

The Beginner's Guide to Downtimes

Downtimes can seem like a complex and intimidating prospect to many new live-game players, but don't worry: they're not as hard as they look. This guide lays out what the Storytellers are looking for in a downtime.

There are three major parts to a downtime: Your night-to-night activities, your downtime actions, and any other notes you want to pass along to the Storyteller team. We'll go through these one at a time.

Please include your character's name at the top of your downtime, and in the subject line of your e-mail when you send it to us.

Night-to-night activities

This is a quick breakdown of your character's night-to-night activities over the downtime period. This doesn't have to be hugely detailed, just a few quick notes on how (and on whom) your character feeds, what parts of Norwich or the surrounding area they'll tend to be in, where you're sleeping during the day (especially important for people with multiple Havens), and anything else that you think might be useful for the Storytellers to know. This is so we can work out if you might run into anyone else, and generally makes it easier for us to tailor our responses to your character.

Remember that if your character is a vampire, they will almost always only be active at night. This can cause problems for even the most basic of interactions, such as visiting a shop that only opens 9-5 or explaining to your Contacts why you can't meet them during daylight hours. This becomes less of a problem during the winter, with longer hours darkness allowing your character more freedom.

Downtime Actions

You have 4 personal Downtime Actions to use each downtime. Downtime actions are used for conducting any significant task, pursuing your character's goals, or otherwise interacting with other characters and the world around you in a major way.

Example downtime actions might include:

- Investigating another character's finances and property holdings
- Researching and translating an ancient manuscript
- Planning and conducting an ambush
- Crafting an item, making a work of art, or other acts of creation
- Teaching another character a trait (Attribute, Skill, Merit, Discipline, etc.) that your character knows
- Increasing your stats or learning a new skill, discipline, or other trait (see the section below for more details on this)
- Scoping out a building and breaking into it
- Feeding beyond your character's requirements. If you spend an action feeding (noting how and on whom you feed), you may start the game with 3 more Vitae than you otherwise would

Each downtime action represents anywhere between a night and a week's worth of effort

(although this time can be spread around the downtime period, e.g. performing a ritual for an hour every night of the downtime period would be one action). If you think a given course of action is going to take more than a week, it's worth putting more than one action into it.

A good downtime action includes:

- An account of the action (what are you trying to do, how are you trying to do it, who are you doing it to or with, where are you doing it, and so forth).
- If you're doing anything risky, illegal or otherwise likely to have potential negative repercussions for your character, *please* include some details on how you're covering your tracks or otherwise acting to counter the repercussions. Remember, we only know about what you tell us your character is doing!
- A note of your planned outcome and what you're hoping to achieve for the action so that the STs know what your eventual goal is and can respond appropriately. Telling us what you want to achieve and if the action is part of a longer-term plan **really** helps us respond appropriately and substantially improves your chances of having your character's plans work smoothly!
- A list of any resources, stats or game mechanics you are using to achieve your goals.

Some things don't take downtime actions:

- Shopping for mundane and easily acquired items. We'd like to know when your character buys things that you plan on using in future downtimes or at a game, but it won't take an action if you can just walk into a shop and buy it. Note that acquiring illegal, rare or very expensive items will generally at least one downtime action, and your purchasing power is limited by your dots in the Resources merit.
- Talking to other player characters. Again, it's helpful from an ST's point of view to know what you've been talking to other characters about (CCing an ST in on any in-character e-mails is a good plan) but it doesn't take an action
- Sending letters or e-mails to NPCs for straight-forwards fact-checking or general correspondence. Just drop a line to the appropriate ST or the usual Shades of Norwich address, and you'll hopefully get a reply. More in-depth correspondence or anything where you're attempting to sway the NPCs attention or enlist their support for your cause will take a downtime action however.
- Anything else that gives the STs more detail about your character but doesn't further their goals or interact with the world in a significant way

If in doubt, **assume that something will take a downtime action to complete** if its success or failure is important to your character.

