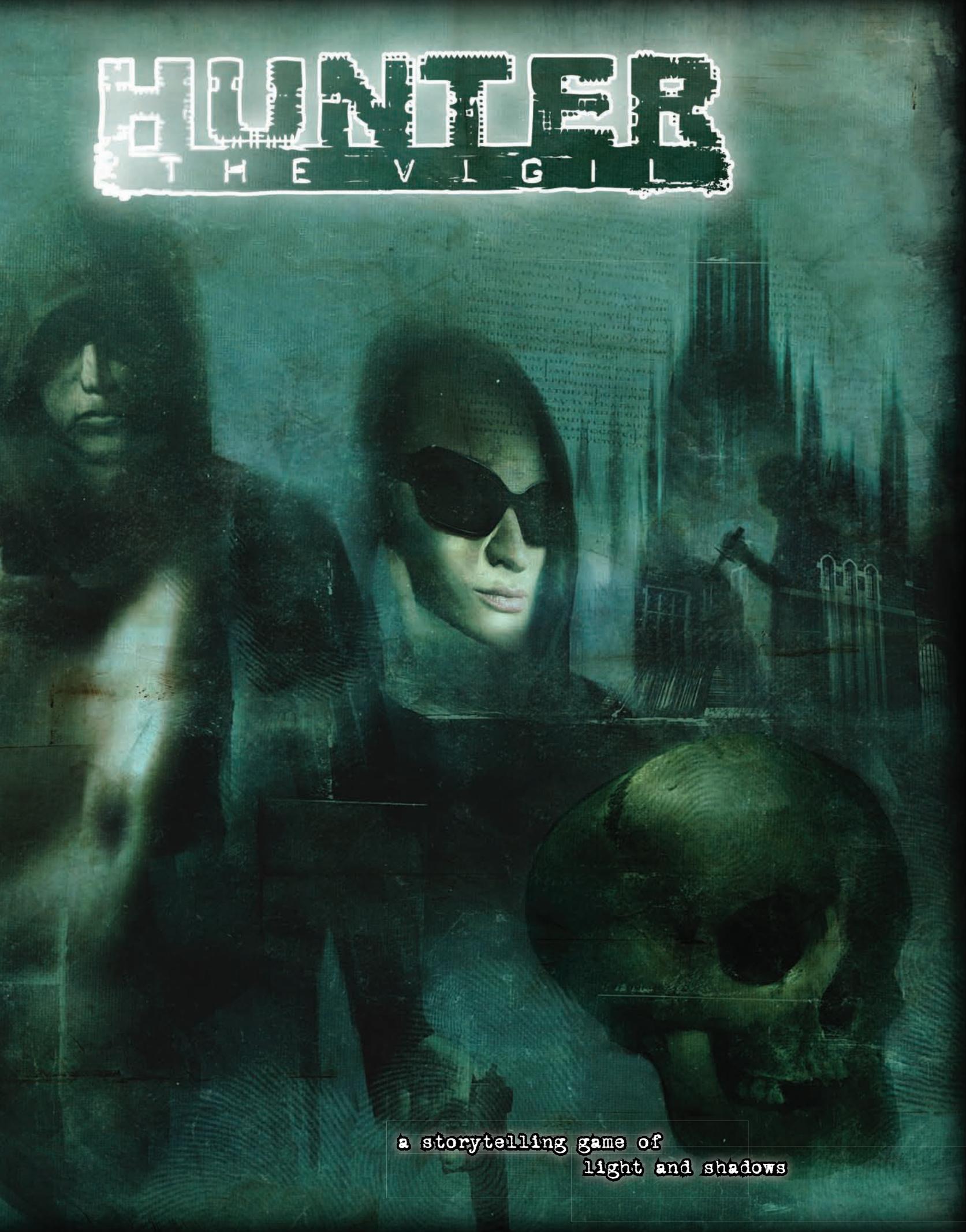


HUNTER

THE VIGIL



a storytelling game of
light and shadows



HUNTER

THE VIGIL



Russell Bailey | Aaron Dembski-Bowden | Rick Chillot |
Alex Greene | Jess Hartley | Martin Henley | Howard Wood Ingham |
Mike Lee | Matthew McFarland | Travis Stout | Chuck Wendig |
Stewart Wilson

CREDITS

Concept and Design:

Justin Achilli, Richard Thomas,
Chuck Wendig

Authors:

Russell Bailey, Aaron Dembski-
Bowden, Rick Hilliot, Alex Greene,
Jess Hartley, Martin Henley, Howard
Wood Ingham, Mike Lee, Matthew
McFarland, Travis Stout, Chuck
Wendig, Stewart Wilson

Developer:

Chuck Wendig

Editor:

Art Direction and Design:

Mike Chaney

Creative Director:

Richard Thomas

Production Manager:

matt milberber

Artists: Costas Haritas, Sean
Phillips, Erik Gist, dugnatiion,
Erica Danell, Avery Butterworth,
Nik Stakal, Anthony Granato,
Phillip Hilliker, Jim Dibartolo,
Jim Pavelec, Travis Ingram, Mattias
Kollros, Eric Kolbek, Efrem
Palacios, Kari Christensen

Greek Reference:

Konstantinos Rentas

Playtesters:

Brad Allbritton, Stephen R. Black
II, Dan Brugman, Aaron Bush,
Stephen Carpenter, Troy Clark, Pam
Collins, Bethany Culp, Christina
Garnett, Katina Haaland-Ramer,
Martin Henley, Stephen Herron,
Matthew Heslin, Marianne Johnson,
Keith Karabin, Suzanne Karabin,
James Mangas, Dave Martin, Fred
Martin-Shultz, Josh Maxwell, Adam
Maxwell, Matthew McFarland, David
Pryor, Matthew Z. Stout, Jeff
Tabrum-Lovie, Tom Trent, Chuck
Wendig, J.T. White, Jeff Willis

Acknowledgments:

A big bag of props to those who paved
the way with the earlier iteration
of this game called Hunter: Ken
Cliffe in particular, Bruce Baugh,
Patrick O'Duffy (not to be confused
with Patrick Duffy), Mike Lee and
all those crazy cats and kittens.
Big chest bumps and frenzied fits
of glee to all the writers of this
book and all the White Wolf folks who
helped usher this book to fruition.
And finally, big high-fives and
girlish giggles to both Fred Hicks
and Rob Donoghue – it's all about the
Game Love, gentlemen. Thanks for the
reminder.

In Memoriam

In December of this past year, my father passed away and moved
on to his own Happy Hunting Ground, and this book is dedicated to
him. Charles R. Wendig was both an incredible hunter and an avid
storyteller, and he passed a love of both of those things down to
me, and now, through this book, to all of you. He is loved and
missed.

– Chuck Wendig



WHITE WOLF PUBLISHING
2075 West Park Place Boulevard
SUITE G
STONE MOUNTAIN, GA 30087

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PRINTED IN CANADA

HUNTER

THE VIGIL

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Flesh Trade Pt 1

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by Mike Lee								

The old, brick warehouse hadn't had a name in more than 40 years. Set on a narrow side street off Lombard, it might have once kept canned goods or auto parts, back in the years after World War II. Vince Gabreski couldn't remember for sure anymore. Back when he was a kid, ducking truant officers and stealing from the corner stores in this part of Kensington, the place had been a favorite haunt for vagrants and heroin addicts. It had caught fire at least once, in the 1970s, but the damage had never been quite enough to condemn the building outright.

Some buildings, like people, were just too damned stubborn to know when to quit, Vince mused.

In the flat, green-and-black hues of the night-vision goggles, the layers of graffiti and faded smoke stains disappeared, and the old building looked much like it had in its heyday. The long, rectangular structure stretched for half a city block, with tall, arched windows running the length of the second story and roll-top freight doors facing the street. Vince noted the heaps of trash lining the front of the warehouse and the layers of plywood covering the window frames and doorways along the first floor - except for one freight door in the dead center of the building, just outside the reach of the few working streetlights on the other side of the road.

Vince lowered the military surplus goggles and rubbed the corners of his eyes. He shifted his broad bulk in the van's cracked vinyl driver's seat and checked his watch.

"Ten-thirty," he muttered, his deep voice gravelly with fatigue. "They're late."

"Late, my black ass," Darnell Waters growled, folding his lean, tattooed arms across his Kevlar vest and glaring out at the rainy night from the van's passenger seat. "This is bullshit, man. I'm telling you, somebody in IA was yanking your chain. No one could be moving illegals through Kensington without us hearing about it."

Detective Waters had a cold, hard voice that made most people nervous when he spoke. With dark, deep-set eyes and a pointed chin edged with a thin, black goatee, he could look like the Devil himself when he wanted to. It was damned useful in the interrogation room, or when shaking down a two-bit pimp for protection money, but it didn't leave much of an impression on Vince. Gabreski was huge, one of the biggest men on the force, pushing six-five and almost 300 pounds. He had a lantern-jawed face and a sleepy look to his pale blue eyes that made him look more like a Mafia thug than a Philadelphia police lieutenant. Vince had been a leg-breaker during his teenage years, but found there wasn't much money in it. Back in the old days, if you didn't have much education and wanted to make some serious money, you put on a badge and a gun.

A squelch of static burst from the police scanner mounted under the dashboard. Gabreski listened to the dispatch call - an armed robbery outside a club up in Harrowgate - then turned down the volume until the sound was just a vague murmur. He rubbed his scarred chin thoughtfully, replaying the phone call in his mind for the hundredth time:

I've been following the exploits of you and your team for some time, Lieutenant Gabreski. There's something happening down in Kensington that I'd like you to look into. Something you and your men might be uniquely qualified to handle.

15TR



CALLING PHONE	SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS
SECURITY CLASSIFICATION CLASSIFIED	
DATE TIME GROUP	



Vince shook his head. "This didn't come from Internal Affairs," he declared. "None of those guys have this much imagination. If they wanted to sting us, they'd try to go through someone we trusted."

"Except that we don't trust anybody," Waters pointed out.

"Goddamn right. That's why we're still in business."

Waters stared hard at his boss. "Then why the hell are we staking out an abandoned warehouse on the say-so of some motherfucker you don't even know?"

Eight hours after he'd gotten the call, Vince found he still didn't have a good answer for that one. "Call it a hunch," he said, shrugging his slablike shoulders. Before Waters could respond, he reached forward and picked up the small walkie-talkie resting on the dashboard. "Radio check. Any movement?"

The other two members of Vince's team were out on the street, watching the rear alley leading up to the warehouse and the approaching traffic coming up Lombard.

Jack Dean checked in first. "Couple of homeless guys passing a bottle at the far end of the alley. Oh, and I'm freezing my nuts off out here. How long are we gonna do this?"

"Quit your cryin', Jack. You lost the toss fair and square," Vince growled back. "Besides, we know your wife keeps your nuts in a jar by the bed. Andrea, what have you got?"

A chirp of static, and Andrea Taggart answered: "No trucks. But there's a dark blue Scion with chrome rims turning off Lombard and heading your way."

"Copy," Vince answered, straightening slightly in his seat. They'd parked their rust-spotted van in an abandoned lot a block north of the warehouse, giving them decent sight lines on the building's entrance without being too obvious. Gabreski had no sooner replied than he saw the Scion easing its way slowly down the dimly lit street. Sickly yellow light from the streetlamps shone dully off the car's tinted windshield. It pulled roughly even with the stakeout van and came to a stop.

There came a creak of leather and a dull pop as Waters unsnapped the catch on his holster, watching. "What the hell is this?"

The car's doors popped open and two men climbed out. Vince recognized the hooded figure on the passenger's side at once.

"You've got to be fucking kidding me," he snarled. Vince tossed the goggles to Waters. "Wait here," he said, then stepped out into the cold night air.

Raimundo Gutierrez came around the front of the car and made his way across the lot towards Vince, his bodyguard in tow. The gang leader and his Siete Muertos soldier wore winter jackets over black hoodies and baggy jeans. Vince met them halfway.

"The hell are you doing here?" he hissed.

Both gangbangers came up short. Raimundo's soldier was squat and broad shouldered, with thick, powerful arms, but Gabreski towered head and shoulders over both of them. Raimundo spread his hands. "Looking for you, vato," he shot back. "You left me voice mails all damn evening, then you don't pick up your phone. I've been driving all over Kensington looking for you, man."

Raimundo's bodyguard took a step forward, his hand sliding into his jacket pocket. Just then, Vince's walkie-talkie chirped.

"Heads up," Andrea said. "I've got a panel truck and three Suburbans turning off Lombard."

"Goddamnit," Vince cursed under his breath. He jerked his thumb back at the van. "Get inside, quick," he told the two gangbangers.

"Fuck are you talking about?" Raimundo said. "What's going on, Gabreski?"

Vince grabbed Raimundo by the back of his neck and gave him a rough shove in the direction of the stakeout vehicle. "Get in the goddamn van," he snarled. The gang leader's bodyguard let out an angry shout and tried to pull out his piece; Vince grabbed him by the ear and shoved him along as well.

Waters had the sliding door open by the time they reached the van. Vince shoved the two gang members inside, then climbed in after them. Raimundo rounded on Vince at once, pulling back his hood and glaring fiercely at the big detective. The gang leader was 25, but his boyish face made him look much younger. Gutierrez made up for his innocent features by being one of the most vicious gang leaders in Kensington. With Vince's help, he'd grown to dominate the other Latino gangs in the district and capture the lion's share of the drug and gun trade. "The hell is the matter with you, vato?"

Raimundo's bodyguard surged forward, reaching for Vince. Gabreski put a wide hand on the gangbanger's face and shoved him off his feet, then pointed at the gang leader. "I got a call this afternoon from a special agent in Homeland Security," he growled. "He said there were some Russians in Kensington smuggling illegals in from Mexico. You know anything about this, Raimundo? If you do, you better tell me now, because if I find out you've been moonlighting on me, I'm going to get real unhappy."

The gang leader gaped at Vince. "Are you stoned, man?" he said. "What the fuck would Russians be doing running Latinos into Philadelphia?"

"For money. Why else?" Gabreski shot back. "And you haven't answered my question, Raimundo. Do you know anything about this, or not?"

"Are you kidding me? Of course I don't!" Raimundo backed away from Gabreski, shaking out his rumpled jacket and trying to reclaim some of his lost machismo. "You think I'm dumb enough to cheat you after what happened to Hugo? Fuck no, man. And there ain't anybody running Latinos through here that I don't know about. You think I wouldn't notice a couple hundred new faces turning up every month?"

Then came the throaty sound of a diesel engine rumbling down the narrow street, and Waters said in a cold voice, "Looks like somebody is gonna have to get his eyes checked."

Gabreski leaned forward between the seats and scanned the dimly lit street. The panel truck was a mid-sized version; Vince recognized the logo of a local rent-a-haul company on its grimy flank. It pulled up in front of the warehouse, followed by a trio of black SUVs. The Suburbans were still rolling when the passenger doors popped open and half a dozen men in heavy coats leapt out. They were large, heavyset types, with military crew cuts and blunt, florid features. Four of the men jogged up to the warehouse and clustered around the roll-top door; the remaining pair walked up to the idling truck, then took an interest in the dark blue Scion sitting at the curb just a block away. After a moment, they began walking toward the parked car. Both pulled flat, black handguns from their belts.

"Son of a bitch," Gabreski hissed. Waters leaned forward, switched off the scanner, then forced his way past Vince into the passenger area. The two detectives crouched against the front seats and tried to see what was happening.

The two thugs walked up to either side of the car and pressed their faces up to the tinted glass. They straightened, talking amongst themselves - and one of them pointed to the van in the middle of the empty lot.

"What the hell's going on?" Raimundo whispered from the back.

Vince cut him off with a raised finger. Moving slowly, he reached down and eased his Glock from its holster.

The two men started across the lot, but paused as the roll-top door of the warehouse clattered open and the truck lurched forward with a clash of worn gears. Vince heard a muffled voice call out from one of the Suburbans, and the two thugs loped back to the SUVs like eager hounds. Vince let out a shallow breath and watched as the truck turned and eased its way into the darkened building. The thugs brought the roll-top down as soon as the vehicle was through, then began pulling sheets of plywood away from a nearby door.

Vince fished the walkie-talkie from his pocket. "Anything going on in back?" he asked. "Negative," Jack replied at once.

"Can you see an unblocked rear entrance from where you're at?" "Yeah, I think so," Dean replied.

Vince thought over his options. "Move up and cover it," he said. "Andrea, back him up." Waters straightened, peering over the edge of the driver's seat. "What in the hell is all that?" he asked.

Vince leaned forward between the seats. More men climbed out of one of the Suburbans; smaller, leaner men with cases tucked under their arms, hustling quickly through the open door between the beckoning thugs. Others were opening the back of both Suburbans and pulling out numerous small, plastic coolers and bags of crushed ice.

Faint yellow light clicked to life beyond the open door and seeped around the edges of the plywood covering the lower windows. The thugs moved with practiced efficiency, hustling their stepped two men in dark business suits and expensive overcoats. One of the men looked to be the boss, judging from the way the thugs circled about his heels. The other man was clearly nervous, glancing worriedly up and down the darkened street. He held a polished metal suitcase in one gloved hand, clutching it closely against his side as though his life depended on it. Vince watched the boss take the second man by the arm and lead him through the opened door. Four of the thugs remained outside as the steel door slammed shut; they lit up cigarettes and watched for signs of trouble.

Waters appraised the activity. "Looks like a pretty professional crew," he observed. "And they've done this kind of thing before."

Vince nodded and fixed Raimundo with a stare. "You ready to change your story?"

"For the last time, I don't know anything about this, man! You ever hear of Russians with connections in Mexico? Where are they getting these people?"

"Maybe they're getting a cut from coyotes down in Texas and are shipping them up here," Vince replied. "I don't give a shit where they came from; I want to know who's handling them and where they're going from here."

"You saw the dude with the case," Waters said. "Looked like some kind of buy to me. Maybe they're selling the illegals to somebody else. Some kind of slavery or prostitution ring, maybe?"

"If it is, it ain't happening here," Raimundo insisted. "These people ain't turning up on the streets, man. I swear on my mother's grave."

Vince shook his head. Things weren't adding up. If Raimundo was telling the truth, then the illegals had to be going somewhere. Truckloads of people didn't just vanish off the face of the earth.

And then there was the matter of those coolers, and all those bags of ice.

Vince's eyes suddenly widened. "Oh, shit," he whispered, realizing what was going on - and then he heard the screech of tires from further up the street and the roar of a powerful engine.

"What the hell?" Waters said, as a dark red Land Rover sped into view and bore down on the waiting Suburbans. The four thugs outside the warehouse scattered, shouting and brandishing pistols, and Vince heard the blast of a shotgun from the Land Rover's passenger side. One of the sentries spun and fell, and then the narrow street echoed with the staccato roar of gunfire.

"Get down!" Gabreski cried as men with pistols and shotguns stumbled from the Land Rover and blasted away at the thugs. A stray round starred the van's windshield, and another punched a hole in its side. Tires screeched, and Vince heard an agonized scream. The rattle of pistol fire suddenly ebbed; there was another loud shotgun blast, and then nothing.

Gabreski's radio chirped. "Vince! What the hell is going on?" Andrea shouted over the radio.

Vince rose cautiously and peered over the seat. The warehouse's steel door was wide open, and people were stumbling out. He could just hear their terrified screams, followed by the flash and pop of gunfire within.

Waters had his gun in his hand. He looked to Gabreski. "What do we do?" he asked.

The question surprised Vince. "What the fuck do you think we do?" he said. He raised the walkie-talkie. "Move in!" he called, then turned and yanked the cargo door open.

Vince hit the ground running, pistol held low and ready. Two silhouettes raced past him across the lot, screaming something in Spanish. More figures fled like deer down the dimly lit street. The Suburbans were gone; Gabreski saw one of the thugs spread-eagled on the street, his face covered in blood. Steam rose in a white plume from the Land Rover's punctured radiator. The engine was still idling, but the SUV was empty.

More screams and gunshots echoed inside the warehouse. Vince heard Waters' footsteps hard on his heels as he raced down the block and dashed for the open doorway. He stumbled on the outflung arm of another of the thugs, lying facedown on the pavement in a spreading pool of red.

Gabreski paused beside the door, clipping the radio to the collar of his jacket. He checked back over his shoulder at Waters - and found Raimundo and his pugnacious bodyguard right behind the black detective, holding guns of their own.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?" Vince snapped at the gang leader.

"Watching your back, bitch," Raimundo shot back. "I got too much invested in you to watch you get killed, man."

Vince gritted his teeth in frustration, but there was nothing he could do. Nodding to Waters, he spun and ducked through the open doorway, pistol at the ready.

The air inside the warehouse was thick with the smell of cordite and the stink of spilled blood. Trash and debris covered the building's concrete floor, but a large space had been cleared farther inside the cavernous space, and someone had used lumber to frame out a large, rectangular space, much like the skeleton of a small house. Heavy plastic sheeting had been hung over the wooden frame, and bright lights inside turned the white sheeting nearly opaque. The truck was parked at a loading dock just on the other side of the roll-top, its back door open wide.

Bodies lay everywhere. A man in dark fatigues with a shotgun in his hand was crumpled by the side of the door, a hole the size of Vince's fist gaping in his back. Gabreski counted five Hispanic men and women lying near the door, their bodies riddled in the cross fire.

Gunfire strobed in the darkness on the other side of the wooden framing. Vince gestured for Waters to head in that direction and dashed forward. "Spread out," he warned, searching the shadows for threats.

Plastic sheeting twitched sharply out of the corner of Gabreski's eye, and a searing pain cut across his upper left arm. He heard the gunshot a half second later and ducked instinctively. One of the Russian thugs stood in a framed-out doorway, pointing his pistol at Gabreski's head. Vince fired two quick shots, and the man toppled to the ground.

Vince rushed toward the thug's prone body, alert for signs of movement on the other side of the sheeting. Gabreski kicked the pistol from the man's motionless hand and then glanced back over his shoulder at Waters.

There was no one there. He'd somehow been separated from Waters and the gangbangers in the darkness and confusion. Biting back a curse, Gabreski pushed aside the tarp with his pistol and edged inside.

Beyond the plastic sheeting lay a notional corridor, with three doorframes covered with tarps along each of the long sides. At the far end of the corridor a figure lay curled in a fetal ball. It was the man with the steel case they'd seen outside. His hands were bound behind his back with a plastic cable tie, and blood oozed from a cut across his forehead. The case itself was nowhere to be seen.

Edging forward, Vince sidled up to the first doorframe on his right and pushed the tarp aside.

Within, he found a small, framed-out room, brightly lit by a circular lamp suspended on a metal arm above a flat, metal table. A young Hispanic man lay there, his dead eyes wide and staring. Someone had expertly cut the man's chest open with an electric bone saw and spread the ribs apart. His heart, fresh and glistening, sat on a bed of ice in an open cooler resting beneath the table.

"Jesus Christ," Vince said, feeling bile rise in the back of his throat. He staggered backwards, letting the tarp fall back into place, and dashed to the next doorframe. The scene within was much the same, except that the butchers hadn't had time to cut into the body of the young woman lying on the table.

In the third operating chamber, the plastic wall had been sliced open with a scalpel, allowing the surgeons to escape. With a deep breath, Vince ducked through the tear and found himself once more in darkness.

Confused shouts and the sound of running feet echoed in the blackness somewhere ahead of him. There was a gunshot, and then all Vince heard were screams. Terrible, throat-rending screams that echoed crazily in the vast chamber.

A wild volley of gunfire rent the darkness - then Vince heard a low, guttural growl. It was a vicious, liquid sound, unlike anything Gabreski had ever heard before, and it sent a thrill of pure terror racing down his spine.

Clutching his pistol tightly, he rushed toward the sounds of the fighting. More screams and wild shots punctured the blackness, followed by a chorus of terrified shrieks. With a shock, Vince realized that some of the screaming was coming over the radio clipped to his collar.

He stumbled over a body, half illuminated by a Mag-Lite clutched in the corpse's left hand. It was another one of the ambushers, his head half shot away. Gabreski snatched up the flashlight and kept going, desperate to find Waters and his other teammates.



The screaming went on and on. It sounded like a dozen voices, shouting in English, Spanish and Russian. Gabreski slipped, and came down hard on one knee. His pant leg was soaked though instantly; when he shone his light onto the floor, he found he was standing in a trail of fresh blood almost two feet wide.

Up ahead he could hear the sounds of a frenzied struggle. He was very close now, less than 30 feet away. Gabreski thought he could hear Andrea's voice among the screams, and the sound galvanized him. He lurched to his feet and ran forward, the light bouncing crazily across the bloody, debris-strewn floor.

He expected to find a pile of butchered corpses, but instead, the bloody trail led to a gaping hole in the warehouse floor. Someone had gone to a great deal of trouble to cut away the concrete and dig into the ground beneath. Piles of dirt and trash rose five feet high in a semicircle around the opening.

The screaming was all around him now. He sensed people scrabbling and crawling across the piled rubble, fleeing the open pit. Another pistol boomed off to Gabreski's right, and in the momentary flash, he glimpsed a strange figure crouched at the edge of the hole.

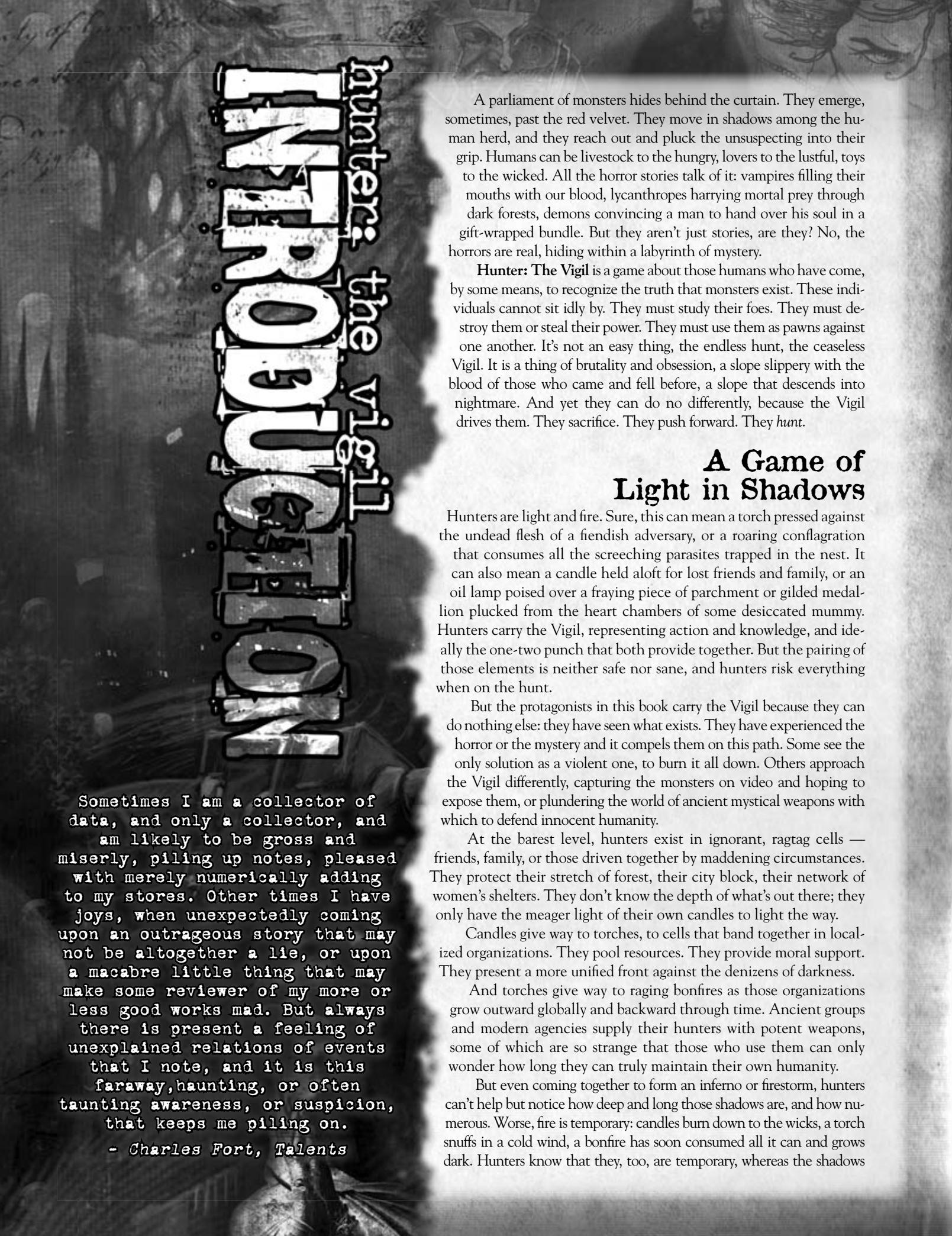
It was humanoid in shape, with broad, sloping shoulders and powerful, apelike arms. Its skin had a dull, scaly sheen where it wasn't caked in layers of blood and filth. When the gun went off, the creature was staring back over its shoulder at Gabreski, and its eyes glowed like a cat's in the muzzle flash.

Darnell Waters was thrashing and screaming in the creature's powerful grip.

Gabreski cried out in horror, bringing up the Mag-Lite and aiming his pistol with a trembling hand. In the play of light, he saw Raimundo crouching just a few feet away, shrieking in fear. His bodyguard lay next to him, literally torn limb from limb.

For just a moment, he found himself staring into the creature's illuminated face. Wide, black lips parted, revealing double rows of pointed, bloodstained teeth - then it leapt into the pit, taking Waters with it.

The detective's screams dwindled, then were gone.



hun ter s o n c u l t u s

the vigil

Sometimes I am a collector of data, and only a collector, and am likely to be gross and miserly, piling up notes, pleased with merely numerically adding to my stores. Other times I have joys, when unexpectedly coming upon an outrageous story that may not be altogether a lie, or upon a macabre little thing that may make some reviewer of my more or less good works mad. But always there is present a feeling of unexplained relations of events that I note, and it is this faraway, haunting, or often taunting awareness, or suspicion, that keeps me piling on.

- Charles Fort, *Talents*

A parliament of monsters hides behind the curtain. They emerge, sometimes, past the red velvet. They move in shadows among the human herd, and they reach out and pluck the unsuspecting into their grip. Humans can be livestock to the hungry, lovers to the lustful, toys to the wicked. All the horror stories talk of it: vampires filling their mouths with our blood, lycanthropes harrying mortal prey through dark forests, demons convincing a man to hand over his soul in a gift-wrapped bundle. But they aren't just stories, are they? No, the horrors are real, hiding within a labyrinth of mystery.

Hunter: The Vigil is a game about those humans who have come, by some means, to recognize the truth that monsters exist. These individuals cannot sit idly by. They must study their foes. They must destroy them or steal their power. They must use them as pawns against one another. It's not an easy thing, the endless hunt, the ceaseless Vigil. It is a thing of brutality and obsession, a slope slippery with the blood of those who came and fell before, a slope that descends into nightmare. And yet they can do no differently, because the Vigil drives them. They sacrifice. They push forward. They *hunt*.

A Game of Light in Shadows

Hunters are light and fire. Sure, this can mean a torch pressed against the undead flesh of a fiendish adversary, or a roaring conflagration that consumes all the screeching parasites trapped in the nest. It can also mean a candle held aloft for lost friends and family, or an oil lamp poised over a fraying piece of parchment or gilded medallion plucked from the heart chambers of some desiccated mummy. Hunters carry the Vigil, representing action and knowledge, and ideally the one-two punch that both provide together. But the pairing of those elements is neither safe nor sane, and hunters risk everything when on the hunt.

But the protagonists in this book carry the Vigil because they can do nothing else: they have seen what exists. They have experienced the horror or the mystery and it compels them on this path. Some see the only solution as a violent one, to burn it all down. Others approach the Vigil differently, capturing the monsters on video and hoping to expose them, or plundering the world of ancient mystical weapons with which to defend innocent humanity.

At the barest level, hunters exist in ignorant, ragtag cells — friends, family, or those driven together by maddening circumstances. They protect their stretch of forest, their city block, their network of women's shelters. They don't know the depth of what's out there; they only have the meager light of their own candles to light the way.

Candles give way to torches, to cells that band together in localized organizations. They pool resources. They provide moral support. They present a more unified front against the denizens of darkness.

And torches give way to raging bonfires as those organizations grow outward globally and backward through time. Ancient groups and modern agencies supply their hunters with potent weapons, some of which are so strange that those who use them can only wonder how long they can truly maintain their own humanity.

But even coming together to form an inferno or firestorm, hunters can't help but notice how deep and long those shadows are, and how numerous. Worse, fire is temporary: candles burn down to the wicks, a torch snuffs in a cold wind, a bonfire has soon consumed all it can and grows dark. Hunters know that they, too, are temporary, whereas the shadows

seem endless and eternal. They can only hope that others will carry the Vigil in their stead.

Theme

The theme here is “light in shadows,” with hunters being a reckoning force that takes action against the darkness. But we’ve covered that already.

The game has a minor theme, too: humankind is both powerful and fragile. He is fragile when he is alone and ignorant, but he is powerful when he gathers his resources and finds knowledge. Hunters must work together to accomplish their goals, but even then, a cell, compact or conspiracy is only as strong as the weakest within — one traitorous worm boring to the heart of the apple or one rogue ant that leads the trail astray has the potential to destroy the rest. And the pressures of the Vigil, the sacrifices inherent, can drive even a hunter of the strongest heart to such disunity and disarray.

Mood

The prevailing mood is horror and mystery: these two elements work in tandem to drive unaware humans to take up the Vigil as hunters. Horror explodes before their eyes: families dead on a blood-slick floor or some awful gibbering thing crawling free from a bus crash. Mystery dangles like a hang-nail that one cannot help but pick — a tattooed cipher on a dead man’s arm, a book written in a language that cannot be human, a box on a doorstep filled with dry leaves and bundles of human hair, all bound together in ribbons of taut skin.

Other moods pervade, too: the Vigil is grim, brutal, insane. But it can also be hopeful and heroic. This is a desperate struggle, but it is not impossible. And it may lead the protagonists on mad adventures, indeed.

Humanity’s Hidden Power

For every hunter, a different Vigil.

This book aims to supply players and Storytellers with all the resources necessary to craft a monster-hunting story of their design. Hunters are brought into the World of Darkness in various ways — how does your character have the scales torn from his eyes? Does he watch something gut his wife and harvest her heart? Is he courted by one of the ancient hunter conspiracies because it believes he has certain skills and “moral flexibilities” that will suit its needs? Has he always known of the supernatural, having been born into a family with a diseased and infernal bloodline?

Your hunter — and your **Hunter: The Vigil** story — have the potential to be nearly anything and assume any face you desire. Want an ass-kicking, take-no-prisoners game, with your hunters grabbing monsters by the throat and taking the city back block by bloody block? That’s perfectly viable. Or do you instead want a game devoted to studying the maddening mysteries of the World of Darkness, where every pulled thread threatens to unravel the entire fabric of one’s carefully crafted theories and, worse, one’s cautiously cultivated sanity? No problem.

Hunters are that candle in the darkness, performing a seemingly endless duty. They’re about taking back the night, about putting humanity back in control. But the road is long and home to many crossroads. Which road will your charac-

ters take? Down what path will the story of your tireless hunters travel? You’ll find no wrong turns in the following pages.

How to Use This Book

The chapters of this book break down the rules and background necessary to run a **Hunter: The Vigil** story.

Throughout, you’ll find **Flesh Trade** as a five-part story detailing the formation of a hunter cell as it’s exposed to the horror and mystery of the World of Darkness.

Chapter One: Shadows Cast by Firelight details the Vigil from the ground up: how much and how little the hunter community knows about itself, how they band together in cells, compacts, and conspiracies, and the many monstrosities they must fight.

Chapter Two: Character Creation features all the rules and processes you need to put together a fun and detailed **Hunter: The Vigil** character, including new Merits and Professions.

Chapter Three: Hunter Organizations looks in depth at a number of potential hunter compacts and conspiracies within the World of Darkness. In addition, it provides systems for each of the conspiracy Endowments, as well as systems of Research and Development regarding new Endowments and a discussion on creating your own hunter organization for use within **Hunter: The Vigil**.

Chapter Three: Special Rules and Systems identifies all the rules that might govern hunter characters in your story, including new equipment and the Tactics available to hunter cells of any experience level.

Chapter Four: Storytelling gives you perspective on the art of taking all the stuff in this book and channeling it into a story for you and your players. The game’s themes and moods are explored more explicitly here.

Appendix One: Morality and the Vigil lets you tweak the Morality settings for **Hunter: The Vigil** to tell the story you want to tell as Storyteller or player.

Appendix Two: Philadelphia takes you monster hunting in the hotbed of American Revolution, the City of Brotherly Love.

Sources and Inspiration

Hunter: The Vigil is a horror game, a game about humans taking control from the exploitative monsters of the World of Darkness. As such, the world offers no end of possible inspirations, and some of these can be found below.

Non-Fiction

Alien Dawn by Colin Wilson offers itself as a non-fiction look at all manner of bizarre phenomena and monstrous incursions into our world. Folklore, ghosts, lost time, psychic weirdness, aliens and monsters all appear in some form or another. Read it as if a very real hunter in the World of Darkness wrote it and it gets scary, fast.

Everything Is Under Control by Robert Anton Wilson: cults and conspiracies in easy-to-digest encyclopedia format.

Harper’s Encyclopedia of Mystical and Paranormal Experience is exactly as its name suggests, and provides a wealth of story hooks.

The Mothman Prophecies by John Keel (also recommended: his *Complete Guide to Mysterious Beings*) is really the story

of a hunter: a guy who catches a whiff of the weird and grows obsessed over it, following the rabbit down the rabbit hole, deeper, deeper. No easy answers here, and sometimes it gets a little too weird. (The film version is a little more “horror” in tone, and works as inspiration, too.)

Parasite Rex by Carl Zimmer is a compelling, easy-to-read book about, well, parasites. Real parasites: worms, bacteria, flies. They bore into bellies, bloodstreams and brains. Great squick factor, and also helps to remind us all that most of the monsters in the World of Darkness are parasitic in some fashion or another.

Fiction

Declare or Three Days to Never by Tim Powers. Supernatural spy novels? Secret history? Strange devices? Mind-blowing conspiracies? All present and accounted for. (And, really, a lot of Tim Powers’ work can serve as inspiration.)

The Exorcist by William Peter Blatty. Don’t know that we even need to explain this, but demonic possession born in the Middle East and carried to Washington, DC? Exorcising priests? A battle of good versus evil and the madness in between? Book or movie will do the trick.

Hellblazer, DC/Vertigo comics, gives us occult detective John Constantine. He’s very much a hunter, albeit certainly a selfish one. Touches on all manner of occult mystery and gross-out horror, and nearly any issue can serve as a great resource for a Vigil story. The film, *Constantine*, isn’t really on par with the comic, but it has some nice moments, too (spear of destiny!).

It by Stephen King. A group of kids battle a malefic force (evil clown, giant spider), and then come back together as adults to fight the resurgence of that force. A hunter cell formed from very early on, if you frame it right.

Seven Soldiers of Victory, a DC comic by Grant Morrison, takes place in the DC Universe and, as such, features a lot of goofy stuff that wouldn’t belong in a World of Darkness game. But a lot of it (occult journeys, secret subway tunnels larded over by urban pirates, the lost colony of Roanoke, demonic invasion) could work as setting material for this game right here.

Stinger by Robert McCammon offers a great look at how disparate people from all walks of life band together to fight the forces of evil: in this case, a shapeshifting alien (the titular “Stinger”) that imprisons a small desert town to look for something it’s lost. Also check out *Swan Song*.

The Walking Dead by Robert Kirkman is one of the best “humans versus zombies but really versus themselves” stories out there today. This one’s in great black-and-white comic book form. Find it. Love it.

Oh, and just about anything by H.P. Lovecraft. The Cthulhu Mythos is certainly about hunters confronting insurmountable evil and standing against it...or crumbling before it.

Films

Children of Men, directed by Alfonso Cuarón, isn’t about hunting monsters, but it is about a man drawn into the light and driven to uncover the truth and protect the innocent even at the cost of his own life. Grim and gritty, it strikes just the right mood.

Fallen, directed by Gregory Hoblin, shows us a detective (Denzel Washington) pursuing a supernatural serial killer — a demon that jumps from body to body.

Frailty, directed by and starring Bill Paxton, is a story about a man and a son who “see” demons, and the father forces his family to hunt them. Are the demons real? Or is he pursuing “monsters” who are truly innocent people? Another good example of this question of reality versus unreality is *Head Trauma* by director Lance Weiler, in which a wanderer returns to his condemned home and is haunted by the monster within.

National Treasure, directed by Jon Turteltaub, is a little light and silly in tone to be a truly Vigil-specific film, but it takes place in Philadelphia and details an interesting investigation into the esoteric history of the United States. That can be very hunter flavored, if you so desire.

TV

Supernatural on the CW details two brothers — hunters, really — who pick up the family legacy and hunt monsters.

Torchwood sometimes goes a little too sci-fi, but otherwise gives us a secret government agency formed to watch over an awful dimensional rift. The characters are very human. They’re clueless, sarcastic, they get sad and angry and afraid. They go out for pizza and beers, they worry about getting killed and eaten...good times, and very Vigil.

X-Files is like an ongoing *Hunter* chronicle, maybe even featuring a pair of Task Force: VALKYRIE hunters. It’s definitely about a story that focuses predominantly on investigation over just “kill the monsters.”

Video Games

Yes, indeed, games can inspire games. The number of monster-hunter video games is limitless, but some bear special mention: *Alone in the Dark*, *F.E.A.R.*, *Half-Life 1 & 2*, *Jericho* (by Clive Barker), *Silent Hill* and *Undying* (also by Clive Barker) can all serve as inspiration for a cool, action-oriented *Hunter: The Vigil* game.

Lexicon

Aegis Kai Doru: Conspiracy. Ancient hunter organization composed of various occult initiates who seek to destroy witches and sorcerers above all else, using magical artifacts to achieve their goals. Sometimes called the “Guardians of the Labyrinth” or “The Shield and Spear.”

The Ascending Ones: Conspiracy. Egyptian mystics and religious hunters whose bodies transubstantiate various narcotics and poisons into spiritual fortitude and strength. Sometimes called the “Cult of the Phoenix.”

Ashwood Abbey: Compact. Hedonistic thrill-seekers. Hunt monsters for fun and pleasure. Known sometimes as the “Sybarites.”

Candle, the: Another name for the Vigil, often used as in “Carrying the Candle.”

The Candle Compact: Another name for the Chestnut Street Compact, a historical alliance between several cells,

orgs and agencies in Philadelphia; has taken on more global and mythic prominence in modern nights.

cancer cell: A cell said to be infiltrated by monsters.

The Cheiron Group: Conspiracy. Seemingly modern hunter organization lurking at the center of a European pharmaceutical and medical conglomerate. To them, monsters are resources to be exploited and sold; their agents are fitted with strange grafts harvested from the monsters themselves. The hunters themselves belong specifically to the “Field Projects Division.”

cell: A group of two to 20 hunters who work together.

cellmate: A member of your hunter’s cell.

changeling: A creature left behind when a human child is stolen from the world by extra-normal entities — it plays at being human, but plainly isn’t.

Code, the A hunter’s individual Code of Morality (see Appendix One)

compact: A hunter group composed of many hunter cells. Smaller and more localized than a conspiracy; does not have access to Endowments. The term “compact” likely refers to the Chestnut Street Compact, a.k.a. the Candle Compact.

conspiracy: A global and sometimes ancient hunter organization; provides its hunters with access to special monster-hunting resources (see “Endowments”).

cult: Group of zealots often supported by a potentially supernatural cult leader or instead serving and worshipping some kind of creature or supernatural phenomenon. Cults serve as dangerous as well as morally questionable targets for hunters (as many cult members are ostensibly human).

demon: Infernal tempters: sometimes bodiless, other times quite corporeal. Other names include devils, daemons, incubi, succubi.

Endowments: Supernatural or high-tech resources available to those hunters who belong to the third-tier hunter conspiracies.

ENEs: Extra-normal entities. Technically, it’s a Task Force: VALKYRIE term, but other hunters use it as a more official name for the various fiends and monsters they hunt.

Fallen: Those hunters who have become truly monstrous (sometimes as slashers; see below). They are often insane and quite dangerous.

ghoul: generic name for any monster, though can refer specifically to flesh-eating graveyard hauntings or to the slaves of vampires. Sometimes *ghūl*.

hunter: One who has taken up the Vigil and hunts the horrors and mysteries of the World of Darkness.

The Long Night: Compact. Modern Christian hunter organization; believes the glorious Apocalypse is on its way and must be ushered forth. However, the world is in the period of Tribulation, and the monsters must be destroyed to pave the way for Christ’s return. Sometimes called the “Tribulation Militia.”

The Loyalists of Thule: Compact. Occult investigators of the secret world. Strive to make up for the fact that two of their members and some of their theories went into the founding of the Nazi party. Also known as “the Indebted.”

The Lucifuge: Conspiracy. Hunters who purportedly belong to the bloodline of Lucifer himself. They strive against the destiny of their blood to bring Hell to the monsters. Sometimes referred to as the “Children of the Seventh Generation.”

Malleus Maleficarum: Conspiracy. Papal-sanctioned witch-hunters. Also known as the Hammer of Witches, or the Shadow Congregation.

Manhunter: A hunter whose Vigil is devoted to normal humans as well as the monsters. Often seen by other hunters as morally dubious and outright criminal.

Network Zero: Compact. Ragtag army of hunters devoted to capturing monsters or monstrous phenomena on various forms of media. Also called the “Secret Frequency.”

The Nibiru: Babylonian hunters, believed to be the first hunter “cell.”

Null Mysteris: Compact. Science-minded hunters who believe that all paranormal occurrences and creatures can be studied and explained. Sometimes refers to themselves as the “Organization for the Rational Assessment of the Supernatural.”

Organization: Hunter cells gather together for common purpose or to battle a common enemy. Smaller organizations are “compacts”; larger and more ancient organizations are considered to be “conspiracies.”

pariah: A hunter who has supposedly “retired” from the Vigil.

Reanimated: Corpses animated with mystical power. Often appear human, but glimpses of stitches and corpse-flesh can sometimes be seen. Some manifest as zombies or muddy golems.

rogue: A hunter who betrays his cell, compact or conspiracy for some purpose. Used as “he’s gone rogue.” Other terms include “gone off the reservation,” or simply, “gone south.”

safehouse: A hunter cell’s place of sanctuary, however temporary.

slasher: A serial killer; often exhibits supernatural traits. Some hunters whisper that going too far on the Vigil can lead one to become a slasher.

Tactics: The concerted strategies enacted by hunter cells against monsters.

Task Force: VALKYRIE: Conspiracy. Clandestine government Joint Task Force established to investigate and eliminate monstrous threats. Sometimes called the “Men in Black.”

The Union: Compact. Blue-collar hunter organization, ultimately decentralized. Concerned more with the defense of local neighborhoods and citizens than any larger ideals. Sometimes called the “Regular Janes and Joes.”

vampire: Undead blood-drinker. Other names include bloodsuckers, the Damned, leeches, licks, ticks.

Vigil: A common name for the hunt, as in “on the Vigil” or “carrying the Vigil.”

werewolf: Lycanthropes who change from man to wolf. Other names include loup garou, beast-men, lupines, *vargr*, wolfmen.

witch: A manipulator of magic. Other names include Crowley, mage, magician, sorcerer, warlock.



Besieged by Hidden Threats

The world is a dangerous place. As much as humanity would like to believe itself safe and in control of the world, the facts argue otherwise. On a daily basis, the news is filled with evidence of these dangers. Natural disasters swallow entire towns, sweeping away lives like so much flotsam and jetsam. Catastrophic accidents claim tragic tolls — buses of schoolchildren, planes full of innocent travelers, hardworking laborers just trying to earn a paycheck. Acts of war, crime and terrorism, ever-present and escalating. For all the defenses and adaptations that humankind has created to protect itself, the peril persists.

And those are just the threats the average person recognizes, the ones that the mainstream media reports. Behind the scenes, beyond the scope of most mortal eyes, an entire world of other dangers exists — perils so dark, so threatening to body, mind or soul, so impossible to defend against that humanity as a whole refuses to truly acknowledge their presence. These dangers will never be reported on the front page of a newspaper, nor made the subject of charity drives or grassroots movements. No bumper stickers or editorial pages will uselessly prod readers to act against them, and humanity, for the most part, will continue to ignore their presence and steadfastly disbelieve they even exist.

The tip of the iceberg may reach the news: "Mother kills children, then self — town outraged!"; "Body found — Sheriff's Department blames cougar"; "Missing teen sought in brutal slaying." But regardless of how much credence is given to such stories, the truth behind most of them will never reach the public. The truth is simple — monsters exist. Some are human, some once were, and some only wear human skins to pass amongst humanity. Many faces. Many horrors.

All the supernatural creatures of legend and nightmares — vampires, ghosts, witches, demons and more — lurk just beyond the kenning of humanity. Some see the human population as little more than toys, tools or food, resources to be used for sustenance or pleasure and then discarded with no more thought than a human gives an empty soda can. Others try to live alongside humankind in relative peace, even attempting to emulate human ways. Unfortunately for humans, regardless of how harmless the intent of any one of these denizens of the supernatural world might be, their very presence still presents a danger to those around them. Even the most pacifistic of monsters may have abilities, knowledge or enemies that are potentially deadly to those who stumble across them unknowingly, unprepared for the clandestine power they possess.

The world at large is not ready for the truth. And so it chooses to gawk at the blood, to shake its head in disapproval, and then to go about its naïve way, never for a moment believing truly in the dangers that exist all around it.

Unfortunately for humankind, not believing in these monsters does nothing to make them less dangerous. Instead, it creates a vacuum within which these threats thrive, a safe zone in which they exist and multiply and from which they continue to threaten the unwary. While humanity spins forth an ever-more tangled web of governmental policy, environmental guidelines and safety regulations in an attempt to deal with the mundane dangers they willingly



My candle burns at both ends
It will not last the night
But ah, my foes,
and oh, my friends -
It gives a lovely light.
-Edna St. Vincent Millay,
"First Fig"

perceive, these unseen threats — the monsters, creatures and denizens of the World of Darkness — continue to endanger humankind as they have for centuries, protected by their victims' self-imposed blindness to the peril they face.

Blind to the Dangers

In most cases, even those who come face to face with these dangers do not recognize them as such. It suits a monster to go unrecognized, unnoticed, unchallenged, and most have some method of blending in with humanity or of blurring their presence from humankind's collective view. Perhaps more effective than any supernatural invisibility or demonic camouflage, however, is the human power to perceive only what pleases them. And it suits humanity to ignore the horrors, to ignore the dangers they present, and thus to maintain their façade of safety.

A woman drives along a dark country road and sees something cross her headlights' path. It turns, looking over one shoulder to face the oncoming car, and she gasps as its blue eyes widen and its human face contorts in fear before it dashes off into the woods. Later, she reports to her husband how lucky she was to have not hit "that deer," and even describes the buck's velvet-covered rack, but she would never admit, even to herself, that the creature she saw wore a man's features.

