



SHADOWRUN



ANOTHER RAINY NIGHT

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ENHANCED FICTION: Another Rainy Night

Connecting JackPoint VPN ...
... Matrix Access ID Spoofed.
... Encryption Keys Generated.
... Connected to Onion Routers.
> Login

> Enter Passcode

... Biometric Scan Confirmed.
Connected to <ERROR: NODE UNKNOWN>

"You are what you eat."

JackPoint Stats

9 users currently active
in the network

Latest News

*Somebody thought trafficking the dependents of a very Special Agent was a good idea. I hope the culprit covered their tracks—the Feds are getting serious. — Fastjack

Personal Alerts

* You have 17 new [private messages](#).
* You have 26 new [responses](#) to your JackPoint posts.

First Degree

Two Members are online and in your area.

Your Current Rep Score: 96
(68% Positive)

Current Time: 08 Mar 2074,
0223 hrs

PREFERENCES

FEEDS

TASKS

LINKS

HISTORY

Welcome back to JackPoint, chummer;
your last connection was severed: 4
days, 5 hours ago.

Today's Heads Up

* There are things with strange eating habits moving in the dark. You might want to stock up on the garlic.

Incoming

- * Sometimes the paranoid people have a clue. [Tag: [Conspiracy Theories](#)]
- * When you need to lay low, there's no place like a safe house. [Tag: [Safehouses](#)]
- * Guns continue to make the world go round. [Tag: [Gun Haven 2](#)]
- * There are groups that only the Awakened seem to keep track of; now you can join them. [Tag: [Magical Societies](#)]

Top News Items

- * Seattle's Attorney General's office has issued warrants for three individuals connected to Proposition 23 advertising. The individuals are SINless, hindering their apprehension. [Link](#)
- * Knight Errant arrested Harriot Lennerwood for impeding an investigation. Ms. Lennerwood, a private citizen, was investigating the death of an SINless ork in front of a Knight Errant precinct. [Link](#)
- * Special Prosecutor Jerrold Worthington was slain in a hit-and-run incident early this morning. Why a vehicle was driving along the jogging path is still unknown. [Link](#)
- * The Amazonian corvette, Chavez, was lost yesterday while on a goodwill tour to Lisbon. [Link](#)



CHAT

MESSAGES

FILES

POSTS

NEXUS

SEARCH

Active



Active



Active



On/Receiving



Excellent



Active



Local Map

ANOTHER RAINY NIGHT

Posts/Files tagged with
"Another Rainy Night"

Thomas McAllister
Lydia Bowden
Alice Bujold
Teresa Castillo

[More]

CONTINUE

ADVANCED
SEARCH

SAVE

... ANOTHER RAINY NIGHT ...

27 October 2073

Thomas McAllister watched the city of Denver emerge below him like a bleak gray cancer as the chartered jet broke through the cloud cover on its approach. He'd never particularly liked Denver, and had someone not paid him a considerable retainer several weeks ago, he wouldn't be going there now. The late October sky seemed dreary and foreboding from the comfort of his seat, and the pilot had informed the three passengers that it was a windy and rainy four degrees Celsius in the Treaty City that afternoon. He shivered slightly, glad that he'd brought the heavy lined coat on the seat next to him.

The two other passengers on the corporate Luxe V jet tried to engage him in small talk shortly after the plane had left Houston. Judging from their demeanor and the way they were dressed, they were mid-level corp executives who probably didn't want to know the real reason Knight Errant was flying him to Denver, so he muttered some noncommittal pabulum about being a university professor from Texas A&M&M (which was true) hired to present a special seminar to Ares senior management in the UCAS sector (which was not). Then he'd smiled a less-than-cheerful smile and let his gray eyes go slightly out of focus, looking at them as if he were deciding which one might taste better. They had quickly stopped trying to engage him in further conversation and had spent the remainder of the flight chatting quietly with one another, occasionally giving him a pointed glance which he was almost certainly not supposed to notice.

Now the crowded, ugly city was drawing closer as the plane made its final approach to the small tower that housed the regional headquarters for Knight Errant's Front Range Free Zone Division. The VTOL-capable jet set down on the building's roof, and Thomas and his fellow passengers rose from their seats and collected their belongings. The two executives seemed more than willing to let Thomas off the plane first, so he pulled the black leather coat on over the dove-gray turtleneck he was wearing, gathered his small duffel bag, and descended the short flight of stairs to the roof. He was greeted by a heavy-set, dark-skinned elven woman about his age, with dark brown, close-cropped hair.

"Dr. McAllister?" she asked as she approached. He nodded. "I'm Alice Bujold, Regional Commander for KE here in Denver; I'm glad you were able to come so quickly." She motioned to the door; Thomas gathered up his bag and followed her. "It's usually snowing here by this time of the month; you got lucky."

"Yes," he replied, his voice a soft Texas drawl. "Lucky. That's just what I was going to say."

Once inside, she bypassed the small customs station, led him to an elevator, and pressed the button for the ninth floor. "This will be number nine for you, won't it?"

"Yes." A brief exchange about the weather, then right to the business of death. He was fine with that. "Has her body been released to the family yet?"

She shook her head tightly, the polite smile disappearing from her face. "No. Corporate was adamant about that not being done until you'd examined her and signed off."

"And you don't like that." It was clearly not a question.

"I do not," she said as the elevator stopped and opened its doors. She stepped out quickly and turned left, not looking to see if he was following. "It's upsetting the family, and it could create a public relations incident if she's not released soon." She stopped in front of a large double door labeled *Morgue*. "Just as it could if your theory got out, Doctor."

He gave her a long, appraising look. She was a heavy woman, but not overly so, and her weight was distributed well. She was nearly the same height as he was. While she was short for an elf, she was still imposing. Standing there, arms crossed across her chest, she reminded him of a wall in a business suit.

"I understand that, Ms. Bujold," he said finally. "And so do your superiors at Knight Errant, or they wouldn't have paid me the ridiculous consulting fee I charged them to bring me here. Or to the scene in Seattle. And the governments of Tír Tairngire, the Pueblo Corporate Council, and the Sioux Nation feel the same way." He took a deep breath and ran his hand through his dark hair before continuing. "Look, I'm not trying to stir shit up with this. I don't want a panic any more than you do, but we need to face the fact. We're probably dealing with the Infected here."

She stood her ground, giving him the same appraisal he'd given her, and then exhaled sharply. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to be





this hostile right off the bat. I want this bastard as much as anyone. I'd just like to do it quietly, and the media is already speculating about vampires because of the blood and the tags on the walls. If they knew about some of the other killings—the ones they haven't heard about—it would be a real mess. I'd rather that not happen on my watch."

"I don't do interviews, ma'am," he said with a hint of a smile. "They won't hear a thing from me. Can I see the body now?"

Bujold smiled in return; they seemed to have reached an understanding. She motioned to the stainless-steel doors behind her, and then turned and entered the morgue. Thomas followed her in. They were greeted by a human woman in her forties, leaning against a table and wearing a neat business suit. Her light brown hair was long and drawn back into a ponytail. Her badge hung on a lanyard around her neck, and an Ares Predator was conspicuously holstered on her right hip. She stood as the two of them entered.

"Doctor, this is Senior Detective Lydia Bowden," Bujold said tersely, placing what Thomas thought was an excessive amount of emphasis on the word "detective." "Detective Bowden is the lead investigator in the Lawrence murder; she'll be your escort and point of contact." Turning to Bowden, she said, "I believe you know your assignment, detective." With that, she spun around and left.

Thomas stood there a moment, a slightly puzzled expression on his face. He found a chair and set his duffel bag down upon it. "Would it be out of place for me to ask what that was all about?" he asked.

