

# The Skinner



*A web enhancement for The Midnight Express Podcast (Episode 22) by BK*



*(image credits and footnotes at the end of the article)*

*There is a face beneath this mask, but it isn't me. I'm no more that face than I am the muscles beneath it, or the bones beneath that*

*V for Vendetta*

Samuel Haight. The Skinner. Speak his name at the gaming table and you'll receive a diverse range of responses from appreciation to rabid hatred. Whilst Episode 22 of the Midnight Express Podcast explored the use of W20's The Skinner SAS module, this article provides two uses for the most infamous kinfolk. The ideas are not fully developed, but rather the catalyst for thinking 'What if?'. In this way, there is enough unexplored territory for Storytellers to personalise concepts for their chronicle.

**Skin Deep** considers the state of the Garou Nation and whether or not the

ends justify the means. It asks whether taking the tactics of the Skin Dancers will win them the war against the Wurm – and whether the cost paid taints their victory.

**Patchwork** is best suited for longer chronicles groups that enjoy delving into the psyche of the Garou Nation. It seeks to understand the machinations of Meneghwo, the Patchwork Wolf and recasts Samuel Haight completely.

## *Skin Deep*

*We are all brothers under the skin – and I, for one, would be willing to skin humanity to prove it*  
*Ayn Rand*

The *Rite of Sacred Rebirth* was discovered by the most unlikely of souls – a Child of Gaia kinfolk. How

he came upon such contentious knowledge fettered by vile purpose is unknown; but the ramifications of this hidden lore are discussed in Caerns across the world. Even the Black Spiral Dancers, unmoored of human ethics and morality take note of the promise of this Rite; their war camps howling to be loosed upon Gaian warriors.

A little over a year ago, Samuel Haight approached the Sept of the Five Seasons after news that unknown assailants had slaughtered two full packs. Of the ten Garou, only one survived, laying in a coma with no sign of awareness. Haight, ever the smooth diplomat and manipulator of emotion spoke to the new Sept Leader for a full day and night in the wake of the killings. Observers heard Molly raise her voice, snarl, and at least once a body was heard flung against the walls. Despite the violence her pack kept their loyal vow to remain outside of the visit.

The next morning Samuel and Molly emerged; the former bearing wounds across his face and chest, and following the Sept Leader with eyes downcast. At her behest, the vale of the fallen was breached and an entire packs' bodies were disinterred for Haight's purposes. Molly had agreed for the kinfolk to use the skins of the fallen

for the rite that would allow them to vicariously participate in the hunt for their killers.

Those Garou who knew about the Rite were sworn to secrecy, but desecration ill-suited their sensibilities. When Samuel Haight emerged reborn as Garou, their distaste was unveiled. Despite their challenges, Molly emerged as both victor and Sept Alpha – her pack worked with Haight to locate and punish those who orchestrated the attack on the Sept's sovereignty. Long Moots later, the sparse Garou population reasoned that with their numbers dwindling and their hold on the Caern tenuous, re-using the



skins of the fallen made a certain macabre sense. Desperate times call for desperate measures became the mantra, where the road to hell would have been more apt.

Molly chose her time well to approach the Elders of her Tribe and share the secret. At first the Fianna Elders were outraged, disgusted, and violent. This was, they argued, a perversion of Gaia's gifts – a Wyrnish plot to corrupt the Garou Nation from within. All Breeds found the idea repulsive, from the Homid objections of desecrating a dead body, to Lupus instinctively reacting to the notion of being skinned. They decried any action that would set the Garou to scavenging like hyenas.

The debate continued for three nights; Elders left as their Rage threatened to spill out, only to return and begin their arguments anew. However, with the rising of the third moon, Molly arrived at the Camp accompanied by Menegwho<sup>i</sup>, the Patchwork Wolf. What he said to the Elders that night has never been repeated and those present show a deep reticence to speak of it. Menegwho's words, though, convinced the Elders to take this knowledge further – to seek out other Garou and spread the word.

The next three years were difficult as the microcosm of this moot was played out across the world. It represented an upheaval that some compared to the lifting of the Interregnum – with all of the attendant accusations.

Currently, the Garou Nation is still divided on the practice. Some Septs, especially those with low full-blood Garou populations have exercised a level of practicality and the Rite of Sacred Rebirth has been taught to their Masters of the Rite. The knowledge of this Rite is guarded. It can be well-imagined what would happen if the Black Spiral Dancers found this process, and no Garou wants to be remembered for imparting it to the Wyrms.

### *Chronicles for Skin Deep*

*Sometimes you must shed your skin to save it*

*Emma Donoghue,  
Kissing the Witch: old tales in new skins*

Stories that adopt this idea are focused on the changing attitudes of the Garou. Most Garou find the idea repulsive – recycling is fine as long as you don't apply it to pack mates. Even the idea of wearing the skin of another does not sit well with either Garou or Kinfolk – and the inevitable caste-like system between 'born' and 'created' Garou will become an issue in future years. Already one Sept has dealt with a disrespected Kinfolk who argued that at least she had 'earned' the pelt, rather than gaining it by 'accident of birth'. The ensuing affronted violence is sure to be repeated – especially if this phrase becomes a rallying cry for disaffected Kin.