A crime scene in the middle of a big city turns up fibers among the victim's disemboweled entrails. When the lab reports the evidence to be shreds of centuries-old linen wrappings that twitch and shudder when touched, the police burn those fibers and console one another that it was just "something weird," some kind of "laboratory error."

Eyewitness reports of poltergeist activity are labeled as the hoax of stage magic, or the secretive actions of a petulant teen, or even mass hallucinations. It couldn't possibly be a supernatural phenomenon. Man likes things rational. Man likes things easy. Don't rock the boat, or you'll be called crazy.

Sometimes, however, ignorance is impossible. Sometimes the evidence is so clear it cannot be ignored or explained away. Unfortunately for humanity, when they are not given the option for self-deception, they often do not leave the encounter in any shape to share their knowledge with others.

For some, an encounter with the horror and mystery of the World of Darkness is fatal. Monsters do not abide by the same laws that hold sway over the majority of humanity, and even those predators that are not driven to kill out of hunger, wrath or bloodlust may do so out of simple expedience or apathy. Dead men, as the saying goes, tell no tales, and those who do discover the truth that lurks beneath the surface of the "normal" world are often dealt with in a permanent fashion to protect the monster's secret existence. By destroying all living witnesses, a monster, be it a human slasher or a supernatural being, is able to foster the aura of disbelief surrounding it, and foster humanity's self-delusions of safety, providing a continued environment of unwariness within which the creature can prowl at will. Other times the death is not even intentional — a creature with superhuman strength, temper or hunger may accidentally kill with no ill intent whatsoever. Humans can seem frail creatures, compared to some of the monsters lurking in the shadows of the World of Darkness.

While destroying all witnesses is one method of ensuring their secrecy, some monsters rely upon other means to ensure the silence of those who have seen "too much." Some have the ability to make those who have seen too much forget what they have witnessed, changing or erasing their memory completely. Unfortunately, such powers are rarely perfect or permanent, leading to trauma and sometimes insanity when the monster's supernatural command to forget begins to fracture. When the truth begins to seep out between the cracks of the monster's control, hallucinations, nightmares and visions begin to emerge. All are shades of an unpleasant truth.

For those without the ability to wipe a witness' memory clean, a threat against his or her loved ones is often enough to buy a witness' held tongue, especially when it is clear that the predator is more than willing and capable of carrying through with the threat. "If you tell, I will kill your family" is a harsh enough threat, but a creature that holds your son's still-dripping ear in the palm of its hand and says, "Speak a word of this, and I will come back for the rest," is unlikely to be argued with or disbelieved.

That is not to say that all encounters with monsters end in the victim's death, however. Sometimes the monster keeps control, fighting back whatever monstrous instincts, drives or passions would set them at humanity's throat. Other times, the predator simply has other priorities — bigger fish to fry. Sometimes outside circumstances intervene, and the monster is either driven off or chooses discretion over satisfaction of his baser desires.

Eyes Ripped Open

The truth is out there and it *crawls* into some like a worm boring into the flesh of an apple. Shattered memories are slowly taped together. Scars on skin tell an inescapable tale. For every voice that tells a person to deny what she saw, what she remembers, what she *feels*, there exists a bigger, meaner voice that gives it to her straight: *we are not alone*. We sleep next to beasts. We drink with monsters. We feel their hands at our throats, their fingers in our mouths, their breath in our ear. Monsters are real.

The realization is different for everyone, of course. A police officer sees a pattern amidst several crimes where the perpetrator can enter locked rooms without a key, can disappear into thin air and can kill its victims with a single touch. The officer's logical mind knows these things are impossible and that *surely* a logical answer exists. But the patterns say otherwise. Draw a line connecting the pins in the map on the wall, and the cop sees a symbol that the Internet tells him is Satanic in origin. He pursues this information, tumbling down the dark rabbit hole, suffering from nightmares, wasting away on his hunt for the truth.

A priest finds himself listening to the slurred tale of a woman who claims to have "stolen" the life of another. It can't be true, of course. And he smells the booze on her breath. She leaves the confession booth and he follows her. He loses her for a time, but soon comes upon her — burying a body that looks exactly the same as hers. He stares aghast as she puts down a grave marker of a white stone, and then he realizes the whole field is *full* of similar stones.

A woman with a violent child opens the door on a foggy night to find a pack of men in ragged clothing: they explain that her child is different, he's like them, and *they're* his fam-

ily now. And they knock her down and steal the child. She buys a rifle and a pair of bloodhounds. Two nights later, she sets off after her stolen boy.

Sure, some can remain ignorant. But for others, it's like a hangnail or a raw tooth: they can't leave it alone, picking at it no matter the pain. They rise to the challenge and seek to protect those who are unaware or unable to protect themselves. Or delve deeper, hoping to glean information, wealth, experience or power from sources others are not brave enough to tap. They may be driven to exterminate the source of their hatred or protect those they love, or to redeem the souls (or what passes for them) of those who have been tainted by diabolic powers beyond their ken. They may be spurred by bravery, curiosity, greed, lust, hope or anger. They seek, in one way or another, to turn the tables on the monsters of the world.

Armed with weapons or wits, using whatever means is at their avail, they make the choice to cross the boundaries between the false light of ignorance and the dark depths of knowledge. They choose to learn, to seek, to explore and to hunt.

They choose the Vigil.

The Candle, Lit

Hunters slip, step or leap into the Vigil. For each hunter, the Vigil begins with a single and unique moment, when he realizes not only the truth, but also what he must do in response to it.

For some it is a conscious choice to make a stand against evil. A man realizes that something has marked his neighborhood as its territory, stalking his neighbors and his family. The police do nothing, and he turns to his local pawnshop's rifle case to protect those he knows and loves from something no one else will stand up against. He lays his money on the counter, hefts the rifle in his hands, and the hunt has begun. He may not know that anyone else in the world fights the same battle he does, but he has just joined a brotherhood that spans the globe and stretches back to the beginnings of humanity.

For others, a heartbeat's worth of reaction time is all it takes for the Vigil to begin. Something reaches for her from the depths of an alley, and rather than allow her purse (and possibly her life) to be taken, she fights back with tooth and nail and pepper spray. And, even after she discovers that the creature she is fighting has eyes that blaze like fire and clicking chelicerae where his mouth should be, she keeps on fighting. When this attacker is vanquished, she finds that instead of slinking back to her apartment, shaking in fear, she's flushed with adrenalin and read to look in the shadows of each alley she passes for the next depraved soul foolish enough to think someone walking alone is an easy target or a fast meal.

One hunter stumbles upon the truth in blood-spattered tomes encrypted in blasphemous languages, another in a tangle of tunnels populated by shadowy figures who gain power from a mysterious stone. Both are pulled into the enigma, tempted into seeking out secrets that humanity was not meant to know. They may continue their search purely



for the sake of learning all there is to know, or stumble across such heinous wrongdoings and unbelievable horrors that they vow to use their knowledge to protect those who live in blissful ignorance. For both, the candle is lit, the Vigil begins.

Some have the hunt thrust upon them. One woman gambles away the rent and then some, but the casino owner offers her a deal. In exchange for clearing her debt, she has to seduce a certain patron and coax a particular piece of information from him. Only, the patron is just wearing the skin of a man; inside is something nesting, something that shifts and shudders like a bag of whispering locusts. Or instead of asking her to serve as a Mata Hari, the casino owner wants only permission to visit her in her dreams. Or for her to offer up the memory of the first time she made love. Or her firstborn child. Where others might agree and become another victim, she refuses and begins her Vigil with that decision to hunt down the creature that would prey upon humanity in such a fashion. Or perhaps she agrees, but lays down terms of her own, turning the tables on her would-be abuser, and sets out on a Vigil of investigation and exploration. Maybe the casino owner is not a monster at all, but a hunter looking to flesh out his cell, and for the sake of her debt, she becomes his resource, and eventually his newest recruit.

Another man might be called to the Vigil by voices from heaven or from hell, by ancestors long forgotten or spirits seeking his aid. Rather than ignore the call or seek therapy, he listens and is drawn closer to the world of truth that lies just beyond what most of humanity is willing to see. Where others might fall into servitude of the voices, regardless of their sources, he investigates further. Discovering the alien desires that lie behind the siren's call, he sets out to ensure they do not pull others in with their persuasive whispers, or even to undermine their efforts to gain a human servant and try to bind them to his service instead. Is he disgusted by what he must do? Or enlivened by the power thrust into his hands?

History of the Hunt

The Vigil is as old as humankind itself. As long as monsters have prowled the darkness, brave and desperate mortals have walked out of the protective ring of firelight to pursue those shadows. Some die. Many go mad. But someone else always picks up the torch and steps into the dark.

Some hunters whisper about the history that has preceded them; others boast loudly about it. Few are certain what's true and what's not, only that the Vigil is both timeless and ceaseless.

The Nibiru

Some claim that tablets recovered from the Lost Library of Ashurbanipal (an Assyrian library handily predating the Library of Alexandria) tell tales of the first hunter, and even the first hunter cell.

Marduk, these tablets claim, was not a god at all but a "divine hero" championed by his army (his "cell"), the Nibiru. As the son of Ea, he was both righteous and holy and tasked with the mission to reclaim the Tablet of Destinies. The Tablet was said to detail all the events of the past and of the future, and whoever held it had great power. Unfortunately, the Tablet had fallen into the hands of the monstrous

goddess Tiamat, who gave it to the god-king Qingu so that he might effectively rule her armies.

With the Nibiru, Marduk hunted Qingu and Tiamat and stole the Tablet (which Qingu wore on his chest as a breast-plate). Marduk also tore into Tiamat (who some say was a bloated sea monster; others claim her to be far more alien and otherworldly than that). Upon slaying her, however, she tore in half and released an army of horrors: scorpion-men, howling dragons, the corpses of men who had already died, and iniquitous demons. It is in this way that some hunters believe they are taking up the Vigil to "put the snakes back in the can," so to speak, fixing the errors of Marduk's legacy. Others, though, rely on the hope that the story is as full of shit as it sounds.

Aves Minerva

Ancient Rome had its hunters, as well — the Empire was besieged by monsters within and without, from mad emperors to cannibal barbarians, from undead things lingering in the Necropolises to skin-stealing owl women. Many hunter cells operated as cults or gangs working on behalf of various gods and goddesses, and the Aves Minerva (Birds of Minerva) were no different. Aventine Hill, one of Rome's seven hills, featured a rough-and-tumble working-class neighborhood that suffered at the hands of several competing gangs. One of the gangs working for dominance was the Aves, and they sought to protect the Hill from the depredations of darkness, operating on behalf of the warrior-goddess Minerva. (They called themselves the birds because not only was Aventine Hill home to various flocks of pigeons, murders of crows and parliaments of owls, but Minerva herself was also associated with owls and birds from her Etruscan origins.) As Minerva gifted Rome with the olive tree, she also gifted the city with the Aves Minerva.

One story suggests it was the Aves Minerva who helped defeat Cacus, a cannibal monster with fire-eyes (and some say the child of god Vulcan) lurking beneath the Aventine Hill in a series of caves. Cacus would eat the bodies of his victims, but leave the heads to be nailed to various doors and cave walls in the neighborhood. It was said that they dragged the corpse of the monster down to the *Forum Boarium* (cattle market) to champion their mighty success.

Some hunters claim the Aves were a brute squad, a cult of thugs representing all that goes against the moral Vigil. Others marvel at their success in ending the reign of a particularly brutal monster (and the child of a god), and even now call themselves the Aves, or Birds, after that group.

Other Roman hunter cells existed as well. Many dedicated themselves to the investigation (and, for some, extermination) of various humanoid cultures noted in various early bestiaries. As Roman explorers traveled the world and noted strange and terrible races, these cells followed in their footsteps and, through poison, treachery or outright murder, decimated the pseudo-human tribes. So efficient were they in their Vigil that later explorers who attempted to reconnect with the dog-headed Cynocephali, the long-headed and long-toothed Macrocephali or the Skiapodes (the "Shadow-Foots") were unable to discover any remaining traces of the tribes.

The Archived Hunt

The Scandinavian hero, Beowulf, noted for the destruction of the legendary monster Grendel (and that monster's mother), is often thought by theologians to be symbolic of overt Christian themes. However, for those who are aware of the truth and not dissuaded by the impossibility of less esoteric answers, Grendel's history is much more sinister. The most common translation of the poem is attributed to a 10th century English monk who refers to both Grendel and his mother as "kins of Cain" — an occasional euphemism for vampiric or otherwise unholy creatures. For hunters who recognize the feasibility of such creatures existing, Beowulf is often touted as one of the earliest recognized followers of the Vigil.

Not all historic hunters fought monsters with sword and shield. Some explored and recorded the habits of witches, demons, ghosts or monsters, so that others might protect themselves. Johannes Nider, a 15th century theologian and hunter, drafted a book entitled the *Formicarius*, which detailed (among other things) the habits and practices of a male witch. Nider himself was a clergyman first and foremost, and served as part of the Council of Florence. The Council, during Nider's participation, had greater religious clout than the papacy itself, in no small part due to the financial backing of the Medici family. Nider publicly denounced the heretical nature of magic users of all stripes, and did his political best to fill the politically powerful Council with like-minded individuals. While not everyone on the Council was there because of the Vigil, Nider and his cell did a great deal to plant the seed of their anti-witch goals in a group that was all too eager to brand sorcerers with the Devil's iron. Perhaps not coincidentally, Nider's main source of information for the *Formicarius* was an interview with an infamous German hunter (and secular judge) by the name of Peter of Greyerz. Greyerz reportedly served in a cell that exemplified the rigorous fortitude of the medieval Inquisition, and used his powers as a secular judge to condemn witches to death. Greyerz claimed to have, in the course of his career, personally tortured the confessions from more than 200 European men, women and children, and then sentenced them to death. Each and every one, he claimed, eventually admitted to practicing witchcraft and having sold their souls to the devil in exchange for some diabolic favor.

More recently, another writer-hunter collected his life's studies of one particular monster into a book that, unfortunately, spelled demise for his career. Anthonid Cornelis Oudemans was a noted 19th-century biologist whose insightful additions to the field earned him the title of director of the Royal Zoological Gardens in The Hague. Unfortunately for Oudemans, not long after being appointed director, he encountered what he would later describe as a sea serpent. Having witnessed what humankind had long claimed was a creature of folklore, Oudemans was struck with a passion (or, some would say, an obsession) to learn more. He took to the Vigil, spending the rest of his years hunting down "mythical" sea creatures, or accounts thereof, across the globe. Early in his Vigil, he was able to mask his hunt in the guise of his work for the Royal Zoo, but in time, his passions took him further and further afield, and it became obvious



RFID CHIPS

The official records of Task Force: VALKYRIE state that the RFID chips implanted in each soldier to operate the agency's Advanced Armory are short range and act only to identify each hunter to his equipment. Rumors suggest, however, that in recent years, additional technology added to the microchip allows the organization to track each hunter's moves down to a matter of feet, through a series of global satellites that can ping the implanted data chips.

In 1995, part of the VALKYRIE cell was lost while assigned to investigate the sighting of a "draconic ENE" (extra-normal entity) in a remote mountain range in Papua, New Guinea. Separated from their base camp by a severe earthquake and stranded without supplies, the rest of the cell feared the worst for the lost hunters. Within hours, however, the organization had forwarded the stranded group's coordinates to the base camp. The hunters were rescued, exactly where the coordinates claimed they would be found.

Inquiries as to how the organization had located the missing hunters went unanswered as "classified," but popular conjecture stated the situation was proof of the unadvertised homing ability of the RFID chips. Official statements deny that the chips can be used for such purposes, but they also claim the RFIDs are hackproof - a claim some enterprising individuals have proved is not entirely accurate.

to everyone (including those who had appointed him to the directorship) that whatever drew Oudemans to the far ends of the earth, it was not his appointed duties. The final straw came in 1892 when, against the advice of his cellmates, Oudemans published a dissertation about his studies. *The Great Sea Serpents of the World* was a popular read, but unfortunately for Oudemans, it was not seen as the scientific treatise he imagined. Instead, readers treated it with the same sense of amusement they did the "Penny Dreadfuls" and other works of gothic horror and occult fiction that swept Victorian culture. When Oudemans, in an effort to be taken seriously, presented the work at a conference of his peers, he was ridiculed, and resigned his position as director soon thereafter. Oudemans' public career ends there, but his cell was rumored to have captured some of the first photographic evidence of lake monsters, one of the earliest recorded uses of cameras and film for the Vigil.

While the inherently clandestine nature of the Vigil means that no overall records of each and every hunter throughout history exist, many conspiracies and compacts keep their own rolls. The Lucifuge, for example, is rumored to have an archive containing the names and histories of every hunter who has joined their conspiracy since its inception. Even stranger, rumors persist that this archive also includes clandestinely gathered samples of every member's hair, blood and other personal articles (family photos, an art project from elementary school, the desiccated ear of a beloved family pet). No member of the Lucifuge has ever confirmed the existence of this archive, believed by some to be located in the Syrian peaks of Mount Hermon, where Jesus was reportedly tempted by the Devil. This region was one of the most hotly disputed during the 1967 Six-Day War, although to this day, the Lucifuge insists that to be entirely coincidental. Similar archives (although without the rumors of supernatural blackmail material) are accredited to many hunter organizations. Modern groups, such as the Union, are often more public about their records (at least to other members of the compact). Task Force: VALKYRIE reportedly uses highly encoded computer databases to keep track of its members' training and assignment history.

For those who have access to these historic files, hunters are credited with innumerable small and large victories against the monsters of the past centuries. According to the Aegis Kai Doru, one of its hunter cells stopped the sadistic rampages of the bloodthirsty Countess Elizabeth Bathory in the late 1500s. Bathory is an interesting case in hunter history, as she was rumored to be in possession of an artifact that, when activated with certain types of human blood, was able to renew her youthful appearance. Paranoid (and rightfully so), the Countess had the relic spirited

away to an unknown location. Rather than sacrifice her and lose track of the relic (said by some to be a spear, others a wretched mask), the hunter cell assigned to her proved her sadism and had her imprisoned in a tower. The group then spent the next several years alternately bribing, threatening and occasionally torturing the noblewoman in an attempt to gain the secret of the item's location. Official agency reports claim the group was successful, although they are less clear on the fate of the magical relic itself. Records suggest that Bathory, separated from the relic, died of advanced age as her purloined years caught up with her.

Others hunters, however, believe that the Aegis Kai Doru was less than pure of motive in its investigation of Bathory's practices. Rumors among members of the Loylists of Thule claim that Bathory was not a monster, but instead a hunter whose victims were not innocent noblewomen as the group professed, but members of a profane



coven possessed by the devil. One Thule researcher created an entire thesis that claims the Aegis was so anxious to get its hands on Bathory's magic relic (which he claims may never even have existed) that they were willing to imprison, torture and eventually kill another hunter.

Journals from within the Ascending Ones point to a perhaps familiar tale: in the mid-1700s, a cell of Ascending Ones traveled to south-central France on the trail of what locals called "the Beast of Gevaudan," a reported giant wolf-monster that had savagely mauled and killed dozens. The hunter cell hoped to harvest the creature's teeth, blood, saliva and bones to fulfill the creation of a number of its more illicit Elixirs. The group spent most of two years tracking the creature, attempting to stay one step ahead of others who had been assigned by the king of France to try to kill the beast (which continued its rampage despite the cell's best efforts to hunt it down). In 1765, the king's chief wolf hunter, François Antoine, brought down a grey wolf of great size that many believed to be the Beast. The Ascending Ones bribed Antoine for samples from the slain creature's body, but the materials proved ineffective, leading them to believe that perhaps the great hunter had killed the wrong animal. Less than three months later, the creature killed two more children, proving the Ascending Ones correct; the king's man had missed or faked his intended quarry. Hunts continued, but none managed to bring down the Beast. In 1767, a devoutly religious local farmer set out to do what hundreds before him had failed to do. Jean Chastel went to a location the Beast was known to frequent, bearing nothing but his Bible and a rifle loaded with bullets made from a silver icon of the Virgin Mary. He began reading scripture aloud, and when the Beast approached, witnesses say it waited patiently for him to finish the text before attacking, at which time Chastel shot it dead. Unlike earlier "successes," this time the Beast's predations ceased and the body was shipped to the king as a trophy, much to the denied Ascending Ones' frustration. The story suggests that Chastel was later recruited by the Malleus Maleficarum.

History books claim that the mysterious serial killer known as Jack the Ripper held the streets of London hostage for a number of years, killing more than a dozen English prostitutes in the late 1880s. Jack was never apprehended by the police and, according to popular knowledge, simply stopped his rampage of slaughter without ever paying the price for his deeds. Members of the Ashwood Abbey know differently, however. In August and September of 1888, five women of loose moral stature were killed on the streets of London and the surrounding neighborhood of Whitechapel. When "Saucy Jack" (as the killer sometimes referred to himself in the smug letters he posted to the police) made it clear that murder was

CHESTNUT STREET COMPACT

In an event that in some ways mirrored, and was perhaps inspired by, the signing of the Declaration of Independence a year earlier, representatives of Philadelphia's various hunter cells met secretly near Independence Hall in the latter half of 1777. At that meeting they drafted a document, the Chestnut Street Compact (sometimes called the "Candle Compact," both as a reference to the Vigil and to the circumference of candles that surrounded them that night), which expressed their commitment to each other and to keeping Philadelphia's population safe from supernatural malevolence.

The existence of the Compact was lost to Philadelphia's modern-era hunters until 1973, when a University of Pennsylvania professor unearthed a colonial diary that referred to it, then began to piece together oblique references from other sources. Ironically, his attempts to understand the origins and meaning of the Compact led him to take up the Vigil as a member of Null Mysteriis. His reconstruction from secondary sources, reproduced below, uses some modern idioms; it's unlikely that the terms "hunter" or "Vigil" were spoken by the colonials protecting their homes and neighborhoods.

The Compact

Let it be known, whereas our common humanity compels us to bind together in a Vigil to stand for people of the City of Philadelphia against a cruel and monstrous Enemy, we declare our allegiance to the following principles that together our light may drive back the armies of the dark:

That hunter shall help hunter. Quarrel, personal animosity, social station, religious conviction or political difference shall not be an impediment when a hunter needs aid against the Enemy. No call for aid shall be denied insofar as any are able to give assistance.

That hunter shall not fight hunter. No hunter will take up arms against another, or treat him as Enemy, or work in any way against him, or seek to undo his work. No hunter shall ally himself with the Enemy against his fellows, nor seek treaty to his own advantage that may cause pain to another who stands in Vigil.

That hunter shall not name hunter. The nature of the Vigil being a secret one, for the protection of the public at large, no hunter shall reveal the activities of another to any authority, be it civil, church or federal. No hunter may identify another as such to anyone not of the Vigil, not to friend, kin, colleague, neighbor, stranger or any other person or persons.

That all who stand Vigil are equal. No hunter is in nature superior to another, all hunters have a right of saying their peace. Rank and structure of command are for the purposes of effective prosecution of the Vigil only, and do not extend beyond the Vigil, nor invest one hunter with authority over another with regard to personal, family, business or other matters. Furthermore, each hunter assembly may conduct its affairs on its own ground as its sees fit, subject only to the concerns of its members and the principles of this document, and need not seek approval or permission of those not operating within the same jurisdiction.

The Candle, Doused

Few know what precisely caused the Compact to end back then. Ancillary journals hint at the possibility that many of the cells were infiltrated or enthralled by the forces of the night, which worked in the cracks and fissures to break the alliances apart. Others suggest that as the horrors of Philadelphia waned as a result of an overly effective Compact, the hunters came to find new enemies: one another. Ideologies ramped, tempers flared and sword-tips and gun barrels pivoted away from the shadows and toward the hunters. Another interpretation suggests that, as hunters are sometimes said to represent fire,

fire burns out. A candle's flame gutters. Over time, the Compact simply winked out, its time done.

The Compact, Tonight

These days, the idea of the Candle Compact is a vibrant, living thing among many hunters. It comes up on web forums. Sometimes it'll be spray-painted on passing trains or scrawled on flyers that are stapled and taped all over the city. The Compact exists as something of an ideal for many hunter cells who envision an army of humans standing against the horrors, who believe that in the spirit of togetherness, humankind can overcome. And this isn't just a vibrant, viral idea in Philadelphia: communities of hunters all around the world know of the Candle Compact (though quite often inventing or adding apocryphal "whisper-down-the-lane" details) and hold it aloft. Cynical (or some say realistic) hunters claim that it's a pipe-dream, a naïve goal that has the substance and strength of a house of cards, and that to pursue it is tantamount to giving the monsters power.

But visionaries struggle to bring the Candle Compact to bear once more from city to city. The efforts usually meet with some success. Hunters from different backgrounds and disparate ideologies may come together for a time and, in evoking the Compact, may manage some triumph against a troublesome threat. But rarely does the Compact (often named for a part of its city: "The Coit Tower Compact" in San Francisco or the "Underground Compact" in London) last beyond the year.

The living dream of the Chestnut Street Compact still thrives in Philadelphia, too. While it's in no way pervasive and, like it is in other cities, it's always short lived, it does seem to stir a likelier spirit of cooperation between hunters who would normally not be caught dead working with one another. The whispered reverie of "revolution is coming" is common on the lips of many who carry the Vigil. The text of the translated Compact in some form always ends up taped to some store window or dropped in one's email inbox from an anonymous sender. Is it a dream come true? Or a nightmare made manifest, born out of blood and fire? Perhaps the truth lies somewhere in between.



more than a passing fancy, he drew the attention of the Abbey's London cell.

Intrigued, the club set out to do what the police could not — catch the Whitechapel killer. And it did. In December of the same year, Jack was apprehended by members of the Abbey shortly after he had strangled a prostitute by the name of Rose Mylett. The Abbey subjected the serial killer to extensive cross-examination to ascertain it had found the true killer — and then recruited him into its midst, where he remained an active member for a number of years. Most members of the Abbey insist that the group intended for the Vigil to fulfill Jack's darker needs in a more positive manner. The official records, available only to high-ranking members of the organization, state that the leaders of the cell at the time claimed it was doing society a service in offering him another outlet for his "needs," and remark on Saucy Jack having taken to the Abbey's particular brand of entertainment with an unequaled enthusiasm. Within a few months, however, even the Abbey's activities began to pale and Jack continued his predilection for murdering prostitutes. Although the Abbey's upper crust had no particular empathy for the street whores, in time it became clear that his hobby would eventually lead the mundane authorities to the Abbey itself. They cautioned him to end his activities, and for a time he did, but in February of 1891, temptation became too great, and Jack struck again.

Shortly thereafter, the Abbey organized its own hunt, bringing down its former member and thus putting an end to the Whitechapel murders. Saucy Jack, a.k.a. Jack the Ripper, thus had the honor of being the first (but not the last) of the Abbey's members to also end up as their quarry. Abbey records suggest that the London cell voted on Jack's fate after capture. Its leader had suggested that, considering its spring-heeled companion's penchant for evisceration (and, according to rumors, consumption of the organs of his victims), it would only be appropriate that he end his existence by serving the cell in the same (literal) fashion. The official vote was four to two against the suggestion, however, with the leading argument against being that it was inappropriate to consume the sweetbreads of one who had formerly been one of their own. "We are many things," the records state, "but cannibals we are not."

One Endless Vigil

The Vigil is the long, dark night waiting for the enemy's footsteps and the knowledge that, while the dawn will come again, it's a long way off and you've got no guarantees that you and those you love will be around to see it.

The Vigil is seeing into hidden places that most men do not acknowledge, let alone explore. It is uncovering secrets, both amazing and awful, that humanity would prefer remained hidden.

The Vigil is remaining eternally watchful, not only for the monster without, but the one within. Each act of despera-

tion a hunter takes, each line he crosses and each sin he commits bring him closer to being a monster himself. Every step he takes into the darkness to protect others from the things that dwell there is one step closer to never coming back, to losing his light and becoming part of the shadows.

The Vigil is desperation. It's knowing that no matter how many things you kill, there will always be more. No matter how many secrets you uncover, you can never know everything you need. No matter how many lights you shine into the darkness, it will always be there, just waiting for your torch to go out, for your light to fade.

But the Vigil is also triumph. Despite the costs, despite the sacrifices, despite the danger, you and yours do make a difference. You might never rid the world of monsters, but you can stop one killer, one predator, one force of evil and, in doing so, make the world a little safer, a little better, a little lighter for those who remain unaware of the truth.

A Thousand Points of Light...

The Vigil is not one thing. It has many faces, many hands. Many truths, many lies. With every individual hunter comes an individual approach to the hunt.

Some are warriors, soldiers, killers. A redneck tracking a strange alligator-human hybrid through the swamps fires his father's shotgun as he seeks vengeance for the old man's death. Street punks chase winged, living statues through the back alleys of their city, brandishing knives, pistols and lengths of chain. Called by God to fight demons, a cell pitches cobbled-together bombs made from holy water at a fleeing demon. One hunter immobilizes and "neuters" the threat. Another might instead torture it for information. A third hunter would rather cut its fucking head off and move on to the next wretch. For these hunters, violence is always the answer.

Some are scholars, investigators, builders. A technician creates a cage that shudders with electromagnetic pulses, counteracting the supernatural abilities to any beast thrown inside. A scholar researches ancient means of detecting and casting out restless spirits, spending nights in the deepest library archives, popping pills to stay awake. A barfly chats up slimeballs, contract killers and the slaves of an undead menace in hopes of gathering information on things even worse. One hunter believes the answer lies in his books or on the web. Another thinks the truth lurks in his lab, staring back at him from behind the lens of a microscope. A different hunter knows he can get what he needs with a silver tongue and a fake ID badge.

Some are healers, rehabilitators, visionaries. A nurse run ragged stays up late, patching the wounds of a fellow hunter and trying to use humor to help him forget the pain. Three hunters in dark suits tie a howling fiend to a chair, knowing that this time, the "deprogramming" efforts will be successful. An alcoholic architect has a moment of clarity and knows that he can not only use the monsters, but he can even work with some of them to find peace, prosperity and, most important of all, *power*. One hunter thinks he can save the world one patient at a time. Another knows the demons can

be again made human if he finds the key to unlock whatever festers in their dark hearts. Another still sees opportunity where others find only horror.

Hunters must use every resource available to them, calling in their contacts, allies and connections to glean knowledge and skills that they themselves may not possess. A politician lobbies for zoning laws and legal injunctions, trading political favors and influence for votes that his constituents have no idea are designed to curtail the activities of cults, slashers and spell-wielding warlocks. A photojournalist gathers images no publisher will ever print, from Fortean forums and kooks too crazy to be taken seriously. He archives them, cross-referenced to serve as resource material for the rest of his cell. Connections. Information brokering. Networking. Hunters know that humanity's eyes are everywhere, even when the witnesses don't know what they're seeing, and that the power created by pulling society's strings is more than any one individual can muster on his or her own. A hunter might be a famous activist or a bodyguard to Hollywood personalities who sees the truth behind all the tabloid tales. Another might be a 911 emergency dispatcher with a reputation for handling the "weird" calls, or a taxi driver in the bad part of town, keeping an eye out for those who have no protectors and gleaning stories from those to whom no one listens. Every hunter, a different face, a different Vigil.

...And a Million Mad Shadows

Whether he deals in guns and bullets or scrolls and parchment, whether she wields an ancient sword or a digital camera, eventually the Vigil takes its toll on every hunter. The hunt is an obsession that can weigh on a hunter's shoulders like a cross made of I-beams. The Vigil demands. It comes with endless cost and requires greater and greater sacrifices. It is truly a candle burning at both ends.

On one hand, a hunter has the financial toll. Sure, some hunter compacts and conspiracies pay their cells, and some pay *well*. The rest? They're shit out of luck. A hunter cell working block after block late at night doesn't get paid in anything beyond the charity of suspecting strangers. Bills mount up. The mortgage comes due, comes late, comes up bust. Families need food. Cars need gas. *Guns need ammo*. Where does the money come from? A day job? A night job? Maybe. But can the hunter do both? The Vigil doesn't stop. A hunter can't just "turn it off." Even when he takes a night for himself, what if the fiends come for him? Or what if his radio squelches and he hears the pleading cries of a cellmate locked in some monster's attic? Some hunters find ways to supplement their incomes: one hunts the dregs of the dregs while another's Vigil is dedicated only to those monsters with old money and blue blood. Every approach brings new dangers.

On the other hand, the Vigil incurs a personal toll. Does a wife understand why her husband comes home at dawn,



sleeps for two hours, then goes to work? Maybe she plays dumb for a time, but even the most devoted spouse can only wash bloodstains out of clothes *so many times*. Maybe the hunter brings his wife onboard, shows her the torch he carries into the darkness, but that only puts a big, bloody bull's-eye right in the middle of her forehead — and if they have kids, they can't afford to both go home in body bags. What about sanity? It's not easy remaining on the Vigil. Dealing night after night with things that howl for a hunter's blood and aren't even supposed to exist in the *first* goddamn place wears away at one's moral fabric. Never mind the nightmares. Sure, hacking away at an undead fiend until it turns to greasy ash is satisfying on one level, but there's always that tiny voice that asks *could it have been saved? Are you just as bad as they are, a murderer, a monster?* Even if the mind doesn't crack and shudder, the body is just as vulnerable (if not more so). Broken bones don't heal easy. Heart attacks and strokes are common (that stress, it's a killer). The barest scratch from a vile thing becomes infected fast, and modern medicine is not swift enough to eradicate a supernatural super-bug.

Finally, the legal. Hunters might be protecting humanity (or their own interests), but what they do exists clearly outside the law. A hunter steals a witch's book from her library, but he's wrong to fear her malefic magics: no, she just calls the cops. A cell tracks down a wolf-headed man-beast and drills it full of silver-laced buckshot, over and over again. When it's done, it's not left with the cooling corpse of a man-beast. The wolf's head is gone. So are the claws, the lupine joints, the bristling hairs. Now it's just a man, and he's got holes blown through his chest and is missing parts of his legs. Can the cell explain that to the police or the FBI? What happens when CSI points the investigation in their direction? After all, it's not like the city's full of guys drizzling hot silver in shotgun shells — a single speck of residue damns them with incrimination. Yes, some conspiracies and compacts offer their protections against this kind of thing, but no protection is bulletproof. Even the most decorated soldier of Task Force: VALKYRIE will find himself in the slammer if he makes a mess so big his superiors can't cover it up.

Hunter Society

The Vigil is a desperate, twilit struggle, waged by a determined few against the monsters that haunt the dark corners of the world. Its skirmishes are fought in back alleys, basements and isolated farmhouses, often under the very noses of the people that hunters stake their lives to protect. Hunters must keep their Vigil a closely guarded secret, because humankind as a whole is ignorant of the horrors lurking in its midst. Rather than being hailed as saviors, hunters are cast beyond the pale of human society. Their actions brand them as criminals, madmen, even terrorists by an increasingly paranoid and fearful public.

COMPACTS AND CONSPIRACIES

The term "compact" is meant to reference the Chestnut Street Compact (a.k.a. The Candle Compact), an early hunter alliance (p. 22).

The term "conspiracy" isn't really a term that hunters use to describe their own organizations, but...they're certainly happy to use it to describe the other shadowy groups with which they clearly compete.

Yet while the Vigil is a lonely and isolating existence, very few hunters can take on the night alone and hope to survive. They need weapons, equipment and first aid. They need food and shelter, and someone they can trust to watch over them while they sleep. Most of all, they need people they can talk to just to keep the horrors of what they do in perspective, lest they become monsters themselves. At the same time, however, the need for secrecy — and the threat of infiltration by supernatural or even human adversaries — means that hunters must view everyone around them with a certain degree of suspicion and paranoia. These conflicting — and often volatile — desires drive the existence of hunter societies all over the world.

Any city or town that harbors a multitude of monsters will, sooner or later, attract a multitude of hunters as well, each with their own tactics, agendas and ideologies. As their paths cross in the pursuit of the Vigil, these hunters form alliances, share information, offer support and sometimes organize into larger and more effective organizations. They also argue, compete for resources, interfere with and even actively oppose one another at times, as all human societies are wont to do.

Hunter society is small and secretive, even in large cities like London or New York, but it is also vibrant and constantly in flux. Individual hunters band together to form *cells*, pooling their skills and resources to take on solitary monsters that threaten their communities. Sometimes these hunters become aware of other cells in their area and they form broader ties that grow into larger *compacts*, creating a network that spans entire cities or regions. In rare cases, hunter organizations grow so large that their resources and influence span entire countries. These *conspiracies*, while powerful and ruthlessly efficient, must contend with the same inter-conspiracy politics, bureaucratic inertia and conflicting interests common to any large organization. Examples of these three organizational tiers can be found in nearly every city around the globe, interacting with one another in an uneasy balance that forms the basis of hunter society as a whole.

This section describes the three tiers of hunter organization in detail, discussing how they take shape, their relative strengths and weaknesses, and how they interact with one another in the keeping of the Vigil.

Hunter Cells

A cell is the smallest and most common element of hunter society; at its core, it's a group of like-minded people dedicated to stopping the monsters that threaten their homes and loved ones. These groups usually comprise only a handful of individuals, often with minimal resources and limited knowledge of the supernatural, and their area of influence is extremely local. They come together to investigate and fight the thing that's stalking children in their neighborhood, or is leaving bodies drained of blood in the alley behind their apartment building.

Any given city features dozens, if not scores, of hunter cells. Many operate in complete ignorance of one another, never glimpsing the larger struggle going on around them. They operate out of living rooms, tool sheds and Internet cafés, fighting with a combination of wits, courage and improvised weapons against a foe they only barely understand. Their composition can be as varied as the circumstances that brought them together: a cell can be composed of a group of neighbors plagued by the same angry spirit, a team of cops who decide to take the law into their own hands in the face of a seemingly unstoppable murderer, or a band of college students out to investigate the mysterious death of one of their friends.

Hunter cells are typically focused on short-term results: they track down and deal with the immediate threat by any

means necessary. They find where the vampire sleeps during the day and drive a stake through its heart, or they burn a haunted house to the ground to keep more kids from disappearing into its depths. The emphasis is on survival: us versus them, with little room for negotiation or compromise.

The lifespan of a hunter cell is often very short; with little support and few resources to draw on, the deck is stacked against it from the start. Apart from the physical risks, the Vigil takes an extreme psychological and emotional toll on hunters as well, and unless they are very careful, a cell's activities can often draw the attentions of local law enforcement. Even those cells that survive a confrontation with a monster will sometimes try to disband and return to their everyday lives, hoping that theirs was an once-in-a-lifetime experience. Only the most dedicated hunters see the Vigil as a true calling, devoting their lives to protecting humanity against the horrors that walk among them. These cells can persist for months or even years, accumulating hard-won knowledge and experience at an often-terrible cost.

Forming a Cell

A hunter cell is often born from tragedy: a husband loses his wife to a mysterious, bestial killer and vows revenge, or a priest watches members of his flock sicken and die from a baffling malady and begins to suspect the work of a sorcerer in their midst. The fact is that monsters have existed unseen



among humankind for thousands of years, and are past masters at concealing their activities from casual observation. It takes a horrific encounter or a terrible loss to pry the scales from a person's eyes and inspire them to take up the Vigil.

Hunter cells tend to grow organically, beginning with one or more core members who have suffered at the hands of the monsters, then growing to include friends, family or co-workers who are persuaded to join the hunt. The founder of a cell might turn to his best friend for backup and support, then his friend suggests bringing his cousin, a retired police officer, into the group. Over time, the cell might incorporate other victims of the monster it's hunting, or family members who insist on taking part for no other reason than to keep their loved ones from completely losing themselves to the hunt. Whatever their initial motivations, by the time they have had their first encounter with a supernatural being, they have become fellow hunters and members of the Vigil. One cannot look into the face of a demon or feel the wrath of an angry spirit and come away unaffected by the experience.

No two hunter cells operate in the same way. Their methods vary depending on the personalities, resources and motivations of the people involved. Some cells may be highly organized and tightly focused, led by former military or law enforcement personnel; others may be a collection of academics who plot strategy at the university library, or a group of used car salesmen who plan their next move at their weekly poker game. Everyone is making things up as they go along, incorporating the techniques that work and trying to survive the ones that don't.

A typical hunter cell is composed of three to five people, but can be as small as two people or as large as 20. In practice, the size of a cell fluctuates over time. Hunters still have to keep a roof over their heads and pay tuition to keep their kids in school, so members sometimes have to drop out and return to their normal lives to keep things on an even keel. Other members become too injured — mentally or physically — to continue, and have to put the Vigil aside while they piece themselves back together. Still others run afoul of the law, or are killed during the course of the hunt. Their absence leaves a hole that the cell must try to fill, so most cells are always on the lookout for other likely recruits. The only practical limits to the size of a hunter cell are its resources and its ability to organize, and its need for secrecy. A hunter cell devoted to confronting malevolent spirits could set itself up as professional paranormal investigators and operate more or less in full view of the public. A group of inner-city kids who are burning down abandoned tenement buildings to wipe out nests of flesh-eating ghouls have to worry about the police and property owners in addition to the monsters they're fighting, so the fewer people who are aware of their activities, the better.

While larger hunter compacts and conspiracies have been known to assign individual hunters to cells on an ad hoc basis to perform specific tasks, most prefer to recruit existing hunter cells and employ them according to their needs. Other conspiracies, such as the government's Task Force: VALKYRIE or the Cheiron Group (see the Hunter Conspiracies section for more details) will recruit individuals and form them into permanent cells for future operations.

Strengths and Weaknesses

The primary strength of a hunter cell is its size — with only a handful of members, the team is stealthy and agile, able to react to changing situations quickly, take action, then blend back into the crowd. If they are careful and keep their numbers small, cells can operate invisibly for a very long time, avoiding notice until they are ready to strike. By drawing on the individual skills and resources of their members and using their wits, the cell is self-contained, self-reliant and, with experience, can become extremely effective.

A cell's limited size is also its primary drawback. Its operations are limited to the availability, resources and skills of its members, and it's difficult to replace losses quickly. The members of the cell have no one to turn to in a crisis except one another, and no safety net in the event things go catastrophically wrong. These shortcomings are the primary factor in driving hunters to band together when possible and form larger organizations.

Hunter Compacts

Hunter cells that survive long enough will eventually stumble across the existence of others like them, each going about the Vigil the best way they know how. After weeks or months fighting a solitary struggle against the unknown, most cells are eager to share what they've experienced and offer help in return for the same. As more cells pool their knowledge and resources to pursue a common goal, their network of communication becomes more elaborate and better organized. Greater numbers and more resources lead to greater success out on the streets, and before long, the efforts of multiple cells are being organized to deal with threats across an entire city. This is how many hunter compacts take shape, starting out as a collection of isolated groups that come together to pursue the Vigil on a much larger scale.

In other cases, hunter compacts began as mundane entities that changed their focus upon learning of the existence of the supernatural. The aristocratic debauchees of the Ashwood Abbey, for example, were little more than a collection of very wealthy libertines until the group was nearly wiped out by a werewolf attack many years ago. Since then, they have devoted their collective wealth and influence to seeking out and confronting the supernatural for their own hedonistic ends.

While a hunter cell typically focuses on the threats that directly impact the homes and loved ones of its members, hunter compacts can cover an entire city or a region — or, in some cases, setting up chapters all across the world. Compacts like the Union use Internet forums and traveling delegations to organize chapters in North America and Europe, for example, while the fraternity of pseudoscience occult scholars known as Null Mysteris takes advantage of the cliquish nature of academics to extend its influence into universities and libraries across the globe.

Any given city can be home to any number of hunter compacts, usually operating as a satellite group or chapter of the larger collective, and interaction between compacts is common. Alliances, rivalries, turf wars and, in rare cases, bit-

ter feuds have been known to occur as the goals and agendas of the different groups intersect and sometimes clash.

Hunter compacts have the numbers, resources and knowledge base to operate on a much broader level than an individual cell. Individual chapters or teams work in accordance with the compact's overall goals, and sometimes are given specific tasks to perform that support the group's broader agenda. A cell might be tasked with gathering weapons, equipment or other resources, or establishing safehouses for use by other members of the compact, or it might be called in to help out a cell in a nearby town that's found itself in over its head. Many of these compacts are very secretive about their operations and their goals, for reasons of security, but such measures leave them open to accusations of hidden agendas and abuses of power. In some cases, these suspicions are justified.

The lifespan of a hunter compact can be quite long, depending on the quality of the group's leadership and its core resources. The Ashwood Abbey, with its well-heeled membership, claims to have been in operation since 1850, while the Union, with its broad base and volunteer leadership, has gone through many different iterations since the early 20th century. When a compact fails, it is usually the result of a schism within the ranks, intervention by law enforcement or, worst of all, from infiltration by monsters. The Union itself suffered this fate in the mid-1990s, when monsters or their agents managed to access the organization's Usenet forums and used them to hunt down and kill many of the group's members. When a compact splinters or is too decimated to survive, its remaining cells sometimes seek to join with other groups in their area or try to rebuild upon the foundations of what went before. In rare cases, the survivors go their separate ways, perhaps scarred by the betrayal of their former comrades. Such a case happened in the late 1990s to a small compact in Philadelphia known as the Order of the Broken Bell. Though the group enjoyed some initial successes, its founder, a former steelworker named Caleb Malone, apparently suffered a mental breakdown after the destruction of a powerful nest of vampires in the city. In the course of a single night, he hunted down and murdered more than half of the organization's members before he was shot and killed by city police. The surviving members scattered in the days that followed, amid accusations that Malone and his cell were communicating secretly with another group of vampires. Though some of the compact's cells are still active in Philadelphia, none of them has attempted to resurrect the brotherhood. Rumors persist that members of the organization had sold out to a powerful vampire, and suspicion still runs deep among those that remain.

Forming a Compact

Most hunter compacts are born of sheer, bloody-minded pragmatism: multiple cells, working together and pooling their resources stand a better chance of survival than a bunch of isolated cells. As cells become aware of one another, they build informal ties together, even if it's just sitting down for a drink every so often to compare notes and offer ideas on how to deal with a particular threat. Over time, bonds of trust form and the cells begin to work together against the monsters in their city. As more cells are brought into the fold, a crude

network develops that has its own set of unwritten rules and methods of operation. Eventually, this network grows until it reaches a critical mass — perhaps it's three or four cells, perhaps more — and someone steps up and begins to formally organize things. Even then, some compacts prefer to operate as a loose fraternity, while others are strictly regulated and have clear chains of command.

Before long, each compact develops its own *modus operandi* with regard to the Vigil. Some focus their efforts on a specific form of supernatural threat, such as sorcerers or vampires. Other groups capitalize on the skills and perspectives of their members to specialize in particular aspects of the Vigil: some are pure information-gatherers, such as Null Mysteriis, while others specialize in tracking werewolves or dealing with ghosts.

Ultimately, every hunter compact develops its own ideology with respect to monsters and the Vigil itself. Sometimes, as in the case of the Ashwood Abbey, an ideology drives the growth of the organization, rather than the other way around. This ideology ultimately affects how the group selects new members and interacts with other hunter compacts they encounter. It also forms the basis for the organization's long-term agenda, which may or may not be shared with the group's rank and file.

A typical hunter compact might number between 50 and 200 members overall, though there are rarely more than 20 or 30 members (anywhere from four to six cells) in any given city. Some compacts have strict limits to their membership, determined by arcane formulae or other esoterica. Others, like the Union, fluctuate in size from month to month as new chapters are added and others break apart.

Strengths and Weaknesses

The main strengths of a hunter compact lie in its numbers and the resources it can bring to bear against a supernatural threat. Most compacts are able to provide financial and material assistance to a cell, especially if it is performing work for the compact itself. A cell can also count on the support of other members of the group if they find themselves in need of backup. Compacts can provide medical assistance at times; they may have members who are doctors, or have a financial arrangement with doctors who are willing to treat injuries with no questions asked. If a cell needs to lie low in order to avoid the authorities, it can take refuge with other members in another city, or even flee to another country. This kind of support often means the difference between life and death for hunter cells all across the globe.

Hunter compacts also provide something arguably more important than money, guns and warm bodies: a store of knowledge gained from arduous research and hard-fought confrontations with supernatural foes. Some of this information may be erroneous, based on faulty observations or misapprehensions, but these "occult databases" are works in progress, constantly added to and refined by the members of the group. Groups like the Union and the underground broadcasters of Network Zero make their databases freely available over the Internet, while groups such as Null Mysteriis hoard their knowledge jealously.

A compact's size is also its greatest weakness. Like an individual hunter cell, the more people involved, the more noticeable the cell's activities become. Hunter compacts have suffered remorseless attacks by groups of monsters (such as the plague of attacks unleashed on the Union in the 1990s) and even been the subject of Federal investigations. One small group in Washington state found itself under investigation by the ATF as a result of several illegal arms purchases, which led to an armed standoff at the founder's residence that resulted in the deaths of several of the organization's members.

Internally, hunter compacts are prey to conflicts of leadership and ideology. Sometimes these differences can be resolved by the group's members, but can also lead to a schism that breaks the organization into a multitude of angry factions. The Loyalists of Thule, an organization of hunter-theosophists, suffered such a schism in the years following the Second World War, which sparked two decades of violent conflicts between splinter groups. The internecine conflict only ended after two of the splinter groups were killed in a mysterious explosion at a farmhouse outside Paris in 1968.

Finally, even the most stable compact is vulnerable to abuses of power, corruption and secretive agendas that can undermine or even subvert the efforts of its members. Hunter compacts are not above using unaffiliated cells as pawns or stalking horses in the course of their operations — and from there, it's only a small step to manipulating its own members as well.

Hunter Conspiracies

Most hunter compacts eventually reach an organizational plateau and, barring a radical change in leadership or a huge influx of resources, they don't grow any larger. Sometimes, this is a conscious choice on the part of the compact's leadership; the Ashwood Abbey, for example, has very strict requirements regarding whom it accepts into its ranks. Larger, more freewheeling compacts such as the Union eventually reach a point where they are too large to effectively control without a strong central authority, leading to dissension and mismanagement that not only inhibits further growth, but can eventually cause the group to disintegrate altogether.

In a few rare cases, however, some hunter groups manage to survive these challenges and grow until they become influential, well-financed conspiracies that are capable of challenging the world's monsters on an even footing. Many of the world's operational hunter conspiracies are quite old: the Malleus Maleficarum, for example, is a monster-hunting society formed by the Vatican in the mid-16th century, while the mysterious cult called the Aegis Kai Doru traces its origins back to ancient Greece (or before, according to some members). Another group, referring to itself as the Lucifuge, claims it can trace its origins all the way back to Mesopotamia and beyond, though not even the scholars of Null Mysterii care to confirm such audacious claims.

Through shrewd leadership and relentless dedication to the Vigil, these conspiracies have built a resource base that allows them to operate more or less self-sufficiently; more importantly, they have accumulated a storehouse of occult knowledge and operational tactics that their smaller peers can only dream

about. This includes special equipment or Endowments specially created by the conspiracies, built to give their personnel superhuman abilities akin to those possessed by the monsters themselves. In certain cases, these Endowments are actually synthesized from the very creatures the hunters fight against.

