

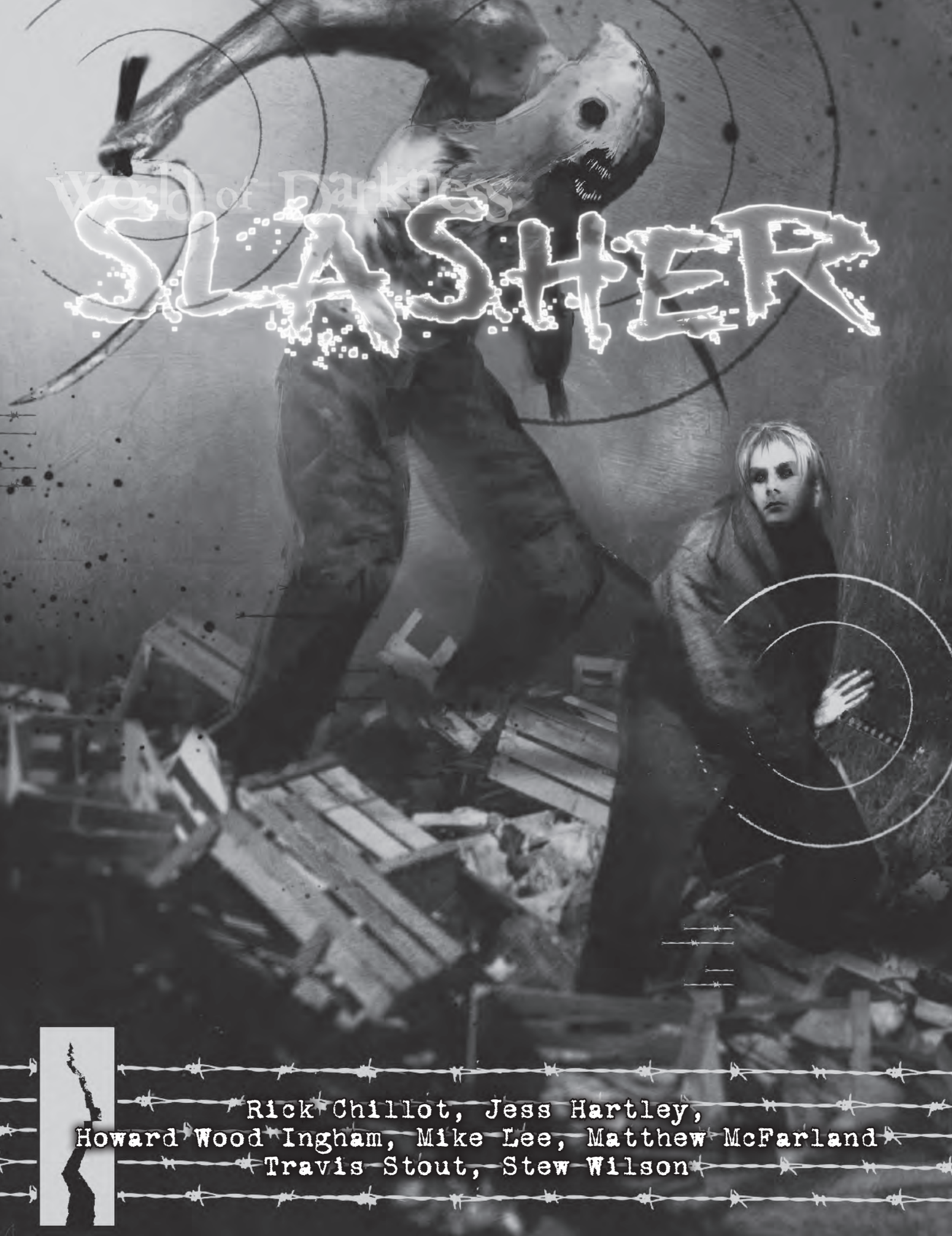
World of Darkness

SLASHER



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CHANGELING

by mike lee

The house, it turned out, was out in the suburbs; a post-war neighborhood of tract homes about five miles outside Philly. Despite getting directions off Mapquest it took them almost an hour to find the place. By that point it was getting very close to sundown, and Elizabeth was trying not to panic.

"This is it," she said, pointing a gloved finger at a green street sign that appeared out of the drifting curtain of snow. "Turn here."

The old Volvo stationwagon chugged like a steam engine as Scott made a right onto another tree-lined street of run-down, two-story homes. The car was a piece of shit: nothing worked the way it should, including the heater, which meant their breath left spreading circles of fog on the inside of the grimy windows. It also had the disconcerting tendency to quit when idling for too long, and there were moments when Elizabeth wasn't sure they would get it started again, but Scott always managed to coax the wheezing thing back to life. They'd bought it off a guy in Bridesburg for \$200 cash, and when they were done they'd abandon it in Kensington with the keys in the ignition. After six months, they were starting to get pretty good at this sort of thing. At least the cops hadn't shown up on anyone's doorstep yet, which Elizabeth took as a sign of their success.

Scott was leaning forward in the driver's seat like a seventy-year-old man, his chin nearly touching the top rim of the wheel as he tried to see where they were going through the murk. His long-fingered hands were chapped and trembling from the cold, and his gaunt face was wrapped in a layered woolen scarf that was tucked into the collar of a dark blue pea coat. A ratty wool knit cap was pulled down tight over his rumpled black hair, leaving only his spectacled eyes and the lower part of his ears exposed to the February air. "Can't see a damned thing," he muttered, his voice muffled by the wool. "Where's the house?"

Elizabeth dug the tiny flashlight out of the pocket of her down coat and shone its tiny light on the directions spread in her lap. It took her a moment to find the street they'd just turned from. "House number's 405," she said. "It ought to be up here on the right, but half these mailboxes don't have numbers on them."

Scott shook his head irritably. "We're running out of time," he said. "Maybe we'd do better if we got out and walked."

Elizabeth shook her head. "No way. We're going to be inside for a bit; I want the car in the driveway so the neighbors don't get suspicious."

"Yeah, but what if he's inside?" Scott replied, shooting Elizabeth a worried glance. "We'll tip him off the minute we pull in."

"He won't be there," Elizabeth replied. "I wish he were. That would make this a hell of a lot easier."

Scott shook his head, clearly disagreeing, but before he could reply there was a creak of worn springs from the back seat and a swish of fabric on cracked leather as James leaned forward and stuck his head between the front seats. There were spots of color on his cheeks, just above his dark beard, and his ears were bright red, but otherwise he didn't seem affected by the cold at all. "That's it", he said, pointing over Elizabeth's left shoulder at a house a half-block down on the right. "The house back at the corner was 381, so that's got to be 405."

All at once, Elizabeth felt the breath catch in her throat. Her stomach

clenched. This is it. "Okay, slow down," she said to Scott. "Let me make sure." Gritting her teeth, she rolled down her window and smothered a curse as the winter wind slapped her full in the face. The house James pointed out was a modest, two-story building with a dark brick lower story and faded siding on the upper floor. The small front yard was bordered with a stained, white picket fence that had lost a number of slats over the years and was lined in places with heaps of dirty snow. A rusty, steel mailbox in a black iron frame resolved out of the drifting snow. The reflective numbers gleamed in the Volvo's headlights. 405.

Elizabeth took a deep breath, feeling the bite of the cold air in the back of her throat. There were lights on in one of the house's front rooms, but the rest of the curtained windows were dark. The rounded, snow-covered shape of a car could be seen at the far end of a half-paved driveway. "This is it," she said, ducking her head back into the car. "Pull all the way in to the back."

Scott muttered something unintelligible into the folds of his scarf and hauled on the steering wheel until the wagon bumped over the curb and into the driveway. James leaned back and reached hurriedly into the stationwagon's cargo bed, shifting the tarp that hid his shotgun from view.

Elizabeth shoved the driving directions into the floorboard and checked the pockets of her coat. "Anybody got the time?" she said, trying to sound casual and businesslike.

Scott pulled back the sleeve of his coat. "Almost six-thirty," he said, peering at his watch.

"Shit. We're cutting this wicked close," Elizabeth said. "Okay, let's do this. Scott, when you see me go in, shut off the car and get in as quick as you can with the bag. James, if that fucker happens to be home after all and tries to head out the back, you make damn sure you hit him in the legs. I don't want him dead, but I don't want him getting too far, either."

"No worries," James said quietly. He racked a shell into the shotgun's breech and slid across the back seat to the right side of the car. Popping open the back door, he slipped outside and ran in a crouch past the snow-covered car and into the house's back yard.

Elizabeth had no doubt that James would shoot if he had to. He'd had ample opportunity to prove that over the last few months. Scott gave her a worried look; the nervous expression was almost comical amid the bundle of wool covering his head. She gave him a reassuring smile that she hoped looked genuine, then opened the passenger door and leapt out into fresh, ankle-deep snow.

Hands in the pockets of her coat, Elizabeth dashed around the front of the car and skipped quickly down the salt-strewn sidewalk. A snow-covered garden gnome beamed happily at her from the middle of a neglected flower garden to the left of the crumbling porch steps. A dark brown welcome mat patterned with faded yellow sunflowers was set at the foot of the house's screen door. Elizabeth's left hand shook only slightly as she reached out and knocked on the aluminum doorframe. Her right hand closed tightly on the stun gun in her coat pocket.

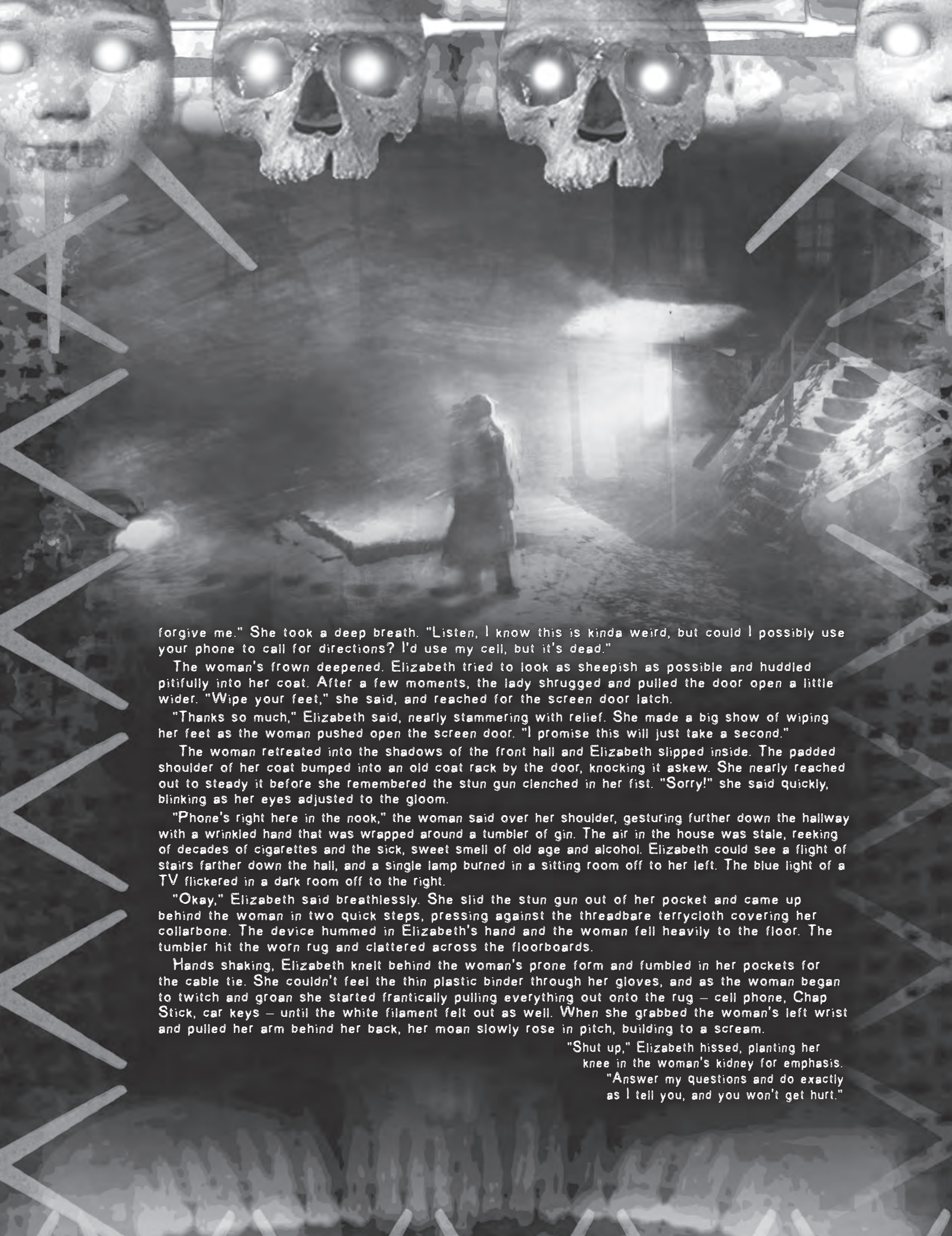
For several long minutes, nothing happened. Elizabeth knocked again. The wind plucked tendrils of blonde hair out from beneath her knit cap and drove icy fingers down the back of her neck.

Another few minutes passed. Just as she started to think they were going to have to go in through the back door she was startled by the sudden glow of the porch light. Elizabeth heard the rattle of a deadbolt and the front door opened partway. The face of an older woman appeared, peering warily through the screen door. She was in her late fifties, her face puffy and jaundiced beneath stark red spots of rouge. Cheap gold hoop earrings poked from rumpled curls of faded red hair that hung down to the shoulders of the woman's tattered blue housecoat. Her bloodshot eyes fixed on Elizabeth and her penciled-on eyebrows drew together in bemusement. "What do you want, honey?" she said in a gravelly voice. Her breath smelled of sour gin.

"Hi!" Elizabeth said, forcing herself to smile. "I'm really, really sorry to bother you, but I'm totally lost. I'm a student at U-Penn, and I'm supposed to be meeting my boyfriend's family for dinner at their house on Walters. It's supposed to be around here somewhere, but I've driven all over the neighborhood and I can't find the street."

"Walters?" the woman frowned. "I've never heard of it, and I've lived here for thirty years. You're in the wrong place."

"Oh, no," Elizabeth moaned. "Don't say that. If I'm late to this dinner they'll never



forgive me." She took a deep breath. "Listen, I know this is kinda weird, but could I possibly use your phone to call for directions? I'd use my cell, but it's dead."

The woman's frown deepened. Elizabeth tried to look as sheepish as possible and huddled pitifully into her coat. After a few moments, the lady shrugged and pulled the door open a little wider. "Wipe your feet," she said, and reached for the screen door latch.

"Thanks so much," Elizabeth said, nearly stammering with relief. She made a big show of wiping her feet as the woman pushed open the screen door. "I promise this will just take a second."

The woman retreated into the shadows of the front hall and Elizabeth slipped inside. The padded shoulder of her coat bumped into an old coat rack by the door, knocking it askew. She nearly reached out to steady it before she remembered the stun gun clenched in her fist. "Sorry!" she said quickly, blinking as her eyes adjusted to the gloom.

"Phone's right here in the nook," the woman said over her shoulder, gesturing further down the hallway with a wrinkled hand that was wrapped around a tumbler of gin. The air in the house was stale, reeking of decades of cigarettes and the sick, sweet smell of old age and alcohol. Elizabeth could see a flight of stairs farther down the hall, and a single lamp burned in a sitting room off to her left. The blue light of a TV flickered in a dark room off to the right.

"Okay," Elizabeth said breathlessly. She slid the stun gun out of her pocket and came up behind the woman in two quick steps, pressing against the threadbare terrycloth covering her collarbone. The device hummed in Elizabeth's hand and the woman fell heavily to the floor. The tumbler hit the worn rug and clattered across the floorboards.

Hands shaking, Elizabeth knelt behind the woman's prone form and fumbled in her pockets for the cable tie. She couldn't feel the thin plastic binder through her gloves, and as the woman began to twitch and groan she started frantically pulling everything out onto the rug – cell phone, Chap Stick, car keys – until the white filament felt out as well. When she grabbed the woman's left wrist and pulled her arm behind her back, her moan slowly rose in pitch, building to a scream.

"Shut up," Elizabeth hissed, planting her knee in the woman's kidney for emphasis.

"Answer my questions and do exactly as I tell you, and you won't get hurt."



She grabbed the woman's right wrist and pulled it back, then wrapped the cable tie around them both and tried to thread the end with clumsy fingers. "Are you alone? Is anyone else in the house? Answer me!"

"No!" the woman said, the word stretching into a low, frightened groan. "What do you want? We don't got any money —"

"I don't want your damned money," Elizabeth said through clenched teeth. She finally got the tongue of the cable tie threaded and pulled it tight, the loop cutting deep into the doughy flesh around the woman's wrists. She grabbed the lady's right arm and pulled. "Get on your feet."

The door opened behind her. Elizabeth turned to see Scott rush inside, his revolver in one hand and the canvas gym bag in the other. She nodded towards the back of the house. "I've got this," Elizabeth said, reaching for the bag as the woman struggled to her feet. "Go let James in and start looking around."

Scott handed over the bag with a curt nod and rushed past, heading for the kitchen. Elizabeth pushed the front door closed with the toe of her boot and then dragged the stumbling woman into the room to her right. By the light of the television she saw a worn couch flanked by twin end tables, plus a pair of vinyl-covered recliners draped with tattered white knit doilies. Family photos sat on the mantelpiece of the empty fireplace, their glass panes darkened with layers of dust and smoke. Overflowing glass ash trays sat on the end tables amid a profusion of chintzy porcelain figurines: sad-eyed dogs, playful cats, fairytale houses and little blonde-haired boys with soulful blue eyes. More figurines perched atop dusty bookshelves and surrounded the TV set on a low table to Elizabeth's right. The sight of their gleaming faces — especially the cherubic smiles of the little boys — made her blood run cold.

She shoved the woman roughly onto the couch and knelt beside her, unzipping the bag. With quick, practiced movements she pulled out a roll of duct tape and peeled back a long strip, biting it off with her teeth.

The woman watched her with wide, frightened eyes. "Please," she stammered. "Please, just don't hurt my babies —"

Elizabeth's eyes widened. For a moment it was all she could do not to plant her fist in the lady's face. After a moment she reached forward and smoothed the tape carefully over the woman's mouth. Shaking her head in disgust, she pulled another cable tie out of the bag and bound the woman's ankles, then put away the tape and fished her pistol out of the bag. With a baleful glare at the wide-eyed matron she chambered a round in the old .45, and went back out into the entry hall.

She knelt and quickly gathered up her things from the rug. Farther down the hall, she caught sight of James pushing open a door beneath the staircase and stepping though, his shotgun held at the ready. Scott was somewhere in the back of the house, his steps causing the floorboards to creak. Elizabeth picked up her cell phone last. The phone's clock said it was six-forty.

Stuffing the phone into her pocket, she checked the safety on her pistol and headed upstairs.

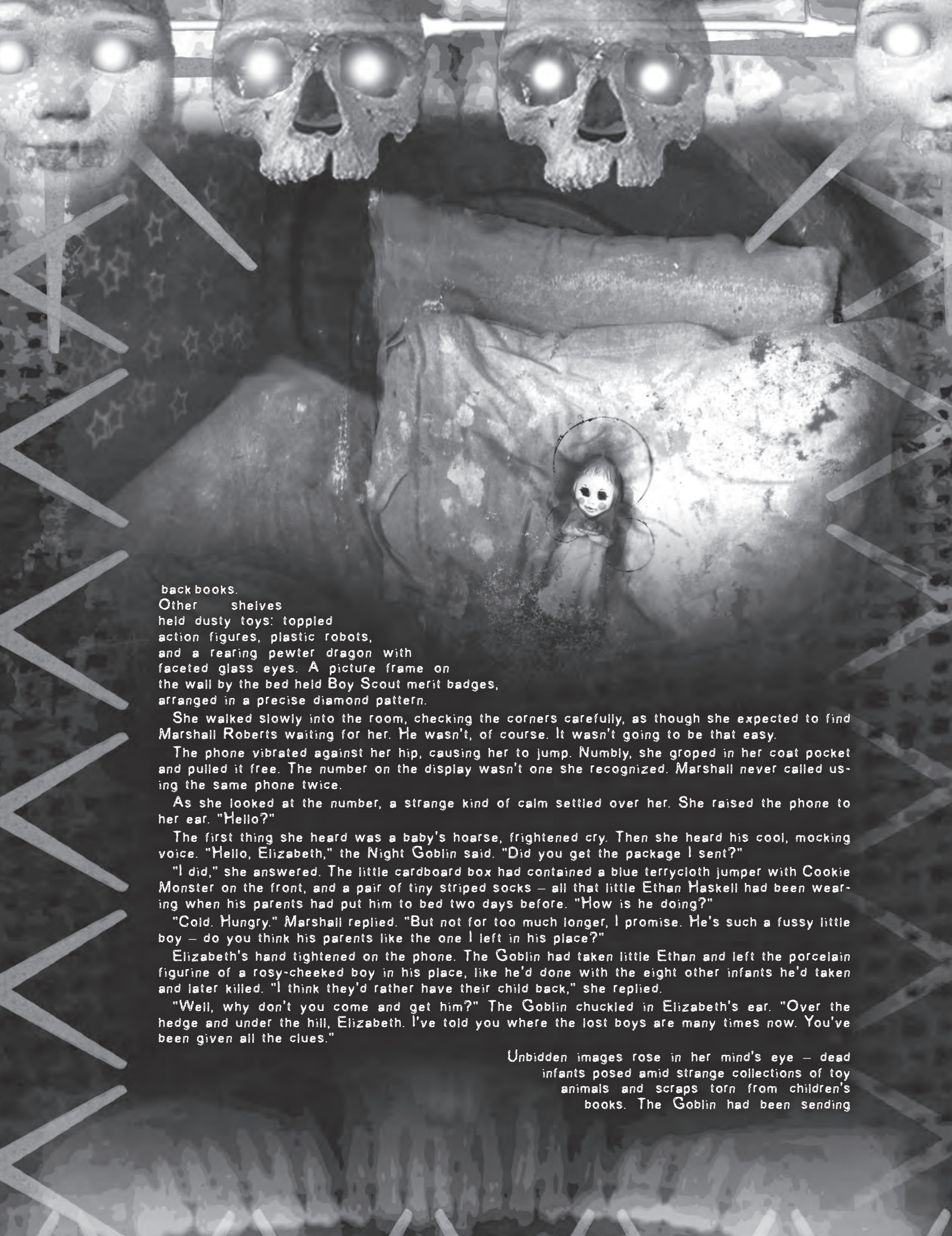
The first door she came to off the landing was a bathroom; unlike the rooms downstairs, it was clean and neat. Elizabeth counted three toothbrushes and noted the men's shaving cream tucked into the corner of a shelf beside the counter.

The door at the opposite side of the landing opened onto a girl's bedroom. Unlike the bathroom, it was a complete wreck: the bed was a rumpled mess, and clothes were strewn across the floor. The furniture was old and worn, and the peeling walls were covered in old posters of grunge bands no one had heard from in ten years.

Farther down the landing, the door to Elizabeth's right opened onto the master bedroom. The air inside was warm and musty, charged with the ozone smell of a space heater. The 70's-era queen bed was piled with old clothes on one side of the mattress, and she could faintly make out stacks of old dishes and empty bottles sitting in the corners of the room.

That left a single door, opposite the master bedroom. Elizabeth edged towards it, raising her pistol. The brass doorknob rattled beneath her fingers as she gave it a turn and pushed the door wide.

The room beyond was lit in the shifting red glow of a replica lava lamp, the wax billowing and swirling like fresh blood. Elizabeth saw a neatly-made single bed, an old, wooden desk and a set of low bookshelves filled with paper-



back books.
Other shelves
held dusty toys: toppled
action figures, plastic robots,
and a rearing pewter dragon with
faceted glass eyes. A picture frame on
the wall by the bed held Boy Scout merit badges,
arranged in a precise diamond pattern.

She walked slowly into the room, checking the corners carefully, as though she expected to find Marshall Roberts waiting for her. He wasn't, of course. It wasn't going to be that easy.

The phone vibrated against her hip, causing her to jump. Numbly, she groped in her coat pocket and pulled it free. The number on the display wasn't one she recognized. Marshall never called using the same phone twice.

As she looked at the number, a strange kind of calm settled over her. She raised the phone to her ear. "Hello?"

The first thing she heard was a baby's hoarse, frightened cry. Then she heard his cool, mocking voice. "Hello, Elizabeth," the Night Goblin said. "Did you get the package I sent?"

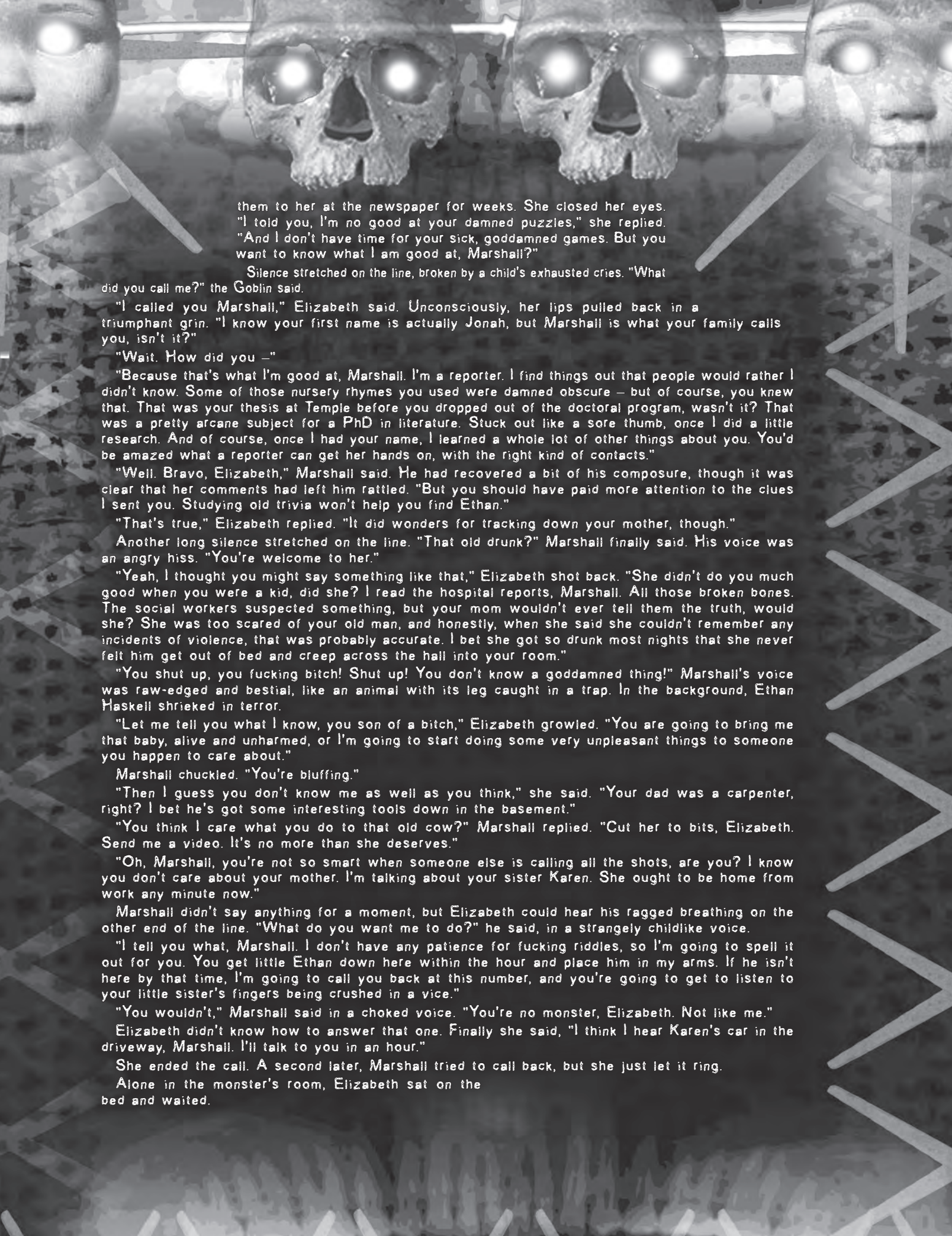
"I did," she answered. The little cardboard box had contained a blue terrycloth jumper with Cookie Monster on the front, and a pair of tiny striped socks — all that little Ethan Haskell had been wearing when his parents had put him to bed two days before. "How is he doing?"

"Cold. Hungry." Marshall replied. "But not for too much longer, I promise. He's such a fussy little boy — do you think his parents like the one I left in his place?"

Elizabeth's hand tightened on the phone. The Goblin had taken little Ethan and left the porcelain figurine of a rosy-cheeked boy in his place, like he'd done with the eight other infants he'd taken and later killed. "I think they'd rather have their child back," she replied.

"Well, why don't you come and get him?" The Goblin chuckled in Elizabeth's ear. "Over the hedge and under the hill, Elizabeth. I've told you where the lost boys are many times now. You've been given all the clues."

Unbidden images rose in her mind's eye — dead infants posed amid strange collections of toy animals and scraps torn from children's books. The Goblin had been sending



them to her at the newspaper for weeks. She closed her eyes.
"I told you, I'm no good at your damned puzzles," she replied.
"And I don't have time for your sick, goddamned games. But you want to know what I am good at, Marshall?"

Silence stretched on the line, broken by a child's exhausted cries. "What did you call me?" the Goblin said.

"I called you Marshall," Elizabeth said. Unconsciously, her lips pulled back in a triumphant grin. "I know your first name is actually Jonah, but Marshall is what your family calls you, isn't it?"

"Wait. How did you —"

"Because that's what I'm good at, Marshall. I'm a reporter. I find things out that people would rather I didn't know. Some of those nursery rhymes you used were damned obscure — but of course, you knew that. That was your thesis at Temple before you dropped out of the doctoral program, wasn't it? That was a pretty arcane subject for a PhD in literature. Stuck out like a sore thumb, once I did a little research. And of course, once I had your name, I learned a whole lot of other things about you. You'd be amazed what a reporter can get her hands on, with the right kind of contacts."

"Well. Bravo, Elizabeth," Marshall said. He had recovered a bit of his composure, though it was clear that her comments had left him rattled. "But you should have paid more attention to the clues I sent you. Studying old trivia won't help you find Ethan."

"That's true," Elizabeth replied. "It did wonders for tracking down your mother, though."

Another long silence stretched on the line. "That old drunk?" Marshall finally said. His voice was an angry hiss. "You're welcome to her."

"Yeah, I thought you might say something like that," Elizabeth shot back. "She didn't do you much good when you were a kid, did she? I read the hospital reports, Marshall. All those broken bones. The social workers suspected something, but your mom wouldn't ever tell them the truth, would she? She was too scared of your old man, and honestly, when she said she couldn't remember any incidents of violence, that was probably accurate. I bet she got so drunk most nights that she never felt him get out of bed and creep across the hall into your room."

"You shut up, you fucking bitch! Shut up! You don't know a goddamned thing!" Marshall's voice was raw-edged and bestial, like an animal with its leg caught in a trap. In the background, Ethan Haskell shrieked in terror.

"Let me tell you what I know, you son of a bitch," Elizabeth growled. "You are going to bring me that baby, alive and unharmed, or I'm going to start doing some very unpleasant things to someone you happen to care about."

Marshall chuckled. "You're bluffing."

"Then I guess you don't know me as well as you think," she said. "Your dad was a carpenter, right? I bet he's got some interesting tools down in the basement."

"You think I care what you do to that old cow?" Marshall replied. "Cut her to bits, Elizabeth. Send me a video. It's no more than she deserves."

"Oh, Marshall, you're not so smart when someone else is calling all the shots, are you? I know you don't care about your mother. I'm talking about your sister Karen. She ought to be home from work any minute now."

Marshall didn't say anything for a moment, but Elizabeth could hear his ragged breathing on the other end of the line. "What do you want me to do?" he said, in a strangely childlike voice.

"I tell you what, Marshall. I don't have any patience for fucking riddles, so I'm going to spell it out for you. You get little Ethan down here within the hour and place him in my arms. If he isn't here by that time, I'm going to call you back at this number, and you're going to get to listen to your little sister's fingers being crushed in a vice."

"You wouldn't," Marshall said in a choked voice. "You're no monster, Elizabeth. Not like me."

Elizabeth didn't know how to answer that one. Finally she said, "I think I hear Karen's car in the driveway, Marshall. I'll talk to you in an hour."

She ended the call. A second later, Marshall tried to call back, but she just let it ring.

Alone in the monster's room, Elizabeth sat on the bed and waited.

WORLD OF darkness-slasher: INTRODUCTION

I probably could have saved her if I'd have moved sooner. But I thought it was just another nightmare, like the one I had the night before. There was... there was this guy. He had knives for fingers.

—Rod, "Nightmare on Elm Street"

The thug with the pig mask walks with a slow and measured pace. He has a pickax in his callused grip. It's already wet with gore. He can hear the teenagers behind the bedroom door. Weeping. But he doesn't know why. He can't *understand* why.

The snake oil salesman sits at the bar, sipping his drink, laughing, making jokes, pretending to care, pretending he doesn't want to murder everybody nearby as soon as fucking possible. Pretending that in his trunk, *right now*, isn't a suitcase full of human scalps and skins. He drinks his drink and dreams of blood.

The legless freak with the burned face runs a rag-tag group of hunters through a maze full of brutal traps and vicious illusions. That will teach them. They kill his parents, and he gets left behind in the fire, just a child in a crib. Why should they get to live normal lives? Lessons must be learned. Mistakes must be corrected.

This is the frightening truth: sometimes, people kill. And not just out of passion, not because of poor judgment or misguided revenge. No, sometimes they kill because they want to, *they need to*. Maybe they're born that way. Maybe they're made. Some are driven to the point, while others are programmed.

They can't just kill one person. Oh, no. They kill two, three, ten, and they keep going until the body count mounts or until they're stopped. They become compulsive about it. It must be done in a *proper* way. A certain organ must be harvested. A cipher needs to be painted on the ceiling above the body. The kill must be completed with a homemade weapon: a set of teeth made from bone spurs or a makeshift ax forged out of junkyard metal. Some have their victims and will not stray: they only kill liars, lustful teens, corrupt cops, beautiful people, pedophiles, perverts, prostitutes, cops, or housewives. Some just don't care. They'll kill anybody. Anywhere. A horror house with bodies stacked to the goddamn rafters.

Sometimes, the killing changes them. It's like a switch. Except, instead of turning something on, it's turning something *off*. A light, maybe. A part of one's self, of one's soul. A place inside goes dead — or, hell, maybe it was dead long ago. Maybe it was never alive in the first place.

And out of that darkness rises power. From the void comes secret power that couples the endless urge to kill with supernatural might or monstrous cunning. Soon, the killer cannot be stopped by bullets. Or maybe his words become truly honeyed, sliding into the ear canals and the brains of his victims like a little snake: could be that, as long as he uses his trusty crowbar, his kills are always perfect, always *immediate*.

The slasher. A perfect predator. Society's modern bogeyman. Part human, part... *something else*.

KILLING MACHINES

The "slasher trope" is one of the cornerstones of modern horror. You could say it began with Hitchcock's *Psycho*. You could say that Bob Clark's *Black Christmas* continued it, as do the Italian Giallo films (think Lenzi, Fulci, Argento). I'd say you were right if you suggested that the essence of the modern slasher genre

is typified by the triple threat of *Halloween*, *Friday the 13th* and *Nightmare on Elm Street*. The trope continues to thrive today: *Saw* is a modern take on the slasher genre. It's about some weird cancer-ridden dude who uses a puppet to voice his threatening enigmas and to test the survival instincts and moral fiber of targets through a series of grisly traps and puzzles. It's easy to lump Jigsaw in with the modern wave of torture porn, and while those films are certainly representative of that, Jigsaw is also very much the slasher.

These monsters — these seemingly unstoppable killing machines — exist in the World of Darkness. This book is about bringing the slasher trope to bear in your **Hunter: The Vigil** game, helping you perhaps tell a story or chronicle that is effectively a slasher horror film writ large, played out with the help of you and your troupe.

Slashers make for potent antagonists: a supernatural serial killer plaguing a city that cannot be stopped by blade or by bullet? Hunters can at least come to terms with vampires, witches, werewolves. They can make deals with demons or infiltrate cults. But slashers? Slashers exist to kill. Making a deal with one isn't... necessarily impossible, but who wants to try to forge an alliance with a lunatic in a rebreather mask? Will your story be about hunters trying to decipher the clues and predict where the killer might strike next? Or are they trapped in an abandoned tenement that's been turned into a trap-laden playground? Might you even tell an inciting incident with a group of teens hunted by a hulking beast, with the surviving teens coming together to form a nascent hunter cell?

That's the hunter advantage: working together, a unified front of defense and attack.

But what if the slashers had that advantage, too? What if, say, we gave you the tools to consider what happens when slashers aren't the lone killers so commonly expected, but instead band together? A family of thrill-killing mutants? A cabal of ritualistic killers? A squad of mindless brute thugs, their faces concealed behind featureless masks? The danger is multiplied. The killings grow exponentially. A hunter cell facing a cabal or cult of slashers is in for a very rough ride, indeed.

And did we mention that sometimes, hunters become slashers? It makes sense, if you think about it. Hunters are in many ways killers. Even when they don't want to be, sometimes it's necessary to put down the beast they stalk for the good of the rest. But killing something that looks human and speaks weighs on the mind. Some hunters find ways past it. For others... it perverts the soul. They begin to justify the killings as their morality shudders and fragments. Soon, maybe they start to like it. They can



TO REITERATE: FICTION

It may seem strange to want to play a slasher character (then again, maybe not). If it's truly uncomfortable, no worries. Slasher antagonists are no less interesting.

But, it's not abnormal to want to examine the slasher phenomenon. Certainly a screenwriter is essentially "roleplaying" the slasher when he writes his horror film. Within the experience there lurks perhaps a catharsis, or perhaps an examination of the human condition and the nature of evil.

All that being said, make sure everybody in the troupe is comfortable playing slasher characters. In addition, make sure everybody is cool and not deeply unsettled throughout the game, too - if ever the game gets too disturbing, it's time to pull back (and maybe even create some hunter characters who will now try to take down the slasher characters the troupe has put into the Storyteller's hands).

In addition, a reminder: this is all fiction. Just as with **Vampire: The Requiem** we are not encouraging people to think themselves vampires, to bite people or to plunge wooden stakes into hearts. We are not here to encourage you to take this game and think that it purports any message beyond the aims of creating memorable fiction. Fiction. To say again: fiction.

find a way to excuse hunting down all of a witch's family members and cutting their throats to let the "hidden magic bleed out." Maybe they don't even bother justifying it. The joy of the kill is plenty reason to keep on stabbing, cutting, shooting.

This begs a question: can one play a slasher character?

INTO THE DARK

Answer: yes. With this book, we provide the tools to play a character who is becoming — or already is — a slasher. Hunters can become slashers, but so can anybody. This book turns the tables on the notion of slasher-as-antagonist and instead asks the question, can you play the slasher-as-protagonist?

This is the reality: we watch slasher films because of the slashers. Slasher films rarely have memorable victim characters. Laurie Strode in *Halloween*, maybe, or Nancy in *Nightmare on Elm Street*. But those characters don't even continue from film to film — maybe they show up in a later installment, but they're not the reason the majority of people go to check those films out. What we want is Freddy, Jason, Michael Myers, Jigsaw, Norman Bates. We love the monster. We thrive on the inventive ways he ends lives, on how there exists a quiet moral message in the nature of those killings. Admit it. Deep down, we all root for the slasher. Without the slasher, where's the film? Where's the compelling drive? With a slasher film — and by playing a slasher character — we are able to experience a forbidden thrill, to push past the cultural taboos of violence but also to see the slasher get his just desserts in the end (slashers often die, or their ultimate victims survive). It is, perhaps, an uncomfortable fiction worth exploring.

Is it possible to play a "good" slasher or serial killer?

Absolutely. Ever seen the TV show *Dexter*? Or read the Bradley Denton novel, *Blackburn*? Both contain anti-hero serial killers whose victims are society's "true" monsters — killers, thieves, liars, and cheats. Considering the frame of **Hunter: The Vigil**, a slasher character may only choose to brutally kill vampires, their ghouls, and their allies. Those touched by the "menace" of vampirism are apt victims: others are innocent, or at least "innocent enough." That doesn't mean it's healthy — no, the irrepressible urge to kill *anybody* or *anything* is fucked up. But some characters will be able to hone it, to direct it toward some positive aim.

The "revenge" motif is apt, too. While movies like *Death Wish* or *The Brave One* or *I Spit on Your Grave* aren't slasher films, they are about killers who brutally end the lives of those who have harmed them or their loved ones. Can a supernatural slasher be seen in this mode? Absolutely. Again, some direct the killings toward a positive aim.

Then again, some don't. If you want to play out a story where a slasher hunts down a group of punk teenagers, go for it. Maybe one player controls the slasher, while the other players control the teenagers. Maybe all the players control a cabal of slashers, and it could be that some of those slashers don't make it to the end of the story (could be that one of the tough victims sprays him in the face with a gas main and lights his head on fire — things like that happen when you're a supernatural killer, you know).

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book will allow you to examine the slasher trope from without and within. You'll gain all the tools you need to create interesting slasher characters, whether as antagonists or as the players' characters. Within, we examine all the bloody facets of the slasher genre, taking aim at a number of play styles that reflect these facets. In addition, we take a look at how a slasher story might play out, and how it may very well end. Whether the slashers in your story are nightmare killers or are the dark reflections of "hunters gone off the reservation," this book should fulfill everything you need to know to include slashers in your chronicle.

But this book is about the hunters, too. How do hunters handle a slasher? Have the hunters formed any compacts or conspiracies specifically bent on dealing with slashers (answer: yup). What tools do hunter characters have to help put slashers down into the ground for good... and what tools do the slashers have to fight back?

THE BREAKDOWN

Chapter One: And Then There Was Blood details the struggle of hunters versus slashers. Slashers are not a recent phenomenon in the World of Darkness — just as hunters have long carried the ancient Vigil, so too has the world been plagued by those humans who "just ain't right," who can do nothing but revel in the glories of murder. Within you'll find the history, as well as the modern response of the hunter organizations when it comes to the depredations of slashers. You'll also find a new hunter conspiracy bent on investigating and ending the slasher menace — the FBI's own Vanguard Serial Crimes Unit, or VASCU. And you'll also find a compact comprising not just hunters, but those hunters who have been given over to the slasher mindset.

Chapter Two: The Mask and the Knife gets down and dirty with how to create a slasher char-

acter, whether as an antagonist for the Storyteller or as a character for a player to control. You'll find the dark reflection of a hunter's Profession with a slasher's Undertaking — exactly how that slasher approaches his own bloody "hunt." Within this chapter you'll also find myriad rules and mechanics both for slashers and the hunters that pursue them — VASCU's psychic Endowment, new Tactics, and slasher-specific equipment.

Chapter Three: Many Shattered Minds is where you'll find the writers of this book giving both the Storyteller and the players advice on the many ways and play styles that incorporate slashers into your chronicle. Herein you'll find examinations of the slasher film as made into a **Hunter: The Vigil** story, how to play a slasher who isn't just a mindless monster, and how a slasher character (protagonist or antagonist) has a "story arc" all his own.

USEFUL SOURCES

We probably don't need to tell you: slasher films (sometimes known as "dead teenager" movies) make the best resources. Any slasher film at all will be overflowing with ideas. Even the ones that are crap, well, you still might be able to mine them for goodies. Some of the developers' favorites include: *Nightmare on Elm Street*, *Halloween*, *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Jeepers Creepers* and *Black Christmas*, though we casually suggest you avoid a number of the sequels and remakes — the original films seem to best highlight the genre's strengths. Also worth looking at are some of the rarer slasher films from Italy (called *Giallo*, or "yellow" for the origins born of yellow-cover pulp novels) like Dario Argento's *Tenebrae*.

Serial killer films have good information, too, especially given that serial killers in fiction often possess more interesting and character-laden backgrounds — think Hannibal Lector (*The Silence of the Lambs*), Norman Bates (*Psycho*), or Patrick Bateman (*American Psycho*).

Showtime's *Dexter* (now on CBS, though seriously censored due to its graphic nature) shows a serial killer worth rooting for.

Some novels are worth looking at, too: the aforementioned *Blackburn* by Bradley Denton details, like with Dexter Morgan, a serial killer with serious anti-hero tendencies (also see the shorter continuation of this novel, *Blackburn Bakes Cookies*). TV's Dexter Morgan was originally at home in a novel called *Dexter Darkly Dreaming* by Jeff Lindsey. For a cool "historical slasher," check out Robert McCammon's *Queen of Bedlam*.

CARVIN JACK

by mike lee

Someone was calling his name.

His eyes opened, and he found himself in darkness. Something heavy lay across his chest and legs, and the smell of old cinders tickled at his nose.

"Carvin' Jack, come out, come out..."

It was a girl's voice, thin and tremulous, muffled by distance and intervening walls. At once, he knew where he was: he was home; home-under-the-stairs, where he belonged, though he couldn't remember how he'd gotten there.

"Carvin' Jack, come out, come out..."

His body felt leaden and stiff, as though he'd been sleeping for a very long time. It took an effort just to wiggle his fingers, and his leather gloves crackled like eggshells. The sound disturbed a trio of spiders, who scattered in different directions across his chest. One raced down and settled in the hollow of his throat, tucking itself beneath the lip of the thick leather collar he wore.

"Carvin' Jack, come out, come out..."

The girl's voice was coming from just inside the front door. He knew every echo of the old house like the scars on the backs of his hands. His wide, wide mouth pulled downward in a rubbery frown. Father wouldn't be happy. The girl had no business being in Father's house. He lay very still, listening for the creak of the door to the upstairs study and the sound of Father's heavy boots treading the floorboards. The sluggish beat of his heart quickened, expecting to hear any minute the rising roar of Father's voice telling the dumb little bitch to get the fuck off his property.

But that didn't happen. Instead, he heard a strange, metallic clatter and the shuffle of footsteps just a few feet away, in the house's entry hall. Another voice spoke — a woman this time, but it didn't sound anything like Mother.

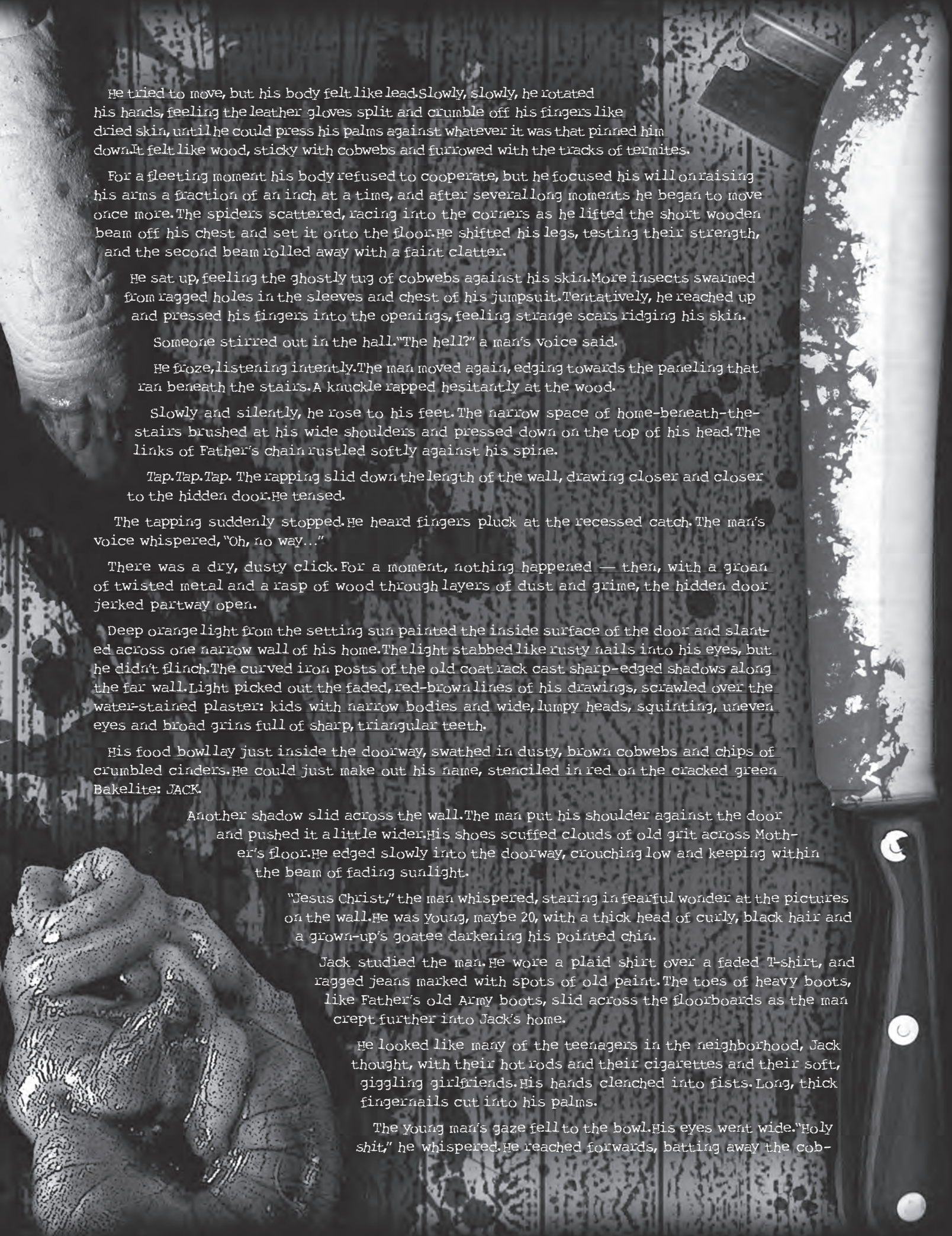
"Debbie honey, that was great. I think we've got what we need, so you're done. Thanks, Mrs. Rogers — I'll send you an email and let you know when the episode is going to air. Have a happy Halloween!"

Halloween? Was it time again already? A tremor went through him at the thought. Faint memories flitted at the edge of his awareness, but he couldn't quite grasp them.

"Okay, Rob, let's get outside and get some establishing shots before it gets too dark," the woman went on to say, and a pair of footsteps thumped down the hall towards the front door.

Nearly dark. Father would come to let him out soon, this one night of all the nights in the year, and he could get to carving. Except... Father wasn't in the house. Mother wasn't either. Only strangers.

Strangers didn't belong. Father always said that strangers would take him away, to wherever they kept fucking freaks like him. Lock him up and throw away the key, forever and ever.



He tried to move, but his body felt like lead. Slowly, slowly, he rotated his hands, feeling the leather gloves split and crumble off his fingers like dried skin, until he could press his palms against whatever it was that pinned him down. It felt like wood, sticky with cobwebs and furrowed with the tracks of termites.

For a fleeting moment his body refused to cooperate, but he focused his will on raising his arms a fraction of an inch at a time, and after several long moments he began to move once more. The spiders scattered, racing into the corners as he lifted the short wooden beam off his chest and set it onto the floor. He shifted his legs, testing their strength, and the second beam rolled away with a faint clatter.

He sat up, feeling the ghostly tug of cobwebs against his skin. More insects swarmed from ragged holes in the sleeves and chest of his jumpsuit. Tentatively, he reached up and pressed his fingers into the openings, feeling strange scars ridging his skin.

Someone stirred out in the hall. "The hell?" a man's voice said.

He froze, listening intently. The man moved again, edging towards the paneling that ran beneath the stairs. A knuckle rapped hesitantly at the wood.

Slowly and silently, he rose to his feet. The narrow space of home-beneath-the-stairs brushed at his wide shoulders and pressed down on the top of his head. The links of Father's chain rustled softly against his spine.

Tap. Tap. Tap. The rapping slid down the length of the wall, drawing closer and closer to the hidden door. He tensed.

The tapping suddenly stopped. He heard fingers pluck at the recessed catch. The man's voice whispered, "Oh, no way..."

There was a dry, dusty click. For a moment, nothing happened — then, with a groan of twisted metal and a rasp of wood through layers of dust and grime, the hidden door jerked partway open.

Deep orange light from the setting sun painted the inside surface of the door and slanted across one narrow wall of his home. The light stabbed like rusty nails into his eyes, but he didn't flinch. The curved iron posts of the old coat rack cast sharp-edged shadows along the far wall. Light picked out the faded, red-brown lines of his drawings, scrawled over the water-stained plaster: kids with narrow bodies and wide, lumpy heads, squinting, uneven eyes and broad grins full of sharp, triangular teeth.

His food bowl lay just inside the doorway, swathed in dusty, brown cobwebs and chips of crumbled cinders. He could just make out his name, stenciled in red on the cracked green Bakelite: JACK.

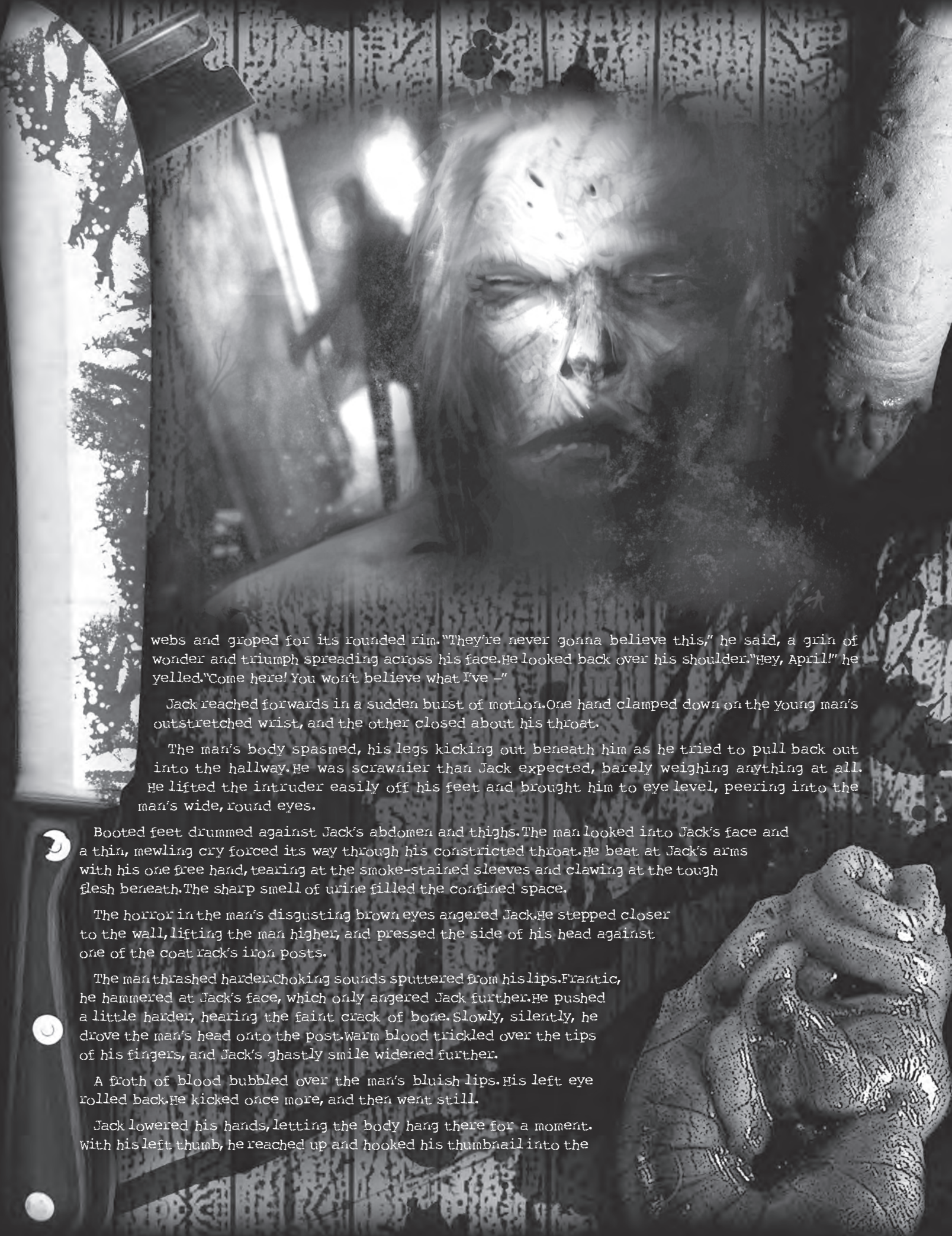
Another shadow slid across the wall. The man put his shoulder against the door and pushed it a little wider. His shoes scuffed clouds of old grit across Mother's floor. He edged slowly into the doorway, crouching low and keeping within the beam of fading sunlight.

"Jesus Christ," the man whispered, staring in fearful wonder at the pictures on the wall. He was young, maybe 20, with a thick head of curly, black hair and a grown-up's goatee darkening his pointed chin.

Jack studied the man. He wore a plaid shirt over a faded T-shirt, and ragged jeans marked with spots of old paint. The toes of heavy boots, like Father's old Army boots, slid across the floorboards as the man crept further into Jack's home.

He looked like many of the teenagers in the neighborhood, Jack thought, with their hot rods and their cigarettes and their soft, giggling girlfriends. His hands clenched into fists. Long, thick fingernails cut into his palms.

The young man's gaze fell to the bowl. His eyes went wide. "Holy shit," he whispered. He reached forwards, batting away the cob-



webs and groped for its rounded rim. "They're never gonna believe this," he said, a grin of wonder and triumph spreading across his face. He looked back over his shoulder. "Hey, April!" he yelled. "Come here! You won't believe what I've --"

Jack reached forwards in a sudden burst of motion. One hand clamped down on the young man's outstretched wrist, and the other closed about his throat.

The man's body spasmed, his legs kicking out beneath him as he tried to pull back out into the hallway. He was scrawnier than Jack expected, barely weighing anything at all. He lifted the intruder easily off his feet and brought him to eye level, peering into the man's wide, round eyes.

Booted feet drummed against Jack's abdomen and thighs. The man looked into Jack's face and a thin, mewling cry forced its way through his constricted throat. He beat at Jack's arms with his one free hand, tearing at the smoke-stained sleeves and clawing at the tough flesh beneath. The sharp smell of urine filled the confined space.

The horror in the man's disgusting brown eyes angered Jack. He stepped closer to the wall, lifting the man higher, and pressed the side of his head against one of the coat rack's iron posts.

The man thrashed harder. Choking sounds sputtered from his lips. Frantic, he hammered at Jack's face, which only angered Jack further. He pushed a little harder, hearing the faint crack of bone. Slowly, silently, he drove the man's head onto the post. Warm blood trickled over the tips of his fingers, and Jack's ghastly smile widened further.

A froth of blood bubbled over the man's bluish lips. His left eye rolled back. He kicked once more, and then went still.

Jack lowered his hands, letting the body hang there for a moment. With his left thumb, he reached up and hooked his thumbnail into the



crook of the man's slack mouth. He drew it upwards, stretching the lips into a smile until the warm flesh started to tear.

A faint voice shouted something from outside, and Jack remembered the woman. She was coming back.

He reached up to the collar at his neck, pawing uselessly at the small, hard padlock hanging beneath his Adam's apple. Only Father had the key.

Something like fear welled up inside him — the desperation of a cornered beast as the hunters drew near. Jack half-turned, reaching back for the heavy links of chain that kept him locked beneath the stairs — only to discover that it ended abruptly at a point just above his knees. More memories sparked weakly in his turgid brain, but they were gone before he could focus on them.

None of that mattered to Jack at the moment. It was Halloween, and he was free.

Jack pushed the hidden door wider and slipped silently into the hall. The corridor was swallowed in late-evening shadows, except for a long rectangle of sunlight stretching across the wooden floor from the open front doorway. The air was thick with the smell of dust and smoke.

Shadows flitted through the ruddy glow. Wooden boards creaked and footsteps climbed the steps of the front porch. "Bill?" the woman called from outside. "Did you say something?"

Jack acted without conscious thought, gliding slowly and deliberately across the hallway and into the shadowy depths of the sitting room on the other side. The two people on the porch never saw him. So long as he kept to the darkness, no one could see him if he didn't want them to.

Thin slits of light leaked into the room from the windows of the sitting room. In the faint light, Jack saw nothing but wreckage. The couch and chairs were nothing but piles of charred sticks and blackened fabric, and the tables were nothing but mounds of cinders and ash. Mother's piano was a splintered wreck, splayed in the far corner of the room with a piece of the ceiling sitting atop it. The heavy velvet curtains were gone, and the glass had been broken in most of the windowpanes. Wooden boards had been nailed across the tall, west-facing windows.

Memories came flooding back now, rising like a tide in his numbed mind. Halloween night; Mother and Father were fighting upstairs. She didn't want Father to let him out. She talked about finally sending him away, to the place where they keep the freaks.

He remembered being afraid then. Wrapping the heavy chain links around his hands and pulling at the staple that fixed it to the floor as screams and the sound of scuffling passed back and forth across the study. He heard Father's hand strike Mother — he knew that sound better than any other — and then a sharp sound, like a firework going off, and something heavy slid to the floor.

The staple had given way as Mother came down the stairs. He had waited in front of the door as she tugged reluctantly at the latch and pulled the panel open. Her beehive hairdo was disheveled and her right eye was swollen shut. Blood dripped freely from her split lip, staining her blue dress. The little revolver in her hand looked almost like a toy.

She started to speak, and he'd hit her with the chain. He wasn't going to let her send him away. Afterward, the house was silent and still.

He remembered going out into the autumn night and walking down the darkened streets. Jack-o'-lanterns winked and grinned at him, welcoming him like a lost brother. Whenever he came to a house without a lantern he went inside and made one.

But then things had gone wrong. There was a girl, he remembered, faster and quieter than all the rest. In the end she followed him home, and then there had been a fire. He remembered the flames eating at his skin as he'd crawled back into the darkness beneath the stairs.



How long had he lain there, waiting for someone to call his name?

Steps echoed down the hallway. "Bill?" the woman called again. "Where did you go?"

"Come on, man, this isn't funny," Rob's voice said. "We've got a lot to do before it gets dark."

Jack understood. It was Halloween. There was carving to be done.

He turned and slipped effortlessly across the darkened space, making his way through the wreckage of the dining room and then into the kitchen. The formica counters had buckled and split in the heat of the fire, and the cupboards had mostly collapsed. The drawers had been pulled out at some point in the past and their contents scattered across the burnt linoleum floor. Near the doorway, Mother's aluminum kitchen table leaned drunkenly against the wall.

Jack bent and ran his hands through the debris, searching for a knife.

Footsteps echoed down the hall. "Billy, dude, are you in there?" Rob said as he approached the kitchen. "You better not be trying to scare me, or so help me God I'll beat your ass."

Jack's hand closed on a brittle wooden grip. He pulled the cleaver free from a mound of ash. Behind him, the man edged carefully into the darkened room. "Dude?" Rob said tentatively. "What are you doing over there?"

There was a faint click, and the yellow glow of a small flashlight played across the rubble-strewn floor. It reached Jack's feet, and then slowly climbed his leg.

"What the hell?" Rob said, just as Jack turned around. The light struck him full in the face, just as he heard a woman's scream split the air from farther down the hall.

Jack could just see the silhouette of the man beyond the bright circle of light. He was short and fat, with a wild head of hair. The flashlight shone in Jack's face for a split-second, then tumbled from Rob's grip. "Jesus!" he screamed. "Oh, Jesus God!"

Rob turned to run, slipping on a pile of cinders and crashing against the doorframe. Jack reached him in two swift steps and grabbed a handful of the man's wild hair. He hauled back on the man's head just as he swung the cleaver in a blurring arc. It was sharp enough to bite deep into the side of Rob's neck, severing the artery. Blood splattered wetly along the walls, and Rob's cries devolved into a gasping, choking gurgle.

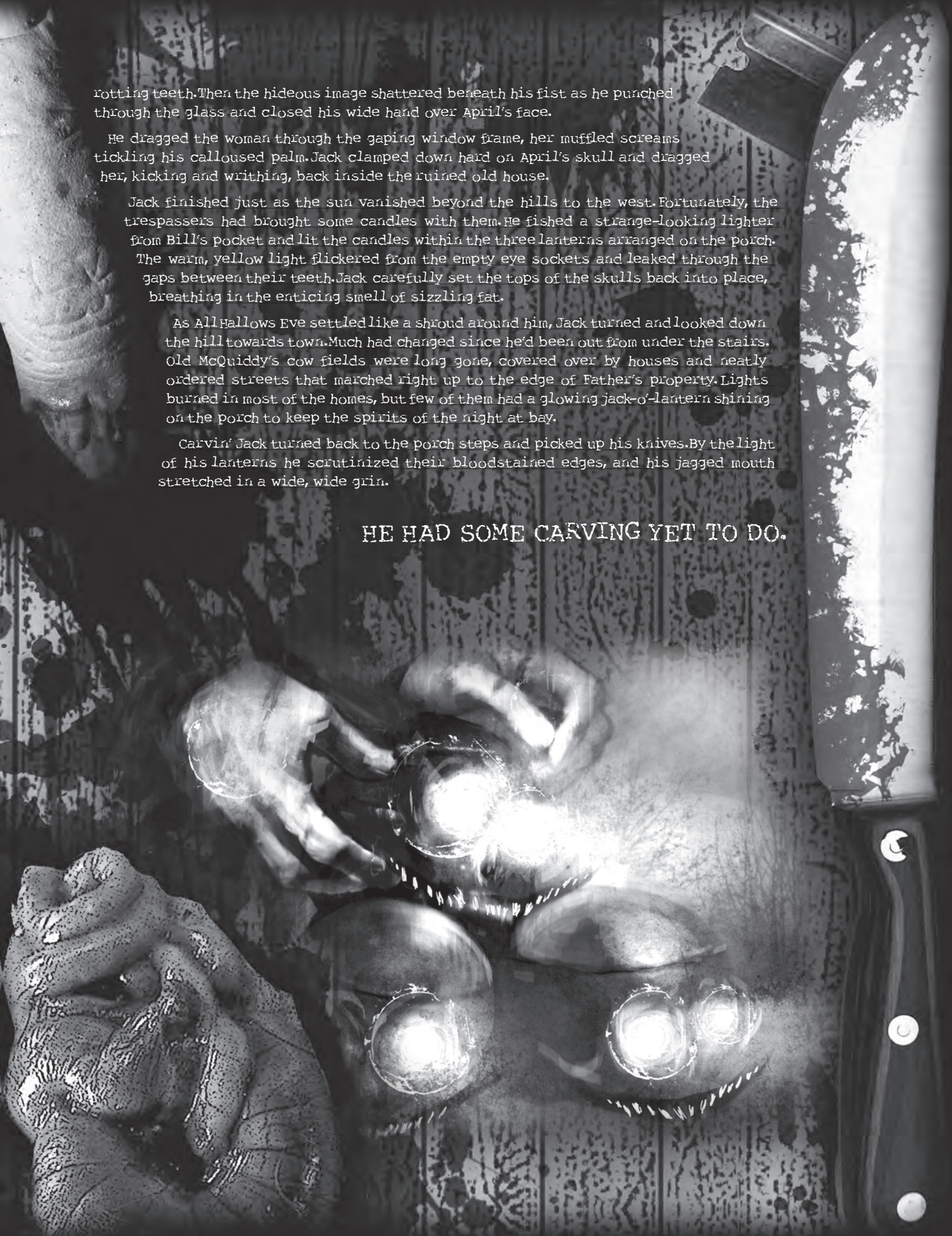
Jack pulled still harder and swung again. The blade bit into Rob's spine, severing the vertebrae with a wet crunch. The man's portly body slumped to the floor. Jack set the bloodstained head on the kitchen table and headed back out into the hallway.

The woman, April, was backing out of the space beneath the stairs, a vomit-stained hand pressed to her mouth. She saw Jack at the end of the hall and shrieked, then turned and ran for the open doorway. Jack followed, walking swiftly in her wake.

A pile of sleeping bags lay stacked on the porch, along with a couple of Coleman lanterns and a number of small, plastic chests unlike anything Jack had seen before. Next to them was something that looked like a TV camera, but there weren't any cables and it was small enough to sit on a man's shoulder.

April raced across the weed-choked front yard and up to a strange red van whose body was as smooth and rounded as an egg. Still screaming, she pulled frantically at the door until it finally popped open and she threw herself inside.

Jack strode up to the driver's side door while the panicked woman fumbled with the keys. For a brief instant, he saw his face reflected in the smoky glass of the side window: uneven, slanted eyes, a gaping pit for a nose and a too-wide mouth full of jagged,



rotting teeth. Then the hideous image shattered beneath his fist as he punched through the glass and closed his wide hand over April's face.

He dragged the woman through the gaping window frame, her muffled screams tickling his calloused palm. Jack clamped down hard on April's skull and dragged her, kicking and writhing, back inside the ruined old house.

Jack finished just as the sun vanished beyond the hills to the west. Fortunately, the trespassers had brought some candles with them. He fished a strange-looking lighter from Bill's pocket and lit the candles within the three lanterns arranged on the porch. The warm, yellow light flickered from the empty eye sockets and leaked through the gaps between their teeth. Jack carefully set the tops of the skulls back into place, breathing in the enticing smell of sizzling fat.

As All Hallows Eve settled like a shroud around him, Jack turned and looked down the hill towards town. Much had changed since he'd been out from under the stairs. Old McQuiddy's cow fields were long gone, covered over by houses and neatly ordered streets that marched right up to the edge of Father's property. Lights burned in most of the homes, but few of them had a glowing jack-o'-lantern shining on the porch to keep the spirits of the night at bay.

Carvin' Jack turned back to the porch steps and picked up his knives. By the light of his lanterns he scrutinized their bloodstained edges, and his jagged mouth stretched in a wide, wide grin.

HE HAD SOME CARVING YET TO DO.



The writing is on the wall, and it's inked in blood: sometimes, a little thing snaps inside a man. Or maybe it was broken from birth. Whenever it happens, the only thing waiting at the bottom of this dark, yawning abyss is an endless hunger — an urge to kill.

These are the slashers, one of the hunters' deadliest foes. They represent the dark reflection of the Vigil: where hunters carry a candle into the night to hold back the forces of darkness, the slashers step into the light with the aim to cast a broad, deep, everlasting shadow. Their hunt is just as ceaseless, but all the more terrible.

It's easy to see why hunters hunt the slashers. It's also easy to see how they can sometimes become them, too.

A HISTORY OF KILLING

In 1971, Oscar Kiss Maerth published *The Beginning Was the End*, an earnest, slightly wild exploration of human origins. It didn't gain much academic respect. It was devoid of any references whatsoever — Maerth claimed he'd gained most of his information from conversations with real-life head-hunters and through meditation.

The Beginning Was the End is little more than a wild-eyed, breathless rant. Maerth tells how the human race evolved from its ape-like ancestor through cannibalism, which was a normative pre-human characteristic. Our ancestors killed their rivals and ate the brains, realizing that the brains had aphrodisiac qualities.

Later, they discovered that eating brain tissue increased intelligence. The change was permanent and hereditary. Eating brains caused chemical changes in our bodies. Our bodies lost their covering of hair. And we developed latent psychic abilities.

And they kept on doing it. The chemical high our ancestors gained from consuming brains was addictive. Tribes of early humans banded together to hunt the heads of rival tribes, to kill their men, to torture their children, to rape their women.

They lost the power to communicate instinctively with each other as animals do. Human skulls changed shape over time, inflicting constant pressure on their brains and on their minds. They went mad, every single one of them, driven to wage war and commit murder, damage the environment and breed uncontrollably. Maerth saw racial integration and miscegenation as a destructive result of the process, too, which perhaps says more about the attitudes one could get away with in a book published on the mass market in 1971 than it does about Maerth's main theory in and of itself.

Was there anything in what Oscar Kiss Maerth believed? Maybe not, but it's easy to believe that something is very wrong with human nature. People kill each other, sometimes for the most trivial reasons. People amass vast amounts of money and possession at the expense of their fellow human beings, and the environment in which they live. People twist the most noble of ideological standpoints into excuses for exclusion and violence.

Chapter One: AND THEN THERE WAS BLOOD

...Man did not evolve naturally, as modern science teaches, either accidentally or as part of a divine plan. He is a freak of his own making. All of his actions — not only his cruelty to his own kind and his ruthless exploitation of the animal world, but even his great intellectual and artistic achievements — are the actions of a monster.

Daniel Farson and Angus Hall,
Mysterious Monsters

What if, even if he was hazy on the details, Maerth was right? What if inside of us all exists not only the capacity for cannibalism, murder, torture and rape, but a hereditary predisposition towards it?

In this World of Darkness, people slip and fall into murderous psychopathy with increasing frequency. And although the phenomenon of the “slasher” has only really been observed by psychologists, Forteans, fringe journalists and witch-hunters for little more than a century, the tendency to become a monster has, in truth, appeared again and again ever since history began. Which begs the question: are these freak occurrences? Are we prone to going mad? Or is the urge to murder the default state of the human race?

GIANTS IN THE EARTH

Right from the very start of history, people killed. Is this how things should be? Fundamentalists deny evolution and point to Adam’s expulsion from Eden: the loss of innocence brought with it within decades the first murder, the first liar. In the *Book of Genesis*, we are told of the

Nephilim, giants in the Earth, born of “sons of God and daughters of men.” They die in the Flood. Apocryphal and expository works explain that the Nephilim were mass-murderers, children of fallen angels, men and women who bathed in the blood of the undeserving.

And they were the heroes of ancient myth. They led the vast wars that scoured the ancient world. They drove the terrified people they ruled over to build insane monuments.

And most of all, they killed. In an age where life was brief and violent, this made them leaders. They got fame and admiration for what they did. But read between the lines of those dusty myths: who were they really? Were the greatest heroes of myth psychotic killers and no more? And what does that say about us and the civilizations we built on their foundations?

A MIGHTY HUNTER BEFORE THE LORD

From the Secret Midrash of The Three Sons of Esau:

NOW NIMROD WAS A MIGHTY HUNTER BEFORE THE NAME, AND HIS PREY WERE THE SONS OF THE FALLEN. HE SOUGHT THEM OUT LIKE A DOG SEEKS OUT BLOOD, AND THOUGH THEY ASKED FOR MERCY, HE SHOWED NONE. HE KILLED NINE OF THE SONS OF THE FALLEN, AND HUNG THEM AT THE GATES OF HIS CITY, WHICH HE CALLED BABEL, SAYING: THIS IS A SIGN THAT THE SONS OF THE FALLEN SHALL NOT VEX THE PEOPLE OF BABEL.

AND THE PEOPLE REJOICED, AND PRAISED KING NIMROD, SAYING, SURELY WE HAVE A MIGHTY RULER, WHO PROTECTS US FROM THE WRATH OF OUR ENEMIES, EVEN THE WRATH OF THE LORD.

AND NIMROD GREW PRIDEFUL, AND SINNED, FOR HE THOUGHT HIMSELF EQUAL TO THE LORD. AND THE LORD WAXED WRATHFUL WITH NIMROD AND STRUCK HIM WITH MADNESS.

AND HE COMMANDED HIS PEOPLE TO BURN BRICKS, AND BADE THEM BUILD A TOWER HIGH ENOUGH THAT HE MIGHT BE EQUAL WITH GOD.

THEY SPENT THREE HUNDRED YEARS BUILDING IT, AND STILL THEY DID NOT REACH HEAVEN. FOR NIMROD HAS SAID TO HIMSELF, I SHALL BUILD THE TOWER, AND MY PEOPLE SHALL DIE. AND HE CONTRIVED THAT MEN SHOULD FALL FROM THE TOWER AS THEY BUILT IT, FOR HE DESIRED THAT THEY BE DASHED AGAINST THE EARTH. AND THE PEOPLE OF BABEL GREW TO FEAR NIMROD, AND WEPT AS THEY SENT THEIR SONS TO BAKE BRICKS AND BUILD HIS TOWER AND DIE.

AND IF THEY REFUSED TO WORK ON THE TOWER, NIMROD IMPALED THEM ON SHARPENED STAKES AND HUNG THEM OUT BEFORE HIS HOUSE FOR ALL TO SEE, SAYING, IT IS NOTHING TO ME WHETHER THESE PEOPLE WORK ON THE TOWER AND DIE OR DIE BY MY HAND, ONLY THAT THEY DIE. AND HE COMMANDED THAT EVERY MAN HAVE A SON AND A DAUGHTER BEFORE HE DIE, THAT HE MAY HAVE GENERATIONS TO KILL IN THE FUTURE.

IN THE THREE HUNDREDTH YEAR AFTER NIMROD BEGAN HIS TOWER, ABRAM CAME TO BABEL FROM UR, WITH HIS FATHER TERAH. HE WAS A DESCENDANT OF NIMROD TO THE SEVENTH GENERATION.

TERAH SAID TO HIM, DO NOT SPEAK OUT AGAINST NIMROD, MY SON, FOR HE IS A MIGHTY HUNTER, AND HE HUNTS MEN, AND IF YOU ANGER HIM, HE WILL FIND YOU AND SEND YOU TO HIS TOWER TO DIE.

BUT ON THE FIRST NIGHT WHEN ABRAM AND TERAH SLEPT IN THE HOUSE OF THEIR FATHERS IN BABEL, THE ANGEL OF THE LORD CAME TO ABRAM IN A DREAM, AND CALLED HIS NAME.

ABRAHAM THREW HIMSELF DOWN AT THE ANGEL'S FEET AND THE ANGEL SAID TO ABRAM, DO NOT BE AFRAID, ABRAM; FOR THE LORD, THE GOD OF HOSTS, HAS GIVEN YOU HIS FAVOR. YOU MUST CONFRONT NIMROD AND PRONOUNCE GOD'S CURSE UPON HIM, FOR GOD HAS JUDGED NIMROD. THE LORD WILL BE WITH YOU. YOU MUST WALK WITHOUT SANDALS TO THE HOUSE OF NIMROD AND SAY TO HIM: THE LORD HAS CURSED YOU, AND HIS JUDGMENT IS UPON YOU.

NOW ABRAM AWOKE BEFORE HIS FATHER, AND WHILE TERAH STILL SLEPT, HE WALKED WITHOUT SANDALS TO THE HOUSE OF NIMROD. AND HE CALLED NIMROD OUT BY NAME.

AND NIMROD AWOKE AND GIRDED HIMSELF AND CAME TO HIS DOOR WITH TEN ARMED MEN. AND HE SAID, WHO IS THIS, WHO DISTURBS THE SLEEP OF THE KING?

AND ABRAM SAID, I AM YOUR DESCENDANT TO THE SEVENTH GENERATION; AND MY NAME IS ABRAM. THE ANGEL OF THE LORD CAME TO ME LAST NIGHT, AND SAID TO ME, GO TO THE HOUSE OF NIMROD WITHOUT SANDALS, AND SAY TO NIMROD, THE LORD HAS CURSED YOU, AND HIS JUDGMENT IS UPON YOU.

AT THIS, NIMROD GREW ANGRY AND DREW HIS SWORD TO KILL ABRAM, BUT ABRAM SAID, I AM NOT AFRAID, FOR THE LORD, THE GOD OF HOSTS IS WITH ME, AND HE WILL PROTECT ME.

AND ABRAM RAISED HIS HAND, AND CALLED ON THE NAME OF THE LORD. AND LOCUSTS ROSE FROM THE DUST IN THE GROUND AND SWARMED AROUND NIMROD, AND ONE FLEW INTO NIMROD'S EAR AND BURROWED INTO HIS BRAIN. AND NIMROD DIED.

ABRAM WENT TO THE BUILDERS OF THE TOWER, AND SAID, YOU MUST STOP, FOR NIMROD IS DEAD.

THE MEN SAID, YOU ARE ONLY A BOY, AND YOU DO NOT EVEN WEAR SANDALS. WE FEAR NIMROD, AND MUST BUILD.

BECAUSE THE MEN DID NOT BELIEVE THAT ABRAM HAD DEFEATED NIMROD, GOD CURSED THEM, SO THAT EACH SPOKE A DIFFERENT LANGUAGE FROM HIS BROTHER. THEY BEGAN TO FIGHT AMONG THEMSELVES...

STORY HOOKS: GENESIS

• The Origins of the Slasher

Where do the origins of the slasher lie? Here's a hunter — he's probably in Null Mysteriis or Task Force: VALKYRIE — who says slashers just happen. Environmental or unusual factors (mutating chemicals, brain tumors, unusual or paranormal external in-

fluences, traumas in earlier life) turn people's minds and bodies and create what we like to call the "slasher" phenomenon. The hunter standing next to him says that's bunk: some people are just evil, and go that way because it's in their nature; but then, she would say that — she's wearing a habit and has a copy of the *Malleus Maleficarum* in her shoulder bag between the knives and the wooden stakes. A third hunter,



a zealot of the Long Night, doesn't say anything because standing next to a nun makes him a bit uncomfortable, but he thinks that maybe it's part of the influence of Satan in the world, and that people like this are consumed with sin, and we're seeing more of them because the Apocalypse is imminent. The last hunter, the close-mouthed chap wearing the Cheiron Group jacket, says it's a genetic predisposition, and that you can trace it back to the ape-like ancestor we share with the chimps (and a sharp intake of breath comes from the Long Night member).

The point is, all of these things can be true for any given slasher, and they're all possible hooks for a story. Just because a character settles on one possible background for the "slasher phenomenon" doesn't mean it's true, either in the game or in the game setting. As a Storyteller, you could happily pick one and stick with it, perhaps if you're cunning and use the others as red herrings, but you don't have to. If the real world doesn't make any consistent sense, why should a fantasy world?

The Maniac with the blood of Nimrod gets impelled to kill by dreams of fallen angels, towers of Babel, deluges, angels at the gates of Eden and the like; she kills in a biblical manner (like Vincent Price in *The Abominable Doctor Phibes*, perhaps, who plays a disfigured musician who murders his critics in a manner reminiscent of the plagues of Egypt). Another slasher is visited by the Angel of the Apocalypse, enduring (real or imagined) visitations from Revelations: the Seven-Headed Beast Of Destruction, or the Whore of Babylon, or the Blood-Stained Lamb, or any of a hundred symbolic horrors from that most disturbing of biblical books. But all of them drive him to kill, whatever they are. A scientific hunter's research into the genetics of another killer reveals that a plague of killings surrounds nearly every male (or female, or both) member of a certain direct family line, going back as long as records have existed. Some got caught out as killers. Some didn't. But they were always there. And it always happens at about the time a member of the family hits his thirtieth birthday. One of the hunters realizes, as he looks at the family lines, that he's a member of the same family line. He's 29 years old.

Or, perhaps, still going along with the genetic theme, the Cheiron Group isolates the millennia-old genetic virus that creates slashers, and tries to turn it into an experimental Thaumatechnological treatment. Then they send another Field Projects Division (FPD) agent or agents in to sort out the predictably gory and disastrous consequences. And no, they don't have to tell the agents what they're dealing with.

• Origin of the Species (Or Not)

Going back to that whole biblical versus evolutionary biology theme, what if a slasher turned out to have something like conclusive proof of the theory of human evolution... or, on the other hand, the truth of some religious creed or another? Maybe a Brute, Freak, Mask or Mutant develops unusual physical characteristics, regressing to the form of our apelike (and psychotic) common ancestor. Or maybe a Genius develops a complete race-memory. In a game set in Britain or mainland Europe, the origin of humanity is hardly controversial, but in a game set in the US, it's part of a fierce debate. The slasher ceases to be just a monster, and suddenly becomes a political tool. A fundamentalist (and hence six-day creationist) hunter who faces such a monster is going to have trouble accepting its origins; particularly when it's revealed the only thing that can stop it is an agent found in the blood of chimpanzees, or some other primate, further underlining the creature's origins. Maybe our Long Night hunter (or Ascending One, who happens to be a conservative Muslim) thinks it a Satanic lie. Maybe he goes through a crisis of faith. Either way, what does he do when confronted with a slasher? Does it drive him to equal extremes of violence? Does he do his best to hide the truth from his colleagues, even when the truth might save them all? Does he hide or destroy the slasher's body?

On the other hand, the slasher might offer certain incontrovertible evidence of biblical prophecies. Admittedly, in the World of Darkness, Richard Dawkins-style rationalism is a hard stance to maintain, but people do, and just like in the real world, sci-

entists don't always behave scientifically, preferring to hide or damn evidence that doesn't fit with the established rules of physics and biology. Although a hardcore believer in conventional science (perhaps a lone debunker, or an investigating member of Null Mystery's Rationalist faction) might be unable to accept the truth of it, her behavior is not likely to be very different from that of the fundamentalists.

• Nimrod, Samson, Achilles, and Other Psychopaths

The heroes of antique myth were psychopaths. They were slashers: Avengers and Legends, Charmers and Lunatics, Genii and Maniacs. Being slashers, many of them might not even have died. A crypt in Greece, Iraq or Palestine, or a stone coffin brought back to the West a century or more ago cracks open in an accident, explosion or archaeological dig, and a naked man of incredible size stumbles out and begins to get on with the business of killing, stopped when he was imprisoned and forced to sleep thousands of years ago. Or a modern slasher is the reincarnation of one of the ancient heroes, perhaps as he begins his career uncovering artifacts belonging to the original "hero," artifacts of great interest to the Aegis Kai Doru. Or perhaps he steals his old possessions from the Guardians of the Labyrinth, and they have no choice but to get them back (and avenge the horrible deaths of the artifacts' unfortunate custodians).

91BCE: THE HAG OF NOLA

From the one surviving copy of the Bellum Sanguinis of L. Poppaedi Caliga, held in the Munich Library of the Loyalists of Thule:

And so, we come to this. The men of Italy, loyal allies of the Romans since the time of Hannibal, are denied citizenship. Drusus is dead; our hopes are shattered, and yet, we take the vow: if I become a citizen by the Law of Drusus, I will hold Rome as my country.

Why do they not see that we pledge loyalty to death and beyond, if only they count us as their own? We have no choice. We go to war against Rome that we may become Roman.

And I stand on a dozen fields this last year, standing against the armies of Sulla with whom I once fought.

I am Italian. I would be Roman. But before these, I am a Bird of Minerva. They cast me from the Aventine as an Italian, but my Roman brothers did not forget me, and twice, I have met my brothers on the battlefield, standing on opposite sides, and let each other pass.

And this is why by cover of night I now admit these three men to the city: Carbo, Brutor and Mercurius. They leave behind the insignia of Sulla. They abandon their murderous commander, risking crucifixion for their trouble. I would do the same for them; this they know.

This is the night where we face the Hag. I explain to them that the Witch comes when a man stands at a junction and cries for her three times, and that no grown man of pure heart can be harmed by her. I saw her kill a group of boys who sought to prove the story wrong; they called for her and she came. The Hag of Nola: a frightful old woman with skin tattooed like a Velt, hands grasping blades encrusted with the blood of a thousand men, breasts like empty wine-skins and teeth like black stones. They say that no man of pure heart can be harmed by her; and this is our weakness. We are soldiers. We whore, we fight, we have done things to the conquered of which we are not proud. Such is the way of a soldier's life.

Carbo calls for her at the crossroads, and he is met by silence; nothing happens for a time, and he laughs and says he does not fear her, and that is the end of Carbo, for her knife is through his heart before he knows more. Brice, Mercurius and I rush to the side of our comrade, but the Hag is out of our sight and Mercurius is dead. Brice cries out in anguish, and then in fear, and Mercurius and I barely see him dragged into the shadows before we choose to run. We know little in our fear, we two soldiers of opposing armies, but when we next speak, we stand in another crossroads, back to back, with the moon above us, having been revealed by the clouds.

We stand for a full hour, our swords drawn and our breath the only sound we make. And then Mercurius makes a small sound, like the yelp of a dog, and makes no more sound, and I know that I am alone.

I kneel down on the earth, and there and then, I put down my sword and I draw my knife. I loosen the strap of my cuirass and I grit my teeth on the leather, and with my left hand, I cut off my right. I waver as I stand, but I hold the hand aloft, and cry out, I sacrifice this to you, in the form we observed, for I am alone, and there is no other hope for me. Show yourself, monster. Show yourself, demon. Show yourself, witch.

And the Hag shows herself, more horrible now than in any of the glimpses I have seen, for her speed is gone. She bends over and takes the hand, and I lunge, and my sword, although inexpertly held, sinks into the back of her neck. And she is still, and I think she must be dead.

And I return to my lodgings and thrust the stump in a flaming torch. And I faint, and in the morning, there is no need for the people to wonder what happened to three Romans and a monster, for Nola has fallen to Sulla and his men. And I must away.

When I hear the story of the Witch of Nola again, I am in Rome, and I am a citizen, like all of Italy, for we lost the war and won our point. I do not return to Nola. It is for others to face the monster again, if it can be killed. For what can I sacrifice now?

STORY HOOKS

• The Avenue You Must Not Take

Slashers are slaves to their stories: they are controlled by drama, and by the fate they will meet. But often the circumstances by which a hero can defeat them are difficult, impossible or distasteful. Caliga

knew he could defeat the monster if he sacrificed his right hand to it, but preferred to fight the monster — a Legend — with his friends. Desperation is at the heart of many good slasher stories. Maybe our heroes could have killed the monster more easily, but they were too sure of their own abilities, and too unwilling to pay that price.

And of course, by the time Caliga *was* willing to pay the price (his right hand), he'd paid another price: three men had lost their lives. Of course, it might be that the thing that saves you might not be obvious.

It's only at the end of the film *Ring*, for example, that Reiko realizes that in order to stop Sadako getting you because you saw the cursed video, you have to copy the tape and show it to someone else to save yourself... and so she gets her son, who has seen the tape, to make a copy and show it to her father.

FAITH AND DEATH

History goes on. The slasher phenomenon no doubt reared its ugly head across the Middle Ages, but that was an age where a brutal killer could make a great name for himself, and where is the line drawn anyway, between a crazed killer and a slasher?

Were the crazed, wordless *berserkers* who sailed with the Viking raiders examples of Brutes accepted by Viking culture, or just men who threw themselves into battle a little more than their comrades? And when Christian warriors joined the Crusades, did some men travel to the Holy Land for the killing more than the spoils?

And what of the legendary figures, the ogres of heroic myth? What if the man-eating giants, trolls and ogres of legend and fairytale were in fact just men warped into something more terrible? Grendel and his mother, slain

by Beowulf in the old saga, seem too earthy and solid to have been wholly spectral horrors. Were they in fact what the people at the Vanguard Serial Crimes Unit (VASCU) now classify as part of a family of Freaks (and do their relatives yet survive, under the earth)?

It's impossible to tell. Now that we have seen evidence that the slasher phenomenon existed in the ancient world, and know that it exists in the World of Darkness now, it seems plain that slashers must have existed in the meantime.

The Renaissance transformed the world, and with it Western society. People began to think of themselves as individuals, as more than simple subjects of kings. With philosophy came questioning of the human condition, and questioning of the authority of the religious and secular leaders of the day. The Reformation sowed the seeds for the Enlightenment, and when both brought new ways of thinking and a new emphasis on personal responsibility, the few who studied the horrors of the world discovered things about the human race they would rather have not known.

1492: IN THE NAME OF TORQUEMADA

From a 19th century French document attributed to one "Panurge, Chevalier Thélème," in the library of the Lucifuge, Milan:

Pope Sixtus wrote that the Inquisitors of Spain had gone too far. He called them thieves. He recognized that they paid no attention to justice, divine or earthly, in their zeal to destroy Jews and heretics. And their response to the Apostolic See's admonition that they show mercy? Within a year, they appointed Tomás de Torquemada Inquisitor General of the Holy Spanish Inquisition. That he proved to be more bloodstained than the Holy Father could ever have imagined is a matter of record. And he in his turn appointed as his adjunct in the city of Badajoz, where I had settled, a Dominican brother named Alphonso Romero.

Now the Inquisitors I had hitherto known had been first and foremost believers, their evil the product of their absolute, certain belief in the perfect goodness and rightness of what they did. A fanatic of any kind (Papist killers; Protestant rebels; disciples of "Reason" who in truth bow only to Madame Guillotine — they're all the same in my experience) is a true danger to all. Give me a Cato any day; a dyed-in-the-wool hypocrite at least can be accommodated, and may even have a price.

But the Dominican was not one of the usual run of believers. While his fellows used their honest, absolute belief as a pretext for their terrible doings, it seemed like Brother Alphonso barely needed to believe in anything at all. For him, it was the killing.

Now, within barely an hour of the Dominican's arrival in Badajoz, the burnings had begun. They brought the heretics into the square, each in his sackcloth sanbenito, and I could see that the heretic's garb only barely suited to cover the marks of terrible vicissitudes. Blood soaked through the garments. Now the prac-

tice of Torquemada was to allow the heretics to recant at the last that they might be strangled rather than burnt, but although three of the five men who stood there tearfully admitted their crimes, no such mercy was given. All burned under the eye of the man who knelt on the platform in an attitude of prayer, a rosary woven between his clasped fingers, a beatific smile on his face; a smile that spoke of more than simple faith.

I watched him from that day on, seeking my moment.

And as time went on, I wished it would come ever more dearly. It seemed that no admission was enough to sway the Inquisitor from inflicting horrendous pains on his chosen victims; no recanting early enough to sway him from his intention of putting to the question and burning whomsoever he pleased.

