-respecting Master would go gulping someone else's sick, for any reward. As if being a freak of nature's something to court instead of something to knock heads into walls over! Big, thick, solid walls with spikes on them, for preference...

Anyhoo, Mr. _____, I'm sure you can guess what happens when a bunch of self-aggrandizing sods with intellectualist pretensions think they've found the all-holy key to power. Righty-ho! Time for closet "brotherhoods" and dancy-chancy shadowy conspiracies, tucked off in the back corner of the house ... or Lodge, as the case may be. Not just one Lodge, mind you - can't be too unified here, where's the fun in that? - but a whole gang of gangs, each with its own favourite slate of powers to mess about with, and its own way of doing things. Its own politics as well, inside and out: some have a wider agenda, some like to pretend they don't, and they all have their share of internal backbiting and bad sportsmanship, just to keep life lively.

Sound familiar, chummy? See, I knew you were a bright one ... considering.

11. A classic self-justification of the doppelganger mindset, and spelled out in the creature's own words, no less: seductive and scathing, yet ultimately too shallow to ring true. Yes, humans can be short-sighted and superficial ... yet, given time to observe those around us, we - both as a collective race, and we three in particular, Miladies - discern that what lies beneath the exterior façade is far more complex and telling than whatever one's mere physical semblance may exhibit. Who better than twins like yourselves, to give the lie to Eddy's self-exonerating argument that appearance, alone, needs must dictate a person's destiny...? In every respect that the pair of you differ, dear ladies, you prove this creature's guileful speech for folly, not fact. Note, too, that Eddy slips up here, in speaking of "the rest of you" or "you lot". Playing coy as to its own inhuman nature has either worn thin by this stage, or been given up as a bad job. - Rookhausen

Alchemical Emotions

Progress along the six alchemical Paths always entails the disciple's secondary use of emotional purgatives: distilled emotions of greed, anger, lust, sloth, gluttony or envy, regurgitated by one creature, then ingested in turn by the doppelganger. To pursue these Paths, imposters therefore need access to volunteers who wish to be stripped of these same sinful emotions. By subverting various alchemical Lodges and persuading the human members to use High Alchemy to "purify" their spirits, doppelgangers discreetly obtain the purged emotions their own Paths demand.

The 3E description of emotional purgatives can be found on p. 64 of Van Richten's Arsenal. As this description became obsolete when the transition to 3.5 removed the emotion spell from the D&D game, DMs in 3.5 campaigns are best advised to present these formulae's effects as a role-playing challenge, if they are used to remove one of the cognate sins of doppelganger alchemy from a PC or NPC, or if a doppelganger ingests such extracted emotion and becomes overcome by the sin in question, in the course of play.

On Doppelganger Society

Alchemy and Doppelganger Society

Like many Zherisian aristocrats (many of whom are, of course, doppelgangers), many imposters take an interest in High Alchemy, ranging from casual dabbling to obsession. This is a means by which factions of Masters which cross clan lines can interact socially, joining in Lodges to work together to attain power over their respective clans' hierarchies, and to expand their alchemical knowledge to enhance their minds or bodies. Some subverted Lodges are strongly identified with a political agenda or socioeconomic class, while others are scholastic and politically-neutral.

Between one-quarter and one-half of Zherisia's mid- to high-ranking doppelgangers are involved in alchemy, and are Apprentices or better in one or more of the Paths. Lower-status individuals cannot easily afford the costly alchemical supplies necessary to be initiated into the Paths, but by banding together, some are able to steal the requisite funds and attain Apprenticeship on the sly.

Each of the six Paths has at least one Lodge or faction associated with it. The internal culture of a Lodge is strongly influenced by the Path it advocates, as members tend to share similar personal strengths (i.e. high ability scores): strong wills and perceptiveness flourish where Lead is pursued, while social butterflies and egotists gravitate to Copper, etc. The cognate sin of a Lodge's Path also has a powerful impact; the temperamental devotees of Iron have been known to engage in "human-bashing" sprees in the Blackchapel slums after important rituals, while the Lodges affiliated with Quicksilver are loath to gather without a sumptuous banquet at which to gorge themselves.

Most doppelganger-subverted Lodges continue to admit humans as junior members. Many of the latter are well-meaning dupes, regularly 'milked' of the sinful emotions necessary for progress on the Path in question. Others are alchemical philosophers tasked with concocting the purgatives. Such alchemists are usually quislings, and actively assist the doppelgangers' plots.

Leadership of subverted Lodges is always held, and jealously guarded, by powerful imposters, usually Smiths. (Full Masters of Paths arise but rarely - seldom more than once in a generation - because Sodo regards them as potential threats to his power, working to stymie or eliminate such ambitious individuals before they reach this peak of development.) Formidable doppelgangers uninterested in running a clan, or too unreliable to be trusted in a position of command, may seek prestige as a Lodge leader. To proclaim their independence from mainstream clan politics, heads of doppelganger Lodges generally change their names, symbolically divorcing themselves from ties to clan and mentor, much as a novice divests itself of its human surrogate-family.

Fun and games and calling names aside, the Lodges do have their job to do, in Masters' society: they're like the pressure valves on those clunky mechanical gadgets the inventors keep knocking together these days. Masters who know they've got more chance of becoming Brother Man than the next Clan Leader - Masters who haven't even got the sand to try - have to settle for other ways to stroke their egos. Playing around with alchemy gives them something to brag on, a weapon or three against their superiors in the clans, and a chance to grouse about their betters to their fellow lab-putterers. Not as if they'd actually risk their necks for real, daring to grab for the brass ring they're always complaining isn't theirs, is it? Like I said, a bunch of wankers. Letting them chase their tails is one of the few things the Grandmaster does right.¹²

12. Dismissive as Eddy is of these "Lodges" - an ex-Clan Leader's contempt for underlings too cautious to play the political game? simple fastidiousness? or is it another personal grudge? - they appear to constitute a rare venue for doppelgangers of different clans to interact with one another. As Eddy previously states that the Grandmaster prohibits such associations in ordinary circumstances, I think it inevitable that these Lodges would be hotbeds of illicit collaboration across clan lines ... and equally inevitable that their enigmatic tyrant will have spies embedded within each Lodge, to keep a wary eye on the members' activities. - Rookhausen

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Subverted Alchemical Lodges

Prominent Zherisian Lodges under doppelgangers' control are as follows:

The Puissant Brotherhood of the Red Star: All acknowledged devotees of the Path of Iron are members of this large Lodge, which is organized along paramilitary lines. The current leader is Captain-General Rewak Ironsmith (LE Ftr6/Duelist2; imago: Colonel Reginald Wakefield). The Puissant Brotherhood is composed almost wholly of staunch loyalists to Sodo, who uses them as muscle to keep the clans in line. Most members with class levels are fighters, warriors, or monks.

Eye of Eternity: Many devotees of the Path of Lead are members of this secretive organization, headed by Grand Seer Arbec Leadsmith (NE Enc10; imago: Dr. Arnold Beckham). It is one of the smallest, most philosophically-inclined Lodges, drawing recruits from those who take an interest in Zherisian philosophies of divine enlightenment; in recent years, several of its members have become clergy of the Divinity of Masters. This Lodge is known to be antipathetic to Sodo's policies, and the prudent adherents of the Eye take pains to conceal their membership from other Masters. Most Eye of Eternity members are clerics, monks or wizards (mainly enchanters).

The Hermetic Brotherhood: This is one of two Lodges adherent to the Path of Quicksilver, and one of the oldest and best-known of the subverted Lodges. Even amongst humans it has gained a rather sinister reputation; its human members are all either thrill-seeking nobles or quislings. The Hermetic Brotherhood has a long history of loyalty to Sodo, and its Grandee, Robga Watersmith (NE Mnk2/Asn6, Shapechangers' Schizophrenia; imago: Master Robert Gates), is a Vanguard and one of the darklord's most feared and unpredictable henchmen. Most doppelganger members have class levels as monks, fighters or rogues.

The New Hermetic Union: The other Lodge associated with Quicksilver is also the youngest, having split off from the Hermetic Brotherhood over controversies roused by the Great Upheaval. It is less hierarchal than most, all full (i.e. non-human) members being considered nominally equal, with the election of a Speaker every three years. It is widely - and rightly - regarded as a breeding ground for radical sentiments and rebellious rhetoric; it advocates greater exploitation of the rising middle class, and blames Sodo's leadership for Paridon's recent years of hardship. The current Speaker is Nastron Watersmith (LE Trans1/Alp7; imago: Nathan Strong). Membership depends more upon political affiliation than character class; even jackalweres are welcome.

Jovian Society: There is no single exclusive Lodge for the Path of Tin, which draws most of its recruits from the lower ranks of doppelganger society. Lacking the authority to subvert existing Lodges of humans, its devotees locate renegade alchemists within human-dominated Lodges who extract other humans' sins, then replace these alchemists' lab assistants and pretend to dispose of "contaminated" coagulants after use. Despite (or because of) its looser structure, the Path of Tin seems to produce more Masters, and more "alloyed" doppelgangers - those who split their studies between multiple Paths - than any other discipline.

The Jovian Society is a sort of umbrella organization bringing doppelgangers with limited resources together, to discuss their discoveries and share communal laboratory facilities financed by membership dues. It caters primarily to Tin devotees and rogues, but is open to imposters who favor any of the Paths. "Alloyed" doppelgangers are usually members of this association. The Jovians have no formal leader or political agenda, but their gatherings are often focal points for criminal dealings and street-rumor. Listrem Tinsmith (NE Rog9; imago: Ellie Rondel) is perhaps the most famous member resident in Paridon.

The Order of the Morning and Evening Star: The Star Order, as it is usually called, is the foremost Lodge for the Path of Copper, although as a collection of strong personalities it is prone to intense infighting and schisms. This intra-lodge struggle generally nullifies the Order's ability to pursue exterior political goals: a fact which Sodo and other power brokers find convenient, as a unified Star Order would be very difficult to resist as a political force. The Star Order is more magic-oriented than most doppelganger factions, having bards, sorcerers, and a few enchanters in its ranks. Its High Scion is Bellark Coppersmith (CE Sor9; imago: Dame Bellisandra Larkin).

The Servants of the Stone: This Lodge, aligned with the Path of Silver, is the smallest of the subverted Lodges, and the most dedicated to the purely arcane and esoteric. As far as can be determined, it has no political goals whatsoever, instead focusing on alchemical and philosophical researches that are barely intelligible to the uninitiated. Its members are exclusively spellcasting doppelgangers, who collectively share enough alchemical feats to make quisling aid unnecessary. The First Servant, Master of Silver Malduk (NE Ill14; imago: Sir Malcolm Duke), and Sodo seem to have a sort of "gentleman's agreement" to ignore each other.

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And with great honour and lovely ink, I come to my next section: the Masters who slip through the cracks, the Masters who have nothing to lose, the Masters who shouldn't even exist.

Exiles

Whether it's a human that's caught wise to them, or the Grandmaster's order that bagged the lot, clans can get nicked wholesale. Tumbles between rival clans sometimes go out of control, boiling up until there's so much blood on the cobbles that the humans start taking notice and the Vanguard have to grind both the contenders into the dust. There are things even nastier than the Masters around too, these days, and the Boogies have seen to enough clans' rank-and-file that it's easier to shut the whole show down as a bad job than to find places for its stragglers.

Plus, there are always cocky gits who break the rules, and loonies too addled-brained to keep their fool heads down, and bunglers whose chronic foul-ups threaten to give the whole game away. Doesn't really matter what the reason: if a Master steps out of line or fouls up big-time or is too bloody inept not to endanger the secrecy that protects them all ... why, it won't even get the luxury of being history, chummy. The Vanguard are very good at what they do, so nine times out of ten when a Master or a whole clan of Masters gets gone, it's gone. No business, no putting, no nabbing and/or running: they just vanish like they'd never even existed.

But once in a while, my friend, once in a blue moon, you get a survivor. Those survivors have no name or rank left to them amongst the other Masters, no rightful Niche to call their own, no place to turn for shelter, no clan-mates to work with or play power-games against or strut their stuff for, and so they become Exiles.

Exiles vs. Expatriates

While Eddy is (for the most part) being truthful in its discourse, one development in recent years has escaped its notice: doppelgangers who leave Zherisia voluntarily. Prior to the Upheaval, most dread doppelgangers shared human Zherisians' opinion that the lands beyond the Mists were too primitive, poverty-stricken and crude to contemplate visiting, let alone emigrating to. Since that catastrophe struck Ravenloft - and their own homeland in particular - and Paridon has become an increasingly-unfriendly place for their kind, a growing number of young adult doppelgangers are leaving their native domain in search of greener pastures. Like rats deserting a sinking ship, they forsake their clans to take up a new life where humans are less wary, there are no Clan Leaders to make demands of them, and the marikith are unheard of.

Such wilful expatriates occupy a gray area in doppelganger society. Having never formally been exiled, they technically retain their original status as clan members; on the other hand, those who simply desert their homeland without warning could potentially be charged with abandoning their duties to their clans. While few voluntary emigrants ever return to Zherisia, the ones who come home with their tails between their legs, having lost out to the Core's own resident horrors, are lambasted as deserters and shiftless layabouts. On the other hand, those that fare well in realms beyond the Mists are "welcomed home" with open arms ... that is, if their foreign experiences have made them strong enough, rich enough, or influential enough to be an asset to their betters.

As yet, the number of doppelgangers who desert Paridon is low enough that Sodo - who believes there are a few too many clans in the city, given the city's reduced population in the Upheaval's wake - has been content to let the emigrants trickle out. Should the trickle swell into a flood, the darklord will likely prohibit doppelgangers from leaving his domain, save on special assignments issued by him as Grandmaster, but such an edict hasn't been imposed yet.

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I won't bullocks you, my friend: many Exiles up and do themselves in. To be an Exile means you've lost everything you'd had: your status you'd worked so hard to achieve is ruined, your chosen role either liquefied by an "accident" or claimed by another Master. All that love and artful dedication to your old identity goes rotten and twisted, futile to recapture, till there comes a point where attempted resuscitation becomes necrophilia. You long for your old self - pine for it - imagine yourself, every day, living within it. His breath, his skin, his thoughts, his manners, his habits, his feelings: once you've been displaced from your favourite "home" by another Master (or your old self's been made a thing of the past, poor thing), there's no going back to what you once had, to who you once were. It's like losing a part of your body, but deeper, because the lost "part" is in your self instead of your flesh: always lacking, never numbed, forever missed.¹³

On the other hand, the Exiles get to run their own ship. The days of order-taking from badgering, out-of-touch superiors end, and in come days of fresh, lovely freedom. Freedom, that cuts an Exile loose to do whatsoever it pleases. Having no betters to satisfy, Exiles don't always bother about cleaning up their leavings when they replace someone; half the time, an Exile won't even care about performing its best, with no other Masters around to impress. Sometimes they've got an agenda - slicey-dicey revenge is a common one, as is winning their way back into the Grandmaster's good graces - but most Exiles are just out to savour a little mirth and fun, playing games with hapless humans who haven't got the wits to catch wise. Whether "mirth and fun" consists of wealth and prestige, drinking and debauchery, or blood-spattered jollies with sharp things, is up to the Exile.

The Vanguard see Exiles as a serious threat to their precious social order, so they get the Sentinels to offer rewards for bagging them. They can't directly order the clans out to seek and destroy, since the infrastructure's got to be kept up, and all that bullocks. (Not that Exiles haven't ever pecked away at that infrastructure, mind you ... but the minute the Vanguard act like Exiles are a real problem is the minute they look weak in the eyes of the Sentinels and Clan Leaders.) Interestingly enough, the Grandmaster's got himself a different approach to Exiles. Rather than snip them out of the picture, he likes to bend the Exiled to his will, cutting deals with them that he couldn't make with any of the regular Masters. And get this, my friend: he even shows favour to some of them, just as a Clan Leader might to a lesser that's good at filling its Niche! It almost makes me wonder if the Grandmaster himself wasn't once an Exile: one who'd twisted the rules around, to make the system work for him.

There's no such thing as a "typical" Exile. I've seen bands of Exiles tag together to form their own clan-like cliques, sometimes referred to as "gangs". I've seen them go down in a blaze of pistol-fire after murderous rampages, their carcasses 'disappeared' by the Vanguard. (After all, the humans these days know far too much about the Masters for comfort, already!) I've seen them try to establish new favourite identities to go home to, only to end up miserable, forever comparing these shoddy second attempts to their precious original "selves". I've heard of those who've fled to other realms, their fate beyond the Mists anybody's guess ... but bound to be just as dreary, as the Core's nothing but a medieval piss-hole. I've seen Exiles build little empires for their high-and-mighty selves, or immerse themselves so deep in assumed identities that they lose touch with what they are, or even swear off using their talents altogether, so they can forget how much they've lost and waste their dull, dull lives plodding along as plain-vanilla humans, if you can believe that!

So if there's anything I can tell you of the Exiles' ways, Mr. _____, it's that you can only predict their unpredictability, gold and juicy and maddeningly-inane. But then again, don't we all love a little anarchy to spice up our livings?

13. Again, the voice of personal experience resonates strongly here. One could almost pity the creature, had the tragedy of such a loss but pressed upon its mind, *before* it murdered the man whose stolen guise it now professes to grieve for. - Rookhausen

Secret Society: The Carlyle Trading Company

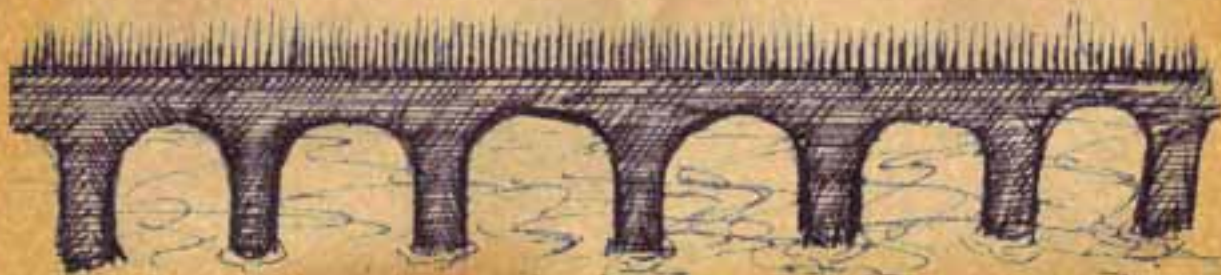
In the parlors of Dementlieu, the counting houses of Borca, and the dockside taverns of Mordent, one name is discussed with a mix of disbelief, envy, and awe: Nicholas Carlyle, fastest-rising merchant venturer of a generation. In less than a decade, Carlyle, a Zherisian-born wunderkind, has built up his holdings from partial ownership in a lone cargo caravel into the largest and most profitable commercial entity in the Sea of Sorrows.

The Carlyle Trading Company was founded in the spring of 752. Since then, the Company has grown by leaps and bounds, charting its course over waves and Mistways, ruthlessly crushing all competition, and making 'Nick' Carlyle, at the ripe old age of twenty-seven, one of the richest entrepreneurs in the Land of Mists. Yet, for all that Carlyle's vessels have earned a reputation for reliable and efficient service, unsavory rumors do persist: hushed whispers of sabotage, spying, corruption and even murder swirl around the Company. Older and wiser heads disregard the bulk of them; given Carlyle's meteoric rise, such bitter allegations are inevitable, and even if some are true, no one becomes the dominant shipping magnate in the western Core by playing nice.

The truth is rather shadier than even the harshest critics could have imagined. Nicholas Carlyle is a dread doppelganger, and the most successful "expatriate" of its species to date. The top levels of the Carlyle Trading Company are riddled with doppelgangers and quislings, their covert doings on the Company's behalf being masterminded by Ricos - 'Nick Carlyle' himself - from its lair in the firm's Central Office in the Bowels district of Paridon.

An entrepreneurial genius, Ricos stands at the helm of one of the mightiest private commercial enterprises in all Ravenloft. With a fleet of twenty-three ships and warehouses in every major port of the Sea of Sorrows, the Carlyle Trading Company is the dominant transportation firm in the western Core. No longer satisfied by "Nick's" success among humans, alone, Ricos has also used its charisma and wealth to return to Zherisia and leverage itself into control of its former clan, the Mirek, deftly (and fatally) displacing the prior Clan Leader ... and bringing its clan-mates into worldwide service as Company agents and saboteurs.

Ricos is pursuing the twin goals of political power within doppelganger society, and expansion of its imago's shipping empire. To that end, it strives to consolidate a monopoly on Zherisia's trade in raw materials - food especially - thus gaining economic leverage over its native city, while guaranteeing a healthy profit for the Company. It likewise continues to grow the Carlyle Trading Company; it has recently bought warehouse space in Armeikos on Liffe, and is negotiating to buy ships from both local shipyards and envoys of the Graben clan, with an eye towards achieving a similar dominance in the Nocturnal Sea, particularly of the Souragnien trade.



On Doppelganger Society

Still, most Exiles are a scroffy lot, bitter and backstabbing and bloody stubborn to boot. Which means they're a hefty step down from even the lowest of clan or Lodge members, who are sneering and backstabbing and bloody stubborn to boot. In fact, there's only one group left, that the Masters count lower:

Quislings

Some tasks, chummy, are beneath a Master's dignity. Some are dead boring - no chance to chat, to play with people's heads, to run them round in circles like little doggies chasing their tails - and a waste of a Master's talents. Sometimes there just aren't enough hands to spare to get something done, or at least none the Clan Leader can trust not to stab it in the back at the first idle moment, along the way.

That's where quislings come in. The boot-lickers, the teacher's pets, the hard-slogging little swots who figure if they please the Masters, they'll snatch a taste of the power and the glory off their betters' tables. The jackals, and the humans who emulate them.

Now, don't get me wrong here: most of the sods working for the Masters are as ignorant as an inbred Core-born clodhopper. Labour comes cheap in Zherisia, oh happy day, and violence is just another kind of work-for-hire if you know the right people. Paying off a few rowdies to hand out the occasional thrashing or dump a body into the drink doesn't make them quislings, just useful. Also expendable, if they're stupid enough to start thinking like they're smart, and get to asking the wrong questions.

The true quislings are those who are in on the joke: who know who really rules the land of human liberty and enlightenment. They know the truth, but also know what's good for them - keeping their gobs shut as a cure for Dropping-Off-A-Roof-Screaming disease - so they do what they're told and thank their lucky stars the Masters find them useful. The best of the lot share the Masters' goals, working voluntarily to keep the populace in line. The jackals (good doggies, they are; you'd like their style, Mr. _____) are like that. Some of the Lodge alchemists are like that, and a few special contractors for the Grandmaster's pet projects. Other quislings are kept in line with magic, threats to families - a classic, that - or straight-out, gut-twisting fear.

Among quislings, the jackals are at the top of the heap. Quick, cunning little beggars, all of them, and handy-dandy as decoys, stand-ins, cronies, what have you. The Masters have been using jackalweres as stooges for generations, ever since a pack of them came dawdling out of the Mists back in the mouldy old days. (I gather there were a few scuffles at first, but the doggies fell into line once they caught on that they couldn't take the fight out of Masters with a look, and that throats that'll blunt a straight razor can still have the life choked out of them.) Nowadays, every Master with the jam to claim one has a jackal on its personal payroll: ready to send inconvenient witnesses to sleepy-land - one way or the other - and nearly as good at passing for human as its betters, provided it doesn't have to say much. Good with real dogs, too - a mutt that'll yap its fool head off at a Master will sit up and beg for a jackalwere - and always willing to clean up the mess after a knocking-off, scavenger style. Again, they're cunning little beggars, and know that loyal service has its fringe benefits.

With a few eccentric exceptions, doppelgangers have little patience for tasks that do not involve any contact with others. Social interaction - even, and perhaps especially, with their enemies - is entertaining to the imposters, whereas solitary labor, study, or craft-work usually bores them to tears. If a qualified quisling is available, doppelgangers seldom hesitate to foist such drudgery off onto them.

On Doppelganger Society

Jackalwares

The first of Paridon's jackalweres immigrated from Har'Akir, soon after Zherisia's appearance in the Land of Mists. Unable to affect doppelgangers with their sleep gaze, they quickly came to a stable business relationship with the city's entrenched imposters. The jackals provide damage-resistant muscle, extra hands and eyes on the street, and corpse-disposal services, in exchange for the doppelgangers' patronage, "provisions", and assistance in maintaining public personas which the magical beasts - far less gifted as liars - can't keep up without aid. Jackalweres also assist doppelgangers in rooting out wolfweres, skin-thieves, and other camouflaged monsters from what these allied races of shapechanger regard as "their" city.

The D&D 3.5 jackalwere is described in the Fiend Folio. Zherisian jackalweres will occasionally take shapechanging feats (Atypical Powers chapter), like their doppelganger masters.

Dogs, Jackals, and Doppelgangers

While most ordinary animals are indifferent to doppelgangers - either they can't tell them apart from humanoids the imposters are duplicating, or they don't care - "Man's Best Friend" is much more particular. A dog can distinguish a doppelganger from its owner (and only its owner) with a DC 14 Survival check, as if it were attempting to track the creature; its +4 racial bonus for scent-tracking applies to this check, provided it can sniff the imposter for a full round or more.

Most dogs have an Unfriendly response to intruders in their homes, and will behave accordingly - barking aggressively and snapping if approached - if a doppelganger tries to take up residence in its owner's guise. If a dog can smell its real owner's blood on an imposter's person or witnessed the doppelganger's attack upon the owner, the animal's reaction will be Hostile, which usually equates to either cringing flight or an immediate attack.

Although not true dogs, jackalweres get along very well with normal jackals, and moderately well with domestic dogs. If a doppelganger is escorted by a jackalwere in any guise, the magical beast can improve an Unfriendly dog's reaction (but not a Hostile one's) by one step, as if it possessed the Wild Empathy class ability. The jackalwere's racial HD count towards its d20 roll; if it has druid or ranger levels, its racial and class modifiers stack. A doppelganger who wishes to replace a dog-lover will sometimes hire a jackalwere to mind the stolen identity's kennels, allowing its lackey to gradually accustom the animals to its presence.

Animal companions' ability to tell humans from doppelgangers by Scent is addressed in the next chapter. Such animals' instinctive hostility to a bogus "master" cannot be eased by jackalweres, even if the animal companion in question is itself a jackal or other canine.

Good, faithful mates, the jackals. Certainly more trustworthy than another Master! Like it says in the doggies' old folktales, they're perfectly happy to tag along with the lions' hunts, or lead the big cats to the game. No fear one of them will stab you in the back to steal your rank: even if other Masters would accept a jackalwere's leadership for a second, they think that being a Clan Leader just makes you everyone's favourite target! Looking back, I'm not so sure they're wrong.

Beneath the jackals, there's the willing allies, the humans who've thrown their support to the winning side voluntarily. Alchemists and academics, some of them - dead set on learning all they can, even if it means selling out their own kind to protect their illegal researches - who work with the Lodges to mix up their revolting draughts. They save the Lodges' real members a lot of tedious bother, so they tend to last for years, puttering away in their labs. More quislings than you'd like to believe are just plain greedy, collaborating with the Masters because they think it'll advance their personal ambitions. Their lot get used up and spit out, or replaced if and when it's convenient. And a few quislings are flat-out mercenaries: spell-muttering stargazers or sparkies recruited to do secret work for the Grandmaster, himself. That's how he gets those vicious little beetle-bombs that he uses to keep his personal toadies in line: another quisling cranks them out for him! I sn't that rich?¹⁴

For those who can't afford a jackal's services, and need muscle more than brains in their pet boot-lickers, there's always the "bilge-pickings" ... that is to say, prison recruitment. (Used to be called "gaol-pickings", before the city started stashing its antisocial blockheads in those rat-infested hulks anchored off the Docks.) Plenty of clans keep an eye on the Newsbill to see which daft beggars from the 'criminal classes' have got themselves nicked of late, and what sorry sod's on docket to swing gently in the wind, in the near future. Desperate men make desperate bargains to keep their necks out of a noose, and knowing they can't change their faces if the police come round, nor hide any disobedient ideas that may worm into their craven little heads - not from any Master with the knack to jolt the truth from said heads, they can't - does wonders for keeping the help on a tight leash. There's always a Master assigned to the penal warden's staff, to make sure any addle-coved rookie that gets itself pinched won't stew for long among the human scum, so slipping a prisoner or two out on the sly is a cushy sideline for it.

14. Dr. Cream (or rather, the man Miladies surely know of by another name) was likely one of these hirelings: in his case, a "sparky", or scientist by Miss P.'s translation. - Rookhausen



Finally, lowest of the low - not just the scum off the streets, but the gunk the scum of the streets scrape off their boots - are the draftees. Quislings recruited with a pistol to their head, or put to work because they're in the right place at the right time, with the right knack. Foreigners and outlanders, more often than not, with delusions of heroism or of "cleaning up" the terrible doppelganger infestation. Sometimes they know they're working for the Masters, but most often they think they're working against the Masters, with all the "poor, suffering citizens of Zherisia" depending upon them to save the day! Pulling them in and then turning them loose against one's enemies - other clans, the Boogies Below, transient pests like wolfweres with the gall to poach on the Masters' turf - can be a real lark, Mr. _____. But whatever their task and however they're impressed into service, they're cannon fodder, and usually far too stubbornly inquisitive to leave alive to stir up trouble, after they've served their purposes.

Of course, your lot know that tune already, don't you, Mister Esteemed Muckety-Muck?

Fun and games, Mr. _____, fun and games. A chummy can get to missing it, even knowing the cost.

Alas, my friend, such is all that I can say for now. I'm honest when I say I hope you don't die, like most sods do when I tell them about the Masters: that gets annoying, the fifth or sixth time round. If you've a mind to blab this information, be informed that the average number of days it's taken the Grandmaster's gooneys to track down such tattletales is precisely three. Some fours here and there, maybe a two or a five; one lucky so-and-so even made it to ten. A couple of my other contacts who had the brains to seal their lips are still around, though ... if you like, I can hook you up! Just realize that if you're careless about it, you'll have a Master on your celebrant-drummer arse fast enough to make your head spin, and I'm not saving you from your own idiocy.

So if you're interested in hooking up with some of my chappies, we could well use a lad with your particular "specialty talents". And no, we don't care a whittle about that brotherhood-of-whatever you're a part of; you can piss about with reality as you please, on your own time. We wouldn't even make you shave that pansy moustache of yours, albeit with great sorrow and regret. So, just for your handy-dandy information, the offer is there for the asking if you should want it. Otherwise, stay out of my way, and we can maybe sit down for a tea together sometime, or whatever it is you people do all day in the Bowels.

And do keep your eyes open, my friend. Once I'm through with my plans, Bloody Jack will be as old news as a Blackchapel obituary.

Toodles!

-Eddy



Excerpts from the Diary of Deborah Creede

November 23rd, 8:00 am

Exhausted, I must have fallen asleep at my desk, my last entry's ink still damp. Again, these horrible nightmares returned the moment my eyes closed, but this time they had changed. I saw, again, how the doctor's neck was torn open - felt the wire in my grasp; felt my muscles tighten, with an unhesitant, practiced ease - but then I saw something else. I saw hands, delicate and graceful, furiously dancing across the keys of a piano, smearing them with something sticky. I saw hands, paint-spattered and wrinkled, hastily dragging a brush across canvas, birthing garish and ugly sceneries, until they cast the brush aside and tore the canvas apart.

And I felt it. I felt anger, and frustration, and finally desperation, as the hands moved ever faster. Felt envy, above all: burning, scathing, maddening. And what was strangest of all, I thought I could feel with these hands - the ivory keys beneath my fingertips, the paint-smears' tackiness on my skin - yet I know they were not mine, could not be mine. My hands are neither so slender nor so well-manicured; their palms are not so callused, nor their veins so pronounced. For a fleeting instant, I watched hands lifting a pocket-watch into my view - a familiar watch, and manly hands that seemed equally-familiar - as if to check the time, as the anxiety of waiting, and of terrible need, rushed over me.

And then it became stranger yet. I saw my hands - this time truly my own hands - scribbling on paper, saw myself sitting upon a freshly-shoveled mound of earth, as I gazed from the hilltop over Shadewell and the gray skyline of Paridon. But the writing kept blurring before my eyes. And I felt something liquid slowly crawling across my face, until a single red drop fell onto the paper.

At its fall, my eyes opened. Apparently, I must return to the scene of Dr. Johanson's demise if I ever wish to put my fears to rest, even though everything in me rebels against the prospect.



On the Hunt

I know I'm human.

*And if you were all these things, then
you'd just attack me right now, so some
of you are still human.*

*This thing doesn't want to show itself,
it wants to hide inside an imitation. It'll
fight if it has to, but it's vulnerable out
in the open. If it takes us over, then it
has no more enemies, nobody left to
kill it.*

And then it's won.

- John Carpenter's *The Thing*



On the Hunt

And so, having read these findings on doppelgangers' abilities and proclivities, their devious tactics and nefarious politics, we come at last to that task which - if I know Miladies rightly - you now feel justly motivated to undertake: the elimination of this insidious threat to life and trust. I know that you must surely share my outrage, and understand the need to free these Lands from this plague, that their kind should neither batten any longer on our societies, nor deceitfully sire new generations, to suffer and be soured against Mankind in turn.

Were I any other writer, or this treatise, concerned with any other threat, this closing section's preface would now ask that oft-repeated question: "Are you sufficiently committed to slay this creature?" Many times, Dr. Van Richten wisely cautioned against undertaking a hunt in a mood of heedless vengefulness, glory-seeking, or craving for excitement. Too many times, as Miladies set forth to carry on the good Doctor's legacy, you yourselves have been regaled with well-meant warnings not to follow his path: that doing so could well lead only to death for one sister and grief for the other. I am not among those voices, dear Laurie, dear Gennifer; I know you too well to question your dedication. It is not your commitment to slay monsters - and to slay them for the right reasons - which I beg you sisters, or any other hunter, to duly question, when the foe one contemplates facing is a doppelganger.

But are you so staunchly committed as to slay *each other*?

For that is the choice with which the pair of you will one day - inevitably - be presented, in confrontations with such facile deceivers as these: to strike down your twin's twin, or perish. Deduction and intuition can only take one so far; sooner or later, Miladies, you will be forced to take that shot, to invoke that killing spell upon your sister's semblance, without the luxury of absolute certainty.

Can you live with yourselves, after, knowing that you were wrong? Knowing, even, that you were right ... yet might not have been? Is each of you prepared to be the one whose life is forfeit to that flip of fate's coin, to that cruel and arbitrary decision? Can you truly, to the depths of your hearts and souls, forgive each other for taking so terrible a risk?

Or, even if you are braced to confront each other thusly, could you take that selfsame action, met with you father's image? Your grandfather's? Your courageous Uncle George? The mother whom you never knew, yet have many times imagined? Having so long sought him out - at such terrible cost, dear Genny! - and so fiercely prayed for his return, could you yet bring yourselves to strike down the living effigy of **Van Richten**, himself?

Will it make you think less of yourselves, in the hunt's aftermath, knowing you are capable of such an act? Will you think less of each other - trust less, love each other less - to see your sibling's hands turned against the images of those you care for and respect?

Averse and uncomfortable though such questions are, Miladies, they must be asked - of one's self and one's comrades - before setting forth to end a doppelganger's depredations. Rare, indeed, is the hunter who has neither thought nor memory of loved ones, easy pickings for the quarry's mind-reading powers; rarer still (and blessedly so), the soul so hardened as to strike down his or her nearest and dearest, without pause. How many times, in researching your own treatise on the Walking Dead, did you sisters hear tell of heroes whose nerve failed, upon facing the shambling, rotted remains of fallen battle-comrades or kin? How many more might have hesitated, had those apparitions worn the veneer of life, spoken in familiar voices, greeted those they deceived with well-known phrases and mannerisms? M. Vignes' affliction is an extreme outcome, yet the manner of 'vision' with which his "Fiend" tormented the poor soul was hardly unprecedented.

For too many doppelgangers, such fleeting hesitation and surprise is all they need, to cut you down. To let one's defenses drop is to hand the advantage to a creature which, for all its urbane veneer and jesting, is ultimately a skulking killer, cravenly camouflaged beneath a trustworthy façade. It knows our affections render us tentative, less prone to retaliate with lethal force; it

On the Hunt

knows that our instinct to trust is its shield, even as our susceptibility to doubt is its weapon. It will not pass up the opportunity to disarm us by our sentiment.

One must strike a balance, hunting doppelgangers, between warding one's self from trusting too much, and lashing out so hurriedly that the innocent suffer blows intended for the guilty. As few hunters are so rash as to operate in solitude, one must find the means to verify one's comrades are the people they claim to be, and to establish one's own legitimacy to the satisfaction of one's companions. The transcript I enclose herein contains several invaluable suggestions, in this regard; use them assiduously, Miladies, for from the moment the creature realizes you seek its undoing, thus-proven allies will be your only dependable lifeline in a sea of turbulent mistrust.

Yet just as importantly, one must *clear the air*, before setting forth. Let it be known to your comrades that you are committed to the purpose of the creature's defeat - committed, even to the point of firing that uncertain shot, or receiving that killing spell in your quarry's stead - and that you will expect no lesser sacrifice from your allies. Make it abundantly clear that, while innocent parties are not to be slain out-of-hand, fellow hunters (the most likely of targets to be supplanted by the foe), being both well-armed and aware of your plans, are in too sensitive a position to be given much benefit of the doubt. Capturing suspects alive is, of course, preferable to killing them - a good stance to adopt with any shapechanging adversary, not just doppelgangers - yet all voluntary participants in such a hunt must be prepared to fall by their comrades' hands, as well as the creature's, should proof of identity be denied you in the clench and that fifty-fifty gamble become necessary.

If you do not believe yourselves capable of that, Miladies - of accepting your own deaths, inflicted in error, without regret; or of living with the knowledge that an ally equally-committed has fallen to your attacks - then doppelgangers are not fitting prey for your hunts. If you, or those who would stand by you, are unable to reconcile yourselves to such instances of 'friendly fire', then you are better suited to seek some other quarry ... or, if you must stalk the imposters, to do so alone: recruiting others' aid only on shortest notice, thus affording the creatures no time to infiltrate your backup, and drawing any assistance from such mercenaries or dubious allies-of-convenience as you are already disinclined to trust or to mourn.

But I have no doubt that Miladies' mettle is stronger than mine, to face peril with a mutual dedication and bond I cannot help but envy. However tested of late, I cannot believe that sisterly bond will be broken, on confronting - nay, on slaying - that false "sister" whom you envision reading over your shoulders, even now. Let that bond become, not a weakness that undermines your defenses, but a source of strength, in knowing that if one should fall ... even by the other's hand ... the twin who remains will yet carry on, to show these mockeries that they can neither subvert nor imitate your determination and spirit.

In the transcripts following (graciously provided by our mutual correspondent, Toret Severin of Levkarest) are contained the words of one whose determination is founded in faith - at times blind and uncompromising faith, but sincere nonetheless - rather than kinship. I do not, admittedly, agree with all his methods; our respective strategies and philosophies differ on a number of key points. Yet the advice Inquisitor Valchov has to offer and the account of his field-experiences should provide a useful case-study of the tribulations and challenges one may expect, when in pursuit of doppelgangers both less forthcoming than 'Eddy', and more conventional in their habits and abilities than 'Adramelech'. May his staunch conviction and modesty serve to balance out the abhorrence of my previous two "contributors," with their gratuitous boastfulness and perfidy!

On the Hunt

March 11th, 758

To his Most Holy Excellency, Praesidius Levin Postoya,

Your Holiness, are you quite certain? While I can hardly dispute that the situation in Lekar is deteriorating and that the Sentire needs all the help he can get to fight the vile shapeshifters, surely there is a more worthy author to be found than myself? I didn't quite cover myself in glory, while hunting the doppelganger in Martira Bay.

Perhaps Bastion Raines might suggest a better author? I've heard that Warden Ragnol of Maykle managed to slay several of the wolf-fiends recently. He is a very learned man, and much more suitable for this task than myself.

Your most devoted servant,

Brother Konraad Valchov

March 13th, 758

To his Most Holy Excellency, Praesidius Levin Postoya,

Yes, Your Holiness, I understand that slaying werewolves is a far cry from killing doppelgangers. But surely the author of this letter should be a scholar and a writer, not a meager anchorite like me. I didn't even learn Balok until half-way through my novitiate, and Falkovnian only last spring! It wouldn't do to force the Sentire of Lekar to muddle through a peasant's scribbles for such important information.

I've heard that hunters in Mordent have been very successful recently in fighting the Legions of the Night. Perhaps one of them could be asked to write this?

Your most devoted servant,

Brother Konraad Valchov

March 16th, 758

To his Most Holy Excellency, Praesidius Levin Postoya,

Yes, Your Holiness, it should be kept within the Holy Mother Church. Yes, Your Holiness, I will write the letter. No more excuses, Your Holiness. I shall report to the scriptorium immediately, Your Holiness.

But are you quite sure?

Your most devoted servant,

Brother Konraad Valchov

March 17th, 758

To his Most Holy Excellency, Praesidius Levin Postoya,

Yes, Your Holiness.

Your most devoted servant,

Brother Konraad Valchov

March 25th, 758

To his Holy Excellency, Sentire Alber Dralicht of Lekar,

Your Excellency, the Praesidius was most concerned with your recent missives about the increased activities of doppelgangers in Lekar. He particularly took it amiss that these creatures felt brave enough to take the position of a Toret, and is in full agreement that something must be done.

He also expresses considerable dismay that the Falkovnian government isn't doing more to hunt down the shapeshifters, but nevertheless sees this as a time for church unity. To the limits of my knowledge, he is currently assembling a task force of Inquisitors to assist in the cleansing of the doppelgangers from Lekar. In the meantime, I enclose a letter to your chief Inquisitor. It contains the best advice of the Holy Church on how to combat these fiends, and the Praesidius hopes that it will assist in the hunt.

Your Servant,

Warden Konraad Valchov

Special Inquisitor, Levkarest

March 25th, 758

To the Chief Inquisitor of Lekar, Warden Olga Beralsdottir,

My name is Brother Konraad Valchov, currently a Special Inquisitor to the Praesidius. I am also, apparently, the Church's top expert on doppelgangers, and if that isn't a scary thought, I don't know what is. Regardless, while the Praesidius musters some human inquisitors to aid you in the fight against the shapeshifters, I'm writing this letter to tell you how to fight them, as well as what not to do.

Now, under normal circumstances, I'd leave off the letter-writing and show up personally, but apparently Falkovnia is much more friendly to doppelgangers than it is to people with even a trace of visible non-human blood. Over a century has passed, and Great-Grandfather is still making my life a misery. You don't know what irritating relatives are like until you have a shadow fey for an ancestor. Anyway, as I'd be clapped in irons the moment I stepped into your country (and as a half-elf, of all things!), you'll have to wade through my miserable Balok instead. Be thankful I'm not writing this in Falkovnian! Still, I'm sure Ezra forgives me my sins of spelling, which means I'm afraid you'll have to as well.

Sorry, but I'm a little aggrieved at being forced to stay here in Levkarest when I'm so obviously needed elsewhere. But it's not your fault, and I shouldn't be burdening you with my irritations. Pray forgive me. And now, to work.

Your Servant,

Warden Konraad Valchov

Special Inquisitor, Levkarest

Dread Possibility: The Grandmaster and the Kingfuhrer

Of all the domains of the Western Core, Falkovnia is - unwittingly - the most hospitable to doppelganger exiles from Zherisia. It is a large nation with sprawling urban centers, and its position as the regional breadbasket ensures the wealth of its military elite. More importantly, it lacks the supernatural competitors of Richemulot, Borca or Darkon, in which wererats, ermordenung and undead respectively suffice to drive all but the craftiest of doppelgangers to seek greener pastures. The presence of the Scholar-Fiend in Port-a-Lucine makes much of Dementlieu a risky proposition. To date, despite its primitive squalor, the largest community of dread doppelgangers outside Paridon is found in Lekar: a city whose dominant man-eater residents, vampyres, are regarded as one-trick-ponies and atavistic brutes by the true Master imposters amongst monstrous humanoids.

More than just a community of outcasts infests Falkovnia, however. Ever since the Upheaval cut Paridon off from its former countryside, Sodo has worked on a plan that, if successful, will secure that city's food supply indefinitely. The Grandmaster's plot is at once simple and ingenious: a few at a time over the last dozen years, he has dispatched powerful imposters to Falkovnia for the express purpose of replacing Talons in Drakov's military and bureaucracy. (To the adaptable shapechangers, donning or removing Talon bracers is an easy task - simply changing to a Small guise lets them slip these on or off - and such items' loyalty-bindings are foiled by doppelgangers' immunity to charm-effects.) Once enough of his minions are in key positions, Sodo will order a covert palace coup, replacing Vlad Drakov and his top ministers with doppelganger loyalists. With control of the breadbasket of the Core, Sodo can import as much food as he wishes through the Mists to Paridon.

Currently there are seven doppelgangers embedded within the Falkovnian state, most of them fighters who follow the Path of Iron. Their field commander is Jafi (LE dread doppelganger Ftr2/blackguard 4), a formidable Journeyman with the Iron abilities of Massive, Leatherback, Greater Body Weaponry, and Oak Body; it has been appointed to replace the Kingfuhrer himself. The plot is midway to completion, some conspirators having worked their way into Drakov's own household, while others have replaced key Talon officers throughout the city. Strategically, the goal is to replace both Vlad Drakov and the head of the Ministry of Finance and Trade, Falkfuhrer Jardon Kovedknochen, but at present, the cabal's numbers are too small to undertake two such elaborate deceptions.

There is one monkey-wrench in the Grandmaster's plan: judging Falkovnia's darklord solely by his curse-imposed reputation as a bungler, Sodo has underestimated just how appealing the mercenary-king's domineering personality is, to militant thinkers. After nearly a decade in Lekar and long years of practice getting "into character" as Drakov, Jafi has begun to take on the Kingfuhrer's own belligerent and tyrannical habits, regarding its own status as leader of both the cabal and Lekar's doppelganger community as but the first step in its own rise to conquering greatness. Should his infiltrators succeed in taking over Falkovnia, Sodo may well find his "stand-in" Drakov has become as intractable and antagonistic as the real thing.