Most hunter conspiracies maintain a permanent presence in every major city around the world; even Task Force: VALKYRIE, a black-ops monster-hunting organization answering to the United States Department of Defense, has one or more officers assigned to embassies in Europe and elsewhere. Smaller chapters or "crisis teams" can be found in lesser cities and towns, ready to swing into action at a moment's notice. Most of these conspiracies go to great lengths to stay informed about the operations of other hunter organizations. Some, like the Cheiron Group and Task Force: VALKYRIE, devote almost as much energy to tracking other hunter groups as they do the monsters themselves.

Hunter conspiracies perform a wide range of operations in pursuit of the Vigil, from tracking and destroying monsters to information-gathering missions, resource acquisition and surveillance of other hunter activities. Many conspiracies also perform what is euphemistically referred to as "human resources" missions — building ties with political and commercial assets that will support the conspiracy's future operations. This can include anything from contributing to a senator's re-election campaign to gathering incriminating photos of a CEO's sex life. Problematic individuals are sometimes removed to pave the way for potential allies as well. Though no concrete proof exists, rumors persist that the Cheiron Group has been instrumental in fomenting unrest in the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince in order to create an advantageous environment to pursue secret initiatives in the island's interior.

Most hunter conspiracies measure their existence in *centuries*; past a certain point, they attain a degree of size and material wealth that insulates them from even the worst catastrophes. A conspiracy could lose all of its field operatives and most of its leaders — such as with the infamous Easter Purge of the Malleus Maleficarum in the early 1800s — but as long as their core supporters remain, the organization can eventually restore itself. The only way to completely tear down a hunter conspiracy is to cut off its lifeblood: the vast amount of money such an organization requires in order to function.

Forming a Conspiracy

Hunter conspiracies typically form in one of two ways: either they are built from the ground up, starting with a few determined cells and a collective vision, or they are created almost whole cloth by the mandate of an even more powerful political, religious or corporate entity.

Conspiracies such as the Lucifuge and Aegis Kai Doru owe their current power and influence to the strength of their respective ideologies, which lent focus to their efforts and sustained them over hundreds of years of bitter struggle. Their mysterious, legendary origins, cloaked in layers of tradition and custom, also serve to draw the attention of wealthy and influential supporters, who ally with conspiracies such as these in hope of future rewards. (The Lucifuge

is rumored to maintain a Skull-and-Bones-style network of academics, industrialists and politicians around the world, for example.) The more wealth and influence these groups acquire, the more supporters and recruits they are able to attract; eventually, their size and capabilities are limited only by the strength of their leadership and the weight of the bureaucracy that supports them.

By comparison, agencies such as Task Force: VALKYRIE and the Cheiron Group are extremely recent creations, but they enjoy a degree of power and influence out of proportion to their age. Task Force: VALKYRIE, which traces its official origins to a classified Presidential Executive Order in the mid-1950s, is composed of highly trained operatives from every branch of the Armed Forces and Federal Law Enforcement, and has billions of dollars of tax-payer-funded resources to draw on. The Cheiron Group, funded by a powerful and influential global conglomerate, enjoys a similar degree of sophistication; it can recruit the best and brightest minds right out of college and back them up with well-paid former soldiers from the world's foremost militaries. What these conspiracies lack in age and experience, they make up for with the best people and equipment money can buy.

The operations of these hunter conspiracies are far more centralized than in smaller hunter organizations, determined in accordance with strategies and directives established by conspiracy leaders. Missions are assigned to respective cells or strike teams, and any change of plans must be passed up the chain of command for approval. This means that, for all their power, these conspiracies do not have the agility or flexibility of their smaller counterparts.

Hunter conspiracies are quite large, often comprising as many as 2,000 to 4,000 personnel worldwide. It is believed that Task Force: VALKYRIE is among the largest of modern hunter conspiracies, with an estimated complement of 8,000 personnel, but three quarters of that figure are support staff and administrators. Even relatively small conspiracies, such as the Malleus Maleficarum, consist mostly of support personnel, in the form of administrators, researchers, armorers and so forth. Estimates vary, but it is widely believed these conspiracies can field anywhere from 750 to 1,000 frontline operatives worldwide. While hunter conspiracies will occasionally recruit new operatives from hunter cells or "headhunt" them from smaller organizations, they also have the resources to seek out and recruit potential operatives. These recruits are then trained and formed into mission teams, or kept in a pool of operatives and organized into ad hoc groups as the situation demands.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Hunter conspiracies are able to bring a wide range of powerful assets to bear in the course of the Vigil, removing many of the day-to-day challenges that smaller cells and second-tier organizations must contend with. A conspiracy's operative has access to operating funds, equipment — even lodging, in some cases — and benefits from a well-established and efficient support network that provides everything from operational intelligence to medical aid. Conspiracy influence and resources can also shield operatives from local law enforcement — Task Force: VALKYRIE frequently operates in

the US under the guise of DEA or ATF crisis teams, and the Cheiron Group keeps a very powerful, well-funded legal team on retainer, 24 hours a day. This doesn't mean that conspiracy operatives are above the law, but they don't spend every waking moment looking over their shoulder, like many hunter cells do. For this reason alone, many hunter cells and small organizations view these powerful groups with no small amount of jealousy — and fear.

In addition to these advantages, hunter conspiracies are able to equip their operatives with unique Endowments that give them powerful advantages against their foes. These Endowments take the form of ancient, mystical relics, elixirs, pharmacological compounds, or cutting-edge technology — the sort of equipment most hunters can only dream about.

Yet there is a steep price to pay for such unrivalled capability. The Endowments these conspiracies bestow upon their operatives often come at a terrible physical and psychological cost. The Cheiron Group, for example, synthesizes crude biotech devices from dissected monsters and issues them to its operatives, leading to nightmarish tales of mental illness, mutation and death. Agents of the Lucifuge wield terrible powers bestowed upon them by purportedly diabolical entities, forcing these would-be hunters to contemplate if they aren't any different from the horrors they are sworn to destroy.

Further, operatives in the employ of these groups don't enjoy the freedom of action an independent hunter cell does. They are given their missions, told where to go and what to do, and have little freedom to deviate from the plan. What is more, many hunter conspiracies will not hesitate to sacrifice an operative — or an entire team of operatives — if it is in the best interests of the conspiracy's overall goals. Sometimes they are even ordered to spare a monster they encounter, for reasons known only to those at the top. Conspiracy operatives frequently operate in a world of shadows, risking their lives for an agenda they only dimly understand.

Finally, like all large and powerful organizations, hunter conspiracies are mired in often-Byzantine layers of bureaucracy and red tape, as the central leadership struggles to maintain its control over its sprawling web of money, resources and political influence. Opportunities are often lost while a mission team sits in its safehouse, waiting for permission to act, or teams find themselves walking into an ambush because urgent warnings took too long to reach them.

The Hunter Community

Any given city around the world is host to a community of hunter groups, from individual cells to representatives of disparate compacts and conspiracies. Despite the secretive nature of the Vigil, it is only a matter of time before these groups come into contact with one another. Alliances are formed against the horrors of the night, but in some cases, the presence of multiple compacts can lead to competition and even open conflict over everything from ideologies to potential recruits.

The sections below detail the various ways that elements of hunter society come together — and the reasons they sometimes compete or even clash with one another.

Alliances

Cooperation is key to survival in the pursuit of the Vigil, and hunters recognize the value of alliances when faced with a common foe. This is especially true among hunter cells, many of which find themselves outnumbered and outgunned by their foes and glad of help wherever they can find it. Even larger compacts or conspiracies are not above forging short-term alliances, often trading information or other resources in exchange for crucial support during the course of a mission. In many ways, the forging of alliances and the sharing of support is the glue that bonds the disparate elements of hunter society together.

The longest and most durable alliances are typically formed between hunter cells; indeed, these ties are often the first steps toward forming a larger compact of linked hunter groups. By combining their resources and focusing their efforts on one threat at a time, the cells can achieve far more collectively than they could ever accomplish alone. Over time, these bonds become complex networks involving multiple hunter cells, each with its own informal rules of operation.

Alliances between cells and hunter compacts are also commonplace, although such arrangements typically favor the compact. Sometimes a cell needs information or special resources it can't get anywhere else, and a compact will provide them for a price. This usually involves sharing information or performing a task in return at a later date, which can sometimes be more difficult and dangerous than the cell's original mission. Some compacts, such as the scholarly Null Mysteris, will frequently seek out unaffiliated hunter cells to perform fieldwork for them, in exchange for information that will benefit the cell's own activities.

By contrast, alliances between hunter compacts tend to be short-term affairs where the interests of both parties temporarily intersect, or to form a united front against a much larger threat. These are typically nervous and mistrustful affairs, even at the best of times, as neither compact wishes to yield any more of its power or influence than absolutely necessary.

Hunter conspiracies are generally less likely to form alliances than other groups; few instances present themselves where a smaller compact can provide assets that they don't already possess, and sharing their own resources for limited gain isn't profitable to them. Exceptions have been known to occur, of course; the Loyalists of Thule have been known to provide crucial data to everyone from the Cheiron Group to the Malleus Maleficarum, and Task Force: VALKYRIE reputedly sought a temporary alliance with the papal-sanctioned hunters in an operation against a group of vampires operating within the Atlanta diocese. Conspiracies pursue these arrangements within carefully proscribed boundaries, often drawing up actual documents that detail the specifics of what support they will provide and the length of such joint operations.

The rarest alliances of all occur not between compacts and conspiracies, but between individuals with differing allegiances who are also members of the same cell. As unaffiliated cells become aware of the greater community of hunters within their home city, they are drawn (or in some cases, actively courted) to join one group or the other. Sometimes the members of the cell are drawn in different directions; a

would-be scholar may find herself drawn to Null Mysteris, while another cell member may prefer the informal, blue-collar camaraderie of the Union. Still another may be approached by the Long Night, appealing to the hunter's deep sense of faith. When these situations occur, most cells will either hash out their differences and go with a group that all the members can agree on, or they will splinter apart and the hunters will go their own ways. Occasionally, however, a very tight-knit or exceptionally idealistic hunter cell will try to have it both ways, allowing each hunter to pursue his or her own affiliations while still working together in pursuit of the Vigil. These collective cells have the potential to be extremely effective, drawing upon a wide spectrum of assets and resources to combat the enemy, but they are also prone to immense internal pressures and conflicts of interest that threaten their survival on a nightly basis.

Every member of a collective cell must walk a knife-edge, balancing his commitment to his chosen hunter group against his loyalty to his cellmates. This degree of pressure largely depends on the groups involved; the Ashwood Abbey affects a degree of disdain toward members who insist on "consorting with the rabble," but doesn't attempt to actually punish its members for such activities. The Long Night, on the other hand, actively fears for the souls of its members who interact with hunters who don't see the spiritual imperative of their mission. In one famous case, a member of the compact named Raul Gonsalves was declared anathema and attempts were actually made on his life after local leaders of the group discovered his wife was secretly affiliated with the Lucifuge. Still other groups are reluctant to share information or resources with members whose commitment is less than 100%. Hunters affiliated with Null Mysteris are informed at the outset that they will never gain access to the compact's higher levels if there is even the slightest chance the knowledge could find its way into the hands of non-members.

As serious as these external pressures are, often the internal pressures of conflicting ideologies pose a far greater risk to a cell's survival. A hunter devoted to the Long Night or the Malleus Maleficarum must fight the forces of darkness with her last breath; what then is she to do when another member of her cell is intent on capturing a monster and delivering it to his masters at the Cheiron Group for study? If the cell is well led or its members are willing to sort out their differences, they might work out a compromise, but sometimes these differences of belief can lead to tragedy. The scholars of the Indebted often relate a cautionary story to new members regarding a cell in London in the 1950s. This cell discovered a rare and infamous magical grimoire at a book dealer's shop in Kensington, and immediately the members of the group began to quarrel over what must be done with the book. One member, who was closely affiliated with the Malleus Maleficarum, was determined to deliver the book to the Vatican's secret archives. Another, who was part of the Long Night, intended to seize the book and burn it. A third member, who sought entry into the Lucifuge, was determined to plumb the book for its awful secrets. The conflict ultimately tore the cell apart, just as the hunters attempted a botched robbery of the bookshop. The book dealer

was accidentally killed, along with two members of the cell, and the rest were arrested shortly thereafter. The grimoire was taken into police custody, and disappeared not long afterward.

Despite the challenges and pressures that weigh upon these collective cells, some still manage to flourish by focusing more on what its members have in common than the things that divide them. Though the Long Night and the Malleus Maleficarum often disagree on what to do about a given threat, they share a commitment to protecting innocent souls from the forces of evil. Both compacts disdain the dissolute behavior of the members of the Ashwood Abbey, but they can at least agree on bringing a monster to bay and ultimately destroying it. Such a combination of conflicting ideologies existed in a single cell — the famous (and possibly apocryphal) Greenwich Village Irregulars, who operated in New York City during the late 1970s. Though constantly pressured by their superiors in the organizations they served, these hunters refused to let their individual beliefs trump the friendship they had for one another. For many years, their activities were a symbol of unity for New York's embattled hunter community, and survivors of that period credit the Irregulars with keeping the Vigil alive at a time when many were willing to surrender the city to the monsters.

Conflict

Despite the many reasons hunters have to work together, just as many pressures exist to drive cells, compacts and conspiracies into conflict with one another. One hunter cell may believe that a few innocent deaths are a small price to pay in order to destroy a powerful monster. It may not think twice about setting fire to an apartment building in order to destroy the flesh-eating ghouls lurking in its labyrinthine basement — but another cell of hunters with friends and family who are living in the building may have other ideas. Or a cell of Network Zero broadcasters may be trying to compile footage of vampire activity in their city — even if that means catching other hunters on camera and exposing their identities as a result.

The most common form of conflict between hunter cells tends to occur when allied groups find themselves at odds over what to do with a particular supernatural threat. One cell may be in favor of destroying the monster as quickly as possible before it claims more victims, while another cell may prefer to watch and wait, gathering valuable information and looking for the right time to strike. Still another group may believe that not all monsters are irredeemable, and are determined to try to negotiate a peaceful outcome instead of going in with guns blazing. With passions running high and lives hanging in the balance, alliances can collapse and, in extreme cases, one cell may act to prevent the efforts of another, culminating in a violent showdown. This can sometimes occur even among cells belonging to the same compact or conspiracy, requiring quick thinking and strong leadership to defuse the situation before a tragedy occurs.

In the case of hunter compacts, issues of ideology and methodology can bring groups into conflict. While the Loyalists of Thule frequently offer their services to hunter cells and organizations in return for new information, they have been

known to oppose the efforts of groups that, in their opinion, threaten a potential opportunity to gather vital data. Rumors persist that Null Mysteris scholars have sent warnings to subjects under observation, allowing them to escape destruction at the hands of other hunter cells — in one case resulting in an ambush that led to the death of an entire cell of Long Night operatives. In another example, hunters affiliated with the Union found themselves at odds with a chapter of the Ashwood Abbey in Moscow. The members of the Abbey, all well-connected oligarchs or members of the local *Mafiya*, were capturing monsters and then releasing them into the city slums to hunt for sport, something the Union militantly opposed. When a Union cell moved against one of the Abbey hunts, it led to a series of violent street battles that left hunters of both compacts dead (or serving permanent prison terms).

In some cities around the world, the prominent hunter groups come together and create an agreement or framework intended to prevent conflicts — or, failing that, to create an impartial means of adjudicating large-scale disputes. An example of this is the historic Chestnut Street Compact (a.k.a. the “Candle Compact”) created by Philadelphia’s hunters back in the 1700s, or the famous Night Pact of Berlin, crafted in the years just after World War I. Such agreements are very difficult to maintain, however — much less enforce. The Papal Concord of Rome is one exception, but that owes more to the overpowering presence of the Vatican and its agents than anything else.

In addition to conflicts of ideology and ethics, hunter compacts and conspiracies sometimes find themselves competing with one another for the resources they need to continue the Vigil. The Union might find itself struggling to rebuild its rosters after a tragic loss in San Diego, only to find that a chapter of Aegis Kai Doru is aggressively seeking out hunter cells in the city and recruiting them. This can lead to strained relations and occasionally open conflict between rival groups as they attempt to continue their operations in the city. Often, unaffiliated hunter cells are drawn into the midst of these rivalries as the participants maneuver for advantage, and sometimes a clever or ambitious contact will learn how to play one hunter group against another for a handsome profit.

Hunters also find themselves in competition for influence in the local political arena, for contacts in law enforcement and sources of information on monster activity in the area. Although it seems irrational that members of the Vigil wouldn’t be willing to share these resources for the greater good, the fact of the matter is that there is a finite number of these assets in any given city, and time is frequently of the essence when hunting the enemy. Time spent tracking down information for one group means that another group must go without, leading to lost opportunities or tragic reversals if the cell decides to act without proper intelligence. As a result, most experienced hunter cells guard their resources jealously, sharing them only when they can afford to or stand to gain something in return. Groups like the Ashwood Abbey and the Cheiron Group are especially notorious for this, placing contacts and political figures on “retainer” in order to guarantee access to their services at a moment’s notice. This has led to some tragic situations in the past, as desperate hunter cells

"CANCER CELLS"

A "cancer cell" is a cell said to be infiltrated by monsters. In some cases, this is an accurate depiction: some witch, demon or bloodsucker probably faked its way into the cell while pretending to be human. It's not always accurate, though: some cells have willingly admitted monsters into their ranks, forming permanent alliances. It rarely ends well, of course. Even if the cell doesn't implode, the members find they must constantly protect their "friend" and themselves from other hunters. Most "cancer cells" keep their...situation on the down-down-low.

take matters into their own hands to persuade the cooperation of a valuable asset. One case in St. Paul involved a small cell of hunters who kidnapped the children of a local city councilman in an attempt to force his cooperation regarding a crucial rezoning vote for one of the city's downtown districts. The councilman's "handler" in the Cheiron Group got the local authorities and the FBI involved, and when the dust settled, one hunter was dead and the councilman's daughter had been hit by a stray bullet in the gun battle. And all the while, the monsters continued to prey upon the city's residents.

Some hunter groups, particularly Network Zero and the Union, strongly believe in the freedom of information and communal use of resources. Union-dominated cities, such as Chicago and Boston, attempt to keep competition such as this to an absolute minimum — and aren't afraid to enforce this dictum on hunter cells that violate this unwritten law. Network Zero simply chooses the subversive approach, disseminating as much information on as grand a scale as possible, though this sometimes causes as many problems as it solves. Hunter cells have, on occasion, actively attempted to shut down Network Zero transmissions, fearing the information could be used against them by tech-savvy monsters. Network Zero has also run afoul of chapters of Null Mysteris on more than one occasion; the underground broadcasters have taken exception to the scientists' secretive practices for some time, and more than once they've "slashdotted" pseudoscientific texts or other rare information that Null Mysteris believes should be kept secret. So far, Network Zero has managed to keep the upper hand in these information wars, but several transmitted texts have recently turned out to be embarrassing hoaxes, tarnishing the Network's reputation. Rumors persist that Null Mysteris has begun pushing back by implementing a misinformation campaign, neither side considering the damage this erroneous data may cause to other hunter cells who try to use it against their foes.

On occasion, money and resources are sources of competition among hunter groups, usually among cells that originate from within criminal organizations or gangs. Sev-

eral hunter cells in Miami with ties to the city's drug trade have wasted no time using their access to illegal funds and weapons to pursue the Vigil. This has led to bloody conflicts over money, guns and territory, which the hunters see as a necessary evil and part of the cost of doing business.

Turf battles aren't just limited to criminal hunter cells, however. Some hunter conspiracies or compacts — and even some large cells — operate on the principle that they alone are capable of effectively pursuing the Vigil, and will actively oppose other cells operating in their area. Task Force: VALKYRIE is especially notorious for this practice, although as an arm of the Federal government, it can be expected to take a dim view of "civilians" getting in the way. Other compacts, such as the Long Night and the Loyalists of Thule, have also been known to move against other hunter cells that they see as interfering in their operations. Even relatively benign compacts such as Null Mysteris and Network Zero have been known to move against hunters who place their information-gathering efforts at risk.

It's been rumored that some conspiracies even protect certain monsters, and will defend them against other hunter cells, if necessary. Task Force: VALKYRIE, the Cheiron Group and the Ashwood Abbey have all been accused of this practice, although for different reasons. These groups have worked with certain monsters in the past, using them as stalking horses, information assets or sources of supernatural resources they could not get anywhere else. Network Zero still transmits the story of the "Portland Seven" on the anniversary of their disappearance, almost six years later. The tale has grown in the telling, as conspiracy theorists add still more twists to the story, but the core facts are this: a cell of seven hunters in Portland, Oregon, contacted members of the Network, claiming they had uncovered evidence of monsters occupying powerful positions in the Federal government. A meeting was arranged to transfer the data files to the Network for uploading, but none of the Portland hunters showed up — and the two Network members sent to pick up the files were killed in a mysterious car crash only a few hours later. No one ever heard from the Portland hunters again, and it is widely believed they were silenced by Task Force: VALKYRIE in an effort to protect national security. Why the conspiracy would want to shield monsters that had managed to infiltrate the government is the subject of heated debate among conspiracy theorists, but the suspicion remains, nonetheless. "Remember the Portland Seven" has become a rallying cry for hunter groups that decry the atmosphere of secrecy and internecine struggle that taints the pursuit of the Vigil worldwide.

Upward Mobility

While hunter society can be classified into three basic, structural tiers — cells, compacts and conspiracies — it's possible for an individual hunter or a team of hunters to cross these lines many times over the course of their Vigil. Hunter society pretends to be an egalitarian one, as far as it goes: personal ability and dedication supposedly trump virtually all

other concerns, and some hunter groups are eager to take on new recruits to replace those lost in the struggle.

Of course, there lingers an obstacle to this: many of the hunter groups remain shrouded in mystery, existing in a big gray ocean of uncertainty. What they do goes beyond the law. It exists outside sane and rational experience. It does them little good to go advertising their actions and motives. Hunter society, for all its supposed alliances, can also be alarmingly guarded, circling the wagons against one another as much as against the monsters out there in the night.

Still, as individual hunters aggregate into cells and, over time, become aware of the larger hunter society in their area, many seek the support of larger hunter compacts whose ideology matches their own (or, at least, they *hope* that's true). Given the constant dangers and the desperate nature of the Vigil, most groups are willing to add new members to their ranks, though many organizations subject new recruits to a trial period to determine their suitability. Issues of trust remain a paramount factor: potential members could be undercover cops or Federal agents, or even servants of a cunning monster intending on subverting their compact from within. They could even be from a rival group, hoping to plumb their "new friends" for information. This attitude is especially prevalent among larger hunter conspiracies; because of their size and secret nature, they are particularly prone to infiltration by enemies and rival hunters. It's not unknown for potential recruits to operate for months with only minimal support before they earn access to a conspiracy's valuable resources.

Even then, it's not uncommon for a hunter cell to gain admission to a larger compact, only to part ways later when presented with a better offer. Conspiracies will ruthlessly recruit exceptional individuals or cells from smaller compacts, offering money and stability (rarely making clear that the cost can be an individual's freedom of choice). In other cases, a hunter cell might grow disillusioned with the practices of the group it belongs to, and will ally itself with another compact that better reflects its ethics and beliefs. Some compacts take a philosophical view when members choose to leave the fold; better to part on good terms and remove a potential source of conflict than to create discord among the ranks. Other groups take an extremely dim view of members leaving the fold, particularly esoteric compacts such as the Loyalists of Thule or the Malleus Maleficarum. Operatives in the employ of Task Force: VALKYRIE are still members of the United States Government and face Federal charges if they "desert" their assigned post, and agents of the Cheiron Group must sign punitive non-disclosure and conflict-of-interest agreements that make parting with the conglomerate an extremely difficult process.

Some ambitious or deeply conflicted individuals find themselves attempting to serve multiple masters, acting as a member of one hunter cell or compact while secretly working for another. Conspiracies will frequently attempt to recruit disillusioned members of rival groups and keep them in place for months or even years, using them as sources of information on the group's inner workings. Sometimes hunters will turn to other compacts for support if they disagree with the leadership of their current group and are looking for help to

set things straight. Unfortunately, once matters have been set aright, these altruistic souls find themselves beholden to the compact that supported them, leading to conflicts of loyalty that can have tragic results. When found out, these "double agents" often find themselves frozen out by both groups and left to fend for themselves.

In rare cases, a hunter cell will attempt to "freelance" with a number of compacts or conspiracies in its area, performing tasks in exchange for material support or information that will aid it in its own efforts. Typically, most compacts are unwilling to risk precious resources on a hunter cell to which they don't enjoy any formal ties, but sometimes such "mercenary" cells are useful for dangerous or risky operations that the group doesn't want traced back to it. Tragically, this typically involves the freelancers in operations against other hunter organizations, or used as stalking horses to flush out powerful and dangerous adversaries for the group's member cells to deal with. Despite these risks, some hunter cells enjoy limited success with this approach, gaining friends and contacts within multiple organizations that they can later use to benefit their own pursuit of the Vigil.

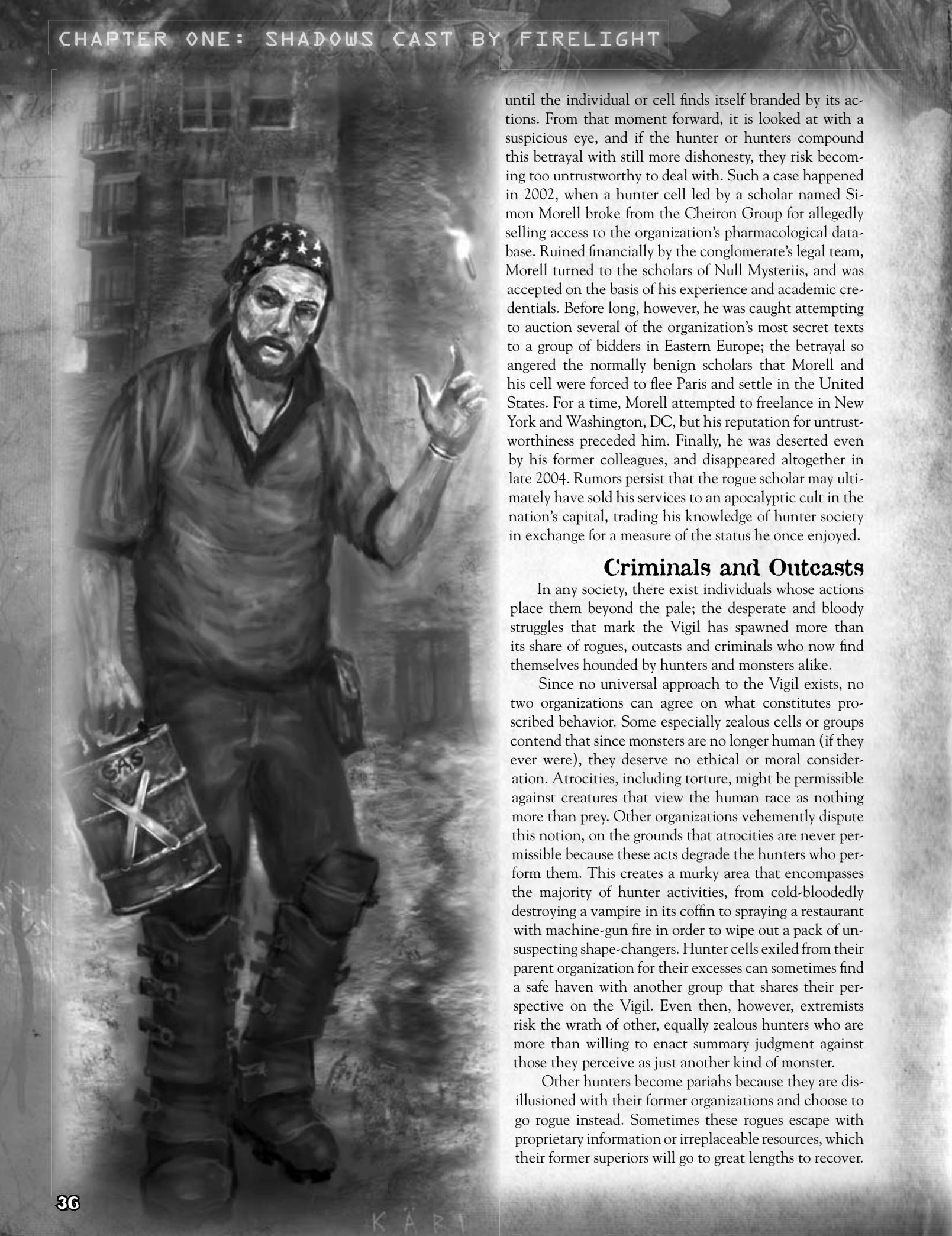
Downward Mobility

As easy as it is for hunters to "rise through the ranks" in hunter society, it is just as easy for individuals and cells to fall from grace. Hunters who disagree with the leadership of an organization can quickly find themselves cast out if they threaten the group's stability or show signs of claiming the leadership for their own. Sometimes this leads to a schism within the group, as the cast-out members take one or more cells with them, but in other cases, the affected hunters represent the lone voice of dissent, and are thus easily pushed aside.

In other cases, a hunter cell might disagree so much with its organization's approach to the Vigil that it takes matters into its own hands, eliminating a monster that the group's leadership refused to act against, for example, or spoiling a much more violent plan that the organization was preparing to set in motion. Few organizations are willing to ignore such insubordination, and if the rogue cell doesn't quit the group on its own volition, it is frequently blackballed by the organization's leadership.

Sometimes a hunter cell performs extreme or reckless actions that make it too much of a liability to its parent organization. Cells that cause civilian deaths, traffic in illegal substances such as poison or explosives or otherwise threaten to expose the organization's activities are cause for casting these loose cannons out of the fold. Ironically, sometimes these cells are quickly snapped up by other hunter groups who admire their resourcefulness and zeal, or want access to the cell's criminal contacts.

Most often, a hunter or a hunter cell can find itself isolated for the simplest of reasons: violating the trust placed in it by one or more organizations. Paranoia and secrecy are unfortunate consequences of the Vigil, and betrayals of trust are rarely, if ever, forgiven. The news of such a betrayal quickly makes the rounds on Internet forums and by word of mouth,



until the individual or cell finds itself branded by its actions. From that moment forward, it is looked at with a suspicious eye, and if the hunter or hunters compound this betrayal with still more dishonesty, they risk becoming too untrustworthy to deal with. Such a case happened in 2002, when a hunter cell led by a scholar named Simon Morell broke from the Cheiron Group for allegedly selling access to the organization's pharmacological database. Ruined financially by the conglomerate's legal team, Morell turned to the scholars of Null Mysteris, and was accepted on the basis of his experience and academic credentials. Before long, however, he was caught attempting to auction several of the organization's most secret texts to a group of bidders in Eastern Europe; the betrayal so angered the normally benign scholars that Morell and his cell were forced to flee Paris and settle in the United States. For a time, Morell attempted to freelance in New York and Washington, DC, but his reputation for untrustworthiness preceded him. Finally, he was deserted even by his former colleagues, and disappeared altogether in late 2004. Rumors persist that the rogue scholar may ultimately have sold his services to an apocalyptic cult in the nation's capital, trading his knowledge of hunter society in exchange for a measure of the status he once enjoyed.

Criminals and Outcasts

In any society, there exist individuals whose actions place them beyond the pale; the desperate and bloody struggles that mark the Vigil has spawned more than its share of rogues, outcasts and criminals who now find themselves hounded by hunters and monsters alike.

Since no universal approach to the Vigil exists, no two organizations can agree on what constitutes proscribed behavior. Some especially zealous cells or groups contend that since monsters are no longer human (if they ever were), they deserve no ethical or moral consideration. Atrocities, including torture, might be permissible against creatures that view the human race as nothing more than prey. Other organizations vehemently dispute this notion, on the grounds that atrocities are never permissible because these acts degrade the hunters who perform them. This creates a murky area that encompasses the majority of hunter activities, from cold-bloodedly destroying a vampire in its coffin to spraying a restaurant with machine-gun fire in order to wipe out a pack of unsuspecting shape-changers. Hunter cells exiled from their parent organization for their excesses can sometimes find a safe haven with another group that shares their perspective on the Vigil. Even then, however, extremists risk the wrath of other, equally zealous hunters who are more than willing to enact summary judgment against those they perceive as just another kind of monster.

Other hunters become pariahs because they are disillusioned with their former organizations and choose to go rogue instead. Sometimes these rogues escape with proprietary information or irreplaceable resources, which their former superiors will go to great lengths to recover.

Task Force: VALKYRIE is frequently accused of using “death squads” to eliminate rogue members, though its operatives vehemently deny such activities. Even smaller compacts, such as the Loyalists of Thule, have been suspected of using assassins to silence rogue members who are believed to know too much about the group’s clandestine origins. One such assassination is believed to have occurred in Prague during the latter years of the Cold War, when a prominent occultist named Janos Kadinsky was found poisoned in his flat just a month after publicly breaking with the group. The Loyalists of Thule denied any involvement with Kadinsky’s death, claiming the scholar had suffered a breakdown and committed suicide. Nevertheless, such coincidences lead many hunters to believe that powerful compacts and conspiracies won’t hesitate to punish those who violate their rules.

Often, rogue hunters have no recourse but one another after they’ve chosen to break with their former colleagues. Freelance cells composed of rogue hunters from a multitude of different groups have enjoyed considerable success over the years, combining skills, abilities and stolen endowments that create a very effective team. Ironically, these renegade cells are often the ones most ruthlessly hounded by their former masters, who see them as a grave threat to the stability of their organizations.

Threats and Targets

This is a world under siege. Humanity is entrenched in a war, a shadow war, an *invisible* war, a conflict so clandestine that few are even aware of it. The darkness has taken form. Monsters have crawled free from chaos and walk within the herd, masked as one of us. Bad magic bleeds from cracked city streets. Curses and ill omens flit about, free as blackbirds. Dark emotions take shape, grow skin and bones and a very bad face.

At the heart of the Vigil, the core of the hunt itself, are the foes hunters face. They’re what this whole deal is about. Some hunters want them neutralized. Maybe that means ending their reign with the downswing of a fire ax. Maybe it means neutering their powers, keeping them “alive” but harmless — like a supernatural lobotomy or castration. It could even mean trying to cure them, trying to rehabilitate them so their human souls can return to decadent flesh. Other hunters? Well, they know the armies of darkness have power. Power in magic. Power in ancient weapons. Power in political connections, occult lore, and big banks full of money. Sometimes, hunters want a taste of that power, and will wade into the fray looking to grab hold of it.

But it’s not easy. The enemies seem limitless. From pathetic things lying in the sewer, gibbering and wailing, to degenerate undead gods lording over entire cities, the monsters have many faces beneath many masks. Then again, so do the hunters.

In *Hunter: The Vigil*, throwing a light switch to see the truth is often the trigger for the monsters to leap. They have fears, just as we do, and they kill those who’ve seen them. Just as we fear they might be hiding in the darkness, they fear being dragged into the light.

Origins of Darkness

To be clear: nobody can say for sure where they came from. Hunters are forced to come up with their own answers as to the origins of monsters. Are they a fairly recent phenomenon? Some believe that. Some claim that with the debauchery and evil of the last couple of centuries, we *broke* something. Maybe humankind accidentally cracked one of the Seven Seals imprisoning evil, or perhaps our own indulgences invited chaos into the world (for every action is an equal and opposite reaction).

Others, particularly those who belong to the disparate compacts and conspiracies, claim that creatures have stalked the shadows since time immemorial. Maybe they poured free from Tiamat’s torn belly. Could be that when Cain bludgeoned Abel or the Lightbringer toppled from Heaven’s grace, it *triggered* something, corrupting the innocence of the world. Some speculate that monsters have simply always been with us, as much a part of the world as wolves and owls and sharks.

Do all monsters come from the same place? Could they possibly share a similar origin? Many hunters certainly hope so. A common origin indicates a common solution, be that a cure or a plague or a shared weakness. Wise hunters, though, see that the horrors of the World of Darkness do not share one face, and while it’s easy to lump them all together, doing so is a sure path to getting dead. You can’t treat a rotting, walking corpse (slouching toward ol’ Bedlam) the same way you’d handle a man whose bones pop and skin shifts so he can become a huge wolf or a ravenous vulture. Some things hiss and scream beneath a jet of fire, where other things seem to feed off the flames. Other creatures, like vampires and werewolves, supposedly drop when capped with silver bullets, but fire one at a keening poltergeist and the hunter’ll just put a hole in the wall.

Hunters who want to stay alive know they have to be ready for everything. They have to recognize the many faces of the enemy, and they damn well better adjust.

The Dead, They Walk

The reason the undead repel and fascinate us in equal measure is not hard to see. They’re dead, yet they still walk. That implies supernatural influence (which is mysterious and interesting, sure) but above all, it deals with death. For thousands of years, humans have been fascinated by death. Many cultures and religions share beliefs of what happens after death, and these faiths and superstitions make up a significant slice of worldwide mythology throughout history, be it the Christian Heaven, the Hades of Ancient Greece, or the many Hells of Buddhist lore. Moreover, modern science has examined death so we know how every cell breaks down, how gases are released and what maggots do to bones.

Death forever fascinates us, because there is no coming back from it, no way to learn more about it until it happens. That’s life. That’s Nature.

The undead are the exception to this rule. Their unlife defies the cosmic and natural cycles. They *have* returned from beyond the grave, and they are no longer the people they once were. Something changed them. Whether demons nest

in their dead flesh or it's some kind of medical anomaly (a disease, perhaps), nobody's really sure. But what's damn sure is that the walking dead are out there, hungry, desperate and sometimes quite mad.

Vampires

In a dockside warehouse, the Rat King licks his fangs with a pale tongue and bellows to his gathered ghouls a command: Go, my little mice, and hunt.

In a penthouse suite, hunters tear at the metal "curtains" locked down over the windows, prying them back just enough to get a single shaft of sunlight in: it burns the beautiful woman they have staked to the floor.

In a boiler room, servants of the Long Night pray over a little girl who, even now, unwittingly sups at the emotion coming off those hunters, her belly growing full with all their hopes and dreams.

It's a grim cycle with these vampires. A bloodsucking creature of the night kills an innocent human, feeds the dying man a drop of its own thick and vile blood, and another bloodsucking creature rises from death and stalks the night.

Vampires exist. Most of them feed off blood, though rumors exist of other types that eat flesh, drink spinal fluid, or drain brains of their memories. Some are solitary, true Lords of the Night, ruling over neighborhoods or whole cities, commanding their own unliving soldiers and relishing in the power it gives them. Others work in packs: blood-spattered coteries that work in tandem just like hunter cells or a pack of distem-

pered dogs, roving the night, looking to slake a living thirst.

Theories abound as to what they are or how they got that way. Speculations suggest a monstrous origin, born from Tiamat's belly or the Devil's own head or from some curse laid upon the earth by God His Ownself. Less popular ideas lean toward the scientific: vampirism is the result of some plague, or perhaps each of the Damned is the puppet of some kind of blood-hungry parasite.

Wherever they came from, vampires are bad mojo, the undead manifestations of vice and inequity. They are driven by dark passions, stirred by the blood to give into whatever geeks them at a given moment: a mad grab for cash, a claws-out cackling sex rush, a gluttonous gorge to get a belly hot with the red stuff. They are passionate creatures, in a way. And those passions are dead and twisted.

To invoke those passions, a vampire can tear a fence out of the ground, ignore a stitching of bullets to the chest, run mind control on unwitting hunters, even command a whole colony of rats to reduce a victim to bones.

Most hunters want the vampires in the ground. They don't like the idea that humanity is a food source. But they also recognize that some of the unliving are still very human, indeed (or at least *look* that way), and hunters sometimes give them the benefit of the doubt, especially if that means forging an alliance with some group of the bastards to put a bigger, meaner enemy down. Vampires have power both mystical and temporal. Some hunters know how to use that to their advantage. Most, though, just get dead, or worse —



enthralled and addicted to the rush of sweet vampire blood on their lips. And it is addictive.

Accepted truth about vampires is that sunlight and fire make short work of them. Beheading, too. Everything else is up for debate. Stakes definitely do *something*, but different cells tell different stories: some say it paralyzes them, others claim they shrivel like dead roaches as soon as it happens. Crosses? Maybe. Garlic? Probably not. Other weirder anathemas exist, too: kill them at a crossroads, pierce their chest with a holy sword, trap them in an open grave, or “bottle” their souls using a Malaysian sorcerer.

Ghosts

A man pulls his boat up to the village dock, and he hears the women wailing and the dogs howling. He sees the shape of mist standing on the dock in front of him: his brother, dead from drowning, still wet and smelling of river water.

A woman uses a Ouija board alone to speak to her husband's ghost. It is not his ghost at all, but the lying specter of a man who was bad in his life and is now worse in death. He tells her how much change she has in her pocket. He tells her he loves her.

A child hunkers down in his bedroom, and he squeezes his eyes shut and opens them again, but it does not stop him from seeing the bleeding walls, the carpet of crickets, the marionette in the corner dancing a slow waltz.

Trauma in death begets trauma after death. This is true in a physical, mundane and corporeal sense: a man murdered leaves turmoil in his wake. His wife can't move past it. The cops are burdened by another unsolved case. Even the murderer can barely stomach his own nightmares. But it's true in a spiritual, metaphysical sense, too: the victim's soul is in turmoil and it clings to this world with an unholy grip, staying behind when it should have long moved past.

Ghosts are the souls of the dead, remaining in this life because, for want of a better term, they are unable to let go of it. Perhaps after the intense trauma of a rape and murder, the spirit of a young woman can't accept the unfairness and injustice of her death, and finds herself lingering as a specter in the alley where her life was so brutally stolen.

Ghosts don't choose to become what they are. They are bound to that fate, and there is something still undeniably human within them. They are likely to feel sorrow and loss with a keenness any mortal can empathize with. But time changes all things.

Some ghosts are powerful entities, little resembling the people they were in life. In some cases, this manifests as an obsession in the ghost — the creature endlessly repeats the same action (something meaningful before its death, or tied into the way the person died) and grows enraged or confused if its ritual is interrupted. In other cases, a ghost might have changed through bitterness and hatred to the point where it's insane because of the stress and torment of the alien situation it's in. This madness is an emotional, soulful insanity, far removed from the biochemical disorders of life. That can make the ghost infinitely more hateful and unpredictable than any living person. Others aren't hateful at all, but their sorrow is so pervasive its effect is just as negative.

Ghosts abound. They remain both a problem and opportunity for most hunters. They're a problem because they represent a cruel unknown and an invisible threat. They're hard as hell to deal with — they're hard to even *find* — and it seems that few certain ways of dealing with them exist. An exorcist? Works sometimes, not others. Resolve the ghost's restless issues? Great, if you can actually dig down and do the research to uncover just what those issues are (alternatively, maybe the hunter finds a way to communicate with the thing). Burn the whole haunted house to the ground? Some say this is the best solution, whereas others claim the ghost'll just move on, following a person or only growing angrier with loss.

But ghosts represent an opportunity, as well. They are a sign of what comes after. They represent a seemingly examinable scientific reality, or are a fascinating source of answers about all manner of unperceived mysteries. Some cells learn new ways of communicating with specters (the Ouija board always seems to work, even when it's a cheap knock-off — but they say to never, ever use one alone: it gives the wraith power). Some hunters have even learned how to enslave ghosts, sending them to haunt their enemies.

(More information on ghosts is found in the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, pp. 209–216.)

Zombies

He sits on the curb, trying to find human words, and he looks at his slowly rotting hands and the picture in it of his lost wife and kids and he tries to cry but unfortunately, his tear ducts have gone to rot, too.

She claws her way from the grave, once-manicured nails snapping as she surfaces, driven by a sorcerer's voice inside her head that tells her to kill, kill and kill some more.

They are a swarming mass, a teeming throng of moans and meat-specked teeth and pounding fists, and they come upon the hunters boarded up in that old hunting cabin, driven not by intelligent thought but only by the hunger for brains wrenched from bashed skulls.

The dead walk. Some of them run. And we're talking the really dead, the rotting dead, the up-out-of-the-grave dead.

Animated (or Reanimated) corpses run the gamut from mindless, shuffling zombies to people who seem normal until you look closely and see the tinge of rot around the ear. Some hunger for flesh, some for brains. Some don't eat at all, and just want to experience life again or hope to right some wrong. Others still seem utterly unrelated to the body they wear, poisoning the ground around them with the same corrosive effect that plagues their decaying or ill-stitched skin.

Ultimately, the result is the same: the dead walk, and they are harmful to life. It is undead without the graceful predation and eroticism of the vampire, and without the tragic half-presence of a touchless ghost.

Hunters know a zombie might be forever alone: a sad lout who might be able to talk (even though his words are slurred) and think and resist his strange urges, eventually decaying so much he cannot stand. Hunters also know that other zombies can beget their own by bite or by some other form of contagion, and that the infection vector is swift and cruel, and before you know it, you damn near have a goddamn

zombie apocalypse on your hands if you can't put it down fast. Good luck figuring out which type is which, hunters say. Most just try to kill the walking dead no matter how pathetic they seem, not caring to risk a potential "hot zone." But when the zombie has the face of a loved one or of a trusted cellmate, what happens then?

Where do zombies come from? Nobody knows. Some seem to spring whole cloth out of nothing. Maybe it's chemicals or pollution, or maybe it's some demonic curse. Others rise like ghosts, driven by some unfinished purpose or need. Rumors exist that more than a few zombies are just the unwitting servants of weird alchemy-slinging magicians or vampiric overlords, and some hunters claim that if you can kill the creator, you kill the zombie.

And how does one kill a zombie, anyhow? To be clear, it's both tough and easy. Tough because for the most part, they're dead. They feel no pain. Their flesh may fall off in hunks but they keep shuffling or, worse, sprinting. It's easy because once you know the trick, you can apply it across the board. Most zombies go down with brain destruction — a shovel, a shotgun, or just a carpet of fire that cooks the skull and boils the brain-meats within. Others need to have their hearts removed or have their bodies *wholly* diminished by damage or fire.

Those Who Change Shape

Some monsters wear masks that shift and warp: men who become wolves, housecats with human eyes, walking bags of skin that look human but are really just a flesh-suit filled with spiders and rats. Those whose bodies are malleable are sometimes ferine, wild like rabid dogs. Others are seductive, manipulative, keen and coy and pulsing with infectious lust. Some shape-changers don't seem all that harmful, and some even seem like they hunt evils greater than themselves. Many hunters contend that this is either just a ruse, or blessed proof that the creatures are just as happy to tear each other to bloody gobbets as they are to prey on humanity. Can one truly trust monsters whose very form is a lie?

Lycanthropes

Two things battle in the street. Both have human bodies but lupine heads. They tear at each other with hooked claws. The hunters hiding behind the torn up VW Bug don't know which one to shoot. So they shoot them both.

Three housecats purr to a hunter in a tongue mostly human: "Kill us if you want, woman, but if you help us, we'll help you. Now let me tell you about the Spider King of Quakertown."

The pack of werewolves, operating as one, slide inside the safehouse as silent as the stars, and they throw the dead witch down on the floor as an offering of peace. They go to leave, but don't smell the trap. Whoosh. The place, and the pack, burns.

The story goes like this: The Arcadian King Lycaon and his 50 sons offered a meal to the god Zeus, a meal secretly of child flesh. Zeus was outraged at the sacrifice and, after striking the King and his sons with terrible lightning, turned them

all into wolves. So lycanthropes were born. At least, that's the story a lot of hunters tell.

Lycanthropy is a term hunters often use to describe any creature that shifts between forms of animal and man, even though it really just indicates a werewolf. Some know the term to more accurately be *therianthropy*.

While the Lycaon origin holds for some, others claim that shapeshifters are bound to the moon somehow. Others say they got that way because they coupled with wolves or other beasts, or were somehow cursed by witches or even the Devil for some wretched act that has fallen outside memory. For as many origins as are suspected, there exist just as many faces of lycanthropy. Most hunters accept that werewolves look human for the most part, though always have an air of wildness (not *wilderness*, mind) about them. They seem to travel in packs in much the same way that hunters travel in cells. They zealously cling to territories, guarding a shitty city park or a rat-trap tenement like it's sacred ground or something. They're basically gangs composed of thugs who become wolves, at least that's how most hunters see it.

Of course, too many prove the exception: some act alone, and seem to gain their shape-changing abilities by wearing animal skins or even stitching those skins to their own. Different werewolves seem keen to help uncover ancient mysteries and destroy monsters just like hunters do, while others are glad to imprison humans and farm them out as brood mares, pack mules, or fatted livestock.

Not to mention that a lot of them don't even become wolves. Hunters hear tales telling of shapeshifters who become housecats, jaguars, lions, bug-eyed fish-men, boars, bulls, even trees. Those stories are either bullshit, or the world is a much weirder and more feral place than hunters had previously considered. If the stories are true that such creatures spread their condition via bite, well...it makes a zombie apocalypse not seem so bad by comparison.

Can hunters make alliances with packs of lycanthropes? It's not common, but it does happen. If both have a common enemy or protect neighboring territories, it can happen. It's rarely permanent. It's hardly *friendly*. But it happens.

The rest? Well, they either need to be cured of their curse or killed before they hurt somebody. They're carnivores, after all. They eat meat. Human meat, sometimes. The question is how to kill them? Silver always seems the answer, but it harms them and fails to harm them with equal frequency. Wolfsbane and foxglove are thought to be potent poisons against them (and foxglove is a very real human-affecting poison known as *digitalis*). Variant hunter tales tell stories that making them drink holy water does the trick, as does skinning them or destroying their holy places (which could be a standing stone or a defunct phone booth — you never know).

Problem is, getting to that stage is no easy trick. They move fast. They often have immeasurable strength. They take on the worst and deadliest features of whatever animal they mimic: claws, teeth, abrasive skin, madness-causing howls and a rate of healing that is swift and diabolical. Worst, some shapeshifters seem so unnatural that hunters blank out after

fighting them, or are reduced to curling into a fetal ball while the beast bears down. This obfuscation of memory is hard for some hunters, but they have ways of dealing with it and drawing the memories back to the fore.

The Possessed

A gang of vagrants with glass marbles for eyes and windows in their mouths descend upon the crying infant in the dumpster, and they collectively reach in and take the baby, for they will offer it to the same thing that took them.

An office worker doesn't know why he keeps scratching those occult symbols into the underside of his desk, but he knows that the voice inside his head seems to like it, and keeps making very interesting promises.

A mother of three knows that a second woman lives within her now, a dead woman, and when she looks in the mirror and lets go of her will, that dead woman's face emerges: red lipstick, black eyes, a hungry tongue.

Hunters don't always realize it, but sometimes the shape-shifter they're fighting has something inside. That "thing" possessing them is using that person like a host, and the more it lives inside the skin, the more it takes. And the more it takes, the more its own monstrous nature emerges, often physically.

Human beings are vulnerable to all manner of possession: ghosts, demons, rogue souls, infectious parasites or alien entities from beyond our own world's boundaries. When they take over, it's often slow. Just a seed, a little voice in the head that maybe pushes the human to give into a sinful urge or plants a terrible thought in his head about how his wife's mysterious absence this morning means she must be cheating on him. And as the parasite gains dominance over the man's will, the parasite's own nature emerges and changes the man physically.