Incontrovertible evidence of heresy sprung from nowhere to condemn even the most innocent appearing of the Inquisitor's subjects. Rich and poor, young and old were burned. Events would conspire against a rich and poor, old and young, man and woman, placing these poor people in absolutely incriminating tableaux, so perfectly able to condemn these people that one might have thought each situation fiendishly contrived to bring about their destruction. A priest finds the implements of the Black Mass among his personal effects, and cannot explain how his handwriting appears on a written curse, consigning his enemy's souls to Hell. A young woman awakens a mile from her bed, naked and surrounded by the cadavers of the three goats, signs of devilish power written in blood on her skin; the Inquisitor meets her on the road before she can get home.

And so on. Of course, it was plain to me that the Inquisitor had brought these things to pass. But I had no proof, and could not explain how I knew.

My patience failed on the day when I saw the Dominican contrive the torture and death of a child. He was a boy of six; he refused to eat bacon after having once loved it. Almost as if his food had been poisoned, or soured for him. He and his family were stuck with pins and branded with irons, and all were burned. And on the day he burned them, I could take no more, and drew my sword to dispatch him in plain view of the assembled people of Badajoz. That is how I ended up in the Inquisitor's dungeon, put to the question.

He laid no finger on me. Always it was his lackeys who turned the levers and applied the grease, and inserted the pins, and inflicted the brands; always the lesser brothers, the kind of fanatics who could only obey without question the monster in their midst.

He spoke always with a mild voice, and gave his orders as if regretful, as if inclined to mercy. But I could tell; I have a gift to see the mark of Hell in men's hearts, but even without it, I could see that his words were false. He just wanted to torture and kill me.

And I endured. I have seen Hell. I had already lived longer than he, although I even then appeared many years younger. The tortures and scars of an earthly vault hold no terrors for me. I screamed, and I wept. But I did not break.

Even now, so many years later, I ache to think of what they did to me. But I did not break. At the last, the Brother bade his men leave; they did not question or show any surprise. Perhaps they feared him too much. Perhaps this was his usual practice. They had barely left when I spoke, interrupting a rehearsed speech.

"You and I know, Brother," said I, although I struggled to speak, "that you believe in no God. You do these things because you wish it, and no more."

He betrayed no surprise at my statement; he but shrugged his shoulders and smiled a smile that did not reach his eyes. "That is true. But you, child, are in

no position to say these things, and should you speak out as they carry you to the stake, you should surely be condemned."

"I am condemned anyway."

"That you are."

"So answer me this before you kill me, Brother. Why do these things if there is no God for your Inquisition to grant reason for the things you do? Why end so many lives? Why go to such lengths to gain yourself victims?"

He smiled again. "Because I can. I awoke on the morning I arrived here, and I saw that there was no God, and saw that our Holy Work was a sham, and that all there was, was the blood, and the burning."

"Do not be so sure."

"There is no power can catch me, child."

He sounded almost regretful. But in this, in gloating and answering my question, he had committed the sin of Pride. And as he drew near and smiled, I met his eye and bade him see his damnation. And he did. The sight of Hell bore him to his knees; and the fire of Hell I spat upon him, and it consumed his face. He wept then, and my companion Franz whom I still love and hate appeared in brimstone and steam, and unlocked my manacles, and barred the door. And I took vengeance upon him.

But when I applied the brands and the needles and the knives to him, and ended his life on the table as slowly and as painfully as I could, he laughed, and he still laughed as he died, and nothing I could do could stop his mirth.

STORY HOOKS

• Good Governance

The quintessential slasher is a lone killer, pursued by our heroes (or, more likely pursuing them). The psychological changes that create these homicidal killers mostly make it difficult for them to relate to other humans in any meaningful sense. At first glance, it seems impossible that one could achieve — or maintain — a position of political, temporal or religious power. But the truth is, power doesn't always depend on relating to people in the way that people usually do. A ruthless businessman doesn't have to talk about anything other than who he's going to destroy and what to do with his shares. It's easy to talk about business (the writer recalls reading some years ago about a Hollywood executive who was noted in the article as having no ability whatsoever to relate to people as equals or friends, and this being regarded as an asset in his business). A politician comes up with ideas and programs that might chill the blood, and yet people follow him: he has power. Some religious leaders are so separated from their flocks, treated with such reverence that it'd be weird if they actually started treating people like normal human beings.

The issue is that, like the Inquisitor of Badajoz, a slasher — probably a Genius, Maniac, Charmer or

Psycho (see p. 92) — with temporal power has many opportunities to kill and torment the innocents under his care. And he can do something most other slashers can't: he can aim big. Really big. A politician encourages bigotry and violence, all the while pretending to deplore it. Or perhaps he attempts the systematic execution of a whole ethnic or religious group in a city or country, after having twisted the people to think them evil or dangerous. And maybe if he's really good, he might one day get a chance of being elected president (or prime minister) of one of the nuclear nations, his only goal to have his finger *this close* to the button that starts the apocalypse. And press it. A religious leader aims to start a crusade (or a *jihad*), and with that a reign of terror.

On a smaller scale, the mayor of a city could use the police as death squads, or have the criminal organizations of the region as his weapons of death; perhaps playing them off against each other like a kid plays with his action figures. Bang, bang. You're dead.

Having said that, most slashers have the hard-wired need to see the killings they perpetrate. It's the thing that makes them so terribly dangerous face-to-face, but at the same time, it's the biggest weakness they have.

For example, consider a Charmer who has somehow managed to become president, and who — let's just be hypothetical here — habitually gets some

White House intern to give him blowjobs. His problem is eventually that the intern's going to get sliced up, because that's who he is and what he does. The Secret Service has to cover it up, but after a while, someone is going to ring one of his mates in Task Force: VALKYRIE. Another national leader might make a point of going to a war zone and having a go himself.

The point of all this is that a slasher in a position of power *will* slip up and *will* be unable to resist the opportunity to go one-on-one with his hunters, no matter how much back-up he has.

That means a group of hunters *will* get the chance to get close enough to deal with him. Of course, getting out alive after the event, what with all the men in black, bodyguards and security backup, is another matter.

• The Torturer's MO

If the Spanish Inquisition taught a slasher anything, it's how to torture people properly. Torture is often an important part of a slasher's grisly work, and Tomas de Torquemada wrote the definitive manual. As the aspiring Inquisitor knows all too well, it starts a long time before the application of the thumbscrews. Torquemada would have his victim stand before him, silently, as he shuffled papers and pretended to get on with other, more important work. When he finally spoke, he would appear friendly and reasonable, as if the victim's friend.

Leading the accused to the dungeons, he would ensure the victim heard the screams of the tortured. Then he'd display the instruments, and make it absolutely clear to the subject exactly what each of them did. He'd tell his men to take their time strapping the victim down; then, and only then, would the physical torture begin.

It's pretty much the same with slashers, even with the supposedly mindless ones, the Brutes and Masks. They torture their victims long before the knives cut flesh. The co-ed in the movie hears the screams of the dog as it is cut to pieces. She stumbles across the mangled corpse of the slasher's last victim. She runs into him, and sees the glimpse of the knife. But somehow he's too slow this time. She thinks she might get away. And then he's there in front of her and there's no way out. By the time he cuts her to pieces, she's already crazed with fear and disgust. He's been playing the torturer's game. He's been ramping up the torment. Because it's what he wants, what he loves, maybe even what he needs. Torquemada knew that lulling them into a false sense of security before sticking the knife (or hook, or scalpel) in is really just another way to make the torture all the more exquisite. You gain their trust, and then you kill them (in the film *May*, for example, witness that when the eponymous protagonist snaps and turns slasher how she toys with her victims before dispatching them, painfully and messily).



Slashers aren't just killers. They might appear to just hop out and thrust a knife into someone, but really there's a whole lot more to it than that. It's sometimes almost an art. Whether it's the Witchfinder General who creates paranoia in his victims before taking them to the dungeons, or the Mask who lets them run and makes sure they see what happened to Bob and Betty first, the chase is part of the murderous act, and a hundred different ways exist to torment a victim before shedding a single drop of blood.

HERE COMES A CANDLE, HERE COMES A CHOPPER

Luther, Calvin and Zwingli could not have known their great and bloody enterprise would allow thinkers the freedom to abandon faith in God entirely. Wars, purges, witch-hunts and inquisitions, as we have seen, allowed the slasher phenomenon the opportunity to flourish in surprisingly influential places.

In our World of Darkness, the age of Restoration and Enlightenment brought with it the first real studies of the slasher, and the first famous monsters.

A few rare pamphlets tell the terrible story of the Beast of Drury Lane, who took his cleaver to animals and women in 1744. He was brought down by a band of brave artisans and craftsmen, all of whom lost their wives to the Beast, and only one of whom survived to tell the story. A playground choosing rhyme, still sung in London playgrounds today, is all that survives in the public consciousness:

Run across to Drury Lane,
Turn around, run back again,
Hold a chopper in your hand,
Cut apart our happy band,
Run away and hide,
For everyone shall stay but you.

In France, the reign of the Sun King was tarnished by Jean Houillier, the Wolf of Verdun, who savaged thirty men with his teeth in the space of a week before a lone hunter killed him with a single musket-ball to the brain.

Not long before the American War of Independence, a former mountain scout named Bad Jack Potter terrorized the settlers and natives of Virginia with a band of black-bearded cannibals. The Mattaponi Indians caught and killed all except Bad Jack, whom they delivered to the settlers, saying the man deserved a punishment of more cruelty than they could inflict.

In 1791, a diary arrived at the offices of the Republican Government in Paris. It told in detail about the manipulation and planting of evidence that had sent over a hundred men and women to the guillotine during the Terror. Investigation showed there were details in the diary that could only have been known to the victims and the Revolutionary Tribunal. The diary was accompanied by no letter, and no one could ascertain any reason why its writer should choose to send it.

In the middle of all this, hunters began to perceive slashers as a real problem, a phenomenon in their own right. During the 18th century, the Mal-leus Maleficarum, Aegis Kai Doru, Ascending Ones and Lucifuge all began to collect records of slashers and to group them together. And in 1761, an artisan scientist from Glasgow named Robert James Harrison published — by subscription — the first treatise on the slasher phenomenon: *Butchers Born, Or a Treatise*

on Distempers of the Brain and the Urge to Murder. Some of Harrison's ideas on psychology were far too ahead of their time to gain any kind of acceptance, and his accounts of personal experiences of slashers and their behavior struck the few who read the book as too wild to deserve any credence. By the time the science of the mind had caught up with him, Harrison had long been forgotten. Only a few copies of Harrison's book exist now. The Lucifuge has one, the few of the Lucifuge's agents who

have read it note the book's mention of and praise for one Chevalier Thélème. The

Aegis Kai Doru keep their own copy in Scotland and count it among their other artifacts — since their copy is reputed to have supernatural powers. The Loyalists of Thule, meanwhile, have two copies, one in Munich and one in New York — the last Loy-

alist who consulted it found herself slightly disturbed by the design on the book's frontispiece: the familiar icon of Cheiron the Healer.

It took time for the benefits of the Enlightenment to filter down into the rest of the world. At any rate, in the age of reason, madness still walked. The highwayman and the pirate replaced the heretic and the witch as the bogeymen of choice for the people of

the West, but the fears were much the same, even if their vehicles were different.

1712: THE TALE OF THE BLACK SCHOONER

From Memoirs of a Naval Man in the Caribbean, by Captain Henry Coale:

Tales of the legendary pirates of the Caribbean and the Spanish Main circulate among the salons of Europe and the Americas alike. It seems that fine ladies and idle men wish nothing more than to thrill at hearing of the exploits of the villains of the seas and their monstrous exploits. If the gentlefolk who begged to hear the stories had the merest inkling of what I had seen, I have my sincerest doubts that they would wish to know more.

This anecdote occurred in the year 1712, when I was captain for the first time, in command of the brig Anne Stuart. I presided over a happy crew. The seamen believed our ship to have an auspicious name. Whether the name has luck, I do not know; I prefer to attribute our success in keeping the waters of Bermuda safe for honest shipping to the hardiness and willingness of my crew.

I had heard the tales of the Black Schooner, and in truth had found them wearisome. Tales of the pirates were all the same in those days: this captain had sold his soul to Satan; this captain's crew was cursed to wander the seas through some act of treachery; victims of this ship would not survive to tell the tale. I did not credit it, then, when I overheard a midshipman telling a story about a pirate crew who had gone adrift on the Sargasso Sea. They had, so the story went, gone mad with the isolation, and had taken to eating one another before a circumstance of weather had freed them of the weed. He said they cared not for booty any more, only for the killing, and to eat the men of the towns they raided. I laughed then, but laughed no more when we landed at Port James barely three days later.

No one greeted us at Port James but seagulls. No flags were raised at our passing, and no signals were returned. We saw no activity in the harbor, although it was a fine Tuesday morning. I went ashore with nine picked men, and found the place curiously still. We saw no one as we came into the port, and it was only when we reached the city square when we saw what had been done, for the women and children of the town had been crucified in their hundreds in the city square on gibbets built especially for the purpose. They seemed to be a week dead. I set my men to the task of taking them down and giving them Christian burials.

Investigating the port, I found that the buildings of the port had been left mostly untouched. It is well known that the practice of raiders is to burn and pillage. But here they had touched nothing. The stocks of food had been allowed to sit there; the treasury had not been opened. If there were signs of upheaval, it seemed to be the upheaval caused by the people being carried away.

Of the men, there were no sign but for a prodigious amount of blood dried on the parade ground of Port James' small garrison. The first mate told me the men were making dire reference to the Black Schooner, and were saying the men were surely carried away. One man wept, and said they had been eaten. Another said the truth was far worse, and pointed to the joinery on the gibbets, the timber that had come from the town's own supplies. I did not bear him out, and I told them not to be foolish, but I had my private doubts. I could not be but appalled at the fate of the women and children, and wondered what manner of men steal nothing, and yet go to the lengths of building a gibbet for every innocent in the town.

Having given the dead the proper respects, we sailed out on the most likely route to catch the perpetrators of this atrocity, vowing to show them with lead, steel and rope what justice we could.

We never found any sign of any perpetrator, whether Black Schooner, more mundane pirate or something worse. I reported the story to Her Majesty's Commissioner in Jamaica. Sometimes, I heard accounts from my friends in the Admiralty — still hear accounts to this day — of ships found adrift without crew and settlements whose fate was much like that of Port James. But I did not see the culprits, nor did I ever see with my own eyes the fruits of their terrible work again.

I have seen many things since, and I have fought pirates and Spaniards, and I have killed men. But still I sometimes dream of who could have done such things, and if they ever met with justice, divine or human, or if they yet sail even now.

STORY HOOKS

• Legends of the Black Schooner

The *Black Schooner*'s still out there, you know. Its silent sailors, dressed in garments of human skin sewn into their flesh and stained with dried blood, yet maintain their lonely voyage across the sea. The sailboat barely floats now, but somehow those patched spider-web sails still hold the wind, still she can outrun shipping with supernatural speed. And her flag is black, stained with brown. The sailors do not speak. They go about their grisly business with no regard for any cry of mercy. They torture the women and children. No one survives. They take the men. Some end up in their larders, hung in rows, impaled on hooks through the throat. Some get press-ganged into joining (which is why the *Black Schooner* yet endures).

They don't talk — they can't, having no tongues (did they cut them out themselves? Did whatever drove them mad take away their power of speech?) — and don't stop. They come and go with no rhyme or reason. Perhaps on the Schooner is a logbook that explains the truth behind these immortal monsters.

Or maybe not. You'd have to get through them first, of course, to find it.

Your troupe's characters may of course never get to sail the waters of the Caribbean, but that's no reason why the well-worn story of the isolated cannibal tribe (comprised, in game terms, of Freaks, Mutants, Brutes, or Masks) can't be adapted for any setting at all — in the movie *Serenity*, for example, the myth gets sent into outer space, but the principle is still the same. Frontier legends from the early days of the US sometimes tells stories of mountain men going mad (like Bad Jack Potter, above). Sawney Bean and his Scots cannibal clan still inform the urban myths of the British Isles. Or what of the many lost highways that criss-cross the country? Couldn't the *Black Schooner* now be a ragged RV — or a caravan of such vehicles — traveling the distant byways?

Bringing it up to date, a group of soldiers on duty in the Middle East, cut off from their own side and harried by the enemy — like the soldiers from *Bravo Two Zero* — might get out intact like Andy McNab did... but could just as easily get lost for a long time



in the middle of nowhere and go very wrong, particularly if they get caught and tortured. Their escape and rescue might make them the toast of the press, but the press coverage could change drastically when they go missing. On the other side, a “terrorist” cell in the middle of nowhere could begin to do things that even their erstwhile masters don’t understand, driven mad by isolation and garbled propaganda.

Isolation doesn’t have to happen in a remote setting. There could be no-go areas of the inner city, whole blocks of flats where the inhabitants go crazy and become silent cannibals; or perhaps a whole extended family was, decades ago, so lost in poverty that the only choice for them was to retreat to the sewers... and now, sometimes they come out, silent and hungry, and the only signs they’ve been there are the blood, and the partially-eaten corpses.

THE AGE OF DESPAIR

The 18th and the 19th centuries were the age of Empire, the Great Game played by a handful of nations with international holdings. The Industrial Revolution transformed the cities of the world into metropolises for the first time, smoke-filled sprawls where opulent wealth and filthy, diseased poverty existed side by side.

With these huge concentrations of people, it wasn’t just a statistical probability that slashers would arise: poverty brings with it crime and despair, and crime and despair bring violence. If the numbers of slashers began to rise in a dizzying degree in the 19th century, it only stands to reason.

Documents belonging to the Order of the Southern Temple give an account of The Calcutta Anatomist, who dissected *Dalit* women’s bodies in the final days of the British East India Company and never got caught. The Kolkata police force does not generally talk about the occasional neatly-dissected bodies they find, even today, in the city’s labyrinthine slum districts. Every so often they issue a press release saying they have a suspect, but nothing ever seems to come of it.

Over one week in 1877, a so-called “Mad Englishman,” a vast, naked sweaty brute of a man, tore his way through gamblers and working men in Shanghai armed with only a meat hook. The British couldn’t stop him, leaving it to three local men finally to put an end to his rampage.

If Ashwood Abbey doesn’t like to mention Saucy Jack, there’s good reason. Still, some believe the Rip-

per’s ghost to be haunting Britain still, transformed into a virtual god of murder by the power of folklore.

Theories that the Ripper was the Prince of Wales abound and are hotly disputed. But it’s a matter of record that a minor Russian prince (who would have been one of Albert Victor’s very distant relatives, remember) took his fill of blood among the serfs of Saint Petersburg in 1909. The people and the authorities alike knew exactly who he was, and why the police would do nothing at all. The student, poet and carpenter who finally defeated him ended their lives in front of a police firing squad, just another minor circumstance to fuel the fires of the coming catastrophe.

The Great War that brought the setting of the imperial sun saw so much death that it becomes almost impossible to single anyone out. But myths persist of a military man, sometimes on the British side, sometimes French, German or Russian, who made chillingly creative use of mustard gas and barbed wire, and who indiscriminately massacred troops on all sides before vanishing, presumably caught in one of the innumerable indecisive cross-fires that claimed so many more lives.

America’s Prohibition era brought new conflicts and new killers. An early Union cell in New York very nearly met its match in Michael “Cleaver” McKay. A mob knee-breaker, McKay a large, ugly individual who was prized for the impressively messy way he dealt with his boss’s opposition. One story has it that he went rogue after escaping a double-cross. Another version current at the time was that he took some bad liquor that damaged his brain. Either way, McKay, who was never stable in the first place, tipped right over any edge his bosses could imagine. He began to wipe out the members of *all* of the city’s gangs — and their families. When he started killing people who had nothing to do with the rackets, the Union cell got involved. Aided by Tommy-gun wielding thugs belonging to several of the mobs, they lured McKay to a warehouse showdown that ended with “Cleaver” in the middle of a hail of machine-gun fire. Even after having taken what looked like over a hundred bullets, the madman was still able to dispatch over half a dozen of the mobsters. The one journal that records McKay’s end tells how one of the gunmen approached and stood over McKay’s inanimate corpse, only to be split in half from head to chest with a single blow of McKay’s meat cleaver as the insane killer got right back up again. The second time the bullets rained on him, however, McKay didn’t get up.

A terrifying number of slashers arose during the Depression, many in the mold of “Cleaver” McKay. World War II came, and the evil of the slasher phenomenon seems somehow empty alongside sane men

who, for ideological reasons, did evil because they knew they were right?

Perhaps therein lies one of the true horrors of the human condition. The slasher becomes what he is because of something that happened to him, some accident or influence. But the things that happened during the Holocaust were the work of men who knew exactly what they were doing, and believed utterly that they were right. The one thing that slashers and the perpetrators of the event that became the byword for human evil have in common is this: certainty. We're all capable of doing terrible things, both on a small scale and as part of a much larger scale. And we don't even have to be mad to do them.

After World War II, the serial killer came into his own, and with him the slasher. The 1950s brought paranoia and brainwashing flaps. The 1960s gave us thrill-killers and char-

ismatic pin-ups with knives. The specter of terrorism arose. And in the 1970s and 1980s, hulking fiends with butcher's knives struck again and again, all over the world.

The 1980s also brought to the World of Darkness the killer yuppie, so filled with the emptiness of his lifestyle he had nothing to do but to descend into increasingly darker and more insane diversions. The 1990s brought more cults, more killers. And the new millennium brought 9/11, and the resulting paranoia, wars and new Inquisitions on both sides of the divide. Human evil endures. But as long as there is human evil, there will be people who will stand against it.

1969: HELTER SKELTER, REDUX

James Moore, agent of VASCU (ret'd) writes:

Christopher Moon: Born 1939, Philadelphia. An abusive family background led to a troubled childhood. He was known to the police by the age of nine for various petty thefts. He'd served two years behind bars by the time he was 21. By 1965, he was known to the police forces of ten states. By 1965, he was resident in San Francisco, where he gained a reputation as a reliable supplier of narcotics to the residents of the Haight-Ashbury district. When the "hippy" movement took off, Moon was at least known by reputation to many of the prime movers and their satellites.

The so-called "hippy" movement for all intents exploded during the events at Altamont. A large number of former hippies, disillusioned with what they perceived as the failure of the Summer of Love, took to less publicly attractive pastimes than rock music, the consumption of marijuana and acid, and a preoccupation with flowers. Thelemic magic became popular, along with Kenneth Anger's Crowleyan films. And the thrill-kill cults first appeared. It was in early 1969 that Moon, for no adequately explicable reason, graduated from small-time hustling and drug dealing to apocalyptic terrorist-prophet.

By the end of March 1969, Moon had recruited his "Young Liberators," 21 young men and women, mostly from wealthy backgrounds, mostly female. All of those, male and female, who later ended up in custody, claimed to have been his second-in-command and primary lover, although all admitted that Moon spread his affections freely among the members of his group. It seems bizarre that so many former hippies should suddenly be so willing to take up arms, and even more bizarre that they should be so willing to undertake Moon's increasingly random and violent missions.

On June 19th, three of them, James Trump, "Flower" (Helen Fields) and "Mouse" (Jane Allison), kidnapped and killed the three-year-old daughter of millionaire Rice Warne, having abscond-

ed with the ransom. They died in a suicide pact before they could be apprehended.

On June 22nd, two more, their bodies unidentifiable but presumably "Sunshine" (Georgina Reece) and "Venus" (Nicola Kenwright) bombed the central branch of Wells Fargo in Los Angeles, taking the lives of three security staff and their own. Whether they intended to die in the explosion, or if it was an accident, remains unknown.

In total, 17 of Moon's 21 acolytes killed, and then died shortly after, mostly by their own hand (see attached report).

Eleven of them were responsible for the San Fernando Massacre of August 9th, where the Young Liberators forced their way into every house on one block of Glendale in the San Fernando Valley and shot everyone they could find. Moon was not present at any of these events, and the four Young Liberators who were finally apprehended trying to bomb a home for the elderly in Santa Fe, Harry Boone, "Brighteyes" (Beth Vickers), "Peaceful" (Ida Buckingham) and "Heart" (Rachel Frost) all claimed that Moon was not involved.

I was present at questioning (it was one of my first cases, in fact), and ascertained through deep profiling that this was not the case, but that they believed they were telling the truth. Either way, my evidence was not admissible, and the four were indicted on several counts each of murder, attempted murder, and accessory to murder. In 1969 the death penalty was not in place, and so nearly 40 years later, they're still in prison, and still denying that Moon had anything to do with their acts.

Christopher Moon is still at large.

STORY HOOKS

• Cults and Thrill-Killers

Christopher Moon is an obvious World of Darkness version of Charles Manson crossed with the founders of the Symbionese Liberation Army (the folks who kidnapped and turned Patty Hearst). He's a pseudo-hippy thrill-killer. Most of all, he's the epitome of the charismatic Maniac, the cult leader who's obviously psycho but who knows exactly how to get the vulnerable and lonely onto his side. He's still out there, and maybe he's doing things differently. Personality cults of the kind that Charles Manson and his ilk founded are not as common, but that doesn't mean there isn't a market for a Maniac with a taste for the good things in life and an urge to drive people to murder. He could, perhaps, have moved into more extreme fringe religion, setting up a Branch Davidi-

an-style cult with a penchant for hoarding guns (and perhaps even contriving the inevitable showdown with the Feds). Or he could set up a UFO cult, like the Heaven's Gate group, who convinced themselves the Hale-Bopp comet was going to take them away and all they had to do was commit suicide.

In the movie *Safe*, a self-help guru takes in vulnerable people, extracts huge amounts of money from them and molds their thinking, more or less turning them into dependent zombies. Christopher Moon could be doing that these days. All he needs is a change of name and a shave and he's out there, running self-help courses, ruining lives and inciting people to kill. And they'll love him and thank him and blame themselves for anything they do. Getting into motivation and self help is the perfect career for a Maniac who never gets his hands dirty.



But then, a really prolific and smart Maniac has probably already done *all* of these things, one after another. The vehicle for control doesn't matter. All that matters is the death.

• Do You Know Where Your Kids Are?

Hunters are often ordinary people: people with teenage kids or kid brothers and sisters in college. That sort of thing. Kids and siblings tend to notice when their family member spends most of her spare time doing secret things that she can't talk about. Things that involve frequent visits to the ER. Things that mean washing blood out of clothing. And burning things in the back yard. It's not conducive to family harmony. And a teenager or college kid with a troubled family and a parent or once-close elder sibling who keeps a lot of secrets is precisely the kind of person a charismatic Maniac targets as a prime candidate for membership in his exploitative cult.

But then, it's Big Sis' fault for going out hunting monsters. Isn't it?

LOVE-BOMBING

Reverend Sun Myung Moon (as in Unification Church, as in "Moonies") came up with the name for it, but really it's been a tool of control in all sorts of ideological groups since time immemorial. The idea is that when someone joins, you make them really welcome. You invite them into your home. You shower them with affirmation and affection. You make them really welcome. You love them. You make them belong.

But the moment they step out of line, or ask questions, or express an opinion even slightly at variance with the accepted line of the cult, you withdraw it all. You ostracize them swiftly and totally until they change their ways and repent and come back into the fold. It's usually religious and political groups who do it, but you see it in everything from high-school sports teams to hobby clubs. Most groups who use the techniques don't even realize they're doing it. But then, that's part of the reason why it's such a powerful means of control. It comes naturally.

2009: TOM THUMB

Transcript of a British police interview, as retained by the European Operations Unit of Project TWILIGHT:

HAYDEN: Interview with DI Frank Crowe, conducted on [REDACTED]. Present with the suspect are DS Alice Crawford, and myself, DCI Michael Hayden. The interview commenced at 4.28pm.

CROWE: Come on. Mike, are we going to have to go through all this shit?

HAYDEN: You know the rules, Frank. I'm sorry, but there it is.

CROWE: Thanks for nothing.

CRAWFORD: DI Crowe. You're aware of the accusation?

CROWE: Straight to business, then.

CRAWFORD: DI Crowe—

CROWE: I heard you, princess.

HAYDEN: Frank...

CROWE: Just get on with it.

[pause]

CRAWFORD: At about 2am on the seventh of March this year, you are alleged to have entered, along with one Simon May, the home of Philip John Hammett, where you beat the aforementioned Mr. Hammett to death with a golf club.

CROWE: A six-iron.

CRAWFORD: What?

CROWE: I beat him to death with a six-iron.

[pause]

CROWE: Well, come on. I haven't got all day.

HAYDEN: You're admitting it?

CROWE: I killed him.

HAYDEN: Frank—

CROWE: I didn't have a choice.

CRAWFORD: I'm sorry. I don't understand.

CROWE: Don't play the innocent, princess. You know who he was.

HAYDEN: He was acquitted.

CROWE: Let me ask you. Were you involved in the Tom Thumb case?

CRAWFORD: We've read the relevant documents.

CROWE: Relevant documents my shiny pink arse. You didn't have a clue. Did you have to look at the crime scene? Did you get the thumbs of teenaged girls — girls of 19, 20 maybe — sent to you in Jiffy bags? Did you have to go and talk to those girls' families, knowing what he did to them? Did you get the letters and the emails?

HAYDEN: This is where it went wrong, isn't it?

CROWE: You what?

HAYDEN: You let it get personal. It happens, Frank. I've seen it happen. You've seen it. You had a personal investment in the case.

CROWE: I did not.

CRAWFORD: How long has your daughter been missing, DI Crowe?

[pause]

CROWE: You evil cow.

HAYDEN: Frank, you know it's-

CROWE: This has nothing whatsofuckingevery to do with Bianca.

CRAWFORD: It's been nine months. It's the most natural thing in the world to take her disappearance and-

CROWE: Don't come over all compassionate, princess. You're fucking awful at it.

HAYDEN: You were desperate to get an arrest.

CROWE: He was guilty.

HAYDEN: He was acquitted.

CROWE: They paid off the jury. Or threatened them. A bit of blackmail. His mates in that Hunt Club of his. I bet there wasn't a single one who they hadn't got to.

HAYDEN: Can you prove that?

CROWE: No.

HAYDEN: This doesn't justify killing him.

CROWE: He did it. He killed those girls. And if I hadn't managed to get him first, he'd have killed me.

HAYDEN: Which is why you were at his place at 2am?

CROWE: We were looking for evidence.

HAYDEN: Evidence against someone who had been acquitted in a court of law!

CROWE: He was guilty. I knew it as soon as he pointed his smug toff face in my direction. Do you know what he said to me as he went out of court that day?

HAYDEN: No.

CROWE: "Hurrah for the good old British legal system." He was taunting me.

HAYDEN: Just because he was an arsehole doesn't mean he was guilty. And it still doesn't explain why you broke into his house with May-

CROWE: Have you found him, by the way?

CRAWFORD: No.

HAYDEN: DS!

CRAWFORD: Sorry.

CROWE: It's all right, love. I hadn't thought you had. Slippery bugger.

HAYDEN: Why kill him, Frank?

CROWE: It's like I keep telling you. It's not like I wanted to. If I'd have wanted to kill him, I'd have got a revolver or something. The golf club was more... insurance. Anyway, we'd found the basement; full of the sickest stuff you ever seen.

CRAWFORD: The basement. The basement was empty when the police arrived, DI Crowe. It certainly didn't contain any of the things you claimed it did.

CROWE: That's 'cause he had insurance: his mates. The Hunt Club.

HAYDEN: You keep mentioning them. There's no evidence of such a group existing.

CROWE: They exist, all right.

CRAWFORD: It doesn't matter. You have no evidence.

CROWE: That's where you're wrong. The place was all CCTVed to hell. We were in the basement. He found us. Jumped out of nowhere like that bloke in the mask in that Friday the 13th film. Stuck a knife into May's shoulder, came for me like a nutter. Barely got out alive. Don't know how I managed it. All on film.

CRAWFORD: There is no CCTV footage.

HAYDEN: She's right, Frank. Cameras were all empty. The tapes were gone.

CROWE: I expect the Hunt Club would have got to the CCTV too.

HAYDEN: There is no conspiracy, Frank—

CROWE: They would have, if we hadn't first.

CRAWFORD: Sorry?

HAYDEN: Wait a minute. What?

[pause]

CROWE: We have it. Two crates full. As much as we could carry. And all the photos May took. We've got it in a bank vault. May had a few contacts of his own. I don't know what's on the tapes, but most of it was labeled with the names of the victims in the Tom Thumb investigation. The ones who weren't mentioned in the press, too. All of them.

HAYDEN: And you withheld—

CROWE: I withheld it from the people who cleared up. I'm giving it to you. I can sort you out with the key to the vault. I'd be careful, mind. Expect they'll be looking for it, too.

STORY HOOKS

• It's Good to Have Friends

Philip Hammett, the "Tom Thumb" killer, was a member of the Hunt Club, a society of slashers. With their connections and money, they were easily able to get him acquitted of the murder charge, and managed to clean up his home of all incriminating evidence in record time. They didn't bank on Frank Crowe's persistence, cunning and luck, however.

But Hammett isn't the only one out there, and while he fell victim to a few choice strokes from Frank's six-iron, others yet continue to kill. And they've got friends.

The Hunt Club is there to clear up evidence and plant other evidence. A hunter pursuing a prolific member of the Hunt Club may find the police look-

ing for him, as fingerprints and bloodied weapons start to point to the hunter as the killer.

It's hard to bring a killer to justice, but it's possible, and the Hunt Club have the means to buy the best legal help (several of them are in fact lawyers and barristers) and to toy with even the most incorruptible jury.

And some of these killers work for the police.

HUNTER VERSUS SLASHER

The slasher departs from the other post-human, in-human and trans-human monsters a hunter faces because he is fundamentally shallow. Although possessed of cunning, finesse and possibly even exceptional intelligence, the slasher is out for the killing, and little else.

A lot of people naturally seek some kind of reason behind the supernatural. In a world where vampires and werewolves and witches invoke the powers of Hell on a nightly basis, it makes sense to assume there's something behind it all. But slashers just happen. People do things to each other, or see things, or hear things, or find themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time, and sometimes nothing happens, but sometimes, here comes the slasher, and there's often no telling how or when such a thing comes about.

Sure, sometimes a slasher has a tragic childhood. Sometimes, someone who's seen too much killing goes wrong and starts becoming comfortable with it. But sometimes it just happens, and people die. And it could happen to anyone. Whether a possessing demon, or an accursed butcher's knife, or a simple fracture, it doesn't matter. It could take anyone. Vampires come into being because of the conscious, deliberate intent of the monster that created them. And everyone (who isn't a werewolf) knows that you become a werewolf after you've been bitten by one. Warlocks — well, that's their own fault.

But slashers? It could happen to anyone. It could happen to *you*. And if you're hunting these monsters, if you're trying to think like them, you're staring into that abyss they talk about, and we all know how the

abyss stares right back. That's a cliché. Thing with clichés, though, is that they usually get to be clichés because they're completely true.

TIER ONE

Hunters who work without the aid of a compact or conspiracy may not have the gear and the resources that working for a dedicated outfit grants, but actually, it doesn't put them at all that much of a disadvantage. Slashers are often solitary. And, with a couple of respectable exceptions, the compacts and conspiracies don't automatically know any more about any given slasher than a grass-roots band of men and women with a mission.

Slashers usually don't have meta-societies like vampires and werewolves do; they don't often form into covens. On the occasions that they do, these groups are terrible in the extreme: gleeful, arrogant killers like the Hunt Club; mindless horrors like the crew of the *Black Schooner*; degraded madmen like Bad Jack's men.

No one on this level goes out looking for a slasher to kill or capture: first-tier hunters *react* to these individuals. Someone they know falls foul of the hook-handed killer who lurks at Lover's Leap; the highway



heading into their city has become the hunting-ground for a diabolical, crazed hitch-hiker; the creepy family up the road have something (or *someone*) locked in the cellar and *it keeps getting out*.

The situation occurs, and our heroes try to do something about it. And then, of course, comes the part where they find themselves in That Slasher Movie, where suddenly it starts raining and the car breaks down and shadows begin to gather.

Sudden death lurks around every corner: who's the hunter now?

It doesn't always play out like that, of course. But a slasher is hard to catch. He attacks when you least expect it. He's just about to jump out from behind the next corner — no, wait, that was only a cat — or he's lurking behind the front door with his knife raised — no, it was the tree branches brushing against the door... The tension dissipates, you lower your guard, take a sigh of relief. And then the next thing you know, you've got a knife sticking out of your shoulder, or you've been hamstringed, or you're running with a bleeding head wound and the blood is getting in your eyes and you're starting to stumble because your head is swimming...

Or it'd be like that, if you were stupid enough to be alone. Unlike the hapless protagonists of the average slasher movie, seasoned hunters know that splitting up when faced with an unstoppable killer is the worst possible thing. More to the point, they're all probably armed and at the very least, prepared for something awful, even if they don't know what it is (as opposed to the cop in those movies who has the gun, but no idea what he's facing, the one who ends up dead in the first reel).

Except that even when you're with friends, the slasher is adept at separating you. Never splitting up is harder than you think. One slasher manipulates the environment, sets traps, changes circumstance. One drives wedges between you, makes your group fall apart emotionally.

With all the research in the world, the best your grass-roots hunters have to help them are their wits and luck. It might get them out of the story alive... but none of them should count on it.

GOING WRONG

Sometimes people who hunt monsters, being just people, cross the line. Like Freddy (Nietzsche, not Krueger) said: battle not with monsters lest you become one. He wasn't kidding. You can spend years on this, and the more you hunt the monsters, the less hope you find, the less good you see in the world. The scum rises to the surface. Everyone seems to be out for blood, and if they're not, it's only because they're either cowards or they're lying to themselves.

And there isn't a single damn person thanking you for what you're doing. Most of them think you're nuts. You've saved their lives more times than you can count. You've kept their kids safe for years. And they don't even think you're worth talking to. Where do they get off? They're complacent, and self-satisfied, and just as capable of turning into monsters as anyone else. You start to wonder if there aren't just two kinds of people: cattle and monsters. The cattle don't deserve to live. The monsters deserve to die.

You stop caring about the victims, maybe not caring when someone gets in the line of fire, or even using them as bait. You take a certain pleasure in torturing the people you suspect of complicity, or killing the innocent families of the monsters. The werewolf comes home to his parents, and finds his parents dead in the lounge, hanging from the light fitting with a note: *you're next*. The vampire owns an art gallery: all the staff die in the blaze. The magician has kids...

If you're not there yet, it's best not to think about it, about what you might become. You're fighting the monsters. You're doing the right thing. Yeah. Stick to that.

TIER TWO: COMPACTS

The hunter compacts don't on the whole have any systematic view on the slasher phenomenon. Most of them know slashers exist, and all of them have members who've met these crazed killers (and not come back to report). But they don't know what to expect, and generally, hunters who work for these groups are not really any better prepared than a ragtag cell of first-tier hunters.

What they do have, however, is back-up: first-hand experience from colleagues, money, a helping hand and sometimes even a bit of legal help. It can make all the difference to a hunter who is about to face a slasher. Providing she survives, of course.

THE LOYALISTS OF THULE

It's not the way of a scholar to enjoy the thrill of the chase. And as scholars, most of the Loyalists of Thule stay out of physical trouble as much as they can. They're the scholars, the thinkers. Let the other hunters see the blood — we'll hit the books.

The problem is that on the whole, hitting the books doesn't really help much. While it's quite



possible that a Loyalist might have access to the records of Nimrod the Tyrant, the Beast of Drury Lane, the Hag of Nola and the *Black Schooner*, who's to say she's even likely to connect them as examples of the same phenomenon?

In the end, it's in the field she's going to get her experience, and through research of narrow, local significance — the family tree of the weird old family that resides in the manor house, the secret records of the Monster of Glamis, the newspaper stories that cover the racist murder of some poor unfortunate who dared sleep with a white woman, an abuse case, a terrible accident, the report of five men who got acquitted of a murder (three of whom are now dead), and so on. This isn't "big picture" information. It's small scale, and it's specific, and when you do the legwork and dig up specific information, you attract attention.

It's impossible to avoid; it's as if some cosmic force keeps trouble looking for hunters, no matter how sedentary they are. The scholar who starts asking questions in the neighborhood about the odd little boy who killed his teenaged sister all those years ago and what happened to him might find that the little boy is all grown up and still fond of knives. The bookworm who figures out that the peculiarly high number of fatal accidents that have happened around the popular congressman

might not realize that the congressman knows all about his researches until he's running through the woods, his glasses broken and his ankle twisted, as someone confident and smiling comes for him with a vicious, heavy broken branch and the will to use it. The researcher who delves into the archaeological evidence late into the night for the Hag of Nola starts to hear noises in the corners of the museum's store room...

One of the terrifying things about some slashers is that even if they have no reason to know that someone is researching them, *they do*. They're often implacable and seemingly omniscient, almost impossible to fool, impossible to trap. And if you're a 90-pound weakling who's never carried anything heavier than a copy of the *Summa Theologica*, when the monster comes for you, all you can do is run.

Sometimes the running gets too much. The weight of guilt constantly put upon the Loyalists' shoulders and the knowledge of always being in the sights of any number of terrible supernatural creatures can make a person crack. A smart man or woman finds ways to fight back. Maybe she begins to wonder if the Loyalists really *should* carry the guilt for things — methods and acts — that could perhaps be used to take on the horrors of the modern age.

The Loyalists of Thule don't like to talk about Valerie Maynard, who somehow managed to rig up a warehouse as a kind of abattoir-cum-gas-chamber, and who tracked down a dozen werewolves. Through trickery, intimidation, ransom notes for already-dead children and a dozen other ploys, she systematically wiped out all twelve of the lycanthropes, along with their parents, siblings, partners and children. In the end, her factory of death was shut down by her own people, who considered what she was doing to be utterly obscene. But not before some of her former colleagues ended up in the gas chamber.

THE UNION

Hunters of the Union are in many ways like their tier-one counterparts, with the benefit of having something of a support network. Even so, the Union's online forums aren't much use: it's all urban legends. Some of the first-hand accounts might prove handy in the field, but every slasher has his own story and his own weakness. The Hag of Nola couldn't harm anyone innocent and had to come if you called her (not unlike the eponymous revenant in the film *Candyman*), but that was hardly the case for the monsters who crew the *Black Schooner*, who cut out their own tongues and cared little for whom they slaughtered. Nearly every case is unique, and even those who share characteristics (in game terms, Undertakings)

are different enough for it to be very difficult to see the similarities. That means a Union member might have an old warhorse standing beside him (or typing information into a forum thread from the other side of the world), but that doesn't mean it's any good.

Union members sometimes go over the edge. The difficulty of keeping hold of one's sanity, of protecting (and sometimes failing to protect) family and home can make them especially prone to become Avengers. A man whose wife and kids fell prey to some monster (it doesn't matter what kind) can fall far and fall hard. The Union are, let's face it, vigilantes anyway, and regardless of what the comic books say, vigilantism isn't generally conducive to mental balance.

The industrial-strength contempt that a slasher holds for the human race can make a man or woman do terrifying things, but more importantly, it can endanger everyone in the Union, anywhere in the world, because the last person you want to have access to your personal details is a bona fide psycho who no longer cares if you live or die.

**TOUGH ON MONSTERS,
TOUGH ON THE CAUSES
OF MONSTERS**

Union Forums > Field Updates > dealing with the root cause

AUTHOR	COMMENT
Blair1   registered user Join Date: Jan 2003 Posts: 207	01-21-2009, 2:17 AM dealing with the root cause It came to me the other day. I've been doing it wrong. All the monsters, they keep coming, and the reason they keep coming is because we're not dealing with the real root causes behind the monsters. People become monsters all the time. Ordinary people. We have to kill them before they become monsters. Pre-emptive strike, right? We kill the bastards before they're monsters. I know how it works. I worked it out. If you look in the right kind of way, you can see who's going to turn. It can happen to anyone, which is why you have to be alert. Wednesday's Child had it. I've been hunting with her for six months and I hadn't realized: she was one of them. I had to kill her. And her kids. I didn't like doing that. But it had to be done. United15 tried to stop me, so he had to go, too. Then I realized that maybe it was something to do with what we do and where we go. It's this place. This website. It's part of the problem. You read it, you get the taint. It's going to happen to me soon, I suppose, but I'm doing something about it. I know where some of you live. I'm sure they'll tell me about some more of you. I have to do it. It's not personal. POST REPLY QUOTE QUICK REPLY

THE CASE OF BOB SHELL

A real-world story: Bob Shell was a professional photographer of some repute. He worked as a film cameraman and edited an American photography magazine. He was also for many years a well-known member of the UFO community, perhaps best-known for being the professional who verified Ray Santilli's alien autopsy hoax as genuine.

In his spare time, Shell took pictures of girls tied up. In 2003, Shell was arrested for the homicide of one Marion Franklin. She was a model, and she had been found dead in his studio, tied up, and overdosed on morphine. She had apparently been sexually abused, both before and after death. In September 2007, Shell was found guilty of involuntary manslaughter and seven other sex- and drug-related charges (but not of defiling the corpse), and sentenced to a minimum of 32 years in a state penitentiary.

Shell still protests his innocence. And there are many in the UFO community who believe he was too close to the truth. Was he set up? Or did he go very wrong?

NETWORK ZERO

YouTube doesn't tend to host movies of serial killers or slashers. Well, it hosts clips pirated from slasher movies, but not the *real* ones. And there's the thing: it's one thing to post up a video of Bigfoot shambling across a stream. It's another to get video of a werewolf changing shape. But you don't get film of a mad unstoppable killer. And that's partly because you can't post actual death via most Internet service providers, and partly because slashers too often just look like people, and partly because if you're close enough to film the Hook Horror of Santa Barbera, you're probably not going to be alive long enough to post it on the Internet.

Still, like the Loyalists of Thule, hunters from Network Zero are curious sorts and they do research. Not all slasher events excite the interest of the Secret Frequency. The weird ones get the guys with the handcams coming along, the cases that connect to the old urban legends and ghost stories, the stories about underground colonies of pale-skinned mutants or the one about the dog gone feral that no one can kill.

Often, slashers turn out not to be quite as supernatural as people think they are. A Network Zero guy with a camera might turn up looking for Mothman with claws, only to find a madman in an oil-skin, goggles and a machete. Outside his buddy in the Union, his only defense is to try to make what he knows public and to get a tape to the cops before it's too late, but what good is circulating something no one believes to be true?

Unlike many other hunters, Members of Network Zero don't tend to go nuts and kill people. Still, it's possible for a hunter who's filmed too many hor-

rors to develop

something of a fetish for it. He starts wondering about setting things up, about *making* it happen. He keeps a collection of snuff movies... homemade ones. It's not common, but it's happened.

A celebrity of the Secret Frequency who goes wrong in this way probably won't last long before someone catches him. If he gets caught by the authorities, the chances are that his conspiracy-theorist buddies, many of whom value his film work immensely, won't believe he's guilty. Maybe they'll even try to stage a rescue or organize an escape (or get a group of hunters they know — your players — to try to break him out). Their success could be fatal.

NULL MYSTERIIS

In *Journal of Pathological Psychology* 1991, vol. 2, George Roberts of the University of Wales, Swansea, wrote a paper about slashers. It's important for a couple of reasons. First, Dr. Roberts' work was torn to pieces within the next two years, despite the fact that in several ways, he was right on the money. Second, Dr. Roberts got torn to pieces himself within about a month of initial publication. The paper sank without trace, which is par for the course when you do your research with Null Mysteriis. Of the organizations, the academics of Null Mysteriis have at least done some work on parts of the slasher phenomenon. The work isn't complete, or even particularly detailed, just a couple of journal articles and the proceedings of a symposium held in 1991.

They're aware that slashers exist, and several have strong ideas about the psychopathology of the "slasher condition." Their knowledge is vastly useful, and has saved lives, but it's only part of the story, and the phenomenon contains things the Rationalists of Null Mysteriis couldn't possibly understand. The Open Minds might be prepared to accept there might be more to it than simple psychology, but even so, they depend on the same ideas as the Rationalists. One or two of the Cataclysmicists have put forward the theory that the wild increase of the slasher phenomenon is yet another datum of evidence pointing towards an oncoming apocalypse, but even the Open Minds have trouble accepting that as a viable hypothesis.

More supernatural slashers pose a problem for Null Mysteriis, but the irony is that sometimes it's the legendary sort to whom a member is most vulnerable. For example, in the movie *Candyman*, the heroine stands in front of a mirror and calls the slasher's name five times *because* she doesn't believe and wants to show it's a sham. And of course, the urban myth is true and the killer comes to bloody life. A Null Mysteriis investigator can fall into the same trap: in showing that there isn't any ghostly marauder, he brings it to glorious, malevolent life.

Academics are weird: they can be the mildest men and women in the world, and yet can be mean-spirited and brutal when aroused on a subject that excites their passion. In-fighting at academic institutions is sometimes terrifying to behold. Few would perhaps go so far as to start slicing up their rivals, but then, most academics aren't faced with the half-eaten cadavers of their colleagues or forced to watch their deeply-held beliefs about the world fall to pieces as some witch or vampire does something impossible. Even so, if a member of Null Mysteriis *did* somehow become a slasher, he'd likely be a Genius or a Charmer, and operate on some cold, strongly binding code (consider the eponymous anti-hero in the TV series *Dexter*, a blood spatter analyst who hunts down serial killers using his formidable detective skills and then murders them, gorily).

THE PSYCHOPATHOLOGY OF AN URBAN LEGEND

Null Mysteriis published the proceedings of its 1991 round-table symposium in *The Psychopathology of an Urban Legend: Towards an Understanding of the "Slasher" Phenomenon* (London, 1991). Notwithstanding massive holes in its information, it's possibly the best single piece of scientific work done on the

slasher phenomenon, taking among its case studies the accounts of the Beast of Drury Lane, Jack the Ripper, Christopher Moon and many others, but wholly ignoring more extreme or supernatural accounts (read: any slasher with a Scourge Undertaking). VASCU actually uses it as a resource, and the libraries of Task Force: VALKYRIE, the Loyalists of Thule, the Lucifuge and the Malleus Maleficarum each contain more than one copy. The Field Projects Division of the Cheiron Group does not recommend its use.

A hunter with a copy of the book gets a +2 equipment bonus when using the Behavioral Science Tactic (see p. 132), but only when profiling a slasher with a Ripper Undertaking (Avengers, Brutes, Charmers, Freaks, and Geniuses). On the other hand, the Null Mysteriis academics present at the symposium avoided dealing with the more way-out cases, and hence *The Phenomenology of an Urban Legend* gives no help at all in profiling scourge slashers (Legends, Masks, Lunatics, Mutants and Maniacs).

THE LONG NIGHT

It's rare that the wild-eyed hunters of the Long Night have much in common (beyond the Vigil itself) with anyone in Null Mysteriis, but those few among the Tribulation Militia who have thought about the slasher phenomenon agree, to some extent, with the Cataclysmicists. Slashers are the foot soldiers of the apocalypse.

Their rationale is, of course, different. The slashers are Satan's mark upon society, the madness that comes from a world infected by sin. It's everywhere: you can feel it in the air, a miasma that clings to everything, that soaks your clothes, that makes you feel ill when you go out on the streets and see the filth that's peddled in every shop, on every billboard, on your television screens and radios...

As the henchman of the Adversary, the slasher must be stopped.

If it's ironic, it's not overly surprising that hunters of the Long Night fall into the ways of their enemies with terrifying regularity. The fear and the horror take their toll: the experience of the Long Night hunter robs the world of its beauty and hope — the world is corrupt, but faith offers no solace for them. Small wonder, then, that Long Night hunters sometimes become Avengers, Charmers or Geniuses, twisting their need to save the world to serve the urge to murder, or maybe even forsaking the path of righteousness altogether, secretly adopting the worship of Satan and offering victims to his name, all the while going to church, taking communion and singing along with the

hymns (hunters who become Charmers and Lunatics are likely here). The worst ones are the ones who *don't* forsake the faith, or at least think they don't. They kill in the name of God (sort of) anyway, and it only takes a slight twist to make a man or woman kill *anyone* in the name of God, becoming a grim, brutal Avenger or a simple kill-first-think-later Brute.

THE ASHWOOD ABBEY

When you're the kind of person who loves a good hunt, what better prey than a killer possessed of na-

tive cunning, speed, determination and a seeming inability to lie down and know he's licked?

It doesn't get any better than that. Of course, the Abbey members are mostly borderline psychos anyway, and slashers — particularly Charmers and Geniuses — might get a kick out of joining. Once or twice, the Freak-ish offspring of those inbred mon-eyed families you hear about have been brought along on hunts, kept on a tight leash (sometimes literally). There have been several members of the Ashwood Abbey who, over the years, have either maintained



A LETTER

—Received by the Central News Agency of London, September 27th 1888.

Dear Boss,

I keep on hearing the police have caught me, but they won't fix me just yet. I have laughed when they look so clever and talk about being on the right track. That joke about Leather Apron gave me real fits. I am down on whores and I shan't quit ripping them till I do get buckled. Grand work the last job was. I gave the lady no time to squeal. How can they catch me now? I love my work and want to start again. You will soon hear of me with my funny little games. I saved some of the proper red stuff in a ginger beer bottle over the last job to write with but it went thick like glue and I can't use it. Red ink is fit enough I hope. Ha. Ha.

The next job I do I shall clip the lady's ears off and send it to the police officers just for jolly. Wouldn't you? Keep this letter back till I do a bit more work, then give it out straight. My knife's so nice and sharp I want to get to work right away if I get a chance.

Good Luck. Yours truly,

Jack the Ripper

Don't mind me giving the trade name.

PS Wasn't good enough to post this before I got all the red ink off my hands, curse it. No luck yet. They say I'm a doctor now. ha ha



dual membership or transferred their membership to the Hunt Club (see p. 74).

Sometimes the members of the Abbey find a killer they respect and invite him to join — in part to get him off the streets and into some “productive” killings, in part to honor his twisted talents. In 1888, a group from the Abbey found Saucy Jack himself. The story is common currency among the Abbey: he joined, he was good at killing beasts, but then he got bored. When he went back to killing prostitutes, the Abbey ended up hunting him down and killing him.

Sometimes, someone finds out about the Abbey’s connection with the Ripper and tries to blackmail them, but it never works out; would-be blackmailers go the way the Ripper did. And that’s where it ends.

CATCHING JACK

Except that isn’t where it ends: see, Jack is still out there. No one knows what he is exactly. A ghost? A spirit? Something worse? Whoever he *was* doesn’t really matter. What he is now matters: a paragon or personification of murder, a veritable Patron Saint of Slashers.

The unwary or the mad can find out who he is with one of the three Ripper Letters that were published during the height of his career. The “Dear Boss” letter is kept at Scotland Yard, under lock and key now, but the other two letters, namely the letter addressed “From Hell” (originally accompanied by a human kidney) and the postcard signed “Saucy Jack” have been missing for over a century. They were originally stolen by one of Jack’s Ashwood Abbey colleagues in return for his aid, but vanished again when Jack went walkabout. They resurface sometimes, and hold the power to call Jack back from wherever it is he went when the Abbey killed him. Hold the letter in your hand and read it, and write another one back to him in reply. Burn your letter with a candle and there he is, all ready to do business, all smiles and expansive hands, teeth glinting in the light like the steel of a fine new butcher’s knife, ready to show you exactly how he did what he did. He’s always ready to find a new pupil.

THE HUNT CLUB

An irony: the Hunt Club isn’t an organization of hunters. It’s an organization of killers. Superficial simi-



larities between the Hunt Club and Ashwood Abbey (the affluence of their members, the exclusivity of their membership practices) cause some hunters to confuse them, or assume that one is a department of the other, but notwithstanding the occasional member of the Abbey who joined the Hunt Club, they're wholly separate organizations with their own structures and their own resources.

This isn't to say that they're not of use in a fight: a Hunt Club member might find the idea of facing a supernatural monster utterly thrilling. A hunter cell goes looking for a monster; they run into someone who can handle herself and who's after the same prey. The hunters make the entirely understandable error of thinking she's a good person to have beside them. The decision bears fruit in the short term, but after the monster's dead and the hunt is over — what then? And will our hunters be able to get out alive when their new friend decides they're her next quarry?

TIER THREE

The smaller organized groups of hunters may still rely a lot on luck, but even vast conspiracies don't have much to go on. The more powerful hunter agencies have the resources to deal with the slasher phenomenon but like the less powerful organizations, their response to the problem is reactive. And sometimes, not even that: some agencies that one would think would take pains to eradicate monstrous individuals don't even seem to care. Individual hunters belonging to these agencies often care deeply and fight just as desperately as their friends, but find to their shock and frustration that the back-up they need to succeed is not forthcoming.

THE CHEIRON GROUP

When you're at the heart of a conspiracy theory, practically nothing you do can convince anyone you're not. And the Cheiron Group just attracts wacky theories like a big old legend-magnet. The Scientologists reckon the Cheiron Group is one of the prime movers behind the Psychiatric Conspiracy. The Fundamentalists think they're one of the heads of the Great Beast. And among the Aegis Kai Doru a theory has been doing the rounds for years about how the very first slashers, the originators of the slasher phenomenon in fact, were those heroes of myth and legend. Of course, the very first of them was Heracles, who killed beasts, kings, and his own children in his fabled madness: and Heracles' tutor, the one who taught him to be a "hero?"

Cheiron.



The implication is that this is a symbolic representation of a more concrete truth: that the mysterious cabal who may or may not have founded the Cheiron Group *invented* the slasher phenomenon.

No one's ever going to be able to prove that one (we think), but it's interesting to compare that theory with the Cheiron Group's policy on slashers. For one, the FPD Handbook doesn't cover them at all, either as a phenomenon or as individual case studies. FPD agents who run into them are more or less on their own as far as background information goes.

This isn't to say that FPD agents *don't* run into them. Of course they do: they've got a free rein to investigate inhuman or supernatural phenomena with a view to recovering material, and a nine-foot-tall man with an urge to slice people up and an apparent invulnerability to bullets fits the bill quite admirably.

Besides, FPD agents often find themselves *wanting* to fight the monsters just as much as their fellows in the other compacts and conspiracies. It's not their fault if they get told by their masters the Cheiron Group doesn't want to retrieve any slashers and they don't count towards the quota. Which either means they don't consider the phenomenon to fall within their remit, or that they don't think they have anything more to learn.

Even stranger: an unsettlingly high proportion of FPD agents exhibit slasher behavior (often as Charmers, Geniuses, Lunatics or Maniacs) either because they turn slasher in the course of their work, or they were slashers in the first place. It's almost as if the Cheiron Group goes out of its way to get psychos on its side, and often long before they go out in the field.

It's even become part of Cheiron's corporate subculture: FPD agents, having absorbed the atmosphere of American-style business, talk about "Batemens" or "going Bateman" when they talk about slashers on the team, in reference to the protagonist of Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho*, the archetypal killer yuppie. Going Bateman seems to be an occupational hazard in the higher echelons of Cheiron. In the world of finance and business acquisitions, things can get a bit cutthroat. But in the Cheiron Group, it seems to be not nearly as uncommon as it should be for an executive in finance (like the titular *American Psycho*) to confuse mergers and acquisitions with murders and executions. Cheiron has ways of finding its executives darkest, bloodiest secrets, and the group, like so many global corporations, considers itself above the law. Executives who "go Bateman" get moved sideways to FPD as a matter of policy, long before any

outside authorities catch them. The idea is that their talents make the company some profit before they go too far off the edge.

These "Batemens" seem to be guinea pigs for all sorts of treatments. They get plied with pills and new therapeutic equipment at every opportunity, ranging from shock-collars right down to inchoate "genetic treatments", which might be attempts to cure the slasher of his tendencies (or hold them off), or to keep him docile and easily controlled, or to ramp up his aggression to even more inhuman levels. R&D isn't telling. And it's up to the agents of FPD to pick up the pieces when the inevitable disintegration happens and people who shouldn't be getting dismembered end up on the wrong end of a Bateman's knife. It's not half as uncommon as it should be for FPD operatives to go out looking for their own former comrades with the sole intention of putting them down and clearing up the mess.

THE LUCIFUGE

The 666 agents of the Lady Lucifuge view the increasing incidence of the slasher phenomenon in a way not unlike the way members of the Long Night do. They're the mark of Satan's hand in the world as it nears the promised Armageddon. Your average representative of the Lucifuge is a little more nuanced in his opinion than the Long Night zealot, preferring to imagine the slasher as being an unwitting tool in a much larger plan.

The Child of the Seventh Generation even has a kind of sympathy for the slasher, imagining him as being in much the same boat, a kind of unwitting bearer of the mark of evil. This doesn't stop the Lucifuge's agents from doing their damndest to destroy slashers. It's often kill or be killed, after all. But like all that the Lucifuge do, the act is bittersweet. It carries with it regret.

Of course, not all of the Children of the Seventh Generation join the Lucifuge, and a fair few of the ones who don't (or don't get the chance) find it easy to indulge their Satanic heritage. Going slasher is easy when evil is in your blood. When you're a child of Satan, what's left to you? And as is so often the way, these are the killers whom the Lucifuge's people can't help meeting — brothers and sisters. The sympathy for the killer that already exists in the mind of a representative of the Lucifuge can turn into much more than sympathy. The Devil's mark never really goes away. Surrendering to that is easy.

The Child of the Seventh Generation who falls onto the road of the slasher does it spectacularly, al-

ways becoming one of the more flamboyant and bizarre kinds of killer (in game terms, a Lucifuge character who becomes a slasher takes a supernatural Scourge Undertaking). Perhaps she becomes more obedient to the Laws of Hell (becoming a Legend) or develops a devilish magnetism (a Maniac). She might change physically, as the power of Hell grows ascendant within her, growing horns or hooves, or strange scales on her skin as she loses her mind and grows inclined to killing (a Mutant), or lose her face and her faculties altogether (a Mask). Or she perhaps cracks the other way, and becomes a single-minded destroyer of everything she sees that has even the slightest taint of her heritage (a Psycho). An agent of the Lucifuge who becomes a slasher doesn't often survive for very long. The Lucifuge herself takes an interest, seeming somehow to know when one of her own goes rogue and commissioning others to do something about it.

TASK FORCE: VALKYRIE

The Men in Black know about slashers as a vague, inchoate phenomenon, but most of what they know comes from monitoring the work of Null Mysteriis and VASCU. Often, they let the other agencies get on with the hard part of the work, if only because it saves resources (funny, though, how selective TFFV's masters are about the budget. It's almost as if they only mention it when it suits them. Not that this is anything more than an opinion. Nah, it's just paranoia).

As far as TFFV is concerned, the simple fact is that slashers often don't fall within their remit: they're not ENEs, they're just psychos. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and local law enforcement can deal with that one, and Task Force: VALKYRIE can continue pursuing their War Against Terrors. Besides, sometimes the slasher happens to be the son of a congressman, and you can't arrest him.

Of course, agents in the field know they're kidding themselves if they think that. These guys might just look (mostly) like people, but how come they don't fall over when they're shot? How come they can do things that normal people can't, like talk perfectly ordinary folks into their psychosis or somehow manage to

take out six heavily armed agents in the middle of a room without a scratch? How do they spring out from around corners and behind doors like that? No, there's something going on there. But try telling the top brass that. Official line is to let the ordinary Feds and cops handle this one, and concentrate on the werewolves and vampires and stuff.

The one exception, of course, is dealing with a slasher who used to work for TFFV. It's not common, but just like so many of the other compacts and conspiracies, the horror takes its toll on a person. Given that TFFV agents are often pretty shell-shocked by their experiences (sometimes before they even join up), it doesn't take as much as it should for them to go batshit crazy after a while. There's no counseling service for TFFV, no regulation psych assessment for agents who deal with demons and vampires on a regular basis. There's no way of telling when a cell working for TFFV will have to put a bullet through the head of a team member who's just sliced up half the population of some Virginia mountain hamlet because he's convinced they're monsters.

MALLEUS MALEFICARUM

Far, far too many killers have done their grisly work in the name of Holy Mother Church for the Shadow Congregation to be complacent or ignorant about the slasher phenomenon. Records talk of the Priest of San Ambrosio, who, in 1772, killed a hundred and one of his parishioners before immo-

THE EASTER PURGE

Between Good Friday, March 28th and Easter Sunday March 30th, 1834, Five Priests-Militant of the Malleus Maleficarum undertook a purge of the conspiracy's leadership in mainland Europe. Nine senior divines died that day, among them the Mother Superior of a respected convent in Rome, the Bishop of Badajoz in Spain, and one Cardinal Bertolli, who had been part of the Papal court. Pope Gregory XVI was not, by reputation, a man given to leniency, but even so, he personally bestowed upon the men who had performed the killings his unconditional pardon. The ringleader, one Helmut Krieger OSB, retired from active service in the Shadow Congregation and was created Bishop of Mannheim less than a year later. Presumably, Ambrogio Baudolino knew about it.

No record of the trial survives. The only evidence of what might have happened is a box in the Congregation's archives containing nine Bibles, bound in human skin, and nine notched knives.

lating himself. Or the Sister of Mercy who showed her particular brand of “mercy” to forty or more of the patients in her Dublin hospital in the middle of the 19th century. Or, of course, the Inquisitor of Badajoz, who contrived the deaths of literally hundreds of innocents in the high days of the Spanish Inquisition before being tortured to death on his own rack by an unknown hand.

It’s a cause for vigilance: an avenging soldier of the Church who faces too many terrible things can lose sight of who deserves wrath, who merits justice, and who warrants mercy.

Mother Church is, say the leaders of the *Malleus Maleficarum*, a reflection of Christ, of whom she is the eternal Bride. And as such, although the same yesterday, today and tomorrow, the Church exists in no vacuum: society changes and it is the Church’s duty to remain conversant with the world’s movements. And so it is that the Shadow Congregation recruits psychiatrists and profilers, who work alongside their ecclesiastical colleagues. Priest-Confessors absolve the sins of the Congregation’s field agents as part of the regular observance of the sacraments. And at the same time keep a close watch on the psychological balance of their colleagues for signs that they could go as wrong as so many of their predecessors.

On their hunts, the faithful of the *Malleus Maleficarum* concern themselves mainly with vampires and witches, but that doesn’t stop them from investigating the marks of Satan wherever they see them manifest. Too many slashers offer their victims to Lucifer for it to be a coincidence, say the faithful of the Shadow Congregation, and too many drink the blood of their victims for the Hammer to be able to ignore them.

The problem with a slasher incident is often that by the time you know you’re facing a slasher, you’re already in the middle of pursuit, if by some fluke you’re still alive. Still, the agents of the Shadow Congregation have access to well-furnished libraries containing much of the most recent and progressive psychological works maintained by the Order of Saint Ambrose. If there’s time to hit the books, the Shadow Congregation’s members have ample resources... as long as they have the opportunity.

ASCENDING ONES

The streets are full of monsters, but the truth is that if you can survive on the streets, you can survive anywhere. For all their ancient heritage, religious fer-

vor and occult skill, the vast majority of the Ascending Ones live on the toughest streets of a hundred cities worldwide. If they have little in the way of information about the slasher phenomenon, they have perhaps the best chance of actually dealing with it, for the simple reason that they are hardened to terrible things, supernatural and mundane. Many of them find killing easy anyway, or at least easier than they did when they started, particularly when they have chemical and alchemical aid. The powerful certainty that drives so many of them is their best friend and their worst enemy.

The Ascending Ones don’t tend to go looking for solitary monsters, on the whole. Their business lies with the more social monsters, the ones with organizations and conspiracies of their own; their plans are complex and rely as much on diplomacy as brute force. Faced with a cunning, implacable killer, the Ascending Ones can only react. The Jagged Crescent respond the best, perhaps, making use of an equal cunning, born of the streets and a savagery developed in the toughest field of all; the Knife of Heaven can be easily as implacable as the most determined Mask; and the Order of the Southern Temple bring an institutional culture of quick-thinking and intuition to the table.

In fact, sometimes it can be hard telling the difference.

The gang banger, the drug-dealer, the ruthless cultist and the hard-line fundamentalist all use violence to achieve their aims, and they *know* they’re right. It’s paradoxical: theirs is the absolute inflexibility of the trusted intermediary. It’s one thing to bring two warring parties to agreement. It’s quite another to agree with either of them. And to stand between two factions of the dead, or the changers of skins, is to see them, and perhaps to learn to loathe them more the better you understand them.

The work of the Ascending Ones can easily turn to bloodshed, if only a delicate balance collapses. It doesn’t take much to *want* to make it collapse, to start a war rather than stopping one, to kill someone (or something) and inject a little bit of personal editorial into the missives each side sends. The point of stopping supernatural turf wars is to keep the innocent safe. But they’re weak. Would they last five minutes on the street? If they wouldn’t, why do they deserve to be spared? If they can’t get out of the way, it’s their fault.

Complete disregard turns to a certain joy in seeing blood spilt. And then it’s too late, and not only is the Ascending One consumed with killing, but he’s just destroyed a round of negotiations that may have taken years



to set up, and might have wiped out the reputation of his group forever for every supernatural and social being in a radius of hundreds of miles. He's killed a legacy, as well as beings innocent and guilty alike.

Small wonder then that this has only happened a few times in the history of the Ascending Ones. All of the disparate factions keep a close watch on any member who looks like going off the rails, the better to leave him gutted in a storm drain before he can completely derail the Ascending Ones' work.

AEGIS KAI DORU

The urge for killing has infected the human race throughout history, from Nimrod with his desire to see men die in his deranged building work to Heracles with his homicidal rages.

The legends of Classical Greece tell of the Bacchae, who worshiped Dionysus and went mad, roving across the countryside of the Arcadian and Peloponnesian peninsulas. Men and women alike, they copulated wildly and tore living creatures apart with their hands and teeth. The myths of Pentheus and Orpheus attest to the psychotic nature of these people; and although orthodox histories describe the rituals in tamer terms, a germ of truth nests in the myths.

Bacchae existed who had gone mad and could only rape and kill; they did indeed wander in groups, less an organization of slashers than a plague who could convince you to join them with wild songs and lewd gestures; the alternative was to be dismembered by their blackened, bloody fingers and teeth.

The Aegis Kai Doru have their own record, telling of how they wiped them out, but only after several of their own joined them and had to be killed. In an underground maze in Athens once inhabited by the walking dead, they even today keep custody of a caduceus wrapped in a pair of still-living snakes, shut within a thin golden case. If it's held to the sky by a determined hand, people go wild en masse, transformed into an assemblage of Masks and Freaks who have the power to make others join them.

And this is one of the big secrets of the Guardians of the Labyrinth: they have many such artifacts in their possession, things that can make the most peaceful people kill. On Lindisfarne Island, a small monastic cell contains a Viking ax with a thirst for blood. A group of Guardians jealously stand watch in a tenement apartment in Brooklyn over the meat cleaver that drove Michael McKay mad and made him unstoppable, its handle still engraved with his strange killer's prayers and stained with 90-year-old blood. The mask

OTHER AGENCIES

There are other agencies out there who hunt monsters. A secret, quasi-masonic society named the Knights of Saint George (see **Witchfinder**) hunts witches, harnessing terrifying conceptual powers to aid them. Rumors of a group of Gnostic vampire-hunters emerge every so often. These "Cainites" (see **Night Stalkers**) are supposedly the survivors of a medieval heresy, and seem obsessed with ridding the world of vampires. And a group known as "Les Mystères" harnesses the power of voodoo to fight and capture beasts and rogue spirits (see **Spirit Slayers**).

These other groups have their emphases, but they've all come across slashers - or created them. Often, there's something of an overlap between other, better documented monsters and slashers. A slasher might have an obsession with Satanic imagery, or perform bizarre rituals with the viscera of his victims: how do you tell for sure that he's not a witch or an acolyte of some warlock? A slasher drinks the blood and eats the viscera of his victims. How can a vampire hunter not afford to investigate? A huge, bestial creature goes on the rampage: werewolf or slasher? Without checking it out, it's impossible to tell straight away, and by the time a hunter has got close enough to figure out that what she's fighting is not actually the vampire she thought she was after, it's too late.

A hunter who gets in the way of a slasher is committed, for the simple reason that just because a hunter isn't interested in a monster, it doesn't mean the monster is going to cease to be interested in him. And no matter who the hunter is, no matter what his intention, when you have a slasher's attention there will be blood.

of
the Con-
tinent Highwayman,
Nick Herbert, who shot fifty
men and women dead on the
roads of Nottinghamshire in the late
18th century, but never stole a penny, sits
in a chest in a church in the town of Melton
Mowbray, and the vicar rarely lets it out of his sight.

These are the Tools of Blood; and more exist. The Aegis Kai Doru is no more likely than any other conspiracy to run into a slasher, but after the fact, they're often there to help clean up and retrieve what's left. They know well that slashers are not normal people, that even the most explicable cases have some extra-normal cause. Items these people leave behind become charged with some sort of emotional energy, or so believe the Guardians. A killer's knife or cleaver; a gun, a badge, a mask, a coat: all these things could one day be the means by which another man or woman goes mad and gains the desire to kill.

Factions within the Aegis Kai Doru argue about what should be done with these objects. Members of the Temple insist that these things should be kept safe, and never allowed to fall into the wrong hands. The Scroll's scholars, meanwhile, agree in principle, but see little value in keeping things that have no use. Many members of the Sword agree with the Scroll on that point at least but insist that this is why they have to try to find a way

to use
these things to up-
hold the old Vow. The Aegis Kai Doru stands at an impasse on this point. It's probably for the best: experience has shown that sometimes a Guardian can fall prey to temptation, and see what happens if you use one of these Blood Tools, just once...

In 1976, a riot broke out in Athens, and dozens of people died in seemingly needless violence. A single press photograph of the day showed a crowd of rioting people, and in the background, a naked woman holding aloft what looked like a caduceus.

A Guardian who absconds with one of the Aegis Kai Doru's treasures has nowhere to run: sooner or later, his former masters will hunt him down like a dog. If he absconds with one of the Blood Tools, the hunt is doubly desperate. If he isn't caught, the killing begins, sooner rather than later.

VASCU

The slasher receives a definition thanks to the Vanguard Serial Crimes Unit. They're a small, under



funded federal agency (part of the FBI, actually), and on paper they're about investigating and profiling serial killers and spree killers.

What they don't say on paper is that they maintain a small but powerful group of psychics. A pseudoscientific procedure known as the Wintergreen Process awakens in latent psychics the power of clairvoyance, directed towards investigation. These "Teleinformatics" are both incredibly useful and terribly, terribly dangerous.

VASCU operatives don't just investigate crime scenes: they feel the emotional resonances in these

places. They detect lies. They ask eerily pertinent questions. They see the past. They can perform amazing intuitive leaps in research and profiling.

The biggest obstacle VASCU faces is that hardly anything its agents' powers uncover is admissible evidence in a court of law. Their constant frustration is that time and again a slasher goes free to kill, acquitted of charges that the prosecuting agents *know* are true.

Small wonder, then, that so many of them go mad.

V.A.S.C.U.

VANGUARD SERIAL CRIMES UNIT

Serial murder is one of the crimes that most homicide squads hate. People who kill on more than one occasion have a fundamental disconnect with the normal human way of thinking. Even the best detectives and profilers can make mistakes, and those mistakes cost lives. If the police department believes the murderer to be a serial killer, it has the option of calling in some assistance.

The FBI maintains a specific unit of agents who deal with spree-killers, serial killers, and slashers. VASCU dispatches agents to assist police investigations, and maintains sleeper agents in the field. These agents look for evidence of all kinds of killers, from deranged sociopaths to supernatural terrors. Unlike other groups who hunt “monsters,” VASCU has one major benefit — and it’s also their greatest handicap. Vanguard agents are bound by the law, and that means bringing killers in to see a fair trial wherever possible. Modern America is pretty far from the Wild West, and lawmen can’t just shoot people they’re sure are killers — even if those killers can shrug off a fire ax to the skull.

VASCU has jurisdiction over any suspected serial murder. Before the police can call them in, they need three murders suspected or recorded with the same *modus operandi* — the same characteristic pattern and style that indicates one specific murderer. In extreme cases, dubbed “chainsaw massacres” by agents too green to have seen one and those too jaded to care, those three murders happen at once in an orgy of violence. In other cases, the serial killer is involved in separate crimes linked by a single method. When the murders are spread out like that, local homicide detectives involve VASCU when something plainly weird is going on — the killer might eat his victims, or

leave evidence that he’s far stronger or smarter than normal humans.

In some cases, it’s not the local police department that calls the Feds. It could be someone in local government, a mayor wanting people to see him doing something about the killer terrorizing his city. Other times, a normal person makes the call. While officially VASCU cannot respond directly to reports of crimes from citizens — that’s what the police are for — they do have a great deal of leeway when it comes to cases that agents uncover as part of their own investigations and intuitions. The unit’s unique nature means that an agent can find a way in to any case that grabs his attention.

Vanguard agents aren’t like any other FBI agents. Most of them have picked up the basics of criminal profiling, and most also know their way around a crime scene, but that doesn’t get anyone the amount of flexibility that the Bureau gives to VASCU. Every agent in the Unit is unique among the FBI. Why?

Because every agent is *psychic*. Criminal profilers claim they get into a killer’s head. A VASCU psychic does that directly, feeling everything that a killer feels. The best forensics teams can re-create what they think happened at a crime scene, but a Vanguard agent can stand at the scene and see the killer plying his deadly trade inside the *theater macabre* of his own mind.

The unique nature of its agents is VASCU’s little secret. Though every member of the unit is an FBI agent on paper, anywhere up to two-thirds of their membership would have failed the agency’s normal rigorous training. They get in through a loophole. The physical tests that prospective agents go through don’t just monitor heart-rate and blood pressure. They also test for psychic latency, scanning the subject’s brain-waves. Roughly

**THE ONLY THING WORSE THAN OUR JOB
IS WHAT HAPPENS IF WE DON'T DO IT.**

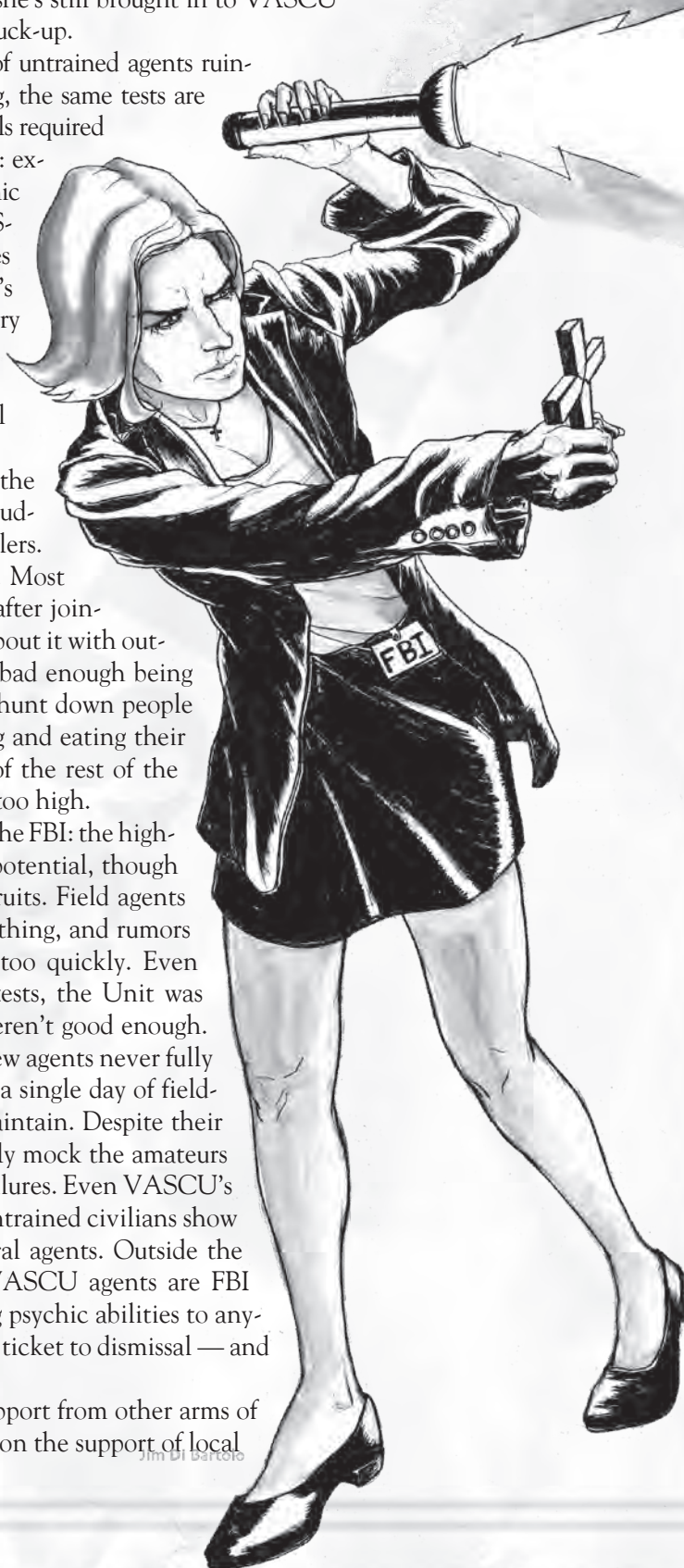
one in every hundred prospective agents tests positive, and even if one of them fails the rest of her training, she's still brought in to VASCU — assuming she's not an unmerciful fuck-up.

To avoid VASCU being a pool of untrained agents ruining investigations with their bumbling, the same tests are administered during the yearly physicals required by the FBI's health insurance provider: existing agents who test positive for psychic potential merit a quick transfer to VASCU. The wing of Human Resources that deals with the unit ensures there's never more than two "newbies" to every qualified agent. When they've too many new entrants, HR simply puts psychic-positive recruits on hold until they can make up the numbers.

Neither the new recruits nor the transferred agents know *why* they're suddenly tasked with hunting serial killers. A Glock and a badge only go so far. Most agents discover their talents shortly after joining the unit, though they don't talk about it with outsiders — not even other agents. It's bad enough being taken from your day job and told to hunt down people who see nothing wrong with cooking and eating their neighbors, attracting the attention of the rest of the Bureau would ramp that pressure up too high.

VASCU is an open secret inside the FBI: the high-ups know about the agents' psychic potential, though not how Vanguard finds its new recruits. Field agents from outside the unit aren't told anything, and rumors quickly die out — perhaps a little too quickly. Even before the introduction of psychic tests, the Unit was a dumping ground for agents who weren't good enough. With fully two-thirds of VASCU's new agents never fully qualifying as an FBI agent, or seeing a single day of fieldwork, that's an easy reputation to maintain. Despite their many successes, other agents routinely mock the amateurs and make special note of the unit's failures. Even VASCU's successes are a cause for friction, as untrained civilians show up well-trained policemen and federal agents. Outside the Bureau, nobody knows the truth. VASCU agents are FBI agents, plain and simple. Mentioning psychic abilities to anyone outside of Vanguard is a one-way ticket to dismissal — and possibly criminal charges.

Though they may not get full support from other arms of the FBI, Vanguard can usually count on the support of local



police. Federal law has provisions for FBI agents who discover a serial murderer through their own investigations to liaise with local police departments to corroborate their investigations and arrest the suspect. Even so, that support is often too little, too late. By the time an agent has enough evidence to call in the cavalry, he's likely already on site — and in great danger. All too often, untrained VASCU agents are the only people who stand a chance of bringing a slasher to justice. All the psychic abilities in the world can't help them, and an agent who succeeds often owes his life more to dumb luck than training or skill. Police departments who have a lot of contact with VASCU build a picture of them as hot-headed glory hogs, but even that's more a result of circumstance than character.

Vanguard's remit covers all kinds of serial murders, no matter who commits them. Some agents never see anything stranger than a twisted serial killer, but they're in the minority. Whether an agent uncovers a cult sacrificing humans for their own strange purposes or strange creatures released from an underground research facility, everyone ends up with some experience with the darker side of the world. Agents who develop psychic talents soon find that they're not the only supernatural things in the world. Whether they encounter a group of killers that can take on the shape of beasts, or a crazed murderer who will not stay dead, their remit goes beyond the mundane, deep into the murky parts of the world where the supernatural is very real.

TERMINOLOGY

The profiling community, and through them the FBI, defines different kinds of serial murder. Though this book refers to slashers and serial killers as a general term, some players may find that knowing more accurate terminology assists them in roleplaying a law enforcement agent.

Serial killers are people who kill a number of people — in America, a serial killer has to have killed three people to earn the title. Usually, serial killers are identified before there's a specific suspect thanks to all the murder sharing a *modus operandi*. What distinguishes serial killers is that

each of their crimes is separate — there's usually a cooling-off period between their crimes so that the killer can gain psychological gratification. The murders are usually linked both through the killer's *modus operandi* and through common elements in the victim's lives. The crimes involved are usually first- or second-degree murder; manslaughter is only involved when the killer requires the psychological "fix" of killing and doesn't have the time to prepare.

Spree killers murder a large number of people over a range of locations. The majority go through two phases, guided and random. The initial, guided phase involves a number of planned-out killings which tend to take place within a single area — a comfort zone. The latter phase involves indiscriminate killings. The killer deviates from his *modus operandi* to kill more often, usually at a predetermined destination. A smaller number proceed straight to the random stage. The lack of cooling off period between these murders implies the target doesn't get psychological gratification. A large number of spree killers commit suicide either with their own weapon or by threatening armed police.

Mass murderers kill a large number of people in a short period of time. Rather than tying the murders together by *modus operandi*, a mass murderer's victims are all part of a single event. The official definition of a mass murder is "a crime involving the murder of four or more victims at one location, in the course of one event." As the broadest category of killers, mass murderers don't have many psychological trends — while one man goes postal after being fired, another strangles random women and a third stabs people out of a sense of religious fanaticism. Most demonstrate an abnormal amount of anger in their lives before they snap, and the source of that anger gives clues as to the trigger event — the event that starts a killer's rampage.

Slashers are a category of multiple murderers that only exists in the World of Darkness. Of the slashers detailed in this book, rippers can fall into the other three categories above, but scourges are a category unto themselves. The unique categorization is due to their paranormal capabilities — whether they are mutated freaks

DEPARTMENTAL CONFLICTS

The Vanguard Serious Crimes Unit isn't the only group of monster-hunters working for the Government. Task Force: VALKYRIE takes the fight to the supernatural with black suits and big guns. There's no love lost between the two conspiracies, however.

Task Force: VALKYRIE hunts monsters. They don't have to profile their targets, check out rap sheets, interview witnesses, or add their results to ViCAP. The black sedans pull up, a bunch of

guys with big guns get out, and the monster's a red stain — or dragged away to some offshore "black site" prison. VASCU doesn't hold with any of that. It hunts serial killers, not monsters, and it's a division of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Criminal Investigations Branch. Just because its agents deal with supernatural crimes doesn't change the fact that they're dealing with crimes.

Every so often, VALKYRIE's agents barge in and

take over a Vanguard operation. There's nothing that VASCU can do in this particular pissing match — Task Force: VALKYRIE has the ultimate jurisdiction. It's the Vigil's equivalent of the homicide cops who have the FBI take over their case. There's even a standing joke that form VOS-F5 — the principle bit of paperwork for agents who have the Men in Black stomp over their case — stands for "VALKYRIE on scene, Feds shitcanned."

of nature or unthinking beasts. The US Bureau of Justice Statistics defines a slasher killing as "killings involving at least three victims where the killer has capabilities that exceed the normal human spectrum." While local police departments can choose to call in VASCU for other killings, a standing Federal law requires VASCU involvement in slasher cases.

Note that the definition of "slashers" used by the Government includes *all* supernatural killers, not just tier-three slashers. Werewolf packs, manifested ghosts, rogue bloodsuckers, witches who rely on human sacrifice, and alien creatures that transplant human brains into strange machines all fall under the definition — and thus under the remit of the Vanguard Serial Crimes Unit. Certainly, it's no easy task to arrest a manifested demonic spirit, but... well, that's VASCU's problem.

HISTORY

The VASCU has its roots in Hoover's post-war reorganization of the FBI. At that time, he recognized that serial murderers often went undetected when the murders took place in different states. His response was the Repeat Crimes Unit

(RCU), a group of agents charged with investigating murders with the same *modus operandi* but in different locations. Agents of the RCU could only support local police departments, moving in to assist in the field when called upon. A number of repeat crimes involved inhuman serial killers and supernatural monsters, and the RCU started to get its reputation as the FBI's monster-hunting wing.

THE SOCIETY OF TWELVE KEYS

The RCU wasn't the first group to tackle slashers: the Society of Twelve Keys was the first organization dedicated to investigating serial murderers. It was founded in 1890 by police detectives from Whitechapel CID, Scotland Yard's central office, and the City of London Police. The officers involved had all been involved in the Ripper murders, and recruited from both within and without the police forces of the time. The Society didn't actually apprehend the Ripper, but they made life much harder for the twisted cult of personality — "the Abbey" — that he built around him. By World War II, the Society had nearly three hundred members throughout the United Kingdom and twenty more in the US. Members shared

TWO KINDS OF AGENTS

The agents who make up the Vanguard Serial Crimes Unit come from two sources. One group consists of trained FBI agents. Of those, some have worked for the FBI for a long time, others only have their psychic potential discovered once they complete special agent training. They're the ranking agents, the ones who take charge in most field offices. In game terms, these agents join the unit with two dots in Status (VASCU).

The majority of agents are recruited during training. Most accept as soon as Vanguard asks them for a follow-up test. Others try to go through the full training, but flunk out for some reason. Due to critically

low staffing levels, VASCU keeps their offer on the table. These agents tend not to go out unaccompanied. After six or so months in the field, most are treated the same as trained VASCU agents (and should buy up their Status in the Unit) but when they join the unit these agents have one dot in Status (VASCU).

Note that most FBI agents who do the work of VASCU agents have attained Special Agent rank — in game terms, two dots in Status (FBI). This Status can be bought separately, representing an agent who's gone through full training but who doesn't have much pull in Vanguard, but see the bonus granted for the third dot of Status (VASCU).

expertise and investigated both serial murders and suspected supernatural crimes.

In 1949, the FBI approached the American members of the Society of Twelve Keys to lend their needed expertise to the RCU. To a man, they accepted. Their history ends there, but the larger British society carried on. Over the intervening years, improvements in investigation techniques and the lack of civilian assistance in police operations left the Society a shadow of its former self. The death-knell for the society rang in 2000, after the British police caught a number of high-profile serial killers without the Society's assistance. They live on in name alone, as a way

for British police forces — and through them, the European Police Office — to bring in VASCU resources and expertise when slashers ply their trade across national borders.

CAHULAWASSEE

The RCU saw some success, but also some failures. The most notable failure was the Cahulawassee Massacre. Six men went missing when on a trip down the Cahulawassee River in the Georgia wilderness. One of them was the brother of an RCU agent, and the disappearance brought the attention of the FBI. The investigation soon linked the disappearance to similar events up and down the river in both Georgia and Alabama, giving the RCU justification to act.

The investigation discovered the men had been killed by a local family who had cooked and eaten their bodies. On October 23, 1953, a squad of agents moved in on the family's isolated farm. They were seen and engaged in a brief but bloody shootout. All but two of the RCU agents died. The

family's bodies showed extreme mutation; reports from both agents indicate an incredible resilience to physical damage, potentially spawned as a result from generations of in-breeding. The loss of so many agents, combined with evidence that the family had been killing and eating people for at least fifty years, lead people at the highest echelons to ask if the RCU was as effective as it could be.

RESTRUCTURING

Hoover's reorganization of the RCU came into force on November 2, 1953. The new Serious

Crimes Investigation Unit (SCIU) had the power to investigate any crimes that involved at least three deaths directly, rather than waiting for local police to request assistance. The second major change to the unit removed the requirement for the crimes to occur in multiple states. This reorganization laid the basic rules of engagement that carry forward to this day.

The SCIU drew in a number of psychological profilers who had previously served under the jurisdiction of the Office of Strategic Services or local governments. These profilers provided the SCIU with a great deal of support, and the unit was one of the first to commonly profile serial killers to catch the right criminal. They also started to profile supernatural killers, and over time they started to isolate personality traits common to different kinds of monsters. Due to a lack of personnel, profilers often went along with field agents on investigations. While some went through full FBI training, others were agents on paper alone, untrained and unsupported in the face of people who had no problems killing indiscriminately.

The prevalence of psychological methods led to Dr. Barbara Wintergreen being relocated to the SCIU in March 1973. Dr. Wintergreen had been working for the CIA on project MK-ULTRA, the Government's psychic research program. MK-ULTRA was forcibly disbanded less than two months later, but by that point any evidence of the team sequestered away within the SCIU was long gone. Hidden within a whole different agency of the alphabet soup of Government departments, Dr. Wintergreen's team could continue their research in peace. Their effects wouldn't be felt for five years.

THE WINTERGREEN PROCESS

Dr. Barbara Wintergreen was a maverick among mavericks. Most of the MK-ULTRA research concerned extra-sensory perception, using the abilities of people with suspected remote-viewing abilities to spy on Soviet operations without ever leaving the continental United States. While some people were able to use their abilities normally, other flourished only after treatments with psychoactive drugs, most commonly LSD. Dr. Wintergreen's team was looking into the effects of other drugs, primarily ayahuasca, though she didn't reach a breakthrough

until after she was seconded to the SCIU.

Her breakthrough involved blending dimethyltryptamine (DMT) with a heavily modified Harmala alkaloid that the doctor referred to as a "telepathine extract." When the drug is administered within a carefully-measured cocktail of other chemicals, it bonds with receptor sites on the brain and supercharges the subject's information processing centers, unlocking abilities that appear (and by some definitions *are*) psychic in nature.