"People work together long enough, they find some reason to like each other, or they don't," she said in a low, husky voice that hinted of the bayous of Louisiana. "I've worked with Alice for a while. I'm Lydia." She offered her hand.

Thomas shook it; her grip was firm and dry, confident without being aggressive. He could feel the slight firmness of an induction pad in her palm. It was the only sign of cyberware he could notice, but he didn't imagine that a smartlink was all she had installed. Even though she was a good fifteen centimeters shorter than he was, he found her just as imposing as Alice Bujold. It might have been the massive pistol, or it might have been the eyes, deep brown and constantly in motion, taking in everything around her. "Thomas," he said by way of introduction, "Thomas McAllister."

She nodded. "I know who you are, Dr. McAllister; I did some research when I found out I was going to be your babysitter. If they're bringing in a noted vampirologist, things must be worse than I thought."

He smiled genuinely. "Well, now. 'Vampirologist.' There's a nice old-fashioned word for you. I don't hear that one nearly enough."

She shrugged. "I'm an old-fashioned girl."

He pretended not to notice as she sized him up. He pulled his commlink out of one of his longcoat's outer pockets and brought up an AR window. They had sent him a copy of the autopsy report, as if that was going to tell him all he needed to know. He wasn't surprised that someone didn't want him coming; his presence frequently indicated something bad had happened or was about to happen. He brought the report up in the open window, and put some of the scene photos in another. Looking at the rows of

lockers on the far wall, he asked, "Are you just a babysitter, Lydia, or are you willing to help out?"

She gave him a sour look. "I work for a living."

"Sorry," he said. "That came out wrong. Most places I go, my escort tries to stay as far from me as physically possible. Especially on this case, for some reason. After a while ..." He let his voice trail off a little and shrugged slightly. "Which one is hers?"

"This one," she said, pulling out one of the drawers to reveal a body draped in a sheet. Thomas pulled the sheet away to reveal a young ork woman. Her body was badly bruised, cut in several places, and there was a ragged hole in the side of her neck where someone had bitten through her jugular vein.

Lydia told him some of the details of the woman's life as Thomas looked over the body. She didn't bother consulting her own AR display. "This is Corinne Lawrence, 24 years old; cause of death was exsanguination. She worked as a private courier, occasionally as a bodyguard, for a local firm. Well-trained, good at her job, at least according to her employment records; whoever did this was good."

Thomas nodded. "She certainly didn't go quietly, I'll give her that."

"No, she did not." She watched as he examined the woman's body. "Not your first rodeo, I see," she said after a few minutes.

He shook his head as he leaned in to examine her neck. "I was an MD long before I was a college professor," he said. The tooth marks were real, he figured, not the product of an appliance. "Damn. Just like the others." He looked up at her. "Did the ME find enough saliva around the wound for DNA?"

She flipped through the report on her AR and nodded. "Yeah; it matched with some of the blood they found on her hand razors. They didn't get any hits."

"Did they do a Harz-Greenbaum compensation before they ran it?"

She shook her head as she searched the report. "If they did, they didn't write it down."

He looked up and shook his head. "Of course they didn't," he said. "Why should they listen to the vampire expert and run the one test he asked for?"

"Good question. I'll try to find an answer for you." She scanned a bit further then said, "The samples are still on file, though; I'll make that happen." She made the appropriate gestures in the AR field. "That shouldn't take too long," she said. "You know who it is, don't you?"

He stood up and shook his head. "I've got an idea, but no, I don't know for sure. There wasn't enough DNA gathered on most of the other bodies to get an ID. It had already degraded by the time the bodies were discovered. This is the first victim to really have enough to run a comparison." He looked at the report in his AR window, flipped through it until he found the notes on the bloodied hand razors. Reaching over, he raised her right hand and examined it more closely. Her surgeon had done some nice work; if he hadn't known what he was looking for, he might have missed the razors altogether. "Most of the evidence I've been able to gather is of questionable admissibility." He turned to face Corinne's body directly, crossing his arms across his chest as he did so. "She's like six of the others; she doesn't fit the profile."

Lydia walked up to the other side of the drawer and faced Thomas. "Which profile?"



"Most victims of vampires have light, if any, cybernetic modifications. Vampires don't just survive off blood. They need it, but it's not *all* they need. They feed off the psychic energy in a person's aura, and cyberware eats away at that." He looked back at the corpse. "Poor Corinne here, though, was heavily modified, as were most of the victims. If this is a vampire—and I'm pretty sure it is—then she's not killing for survival. She's doing it because she can."

"She? Serial killers are almost exclusively male."

"Just a hunch," he said. "Excuse me a moment." Without waiting for a response, he reached out and placed his right hand on Corinne's cold cheek. He closed his eyes and assented her.

The razors popped out of her fingertips as the intruder lunged for her, a fighting knife in her hand. Fast, too fast, she's so damn fast! The knife's edge sliced across her ribs, through the fabric of the vest like it wasn't even there; strong and fast, a bad combination. Corinne managed to get a straight jab into the woman's gut as she shot past, driving the razors deep into her flesh and coming away with blood on her hand. The pommel of the knife struck her in the back of the head as the bitch shot past; would have crushed her skull if it weren't for the ceramics fused with her skeleton ...

"Doc?" Lydia's voice shook him from his reverie. "Are you all right?"

"Yes, yes, I'm fine. A little disoriented, that's all." He shook his head to clear it; he hadn't gotten a good look at the killer, but it could have been her. "How long ...?"

She shrugged. "Few seconds. Learn anything?"

"You were right about her not going quietly, but that's about all I saw. Her opponent was a woman, very fast, quite strong."

Lydia frowned. "So you were right about the killer being female," she said. "And I was right in thinking that you know a lot more about this than you're telling me."

Thomas nodded. "Like I said, I don't get too close to most of my escorts. We don't talk much."

Her frown deepened a little. "I'm not most of your escorts, Doctor. If we're going to work on this investigation together, you need to keep me in the loop." She paused, reconsidering what she'd said. "Hell, you need to bring me into the damn loop to start with."

Thomas was silent for a few moments. He looked down at Corinne Lawrence, and then reached and touched the hideous wound in her throat. He closed his eyes, and Lydia watched his fingertips begin to glow slightly. Beneath them, the wound closed itself, flesh stitching itself back together under his touch. In a few moments, her throat was whole again.

He opened his eyes to see Lydia almost smiling at him. "That's tampering with evidence," she said quietly.

Thomas almost smiled back. "The autopsy was completed yesterday, and the family's waiting to bury her. That's hard enough in any circumstance; it's worse when there's such an obvious wound." He motioned to the rest of her cuts and bruises, as well as the autopsy incisions. "These can be covered up, but that one..."

"I didn't say I disapproved," she said.

"Thanks," he said. "Magic doesn't bother you, then? It makes some people a little jumpy."

She shrugged. "Not my first rodeo."

Thomas pulled the sheet back over Corinne's body and slid the drawer back into the wall, a thoughtful expression on his face.

He then retrieved his duffel bag and headed for the door. "I'll fill you in on things in the car," he said as he passed Lydia.

She grabbed her own jacket and pulled it on. "Where are we going?"

"To the crime scene. I need to see where she died."



Lydia turned her beat-up red '62 Ford Americar onto I-70 and headed east. She drove herself, not turning control over to the autopilot and the city's GridGuide system. Between the crappy weather and the crappy drivers, traffic was worse than usual for this time of day. She radiated irritation as the drive continued—cursing under her breath, muttering things like "You'd think these people would know how to drive in rain." She looked over to the passenger seat when McAllister pulled an Ares Viper slivergun out of his duffel bag. He'd shed his longcoat before they got in and had pulled on a well-worn shoulder holster rig as they left the parking garage.

As he slid the pistol into the holster, she said, "I just know you're licensed for that."