A sewer worker infested by otherworldly worms finds that the worms now peek out of his irises or rise from beneath loose, corroded fingernails. An entity so pure that it comprises little more than murderous energies manifests as a bloody cleaver in its host's hand or as the names of a hundred murder victims rising upon the victim's flesh as scars or brands. A child possessed by the ghost of a neighborhood pederast finds that strange lusts and vices rise within him, and starts to experience a paranormally early pubescence.

What do hunters cells do with the possessed? Quick-to-judge hunters destroy them. They look horrific. They exhibit monstrous traits. Put them down. More judicious and investigative cells will do some research, uncovering just what it is that acts as possessor and perhaps how it got there in the first place. Hunters with an eye to rehabilitation see the possessed as a prime target for a "cure" — the parasite may somehow be ushered from the body, though some cells handle this differently than others (some accept that an exorcism will do the trick, while others go for outright physical torture, ruining the vessel to the point where the invasive entity leaves it, like rats fleeing a sinking ship).

The Demonic

He wears a white suit, a white tie, white shoes and a white smile. And he offers you just what you want, and you say you'll take it no matter the price, and that's just the sort of thing he wants to hear.

It's small, leathery, with a sucker for its mouths and horns on its heads. It sniffs the ground, and the hunters watch because they know that where the imp stops to lick the floor, well, that's where the murder was committed.

She can be everything the teenage boy wants her to be: naughty teacher with librarian glasses, infernal seductress with that outfit he saw in his mom's Victoria's Secret catalog, and she can even be Betsy, the girl he likes in his British Literature class. But someday, she'll want to show him the side she likes, the side with the whipping tail and the cloven feet.

They aren't shape-changers, strictly speaking. But they do seem to wear many faces and forms. Moreover, their identity is strictly a mystery to most hunters. They appear to offer deals. Or they show up as chattering imps serving some inexplicable purpose (inexplicable until later, when the purpose is revealed, at least). They might sit on the banks of a river, wailing a cacophony as their sorcerous master's corpse floats upon the waters. They might become cats or owls or steal bodies as part of some hellish pact.

The origin of the term *daimon* or *daemon* has somewhat more beneficent roots than what manifests during the Vigil. A *daemon* was thought of as an entity capable of delivering divine knowledge or power. It has since been subverted to mean something infernal, diabolical, malevolent.

And those definitions are true, to a point. Demons are selfish entities, which sometimes comes across as "evil." They don't do harm because it thrills them, so it seems; they do harm because it serves them. Or, worse, it serves whatever beast holds their leash.

Who does hold a demon's leash, if any? Is it Lucifer, as the Lucifuge would have any hunter believe? Are lesser demons in thrall to greater demons who are held as slaves to truly unknowable beings? Do they serve vampires, sorcerers or Devil-cursed wolfmen? Could they be rogue agents, free from some spirit world, or released perhaps from a broken Hell itself?

Even the Lucifuge, which holds truck with such creatures and sometimes even holds the leashes (however temporarily), doesn't have good answers, though it tells compelling lies.

And what does a demon want? Demons generally seem to serve vice: they enjoy urging others to the services of their most basic desires. They seem to gain from this in some fashion, feeding on it like a vampire does blood. To stir such improper passions, demons can take on varying shapes and faces to "encourage" desired behaviors. One demon might strike a bargain to encourage a man to go back to the heroin needle, while another pact might be something more simple and seemingly more innocuous, like engaging in a one-night stand or stealing something from a grocery shelf. Some demons prefer to create great chains of urges, making a deal with one individual who will then go to tempt another, who may then go on to tempt someone else.

And what do the tempted gain? That's where their nomenclature comes into play: demons still seem to be the keepers of knowledge. How they got this knowledge remains unknown (whether they know it as part of their very being or whether they gained it through pacts), but they have it, and they're willing to share. They don't share



it fully, of course. And often enough they share just enough knowledge to be dangerous, often omitting parts that might earn them an undesired reaction.

This makes demons seductive to hunters. The whisper of forbidden knowledge (the location of a blasted shipwreck, the address of a cult-of-personality vampire, the true name of a troublesome witch) is sometimes too hard for a hunter to resist.

Worth noting is that not every demon is so keen to stir sin, or is even so powerful. Many are familiars or imps, strange mindless kobolds or hobgoblins. Again, these may serve greater demons. Or perhaps they're not demons at all, given the title by hunters who simply don't know any better.

Fairy Tales

The girl tears her way through the hedgerow, her skin bitten by thorns, and as she emerges back into this world, she can taste her hunger for dreams welling up within.

The boy with the rose tattoo takes the baseball bat to the face and his nose goes up into his brain and boom, now he's a pile of sticks and stones and puppy dog tails.

The thing is neither man nor woman, but unwholesome in its androgyny: long dress made of silver moonlight, a spiked collar around its neck, a twist of rosewood around its wrists, and a face full of eyes.

The fairy tales are true. Hell, they're worse than true: the stuff you read out of Grimm's is light, fluffy; frankly, all too optimistic. Somewhere in the deep dark forest, you'll find a house with gingerbread walls whose cake-mortar bleeds if you

eat it. Somewhere you might find a wicked stepmother with a poisonous apple and thorns for eyes, or seven dwarves who will save you for the cost of pledging your eternal service to the wizened men.

The story seems to be that hunters sometimes face Real Actual Fairies, while other times they face changelings. Real Actual Fairies are...well, who knows? Nightmares made manifest? Ancient spirits, puckish and cruel? Some seem to look human, but they stride with such eerie, lordly grace through this world that they must be something far stranger. Others are nothing more than shadows, shapes, colors, smells: an alien glimmer of light down an old wood path, the smell of funeral flowers drifting up out of that sewer drain.

Changelings seem to be liars. They claim to have been stolen from the world by Fairies and have muscled their way back, but hunters suspect that changelings are in reality as the old folklore suggests: not the human abducted, but the inhuman replacements. And even if they *are* telling the truth, then being stolen by Fairies has damn sure changed them, and not for the better. Some look human, but then you curb-stomp them and they turn into a pile of leaves or a fleeing army of hornworms. Others look human only some of the time: a sideways glance or a peek at them through a doorway and you might see a pair of antlers, a mouth filled with ragged teeth, or skin made of glossy ivy. The good news is many seem to die like any other human, with a knife to the gut or a bullet to the brain. The bad news is that just when you think one is dead, you see him crawling away, his

mouth dripping with bloody juices from some strange magic apple he's had in his pocket.

Human Hearts Grown Dark

It's nice when the monsters can be easily categorized. It's also rare. Every time a hunter thinks he has an answer, it disappears in an eerie blur, a strange symbol burned into the cornea, or a spray of bad blood. What's worse is that many of the so-called "monsters" have not only human origins, but are, by most examinations, *still* human in some fashion or another. Perhaps they wield inhuman powers or worship at the feet of something fiendish, but they still have the hearts and minds of human beings.

Witches, Sorcerers, Magicians

In a swamp, a warlock eludes his pursuer by carving a strange symbol on that bent elbow of cypress root. Out of the bog grow vines that will snare the feet of those who come for him.

In a penthouse suite, a sorceress completes the ritual whose reagents have taken her years to collect: seven tears from seven blind boys, a drop of water from every ocean, a cup of blood from three mythic beasts. The city will shudder tonight.

On an empty city street, the air smells of ozone and the hunter's hackles rise with a numb rush of static electricity. He sees the fiend in the third-floor window far too late. Lightning strikes not once, but twice.

Magic is real. It is the embodiment of supernatural will coupled with the rewards of ancient mysteries solved. See, humankind has always been drawn to knowledge. Sometimes that knowledge has its roots in dark foundations, allowing those who learn the lore to manipulate forces perhaps best left alone — at least, if a long and happy life is desired. Some hunt that knowledge with mad abandon. Many become witches, channeling this knowledge directly into power. One witch is called to her power, pulled into a dream-state and given access to reality-bending magic atop a phantasmagoric watchtower. Another must fight tooth and nail for her power, learning ancient and seemingly impossible spells, pulling them out of old books or choking them from the mouths of demons.

What can't magic do? Therein lies the mystery, and the fear. Because it seems like magic can do just about anything. Tip dice rolls or card hands in the witch's favor? Call up hoary beasts from a fire circle in the snowy tundra? Pull the blood out of somebody's body? Immolate a crowd? Disappear from view? The good news is it seems that few sorcerers have more than a couple of strong tricks up their sleeve. The bad news is that a hunter never knows what tricks the fiend knows until they're in play.

Worse, some seem able to conjure this stuff out of thin air. Others only seem like they can make such drastic effects happen by long periods of meditation, ritual and ceremony. Once more, how does a hunter know? Observation helps, but only so much. The difficulty is compounded by the fact that some magic seems to comprise unlikely-but-still-possible coincidences and accidents. Sure, it's *odd* that lightning strikes the same tree thrice. Sure, it's *weird* that this gambler always

gets a perfect 21 in blackjack. But is it magical? Hunters might assume so. They also might see magic when, in reality, it's just a genuine coincidence. Innocents have died at the hands of hunters, thinking those innocents were slinging curses or fucking with fate. But they weren't. They were just people.

And that's a problem. Sorcerers *are* people, just like hunters. Yes, some hunters think they know how to spot witches (strange markings, witch's nipples, forked tongues, and so on), but rarely do such "identifiers" manifest reliably. A witch looks like a normal human. That said, therein lies a secret advantage: they suffer just like normal humans, too. A bullet that makes a vampire laugh makes a warlock *die*. They're also susceptible to the same human foibles: paper trails from mortgages, broken marriages, they appear on video cameras.

Though, once more, their humanity goes back to being a problem: isn't it murder to kill a human? Behead a vampire, and he becomes ash. Behead a witch, and you just beheaded a human. Not only does that conjure legal ramifications, but some hunters have a true moral problem with hunting witches. Those with such problems tend to hunt sorcerers with as little violence as necessary. If they can kidnap them and "deprogram" the magic out of them, great. If they can blackmail them or somehow force them to stop using magic or only use it for the benefit of humankind, great. But all too often, it comes down to causing them pain or death, at which point a hunter starts waking up in cold sweats, wondering just what kind of monster he has become.

So why hunt witches at all? What harm do they bring to the world? Not every cell hunts them, actually. More than one cell has found a reasonable, if competitive, partnership with a cabal of magicians. Of course, that competition can become an issue. Sorcerers and hunters sometimes pursue similar resources: *verboten* knowledge, ancient artifacts, esoteric secrets. Sometimes, neither side wants the other to have answers to such mysteries, drawing them into ideological conflict rather than visceral conflict driven by, say, revenge. Some witches use power to possess power both temporal and numinous. Some hunters want to take that power for themselves.

Other cells know it's necessary to hunt witches because while they may be human, the magic they perform is inhuman and, in turn, represents a *conscious* choice to do wrong. A guy who steals a car isn't directly hurting anyone else, but he's still punished, right? If he's drunk and kills someone, he's all the more culpable. Magic isn't natural, some hunters say, and those who wield it are therefore unnatural, too. The Vigil for many is about eradicating such supernature from the world.

The final problem? Witches force some hunters to look inward and face the darkness inside. To be clear, some hunters have access to Endowments from their respective conspiracies that, to many, look like magic. Can this be justified? Or are they just...witches, too? Most hunters with access to strange resources justify them somehow: *oh, these are rituals granted by God, or I use these dread powers to repel evil, and the end justifies the means.* A few, though, recognize the cruel irony, and suffer breakdowns from the guilt.

Cults and Cultists

Flickering lights coruscate from behind the train-car door, and the "sky clad" men and women within chant to bring a dread beast with the face of a red mandala into this world so they may serve it. The air fills with narcotic mist — the beast's breath.

A computer screen offers cascading AS/400 that instructs its servants and sycophants to plug themselves in and "download" its desires into their blood.

A flyer lands on an administrator's desk, and it's from a group of his co-workers who stand around smiling the same smile, and he looks at the flyer and it tells him that he can lose weight, be rich, and become "empowered." They all have. They feel great. And they want him to join.

It sounds nice if you look back far enough. "Cult," from *cultus*, the Latin. Meaning to care for, to cultivate. The nice-ness has since been lost, however. Cults want to care for



something, and they damn sure want to cultivate something: they want to cultivate eldritch powers, strange demons, mad monsters or themselves. And they want to do so at costs too high: whether at the cost of their own bodies or sanities or at the cost of the safety and sanctity of innocents.

Yes, some cults are overt. They act as loud lunatics, heralding the coming of some entity from beyond the veil. They release nerve gas in shopping malls, using the dead patrons as

a sacrifice to some nascent power. They chant and handle serpents and gibber in alien tongues. Those cults are scary, yes, but hunters can see those guys coming. They wear the danger they represent right on their sleeves, next to the bloodstain and the wristwatch that counts down to some sinister event.

But they aren't the *really* scary ones.

No, the truly frightening cultists are the ones who remain hidden. The ones who don't telegraph their desires. They mask themselves as church groups, self-help groups, weight loss clinics, Neighborhood Watch programs, fraternities, academic brotherhoods, town councils or rabid fan-bases. They don't wear robes (at least when anybody's looking). They don't have tattoos marking them as slaves of some fiend or god (at least where anybody can see). They *blend*. And that makes them insidious.

So what is it that cults do? Some offer worship to dread gods and powerful spirits. Their belief provides fuel — food, really — for such entities. Others work for the monsters in much the same way the hunters work against them. A vampire might maintain a herd of blood-addicted ghouls, ultimately forming a cult that sees the leech as a hierophant, celebrity or deity. One cult might doggedly pursue fundamentalist ideals, while another obsesses over communing with the strange UFO lights in the skies or the spirits of haunted houses. All cults become dangerous, so the hunters believe.

Once more, a cruel irony. Are hunter cells, compacts and conspiracies little more than cults with shared purpose? The Lucifuge numbers 666 members and claims heritage back to Satan. The Long Night espouses eschatology, and figures the Apocalypse as key to its ethos. Cultic practices? Could be.

Cults therefore represent a pretty dark mirror image for hunters and their affiliations, a mirror image that most refuse to acknowledge. Some cults actually grow out of hunter cells that have gone mad or become so morally bankrupt that their ideals end up truly tortuous. A cell starts out hunting the monsters, and soon finds a sorcerer who sacrifices children to some sewer-bound serpent god called Ndengei, and that sorcerer gets a *lot* out of the bargain. No, they don't sacrifice children to the serpent right away. And they probably kill the sorcerer. But time, horror and mystery wear down the hunters. Some or all of members of the cell think, "Maybe we need greater resources to keep this city safe." And they know that a local lycanthrope visits his nephew, an ADHD kid who, frankly, will probably become a werewolf just like his uncle. Would it be so bad to offer this one child to the serpent god for a taste of righteous power? To save the city, isn't that a reasonable cost? They do so. And all seems good. But maybe the power wanes. Or maybe they get sick. And maybe Ndengei offers to return the power if only they'd find another wayward child who doesn't deserve to cling to this mortal coil...

That's the other problem with cults. They're seductive. They *always* have something to offer, even if it's not real.

Slashers

It's summer. A man in a rebreather mask stalks a teen girl down the halls of an empty high school. She's a naughty girl who needs to make love to his knife.

EVERYDAY ENEMIES

Do hunters hunt humans? Regular humans? No supernatural powers? No ties to ancient mystery, no inclination toward ushering in hungry horrors?

Yes, though it's not common. Most hunters know they already run afoul of the law often enough that hunting humans isn't such a wise move. But it happens. A gang muscling in on the cell's turf? An abortion clinic bomber wreaking hell and havoc in a small town? A pederast or serial killer with no seeming ties to the supernatural? They might be cause to put a bullet in a human head, or at least kidnap and capture for the police.

Also, some humans ignorantly contribute to the strength of monsters. An accountant who fudges corporate books and thus helps swell the coffers of an ancient vampire might need to be put down if he refuses to see the error of his ways. A drug dealer whose zoned-out customers often end up as the unwitting recipients of spiritual parasites might need to be taught a cruel lesson in customer service.

Morally, it's tough for some hunters to go that route. Hunters fight a fight that mortal law enforcement won't, can't, or doesn't know how to handle. It goes the other way, too. Mortal law enforcement handles the shit that hunters don't. When they violate that, it's hard to justify. One's moral code winnows, at times.

It's winter. A crying woman steps out into the snow, covered in blood. The waiting police empty their service revolvers into her. She doesn't seem to care. She charges at them. She keeps coming. She keeps crying.

It's spring, at least in the hunter's dreams. She runs through a meadow. Sparrows sing, finches flit. Then, pain. Her leg in a jawtrap. The clouds darken. Sun goes bloody. Behind the clouds, a face, the face of a killer she hoped, prayed was dead.

Some humans, some hunters, go off the rails. They lose their minds. They give into evil. They are compelled to kill.

Hunters know them as "slashers," and it seems a phenomenon that, worryingly, gathers strength. They're generally lone serial killers. Some kill to invoke "moral messages." Others kill to get revenge on those who wronged them. Others still pick a type — teen girls, cross-dressers, father figures, psychotherapists — and end those lives with great zeal and lots of blood.

Of course, some hunters end up as slashers, which is the most damning part of the whole thing. A hunter sees too much, loses his mind. Next thing you know, he's got a pair of cleavers and he goes after every member of a werewolf's family — every child, every aunt, every distant relative. Or maybe the hunter sees every person as tainted by the supernatural, and in the strange puzzles and ciphers he leaves behind at every murder, he either imparts his wish to be caught or is unconsciously dropping clues to some ancient mystery that plagues the darkest recesses of his mind.

Why do many slashers manifest supernatural powers? No hunter knows, but every hunter is afraid of the answer. Has evil been made manifest? Does the human mind have a switch in it that, when flipped, gives any person access to dread abilities? Is some awful god or devil inspiring such slashers to kill?

Abilities range, though some patterns are seen. Some can suffer limitless physical punishment. Some are capable of supernatural levels of deduction and problem solving. Some possess eerie strength, alarming alacrity, or burgeoning psychic abilities.

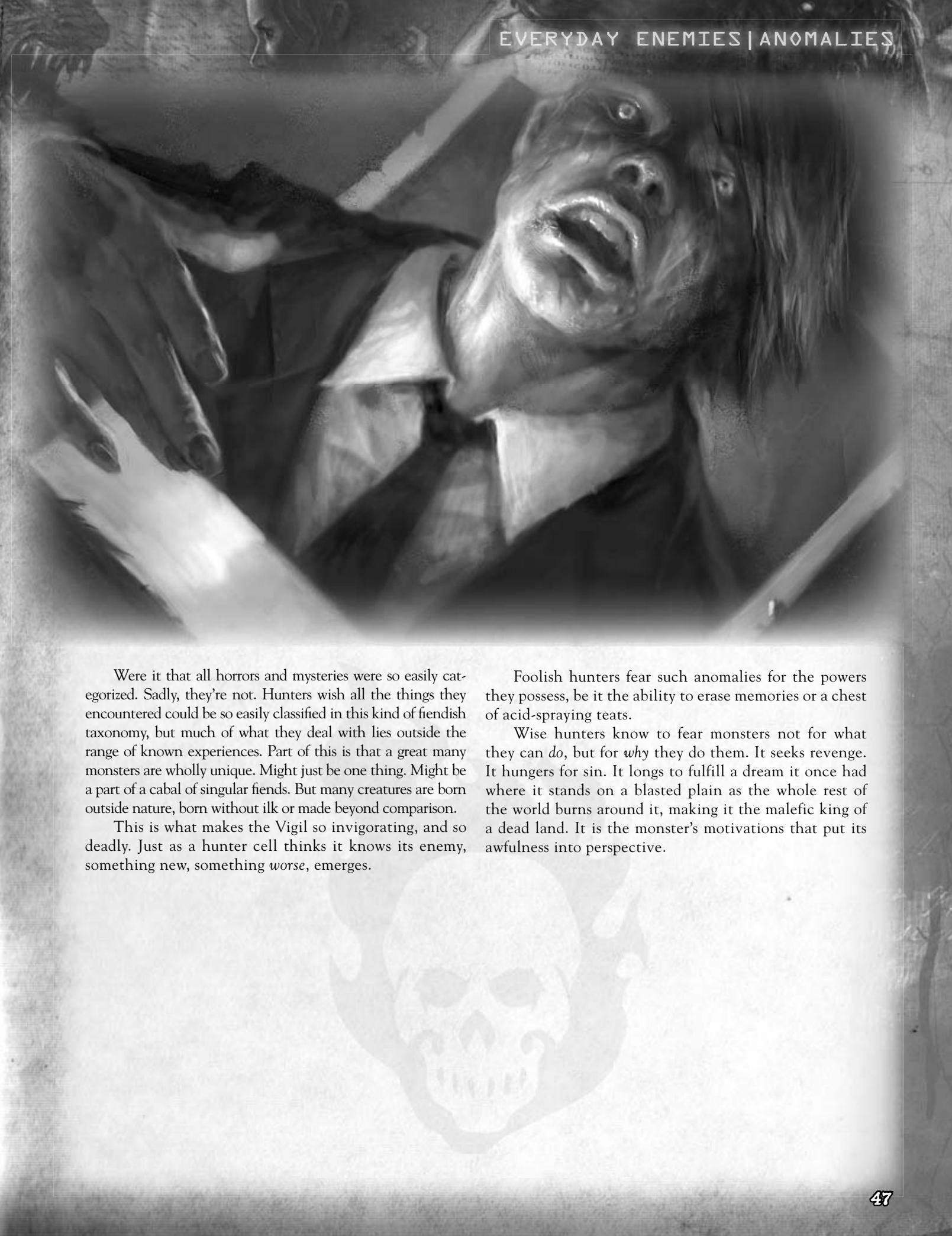
Slashers are terrifying. To most hunters, they are a plague that needs only wiping out. A few, though, try to commune with such killers, hoping to find a message or a still-human soul buried within. Can a hunter find success at this? Or will he find only a sucking void that threatens to make him a killer, too?

Anomalies

A man crawls out of a sun-touched Polaroid picture, his skin faded like the rest of the image. He only needs a bride to bring back into the photo.

A whitetail deer with black tumors hanging from its muzzle and neck steps onto the highway. A car strikes it dead. The tumors open. Something a bit like snakes, but not enough like snakes, emerges from them.

A set of white lights darts across the sky, and the teen couple who watches them feels woozy, and soon they pass out. Days later, the boy awakens on a long stretch of desert highway. The girl lies next to him, her neck broken.



Were it that all horrors and mysteries were so easily categorized. Sadly, they're not. Hunters wish all the things they encountered could be so easily classified in this kind of fiendish taxonomy, but much of what they deal with lies outside the range of known experiences. Part of this is that a great many monsters are wholly unique. Might just be one thing. Might be a part of a cabal of singular fiends. But many creatures are born outside nature, born without *ilk* or made beyond comparison.

This is what makes the Vigil so invigorating, and so deadly. Just as a hunter cell thinks it knows its enemy, something new, something *worse*, emerges.

Foolish hunters fear such anomalies for the powers they possess, be it the ability to erase memories or a chest of acid-spraying teats.

Wise hunters know to fear monsters not for what they can *do*, but for *why* they do them. It seeks revenge. It hungers for sin. It longs to fulfill a dream it once had where it stands on a blasted plain as the whole rest of the world burns around it, making it the malefic king of a dead land. It is the monster's motivations that put its awfulness into perspective.

Flesh Trade Pt II

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MESSAGE HANDLING INSTRUCTIONS											by Mike Lee

The van's bald tires squealed as Raimundo took a hard right onto South 6th Street. He clipped the curb with a heart-stopping thud, and for a moment Vince thought the van was going to roll over, but the gang leader cut the wheel left at the last second and got the vehicle back under control. Horns blared in their wake; Vince barely heard them over Andrea's agonized shouts. She lay in the back of the van, the heels of her athletic shoes beating a ragged rhythm against the van's rusting floor.

"I shot the thing," Andrea growled through clenched teeth. Her eyes were fever bright, and her breath was coming in shallow gasps. "It just reared up out of the darkness, right in front of me. I couldn't possibly have missed - we were close enough to touch. But it didn't even notice. It just...it just bit down..."

"Andrea," Vince snapped. "Get it together, okay? This isn't over yet."

The gang leader looked suspiciously at Gabreski. "What do you mean, this ain't over?"

"I mean Darnell was still alive when he went down that hole," Vince said. "I don't care what took him. We're going to go and get him back."

"We?" Raimundo exclaimed. "No way, motherfucker. You heard what your girl just said. And there wasn't just one of them." He swallowed hard. "There was, like, a whole pack of them, grabbing people and corpses and dragging them back to that hole. They were devils, man. You hear what I'm saying? Maybe you didn't see what one of them did to Manuel, but I did." The gang leader took a swig from his glass. His dark eyes were haunted. "He got between me and one of them, and it ripped him to pieces."

"So you've got as much reason to go after these bastards as I do," Vince said. "Blood for blood, right?"

"What am I supposed to do, man?" Raimundo shot back. "Guns don't hurt 'em."

"Then we get bigger guns," Vince replied. "Or dynamite. We'll find a way." He took a threatening step forward. "Don't punk out on me now, Raimundo. You've got to stand up and help me deal with this."

"Then let me take her to the HUP, man," the gang leader said. "She's tore up! C'mon, it's just a few blocks."



"Are you deaf? I said no fucking hospitals!" Gabreski snarled. "We don't need that kind of attention right now. You said you knew somebody who could take care of this. Now shut up and get us there!"

Vince twisted in the seat and glanced into the back of the van. The bullet wound in his arm burned like fire; just a graze, he was pretty sure, but his sleeve was soaked with blood. "Jack!" he called. "How's she doing?"

Dean was bent over Andrea, trying to keep her still. With his red hair and freckled face, Jack looked more like an altar boy than a police detective. "I don't know, Vince. She's pretty bad," he said. "She's not moving her right arm at all, and her skin is turning gray."

Vince gritted his teeth. "She's going into shock. Keep her feet elevated, like I told you to!"

"Elevated with what?" Dean moaned. "It's not like we've got any pillows back here."

"Use that asshole we dragged out of the warehouse if you have to," Gabreski shot back. "He's not good for much else right now."

The man in the expensive business suit lay on his side just behind the driver's seat, still bound at the wrists and unconscious from the pistol-whipping the Russians had given him. To tell the truth, Vince couldn't recall how the man had wound up in the back of the van; he remembered staggering up to the pit and screaming Darnell's name, again and again. He remembered the cold wind that rose from the hole, stinking of blood and shit and stagnant water, and the bright red of the broken bricks jutting from the jagged edges of the pit. Then someone grabbed his arm - maybe Jack, maybe Raimundo - and he heard Andrea screaming. Everything else was pretty much a blur after that.

Except for the sight of that...thing...that had grabbed Darnell. Vince couldn't seem to get that out of his head.

Raimundo jammed on the brakes, throwing everyone forward. Vince cracked his elbow against the dashboard and was about to yell at the gang leader again before he realized they'd pulled up in front of a weather-beaten tenement house. Raimundo was already out of the van, circling around to open the cargo door. With a grunt of effort, Vince shouldered his way out of the passenger seat and made his way to the back of the vehicle, where Andrea lay.

She was calmer now, or perhaps simply exhausted. Jack was kneeling at her feet, resting her heels on the tops of his thighs.

"Hurts," she hissed through clenched teeth. Her right arm was stretched taut, the fingers of her gun hand clenched into a painful, almost arthritic claw. Vince could see the semicircle of shredded fabric between her shoulder and collarbone where the thing had bit down. "Hurts like a bitch and I can't move my arm. I can't move it!"

"I know, Andrea, I know," Vince said. He leaned close, looking her right in the eye; it seemed to focus her. "We're taking you somewhere to have that bite looked at, but you've got to hold it together and not attract any attention on the street. Do you understand?"

For a second, Andrea just stared at him. She had a sharp, hatchetlike face, and close-cropped black hair that was prematurely peppered with gray. A year before, Vince had seen her take a shotgun blast point-blank while serving a search warrant; her vest had stopped the buckshot, and she'd bounced right back up as though nothing had happened. Seeing her in this state unnerved Gabreski, but that was the last thing she needed to know at the moment.

Finally, she took a deep, shuddering breath and nodded. "Okay, okay. Help me up." Between the two of them, Vince and Jack got Andrea to her feet.

Raimundo had the door open. "Quick!" he whispered, beckoning impatiently.

They helped Andrea out onto the street. Under the sickly halogen glow of the streetlights, she looked even more haggard than before. Vince wondered if he looked much better.

"What about him?" Jack asked, jerking his thumb at the unconscious suit.

Vince took a quick glance up and down the street. For the moment, the coast was clear. "I'll get him. You guys go on. I'll be right behind you."

He climbed back into the van, pulling a clasp knife from his pocket. With one swift cut, the cable tie fell away, and Gabreski grabbed the man's arm. The suit didn't weigh much, and Vince wasn't worried about being gentle. He hauled the man out and dragged him into the tenement, right on Jack's heels.

They had to climb three flights of dimly lit stairs until Raimundo stopped and knocked at an apartment door. It opened a crack and the gang leader whispered something in Spanish. A woman's voice answered, and the conversation grew heated. The exchange echoed up and down the stairwell, leaving Vince feeling more vulnerable with each passing moment. He was nearly at the point of kicking in the door when he heard the rattle of a chain being drawn and Raimundo started hustling everyone inside.

Vince brought up the rear and found himself in a small, neatly kept apartment. They entered through a narrow kitchen that smelled of old linoleum and spices, and found themselves in a small living room. A young Hispanic woman stood in the middle of the room, clutching the neck of her frayed bathrobe shut and staring daggers at the people invading her home.

"This is my sister, Lupe," Raimundo said. "She's a nurse at the hospital."

"And I've got a shift in four hours," she snapped. "I've been up for the last two days, Raimundo! Have you lost your mind? I told you never to bring your business into this apartment!"

Vince let the unconscious suit slump to the floor. "Call in sick if you have to," he said. "I'll pay you double whatever you'd make on your shift. I promise."

Her eyes narrowed on Vince. "I know you. You're that cop my brother is always talking about."

"Then you know I'm not bullshitting you," Gabreski said. "Just take a look at my friend here. She's hurt pretty bad. This guy, too." He pointed at the suit.

Lupe glared at Gabreski for a long moment, then nodded at the couch. "Put her there," she said, then moved past Vince to take a look at the unconscious man.

Jack eased Andrea onto the couch. Vince grabbed Raimundo's arm. "Your sister keep anything to drink around here?" he asked. "I'll pay for that, too."

Raimundo nodded reluctantly and went back into the kitchen. Vince stepped to the far side of the living room, where a pair of windows looked out onto the street. He dug into his pocket for his cell phone and looked up the number of the man who'd called him just a few hours ago. His thick fingers trembled on the key pad.

The voice answered on the first ring.

"Agent Carver."

"You son of a bitch," Vince snarled. "What the hell have you gotten us into?"

"I'm not sure I know what you're talking about, Lieutenant Gabreski," Carver said calmly. "Maybe you should start at the beginning."

Gabreski's hand tightened on the flimsy plastic phone. "Those Russians weren't smuggling illegals, Carver, they were killing them. That warehouse was set up like a goddamned butcher's shop. What's a healthy heart or kidney bringing on the black market these days?"

"You're talking about mass murder," Carver replied. "What did they do with the bodies?"

Gabreski saw the stone floor of the warehouse in his mind, and the wide, dark trail of blood. "I...I don't know for sure," he said, rubbing at his eyes. "There wasn't much time to check things out. Some guys showed up out of nowhere and started shooting. Everything went to hell after that."

Suddenly Carver sounded interested. "Who do you think they were?"

"Damned if I know," Vince said. "They were driving a high-end Land Rover. Maybe the Russians have some competition, or maybe someone was looking to rip them off. There was a guy with a metal briefcase who showed up with the Russians. It might have been a buy that went bad."

"What happened to the Russians?"

"Most of them got away. I'm sure they had half a dozen escape routes we didn't know about."

"Did you get any prisoners?"

Vince glanced over his shoulder at the unconscious figure on Lupe's floor. "No," he lied. "Everybody bugged out once the shooting started."

"I see," Carver said, although from the tone of his voice he didn't seem entirely convinced. "Is there anything else I need to know?"

A vision of the jagged pit loomed in Gabreski's mind. Gritting his teeth, he pushed the image away. "How about you tell me something useful for a change," he said. "Who the hell are these Russians, and how did they wind up on your radar?"

"They showed up in Seattle about a year ago; came over on a slow boat from Vladivostok, as near as we can determine. Dropped out of sight almost immediately, then last month we got a tip that they had turned up in Philly. If their operation is as sophisticated as you're describing, they must have put down some roots there."

"Give me a name," Vince growled. "Something I can work with."

"Everything we've got on them has turned out to be an alias. I wouldn't even know where to begin."

Vince sensed that Carver wasn't telling everything he knew. "Dig a little deeper," Gabreski said. "I'll be in touch."

He jabbed the END button and dropped the phone in his pocket. Raimundo had cleared off Lupe's coffee table and was pouring rum into four glasses.

Lupe had produced a large first-aid kit from somewhere and used surgical scissors to cut away Andrea's shirt. With Jack's help, they undid the Velcro straps and pulled off her lightweight Kevlar vest. Andrea's white t-shirt was spotted with quarter-sized drops of blood in a huge semicircle across her right shoulder.

Gently, Lupe lifted Andrea's torso and checked her back, probing with a gloved hand. "Dios mio," she whispered. "There's wounds on both sides. It looks like something bit her."

Andrea let out a pained chuckle. "You've got no fucking idea, sister," she said.

"Still, looks like the vest stopped the worst of it," Jack said, squinting at the holes in her shirt.

"That's great," the female detective said. Her laugh had a hysterical edge to it. "So why can't I move my fucking arm?"



EVIDENCE	
Submitting Agency	PHILADELPHIA POLICE
Date Collected	08/9/96
Item No.	Case #
Collected By	DET. JACQUELINE BROWN
Description of Evidence	BLK
Location Where Collected	INT
Type of Offense	CRIM
CHAIN OF CUSTODY	
Rec. From	Date

Lupe gingerly probed Andrea's shoulder. "The collarbone looks intact," she said. The nurse pulled back the collar of Andrea's shirt and looked at the bite marks. "I don't know...maybe some kind of toxin?"

"Oh, shit," Andrea said, still chuckling to herself. "The fucking monster poisoned me." Tears of fright glistened at the corners of the detective's eyes.

Lupe frowned. "What is she talking about?"

Vince shot Andrea a warning look, then motioned to Raimundo. "Give her one of those glasses."

The gang leader handed one over, and Andrea took a grateful swallow.

Raimundo stared down at the wound stretching across Taggart's shoulder and shook his head. "That's it, man. I'm done. I helped you take care of this girl, but I'm not going up against those things again. You got the badge, you call the damn Feds. Call the fucking Marines. I don't care. Just leave me out of this."

"We don't have any badges," Andrea snapped. Gasping, her head fell back against the cushions, but her brown eyes fixed angrily on Vince. "IA suspended us this afternoon. Every damn one of us."

Vince's fists clenched. He closed his eyes, collecting himself, then looked back at Raimundo. The gang leader was giving Gabreski a cold, calculating stare.

"Well, well, well," Raimundo said quietly. "Big, bad Vince Gabreski ain't a cop no more." He took a step toward Vince, almost nose to nose with the big man. "Maybe you want to come work for me now, bitch."

Vince laughed at the gang leader, but there was a brittle edge to the sound. "Don't go thinking anything's changed, you little shit. We'll beat whatever IA's cooked up against us and be back on the job before you know it." He pointedly turned away from Raimundo and picked up a glass of rum from the table. "Andrea's right about one thing, though. Right now, we're it. There's no one else to back us up, and honestly, I don't know who the hell would believe us if we told them what we saw back at that warehouse. I do know that if we don't do something soon, Darnell and maybe a whole lot of other people are going to die, and I'm not going to let that happen." He pointed at Raimundo. "The question now is what are you going to do? Those things killed your boy. What are you going to tell the rest of your hombres when they ask what happened to Manuel? No one's going to respect you if you let that slide."

Lupe finished taping a bandage to the front of Andrea's chest and looked up at the two men. "Don't listen to him, Raimundo!" she said. "He's going to get all of you killed! I told you this would happen, sooner or later -"

"Shut up, Lupita!" the gang leader pleaded. To Vince, he said, "Okay, goddamnit! I'm in. But what the hell do we do?"

Vince tossed back the rum and bared his teeth in a wolfish grin. "First, we're going to go find those Russians."



Chapter -two

Hunters are not born or built. They are *forged*. People don't idly make the decision to risk their lives, especially not in the pursuit of things most of humanity doesn't acknowledge exists. The Vigil is a choice that is made because all other options, including doing nothing, are far, far worse. It is the choice to force your way into the weird room in the basement of the district library, rather than to turn and walk back out upstairs. It is the choice to follow up on the paper trail of what appears to be a centuries-old person still alive and kicking, rather than to write it off as obvious clerical error. It is the choice to carve crosses into all your 9mm bullets because some niggling instinct tells you it might help to knock down those "demons" you've seen hanging out at the playground, waiting for children. The Vigil is a choice: a very conscious, very obsessive, borderline insane choice to walk where angels fear to tread and, once upon the path, to remain there rather than run for the "safety" of willful ignorance.

Those who survive their initial choice are, through danger and pressure, formed into something greater than they once were, and yet, like any forging process, some aspects of the raw material are sacrificed along the way. Those who remain on the hunt are like a battle-worn sword — as they are used and abused, nicks and chips form on the surface. It is not the visible scars, however, that are the most dangerous. It is the hairline cracks beneath the surface, just waiting for the wrong stroke to shatter a once-vital weapon into a thousand razor-sharp shards.

To create a character for **Hunter: The Vigil** is to forge a role-play persona that is, at once, altogether human and yet something more. The character is crafted, step by step. It's up to you to decide both the raw material (who she is, where she comes from and where she's going) as well as how she was forged (what has happened to make her a hunter and what shape those pressures will create in her). As the creation progresses, each stage offers new opportunities to hone your vision of the character to give her additional dimension. As you proceed through character creation, keep in mind it is not just a character's strengths that make her the person that she is, but her weaknesses, quirks, goals, desires and dirty little secrets. While the skeleton of a character may be the Traits on the character sheet, it is how those Traits manifest, why they exist (or are lacking) and what exists beyond the dots on the sheet that make a character interesting.

A Note about Creating Cells

Groups of hunters (called cells) must rely upon one another in life-or-death situations on a regular basis. This requires a certain amount of compatibility, which would evolve naturally within the cell, but which may need a bit of planning on the part of the players in a **Hunter** game. Because many **Hunter** games will focus on the actions of a single cell represented by the players, it may behoove players to consider not only their own ideas but also those of the group when creating hunter characters. Creating characters that can interact well together will go a long way toward promoting a cohesive game. Characters do not necessarily have to share in-depth backgrounds, goals or outlooks (although these ties can add dimension to a game), but communicating enough during character generation to ensure the characters won't try to kill each other on sight should help a game remain functional and fun.

Communicating openly with the Storyteller and other players about not only the types of character you are interested in playing,

**"There are a thousand
hacking at the branches
of evil to one who is
striking at the root."**
-Henry Thoreau



but also the style of group and overall theme and atmosphere of the game you enjoy will help ensure the game is as enjoyable as possible for everyone involved.

Step One: Choose Concept

Choosing a concept for your character is the first and most vital step in creating him. Whether it's a two- or three-word blurb ("revenge-seeking widow," "former vampire-slave," "fanatic clergyman") or a bit more expansive ("bookworm who discovered one secret too many about werewolves and is now trying to learn enough to keep himself and his loved ones alive"), the concept is the framework upon which the rest of the character will be built.

While it isn't necessary to choose what type of hunter your character will be at this stage in the character creation process, it doesn't hurt to give a little thought to the types of Professions you are most interested in playing, as it is very possible the character's background will contribute significantly toward the Profession he ends up pursuing as a hunter (or vice versa).

As well, it may be advantageous to discuss with your Storyteller whether the game in which your characters will be involved will be a first-, second- or third-tier chronicle. It is perfectly acceptable for a game to progress from one tier level to another, with the characters starting as an isolated cell, for example, and eventually coming to the attention of (or coming into conflict with) compacts or conspiracies. If, however,

the Storyteller intends for your character to begin play as part of a second- or third-tier group, you may want to keep compact and conspiracy concepts in mind when building your hunter. Certain background qualities (religious views, especially) may work better with some groups than others, for example.

Step Two: Select Attributes

Once you have decided upon a character concept and given a bit of thought toward the things that make your character who he is, it's time to build the game-mechanic aspects of the character. The building blocks we use to quantify how smart, fast, strong, quick-witted or charming a character is are called Attributes. Attributes are divided into three categories: Mental (Intelligence, Wits and Resolve), Physical (Strength, Dexterity and Stamina) and Social (Presence, Manipulation and Composure).

The more dots a character has in an Attribute, the stronger his capability in that area. Thus a character with four dots in Intelligence is innately smarter than one with one dot, and so on. Every character begins with one dot in each Attribute in each category, representing the base levels of human capability to function. These initial dots do not cost points. During character creation, additional dots in any Attribute cost one point per dot, except for the fifth dot in any category, which costs two points. Thus, it costs five points to raise any Attribute to five dots: the first dot is free, the second through fourth cost one point each and the fifth costs two points, for a total of five.

Every character is built with one category starting out strongest (called primary), one weakest (called tertiary) and one that falls between the two (called secondary), although the Attributes within each category can be bolstered later. While certain concepts seem stereotypically suited to certain arrangements of Attribute priorities, it's important to remember that real people (and realistic characters) are unique. A researcher seems most likely to be a Mental primary character. If he's outgoing and charismatic, he might be Social secondary and Physical tertiary. If, on the other hand, he prefers to spend his off-hours hiking, jogging and riding mountain bikes rather than hanging out with friends, he might be Physical secondary and Social tertiary. Not every researcher will have these Attribute priorities, however. Perhaps he's not a very good researcher, having been assigned to a desk job after the rest of his cell was killed by a group of vampires. In that case, he might not be Mental primary at all, concentrating on Social or Physical Attributes despite the stereotype. Anything is possible; what is important is that the Attributes are arranged in a way that makes sense for your specific character concept and background (and are fun to play).

Determine which category makes the most sense to be strongest for your character. This will be your primary Attribute category, and you get five points to spend divided between the three Attributes in that category. You get four points to spend in your secondary category, and three points in your tertiary category.

A table that details relative power levels of various dot levels of Attributes can be found on p. 43 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*.

Step Three: Select Skills

While Attributes measure your character's basic capabilities, Skills represent the things he knows how to do. Everything from sniping to Sudoku is represented by one Skill or another, and like Attributes, the more points he has in a Skill, the better he is doing things that relate to it.

Like Attributes, Skills are grouped in categories (Mental, Physical and Social) and each character will have a primary, secondary and tertiary Skill category (which do not have to be the same as his Attribute category priorities.)

You get 11 points to spend in your primary Skill category, seven to spend in your secondary category, and four to spend in your tertiary one. Each dot in a Skill costs one point, except for the fifth dot, which costs two. Unlike Attributes, characters do not begin with a free dot in any of their Skill categories. Experience points can be spent later on to bolster Skills.

Characters without any dots in a particular Skill can still attempt to take actions related to that Skill using only the appropriate Attribute as a dice pool. They are said to be "untrained" in that skill, however, and will be at a penalty to perform the action, and more likely to fail. These penalties differ from category to category (-3 dice for Mental, -1 die for Physical or Social).

A table that details relative power levels of various dot levels of Skills can be found on p. 54 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*.

CHARACTER CREATION PROCESS

Use the character creation process from the *World of Darkness Rulebook* and add the following template to Hunter characters during Stage Five.

Choose a Profession (see pp. 74-93). Choose one free Skill Specialty based on the Asset Skills of that Profession.

Decide upon a beginning tier level. If tier two, choose a compact; tier three, choose a conspiracy (see pp. 102-149). You may choose from Storyteller-created compacts and conspiracies, as well.

Hunters choose from among standard human or special hunter Merits. Some hunter Merits are only available to certain tier level hunters (see pp. 67-74).

Step Four: Select Skill Specialties

While Skills often represent general knowledge areas and abilities, characters can also develop specific strengths within those greater categories. For example, a marksman might be good with any gun, but especially experienced with rifles. A scholar might be well versed in Academics, but have a focus in Medieval History or Chinese Art. These particular areas of focus are represented by Skill Specialties.

At any time when a particular Skill Specialty applies to a challenge, the character receives a bonus die for that dice pool.

Choose three Skill Specialties for your character. These Specialties can be applied to different Skills, or two or more can apply to different focuses within the same Skill. Skill Specialties can be specific sub-categories of a Skill (such as the Weaponry Skill with a Knife Specialty), a situation in which the Specialty applies (the Computer Skill with a Hacking Specialty) or any similar specific, restricted category. The Storyteller has the final say as to whether a particular Specialty is too broad or narrow.

Step Five: Add Hunter Template

Up to this point, creating a hunter character has been identical to creating a standard human character using the *World of Darkness Rulebook*. By choosing a concept, Attributes, Skills and Skill Specialties, you've defined the basic traits that reflect your character's abilities and talents, just as any non-hunter mortal in the *World of Darkness* might have. Now it's time to add the things that make a hunter something more than the average human on the street.

Note: Some of the options are applicable only to hunters at particular tier levels (see pp. 272–276 for discussion of the three tier levels). Because of this, it's important to know what level your Storyteller intends for your character to be played at before progressing with the character creation process.

Professions

All hunters have a Profession. In many cases, this is a specific job title (Soldier, Clergyman, Technician), while in others, it describes his primary activity or interest focus, regardless of whether this is an actual “job” or not (Socialite, Criminal, Vagrant). Check out the Professions detailed on pp. 74-93 and determine which best suits your character concept.

Each Profession has two Asset Skills, which represent training or areas of expertise that are particularly pertinent to that Profession. After choosing a Profession for your character, look at the Asset Skills listed for that Profession and choose a free Skill Specialty in one of them. (This will bring your character's total starting Skill Specialties as to four.)

Tiers

First-tier characters are hunters who, through choice or circumstance, are not associated with an organization larger than their cell. Some tier-one hunters are isolated from other groups; they may have fled an existing group or may not know that other such groups even exist. Tier-one characters may also be those who have not yet proven themselves to an organization to the extent that they have been recruited or allowed entry.

As part of a first-tier game, your character may be part of a cell, but even then, the cell itself is not a part of an expansive compact or conspiracy, instead acting independently as its members pursue the Vigil. If you are playing in a tier-one game, you do not choose a compact or conspiracy to be affiliated with at character creation.

Tier-two and -three hunters, however, may well belong to a compact (second tier) or conspiracy (third tier), which affords its members certain advantages but also may well demand commensurate levels of obedience and service in exchange. If your Storyteller has indicated that your characters will be part of a compact or conspiracy, you may choose to begin play with your character already belonging to a group of the appropriate level. Choosing a compact or conspiracy requires at least one dot of the Status Merit in the appropriate group (see Step Seven for Merits).

Players and Storytellers may want to deviate from the examples of compacts and conspiracies found in this book. A discussion on creating your own hunter organization can be found on p. 203.

Compacts

Compacts (second tier) are small or loosely networked connections of similarly minded hunters who can offer each other support and the strength of numbers. Tier-two characters can select from the following compacts at character creation, or may wait and potentially join an organization during the course of the game. They may, alternatively, join a Storyteller-created compact where appropriate.

The Long Night – Christian hunters who fight the agents of evil in attempt to stave off the end of the world (pp. 106-109).

Null Mysteriis – Skeptics who battle the supernatural in an attempt to prove it does not exist (pp. 118-121).

Network Zero – Network Zero uses radio, television and Internet resources to not only hunt monsters but also to publicize its existence (pp. 114-117).

The Union – Ragtag blue-collar monster hunters, members of the Union work without government sanction to protect humanity against its most dangerous enemies (pp. 122-125).

The Ashwood Abbey – A decadent Hellfire Club dedicated to experiencing everything that life (or unlife) has to offer (pp. 102-105).

The Loyalists of Thule – Hungry for knowledge, this occult group seeks things man was not meant to know in places he was not meant to tread (pp. 110-114).

Conspiracies

Conspiracies (third tier) span the globe and often the centuries. If your Storyteller has indicated you will be playing a tier-three game, you can choose to begin play as a member of one of the following groups. Membership within one of the conspiracies offers hunters not only support and solidarity, but each also has developed certain unique resources called Endowments, which are available to members only.

Task Force: VALKYRIE – As part of a Joint Task Force, this covert government anti-monster brigade includes members from every branch of the military, foreign and domestic. It hunts by order only, slaying monsters where and when its higher-ups dictate. Task Force: VALKYRIE's Endowment is Advanced Armory, high-tech supernatural weapons with which to fight the monstrous enemies of the human race (pp. 146-149).

The Lucifuge – Is it a paradox for those who consider themselves the children of a fallen angel to hunt monsters? The Lucifuge doesn't think so, hoping to earn its redemption by slaying the truly evil forces in the world. The Lucifuge's Endowment is Castigation, unholy rituals that grant it power over its foes. Will it be enough to atone for its founder's sin? (pp. 138-141)

The Cheiron Group – A confederacy of international corporations, the Cheiron Group possesses great wealth and technology. Those who serve the conspiracy have access to the Thaumatechnology Endowment, which allows them to use the supernatural's own physical and metaphysical powers against it...but is the price their own humanity? (pp. 134-137)

Aegis Kai Doru – Greek for “Shield and Spear,” the Aegis Kai Doru searches the world for history's legendary artifacts with which to bolster its numbers in its nigh-timeless battle against the forces of darkness. Members of Aegis Kai Doru have access to some of the world's most powerful (and profane) Relics as an Endowment (pp. 126-129).

Ascending Ones – The Ascending Ones trace their history and symbology back to both ancient Egypt and Muhammed the Prophet. Like the sacred sun, they see themselves as a cleansing agent that can burn away the monstrous impurities of the world. The Ascending Ones' Endowment is Elixirs, powerful potions that can bolster their members' bod-

RANK AND FILE

Storytellers may wish to allow players to create starting characters with more experience as hunters than the newly minted hunters that the character creation system offered here represents. While it may be best for players new to *Hunter: The Vigil* (or the World of Darkness in general) to begin with new recruits and explore the game system as their characters learn, more experienced players may want the additional challenge (and benefits) of playing characters who have already spent varying amounts of time on the Vigil.

As there are two types of experience points available to Hunter characters, it is recommended to allow experienced characters a combination of normal experience points and Practical Experience (which can be spent only on select benefits for the character - see pp. 209-211 for more details). Membership in a compact or conspiracy does not necessarily reflect greater experience: a member of Task Force: VALKYRIE can be just as green (or greener) than a lone hunter on the streets.

New Recruits

0 experience points & 0 Practical Experience

Survived First Contact

25 experience points & 12 Practical Experience

Seasoned Soldiers

60 experience points & 30 Practical Experience

Grizzled Veterans

100+ experience points & 50 Practical Experience

Note that a starting cell of hunters does not start with any Tactics. As an option, the Storyteller may allow a cell access to one shared Tactic at the beginning of the story.

ies and spirits — or bring excruciating agony, addiction and death to those who oppose them (pp. 130-133).