When VASCU revised the Wintergreen Process, they realized that most agents would either start over-thinking their newfound abilities or reject them entirely. Trained FBI agents wouldn't go for what amounted to barely-tested drug therapy. The Director of Operations reasoned that psychic abilities were significantly easier to explain, and included covert tests for compatibility with the Wintergreen Process in the Bureau's physical screenings. Agents and applicants who tested positive — and were therefore likely to develop "psychic" powers through the process — swiftly received reassignments to VASCU. Only afterwards did they learn that the FBI tests every agent for psychic potential, a lie that explains why an agent's recruited without leading to a mass freak-out.

Those agents who undergo the process describe it as "otherworldly." Several have compared their experiences to alien abductions, or particularly harrowing hallucinations — a side effect of the drugs bonding to receptor sites on the brain. Despite their similarities, every agent who undergoes the process experiences a very personal visitation that touches on memories from their childhood. After the visions pass, the agent awakes in a reception room where she undergoes tests to determine what abilities the process awakened within her. Though everyone goes through the same process, everyone's brain is different and the specific properties of an agent's enhanced mind usually takes a few forms that VASCU scientists have isolated over the past twenty-five years (see *Teleinformatics*, p. 165).

The real nature of the Wintergreen Project is one of the few secrets that Vanguard holds from even its own agents. Anyone who leaks the lie

LEADING FROM THE FRONT

Other FBI units have a large and convoluted chain of command. On paper, Vanguard is no different. There's all manner of agents in a long and twisted chain between most agents in the field or staffing Lansing and the Director of Operations. In reality, that's not the case. Individual agents hold positions in the chain without any of the responsibility. The current Director of Operations insists on working every hour of every day, taking on more responsibilities in order that more of his agents can work in the field.

about "psychic latency testing" to fellow FBI agents gets kicked out in short order, along with a gag order so strong that even the supermarket tabloids think twice before listening. An agent who finds out the truth about the Wintergreen Process, or any background on Dr. Wintergreen and MK-ULTRA, had better keep it to herself. That kind of information is for the Director's eyes only, and an agent who can't keep his mouth shut is on a one-way trip to amnesia through electro-shock therapy. Some secrets are just too dangerous.

the agents investigating them, or committed suicide to avoid a trial. The SCIU was taking flak from sources both within and outside the Bureau, who saw the unit as a dumping ground — by late 1978, other departments sent their slackers to the SCIU so they could be slasher fodder, drawing the killers out for the "real" agents to arrest. By 1979, the SCIU was in a bad state. Though it had a reasonable amount of success in capturing serial killers, its track record against supernatural killers was in the shitter and getting worse with almost every case.

In 1979, the remaining agents who had undergone the Wintergreen Process used the powers that the process had awoken in them to capture three slashers. One of the killers burst into flames when exposed to sunlight on her way to trial, but the other two ended up on death row. The high-profile arrests prompted the SCIU to re-examine Dr. Wintergreen's research. Every agent in the SCIU was given a psychic latency test, and those who passed were given the option to undergo the process. Almost all of them accepted.

The sudden uptake of the Wintergreen Process galvanized the agents and profilers of the unit. Though they remained chronically undermanned, the upper echelons of the FBI agreed to test other FBI agents. The psychic agents, redirected into the SCIU, provided enough manpower for the unit to start being more pro-active. For the majority of the 1970s, agents relied on local police liaisons, but with the sudden influx of agents — and psychics at that — slasher killings old and new started resulting in arrests. Agents of the SCIU scored a tremendous victory in Haddonfield, when they finally put to rest a killer who wouldn't stay in his grave.

DEPARTURE

After documenting her means of activating latent psychic abilities, Dr. Wintergreen grew restless. The SCIU ignored her recommendations and sent agents out without the proper training or information. Agents who had undergone Dr. Wintergreen's process solved a number of high-profile slasher cases, yet the chain of command believed the process wasn't fit for field deployment — after one of the agents suffered paranoid delusions and two others disappeared, their fears seemed well-founded. The doctor herself vanished, along with her later research notes, in October 1978.

Slasher cases received much wider media attention as the '70s wore on, both in the United States and across the world. Several slashers, especially those with supernatural capabilities, killed

VANGUARD

After Haddonfield, the FBI restructured the department once more. Despite the newly-empowered investigators, numbers still weren't on their side. The restructure instigated psychic latency testing during the physical that every applicant goes through, and also brought in testing of all existing FBI agents. The tests piggyback on a standard physical, and only agents who have the potential to develop psychic power even know that the Bureau looks for potential mind-readers.

THE LANSING FACILITY



The Vanguard Serial Crimes Unit took on all recruits and agents who had the potential to develop psychic abilities. While new recruits were sent straight to VASCU with minimal training, everyone involved in the unit's creation signed off on a strict two-to-one ratio of inexperienced recruits to veteran agents.

Since the reorganization, which was completed in 1982, VASCU has become the world's leading authority on serial killers, from human mass murderers to inhuman slashers, murder cults, and nightmares given form. While they are an arm of the FBI, their links to the Society of Twelve Keys means that agents may be called upon to support investigations against slashers across Europe and possibly beyond. Because of their expertise and mental powers, VASCU agents are in high demand. Despite their ongoing tests, the department is chronically undermanned — only 1% of applicants to the FBI display psychic potential. Despite their lack of manpower, agents continue to investigate and arrest serial killers. They have to. They're the closest thing to law enforcement that most monsters will ever see.

THE LANSING FACILITY

For a long time, VASCU had no authority to hold serial killers without charge or trial. Though their focus is on capturing and apprehending killers, some slashers are just too damn dangerous. With presidential approval, Vanguard researchers set to designing a prison facility specifically for supernaturally-powerful serial killers who could not be held within the regular prison system. In 1992, construction began on the Lansing Facility. It was completed in 1996.

The facility is the first prison to qualify as "ultramax;" a level of security even higher than the federal supermax security facility in Florence, Colorado. The building itself is a repurposed nuclear bunker outside Lansing, Missouri. The staff and guards are all VASCU agents. Psychics tend to have abilities that allow them to read prisoners' minds to detect escape attempts or control individual prisoners, and they're placed strategically throughout the facility. They specialize in defining methods of incarceration for slashers who cannot normally be captured. Most cells are sealed from the rest of the complex by at least

SLIPPING AWAY

A VASCU agent needs an incredible amount of self-control. Most of the people he arrests have no respect for human life, and would just as happily kill him as look at him. He has to remain strong and only shoot in self-defense. If he doesn't, he's no better than the monsters he hunts. A few agents manage to carry out a covert program of slasher executions, convincing their superiors that every shot fired was in self-defense. While some agents — occasionally even a whole

field office — are content to turn a blind eye, the unit as a whole cannot allow those agents to go unpunished.

Every VASCU agent's worst nightmare is a fellow agent gone rogue. After a while, a rogue agent starts going after people who display the psychological traits of a serial killer, even if those people haven't killed anything. At that point, there's no difference between him and the killers he hunts. It's up to Vanguard agents to capture the rogue before he can do more damage.

two feet of steel-reinforced concrete, with the only access through airlocks and the only communication being through two-way audio link. The staff customizes some cells to counter the capabilities of scourges and other monsters.

Though the Unit incarcerated a small number of slashers throughout the late 1990s, a rider on the 2001 USA-PATRIOT act allows for the unconditional and unlimited imprisonment of serial killers who present a clear and present danger to human life and who are not able to stand trial for whatever reason.

If VASCU has access to such a facility, why do they bother bringing slashers to trial?

In part, it's because the Lansing facility is small. There's space for less than two hundred inmates, and each is held for life — in the case of some mutants and atavisms, that could be a very long time. The bigger reason is that most slashers would never see the facility. Part of the legal requirement for the unlimited incarceration clause states that the Director of Operations has to convince not just the FBI but the Supreme Court

that an individual must be locked up in the special facility, and every agent working on the case helps prepare his brief.

Many agents aren't exactly happy about operating their own version of Guantanamo Bay: it's there as a last resort for killers who cannot be brought to trial after arrest — a small number, but one that grows every year. There's already over a hundred prisoners in Lansing, and while the Director of Operations is lobbying for an additional facility, it may take a disaster in a courtroom to sway the President's opinion.

FIELD OPERATIONS

Different cases call for different degrees of VASCU involvement. When an agent's called to support a local police department, she may spend more time applying her skills and paranormal abilities in analyzing evidence and compos-

ing a psychological profile of the case. Depending on the police department in question, she may be part of the bust or left trawling crime scenes long after the crime scene units have left the place dry of trace evidence. Larger police departments tend to have less animosity toward VASCU agents simply because they have less contact with the Feds. The New York Police Department has a range of psychological profilers, forensic scientists, and experts in all kinds of murder on hand, so calling in Vanguard is a last resort — something that only happens when all the experts can't put it together. Small-town police call in the Feds whenever they get a report of a serial killer or a slasher, and some can get sick of Vanguard coming along and stealing their thunder. A few are glad for the help, but they're definitely in the minority.

Whenever the police decide things don't make sense, VASCU agents are often left to lead the investigation. Most police departments would rather lose some Feds to a crazy serial killer, rather than some of their own officers. While they remain available to assist the federal investigation,



most commissioners are glad of a chance to hang back. That means Vanguard agents are the ones kicking down the door and cataloguing all the gruesome remains. No matter how clear the evidence, the police called them in. The agents *have* to try to arrest the slasher. No matter how much evidence there is, or how plain the fact that the slasher's going to death row, the agent cannot pull the trigger without good reason. Then again, if she does have good reason then she's likely got a van full of SWAT officers out front willing to vouch for her, even though they have no idea of the real danger.

VASCU isn't constrained to cases where the police call in its agents. The hunters of the Unit have a free rein to investigate any leads they come across, and have access to the Bureau's files to help them. Sometimes, a team of agents works on one case at a time, relying on a tip-off or premonition. These are the really dangerous cases — when a team of psychic investigators goes hunting for trouble, their combined talents have a nasty

habit of, well, finding trouble. Most VASCU agents aren't trained as Special Agents, and yet they're the ones who go out looking for killers who think that some people look better dangling from meat-hooks. With psychic abilities it's a lot easier to capture a killer, but no court recognizes psychic abilities as admissible evidence. The agents still need to go through the whole process of investigation, find evidence, and hopefully force a confession before the courts will deal with a killer — or the Director of Operations will make a case for locking the slasher up in Lansing. If a slasher threatens an agent, she can respond with deadly force, but the majority of agents don't abuse that power to kill without good reason — it's hard to keep secrets in a department full of mind-readers.

A few VASCU agents work full-time in the field. While they still report to the local FBI office and have a chain of command from there, they spend most of their time associating with "monster hunters." Often, an agent has two goals in mind when he joins

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

A suicide squad working for VASCU is a great story hook — players can assume control of characters of varying experience levels, having belonged to different cells, compacts or conspiracies in the past. At some point, VASCU arrested them for their crimes and is now offering them reduced sentences to act as a suicide squad for the Unit.

What does this newly-minted cell do? Do the job and take the lesser sentence? Work together to off their handlers and escape, perhaps into the arms of a waiting conspiracy (ready with fake papers and a new life)? Does tension threaten to shatter the new cell, or is the fear of going back to prison enough of a common task to keep them coordinated?

such a cell. Most of the monsters that the cell hunts have killed multiple people, and have some supernatural aspect to them, legally making them slashers. The other reason is just as obvious: if the cell prefers to kill the people and things that they hunt without at least attempting capture, the cell is equally a bunch of murderers. A Vanguard agent will likely bide his time before taking his cell in, simply because they're so useful — but in a cell with a fanatical desire to kill monsters, even those who have committed no crime, he will likely have to arrest the others for their crimes. That's not always the end for hunters who go too far; some cells end up being too useful and are recruited into suicide squads.

DANGEROUS LIAISONS

Sometimes, you have to set a thief to catch a thief. That remains just as true when the crime is serial murder as it is for theft. Sometimes, a team of VASCU agents has no choice but to turn to a

convicted slasher to crack a particularly gruesome case. Most often, they quiz incarcerated killers when people start dying from the same MO — usually the sign of a copycat killer. Rather than relying on psychological profiles, it's often faster for the agents to ask the original killer.

After a disastrous situation which resulted in both the original and copycat killers going free, Vanguard's Director of Operations mandated that any liaison with slashers had to be between one slasher and a whole team of agents. Even then, some killers try to fragment the team, seeing a chance to escape, or just to kill again. Many killers try it, but most fail. Psychic agents don't even need to talk to a killer, they can just read his mind without exchanging a single word.

Though the procedure for dealing with a slasher stipulates that the deal must be entirely one-way, most VASCU agents take a "sweetener" in with them. While they have no authority to alter sentences, an agent can bring books, magazines, or comic books to killers who don't get to visit the prison library. Some agents have bought a mutated killer's cooperation with nothing more than a trip to a fast-food joint.

Despite everything that VASCU agents do to ease the relationship between themselves and the killer, it's never a professional relationship. Someone put the slasher away, most likely a Vanguard agent. He's not about to help those same people capture someone else. Likewise, most agents aren't exactly comfortable about working with someone who has as much regard for human life as they have for a paper cup.

SUICIDE SQUADS

Despite every recruitment push, VASCU remains drastically underpowered. New killers are rare, but even with agents spread out covering the entire United States, as well as teams tasked with overseas operations, nobody's got the manpower to stop them. When things get really bad — if the Hunt Club has been particularly active, or a cult's halfway through a mass sacrifice — VASCU needs to do something. In those instances, they occasionally deploy a disposable resource in the charge of field agents. Agents who act as minders in the field have dubbed these resources "suicide squads."

COURTROOM DRAMA

Less than a half of all successful VASCU operations end in the arrest of the slasher in question. Far more often, an agent has to put the killer down like a rabid dog after he slaughters her fellow agents. In most cases, there's no on-going repercussion, the FBI deems that the agent acted in self defense with reasonable force. Even so, some agents feel like they've failed by not giving the state a chance to kill the slasher — whether through lethal injection or the old standby of 150 years without a dream of parole.

A slasher who is arrested may never see trial. His inhuman qualities mean that he stands a greater chance of escaping captivity before his trial — or other inmates have heard

of the slasher and kill him. Agents know better than to try arresting obviously supernatural creatures, taking those who are captured straight to Lansing.

The evidence against most killers is so overwhelming that it's hard for a lawyer to mount an effective defense, though some do still try. When they do, the agents involved in his capture may be called to give evidence. An agent's day in court is harrowing. If she's got psychic abilities, she may have used them to gain information — information that she can't admit in front of the court. She has to build up a framework of detective work around her abilities to avoid perjuring herself, though a

few agents hold to a stricter code of honesty. Fortunately, a lot of serial killers avidly photograph or video their work, providing a body of evidence that they next see in the courtroom.

Hyper-intelligent and especially charismatic slashers may show up with a lawyer who goes out of his way to defend the slasher. Some of them even manage to convince a jury to acquit them. The lawyer may be the slasher's next target, or a partner in crime who keeps a mad killer out of jail for a long time to come. More bestial slashers may have a secret patron who conspires to keep them on the outside — or may just use the trial as a chance to rack up more of a body count.

Most often, a suicide squad is a cell of monster hunters who made the mistake of working with a Vanguard agent. Others were in the wrong place at the wrong time, and the local authorities locked them up. How they ended up in prison doesn't matter, Vanguard can use them on the outside. VASCU secures their release — conditional on working with one agent as a "handler." In some cases, a suicide squad isn't just unlucky monster hunters — one or two agents may hand-pick a squad based on psychological profiles of the criminals, working out who would be best-placed to take down a slasher. The inmates get a shot at life on the outside again, and they get to fuck up all manner of monsters — some human, some far stranger. Three basic rules govern

all field operations: 1) at least one VASCU agent per three convicts at all times; 2) if anything happens to the handling agents, all members of the squad are considered escaped convicts; 3) the squad initially aims to capture, not kill, and can only use lethal force with an agent's go-ahead.

While the relationship between a suicide squad and their handlers may appear jovial, they're never friends. The handlers are agents of the Government, and the people under their charge are convicted felons. A handler has the power to send them back to prison in a heartbeat, but as long as they go along with him they stay on the outside. Normally, that's enough incentive for the group to work together. Even then, some hunters try to escape — but most handlers

are talented psychics as well as experienced field agents, and anyone thinking about running has to be damn good at hiding (or have a compact or conspiracy willing to keep them safe). That friction does mean that even though most suicide squads live, work, and train together, they never bond into a single group.

Suicide squads are set up as temporary arrangements, dealing with killers and related monsters only for as long as it takes to deal with a specific threat. Most act in just that fashion, the squad working its way through the world of supernatural murderers until they find the ones responsible for the spree that activated the squad. Some outlive their original mandate, with the handlers keeping the squad active. While that's a big help in sparsely-populated areas with barely enough FBI agents to catch mundane criminals, let alone slashers, it's less common in places that have a larger number of monster-hunting groups who keep the numbers down.

THE ENEMY

First and foremost, VASCU investigates and deals with serial killers. The vast majority of those are slashers, serial killers with a mysterious edge that leaves normal law enforcement agencies unable to cope. Other cases concern killers who appear to be creatures from folklore. Some agents think it's their job to bring such beasts to trial, but when a killer grows into a nine-foot tall monster of fangs and muscle, arraignment might be the last thing on most agents' minds. If a monster can't pass for human, then it likely isn't human, and it's up to the chain of command to decide whether to destroy the creature or lock it in Lansing. Hopefully, the agent doesn't lose too much time while the brass makes that decision.

SLASHERS

The majority of VASCU's case studies concern slashers. Case reports and paperwork go into the meticulous detail one expects of a modern law enforcement agency. Sometimes, this helps agents — profilers have a wealth of psychological research available to them. Unfortunately, a lot of those files are still on paper. While the unit would

love to get their files into the Violent Criminal Apprehension Program (ViCAP), the program's data purity restrictions don't allow reference to the supernatural traits of a given killer, because most police departments would never trust the system again. Roughly half of VASCU's cases are summarized on ViCAP, with a note referring to the associated VASCU file code acting as a tip-off for agents. The other files are all paper, held in one facility. The majority of agents can spend a whole day just finding the right file, making agents with research-based abilities highly prized.

Vanguard agents tackle slashers alone — or, at least, with other Vanguard agents. While a few agents can call in armed support as a favor, it's hardly routine. Agents have to document their investigations, but they have a degree of leeway that wouldn't otherwise be acceptable. An agent who gains information from his psychic talents just writes up his experience and notes anything that's significantly out of line with his prior experiences. Nobody but other VASCU agents will ever read those reports.

Investigating a slasher is the same as any police investigation. The agents are either called in after the slasher has struck and local police can't make heads or tails of the crimes, or they get a tip off — a phone call from an old friend in the NYPD, or a particularly harrowing premonition. Police involvement makes the case easier in many ways, simply because agents can proceed in a familiar fashion. A pre-crime vision brings as many problems as it does clues, not least that the agents have to explain to the local police why they're in the area.

Green agents have a nasty habit of freak-ing out on their first case. They didn't complete the full Special Agent training. Instead, they go through a couple of days of strange visions and then get a phone call from Vanguard asking them to report to the local field office. Told that they have psychic powers, the new agent often has only a week or two — if that — to acclimatize before going to hunt a serial killer. An experienced FBI agent doesn't have it easier: she's torn from her existing department and given a forced transfer to VASCU, and when she shows up on her first day they're talking about *psychic powers*

and most of the people in the office are so green they need watering. But whenever Vanguard gets involved in a case, people start dying.

There's three parts to any criminal investigation and a team of VASCU agents needs to be able to conduct all three. Investigation concerns the analysis of crime scenes, looking for clues as to what actually happened. One part of this is forensic examination, and while a team of agents may have to pick up their own trace evidence and run their own fingerprints, those without a forensic scientist on hand can send the evidence they collect off to FBI labs. The pattern of blood splatters or the contusions and lacerations on a mutilated victim's body can tell the investigators the height and handedness of the killer, as well as the kind of impact that shed the blood. Other investigators look at evidence from a holistic point of view, looking into a phone number scribbled on the back of a matchbook or reading a discarded diary. Psychic abilities can enhance the investigation phase — from psychometric readings of evidence to perceptive enhancements that find evidence an agent would otherwise overlook.

The other side of the investigatory coin involves interviewing people close to the crime. Agents need good social skills to extract things that witnesses might not want to admit — or buried after seeing a slasher's handiwork. By comparing witness reports with each other and with evidence from the crime scene, agents can work out the gruesome picture of what's happened and re-interview people who didn't give a full account. Agents with empathic or telepathic abilities — traditional mind readers — make excellent interviewers, as do agents who can mentally reconstruct a crime scene since they're perfectly placed to catch people's lies; however, they're in danger of getting too close, and of taking on a witness' trauma for themselves.

Interview and investigation both provide hooks for research. For VASCU agents, research typically falls into two areas — creating psychological profiles of the slasher, and tracing similar crimes. Every field office that has a VASCU presence has at least one profiler, though their psychic talents lean towards those useful when interviewing killers as opposed to building profiles. ViCAP

holds records of all violent crimes, but more detailed information resides in VASCU's paper files. Profiles of the killer and information on similar crimes feedback to the investigators, giving them insights that help lead them to the slasher.

Once they've identified the killer, the agents make their arrest. While the investigation is much like standard police work, agents going in against a slasher are stepping into mortal danger. While some slashers are bestial half-men, at least they're only physically dangerous. Other killers are cold and calculating, leading the agents to a location designed to be a death-trap. Every slasher's different, and all are incredibly dangerous. Some agents have psychic talents that can help when apprehending a slasher, but often that just gives them a false sense of security that the slasher tears apart.

While the intent behind agents who go after a slasher is arrest, often that's just not possible. If the slasher attacks the VASCU team, self-defense often involves drawn guns. Occasionally an FBI team or the local police will provide backup, more often the agents are left with nothing but their own weapons and their own discretion as to when to pull the trigger and when to slam on the cuffs.

OTHER MONSTERS

Their unique perspective on the supernatural world colors VASCU's interaction with all kinds of monsters. The majority of agents only encounter strange creatures after they've confirmed their status by killing people. Unlike other conspiracies, if a monster hasn't committed murder, most Vanguard agents won't go near it with a 10-foot-pole — if nothing else, many of these mundane horrors maintain cover identities as perfectly ordinary people, and without evidence can sue the FBI for wrongful arrest. Despite VASCU's track record of success, there's enough built-up enmity in the rest of the Bureau that harassment charges are taken very seriously. An agent who wants to turn "monster hunter" has to do it in her own time, and be very careful that her extracurricular activities don't dump the unit in a whole bunch of trouble.

One point that marks VASCU out as unique amongst hunter conspiracies is its approach to ac-

tively supernatural monsters. Vanguard has common psychological profiles for the most populous supernatural creatures, but that's it. Because their cases often end with the death of the monster, Vanguard agents believe that each is unique. The profiles they have apply to humans who engage in the kinds of murders associated with supernatural creatures. Because they display obvious supernatural abilities, the agents call them "monsters," but they don't know that their profiles apply to actual groups of monsters with related powers.

Vanguard's profilers understand vampires in a way that even some vampires find astounding. Despite the rhetoric about "killing" only to survive, VASCU agents know of creatures that feed on blood who don't kill anyone. Those who do often bear psychological similarities to serial killers — they feed for psychosexual fulfillment. Something's missing in the vampire's existence: for some it might be the spark of humanity, while others pine for their lost family. The creature feels like he's not in control of its life, and killing the victim is the only way he can be in control. It helps that feeding engenders near-sexual pleasure in the victim, allowing the killer to believe that the victim actively enjoys it.

Most vampires who kill do so over a period of time, like human serial killers, though some undergo a trauma that makes them lose control and turns them into spree-killers who are almost bestial. The mind of a vampire is much like that of a human, though some possess incredible powers of suggestion that makes them very dangerous. One particularly bloodthirsty example of a vampire rests in a windowless cell in Lansing, though he's an exception to the rule.

Werewolves also have deep similarities with human killers, though there are points when VASCU's profilers have to admit they're extrapolating — profilers get as much of their insight from zoological studies as they do human killers. They share many social traits with pack-based predators. They're territorial, and group together in packs — a lone creature feels increasing anxiety that often translates to murderous rage. Like many human territorial killers, they're constantly vigilant for people who the werewolf thinks are "invading" their patch.

Once he has a target, it's almost impossible to change a werewolf's mind. Another similarity with territorial human killers is the fury of a werewolf's attack. Provoking a werewolf can lead to a murderous rampage analogous to those seen in some psychopaths: this is seen as a reaction to werewolves' rigidly hierarchical society, which may suit animals but produces feelings of repression and rage in human minds.

There's rarely a sexual angle to a werewolf's hunts, they instead feel that their killing is necessary to maintain their territory. Some look on it as little more than a dangerous chore. A werewolf feels no remorse at murdering a person, but understanding the dynamic between a hunting animal and its prey can help agents appreciate what the creature thinks when it kills people. While some kill and eat humans there's no evidence to suggest they need human flesh.

Some people murder in pursuit of what they think is magic. Human sacrifice is normally a ritual affair, though some survivors of attempted sacrifice tell different tales. "Witches" who kill people either do so as part of a specific ritual — they believe the sacrifice will raise a dead loved one, for example — or as an end to itself. That means there's two different profiles involved. Desperation's the cornerstone of sacrifice. People who engage in it feel powerless, or wronged in some way by the world, and believe that by killing someone, some "magical effect" will give them power. In the witch's own head, he's got nowhere left to turn and it no longer matters if people die as long as he gets what he believes he deserves. Some of these killers are ameliorated by VASCU attention, thinking that people finally recognize them as equals. Far more common are those who regard FBI investigation as just another example of the world keeping them down.

Witches who sacrifice people for magical power believe themselves superior to normal people. The killer feels that through his occult knowledge, he's one of the only people who matter. Normal folks, those who don't share his enlightenment, aren't worth anything. He thus derives the simple idea that if the magical energy he believes he gains from the sacrifice matters more than a mundane person's

STEREOTYPES

Ashwood Abbey: My partner came from NYPD Special Victims. She'd dealt with sex-crime victims, abused kids, the worst shit you can imagine. We were after a bastard who liked to chop up old men with a hatchet. We got there too late. These fucks were already in residence, violating our perp like animals. They hadn't even put him out of his misery. I threw up harder than I ever have before and when I looked up, she'd shot every last one of them. She said self-defense. With the look in her eyes I didn't argue.

Network O: Computer crime is still crime, but we don't deal with that. I spent some time with a bunch of YouTube shock-shooters, and

they weren't entirely useless — though I had to be very careful that my face didn't end up on screen. They helped me get a lot of evidence, though they were more than a little wary about showing their face in court. They gave me the original videos to show at the trial, I kept them away from other Feds.

Ascending Ones: I worked with a cell of these freaks for a while when I was seconded to the Dubai police. We went after the Headhunter, a guy with quite the decapitation fetish. I was fine with their drug use, to be honest — different country, different rules, we drink coffee, they chew qat. What really got

me was their burning certainty that what they were doing was right. They gave the Headhunter a taste of his own medicine, and I don't think any of them felt bad.

Task Force: VALKYRIE: I've lost count of the number of times these military Men in Black have showed up and put their high-caliber footprints all over one of my cases. I try to take it like a man and file the paperwork, but some days I wonder if they don't have the right idea. I don't think even the Director knows I've got an application form in my desk drawer, but for the moment I'm happier doing justice than getting revenge.

life, then the killing is entirely justified. Some witches will form temporary alliances with investigating agents as they think that sacrifice bodes ill for the whole community.

ONLY HUMAN

VASCU gets called in to investigate repeat killings. It's a given that a significant percentage of those calls involve humans who may be monsters, but who aren't slashers. Not every serial killer is a slasher, and there's plenty of people who are canny murderers but never make their third kill. When the police call them in, VASCU agents are legally bound to take the case, though they can be redeployed to a more serious crime if it warrants the extra manpower.

Almost all agents don't have a problem with that. They're attached to the FBI, and the FBI catches criminals. There's no fundamental difference between hunting a serial killer and a

predatory pedophile, and for some putting the latter behind bars gives them a rush that's as good as locking up any number of killers. A few agents believe that police departments who "cry wolf" are wasting their time, drawing needed psychic resources away from where they're most needed: hunting down crazed killers. If there's evidence that the case they're working on doesn't involve murder, these agents sometimes deliberately open an unsolved case just so they can get back on the track of a killer. Agents who open too many old cases soon come to the attention of the Director of Operations, and he's going to want an explanation.

Whether their target is a kidnapper, serial rapist, or murderer, VASCU agents have the same strategy for every case — though if they can give the local police the full story about the suspect, they're likely to get a great deal more support from those cops. Acting in a supporting role means

that evidence goes to both local and FBI forensic facilities. An agent who knows her forensics can work alongside police scientists and county medical examiners in a way that most would kill for on a slasher case. While local police will want to interview witnesses first, detectives may allow the VASCU agents to sit in, or to interview suspects for a psychological profile. Agents can butt heads with local cops when it comes to arrest, especially when those cops cried to Vanguard and coasted to the bust off the agent's hard work. While it's not exactly common, a few police departments have bad reputations for overusing their ability to call in VASCU agents. Working close with normal police officers, a psychic agent must conceal her abilities — having normal people around can be a real pain in the ass for an agent who relies on her mental gifts.

Again, it's worth mentioning that VASCU will sometimes take up the investigation of existing hunter cells. Hunters leave corpses. These corpses may once have belonged to monsters, but a dead witch looks like a dead human. Three such dead witches, and suddenly the hunter's labeled as a serial killer, his cell labeled a cult.

HUNTERS

You were recruited into the SCIU back in the late '70s and haven't quit yet. You've kept on top of every change, from the Wintergreen Process to advances in psychological profiling because you know how slashers think. It's kept you from having a wife or even a girlfriend, but you don't care — you're married to your job.

You're a mechanic who tried to better himself. You threw yourself into school and worked two jobs to pay your way, even though you weren't too smart. You got a college degree so you could try to join the FBI. After all, your daddy was a cop. They were all set to kick you out when a routine test said you could read minds — and that threw you into the scariest job you've ever had: trying to catch serial killers.

Life in the DA's office was good, until you drew the one judge who found you in contempt for not wearing a skirt. You tried to get him disbarred, but everything fell apart and before long

you didn't get any cases worse than traffic violations. An old friend suggested you jump ship for the FBI, and your track record at locking up serial killers landed you in the strangest government department you've ever worked for.

Your husband and son were in the wrong place at the wrong time. A spree killer sat in the back of a van with a high-powered rifle and killed them. *Pop, pop, pop.* They never saw it coming. The people who came to investigate were more like the agents on TV than anything else, but they couldn't help. You quit your job in the financial district and applied to the FBI because you wanted to make the bastard pay. When you're not on a case, you're looking through the archives for the one clue that nobody else could see.

You've always known you had psychic powers. You got high marks on every Zener test you ever took, and you knew that Government was covering up real psychics. You thought you could infiltrate their psychic research program if you could get in to the FBI. You never realized they'd scan you for psychic abilities when you were in training, or just what the Feds did with the psychics they found. For the first time in your life, you feel seriously out of your depth.

DEPARTMENTS

A number of different departments fall under the umbrella of the Vanguard Serial Crimes Team. Some don't see field assignments, whether they're the archivists of the Violent Crime Research Team, or the scientists of the Neuro-Cognitive Research Team who research the powers unlocked by the Wintergreen Process. Though the Paranormal Research and Detention Department have close contact with a wide range of extremely dangerous criminals, they're restricted to the Lansing Facility and would only see field work in the case of a major breakout — though that's not likely.

The wild cards amongst the wild cards, the **Field Liaison Department** consists of agents who liaise with other "monster hunters." All requests for a team of agents to work with a known killer come through this office to be approved, though in most cases the process is pretty much

a rubber-stamp. Field Liaison agents join hunter cells under a number of cover stories, using their companions to arrest or kill supernatural murderers. Others act as the handlers for suicide squads of monster hunters released from prison. Agents tend to bend the rules in their favor whenever they can — it helps that they don't spend too much time around other VASCU agents. A few focus on hunting monsters for being monsters, rather than because the monster has killed, through an agent needs to be careful that her fellows don't think she's gone rogue.

By far the largest department is the imaginatively named **Operations Department**. They're the field agents, the people on the ground who research, investigate, and profile serial killers. At least seven out of every ten VASCU agents belong to the Operations Department, all the way up to the Director of Operations — the officer in charge of VASCU as a whole. While some agents have had extensive training either in prior law enforcement careers or as FBI agents, others in the department have no formal training and rely on their psychic potential and whatever techniques they can pick up from their fellow agents. Teams of Operations agents always have one long-serving agent attached simply so the others don't drag the VASCU name — and by association the whole FBI — too far through the mud.

Though the FBI has never had an "X-Files" team, VASCU's **Special Project Department** comes close. These agents specialize in the really extreme cases. Some burn with psychic power, pushing their brains to the point of breaking. Others don't have the same degree of mental power, but have a knack for getting into killers' minds. Special Projects takes on the really extreme cases — cases that would break other agents. A perp who flays her victims and wears their face in public, but everyone treats her as though she's the person whose face she wears. Another never touches a single person — but every single person he talks to later kills in the throes of their worst vice. The agents who work Special Projects know

every case they get risks breaking their minds, but they do it anyway — because leaving the killers out there isn't something they can allow.

STATUS

Status in VASCU is a combination of formal rank within the department and the informal air of respect paid to a specific agent. While a high-profile collar is good work, the Director of Operations praises consistency over showboating.

- You applied to the FBI, and they told you that you're psychic. They offered you a chance to sidestep the existing training and organizational regime and you took it — though the nature of the job is still a shock. Some of the paperwork is brain-crushing, but nobody can doubt the thrill of tracking down a real life serial killer and bringing him to justice. To help you toward that end, you have the option of spending Merit dots to unlock Teleinformatic abilities.

- You've been at this for a while now. Either you were an agent in another unit who flagged positive for psychic potential during your last physical, an old-time member of the Serious Crimes Investigation Team who doesn't know when to quit, or you were recruited for psychic power and put yourself through the full FBI training program. Regardless of how you did it, you hold full Special Agent status with the FBI and other agents respect you for it. You gain one extra dot of Status (FBI).

- People keep saying you should take an easier job, but you wouldn't transfer to another department if they paid you. The hell with counter-terrorism operations, you know how serial killers tick, and you've probably faced at least one who ended up in Lansing. Among VASCU agents, you gain the benefit of the Inspiring Merit, whether or not you would normally qualify for it. If you already have the Merit, those who follow you regain two Willpower points instead of one.

the Hunt Club

Some people are only alive because it's illegal to kill them. Everyone's got something, some point where a person just doesn't have a right to go on living. Even people who are against the death penalty have that line in the sand, that point beyond which people just don't count as "people" any more.

Acting on that impulse is illegal. That doesn't stop everybody.

Most people never hear of the Hunt Club. When they do, it's in the same terms as the Masons — a secret society bound together by fox-hunting lore. Rumors speak of members being "blooded," of counting "kills," and of the many strange rules and regulations that govern a member's dealings with the rest of the world. It's nothing, just a faddish secret society that maintains the old boy's network.

The rumors are broadly correct, but the prey in question is rather more plentiful than foxes. Members of the Hunt Club prefer to kill *people* for sport, not foxes.

HISTORY

The Hunt Club started as a secret society in Edwardian England. Its founder members came from the prestigious gentlemen's clubs of the time — insular organizations started by and for upper-class men who shared some common pursuit. Though each club started around a shared goal, by the 19th century most members supported the goal in name only. The Hunt Club set out to rectify that, by providing an organization that explicitly only allowed membership to those who would join in their illegal hunts.

Originally, the club did hunt foxes. While their hunts were illegal, nobody paid them much mind, and after a while the hunts gained a sort of

legitimacy. Therein lay a problem for the founders — hunting foxes had lost its edge with society's tacit acceptance of the club. Rather than looking for a new goal, the inner circle of the club decided to refocus their goals — they wanted the thrill of the hunt, not just a job destroying vermin. After a couple of abortive attempts to restart the hunt with new prey, including a proposed trip to Africa, the inner circle told members they were dissolving the Hunt Club. Only five people remained when the club brought out its latest quarry in 1881: two homeless drunks plucked from the streets of London. Club members eschewed horses and dogs, running through the woods armed with just long knives and a longing for blood. Every member shared in the deaths, hacking at the corpses in an orgy of Dionysian proportions. The Hunt Club had found its prey.

After two further hunts (one of which reinstated the horses and dogs), the club built to twenty members. Every single one was a killer in his own way, and every single one relished the chance to slaughter human prey without intervention. Finding out about the Hunt Club was no easy affair, but gentlemen who had a certain sense of style, and a certain... flexibility of morals might receive a card from a member of the inner circle. They had to kill once before they would ever see a member in person, and bring part of the body with them — most commonly an ear or a finger. New members then joined the prey in their first hunt. If a prospective member could somehow overcome a hunter without killing him, he joined the club. Anyone who didn't

THE HUNT CLUB (COMPACT)

live — or who killed the hunter — soon found a new home in an unmarked grave.

By 1903, the Hunt Club had spread throughout the English-speaking world. Chapters organized hunts in Pennsylvania, in Massachusetts, and in upstate New York — all locations with a number of clubs that the society could draw members from, and plenty of open space for the actual hunts. Outside of the US, hunts started in Bombay, Vancouver, and Melbourne. The pattern of murder couldn't last. The inner circle got sloppy.

The winter hunt of 1904 attracted the attention of the Society of Twelve Keys, and through them the police. Detectives seized telegrams and letters between the clubs, and coordinated with police around the world. Though the members fought hard to remain at liberty, the worldwide ring of murders was too much — and excellent fodder for the tabloids. Fully half of the London club received life sentences, and members around the world scattered to the four winds to avoid capture.

For twenty years, authorities considered the Hunt Club disbanded. Unfortunately, the idea proved too persistent. The inner circle had the hunt in their hearts and in their blood. The old way wouldn't work, not with the advances in policing. Meeting in secret, they decided to fragment, and to take the hunt with them. Each started in a different major city, recruiting through the same observation that had served them so well through the initial incarnation of the Hunt Club. This time, they de-centralized. The new system works — it has kept the police at bay for over 80 years. Any time the local cops think they've caught up with the killers of the Hunt Club, the murderers have vanished.



THE HUNT CLUB (COMPACT)

REFORMATION

The modern Hunt Club still considers humanity as its greatest prey, but they don't work as one. Instead, each club runs its own version of the Great Game. At its most basic, members of the Hunt Club receive points for killing people. Basic murder is all well and good, but doesn't score highly. Instead, a single murder needs to be *elegant*. A single well-framed killing — say, arranging the organs according to the elemental associations of the cardinal points — is worth a hundred times more than randomly stabbing someone in the middle of the street. Members of the club have to demonstrate style above all else — they are upper-class gentlemen who would never stoop to the level of mere murder when they could execute their targets.

Every club scores the Great

Game each July. Those who finish in the top five receive significant cash prizes taken out of the club's membership dues. While the first prize is normally a seven-figure sum, most members don't kill for money. They want the thrill of slipping a blade between a whore's ribs and feeling the slight resistance as they break her heart. They want to poison individual banknotes and checks and watch a stockbroker kill himself every time he touches money. They want to match wits with killers and soldiers, proving themselves master huntsmen in a game of chess that uses a whole country as its board. Thanks to the subjective scoring, the winners of the Great Game sometimes only need to kill a single person — but such truly momentous murders are few and far between.

The top three huntsmen each year receive the real prize: they become the judges for the next year, awarding points

to aspiring killers. The judges ensure some continuity between years, as most members play not just to their own style but the style of the judges — a particular judge with a penchant for faked suicide will encourage a whole group of copycat crimes from those who seek his favor.

Some members of the Hunt Club regretably draw police attention. As each club is still organized as a gentleman's club, members can call on their fellows for financial support, or for legal representation. That only works if the club can buy off the police or convince a jury. When a member of the club leaves so much



Women

The Hunt Club is an underground gentleman's club, and is rather set in its ways. The oldest rules reinforce the idea of the club as a place where gentlemen can get away from the "weaker" sex to a location where they can turn their minds to the pursuit of the Great Game. Though nobody actually challenged the rule, a number of female killers demonstrated such style that a slow wind of change blew through the Hunt Club, and in 1982 the London club suggested an update to the club rules:

"Any woman of good standing in society, who demonstrates a knowledge of the Great Game, an understanding of elegance in the way that members conduct their duties, the independent fiscal capability to meet the membership demands, and the desire to take her place alongside members in the Great Game shall be considered the ultimate equal of a man of similar standing under these rules."

The changes were incorporated into club rules almost unanimously. As female members are considered the same as men, the Hunt Club gives no special treatment to married couples, and each partner must approach the club based on their independent merits.

THIS ISN'T YOUR FAULT, BUT I CAN'T KEEP SCORING LOW.

evidence that he announces himself as the killer, other members subtly turn on him — killing him with style and grace is often a good way to gain places on the scoreboard of the Great Game.

Recruitment into the Hunt Club comes through one of two channels. Existing members may approach a promising killer. A prospective member has to demonstrate a taste for elegance when killing, and he must appreciate the finer things in life — a member needs the tastes, if not the wallet, of a gentleman. In rare circumstances, a slasher can be sponsored into the club, all fees waived. An existing member in good standing,

who can afford the extra membership dues, takes responsibility for the new member — but if one breaks the rules or otherwise leaves the club, so must the other.

A few killers follow up on strange rumors of the Hunt Club, and word spreads. Often, these killers work through intermediaries or elaborate traps, so nobody knows that they really exist. Through patient work they can arrange a meeting with one of the club's inner circle and the current judges. In that case, one of the judges must act as a sponsor if the slasher is to join the club.



Stereotypes

Ashwood Abbey: Ugh. Poseurs. They play at being hedonists, but they're only willing to take it so far. They don't see the slippery slope beneath their feet, wet with blood and fluids. It's like... if only they'd be willing to just let go and slide down the rest of the way. Until then, we have some lovely consolation prizes and parting gifts.

Network o: I had the most disturbing experience with a whelp shooting video for an Internet site. He had assumed from my upbringing and demeanor that I was somehow insane, as if good breeding was the reason for standing over a housewife with a straight-razor soaked in her blood. I allowed him to interview me, though I had to... cut it short. The poor boy never stood a chance.

The Lucifuge: One man I spent some time with claimed he had a great secret — his father was the Devil, and Hell bent to his will because of it. I naturally assumed he was out of his mind or seeking attention, but when our target discovered us prematurely I learned that I was wrong. This man summoned hellish fire from his hands. I doubt he was the only one. The natural role for his kind is as lords and masters of humanity, but I cannot allow that.

VASCU: If any group annoys me more than the Vanguard Serial Crimes Unit, I haven't met them. These Feds seem to have a wide berth when it comes to investigating people who happen to do the world a favor by separating the wheat from the chaff. Worse, they've access to profilers and investigators who know about the Club's existence, but not about our members. We must be very careful, but all is not lost. One of the higher ranked agents has a Club tie in his wardrobe, though he'd never admit it.

THE HUNT CLUB (COMPACT)

HUNTERS

You're an old man now, but just as vicious as ever. In your day, any gentleman worth his salt was a member of a club. You're a member of at least six, and it's up to the club to remember which name you used at the time. While you spend most of your time watching for the latest up-and-coming killer, you keep your hand in. When night falls and fog shrouds the streets, you solicit the working girls. Nobody misses a dead whore.

You're new money. A club is more than just a place to relax, it's a place to meet people — people who know what a stain the “undesirables” are on the country. You've had to avoid that language when defending other members in court, of course. You and they both make the world a better place. You've spent a lot of time vivisectioning jurors who convict for what you think are the wrong reasons.

You've never had money, but you have talent out the ass. You're the technologist, the guy who puts together the Web site while the CEO sprays the venture capital up the wall. Likewise, you've got a real knack for faking suicides. There's a real, visceral thrill in seeing the cops and detectives fall for your fakes, and someone thought you were worth enough to sponsor. It's taken a while, but you hit the top ten last year. That money would be a sign of recognition for your art, and you've got some ideas for next season.

You've worked in the Hunt Club for nearly forty years, looking after the needs of the club members. You're the man who greets every member at the door and remembers assumed names, the man who knows when to bring newspapers and what drink each member prefers. You're also a member yourself, placing consistently mid-table. You don't have the inventiveness, but you're in it for the real challenge — hunting and taunting detectives. You organize everything for the members, including legal representation — and collecting membership dues.

You were a hunter — of monsters, not of men. And you were good at it. too good. It's not so much that you started to *like* it, but that you soon found you could do no differently. The

Hunt Club left a card on your door. They knew your talents. They told you how they figured you for a “high-scorer.” And the gold coin they placed beneath the business card? You had it valued. It paid your mortgage for a year. You called the number. You hunt people, now.

RULEBOOKS

The Hunt Club does not divide itself on petty things like money or social status. Club members instead divide themselves by the three rulebooks. While each individual club adheres to one or another of the books, members are free to select the specifics.

The **London Rules** are the oldest set of rules for the Hunt Club's activities. Followers of the traditional rules for the Great Game hew to the classic rules for selecting their victims — they kill street people, drunks, prostitutes, and other people who won't be missed. Most members who trust to the old rules are either old or new money, used to surrounding themselves with other members of the same class and certain that their victims don't really matter.

Boston Rules, by contrast, have an almost philanthropic bent. Choice victims for the Great Game should be those who have squandered their lives, people who hold everything back — people who are only alive, as the saying goes, because it's illegal to kill them. Members who prefer Boston Rules sometimes have an idiosyncratic view on who holds humanity back, speaking as they do from positions of privilege, but most of the killers who come looking for the Hunt Club find these rules to their liking.

The **Melbourne Rules** hold to the ancient ideal of the hunt. Though the least subscribed rulebook, members command respect. They go after targets who present a challenge to hunt, either people who have the skills to look after themselves, or those whose deaths bring police scrutiny. While one killer may focus on detectives, government agents, and even soldiers, others concentrate on captains of industry — wanting the attention from the police, and confounding them at every turn.

THE HUNT CLUB (COMPACT)

STATUS

Status in the Hunt Club is strictly tied to a slasher's position on the league table of the Great Game. Murdering someone isn't enough, the death has to match the judges' idea of elegance. Some hunters send messages, others prefer irony, or slaughtering people in a way they hope will please the judges.

- You've undergone the Hunt Club's initiation. By club traditions, someone watches over you. Either you're new, or you placed low, and the club wants to help you improve. To that end, they've assigned one of the judges to watch over you. He has his uses, and lets you know what he likes to see in an execution. Your patron counts as a one-dot Mentor.

••• You've placed mid-table, and may have come close to the monetary rewards before. You know what the judges like, and you tailor your butchery to pander to those tastes. You gain the two-dot version of the Telltale Murder Merit, or the three-dot Merit if you already possess the Merit at two dots. If you have the Merit at three dots, you do not suffer the Merit's drawback.

••••• You've judged the Great Game, possibly more than once, and your winnings more than cover the membership dues. When you kill, you kill with skill, panache, and grace. You're right, and to Hell with anyone who denies you. You gain the Damnable Certainty Merit. If you already possess the Merit, you can use it twice per session.

CALLS IN THE NIGHT

by mike lee

The weather had been cooperating with him for almost a week now. Had he been the superstitious sort, he would have taken that as a good omen.

Rain stretched a gauzy curtain through the night sky, tinged orange by the clusters of sickly orange halogen lights that ringed the 24-hour Stor-All. The downpour rumbled across the roof of the pickup and poured in languid waves down the cracked windshield. Edward sat back in the old vinyl-covered seat and listened to it for a little while as he smoked a cigarette. Once upon a time he'd loved the sound of falling rain. It had soothed him when nothing else could.

As he smoked, he scanned the Stor-All from across the street. It was well after midnight, so there weren't many good reasons for anyone to be about. No vehicles in sight, neither inside the steel-fenced enclosure nor parked near him in the parking lot of an old greasy-spoon that catered to truckers pulling in off the interstate.

Still, one couldn't be too careful. He took his time with his cigarette, watching and waiting for telltale signs he was being watched. Getting careless was what got you killed in this world. Edward knew that for a fact, and exploited it every chance he could.

Edward wasn't a large or intimidating sort of man

— an impression he'd learned to cultivate recently — standing an average height and possessing a slightly below-average build. He wore faded khaki pants and an Oxford jacket over a moth-eaten black sweater, and his brown hair was unkempt. A woman he'd known just a year ago observed that he looked like an unemployed English teacher, which wasn't too far from the truth.

He smoked the cigarette all the way down to the filter, and then carefully stubbed it out in the truck's packed ashtray. The coast looked clear, though he knew full well that nothing was ever guaranteed. Many times in the last months he'd wondered what he would do if the police ever caught on to him. Sometimes he thought he might go quietly, while other times his thoughts turned to the Glock semi-auto resting in a concealed holster on his hip. He still hadn't made up his mind.

Starting the truck, he drove slowly across the street and up to the Stor-All's entry keypad. He entered the code from memory, and waited while the heavy gate rattled noisily to one side.

Fortunately for him, the storage shed he'd been given was near the far back corner of the lot and thus hidden from the street. He edged the truck slowly down the narrow lanes, studying his surroundings carefully for any sign that things were amiss. Nothing caught his attention through the pounding rain.

The shed itself wasn't actually his. It had belonged to Jason, an auto mechanic he'd known for less than a year. Jason had been killed in a freak accident as he and Edward had tried to neutralize a magus they'd been hunting up in Germantown. The amount of formaldehyde the police had found in Jason's decaf coffee had been enough to kill three grown men — yet the dozen other people who'd drunk coffee from the same convenience store coffeepot had been unharmed.

Of course, it hadn't actually been an accident — that was how the magi worked, manipulating causality in ways that Edward still didn't fully understand.

He stepped out into the driving rain and dashed around the car to the shed's steel door. By the time he'd unlocked the heavy padlock and raised the rolling barrier, he was soaked to the skin. Edward went around to the back of the truck, letting down the gate and flipping up the back of the camper top. Shivering in the cold, he reached in and pulled out the rusting hand truck, then climbed into the bed and started wrestling with the drum.

It was made of thick, heavy-duty blue plastic, with a solid lid that screwed down to make a fairly airtight seal. He'd first learned about them from Jason. They're tailor-made for serial killers, the mechanic had said with a chuckle.

Grimacing with effort, Edward rolled the drum to the back of the truck, then climbed out and tried to ease it down onto the ground. The smooth plastic slipped out of his hands and fell onto the pavement with a forbidding thud, just missing his foot. Cursing, he levered it upright and checked the container for damage, but its integrity seemed to be intact.

After another minute of rocking and

heaving, Edward got the drum onto the hand truck and rolled it carefully into the shed. Once inside, he pulled down the rolling door, and only then did he grope around in the total darkness for the light switch.

Seventeen identical drums were laid out in orderly rows stretching to the back of the shed, with narrow aisles running between for easy access. Each drum was marked with a set of numbers on its lid in black permanent marker. Hanging on the wall near the drums was a

clipboard with a black pen hanging from a tiny chain. Bags of coarse road salt stood in slumped ranks along the opposite side of the shed.

Edward rolled the new drum into place with the others, then he went to get the clipboard. On the front page were dates, times, and ID numbers for each of the drums. He logged in the new arrival, then checked the date on his watch and compared it against the first entry on the page. "Thirty days,"

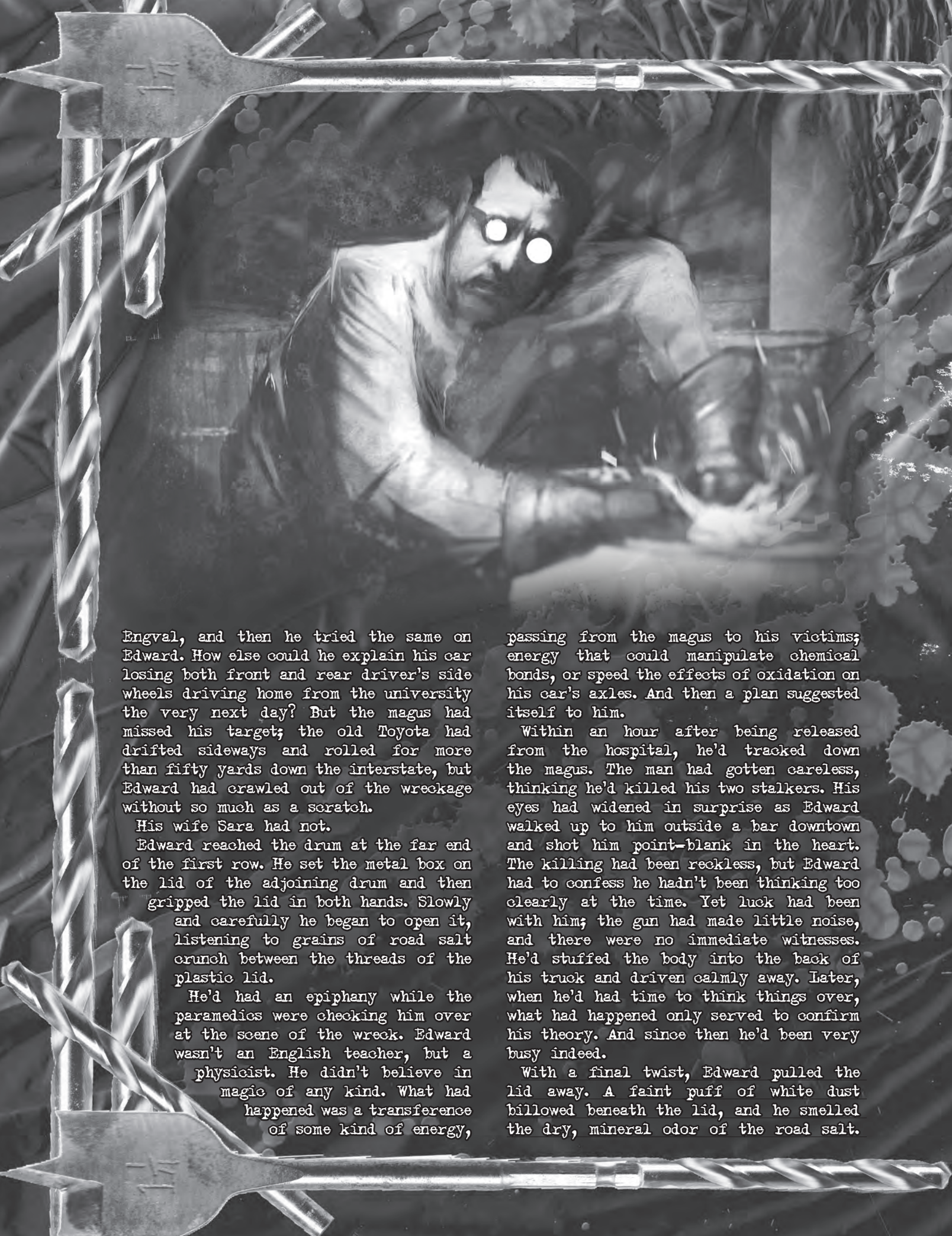
he murmured with some surprise. "Where does the

time go?"

He replaced the clipboard on the wall and went back to the new drum, pulling a black Sharpie marker out of his jacket pocket. He wrote an ID number onto the drum in a careful, precise hand, and then went back out into the rain. Edward was back a minute later, carrying a tiny metal box in the palm of his hand and a pair of leather work gloves.

In the end, the magus had gotten careless. He'd used his power to poison Jason

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KILL THREE
GROWN MEN



Engval, and then he tried the same on Edward. How else could he explain his car losing both front and rear driver's side wheels driving home from the university the very next day? But the magus had missed his target; the old Toyota had drifted sideways and rolled for more than fifty yards down the interstate, but Edward had crawled out of the wreckage without so much as a scratch.

His wife Sara had not.

Edward reached the drum at the far end of the first row. He set the metal box on the lid of the adjoining drum and then gripped the lid in both hands. Slowly and carefully he began to open it, listening to grains of road salt crunch between the threads of the plastic lid.

He'd had an epiphany while the paramedics were checking him over at the scene of the wreck. Edward wasn't an English teacher, but a physicist. He didn't believe in magic of any kind. What had happened was a transference of some kind of energy,

passing from the magus to his victims; energy that could manipulate chemical bonds, or speed the effects of oxidation on his car's axles. And then a plan suggested itself to him.

Within an hour after being released from the hospital, he'd tracked down the magus. The man had gotten careless, thinking he'd killed his two stalkers. His eyes had widened in surprise as Edward walked up to him outside a bar downtown and shot him point-blank in the heart. The killing had been reckless, but Edward had to confess he hadn't been thinking too clearly at the time. Yet luck had been with him; the gun had made little noise, and there were no immediate witnesses. He'd stuffed the body into the back of his truck and driven calmly away. Later, when he'd had time to think things over, what had happened only served to confirm his theory. And since then he'd been very busy indeed.

With a final twist, Edward pulled the lid away. A faint puff of white dust billowed beneath the lid, and he smelled the dry, mineral odor of the road salt.

Inside, the drum was filled almost to the brim with coarse, gray-white salt. A tuft of black hair poked up above the grainy surface.

Edward reached in with a gloved hand and began sweeping the salt away, exposing the upper part of Steven Mailer's head. The magus's skin had been yellowed and wrinkled by the salt, emphasizing the curve of his eye sockets and the edges of his cheekbones. His eyelids had shrunk inwards as the fluid-filled orbs dehydrated, creating pools of darkness half-submerged in salt.

Mailer's head had been carefully tilted back so that the forehead was angled towards the top of the drum. Using his fingertips, Edward gently brushed away more salt until he revealed the half-inch hole he'd drilled into the man's head and the cylindrical quartz crystal he'd slid neatly into the wound.

Edward carefully pulled the crystal free and wiped away a few stray specks of brain matter still clinging to its tip. Then he opened the lead box and laid the crystal inside. With a satisfied smile, he closed the lid and secured the clasp.

He knew from his background in science that energy couldn't be created or destroyed, only transferred. So it followed that whatever energy a magus used to alter the forces of probability flowed from person to person like an electrical charge, until it finally dissipated to the point that it lost its potency. Or was contained.

When the magus tried to kill him, a part of that causal energy had been transferred from Mailer to Edward, and it was with him still. For whatever reason, it was working in an opposite fashion than the magus intended, gifting the former teacher with a run of exceptional luck instead of the other way around.

Edward replaced the lid and turned to survey the ranks of plastic drums. Every other person the magus had affected with his power also contained a spark of that energy. It wasn't too hard to isolate likely recipients, once he'd done a little research. Mailer's friends had enjoyed some remarkable luck at crucial moments in the last few years, as well as members of his immediate family. His best friend had received a series of

high-profile promotions.

His sister had won a full scholarship to Yale. His father had miraculously beaten stomach cancer. All told, he identified nineteen individuals who had been gifted with some of Mailer's "magic." Fortunately, they'd all been local, so it hadn't taken more than a few weeks to find and kill them. The crystals embedded in their heads would soak up the energy and trap it in their matrices so no one else could use it ever again. When Edward was done, most of Mailer's pernicious energy would trouble the world no more.

All he had left to do was track down Alicia Harris and drill a neat hole in the centre of her forehead.



Alicia Harris had been Mailer's fiancée just a few years ago. Edward had no way to know why the planned wedding fell through, but he could tell the magus had continued to take care of Harris long after they'd parted ways. She'd enjoyed a spectacular run of good fortune upon breaking up with Mailer: she'd landed a series of lucrative, high-profile contracts at her architectural firm, made senior partner years ahead of schedule — even met the love of her life and got married after a whirlwind romance, according to her blog.

Edward had traded his pickup for a rented Lexus SUV — a vehicle that wouldn't look out of place in the exclusive suburb where Harris now lived. He followed her Land Rover down the rain-slicked street towards her house and once again scanned his surroundings for signs of danger. No one was out on such a wet, miserable night. Also, as a newly-minted senior partner, Harris worked long hours at the firm, so she was getting home at close to eleven o'clock. If he was quick and quiet,



he could load her body into the SUV and be gone with no one the wiser. The only real danger was her husband, Alan. Would he be watching for her arrival? That was one variable he couldn't control. If the man tried to intervene, Edward was ready to shoot him, but he hoped it would not come to that. The gunshot might attract attention in such a quiet neighborhood.

For Harris, Edward had a stun gun in his right coat pocket and a looped cable tie in his left. He would hit her with the gun, then put the

plastic loop over her head and draw it tight enough to cut the blood flow to her brain. She'd be unconscious before the effects of the stun gun wore off, leaving him to drag her to the Lexus while the cable tie did its work. He'd done it often enough by now that he had it down to a science. The drill, the drum and the salt were waiting in his wood shop back at home.

Up ahead, Harris pulled the Land Rover into her driveway. Edward rolled past, then he eased the SUV just past her house and up to the curb. He rolled down the window and leaned out with a sheepish grin. "Hey. Excuse me."

Harris had climbed out of the Land Rover and was fetching her briefcase from the passenger seat. She looked over warily, then she relaxed fractionally after she looked Edward over. "Yes?"

"I'm really sorry to bother you, but I'm trying to get to a party at a co-worker's place, and I'm totally lost. Can you tell me how to get to Sycamore?"

At the far end of the drive, Harris frowned for a moment, then she approached the Lexus, her pant legs swishing with each swift step. Edward continued to smile, digging into his pocket for the stun gun. When she was within a yard or two, he said, "I've got a map here of the subdivision, but I can't find Sycamore anywhere." He turned away from her, appearing to lean over the passenger's seat. Edward listened as her steps drew nearer. When he turned back she was standing by the open window.

"Yeah, here we go," he said cheerily, and pressed the stun gun to her shoulder. There was an audible crackle and a blue spark that left a tiny burn on the front of her wool jacket, and Harris collapsed silently to the wet ground.

Edward was opening the door to the SUV even as she fell, digging the plastic loop from his pocket. He slid out of the Lexus and sank to one knee, pulling Harris's stiff body towards him.

"Let her go!"

Edward froze. It was a woman's voice, hard-edged and rough. Slowly, he glanced up and saw three figures crossing Harris's front yard and heading directly for him. There

were two men and a woman, all in jeans and windbreakers. The woman, in the lead, was pointing a pistol at him.

Reluctantly, Edward let Harris go. The door to her house was wide open — her three would-be rescuers had been waiting inside. Careless, he recriminated himself. He dropped the cable tie and slowly raised his hands.

"Don't bother," the woman growled. "We aren't cops. Just stand up and step away from the woman."

Edward frowned. He stood up, feeling the weight of the pistol setting against his hip. "If you're not the police, what are you doing here?"

The woman shrugged. "We were tracking Steve Mailer for some time when he mysteriously disappeared. Then, when everyone he knew or loved started disappearing too we figured out that we had another monster on our hands."

"Monster?" Edward said. "Don't be absurd. I'm trying to put an end to Mailer and his magic. I'm just like you."

Even as he spoke, his hand was moving, darting back to his holstered weapon. If he was lucky — if he was very, very lucky — he could draw and fire before the woman could respond.

He never heard the shots. Two hammer blows punched into his chest, slamming him back against the SUV's driver's side. Edward felt his legs give way, and he sank back to the ground, a look of shock frozen on his face.

The woman stepped close. She had green eyes, he noticed, like chips of emerald. A line of pink scar tissue ran down the right side of her jaw. Her face was an indifferent mask as she brought the pistol up to Edward's face.

"No. You and I are nothing alike," the hunter said, and put a bullet in the middle of Edward's forehead.



Maybe the slasher hides his face: a rubber Halloween mask turned inside out and stained red with blood, or a gas mask painted white like a skull. Maybe the slasher sharpens his knife for a quick kill, or maybe he keeps it dull, the blade chipped, all the better for a slow death. One slasher dies in a hail of bullets. The next keeps walking, seemingly unaware that his lungs have perforated with a dozen bumblebees of hot lead.

Many faces of death, these slashers. This section will show you just how deep the open grave goes — just what powers are truly available to a slasher as antagonist? But even more concerning, just what can a player do with a slasher character all of his own? In addition, you'll find some new tricks that both hunters and slashers might keep up their sleeves when it comes to the ceaseless Vigil and the bloody hunt.

BUILDING THE PERFECT KILLER

This section, and in fact much of this chapter, discusses slasher characters. Such beings can take the role of antagonist, certainly, or perhaps a foil for a cell of hunters. But players can also assume the roles of these deranged killers.

A series of essays in the subsequent chapter discusses the possible motivations for doing so, what kind of story it makes, and how the Storyteller should handle crafting a chronicle for a crew of psychopathic killers. For now, we're just going to talk about how to create such characters, and not spend much time talking about who's going to play them.

Building a slasher character works much the same way as building a hunter, as described on pp. 55-64 of **Hunter: The Vigil**. The first step is coming up with a concept — without a strong concept, a slasher is just a big guy with a bladed implement. While slashers *can* be faceless, nameless murderers, devoid of personality and motivation beyond the urge to slaughter, in many ways this shortchanges them of their dramatic potential. A killer can be a tragic figure, doomed to a terrible end (though not as terrible as those of his victims) by circumstances beyond his control, or by his own tragic flaw, whatever that may be. A slasher might, in fact, be the hunter taken to the extreme. Years of perfecting the ability to sneak up on prey and drive a knife (or a stake) home has left the hunter unable to do anything else or to relate to people in any meaningful way. The hunter becomes the hunt, and, ironically, might well wind up as a target of a cell as his killings grow more gruesome and indiscriminate.

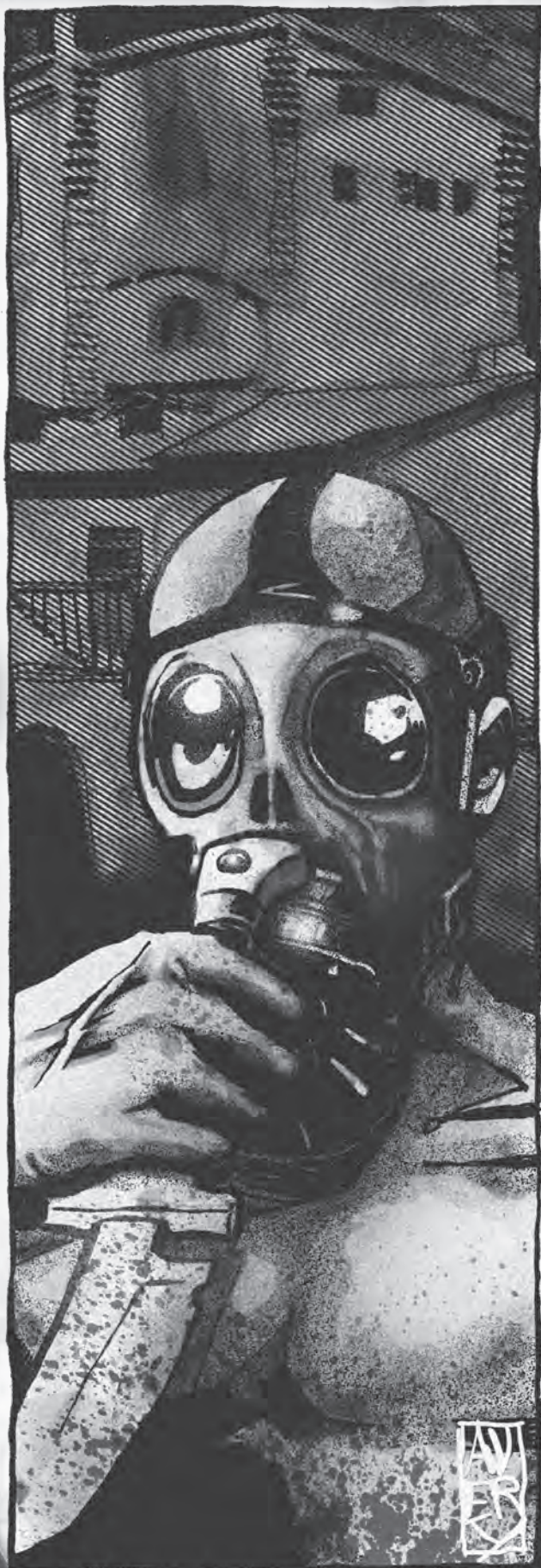
CONCEPT: THE FIRST TASTE OF BLOOD

The initial point of consideration for slasher characters, of course, is the question: why does the slasher kill? The pos-

chapter two: THE MASK AND THE KNIFE

Blackburn was surprised that it was so easy. He hadn't thought he would be able to shoot another man. But here was Number Two trying to pull on his pants. The man was big, and his footfalls shook the telephone on the nightstand. A hole in his stomach pumped dark blood. The blood glistened on the man's skin, on the bedsheets, on the floor.

—Bradley Denton, "Blackburn"



sibility mentioned above — that the character has simply been killing so long that it's all he knows — is one option, but even *that* character had to have a moment in which he became a killer. What drove him to that moment? What started him on the slope to his present blood-soaked condition? Below are some possibilities (which are discussed in greater detail in the subsequent chapter):

MENTAL ILLNESS

It's a touchy subject, for a good reason. Not everyone who suffers from mental illness is dangerous, much less a killer. That said, some people do seem to be born to kill. The debate of nurture versus nature with regards to violent tendencies is by no means settled in the medical and psychological communities, and is beyond the scope of this book, anyway. You don't need to dig into the psychological literature and find the disorders from which a character suffers (though you're welcome to do so), but you might consider whether the character is aware of his actions and to what degree. Are those really people he's cutting up, or does he see them as monsters? What about as animals? As replicas of people, masquerading as the humans that once surrounded him? Does he hear voices telling him to kill, or is his world eerily silent and dead? How is this slasher's reality, his perception, different from ours?

MADE A KILLER

Most serial killers suffer through terrible abuse, normally at the hands of a parent or guardian. In film and literature, killers often have hard lives or extremely traumatic events that break them. The slasher is flawed, not because the event happened, but because the event overcame him and made him a monster. Consider what happened to the character that made him turn his back on the world — the death of a parent? Attempted murder by a parent? How long did he carry his pain, grief, rage or shame until something set him off and drove him to pick up his knives? What was the trigger that set him off?

In the World of Darkness, the supernatural might take a hand in the formation of a killer. What if the torture that the slasher-to-be endured wasn't at the hands of a relative, but of a ghost or another ephemeral creature that disappeared as soon as the character screamed for help? The character might eventually come to blame those around him for *not* helping — surely they could see what was happening!

Another related possibility is that the character was destined to become the monster that he is. The World of Darkness is a strange place, ruled in part by forces far beyond the ken of mortal men. Are some

people simply chosen or fated to become bloodthirsty slashers? Perhaps they kill because they cannot do otherwise. Murder is in their bones and their souls, their *raison d'être*, and changing that would mean changing their very purpose. Of course, such a change might well be possible, and this sort of redemption story might form an especially compelling character arc.

OUTSIDE INFLUENCE

Spirits and other unsavory beings can push a person toward murder. It takes a fairly powerful spirit to turn a person into a slasher, but it does happen. A murder spirit possesses, or perhaps simply urges, a victim who already has some innate violent tendencies. Over time, the victim loses his humanity and becomes what the spirit would most like him to become. The influence doesn't have to be so overt, of course. A vampire's blood-addicted servant might become a vampire-style serial killer over time. A member of Null Mysteriis, watching werewolves devour prey through a high-powered lens, might not be able to ignore that rumbling in her stomach anymore.

The question raised by a slasher character whose urge to kill is ostensibly from an outside source is this: was there some analog of the slasher already present, and if so, who is really responsible? Did the character ever have a choice in what she was to become? Could she have chosen to remain human, to stifle the murderous impulses? Both have good story possibilities, but they lend themselves to different ends for the slasher character. A character who was literally forced into her predations is a better candidate for redemption than one who chose her lot, even if that choice was nudged a bit.

PROFESSIONS, UNDERTAKINGS, AND ORGANIZATIONS

Slashers don't necessarily have Professions. Their Vigil (which might more accurately be called "the Slaughter") consumes them and leaves little time for development of anything beyond their endless bloodbath. But some slashers *were* hunters, and thus might have had Professions in the past. Here's how to handle that when creating a slasher character:

SLASHER CREATION

The mechanical process of creating a slasher character is as follows:

- **Step One: Concept.** Slashers who were once hunters can have Professions, and it's possible for a slasher to be a member of an organization. Choose (or create) an Undertaking.
- **Step Two: Attributes.** Prioritize Attributes (Mental, Physical, Social) and divide points between them (5/4/3) as usual. Increase one Attribute to 4 dots (ripper) or 5 dots (scourge), based on the character's Undertaking.
- **Step Three: Skills.** Prioritize Skills (Mental, Physical, Social) and divide points between them (11/7/4). Slashers must have at least two dots in each of their Undertaking Skills.
- **Step Four: Skill Specialties.** Slashers have three Skills Specialties to distribute. At least one must be placed into an Undertaking Skill.
- **Step Five: Apply slasher features.** Make note of the character's Talent and Frailty on the character sheet. Scourges have both the ripper and scourge Talents and Frailties of the appropriate Undertaking. For instance, a Psycho has the Talents and Frailties of the Charmer as well as the Psycho.
- **Step Six: Select Merits.** Spend seven dots on Merits, from the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, the **Hunter: The Vigil** book, this book, and any other World of Darkness books that your Storyteller deems permissible.
- **Step Seven: Record Advantages.** All Advantages except Morality are computed as described on pp. 90-105 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**. Morality for starting slashers is discussed in the text, and in more depth in the essay on p. 214.
- **Step Eight: Spark of (Taking) Life.** Describe the character, consider his history, his style of murder, and the eventual end you foresee for him (which might not be the end he actually comes to, of course).

- If the slasher was created as a hunter, and had a Profession: Erase the Profession and replace it with the character's Undertaking. Undertaking Skills replace Asset Skills, and the Professional Training Merit no longer applies its bonuses and experience point breaks, though obviously any dots or Specialties remain. If the character had five dots of Professional Training, the benefit of the last dot persists if the slasher is still perform-



ing his original job. If (when) the slasher gives up his life for the Vigil, these benefits fade within a month. The Contacts gained from the first dot of Professional Merit *might* still be viable, if the slasher is still socially functional.

• **If the slasher is being created from scratch:**

Assign an Undertaking, and consider what the character's Profession (if any) was before becoming a slasher. Let this guide your choices of Skills and Merits. If the Storyteller wishes, she may grant you experience points to be spent on Skills and Merits that reflect your character's life before picking up the chainsaw.

Organization Status and whether slashers can belong to organizations is in the hands of the Storyteller. On the one hand, none of the hunter organizations on any tier have an infallible "slasher detector" that tips them off when one of their number starts following people around and skewering them. On the other hand, slashers behave strangely — even outright *wrong*. They don't read like normal people, and while some of them (the social-predator Charmers particularly) can fake being normal people, that doesn't wash with people who spend long periods of time around them.

So, while it's *possible* for a slasher to retain (or even gain) organization membership, it's not likely, and that membership should be in constant peril. Being caught murdering an innocent person would result in immediate expulsion from any of the presented organizations, and probably summary termination from most of them. Being caught torturing a supernatural creature, or killing one in a particularly "slasher" manner, though, might not immediately result in anything more than some raised eyebrows. This is especially true of Geniuses who are too smart for the organization to lose, or Brutes who can hold vampires and werewolves down while the rest of the cell gets a Tactic going.

The other issue is that slashers don't identify with other people. Often, they don't even identify with each other, but they can stand to be around other slashers. Many slashers are uncomfortable, even downright nauseated, by "normal" people, including other hunters. While a slasher in the employ of the Long Night might appreciate having some warm bodies around that can soak up the damage that monsters dish out, the "let's save the world for Jesus" rhetoric eventually starts to grate on his nerves (not that he doesn't *believe*, necessarily, it's just that *his* belief is so much more pure and fervent than those of these half-assed weaklings).

SLASHERS AND ENDOWMENTS

If a hunter becomes a slasher, can he keep his Endowments? Yes, but it's not necessarily easy to do so. Some Endowments necessitate upkeep. VALKYRIE will likely shut down the RFID chips necessary to operate items of Advanced Armory, while Cheiron Group and the Aegis Kai Doru are sure to hunt down "rogue hunters" who have absconded with their very expensive and unique property.

The fact that slashers can keep Endowments such as Benedictions and Castigation rites concerns those Lucifuge and Malleus Maleficarum members who discover such a thing. It's not widely revealed.

Note that slashers are unlikely to ever learn new Endowments, however, unless they've managed to conceal themselves within the memberships of the existing conspiracies.

Undertaking

As part of the concept stage of your character's creation, choose an Undertaking. Undertakings are the *modus operandi* of the slasher, but more than that, they define the weapons he uses. All slashers are proficient with literal weapons of some kind, but Genius-es use their minds in a manner most deadly, while Charmers can talk their victims into handing them the knives they use to skin the hapless fools a second later. Brutes, Freaks and some Avengers use physical power to bring their victims low, of course.

Undertaking defines the Attribute that you boost to 4 or 5 dots during character creation. This boost is free; instead of starting with one dot of the relevant Attribute, you start with four (for rippers) or five (for scourges). If you wish a ripper to have a rating of 5 in the Attribute, you must spend two of your Attribute dots allocated to that category.

Undertaking also dictates which Skills the character uses to commit his crimes. The player chooses two Undertaking Skills from the lists provided in the Undertaking write-ups later in this chapter. These Skills *must* have a rating of at least 2, and at least one of the character's three Specialties must be placed in one of these Skills.

THE CHARACTER'S DESTINY

The life of a slasher is, to borrow a phrase, nasty, brutish and short. Well, actually, it's not always short. Some slashers live for decades or centuries, unable or unwilling to die. Some last just long enough to complete one "great work." And some die with their heads severed, pitchforks sticking out of their chests and trapped in burning barns. Chapter Three discusses the endgame scenarios for slashers, and character creation is the perfect time to start thinking about them. If you have a strong vision for how your slasher is going to go out, discuss it with your Storyteller. If not, that's fine, too — see how you feel after the character is involved in the story a while and really gets into his work.

Storytellers, if you're creating a slasher to act as supporting cast to a hunter cell ("supporting cast" meaning "relentless, blood-soaked foe"), take endgame into consideration as well. Is there a character in the cell who *should*, by rights, get the killing blow? Is there a locale that

you've always wanted to revisit in your **Hunter** chronicle that would make for a great showdown? Is there an epilogue moment, where we flash forward 20 years and see the characters' children finding the killer's coat, caked with dried blood, at the bottom of a now-dry riverbed? Keep these ideas in mind.

But please note: nothing is set in stone, especially in a Storytelling game. The dice can and do change fortunes quickly. While you should not, of course, let the dice tell the story for you, there's no point in using them if you already know all the details, right? So, when considering endgame, have an idea — but be flexible.

MORALITY

A starting slasher character can have a Morality rating of anywhere from 0 to 4. The Storyteller and the player should discuss the character's activities, including how often he kills and whether he feels any sense of remorse, and base the Morality rating on that discussion. Slashers can start with derangements (or Tells) to represent their crimes, but these traits *cannot* be taken as Flaws the way that they can for normal **Hunter** characters (see p. 96 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). Also, slashers cannot reduce their Morality at character creation to gain experience points.

UNDERTAKINGS

Undertakings are a general way of describing the style and *modus operandi* of slasher characters. They are broad generalizations, and the inspiration for these Undertakings is largely cinematic (in fact, each Undertaking description includes a short list of films that inspired it).

“Undertaking” is a game term, rather than an in-game term; you won’t hear members of a hunter organization discussing a “genius slasher” or a “mutant slasher.” That said, VASCU recognizes the slasher phenomenon in general, and does note that these monsters have wildly different approaches to their grisly tasks. Each Undertaking write-up includes a case study from VASCU, meant as inspiration for players and Storytellers.

The Undertakings listed here are not the only ones by any means. Following the descriptions, we present a section on designing a new Undertaking whole cloth, including advice on making up

new Talents and Frailties, which Attribute is appropriate to the Undertaking, and how to differentiate your new Undertaking from those already presented.

THE RIPPER AND THE SCOURGE

Each Undertaking has two aspects. These aspects are referred to as “rippers” and “scourges,” respectively. These terms aren’t in-character vocabulary; you won’t hear Task Force: VALKYRIE soldiers referring to “taking down a scourge.” They’re just here to provide a way to differentiate the two levels of Undertakings. You might consider the scourge aspect to be the supernatural version of the ripper Undertaking. Yes, the Genius’ ability to predict his foes’ moves borders on precognition, but it does not cross that border. The Mask’s ability to withstand prolonged gunfire, however, is manifestly supernatural. As such, rippers’ Talents





are abnormal, eerie, even awe-inspiring, but they aren't magical. Likewise, their Frailties are logical extensions of their madness and shortcomings, not arcane secrets that hunters can use to bring them low. Scourges are much harder to kill, because their Talents propel them into the realm of supernatural characters. But then again, their Frailties give them weaknesses that can allow enemies to kill them or drive them off, so it's not all knives and roses.

Not all slashers progress from one state to the other (in particular, a ripper might die before reaching his full potential), but everything needed for a scourge is contained in the ripper. For instance, an Avenger only requires time and the

right circumstances to become a Legend. A Brute, left unchecked, will lose the remainder of his ability to relate to people and become a Mask. The difference between the Charmer and the Psycho is simply a matter of how long the illusion of humanity can be maintained.

A ripper can become a scourge. When and how this happens is discussed under "New Undertakings," beginning on p. 124, later in this chapter. In the write-ups below, the ripper Undertakings precede the scourges, but they are presented in the same order (so Legend is the scourge analog of Avenger). Remember that a scourge slasher has the Talent and Frailty of his Undertaking's ripper analog as well as the one listed.

AVENGER

REMEMBER ME?

Everyone commits crimes against their fellow human beings. Sometimes it's as simple as cutting someone off in traffic. Sometimes it's emotional — people cheat on their spouses, steal from their employees, and lie to their constituents. Sometimes it's physical. People shove each other out of the way, get into drunken brawls. We wound people every day, and figure it's all going to wash away by the next morning.

Some people, though, don't forget.

Avengers are slashers driven by the hurts they have received. Usually, an Avenger starts with something very specific to redress, such as the murder of a loved one. The Avenger finds the people responsible and slaughters them, sometimes one by one, sometimes in an orgy of carnage. It might end there — the killer puts away his knives or his guns, never to kill again. This is especially likely if the offense that drove the character to kill wasn't permanent. A man's daughter is raped, and he finds the four boys responsible, beats them unconscious, ties them up in a van, and burns them. His daughter never knows of his actions, and the two of them try to put it all behind them. But if the Avenger *cannot* move on with his life, if his existence has been so fundamentally altered by the infractions against him that he is no longer the same person, the call to murder becomes his passion. He generalizes his need for vengeance, and the circle just keeps growing wider.

The man mentioned above starts out by killing the men who raped his daughter, but finds he can't sleep knowing that other brutes like that are loose. He looks up sex offenders on the Internet and starts hunting them down, one by one. A woman whose husband died on the operating table because the doctor was incompetent isn't content with poisoning the surgeon. Now she hunts down other medical professionals who have, in her mind, failed their patients. Organized crime ruins a man's business, and the next day the papers are full of stories about the "Little Italy Shooter."

Avengers don't necessarily become indiscriminate in who they kill, but the line blurs as they become more willing to commit murder for reasons other than their "mission." It might be expedient to

shoot a cop in the head, rather than incapacitate him. And he's probably on the take, anyway. As an Avenger moves farther away from his original purpose, and as tales of his exploits spread, he grows closer to becoming a Legend (see p. 97).

Background: Avengers are versatile. Anyone can be wronged, so anyone can, theoretically, pick up a weapon in pursuit of justice. The method by which an Avenger kills is one of the main ways of defining him (second only to *who* he kills). The tactics employed by Geniuses and Charmers are as much open to Avengers as the more corporeal methods of Mutants and Brutes, but Avengers generally pick an approach and stay with it. This versatility is reflected in their expanded choice of Undertaking Attributes.

Once-hunter Avengers are somewhat rare, because many hunters are out for revenge. Hunting down supernatural creatures in response to the death or corruption of a family member is a different thing than lying in wait for muggers with a length of razor wire. Avengers don't usually target supernatural creatures specifically, and so the outgrowth of hunter to Avenger is uncommon. It does happen, however. Sometimes a hunter feels that monsters would disappear if the world stopped being so damned complacent about it. They start hunting down people in positions of power, who (as they see it) are keeping humanity blind.

In character creation, Avengers might show any set of Attributes or Skills as primary. They almost always possess the Iron Stamina Merit, however, and many have some rating in Safehouse — they need time and space to plan their hunts.

Inspirations: Paul Kersey (*Death Wish*). Erica Bain (*The Brave One*). Brenda Bates (*Urban Legend*). Ben Willis (*I Know What You Did Last Summer*).

Attribute: Strength, Intelligence or Presence

Undertaking Skills: Brawl, Computer, Expression, Firearms, Investigation, Intimidation, Stealth, Weaponry

Talent — Working the Room: Avengers might try to kill their victims one by one, but sooner or later they wind up with a roomful of people that require their attention. Fortunately, these slashers are adept at taking on crowds without being beaten down. The rules for



VASCU CASE STUDY : THE GHOST-MAKER

From the files of VASCU (Orlando, Florida Division)

The "Ghost-Maker," as the press liked to call him, gained some notoriety as a serial killer in the late 1990s, but was presumed killed in a shootout with police in early 2000. This is not the case - VASCU and [REDACTED] have obtained information that the Ghost-Maker is still alive, and still active.

This killer targets fortune tellers, palm-readers, Tarot readers and, most of all, mediums. His motives for doing so are unclear, but his profile and evidence at crime scenes suggests that he was the victim of a confidence scam involving someone pretending to pass along messages from the "other side." In one case, his victim purported to hear voices of the dead in static (this is commonly called EVP or Electronic Voice Phenomenon), and the tape recorder was left running while he murdered her:

Ghost-Maker (GM): You want to hear the dead?

Sarah Crawford (SC): Please... don't... I just-

GM: You want to hear the fucking dead, you selfish bitch?

SC: I don't want to die, please-

GM: Then listen.

(gunshot, followed by distortion on the tape - several agents report that the distortion sounds like laughter)

GM: Tear that bitch up, fuckers. Just stay away from me.

Defense vs. multiple opponents do *not* apply to Avengers. No matter how many times in a turn an Avenger is attacked, apply his full Defense to all incoming attacks. This Talent does not, however, allow Defense against attacks that normally wouldn't benefit from it; the Avenger still gets no Defense against Firearms.

Frailty — Nothing But the Mission: Most slashers are obsessive, but Avengers take it to a whole new level. When faced with the choice between pursuing a target and taking some other course of action, the Avenger's player must roll Resolve + Composure. If this roll succeeds, the Avenger can choose to let the target go (for now). If the roll fails, the Avenger re-

mains focused on his mission and ignores the other situation. *Example:* The rapist-hunting Avenger mentioned above is out stalking a boy in his daughter's high school class who is frequently accused of date rape. While watching the boy walk down the beach with his latest girlfriend, the Avenger notices a man walk by a window and cast a murky, blurred reflection — almost certainly a vampire. The player must roll the character's Resolve + Composure; if this roll succeeds, the Avenger can follow or otherwise deal with the vampire. If not, the Avenger *must* pursue the "rapist" (even if he turns out to be nothing more than the victim of vicious gossip).

LEGEND

YOU CALLED ME UP.
DIDN'T YOU WANT TO SEE ME?

It's possible to get swept up in one's own story. The Avenger, unable to make rational choices regarding his mission, becomes the nightmare that his victims imagine him to be. The Legend is a deadly foe, because Legends do not die — but on the other hand, a Legend's fate is not his own. The slasher has no control over how his story ends, and his free will is tenuous at best.

A Legend, in practical terms, is a slasher about whom stories are told, often within a community that the slasher has already preyed upon. Legends are the scourge version of Avengers because Avengers *want*, on some level, to become Legends. They want their victims to know them, to appreciate how they've suffered, and to feel remorse or terror in the wake of the slasher's attack. As mentioned

with Avengers, though, the net for victims is always cast too wide. Sooner or later, the slasher doesn't discriminate anymore, and at that point, others try to make sense of his killings, ascribing rules and logic to every knife wound, every flippant statement, and every coincidence.

So, consider again the man who targets young would-be rapists. Over time, he stops bothering with the "rapist" part. He feels that *all* young men should be chaste until they learn to handle their hormones, and since they don't do that, he hunts any sexually-active male under the age of 21. The people of the community, after losing several of their sons, grow frightened. Police investigations ensue, but in the background there are murmurs about the "true" nature of this beast, whom the locals call "Shotgun Dad-



VASCU Case Study : Rusty Nail

From an interview with folklorist Louise VanDerGraaf

"Supposedly he was a carpenter. The story goes that he sawed off four of his own fingers - accidentally, I assume - and his assistant didn't go to get help because he was too drunk to hear his boss' screams. The carpenter took a handful of nails and pounded them into the drunkard's head - though how he managed that missing four fingers I don't know - and then he went on a crusade against drunks. Folks started calling him 'Rusty Nail,' and the story was a pretty common one in the 1920s. It should be pretty easy to see why; it's a nice morality tale for the Prohibition set.

"Of course, like most of these legends, there were ways to avoid Rusty Nail's wrath. For one thing, he only attacked people who were drinking illegally or when they really shouldn't be. Now, that didn't mean much back then (since it was all illegal), but there was a resurgence of this story about a year ago, and Rusty Nail supposedly went after people who were drinking underage, or while driving, or other illegal or inappropriate times. The other thing was, if you saw Rusty Nail coming for you - you'd know by the hammer and the trail of blood from his hand - you could show him the back of your hand, keeping your fingers flattened against your palm. That way, he'd see you were a kindred spirit and leave you alone.

"What? Oh, the resurgence in the legend followed the unearthing of some legal documents from the 1920s. Stuck in among them was a newspaper article about a man killed with nails in the head. Probably someone did some research, started telling the story, and boom, instant legend. Copycats, even, as I recall. Some deadbeat dad got drunk and left his kids home alone and they all nearly died when the place caught fire. They found the man two days later. His face looked like a pincushion, I heard."

dy." They say he can feel it when young men get too frisky with their dates, and he'll show up to drag you into his van, blow your legs off with a shotgun, and burn you alive as you try to crawl to safety. When the slasher started his crusade against date-rapists, he had no special "sense" for when people started to grope each other... but as the stories spread, he starts to notice it. He also realizes, however, that he can't approach cars or rooms, even if some sexual assignation is going on within, or if a fresh rose is wound around the handle or doorknob. The legends say this is because his daughter loved roses so much, and the sight of a rose drives him away in grief. Is this true, or is Shotgun Daddy now powerless within his own story?

Legends, more than other slashers, take on a supernatural or mystical tone. Their special senses and weird vulnerabilities make them seem more like spirits than people, and the question of how much free will they retain is a valid one. Legends draw

strength from people acting in accordance with their particular "rules," but these rules can also be their undoing.

Background: While an Avenger can "evolve" into a Legend, given time, it's also possible for a slasher to generate enough of a mystique to qualify as a Legend immediately. Legends who were once hunters, for instance, might have seen enough of the supernatural to be confused or even intrigued by the arbitrary seeming rules that these creatures live with. Why do vampires avoid the sun? Why can't they cross running water? Why does a werewolf recoil at wolfsbane, or a ghost vanish with the dawn? Even when a given rule turns out to be false, the hunter takes comfort in it. If the world has rules, the world has order. There's a point to all of this. This kind of solace can, in some few hunters, fester into the desire to become part of that order — and a Legend is born.

Character creation for Legends, like Avengers, is highly variable depending on the character's history and

motives. The important thing, though, is that Legends all have a set of precepts dictating their behavior and choice of victims. These might include a certain way to summon them (saying a slasher's name might do it, or engaging in a particular behavior or ritual), a way to defeat or outwit them (certain types of attacks inflict aggravated damage, or the Legend might be free to hunt only on certain nights) or an abjuration or protective measure (the slasher might be distracted by a particular scent, or cannot bring himself to attack a given type of person).

Inspiration: Candyman (*Candyman*). The Tooth Fairy (*Darkness Falls*). Freddy Krueger (*Nightmare on Elm Street*).

Attribute: Strength, Intelligence or Presence

Undertaking Skills: Brawl, Computer, Expression, Firearms, Investigation, Intimidation, Occult, Stealth, Weaponry

Talent — Strength from the Tales: The Legend can draw strength from his victims (or other people) acting in accordance with his myth. Once per scene, when someone fulfills one of the tenets of the slasher's supernatural "rules," the player can roll Strength, Intelligence or Presence (whichever Attribute is the Legend's Undertaking Attribute) + Occult. Successes on this roll can be applied to one of the following: restoring spent Willpower, healing damage (one success for a bashing wound, two for a lethal, three for an aggravated wound) or applying bonuses to rolls made in pursuit of the Legend's agenda. The Legend does not have to use the successes in the same way each time, but cannot split the successes on any given chapter. *Example:* Shotgun Daddy draws power from brash, teenaged men choosing to let their hormones think for them. He goes hunting one night and his prey hears him lurking in the woods near his car, but chooses to ignore it in hopes of getting lucky with his girlfriend. The slasher's player rolls Intelligence + Occult and comes up with three successes. The player could choose to regain three points of spent

Willpower, or heal damage, or take three bonus dice to apply in his upcoming attack on the boy. Bonus dice gained from this Talent can only be used once. Note: This Talent has a great deal of potential for abuse, and so it is crucial that the Storyteller and the player design the Legend's "rules" carefully, considering what kinds of actions would be appropriate triggers for the Talent. A Legend should have at least one such rule, and might have many more, but keep in mind that as the story gets more convoluted, the Legend runs more risk of being Trapped in the Story (see below). In game terms, a Legend with many rules to empower him probably also has several ways to weaken him.