Legibility

We have to be able to read and understand from your downtime to successfully respond to it. As a minimum, we need to know:

- a) what you mean by what you have written
- b) what your aims are
- c) whether there is any mechanical aspect to what you are doing

If we cannot tell the above, we cannot do the best we can on your downtime. If you do not explicitly state that you are buying something with XP or working towards buying something in the future, either in the action itself or in a summary of XP expenditures at the end of your downtime (preferably both), then we will not usually let you spend that XP.

If you think you will have issues with this for reasons such as dyslexia, you could potentially ask another player or a friend to proofread things for you, or if you are comfortable with letting the ST team know, you could tell us in advance and we can work with you to help you with your downtimes.

We do not ask for perfect grammar and spelling (though it is always appreciated), but we must be able to understand you.

Reserve actions

Often, everything will go according to plan and your downtime actions will work out as you'd hoped. However, when working with other player characters (PCs) during downtime, there is always the risk that they won't submit a downtime. Rather than have all of your hard work (and downtime actions) go to waste, it's often a good idea to include a reserve action or two at the end of your downtime, just in case. These reserve actions will only be carried out if one of your other actions doesn't work due to a lack of participation from other PCs, or other factors beyond your control make one or more of your planned actions unworkable from the start.

Training and spending XP

Training your character and increasing their Attributes, Skills, Merits and other characteristics with XP takes time, as well as suitable in-character justification and expenditure of Experience Points. Listed below are the minimum training times required to improve your traits:

- Buying dots 1-3 in an Attribute, Skill, Merit, Discipline or Blood Potency usually takes a single downtime action. Being taught a new Crúac or Theban Sorcery ritual or buying back a lost dot of Willpower also takes a single Downtime Action.
- Increasing any trait to 4 takes a minimum of 2 Downtime Actions. Gaining this level of expertise takes a significant investment of time.
- Increasing any trait to 5 takes a *bare minimum* of 3 Downtime Actions across *at least* two separate downtimes. As five dots in any stat represents the pinnacle of human achievement, we expect very good in-character justification to support such an increase, and don't be surprised if it takes longer than the listed minimum.
- Humanity and Skill Specialisations cost a variable number of Downtime Actions, depending on what is being bought, to how many dots, and the in-character justification for it.

Please check with a Storyteller if you're uncertain as to how long anything might take. As noted earlier, all of these listed times are the minimums required to obtain the trait. It may take longer than the listed time, depending on how your character is learning or being taught the trait in question, or any other factors that might impede your character's ability to focus over the downtime action in question. As a general rule, it's quicker to be taught than to teach yourself, particularly when it comes to complex, obscure or occult knowledge.

Learning another Clan's disciplines will **always** require a teacher who knows the discipline in question. You can only self-teach your three Clan disciplines, plus your Bloodline discipline (if any). (You can also potentially self-teach your Covenant's discipline (Cruac, Theban Sorcery or the Coils of the Dragon), although this will almost always take longer than the listed minimums above.)

Merits and downtime actions

As well as your own 4 personal downtime actions, you may get access to additional downtime actions via certain merits representing friends and associates of your character willing to do some legwork for them. You get one additional action for each Mentor, Retainer or set of Allies your character has access to, and one additional action for each dot of Contacts they have. These merits each work in a unique way and can be used for different things:

Allies: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Friends and associates in a given area of influence• Each Allies merit represents a different area of influence• The should be reasonably specific (so East Anglian bus networks rather than transport, Royal Norfolk Constabulary rather than police, or Norfolk bioengineering rather than industry). In general, the more specific a set of Allies, the better they work• The more dots you have in a given set of Allies, the more they'll be willing to do for you• When using your Allies in a downtime, the STs need to know:<ul style="list-style-type: none">- The area of influence covered- The number of dots you have in that area• Regardless of level and type, your Allies will not act outside of their area of influence, and will not place themselves at undue risk• Your Allies may ask for favours in return for their services	Contacts: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Each dot you have in Contacts represents a network of informants, gossips or researchers in a given area• Each dot represents a different network, so with Contacts 3 you would have three networks to draw from. For example, Police, Organised Crime, City Hall• They are generally in broader categories than Allies (So Transport, Police, Underworld, etc. would all be OK)• They will only gather information for you, and will not take any direct action on your behalf• Your Contacts may require small bribes or favours in exchange for rare or difficult to obtain information
Mentor: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A Mentor is a skilled and knowledgeable figure who has a teacher/pupil relationship with your character. They are usually an elder Kindred, although mortal Mentors are possible.• Each Mentor is a separate merit• They can provide you with advice, information and training. For full details, see the "Mentor Merit" thread in the Shades of Norwich rules forum• Dots in the Mentor merit represent a combination of the Mentor's capabilities, power, and how much access your character has to them.• Your Mentor will not take direct action on your character's behalf• You Mentor is likely to ask for favours from your character in return for their expertise	Retainer: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A Retainer is a mortal or ghoul loyal to your character.• Each Retainer is a separate merit• They will do anything non-suicidal or otherwise fantastically risky that you ask of them. Blood-bound, Dominated or ghould Retainers may even be willing to die for your character.• The number of dots represents their competence and ability:<ul style="list-style-type: none">- A one dot Retainer is an average adult human or an animal.- Each dot thereafter improves their capabilities. A three dot Retainer is either a good all-rounder or notably proficient in a specific area. A five dot Retainer is highly capable and may be an expert in one or more fields.• For each Retainer, the STs need:<ul style="list-style-type: none">- The number of dots invested in them- The type of retainer (lawyer, security, occultist, guard dog, etc.)- A name and short description

A few more notes on Retainers

At character creation, you may stat your own Retainer. Retainers acquired after that point will be stattd by the ST team based on the individual you've gained as a Retainer during play. As such, it's a good idea to be specific about the kind of Retainer you're looking for

Your Retainer should have some areas of expertise: these are the areas in which they have specialist knowledge, competence and respectability. For a very specific kind of knowledge (e.g. one of the academic disciplines or Allies: University of East Anglia) this should be listed. If they are more generalised, it will be more difficult and will take more time for them to achieve their goals as regards a specialised area. As a general rule of thumb, it's better to let the ST team know what you want to do with your Retainer than worry about the stats yourself. Please note that you cannot have supernatural creatures or other vampires as Retainers - these would usually be represented by a Mentor or an Ally.

And finally...

Please include any out-of-character notes or other things you want to bring to the Storyteller's attention. If you spot an error on your character sheet, letting us know in your downtime is a good way of getting it corrected for the next game.

In short, what the STs want from a downtime is:

- 1) A brief summary of your character's night-to-night activities, including feeding
- 2) Your four personal Downtime Actions using the format above
- 3) Any further actions your merits give you
- 4) Any other information you think may impact your downtime or the STs might like to know about

And as always, please do drop us a line at shadesofnorwich@yahoogroups.com if you've got any questions about your downtime or anything else to do with the game.

As a final section, we've included two sample downtimes using the systems above, which should hopefully help you with writing your own. One is a short downtime from the perspective of a young tech-savvy unaligned Daeva, the other is from the perspective of an elder Circle of the Crone Nosferatu who is a potent priestess and patron of the arts.

With thanks to Luke Slater for permission to base this on his "System of a Downtime" document for the Isles of Darkness chronicle.

Peter Reynolds Downtime

[Peter Reynolds is an unaligned Daeva who was turned into a vampire early last year. He's a slightly famous blogger, and thinks of himself as an Internet entrepreneur. His concerns in downtimes are usually: looking for his sister who went missing the same night he was Embraced, his blog and general Web presence, and hanging out with members of his clan. He's a current NPC in Shades of Norwich, but is being treated as a PC for this example.]