Malleus Maleficarum – In the Middle Ages, the Malleus Maleficarum wielded the power of the Church against vampires. Today, the Catholic conspiracy pursues supernatural monsters of all sorts with religious zeal. The Malleus Maleficarum uses its Benediction Endowment in an attempt to purge the world of monsters with these on-demand miracles (pp. 143-145).

Step Six: Choose Merits

Characters receive seven points that can be spent on Merits. Hunter characters may choose from the standard Merits offered on pp. 108-177 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, or from the *Hunter* Merits detailed on pp. 67-74. Many of the *Hunter* Merits are restricted to specific tier-level characters or to characters in certain organizations, so be certain to check prerequisites when choosing them.

Merits should fit into your hunter concept: a library-bound paranormal investigator is more likely to possess the Eidetic Memory Merit than Fighting Style: Boxing, while a Marine Corps sniper now working as a God-chosen marks-

man for the Malleus Maleficarum is likelier to have Fast Reflexes than, say, the Inspiring Merit.

Step Seven: Determine Advantages

Rules regarding the standard use of Advantages can be found on pp. 90-105 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*. Hunter characters follow the standard rules for determining initial Attribute scores. Rather than repeating this information verbatim, this section details how certain Advantages pertain specifically to *Hunter: The Vigil*.

Willpower

While hunters are human, they are also something more. The Vigil is an obsession that pushes them to extremes non-hunters never experience. This obsession is represented by an ability to use Willpower in ways different from normal humans. While your character's Willpower trait is figured in the same way as a standard human (Resolve + Composure), he can opt to "risk" Willpower for certain superhuman effects, in addition to the standard Willpower expenditures. (See pp. 65-66, "Risking Willpower.")

Morality

Non-hunter humans have a Morality rating that serves as a gauge of their accordance with the moral standards of human society. Hunters are human and, as such, are held to the same standard. Hunters on the Vigil, however, are often duty bound to commit sins to survive and to execute the needs of the hunt.

As an optional rule, Storytellers may allow players to exchange Morality for experience points during the character creation process. This represents the acts the character has taken in his life before becoming a hunter (or perhaps during the prelude that brought him to his role as a hunter), which have already begun to shift him away from what normal humans think of as being a “good” person. Players may sacrifice one dot of Morality for five experience points, lowering their Morality to as low as 5 (for 10 experience points). This exchange does not inherently invite a derangement or a “Tell” (a hunt-specific madness; see pp. 330), although if a player wants his character to begin the game with one as a matter of character development (without any compensating benefit for it), he is welcome to do so.

Step Eight: The Spark of Life

Other than a basic character concept, character creation up to this point has been predominantly a matter of statistics, defining your character in terms of what he can and can’t do or what he does or doesn’t know. A roleplaying character, however, is more than dots and traits and percentages of success. The statistics on your character sheet are just the foundation of the character, the finite and measurable aspects of what he can do. Your challenge now is to determine the other half of the character — who he is.

Some of the same statistics you chose earlier may serve as guidelines for the other aspects of your character. But traits can always be interpreted more than one way. If, for example, your character has high Dexterity, does that mean he’s slim and athletic, nimble on his feet and ready to dodge danger at every turn? Or is he adept with fine motor skills, capable of shooting an apple off a demon’s head or carving the “Lord’s Prayer” on a grain of rice? Does his low Presence reveal him as a shy hermit, overlooked by everyone in a crowd, or does he make an impression (but a bad one) with poor hygiene and worse manners? Each trait can manifest in a variety of ways, depending on how you see your character.

Other aspects of your character have nothing to do with his traits. Is he old or young? Tall or short? Tidy or slovenly? Is he popular with his peers, or seen as an outsider? Does he read the paper, or prefer sci-fi novels? Does he spend his leisure time oiling rifles and researching monsters, or does he coach the local Little League team and rebuild vintage sports cars? Little details like this are not represented by any particular statistic on your character sheet, but they go a long way toward making your character three-dimensional, rather than a cardboard cutout in the shape of a hunter.

The Prelude

The prelude is another way to flesh out your character above and beyond the basic character creation process. While it is an optional process, it is one that can allow a player to explore his character’s background and, in the process, get a real feel for his persona, rather than just the character sheet. During character creation, you’re building your character in the abstract, as a conglomeration of concepts and statistics. In the prelude, you are given the chance to try your character on for size, to begin experiencing the World of Darkness through his eyes, ears, goals and fears. Preludes are normally run as a one-on-one scenario with the Storyteller, though some character creation sessions might be run as a group process: if the players create a cell together, it is perhaps appropriate to run them through the prelude together.

The prelude may also be used as an opportunity to fine-tune your character’s statistics to better reflect how the character “comes to life” once you’ve actually played him. Frequently, when a character is actually put into play, the player may discover that a slightly different trait combination better suits the actual character (rather than the theoretical version built during character creation). He may manifest as more cunning and less book smart, for example, prompting the player to move a dot from Intelligence to Wits, if the Storyteller approves of the change. If allowed, a player can swap dots within the same trait groups (so increasing one Physical Attribute while decreasing another Physical Attribute by the same amount), as long as the end product is something that could have been built with the original character creation rules.

Storytellers benefit from running prelude scenes with their players, too. They are given the opportunity to impart setting and backstory information to the players without the necessity of a lengthy narrative session where the players do nothing but listen. Prelude scenes give Storytellers the opportunity to establish relationships between the players’ characters and others who exist in the story. Rival or allied cells, mentors, even ongoing antagonists can be introduced, and their presence as three-dimensional characters with their own histories, goals and desires established in a tangible fashion for the players and their characters.

Storytelling the Prelude

As a Storyteller, there are several decisions you will need to make before running a **Hunter** prelude. The initial set of decisions deals with the nature, rather than the subject matter, of the prelude.

You can run preludes one on one, or in a group setting. Individual preludes for each player are useful in that they allow a single character to act as protagonist in his own backstory, while cell-preludes are useful in establishing a cohesive group experience (and may be necessary if time is limited).

Your prelude scenario can be interactive (with players being allowed to control their characters during the scene) or simply narrative, where you, as Storyteller, describe the scenario and the actions of everyone involved in the scene. Nar-

narrative preludes are faster and easier to script, but interactive scenes often have more emotional impact and allow a player to get a better feel for his character by acting as a sort of “dry run” before the actual game.

And, if the prelude is run as an interactive scene, you've got to decide if you're going to use the Storyteller rules for challenge resolution, or just allow the players to script their characters' actions at will. Rules tend to slow down a narrative scene, and if the outcome is planned out already, they may be an unnecessary encumbrance. On the other hand, especially if the players are unfamiliar with the game system, giving them the opportunity to roll a few challenges in a prelude may help them understand how the rules work before the game actually begins.

Particular care should be given when allowing dice rolls (rather than raw narrative) to determine the outcome in combat and Morality loss in prelude scenes. No one wants to roll up a character and then have him die or go insane before the “real” game even begins. To avoid this, it is advised to use narrative to ensure that the outcome of combat scenes is at least non-fatal for players' characters and to steer clear of Degeneration rolls during prelude scenarios.

Elements of a Prelude

The purpose of a prelude is to give the Storyteller and player an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the

character and his setting. As such, a prelude offers a brief but meaningful glimpse (or glimpses) into the character's past, his life before the game chronicle begins. Some pivotal points in the character's life that might be used as prelude scenarios are offered below. Storytellers should feel free (but not pressured) to utilize any or all of them, or to create alternate scenarios based on significant clues from the character's background. Any emotionally charged situation can serve as a useful prelude scene, especially those that have helped to guide the character toward the Vigil.

Everyday Life

“Daaaaaddyyyy?”

The plaintive wail is hard to ignore, even though this is the 20th time you've heard it tonight. So far, it's been requests for drinks of water and hugs, emergencies like missing stuffed animals or trips to the bathroom. But this time it sounds a little different. This time he sounds scared.

“Daddy? There's something outside...Something scary!”

This is just another ploy to avoid going to sleep. Or is it?

There's a crash outside, and your child screams.

What do you do?

No one is born a hunter. Even those who come to the Vigil early experience some sort of life before turning to the hunt, and many hunters had friends, families and careers before being called to task. Many times, it is the threat against or loss of those precious



commodities that spurs a person to become a hunter, so a prelude that gives a player the opportunity to experience them in a real sense can add layers of reality to their later reaction if those valuable assets are threatened or taken away.

Change to:

This scene might be the one that leads directly to the character's loss (see First Contact below), or it might just reinforce the importance of these aspects in the character's life before the Vigil takes over. An athletic character might play out a scene that involved a sports triumph, while a soldier goes on a vital training mission. Characters with spouses or children might go through a proposal, a wedding, a family celebration or holiday scene. Those with scholastic or vocational focuses might be taken through a scene that involves a promotion, graduation, hiring or firing.

Scenes of everyday life can be played out as any other game session. If traits come up during the course of the Everyday Life prelude, just disregard any Traits added in Step Five and any Hunter-specific Merits the character has. The Storyteller may choose to use a narration style for this prelude, or to have the player roll for significant actions during this scene.

First Contact

You're standing in the backyard, flashlight in hand. You're shivering and barefoot, because you didn't pause to grab a jacket or put on shoes. As you wave the flashlight around, the flickering beam barely cuts through the darkness. Stupid dollar-store lights. Your heart's still beating double time and nervous little puffs of breath hang in the air as you catch your breath. There's nothing here. Of course there's nothing here.

The flashlight beam slides past bushes and trees, sending weird shadows all around. The yard is empty, except for a half-coiled garden hose, a rusty grill and an overturned tricycle, one pedal still spinning slowly. A sound comes from the vicinity of the back door. "I told you to stay in bed while I looked arou—"

You turn just in time to see the back door shut. He must have gone back upstairs...

A scream from his room sends icy daggers down your spine and you're on the porch before it stops. But the door is locked.

And through the back door window, you can see muddy boot prints leading from the door toward the staircase.

What do you do?

Most hunters set out on the Vigil having experienced some kind of "inciting incident." A husband finds something preying upon his wife on their blood-slick kitchen floor. A father tells a son that his is a legacy of holding back the shadows, and then puts a .22 pistol in the teen's hand. A surgeon gets a lucrative job offer from a prosthetics conglomerate, but swiftly discovers they make their artificial limbs from something far more sinister than steel and plastic.

Discovering the horrors and mysteries of the World of Darkness is almost always an eye-opening and life-changing event. Using a hunter's first contact can be a powerful way to juxtapose his pre-hunt life with the challenges he'll face on the Vigil.

The Vigil

The sun beats down on you, and sweat is rolling into your eyes, but you don't dare blink it away. If you blink, you might miss it, and you've waited for weeks for this moment. You aren't going to miss a thing.

The others are spread out in a half circle around you. You can see them moving forward in your peripheral vision. Jake with his shotgun. Terry with a sawed-off. John's got his service revolver, and some sort of Taser he says they'd been experimenting with down at the HQ. These are your friends, the ones who believed you and your crazy story about what you saw that night. They helped you track down this...thing. You won't even give it the respect of calling it a person.

John signals you forward, toward the caved-in shack you've tracked it to. Your hands are sweaty around the wooden stock of your hunting rifle. You've taken down bucks with it, and once a black bear, but today you're not out for sport.

For just a second, the heat makes your vision go red, and you see the scene again. The one you never want to remember. The one you can't forget.

The white cotton sheets stained crimson. The torn flannel jammies, one foot smeared where he'd tried to run. The floorboards puddled with red-brown-black.

Sweat runs down into your eyes, the salt stinging. You can't blink back the tears.

"Now!" John drops his fist and the rest of the group jumps forward.

What do you do?

Often a hunter's first hunt comes long before he joins a cell or is recruited into an organization. Protecting family and friends (or revenging wrongs done to them) can be a strong catalyst for setting a person onto the Vigil. For others, the hunt begins with a religious epiphany, a chance encounter with a monster or a run-in with a hunter cell. It could even be that the hunt is a job, a "first encounter" planned and paid for by an organization whose Vigil is clouded in mysterious motives. Whatever the circumstance, the first hunt is the beginning of the rest of the hunter's life, and playing that scenario out can give the player the opportunity to explore aspects of the Vigil that might not otherwise come to light.

Final Questions

The following questions are provided to give you the opportunity to add the final touches to your character post-prelude. You are welcome to answer all, some or none of them, but each detail you flesh out will make your character more realistic and three-dimensional.

What Do You Look Like?

How tall or short are you? How old are you? What race or culture are you from? What color is your hair and how do you wear it? How do you dress, both during the hunt and in your off hours? Has the Hunt left you with any scars or lasting injuries?

What Brought You to the Vigil?

When were you first exposed to the supernatural (or do you still deny its existence?) Were you recruited by a cell or organization, or did you learn of its existence and petition to join? Did you start the hunt on your own and then were brought into your group, or did you help found it with others?

What Type of Hunter Are You?

Is the Vigil a duty, or revenge for some previous wrong? Are you in it to accomplish a particular goal, or for the long haul? Do you have a favored target or some sort of a personal vendetta against a particular type of monster? Do you see your weapons as just tools, or do they mean more to you than that? Could it be just for the money your organization pays you, or do you do it for the mad joy of putting bullets in monsters?

Example of Character Creation

Pat is creating a character for Autumn's *Hunter: The Vigil* game. Autumn tells Pat the game will focus on an unprecedented surge in the frequency and intensity of supernatural activity in Philadelphia. The players' characters will make up a covert hunter cell put together to investigate the causes and extent thereof, and to try to stop it if possible. The game will focus on paranoia and danger as the group attempts to survive in an obviously hostile environment and discover the source of the threat while learning to work together as a newly created cell. Autumn says the game will be a trial by fire for the cell as the characters learn about one another and the grim scenario.

Pat takes a copy of the character sheet and some scratch paper for notes, and begins writing down some rough ideas for his character. Before committing completely to an idea, he discusses several aspects of the game with Autumn. He learns that the characters will all be from third-tier conspiracies, although they can choose to which conspiracy the characters belong. Autumn envisions this being each character's first official hunt, so she would like all to start with the basic character creation statistics, rather than additional experience points or Practical Experience. Autumn explains why the cell features hunters from differing conspiracies: the situation in Philly is bad enough that multiple conspiracies have assigned hunters to the cell in order to counterbalance each other's interests in the area and ensure no one group can claim all the glory (and possible bounty — knowledge, captive "guinea pigs," arcane items or the like).

Step One: Concept

Pat's interested in playing a museum curator, someone who seeks out lost treasures and antiquities to sell them to the highest bidder. He decides

CODE NAMES AND ALIASES

Some hunters, especially those in first-tier cells, continue to refer to themselves by their normal human name after joining the Vigil. Others may take on an alias specifically for the hunt, out of a desire for anonymity, a need to protect their families or an attempt to juggle the double life of pursuing the hunt while maintaining careers and families.

Individual hunter aliases may be completely mundane, simply a generic name that isn't tied to the hunter's actual identity. On the other hand, a hunter may take (or be given) a "nom de guerre" (war name) that is designed to convey a particular meaning. Jerry Kravitz isn't a particularly intimidating handle, but the Jackal, Doubletap or Ghoul might well communicate a measure of intimidation (especially if backed up with actual lethal ability.)

Hunter cells also often take on unique nomenclature. A tier-one cell dedicated to protecting a particular town might call itself the Saviors or the Gatekeepers, denoting its goal of shielding the city from harm. Alternatively, a cell might choose a name that speaks of its own attributes rather than its purpose: Lightning, for a group that specializes in quick (and fatal) strikes, or The Ghosts, for a cell that "haunts" a particular region.

Cells working for a particular organization may be given a code name that suits the organization's goals or focus. The Ascending Ones might name a strike-team cell after Sekhmet (the lion-headed goddess of war), and one that is devoted to the collection of research and information after Ipuwer, one of the oldest known papyrus documents.

In general, almost anything can be used as a code name for a hunter or cell, although players would be well advised to listen to Winston Churchill's advice when choosing one: "Intelligent thought will already supply an unlimited number of well-sounding names that do not suggest the character of the operation or disparage it in any way and do not enable some widow or mother to say that her son was killed in an operation called 'Bunnyhug' or 'Ballyhoo'."

that his character supplemented his meager museum earnings by selling Egyptian artifacts (including papyrus scrolls and jars with traces of millennia-old unguents and potions) under the table to representatives of the Ascending Ones. He chooses the name Robert Kilcannon and figures that somewhere along the line, something “bad” drew him away from the museum and the smuggling and onto a hunter’s Vigil. Pat decides that Kilcannon’s family was murdered by some supernatural force. Pat files this as potential background and goes forward to the next step in character creation.

Step Two: Attributes

Now that he has a basic character concept and a bit of history for Kilcannon, Pat needs to begin building the character’s statistics, starting with his Attributes. Since Kilcannon was a museum curator, Pat decides to make his Mental Attributes primary. He’ll have relied heavily on his knowledge and cunning, both in the museum and as an artifact smuggler, and is likely to continue to do so as a hunter. As a former anthropologist who’s accustomed to life in rough areas and among rougher peoples, Pat chooses Physical as his character’s secondary Attributes. This leaves Social for Kilcannon’s tertiary category, which is fine with Pat — he figures Kilcannon’s losses (whatever they end up being) have left him bitter and difficult to deal with.

To represent Kilcannon’s background in anthropology and academics, Pat puts two of his five points into Kilcannon’s Intelligence, raising it to a 3. He figures that Kilcannon’s experience in artifact smuggling and whatever additional training he’s received from the Ascending Ones has made him a pretty quick-witted chap, so he allocates two of the remaining three dots into Kilcannon’s Wits, raising it to a 3 as well. This leaves one last dot to add to Kilcannon’s Resolve. This makes it a 2 — he’s okay, but not exceptional at keeping his wits and temper about him.

Next, Pat has four points to split between his Physical Attributes. Since Kilcannon has had to endure a lot of physically challenging situations on site at digs in his past and would have to prove himself physical capable of enduring the travails of being a field agent in the Ascending Ones, Pat assigns two dots to his Stamina, which gives him 3 dots in it total. He doesn’t see Kilcannon as being more than average in Strength or Dexterity, so he divides the remaining points up evenly, with one point in each of the two remaining Attributes, making each a 2.

Finally, Pat assigns his three points in Social Attributes. He decides that Kilcannon’s smuggling and work in the university system (not to mention his ability to talk his way into the Ascending Ones) merit an additional dot in Manipulation — he’s learned how to connive and influence others. He spends one point there, making it a 2 total. With Kilcannon’s generally surly attitude, Pat chooses not to add any additional dots to his Presence, leaving it at the 1 he began with; he’s below average in the kind of impression he makes on others. This leaves Pat with two points left to add to Kilcannon’s Composure, which raises it to a 3. Once you’ve lost your family to a supernatural monster and lived through it, Pat figures, it’s difficult to run into anything else that’s going to shake you too much.

Step Three: Skills

Next, Pat has to decide what Skills Kilcannon possesses. While his Mental Attributes are primary, Pat decides that the curator’s time outdoors and any training he’s undergone since becoming a hunter are sufficient to justify choosing Physical Skills as his primary category. He still wants to represent Kilcannon’s education and experience (and the new things he’s learned as a hunter), so he makes Mental Kilcannon’s secondary Skill category, which leaves Social as tertiary for the surly Kilcannon.

Pat has 11 points to spend on Physical Skills. He figures Kilcannon’s experience with the supernatural that destroyed his family and career is going to have left him wanting to be able to protect himself, so he spends three points in Brawl and two in Firearms. He also wants to be able to have Kilcannon jump, climb, run and swim effectively in the field, so he spends two points in Athletics. And, since he has a history with thievery, he spends two points in Larceny. This leaves him with two points, which he spends on a point each of Survival and Stealth. Since Kilcannon isn’t a super-strong toe-to-toe brawler, the ability to sneak would be something he’d at least have begun to develop, as would his ability to survive in a variety of environments.

Moving on to his secondary Skill category, Pat has seven points to spend on Mental Skills. Since the curator has continued to hone his knowledge-gathering skills, Pat allots three dots to his Academics Skill and one to Science. He spends two points in Investigation to represent not only the research process, but also Kilcannon’s ability to track down artifacts and customers. This leaves him with one point to spend, which he puts into Occult, representing Kilcannon’s new interest (and hatred of) the supernatural.

Pat knows that his four points in Social skills aren’t going to go very far, so he ponders how best to spend them to represent Kilcannon accurately. He gives Kilcannon a point of Streetwise to represent his ability to find buyers for his smuggled goods, and a point of Persuasion to reflect his negotiating ability. He feels that Kilcannon’s surly nature is worth a point of Intimidation and spends his last point on Subterfuge, because Kilcannon managed to pull off the double life of museum curator and relic smuggler for a time before his family’s murder.

Step Four: Skill Specialties

Now that Pat’s chosen his character’s Attributes and Skills, he gets to pick three Skill Specialties. To tie into both Kilcannon’s history as a curator of antiquities and his interest in the Ascending Ones, Pat chooses to give Kilcannon the Academics Specialty of Anthropology. To represent his ability to locate buyers for his stolen goods, Pat spends one point to give Kilcannon the Streetwise Specialty of Black Markets. Additionally, as Kilcannon has no desire to be caught helpless, Pat assigns him the Brawl Specialty of Dirty Tricks — why play fair when lives (especially his own) are on the line?

Step Five: Hunter Traits

Now Pat’s ready to move on to the hunter-specific parts of creating his character. He’s been told the game will focus on third-tier conspiracy characters, and he’s already decided



to tie his character to the Ascending Ones, so he notes that next to the Faction space on his character sheet.

In reading over the options for Professions, Pat is drawn to the Academic. While Kilcannon's given himself to criminal behaviors, he's still a scholar at heart. Pat notes the Academic Asset Skills of Academics and Science. For Kilcannon's free Asset Skill Specialty, Pat chooses to give the surly curator the Academics Specialty of Middle Eastern History, given his connection to the Ascending Ones.

Step Six: Merits

Pat has seven points to spend on Merits, either hunter-specific ones or normal human ones from the book. He decides to spend three points to give his character the Unseen Sense Merit regarding ghosts; Kilcannon gets the heebie-jeebies whenever anything spectral is around, even if he's not aware of it. Pat also takes one dot worth of Contacts (Underground) to represent his character's associations with the fences and black market artifact dealers. While he could take Professional Training or Safehouse, Pat decides that as a fairly new hunter, Kilcannon probably hasn't established either to his liking yet. He does take a point of Status (Ascending Ones) to represent his fledgling place with that con-

spiracy, but then puts his two remaining Merit points into the Elixirs Endowment, representing his trained tolerance for the drugs and poisons of the Ascending Ones.

Step Seven: Advantages

Now that all Pat's character's Traits are established and his Merit points are spent, Pat needs to calculate his character's Advantages. Some of these are derived from other traits. Pat adds Kilcannon's Resolve of 2 and Composure of 3 together to come up with a Willpower of 5. Kilcannon's Morality begins at the standard 7. Although Pat has already established his character as an occasional tomb robber, he decides that Kilcannon's never really come to terms with it (his Morality hasn't degenerated) and thus his Morality remains at 7. After looking at the list of Virtues and Vices, Pat decides that Kilcannon's desire for vengeance against whatever supernatural force spurred him into being a hunter would be appropriate for giving him Justice as Virtue and Wrath as Vice. He truly believes his vengeance is righteous and it manifests in a violent and destructive manner.

Kilcannon's Health is 8, determined by adding his Stamina of 3 with his Size (5 for a human adult). His Dexterity of

THE MORALITY OF THE HUNT

In terms of sins against Morality, humanoid monsters should be treated as human. The line between "human who has become a vampire," "human who has magical powers," "human with a magical item," and "human who just happens to kill people" is too morally ambiguous to be considered in terms of Morality sins. Hunters must bear the full moral impact of injuring or slaughtering sentient beings, regardless of whether they are technically human or not. Driving a stake into the heart of a cherubic vampire who looks like a human child can be just as morally taxing as if it were a mortal child who has killed her parents and siblings. (That said, if a creature is something truly alien or manifests no human features, Morality may not figure into the picture. Destroying something that looks like a giant bacterium earns the character as much guilt as wiping out strep throat with an antibiotic...which is to say, none at all.) More information on Morality (including changing the hierarchy of sins and using it to enhance theme and mood in your game) can be found in Appendix One (p. 322).

2 and his Composure of 3 give him a 5 Initiative. His Wits are 3 and his Dexterity is 2, but since his Defense is the lowest of the two, he's only got a 2 Defense. Finally, Kilcannon's Strength of 2 and his Dexterity of 2 are added to his species factor (5 for a human adult) to give him a Speed of 9.

Kilcannon begins play with 5 Willpower points, the same as his Willpower dots.

Step Eight: Spark of Life

Pat now has a pretty good idea of who his character is, and what he can do. Now's the time to fill in the details and make the collection of numbers and letters on the character sheet into a three-dimensional persona. Pat starts by looking at the questions on p. 60 for some ideas on how to round out Kilcannon's history and character.

Pat wants to build a history in which Kilcannon blames the supernatural for destroying his life before he became a hunter. He decides that Dr. Kilcannon's young son was serving as an assistant in the museum, but followed when his father snuck off to meet with an antiquities fence. The curator, however, found the fence already compromised by some faceless thing with a keen interest in possessing a baboon-headed Canopic jar. The creature attacked Kilcannon; the boy rushed in to save him. All went dark.

Upon waking, Kilcannon found his boy dead — and the museum had discovered his moonlighting thievery. His wife divorced him because of the disgrace, leaving Kilcannon alone, with few options. He blamed the faceless monster for the destruction of his family and his career and sought out those contacts among the Ascending Ones who, he suspected, had more than a passing interest in the supernatural. It was time for revenge.

Pat remembers that the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia has a huge Department of Archeology and Anthropology and that the Philadelphia Art Museum is hosting a huge Tutankhamen exhibit, so he asks Autumn if that would make a good justification for why his character has been assigned to the cell. She agrees that Kilcannon's background will make him a great artifacts and Egyptian culture resource for the cell (and mentally notes to take advantage of the exhibit as a plot hook). Having fleshed out his history, Robert Kilcannon is ready for his first assignment on the Vigil.

Willpower

What can a human being will himself to do? A man trapped under a fallen tree cuts off his own leg with a penknife. A woman lifts a car to rescue her child. A husband breaks a man's neck with his bare hands, saving his wife from an attacker. These aren't miracles, and they aren't born of the blood undead or gifts from spirits. They just represent what human beings are capable of doing...

if they have the will.

Any character, human, animal or otherwise, can use Willpower to bolster normal dice pools or Resistance traits (see p. 95 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*). Hunters, by nature, are more willful than the average human being, and can use that will in slightly different ways. More specifically, they can take risks with their Willpower, "betting" it against a success. If the gamble pays off, they grow stronger. If not, they lose their resolve and become easier prey for the creatures they hunt.

Willpower works for hunters in the same ways it does for other *World of Darkness* characters, with a few additions. The sections below include the methods for regaining and spending Willpower from the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, for sake of quick reference.

Spending Willpower Points

This section discusses not only the different ways in which a hunter can expend Willpower, but also goes into when doing so is most appropriate and of the greatest benefit (to both character and player).

When to Spend

When a player spends a point of Willpower for the character, the character puts forth a great deal of effort on the task in question. This means that the action is important to the character, even if it isn't important in any objective sense. For instance, the character might decide that baking his daughter's birthday cake demands his attention and effort, and so the player spends a Willpower point on the Crafts roll to do so. No one's life hangs in the balance, but the character finds this task crucial, and this attitude is represented by the expenditure of Willpower.

But very often, the kinds of actions that are represented by dice rolls *are* the important ones, because it is by injecting a chance for failure that these actions gain some drama. Stating "spend Willpower when it's important to the character" can cover a lot of ground.

One way to think about spending Willpower is to consider whether the action attempted fulfills the character's Virtue or Vice. In the example above, what if the father's Virtue is Fortitude, and he's already been up all night chasing a vampire, but he goes without sleep (again) because he promised his little girl she'd have her cake? Spending the Willpower point weakens the character, but in taking the action, he fulfills his Virtue and at the end of the chapter (game session), gains it right back. Likewise, if his Vice is Envy and he's trying to one up his estranged wife by making the cake, he gets the same effect (though he only gains a single point and receives it immediately). The system for risking Willpower (see below) is another way to "spend Willpower to get Willpower," although failure carries harsh consequences.

Something else to consider about spending Willpower: a character doesn't know he only has five or six extra "boosts" to work with. He might realize he's getting tired, he's running on fumes, and he needs to rest soon. Depending on the nature of the actions for which the player uses the Willpower, that exhaustion might be less physical and more emotional. A character who burns his Willpower on Social or Mental tasks might be grouchy and standoffish, needing some time alone before he's ready to rejoin the world. A character whose Willpower went toward a physical confrontation is achy, tired and bruised.

In either case, the character needs to find a way to center and reaffirm himself, and find some comfort. Zones of personal comfort can be expressed, again, through Virtue and Vice. A character with the Vice of Gluttony opens a tub of his favorite ice cream. A character with the Virtue of Charity stops by a coffee shop and throws \$10 into the tip jar. These actions might or might not cause the character to regain Willpower by fulfilling Vice or Virtue, but they provide a way to express those traits and help the player and the Storyteller realize what they mean to the character.

From a purely mechanical perspective, a Willpower point on most rolls means three extra dice. That boosts a dice pool of one (an Attribute and no Skill; about a 30% chance of success) to four (about a 75% chance of success!). Remember, multiple successes don't normally matter, and so a dice pool of four is generally sufficient. A Willpower point spent on top of a dice pool already at that point boosts the probability of success high-

er (to about 90%), and so it's not inappropriate to do so, but the player should certainly consider the best use of the points.

Of course, multiple successes *do* matter sometimes. They matter when the hunter tries to sneak up on the lurking werewolf (contested action), when the hunter is frantically trying to dig up a ghost's birth name (extended actions) or when the hunter is trying to destroy a monster (combat). Having more dice on these sorts of actions is of benefit, and thus Willpower is never inappropriate.

How to Spend

- A hunter's player can spend a point of Willpower to give him a +3 modifier on a roll. Only one dice pool can be affected *per turn*. Some rolls may not be modified in this way. For instance, degeneration rolls to avoid losing Morality or the subsequent roll to avoid gaining a derangement cannot benefit from Willpower expenditure. The Storyteller may, at her discretion, decide a roll that measures the character's reflexes or unconscious reactions (such as the roll to avoid surprise; see p. 46 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*) also cannot benefit from Willpower.

- A Willpower point can be spent to add two to a character's Stamina, Resolve, Composure or Defense to resist mental or social/emotional pressures asserted on him, or to make a concerted effort to avoid being harmed. See "Resistance," on p. 133 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*.

- A player can risk one point of Willpower on certain types of actions to gain one of several potential benefits. This is discussed in more detail below.

- Willpower is often spent to activate or empower Endowments and to use Tactics. These traits are described in Chapter Three.

Risking Willpower

The life of a hunter is risk. It's one long gamble, from the moment the hunter takes up his weapons or books and starts looking for a target. Sooner or later, a hunter's luck runs out. Ironically, by taking some further risks, the hunter can push this eventuality to "later."

A player can risk a point of Willpower on a roll once per scene. Risks don't stack; that is, if a player didn't risk Willpower last scene, he can't do it twice during the current scene. Only certain types of rolls can benefit from a risk:

- The roll must directly relate to the Vigil. A roll to uncover information about a *known* monster, to break into a monster's home (or into the library to gain information on the monster, for that matter), to interrogate the monster's minion, to sneak up on a sleeping creature, rolls to resist a monster's powers and, of course, combat rolls against monsters, can all benefit.

- Perception rolls (see p. 45 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*), rolls to resist toxins, fatigue or deprivation, rolls to avoid surprise and any other rolls that don't draw on the character's commitment to the hunt more than his own body are not eligible for a risk.

WHY SHOULD HUNTERS HAVE ALL THE FUN?

If you've played other World of Darkness games, you might wonder why other types of characters can't risk Willpower. After all, while a werewolf's hunt isn't by any means the same as that of a Hunter character's, it's no less important to her. Why not let the player risk Willpower on, say, rolls to bar a spirit from possessing a human?

The arguments against doing so run this way: supernatural characters have far more advantages than hunters, but that also splits their focus. A werewolf has to contend with her desire to rage and feast, and this makes the kind of bloody-minded focus that hunters achieve difficult. Thematically, the other World of Darkness games haven't been designed with this kind of focus in mind, and so the Willpower risk might not be appropriate. It's present in Hunter not only to reinforce the "all-or-nothing" feel of the game, but to give hunters a bit of bite, as it were.

That said, if you and your Storyteller feel it's appropriate, nothing stops you from implementing it. Just be aware: where there's risk, there follows a fall. Dramatic failures are dangerous, and if you use these rules, you'll see them more often.

- Rolls made to activate or empower an Endowment are not eligible. Using a piece of equipment, however, counts, even if the equipment is represented by an Endowment. For instance, if a Task Force: VALKYRIE character fires an Etheric Round at a ghost, the player can risk Willpower on the Firearms roll. Rolls to activate Castigations and Benedictions or to create Elixirs, however, are not eligible.

- Rolls made as part of a Tactic are eligible.

When a player wishes to risk Willpower, he simply states this *before* rolling the dice. If the roll succeeds, the character regains the point of spent Willpower and an additional point on top of that (for a net gain of one Willpower), though this can never go beyond the character's pool limit. The character feels a flush of exhilaration and a sense of invincibility. This might feel like a runner's high, like the touch of God, or just like plain old-fashioned good luck, but the character knows he did something right, everything fell into place, and the Vigil continues. Successful risks have benefits for the rest of the hunter's cell, too (see Modifiers to Risked Rolls, below).

If the roll fails, however, the world comes crashing down around the hunter. The roll is considered a *dramatic failure*, no matter how many dice were rolled.

Benefits of Risk

When a player risks Willpower on a roll, he can choose one of three possible benefits:

- The roll gains three dice, as usual. The benefit is best used if the hunter is rolling a small dice pool and is low on Willpower.
- The roll gains the 9-again benefit (see p. 134 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*) on the roll. This is a good benefit if the dice pool is large enough to count on a success, but the roll is one in which multiple successes matter.
- The roll is counted as an exceptional success on *three* successes, rather than five. This benefit *cannot* be used on any roll in which successes are counted as damage, or inflict any other kind of loss to a target. It can, however, be used on a contested action. For instance, if the hunter is shadowing a monster back to its lair (see p. 76 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*), an exceptional success would allow the hunter to tail the monster with no further rolls necessary. Normally, this requires that the player rolls more successes than the Storyteller (or whoever is controlling the monster) and rolls at least five successes. By using this benefit, the number of successes required for an exceptional success drops to three (the requirement for rolling more successes than the monster still stands, obviously).

Regaining Willpower

Hunters can regain Willpower in all the ways available to World of Darkness characters. Pursuing the Vigil, however, allows them a few more options.

- Hunters can regain Willpower by fulfilling the conditions of their Vices or Virtues. See Chapter Four of the *World of Darkness Rulebook* for more details.
- A character may regain a point of Willpower after she has had a full night's rest or the equivalent opportunity to recharge her batteries and redouble her efforts. This assumes that the character rests or relaxes and does not engage in strenuous activities.
- If the character achieves a significant goal or performs a particularly impressive act that affirms her sense of confidence, the Storyteller may choose to award a Willpower point.
- The character regains all spent Willpower points at the end of a story (not a single game session).
- A hunter can regain Willpower by risking a point on an appropriate action, as described above (and she gains an additional Willpower point atop what is reclaimed).

- The player can spend one point of Practical Experience (see p. 210) for a chance to regain Willpower. The player rolls Resolve + Composure with no modifiers, no matter how wounded, fatigued or otherwise downtrodden the character is presently. Every success gives the character one Willpower point back, up the character's normal maximum rating. This roll cannot fail; in the event of a failure, the character still regains one Willpower point. There is no limit to the number of times the player can attempt this, but spending Practical Experience this way isn't terribly efficient.

Merits

Hunter characters receive seven dots of Merits at character creation, just as other World of Darkness characters do. They have a wider pool of Merits from which to choose, however, particularly third-tier hunters who can choose Endowments (see below).

Endowments (• to ..•••)

Prerequisite: Membership (at least one dot of Status) in a third-tier conspiracy.

Effect: The hunter has been entrusted with some of the secrets of the conspiracy to which he belongs. The six Endowment categories and the specific Endowments they can grant are discussed later in this chapter, beginning on p. 150. A character can learn these Endowments in play by purchasing the Endowments Merit with experience points (and probably by fulfilling some story-based prerequisites as well; Task Force: VALKYRIE doesn't hand out equipment to just anyone, for instance), or at character creation by allotting Merit dots to Endowments. What exactly those Merit dots buy the character varies depending on which Endowment is represented.

Advanced Armory, Relics and Thaumatechnology are all Endowments represented by devices and objects. These objects have ratings of one to five dots, and so representing them with the Merit is simply a matter of taking the required number of dots in the Endowments Merit. For instance, if a Cheiron Group character wants the Devil's Eyes Thaumatechnology Endowment at character creation, the player needs to invest two dots in the Merit. These Endowments don't run dry or disappear (though some of them might need ammunition — these are called Renewable Endowments, and are described on p. 150), but a character might lose an Endowment in play, or if he chooses to abandon his organization (and the organization has enough time and notice to make sure it gets its equipment back).

Elixirs are the oils, potions and other alchemical preparations of the Ascending Ones. Taking dots in this Merit indicates the character has the necessary "tolerance" to the potions to be able to use them without ill effects.

An Ascending One can use Elixirs with higher ratings than her own ratings in this Merit, but suffers a penalty on the Stamina + Elixirs roll to successfully use the substance (see p. 172 for more details).

Castigation Endowments represent the knowledge of the rites of the Lucifuge. For every dot in this Merit, the character can learn one more rite. A character with three dots in Endowments (Castigation), therefore, can learn a maximum of three rites. Any given

character, though, can only call upon a maximum of five Castigation rites at a time. Simply knowing the rites creates a strain on the soul and the sanity of the character, and using them requires sacrifice, of blood, will or some other precious commodity. A character can "swap" a Castigation rite that he knows for a new one, provided he learns about the rite from someone who knows it or from a Lucifuge text. Switching out rites requires a rededication of the character's energy, though, and that takes time. The player rolls Resolve + Occult as an extended action. The target number of successes is 20 minus character's rating in Endowments (Castigation), and the player makes one roll per day in which the character spends at least four hours studying, fasting, flagellating or otherwise preparing himself for the change. As the total number of successes climbs, the character suffers nightmares, sweats, spontaneous nosebleeds and other ailments, and then finally peace as the change sets in.

Benedictions, like Castigation, represent the character's ability to know rites, but unlike Castigation, the number of dots in the Endowments Merit doesn't reflect how many rites the character knows. A character with the Merit Endowments (Benedictions) at one dot can potentially know every Benediction in existence, if he's willing to invest the time (and experience points) to learn them. The Endowments (Benedictions) Merit reflects how well the character can access that knowledge. All the Benediction rituals have different dice pools associated with them, but the character's Benedictions rating is always part of these pools.

Favored Weapon (••)

Effect: Any given monster may not even notice a hunter's attempt to stab, slice or club it, but having a weapon to grip when stalking the enemy in a dark place does provide a measure of comfort. You character has a particular handheld melee weapon or firearm that's served him well in the past, and as long as it's on his person or within reach and easily accessible, he gains a +2 to Resolve + Composure rolls. The bonus only applies to one specific weapon, and it must be one he's used in combat while upholding the Vigil. If the weapon is lost or destroyed, or you want to switch the effect to a different weapon, you must purchase the Merit again to gain its benefits (and it necessitates carrying the subsequent Favored Weapon for at least one story before the Merit kicks in). A character can only have one Favored Weapon at a time.

Professional Training (• to ..•••)

Effect: Your character has been on the job for a while, and has grown skilled in the areas important to her Profession. This Merit reflects your character's job experience, natural prowess at the talents important to her line of work and how well she can learn and grow within her field.

Each of the Professions listed later in this chapter has two Asset Skills associated with it. Players choose a free Specialty in one of those Skills at character creation, and characters probably have at least a dot in both of the Asset Skills. Characters do not have to begin with a dot in Professional Training, though, in order to choose a Profession.

The Professional Training Merit is progressive; a character can't have **Continuing Education** until she has **Networking**. The Professional Training ranks listed in the individual write-ups of the Professions beginning on p. 74 allow a good shorthand for how well trained a given character is. A Hacker character with two dots



of the Professional Training Merit can be called a “Programmer,” while one with five dots is a “Genius.” Characters, of course, don’t use this nomenclature, but it can be handy way for players to note roughly how experienced their hunters are.

• Networking: Your character has amassed the contact information for people in her chosen Profession. At low levels of the Merit, she is an up-and-comer, asking questions of older and more established colleagues. As her Professional Training increases, people start coming to her with questions, requests for advice and consultations, offers to coauthor papers, and invitations to speak at conventions. In game terms, the character is considered to have the Contacts Merit (see p. 114 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**) equal to her rating in Professional Training, in addition to the other benefits that later levels provide. Every time a hunter character gains a dot of Professional Training, the player must choose a sub-field of the Profession for this portion of the Merit.

Example: John’s character, a Detective, gains a second dot of Professional Training. John specified that the first dot of Contacts bestowed by this Merit was Police, reflecting the character’s work with the local cops. With the increase, John decides that since his character has made a name for himself in law enforcement, he now has Contacts in Federal Agencies.

Note that the Networking facet of this Merit does not preclude the player from purchasing the Contacts Merit separately,

nor does it imply any special relationship with any one particular person in the areas specified. It simply means that the character saves business cards, writes down numbers, buys drinks at conventions or otherwise pays attention to the people he meets.

•• Continuing Education: As part of her growth within her field, the character learns new skills that are applicable to what she does. Sometimes, the character finds herself learning things she never thought would apply to her Profession. An Academic might take a class in physiology and find she has a passion for it, signing up for gross anatomy classes, learning first aid and thus gain dots in the Medicine Skill. When the player purchases this dot of Professional Training, the player chooses a third Asset Skill. If the player takes this Merit at character creation, she can take her free Specialty in any of her three Asset Skills. *The Storyteller is the final arbiter of whether a given Skill is an appropriate choice.*

••• Breadth of Knowledge: A character who settles into the routine of her job never stops learning, but probably doesn’t learn new aptitudes so much as how to make better use of her existing ones. In game terms, this “breadth of knowledge” is best represented by Specialties. Upon purchase of this dot of Professional Training, the cost for Specialties in Asset Skills drops to 2 experience points per Specialty.

•••• On-the-Job Training: Schooling is no substitute for experience. A character who has been at her Profession for a

long time (and who dedicates herself to it, rather than just coasting or dodging work), progresses efficiently within her field. She learns not just facts, but patterns, tricks, shortcuts and truisms that help her do her job well. In game terms, characters at this level of Professional Training pay only (new dots x 2) for Asset Skills, rather than (new dots x 3).

Drawback: The problem is that picking up new Skills is difficult for those who specialize. Buying the first dot of a new non-Asset Skill costs one extra point of experience (four points, rather than three). This increase does not affect raising the Skill further; it just represents a steeper learning curve, because the character has to shake herself out of her routine a bit more than others in order to learn new talents.

••••• **A Day on the Job:** Characters who achieve this level of competence at their Professions are envied, highly sought after and extremely rare. The character might not be the most Skilled person on the planet (i.e., might not have an Asset Skill at five dots), but she has learned so much about the application of those Skills that she can do her job in her sleep. When the player spends a Willpower point on a roll involving an Asset Skill, and that use of the Skill is something that would fall into the daily purview of the character, the roll can instead become a *rote action* (rather than the usual +3 dice for spending a Willpower point). Details on the rote action rule can be found in the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, pp. 134–135.

“Daily purview” means that the action is something the character would encounter on a regular basis in the course of his job. A Soldier could use the ability in a firefight. A Detective could use it while searching a crime scene. An Occultist could use it for research, and so on. The exact Skill being used isn’t as important as the way in which it is used. For instance, a Laborer who uses the Crafts Skill to fix cars and other machines couldn’t use this Merit to turn baking a cake into a rote action, even though it’s covered by the same Skill. Note that hunting down and killing monsters isn’t a matter of routine for *anyone*, and so while a hunter can use A Day on the Job in a fight with a monster, he *cannot* use it on a Tactics roll (see p. 217).

Drawback: While a character *can* use this Merit to make a combat roll into a rote action, doing so forces the character to concentrate on following through the attack above all else. The character receives no Defense during that turn. Also, the character cannot specify a target (see p. 165 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*). In addition, the Storyteller may determine that the scene of combat is simply too out of the ordinary to fall under the “daily purview” rule. See the sidebar entitled “Combat by ‘Rote’” for more information on rote actions in combat.

Example: John’s Detective character has, over the course of the chronicle, become extremely well

respected, an authority on serial killers and cult-style murders. When called upon to make an Empathy roll to detect a lie, even if that lie comes from a supernatural creature, John can spend a Willpower point and make the roll a rote action. If he were called upon to make an Empathy roll to assess whether a child’s description of an event has been coached or is genuine, he *might* be able to make this roll a rote action, if he has worked with children under such circumstances often enough in the past. This, of course, is the Storyteller’s decision to make, based on the events of the chronicle and the player’s input.

COMBAT BY “ROTE”

Combat is never really rote. It’s fluid, dangerous and chaotic. The description of rote actions in the *World of Darkness Rulebook* doesn’t really apply to combat as written. The game mechanic, however, works just fine, so the Professional Training Merit allows it, but it behooves us to take a moment and consider what a “rote” action in a fight means.

Much of combat is muscle memory. Soldiers and police officers drill for hours, repeating the same movements thousands of times precisely so that when they do find themselves in life-or-death situations, their bodies can do what they’re “programmed” to do without their brains getting in the way. This is why you don’t usually see cops shooting to disarm or wound, or, indeed, taking head shots. They drill on the range to shoot for center mass, and in the heat of battle, that’s what they do.

In *Hunter: The Vigil*, an attack that uses the Professional Training Merit to become “rote” draws heavily on that muscle memory. The character doesn’t so much focus on the attack to the exclusion of all else as go on autopilot. When the dust settles, odds are he’ll still be standing and his opponent won’t – but that assumes his opponent didn’t have backup, or that the hunter did.

In game terms, this is simulated by the character losing Defense when he uses a rote action. He’s letting his body take over, using his hours of training and experience to do the maximum amount of damage to a target (or, possibly, to immobilize the target in the fastest way possible), and isn’t paying careful attention to what’s around him. Hopefully, as a hunter, he’s got a cell at his back.



Safehouse (• to •••••)

Effect: The hunter has a place of his own where monsters cannot find him. A safehouse might be the headquarters for a cell, or it might be a personal hideaway for an individual. Hunters often rig a safehouse with traps, hidden weapons, security systems and escape routes, because as impregnable as it might be, monsters are persistent and clever. They'll probably find the way in, and the best a hunter can do is make it hard on them.

A safehouse might be a storage shed that the hunter rents out and uses as a weapons locker, an apartment that is rigged to set the building on fire if he flicks a switch, or a mansion belonging to his organization that is woefully lacking in security. In game terms, dots spent on the Safehouse Merit need to be distributed among four categories: Size, Cache, Secrecy and Traps. Thus, the storage shed might have no dots of Size or Traps, but several of Secrecy. The apartment doesn't hold much in the way of Cache (as the owner is afraid to leave anything there), but has a high Traps rating. The mansion has five dots in Size and probably a few in Traps and/or Cache, but none in Secrecy.

Safehouse Size is perhaps the simplest defining characteristic, governing the amount of raw space the safehouse encompasses.

x Barely any space; only a pair of characters can fit inside comfortably.

• A studio apartment; one to two rooms.

•• A large apartment or small family home; three to four rooms.

••• A warehouse, church or large home; five to eight rooms, or large enclosure.

•••• A mansion or very large home; equivalent to nine to 15 rooms.

••••• A sprawling estate, interconnected tunnel network; countless rooms or chambers.

Safehouse Cache: A lot of space is good for a very large cell, or for a cell that chooses to live in its safehouse, but it can also make the inhabitants paranoid. After all, if there are 10 rooms in the place, who knows what's in the other nine at any given time? Hunters find that having some weapons at their fingertips lessens this paranoia somewhat (or it might make it worse, because what if the monsters find the stash?).

Each dot allocated to Safehouse Cache translates to one cache. A cache can hold five Size points worth of equipment, so while one might be a weapons locker with two shotguns and a pistol (and a few boxes of ammo for each, which is negligible as far as Size goes), another might hold surveillance equipment (a set of wire taps, binoculars, night-sight goggles and maybe a pistol for good measure). Chapter Six of the *World of Darkness Rulebook* has some examples of equipment and weapons that might be useful, and players should work with the Storyteller to figure out what might fit

in a cache. It is possible, too, to combine two or more dots of Cache into one space, for a total Size of 10 or more.

Equipment doesn't have to be stored in a cache, of course — a large safehouse can have entire rooms devoted to storage. Equipment that is stored in a cache, however, is effectively hidden from anything but a devoted (or supernatural) search. Mundane interlopers receive a -5 modifier to any attempt to find a cache (on a dramatic failure, the searcher finds and triggers a trap, instead, if the safehouse has any). If the players wish, this modifier can instead apply to attempts to access the Cache. The gun safe might be in plain view, but it's not at all easy to crack open without the proper combination.

Safehouse Secrecy: One of the biggest advantages a hunter can enjoy is, ironically, one that his prey tries to cultivate as well: anonymity. If the monsters don't know where to find the hunters, they have a harder time killing them. Dots in Safehouse Secrecy indicate how far removed from the hunters the safehouse is, from a legal (and paper trail) standpoint. These dots impose a negative penalty on any attempt to find the hunter through the property, or vice versa. The descriptions of the different dot ratings below are just examples; it's up to the player to decide what the Secrecy represents.

x The hunter rented or bought the place using his real name, credit card or bank account.

• The hunter went through an intermediary, but co-signed a loan at some point.

•• Some effort toward concealment; an assumed name or paying in cash.

••• Considerable difficulty in tracing the property — the hunter might just be squatting.

•••• The hunter never goes back to the place if he doesn't have to, never gets there by the same route, and his real name never appears on any of the documentation.

••••• The property has a real owner who lives there full time, is aware of his rights and, if necessary, can show cops around the place while casually denying that he's ever seen the hunter before.

Safehouse Traps: Sooner or later, a safehouse is going to be compromised. Hunters know it, even if they don't want to admit it. That's why many of them build traps into their safehouses, in hopes they can kill a supernatural intruder — or at least deter him long enough to get away. A trap can take a myriad of forms. Opening a door to a promising-looking room reveals a shotgun aimed at chest level, which promptly fires. Walking up the stairs on the left side is safe, but on the right side, they're rigged to collapse. Looking behind a painting causes an ax to swing down from the ceiling, just about at head level. A trap can also be designed to destroy part (or all) of the safehouse — at the flick of a switch, the place goes up in flames, collapses or explodes (see sidebar for what this means in terms of the Merit).