Frailty — Trapped in the Story: All Legends have a weakness. This weakness is up to the player (with Storyteller input), but it needs to be fairly stringent. An attack exploiting the weakness might inflict aggravated damage, or ignore Armor and Defense. A banishment, repellent, or abjuration do *not* allow the slasher's player to roll to resist — if the Frailty is employed against the character, it has the effect, every time. Shotgun Daddy, for instance, *cannot* approach a car with a rose on the door. It doesn't matter what he sees going on in that car, he just can't bring himself to get near that rose. A Legend who gave up his name and identity in exchange for power from the Devil (that's the story, anyway) might become deaf for a scene and suffer a point of aggravated damage when he hears his name spoken aloud. If a Legend is focused exclusively on protecting members of his family, he might lose *all* supernatural abilities if he tries to protect anyone else, or harm someone who has no chance of harming his family.

The Storyteller is the final judge of whether a Frailty is harsh enough. Keep in mind that Legends with multiple ways to benefit from their Talent usually have multiple versions of this Frailty. Matching the two exactly probably isn't necessary, but stories do have a way of balancing themselves out.

BRUTE

(NOTHING BUT A COLD STARE)

All slashers are horrific, but the Brute is unstoppable. All rage and unbridled strength, he crashes through doors, breaks necks with his bare hands, and is unfailingly deadly with any instrument he picks up. He is a killing machine; he knows or wants nothing else. And everyone, *everyone* is a target.

The Brute might seem simple, even stupid. Maybe he is. Perhaps whatever condition led to his enhanced physical strength also reduced his ability to reason. It almost certainly reduced his capacity for moral or empathetic behavior. It's hard to get inside the Brute's head, because there's just not much room in there. His motives aren't oddly justifiable like the Avenger's or the Freak's, or fascinatingly arcane like the Genius'. He doesn't even have the compelling, cloying madness of

the Charmer. He drives the knife home, watches the light in his victim's eyes die, and then searches, slowly, methodically, for the next one.

But that is the source of the Brute's horror. He can't be reasoned with or intimidated. Even if the Brute is outnumbered or sorely outgunned, the best that his victims can hope for is that he retreats into the shadows, stalking them until he can, once again, lurch from the dark, knife raised. He's not obsessive about killing, precisely, it's just that he doesn't *do* much else. It would be tempting to say that he's more animal than man, but that's not quite right. Animals eat, breed and feel fear and pain. Brutes are forces of nature or, more accurately, supernatural.

Brutes, unlike their scourge counterparts, the Masks, are still recognizably human. Their savagery retains a

VASCU Case Study: Bryan Gern

From an interview with Drill Instructor W. E. Naylor, US Army (Ret.)

"Private Gern was a strange one. When he joined up, I overheard him and a bunch of recruits talking about why they enlisted. Mostly it's the same stories. Farm boys join to get the hell out of their towns, or sometimes because their folks were Army. Black folk join to get out of the inner cities. Some folks join for the free education, some join because they're running away from something - you never hear nothing you haven't heard before. And then there's Gern. And he's almost seven-foot tall, built like... shit, I don't know what, a monster. They ask him why he joined up, and he says in that stupid West Virginia accent, 'Don't rightly know. Figured maybe I wouldn't hurt nobody here.'

"And that sticks with me for a while, and I dig into his records. Turns out one of the cops in his hometown is a boy I about carried through basic back in the day, and he remembers Gern. 'Oh, yeah, Sarge,' he tells me. 'Gern used to get into trouble when he was a boy, 'cause he'd go out in the fields with the cows. Not to tip them. He'd stand next to them with his daddy's straight razor and make these long, thin, cuts. Farmers would catch him and tan his hide, but he never cared much.'

"Oh, I kept an eye on him through basic. Not close enough, though. He's still listed AWOL, but I read about those murders in Lansing last year, those people found dead with those long cuts down their backs. I figure cows just got too boring for him."

personal style; their eyes still have a grimly gleeful light while they kill. Some Brutes lead double lives, remaining human most of time, but picking up their weapons when the full moon rises, when the sun sets, on the third Sunday of every month or just when the mood strikes them. Brutes often retain enough intelligence to have a sense of deliberation about their hunts. They change clothes — and tactics — as necessary to avoid detection. Often they travel to different areas for their activities, but as the lust for blood grows, it's often possible to trace the path of death to the Brute's door.

Brutes seldom speak, and those that do are often monosyllabic or unable to use much in the way of language. In many ways, the Brute is the personification of the fear of strangers. Most urban legends that deal with murdering madmen refer to Brutes, and while none of those killers are Geniuses, some do exhibit a certain amount of cunning. One story tells of the girl who wakes up to a dripping sound and feels afraid, but when she reaches over the side of the bed she feels her dog lick her hand. In the morning, she finds her poor dog gutted and hung in the shower, a message waiting on the mirror: "Humans can lick, too." Some Brutes, like the

dog-killer, are sadistic, but most are almost robotic. To achieve their superlative skill at taking life, they have given up everything else — cognition, social skills, even personality.

Calling a Brute a serial killer is misleading. Charmers are closer to the classic notion of a serial killer, because Brutes just don't interact with those around them except to inflict violence. If a Brute is socially functional enough to work with a group of other characters, it's likely that he's taciturn at best. More commonly, Brutes are solo killers. Some might keep trophies or toy with their victims, but most simply kill. Do they remember particular victims? Possibly, but not necessarily. Some have favored weapons; others use whatever is handy to kill. Some delight (if such a term is appropriate) in driving terrified victims toward environmental hazards — off cliffs, into bogs, through traffic, against spinning buzzsaws, etc. As they kill more people, they become more detached, less human, until only the Mask remains.

Background: Becoming a Brute requires dissociation. The slasher must stop thinking of people as people. They are merely objects to be torn up. They might make funny noises, they might speak to the Brute and seem almost like he is, but



they are creatures that are fundamentally “other,” as far as he is concerned. The degree to which this notion has taken hold in the mind of a Brute is a good litmus test for how close to becoming a Mask he is.

What brings on this kind of dissociation? Rejection from the world, humiliation from a parent, and abuse of trust or power from an authority figure are good starts. But a hunter who becomes a Brute likely just witnesses the use of raw physical power and its effects on the world. A group of hunters hides in a well-fortified Safehouse, but the werewolf tears through the door like it's tissue paper. A woman appears slight and even frail, but then snaps a hunter's neck like a pretzel. The Brute notes these things, and develops his physical strength in hopes of becoming a match for the supernatural. In the process, though, he must learn to put aside pain, fatigue and suffering. Sadly, these things are part of what make people human. Without suffering, empathy is impossible. Without empathy, humanity is questionable.

Physical Attributes and Skills are almost always primary for Brutes, although many have high ratings in Crafts (leatherworking, perhaps, or creation of weapons or traps, though not nearly so elaborate as Geniuses) or Animal Ken (reflecting an ability to calm or train animals, but not necessarily any true empathy with them). Merits such as Quick Healer, Strong Back and any of the Fighting Styles are also common.

Inspirations: John Ryder (*The Hitcher*, 2007). Colqhoun (*Ravenous*). The Man and the Woman (*The*

People Under the Stairs). Mickey and Mallory Knox (*Natural Born Killers*, though one might argue that Mallory is actually an Avenger or even a Charmer).

Attribute: Strength

Undertaking Skills: Animal Ken, Athletics, Brawl, Crafts, Intimidation, Stealth, Survival, Weaponry

Talent — Unstoppable: Brutes are hard to kill. When hunting, they enter a kind of trance, in which they do not feel pain, discomfort, or fear. Brutes do not suffer wound penalties of any kind, and the player need not make the reflexive roll to stay conscious when the Brute's Health track is full of bashing damage. Instead, when the Brute's track fills with lethal damage, the player makes a reflexive Stamina roll to remain conscious and active. If this roll fails, the Brute falls unconscious and begins to bleed out, as described on p. 174 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**. If it succeeds, the Brute can remain active until he suffers one more wound, at which point he is Incapacitated. Often, the Brute falls down, seemingly dead, before reviving for a few seconds for one last attack.

Frailty — Blinded by Blood: The hyper-focus on murder that gives Brutes their strength also means they don't perceive the world around them very clearly. All Perception rolls made for Brutes suffer a -3 penalty, and on opposed rolls made to notice a hiding opponent, ties always go against the Brute (that is, the Brute's player must roll more successes than the hiding character's player in order for the Brute to notice the character).

MASK

(A BRUTAL ROAR, FOLLOWED BY PANTING)

The Brute taken to its bloody, frenzied extreme is the Mask. When all traces of humanity have gone, and all that remains is the body, the blade, and the urge to kill, the Mask has arrived. The Mask has no compassion, no fear and no remorse. He — it — does not hesitate to kill in the face of pleas or entreaties. Some Masks do refuse to kill certain targets (children, people of a particular race, age or even hair color), but the Mask makes no show of granting them mercy. Instead, the Mask simply ignores them.

Masks have little or no ability to use or understand language. The very few that are willing to take orders or work in a group retain a tenuous grip on receptive language (that is, they can understand what is said to them), but spoken or written language is far out of their purview. Language is unique to humanity, and Masks have given up their humanity for superlative ability to *kill*. Some occult researchers espouse the theory (and VASCU's data seems to support it) that Masks feel physical pain in the presence of living human beings. This doesn't allow them to detect



VASCU Case Study: Subject #714

From the files of VASCU Special Investigator John Deng

Subject #714 was captured outside a swamp in Michigan. His capture cost the lives of four VASCU agents and six unaffiliated citizens (believed to be active in vigilante activity, but verifying this posthumously has been difficult). Subject #714 was transported to our Lansing facility. En route he nearly escaped once, killing two agents, but was subdued. At the facility, we eventually decided to imprison him by submerging him in concrete up to his chest.

Special Agent Jennifer Trask, a noted empath, was brought in as a consult. Since Subject #714 does not or cannot speak, and since any attempt to take fingerprints or dental pictures is dangerous, we felt that Trask might be able to shed some light on his identity. She could not, but she was able to establish a strong psychic link. While she was "in synch," as she calls it, with Subject #714, she spoke of the experience. The transcript follows:

Needles in my eyes. Needles. Everything I see hurts. Shutting my eyes just makes it worse. Oh, God. Sounds grates on my skin like... like... (inchoate screams). Silence hurts! Noise hurts! Clothing, light, the feeling of my own skin hurts! Shoes crush my feet, but the floor is made of razors and snake's teeth. My teeth... my teeth...

At this point, Trask attempted to tear her own teeth from her head. She was sedated, at which point the episode passed. She was not able to recount her experiences afterwards, and she went AWOL six days later. She has not been found. Subject #714 remains in custody. His identity has not been established.

life. Indeed, like Brutes, their senses seem to be fairly dull, or no better than a normal person's. Instead, it means that they cannot be at peace until all life around them is extinguished. Few Masks display anything like a survival instinct, and if the presence of life does indeed needle them, this makes sense. Simply being *alive* causes them pain.

One might ask, then, why they don't simply commit suicide, but as anyone who has stood against a Mask and survived can attest, it's not easy to kill one. Masks seem unfazed by most wounds. A large cell of hunters can generally take one down with some casualties, but this is because such cells are trained to fight supernatural opponents. Mundane warriors (police, soldiers, etc.) who attempt to fight a Mask like a human opponent seldom live to be surprised. Shotgun wounds just leave the Mask bleeding a bit. Tasers don't faze them. Setting a Mask on fire might kill it, but is just as likely to result in an inferno as the Mask casually spreads the fire to every flammable object within reach.

Not every Mask actually covers his face, but even those that don't are easily recognizable. This is because their faces don't change when they kill, when they are shot, or under any other circumstance. Even if the slasher's face is clearly visible, his face is an immobile, dispassionate Mask.

Background: Where does the Mask come from? A Brute might become a Mask, yes, but how? If the Mask is, indeed, in constant pain simply from being alive, is this condition a congenital one that takes time to manifest, or can it be acquired, perhaps from prolonged supernatural contact? Likewise, if a physically adept hunter can become a Brute by over-focusing on his ability to kill to the exclusion of his humanity, is the logical progression of this tendency the Mask?

It would be tempting, and not altogether inaccurate, to say that a human being who exhibits the "classic" serial killer pathology might become a Mask. Note, though, that a Mask is truly a supernatural being, all but

impervious to physical harm. Some kind of supernatural interference must take place, but the drive to kill must already be in place. One possibility is that the mind becomes trapped within the body, the senses driven to absurd sharpness, to the point that, as described above, any sensation is perceived as pain. The only place that the mind can flee is into the deep, dark lizard brain, finding the lowest, most savage response to pain — fight. Kill. Make the pain stop. Masks are terrifying because of their simplicity.

Although every Mask was once human, Masks don't normally respond to stimuli from their previous lives. Once in a while, though, something catches a Mask's attention, breaks through the haze of pain and murder, and reveals to a witness a tiny shred of the man within. That witness, if he should live, will later report that the man looked *terrified* — trapped behind the Mask, surrounded by blood and agony, and subsumed almost immediately.

Masks invariably have high Physical Attributes, Skills and several Physical Merits. Mental Attributes are usually average, and Social Attributes are nearly non-existent (Masks don't speak, after all). Skills that are unrelated to murder are rare, and Mental and Social Merits are, for the most part, inappropriate.

Inspirations: Michael Myers (*Halloween*). Jason Vorhees (*Friday the 13th*). Coffin Baby (*Toolbox Murders*, 2003).

Attribute: Strength

Undertaking Skills: Animal Ken, Athletics, Brawl, Crafts, Firearms, Intimidation, Stealth, Streetwise, Survival, Weaponry

Talent — Unstoppable Killing Machine: Like Brutes, Masks do not suffer wound penalties and do not need to check for unconsciousness when their Health tracks fill with bashing damage. In addition, though, Masks do not need sleep or food. Finally, *every* successful attack made on a Mask inflicts one point of damage, no matter how many successes are actually rolled. This includes supernatural attacks. Incidental damage (falling, electrocution, drowning, fire) inflicts its usual damage.

Frailty — No Mind but for Murder: Masks cannot speak, write or generate language in any meaningful way. They might be able to indicate a direction or an intent to kill with a nod of the head or a wave of the knife, but complicated gestures are beyond them. Likewise, the Mask's player must roll Intelligence + Composure for the Mask to understand spoken language of any kind (reading is impossible for the Mask).

CHARMER

I'M NEW IN TOWN.
MAYBE YOU CAN RECOMMEND
A PLACE FOR ME TO STAY?

The Charmer is deadly not because he is strong or even smart. The Charmer kills with trust. He is impeccably polite, sympathetic, well-spoken and knowledgeable. He is selfless, he is a superb listener and he has a voice that makes you hang on every word. Charmers often sing, whistle or hum to themselves, and their voices are hauntingly beautiful. They choose their victims and seduce them — not necessarily to the point of sexual congress (indeed, most Charmers find the notion of coitus unspeakably revolting), but to the point of intimacy. And then the victim feels the knife slide home, or receives a sharp blow to the head. The truly unlucky ones are the ones that the Charmer drugs, because then he can take his sweet time. Off all of the Undertakings, Charmers make some of the most enthusiastic torturers.

A Charmer might troll for victims in any number of ways. He might find an isolated community and surreptitiously murder a priest, teacher or some other important figure, and then replace him before the death can be reported to the proper authorities (this tactic doesn't work as well in the modern era as in decades past, but some Charmers are also skilled hackers and can forge what records they need). He might bar-hop every night, and develop a reputation as a true gentleman — he'll give you a ride home if you're too drunk to drive, and he'll never, ever take advantage. The Charmer might even open a shop on the corner, selling books, selling food, selling coffee, and become a fixture in the community.

And then the bodies start appearing. Members of the choir turn up dead after late-night practice sessions. A young woman was talking about meeting that nice man she met last night... and why hasn't she reported to work today? The kids in the neighborhood start holding their breaths when they walk by the alley behind that new coffee shop, because the garbage back there sure don't *smell* like coffee. Charmers are ready to pull up stakes at any moment, but they'd prefer to keep their charade going as long as possible. The goal for a Charmer isn't necessarily the kill — that's something they do almost in spite of themselves. What a Charmer loves most is knowing that his victims trust him.

Background: Most Charmers don't see people as thinking, feeling beings. Like most serial killers, they see people as objects, to be toyed with and ripped apart at leisure. Charmers, though, find the notion of trust and vulnerability fascinating — people are so stupid that they allow people that they barely know access to them while they *sleep*. Surely they're aware of the fact that people are monsters?

But the reason the Charmers feel this way, often, is because they've *seen* monsters. A Charmer was probably horribly abused in his childhood. Locked in a closet when he failed to do his homework, beaten regularly for no reason he could fathom, sexually abused — but often, also taught that sex in any form is *wrong*. Many Charmers have a pathological hatred of all things sexual. Most also despise the opposite sex. Often, Charmers were raised by the Bible and the strap, and grow up doggedly devout to their own twisted interpretations of their faith (Christianity isn't the only option, of course; any religion that preaches some concept of sin can help in creating a Charmer because it produces the excuse for hatred).

Not all Charmers are men. A female Charmer can actually get away with her crimes much more easily and more frequently, because like it or not, men are more willing to run off with strange women than vice versa. A female Charmer is often a black widow-style killer, seducing her victims and murdering them before, during or after the sexual act (depending on her own feelings about sex). Some Charmers worm their way into positions in which others are dependent on them — nurses, orderlies, even candy strippers — and kill the young, the elderly or the infirm in “angel of death” murders.

Charmers who began as hunters are somewhat different. While the potential for murder (the abuse, the inability to empathize) was probably already there, these Charmers became practiced at seeming harmless to the supernatural. A hunter acts as “bait” for vampires, luring them out of their crypts and their dark, gothic night-clubs into wide-open areas where they can be immolated. She becomes skilled at finding predators, at seeming



innocent, seductive and yet naïve, and one night she goes hunting alone. But what she brings out of that club isn't a vampire, just a randy young man hoping for a quick fuck in the cemetery. He still ends up burnt alive, though, and the hunter realizes, watching him burn, how much she hates being looked upon with lust. She'll do the same thing next week, but at a different club.

Social Attributes and Skills are almost always primary for Charmers, for obvious reasons. They aren't any great shakes when it comes to physical fighting, and their ability to kill depends upon taking their prey by surprise at a moment of great vulnerability (see *Killing Blow*, p. 168 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). A Charmer might have high ratings in Wits (thinking of excuses and quick getaways) or Dexterity (slipping a pill into a drink or a garrote around a victim's neck), but Strength, Stamina and even Intelligence aren't necessarily above average. You can get by on charm for 15 minutes, the saying goes, after which you'd better actually *know* something; charmers usually only need 10 minutes.

Inspirations: Stuntman Mike (*Death Proof*). Preacher Powell (*The Night of the Hunter*). Mick Taylor (*Wolf Creek*). Catherine Tramell (*Basic Instinct*).

Attribute: Presence

Undertaking Skills: Computer, Larceny, Weaponry, Empathy, Expression, Persuasion, Socialize, Subterfuge

Talent — Disarming: When a Charmer meets a new person, the player rolls Presence + a Social Skill. The Skill might be Expression (the Charmer speaks poetically or sings, plays an instrument or otherwise performs), Socialize (the Charmer plays groups of people like a fiddle) or Persuasion (the Charmer can always say exactly the right thing at the right time). This roll is contested by the listener's Intelligence + Subterfuge. If the Charmer wins, that person refuses to see anything wrong with the Charmer and makes excuses for him, supports him and might even lie for him. Common Sense and Danger Sense do *not* apply to characters who have fallen prey to the Charmer's wiles, and all Initiative rolls against the Charmer are penalized by five. If someone actually *witnesses* the Charmer harming another person (and the Charmer can't make a case for self-defense or justifiable homicide), the effect is lost.

Note that Charmers get one chance at this for a given person. First impressions are ev-

VASCU Case Study: The Wingman

From the files of VASCU Special Agent William Caffler

The "wingman" in the bar scene is the guy who distracts an attractive girl's friend(s) so that the "pilot" can seduce her. It's a pretty Neanderthal notion, if you think about it, but it persists. The wingman might be called upon to take an unattractive girl home for the night, anything to facilitate the pilot's "mission" being successfully completed. Of course, the roles of pilot and wingman can change (one would hope). The Wingman, however, likes his role just fine.

I first encountered this story in Memphis, and I thought it was an urban legend. I heard several different variations, but a few details remained consistent: The Wingman is about 30 years old, white, and trim. His hair is inconsistent; sometimes he is bald, sometimes not, but he is always described as attractive. His voice is always mentioned, and variously given traits such as "smooth," "sexy," and "musical." He approaches groups of men at bars, strikes up conversations, and eventually (after a few rounds) offers to act as wingman. The men don't know him, the women don't know him, but he is superb in his role because he seems interested but detached, as though he doesn't want anything but pleasant conversation. What he wants, of course, is to get out of the bar with a girl that no one but her friends (who are now distracted by the other men) will miss.

As I said, I thought this was an urban legend, but then I met a young woman named Alyssa Bylarsky. The Wingman had approached her at a bar while she was there with a friend, and she had been intrigued by his sophisticated conversation and his gentle voice. She took him home that night, and when her back was turned, he pushed a chloroform-soaked rag against her face, tied her to the bed, and spent the next few hours scorching various parts of her body with a butane lighter. She probably only escaped with her life because a friend (the girl she'd been with at the bar the night before) stopped over on her way home to check on her. The Wingman met her friend at the door, they smiled knowingly, and he was gone. Alyssa is still suffering from intense agoraphobia, as well as a pathological fear of fire. The Wingman's real name and whereabouts remain unknown.

ery-
thing. If the Charmer fails to meet or exceed the target's successes, she sees through the Charmer to the Psycho beneath (see p. 108). She might just feel that the Charmer is a phony, not necessarily dangerous, but the warning bells definitely go off (which probably makes her the Charmer's first target).

Frailty — Thin Veneer: Charmers are held together by staples and a few strands of sinew. They have a tightly regimented view of the world, and they hate having it shaken. They often believe their own hype; a Charmer taking the persona of a preacher might really believe that he's doing God's

work. All Charmers have a trigger, which the player or the Storyteller must decide at character creation. This might be bringing up a certain topic, a particular song, being touched in a sexual manner, or just being called by name rather than by title. When this trigger occurs, or when someone who resists the slasher's charms calls him out ("You're fucking creepy, dude" is enough), the Storyteller or player rolls Composure. If this roll fails, the slasher lashes out — usually verbally, but sometimes physically. At this point, anyone who fell under the Charmer's wiles before has a chance to snap out of it (players roll Wits + Subterfuge; success means the Charmer's Talent no longer applies).

PSYCHO

YOU JUST DON'T GET IT, DO YOU?
YOU'RE SO FUCKING WEAK.

Beneath the polished veneer of the Charmer is the Psycho. The Charmer's pathological hatred of the world — of women, of sex, of whatever the Charmer most despises — has become a full-blown ideology. The Psycho retains the Charmer's ability to disarm, up to a point, but the mask is much thinner. The Psycho is obviously crazy, noticeably damaged, and clearly dangerous.

Some Psychos are zealots. Their fervor might be focused on religious faith, and their murders have become a kind of cleansing activity. Once

in a while, racial "purity" or some other supremacist agenda drives the Psycho. A Psycho might be a Jack the Ripper-style killer, slaughtering prostitutes out of some mad desire to rid the world of lust. He might target gay men (or men who just look gay to his demented eyes) in a Biblical rage, or he might kill divorced women for forsaking their wedding vows. He has a reason for what he does, even if that reason is ludicrous on its own.



The Psycho has lost much of the social functionality of the Charmer. Instead of keeping the charade going to any length of time, the Psycho is only able to physically close the distance between himself and his victims, or talk others into unlocking doors, letting him past security, getting hitchhikers into his vehicle, and so on. The slasher's real agenda becomes clear if the victim is given time to evaluate the situation, but the Psycho only needs a minute. He doesn't thrive on violation of trust as a Charmer does. He has become a true slasher, interested in fulfilling his needs through violence.

Background: Psychos had it even worse than their ripper counterparts. Any sense of humanity was long gone from them by the time they picked up the knife.

Unlike Charmers, who are often physically weak, Psychos are surprisingly strong, tenacious and brutal. Also unlike Charmers, they don't necessarily look harmless. (Real-life serial killer Edmund Kemper once talked his way past campus security with two dead women in his backseat — he claimed they were drunk and he was giving them a lift. He was anything but harmless-looking. He was 6'9" and weighed over 300lbs. Kemper was never caught, by the way. He turned himself in after murdering his tenth victim.) Psychos are capable of seeming harmless, even in need, for brief periods of time. They only need a window of time to kill a victim.

Ex-hunters who become Psychos often suffered at the hands of a supernatural creature, but not physically. One Psycho might have become bound by blood to

VASCU Case Study: Dr. Belinda Gooding

From the files of VASCU Special Agent [Name classified]

While I was undercover investigating some umbrella pharmaceuticals company called the Cheiron Group, I met a doctor named Belinda Gooding. Belinda, when I met her, was extremely personable. She was friendly, witty, and attractive. She flirted, but wasn't overtly sexual, and in fact projected an air of sexual innocence that somehow made her seem more like someone deserving of protection than seduction (at least to me). After I'd been with the group for a while, though, I started noticing some changes in her. She'd stare a little too long at the wounds she was treating before actually starting to tend to them. She rarely blinked when in conversation, and would often point out facets of her personality that she thought people should notice (notably that she was a "good listener" and she "didn't judge").

I witnessed her kill a subject without prior authorization four months before her disappearance. The subject was suspected of supernatural activity, but there was no proof at that point. Belinda volunteered for the mission, coaxed the subject to look under the hood of her car, then slammed the hood down on his head and shot him in the back when he fell unconscious. She was removed from active duty pending an investigation; I unfortunately did not have the clearance necessary to see the results of that hearing, but I do know that she vanished recently, leaving behind the body of one of her former teammates (who'd apparently helped her escape) and a note promising to "ferret out the evil and the betrayers," along with a list of these "betrayers." My name was at the top of that list, which was ultimately the reason for my reclassification and removal from that undercover assignment.

Belinda's whereabouts are unknown. She is believed to have taken a large amount of medical supplies from the Cheiron Group with her when she fled.

vampire. Another was the mate of a werewolf. A Psycho might have been magically enslaved, unable to reach out for help due to spells placed on her mind. The Psycho hates the supernatural, and that hate spills over into every other aspect of his being.

Psychos have high ratings in Presence, but usually not Manipulation. It isn't that they aren't articulate, but they tend to sound crazy if they talk for too long. Skill with words is better simulated with high ratings in Subterfuge or Expression. Psychos tend to have higher ratings in Physical Attributes and Skills than Charmers. They are less likely to use poison or drugs to incapacitate, wanting the tactile sensation of beating their victims senseless, strangling them until they pass out, and feeling the knife slide home. Some use guns, but might shoot to wound rather than kill and then take their time with the dying victim.

Inspiration: Darryl Lee Cullum (*Copycat*). Patrick Bateman (*American Psycho*). Anton Chigurh (*No Country for Old Men*). Bo Sinclair (*House of Wax*, 2005). May Canady (*May*).

Attribute: Presence

Undertaking Skills: Computer, Empathy, Expression, Intimidation, Larceny, Persuasion, Socialize, Stealth, Subterfuge, Weaponry

Talent — Deadly Distraction: A Psycho can cause someone to drop her guard just long enough to incapacitate or kill her. This requires only a turn of conversation, and cannot be attempted in combat or when other (non-slasher) witnesses are about. The Psycho's player

rolls Presence + Persuasion, contested by the victim's Wits + Composure. If the Psycho's successes equal or exceed the victim's, the victim falls prey to the Psycho's charms for one brief but fatal moment. What this means depends on what the Psycho is trying to accomplish. He might just be trying to gain entry into a building or recover a lost weapon or piece of evidence, and if that's the case, the victim gets off light. But if the slasher wishes to attack the victim, he can make a Killing Blow (see p. 168 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**) with whatever weapon he has at hand, inflicting damage equal to the relevant dice pool with no roll required. This might not actually kill the victim, but it certainly wounds her grievously and probably places her at the Psycho's mercy.

Frailty — Obsessive: Psychos just can't let something go. Once a Psycho chooses a victim, and attempts to charm her (either by using Deadly Distraction or mundane Social attempts) and fails, the Psycho *cannot* just leave her be. He must break her down, hurt her, scare her and finally kill her. The Psycho can be patient, but most of them aren't equipped for it, and wind up impulsively attacking the victim (who is by no means unsuspecting and helpless). If the victim inflicts damage upon the Psycho, the Frailty's effects end and he can flee, but the Storyteller or player must roll Resolve + Composure every month thereafter. If the roll fails, the Psycho must seek out the victim once more. This Frailty is obviously a problem for the potential victim, but it does make Psychos easier to track and predict than other slashers.

FREAK

DON'T LOOK AT ME.

The Freak is similar to the Brute, but rather than being defined by the strength and tenacity with which he approaches his grisly work, the Freak's characteristic trait is deformity. Freaks are born of humanity, but set apart by physical ugliness. It might be a birth defect stemming from inbreeding or even prenatal drug use on the mother's part. It might be the result of an accidental (or deliberate) fire or splash of acid. It might even be that the Freak is otherworldly, and that his hideous outward appearance is reflective of some

supernatural taint. In either case, Freaks wear their evil on their skin.

Not all Freaks are self-conscious about the way they look. Some are, of course. They shun humanity, sticking to dark places and covering themselves with heavy clothes or scarves. They hate other people for the way that they have been treated, and this hatred ultimately serves as the impetus to kill. But some Freaks revel in what they are. Some might even be self-made Freaks, made grotesque not by birth or mishap but by their own knives. And then some Freaks are just as



VASCU Case Study: Flemming

Transmission received from Agent Sarah Stippler, VASCU field observer

SENDING REPORT. NEED IMMEDIATE EVAC. TRAPPED; TRACE IP ADDRESS.

Monday: Arrived in Grendel, CO last night, checked into a cheap motel. Probably have to move tonight. Spent the day looking for B&B or even slightly more upscale hotel; no luck. This town doesn't like visitors. So far, not one of the locals seems to know the story of the town's namesake. Depressing.

Tuesday: Stopped by a bar after business hours. Kept a hand on my gun the whole time - local men aren't exactly progressive. Heard disturbing, persistent whispers: "Get Flemming on her. Give her to Flemming."

Wednesday: Found a nice old lady who's willing to rent me a room while I'm here (used photojournalist cover story; might need to put in a request for a "clingy boyfriend" phone call, just to keep up appearances). Asked about "Flemming." She said not to "worry about that, dear, that's all done and we don't talk about it."

Thursday: Tunnels from old mine reach right under this house and most of the other houses in this town. Flemming's a kind of local legend, it seems - comes up out of the tunnels and grabs people. But why "Flemming?"

Friday: Saw Flemming today; nearly eight feet tall. Obviously has some kind of congenital condition. Not sure of his age; facial deformity makes it impossible to check. He does indeed stick to the tunnels, but I saw him in the woods outside of the factory. He waved at me with two fingers. The old lady won't tell me what that means, but she did ask me to move out today.

Saturday: Saw him again. He waved one finger. Leaving tonight. Only way out is through the woods. Going armed; requesting VASCU picked in next town.

bestial in mind as in body...but these Freaks are usually well on their way to becoming Mutants (the scourge version of this Undertaking).

Of all of the Undertakings, Freaks are the most likely to engage in cannibalism, necrophilia or other especially depraved activities with their victims. Their methods of murder vary, but are often horribly bestial — Freaks attack with teeth, claws and improvised weaponry. That isn't to say that a Freak couldn't use knives, bows or even guns, just that Freaks grow atavistic over time, and their methods of slaughtering their prey become likewise less sophisticated.

Freaks are also more likely to form attachments to others of their kind, and it's (unfortunately) not uncommon for Freaks to gather in small clans. These might actually be families, but a circus sideshow might spawn an impressively varied menagerie of deformed killers. A

Freak might wind up as the lapdog to a supernatural being such as a mage or a vampire, provided that the service that the master has in mind is bloody enough. Such partnerships tend to end badly, of course — sooner or later, the Freak realizes that he is being used, and then either dies as he attacks his master, or tears him limb from limb and flees.

Background: Freaks who are born to their condition, but born into an otherwise normal segment of society, often grow up hating themselves and everyone around them. Their murders are thus equal parts acts of revenge and acts of self-sabotage — they *want* to die, but they want everyone else to hurt right along with them.

Those Freaks born into a society (or even race) of similar creatures probably don't feel the same kind of self-loathing, though if

ALTERNATE FREAK TALENT: REVULSION

The Talent above for Freaks relies a bit on the slasher being somewhat clannish or territorial. If that doesn't fit your character, at the Storyteller's discretion the following Talent can be swapped out:

Fighting a Freak is hard, because it might mean touching them. All attempts to grapple or touch a Freak in combat suffer a -3 penalty. Once a grapple is established, attempts to immobilize or perform other maneuvers incur a -1 penalty, and the grappling character's Strength is considered one lower for purposes of escape attempts. Punches and kicks do not suffer this penalty, nor do ranged attacks. For hunters, though, for whom Tactics so often rely on holding a monster immobile, this Talent can be highly unpleasant.

(Alternately, any slasher can buy this as a ... Merit, provided the Storyteller approves.)

the clan lives near normal humans, they are usually taught to hate and fear them for self-preservation purposes. These Freaks often gang up on people, dragging them into quarries, sewers, junkyards, slums, forests, mines and other dangerous and loathsome places for purposes too horrible to consider.

But not all Freaks grow up deformed. Some come to freakishness later in life, and indeed, if a hunter becomes a Freak, it is most likely because he was injured during the Vigil. The hunter suffers a grievous wound fighting a werewolf, and his face is clawed to ribbons. Afterwards, he can't reclaim his place in society without explaining what has happened, and even his cell has difficulty dealing with him. At first he is content to take out his frustrations on supernatural creatures, but eventually he might come to loathe beautiful people — and perhaps even empathize with the beast that took away his face.

Freaks, like Avengers, are versatile, but in a somewhat different way. While most slashers increase a Power Attribute (Presence, Intelligence or Strength), Freaks can choose one of four Attributes encompassing Power or Finesse. Social acumen, of course, is largely beyond them, apart from some obvious ability to Intimidate. Physical Skills tend to be primary, but occasionally an extremely intelligent Freak comes along, setting traps for his victims. What is the difference between a Freak like this and a Genius? The character could be considered to follow either Undertaking; the player or the Storyteller must decide which one is most appropriate.

Inspirations: The Clan (*The Hills Have Eyes*, 1977). Vincent Sinclair (*House of Wax*, 2005). Francis Dolarhyde (*Red Dragon*). Leatherface (*The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, 1974).

Attribute: Strength, Dexterity, Intelligence or Wits

Undertaking Skills: Animal Ken, Brawl, Crafts, Firearms, Intimidation, Stealth, Survival, Weaponry

Talent — Lay of the Land: When Freaks find a place to call home, they learn it quickly and completely. Freaks all receive the Direction Sense Merit at no cost, and rolls made to orient, retrace steps, track others or hide in areas in which the Freak has spent at least a month receive a +3 modifier. Also, a Freak involved in a Foot Chase in his own turf (see p. 65 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**) takes no penalty for terrain, no matter how uneven or slick.

Frailty — Deformity: All Freaks are hideous to the eye. No matter what the source of their ugliness, birth or accident, normal people cannot help but stare at them. Many mock them, or shun them thinking that their disgusting visage is contagious (and maybe it is). Apply a -4 penalty on *all* Social rolls if the other parties involved can clearly see the Freak's face. This penalty does not apply to Intimidation attempts, of course.

Alternately, it is possible for a Freak to possess some other quality that sets him apart from humanity so completely as to make him fit this Undertaking. Francis Dolarhyde in the film *Red Dragon*, for instance, isn't entirely unpleasant to look at, but his speech makes him a Freak. Of course, a great deal of the reason why his speech makes him such an outcast is because he is so ashamed of it, and so a Freak with this kind of "deformity" is more of self-made Freak than one who wears his problems on his face. The system, however, remains the same, though the circumstances in which the modifier applies probably differ.

MUTANT

GO AHEAD AND SCREAM.
I KNOW YOU WANT TO.

The Mutant is an atavism, a creature recognizable as human only by its gait and, perhaps, its language. Unlike Freaks, who might have acquired their conditions after leading relatively normal lives, Mutants are almost invariably born with their hideous features. This might be the result of genetic disorders, inbreeding or toxin exposure, but is much more likely to be the fault of supernatural in-

terference. A witch curses a pregnant woman, and her child is born with a pig's snout and mouthful of fangs. A demon takes on human shape and sires a child — and that child has his father's (true) looks. A young werewolf, dosing on experimental drugs from early puberty, becomes pregnant and the baby has all of the aggression and animalistic features that the mother works so hard to deny.



VASCU Case Study : Alabama Stalker

Rejection letter sent to aspiring journalist (now VASCU agent)
Emily O'Connell

Dear Emily,

I am writing in response to your submission of photographs and copy on the so-called "Alabama Stalker." Normally, works such as yours doesn't merit a response, but as we have mutual friends in the publishing business I thought you might appreciate some friendly advice: don't try to pass these photos off as real to any paper not sold in supermarket checkout lines. They don't look the least bit convincing. The proportions are all wrong, for one thing, and then there's that horrible mouth that you clearly imported from a pig or a horse. The mouth is off-center on the face, by the way. The picture itself would be amusing, and might even make for a good scare, if not for the article accompanying it.

Emily, real people have lost their lives here. Some are still missing. It is possible that these people were abducted or even murdered, but blaming it on some kind of "monster" is irresponsible and, plainly put, bad journalism. I'm advising you not to send this article to anyone else, because if someone ever did publish, you might be at risk for lawsuits arising from mental anguish or the like.

I'm very disappointed to see this foolishness from you, as Dr. Kalloway gave you a glowing reference. I trust his judgment, but evidently, everyone makes mistakes.

Sincerely,

Herbert Pleasance, Editor-in-Chief

Are Mutants truly aggressive, even evil? Or are they simply striking out at a world that hates them? It's impossible to say, because *every* Mutant has at least some negative experience with "normal" human beings. Sometimes that experience starts at home — like Freaks, Mutants might be chained in an attic or thrown down a well to keep them from shaming their parents. Sometimes a Mutant grows up with well-meaning adults (whether they are his biological parents or not), and the abuse comes from the world outside the home. A Mutant's first encounter with people who hate or fear him because of his appearance is a formative experience, and one that often leads to another such experience: the first kill.

A Mutant's first murder might be born out of fear, anger or revenge. The Mutant might lash out at attackers, breaking a neck or slashing open a throat. A Mutant might leap upon a tormentor and tear out chunks of flesh with his teeth. It's not impossible, though, for a Mutant's first murder to be accidental. The Mutant might develop a crush on a classmate and give her a hug, not realizing his own tremendous strength.

He might chase a terrified person into traffic while trying to assuage his fears. The circumstances of this death shape the Mutant's view of murder, of course, but also shape the course of his life. He might run away into the wilderness to escape the human justice system, or he might wind up in an institution for years. Whether banished or imprisoned, the Mutant learns one inescapable fact — the normal people feel better if he isn't around.

The response to that, of course, might be to hide and kill only when threatened, or to live among people invisibly and kill at will. Mutants sometimes delight in showing their horrible visages as they close in for the kill. Some even hunt naked, and are thus mistaken for demons, werewolves or animals.

Background: As mentioned, Mutants are usually born with their deformities. That doesn't preclude a Mutant from becoming a hunter, however. Some Mutants are quite intelligent and well-spoken, and some are socially functional enough to join cells or organizations. Mutants with some degree of supernatural taint in their histories might find attention from hunter cells as targets, but join

the cell once it's clear the Mutants aren't interested in killing indiscriminately. The irony is, unfortunately, that hunters often wind up becoming practiced killers, and this includes Mutants. As their Morality warps and changes in response to the hunt, they become the monsters that other people always made them out to be.

Non-hunter Mutants, of course, aren't necessarily as well-trained, but are just as deadly, especially on their home turf. Mutants are territorial, much like Freaks, and respond with deadly force and precision if their homes are threatened. A Mutant's home is often riddled with escape routes, shortcuts, traps... and probably trophies from past victims.

Mutants usually place Physical Skills and Attributes first, but some Mutants are extremely intelligent or quick-witted. Social traits are almost always tertiary, but a Mutant with a lyrical voice and a good command of language might have a high Manipulation score (and probably a decent rating in Expression or Persuasion). Most Social Merits are probably inappropriate, but almost any Mental or Physical Merits can be justified for a Mutant character.

Inspirations: The Mountain Men (*Wrong Turn*). The Crawlers (*Descent*). The Clan (*The Hills Have Eyes*, 2006).

Attribute: Choose one of: Strength, Dexterity, Intelligence or Wits

Undertaking Skills: Animal Ken, Brawl, Crafts, Firearms, Intimidation, Investigation, Occult, Stealth, Survival, Weaponry

Talent — Natural Weaponry: The deformities of a Mutant work for him, at least with respect to murder. A Mutant might have sharp fangs, gnarled claws or even bony outgrowths from his forehead. His skin might be as tough as leather, or covered in a heavy layer of callus. The player chooses either to have a natural attack method (claws, teeth, horns, etc.) that inflicts lethal damage (attack roll is Strength + Brawl + 2) or to have two points of natural armor (incurs no Defense penalty).

Frailty — Sensitivity: Mutants inspire fear and revulsion in all who see them. The Mutant automatically fails at Social rolls (except for Intimidation) made against any character that can see or has seen his face. In addition, Mutants are all hypersensitive to some form of stimulus — bright light, powerful antiseptic scents, certain textures, sudden shifts in temperature, and so on. The Mutant's player must choose a stimulus that the character cannot abide. When the character is confronted with that stimulus, the player must roll Resolve + Composure. If this roll succeeds, the character can act as he pleases, but must devote his energy to ending the stimulus (and suffers a -3 on all actions until this is accomplished). If the roll fails, the character must flee the area immediately. If he cannot flee, he lashes out at any available targets (with the aforementioned modifier), or tries his best to hide.

GENIUS

I THOUGHT SO.

Ignorance is bliss, they say, and according to one source, whoever increases knowledge also increases sorrow. Is that, perhaps, why Genius slashers are so angry, why they hate people with normal intellects so much? Do they feel a twisted sense of jealousy, wishing they could *ignore* what their minds tell them?

Geniuses are slashers that kill with their minds. They don't wield psychic powers (usually), but they certainly *seem* like they do. They think several steps ahead of their victims, predicting what a target will do based on a set of options, how those options are presented, and that target's predisposition. Geniuses profile their targets, tailor their methods of abduction and murder to suit them, and then sit back and watch their victims kill themselves. It's not uncommon for Geniuses to kill using traps, rather than to do the deed themselves. Some Geniuses consider killing coarse and vulgar, some are physically incapable, and some feel that allowing victims the *possibility* of escape in some way obviates their moral responsibility in the victims' deaths.

Geniuses aren't always educated. Sometimes their intellect comes in the form of "street smarts" rather than learned information, a gut instinct about people and their behaviors that borders on prescience. But even these Geniuses tend to be technically skilled, with or without training — a Genius given a few hours and the proper tools can pull apart a car, figure out how it works, and put it back together, probably rigged with a series of blades that impale the driver when the CD player is activated.

Some Geniuses do enjoy wielding their own knives. They still play cat and mouse games with their victims, making allusions to the victim's eventual fate, skirting the edge of good taste but keeping a civil tongue. Then, when the victim is uneasy but not sure why, the Genius strikes, slashing for major arteries, watching the hapless soul bleed out in seconds. For many Geniuses, this is the closest they can come to true intimacy with another person, after all.

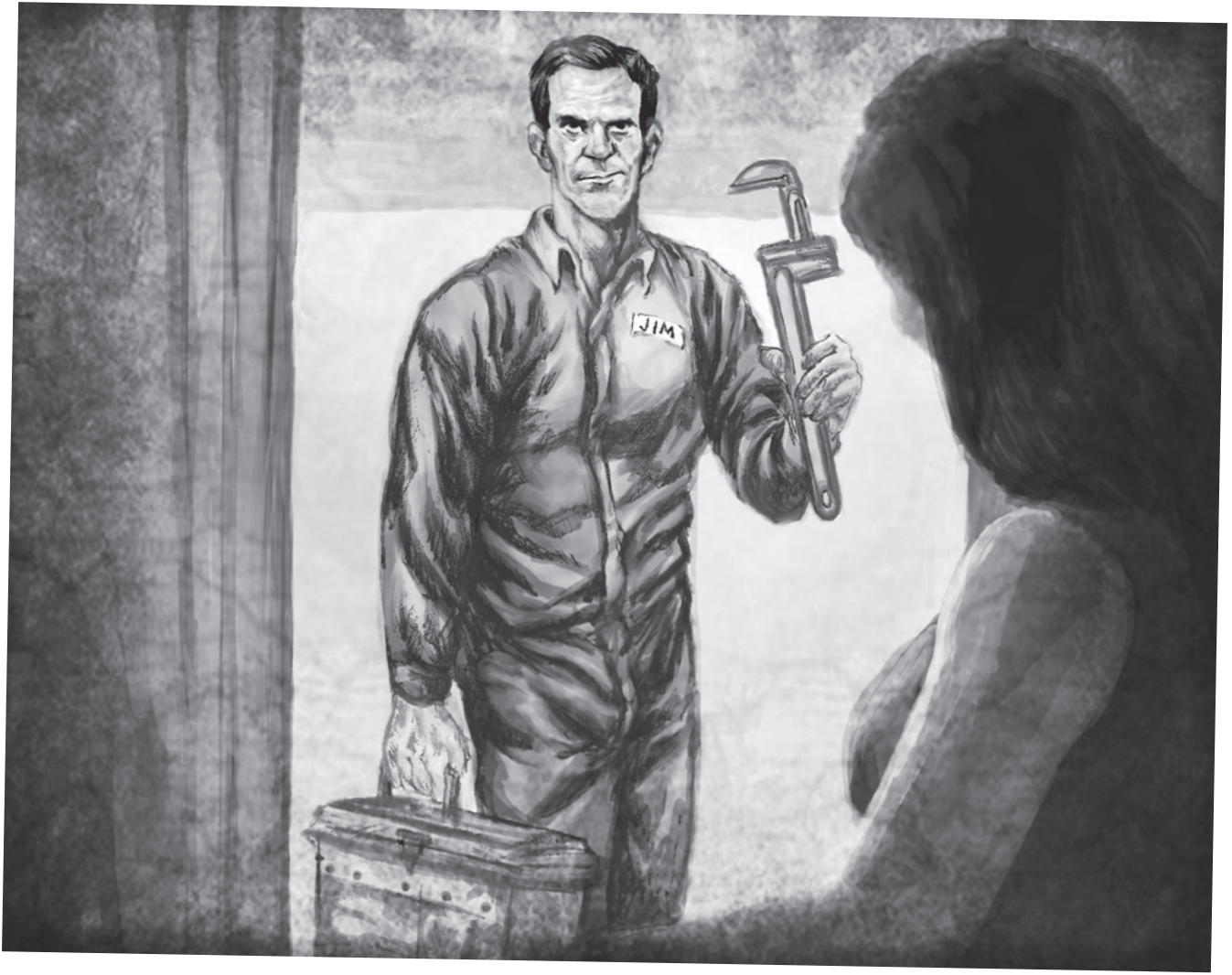
One very disturbing thing about Geniuses is that their ideas seem to be contagious. Rather, given a bit of honest conversation with a Ge-

nius, an otherwise rational person might "come around" to the Genius' way of thinking. As such, Geniuses tend to have apprentices, sidekicks and understudies that they train (and sometimes betray) in the course of their work. This tendency isn't powerful enough to merit a game system for rippers, but the scourge Maniacs (see p. 121) can *force* others into compliance with their unique mindset, given time.

Background: Most hunter cells have an idea man (or woman), someone who conceptualizes new Tactics, designs traps, modifies weapons, crunches numbers, does research and so on. In functional cells, the more physically-oriented members of the team appreciate their intelligent cohorts, knowing that a solid plan is better than a strong arm when fighting the supernatural. But not every cell is so functional, unfortunately. In monster hunting, just as in high school, the nerds sometimes get picked on. And occasionally, that ribbing (even if it's really good-natured) can breed resentment. The Genius retreats from social interaction, and treats every problem as a riddle, a challenge that can be solved like an equation. He develops a reputation for being cold, unfriendly, socially stunted and probably obsessive (since he *hates* unsolved problems).

Geniuses who were never hunters are usually ciphers, though not nearly to the same degree as Freaks or Brutes. They are capable of interacting with people, but they don't find it very interesting. As such, when they meet people who can challenge them somehow, they tend to become obsessed. That might escalate into a murderous fixation, but just as often the Genius decides that this interesting person has to be spared (and woe betide anyone who threatens her). Some Geniuses have careers that require interpersonal interactions, but always on their terms. A Genius might be a college professor lecturing his students, a doctor who can comfortably view patients as charts and disease rather than people, or a radio personality who never has to *see* the people he speaks with until he tracks them down.

Either type of Genius slasher tends to have high Mental Attributes (obviously), but the secondary Attribute category can just as easily be Social as Physical.



Some Geniuses use Charmer-like tactics to lure their victims into peril, while some just get their victims alone and then attack, savagely, with weapons or bare hands. Almost all Geniuses have high ratings in various Mental Skills, and invariably possess the Encyclopedic Knowledge Merit. The Resources Merit is also common; most Geniuses turn their intellects to the prospect of becoming financially stable for at least a short while.

Inspirations: Hannibal Lecter (*Silence of the Lambs*). Peter Foley (*Copycat*). Suzie Toller (*Wild Things*).

Attribute: Intelligence

Undertaking Skills: Academics, Crafts, Empathy*, Investigation, Medicine, Science, Stealth, Weaponry

* Although most Geniuses possess the Empathy Skill (perhaps even as an Undertaking Skill), this is due to careful study of human behavior. They recognize that emotions exist and the patterns in which they operate, but they possess very little intuitive understanding on the subject. Any Empathy roll that requires true connection between human beings, rather than clinical and objective understanding, receives a -3 penalty for Geniuses.

Talent — Profiling: Geniuses aren't psychic, but they certainly seem like it. Even on casual observation, a Genius can predict what a given person will do in a basic way based on appearance, body language and bearing. The Genius' player rolls Intelligence + Empathy (this Talent can be used on a group of people, as group dynamics can tell a Genius just as much about a person as solo observation). If the target is actively trying to conceal his motives or pretend to be something that he's not, he can contest this with a roll of Manipulation + Subterfuge. If the Genius succeeds, he has a good enough understanding of the person to predict his actions. The Genius wins all ties in contested rolls against the target(s), and always wins initiative against him/them.

Worse, though, if the Genius has the opportunity to talk with a target at length, he can ferret out mental problems — or create them. This is an extended action. The Genius' player rolls Intelligence + Manipulation, penalized by the target's Resolve. Each roll requires one scene's worth of conversation,

VASCU Case Study: Michael Elliot

From the files of VASCU Agent Nautica Williams

Michael Elliot was an entomologist working for the Smithsonian when he joined up with three like-minded individuals to go hunting for vampires in our nation's capital. Reviewing the records (and he kept meticulous records, though they may have been altered) and interviewing the surviving member of this cell, it seems that Elliot had no prior contact with the supernatural. He simply figured out that vampires must exist, based on population figures, anemia rates, sudden outbreaks of porphyria (which young vampires apparently overuse as a cover) and so on. He worked with this cell for several years, during which time 17 innocent people died in crossfire, accidents and even in the path of frenzied, wounded vampires.

And then one of the other members of his cell found one of his journals and learned that he had been deliberately setting up circumstances that killed these bystanders. The phrase "flies on the heads of pins" appeared 43 times in that journal, sometimes in the middle of sentences or written in the margins. That person told the other two members, one of whom (the survivor) had a cousin who worked for VASCU. He went to visit his cousin, while the other two confronted Elliot.

When VASCU arrived at the museum, Elliot was gone. The two members of his cell who had gone to find him - both strong, capable men, experts in unarmed and armed combat and veterans of the military, to say nothing of battles with the undead - had both been murdered. The murder "weapon" was a species of spider found only in the Amazon, whose venom would have been merely annoying to the men, had Elliot not been dosing them with a secondary poison for months. This secondary poison interacted with the spider's venom, producing anaphylactic shock in both men. They never even had a chance to draw their weapons. Michael Elliot remains at large.

and only one roll can be made per day. The Genius' target number of successes is equal to the target's Resolve + Composure or Morality, whichever is *higher*. When the Genius has the requisite number of successes, he can either choose to learn one damning fact about the target (a dark secret, a particular fear or "hot button," or the location of something important) or force the target's player to make a derangement roll.

Frailty — Intolerance for Chaos: Not every variable is predictable. Geniuses might understand on some level that they can't allow for every freak of chance, but in practice, they get frustrated if they miss something or if something happens that they couldn't have predicted. If a Genius' player fails an Intelligence or Undertaking Skill roll, the Genius loses two points of Willpower.

MANIAC

AH. YOU'RE BEGINNING TO
UNDERSTAND. YOU'RE SO CLOSE!
LET ME TURN UP THE VOLTAGE A BIT.

The mind of a Maniac is alien. It functions on a different level than the mind of a normal person, even that of a supernatural being. The Maniac's mind is predictive, functioning with both induction and deduction at frightening speeds. Guessing a Maniac's next move is almost impossible. Outsmarting one is unthinkable. Trying to understand one is dangerous, because a Maniac's mind is infectious.

Maniacs, like Geniuses, are more likely to trick victims into dying than actually driving the knife home. The difference, though, is that Maniacs more often work through intermediaries. Most Maniacs have henchmen, acolytes or assistants ready to do their bidding, but the subtlest (and most dangerous) slashers have dozens of employees waiting on cue to perform simple actions. One might open a door at a precise moment, allowing another access to a building where she leaves a small, insulated bag containing a peanut butter sandwich. A third henchman — with no knowledge of the other two — picks up the bag and carries it to a break room. A fourth steals a sandwich out of the intended victim's lunch, while a fifth replaces it with the sandwich from the planted bag. The victim takes one bite, and her allergies do the rest. The Maniac reads about the "accidental" death the next day, and makes another mark on his wall. His henchmen, unable to see the whole picture, remain unaware of their roles in the murder.

Maniacs often have a twisted ideology that accompanies their genius. Sometimes this is a religion, devotion to a higher (or lower) power, but just as often the basis for the ideology is philosophical rather than spiritual. Cleansing of a particular kind of individual is one possibility, as is the desire to help people appreciate their lives. Sometimes the victim may have the chance to save herself, and sometimes the victim is an example to others. The Maniac might want others to perceive the death as an accident, or he might want the murder to be grotesque, loud and obvious.

Maniacs don't get the same kind of fetishistic thrill out of their murders that Psychos do, and they don't have a Mask's robotic tenacity. Maniacs are flexible, because flex-

ibility is important to their ability to second-guess others. Everything they do makes sense to *them*, though probably not to a casual observer. Likewise, though, Maniacs have difficulty understanding emotion. They can predict it in extreme cases (a parent can be assumed to want to protect children, most people will run from an obvious threat), but emotion is heavy with nuance and variation. It's hard to keep in mind the myriad of factors that push a person toward anger one day while the same stimulus might provoke amusement the next. Maniacs don't always shy away from real human interaction, but they aren't very good at it when they do attempt it.

In light of this, their ability to "infect" others with madness makes a bit more sense. A Maniac's perspective is fundamentally different from the viewpoint of other people, and as such, Maniacs are lonely. No one can truly understand them, and so keeping someone close that they can train, whose mind they can shape into a replica of their own, can alleviate this solitude. Unfortunately, shaping another's mind results in two people with similar, but not identical, pathologies, and for people as egocentric as Maniacs, any deviation is unacceptable. The pupil becomes a heretic; the confidante becomes a scrounging copycat. Eventually, of course, one of them winds up walking into a trap. Either experience or ingenuity wins out, and hopefully the collateral damage isn't too great. Woe betide a cell caught between a Maniac and his student.

Background: A former hunter who becomes a Maniac might be an idea man or engineer, as described for the Genius (p. 118), but it's just as likely that a Maniac-to-be has direct contact with the supernatural. Discussion of arcane philosophy with mages, studying brain-melting occult mathematics to send a demon back to its foul home, constant exposure to a vampire's emotion-manipulating powers and other such risky behavior can warp a hunter's mindset. The philosophy begins to emerge, the Maniac talks about it to his fellow hunters (almost certainly changing his Morality and developing Tells). The Maniac second-



guesses those around him, at first not as a predictive measure but just to gain some sense of stability, since he loses the ability to intuit (rather than puzzle out) how a person will react in a given situation.

Non-hunters who become Maniacs are usually savants, wise or intelligent far beyond their years. They might temper their intellects with life experience, perhaps in the military or simply by traveling, or they might shun the outside world and learn everything through books and correspondence. Like Geniuses, Maniacs learn at a fantastic rate and assimilate information quickly, but unlike Geniuses, Maniacs generally have some kind of agenda driving them. This keeps them active, motivated and, unfortunately, prevents them from stagnating.

In terms of character creation, Maniacs are Mental first (Skills and Attributes), but are often Social second. High Presence or Manipulation (but not usually both) is common—either the Maniac has an amazingly forceful personality or a bewitching way with words.

Physical traits aren't necessarily neglected, but they don't tend to rise much beyond average. With proper planning, even a cripple can kill scores of people. Common Merits include Encyclope-

dic Knowledge, Eidetic Memory, Iron Stamina and, of course, Retainers.

Inspiration: Jigsaw (*Saw*). John Doe (*Se7en*).

Attribute: Intelligence

Undertaking Skills: Academics, Crafts, Empathy*, Investigation, Medicine, Occult, Persuasion, Science, Stealth, Weaponry

* The same caveats and rules apply for Maniacs as described for Geniuses (see p. 118).

Talent — Compelling Madness: Maniacs only need a few minutes of observation to know a victim better than he knows himself. If a Maniac watches a character for five minutes, whether the target is in conversation, doing his job, or just driving down the street, the Maniac can profile him. The victim's player rolls Morality or Wits + Subterfuge (if he is actively trying to disguise his habits) contested against the Maniac's Intelligence + Resolve. If the victim wins, there is no effect, and the Maniac becomes frustrated — further attempts to profile this victim incur a -3 penalty for the Maniac. If the Maniac wins, though, he knows his victim inside and out. The Maniac gains the 8-again advantage in all contested actions with any he has profiled (including the second effect of this Talent, below). In addition, the Maniac's player

VASCU Case Study : "None"

Transcript of LAPD interview with crime confessor and conspiracy theorist Larry Dern

"He doesn't have a name. I mean, he probably does, but I have no idea what... I just call him 'None.' No, not 'nun!' Jesus, cops are pretty stupid, huh? Look, shut up, let me talk. This guy's killed 53 by my count. Oh, you have to know what to look for. There's timing involved, right? Timing on the killings. There's a pattern to the methods he uses, too. Accident, gunshot, poison, stabbing. Stabbing, gunshot, accident, poison. Poison, poison, gunshot, gunshot... you could make a children's rhyme out it. I wonder if that's what he's done? Encoded the pattern in rhyme, maybe it only makes sense if you sing it? I just - right, sorry. I first noticed this a few months back. Got started talking to him on a message board. He always logged on anonymously, but I figured out his code. He had a way of talking. It was different every time, but it was always the same guy. It's hard to explain. Anyway, I would respond to him, and try to make it clear but not clear-clear that I knew who he was. And then the first killing happened right down the block from me. Girl named Edie Stephens. Accident. Not really; he killed her. She always took the stairs on Fridays because she didn't work out Fridays, and he rigged the stairs with this oil-like stuff that-

Look, I know how it sounds. I do. But I'm here because I need your help. It's not that you can catch him. You can't. Sorry, but you guys are - never mind. I need your help because he's starting to make sense to me. You have any idea how fucking scary that is?

No, don't kick me out! Please! I'm not crazy. I'm not just-"

can spend a Willpower point to remove the 10-again advantage from the victim for one scene (the 9-again conferred by weapons such as shotguns is likewise removed, though a hunter can still risk Willpower for 9-again). The Maniac must be able to see the victim to do this, but seeing her over a video feed or from a distance is enough. Finally, if the Maniac sets up a trap or ambush with a person (or people) he has profiled in mind, the victims receive a -3 penalty to any Perception or Reaction to Surprise rolls to avoid their fates.

In addition, Maniacs can, given time, alter a victim's Morality. This works as described in "The Code" (**Hunter: The Vigil**, pp. 322-323), except that the trigger point is simply prolonged interaction with the Maniac. This interaction does not have to be face to face; letters or even Internet correspondence works just as well. The victim needs a degree of susceptibility (Morality rating of 5 or below, a derangement gained from a Morality violation, or the player's decision that the character is susceptible), and the player makes a contested roll of Resolve + Composure against the Maniac's Intelligence + Presence or Manipulation, whichever is higher. This action is extended. The Maniac needs to accumulate successes equal to twice the victim's Morality, while the victim needs to accumulate

successes equal to the Maniac's Resolve + Composure. If the Maniac wins, the victim experiences a shift in Morality — a level 4 or 5 sin changes in accordance to the Maniac's worldview. The shift doesn't have to mirror the Maniac's Code (if any). As mentioned above, the Maniac and his pupil don't see eye to eye for long.

The game system here can be ignored if the player *wants* his character to adopt the Maniac's twisted worldview, of course.

Frailty — Obvious Lunatic: Maniacs are dangerous, and it's obvious to anyone who talks to them. They can keep it under wraps for a few minutes, long enough to give instructions or convey a message, but beyond that time, people around them feel threatened. Maniacs suffer a -3 penalty to all Social actions with others, *unless* that person is susceptible to their logic (Morality of 5 or less, a derangement gained from Morality loss, or player's/Storyteller's decision). The penalty, of course, can be mitigated with a Willpower point, but sooner or later the Maniac's insanity comes through. At that point, the listener is suspicious of the Maniac and probably keeps her distance. She might not call the police right away, but if the cops come asking questions, she'll definitely remember the Maniac.

NEW UNDERTAKINGS

The Undertakings described in the previous pages are our attempt to encapsulate the various slasher tropes and conventions and make them applicable to your **Hunter: The Vigil** chronicle. They're deliberately presented in a broad manner, in order to help you see as many possibilities for each one. But it's entirely possible that a player or the Storyteller might develop a concept for a slasher character that doesn't fit one of those Undertakings, or fits one for the most part but should have a different Talent and/or Frailty. This section is meant to help you design your own Undertaking. Start by considering the following.

RIPPER OR SCOURGE?

This is an easy decision: how supernatural do you want the Undertaking to be? Rippers are vicious and powerful, but still human. Scourge Undertakings make for slashers that are noticeably (though sometimes subtly) inhuman. Remember, too, that scourges have two Talents and two Frailties, since they "keep" the traits of their less-powerful versions. If you're designing a scourge Undertaking whole-cloth, there's no reason to design a ripper version, though you may still want to design the Talent and Frailty (this is discussed further anon).

METHODS

How does the slasher kill? By that, we don't mean "machete or butcher's knife" — though that's a good question to answer, too — but rather, consider how the slasher gets his victims in the position to *be* victims. The Charmer and the Psycho make people drop their guard for one critical second. The Genius and the Maniac arrange elaborate traps for their victims, and the Brute and the Mask just walk up and chop. Is this character predominantly Physical, Mental or Social? A good secondary question here is: does the slasher care if he is caught or killed? Physical slashers *normally* don't care, while Social and Mental slashers usually have escape plans. These aren't hard-and-fast rules, though, and you should always consider if and how your concept differs from the norm, rather than making sure it conforms.

MOTIVES

Why does your slasher kill? Avengers and (sometimes) Freaks kill for revenge. Charmers kill out of the

love of doing so or the hate for other people, while Brutes kill to satisfy some deep, almost primal need within them. Scourges often kill for reasons that are a bit more obtuse, maybe even cerebral. Legends, for instance, kill because they have become characters in their own stories. How does that happen? From the perspective of most people who interact with the slasher, it's irrelevant. What's relevant is learning the story and how to end it.

Motives, therefore, aren't always as important for the slasher genre as they are for, say, a murder mystery. Yes, it's interesting to know that a given character once nearly drowned because the people who were supposed to be watching him were busy having sex, and so he hunts people out of a loose desire for revenge... but that bit of information isn't immediately relevant to stopping or surviving the slasher's attacks. Put another way, if the motive is important, it should somehow figure in to the slasher's Talent and/or Frailty. If it's not, it's flavor and is probably worth considering, but it's perfectly acceptable to say that the slasher kills because that's what he *does*.

Learning why a slasher kills *can* be useful, though, in the context of a **Hunter** game because the characters are probably going to be stalking the killer, not the other way around (at least at first). It's worth paying attention to motive, depending on the slasher, but for Brutes, Masks, and even Charmers, part of the horror might be the *lack* of apparent motive.

TEMPERAMENT

Murderous, obviously. But consider how the slasher gets along with others of his "kind." How might the character interact with someone who, like him, is willing to cut people up for fun? Taking this a step further, how does the slasher view people who kill for different reasons than he does? Are they just more victims, or potential converts? If the slasher used to be a hunter, how did this transition come about? Do any behaviors or ideals linger from his pre-murdering life?

This is the time to consider foibles like the Mask's constant pain of existence or the Maniac's inability to understand normal people except as test subjects. These foibles may or may not have any bearing on the

SUPERNATURAL SLASHERS

Is a vampire who always kills her victims a slasher? How about a werewolf that leaves only partially chewed bodies? Or, better yet, what about a changeling that, for reasons known only to himself, hunts people down and scares them half to death... and then uses an ax to take care of the other half? Are any of these creatures "slashers" in the **Hunter** sense?

Not in the sense of having Undertakings and using the other game mechanics presented here, no. Monsters that kill are, first and last, creatures of their respective types, and should be created using the rules provided in **Hunter: The Vigil** or (if the Storyteller has access to them and wishes to use them), the core books of the various supernatural game lines (**Vampire: The Requiem**, **Werewolf: The Forsaken**, **Mage: The Awakening**, **Promethean: The Created** and **Changeling: The Lost**).

Consider, too, that hunters expect monsters to kill. Even if not every vampire is a killer, the one that got the attention of your character's cell probably is, and it's a logical leap to assume that other supernatural beings are inherently hostile to humanity. But a slasher looks human - is human, for all intents and purposes - and so generates a different sort of horror than a supernatural being.

game itself, but they are important to understanding the mind (or at least behavior) of the Undertaking.

TRAITS

And, of course, you need to consider the Undertaking's game traits. For the most part, slashers are mechanically the same as hunters, and the Undertaking specific traits are really highlights of existing traits.

ATTRIBUTE

Every Undertaking gets one Attribute boosted to 4 or 5 dots. Sometimes the choice is predetermined, sometimes there are multiple possibilities. Note, by the way, that because a slasher gets a boost to a given Attribute doesn't mean that *other* Attributes can't be rated at 4 or 5, too. The choice of Undertaking Attribute just shows where the character's natural proclivities take him.

UNDERTAKING SKILLS

The Undertakings above presented a range of Skills (eight for rippers, 10 for scourges) but if you're designing an Undertaking around a character, you might just pick the Undertaking Skills you want and not bother with choosing the whole range. As a side note, all Undertakings should have at least one of the three combat Skills available as Undertaking

Skills — slashers are, after all, supposed to be good at killing.

TALENT AND FRAILTY

The Talents and Frailties listed in the Undertakings above are meant to be subtle, enhancing abilities that all people have or can have. Even the scourge Talents aren't as overtly supernatural as, say, a werewolf's ability to change shape or a sorcerer's ability to summon up fire. That's not in-genre for slashers, after all. Their "powers" have more to do with predicting an enemy's movements, surprising their foes, dealing out horrible amounts of damage and, of course, getting up after being shot, stabbed, gassed, electrocuted and burnt. The design philosophy for their powers, therefore, is to use existing rules as the basis for the Talents, expanding on the capabilities of Merits and Skills.

For instance, consider a slasher that can freeze an opponent in place with a glare. This could be a supernatural power (and indeed, various supernatural creatures published in other books have similar abilities), but the system for a slasher probably works off the Intimidation Skill.

Any power that a slasher has, though, is designed to facilitate killing. Since the Storytelling system for inflicting damage makes one-shot kills difficult, sys-

GENDER INEQUITY

Female slashers are rare in the medium (slasher movies) that inspire **Hunter: Slasher**. There are a few, of course: Baby and Mother Firefly from *House of 1000 Corpses*, Amanda from the *Saw* series and even, perhaps, Hedy Carlson from *Single White Female*, for example. But for the most part, it's men that we see in movies cutting other people to ribbons or luring them into deathtraps.

Without speculating or pontificating on why this is the case, do note that in **Hunter** and in the *World of Darkness* in general, this disparity exists only to the degree that you wish it to. Nothing says that women can't be slashers of any Undertaking, and you'll note that several

like the killing blow (p. 168 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*), the role-action rule or extra successes rule (p. 134 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*), or a system that increases the effects of wound penalties (p. 171 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*) are all appropriate.

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Frailties, like Talents, get more "supernatural" at the scourge level, but still aren't on the same level as, say, a vampire's allergy to sunlight. A Frailty might provide opponents with a way to kill the slasher, but it's more likely, especially at the ripper level, that they'll provide a way to escape the slasher's attack, drive the murderer away, or weaken the slasher to the point that capture or normal combat is possible.

Something else to consider about slashers, Frailties and **Hunter**: the slashers described here are modeled on movies such as *Halloween* and *Scream*, as well as the more overtly supernatural and inhuman killers of *Nightmare on Elm Street* and *Wrong Turn*. But the victims of the slashers in **Hunter** aren't going to be scared, unprepared teenagers, at least not as written. The victims during the chronicle are more likely to

FIGHTING STYLES

Cold, calculating slashers don't have a Fighting Style. This is a deliberate choice. A calculating murderer doesn't ever fight with his victims, he kills them. If he's trying to kill someone and the Storyteller calls for Initiative and starts asking about Weaponry dice pools and Defense, he has already fucked up.

Murderers should use Murder Expert in place of a Fighting Style, and make gratuitous use of killing blows to avoid combat. Slashers who let their victims know that they're coming will find plenty to benefit them in Fighting Style: Frenzied Assault

benefit from this Merit.

be players' characters

— trained hunters, people who are used to fighting the supernatural. This is why Frailties don't tend to involve aggravated damage or other types of one-step kills against slashers, because such things would end the fight quickly (especially when you add Tactics into the mix). Frailties, therefore, are presented to give a slasher a weakness that helps define him as a character, without providing an easy out for a cell.

SLASHER MERITS

The following Merits are especially suited to slasher characters, dealing as they do with the art of serial murder. Other characters may only take them with Storyteller permission.

MENTAL MERITS

ATAVISM (●)

Prerequisite: Dexterity ●●● or Wits ●●●, Intelligence ●● or below.

Effects: You're a throwback to a time when men were closer to beasts. Whether your mental state matches a warped and twisted body, or you look out of a normal face with the eyes of an ancient predator, you're not normal. You run on instinct more than intellect, your body moving in response to signals that your brain never consciously registers. Like an animal, you use the higher of your Dexterity and Wits to determine your Defense. *Available at character creation only.*

Drawback: Other people can see that look in your eyes and know that something's wrong. You suffer a -2 modifier on non-confrontational Social rolls. If you raise your Intelligence above ●● then you no longer

DAMNABLE CERTAINTY (●●●●)

Prerequisite: At least one altered tenet of Morality (see *The Code, Hunter: The Vigil* p. 325)

Effect: You know that what you're doing is right. That passion burns within you; the fire of certainty scours all doubt from your soul. When you kill, you are whole again. When you kill a person in a fashion that is not a violation of your altered Morality, you regain a point of Willpower. You can use this ability once per session.

Drawback: You have to remain moral in order to know right from wrong. Your Morality must be equal to or higher than the level of the altered sin.

MURDER EXPERT (●●●●)

Prerequisite: Intelligence ●●, Stealth ●●●

Effect: You may not be any good in a fight, but it doesn't matter. You understand the language of murder in a way that few others do. You're a connoisseur of death, skilled at bringing other people to their ends. When you attempt a surprise attack in combat, if your target doesn't detect your attack (and would normally not apply Defense), you instead strike a killing blow (*World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 168).

Drawback: You must name your target on the turn before you attack — you can't choose to slaughter whoever is slowest that turn.

TELLTALE MURDER (●● OR ●●●●)

Prerequisite: Intelligence ●●●●, Medicine ●●

With the two-dot version of this Merit, you know how to disguise a murder as a suicide, or use the means by which your victims die to taunt your attackers. Roll Intelligence + Medicine before the

character ends a victim's life. Each success allows you to make one brief statement: "The murder symbolizes Pride," or "The victim is not innocent." An investigator will pick up on these statements with one success on a Wits + Investigation roll. You can use this capability to taunt the officers investigating your crimes, or to foil their attempts to build a profile.

The three-dot version of this Merit enhances understanding of murder. You can stage a killing so that it sends a message that isn't true: "This death was a suicide," for example. Anyone studying the body must gain more successes on an Intelligence + Medicine roll than you rolled when using this Merit, or believe your lie.

Note that use of this Merit isn't supernatural: the character isn't psychically willing a message into the corpse or the murder scene. No, this necessitates work on the part of the slasher: arranging a series of bodies in some grisly display out of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, for instance, carving a scarlet letter ("A") in a dead adulterer's chest, or some other kind of murderous theatrics.

Drawback: Once you start leaving messages, it's very hard to stop. If you don't make use of this Merit when you strike a killing blow, the Storyteller may decide on a single statement that investigators will pick up.

PHYSICAL MERITS

FIGHTING STYLE: FRENZIED ASSAULT (● TO ●●●●●●)

Prerequisites: Strength ●●●, Stamina ●●●, Intimidation ●●, Weaponry ●●

Effect: Your character knows how to use her weapon to great effect, lashing around her in an orgy of blood and death. She doesn't think when fighting, instinct drives her to kill with a passion that only a few people will ever really understand. She's a natural killer, making up for her lack of finesse with savage fury and dismembering opponents with each swing. Despite her almost animal intelligence, she realizes the benefit of having a weapon, and the bigger the better — though some spree killers prefer to use a more concealable tool, hiding it like a tiger hides its claws.

Dots purchased in this Merit allow access to special combat maneuvers which must be bought sequentially. Your character can't have "Terrorize" until she has "Bestial Instincts." The maneuvers and their effects, most of which are based on the Weaponry Skill,

are described below. To perform these maneuvers, your character must have a close combat weapon capable of dealing lethal damage in her hand.

Bestial Instincts (•): Your character sees weakness as an opening, and strikes before her prey has a chance to defend herself. Your character may substitute her Weaponry score for her Composure when determining her Initiative modifier.

Terrorize (••): Whether she grins manically whilst drenched in other people's blood or refuses to speak from behind a gore-spattered hockey mask, your character can use her very presence to scare her targets into submission. Instead of attacking, you may make a contested Strength + Intimidation roll. Everyone who has seen you inflict at least two levels of lethal damage resists with their Resolve + Composure. Every character who fails the contested roll loses their Defense until after your character's next action.

Hard to Kill (•••): Your character doesn't feel pain when he could be inflicting it. Whenever he is engaged in combat — specifically, part of a scene where he takes specific actions in order of Initiative — he gains an extra two points of Health and doesn't have to roll for unconsciousness until his rightmost Health box is filled with lethal damage. **Drawback:** The bonus Health vanishes at the end of the combat — when the action fades to a point that Initiative is no longer necessary. See "Temporary Health Dots" on page 137 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook* for more information.

Savage Rending (••••): Your character swings wildly with her weapon, rending flesh from bone — and limbs from bodies — in an orgy of death. Reduce all penalties for targeting specific body parts by two (see "Specified Targets," *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 165). If you target an arm or leg and do five or more points of lethal damage, the blow severs the limb. Each character witnessing the attack must succeed at a reflexive Resolve + Composure roll or suffer a -2 modifier on their next action. **Drawback:** Your character cannot use her Defense on the same turn she intends to use this maneuver. If your attack is a dramatic failure, the weapon lodges in your foe, wrenching it from your character's hands.

Trance of Death (•••••): Your character is so far removed from normal humanity that the dangerous and chaotic whirl of combat means very little to him. Maybe he tunes it all out, like a soldier who has seen too much. Maybe he actually enjoys it, finding solace in knowing that he could die at any second. Whatever it is, nobody can question his effectiveness.

When attacking, spend one Willpower point to turn the roll into a rote action (see the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 134). **Drawback:** Spend 1 Willpower per attack. This willpower expenditure does not add three dice to the attack. If your character uses a rote action in combat she cannot apply her Defense to incoming attacks on the same turn (see the "Combat by 'Rote'" sidebar on p. 69 of *Hunter: The Vigil*).

HANDS OF A KILLER (•)

Prerequisite: Dexterity •••, Weaponry ••

Effects: Your character has a talent for using mundane objects to inflict pain; in his hands, almost anything with the right heft or edge is an effective killing tool. The character ignores the standard -1 penalty for improvised weapons. This doesn't negate other limitations inherent to certain objects, like a damage maximum or a propensity to break in combat.

Drawback: The character can never take a specialty relating to the use of a melee weapon, ranged weapon or firearm. While the character is capable of using actual, designed weapons, they don't interest him enough to become especially proficient in them.

WEAPONRY MONOMANIAC (•••)

Prerequisite: Weaponry •, and a specialty in the specific weapon

Effects: Some slashers take great comfort in one weapon. Whether a woman gains power from her dead husband's straight-razor or a Legend possesses a fire ax that he believes speaks to him, the reliance on one specific weapon is this slasher's defining trait. When using one specific weapon — a custom glove with razors in the fingertips, or a perfectly-balanced sniper rifle — the slasher's roll gains the 8-Again quality.

Drawback: The slasher cannot voluntarily get rid of his weapon. Even if the cops are after him and it's dripping with the blood of a dead cheerleader, he will take it with him. If circumstances outside his control separate him from his weapon, he gains a derangement that remains until he is reunited with his weapon.

SOCIAL MERITS

MORBID FASCINATION (•••)

Effect: People find themselves wanting to talk to your character even despite themselves. There's something distinctly wrong with how you come across, whether you miss common social cues or deliberately cultivate a predatory air. Their fear

begets fascination, and soon they can't leave you alone. You ignore all penalties for your otherwise disturbing mannerisms when talking one-on-one with someone. This includes any penalties that you gain for changes in your Code (see "External Costs," **Hunter: The Vigil** p. 329). You may give off a weird air because you see no problem in killing the "unclean," but when you give someone your full attention they just don't care.

Drawback: If at any point you fail a Social Skill roll when talking to that person, your penalties come back in full force.

TACTICS

A lone slasher is a dangerous foe — even the most savage thugs among them often retain a degree of low, animal cunning. When slashers come together and develop their own twisted Tactics for the Hunt, the results can be downright terrifying. Whether it's an inbred family of backwoods Mutants or a high-society club of killers, a cell of slashers that learns to incorporate tactical thinking into its murderous work is capable of cutting an unholy swathe of destruction through its prey and leaving terror and death behind it.

At the same time, those who hunt the slashers

themselves develop a number of specialized Tactics to deal with their targets. VASCU in particular has devised a suite of strategies specifically devoted to tracking, identifying, and ultimately destroying slashers. These Tactics have likewise trickled down into the repertoires of other hunter compacts and conspiracies, and even to unsupported cells, thanks to parallel development or consults with VASCU agents in the field.

In addition to the new Tactics listed here, slasher cells often employ the Controlled Immolation, Corral, Cripple Claws, Dentistry, and Harvest tactics described in **Hunter: The Vigil**, though they are often employed as much for the sadistic enjoyment of inflicting pain as any tactical advantage. Slasher cells are usually headed by a single, powerfully-charismatic psychopath, who is often the trained primary actor for most if not all of the cell's Tactics.

Hunters who specialize in eliminating slashers often learn the Disappear, Identification, Measurements, Net, and Profiling tactics. VASCU cells in particular often divide their members into specialties, each of whom serves as the primary actor for one or more Tactics the team regularly employs.

The cells below work for both slasher cabals and hunter cells.



OPTIONAL RULE: TACTICS AND THE SOLITARY KILLER

Many of the Tactics described in this section describe common tropes of slasher movies, books, and TV shows. **Slasher** seeks to emulate - but Tactics are a group exercise, whereas the most common slasher in fiction is the solitary monster. So, why is the lone killer robbed of using these iconic abilities? The stock answer is that they aren't, they just don't gain the benefits of the Tactic's mechanical advantage. A solitary slasher is quite capable of building a difficult-to-escape dungeon in which to stalk his prey, it just won't be as secure as a killing den built with the No Escape Tactic (and since he lacks the benefit of bonus dice from his secondary actors, it will take him longer to build it).

However, if you feel your game will be improved by allowing lone killers to use some of the Tactics presented here (or in any of the **Hunter: The Vigil** sourcebooks for that matter), consider using one or more of the following rules, depending on how easy you want it to be for a single character to use Tactics.

- The character must have one more dot in all Attributes and Skills required by all actors for the Tactic.
- The Willpower cost associated with the Tactic is increased by one.
- The character rolls only the primary actor's dice pool, he can gain no benefit from the secondary actor dice pool.
- When activating a Tactic alone, the character's player does not re-roll any tens that show on the dice. Additionally, any ones rolled subtract successes from the roll on a one-for-one basis.
- Any failure on a Tactics roll is considered a dramatic failure.

Common sense must, of course, apply. If a Tactic physically requires the presence of multiple actors, a solitary character must either find a way to improvise or find another Tactic. For example, the Dentistry Tactic (**Hunter: The Vigil** p. 220) requires that the secondary actors grapple the target while the primary actor smashes it in the face. A lone hunter might be able to employ this Tactic if he can bind the target securely or immobilize it, perhaps tying him to a chair or drugging him with a powerful sedative.

Additionally, you might levy some of these drawbacks against a group trying to activate a Tactic with fewer than the minimum required actors. One of the above drawbacks per actor below the requirement is a good rule of thumb.

Re-
quires: 5, up
to 7 adds one dice
to all secondary actors
per hunter, 9 maximum
Dice Pool: Primary:

Strength + Brawl or Weaponry

Secondary: Strength + Brawl or
Weaponry

Action: Instant

Description: Some slashers are notoriously resilient, shrugging off blows that would cripple or kill an ordinary man. Others are lithe and impossibly quick, dodging attacks with ease. The same goes for many other creatures of the night, and sometimes the only way to deal with them is to gang up on them and pummel them until they stop moving. In using

**BENT-DOWN,
GOOD OLD FASHIONED**

Prerequisites: All: Strength 2, Brawl 2 or Weaponry 2. Partial (1): Brawl 3 or Weaponry 3 (primary actor).

this Tactic, the secondary actors attack the target, throwing him off-balance and holding his counterattacks at bay until the primary actor can step in and deliver the finishing blow. The primary actor must have the presence of mind to wait until the opportune moment, but also the strength and fighting skill to land a telling blow.

The secondary actors' players must each make a Strength + Brawl roll, which counts as an attack. The target's Defense is subtracted from each roll, with each attack reducing the target's Defense by 1 for the rest of the turn. The secondary actors can use any attack-roll-related options or abilities, such as All-Out Attack, on their rolls. Instead of inflicting damage, each attack reduces either the target's Defense by 1 (in addition to the multiple-attackers Defense reduction) or negates one point of the target's Armor for the primary actor's attack. (Imagine it as the characters shoving the target, pushing him off-balance, tripping him up, even tearing off bits of actual armor.)

Potential Modifiers: Secondary actor(s) has at least one dot in the Fighting Style: Boxing Merit (+1 to secondary actors); secondary actor(s) attacks with Tasers or similar stunning weapons (+2 to secondary actors) secondary actor(s) has a lower Initiative than the primary actor (-3 to all participants); monster grapples a secondary actor (-5 to primary actor)

Organizations: The Union and Task Force: VALKYRIE both favor the up-close, in-your-face style of this Tactic, and typically have the numbers to make it work effectively. Slasher cells themselves often use this Tactic, tossing their unfortunate prey from member to member like toys before cruelly finishing them off.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The primary actor badly miscalculates her attack and leaves himself vulnerable to the target. If the target attacks the primary actor on his next turn, he ignores the primary actor's Defense.

Failure: The primary actor fails to land a damaging blow.

Success: The primary actor lands an attack. In addition to inflicting damage, the attack causes the target to lose his Defense against the first attack made against him in the next turn.

Exceptional Success: In addition to suffering damage and losing his Defense against the first attack against him next turn, the target loses his next action.

To Purchase: 14 Practical Experience, 11 for the Union, 9 for Task Force: VALKYRIE

BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE

Prerequisites: All: Wits 3, Investigation 2 Partial (1): Empathy 3 (primary actor).

Requires: 3, up to 10 adds one dice to all actors.

Dice Pool: Primary: Wits + Empathy. Secondary: Wits + Investigation.

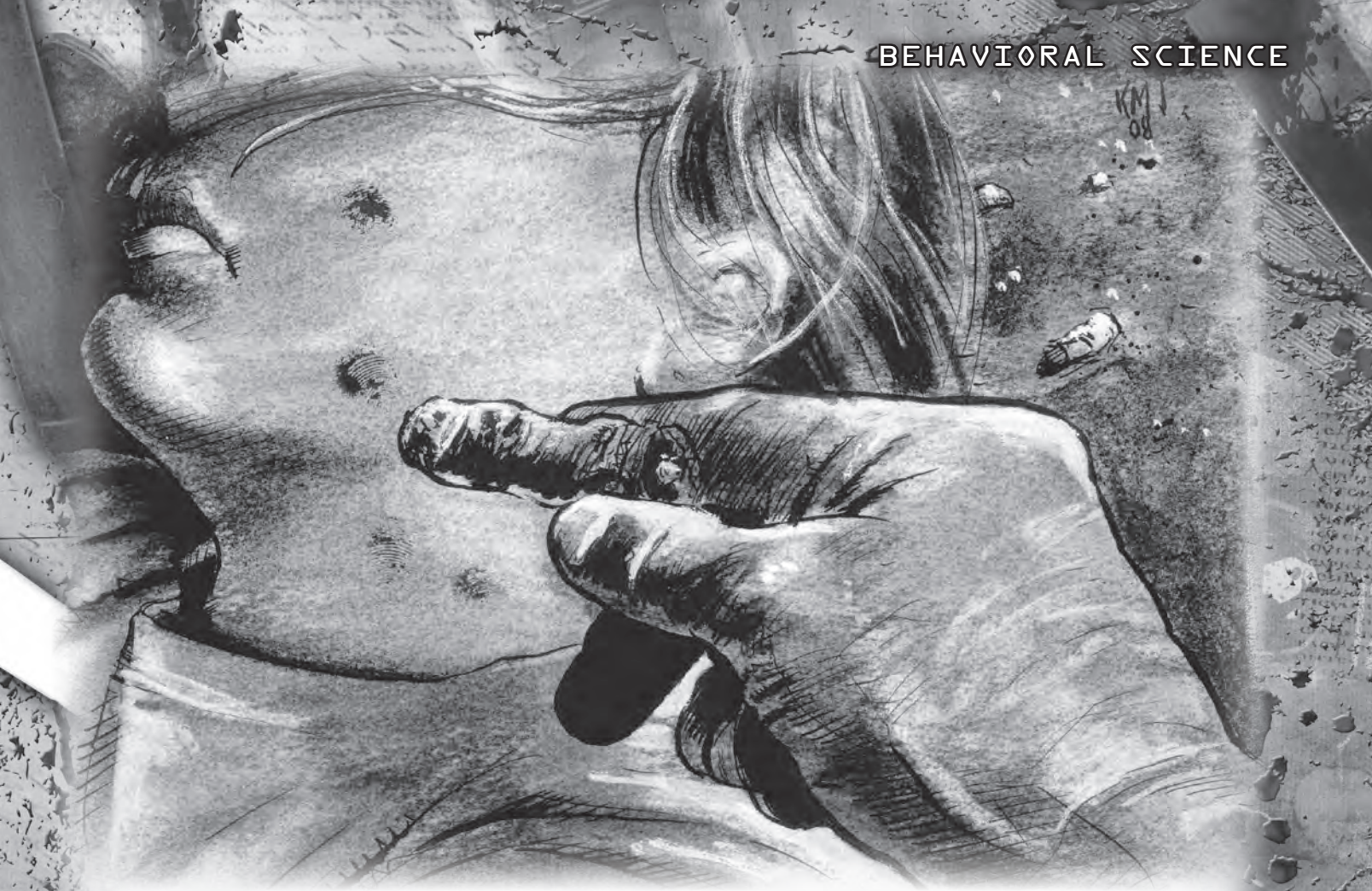
Action: Extended and possibly resisted (see below). Each roll represents one hour of theorizing.

Description: The art of criminal behavioral profiling is a taxing and dangerous one. Beyond the Profiling Tactic described in **Hunter: The Vigil**, which merely allows a cell to unearth background data on a known subject, Behavioral Science takes things a step farther, analyzing patterns found at crime scenes, victim selection, and a myriad of other tiny clues that might be overlooked by other investigators and compiling them into a profile of an unknown killer. A skilled team of investigators, led by a competent behavioral scientist, can deduce everything from the subject's sex, race, and age to more esoteric facts such as childhood traumas that might have directly influenced the subject's transformation into a killer.

The secondary actors in this Tactic serve as investigators, gathering and collating evidence and presenting it to the group with Wits + Investigation. The primary actor takes the active role, both mediating the theories of her compatriots and bringing them together to form a cohesive whole with Wits + Empathy. The entire cell contributes its expertise, and while this Tactic cannot provide a name, address, or similar piece of hard evidence, it can prove invaluable in narrowing a field of suspects to a select few that the investigators can focus on.

Success on this action is not a binary state; as the Tactic progresses, the cell gains bits and pieces of information over time rather than a complete work-up of the subject when all successes are achieved. For every success on the activation roll, the cell uncovers one piece of information (see below for the types of information gleaned by this Tactic).

Unlike many extended actions, it is entirely possible to leave off in the middle of a profiling session and resume at a later time. Given the hefty penalties associated with a limited knowledge of the subject's activities, many cells do exactly that: come up with the best preliminary work-up they can upon starting a case, and then wait for the subject to kill again in the hopes of learning more from subsequent crime scenes. It's a grim business, knowing that the only way to catch a killer may be to let him kill again. More than a few hunters who regularly employ this



Tactic start to see the victims as little more than bait for their trap; for some, it's a psychological scar that drives them to drink, drugs, or other self-destructive behavior. For others, that change in philosophy is the first step down a dark road that ends with the creation of a new slasher.

Most slashers and mundane serial killers alike are too driven by their own mad compulsions to consciously alter their patterns to fool investigators. Some, though, retain enough self-control, or operate on a paradigm so far beyond the expected norms, that they can try to plant false evidence or deliberately change some aspect of their patterns to mislead investigators — and sometimes what looks like the work of a serial killer is actually the work of a perfectly-rational vampire, witch, or some other monster that kills for reasons divorced from psychological compulsion. The killer's player rolls Wits + Investigation, with success causing one roll of the Behavioral Science Tactic's activation roll to be resisted by the subject's Composure. The hunters must be using evidence from that crime scene (see Potential Modifiers, below) in order for this resistance to apply. Slashers must spend one point of Willpower to force themselves to break their usual signatures, and at the Storyteller's discretion some subjects (such as Masks

or vampires in the throes of a blood-frenzy) may be unable to utilize this trick.

For example, it's a known aspect of behavioral science that serial killers rarely kill across racial lines — if a killer's victims are all white, that's an indicator that the killer is probably white also. A Genius who knows that VASCU agents are following his case (or who merely wants to keep his tracks covered) might consciously choose to kill one or more victims of a different ethnicity, thereby throwing off the profile.

Potential Modifiers: Actor has psychological training (Psychology Specialty in Academics or Medicine) (+1 to any actor with Specialty), primary actor has fully examined a crime scene (**World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 59) by the subject (+1 to primary actor for each crime scene, -3 for each dramatic failure), secondary actors make rolls while at a crime scene by the subject (+1 to secondary actors), actors have been part of a dramatic failure in an attempt to use this Tactic on the subject before (-3 to primary actor), actors have examined only one crime scene by the subject* (-5 to primary actor), actors have examined two crime scenes by the subject* (-3 to primary actor), actors have examined five or more crime scenes by the same subject* (+2 to primary actor), actor has previous experience with similar slasher types (e.g. same

GLIMPSES INTO THE DARK

The following are some of the types of insights that characters using the **Behavioral Science Tactic** may glean about a subject. Some are duplicable through hard evidence examination, but most are not. At the Storyteller's discretion, it may be possible to acquire other insights, but the following list provides a solid baseline foundation for the information discovered through this Tactic.

Sex: male, female, androgynous, cross-gendered, asexual

Age: youth, pubescent, elderly, mature, teen, young adult

Physical Build: height, weight, hair color/lack thereof, strength, fitness

Education: uneducated, high school education, college graduate, advanced studies, specialist in a particular field, military training

Career: unemployed, service work, academic, physician, prostitution, homemaker, soldier

Personal Habits: fastidious, unkempt, obsessive, smoker/non, drinker/non, drug-user/non, particular clothing styles (formal/casual wear, uniform, cross-dressing)

Obsessions: certain locations or types of locations (churches, bridges, crossroads, schools), preferred weapon types/attack style, targets

Phobias/Philiias: blood/bodily fluids, gender, sex, animals, heights, water, crowds, germs, disease

Mental State: mental disorders (schizophrenia, delusion, depression, paranoia, etc.), sharp/dull wit, views humanity and/or targets as (prey/evil/unreal/animals/enemies), mysogyny, emotions (anger, excitement, cool calculation)

Goals: to destroy evil, to exact vengeance, to redeem self, to fix former mistakes, to stop corruption, to heal self, to protect others

Quirks: never/always apologize, never surrender, suicidal, promiscuous, religious

Undertaking, same or similar signature, etc.) (+1 to +3 depending on amount and intensity of experience), perpetrator does not have Undertaking/is not a slasher (-4).