On the Hunt

Now, the good news is that, if compared to an infestation of vampires or a pack of werewolves, doppelgangers aren't as destructive. They don't need to feed upon humans, and are more concerned with their own comfort than committing mass murders. Considering some of the all-human monsters that roam the land, this makes them virtual model citizens! Most doppelgangers would much rather live comfortably in a stolen identity for years on end, rather than have to work for their luxuries. Simply put, they're lazy. Yes, they are murderous, thieving monsters, but they're usually too idle to cause half the trouble they could, a trait for which I give thanks to Ezra regularly.

Likewise, doppelgangers aren't very powerful, at least in the physical sense. Most are quite clever, and they tend to have a punch like a steel bar, but they have nothing of a league with a lich's magics or a golem's strength. Furthermore, they tend to be solitary (at least, here in the Core; stories that filter in from Paridoners don't bear thinking about, Ezra have mercy on their souls!), which means that most groups of dedicated hunters can bring a cornered doppelganger down without too much trouble.

That's the good news. Keep a firm hold on that, because that's all the good news I have to offer. The bad news is that doppelgangers are some of the most insidious threats to a community that exist. They're like ticks: not actually very dangerous individually, but they spread a plague - a plague of suspicion - far in excess of their individual might. Rumors of doppelgangers spread paranoia and mistrust out of all proportion to reality, and it is this that makes them so vile. Even a few doppelgangers, once their presence is known, can turn a city into a hotbed of distrust. One need only look at Paridon to see what a sustained infestation of doppelgangers can do to the social order. It isn't pretty.

They're also very hard to find. As their name attests, doppelgangers are the most skilled shapeshifters in existence. No creature or magic in this world can compare to the doppelganger's knack for mimicry. Coupled with their mind reading powers, ferreting out a doppelganger from among the ranks of true men can be virtually impossible. One of my fellow inquisitors once compared a doppelganger hunt to playing Geas while blindfolded, against a dealer who cheats, with your life as the stakes. Far too often, what the doppelganger-hunter must do is simply to be vigilant and hope that the doppelganger makes a mistake. Sooner or later they do, Ezra be thanked.

Lastly, doppelgangers are extremely versatile. The late Dr. Van Richten was fond of saying that there is no "typical" monster. If this held true for werebeasts and golems, creatures whose powers and aptitudes bend toward physical might, or for liches, with a leaning towards magic, it becomes doubly true for doppelgangers. As a doppelganger may imitate anyone, so it can be virtually anything. Many master the skills of the thief, perfecting their powers of stealth and disguise to nigh-preternatural perfection. Others are warriors, using their shapeshifting abilities to imitate ever more dangerous forms, or to create weapons from their very flesh. Some few are wizards, combining magic with their other abilities. And rumors of a doppelganger archpriest that plagues Dementlieu are enough to keep me awake at night. This means that, until you have actually fought the deceiver, you won't know whether to expect a sword in the gut or a spell in the face.

From Inquisitorial Report #4943

October 11th, 755

We arrived in Martira Bay early this evening, tired, hungry, and wet. The weather this far north is horrific, and it was pouring water from the sky as if someone had overturned Our Lady's bathtub. I doubt I'll ever feel dry again.

Sister Irena seems to have come down with a cold, which I blame on the weather and the breakneck pace we made from Levkarest. For the past four weeks we've been chasing a creature called "The Faceless Filcher", a strange creature with the ability to infiltrate even the most heavily defended homes. Four weeks ago, it stole a set of important books from the vaults of the Great Cathedral and murdered an anchorite who tried to stop it. The Praesidius would not have this, and dispatched the four of us to hunt it down. Myself, Sister Irena Taleria, fresh from her novitiate but nonetheless a sorceress of no little skill; Brother Philip Carvelle; a former warrior from Invidia and a good man; and Toret George Fielding, a Mordentishman and our spiritual leader.

We've been tracking the creature through some of the worst conditions imaginable, but so far, we haven't lost the trail. From Borca it slipped through the border to Falkovnia (an interesting trip for me, I must say), and then into Darkon. Apparently a childhood spent tracking merchants and animals all over the Tepest-Nova Vaasa border was good for something, since we've managed to follow the Filcher no matter what it and the weather could throw at us. What's more, we seem to have gained on it. The most recent tracks are no more than a day old. With a little bit of help from Our Lady in the Mists, we might just catch the thing now.

Brother Konraad Valchov

Discovery

Perhaps the trickiest part of finding a doppelganger is knowing that there exists a doppelganger to find.

Now, with ghosts or ancient dead, you hear tales of their activities far and wide. Vampires and werewolves have distinctive habits that are hard to hide. Golems are generally incapable of functioning in society, and hags and demons have auras that identify them from miles away. No such luck with doppelgangers, Ezra curse them.

The vast majority of doppelgangers, in my experience, are found accidentally. Most often this is due to the corpse of a doppelganger's current guise being found; this is why most of the shape-changers pay special attention to the disposal of the body, sometimes using elaborate means to destroy their victims or render their features unrecognizable. If a dead and defaced body turns up unexpectedly - one that bears no evidence of predatory gnawing, as a werebeast would engage in, yet has been stripped nude or re-dressed in clothes that fit it only poorly - a doppelganger is one likely suspect. Others of these shapechangers are found out if they accidentally bleed, and the weird behavior of their blood betrays them (more on this later). And still others are found by sheer luck, when an innocent witness chances to observe one shifting its form, or perhaps altering the shape of some item it carries.

It took us some time, but we'd finally managed to figure out where the Filcher was hiding. Our quarry had apparently taken rooms at an inn along the dockside called the Randy Rat, a name of such implications as I try hard not to think about.

The four of us waited until evening, when all the patrons of the inn would be at supper, and then entered the inn together, all of us in our formal green-and-white robes, with Ezra's symbol prominently displayed. Brother Philip thought I was slightly addled in my wits about it, but the rank of Inquisitor has its uses. And there was a method to my madness.

*As we entered, I surveyed the inn's common room carefully. This would've been more helpful had we actually even the faintest idea of what the Faceless Filcher looked like, but the fugitive's nickname was well chosen, as not a single description we'd received from innkeepers and eyewitnesses matched another. Only his (her?) distinctive *modus operandi* had led us this far. And yet, as I gazed upon the burly sailors and wretched prostitutes of the den of vice, I noticed one grizzled seaman flinch as we entered. Perfect. As the four of us bore down upon him like the wrath of Ezra, he excused himself from his dice game and all but fled to the rooms upstairs, disappearing from our sight as he reached the top of the stairwell. We followed.*

As we arrived at the second floor, we saw it abandoned except for a slim wisp of a girl, a maid or some such. We asked her where the sailor had disappeared too, and she pointed to one of the rooms. Leaving Toret Fielding and Brother Philip to guard the stairs, Sister Irena and I searched the top floor. And searched. And searched a third time. By this point, we were very confused. Fifteen-stone seamen do not commonly vanish into thin air, even in Darkon.

We eventually went back downstairs to request assistance in looking for any secret passageways, as well as a more detailed description of the suspect from the maid. To our considerable surprise, the scarred innkeeper told us that no such woman worked for him.

Perhaps the sailor didn't vanish after all.

Brother Konraad Valchov



Of course, it has happened that the doppelganger's identity is revealed only after it is already dead. Several years ago, while I was still in my novitiate, a Borcan nobleman was poisoned at a banquet up near Lechberg. Not exactly an unusual event, sadly. What was unusual is that the slain noble promptly collapsed, transforming into a grey, rubbery-skinned, androgynous monster. In fact, given these creatures' ruthless and greedy behavior when in human guise, many may be assassinated for their misdeeds as a human, their awful nature unsuspected until the blade sinks in. It is events like these that show us the Grand Scheme does work, however convoluted its ways.

Being less formidable on average, most doppelgangers are decidedly lower in the hierarchy of the Legions of the Night. Vampires and lycanthropes, as well as more obscure creatures such as red widows or wolfweres, often destroy any doppelganger that dares to enter their territories. (As a matter of fact, a few years ago, nearly a dozen doppelganger corpses were found poisoned and displayed in various parts of Levkarest. One can only assume that they ran afoul of some preternatural agency. This would make me happier if it didn't imply there is something living in Borca which is capable of recognizing a dozen doppelgangers for what they are, and of killing them so easily!) Realms where the most predatory of the Night's Legions tend to be rare, such

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as Dementlieu or their native Zherisia, thus tend to harbor more doppelgangers; this might, in part, explain why your own parish in Falkovnia has seen these imposters' numbers increase.

If the hunter is trying to actively discern the presence of doppelgangers, there are two ways of going about it. The first is to seek out patterns. Much as Man may learn the secrets of the divine from observing the Grand Scheme, he can learn the secrets of other things by looking at more secular patterns. If I am searching for doppelgangers in a city, my first stop is always at the local hall of records. Gossip is also useful. Look for patterns of deaths among the wealthy. If there is a regular pattern of rich old people becoming recluses and then dying after a few weeks' or months' solitude, chances are good that there is a doppelganger at work. In general, any kind of pattern might be a clue, but look particularly for patterns in the cause of death, the unexplained disappearance of the decedents' fortunes, and the behavior of the deceased shortly beforehand.¹

Doppelgangers are lazy creatures, and even though most realize they shouldn't, they tend to fall into a rut, particularly about the means by which they steal identities. One doppelganger may specialize in aged invalids who are likely to die soon, another in young hellions who die of over-indulgence. They might get into a habit of "killing off" their assumed guises, once they have run through their victims' fortunes, with a particular disease or style of accident. Most doppelgangers will hit upon one reliable, fairly safe method of life, and then see little need to change a winning stratagem. This is one of doppelgangers' greatest flaws and a key to their downfall, so I'll repeat myself: look for patterns.

Sometimes the patterns can be quite strange or obscure. I've heard that one particular bibliophile doppelganger made a practice of stealing the identities of librarians. It takes their form, ransacks the collections they oversee for the most valuable or exotic books, then kills off the identity and proceeds to the next. It eventually came to a bad end after attempting to steal a spellbook in Hazlan from a librarian who also happened to be one of that strange land's more notorious wizards. And they say Ezra doesn't have a sense of humor.

This is another important note. Doppelgangers prefer to usurp the lives of wealthy, or at least well-off, individuals, but they can and will steal the shape of any member of society, should it serve their purposes. I shudder to think of them infiltrating our Holy Church, though thankfully few of the creatures seem to favor the ascetic life of the clergy. There is a significant minority of doppelgangers who specialize in criminal identities, and I have heard tell of some that even prefer the life of an adventurer! As wiser monster hunters than I have said, there is no such thing as a typical monster, and this is doubly true for doppelgangers.

1. Patterns are, indeed, of great help in determining when something untoward is going on. However, I would caution Miladies against assuming that shapechangers are the only possible explanation for the patterns Warden Valchov describes. A vengeful odem that takes possession of, ruins, and kills its victims might produce a similar series of tragedies, as might a purely-mundane villain who isolates the elderly from others' cautionary words, then entices them into handing over their wealth before disposing of them. Pursue such leads as fortune might provide with diligence, dear ladies, but never wholly blind yourselves to alternative theories. - Rookhausen

Dread Possibility: Gilam the Hunter

Unlike Zherisia's highly-structured doppelganger society, most doppelgangers found in the Core are oddballs and fugitives: criminals or pioneers, fleeing the tyrannical punishments of their Grandmaster or seeking opportunity in a land less wary of their kind. As such, they tend to be a far more diverse group than doppelgangers that stay home, less compulsively sociable and obsessed with status. Few exiled Masters are more representative of this misfit tendency than Gilam the Hunter (CE dread doppelganger Ftr2/Brb2).

Gilam is a Exile doppelganger in its late twenties. Even during its faux-human childhood, it displayed a startling capacity and love for violence, and Wakening only made its aggressive tendencies worse. Where other doppelgangers took pleasure in plotting and disguises, nothing could surpass the thrill of the hunt for Gilam, nor the feel of hot blood gushing through its fingers. As it grew into its powers, its depredations became increasingly vicious, until finally the elders of its clan had enough of covering up this young thug's casual brutalities. Gilam was banished to the Mists, and good riddance to it.

For some months after its exile, Gilam wandered the Core, committing vicious acts of murder and mayhem, but the thrill gradually palled. Where was the sport in slaughtering pathetic humans? Where was the danger, the challenge? It was a chance encounter with a wolfwere in Kartakass that opened up new horizons for Gilam: the Core, unlike Paridon, teemed with wild monsters of all kinds. Why butcher humans, when more stimulating prey is so abundant?

For the past few years, Gilam has been a monster hunter, and a fairly successful one at that. It works primarily in the southern Core, roving from Kartakass to Barovia to Sithicus and back. It specializes in hunting lycanthropes and other animal-like monsters, though it also has two vampire spawn and one confirmed golem to its credit. Unlike most doppelgangers, Gilam has little taste for settled life, deriving the same satisfaction in besting its prey that others find in appropriating urban comforts. It has the privilege of living almost constantly as its imago, and the hunt and slaughter of a foe is sheer ecstasy to Gilam. The odd robbery and proceeds from its kills supply it with enough money to continue to hunt, and that's all it wants out of life.

In person, Gilam almost always appears as its imago, a hulking Kartakan ranger named Giles; it also transforms to a willowy Sithican elf huntress, Tharivola, at need. Gilam is a fearsome warrior, using a massive great-axe as a weapon of choice, and is a Journeyman of Iron, with powers of Strength of Wrath and Crushing Blow. Despite its alignment, it is one of the safer doppelgangers people can meet, as it isn't really interested in killing mere humans, so long as its true nature is not exposed. Although a hardcore hermit by doppelganger standards, it does enjoy engaging in "shop talk" with adventurers and hunters as an outlet for its sociable urges. On occasion it has even aided mundane monster-hunters in tracking some especially-exotic quarry, though its ravening bloodlust makes Gilam an uncomfortable ally.

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Of course, sometimes the doppelganger one pursues is too recent an arrival to have established any kind of pattern. In that case, one must look for people acting out-of-character. Doppelgangers are masters of disguise, but even they aren't perfect, and can be found out. Generally, look for any kind of change of habits that might be explained by an imposter's efforts to secure its claim on a stolen identity. Most doppelgangers replace their employees and try to drive off close family members, so if someone seems to have become a recluse overnight, it's a good hint that a doppelganger may be involved.

Now, intelligent doppelgangers realize that their actions can cause gossip, but they're stuck between the proverbial devil and deep blue sea. If they don't keep old friends of their form away, these old valets, brothers, mistresses, and so on can notice little changes of habit: mistakes that even the most careful of doppelgangers can make. Experienced doppelgangers will strike a balance between security and secrecy, slowly but systematically replacing their acquaintances. Feigning illness is a common ploy used by many of these creatures, to excuse their strange behavior and desire to be left alone, when they first step into a victim's shoes.

One final thing to remember is that doppelgangers are far from the only beings able to change shapes. Numerous creatures of Night, such as werewolves and paka, can change to a human-seeming form. A number of human and not-so-human mages can use illusions to cloak their true appearance. And a few creatures, notably the skin-thief and impersonator, routinely take on other forms for a living, much like a true doppelganger. It is important to know precisely what kind of shapeshifter you are facing. Ezra help you if you go in expecting a doppelganger and meet a spell-changed lich, because no one else will!²

As a rule of thumb, most other shapeshifters are either limited to a single human form (such as lycanthropes or red widows), or are incapable of copying specific individuals' forms (such as wolf- and jackalweres). Those that use magic to adopt a guise are more varied in the forms they can mimic, but a simple spell of magic detection can reveal such imposters.

Impersonators are best described as shapechanging oozes. Like doppelgangers, they can appear as a near-flawless copy of a person, but unlike the more advanced creatures, their rudimentary intellect gives them away easily. They're sentient, but only barely, and can't actually speak any language. So if the suspected doppelganger is curiously mute, then you've encountered an impersonator instead. (Be careful, however, for the creatures are still effective predators, with a paralyzing touch. Ezra can't make things too easy for us, now can she?)

Telling a doppelganger from a skin-thief is a bit trickier. Skin-thieves are intelligent, and are thus capable of fairly complex deceptions, as well as being able to speak. They do, however, have three major differences. To begin with, they need to kill and physically skin the victim to be imitated, which makes spur-of-the-moment transformations problematic. Secondly, a stolen skin is exceedingly delicate, ripping easily at the slightest tug. Third and finally, they lack the doppelganger's psychic prowess, so can often be exposed through simple conversation (although particularly canny skin-thieves are usually very good liars). Praise be to Ezra, these creatures are considerably more intimidating in appearance than they actually are in a fight. After an old Vaasi farmer's son stabs them a few times, they tend to fall over with a rather satisfying thunk, for all that they look like werebears. Needless to say, it's a very bad idea to mistake a skin-thief for a werebear, or vice versa for that matter.

2. *Miladies should not overlook the possibility of mundane disguise, before taking it for a given that a suspected imposter is, in fact, a doppelganger, or indeed a monster at all. I myself have a close acquaintance who makes extensive use of such techniques, and can attest that, while mimicking any specific individual can be devilishly difficult, it is by no means impossible. It would be awkward indeed to slay a "doppelganger", only to discover the body to be that of a petty fraudster engaged in some humdrum financial scam ... or worse, an actor hired by a friend of the mimicked party as a practical joke! - Rookhausen*

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The importance of knowing what your enemy is can't be overstated. One of my older friends, Brother Belich from Stangengrad, made just such a mistake in Kartakass. Thinking he had found a doppelganger in one of the logging camps, he walked straight into an ambush by a half-dozen wolfweres. Hence, he is the late Brother Belich, may Ezra guard his soul. The moral of the story?

Be prepared and know what you face.

From Inquisitorial Report #4943

October 14th, 755

I've just spent the day pawing through the records at the Temple of Eternal Balance, which the Eternal Order's somber acolytes let us use in the spirit of inter-faith cooperation...and after a three-hundred-nightshade bribe. I'm afraid that my expense account is growing precipitously.

Nevertheless, the Temple's records were useful, and quite vocal on the subject of shapeshifters. This is apparently due to the proximity of a Mistway leading to somewhere called Paridon: a name that appeared repeatedly in the records, often in association with reports of such deceitful entities.

Apparently the Filcher is itself a shapechanger, a fact that explains a great deal about its actions, as well as its "Faceless" epithet. After consulting with both the Toret and Sister Irena, I concluded that no magic had been used for its disguise. Of the other possible shapechangers known to scholars, an impersonator could not have spoken to us, and a skin-thief would've left a rather smelly and skinless corpse behind. A wolfwere would not have fled the common steel of the guards who interrupted its looting, after it slew Warden Belanel, and most other shapeshifters could appear as either a man or a woman, not both. Therefore, we were most likely facing a doppelganger.

This did not fill our hearts with joy.

Brother Konraad Valchov

Confirmation

Still with me? The situation in Falkovnia must be truly desperate if you can brave the scribblings of a half-literate Vaasi farmer's son. I think Brother Copyist is in tears because of me. Oh well, back to work.

Now, sometimes Ezra is kind, and you start the hunt by finding out what the identity of the doppelganger is, and are able to kill the thing before it manages to get away. If you are that blessed, do say a prayer of thanksgiving. More likely you'll need to discover the identity of the creature several times before you actually corner it. Doppelgangers are cowardly foes, and most would rather forfeit an identity than stand still and fight fair. As such, if you plan to pursue even a single one of these elusive creatures, expect to get a lot of practice ferreting out shapeshifters.

Most of the time, the only way to catch a doppelganger is through lots of determined detective work. Doppelgangers are probably the best experts at disguise in all the Land, but they're hardly perfect. Often the only way of finding them is to pick up on the tiniest flaws in their impersonations. If this is the case, prepare yourself to spend a lot of time staring at the Grand Scheme and struggling to unravel its intricacies. Don't worry, it's time well spent ... though I gather the younger anchorites tend to spend a lot of time 'preaching' in taverns once they reach this conclusion. (Not that I'd know anything about that first-hand. Of course not.)

The first way of finding flaws is at once the simplest and trickiest, and it involves penetrating the physical appearance of a doppelganger. The creature's shapechanging ability is a conscious one: the doppelganger doesn't actually 'steal' the form of a target, but rather, it crafts an identical

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image. This might sound like an academic distinction at first, but it means that the shapeshifters can only copy features that they have actually seen.

This fact has led to the downfall of more than one doppelganger. The creatures have a natural talent for memorizing faces and body shapes, but not every distinguishing mark is immediately visible. Tattoos, scars, moles and the like can escape quick examination, and lead to an imperfect disguise.

For this reason, most doppelgangers that plan any kind of long-term impersonation make a point of seeing the target naked, either by pretending to be a lover or some such (dangerous, since the target might realize something is wrong, but less so if the target is killed shortly thereafter), or by simply examining the corpse with great care after the victim is slain. Still, this is one of the few ways Ezra has seen fit to weaken the doppelgangers' disguises, so it's useful information to know.

The first problem, of course, is that to check for such anomalies, you need to see the suspected doppelganger disrobed, which causes certain problems for ordained anchorites of Ezra. (For less savory hunters, on the other hand...) Secondly, the doppelganger can often mold its body on the spot to meet observers' expectations, by reading their thoughts and discerning what they are looking for (though there are ways around that). And third, this only works if you know what distinguishing marks to look for: information which is often hard to come by, unless you are personally acquainted with the suspected doppelganger, their spouse, or perhaps their childhood nanny or parents.³

The second method of piercing a doppelganger's disguise is by testing its knowledge. Doppelgangers are capable of reading thoughts, and they use this ability to great effect on their targets and enemies, alike. (Personally, I consider this ability even more dangerous than that of shapeshifting, though others may disagree with me.) Despite that, the deceivers don't know everything that the target knew. For one thing, while their power makes these creatures quick on the uptake and sly interrogators, they can only read surface thoughts, not memories. For another, even for a doppelganger, memorizing a man's entire life is a difficult task, for which Ezra be praised: if neither prior observation of their victim nor others' surface thoughts tell them what they need to know, they're stuck.

This means that a doppelganger can be tripped up with detailed information about its target. Generally, the best information for this purpose is something minor and obscure, yet definite. Every doppelganger I've ever encountered that planned an impersonation knew most, if not all, of the current secrets of the target, but they tend to be much less certain about details of the form's childhood. Even if the doppelganger has realized that it's missing vital information, almost all of these creatures kill their targets, leaving them at a loss for finding such things out after-the-fact. Some few keep the victim around for later questioning, sedated or trapped, but this in turn can give rise to a dozen more potential security breaches, so few bother unless they feel utterly secure.

Thus, if you can get your hands on an old school friend or playmate of the suspected doppelganger, praise Ezra, for your task's become a dozen times easier! Still, don't be too happy. Doppelgangers are marvelous liars, and can worm their way out of most conversations with suitably vague statements. Of course, if they can read your thoughts, they may already know the answer you're seeking! And even someone who isn't a doppelganger could well have a

3. *Provided one can shield one's thoughts from the creature, one need not actually know of a replaced victim's distinguishing marks, to use such lapses in doppelgangers' guises as a means of exposing them. Simply gathering one's suspects in a confined space and then going through the motions of checking for some telltale marking - underneath the hair or inside the mouth are ideal sites to "search", being quite often neglected when the creatures examine the physique of their prey - can drive an imposter into self-betraying panic, even if the search is a spurious one, staged solely to provoke such a response on its part.*
- Rookhausen

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bad memory, so an innocent suspect might make an honest error, and your invaluable source may be mistaken. This makes it devilishly tricky to catch an intelligent doppelganger out this way, but it can be done, Our Lady be thanked.

The third and final detective method is to closely observe the habits of a suspected doppelganger. Even if the physical disguise is perfect and the creature is well prepared for any possible question, it should always be remembered that the goals of the doppelganger are not the same as those of its unfortunate victim, and if you can spot such a difference in the suspect's actions, you've found your doppelganger.

Look for any changes of habit, particularly any that make the suspect more reclusive or changes the way people behave around him. Every disguise - and this goes for mundane, magical or supernatural impersonations, alike - is only one piece of bad luck from discovery, so doppelgangers try to minimize human contact, or at least contact with people who knew their victims well, beforehand. Keep track of the suspect's daily activities: if a sound sleeper is suddenly active late into the night (or better yet, round the clock,) a younger doppelganger, too inexperienced and easily-bored to hide the fact it does not sleep, may be to blame.

Likewise, most impersonations doppelgangers carry out are for money, so if the rich merchant is suddenly selling off his property and buying easily portable gold bars, it's a good idea to take a look. Even if you don't find a doppelganger, you might just find an embezzler about to make a getaway, so these sorts of financial transactions are always good to follow up on. Any knowledge in the Grand Scheme is useful, and if it brings a human evil-doer to justice instead of one of the Night's Legions, well, I doubt Ezra is displeased.

Unfortunately, the most common way to find out that the habits of the target have changed is when you find yourself attacked from ambush by thugs hired by the doppelganger. Most of these creatures tend to be twitchy regarding their secrecy, and will sometimes break their masquerade themselves out of fear to attack, even if hunters aren't actually anywhere near a discovery. If you can track back the source of the attack, you've found your monster.

All told, finding a doppelganger by noticing changes in your suspects' habits is one of the most grueling and tiring things a hunter can do. It means days, weeks, or even months of legwork as you study old records, observe targets, and probably end up following ten or twenty innocents before you find the doppelganger. That said, its also the method which the creatures are least able to guard against, so if you find yourself obliged to hunt this way, grit your teeth and do it, and know that sooner or later you'll get lucky or the doppelganger will make a mistake. I find that praying to Our Lady in the Mists also helps. Of course, I'd rather come to Falkovnia and show you the methods personally, but great-grandmother had to have a thing for men with ears, so that's out of the question.

Anyway, there are a few little shortcuts in the process of hunting a doppelganger. (You didn't think all the advantages were on their side, now did you?) Magic is of incredible use to a hunter, and certain traits of the doppelgangers can also be used against them.

Magic is, after knowledge, the greatest tool that a hunter can have. Aside from all its myriad uses in offense and defense, divinations are extremely useful for a hunter. Scrying on a potential doppelganger in private could allow you to see it relaxed, and possibly without the usual defensive posing that such creatures practice in front of witnesses. Not that any true Ezran would ever consider such voyeurism...

I've also heard tell of a spell from Zherisia, which involves a golden monocle and can disrupt the creature's shape-changing for as long as a minute or two, but it is obscure and somewhat beyond the modest budget the Holy Mother Church grants its servants. A rare few tales speak of weapons which deliver such a form-locking effect with a precision strike; if so, such a weapon would be of great value against all kinds of Legion shapechangers, not only doppelgangers.

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More practical is taking advantage of the strange qualities of doppelgangers' blood. (Now, I've heard tell of scholarly types calling it 'plasm' or some such, but it leaks out of doppelgangers when you stab them, it's blood to this humble Vaasi.) Anyway, the blood of a doppelganger can be best described as being alive. For a few minutes after being removed from the imposter, it remains at least partly living, able to move and flow rather like an ooze. Aside from being remarkably disturbing to look upon, this means that, once shed, blood from a doppelganger will react to threats independently, whether the creature it came from wants it to do so or not. I believe the classic experiment is to try and poke it with a heated needle, and if it's the blood of a doppelganger, it'd "flow away" to avoid the danger.

From Inquisitorial Report #4943

October 16th, 755

We finally had our second encounter with the Filcher today.

We had been using Sister Irena's scrying magics and my tracking ability to follow it, and had managed to trace the creature to one of Martira Bay's docks, where a lively trade in fish and fish by-products was going on. I'm afraid my vestments still smell rather peculiar.

Regardless, we decided to leave Brother Philip and Sister Irena at the market-gate, with orders to examine everyone passing through with Sister Irena's magics; meanwhile, the Toret and I would search the market.

The attack came without warning, towards the evening. One of the merchants, after watching me for a few moments, suddenly drew a dagger and lunged. I daresay "he" hoped to kill me instantly, and thus rid itself of both tracker and lead inquisitor, all in one blow. I'm not sorry to say that our quarry underestimated the kinds of tricks an old bandit like me picks up. At any rate, it certainly had not expected to have its dagger-arm broken, nor to be flipped over and hurled into a shellfish-stall.

Toret Fielding, Ezra bless him, grabbed a whale-oil-soaked torch from the stall next door and threw the smoking brand at the creature. Finding itself hemmed in by the pair of us, the doppelganger must have decided enough was enough. It scampered over the stall and quickly vanished in the crowd of the next aisle, lost from sight. We tried to give chase, but found it was futile: the press of eager market-goers had closed in its wake, by the time we fought our way through the stalls and past the outraged oil- and oyster-sellers.

It was while making restitution for the Toret's use of the torch that we noticed this improvised missile had landed in a pool of fresh blood, shed when I threw the creature into the stall in a crash of splintering wood and oysters. Eerily, the Filcher's blood seemed to be flowing away from the flames, as if a blast of wind were blowing straight down upon the pooled liquid, driving it back from the fire's heat.

It didn't matter. We had a sample of the creature's blood now. It won't get away.

Brother Konraad Valchov

The uses of this for hunters are obvious: blood tests can be used to check if a person is a doppelganger, with an extremely high degree of reliability. I say high and not perfect, because a small minority of doppelgangers exist whose blood is completely inanimate, and thus can't betray them. A few others seem to have found a way to consciously order their blood to remain quiet, while some heal so quickly, they can't be bled very easily. (I suppose Ezra couldn't make things too easy for her servants, though I certainly wish she'd make an exception with regards to doppelgangers.) I've even heard that a few particularly-clever doppelgangers carry around small pouches filled with human blood, kept fresh by magic; by staging some minor, yet messy accident in front of witnesses, they seek to clear themselves of suspicion by "bleeding" what seems to be normal, inanimate blood.

Then, of course, there is the problem that most people aren't willing to be bled, even by an Ezran Inquisitor. Unless you have unusually cooperative suspects, blood tests are more useful for defense than for singling out such a creature from a crowd. Still, if you can arrange to slightly wound a target, it serves as a good test. I find that giving the target something sharp to handle can be workable, perhaps a glass

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goblet with a subtle, slightly-cracked edge. If you've access to medical equipment, a syringe and anesthetic can allow a very quiet blood test. Lacking such elaborate preparation-time, a simple "spontaneous" fist fight with one's suspect can get you the blood you need (aim for the nose). In backwoods regions where the medical arts are more superstition than science, offering to heal the hurts of residents can be a handy excuse to perform therapeutic "bleedings" with patients' full cooperation, thus letting you exonerate many of a village's inhabitants at a stroke.

None of these methods, of course, are things a person of conscience will do lightly. It is best to be fairly certain of your suspicions, before you risk harming an innocent with such tricks. Even so, the blood test is an extremely useful tool in any hunter's arsenal.

The third and final little trick I've picked up over the years revolves around the habit of doppelgangers. (See a pattern? Clues of mind, of body, of demeanor. Never doubt the Grand Scheme.) In my own experience, I've noticed that many doppelgangers have their own little involuntary habits or quirks, a bit like nervous tics. I think other hunters of doppelgangers call these habits 'tells', after the gambling term. Not that I would know anything about gambling. Of course not.

Anyway... if you can find out what the 'tells' of a doppelganger are, you've found yourself a method of tracking the creature. These tells can be just about anything, but they tend toward the playful and almost childish. As a matter of fact, they tend to be the sorts of thing a young boy or girl would do, or dream of doing: perhaps something left over from the creature's own youth, assuming these beings mature in the same manner as humans.⁴

This does not mean that a tell need be, in itself, harmless! Children can be cruel, and their pastimes can be as malicious as any adult's, if not more so. A simple childish habit of pulling the wings off flies can, in beings without remorse, culminate in a doppelganger's taste for dismemberment. I met and slew just such a creature once, and Ezra hold me, it was not an experience I'd care to face again.

Very few tells are so graphic, however. Most are something fairly mundane: a way of holding a book, a particular turn of phrase, or a love of a certain food. A tendency towards nervous humming, a hobby of collecting model soldiers, or a compulsive fear of heights are all possible tells.

In theory, it might even be possible to track a doppelganger's tell backwards, through role after role, to its place of origin, though the logistics of such an endeavor are immense. If it could be done, it could certainly give valuable insights into the deceiver's personality! The best chance of achieving such a feat would likely be in smaller, obscure, and isolated realms - places more rumor than fact, such as Mist-bound Odaire or the islands recently emerged off the coast of my own homeland - rather than in the mainland Core, where doppelgangers roam widely, or Paridon where there are (Ezra help its citizens!) too many of the vile creatures to keep track of individuals.

A hunter who distinguishes a tell is in luck, as it allows you to track the doppelganger from one disguise to another: the tell follows the creature across all its changes of shape. Still, one should be careful about reading too much into a tell, as they tend to be very subtle, and doppelgangers can usually suppress the tell if they realize they are being pursued. Likewise, sometimes tells can be exhibited by non-doppelgangers. (As a matter of fact, one of the most frustrating hunts I ever carried out had the quarry use a devious trick, after I learned of its tell: a habit of tilting its head whenever it asked a question. At a grand ball hosted by the stapan of Sturben, it used some spell or unnatural ability to implant a magical suggestion in half the well-

4. Given the traumatic experiences of Wakening I addressed previously, it is no surprise that compulsive behavior would be a common end result of such a harrowing ordeal, in these misbegotten beings. Even discarded, the "child-face" leaves its mark. - Rookhausen

to-do in the town. For the rest of the night, something like one out of three nobles looked like they had neck problems. *That* was a bother!)

Somewhat related to this is these shapeshifters' habit of writing. Near as I can tell, younger doppelgangers seem ill at ease with their mind-reading powers, as if their minds get saturated by the inner voices of all the humans around them. Thus, like a firewood-gatherer carrying too many logs at once, they need to unburden themselves of these thoughts by putting them down in words. Some use simple graffiti, while others fill up whole books with scribbles. Most doppelgangers are very canny about these writings and either destroy them or hide them, so it's a habit of fairly limited use, but if you were to break into a suspected doppelganger's home and find some weird, rambling writings, it's a good indicator you're on the right track, as well as a way to learn about your quarry's plans. Not that I would condone breaking and entering. 'Course not...

None of the seven tricks I've given here (Is it seven? I'm a Vaasi farmer's son. You should be happy I can count up to ten!) is foolproof. Any man might have an odd habit, and many people keep strange diaries. Some doppelgangers can control their blood, and many are too canny to be tripped up by lack of knowledge. So the wise hunter - assuming the course of wisdom isn't to simply stay home and bar the door - never takes a single piece of evidence as proof. If, however, two or three different clues all point to the same suspect, congratulations, you've found your doppelganger!

Now go kill it before it runs off and you have to start all over again.

From Inquisitorial Report #4943

October 18th, 755

We lost the Toret.

Using my magics, our group had followed the Filcher to a little-used warehouse of some Lamordian shipping company. As had become our wont, we left two of our number, the Toret and Brother Philip, outside to keep the creature from escaping, while Sister Irena and I entered the warehouse.

We found the doppelganger's lair easily enough, it being the only inhabited part of the old building. Somewhat to our surprise, the walls of its room were covered in graffiti: strange words and phrases scrawled in a loose, frenzied hand, in at least three languages. Darkonese, Balok, and a third I didn't recognize. It was disturbing to find our names present among these scribbles, particularly mine. There was a wardrobe with a curious assortment of garments - many sizes, both sexes, even some children's garb - and a rudimentary kitchen and wash-area had been thrown together, perhaps from furnishings damaged in shipment by the warehouse's proprietors. No bed, of course; the Filcher wouldn't need one.

We soon found the lost books from the Great Cathedral, and were searching the rest of the chamber when we heard a yell from outside. I can only guess that the doppelganger had been present when we entered the warehouse, and had somehow managed to hide from Sister Irena and I, then double back after we'd passed by.

When we rushed outside, we saw Brother Philip grappling with an assailant, a large and singularly ugly caliban, while Toret Fielding lay unmoving at the combatants' feet. On seeing Sister Irena and I emerge, the creature flung our surviving companion aside, gulped a swig of something from a flask, then sprang onto a rooftop - a leap of a some two dozen feet, easily - and disappeared over the dockyard's skyline.

We learned from Brother Philip what had happened. The doppelganger must've lain in wait till we were busy in its quarters, then rushed out. It ambushed and struck the Toret but once, a vicious blow that shattered his skull, and was in the process of trying to kill Brother Philip when we arrived. We had the stolen books now, but the hunt was far from over.

Brother Konraad Valchov



Defense

You would think that finding and killing a doppelganger would be a sufficiently epic task in and of itself, wouldn't you? But I'm afraid that the Grand Scheme is not quite so merciful. Unfortunately, most doppelgangers tend to take a distressingly proactive approach to deterring monster-hunters.

Some of the Legions of the Night take no more notice of being hunted than a noble prince takes of his peasants. The Ancient Dead and ghosts in particular aren't in the habit of paying much attention to those "mere mortals" with the presumption to hunt their kind down. Others, like werewolves or vampires, are prone to rely on their inherent power to defend themselves against all comers, or are content to make do with a gauntlet of vicious guardians and traps. A few of Night's worst creatures - liches especially - go so far as to tempt heroes to try to destroy them, the better to draw out potential enemies and seize their magic for their own use.

Not so, doppelgangers. Perhaps because they lack the preternatural defenses of their fellow Legionnaires, the deceivers believe that once camouflage proves insufficient, the best defense is a good offense. Thus, when they learn that someone is on their trail, they turn their agile wits and inside knowledge of human culture to the problem of how to deflect, rout, or destroy their pursuers, preferably before the hunters even get near them.

This means that any hunter of doppelgangers, be he an Inquisitor with the full force of the Church of Ezra or a simple farmer with a grudge, should be prepared to defend himself from attacks on his body, his mind, his reputation (a favorite target), and even his very soul. In particular, the wise hunter should be prepared to defend against both of the doppelganger's greatest assets, its mind-reading and its mimicry, as well as against the more common tricks these creatures employ.

Any hunter with a few kills notched on his sword-sheath will tell you that knowledge and preparation are the key to a successful hunt. Unfortunately, this applies even when it is a doppelganger doing the hunting, and the quarry is ... you. So the first order of business is to keep one's mind free of intrusions, so you can deny your enemy the tools it needs to decoy or defeat you.

Having a strong will can help a great deal. Spiritual training, be it that of an Ezran anchorite or a Rajian monk, can be invaluable, as might the discipline of an arcane education. A natural strong mind is always helpful. If you are facing a doppelganger, it may be wise not to tell the weaker-willed members of one's group anything too vital, else a doppelganger that is rebuffed by stronger minds will steal the facts it seeks from those possessed of less mental stamina.

Of course, a devious strategist might come up with the idea of lying to the warrior of your group, and feeding the doppelganger false information in that way.⁵ Not that I would ever suggest such a duplicitous course of action. 'Course not.

5. *If Miladies will forgive my elaboration on the Special Inquisitor's allusion, seeding of disinformation is an invaluable tactic for the hunter of doppelgangers, given that they - like certain human madmen - often exhibit a propensity for insinuating themselves into organized investigations of their crimes. Some are so prone to this behavior that any folk whom one has recently met, within the shapechanger-infested community, should always be included on one's suspect list - no matter how many times you have tested them before - and repeated social contact with innocent bystanders should be kept to a minimum during the hunt, lest you unwittingly single such a person out for replacement, as a means by which the monster might get closer to you and your allies.*

Indeed, once your quarry catches on that you are planting false information for it, sowing clues it will recognize as false with a third party can effectively screen that third party from its attacks! If it knows that you are feeding lies to a certain person, it will likely leave that person unharmed, as their guise will be useless to its efforts to uncover your plans ... though it might still adopt their guise very briefly, in order to get near enough to attack you outright. - Rookhausen

On the Hunt

New Alchemical Formula

Chelated Lead [General]

Prerequisites: Brew Potion, Int 13+

Formulation: DC 25; 5 days; one dose of white lead and a pint of humanoid blood, 140 gp.

Effect: The lead harmlessly enters the bloodstream and creates an alchemical shield against certain magical effects. Treat the subject as protected by a thin coating of lead with regards to all spell or psionic effects (see specific spell descriptions for details). The protection lasts four hours. If the blood component came from the imbiber, the duration is doubled.

If force-fed to a doppelganger or other natural mind-reader, chelated lead suppresses its detect thoughts ability for four hours (no save). This does not apply if the creature has an inherent immunity to poisons, nor does it bar it from casting the detect thoughts spell or using psionic abilities with similar effects. Due to its strong metallic taste and opaque white color, chelated lead cannot normally be slipped into a creature's drink or otherwise administered without the imbiber's knowledge.

Partial Failure: The potion works as normal, but also counts as 1d3 doses of white

Magic is always a useful tool, whether in the form of a magical cloak or the blessings of a priest. I am given to understand that particularly powerful rings and spells are capable of comprehensively blocking all mental probing. Unfortunately, such things are rather beyond the means of a Vaasi peasant's son. I understand that the Paridoners' own clergy (if one can rightly use that term for a "faith" without a deity's guidance) do make use of such things.⁶

Another interesting fact that a Special Inquisitor picks up is that lead or gold blocks the mind-reading ability of a doppelganger, or of most other creatures for that matter. I'm not honestly sure why that is so, but since Ezra has seen fit to grant us this gift, I certainly intend to use it. Of course, the practicality of carrying around a lead sheet is somewhat limited.

I think a Mordentishman first came up with the idea of lining a helmet with lead. One would have to wear an extremely heavy helmet at all times, but it would be preferable to having all of your secrets stolen from your mind. Be warned though, as with everything else, this isn't full proof. Some rare doppelgangers are capable of piercing even lead or gold sheet, and unless you encase your head entirely in lead, it still is only a partial protection. Never assume that any plan is foolproof when facing doppelgangers. Still, every little bit helps, and making life difficult for the creature gives it more chances to make a mistake.⁷

6. *On a related note, while secular law enforcement may be of assistance in the final cornering of a doppelganger, it is usually counterproductive to work too closely with such authorities in locating one's quarry. Not only is the creature likely to keep a wary ear turned to police activity, but municipal politics in most lands is, lamentably, skewed to favor persons more highly-placed within the social hierarchy ... the very persons whom the creature is most likely impersonating. By the time you gather sufficient evidence through "proper channels" to level accusations of doppelganger-hood at anyone rich enough to draw these parasites' interest, your adversary will have already taken steps to discredit or destroy you! It is more effective, in my experience, to feed law's enforcers only such information as you deem it useful for the imposter to "uncover". Provided your tale is convincing enough to deceive the local gendarmes, the honest sincerity of their misled thoughts will help fool the creature in turn.*

7. *While I am not wholly convinced of their efficacy, such lead-lined helmets are put to extensive use by a certain secretive cabal, active on the isles of the Sea of Sorrows, which regards mental intrusion and memory-tampering to be vile banes to all Mankind. I shall not relate this organization's name here, as I am indebted to one of their number (a personal matter, Miladies). But I will say that they routinely use heavily-shielded helmets of this kind during interrogations of suspected mind-readers, doppelganger or otherwise. - Rookhausen*

On the Hunt

Interrogation and Defense Helms

Dr. Sean McClintock of Saulbridge Sanitarium in Mordentshire has caused a renaissance in a Zherisian hoax. When the doppelganger threat was first exposed, street vendors in Paridon sold lead-lined skullcaps to the gullible, claiming that they protected the wearer's thoughts. Divinity of Mankind priests debunked the caps so thoroughly that no one in the city stopped to wonder if the overall concept had merit. McClintock has since used a lead-lined helmet to incapacitate one Marcu Vasilis, a talented psion who had developed paranoid tendencies and commensurate psychic attacks.* Such a helmet on the head of a doppelganger effectively cuts off the creature's mind-reading capabilities. Conversely, wearing a lead-lined helmet tends to make it difficult (though not impossible) for doppelgangers to read a wearer's mind.

[* - Forgotten Children: JWM's "Marcu Vasilis; The Man Who Lost His Mind."]

Lead-lined helms come in all shapes and sizes, with varying levels of effectiveness:

- McClintock's "shield helm" is a bulky contraption only slightly smaller than a beach ball. Dr. McClintock improved on the original design by adding a lead-lined visor that blocks vision as well. The helm makes it impossible for a wearer to use any detection spell or ability, including detect thoughts, so long as the visor is down. It also gives the wearer a +10 save bonus to resist detection spells for thoughts, alignment, or mind-affecting magic effects. When the visor is down, however, the wearer is essentially blind, and suffers a -4 penalty to Listen checks. Likewise, the helmet is so ungainly that it imposes its own -2 armor check penalty, in addition to the above penalties. If the visor is up, McClintock's shield helm functions as a lead-coated barrel helm.
- A lead-coated barrel helm blocks detect thoughts or other detection-spells and effects by the wearer in all directions except straight ahead, and reduces the Will save DC to resist the creature's probing by 5. Conversely, the helmet grants its wearer a +3 circumstance bonus to saves against detection spells for thoughts, alignment, or mind-affecting effects.
- A lead-coated version of a conventional helmet imposes a -5 penalty to the DC against all mind-reading or other detection effects used by the wearer, and grants the wearer a +2 bonus against certain detection spells (as per barrel helms, above).

Lead

Unfortunately, the lead enamel used in some coatings for helmets dissolves in sweat and can be absorbed through skin. For every four hours spent wearing such a lead-coated device in direct contact with one's skin (cumulative), the wearer must make a Fort save or suffer lead poisoning (see below).

Lead Poisoning: White lead is commonly powdered as a base for paint. It's useful as enamel on ships and houses, and several coats can even protect an object from scrying, but those who work with it often suffer the effects of lead poisoning, including painful arthritic gout in the short term and brain damage over the long term.

Poison	Type	DC	Initial Damage	Secondary Damage	Craft DC	Market Price
White Lead	Contact / Ingested ^a	12	1d2 Dex	1 Int*	DC 12	80 gp

a. If ingested, the initial save's DC increases by 4.

The usefulness of lead as a shield against thought-reading has driven Zherisian alchemists to devise methods of making it safer for ingestion. The obscure High Alchemical formula for "chelated lead" has won a growing popularity among Zherisians who can't afford to guard their thoughts magically, despite the risks of imbibing the poisonous metal.

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Of course, not everyone has access to powerful enchantments, and going around with lead-lined helms on all the time has its own disadvantages, including the perfectly realistic chance that the doppelganger will die laughing before the hunters can reach it. More seriously though, it might not be a good idea to identify yourself as a monster-hunter quite so obviously for the doppelganger.

Still, there are a few basic precautions that a group of would-be doppelganger hunters can take that should, if Ezra is merciful, keep them alive a bit longer. (And one should hope that Ezra is merciful, for doppelgangers generally aren't.)