A trap can either inflict damage equal to the dots allocated to it to a single target, or can inflict less damage to a large area. Once a trap is tripped (provided it doesn't destroy the place), any hunter who contributed

SACRIFICE OF THE SAFEHOUSE

The monsters invade, the hunters torch the place...now what? Are the players just out those Merit dots? That's up to the Storyteller, preferably with some consensus from the players. Below are two options for how to handle destruction of the safehouse.

Tough Luck: Everything in the Safehouse is gone. The dots are lost. The characters can come back and pick through the rubble for anything they left in a Cache (extended Intelligence Investigation roll, one roll/10 minutes of searching, five successes per cache), but dots in Size, Secrecy and Traps are forfeit.

Salvage: The dots in the safehouse are totaled and multiplied by 1.5. The resulting number is converted into experience points (round up) that can be spent on whatever the troupe and the Storyteller agree is a reasonable outcome of the safehouse's destruction. If the place was insured for a large sum of money, Resources makes sense. If the characters had a backup property and just need to move in and prep the place, they can use the points to build another safehouse. If they go their separate ways for a while and agree to meet up when the heat's off (that is, they take some downtime), maybe the players split the points up equally among their characters and buy Skills, Merits or whatever else best represents how they spend that time.

dots to the safehouse can reset it with minimal work. This is what differentiates traps represented by this Merit from others that the characters might build themselves during the course of the chronicle; no rolls or special effort are required to reset a Safehouse Trap. Again, though, if the trap is designed to destroy large sections of the safehouse, that damage can't be repaired without significant effort and expense, if at all. Any trap that deals damage to the Safehouse Size can be rigged to go off after a short delay, giving the hunters time to flee.

x The hunters haven't bothered setting traps. Perhaps they're afraid of setting them off themselves.

- A trap that inflicts one point of lethal damage to a target (concealed knife, caltrops) or three points of bashing damage to a small area (electrified floor, mild poison gas).

- A trap that inflicts two points of lethal damage to a target (spring-loaded knife, concealed pistol trap) or inflicts six bashing damage to a small area (falling sandbags, fire-hose trap), or a trap that incorporates fire and thus has a chance of igniting targets and the house (see p. 180 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*).

- A trap that inflicts three points of lethal damage to a target (falling ax, poisoned needle on a doorknob) or eight bashing damage to an area (collapsing staircase), or a trap that damages a portion of the safehouse, reducing its Size by one (explosives; anyone caught in the blast takes two lethal damage).

- A trap that inflicts four lethal damage to a target (shotgun trap, pit with spikes) or 10 bashing damage/two lethal damage to an area (concussion grenade trap, dead-fall trap), or a trap that reduces the Safehouse Size by one to three dots (anyone caught in the area suffers three points of lethal damage).

- A trap that inflicts five points of lethal damage to a target (spring-loaded sharpened stake, blowtorch trap) or 12 bashing damage/three lethal damage to an area (bouncing Betty, acid spray), or a trap that completely destroys the safehouse, no matter how large (anyone caught inside suffers four points of lethal damage).

A note on vulnerabilities: some creatures, such as vampires, suffer aggravated damage from fire. Others have more specialized weaknesses, and hunters might well guess at them or learn them over the course of the chronicle. The Safehouse Traps system doesn't make capitalizing on these weaknesses a special case — working silver bullets into a gun trap doesn't put the dot rating up. This is because the creatures get a chance to notice the traps anyway (see below), and because a hunter can't be sure that a) werewolves really *are* vulnerable to silver, or if that's just a story and b) werewolves are going to attack the safehouse, rather than, say, vampires, who don't care a bit about silver.

Any intruder receives a Wits + Composure roll to notice a trap before it activates:

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The intruder activates the trap and suffers all relevant damage. In addition, roll (the rating of the trap in question + 2) and apply any successes as additional damage (type as appropriate to the trap).

Failure: The intruder activates the trap and suffers all relevant damage.

Success: The character notices the trap and can try to disarm it (Wits + Crafts minus the dots allocated to that trap, failure sets off the trap, dramatic failure doubles the damage) or just leave it be.

Exceptional Success: The intruder notices the trap and can attempt to disarm it (Wits + Crafts, no penalty for the trap rating).

Suggested Modifiers:

Modifier	Situation
+1	Intruder is actively looking for traps
+1	Intruder has successfully surveilled the location recently
-1	Dim light
-1	Loud ambient noise
-2	Intruder is hurried
-2	Trap does not require visible apparatus (collapsing staircase, for instance)
-3	Total darkness

Each aspect of the Safehouse Merit has a limit of 5. In other words, Safehouse Size, Safehouse Cache, Safehouse Secrecy and Safehouse Traps may not rise above 5 (to a maximum of 20 points spent on this Merit). The combined pool of points is used to determine the cost in experience points for raising the Safehouse Merit during play.

Special: The Safehouse Merit may be shared among characters in a cell. The cell may have built the place from the ground up, or a single hunter might have found or purchased it and improved as he met the other characters.

To share this Merit, two or more characters pool their dots for greater capability. A shared rating in the Safehouse Merit cannot rise higher than five dots in any of the four aspects of the trait. That is, characters cannot pool more than five points to be devoted to, say, Safehouse Size. If they wish to devote extra points to the Merit, they must allocate those dots to a different aspect of the Merit, such as Traps or Secrecy.

Shared dots can be lost. If a hunter dies or leaves the cell (perhaps due to a falling-out over methods), the dots that he contributed are subtracted from the safehouse. The Storyteller decides what reduced dots mean in the story when a character leaves a shared safehouse, but the decision should make sense. Dots representing Size, for instance, should probably disappear last, if at all, and if they do, it might mean that a portion of the safehouse has become unusable rather than vanishing outright. A character might take equipment with him when he leaves, thus reducing dots in Safehouse Cache, or a death might draw attention to the place, reducing Safehouse Secrecy.

A character need not devote all of her Safehouse dots to the shared Merit, of course. A hunter might maintain a separate safehouse of her own outside the communal one represented by the shared trait. Any leftover dots that a character has (or is un-

willing to share) signify what she has to draw upon as an individual, separate from the cell. For example, three characters share a safehouse and expend a group total of five dots. One character chooses to use two other dots on a private safehouse for herself. Those remaining two dots represent a safehouse entirely separate from what she and her comrades have established together.

To record a shared Safehouse Merit on your character sheet, put an asterisk next to the name of the Safehouse Merit and fill in the total dots that your character has access to thanks to his partnership. In order to record his original contribution, write it in parentheses along with the Merit's name. It is not important to note which aspect of the Safehouse Merit on which those points are spent, as this allows greater flexibility should a character ever decide to withdraw from the community arrangement. The result looks like this:

MERITS

<u>SAFEHOUSE*</u> (2)	●●●○
<u>SAFEHOUSE</u>	●●●○○
<u>PROFESSIONAL TRAINING</u>	●●○○○
	○○○○○
	○○○○○
	○○○○○
	○○○○○
	○○○○○
	○○○○○

In this example, the character shares a Safehouse Merit dedicated to the cell's collective headquarters. He contributes two dots to the safehouse, and the group has a total of four dots that are made available to each member. The character also has his own private Safehouse Merit rated ●●●, which he maintains by himself. And, the character has Professional Training rated ●●, which is also his own Merit.

Status, Compact or Conspiracy (• to ⚡)

Effect: The character holds membership in a hunter compact (second tier) or conspiracy (third tier). These groups are described fully on pp. 102-149. Organization (Compact or Conspiracy) Status is similar to the Status Merit found in the **World of Darkness Rulebook** (p. 116), but the arena in which the character is known is much smaller. Even the conspiracies are much narrower and more specific than, say, "City Government." The Merit, therefore, represents a bit more: it indicates the character's standing, achievements and reputation within the group.

In a second-tier compact, Status indicates how well regarded the hunter is. Other hunters respect the word of a high-Status character, and while they won't necessarily lay down their lives for him, they regard him as a leader. In game terms, each dot of Status in a second-tier compact grants a +1 modifier to Social rolls made involving other members of that compact. A character with Status (Ashwood Abbey) 3,

MULTIPLE MEMBERSHIPS?

Can a hunter character belong to two different compacts or conspiracies? Yes, but it's not easy. Few groups will allow for such a thing (though certainly some hunters do it quietly, as double agents, even at the behest of their own parent group), and even if they do, they tend to view that hunter with suspicion for fear his loyalties will lean away from their needs.

Buying Status in a second compact or conspiracy costs double the experience points (new dots x 4). In addition, the character may never rise above two dots in the second group if it's not his original compact/conspiracy... unless he extricates himself from his initial membership. (Even if the group doesn't know that the hunter belongs to an initial group, they still maintain suspicions, hence the difficulty.)

What about Endowments? If the hunter belongs to two different conspiracies, can he share in both conspiracies' Endowments? Yes, but buying Endowments from a second conspiracy comes with an even steeper cost: new dots x 6, and they're limited by two dots, as well. This represents the difficulty of convincing a group of one's true loyalty, whether as an admitted member of an initial group or as a double agent.

therefore, receives a +3 modifier to all Social rolls made involving other members of the Abbey.

In a third-tier conspiracy, the Status Merit grants the Social bonus, but also gives the character access to Endowments. Even a single dot in Status is enough to grant the character access to these benefits (which are purchased with a separate Merit; see Endowments, p. 150).

x A character with no dots in Organization Status, but who still claims membership in an organization, is a prospective member. Such members are not usually privy to important plans, and certainly aren't trusted with expensive equipment (or Endowments, for a third-tier conspiracy).

• The character has been accepted into the order, but probably hasn't done anything special. He may or may not have been on a real hunt yet.

•• The organization in the character's area knows the character as a trustworthy and dependable hunter. He might be chosen as a second-in-command for a hunt.

••• Members of the organization in other parts of the country know the character's name, and trade stories of his exploits. At this point, the character needs to be concerned about his reputation becoming a liability.

•••• The character is considered a leader in the organization, whether he likes it or not. He can get support (personnel and equipment) to undertake his own hunts without difficulty, but if a hunt under his command fails, he runs the risk of being ousted. Monsters belonging to organized societies might have heard his name (or, more likely, a nickname and a description).

••••• Hunters who live long enough to achieve this level of Status are the stuff of legend, and that's not a good thing for people to whom anonymity is survival. Of course, a leader like this is considered too important to go on dangerous missions without a lot of support. The character probably runs the organization in his area, and answers only to the leader(s) of the entire group.

Torture Suite (• to ...)

Effect: Interrogation, torture, brainwashing, deprogramming: all gruesome and disturbing acts that require, among other things, a safe place from prying eyes. Dots in this Merit represent just such a space, preferably one the hunter has control of, like a storage unit for which she is the primary key-holder or a secluded cabin she owns. This can be a space she doesn't own (police interrogation room, boiler room at the elementary school where she works as janitor, a secret room in the basement of her apartment building), but still must be one she controls semi-regularly for the Merit's effects to apply.

Dots in this Merit are unrelated to Size, but are instead related to the space's intimidation factor: a spare room in a small apartment isn't that foreboding, but a dark room with a bare bulb next to a hissing heater and a wall full of sharp implements might just do the trick. For each dot purchased in this Merit, the hunter gains +1 to appropriate Intimidation-based Interrogation rolls (including torture, brainwashing or deprogramming events). Note that a Torture Suite can be a part of a hunter's safehouse, though it doesn't need to be.

PROFESSIONS

Most hunters don't get paid for killing monsters. The world doesn't work like that. Hunters are people, just the same as anyone. Those who work for larger compacts or conspiracies that offer Endowments may collect a paycheck for hunting, but most still have day jobs. A hunter has to balance her Vigil between confronting the dark underbelly of the world and doing what she has to do to make a living.

Smart hunters know how to balance hunt and career, at least. Unfortunate hunters lose that balance and spiral downward: maybe she gives up the hunt, which at first seems like the best way. She provides a normal home for her family. She pays the bills, puts food in their mouths. But that's not easy. She can't set aside her burning knowledge of the strange things that haunt the darkness. Ignoring them doesn't make them go away. Images of slashers and inhuman things haunt the hunter's dreams, a warning that monsters are out there harming the innocent, and maybe even coming for the hunter's own family. Spiraling in the other direction means job and family fall by the wayside: sacrifices for a greater and madder cause. It's rarely a swift loss: the hunter with bloodshot eyes and sweat-stained shirt zones out in his office or at the building site. He fails to pay attention to the family. Soon he's divorced, fired, or both.

Truly wise hunters know to not just balance elements, but to incorporate their work into their Vigil (that still doesn't help with

family, but at least two out of three elements have some equilibrium). A Doctor cuts a deal when patching up those who share his Vigil. An Engineer knows how to demo the old bridge that's home to the bat-faced things dwelling beneath it. The Technician builds hidden cameras, weird turrets, strange traps. The Soldier marches into battle with a strategy at hand and his band of brothers behind

HUNTER GROUPS

Hunters who work full time for conspiracies and compacts like the Union, Null Mysteriis or the Cheiron Group still choose Professions as normal. Even within those organizations, everyone has a part to play, be it Detective or Scientist, Socialite or Clergy. Hunters in such a group can choose to base their Profession on either their job before joining the hunter organization or their role within the group.

him. An Artist writes and illustrates a field guide to the unknown occult mysteries and monsters that plague his proud city.

See, that's what one's Profession is: not just a job, not just something a hunter does for a quick paycheck, but something she does because that's who she is. Hell, sometimes a paycheck isn't even involved. A hunter who is a Soldier may no longer be on his tour of duty. Maybe he's a sales clerk or a counter jockey at the local gas station, but his *Profession* remains that of Soldier. Because that's what he is, it's what he does. A Doctor may have had his license to practice medicine revoked for risky operations, but he's still a doctor, he swore an *oath* and now he takes his gauze and scalpel into the field to patch up hunters or even monstrous allies.

The Professions below are for **Hunter: The Vigil** characters. They function potentially as a way to make money, as well as a way for the hunter to approach the Vigil *her way*. (Note that professions are made more robust by dots purchased in the Professional Training Merit, found on p. 67.)

Academic

Wolfmen? I wonder what else freshman biology neglected to mention.

Academics live a life that, on the surface, is perfect for the Vigil. Nobody expects a student to show up to every class, professors have an incredible amount of free time, and researchers have access to fantastic resources. Campus mainstays can shrug off weird behavior as a film project or high-spirited frat boys.

All Academics are nominally in it for learning or teaching. Even students who spend their time drunk or hungover still have a major. It's bad enough when hunters encounter a vampire in their favorite bar. Some universities have demon-possessed autocrats in the campus police, otherworldly drugs cooked up in local nightclubs, and cults among poets and professors. Academics who know the hidden truths often live close to those monsters who hold positions of power and influence over them.

Some Academics find it tricky balancing the Vigil with the world of academia: tracking down some ax-wielding lunatic is certainly more demanding than C++ compiler internals or 17th-century French literature. A hunter who makes his living going on the lecture circuit or writing theses on operant conditioning finds his time (and sanity) damaged by the needs of the hunt.

Whatever her specialty, an Academic *can* apply it to her hunt, however. Computer science gives her tremendous resources for image recognition or distributed tracking, researchers have well-stocked workshops at their disposal, and literature students have access to collections of books that few outside of a university could hope to see. Lazy undergrads who chose a party college for the hell of it soon become a lot more dedicated when a cult figures them for a sacrifice in the middle of a frat party, and even the oldest professor still has a hell of a lot to learn — but is well placed to do so.

Her university says a lot about an Academic. An Ivy League or Oxbridge institution has a whole set of customs and mindsets, and may house a group of hunters made up of students and faculty who integrate the Vigil with university traditions. Even those hunters who are not a part of the university life are often tied to it

somehow: perhaps they gain funding from it, have colleagues on staff, or are even allowed to borrow the labs or libraries for their own use (especially as alumni).

In addition to any groups of hunters who operate out of her university, local groups often have at least one Academic as a member. She has free time and access to a lot of resources, which can be a massive boon. It's often hard for these groups to remember that their most useful member must also teach classes or get thrown out — and most hunter groups can't afford to float a member rent for a couple of months. Everyone involved has to be realistic.

Some Academics live in a desensitized state. Once they get over their visceral reaction to a man made of brass and skin grafts, the hunt becomes a damning puzzle. Werewolves are interesting biological anomalies. Hauntings may inspire fear, but they also spawn a near-obsessive desire to find out more. It's a dangerous path to walk, with the hunter exposing herself to incredible peril for just a bit more knowledge.

Several hunter compacts and conspiracies, most notably the Aegis Kai Doru, Null Mysteris and the Loyalists of Thule, recruit Academics right out of college. (Though sometimes "recruiting" is done at the point of gun or sword.) As with any large group, they look for the best and the brightest, especially those who have found a way to put their major to good use.

Background: Academics can come from any background, and any point on the academic curve. Some are students, young, foolish, working their way through school, having come from a disadvantaged background, or freewheeling through college with Mommy and Daddy's money footing all the bills. Some are grad students or teaching/research assistants, given a little more freedom and a small stipend. Many are professors, scholars, writers, researchers, lecturers. The drive for more knowledge is the main factor tying Academics together, no matter what their subject of study.

Attributes often depend on the Academic's major. Most will have Mental primary, especially Intelligence or Resolve, though sports-inclined academics might have Physical primary, while lecturers could have Social as predominant. Resolve and Composure are commonly high — dedicated students sacrifice when completing assignments, and that helps with staking out monster lairs. Most Academics have at least one dot in, well, Academics, along with Computer, Science and Streetwise. Depending on subject, an Academic can justify almost any spread of Skills. Likewise, possible Merits run the gamut. Contacts, Encyclopedic Knowledge and Mentor are the most common.

Concepts: Community college adjunct professor, detached researcher, frat boy, Ivy League student, lab technician, lecturer on Forteana, musty old professor, overworked research assistant, teaching assistant

Asset Skills: Academics and Science

Professional Training:

- Undergrad
- Postgrad
- Teaching Assistant
- Professor
- Doctor

Artist

Claws and teeth and fury. I'd say it was inspiring, but you wouldn't understand. I create, when all you do is destroy.

Artists create. That's what defines them more than anything: the act of picking a perfect feeling or emotion and pinning it to a page or locking it into a sculpture so that other people can experience the same thing they do. Some Artists work in one form exclusively, writing music or sculpting or painting. Others can work in many forms. They're as talented writers as they are movie directors and comic artists. Whatever her fields of choice, an Artist often goes to a range of extremes for new inspiration.

Some use drugs, believing that the only way they can get proper inspiration is through a heroin kiss or the wonderful crackle of psilocybin across their brain. Some writers can only spin words into coherent fictions with a glass of bourbon in front of them (and the hunt only draws them closer to alcohol, not away from it). Others keep themselves straight, preferring to condense their view of the world through only their perceptions. Several Artists dive into the occult for inspiration, researching and even joining modern hellfire clubs. Those who don't throw themselves into the underbelly may still find themselves embroiled in its plots. A painter exhibited in a vampire's gallery attracts admirers who can't walk in the sunlight. They want to make sure that time never steals their precious painter away, but she's got other plans. A musician's latest tune summons ghostly birds with human faces. The creatures don't stay long, but people around him start to die. A sculptor's tools turn up at the scene of a number of brutal murders, though she was nowhere near the scene.

Art can help a weaker human hide from the truths of the World of Darkness, but for a hunter, art helps her examine it, helps her get close to it. Artists provide many functions within a cell. Maybe she's a crime scene artist or can paint portraits of monsters she's seen (since photographic or video media do not always accurately catch such creatures). Maybe she writes field guides or cobbles together propaganda. The Artist may also bring a wide social network as an opportunity: many artists know how to talk to people, forming those connections to get paying commissions. Often enough, she throws herself into researching the occult and the weird, using her "latest project" as a useful cover for finding whatever information her cell needs.

An Artist's work turns darker as she brings her Vigil in to her creations. Some do so intentionally, channeling the hunt to cleanse her soul and warn the world about the things that lurk beneath. Only a lucky few ever pick up on the hints, but the majority remains ignorant. This isn't without danger. Her art changes. Her fans drift away, thinking she's lost her focus (or has gotten "too dark"). A few creators give up their work entirely, plunging headfirst into occult practices and drug use, possibly even dragging the whole cell into it. The Artist starts treating old friends as informants. Her social networks dissolve as people lose their respect for her. Art and insanity are sometimes bound together. For hunters who are Artists, these two elements are all too easily joined.

Artists join all manner of hunter organizations. An art historian does well in the Aegis Kai Doru, or may be used

to interpret the old texts pored over by agents of the Lucifer (and more than one Artist has found that his "work" has been reflecting his supposedly infernal lineage all along). The Ashwood Abbey gladly acts as art patrons, letting Artists explore whatever "creative" urges they desire. Network Zero is, of course, home to a large number of technically able Artists: editors, directors, writers and so forth.

Background: Artists have a desire to share feelings, ideas, images and stories. Some come from abusive or broken homes, while others emerge from creatively spirited and "free" households, representing two extremes that stir the creative mind: authoritarian rules and environments where no rules apply. Many grow up and end up having a wide network of contacts and friends, from galley owners to publishers to fellow creatives, and they know how to play to those networks.

Most Artists have Social Attributes as primary, though a sculptor may favor Strength and a musician may require high Dexterity. Writers and painters instead focus on Intelligence and Resolve. Most Artists have dots in Academics, Crafts (for physical forms of art), Empathy, Expression (for writing, music or film), Occult, Socialize and Survival. Common Merits include Barfly, Contacts among other artists, occultists, and her target market, and Fame. Addiction and Derangements such as Depression, Irrationality and Vocalization are common problems.

Concepts: artistic savant, blues musician, crime scene photographer, method actor, horror writer, occult-addicted rock star, police sketch artist, tortured painter, web TV director

Asset Skills: Crafts and Expression

Professional Training:

- Critic
- Amateur
- Artist
- Gallery Regular
- Warhol

Athlete

Go ahead, demon. Run. I trained for the Olympics, so I'm ready to race the Devil.

Athletes devote themselves to perfecting action. Ostensibly, an Athlete is out to prove that she is the best in her field. She can't be the best at everything, but she damn well can be the best distance runner, the best soccer player, the best martial artist. As a competitor, she needs to win. That drive and that desire push her forwards. A few really are the best, displaying a potent combination of training and genetics that puts them near the peak of human ability. Others aren't champions, but remain solid contenders in whatever sport or physical art they choose. Certainly the Athlete's goal is to turn professional, but some compete as amateurs and still earn whatever belt or trophy goes with their field.

How does an Athlete get drawn into the Vigil? Maybe he sees how gambling wizards use their strange rituals to twist the outcome of a race or how ghosts turn aside blows in a haunted boxing ring. Maybe out running and training on a lonely city street, he sees something flit down a dark alley, leaving behind the smoldering (even though it's winter) corpse of a dead

woman. A soccer coach sees several of his girls have strange markings on their necks, almost like...little *implants*.

Hunter cells look to Athletes for their physical abilities. While others offer mental or social aptitudes, an Athlete offers a cell a broad range of physical skills. He doesn't have the real-world experience of combat that a soldier or cop has, but they don't have his dedication to his athletic potential. Focusing his life on physical development means he's the one his cell turns to when it has to chase down a wounded cultist, follow an inhuman creature in a mad dash across rooftops, or get a serial killer in a headlock.

Maintaining his skills takes time — time that the Vigil takes up. That's what matters, and he needs to keep his physical prowess up to par. His cell relies on him to be ready for whatever happens. Some balance it. Some can't, and lose sight of those he protects or instead loses sight of his skills. A few make use of performance-enhancing drugs.

Task Force: VALKYRIE can always use — and equip — a capable Athlete, and he's a useful test subject for the Cheiron Group (maybe he's blown a knee or a rotator cuff, and Cheiron offers to "fix" him). Athletes who have strong faith are very useful to the Long Night (thanking God for their accomplishments), while more skeptical Athletes may find Null Mysteriis more in line with their beliefs. Many fall in with the Union, especially those who work blue-collar jobs to fund their training.

Backgrounds: Athletes are generally born with basic physical capability and a desire to compete. To that, they add years of training and dedication to their chosen sport. Though athletes in America often get a free pass through high school, the majority still need a day job. Whether she wants to or not, she has to eat — especially if she's got a family to support. The stereotypical view of the dumb jock isn't necessarily true, but those who sail through high school with inflated grades may believe they don't need to learn more than they have in order to get by — a shock when they encounter the post-school world.

Athletes generally prioritize Physical Attributes. A wrestler, javelin thrower or football player benefits from high Strength, while martial artists and sprinters alike rely on their Dexterity. Those who have Mental Attributes as their secondary choice find the most benefit from Wits, while those who prefer Social Attributes have an above-average Presence. Physical Skills are also often primary. Athletes usually have at least two dots in Athletics, though some fields are better suited to other Skills, such as Brawl and Weaponry for martial artists. Depending on their chosen sport and background, she will likely also have one dot in Academics, Brawl, Drive, Empathy, Intimidation, Medicine, Socialize or Streetwise. Common Merits include Fame, Fleet of Foot and Resources. Some sports also lend themselves to combat Merits.



Concepts: fencing student, high-school football star, little-league coach, marathon veteran, Olympic sprinter, target marksman

Asset Skills: Athletics and Medicine

Professional Training:

- Local Coach
- Bush League
- Minor League
- Pro
- Sports Star/Olympian

Cop

The law is the law. I don't care if you dig up bodies. I don't care if you drink blood. You're under arrest.

Cops join the force for any number of reasons. Most actually want to help their community, though a few believe the community owes them something for the privilege. Some pick up the gun and badge because their fathers did it, their grandfathers did it, and so forth; it's a whole legacy.

Most times, Cops deal with human crime — theft, assault, drugs and murders. Some Cops get cases with...different aspects. Whether they're first on the scene or they've got a rep for handling the weird shit, some come into contact with the hidden underworld. They are the ones who uncover the remains of human sacrifices, the ones who discover a nest of twisted beasts breeding and feeding beneath a meth lab. A Cop is on the front line, uncovering things that people don't want to see. It's up to her whether she gives chase with baton drawn or pulls her piece and brings bullets into the equation. She has to weigh up every situation she meets in the blink of an eye. Occasionally the situation's so weird that she doesn't know what to do. If she's lucky, she'll make the right choice.

If she doesn't, both the Cop and her partner are dead. Maybe not immediately. Maybe she screws up, tries to give chase after a creature that fades into mist, or tries shooting a slasher that shrugs off bullets like one shrugs off drops of rain. If she makes the right choice, she'll live. If she's very lucky, she'll save more lives than just her own. Of course, nobody else in her precinct will believe her. Maybe her partner will join her on the Vigil, which can be a blessing. But maybe he doesn't. Maybe when the moment of truth hit, she acted and he didn't. Survivor guilt is a terrible thing between friends.

For all that she can track down monsters in her day job, a Cop still has real criminals to catch — the drug dealers, rapists and murderers who prey on their city. She has to work the night shift to catch monsters, something that works much easier if she has a cell backing her up. They provide backup in the same way her precinct does when she's on duty. Hunter groups don't have SWAT teams — except Task Force: VALKYRIE — but other members can back her up in a fight. Still others can work the scene to find out what really happened. If she makes sergeant, she doubtless knows what she's doing working with a team, and can offer valuable leadership advice. Of course, if one member of her cell has dealings on the wrong side of the law, the tension of keeping that secret can drive a wedge between members of the cell.

Note that "Cop" doesn't necessarily mean the hunter belongs to the actual police force. He could be an FBI, CIA or

NSA agent. He might be a security guard at a major conglomerate, or he could belong to the Secret Service and protect politicians. Some aren't technically police any longer, but still have that "nose" for the job even if they work in a warehouse or are collecting disability somewhere.

Task Force: VALKYRIE makes use of Cops fairly often: Cops know how to work a beat, know how to be loyal to their own brotherhood, know how to handle a weapon. Cops have a certain blue-collar quality, too, and often end up as members of the Union. Catholic Cops are glad to bring the hammer down on witches with the Malleus Maleficarum, while more surveillance-oriented officers sometimes end up serving in cells with Network Zero hunters.

Background: A rookie must pass through a police academy before being assigned to a precinct. There he learns the Skills he will need to uphold the law. Only after he starts cruising the streets does he learn what he needs to protect his community. Most Cops don't go through college before the academy, though some join the force later in life. Once he's had his first year on the streets, he picks up the police officer's instincts that are so vital to the role.

Cops normally have Physical Attributes primary. Wits and Composure both go a long way, covering Perception rolls and the quick thinking needed to evaluate a situation on the fly. After their academy training, most Cops possess at least one dot in Athletics, Academics (Law), Firearms, Investigation, Intimidation, Medicine, Stealth and Weaponry. Depending on their field, these may be backed up with other Skills — K-9 units require Animal Ken, while SWAT officers have higher than average Firearms, and narcs rely on Persuasion and Subterfuge. Common Merits include Allies (Partner), Danger Sense, and combat Merits such as Disarm and Weaponry Dodge.

Concepts: Crooked arm of the law, deep-cover agent, grizzled beat-cop, K-9 officer, mall rent-a-cop, military policeman, old-guard sergeant, SWAT officer, traffic cop

Asset Skills: Streetwise and Firearms

Professional Training:

- Rookie
- Beat Cop
- Officer
- Sergeant
- Captain

Criminal

If you keep leaning on me, Slick Jimmy's going to get word. Then a wrecking bar's going to have words with your kneecaps, right?

The only thing that ties Criminals together is that they make their living by breaking the law. Con artists, drug dealers, cat burglars, muggers and leg-breakers are all Criminals. Some treat their role as "just another job," while others throw themselves into their work with obsessive gusto, eventually coming to the notice of well-connected people. A few regret the choices they've made so far, but can't go straight until they pay off their "debts." Some just do it for the thrill of stealing shit and breaking bones.

Generally, Criminals have nothing to do with organized crime — at least, not directly. A student who grows and sells

marijuana thinks he's just a guy doing business, but his money filters up and down the chain and somewhere it gets into the hands of some mob, some gang, some underworld network. And that network has a far reach and a menu of crimes at its disposal: drugs, prostitution, leg-breaking, people-trafficking. (That said, some crimes are too vile for most criminals. The majority of muggers aren't rapists, and only the lowest have anything to do with child pornography or other disturbing crimes. They require a level of detachment from the human norm that puts normal people on edge, no matter what those people do. At that point, being a Criminal has nothing to do with a Profession; it's a perverse predilection.)

Of course, Criminals often travel in the same circles as the monsters who prey on society (in a way, Criminals prey on society, too, making them unwitting allies half the time). A burglar who breaks into the wrong place uncovers the lair of an opium-addled demon cult. A loan shark who needs his money back from a down-on-his-luck fiend almost ends up as a midnight snack. A mob boss is killed by a vampire and his bodyguards are offered a chance to work for the new boss — if they drink some of their new lord's blood. However they encounter the supernatural, some Criminals join groups of other monster hunters, providing valuable talents — though many lie about their pasts. A few see the hunt as their chance to break back into the law-abiding world. Others hope to eliminate the competition or maybe make a little extra money out of the deal.

After a time on the Vigil, many Criminals become even more paranoid. Everyone they deal with could be a cultist or in thrall to an inhuman creature. They become security conscious, and some refuse to deal with people they haven't personally vetted. A hunter who goes that far sees the members of her group as the only ones she can really trust — for as long as she can trust them.

Task Force: VALKYRIE often recruits Criminals, sometimes using a "suicide squad" deal for lawbreakers facing overwhelming charges. They make the charges vanish, and in return, the lawbreaker works for them now. Ashwood Abbey uses Criminals in much the same way. Some of the strange rituals in use by organized crime families tie back to the Malleus Maleficarum or the Lucifer, and a felon displaying knowledge of these rituals may be made an offer he can't refuse. Finally, the Ascending Ones run an incredible amount of drugs, and need people to push for them.

Background: Anyone could end up a Criminal. Some choose to make drugs and sell pirate DVDs rather than get a real job when they get out of college. Some make enough of a profit fencing stolen goods that a real job looks like a chump's game. Many just can't get a break and have to steal purses or starve. Whatever their initial reason for becoming Criminals, they either decide to carry on, or some outside force convinces them that a life on the wrong side of the law is the only way forward they have.

In game terms, Physical Attributes are very useful. Strength is useful for violent criminals and Dexterity for those with a lighter touch. Forgery and confidence tricks rely on Wits and Intelligence. Almost all criminals have two dots

spread between Larceny and Streetwise, with other skills depending on their precise role: Firearms, Intimidation and Weaponry for a tough; Athletics, Investigation and Stealth for cat burglars; Empathy, Persuasion and Subterfuge for con men; and so on. Most have Contacts, Fast Reflexes and some form of Fighting Style among their Merits. Several Criminals sacrifice one or two points of Morality.

Concepts: Career low-life, cat burglar, drug dealer, forger, gun runner, high-rolling con artist, hired gun, hustler, reluctant leg-breaker, safecracker, worn-out fence

Asset Skills: Larceny and Streetwise

Professional Training:

- Mook
- Thug
- Criminal
- Made Man
- Boss

Detective

Uniform found him in four dumpsters, no prints or signs of a weapon. The guys in the precinct were baffled. They gave it to me. They always do.

Whether working on the police force, as part of a private office or on the staff of a global corporation, the Detective's job is to get to the truth. Some rely on forensic analysis; others eschew (or can't afford) scientific backup and instead use their knowledge of people. However he does it, truth is king. And in the World of Darkness, that's not a healthy ambition.

Detectives take up the Vigil for any number of reasons. Some are assigned to investigate strange crimes — bloodless corpses, violent poltergeist activity, a trail of ciphers left by code-talking cultists. Others don't wait for life to lead them to the supernatural. The mark of a good Detective is that she's never off duty. Every word, every strange noise, every weird feeling is a clue to something that's not right. Maybe that something is supernatural in origin. If she goes looking, she'll soon find others who know of the dark secrets hiding in the shadows. However she discovers the world's supernatural side, she has a valuable role to play. The last thing a monster wants is a smart human digging into his business, finding where the bodies are buried and perhaps uncovering a weakness.

Private dicks are free to go after whatever cases strike their fancy — but unless someone offers to pay him for the time he spends hunting, a PI still has to chase cheating spouses and track down missing kids. Investigating strange creatures may keep humanity safe, but it doesn't pay the bills (unless it intersects with an existing case). Even small offices cost rent. Plus, a guy's gotta buy coffee for the morning, booze for the night — or is it the other way around?

Even if she has a precinct house supporting her, a detective can fall prey to isolation. The people around her don't know what she's seen — and would laugh at her if she told them. Working with other hunters is the only help. She needs someone she can open up to; someone she can trust keeps her grounded in the mundane even as her world's turned upside down. When watching over the sleeping city, she needs someone to remind her who she's fighting for.

Some Detectives have forensic backup. Blood tests, chemical analysis, fiber analysis, DNA testing: everything a good CSI team can come up with. The problem is that many creatures aren't normal. A crazed slasher might not have entirely human DNA, while a flock of ghostly ravens leaves no physical evidence. Even with science on his side, a Detective knows how to talk to people and how to read people. Whether it's a conversation in a bar or a formal police interview, a Detective has to know what people *aren't* saying along with what they *are*.

A Detective, whether police or private, has a gap between him and other people. Most folks just don't like being around someone who is — however subconsciously — prying into their personal lives. Some haunt bars to drown their sorrows, some find release in less legal substances, and some face the world in the only way they can: by keeping a watch over it, maintaining the thankless Vigil.

Many hunter groups are glad to have a Detective as a member. Better to have him on the inside, rather than chasing after the motley crew of individuals who go after people with stakes and axes. A homicide Detective can work with a regional group without jeopardizing his job too much, as long as he can keep everything separate. Larger groups retain a number of in-house Detectives, but sometimes hire outsiders for individual cases when they need plausible deniability. Some Detectives join investigatory groups like Null Mysteris, while others go a bit weird and sign up as researchers for Network Zero.

Background: Most Detectives aren't in it for the money (though some earn a pretty penny when working for high-profile clients). Some have a knack for solving problems, while others want to serve justice. Many Detectives have some police training: the majority of private investigators are ex-police. Those who don't often join small agencies that can use their skills — especially in fields such as computer espionage or electronic forensics — and learn on the job.

Dumb Detectives don't solve crimes. Above-average mental Attributes, especially Intelligence and Wits, are key. Many also have a high Presence or Manipulation to extract information from unwilling people. For Skills, Academics (Criminology/Law), Empathy, Investigation and Streetwise are often high. Those with police training will usually have at least a dot in Athletics, Brawl, Firearms, Intimidation and Stealth. Private investigators have a range of possible skills depending on what brought them into the field. Common Merits include Barfly, Contacts and Encyclopedic Knowledge.

Concepts: corporate dirt-digger, CSI, forensic accountant, gentleman detective, hard-drinking PI, Internet investigator, NDA code cracker, old-fashioned police detective

Asset Skills: Empathy and Investigation

Professional Training:

- Clouseau
- Detective
- Sam Spade
- Columbo
- Holmes

Doctor

Upon examining the stomach contents, I identified large quantities of metal and glass, probably ingested by the unidentified creature that took over the body.

Everyone needs to see a Doctor at some point. The human body breaks down, and doctors know how to put it back together. Many Doctors go through medical school and take positions in hospitals. Others find their calling working with dead bodies, performing autopsies to explain how people died. Still others eschew formal medicine, either endorsing alternate therapies like acupuncture and herbalism, or cures with no scientific basis, like homeopathy.

Some doctors run themselves ragged trying to help people, while others care more about the condition than the person (and a few care only for the state of the patient's wallet). Ultimately, their reasons for taking the job don't matter. When an herbalist attends a faith-healing seminar and sees the impossible, he perhaps suspects trickery — and may find that the healer used magic to augment his hands. A consulting Doctor discovers that her oldest, richest patient is missing several vital signs, but can't risk speaking against someone with a wing named after them. The pathologist performing an autopsy finds a cluster of spiders eating away at the body's organs, with their nest in the brain.

Doctors also encounter monsters by their results. Reconstructing a body that's been ripped in two by impossibly powerful jaws gives one Doctor the impetus to take up the Vigil. Another comes to the hunt after she had to identify the victims of a serial killer who were skinned alive by seemingly perfect and impossible means.

When she joins a cell, a Doctor rarely finds rest. Administering first aid to the hunters, stealing anesthetics from the hospital, dissecting corpses to discover how an attack was made... it's all part of a night's work for a Doctor on the Vigil. Her efforts can turn to heal or harm the monsters as well. When a creature is cornered, her knowledge of anatomy and human biology can give her cell the edge when it comes to capturing, poisoning or killing the monster. Some study fiendish anatomy, leaving the realms of human bodies behind. Others aim to rehabilitate humans or creatures through psychotherapy (perhaps coupled with brain surgery). Others still autopsy all the dead things their cell destroys to find out what grisly secrets lie within...and to make sure that the thing isn't getting back up again.

The Cheiron Group employs a number of surgeons both as Thaumatechnological implant technicians and on the front lines. Likewise, the Ascending Ones have Doctors on retainer for isolating the effects of specific drugs. Ashwood takes pride in its Doctor members, though such hunters rarely adhere to the oaths they took (imagine, if you will, a neurosurgeon whose role is to keep a demon alive and comfortable while a cadre of Abbey members dine upon its raw sweetbreads). Others have made a profit conducting "monster autopsies" for Network Zero or performing more scientifically valid studies for the Loyalists of Thule and Null Mysteris.

Background: Traditionally, Doctors go through medical school, then spend time as a resident in their specific field.

It takes a lot of money to become a full-fledged physician, as well as the grit and dedication to live through mistakes that kill people. This experience hardens some Doctors, while others see human beings as complicated machines. Alternative therapies require just as much training as conventional medicine, though practitioners know more about how to deal with people face to face.

Most Doctors have Mental Attributes primary, though no one Attribute stands out above the others. Surgeons and pathologists need a high Dexterity and Composure for their work, while those who speak to patients face to face can benefit more from Presence and Manipulation. Many Doctors have a high Stamina, no matter their other Attributes. Most Doctors will have three dots spread between Medicine and Empathy, with a specialty depending on their field of expertise (Surgery or Psychotherapy, for example). Other common Skills include Academics, Larceny, Politics, Science (Biology) and Socialize, along with any Skills required by her specialty (e.g. Animal Ken for a veterinarian). Holistic Awareness, Iron Stomach and Toxin Resistance are all common Merits.

Concepts: Abortion clinic worker, city coroner, diagnostician, EMT, forensic pathologist, herbal therapist, overworked resident, psychotherapist, triage nurse, veterinary surgeon

Asset Skills: Empathy and Medicine

Professional Training:

- Nurse
- Resident
- Doctor
- Specialist
- Chief of Medicine

Engineer

I'm building a new world, a better world. A world without things that go bump in the night.

Engineers think big. It's a requirement of the job. Whether he's designing a new hospital or coming up with a way to get people into space, at the back of his mind, the Engineer is thinking about the impact he will have. His hospital will change lives. His new drug will make life so much easier for people. It may just be a tiny change, but it's there — a lasting legacy. Some Engineers want to help people, others want to go down in history alongside Henry Ford and Isambard Kingdom Brunel, but whatever their motive, their goals are the same.

What inciting incident might draw an Engineer to the Vigil? A civil Engineer who plans a bridge could put a road through the middle of a werewolf pack's territory, pissing off the creatures that live there. An aerospace Engineer's prototype space-plane comes back with the pilot replaced with biological machinery and claw marks on the wings. A cult kidnaps a chemical Engineer, forcing him to process odd substances and human remains into new drugs. However it happens, an Engineer starts questioning her experience after the fact: What were they? Why did they target her? How did they do what they did? Most importantly, how can she use what she knows to her advantage?

An Engineer working a defense tech trade show is the target of a vengeful ghost. After realizing that what he's been through isn't a lie, he resolves that monsters must be a glitch in the world — and it's up to him to fix it. A biotechnologist works late, taking a shortcut home through an old park where she's set upon by a patchwork man. She takes a sample, and wants to find the creature again to study it. The aerospace Engineer resolves to fly his next mission personally, hoping to make contact with whatever found — and marked — his creation. The Vigil is the perfect excuse for the Engineer to learn more about this world that has been hidden from him for so long, a task he throws himself into. The only problem is that if he's not careful, his work will suffer. Fresh graduates with brilliant ideas all want his job, and if he can't keep his hunt and his work separate, he's going to be in a world of trouble.

The longer the Vigil draws on, the more it takes its toll on an Engineer. The supernatural doesn't have an underlying scientific order. A killer returned from Hell doesn't hold to the rules of human biology. The Reanimated are so much worse than plastic surgery addicts. Every answer brings more questions, and trying to answer those takes more time than the Engineer has. The hunt consumes every waking hour of an Engineer's life. Eventually, something has to break (ironic, given their predilection for building), either at work or at home.

Task Force: VALKYRIE recruits a few who can turn their hands to advanced weapons design, while the Loyalists of Thule prefer to take Engineers who want to continue their studies of monster biology. Engineers with a flexible attitude toward the monsters' rights, or a desire to use what they find to improve humanity, may see the Cheiron Group as a better employer. Chemical Engineers — especially those who might be used to make certain "pharmaceuticals" — might instead be snatched up by the Ascending Ones. Engineers in smaller cells tend to find less use for their "big ideas," and often end up in the hands of larger groups, regardless of intention.

Background: Many Engineers are graduates, but a surprising number are college dropouts. They train themselves, then parlay their skills into a role within a larger organization. From there, they keep learning. Some Engineers never learn how to deal with people, requiring mediators between them and their co-workers. Like it or not, she needs the backing of a big company or the government if she's going to make significant changes.

Whether they completed a degree or not, most Engineers are smart. Some only really know their field, others benefit from nepotism, while a few are true polymaths. Though they specialize in a specific technical field — anything from chemical engineering to architecture — often an Engineer picks up just enough knowledge of other fields to get her colleagues' jokes. While a few achieve worldwide name recognition, many more never escape the cubicle.

In game terms, Engineers often possess high Intelligence, backing that up with a similar amount of Resolve. Those who look after themselves put Physical Attributes secondary, while others see human interaction as a system to learn and understand, preferring Social Attributes. Common Skills include Computer, Crafts, Investigation, Medicine, Persuasion and



Science. Other Skills can range from Brawl or Weaponry to Politics and Socialize, often depending on out-of-work activities. Eidetic Memory, Resources and Status are all reasonably common Merits.

Concepts: Aerospace jock, chemical engineer, demo man, driven architect, designer drug baron, government contractor, military consultant, old-fashioned civil engineer, prosthetic designer, radical biotechnologist

Asset Skills: Crafts and Science

Professional Training:

- Intern
- Engineer
- Team Lead
- Visionary
- CIO

Hacker

Monsters are old fashioned. Most of them don't realize that their paper trails are open to anyone with the right Google-fu.

People who self-identify as Hackers live and breathe computers. Despite the negative connotations the media attach to the word, they hold to the original meaning, found at MIT. A Hacker doesn't lock himself in his room for 36 hours while he plays online computer games, but he just might spend that long solving an interesting problem in an innovative way. Most Hackers think nothing of writing tools that help them

write other tools, on and on until they've spent two weeks making the tools they need to tackle a two-day job. Repetition is boring. Coming up with a way to make someone else do the boring bit is interesting. Hackers focus on the interesting bits to the exclusion of everything else.

A number of Hackers work in technical support, while others provide IT departments around the world with their shining stars. Many don't play well with others, but only a few go to the extent of living on welfare and using their time to solve truly interesting problems. However she funds her life, anyone who specializes in problem solving in a highly technical field is a Hacker at heart.

Hackers have myriad gateways to the Vigil. Fuck with too much corporate security code, and the poor bastard finds a team of pistol-carrying "security forces" storming his hovel, each with a bone-white rebreather mask and mumbling in Slavic. Tap into various CCTV sources, and a Hacker sees things he shouldn't ever see. Go too far out into the null zone of hidden web sites and he discovers that something intelligent — and altogether not human — has contacted him and won't leave him alone.

Most hunter groups are glad to have a Hacker among their number. While they're usually no good at frontline work, a Hacker brings a wealth of backup skills to the group. She tests the cell's plans to destruction and then comes up with ways to fix the bugs. Depending on her specialty, she may be able to

crack a cult's secure mailing list, clone and analyze a sorcerer's hard disk, break the code that a serial killer leaves sliced into the bodies of his victims, or discover the identity of a parasite's latest host through computer-based DNA analysis.

Hackers can become obsessed with the Vigil over time. It's very easy for a computer geek to take home security to an absurd level, living in a Faraday cage in the middle of her apartment with cameras at every entrance and security systems at her fingertips. If her group relies on telephone or Internet contact, it may never know its Hacker has gone shut-in (and maybe they won't care, if she's effective from her "HQ"). It's easy for Hackers of every stripe to detach themselves from the real world. A Hacker disassociates herself from a situation, reducing it to a set of axioms that describe a problem — from vampires using a nightclub as a feeding ground to a ghostly serial killer carving Enochian runes on teenage boys. This disassociation can go too far, especially when she ignores danger in order to get a vital clue. There's a distinct difference between knowing intellectually that she's the next target for a serial killer and feeling the knife slide between her ribs.

Often, Hackers who have a job find it easier to remain employed than other hunters. Some work from home, while others work flexible hours. Both are very common for Hackers working for the latest generation of web companies. Still others just leave when they like — most Hackers bring a wealth of technical skill to their chosen field, and management understands just how bad it would be to lose them. Cheiron is happy to have Hackers at its disposal; after all, what it does is kind of a "hacking" procedure (metaphorically and literally). Network Zero is arguably the most common home for Hackers, whether they're used to reroute a crucial web-feed revealing fuzzy images of some shadowy lake monster or to gussy up a quick set of encryption algorithms to hide the cell's personal data. The Loyalists of Thule, Null Mysteris and Aegis Kai Doru all have their uses for someone who can hack, crack and invent codes or ciphers.

Background: Hackers can come from any background, though usually result from a middle-class home (i.e. someone who has access to a computer). Traditional computer geeks accept anyone who can solve problems regardless of social background, gender or sexuality. For a Hacker, any discrimination is just a bug in the system, something they need to work harder to get around. Most have a university education and further training in their specialized field, but some are self-taught. Most Hackers don't have a wide social network outside the Internet, and often don't have time for a family alongside their obsession.

Mental Attributes are generally primary. High Intelligence and Wits practically define the profession. Physical and Social Attributes tie for second and third place — Stamina and Composure are both often above average, while other Attributes may suffer. It's rare for a Hacker to have less than three dots in at least one of her Asset Skills, and most Hackers have dots in Academics, Crafts (Electronic), Expression, Investigation and Occult among other skills. Common Merits include Eidetic Memory, Encyclopedic Knowledge and any number of Languages. Hackers who have above average equipment also need the Resources to pay for it.

Concepts: Anarchist code-breaker, back-room techie, frontline support operative, NSA cryptographer, old-school phreaker, puzzle expert, shut-in cracker, system administrator, web programmer, wireless war-driver

Asset Skills: Computer and Science

Professional Training:

- User
- Programmer
- Hacker
- Brainiac
- The Government Took Your Computer

Hit Man

When I kill people, I do it for money. It's not a nice job. I don't claim I enjoy it. But sometimes, just sometimes, I get the feeling of a job well done.

A Hit Man kills people for money. He may justify his actions to himself by his range of targets — "no women, no children" is common — but he has turned the art of premeditated murder into a career. Most ply their trade from a distance, doing their job with a single bullet, while others prefer to get in close with weapons that leave less forensic evidence. Whatever their preferred method of murder, a Hit Man has almost surgical knowledge of how to end a human life. That training can come in very handy on the hunt — until she meets something without the vulnerabilities of normal people.

Depending on his employer, a Hit Man can live a range of lives away from the job. Some are family men, their wives and children thinking they have a high-flying (and well-paying) job that takes them from country to country. Many live alone so they don't have to maintain a separate safehouse with their tools of the trade and any incriminating evidence. Whatever their home situation, they have some form of protection that ensures other people don't find out the truth. Some trap their hideouts with thermite and claymore mines. Others have built up one or several comprehensive false identities to keep themselves safe if they are found out.

Some people think it's strange, but many Hit Men don't really know how to fight. They have enough training to join a melee, but their main skills assume an unsuspecting target. Theirs is the art of premeditated murder, and many never see their targets save through a telephoto lens. A Hit Man researches her target, or has one of her associates do it for her, and determines when he is most vulnerable. Then and only then, she strikes.

Hit Men may perform their work alone, but they need associates. Many employ secretaries or partners who have better business sense, entrusting them to work out the details of each hit. Mob Hit Men have this angle covered, while independents have a hard time finding someone they can trust. A Hit Man's partner is the only person she can trust to know the details of her business. The partner deals with everyone from prospective employers to the assassin's family, keeping everything in order so that the Hit Man can do what she does best.

When a Hit Man takes up the Vigil, she'll often try to bring any partners in as well. Without them, she's got nobody

MORALITY

Hit Men sometimes try to mitigate Morality loss. Simply doing their job is a recipe for plummeting Morality, and becoming deranged makes it harder and harder for them to keep doing that job. They have to do something to maintain the balance.