* "Examining a crime scene," for the purpose of these modifiers, requires only that at least one secondary actor have earned at least one success on an Examine Crime Scene roll (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 59). Having access to crime scene reports and case files counts as examining a crime scene for the purposes of negating penalties, but not for gaining bonuses. Depending on the thoroughness of the files, the Storyteller may apply an equipment modifier of anywhere from -2 to +3.

Organizations: Behavioral science was practically invented at the FBI, which means, not surprisingly, VASCU is at the forefront of using this Tactic to apprehend slashers. Null Mysteriis uses a similar Tactic to track the migrations, feeding patterns, and territorial disputes

of monsters like vampires and werewolves. The Loyalists of Thule retain the services of several hunters skilled in behavioral sciences, who are often called in on cases related to Nazi occultism.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The profile the cell constructs is fatally flawed and inaccurate in one or more key ways. The Storyteller should construct a false profile that leads investigators down one or more wild goose chases or dead ends. Any further attempts to classify the subject with this Tactic suffer a -3 penalty until evidence that incontrovertibly disproves the incorrect theory surfaces.

Failure: The investigators fail to assemble any meaningful information from the assembled evidence.

Success: For every success rolled, the primary actor comes up with one piece of information about the subject of the investigation. As with crime-scene examination, the actors never know when they have accumulated everything there is to know about the subject; there is always the possibility that more information can be extracted from the evidence. See the sidebar for examples of what can be learned about a subject.

Exceptional Success: If the primary actor rolls five or more successes on a single roll, he gets so deep into the killer's head he experiences a moment of almost preternatural inspiration. The Storyteller chooses one fact about the killer that could not be determined by ordinary behavioral science (such as the subject's supernatural nature, a specific religious belief, or a specific manifestation of a derangement) and conveys it to the primary actor.

To Purchase: 15 Practical Experience, 12 for Loyalists of Thule, 10 for the Vanguard Serial Crimes Unit (VASCU)

Example: VASCU agent William Caffler and his Behavioral Science team are called in to assist in a serial murder case in rural Mississippi. A killer the media has dubbed "the Red Hand Killer" has been murdering unwed mothers, leaving them dead in their children's bedrooms with their left hands coated in red latex paint. Local law enforcement faxes their case files on the three victims so far to Washington, and VASCU dispatches Caffler and his team of four agents. Caffler has Wits 3 and Empathy 4 with a Specialty in Behavioral Science, and his assistants have Wits 3 and Investigation 3. All are fully trained in Behavioral Science, and have a Psychology Specialty in either Academics or Investigation.

It's a five-hour flight from D.C. to Biloxi, so the team decides to get started right away. They have the case files for three victims, which counts as having investigated those scenes, and the Storyteller gives the files a -1 equipment penalty. They're better than nothing, but not much help. On the third victim, though, a rookie officer botched his investigative work and rolled a dramatic failure; that adds another -3 penalty for the dramatic failure and a -3 for only having examined two crime scenes. Caffler has had extensive experience with this type of ritualistic killer, and so receives a +3 bonus for his prior experience. Factoring in his Psychology Specialty, his total modifier to the roll is -3. Over the course of the five-hour flight, he and his team accumulate seven successes, deducing that the killer is white (1), male (2), middle-aged (3), an orphan or the child of a broken home (4), left-handed (5), a loner (6), and employed in a blue-collar job (7).

Once the team arrives on-site, they check out the three crime scenes for themselves. Two are scoured thoroughly, with every available clue found, while the third, hampered by the false leads from the rookie cop, still holds a few secrets. Investigating all three scenes personally negates the -1 equipment penalty from the shoddy case files and allows the team to uncover the faulty evidence from the third crime scene, removing a further -3 penalty. Coupled with the +2 bonus for completely examining the first two crime scenes brings Caffler's bonus to +5. With first-hand evidence, the team has a much better chance of accurately identifying the target.

BLOODY IMPROV

Prerequisites: All: Intelligence 2, Crafts 2. Partial (1): Strength 2 or Dexterity 2, Weaponry 3 (primary actor) or Athletics 3 or Firearms 3.

Requires: 2, up to 7 adds one dice to all secondary actors, maximum 8.

Dice Pool: Primary: Strength + Weaponry. Secondary: Intelligence + Crafts.

Action: Extended (2-10 successes required; each roll represents one minute of tinkering).

Description: Slashers are legendary for their ability to kill and maim with damn near anything they can get their hands on. Whether it's a medical Genius injecting air bubbles into someone's veins or a Mask jamming a fence-rail through someone's chest, slashers end up using some of the most unlikely (and downright impractical) tools to kill people. This Tactic lets a group of slashers or hunters work together to quickly (albeit temporarily) transform an ordinary household object into a vicious killing tool.

Using this Tactic doesn't require a workshop or any sort of manufacturing tools, but some basic materials might be required. It's possible, for example, to sharpen the plastic tube in a ballpoint pen by carefully breaking it, but sharpening a key to a knife's edge probably requires metalworking tools or at least something to use as a makeshift whetstone. Except in extraordinary circumstances, however, the Storyteller should not disallow the use of this Tactic in the absence of quality tools; rather, he should assess an appropriate penalty (see below).

The primary actor's task in this Tactic is to test the improvised weapon's effectiveness, testing its weight, balance, and edge (or its sights and trajectory in the case of improvised thrown or fired weapons). His roll of Strength + Weaponry represents this testing, not an actual attack made with the weapon. Likewise, the dice pool changes based on the type of improvised weapon being devised: melee weap-

ons use Strength + Weaponry, thrown weapons use Dexterity + Athletics, and fired weapons such as an improvised spear gun use Dexterity + Firearms. The secondary actors do the grunt work, bending, breaking, or adding to the base weapon in an effort to increase its lethality.

The primary actor decides in advance how many improvements he wishes to add to the weapon. A maximum of five improvements may be added to any one weapon, drawn from the list below. Unless otherwise stated, the same improvement can be added multiple times. Each improvement requires two successes on the extended roll.

- Increase damage by +1. Remember that improvised weapons have an inherent -1 to damage because they were not designed for killing.
- Increase thrown range by 5/10/20 (if the base weapon does not have a thrown range, it gains a range of 5/10/20).
- Increase fired range by 10/20/40 (only if the base weapon already necessitates a Dexterity + Firearms roll to attack).
- Upgrade a weapon that inflicts bashing damage to inflict lethal damage (counts as three improvements).
- Silencing effect: Any target struck by the weapon for more than the target's Size in damage is unable to speak (possibly due to a sliced trachea, bruised solar plexus, etc.) until all damage from the attack is healed. Counts as two improvements.
- Crippling effect: Any target struck for damage greater than the target's Stamina has her Speed reduced by three until all damage from the attack is healed.

An improvised weapon can only maintain these enhanced properties for one scene's worth of use before the makeshift modifications lose their effectiveness, but the weapon can be stored indefinitely. This Tactic can be used to modify actual weapons, but this increases the time per roll from one minute to 30 minutes, as weapons are already designed for maximum killing capacity and are thus harder to improve. Only the primary actor can gain these benefits from the weapon, as using it properly requires knowledge both of how the device was modified and how that impacts its practical use.

Potential Modifiers: Actors have plenty of appropriate tools (+3 to secondary actors), actors have a few tools or improvised tools (+1 to sec-

ondary actors), primary actor has a "test dummy" (live human being or fresh cadaver) (+2 to primary actor), actors have no access to tools (-3), primary actor has a Specialty in Weaponry, Athletics, or Firearms for a weapon similar in function to the improvised weapon (e.g. Clubs for a makeshift hammer, Crossbows for an improvised harpoon launcher).

Organizations: Task Force: VALKYRIE standard training teaches the recruit that a soldier is *never* unarmed as long as he has his wits. For most soldiers, that means finding the nearest big and heavy thing with which to bludgeon a monster to death before recovering your gun, but some operatives take the time and effort to learn enough of the basics of weapon use and manufacture to field-modify just about anything into an effective killing tool. Network 0 hunters usually don't carry heavy firepower, but sometimes shit goes bad in the field — luckily, the techies are usually bright enough to rig something up.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The improvised weapon appears functional, but breaks, bends, or is otherwise rendered useless the first time it's used in an attack. Regardless of how many successes were rolled on that attack, the weapon inflicts one point of damage and is rendered useless.

Failure: No success is made toward modifying the weapon.

Success: The primary actor accumulates successes toward figuring out the modifications to the weapon.

Exceptional Success: Extraordinary progress is made toward finishing the modifications. If the primary actor's player rolls 5 or more successes *beyond* the number required, he may add one single, additional improvement of either damage or range to his weapon.

To Purchase: 14 Practical Experience, 11 for Network Zero, 9 for Task Force: VALKYRIE

CANNIBALISM

Prerequisites: All: Stamina 3. *Partial* (1): Iron Stomach Merit or Morality 1 or less (primary actor), Occult 3. *Partial* (1): Strength 2, Brawl 2 or Brawl 1 with a Specialty in Grappling.

Requires: 2

Dice Pool: Primary: Stamina + Occult. Secondary: Strength + Brawl.

Action: Instant.

Description: Tales of cannibals eating the flesh of their enemies to gain power are at least as old as the written word, if not significantly older. Accord-

ing to many cultures, the devouring of human flesh is among the greatest sins imaginable, but also the key to unlocking great mystical power. True supernatural benefits from cannibalism require specialized mystic knowledge, but even without witchcraft or hedge sorcery there are rituals that can bestow unusual boons upon those who dare to break the ultimate taboo. Scholars of the occult hotly debate whether there is some true, metaphysical benefit to consuming the flesh of one's fellow human beings or whether the deranged mind of someone who would perform such a rite merely floods the body with adrenaline, in effect creating a "mind over matter" effect.

The primary actor and secondary actors first grapple the target. See pp. 156-158 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook** for information on Grappling (note especially the section on multiple people grappling a single target). The roll to grapple the target, however, is not part of the Tactic. That is, the initial roll to grapple does not add dice to the primary actor's roll. This roll is to keep the target from thrashing about, giving the primary actor a clear target. Once the victim is grappled, and one secondary actor successfully overpowers the target, the primary actor makes a bite attack as a reflexive action. If the attack hits, the primary actor tears away a ragged hunk of flesh and devours it. A human being can devour the equivalent of one point of damage worth of flesh per turn; if the primary actor inflicts more damage than that, he must spend subsequent turns chewing and swallowing (a reflexive action); spitting any of the flesh out causes all actors to lose the benefits of the Tactic. After the bite attack, all of the secondary actors' players make their rolls (Strength + Brawl). The primary actor then rolls Stamina + Occult, representing his ability to invoke the cannibal rite while choking down gobbets of raw human flesh.

The "cannibal rite" can take any form, from elaborate chants in long-dead tongues found in ancient scrolls to a simple mockery of the traditional grace said before a meal. The rite can be an authentic mystical practice or something the cell made up while devising the Tactic (lending credence to the idea that the Tactic's benefits are psychosomatic), but the same rite must be used every time, or else the cell must re-learn the Tactic from scratch.

This Tactic may be used to gain a benefit from devouring a dead body, provided it has been dead no more than an hour and has not been embalmed or otherwise prepared for burial. The requirement



that the target be grappled is waived when consuming a dead body.

Potential Modifiers: Primary actor inflicts lethal damage with the bite attack (either through filed teeth or damage rollover) (+2 to primary actor), primary actor is suffering from the effects of starvation (*World of Darkness Rulebook* p. 175) (+2 to primary actor), target is unconscious, drugged, or unable to feel pain (-1 to primary actor), target is a supernatural being, but was once human (vampire, witch, werewolf, etc.) (-2 to primary actor), target is dead (-5 to primary actor), target strikes a secondary actor (-2 to primary actor), secondary actor(s) has a lower Initiative than the primary actor (-3 to all participants), target grapples a secondary actor (-5 to primary actor)

Organizations: No compact or conspiracy sanctions behavior as abhorrent as this Tactic. Even the Ashwood Abbey, which if rumor is to be believed serves “long pig” at its most exclusive, private functions, prefers its human flesh in artfully-prepared filets rather than torn steaming direct from the body. Nevertheless, its practice has been known to crop up in troubled hunters from time to time. Some Aegis Kai Doru hunters have noticed that werewolves seem to gain a sort of mystical “boost” from eating human flesh and wondering whether they might do the same. VASCU agents, who often find themselves crawling around in the heads of slashers and serial killers for months at a time, sometimes lose their self control and succumb to the temptation to see what it’s like — just the one time.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The primary actor not only fails to perform the rite, he gags, chokes, or is otherwise unable to swallow the flesh of the target. The primary actor and all secondary actors suffer a -3 penalty to all rolls for the rest of the scene.

Failure: The primary actor is unable to perform his prescribed cannibal rite well enough to gain any benefit. Either the power fails to manifest, or the ritual is insufficient to trigger a release in the actor’s brain, depending on your point of view.

Success: The primary actor performs the rite and, through means mystical or psychological, empowers himself and the secondary actors. For every point of damage inflicted by the primary actor’s bite attack, all actors involved in the Tactic gain a +1 bonus on all Strength-based dice pools, +1 to Initiative, and a +1 to Speed. The benefits last for the rest of the scene.

Exceptional Success: The primary actor’s performance of the rite is so spellbindingly intense that it inspires his cell to a near-superhuman frenzy. All

actors gain one additional Health level per point of damage inflicted by the primary actor’s bite attack. This extra Health vanishes at the end of the scene, and any damage remaining in those Health boxes “rolls over” just as though it were damage in excess of the character’s maximum Health.

To Purchase: 13 Practical Experience; no compact or conspiracy teaches this Tactic

DRAW AND QUARTER

Prerequisites: All: Strength 3, Brawl 1. *Partial* (1): Intelligence 3, Medicine 3 (primary actor) or Medicine 2 with a Specialty in Anatomy. *Partial* (4): Brawl 3 or Brawl 2 with a Specialty in Grappling.

Requires: 5, up to 9 adds one dice to secondary actions per hunter. Maximum 9 for this Tactic.

Dice Pool: *Primary:* Intelligence + Medicine. *Secondary:* Strength + Brawl

Action: Instant

Description: Drawing and quartering, the act of tearing a person limb from limb by pulling on each of his arms and legs, has been a popular method of execution for much of history. Traditionally, the condemned would be lashed to four horses, oxen, or similar powerful animals which were goaded into moving in opposite directions, thereby ripping the victim apart. Modern takes on the practice have used everything from motorcycles and trucks to (in the case of preternaturally strong slashers) bare hands.

While this Tactic may not be able to tear the limbs off of an adult, healthy human being, it can cause severe internal trauma, hampering the victim’s ability to do anything.

The secondary actor(s) first grapple the target. See pp. 156-158 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook* for information on Grappling (note especially the section on multiple people grappling a single target). The roll to grapple the creature, however, is not part of the Tactic. That is, the initial roll to grapple does not add dice to the primary actor’s roll. Once the creature is grappled, all of the secondary actors must inflict at least one point of damage on the target, at which point all of the secondary actors’ players make their rolls (Strength + Brawl). This roll represents the secondary actors hauling on the victim’s limbs, pulling each away from his torso. The primary actor’s player then rolls Intelligence + Medicine to direct the secondary actors, telling them how to inflict the maximum amount of trauma.

Potential Modifiers: Hunter’s Size rating is greater than the target’s (+1 to applicable secondary actor), secondary actors have mechanical assis-

tance (e.g. motorcycles, winches, etc.) (+3), target has Strength of 3 or higher (-1), primary actor is also grappling target (+1).

Organizations: According to some ancient texts held by the Aegis Kai Doru, the only certain way to kill a vampire is to dismember it and bury its body parts at different crossroads. Most cells just chop the body up after it stops fighting back, but some take more drastic measures. Ashwood Abbey hunters sometimes make this Tactic's use the highlight of one of their gory debauches; the first person to tear a limb completely off is traditionally offered a choice of bottles from the host's wine cellar.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Not only do the hunters fail to inflict extra trauma, all secondary actors lose their grapple on the target thanks to the primary actor's botched instruction.

Failure: The primary actor is unable to direct the secondary actors to properly rend the target's flesh. Apart from the damage inflicted by the secondary actors' grapple, the target suffers no ill effects.

Success: By directing the secondary actors' physical effort, the primary actor shows just how to rend the target's joints, tearing ligaments and partially dislocating limbs. For every success on the activation roll, the target suffers a -1 wound penalty on all actions, to a maximum of -5. This penalty does not stack with the wound penalty from having damage marked in one of the victim's rightmost three Health boxes. The penalty lasts until the victim is the recipient of an Intelligence + Medicine check that heals at least one point of bashing damage *or* downgrades a wound by one step (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 61).

Exceptional Success: In addition to inflicting massive wound penalties, the target suffers from the effect of the *Lame Flaw*, reducing his Speed by 3. This effect persists until the wound penalties from this Tactic are removed (see above).

To Purchase: 14 Practical Experience, 11 for Ashwood Abbey, 9 for Aegis Kai Doru

EXPLOIT TELL

Prerequisites: All: Manipulation 2, Empathy 2.
Partial (1): Manipulation 3 (primary actor). Partial (1): Wits 2 (secondary actors).

Requires: 2, up to 4 adds one dice to all actors.
Maximum 4 for this Tactic.

Dice Pool: *Primary:* Manipulation + Empathy. *Secondary:* Wits + Empathy.

Action: Extended and contested; each roll represents one minute of discourse with the subject. The target rolls Resolve + Composure.



Description: Tells and derangements are a factor that slashers and hunters alike must deal with. Whether it's a hunter who compulsively checks the salt lines across every entrance into his apartment or a slasher who caves the Anglo-Saxon rune "Tywaz" into the palm of the left hand of every one of his victims, these behavioral quirks are a hindrance to those who possess them and a potential boon to those tracking the deranged. With a careful understanding of applied psychology and the principles of interrogation, a pair (or more) of investigators can "work" a suspect, poking and prodding at her psyche and forcing derangements to the surface.

While the primary actor goads and cajoles and pushes buttons, the secondary actor watches the subject carefully, looking for tacks that seem to have an effect and communicating this to the primary actor through subtle cues. This can be a weapon (pushing a violent suspect into a fugue state), an investigative tool (fishing for explosive outbursts of violence from an otherwise normal-seeming suspect in a serial murder case), or even a sadistic recruiting tactic (as in a cell of slashers forcing a captive to lash out and potentially further damage his own Morality).

Using this Tactic requires that the actors involved have the time and the ability to converse with the target. This doesn't necessarily mean the subject must be willing, or even that she reciprocate the conversation: a pair of VASCU agents interrogating a detained and unresponsive suspect can use this Tactic, as can a VALKYRIE strike team engaged in a standoff at gunpoint with a hostile ENE. The actors need not be aware of a specific Tell or derangement, although knowing something about the subject's psychological makeup provides a bonus. The primary actor must, however, specify a general category of derangement the Tactic aims to ferret out, such as sexual deviance, violent behavior, or sociopathic tendencies. Because of the wide range of specific manifestations derangements and Tells can take, the Storyteller must rely on his own judgment to decide whether the specified category is appropriate. Sadism in one slasher might qualify as "violent tendencies," while in another it might fall under "sexual deviance."

The target number of successes for the primary actor is five plus the subject's Morality. The subject must reach a total equal to 10 minus his own Resolve + Composure. Because it is possible on a failure to receive false information, the Storyteller should consider rolling for the primary actor so the players never know for sure if they've received correct information.

Potential Modifiers: Subject is a complete stranger to the actors (-3), subject does not actually possess any derangements or tells (-2), subject's Morality is 7

or higher (-1), subject is only slightly known to the actors (a new case without much data, or an enemy the actors have faced a few times before) (-2), actors have had frequent contact with the subject (+1), subject has a Morality of 4 or less (+1), actors have a profile on the subject (see the Profiling Tactic on p. 227 of *Hunter: the Vigil*) (+3).

Organizations: VASCU practically invented this Tactic and remains its most common user. While hardly sufficient for a conviction, an outburst of psychotic behavior during an interrogation is a damning piece of evidence in a prosecutor's arsenal. Task Force: VALKYRIE and the Cheiron Group likewise use this Tactic, primarily as part of the recruitment process to screen potential members for major psychological problems. Slashers, especially Geniuses and Psychos, use this Tactic on captives to twist the unfortunates into deranged killers themselves.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: For the primary actor, the process goes awry and some key facet of the subject's psyche is overlooked. Not only does the primary actor lose all accumulated successes, the subject can feed him one piece of false information about herself. She might convince him that she possesses no derangements at all, or that her Vice is something other than it is, or that her Willpower is significantly stronger or weaker than it is. For the subject, dramatic failure means she loses all accumulated successes *and* suffers a -1 penalty on all remaining rolls. This penalty is cumulative for multiple dramatic failures.

Failure: If the primary actor fails to reach his required total before the subject, he is unable to force her to display her Tell. The subject cannot be the target of this Tactic again for at least one hour per point of Willpower she currently possesses.

Success: If the primary actor reaches his required total before the subject, the subject is forced to display one of her Tells or derangements. She is unable to control this outburst; it merely happens, exactly as if she failed a Resolve + Composure roll to resist the stimulus of the Tell. If circumstances would prevent her from *actually* acting out her derangement, she instead launches into an outburst, vocalizing or otherwise conveying her desired course of action. Since this behavior can be both violent and unexpected, hunters employ this Tactic sparingly outside of controlled situations.

If the subject has more than one Tell or derangement that could fall under the same broad category, the most severe one manifests. If the subject has multiple derangements of equal severity, the Storyteller

chooses one. If the subject has no derangements or Tells, she instead takes some action or makes an outburst that exemplifies her Vice.

Exceptional Success: In addition to goading the subject into revealing her psychological traumas, the primary actor gleans one of the following pieces of information about the subject: the total number of derangements she possesses, her Vice, her current Morality rating, or her current reserve of Willpower points. The character, obviously, interprets this information in a qualitative fashion, not as game mechanics. While the *player* might learn, for example, “her Morality is 4,” the *character* learns “she seems pretty jaded, but you’re not sure she’s capable of callous, cold-blooded murder.” For the subject, an exceptional success allows her to convey a false version of the above pieces of information, just as she can if the primary actor rolls a dramatic failure.

To Purchase: 14 Practical Experience, 11 for Loyalists of Thule, 9 for VASCU

FALSE PRETENSES

Prerequisites: All: Composure 2, Subterfuge 3. *Partial* (1): Manipulation 3, Socialize 3 (primary actor)

Requires: 4

Dice Pool: *Primary:* Manipulation + Socialize
Secondary: Composure + Subterfuge

Action: Extended and contested; target rolls Wits + Composure (if more than one target, the character with the highest Wits + Composure total rolls for the whole group). Each roll represents 10 minutes of socializing.

Description: While the insanity of a particular slasher might be subtle enough to escape notice, many lunatics exude a subtle sense of malice and general *wrongness* that puts people on their guard. By putting on a forced veneer of normalcy, a group of slashers can, for a limited time at least, convince others they are nothing but a harmless, if a little odd, group of characters. The group dynamic is key: primal human instinct tells us the loner is to be shunned and feared far more than the group. Groups of slashers can “cover” for each other, passing Tells or derangements brought on by low Morality as harmless simple-mindedness or eccentricity.

Some slasher cells affect the façade of a family unit (sometimes the degenerate wretches actually are related by blood), others might pass themselves off as a traveling garage band or the employees and regular customers of a small-town business. In any case, by masking their homicidal intentions and subtly reinforcing the group dy-

namic, they can lull potential victims into a false sense of security and leave them vulnerable to a savage ambush.

Much like a foot chase, the False Pretenses Tactic works a little bit differently than other extended actions. Each participant has a different target number of successes that must be reached in order to succeed: the primary actor must earn successes equal to the target’s Wits + Composure, but to see through the deception, the target need only accumulate more successes than the primary actor’s *current* total.

Potential Modifiers: Attempting to use the Tactic on a group of four or more targets (-3), every Tell the primary actor possesses (-2), attempting to use the Tactic on a group of two or three targets (-2), every derangement the primary actor possesses (-1), every three derangements possessed by all secondary actors (-1), group appears out of place or in an inappropriate environment (e.g. a backwoods family of mutant cannibals at an inner-city club) (-1 to -3, depending on the level of incongruity), primary actor has no derangements (+1), cell offers to perform some helpful service for the targets such as fixing a flat tire, getting them into an exclusive party, etc. (+2).

Organizations: The Malleus Maleficarum sometimes uses this Tactic to lure monsters and witches into a false sense of security, often by masquerading as priests, deacons, or groundskeepers of a church. The Union capitalizes on its members’ “everyman” appeal in much the same manner, passing themselves off as belonging to the anonymous, blue-collar world before striking.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: For the primary actor, a dramatic failure means the group has revealed some sign that it intends malice toward the target. All accumulated successes for the primary actor are lost. For the target, a dramatic failure means that he believes the group to be entirely harmless and immediately loses the contested action.

Failure: If the primary actor fails to reach her target number of successes before the target reaches his, the target remains unconvinced by the cell’s act and may react accordingly.

Success: If the primary actor reaches her goal without her total being exceeded by the target’s total, the target is taken in by the cell’s display of helpful, or at least non-threatening, behavior. The first time a member of the cell attacks him for the rest of the scene, his roll to react to surprise is reduced to a chance dice (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**,

p. 46). If this Tactic succeeded against a group of targets, all of them suffer the same effect. Should any target suffer a dramatic failure on the roll, he is blindsided for *two* turns. This effect only applies once; if the primary actor attacks the target and then, some time later, another member of the cell ambushes the target, the reaction to surprise is rolled normally for the second attack).

Exceptional Success: If the primary actor accumulates five more successes than required to succeed, any targets of this Tactic are *automatically* surprised. The targets do not even get a roll to resist surprise; they are simply unable to act or subtract their Defense from incoming attacks during the first turn of combat. Should the target earn 5 more successes than the primary actor's current total, not only does he see through the ruse, he expects the inevitable violence from the cell. The first time a member of the cell attacks the target during the scene, the target not only automatically succeeds on the roll to react to the ambush, he automatically acts first in the first turn (after the first turn, roll Initiative for the target normally). This benefit likewise affects all targets in a group.

To Purchase: 15 Practical Experience, 12 for the Union, 10 for the Malleus Maleficarum

GRISLY SCENE

Prerequisites: All: Presence 2, Expression 1
Partial (1): Presence 3, Manipulation 2, Intimidation 2 (primary actor). *Partial (1):* Crafts 1 (secondary actors).

Requires: 2

Dice Pool: *Primary:* Presence + Intimidation.
Secondary: Intelligence + Crafts.

Action: Extended. Each roll represents one hour of prep time.

Description: Many slashers like to keep trophies of their kills, from the comparatively mundane (a piece of jewelry worn by their victims) to the truly grotesque (human heads mounted on a wall via taxidermy). The sight of such a trophy room can shock and sicken the unsuspecting, and some slashers deliberately set up gory trophy rooms in their lairs and then funnel would-be pursuers or hapless victims into them, waiting for the horror to incapacitate them before closing in for the kill.

This Tactic works a bit differently than many others. Instead of directly affecting one or more target, this Tactic allows the cell to set up a sort of trap that triggers an effect on any character who sees the Grisly Scene. The slashers' presence when the target



witnesses the room can enhance the effect, but is not required for it to function.

To use this Tactic, the secondary actors perform the basic work of constructing the “trophy room.” This might include anything from bizarre altars made of human bone to meat hooks suspended from the ceiling to hang carcasses from. The primary actor directs their actions, creating a scene calculated to inspire revulsion and terror. Depending on the slashers in question, this scene might be a gruesome “meat locker” with human bodies in place of sides of beef, a coldly clinical laboratory with the vile evidence of horrible experiments strewn across stainless steel tables, a shrine to blasphemous, unknowable gods, or any other appropriately revolting tableaux.

Setting up this Tactic requires time; each success on the activation roll allows the cell to convert an area five feet by five feet into a Grisly Scene. Obviously, the cell must have appropriate “building blocks” on hand; some slasher cells go on a killing spree before setting up a trophy room with this Tactic, while others meticulously preserve souvenirs from kills long completed.

As long as no one disturbs it, a Grisly Scene maintains its effectiveness almost indefinitely. Indeed, an older scene might levy a penalty to resist its effects, as putrid, decaying flesh is rather more horrific than freshly-killed corpses.

Any character with a Morality of 2 or less is immune to the effects of this tactic. Such debased wretches are so incapable of basic human empathy that the sight of horribly mutilated bodies fails to move them.

Potential Modifiers: Each identifiably different human body used (e.g. multiple heads or limbs, cured human skin with different skin tones) (+1 to primary actor), human body parts fashioned into *objects d’art* such as lamps, thrones, or the like (+2 to primary actor), location is particularly dark, isolated, or otherwise creepy (an abandoned church, backwoods shack, Victorian-era asylum) (+1 to +3), victims killed in an especially brutal fashion (+2 to primary actor), no human remains used (-3 to primary actor), blood used but no other physical remains (-1 to primary actor), location is brightly lit or not conducive to an atmosphere of terror (shopping mall, pleasant city park in a “safe” neighborhood, etc.) (-1 to -3 to primary actor), using fake body parts or gore to simulate a killer’s trophy room (-2 to -5 to primary actor depending on the quality of the props).

Organizations: The Long Night, despite its fervent denials, has been known to practice a form of this Tactic

to terrify witches and demons with “scenes of their own inevitable damnation.” (Think of the fundamentalist Christian “Hell Houses” that pop up at Halloween.) Network 0 sometimes trades in the actual blood and guts for cutting-edge special effects to “spice up” their videos.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Instead of inspiring panic and revulsion, the scene created by the cell inspires rage and a single-minded devotion to destroy the perpetrators. Anyone who enters the Grisly Scene and fails a Resolve + Composure roll gains a +1 bonus to attack any member of the cell who participated in the Tactic.

Failure: While the scene prepared may be disturbing and sickening, it fails to inspire devastating dread in those who see it.

Success: Success on this Tactic functions a bit differently depending upon whether it is discovered “blind” (that is, none of the slashers involved in the Tactic are present), or whether the primary actor is in the trophy room. If a character stumbles across an empty trophy room, his player simply rolls Resolve + Composure. On a success, he is shaken but suffers no game mechanic penalties. Should he fail, he loses a point of Willpower from the shock and suffers a -1 penalty on all actions for the rest of the scene. The Storyteller should feel free to assign bonuses or penalties to this roll; a completely unsuspecting victim might suffer a -2, while a hunter who knows he’s entering a slasher’s lair and expects some fucked up shit might receive a +2 bonus.

If the primary actor for the Tactic is present when a character discovers the scene, the roll becomes a contested roll of the victim’s Resolve + Composure vs. the primary actor’s Presence + Intimidation. Should the victim earn more successes, he suffers no ill effect, but should the primary actor win the roll, the victim loses one point of Willpower *per success* that the primary actor’s player rolled in excess of his own. The primary actor must be present at the moment of discovery and aware of the interlopers to make this roll. If multiple characters enter the scene at the same time, the primary actor’s player makes one roll and compares it to each of the victims’ individually.

Exceptional Success: The scene is so horrifying that any character who fails to resist its effects also gains a temporary minor derangement of the Storyteller’s choice.

To Purchase: 13 Practical Experience, 10 for Long Night, 8 for Network Zero

KEEP 'EM AWAKE

Prerequisites: All: Dexterity 2, Medicine 1 *Partial* (1): Intelligence 2, Medicine 2 (primary actor)

Requires: 2, up to 4 adds one dice to all secondary actors, 5 or more levies a -2 penalty to all actors.

Dice Pool: *Primary:* Intelligence + Medicine. *Secondary:* Dexterity + Medicine.

Action: Extended (each roll represents one turn of triage).

Description: Sometimes you need to keep someone awake who, by all odds, should be unconscious or dead. Slashers use this Tactic to keep victims conscious and prolong their suffering, hunters use it to keep allies alive until help can arrive or long enough to convey vital intelligence. One actor acts as the primary physician, tackling the worst of the medical problems as they come up and directing his secondary actors to deal with less severe ones.

This Tactic can be used on an individual who is unconscious (rightmost Health box marked with a bashing wound), dying (rightmost Health box filled with a lethal wound) or even dead. All actors must begin using this Tactic within one turn per point of the victim's Stamina after death, otherwise the target is too far gone. A dead character cannot actually be resuscitated with this Tactic; the target cannot heal damage by mundane or supernatural means and still has an aggravated wound in his rightmost Health box. The best this strategy can manage is to hold off the inevitable for a time.

The target of this Tactic must remain immobile. Any attempt to move, or take an action more physically taxing than speaking in a low voice, causes the Tactic to immediately fail. Even when this Tactic is not employed for nefarious reasons, it's usually best to restrain the target so that his inadvertent struggles don't inflict further injury on himself.

The target number for this tactic functions differently than other extended actions. While this Tactic is being used, the target has a "pain threshold" number, which represents the number of successes the primary actor must achieve. This threshold begins at 1 and increases by two every turn. Any damage the target suffers adds directly to the pain threshold. Should the pain threshold ever exceed the primary actor's current success total, the tactic fails and its effects end. There is no long-term "success" for this Tactic, the target can only be kept conscious for so long before his body gives out and needs to heal.

Potential Modifiers: Set of surgeon's tools (scalpels, retractors, clamps) (+1 for any actor with a set),

field surgical kit (+1 for any two actors), military surgical kit (+2 for any three actors), target is securely restrained (+2 for all actors), access to surgical facilities (+3 for all actors), lack of tools (-1 to -4 for each actor lacking tools), target is held immobile by a grapple (-2 for all actors), bad weather (-2 for all actors), distraction from noise (-1 for all actors) to imminent danger (-4 for all actors).

Organizations: Task Force: VALKYRIE agents sometimes get a little overzealous in their interrogations and need to bring a suspect around. Null Mystery finds it quite useful to keep monsters conscious to more accurately measure pain thresholds and responses to negative stimuli.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The medical efforts do more harm than good; not only does the target immediately suffer the effects of being wounded, dying, or dead, he suffers one point of damage of the type currently filling his rightmost Health box.

Failure: When the target's pain threshold equals or exceeds the primary actor's accumulated successes, the target lapses back into unconsciousness (or dies, if the wound in his rightmost Health box is aggravated).

Success: As long as the primary actor's success total exceeds the target's pain threshold, the target remains conscious and aware of his surroundings. Any negative effects of his current state (such as bleeding out) are held in abeyance as long as this Tactic continues to function.

Exceptional Success: Since there is no fixed target number of successes for this Tactic, there is no way to roll an exceptional success.

To Purchase: 13 Practical Experience, 10 for Null Mystery, 8 for Task Force: VALKYRIE

IMPALE

Prerequisites: All: Composure 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 1. *Partial* (1): Athletics 3 or Firearms 3 or Weaponry 3 (primary actor).

Requires: 2; 4 or more levies a -2 penalty to the primary actor, above and beyond the penalty for shooting into combat (see below).

Dice Pool: *Primary:* Strength + Athletics or Strength + Firearms or Strength + Weaponry. *Secondary:* Dexterity + Athletics.

Action: Instant.

Description: Slashers are infamous for their gory kills. Some grind victims up into hamburger, some gut their prey with rusty boat hooks, and some prefer to inflict an agonizingly painful wound and

then leave the target to bleed out, slowly and painfully. This Tactic demonstrates the latter philosophy, allowing the slasher to literally nail victims to a wall.

Using this Tactic requires the primary actor to be armed with a stabbing weapon at least 18 inches long. Brutes, Masks, and other especially strong slashers tend to favor thrown or melee weapons to show off their brute power, while others make do with crossbows, spear guns, or other Firearms-based weapons. The target must also be adjacent to a vertical or nearly-vertical surface, such as a wall, a large tree, or a vehicle; the target may instead be pinned to the ground if the target is prone.

While the primary actor readies his weapon, the secondary actors bait the target, goading him into a position where a powerful strike can skewer him. If a secondary actor's roll fails, he does not get out of the way of the target in time. When the target's next action arrives, it can attack that actor without applying the actor's Defense. This does not affect the primary actor in any way (other than not granting the player extra dice, of course).

The primary hunter's activation roll is his attack roll, and therefore subject to all the normal rules for an attack (he adds his weapon's damage, subtracts his target's Defense unless it is a Firearms attack, and may use various attack options or Merits as appropriate). The attack, if successful, impales the target on the weapon, and has a chance to pin him to the adjacent object.

Removing an impaling weapon from one's own body requires a successful Strength + Composure roll, and inflicts one additional point of lethal damage. Another character may remove the weapon with a successful Strength + Stamina roll, also inflicting one point of lethal damage. Finally, another character may remove the weapon without inflicting additional damage with a successful Strength + Medicine roll. In any case, removing an impaling weapon that has pinned a target to a wall incurs a -2 penalty on the roll.

Potential Modifiers: Secondary actor is especially frightening/intimidating to the target, such as a torch-wielding hunter goading a vampire (+2 to secondary actor); target strikes a secondary actor (-2 to primary actor); secondary actor(s) has a lower Initiative than the primary actor (-3 to all participants); target grapples a secondary actor (-5 to primary actor).

Organizations: Ashwood Abbey members take a perverse glee in doggedly pursuing some quarry to the

point of exhaustion, then hitting it with a harpoon from a high-powered pneumatic spear gun. Once it's pinned (and hopefully still alive), the hunters... well, use whatever imagination got them into the compact in the first place. On a less sybaritic note, some particularly sadistic Aegis Kai Doru hunters carry a sheaf of Grecian javelins tipped with silver rather than the traditional soft iron when hunting werewolves. It's considered an impressive display of prowess to skewer a charging shapechanger in its full battle form without going mad from terror or letting it eviscerate you.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The attack misses the target altogether and hits one of the secondary actors. The primary actor's player immediately makes a new attack roll against the secondary actor, subtracting her Defense if applicable.

Failure: The attack misses the target completely.

Success: The attack hits its mark, and the weapon impales the target through a limb, or possibly even the torso if the attack inflicted significant damage. The victim suffers a -3 penalty to Speed, Initiative, and attack rolls until the weapon is removed. In addition, if the successes rolled on the attack exceed the Durability of the adjacent surface, the target is pinned to that surface and cannot move until the weapon is removed. A pinned target loses one point from his Defense as he cannot evade attacks as effectively.

Exceptional Success: The target suffers massive damage and is likely pinned to all but the hardest of surfaces. In addition, if the weapon is made of wood and the target is a vampire, an exceptional success pierces the heart and stakes the monster.

To Purchase: 14 Practical Experience, 11 for Ashwood Abbey, 9 for Aegis Kai Doru

LOBOTOMIZE

Prerequisites: All: Medicine 2 or Medicine 1 with a Specialty in Surgery; Brawl 2. *Partial (1):* Dexterity 3, Medicine 3 or Medicine 2 with a Specialty in Surgery (primary actor). *Partial (2):* Strength 2, Brawl 2

Requires: 3

Dice Pool: Primary: Dexterity + Medicine. Secondary: Strength + Brawl

Action: Instant

Description: Lobotomy was a popular and accepted means of treating aberrant psychological behavior for nearly one hundred years. The theory was that the process of destroying the prefrontal cortex of

the brain would eliminate criminal behavior, aggression, and other undesirable traits. Modern psychiatry has rejected the notion entirely, but hunters and their deranged counterparts have discovered a variation on the technique that can cripple a monster's ability to invoke supernatural powers of the mind.

The secondary actor(s) first grapple the target. See pp. 156-158 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook** for information on Grappling (note especially the section on multiple people grappling a single target). The roll to grapple the creature, however, is not part of the Tactic. That is, the initial roll to grapple does not add dice to the primary actor's roll. Once the creature is grappled and one secondary actor successfully overpowers the creature, all of the secondary actors' players make their rolls (Strength + Brawl). This roll is to keep the monster from thrashing about, giving the primary actor a clear target. The primary actor's player then rolls Dexterity + Medicine as the primary actor delicately inserts a long, thin needle or pick into the target's tear duct and twists it around, severing the connections to and from the prefrontal cortex of the brain.

Potential Modifiers: Set of surgeon's tools (scalpels, retractors, clamps) (+1 for primary actor), field surgical kit (+2 for primary actor), military surgical kit (+3 for primary actor), target is securely restrained (+2 for all actors), access to surgical facilities (+3 for all actors), lack of tools (-1 to -4 for primary actor), target is only held immobile by a grapple (-2 for primary actor), distraction from noise (-1 for primary actor) to imminent danger (-4 for primary actor).

Organizations: The Cheiron Group, endlessly fascinated by the biological workings of monsters and sub-human slashers alike, makes use of this Tactic both in the field and in the lab. Null Mysteriis likewise prefers a "medical" approach to the problem of dealing with a monster's psychic abilities rather than pseudo-mystical counter-charms.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The primary actor is unable to plant the lobotomy pick properly, and the target's thrashing causes him to slip and injure one of the secondary actors. The primary actor's player rolls a new attack as a reflexive action against his ally (treat this attack as a Strength + Weaponry attack, and assume the tool used for the lobotomy has a +1 damage rating), inflicting lethal damage if he hits. The target automatically escapes the grapple.

Failure: The primary actor is unable to perform the procedure, and the target suffers no ill effects. The target remains grappled.

Success: The target suffers one point of lethal damage per two successes on the activation roll (minimum one point of damage). In addition, the procedure disrupts the target's mind, rendering him unable to employ any sort of psychic power or supernatural mental ability. This includes a vampire's dominating gaze, a witch's love spell, or even the Talents of Psycho and Maniac slashers. This effect lasts until the victim heals all damage inflicted by this Tactic.

Exceptional Success: In addition to having its psychic powers disrupted, the target loses one point from all of its Mental Attributes until all damage from the Tactic heals.

To Purchase: 14 Practical Experience, 11 for Null Mysteriis, 9 for The Cheiron Group

MAN CAN LICK TOO

Prerequisites: All: Wits 2, Stealth 3. *Partial* (1): Dexterity 2 (primary actor). *Partial* (1): Presence 2, Subterfuge 2 (secondary actors).

Requires: 2, more than four subtracts one dice from all actors.

Dice Pool: *Primary:* Dexterity + Stealth. *Secondary:* Wits + Stealth.

Action: Extended (5-10+ successes required; each roll represents one minute of sneaking) or reflexive and contested (see below).

Description: Many apocryphal stories of slashers tell it in different ways: sometimes it's the dead dog and the note "Man can lick, too;" sometimes it's the dead roommate with "Aren't you glad you didn't turn on the lights?" Whatever form it takes, the idea of a killer almost revealing himself but passing his presence off as something else is a common trope, and it can be a useful tool in the arsenal of any cell. While the primary actor attempts a stealthy infiltration, the secondary actors watch from a distance, ready to create distractions at a moment's notice. Should the primary actor falter and inadvertently announce his presence, the secondary actors stand ready to "cover" for him by creating a distraction somewhere else.

This Tactic works a little differently than many others, in that the primary actor's action does not directly relate to the execution of the Tactic. The basis of this Tactic is the primary actor's attempt to move silently and undetected — a slasher sneaking into his victim's home, for example. He gains the teamwork benefit from the secondary actors' roll (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 134) as normal, but the extra advantage that comes from learning this Tactic and employing it comes in the secondary actors' ability to reflexively "reinforce" the primary actor.

While using this Tactic, whenever the primary actor loses a contested roll to remain undetected, any secondary actor with at least one success on her activation roll may choose to reflexively spend one point of Willpower to quickly react and try to create a distraction or explanation for the revelation. Her player rolls Presence + Subterfuge; if she succeeds, anyone who won the contested action to detect the primary actor's presence writes it off as something inconsequential and allows the primary actor to continue the extended action. The sound of something being knocked over might be attributed to raccoons getting into the trash, or a brief glimpse of a silhouette as a curtain blowing in the air conditioning's current.

To use this Tactic, the secondary actors must all be able to see the primary actor, or at least communicate with him. This might mean something as low-tech as peering through windows or watching from the roofs adjacent to a city park, or it might involve live streaming video and audio feeds from a stereoscopic camera rig and microphone the primary actor wears.

This Tactic, as written, assumes the primary actor is using the Stealth skill to remain hidden and silent; the Tactic can just as easily be used to shadow a target through a crowd. This does not require learning a separate Tactic, merely swap the Dexterity 2 requirement for Wits 2 and change the primary actor's dice pool from Dexterity + Stealth to Wits + Stealth.

Potential Modifiers: Secondary actors can only dimly or intermittently see primary actors (-3 to secondary actors), secondary actors have good visuals, but no audio for the primary actor (-1 to secondary actors), each subsequent negation of a failed roll (-1 to all secondary actors) primary actor hiding in a shadowy area (+2 to primary actor), primary actor moving quietly through a loud area (near a busy freeway, factory, animal shelter, etc.) (+2 to primary actor), all actors in constant communication (e.g. radios, cell phones, hand signals) (+3 to all actors).

Organizations: Network 0 reporters often have to shadow people who very much do not wish to be shadowed in order to get their stories. This Tactic gives them a little extra insurance to avoid being noticed — or worse yet, caught. Likewise, the Loyalists of Thule, with their general policy of noninterference, use this Tactic to observe without being detected. VASCU agents sometimes use this Tactic when covertly placing wiretaps or cameras in a suspect's home.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: For the primary actor, a dramatic failure immediately and unequivocally reveals

his presence to anyone contesting his attempt at Stealth. Secondary actors may not spend Willpower for a roll to “negate” a dramatic failure. For a secondary actor's reflexive roll, the attempt at distraction just makes the contesting character *more* edgy. Instead of writing it off as nothing, she might raise the alarm, call the police, or shout for her father to bring his scattergun.

Failure: For the primary actor, he makes a noise or allows himself to be seen briefly. A secondary actor may attempt to “negate” this failure as described above. For a secondary actor, failure means he was unable to cover for the primary actor and the extended action fails.

Success: For the primary actor, a successful roll means that he makes progress toward the number of successes required to meet his goal. For a secondary actor, success means that anyone who won the contested roll against the primary actor dismisses what she saw or heard.

Exceptional Success: For a primary actor, winning the contested roll with five or more successes means he has found an exceptionally good hiding spot or route to avoid being detected. His next roll is treated as a rote action, allowing him to re-roll any dice that do not come up successes. For a secondary actor, the distraction is especially convincing. Any character contesting the primary actor's action suffers a -2 penalty for the rest of the extended action.

To Purchase: 15 Practical Experience, 12 for Network Zero, 10 for VASCU

NO ESCAPE

Prerequisites: All: Strength 2, Crafts 2. *Partial* (1): Intelligence 2, Crafts 2.

Requires: 4

Dice Pool: *Primary:* Intelligence + Crafts. *Secondary:* Strength + Crafts.

Action: Extended (1-5 success required per five foot by five foot area; each roll represents one hour of crafting.)

Description: The isolated, inescapable killing den is a trope of the slasher story, and it's a trope that has more basis in fact than fiction. Many slashers take some isolated space as their lair, fortifying it and riddling it with trap doors, secret hiding places, and most especially reinforced exits to trap their victims inside. For some, it's an apparently-ramshackle old house on a deserted lane, the windows all boarded over and the doors nailed shut. For others it's a disused factory in the industrial district, refitted with the latest steel security doors and elec-

tronic locks. Whatever form it takes, it serves one purpose: trammeling some unfortunate quarry into a confined space from which there is no escape.

A cell of slashers can convert a space into a killing lair in relatively short order. The primary actor directs the work and ensures that any potential escape routes are blocked off, that secret tunnels allow the cell to access all the rooms easily, and so on. The secondary actors perform the actual manual labor, nailing up planks, bricking over windows, and the like.

When the cell undertakes this Tactic, the primary actor must determine the level of quality he wants the killing den to possess. This determines both the number of successes required per five-foot by five-foot area and the effects on anyone unfortunate enough to be trapped in the killing den, and any attempt to force an exit (battering down a door, hacking an electronic lock, etc.) suffers a -1 penalty per base success required. Characters involved in the construction of the killing den do not suffer this penalty. In addition, anyone within the killing den who was not part of its construction suffers a -1 penalty per base success on Initiative against members of the cell.

There is no limit to how large a killing den can be, but it must be at least ten feet by ten feet. In addition, it must fill at least the entirety of an available room. A killing den set up in a 20 foot by 30 foot room cannot occupy a ten foot by ten foot space in the middle of that room. A separate room would have to be built into the larger room for that (an extended Crafts roll in its own right). The killing den can, however, occupy only part of a building. A five-room house with a basement could have one killing den that covers the basement and two other rooms, or even three different killing dens in three different rooms.

A killing den can last indefinitely, but requires regular upkeep. Once a year, the cell must re-apply this Tactic to an existing killing den, with a target number of successes equal to one-quarter of the original target successes. Failure to do so causes the penalties the killing den incurs to drop by one; should the penalty ever drop to 0, the killing den loses all effectiveness and must be rebuilt from scratch. Likewise, a victim (or group of victims together) managing to escape reduces the penalty by one and necessitates immediate upkeep.

Potential Modifiers: Secondary actors have high-grade tool sets (+1 to secondary actors), high-quality materials (+1 to secondary actors), high-tech tools (laser leveler, saws with laser guides) (+2 to secondary actors), extensive reference library (+2

to primary actor), carpentry shop (+3 to all actors), poor-quality tool set (-1 to secondary actors), poor quality materials (-1 to secondary actors), lack of reference library (-1 to secondary actors), improvised work area (-1 to all actors).

Organizations: Null Mysteriis sometimes sets up "secure houses," more colloquially known as "zoos," where monsters are turned loose and their natural reactions observed. Both the Long Night and the Maleus Maleficarum build secure prisons to house captured monsters for attempted "deprogramming," and VASCU field teams are sometimes trained in setting up field prisons when local law enforcement's jails aren't sufficient to hold paranormal killers. Finally, the Lucifuge sometimes use it to attract, summon, or bind demons.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: An apparently-secure killing den provides the victims with an easily-defensible position. Instead of assessing a penalty, the killing den grants a *bonus* equal to the base number of successes required against members of the cell.

Failure: No appreciable headway is made toward the construction of the killing den.

Success: The cell makes progress toward constructing its murderous fortress. Actions taken to escape the killing den suffer a cumulative -1 penalty equal to the primary actor's successes. In addition, those trapped within the killing den suffer a cumulative -1 penalty to their Initiative scores equal to successes gained.

Exceptional Success: In addition to the penalty on Initiative and escape attempts, any victim trapped in the killing den loses his Defense against the first attack any member of the cell makes against him during the scene.

To Purchase: 14 Practical Experience, 11 for Null Mysteriis, 9 for Lucifuge

PACK OF BLOODHOUNDS

Prerequisites: All: Wits 3, Survival 2 *Partial* (1): Survival 3 or Survival 2 with a Specialty in Tracking.

Requires: 3, up to 9 adds one dice to all actors; more than 10 subtracts one dice from all actors.

Dice Pool: *Primary:* Wits or Intelligence + Survival. *Secondary:* Wits + Survival.

Action: Extended or extended and contested (10-20+ successes; each roll represents 10 minutes of tracking).

Description: Stories about slashers often include tales of their uncanny ability to hound their victims, whether through sprawling back-country roads or through the claustrophobic spaces of an inner-city



apartment building. Some stories attribute supernatural acuity to a slasher's senses, insisting that the killers can find victims by the smell of their fear or the sound of their heartbeat. While some slashers might possess such preternatural senses, even an otherwise-ordinary cell of slashers can demonstrate a terrifying efficiency in locating and pursuing its quarry. Whether practicing Special Forces-level tracking skills or simply operating on the raw predatory instinct that comes to the fore as Morality degrades, the secondary actors fan out in front, scouring the terrain for any sign of their prey's passage. They call back their findings to the primary actor who, like a huntsman, interprets those findings and gages the course his subject must have taken.

The primary actor has two options for his dice pool when using this Tactic: Wits + Survival or Intelligence + Survival. Most trackers roll Intelligence + Survival, representing tracking by sight (finding footprints or broken branches, torn clothes, etc.) and by rationally extrapolating the quarry's course from those clues. Trackers with supernaturally-keen senses may instead roll Wits + Survival, representing tracking by scent, sound, and raw animal instinct. At the Storyteller's discretion, some slashers

(especially Brutes, Freaks, and their scourge equivalents, but any Undertaking might be appropriate) may track with Wits + Survival even without being gifted with inhuman senses.

Tracking can also be an extended and contested action if the quarry attempts to hide his tracks or otherwise conceal his passage. Wits + Survival may be rolled for him at each stage of the pursuit. If the quarry ever achieves the most successes on a single roll, the tracker loses the trail altogether. If the tracker gets the most successes with each roll, they count toward the total number needed to follow the trail to its end. If there's ever a tie on any particular roll, the Storyteller may allow the tracker successive attempts at that stage (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 132) to resume the trail, all compared to the same number of successes achieved in the tying roll made for the subject. So, if the tied roll involves four successes, five or more successes must be achieved for the tracker to ever pick up the trail again. The Storyteller decides how many successive attempts are allowed, but each becomes more difficult.

Potential Modifiers: Quarry is bleeding (+1 to secondary actors), tracks lead through mud (+2 to secondary actors)***, tracks lead through snow (+2 to second-

ary actors)**; tracks lead through new-fallen snow (+3 to secondary actors)**; access to an item with quarry's scent (+1 to secondary actors)*; supernaturally-keen senses (+1 to +2 to all actors)*; quarry crosses stream (-1); members of quarry group split up (-3)**; tracking over pavement or stone (-4)**; quarry crosses stream (-1); multiple conflicting scents (-1 to all actors)*; quarry uses chemicals to obscure trail (-3 to all actors)*; each eight hours since the trail was made (-1 to all actors); trackers moving from one-half speed to three-quarters speed (-2 to all actors); trackers moving from three-quarters speed to full speed (-4 to all actors).

* These bonuses and penalties apply only to hunters tracking via superhuman senses (Wits + Survival).

** These bonuses and penalties apply only to hunters tracking via Intelligence + Survival.

Organizations: Task Force: VALKYRIE, with many members drawn from Special Forces, uses this Tactic frequently, although almost always using the Intelligence + Survival variant. A coordinated, trained VALKYRIE strike team can follow a target through inhospitable terrain at nearly a full sprint, overtaking all but the most dedicated woodsmen. The Cheiron Group has had some limited success grafting enhanced olfactory perceptions onto its agents and training them to hunt like a pack of wolves. And certainly Ashwood Abbey loves to use this to noisily harry and track fleeing prey.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: For the trackers, a dramatic failure causes them to lose all trace of the quarry's trail. Further attempts to re-acquire the trail are made at a -3 penalty. For the quarry trying to hide her trail, a dramatic failure means she has inadvertently led her pursuers right to her; the primary actor's next roll gains a +3 bonus.

Failure: The primary actor momentarily loses the trail and wastes 10 minutes backtracking and finding it again. In a contested roll, the quarry's attempts at stealth are successful, and the trackers lose the trail. Attempts to re-acquire it are made at a -1 penalty.

Success: The trackers make progress toward following the trail to its end.

Exceptional Success: Considerable progress toward the end of the trail is made by the trackers.

To Purchase: 15 Practical Experience, 12 for Ashwood Abbey, 10 for Task Force: VALKYRIE

REVEL IN THE KILL

Prerequisites: All: Morality 3 or less

Requires: 2

Dice Pool: Primary: Resolve + Composure. Secondary: Manipulation + Socialize.

Action: Instant

Description: Charismatic or forceful slashers often surround themselves with weak-willed cronies to validate their existence and provide companionship (or just someone to kick around). Where a solitary slasher might find a threshold of depravity at which she balks, a cell of slashers eggs each other on and pushes its members to greater atrocities. By gaining the approval of his twisted peers, a slasher renews his commitment to indulging the baser aspects of his nature and experiences a rush of energy. Thus invigorated, the slasher can operate at a manic level of intensity for periods that would exhaust an ordinary man.

The primary actor must have committed a Morality 3 sin prior to using this Tactic. He need not have had actually suffered degeneration from the sin, or even have been at risk for degeneration (if his Morality were 2 or lower, for example). He must, however, undertake this Tactic immediately upon committing the sin, or revisit the scene of a previous crime to trigger memories of the act. In either case, any given sin can only serve as fodder for this Tactic once.

Note that despite the name of this Tactic, it isn't strictly necessary that the sin committed by the primary actor be murder. Any sin judged to be Morality 3 or worse is applicable.

Potential Modifiers: Primary actor is returning to the scene of a previous crime rather than using this Tactic "live" (-3 to primary actor), sin committed was not "satisfying" to the primary actor (e.g. rushed, victim not of preferred type, etc.) (-2 to primary actor), sin committed was related to the primary actor's Vice (+1 to primary actor), primary actor rolled at least one exceptional success during commission of sin (+2 to primary actor).

Organizations: Task Force: VALKYRIE soldiers use a variation of this Tactic, usually called by a less morally questionable name like "Blooded" or "Battlefield Commendation." It's an ugly truth in warfare that sometimes a soldier must commit an act he considers morally repugnant, but the support of his teammates and their assurances that the act was the right thing to do, no matter how unpleasant, helps all of them to pick up and soldier on. Under the guise of group counseling, VASCU uses a similar Tactic to help agents gain strength through traumatic events in the field such as officer-involved shootings. In addition, the Hunt Club is depraved enough to gain strength from such a Tactic.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The exultation and reveling in the kill ring hollow. Perhaps the slasher sees, just for a moment, what a hollow and wretched beast he's



become, or perhaps he simply can't "get into" the kill this particular time. Instead of regaining any spent Willpower, he loses one point.

Failure: The primary actor is unable to gain inner strength from the contemplation of and glorying in his kills. He regains no Willpower.

Success: The primary actor charges himself up with the energy of the kill, reveling in the deed and in the approval of the secondary actors. The primary actor regains all spent Willpower, as though he had indulged his Virtue. In addition, all of the secondary actors involved in the Tactic regain one point of Willpower. This Willpower cannot exceed the secondary actors' normal Willpower maximum.

Exceptional Success: In addition to regaining all spent Willpower, the primary actor gains one additional, temporary point of Willpower beyond his normal maximum. This extra Willpower goes away at the end of the scene. The secondary actors involved in the Tactic regain *two* Willpower points, which may exceed their normal maximum. As with the primary actor's extra Willpower point, any Willpower in excess of any character's normal maximum disappears at the end of the scene.

To Purchase: 15 Practical Experience, 12 for the Hunt Club, 10 for Task Force: VALKYRIE

RUINATION

Prerequisites: *All:* Strength 2. *Partial (1):* Presence 3, Expression 2 (primary actor). *Partial (3):* Brawl 2 or Weaponry 2 or Brawl 2 and a natural weapon (such as claws or fangs, see Equipment later in this chapter) with at least a +1 damage bonus (all secondary actors).

Requires: 4; up to 8 adds one dice to the primary actor, maximum 9

Dice Pool: *Primary:* Presence + Expression or Strength + Weaponry. *Secondary:* Strength + Brawl or Strength + Weaponry.

Action: Instant

Description: Much like blood in the water drives a school of sharks into a frenzy, the thrill of battle sometimes stokes slashers into an orgy of bloodletting, tearing at their prey's existing wounds and exacerbating even minor injuries to the point of near-lethality. The fact that this Tactic causes excruciating pain is only an added benefit for many slashers.

To use this Tactic, all of the secondary actors must have attacked their target within the last turn, and at least one of them must have inflicted at least one point of damage. (This attack is not the activation roll for

STORY HOOK: THE DEMON DEMANDS RUINATION

Ruination is, for most hunters (and even some slashers), a sin against Morality. It's not quite torture, but it's damn close.

Consider: a demon offers to teach this Tactic to a hunter cell. It demands no cost for doing so other than the Tactic's use. Of course, this should set off warning bells in the hunters' heads - but sometimes, the allure of power and violent possibility is a potent one. Those who have not been burned by a demon's wicked machinations in the past are especially vulnerable to such dangerous bargaining.

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When the actual Tactic is performed, the secondary actors tear into the target with their weapons, or failing that, with fingernails or teeth. The primary actor screams, snarls, and generally exhorts his allies into a greater and more savage frenzy. The strength of his urgings in turn drives the secondary actors to rip and tear and hack with wilder abandon, ripping open wounds and leaving the victim a crippled wreck.

Using this Tactic is an especially heinous and sadistic act; treat participating in the Ruination Tactic as a Morality 3 sin.

Potential Modifiers: Target is suffering from a wound penalty (bonus to all secondary actors equal to wound penalty), target has at least one lethal wound (+1 to all actors), target has at least one aggravated wound (+2 to all actors), target has less than three bashing wounds and no more severe injuries (-1 to all actors), target has not been damaged by any actor involved in the tactic (-2 to all actors).

Organizations: Few organizations actually take the time and energy to practice and master a Tactic

as sadistic as Ruination, but dark rumors suggest that Ascending One cells in the throes of an Elixir-induced frenzy have been known to employ this tactic on any quarry unlucky enough to be cornered by the cell. Certainly, it's possible that particularly vile Ashwood Abbey cells might pass knowledge of this Tactic around, too — it has a certain orgiastic quality to it that might appease more iniquitous hunters (especially those on their way toward becoming slashers).

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Not only does the primary actor fail to exhort his comrades to exacerbate the target's wounds, the target's seeming imperviousness to the Tactic demoralizes the cell. All actors who participate in the Tactic must spend a Willpower point in order to attack the target for the rest of the scene. This cost must be paid for each attack until the actor hits and inflicts damage.

Failure: The primary actor's performance fails to spur the required amount of frenzy, and the target suffers no ill effects.

Success: At the primary actor's urging, the secondary actors rip into the target's injured body, tearing cuts open, hammering on bruised ribs, and generally seeking to increase her suffering dramatically. For every success on the primary actor's roll, one bashing wound the target is suffering from is upgraded to a lethal wound. This automatic damage upgrade starts from the leftmost Health box marked with a bashing wound and proceeds to the right. This Tactic cannot inflict additional damage; only convert extant wounds to a more severe type (thus this Tactic has no effect on an uninjured target).

Exceptional Success: In addition to potentially converting a large amount of bashing damage to lethal, any successes left over after *all* of the target's bashing wounds have been converted to lethal can be used to upgrade lethal wounds to aggravated at a rate of two successes per wound upgraded. Lethal wounds caused by the use of this Tactic can be upgraded in this manner.

To Purchase: 12 Practical Experience, 10 for Ashwood Abbey, 8 for Ascending Ones

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Many slashers kill without discernable rhyme or reason. Certainly, some tendencies exist across members of particular Undertakings (Brutes favor heavy, powerful melee weapons; Maniacs favor elaborate traps and staged "accidents"), but a killer's choice of



weapon is at once deeply personal and unique to that slasher. One factor that remains common throughout slasher stories (at least, those that make national news and stir up the kind of frenzy that gets VASCU agents involved) is that the killings are marked by a morbid, bizarre signature. It might be the nature of the murder weapon (people get shot every day, but when someone is murdered with a syringe full of sulfuric acid it tends to make the news) or it might be some calling card or token that identifies the killer — Masks often wear a literal mask, while Freaks and Mutants display weird body modifications beyond their deformities.

BODY MODIFICATION

Not all of a slasher's tools need be separate implements. Some, particularly those nearly-feral Mutants and Freaks, shape their own bodies into killing machines, all the better to emulate the beasts with which they feel such kinship. Body modification requires a surgical procedure similar to that required to insert Thaumatechnology implants into a Cheiron Group hunter (see **Thaumatechnological Surgery, Hunter: The Vigil** p 184). Body modifications have a Resources cost, like all equipment, and it is this dot rating rather than a Merit rating that determines the number of successes required to perform the modification. Body modification proce-

dures require a Specialty in Surgery to perform without a -3 penalty, rather than a Specialty in Thaumatechnology. Finally, unless otherwise mentioned, assume that any body modifications are permanent and cannot be removed. The rules are otherwise unchanged.

A character may have a number of body modifications equal to his Stamina score, but any modifications that are plainly visible incur a -3 penalty on all Social interactions (with the exception of Intimidation) with people the character doesn't know.

FILED TEETH

Cost • or •••

The character has his teeth filed down to points. This procedure is excruciatingly painful and best done under anesthesia, but a determined character *can* file his own teeth. He suffers a -3 penalty to the surgery action due to the distraction from the pain. Filed teeth allow the character to inflict lethal damage with a bite attack. He must still grapple his target before biting, however, and the filing makes his teeth less durable. On a dramatic failure on a bite attack, one or more of the character's teeth snap off, inflicting one point of lethal damage.

For a Resources cost of •••, the character may undergo a more radical procedure, having *all* of his teeth pulled out and being fitted with dentures made

CANNIBAL HILLBILLIES AND ADVANCED SURGICAL PROCEDURES

Several of the body modifications described in this section cost two or three Resources dots, the equivalent of a sophisticated computer or a fully-stocked auto garage. So how does a clan of psychotic Freaks in the backwoods of Kentucky afford filed teeth or scarified armor for its proud sons? They do it themselves. The Resources costs listed here assume that characters are paying a licensed, reputable surgeon (or as reputable a surgeon as is willing to file a man's teeth to points) to perform the procedure. If a character wants to perform this procedure for a cellmate, there's no charge necessary and the costs can be used to calculate the number of successes required for the procedure.

Of course, few backwoods cannibal mutant patriarchs have the requisite Specialty in Surgery or the proper, sterilized tools to perform a procedure, and even fewer have access to anesthetics. In other words, the pain of the procedure is usually enough to drive the "patient" insane, if he wasn't already. That might even be how some slasher cells recruit new blood.

from sharpened steel spikes, razor blades, or whatever other sadistic implement the character feels appropriate. These enhanced

teeth give the character a bite attack that inflicts +1 lethal damage; as before, the character must still grapple his target first. They also have the advantage of being removable, allowing the character to replace them with a set of normal-looking dentures so to appear less conspicuous.

CLAWS

Cost • or •••

The character's fingers are tipped with nails sharpened to terrible points. At the most basic level, the character simply grows his fingernails out extremely long and thick, and then carefully trims them to points. The one-dot version does not require surgery, merely an hour or so of time to shape the nails into something sharp enough to inflict damage. This modification gives the character a Brawl-based attack with a +1 damage bonus; plus, the character can make a generic targeted attack (-3) to target "vital

bits" — damage born of such an attack is always lethal. Human fingernails are not biologically designed to be used as weapons, and on a dramatic failure, the nails catch in the victim's flesh and are violently torn out by the roots. This inflicts one point of lethal damage and renders that hand unable to make claw attacks until the nails grow back in and can be trimmed down to points (a process that takes one month).

For Resources •••, a more elaborate procedure can improve the usefulness of the claws. The exact procedure varies — some hunters have small blades pinned to their finger bones and let the flesh heal around it, others actually alter the fingers themselves. One family of Mutants in rural Colorado is known to fix bear claws to the bones surrounding the first knuckles, so that when they make a fist the claws protrude from between the fingers. The sole surviving victim of a killer (still at large) dubbed "Needlefinger" by the media reported that her captor had sheared away the flesh

at the tips of his fingers and ground the bones to a point on a belt sander. These claws inflict +1 lethal damage and do not risk snapping off on a dramatic failure, though they are prone to infection. The character suffers a -1 penalty on any rolls to resist infectious diseases or poisons.

EXTREME SCARIFICATION

Cost ••

The character has undergone an extensive process of self-mutilation, building up a dense layer of scar tissue over most of his body. This scar tissue, while restricting flexibility somewhat, gives the character some moderate resistance to damage. Unlike other body modifications, building up this level of scar tissue takes a considerable amount of time: one roll may be made per week. The character can take other actions between the rolls, and a character may perform this modification on himself.

Extreme scarification gives the character one point of Armor against bashing attacks only. This Armor stacks with Armor from other sources, such as the Iron Skin ability of the Fighting Style: Kung Fu Merit. Because the scar tissue is stiff and less responsive than normal, he suffers a -1 penalty on Dexterity rolls that pertain to movement or flexibility.

CONCEALED POUCH

Cost •

By making a small incision in her body and inserting a small item under her skin, the character can create a subdermal pouch as the skin heals around the item. Performing this procedure automatically inflicts one point of lethal damage; when that point of damage heals, the incision closes over and conceals the object. An object concealed in the skin must be small (no more than Size 1) and relatively flat. A key, a lockpick, or a small capsule about the size of a crayon are appropriate examples.

Retrieving the item from a subdermal pouch requires a knife or similar cutting implement capable of inflicting one point of lethal damage. The item may be re-inserted (or replaced with another object

of similar size and shape) without the need for another roll as long as the incision hasn't completely healed yet.

UNUSUAL WEAPONS

Not all slashers favor the unusual. Knives, clubs, axes, chainsaws and even guns are common enough tools of the trade among slashers — but some prefer bizarre, outlandish means of dispatching their victims. Some use a particular tool to make a statement or enhance their own legend; Rusty Nail kills people by hammering nails into their skulls because he was a carpenter, and the story of his dispatching a drunken assistant with hammer and nails is a part of his legend. Others are mere opportunists, such virtuosos of the killing art that they can turn anything they lay their hands on into a deadly weapon.

The weapons presented below are examples; the same statistics could be applied to a variety of similar weapons. Each weapon has a list of similar items with suggestions for more improvised weapons that could use the same rules. **World of Darkness: Armory** also has an extensive listing of unusual and improvised weaponry beyond what is presented here.

IMPROVISED WEAPONS

Most of the weapons described here fall under the category of "improvised weapons." Those that do not are called out in the text; all of the improvised weapons here have the -1 penalty factored into their stats.

KEYS

Size 0, Durability 1, Damage -1(L) or 1(B), Cost •

A common house key or car key can be used as a makeshift stabbing weapon. While ill-suited to hand-to-hand combat, getting the drop on someone with a key is significantly easier, since it is such an innocuous and ubiquitous item. When you make a surprise attack with a key, your victim suffers a -1 penalty on her roll to react to surprise.

A large ring of keys, such as might be carried by the custodian of a large office building, can be used as a bludgeon rather than a stabbing weapon. There must be at least 50 keys on a ring to make an effective weapon. A key ring inflicts one point of bashing damage, and has the same surprise benefit as a single key.

Similar Items: Ballpoint pen, salad fork, small screwdriver (stabbing key), nail; box of coins, small, one-handed barbell, large hardcover textbook (key ring)

HAMMER AND NAILS

Size 1, Durability 2, Damage 2(L), Cost •

By itself, a claw hammer has a damage rating of 1(B) for the blunt end or 0(L) for the claw end. A nail, by itself, uses the same stats as a key. The truly sadistic, or truly desperate, can bring the two together and use the striking power of the hammer to inflict far greater damage with the nail.

To use a hammer and nails, the target must be immobilized. The attacker may attempt to do this himself using the grappling action, but suffers a -2 penalty to his rolls because he must keep his hands free to use the hammer and nails.

Nailing someone to an object requires that the attacker target a specific body part to drive the nail through (any body part will do as long as the nail is long enough to pass completely through it; for common roofing nails, this usually means the hand or foot). The attack roll must inflict damage in excess of the object's Durability in order to sink the nail in. If the attack is successful, the victim's player must succeed on a Strength + Composure roll to pull the nail out or to wrench one's body off the nail. Pulling the nail out inflicts one

additional level of lethal damage.

Similar Items: A similar tactic can be used on a larger scale with, for example, a railroad spike and a sledgehammer. Lower the weapon's bonus to 1(L) to represent the decreased accuracy, but give the attack 9-again.

POWER TOOLS

Size 1-2, Durability 2, Damage -1(L) plus 9-again, Cost ••

This category is a catch-all for any sort of power tool, from belt sanders and circular saws to electric drills, nail guns, and wood planers. While not designed to be used as weapons, anyone who had to watch a safety film in shop class knows just how much damage these devices can inflict. In addition to the 9-again rule, whenever a power tool inflicts 5 or more points of damage on a target, anyone within visual range must roll Resolve + Composure or lose their next action thanks to revulsion. The Storyteller should apply a modifier to this roll based on the individual in question: a sheltered rich kid who has never seen blood might suffer a -3, while a grizzled cop or soldier who has seen wartime atrocities or truly fucked-up crime scenes might receive a +3 bonus. Slashers and anyone with a Morality of 3 or less are immune to this effect; they simply lack the necessary capacity for empathy.

CHAINSAW

Size 3, Durability 3, Damage -2(L) plus 8-again, Cost •

Loud, awkward, and heavy, chainsaws are not meant to be melee weapons. That said, the whirring metal teeth of a chainsaw will chew through a body as if it were a rotten stump. Regardless of the tool's size, a chainsaw does quite a number on flesh and bone. If an attack with a chainsaw is successful, the bodily destruction it causes is unparalleled. Chainsaws benefit from the 8-again rule, meaning *all* successes are re-rolled. However, dramatic failures made while wielding a chainsaw are likely to cause horrendous damage to the user. (Roll 3 dice, applying the 8 again rule; this is the damage the user takes as a result.)

Using a chainsaw in combat adds +1 to the wielder's Defense score. A character attempting to make close-combat attacks against the chainsaw's wielder have to first get past the spinning teeth.

Note that better chainsaws exist than the average one used to chop down errant branches. High-end pneumatic chainsaws (with diamond teeth) can cut through concrete. These chainsaws are Damage -1(L), Size 4, Cost •••••.

INDUSTRIAL MACHINERY

Size 3-7, Durability 2-5, Damage 4(L) plus 8-again (see below), Cost ••••••••

Similar to power tools, this is a catch-all category for any sort of large piece of industrial machinery capable of shredding, chopping, grinding, or otherwise maiming a human being. Plastic shredders, automated slicers, newspaper presses, grain mills, and the like are all covered by this category.

Unlike power tools, industrial machines are not portable, and thus the victim must be brought to them. A grapple is the most common means of doing so, and in lieu of the standard "inflict damage" option as part of a grapple, a character within 2 yards of one of these machines can opt to force their victim into the machine. This is a Strength + Brawl roll, but do not add the machine's damage bonus or apply damage based on successes on this roll. Instead, roll four dice as a separate dice pool with the 8-again rule, and apply *those* successes as damage; per turn, if appropriate to the device.

STRAIGHT RAZOR

Size 0, Durability 1, Damage 0(L), Cost •

Seen as archaic in this day of disposable, safety, and electric razors, the straight razor is still popular as a grooming tool in some circles, and as a murder weapon in others. Though sharper than many standard knives, its design makes it ill-suited for combat. As a tool for a cold-blooded killing, though, the finely-honed edge is ideal for slicing through major arteries, tendons, and the like. When a character inflicts a killing blow (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 168) with a straight razor, the wound bleeds copiously, inflicting one additional lethal wound per minute as though the victim's last Health box were marked with an X. Should the victim's last Health box be filled with a lethal wound (whether from this bleeding or from the initial attack's damage), *two* wounds per minute are upgraded from lethal to aggravated. Assuming the victim is still conscious af-

ter the attack, he may attempt first-aid on himself to stop the bleeding (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 61).

Similar Items: Scalpel, hobby knife, razor blade with damage rating -1(L).

RAZOR WIRE

Size 1, Durability 3, Damage 3(L) or see below, Cost •• for a 100-foot bale.

A mesh of long metal strips covered in sharp, barbed edges, razor wire was invented to serve as a barrier, whether to cattle, men, or unnatural beings. It can be used in the construction of a fence or field to secure an area, in which case anyone moving through the wire automatically suffers two points of lethal damage per turn (reduced by Armor), but enterprising killers have been known to use it as a weapon.

Handling razor wire requires the use of special gloves; these gloves have a Resources cost of • and effectively provide one point of Armor to the character's hands and forearms. The gloves also incur a -3 penalty on any action requiring fine manipulation or manual dexterity. Without the gloves, a character suffers one lethal wound per minute.

Razor wire wrapped around the hands and used as a form of brass knuckles grants a +1 damage bonus on Brawl attacks and allows the attacker to inflict lethal damage. Likewise, razor wire wrapped around a bludgeoning weapon, such as a club or baseball bat, adds +1 to the damage bonus and upgrades the damage to lethal.

Razor wire can also be used as a strangle wire. Attacking with a strangle wire first requires the wielder to succeed on a grappling roll. The following round, the attacker can apply the wire to the subject's neck with a successful Strength + Weaponry roll (-3 for a targeted attack, but the victim's Defense is not subtracted from the attacker's roll). However, if the attacker makes a successful surprise attack *from behind*, and the opponent fails her Wits + Composure roll to notice the ambush, the attacker can grapple directly with the Strength + Weaponry roll. The opponent's Defense is not applied.

The victim may attempt to break the hold every subsequent turn (per the grappling rules, pp. 157-159, the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). Every turn after the first, the victim takes a cumulative -1 penalty to the escape roll, as the blood flowing to her brain diminishes (maximum -5 penalty). Once the victim takes damage equal to her Stamina, she passes out. She can fight unconsciousness by succeeding on a reflexive Stamina roll. A

single success allows her to stay conscious until the following turn, when she must succeed again on another Stamina roll.

This works only on living creatures. Vampires suffer the damage, but do not require oxygen to remain conscious. Werewolves or other living supernatural entities cannot preternaturally heal any of the damage caused by strangulation until they manage to once again take air into their lungs.

TRAPS AND HOMEMADE WEAPONS

Sometimes an off-the-rack weapon, or one improvised on the spur of the moment, just isn't going to cut it. Some slashers, especially Geniuses, Charmers, and their scourge counterparts, take pride not only in the artistry of the kill, but in the artistry of the weapons they use. Whether it's an insidious trap that shoots out a scything blade at gut-level when the jukebox finishes playing *Hey Jude* or a pair of metal gloves with razor-sharp fingernails and poison reservoirs in the wrist, sometimes the thing that elevates a slasher from horrifying to a truly memorable foe is a unique, signature weapon.

The following section presents a point-based system for designing your own weapons and traps. Add up all of the modifiers for the cost of each Trait your weapon or trap possesses, and the result is the Resources cost to purchase that weapon. For traps, rather than Resources, the cost represents the number of dots that must be spent on Safehouse Traps to add that particular trap to a hunter's (or slasher's) Safehouse.

As per normal combat rules, weapons that augment natural attacks (such as brass knuckles or lead-lined gloves) use Strength + Brawl, melee weapons use Strength + Weaponry, thrown weapons Dexterity + Athletics, and any sort of launched or fired weapon uses Dexterity + Firearms.

DAMAGE (● TO ●●●●●●)

Each point of damage bonus a weapon possesses adds one dot to its cost. By default, weapons inflict lethal damage. A homemade weapon or trap cannot be made to inflict aggravated damage. The exception, of course, is if a creature suffers aggravated damage from the nature of the attack itself. A homemade flame-thrower still inflicts aggravated damage to a vampire, for example.

You may assess a damage penalty or up to -3 and reduce the final cost by a corresponding amount.

ACCURACY (● TO ●●●●●●)

This property applies only to traps. When making an attack roll for the trap, the dice pool for the attack is equal to Accuracy + Damage.

BASHING DAMAGE (SUBTRACT ●●)

The weapon or trap inflicts bashing damage rather than lethal.

NO DAMAGE (SUBTRACT ●●●)

The weapon or trap inflicts no damage on a successful attack, regardless of how many successes are rolled. This property is usually assigned to a weapon or trap primarily designed to inflict a secondary effect. A poison needle doesn't inflict any damage from the jab, the poison itself does the work.

9-AGAIN (●●●)

Giving a weapon the 9-again quality means that the attacks it lands are especially devastating. Appropriate weapons might include serrated blades, powered components, or large, heavy smashing heads.

8-AGAIN (●●●●●)

More so than 9-again, 8-again represents a weapon that causes truly horrendous injury to anyone unfortunate enough to be struck with it. Many 8-again weapons have a low damage bonus, reflecting a weapon that is inaccurate or difficult to use but brutally effective when it lands.

SIZE (SUBTRACT ● TO ●●●●●●+)

By default, a homemade weapon begins with a Size of 1. Each dot by which you increase the Size of the weapon reduces the cost by 1 dot. Remember that, for melee weapons, the Size of the weapon is also the minimum Strength score the wielder must have to use the weapon without suffering a -1 penalty. Traps don't have Strength requirements, but every two points of Size grant a +1 bonus on any roll to notice or locate the trap.

STRENGTH REQUIREMENT (SUBTRACT ● TO ●●●●)

This property applies to ranged weapons only. By default, a ranged weapon has a minimum Strength requirement of 2. By increasing this requirement, you may subtract one point from the final cost per additional point of Strength required.

TWO-HANDED (SUBTRACT ●)

This property cannot be applied to traps. The weapon requires two hands to wield effectively. If a character wishes to wield the weapon one-handed, he must have a Strength one dot higher than the minimum Strength requirement for the weapon.

CONCEALABLE (● TO ●●●●)

For a weapon, this property incurs a -1 penalty per dot on any roll made to notice that the character is carrying a weapon (possibly because the weapon looks innocuous until used, possibly because the weapon is designed to be hidden). For an additional ●, the penalty applies to bodily searches as well.

For traps, this property incurs a -1 penalty per dot on any attempt to notice the trap or to actively search for it.

KNOCKOUT (●●)

The weapon or trap has the Knockout special ability (see the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 168). Traps with this property are typically some sort of deadfall or drop trap, to account for the height difference in potential targets.

KNOCKDOWN (●)

The weapon or trap has the Knockdown property (see the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 168).

ARMOR PIERCING (● TO ●●●●)

The weapon or trap has one point of Armor Piercing per dot spent on this property (see the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 167).

CONTINUOUS DAMAGE (● TO ●●●●)

The weapon or trap inflicts one point of continuous damage per turn per dot spent on this property. This might reflect some caustic substance like acid or lye, or a fire attack that sets the target ablaze, or even an attack that causes severe bleeding. The continuous damage lasts for two turns or until the victim makes an appropriate roll to stop it (Dexterity + Medicine to stop bleeding, Dexterity + Athletics to stop, drop and roll to put out a fire, etc.).

POISON (●● TO ●●●●●)

Whether by a natural toxin or a man-made chemical, the weapon or trap with this property poisons the target on a successful attack. The poison is considered to be Injection-based, and inflicts

damage equal to its Toxicity immediately upon taking effect and once an hour thereafter for two hours. For two dots, the poison's Toxicity is 1, for four dots, the Toxicity is 2.

AREA EFFECT (● TO ●●●●)

This property, usually applied to explosives or toxic gas or the like, allows the weapon or trap to affect multiple targets at once. For every dot assigned to this property, the attack has a blast radius of one yard. Rather than make an attack roll to inflict damage, the attack automatically inflicts damage equal to its damage rating. The attacker's player then rolls a number of dice equal to the damage rating, adding any successes to the damage inflicted on anyone within the blast radius. Traps generally require no attack roll for an area effect, but a thrown or fired weapon might require an attack roll to place the blast radius where the attacker wants it.

TRIGGER (● TO ●●●●)

This property applies to traps only. With no dots in this property, a trap is assumed to be triggered by a direct, simple mechanical mechanism, such as breaking a tripwire or stepping on a weak floor. This property allows for traps with more intricate triggers, as described below.

- Complex mechanical trigger: opening a door springs a poison needle trap, stepping on a pressure plate triggers spikes to shoot out of the walls.

- Simple electronic trigger: entering the wrong code on a keypad triggers a scything blade at head height, flicking a light switch causes the floor to drop out, turning the ignition of a car triggers the explosives under the seat.

- Complex electronic trigger: entering a specific sequence of keys on a keyboard detonates the computer, poison gas floods the room if a thermometer reads higher than 74 degrees Fahrenheit.

PORTABILITY (●●)

This property is for traps only. By default, a trap is assumed to be built into a structure and fixed in place. By adding this property, the trap is portable and can be set up anywhere with one minute of prep time. Remember to keep the trap's Size in mind; it might be "portable," but a large trap might have to be moved around on a vehicle.

COMPLEXITY (● TO ● ● ● ●)

This property is for traps only. For every dot assigned to this property, any attempt to disable the trap suffers a -1 penalty.

BYPASS (●)

This property is for traps only. A bypass creates a means by which the triggering action of the trap can be performed *without* setting off the trap. A car explodes when the ignition is turned, unless you pop the cigarette lighter out first. It's safe to walk up the stairs on the left, but not on the right. This property is typically added to traps used to hinder intruders coming into a Safehouse; the hunters know how to avoid their own traps, and can lead the intruders right into them.

INACCURATE (SUBTRACT ● TO ● ● ● ●)

The weapon or trap is particularly difficult to aim, or is prone to a wide margin of error. Any attack roll made with the weapon or trap suffers a -1 penalty per dot assigned to this property.

CONSTRUCTING A HOMEMADE WEAPON OR TRAP

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Crafts

Action: Extended (three successes required per dot of cost; each roll represents one hour of work)

Rather than purchasing a unique weapon or trap with Merit dots (Resources for weapons, Safehouse for traps), it is possible for a character to create such implements of destruction himself. To construct a homemade weapon or trap from scratch, first settle on the properties the weapon will possess. Once you have selected the properties and determined the base dot cost, the construction can begin. Depending upon the precise nature of the construction, the character may suffer penalties if he cannot access the proper tools or equipment. For example, bolting the blade of a large kitchen knife to the back of a leather glove might require tools no more complex than those found in a typical garage or workshop. Hand-crafting the blade from scratch requires significantly more tools, including a forge, water or oil to quench the blade, and a full suite of blacksmithing or machining tools.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character makes a horrible mistake in the construction process and must begin again from scratch. Depending on the nature of

the components (for example, if he is working with volatile chemicals or explosives) he may suffer damage equal to half the damage bonus of the weapon or trap he constructs.

Failure: The character makes no progress in creating the item in question.

Success: The character makes progress in crafting the weapon or trap (apply successes rolled toward the total needed).

Exceptional Success: The character makes substantial progress in crafting the weapon or trap — a sudden burst of inspiration or a breakthrough in fabrication speeds up the process dramatically (apply successes rolled toward the total needed).

Suggested Equipment: High-grade tool set (+1), high-quality materials (+1), high-tech tools (laser leveler, saws with laser guides) (+2), specialized tools (+2), extensive reference library (+2), garage (+3), carpentry shop (+3)

Possible Penalties: Poor-quality tool set (-1), poor quality materials (-1), lack of reference library (-1), improvised work area (-1).

NEW ENDOWMENTS

The Endowments detailed in **Hunter: The Vigil** are tools for monster-hunters who belong to specific agencies. These are slightly different, targeted as they are towards foes who are often all too human. When they face dangerous killers rather than rampaging werewolves, most agencies need to change their tactics.

ADVANCED ARMORY

Though the weapons available to Task Force: VALKYRIE are fine for putting big holes in things, sometimes the brass want a killer alive — especially if he's gained some measure of fame.

TRANQ ROUNDS (● TO ● ● ● ● ● ●; RENEWABLE)

Tranquilizer bullets are at the cutting-edge of ballistics technology. Ten years from now, they could be available in gun shops, but until the rounds can be mass produced, VALKYRIE keeps a close track on them. Each bullet is made of the same frangible polymer used in Glaser rounds, but containing a gel-suspension of tranquilizers that are quickly absorbed through the skin and into the body.

Function: Tranq Rounds do little appreciable damage. Against objects, they are useless. Against living targets, a successful roll deals only one point

of lethal damage, no matter how many successes were scored on the attack. Every hit also delivers a potent tranquilizer that gives the target a -1 penalty to all rolls. Once the target's penalties from the tranquilizer are equal to his Stamina, he must spend a point of Willpower or lose consciousness. If he remains active, each further hit with a Tranq Round requires another Willpower expenditure. The negative modifier wears off after 10 minutes, but a target rendered unconscious remains in that state for at least half an hour.

Special: The Tranq Rounds Merit is Renewable; for each dot the character has in this Merit, Task Force: VALKYRIE supplies him with one clip of Tranq Rounds for a specific weapon type (e.g. MP-5, Glock 19) every session.

A character may purchase multiple instances of Tranq Rounds, each specifying a different weapon. For example, an assault team leader might have Tranq Rounds (AR-15) ••• and Tranq Rounds (P90) ••; every session, he has three magazines worth of tranquilizer ammo for his AR-15 and two magazines for his P90.

Tranq Rounds, unlike most Advanced Armory Merits, can be used by anyone, even if they lack a Task Force: VALKYRIE RFID chip.

BENEDICTION

The Shadow Congregation sees few problems in using the powers of angels against human serial killers. The Lord has more mercy than His hunters.

SAINT AGATHIUS' CALL

Saint Agathius of Byzantium is one of the Fourteen Holy Helpers, or Auxiliary Saints, and among their number is the patron of soldiers. Scourged and beheaded after terrible torture for refusing to renounce his faith, a hunter knowing Saint Agathius' Benediction can draw upon a measure of that saint's resolve. The hunter empowers himself in the martyr's role, drawing the attention and ire of an attacker so that his companions may live unmolested.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Action: Instant

Dice Pool: Presence + Benediction

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The hunter prays, but answers are not forthcoming. He suffers a -1 to all dice pools for the rest of the scene.

Failure: The hunter does not gain the benefit of Saint Agathius' blessing.

Success: The hunter shines as if lit from within. Those wishing to attack the character's cell see the

hunter as the perfect choice, the only possible one to attack. Anyone with Morality (or equivalent trait) 6 or below who wishes to attack a member of the cell must spend a point of Willpower in order to attack anyone other than the hunter using this Benediction. If the attacker wanted to strike at the hunter anyway, this power has no further effect.

Exceptional Success: Though they strike at him, the hunter is protected by his higher calling. The hunter's Defense is increased by 1 until this effect ends.

Saint Agathius' Call lasts for one scene.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+1	The hunter is a Soldier by Profession.
+1	The hunter possesses the Giant Merit.
+2	The hunter has the highest Strength of his cell
+5	The Benediction is performed on May 8 (feast day of Saint Agathius of Byzantium)

CASTIGATION

The Lucifuge hunt demonic serial killers in fear of finding their own kin. Little wonder then that the children of the Devil know ways and means that let them track such errant offspring and bring them into the fold.

GUILT'S BLOODY TRAIL

The torments of Hell scourge all traces of sin from the souls of men. That much is true. Hell knows and sees all sins, even those that man chooses to ignore. A member of the Lucifuge can tap into this universal library of guilt and sin, bringing a sign of Hell's impending judgment to a killer. The hunter must be present at the scene of a murder, with the body still in residence. He smears the deceased's blood on his tongue and concentrates. After a few seconds, he begins to feel a pull towards the killer. At the same time, the killer develops stigmata — wounds on the palms or wrists that bleed freely and do not heal. Medical examination shows no cause for the wounds, but enough fresh blood wells up through them to soak through the thickest bandage. The killer isn't losing his own vital fluids; instead, the blood that drips from his hands is that of his victim. Any forensics test will bear that out — the blood is identical to that in the victim's body at the time of death.



Cost: 1 Willpower

Action: Contested; resistance is reflexive.

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Investigation vs. Wits + Subterfuge

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The hunter may taste the blood of someone other than the victim, or Hell's archivists may just be in a capricious mood. Whatever the case, he receives all the effects of a success but directed against a person innocent of the murder.

Failure: The hunter gains no information as to the killer's location.

Success: The killer's hands or wrists start bleeding, slowly but steadily. After a couple of minutes, blood will drip from his fingers if the wounds remain unbound. Even if bound, the blood eventually soaks through the bandages. While the killer bleeds, the hunter knows a vague direction and distance — a rough idea that's only accurate to about 500 yards and one of the eight compass points. The stigmata and associated direction sense last until the end of the scene.

Exceptional Success: The blood flows over the killer's hands, reminding him of his crime and stirring feelings of guilt and shame possibly long thought forgotten. This so unnerves the killer that he must make a degeneration roll as though he had committed a sin with Morality Threshold 2. This roll must still be made if the killer has changed his moral code to the point that murder is no longer a sin (see *The Code, Hunter: The Vigil* pg. 325).

ELIXIR

The strange drugs of the Ascending Ones mostly elevate a hunter to the point where she can take on the strange monsters that haunt the night. Their alchemical combinations give them an edge that some use to take on more human monsters as well.

JUSTICE OF MA'AT (●●●)

While the incense called the Breath of Ma'at soothes a hunter's soul when the righteousness of his Vigil is called into question, justice is more than a salve for the soul. Ma'at is the goddess of truth as well as justice, something worth its weight in gold in a murder trial. Inhaling this Elixir makes a hunter burn with the need for truth, his mind alive with possibilities and his soul burning with the need for justice.

The Justice of Ma'at is a blend of four drops of a child's blood, the powdered bone of a hanged man, and cocaine. Combined into a very fine red powder,

the Ascending Ones either inhale the compound or rub it into the gums. While under the effects, the hunter feels possessed by an otherworldly force, whether it is the Just Will of Allah or the goddess Ma'at. She must find the truth — though whether she uses it towards justice or revenge is a very personal thing.

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Ascending One is afflicted by a Toxicity 4 bashing poison. This poison can be resisted with a contested Stamina + Resolve roll against the poison's Toxicity.

Failure: The hunter receives no bonus from the Elixir, and is affected as though he had taken a mild (-1 to Social rolls, no bonus to Strength or Stamina) dose of cocaine.