Night-to-night activities:

I am mostly hunting in the clubland area of Norwich around Prince of Wales Street, mostly targeting student nights or other popular events. I will be using my socialising skills backed with a hint of Majesty where appropriate.

Other than my downtime actions, most of my time will be spent at my Haven on St Benedict's Street. I will be working on my blogging and web design businesses in my free time.

Action 1:

After some of the scrapes I've been almost in recently, I'll be spending some more time training myself up on some self-defense skills. I'll swing by Julian Black's dojo and train there, working on my general unarmed fighting techniques.

(OoC: Spending 6 XP to buy Brawl 2.)

Actions 2 and 3:

I'm going to work on improving the profile of my blog. I'm going to get some of my friends in the media to use some quotes from it in their reporting and reviews, and start cross-promoting with other complimentary media blogs.

I'm also going to try to raise the profile of the local band Foppish Man-Bird in the local music press, as part of my plans to raise the profile of Norfolk alternative music generally. I will promote them via my blog, and encourage other bloggers I know to do the same.

(OoC: Using Manipulation 3, Persuasion 3, Socialise 3, Computer 2 with a Blogging specialisation, Fame (Blogger) 1, Status (Media Blogger) 2, as well as my Allies action below. I'm not entirely certain out of character about how to go about this action, but I think Peter has the skills to make it work so any suggestions from the ST team would be very welcome!)

Action 4 and Contacts (Street):

I'm going to look for further clues as to my sister's whereabouts, following up on some of the leads I uncovered last downtime. I'm going to continue flyering the city centre, and I will ask my contacts if there have been any further sightings of her.

If I get any leads, I'll be keen to follow them up, although I'll try to keep an eye out for any signs I might be entering any-one's territory or Haven and I will be particularly cautious if I sense any other vampires in my vicinity. Ultimately, I'll go for caution over valour, as there's no chance of me finding her if I meet Final Death!

(OoC: Using Intelligence and Wits 2, Investigation 1, Streetwise 1, and any other relevant social skills I have.)

Allies (Internet Media) 3:

I will get my allies to improve my blog's profile and promote Foppish Man Bird. I'm hoping for a lot of cross-linking, sharing via Facebook, Tweets, and so on. With this rise in profile, I'll also try to get some additional advertising revenue from the blog.

(**OoC:** Spending 4 XP to buy Resources 2.)

Melora Rosenbach Downtime

[Melora is a Nosferatu Circle of the Crone who owns a theatre (the Aglaea) and also serves as an occult investigator for the Fief. Her concerns in downtimes are usually: her theatre, the society and politics of the Kindred Court, occult mysteries and personal spiritual development. She used to be a PC and is now an NPC.]

Feeding:

Melora feeds by having actors at her theatre come to her room for 'private rehearsals'. They always leave woozy and with little recollection of what happened. She probably has rather a reputation among the actors as someone who employs the casting couch.

Haven:

Melora's haven is a set of rooms in the Aglaea Theatre. To all intents and purposes they look like the flat of an eccentric and gothic-obsessed theatre director, with heavy red velvet hangings, shelves filled with leather-bound copies of plays and novels, and a variety of bizarre artworks and occult objects that suggest extreme pretentiousness. The windows are covered over with shutters and there are hangings in front of the shutters so they are not too obvious. Melora sleeps in a large bed with a canopy. However, if she allows anyone into her haven, it will be to the modest sitting room with its chess table, piano and embroidered armchairs, though the fireplace has been blocked up and a tasteful screen set in the alcove.

Nightly activities:

Melora generally spends the early evening watching rehearsals and discussing performances with actors and directors (she deliberately arranges rehearsals she wishes to attend quite late so that she can maintain her level of artistic control) or the performances themselves. This will usually be when she feeds. After this, unless she has any other pressing matters to attend to, she will retreat to her rooms to read and have Hilary update her on the daily happenings. When the theatre has been cleaned and locked up, she will often walk through the darkened building enjoying the silence. At some point during most nights she will go up to her ritual space, in the attic, and pray to the Crone. Wherever possible, she likes to time her devotions with the moon shining through the large skylight above the space. During this time, Hilary stands guard at the door, inside or out depending on Melora's mood, and guards from intruders. Melora travels to and from places like Court in an old-fashioned but expensive car, driven by Hilary.