"As a matter of fact, I am," he said. "And a few other things, as well. Knight Errant was kind enough to arrange for my CAS licenses to follow me into UCAS territory. Wish the Sioux had been as cooperative."

She sighed and shifted in her seat. "You're expecting trouble, then."

"Yup," he said, exaggerating his drawl to try and sound like a western hero. "Afraid I am." He pulled a bracer onto his left wrist. It was too short and unadorned to be a Tiffani Élégance; it looked like one of the many self-defense sprayers on the market.

She inhaled sharply, swore under her breath again, and engaged the car's autopilot. She punched in an address, and then turned in her seat a little to face him and said, "Time to open up. What are we walking into?"

He stared into his duffel bag, closed it, pulled his longcoat back on as best he could, and deliberately did not look at Lydia. They sat in the car. The noise of the engine and the steady beat of the windshield wipers fending off the rain were the only sounds. She was about to prompt him again when he began speaking, softly, almost to himself. "About ten years ago, there was a young woman in one of my 'Vampires for Laymen' courses at the University. Bright girl, very focused and very enthusiastic. Aced the course. Maybe I should have known. Maybe she was too into it. Maybe something should have warned me that she was a little off-kilter. But I get all sorts in those classes. One enthusiastic twenty-something didn't set off any alarms for me back then."

"What do you mean by 'off-kilter'?"

He raised his head and looked at her. His eyes were wide, his mouth a limp frown. "She had grown up fascinated with vampires,



INCOMING FEED.....

glamorizing and idealizing them in her head. She was hardly alone in that, of course, but she certainly had one of the worst cases I'd ever seen. She also had certain ideas about our relationship that weren't grounded in reality, something else I completely missed at first."

Lydia nodded. "I had a thing for an archeology professor I had back in college, but I got over it. I'm guessing she didn't."

He shook his head. "No. And I was oblivious."

"Strange how often that happens."

"Yeah." He sat there silently for a little while as the car wound its way through residential streets. Neither of them had even noticed when they left freeway. The car brought itself to a halt in front of a small apartment building and parked itself. The two passengers stepped out into the freezing rain.

Lydia made a gesture to arm the car's security system, then led her charge up a small flight of steps and through the building's front door. Silently, they took an elevator to the eighth floor and then made their way to the end of the corridor. They came to a doorway crisscrossed with yellow crime-scene tape. Flashing AROs attempted to warn them away, but Lydia walked right through them. She pulled a passkey from her pocket, opened the door, and stepped under the tape to enter the apartment. Thomas followed.

Clearing the threshold, he surveyed the apartment's living room. It looked much as if the bulls of Pamplona had run through it on their way to the *plaza de toros*. A small coffee table lay splintered in front of a small, overturned couch. The plate of food that had been on it scattered over the floor. A few small, dark splotches of blood and other bodily fluids stained the floor and the walls.

The words "MIDNIGHT SNACK" were written in large block letters on the back wall. Forensics had determined that they were written in Corinne Lawrence's blood.

"So you think the Mealtime Killer's a real, honest-to-God vampire?" she asked. Then she shook her head. "Good Lord, the 'Mealtime Killer'? Seriously? Have you ever wondered who comes up with these stupid names?"

"A bored reporter somewhere, I'm sure. Them and police—they're the ones who spend enough time around tragedy to be flip about it." He looked around the room at the various bits of organic debris. "I'd be willing to bet that this is one of the times when not being able to smell is a good thing."

She turned to face him and rested her hand on the grip of her pistol. "Don't make me use this thing on you, Doc," she said, only half-jokingly. "The stench is pretty bad, but not as bad as the first time I was in here." She looked at him quizzically. "You really can't smell this?"

He shook his head. "Chemistry accident in high school; can't smell a damn thing." He hadn't moved past the threshold of the apartment; it was like most of the other crime scenes, so he didn't need to look things over too closely. Not in the physical world, at any rate. He widened his perceptions and assented the room where Corinne had died.

The room in the astral plane was, if anything, even more of a mess. A dense fog hovered in the room; death struggles frequently left a haze in astral space that could take days to clear away. Absent, though, was the telltale horror show that inevitably followed a vampire feeding on the life energy of a victim's aura.

His senses returned to the real world, and he walked to the back wall, examining the grisly message and shaking his head. "You ever see Darwin's Bastards live?" he asked her. He raised his right hand and reached for the letters; he hesitated at a centimeter or so from the surface. Gritting his teeth, he forced himself to touch the wall.

That's it—you're getting closer, Thomas! We'll see each other soon!

He stiffened slightly, then dropped his hand quickly to his side.

Lydia joined him at the wall and nodded. "Did an off-duty security gig for them when I was younger to pick up some extra cash. Not really my kind of music." Turning to face him, she motioned with her head toward the message. "You okay?"

"I'm fine," he lied. "Your security gig ... did Big Billy and Gristlehide get into it on stage, try to kill each other with their guitars while the crowd went completely apeshit, chanting and screaming until it looked like there was going to be a riot?"

She nodded again. "How'd you know?"

He chuckled. "It was like that almost every show; it's amazing the band managed one tour, let alone fifteen years' worth of them." He turned and motioned around the room. "When a vampire feeds on a person's aura, it's an extremely intense, emotional connection. It leaves a mark on astral space for days, even weeks if it's a particularly intense episode. Astral space in this room, right now, should look kind of like a Bastards concert during a Billy/Gristlehide showdown. And it doesn't." He stuffed his hands into his coat pockets and let out a frustrated sigh. "She's not feeding. I don't get it."

Lydia wandered into the small kitchenette and sat down in a kitchen chair, one of the few intact pieces of furniture in the apartment. "You said back at the morgue that Corinne's aura was weak because of her cyber. You also said she was doing it because she could, not for food. Maybe your lady vampire wasn't hungry."

Thomas walked into the kitchenette and plopped down in the other chair, opposite Lydia. "Not likely," he said. "Even a weak aura has some energy in it. She'd try to take it just to top off the tank, as it were. And she has to be hungry." He pointed at the wreckage in the living room. "Vampires use that energy to power their abilities. Judging from the fight she and Corinne had in here, Teresa was burning energy like an acetylene torch."

Lydia gave him a long, hard look. "So this girl from your class went out, got infected with HMMHV, and is now on a killing spree across at least four countries ... just to try and impress you?"

"No, she became a vampire to try and do that," he said. "The killing spree ... that's her trying to send a message, though I'm damned if I can figure out what she's trying to accomplish."

Lydia began flipping crime scene photos into her AR display. Each killing had borne the name of a meal, which had led to the stupid media nickname. *Lunch. Breakfast. Dinner. Second breakfast.* She looked at all nine of the crime scenes and scoffed. "For a man with multiple post-graduate degrees, you can be remarkably dense. She's trying to remind us that we're the next link down on the food chain."

"You sound like my ex-wife," he said, but he kept his tone light. "I didn't mean that I couldn't figure out what the message was. What I meant was that I can't figure out why she's sending it."

Lydia's commlink chose that moment to signal an incoming message. She brought it up on her commlink, read it, and then gave Thomas a long, incredulous look. "I shouldn't be surprised by this," she said, "but for some reason, I am. Is the girl you rejected in

your classroom named Teresa Castillo?" He nodded, and she held the commlink up so that he could see it.

Staring out of the picture was an attractive red-haired young woman, with sparkling green eyes and a ready smile. "There's your DNA hit. Says she died in '66."

Thomas nodded grimly. "I thought she had."