Success: For the rest of the scene, the hunter burns with a need for the truth. He receives a bonus to all Investigation rolls equal to his Elixir rating. If the hunter commits a sin against Morality in her quest for the truth, she gains an additional die on rolls to avoid degeneration.

Exceptional Success: In addition to receiving the benefits of a success, the hunter is able to mete out justice with the mandate of heaven. He ignores all wound penalties while under the influence of this Elixir.

RELIC

The Aegis Kai Doru's storehouses of mystical items don't just hold swords and amulets from prehistory. Slashers leave several Relics behind, enchanted by such close contact with death. Some hunters of the Aegis hold them close, though the touch of darkness is never far away.

MASK OF TERROR (●●●)

Some killers hide their faces from the world. Whether his face is disfigured by terrible scars or he hides behind a hockey mask, the slasher's victims don't ever see their killer in any recognizable way. These Relics are either made from the mask, if the slasher uses such a thing, or the dried skin of a dead slasher's face, flayed off in one piece. This Relic requires the whole face (or mask) — scars acquired in combat are fine, but the shape of the face (and the holes where the eyes would be) must be intact. Whatever the form, a hunter who wears the Mask of Terror must wear it against his skin. The mask attaches to the hunter's flesh, usually the chest. It burrows in to the point where mere hands cannot remove it. Anyone cutting the mask off will bring chunks of the hunter's skin with it — *and* leave a nasty scar, to boot.

The Mask of Terror gives the hunter the ability to inspire the same fear that the slasher's victims felt. The vic-



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LOSING CONTROL

Some groups may prefer a more involved variety of Cortical Adaptation, where the hunter risks his control for greater abilities. If your Storyteller agrees on your taking an experimental version of the implant, add the following effects to the listed Cortical Adaptation:

When the Cortical Adaptation is active, the hunter can use the Talent of her chosen Undertaking. However, if she suffers Morality degeneration when this implant is active, her inner slasher might take over. She must roll Resolve + Composure as a reflexive action. On a success, she gains the Frailty of her chosen Undertaking until the end of the scene, one turn for an exceptional success. On a failure, the hunter loses control, and acts in a fashion appropriate to a slasher character of her Undertaking until the end of the scene. A dramatic failure leaves the slasher in control for the rest of the day.

Though the hunter gains the benefit of her Undertaking's Talent, the increased danger doesn't merit an increase in cost for this version of the Cortical Adaptation.

tim
sees the
second face's eyes
glow red for just a second,
and has to fight to stave off a
cloying fear that latches on to her
soul and refuses to let go.

Cost: 1 point of lethal damage

Benefit: The hunter must spend a point of Willpower to attach a Mask of Terror to his bare skin. Though the hunter can remove it at any time, anyone else attempting to will inflict damage as if the mask were a part of the hunter's body.

The hunter can inspire true fear in one person he looks upon. The Mask of Terror consumes part of his flesh to activate this effect, hence the listed Cost. The hunter rolls Presence + Intimidation - target's Composure. Any success inspires a terror response in his target, who either remains rooted to the spot with fear or runs for her life, but cannot approach the hunter and cannot take any actions that don't involve getting the hell out of the immediate vicinity. The victim remains terrified for one turn per success rolled. Victims who are immune to normal fear still suffer this effect, but supernatural resistance helps as normal.

THAUMATECHNOLOGY

The Cheiron Group has a long record of harvesting slashers. A bone may improve a hunter's natural healing process, or a patch of skin tingles in the presence of a murderer. Cheiron hunters will get a chance to use whatever they can harvest.

CORTICAL ADAPTATION (●●●●)

Some slashers are driven to kill because of a condition that affects their brain. In at least three recorded cases, tertiary syphilis destroyed the moral center of the subject's brain and caused powerful delusions that drove the individual to kill. In other cases, large tumors destroy the subject's impulse control and punch great holes in her ability to make moral judgments. Cheiron's R&D harvests alien parts of these tumors and implants the resultant lesions on the surface of a hunter's brain.

Every hunter reacts differently to having part of a cancerous (and murderous) growth attached to their brain during extensive and invasive surgery. In effect, the hunter can "switch on" a part of her personality that makes her think in the same way as a slasher, giving her an unparalleled insight into the thoughts of a serial killer. Her thoughts resonate with others of her new kind; she can use her understanding to read the scene of a murder in ways that no profiler or investigator can manage. She's got an intuitive understanding of murder, and it shows.

The real magic behind this Endowment is an inhibitor chip that sits between the lesion and the hunter's brain. The chip does more than let the hunter switch a new mode of thought on and off: even when emulating a slasher's mind, the hunter re-

mains in control. It's more than a little unsettling for the hunter, seeing herself thinking in alien ways that suddenly seem so tempting. The chip helps her retain control. Reports that the inhibitor chip dissolves after three years of swimming in cerebral fluid are so far unconfirmed — few hunters have lasted that long with the implant in place.

Benefit: By spending a point of Willpower, the hunter can think in the same way as a slasher. She gains a three-dice bonus on Investigation or Empathy rolls regarding slasher murders. When “in the zone,” she understands things as a serial killer does, and her impulse control and moral centers are affected. The implant remains active until the end of the scene.

A hunter with this implant must choose a ripper Undertaking for his slasher-self (see Building the Perfect Killer, pg. 87). She chooses two of that Undertaking's Skills. She *gains* one new Specialty in one of these Undertaking Skills, and may increase these Skills at a rate of (new dots x2) rather than (new

dots x 3). Finally, she may purchase Merits that are normally restricted to slasher characters (see below). The character must meet all the other prerequisites as normal.

The hunter can only use her slasher Merits and her additional Specialty when under the influence of the Cortical Adaptation, though she can increase her Undertaking Skills at the discounted rate at any time.

Special: Using this implant generates a strong sense of disassociation — the hunter watches her own thought processes, things that she knows she is thinking, and doesn't recognize them at all. The hunter suffers a -1 penalty to all rolls made to resist Morality degeneration. If the Cortical Adaption is removed, this effect does not remain. It's also worth mentioning that hunters with this implant suffer a high rate of malignant cancers throughout the body... though, Cheiron doesn't share this data with its employees, of course.

TELEINFORMATICS

(• TO • • • • • ; SPECIAL)

Prerequisite: Status (VASCU)

Agents of the Vanguard Serial Crimes Unit augment their investigative abilities with strange powers of the mind — the end result of the mysterious Wintergreen Process. The process doesn't just awaken the latent abilities in the human mind, it actively alters the brain. Agents go through hallucinations and alien visitations as their powers awaken, all of which allude to the Process modifying them. Most put the experience to the back of their minds. Each new power comes after a supplemental therapy, another dose of bizarre mind-altering chemicals. Only agents who investigate VASCU itself know anything about the truth behind Teleinformatic powers: that they're an extension of their brains' ability to process information.

VASCU doesn't categorize Teleinformatic powers in the same way as a psychic investigator might. The unit doesn't care whether a particular power is telekinetic or telepathic in nature. Being a department of the FBI, the unit cares about how the powers fit into the general realm of investigation. They divide an agent's abilities depending on which area of fieldwork the power enables. Interview abilities may

read a subject's mind or force him to answer questions he doesn't want to answer. Investigation powers allow the hunter to work a crime scene in seconds. Research abilities give the hunter background information to help build his case.

Unlike most Endowment Merits, but similar to the Safehouse Merit, Teleinformatics abilities are broken into three spheres of abilities: Interview, Investigation, and Research. When purchasing a new dot in the Merit, a character gains one power of that rating or below from any sphere. A character purchasing a four-dot power must already have one power from the same sphere. A character purchasing a five-dot power must possess at least two powers from the same sphere. Note that a character can pick any power that augments his investigation style when he gains the new dot, the player doesn't have to plan his powers in advance.

Example: Special Agent Hosell has three dots in Teleinformatics. He's able to use *Just One More Thing*, *Polygraph*, and *Speed of Thought*. His player buys the fourth dot of Teleinformatics, and casts his eye over the possibilities. He could pick another power rated at three

or fewer dots, but none really fit his concept. He can select Postcognition or The Talon, but he's not got any Research powers and so Tag is out of the running. If he picks Postcognition he could later choose his fifth dot power from either Tactical Coordination or Hall of Mirrors, but if he selects The Talon then his only possible five-dot power will be Tactical Coordination.

Most Teleinformatics powers require agents to take damage in order to use them. Bashing damage comes in the form of migraines or nosebleeds as the agent's body tries to keep up with her brain's demands. Lethal damage is more severe: the agent hemorrhages from her eyes and ears as she forces her body beyond its limits. Aggravated damage signifies lesions on the brain that require delicate surgery to fix. An agent can spend one point of Willpower to downgrade that damage, but only if the power doesn't already require a Willpower expenditure. Aggravated damage becomes lethal, and lethal becomes bashing. Bashing damage cannot be downgraded in this fashion.

INTERVIEW

Teleinformatic abilities that boost an agent's interviewing skills are what most people think of as psychic powers. Rather than boosting an agent's own abilities, these powers can read the information from other people's minds. The highest echelons bridge the barrier between mind and matter to get a suspect to spill his guts. Though she picks up the mental echoes of other people's minds, affecting those minds is significantly harder, broad attacks wielded without finesse. Unlike psychics in books or on television, she cannot guide or sway a person's thoughts. She makes up for that with sheer mental force, directing crushing emotional pressure against her suspects.

● JUST ONE MORE THING

There's always one question that a suspect doesn't want anyone to ask. An interview is a stressful time, and that question bubbles up to the surface of the suspect's thoughts. If the agent concentrates,

NATURAL PSYCHICS

Second Sight offers Merits for characters who discover natural psychic abilities. Teleinformatics, being artificially induced, don't have the same source and don't share the same systems. But what about VASCU agents who have psychic abilities before they join the unit?

As a Storyteller, you've got a few options. VASCU's psychic latency tests might look for indicators that real psychic talents hide. If this is the case, no psychic could end up in Vanguard. If Vanguard doesn't have that level of understanding, the Wintergreen Process might alter the brain enough to "lock out" a natural psychic's powers - though she might come out the other side with more power than other agents. And there's always the possibility, though it's an outside bet, that the agent keeps his inborn powers alongside his Teleinformatic abilities.

If you do opt to remove a character's psychic Merits, talk with the player. Some will be fine with losing the Merit dots that they've invested. Others will understandably want something in return. Give the character half the experience points required to purchase her psychic Merits anew.

he can listen out for a phrase in his mind's ear, along with an empathic twinge of guilt. When he hears it, he knows just what to ask.

Cost: 1 point of bashing damage

Action: Instant

Dice Pool: Teleinformatics + Subterfuge

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The agent hears something along with a pang of guilt, but he's not hearing it from the suspect. The Storyteller should give her two or three words relating to a guilty secret of another character in the same area. Further rolls to interview the suspect suffer a -2 modifier.

Failure: The agent doesn't hear anything useful.

Success: The agent hears two or three words, but it's up to him to work them into a question. The Storyteller should furnish the character with a two or three word prompt. Any roll involving questioning the suspect on that subject gets an additional +2 bonus.

Exceptional Success: The agent hits just the right question. The bonus increases to +3.

● ● POLYGRAPH

Sometimes, asking the right question isn't enough. By tuning in to the same frequency as her suspect, an agent can read the emotions straight from the surface of his target's mind. While it's hard to direct an interview based just on the subject's emotional state, listening out for specific instances of guilt and shame when asking questions or stating how the agent believes things happened is a damn fine way to detect a witness's lies.

This power is used to enhance an Interrogation task (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 81). The agent using this power enhances his ability as the interrogator.

Cost: 1 Willpower + 1 point of bashing damage

Action: Contested; resistance is reflexive

Dice Pool: Teleinformatics + Persuasion vs. target's Stamina + Resolve

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The agent misreads his subject, seeing guilt when none is really present. He suffers a -1 modifier on his first roll, a -2 on his second, and so on until the interrogation is over.

Failure: The agent doesn't tune in to his subject's emotions.

Success: The agent senses spikes of guilt, fear, and shame — or deceit, or even pride. Whatever he senses, he knows how it relates to the questions he asked. The character gains a bonus to all Interrogation rolls equal to the successes gained over the subject. This bonus lasts for the rest of the scene. This bonus is *doubled* on any Subterfuge or Empathy rolls meant to sniff out a lie.

Exceptional Success: The psychic interrogation provides a paroxysm of pleasure: the character regains the spent Willpower.

● ● ● SYNCHRONIZATION

VASCU psychics go beyond just reading emotions and snippets of thought. The agency maintains a number of empaths, people who can read a subject's mind so thoroughly that they share the subject's thoughts and memories. In effect, the agent makes a copy of the subject's mind within his own. It's a dangerous process, but the easiest way to get answers from dangerous slashers — including "Why did you kill them?" and "Where are the missing children?"

Due to the effects of a dramatic failure, the Storyteller should make the roll for this power.

Cost: 1 Willpower + 1 point of lethal damage

Action: Instant

Dice Pool: Teleinformatics + Empathy minus subject's Resolve

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The agent gets in synch with her suspect's mind, but a part of her target lurks within her mind even after the contact is over, biding its time until it takes control of the agent. The agent maintains contact initially as if she had rolled three successes. Every day over the course of the following week after the contact is made, the Storyteller should roll the target's Presence + Resolve in an extended action. Once the Storyteller rolls more successes than the agent's Resolve + Composure, the target's mind takes control of the agent's body for one day per dot of the target's Willpower.

When the target is in control, the player has two options. She may relinquish control of her character to the Storyteller for the duration, so as to remain ignorant of whatever her character has done. Alternately, the Storyteller and player may work together so that the player can portray the "possessed" agent.

Failure: The agent can't get synchronized with the subject's mind.

Success: The agent copies the subject's mind. Each success gives the agent enough time to answer one question posed by herself or another character. The Storyteller should provide the answer, along with enough context for the answer to make sense. In between questions, the agent experiences life as the subject does. She suffers the same negative modifiers as the suspect, as well as any derangements that the suspect possesses. The "copy" of the slasher's persona exists for a number of hours equal to the slasher's Resolve score. During this time, the character may experience certain elements of the slasher's persona, even down to physical maladies (if the slasher has an atrophied left arm, the agent's own arm may grow rigid and useless — not atrophied, but physically without much use during that time).

Exceptional Success: In addition to the effects of a success, the agent can attempt to record one Skill that the subject possesses. His player "trades in" a number of successes on his roll equal to the rating of the Skill he wants to borrow. The "borrowed" Skill lasts for a number of hours equal to the slasher's Resolve score; if the agent doesn't have any dots in that Skill herself then her rolls using it do not benefit from 10-again.

● ● ● ● THE TALON

Focusing her power, the agent disrupts her target's thoughts. She focuses on a point or talon slowly pressing into her victim's head. It seeks out sources of

guilt and shame, flaring those emotions without any stimulus. The attack scares its target, making him more liable to tell the truth when the agent asks a question.

Cost: 1 point of lethal damage

Action: Instant

Dice Pool: Teleinformatics + Intimidation minus subject's Composure

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The talon rebounds from the target's mind and embeds itself in the agent's mind. Her rolls suffer a -2 modifier for the remainder of the scene.

Failure: The agent can't focus clearly enough to manifest this power.

Success: The point of pressure works its way through the target's mind.

Each success on the activation roll inflicts a -1 penalty on any Mental or Social rolls that the target makes (to a maximum of -5). This penalty lasts until the end of the scene. If the agent makes a show of using this power in an interrogation, she gains two bonus dice on related rolls.

Exceptional Success: The talon pricks the subject's pain centers on its way through his brain. In addition to the effects of a success, the target takes two points of bashing damage.

●●●●● TACTICAL CO-ORDINATION

Some VASCU agents develop incredible telepathic abilities. By developing a working duplicate of their teammates' minds, this allows them to predict what their allies will do. She can use this duplicated mind model to communicate with her teammates. Some agents liken the effect to rumors of "twins' telepathy," though nobody's yet demonstrated that effect to anyone's satisfaction. These agents are too useful for VASCU to leave behind. Rumor has is that one such agent had his brain transferred to a life-support system because his cell was too used to their instantaneous communication.

The dice pool to activate this power is reduced by one per character that the agent wishes to network, excluding herself.

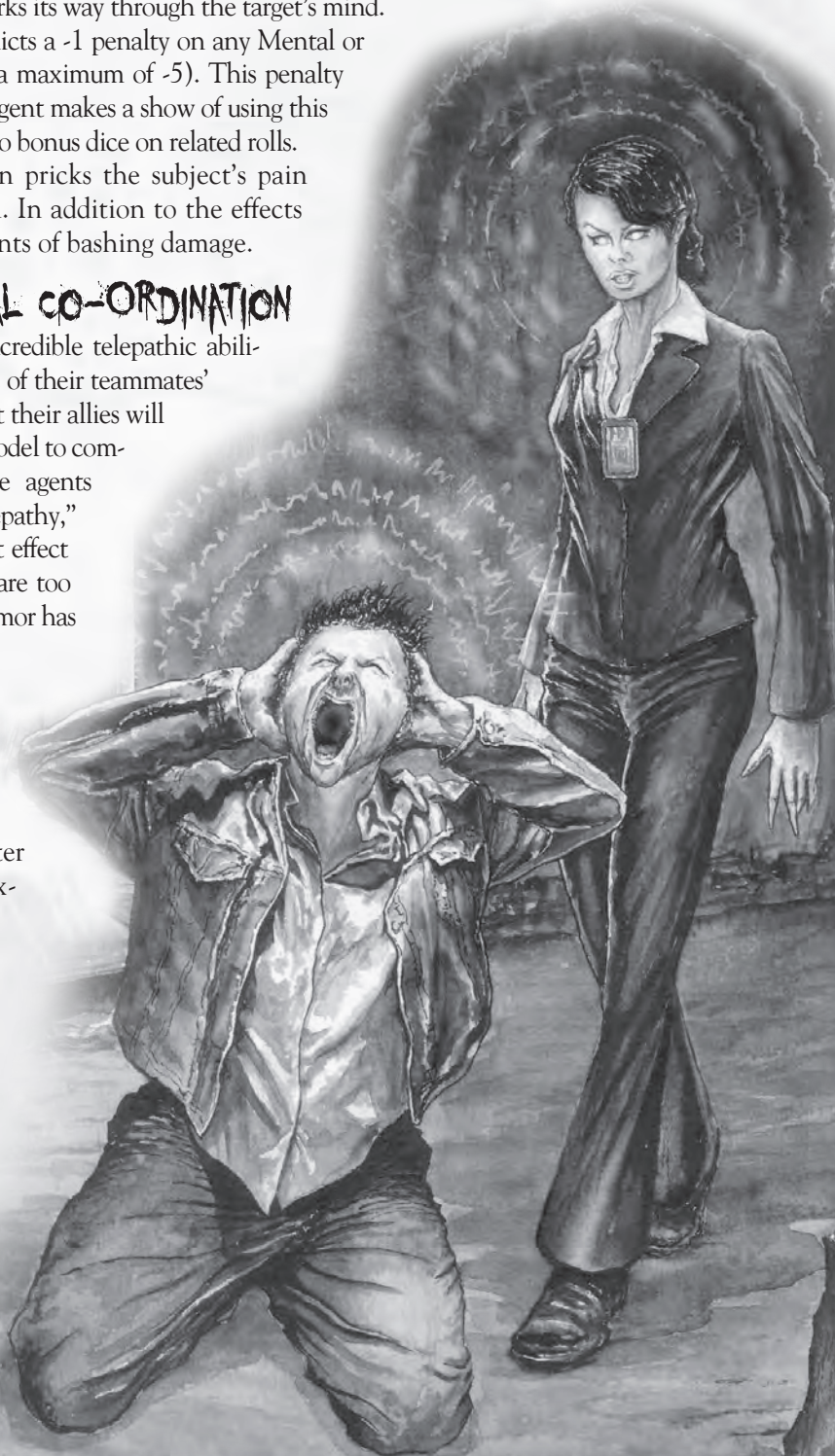
Cost: 1 Willpower + 1 point of lethal damage

Action: Instant

Dice Pool: Teleinformatics + Brawl -1 per other agent

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The agent's mental models intermix, sending the wrong signals to the wrong minds. Every agent that would have been linked suffers a -2 modifier to all rolls from psychic static until the end of the scene.



Failure: The agent cannot link her allies' minds.

Success: While the agent focuses, her team benefits from her network. Members can communicate instantly and silently as a reflexive action. Like using radios, all members of the mind-link can hear anything that another linked mind "says." In addition, the team can share their Skills. Any time an agent needs to make a roll, she gains a +1 bonus for every member of the link who possesses the same Skill at a higher rating. The link works in a radius of 50 yards per dot of Willpower centered on the agent using this power, and lasts for five minutes per success or until the agent loses consciousness. The level of concentration required to maintain the link means the agent cannot apply her Defense on the turn that she activates this power.

Example: Agents Partridge, Quire, and Rooney are participating in a mental link. Partridge is cornered by a slasher. As he's not a full agent, Partridge isn't used to his own gun — he's only got one dot of Firearms. Fortunately, Quire spends his time off at the range (Firearms 2) and Rooney's been through full Special Agent training (also Firearms 2). Partridge makes his roll with a two-dice bonus.

Exceptional Success: The agents' minds link together smoothly. The psychic doesn't lose her Defense when activating the power, and the link remains up for the duration rolled even if the agent is unconscious — as long as she's still alive.

INVESTIGATION

Investigatory abilities heighten an agent's ability to read a crime scene — or any location — and understand what happened there. All Investigation powers rely on pure information processing rather than actually sending an agent's senses through time. As such, while she may pick up on hints and evidence that she's not consciously recognized, if there's absolutely no evidence of something occurring at a scene then she will not know that it happened. Note that this limitation is rare — modern forensic science demonstrates that it's nearly impossible to destroy all evidence without leaving a trace.

● PSYCHOMETRY

By holding an object in his hand, an agent can understand both its form and its function. He can tell the specific brand of a condom, knows if a briefcase has a hidden compartment, and instinctively understands when someone last fired a gun. His ability doesn't limit itself to man-made objects — while dipping his finger in a pool of blood won't give him the victim's name,

he knows her blood type, and will instinctively know if he ever encounters it again. Likewise, he can match fingerprints between two objects through this power, rather than waiting for a crime-lab. Using this power requires an agent to make skin contact with the object, potentially destroying any fingerprints and polluting DNA evidence. He suffers a -1 penalty for every point of Size that the object has above 2.

Cost: 1 point of bashing damage

Action: Instant

Dice Pool: Teleinformatics + Crafts

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The agent wipes all psychic traces from the item. He doesn't read anything from the item and cannot use this power on it again.

Failure: The agent gets nothing from the object.

Success: The agent understands what the object is and when it was last used for its intended purpose. The Storyteller should furnish any relevant details, which may provide a +2 bonus to later Investigation rolls. If he uses this power on two objects carrying the same person's fingerprints, he knows that they were used by the same person — but not who that person was. He can't just shake the guy's hand to confirm his suspicion.

Exceptional Success: The agent's instinctively understands the object. If he comes across another of the same type — blood from the same person, a used condom of the same brand — while using any other Teleinformatics power, he automatically knows that the two items are related.

● ● SCENE READ

Sometimes, VASCU doesn't have time for forensic examiners to comb every inch of a scene. When a serial killer snatches a girl, every second is a second he could use to butcher her and the agent needs clues fast. A psychic with this ability unleashes her stress on the scene, mentally browbeating it like she would a suspect who didn't talk.

Using this power replaces the standard roll for examining a crime scene (*World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 59) with an Instant action.

Cost: 1 point of bashing damage

Action: Instant

Dice Pool: Teleinformatics + Investigation

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The agent studies the scene, but jumps to the wrong conclusion before she hears everything.

Failure: The agent gets nothing from the area. She'll have to comb the scene manually and hope she's still got time.



Success: Though the agent only appears to glance around the scene, she has a basic idea of what's going on. The Storyteller should give her the same information as if she had rolled half the necessary successes to examine a crime scene. She cannot use this power twice on the same scene.

Exceptional Success: While this power doesn't replace forensic analysis, the agent knows everything that the scene has to tell her. The Storyteller should give her all available information.

● ● ● SPEED OF THOUGHT

Though the agent's body is as slow as ever, his mind works at inhuman speeds. He's hyper-aware of everything, from the way the loose floorboard behind his left foot stops before it's fully bent — indicating something underneath it — to the tensing of a slasher's tendon right before he pulls the trigger. Other people who see him dodge bullets or instinctively uncover a serial killer's storehouse of bodies may wonder



if he's precognitive, but the hunter's just working the scene as fast as his mind allows.

Cost: 2 points of lethal damage

Action: Instant

Dice Pool: Teleinformatics + Athletics

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The agent's enhanced senses overwhelm him for a second. He cannot take any action on this turn, and his Defense is halved against incoming attacks.

Failure: Despite his enhanced reaction time, the agent just can't process everything coming at him fast enough to make a difference.

Success: Starting with the next turn, the agent adds his Teleinformatics dots to his Initiative. He may also use the higher of his Dexterity or Wits as his Defense. As a final bonus, he can apply his increased Defense against firearms attacks. This effect lasts for one turn per success (maximum 5), and can only be used once per day.

Exceptional Success: The character overrides his body's limits. Increase his Speed by his Teleinformatics dots for the duration of the effect.

●●●● POSTCOGNITION

It doesn't matter how well you describe a crime scene or reconstruct what happened, it's not the same as witnessing the crime. Without seeing what happened, an agent possesses only knowledge without understanding. With this power, she creates a model of the crime that's as real to her as was to the people there. She's there, able to "play back" the crucial five minutes about which she has most evidence, in order to see what really happened.

The agent must be present at the scene or at a faithful reconstruction to use this ability. The Storyteller should make the final roll for this power.

Cost: 1 Willpower + 1 point of lethal damage

Action: Instant

Dice Pool: Teleinformatics + Science

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The agent synthesizes the information presented and comes up with something wildly off-base. The Storyteller should allow the player to ask between one and three questions to which she should supply erroneous or misleading answers.

Failure: The agent just can't fit the pieces together. She's wasted her time.

Success: The agent reconstructs what actually happened, which runs back and forwards before her eyes. The player may ask the Storyteller one question per success rolled, which he must answer (within reason). Additionally, further Investigation rolls regarding anything in the vision gain a +2 bonus until the end of the day.

Exceptional Success: In addition to extra questions, the character notices something that sheds new light on her investigation. The Storyteller should tell her (unprompted) a significant detail or clue about which the player did not ask.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+1	Agent spent significant time at scene (6 or more hours).
-1	Agent spent less than three hours at the scene.
-2	Agent only skim-read forensics reports.
-2	Agent supervised evidence gathering but did not sweep the scene.
-4	Agent is not at the scene when using this power.
-4	Agent uses this power within first hour at scene

Cost: 1 point of aggravated damage

Action: Instant

Dice Pool: Teleinformatics + Occult

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The agent sees a strange future that doesn't sit right with her. The Storyteller can declare that one of the agent's actions in the next 24 hours is a dramatic failure before the player rolls the dice.

Failure: The agent makes it to the Hall of Mirrors, but none of the viewing portals show anything but inky blackness.

Success: The agent finds portals that show possible futures, and can see how they pan out over the next few days and how they relate to her. Unlike other means of telling the future, this power doesn't hide the future behind metaphor, but it's very much the edited highlights — like the preview of next week's episode at the end of a TV drama. The player can "spend" her successes on this roll in two ways: first, she can re-roll one action, keeping whichever roll she

● ● ● ● ● HALL OF MIRRORS

The logical progression from investigating what did happen is investigating what might happen. The agent withdraws into herself, shutting out the outside world until she arrives in the Hall of Mirrors. The Hall is an alien chamber studded with portals that shine like mirrors covered in a thin film of oil. Staring into one, an agent sees the future. Not what will definitely happen, but the most likely cause of events based on everything that the agent knows, hopes, and fears. The visions never show more than a week into the future.

VASCU *claims* that the Hall of Mirrors isn't a real place. According to the top brass, the Hall is a shared hallucination, an artifact of the human mind trying to extrapolate every possible causal link and derive the most probable overall outcome. The explanation doesn't hold water with agents who have been to the Hall. If it was a shared hallucination, how come every agent who has been to the Hall describes it *exactly* alike, down to the strange geometric pattern on the floor and minute imperfections in each mirror? Some even claim to have seen other agents in the Hall at the same time — even though they were half-a-world apart.

The Storyteller should make the final roll for this power.



chooses; and secondly she may ask the Storyteller one yes/no question relating to her immediate situation, which he must answer. Any unspent successes are lost after 24 hours.

Exceptional Success: The agent notices something affecting a cellmate in one of the visions. She may spend a success to allow another player to re-roll a single action. That player chooses which roll to keep.

RESEARCH

VASCU agents who awaken research-based powers access information from a wide range of sources, even when the agent's miles from cellphone coverage. Whether the agent's capable of running a background check without touching a computer or following a target using a hundred eyes, he can see whatever he needs. A statistically significant number of agents who undergo the Wintergreen Process awaken research-based powers, as Wintergreen's original research was into ESP and accessing sources of information. Those scientists Vanguard has tasked with improving the process have noted the trend, but lack Dr. Wintergreen's insights into the human brain.

● NETWORK

Agents who can't find what they need make pretty poor researchers. If they possess this power, they know where to start looking. An agent concentrates hard on what she wants to find — the power only works on inanimate objects, and she has to be specific — and she knows where it is. While it's useful for showing up the agent who forgets his car keys, the power has broader applications: an agent with this power picks up clues from the surrounding area as well as her memory. If she's in a library, archive, or some other place where information is stored according to some kind of pattern, she knows precisely which shelf to go to, even if she's never been in that building before.

Cost: 1 point of bashing damage

Action: Instant

Dice Pool: Teleinformatics + Academics

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The agent misinterprets the clues, sending her on a wild goose chase. Sometimes she wastes her time or the power points her to places that she'd rather not be.

Failure: The agent gets no clues as to what she's looking for.

Success: The agent knows where she needs to look. If she's outside, or in the wrong building, she

knows which building to look in, out to a quarter-mile radius. If she's in the right building, she knows what room to look in. If she's in the same room, she narrows her search down to a 10-yard radius. On the off-chance that she's looking for something reasonably common, like a specific brand of cigarette or a specific make of gun in a firing range, she knows the location of the closest instance of that item.

Exceptional Success: The character knows just where to look. If she's outside, she knows which room in which building. If she's in the same building, she knows to a 10-yard radius. If she's in the same room, she knows precisely where her target is.

● ● DEEP BACKGROUND

Even with computers, background checks take time. Often, the first that a VASCU agent learns about projecting her senses involves speeding up the process. Working from a single piece of information — a photograph, a name, address, or license plate, for example — she can trace back, digging up everything from criminal records to bank details, credit reports, phone records, even down to individual school report cards. As long as the agent has an Internet connection, she can find whatever she needs.

The number of successes required depends on the nature of information the agent wants to get. For convenience, the five most likely sources of information are abstracted as follows: criminal record (covers crimes committed, records of arrest, and presence on sex offenders register), credit file (indicating the amount of credit the subject has, along with the extent and nature of any loans), phone records (all calls made from one phone line), bank records (details of transactions, including ATM withdrawals with location), and medical records (details of all visits to doctors and all treatment). Each source requires three successes on the roll, so requesting the suspect's credit file and bank records would require six successes. Each document covers the last month unless the agent specifies otherwise. If an agent wants some other information — educational records, or child protection records — it adds another three successes to the total required. Rushing through distinctly different systems stresses an agent's mind, and the more time she spends engaged in background checks, the more damage she suffers.

Cost: 1 point of bashing damage per roll

Action: Extended (3-15 successes; each roll represents 30 seconds)

Dice Pool: Teleinformatics + Computer

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The agent follows a bad link, ending up with the wrong information — not that she knows it at the time.

Failure: The agent probes the records, but can't find what she's looking for yet.

Success: The agent recovers the records she's after. The Storyteller should furnish her with any pertinent information based on the records she searched for. Further Investigation rolls against her target gain 9-again.

Exceptional Success: Searching through the records turns something up that the agent wasn't looking for, but is even more helpful. The Storyteller should include an extra source of information that the character didn't request but that contains something pertinent to the investigation.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier Situation

0	Agent has subject's unique ID — social security number, passport, etc.
-1	Agent has subject's name, address, and photograph, but nothing unique.
-2	Agent has some ID, but is missing at least one piece.
-2	Subject used a false name.
-3	Agent only has name, address, or license plate.
-4	Subject used a false identity with its own unique ID.

BOOKWORM

The agent has synchronized her mind with the vast amount of information available across the world. She no longer needs to spend hours reading through books and case notes in order to research her target. Instead, all she has to do is focus, and the information comes to her unbidden. She has an instinctive understanding of just about everything that's available to the public, just waiting behind her eyes for her to call upon it. Even restricted information is open to her, as long as she has some token of her authority — her FBI badge, for example.

Cost: 1 Willpower + 1 point of lethal damage

The agent automatically succeeds at any Academics or Occult based research action (**World of Dark-**

ness Rulebook, p. 55). She gains a normal success on the action with no roll required. This power takes 30 seconds if the agent has some means close to hand that would help her carry out the research normally — simply being in a library or holding a laptop computer is sufficient. If the agent has no means of making a Research roll, or is accessing non-public information, her automatic success takes two minutes. The agent loses her Defense for the duration of this power.

● ● ● ● TAG

The agent can send her mind through any kind of network in order to follow a suspect. This power isn't the classic form of remote viewing — the agent co-opts anything with a lens to act as her eyes, from a store's CCTV to an ATM camera to the dashboard camera in a cop car. With concentration, she can even use the eyes of animals to help her out — while cats and rats are fair game, higher animals are too complex. Though she may borrow their senses, the communication is strictly one-way — the agent can't exert any control over the animal.

Most agents use this power from a "backup" position, remaining in a safe location and tailing the target. The target's actions can be useful for building a psychological profile or for getting access to the target's records — using Deep Background on a target that an agent has followed with Tag receives a two-dice bonus.

Cost: 1 point of lethal damage, optionally 1 Willpower

Action: Instant

Dice Pool: Teleinformatics + Streetwise

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The agent follows someone who looks like the target, rather than the target. Any Investigation rolls made against the target suffer a -2 modifier.

Failure: Despite her best efforts, the agent loses her target.

Success: Using cameras as her eyes, the agent can follow her target without ever being observed. She has to remain within 500 yards per dot of Teleinformatics, but the agent doesn't need any obvious connection to the target. Each success allows her to follow her target for five minutes. Spending a point of Willpower allows the agent to see through animals as well as machines. This is mostly beneficial in rural areas without CCTV and every other person carrying a camera-phone. All rolls made by the agent's cell to track the suspect, or to create a psychological profile or run a background check, gain a +2 bonus.

The agent must concentrate on this power. She can talk, but does not apply her Defense against incoming attacks. Taking a Reflexive action, or receiving damage, requires the agent to succeed in a Resolve + Composure roll. If the agent fails, the power ends prematurely.

Exceptional Success: The agent gets a good look at his suspect throughout the chase. If his cell confronts the subject while this power is active, they automatically gain surprise.

●●●●● OMNICOOMPETENCE

An agent with this ability can use the sum total of information in the world for more than just background reading. Tactical manuals and weapon specifications give her an understanding of how to shoot any firearm she can get her hands on. The combined occult lore of everyone from Enki of Sumeria to Aleistair Crowley is there when she needs it. She can instantly research any field that she requires, learning in seconds what normally takes years of practice and dedication. Using this power, an agent can become an expert in one field, or become the jack of all trades that her cell needs to catch a particularly vicious killer.

When activating this power, the player must choose whether he wants to increase just one Skill, or one group of Skills (Mental, Physical, or Social). Increasing one Skill costs one point of lethal damage — though the agent must possess that skill in the first place. Increasing a group of Skills takes one point of aggravated damage. This ability can only be used once per scene.

Cost: 1 point of lethal or aggravated damage

Action: Instant

Dice Pool: Teleinformatics + Larceny

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character is overwhelmed with the sheer volume of information available. All uses of Skills in the same category (even if the agent only wanted to increase one Skill) suffer the penalty for untrained use.

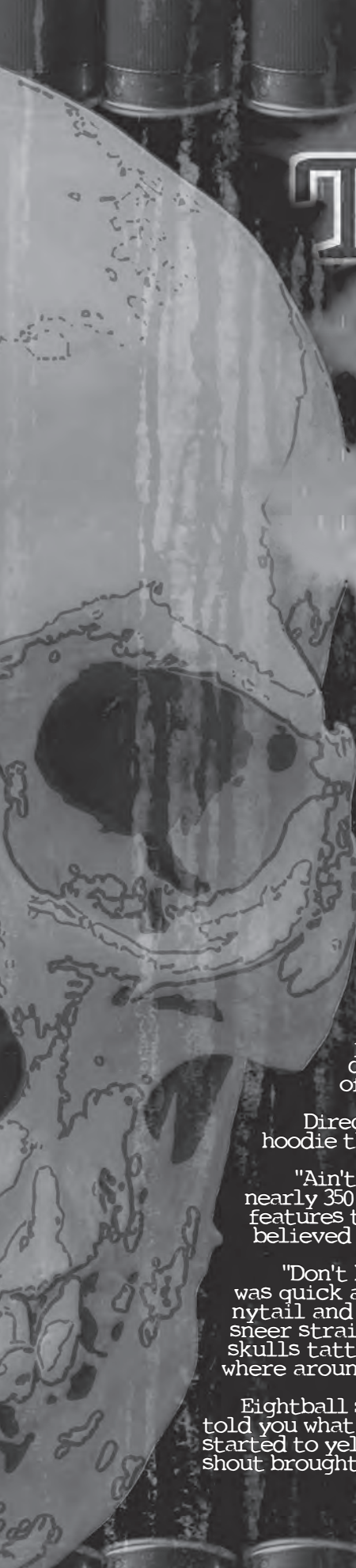
Failure: The agent can't focus enough to increase his Skills.

Success: The agent reaches out to the world's supply of information, absorbing and integrating everything that's available. If the agent chose to increase one Skill, he temporarily increases his rating in that Skill to five dots until the end of the scene.

If the agent chose to increase a group of Skills, he raises each Skill in that group to three dots for the rest of the scene. If he already possessed three dots or more in a given Skill, that Skill is unaffected. Each Skill increased by this ability loses 10-again. The effects of this power last for a scene.

Example: Agent Turner faces a bestial slasher who acts more animal than human. Attempting to counter that, he opts to boost his Physical Skills with Omnicompetence. He takes a point of aggravated damage and rolls a success. Looking down his Physical Skills, he has Brawl 3, Drive 4, and Stealth 3. Those Skills are unaffected. He rolls all his other Physical Skills as if he has three dots in them, though he doesn't re-roll 10s when using those Skills.

Exceptional Success: The hunter retains some of the knowledge granted by this power even after it ends. The player may immediately increase any one Skill affected by this power with experience points. Note that this result doesn't grant extra experience points, just a chance to spend them in the middle of a story.



THRILL KILL KULT

by mike lee

They
blew into Philly
in a '68 Impala with
a trunk full of guns,
an address and a name
scrawled in blood. They'd gone
through the last of the speed some-
where near Muncie, Indiana, and as the sun
began to set out past the city skyline they headed into Kensington in search of their next score.

"Fuckin' vampires," Squint growled as he turned the car onto another nameless street in a town he'd never been to before. The wide, steel rim of the Impala's steering wheel spun lightly through his nicotine-stained fingertips. "Fuckin' vampires always hidin' the good shit elbow deep in some city's asshole." He turned to his companions and bellowed in his thunderous, Zeus-like voice. "Does anybody know where in the fuck we are?"

Smiley giggled like a little girl across the broad expanse of the Impala's cracked leather seat, showing a mouthful of rotting, splintered teeth. He was a mountain of a guy with more scars than tattoos, though he was inked almost from the top of his craggy, bald head down to his crooked toes. His nose had been broken so many times it looked like a smashed turnip pressed into the center of his face, and his left ear had been half bitten off in a bar fight God alone knew how long ago. Thick, stubby fingers tapped a staccato rhythm against the car's metal dashboard, as though he were trying to answer Squint in deranged Morse code. He wore a wife-beater over ragged jeans and a pair of battered, steel-toed boots that had kicked in its fair share of teeth.

Directly behind Smiley, Eightball rolled his thick shoulders beneath a grey hoodie the size of a circus tent.

"Ain't my kinda city, man," he said with a phlegmatic wheeze. He weighed nearly 350 pounds, and the layers of fat surrounding his dark face pushed his features together in a scowl of permanent bemusement, as though he never quite believed anything he saw.

"Don't be so quick to judge," Two-Tone said with a breathless chuckle. He was quick and lean, like a weasel, with long, greasy hair pulled back in a ponytail and a sharply-angled face tufted with scraggly black stubble. He had a sneer straight out of an old-time movie: Snidely Whiplash with gray teeth and skulls tattooed on his knuckles. "I bet there's a twenty-four-hour buffet somewhere around here."

Eightball shifted in his seat with a groan of tortured springs. "Motherfucker, I told you what would happen the last time you cracked on me like that—" Everyone started to yell at once—first Two-Tone, then Eightball, then Squint—but a sudden shout brought them all up short.

"Left! Turn left up here!" The black-haired teenager said from the backseat. He let the smart phone drop into his lap and held his hands up in a gesture of frustration. "Jesus Christ, you people are just like my folks."

Eightball and Two-Tone gaped at the kid sandwiched in between them like he was a live cobra. Squint looked back over his shoulder, the skin around his eyes crinkling with that madman's grin of his. He had a shaggy head of black hair and a bushy beard that completely hid the lower part of his face. His eyes said everything about him—they were a fierce, electric blue, sharp and penetrating and bugfuck crazy. "Ha! See! The kid can talk after all!" Squint roared. "All fuckin' right!" He swung the Impala around in a quick left turn, the suspension groaning under the strain. "Now what, Motor-mouth?"

Eightball and Two-Tone cackled at the name. Squint was the guy who gave everybody their names; he was the driving force behind the little gang, the torque-out engine fueled by equal parts meth and murder. He decided who got to ride in the car and who got a bullet in the brain. No one was quite sure why he decided to drag Motor-mouth out of that diner back in Arizona, when he'd blown the living hell out of everybody else in the place. Near as anyone could tell, the kid was a runaway, hitching his way east; he hadn't screamed or struggled when Squint had dragged him out from his hiding place beneath one of the diner's tables, and the kid hadn't flinched when the hot barrel of a shotgun was stuck against his forehead. He also hadn't said a single word since Squint had tossed him into the car and got back on the highway.

Motormouth picked up the phone again; Squint had picked it up while they were getting gas just over the Pennsylvania state line, and the case was still a little sticky with spots of dried blood. The kid peered at the map on the screen. "Go up like, three blocks. The address should be on the right," he said, the tone in his voice dangerously close to a sneer. His hair was dyed black and hung down in front of his eyes, and a glossy black lip ring nestled in the corner of his thin-lipped mouth. He wore a dark hoodie like Eightball, and a pair of faded, baggy jeans.

"That's what I wanted to hear," Squint said, his head bobbing. "Gonna squeeze some vampires 'til ice comes outta their veins," he said, his hands drumming on the steering wheel. He peered left and right at the boarded-up row houses lining the narrow street. "Yeah, this looks right. This looks like the kinda place some bloodsucker would hole up."

Two-Tone was still staring at the kid next to him. "Since when do you start giving directions?" he said.

The kid glared at Two-Tone. "Anything to get me out of this oldmobile," he snapped. "It smells like ass in here."

Everybody but Two-Tone roared with laughter. Two-Tone pulled his pistol and stuck it under the kid's chin.

Motormouth stared daggers at Two-Tone. "Go ahead," he told the killer. "Pull the fucking trigger. You think I give a shit? I know you guys are just gonna kill me sooner or later. So, get it over with."

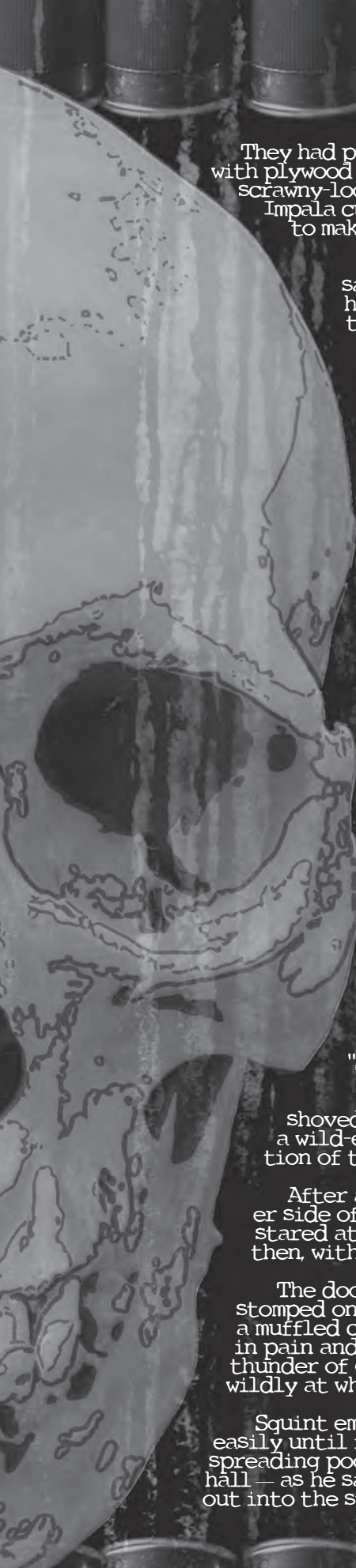
Squint threw back his head and laughed even louder. "Damn, kid, you're what? Sixteen? You sound just like I did back then." He shook his head and chuckled. "My car, my fuckin' rules. Only person's gonna shoot you is gonna be me, kid. Right, Two-Tone?"

Two-Tone grimaced. "Yeah. Whatever." Reluctantly, he stuffed his gun back into his waistband.

Eightball sneered at Two-Tone over the kid's shoulder. "Now I see why you brought Motormouth along," he said, braying laughter.

The Impala swerved sharply and eased up to the curb. "Shut the hell up," Squint growled. "We're here."





They had pulled up in front of another row house, its lower-story windows covered with plywood and its brickwork layered in gang tags and garden-variety graffiti. Two scrawny-looking kids were standing on the sidewalk a dozen yards away, eyeing the Impala curiously. One the meth lab's lookouts pulled out a cell phone and started to make a call.

Squint looked his boys over and was somehow pleased with what he saw. His madman's eyes glittered like polished stones. "Let's go get some," he said. "Time to make the vampire give up some blood! Smiley, you bring the bag. Motormouth, you stick close to me and do what I fuckin' tell ya."

The five of them climbed out of the car. Eightball and Two-Tone were grinning like devils, already imagining the next hit. Motormouth looked around uncertainly, following along in Eightball's wake like he was trapped by the bigger man's gravity. Squint laughed like he was the punch line of his own joke, coming around the front of the car and grabbing Motormouth by the back of the neck. He took the lead, giving the lookouts the finger and taking the steps up to the row house two at a time.

The house had a painted-over steel door with a close-circuit camera covering the stoop and a speaker grille set into the brickwork. Squint grinned up at the lens like a rabid bear and started kicking at the door for all he was worth.

After a moment the speaker crackled. "What?"

"I want a big kid's meal for my boy here and two chocolate shakes," Squint said, giving Motormouth a rough shake. "Whaddya think? Open the fuckin' door. I'm here to do business."

"You got the wrong house."

"Yeah, yeah, wrong house, no habla, whatever," Squint said, kicking the door a couple more times for emphasis. "Can we cut the bullshit? I've been on the road for three days, man. Momo told me to look you up when I hit town. You know Momo."

"Momo's dead," the voice replied.

"Sounds like a personal problem to me," Squint said. He held out his free hand, and Smiley gave him an open travel bag. Squint held the gaping bag up to the lens. "I've got five grand and I'm here to buy, motherfucker," he said. "Are you gonna open the door or do I have to go across town? You weren't the only dudes Momo told me about."

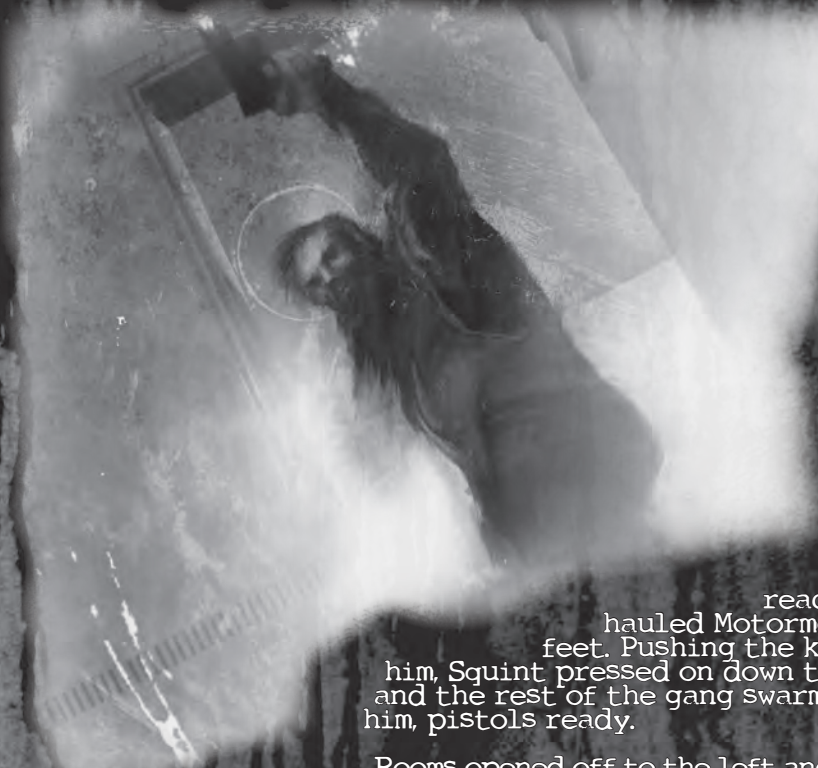
The speaker was silent for a few moments. Finally, the voice said. "Send the kid in with the money."

Squint chuckled. "All fuckin' right! That's what I'm talkin' about." He shoved the bag into Motormouth's hands and took a step back. The kid threw a wild-eyed stare over his shoulder at Squint, who simply nodded in the direction of the door and folded his arms to wait.

After a few minutes there was a thud and then a loud set of clicks on the other side of the door, and then the portal swung open a couple of feet. Motormouth stared at the slice of darkness beyond the door and hesitated just a moment; then, with a nervous shrug, he squeezed his way through the gap.

The door swung shut. Just before it latched, Squint took two steps forward and stomped on the steel plate as hard as he could. It rebounded from his foot with a muffled clang and connected with someone on the other side. Someone yelped in pain and let out a stream of curses, but the sounds were drowned out by the thunder of gunfire as Squint stuck a pistol around the edge of the door and fired wildly at whatever was on the other side.

Squint emptied the clip and then kicked again. This time the door swung back easily until it smashed into the body of a man who lay slumped on the floor in a spreading pool of blood next to an AK-47. A second man was backing quickly down the hall — as he saw Squint he fired two wild shots that tore past the madman's head and out into the street.



Mo-
tormouth
was on
the floor
beside the
dead man,
covering
his head
with his
arms. The
bag with
the money
was nowhere
to be seen.
Squint
tossed
the empty
pistol
aside and
grabbed
the AK
lying
beside
the dead
man, then

reached down and
hauled Motormouth to his
feet. Pushing the kid ahead of
him, Squint pressed on down the hall. Smiley
and the rest of the gang swarmed in after
him, pistols ready.

Rooms opened off to the left and right of the
entry hall. The room to the left held only a couple
of chairs and a small TV, while in the room to the right
two men and a woman cowered on the floor with their hands
in the air, kneeling in front of a tattered couch. Squint let go of
Motormouth long enough to shoot each one of them, then shoved the
kid further down the hall.

The acrid reek of cooking chemicals hung like a cloud near
the back end of the row house. At the far end of the hall a doorway
opened into a large kitchen, flanked by two more doors to the left
and right.

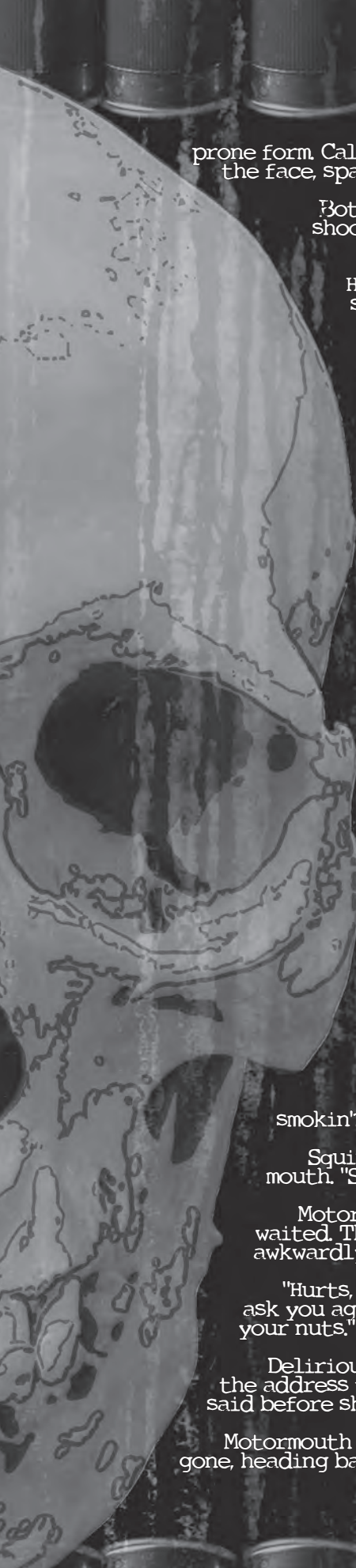
Squint's hand tightened on the back of the kid's neck and he rushed
forward, hurling the kid like a rag doll past the open doorways and
into the kitchen. Gunfire erupted at once from the doorway on the right,
missing Motormouth by inches and chewing up the doorframe on the left.

Laughing, Squint raced after Motormouth, spraying the room on the
right with gunfire as he ducked past. Behind him, Smiley and Two-Time
ducked through the right-side doorway and opened fire, the shots punctu-
ated by terrified screams.

Squint charged through the doorway and caught sight of four men in
the kitchen. One, the guy who'd run from the front door, leveled his pistol
and fired another round at Squint. Two more men bolted from a kitchen ta-
ble covered with piles of small plastic baggies, a scale and a jar of crystal
meth. The fourth man was halfway out a window in the back, his left leg and
shoulder already across the sill. Squint's bag of cash was clutched in his
right hand.

The guy's shot went wide and punched a hole through a wooden cabinet by
Squint's head. Squint ignored him, taking aim instead on the guy lighting out
through the window and shooting him twice in his right leg. He fell back in-
side the kitchen with an agonized scream, his calf and thigh shattered by the
heavy slugs.

The man with the pistol yelled in terror and fired twice more, but once again his
shaking hands betrayed him and the bullets dug into the wall above Motormouth's



prone form. Calm as ever, Squint brought the AK around and shot the poor bastard in the face, spattering his two companions with gore.

Both survivors threw up their bloodstained hands. "Don't shoot, don't shoot!" one of them screamed. "We're just the cooks!"

Squint thought that was the funniest thing he'd heard in a while. He laughed for a good 10 seconds, tears streaming down his face, before shooting both men in the head.

"Holy shit that felt good!" Squint yelled, breathing in the stink of cordite and blood. Eightball lumbered into the room a moment later and went to work at the table, shoveling the meth into baggies as fast as his huge hands could go. A woman's screams echoed from the room next door, followed by Two-Time's high-pitched laugh.

Squint walked over to Motormouth and gave him a good-natured kick in the ribs. "Are ya hit?" he asked cheerfully.

"Fuck you!" Motormouth yelled. "What kind of shit was that?"

"You just earned your keep, is what," Squint said, once more reaching down and dragging the teenager upright. "Everybody's got to pay to ride, my friend. That's the rule." He nodded towards the doorway. "You want to leave, that's fine by me. See ya."

Motormouth laughed like a madman. "Are you nuts? Those kids saw me go in here with you. I'm not going to prison, asshole."

Squint winked. "That's the spirit, kid. Now come here and help me talk to this guy."

He led Motormouth over to the wounded man writhing on the kitchen floor. Blood was spreading in a wide pool across the filthy tile. "Hey, shithead," Squint said genially. "Thanks for not running out on us. Since you're probably the one in charge of this rat hole, I've got a question for you. Just tell me what I want to know, and I'm gone, okay? That sound reasonable to you?"

The man moaned weakly, his hands pressed to the wound in his thigh.

"I'll take that as a yes," Squint said. "Okay, now listen carefully, and I advise you not to say anything stupid, or else I'm gonna get pissed. Now, I'm looking for a dude, name of Goren. You gotta know who he is, on account of the fact that this is his lab. I also know he's a fuckin' vampire. So why don't you tell me where he is?"

The man shook his head. "You're nuts, dude," he whispered. "What you been smokin'?"

Squint shook his head. "What did I just tell you? Huh?" He glanced at Motormouth. "Stomp on that hurt leg of his. Maybe we'll shake somethin' loose."

Motormouth glanced from Squint to the wounded man, then back again. Squint waited. The kid took a deep breath, then picked up his foot and stomped down awkwardly on the man's wounded thigh. The dealer let out a shriek.

"Hurts, don't it?" Squint said after the man's screams subsided. "Now, I'm gonna ask you again, and this time, if I don't like what I hear I'm gonna shoot off one of your nuts." He stuck the muzzle of the AK into the man's crotch. "Where's Goren?"

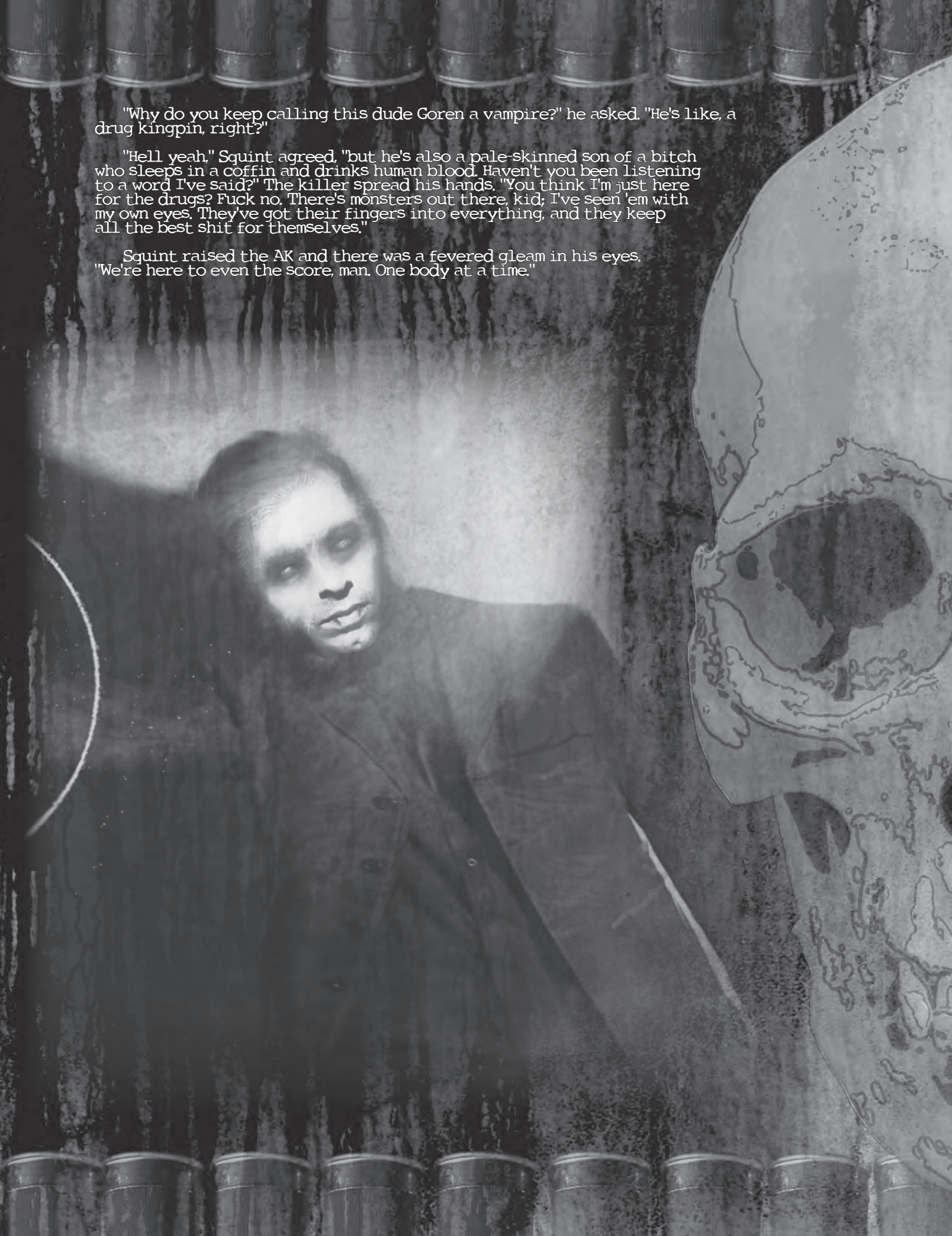
Delirious from shock, the man started babbling at once. Squint made him repeat the address three times before he was satisfied. "See? How hard was that?" Squint said before shooting the man in the head.

Motormouth stared at Squint in the silence that followed. Eightball was already gone, heading back for the car with twenty grand of pure crystal in his huge hands.

"Why do you keep calling this dude Goren a vampire?" he asked. "He's like, a drug kingpin, right?"

"Hell yeah," Squint agreed, "but he's also a pale-skinned son of a bitch who sleeps in a coffin and drinks human blood. Haven't you been listening to a word I've said?" The killer spread his hands. "You think I'm just here for the drugs? Fuck no. There's monsters out there, kid; I've seen 'em with my own eyes. They've got their fingers into everything, and they keep all the best shit for themselves."

Squint raised the AK and there was a fevered gleam in his eyes. "We're here to even the score, man. One body at a time."





The slasher story. It's a brutal one. Tiles slick with blood. Hallways echoing with screams. A victim — still alive, madly and mercifully and *miraculously* still alive — dragging his broken toward the phone by the patio door. A shadow. A knife. A nightmare that just keeps on coming, moment after moment and year after year.

Telling a slasher story can be just as brutal, whether you're telling the tale from the perspective of a bunch of potential victims who ran afoul of some supernatural killer, from the actions of a cell of hunters trying to put a stop to the murderer's gory reign, or from the view of the slashers themselves — men and women driven to kill, possessed of its spirit as if murder is somehow *alive*, given abilities and urges that take them just past the realm of "human."

It's not a comfortable look, no. These aren't mythic movie monsters out of folklore. These are human beings: serial murderers, spree killers, slashers. By telling a slasher story, you're connecting with a very primal fear: the fear of death by one of our own, by a predator dwelling not among beasts but among our own kind. Murder, madness, and morality, all tangled up in a grisly telling.

If you're up for it, then this chapter's for you. Before the screams begin, before the axe starts to fall, feel free to peruse this chapter — it speaks to both Storytellers and players, and aims to give you all the tools that wait in your toolbox when it comes to getting down and dirty (or beyond and bloody) with a slasher story.

VERSUS

by Jess Hartley

It's likely that any given cell's first exposure to and interaction with a slasher character will be an antagonistic one. Slashers, after all, are defined by their actions (all that murdering). As such actions put them at odds with the vast majority of humans, let alone hunters, it's less likely that a slasher will have an ongoing positive relationship with a hunter cell than any other "monster" type will — at least once his or her murderous nature comes to light.

That being said, running slasher-as-antagonist games can pose some interesting challenges to a Storyteller. They also, however, have the potential to be unique opportunities to explore dark and twisted stories with equally twisted morals. Within the slasher-trope, hunters have the opportunity (or the burden) to examine the depths and breadths that human depravity can reach, while constantly being reminded that they, themselves, are on the same path that took many of these murderers to their current condition.

INTO THE DARKNESS

Every story has to start somewhere, and slasher-focused stories can begin in a wide variety of different places. Even a

Chapter three: SLASHER MINDS

Blood. Sometimes it sets my teeth on edge. Other times it helps me control the chaos.

—Dexter Morgan, "Dexter"

GLIMPSES IN A BROKEN MIRROR

The essays below, as written by their respective authors, aim to take a look at some of the fundamental concerns Storytellers and players might have when using slashers (whether as antagonists or anti-hero protagonists) in a game. What essays talk about what? Well...

"Versus" gives us a look at the "hunter versus slasher" phenomenon - how does a slasher draw the attention of a cell? What does the cell do about it?

"Becoming" takes it to the next step... what happens when a hunter starts to inch down that slippery slope that may one day make him a slasher?

"Faces of Death" approaches the gory breadth and depth of the slasher arc, from a slasher's grim origins to the miles of bodies left in his wake to his eventual (and some might say inevitable) end.

"Twisted" examines the slasher phenomenon - specifically, slashers-as-protagonists - through the lens of variable Morality. How can a slasher be anything but a zero Morality freak? This aspires to answer that question.

"Favorite Cuts" takes one last look at the slasher story - specifically, the slasher film. Want to know how the tropes of the so-called "Dead Teenager Movies" can be utilized in your game? This is the essay for you.

Finally, at the end of the chapter? A brutal buffet of slasher characters that can be used in a game or mined for grim inspiration.



hunter cell which has a non-slasher focus may find itself investigating one of these horrifying killers. A myriad of methods exist for Storytellers to tempt their players onto a slasher's trail. Some are more effective for one character type or another, but for Storytellers who want to run a slasher-focused chronicle (or a serial-killer story within a chronicle), many options exist for bringing the characters and the antagonistic slasher together in a believable fashion.



THE ASSIGNMENT

It's possible, especially with tier-two and tier-three cells, that hunters may be sent in to investigate and "deal with" slashers (or monsters suspected of being slashers). Certain agencies, such as the Vanguard Serial Crimes Unit and Task Force: VALKYRIE, are especially likely to give out such assignments, but any compact or conspiracy might well direct its members

toward the trail of what may turn out to be a slasher. The reason for such assignments (and thus the type of cell assigned to investigate) may differ broadly from conspiracy to conspiracy, as may the type of slasher most likely to receive an organization's notice.

The Cheiron Group, for example, is unlikely to bother with assigning a cell to a series of murders, unless there seems a clear likelihood that the perpetrator possesses supernatural powers. If the slasher appears

to be manifesting something beyond human capacity, Cheiron hunters may be assigned to investigate and apprehend the murderer (preferably either causing him to disappear without a trace, or if necessary, by leaving a red herring to throw mundane police investigators off his trail). Similar assignments may be given by the Aegis Kai Doru if they believe the slasher is either using or being influenced by some sort of supernatural item that might be recovered for the conspiracy's benefit.

Null Mysteris cells might be set on a slasher's trail not to stop him (although that might be a secondary goal) but to research and investigate how a tier-three slasher is able to do the things he is doing, or how his powers have evolved from those exhibited while he was still a tier-two killer to the not-explainable levels he is now portraying. Similarly, Network 0 cells might focus on bringing the slasher's deeds and identity to light so that he can be dealt with by others: more assault-focused hunters or even mundane police. By making certain that surveillance tapes, recordings of phone calls, credit card transaction records or even toll-gate EZ-pass records fall into the right hands, Network 0 has proven itself fundamental in some slasher investigations, without those who did the actual apprehension ever knowing the identity of their information-gathering allies.

Task Force: VALKYRIE, on the other hand, often assigns its cells to deal with slashers that appear unstoppable by less-direct means. Masks, for example, may require the brute strength and firepower of VALKYRIE's Advanced Armory in order to slow them down long enough to be detained (or alternately, to be more permanently "neutralized"). Similarly, slashers with obvious religious (or anti-religious) focuses, powers or methodologies might be assigned to cells of Long Night, Lucifuge or Malleus Maleficarum hunters, although whether the assignment is for the hunters to research, neutralize, or even recruit the slasher will depend on the cell, organization, and slasher in question.

THE CALL

Not all assignments come from hunter organizations, however. Private individuals, powerful families, businesses, corporations, mundane organizations or even law enforcement agencies may place the call that leads hunters onto a slasher's trail.

Some hunter cells have formal or informal relationships with mundane law enforcement authorities that may lead to them to being called in to assist with investigating a slasher. In some cases, this may

be an official request; a hunter with the Detective or Soldier profession may have a career that directly relates to a human police agency and may be put on a slasher's trail as part of their mundane work assignment. Even if the "official" investigation ends, a cell that has been put on the case in this way is unlikely to let up on a slasher's trail once it begins. This may lead to conflict, especially if the hunter in question is discovered to still be following up on an investigation that she has been ordered off.

In other cases, the hunter may consult with law officials (without being officially requested to investigate). Hunters in certain professions (Academic, Religious Leader, Doctor, Hacker and Technicians, especially) may receive contacts from police, medical authorities or journalists for their "professional opinion" on a situation — from coroners and morticians who are called on to determine the forensics of mysterious deaths to researchers and surveillance specialists who are brought in to fact-check or determine whether evidence has been tampered with. Such subtle clues might not mean anything to the average professional, but may tip off a hunter to a slasher's presence, and lead a cell onto its bloody trail.

Sometimes private individuals may not feel that a particular situation is being sufficiently addressed by their local police force, and they may take it upon themselves to call in specialists. While most hunters don't advertise their Vigil, a cell may have a public identity in investigation, such as a team of licensed private investigators (think the historic Pinkerton Agency, credited with unveiling an assassination plot against President Lincoln in the 1850s). Or, they may have earned enough of a reputation for dealing with "special situations" — some hunter cells have earned a certain "word-of-mouth" reputation that might lead clients (wanted or unwanted) to their doorsteps.

THE TRAIL

Not every investigation begins outside of cell, however. Sometimes the cell itself is the first to realize a slasher has been at work, or that the yet-unrealized signs point to something beyond an accident or isolated incident.

Certain character types are more prone to this leap of recognition than others. Those who have worked on or received formal education in slasher-type cases may recognize the signs before those with less experience. Psychology, forensics, or police experience or training may tip off a hunter as to the nature of the crime he's dealing with, as might a more casual

THIS TIME, IT'S PERSONAL

Of course, one of the best ways to get a hunter cell involved with a slasher case is to make it personal. The slasher goes on a reign of terror in the cell's hometown. Or maybe the killer makes a victim of one of the hunters' loved ones from past or present. Some hunter cells are territorial - a first-tier or even a Union cell might stridently defend a single block in a single neighborhood, and if the slasher's bloody swath cuts through the hunters' domain, well, it's time to step up and put down a sick dog.

(but no less enthusiastic) interest in true-crime literature or criminal investigation movies, books and television shows. Some people seem intrigued, even obsessed, with the abnormal-psychology and aberrant practices that typify serial killers. Hunters with these interests might be more likely than their fellows to pick up on the possibility that a certain crime is the work of a slasher, although they are also likely to be more prone to seeing slasher activity where none exists.

As well, some individuals' habits, professions, or social circles may make it more likely for them encounter clues about a slasher at work or to recognize a slasher (or a slasher's trail) for what it is. If a slasher's preferred target is society's upper echelon, then a socialite hunter or one with the Artist Profession (especially with the Fame Merit) may be the first to hear graphic (and titillating) rumors. Similarly, a killer who preys upon street kids, gang members, homeless people or prostitutes may cause stirrings that would quickly reach the ears of hunters with the Vagrant, Criminal, or Hitman profession. A hunter who pays her bills bartending or stripping at a seedy nightclub may hear of such things before any official police reports are filed by fortunate victims who've escaped or those who are spooked by the crimes in their community, or (in extreme cases) by the slasher himself as he seeks to brag about or confess his crimes to a seemingly neutral party. By a similar token, a priest, rabbi or lay-member of a certain religious group may have access to rumors and stories spread within those communities that are not available to outsiders.

THE BULLSEYE

Whether the focus is a single cellmate or the entire group, one of the most terrifying ways for a cell to become aware of a slasher's existence is when it happens

because they themselves have become the target of the monster's murderous intent.

This might come about in one of a variety of fashions, depending on the nature and purpose of the cell as well as the slasher-antagonist's goals, personality, and *modus operandi*.

Sometimes a slasher will have a preferred target type that one of the cell members fits: blonde women, corrupt officials, immigrants (or foreign appearing individuals). This, in and of itself, is sometimes enough to bring the hunter (and her cell) into direct contact and conflict with the killer. Perhaps the cell doesn't realize that one of their members has become the slasher's focus until after he makes his first attempt on his target, or perhaps they become aware that someone (or something) is stalking one of their own — either way, it is unlikely they will ignore the situation once it comes to their attention.

Even more frightening is when a hunter's vulnerable loved one fits the slasher's focus group. Whether the cell becomes aware of the killer's interest before he strikes, or they are brought into conflict with him after he's already taken their loved-one as a victim, few things ensure a cell's willingness to pursue a slasher as completely as having known one of his victims.

Other slashers may target a hunter or cell because they fear (or in the case of Geniuses and Maniacs, sometimes hope) that the cell is capable of ferreting them out. Whether it is because of a past interaction or merely the hunters' reputation, a slasher may see the cell as either worthy opponents capable of giving him a unique challenge or pretentious wannabes who must be taken down a peg. (And, keep in mind that the psychology of some killers is that they want to get caught.) He may have inherited the hunters as targets, after other members of his cult, family or gang were targeted by the cell and killed, abducted or (perhaps worse in some slasher's eyes) rehabilitated. A slasher who fancies

himself as a divine force against evil or a holy warrior (or, on the opposite end of the spectrum, is or believes himself to be a tool of demonic influence) may target a cell because of their own spiritual affiliations (or lack thereof.) For more brutish killers, a group of hunters may be merely an obstruction to their goals, a momentary distraction that stands between the slasher and his desired target.

ON THE BLOODY TRAIL

Whatever the method by which the hunters become aware of a slasher, hunters who realize such an individual is operating within their purview are unlikely to ignore it and allow it to continue its predation. Whether they have been assigned or hired to deal with the perpetrator by an outside party or are motivated to do so by other factors (revenge, research, selfless desire to protect innocents, moral imperative, blind fury, protection of their turf, etc.) the first step in dealing with a slasher is identifying the killer. Whether the ultimate goal is researching and investigating, apprehending or “neutralizing” their target, hunters must first determine exactly who that target is.

CRIME SCENE INVESTIGATION

Much of an investigation of a slasher is similar to that of any other monster or crime. Hunters gather evidence and try to piece together what happened at a given crime scene, hoping it will give them some insight into the assailant’s methods, personality, identity, and how and when he might strike again. Basic rules for Investigating a Crime Scene are offered on pp. 59-60 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, and may be used for basic information gathering and factual evidence processing. Additional investigation methods might involve accessing police databases, using the Profiling Tactic (pp. 227 of **Hunter: The Vigil**) or other standard investigation methods. What is not likely to be standard, however, are the results of those investigations. Slashers are particularly merciless antagonists, and typified not only by what they do (kill people) but how they go about it. Characters who investigate a slasher’s handiwork are faced with some of the most graphic and horrific situations that a hunter will ever encounter. Below are some suggestions to aid Storytellers in presenting the breadth and depth of that horror.

GORY BITS

A slasher’s handiwork is rarely tidy. Although some fastidious or germ-phobic neat-freak slashers may clean and sanitize their “work” area to an obsessive degree, many hold to the opposite extreme, leaving crime scenes, torture rooms or private sanctuaries that are awash with gore and effluvia. The use of sensory details when describing a slasher’s domain (be it the murder scene, the killer’s inner sanctum, or both) can give players a more realistic sense of the true depths of ghoulishness and depravity encountered by their characters. Storytellers should be aware, however, that at a certain point an intense scene can become “too much.” Whether it offends players to the point that they are no longer enjoying the game, or simply desensitizes them to the true horror of the situation, too much gore can sabotage a Storyteller’s attempt to translate the pathological ghastliness of a given scene. Storytellers are encouraged to be aware of this possibility, and gauge when to tone down the “splatter” of their descriptions, as well as when a particularly gory detail (such as those offered below) may be just the thing to drive home the true depravity of the slasher encountered by his players’ characters.

BLOOD

The average human body contains around five to six liters (11-12 pints) of blood at any given time. This liquid is contained within what basically amounts to a closed hydraulic system under various levels of pressure. Vein or capillary wounds may bleed profusely but at a low pressure, while wounds close to the heart or involving arteries are under much more pressure and are more likely to spurt. However, when an artery is pierced or cut, this pressure alleviates fairly quickly, resulting in a rapidly declining spurt-zone. Death from simple blood loss doesn’t normally occur with the loss of less than two liters (40% of the average human supply) although incapacitation can occur with as little as a liter and a half. Death that includes deep cuts, lacerations, or punctures may result in more than half the victim’s blood being spilled, either before their death or posthumously.

While a liter may seem like a relatively small amount of liquid, a little bit goes a long ways when it comes to creating a horrific murder scene. A liter is 1000 cubic centimeters, or enough to leave a one millimeter deep, continuous puddle over a meter square area. Considering that most violent crimes involve drips, smears and splatters (which would provide partial coverage and less than a millimeter of depth, thus

covering a much larger area in gore) in addition to pools of blood, it's easy to see that a violent crime scene has the potential to give the appearance of a great deal of blood, even if a relatively small proportion of the victim's blood is actually shed.

Three main types of blood stains can be found at crime scenes: passive (where gravity has caused blood to drip undisturbed onto a surface), transfer (where blood has been wiped, smeared or otherwise transferred from the source to a surface through another object such as a hand- or shoe-print) and projected (where force from a source greater than gravity influences the pattern or direction of the blood's flow). Projected stains can be further subcategorized by the source of the force acting upon the blood: arterial spurt results from the body's internal pressure forcing the blood from a cut or puncture (normally of an artery), cast-off stains are caused when blood flies off a blood-tainted object in motion (such as when a blood-soaked knife is thrown away, or a dripping object of clothing is tossed and sheds blood in mid-flight), and impact spatter is caused when the blood source is subjected to force and thus "splatters." The higher the velocity of the force that causes the impact spatter, the smaller the droplets of blood caused. A hammer blow might cause large stains and droplets scattered over a small area, while a bullet is likely to create more of a fine mist of blood with a larger splatter zone.

Areas where significant amounts of blood have been spilled or sprayed may have a metallic (coppery or iron-ish) smell to them, a scent which tends to also translate into a taste when people breathe blood-tainted air. Because blood tends to clot and become viscous as it is exposed to air, if blood spills aren't cleaned up almost immediately, they become exponentially more difficult to completely eliminate. Several commercial substances are available that react to the proteins left behind by an incompletely cleaned blood-stain, allowing investigators with access to them to detect trace remains of blood left by all but the most wary slashers.

REMAINS

Slashers kill. It's one of their defining features. This inherently presents a problem for the slasher who does not wish to be caught — how to dispose of the body. Some sidestep this issue by causing their victims' deaths to look like accidents, but most must deal with the results of their handiwork.

Cremation: Human bodies, being mostly water, don't burn well. Modern crematoriums use tempera-



tures of 2000+ degrees created by burning natural gas or propane to completely consume a corpse, a process which takes about two hours, and still leaves traces of bone or teeth. While it is possible to vastly reduce the mass of a human corpse by informal cremation, evidence of some form is likely to be left behind, from that similar to what is left behind with formal cremation if the fire is sufficiently hot and the burning time long, to essentially cooked human flesh, charred skin and burned hair if the process is interrupted early on or the fire is not hot enough to finish the job.

The smell of a human body being burned is horrific. Burning hair smells acrid or sulfurous, and the scent can linger in the nose for days. Burning human skin, fat and muscle may smell somewhat like “off” pork or beef, but unlike butchered meat (which is little more than bled-out tissue, bone and fat), human corpses normally include blood and internal organs. The presence of such effluvia taints the air with the smell of metal (blood) and rot (organs, especially the stomach and intestines, which are likely to contain half-digested material and waste). Unless the slasher has fully “dressed out” his victim, it is unlikely that anyone would ever mistake the scent of a burning human body for anything but that.

Decay: Human bodies decay at vastly differing rates depending upon environmental factors such as temperature, humidity and whether they are accessible to insects and other animals. On the hot, humid floor of a tropical rainforest or jungle, a human corpse could decay very rapidly, helped along by insects and other minute animals (assuming it was not hauled away and consumed by a larger scavenger). Within days, a body would be reduced to little more than bare bones. In an arctic environment, or a dry desert scenario, where extreme heat or cold and lack of humidity inhibit bacterial and insect populations, a body might dry out before decaying factors could begin, leaving a virtually mummified corpse that could remain (if undisturbed) for decades or even centuries.

Most slashers, however, are more at home in the urban jungle than the wilderness, which means that most slasher victims will be disposed of in moderate climes with sufficient humidity to allow decomposition and decay. Assuming that the corpse is not protected from insects, flies will begin laying eggs on a corpse within 24 hours. Any openings (natural or inflicted) will provide access to the body’s internal regions for other scavenger insects, which thrive on the protein rich, wet and often still warm flesh.

Depending on the species of insect, a life cycle (from egg to adult) takes a very specific time period

to complete, so investigators can often track a recent corpse’s age by discovering what types of insects have infested it, and what stage of their life cycle they’ve entered. During that same initial time period (24 hours), the natural bacteria and enzymes within a body’s digestive system will also begin to work on the corpse from the inside. By the time several days have passed, a corpse in a moderate climate will bloat, inflated from within by the gasses put off by the decomposition process. The process of putrefaction (breaking down the body’s soft tissues) continues for two-three weeks, eventually collapsing as enough of the skin decomposes to allow the internal gases and heat to escape. Between three and eight weeks, the remainder of the corpse’s soft flesh is consumed and transformed into a substance known as butyric acid. This cheesy smelling substance attracts a new population of organisms — beetles, ants and other “chewing” insects. The parts of the skin protected from exposure to the air (those touching the ground or a bed or sofa) actually begin to mold, while the exposed skin dries into a leathery substance. After the last of the soft flesh has been consumed by insects or “eaten” by the bacteria-formed acid, little remains but dry skin and bone. Over time, even this will weather or rot as well, leaving nothing but skeletal remains.

Many factors can affect this natural progression. Protecting a corpse from intrusion by insects (by keeping it in an airtight container or the like) will slow the decay process which will then rely only on internal factors (enzymes and bacteria). Extreme cold can, essentially, freeze-dry a corpse and prevent most decay for a long period. Likewise, extremely arid locations can cause the body’s soft flesh to dry out rather than putrefy, resulting in a mummification (flesh turning the consistency of beef jerky).

DESECRATION

Human society has many taboos, most of which are deeply enough ingrained in the average person’s psyche that she never considers encountering them in her daily life, let alone breaking them. While many religions reinforce these taboos, most of them stretch through so many different cultures and belief systems that violating them is a crime against humanity, regardless of one’s spiritual beliefs.

The desecration of the human body, especially after death, is one of these. While different cultures have differing views on how corpses should be dealt with, most treat the bodies of fallen members of their societies with respect. Many slashers violate this taboo as a matter of course. Whether by evisceration,

decapitation or even necrophilia, slashers aren't always done with a victim once the victim is dead.

Cutting up a corpse, using its parts for frivolous or profane purposes, is a taboo in almost every human society. And, perhaps because of this, it is *de rigueur* for many slashers. Slashers have been known to keep trophies of their kills, even if they dispose of the rest of the corpse. These are sometimes simple body parts removed and kept as a memento, but can sometimes include complex and macabre constructions. Slashers have been known to create anything from shrunk heads to clothing, masks or jewelry items made out of their victim's skin. Cups and bowls made from skulls are not unheard of, and after one noted slasher was apprehended, it was discovered that he'd been making and selling "faux" skeletal arts and crafts online — from jewelry made from supposedly fake bones to macabre sculptures that incorporated the skeletons of his victims, those who purchased his "art" received far more realistic pieces than they bargained for.

CANNIBALISM

Perhaps the ultimate in corpse desecration — and one of most modern culture's greatest taboos — is cannibalism. Strangely, however, cannibalism is fairly common among slashers, for a variety of different reasons. Some slashers believe that by consuming their victim's flesh they are somehow communing with them, or retaining a portion of the slain individual's strength or spirit within themselves. Others come to cannibalism from a more epicurean direction, developing a taste for human flesh either because of the flavor or the forbidden aspect (slashers who once belonged to Ashwood Abbey are particularly prone to this predilection.) For others, cannibalism is just a simple answer to the problem of how to dispose of their victim's bodies. Some have even gone as far as to prepare their victims for others, playing the gracious host or restaurateur while tricking others into unknowing cannibalism.

Hunters searching a slasher's abode may well encounter grisly remains either partially or fully prepared for consumption. Preserved flesh (stored in the freezer, canned into jars, or even dried into strips like jerky) is not uncommon, nor is it unheard of for hunters to interrupt culinary-minded slashers in the middle of preparing their next gruesome meal.

PROFILING AND PERCEPTION

The standard Perception roll (Wits + Composure) can go a long ways towards recognizing there is



more than meets the eye to a given situation. However, differentiating between, say, a single crime of passion where a woman kills her husband and the three young women he was dallying with behind her back, and the work of a prudish slasher who believes she's acting to "clean up" dirty, nasty pigs who aren't capable of behaving as humans do should require more than a simple Perception roll. Even in a situation where the evidence appears the same, things like the time, location, victim and style of murder can say more to an experienced slasher-hunter than to someone who is simply working the facts of a situation.

Investigating a potential slasher can be handled in many ways. Academic or hacker-heavy cells may do the majority of their research in a technological form, setting up surveillance, tapping phones and computers, digging up records or putting together elaborate databases of information.

Other cells will do the majority of their investigations in person, either to get to crime scenes before the police discover them (and thus running the risk of being mistaken for the perpetrator or charged with tampering with evidence) or by following in the police's footsteps (and hoping to discover some shreds of evidence the police have missed). The fortunate cell with sufficient Contacts, Allies or other connections in the appropriate locations may be able to bribe, blackmail or pull favors enough to get their hands on what police reports or evidence the "official" investigators have obtained, but they again risk drawing attention to themselves as the investigation continues.

In either case, the Profiling Tactic (pp. 227 of **Hunter: The Vigil**) can be very useful in such information gathering efforts. Not all information that might be useful to a hunter cell can be gleaned in such a straightforward manner, however. Canny slashers are often very good at covering their tracks, whether through calculated intellect, natural instinct or primal cunning. Sometimes there are no real witnesses or suspects in a situation, and the best a cell can hope for is to start building a general outline of what type of individual might be capable of taking certain actions and committing specific crimes, rather than following up on leads to investigate particular suspects.

Creating a criminal profile of an unknown slasher (or suspected slasher) is more than simple investigation. The roll for "Examining a Crime Scene" (pp. 59-60 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**) covers characters using Wits and Investigation to "piece together useful facts about events, perpetrators or a mystery." This type of roll is an extended action which allows a character to uncover physical clues about the scene, victim and perpetrator.

However, the hunters may prefer a unique blend of investigative research, psychological theories and instinctive hunches that they hope will allow them to build a general analysis and behavior scheme of a potential perpetrator — even when no direct evidence is available to identify the killer directly.

In this case, the Behavioral Science Tactic (p. 132) can be useful in building the required profile of the killer. Sometimes known as Criminal Investigative Analysis, this process *generally* requires the attention of a whole cell, or at least a team of investigators. That said, it is possible for a single hunter to attempt to put such a profile together. Assume that the rules are generally the same as with the Behavior Science Tactic, except in this case the lone hunter must perform both the rolls/roles of primary *and* secondary actor. He first must endeavor to gather what theoretical evidence exists (Wits + Investigation, as per Tactic), and then he must put that evidence to work with a Wits + Empathy roll (as per Tactic). As with the Tactic, both actions are extended, with each necessitating an hour's worth of work. A hunter can continue to make rolls as long he feels it is necessary.

Note that this Tactic can often overlap with general evidence analysis in an investigation. For the most part, Storytellers can assume that non-intuitive attributes which can be gleaned from physical evidence are not subject to the same potential mistaken assumptions as CIA rolls can sometimes produce. If a bullet's trajectory indicates the shooter was very tall, there is no need for a CIA roll to determine that fact (although the Storyteller may require characters to make an Investigation roll to notice the trajectory or a Firearms roll to determine the shooter's height). Some insights, however, are not discernable by normal investigation: motives, psychological profiles, even hard facts (sex, height, etc) when determined not by physical evidence but by the assailant's *modus operandi*, are all the purview of Behavioral Science.

DEALING WITH THE WORST

As previously noted, many of the same techniques utilized for investigating any sort of crime scene are useful to hunters when investigating a slasher's handiwork. Slashers, however, are twisted in a way that the average criminal, thankfully, is not. Some possess superhuman powers, others merely represent a nearly inhuman level of strength, fortitude, cunning or charm, but regardless of their relative power level, slashers are capable of horrifyingly inhuman levels of cruelty. Even an experienced hunter investigating a slasher's crime scene may find their mettle tested

when faced with some of the strongest taboos humanity holds: torture, sadism, desecration of bodies and/or cannibalism. Thus, hunters who are investigating slasher crime scenes must not only be alert for clues (both physical and more esoteric) but they must do so within what are frequently horrific and sanity-shaking environments.

Investigations that take place in a slasher-created crime scene are likely to qualify for derangement checks (or Trigger Points, if a Storyteller is using the alternate Morality rules described in pp. 326-327 of **Hunter: The Vigil**.) Even if hunters who encounter such situations are not stricken with derangements (or Tells), it is completely within a Storyteller's purview to inflict external symptoms of the horrific situations hunters may have encountered in a slasher crime scene. Non-derangement effects that might interfere with investigations might include uncontrollable nausea, vomiting, or an inability to focus because of the carnage, all which might be reflected by penalties for distraction while at the scene. Such horrors are also not lightly forgotten, and hunters may find that the effects of investigating such a crime scene remain long after they have departed the location. Nightmares, of course, are very common results of not only witnessing but examining such a scene in detail. Other after-effects might include depression, jumpiness or squeamishness (inability to consume or prepare raw or rare meat, repulsion to whole-body meat forms like turkey or uncarved chicken, or aversion to sexual or other "messy" situations.) Storytellers may choose to inflict a penalty when dealing with such situations shortly after investigating a slasher scene, or may simply offer them as roleplay "flavor" without mechanical effects. Penalties, as usual, can range from -1 to -5 depending on the severity of the situation encountered.

DUSK AND DAWN

While it is unlikely to find slashers who still qualify as protagonists, if the possibility exists anywhere, it exists within the World of Darkness. The paradox of "serial killer" and "good person" may seem improbable, but it is not impossible for a person to do "evil" for "good" reasons, or at least for good enough reasons to retain a not-entirely-antagonistic relationship with a hunter or cell. (More on this can be found later in this chapter.)

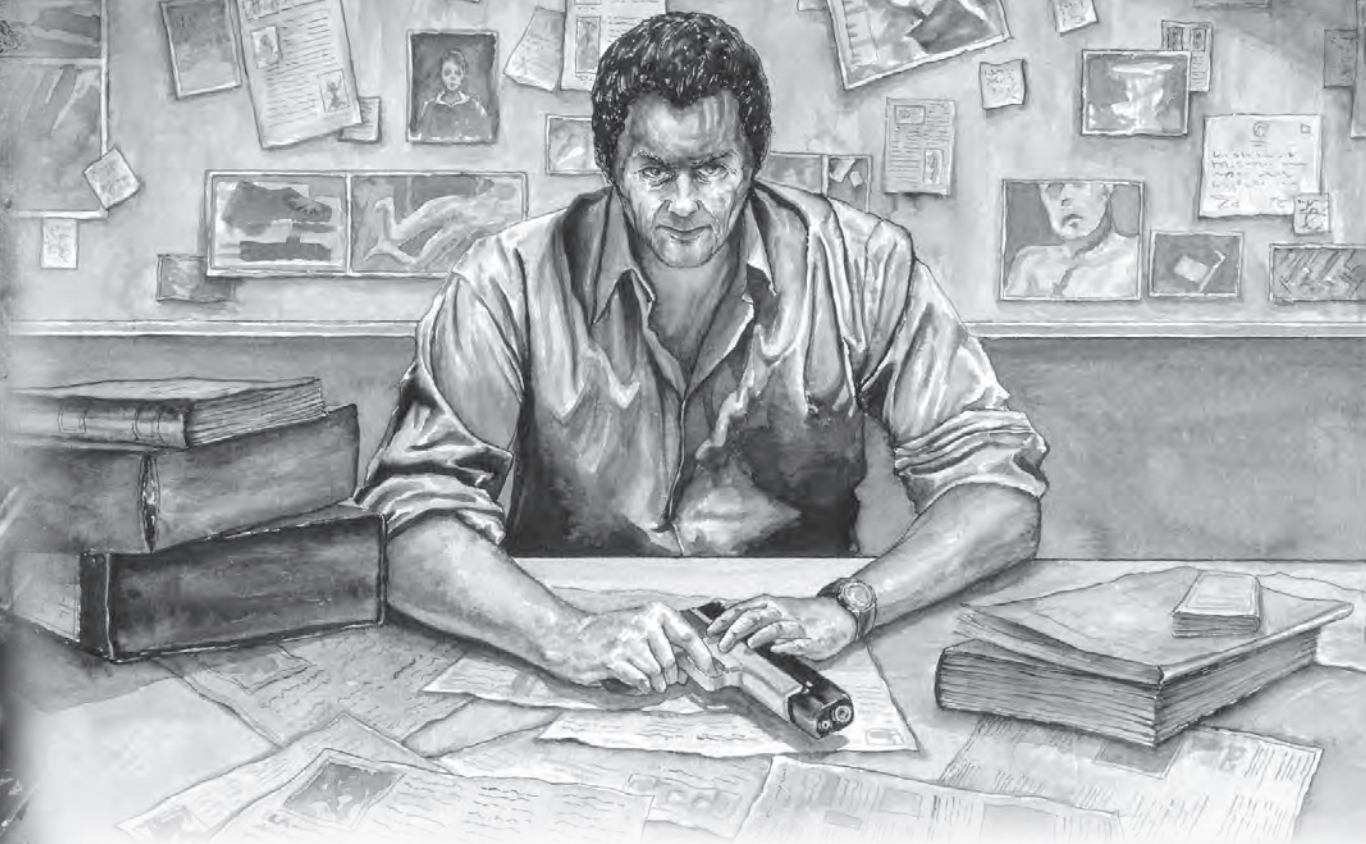
Unfortunately for hunters, such interactions are rarely completely positive; whether a situation is more complex than it seems or gradually evolves into something much more heinous than it first appeared,

even "positive" interactions with slashers are likely to eventually end in disaster. (Probably with lots of blood. And screaming.)

