The Shadow of Yesterday

A preview of

The World of

Near

Concerning the nature of vampirism

This is a sort of a preview/extension of THE WORLD OF NEAR, my book that thoroughly revises and revisits the roleplaying game SHADOW OF YESTERDAY. The preview chapter here is an example of the typical sort of content from the book – there are 36 chapters like this (mostly a bit longer, though) in the book, discussing different facets of the world of Near and how to adapt them to the universal SOLAR SYSTEM rules.

This particular chapter is a digression on vampires and their place in Near. I originally wrote this as I processed my various sources for the book, but we ended up leaving this specific chapter out of it; although the book has some pretty fresh parts, including vampires just like that felt like it might go a bit over the line for many old friends of Near. Thus I made this chapter a preview, instead – you can see how I write, what sort of focus the book has and so on. Those who already have the book and like the vampires can print this out for actual use, I guess.

If you haven't looked into TSoY before, I recommend checking out one of the various Internet resources on the topic. The central TSoY materials are all under various open licenses, so there's plenty of material available for free with a bit of googling. I discuss the issue further on the last page of the preview

– Eero Tuovinen, January 2009

Arkenstone

Vampires

Slaves of Blood

Based on the Finnish edition of TSoY.

I think that vampires fit very well in Near. They have a human vulnerability in their need for blood, and identity politics fit the game like a glove as we already know after reading the book. Also, the concept is familiar to many people from Whitewolf's VAMPIRE roleplaying games. All in all, vampires are a good generic complication to throw out there when the game just needs some flexible content, sort of like ninjas for the dramatic game.

I originally included vampires in the Finnish edition of THE SHADOW OF YESTERDAY simply because they're useful and a very good example of the sort of crunch people can easily design themselves. The SOLAR SYSTEM rules work for them quite naturally, as can be seen. Since then I've used and considered them enough to put them in here as well, in case others find them suitable for their Near.

My favored background context for vampires in Near is that they are well-known in myths but that they got hunted to extinction during the imperial era. As the legend has it, however, the opening of ABSOLON'S TOMB some generations into the new age released the curse upon Near once more. Now everybody knows what vampires are, roughly, but few know that they actually stalk the night once more here and there. Their existence is perpendicular to the most common myths of Near, but they can also be explained by all of them in some manner, whether as a curse of the Goddess, forsaken knights of Absolon, lost Ancestors or other things.

Another angle I have on this concerns the city of Kalderon (chapter 28): for some reason I'm convinced that the ruling patricians of the city are almost all vampires who induct newly raising politicians and make uncooperative horse lords disappear. Perhaps the place is too perfect otherwise.

When using vampires as generic content, the Story Guide will do well to refuse easy judgments: each vampire is an individual, and the rules do very little to limit what vampirism might mean for them. It's interesting to think about how different cultures might deal with the condition; I could see highly variable attitudes, all depending on how the culture deals with outside influences in general.

Secret of Vampirism

The character is a vampire. He gains the Blood Pool at 1 and can raise it normally with Advances; he may also use and improve vampiric Abilities. Vampires suffer a one-die penalty for any Ability checks made in sunlight. **Requirement:** be human.

Awakening (B)

The most basic vampiric Ability concerns reviving from seeming death. A vampire will need to check this Ability to raise from his slumber. Failure pretty much leaves the vampire helpless until the next scene. The Ability can also be used to avoid destruction after life-threatening injuries, such as stakes through the heart.

Hypnosis (B)

The magnetic charisma of the vampire is supernatural in nature. The Ability can be used to convince others or even influence their memories; a calm and non-threatening situation is required to do this, however.

Flight (B)

Vampires can fly, but only at night.

Secret of Ritual Contagion

The character knows how to create a vampire. The victim needs to be willing or restrained. They need to succeed in an Endurance check or die, after which the Vigor Pool is emptied. If the target does not have a free Advance to spend on the SECRET OF VAMPIRISM, they die regardless. **Cost:** 3 Blood
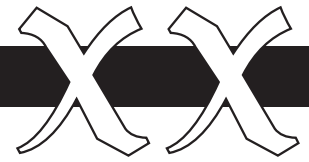
Secret of Vampiric Strength

The character has the strength of 20 men, and may use Blood Pool as bonus dice in Vigor-based Ability checks without limit. This does not work in sunlight. **Requirement:** SECRET OF VAMPIRISM

Secret of Vampire Beast

The character can refresh his BLOOD Pool by drawing blood from an unwilling victim. Should the vampire succeed, the target suffers a level of Harm assigned by the Story Guide. **Requirement:** SECRET OF VAMPIRISM

Vampire Lore (R)

Vampires are intentionally something of a wildcard phenomenon that might not be explained in the traditional ways at all. This Ability can be used by characters to uncover snippets of legend and truth about the origin, powers and nature of vampires. For example, they might have some traditional weaknesses, such as running water or whatnot, which could be established in the game by successfully using this Ability.

Secret of Blood Magic

The character can suffer Harm to gain Blood Pool points equal to the level of Harm. These points need to be spent before the scene is over, or they are lost. The character can also cause Harm to others for this purpose, although the target needs to be willing.

Key of Vampirism

The character has internalized his vampiric nature.
    1xp: Vampirism comes up in play.
    2xp: Deal with your bloodthirst.
    5xp: Another gets hurt because of your condition.
 Buyoff: Refuse to feed on blood.