They sat opposite each other in a booth at a small diner not far from Corinne's apartment. It was already growing dark outside, and the cold rain had begun to fall in earnest. Thomas sipped at a cup of coffee as Lydia contemplated the menu. The ride to the diner had been silent, and Thomas was eager to steer the subject of any impending conversation away from Teresa Castillo, if only for a little while. It occurred to him that Lydia knew a great deal more about him than he knew about her. "Shouldn't you be a lieutenant or a major or something higher up the chain of command?" he asked her.

She chuckled and ordered a bowl of chili. "You think I want to be responsible for some of the kneecap-smashing knuckleheads we've got on the streets?" she asked as she took a sip of her own coffee. "You sure you don't want something to eat? The food here's pretty good, and KE's buying."

"No, I'm fine. Thanks, though."

She shrugged, leaned back a little bit in the booth, and let out a long sigh. It was, he realized, the first time he had seen her relax since they'd been introduced. "I was a sergeant about, oh, twelve or thirteen years ago, I guess," she said. "Knight Errant has a bad rep in a lot of places; we're known more as leg-breakers than as cops, and really, all I ever wanted to be since I was a little girl was a good cop. Help people, enforce the law, and sometimes actually get to see justice done." She drank some more coffee and went on. "I tried from day one to change the image, and it was hard."

"Especially when so many other people are helping build that image," he said.

She nodded ruefully. "Yeah, so I got the bright idea to try to change the culture from the top down. Tested for sergeant, made it, had a couple of newbies I was assigned to supervise—and they turned out to be just as bad as the rest of the people around me. The job became less about being a cop, or training them to be better than our corporate culture, and more about corporate paperwork and covering my ass by kissing someone else's." She stopped speaking as her chili arrived, and she ate several bites in silence as Thomas accepted a refill of his coffee. He saw that her expression had darkened, but considering how much of his past had been dredged up in the last couple of hours, he felt a little less sympathetic than he might have normally.

"Is that why Alice Bujold has issues with you? You buck the system, didn't kiss up to be promoted, that sort of thing?"



She nodded. "She was my supervisor when I got out of the Academy in '52. Kept me under her wing, but we started drifting apart when I wouldn't play the game in spite of her advice. When I asked to be returned to officer status and gave up my sergeant stripes, she gave up on me." She finished off her chili and pushed the bowl away. "I got transferred here, and I never saw her again until the company lost the CAS sector contract and got this one. I moved over here from the CAS sector, she flew in from Detroit one day to take over as the new RC, and life's been uncomfortable for the both of us ever since."

Thomas finished his coffee. "Aren't you afraid she'll cause you problems?"

She idly checked a few windows in her AR field before answering. "I'm a twenty-one-year veteran with a clean record, and I close a *lot* of cases. I'm good for the bottom line, so she just gives me static when we're in the same room. Otherwise she leaves me alone." She entered a few commands and squinted at one of the AROs before turning her attention back to him. "All right," she said. "Enough about me. It's time you told me why there's a dead girl killing people in my city."

"You're very blunt."

"Comes with the job."

He leaned back and sighed. "Sometime in 2064, after she'd aced my class and apparently given up on seducing me, Teresa went off and convinced some bloodsucker to turn her. I didn't hear from her again until the end of 2065, when she started emailing me about what she had become and what she was doing."

"Which was killing people." She was actively looking through her AROs again, but she was clearly following his side of the conversation.

He nodded. "I reported it to Lone Star, but there wasn't a lot they could, or would, do about it. So after three or four months of this, I took it on myself to do something about it."

Lydia turned away from her AROs, a smirk on her face. "From college professor to vigilante vampire hunter," she said, "in one fell swoop. What made you think that would work out?"

Thomas felt his face redden slightly. "Sheer determination, youthful enthusiasm, and an almost tragic lack of understanding about the difference between academic theory and reality," he said quietly. "I tracked her down, and we fought, and she nearly killed me. Her vampirism had Awakened her as an adept; if I hadn't gotten a couple of spells off to slow her down, we wouldn't be having this conversation."

"How'd you manage to survive?" she asked.

He blushed some more. "Her infatuation for me bought me some time. She wanted to turn me, so we could be together forever," he said. "She started getting ready to Infect me, I cast a stun spell on her, and while she was still dazed, I tackled her and drove a stake through her heart. Which is a lot harder than it sounds, by the way; there's a lot of bone and cartilage to deal with."

Lydia's expression was hard to read, but seemed to be hovering somewhere between appalled and impressed. "That would seem pretty final to me," she said.

He shrugged and shook his head. "I thought so, too. Classic rookie mistake, as it turns out." Their waitress had appeared to clear the dirty dishes away and refill their coffee cups. He was quiet until she left. "They regenerate any damage done to their bodies, but they're allergic to wood. As long as they're in contact with the

allergen, they can't regenerate. Amateur that I was, I thought that if they were killed with the allergen, they were dead."

"And this isn't the case?"

"Not generally, no."

"And you teach classes on this sort of thing?"

He glared at her. "Theory versus practice, remember? There's a *lot* of information out there; sometimes figuring out which is fact and which is fallacy requires going out and testing it yourself. I'm a virologist by specialty; most of my time is spent in a lab looking for a cure for HMHV, not killing its victims." He drank some more coffee. "I've since revised my curriculum."

"That's good to know," she said, chuckling. "So a stake through the heart turns out to just be inconvenient?"

"Yes. Someone pulls the stake out, the heart regenerates and starts beating again, and you're left with a pissed-off vampire."

Lydia pondered that for a moment, studying her AROs, and then asked, "So how *do* you put one down?"

"Head shot. They can't regenerate damage to the central nervous system."

She looked at him incredulously. "You carry a scatter-gun."

"I'm not a very good shot." He shrugged. "I'm also a magician; gives me something else to work with." He watched her gesturing in the air for a few moments, then asked, "What are you working on over there?"

"I started scanning the system for processing entries into the sector once we had a name and an image," she said. "Haven't found anything yet for a Teresa Castillo ..."

At that moment, an indicator started blinking in her field of vision. "We've got ourselves an image match at customs, though, coming in from Las Vegas three days before Corinne was murdered." She gestured, bringing up the relevant record. "Different SIN, of course, and she's going by Teresa McAllister." She gave him an almost pitying look; Thomas just rolled his eyes. Lydia brought up the old ID image and the one from customs and placed them side by side. "Yeah," she decided after a few moments' comparison, "that's her all right."

Her fingers flew as she changed the search parameters. "Oh, boy," she said softly. Looking up, she said, "Thomas, I think she might still be in the city."

"What?"

Lydia rose and sat down next to him in the booth. "Here," she said, "mesh your 'link with mine." He pulled out his commlink, and she let out a low whistle. "Fancy! You don't see many Ikons in my line of work. Unless they belong to a corpse."

He gave an almost embarrassed smile. "I like my gadgets."

"You're a guy; of course you do," she said. "My husband was the same way."

"Was?"

She nodded. "He died last year; line of duty."

Thomas opened and closed his mouth once or twice, trying to get words to come out. Finally, he said, "I'm sorry, Lydia. I didn't know."

She gave him a sideways glance, and said, "Of course you didn't. How could you?" She smiled, a little more warmly this time. "When you said that, though, you sounded a lot like him." She made a couple of gestures in her AR window, then said, "Okay, you should be able to mesh your 'link with mine now."

He did so, and suddenly a half-dozen AROs popped into his field of vision. She reached up, closed a couple of them, and began



pointing at various items in the two remaining windows. “Here’s the entry visa from last week,” she said, “and here’s exit processing from around the time of the killing—based on the emergency call Corinne’s neighbor’s placed during the fight—up to about half an hour ago.”

Thomas scanned the second window. “There’s no exit visa.”

Lydia nodded. “There’s no exit visa. Now, that doesn’t mean she didn’t just jump the border and take her chances in one of the other sectors; believe me, it happens all the time. But considering she had the moxie to just walk in ...”