They perhaps play to their Virtues more than other people, stepping in when something looks wrong and trying to make a difference in some small way. While she can't tap her Virtue for Willpower more than once per chapter, acting on it reinforces her sense of self - giving her player a good justification to regain lost Morality points. It's not surprising to find an assassin who works at a soup kitchen, helps train abused animals, or simply acts as a loving family man. Of course, it's also not surprising to find a Hit Man who's cold and narcissistic, gladly putting a knife through a bum's hand before tossing a couple of quarters into his bloody palm.

who knows what she does already, and has to play dangerous games of trust, balancing what she learns and what she tells to her new associates. Worse, joining a new cell of hunters means she has their pending discovery of her *actual* profession hanging over her head. Having partners-in-crime on hand can make that a lot easier.

Larger groups of hunters often have fewer moral problems with bringing Hit Men into their numbers. Some simply take over as a Hit Man's primary employer. A number of compacts and conspiracies are glad to have an assassin on hand to do some wet work: the Union, Task Force: VALKYRIE, the Malleus Maleficarum and so on. Cheiron is always looking for potential recruits with "flexible attitudes" toward their fellow human beings (somebody has to kill the things so others can go to collect the "spare parts"). Some groups have a harder time incorporating paid murderers into their ranks — a Hit Man joining the Long Night must be very sure of his faith and place in the afterlife.

Background: Some Hit Men take the job after spending time in the military. Unwilling to learn new skills, they're unable to support their family without a job that pays as well as the armed forces. A few discover — through whatever means — a natural talent for murder, and look for a way to make their skills profitable. Many come from organized crime: criminals who don't specialize in any role but who don't have the conscience that warns them off killing. However they start, the successful ones become Hit Men. The unsuccessful ones are incarcerated, if lucky, dead if not.

A Hit Man's Attributes play to his strengths. High Dexterity is a requirement for precision aiming. Wits and Manipulation help a Hit Man keep his personal and professional lives separate, while Resolve and Composure both help him deal with what he's seen. Useful skills include Crafts (often with a Gunsmith Specialty), Firearms, Investigation, Persuasion, Stealth, Subterfuge and Weaponry. Most combat Merits don't apply to Hit Men. Many have Allies (a partner or confidant), Contacts (Underworld), Fast Reflexes and Resources.

Concepts: CIA assassin, corporate killer, duelist, infiltration expert, mafia hit man, marine sniper, stone-cold psychopath, unarmed combat expert

Asset Skills: Firearms and Stealth

Professional Training:

- Gun nut
- Hit man
- Sniper
- Professional
- The Bogeyman

Journalist

Some things are too weird even for the Weekly World News. That's not going to stop me taking this all the way to the front page.

Journalists are always on the lookout for a story. Most spend years working for local papers, covering charity bake sales and flower shows before moving on to bigger news — if they ever get that opportunity. Journalists walk a thin line: on the one side, the truth, and on the other, a fiction that's guaranteed to get attention. Whether she works in television, in print or online, a Journalist often builds a following of people who like her work — and when she gets popular enough, of people who hate what she writes.

A Journalist's style depends on who publishes her. A right-wing tabloid encourages a different outlook and a different style of writing to a left-wing blog or a neutral broadsheet. Some Journalists refuse to work for people who don't understand her views on controversial subjects, but for every Journo who takes a stand, three more jump at the chance to reinvent their stance to get a better job. Larger organizations require Journos to file evidence and log facts to back up their stories, covering their asses against libel suits and lying Journalists both, though the truly determined can still game the system. Supermarket tabloids and shitty news rags have the same rule on the books, but it's honored more in the breach than the observance. Hacks who sell in those markets have much greater leeway with the truth.

Evidence is how most Journalists come to the hunt. Whether she captures a photo of a slumlord dissolving into a host of rats, or her exposé of secret meetings in City Hall uncovers robed people conducting human sacrifice, her nose for a story brings her to the dark underbelly of the world. Once she's there, she has to fight back — if only for her own survival. She's got to get the story out. When she does, she'll often find that the only people who believe her are kooks and hunters — if she's able to tell the difference.

Even the most reputable Journalist will have a very hard time getting stories about ghosts or sewer goblins or Reanimated corpses onto the evening news. Tabloids may run the occasional story, but even they have their limits when a whole load of outlandish stories come from just one address (plus, most of what they run is purposefully fake, so what's the use of injecting truth into a bed of lies?). If she's skilled, she can twist her words just enough, substituting rabid dogs for were-wolves or reporting on a serial killer without actually mentioning that the "man" took 10 bullets to the head without dying. She may need to edit photographs or video, but that's the price a Journalist has to pay in order to air her story.

After spending some time on the Vigil, a Journalist's nerves often fray. She constantly looks for the supernatural angle on any story, expecting an explanation that may not be there. Sometimes, she has to take a step back and remember that plain old humans can be plenty fucked up without monsters pulling their strings. Any hope of the prime time slips away, with more and more editors relegating her stories to the slush pile. For many, regaining an even keel takes time that could better be spent sleeping or interacting with normal humans. It's no surprise that most Journalists who take on the Vigil spend at least some time looking out of the bottom of a bottle.

Who can use a Journo? Cheiron needs someone to write its PR (and hide its myriad secrets). Null Mysteris is consumed with the nature of truth (or, some would say, the denial of it), and Journalists can fit right into that equation. Network Zero is a natural home for Journalists, and for good or ill, doesn't have the same pesky "ethics" getting in the way when it comes to reporting "truth."

Background: Some Journalists are college educated; others start blogging or writing for a free paper. Education is less important than training and a desire to print the truth. She needs the skills to uncover her own evidence, and needs an eye for events that could later turn into news. Even when she's just talking to people, she may hear something she deems interesting, and needs to know how to get people to open up.

Resistance Attributes across all three categories are very valuable to a Journalist. Presence and Manipulation help with getting the truth out of people. Of Mental Attributes, Wits is usually higher than Intelligence: the former helps with uncovering clues, while the latter covers interpreting those clues to make a coherent story. Journalists commonly have at least one dot in Expression (specializing in written or video journalism), Investigation, Larceny, Persuasion, Politics, Stealth and Subterfuge. A Journalist in a specific field tends to have skills related to that field, be they Athletics, Brawl, Intimidation, Medicine, Occult, Science or Socialize. Journalists tend to have Contacts, Danger Sense and a small amount of Fame among their Merits.

Concepts: Columnist, conspiratorial blogger, corporate shill, freelance correspondent, lifestyle writer, local editor, muckraking journo, new media critic, political firebrand, sports anchor, TV news anchor

Asset Skills: Expression and Investigation

Professional Training:

- Hack
- Blogger
- Journalist
- Columnist
- Editor

Laborer

You assholes don't like it when people try to take you apart. Funny thing is, I work in a wrecking yard.

Laborers are blue-collar workers. Electricians, builders, joiners, plumbers and demolitions workers all fall under the purview of this profession. Some take up their job out of a love of building things; others couldn't afford college and prefer using their hands. While some take their job to keep their family under a roof, others really take to their role, becoming contractors or foremen and, in time, possibly hiring engineers to help them open a building firm.

There's a strange idea among people who grow up in a white-collar world that Laborers are poor, badly educated, or otherwise not worth an office job. While plenty live the stereotype, it's not always the case. A joiner might not have a clue how to use a computer; a banker wouldn't know how to build a house. Foolish monsters suspect that while a powerful banker going missing means a manhunt, nobody misses a builder or an electrician. They're wrong. Many Laborers have families — even those who work odd shifts have time enough for a wife and children. A wide range of trade jobs are unionized, and even in those that aren't, people look out for each other.

Laborers take up the Vigil for a range of reasons. A building crew that starts work within a skin-stealing spider-creature's territory comes under attack. A plumber notices a 13th floor in a building he's maintaining and goes to investigate (and later wonders at the "missing time" he suffers when he wakes up in his bed). An electrician uncovers a whole bunch of bloodless corpses behind a wall when putting in a fuse box. A demolition crew uncovers a strange artifact and suffers bizarre deaths. Whatever happens, a Laborer is often one of the first targets of a monster on the rampage, and has to fight back.

Those who survive their initial encounter join — or found — monster-hunting organizations, seeing them as a union for people who have taken up the Vigil. A blue-collar worker brings a wide range of skills to their groups. Highbrow groups who shy away from the criminal element may find that a Laborer has physical skills they sorely need. A foreman can look at an individual hunt in the same way he looks at a project. He divides the group's resources and analyzes the critical path of the hunt, knowing where each plan's weak points lie. Maybe the building inspector owes him a favor. Maybe he knows how to demo a wall.

While some employers will tolerate showing up late, dog tired, or hungover, most won't tolerate an electrician who shows up in bloodstained overalls. Word gets around, and bosses talk to each other. A Laborer who's fired from one job has a hard time getting another — though a monster who owns a construction firm may offer a recently fired hunter a



job in return for inside information. Some Laborers with a reputation end up working for mob bosses, who have some under-the-table work for someone who isn't afraid to break heads, while others drop through the cracks. There's always someone who needs a pair of hands willing to work for cash and no questions.

Most Laborers who join large hunter groups fall in with the Union (the ethos is nearly identical, though here the "power to the people" is all about defending innocents from monsters). Cheiron needs project leaders. Task Force: VALKYRIE needs grunts. The Ascending Ones need drug mules. Laborers fit the bill in a lot of these groups.

Background: Most Laborers don't go to college. They take up their trade out of high school, either because they don't have the grades or actually want to make things. Some pour themselves into a single trade; others don't take any job seriously and bounce from site to site until the only paying job they can get is tearing up cars in a wrecking yard. Most Laborers were on a sports team in high school, and some carry on coaching in their free time. Even those with little athletic ability develop muscle after months of heavy physical work.

In game terms, most Laborers have Physical Attributes as their primary, focusing on Strength and Stamina — though an electrician or plumber whose job requires precision will likely have a high Dexterity. High-school dropouts don't necessarily have low

Mental Attributes; they just have a different focus. Laborers who lead a crew need an above-average Presence, and those in dangerous jobs benefit from high Wits. Common Skills include Crafts (with a specialty of the character's trade), Politics (Union), Athletics and Streetwise. Several also have at least a dot in Skills like Brawl, Weaponry, Intimidation and Persuasion. Fast Reflexes, Giant, Iron Stamina and Mentor are common Merits

Concepts: Builder, building superintendent, carnival ride mechanic, demolition man, electrician, factory worker, joiner, old-school blacksmith, plumber, unlicensed contractor, wrench-swinging plumber

Asset Skills: Athletics and Crafts

Professional Training:

- Junkyard dog
- Laborer
- Builder
- Union rep
- Foreman

Occultist

Monsters think we don't know what they're up to. They're wrong.

Occultists come in many varieties. Some are occult investigators, private investigators with a specific interest in ghosts and

Fortean phenomena. They saw a strange creature firsthand and decided they had to know more. Other Occultists read a lot of books, build Kirlian cameras, or start businesses holding séances to contact Grandma (or her dead cat). While some have encountered the true horrors that lie just below the surface of the world, many — most, even — have not.

However she got started, an Occultist needs a range of skills to stay in business. Investigators need to learn how to solve mysteries. Other Occultists hold séances, and understand the differences between what people may mean by “spirit.” Conning old ladies is one thing, but if she’s going to get anywhere as an investigator, she has to know what’s really happened. All Occultists need to find a wide range of equipment for detecting ghosts, demons, auras and other phenomena. Equipment can just as easily be an Electromagnetic Field detector as it can be a Ouija board or an ornate box of bird bones. Plus, those who do run the occult game as a big con likely have a wide array of “people skills,” particularly skills used to cheat and manipulate.

Before taking on the Vigil, most Occultists have only fleeting contact with the supernatural. Sometimes they see the aftermath of a scene (the effects of a visit of a flock of human-faced crows) or catch just a glimpse (trying to contact ghosts in a mirror). Despite their trappings, most investigators are initially unprepared for full-on encounters with things like occult killers, living shadows and bloodsucking fiends.

A few Occultists freeze up on their first encounter with something weird. Whether they witness a magical ritual that actually works, a serial killer shrugging off incineration, or a woman made out of cracked porcelain, their minds cannot process it. Others vow “never again.” Uniquely poised to take up the Vigil, they seek out the monsters to learn from them, to steal from them, and maybe to put them back in the ground where they belong. (Plus, they often have a better idea of what’s supposed to work on monsters, and most have a revolver loaded with silver bullets or a stake and some holy water lying around the office in order to give people the right impression. Of course, just as often they cling to stubborn misinformation pulled from some “spirit guide” or “book of magic.”)

Hunter cells often seek out Occultists, even those who only run their businesses to con impressionable kids and old folks. The average Occultist has something that only a few people possess: a wide range of occult knowledge. Certainly some organizations make use of Occultists more than others: the Aegis Kai Doru, Null Mysteris and the Loyalists of Thule all find a world of use for those with strong esoteric know-how. Ashwood is happy to have those in-vogue Occultists who are social butterflies and see the occult as a doorway to mad adventure. Some Occultists are, curiously, Christian, either having converted or simply studying ways to rehabilitate, diminish or destroy pagan and New Age influences; these hunters often find a home in the Long Night, though even there they suffer the brunt of some suspicion.

Background: Occultists generally come from one of two fields. Some were Detectives first, while most started out with an interest in the occult. The former know how to deal with

people and read crime scenes, and may have some allies from their past life, but don’t know their way around the Key of Solomon. The latter grew up isolated, diving into the occult with a passion but often neglecting other people in their drive for the strange.

Many Occultists have high Mental Attributes, with investigators focusing on Wits while pure Occultists concentrate on Intelligence. Those who actually make money from their occult practices (or are themselves “cult leaders” of a sort) have higher Social Attributes. An Occultist who runs fraudulent séances or who reads tarot cards would need a high Manipulation, for instance, while a cult leader may rely on his high Presence. Occultists often have at least one dot in Academics, Larceny, Occult and Stealth. Paranormal investigators and detectives back that up with Investigation, Streetwise and maybe a bit of Brawl, while Occultists commonly possess Empathy, Persuasion and Subterfuge. Danger Sense, Meditative Mind and Unseen Sense are all common Merits.

Concepts: Cult leader, crystal gazer, deprogrammer, mystical pyramid-scheme seller, New Age author, occult investigator, professional conspiracy theorist, professional skeptic, psychopharmacologist, tarot card reader, UFO theorist

Asset Skills: Investigation and Occult

Professional Training:

- Dabbler
- Occultist
- Initiate
- Acolyte
- Crowley

Professional

Vampires think they know how to enslave people. But they don't have shit on middle management.

Professionals are the white-collar masses. Some are on the up and up, clawing their way to the top, while others have a reputation for being the best in their department, promoted just far enough that they can hide in their cubicles watching YouTube videos. Professionals run the range. The lawyer who works 100 hours a week to crack a case, the banker who spots an ancient embezzling scheme in the old books, and the manager who spends four nights a week screwing his secretary all fit into this profession.

While not immediately apparent, a Professional has skills that are useful on the Vigil. Many higher-ups know how to deal with people and how to get the best out of a team — even if they micromanage or rule by fear. Other Professionals come from a wide pool of white-collar non-technical roles. Lawyers have access to court records and may work pro bono for members of their cell. Accountants can trace a vampire’s books, identifying her havens and exposing deeds signed by a dead woman. Bankers can investigate accounts and can put a stop on funds or bring in the full wrath of a fraud investigation. Stockbrokers can decimate a monster’s financial holdings with just a few days on the trading floor. Stockroom managers can sneak equipment and supplies onto the corporate budget. Professionals can make life very difficult for the monsters.

Though, how is it that a Professional — being in a nominally sheltered profession — is drawn into the Vigil? An accoun-

tant might notice something odd in the company's books: weird ROT-13 ciphers, strange patterns, or dizzying numerological tracts. A lawyer might gain access to any number of horrors: secret video evidence of a CEO sipping at the teats of some demon or a brutal werewolf attack captured on a prison security camera. A manager or administrator wonders who the shadowy figure is sitting in the corner office, or tries to help a co-worker who is slowly losing herself to a winnowing addiction — they assume drugs, but really she's drawn to the blood of a tall man she met at a sex club.

Of course, working as a Professional is *at least* a nine-to-five job. Lack of sleep from spending nights hunting, showing up in the same clothes two or three days in a row, not shaving or showering — soon enough, management will want a quiet word, and offer a few weeks off (without pay) to "get your head together." After time on the Vigil, Professionals need support. The threefold demands of job, family and the Vigil fit together in a way that takes more than the hours in a day. Bosses and co-workers grow suspicious, especially when she starts giving her team extra things to work on or authorizes fraud investigations with no reasonable grounds for suspicion.

Null Mysteris can use forensic accountants or tame bankers, legitimizing the Professional's hunt. The Cheiron Group has plenty of room for desk-jockeys, moneymen and lawyers, and the Ascending Ones can always use someone who can help them launder drug money or defend them in courts-of-law.

Background: Professionals come from a wide range of backgrounds. A number grew up in upper-middle-class homes with their parents pressuring them to go for an MBA. Others started work in the mailroom and worked their way up to middle management one rung at a time. Bankers, accountants and other analysts typically come to the role fresh out of college, while some do the best they can while working through night school. The defining trait for the profession is an aptitude — tapped or otherwise — for a particular role, be that selling shares or delivering mail in an office block.

This translates into high Mental and Social traits, especially Manipulation and Resolve. Physical stats are usually average, but some take pride of place in their position on company sports teams. Most Professionals have some grounding in Academics (relating to their field of business), Politics, Persuasion and Socialize. Those who came in at the bottom of the ladder have other Skills based on their jobs throughout the company, often involving Athletics, Craft, Drive and Investigation. Professionals who come straight from college normally have at least one dot in Athletics, Computer, Science and Subterfuge. Common Merits include Contacts, Inspiring, Resources and Status.

Concepts: Analyst, banker, embattled defense attorney, forensic accountant, hot-shot lawyer, manager, numbers-obsessed stockbroker, secretary who hears all, unsung mailroom hero

Asset Skills: Academics and Persuasion

Professional Training:

- Desk Jockey
- Professional
- Manager
- Associate
- Partner

Religious Leader

The good Lord forgives many things in his infinite mercy. He shall judge abominations like you, not I.

Religion has always played a role in the hunt. In older times, a handful of priests looked after a whole town or village, and people brought (or dragged) supernatural phenomena to the church door. While modern nights have introduced new churches and broadened the number of faiths in most areas, leaders of a religion — be they Catholic or Protestant, Jew or Muslim — still walk close to the dark truths of the world. Many never know how close they come. They hear confession from a vampire, or teach numerology to a cult leader. These are the lucky ones.

A few Religious Leaders get a closer look at the supernatural. Whether they're called upon to remove a poltergeist and end up in conversation with the ghost of a murdered child, or they uncover a twisted killer seeking sanctuary in their place of worship, they must come to terms with one simple fact: monsters exist. This revelation causes a few to lose their faith or go mad, so sure are they that their God could not allow such horrors to walk the earth. Others realize they are the Lord's instrument on earth, and take up the Vigil.

The life of a cleric is good preparation for the hunt. It teaches spiritual fortitude that few other professions attain, and offers many ways to deal with all manner of horror. A priest can build a group of hunters, helping all of them to survive one more night. A rabbi helps the members of his cell strengthen their souls against the intrusions of possession *dybbuk*. He's often responsible for the group's spiritual welfare, and his position means that most members of the group will likely afford him respect even if they don't share his faith.

The burden of being a group's conscience weighs hard on every Religious Leader's mind, and when the group hunts monsters, the burden is doubled. Everyone on the Vigil does things that could be considered sinful or contrary to their own ethical codes. A pacifist kills the cult leader who would sacrifice her daughter. A family man shoots his wife when serpents squirm from her mouth and eyes. A Religious Leader is responsible for his group's spiritual welfare, and must navigate the muddy waters between holy forgiveness and condoning sin. For some, such as fundamentalist priests with fire and brimstone in their sermons, the line is easy. Monsters aren't human, and it's God's will that his holy agents slay the beasts. These priests can become dangers to their own cells. It's too easy to paint an undercover cop investigating allegations of child abuse in the church as an abomination in the eyes of the Lord. It's also easy for them to point a shotgun at a Reanimated nurse who works in a hospital and uses a surgeon's hands to heal people, or at a coven of witches that might otherwise close a fracture in reality. Moral absolutism is a trap that many clergymen fall into after a long enough Vigil — though, admittedly, it can be a comfortable trap to feel righteous.

A Religious Leader must balance the demands of the Vigil with the demands of his calling. A Catholic priest may need to wait until sunrise on a Sunday morning to kill a vampire, but if he can't get to church on time, he's leaving his community without spiritual guidance. Once he takes up the Vigil, his community

calls on him for advice more. He sees the supernatural and unexplained everywhere, in every panicked call from a parishioner, in every tragedy that befalls his congregation. A monk must adhere to peace, but know when to pick up the sword. He must balance his two lives, lest the hunt consume him.

Background: Religious Leaders come from all religions. In the United States, leaders of all flavors of Christianity take up the vigil. Rabbis and imams also fall under this profession, as does any servant of a religion who undergoes specific education and training. It takes a special mindset to give oneself over to the church, a mindset that necessitates strong faith and a desire to both learn and understand.

Social Attributes are normally primary. Many clergymen favor Presence and Composure, though televangelists and the like prefer Manipulation. Mental Attributes focus on Intelligence and Resolve. Most Religious Leaders have at least two dots in Academics (Theology). Many also have a dot in Empathy, Expression, Medicine, Occult and Socialize. Common Sense, Contacts, Holistic Awareness and Unseen Sense are all common Merits.

Concepts: Blood-and-thunder Baptist, conflicted rabbi, callous confessor, jihadist imam, popular televangelist, traveling Catholic exorcist, Vodou *houngan*, Wiccan high priest

Asset Skills: Academics and Occult

Professional Training:

- Lay Priest/Upasaka
- Pastor/Hazzan
- Vicar/Rabbi
- Bishop/Imam
- Cardinal/Ayatollah

Scientist

What I don't think anyone else has realized is this creature sleeps in water. Hence, we have the advantage: my lab has plenty of potassium.

Most people think Scientists are looking for the truth behind the world. That's not necessarily the case. While many get into the profession looking for the truth, they soon find out that science doesn't uncover the truths behind the world, it models the facts that a Scientist observes. This is a crucial difference that most people don't understand.

Scientists often find themselves pulled into the Vigil by friends or associates. A contact might bring her a strange ore sample to analyze. A lab assistant has a photo of what he thinks could be a ghost and dares the Scientist to disprove it. The guys over in the bar want to know if it's possible for a pack of *wolves* to live in the sewers. Only rarely does a Scientist encounter the strange events that lead her to hunt firsthand: a serial killer hunts the Scientists who proved that he wasn't really human, or a strange eschatological cult kidnaps her to sacrifice in a ritual to keep evolution out of their schools. However she starts out, a Scientist is driven by a need to prove (or more likely, disprove what she saw). Some dismiss the supernatural events they witness as too much adrenaline; others realize there's something below the surface and try to explain the creatures of myth and legend.

The Vigil is tough on a Scientist's presumably rational outlook. Either the models they have are wrong and corpses

really do walk the streets drinking blood, or the so-called vampires are something else entirely. A Scientist who encounters such creatures firsthand has to come up with some way to explain what she has seen. Some develop theories, capturing the monsters they encounter in order to better explain them — is a cult ritual really relying on ultra-low-frequency vibrations and hallucinations, or is the 10-legged horror clinging to a meteor actually an extraterrestrial life form? Only experiments will tell. Others brush off such strange encounters, lumping them into an area that science cannot explain.

Cataloguing and modeling the supernatural is hard work. Just when one theory seems to explain all the creatures that a Scientist encounters, an example comes along that blows the whole thing out of the water. Several Scientists find solace in fringe fields like parapsychology, trying to piece together working theories from whatever they can find. Others discard their framework altogether or begin taking wild forays into pseudoscience.

Perhaps the worst part is the hit that a Scientist's reputation takes if he dares to publish one of his theories. The scientific world thrives on peer review: the concept that a theory must be testable and verifiable by anyone. The unique nature of most paranormal phenomena means that even if one Scientist comes up with an experiment to back up his theory, the next time he encounters it, his experiment won't work. Woe betide anyone who tries publishing such a fanciful notion — and a Scientist who spends his time chasing monsters rather than publishing papers soon finds himself unemployed.

Several compacts and conspiracies recruit Scientists. Task Force: VALKYRIE and the Cheiron Group both conduct R&D according to their version of the scientific method. Others are drawn to the approach of Null Mysteris and the Loyalists of Thule, or want their 20 minutes of fame conducting bizarre pseudoscience experiments on Network Zero. Those who reject the paranormal as "beyond science" may find a more welcoming home among the Malleus Maleficarum or Long Night (as not all Scientists are so keen to separate God from the equation). Many Scientists relegate themselves to the background of an organization or cell's activities, but more than one theoretical physicist has taken up a crowbar to beat back a swarm of living dead.

Background: Many Scientists come from estimable universities, and return to those universities to continue their studies and teach. But just as many fall in line with big companies: oil conglomerates, the pharmaceutical industry, food production and government work all need help from biologists, chemists, physicists.

Mental Attributes are usually primary, with Intelligence and Resolve often higher than Wits. Dexterity and Stamina are useful for conducting experiments, as is Resolve, while Manipulation and Presence are both useful for dealing with superiors and bureaucrats. When it comes to Skills, most Scientists have several dots in Science or Investigation, along with a specialty that applies to their field. Other common Skills include Academics, Computer, Medicine, Persuasion and Socialize, with refinements according to specialty — a zoologist or botanist likely has Survival, while a psychologist would have dots in Empathy, and a pop-sci author would have

Expression. Contacts, Encyclopedic Knowledge and Meditative Mind are all common Merits.

Concepts: Atheist author, deranged chemist, disgraced parapsychologist, evolutionary biologist, forensic scientist, geologist, high-school science teacher, paleontologist, polymath, psychologist, religious physicist

Asset Skills: Investigation and Science

Professional Training:

- Lab assistant
- Research assistant
- Scientist
- Think-tank lead
- Brainiac

Socialite

You can't do anything in this city without me knowing. Some influential people owe me favors, and there's nothing you can do about that.

Socialites are the movers and shakers of the social sphere. Most of them have a significant amount of cash that they're not afraid to spend on gala dinners and charity events. Some live in the eye of the media, often famous only because they're in line for a large fortune — or just because they make good tabloid fodder. Others live and breathe high society, with "low society" (read: the rest of the world) never knowing they exist. Socialites may be sportsmen. They may run massive business empires. They may be celebrities.

Their position in society brings many Socialites into conflict with creatures that would control humans. Some vampires talk people round to their point of view at society dinners, then use their playthings for food. Hellfire Clubs and insane cults recruit the rich and famous. A few Socialites pour their money into strange scientific experiments with horrific (or miraculous) results. Some serial killers keep score by the fortunes of those they kill, while other stalkers use black magic to know every inch of their celebrity obsessions. All the money and fame in the world doesn't save someone from the darkness outside.

If a Socialite survives an inciting incident, she can bring her resources to bear. Rumors spread fast, and leaking the right photographs to the right tabloids can work wonders. A Socialite may also join — or bankroll — a group of hunters (think of the weapons or surveillance equipment her vast coffers can buy). A cell gives her the combination she needs: a wide range of skilled people from computer experts to detectives to soldiers, and other people who suspect the truth about the world. She may use herself as a snare for a monster who stalks high society, putting her life in the hands of her cell.

A celebrity who joins a strange organization brings the media's attention to every member of her group, even in the (likely) case that she doesn't advertise her monster-hunting activities. She needs a silver tongue to talk her way out of the inevitable media storm, and to prepare for the next. Non-celebrities don't have those problems. They can sit on the board of the Cheiron Group without anyone batting an eyelid. Socialites who believe they make the world a better place are drawn to the Loyalists of Thule or the Malleus Maleficarum.

Those who prefer to revel in Hellfire Clubs find themselves drawn to the Ashwood Abbey. Others find their family bloodlines include more than just a big bank account...and may instead offer genetics that purportedly link them all the way back to the Devil Himself, making them irrefutable members of the Lucifer "lineage."

Background: Many Socialites are the heirs to or owners of vast fortunes and business empires. They go to the best schools so they can take their name to greater heights. Others are celebrities or the *nouveau riche*. While they often lack the education opportunities afforded their old-money counterparts, they instead have had to earn their place in the news and at charity events with their own skills — whether they're sportsmen or have built a company from the ground up.

Social Attributes are almost always primary. Of the three, Presence and Manipulation are tied for the most important Attribute — some people work through force of personality, while others prefer a more nuanced, targeted approach. Most Socialites keep in shape, meaning they rarely neglect Physical Attributes. Wits is the most important Mental Attribute, closely followed by Resolve. Most Socialites have at least one dot in Academics, Athletics, Drive, Empathy, Persuasion, Politics, Socialize and Subterfuge. Many pick up dots in skills that interest them (as opposed to skills they need), potentially including Animal Ken, Computer, Expression, Larceny, Occult and Streetwise. Socialites can and should spend many dots on Social Merits, including Barfly, Fame, Resources, Retainer and Striking Looks (often through plastic surgery). Other common Merits include Common Sense and a number of Languages.

Concepts: abused heiress, business empire owner, charity queen, devout fashionista, Hollywood mogul, infamous cad, media darling, shadowy CEO, soccer star, tech billionaire

Asset Skills: Politics and Socialize

Professional Training:

- Bit Player
- Known Face
- Socialite
- Life of the Party
- Household Name

Soldier

Some of the things I've seen still scare me. Kids with automatic weapons. Good friends shot dead for no reason. You don't scare me. You can't scare me.

A Soldier is no stranger to horror. The armed forces rewire the parts of a recruit's mind that tell her not to kill or stop her from losing her head during a gunfight. After training, she's shipped out to strange places where people she has never met try to kill her. Bosnia. Iraq. Somalia.

Some Soldiers see their first monster on the battlefield. An enemy sucks the blood from a fresh corpse before tearing through their squad. A swarm of creatures from below the sands works with one mind to destroy a base. A group of refugees uses strange magics to twist the minds of military administration to end a war. Soldiers who witness the horrors of war and the horrors of the World of Darkness often return home diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, to fit back into

a life they left behind. Others, though, keep their heads and work against the monsters on the fields of war.

Away from the battlefield, Soldiers still encounter the world's supernatural underside. One Soldier takes up the hunt after returning home to find her husband and children mutilated and killed by what the police dubbed a "mad slasher" while she was on maneuvers. Another pokes his nose in when his commanding officer starts taking orders from a civilian nobody sees during daylight hours. Others don't believe what they see — if they're drunk or running on 36 hours without sleep, they have plenty of reason to doubt their own senses — but soon understand what they have to do.

Stationed Soldiers who take up the Vigil must keep their hunt under wraps. They stalk monsters with larger groups when they're able to get off base, but military bases have their share of the supernatural for when the group is not around. One base might have a whole squad that has sworn to uphold the Vigil, wherever they are posted. The problem's even worse if the hunters are aboard a ship or submarine. While Soldiers can't take automatic weapons off base, many hunters smuggle smaller arms with them to protect themselves. Those who leave the forces often keep their service pistols, and with a network of contacts and old Soldiers, they can get their hands on much bigger armament.

A Soldier brings more to a group of hunters than just access to guns. She's trained in combat and small-unit tactics

— exactly the sort of thing a cell needs to know. Officers have a better grasp of tactics, and sergeants know how to motivate people going into dangerous situations. The difference between Soldier and civilian can really raise tension in a hunter group. The Soldiers stop trusting the civvies to do their part because they haven't gone through the same shit the Soldiers have. Civilians, for their part, refuse to take orders from someone who shows up and bosses them around without asking them to put their specialized knowledge to good use. When a cell has more than one Soldier, it has to ensure they don't split into factions.

Fighting humans on a battlefield is a damn sight easier than fighting a monster off it. A vampire kills perfectly good people not because the humans would kill it, but because murder is part of its own sick life. A cult kidnaps people not because it wants information but because the cult believes it can trade life for power. Some Soldiers have real problems fighting things that aren't out to kill them, while others throw themselves into the fray with gusto.

Away from the forces, some Soldiers go right back to the soldiering life with Task Force: VALKYRIE, or get jobs in private security firms. The Cheiron Group is always in need of volunteers for experimental surgery, and Soldiers have all manner of skills the group can use (and all manner of wounds and derangements that Cheiron may hope to "repair"). The Union recruits veterans who saw 10 shades of Hell during



their tour of duty. The Ascending Ones often recruit old Soldiers as protection, or ship Elixirs and drugs between bases.

Backgrounds: Military training and induction is physically and mentally demanding on a recruit, as it must leave a Soldier willing to listen to orders that no sane man would follow. She has to keep herself in good physical shape, and that continues even after she leaves the forces. Many carry their sense of discipline through to their civilian lives, showing in their conservative choice of clothes, cars and other accoutrements.

In game terms, Soldiers tend to have Physical Attributes as their primary. Wits is also usually high, leading to high Defense. Composure and Resolve both help a Soldier deal with some of the things he sees on the battlefield. Most Soldiers have at least one dot of Athletics, Brawl, Crafts, Firearms, Intimidation, Medicine, Stealth, Survival and Weaponry. Most combat Merits are reasonably common, especially a Fighting Style, along with Gunslinger and Strong Back — though a good sergeant likely also has Inspiring.

Concepts: AWOL pilot, drill sergeant, grizzled veteran, ground-pounder, icy marksman, PTSD-rattled Soldier, persuasive recruiter, private mercenary contractor, Special Forces psychopath

Asset Skills: Firearms and Survival

Professional Training:

- Grunt
- Private
- Sergeant
- Lieutenant
- General

Technician

It's a zip gun with a shotgun shell and a sharpened table leg. Let's see fang-face get up after that happens to his heart.

Technicians get their hands dirty fixing things. Whether they're car mechanics who can rebuild the engine for a '76 Ford pickup while blindfolded or the kid everyone goes to for computer repairs, they've got skills other people don't have and they like putting them to use. They don't think they're building a better world; they just like fixing old things and building new ones.

Quite a few Technicians are backyard inventors, with one or two projects they work on when things get quiet. When an inventor takes up the Vigil, it's only natural that he starts coming up with things that will help his fellow hunters. More than one cell has taken down monsters that should have torn its members apart, through a combination of dedication, tactics and jury-rigged devices. While they often don't work more than once, stories of these monster-hunting weapons and traps go on the Internet and other cells pick up and improve upon what may have started as an unreliable Rube Goldberg machine.

Like most hunters, Technicians come to the Vigil through their jobs. A mechanic moves the wrong tarp, revealing a vampire who's sleeping through the day with blood still crusted on his chin. A kid repairing a computer for the strange lady down the street finds a Word document on turning cats into her "familiars" (just add the blood of an only

child). A Technician out to fix a refrigerator finds human remains in the icebox. A gunsmith fixes a revolver that's got silver residue around the tip of the barrel and can't help but ask the owner why. Most can't resist the urge to look just that little bit further than they need to; it's the same impulse that leads them to figure out how things work in the first place.

Once they know the truth, most Technicians know they have to do something. After all, they're used to helping people. The Vigil is the obvious step. Whether a mechanic steps in with a monkey wrench and a getaway car to save his daughter's school from a twisted killer or an electronics geek builds spy gear to listen in on the cult meeting in the mayor's office, the hunt is full of interesting ways to show what anyone can do.

Those who manage to survive more than one hunt go on to join larger groups, supporting the group with equipment and ideas in the background, and then proving that they can do so much more on the front lines. Some express their wilder theories and inventions with like-minded hunters on the Internet. Technicians have a prominent home in compacts and conspiracies like the Cheiron Group ("Tom, I need your thoughts on how to repair this knee replacement"), Task Force: VALKYRIE ("Tinker with this auto-turret, fast — we need it to trigger when a specter enters the room") and Null Mysteris ("Will a Kirlian camera work to capture the aura of these witnesses I have in the other room?").

Backgrounds: Technicians are generally bright, but quite a few don't realize their own ability. For some, a quirk of learning or personality keeps them from college, while others find their time on campus gives them the skills they really need. Most would rather be building something than learning in a classroom. In addition to inventors, several Technicians care enough about their community to join neighborhood watch programs, or just break up bar fights with a few choice words and a heavy wrench.

In game terms, most Technicians have above average Intelligence combined with medium-to-high Physical attributes — electrical savants need high Dexterity to keep their hands steady, while mechanics get more use out of Strength. Most keep Social Attributes at two dots or higher, simply because nobody goes to an unlikable bastard when they need work done. With regard to Skills, most have at least a dot of Crafts (and a specialty relating to their field), Drive, Investigation and Science, backed up with Skills appropriate to their field, from Athletics and Weaponry to Computer and Larceny. Common Merits include Common Sense, Fresh Start and enough Resources to buy their equipment.

Concepts: chop shop auto mechanic, computer repairman, garage inventor, gunsmith, jack-of-all-trades, "Mister Fix-It," special effects wizard, unconventional weapons designer, video engineer

Asset Skills: Crafts and Investigation

Professional Training:

- Dabbler
- Technician
- Garage Inventor
- Junkyard Wizard
- MacGyver

Vagrant

I ain't nobody's collateral damage or acceptable losses. I got a soul the same as any sonofabitch.

Lots of people write Vagrants off as worthless. They're the ultimate underclass — homeless, often jobless, and seemingly worthy only of society's derision or pity. Every city has them, huddled in shelters and doorways for warmth or begging for cash to buy food. All too often, the only people to notice when one Vagrant goes missing are the other bums. Monsters can easily feast on Vagrants like they're an open buffet with free salad bar. Some of them survive their encounters with the shadows. Some of them decide to fight back.

Few come to the "vagrant life" the same way. A family of illegal immigrants sleeps alongside a dot-com coder who didn't see the bubble bursting. Their only common factor is that they live on the streets, taking one day at a time. Some are drug addicts, some are mentally ill — most who have one problem have the other to look forward to — but many are clean. Most people don't care to make the distinction. They overlook street people, and after a while, the Vagrants get used to it. They band together, with disparate origins but shared problems. They look out for each other simply because the others look out for them. Some fight. Some attack other Vagrant gangs. But a group survives a lot longer than one man alone.

Despite what proponents of the free market would like to think, many Vagrants can't just "get a job." They don't have the things that jobs need — fixed addresses, telephone numbers, bank accounts and the like. The myth of working up from flipping burgers or pushing a mop is for many just that: a myth. Instead, Vagrants need other ways to survive. Some beg for money, others scavenge or steal whatever catches their eye. When one goes missing, his fellows ask questions. The cops may never find any extra bodies, but some bums know where they're all buried.

Whether they survived a monster attack or saw a cult dragging their best friend off for a human sacrifice, some Vagrants know the score. People and things are preying on them, and it's only a matter of time before they succeed. A Vagrant has to fight back. Intelligent spider colonies looking to hollow out a human body, crazed organ thieves, or rich old lords out on a hunt for "foxes" (codename for human prey) — in the end, it doesn't matter. She's used to desperation, to making hard decisions in the blink of an eye, because if she doesn't, she dies.

A Vagrant knows her part of the city like few others. She goes wherever she can by any means she can. She knows who's dealing in what and what they're charging. Hell, on a particularly flush day she may just partake — or lift something from the dealer. If she joins a group of hunters, she has skills from her life before the streets as well as everything she's learned since then to bring to the table. Of course, she may end up sleeping on the table if the weather gets too cold, but them's the breaks.

Cheiron sometimes kidnaps Vagrants to test Thaumatechnology on them, and if the strange grafts take, they're recruited as agents. Other groups sometimes recruit directly from the streets. The Malleus Maleficarum and the Long Night often run soup

kitchens or shelters, and the Vagrants who take sanctuary in such places may end up with a new faith and a rifle in hand. Some Vagrants are Lucifuge, maddened by horrific nightmares and driven to a lost life...until the Devil's children come calling. Ashwood Abbey runs a curious "recruitment drive" once per year. They pick up a single Vagrant from the streets and give him a gradual taste of the good life: food, wine, clean linens, steam baths. The taste, of course, gets stranger and stranger, and if the Vagrant seems to find the mad pleasures to his own predilections, the Abbey extends an invite.

Background: A Vagrant knows whatever she knew before living on the streets, but she picks up some other skills pretty damn quick. She has to know how to find warm places to sleep when the snow comes in, which shelters are worthwhile and which lead to people vanishing, and where she can get a good meal. Often, she picks up on everything that's going on around her while waiting for the next guilt-ridden professional to drop her some pennies.

Most Vagrants build up their Stamina. Surviving is very hard if you get sick easily, and if you're already sick when you hit the streets, you either dig deep or you die. High Wits and Composure are a must to know what's going on around you. Other Attributes depend on her previous life; an athlete is going to have a very different spread to a banker. After hitting the streets, most focus their Skills on Animal Ken, Brawl, Intimidation, Larceny, Medicine, Stealth, Streetwise, Subterfuge and Survival. Holdover Skills often include Computer, Investigation, Athletics, Politics or Science. Contacts, Iron Stomach and Natural Immunity are often features of a Vagrant's Merits. A lot of Vagrants have Flaws that are very common, especially Derangements and Addictions.

Concepts: Dot-com burnout, homeless ghost-talker, illegal immigrant, junkie with visions, schizophrenic, shaman of the rust, subsistence thief

Asset Skills: Streetwise and Survival

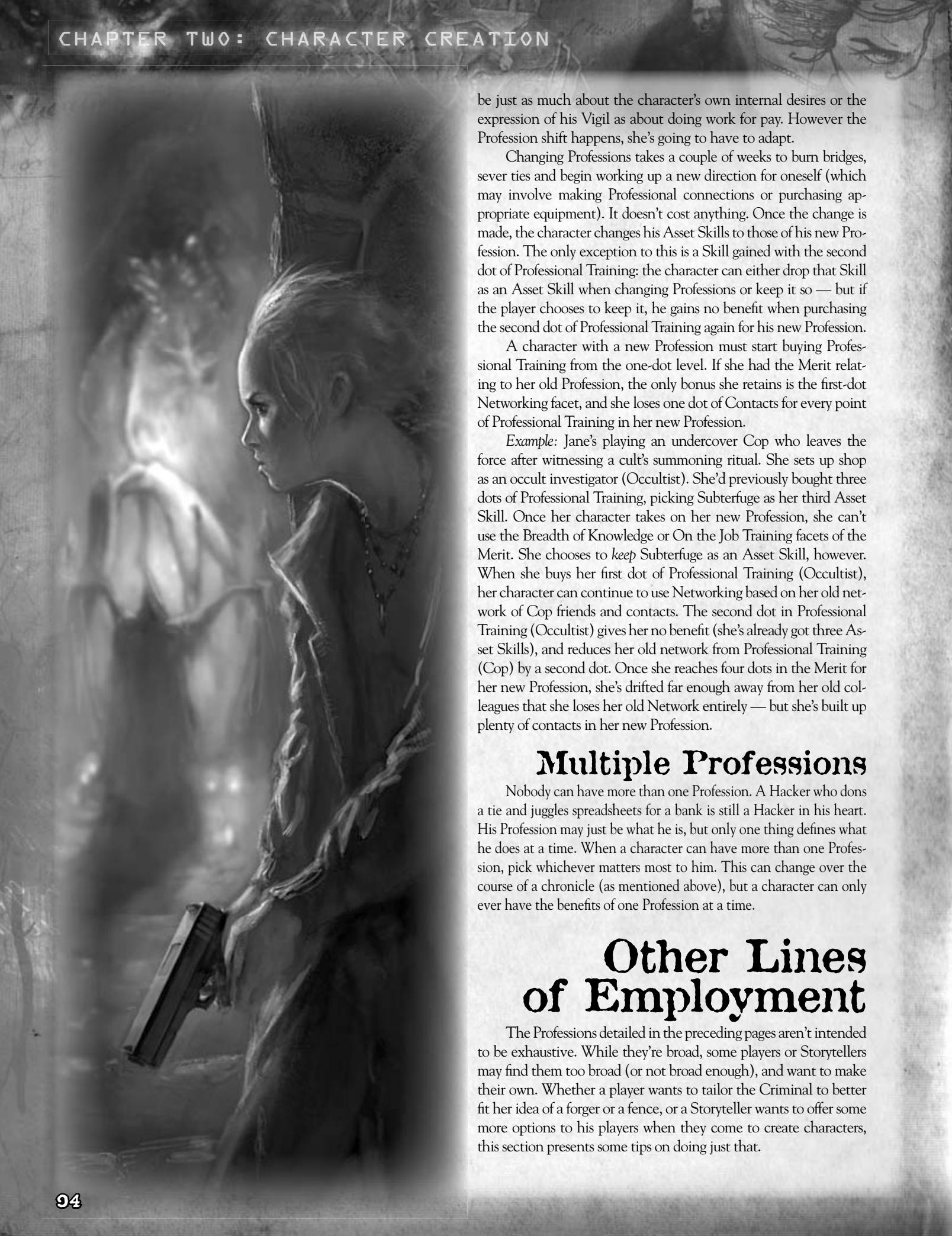
Professional Training:

- Trash
- Bum
- Vagrant
- Hobo
- Rat King

Changing Fields

Few people have one job their whole life. A Soldier leaves the military and joins the police force, putting his skills to use. An Artist makes a big name for herself, and uses her new fame to move in social circles that were once above her. A Laborer heads to college, needing to re-train. An Athlete loses his leg to a cackling slasher, leaving him to find another means to support himself.

However it happens, a character may come to a point in her own story when she changes Profession. Sometimes, that change happens in downtime, for reasons unrelated to the hunt. Other times, her new vocation comes as a direct result of her Vigil. Again, it doesn't always have to do with making money: a hunter who earns a paycheck setting up emergency "hot-zone" bunkers for VALKYRIE may continue to earn that paycheck but still change his Profession from Technician to Artist if he begins to embrace his inner creative side more and more. Profession can



be just as much about the character's own internal desires or the expression of his Vigil as about doing work for pay. However the Profession shift happens, she's going to have to adapt.

Changing Professions takes a couple of weeks to burn bridges, sever ties and begin working up a new direction for oneself (which may involve making Professional connections or purchasing appropriate equipment). It doesn't cost anything. Once the change is made, the character changes his Asset Skills to those of his new Profession. The only exception to this is a Skill gained with the second dot of Professional Training: the character can either drop that Skill as an Asset Skill when changing Professions or keep it so — but if the player chooses to keep it, he gains no benefit when purchasing the second dot of Professional Training again for his new Profession.

A character with a new Profession must start buying Professional Training from the one-dot level. If she had the Merit relating to her old Profession, the only bonus she retains is the first-dot Networking facet, and she loses one dot of Contacts for every point of Professional Training in her new Profession.

Example: Jane's playing an undercover Cop who leaves the force after witnessing a cult's summoning ritual. She sets up shop as an occult investigator (Occultist). She'd previously bought three dots of Professional Training, picking Subterfuge as her third Asset Skill. Once her character takes on her new Profession, she can't use the Breadth of Knowledge or On the Job Training facets of the Merit. She chooses to *keep* Subterfuge as an Asset Skill, however. When she buys her first dot of Professional Training (Occultist), her character can continue to use Networking based on her old network of Cop friends and contacts. The second dot in Professional Training (Occultist) gives her no benefit (she's already got three Asset Skills), and reduces her old network from Professional Training (Cop) by a second dot. Once she reaches four dots in the Merit for her new Profession, she's drifted far enough away from her old colleagues that she loses her old Network entirely — but she's built up plenty of contacts in her new Profession.

Multiple Professions

Nobody can have more than one Profession. A Hacker who dons a tie and juggles spreadsheets for a bank is still a Hacker in his heart. His Profession may just be what he is, but only one thing defines what he does at a time. When a character can have more than one Profession, pick whichever matters most to him. This can change over the course of a chronicle (as mentioned above), but a character can only ever have the benefits of one Profession at a time.

Other Lines of Employment

The Professions detailed in the preceding pages aren't intended to be exhaustive. While they're broad, some players or Storytellers may find them too broad (or not broad enough), and want to make their own. Whether a player wants to tailor the Criminal to better fit her idea of a forger or a fence, or a Storyteller wants to offer some more options to his players when they come to create characters, this section presents some tips on doing just that.

Specialization

If a player wants to focus on a specific area of a Profession, there are a few things she can do before creating a whole new Profession. Most obviously, she can note her specific title for the Profession in the same way as a specialty. This helps reinforce the difference between a Criminal (Dealer) and a Criminal (Forger) or a Journalist (Blogger) and a Journalist (On-Air Personality). This specialty will probably echo a specialty in one of the Profession's Asset Skills.

Above and beyond that, the second dot of Professional Training allows a character to broaden his horizons, adding a third Asset Skill. Players who want to explore a specific niche of a Profession should note that taking this level of the Merit during character creation can take her free specialty in her new Asset Skill. This is especially valuable for concepts that fit into one Profession, but in an area that would be better served with a different Asset Skill.

Source

The first question to ask is "Where is this Profession coming from?" Is it a new creation that doesn't fall under one of the existing Professions, or is it mentioned as part of a Profession that otherwise doesn't seem to fit? Once you've worked this out, you'll have a better idea of what you want from the Profession. Something created whole cloth will normally be broader than a slice off an existing write-up. That's not always true — if you wanted to make Musician a separate Profession to Artist, both may still be just as broad as each other — but it gives you a starting point.

Work out what the Profession does, what kinds of jobs and roles it covers. Feel free to borrow or steal ideas from the existing Professions when describing this — not just the job description, but how a typical member of the Profession tends to think. Try to answer as many of the following questions as possible.

- Does she approach her job as just something she does for money, or does it give her a chance to learn and use skills that she wouldn't otherwise?
- Does the job require special training?
- Does it give her access to equipment and resources that she wouldn't otherwise have?
- Do most members of the Profession come from a specific social class?

Bear in mind that there's nothing wrong with going against these suggestions when creating a character, but it helps give the Storyteller an idea of what the archetypal Musician, Forger or Drug Chemist is like.

The Candle in the Dark

Next, you have to consider how the Profession intersects with the Vigil. Some Professions work better for low-level games — street criminals, vagrants, laborers and anyone else who looks like easy prey to a monster. If your new Profession doesn't have a "street level" hook into the hunt, you need to work out how members of this Profession can find out about the darkness, and what they do about it when they know. The following questions cover that aspect:

- What are some common ways that members of this Profession first encounter monsters (i.e., the "inciting incident")?

- After their first encounter with the supernatural, what about the Profession pushes them to confront the supernatural?

- Do any of the Profession's Skills have particular use when hunting monsters? A Technician can build weapons and equipment, a Hacker can trace computer records, a Detective or Journalist knows how to find clues, an Occultist knows the folklore behind the monster, and so on.

- How do members of this Profession react to the Vigil in the short term? Do they see it as an interesting distraction, or something they throw themselves into full time?

- What effect would carrying on the Vigil have on members of this Profession over the long term?

Differentiation

Consider what makes this Profession unique. A "Con Man" Profession may encompass a whole range of white-collar criminals, while Criminal remains the standard Profession for muggers, leg-breakers, and other blue-collar workers on the wrong side of the law. This is your chance to say "[Profession X] was too limited and didn't have the focus for people who do [Profession Y]. This Profession has that focus, but doesn't care so much about another integral part of [Profession X]." The clearer you are, the easier it is for other players to know what makes your Profession unique.