THE MOTIVE JUSTIFIES THE MEANS

In some twisted fashion, it can be said that every slasher kills for a reason. For some, this reason is concrete, defined, and plainly understood by the killer. For others, it's buried in the sea of one's subconscious. Whether it is the psychological unbalance of the Brute, the Genius' need to prove himself superior to those around him, or the Freak's striking out at those who've ridiculed him, the reasons are always present if not precisely known. It's just that, in most cases, they are either motivations that are socially unacceptable (evil, wrong, inappropriate) or disproportionate to the situation. A woman who goes out of her way to interact with the psychologist she's developed a crush on, for example, may be creepy, but hardly qualifies as a slasher. The Charmer who not only seduces him into her basement prison, but then kills him so he can never leave her, however, is well on her way to slasher status, especially if her next crush (and the next one, and the one after that) quickly join him in his shallow cellar grave. In most cases, a slasher's motives may be understandable enough to be comprehended, but not enough to empathize with, and certainly not enough to justify. Sometimes, however, the motive does seem to justify the means, or may do so for certain hunters in specific situations.

The Avenger is the classic example of a slasher whose motivations may strike a chord with others. An Avenger may well begin his path of vengeance by choosing victims that others can understand or even approve of him killing. Think of the mother who tracks down and kills not only the drunk driver who killed her own children, but a long line of those who have killed innocents through inebriated vehicular manslaughter. Or the soldier who, after losing the rest of his unit to a suicide bomber, begins a one-man terrorist killing squad. What about the call-girl who uses her beauty as the key to enter, and then eliminate, snuff-movie rings? Whether the Avenger's targets are pedophiles, rapists, or even less discriminate serial killers, hunters may see him as "taking out the trash," killing those who deserve to be killed. Additionally, an Avenger may initially seem to be a force for good working outside the boundaries of human law (which is often bound up in tangles of red tape and corruption). An Avenger whose victims have



(thus far) only included those rich or powerful criminals who have used their wealth and might to escape justice might earn the tolerance, or even the respect, of hunters who discover what he is doing. And, some Avengers may even focus on the same “monsters” on which the cell itself focuses, be they human or inhuman in nature.

As such, hunters may be tempted to turn a blind eye to slashers who appear to be plying their work within perimeters the hunters deem as acceptable. A cell might even be tempted to deal with some of its own problems by tipping off the slasher to the “fact” that one of the monsters they need dealt with falls within the slasher’s target range (even if, in truth, it does not). It’s a win-win situation, after all. If the slasher kills the monster, the hunters have one less monster to deal with. If, on the other hand, the slasher is killed (or apprehended by the police), the hunters themselves remain safe and can go on to deal with the monster as they see fit. In an ideal situation, the monster and slasher might both be neutralized, either killed or incarcerated, and the cell can go on about its work having killed two birds with one stone.

The drawback to dealing with slashers in this manner, however, is that the center rarely holds. Eventually things escalate, and even the most justifiable motives begin to broaden. A slasher who kills rapists begins to kill accused rapists, or suspected rapists, or those who play out consensual rape fantasies with willing partners. The snuff-movie makers are dead, and their murderer discovers a list of those who’ve ordered the films, and begins a killing spree of everyone she suspects of ever having watched a snuff flick — real or fake. Killing terrorists leads to killing anyone who expresses an opinion that the slasher deems to be anti-patriotic or un-American. The purview widens as the hunger for death grows deeper.

AT WHAT PRICE?

Hunters sometimes begin their Vigil with a very idealistic viewpoint of right and wrong. For some, this only increases as their Vigil progresses, to the point no shades of moral grey exist within their worldview whatsoever. Others come to see things differently, compromising their own moral codes again and again to achieve their objectives until they are left with little more than a goal and no moral or ethical guidelines

at all about what they will do in order to reach it. Regardless of which direction the Vigil pulls a hunter's moral compass, sometimes circumstances are such that a hunter's most expedient means of gaining vital information, insight or resources involves cooperating with those he'd rather not — including slashers.

One of the classic examples of a situation where a hunter finds himself turning to a slasher-type character is when hunting a similar slasher. Who better understands the mind of one Maniac than another such killer? (Think of how the FBI courts Hannibal Lecter in both *Red Dragon* and *The Silence of the Lambs*.)

Slashers whose knowledge, experience, or aid makes them too valuable to not cooperate with can create a particularly thorny challenge for hunters. On the one hand, sometimes it takes a thief to catch a thief. If the slasher in question is currently in custody or the cell believes he is otherwise incapable of continuing his murderous acts, then they may well feel justified in providing him with seemingly innocent favors in return for aid that might bring another slasher to justice. However, especially with Lunatics and Geniuses, every interaction between hunter and slasher-ally may well be a significant move in a chess game that only their ally truly understands. More than one cell has initiated a non-antagonistic interaction with a slasher to achieve what they believed was a greater good, only to find the tables turned on them, often at the cost of human life — including their own.

FORGIVEN, NOT FORGOTTEN

For all that they are monsters, slashers are also human. And, like other humans, they are capable (at least in theory) of having a change of heart, feeling remorse, and attempting to make amends. While most slashers are utterly unrepentant, situations exist where a slasher might not only feel regret for his actions, but also actively take steps to redeem himself. A slasher who has been acting under the control or influence of some other being might change his perspective and his actions if that control is severed. One who has been apprehended might enter counseling as part of his debt to society and, through therapy, begin to mend some of the psychological damages that spurred his earlier crimes. Alternately, one who has a narrow brush with the law, and is almost caught (or caught and manages to escape) may find a way to walk the straight and narrow in an attempt to avoid being caught for good. A slasher might, through an interaction with a powerful force of good, have a change of view and begin to work hard to fight against his drive to kill, even attempting to compensate through

a broad variety of good works, charity and kindness in an attempt to balance out his past sins. One who is still early on his path as a killer might encounter a scourge slasher — one who has wholly given himself over to his crimes — and be “scared straight.” Or one who falls in love, has children, or has a similar significant life-change may well dedicate themselves to the “straight-and-narrow” doing their best to leave their past transgressions behind for the sake of starting over. Any of these changes, while very rare, are possible, resulting in a former slasher who has abandoned his past and hopes only to forge a new life for himself. But, at least in the World of Darkness, the truth rarely stays buried, and eventually even a “former” slasher is likely to be found out.

While many hunters focus only on immediate threats and active antagonists, some are not content to let unsolved mysteries lie fallow. Some cells specialize in rooting out “cold cases,” unsolved crimes with often contradictory or seemingly impossible evidence. Others may be assigned to a particular investigation, or may become intrigued and decide to dig into it on their own. Regardless of the motivation, these situations can put a hunter cell on the long-cold trail of a slasher who believes he has left his former sins behind.

How do hunters handle situations where their investigation of past crimes leads them to what amounts to an “ex-slasher”? At what point do past crimes warrant current action, once the slasher appears to have made a change for the better? Some hunters (especially those with a strong sense of moral imperative or obsession with lawful behavior) may continue to see the former-slasher as a monster, and act accordingly. Others, believing in the power of rehabilitation, might be willing to give the slasher a second chance, especially if he seems to have taken to the straight and narrow for a lengthy period. Still other cells might feel that, while they don't especially like or trust “redeemed” slashers, their efforts and resources are better spent focusing on those who are doing harm now, rather than those who appear to have seen the light and changed their ways.

In some cases, the fact that a slasher appears to have changed his ways might not be sufficient to change him from antagonist to ally on its own, but it might well serve as a “justification” for one of the other scenarios where hunters find themselves motivated to work with (or at least not actively hunt) slashers. Either way, however, it's a dangerous situation for the hunters involved, both physically and morally.

Slashers on the road to redemption are a sticky situation for hunters. The road to hell, after all, is paved with good intentions and old habits die hard. A recovering alcoholic who relapses just ends up back in the bottle, but when a recovering slasher relapses, people die, often in horrible and terrifying ways. Hunters who are willing to give a “redeemed” slasher a second chance often find themselves watching their ally constantly looking for signs that their recovery has begun to slip. Those who do not, often find themselves wishing they had.

DARK REFLECTIONS

One of the likeliest slasher character types to straddle (or blur) the line between antagonist and ally is that of the former hunter-turned-slasher. Former hunters often fall in one or more of the previously mentioned categories that make them likely non-antagonists to active hunters. An ex-hunter may well be pursuing a Vigil-like calling that began very similar to the path the hunters themselves are currently on. Just because her methods have dropped well beyond the boundaries of acceptable behavior, or her target has become too broad for most hunters to accept, doesn't mean that there are not recognizable roots of the Vigil in everything she does. She may have very clear motives, ones that the cell can empathize with, perhaps even one's they share. More than once, a cell has formed a cooperative relationship with what they assumed was another lone hunter, only to discover far too late that the “monster” she sought their aid in neutralizing was guilty only in the hunter/slasher's own delusions, or that the “interrogation” for which they'd helped apprehend their target was not for information, but for their new ally's sadistic pleasure.

Unfortunately for hunters, not only are ex-hunter's among the easiest slashers to empathize with, they also may well be the most valuable resources in the slasher world. More than any other type of slasher, it is very likely that a former hunter, especially one who has had access to Endowments and now has supernatural powers, could be a uniquely powerful ally. As a former hunter, she likely has resources — items, knowledge, past records — that could be of aid or interest to the protagonist hunter cell. After all, one does not stay on the Vigil for any length of time if one is incompetent. Those who have lasted long enough on the Vigil to devolve to the point of becoming slashers are often the epitome of cunning and skill, as well as bastions of information that could potentially aid other hunters in surviving longer on their own Vigils — and hopefully avoiding the slasher's fate.

The same aspects that make an ex-hunter valuable, however, also make them dangerous. Sanity and emotional stability are not often assets slashers possess, and even if a hunter can do the moral-sidestep sufficiently to justify working with a former-hunter-turned-slasher, he might quickly find himself a part of a Genius' complicated plans, or even falling for a Charmer and thus lowering his own defenses to a known serial killer to whom loyalty and honesty are very mutable terms.

While dealing with ex-hunter slashers is always dangerous to the body, it also can be a danger to the soul. The path which begins with a hunter excusing enough of a former-hunter's crimes to allow himself to deal with her on a non-antagonistic basis all too often ends with him beginning to make the same excuses for his own behavior and allowing that behavior to deviate further from any earlier guideposts he'd set for himself. “After all,” he is tempted to think, “it's still far less than *she* is doing.” Dealing with a slasher, no matter how great the potential payoff seems, can be the first step towards following in her footsteps and walking down that conveniently cleared road on which she has already forged ahead.

On the other hand, interacting with ex-hunter slashers can also serve as a morality lesson to the hunter who is wary enough to keep her fate in mind as a warning. Seeing her depravity, and realizing that her fate could be his, can serve a hunter as a grim reminder of the monofilament-tightrope he himself walks.

THE BECOMING

By Jess Hartley

The transition from hunter to slasher is one of the most horrifying things that can happen to a hunter character. If he has any idea it is happening to him (and all too often, he suspects the truth even if he is not able to admit it to himself) the realization that he is not only becoming a monster, but that (unlike a vampire's victim or someone bitten by a werewolf) he has no one else to blame for his transformation, is a terrifying one. It can feel as if he is being swallowed whole by the darkness, like all hope is lost, or like every choice he makes only serves to bring him closer to the inevitable fate he has been hoping against all odds to avoid. It is the dark spiral, the slippery slope, the hungry sea within which only lies madness and murder, a fate so feared and abhorred that other hunters will often refer those who have succumbed to it as “fallen.” Of course, it can also feel exhilarating, powerful, even gleeful — which is all the more horrifying to player and, potentially, character.

It also has the potential to be an intense, challenging and thoroughly captivating story line for a **Hunter** player. It is, however, a situation which holds potential pitfalls for the Storyteller. While the degeneration of hunter to slasher is an ever-present potential it can mean major changes in the theme of a **Hunter: The Vigil** game and proportionately large challenges for the Storyteller who hopes to keep his game from becoming little more than a violent blood-fest. With planning and preparation, however, it is entirely possible for one or more hunter characters to cross the razor-thin boundaries between hunter and slasher without the game entirely spiraling downward to disaster.

THE SLIPPERY SLOPE

Any hunter who has been on the Vigil for any length of time understands that the pressures the hunt puts upon a person are incredible. There is a word for those who are not capable of using the pressure to hone their skills, attention, and focus to an almost inhuman degree — the word is “dead.” On the other hand, those who take to the hunt too well risk another horrific fate. When a hunter is able to cut away all distractions, all of the “chaff” that might interfere with the Vigil, what is left is little more than a killing machine — and the line between killing machine and slasher is a thin one, indeed.

So, what pushes one hunter across the line from hunter to slasher, when another, faced with similar horrors, is able to avoid this fate? Opinions are mixed. Any of the pet theories held by different individuals and organizations regarding why slashers, in general, come into being can be applied to the hunter/slasher transformation. Religious fanatics may see the transformation as evidence that the hunter’s faith was impure, or that he was singled out for punishment by some holy or unholy entity for his “sins” (whatever they might have been.) Others see it as a matter of purely logical psychology: somewhere in the fallen hunter’s past his psyche was wounded in ways that simply gave way under the unrelenting pressures of the Vigil, leaving him vulnerable in ways that his cell-mates were not. Some claim that to fall is every hunter’s eventual fate, that the only way to avoid it is to die first. These views, understandably, are rarely espoused during the process of recruiting new hunters to the Vigil, and most often come only from those few hunters who have long since divested themselves of any hope of a normal life outside the hunt.



THE BLOODY LINE

In terms of game mechanics, there is no hard and fast rule about when a hunter crosses the line between being a hunter and being a slasher. Or rather, there is no concrete definition of what point the slasher template needs to be applied, signaling the Vigil has been abandoned for the slasher's calling.

Certainly, argument could be made that when a hunter's Morality reaches 0, he becomes a slasher and "earns" his Undertaking. The **World of Darkness Rulebook** says that Morality 0 characters "can no longer be played in any meaningful way" and "becomes a true monster." At this point, according to the core rules, control of the character passes to the Storyteller. The description of a Morality 0 character certainly seems to fit slashers, and this creates a firm definition of the line between hunter and monster.

Not all hunters will reach Morality 0, however. Because of the moral adaptability that their obsession with the Vigil affords them (see "The Code," p. 325 of **Hunter: The Vigil**), some hunters will end up with a slasher attitude and slasher behavior, while still holding onto at least a vestigial amount of Morality. Does this mean they are not "really" slashers? Their victims don't think so. (This idea is explored more completely in the essay called "Twisted" later in this chapter.)

A less concrete method puts the determination in the hands of the Storyteller, basically allowing him the final determination on at what point a particular character has made the transition. Some Storytellers may feel most comfortable creating across-the-board guidelines for their own games. A hunter might "go slasher" when he has hit Morality 3 and made at least two "murder" based changes to his Code; or when his Code has switched out sins in three of the four lowest Morality ranks; or simply when the "mass murder" sin has been switched. Any of these (or other qualifications that the Storyteller sees fit to use) can be combined with that of hitting zero Morality to create a customized guideline for "what makes a slasher a slasher." Whenever any hunter character in his game meets these qualifications, he has crossed the line to slasher and gains his Undertaking (with whatever consequences that entails. See "The End or No?" below).

Alternately, a Storyteller might use more freeform guidelines in making this determination, taking into consideration both mechanical aspects (such as Morality rating and Code changes) as well as the character's actions, viewpoints and motivations. Using a flexible system can have advantages over a more

static ruling. It not only gives the Storyteller more leeway for customizing the story to the characters, but also keeps players from knowing exactly what actions will push their character over the line. Storytellers must use care, however, when handling such situations in a freeform method. Especially if crossing the line to slasher means the player loses control of his character, such a change should not come as an utter surprise to the player. Storytellers are encouraged to use subtle clues as well as (if it seems appropriate for the situation) to warn players that their characters actions, attitudes and motives are entering into dangerous territory. While the actual action that causes the character to cross the line may be a surprise to the player, the fact that his character has been growing closer and closer to becoming a slasher should not.

THE END OR NO?

Hitting Morality 0 is normally the end of a player's control of a character. **Hunter: The Vigil**, however, offers more options, and a hunter character reaching Morality 0 can be handled in a number of ways. First, as normally happens, the hunter could become a slasher under the Storyteller's control, simply by having the player hand the character sheet over. The Storyteller can add the Undertaking he sees fit and take control of the character from there on out. This method does, however, have some drawbacks. First and foremost, the character's former player is now characterless and, while creating a new character is always an option, the player loses the history and depth of development he has created with his original character. (That said, one could make an argument that a player who has driven his character to the depths of voided Morality must surely be aware that losing his character is a very real possibility.) Bringing a new character into an established hunter cell can result in challenges of its own from the character's perspective as trust and history that were present with the old character are missing from the cell's newest member, and group tactics are no longer shared between all of the members.

Another argument against having a player label his Morality 0 hunter "slasher" and hand it off to the Storyteller is that, while the game mechanic for a character hitting Morality 0 is fairly clear from a player and Storyteller's point of view, it is less immediately apparent from the perspective of the characters. In a non-slasher-inclusive game, the "Morality 0 = unplayable" formula is present, in part, to encourage players to at least consider the ramifications of potentially game-degenerating actions by imposing a final, ultimate consequence. In a game which includes slashers, we see that even an utter psychopath has the potential of moving among humanity with

PLAY ON

The World of Darkness is, for characters, a reality filled with many questions and few (if any) hard answers. While players may know X, Y and Z facts about a situation, there is often a great deal more ambiguity in their characters' lives, and that uncertainty breeds alertness, tension and often paranoia that are very thematic for a **Hunter: The Vigil** game. Whether or not another hunter has "fallen" is one of those areas that can hold a great deal of uncertainty for characters, uncertainty which is lost when the players are sure of the situation. If they know the character has, in fact, fallen, they are more likely to have their characters act accordingly than if there is still uncertainty about her fate.

Because of this, Storytellers may want to use subtlety when informing one of their players that her character has crossed the line and become a slasher. Making this announcement privately between games, rather than at the table, is perhaps the most effective option, if the Storyteller wishes to garner the player's support in keeping the rest of the players away from the knowledge. While some players may see the change from hunter to slasher as a punishment, others will rise to the occasion, using the change as an opportunity to explore another facet of their character's existence. By presenting it as such, and expressing his faith and trust in the player to use the situation

his

aberrant

nature undetected

—at least for a time. From

this perspective, it makes little

sense to automatically assume that

the moment a character hits Morality 0

his behavior changes in such a complete fashion that his role as a hunter is instantly abandoned and that, even if he does become a slasher, it has an immediate and final impact on his Vigil and his relationship with his cell.

By using one of the methods described in "Play On" (sidebar, below) Storytellers accomplish several things. Firstly, they allow the player to continue playing out the "natural" progression of his character's descent, a process which can provide interesting roleplay experiences and a chance to examine the Vigil from a different and unique viewpoint. Secondly, allowing the player to remain in control of the character as it makes the transition from hunter to slasher is less jarring to the other players, who (if the transition is handled subtly and privately between the player of the fallen character and the Storyteller) may not realize at first that a transformation has happened. The growing suspicion that their companion has gone too far is a paranoia that many hunters will experience as their Vigil progresses, and by not taking control of a character once the change is made, the Storyteller takes away the player's knowledge about if and when that change has happened. This

as an opportunity to enrich and strengthen the game experience for not only the fallen character's player but the other players as well, a Storyteller may be able to recruit the now-slasher's player where a less diplomatic approach might well alienate her.

paranoia adds to the tension of a **Hunter** game, and may well lead to the members of a cell keeping a suspicious eye on each other, questioning why and how choices (especially violent ones) were made, and wondering constantly about each other's actions and whereabouts at any time the group is not together in one place. The subtle and horrifying realization that their companion is no longer wholly one of them is a dramatic effect that is undermined by the Storyteller taking control of the character, and doing so effectively erases what can be a plotline filled with personal tension and soul-searching for hunter characters. Those whose characters realize their camaraderie has fallen may endeavor to aid in his redemption, or may allow themselves to be pulled under as well, leading to an entire cell of former-hunters-turned-slasher.

GENTLE NUDGE
OR HARD SHOVE

Game mechanics aside, what makes one hunter fall when another stands fast? Why does the Vigil strength-

en some hunters, while breaking others completely? For one hunter, falling might be a gradual process. Slowly but surely, the horrors of the Vigil build until, like a man trapped in a slowly filling well, they rise and consume him. Deaths mount, corruption spreads; the war goes on in spite of battle after horrific battle. Good men turn evil, children are slaughtered, innocence corrupted. Little by little, his strength and faith are eroded away until one day he realizes he has nothing left. No amount of being good or true can possibly make even the slightest dent against evil, so he finds himself either using the darkness' own tactics against them, or — if he is truly fallen — switching sides completely.

For another hunter, the change might be the result of one intense moment where everything he'd built his hunt upon is yanked out from beneath him. Dedicated to the Vigil by his faith, his need to protect a certain place or person, or his search for "truth," he experiences something which proves (at least to him) that his deity does not exist (or at least does not care about the fate of humanity). Or that which he has sacrificed everything to protect is destroyed. Or he realizes every bit of information he has struggled for, killed for, nearly died for, is false. In one moment of "clarity," everything his Vigil was based upon is taken from him, leaving him ready to strike out at the world — a prime candidate for slasherhood.

Some hunters do not so much "fall" into being slashers as much as they are taken there. Many of the creatures that hunters fight against have subtle or overt powers to influence or control a person's thoughts, emotions and actions. Whether the hunter-turned-slasher's change is entirely controlled by an outside being (perhaps regaining his self-awareness only for a short time after murdering each victim) or is just nudged along a path he's already walking down, many hunters have "help" in crossing the bloody line between Vigil and slash. Others may believe they are acting under another's influence, when in actuality they are simply imagining or manifesting the symptoms of outside control to justify or excuse their fall. While their companions (assuming the falling hunter turns to them) may not be able to detect outside influence, they are likely also not going to be able to *disprove* that their friend is being pushed to kill, leading to an opportunity for interesting conflict and roleplay as the cell tries to determine for once and for all what is happening in their midst.

**ALL FOR ONE
OR ALL ALONE**

The bonds between hunters are tight. When you continually put your life (and your soul) in the hands

of another person, it forms bonds which are as tight as any humans make. Seeing one of your own begin to slip down such a treacherous path can be horrifying to deal with, and since the Vigil really doesn't allow for time off to deal with personal issues, hunters who suspect one of their cell mates has maybe gone a bit too far have to deal with that issue on top of all of the other pressures the hunt puts upon them. Many decide to give their companion the benefit of the doubt, assuming they don't have concrete proof that he's a completely lost cause. Because of this, many hunters-turned-slashers are not discovered or dealt with until they have slipped well past the point of no return.

Falling from the Vigil is a personal act. Becoming a slasher is an internal process, which, although it may be influenced by outside factors, is a result of a million subtle influences collecting in just the right (or wrong) fashion to break a hunter's sense of self and send him spiraling into the darkness.

As such, it is not something which normally happens to an entire group at the same time. Even a cell which has shared myriad horrific experiences together will react to them differently and, possessing differing levels of internal fortitude and resources, proceed through them in different ways and to different emotional destinations.

What this means, to a hunter who is part of a cell, is that whatever personal crisis and challenges he is going through that may result in him teetering on the precipice of becoming a slasher, it is unlikely that his companions are with him in the exact same psychological and metaphysical place. In some ways, this is a good thing. It means that while, at any given time, various members of a cell may be in danger of falling, there is a good chance that at least a few are also not in overt danger of it at the same time. This means that, for a cell that is alert to the danger and has the time and resources to attempt to pull their members back from the brink, there may be a chance of recognizing the danger before it is too late. While this alertness may put additional pressure on the cell as each member maintains an almost-paranoid watch over the others, it also is sometimes the only safeguard a hunter has against falling.

Unfortunately, far too often a cell has neither the time nor the resources to attempt to coddle its members, regardless of the metaphysical and emotional danger they may be in. The Vigil doesn't come in shifts, nor does it recognize holidays or offer vacations. Darkness is never more than a few hours away, and evil is a constant presence in the World of Darkness. Even if a cell recognizes that one (or more) of their members

are in danger of snapping, the chances that the realization will come in the heart of a crisis are high. After all, when *isn't* there a crisis on the Vigil? Perhaps even more unfortunate is the ambiguous difficulty involved with exactly what to do about a potentially falling cell-member. In the more than a century that human authorities have recognized the presence of slashers in mainstream society, there is yet to be a solid explanation for their condition and actions, let alone a viable cure. Those who are caught by the police are sometimes deemed criminally insane and sent for therapy and treatment rather than imprisoned, but rarely does a true slasher ever become rehabilitated. While the compacts and conspiracies of hunter society sometimes employ specially-trained psychologists to try to "cure" broken hunters, their success rates are abysmally low and the treatments are often dangerous and likely to push a teetering hunter further over the edge. Other cells, either lacking or not trusting help from overseeing organizations, may try to help their companion on their own. Methods might include enforced vacations, "talking it out" or a hunter-version of "tough love" (which often roughly equates to little more than beating the hell out of the hunter in question while yelling "What the hell are you thinking? Straighten up! Knock it off! You want to become one of them?" or similar intense arguments). These methods are, unfortunately, rarely successful.

GOING DOWN TOGETHER

When one member of a cell falls, one of two things normally happens. Either the change is so extreme that the cell cannot ignore what is happening and is forced to take action, or the changes are subtle and the fallen member is able to maintain at least the semblance of a continued role within the cell, at least for a time.

If the slasher's transformation was obvious, the cell may attempt its own form of rehabilitation. Cells belonging to compacts or conspiracies may opt to place their fallen companion in the custody of their given organization, especially if they are on good terms. Lone, unaffiliated hunter cells, however, have fewer options. They may turn their fallen friend over to the mundane authorities and hope the police will be able to provide him with therapy and medication sufficient to reverse the fall (or at least to keep him from killing again.) Or they may attempt their own rehabilitation processes. These may include using the Deprogramming Tactic (only effective when the fall is directly related to mental control by an outside entity), enforced attempts to bolster the fallen hunter's faith (putting

him in situations which may Trigger a change in his personal Code) or his sense of right and wrong (essentially walking him through Morality-improving acts in an attempt for something to "take"). These methods are rarely effective. A pragmatic cell recognizes this, and, while they may feel obligated to make an attempt, will eventually turn their fallen companion over to those who have greater resources for dealing with these situations or, if they have no other options, neutralize him themselves. Pragmatics, however, are not what keeps a cell together, and many are built on a loyalty and trust that far outweighs the logic of turning one of their numbers over to the police or turning a shotgun towards them. They may try far longer than is wise to "fix" their fallen member, and the results can often be disastrous, or even deadly.

MY BROTHER'S KEEPER

Slashers' madness can be contagious, especially at scourge levels. Even for rippers, a slasher who truly believes in his own deranged world-view can often turn the tables on the already-pressured cell that is trying to redeem him, and pull his companions deeper into the darkness themselves.

Depending on the means the Storyteller has determined for marking the dark spiral towards a slasher's mindset, this may be accomplished by putting the cell members into positions to violate their own Code of Morality (and afterwards helping them find justifications for their actions). It might also include putting them into no-win situations, where the best they can hope for is to choose the lesser of two evils. In time, even small evils wear down on a hunter's spirit, and each "sin" drags them closer to joining their fallen cell-member and abandoning the Vigil.

A slasher may well begin using these tactics long before the other members of his cell even suspect he has fallen. Especially for Geniuses and Maniacs, laying the groundwork of moral traps which will ensnare their companions is just part of a satisfying day's work.

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

Because of the one-two punch of the pressure of the Vigil and malevolent intent by a fallen companion, it is entirely possible for the majority (or entirety) of a cell's members to fall in quick succession, resulting in a former-cell full of slashers.

In some cases, there is the hope of redemption for the group. As detailed in "Forgiven but Not Forgotten" (p. 195), a slasher can have a myriad of ways and reasons to redeem himself once he has fallen, and it is possible that the cell may one day take up the Vigil once more.

In other situations, the cell's fall from the hunt will entirely change the focus of the chronicle, as the now-slasher characters go forward into the World of Darkness and attempt to carry out whatever goals their Undertakings and previous experiences have led them towards. Some slasher bands will continue on a (likely warped) version of their previous Vigil, turning their psychopathic attentions onto monster-hunting without concern for human bystanders. Others will become true monsters themselves, existing only to kill for the joy of killing and eventually becoming little more than a destructive force incapable of maintaining even the guise of humanity.

FACES OF DEATH

by Mike Lee

Human history is a blood-stained tapestry of violence, stretching all the way back to our origins on the plains of Africa. Our ancestors learned to kill to survive, sharpening stones to hunt animals and butcher their remains — or to defend themselves from predators that saw humans as another form of prey. Killing was a functional necessity; for a family to exist, much less prosper, its members had to spill blood on a regu-

lar basis. Eventually, when climate changes forced early humans to compete for dwindling resources, it meant killing other people as well. Violent death was an ever-present threat, and human life was no more sacred than that of a fish or deer.

Civilization originated from the need to escape this constant life-and-death struggle. Animals were domesticated to avoid the dangers of following the herds and competing with more capable predators. Agriculture grew from the desire to concentrate edible plants in one location and reduce the risks of foraging. Permanent communities allowed for greater security and a means to protect resources. As a species we are wired for survival, and over the millennia we have built and refined systems designed to insulate ourselves from the nature of our own mortality. The evolution of religion, philosophy, medicine and science pursued the common goal of elevating the value of human life, and advances in technology have succeeded in prolonging a human lifespan to an unprecedented degree. As a result, modern society views death as not only unnatural, but *unnecessary*. Murder, long since outlawed, is now anathema. When the news carries reports of a series of grisly killings, people



can't conceive that once upon a time, such things occurred as a matter of course. They don't wonder *why* such a thing could happen, but *how*.

Civilization is predicated on the notion of taming the savage, of transforming humankind's predatory nature, but something in our nature refuses to let go of our bloodstained past. An atavistic urge to kill lurks deep within the human psyche, and its siren call is seductive to a diseased or wounded mind. Sometimes a man cracks under the weight of the world, or has enough of society's petty cruelties, or simply gives in to the vicious little voices whispering in his head and decides that the only way to make things right is to take a sharp blade and start spilling blood.

The slasher — whether he is a mass murderer, a serial killer or a supernaturally-endowed predator — is an entirely modern form of monster. He is death incarnate: relentless, remorseless and implacable. He kills his victims because on a fundamental level he is compelled to. Murder isn't a matter of choice; *it is the only way the world makes sense to him*. For whatever reason, his experiences in life led him to embrace death, whether in search of revenge, or to feed his inner demons, or simply to assert his own twisted vision on the world and humanity's place in it.

This section of the Storytelling chapter is intended to offer suggestions on playing slashers as characters and telling compelling stories about their awful deeds. This essay covers the essential elements of a proper "story arc" for a slasher character, then details each of these elements and offers suggestions for how to apply them to a slasher chronicle.

DANCING WITH DEATH

Viewed from the outside, a slasher appears to be little more than a deranged killing machine, carving a bloody path through his victims until someone finally puts a stop to his reign of terror. But a slasher isn't a robot — there lurks a definite method to his madness, even if the character himself isn't fully aware of it. Whether he is driven by deep-seated compulsions or a carefully thought-out rationale for serial murder, the slasher is compelled to commit his crimes and place himself at odds with human society. It is this conflict that lies at the heart of a slasher's story: viewed from the inside, the slasher isn't defined by the *act* of killing so much as the *need* to kill and the challenges that such a need creates. Does he try to maintain the illusion of normalcy, even try to lead a mostly normal life in spite of his murderous urges, or does he ruthlessly embrace his true nature and alienate himself completely from human society? Regardless of the choices he makes, his

compulsion to kill will ultimately prove his undoing; with each new victim, the risk of discovery increases, until finally the killer's identity is discovered and the hunter becomes the hunted. Sooner or later, the slasher faces society's judgment, in the form of a policeman's bullet or a babysitter's knife; how does the character regard his impending fate? Does he accept his inevitable demise? Does he plan for it, laying out the circumstances of his own death as methodically as he plans the deaths of his victims? Or does he pass the glittering knife to a successor, to carry on the killer's work once he is gone? The choices that the character makes define the course of his story.

Thus, a typical slasher chronicle forms a story arc with three key elements: the character's origin, his murderous career, and his ultimate demise.

CRACKS IN THE FACADE

Killing another human being is no easy thing, even for men and women who have been trained to the task. Matters of conscience and morality aside, the act of murder forces both victim and perpetrator to face the sordid reality of death and the fragile nature of human life. Once a person has stared death full in the face, the world is forever changed. Many are scarred by the experience and spend the rest of their lives haunted by what they've done, but a rare few experience exactly the opposite. Instead of being horrified by their actions, they feel *empowered* by them. The act of murder feeds their inner demons and brings a sense of order to their tormented lives. For many slashers, killing is a *release*; months, years or even decades of internal pressure finally exploding in a geyser of blood and screams. The circumstances leading up to that first, fateful killing determine nearly every aspect of a slasher's identity, from his motives for murder to his choice of victims and his methods of execution.

A slasher character may feature any number of origins, ranging from severe physical and mental abuse or trauma, to influence by external (or even supernatural) forces. Much of this origin is simply background, determined between the character's player and his Storyteller during character creation (see Chapter Two for more information), but this information is then brought to bear during the character's prelude, when he commits his first murder. That is the moment when the internal or external forces driving the character crystallize into his new identity as a killer. The following are some suggested origins for slasher characters, along with insights into how different origins lend themselves to particular victims and methodologies.

CHILDHOOD TRAUMA

Some people become killers as a result of extreme physical, emotional or sexual abuse suffered during the course of their childhood. Repeated beatings or other abuse create feelings of helplessness and rage that build inside an individual; since they can't strike back at their abuser, they take out their suffering on victims weaker than themselves. In most cases, this simply creates a cycle of violence: fathers beat their children, who become bullies at school and eventually take out their trauma on their own children, thus perpetuating the crime. Sometimes, however, the abuse is so systemic and extreme that the victim's rage becomes murderous. The urge to kill the tormentor finds expression in other violent acts. The would-be slasher may initially be driven to torture and kill pets or other animals, but eventually the killings grow too easy and too routine to provide any relief. They then fixate on other people, perceiving or imagining flaws that focus the killer's rage until finally they lash out. Sometimes the slasher vents his murderous rage on victims that resemble (or he thinks resemble) his abuser; in other cases, he might prey upon individuals whose appearance or behavior offends his sense of morality. In still other cases, the killer may target individuals who remind him of himself; because he was taught that he had no value and deserved to die, then others like him deserve the same fate as well.

Slashers with abusive origins are often callous and violent themselves, and prone to acting spontaneously. The hunt is not as important as the kill itself; they want to make their victims suffer, as they themselves have suffered. They may focus on a specific type of victim that speaks to the abuse they suffered. For example, a slasher who suffered sexual abuse as a child might fixate on sexually promiscuous men or women, or take out their anger on prostitutes. They are more likely to kill with their bare hands, beating or strangling their victims rather than employing exotic methods like poison or electricity. The killing must give the killer a visceral release, an explosion of pent-up loathing and rage. Improvised weapons like a brick, a pipe or a baseball bat are sometimes used. Torture factors into the methodology of this type of slasher, though it is rarely prolonged. These are killers who pass by their victims on the street and something sets them off, or they have a bad day at work that awakens submerged feelings of anger and frustration, and they go looking for someone they can take it out on.

This type of origin is common to many serial killers; everyday guys with a steady job and good

standing in the community who go cruising skid row looking for bums or runaways late at night. These slashers often have outwardly stable, even prosperous public lives, and depending on their upbringing they may devote considerable effort to keeping up appearances, even as they have to kill more and more frequently to assuage their inner demons. No matter how many people they teach a lesson to, it is never enough to stifle the voice of the abuser roaring in their head.

OCCUPATIONAL TRAUMA

Some people are raised to violence, while others have it thrust upon them. There are individuals who are forced to make awful choices and deal with reprehensible people day in and day out, until their morality and ethics become worn down to nothing. Take for example a soldier who goes off to war and spends years fighting brutal, merciless men who can't be dealt with any other way than to blow up their homes and put a bullet through their heads. After enough explosions and enough gunshots, the act of destruction loses its horror, and becomes a normal — even *rational* — way to deal with certain problems. Worse, their judgment on what is proportional and what is excessive becomes skewed as well. If you're going to kill one man, why not be thorough and hunt down his entire family?

These slashers originate in a crucible of extreme stress and inner tension, until finally they become so desperate and callous that the most ruthless acts of violence become acceptable. Hunters are especially prone to this sort of situation, because they are constantly faced with combating horrific threats without any recourse but their own small circle of equally-desperate peers. Their numbers are few and the monsters seem to be everywhere; in a situation like that, how far must one go in order to win the battle? A sufficiently traumatized hunter might not stop with killing a werewolf who had been terrorizing his city; he might go so far as to hunt down every last member of the werewolf's family and friends to make sure the curse was eradicated.

Alternately, this type of origin also crops up in otherwise harmless individuals whom society has pushed past the breaking point. A victim of constant bullying as a kid finally suffers one humiliation too many and climbs a bell tower with a sniper rifle. Or a mild-mannered, workaholic plumbing salesman finds himself suddenly laid off and goes on a rampage with a blowtorch and a pipe wrench. These broken individuals usually go out in a single, epic bloodbath; oc-

asionally, however, they embark on a cold, calculating campaign of murder, targeting specific individuals or types of individuals to redress a real or perceived offense. The pipe salesman may target the middle managers of his former company, or officious middle managers in general, sizing them up and killing them in sometimes elaborate and even poetic ways.

Slashers created in this fashion have been broken by the unrelenting pressures of their lives. Depending on their personality, they either explode in an orgy of violence or they turn inward and begin formulating a methodical campaign of justice or revenge. These individuals often have outwardly normal public lives, and in most cases will try to maintain them. In fact, many of these slashers don't see any inherent contradiction between their public lives and their private undertakings. They develop elaborate rationalizations to justify their actions, and sometimes employ specific methods of killing their victims. Usually, either the type of victim or the methodology is derived from the slasher's torturous logic, and can also be very specific. A deranged hunter might stalk and kill only vampire servants, or believe that his victims must all be killed by fire to ensure that their souls are cleansed. A man dying of lung cancer might dedicate himself to hunting down lawyers for tobacco companies, or believe that it is only just that his victims die from smoke inhalation. Such specificity also makes them predictable, and sooner or later someone will see a pattern and lay a trap for the killer.

VIOLENT TRAGEDY

Violence begets violence. Victims of violent crimes, or those who have seen loved ones brutalized or killed, are sometimes so tormented by their experiences that only the spilling of more blood will quiet their inner demons. Not unlike hunters, they take matters into their own hands, prowling the city streets and killing the scum that the law can't seem to touch. Often they lure their victims to their deaths by inviting the attentions of would-be criminals and performing summary executions under the pretense of self-defense. In other cases, these slashers hunt thugs and pimps like game hunters, staking out housing projects or skid rows and ambushing their prey with a high-powered bullet or a flashing knife.

These slashers commit murder to regain the sense of power and safety they believe they had before they were assaulted, or before they lost someone they loved. They might claim they are motivated by revenge — some might even believe it themselves, at least for a time. But an eye for an eye is not enough.

Some of these vigilantes tell themselves that the next victim will be the last, but the fear and the rage never go away. Every night they drive down the darkened streets and catch themselves studying the people they pass along the way, judging their worth.

Most of these killers don't see themselves as monsters; indeed they believe themselves to be heroes, standing up for the helpless and redressing the balance in favor of the innocent and the law-abiding. But all too often their victims are chosen because they play into the killer's prejudices; a Black man in a bad part of town has to be looking to rob someone, right? Before long the need for justice is subsumed by the need for blood, and innocent people die because they were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. In some cases, victims are tortured for information on other criminals, or simply to sate the killer's need to dominate his prey. For some of these slashers, a single bullet to the victim's head is sufficient, but others perform sensational, ritualistic murders that are meant to send a message to the community and instill fear among potential victims.

Like other slashers, these killers typically lead double lives, maintaining home and family in an uneasy balance with their need to hunt and kill human prey. It is only a matter of time before the line between the two begins to blur, however; the killer might leave clues behind that lead the police — or a dead victim's friends — right to his own front door.

MENTAL OR PHYSICAL ILLNESS

Some people commit murder because God told them to, or because they believed their neighbors were gargoyles wearing the skin of human beings. Mental illnesses such as schizophrenia create hallucinations or delusions that spur violent behavior in people. Sometimes these delusions are so persistent and systematic that they direct the course of a person's life for months or even years, leading them on a nightmare odyssey of murder. By the same token, a stroke or brain tumor might create sudden and dramatic personality changes, spawning urges and altering perceptions in ways that incite the affected person to commit terrible crimes. In the case of physical alterations to the person's brain, these horrific murders might seem like a perfectly rational act, while mentally ill individuals are unable to tell the difference between what is real and what is fantasy. The result is a killer without conscience, mercy or fear.

Mentally or physically ill slashers don't kill randomly; in some cases, they are not unlike hunters, seeing and experiencing horrors that no one else is aware



of. As these torments increase in frequency and menace, they become so desperate that they believe if they don't take action something truly terrible will happen. Maybe they believe the man living across the hall is a monster who plans on eating his adopted kids, or that the statue in the lobby of their office is telling them their boss plans to murder them. Sometimes these compulsions lead to elaborate, ritualistic murders that speak to the killer's rationalization of his delusions. If he believes he's killing demons, for example, his murders might be infused with religious iconography or ceremony, or he could develop ritual elements entirely his own. As their murderous crusade continues and they become conditioned to the act of murder, these killers become increasingly divorced from reality, until the nightly hunt for victims becomes an end unto itself.

Mentally or physically ill slashers are frequently loners, alienated from family and friends by their bizarre and dangerous behavior. This is both a strength and a weakness; their isolation makes them difficult to discover, and gives them greater freedom to devote their full time and energy to their efforts. By the same token, this isolation only accelerates the slasher's descent into madness, spurring more frequent and more dramatic murders that further spur the efforts of the authorities to track them down.

PHYSICAL MUTATION

Some people are just born monstrous. Severe and horrifying physical mutations, whether as the result of radiation, genetic tampering or inbreeding, create the potential for inhuman, almost bestial behavior. Normal people become objects of envy, agents of torment, or sometimes simply *prey*. Isolated, often victimized, these slashers are antisocial and amoral by nature, and many suffer some degree of mental illness or reduced intelligence. Sometimes they possess gifts of physical strength, endurance and speed that make them fearsome predators, and have no compunction sating their appetites with human victims. In other cases, they act out of a need for revenge against those who tormented them.

These slashers often kill their victims with their bare hands, or use simple weapons like axes, hammers or machetes. Sometimes these predators employ cruel traps to capture their victims, keeping them alive to torture or otherwise abuse them over a period of time. Having been treated like an animal since birth, these killers deal with other humans in bestial terms. They might choose to keep trophies of their victims, from masks made of sewn pieces of skin or boxes of teeth, or even partake in cannibalism.

Mutants are solitary creatures, unable to interact with human society in any meaningful way. In most cases they haunt remote or inhospitable locations, from decaying desert towns to ruined housing projects in the heart of a major city. In rare cases, multiple mutants form a pack or colony of sorts, hunting as a group and sharing in the kill. Though cunning and often more physically capable than an average human, they don't have the ability of other slashers to hide in plain sight; their survival depends on having remote or isolated hunting grounds, or stalking prey with stealth and guile. All it takes is one survivor of a mutant attack to make it back to the authorities — or round up a bunch of his heavily-armed friends — and these slashers must either try to escape or face a bloody reckoning.

SUPERNATURAL INFLUENCE

Urban myth and campfire legends abound with tales of grisly killers who rose from the grave to revenge themselves against those who wronged them — or to spill the blood of innocents to slake their unearthly hate. And, like many legends, in the World of Darkness these stories contain a grain of truth.

A rare few slashers are born of a pact between a mortal and the forces of the supernatural, whether as the result of a magic ritual or a gift of holy retribution shared by the divine. Sometimes these killers return from the grave itself, hunting down their victims with unnatural skill. Rarest of all are those killers who are empowered to act as an agent of a supernatural master, furthering their master's goals on Earth by eliminating rivals or offering up a feast of human souls.

These slashers are motivated by a wide variety of reasons to kill, from simple revenge to a basic need for survival or the lust for power. A Satan-worshipping ritual killer may receive his supernatural gifts in return for bloody offerings to his demonic lord, while a man suffering from terminal cancer may sustain his life by means of a ritual that requires him to kill innocent victims. Still others might be *forced* to commit murder as the result of an ill-chosen deal with the forces of the supernatural. A man who makes a foolish deal with a potent spirit to save the life of his child may find himself required to kill a different child each night in order to keep his own alive.

The majority of these slashers commit their killings in a ritualistic fashion, to sustain the supernatural gifts they possess. In other cases, these killers must complete a set number of killings within a specific amount of time, or pursue

a specific kind of victim to fulfill the terms of their pact. Slashers motivated by revenge have their own list of victims in mind; although they often won't hesitate to spill the blood of anyone foolish enough to cross their path.

Because of their unnatural origins, these slashers almost always act alone, though some legends persist of gangs of murderous killers who formed a pact en masse and continue to stalk their victims as a group. Whether operating singly or as a group, these killers face similar challenges, all of which involve fulfilling the demands of their supernatural pact. Some of these killers might even fight to escape the bonds of their contract, trying to find a way to cheat the Devil rather than take another life. Still others might only have a limited amount of time to achieve their goal, whether it's a year, a week or even a single night. The forces that bestow such terrible gifts always do so for a price.

As powerful as these killers are, their implacable drive and near-invulnerability often bring about their downfall. Their stubborn resolve makes them predictable, and once a hunter learns a slasher's identity he can likely infer the killer's next victim. But hate is eternal, and what died once may eventually rise again to spill the blood of an innocent.

THE KILLING FIELDS

Creating a compelling story about a slasher — or slashers — is a difficult task for any Storyteller, because unlike other stories set in the World of Darkness, a slasher's motivations are internal rather than external. A hunter is faced with a world full of monsters and dedicates himself to hunting them down, but a slasher is the monster — it's his inner demons that drive the story along. The Storyteller's role in a slasher chronicle is to create the setting — in effect, the hunting ground — and provide the situations that allow the slasher to fulfill his murderous ambitions, while slowly (or in some cases, swiftly) steering the stories towards the chronicle's ultimate end.

The nature of the setting and the cast of potential victims that populate a slasher chronicle depend largely on what kind of stories you and your players want to participate in. This section describes a range of potential play experiences that are appropriate to slasher characters, and it's possible to switch between them many times over the course of a single chronicle, depending on the choices the players make and how the characters change over time. Each play experience presents its own challenges, choices, and conflicts for players to explore.

STARING INTO THE ABYSS

One cannot fight monsters forever without becoming a monster oneself. Hunting the creatures that lurk in the shadows and prey upon humankind thrusts the hunters into a nightmare world of pervasive fear and violence, slowly but surely hardening them to the worst horrors a mortal mind can endure. After months or even years of such an ordeal, what wouldn't a person do to make the nightmare end once and for all?

This play experience is perhaps the easiest for a Storyteller to include a slasher into the midst of a hunter group, or create a chronicle out of whole cloth based on the idea of an entire team of hunters that have lost their way and become the very thing they've fought to destroy. These slashers believe they are heroes, still fighting the good fight to keep humankind safe from the monsters and committing unspeakable crimes in the process. Theirs is a kind of "scorched Earth" Vigil; for them, it's not enough to kill the werewolf that's stalking homeless victims throughout the city — they have to hunt down and kill the werewolf's family and friends to ensure that the monster's taint has been eradicated once and for all. Or their pursuit of the monsters has transformed the characters into callous killers with no regard for innocent life at all. They will open fire on a crowd of bystanders to take down a vampire on the prowl, or burn down a hospice facility to drive out a murderous spirit that had been stalking its residents. After witnessing so much death and destruction, the value of human life has been lost to these wayward souls, and the harder they fight, the more monstrous they become.

The primary conflict that characters face in this type of chronicle is how far they are willing to go in their pursuit of the enemy. The degeneration is typically a gradual one, beginning with a single, difficult choice that culminates in the shedding of innocent blood. Then, over time, the scale of slaughter increases as conscience fades and the hunters' morality transforms into a harsher, more extreme perspective on the Vigil. If the chronicle is built around an entire group of hunter/slashers, then inner conflict is bound to occur as different members cling to their own eroding consciences and perhaps try to drag themselves back from the moral abyss yawning before them. Ultimately, their grim campaign of slaughter will lead the killers to a final confrontation, either with the authorities, or another hunter group — or perhaps even with themselves. Will the characters die in an orgy of violence, shooting it out with those whom they'd once sworn to protect, or will they turn upon one another in a last-ditch effort to stem the tide of violence?

This chronicle might begin like any other tier-one Vigil, with ordinary people driven to take up arms against the creatures of the night. Slowly, however, as the characters are faced with difficult choices in their battle with the monsters, they lose more of their humanity. The challenge for you as the Storyteller is to create conflicts that can't be easily resolved with a single bullet or a stake through the heart. A vampire may be shielded behind layers of security and unnatural guards — but his obsession with a particular mortal could leave him vulnerable. As far as the hunters can tell, the mortal in question is completely ignorant of the vampire's interest — he or she is little more than an innocent bystander. But if that person were kidnapped, and placed in real peril, it might be enough to draw the vampire out and give the hunters the chance they need. How long can hunters cling to the higher moral ground when their enemy outnumbered and outguns them on a nightly basis? What you have to do to make this kind of chronicle powerful and compelling is to pull no punches about the brutal and horrific toll such tactics inflict — innocent people die, lives are shattered forever — without shying away from the fact that such tactics *work*. For the first time, the hunters potentially have the upper hand against their enemies, but at what cost? Do the hunters limit their killings to a narrow range of victims, like the human allies or family members close to monsters, or do they consider the deaths of a few dozen unrelated bystanders to be worth the cost of removing a deadly monster from the streets?

It's worth noting that this kind of play experience isn't necessarily limited to hunters. Any occupation or career that forces characters to make violent choices to survive can provide the foundation for a slasher chronicle. Police officers patrolling the worst neighborhoods in the city might finally decide to launch their own bloody campaign against the thugs and lowlifes they see each night, or soldiers returning home from a brutal and hopeless war might continue their bloody campaign against the "enemies" they see walking down the streets of their town. Or a gang of petty criminals in a ruthless mob organization might embark on a campaign to take over the streets no matter the cost, climbing over the bodies of rivals — and their families — in the process.

BLOOD FOR BLOOD

The thirst for revenge lies at the heart of many slasher tales, from the scrawny kid who grows up to stalk his tormentors to the murder victim who rises from the grave to bathe in his killers' blood. This

chronicle seems simple on the surface — the character or characters go after those who wronged them — but the pursuit of that bloody goal is rife with the potential for conflict. How far can one go in the pursuit of vengeance? When does the killing stop? The characters may begin their quest with what they believe to be noble and just intentions, but once the blood begins to flow it's difficult to keep from turning the knife on anyone who stands in their way.

This type of chronicle begins as the character or characters suffer a terrible loss at the hands of another: perhaps a loved one is killed in a brutal crime, or their lives are destroyed by the machination of a ruthless corporation or political machine. They may even be slain themselves, perhaps betrayed by someone they thought of as a friend or simply innocent victims caught in the wrong place at the wrong time. The details of this prelude are crucial, and deserve careful thought, because they are the foundation upon which the entire chronicle will be based. As the storyteller, you must tailor the crime to suit the background of each character to create a motivation that resonates and drives the slasher to commit his crimes. This play experience benefits a great deal from close player-Storyteller interaction when creating each character and fleshing out their origins, and then creating a situation that directly attacks the things the characters hold dear. The specific crime can even be different for each character, so long as they are linked by a common perpetrator. A gang leader might embark on a campaign to destroy anyone who tries to stop his control of the inner city, murdering the sister of a local cop, blackmailing the city District Attorney and ruining the credibility of a hard-nosed journalist that has been covering the gang leader's activities. All three characters have their lives ruined by a common foe, bringing them together in an uneasy alliance as they seek vengeance.

The primary conflict lies in the nature of revenge itself. The more terrible the crime, the more violent and brutal the vengeance, but what begins as a simple campaign to redress a terrible wrong frequently spirals out of control. The focus of the characters' revenge won't sit idly by while they are being attacked; they will strike back if they can, motivated by their own need for vengeance, creating an ever-increasing cycle of bloodshed as each succeeding crime demands a more vicious response. Are innocent victims fair game if the slasher believes their deaths will even the score against their enemy? What about a police officer who tries to stop the slasher from taking his revenge? Is killing him justified in pursuit of the slasher's higher goal? How far can the slasher go before the reasons for

his quest are lost beneath a growing pile of corpses?

The challenge in this type of chronicle lies in presenting situations that muddy the characters' initially straightforward pursuit of revenge. Once the blood starts to flow, can the slashers limit their killings to just those whom they believe deserve to die? If a gang member murdered the slasher's fiancée, isn't it fitting to find the guy's girlfriend and cut out her heart, even if she hates what her boyfriend has become and is trying to get him out of the gang life? At what point does the pursuit of revenge make the slasher every bit as bad — or worse — as the person or persons who wronged him? These sorts of questions lend themselves to a short, intense type of chronicle, covering only a few days — or perhaps only a single night — of game time before leading to its grim conclusion.

A POUND OF FLESH

Next to revenge, the pursuit of bloody-minded justice is one of the most seductive and dangerous crusades a character can undertake. The world is full of criminals who seem to exist beyond the reach of the law, committing unspeakable acts and poisoning their communities without fear of retribution. Someone has to do something before it's too late — and if that means cutting throats and burning down homes, then so be it. The bastards get what they deserve.

This type of chronicle casts the slasher as a grim vigilante, turning his murderous skills against those whom he believes richly deserve to die. He might focus his efforts on rapists, child molesters or even other serial killers, believing that his crimes can be excused in the service of a greater good. But separating the guilty from the innocent is not as simple as it seems on the surface, and once the character decides to take the law into his own hands he risks falling prey to his own prejudices and striking out at those whom he only imagines to be guilty. Soon he is nothing more than an arbitrary executioner, killing anyone who crosses him and calling it justice after the fact.

This play experience lends itself well to a **Hunter** chronicle, illustrating the vigilante aspect of their crusade against the darkness. Hunters may claim that monsters exist beyond mortal laws, and to an extent they are right, but that doesn't change the nature of the crimes they must often commit to protect humanity from a greater evil. Likewise, any normal person victimized and frustrated by the criminals that infest his community could be driven to take matters into his own hands — and the cruel irony is that, as his killings have a positive impact on his neighborhood, the slasher is only encouraged to continue killing more victims.

But who is fit to stand in judgment over his neighbors? What role does mercy play in the slasher's calculations? These are the primary conflicts that this sort of chronicle presents. The choices become even more muddled if more than one slasher is involved, and disputes arise over the degree of a victim's guilt and the need for his or her death. Which crimes are deemed worthy of death, and who gets to make that decision? Should criminals have a chance to change their ways, or is there no forgiveness for their crimes — and how can that be turned around and applied to the slashers themselves?

This type of chronicle can begin with the characters suffering at the hands of a criminal — whether it's something as straightforward as a brutal mugging or the more indirect victimization of a white-collar crime like embezzlement or bribery, or they might simply be immersed in an environment where crime and corruption pervades every aspect of daily life. The choices presented to the characters should be stark — the only way justice will be done is if they take matters into their own hands and make the guilty suffer. And that first victim leads the characters to a host of tantalizing possibilities. Why stop with just one petty thug or smirking executive? What kind of difference might they make if they went after every one of the thieves and killers that plagued their communities?

Of course, the implication is that sooner or later the slashers will run out of criminals, and then they can go back to their normal lives, but that never quite happens. The slashers kill and kill and kill, but it's never enough. And the more daunting their task becomes, the more the characters are driven to up the ante and kill even more. Soon they have become a force of terror and violence every bit as dangerous as the thugs they swore to stop, and the slashers find themselves faced with another band of vigilantes determined to make them pay for their crimes.

THE COMPANY MAN

Some slashers are born killers, while others are made that way — whether by society or by an institution that has need of expert, cold-hearted killers. This type of chronicle presents a different perspective on the notion of professional killers as essentially slashers-for-hire; these are men and women who have been trained to kill quickly, efficiently, and without remorse, regardless of who their target might be. The problem, of course, arises when these slashers lose their last shreds of humanity and begin taking the lives of anyone and everyone who crosses them — including the very people who created them in the first place.

This play experience is a kind of hybrid that presents external and internal conflicts for a slasher character to deal with. As professional killers, the characters don't get to choose their victims; sometimes the targets may seem entirely deserving of death, while other times they may be completely innocent, like the young daughter of a judge to whom their superiors want to send a message. Each death eats away at the characters' moral centers and conditions them to cold-hearted, impersonal violence, until sooner or later they become too dangerous and unpredictable for even their employers to trust. The hunter then becomes the hunted, and the slashers must turn their skills against the men and women they once knew as friends.

The primary conflict of this type of play experience is the struggle to maintain one's humanity in the service of a grim and merciless cause. The characters may begin their careers believing that what they are doing is just, whether they are specialists working for a government organization like the CIA or a hunter compact like *The Long Night*, or even as a mob hitman who sees himself as a soldier fighting the enemies of his gang. But as time passes, the characters are faced with targets that violate their principles and careful rationalizations. What happens then? The organization they work for is no stranger to violence, and won't hesitate to punish disobedience by going after the characters' loved ones. How long can they continue to ignore their own conscience and commit terrible murders before they can take no more? Eventually, these killers arrive at a grim crossroads: they must either rebel against their masters to maintain what little humanity they have left, or else they surrender themselves completely to their job and become cold-hearted killing machines the organization fears to trust. The tension between the characters and their superiors builds to a climactic confrontation that will destroy one or both of them before it's over.

This sort of play experience plays well with hunter characters, and can easily cross the lines between other play experiences as well. Motifs of revenge, justice, and monstrosity play into this kind of chronicle very well, and can play out over the course of numerous stories. It's possible to start with a **Hunter** chronicle, cross over into a slasher chronicle and then come full circle again as the characters realize what they have become and dedicate themselves to bringing down the organization that recruited them.

UPON A PALE HORSE

The path to power is often paved with the bones of the innocent, especially where the forces of the su-

pernatural are concerned. This type of slasher chronicle focuses on a kind of Faustian bargain between the slashers and an otherworldly force that grants them awesome power in return for human sacrifices. The characters may be ritual magicians who have entered into a pact with a demon or other malevolent spirit, or they may be young clergymen who have sworn to bring Old Testament judgment upon the wicked. They may believe they are acting in the service of a greater good, but the fact remains that for them to continue their crusade, someone has to die — and they may or may not have a say in who those victims turn out to be.

The primary conflict in this play experience lies in the temptations of power and its ability to corrupt even the noblest of intentions. What acts can be justified in the pursuit of ostensibly noble ends — or what degree of power can excuse the most terrible crimes? Conversely, the character may know exactly what he's getting himself into, pledging himself to a malevolent entity and eagerly seeking out sacrificial victims to please his infernal lord. In such a chronicle, the conflict becomes one borne of greed and the degree to which the lust for power tempts even the strongest souls to destruction. Because no matter how many victims the slasher offers to his master, it is never enough. The more souls it receives, the greater and more refined its appetites become — and the more tempting gifts it offers in return. How far is the character willing to tread along the precipice in search of more power?

This type of play experience works well with a **Hunter** chronicle, and needn't necessarily draw upon a supernatural origin for the hunter/slasher's power. An operative of Task Force: VALKYRIE or the Cheiron Group, for example, may be fitted with surgical implants or other physical augmentations that provide superhuman ability, but insinuate homicidal urges into the bearer's subconscious. These urges might even manifest themselves as vivid hallucinations, giving the character the impression he is being contacted by an otherworldly spirit, but in fact is suffering from a severe form of psychosis.

In the end, the spirit and its gifts drive the slasher to destruction, as his increasingly frequent and shocking murders draws the attention of hunters, vigilantes or local authorities. But even then, the pact made between human and spirit may even transcend death itself, spawning a cycle of death and rebirth that may continue for decades to come.

THE SLAUGHTERHOUSE

Most slasher stories focus on the struggle between the waning humanity of a slasher and the urge to kill that drives him on. He takes the lives of the innocent and the not-so-innocent in search of revenge, or justice, or power.



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Sometimes, however, your players might not care about conflicting urges and homicidal angst. They may just want to create a slasher and go on a rampage through a summer camp just for the hell of it. This type of play experience boils down the slasher story to its most basic elements: a killer on the hunt in a closed environment with a collection of mostly helpless, mostly clueless victims. It's not the sort of experience that lends itself to a long and drawn-out chronicle, but can work as a quick, intense story that condenses the slasher's arc into a cinematic three-act structure. As the Storyteller, you set the stage and narrate the slasher's prelude, introduce the victims a bit at a time as the slasher begins to stalk his prey, and then as the killings begin, you guide the story to a suitably violent and dramatic conclusion. This kind of play experience is more of a cat-and-mouse game between the slasher and his victims; as the deaths mount the survivors become more aware and more organized against the danger in their midst, until they are finally able to confront the slasher and bring about his defeat.

DRAWN TO THE FLAME

No matter how cunning or deadly a slasher is, his murderous career cannot last forever. Once the killings begin the clock starts ticking, and the odds slowly but steadily mount against him as the authorities and ordinary citizens start to take notice of the strange disappearances or gruesome murders being committed in their midst. Sooner or later the killer stands revealed — indeed, one could argue that this is the entire point of the slasher's story. His elaborate and terrible crimes must be made known, or else they become meaningless. Though his reign of terror is eventually brought to an end, his murders exist as a testament to his depraved vision, leaving an indelible mark on society for generations to come.

From the very beginning of a slasher chronicle, you should have some idea of how it will eventually end. The slasher might ultimately meet his death in a fiery confrontation with the police or local hunters, or he might complete his murderous quest for revenge and return to the grave from whence he came. The following are some possible ways for a slasher chronicle to come to a conclusion. Although the ending for a chronicle shouldn't necessarily be set in stone, it's good to have a number of possibilities in mind as the chronicle progresses and the characters are transformed by the choices they make along the way.

TEMPTING FATE

Most serial killers enjoy the game of cat-and-mouse with the police and their victims. They enjoy the feel-

ing of power they get as they demonstrate their ability to stalk and kill their prey at will. The thrill of getting away with murder time and time again tempts slashers to create increasingly elaborate and dramatic crimes. They may leave their victims posed with clues that point to the slasher's next victim, or provide cryptic hints about their true identity. They may send manifestos to the local papers, or send messages directly to the detectives assigned to work the case. Sooner or later, someone comes along who is smart enough or lucky enough to solve the riddle, culminating in a dramatic and often fatal confrontation.

This is one of the most likely outcomes for a slasher chronicle, and focuses on the battle of wits between the killer and his adversaries. The character doesn't have to deliberately taunt the authorities; as the disappearances or the killings mount, the police or other investigators will waste no time trying to hunt the slasher down. Each murder increases the stakes and adds to the tension as more resources are devoted to the hunt. Over time, the pursuers become prominent characters in the chronicle, acting as the slasher's nemeses. How long can the killer continue to push his luck and outwit his pursuers? He might turn the tables on the forces hunting him from time to time, but for every pursuer who dies, the rest only grow more capable and more determined, until one finally manages to bring the killer down.

TORCHES AND PITCHFORKS

Sometimes a slasher picks an isolated locale as his hunting ground: a summer camp, a mental hospital or an island resort — someplace so far away from law enforcement that help won't arrive in time to save his intended victims. That leaves the victims themselves to somehow find a way to turn the tables on their tormentor and stop him before their luck runs out. The process is ruthlessly Darwinian — the stupid and the careless typically die first, leaving the smarter (or luckier) victims to try and figure out what is happening and take steps to defend themselves. As the number of victims dwindle the challenge for the slasher increases, as his quarry becomes increasingly paranoid and determined to survive. By the time there are only a handful of survivors left, they have likely banded together and armed themselves as best they can, turning the hunt into a final confrontation that ultimately leads to the slasher's demise.

Alternately, a slasher may choose to prey upon a specific locale or a set of victims — a ghetto neighborhood in a crime-ridden city, a specific group of

monsters or a particular human gang — until ultimately the survivors are forced to band together and hunt the killer down while they still can. Former hunters turned slashers might find themselves stalked by their one-time comrades, or the terrorized populace may form a vigilante mob and tear the neighborhood apart in search of the killers in their midst. Sometimes the slasher finds himself betrayed to the mob by a friend or loved one who stumbles onto the character's grisly chamber of horrors, bringing a swift and dramatic end to the slasher's reign of terror.

A SHORT SEASON ON EARTH

Under certain circumstances, a slasher's killing spree already has a preprogrammed end: the All Hallows Strangler only strikes on the day after Halloween, for example, or the vengeful revenant must return to the grave once again after the five men who killed him have paid for their crimes. This kind of ending works best for supernatural killers, and is a good way to focus the action of a short, intense slasher tale. Alternately, the slasher may be suffering from a terminal illness, and he must complete as much of his grand work as he can before the Reaper comes to claim him. This adds an interesting degree of tension to a slasher chronicle, because the character's demise could happen at literally any time, regardless of how much he has or hasn't accomplished. The uncertainty can drive the action of the chronicle and influence a character's choices in dramatic and interesting ways. It can also create a framework for a cyclical sort of slasher chronicle; the All Hallows Strangler disappears as dawn breaks, only to return again the following year as a new person is possessed by the killer's spirit.

A KIND OF REDEMPTION

Is it possible for a slasher to realize the enormity of his crimes and seek a form of redemption or atonement before he dies? Possibly his actions result in the death of a loved one, or a loved one's discovery of his crimes forces the slasher to see himself for what he truly is. Perhaps this terrible realization leads the slasher to take his own life, or possibly he turns upon his murderous compatriots and destroys them in an apocalyptic showdown. Or possibly he seeks a more lasting form of atonement, pitting his deadly skills against other slashers for as long as he can before one of them finally ends his life. This book focuses partially on how

AFTERMATH

The aftermath of a slasher story is essentially a denouement - what happens to the survivors? Their families and friends? The kids on the college campus must rebuild their lives or the nurses at the old mental hospital must find a way to cope with their experiences.

But it also begs the question of whether or not the slasher's legacy will somehow live on. Does one of the surviving victims go mad, plagued by visions of the events from the slasher's reign of terror, herself now driven mad enough to kill? Do copycat killers rise from the ashes?

Or does the slasher's own burned and charred hand thrust up out of the grave-earth again, fingers flexing and feeling around for the nicked and rusty cleaver it must've dropped around here somewhere...

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come slashers themselves — perhaps the same can occur in reverse, as a slasher turns his murderous urges to pursuing a Vigil of his own against monsters far more terrible than himself?

Another option might be for the slasher to simply put away his knives and try to return to the life he once led, determined to never surrender to the whisper of his inner demons ever again. Can he master the urges that once drove him to spill innocent blood, or will he become a ticking bomb, ready to explode once more into a murderous frenzy?

PASSING THE KNIFE

Most slashers know on some level that they can't go on killing forever. It's only a matter of time before their luck runs out and they find themselves surrounded by police. And so they begin searching for someone who can take up the mantle once they've gone — a worthy successor to their bloodstained legacy. It might be a relative, or a loved one, or even a total stranger; for whatever reason, the slasher sees in them the potential to follow in the killer's footsteps, whether the would-be successor realizes it or not. In most cases, the slasher manipulates his chosen

“heir”, convincing him that he is capable of murder. Sometimes that requires tormenting the would-be successor until he takes the life of the slasher himself, providing the killer with a necessary end and passing the murderous curse onto the next generation. A supernaturally-created slasher might search for a new recipient for his paranormal gifts, exposing him gradually to unnatural phenomena to make him more receptive to the slasher’s patron. Or on a more mundane level, the killer may take an apprentice of sorts, choosing a likely subject to hunt alongside him until such time as the slasher judges him ready — and then challenging him to a lethal test of his abilities, where the winner lives to kill another day.

TWISTED

by Matt McFarland

Any role-playing game system that purports to represent morality is asking for trouble. But in certain genres, it’s necessary. The *World of Darkness* incorporates themes of forbidden occult truths and taking actions that might lead to power or knowledge, but might just as easily lead to damnation. At the same time, the *World of Darkness* also includes the notion that as a character delves deeper into the supernatural, he loses his connection with the “normal” world. All of these themes and assumptions go into the presentation of Morality.

Morality is, perhaps, ill-named. Yes, one can lose Morality by performing acts that are immoral, but at the highest levels, one can also lose Morality by thinking “selfish thoughts.” And that begs the question — if selfish thoughts, a victimless crime if ever there was one, are enough to lower the Morality score, then surely perspective informs Morality just a bit? And if *that’s* true, then is Morality really objective? If not, shouldn’t every character have his or her own hierarchy of sins?

The Devil’s in the details, as usual. Morality changes forms when a human being becomes a supernatural creature. Vampires have to be concerned about their Humanity, but it’s something they have to retain, rather than *attain*, which is what the ever-hopeful Prometheans try to do. Werewolves don’t give a collective fig about humanity, but they must stay in Harmony with their own natures, lest they lose the ability to reason and become nothing more than especially violent spirits. And so on. Hunters are human, no matter how many weird weapons they slap on or supernatural organs they have implanted, and so they retain basic Morality. But as the **Hunter: The Vigil** book indicates, Morality *can* change. The Code means that what is a sin for most people might

stop being a sin for hunters, and what is a quaint or slightly disturbing religious precept for most people might be a real moral concern.

This is, perhaps, worrisome for Storytellers. The Morality system is in place for thematic reasons, but let’s be realistic: it’s also in place so that internal and immediate consequences exist for people acting like psychopaths in a chronicle. Yes, your character *can* gun down a room full of battered women, but he’ll almost assuredly lose Morality and probably gain a derangement or two out of it. That doesn’t render him unplayable, just a little less functional. Players occasionally voice complaints about this system, saying that the Morality system doesn’t “allow” them to play their characters in the way they’d like, but that’s not really true, is it? You can play a character however you want, just know that everything gets a reaction, even if the reaction is internal. And it’s not like you want to play a serial killer, right?

Except... here we are in a book that tells you how to play serial killers.

I’m not going to tell you that playing slashers is right or wrong, and I’m not giving you advice on doing it (that’s a different essay, above). All I’m going to consider here is Morality, what it means to hunters, what it means to slashers, and whether every slasher must be a Morality 0 freak.

MORALITY 0

Considering a slasher to be a Morality 0 character works just fine, for the most part. From the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 92: “If a character descends so far that her Morality drops to zero, she can no longer be played in any meaningful way. She becomes a true monster, inflicting pain and suffering on everyone around her without the slightest hint of remorse and no hope of redemption. At that point control of the character passes to the Storyteller.”

Sounds like a slasher, doesn’t it? A hunter that loses all Morality can be converted directly over to the slasher template, adding an Undertaking and the accompanying traits, with no real problem. Whether that means the character is unsuitable for play is up to the troupe — again, that’s a different essay.

Note that losing Morality doesn’t carry any inherent dangers or penalties beyond the chance for derangements, at least for mortals (vampires, werewolves, changelings and other creatures *do* suffer certain penalties as Morality falls). That means it’s entirely possible for a careful and lucky person — hunters included — to drop all the way to Morality 0 without anyone noticing they’re going crazy. After all, the roll

to avoid a derangement is separate from the one to lose Morality, and until a character drops below Morality 4, the odds are still on the player's side to avoid a derangement.

A few powers and effects exist that play off of a character's Morality rating (the Exorcism Tactic, for instance, requires a certain level of Morality), but about the only time Morality is ever used as a dice pool is following a failed degeneration roll, which of course doesn't apply if one's Morality rating is zero.

THE SLIDE DOWN TO NOTHING

Of course, since no unavoidable mechanical effects are associated with the slope to Morality 0, it's incumbent upon the player to portray this descent. Some suggestions:

- Change your character's mannerisms. Stare a little too long at your conversational partner, tap your teeth, crack your knuckles — the intent here isn't to be creepy, necessarily, but just to show that things are *changing*. If you're playing online or just don't want to act such things out, describe them. Don't stress the fact that they haven't happened before, just make the statement and see if other folks catch on (you might want to inform your Storyteller about what you're doing, though).
- Behave dispassionately about subjects that would normally get people's blood up. Some people talk a good game about how "people should die," or spout other such misanthropic sentiments, but mostly folks like that are crying out for attention. The people who *really* don't care one way or another about others don't say much, and they don't get upset or emotional in situations where other folks come to pieces. Other people might think your character is just hardened or well-composed when a fellow hunter gets a leg bitten off and your character just robotically performs his role in the Tactic. The truth is, your character is losing the ability to feel what normal people feel, and that includes fear.
- Have some moments of clarity. These are especially appropriate after losing a dot of Morality but not getting a derangement. Your character suddenly becomes aware that things that once would have made him uncomfortable or even outraged just don't matter, and that revelation might make him feel sad, angry, guilty or even liberated. This kind



of epiphany, however, makes for a superb Learning Curve experience point (see p. 217 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*).

THE CODE

Another way to represent slashers within a **Hunter** game is by considering them to be hunters who have replaced some major “sins” on the Morality scale. Specifically, the “mass murder” sin no longer seems to apply, and “premeditated violence” certainly isn’t any cause for alarm for such characters.

The Appendix to **Hunter** explains the game systems for the Code, as well as concepts like Trigger Points and Tells. We do need to put these terms in a slasher perspective, however.

SWITCHING SINS

Hunters have the capacity to switch out the sins on the Morality scale following dramatic challenges to the moral precepts behind those sins (that is, Trigger Points). The reason that hunters have the opportunity to do this is because of their commitment to — or obsession with — the Vigil. What, then, could make a hunter’s Code change so drastically as to propel a person dedicated to protecting humanity from supernatural beings to slaughtering those he once safeguarded?

The fundamental assumption there, of course, is that the hunter was ever interested in protecting anyone. Some policemen uphold the law, and some are just bullies with guns and sticks. Some soldiers fight for the values of their country and some just want to shoot people. (Remove violence from the equation and the principle still holds up: some teachers truly want to enrich their students’ lives, and some just want summers off.)

Some hunters channel murderous impulses into disposing of supernatural beings. These are the sorts of hunters that don’t care about collateral damage, but are very conscientious of witnesses. These hunters feel a thrill when killing, no matter who or what the victim, and over time, their Morality shifts. It’s not impossible, in fact, for the same sin to change twice.

Example: A hunter of the *Aegis Kai Doru* specializes in killing mages from a distance, normally with a sniper rifle, and cleaning up the bodies quickly so as not to draw too much attention. This is most certainly “planned crime,” a sin at Morality 3 (arguably, it could be “casual crime,” but for the moment we’ll consider it a level 3 sin). After a suitable Trigger Point, he removes “planned murder” from the hierarchy of sins and replaces it with “badly executed murder.” He risks Morality, not from killing, but from killing in a sloppy and haphazard

fashion. As he progresses as a killer, he loses his inhibitions about killing non-mages. He starts targeting associates of mages, then people who study magic, and finally begins killing people with no supernatural connection at all. He works up elaborate reasons for why these people should die, however, and his murders are always swift, clean and virtually unnoticed. He has become a slasher (probably of the *Avenger* or even *Genius Undertaking*), and his “badly executed murder” sin changes to “killing randomly.”

Changes to the Code that lead to a hunter becoming a slasher can occur at any point on the Morality scale, but are usually limited to the one-to-four dot range. This is mostly because any hunter in danger of becoming a slasher isn’t likely to stay above four dots for very long, anyway. But the other reason is that Morality at higher levels is too complex for slashers, or at least too complex to be meaningful. Consider: at Morality 9, a person risks Morality loss for “minor selfish acts.” The example given on p. 91 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook* is “withholding charity.” But think about what kind of relationship with the world that person must have in order to risk his view of it and his ability to deal with it diminishing, even a tiny bit, if he withholds something that he *could* give away but has every right to keep. This mindset requires that the person be aware of the rest of the world and the people in it to a great degree, and it might require that the character give to charity for the right reasons. That is, if the character donates money but does so in order to see his name at the top of the benefactor list, why is the character really donating the money? Is this act of charity, then, a selfish act? (A more consequentialist view, in which more importance is placed on the fact that the money is being donated at all rather than the subtle reasons behind it, is just as valid.)

But the slasher is incapable of this kind of reasoning. Rather, he might be able to appreciate it if it’s brought to his attention, but slashers don’t look out at the world and see other beings like themselves. They see creatures, animals, objects, automatons or pawns. As such, the question of why they are deliberately improving the lives of other people and what reflection that act has on them is leaps and bounds beyond their level of interaction with their environment. Their level is more appropriately concerned with differences between murder and manslaughter, self-defense and planned crime, and torture for fun versus torture to extract life-saving information. Put another way, the Code of a slasher is best represented by the following two questions: Whom can I kill? Under what circumstances can I kill?

What advantage does a slasher with a few points of Morality (because of the Code) have over a Morality 0 slasher? In game terms, not much. It could even be argued that since a hunter with a Morality rating could conceivably gain derangements as part of degeneration, whereas a Morality 0 hunter does not, a Morality 0 hunter has a mechanical advantage over a Code-based slasher. Of course, having a Code means that some of the sins on the Morality scale no longer *apply* to slashers, meaning that their Morality can remain fixed rather than continuing to fall. Likewise, gaining Tells over derangements is advantageous because Tells only apply to the hunt. The Code can therefore keep a slasher capable of social functionality, provided he doesn't devolve further (and of course, most slashers do). Obviously, some Undertakings are better suited to this than others. Brutes are much less likely to have Morality ratings than, say, Avengers, who kill *because* of ideology. A Freak that still genuinely wants to be part of the world, even if it makes him horribly bitter to try, probably has a dot or two of Morality remaining. If you're playing a slasher, Morality can therefore be the gauge by which you can judge your character's last shreds of humanity — still assuredly *shreds*, of course, but enough to form a few bonds of attachment. It might be interesting, after all, to play the Charmer who spends a few minutes pleasantly chatting with a little girl, and gives her a few dollars for ice cream... just before he slips a knife between her father's ribs for being enslaved to a vampire. Was the conversation just for show? Just to satisfy his own perversion? To get her out of the way? Or does he just miss his niece, the one that died under a vampire's fangs some years back?

If you would like a more concrete benefit for slashers who keep a Code rather than slipping to Morality 0, consider one of the following. All of these are optional, of course, and it's probably better to pick one than use them all, but obviously you should do what works for your chronicle.

- Virtue and Vice invert. The slasher with a Code can regain all Willpower by acting within his Vice (once per session), and regain one point of Willpower for acting within his Virtue once per scene.
- Hunters with no Morality are unable to risk Willpower. They might be obsessed, but their ob-

THE MORAL SLASHER

A concept that bears discussion is that of the slasher that only targets people deserving of his attentions. The *Avenger Undertaking* lends itself nicely to this sort of character: the victim of a violent crime who stalks similar criminals; the man who sees his family killed and goes on a murder spree; and so on. But even a Brute, normally unconcerned by the precise identities of his victims, can be such a slasher by proper application of the Code. "Only kill those who deserve it" makes a good alternate sin to "premeditated murder," for instance. Even a slasher can have ethics.

This puts the slasher in the position of having to compromise his ethics when it would mean incarceration or death to do otherwise, of course. This is very much in-theme for *Hunter and the World of Darkness Rulebook* in general, however, and allows even the cold-blooded killers of *Slasher* to explore a moral quandary or two.

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been muddled by their obsession with killing to the point that they can't focus to the same degree anymore.

- Whenever a slasher uses a Talent that involves non-violent interaction with a normal person (not a supernatural being), the player can spend a Willpower point and add the slasher's Morality to the roll. If the slasher's Morality has fallen below 3, the player can choose to spend a Willpower point for the normal +3 bonus *or* add the Morality rating at no cost, but not both.

TRIGGER POINTS

The path to a change in Morality is marked by Trigger Points, events that shift a hunter's perspective and comfort zones until what was once abhorrent is now unimportant. In order for a hunter to become a slasher, these Trigger Points must change the hunter's view of murder in all its forms, from accidental manslaughter right down to serial killing. While every hunter's descent into bloody madness is unique, below are some general guidelines for what kinds of Trigger Points might be appropriate.

• **Accidental Killing:** Obviously, it's possible for an accidental death to be collateral damage. The hunter, in his attempts to bring low a supernatural creature, detonates a bomb too soon or releases a spray of bullets into a room containing inhabitants other than the target. It's also possible, though, that the *target* of the hunt is the victim of an accidental death. A hunter working for Network 0 or Null Mysteries in particular might have only been trying to study a vampire while driving it into the sun, or take a few photos of a mage in action, distracting her at a critical moment. The take-home message for slashers in accidental killing is how easy it is to kill, how fragile people (or even supernatural beings) are, and the precision necessary to make sure not just that someone dies, but that someone *specific* dies.

Another possibility with resonance for burgeoning slashers is the accidental death of a fellow hunter. This might happen in the heat of battle, or it might be the result of improper planning. A hunter swings his ax, aiming for the monster's fingers as part of the Cripple Claws Tactic, and instead bashes in his brother's head. The hunter pulls the trigger on his newly acquired automatic rifle but is unprepared for the kick, and two members of his cell die along with the target. The bomb was only supposed to blow the door off the hinges, but the charge was too strong and the shaping was improperly set, and the hunter placing the bomb disappears into a thick red and black spray. Any of these accidents serve to show the slasher that no one is exempt from the ravages of bad luck or stupidity.

Accidental killing is a Morality 4 sin. A Trigger Point such as the ones described above might shift "accidental murder" to one of the following: Field test all weapons before use. Never engage in Tactics where others are at risk. Never use weapons that inflict lethal damage where non-supernatural targets are involved. Incompetence must be expiated in blood.

• **Impassioned Killing:** The hunter might not have *meant* for anyone to die, but he was certainly pointing the gun at the target when he pulled the trigger. Impassioned killing is uncomfortably easy for hunter cells. They are usually scared, angry and well-armed. Many hunters are also sleep-deprived, paranoid and dosing on stimulants, which makes them jumpy. Add these factors together, and it's easy to see how

what started off as a simple reconnaissance mission turned into a bloodbath.

Impassioned killing, though, has a sense of justification about it. It happens when the hunter's emotions get the better of him, and that fear, anger or righteousness leads to a split second's worth of action. Impassioned killing is most commonly practiced against monsters that are already incapacitated, and heavily armed and mandated organizations like Task Force: VALKRYIE and the Long Night are probably guilty of it most often.

A Trigger Point might come about with an impassioned killing when the hunter kills for the first time. A hunter taking up the Vigil for ideology is actually *less* likely to kill in passion (he might be doing God's good work, but blasphemy doesn't hold a candle to revenge as a motivator), but if the hunter took up arms to avenge or, better yet, protect his family, having a monster dead to rights is probably too great a temptation. Yes, this *particular* vampire might never have killed anyone, but he will. The werewolf currently bound in the net is trying to talk his way free, but once he does, it'll be all fangs and fury again. And why does witch's eye keep twitching?

The disconnection between slasher and normal person grows with Trigger Points for impassioned killing. They become capable of arousing passion over offenses that barely register to their (comparatively) sane comrades, and they remain dispassionate over issues that drive their fellows wild with rage. After all, the monster that attacks and eviscerates another hunter is just defending his home. No reason to get angry over that. But the monster that makes his home on a rooftop, looking down on all the decent people? How dare he sit up there in judgment of the *real* people!

Likewise, a slasher in the making is likely to form Trigger Points around the impassioned murder of still-human servants, contacts or even employees of supernatural beings. A vampire's blood-slave is, for all intents and purposes, a monster himself, but the younger sister of a werewolf; an occult researcher writing a book on golems; even an overly ambitious neo-pagan trying to summon up elemental spirits? These people might be useful sources of information, but to a slasher, they are consorting with the enemy.

Impassioned murder is a Morality 4 sin. A Trigger Point for a slasher might result in a shift from

“impassioned killing” to one of the following: thou shall not suffer a witch to live; service to the enemy is enemy action; and ignorance is no excuse. Emotion is a tool of the enemy, and its expression is weakness. Emotion is strength, and repressing is foolish.

- **Premeditated Killing:** The bread and butter of the slasher, premeditated murder is something that every cell knows it might need to confront at some point. After all, what is the point of the Vigil if not to protect humanity? And if protecting humanity is the goal, eventually a monster needs to die, because incarceration isn’t always an option. Even the organizations with supposedly mercenary goals (such as the Cheiron Group) must confront the fact that a creature — a creature that looks completely human — might have to die so that they can achieve those goals.

Premeditated murder is much easier in the abstract planning phase; ask anyone who’s ever played a murder-simulator video game or enjoyed a film like *Munich*. Until it’s time to pull the trigger, it’s just a puzzle to be solved, a logistical problem to be unwound, and a lot of people *like* that kind of thing. But when the deed is done, the bloodstains are fresh on the hunters’ hands and the cell is regrouping and licking its collective wounds, the hunter reflects back on the planning phase and thinks, “I enjoyed parts of that experience — what does that make me?” A hunter who is asking that question, to put this in the context of Morality, probably *didn’t* lose a dot of Morality during the fight. He recognizes that enjoying part of the process is disturbing, but that he still participated in a murder. The truth of that is uncomfortable, but in that discomfort is an affirmation of the hunter’s humanity.

The slasher or slasher-to-be, however, reflects only on the concept-execution and how interesting it was, and looks forward to *perfecting* the process later. Or, if the slasher wasn’t really in on the planning stages but is just the muscle used to swing the ax, then he has no way to differentiate between the logistics and physical act. For him, the “job well done” *was* the murder, and the reinforcement he receives comes from that act. It’s not hard to see how it could become addictive, especially since the rest of his cell sees it as a good thing.

A Trigger Point might occur for premeditated killing if the character is praised often and sin-

cerely for doing it. Likewise, a murder that was poorly planned and performed might act as a Trigger Point, particularly if the slasher suggested modifications that were, perhaps, too intense for the other members of the cell to consider. A Tactic such as Dentistry, Staking or Controlled Immolation might have gruesome enough results to act as a Trigger Point by itself. Hunting down a human being who needs to be silenced might also be a good Trigger Point for a slasher.

A slasher might exchange “premeditated murder” (a Morality 3 sin) for one of the following sins: never kill without approval from a higher authority; never kill with bare hands; never kill someone without at least a day of preparing (either planning or spiritual preparation, or both).

TELLS

Hunter: The Vigil lists a few sample Tells for use with the Code system of Morality. Of those, the Sadism and Overkill Tells are probably the most appropriate for slashers in general, though none of the ones listed are inappropriate. Below are a few more Tells that are especially suitable for slasher characters:

- **Weapon Fetish:** The character forms a relationship with his favorite weapon that just isn’t healthy. The slasher refuses to kill with any weapon other than his favorite. At higher levels of Morality (4-5), the character just obsesses over a certain type of weapon — knives, pistols, baseball bats, etc. As Morality drops (2-3), the tastes become more specific. Only a machete, a revolver, or a wooden bat will do. Finally, at Morality 1 or 0, the character has to use his own personal weapon. “Bare hands” is always a viable choice.

If an appropriate weapon isn’t available, the character can still fight and kill, but suffers a -2 to all combat rolls from distaste for the tools at hand. In addition, the normal weapon bonus for the object is reduced by one, so a handgun that normally inflicts 3L damage only adds two dice to the attack roll (this cannot reduce the weapon bonus below zero, however). If the character suffers from the most extreme version of this Tell — he has one special weapon that he always uses — destroying that weapon might well drive him mad. If his weapon breaks or is lost, the player immediately rolls the character’s Resolve + Composure. If this roll fails, the character immediately either attacks the one responsible for the weapon’s destruction or flees the area in horror.



- **Trophies:** Similar to Calling Card, this Tell impels the character to remove something from his victims. As grotesque as that sounds, the trophy doesn't have to be a body part. It might be a piece of jewelry, a scrap of fabric from a shirt or even a certain type of possession. The slasher must keep these trophies somewhere close by, so that he can look at and fondle them between hunts. Some slashers throw their trophies into a big box, some obsessively label them and preserve them. If the slasher is forced to conclude a murder without taking a trophy, he suffers a -3 on all rolls for the rest of the day. If he can return to the scene and obtain a trophy, this penalty goes away.

- **Warnings:** The slasher might want to give his victims a sporting chance, but more likely he just wants to terrify them before the killing stroke. When the slasher chooses a target, the player rolls Resolve + Composure. If this roll fails, the slasher must warn the target in some way. For a minor version of this Tell, the warning can be obtuse or can immediately precede the attack (that is, the character can't surprise the target, but can wait until she's alone and helpless before attacking). For a severe version, the slasher must spend at least a few days toying with the target,

leaving notes, murdering pets, making threatening calls and the like before finally striking. This, of course, gives the target time to prepare.

- **Cannibalism:** Like Sexual Deviance (p. 333 of *Hunter: The Vigil*), this isn't for the faint of heart. The slasher isn't satisfied with killing his victims. He feels he needs to consume their flesh as well.

The particulars of the cannibalism vary from slasher to slasher. Some just dig right in, consuming handfuls of raw meat. Some chop out the choice bits and cook them with appropriate spices and accompanying wine, and some eat selected organs in elaborate, spiritual ceremonies. The motive for the cannibalism likewise varies. One slasher might have been raised on human meat and is now addicted. Another believes that by eating the flesh of his enemies, he gains courage, strength or insight into that enemy's life. And some slashers just enjoy the taste.

Not every victim is an appropriate target for the slasher's gustatory habits. Some slashers still pursuing the Vigil only eat the flesh of supernatural beings. After all, such creatures aren't *human*, so eating them isn't really cannibalism. Other slash-

ers feel that eating the bodies of unholy beings would taint them, but that eating the corpses of their human kills is perfectly all right.

When the slasher claims an appropriate victim, the player rolls Resolve + Composure. If the roll fails, the character needs to indulge his hunger, either by slicing away a piece to eat later or digging right in. If the character has a more severe version of this Tell, apply a negative modifier to the roll equal to the number of days since the character last feasted. If this results in a chance dice, a dramatic failure means that the character feasts right then and there, no matter who's watching, consequences be damned.

FAVORITE CUTS: TROPES OF TERROR

by Chuck Wendig

Watch enough slasher films, and you start to realize it's a genre all unto itself. It's a horror film, sure, but it's a certain *kind* of horror film. It has its own gory bits, its own precise cuts and incisions. A good slasher film isn't a mirror image of another, but it quite often... remixes the key elements. It switches the expected parts around, building a new tale out of the same bloody components.

These, my friends, are "tropes."

What is a trope, exactly? In literature, film, and television, certain types of story are given over to certain literary elements. Motifs, you might call them. They can be themes. Plot devices. Character strokes. Story elements. To be an exemplar of a genre, a story must strike some of these trope "chords" in an effort to *be* of that genre. These elements aren't immutable, and they can be approached from new angles (the "Western" told in outer space is a good example of using one genre's tropes in another to make a whole new twist on the tale), but they must be present in some form to earmark the story.

The slasher film has its own tropes. And, given that you're likely going to be telling a slasher story in the context of the World of Darkness, it's important to know how to paint with these many shades of red and black to create the slasher tale you hope to tell. Most of this book has been concerned with giving you the tropes in one form or another, but herein lurks a more frank examination of certain elements of the slasher story. You'll find advice on how to use them, and how to reflect them in the systems of your game.

THE NOT-YET-DEAD KILLER

You know the deal. The survivors have just put a bullet in the slasher's head, cracking his mask in twain and leaving him an apparent corpse on the kitchen tile. Or maybe they drowned him in the swimming pool and electrocuted the water, leaving him a charred husk bobbing in the blue. However they did it, a body is left behind. Seemingly — *blessedly* — demised.

Of course, the killer's taken no end of punishment. A buzzsaw to the face. A shotgun to the chest. A tumble down two flights of stairs. And he always got back up, ceaseless, a wretched and unstoppable machine of death.