Thomas nodded. “She’s been here a week; she has to be staying somewhere. Can you access hotel registrations?”

“Yeah, I think I can do that,” she said, her fingers dancing. A couple of minutes passed silently, and then she raised her eyebrows in surprise. “You and your wife are booked in a very nice suite at the Conner-Westin.”

“They booked me a room at the Holiday Inn, and I’ve been divorced for fifteen years,” he said, his tone suddenly irritated. “You know as well as I do that I haven’t even checked in yet.”

“Well, be that as it may,” she replied, “a Dr. and Mrs. Thomas McAllister are staying at the Conner-Westin in a 2,000-nuyen-a-night suite with a lovely view of the Rockies.”

He leaned back and stroked his chin with one hand; he really needed a shave, he realized. “She did everything but send up flares.”

“Yeah,” Lydia said, “it’s almost an engraved invitation—which means it’s a blatant trap.”

“Who says you can’t have it all?”

She looked at him with astonishment. “You’re actually thinking of just waltzing right in there?”

He nodded. “I *was* invited.”

“Were you paying attention when I said, ‘blatant trap’? It’s a setup, Thomas.”

He looked at her and smiled mirthlessly. “Of course it is, Lydia; I’d be surprised if it was otherwise. I killed her, though, remember? She wants to return the favor.”



The lobby of the Conner-Westin Hotel was everything Thomas had ever imagined about luxury hotels. Carpet that caressed your feet running in paths between marble flooring. Leather divans holding men and women in cocktail dress sipping at drinks that cost more than the person serving them made in a day. Subtle AR architecture that made the stones look smoother, the leather richer, and the shadows of the lobby more welcoming.

Thomas felt immediately and completely out of place. He patted himself down again, making sure his weapon was ready and his charms had not managed to vanish in the last five minutes. Unable to stall any longer, he approached the desk, ready to transmit his ID.

He was greeted by a coolly efficient elven woman who was somewhere between twenty and sixty-five years old. “How may I help you, sir?”

“I’m Dr. Thomas McAllister,” he said. “I’m meeting my wife here.”

Without appearing to look anything up anywhere, the woman said, “Of course, sir; Mrs. McAllister told us you’d be arriving soon.” She pressed a couple of keys on a touchscreen—finer hotels knew that having desk clerks waving their fingers in empty air was unnerving—and a slot on the counter silently disgorged a keycard, which she handed to him. “You’re in suite 1703; I hope you enjoy your stay.”

He accepted the keycard and muttered his thanks, then made his way to the elevators, where he found Lydia waiting for him. “I’d like to go on record, again, as saying that this is a really stupid idea,” she said. “Of course, I’m not sure which is worse, you going in there or me coming along to back you up.”

“I’ll keep that in mind if I wind up having to complete a survey on our time together,” he said. As he spoke, Thomas reached into his pocket and pulled out a cheap-looking silver ring and a pair of military dog tags on a beaded chain. The ring he placed on his right middle finger, and the tags he hung around his neck. He pushed the elevator call button, and while they waited for the car to arrive he closed his eyes and took several deep breaths.

As the car arrived, Lydia noticed the ring begin to glow softly. Thomas seemed not to notice the door open, and Lydia had to guide him through it. The ring’s glow began to fade as the doors slid shut, and then the dog tags took their turn. When he made no move to push a button, she reached out and pushed the button for the seventeenth floor. The car began to ascend. As they passed the eighth floor, he finally opened his eyes.

He was surrounded by a dimly glowing aura; in the brightly lit elevator, it was hard to make out. “You’re glowing,” she said, her tone slightly annoyed.

He nodded as he tucked the dog tags under the collar of his shirt. “Armor spell. Unfortunate side effect that I haven’t been able to do anything about.”

“So much for stealth.”

As the door opened, he looked down the hall and muttered under his breath. Then he shook his head. “Probably wasn’t possible in the first place. She’s in there, waiting for me.”

She looked at him dubiously. “You’re sure?”

He gave her a sidelong glance and nodded. “I’m sure.”

Lydia drew her Predator from its place on her hip. “Then I guess the fact that you’re also twitching just a bit doesn’t make a lot of difference, does it?”

Reaching under his longcoat, Thomas pulled out his Viper and racked the slide. “Not really, no.” He pointed to her pistol and said, “Aren’t you going to chamber a round?”

“I always keep one in the pipe,” she said. “They only rack the slide like that in sims and trids.”

“I see,” he said sheepishly. “I’ll keep that in mind; I’m still kind of new at this.”

“You looked very dramatic, though.” She bowed her head slightly, and then looked up at him. “Thomas, none of these murders are your fault, you know.”

He didn’t meet her gaze. “I wish I believed that.” Without waiting for a response, he started down the hallway with Lydia

close on his tail. He paused in front of the door to suite 1703. He moved his keycard toward the door.

The door opened of its own accord.

Lydia looked up at him. "I've been a cop for twenty-one years," she said quietly. "That's never good."

He was about to reply when a woman's voice called out from the other side, "Come in, Thomas. And please, bring your friend."

Thomas pushed the door open and entered, his pistol held ready. Lydia followed close behind, her gun moving ahead of her. She stopped a couple of steps inside the door and pointed the Predator squarely at Teresa Castillo. Thomas walked a few more steps into the suite's luxurious sitting room. "Hello, Teresa," he said. "I got your invitation."

She was leaning against the doorframe leading into the bedroom, dressed in a billowing blouse and a knee-length skirt of blue silk. Her long red hair was loose and cascaded over her left shoulder. She stepped out of her high heels, walked to a lavish armchair, and sat down. Despite her elegant clothes, she settled into the chair like a little girl, legs curled up underneath her. "I'm very glad you came," she said, her voice as cold as the rain that still fell outside. "Though with the guns you and your friend are carrying, you'd think I was some sort of monster."

"You *are* a monster, Teresa," he said, working to keep his voice level. "A killer, without remorse or conscience."

The vampire looked at him thoughtfully and shook her head. "Neither of those traits encourages survival when you're a vampire," she said. "I'm a predator, Thomas, hunting to survive, that's all. And these people you seem to be mourning are just like you. They're food."

"You are *such* a damned cliché, lady," Lydia said. Her pistol never wavered from its position. "Regardless of your opinion of her, Corinne Lawrence was a person, not a kebab from Stuffer Shack, and you murdered her. I plan on Mirandizing you and taking you in, once the doctor here's through talking to you."

Teresa laughed. "Don't bother trying, Detective," she said.

"Why, Teresa?" Thomas asked. "Nine people we know are dead, at least as many SINless we don't know about to keep your energy up along the way ..."

She smiled, her green eyes sparkling. "Fourteen SINless, actually. A couple of the ones you know about put up a hell of a fight."

"I saw," he said, his voice cold. "Why? Why the message?"

She turned in her chair to face him. "To remind you where you stand on the food chain."

Thomas cast a pained look at Lydia; she shrugged, but she didn't take her eyes off Teresa. "I know what the message *is*, Teresa," he said, shaking his head. "But you haven't told me why you're sending it."

She stood up from the chair and walked toward him slowly. Lydia followed her with her Predator, but Thomas raised his hand. "We don't *want* your sympathy," Teresa said. "We don't *want* your second-class SINs. We don't *want* 'Infected rights.'" She stopped in front of him and stroked his chest with her hand. She smiled at him, a smile evenly divided between seduction and menace. "We want you to remember that you're prey. We want you to be afraid of the dark again."

"Not happening," Lydia said.

Her smile turned into a smirk as Teresa turned her head and asked, "How do you propose to stop us, detective? With that?"

"The thought's crossed my mind."

"I'm sure it has."