The most basic of these precautions is not to over-plan. Elaborate schemes and plots designed to entrap the monster may suffice against a ravening werebeast, but they are only likely to amuse a doppelganger: the more complex the scheme, the more threads it contains that the creature can sabotage or turn against you. The best plans against a doppelganger are simple, straightforward, and very hard to disrupt. (I find that simply killing the thing is a good plan.) Overplanners often find that the doppelganger has found a hole in their design and brought the entire thing crashing down on its pursuer's heads. If they're lucky, that's the only thing that comes crashing down on them.

Likewise, don't plan too many steps ahead. Stay flexible, keep alert for opportunities, and when you see an opening, take it. The longer one broods over strategy, the likelier the doppelganger is to get wind of one's efforts and either counterattack or simply change forms and disappear. This isn't to say that you should rush in without a thought - though that can actually work better against a doppelganger than some creatures - but that you should be aware that every hour between formation and execution of a plan hurts your chances.

The worst possible thing a hunter can do is construct an extravagant plot to destroy the doppelganger's public persona and then spend a week enacting it. The doppelganger can and will learn of the plan at its leisure, and mortal schemes, unlike the Grand Scheme, tend to be all too frail. Such a fool will be lucky to escape with life and wits intact.

Another good idea is to concentrate information within a group. Every member of a party of hunters who knows the group's plans is a potential avenue for the doppelganger to learn them as well, be it through mind-reading, deception, blackmail, or outright kidnapping and interrogation. This requires a great deal of faith in one's comrades, but if only a single person constructs such plans as there are, that leaves only one potential security-leak, who can then be warded with magics and such extravagances as lead-lined helmets. I generally propose a priest for such a role, since their strength of faith makes them resistant to a doppelganger's probing. Of course, the downside is that if the doppelganger does pierce the mind of the sole information source - or worse, replaces that source, and thus takes over its pursuers' group from within - it has everything, but no plan is perfect.

This brings us to the more famous ability of doppelgangers, and one which is no less dangerous: their impeccable talents for mimicry. I've already spent a great deal of ink and sent Brother Copyist into vapors covering how to find out if someone else is a doppelganger, so I'll try to concentrate on the defensive aspects of the doppelganger hunter's trade. They are two-fold: how not to be replaced yourself, and how to learn as quickly as possible if another member of the group has been replaced.

The first half of that is fairly simple, and is reduced to "Don't let the doppelganger ambush and kill you." Yes I know, as far as advice goes, this is right up there with "Kill the thing", but bear with me. As with the Grand Scheme, all will be revealed in due time, though I certainly hope to be faster than Ezra with the unveiling.

An important rule of the doppelganger hunter is to never be alone. Ever. *Anywhere*. A lone hunter is just begging to be ambushed and slaughtered by the doppelganger. Rather, travel in pairs, or better yet, in threes at all times. Sleep in the same room, eat in the same kitchen, and don't even go to the privy without two others to watch the door ... and that, after checking for

other entrances. (Yes, that includes under the seat. Shapeshifters, yes? If your two fists can pass through an opening, it's an entrance.)⁸

The other fairly important rule is that, if you are attacked, scream. Or yell, bellow a war-cry, something. Basically, raise a ruckus. First off, this will alert anyone around, which may get you some help against the doppelganger. It also means that the creature will have only a short amount of time to do whatever it plans, possibly causing it to abandon its attempt to do away with you. And lastly, it'll have quite a bit of explaining to do, even if it does manage to replace you, so your companions will have a fair shot at avenging you promptly. Pretty good results, for a single scream. Would that all the Grand Scheme were as favorable!

From Inquisitorial Report #4943

October 21st, 755

I suspect that the Filcher is becoming more desperate. At any rate, it is trying to be more clever in its attacks. Actually, it's becoming a little too clever: it quite nearly got me killed.

We had tracked the creature to a tenement in one of the poorer sections of Martira Bay, using its blood spilled in the market as a compass. It was long since inert, but it was more than enough to lead us to the Filcher. The tenement was grimy and squalid, packed with people in the most wretched poverty imaginable. By Ezra, I hate such things. Peasants are poor, yes, but at least we had the sky, the plains, horses, space most of all. I thank Our Lady in the Mists that the Grand Scheme did not cast me into such a place upon my birth.

The Filcher attacked while we were in one of the chambers of the Legions-touched building. From the chamber above, it had silently removed a piece of the flooring, and as we passed below, it dropped a smokestick down into the room with us. As we coughed away the smoke, the creature jumped down among us and I felt a shove from behind. When the smoke dispersed, I was confronted with a most peculiar sight.

8. As any visitor to Paridon quickly notes, the residents of that beleaguered city seek the safety of numbers, if given a choice. If such is not feasible - as is often the case when one is reconnoitering a suspected imposter's residence or discreetly engaged in surveillance of such an individual - then precisely the opposite is one's safest course: act alone, and ensure you remain in solitude at all times. Disguise your purpose behind some innocuous urban façade, keep your distance from others and from likely ambush-sites, and ward your thoughts so as to bypass doppelgangers' psychic sensitivities. Be prepared to prove you are still you, upon rejoining your comrades; if they should neglect to check, check them. - Rookhausen



On the Hunt

Myself, to be precise (which I will admit many would consider a peculiar sight). The Filcher had taken my form, right down to my travel-stained vestments and my swords and net. Brother Philip and Sister Irena were staring at us both in consternation.

"Imposter!" it cried. "The Night-accursed thing's taken my shape!"

I have to admit, even its voice was eerily convincing. "Now, wait just a moment," I said as I regained my bearings. "You're the deceiver, and you don't really expect us to fall for this?"

"Precisely what the Filcher would say. Look at him! The creature didn't even copy my face properly, see? The scar is off." I felt a bit offended at this. Brother Philip and Sister Irena were looking undecided, though, so I realized I had to try something or else matters might get unpleasant quickly.

With a gesture, I called up one of the few powers Our Lady has seen fit to grant me. Black-eyed rats crawled from holes in the floorboards and hunkered on the rafters above. I must admit that my smile was rather chill.

"Can you do that?"

The Filcher was unfazed, or so I gathered from its face. Raising one hand high in an arcane gesture, it suddenly spun round and punched Brother Philip in the face, breaking his nose with an audible crunch, then dashed out through the door.

It managed to elude us in the warren-like confines of the tenement, but we'd catch it again. We had the scent.

Brother Konraad Valchov

The other half of guarding against mimicry is trickier. Letting a doppelganger imitate one's companions can be a death sentence to any would-be hunter. It's also fiendishly hard to stop. Most of the methods I've already mentioned for discerning true folk from duplicates can be applied defensively, Ezra be thanked. Blood tests, for example, are very reliable and easy to make use of among willing colleagues. And as hunters tend to live in each other's pockets, an imposter would have to be very good to get away with any such deception. Unfortunately, some doppelgangers *are* very good.

I can offer a few more tricks that can help. The first is signs and countersigns. Every member of the group should have a sign and countersign they should repeat after even a brief absence, and these should be changed regularly, the more often the better. Personalizing them to each possible pairing is another good idea. Of course, the doppelganger may well be able to pluck the correct password from your mind, but you might get lucky, and using them gives the doppelganger yet another chance to make a mistake.

You can add more complexity with rotating journals, memorized passages, special codebooks and the like. Just how elaborate the system should be depends on how much effort you are willing to put into constant defense, and how good the memories of the participants are. One should be careful not to construct so complex a system that the hunters themselves are confused and exhausted from defending against a possible replacement; else, the creature might just sit back and enjoy the show of watching the hunters go slightly batty trying to foil its ploys. I doubt Ezra would approve.

Another useful trick is to speak in a language the doppelganger does not know. Sure, a doppelganger can read your thoughts, but translating your speech is another matter. I would imagine this would be particularly useful in secluded Paridon. So if everyone in the area is speaking Zherisian, start talking in Vaasi, or better yet, some regional backwater-dialect like Old Kartakan or Grabenite. The more obscure the language, the better one's chance of foiling the doppelganger ... assuming it's not equipped with translation-spells, of course.

Yet another good idea is to make sure that all members of one's hunting party have identifying marks somewhere on their body, preferably somewhere not obvious upon casual inspection, yet easily revealed at need. The back of the neck is a good place, particularly if one wears a high collar.

On the Hunt

A concealed tattoo there gives the doppelganger something else to worry about. One can incorporate hidden messages or designs into such a marking that aren't apparent on cursory examination. A simple "Praise Ezra" wherein the 'S' has a peculiar serif at the bottom can trip up a doppelganger in a hurry. For even more subtlety, one can choose a design that is actually writing in a foreign language, so a less-educated doppelganger won't know its meaning and can be quizzed to that effect. I gather that the Pharaizian alphabet can be particularly suitable for this sort of thing, as are pictographic scripts like Rokuma or Akiri. Done artfully, a doppelganger may not realize such a tattoo is writing at all.

A clever variation on that is inscribing an arcane mark on the palms of all the hunters. This is a simple, cheap spell that any apprentice knows, yet it can't be easily replicated by a doppelganger without arcane training, thank Ezra. Simply having the group's wizard activate the marks before every planning session goes a long way towards improving security. If you are without arcanists' support, disappearing ink can also temporarily and invisibly mark one's teammates, while a splash of restorative brings it back into view.⁹

Now, this tactic isn't foolproof, as Ezra knows few things are around doppelgangers. A cunning doppelganger could find out what the mark is from the thoughts of one of the hunters, then apply its own ink or, if it lacks wizardly talents, hire a wizard to lay an arcane mark on itself. Neither, fortunately, is something it can do on the spur of the moment, and even then the mark may well be cruder and thus, visibly different, after being transferred through so many minds. Fair warning, though: doppelgangers possess a keen eye for detail and excellent visual memory, so recreating even a complex rune isn't beyond their ability.

Where human eyes deceive, animal noses may serve. Nature and Ezra have favored Man's best friend, and certain other tamable beasts, with a sense of smell so acute as to know their masters' individual aroma. Properly trained, a faithful hound can test if a person whose scent it recognizes "smells right", potentially alerting we nose-blind humans to an imposter in our midst. Unfortunately, doppelgangers have very little scent of their own, so you cannot train a dog to distinguish any doppelganger it comes across, but only to point out when one of the people it has learned to recognize by smell has been replaced.

9. I am sure Miladies need not be reminded of Celebrant Clairmont's description of this useful concoction, as you cited in Van Richten's Arsenal. At the time, she proposed that such ink might be splashed upon the doppelganger itself, indelibly labeling the creature as such, yet leaving it ignorant that it has been so-marked. Its corresponding potential as a means of distinguishing one's true allies from duplicates had not, evidently, occurred to the Celebrant at the time you corresponded with her. - Rookhausen

On the Hunt

Animals as Doppelganger-Detectors

Any animal companion with the Scent special quality can potentially recognize if its master has been replaced by a phony. This requires a DC 16 Survival check, DC 12 if the duplicate is something other than a (sweatless) doppelganger. If not trained to identify imposters, the animal will behave with hostility to the bogus "master", but it will not attempt to point the person out as such; thus, its aggression may seem indistinguishable from magical influence, nascent rabies, a darklord's control, the result of a failed Powers check or curse, etc.

To reliably indicate someone does not "smell right", the animal must first be trained to do so. Only animals with the Scent ability may learn the following trick and general purpose:

Check (trick; DC 20): The animal takes a full-round action to sniff the indicated subject, then reacts in a designated way (barking, sitting, growling) if the scent it detects fails to match the subject's usual odor. It must still succeed on a Survival check to distinguish a phony, but the thoroughness with which it inspects its subject gives a +3 competence bonus to its check.

Teaching an animal to Check takes a week, plus a day for each subject (other than its master) whose scent it is taught to recognize. Additional subjects may be added to its repertoire at a later time, but an additional Handle Animal check is required for each session in which new subjects are introduced to it. These subjects must personally be on hand, on the training-day in question; an animal cannot learn to Check someone from their clothes, scent-trail, etc. The maximum number of subjects an animal can learn to Check (master included) is equal to its Wisdom if its Intelligence is 2, or half its Wisdom if its Intelligence is 1.

Verify (general purpose; DC 20): An animal trained to Verify knows the commands check, come, seek, and track. In addition, it automatically performs the Check trick when a person it has been trained to Check approaches it, unless told not to by its handler. Teaching an animal to Verify takes four weeks, plus one day per subject (not counting its master) it can Check.

Note that an animal's ability to Check may be hampered if the doppelganger has just changed into the real person's clothes (-4 circumstance penalty to animal's Survival check for the first 24 hours), or if a Checked subject is drenched in a pungent aroma such as spices, paint, or a gha'st's stench (also -4). If the animal has Track as a racial bonus feat, or has the Keen Scent special quality, the DCs of all Survival checks described in this sidebar are reduced by 2, and any racial bonus to Track via scent (such as a dog's +4 bonus) applies to its roll.

The doppelgangers in Zherisia make it a practice to poison any canine units that the Paridon Police attempt to establish, forcing the city's human police to requisition civilians' hounds for tracking fugitives, and preventing them from taking advantage of dogs' keen noses in their efforts to deal with the imposters.

As sentient beings, familiars and special mounts lack the gut-level instincts to distinguish true humanoids from doppelgangers by scent, even if they possess the Scent special quality. Such creatures are required to use ordinary means (Spot, Listen, Sense Motive, etc) to distinguish imposters from the genuine article, save that their empathic link automatically reveals if their master has been replaced.

Note that standard doppelgangers or changelings, unlike dread doppelgangers, have a distinct aroma that is unique to their respective strains. Animals with the Scent ability can therefore be trained to point out such imposters (same DCs as above), even within a crowd of strangers. Greater and ethereal doppelgangers, like those of Zherisia, do not have such telltale scents. Half-doppelgangers smell exactly like the base creatures to which their template is applied.

On the Hunt

There are other methods hunters can use to defend themselves against doppelganger replacement, but for reasons of expense or elaboration, they're best reserved only for special situations, such as when all else fails and the choice is between possibly slaying an innocent and letting the doppelganger remain in the group.

Hypnosis can be useful, particularly the implanting of hypnotic suggestions into a subject. Have a hypnotist implant a covert suggestion into each member of the hunting party - essentially a sign and countersign - which are kept secret from all members' consciousness, and recorded on separate pages of a book. If a given hunter is strongly suspected to be a doppelganger, one takes out the book, and reads that person's sign aloud: if the suspect is, in fact, the hunter, the hypnotically-implanted countersign will be given in response. As no one will know what the countersign is until the relevant page is turned, the doppelganger can't poach the answer from the minds of those around it. As such a sign-and-countersign can only be used once, it is best reserved for a fall-back method.

A catalytic poison can also work wonders. I'm afraid that the alchemical process is a bit elaborate for this Vaasi peasant to grasp, but basically you take a bit of a target's blood or tissue, mix it up with a poison, and you get a venom that is effective only on the person who contributed the gory sample.

I can think of two ways to use this. First and easiest is to mix blood from each hunter with a cheap and fairly harmless poison; oil of taggit is cheap and reliable, while a doctor's emetic will provide vivid (though distasteful) proof of its efficacy. Then, if a doppelganger is suspected, administer the catalytic. If genuine, the hunter should succumb appropriately. (Of course, the hunter's constitution might withstand the toxin anyway, and a doppelganger could feign sleep or force itself to be sick, but it might work, so if Ezra gives you a tool, use it!)

Alternatively, you can use blood left over from a fight with the doppelganger and mix it with a poison, to be administered to all hunters and to likely suspects as well. Whoever is affected is surely the doppelganger. The chief problem with either approach is that the cost of catalytic poisons can ratchet up quickly, even if one is using cheap ones like oil of taggit.

Finally, in extreme situations, there is one fairly drastic test that no doppelganger can pass. You simply seize the suspected doppelganger and sever the tip of the suspect's little finger. (I would suggest a lock of hair, but alas, such samples remain just as they are, once removed from these creatures' persons.) Collect your 'sample' and walk away. Past five feet, or ten to be extra certain, the severed fingertip should turn grey and rubbery if it is, in fact, a doppelganger's.

Pray to Ezra that you make no mistake in this. The consequences of such desperate measures can be dire, to one's soul as well as one's hunt. Perhaps Ezra will be understanding and you'll get away with it once or twice, but the Legions of the Night will kill you - or claim you - if you resort to such heavy-handed solutions lightly.

Actually, they'll probably get you sooner or later anyway, but then again, none of us are in this for our health, now are we?

Catalytic Poisons

Due to their unusually-close genetic relatedness, a doppelganger has a flat 50% chance to be susceptible to a catalytic poison created using plasm or tissue from a member of its own clan. This increases to 75% if it is the biological parent or offspring of the imposter from which the required tissue-sample was obtained.

Lacking parental instincts, most older doppelgangers will not hesitate to sacrifice an offspring to ensure their personal survival, by letting it succumb to hunters' catalytic poisons and thus, be exposed and slain in their own stead.

The Kill

Now comes the part we've all been waiting for. You've tracked the creature, you've survived its attacks, and now you know who it is. All that is left is to kill the accursed beast. If you've managed to get this far, consider that the worst is over.

Now, as far as the Legions of the Night go, doppelgangers are some of the weakest. They lack the raw ferocity of the werebeast or golem, the arcane magics of the lich, or the preternatural abilities of the ghost or vampire. Unlike the Ancient Dead or ghosts, they don't come back if slain, and unlike a lich or too many other monstrous beings, a common blade is all you need to kill it.

What can make doppelgangers risky to fight, however, is their variability. Inherently, a doppelganger is only modestly more powerful than a human warrior, but like a human, they pursue a diversity of skills. If you are facing a werebear, it is a safe bet that he will try and rip your arm out and beat you to death with it. A doppelganger might well do the same ... or it might slip a dagger into your ribs, or shoot you down with a musket from fifty paces, or toss a fireball in your face. Then again, it might transform into a gigantic serpent and swallow you in one gulp: doppelgangers aren't entirely like humans.

Still, let's get a few generalities out of the way first, then we'll move along to the rarer (praise Ezra!) abilities. Firstly, all doppelgangers can deliver quite a vicious punch in their natural forms. Nothing approaching a golem's rock-shattering blow, mind, but even the most indolent or bookish doppelganger is more than capable of breaking a hunter's jaw, if you allow it to get inside your guard.

Now, some doppelgangers never do anything else with their punch. It exists, they use it, and that is the end of our tale. Some, though, practice boxing or similar martial arts, to the point that they become like the Rokuma monks, capable of breaking bricks with their hands. Try to attack a doppelganger from a moderate distance, and don't let it close with you.

Secondly, doppelgangers are quite hard to kill. Their rubbery hide is quite resistant to blows of all sorts, in their natural forms or otherwise, and a doppelganger can absorb a good deal more punishment than an equivalent human. Deep injuries that would bleed a human foe white may yet cause a doppelganger's bizarre blood to seep only gradually, and a strike you could've sworn had pierced its heart or vital arteries may prove no more than a flesh-wound. This can pose a particular annoyance to combatants who rely on precision over brute strength, and renders such advantages as the keen edge spell relatively useless against them. Still, it's not notably harder to pierce a doppelganger's hide than the skin of a vampire, and the former is vastly more vulnerable to common steel, so its durability isn't that serious an obstacle. Just another part of the Grand Scheme to remember.

Dungeon Master's Tips: Unorthodoxy

The Special Inquisitor isn't quite right here, confusing class levels with the alchemical Path abilities, and with some of the shapechangers' more dramatic racial feats. The fact remains that while the majority of doppelgangers concentrate on a single suite of skills, be it those of the fighter, the rogue, the bard or the monk, or occasionally the sorcerer or cleric, a sizeable minority spread their talents so as to maximize their flexibility. The powers of the Paths of Lead and Copper are particularly useful to any doppelganger, while Pugilistic Imposter is a great feat for any doppelganger wishing to boost its melee power while keeping its disguise intact. The Path of Silver can allow a non-arcane imposter to pass for a spellcaster, and the Specialized Anatomy feat can boost a cross-class skill in a way that belies the creature's role as a straightforward, single-class character.

Don't be afraid to shuffle around classes, feats, and Paths in an unorthodox fashion. It pays to keep players guessing as to whether they're fighting a warrior Leadsmith or a spell-casting Ironsmith till the last moment.

On the Hunt

All this, even a Vaasi peasant can remember. Then things get a bit more complicated. Doppelgangers lack discipline, but they adore surprises - at least, so long as they're the ones springing their hidden talents on others - and while most concentrate on those skills suited to ambush and deception, be it with blades, lies, or spells, others blend and combine their talents to a greater degree than I had ever thought possible. I've seen timid doppelganger sorcerers land earth-shattering punches, or warriors skilled with the sword suddenly call forth illusions or mind-clouding spells.

Another important thing to consider is that doppelgangers are perhaps the Legions' most sociable of troops, so even if they lack the numbers to form societies of their own kind, here in the Core, they will usually have minions of some sort at hand. Some might be fellow minor Legionnaires such as jackalweres, others mundane thugs and lackeys, while others still may be undead servitors or alchemical creations. Whenever you fight a doppelganger, expect it to have back-up nearby. "Back-up" needn't always be knowingly allied with a monster, either: accusing a 'pretty young lady' at the Grand Ball may leave you fencing with a dozen gullible bravos, trying like mad not to injure them too permanently, while the 'fair maiden' whose alleged honor they're defending slips out the back, laughing all the way.

Come the end, there is a decision to be made. Dare you attack the creature in private, where it is likely to have minions and traps at hand and can use its powers freely? Or should you confront it in public, where innocents may come into harm's way, but the doppelganger's actions will likely be restrained at first, in hopes it might yet preserve its disguise? This is the kind of choice that is left to the personal judgment of each hunter, based upon the knowledge at hand. I can only hope that your choice fits the Grand Scheme favorably.

Personally, I find that attacking a doppelganger directly is marginally preferable than sneaking around or similar coy strategies. Usually, the doppelganger isn't expecting it. The creatures are so wrapped up in their deceptions and mysteries and sophistry that the notion that someone may just charge straight at them and strike their heads off simply doesn't occur to them. With luck and Our Lady's guidance, you can swiftly incapacitate it before any other lives are put at risk.¹⁰

One more concluding piece of advice: once you've felled a doppelganger, make sure that it's well and truly dead. I have tell heard of these deceivers pretending to be slain, only to rise again and escape. I find that decapitation is a good insurance policy.

10. A viable strategy, but only if you are certain. Brother Valchov's faith is plainly of a sort to let him trust in Ezra to stay his hand or forgive him, should his judgment fall short. To those of us bound more by individual conscience than higher calling, the bitter consequences of error are too painful to gamble upon so heedlessly. In Paridon, I met a retired constable who'd once pursued a doppelganger - dressed quite distinctively in a red cap, blue jacket and tan trousers - for five blocks, at the climax of a long and grisly investigation. For the briefest instant, it rounded a corner and passed out of view. The constable raced after it, spotted a familiar face and garb just ahead, and, when his demand for immediate surrender was met only with stammered pleas of incomprehension - pleas he presumed were yet another attempt to trick him - ran the figure through.

The body never changed. The fugitive doppelganger had not been fleeing heedlessly, but has run to where it knew the man it had copied its appearance from - an innocent corner street-vender, and father of four - would be working. Perhaps it had expected the vender to be taken into custody in its place, or perhaps it harbored some grudge against the man; more likely, it simply did not care what might befall its unwitting decoy.

These mocking mirrors of humanity know our hearts, not just our thoughts or forms, Miladies. And they do not hesitate to turn even our own morality against us! The constable in question could never bear to draw steel again, knowing what his careless haste had cost an innocent man ... and, knowing this erstwhile pursuer no longer poses a threat, the imposters have let him live on, regretting for a lifetime an error that took a heartbeat. Do not give them any such opportunity, Miladies. **Make certain.** - Rookhausen

From Inquisitorial Report #4943

October 23rdt, 755

We caught up with the Filcher in the place where we'd first met it - the Randy Rat - following the magical trail that had led us so far afield, and lost us the Toret. This time there would be no games, no delays.

As before, we entered the inn around dusk. I can only guess that the Filcher was chartering a boat to somewhere else, or perhaps waiting for accomplices. It was no matter. The three of us entered to a room gone silent, its patrons once again staring at our vestments and wondering what three anchorites were doing in such a den of vice. And once again, the Filcher betrayed itself.

While the sailors and dockworkers were pondering, one of them was moving quickly for the stairs. I can only guess that the Filcher was planning to escape out of a window. Unfortunately for it, we were prepared. With an arcane word, Sister Irena closed the door to the stairwell, and with a second, locked it. I charged the creature and threw my net over it, while Brother Philip brought his stout spear to the ready. I daresay the tavern's patrons were not the sort to interfere, for which I was thankful.

The net entangled the creature, and we reached it before it could free itself. A kick sent its dagger flying from its grasp, and Brother Philip poised his spear. The doppelganger seemed to realize just how grave its situation was. Its counterfeit eyes widened with horror at our lack of hesitancy: it knew it had used up its every chance to foil or to fool us. True to its cowardly breed, it began to cringe, to beg:

"Now, now, let's not be hasty...I just want to get out of this place. Right? Right?!" The creature was babbling, its pretense breaking down in the grip of fear. "I mean, you've got the books, so why not just let me go, and I'll leave and never come back? Everyone's satisfied, just let me go..."

I cut it off. "For the murders of Warden Ivan Belanel and Toret George Fielding, and for the theft of four illuminated manuscripts, you are condemned to death. So witnessed and executed by Special Inquisitor Konraad Valchov. May Ezra have mercy on your soul, for no other will."

It was panicked now, wailing its piteous appeals. "No, don't! PLEASE!!! You don't want to do this: I know about things! Things worse, FAR worse than me, right there in your home city! There's these people, they kill you with a touch, I could help you FIND th-"

Lies, all lies. I stepped back. "Brother?"

Brother Philip drove the spear in. After ascertaining that the creature was, in fact, dead, we left Martira Bay and returned to Levkarest.

Brother Konraad Valchov

Faking Death

Again, high-ranking doppelgangers are usually willing to sacrifice their underlings in order to shake off pursuit. As members of the same clan are virtually indistinguishable in their true forms, this ploy has been used many times by elite Zherisian imposters to trick their would-be slayers. A close examination of a doppelganger corpse may discern subtle differences (Spot check DC 25), but only if the examiner has seen the true quarry's natural form. The evidence of recent wounds, personal knick-knacks associated with a 'tell', or disappearing-ink blotches are far more reliable ways to distinguish a decoy-doppelganger's corpse from its superior's.

More rarely, a doppelganger will trick a member of another clan into dying in its place. This can be less reliable than sacrificing one of its own lackeys, as differences between imposters of different clans - ear-shape especially - are easier to notice (Spot check DC 20). However, such a ploy serves a dual purpose, both deflecting pursuit and eliminating a rival, and in such a manner that the rival's clan has little basis on which to petition Sodo for redress.

On the Hunt

There you have it. All of one ignorant Vaasi peasant's knowledge about the most sinister, subtle, and crafty deceivers in all the land. Ezra guard you and hold you in Her hand. I wish you luck, and my prayers are with you.

Signed on this twenty-fifth day of March, in the year of Our Lady 758 by the Barovian Calendar, by the Special Inquisitor to the Praesidius

Brother Konraad Valchov

April 19th, 758

To his Most Holy Excellency, Praesidius Levin Postoya,

I pray forgiveness for my disobedience, and I am very sorry to have worried you needlessly. I quite understand that you are angry with me, but the situation in Falkovnia was desperate. Yes, I understand that I could've been killed, but Warden Beralsdottir needed all of the help she could get to combat Lekar's doppelganger infestation, and infestation it is.

Yes, Your Holiness, I will undertake whatever penance you assign. I pray you will forgive me this trip, but it seemed needful at the time.

Your most humble servant,

Brother Konraad Valchov

Note by Constable Radcliffe

Paridon City Guard, Nov. 25, 732

This diary was found in the wreckage of a townhouse that caught fire two nights ago. The pages were badly singed, but I have reconstructed the text as well as possible. Possibly they will offer us a clue as to the cause of the fire.

Our initial search of the former residence of poet Deborah Creede uncovered no recognizable human remains, in the wake of the blaze, but the borough fire marshal's investigation continues. The missing woman, herself, has not been seen since the night of the fire. The Ladies' Poetry Appreciation Society of King's Quarters has advertised a small reward for information as to Miss Creede's whereabouts and welfare.

The brutal murder of a yet-unidentified woman indeed took place in the alley between #22 and #24 Hanover Street on the night of November 20th, not a dozen yards from Miss Creede's flat. However, the diary's claim that the missing poet had overheard the murder in progress is contradicted by nearly a score of statements by residents of other adjacent buildings, who unanimously report having heard nothing. Both constables detailed to collect the remains, discovered an estimated 30 hours after death, vigorously deny having spoken aloud of their gruesome condition in the presence of the public. The possible involvement of local physician Morris Johanson in the murder, fire, and/or Deborah Creede's own disappearance is now under investigation. Dr. Johanson, himself, has not been seen since he dismissed his valet for the night, on the evening of the 22nd.



As for the "Daniel" of which the diary repeatedly makes mention, Miss Creede filed a missing-persons report in regards to a Mr. Daniel Worthington with the Carver Street watch-station on November 4th of this year. Given a low priority at the time, this report has been pursued with a greater diligence in the wake of the fire, on suspicion that "Daniel" might have been the culprit. However, no trace of "Mr. Worthington" has turned up, either on the street or in city records, implying that this suspect is either a visitor to Paridon, or (more likely) made use of an alias.



Concluding Thoughts

"What separates us from the monsters that we fight? It is this: We take responsibility for our deeds, and we have compassion for those we have wronged. I must take responsibility for my crimes and, if possible, make restitution."

- Dr. Rudolph van Richten



And so, dear sisters, there it is. The sum total of my own discoveries and deductions about this subtlest of unnatural threats, together with the observations of scientists and clergy, madmen and monsters, savvy hunters and duped surrogate-kin. I am counting on you to disseminate such of its revelations as will serve our Society compatriots' struggles against darkness, and also - in time, with due judiciousness as to content - to dispense these discoveries to the world at large, just as you have passed on vital knowledge of hags, the unquiet dead, or the shadowy creatures of faerie and Mist. (Not credited to myself, please; anonymity for all sources is wisest in this matter.)

Were I a man of faith, Miladies, I would pray that these insights not diminish - in yourselves or in others - that precious capacity to trust which doppelgangers' wicked machinations undermine. Alas, suspicion is too much a part of my own character - ingrained long before I set about these particular enquiries - to allow me so trustful a luxury as belief. Nonetheless, if Miladies might offer a prayer to Her Divine Guardianship to that effect, on my impious behalf, I would account it a great courtesy and favor.

Indeed, were I a better sort of man, I could close this communiqué with naught but my words of encouragement and support, contented with a job well done. In exposing doppelgangers' ways - their treacheries, their torment of the innocent, the sordid tragedy of their origins - I am confident my investigations will not be deemed misguided, that I did not devote these past months' effort to researching some other threat. In part, my selection of doppelgangers as a topic was a fortuitous one, my work in Paridon having made it a convenient thread to pursue. And yet, the more I have learned, the more I feel I must confess another motive in sending you these hard-won insights.

Commencing this treatise, I asked Miladies the rhetorical question: "Why doppelgangers?" Yet, having weighed the knowledge I have unearthed - and re-examined those techniques by which I uncovered it - I realize, now, that the proper question to ask myself is: "Why *me*?"

For my methods are not Inquisitor Valchov's, to march openly in confidence of Ezra's favor, nor Captain Vignes', to bull ahead by sheer determination and strength. I do not have Van Richten's well-deserved reputation or stature, to invite informants' disclosures unasked, nor Miladies' bond of sisterly teamwork and affection, to sustain me in times of difficulty. My methods are those of the sly word and the shaded truth, the tactical pretense and the slanted bargain. It is by subtlety and misdirection that I have acquired the knowledge I present to you - the only means by which I believe such information could have been procured, guarded and veiled as doppelgangers' secrets invariably are - and I make no apology for resorting to such means, in the service of our Society and to the defense of the Land against these imposters' vile depredations.

Yet, though I do not regret such necessary recourse, I can no longer deny the undesirable changes their chronic usage has wrought, in my own character. There are few indeed in this world whom I do not regard with suspicion - wary, calculating, oft-baseless - and fewer still with whom I maintain any lasting affiliation, even through such fragile avenues as our own correspondence. Too easily, I fall into the habit of viewing others as obstacles to be circumvented with a lie, or vehicles to be 'steered' by a cunning façade. My work for the Society is not to blame for this leeriness - it was, alas, entrenched in me before our association began - but recent developments in my other work have brought it to my attention that such overcautious habits and duplicities carry a price, and my investigation into doppelgangers has thrown this cost into still sharper relief.

For I **recognize** these creatures' feelings, all too well. Repulse me though "Adramelech's" cruel sport with M. Vignes might, I well know the satisfaction to be savored in steering others' way of thinking; for all that it is monsters or mortal wrongdoers I turn my own manipulative knack upon, the thrill of the "game" is little different for myself. As obnoxious as "Eddy's" snide jeers might seem, its taunting of

Mr. _____ stuck a too-familiar chord, for I am prone to make silent mock of those taken in by my guile, each time I deceive some villain and thus, uncover a malign agenda or threat. In documenting doppelgangers' yearning to submerge themselves within some other identity and so, mingle with humans without the visible stain of monstrous heritage, I think to my own strivings on the behalf of our Society - acts by which I aspire to become a worthier man, forsaking the sins of a renounced and banished past - and I know this yearning to re-invent one's self is in no way unique to *their* kind.

I am human, Miladies: I sleep, I dream, my shed blood lies as still as any man's. Yet I see far too much of myself in these creatures, beyond the superficial mimicry at which they - and I - are so adept. Doppelgangers are not the only deceivers in these Lands, Miladies, and my own work for the Society is not always so aboveboard as you, or our colleagues, might approve. My "masques" are the work of cosmetics or spells, yet no less a subterfuge than theirs; my insights into others' motives derive from observation and intuition, not psychic trespass, yet no less do I exploit these assets for purposes of deception ... or betrayal. I have concealed my identity and intentions, laid claim to honors not my own and advocated stances I despise, to achieve aims I hope may advance a higher purpose: aims I dare not detail - not even to you, dear ladies - for the sake of my allies' safety. I have stolen names and credentials of dead men and borne them to my own advantage, and fear that the fact I did not inflict those deaths myself, doppelganger-fashion, marks me as but nominally less reprehensible than they: a grave-robber, in lieu of a murderer.

Though not conscious of it at the outset, I realize now that my investigations into these monstrous imposters is, at heart, my way of repudiating the stigma of my own "imposter's" habits: to redeem those methods which doppelgangers apply to malign purposes and I, to the defense of others. If I believe in nothing else, I must have faith that deceit, in itself, is *not* what brands a soul as corrupt, but rather the objective to which such deception is turned: that the moral scales of the cosmos do not weigh the little white lie as equal to the cruel fraud, the liberator of slaves no better than the cutpurse, the stealthy spy as like unto the skulking traitor. Doppelgangers must go disguised to survive in a world of men, yet naught in their biology obliges them to kill; and it is for the latter, not the former, that they are to be condemned: crimes incited by neither curse nor instinct, but by their selfish ambition to own (and be) what is not rightly theirs. If justice denounces their willful treacheries, then it is likewise justice that we who oppose them - or indeed, any force of Evil - should be forgiven our use of deception to save lives, not pillage and usurp them.

In entrusting you with this discourse, Miladies, I affirm what I *must* believe: that I am better than a doppelganger, or the other Legions of Night I turn their sly stratagems against. I do this, not for my own benefit, as a doppelganger might - not out of spite, as "Eddy" did, nor in expectation you should serve my own narcissistic aims, as with "Adramelech" - but because I know its truths will be put to best use in your hands ... and that you, dear Gennifer, dear Laurie, can assess its worth objectively, as I (empathizing far too much with these creatures) cannot fully trust myself to do.

By commending these secrets to you, no strings attached, I defy that base facet of myself which is akin to these monsters, that shies away from confidences or trust. But more, I affirm that bond of friendship we have forged - I, who really should write more often; and you twins, whom I deem my own "sisters" in every sense save birth - that no doppelganger (so urbane and charming in its veneer, yet forever faceless, friendless, and loveless beneath its façade) can ever hope to know.

With all the warmth and trust I yet am able,

My fondest of regards,

Rookhausen



Dungeon Master's Appendix


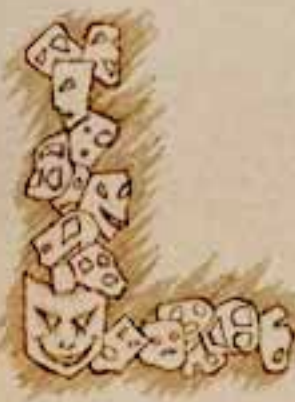
Amicus
VR
Rector
Magister



Running Dopplegangers

"I know I'm human. I can't prove it, either. One of us two is a liar, for that test cannot lie, and it says one of us is. I gave proof that the test was wrong, which seems to prove I'm human, and now Garry has given the argument that proves I'm human - which he, as the monster, should not do. Round and round and round and round and -"

- John W. Campbell Jr., "Who Goes There?"



Running Doppelgangers

Suspense and doubt are the essence of a good doppelganger adventure. If you're a player, stop reading now so you won't spoil the surprises!

This section is intended to advise DMs on the use of doppelgangers in their campaigns. As some of the most elusive and role-play-intensive of all monstrous foes, the imposters can pose as great a challenge to run as to track down. Moreover, their capacity to impersonate player characters and thus, undercut a PC party's cohesion - or a gaming group's - if mishandled, means that using these creatures as full-fledged villains demands both restraint and consideration on the Dungeon Master's part, and good sportsmanship and maturity on the part of the players.

If you or your group aren't ready and willing to cope with the issues a PC's replacement can stir up, then it may be best to keep doppelgangers as a rare element in your Ravenloft campaign, seldom seen outside of Paridon. If your group is ready for these challenges, the two essays to follow - Sorti's on the hands-on staging and design of doppelganger adventures; DeepShadow's on creating and sustaining an atmosphere of suspense - should help you conduct scenarios which showcase the veiled threat posed by the insidious imposters, without either alienating your players or giving too much away.

Though directed primarily at Ravenloft DMs, these essays (even more than the rest of this netbook) may also be of help for "standard" doppelgangers' appearances in other game-settings.

Doppelgangers in Ravenloft Campaigns

By Sorti

"Some people say they haven't yet found themselves. But the self is not something one finds; it is something one creates."

- Thomas Szasz

A doppelganger is not a common or simple encounter, and you should think carefully about what you expect from it and how it will impact your campaign and playing style. Many of the decisions you'll have to make will depend directly on how mature your players are; this will be addressed later.

To begin, let's introduce some standards and ideas for using doppelgangers as villains in your campaign.

Doppelgangers as Villains

"To see ourselves as others see us is a most salutary gift. Hardly less important is the capacity to see others as they see themselves."

- Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception*

Agent

This is probably the most common image people have of the doppelganger, and is in fact the idea the game creators had in mind when they inserted the first doppelgangers in the game: the Agent.

The Agent's duty is to secretly infiltrate an organization (more often than not, the adventuring party), either to retrieve information or to undermine the group's activities by sabotage or assassination. An Agent is able to impersonate a member of the targeted group using its Change Shape ability and can use its abilities to complete either of those two missions. Either it will read the information it needs directly from the minds of the ones surrounding it, or it will eventually find an unguarded moment in which to strike.

Running Doppelgangers

The Agent's life often depends on whether it's discovered or not. An Agent who survives for more than one mission has learned many tricks of the trade, and will take painful measures not to be caught, and to keep its identity a secret ... even from enemies who have magical means of detection available.

It will probably study its target or targets from afar for a time, gather intelligence on them and their powers, and read the minds of some of their friends or companions to know what to expect. An Agent must be careful to get all of this information in place before it begins its mission; more often than not, it works alone and can expect no support in case things go wrong, so must prepare for all contingencies itself. Often, it will confirm those facts its employer initially passed along, to make sure such reports are not out-of-date or misleading. After all, it's the one risking its life on their accuracy, not its master.

An Agent will never fight after it's discovered: if the targets could have been defeated by a frontal assault, its services wouldn't have been needed. Instead, it will always have some kind of escape plan in case anything goes wrong. If captured, it will probably try to bargain its life in exchange for whatever information it holds. Probably its master won't be pleased, but a doppelganger Agent isn't easily traceable, so it usually fears the ones who captured it now much more than a possible future revenge by its employer. The chief exception, of course, is Agents who work for Sodo: frightened as they may be by death, they know that the PCs can only kill them once, whereas Sodo can torture them to death as many times as he pleases.

The Agent, as the name implies, works for someone. It could be a freelancer under contract for a mission, or a minion seeking to further its master's goals. It may even not care about its target, master or job: the doppelganger is paid to do something, and it's good at what it does. Should it serve a master or an organization, it probably knows perfectly what will happen to it, if and when it fails its job, based upon the master's reputation. Because Evil is not monolithic and doppelgangers are survivors, first and foremost, the DM should consider the Agent's made-in-advance contingency plans to escape punishment, should capture or circumstance (such as a better offer) make betraying its superior seem the wisest course of action.

Mastermind

The great difference between the Agent and the Mastermind is that the latter is working for itself, and has no superior to refer to or satisfy. This means it has a plan on its own, and probably cares about it, since it likely took weeks, months, or even years of planning and work to get where it is now.

Another difference is that, if everything goes as it planned for the Mastermind, it will never meet the PCs in person and they will never be aware of its existence. This should be its *modus operandi* during all its plans, to assure it a long, secure life with all its schemes achieved. The Mastermind is working behind the scenes, avoiding risks, and manipulating people to do its bidding, instead of doing field work itself. The Mastermind fights its enemy from the distance, sending minions that have no idea about who they're working for, ruining the heroes' reputations, contacting or manipulating their enemies, killing and possibly replacing their loved ones, and generally making life difficult (and miserable) for them.

If well played, the players shouldn't realize that a specific individual is responsible for all of their trials for some time, and shouldn't discover it's a doppelganger until the very end (if ever).

Of course, killing someone and replacing him is the bread and butter of a doppelganger's portfolio, but not for the Mastermind ... or at least, not so often. It prefers to make an ambitious strike to take some important person's position and then occupy it for some time. Replacing a single noble is often far more effective than replacing an entire court; if many of the king's advisors suddenly change their minds about the war with the neighboring kingdom and then disappear, even the most ignorant peasant will become suspicious. Instead, it works better if the Mastermind impersonates one of the advisors (not the most trusted ones, at least at first), and

Running Doppelgangers

begins reading the others' minds: there is probably quite a bit of interesting information that can be used to reach the same objective in a far more natural and believable way. For instance, the wizened court priest is against the war, but his granddaughter was brutally killed by Falkovnian soldiers; if someone could bring evidence that the neighbors are secretly harboring Falkovnian refugees, he likely will be much more inclined to attack them...

The Mastermind is doing a very complicated job, and will surely need trusted people to do part of it. Yet to keep its disguise for a long time, as it probably wants to, it has to trust as few people as possible. Its Change Shape ability provides it much deniability here. It does not have to be the "noble" who hires mercenaries or assassins to dispose of the pesky heroes who discovered the evidence against the other king was false; an old woman with an unsettling grin in a black cloak and full money-purse will do. Even if the hirelings were to speak, the heroes could well be turned against the wrong target: isn't there an old witch who cursed the king some years ago, when she was driven from the kingdom? Masterminds would do well to assume they can never trust anyone in the world, and act accordingly.

The Mastermind has invested most of its energy and time in its master plan, and won't be happy when the PCs stop it, nor when (and if) they see through its disguise. As with the Agent, a Mastermind always has a carefully-planned escape route, and some resources hidden somewhere safe, the better to hide its tracks and begin anew somewhere else. Unlike an Agent, a Mastermind is likely to take being driven from its carefully-woven web of intrigues personally, leading it to plot its revenge...

Organization

A structured group of doppelgangers, working together, is something you never wish to cross in your life. Whereas a single shapeshifter can replace someone important to you or influential within society, and exploit this position, the mind boggles at the possibility of having a network of such individuals, every one of them in a key point to control some particular objective.

Such an organization probably has a single leader, who holds the reins of the plot and makes sure everyone is in the right position and doing the right thing. Others will heed its authority, perhaps out of fear, and always in the knowledge that it endangers the whole conspiracy if any one of them decides to do something stupid (like wasting resources trying - and failing - to kill its festering PC nemesis). The leader of a doppelganger conspiracy is very similar to a Mastermind, with the exception that many of its followers are aware of its nature, being doppelgangers themselves. In Paridon, doppelganger clans adhere to this structure, and exiles who gather in "gangs" emulate this pattern in other lands.

Another possibility is that a group of allied doppelgangers might operate more loosely, not having a single leader, but cooperating for mutual advantage. This exchange of favors is in fact common in any society and subculture - who else are doppelgangers to turn to, when faced with problems unique to their covert way of life, if not others of their kind? - but will only work so long as there's no infighting in the group. If working together benefits them all more than they lose by tolerating "the competition", it's fine, but if someone steps into someone else's territory, or abuses another ally's favors while never returning them in kind, their mutual support-network risks degenerating into a free-for-all. Exile doppelgangers outside Zherisia often form such alliances of convenience, but they seldom last long, either shattering from within, or evolving into gangs when a strong-willed individual bullies or connives its way into power over the rest.

In all cases, an Organization is just a group of doppelgangers collaborating. Any one of them will likely fit into one of the other archetypes, most being Agents or Substitutes, with one or two Masterminds contributing motivation and direction to most of the group's schemes.

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Substitute

A Substitute is a doppelganger with a long-term mission that entails impersonating someone. It is similar to the Agent, and almost everything discussed for the Agent holds true for Substitutes; the main difference is that the Substitute has no immediate task to accomplish or foe to vanish, but is situated in a place allowing it to gather, disseminate, and control information. The Substitute takes the same measures as the Agent to keep hidden, but its mission does not demand that it do anything directly suspicious, so it will probably face fewer challenges to its deceptions and be able to maintain its charade for a long time.

Compared to Agents, doppelganger Substitutes have good cause to maintain their false identities for the long term. Working its way into a position where it can gather information probably took some time, and loss of its façade will shatter the network of contacts and informants it has built up. Doppelgangers do not forfeit a chance to keep informed lightly, so will go to some lengths to deflect suspicion onto others, and to sabotage heroes whose activities threaten to expose them.