The Nation is in a delicate position in this chronicle, and it plays out at the local Sept (or even Pack) level. The Sept is not a singular ideological group, and individual members will



have very different beliefs about this Rite. Kinfolk too will receive the news differently. Consider the Kinfolk who hear of a nearby Sept that accepts the Rite when their own denounces it. Does this cause a Kinfolk schism and migration? What do the Sept leaders do when their own Kin start to demand action? Destabilisation is a major theme and the characters should feel that the 'old ways' are threatened or changing, and they have a role in determining the future.

Another theme is exclusion. A Sept that forbids the Rite and any contact with Skin Dancers may cast out members. If the characters hear a Howl of Succour and investigate – only to find a wounded Skin Dancer – how should they respond? Do they abandon another Garou on the edicts of their Elders? What if a Skin Dancer comes to the Bawn claiming

to have news of a dire threat to the Caern? Are they heard out, or turned away? Conversely, what happens if a member of the Sept is mortally wounded and as they prepare for the Rite of the Winter Wolf declare that they want their pelt used to avenge their death? Can the Sept leaders honour such a request?

Lack of certainty may cause some to cling to comfortable tradition, but this type of chronicle should challenge the players to make hard choices, and will emphasise Garou-Garou conflict, as much as (if not more) than Garou-Wyrm.

### *Patchwork*

*The search for a scapegoat is the easiest of all hunting expeditions*

*Dwight D. Eisenhower*

Meneghwo the Patchwork Wolf is a cunning spirit who has watched his children – the Metis – over the long centuries. Every time a Metis is blamed, Meneghwo rankles at the injustice; every time a Metis is attacked, he snarls in defiance. When a Metis stands tall, even for a short while, Meneghwo smiles.

The other spirits do not notice the travels of Meneghwo. He deliberately keeps beneath their notice, and his affiliation with the deformed offspring of Litany violations reinforces his position in the Umbral Courts. The Patchwork Wolf was responsible for passing the Rite of Sacred Rebirth to the Garou through Samuel Haight, though few know this, and even less know why. Haight – who has become known as the Patchwork Messenger – shared the Rite with an all-Metis pack in Seattle after they lost brothers and sisters in a brutal Sabbat attack. Sam showed them how to harvest the skins and keep them preserved for the Rite of Sacred Rebirth. The possibilities offered by the Patchwork Wolf and his Messenger fired the pack's imagination. They had ever been watchful of other groups in the wider Sept who were constant scapegoats – everyone from the Bone Gnawer population to small pockets of downtrodden Kin. The Metis had seen more than one Kin give to the Garou Nation only to be ignored when support was needed.

It was this sense of 'justice' that allowed Meneghwo's offer a toehold in the pack's conscience. They continued with their own investigations and battles against the

Wyrms, all the while listening to the Messenger and learning the Patchwork Wolf's lore. When the pack had collected four skins, they became impatient. With only one skin between them and a new pack mate, the Alpha asked Samuel if the pelt of Black Spiral Dancer would work. It was – he reasoned – only one skin out of five. He would never suggest using five Wyrmskin skins (of course), but needs must as the devil drives. Haight agreed that it could be done; five pelts were needed, the Rite did not stipulate their origins.

The first Skin Dancer was born on the north side of False Creek in Vancouver<sup>ii</sup>. The pack had travelled north to escape the notice of their Elders and used the grounds reputation to ensure privacy. The Rite, performed by the Bone Gnawer Theurge Wet Dog (named to ridicule his odour), was successful. Amelia Johnson (see below) became their newest pack member, and Meneghwo secured his place as the pack's Totem.

In this chronicle, the Rite of Sacred Rebirth is a tool of the Patchwork Wolf. His Messenger, Samuel Haight is still Kinfolk yet Meneghwo has chosen him – not a full-blood Garou – as his follower. In some ways, this helps to cloud Haight's purpose, for which Sept would believe that a Kinfolk actually speaks to the spirits? The stubborn refusal of the Garou to acknowledge those beneath them (in direct violation of the Litany) is the most powerful weapon of the Patchwork Wolf.

The stories that will be told of Samuel Haight – that he is in league with the Wyrms, that he killed members of his own Sept to wear their pelts, that he escaped Valkenburg before his treatment was complete – all of these will become part of the active disinformation designed to discredit the man who will be labelled 'The Skinner'. Other outlandish tales will be added along



the way – how he bested vampires and drank their blood, how he took powers that bend reality, how he is possessed by Wyrms-tainted Umbral powers, and even that he is an ally of the Sabbat – each more ludicrous than the last in an attempt to ensure he is seen as a dangerous pariah.

The truth is that Samuel Haight is a simple Kinfolk with a desire to see others like him taken seriously, and accorded a modicum of respect. 'The Skinner' is a simple man,

quietly spoken, determined and pragmatic, and possessed of his Tribe's affinity for mediating conflict. Samuel would have been a model Philodox. It is the lies perpetuated by his own people that have demonised and ostracised his character and person. Haight treats these stories with a sense of grim humour, and has an honest curiosity of his own supposed infamy. There is even conjecture as to whether the more outlandish stories were started by Haight as a way to destabilise the propaganda.