So, a survivor reaches for him. Hand outstretched, slowly. *Boom*. The killer's back up, lurching forth, his face a bloody mess, his body a burned wreck.

Or, alternately, the survivors turn their back one moment, and when they next turn back around... the killer's body is gone. (Likely to return in the sequel, if the first film earned the big bucks! How many times have Jason and Freddy come back to end the lives of whiny teenagers?)

OPTIONS

Narratively, if you're intending to use this device, it's best to use it once, and only once. If the players keep killing the monster and he keeps lurching to life after every deadly blow, players will not only grow wise to it, they'll get bored. (And boredom is a sin against Morality 1 for every Storyteller.)

Ways to invoke this device:

- The slasher (or slashers) in your game have "one last gasp." Upon receiving the killing blow, the slasher seems to die. But, in reality, it's just taking him some time to shake off the murder and get back to his bloody work. Assume that the killer heals *one* level of damage — just enough to wake back up, his bones still broken and his face still a hacked-up slab of meat, and try to bury his ax in one of the survivor's heads. As per the trope, he either lunges for them just as they've settled into complacency or triumph, or he disappears when they turn their backs and least expect it.
- If you want to use this more than once with a single slasher, it needs to have some folkloric bent to it so that players can discover the "magic number" of deaths necessary to finally put the slasher in the ground. If the slasher was one survivor among six accident victims (and the survivor's guilt is what drove him to kill), then maybe "six" is the magic number.

Also think of a folkloric way to permanently end up without having to engage in six total killings. If the aforementioned accident was a bloody bus accident, maybe hitting him with a car or beating him to death with a tire iron ends him swiftly.

THE WAGES OF SIN

Slasher films are rough-hewn morality tales. While sometimes silly, the *Scream* trilogy nails it: teenagers do bad things, and then teenagers get killed. They have sex. They do drugs. They sneak out of their houses. And they end up getting chain sawed or cut in half by garage doors or hanged from trees. While not strictly a slasher film, *Se7en* certainly emblemizes the “sin = death” equation in obvious strokes, given that each of the Seven Deadly Sins are embodied in John Doe’s theater of the macabre.

OPTIONS

The Storytelling System has an inbuilt Morality scale, and that Morality scale will gladly work to demonstrate this slasher trope nicely.

Ways to invoke this device:

- The slasher is driven only by a single sin, and it doesn’t need to explicitly be a sin tied to the Morality scale. It could be “premarital sex.” Could be “do drugs” or something worse like “rape.” Once a person commits that sin, they’re now all the more vulnerable to the predations of the slasher. Assume that the slasher gains +3 to all rolls to negatively affect the sinner-slash-victim.
- This can be tied more explicitly to the Morality scale without highlighting individual sins. A seemingly religious or beatific slasher might hew to this device. When sizing up a victim, subtract that character’s Morality from 10, and then halve that number (and round up). This number is the bonus the slasher gains to negatively affect the victim.
- Alternately, in either of the above, instead of using the number to add a bonus to the slasher, mark it as a penalty for the victim on all rolls meant against the slasher — this could even take away from the victim’s Speed (which nicely reflects the scenes in slasher films where the victims flees, stumbles, and struggles to stand while the slasher closes in slowly-but-diligently).

THE FINAL GIRL

Quite often in slasher films, the killer falls to the hands of a single survivor, who is almost always a fe-

male protagonist. In fact, she’s sometimes a protagonist who is in some way bound to the slasher (Nancy from *Nightmare on Elm Street* is the daughter of one of Freddy’s original killers, while in *Halloween II* we learn that Laurie Strode is actually Michael Myers’ sister).

OPTIONS

It’s not explicitly necessary for the Final Girl to be the sole survivor, nor is it necessary for it to actually be a girl (in fact, it’d be a nice twist that if the slasher is female, then the killer’s mortal nemesis is actually male). Also, if this heroic survivor character is in some way tied to the slasher, then it should be in a way that the character (and potentially the player) doesn’t yet realize. Long-lost sister? Did she accidentally harm him some years before? Did she grow up with him as a neighbor and never even knew him? Such twists are best reserved for the latter third of the game — what you might consider the cinematic “third act.”

Ways to invoke this device:

- Randomly choose (perhaps by dice, perhaps by drawing straws) one of the characters — or, if the players are controlling slashers, then choose one Storyteller character among the potential victims. This character is the Final Girl — don’t tell the players this. They don’t know which one is the Final Girl, and may not even know you’re instituting this rule in the first place. The Final Girl possesses advantages against the slasher that others do not. She gains +3 to all attack-related rolls (including Initiative), and also gains the +3 to her Speed. In addition, she suffers no wound penalties when making rolls that directly involve the slasher (such as a last ditch bloody-minded effort to bury a pickax in his brain).
- How many potential victims (be they the players’ characters or Storyteller characters) are in the game? Well, any time one of them dies, the others gain a +1 bonus. And this is cumulative. So, if you have five potential victim characters, and three die, then the remaining two now have a +3 to all rolls dealing with the slasher. Thus, should there be only one survivor, that survivor has a hefty bonus with which to try to dispatch the slasher.

BLOODY HOLIDAYS

Some slashers are bound to certain holidays. Might be a genuine holiday, like Christmas, Halloween, even the Fourth of July (think of a soldier killed in Vietnam

who returns to life every Independence Day to slake his vengeance upon the children of those platoon mates who abandoned him). Alternately, it might be a day that has meaning only to the slasher or to the victims: the anniversary of his mother's death, the "dog days of Summer" (i.e. the hottest week of the year when the Sirius star is bright in the sky), one of the victim's birthdays.

Ways to invoke this device:

- The slasher is only active on this day. This gives a dramatic limit to the tale, invoking suspense: the tale only operates within one 24-hour period. From midnight to midnight, the slasher wreaks his grisly havoc.
- The slasher gains strength on this day, with bonuses ranging from +1 to +5 depending on the ultimate danger of the slasher. Perhaps it's only tied to a single trait (+3 to Strength rolls), or perhaps a whole slate of traits gain a bonus (+2 to Crafts so he can build his awful traps, +5 to his Wits because he's freakishly sensitive to the day, +3 to his Survival so he can hunt his victims and harry them into his grim devices).
- Alternately, it's possible the slasher also suffers a certain vulnerability on this day (and perhaps can only be *killed* on this day). The aforementioned Vietnam Vet killer might suffer extra damage from machine gun rounds on that day. A slasher who rises only on his birthday might take extra damage from fire (think of candles flickering on a birthday cake, and you get the idea). Extra damage likely manifests as aggravated, though you might prefer *more* damage instead of *worse* damage.

FAVORED VICTIMS

Some slashers seem bent on killing certain types. In fact, slasher films are sometimes jokingly called "Dead Teenager Movies" (a term coined by critic Roger Ebert) for a reason: a lot of them feature nubile teenagers as victims. Alternately, maybe a slasher kills only mafia guys, doctors, gang members, or ex-wives.

Ways to invoke this device:

- The slasher character suffers a penalty when he tries to kill outside his "scope" of intended victims. This might be a static penalty (-3), or might get worse the farther afield he is from his victims (if he kills doctors, then killing nurses might only earn him a -1 penalty, patients a -2 penalty, and anybody else a -3 penalty).
- Alternately, the slasher gains +3 when attacking his favored victims, and suffers nothing when



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he tries to kill anybody outside that range. If the slasher is a player's character, then this can be bought as a three-dot Merit. Alternately, if the favored victim is a type of supernatural (witch, demon, vampire, werewolf, etc.), the Merit is a five-dot Merit instead.

GRISLY MISCELLANY

Below are a few more quick tropes you might consider using in your slasher story. Some of these are handled earlier in the book, and are mentioned here with variants should you choose to use them:

- Improvised weapons always seem to make better implements of death in slasher films, don't they? And not just for the slasher, but the victims seem to have better luck using, say, a screwdriver or fencepost than a shotgun. In this case, assume improvised weapons do not suffer the -1 rule, but in fact *gain* +1 dice. The more improvised the weapon, the better the bonus — to a maximum of +3 dice. Conventional weapons (combat knives, guns) actually *suffer* their Damage modifier as penalty dice instead of bonus dice.

- A lot of slashers wear masks — not just Masks (see p.103), but any slasher might be appropriately concealed behind some kind of masquerade. Thematically, this can be appropriate to the tale: Jason's hockey mask speaks to children playing sports at camp, while Michael Myers' mask is an inverted Halloween mask (and Halloween certainly carries some history when it comes to that Myers boy). Feel free to tie a mask to the slasher. A paraplegic slasher might wear a welder's mask that grants him a +1 bonus to all Crafts rolls when he wears it. A Jason-style slasher with a hockey mask or half-shattered football helmet maybe earns him a +1 to Athletics.

- No rule is really necessary to reflect this, but a lot of slasher films are keen to show the world through the slasher's eyes (picture the frame bordered by the rough edges of a mask's eyeholes, probably coupled with the killer's raspy breathing). If the characters are slashers, it's always good to describe everything from their perspective, a show-don't-tell approach to what their eyes tell them, but nothing else (eschew using scent or audio cues for the most part — it can be all about what the slasher's callous gaze finds in its view). If the characters are hunters or victims, then you might want to invoke this in a more unique way:

think about dream sequences (which aren't inappropriate given, say, *Nightmare on Elm Street*).

- Suspense is key to a slasher film. And, in many slasher films, suspense is easily demonstrated when a character (meaning, one of the potential victims) does something dumb. She goes away from the group to get a beer from the garage fridge. She hears a noise and investigates. He stumbles and knocks over the lamp, breaking the bulb and casting the room into darkness. He can't find his friends so he yells out time and time again (thus alerting the slasher of his position). Thing is, players don't necessarily want their characters to do stupid stuff like that. So, you have to reward them for doing so — offer them maybe some bonus dice later for penalty dice now, or maybe say that if they choose a foolish course of action *now*, they'll get some bonus experience points at the end of the game (with the spoken or unspoken addendum being, *if they survive*). The player then has the character do something foolish, which could attract the slasher. And it might not. But now the player grows tense, knowing she just had her character willingly step into a metaphorical minefield for the benefit of the tale...

A MURDER OF CROWS: SLASHER CHARACTERS

In this section you'll find an assortment of rippers and scourges: cold-hearted killers designed to serve as antagonists, secondary characters or inspirations for your game. All slasher undertakings are represented, some more than once. When weaving their bloody stories into your own, keep in mind that not every slasher is of the kill-everyone-in-a-single-unstoppable-rampage variety. Some are relatively weak, at least physically, but excel at disguising their intentions and manipulating their prey into a vulnerable position. Some observe their targets carefully and wait for the perfect moment to strike. Some toy with a victim in a drawn-out campaign of prolonged terror that takes a toll on the victim's friends, family and property. In true cinematic style, a slasher's first scene in your story might happen when the characters take shelter in an abandoned barn after their car breaks down. But what if a character's mailman is a devilous Charmer, taking note of who's home alone during the day? What if the waitress who's been pouring the

characters' coffee at their favorite diner since they started their Vigil turns out to be a patient Avenger with a grudge against hunters? It's something of a cliché for someone attending a costume party without a costume to say "I'm dressed as a serial killer; they look the same as everybody else." But the superficial ordinarieness of some killers can be as potent a weapon as a chainsaw or straight razor. A hunter can be anyone, from a well-muscled, highly-trained combat veteran to a pencil-pushing office manager. And so can a slasher.

THE BOOKWORM (FREAK)

Quote: *Mother said, do good things. So you kill the rat-walker, and then I tell you what tunnel takes you out so you won't die. Good?*

Background: City workers and independent contractors whose jobs take them into the storm drains, sewers and steam tunnels of Philadelphia are no strangers to strange happenings. But few of them paid much attention when stories began circulating about a skinny, pale-skinned boy with eyes like goggles who lived beneath the streets and fed on rats and bugs. Then a cell of Union and Long Night hunters looking for an underground zombie nest found that some raw meat they'd left as bait had been replaced by a crude map of the nearby tunnels. After a few more trades, they glimpsed the Bookworm himself, shimmying in and out of narrow pipes and conduits as if his bones were made of rubber. Sometimes he left behind books or fragments of books, with pages ripped out or covered in an unintelligible scrawl. The hunters found that Bookworm was willing to advise them as long as they made it worth his while with offerings of food and books. That didn't keep the Freak from trapping and killing one of their members, though, who tried to follow him back to his lair.

Appearance: Though he's not strictly an albino, Bookworm is as pale as a cavefish. His hair is a ragged mat that he trims from time to time into jagged, spiky locks. He might pass as a bony, sickly teenager, except his eyes are abnormally large: he looks like one of those '70s big-eyed "sad children in the rain" paintings come to life (except for a crooked, gap-toothed grin). He dresses in cast-off garments that he tears apart and sews together as needed. Some days he may be covered head to toe and wearing thick, mismatched gloves and boots; at other times he'll wear a pair of swim trunks and nothing else. The Bookworm is extremely flexible, and he often stands or sits with one limb bent at a seemingly impossible angle.

Storytelling Hints: Bookworm hints of "the mother" and "the father" and how they tried to raise him

right, but were taken Below. Now he waits for their return. He expresses regret at killing "good people" but admits that sometimes he just can't help himself — especially if he's bored and they come near his territory. He prefers to hunt down "bad people" — typically this means the various supernatural denizens who dwell in the subterranean tunnels he frequents — but he finds them dangerous to pursue and hard to kill. The information he shares tends to be incomplete, exposing his "allies" to unexpected danger (sometimes intentionally and much to Bookworm's amusement). Though he can't read or write as such, he's fascinated by books and writing, and has created his own symbolic, semi-alphabetic code. His underground chambers are full of discarded books, magazines and newspapers that he's ripped apart and reconstructed, cutting and pasting the letters so they make sense to him.

THE BURNING WOMAN (MASK)

Quote: *Hsssss...sssss...sssss...sssssss...*

Background: The clinic was located just outside town, set back from the road in a single-story cinder-block building. Most locals never even noticed it was there. But a minister from three states over decided that some of the services it offered to women needed to be stopped, so he arranged for his faithful to converge there for a day of protest and prayer. It's unclear whose idea it was to firebomb the building, or why the perpetrator used such overwhelming force: the explosion killed three nurses, a doctor, four patients and seven of the protesters.

One of the survivors arrived at a nearby hospital, burned too badly to be identified. The police suspected she set the bomb. A news crew believed her to be a surviving patient. The minister decided to gain points with the public by praying at her bedside. He was waiting for the TV cameras to show when the woman woke up, and he became the first to die when she strangled him with her IV tube. Wrapping herself in blankets and bandages, the woman next overpowered a police officer, then made her way to the ground floor, started a fire, killed two paramedics and stole their ambulance. Police trailed her to the wrecked clinic; she trapped them inside and set the structure on fire. Then she entered the burning building and killed each of them — in most cases by incapacitating her targets and throwing them into the flames. When the local cops put in a call to the FBI they discovered there were agents already in the vicinity, looking for a female terrorism suspect who'd escaped their custody earlier that day.

BOOKWORM (FREAK)**Real Name:** Unknown**Undertaking:** Freak**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 3**Physical Attributes:** Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4**Social Attributes:** Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 3**Mental Skills:** Crafts 4 (Setting Traps), Investigation 3, Occult 3**Physical Skills:** Athletics 4 (Contortion), Brawl 3, Larceny 4 (Lockpicking), Stealth 4 (shadowing), Survival 4, Weaponry 3**Social Skills:** Animal Ken 3, Expression 3**Merits:** Atavism, Danger Sense, Fast Reflexes 1, Fleet of Foot 3, Holistic Awareness, Iron Stamina, Iron Stomach, Natural Immunity, Toxin Resistance, Unseen Sense**Willpower:** 6**Morality:** 3**Virtue:** Charity**Vice:** Sloth**Initiative:** 8**Defense:** 4**Speed:** 15**Health:** 9**Derangement:** Vocalization**Talent:** Revulsion**Frailty:** Deformity**Weapons/Attacks:**

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Brawl	—	—	6	
Knife	1 (L)	—	7	Poison blade inflicts extra 2 L on first hit.
Bone Club	3 (B)	—	9	Knockout
Sling	2 (L)	33/66/132	10	

Special: Bookworm likes to keep his territory crawling with venomous spiders and reptiles stolen from pet stores, zoos and aquariums; he's developed an immunity to their various poisons. A hunter who acquires and decodes one of Bookworm's self-created manuscripts (decoding is an extended action, Intelligence + Investigation or Academics + equipment; 10 successes required with one hour per roll) will gain a +1 bonus on Investigation or Research rolls relating to the type of monster described therein. Presuming the book contains Bookworm's observations of some such creature, that is; it might just as easily be a treatise on how to catch, fillet and cook sewer rats.

THE BURNING LADY (MASK)

Real Name: Unknown

Undertaking: Mask

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 2, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 5, Stamina 5

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 2, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Crafts 2, Investigation 2

Physical Skills: Athletics 4 (Throwing), Brawl 4, Drive 2, Firearms 3, Larceny 4 (Arson), Stealth 4 (moving in damaged buildings), Survival 4, Weaponry 4

Social Skills: Intimidation 4

Merits: Atavism, Danger Sense, Direction Sense, Fast Reflexes 1, Murder Expert, Strong Lungs, Stunt Driver

Willpower: 8

Morality: 0

Virtue: Prudence

Vice: Wrath

Initiative: 10

Defense: 5

Speed: 15

Health: 10

Derangement: Fugue. In the presences of a fire of Size 5 or greater, she must succeed on a Resolve + Composure or enter a trance-like state and watch the flames. The fugue lasts the remainder of the scene, but is broken if she's attacked or threatened. She will have no memory of anything that transpired during the trace; if one of her targets ran away during that time, for example, she won't remember which way he went. Any given fire can only trigger the effect once in an 8-hour period.

Talent: Unstoppable Killing Machine. Unlike most Masks, the Burning Woman also gains this Talent against fire (though not other forms of incidental damage). She tends to use her resistance to fire to her fullest advantage in combat.

Frailties: Blinded by Blood, No Mind But For Murder

Weapons/Attacks:



Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Unarmed	—	—	8	—
Wooden Club	2 (B)	—	10	See below.
Knife	1 (L)	—	9	See below.
Modified Shotgunw/flare round	1(L)	10/20/40	9	*

*Target's clothing combusts on an exceptional success, causing 1L per turn until extinguished.

Molotov cocktail: Throwing modifier -1, Blast Area 2, Damage 2, Dice Pool 10 (includes +1 specialty bonus for throwing)

THE BURNING LADY (CONTINUED)

Special: The Burning Woman sometimes coats her melee weapons with a homemade oil/wax mixture that she then ignites. If she scores an exceptional success in combat with a burning weapon, the target's clothing will catch fire, inflicting one point of lethal damage per turn until it's extinguished. The oil burns itself out in four turns; using this technique on the same weapon more than twice damages the weapon to the point of uselessness.

Appearance: The Burning Woman usually wears clothing scavenged from her victims, but her hands and face are always covered in bandages. Between the wrappings, charred and bloody flesh is visible. Often there's a distinct odor of smoke and burned fabric surrounding her, and sometimes the revolting smell of burnt flesh as well (in which case characters must succeed on a Resolve + Composure roll or become so nauseas that they lose an action).

Storytelling Hints: The Burning Woman seems drawn to infernos; she's been spotted in crowds near burning houses and high rises, and glimpsed on hiking trails in the vicinity of wildfires. There's a VASCU theory, though no evidence, that she's the one who starts these fires; in any case, their presence seems to calm her. If allowed to watch the conflagration undisturbed, the Burning Woman remains docile. But once the fire burns out, or if she's confronted or harassed in any way while watching the blaze, she'll begin killing. Her *modus operandi* usually includes setting her victim's face and hands on fire... but not always before they're dead.

CAPTAIN HOOK (PSYCHO)

Quote: *Hi, can't talk, goin' fishing. A big one got away from me last weekend and this time I'll get 'im for sure.*

Background: Some slashers can summon immense charisma, if just for brief moments, disarming their victims with their hypnotic good looks the way a cobra hypnotizes a mouse. At the opposite end of the scale are slashers like Larry Meeks: people in his neighborhood wonder if the bland little man has any interests besides fishing. Customers who frequent his bait-and-tackle shop wonder how he stays in business, with such a dingy store in such an inconvenient location.

The people who end up in his fishing shack with a thousand tiny fish hooks tugging at their skin wonder how much blood is left in their bodies.

Larry was fifteen when his determination to prove himself as more than a weak lump of nothing inspired him to invent the identity of Captain Hook. After a

few clumsy attempts, he learned the art of baiting his victims with kindness, playing them with friendliness and helpfulness, then reeling them in when their defenses were weakest. He thrived for years as a Charmer, but an invitation to the Subtle Collectors Association (see entry on p. 254) motivated him to step up his game. Now he targets the strongest and most beautiful victims he can find, observing them from a distance until he identifies the chinks in their armor, then bagging them quickly for gutting and cleaning. Just like pretty trout.

Appearance: Larry is all soft edges, with a sagging body, rumpled clothes and the drooping face of a half-melted snowman. From his receding hairline to his pudgy face to his not-quite-a-beer-belly gut, everything about him says "non-threatening." His strong Presence expresses itself not as conventional attractiveness, but in the benign trustworthiness of a favorite uncle or helpful neighbor. He seems to always be on his way to or from some fishing expedition, and consequently he's usually wearing a hook-studded hat or vest, if not full hip-waders. He keeps a large tackle box close by, with his favorite fishing gaff folded inside a false bottom.

Storytelling Hints: Larry is driven by a need to prove himself superior to anyone lucky enough to be born with good looks or money. The more confident, attractive, talented his potential victims are, the more irresistible his temptation to snatch them from their perfect world and pierce their veneer of perfection with the tools of Captain Hook. When he feels his mask of congeniality slipping, he quickly turns the conversation to his favorite pastime, knowing that the listener will misconstrue the kind of fishing Larry favors.

CINDERELLA (GENIUS)

Quote: *You don't look so good. Here, drink this. It will fix you right up.*

Background: You know the fairytale: beautiful girl is abused by her stepfamily, endures years of hardship, and then is rescued by a handsome prince. For Ella Young, the first part of the story seemed destined to never end. When her father died, Ella's step-

CAPTAIN HOOK (PSYCHO)

Real Name: Larry Meeks

Undertaking: Psycho

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5

Social Attributes: Presence 5, Manipulation 3, Composure 5

Mental Skills: Academics 2, Computer 4, Crafts 4, Medicine 2

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 4, Drive 3 (Small Watercraft), Firearms 2, Larceny 3 (lock picking), Survival 3, Weaponry 4 (Fishing Gaff)

Social Skills: Animal Ken 3, Persuasion 4, Subterfuge 4

Merits: Allies 2 (Association of Subtle Collectors), Contacts 3 (local politicians, businessmen and police officers who are fishing enthusiasts), Encyclopedic Knowledge, Iron Stamina 2, Resources 3, Strong Lungs, Torture Suite 4, Weapon Monomaniac (Fishing Gaff)

Willpower: 9

Morality: 0

Virtue: Prudence

Vice: Envy

Initiative: 9

Defense: 3

Speed: 13

Health: 10

Talents: Disarming, Deadly Distraction

Frailties: Thin Veneer (comes into play whenever someone resists Larry's Disarming Talent, or mocks his physical appearance); Obsessive.

Weapons/Attacks:



Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Unarmed	—	—	8	
Modified Fishing Gaff	1 (L)	—	10	8-again; see below.
Fish Knife	2 (L)	—	10	
Brass Knuckles	1 (B)	—	9	

Special: Larry's preferred weapon is a fishing gaff which he's modified for combat (no improvised weapon penalty). It's a large (Size 2) barbed hook; if target is damaged, the hook catches in the victim's flesh and his Defense is halved (rounded down) until it's pulled lose or removed. Forcibly extracting the hook (by Larry or by the victim himself) requires a successful Strength + Brawl roll, which will inflict an additional point of lethal damage as the barbs rip their way free.

CINDERELLA (GENIUS)**Real Name:** Ella Young**Undertaking:** Genius**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 4, Wits 4, Resolve 3**Physical Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2**Social Attributes:** Presence 2, Manipulation 4, Composure 3**Mental Skills:** Academics 4 (Research), Computer 3, Investigation 4, Medicine 3, Science 4 (Toxicology, Psychology)**Physical Skills:** Brawl 1, Drive 1, Firearms 3, Larceny 3, Stealth 3**Social Skills:** Empathy 4, Persuasion 4, Subterfuge 4**Merits:** Contacts 3 (Academia), Contacts 3 (Toxicology Experts), Eidetic Memory, Encyclopedic knowledge, Language (French), Language (German), Natural Immunity, Resources 4, Toxin Resistance**Willpower:** 5**Morality:** 0**Virtue:** Fortitude**Vice:** Pride**Initiative:** 6**Defense:** 3**Speed:** 10**Health:** 7**Derangement:** Suspicion**Talent:** Profiling**Frailty:** Intolerance for Chaos**Attacks:**

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Dart Pistol	0	10/20/40	6	0 damage, see below.
Dart Rifle	1 (B)	25/50/100	7	1 max damage, see below.
Taser	-1 (B)	1/3/7	5	See below.
Pistol	2 (L)	20/40/80	8	

Special: Cinderella prefers to avoid physical conflict, but she keeps some weapons handy in case a field experiment goes awry. If an attacker might be useful as a lab subject, she'll incapacitate him with a dart gun or stun gun. The former does no damage (or one point of bashing damage for the rifle), but delivers a drug or toxin payload upon a successful attack. The Taser fires dart-tipped wires that carry an electrical charge from the gun to the target on a successful hit. The initial shock inflicts one level of bashing damage; every subsequent turn until the probes are removed allows

CINDERELLA (GENIUS)

Cinderella to make an additional attack that automatically achieves three successes. Once the cumulative successes exceed the target's Size, the target falls unconscious, remaining so for a number of turns equal to the successes rolled. Tearing the darts out is a free action that inflicts one additional level of bashing damage. If the target attempts to tear out the probes himself, he must score more successes on a Resolve + Composure roll than Cinderella gained on the initial attack.

Poisons: Cinderella can administer the following poisons by touch (the chemical must contact the target's bare skin), in food or drink, or with a dart gun. A different formula is required for each delivery system (knockout drops she was planning to slip into a victim's drink can't be loaded into a dart instead). Targets resist the effects with successes on Stamina + Resolve roll that exceed the poison's Toxicity.

Poison/toxin	Toxicity	Effect
Knockout	5	Unconsciousness for 1 hour
Paralysis *	4	No movement possible for 10 minutes
Mood Alterer**	6	-1 to Dexterity dice pools, -2 to Mental and Social pools
Muscle Relaxant**	7	-3 to Strength and Dexterity pools
Infectious bacillus*, **	4	3 (B) upon exposure; 3 (B) per day until character succeeds on a daily Stamina + Resolve roll.

* Cinderella is immune to the effects of this toxin.

** Repeat exposure occurs every 10 minutes for 12 hours, requiring a new Stamina + Resolve roll if the character is not already affected.

mother kept her a virtual prisoner under the pretext of home-schooling her, controlling Ella's inheritance and allowing her own daughter and sons to inflict innumerable horrors on the girl. Only Ella's intellect saved her: the family had to supply her with books so she could pass the state tests, and in their disdain they didn't notice that at age nine she was asking for college-level textbooks. Soon after, she decided she'd stop waiting for Prince Charming and take matters into her own hands. Using her knowledge of chemistry and some simple household cleaning supplies, Ella surreptitiously poisoned each of her tormenters in turn, killing one, hospitalizing another, weakening the rest until she was able to take control of the household finances. She refined her understanding of poisons and toxins, using her former torturers as guinea pigs, prolonging their misery until she turned twenty-one. At that point Cinderella, as she'd taken to calling herself, gained full access to her inheritance money. She drained the family bank accounts and burned down the house — after making sure the residents were fully conscious and completely paralyzed.

Cinderella spent the next several years deepening her understanding of the fine art of poisoning. At some point her obsession with toxic substances

became a fascination with the psychological impact that poisoning had on the unfortunate victims. She earned dual PhDs in psychology and toxicology, offending both professors and fellow students with her arrogance and seemingly infallible intellect. She conducted secret experiments to satisfy her morbid curiosity, introducing various toxins to office buildings, trailer parks and school cafeterias, and observing the psychological fallout of inexplicable pain and suffering. She once spent an entire year recording the behavior of a single college student, inflicting symptoms, and then easing them, repeating the process to see how quickly the relapsing-remitting cycle would push her victim towards suicide.

Appearance: Ella is a stern-looking woman in her forties who dresses simply but elegantly. Her garb always seems a bit too warm for the weather, a psychological holdover from the days and nights she spent locked in an unheated basement. She's clearly well-off, but not ostentatious. She's slightly overweight and projects an air of confidence with a whiff of condescension, with a penetrating gaze that seems to pierce through any superficiality.

Storytelling Hints: Cinderella sees the world as a vast laboratory, and considers everyone in it to be lit-

tle more than lab rats. What she expects to learn from any given experiment is known only to her, but her results are rarely achieved without slow and painful loss of life. She tends not to get too close to her victims; with her knowledge of psychology, she usually has no trouble finding ways to surreptitiously expose them to whatever chemical or toxin she chooses. After that, it's just a matter of careful observation until the experiment comes to a fatal conclusion.

THE DOLLMAKER (CHARMER)

Quote: *Don't cry, honey. This is really for your own good.*

Background: As a child, Bette Sleet loved nothing more than playing with her dollhouse. She'd spend hour after hour arranging the toy furniture and people, placing everything exactly where she wanted it — and threw a terrible fit if anyone else touched her carefully-arranged tableau. When she grew older, Bette seemed to lose interest in her childhood playthings. But in fact she'd simply discovered that real people were much more interesting to manipulate. So she now amuses herself with lost souls who seek fame and fortune. Using her skill at deception, she establishes herself as some sort of guru. And with the right words, the right smile, the right suggestions at the right moment, she can change lives. Under her direction, hopeless losers can learn to dress and talk and act the way they should. That is to say, the way Bette thinks they should.

Except it never quite works: at some point, her "toys" always resist her domination. The model decides that her new makeover isn't the look she wants. The actor decides his new agent is pushing him in the wrong direction. The couple decides their therapist isn't helping them work out their problems. And that's when Bette's old tantrums come back, and she decides it's time to find something else to play with. Eventually the FBI gets another call: more bodies were found, carefully dressed, hair fashionably styled, make-up perfect, and next to each corpse, a doll dressed and styled in exactly the same way. But by then the Dollmaker has moved on.

Appearance: Bette is an attractive woman in her thirties, but she's skilled at changing her appearance and can look up to ten years younger or older. She dresses appropriately for her identity of the moment, but is impeccably neat and dead-on fashionable in any guise.

Storytelling Hints: Bette really believes she's helping her target, at least at first. She rarely inflicts

violence on him or her early in the relationship. Right from the beginning, though, she won't hesitate to incapacitate, disable or kill anyone who she perceives as a threat to the burgeoning connection with her desired protégé. When an established, seemingly-promising relationship begins to sour, she'll concoct a plan to put away her latest toy — and should the target fail to come around to Bette's way of thinking, she'll enact it without regret.

THE DRIVER, A.K.A. THE REST STOP KILLER, A.K.A. THE TORSO MAKER (MANIAC)

Quote: *This is the Driver. A blue Accord is about to pull into your station. See that the car remains there for the next 45 minutes. Stay near the phone for future instructions.*

Background: Once Harvey Ecks roamed the highways alone, practicing his art on solitary travelers, careless hitchhikers, even whole families who'd made a wrong turn on their way to some touristy vacation spot. Early in his career, he was sometimes sloppy; the headless torsos he occasionally left behind gave rise to lurid tabloid stories about the Rest Stop Killer. Eventually, he perfected his methods and could torture and kill without leaving a trace. But still he wasn't satisfied: stalking and capturing his targets one by one was too slow, too inefficient. So he chose a certain stretch of interstate and its various offshoots and tributaries to claim for his own. He took time away from hunting and killing to install video surveillance cameras on billboards, brainwash and co-opt diner waitresses, state troopers and gas station attendants. It was time well spent, for now anyone who passes through his domain can be observed, scrutinized, and — if worthy of his special attention — taken.

To his pawns Harvey is known only as "The Driver," for service to him always begins with a long ride down the highway on moonless night. By the end of that drive, they are his: driven by fear and paranoia he's implanted in their heads. To himself, Harvey is not a killer but an explorer, driven by a dream he claims he had while still in the womb. In that dream he glimpsed a network of pathways and conduits whose pattern was embedded into reality itself. From an early age he used his precocious intelligence to search for the pattern he'd glimpsed. He found hints of it again and again, inscribed on ancient Mayan pottery, illuminated in the medieval *Book of Kells*, refer-

THE DOLLMAKER (CHARMER)

Real Name: Bette Sleet

Undertaking: Charmer

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 4, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics 3, Computer 2, Crafts 4 (Clothing Design), Drive 3, Politics 3, Science 3 (Social Psychology)

Physical Skills: Drive 2, Firearms 3, Larceny 4 (Forging Documents), Weaponry 3

Social Skills: Empathy 4, Expression 2, Persuasion 4 (Seduction), Socialize 4, Subterfuge 4

Merits: Allies 2 (Fashion Industry), Barfly, Contacts 3 (Entertainment Industry), Language (French), Murder Expert, Quick Healer, Resources 3, Retainer 3, Status 2 (Entertainment Industry), Striking Looks 1, Torture Suite 2

Willpower: 6

Morality: 3

Virtue: Charity

Vice: Pride

Initiative: 5

Defense: 2

Speed: 9

Health: 8

Talent: Disarming

Frailty: Thin Veneer



Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Pistol	2 (L)	20/40/80	7	
Baseball bat	2 (B)	—	7	
Knife	1 (L)	—	6	

Special: As reflected by the Retainer Merit, Bette always has a personal assistant, a hanger-on who wasn't talented enough to become a full-blown protégé. This person is absolutely loyal to Bette and will do anything for her. Storytellers should create a character with Attributes and Skills that match whatever goal Bette's currently chasing.

THE DRIVER (MANIAC)**Real Name:** Harvey Ecks**Undertaking:** Maniac**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 5, Wits 4, Resolve 4**Physical Attributes:** Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4**Social Attributes:** Presence 2, Manipulation 4, Composure 3**Mental Skills:** Academics 4, Computer 4, Investigation 4, Medicine 3, Science 3, Occult 4 (Numerology)**Physical Skills:** Athletics 4, Brawl 3, Drive 4 (Vehicle Tailing), Firearms 2, Larceny 4 (Surveillance), Stealth 4**Social Skills:** Empathy 4, Intimidation 4 (Brainwashing), Persuasion 3 (Blackmail)**Merits:** Eidetic Memory, Fast Reflexes 2, Murder Expert 4, Resources 4, Retainer 3 (special, see below), Stunt Driver, Safehouse 4, Torture Suite 4, Unseen Sense**Willpower:** 7**Morality:** 0**Virtue:** Fortitude**Vice:** Pride**Initiative:** 8**Defense:** 3**Speed:** 11**Health:** 8**Derangements:** Obsessive Compulsion: Harvey must get in his car - or someone's car - and spend at least thirty minutes driving up and down a highway or open road every eight hours to assuage his fear that he's being spied on by unknown enemies.**Talents:** Profiling, Compelling Madness**Frailties:** Intolerance For Chaos, Obvious Lunatic**Weapons/Attacks:**

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Unarmed	—	—	6	
Sap	1 (B)	—	7	Target stunned if successes exceed Stamina
Fire Axe	3 (L)	—	9	9-again
Heavy Pistol	3 (L)	30/60/120	8	

Special: Through blackmail, bribery and judicious use of his Talent, Harvey has an effectively unlimited number of agents within his territory. Storytellers should bring them into play whenever needed; they behave as if bought with the Retainer merit but each can only be used once per Story. Harvey never exposes them to physical danger, and usually has them perform mundane tasks that add up to a major problem for his victims.

enced in the ravings of a New Delhi street prophet. Whoever could understand the Dream Pattern, the Road to Under, the Black Sun Map, would unlock an understanding of reality that would grant... almost anything. Harvey came to believe some people contained fragments of the Map deep inside their psyche. And he's found that under extreme stress — the duress of having to watch one's limbs being amputated, for example — these people spontaneously reveal a piece of the treasure he seeks. And so he instructs his agents on what to look for: certain gestures, habits, speech patterns that echo, to Harvey at least, a piece of the dream he had so long ago.

Appearance: His agents know that Harvey takes on dozens of guises: he could be the man in the winter coat and scarf, sipping coffee in his car in the parking lot; he might be the state cop parked next to the billboard east of exit 35, he could be the bland-looking salesman chattering into his cell phone while he finishes his turkey club on wheat. If he needs to speak with a minion face to face, Harvey does so at night, arranging to meet behind a building in the glare of his car headlights. When he has a victim in his custody, he makes no effort to disguise his appearance, revealing himself to be tall, rail-thin, with a beak-like nose and narrow eyes that seem constantly in motion.

Storytelling Hints: When he's identified a potential victim, Harvey may take him or her right away. Or he may follow until the target's far enough away that the disappearance won't bring investigators to his territory. Sometimes he'll have his agents sabotage a vehicle so he can arrive during the breakdown as a Good Samaritan. Harvey's conviction in the Dream Pattern never wavers, but he does have one great fear: that there are others striving to recreate the Map. He's heard rumors of at least two rivals — “the Watery Doctor” and “the Man with the Moth,” as he calls them. Any indication that someone else is close to completing the Map immediately shakes his confidence.

FATHER GHOST (AVENGER)

Quote: *Afraid to die, brother? Take my word for it — the experience is even worse than you think.*

Background: The man who identifies himself as Father Ghost was a priest in the service of Malleus Maleficarum, but he came to disagree with their methods. Accusing the organization of being as corrupt and sinful as the creatures they hunted, he resigned from their ranks and went into hiding. But a strident faction within the Order took it on themselves to track him down. Claiming they were protecting the secrets of the Church, his former peers executed him and buried his body in unconsecrated ground.

That turned out to be a rash action: not long after, a Malleus bishop had need of information known only to the dead apostate, and ordered him called him back to life with the ritual of Lazarus. The revived priest returned from the grave with his distaste for the Order's methods transformed into a smoldering hatred for the Hammer of Witches, and a determination to enact bloody revenge. Within a week, he not only murdered the men who'd killed him and the bishop who'd brought him back to life, but burned three churches to the ground. Next to each corpse he left what would soon become a familiar calling card: a hammer soaked in the blood of his victim.

Appearance: Father Ghost dresses like a priest when it suits his purposes, otherwise he'll assume whatever guise brings him closer to his goal of the moment. He's a man of average height with a lean build and a tan, weathered face. His hair is usually cut short, and he tends to wear a few days' worth of beard, but he's been known to change either feature to help him get close to a target. On the inside of his left arm, just below the elbow, the Latin phrase “*memento mori*” is visible, where it was burned into his flesh during his ritual execution.

Storytelling Hints: Some in the Order claim Father Ghost targets specific victims as part of a larger plan designed to bring down the Malleus Maleficarum; others say he simply uses information and resources acquired from one group of victims to help stage the next attack. In any case, his drive to kill extends not only to the priests, nuns and laity that make up the Order's hierarchy and foot soldiers, but to anyone who he perceives as knowingly supporting their efforts. Unaffiliated hunters, or clergy or laity who aren't part of the Order, are generally ignored or given a warning — unless they get in his way. He no longer actively pursues the Vigil, but will act to save a life if he comes across a monster preying on a victim. Should he cross paths with a hunter cell, he may offer short-term help if innocent lives are directly at stake. These actions help him raise his Morality level, at least temporarily.

FATSO (MUTANT)

Quote: *[chewing noises, snorts, wheezing.] You gonna eat all a'her?*

Background: The details were never written down, but if you asked the doctors or nurses present at John Grube's birth, they'd have some chilling stories to tell; about what happens when a 120-pound woman tries to give birth to an 18-pound infant; about at-

FATHER GHOST (AVENGER)**Real Name:** Unknown**Undertaking:** Avenger**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 3, Wits 4, Resolve 4**Physical Attributes:** Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3**Social Attributes:** Presence 4, Manipulation 2, Composure 4**Mental Skills:** Academics 4, Computer 3, Investigation 4 (Malleus Maleficarum activity), Occult 4, Politics 2**Physical Skills:** Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Drive 3, Firearms 2, Stealth 3, Weaponry 4**Social Skills:** Empathy 2, Intimidation 4 (Stare-Downs), Subterfuge 3 (Misdirection)**Merits:** Danger Sense, Damnable Certainty, Eidetic Memory, Endowment: Benedictions 3 (see below); Hands of a Killer, Language (Latin), Meditative Mind, Quick Draw, Quick Healer, Safehouse 4**Willpower:** 8**Morality:** 2**Virtue:** Justice**Vice:** Wrath**Initiative:** 7**Defense:** 4**Speed:** 11**Health:** 8**Tells:** Minor Calling Card (the bloody hammer he leaves at the site of his killings), Minor Sadism (towards monsters as well as towards his Malleus Maleficarum targets).**Talent:** Working the room.**Frailty:** Nothing but the Mission.**Weapons/Attacks:**

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Unarmed	—	—	6	
Claw Hammer	1 (B)	—	8	
Cruciform knife	1 (L)	—	8	
Sledgehammer	2(B)	—	9	9-again
Heavy Revolver	3 (L)	35/70/140	8	

Code: Father Ghost has replaced the Morality 3 sin of Planned crime (murder) with Suffer an agent of Malleus Maleficarum to live, and the Morality 2 Sin of Casual/Callous crime (serial murder) with Permit Malleus Maleficarum activity to take place unopposed.**Special:** Endowment. It's troubling to the theologians of Malleus Maleficarum that an amoral killer like Father Ghost can still utilize the sacred Benedictions of the Order. Some suggest he no longer draws on the power of God and is instead empowered by some infernal source. Other wonder if this means the Benedictions are not what they seem to be. In any case, the former Malleus operative has used the rituals of the Shepherd, Saint Martin, and Saint Michael in his pursuit of vengeance, and might know others. Note that Father Ghost suffers a -2 penalty to Benediction dice pools: -3 due to his low Morality, +1 for being an ordained priest. See **Hunter: The Vigil** for other possible modifiers.

FATSO (MUTANT)

Real Name: John Grube

Undertaking: Mutant

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 2, Stamina 4

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 2, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Computer 1, Crafts 3 (cooking), Investigation 1, Science 3 (sedatives and tranquilizers)

Physical Skills: Athletics 1, Brawl 4 (grappling), Larceny 3, Survival 3, Stealth 4, Weaponry 1

Social Skills: Intimidation 3, Subterfuge 3

Merits: Allies (hospital staff) 1, Giant, Hands of a Killer, Iron Stamina, Iron Stomach, Strong Back, Toxin Resistance

Willpower: 7

Morality: 0

Virtue: Prudence

Vice: Gluttony

Initiative: 6

Defense: 4

Speed: 7

Health: 12

Derangement: Avoidance. Fatso hasn't left the hospital buildings in years, and will do almost anything to avoid having to step into the open air.

Talents: Revulsion, Natural Armor

Frailties: Deformity, Sensitivity: Fatso has a dread of animals, particularly dogs. He must succeed on a roll of Resolve + Composure to remain in the vicinity of any canine, even the smallest of breeds. The sound of a barking or aggressive dog will have the same effect.

Weapons/Attacks:



Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Unarmed	—	—	9	+1 to grapple attempts
Club	2 (B)	—	8	
Scalpel	0 (L)	—	6	While grappling only
Hypodermic needle	-2 (B)	—	6	Breaks if more than 2 Damage inflicted. Injects tranquilizer on Success; roll Stamina + Resolve or fall unconscious for one scene

tempting a Caesarean section with the unborn child snapping at the surgeon's fingers; about delivering a baby that already has a full set of teeth and is chewing on its own umbilical cord; about what happens when the mother starts bleeding from bite marks *on the inside of her womb*.

For the first several years of his life, John was under the care of an endocrinologist who studied his strange physiology with hopes of unlocking the secrets of human metabolism. John was eleven years old — and 180 pounds — when that doctor disappeared. (His skeleton would be found seven and a half years later, wrapped in hospital blankets, all flesh stripped and every bone cracked open and sucked dry of marrow.) John was then transferred from one state institution to another until, around the time of his fifteenth birthday, a change in public policy led to him being “mainstreamed.” John endured a year and a half of public school education and group-home living before he walked away, taking only the clothes on his back and the nickname Fatso.

After living on the street for several years, Fatso found a niche for himself in a familiar setting — a large, metropolitan hospital. He began as a volunteer, taking on duties no one else wanted, and eventually found part-time work on the custodial and kitchen staff. If coworkers find his appearance off-putting, they appreciate that he never balks at the most degrading of tasks. Fatso is polite, quiet, and despite his girth never seemed to tire. What no one realizes is that in his off time, Fatso lives in the hospital complex, hiding among the machine rooms, subbasements and unfinished storerooms in the lower levels. Away from prying eyes, he's free to indulge in his... unusual appetites. Sometimes amputated limbs, surgical waste and discarded organs don't fulfill his hunger, though. And that's when he goes in search of fresher meat.

Appearance: Fatso is built like a sumo wrestler, with massive rolls of fat that create an almost unimaginable bulk. His skin is pasty white, his head is hairless, and his teeth are crooked and gapped. His voice, which he rarely uses, is high-pitched and whiny. Fatso's mutant physique allows him to move much more easily (and, at times, more quietly) than a person of his girth should be able to, but when in public he usually conceals this by moving with deliberate slowness. Note that although his appearance is extreme, there are parts of the hospital where he's such a familiar figure that he can easily go unnoticed, at least by the staff.

Storytelling Hints: Fatso's primary motivation? To eat. He can survive on ordinary food, but it's taste-

less to him; human flesh is his preferred fare. When he tires of scavenged surgical waste and the like, he'll look for isolated patients, visitors or hospital staff who he can overpower quickly and carry to his lair for preparation and a leisurely meal (he prefers his dinners cooked). Fatso's usual method of murder is to strangle or smother his victim, using his own bulk as a weapon; to that end, he tries to catch or herd the target into a small space. He's also been known to inject the target with a sedative, or slice the jugular with a scalpel (the latter only attempted if he knows he can clean up the blood before it's discovered). While Fatso once spent months sizing up a victim who wouldn't be missed, pairing up with Skeleton (see below) has vastly expanded his opportunities for feeding and his ability to cover his tracks.

JENNY THE FIXER, A.K.A. THE ESTATE HOUSE KILLER (AVENGER)

Quote: *No, I don't want your money. You can't buy your way out of this*

Background: Jenny Nonemacher was a classic tomboy growing up, interested in sports, guns, martial arts and, especially, working with tools. So it was no surprise when she started working at her father's contracting company, eventually taking over the business when he retired. Coming home from a job one evening, she stopped to take a jog around the lake and enjoy the sun setting over the water. Since it was the off-season, she had the area all to herself; except for the two men loading a woman's corpse into their power boat.

Jenny made it to her pickup truck when they caught up to her. One of the thugs took a two-by-four to the side of his face; the other, a pipe wrench to the gut. Jenny sped off, but not before recognizing one of the assailants: Emil Deavereaux, favored son of the richest family in the state. When the police refused to investigate the incident, she called the local papers. When threatening phone calls warned her to forget what she saw, she warned them not to step within range of her nail gun.

When the explosion killed her and her father and reduced their house to rubble, the papers called it a “faulty gas line.”

Flash forward one year: with the Deavereaux mansion engulfed in yet another remodeling project, no one noticed the worker who wandered from the job site and made some uncontracted modifications throughout the house. Especially since none of the changes were visible — until one the of Deavereaux

JENNY THE FIXER (AVENGER)

Real Name: Jenny Nonemacher

Undertaking: Avenger

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 4, Resolve 5

Physical Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 2, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Computer 2, Crafts 4 (Carpentry, Home Repair, Jury-Rigging)

Physical Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 4, Firearms 4, Larceny 4 (Security Systems), Weaponry 3

Social Skills: Animal Ken 2, Intimidation 3, Streetwise 4, Subterfuge 4

Merits: Contacts 1 (Contracting and Home Repair Industry), Danger Sense, Fighting Style: Frenzied Assault 2, Fighting Style: Kung Fu 2, Hands of a Killer, Quick Healer

Willpower: 9

Morality: 1

Virtue: Faith

Vice: Wrath

Initiative: 8

Defense: 4 (Armor 1 against bashing attacks due to Fighting Style: Kung Fu)

Speed: 12

Health: 9

Derangement: Paranoia

Talent: Working the room

Frailty: Nothing but the mission. (If Jenny's target is not in his own house, she gains a +1 bonus on her rolls to resist pursuing him.)

Attacks:



Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Unarmed	—	—	8	Fighting Style: Kung Fu
Modified Nail Gun	1(L)	5/10/20	7	See below.
Hand tool	1(B)/1(L)	—	7	Blunt tools do bashing damage.
Power Drill	0 (L)	—	6	
Shotgun	4	20/40/80	11	7-again

Special: Jenny's modified nail gun doesn't need to be pressed against a target to fire (a safety feature of standard models). As a weapon, it adds one automatic point of lethal damage to the successes rolled. She can attempt to literally nail a victim to a surface; this requires a targeted shot to a limb (-3 penalty) and she must press the gun directly against the target, attacking with her Strength + Firearms dice pool of 7. Freeing the attached body part requires a Strength + Stamina roll with a -3 modifier. If successful, the victim takes one point of lethal damage as flesh rips away from the metal nail. If done surgically or with tools (such as the claw end of a hammer), a Strength + Crafts roll is required with the -3 penalty, but no additional damage is conferred upon success.

family turned on the acid-filled shower head, or stepped on the weakened floor that dropped directly into the furnace, or disturbed the tripwire that released a rain of kitchen knives from the ceiling. From what the authorities could piece together after the fact, Emil returned home from a stay in Costa Rico to find the house staff missing — all of them having been given a day off through mysterious emails and phone calls — and his family dead through various creative means. Emil himself was found nailed to the attic ceiling — and stapled to a staircase railing, and stuffed into a dishwasher, and splattered across the plasma screen of a widescreen TV — having been dismembered by chisel, drywall knife and circular saw.

Appearance: Thin and wiry, Jenny typically dresses in a handyman's garb, with a tool belt full of equipment that can double as weapons in her capable hands. Her face is gaunt, with traces of the scars and burns acquired during her seeming death. She keeps her hair cut short, the better to disguise herself when needed. Her hands are nimble, her fingers callused, and she moves with calculated efficiency.

Storytelling Hints: Whether or not Jenny took satisfaction from her bloody revenge, it clearly aroused a thirst for violence that isn't going away. The FBI file on the Estate House Killer grows by about one case per year or so, as another wealthy family finds itself targeted by her for their perceived crimes. Sometimes Jenny takes on a subcontracting job — she's become quite adept at creating false identities that allow her to ply her trade — and finds evidence of some crime, cruelty or exploitation perpetrated by the wealthy upon some disadvantaged victims. Other times, the victimized or exploited hear stories about "The Fixer" and manage to get word to her of their plight without really knowing who it is that responds to their plea. She'll observe her target closely, sometimes with hidden surveillance equipment, while wrestling with a compulsion to inflict punishment. When she decides that a target deserves death, she'll wait for a chance to turn his home into a killing ground. Her preparations aren't always as elaborate as they were for her first murders; changing a few locks and altering the security system to keep people in instead of out can be enough. Often she'll take valuables from the house, convert them to cash, and make anonymous gifts to the victims of her target's crimes.

JOHN SMITH (CHARMER)

Quote: Hey, don't worry. I'm here for you.

Background: John Smith surely had an identity of his own once, but these days even he can't remember

it. He could be a monster hunter whose psyche was shattered by a supernatural enemy. Or perhaps his true past is something too painful and horrific to recall. Most of the time, he tells himself it doesn't matter: the past is past, and what's important is what to do next.

In most cases of identity theft, victim and violator never meet. It's information that's stolen, allowing an impersonation that takes place mainly in the virtual world of credit card transactions and bank account records. But John's forte is identify theft in its most literal sense: he wants to become his target, taking for himself the property, the wealth, the name, the history, and the future of his victim. When he's confident he's absorbed the very essence of his target's existence, he eliminates the real person and relocates somewhere else, attempting to convince himself and others that the new persona is who he's been all his life. For awhile, it seems to work. But then John — or whoever he is now — gets a nagging feeling that this new existence doesn't quite fit. And that's when John goes searching for his next victim.

Appearance: John's true appearance is as unremarkable as a beige sofa. Average height, average build, average features... he's a perfect blank slate that can be altered to look like almost anyone. When he finds a new target, he'll adjust his looks to whatever the victim is likely to consider familiar and non-threatening.

Storytelling Hints: John's *modus operandi* is to infiltrate his target's life, first as a helpful stranger, then as a pleasant acquaintance, finally as a trusted friend. With each step, he gathers more details about his target, from the subtlest of mannerisms to debit cards and Social Security numbers. He gradually isolates the target from friends and family, turning them against the victim, killing whoever might unravel his schemes. At some point John will disguise himself as the victim in order to commit some illegal or unforgivable act: he might let the victim's fiancée glimpse him with another woman in a crowded bar, or go so far as to frame the victim for murder. Presenting himself as the only one who believes his new friend's innocence, he convinces the target to take a trip with him, anything from a weekend fishing excursion to a desperate flight from the police. After John murders his prey and fabricates evidence that the victim has broken off contact with estranged friends and family, he uses the stolen identity to make a new life somewhere else.

LEFTY (FREAK)

Quote: What are you starin' at? You think I'm gonna grow a new one?

JOHN SMITH (CHARMER)

Real Name: John Smith?

Undertaking: Charmer

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 4, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 4, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics 3, Computer 4 (hacking), Crafts 2, Investigation 2

Physical Skills: Athletics 1, Brawl 3, Firearms 2, Larceny 4 (forging documents), Weaponry 2

Social Skills: Empathy 3, Expression 4 (Acting), Persuasion 4 (Fast-Talking), Socialize 3, Subterfuge 3

Merits: Ambidextrous, Barfly, Fleet of Foot 1, Inspiring, Language (Spanish), Murder Expert

Willpower: 5

Morality: 0

Virtue: Faith

Vice: Envy

Initiative: 6

Defense: 3

Speed: 11

Health: 7

Talent: Disarming

Frailty: Thin Veneer; comes into play if someone presses John to speak about his childhood, or resists his Talent and accuses him of being deceptive.

Attacks:



Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Unarmed	—	—	6	
Pistol	2 (L)	20/40/80	7	
Knife	1 (L)	—	6	
Chloroform	4 (B)	—	—	Requires grapple; see below.

Special: John sometimes uses a chloroform-soaked rag to quickly subdue his victims. He must first achieve a grappling hold on his target. The following round, he can apply the chloroform to the victim's mouth with a successful Strength + Brawl roll (dice pool 6; -3 for a targeted attack, but the victim's Defense is not subtracted from the attack roll). If he makes a successful surprise attack from behind, and the target fails a Wits + Composure roll to notice the ambush, he can apply the chloroform with a Strength + Brawl roll at no penalty; the opponent's Defense is not applied. The target may attempt to break his hold every subsequent turn (per the grappling rules, pp. 157-159, the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). For each turn in which the chloroform is applied, the victim must make a Stamina + Resolve roll in excess of the chemical's toxicity of 7, or suffer 4 points of bashing damage.

LEFTY (FREAK)**Real Name:** Elvira Farmer**Undertaking:** Freak**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 3, Wits 4, Resolve 3**Physical Attributes:** Strength 3 (4 with the arm, see below), Dexterity 2 (4 with the arm), Stamina 3**Social Attributes:** Presence 3, Manipulation 4, Composure 4**Mental Skills:** Academics 3 (History and Folklore of Shinbone Hollow), Crafts 4, Occult 3**Physical Skills:** Brawl 4 (with the arm, see below), Firearms 2, Stealth 3, Survival 4, Weaponry 1 (4 with the arm, see below)**Social Skills:** Animal Ken 4 (Dogs), Contacts 3 (Local Criminals), Empathy 3, Persuasion 3, Streetwise 4 (Shinbone Hollow), Subterfuge 4**Merits:** Endowment: Relic 5 (see below), Hostile Awareness, Quick Healer, Resources 2, Unseen Sense**Willpower:** 7**Morality:** 0**Virtue:** Hope**Vice:** Greed**Initiative:** 7/8**Defense:** 3**Speed:** 10 /13**Health:** 8**Derangement:** Fixation (see below).**SPECIAL: RELIC: THE GOLDEN ARM (.....)**

In its inert form, the arm looks like the somewhat battered and tarnished limb of a gold statue that's been sliced off at the shoulder. The Relic is useless to those who possess two limbs of their own, but can take the place of a damaged or missing arm. In shape and length, it vaguely resembles the limb(s) of whoever finds it, and the resemblance increases each time it's used.

Cost: 2 Willpower

Benefit: While it's in place and active, it grants Elvira the following characterizes: Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Brawl 4, Weaponry 4. The boosted Attribute empower her whole body, raising the traits derived from them. In addition, while attached and inactive the arm functions in like a normal arm in every way (though it retains an unnatural sheen of gold).

Drawback: If the arm is not used to kill within one hour of being activated, it becomes dormant and will not move again unless used to take a life. In addition, the owner is afflicted with the Fixation derangement, focused on keeping the arm both well hidden and as close as possible at all times. Should the owner die while in possession of the arm, her ghost is likely to come looking for it if it's not buried with her.

LEFTY (FREAK)

Talent: Lay of the land. Within ten miles of her house, Elvira automatically gains the Danger Sense merit, and never suffers environmental penalties in a Foot Chase.

Frailty: Deformity.

Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Unarmed	—	—	7	When wearing the arm only; arm grants +2 to grapple attempts.
Shotgun	4 (L)	20/40/80	10/12 with the arm	
Antique bayonet	2 (L)	—	6/10 with the arm	

Background: Elvira “Lefty” Farmer grew up hearing two stories about the days when her ancestors settled in Shinbone Hollow: first, that they farmed the biggest plot of land in the county; second, that they were hardworking folk who lived by the fruit of their own labors and took nothing they didn’t earn with the sweat of their own brow. And far as Elvira was concerned, the constant repetition of these tales stung like horsefly bites. The land her clan once owned had long since been sold off, leaving her and her immediate family to sell cheap antiques and junk from the first floor of their ramshackle farmhouse. And physical labor far from easy for her, given that she’d been born with a withered left arm that never grew larger than an infant-sized, five-fingered stub.

There was another family story, though, that kept her going through the lean years and cold nights. An elderly aunt had once whispered to her of a great, golden treasure that had been buried by a great-great-great uncle somewhere on the former farm. Something this oddball, globe-trotting relative had purloined from some peculiar fraternity whose name nobody remembers; something so valuable that he’d been bludgeoned to death by jealous neighbors when he refused to tell them where he’d hidden it.

Shunned by the other children of the Hollow because of her deformity, Elvira spent many lonely hours of her childhood dreaming of that treasure, dreaming of how she’d use it to leave Shinbone Hollow and never come back. She was 25 when it happened: hiking across a cow patch, she stopped to rest on a tree stump, and suddenly her withered left arm began to tingle. She took a few steps and her arm began to ache, its fingers opening and closing of their own accord. A few more steps and Elvira’s useless arm was shaking like a tree branch in gale. She thought of her great-aunt’s dowsing rod, how it was said to shake and quiver in the presence of water or precious stones. That night she snuck out the house — no need to answer nosey questions from her mother or

sisters — and returned to the spot with a shovel and lantern. After four hours of clumsy, one-armed digging, Elvira’s shovel struck wood. It wasn’t a treasure chest she’d found, but a coffin. As if in a trance, she forced the lid open. And then she laughed. In the pine box was someone’s Sunday dress and a tangle of old, bleached bones — and something that flashed yellow in the rising sun. It was gold all right: an arm, a golden arm, a woman’s arm crafted of pure gold from shoulder to fingertips.

She reached down and picked it up. As the golden arm oozed around her withered limb and attached itself to her shoulder, she knew she’d never be able to sell it. Even though that meant giving up her chance to fund an escape from the life she despised. She’d never be free of the arm, and the Hollow would never be free of her.

Appearance: Elvira has had the golden arm for ten years now, but she looks older than her 35 years. She typically dresses like an old-fashioned farm girl, with printed flowered dresses, aprons, sensible shoes. Her hair is long and dingy, sometimes tied back with a kerchief. When she’s not wearing the golden arm, she does nothing to hide her deformity; often she defiantly wears her left sleeve rolled up.

Storytelling Hints: For awhile, a string of murders and strange disappearances plagued Shinbone Hollow; having just one arm, Elvira was never a suspect for the brutal killings. She’s long since eliminated most of the folk who made her life miserable growing up, but this hasn’t made Elvira any happier. Since the arm seems to like killing, she’s turned her attention to gullible city folk who find their way to the antique shop that she runs. When a lone visitor strikes her as particularly wealthy, she’ll direct him or her to a back room while she retrieves the arm from its hiding place. After helping herself to anything of value the victim brought with her, she’ll contact some acquaintances from the other side of the Hollow who are always looking for a car to buy. As for the body, well, there are people in Shinbone

Hollow sometimes willing to buy those, too. If not, she'll feed most of it to her dogs and bury the rest.

THE PAINTED BRIDE (LEGEND)

Quote: *I do.*

Background: The story begins with a young woman on her wedding day. She rose early, too excited to sleep. She dressed and went for a walk to the church, for her parents were buried in the cemetery there, and she wanted them to see her in her wedding gown. But she was followed by her husband-to-be, who was livid with rage and accused her of laying with another man. She denied his accusations and fled into the graveyard. He pursued. Finally he cornered her at the side of a crumbling mausoleum. She declared that she'd sooner marry any of the dead in the cemetery than him; with that he drew his knife and plunged it through her heart, staining her white dress red and pinning her to the consecrated soil. He found a shovel and dug a fresh grave in the oldest part of the yard, where even the caretaker rarely visited. He interred her body there, dragging an old headstone over it so no one would know who lay beneath.

Long after that church had collapsed, and the cemetery was forgotten, and the headstones had sunk into the earth or been washed away by decades of flooding, a young woman named Mary walked the edges of the river that had claimed the area. It was her last morning of freedom; she was going to be married that very day. And she was crying, because this was a marriage of convenience meant to bring fortune to her impoverished family, a marriage to a cruel man who was likely to become even crueler. She was tempted to walk out into the water and let the river sweep her away. But then she found an old, rusted hunting knife sticking out from the damp soil. She picked it up and took it home. She went into her room and changed into her wedding dress. She slashed her left palm and painted her left breast with the blood. And then she went searching for her bridegroom.

Appearance: The Bride prefers to wear her wedding dress when working: the front painted with streaks of dried blood, the veil hiding her face. However, if she needs to get close to a target she's capable of wearing just about anything. Any clothing she wears begins to turn pale after an hour or so; after two hours, all the color is gone, leaving her garments bone white. After three hours, streaks of red begin to appear across her heart.

Storytelling Hints: The Painted Bride targets newly-married couples, or couples about to marry. She has one overriding goal: to manipulate the bride

into murdering her groom. Her usual method is to slaughter members of the bride's family in increasingly brutal and bloody ways and make it seem that the groom committed the murders. At some point she'll reveal herself to the groom, whose claims about "the real murderer" just make him look all the more insane. With the groom on the run or incarcerated, she'll stage attacks on the bride to make her fear for her safety. Finally, she'll bring the two together for a bloody climax: bride kills groom, and the Painted Bride offers her a choice: follow him in death, or take up the knife and become the new Bride.

The Painted Bride's appearance seems to be triggered by a serious argument between the married (or soon to be married) couple — not just a spat, but a heated exchange in which unkind words are said. The couple will likely reconcile and chalk it up to the stress of the wedding. But by then it's too late; somehow, the Painted Bride has already heard the call. Her first appearance is always presaged by some pseudo-bloody accident: the bride spills red wine on her dress, the groom spatters his shirt with tomato sauce, a wedding guest asks for a martini and is mistakenly given a bloody Mary instead. Soon after, the real blood begins to flow.

Real Name: Mary, last name unknown. Or the storyteller may decide that someone else has taken up the Bride's knife, perhaps someone the characters already know.

PHELPS (BRUTE)

Quote: *You're one of them. This is what I do about it.*

Background: Classified files about Phelps lack several salient details — like her first name — perhaps a result of government agencies trying to cover their tracks. What's known to those with proper clearance is that she was recruited into covert service while still in college and that her posting to Task Force: VALKYRIE came soon after. She distinguished herself in a number of low-level ENE encounters and was assigned to infiltrate a suspected vampire cult under deep cover. How things went batshit was not clear at the time, but current thinking is that Phelps found herself tortured by divided loyalties. And when her TFV comrades raided the vampire's nest, she worked out her conflicts by killing everyone on both sides.

Phelps was reassigned, but her increasingly brutal tactics quickly earned her a suspension from standard field duty. TFV tried channeling her aggression towards the assassination of high-profile targets, but the high level of collateral damage she inflicted became

THE PAINTED BRIDE (LEGEND)

Undertaking: Legend

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4

Social Attributes: Presence 5, Manipulation 4, Composure 5

Mental Skills: Computer 2, Crafts 3, Occult 3

Physical Skills: Brawl 3, Larceny 4, Weaponry 4 (knives), Stealth 4 (Moving in Darkness)

Social Skills: Athletics 4, Empathy 3, Intimidation 4 (Verbal Threats), Persuasion 4, Subterfuge 4 (Disguise)

Merits: Barfly, Danger Sense, Fighting Finesse (Knives), Fresh Start, Telltale Murder 3, Weapon Monomaniac (Hunting Knife)

Willpower: 9

Morality: 0

Virtue: Justice

Vice: Wrath

Initiative: 9

Defense: 3

Speed: 12

Health: 9

Talents: Working the Room; Strength from the Tales: The Painted Bride can invoke this Talent while pursuing or attacking a member of the bride's family, though not the bride herself. She must first mark the target with blood or something that resembles blood (red paint, ketchup, etc.).

Frailties: Nothing but the Mission; Trapped in the Story: The Painted Bride cannot kill the targeted groom herself; nor can she kill the targeted bride until that target kills the groom. Also, finding the grave of the original murdered bride and giving it a proper, named marker might bring the Bride's story to a permanent end.

Attacks:



Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Unarmed	—	—	6	
Hunting Knife	1 (L)	—	10	Fetish Weapon (B-again); Weaponry Specialty
Large Chef's Knife	2 (L)	—	11	Weaponry Specialty
Throwing Knives	1 (L)	20/40/80	9	Weaponry specialty

Special: Once per day, the Bride can call upon the ghost of one of the bridesmaids or groomsmen she's killed. The ghost cannot directly harm a living person, but must otherwise obey her. Typically she uses their assistance to help her get to a victim that's difficult to reach - a groom who's been arrested for the murders she committed, for example. Such ghosts will sometimes leave behind subtle clues that might help characters understand who the Bride is and how to defeat her.

PHELPS (BRUTE)

Real Name: Phelps, first name unknown.

Undertaking: Brute

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics 1, Computer 2, Crafts 3 (Firearm Repair), Occult 3

Physical Skills: Athletics 4 (running), Brawl 5, Drive 3, Firearms 4, Stealth 4, Survival 5 (Mountains), Weaponry 4

Social Skills: Intimidation 3, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 2

Merits: Ambidextrous, Brawling Dodge, Danger Sense, Disarm, Endowment: Advanced Armory (see below), Fast Reflexes 2, Fighting Style: Kung Fu 4, Fighting Style: Two Weapons 3, Gunslinger, Iron Stamina, Meditative Mind

Willpower: 6

Morality: 0

Virtue: Temperance

Vice: Wrath

Initiative: 9

Defense: 3 (Armor 1 against bashing attacks due to Fighting Style: Kung Fu; may be wearing Kevlar vest or riot gear; see p. 170 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**.)

Speed: 13

Health: 9

Derangement: Paranoia

Talent: Unstoppable

Frailty: Blinded by Blood

Attacks:



Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Unarmed	—	—	9	Fighting Style: Kung Fu
Combat Knife	1	—	9	
Nightstick (Tonfa)	2 (B)	—	10	Grants +1 to defense
Heavy Pistol	3	30/60/120	11	Gunslinger
Assault Rifle	4	150/300/600	12	autofire capability

Special: Phelps has access to the following Advanced Armory items: etheric goggles, equalizer grenades, etheric tracker, Munin serum.

difficult to cover up. She was posted to an administrative position, and at first the desk job seemed to calm her down. The last physical records in her file consist of surveillance videos that show her calmly hunting down and slitting the throats of each person in her office complex, right down to the receptionist and janitor. After that, she absconded with an unknown inventory of TFV equipment and weaponry and has evaded all attempts to bring her back in.

Appearance: Phelps is slightly taller than average, with the muscled body of an Olympic sprinter. She keeps her hair cut extremely short; her face is plain, devoid of cosmetics, and usually quite expressionless. When “working,” she favors black covert-ops field gear, complete with hood and night-vision equipment. She always keeps at least one knife and one firearm within easy reach.

Storytelling Hints: In debriefings before she went AWOL, Phelps described a delusional belief in a worldwide conspiracy, in which supernatural and human agencies cooperate to dominate the world at the behest of some unknown entity. She’s convinced that “the conspiracy” is out to kill her for her knowledge; hence, she must eliminate anyone who shows any sign of being one of the enemy. She seems to divide her time between hunting monsters and hiding out in remote wilderness areas. Hunters whose goals overlap with hers may consider her a godsend at first... until all the supernatural targets are put down, and she casts a suspicious eye at whomever else is still standing.

SKELETON (MUTANT)

Quote: *Oh, look at that woman’s kneecap. Look at the shape of it. Oh, I’d so like to keep it under my pillow.*

Background: The daughter of a mortician, Savannah Woodbury was accustomed to the sight of dead bodies by the time she was two years old. She was five when she walked in on her father indulging in necrophiliac practices with a corpse under his care. She was ten when she began helping her father in his business and eleven when the police raided the funeral home to arrest Mr. Woodbury and several guests in the midst of one of their “special parties.” Savannah fled from the noise shouting and hid as best she could, accidentally locking herself in the hidden embalming room where her father kept his choicest remains. She spent a two weeks there, locked in with the corpses, until authorities finally came looking. Afterwards, the nurses called the emaciated child in their care “the Skeleton,” at least among themselves. Savannah overheard, and rather liked the nickname.

For a while it seemed Savannah suffered no long-term effects from the incident. She went to school, grew into a slim and beautiful young woman, and started a promising career as a fashion model. Then her organization noticed that on each shoot she looked a little bit thinner. Soon Savannah’s thinness was unnatural, freakish even by professional model standards. When her hair began to fall out and all her ribs were visible, Savannah’s manager insisted she seek medical attention. But by then Savannah had gone, leaving behind an empty apartment — empty, except for the embalmed corpses of three other models who hadn’t shown up for work for a while.

Skeleton met Fatso (see above) while making a visit to the big city and trying to sneak into the hospital morgue. Whether their relationship was love at first sight, or just the recognition of kindred spirits, it’s hard to say. But the pair recognized almost instantly that their mutual obsessions were synergistic. Now Skeleton stays in the hospital, helping Fatso choose his victims, erasing any evidence left behind by the carnage. She has a nimble mind as well as nimble fingers, and soon learned to master the hospital’s computer network and security systems.

Appearance: Her name describes her; with pale skin, a bald head, an emaciated face and almost no body fat, she seems indeed like little more than a bag of bones. Unlike Fatso, she can conceal her strange appearance fairly easily when she wants to using padded clothes, glasses and a wig or hood. Skeleton may appear frail, but she’s far from it; her mutant musculature and the hardness of her bones grant her the natural weaponry Talent (see below).

Storytelling Hints: Skeleton occasionally indulges in cannibalism, but she doesn’t eat much and can survive on far less food than an ordinary human. More often, she treats corpses as toys or uses them for sexual pleasure. She’s interested in the mysterious ways in which the human body is held together. She’ll spend hours with a corpse, dissecting skin from muscle, muscle from bone, teasing out organs and systems reattaching them in creative ways. Sometimes she’ll stand back and let Fatso butcher a corpse, content to amuse herself with whatever pieces he isn’t in the mood to eat. Other times, she’ll claim a victim for herself and he’ll have to wait until she grows bored with it. He usually accepts this with equanimity, since her assistance virtually assures that more food will be along soon.

THE SOWER (LEGEND)

Quote: *I’ll put that monster in the ground for you. Then one of you will join it.*

SKELETON (MUTANT)**Real Name:** Savannah Woodbury**Undertaking:** Mutant**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 5, Wits 4, Resolve 4**Physical Attributes:** Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3**Social Attributes:** Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 3**Mental Skills:** Academics 2, Computer 4, Crafts 4 (embalming arts), Investigation 4, Medicine 3 (human anatomy)**Physical Skills:** Athletics 3, Brawl 4, Larceny 4 (security systems), Stealth 4, Weaponry 3 (strangle wire)**Social Skills:** Empathy 1, Expression 2, Subterfuge 4**Merits:** Ambidextrous, Fast Reflexes, Fleet of Foot 2, Fresh Start, Iron Stomach, Strong Lungs**Willpower:** 7**Morality:** 0**Virtue:** Hope**Vice:** Envy**Initiative:** 7**Defense:** 7**Speed:** 14**Health:** 8**Talents:** Revulsion, Natural Weaponry**Frailties:** Deformity; **Sensitivity:** Skeleton is sensitive to loud noises; any sound louder than a shout causes her to flee if she fails a roll of Resolve + Composure. This means there are parts of the hospital she refuses to enter, such as the boiler rooms and garages.**Attacks:**

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Natural Weaponry	1 (L)	-	8	
Dissecting Saw	2 (L)	-	8	
Strangle Wire	2 (L)	-	9	Skill specialty, see below.

Special: Strangulation is one of Skeleton's favorite methods of murder. If she uses a strangle wire, she must first succeed on a grappling roll. The following round, she applies the wire to the victim's neck with a successful Strength + Weaponry roll (dice pool 6, including a -3 penalty for a targeted attack, but the victim's Defense is not subtracted from her attack roll). If she makes a successful surprise attack from behind, and the target fails a Wits + Composure roll to notice the ambush, she can grapple with the Strength + Weaponry roll at no penalty. The opponent's Defense is not applied. The target may attempt to break her hold every subsequent turn (per the grappling rules, pp. 157-159, the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). Every turn after the first, the victim takes a cumulative -1 penalty to the escape roll, as the blood flowing

SKELETON (MUTANT)

to the brain diminishes (maximum -5 penalty). Once the victim takes damage (Skeleton's dice pool is 9, including her weaponry specialty) equal to her Stamina, she passes out. The victim can fight unconsciousness by succeeding on a reflexive Stamina roll. A single success allows her to stay conscious until the following turn, when she must succeed again on another Stamina roll. If Skeleton attempts to strangle someone with her bare hands, the same process applies, but she uses her Strength + Brawl dice pool of 7.

Background: For as long as there have been hunters, there has always been a Sower. Somewhere, in a shadowy reality distant from our own, stretches an endless field of black soil beneath a dim, blood-red sun. And there the Sower toils, furrowing the earth and burying the seeds at the behest of an unknown master. Why he must do this, and what those seeds will grow into, even the Sower can't say. For his seeds are the souls of monster slayers. Some hunters who know the story have heard that the Sower is called to Earth via the ancient "sator" square: SATOR AREPO TENET OPERA ROTAS written as a 5 x 5 square of letters. They say that when the Sower walks the Earth, hunters die — but so do monsters; and the Sower aids the Vigil by culling the weak and slow among those who pursue the Vigil. Others say it's foolish to consider the Sower any kind of ally: he takes the souls he will, and no one can tell who he'll choose or why.

Through the long centuries, hundreds of men and women have taken up the Sower's mantle. It works like this: a person who's spilled supernatural blood crosses a certain patch of ground. They feel called to put their talent for killing towards another purpose. They accept. And they vanish utterly from this world, only to reappear when the time comes to claim another soul. The current incarnation is Geno Carcione, a Philadelphia Union hunter who grew a little too enamored of killing monsters (or humans he suspected of being monsters). When his Vigil led him to a row home attic inexplicably filled with garden soil, he found his new calling.

Appearance: The Sower is a tall, broad-shouldered man with dark skin weathered by time and the elements. When he's out for blood, he usually wears overalls and nothing else. His hands and bare feet are caked with dirt; he wears a burlap sack over his head with small slits cut for eyes. Should it be removed, his face and hair are seen to be smeared with mud, soil and clay. The Sower can choose to take on a mundane appearance in

pursuit of his goals, but if he steps on bare soil the illusion of normalcy will instantly vanish.

Storytelling Hints: Every Sower is responsible for a patch of ground that's his link to the Fields Beyond. While on Earth, he must kill hunters on that soil and bury their corpses there. But for each hunter he kills, he must also kill two monsters. He must do his killings in alternating order; e.g. if he recently killed a hunter, he can't fulfill his quota until two monsters lie dead at his hands. Sometimes he shadows a hunter cell, or even actively aids one, in order to get close to a targeted monster.

THE TIN ANGEL (MASK)

Quote: *(A slow creaking of metal on metal.)*

Background: In south Philadelphia, there sits a certain junkyard that's been there longer than anyone can remember. The kids in the neighborhood dare each other to sneak into its very center, where there's a statue of an angel made out of rusted car parts and corroded sheet metal. Anyone who looks at it, they say, will be visited by the angel of death that very night.

That's one piece of the story. The other is this: several years ago, Philadelphia's Cheiron Group sub-corp recovered what its files describe as "living metal" from that same junkyard (which, perhaps not coincidentally, abuts against an illegal dump site for chemical waste). Project Tin Angel, an attempt to graft this substance onto a Cheiron agent as a form of fluid armor, initially seemed to be a smashing success. As it did with the lab animals, the metal formed a fluid layer beneath the human subject's skin. When subjected to sudden impacts, the liquid became suddenly rigid, protecting the flesh beneath. The first field test, however, quickly proved to be a disaster: some pollutant in the outdoor environment reacted with the strange metal, and the test subject suddenly began slicing off his own skin with a combat knife. When his colleagues attempted to restrain him, codename Tin Angel went berserk, slaughtered them to a man, and then fled the premises.

THE SOWER (LEGEND)

Real Name: Geno Carcione

Undertaking: Legend

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 3, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Crafts 3, Investigation 3, Occult 5

Physical Skills: Athletics 3 (Foot Chase), Brawl 4, Firearms 3, Stealth 4 (Shadowing), Weaponry 4

Social Skills: Intimidation 4 (Physical Threats), Persuasion 3, Streetwise 3

Merits: Brawling Dodge, Danger Sense, Disarm, Fast Reflexes 2, Fighting Style: Frenzied Assault 5, Hands of a Killer, Iron Stamina, Unseen Sense

Willpower: 7

Morality: 1

Virtue: Fortitude

Vice: Wrath

Initiative: 7

Defense: 3

Speed: 13

Health: 9

Talents: Working the Room; Strength from the Tales: This Talent becomes active whenever the current targeted hunter or monster reads the sator square in the Sower's presence (either silently or aloud).

Frailties: Nothing but the Mission; Trapped in the Story: The Sower can only enter buildings or dwellings if the sator square is present somewhere inside: written on a wall, scrawled on a piece of paper, even viewed on a computer screen. Also, should the Sower's patch of earth be rendered unusable or infertile - covered in stones or concrete, for example, or tainted with enough pesticides to kill the organisms in the soil - the Sower disappears. (Note that in most cases, the Sower's patch is a square of land several acres in size.) He might return if the land is somehow restored; otherwise, a new Sower will be chosen from the next generation of hunters.

Attacks:



Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Unarmed	—	—	9	
Shotgun	4 (L)	20/40/80	10	9-again
Large garden tool (scythe, pitchfork)	3 (L)	—	12	Requires two hands.
Small garden tool (sickle, sharpened trowel)	1 (L)	—	10	

TIN ANGEL (MASK)

Real Name: Unknown

Undertaking: Mask

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 2, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 2, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Crafts 4 (Metalwork)

Physical Skills: Athletics 4 (jumping), Brawl 4, Stealth 4, Weaponry 4 (homemade weapons)

Social Skills: Intimidation 3

Merits: Ambidextrous, Danger Sense, Disarm, Fighting Style: Frenzied Assault 4, Strong Back, Thaumatechnology (see below), Toxin Resistance, Unseen Sense

Willpower: 7

Morality: 0

Virtue: Fortitude

Vice: Wrath

Initiative: 7

Defense: 3 (2 points of armor when Thaumatechnology is active, see below)

Speed: 13

Health: 9

Talent: Unstoppable Killing Machine

Frailties: Blinded by Blood, No Mind But for Murder

Attacks:



Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Unarmed	—	—	9	Fighting Style: Frenzied Assault
Homemade machete	2 (L)	—	12	Weaponry specialty.
Homemade club	2 (B)	—	—	13 Weaponry specialty.
Homemade spear	3 (L)	—	13	Weaponry specialty.
Welding torch	-1 (L)	—	—	8 Max damage 3; exceptional success sets target on fire.

Special: Thaumatechnology. If his health track becomes filled with bashing damage, the Tin Angel's metal underskin will activate, granting him two points of armor. However, his speed will be reduced to 6, and the metallic grinding produced when he moves reduces his Stealth rolls by -2. After one hour, the metal becomes inactive again.

Cheiron management lost track of their failed experiment soon afterwards. Then the bodies started turning up: men, women, a child, all found on the south side of town, in the vicinity of the junkyard. Each corpse was embedded with shards of metal, with the crude outline of an angel scratched into each piece. Soon VASCU arrived on the scene; five days and seven agents later, they reported the suspect destroyed and the case closed. Cheiron breathed a sigh of relief and reallocated the project's retrieval/recovery budget. Prematurely, as it turns out.

Appearance: Tin Angel is a tall man with a thick, muscled frame. He wears the ragged clothing of a street person, and his coat, trousers and shirt are tattered and torn as if they've been sliced by a hundred knives. His stringy hair is silver-white and hangs down past his shoulders. He wears a crude mask crafted of welded-together metal fragments from the junkyard. It appears to be stapled directly into his head. When his armor is active, a dull metallic patina becomes visible through breaks in his skin.

Storytelling Hints: Some combination of minerals, metals, and unknown substances in the air and soil of the junkyard soothes the Tin Angel's madness. He's learned by trial and error to assemble the correct assortment metallic debris into a mound beneath which he can rest indefinitely in a torpid state. However, should any component of his mound be removed or taken from the vicinity, the Tin Angel will rise within an hour or so and go searching for the missing piece. He can unerringly sense the location of the missing object, and can also identify anyone who's touched it. Such persons are marked for slaughter, along with anyone else who crosses his path. Even if the stolen item is returned to him, Tin Angel will not go back to his junkyard until everyone who handled it is dead.

Y (MANIAC)

Quote: *We've been watching you. Your work shows much potential.*

Background: That its agents sometimes go rogue is an uncomfortable truth for VASCU's directors; the entity that calls itself Y may be their most painful reminder. The incident began with an agent named Andrew Flemming, who went missing after a case involving a non-human serial murderer. It soon came to VASCU's attention that Flemming was responsible for the execution-style killings of a number of occult practitioners

with connections to the original suspect. Having seen this kind of thing before, Vanguard profilers quickly recognized that Flemming was targeting those who he felt to be the servants or pawns of monsters. Two experienced field agents — Marianne Cortez and Lionel Solerno — were dispatched to track Flemming down. When the agents confronted the rogue, things went pear-shaped very quickly: the trio found themselves staring down each others' aimed firearms while using Teleinformatics to grapple with each others' minds. All the while, a bomb set by Flemming ticked down to zero.

One of the three staggered away from the explosion; the bodies of the other two were buried forever. But in a sense, all three were lost. The survivor carried fragmented memories and distorted personality traits from all three agents within his — or her — mind. The trauma of the incident caused the shattered personas to coalesce into a single, fused personality. It called itself "Y."

One year later, Y released its manifesto to VASCU, "granting the agency permission" to continue its activities for as long as Y deemed them useful. According to the communiqué, Y believes the slasher phenomenon is a response to supernatural predation against humanity, an attempt by nature to develop a new kind of human, better equipped to withstand hidden superpredators. By inflicting pain and fear upon human sheep, Y states, sociopathic killers inspire the creation of more of their own kind. And one day there will be enough of them to collectively eliminate humankind's shadowy enemies. Until then, Y intends to support this process by seeking out slashers and putting them to the test. Those who are weak will be executed or turned over to VASCU. Those who are strong will be assisted by Y in their evolution into perfect killers.

Appearance: Two mutually-contradictory descriptions of Y exist in VASCU's files. The first, based on a brief glance obtained by two agents before Y eluded their pursuit, depicts Y as slim and androgynous, with some features that could match Cortez, Flemming or Solerno and others that don't seem to fit any of them. The second description, given by a bureaucrat who was held hostage for eight hours while Y ransacked her office, describes Y as a man or woman of average height and build, whose hands and face are covered with scars and burn marks that make a positive ID impossible. One thing that everyone who's dealt with Y agrees on is the voice, which is consistently described as

Y (MANIAC)

Real Name: Marianne Cortez, Lionel Solerno, Andrew Flemming

Undertaking: Maniac

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 5, Wits 3, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 5, Composure 5

Mental Skills: Academics 4 (Law), Computer 4, Investigation 5, Medicine 3, Occult 3, Science 4

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Drive 4, Firearms 4, Larceny 4, Stealth 3

Social Skills: Empathy 4, Intimidation 4, Persuasion 4, Subterfuge 4

Merits: Ambidextrous, Contacts (VASCU), Disarm, Eidic Memory, Encyclopedic Knowledge, Endowment: Teleinformatics 4 (Psychometry, Scene Read, Speed of Thought, Out of Mind), Fighting Style: Boxing 2, Gunslinger, Meditative Mind, Morbid Fascination, Quick Draw, Resources 4

Willpower: 9

Morality: 2

Virtue: Prudence

Vice: Pride

Initiative: 8

Defense: 3

Speed: 11

Health: 9

Derangement: Multiple Personality. This derangement is triggered if Y is exposed to the sound of an explosion or similarly loud noise (thunder, fireworks, etc.) On a failed Resolve + Composure roll, Y's fused personality will become temporarily fragmented for one scene. While Y still retains a singular identity, the entity loses access to either mental, physical or social skills and merits for the duration.

Talents: Profiling, Compelling Madness

Frailties: Intolerance for Chaos, Obvious Lunatic

Attacks:



Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Unarmed	—	—	6	Fighting Style: Boxing
Sword Cane	2(B)/2(L)	—	8	Bashing if used when sheathed.
Pistol	2	20/40/80	9	Gunslinger
Rifle	5	200/400/800	12	

a smooth contralto with careful enunciation and an almost musical lilt.

Storytelling Hints: The Y-entity's stated goals are the stuff of nightmares for VASCU, who've linked Y to the escape of several slashers from the agency's reach. Even worse, there's evidence that Y has attempted to *create* slashers by inflicting physical and psychological trauma to carefully-profiled victims. One VASCU profiler has suggested that Y is slowly assembling some sort of shadow-VASCU, composed of slashers, to advance Y's agenda. And yet Y at times passed to VASCU critical information leading to the apprehension of supernatural malefactors, or human killers Y considers "unworthy." Officially, VASCU agents are not to engage in any communication with Y, but it's likely some have, if it seemed the only way to gain critical information and put a slasher away. Hunter cells not affiliated with VASCU might encounter Y as a mysterious ally, but this usually means Y is steering them towards a slasher Y wants to put to the test. Or it could mean that Y believes one of the cell's members is one or two violent incidents away from becoming a slasher himself.

THE SUBTLE COLLECTORS ASSOCIATION (SLASHER CABAL)

Quote: Yes, that's quite an acquisition. But take a look at this.

Background: The Association has existed for centuries. Or at least that's what members are told when invited to join, membership being by invitation only. But by tradition, the Association keeps no records of any kind, written or otherwise. And the group's reclusive patron, the First Collector, doesn't answer questions about such matters. So perhaps the club really does date back to the days of the Spanish Inquisition. Or maybe it was founded in the 1950s by a wealthy Englishman with a penchant for abducting art students, as one current member claims. Or possibly, as some newer members theorize, it began just ten years ago as an FBI sting operation and was co-opted by those it was meant to catch. Who can say?

Currently, the Association has just a half-dozen members. It's likely that it never includes many more than that, since few serial murders possess the balance of depravity and social grace needed to interact with their own kind. Rules are simple: once a year, Collectors gather and display "collect-

THIS GRIM CABAL

Want to use this slasher cabal in one of your stories? Feel free to pick and choose from the slashers in this section (specifically any of the rippers); any of them might make useful candidates. Certainly the group is already courting Captain Hook...

ibles" that they've acquired. Stories are swapped, collection techniques are shared, and at the end a vote is cast to determine whose acquisitions are the most impressive. The winner is then entitled to visit the First Collector, an enigmatic old man who dwells in a sprawling estate somewhere in the American Midwest. After viewing the First Collector's gut-churning artifacts, the honored visitor is granted a supernatural gift: some minor, inexplicable boon to help the collector maintain anonymity. Each gift is unique; recent examples include fingerprints that are never the same twice, footsteps that are silent in any situation, and the ability to perfectly mimic any voice. How the First Collector can work this magic is a matter of occasional debate among Association members. What he may one day ask in return is a topic no member seems willing to discuss. No current Collector has been gifted more than once, but a few believe there are former members out there who are completely imperceptible thanks to repeat visits to the First Collector.

The annual meetings can be extraordinarily difficult to arrange. No member wants to invite others into his or her territory, so neutral ground must be determined. Acquisitions can include anything from carefully-preserved human faces to a surgically altered corpse to a bound and gagged family of five, so security and privacy concerns are

paramount. And since more than one member is wanted by various law enforcement agencies, secrecy must be absolute. As a result, there are years when no meeting is held, or when a meeting is cut short to avoid discovery (or because a member decides to pursue some extracurricular activities instead).

Appearance: Membership is only offered to slashers with ordinary, even unimpressive, physical features. Flamboyant or unusual-looking candidates are never considered — they might draw too much attention to the group. Exceptionally attractive slashers are likewise disdained: it's assumed that they rely on their looks, rather than their wits, when making acquisitions.

Storytelling Hints: You can only bring so many blonde cheerleader scalps to the meetings before the other members lose interest. Pursuit of the Collector of the Year title can motivate a slasher to hunt victims outside her comfort zone, in which case mistakes leading to apprehension by law-enforcement become more likely. And it's not unknown for a member to decide that the most challenging acquisition of all would be another member, in which case one Collector might recruit hunters or other characters to help capture another (under false pretenses, of course). By tradition, a member who is collected by another member is considered unworthy of membership, and never spoken of again.

World of Darkness SLASHER

Name: _____ Concept: _____ Undertaking: _____
 Player: _____ Virtue: _____ Cell: _____
 Chronicle: _____ Vice: _____ Compact/Conspiracy _____

ATTRIBUTES

POWER	INTELLIGENCE ●●●●	STRENGTH ●●●●	PRESENCE ●●●●
FINESSE	WITS ●●●●	DEXTERITY ●●●●	MANIPULATION ●●●●
RESISTANCE	RESOLVE ●●●●	STAMINA ●●●●	COMPOSURE ●●●●

SKILLS

MENTAL

(-3 unskilled)

☐ Academics	○○○○○
☐ Computer	○○○○○
☐ Crafts	○○○○○
☐ Investigation	○○○○○
☐ Medicine	○○○○○
☐ Occult	○○○○○
☐ Politics	○○○○○
☐ Science	○○○○○

PHYSICAL

(-1 unskilled)

☐ Athletics	○○○○○
☐ Brawl	○○○○○
☐ Drive	○○○○○
☐ Firearms	○○○○○
☐ Larceny	○○○○○
☐ Stealth	○○○○○
☐ Survival	○○○○○
☐ Weaponry	○○○○○

SOCIAL

(-1 unskilled)

☐ Animal Ken	○○○○○
☐ Empathy	○○○○○
☐ Expression	○○○○○
☐ Intimidation	○○○○○
☐ Persuasion	○○○○○
☐ Socialize	○○○○○
☐ Streetwise	○○○○○
☐ Subterfuge	○○○○○

OTHER TRAITS

MERITS

_____	○○○○○
_____	○○○○○
_____	○○○○○
_____	○○○○○
_____	○○○○○
_____	○○○○○
_____	○○○○○

FLAWS

TACTICS

TALENTS

FRAILTIES

HEALTH

□□□□□□□□□□□□

WILLPOWER

□□□□□□□□□□

MORALITY

10	_____	○
9	_____	○
8	_____	○
7	_____	○
6	_____	○
5	_____	○
4	_____	○
3	_____	○
2	_____	○
1	_____	○

Size _____
 Speed _____
 Initiative Mod _____
 Defense _____
 Armor _____

Experience _____

WEAPONS

DICE MOD

EQUIPMENT

DICE MOD



Great Green Gobs of

Little dirty flirty feet

Scooped-out eyeballs

But I didn't
Forget my spoon.

— The Sixpence Killer

THIS BOOK INCLUDES

- A grim exploration of the slasher phenomenon: why they're driven to kill, and how some can shrug off bullets and axe wounds.
- A look at a new hunter conspiracy driven to investigate, hunt and, hopefully, arrest supernatural serial killers.
- Learn how to use slashers and their Undertakings in a story both as antagonists and as anti-hero protagonists.
- New slashers - and new weapons, equipment, Tactics, Merits and Endowments to use against them.



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