An interesting twist is to have a Substitute disguise itself as someone the PCs are used to taking orders from, like the local sentire of the Church of Ezra, or the wizened retired adventurer that needs them to do the work he can't do anymore. It's possible that the PCs will complete several missions, before uncovering hints that their actions aren't serving the greater good, as they'd been led to believe...

Constructing Doppelganger Scenarios

"All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players. They have their exits and their entrances, and one man in his time plays many parts..."

- William Shakespeare, *"As You Like It"*, Act II, sc. vii

Paranoia: How Much Is Too Much?

The doppelganger is probably one of the hardest creatures to use successfully in a campaign. Let's define success: remember that, as DM, your goal is to have fun and provide fun to your players. The hidden risk of the doppelganger is that its use may turn your campaign into a paranoid scenario where the heroes trust no one and spend most of their time pricking fingers for blood-tests, as players fear to let their characters out of each others' sight, lest a beloved PC be lost forever. This kind of campaign would be no fun for anyone.

If you plan to have a doppelganger infiltrate the PCs' party or organization by killing one or more of them, keep this in mind: if you play it correctly, and your players aren't excessively paranoid, **you will succeed**. The doppelganger's abilities are perfect to do this, probably surpassing those of the PCs if they are low-level enough to be confronting CR 3 monsters; if the campaign is a low-magic one, even mid-level characters will be vulnerable. None of your players' characters is likely to survive a coup de grace with sneak attack while sleeping, and no intelligent doppelganger will leave a body lying around for its target's companions to find, so there won't even be a corpse on hand to resurrect. You basically will be taking a player aside to announce, "You're dead." Again, this would not be fun for the player involved, unless he or she was champing at the bit to play a new character. If you are set on killing and replacing a PC, be sure to choose a mature player and to make it clear from the start of the campaign that death is a possibility for everyone.

Of course, the GM could avoid this situation by setting up the encounter so the players will be able to root out the doppelganger before the assassination attempt is made. However, this can lead to illogical situations in which a shapechanger with years of experience in infiltration and killing gets caught by a group of low-level adventurers, because it made a mistake any novice should have avoided, like leaving witnesses to its killings, being a poor actor, or being caught

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because it missed some piece of information it could and should have reaped from the PCs' minds.

A good middle ground between these two scenarios is not having the PCs as the doppelganger's targets, at least at the beginning. After the long-decayed body of poor Adrian Miller is found buried in his field when he just left yesterday for a journey, the PCs will have a hint that a shapechanger's around; they will know what to expect, so rather than trying to infiltrate them, the monster may choose a safer course of action, such as impersonating a guard captain and have them arrested on false charges, or disguising itself as one of the PCs as it commits a heinous crime. This creates a very different kind of scenario than many players are used to, as instead of having some physically-powerful foe to fight, they will find themselves persecuted by every well-meaning peasant in Mordentshire.

An even better alternative is to send a doppelganger to abduct the PC it intends to replace, rather than killing its victim outright. Whether it's an Agent whose superiors wish to interrogate a member of the adventuring party, or it has a standing arrangement with slavers or an evil cult to buy its victims alive for sale or eventual sacrifice, or it intends to use the PC as a hostage should its infiltration be exposed, giving the doppelganger a motive for keeping the player character alive is far preferable to alienating a member of your gaming group. Only after the doppelganger's ruse is exposed should the other PCs acquire clues to where their true comrade is being held captive, thus allowing them to launch a rescue-mission.

Extending the PC such mercy is, admittedly, a bit contrived. Most victims of dread doppelgangers are, and should be, killed; otherwise, these creatures' threat may seem rather puny, measured against the other deadly menaces of Ravenloft. However, PC heroes are unusual people, simply because they are willing to stand up to what the average civilian in the Land of Mists is terrified to face. That doppelgangers or their employers should recognize their threat, and try to head off such dangerous opposition by taking hostages as well as by infiltration, isn't unreasonable.

Adapting Doppelgangers to Your PCs

It is different adapting a doppelganger to your games than most other kinds of monster. Many villains in Ravenloft start out as merely frightening, yet as more is learned of their nature and past, they come to serve as a dark mirror to the PCs: a horrifying reminder that there, save by the grace of Ezra or a shadowed path not taken, they go. Doppelgangers, by their very nature, reverse that usual progression, initially appearing to be people but little different from the PCs, winning their trust, inviting their camaraderie or affection. Only later is it revealed that they are, in truth, not human at all, and this concealed inhumanity turns the immediate shock of betrayal into true horror at their alien appearance and callous, scornful mindset.

However, it is very easy to adapt your doppelgangers' abilities and motivations so as to prove challenging to your players. The easiest way to do this is to adapt the imposters' skill level to that of the PCs. While you should pull no punches with mid- to high-level parties, making your dread doppelgangers as deceptive and difficult to identify as possible, low-level PCs might confront a newer, less experienced agent. The agent is no idiot, but makes the occasional slip that could prove to be its undoing. This is not only a way to be lenient with your players, but also an arrangement that makes perfect sense in-game: why would a mastermind send the most seasoned of agents against a fighter who's barely learned how to swing a sword, a petty thief, and an anchorite who's leaving her home church for the first time? There's no need to waste master spies on such pathetic would-be heroes for now; better to let a novice doppelganger get its feet wet, undertaking its first solo mission, against targets it has a fair chance of escaping if it should bungle its task. Even if it fails, it will have had a useful learning experience, and will likely come away with some stolen thoughts for its boss to consider. It's not as if such novice adventurers are any real threat to its superiors.

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Such inexperienced doppelgangers, in addition to proving a statistically-balanced foe for novice PCs, will also have a rather different outlook on their job. They may be a little cockier than veteran agents, having seen their successes but not their failures, and convinced themselves their present job - which pits them against foes who are "only human" - will be just as easy. They might also try to achieve a more spectacular success than an older doppelganger would: their elders have already proven themselves, but young doppelgangers are still trying to secure a solid reputation as spies or assassins, and hoping for some fantastic "score" that wins their Clan Leaders' favor and paves them a smooth path in future. This isn't to say that novice doppelgangers will be stupid; they possess their race's innate talents for deceit and treachery, and the desire for success will cause them to use every weapon at their disposal to bring the PCs down. However, their inexperience, Clay-born contempt for humanity, surplus enthusiasm, and ambition may yet lead them to take risks that a mature agent would be prudent enough to pass up.

With higher-level PCs, show no mercy. Only the most experienced doppelgangers would be sent to stop such powerful forces for Good. In addition to playing these foes in a manner that is almost indistinguishable from how you would play the NPCs they are replacing, you should also give them several class levels in order to bolster their abilities, combined with enough racial feats and alchemical salient powers to make uncovering their façade by conventional means (such as blood tests) unreliable. Most doppelgangers are rogues who may multiclass into assassin, but they often take other classes, and a Mastermind will surely send those whose abilities would be most destructive to the PCs. As said before, a doppelganger can expend days and weeks studying the PCs, their tactics, their defenses and their weak spots; any rational-minded doppelganger who wishes to slay a high-level adventuring party knows it needs a reliable list of their magical powers, favorite spells, most powerful items, contacts, and so on, before it dares to engage them directly.

A high-level party is likely to have spells that suffice to unmask a doppelganger on the spot, and to kill it the next round. A shrewd approach is to stay far from these spells for as long as possible, and be prepared when it does happen. In fact, a wise imposter could limit its own role to investigating its targets, while equipping one of their PCs' current (non-doppelganger) enemies with magic, information and opportunities to get rid of a mutual threat. Even if the pesky PCs survive the trap and capture some of their would-be killers, they will have no clue about who has been providing such intelligence to their foes. Of course, another problem with high levels is that PCs use divinations and other information-gathering spells in abundance, but some magic items and spells can help against those, too, even it's one of the most dangerous parts of the doppelgangers' game. A prudent dread doppelganger Mastermind might organize and direct its entire operation against such powerful foes from a neighboring nation in the Core, knowing that divinations are in some manner inhibited by national (i.e. domain) borders.

Staging a PC's Replacement

"Varium et mutabile semper femina." (= "Woman is ever fickle and changeable.")

- Virgil, "Aeneid", Book IV, line 569

Even since the adventure-module Caldwell Keep, one of the doppelganger's most clichéd and funny (for the DM) uses is to replace a PC. Replacing a PC can be easy or hard, fun or disturbing, mostly depending on the maturity of your players and how much of a "railroading DM" you are.

Initially, you must decide what the doppelganger's aim is in replacing a PC: does it simply want to kill them all, or does it need information which they keep to themselves, or perhaps just easy access to the girl they're protecting to kidnap her (and/or replace her in turn, of course...). You must also choose which PC to replace, a decision which is better made by choosing the player - ideally, one who won't take personal offense at such treatment of their character, but

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will enjoy the 'plot twist' and role-playing opportunities it provides - rather than the PC. This decision in particular will have an impact on your doppelganger's statistics: if it's to play the role of a spell-caster, for example, it'll need at least a few levels in the same class as the one it will be impersonating, or perhaps Use Magic Device ranks and a few appropriate scrolls.

Once you know who the doppelganger is and why it intends to replace a party member, decide how long it hopes to maintain the disguise ... and how long you will actually let it do so. Unless the PCs met only a few days before, sooner or later someone will notice that their friend is acting strangely, or forgetting details of old tales, or otherwise acting "out of character". This could happen at any moment, so always have an escape plan ready, starting well before the point when you intend to reveal its presence. Likewise, if you opt to play out the creature's attack on its chosen victim, you should make sure that the creature remains unidentified as a doppelganger (e.g. by having it attack while it is disguised as another campaign villain's liveried thug); this way, if the PC unexpectedly wins the fight, it can try again later against this or another party member.

The most fragile moment in a PC's replacement is the first encounter between the doppelganger and other party members, after the imposter has taken the character's place (and hopefully disposed of the original, or a body, as the case may be). It is then that other party members' suspicions can most easily be roused, before the doppelganger's mission has even gotten started, so it's best to keep things as "normal" as possible from other PCs' point of view. The safest approach is to carry out the replacement when there's a reason for the victim to be far away from the rest of the group; wait for her to be alone in the woods hunting, off buying spell components in town, or just relaxing in the bathtub, and then strike. Avoid obvious set-ups that divide the party on purpose: should the victim hear something suspicious in a dungeon, spend an unusually-long time investigating the noise, and behave oddly when she returns, the players have surely seen enough horror movies to guess what's happened.

Another basic question you should ask yourself is, how to treat it out of character? Or in other words, should you inform the player? There are three possible approaches here, each with its advantages and weaknesses.

1. Inform the player

You tell the player that her PC has been replaced by a doppelganger, and that she must now roleplay the impersonating creature in lieu of her usual character, while hiding the truth from the other players. This is the most used option, since the others (see below) tend to raise more problems than this one.

By informing your player, you essentially recruit her to roleplay an NPC, so it's your responsibility to give her guidelines as to the doppelganger's motives, its purpose, and any subtle quirks of behavior or lapses in its impersonation that she'll need to portray. Telling her the complete story behind its presence isn't necessary, as this may be counterproductive; for example, if the doppelganger is an Agent, you are perfectly justified in withholding the name of its employer from your player, so she won't know too much about that villain when she resumes playing a legitimate party member.

The problem with this method is that it's not you role-playing the doppelganger, so the player could make decisions you wouldn't have, and eventually be discovered because of it. Furthermore, it won't work if your player isn't good at fooling others at the gaming table, or if she is tempted to play the doppelganger badly in order to clue in her fellow-players. Offering a small experience-point award to her regular PC (safely tied up in a cell somewhere), for carrying out a successful deception, can help overcome such temptations.

Nonetheless, you should always inform the player if the PC has a significant chance to escape the replacing, or of breaking free from her jailers later and rejoining the party to inform them of the threat. These parts can, and probably should, be role-played separately from the normal playing sessions; see "Out of game", below.

Running Doppelgangers

A) *During the game*

In this version you take the player aside, tell her that her PC has been replaced and how to behave, and return promptly to the table. (Don't waste too much game time at this, or you'll bore your other players.) This is an appropriate solution if the PC has basically no chance to escape, and if you already rolled the necessary dice behind your screen or before the game-session. If you've "cheated" the player, by deciding in advance that their character's replacement will be successful, you'd best not kill the PC; rather, make it clear to the player that the PC is alive, but has been imprisoned, knocked out, lured away or otherwise put out of commission. Provided the doppelganger's ruse is meant to last until the next meeting of your gaming group, you should also arrange to meet with the player before then, to bring them up to speed on their new role.

The true problem is the other players will know that something happened. How much this will impact their game-play depends on how good they are in acting as if nothing happened, and how often you tell players something secret during a game. Holding such "private discussions" often - whether or not anything sinister is afoot - is, in fact, a good technique in a Gothic campaign to keep the players' suspicions high, and also a good way to hide the times there's something really important afoot, like this one.

DM Tip: Online Games and PC Replacement

Unlike a tabletop game, online RPGs do not involve face-to-face contact between participants, but only text-form submissions to chat rooms, message boards, or other electronic venues. This has the advantage, when replacing a PC, that other players are in no position to observe the private-message or e-mail consultations between you, as DM, and the player of the replaced character. In an online game, conspiring with the player in "real time" is a much more feasible option than in a tabletop game, unless consulting with them grows so time-consuming that it distracts you from the rest of the action.

While many people are possessive of their online identities (with good reason), it's often possible for a single person to create multiple "logins" by which to access the same forum or chat room. If the online venue in which you play allows for this, it can be worthwhile for each player to create a separate "in-character" login under their PC's name, and to give the DM their PC's login and password. That way, the DM can play the role of their character using the PC's account, should the real player have to stay offline for a time - just as a tabletop DM would run the PC of a player who misses a game session - and can "take possession" of such an online character, assuming control of its account, should it be charmed, possessed, or (in this case) replaced by a doppelganger.

The player of the doppelganger-supplanted PC may be given a new character to run - anonymously - while the DM takes over their original character's postings. Properly executed, this hand-off will leave the other players believing the replaced PC is still being run by the same player, and that the new PC's player (whom you have sworn to secrecy) is actually a "drop-in" player who has temporarily joined your group. Only after the doppelganger is exposed as a monster does the collaborating player reveal he or she has been running this substitute character, which can be retired to NPC status once his or her original PC is rescued or resurrected.

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B) Out of the game

Strangely, plenty of players seem to forget that you have their cell phone number and their e-mail address, and know where they live, and can contact them at any moment ... not just during game-sessions.

If during a game-session, when the PCs are asleep, a player asks you to step out of the room and you speak in private for five minutes, and next morning some of the party's treasure has 'mysteriously vanished', it's no surprise when the other players suspect his character. But what about if, the day before the game, he tells you: "During the night I steal the flawless sapphire and those platinum coins and hide them in the bottom of my quiver, with some tar to avoid them clinking while I walk."?

Nothing stops you from doing the same thing, when replacing a PC. The problem, as before, is whether the PC has any possibility to avoid being replaced. If so, you can't just e-mail a player to say: "You've been replaced by a doppelganger. Act normally, but try to get alone with Alvissa, in a place where the others won't hear her scream.". To be fair to your player, you need to roleplay the encounter.

While the encounter will likely take time, it's much easier to stage such a thing outside of a normal gaming session. Just contact the player in secret and arrange for a one-on-one playing session, with the other players remaining none the wiser. Roleplay the doppelganger's attack normally, giving the PC a chance to escape if (and only if) she deserves one. Odds are, the player will be extra careful, knowing something's going on. But sometimes knowing some misfortune is likely to befall you is not enough to avoid it...

Assuming the doppelganger's attack succeeds, you'll have plenty of time to pass on more information to the player, to prepare them for their new mission as your undercover agent within the gaming group. You can also reassure them that their original PC isn't beyond saving, by presenting them with a "cut scene" of their character tied up in a cell, unconscious in a ditch, or otherwise incapacitated.

Conversely, if the PC defeats the doppelganger, you can halt the encounter right there, as the character sees the slain attacker's corpse transform into its natural form. In this case, you can pick up on events at the next game session, giving you plenty of time to adjust the plotline accordingly, and think up appropriate clues that might be found on its body.

2. Don't inform the player

The one way to make 100% sure no one discovers the replacement has occurred is, obviously, to tell nobody else that it's happened. This ensures the player won't have problems feigning ignorance, but invites another problem: your doppelganger will probably be acting too perfectly, never making errors or forgetting details it should have no means of knowing. Also, it's probably not taking steps to advance its nefarious goal (killing, kidnapping, sabotage, etc), unless it's just tagging along with the party until something specific happens.

With this option, you'll have to make secret Bluff and Disguise rolls every time it's necessary, and probably tell the player something like "You don't exactly remember where you'd hidden it" or "You don't really think it's the right moment to discuss that", which can become very strange, and probably more obvious than just handing a note to the player.

Also, some players strongly dislike this technique. They expect that they're the ones who'll be playing their character, and prefer for you to tell them everything that happens to her, instead of hiding the truth in order to achieve a better surprise later on. As such, this method is often better for entirely different types of "party infiltration" - for instance, a PC afflicted lycanthrope, unaware of her condition, who passes under the DM's control when she transforms and then loses all memory of having done so - than for doppelgangers ... that is, unless the imposter happens to suffer from subsumption, amnesia, Darkonian memory-alteration, or some other effect that might plausibly cause it to be "lost in its role" as a faux-PC.

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3. Inform everyone

The last option is to simply tell everyone the situation. As with informing just the player whose PC has been supplanted, there are multiple possible approaches here.

A) *Everybody knows who*

You roleplay the event in which the PC gets replaced in the open, and the players agree to act as if they don't know what's happened. This is unlikely to be the best way to stage a replacement, as even the greatest role-player in the world could ask himself: "Would my character choose to be alone with Jacob in this situation? I know he's a doppelganger, but what would I decide if I didn't know? If I don't have my PC go with him, will the other players think I'm using out-of-character knowledge?"

This dilemma actually forces players to think things through from a metagaming perspective, rather than to simply think in character. Spare your players the fatigue of having to second-guess their PCs' decisions, lest knowledge of the doppelganger's identity skew their behavior. Besides, how much suspense or paranoia can really be generated if the players know who's the monster ... and, by extension, who isn't the creature, so can be trusted?

This option is not recommended for Ravenloft campaigns, unless you believe your players would strongly resent being surprised by the revealed identity of the doppelganger. (But then, why are they playing in a Gothic campaign, anyway?) In "Kick In The Door" campaigns that take place in other game-settings, it can be a time-saving alternative, particularly if the doppelganger is merely reconnoitering the PC party and will stay within the group only long enough to spy on, rob, and/or attack them.

B) *Everybody knows ... but not who*

A compromise between telling everyone and telling no one, this method means that you let the group know that something has replaced one of the party members: you just don't tell them with what sort of creature, or (more importantly) which PC it is. Perhaps the party members wake up to find the trail of a body which was dragged from their campsite, or a torn and bloodied item of a type that each of them owns (e.g. the matching cloaks the local villagers gave them out of gratitude, at the end of the last adventure). Someone in the group seems to have been replaced ... but who?

Out of character, you then hand out notes to each player in your group, informing them individually if their PC has been replaced or not. Assure the players that the absent PC is not permanently dead, and whoever it is will receive full experience points for their original character, but only if they successfully conceal their replacement from the rest of the players, until you tell them otherwise. Suddenly, the players can empathize with how their PCs feel, when a doppelganger is around: knowing that one - or, if you really want to stoke their paranoia, hint that it might be more than one - of their friends is secretly working on the villains' side! Make sure to collect the notes immediately after the players have read them, so that they (like their PCs) are left without any tangible proof they're not the ones now playing the doppelganger.

This method is best saved for players who are mature enough to handle keeping secrets from one another, and having secrets kept from them. Provided that's the case, it may well be the most exciting and puzzling of options, building suspense as the various PCs - and players! - fall under suspicion in turn, yet salving any potential hard feelings from players who might otherwise complain that the doppelganger just popped up out of nowhere.

For a novel twist to this approach, you could stage a one-shot adventure as a 'break' from their usual PCs, by handing everyone a note that their PC has been replaced, then seeing how long it takes the players to catch on that they're all doppelgangers. Next session, return the players' old characters, and let the PCs work together to escape from whatever captivity their duplicates (perhaps young doppelgangers whose talent for mimicry was being tested by their superiors) had stashed them away in. Or, just as nasty, hand

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them all notes saying they have not been replaced - i.e. the clues they found were a hoax or have been misinterpreted - and see how long it takes the players to accept that everyone else's PC is still the person they appear to be.

Finally, if you'd like to partake of this uncertainty for yourself, you can shuffle the notes that say who's been replaced and who hasn't, before distributing them. If even you aren't aware of who the doppelganger is, you can't be accused of playing favorites in choosing whom to replace, and your players will have less grounds to complain that you've taken them by surprise. After all, when the time comes for you to order the imposter to attack or otherwise reveal itself, you'll be surprised by who it is as well!

Doppelgangers and the Techniques of Terror

By DeepShadow

"Deception is a cruel act...

*It often has many players on different stages
that corrode the soul."*

- Donna A. Favors

While the basic toolbox of a Ravenloft DM (details, isolation, strangeness, and evil in control) has gone largely unchanged since the days of the Black Box, many of these tools merit special attention with a doppelganger villain. What follows is advice on how to apply these concepts to scenarios in which psychological horror - deception, suspicion, and the threat of losing one's identity or sanity - takes center stage, and the worst monsters lurk, not in the dark forest or under the bed, but behind the friendly smiles of one's own neighbors and companions ... or, worse yet, in the mirror.

Details: Faces in the Crowd

The details in the DM's descriptions are vital to the mood of the Ravenloft setting for three main reasons. First, detailed descriptions help players feel the emotional resonance of their characters' environment and resist the temptation to focus on the game mechanics. Second, frequent details allow a DM to scatter small hints throughout the course of the game without drawing unnecessary attention. Third and most importantly, careful word choice is the greatest tool a DM has for developing the critical mood of a Gothic game.

In a doppelganger scenario, details are often tricky. How can you impress your players with a detailed description of a creature that, by definition, isn't supposed to stand out? Physical characteristics of a doppelganger's human form are not always striking or worthy of attention, and even if they are, what's the point when they may disappear in a few minutes? DMs should be on the lookout for other critical details that can enhance the game in one of the ways above. These may be details about the creature apart from its appearance: habits, turns of phrase, or other giveaway "tells". They could be details about the location, the social milieu, or the weather, anything to give the players a sense of genuine presence in a real world.

Play a Village

Ten years ago, when I was setting up a game at a friend's house, some players were watching an anime as we waited for the others to arrive. It was a new show that none of us had seen before, so when Rick fired off that some guy in the background was destined to be a major character, we looked at him a little funny.

"He's conspicuously well-drawn," Rick said with a knowing smirk.

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He was right, and his comment became the new catchphrase of the gaming table. My players would fire this off whenever I delved into small details that they hadn't asked for, lingered on a description of one person in a crowded room, or had details ready to hand where I'd otherwise be making them up on the fly. It was a lesson I'd never forget, how my unconscious cues could steer them to metagaming shortcuts that none of us wanted.

In the same vein, playing a doppelganger often means playing a village, sometimes even a town or a city. This not only applies to the creature's false identities, but to the myriad other suspects that PCs may demand to know more about. If you don't have the information at hand, they will know this is a minor character, and metagaming will allow them to dismiss "faceless villager #6" in favor of the NPC with more detail in his description. You can downplay your descriptions of a doppelganger's guises, but the amount of work that you've put into this character is likely to betray you sooner or later.

Dungeon Master's Tips: Gothic Horror vs. Psychological Horror

For the most part, Ravenloft's particular brand of horror is steeped in the themes and tones of the Gothic fiction genre, especially those of dread and helplessness. As presented in this netbook, the doppelgangers of Ravenloft represent a detour into psychological horror, which features a slightly different slate of tones and themes. Helplessness is still a major issue, but it's skewed now, because the element of dread - that is, fear of the unknown and unseen - has been replaced with crippling self-doubt as to what is seen. The protagonist in a psychological thriller is less concerned with fighting the creature of darkness, and more with merely getting a good look at it, to see if it's really there at all.

This is why one of the greatest hallmarks of psychological horror is the untrustworthy narrator. As seen in Henry James's classic, *The Turn of the Screw*, the reader is drawn into a psychological guessing-game with the discovery that the narrator - sole source of information for the reader - may not be explaining things accurately. As terrifying events escalate, the reader is forced to wonder whether the narrator is truly being haunted, or has simply taken leave of her senses. In Steven Spielberg's cult classic film *Duel*, the protagonist spends a great deal of time trying to convince himself that the mysterious tractor-trailer rig following his car is doing so merely by coincidence. The "twist ending", an icon of psychological horror in film, follows through on this ambiguity, keeping viewers guessing what is true and what is merely the protagonist's imagination until the bitter end.

In a psychological horror scenario, DMs should do all they can to foster players' doubts about what their PCs are told, what they observe, or even what they remember or intuit, thus blurring the borders between what is real and what isn't. Between mind-reading, shapechanging, and fresh possibilities offered by this netbook's alchemical Paths of Lead, Silver and Copper, doppelgangers are particularly well-suited for scenarios in which the heroes' perceptions are manipulated. Other monsters appropriate to psychological horror themes include illusion-casters such as rakshasas and aboleths; beings which can appear and vanish mysteriously, like bakhna rakhna or sith; entities such as bastelli or ennui, that can penetrate and influence dreams; psionic opponents (human or monstrous) that assault PCs' brains or senses directly; and creatures that can subvert NPCs' loyalties en masse, via monstrous conversion (lebensdod, doppelganger plants) or physical or spiritual possession (sea spawn, carrionettes).

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For a little work, you can get a huge payoff by fleshing out more of the community. The hardest part in generating "instant NPCs" is names, so take time to assemble a "name bank": ten to fifteen local surnames, twenty to thirty first names each for males and females. Use reference books and websites with similar languages as well as the appropriate Gazetteer. Some name-generation programs like the 'Everchanging Book of Names' will generate lists of first names for a specific language, with blanks for age, alignment, stats and notes. Consult a 'baby name' website that lets you select language or nation of origin. If you can't get enough by using those, create masculine versions of feminine names and vice-versa. Repeating the more common first names is okay too, provided you keep who's who sorted out in your notes: there are thousands of "Johns" in most English-speaking cities in the real world, and uncertainty as to which "Piotr" or "Ingrid" a dying witness actually saw may come in handy later.

Once you have your name bank, create a list of about fifty NPCs, numbered for easy reference. Order them into family groups, assign jobs and a few details, but don't focus on one too far above the rest. Don't be afraid to have more than one small family that share the same surname; many communities have one or more "backbone" families that go back several generations. Let NPCs acquire uniqueness from your semi-random sprinklings of details, but don't be afraid to make judgment calls. Bring in "local color" that reflects the setting; if your doppelganger's territory is a city in Falkovnia, for example, consider making some of the families fatherless or orphaned due to the Dead Man's Campaign. Be sure to cover all of the community's linchpins: civic leaders, law enforcement, religious figures, and major businesspeople. Include a dozen or so workers for any major industries in town, and another half-dozen or so who are presently down on their luck, or even genuine lowlives. Finally, you should leave about a dozen totally undetailed, just in case you need to add another fisherman or forgot to give a name to the butler in scene 3.

As you construct your adventure, refer back to your list of NPCs and add notes. Who is the target of the doppelganger? What people are connected to that person, who might offer clues or notice discrepancies that force it to silence them? Who else would be a logical suspect in the creature's crimes? Who might it try to frame for its misdeeds? Who might be an accomplice? Who might implicate someone else out of personal spite, or to save themselves or those they love?

Scatter your clues throughout the community, adding more NPCs where you need to, and then turn your PCs loose. Like children in a funhouse, they will turn in all directions, as their players wait for something to seem "less real" so they can rule it out. As the PCs ask their questions, jot notes on your list so you know whom they have talked to, and about what. Stay a few steps ahead of them, making up details to answer unexpected questions, and planning what to say if they ask them again.

Later, during a mid-game pizza break or between game sessions, you can use these same notes to plot out the doppelganger's response to their inquiries. Who might it bribe or threaten? Who will it remove from the picture altogether? Whose suspicious thoughts will it overlook, that might hand the PCs the answer if they ask the right questions? What clues might its damage-control efforts create, as it tries to cover up evidence? At one point should it abandon its goals, steal whatever it can carry, and run for its life? Doppelgangers are interactive, dynamic adversaries who should be portrayed just as animatedly as PCs, so its responses should be as "well-drawn" as the rest.

Isolation: Trust No One

Isolation is arguably the central tool of the DM during a doppelganger hunt. As the community closes in around them, daring them to pick out the imposter, the logical thing to happen is for everyone to become a suspect. Instead of a mysterious enemy hidden in a sea of friends, it becomes a sea of potential enemies, the creature hiding behind all these pleasant faces together.

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Many PCs will try to isolate themselves, talking their plans over behind closed doors and glaring at anyone who so much as glances their way. With this kind of frosty reception, many NPCs will respond in kind, rapidly isolating the PCs from the community and any help it might provide.

If the PCs don't isolate themselves in short order, there are plenty of ways to nudge them along. It's hardly ever unreasonable to make them suspects in whatever crime they are investigating, and even if the authorities can be convinced of their innocence, there's also the court of public opinion. Moreover, doppelganger hunts have the unique element of recycled suspicion: a person who was found innocent ten minutes ago might be the imposter right now.

Isolation from the Community

Any member of the community who knows of the doppelganger's presence among them ought to become increasingly paranoid as the hunt draws out. One way to convey this buildup of popular fear is to have "paranoia stages" laid out for major NPCs, and a few notes on what the individual does as time passes and the imposter remains at large. Ignorance is bliss under this circumstance, so anyone who doesn't know of the creature stays at Stage 0. Once an NPC finds out, move them to Stage 1 and have them begin engaging in some prearranged, minor paranoid habits. These can vary widely depending on personality, culture and alignment; one person might simply speak more cautiously and pay more attention to who is around, while another might up and leave town without another word. NPCs who are used to intrigue and murders may not exhibit any outward sign at all, as the presence of a doppelganger merely adds another variable to the paranoia they already live under. Others may remain stoic and unaffected - or seem to do so - through the first few stages of paranoia, only to explode into desperate panic when the pressure grows too great.

NPCs should advance steadily in paranoia throughout the hunt. Each time the doppelganger slays another victim, roll a Fear save for each key NPC whom the terrible news reaches, to determine if they advance to their next stage of paranoia. A hunt that visibly continues - even without a body-count - should be alarming to many NPCs, and the DM may consider imposing additional Fear saves, every day or week, if the hunt is prolonged. Mysterious disappearances, such as fearful souls who leave town without an explanation, or deliberate acts of terror perpetuated by the imposter may also crank up the tension and trigger NPCs' Fear saves. As with the first stage, NPC responses to additional failed Fear saves should be determined by the DM, based on the individual.

The higher your NPCs' paranoia stage, the more fear will begin to skew their judgment, inciting them to shy away or lash out at anyone they suspect of being the imposter. In game-mechanical terms, an NPC's stage of paranoia is like an Outcast Rating modifier, in that it is added to the OR of anyone that NPC suspects of being the doppelganger. If the NPC becomes solidly convinced that a particular individual is the creature - for instance, due to evidence planted on that person by the real imposter - this OR modifier is doubled. As paranoia spreads, frightened townsfolk begin to view everyone they meet as a potential doppelganger ... and when they think they've finally found the monster which has terrorized them, they aren't likely to listen to the suspect's excuses before ganging up to strike down their fear's presumed source.

In an environment so highly-charged, the doppelganger could actually leave town, only to have the residents turn upon one another anyway, not realizing the menace is no longer a monster lurking among them, but the desperate acts their own fear spurs them to commit.

Isolation From The Party

Another joke around our gaming table claimed there must be a neon sign over each character's head, proclaiming whether they were a PC or an NPC, because the PCs gravitated towards and trusted one another for the flimsiest of reasons. In a doppelganger scenario, the DM should

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employ every trick to disabuse the players of this notion, and the best way to disabuse them of it is to abuse them. If doppelgangers are known for hiding behind pleasing faces, then the ones at the gaming table should be at the top of the list.

1. The Inside Job

Sometimes, circumstances allow for an extra player at the table. Perhaps a PC has just died, or a new player has joined the group before the corresponding character has joined the party. Such a rare circumstance offers the DM a tempting opportunity: let the extra player secretly play the villain, fighting the party from within under the guise of a newly-made PC. This is especially tempting with doppelgangers, whose talents make them ingratiating when they wish to be. DMs faced with this opportunity must consider a few things before venturing down an uncertain road.

A secret villain should be played by an experienced player, preferably someone who has been a DM and who understands the difference between crafting a story and advancing a character. The player must be privy to enough information to pursue the villain's agenda properly; if the villain knows secrets that would affect the player's next PC, then the DM should probably not hand over the NPC. Likewise, if the villain possesses extensive campaign information that would require long discussions to elucidate, it's best to stick with a more traditional approach. Finally, if the DM is seeking a specific resolution or is otherwise unprepared for the "wild cards" that may result from a dedicated player's improvisations, people will be happier if the DM retains full control rather than micromanages the villain's actions for the player.

If the DM decides the conditions are right and the player accepts the responsibility, the two should sit down before the game and discuss the villain's goals, personality, and resources. To avoid arousing suspicion from the other players, the two should concoct a suitable story for the doppelganger's "PC mask," preferably one with a small secret to justify the player and DM calling each other aside in the middle of the game. The timing and frequency of such interruptions may also arouse suspicion, so the two should also decide on some prearranged signals: the fewer, the better. For example, they might decide on a finger gesture for reading thoughts, a turn of phrase for glamering objects, a grimace when the player wants the DM to call the player aside, and a double shrug when the player cedes control to the DM during a party split. By covering a few standard bases like these, the DM and player can avoid excessive interruptions and catch up as necessary between games.

2. The Temp Job

More commonly, a doppelganger will impersonate a preexisting PC, and unless the original PC has been incapacitated or killed in secret, the impersonation will be a brief one intended to gain information, steal resources, or perhaps allow for a quick assassination attempt. If the story justifies such an impersonation in front of the other PCs, a "cut scene" will not do: the other players will demand the right to determine their PCs' reactions to the infiltration. To avoid the dead giveaway of taking over the character, the DM should pull the player aside and set up a "temp job," where the player plays the doppelganger while it impersonates his or her PC. Temp jobs do not require all the planning and secrecy of a secret villain, but they have their own set of complications. For starters, the player's sympathies are more likely to lie with the party and the long-range PC rather than the temporary villain role. Many players find it difficult not to betray the creature during the performance, even unconsciously, because their hearts are still set on the monster's defeat.

To win the loyalty of the player, the DM should consider offering an incentive ... payment for the service to be rendered, if you will. There are four main types of incentives to offer: experience points, character incentives, plot incentives and player incentives. The first needs no explanation; the DM merely decides on an XP reward for playing the creature during the encounter. Character incentives take the form of things desired by the PC: money, magic items, permission to choose their next spell or feat from a hot new game supplement, or perhaps less

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concrete rewards like a knighthood or removal of a price on the PC's head. Plot incentives occur when the DM allows the player to dictate a key plot element; perhaps the original PC will return to unmask the doppelganger if the other PCs fail, or perhaps the creature's hostages will be guaranteed to live for a specified amount of time. Finally, the DM should consider using player incentives: more pizza, a better seat at the table, a posthumous peek at the game-stats of a villain the party killed last week, or even a few dollars.

Whatever the incentive happens to be, it should be made clear that it is payment for the doppelganger's accomplishing a specific goal, and if the creature is unsuccessful, the player goes unpaid. The DM should be careful to make the goal tactical, and without context, or the player's motives may not realign as required. After discovering the underlying purpose of the goal, the player may recognize the incentive for what it really was: a bribe. The player has sold out to the villain, and such deals don't always end up on the square. A player who haggles or holds out for a larger bribe is only begging for a lesson in cruel irony, as subsequent events demonstrate that no amount of reward can make up for certain losses. A player who gets five bucks to pretend to steal a handful of fictional spell components from a made-up wizard may feel he made out like a bandit, until he realizes that the entire game depends on those spell components, and remembers that his real-life friends have an emotional stake in this game. Naturally, the DM should take care that this double-dealing enhances the treacherous mood of the game-session, without destroying the long-term relationships between the game's participants!

Like many great DM techniques, "temping" suffers from diminishing returns: the more it is used, the fewer results each use yields. Getting a lot of mileage out of it requires that the exchanges be relatively fair, and that any serious consequences of temp jobs are saved for the most dramatically appropriate moments. Remember, the best yields from temping come from the mood that it brings to the gaming table: divided loyalties, duplicity and paranoia. A little doubt sown around the table can go a long way toward helping the players portray their PCs as mistrustful and guarded about the pleasant faces around them, and that's what a doppelganger hunt is all about.

3. The Retroactive Temp Job

Perhaps the dirtiest trick in the DM toolkit, "retroactive temping" is a fallback technique when players have proven untrustworthy at temping, or have even deliberately sold the imposter out while playing it. In this case, simply note to yourself that a given PC is actually the doppelganger during the current encounter, and reveal the truth later. The real PC may arrive on the scene later without any knowledge of the encounter, or you may allow the creature to be unmasked all of a sudden, leaving the player to wonder where his actual character is. Either way, the player has been unwittingly playing the villain for several minutes without realizing it! This is enough to make most players request a return to traditional temping, where they at least get rewarded for the performance.

Retroactive temping should not usually be decided on after-the-fact, because those around the doppelganger should have the opportunity to notice that something is off. If the creature is there to steal something, make a roll whenever the PC is near the item in question, and allow the others their Spot checks. If the subterfuge is spotted, take control of its actions at that point, and let the actual PC show up later when convenient.

On the other hand, if the imposter can accomplish its goals quickly and with little need for dice-rolling, you might not inform the affected player immediately, but can let them in on the secret later when the PCs realize an act of spying, sabotage, or theft has taken place. In situations like this, you need not even decide who the doppelganger has replaced until it's time for it to take action: simply make the Disguise and Bluff checks for its impersonation when it first infiltrates the group, then retroactively select whichever PC happens to move into an ideal position to observe, steal, or attack as appropriate.

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The Murderer Within...

Perhaps the darkest danger of paranoia is the ruthlessness it inspires in those it afflicts. This plays into one of the fundamental differences between standard horror and psychological horror: the latter showcases the atrocities that ordinary people are capable of, when pushed by their circumstances. When a roomful of hostages is asked to choose one of their own number to die so that the others can go free, the greatest terror is not merely of death, but of the latent murderous streak the offer awakens in the souls of the hostages. Thus, psychological horror is less about the villain lurking outside your home or even the one standing next to you, and more about the one hidden in your own heart. In a psychological horror story, no one is truly safe from becoming a monster ... especially not those who complacently deny their own capacity for evil. If you deny something exists, after all, you can't protect yourself from it.

Not even PCs are immune to this. At some point, as the tension builds, an eerily-elegant solution is bound to suggest itself: kill all the suspects. Most of them are human, but a doppelganger can easily destroy as many lives and more, in the course of its life, not to mention the lives its future offspring will take one day. This solution is particularly tempting if some or all of the suspects aren't very likeable to begin with - the more the NPCs get on the PCs' nerves, the more palatable the easy solution will seem to your players - and more so, if the creature and its hunters share an enclosed, isolated space, such as a ship at sea.

Even the noblest of intentions can give rise to terrible outcomes, under pressure of fear. If a majority agrees the need is dire enough, they could choose to sink their ship and sacrifice themselves to prevent the creature on board from escaping when the vessel reaches harbor ... yet not everyone aboard is liable be willing to die for such a cause. Anyone who objects is bound to become the next suspect.

DM Tip: Covert Game-master Operations

When dealing with doppelgangers or other secretive monsters, it's often necessary to perform Spot or Sense Motive checks and other die-rolls in secret. While players expect a certain amount of die-throwing behind the DM screen, the sheer number of rolls which are needed to adjudicate a doppelganger scenario can easily give away the fact that far more behind-the-scenes activity than usual is going on.

A handy resource in such cases is a prepared list of die-roll results - mainly d20 rolls, plus a few for each of the other dice used in your games - that can be checked off as you use them. Rather than the sound of dice, players will have only the scratch of a pencil to clue them in: a good way to conduct things, when the doppelganger's undetected presence is essential to the plotline.

On the other hand, once the plot shifts to rooting out the doppelganger hidden within a crowd of NPCs - or PCs - it's often a good idea to resume obvious die-rolling, so that players will realize the monster lurks close by: their PCs just can't identify it! Like the audience who know the masked killer is there, yet are powerless to warn the characters on the movie screen, your players will bite their nails and fret over their PCs' being in the dark, yet have no way to alert their characters to the threat without being caught 'metagaming'.

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Strangeness: Somebody's Watching Me

The Black Box advised DMs to exaggerate the uncanny, creating an ambience of "oddness" that can lend uncertainty to character interactions, and accentuate the menace of the PCs' surroundings. In a doppelganger scenario, however, the bizarre is best understated, events and locales described in such prosaic, conventional terms that the player is left wondering whether there's anything odd at all. The sheer banality of everyday life can take on a tilted, suspenseful feeling when one knows there's a murderous imposter about. Alfred Hitchcock explained that the most suspenseful of situations would be to show an innocent conversation - perhaps a group of people playing cards - but to let the audience know that there was a bomb in the room, unsuspected by the idly-chatting players.

In keeping with Hitchcock's "Bomb Theory," suspense writers regularly keep their audiences two steps ahead of the characters, but in a role-playing game this can become problematic, as the audience and the characters are actively linked. The simplest way to separate these roles is with a cut scene: a non-interactive narrative related to the players, to increase drama and crank up the tension. In a scenario involving a doppelganger, such a cut scene might depict the creature posing as one of the heroes, perhaps arriving at the hero's residence to evacuate his family "to a safe house". Like the audience in a suspense movie, the player can scream and rant against the scene, yet is helpless to stop it. The imposter's identity is simultaneously obvious and obscured, but the horror of what it's doing is thrown into sharp relief, once juxtaposed with the innocence and trust of those whom it lures into peril with the hero's face.

Another trick in the same motif is to inform the players from time to time that the enemy is secretly watching their PCs. This is best used in public places and/or while the doppelganger is in a temporary "mask", so that your players don't get any solid hints as to the creature's primary identity for the purposes of this adventure. You can pass on this information as a quick aside or a narrative cut scene, providing them brief insight into the creature's thoughts and minor actions without revealing its exact location or a lasting description.

Let Them Lead

It's a funny thing about people: the harder that you scrutinize them, the more it appears that they are hiding something. The hardest part about tracking down a doppelganger is knowing when you are seeing a pattern of genuine clues, and when you are only imagining such a pattern in innocent events. Scatter tiny red herrings throughout your NPCs' interactions, as is appropriate for people who think of their own personal indiscretions while under investigation and hence, look a little guilty. If grilled for information about the doppelganger's activities, many NPCs will be more concerned with covering up their own dirty laundry than assisting the heroes: a goal which can easily be mistaken for guilt, or collusion with the monster's misdeeds, by suspicious heroes. Depending on how they are approached, even those who are blameless may resent and resist inquiries into their private lives, merely on principle. In an atmosphere of paranoia, their indignation may likewise be interpreted as proof of wrongdoing.

If someone has important information, consider what it is and what would make them talk. A business rival may have lots of information on one of the suspects, but the type of information is different from that held by the suspect's secret lover. Likewise, the method of getting each potential informant to talk will be totally different. Give the players clues as to each NPC's motives, but don't tell them whether they should attempt flattery or bribery, if they should roll Intimidate, Bluff, or Diplomacy. That's their decision to make, as the investigators.

If the PCs are having too easy a time of it, consider giving one or more of the NPCs a secret that is actually worth hiding. This option must be used sparingly, not because having such a secret is truly rare, but because most players have a hard time letting go of such plot-threads, once found. The key is to present them with a clear 'dead end', to prompt the players to look elsewhere. If the players discover that the son of a prominent family is secretly an infected werewolf, and the signs of imposture they found were part of a cover-up of his monthly incarcerations, let the infected werewolf offer them some crucial clue or

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extremely helpful item in exchange for keeping his secret. This gives players the feeling that their efforts have borne fruit, so that they can move on to other lines of investigation.

If you worry about giving away too many clues too soon, consider a "floating villain." Decide ahead of time how many NPCs the heroes will have to interview before they will encounter the doppelganger, and let the players 'choose' the doppelganger's false identity by the order in which their inquiries takes them from one NPC to the next. An advantage of this is that you can't accidentally betray a secret you don't know; it also means that you can choose how many role-playing encounters the players must go through, in the course of the adventure, ensuring that your game won't run too short or too long. Any clues and suspects they uncover which point elsewhere are retroactively declared red herrings, once they've 'chosen' the true culprit.

If the "floating villain" technique seems a little unfair to your players, you can always reverse your decision, choose an identity for the creature, and start giving them legitimate clues if they get frustrated. On the other hand, if the heroes should eliminate several suspects in short order, you can raise the number of encounters they need to complete, to ensure that they start to get properly tired and paranoid. (After all, the more irked and fearful you make them before they track it down, the more satisfying the doppelganger's eventual defeat will be!) Dropping hints about its malign agenda - as opposed to its current identity - can reassure flustered players that their PCs are making progress, even if the creature's disguise has yet to be 'chosen' by them.

If you fear tipping your players off once they finally do get to interview the doppelganger face to (false) face, consider simply letting them investigate a half-dozen suspects or so, then rolling a die to retroactively decide which one is the imposter. This definitely prevents you from betraying the creature's identity in error, but you may find yourself owing the players several clues, if you aren't careful! Prepare an innocent explanation for each clue you intend to present to the heroes, so those hints which had cast suspicion on NPCs who were not doppelgangers can be explained away, after the true culprit has been identified.

Evil In Control: Everywhere and Nowhere

A doppelganger has plenty of tools with which to pull the strings of would-be pursuers. While it may be one of the weakest of "Night's Legions", its inherent powers are tailor-made to spy upon its opponents and ferret out their secrets. Where other monsters' strength comes from Hit Dice or special powers, and much of a darklord's might comes from control of the Land itself, a doppelganger's power comes from deception, the cultivation of doubts, and - above all - from knowing exactly who and what it's up against, even as its foes blunder about in ignorance.