It was true, Thomas thought later, what you see in action trumps: when your reactions are cranked up to ridiculous levels, things around you really do slow down. He'd noticed the sensation ever since he'd cast the spell on himself in the elevator and given himself heightened reflexes. Even with his vastly improved reaction time, however, what happened next was hard for him to comprehend.

Before Thomas realized what was happening, something alarmingly solid struck him in the chest and sent him flying backward; Teresa's hand, which had been stroking his chest, suddenly became a battering ram. He struck a wall with enough force to knock the wind out of his chest and the pistol out of his hand. The protective spell he'd cast, combined with the longcoat's armor, prevented any real damage, but the impact was enough to leave him momentarily dazed.

The space between Lydia and Teresa was, perhaps, five meters. As Thomas flew backward into the wall, Teresa crossed the room in a blur of copper and azure. As she reached the halfway point, Lydia got off a shot; the Predator's report was startlingly loud in the confines of the room. Thomas figured she must have missed, as Teresa didn't slow down at all. He saw Lydia start to squeeze the trigger again when Teresa stopped in front of her and casually back-handed the detective's right hand, sending the pistol flying across the room.

The two women began fighting hand to hand, and Thomas saw that Lydia must have some augmentations giving her a boost; she was, for the most part, able to keep up with Teresa. He shook his head to clear it and stood up from where he'd fallen. He watched them, mesmerized for what seemed like ages but was probably less than a second. It took him forever to retrieve his Viper, stand up, and aim it; as he did so, he could tell that Lydia Bowden was losing the fight. Her nose was bleeding, and her breathing was ragged. He hoped that whatever body armor she was wearing would protect her from his pistol's specialized ammunition should he miss.

He held his breath and squeezed the trigger.

The two women were locked together in combat, Teresa with her back to Thomas and Lydia's right wrist gripped in her left hand. Lydia had taken too hard a swing at her opponent and had lost her balance; she was falling to the floor when the three-round burst Thomas had fired struck Teresa. She was wearing ordinary clothing, he realized; the lightweight flechettes tore through her blouse like it wasn't even there and buried themselves in her flesh. Blood oozed from the wounds and she stiffened as the pain started. Thomas heard a sickening crunch as her hand clenched around Lydia's wrist, breaking it. She brutally tossed the detective against a wall as she spun around to face him; he watched Lydia crumple in a heap on the floor as Teresa turned.

She was on him with the same blinding speed she had used on Lydia; he found himself slammed against the wall, staring at Teresa as she truly was. The lovely young woman from before was gone, replaced by the monster she'd become. Her face was drawn, hungry-looking, and her lips were pulled back in a grimace, revealing her fangs. Her green eyes seemed to burn from within. He fought to regain his breath as she grabbed him by the throat

and picked him up off the ground with one hand, and used the other to snatch the pistol away from him and toss it away.

"What did you do?" she demanded.

He grabbed her wrist with both hands, trying to pry himself loose. "Specialty round," he told her, his voice harsh and raspy. "It costs a fortune, but I found someone who can make the flechettes out of ash wood instead of metal. I imagine it burns like a son of a bitch."

Tears began rolling down her cheeks. In spite of popular lore, they seemed to be ordinary tears, not tears of blood. "Why, Thomas?" Her voice sounded almost forlorn as she lowered him slowly to the ground, and raised her green eyes to look into his gray ones. "I loved you! I was going to let you live, let you be the messenger," she said as she locked her gaze with his. "But I can't do that now."

Thomas realized his mistake a heartbeat too late. She was making the connection; their mutual anger was making it possible for her to align her aura with his. She'd begin tearing it away from him in a moment. He could feel the warmth of her breath as she pulled him closer, her fangs almost at his throat. He saw the glint of light on his bracer ...

His bracer. Knowing he had nothing else to lose, he let go of her wrist, held his breath, and jerked his hand back hard, triggering the device.

Bracers like his were normally loaded with pepper spray. His was loaded with sawdust. It exploded in a nearly-silent cloud around their faces, and the effect was almost instantaneous. Teresa shrieked in pain as the wood dust seared at her eyes and her throat; she dropped him as she clawed at her face, trying to rid herself of the burning powder.

He fell to the floor, coughing and gasping for breath. He looked up to see the horror that Teresa's face had become looking down at him in fury. She started to reach for him.

Two gunshots erupted in quick succession, and Teresa Castillo fell to the floor. Looking to his right, Thomas saw Lydia sitting up, slumped against the wall, with her Predator in her left hand, braced on one knee. Turning his gaze to look at his former student, he saw that both of Lydia's shots had taken away the back of her skull; she was well and truly dead this time, a look of sad surprise locked on her face. He knelt down and closed her eyes, then strode quickly over to Lydia. He dropped the spells he'd cast in the elevator as he approached her.

"Nice shooting, Tex," he said as he knelt by her side. "How are you feeling?" He put a hand on her shoulder and closed his eyes as he began to assess her injuries.

She chuckled ruefully, then regretted it as she curled up in pain, coughing and gasping for air. "I've been better," she said finally, her voice weak and breathy. "Next time that bitch turns her back on me, though, she'd better make sure I'm dead."

He opened his eyes and looked down at her. "She came closer than you want to know," he said. He helped her into a more comfortable position. She had multiple internal injuries and several broken bones, and if he didn't do something very soon the internal bleeding would kill her. Placing both hands on her shoulders, he poured all of his power into a healing spell. Golden light poured out of his hands and flowed down the length of her body, enveloping her, filling her with warmth. Her eyes opened wide as she gasped in surprise as his magic repaired her body.

They stayed like that for several minutes that felt like an eternity. Eventually, the spell subsided and Thomas slumped down beside her, unconscious. Lydia sat up, still tired but no longer in pain. She checked to make sure he was still breathing, then retrieved her pistol with her now-usable right hand. She kept the weapon ready, and sat vigil over her friend for the next few minutes until a Knight Errant patrol arrived to investigate the gunshots.



28 October 2073

In many ways, it was a very old-fashioned room. Rows of shelves filled with books lined two full walls and much of a third, and were interrupted there only by the door through which Deacon entered. The old-fashioned appearance was shattered by the huge trideo system on the far wall, which was currently playing one of the countless *Neil the Ork Barbarian* trids her employer seemed to enjoy. She'd never quite understood his fascination with the character, but it wasn't her place to question his tastes.

The volume was high. She had entered almost silently, and he never turned his chair around. Regardless of that, however, he greeted her as she approached the massive desk in the center of the room. "Good evening, Deacon," he said, his voice neutral. His voice was always neutral; he never seemed to get angry, or happy, or anything else. At least not in her presence.

"Good evening, sir," she replied. "I have news from Denver. Castillo has been killed."

There was a brief pause, but he didn't interrupt the trid. "That's unfortunate. How did it happen?"

"The doctor was assigned a competent escort. Apparently, Ms. Bujold allowed her personal feelings for one of her detectives to override the suggestions she was given by her superiors at Knight Errant."

Another pause; she could imagine the look on his face as he considered the matter. "I suppose I should have seen that coming," he said eventually. "Her temper has gotten the better of her in the past. Still, it shouldn't cause any insurmountable problems. Did Dr. McAllister survive?"

"Yes, sir."

"Excellent. The good doctor and I have a great deal in common, and I'd be very disappointed if I didn't get the chance to discuss that with him before this is all over."

She nodded, though he couldn't see her, and said, "Of course, sir. Will there be anything else?"

"Send me the compiled report from this detective once you receive it from Knight Errant. Good evening, Deacon."

"Yes, sir. Good evening, sir." She turned and walked toward the door.



She was about to exit when he said, "Deacon?"
 She stopped and turned. "Yes, sir?"
 "Send the word to begin the second phase."
 "Yes, sir," she said, and left the room.