Key of Vampire Hunter

Hatred of the breed drives the character.
    1xp: Vampirism comes up in play.
    2xp: Encounter a vampire.
    5xp: Destroy a vampire.
 Buyoff: Befriend a vampire.

Blood Pool

Humans become vampires through a ritual contagion, and sometimes by accident. They lose their humanity (and related crunch), but gain a new Pool:

Blood (B) Pool depicts a vampire's vital reserves. A vampire low on Blood tends to be gaunt and corpse-like, while a high Blood Pool might imply a vital, magnetic darkness. Blood is used to empower a character's vampiric nature. It is replenished by drinking blood from a willing person, preferably human; the target loses all but one point of their Vigor.

AWAKENING (B) is the Passive Ability for the Blood Pool. SECRET OF VAMPIRISM is a mandatory Secret for vampires.

It's notable that a separate Blood Pool is not that mandatory for dealing with vampires, I just happen to like this sort of quirky stuff. If you want a simpler solution that emphasizes the vampiric condition less, just use the same crunch with Vigor Pool instead of Blood. The SECRET OF VAMPIRISM would look like this:

Secret of Vampirism, alternate

The character is a vampire. He has the equivalent of the SECRET OF ADDICTION (VIGOR, HUMAN BLOOD), and he can access any of the vampiric crunch, replacing Blood costs with Vigor. Vampires suffer a one-die penalty for any Ability checks made in sunlight. **Requirement:** be human.

I guess I could see using both of these vampire variants simultaneously, too. Maybe the alternate vampires are something created by weird Three-Corner necromancy, while real vampires have a permanent Blood Pool. That'd account for the intriguing mechanical differences rather nicely, I think.

Actual Play

What I mentioned earlier in passing bears consideration: as ninjas are unto action roleplaying, vampires are for the sort of swinging otaku fantasy drama I often end up playing with the various teenagers around here. If all else fails, you can always have a vampire turn up and fall in love with a player character. Or perhaps one of the mysterious NPCs is a vampire. Or a NPC decides to suspect a player character of being a vampire, while the real vampire is out in Sireap Valley robbing passerbys with his ratkin pals.

Specifically, consider the great vampire humanization of the '70s spearheaded by Anne Rice and such. This is not a simple monster we have here, but an exotic minority tragically sidelined by physiology, religion or other tenuously justified reasons.

THE SHADOW OF YESTERDAY is a roleplaying game originally published by the American game designer Clinton R. Nixon in 2004. At the time the game was remarkable for how it leverages, arranges and clarifies the modern set of narrativist adventure gaming ideas garnered from original sources such as HERO WARS and SORCERER. Not many games published since then combine the traditional fantasy adventure focus with proven technique with such clarity.

TSoY was soon released freely in the Internet under a CREATIVE COMMONS license, allowing people to do what they would with the game. The result was a series of translations into the major European languages, as well as plenty of individual development by independent designers.

My own book published in 2009, WORLD OF NEAR, is a comprehensive update and collection of the various ideas and developments made to TSoY since its original publication. The book is a sister work for my 2008 booklet SOLAR SYSTEM; together the two might be considered a new, revised edition of the game as these things are accounted for in the rpg scene.

SOLAR SYSTEM is the rather Google-hostile name Clinton gave to the rules system of TSoY soon after he published the first edition of the game. As a generic rules system SS is a dramatic, personable thing that does well with all sorts of growth and identity stories in almost any setting conceivable. An universal rpg rules set, in other words.

Clinton cleaned up the TSoY rules somewhat for the universal edition, but never published a separately productized text for it. As this was something I was interested in myself, I did just that in 2008: I rewrote the rules text, clarified it in many places and made some minor additions. The end result is a pretty nice 80+ page booklet – I've been told that it's a great resource and well worth its price for anybody who likes the protagonist-centered approach Solar System takes in story-focused roleplaying.

At this writing THE SHADOW OF YESTERDAY is the only fully finished roleplaying game out there that uses the SS rules as its basis, but I imagine that it's only a matter of time before one of us fans gets around to publishing something completely original. Like Clinton's game, the new SS rules are CC-licensed and freely available for most purposes.

Availability

The original TSoY is still available in POD print runs and PDF form, I understand. It is well recommended as a compact, complete game set in the world of Near. The full text of the game, rules and setting included, is available on several Internet sites, among which perhaps the foremost is Clinton's own TSoY wiki.

My own WORLD OF NEAR and SOLAR SYSTEM are available in printed form from well-supplied game stores and, perhaps most reliably, from various Internet outlets. I've myself been giving the SS booklet for free to anybody who orders the World of Near, as you need the rules to make good sense of the book. SS is rather cheap, though, so no big deal either way.

Americans should order the books from Indie Press Revolution, as they hold a sizable part of my own stock for just that purpose.

The rest of the world might as well order from my own website. We also sell pdf editions of the works there – World of Near will get a pdf release, too, whenever I have the time to lay it out for that.

Both WoN and SS can be found in the Internet for free in HTML form thanks to their free license. I'm myself aware of the Solar System at Janus Design and WoN at Mausdompteur. Aside from not being as pretty as the books these are most serviceable.