Round-the-Clock Surveillance

Between use of its gauging mode and covert observations made while disguised, an imposter can quickly identify which PC in a group is most vulnerable to its mind-reading, then target that PC with probing mode at every opportunity. If the weak-minded PC is being kept ignorant of the group's plans or is not intelligent enough to provide the information it desires, the doppelganger moves on to the next most susceptible PC, and so forth. Naturally, if the group confides in NPCs, the creature will include them in its eavesdropping campaign. Even dread or animal companions may become a target, as they are often neglected when players dream up ways to ward off mental observation. (Canny DMs should always be on the lookout for chances to turn an asset into a liability: doppelgangers certainly do!) As its detect thoughts ability can penetrate all but the stoutest walls, floors, or ceilings, the creature may prefer to remain entirely out of view - in an adjacent room perhaps, or on a different floor of a building - as it psychically monitors the party. That way, even if its prying is detected, PCs can't be sure of where it is hiding, or just what sort of mind-reader (a diviner? a fiend? an aberration?) was responsible.

Using this treasure-trove of information, the creature can then begin usurping control of the PCs' own lives, discrediting them in the eyes of NPCs and undermining their sense of security. A sly doppelganger might make brief visits to lone party members, in the borrowed faces of other PCs. Perhaps a PC wizard known to be absentminded drops by at another PC's home, to retrieve a pouch of spell components he had

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left there by accident. An hour later, an identical PC wizard comes calling to retrieve the exact same pouch, and insists that it wasn't him (or was it?) who'd visited earlier. A search of the second PC's home reveals that her own personal belongings have been tampered with as well, demonstrating how the creature dares to violate both characters' privacy and possessions, and does so with impunity. Moreover, once the nature of the trespasser is deduced, each and every PC who'd been alone with the imposter will fall under suspicion.

The eventual realization that the doppelganger knows their every move, and can do whatever it pleases with that knowledge (especially if it learns something that the PCs, themselves, would prefer to keep quiet) can potentially be much scarier than its mere physical threat. Taunting them with how it could exploit their most closely-kept secrets - be it by auctioning off a list of the sorcerer's spell-repertoire to the highest-bidding villain, or luring the fighter's secret sweetheart to his doom in her guise - can leave even high-level heroes, who could slaughter such an opponent face-to-face with ease, feeling helpless. Blackmail is the sneaky coward's great equalizer, and the cowardly, sneaky "Masters" are masters of this ploy.

In truth, a doppelganger scenario reverses the traditional Ravenloft monster-hunting sequence: one in which knowledge constitutes a hero's most precious weapon against evils that would otherwise be invincible. A shrewd imposter recognizes the PCs as a possible threat, researches their origin and powers, observes their capabilities in-the-field, and finally lures them into a position of weakness to be defeated: the very strategy Van Richten so often vouched for, from the other side of the fence! By carefully gathering, exploiting, and disseminating (dis)information, a doppelganger can maintain a slim edge over pursuers who could otherwise easily best it, if only they knew where to look.

Of course, mere survival shouldn't be the limit of a doppelganger villain's agenda: it also exploits its own knowledge of its foes, and controls what they know (or think they know) of itself, so as to turn their actions to serve its own ends. If they trust an NPC, the imposter can mimic that person to request aid in a project of its own; if it and the PCs share a mutual enemy, it can incriminate that foe to persuade the heroes to attack him or her rather than itself, perhaps killing two birds with one stone. As events progress and heroes begin to suspect its true nature, the creature might drop deliberate clues for PCs too thickheaded to notice things on its own timetable. With every such teasing trifle, the full extent to which the creature's machinations have danced their PCs around like marionettes should become painfully clear to the players.

Nary a Conspiracy

Even if a doppelganger is working alone, without clan-mates or collaborators, happenstance often seems to conspire against heroism in the Land of Mists. This can be particularly helpful to DMs, and demoralizing to PCs, when magic threatens to undermine a doppelganger-oriented scenario. The DM should be familiar with whatever methods the PCs use for hunting, and dream up twists of bad luck that ensure they don't make the pursuit too easy for the heroes. For every bloodhound, there's at least one kind of red herring. Lead paint (often used in shipbuilding) could be common enough in a seaport area to pose a nuisance if PCs scry for the creature. In rainy weather, running water might interfere with locate creature spells, especially if it causes flooding or excess runoff into ditches and streams. Cruel mischance shouldn't always bar the heroes from benefiting from their use of such magics - it's a class ability that spellcasters have every right to use - but if a scenario is in danger of ending too soon for everyone's satisfaction, a little hard luck can go a long way.

Be aware that doppelgangers are particularly alert to divination-blocking effects: if they can't use their own detect thoughts power to pierce a barrier, most realize they can also hide behind it to escape their enemies' detection spells. Nor should DMs forget that the PCs' own anti-mind-reading precautions can backfire: if the heroes are warded against detect thoughts, allies' divinations will have to penetrate those protections, just as hostile ones do. Other magics can also be foiled by circumstances, rather than bad luck. Scrying will fail if the caster unwittingly uses items from both the doppelganger and the person it is imitating to fix its location; true seeing never reveals a doppelganger's true appearance in Ravenloft, as Change Shape is a supernatural ability. In the latter instance, once again, the game-setting's essential nature directly resists making a hero's job too easy.

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Of course, the goal is to make the PCs' task grueling, but not impossible. One handy way to build frustration while keeping a game moving forward is with the judicious application of what I call the "Zeno Effect." In philosophy, Zeno argued that people never actually went anywhere, because first they would have to traverse half the desired distance, and before that they would have to go a quarter of the distance, and so forth. While the so-called "dichotomy paradox" is (of course) refuted by real-life experiences, it does have some bearing on the pursuit of in-game goals ... such as chasing down an elusive and murderous shapechanger.

The Zeno Effect happens when you allow a proposed action to yield only a fraction of the desired effect. If the players cast locate creature to find a doppelganger in the midst of a city, let them follow the lead for a few blocks ... and then have a gutter collapse a few yards up ahead, spilling water all over their path. When the caster has bypassed the area of spilled water, let him find a bearing again ... but he can't find his way through the maze of alleyways to get any closer to the creature. Moving along, he attempts to triangulate ... but the creature moves out of range. Based upon the triangulation, he finds the warehouse where the creature had been hiding ... but it's long gone, and there are six sets of footprints in the dust. The party's ranger begins tracking, one trail at a time....

As you may have guessed, the idea behind the Zeno Effect is to give the players a small reward for every effort, but not as much as they expect or want. This gives them a feeling that every bit of information they acquire is dearly won, and therefore precious. As they assemble these prized, fragmentary clues, they may grumble at the cost ... but they'll stay committed to seeing the hunt through, nevertheless, because giving up would mean they'd wasted all that effort. When they do find a sizable chunk of information - say, that the doppelganger from the warehouse has five quivering accomplices - it'll be all the more appreciated, too.

The Flip Side: It's Only A Game

The techniques I've explained here are powerful, but they must be used carefully for everyone's enjoyment. Players have their own solutions for a DM who abuses the position and authority, and most consist of never playing with that DM again. In adventures involving doppelgangers, even a well-meaning DM can cross the line if he or she doesn't pay close attention to the mood around the gaming table.

Sometimes DMs feel justified in fudging rolls to give the villain an edge, but the opposite has its advantages also. The "mind game" of a doppelganger-hunt should reward clever strategies, not just lucky die rolls. If players come up with a cunning way to expose and/or trap the imposter - physically, verbally, magically - consider "rolling it" behind the screen, then letting them succeed regardless of the roll. Players need to feel that their achievements are more than mere luck, and all too often, the dice destroy a good idea while they bless the random hit in combat. If a player proposes a good line of investigation and you haven't thought of that one in advance, give them a fair (or better) chance of discovering a clue, depending upon the cleverness of the idea.

If you catch yourself unintentionally stacking things in your villain's favor, try taking a stack of 3x5 cards and writing down as many mistakes - big or small - as you can think of, that the villain might make in minor encounters. Include DC's to uncover the clues left behind by its mistakes, and keep them generic enough to apply under a variety of circumstances. Choose or draw a card at appropriate moments, especially when players are getting confused or frustrated. If you create a generic "failure deck" for encounters with doppelgangers (or deceptive villains in general for that matter), be sure to remove those mistakes which are wildly out of character for your current doppelganger villain, before you use it in a particular game.

Mood Building

As a prelude to your game session or while waiting for late players, play the party game "Mafia" with your group to get into the mood of paranoia. If your group really enjoys the game, consider the card game "Are You A Werewolf?" created by Looney Labs.

Adventure Hooks

"I invite any sort of myths because I like the stooges and doppelgangers and doubles out there. I feel protected behind all these things. Let them blossom! I do not plant them, I do not throw out the seeds."

- Werner Herzog

- The wayward son of a wealthy landowner returns to the family estate, deeply apologetic for the dispute with his father which had led him to leave. While outwardly pleased by his prodigal heir's reappearance, the father is suspicious that his son may have come home purely to escape debts or other disgraceful acts committed while away. Hired to investigate the son's activities, the PCs instead find the landowner's real son, still living in another city. Can the heroes get back to their employer in time to save his household from a doppelganger-clan's mass assumption?
- A doppelganger has replaced a local noble without reading his mind thoroughly, and discovered too late he was a member of a secret evil organization. Now it has to act as one of them, without knowing any of the secret rituals, pass-phrases and handshakes, and the other members are growing suspicious. Its only hope is to have the PCs eradicate the organization for it; obviously, they mustn't discover that the one who'd hired them is part of the organization, or it will have to dispose of them as well.
- In a crime-plagued city, two factions of smugglers are on the verge of open warfare, as each suspects the other of absconding with a shipment of opium in transit to the black market. Both of the factions seek outside help to retrieve the missing drugs or destroy the other; the city watch likewise searches for the opium-thieves, to keep the drug off the street and to avert the impending gang war. The real culprit is a doppelganger drug-addict, recently disowned by its clan for its out-of-control cravings, which posed as the opium's intended recipient and took possession to feed its vile habit.
- The PCs encounter a mournful ghost one eerie night, which describes its recent, ghastly death and begs their help in bringing its murderer to justice. The party soon learns of an NPC who perfectly matches the ghost's description of its killer; however, they find only a second ghost at the suspect's home: the earlier victim of a roving doppelganger, which wore one victim's form to attack another. Now, the heroes must find the person who shares the first ghost's living appearance, before the imposter can kill again.
- A famous local adventurer returns alone from a dangerous mission in the woods, claiming that a group of werebeasts ambushed him and his companions, and only he escaped alive. In fact, the adventurer has been replaced by a doppelganger, whose hidden agenda is to have its previous employers (the werebeasts) killed, and to replace someone important while the town's protectors are distracted by the external threat.
- Having escaped from a mad surgeon's laboratory, a doppelganger finds that its shapechanging ability has been impaired by surgical damage to its metamorphosis gland. At first, it tries to coerce a physician (a friend of the PCs) into "curing" it; later, as exhaustion saps its wits, the increasingly-desperate creature resorts to murdering humans and washing itself in the blood, in accordance with an obscure doppelganger superstition that this might help it to adopt the slain victims' forms.

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- Mysterious letters begin arriving at the PCs' urban address, all in the same handwriting. Each one tells them the identity of a monstrous creature that preys upon the community. While it appears that the source of the letters is working for the good of the city, it is actually a doppelganger out to eliminate these more-aggressive monsters, so it can procreate a new clan without interference from rival predators.
- A noble has suddenly announced the marriage of his only daughter to a rich stranger. Despite the fact her future husband seems eager to please her in every way, the girl feels something is wrong with him: he seems to have some strange influence over her father, as if the stranger were the more important of the two. She asks the PCs to discreetly gather some information about her betrothed. Of course, the man is a doppelganger who will read what she has done from her mind, and will send someone to kill the PCs before they discover too much.
- An assassin-for-hire known only as "the Clockmaker" stalks the Core, armed with a terrifying new weapon: explosives. This shadowy figure levels whole houses with kegs of gunpowder to get at a target, yet none have ever seen how the bomber smuggles these deadly devices into secured locations. In truth, it doesn't do so: the Clockmaker, a doppelganger Exile that resides in Lamordia between jobs, is a Glamer-craft specialist and mechanical tinkerer, shaping and transmuting its deadly munitions on-site. Any PCs who can figure out the secret of the deadly imposter's methods and put an end to its crimes will be well rewarded, whether by law enforcement, its victims' grieving survivors, or rival assassins outraged at how the Clockmaker's unorthodox methods are escalating the hazards of their profession.
- An aging doppelganger Clan Leader, weary of politics and planning to retire, must test its subordinates' capabilities and choose which should inherit its power. It challenges its potential heirs to dispose of and replace foreign visitors to Paridon - the more powerful, the better - to demonstrate their competence and cunning. As it happens, the PCs are some of the most formidable foreigners currently in town...
- A guard captain is discovered to be a shape-shifting monster and immediately killed. But why would anyone try to infiltrate the calm village where the PCs live? Is there some dark force at work? Perhaps the captain was not the only imposter? And who killed it before it could be properly interrogated? Could this be connected with the prominent personality who is expected to visit the community soon?
- Pottery shops throughout Paridon are being vandalized, the owners and their families terrorized. After one such incident, some of the vandal's blood is left behind on a piece of broken stoneware; tests prove it to be plasm from a doppelganger. Oddly, one potter's shop has been left completely untouched. Is he the imposter, or an innocent decoy set up to take the blame for its crimes? The potter's family history reveals the truth: as a youth, he was the faithful protector of a young sibling who later 'ran away'. Now an adult doppelganger of some prominence in its clan, the former "sibling" seeks to repay its faux-brother's past support by eliminating his business rivals.

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Magic

True to their natures as parasites, doppelgangers usually steal existing magical items rather than craft them. Even the few which have spellcasting abilities rarely select Item Creation feats; more often, they appropriate magic items from people they replace, pay or coerce quislings to fabricate them to order, or adopt temporary "masks" to commission the creation of items they can't acquire by any other means. Even Sodo's trademark possessions, the Fang of the Nosferatu and his timed scarabs of death (statistics in *Shadow of the Knife*) were originally forged by human hands.

That being said, doppelgangers of Ravenloft have developed two item qualities from which they - and they alone - can benefit. More than a few heroes who have claimed enchanted items from slain imposters' gear never suspect their new treasures boast additional magic properties.

QuickGlamer

Price: +1500 gp (armor) or +750 gp (other)

Property: Special

Caster Level: 5th (armor) or 3rd (other)

Aura: Faint; (DC 17) transmutation and illusion

Activation: -

Curiously, this item's color seems to shift a bit as you watch, perhaps as a trick of the light.

Unusual in that it can be applied to any "worn" magical item, from rings to full plate armor, this item quality is often added to existing magic wares which pass into doppelganger hands. Only the wealthiest Masters can splurge on having this largely-cosmetic quality added to their equipment, so low-ranking and poor imposters tend to dismiss it as a snobbish extravagance of the pampered elite.

An item with the Quickglamer quality that is worn by a dread doppelganger instantly changes in both form and appearance, if its wearer so wishes, whenever the creature employs its Change Shape power. Aside from the fact that this alteration occurs simultaneously with Change Shape, rather than as a separate action, the Quickglamer item's transformation functions no differently from any other use of the Glamer power.

If a dread doppelganger wears three or more Quickglamer items at a time, the effects of these multiple items build upon one another, extending this instantaneous use of Glamer to all of its worn possessions, magical or otherwise. Thus, a Master so-equipped need not take a full-round action to transform its entire outfit, but can do so simultaneously with Change Shape.

Prerequisites: Craft Magic Arms and Armor (armor), Forge Ring (rings), or Craft Wondrous Item (other worn items); Apprentice or better on the Path of Silver.

Warpslayer

Price: +1 bonus

Property: Melee weapon

Caster Level: 9th

Aura: Moderate; (DC 20) transmutation

Activation: -

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This weapon's grip is decorated with intricate, twisting lines that weave into patterns reminiscent of faces, eyes closed as if in repose or death. More delicate lines curl from one face to the next, linking them together in series.

Second only to the Fang of the Nosferatu on every Zherisian imposter's wish-list, a weapon that bears the Warpslayer quality offers an ideal solution to the bothersome tasks of body-disposal and of staging a lapsed identity's demise. In the hands of a doppelganger wielder (not necessarily a dread doppelganger), such weapons cause a slain victim's corpse to transform, five rounds after death, into an exact physical duplicate of the shape which was worn by the doppelganger at the moment it slew them.

Any Small or Medium humanoid or monstrous humanoid corpse may be affected this way. The cadaver's transformation lasts for one week - long enough for the body to be buried, in most cultures - at which point the corpse reverts to its true appearance. No telltale aura of transmutation lingers over the affected body, but other divinations (e.g. true seeing) reveal the truth, and the effect may be dispelled. If it is restored to life, the corpse regains its prior appearance immediately; if the victim revives as some type of corporeal undead, its body remains transmuted until a week after being slain by the doppelganger, at which point it reverts to its original shape.

The doppelganger may kill a victim while in a false guise, in which case the body will transform to resemble this adopted shape - thus, sending hunters off on a false lead - or it may do so in its native form, to trick any pursuers who find the 'doppelganger corpse' into thinking it slain by some other agency. The imposter need not battle the intended victim alone for this postmortem transformation to occur, nor limit itself solely to that weapon's attacks, so long as the fatal blow (whether a melee strike or a coup de grace) is inflicted by the Warpslayer weapon. Only the forms of humanoids or the imposter's natural form may be imposed on a slain corpse; if the doppelganger is in a non-humanoid shape (e.g. when polymorphed or using a salient ability of the Path of Tin) at the time it fells its victim, the Warpslayer effect on that victim's body will not occur. The transformation's delayed onset allows the imposter time to strip the corpse of clothing or other items which might be damaged, in case the final form is larger than the original.

Only a bare handful of Warpslayer weapons have been crafted over the centuries, despite their tremendous utility and relative cheapness, as very few doppelgangers who pursue the Path of Tin to its Apogee have any interest in magic, and fewer still, in item-crafting. Most such weapons that do exist are lightweight, easily-concealed items such as stilettos, sword-canes, hand crossbows or garrotes, and are treasured possessions of elite Clan Leaders, Lodge officers, or members of the Vanguard.

Prerequisites: Craft Magic Arms and Armor, baleful polymorph, Nystul's magic aura, Master on the Path of Tin.

And for the heroes, the following weapon quality was recently developed by Zherisia's human wizards to battle the city's doppelganger infestation. It has since proven useful against other shapechanging monsters:

Formfixing

Price: +2 bonus

Property: Weapon

Caster Level: 9th

Aura: Moderate; (DC 20) abjuration

Activation: -

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This weapon is decorated with a motif of nails, shackles, and a large insignia of a closed padlock.

On a critical hit, a creature struck by a Formfixing weapon must succeed on a Will save (DC 17) or revert to its natural form, assuming it isn't already in that shape. It must remain in its true form for three rounds at a minimum, or one round per hit point of damage inflicted by the attack, whichever is higher. Polymorph-type spells, supernatural or extraordinary shapechanging (Alternate Form, Change Shape, Minor Change Shape, etc), or related innate abilities such as a dread troll's variations in height, can all be negated in this fashion. Illusionary effects like disguise self aren't undone by a Formfixing weapon, nor does it expose monsters (such as vampires) which pass for human due to their natural shapes' physical resemblance to humans.

Being forced into its true form is not harmful to the affected creature, although the circumstances that it finds itself in as a consequence might be (e.g. a wildshaped druid forced into her true shape while flying in eagle form). If reversion to true form would place the target in immediate danger from its physical environment - not counting nearby creatures who will attack it if exposed - it receives a +4 bonus to its Will save. As the target's reversion is involuntary and instantaneous, it is not healed of any damage when it changes, even if the subject would otherwise regain hit points when it returns to its native shape.

An affected creature need not be of the shapechanger subtype to be affected; however, targets that are of this subtype suffer a -2 penalty on their Will saves to resist the Formfixing effect. As this is an abjuration effect rather than transmutation, an affected shapechanger is unable to shake off the effects of Formfixing as it could, a polymorph-type spell effect.

Formfixing cannot negate permanent transfigurations, such as conversion into a broken one, nor can it nullify changes incurred through failed Powers checks. If the affected creature had been temporarily forced into another shape against its will, such as by a conditional curse, the weapon restores it to its true shape, but the subject reverts to the other shape when the Formfixing special quality's effect expires.

Prerequisites: Craft Arms and Armor, reveal true form

Cost to Create: Varies

Reveal True Form - Revisited

Introduced in the Zherisia Survey, this spell, as it was originally written, has an unfortunate defect ... one that makes it useless against the very dread doppelgangers it was designed to expose! In the description on p. 117 of that netbook, the phrase "alternate form ability" should be replaced with "Alternate Form, Change Shape, or Minor Change Shape ability", both in the Target listing and in the first two paragraphs of the spell description.

This is an official correction to the Zherisia Survey.

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And finally, an item both doppelgangers and other races can benefit from:

Writs of Communication

Price (Item Level): 5,000 gp + 500 per additional scroll (9th)

Body Slot: - (held)

Caster Level: 9th

Aura: Moderate: (DC 19) evocation

Activation: Full-round (manipulation)

Weight: -

The writing on this thick, creamy scroll glitters with a golden inner light, then slowly fades away.

Writs of communication, much in demand among businessmen, generals, conspirators and spies, permit written contact across great distances, even between separate Mist-bound regions. When something is written on one scroll of a set, the same writing appears on all other scrolls which are part of the same set. This writing disappears after twenty-four hours, allowing the scrolls to be re-used. The only real limit on the amount of information that is sent is how small one's writing is. Anything that can be written or drawn on the scroll is transmitted, but magical markings (such as a sepia snake sigil or a spell inscribed with the Scribe Scroll feat) cannot be transferred.

Regardless of what medium is used to write with, a message appears on the receiving scroll(s) in black ink. Writing transferred from one writ of communication to another retains its appearance, including distinctive quirks of individual handwriting. A writer cannot pick and choose which linked writs from a set will receive the written information: either all of them receive the message, or none do.

Writs are usually created in sets of four, linked in two sets of two. Their owner can lend one writ from each set of two to another person, then use the first pair to send the recipient a message, and the second to receive his or her reply. Additional scrolls, enchanted in the same manner, may be added to a set of linked writs of communication by rolling them up inside an existing writ for 24 hours. Attuned writs can be re-assigned to other sets in the same way. A writ with no linked counterpart(s) remaining in its set becomes non-functional until it is linked to another.

Across planar and domain boundaries, writs are less reliable, with a flat 5% chance of failure for any given message. If a message is blocked, the writing on the sender's scroll spreads out like an ink blot, covering the page and rendering the sending writ unusable and illegible for twenty-four hours. Writs' messages cannot cross a closed domain border, failing as described above.

Prerequisites: Craft Wondrous Item, sending, CuL 4.

Cost to Create: 2,500 gp + 250 gp per scroll; 200 xp + 20 xp per scroll; 3 days + 1 day per two scrolls

New Monster

Gaunt

The caliban's grotesque body twists and shifts, lopsided facial features melting away as distorted limbs unfold. At first, as ash-gray hide displaces blemished skin, you believe you know what to expect ... but the gangling limbs keep on unfolding, longer and spindlier than any doppelganger's. The warped, nearly featureless face rises up, head and shoulders above a tall man's. The creature's toothless, asymmetrical mouth lolls open, revealing a whirlpool tunnel of "throat" lined in churning scarlet fluid, and the attenuated trio of fingers on each hand spread wide, tipped by curved, needle-sharp spines.



Gaunt

CR 7:

Always NE Large aberration (shapechanger)

Init: +7; **Senses** Listen +10, Spot +9, darkvision 60', detect thoughts (DC 17)

Aura: maddening thoughts (60')

Languages: same as doppelganger parents; true form can gesture but not speak

Outcast Rating: 9 if exposed, 5 as caliban

AC: 19, touch 12, flat-footed 16

(-1 size, +3 Dex, +7 natural; blood armor)

Miss Chance: 20%

hp: 56 (8 HD)

Immune: sleep, charm, Hypnosis skill

Resist: 75% chance to ignore extra critical hit or sneak attack damage; shed polymorph effects

Fort: +7, **Ref** +5, **Will** +8

Weakness: dying by inches

Speed: 50 ft. (10 squares), climb 20 ft.

Melee: 2 claws +12 (1d6+7)

Space: 10 ft.; Reach 10 ft.

Base Atk: +6; **Grp** +17

Atk Options: blood/plasm drain, improved grab

Special Actions: call to madness, Path absorption

Running Doppelgangers

Abilities: Str 24, Dex 16, Con 21, Int 13, Wis 15, Cha 16

SQ: blood armor, blurred edges, caliban shapechange, detect thoughts, immune to sleep & charm, moderate fortification, shapechanger traits

Feats : Alertness, Combat Reflexes, Improved Initiative, Squeeze ^{B†}

[† - New feat; see p. 77]

Skills: Bluff +7*, Climb +15*, Disguise +7*, Escape Artist +7*, Hide +10, Listen +10, Move Silently +14, Spot +9

Aura of Maddening Thoughts (Su): A gaunt radiates a psychic aura of twisted, aberrant thoughts in a 60' radius around its head. Any creature entering that radius with active detect thoughts, whether by innate power or spell effect, is subject to a Madness save (DC 16) due to direct exposure to its alien psyche. Doppelgangers are susceptible when their detect thoughts power is in either gauging or probing mode, and can succumb even if the latter mode is directed towards a target other than the gaunt. A creature that successfully saves against Madness cannot be affected by that same gaunt's aura for 24 hours. The save DC is Wisdom-based.

The aura of a gaunt can penetrate common barriers in the same manner as detection spells, but it is blocked by three feet of wood or dirt, one foot of stone, one inch of common metal or a thin coating of either lead or gold. The maddening aura's effect is a mind-affecting one; the gaunt cannot consciously suppress this, although it ceases to radiate its aura while unconscious.

Blood Armor (Ex): Whenever a gaunt takes slashing damage, the living plasm which spills from its wound spreads across its surface and hardens into armor. This protective coating provides an armor bonus to AC equal to one-half the number of hit points of slashing damage it suffered. Multiple slashing wounds' armor bonuses do not stack; only the highest such bonus applies.

Blood armor is temporary, shattering into spilled drops of inert plasm after five minutes' time. The coating of hardened blood remains in place until then, even if the injury which initially caused it to form is later healed via magic or the gaunt's Blood / Plasm Drain ability.

A gaunt may bleed itself to armor its skin in preparation for battle, up to a maximum armor bonus of +13 (half its highest possible claw damage on a critical hit).

Blood / Plasm Drain (Ex): Hollow spikes at the tips of a gaunt's fingers allow it to drain the blood from its opponents, bolstering its own vigor. To do this, the gaunt must successfully grapple and pin its enemy. Each round it maintains a pin, it deals 1d4 points of Constitution drain, while gaining 3 hp for itself. Hit points acquired by draining blood are treated as normal healing when counted against its daily hit point loss (see below), else they are temporary.

If the gaunt's opponent is a dread doppelganger, it receives 5 hit points per successful draining of doppelganger plasm instead of 3, and may utilize its Path absorption special action. All hit points gained from plasm-draining count as normal healing rather than temporary.

People killed by a gaunt's drain attack are often misidentified as the victims of a vampire, or perhaps of a stirge flock. The Knowledge check DC (religion or nature) to tell that such a victim was not killed by a vampire is 15, while the DC (arcana or nature) to distinguish the wounds of a gaunt's finger-spikes from those of a stirge's proboscis is 25.

Blurred Edges (Su): Using its own aberrant manifestation of the doppelganger's Glamer ability, a gaunt can warp and churn the very air around it, causing its body's edges to appear blurred via refraction of light. Opponents' attacks have a 20% miss chance against the gaunt so long as it employs this ability, as per the blur spell.

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The gaunt may use this power three times in a day, maintaining it without need for concentration for up to an hour at a time. It cannot benefit from this ability in the absence of light. It takes a move action to activate or deactivate the Blurred Edges power.

Caliban Shapechange (Su): Like a true doppelganger, a gaunt can change its shape to resemble a Medium or Small humanoid. Unlike its parents, the shapes which it assumes are always severely distorted and deformed, like a "caliban version" of whomsoever it sought to emulate. Viewing a gaunt's horribly-warped attempt to imitate one's self or a loved one is grounds for a DC 15 Horror save, with a circumstance bonus to the save if the viewer and/or the person being mimicked was already a caliban, Twisted, or otherwise physically distorted.

Gaunts lack sufficient control over their shapechanging to successfully imitate any specific individual - not even a real caliban - but may adopt a caliban-like guise to conceal their true nature. When in caliban form, a gaunt loses both its natural weapons and Large size, but retains the free use of its other extraordinary or supernatural abilities and feats. It also gains the ability to speak.

Changing to or from caliban form is a standard action, useable at will.

Call To Madness (Su): Once per day, a gaunt can unleash an eerie, gurgling groan from its throat which can be heard up to 500' away. Any creature currently suffering from a Madness effect that hears the gaunt's call must pass a Will save (DC 17), or be irresistibly drawn toward the source of this unearthly sound. If the insane creature was initially driven mad by exposure to the gaunt's aura, it suffers a -4 circumstance penalty on its Will save. The save DC is Charisma-based.

If prevented from heeding the gaunt's call, an affected being will keep trying to follow the sound to its origin until 24 hours pass. Affected subjects that successfully reach the calling gaunt's location react to it as if subject to the "Fascination" Horror effect, regarding the aberration as an all-powerful master and slavishly complying with its every demand. Removing an affected being from the gaunt's presence for 24 hours will negate this effect; their servile state also ends immediately if the gaunt is slain.

An insane creature drawn to serve a gaunt will not obey self-destructive orders, unless the creature in question happens to suffer from the "Suicidal Thoughts" Madness effect. The subservient subject does, however, fight viciously to protect the gaunt, or to incapacitate other Fascinated minions so the gaunt can feed upon them. A mad creature which is called to serve a gaunt ignores the aberration's OR penalty to social skill checks.

Call To Madness is a sonic, mind-affecting effect which requires a full-round action.

Detect Thoughts (Su): A gaunt possesses the same detect thoughts power as a true doppelganger, with the same three modes of operation and a similar area of effect, save DC, etc. Having one's thoughts read by a gaunt doesn't impose a Madness save, provided the contact is one-way. A gaunt can easily distinguish the thoughts of a doppelganger from those of other races, no matter how cunningly veiled.

Doppelganger Heritage (Ex): Although technically an aberration, a gaunt is treated as a doppelganger for most game mechanics related to race. For example, a ranger who receives a favored enemy bonus vs. monstrous humanoids receives that bonus against a gaunt, and Knowledge (nature) is the correct skill to retrieve what-little information is known about their kind. Gaunts are free to select monstrous feats that have "doppelganger (any)" as a prerequisite.

For Madness saves incurred by mental contact, a gaunt is treated as an aberration.

Dying By Inches: Lacking even the most rudimentary of internal organs, a gaunt is incapable of deriving any nourishment from food or drink, or eliminating metabolic wastes from its tissues. Only taking in the clean, nutrient-bearing blood of others can stave off its inexorable death from malnutrition and the slow buildup of toxins in its plasm.

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For the first month of its life, a gaunt automatically takes 3 hit points of damage every 24 hours, with no saving throw. This hit point loss accelerates to 3 hp every 12 hours (6 hp/day in total) in its second month, 3 hp per eight hours (9 hp/day total) in its third, and so on, until the creature either expires from the cumulative loss or is slain.

This variety of damage can be cured by a gaunt's Blood / Plasm Drain ability, but not magic healing or rest. As months pass and its rate of decline accelerates, the gaunt's attempts to hold off its inevitable demise drive it to ever-more-desperate acts of mayhem.

Moderate Fortification (Ex): With no visceral organs or blood vessels, a gaunt is 75% immune to critical hits and sneak attacks, exactly as if it had the Moderate Fortification armor quality. Note that this benefit takes effect before its Blood Armor ability is applied.

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, a gaunt must hit the same opponent with both claw attacks. It can then try to start a grapple as a free action, without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it successfully pins its foe, it can use its Blood / Plasm Drain ability against the pinned target.

Path Absorption (Su): If a gaunt drains the plasm of a dread doppelganger with one or more alchemical Path abilities, it acquires temporary use of one of that doppelganger's salient abilities. The potency of the acquired ability depends on how many rounds of Plasm Drain attacks the gaunt has made against the doppelganger: one round of draining lets it absorb an Apprentice-level salient ability, two rounds lets it absorb a Journeyman-level ability, and three or more rounds of Drain allows it to absorb a Smith-level ability. Master-level salient abilities cannot be absorbed in this fashion.

If more than one salient ability is available to choose from, the gaunt may select which of its victim's abilities to absorb. Path abilities absorbed last for one day per Constitution point the gaunt drained from the doppelganger in question. Should its victim survive the attack, the doppelganger retains its own use of the ability the gaunt absorbed, unless (in the case of the Path of Quicksilver) its reduced Constitution denies it access to that power.

Gaining initial access to a Path ability absorbed from a doppelganger's plasm requires a full-round action by the gaunt, as it assimilates the new power. Once accessed, the gaunt may utilize the power exactly as would the doppelganger it absorbed the ability from, even if it lacks the power's prerequisites (HD, ability bonus, other powers from the same Path).

A gaunt can possess no more than three salient Path abilities at a time. If it attempts to absorb a fourth power, it must forfeit one of the three it already has. If any of the three are of the Path opposed to the one it is absorbing, it must give up the opposed power; thus, if a gaunt with powers from the Paths of Lead, Silver and Copper wishes to absorb an ability from the Path of Iron, it must forfeit its Copper Path ability. Otherwise, it may choose what power it will give up in exchange for the new one.

Skills: A gaunt receives a +4 racial bonus on Bluff*, Disguise, and Escape Artist checks and a +8 racial bonus on Climb checks.

*When using its Caliban Shapechange ability, a gaunt gains a +10 circumstance bonus on Disguise checks to pass for a caliban. If it can read a subject's thoughts, it receives an additional +4 circumstance bonus on its Bluff, Disguise, and Gather Information checks made against that subject. A gaunt may Take 10 on Climb checks; it retains its usual Dex bonus to AC while climbing, and opponents receive no circumstance bonus to attacks against a climbing gaunt.

Gaunts are the product of unwitting or forbidden unions between two dread doppelgangers, which normally interbreed with humanoids rather than their own kind. Lacking a humanoid parent's anatomical template on which to pattern its visceral organs and other vitals, the

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offspring of such a pairing is neither a doppelganger, nor even a monstrous humanoid like its parents, but a distorted, mute aberration: one which is able to survive (usually briefly) only by replenishing its plasm with other beings' body fluids.

As freakish creatures lacking either self-restraint or the ability to pass for human, gaunts have no place in doppelganger society; indeed, their parent-race is also their prey of choice. Accordingly, Sodo and the chieftains who came before him have ruthlessly suppressed every inkling of attraction or affection between dread doppelgangers, to a point where mating amongst themselves is regarded as utterly perverted and repellant by most. Whole generations of men and doppelgangers can pass in which gaunts are no more than an obscure, sordid legend, yet the possibility of their conception - usually involving imposters who fall prey to amnesia, subsumption, or other Madness effects that render them ignorant of their own nature - remains a grisly reality.

Strategies and Tactics

Freakish mockeries of doppelgangers as doppelgangers are of men, a gaunt possesses powers recapitulating the supernatural abilities of its parent-race, including those its antecedents only acquire through alchemical means. All of these powers are twisted and abnormal, such that gaunts' assumed shapes (Tin) are malformed and grotesque; their psychic gifts foment insanity in other mind-readers (Lead) and beguile none but the mad (Copper); their Glamer (Silver) and plasm (Iron) grant these already-formidable creatures a distorted variety of protection; and their gluttonous appetites (Quicksilver) are solely for the life-fluids of other beings.

Gaunts are predators first and foremost, dependent upon their blood-draining ability to stave off the ever-accelerating deterioration of their tissues. Able to summon the deranged to its service, a gaunt far prefers to subsist on compliant lunatics or captives delivered to it clutches by fascinated minions; nevertheless, to sate its growing needs and elude doppelgangers' and heroes' efforts to hunt it down, each gaunt must inevitably fight for its survival. As gaunts are generally born only by a wild stroke of coincidence, it is unknown if two gaunts would cooperate, or fight: to date, no case is known where more than one of these misbegotten creatures has existed at a time.

Gaunts use hit-and-run tactics, harassing opponents for a few rounds at a time and then fleeing before they can suffer serious damage. Given a chance, a gaunt always seeks to drag one of its living opponents away as food, commonly escaping its pursuers by clambering up sheer walls and fleeing across the rooftops of Paridon. If expecting serious opposition, a gaunt can wound itself to build up a thick layer of Blood Armor, then feed off its captives or servants to restore itself to full hit points, prior to combat. In broad daylight, gaunts prefer to hide in caliban form while their mad minions fight for them. Only at night, when it is certain there are no witnesses nearby, or if it is cornered will a gaunt assume its true shape to fight or to feed.

Ecology

Gaunts lurk in noisome alleys or abandoned buildings, adopting their caliban guises much of the time and dressing in the ragged clothing of street beggars or others on whom they feed. Although capable of living on the blood of animals, a gaunt's thirst cannot readily be assuaged with meager meals of Tiny or smaller prey; aside from the occasional attack upon a carriage-horse or large dog, humans and true calibans make up their staple diet, with doppelganger plasm constituting a rare and savored treat. A gaunt seldom survives for very long, but its appetites make it a deadly threat to innocents and doppelgangers while it lasts, and the insanity-spreading effects of its aura imperil the imposter-race's social order, even as its hunger threatens lives.

A gaunt shares the thick, glistening gray hide of a true doppelganger, but its limbs and torso are much more elongated and scrawny - almost spider-like in their attenuation and movements - than those of its parent-race. It has an unnaturally-narrow waist and tapered chest, malformed

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slab-like feet devoid of digits, and stunted hands, each with three finger tipped by sickle-curved, blood-draining spines. The face of a gaunt has a caved-in, half-melted look to it; the cranium is often lopsided, the all-black eyes are situated unevenly, and the mouth hangs open, lipless and slack. Ears and nostrils are rudimentary buds and slashes, and its entire body is as bereft of hair or gender as that of the imposters which erroneously spawned it.

No teeth, tongue, or throat are visible inside a gaunt's lolling mouth, only a whirlpool of the animated plasm that fills its body cavities, in the absence of blood vessels or internal organs. This fluid - bright scarlet when fresh, darkening to maroon or even black when it requires replenishment - flows under its own power to the muscles, cartilaginous skeleton, nervous system and skin, and fills the interior void of its chest and abdomen, save two air-filled hollows where a true doppelganger's lungs would be. Having no windpipe or larynx, the gaunt cannot speak in its true form; it utters its groaning Call To Madness by expelling bubbles from its air-pocket 'lungs', up its plasm-filled neck, and out its mouth. If a gaunt in its true form wishes to attract others' attention with sound, it clatters its hollow finger-spines against one another. (DMs can simulate this noise at the gaming table by clacking two ballpoint pens together.)

Gaunts' conception is always unintentional, occurring when a doppelganger that is unaware of its true nature is mistaken for human by another, and unwittingly selected as breeding stock. Once pregnant, the female-mode parent's health immediately goes into a decline, as the unborn gaunt drains one point of Constitution per month from its mother throughout the period of gestation. Provided the maternal parent survives, the gaunt is born abnormally large (Small size); only its spindly physique and the elastic nature of doppelganger flesh allows the mother to survive the delivery.

Having sensed and learned much from its mother's thoughts, during the final three months of its gestation, the gaunt is fully mobile, intelligent, and able to use its special abilities from birth. The first doppelganger it drains of plasm - usually its mother, ailing and unconscious from the ordeal of labor - fills up its body's internal voids and causes its shriveled, newborn frame to expand to Medium size. The plasm of its second imposter-victim - often, but not necessarily, the father - enlarges its body further, allowing it to attain its full height of over nine feet.

Society

As a gaunt is invariably the only one of its kind to exist at any given time, these beings have no society of their own. Instead, they exist in bitter antipathy to the doppelganger society that births them, and that of the humanoids they also prey upon. Unable to mimic humans as their parents do, gaunts seethe with envy over their forbearers' imitative abilities, and try to steal their powers whenever they get the chance. Lacking the human upbringing which gives dread doppelgangers at least some comprehension of human nature, gaunts have only the sketchiest grasp of humanoids' fears or concerns, regarding them as little more than trainable animals. Beyond this, a gaunt's view of the world is often colored by whatever thoughts it gleaned from its female-mode parent's mind, prior to its birth.

In the generations since he seized power, Sodo has confined all knowledge of gaunts' distasteful origin to an ever-dwindling circle of elite Clan Leaders, out of paranoid fear that a rival might deliberately arrange such a monstrosity's conception to use it as a weapon against him. Ironically, this policy has actually increased the risk of another gaunt being born, as uninformed doppelgangers take fewer precautions to verify the humanity of potential birth-surrogates.

Due to their extreme rarity and the secrecy surrounding their existence, it is virtually impossible to discover information about gaunts by means of conventional or bardic Knowledge checks (+15 to checks' DC). The Knowledge (nature) DC to distinguish a gaunt's natural form from that of a doppelganger on sight is 20, or 15 if its use of un-doppelganger-like powers is also observed.

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Alignment: Gaunts are eminently self-serving, considering all other beings' welfare or suffering irrelevant. Whereas a dread doppelganger's alignment may vary to better integrate the personality of a chosen imago, a gaunt's psyche has only one facet - its Clay - and thus, it never deviates from a survive-at-any-cost mindset: one lying firmly on the Evil side of neutrality.

Typical Treasure

Unlike their doppelganger parents, gaunts see no purpose in accumulating material possessions. If a gaunt keeps any treasure at all, it is either using it as bait for victims or has confiscated it from its crazed minions to increase their emotional dependency on its favor. Enchanted items are an exception: if a gaunt can use such an item in either its true form or a caliban guise, it is likely to find a way to benefit from it.

Note that, while gaunts cannot ingest potions or other consumable items - not even in a caliban form - they may distribute such items among their deranged servitors, or even force-feed healing potions to captives, in order to prolong the opportunity to feed upon a particular victim.

Advanced Gaunts

As gaunts never survive for more than a few months, they simply don't have enough time to gain additional hit dice or character class levels. If a more powerful gaunt is desired, DMs can assign it one or more salient abilities from the alchemical Paths, ruling that it has recently fed upon one or more doppelgangers which possessed such abilities, and absorbed these powers from them.

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Folkloric Doppelgangers

The D&D doppelganger is an original creation of the gaming industry, but real-world mythology has its own, very different spin on the concept. In folklore, a "doppelganger" is not an earthly predator that kills to take the place of someone, but the ghostly double of a living person - often the very person who sees it appear - that presages the witness's own demise or some other traumatic misfortune. Such famous historical figures as Abraham Lincoln, Johann Wolfgang Goethe, and Percy Bysshe Shelley have reported unsettling sightings of their own duplicates.

To recapitulate these mysterious doubles of ill omen, the following special attack may be assigned to ghosts in the Ravenloft setting:

Ghostly Double (Su): The ghost may manifest as an apparition of one individual it confronts, rather than as it appeared in life. Such a manifestation has the same effect as the Entrancing Appearance ghost attack (see *Denizens of Dread/Darkness*), save that it affects only the duplicated person and has a range of 120 feet. If the duplicated creature fails its Will save against the ghost's special attack, then the next Fortitude or Reflex saving throw which that subject needs to make, once the encounter with the ghost is over, will automatically fail: an effect that can only be undone under the same terms as a Dangerous curse of vengeance.

Who's Who



This section offers game statistics, background and plot hooks for four of the informants (one uncredited) who contributed information - wittingly or not - to Rookhausen's investigations for the VRS.

Other sources which are cited or consulted herein include Emil Bollenbach (a.k.a. "Dr. Thomas Cream") from Chilling Tales, Children of the Night: The Created, and Shadow of the Knife; Roja (a.k.a. "Eddy", "Sir Edmund Bloodsworth", "The Invisible Man") from Hour of the Knife and the FoS Zherisia Survey; Esteemed Brother Alfred Larner of the Paridon branch of the Fraternity of Shadows, also in the Zherisia Survey; and Toret Johann Severin, from Van Richten's Arsenal. The Philosophy of Humanity, a radical splinter-sect of the Divinity of Mankind, appears in Shadow of the Knife and the Zherisia Survey. The Weathermay-Foxgrove twins, of course, appear in Van Richten's Arsenal.

As for "Cory J. Rookhausen", his own dossier remains confidential ... for now.

Adramelech, The Scholar-Fiend

CR 15

Dread doppelganger cleric 13

NE Medium monstrous humanoid (shapechanger)

Init +3; **Senses** Listen +15, Spot +15; darkvision 60 ft., detect thoughts (DC 22)

Languages Zherisian*, Akiri, Balok, Darkonese, Draconic, Elven, Falkovnian, Gnome, Lamordian, Mordentish, Rajian, Rokuma, Vaasi

Outcast Rating 6 if exposed

AC 34, touch 16, flat-footed 30

(+3 Dex, +9 armor [chain shirt], +2 deflection [ring], +9 natural [racial & amulet], +1 dodge [boots])

hp 141 (17 HD); **DR** 10/adamantine (150 hp worth) [stoneskin]

Immune sleep, charm, Hypnosis skill; benefits of death ward, freedom of movement, spell immunity (*dispel magic*)



Resist 50% chance to ignore extra critical hit or sneak attack damage; shed polymorph effects; nondetection (DC 32); SR 29 [spell resistance]

Fort +16, **Ref** +16, **Will** +24

Speed 60 ft. (12 squares) [boots] or 30 ft. (6 squares); freedom of movement effects

Melee 2 slams +17 $\frac{1}{2}$ /+17/+17 (2d8+3) or

Melee unarmed strike +17 $\frac{1}{2}$ /+17/+12/+7 (2d8+3)

[$\frac{1}{2}$ - Only if boots' haste effect is active; without haste, extra attacks cease and other attacks' bonuses decrease by 1.]