### *Themes and chronicle for Patchwork*

*Men are mad most of their lives; few live sane, fewer die so. The acts of people are baffling unless we realise that their wits are disordered. Man is driven to justice by lunacy.*

*Edward Dahlberg*

The theme of this chronicle is justice. Whilst the argument that the Rite of Sacred Rebirth promotes meritocracy in an autocratic society is possible; the very idea that recognition of achievement is made possible by wearing the skins of fallen heroes is an indictment on the practices of the Garou (at least if modern sensibilities were applied). This type of chronicle highlights the disparities between the Garou and 'others' whether they be Kinfolk, Metis, or even the other Changing Breeds. Garou have alienated or taken for granted anyone or anything that haven't deemed worthy of full and participatory inclusion in their War – and this lack of possible allies in the Final Battle may be the deciding factor for defeat. Conceptually linked to this is segregation. The

Garou have a binary view of the world – us and them, despite the triatic nature of the universe. The Weaver has been contested space for centuries, and the Urrah are yet another example of cultural isolation. Interestingly, Urrah, Metis, Kinfolk, and Changing Breeds outnumber the rest of the Garou and this hubris allows the Nation to either ignore or wilfully exploit 'others'. Imagine a chronicle in which the Rite is performed on the Kinfolk of a Changing Breed. That Kin is now Garou, but has ties to their 'other' cultural group. Such a creature would lead a difficult life, but stories are enhanced by this type of conflict. Samuel Haight, in this version of events, is a willing servant of a higher power. He will surprise the characters no doubt, especially if care has been taken to foreshadow his persona through tales across the Septs. It is also a way to challenge the pre-conceptions of experienced players, too.

The role of the Metis is also highlighted in this type of chronicle. If the Skin Dancers grow in number, Meneghwo will encourage Metis – with their insider knowledge of the Nation – to take an active leadership role in the new order. Packs of Skin Dancers, led by Metis Alphas could become reasonably visible across the world. Previously, Metis Alphas would have been – in the words of a certain Sicilian mastermind – inconceivable. Those who were once powerless would now have packs – a family, a place to belong, a group of peers. On the positive side, this

type of support provides Metis with a way to meaningfully contribute to the War; but in the World of Darkness consider what happens when the abused gains a measure of power – and a loyal pack. Divisive retribution is an option that would validate all of the Nations' fears. Packs that stand in judgement of other Garou and redistribute their power by taking pelts and giving them to those deemed 'more worthy' is a pogrom that serves the madness of the Wyrms. 'The Road to Hell' would be the best by-line for this chronicle. Within such a story, the role of Meneghwo gives pause for thought. What is the Patchwork Wolf's gambit? With so much scope for this plan to go awry, why would the spirit provide Metis with this Rite? If Meneghwo is in fact working against the Garou by using the Metis, Samuel Haight becomes one of the best allies of the Nation as he tries to undo the horror he helped to foster.

Storytellers who wanted to take this morality play to extremes could also consider the following: what if the local Black Spiral Dancers are pitted against the encroaching power of the Weaver and suggest a temporary alliance with one of these packs? As a gesture of goodwill, they bring the pelts of the Garou they have recently battled – including their own fallen – as a way to create more 'troops' for the coming battle against the Weaver? In a longer-term story, characters will be able to see their downfall clearly signposted in hindsight.



### *Amelia Johnson, First of the Dancers*

*What is it like to wear another person's skin?  
I don't have a good answer for that, I said. It hurts  
Can you remember their stories? Can you feel the love  
that they felt?*

*Andrew Davidson, The Gargoyle*

**Image:** Amelia is a Caucasian in her mid-twenties, athletic in pose and movement, and has long black hair. She is fond of simple jewellery, including two snake-like bands of black metal that she wears on her left fore-arm and right leg. She is confident and has little trouble in standing her ground when her beliefs are questioned

**Role-playing hints:** Amelia was a very self-assured young lady before the Rite. She was guided by a sense of social justice and has a history of authentic volunteerism. In recent

weeks however, there is a quiet anxiousness that is starting to manifest. If asked, she'll simply state that the Change takes some adjustment time, and that she would like to get more sleep. The truth is somewhat darker.

**Secrets:** When a Black Spiral Dancer pelt was used in her Rite neither Samuel nor the attendant Garou thought it would be harmful. A Rite of Cleansing had been performed and it was only one pelt of five. The Wyrms, however, is insidious and the pelt is now a part of Amelia. When she sleeps, the Skin-Dancer experiences Nightmares (as per the Flaw), but she doesn't realise that these are actually the memories of the Dancer whose skin she now wears.

## Images

(in order of appearance)

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<sup>i</sup> See *Axis Mundi: the book of spirits*, p. 45, and the novel *Predator & Prey: Werewolf* by Gherbod Flemming.

<sup>ii</sup> See *Dark Alliance: Vancouver*, p.21 under 'Expo Site'