31 October 2073

Thomas McAllister leaned back in his desk chair in his office at Texas A&M&M University. The last several weeks of consulting work had interrupted his teaching duties, and in spite of his very competent teaching assistants, he had a considerable amount of work to do as the semester began its final assault on the students. He smiled as he prepared to dive back in. The last several weeks had helped him remember what he loved best in his work and his life, and it wasn't chasing clues, criminals, or consulting fees.

He had just opened a student's paper when his commlink chimed. He pressed a key and said, "McAllister."

"Thomas, it's Lydia." Her voice sounded subdued, almost shaken.

He turned away from the research paper and gave the call his full attention. "Hey, Tex! I hadn't expected to hear from you quite so soon. Are you all right?"

"Fine, Doc, I'm fine. Physically, anyway. You patched me right up, remember?" She paused, then said, "You haven't seen the news today, have you?"

He picked up the commlink and spun his chair toward the small trid he kept in his office. "No, actually, can't say that I have; I've been grading papers since I got up." He bought the trid to life and scanned for a news station.

"Grading... ? Oh, right. You're a teacher. In all the excitement, I forgot." She paused. "Keep looking. You'll know it when you see it."

Thomas raised the volume as an attractive blonde talking head came into view. "This morning's killing here in Atlanta would not be so noteworthy, even with the death of a famous chef like Conor Roland, were it not for the ten *other* killings across North America, all with the same *modus operandi*, most notably the words 'Be afraid of the dark' written on the wall in the victim's own blood. These killings have been reported in Cheyenne, Bellingham, Cara'Sir—"

He muted the volume and sat there, numb, as Lydia spoke again. "There was a murder, or attempted murder, in every capital in North America last night," she said, "fifteen in all. All of them by vampires, all of them using Teresa's MO, and all eleven of the successes had that tag on the wall."

The lack of sensation spread all through him until he felt like he was floating, drifting out of control. "That was the last thing she said before everything went straight to hell," he said, his voice a monotone. "She said, 'We want you to be afraid of the dark again.' *We* want you to be afraid." He turned back to his desk. "I thought she was being figurative. Obviously I was wrong. Something like this takes coordination, planning."

"No kidding," she said. "I'd get those papers graded quickly, Thomas; I have a feeling you might be getting another consulting request before too long."

"You may be right," he said. "I'll talk to you later." He shut down the connection and stared at his desk for a while, asking himself a single question over and over, unable to think of an answer.

Who, exactly, did Teresa mean by "we?"

... GAME INFO ...

THOMAS MCALLISTER

VITAL STATS

Age: 49 **Height:** 1.78 m
Weight: 81.6 kg **Hair:** Black
Eyes: Gray **Gender:** Male
Metatype: Human **Awakened:** Yes (Shaman)

B	A	R	S	C	I	L	W	M	Edg	Ess	Init	IP
3	4	4	3	4	5	5	5	9	4	6	9	1

Condition Monitor Boxes (P/S): 10/11

Armor (B/I): 6/4

Active Skills: Arcana 4, Assensing (Astral Signatures) 5 (+2), Astral Combat 2, Banishing 3, Binding 2, Blades 2, Chemistry 4, Computer 3, Counterspelling 4, Data Search 3, Enchanting 3, Exotic Ranged Weapon (Bracer) 1, First Aid 5, Instruction 4, Intimidation 1, Medicine (Magical Health) 6 (+2), Perception (Visual) 4 (+2), Pilot Ground Craft 2, Pistols 2, Ritual Spellcasting 2, Running 2, Spellcasting 6, Summoning 4, Swimming 2, Unarmed Combat 2

Knowledge Skills: Action Trids (Neil the Ork Barbarian) 4 (+2), Anatomy 5, Area Knowledge: Houston 2, Biology 5, Gaming 2, Goblin Rock Bands 3, Magical Theory 5, Magical Threats 4, Physiology 5, Sports (Football) 2 (+2), Vampire Lore 4, Virology (HMHVV) 6 (+2)

Languages: English N, Japanese 3, Spanish 3

Qualities: Analytical Mind, College Education, Day Job (10 hrs/wk), Magician, Mentor Spirit, Reduced Sense (Smell, Complete), Simsense Vertigo, SINner (CAS)

Initiate Grade: 3

Metamagics: Centering, Masking, Psychometry



Gear: AR contacts [Rating 3 w/ image link, smartlink, thermographic vision], AR earbuds, AR gloves, 2 x clips of standard slivergun ammo, commlink [Hermes Ikon w/ Novatech Navi, Response 4, Signal 3, System 5, Firewall 5], gun license (legitimate, concealed carry), lined coat, medkit, military dogtags [sustaining focus for Manipulation spells, Force 3], silver ring [sustaining focus for Health spells, Force 2], sister's high school class ring [power focus, Force 3]

Spells: Alleviate Addiction, Alleviate Allergy, Antidote, Armor, Bind, Confusion, Cure Disease, Detect Individual, Detect Life (Extended), Detox, Diagnose, Fix, Fling, Foreboding, Heal, Healthy Glow, Increase Reflexes, Levitate, Light, Magic Fingers, Manabolt, Night Vision, Preserve, Prophylaxis, Resist Pain, Shatter, Stabilize, Sterilize, Stunball, Stunbolt

Mentor Spirit: Great Mother (+2 dice to Health spells, +2 dice for earth spirits, -1 die for Combat spells)

Weapons:

Ares Viper slivergun (Heavy Pistol, DV 6P (f) [8P vs. targets Allergic or Vulnerable to Wood], AP +7, SA/BF, RC 3, 30 (c), w/ gas-vent 2, personalized grip, smartlink, wooden sliver ammo]

Cavalier Arms personal defense sprayer (Bracer, w/ weaponized sawdust payload)

LYDIA BOWDEN

VITAL STATS

Age: 44 **Height:** 1.63 m
Weight: 54.4 kg **Hair:** Light brown
Eyes: Brown **Gender:** Female
Metatype: Human **Awakened:** No

B	A	R	S	C	I	L	W	Edg	Ess	Init	IP
4	5	5 (7)	4	3	5	4	4	4	2.08	10 (12)	1 (3)

Condition Monitor Boxes (P/S): 10/10

Armor (B/I): 6/3

Active Skills: Archery 2, Automatics 5, Blades 3, Climbing 3, Computer 5, Data Search 5, Dodge 4, Etiquette 3, First Aid 2, Infiltration 4, Instruction 2, Intimidation 3, Leadership 4, Longarms 3, Negotiation 4, Perception (Visual) 5 (+2), Pilot Ground Craft (Car) 5 (+2), Pistols (Semi-Automatics) 6 (+2), Riding (Horses) 4 (+2), Running (Urban) 3 (+2), Shadowing 4, Swimming 2, Throwing Weapons 4, Tracking (Urban) 3 (+2), Unarmed Combat (Martial Arts) 5 (+2)

Knowledge Skills: Area Knowledge: Denver 5, Art (Impressionists) 3 (+2), Firearms 4, Forensics 5, Gangs 4, Horses 4, Literature 3, Police Procedure 6, Sci-Fi Trids 4, Security Companies (Knight Errant) 5 (+2), SWAT Tactics 5, Syndicates 4

Languages: English N, French 4, Japanese 3



Qualities: Ambidextrous, College Education, Day Job (40 hrs/wk), Martial Arts 3 (Karate, +1 die for Full Parry, +1 die on melee block Defense Tests, +1 DV on Unarmed Combat attacks), SINner (Ares), Will to Live 2

Augmentations (all alphaware): Bone lacing (Kevlar), cyberears [Rating 3, w/ audio enhancement 3, balance augments, damper, ear recording unit, sound recording unit], cybereyes [Rating 3, w/ eye recording unit, flare compensation, image link, low-light vision, protective covers, smartlink, thermographic vision], datajack, wired reflexes 2