Base Atk +13/+8/+3; **Grp** +11

Attack Options Strength boost (+13, 1 round/day)

Special Actions Spontaneous casting (inflict spells), rebuke undead 7/day (+6, 2d6+17, 13th), detect thoughts (DC 22) at will

Combat Gear Boots of speed

Usual Cleric Spells Prepared (CL 17th, 19th for Necromancy spells; Spell Focus (necromancy), Greater Spell Focus (necromancy); 1d20+17 to overcome SR, 1d20+19 for Necromancy):

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- 7th (2+1) - *destruction* (x2) (DC 27), *screen*^D
- 6th (3+1) - *geas/quest, harm* (x2) (DC 26), *stoneskin*^{D*}
- 5th (4+1) - *flame strike* (x3) (DC 23), *righteous might*^D, *spell resistance* (29)*
- 4th (5+1) - *death ward**, *freedom of movement**, *poison* (x3) (DC 24), *spell immunity*^{D*}
- 3rd (6+1) - *blindness/deafness* (DC 23) (x2), *dispel magic* (x2), *nondetection*^{D*}, *water breathing, wind wall*
- 2nd (7+1) - *delay poison, hold person* (x3) (DC 20), *invisibility*^D, *shatter* (x3) (DC 20)
- 1st (7+1) - *command* (x7) (DC 19), *enlarge person*^D
- 0th (5) - *detect magic* (x3), *detect poison* (x2)

^DDomain Spell. Domains: Trickery & Strength

[* - One of each of these spells is cast in preparation for confrontations.]

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 17th)

2/day - *modify memory* (DC 24), *suggestion* (DC 24)

1/day - *dominate person* (DC 24); *mass hold person* OR *mass suggestion* (DC 26)

Abilities Str 17, Dex 16, Con 16, Int 28, Wis 27, Cha 19

SQ Change Shape, Glamer, Leadsmith, psychic sadism, shapechanger

Feats Gaslighter#, Greater Spell Focus (necromancy), Improved Unarmed Strike, Practiced Spellcaster (cleric)CD, Pugilistic Imposter#, Spell Focus (necromancy)

[CD - Complete Divine # - New feats introduced in this book.]

Skills Bluff +23*, Concentration +13, Craft (alchemy) +13, Diplomacy +15, Disguise +8 (+10 to act in character)*, Escape Artist +3*, Gather Information +6*, Intimidate +6, Listen +15, Knowledge (arcana) +14,

Knowledge (history) +29, Knowledge (local) +19, Knowledge (nobility & royalty) +14, Knowledge (religion) +29, Sense Motive +28, Sleight of Hand +5, Speak Language x3, Spellcraft +18, Spot +15*

Possessions combat gear plus belt of giant strength +2, gloves of dexterity +2†, headband of intellect +2†, ring of wisdom +2 (as periapt), +5 mithril chain shirt†, cloak of resistance +4†, amulet of natural armor +3, ring of protection +2

[† - Disguised as innocuous garments by illusionary effects of Glamer.]

Change Shape (Su) Adramelech can assume the shape of any Small or Medium humanoid, including specific individuals it has adequately observed, as a standard action. It can stay in the chosen form indefinitely until it assumes a new form or returns to its own.

Detect Thoughts (Su) Adramelech can continuously detect thoughts (Will save DC 22 negates). It can suppress or resume this ability as a free action, or switch between modes of perception (skimming, gauging, or probing) as a swift action. It can attempt to obtain visual or auditory impressions from a subject as well as thoughts (Will save DC 20); a save failed by 4 points reveals one sense, by 8 points reveals both, and by less than 4 reveals thoughts only.

Gaslighter (Ex) When Adramelech deliberately provokes a Fear, Horror, or Madness save, the victim's save DC is increased by 4. If it uses detect thoughts and appropriate disguises to gaslight a victim, it also receives a +3 circumstance bonus on its Bluff check.

Glamer (Su) Adramelech can alter the texture and appearance of objects on its person, applying this effect to a single object as a standard action, or to a complete set of clothing as a full-round action. Dismissing Glamer is a free action. It cannot change the objects' basic material (cloth remains cloth, metal remains metal, etc), but Adramelech can turn a tweed jacket into a lady's wool dress, or a gold watch into a gilded cameo. Objects may be physically transmuted by

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glamer, but these only function within the boundaries of their original purpose (e.g. a spoon could become a fork, but not a nail-file). Glamer-disguised objects automatically revert to their true form if separated from Adramelech by at least five feet.

Leadsmith (Sp) Adramelech is an adherent of the Via Plubum, with four salient abilities of the Path of Lead: Dominate Person, Modify Memory, Spellbinder, and Suggestion.

Psychic Sadism Although its ability scores have long since recovered from the sadistic Madness which overtook it when it lost control and was driven from Zherisia, Adramelech continues to exhibit the behavioral symptoms of Psychic Sadism, including the craving to read victimized beings' thoughts for 136 minutes every day (68 if it inflicts their distress itself or the victim is a personal enemy; 34 if both conditions apply).

Skills * +4 circumstance bonus to Bluff, Disguise, and Gather Information checks when using detect thoughts. * +10 circumstance bonus to Disguise checks when using Change Shape. * +4 racial bonus to Escape Artist checks if in true form. * +2 circumstance bonus to Spot checks to detect disguises; -2 circumstance penalty to Spot and Listen checks in wilderness.

Hook (Adram) "The equality of people is a myth. There are always divisions, between the strong and the weak, the wise and the foolish, the winners and the losers, and the Masters and the common herd."

Hook (Ramsey) [To Blake] "That should do it for my schedu-oh, wait, best include a reminder to send M. DuLac's widow some sympathetic flowers in a week or two. It's not her fault her idiot husband saw fit to critique my last monograph so rudely, and she'll likely still be quite distressed over the ugly manner of his demise. No need to be uncivilized about such matters, now is there?"

"How he died? I haven't decided yet, to be honest...."

[Note: Adramelech casts nondetection upon itself daily, and unless it is truly surprised (a

rarity), it enters combat equipped with death ward, freedom of movement, spell immunity (dispel magic), spell resistance and stonewall in place. It also activates its boots of speed just before any fight. All these preparations have been factored into its statistics, above.]

In many ways, "Lord Adrian Ramsey" is almost a caricature of the Zherisian professor. Tall and thin, dressed in a tweed jacket or a greatcoat in poor weather, with a pair of spectacles perched atop his long, hooked nose and a shock of badly-combed white hair fringing his bald pate, a more scholarly image is hard to imagine. Only the predatory eyes, a pale, icy blue, hint at the true nature of Lord Adrian.

In its true form, however, Adramelech is as monstrous without as it is villainous within. Like all dread doppelgangers, it is a hairless, sexless humanoid with oily-looking gray skin and over-long arms. Its skin is heavily wrinkled with age, and it seems frailer in appearance than most of the imposters. Most noticeable, however, are its eyes, which are the same chill blue as they are in the form of Lord Adrian Ramsey. Despite its Glamer power, Adramelech's clothing is just as high-quality when revealed in its true state, as it prefers to dress in "proper" garments rather than disguise cheaper garb with Glamer.

Unless its form might dictate otherwise, the Schlar-Fiend's voice is a rich, mellifluous instrument, honed by over half a century of guileful deceptions, and well-practiced from long hours of lecturing to packed auditoriums of students. Adramelech wields its imago's voice like a scalpel, easily replicating a range of emotions ranging from haughty disdain to amused condescension. Age may have given its body a few creaks and wrinkles, but its public speaking has only improved over the years.

People who can resist Adramelech's mental probing feel a brief chill, as if an errant, icy wind has blown across the back of their necks. Most dismiss this sensation as anxiety or a passing breeze.

Background

The tale of Adramelech, Scholar-Fiend of Port-a-Lucine and eminence grise among the Core's doppelganger Exiles, began in the home of a humble working couple in Paridon. In the year 687, Martha Dramwell gave birth to a child, whom they named Aaron. Unbeknownst to the proud 'parents', the babe was not the son of her husband, Roger, but that of a doppelganger of the Pomath clan.

Even in his youth, Aaron was a gifted child. He could read and write easily at a very early age, and by the age of nine, was reading complex philosophical treatises and historical chronicles borrowed by his mother, a housekeeper employed at one of Paridon's philosophical Lodges. At twelve, he could out-reason either of his parents easily, and even the neighborhood's Celebrant of Mankind was at times hard-pressed to answer the inquisitive and intelligent child.

To his parents, Aaron represented the future. For them, it was too late; they knew they would live and die in service to their betters. But perhaps Aaron's genius could break through the social barriers and enter higher society. Such elevations were rare, but not unheard of, and with his intellect, Aaron might well be able to do it. In their happiness and hope, the Dramwells missed the signs of Aaron's blossoming arrogance, as well as a dangerous, manipulative streak.

As he grew older, Aaron became interested in the Divinity of Mankind, going so far as to help out around the Temple of Mankind, just so he might eavesdrop on the celebrants' theological discourses. The philosophies and ideas there excited and enthralled him: it was here, and here alone, that he thought to find folk whose education and insightfulness he could respect. The philosophy's doctrine of perfectibility of mind and body wormed its way into Aaron's spirit, coloring his expectations and ideals.

And yet... the Celebrants of Mankind did not, on closer inspection, seem to be superior beings. Acutely alert to others' ulterior motives and veiled feelings, he sensed that the clergy around him were no less petty and

base than the rest of Mankind. For all their prattle about the improvement of humanity, they were too concerned with their own private wants to truly better themselves. As the Wakening came upon him, and Aaron began to perceive the thoughts of the celebrants he observed, it seemed only to verify his growing conviction that the "humanity" the exalted was neither divine nor deserving.

Thus, when the Wakening's transformative stages proved the Dramwells' child not human at all, it was a vindication for Aaron ... or rather, Adram, as it would soon be known. Finally, the youth's genius would be recognized, its feelings of superiority proven justified. It was a superior being because it was a member of a superior species - an unseen Master amongst men - and soon it would join its equals. When its mentor came seeking Aaron Dramwell, it found not the frightened and bereft child-face it expected, but a creature already at peace with its Clay, eager to embrace its newfound heritage.

It took barely six months for disillusionment to settle in entirely. To Adram's shock and surprise, the Masters turned out to be little smarter and no better-disciplined than the human folk they lorded over. They had great natural gifts - that was unquestionable - but they squandered their abilities upon fleeting amusements and pointless internal power-struggles. Worse, not one of them seemed to share its love of knowledge or intellectual diligence: its "Master race" was, in its reckoning, a mob of frivolous socialites, who jockeyed for empty accolades to sate their own vanity.

Realizing this, Adram suddenly understood that it, and it alone, was a superior being: a genius, not merely by the modest standards of men, but by those of the Masters themselves. And, as a superior being, it had the responsibility to improve not just itself, but also its species as a whole.

Over the next few years, Adram prepared itself to achieve this lofty aim. Rather than claiming an imago from an existing person, it chose to emulate one already dead. During his service at the Temple of Mankind, Aaron Dramwell had been captivated by the

writings of one Philip DuMond, a controversial philosopher and theologian. This author was more than a century dead when Aaron first read his essays, yet something in the old human's works spoke to the nascent Master within. DuMond wrote of "survival of the fittest" as an inevitable consequence of strife in Nature, and had speculated how this concept might apply to the lot of Man. Deeming no living human to be worthy of itself, Adram fixated instead upon the late philosopher, and crafted its imago as Philip DuMond's latter-day incarnation. Thus was the scholar "Adrian Ramsey" created.

Living as "Ramsey", the creature studied at the University of Paridon, specializing in philosophy and history. It labored to improve its mind, whilst undertaking a strict regimen of exercises to strengthen its body. If Adram was to lead the race of Masters to the next pinnacle of evolution, it believed, it would need to be worthy of the task. A supposed cousin of a Pomath clan-mate's highborn imago, in the eyes of the "cattle", young Lord Ramsey next trained as an acolyte of Mankind, learning the theologies and practices of the humans' faith; as Ramsey studied, Adram secretly perverted Zherisia's native philosophy, twisting its pro-human precepts to exalt its own species. So deep was the young Master's conviction that its kind - or, at least, itself personally - stood head and shoulders above the human dross that, in time, its devotion was repaid with divine magic: a sign, perhaps, that the dark forces of Ravenloft approved of the notion of its kind developing their own corrupt religion.

In the year 706, the pious imposter set out on its missionary work. It preached a doctrine of self-improvement, calling upon its fellow Masters to set aside their indolence and pride, and strive to become worthy of their superior station. Its sermons' reception was as might be expected: content with their lives of self-indulgence, the doppelgangers jeered the young cleric, ignoring its message and driving it away with catcalls and taunts. Perhaps if Adram's faith had run deep, as well as strong, it could've taken these initial setbacks in stride. Instead, each taunting

insult strained the young Master's patience to the breaking point, until at last it snapped. There was little left of the luckless heckler to require incineration.

A petition for redress was dispatched to the Grandmaster from the slain doppelganger's clan, and Sodo called a Conclave to make an example of the 'religious crackpot'. The darklord's verdict (of course) was a foregone conclusion: hotheads and troublemakers have no place within the secretive clans. For the unsanctioned rage-murder of another Master - an offense proving Adram too volatile not to constitute a security-risk - the only fitting punishment was death. A quartet of Iron-Path thugs was sent to apprehend Adram and haul it in for sentencing. To the eternal surprise of the clans and Sodo (and temporary surprise of the thugs), Adram's command of clerical magic was far greater than they'd realized. Four more bodies had to be discreetly disposed of at the townhouse of Lord Ramsey, and Adram fled into the Mists.

Adram wandered the Land for over thirty years, traveling to nearly every corner of the Core and to several other Islands, seeking knowledge and power. In Sri Raji, it studied philosophy and religion at the University of Tvashti. Robbing a few tombs in Har'Akir taught it much of undead and curses, though it usually disdains the use of such coarse tools. Lamordia refined the doppelganger's already-scientific mindset. A sojourn working at the asylum of Daclaud Heinfroth in Gundarak gave Adram deeper insight into the fragility of the human psyche.

Two particular trips stand out for the lasting effect they had on the young, and later not-so-young, doppelganger. A few years spent at the University of Il Aluk, back in the 720s, allowed Adram to master the arts of necromancy and refine its control of negative energy to a level most villains can only dream of. (As Adram is already a monster to the core, the Dark Powers seem disinterested in its use of such black magic ... either that, or the Scholar-Fiend has merely been very lucky.) The greatest of its teachers there was gnome necromancer Aldea Mirana, fated to become a lich after the Requiem.

The Divinity of Masters

Symbol: A stylized doppelganger within a square, in turn inscribed within a circle.

Alignment: Lawful Evil

Portfolio: Strength, deception, dominance, superiority, secrets (doppelgangers)

Domains: Knowledge, Strength, Trickery, Mind (Spell Compendium)

Favored Weapon: Straight razor

The Divinity of Masters is one of the newest faiths in Ravenloft, and one of the most unusual. Founded some fifty years ago, it is a small, non-hierarchal creed found almost exclusively in Zherisia. What makes it unusual is that it is practiced wholly by doppelgangers. Founded by the clerical Exile Adramelech, this theological philosophy - a monstrous travesty of Paridon's human religion - was initially suppressed by the Grandmaster as a source of discontent and trouble. Still, a handful of imposters, discontented with Sodo's heavy-handed rules and impressed by theological writings the fugitive had left behind, did not let the darklord's edict stop them from preserving the fledgling faith's tenets. In time, a few of the converts - many of them affiliated with the Eye of Eternity, an alchemical Lodge - even succeeded in attaining the power of divine magic, by force of their belief in doppelganger superiority.

Following recent troubles (Shadow of the Knife), Sodo appears to have had second thoughts on the issue, and rescinded his prohibition. (Events of 755 would seem to have alerted the Grandmaster to the fact his invincibility is not perfect, so the fact that he cannot resurrect himself may have motivated this reversal.) The Great Upheaval, the emergence of marikith, and the exposure of their existence had spread doubts as to their collective future among many imposters, in recent years, so a growing minority of lay Masters are embracing the now-legal philosophy's reassuring doctrines of their race's inherent superiority, and their undeniable birthright as Masters of their realm.

The Divinity of Masters is (as yet) non-hierarchal, with each cleric - known as a "Seeker of Divinity" - learning the philosophy more or less on its own. The eldest and most powerful Seekers are respected, but hold no formal authority over the others. Most Seekers favor cloistered research and alchemical pursuits over proselytizing, but some do try to spread the philosophy; most of these have find success only within the ranks of their own clans, as intra-clan suspicion and enmity usually trumps evangelism. The bulk of Paridon's doppelganger population still regard Seekers of Divinity as self-deluded dreamers and fools, for all that a grudging appreciation for the practicality of their divine magic is emerging in several clans, low-ranked ones with little access to alchemy in particular. A few Seekers have left Paridon voluntarily, most of whom now reside in the Core, where they work to organize the Exiles (when they can find them) and thus expand the power of the Masters.

The Divinity of Masters has a complicated relationship with its nominal founder. On one hand, Adram instigated the faith's teachings, and the persuasive force of its writings' philosophical arguments remain undiminished, despite the intervening years. At the same time, Adram is an outcast, a bitter enemy of Sodo and the Zherisian clans, and it gleefully slaughters any doppelganger it catches in Port-a-Lucine. Most Seekers feel a mixture of awe and fear for their predecessor; many also suspect Adram is quite mad, though they keep this belief to themselves.

Dogma: The Masters are the highest creation of all the natural order, rightfully placed above men and other lesser forms. With our minds, we touch and bend the thoughts of every creature. With our bodies, we recapitulate the strengths of every strain of flesh. Born unto the lesser breeds, we alone are chosen to transcend their physical and moral limits. Petty politics and laziness are beneath us, as Masters, and we should claim our birthright as overlords of all the world, the unseen hand that coaxes all lessers to the service of our choosing.

Even more pivotal was an association with an expatriate Mordentishman by the name of Percy Blackburn-Bruce, a member of that fell clan of outcasts and an impressive alchemist in his own right. The two met in Ludendorf, whilst snowed in for the winter at the same inn; the exiles became first colleagues, then friends, brought together by their shared hatred for their respective homelands. It was Blackburn-Bruce who taught Adram most of what it knows of alchemy, and who created the purgatives which have allowed the creature to ascend to the 3rd rank of the Via Plubum. The pair still keep up a correspondence, though Blackburn-Bruce's advancing age has made this increasingly difficult.

Following the Grand Conjunction, Adram - now styling itself "Adramelech" in its own mind, as a more occult-sounding and impressive title - settled in Port-a-Lucine, where the renowned scholar Lord Adrian Ramsey joined the faculty of the University of Dementlieu, eventually becoming the head of its Department of Philosophy. The university's president, Balfour de Casteelle, has been fully aware of Adram's nature from the outset; however, he has allowed the doppelganger to retain its position because of Ramsey's academic competence... and to provide an emergency scapegoat for his own sinister doings, should one ever be required. Adram, conversely, knows de Casteelle is deeply involved in the unsavory activities of the Fraternity of Shadows, but has been unable to pierce its employer's thoughts to determine just how pivotal a member it is working for.

Current Sketch

Today, the Scholar-Fiend is a dangerous "free agent" in Dementlieu, beholden to neither Dominic d'Honaire nor the Living Brain. Time and frustration have made Adram into a sour, broken, world-weary old crank: having watched its dreams of revitalizing and improving its race wither away for the past five decades, it has little more than hatred, obstinacy, and a pure and unalloyed love of knowledge with which to sustain itself.

The idealism and ambition of the young Master have rotted into bitterness and self-doubt over the years. Since its exile, Adramelech has grown to hate other doppelgangers, but even more so, it has grown to hate itself. It has never forgiven itself for its failure to lead the other Masters to greatness; even fifty years after the fact, shame and self-doubt continue to eat away at Adramelech. Its many successes in the interim - its erudite papers and academic coups, its practiced deceits and criminal triumphs, its eldritch discoveries and alchemical breakthroughs - have but fleetingly assuaged its gnawing sense of inferiority. Even its faith in "inherent doppelganger superiority" has begun to ring hollow: none of the doppelganger 'trespassers' it has caught in Port-a-Lucine, over the years, have displayed enough cunning to vindicate its old elitist stance; and its own failure to procreate its "superior" genes (having never found a human birth-surrogate who met its insanely-high standards of 'breeding quality') casts doubt on its conceit that it seeks to 'improve its race', rather than salve its own bruised ego.

On a day-to-day basis, Adramelech covers up its self-doubts with a veneer of cutting, urbane wit, flaunting its mental and physical superiority. Whether as Clay or as imago, it is malicious in the extreme; it toys with its victims as a cat toys with a mouse, destroying those who dare to oppose it completely and utterly - shattering rival academics' careers and reputations as Ramsey, or crushing hapless playthings' sanity as Adram - and leaving only their bare existence intact. Living up to the adage that "misery loves company", the Scholar-Fiend sometimes causes pain and havoc for no higher purpose than to combat its own boredom and unhappiness. A "recovered" psychic sadist who saw no need to give up the practice, it sometimes yearns to indulge in more 'hands-on' means of inflicting pain, and so keeps a professionally-equipped torture chamber in its cellar. It is a source of great comfort to the creature.

Dread Possibility: An Age-Old Problem

As of 760, Adramelech is seventy-three years old, an advanced age for human or doppelganger. Between its clerical magics, alchemy, obsessive self-improvement regimen and sheer bloody-minded stubbornness, the Scholar-Fiend could probably live another twenty years, but in recent years, the prospect of death has preyed upon the embittered doppelganger's mind. Adramelech is not keen on dying, particularly with its work unfinished, and the notion that the two-hundred-year-old Sodo might simply outlive it has driven Adramelech to search for ways to extend its lifespan, by means both fair and foul.

While Adramelech has probed avenues as diverse as alchemy, ancient relics, vampirism, membership in the Fraternity of Shadows, lichdom or controlled resurrection as a ghost, in the past few years the creature has focused its efforts on perfecting a new potion: one capable of making the imbibor immortal.

The potion is based on the 'Vital Venom' (Gaz IV) of Ivana Boritsi and Nostalia Romaine. Over its years of travel, Adramelech could not help but notice that Borca's "Black Widow", only three years its junior, has failed to age in the least. After several years' investigation, Adramelech has finally managed to learn how this marvel might have been achieved, and to steal a sample of Vital Venom for analysis. This theft may well have incited the recent purge of Borcan doppelgangers by an enraged Ivana Boritsi.

With the help of its old acquaintance, master alchemist Percy Blackburn-Bryce (NE male human Wiz5 / Alp10), Adram painstakingly reverse-engineered Vital Venom's formula. Now, after long and exhaustive study, the two have devised a more potent version of the poisonous elixir: one which, imbibed but once, should theoretically make the drinker permanently ageless. For these two elderly outcasts, this is a prize well worth the effort it cost them.

The main difference between Vital Venom and the new poison, called "Formula #82", is one of intensity. Vital Venom requires a pint of ermordenung blood, plus the heart's blood of three members of the same species as the drinker. Formula #82 requires a pint of blood from the greatest of all ermordenung - Ivana Boritsi herself - and the lifeblood of nine "creatures of power" (i.e. of eleven HD or higher) of the same species. Other obscure herbs and chemicals are also added, but blood is the base of Formula #82.

Adramelech and Percy Blackburn-Bryce have been collecting life-blood from individuals they judge to be sufficiently powerful, but such formidable specimens are hard to come by. So far, seven doppelgangers and six humans have been slain and their blood, alchemically preserved. Soon the two aging villains will face the deadly challenge of securing two pints of blood from the darklord of Borca. Of course, if human PCs are of sufficient level to attempt this, they might be recruited to harvest the blood in question ... only to end up as ingredients in an elixir of eternal youth for a ninety-year-old alchemist.

Blackburn-Bryce is an ancient scion of the Mordentish family of the same name, and dwells in a secluded manor outside Neufurchtenburg in southern Lamordia. A small, hunched, hideously-ugly old man with a deformed, razor-clawed arm (product of a failed experiment), Percy Blackburn-Bryce is nevertheless the spiritual brother of dapper Adramelech: a vicious sadist and egomaniac, yet among the greatest alchemists of the age. A small army of alchemical and enlightened children (Van Richten's Arsenal) guard Schloss Blackburn-Bryce, while the diminutive alchemist himself keeps an astounding assortment of potions and alchemical brews on hand to enhance his strength, speed and agility.

Only its seething hatred of its fellow Masters or its own realization of failure can disturb the pose of confident unflappability Adramelech has constructed. Woe betide any doppelganger unlucky enough to be caught by the Scholar-Fiend in Port-a-Lucine! Such trespassers tend to live a long time in Adram's cellars, regretting every breath. Even more dangerous is Adramelech's violent reaction to its own bruised self-esteem. The least failure on its own part risks triggering the roiling rage kept bottled up inside the cantankerous creature, causing the outcast Master to lash out vindictively at anything nearby. The heat of its fury, thus unleashed, could level buildings and burn through steel.

Like most doppelgangers, Adram tends carefully to the reputation of its human alter-ego, Lord Adrian Ramsey. Created as an emulation of the philosopher DuMond, Ramsey has become a famous - or infamous - thinker in his own right. His credo preaches of the survival of the fittest, the strongest and the smartest. Those who succeed do so because they are inherently better than their fellows; failure comes to those who are innately flawed or lacking. Mercy and pity are the undeserved refuge of the weak: success, however achieved, is the only true measure of worth. His philosophy has proven popular among the elite of Dementlieu, Borca and Nova Vaasa, where the rich eagerly seize up on it as justification for their own lack of charity; however, many others decry the "Ramseyan" creed's dearth of spirituality or compassion. The Ezran Church disputes its amoral standpoint, while followers of Francois de Penible's writings take umbrage at his claims that suffering is proof of failure, rather than a path to enlightenment.

To most Dementlieuse, Lord Ramsey is the Head of the Philosophy Department at the University of Dementlieu, a Zherisian expatriate, and a radical free-thinker ... not to mention cynic, atheist, corrupter of public morals and generally wicked old man. Ramsey has published over a dozen works of philosophy, the most famous of which is his controversial *On the Future of Humanity*, a tome found in nearly every library from Martira Bay to Kantora. Due to his radical reputation (which Adramelech cultivates with care), Ramsey's lectures at the University

swiftly fill to the brim with paying students, and he receives invitations to nearly every avant-garde salon and social event in the city.

A few rumors (planted by Adram itself) claim that the irascible Lord Ramsey is secretly a cocaine addict. These unsavory whispers explain away the secretive and eccentric habits of Ramsey, while hiding the considerably-more-heinous truth about Adramelech. There are also even quieter rumors (not planted by Adram) that Ramsey cheats at cards, but the irascible firebrand of a professor is so universally loved by his students and so respected a figure among the Port-a-Lucine intelligentsia that nothing has actually been proved.

In addition to living the life of Ramsey, lecturing in the mornings and attending salons in the evening, Adram has a few plots continually active. It keeps an eye out for any doppelgangers that enter Port-a-Lucine, which it considers its private territory. Any which come to its attention usually regret it, as the outcast elder makes a game of suckering these trespassers into its clutches by besting them at their own deceptive game. While "Lord Ramsey's" presence in Port-A-Lucine is known to Sodo, the darklord has yet to make a move to retrieve or eliminate this fugitive from clan justice, uninterested in the exiled cleric's fate so long as it keeps clear of Paridon. This indifference is something the Grandmaster may well come to regret one day.

Adramelech also keeps an eye out for rare books or historical artifacts, buying even relatively worthless relics. One of its 'masks' - one not associated in any way with Lord Ramsey - is fairly well known in criminal circles as a buyer of antiquities, who asks no questions and pays well. Adram usually has one or two schemes against the Zherisian clans under consideration at any given moment, although few of these reach fruition.

Recently, the Scholar-Fiend's for-profit blackmail activities have attracted the attentions of both Dominic d'Honaire and the Living Brain; however, Adram's immense willpower has kept it free from the mental domination of either. It had entertained emissaries from both, but has yet to commit conclusively to either camp.

Dread Possibility: The Stones of the K in-Slayer

One of the little-known facts of Necropolis is that it is not entirely cut off from communication, assuming one has the means and a willing Slain correspondent. It is this way that the Scholar-Fiend maintains a correspondence with its old teacher, Aldea Mirana (LE female gnome lich necromancer 14), via unliving messengers. (While Adram rarely uses undead, it is because it finds them too conspicuous, not due to lack of ability.) Over the years, the two have become, if not friends, then fellow scholars and allies, although Mirana refuses to leave the University of Il Aluk and its library, and Adramelech can't visit for obvious reasons. They advise each other in research, and occasionally create items for one another, delivered by ghoulish couriers. Mirana is a superior crafter of magical items, while Adramelech is a skilled alchemist.

Recently, a Necropolitan ghoulish delivered Adram a package containing half-a-dozen paving stones. An attached letter explained their significance: they had been taken from Castle Forformax, and contained the restless spirit of one of the men-at-arms who'd died in the fratricidal ambush that took place there. Mirana has treated the stones with unique spells she devised, using dark secrets of Il Aluk's library. If powdered and then inhaled, the dust of these stones delivers a unique curse: those who breathe it in must slay three of their own species, or wither away and perish. Mirana called these items 'Stones of the Kin-Slayer'.

For several weeks, Adramelech has barely left its residence of Harrow House, as it considers how to use the stones to achieve its goal of improving the doppelganger race. Mirana's gift seems ideal for its goal of culling the weak or foolish from its people's ranks ... but to do this, the Scholar-Fiend will have to somehow get all, or at least most, of the imposters of Paridon into an enclosed space.

Adramelech surmises that if it can trick Sodo into calling a Conclave - possibly by permitting itself to be "captured" in Paridon, and dragged before the clans for its long-belated trial and execution - the Scholar-Fiend can use the gathering as a forum to preach its views ... and as Ground Zero for "ethnic cleansing". Using the power of the stones to force the assembled doppelgangers to turn on one another, as the cursed dust compels them to kill one another or wither away, Adram hopes to buy time to personally vanquish the Grandmaster and his Vanguard. With them out of the way and only the most powerful and ruthless of doppelgangers left alive, Adramelech imagines it will finally be able to lead its race into a golden age.

For this plan to work, Adramelech needs help, and a great deal of it. Even the Scholar-Fiend can't expect to single-handedly smuggle the stones in beneath the Grandmaster's nose, kill Sodo's most lethal agents, and survive the ensuing slaughter. (The fact that Adram itself is a doppelganger, hence a viable target for the powder-induced killing spree, hasn't escaped its notice.) Allies will need to secretly bring the stones to the hidden assembly-hall beneath the Parliament building. If these allies believe "Lord Ramsey" to be a human scholar, captured in his selfless effort to rid of imposters forever, all the better: Adramelech can disabuse them of that belief after the decimation of its kind has been accomplished.

Each of the six Stones of the Kin-Slayer contains a portion of a ghost from Castle Forformax. The stones vary in size, and have been specially treated to give them the consistency and hardness of old wood. If broken, a stone crumbles, spreading a cloud of powder in a radius of 5' per pound. Those who inhale this dust must kill three creatures of their own species, or acquire a negative level every 10 minutes. The first victim must be slain within three rounds of inhaling the powder, the others at 10 minute intervals, to halt this withering effect without magic, and only a remove curse spell from a cleric of 10th level or higher can otherwise halt the accumulation of negative levels. Such negative levels can be removed normally, but only after the dust's influence is ended, one way or another.

Should Adram succeed in its plans, it is not inconceivable that it will become the next darklord of Paridon ... assuming its own people don't tear it to pieces for its genocidal act of treachery, first.

Combat

Despite its power, Adramelech disdains combat: it considers merely killing someone outright to be crude. Rather, the Scholar-Fiend prefers to help its foes suffer. Against someone who provokes its mild irritation, Adramelech will usually settle for causing them to lose their social status, usually by planting scandalous rumors or the creative use of suggestion and dominate person. Against more serious offenders, Adramelech destroys their lives more thoroughly, taking away status, wealth, friends and even sanity; it uses all the tricks of the Master's trade, and is especially fond of provoking Horror saves. In extreme cases, if it considers itself to be genuinely endangered, Adram turns to false criminal accusations, and to committing heinous misdeeds in the foe's form, so all men's hands will be turned against its enemy.

If Adramelech does choose to fight (usually because all other plans fail), it prefers to do so from ambush and when the intended victim is alone, often by imitating servants or friends to maneuver itself into a suitable position. It tries to end the battle before it begins with a destruction spell. Against multiple foes, mass hold person serves to even the odds. Whatever the situation, the old doppelganger is a canny fighter, using powerful necromantic magics combined with unexpectedly-formidable physical abilities to eliminate foes quickly.

Adramelech generally concentrates on killing its foes one at a time, often via destruction or harm, or by a coup de grace once they are paralyzed by mass hold person. It cares little about its allies, if any, unabashedly hoarding its protective magics for itself. The Scholar-Fiend always has at least two or three escape plans, and has no qualms about slaying one or two foes and then escaping (usually via invisibility or its boots of speed), only to lie in wait and return when its surviving enemies least expect it.

An important factor to remember in any confrontation with Adramelech is that it is a genius - one of the most brilliant entities in all the Land of Mists, on par with the likes of Azalin Rex or Father Tarnos Shadowcloak - even if it lacks the age and political influence

of such venerable villains. Furthermore, Adramelech's wisdom is equally daunting, making it more practical and level-headed than your average evil super-genius: it harbors few illusions about its powers or the danger foes can offer it. The Scholar-Fiend isn't given to over- or underestimating its adversaries. Beyond this, Adramelech is extremely well-traveled, having knocked about Ravenloft's far-flung corners for decades. Very, very little can surprise it anymore, and its experience in evading and destroying hunters is considerable.

Lair

Adramelech is a resident of the city of Port-a-Lucine in Dementlieu, where it plays the role of the popular, high-profile academic Lord Adrian Ramsey. During working hours, Adram can usually be found in one of the lecture halls of the University of Dementlieu, while after work it may be found in any of the more intellectually-oriented salons of that city. At night, Adramelech usually either prowls about town on one of its less salubrious projects, or sneaks into the Grande Bibliotheque, to engage in a little private after-hours research. It adopts other guises for such nocturnal ventures, not wishing Ramsey's round-the-clock activity patterns to draw any notice.

Regardless of its current location, Adramelech maintains its base of operations at Lord Ramsey's home of Harrow House.

Harrow House

Ostensibly named for the agricultural tool, though Adram actually associates it with the adjective "harrowing" (= extremely painful), Harrow House is a smallish country house located on the grounds of the University of Dementlieu. Adramelech bought a few square miles of land from the University upon joining the faculty, and has since constructed the house of its dreams (and others' nightmares) on the land.

From outside, Harrow House is a modest, unassuming residence two stories in height, comprising some two dozen rooms. The upper floor is devoted to Adramelech's private quarters, including a bedroom (more

of a dressing room in truth); a study with a large desk and a massive collection of papers, as well as numerous little artifacts and knick-knacks of historical value; and a library with over two thousand books. The ground floor contains the servants' quarters, kitchen, and storage rooms. A small stable adjoins the house, with a brace of horses and a sable-painted carriage. The house sits on a slight rise, overlooking the waters of Parnault Bay. About a mile of trees and greenery surrounds the House in all other directions, with a cobbled path leading down to the main road.

This sedate appearance gives lie to a sinister reality. Harrow House is riddled with secret passages and deathtraps, and spy-holes and listening posts abound. The layout is such that Adram can monitor the thoughts of anyone in the house from its study, without encountering any "blind spots" from its home's structural materials. The vilest secret lies in the cellar. There, accessible through a secret door inside a giant barrel in the wine cellar, Adramelech keeps its private sanctum and torture chamber.

The latter, a dry stone room with heavily-insulated walls, houses dozens of implements of pain and suffering: mute testament to the exiled Master's villainy. Scourges of varied design adorn one wall, while a rack stands in a corner. An assortment of daggers and pincers rest on a central table, with a forge for heating metal set into the wall on one side. Most frightening of all is a stone pit, some eight feet in diameter and twelve deep, its floor ankle-deep in a vast, glittering swarm of flesh-eating beetles. Four sturdy prison-cells adjoin this chamber of horrors, their shackles engineered to confine doppelgangers as securely as humans.

Adjoining the torture chamber is Adramelech's private sanctum. Here, surrounded by luxuriant Hazlani carpets, masterpieces of Borcan artwork, and soft-glowing magelight, the Scholar-Fiend keeps its treasures that cannot be seen. One wall is inset with bookcases, where dark tomes of eldritch magic stand alongside forgotten volumes of heretical apocrypha. Plush storage-cases for its magic items fill a bureau

to one side, while a glass case on the opposite wall displays the skulls of every doppelganger Adram has slain in Port-a-Lucine. They number in the dozens. A locked writing-desk in the back of the room houses Adram's perpetual work-in-progress, *On the Future of Masters*: a personal manifesto it has written, re-written, and burnt to ashes to start afresh many, many times over the years.

Such a fiendish House cries out for villainous servants, and Adram has assembled a wicked crew, their loyalty assured by a combination of wealth, pleasure, intimidation and geas spells. The cook, Yvette Lafarge, (NE female human Exp 5 / court poisoner 2) is a serial killer who poisoned her entire family and was "recruited" from the Gendarmerie's custody. Her previous apprenticeship with the top chefs of Port-a-Lucine ensures the palatability of the food, while a geas ensures its safety. The housekeeper, Genevieve Ducasse (CE female human Rog 6), is an ex-prostitute who had a tendency to kill her patrons in fury, and was likewise recruited from prison. The Mordentish gardener, Charles Douglass (NE male human Rgr 6), was a successful bounty hunter before his retirement. The quiet life of a gardener suits him. The last and worst of these villains by far is Adramelech's personal manservant, Blake (LE male jackalwere Rog 5 / Ftr 4), a fellow Zherisian expatriate and the closest thing Adram has to a friend. Blake was never formally exiled, but decided that leaving home was a good idea after certain unpleasantries back in Paridon were discovered. He knocked about Dementlieu for a while before falling in with the Scholar-Fiend, and has served it loyally for nearly a decade.

Naturally, Harrow House is thoroughly protected. Between Adram's criminal contacts and magic, and Lord Ramsey's wealth and access to the University wizards, the security system of Harrow House is second only to that of Lord Balfour's mansion. Audible alarm spells gird the outside of the house, while a mental version of the same spell guards the doppelganger's inner sanctuary, all imbued with

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permanence. Permanent symbols of pain dot the interior of the building, while others are strategically distributed about the grounds. A forbiddance spell guards Adramelech's private sanctum, keyed to a tonal password only a doppelganger's versatile vocal cords have the range to produce. A half-dozen topiary guardians (Monster Manual III) are situated around Harrow House, under orders to capture any intruders for interrogation and torture. Other dangerous plants, such as assassin vines and bloodroses (Denizens of Dread), are carefully tended by Douglass as an added line of defense.

Between the vile Master of Harrow House, its sinister servants, fiendish protections and depraved tortures, the House is a Rank 3 sinkhole of Evil with the dominant emotion of hatred. During particularly-sadistic torture sessions this can rise to Rank 4.

Dungeon Master's Tips: Using Adramelech

Adramelech makes for an interesting addition to any campaign. PCs are most likely to meet it first in the form of Lord Adrian Ramsey, either while visiting Port-a-Lucine or during one of Adramelech's scholarly trips. Adram tends to travel extensively, even now, and can be found as far away from Dementlieu as Sri Raji, Tepest or Souragne, seeking historical or magic curios. Ramsey, at least early on, could serve as an academic resource for the PCs, dispensing information, or even as a patron. (While it is undeniably evil, the Scholar-Fiend is sincerely passionate in its research.) PCs could work for Ramsey for a long time, collecting artifacts and curios from across Ravenloft, before they realize the aged scholar's true nature.

Alternatively, Adram may wish to enlist PCs in one of its psychotic plots against Sodo and the Zherisian clans. This provides an excellent jumping-off point for further Paridon-based adventures, doppelganger-related or otherwise. In such cases, the creature is likely to keep "Lord Ramsey" safely out of the picture, using some other temporary mask for its interactions with PCs, to keep any hint of its imago's connection to doppelgangers safely concealed.

Eventually, however, PCs are liable to learn "Ramsey's" secret, be it from another dread doppelganger, a criminal investigation by Alanik Ray, or Adramelech's own rambling monologues. Once the ugly truth is out, Adramelech can unleash the full arsenal of the Masters, using blackmail and bribery to coerce the PCs' silence, or if that fails, using terror, gaslighting, and false accusations (both social and judicial) to eliminate the threat to its masquerade. If the PCs are not to be utterly destroyed - body, mind, and soul - they'll either have to flee Port-a-Lucine forever, or vanquish Adramelech. This entails either challenging the creature's identity in public, where Lord Adrian Ramsey has a great deal of support, or assaulting the vile fortress that is Harrow House to destroy it once and for all.

Penelope (Miss Penny / Penny Poundsworth)

CR 3

Female caliban barbarian 1 / commoner 3 / expert 2

NG Medium humanoid (caliban)

Init +2; **Senses** Listen +7, Spot +7, darkvision 60'

Languages Zherisian, Darkonese; will start to recall Timorian if she hears it spoken

Outcast Rating 5

AC 10, touch 10, flat-footed 10

hp 35 (6 HD), +12 hp raging

Fort +5, **Ref** +1, **Will** +2

Speed 40 ft. (8 squares)

Melee dagger +5 (1d4+2); or

Melee (raging) dagger +7 (1d4+4)

Space 5 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.

Base Atk +3; **Grp** +3

Attack Option rage 1/day (7 rounds)

Abilities Str 15, Dex 10, Con 15, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 7

Feats Courage, Jaded, Quick Reconnoiter#

Skills Diplomacy +1, Hide +5, Knowledge (dungeoneering) +2, Knowledge (local) +1, Knowledge (nature) +4, Listen +7, Profession (scribe) +5, Spot +7

Possessions ring of mind shielding, dagger, scribe's kit, beaded Timorian bracelet

[# - Complete Adventurer / Dungeonscape]

Hook "I... um... well, I... don't expect you to believe me. About what I saw. I mean, thought I saw. I... I could be wrong about that. I... um... really, isn't there someone else you could ask?"



A big-boned, anxious-looking woman in her twenties, Penelope is the kind of person who is much more comfortable when she fades into the background. Though far less grotesque in appearance than many other calibans - her mild features and soft brown eyes are reminiscent of a forlorn puppy's - her timidity in social situations routinely undermines her poignant efforts to "fit in". Between her nervous habit of twisting a handkerchief in her hands as she speaks, the stammering softness of her voice, and her tendency to hunch her shoulders as if fearful of filling too much space, Penelope is so plainly ill-at-ease in conversation that even doppelgangers tend to overlook her, dismissing her shyness as proof she is harmless. In reality, beneath her anxiety and lack of self-esteem, the newcomer whom her Southshore neighbors courteously address as "Miss Penny" is a far more courageous, observant woman than her social insecurities let on.

Ostensibly to look sufficiently 'respectable' for her profession as a writer and transcriptionist, in truth to bolster her own fragile confidence, Penelope wears prim, scrupulously-tidy dresses at home, and conservative skirt-and-blouse outfits like a schoolteacher's when she's working. She tucks a quill pen behind one ear, to broadcast

her literacy and the fact she's not stupid, any time her work takes her outside her comfort zone in Freak Street. Brought up first by tunnel-scavengers and then by religious ascetics, Penelope never had the chance to learn to preen, as human girls are wont to do; her hair - an unusual salt-and-pepper mix of white and black strands - is gloriously lush and thick, yet she doesn't know how to do any more than wash, brush, and ignore it.

Background

Though Penelope believes herself to be Zherisian, she is actually Timorian by birth: a daughter of Remnants, who became separated from her parents and wandered into the sewers of Paridon shortly after the Zherisia Cluster was born. Only five years old at the time, she recollects almost nothing of her early childhood, and what little she can recall - fragmentary memories of dank tunnels, hiding from terrible pursuers, and her own gnawing hunger - she now assumes took place in the dreary alleys of Blackchapel. Even her Timorian name has been forgotten; all that Penelope has left of her true heritage is a bracelet of oddly-carved stone beads (too small to wear any more, but she retains it as a good-luck charm) and a fleetness of foot that childhood games of hide-and-seek in the lightless warrens of Timor had given her.

On finding her way to the surface, little Penelope - having met only a few dozen people in her life up to then, and thinking the coaches and horses were monsters - understandably panicked and fled through the bustling streets. Eventually she stumbled, twisting her ankle too badly to run any further. Delivered by kind citizens into the care of the city's Temple of Divine Form, the confused and frightened child was entrusted to Celebrant Edward Chaswick, an idealistic priest with a philanthropist's drive to aid the needy.

For the next several years, "Father Ned" accepted responsibility for the ill-favored girl, believing she was yet another victim of Zherisian parents' attempt to conceal their caliban daughter in some lightless cellar or attic. He taught her to speak and write the

Zherisian tongue, and gave her a proper, ladylike name. Chaswick saw to it that Penelope led as human and as respectable a life as possible, even as he considered ways by which his new ward and others like her might be spared the social and spiritual disgrace of their caliban forms.

Father Ned's musings took on a new seriousness when one of his pet projects - a scarlet woman he had been guiding back to the light - was slaughtered by the infamous Bloody Jack in 742. Investigating the ladybird's demise, Celebrant Chaswick learned of the doppelgangers infesting Paridon, and soon became captivated by the idea of 'redeeming' the creatures by trapping them in a superior human form. (Perhaps it was Penelope's own ramblings as a confused child of five, about the Remnants' doctrine of "True Form", that initially gave Chaswick and his associates this notion of earthly redemption.) Unfortunately, her guardian's enthusiasm for this project blinded him to how his compelling proposals about "divine human shape" or "stripping away the baseness of deformity" made Penelope still more ashamed of her own nonhuman appearance. The more progress Father Ned made, in recruiting his fellow celebrants to this naïve cause, the more painfully insecure his young ward became.

Despite the worsening handicap of her terrible bashfulness, Penelope sought to please her guardian by aiding in his quest as best she could. First by fetching and carrying, then by copying out documents, and eventually by volunteering as a "patient" at the Philosophy of Humanity's hidden sanctuary-cum-detention-facility, Chaswick's ward became something of a mascot for the splinter-sect. By her dutifulness and deference, the well-meaning caliban lass received the other celebrants' patronizing affection, albeit never their respect.

It gradually became clear to Penelope that the salvation of monsters had become a higher priority for Father Ned than her own: his obsession with doppelgangers had driven all else from her guardian's mind, as Bloody Jack's next anticipated rampage drew near. Still she persevered, even though it meant

sharing the same cell-block as the sect's doppelganger prisoners and its other unwilling "patients". Residing in the near proximity of these imprisoned monsters throughout her teenage years, Penelope grew inured to the grisly threats and jeers they hurled at one another and their keepers, and the information the attentive girl gleaned from the irate creatures' ramblings - although not wholly accurate or complete - was a valuable contribution to the priesthood's knowledge of their inhuman natures and habits.