Relevant stats:

Academics (Theatre) 2, Occult 4, Expression 3 (Acting), Resources 4, Striking Looks 2, Retainer 2 (Hilary Stott), Staff (Actors, Front of House) 2, Cruac 2, Majesty 1

Action One:

This downtime, Melora's theatre is going through the second half of its run of 'Beauty and the Beast' and at the same time preparing to begin the run of 'Dracula' by Hamilton Deane (which will begin on the 1st of February), keeping true to the spirit of the Gothic genre. She will be ensuring that every Kindred or Supernatural who has personally requested a ticket (or tickets) for performances receives them. When asked for at the ticket office, they will receive them in a sealed envelope (with Melora's personal device of a stylised pair of tragedy and comedy drama masks with skulls instead of masks) containing priority tickets, a complementary programme and a note from Melora, including free drinks at the bar upon mention of the Kindred's name for them and any guests they may have with them. This will be handled by her Retainer, Hilary Stott, who is a ghoul.

'Beauty and the Beast' is a reasonably modern interpretation, with beautiful set dressing and artistic, extravagant costumes. For those who would ask such a thing, the genre is very much 'magic realism'. It is an interplay between the classic tale of the woman who learns to love a monster and a more contemporary story that is relevant today. A young woman in the modern day is confronted by a dreamlike landscape containing her double, a bestial and crude creature, by whom she is initially shocked, but who she comes to accept as the play goes on, finally embracing her own darker nature. The play is a series of scenes, some realistic with occasional uncanny touches, and others very much a fairy tale or a gothic landscape. It is arty and even vaguely disconcerting at times, but creates a heightened atmosphere of magic in the mundane.

Melora will also spend some time hobnobbing, so to speak, with a few patrons of the Aglaea, inviting them for a 'private discussion'. She will wine, dine and feed off them, with every attention paid to the Masquerade. If possible, she will use these scandalous meetings as a way of trying to persuade them to donate to the theatre or sponsor a seat (with a nice little silver plaque saying who sponsored it).

[OOC: Buying Allies 1 - Theatre Patrons for 2xp.]

Action Two:

This month Melora is, once again, hitting the books, committing herself to researching the symbols she found on the ship investigated last game using Academics 2 and Occult 4, while steering fairly well clear of looking too deeply into any reference to the De Aquila family.

Action Three:

Invite Doctor Obadiah Trembleton to dinner, provide him with free tickets to a performance, and generally seduce him in pretty much any way short of actually sleeping with him. Then ghoul him.

[OOC: I'd like to buy him as a retainer but I'm not sure what level he would warrant. If you could give me some feedback on it, that would be good.]

Action Four:

Melora will focus on the pain of the fire from last game's out of court excursion (when she was hit by the dude with the evil sacrificial knife) and use the pain to delve into the power of her blood, channelling it into the power of ritual magical fire in her right hand.

I would like to work towards buying Cruac 3 with the 'Touch of the Morrigan' ritual, or buying it this downtime if this action is sufficient.

Retainer action: Hilary Stott

Hilary will be spending her action this month keeping the theatre ticking over while her employer becomes pretty much fully invested in her research. She will set up the relevant performances and deal with the organisation.

At Christmas, Hilary will be given a delicate music box that plays the Lament of Dido, a bottle of wine and some chocolates.

Reserve action: If any of the above doesn't happen for any reason, Melora will put the time into reviewing the current performances and business of the theatre, attending even more rehearsals than usual and generally interfering in the directors' artistic visions. It is her

prerogative, as owner!