Gear: Actioneer Business Clothes, 4 x clips of standard ammo, commlink [Erika Elite w/ Novatech Navi, Response 4, Signal 4, System 6, Firewall 5], flashlight, Ford Americar [w/ engine customization (acceleration), engine customization (speed), improved suspension, and vehicle sensor], handcuffs, license (legitimate, concealed carry)

Programs: Analyze 4, Browse 6, Command 3, Edit 4

Maneuvers: Disarm, Ground Fighting, Kick Attack

Weapons:

Ares Predator III [Heavy Pistol, DV 5P, AP -1, SA, RC 1, 15 (c), w/ personalized grip, safe target system, skinlink, smartgun system]

ALICE BUJOLD

VITAL STATS

Age: 56

Height: 1.73 m

Weight: 95.3 kg

Hair: Dark brown

Eyes: Brown

Gender: Female

Metatype: Elf

Awakened: No

B	A	R	S	C	I	L	W	Edg	Ess	Init	IP
4	5	4 (5)	4	5	4	4	4	3	2.88	8 (9)	1 (2)

Condition Monitor Boxes (P/S): 10/10

Armor (P/I): 5/3

Active Skills: Automatics 3, Computer 4, Data Search 4, Etiquette (Corporate) 5 (+2), First Aid 3, Infiltration 2, Intimidation (Interrogation) 4 (+2), Leadership 4, Locksmith 3, Longarms 3, Navigation (Urban) 3 (+2), Negotiation 4, Perception (Visual) 4 (+2), Pilot Ground Craft 4, Pistols (Ares Predator IV) 5 (+2), Running 2, Shadowing 3, Swimming 2, Unarmed Combat 4

Knowledge Skills: Area Knowledge: Denver 3, Broadway Musicals 3, Corporate Politics (Knight Errant) 5 (+2), Forensics 3, Gangs 4, History 4, Mafia 5, Police Procedure 6, Security Companies (Knight Errant) 5 (+2), SWAT Tactics 3

Languages: English N, Japanese 4

Qualities: Claustrophobia, College Education, Day Job (40 hrs/wk), Guts, High Pain Tolerance 1, Magic Resistance 1, SINner (Ares)



Augmentations: (all alphaware) Cybereyes [Rating 2, w/ eye recording unit, flare compensation, image link, low-light vision, smartlink, thermographic vision], datajack, cyberleg [full, synthetic, right, customized, Bod 4, Agi 5, Str 4], wired reflexes 1

Gear: Actioneer Business Clothes, 2 x clips of standard ammo, commlink (Device Rating 4), handcuffs, license (legitimate, concealed carry)

Weapons:

Ares Predator IV (Heavy Pistol, DV 5P, AP -1, SA, RC 3, 15 (c), w/ gas-vent 2, personalized grip, safe target system, skinlink, smartgun system)

TERESA CASTILLO

VITAL STATS

Age: 31 **Height:** 1.68 m
Weight: 56.7 kg **Hair:** Red
Eyes: Green **Gender:** Female
Metatype: Human (Vampire)
Awakened: Yes (Adept)

B	A	R	S	C	I	L	W	M	Edg	Ess	Init	IP
4	6	6(8)	4	6	5	3	6	7	2	10	11(13)	1(3)

Condition Monitor Boxes (P/S): 10/11

Armor (B/I): 2/2

Active Skills: Animal Handling 4, Animal Training 3, Archery 3, Assensing 2, Astral Combat 3, Blades 4, Climbing 2, Computer 3, Data Search 4, Dodge 4, Etiquette 3, Gymnastics 4, Intimidation 4, Perception (Hearing) 3 (+2), Pilot Ground Craft 2, Pistols 3, Running 3, Throwing Weapons 2, Unarmed Combat (Martial Arts) 4 (+2), VerTech 3

Knowledge Skills: Art 3, History 3, Literature (Vampire Novels) 4 (+2), Parazoology 5, Popular Music 3, Social Networks (Vampire Forums) 5 (+2), Vampire Lore 5

Languages: English N, Spanish N

Qualities: Adept, Allergy (Sunlight, Moderate), Allergy (Wood, Severe), Animal Empathy, Bilingual, Delusion (Future w/ Thomas McAllister), Dietary Requirement (Metahuman Blood), Distinctive Style ("Mealtime Killer"), Enhanced Senses (Hearing, Smell), Essence Drain, Essence Loss, Fangs, First Impression, Immunity (Age, Pathogens, Toxins), Induced Dormancy (Lack of Air), Infection, Mist Form, Reality Impaired, Regeneration, Thermographic Vision

Initiate Grade: 1

Adept Powers: Animal Empathy 4, Astral Perception, Improved Ability: Unarmed Combat 2, Improved Reflexes 2, Mystic Armor 2, Pain Resistance 1

Metamagic: Adept Centering

Gear: Commlink (Device Rating 4), fashionable clothing



etk

Notes: For campaigns using the optional rules from The Way of the Adept, make the following changes to her stats: Add the Warrior's Way to her list of Qualities, raise her Pain Resistance power to 2, and add Swift and Terrible to her Adept Powers.

SPECIAL WEAPONS AND AMMUNITION

Wooden Sliver Rounds: Designed specifically as anti-vampire rounds, these specialized rounds for the Ares Viper slivergun replace the normal metal flechettes with splinters of ash or oak, hard woods that can withstand the firing process. The lesser mass of the projectiles reduces the weapon's range to that of a taser. When used against a non-allergic target, the relative softness of the wood reduces the base damage of the weapon substantially (–2 DV). When used against a vampire or another target with an allergy to wood, these rounds do normal damage. In addition to normal damage, the target is also subject to the normal conditions of their allergy until the flechettes can be removed.

Ammunition, per 10 shots	Damage Mod.	AP Mod.	Armor Used	Avail.	Cost
Wooden Sliver Rounds	–2 DV (none vs. targets Allergic or Vulnerable to Wood)	+2	I	12R	250¥

Cavalier Arms Personal Defense Sprayer: This wrist-bound sprayer is popular among travelers who regularly pass through dangerous areas. With a single-dose repository for pepper spray, the weapon can be triggered via Panic Command through a PAN or by a sharp wrist movement. Rumors of criminals replacing the pepper spray with other chemicals have led to a crackdown on such items by law enforcement personnel.

When the defense sprayer is triggered, the chemical is aerosolized and released in a one-meter diameter cloud from the end of the wearer's arm. The compound can catch up to two targets that are within one meter of each other. Use the Speed, Power, Effect, and vector of the compound (only compounds with contact or inhalation vectors can be used in this manner). The cost shown is for the sprayer only; chemicals are purchased separately.

Survival Gear	Cost	Avail
Cavalier Arms Personal Defense Sprayer	1,500¥	8R

Weaponized Sawdust

Vector: Contact, Inhalation

Speed: 1 Combat Turn

Penetration: 0

Power: 2

Effect: Disorientation, nausea (coughing, teary eyes), Stun damage

A specialized “toxin” for use against vampires and others with an allergy to wood, this chemical is very finely-ground wood shavings. Against a normal target, the above listed statistics apply. Against vampires, the Power is raised to a 6 and the Effect changes from Stun damage to Physical damage. In addition, all the normal conditions of the target's allergy apply.

This toxin costs 150¥ per dose.

VEHICLES

Ford Americar: While it's no longer the best-selling family car on the road in the UCAS, the Ford Americar is still a very popular vehicle, and it retains a significant amount of loyalty amongst its fans.

FORD AMERICAR (SEDAN)

Handl	Accel	Speed	Pilot	Body	Armor	Sens	Avail	Cost
0	15/30	105	2	10	6	1	—	14,000¥