When the 14th Bloody Jack was smuggled into the hidden sanctuary by Chaswick, in a misguided attempt to prove his dream of doppelganger redemption was attainable, Penelope's own safe refuge with the Philosophy of Humanity was shattered. "Jack" proved to be, not a doppelganger, but a grotesque shapechanging golem assembled from the imposters' own dead. Unimpaired by the Philosophy adherents' shape-locking ritual, it murdered Edward Chaswick and escaped the sanctuary, transforming piecemeal as it went. Seeing it start to assume Father Ned's familiar appearance, as the blood-spattered construct rushed past her, the young woman knew her benefactor had become its latest victim.

Under any other circumstance, she would've given chase, but a swarm of marikith hunters had also assaulted the sanctuary, seeking the Fang of the Nosferatu. Penelope's strong arm, and her steely nerve in situations other than the social, were sorely needed by Chaswick's remaining brethren. The usually-diffident caliban fought the horrific aberrations with the dauntless ferocity of a lioness; she most likely would have perished in the fray, had one of Chaswick's colleagues not been bitten by a second escaped captive (a red widow) and overcome by its venom. Ordered by the surviving celebrants to bear the stricken man to safety, she reluctantly did as she was bidden. Thus, she escaped death at the marikith's claws ... not to mention the brutal, doppelganger-instigated cover-up that followed, as the shapechangers strove to eradicate every trace of the Philosophy's dangerous research.

Sadly, the celebrant whom Penelope carried from the sanctuary did not survive his injuries, but he lived long enough to pass his ring of mind shielding along to her, warning that doppelgangers would soon be hunting anyone who'd assisted the sect's work. She held the dying man's hand until he expired, then set out to lose herself in the urban warrens of Paridon. With her guardian dead, the only home she had known for years in ruins, and the mainstream Divinity of Mankind less than charitable to a caliban no longer a child, Penelope was on her own.

Current Sketch

Self-effacing and timid though Celebrant Chaswick's doctrine had unintentionally left her, Penelope had also gained a valuable skill from his tutelage: swift and flawless penmanship. Uneasy at the prospect of dwelling among other calibans (whose uncouth company Father Ned had always discouraged his ward from keeping), she nonetheless took refuge in Southshore, hoping to vanish into Freak Street's crowds of equally-afflicted faces. To her surprise, Penelope found her facility with pen and ink to be in great demand in that borough of immigrants, for many foreign-born inhabitants of Southshore were unfamiliar with Zherisian script, and few of Paridon's native calibans had received a proper education. Before long, news spread among the ghetto's residents that "Miss Penny" was the one to seek out to scribe letters, read or record business contracts, copy out documents or take dictation. As her reputation grew, she was even hired to teach immigrants to read and write Zherisian for themselves; in return, she has picked up enough of the Darkonese tongue from her pupils to get by in that language.

Penelope has made a fairly successful life for herself since her guardian's death, despite her shyness and self-doubts. No longer sheltered from urban life's harshness, she's been teased and insulted by human ruffians; facing human bigotry in its raw state, she is learning to question the celebrants' motives, in proclaiming her form "tainted". On the other hand, dealing with other calibans still

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makes Penelope, herself, a bit uneasy on occasion: the humanocentric biases ingrained by her caregivers run deep. Moreover, she worries that her past desire to become human will be regarded with scorn by these stubbornly-proud folk, should her past history with the Philosophy of Humanity come to light. It is this fear, as much as residual discomfort, that bars her from relating to her Freak Street neighbors on any more than a strictly-professional basis.

For their own part, Southshore's other calibans are content to make allowances for "Miss Penny's" retiring habits, assuming they stem from the same childhood neglect and exploitation which so many of their kind endure. Timid as she is, her Freak Street neighbors feel very protective of her gentle and charitable nature, and are quick to discourage outsiders from intruding on her privacy. One particular local - a cheerful rascal employed as an usher at the Ellie-Mack - has developed a bit of a crush on the soft-spoken scribe; Penelope has never so much as imagined that any male might find her attractive, however, and she remains innocently clueless as to why young Benedict so eagerly runs errands for her.

Though still socially isolated, Penelope's self-sufficiency and polite dealings with her clients have begun to bring her out of her shell. In the past year, she has penned a few short articles for the city's minor newspapers (submitted by mail to conceal her race), under the alias of "Penny Poundsworth". As yet, she has sent no articles to the Newbill: its breadth of circulation intimidates the novice writer, and she has never forgiven its scathing denunciations of Father Ned, when her guardian came under posthumous media-attack for abetting Bloody Jack's escape from custody. What she would like to publish - not now, but someday - is an account of what really happened at the Philosophy sanctuary on the night Chaswick died. Unfortunately, even if she musters the nerve to send in such an article to Disclosure or another lesser periodical, Penelope knows doing this would only invite the very doppelganger attention she came to Southshore to avoid.

Until she feels the time is right to tell her story, Penelope instead writes of events she witnesses or overhears (a timid caliban wallflower can be so unnoticeable that people forget she's there), and educates her neighbors on Freak Street - and, just recently, a charming foreign bard who'd stopped by the Ellie-Mack to view the museum's stuffed doppelganger - about the capabilities and mindset of the various monsters once detained at the Philosophy's detention facility. She is especially motivated to help to those who hunt the marikith that destroyed her refuge, or golems like the one which killed her guardian, although she knows far less of these creatures than she does of doppelgangers and other monsters that pass for human.

Combat

However timid she might be in conversation, the displaced Timorian can be remarkably brave in the face of danger. She carries a dagger for protection - technically a minor crime, but such rules are seldom enforced in Southshore - and is quick to improvise weapons out of furniture, rubbish, or other items in a pinch. Her "rage" is less an expression of fury than of desperate determination to survive, like a wild creature that holds nothing back in its struggles. Also like a wild creature, Penelope far prefers to flee from attackers, so long as this doesn't entail leaving those she cares for, or feels indebted to, in peril.

Having kept watch for doppelganger pursuers for years, Penelope stays in tune with her surroundings and alert to danger. She can take in more details with a momentary glance than most folk distinguish by a good long look, no matter how nervous or distracted she seems.

Home

In a city where food and shelter are often hard to come by, Penelope's skills and diligent work-ethic have allowed her to support herself adequately since the death of her guardian. She keeps a tidy, unadorned flat on the outskirts of Southshore's caliban ghetto. She normally works on-site at

Dread Possibilities: Foundlings of Freak Street

Penelope believes she was either orphaned or, worse, abandoned when she was very young. The truth is that her parents still survive in the Enclave, deep beneath the city. They have long since given her up for dead, but would be overjoyed to learn their long-lost daughter is alive and well. (They'd be rather less pleased to discover that she has grown up thinking that her caliban nature is a liability, rather than a mark of spiritual ascendancy to the True Form.) The stone beads of her childhood bracelet are, in truth, a tactile map of the winding passages of Timor, by which someone clever enough to interpret its textures can find her parents' former residence in the upper Ruins, as well as clues to their present whereabouts.

Regardless of how she first came to be lost and alone in the city, Penelope's own gratitude to Father Ned for taking her in, along with her financial prosperity - by Southshore's modest standards, at any rate - have led her to assist other young calibans in turn. She has converted a spare room in her flat into a dormitory-style bedroom, and takes in runaways or homeless orphans from Paridon's other boroughs, long enough for them to find work and permanent housing in Southshore. Penelope wishes to provide these needy youths with a place to feel safe and accepted, so refrains from sharing her accounts of monstrous creatures with youngsters who've likely been called "monsters" themselves. Her latest guest, Martin, has had an especially rough time of it, for his fishbelly-pale complexion, thin wisps of white hair, and barely-evident features have led even his Freak Street peers to dub him "the Ghost".

Unbeknownst to Miss Penny, Martin is actually a changeling rather than a caliban, and he is just now gaining voluntary use of his Minor Change Shape power. He's kept this newfound ability a secret from everyone - Penelope included - and is struggling to cope with the situation without help or adult guidance. Knowing next to nothing of real doppelgangers' powers or how they come into the world, Martin now believes that he is one himself, and is torn between morbid thoughts of suicide and of seeking "his people" out, in desperate hope that they (like calibans) might merely be the victims of bad press and bigotry, not bloodthirsty killers as popular hysteria attests.

If nothing is done to ease his worries, sooner or later Martin will run away from Penelope's flat, seeking a true doppelganger to talk to ... and will, unwittingly, bring the name and address of a fugitive caliban - sole survivor of the Philosophy of Humanity's sanctuary, who knows far too much about the splinter-sect and its ritual to trap imposters in human form - along with him. As Martin (N male changeling Rog 2) can now change his own appearance, it may come down to a question of who can penetrate whose disguise, first: the lonely adolescent searching for a genuine doppelganger, or heroes sent by Penelope to find him and bring her tormented and confused fosterling safely home.

employers' homes or places of business, but she also maintains a workspace at her residence, where she transcribes longer documents and composes newspaper articles. As Penelope's modest apartment has no kitchen, she keeps very little food in her home, living on fresh-bought breads and produce, or purchasing occasional hot meals

(she adores spicy foreign foods) from Southshore's immigrant venders.

DM Notes: Using Penelope

Even in a setting like Ravenloft, where mundane civilians far outnumber heroes, campaigns can lose sight of the ordinary people who coexist with the PCs and must bear up, as best they can, beneath the hardships of daily life. It's easy to fall into a habit of treating non-adventuring NPCs as stage-dressing rather than individuals, until the PCs need something from them ... or until the DM promotes (?) them from "stage-dressing" to "victim". For storytelling purposes, there's nothing wrong with this - if adventurers stop to get to know every NPC they meet, they won't have time to adventure - but giving an ordinary, workaday person like Penelope center stage once in a while can remind both players and DMs that these background characters have personalities, interests, and histories.

Moreover, as a caliban accustomed to being judged unfairly due to ugliness, using Penelope as an NPC in a doppelganger adventure can offer a clear contrast to the imposters' stolen veneer of "beauty" ... all the more so, if players likewise underestimate her abilities, due to her shyness and drab-seeming way of life. Not judging by appearances is a theme which needn't be confined to just the bad guys, so learning that "Miss Penny" is far more than she appears to be can foreshadow others' revealed secrets yet to come.

Introducing Penelope to PCs is easy enough, though the heroes should have to work at it to encourage this painfully-shy woman to open up to them. In Paridon, PCs who are investigating the local monsters (not necessarily doppelgangers) can be pointed toward Southshore's Elucidating Museum of Anthropological Curiosities, where the operators direct them to "Miss Penny" for a small gratuity. Her work as a scribe-for-hire takes Penelope all over Southshore and occasionally into adjacent boroughs, where her keen eyes could witness something vital to the heroes' mission. An article in one of the lesser newspapers might contain a partial clue to the PCs' current adventure, motivating them to track down the elusive "Penny Poundsworth" to hear the full story. A young caliban for whom the PCs are searching might take shelter with Penelope, forcing the heroes to convince the wary inhabitants of Freak Street they mean their quarry no harm before they'll tell them anything.

The fact that she is a caliban, and not well-off, makes Penelope an unlikely target for assumption, hence more trustworthy than most Zherisian contacts PCs might cultivate. Through "Miss Penny", the heroes can build ties with Southshore's ghetto community and the businesses which hire her services. Her work as a freelance reporter can provide a source for adventure-hooks, information, or even fame, if the PCs are amenable to having their exploits sensationalized by the press. Eventually, as her shyness of them abates, Penelope may reveal the truth of her past with the Philosophy of Humanity to the heroes, leading them to investigate what became of Chaswick's other associates or how she came to be lost on Paridon's streets as a small child.

Ricos of Clan Mirek

Chairman of the Carlyle Trading Company

CR 8

Dread doppelganger bard 6 / expert 2

NE Medium monstrous humanoid
(shapechanger)

Init +2; **Senses** Spot +5, Listen +5; darkvision
60 ft., detect thoughts (DC 25)

Languages Zherisian*, Balok, Darkonese,
Mordentish

Outcast Rating 6 (if exposed)

AC 21, touch 11, flat-footed 20
(+1 Dex, +4 armor, +6 natural armor)

hp 72 (12 HD)

Immune sleep, charm, Hypnosis skill

Resist 50% chance to ignore extra critical hit
or sneak attack damage; shed polymorph
effects

Fort +5, **Ref** +10, **Will** +15

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)

Melee 2 slams +10 (1d6+1) or

Melee dagger +10/+5 (1d4+1)

Base Atk +9; **Grp** +10

Special Actions detect thoughts (DC 25) at
will; bardic music 6/day (countersong,
fascinate [2 targets], inspire courage +1,
inspire competence, suggestion [DC 18])

Combat Gear wand of lightning bolts (10th
lvl)

Bard Spells Known (CL 10th; 1d20+10 to
overcome SR):

2nd (4/day) - *enthrall* (DC 17), *suggestion*
(DC 17), *tongues*

1st (5/day) - *cause fear* (DC 16), *charm person*
(DC 16), *expeditious retreat*, *grease* (DC 16)

0th (3/day) - *dancing lights*, *ghost sound*
(DC 15), *mage hand*, *mending*, *message*,
prestidigitation



Abilities Str 12, Dex 12, Con 14, Int 16, Wis 17,
Cha 20

SQ bardic knowledge +11, Change Shape, Glamer,
shapechanger traits

Feats Ability Focus (detect thoughts), Disguise
Spell ^{CA}, Invasive Insight[#], Practiced Spellcaster
(bard) ^{CD}, Skill Focus (Use Magic Device)

[CD - Complete DivineCA - Complete Adventurer
- New monstrous feat.]

Skills Appraise +11, Bluff +22*, Diplomacy +23,
Disguise +19 (+21 to act in character)*, Escape
Artist +0*, Gather Information +20*, Intimidate
+15, Knowledge (geography) +11, Knowledge
(history) +8, Listen +5*, Perform (oratory) +16,
Sense Motive +18, Sleight of Hand +2, Spellcraft
+9 (+11 for scrolls), Spot +5*, Survival +3 (+5
versus getting lost/avoiding hazards), Use Magic
Device +19 (+21 for scrolls)

Possessions combat gear plus circlet of
persuasion†, several writs of communication,
masterwork chain shirt† (-1 armor check penalty),
dagger†, various knickknacks, illegible business-
related notes scribbled on any paper handy

[† - Disguised as innocuous garments or accessories
by illusionary effects of Glamer.]

Who's Who

Bardic Knowledge: Ricos may make a bardic knowledge check at a +11 modifier to see if it knows some relevant information about local notable people, important items or events, or noteworthy places. Ricos collects a number of odd facts during the course of business. It can use Bardic Knowledge without penalty in Paridon, Mordent, Darkon, Sri Raji, Lamordia or the Sea of Sorrows.

Change Shape (Su): Ricos can assume the shape of any Small or Medium humanoid, including specific individuals it has adequately observed, as a standard action. It can stay in the chosen form indefinitely until it assumes a new form or returns to its own.

Detect Thoughts (Su): Ricos can continuously detect thoughts (Will save DC 25 negates). It can suppress or resume this ability as a free action, and switch between modes of perception (skimming, gauging, or probing) as a swift action. It can attempt to obtain visual or auditory impressions from a subject as well as thoughts (Will save DC 23); a save failed by 4 points reveals one sense, by 8 points reveals both, and by less than 4 reveals thoughts only.

Glamer (Su): Ricos can alter the texture and appearance of objects on its person, applying this effect to a single object as a standard action, or to a complete set of clothing as a full-round action. Dismissing Glamer is a free action. It cannot change the objects' basic material (cloth remains cloth, metal remains metal, etc), but Ricos can turn a smoking jacket into a sailor's rough shirt, or a gold earring into a gilded cameo. Objects may be physically transmuted by glamer, but only function within the boundaries of their original purpose (e.g. a spoon could become a fork, but not a nail-file). Glamer-disguised objects automatically revert to their true form if separated from Ricos by at least five feet.

Skills: * +4 circumstance bonus to Bluff, Disguise, and Gather Information checks when using detect thoughts. * +10 circumstance bonus to Disguise checks when using Change Shape. * +4 racial bonus to Escape

Artist checks when in true form. * +2 circumstance bonus to Spot checks to detect disguises; -2 circumstance penalty to Spot and Listen checks in wilderness.

Hook (Carlyle) "Oh, hello, didn't see you there! Name's Nick. Nice party huh? Ooh, try these little crackers, they're great. Say, have you heard the Darkonians just raised their exchange rates again? Gonna play havoc with the Demento money market."

Hook (Ricos) "Oh, it's really just a question of understanding supply and demand, interest rates, factors of risk, regular business cycles, and Dementlieuse-Borcan exchange rates. After that, everything's really rather easy. Sinking the other fellow's ship also helps."

The first thing anyone notices about Nicholas Carlyle is his constant movement. He is always in motion, sitting down, jumping to his feet again, pacing, gesturing, or scribbling notes on bits of paper, as if his lithe frame cannot contain his restless energy. A tall, attractive young man with a friendly grin, slightly disheveled brown hair, and twinkling, laughing gray eyes, 'Nick' Carlyle seems too nice to be a ruthless shipping magnate. He dresses in upper middle-class Zherisian fashions: conservative three-piece suits, brown usually, well-buffed leather shoes, topped off with a bowler hat with a silver band about the center. Despite his immense wealth, Carlyle clearly considers himself a captain of industry, not a wannabe aristocrat.

If revealed, Ricos' natural form is as memorable as that of its imago, albeit in a rather less positive fashion. As anatomically undistinguishable as are most dread doppelgangers, Ricos still displays its tell: its constant, restless movement. Its ashen skin is unmarred by wrinkles, and its eyes remain Carlyle's, though their gleam is more one of sly calculation than merriment. Like most well-off doppelgangers, Ricos wears clothing of genuine high quality, rather than veiling cheap garments in Glamer; as a self-indulgence, it has its garb tailored to fit its imago perfectly, instead of donning outsized clothing and glamer-shrinking it to fit.

In either form, Ricos is endlessly talkative, jumping from topic to topic in its pleasant, soothing tenor voice. Something of a motor mouth, Ricos is nevertheless a skilled orator, informal and friendly rather than austere, with a tendency to sound like an old school chum, only half grown up. This is no doubt a part of its charm, and thus, its success.

Those who are able to shake off Ricos' mental probing imagine that they hear something - voices or laughter far off in the distance - gone before it is fully understood. This is usually put down to an overactive imagination or actual activity at the very edge of hearing.

Background

Margaret Costock was born on December 11th, 738, the third child of Mr. Philip Costock, an accountant for the merchant firm of Russell and Sons, and his wife, Alice, of number forty-one, Harker's Lane, in the Bowels district of Paridon. Or so the birth certificate would have it. The truth is that 'Rita' was the child of a doppelganger, a mid-ranking member of the Mirek clan: couriers and occasional smugglers for Sodo and other elite Masters.

As a child, Rita chafed under the constraints and frustrations of being a girl in a male-dominated society. She was an active and athletic child, but was kept bundled in so many skirts and petticoats she could hardly move. She was fascinated by history, geography, and most of all, mathematics, but was expected to learn needlework, etiquette, and other 'feminine' skills. Rita wished nothing more than to enter the world of business, to travel and see the world. Society decreed that she was to be marriage stock for her family's advancement into the upper middle class.

Still, her irrepressible energy and determination found outlets where they could. At ten years old, in a show of talent that would prove prophetic, Rita took a basket of long-hoarded fabric from her hated sewing-lessons to the Riverside market, dressed in the borrowed clothing of a servant's child. Playing upon sympathy and shrewd negotiating talent, she managed to

barter the cloth-scrap first into a feather fan from Dementlieu, then into a golden earring, and finally into one of the fancy new bicycles. Her triumph was short-lived; the Costocks were aghast at her sneaking off, and the bicycle was confiscated.

By the time she began to hear others' thoughts, a year later, Rita was sure she had to do something desperate, or else go mad with frustration. Though traumatic at first, the Wakening also bore the promise of escape, which mitigated the young doppelganger's initial distress. The adolescent seized upon its mentor as a harbinger of greater things, thankful for something - anything! - that meant liberation from Rita's feather-lined cage.

Ricos, as Rita's mentor re-named its offspring, adapted quickly to life among the Masters. They had their own strange rules and bylaws - as rigid and unyielding, in their own way, as the societal codes the young Master had left behind it - but at least it no longer had arbitrary limits of gender to hold it back; the dynamic young doppelganger swiftly proved its resourcefulness and guile to its elders among the Mirek. That its youth technically placed it at the bottom of the clan's pecking order didn't bother Ricos: it was through being kept out of the limelight, tied down by antiquated social conventions. All it needed was the right opportunity, to make its dreams soar.

And soon enough, in observing the Mirek's dealings with other, more prestigious clans, Ricos had an epiphany: the elite doppelgangers were just like the "old money" aristocrats Rita's faux-father had dealt with. Content to usurp fortunes built by human effort, they themselves were unfamiliar with business, and didn't use their natural talents to make the wealth they'd stolen work for them. They frittered away capital that could be the foundation for empires, and squandered their ability to lie, persuade, and penetrate thoughts as if impersonation were all that such gifts could be used for.

Ricos felt like the only person in a gold mine who knew what gold looked like.

Who's Who

First, to take full advantage of its mind-reading powers, Ricos sensed it needed an imago to anchor its personality. The fledgling doppelganger went about claiming one more methodically than most, viewing each prospect with the eyes of an investor more than a stalker. Eventually it settled upon Nicholas Carlyle, a teenaged baker's assistant with whom Rita had been acquainted. He was handsome, well-spoken, and had no roots to tie him to Paridon, having been orphaned in the post-Upheaval riots. His personality was congenial and friendly, yet ambitious: a comfortable fit for Ricos' own drive and persuasiveness. Most importantly, he was male, hence exempt from the social constraints that had been the bane of Margaret Costock's existence. One fell evening, Carlyle was ambushed, had his neck snapped, and was quietly buried under an old building in the Bowels, with a last, grateful kiss from "Rita" upon his cooling cheek.

Next on Ricos' agenda was starting capital. For most of the next year, Ricos watched the various elite doppelgangers which contracted the Mirek clan's services, eventually settling on the extremely wealthy leader of the Stawey clan. 'Borrowing' its imago without permission - a feat of daring that could well have gotten it charged with "trespassing" - Ricos visited a small banking house, requesting a quick (and discreet) loan. Three weeks later, the bank's manager was found

dead with a snapped neck at the foot of some stairs, and a fire engulfed his office, destroying countless documents. Confident it had covered its tracks, Ricos departed Paridon by ship shortly thereafter, carrying with it some four thousand pounds. What it had planned next couldn't be done in Zherisia, where its clan's ambitions were firmly curtailed by Sodo's mandates.

In Darkon, Ricos joined forces with a Dementlieuse merchant, Pierre LeGuar, and in 752 it pooled funds with the man to buy a trading caravel from a factor in Port-a-Lucine, and outfit it for a trip to Sri Raji. The venture was an astounding success, with Carlyle managing to secure a load of spices quite cheaply in exchange for helping the spice-dealer's son escape Sri Raji and avoid being sacrificed. As luck (and a timely shove) would have it, LeGuar himself fell overboard during a nasty storm on the return voyage, leaving Nick Carlyle in sole possession of the caravel.

With the proceeds of the trip, Ricos was able to leverage a loan large enough to buy a carrack, the *Golden Opportunity*, and fund a trip to Rokushima Taiyoo. The journey was another success, and with this and later profits Ricos bought more ships, acquired warehouse space, and hired a young half-Vistani Captain of the Mists by the name of Serina Grey. The Carlyle Trading Company was born.

Dread Possibility: A Non-Traditional Family

Most doppelgangers use quislings if they can get them, but "Nick Carlyle" employs far more than usual, in part because he can afford to hire so many. More importantly, Ricos considers itself an entrepreneur first and a doppelganger second: it runs the Company as a true meritocracy, with capable quislings occasionally being given authority over fellow doppelgangers, to the marked disapproval of Zherisia's other Clan Leaders. Yet they disapprove even more of the young Master's scandalous relationship with one quisling in particular.

Born in Martira Bay, daughter of a Mordentish sailor and a wandering Corvara Vistana, Serina Grey (NE female half-Vistani Rgr5/Captain of the Mists 5*) grew up to become a harsh and unforgiving woman, with a heart full of rancor toward the parents who'd abandoned her and the society that left her on the streets, as well as a ruthless desire to prove herself. She parlayed her natural affinity for the Mists into apprenticeship to a ship's navigator, making her way to Paridon where she learned more secrets of mist-traveling.

Who's Who

Unfortunately, being female proved an impediment when she tried to get work as a captain, until a strangely gender-blind young man named Nick Carlyle hired her to pilot his carrack, the *Golden Opportunity*. It was the beginning of a successful partnership ... and a long-standing affair. What began as Serina's attempt to seduce and manipulate her unworldly-seeming employer (to Ricos' immense amusement) has grown into a stable relationship based on an aesthetic appreciation for each other's ruthlessness. The sole reason Serina and "Nick" have yet to wed is because Ricos enjoys watching overdressed matrons and stiff noblemen dance around the topic in conversations too much.

Ricos at first used the affair as a means of keeping tabs upon the ambitious half-Vistani's thoughts, while the sultry and seductive Serina sought to dominate Carlyle. When Ricos came to realize just how much alike they were, it took the gamble of letting Serina in on the secret of its nature. To the doppelganger's surprise, the Mist-Captain - never much of a fan of humanity - didn't let this revelation discourage her advances. After a few months' psychic observation to ensure its lover could be trusted with such knowledge, Ricos proposed a still more daring endeavor: a child. Serina agreed, as much out of curiosity as to what a "half-doppelganger" (for so Ricos claimed it would be) would be like as to secure her own place as mother of the heir to Nick's expanding fortune.

The son of Ricos and Serina, Alexander Carlyle was conceived aboard the *Golden Opportunity* in late 752, as the ship traversed the Royal Channel Mistway. To Serina, Ricos' professed goal was to sire an heir with the business sense of Nick Carlyle and the mist-guiding ability of Captain Grey; in reality, it wished to see if her half-Vistani talents (being supernatural rather than genetic) could be expressed in its offspring. Initially as indifferent a parent as other dread doppelgangers, Ricos has grown somewhat fond of playing the father-figure in the past year or so, now that the boy can hold a decent conversation. Perhaps egged on by a vestige of the true Nicholas Carlyle's orphaned yearning for a family, it takes a growing interest in the education of seven-year-old Alex ... or Alcar, as Ricos eagerly anticipates naming him.

Alex is a wary, quiet child, dusky-skinned and raven-haired like his mother; he has a fondness for adventure-fiction and the Alanik Ray tales, a preference Ricos (ironically) encourages as a lesson in vigilance and guile. Raised mostly by nannies and tutors while both his parents work, and a virtual outcast due to his illegitimacy and apparent Vistani blood, Alex is a lonely boy in sore need of friends. He has had few chances to try his hand at manipulating others, being a bit overwhelmed by his father's sheer charisma.

Serina, meanwhile, finds being a mother both more joyous and more intimidating than she ever anticipated: though her ruthlessness remains unchanged, she loves her son and is very afraid for his future as an outsider. She does not realize that being a half-Vistani will be the least of Alexander's growing pains, compared to the Wakening ... an event Ricos hasn't warned her will re-make her son into something she, herself, is likely too human to understand. Not does Serina suspect that this very ignorance is the one thing that stops the other Clan Leaders from insisting she be killed or her mind tampered with, to safeguard the secret of how dread doppelgangers reproduce.

Just how successful Ricos' experiment has been is left to individual DMs to choose. Child of a doppelganger and a deeply Mist-touched half-Vistani, conceived in the Mists, Alexander Carlyle might evolve any number of peculiar talents ... or none whatsoever. Perhaps he will Waken as a Mist-touched doppelganger, or some variety of Fugued. His blending of doppelganger and Vistani heritage, strengthened by the Mists, might give him a gift of prophecy - Vistani Sight sharpened by an imposter's psychic acuity - that could make "Alcar" its sire's equal in business ... or brand it as a Dukkar, in the eyes of Serina's fellow Mist-Captains: a stigma it can't very well refute by outing itself as a doppelganger, rather than a male!

Or perhaps the Mists have marked Ricos' offspring as their own, and when he matures, Alex will become, not a dread doppelganger, but an ethereal doppelganger, and a being far too powerful for either its sire or Sodo to control.

Who's Who

The Company grew by leaps and bounds in the next few years. Between the understated competence of Captain Grey and the vibrant energy of Ricos, the shipping business boomed, with new routes opening constantly. An underground trade in opium and the human smuggling that grew out of that one Rajian refugee only helped. Competitors who tried to challenge the Carlyle Trading Company tended not to last long: those which aggressive business practices failed to cut out of the field, a little espionage and sabotage quickly brought down.

In time, too much success in the business venue left Ricos feeling bored. Running the Company has become rote, even mechanical, between trade routes secured, competent captains and clerks on staff, and port officials properly bribed or blackmailed. A new challenge was necessary.

In 758, the Carlyle Trading Company relocated from its long-established headquarters in Ludendorf to new offices in Paridon's Bowels district. At the same time, the Mirek doppelganger clan suffered a sudden blitz of unsolved attacks. Within days, the Clan Leader and its top bravos were slain, a number of hired thugs retired as wealthy men, and Ricos - spilling coin like water and slick-talking its way onto center stage among its fellows - stepped straight from the dubious status of an expatriate into the rank of Clan Leader.

Current Sketch

To call Ricos "unorthodox" is to do it a disservice: it is a true social heretic, a dedicated maverick who takes a childish delight in confounding expectations and shocking the conservative, staid "old money" types, whether human or doppelganger. In truth, Ricos has never forgiven the misery it endured, growing up as a young girl in Zherisia, and it takes a vicarious revenge upon society by confounding anyone who expects it to act in a particular way.

Despite this foible, Ricos is still a businessman, and a brilliant one. A born wheeler-and-dealer, the doppelganger applies the natural social talents of the

Masters to the field of commerce, and its success has been phenomenal. Whereas most doppelgangers compete viciously for status, Ricos seeks to buy its way into society. The blandishments of unlimited wealth can be enticing to even the most snobbish of Masters ... and if that won't suffice to win over its peers, there are plenty of ambitious underlings beneath its fellow Clan Leaders, whose drive for advancement can be spurred by healthy bribes and a promised political alliance.

Ricos' imago - the one and only human it has ever personally murdered in order to supplant - is that of the onetime baker's assistant, Nicholas Carlyle. Slightly older than Ricos itself (an apparent twenty-seven to Ricos' twenty-two), "Nick" is a common sight around King's Quarter in Paridon; there, he is sneered at behind his back by the aristocracy, yet is simply too rich to snub openly or to ignore. Often seen with an arm draped round his paramour and second-in-command, Serina Grey, Carlyle's demeanor is that of an energetic, enthusiastic overgrown teenager - one with a fleeting attention span and a tendency to talk too much - who seems entirely unaware of the social faux pas he commits. Popular wisdom among Zherisian high society holds that Carlyle picked up his unwittingly-obnoxious behavior among the uncultivated louts of the Core, a belief that his tasteless willingness to hire any ill-bred oaf who'll make his Company richer - even calibans or women - and his constant nattering about overseas business practices seem to bear out.

This empty-headed demeanor is only partially an act on Ricos' part. The young Master is given to frequent bursts of interest which wane in a few months (the most recent being a collection of model soldiers), yet its focus in matters of business or politics is as concentrated as an eagle's gaze. It suits Ricos' purposes if Carlyle is viewed as a well-meaning, likable buffoon. Commercial rivals who've met "Nick" are baffled by how the scatter-brained Carlyle could possibly run the largest shipping network in the Land of Mists. Most assume there must be more to him than meets the eye, yet few ever suspect how sinister the truth happens to be.

Just Business

However dubious its ownership, the Carlyle Trading Company is precisely what it professes to be: an enormously successful shipping company, transporting goods across the Sea of Sorrows to no less than seven major domains, as well as minor enclaves like Ghastria or Dominia.

The Company's profit comes primarily from a trio of Mistways linked to the Sea of Sorrows: the Way of Venomous Tears to Rokushima Taiyoo, the Emerald Stream to Sri Raji, and the Royal Channel to Paridon. Rare luxury goods (such as spices, silk, gems, or tea) and bulk raw materials (timber, iron, cotton, etc) are shipped in from the former two realms, while manufactured goods, medicines, and similar advanced products are exported from Paridon. In return, Lamordian, Dementlieuse and Zherisian refined wares are shipped to Sri Raji and Rokushima Taiyoo, and raw materials such as food (primarily Falkovnian grain) and Mordentish wool are hauled in to keep Paridon afloat. The mainland Core is the ultimate destination for commodities of all kinds, with Dementlieuse coronas and Darkonian crowns pouring into the coffers of the Carlyle Trading Company by the hundred-weight.

Of course, not all the Company's activities are so lily-white in the eyes of the law. Smuggling is a profitable (if discreet) sideline, particularly of opium from Sri Raji. Some fifteen percent of the Core's opium comes in on Company ships - second only to Hazlani caravans - as does nearly all of Zherisia's. Alcohol and cultural artifacts are also smuggled in to avoid hefty tariffs, and the Carlyle Trading Company maintains a lucrative business moving fugitives to and from the Core: particularly Falkovnian refugees trying to put some distance between themselves and the Talons, or Darkonian criminals and dissidents evading the Kargat. A courier service and passenger fares round out the Carlyle Trading Company's commercial pursuits.

A last, slightly more unorthodox job of the Company's vessels is that of pirate-hunting. With the likes of Andre de Sang and Auden Beck prowling the Sea of Sorrows, and the Royal Channel to Paridon opening near Blaustein, maritime trade is risky at even the best of times. To that end, the Company outfits its ships with heavier defenses than usual for merchants, and one ship, the *Golden Opportunity*, doubles as a part-time pirate hunter. Ricos' "public-spirited" campaign against buccaneers does have an ulterior motive: in addition to keeping the shipping lanes safer - at least, for vessels which fly the Company's banner - capturing pirate ships is cheaper than buying new ones.

The Company itself is jointly owned, with Nick Carlyle as Chairman and chief shareholder, holding 40% of Company stock. Other key stockholders include prominent Zherisian nobles and merchants - more than half of them doppelgangers - and foreign investors such as Dominic d'Honaire (10% stock) and Count Wilhelm von Lovenhorst (7%). Serina Grey holds 5% of the stock, and through various agents, Sodo has his hands on a further 15%. To date, Ricos has had a free hand to run the Company as it sees fit, the other investors being content so long as profits continue apace; this state of affairs could change swiftly, however, should financial or legal difficulties arise.

The dominance of the Company in the Sea of Sorrows is due to several factors, foremost of which is Nick Carlyle himself. A financial wizard, "Nick" is also a negotiator of the first degree (and one far from averse to using a subtle suggestion-effect during talks). Through a cunning blend of charisma, monetary or political favors, and extortion, he has built up profitable and influential connections throughout the Sea of Sorrows. The Carlyle Trading Company is also outright ruthless toward its competitors, more than a few rival captains having found their sails slashed, rudders broken, or cargo sabotaged. Doppelganger spies give the Company unparalleled information on competitors, as well as a near-impregnable defense against corporate espionage. Magical writs of communication and an army of clerks keep the widespread shipping empire in step, and a network of bribed and blackmailed officials (plus a few actual quislings or doppelgangers) turn a blind eye to Company doings, or arrange for timely port closures and searches. (Tipping off port officials to competitors' smuggling is a favorite trick of Ricos.) Sheer size and financial weight come in handy as well.

Dread Possibility: A Conflict of Interests

Before Ricos came along, the Mirek were a minor, weak clan of nine members, operating out of the Bowels district of Paridon. Their niches were those of couriers and teamster/haulers, as theirs was the covert task of smuggling illicit goods throughout the city for the other clans. Since Ricos' return, Carlyle Trading Company employees have taken over these duties. The now seven-member clan (after a few fatalities during the shift of power to Ricos) works almost exclusively to increase the power of the Company, serving as saboteurs and corporate spies. To the delighted surprise of the Mirek, their personal fortunes have increased, their tasks are less arduous and much more exciting, and they get to spend considerably more time in their imagoes' roles, with Ricos in charge. That, plus the fact that the last challenger for clan leadership was keel-hauled behind a Company ship for a few days, keeps them in line.

All this has not escaped the Grandmaster's notice. The Mirek, formerly small and insignificant, is now one of the wealthiest clans in Paridon. Once it became clear that this nonconformist upstart wasn't going to be killed immediately, the Vanguard brought Ricos an offer. In exchange for Sodo's patronage and permission to exert authority over the Mirek beyond Paridon's boundary, Ricos would use the Carlyle Trading Company to secure a monopoly on Zherisian trade for the Masters. Realizing it needed Sodo's endorsement to keep the established Clan Leaders' envy of its lightning-fast rise in check, Ricos accepted in a heartbeat.

For Sodo, the allure of more economic power is strong. If he can secure the shipping lanes via the Company, the Grandmaster will have his finger on the beating pulse of Zherisia's mercantile destiny. Beyond his crude ability to cut off trade, the darklord will be able to manipulate prices, availability, and transport of goods as he chooses. Ricos, meanwhile, has taken full advantage of the Grandmaster's forbearance to secure its own political base, as well as make ever more money via tax advantages and loopholes Sodo's entrenched agents have provided. Having the Grandmaster's backing means that other Clan Leaders are hesitant to openly defy the wunderkind. For his part, Sodo is amused by the Vanguard's reports of how Ricos shocks and discomfits other doppelgangers, perhaps seeing something of a kindred spirit in this fellow-iconoclast.

None of this would stop Sodo from killing Ricos without a moment's hesitation. The returned expatriate is far from loyal, and its ambition has already led it to secure the support of over a dozen Clan Leaders, most by outright bribery; it won't take much more glad-handing on Ricos' part to rouse the darklord's paranoia. Nor would Sodo mind seizing direct control of the Carlyle Trading Company, without the potential disruption of Ricos' contrary streak. A conflict between the two doppelgangers is inevitable. The only question is whether Sodo will strike first - very likely, given the darklord's usual caginess - or grant Ricos time to gather enough support to break the ancient Grandmaster's hold on power.

Assuming Ricos survives whatever Sodo's first attack might be, it will flee Paridon to regroup somewhere in the Core. Once out of the darklord's reach, the doppelganger tycoon will counterattack with all the clout and resources at its disposal. Carlyle's ships are heavily armed, and already control a large fraction of Zherisia's maritime trade; a Company embargo of Paridon could lead to a virtual second Imprisonment, particularly if hired mercenaries should blockade the other Mistways. (And with apparently-limitless wealth, Ricos can hire a lot of mercenaries.)

Sodo, meanwhile, will do everything in his power to either have Ricos assassinated, or undermine its place as Chairman. The Carlyle Trading Company's wealth only seems limitless, and if profits drop precipitously, its other shareholders may well dethrone Ricos for the Grandmaster. Kidnapping Alex Carlyle - legal heir to Ricos' shares of the Company - and staging the senior Carlyle's accidental death is another ploy Sodo may resort to; if successful, the darklord could then expose the "Nick" who fled Paridon as a doppelganger, and use Alex to seize control of the Company from its founder.

Who's Who

In addition to keeping the Company's rivals mystified, Ricos gets a kick out of 'fortuitously' insulting and shocking the hereditary human aristocrats whom it holds in contempt: money or power not earned is not worth paying attention to, in the doppelganger tycoon's reckoning.

Currently, Ricos is in the process of expanding the Carlyle Trading Company and its own political power-base. In pursuit of the first goal, the young Master has been steadily buying more ships and warehouse space, and establishing contracts for regular shipments of goods from ever more ports across the Land of Mists. Notably, it has recently opened a warehouse in Armeikos, as a first step in expanding the Company's influence into the Nocturnal Sea. Ricos' eventual goal is to secure a shipping monopoly in both Seas, and perhaps someday in overland trade across the Core. With that kind of influence, it would be able to dictate terms to local rulers. It'll take a while, and such well-established firms as the Boritsi and Red Vardo trading companies won't surrender an inch of their own shipping territories without a fight, but Ricos is young, so has plenty of time.

On the political front, Ricos has been building a power base by the straightforward tactic of buying its fellow Clan Leaders left and right, offering them percent or half-percent shares in the Carlyle Trading Company (one percent of which works out to some fifteen hundred pounds in profits per annum), or lump sums of cash. It has received courteous overtures from Bellark, current High Scion of the Star Order; though uninterested in alchemy for its own sake, it is now weighing the possible political advantages to be gained in joining the alchemical Lodge against the distractions and headaches which negotiating the Order's internal snake-pit would entail.

Fast as its ascent from obscurity has been, the wunderkind's plans for the future aren't limited to the short term. Ricos has set its underlings within the Mirek clan to work siring a new generation of "recruits", both in Paridon and in other ports where its vessels dominate trade. Boasting over a thousand employees, the Company can easily harbor

dozens of doppelgangers in its ranks, so Ricos intends to embed its clan's heirs throughout its shipping empire, where they can keep tabs on every facet of operations.

Combat

Frankly, Ricos isn't much of a combatant. Its abilities are geared towards negotiations and dialogue, and would seem to be of little use in a fight. On the other hand, its powers are also very hard to detect. As an orator, Ricos can use its bardic-music powers simply by speaking, and with Disguise Spell, effects such as enthrall or suggestion can be worked into a monologue, so there's nothing more for victims to notice than that Nick Carlyle talks too much.

Confronted with violence, Ricos usually tries to escape, using its modest roster of spells to confound its foes long enough to get clear. Ghost sound can make it seem that reinforcements are on their way, while grease or cause fear buy it time to put some distance between itself and pursuers, often via expeditious retreat. Once out of view, it swiftly swaps guises to throw attackers off its trail, perhaps using dancing lights to lead them off-course if it's dark enough. In extremis, Ricos uses its wand of lightning bolts to discourage persistent foes, so chasing it into a corridor is a bad idea.

Given time to organize and launch an offensive, Ricos uses all the power wealth can buy to destroy its foes. Hiring mercenaries or criminals is its preferred method of attack, though rough sailors or dockhands on the Company payroll can be used in a pinch. Ricos itself may tag along, providing support with its bardic music and occasional shots from its wand, staying safely in the rear and adopting a guise that won't make it stand out as a target.

Lair

Ricos is a hyperactive creature by anyone's standard, let alone the indolent lifestyles of its fellow Masters. Much of its time is spent in the Carlyle Trading Company's Central Office, a huge brick edifice in the Bowels district, from which Ricos manages its

The Carlyle Fleet

The Carlyle Trading Company maintains a fleet of fourteen caravels and nine carracks. Caravels are small, three-masted vessels, quite fast, while carracks (sometimes called greatships) are massive, four-masted sea-going fortresses which, while slow, can carry over five hundred tons of goods. Due to the constant threat of piracy in the Sea of Sorrows, Company ships are generally heavily armed and have larger crew complements than usual, with caravels mustering crews of fifteen and carracks, of a hundred men or more. Carracks are usually armed with cannons, while caravels rely upon small ballistae that require fewer crew to man.

More information on ships, armaments, and other nautical topics can be found in Stormwrack.

maritime empire. The entire top floor of the building has been converted into luxury apartments for Nick, his live-in paramour Serina Grey, and their son Alex. Ricos spends most of its day working on Company matters (Carlyle is a notorious workaholic), often laboring from sunup till late at night; if engaged in particularly intense bargaining, it sometimes works around the clock, switching from Carlyle's guise to that of a quisling employee for the few hours Nick is supposedly sleeping.

When it isn't at the Central Office, Ricos is usually off playing politics with other doppelgangers, or bearding Carlyle's competitors and customers in their dens. Ricos occasionally attends balls or parties in King's Quarters or Shadewell, usually invited by shareholders or customers who are afraid to offend. Ricos tends to view these affairs as trawling grounds for potential investors and/or blackmail information, and as a chance to entertain itself by annoying the upper crust. Once or twice a year, the young imposter ventures overseas to check up on the Company's status in other ports; at such times, Ricos likes to travel incognito - an easy task for a doppelganger - both to avoid human and inhuman rivals' or vengeful pirates' reprisals, and to catch its own corporate officers off-guard as a test of their professionalism and loyalty.

The Carlyle Trading Company Central Office

The Central Office (nicknamed the "Catacomb" based on its initials), is a massive red-brick building in the northern part of the Bowels. A full five stories tall, the Catacomb was formerly an orphanage that was gutted by fire shortly after the Great Upheaval, and acquired an unfortunate reputation as a ghost-ridden old ruin. Carlyle bought it for pence on the pound, fixed it up and made it the headquarters of his corporation. As a matter of fact, the Central Office is haunted, but its ghost, the five-year-old orphan and fire victim Burning Mary (N female human geist Com1) is both shy and relatively harmless by spirit standards.

The ground floor of the Central Office contains a reception area, a guardroom, and various storage rooms. The next two are taken up by large, open rooms where masses of clerks busily calculate costs, fill out shipping manifests and docking forms, coordinate ships' time of departure, and in general keep the Carlyle Trading Company operational. The floor above is devoted to private offices for company higher-ups, as well as a lavish conference room for shareholder meetings, a second guardroom, and a closely-guarded vault for the Central Office's on-site bankroll. The top floor is the private apartment of Nick Carlyle and his lover and son. The basement houses corporate records and personnel files.

Ricos' apartment is lavishly decorated, in an unusual and evocative style. Exotic goods from Sri Raji and Rokushima Taiyoo predominate, with tapestries, statues and weapons gracing the walls, in a theme that casts Carlyle as a foreign potentate. In one corner, a golden shrine of Tvashtri, the Rajian god of industry and invention, benignly sits. Other rooms are decorated in other styles. Nick's study is the epitome of Lamordian practicality, while the dining room displays a Dementlieuse ostentation and refinement. Serina's private suite of four rooms shows both nautical and Vistani touches, while Alex's quarters (bed, bath, and tutoring rooms) contain more books than toys. All in all, the residence is sumptuous, very international, and quite beautiful, though in a somewhat haphazard motif.

The Catacomb is a constant buzz of activity. Some two hundred clerks working there, plus cleaning crews, office assistants, security, and other miscellaneous employees, bringing the total up to nearly three hundred people. Phineas Atwater (LN male human Exp6) is the chief clerk: a thin, somewhat unpleasant man, but an exceptional accountant. He has no idea of the true nature of his employer.

Nigel Young (LE male jackalwere Ftr6), a pale, blond-haired hulk of a figure, is head of security, as well as Ricos' personal enforcer and bodyguard. The Central Office is patrolled by three shifts of twelve guards each - ex-mercenaries and similar professionals (human and caliban fighters of 3rd-5th level, plus one wizard of 4th-5th level per shift) - as well as guard dogs (four of which are jackalweres) and a few warding spells, mostly alarms and arcane locks cast by staff mages. Ricos primarily relies upon the constant activity of the Central Office as security, as even in the dead of night there are always at least fifty people - a few of them unsleeping doppelgangers - at work in the building.

DM Tip: Using Ricos

Ricos and its Company can be a means to draw PCs into Zherisia and involve them in doppelganger-related adventures, or simply part of an adventure or campaign based in the Sea of Sorrows. The Carlyle Trading Company is best introduced gradually, so players regard it as a mere in-the-background presence before they actually become involved with its affairs. Have the PCs hire passage on a Company ship, let a package be delivered to them which is stamped with the CTC insignia, or let an information-gathering PC turn up reports of a Carlyle-owned vessel's latest skirmish with pirates.

Once the Company has been established in the PCs' minds as part of the scenery, DMs can use it in many ways. Perhaps Nick Carlyle or one of his factors hires the PCs to slay a sea hag or jolly roger that endangers Company ships. Perhaps the PCs stumble across one of the Company's less salubrious activities, like opium smuggling or strong-arming of rivals. Perhaps they need to escape a domain quietly, and book passage from the Carlyle Trading Company to make good their escape. Or perhaps they're simply on board a Company vessel when it is attacked by pirates, and they are forced to defend it. Whatever the case, they'll eventually end up visiting the Company's headquarters in Zherisia, be it to receive a commendation from Carlyle or to investigate the illicit doings of the Company. Once there, Ricos can serve as a gateway into the Byzantine politics of the doppelganger clans.

Ricos also presents an opportunity to confront PCs with a difficult moral quandary. Opium smuggling aside, the overwhelming majority of the Company's business is legal and aboveboard. Indeed, fugitives secreted on Company ships are usually fleeing from Arijani or the Kargat: a service that might well be accounted a good deed on Ricos' part. And the Carlyle Trading Company vigorously opposes piracy throughout the Sea of Sorrows. Moreover, although Ricos killed to reach its present position of wealth and influence, all of its crimes - with the singular exception of its imago's murder - have been the acts of a ruthless corporate shark, not an inhuman monster. Indeed, it has committed no offense in the past decade that a human tycoon with a medallion of thoughts and hat of disguise wouldn't be sorely tempted to do.

Is justice truly served if Ricos is slain out of hand, like a monster, or must Nick Carlyle be prosecuted for his crimes like a man? Can the PCs justify killing or exposing Ricos, knowing this would spell the collapse of a company with over fifteen hundred employees - sailors and clerks and dockhands - and severely wound the economies of half a dozen countries? Would the death of his sire leave little Alex Carlyle - the only dread doppelganger's child in history ever to be conceived without rape-by-deception - deprived of a guiding hand, to ease him through the Wakening with his sanity and (perhaps) his conscience intact? Yet can the heroes just let a monster like Ricos walk away? Moral uncertainty, thy name is Ravenloft.

Brother Konraad Valchov, Special Inquisitor

CR 14

Male human† ranger 3/fighter 2/ rogue 1/
consecrated harrier 8*

[† - 3rd-generation fey descendent (muryan)
* - Complete Divine]

LN Medium humanoid (human)

Init +5; **Senses** Listen +20, Spot +20;

Languages Vaasi*, Balok, Darkonese,
Mordentish

Outcast Rating 1

AC 21, touch 15, flat-footed 16
(+5 Dex, +6 armor)

hp 123 (14 HD)

Resist +4 on all saves vs illusions, Endurance,
Nine Lives

Fort +11, **Ref** +12, **Will** +11

Speed 40 ft. (8 squares)

Melee "Ezra's Mercy" +18/+13/+8
(1d6+2+2d6 holy damage vs Evil/17-20) and
"Ezra's Justice" +18/+13/+8 (1d6+1/17-20)

Ranged "Canon Lawyer" +20 (special)

Base Atk +13; **Grp** +14

Attack Options Blessings of Scripture +4,
Dancing Strike, Favored Enemy (monstrous
humanoids) +2, Sneak Attack +1d6

Combat Gear "Canon Lawyer" (+1 net of
distance), "Ezra's Justice" (+1 ghost touch
silver short sword), "Ezra's Mercy" (+1 holy
silver short sword)

Usual Consecrated Harrier Spells Prepared
(CL 8th):

4th (2) - *legend lore*, *summon nature's ally IV*
(1d3 dire wolves)

3rd (2) - *discern lies* (DC 17), *see invisibility*

2nd (2) - *daylight*, *cat's grace*



1st (3) - *identify spoor*^{VRA}, calm emotions (DC
15), *alarm*

[VRA - Van Richten's Arsenal]

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 8th)

At will - *detect chaos* (DC 13)

4/day - *dispel magic* (d20+10), *crushing
despair* (DC 16), *false vision*

Abilities Str 13, Dex 21, Con 16, Int 14, Wis
18, Cha 15

SQ Code of Conduct, Combat Style (Two-
Weapon Fighting), Implacable Hunt, Path of
the Cat, Sanctified Sight, Trapfinding, Wild
Empathy +5

Feats Dancing Strike^{SF}, Endurance^B, Exotic
Weapon Proficiency (net), Greater Two-
Weapon Fighting, Improved Critical (short
sword), Improved Two-Weapon Fighting,
Nine Lives^{VRA} [6 used], Skill Focus
(Survival), Track^B, Two-Weapon Fighting^B,
Weapon Focus (net, short sword)

[B - Bonus^{SF} - Van Richten's Guide to the
Shadow Fey VRA - Van Richten's Arsenal]

Skills Diplomacy +4, Disguise +7, Gather
Information +18, Knowledge (nature) +9,
Listen +20, Perform (dancing) +18, Ride

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+14, Search +13, Sense Motive +18, Speak Language (1), Spot +20, Survival +23 (+27 to track aboveground)

Possessions combat gear plus mithril chain shirt +2, lens of detection, silver holy symbol of Ezra, travel vestments, documents identifying him as Special Inquisitor of Praesidius Levin Postoya

Blessings of Scripture +4 Brother Konraad receives a +4 sacred bonus to Bluff, Listen, Sense Motive, Spot, and Survival while in pursuit of a target assigned to him by the Church of Ezra. He also receives a +4 sacred bonus to weapon or unarmed damage rolls against the target, and on dispel checks when using his dispel magic spell-like ability (included).

Code of Conduct: Brother Konraad, in addition to the standard vows of an Ezran Anchorite, also works under the auspices of the Office of Praesidius as an inquisitor, and must follow their laws. Though most of the creatures he hunts are already slated for death, Brother Konraad must still introduce himself as the Special Inquisitor and list their crimes before executing the target. He cannot sneak attack them, he cannot slay them on a battle-field without the target knowing who and why he is there. The rules of the Inquisitor are purposely worded vaguely so as to grant flexibility to an individual Inquisitor out in the field. The one constant is that the target must know who is killing it and why. Should Brother Konraad break these laws, he must atone, as per the spell, before he can progress further in the consecrated harrier class (he doesn't lose any existing abilities).

Implacable Hunt (Su): If Brother Konraad wounds a target which then escapes, Brother Konraad always knows the direction and approximate distance (within 10% of the total distance) of the target. If Brother Konraad is within 50 feet of the target, he can pinpoint it's location precisely. This ability can be used against multiple opponents simultaneously, but only if all the opponents are a part of a group that collectively is Brother Konraad's current quarry. Implacable Hunt only works when both

Brother Konraad and the target are in the same domain. Should one leave, the link is severed, though it is re-established if the two find themselves within the same domain again.

Path of the Cat I: During his time as a brigand in northwest Nova Vaasa, Brother Konraad failed a Powers check, and received the speed and hunger of a plains cat. He gains a +10 bonus to speed, but has acquired a taste for raw meat. Konraad cooks his meals very, very rare, and occasionally dispenses with cooking entirely when he is alone in the woods.

Sanctified Sight (Su): Brother Konraad receives a +4 bonus on all saves against illusions.

Hook "You didn't really think you could defy the Grand Scheme and get away with it, did you?"

In appearance, the Nova Vaasan anchorite resembles one of the plains cats of his homeland. Tall, lean, and rangy, with outsized hands and feet, Brother Konraad Valchov presents a clumsy-looking figure: an impression given the lie by his graceful, near-feline movements. Freckles, a constant smile, and an equally-perpetual sunburn make his raw-featured face seem younger than his years, despite the scar below one eye. His ginger-red hair is worn long enough to cover his pointed ears - relics of an ancestor's tryst with a Muryan Arak - and bright green eyes complete the ensemble.

The dedicated Special Inquisitor usually goes clad in clean, well-worn anchorite's vestments, adding a full-length cloak in chilly weather or when he wishes to remain inconspicuous. When his missions demand greater anonymity, Valchov dresses as a woodsman or day-laborer, in course tunics and trousers. Traveling overland, he favors light riding horses of part-Gedfode descent: animals sharing the hardiness and agility of his homeland's purebred "goat-feet", yet not so small as to make him look silly astride one.

Valchov's speech is cheerful and blunt, peppered with references to Ezra and the

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Grand Scheme and his own plebian past, all delivered in a flat rural-Vaasi accent.

Background

Konraad Valchov was born in a one-room farmhouse on the Tepest-Nova Vaasa border, not far from the city of Liara, one winter night in later 727 or early 728. His family was a small but colorful one, of long-assimilated Barovian immigrants, on his father's side, and displaced Tepestani on his mother's. The family was remarkable for more than its ethnic mix: a strain of fey blood set them apart from their fellow farmers. In 692, Konraad's great-grandmother had had a romantic encounter

with a muryan, and the fruit of that tryst would be Konraad's grandmother. Tepestani are not very forgiving of differences, and Konraad's maternal forbearers soon left for Nova Vaasa, where people were less curious and marginally more tolerant.

Konraad grew up as a tall, strapping farm-lad, a good horseman and a better hunter, not to mention a third-generation feyblood. Then came 742, and a particularly harrowing winter that confronted the Valchovs with a painful choice: give their appointed food-tax to their noble lord and starve, or be proclaimed outlaws. Konraad chose that moment to spare his kin from the choice. Taking only a hunting bow and enough food

Dread Possibility: The Sins of the Fathers...

Valchov's family has a rather romantic tale of how the blood of a muryan came to flow in their veins. As the story goes, Valchov's great-grandmother, Sondra, was a great Tepestani beauty, the kind of woman to set the pulse of every man in the village racing. But she was betrothed to the village blacksmith, a homely, hulking man, but with a kind soul. They were madly in love.

On the eve of the wedding, a stranger arrived in the village and entered the home of the bride. Auburn hair and ears longer than an elf's revealed his nature, as he went on one knee before Sondra, and proclaimed his love. He asked for but an hour to woo her away, and took her somewhere. When the hour was past and the stranger and Sondra returned, she was different, wiser, having seen so much of the beauty of the world, and known the pleasures of the fey. And yet, though she thanked the muryan for his blessing and his gifts, she would marry the blacksmith. As the family legend goes, the muryan nodded sadly to this, gave her a parting kiss, and disappeared from mortal sight. A rather pleasant tale of true love conquering all temptations.

The reality is rather less pretty. Although the story is true as far as it goes, it neglects the small fact that the muryan was a sore loser. In bestowing that final kiss, the Arak whispered a curse to the Tepestani beauty.

"Spurn me for a mortal? Then learn just how mortal they can be ... let disease teach you that lesson, and fire, and the axe, and the darkness of the soul. And you, my beauty, will watch, 'til the last drop of my blood has been spent from mortal veins."

So far, the curse has been chillingly effective. Sondra's husband died of a long and painful illness, the cause of which was never determined. Sondra's son was burned at the stake by a mob, and though Konraad doesn't know it, his parents were beheaded by the 'Straffers' - the Vaasi Secret Police - soon after he became a brigand. And throughout all this, Sondra (NG female human geist Com1) has had to watch powerlessly, able to send dreams and nightmares, yet never to affect the waking world.

Now, with Konraad as a Special Inquisitor, it's only a matter of time before 'the darkness of the soul' leads him to an early death, which (as he has no descendants) will mean the end of the curse. Of course, with the assistance of modern medicine, perhaps there is another means of resolving the curse.

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for a week, he slipped away into the wilderness. Without him, the family could meet its obligations without starving.

A week was all it took to convince Valchov that he wasn't made for living in the woods, particularly with goblins and worse swarming across the border from Tepest on regular raids. The young farm-boy took the one course of action that wouldn't leave him as a starved corpse in the woods. He joined the bandit gang of "Smilin' Staan" Garkiin, and became a highwayman.

Valchov 'the Wolf', as he was soon dubbed for his lanky build, was a modestly successful robber in northern Nova Vaasa for several years; in time, he parted ways with the gang, after a bitter disagreement with Garkiin left his cheek scarred. He wasn't the worst of the brigands in the area, though he was far from the best. He robbed passing merchants, held up an outlying farm or two, and killed a few people who resisted too much.

Dread Possibility: ... Shall be visited upon the Sons

In Ravenloft, one can never walk away from evil. And for all that Valchov the Wolf has reformed and re-invented himself as Brother Konraad Valchov, others are less forgiving. He is still a wanted criminal in Nova Vaasa, though the passage of time has made most forget about him. Moreover, one specific individual, Lucia Chekiv (CE female human Rank 4 ghost Sor10/Ari2) has neither forgotten nor forgiven Valchov. And with the recent arrival of a Borcan anchorite in her, this vengeful spirit has gone hunting.

A few years after Valchov joined "Smilin' Staan" Garkiin's band, the bandit gang ambushed a carriage. In it was a minor daughter of the great Chekiv family, on her way to Liara. Lucia and her servants were captured, to be held for ransom, but that night something went wrong. One of the carriage's drivers tried to escape, and in the process, stabbed Garkiin in the side. The bandit leader survived, but in the outbreak of violence that followed, most of the servants were killed and Lucia herself was gravely wounded. In the end, the idea of the ransom was abandoned, and Valchov - who had stood aside during the violence, due mostly to fear - cut Lucia's throat as a mercy killing. It was this incident that prompted Valchov's leaving Garkiin's band.

This could have been the end of things. Garkiin continued his bloody ways, while Valchov became an Ezrite and tried to put the ugly incident behind him, offering his life and service as a penance for the evil that he had done in his youth. But Lucia's ravaged soul wasn't content to rest. A year and a day after her death, she rose again, with the goal of vengeance against those who slew her.

In the following years, every remaining member of Garkiin's band died. Some were killed by their fellows, others simply perished of fright. Garkiin himself was trampled by a herd of horses spooked by something the bandits never understood. Eventually all were dead, with the exception of Valchov, who had traveled so far that he had vanished from the vengeful spirit's perception ... until, that is, a young anchorite arrived in Liara with tales of the great Special Inquisitor on his lips, whom the young man hero-worshipped. Lucia Chekiv had found her final victim.

Lucia is more conscious of time's passage than many ghosts, and has greater powers than most. When she manifests, she appears as a gentle, quiet young noblewoman, though her true form is horrific and bloody. In addition to the usual ghostly abilities, she acquired a great deal of magical power upon death; her spells are primarily illusions and enchantments, plus a smattering of necromantic magics. At the moment, Brother Konraad is under the protection of the Church of Ezra, which makes it difficult for Lucia to reach him. But she is determined to slay the former brigand, before she can lay the darkness of her soul to rest.

Valchov's life was transformed again - this time for the better - six years after he became a bandit. In search of victims to rob, he encountered a grandmotherly old woman, better-dressed than most of the local traffic, in green and white silk. The twenty-year-old bandit abducted the eighty-year-old traveler at sword point, though the octogenarian seemed remarkably calm for someone kidnapped by a (not terribly) fearsome highwayman. Something was plainly wrong with the situation; still, she would probably be worth a ransom, or so "The Wolf" reasoned.

Two days later, as the woman cooked a meal of horseflesh for the slightly confused robber, the two were attacked by one of the ravening ghouls packs that menace Nova Vaasa's backcountry. Valchov fought well, dispatching three of the ghouls with his twin short-swords, before being treacherously 'betrayed' by an inconvenient rock. Fallen prone, Valchov thought this was the end of his short and (in)glorious bandit career.

He was right. Just as the ghast which led pack raised its clawed hand to deliver the death blow, its slavering jaws went stiff, its yellow eyes wide. Without a sound, the loathsome creature shied back cringing, turned and fled in terror, its ghoulish lackeys whimpering and bounding at its heels. Shaken, Valchov rose to see his green-and-white clad "hostage" holding aloft a silver symbol of a shield, with a long sword and a sprig of berries on it.

Chastened and humbled by the protective mercy of a power greater than himself, the Vaasi peasant-cum-brigand traveled to Levkarest and entered the Church of Ezra.

Upon completing his novitiate, now-Brother Konraad Valchov was tapped for the nominal position of 'secretary' of the Sentire of Vor Ziyden. In truth, Valchov was the bodyguard of that politically-influential Borcan. The rangy Vaasi's combat skills had been noted, and Valchov soon picked up a measure of subtlety during his sojourn in Borcan high society. By bearing, he was still a big ox of a peasant, but that was all right with him: Konraad soon learned that being underestimated could be useful.

Valchov's career took yet another turn in 753. The twenty-five-year old anchorite was escorting the Sentire to a meeting with a Borcan noble, when he noticed something amiss in the night air. Taking a slight liberty with the person of the august Sentire, Valchov hustled his superior into the safety of the waiting coach ... and not a moment too soon, for one of the passersby on the street was already transforming. When the fight was over, three men lay dead, including the werebat assassin, and Valchov had slain his first member of the Legions of the Night.

Not long afterwards, a letter arrived for Valchov from the Office of the Praesidius. It seemed that Levin Postoya had a use for a young man of Brother Konraad's talents...

Current Sketch

Presently, Brother Konraad Valchov is a Special Inquisitor attached to the Office of the Praesidius. Informally, he is Levin Postoya's hound: a far-ranging agent who travels the length and breadth of the Core searching for and destroying supernatural enemies of the Church.

While the Vaasi-born is a doughty fighter, his skills as a hunter and tracker are what make him most valuable to the Praesidius. Years of stalking wild game and merchants, alike, have given Valchov an intuitive genius for pursuit, and once he has found even the least trace of a target, he will give chase to the far corners of the world, into the Mists if need be. He has tracked werewolves in Verbrek, ferreted out a red widow in Levkarest, and once pursued a vampire all the way into the high Balinoks before staking it.

In person, Valchov is a lean Vaasi anchorite who seems unaware of the great prestige and authority which his job as the Special Inquisitor grants him. His flat north-Vaasi accent and self-deprecating remarks about his poor education (he didn't learn to read till arriving in Levkarest) hide a keen mind and a convert's fanaticism. And a fanatic he is. If Valchov doesn't go around preaching fire and brimstone, he is no less devoted to Ezra. Insults to Our Guardian in the Mists cannot go un-avenged, and those who harm

Inquisitors of Ezra

Like several other faiths, most notably those of the Lawgiver, Belenus and Zhakata, the Ezran Church relies upon Inquisitors to police the faithful. These are men and women of devout faith and trained investigative ability, who are chosen to search out and, if need be, destroy the enemies of the Church, in particular the Legions of the Night.

While all four sects of the Ezran Church use Inquisitors, the Home Faith and the Nevuchar Springs branch are most famous for it. Darkonian Inquisitors are strongly influenced by their Bastion's apocalyptic visions and their Tepestani neighbors; they are straightforward monster hunters, particularly of the undead. Most Borcan Inquisitors are more subtle, operating like detectives rather than crusaders. The Dementlieuse and Mordentish sects each maintain miniscule inquisitions, but these are primarily charged with ensuring that the anchorites of their respective branches don't fall into darkness.

Most every city of sufficient importance to have a Sentire has at least one Inquisitor assigned to its Sentire's staff, and large cities like Levkarest have teams of them. The head inquisitor of a city is called the "Chief Inquisitor" and the head inquisitor of an entire sect is the "Grand Inquisitor", although the latter office has fallen into disuse as the Bastions prefer to direct the inquisition's activities personally.

A Special Inquisitor is an inquisitor who reports directly to the Bastion or Praesidius, and is essentially a wandering trouble-shooter, sent to assist the locals in cases of extreme corruption or hunt down particularly lethal monsters. They are equivalent in rank to a Sentire, and are authorized to draw upon a great number of Church resources if their duties require it; they have to justify such measures to their superiors immediately afterwards, so few abuse this power.

Inquisitors are investigators, first and foremost. It is their job to find the source of trouble and to organize a response, but most requisition aid from local congregations or secular authorities for any actual fighting. In a pinch, such as if a quarry flees into domains where Ezra-worship is banned, some even recruit the help of adventurers (worshippers of Our Lady by preference) to achieve their holy missions.

the Church must be hunted down and slain like the dogs that they are.

Strangely, despite being one of the ranking members of the tightly-ordered Home Faith, Valchov is averse to hierarchy for its own sake, perhaps as a result of having been taxed off his family's farm in youth. He respects the Praesidius for his intelligence and erudition, but does not

hesitate to argue with anyone he disagrees with, regardless of age, creed, species or rank. Ezra alone is worthy of unquestioning obedience.

Valchov sees himself as an agent of his goddess far more than of the Church, and if Her will can be better served by subverting official Church procedures ... well, he'll be very contrite about it and do penance

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afterward. Luckily for the Nova Vaasan, the Praesidius seems more amused than offended by this attitude. (Indeed, although Konraad doesn't realize it, the fact that he isn't cowed by mere prestige is a key reason why Postoya selected him for this work: an internal affairs officer needs to be willing to step on a few toes, to be effective.) Not even the stuffiest Church bureaucrats can dispute the Special Inquisitor's competence or dedication, for all that his attitude irks and frustrates more than a few.

Combat

Brother Konraad Valchov is one of the best trackers in the Core, with years of experience following game, merchants, and monsters alike through all manner of terrain. When chasing a target designated by the Office of the Praesidius, Valchov is without peer. He uses his magics as a consecrated harrier to considerable effect. Identify spoor is of tremendous use in tracking, and most of the indigenous monsters of Ravenloft have at least a few tales floating about them, just ripe for legend lore.

Once his target has been found, Valchov attacks without mercy. He prefers to strike from ambush, and often starts a fight by casting his +1 net of distance (snidely named 'Canon Lawyer') to entangle the foe, following up with crushing despair. Once a target has been firmly disabled, by net and by spell, Valchov introduces himself and states the crimes of which the foe has been accused of, before moving in to vanquish the weakened enemy with his twin short swords, 'Ezra's Justice' and 'Ezra's Mercy'. Against foes that can't be ensnared, such as spirits or vampires, Konraad may feign death or helplessness to draw them near enough to Sneak Attack with these formidable blades, or set an ambush or trap.

While Valchov prefers to fight alone to avoid leading others into danger, he knows full well when he is outmatched and has no qualms about calling in reinforcements as necessary. As the Special Inquisitor to the Praesidius, Valchov can requisition help from any acknowledged agent of the Church,

and can overrule any church official below the rank of Bastion. Against more dangerous foes, Valchov leads a mixed squad of local anchorites, adventurous lay believers, and hired mercenaries; he may also cooperate with secular law enforcement officials, but cautiously, and only if he feels they can be trusted to serve justice before politics. Even if he has backup, Valchov still prefers to thoroughly disable his foes before moving in for the kill.

Lair

Officially, Valchov resides in a fairly nice room in the back of the Great Cathedral of Levkarest. In truth, the room is barely furnished, and Valchov lives there for maybe two weeks out of the year. The rest of the time, Valchov can be found on the roads and byways of the Core, sleeping in the open or asking shelter from local anchorites.

Dungeon Master's Notes: Using Valchov

Brother Konraad Valchov is another of the "new generation" of monster-hunters, a contemporary of the Weathermay-Foxgroves who rose to prominence outside the shadow of Rudolph Van Richten. Konraad is only three years older than Laurie and Gennifer, yet his life could hardly have been more different. He serves as a thematically-different hero, more in line with the historical witch hunters than the more personally-driven hunters in the style of Van Richten.

PCs are most likely to encounter the Special Inquisitor in pursuit of a quarry assigned to him by the Office of the Praesidius, perhaps even the PCs' current foe. He can be a useful ally, both for his connections and his combat prowess, but most often for his tracking ability. Alternatively, Valchov could request the PCs' aid against an especially-vile monstrosity. Valchov can be quite hardnosed around securing assistance from PCs, should he feel circumstances warrant it. If one of the PCs is an Ezran cleric or paladin, he may simply pull rank, but he isn't above resorting to bribery or even blackmail if he deems the situation grave enough. (He'll be very contrite about it and will pray that Ezra forgives him, but he'll do it.)

In fact, a grimmer presentation of Valchov might cast him as a non-evil antagonist to the PCs. Konraad is a fanatic, and a firm believer that the end justifies the means. If he must kill an entire family to ensure that a ghost soon to wipe out an entire village is destroyed, he will do so. In one classic set-up, the PCs may have to race against time to cure an infected lycanthrope that Valchov or the Church has deemed too dangerous to live, though any not-necessarily-evil monster could serve. Thus, he may end up opposing the PCs, not out of ill will, but simply because his faith will broach no compromises where a holy mission is concerned. Brother Konraad might like the PCs personally and give them every chance to stand aside, but if they don't....

Suggested Inspiration



D&D Doppelganger Sources & References

3rd Edition Ravenloft

- *Ravenloft Campaign Setting* (3E)
- *Ravenloft Player's Handbook* (3.5)
- *Denizens of Dread/Darkness* (doppelganger, dread)
- *Shadow of the Knife*
- "The Brood of Blutkalte", *Dark Tales & Disturbing Legends*
- *Survey of the Zherisia Expedition*

2nd Edition Ravenloft

- *Domains of Dread*
- *Hour of the Knife*
- *Ravenloft Monstrous Compendium, Appendix III: Creatures of Darkness* (doppelganger, Ravenloft).
- "Doppelganger Golem", *Children of the Night: The Created*
- "A Kargatane Bookshelf - The Fall of Lady Owen", *Book of Sorrows*

2nd Edition Gothic Earth

- "Mysterious Cities", *Dragon* #240
- "Seeds of Evil", *Dragon* #249

Core D&D

- *Monster Manual* (1st Edition, 3E & 3.5)
- *Monstrous Compendium, Volume Two* (2nd Edition)
- *Races of Destiny* (3.5)
- "The Psychology of the Doppelganger", *Dragon* # 80 (1st Edition)
- "The Minions of Darkness", *Dragon* #300 (3.5)
- "Strange Bedfellows", *Dragon* #313 (3.5)
- "Night of Fear", *Dungeon* #28 (Basic D&D)

Variant Doppelgangers

- *Monsters of Faerun* (3E)
- *Monster Manual II* (3E)
- *Eberron Campaign Setting* (3.5)
- *Races of Eberron* (3.5)
- "Legacies of the Suel", *Dragon* #241 (2nd Edition)
- "The Ecology of the Mongrelman", *Dragon* #242 (2nd Edition)
- *The Complete Book of Doppelgangers* (d20)

Evil DM Tricks

- *Castle Caldwell* (Basic D&D)
- "Quest for the Midas Orb", *Dragon* #61 (1st Edition)
- "The Nature of Evil", *Dragon* #218 (any edition)
- "Villains, Like Fine Wine", *Dragon* #238 (any edition)
- *Heroes of Horror* (3.5)

Inspirational Reading and Viewing

As threats created for the D&D game, doppelgangers lack the centuries-old literary and mythic traditions of such classic Ravenloft foes as vampires, lycanthropes, or ghosts. This doesn't, however, mean that sources of inspiration for doppelganger adventures are hard to come by: it only means you need to look farther than the usual "Gothic literature" reading-lists to find them. Depending on the type of adventure a DM wishes to run, ideas and thematic inspiration may be found in classic sci-fi tales, contemporary psychological thrillers, supernatural TV series, or even comic books.

Because doppelgangers lend themselves to several "styles" of plotline - paranoia, identity-theft, confusion of identity, and mainstream adventure - different sources will be suitable for different scenarios. The resource lists to follow group sources (novels, stories, films, and TV series or episodes) by what type of scenario they can offer the most inspiration for; many, of course, can apply to other themes also. Lists are in chronological order, save for film adaptations of written works (listed with the text they're based upon).

Aliens Among Us

Isolation from society and dread of betrayal form the backbone of these scenarios, in which the heroes' chief fear is that people around them - strangers, allies, even trusted friends and relatives - have been supplanted by look-alikes who serve some ominous agenda. Such treacherous phonies might infiltrate society at large, confronting the PCs with the fact they're not only isolated, but also grossly outnumbered; alternately, such foes can strike below the belt, suborning or infiltrating that most sacrosanct social refuge: the family. The "aliens" may be genuinely inhuman, as with doppelgangers; then again, they might be human spies whose deceptive talents and/or use of magical disguises place them on par with (and could lead players to mistake them for!) such creatures.

Imposters in the crowd

- Lovecraft, H.P. (short stories) - "The Festival" (1925) & "The Whisperer In Darkness" (1931)
- Howard, Robert E. "The Shadow Kingdom". (short story, 1929)
- Finney, Jack. The Body Snatchers. (novel, 1955)
- Invasion of the Body Snatchers (film, 1956; numerous remakes)
- The Invaders (TV series, 1968-69)
- Philip K. Dick. Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? (novel, 1968)
- John W. Campbell. "Who Goes There?". (short story, 1938)
- John Carpenter's The Thing (film, 1982)
- Star Trek: The Animated Series (animated TV, 1973-1974) - "The Survivor"
- Kolchak: The Night Stalker (TV series, 1974) - "Horror in the Heights"
- John Carpenter's They Live (film, 1988)
- Terminator 2: Judgement Day (film, 1991; also sequel)
- Simon R. Green. Wolf In The Fold. (novel, 1991)
- Star Trek: Deep Space Nine (TV series, 1993-1999) - "The Adversary", "Homefront", "Paradise Lost", "Apocalypse Rising", "In Purgatory's Shadow / By Inferno's Light"

Suggested Inspiration

Imposters in the family

- John Wyndham. *The Midwich Cuckoos*. (novel, 1957)
- *Village of the Damned* (film, 1960; remake 1995)
- Ira Nevin, *The Stepford Wives* (novel, 1972)
- *The Stepford Wives* (film, 1975)
- *Screamers* (film, 1995)

Human imposters-among-us

- John Buchan. *The Thirty-Nine Steps*. (novel, 1915)
- *The Avengers* (TV series, 1960-1969) - "Man With Two Shadows"
- Diane Duane. *Dark Mirror*. (Star Trek: TNG novel, 1993)
- Frank Herbert's *Dune* series (novels) - *Face Dancers*

Identity Theft

A concept which - thanks to online commerce and its myriad forms of fraud - has grown far more disturbing in real life than it was, when D&D's doppelgangers were first imagined, fear of being displaced from one's identity has been with us far longer than credit cards or virtual signatures. Sometimes, the mere knowledge that a near-duplicate of one's self exists incites a surge of possessive jealousy and the outrage of violation, in the archetypal "hostile double" storyline; in other cases, the protagonist of such a tale dreads literal, physical displacement from his or her own life, at the double's murderous hands.

Whether by threatening mundane murder and/or supernatural possession, or simply by proving itself better at living the protagonist's life than the protagonist himself, a double of this sort leaves the duplicated person feeling - like a clone unable to tolerate the continued existence of its "real" counterpart - that he must either do away with his copy, or yield to dissolution in the duplicate's favor. For Ravenloft DMs, sources like these can inspire stories of fiendish transposition, renegade clones, an evil ghost's usurpation of the body of its descendent, mirrors of opposition, or even a PC's gradual shift to NPC status via failed Powers checks, in addition to doppelgangers' attempts to claim a niche or chosen imago.

Other Inspiration: Contagion-Fear

With the growing popular awareness of HIV, avian flu, and other real-world pathogens, the classic "aliens among us" scenarios seen in *The Body Snatchers* and its many film adaptations have recently shifted their focus, from the bodily replacement of victims to their contamination by viruses or other mind-controlling vectors. Though they employ a different plot-device to spread such sci-fi "possession", more inspiration for paranoia-themed doppelganger scenarios may be found in such "alien contagion" references as *The Puppet Masters* (novel, 1951), *The Astronaut's Wife* (film, 1999); *Invasion* (TV series, 2005); or *The Invasion* (film, 2007). The crowning example of an action-sequence which plays off of this motif, turning everyone and anyone into a potential hidden killer, can be found at the conclusion to *The Matrix* (1999), as agents seize the virtual bodies of innocent bystanders - mothers, policemen, little old ladies - to hound a fleeing Neo through the streets, "infecting" one host after another like a hypercontagious (computer) virus.

Suggested Inspiration

Stolen lives

- Hans Christian Anderson. "The Shadow". (short story, 1847)
- Lovecraft, H.P. "The Thing On The Doorstep". (novella, 1933)
- C. Hall Thompson. "The Will of Claude Ashur". (short story, 1947)
- Patricia Highsmith. The Talented Mr. Ripley. (novel, 1955)
- The Talented Mr. Ripley (film, 1999)
- Andre Norton. Android at Arms. (novel, 1971)
- Kolchak: The Night Stalker (TV series, 1974) - "Firefall"
- Single White Female (film, 1992)
- Michael Pye. Taking Lives. (novel, 2004)
- Taking Lives (film, 2004)
- Supernatural (TV series, 2005 - present) - "Skin"

Unbearable Trespass

- Edgar Allan Poe. "William Wilson". (short story, 1839)
- Histoires extraordinaires (film, 1968, French; a.k.a. Spirits of the Dead, 1969)
- Henry James. "The Jolly Corner". (short story, 1908)
- Al-Tayyib Salih. Season of Migration to the North. (novel, 1966)
- Jonathan Smith. Night Windows. (novel, 2006)

Other Inspiration: Stalkers

Incorporating elements of the "stalker" archetype into a doppelganger scenario can help elevate the dramatic tension of the storyline, as well as heightening the emotional intensity on the villain's part. The notion that doppelgangers can take on an obsessive attraction/envy of a specific individual (the intended imago), rather than adopting and discarding all stolen guises with callous indifference, is an essential element in making an "Identity Theft" scenario as much Gothic melodrama as murder mystery.

There are so many stalker-themed films and novels that it can be hard to separate out genuine psychological horror from thinly-disguised slasher flicks, but some of the best (and best-known) examples on film are Play Misty For Me (film, 1971), Fatal Attraction (film, 1987), Sleeping With The Enemy (film, 1991), and The Bodyguard (1992). Less famous, but particularly suited to storylines about imago-hunting doppelgangers, are the play Boy Gets Girl and the true-life TV movie The Stalking of Laurie Snow (both 2000). One unique reference for both "Identity Theft" scenarios and the imposters' practice of mentoring may be found in The Stalker's Apprentice (novel, 1994).

For the ultimate stalker-cum-doppelganger inspirational reference, nothing beats "Face: Make Up", a 2004 episode of the cyberpunk anime, Ghost in the Shell: S.A.C. (2nd GIG). (Plus, perhaps, the entire remainder of the series, depending on how one chooses to interpret the ending....)

Suggested Inspiration

Identity Confusion

While not applicable to every doppelganger adventure, uncertainty about one's own identity - whether due to amnesia, insanity or outside interference - is a staple of psychological horror, which can be employed as both an in-character and a metagame tool by the canny DM. Between plot devices already available in the Ravenloft setting (Madness effects, Darkonian memory-erasure) and the various Path of Lead salient abilities introduced in this netbook, it's possible to tamper with PCs' memories or self-image enough to leave players in doubt of whether or not the DM has pulled a fast one. Has a PC been supplanted? Is their character now a doppelganger, slipped into the group without the player's knowledge as a "retroactive temp job"? When you don't even know if your own PC can be trusted, a role-playing game can take on a whole new level of surreal double-think: not only are you thinking "in character" for the PC's original identity, but you have to imagine the motives and doings of the monster who might be wearing the character's face.

Many psychological horror tales and films rely on identity confusion as a source of suspense, and often as an allegory for suppressed aspects of a character's personality. Such conflicts between alter-egos - especially if they seem to be played out physically - can provide inspiration for doppelganger scenarios that get personal. By assuming PCs' appearances to incriminate them, an imposter might accidentally (or deliberately!) behave in a way that reflects the "dark side" of a PC's own nature. Villains who are a shadowy reflection of PCs are a Ravenloft tradition, so a doppelganger's assumed resemblance to its enemies might turn out more than skin deep. Whether in their aspects of identity-confusion, conflict between facets of the protagonist's nature, or even - an ironic twist - in tales where a doppelganger proves to be more of a "good twin" than an evil one, the following sources can provide plentiful ideas.

Protagonists' identity crisis

- Fyodor Dostoevsky. *The Double: A Petersburg Poem*. (novella, 1846)
- Philip K. Dick. "The Impostor". (short story, 1953)
- *Impostor* (film, 2002)
- *The Twilight Zone* (TV series, 1959-1964) - "In His Image"
- *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* (TV series, 1993-1999) - "Whispers", "Inquisition"
- Brian McNaughton. *The Throne of Bones*. (anthology, 1997)
- *Dark City* (film, 1998)
- *Identity* (film, 2003)
- *Unknown* (film, 2006)

Real-Life Imposter Delusions

Though doppelgangers are creatures of fiction, the fear of replacement - either of one's self, or of those around us - is terrifyingly real for an unlucky handful of people. Neurological disturbances and brain injuries can disassociate a person's notion of where their "self" resides in space, such that they believe a duplicate is following them around: not a supernatural creature, but their own self-image displaced from their physical body. In Capgras syndrome - an illness portrayed in the 2006 novel *The Echo Maker* - a victim of brain injury becomes convinced that his or her associates and loved ones have been replaced by identical duplicates, seeing "doppelgangers" all around.

Suggested Inspiration

Alter-ego enemies

- Angel Heart (film, 1987)
- Total Recall (film, 1990)
- Doppelganger: The Evil Within (film, 1993)
- Fight Club (film, 1999)
- Buffy the Vampire Slayer (TV series, 1997-2003) - "The Replacement"
- Haute Tension (French, 2003; a.k.a. High Tension, 2004)

Double as conscience

- Barker, Clive. "Human Remains". (short story, 1984)
- Doppoerugengâ (film, 2003, Japanese; international title Doppelganger)
- David Stahler Jr. Doppelganger. (young adult novel, 2006)

Suggested Inspiration

Pure Adventure

Unrelated to doppelgangers' allegorical significance, these sources simply offer ideas for how doppelganger powers can be used as a tool and/or weapon, by villains and heroes alike. Whether in doppelgangers' hands, those of other villains, or those of PCs engaged in counterespionage against the forces of evil - and whether they're played for horror, thrills, or just comic relief - these "inspirational sources" are just plain fun.

Disguise and Betrayal

- Marvel Comics & X-Men film series - character Mystique
- The Twilight Zone (TV series, 1959-1964) - "The Four Of Us Are Dying"
- Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country (film, 1991)
- Supernatural (TV series, 2005 - present) - "Everybody Loves a Clown", "Nightshifter"
- Heroes (TV series, 2006 - present) - characters: Candice Wilmer (recurring: "Company Man", through "How to Stop an Exploding Man"); Matt Parkman (series regular)

Shapechanger as Hero

- Critters (film, 1986; also first sequel)
- Darkman (film, 1990; also sequels)
- Star Trek: Deep Space Nine (TV series, 1993-1999) - character Odo (series regular)
- The 4400 (TV series, 2004 - present) - character Boyd Gelder (recurring: "Terrible Swift Sword", "Being Tom Baldwin" & "Fifty-Fifty")
- Stan Lee's Mosaic (animated film, 2007)

Special Honors: The X-Files

Has Chris Carter's blood been hot-wire tested lately? If ever a TV series was scripted by a doppelganger, this one's it. Not only does it boast two (?) recurring characters with shapeshifting abilities - Jeremiah Smith ("Herrenvolk", "Talitha Cumi", "This Is Not Happening") and the Alien Bounty Hunter (many appearances, "Colony" through "Without") - but its conspiracy-ridden metaplot and multi-layered, eerie ambiguities make it an ideal warm-up to get players and DMs in the mood for a doppelganger-themed scenario. More than a few ideas in this netbook were inspired by The X-Files; check out episodes like "Squeeze", "Tooms", and "Leonard Betts" (powers) or "GenderBender" and "Small Potatoes" (life cycle) to spot a few.

I ndex



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You sure you don't want this one
"lost in shipment", boss?



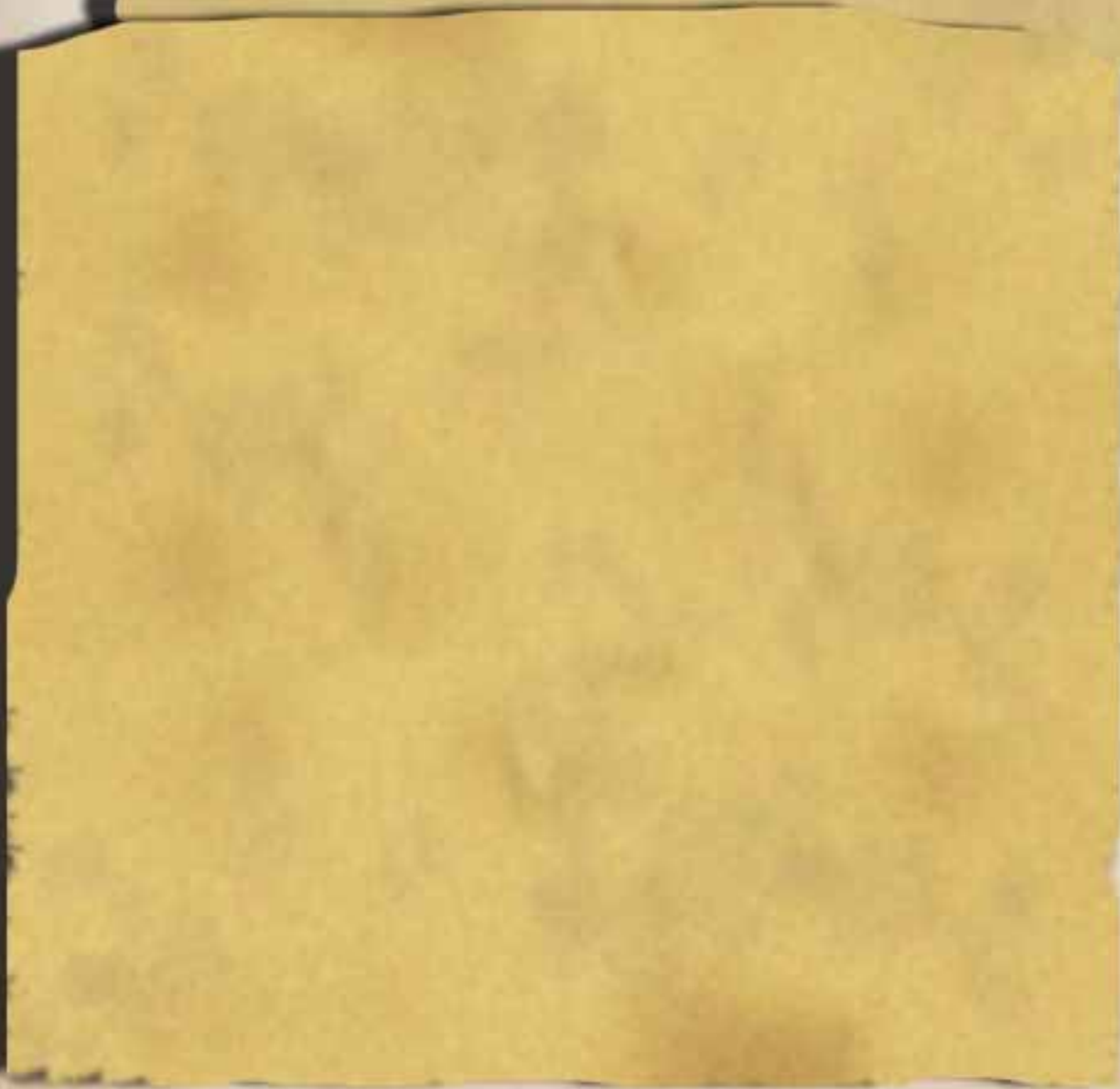
*And miss our chance to see that self-deluded
old fossil run out of Port-a-Lucine?*


*Now, that would hardly live up to an "ex-
ploitative, opportunistic, contemptuous"
image!*

*Mend the seal and send it on, just as it was:
any man who can learn this much about us
is entitled to professional courtesy.*

- NC







Mad Impostor strikes again

Once more our city reels in a
spring of impersonation re-
vealed. Folke society is in
emerges revealing a plot.

Two months ago, de-
non into the dealings of
wealthy industrialist. A
Windweather ascends
when he began a series
dealings. Though he
high society, question
ive loans and suspen-

When Windweather
unkles began search-
ing for clues to the
his embzzled millic
wed a secret pastag
wherein they found
Horace Windweather
declared the crime of
year previous.

Police have a head-
gruesome case in a
murder/impersona-
cades. The search goes
poorer as well as his

Criminologists fear
der represents the best
identity choice". The
have occurred nearly
Lord Pizzlebottom was

Who Goes There?

Trust is fundamental to human society. Yet how can trust exist where the dreaded doppelgangers hunt? These insidious shape-shifters stalk our cities and towns, killing with impunity and disguising themselves as their victims. Worse yet, doppelgangers use a terrible form of telepathy, allowing them to flawlessly imitate anyone they choose. The next person you meet might be one of... *them*.

You hold in your hands your single greatest weapon in the struggle against the forces of darkness: Knowledge.

Following the death of famed monster hunter Rudolph van Richten, scholars and adventurers from all corners of the world have banded together to share their learning and experience. The Van Richten Society continues the legacy of their namesake, pitting their courage and ingenuity against the ferocity of the Children of the Night.

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Monster Manual™ as well as the following Ravenloft
core books: Ravenloft Campaign Setting 3rd
edition™, Ravenloft Player's
Handbook™ and Ravenloft
Dungeon Master's
Guide™