Also think about people who go into your Profession. What are they like? Did they go to college or drop out of high school? Do they need proficiency for a certain subject, or do they get training on the job? The preceding questions define what a person who takes your Profession does; now you need to define what they were like in their life before taking on the Profession.

Character

As a result of working out the typical background for a member of your Profession, you probably have an idea of what Attributes, Skills and Merits a member of your Profession should have. Note those down. If a musician needs above-average Presence or a Forger needs both Dexterity and Wits, make it plain. Likewise, list a few Skills — no more than half a dozen to begin with, but if your Profession is sufficiently broad, you may find you need more. Finally, what three Merits are most likely among members of your Profession?

All this information is a guideline for prospective players, but it serves another purpose. Not every student is going to have dots in Streetwise or the Iron Stomach merit. These suggestions come in handy for a Storyteller who needs a rough sketch of a character immediately. Assume two dots in every Attribute and none in Skills, raise any mentioned Attributes to three or even four dots, and assume ratings between one and three dots in each mentioned skill. Pick two or more of the Merits, and the character has enough statistics to be useful in a range of circumstances. Players and Storytellers both benefit from Professions, after all.

Finally, work out the two Asset Skills for your chosen Profession (see p. 74), think up some evocative titles for each rank of Professional Training (p. 67), and you're done.

Flesh Trade Pt III

PAGE 01 OF 03	DTG RELEASE TIME		PRIORITY		CLASS		SPECIAL		AMR		CIC		ORG-MSG IDENT	
	DATE TIME	MONTH	REL	INFO	RR	RR	UUUU							0470730Z
MESSAGE HANDLING INSTRUCTIONS														
by Mike Lee														

"A reporter?" Jack gave Vince a dubious eye as he turned the van onto North Broad Street. "I thought you didn't like reporters."

It was past midnight, and the temperature was dropping quickly. The van's heater was broken, leaving its occupants to huddle deep in their jackets and watch their breath plume in the air. Vince shrugged his broad shoulders. "This guy's not your typical vulture," he said. "He used to work as an investigative reporter for the Inky until they got tired of his conspiracy theories."

The baby-faced detective frowned thoughtfully. "Wait a minute," he said. "You're not talking about that guy who claimed the Mayor was a slave to some... zombie?"

"Vampire, but yeah, that's the one."

"Jesus, Mary and the saints," Dean moaned. His mother had been born in County Cork, back in the old country, and when he was upset, his voice took on the lilting notes of his forebears.

Gabreski chuckled. "You haven't heard the half of it, kid. When the Special Cases Unit was first put together, some joker in the Mayor's office told him our job was to handle reports like his. He must have called me every day for the first six months, telling me all kinds of crazy shit. Claimed to have all kinds of evidence, too, but somehow or another, he always managed to lose track of it before he could bring it in to show me."

Dean shook his head. "Sounds like the guy needs to be on some expensive medication, if you ask me."

Gabreski's smile faded. "Yeah, I thought so too, until tonight." He glanced out the window at the rainy streets. Once upon a time, he thought he knew this city down to its very bones, but now every dark alley seemed strange and secretive to him.

"Anyway, he freelances now," Vince continued. "Last I heard, he was living out of his car and working in coffee shops, selling stories to fringe magazines and web sites."

"So why the hell are we going to talk to him?" Dean said.

Vince sighed. "Because the guy is wired into this city in ways you wouldn't believe. Since we can't use official sources, he's the next best thing. And frankly, this sort of shit has his name written all over it."

After a moment, Dean nodded. "Yeah, I guess it does, at that," he said.

15TR

ROUTER TYPE OR NAME TITLE OFFICE SYMBOL PHONE

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS

ROUTER TYPE OR NAME TITLE OFFICE SYMBOL AND PHONE

ROUTER

SECURITY CLASSIFICATION
CLASSIFIED

DATE TIME GROUP

Gabreski glanced over his shoulder to check on Andrea. "Getting any better?" he asked.

Lupe had bandaged Andrea's shoulder and, after massaging the muscles of her right arm, they'd managed to bend it enough to put it in a sling. Raimundo's sister had found a shirt in her closet that the detective could wear, and Vince had pushed a wad of bills into the nurse's hands on the way out the door. Now Taggart sat on the bare floor of the van opposite Raimundo, wrapped in her torn jacket and sipping from Lupe's bottle of rum.

"I can wiggle my fingers a little, and my arm and shoulder are throbbing like a son of a bitch," she said grimly, though there was a glimmer of relief in her eyes.

Gabreski nodded. "That's some good news, at least. Raimundo, what about our friend?"

The gang leader eyed the prone form of the suit. Vince had handcuffed the man and they'd wrapped him in a threadbare blanket. Raimundo shrugged. "He's still out, man. Lupe said he might have a cracked skull. He'll come around when he comes around, I guess."

"Here we go," Jack said, pulling up to the curb in front of Blackfriar's Café. "You see your guy in there?"

Vince scanned the café's tall windows. Blackfriar's catered mostly to the students up the street at Temple University, and many of the tables Gabreski could see were occupied. "Yeah. There he is," he said, spying a gaunt figure hunched in a corner booth. "Get in there and get us some coffee while I talk to this guy. This won't take long."

Gabreski stepped out into the cold, wet air, conscious of the wind seeping through the tear in his jacket sleeve and freezing his wounded arm. The shirtsleeve beneath was stiff with dried blood. Out of habit, he straightened his jacket and surreptitiously checked the seating of the pistol at his hip, then made his way into the café.

Heads turned as Vince stepped in out of the night. A pair of teenagers near the café's gas fireplace rose hurriedly and headed for the door, shoulders hunched and avoiding the detective's gaze. He ignored the dealers and made his way to the back of the coffee shop. The reporter was typing fitfully on a battered-looking laptop, surrounded by a disorderly pile of papers, books and pages of grainy digital photos. He looked like a day-old corpse in the pallid glow of the computer screen: gaunt face shadowed with stubble, sunken eyes and lank, greasy black hair that fell in a tangle to the young man's shoulders. An unlit cigarette dangled from the corner of the reporter's thin lips.

He didn't look up as Vince approached. For a guy who saw monsters and bizarre conspiracies around every corner, he was awfully damned oblivious, Gabreski thought.

"Hello, Junior," Vince growled. The wooden seat creaked as he wedged his bulk into the small booth. "What's shakin'?"

The reporter jerked back as though stung. For a moment, it looked as though he was going to grab his laptop and bolt for the door. "I asked you not to call me that, Detective," the young man stammered. "My name is Karl. And I haven't called you in, like, months. The restraining order was really specific -"

"Yo, Karl, relax," Vince said, cutting off the reporter's rapid-fire chatter with a wave of his hand. "All's forgiven." He pointed at the cigarette. "Those things work better when you light them, you know."

Karl eyed the detective bemusedly. "Huh? Oh. Yeah, I was just about to step out and smoke, but I got an IM from this guy who's with Network Zero..." His gaze returned to the screen. Vince watched Karl's eyes move as he read something, then the reporter's thin, nicotine-stained fingers tapped out a staccato reply.

The detective grinned. "Network Zero? Is that some kind of cable-access channel?"

"Yeah, something like that," he said, glaring at Vince over the top of the laptop's screen.

Gabreski started to scowl at Karl, but forced himself to relax. He reached over and picked up one of the digital prints. "What are you working on right now?"

"Disappearances down by the river," Karl replied absently. He glanced up, saw what Vince was doing, and with surprising speed he snatched the print from the detective's hand. "The victims are homeless people. This is an image from one of the police's closed-circuit cameras that shows the perpetrator."

SUBJECT: OMFG...Image capture from Saturday Night
FROM: luvmacheen@gnx.net
TO: thegauntman@voldstadt.org
📎 imgcapture.jpg

Hey Karl,
This is a still from one of our cameras down at the docks. I don't know
what in the hell that thing is on the right side, but the son of a bitch is
huge. Got any ideas on what we are dealing with here.

Doug



Karl handed the print back. Gabreski kept his temper in check and took another look at the image. After a moment, he saw the low-slung form in the corner of the photo. It was looking in the direction of the camera, its eyes shining like coins in the reflected light. "Looks like a big dog," he said. "Maybe a coyote? Those damn things are turning up all over the place these days."

"Typical," Karl muttered, scowling. "Compare the size of that thing to the car it's trying to hide behind. That beast is huge."

Vince shrugged. "Sure. So's my neighbor's Newfoundland. If it's not a dog, what else could it be?"

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you," he mumbled, typing a bit more. "Whatever, ways." He pointed to the screen. "This guy here is part of a group trying to get the truth out, and he's interested in hearing what I've got to say."

Vince considered his reply carefully. Setting the print back atop the pile, he said quietly, "What if I told you that I saw something tonight?"

Karl's dark eyes flicked up from the screen. "Something?"

Gabreski took a deep breath. "Okay. A monster."

The reporter stared at him. "You're fucking with me."

"Not this time," Vince said. "I'm here because I need your help. I need information, Karl, and I need it fast."

The reporter's eyes narrowed. "What kind of information?" he asked.

"I need to know who bought or leased a warehouse in Kensington," Vince said, giving Karl the address. "The ID is probably an alias, but there's got to be some kind of paper trail out there."

"Now I know you're fucking with me," he said. "You can call your buddies downtown and get that info in, like, two seconds."

Vince leaned forward, resting his elbows on the table. "Not this time. People downtown will want to know why I'm interested. And they won't believe what I've got to tell them. Sound familiar?"

The reporter studied Vince for several long moments. His gaze fell to the screen again, and his fingers clattered on the keyboard some more. "How does this tie in to what you saw tonight?"

"First things first. Can you get me the information? I'm pressed for time here."

Karl didn't answer right away, leaving Vince to listen to the rattle of keys for almost a full minute.

Finally the reporter leaned back and folded his arms. "Yeah. I think I can do that. On one condition."

"What?"

"I get the full story. When a cop like you starts to believe in what's out there, it's big news."

Vince grinned. "Sure, Karl. No problem. I'll get back to you once this is done and tell you everything."

"Give me a break, man. Do I look that dumb?" He barked laughter. "I'm going with you."

Now it was Vince's turn to laugh. "No chance, kid. I don't do ride-alongs."

"Suit yourself. I'm gonna go smoke."

Vince gritted his teeth. "Okay, fine. You come along. It's your funeral. If you can get me what I need in the next hour."

The reporter leaned back against the wooden backrest, giving Vince a Cheshire-cat smile. "A whole hour? Man, get with the times. The warehouse was bought by a guy named Lermontov," Karl said, glancing at the screen. "You want his home address?"



Chapter three

Compacts and Conspiracies

The odds, they're not good. Oh, they should be—humanity's herd has all the numbers it needs to take the war to the monsters. Mortal beings could swarm them, casting light into the shadows, illuminating the darkest corners with a blanket of cleansing fire. If the herd were to stampede, it would crush all the creatures beneath its thundering feet.

Sadly, it doesn't work like that. Humans remain ignorant. Some do it by choice (it's the same ignorance that informs a blindness to war, poverty, and all the pain of the world). Others are kept in the dark by the dominant monsters, those creatures representing a distinct minority with control over the blind, deaf and dumb majority.

Hunters are different. They can no longer abide the ignorance, even if they'd like to. The scales have fallen from their eyes, and the truth stands revealed. They can't just turn it off. They can't pretend not to see what's happening to the neighbor girl or that poor homeless dude with the one atrophied leg. Hunters cannot be blind, not to the pain, not to the power.

But standing alone against the night, reaching into the dark to grab hold of justice or revenge, that's a sure way to lose a hand. So, hunters gather. They support one another in disparate cells, but even that's not enough. Five guys holding back the encroaching shades are five guys who hopefully put some money down on a casket and a good estate lawyer. But what if those five guys find five others? Men and women committed to the cause, determined against all sanity to uphold the Vigil?

Soon, they form compacts, smaller sects of hunters with decentralized direction but pooled resources. Particularly old compacts change, shift, often grow. They fade deeper into the fog, becoming true conspiracies—from beyond the prying eyes of both human and monster they work at a ceaseless and often deranged Vigil that has played out over centuries, if not millennia.

Below, you'll find several of the compacts and conspiracies that conquer, connive and compete within the World of Darkness.

The list of second-tier compacts are:

Ashwood Abbey, pp. 102-105

Long Night, pp. 106-109

Loyalists of Thule, pp. 110-113

Network Zero, pp. 114-117

Null Mysteris, pp. 118-121

The Union, pp. 122-125

The list of third-tier conspiracies are:

Aegis Kai Doru, pp. 126-129

Ascending Ones, pp. 130-133

Cheiron Group, pp. 134-137

Lucifuge, pp. 138-141

Malleus Maleficarum, pp. 143-145

Task Force: VALKYRIE, pp. 146-149

In addition, you'll find information on the strange (and by many definitions supernatural) Endowments offered to those hunters of the various third-tier conspiracies. These Endowments are, for many, both blessing and curse. Yes, they often provide a critical and often life-saving edge to those hunters that possess them, but many of the Endowments come with steep and irrevocable costs. Are you willing to lose an eye for such power? Will you channel the Devil's blood within? Or feel divine shame cast upon you by God's great and judging eye? Will you assume an enervating madness after using a rusted Roman gladius, or willingly inject a toxic cocktail into your femoral artery? At what point does a hunter feel he's gone too far, that he's no longer amongst the humans he protects? If a hunter's truly willing to sacrifice, he can endeavor to engage in a little research and development for new Endowments...

Finally, you'll find some guidelines for creating your own hunter organizations. The organizations listed in this chapter are by no means exhaustive—you may want to only use one or two in your game, or may instead prefer to come up with your own mysterious compacts and conspiracies, using the ones in this book as nothing more than examples.

If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being.

— Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn,
"Gulag Archipelago"

Ashwood Abbey

The vampire awoke.

It squinted through a haze of velvet smoke. The room was low lit. Lots of pillows. Mirrors, too; one on every wall. Somewhere, a dull bass beat pulsed. It almost made him think he had a heartbeat again.

The creature's vision swam and dipped. A line of drool - blood, really, given that the thing didn't have saliva anymore - trickled down to his chin. He tried to wipe it away, but his hands were held above him, affixed to something...

A round shape floated in front of him. A face. A body came with it. Stocky. Crammed into a tuxedo. The shape, the face, smiled: pearly whites; small, happy eyes; a bald head that gleamed with a sheen of perspiration.

"You're up," the face said. "Good! Sorry about this. Had to dose you. Well, had to dose me, strictly speaking, before you came in for the bitey-bite. Oxycontin and Vicodin make for a powerful cocktail - I could barely keep it together, I swear! If you hadn't bitten me when you did, oof, I might've toppled right there on the men's room floor."

"Buh..." the vampire said, or rather, tried to say.

The round face laughed silently, then took an eyedropper full of red and squeezed a dot of the crimson fluid onto his tongue.

"Mm, delicious!" he said. "Your blood has a kind of...hazelnut aftertaste, did you know that? It's got quite a long finish. Don't worry, I don't plan on hurting you. You might even enjoy this. I've nothing against your...people. Hiram does, of course. And so does Bettina. But they won't be here for a few hours, with the rest of the guests. Until then?"

The man took another hit from the eyedropper.

"Until then, you and I have time to play."

Caught alone in the dark, back against the wall, pursued by things you barely understand, things that treat humans like cattle or insects or breeding stock, chased by witches who stand above you like cut-price gods...this is the Vigil. It's what it means to be a hunter. Hunters do it because they feel they have to, or because they want to get revenge for some loss inflicted upon them, or because

they're curious. Ask them. They'll give you all sorts of reasons. But hardly any of them admit the one thing they all have in common, even to themselves: it's one of the greatest rushes anyone could ever know.

The members of Ashwood Abbey have never once pretended they're doing it for anything other than kicks. Since 1855, this cabal of silver-spoon-sucking party ani-

mals has got its kicks from killing things no one else ever managed to kill. And having fun with them. Before *and* after the killing part.

The original Ashwood Abbey, near Edinburgh, was the home of Reverend Doctor Marcus McDonald Ogilvy, who, notwithstanding his august title and status within the Anglican Communion, was, by any standards of the day, a very bad man. He held debauched court over one of the several so-called "Hellfire Clubs": secret societies of like-minded, well-connected men and women who sought to smash the taboos of the day. By modern standards, the recreational drugs, casual sex and public bondage-play were pretty tame. Rev. Ogilvy, a thinker ahead of his time, seemed to understand that. He urged his followers to break the rules any way they could. It was during an outdoor orgy one Midsummer night that the wealthy attendees at Ashwood Abbey fell foul of a pack of werewolves who objected to people taking turns screwing against a standing stone they put great store in.

Many of Ashwood Abbey's regulars died that night. The rest ran off. The survivors were nonetheless able to avert a scandal: the dozen or so worthies who died had not left behind any note of their location. When Ogilvy and a dozen armed men went back by day to get rid of the bodies, they found a couple of gnawed, bloodied bones, and what looked like dog feces, only in prodigious quantities, left at the corners of the site, as if as a marker.

A more conventional Victorian clergyman would have thought it a sign that perhaps it was time to give up on the pursuit of sin. Ogilvy was no conventional clergyman. He saw it as an opportunity. He led his inner circle back to the stones three nights later. And on the top of that hill, in full sight of all his companions, he masturbated over the central stone.

Then he waited, standing next to the valet, who cleaned him up and dressed him again even as Ogilvy loaded his trusty elephant gun with solid silver shot. To his disappointment, he never got to hang the werewolves' heads on his wall; they reverted to human form as they gave up the ghost. Still, he'd got the bug. Over the next decade, Ogilvy's followers bagged everything from a six-armed demon goddess they'd caught in India and let loose in Berkshire, to a thousand-year-old man made of pieces of dead people.

And so it went. After Ogilvy's swift and untimely death at the wooden talons of a three-armed goblin, the society continued. The Abbey was preserved at his bequest, and became a high-class clubhouse. Several members moved to the New World at the end of the 19th century and set up chapters there. Thanks to the incestuous nature of European royalty (and yes, several members of the British Royal family were members), chapters likewise were set up across Europe. They often outlived the social structures that had created them, as societies collapsed and changed over the course of that tumultuous century.

These days, the chapters exist more or less independently. Most still pay a regular fee to Ashwood Abbey for the use of the name and a list of worldwide members.

Joining is an odd business. Some people are simply asked, after having been groomed by a member for some time. More commonly, members are coerced into joining: a prospect is invited to a dinner party held by the membership; they reveal they hunt monsters, describe the location of a prospective victim and make an elaborate show of drawing lots. There's a bag of billiard balls. Lots of red balls, one white ball; the one who gets the white ball gets the privilege of leading the hunt. And — surprise — who's the lucky member? The new boy. It's fixed, of course, and by the time the hunt's over, the new member is either full fledged or dead.

Try this.
I think you'll
find it quite surprising.



The Enemy

Ashwood Abbey's membership does take some care to cultivate relations with other individuals who hunt down monsters. It usually plays out like this: a couple of Abbey regulars accompany a group of unaffiliated hunters (or members of one of the other organizations) as they track down their supernatural quarry. The Abbey tends to prefer those groups that gather information rather than those that weigh in with all guns blazing (where's the fun in that?) When their palsies have done the boring stuff, the Abbey sideline them, perhaps giving them false leads, or arranging for them to be conveniently somewhere else.

After that, all bets are off. The Abbey use whatever tools it feels like, from antique broadswords to whips and elephant rifles.

What they do next could be anything. Sex and killing seem to be equally common these days, and not necessarily in that order. Some get a kick out of torture and dismemberment. Some wonder what it'd be like to snort the dust from a disorporated vampire (don't bother — it's pretty disappointing). Some prefer to drink vampire blood and swear by its rejuvenating qualities. Some quite like the idea of leather and fur goods made from monsters — demonskin shoes, soft pale leather jackets with the look of patchwork, hats made from giant wings. The holy grail is, of course, a werewolf-fur coat, but this leads to all sorts of problems, since the fur vanishes as the werewolf dies. Or, at least, it turns into human skin when the werewolf's at the point of death. Skinning a werewolf alive is something everyone should try once, the Abbey regulars maintain.

Actually, so far it's only ever *been* done once. But that's not the point.

The Abbey's knowledge of the monsters is woefully inadequate in many ways. They know some of the basics — silver bullets kill some werewolves, crosses don't work against most vampires, that sort of thing — but mostly, they don't even bother. They see no real challenge in assassination. There's no sport in it.

A lot of members of Ashwood Abbey are missing eyes or limbs, or sport spectacular scars. Many are dead or, worse, the will-less thralls of magicians, vampires or other creatures who have caused several chapters to be hopelessly compromised. But then, for some, that's a thrill in its own right.

Hunters

You're a senior at an Ivy League college, good at field athletics and heavily involved in the Greek system. But you're nowhere near as rich as some of the other boys in the frat house. You didn't believe your roommate when he told you about his extracurricular activities. Now you believe him. Hell, you had to help cover up his death the day after your first hunt.

You're a fashion model. And you're a walking cliché. God, you're shallow. The coke wasn't doing it for you anymore. Dating was dull as hell, because no one you ever dated was as beautiful as you. But there was someone you met (and might have slept with — you can't remember) at an after-

show party, and you had a few thrilling nights, and now you're completely hooked. Risking scars is just part of the fun.

You didn't mean to end up in the Abbey, but the Board of Directors invited you to a private party, and then you drew the white ball from the bag and before you knew it, it was kill the werewolf (or vampire, or witch, or sasquatch) or never get promoted again. Sure, you got your promotion, but if you want your career to advance, you have to keep doing this. Losing your job is not an option. It's all a nightmare. You wish it would just stop.

You're old money: your great-great-grandfather was a founding member, and every heir of his since then has been brought into membership, whether they want it or not. It's the family secret. Maybe you love it. Maybe you hate it. But either way, you can't drop it.

You're possibly the next District Attorney, and there are folks in the Abbey who are going to make sure you get the job. Sometimes you tell yourself you'd never be able to indict the monsters legally, and this is a kind of justice, but when you're honest with yourself, you just get your kicks from killing things and getting laid, often at the same time.

You're the vicar of an Anglo-Catholic parish just outside London. Your parishioners have no idea that your enthusiasm for Victoriana isn't the only thing you've got in common with Prince Albert, and they certainly wouldn't even believe it for a second if they found out what you get up to on a Friday evening after the ladies from the Bible Study Group have left the vicarage. Fortunately, your clerical vestments easily hide the scars.

You're a high-class escort — maybe you're from Moscow and you only trade in dollars; maybe your home is a suite in whatever five-star hotel you're working in this week; maybe you're on first-name terms with Presidents, CEOs and Prime Ministers the world over. You got into the job because you wanted danger, and the thrills don't end with being party to the President's infidelity. Sometimes your clients are more bizarre than you ever could have expected. But sometimes you're more interesting than they expect — and you have friends.

Cliques

Many cliques and worldviews appear and vanish among Ashwood Abbey's members as time goes on. Some do endure, though.

Competitors treat the whole thing as sport, and the others as their competition. They have to do each new thing first, above all. They have to kill, screw or capture bigger, nastier or weirder quarries than their colleagues. Life is nasty, brutish and short for this lot. It's also, to them, a great deal of pleasure.

Members of the **Pursuit** want to know secrets. They want to know the most awful things they can. They want to see and experience, rather than do. While some go out there and perform unspeakable acts, the Pursuit gather the information and record the hunt, circulating DVDs and privately printed documents among their fellows, containing the juiciest events of the hunt.

STEREOTYPES

The Long Night: Jackson Hughes spent a week pursuing the most fascinating demon - it looked like a man, except for the snakehead on its...well. Anyway. Hughes went along the whole time with this dreadful little oik who just took the whole thing so seriously. Honestly, he was bored out of his mind.

Null Mysteris: I had occasion some time ago to converse with a gentleman who was collecting certain objects pertaining to a witch I'd had back in Rhode Island. Odd chap. Just wanted the books; let me do what I wanted with the rest. Obviously, I made him pay for them. Not that I needed the money, of course. But he wanted them so much. It seemed the thing to do.

The Lucifuge: The Children of Satan! Oh! Yes! I've heard all about them! I would love to meet one. I suspect it might be a little disappointing, though. These so-called semi-divine individuals never seem to have much of a sense of adventure.

The Ascending Ones: Rachel Grahame spent quite a lengthy hunt alongside a Middle Eastern gentleman who always seemed to be partaking of some of the most marvellous drugs. She could never get to try some, though. Must try harder next time, Rachel.

Libertines, on the other hand, want to break taboos. They want to do things that no one has done to things that no one has done things to. They want to find brave new worlds. Many adopt a Byronic pose, imagining themselves as creators of new moralities, new paradigms of living. A lot of the things they do revolt even the members of the Abbey.

Status

Status within Ashwood Abbey comes from who you know and, to a lesser degree, what you've killed. But mostly it comes from getting a reputation for being adventurous, for putting on great, bizarre parties, for doing imaginative things to your quarry.

- You've drawn the white ball or you've been asked to join, and you've already done things that you can't

tell anyone about. You're in, and you're never leaving. Still, you've been to some terrifying parties. You gain the Barfly Merit for free, if you didn't have it already.

••• You can use rooms in the local chapter's clubhouse as a place to stay. This is equivalent to a two-dot safehouse (see p. 70), with the dots assigned to Secrecy, Cache or Size in any combination you wish.

•••• You can call Ashwood Abbey and get the address lists of members across the world, who will supply arms, prostitutes and bait, and arrange hunting parties for you. You just need to ask. This is equivalent to four new dots of Contacts. These dots are assigned to Legal Aid, Vice, Arms Trafficking and Ashwood Abbey Networking.



THE LONG NIGHT

THE TRIBULATION MILITIA



MIDWAY CHURCH OF GOD SEVENTH DAY

CHURCH NEWSLETTER

Brother Uriah did not stand at the pulpit. He didn't bang the Bible and spit and holler as he did so. No, he sat on the edge of the stage, his legs dangling over. The guitar lay across his knees, and in his hand, a microphone. His voice was quiet, but hard. It was, as one woman had described it just yesterday, "comforting."

He looked out over his flock. Almost two dozen now. It filled his heart with warmth.

"Listen," he said, his voice echoing out from the pair of guitar amps that flanked him. "This is a pivotal time, for us. For humankind. The end of this covenant —" he held up the Bible and gestured with it, " — is drawing near."

Their eyes, wet with tears, watched him. Hung on his every word. Smiling.

"You've all seen the earliest signs. The doors have blown off the bottomless pit and all manner of awful things have come crawling out. Mary, you felt the touch of a witch and her diabolical magics — your own daughter, God bless, how horrible that must feel for you. Ted, you were in the hospital for — what was it? Two weeks? In and out of the coma because that thing drank so much of your blood you could no longer stand?"

Ted held up a fist, nodding, biting back tears.

"Soon the sun will grow dark. The moon will wink out. And it will seem like it's all ending. But that's not true, is it? It's just the closing of one book and the opening of another. For soon we shall see the sign of the Son of God in the Heavens above us, and he will come galloping forth on his white horse and he will lead the way to a new land!"

The congregation cried "Praise Jesus!" as one.

"That's a beautiful thing. But first, we are mired in the Tribulation. The darkness has settled upon this earth and the Devil's army waits in the shadows. If we want Jesus to come, his big ol' horse needs a road upon which to run, which means we have to clear the way. Are we going to clear the way for Jesus the Son?"

"Praise Jesus!"

"I said are we going to clear the way for Jesus the Son?"

Louder, this time: "Praise Jesus!"

Uriah smiled, and eased his guitar off his lap. He replaced it with a Remington 700, the rifle fitted with a Leupold scope. Others in the pews brandished their guns, too, holding them aloft. Ted didn't have a gun, he had a fire ax, but that was okay, too.

Praise Jesus, indeed.

The world is going to end soon. God is going to snatch away all the True Christians, and the unworthy are going to suffer under the rule of the Antichrist until Jesus comes back and ends it all in blood and fire. Because Jesus loves you. Right? Wrong.

Well, some of it is wrong, at least. That part about the Rapture, where God will pluck all his righteous children from the earth and carry them to the cradle of Heaven, well,

that's not going to happen (though some fear this has *already* happened, and the still-significant population remaining are those too wicked to be allowed entry into the Kingdom). No, this is the Tribulation. This is the war. It's the battle of righteousness, Armageddon. It's between the righteous and the wicked, between the forces of God and the armies of Satan. A man cannot rely on the Rapture to come and claim him. He can only rely on his Bible, his voice, his fist and his gun.

This world is mired in sin, and Christ cannot — *will not* — return until humankind proves itself worthy. In the meantime, that means war, famine, plague and horrors beyond horrors. And many know these horrors aren't metaphorical: they're real; they're out there walking around and feeding from the innocent and exploiting iniquity. It'd be great if God took the worthy ones away from the horror, but that's not the case. So it's time to do something about it. They spread the Good News to families and friends. They try to live good lives. And they hunt the monsters.

The Long Night began some time in the 1970s, but as far as its members are concerned, it's always been around. This self-styled Tribulation Militia has no record of its founder; aside from a few web sites maintained by individuals, it has little in the way of structure.

Its members have included Branch Davidian-style militarized gun-cults, Family Values campaigners, paranoid survivalists, affluent Southern fundamentalists and middle-class conservative evangelicals. They've sprung up in the southern USA, the cities of Australia and the southeast of England. They have many different takes on what constitutes the correct response to the imminent, self-evident end of the world.

Individual members exist in a hundred fundamentalist churches. Some attend more liberal churches, looking for the troubled believers they consider — somewhat ironically — to be a True Remnant among the godless liberals. They form small cliques. They keep their eyes peeled for those fellow believers who can't seem to be at peace with the things they believe, take them to one side, ask them a few questions, sound them out, and when they know enough, they take them on hunts. Usually, the thrill and danger of the hunt is enough for the newly minted member of the Long Night to understand.

The hunters of the Long Night say the signs are there, that Armageddon is on its way. But what if the apocalypse depends upon those signs, the wars and the rumors of wars, the fall of the Wormwood Star, the rise of the Great Beast and the Whore of Babylon? What if the devil's agents do the work of the Deceiver by ensuring those signs will come to pass? What if God cannot come until the devil's agents are dealt with?

Abstractly, they recognize the Tribulation is a necessity. But it cannot resolve without work on the part of the faithful. The world exists in eternal night, but the Second Coming will bring morning (Revelation 22: 5, 16), if only we persevere. And so this is the Long Night, and these are the warriors who know the world must endure great horror before it can witness the glorious unveiling.

Blessed is he
who stays awake.
Let us all
keep watch.



The Enemy

Beings of magic and fear exist because they are the iniquitous servitors of evil. There have always been demons and magicians — Jesus banished countless demons; Peter faced off against Simon Magus — but now there seem to be more than ever before.

No, they must be stopped. The members of the Long Night can certainly show mercy: the whole creed comes, after all, from the love of a merciful God. A group of Militia might, for example, kidnap a magician and keep him tied and gagged in a room, where they preach to him and try to bring him to repent. If he doesn't, they'll burn all his books. If that isn't enough, they may regrettably have to cut out his tongue. And if that isn't good enough, they'll just have to shoot him. Judgment comes one way or another.

They're not fools, though. They're aware that any idiot can say he's turned away from his sins. A warlock says he's given it all up and the Long Night lets him go with rejoicing. Of course, he returns to his conspiracy anew and carries on with the Devil's work. But they're watching, and the moment they see him sin again, that's the end of it. The Long Night expects no second chances; it offers none.

Less human creatures expect no mercy at all. Werewolves sold their souls to get their skins. Vampires are the damned; if they weren't, they wouldn't be vampires. Demons: they're from Hell. They've all got to be destroyed. Only if they cease to be, only if they're sent screaming back down to the Devil's lap, will the Tribulation end and the Revelation begin.

Hunters

Maybe it was when your son was born, but you suddenly started looking at the world and thinking that perhaps there were some things to love in it, and that you would do anything to protect that love. You said as much at church. And then the assistant pastor took you aside and had a quiet word with you.

You know you're mired in sin. You drink, and you don't want to. You lie, sometimes, too. On top of it all, you're gay — but the people at church accept you knowing that they're all marked with iniquity. But God's given you the chance to make it all better. You can cleanse the corruption from your soul by putting the boot on the neck of the monsters and making them thank God for the mercy you're about to deliver. You do that, and everybody gets a free ride to the Apocalypse. And there's nothing wrong with that.

Your husband died on the church soup run. Something attacked him, and the police wouldn't tell you what the wounds were from when you went to identify the body, and they wouldn't do anything about it. No one was caught, and you began to mention it to people. And then someone showed you the proof: photos, accounts, and — the clincher — Scriptures that proved the monsters were already there. What can you do?

You can see all the signs, falling into place. You tell people, showing them the notebook you keep with all the signs and references and cross-references and cuttings, and no one seems to be as interested as they should be. The world is end-

ing! Doesn't that mean anything to anyone? But a few people care. They showed you terrible things. And they use your talents to research the signs, so they can destroy them. Sometimes they let you tag along.

You're like Saul on the road to Damascus. It happened one night: a flash of light, the rush of wings, and God's tremendous voice booming in your ears. You don't know where the tire iron came from, but you beat something — no, somethings — down. Next thing you know, you walked into a late-night chapel where all the candles were lit. The congregation gazed upon you, dripping rain, dripping blood, and they didn't freak out. They welcomed you, arms wide open.

Doctrines

The Long Night really encompasses several smaller groups, all of whom have in common the acceleration of Armageddon.

The **Hopeless** simply believe they are damned to hell. All have secret sins they can no longer hide: addictions or affairs, or peccadilloes that for someone not from such a strict background would be thought not worthy of guilt or self-examination. Some bear the taint of the supernatural, perhaps having been used or abused by inhuman forces. And one or two might even have within them the blood of Satan himself. They're not sure they can ever be saved, but others can.

The **Faithful** believe they are doing God's work, that God is behind all they do. They are foot soldiers in the first war of Armageddon. They're part of the prophecies. The monsters are prolonging the horror while the Long Night aims to cut it short, and all are tools of God's perfect will. He has ordained that they fight.

The **Merciful** cling to the idea that God is love. They preach a doctrine of mercy and redemption, looking for ways to rehabilitate monsters and witches and reclaim the humanity of monsters who once walked by day. Theirs is the forgiving Christ, not the sword-bearing Messiah. They devote themselves to prayer for the lost, and adopt more practical methods, too. They're the ones who'll try to return a vampire to humanity by giving her a blood transfusion, or save a werewolf by feeding him wolfsbane or destroying the creature who bit him. Rumor has it that a small handful of the Merciful were once vampires, werewolves and witches; cleansed of the taint of evil, they stand together against the darkness.

Status

It's difficult to get status within the Long Night: most of their hunters don't have any idea how many of them there are, and some wouldn't believe you if you told them there were members of the Tribulation Militia in Australia or England. Still, the web sites and the word-of-mouth recruitment have created a very loose kind of network. It's possible, through knowing how to destroy monsters and recruiting more people to the cause, to get a sort of reputation among the Long Night.

- You know the idea of the Long Night, and some of the logic of the theological discourse. You've got some

STEREOTYPES

Network Zero: In the End Times, you make strange friends. I never expected to fight so often alongside someone so irreverent (and with such poor hygiene), but even though he's no Christian, he values the truth. He makes so many things public. He just needs someone to believe him.

The Union: There's a woman in town helps me out with guns sometimes. She introduced me to a doctor who didn't ask any questions about the wounds in my leg. She can handle herself. She just won't. Unless the monsters end up on her turf. I feel bad that sometimes I've driven things onto her block, just so she'll help me kill them.

The Cheiron Group: See that logo on the medicine packet? It's the sign of the Beast of Judgment. It has men serving its needs. I saw them, one time, a half a dozen, wearing that terrible sign on their badges. They caught up with a creature I had been trying to kill and they caught it in a net and took it away in a van, as I watched, helplessly. One turned and looked at me, and he had no pupil in his eye, and I knew that he was in thrall to Hell.

Malleus Maleficarum: I used to think that the Catholic Church was the Whore of Babylon, and that we were the True Bride of Christ. I don't know what to think anymore. There's this priest I keep meeting. And he knows exactly what I'm talking about. And he fights and kills like nothing else on Earth. No mercy, no second chances. I fear him like I fear God.

phone numbers, and maybe you've even brought some more people into the fold. You gain Evangelism as a free specialty of either the Persuasion or Expression Skills.

••• You've developed enough of a reputation that you can rely on people from far afield that can help you out with matters pertaining to the Vigil. You gain the Merit: Allies (Long Night) at two dots or, if you have it already, two more dots, to a maximum of five dots.

••••• You've a web presence, and maybe something of a reputation as a bearer of the Breastplate of Righteousness (Ephesians 6:14). Among fellow members of the Long Night, you gain the benefit of the Inspiring Merit (see the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 115), whether or not you would normally qualify for the Merit. If you already have the Merit, its effects stack (meaning that members of the Long Night regain two Willpower points when you use the Merit successfully).



THE LOYALISTS OF THULE THE INDEBTED

The house burned, an orange monster with many mouths cast bright against the dark night. Smoke whorled, swallowed the moon. But worst were the wisps of paper - embers at first, then growing dark, darker than the midnight sky - catching the uplifts of hot air and then slowly drifting back to the earth. Like gray bats or black butterflies.

All that knowledge, all those books and book pages, consumed by fire.

Elias Erhard knelt on the ground, watching his life's work burn. He had failed the Loyalists. He was no scholar. He was no hunter. Just a weak and stupid man who never thought the monsters could find him here. He never put himself out there, so how had they known? How had they come to realize how many of their secrets he kept?

He pulled great clumps of his white wispy hair into his tightening fists and wept.

Just then, a shadow next to him. And then, a hand on his shoulder.

Mr. young Joseph. His protégé in the compact. A reedy boy, gaunt, all wrist and ankle. The boy's parents weren't killed by the monsters, but they might as well have been. No, they were enslaved, made to taste the blood of the demons, and thus did they come to serve the demons. Joseph, Elias figured, would never be much of a hunter, not really - he wasn't that fast and didn't seem that sharp. And he was woefully presumptuous.

"I'm sorry I didn't get more," Joseph said.

"Me too," Elias answered. Wait. What? "Get more of what? Spit it out, boy!"

"The books. Scanned." He pulled one of the old man's hands from the white hair and peeled the fingers back the way one might pull skin from an orange. He pressed a small plastic widget, no bigger than a postage stamp, into the man's deeply etched palm.

"What? What is this?"

Joseph shrugged. "I scanned about a third of the books in your library. I PDFed them and copied them to this secure digital card. I wish I'd gotten more."

But Elias leapt to his feet with a spryness he hadn't felt in 10 years or more. His bony arms drew the boy into a swift embrace.

"You might turn out all right yet, my boy," Elias said, weeping anew. "We must make haste. Others can use this. We've been keeping this information to ourselves for too long. It's time to share. It's time to make our allies stronger! It's time to make the monsters weaker and pay our debts."

Secrets make us who we are. Secrets build us all. The desires, the hopes we hold inside us change the world. Everything runs on secrets, things occulted from the rest of the world.

And some occult things are more occult than others.

Some legends have it that once upon a time, a land now lost — Atlantis, Mu, Thule, Pan or whatever its name was — gave the world civilization. A cataclysm took it, but its survi-

vors sailed across the sea in ships with painted sails to the benighted lands of Europe and Asia. They became, so the theories go, the gods and lawgivers of the peoples. They gave the world art and architecture, and the ability to work bronze. They also gave man the terrible mystical secrets that, over thousands of years, were forgotten by the masses, but hidden by those who knew (and can yet be found if you know where to look).

The Loyalists of Thule spent the first decades of the last century looking for that Ultimate Source — to their eternal shame. Back then, they were the Thule Gesellschaft, a German occult group that took its belief in that Ultimate Source to its eventual conclusion: that a master race had descended from Lost Thule, the Aryans were the oldest and most highly evolved of people, and the perfect Aryans were the German people. And then, two of their members founded the German Workers' Party, which, in a couple of years, became the Nazi Party.

By the time the Nazis came to power, none of their leaders had anything to do with the Thule Society. Contrary to popular belief, in the end the Nazis banned mystical societies and eschewed the occult, ultimately suppressing the Thule Society's literature.

The majority of the Thule Society's members dispersed, leaving a minority to hang on, illegally, to face the horrors their theories and philosophies had wrought. When the truth came out at the end of the war, some didn't believe it. Some denied it, and joined even less savory *Völkisch* societies. And some admitted they were wrong.

Their horror at what their actions had helped create was compounded by the fact that throughout the 1920s and '30s, their studies had actually borne fruit. They had discovered the true existence of ancestral ghosts. Some had met the ghosts of the Rmoahals, the tribesman who had roamed lost Atlantis and fought in the armies of the sorcerer-kings. Some had sneaked into Tibet and found evidence of Shamballa, barely escaping with their lives. Some had narrowly escaped confrontations with spirit-summoning witches, demons, werewolves, vampires and other, even more bizarre things.

There was a secret world, a world of the night, and the *Völkisch* weren't any kind of master race. To the hungry dead, humans — Aryan or not — were just food. To the werewolves, they were breeding stock and prey. And to the demons, and the other, more alien creatures that waited behind the corners of reality, we were just insects to be played with and squashed. The newly reformed Loyalists of Thule stopped looking for Atlantis, instead seeking to find out more about this invisible world. They wanted to know, needed to know — but at the same time, they felt a kind of duty to the world. They owe it to the human race. They are the Indebted. They will never make full payment.

They still do it today. They're a secretive group. Few know they exist, and not all of their members and contacts know what they used to be, or even the name of the group, at least until they've done something illegal or immoral for the Loyalists, and are in too deep.

Not that the Loyalists *like* blackmailing their new members. It's just that if they are to atone for what they are, they have to keep themselves secret. They often find themselves working alongside other hunters. They appear as scholars and collectors of information. They provide aid and information. They never, ever say who they are.

They answer to secretive leaders, each of whom controls the compact on a national level, and those leaders defer to the three founders, who still reside in Germany. The founders — three men, all resident in Munich

I don't have
any choice.
I have a
debt to pay.



— are all over 90 years old. They meet once a week and compare notes collected by their small group of secretaries, deciding which to disseminate and which to act on. These three surviving Loyalists have only each other, and each hates the other two passionately, as a reminder of his guilt and the task he's set himself. The few Loyalists who have met them face to face reckon they're only holding on to see the others give up and die first, locked in a kind of eternal three-way staring match with decrepit, remorse-laden lives as the stake.

The Loyalists have to know. They find the truth about the monsters, and they pass it on. If they can save the human race, maybe they can atone for their part in the making of a century that almost destroyed us.

Not all are as dedicated as others. Some have to work for the Loyalists because they're blackmailed into doing so. And sometimes, people join who find out about the Loyalists' *Völkisch* past and are just a little too enthusiastic about it; they don't last long. Neo-Nazi ideologies are the one thing wholly *verboten* among the Indebted, and those who express them, or even who only suggest that maybe shame has had its day, don't get much of a hearing. Some find themselves walking into the middle of a nest of dangerous creatures only to realize that all of a sudden, they're completely alone. Some find themselves surrounded by colleagues holding long knives, and given one very brief chance to explain themselves.

Many of the Indebted think their job is hopeless, that it's impossible to equip humanity against the monsters, especially from an organization whose whole reason for being is a guilt-ridden secret. But then, an impossible task is the only thing that can even hope to make up for an unforgivable sin.

The Enemy

The Loyalists of Thule are scholars first, above all. They aim to know. They're investigators: archaeologists, antiquarians, students of academic ritual magic, detectives. This isn't to say that they're not capable of being physically adept — they have their share of tomb raiders and two-fisted investigators of the unknown. Frankly, with the kind of things the Loyalists investigate, it's not surprising that even the most closeted scholars eventually learn how to handle themselves.

But still, it's not really the Loyalists' job to face the enemy. They exist to equip others to that end. Most of the Loyalists of Thule hook up with other hunters, either individuals or members of compacts such as the Union, the Long Night or Network Zero. They sometimes join them in the field, but really they're the people who give advice on how their companions can defeat their foes.

Understanding is key, and the Loyalists recognize that different kinds of supernatural creature pose different kinds of threat. Corpses that consume blood, flesh and souls to exist receive a lot of attention from the Loyalists. Werewolves, particularly the kind who — apparently — breed true, don't always pose a threat to humans if they're left alone. Demons, ghosts, spirits and the kind of eldritch entities that invade from other dimensions, however, have no business existing. They need to be studied and, once their weaknesses are found, the Loyalists need to destroy them or find someone who can. Even if a supernatural creature is not a threat to anyone, it's still worth studying: knowledge is knowledge, and secrets are always worth knowing.

If the Indebted find a creature or organization that either still ideologically supports Nazi ideals, or even took part in the things

that happened, all bets are off. Whether it's a faction of magicians who were proved to have supported the Nazis, or a vampire who meddled with the experiments in the death camps, they have to die. Even the mildest-mannered scholar takes an active part in her quarry's destruction.

Ordinary human hate groups fall under the same category as monsters. A witch with something of the ideology of a Savitri Devi may be more interesting than a neo-fascist demagogue in mystical terms, but to the Loyalists, both deserve the same fate.

Originally, the Loyalists were wholly about collecting knowledge, about learning secrets. But what point is knowledge if it's not used for something? By learning the secrets of the monsters, they become indispensable, earning enough respect so that if their colleagues ever learn who they are, they may understand at least that they're needed in the Vigil.

Hunters

You're old now. You came to join the Loyalists thanks to your father, who was wracked with guilt about his part in what happened in Germany back then. He made you share his guilt. You can't bear to think of him, but you have no choice. He forced you into his mold, and you're too old to stop now.

You're young. You were a nerdy kid at school, fascinated with archaeology and mysticism. You stumbled upon a monster, and a strangely knowledgeable history teacher showed you how to destroy it. Then he got you stealing stuff. Then he let you into a secret. You understand why he did that, but you don't have to like it. Now you and he work together. You're in the field, checking out weird stuff while trying to finish your college course. He's in the library, helping you out with essays and letting you know what to do when the next monster turns up.

You're white, you're middle class and you had a liberal education. You operate on white middle-class liberal guilt. It informs and controls everything you do, and after working alongside one of the Indebted who went to your college and met an untimely end, you ended up seeking out the Loyalists of Thule yourself, seeing a kinship that isn't really there. You're a firebrand and an activist, and you're probably going to get yourself killed.

You're an archaeologist with a collection of guns and the knowledge of how to use them, thanks to a career spent digging up artifacts in some of the most dangerous places on Earth. You've been finding ancient knowledge for over a decade now, in ancient places, and some of it is essential to your more militant friends.

Philosophies

The Loyalists seem to be mostly on the same page when it comes to methodology: find the supernatural and research it to death (metaphorically and sometimes literally). Simple. It's the reasons *why* that vary.

Most of the Loyalists of Thule are simply **Scholars**. They collect information about supernatural threats to humanity and disseminate it among those who would defeat or destroy those threats. They're cautious and prudent, and although they sometimes end up on the front line, it's others among the Indebted who do the fighting.

The **Penitents** are more proactive. They're the gun-toting archaeologists of popular culture, the tomb raiders and barnstormers who put themselves in terrible danger to learn ancient secrets. It's

STEREOTYPES

Ashwood Abbey: I spent a month in Ashwood Abbey, actually. Their library was amazing, and I even participated in a hunt, which was most educational. It was just...I mean...I couldn't go back there. They'd found a demon. A vile-looking thing. I told them how to make it powerless, and they did, and then...I can't. Just - I actually felt sorry for the demon.

Null Mysteriis: One of my colleagues corresponds regularly with a member of Null Mysteriis. She says he's really frustrating. He never seems to do anything with the information he collects. He says he keeps it for when it's useful. My colleague says can't he see how useful it is right now?

Aegis Kai Doru: I keep hearing rumors about a cabal of men who have the head of John the Baptist in a cave. I've seen too many things to be skeptical. But oh, what wouldn't I do to talk to the people who have it?

Ascending Ones: Our records have several references to other occult societies, and several accounts clearly refer to a group who use some fusion of Islamic and pre-Islamic mysticism. Apparently, they ingest poisons to give themselves mystical abilities. Training, it seems, is essential: one of my predecessors once obtained one of their potions. He tried it. He survived, but as far as anyone can tell, he never slept again. He was mad within a few weeks, and his body shut down completely, killing him after about two months. The rest of the potion is in the archives now. No one else is trying it.

about atonement. It's about guilt. It's one thing to help others to make things better, but the Loyalists should be doing something about it themselves. They should be playing an active part. If they die in the process, well...it's the price they pay.

The Penitents do the dirty work, but often it's the **Advance**, on the other hand, who leads them. Members of the Advance accept the guilt of the Loyalists of Thule and reason that yes, the Loyalists need to atone, but if they're going to make up for the organization's past sins, they should be at the forefront of the struggle. They should be leading humankind against the monsters. In gaining knowledge, they gain power over the monsters, but also power over their colleagues. True atonement requires the Loyalists to take control — humbly, of course — and become indispensable to the hunters around them. It's the rarest of the Loyalists' philosophies, if only because some fear a return to the *Völkisch* viewpoint that brought the Thule Society to this pass in the first place.

Status

Loyalists of Thule gain Status simply by learning occult secrets — and sharing them.

- You've been let into the secret of the society's heritage and guilt. You may have found yourself doing some petty crimes, and they may be blackmailing you, in a friendly, slightly nervy kind of way. On the other hand, you may have joined willingly. Either way, you know secrets that others don't. If you successfully risk Willpower on an Occult- or Academics-based roll pertaining to the hunt, you gain one additional Willpower point as a result — even if this pushes beyond what your normal Willpower pool will allow.

- You're in contact with several other Loyalists, who can furnish you with advice, which you can pass on in turn. You report to an older, more experienced Loyalist, acting as the equivalent to a two-dot Mentor.

- You've been to Munich and met those three bitter old men firsthand. You've got the names and addresses of dozens of fellow members, most of whom probably have snippets of information, equivalent to three new dots in the Contacts Merit. Each dot is defined as an expert in one particular kind of supernatural being, such as vampires, ghosts, or demons, for example.



NETWORK

ZERO

THE SECRET FREQUENCY

• The invisible voices weren't so invisible anymore, were they?

• The van lay on its side on the shoulder of the deserted highway, and Vanida felt all turned around — the van had been torn open, the driver-side door removed entirely, and the howling spirits whose bodies seemed one reached in, keening, wailing, whispering, gibbering. One swiped at her and she ducked it, clambering toward the back where their tendrils could not reach. The sounds bored straight into her ears. She felt a wetness dripping down the side of her neck. Blood?

• From the passenger side, Becky screamed. Hanging out of the driver side with a camping machete was Blake, swinging into the awful specters, the blade refusing to find purchase in their phantasmal flesh.

• Earlier, Vanida had thought, I'll just take the crew, we'll bring out gear, see if we can't figure out just what's trying to talk to us. Maybe we'll get some EVP. Maybe we'll catch something on video and post it to the Net, hope it goes viral. Maybe we won't find shit. Usually, it works out okay. The voices tell her something. She captures it. Sometimes she even passes the message along to those who need to hear it — the living left behind.

• And then this happened. They came out of the forests. Specters with open mouths and empty eyes. The cell bolted. The creatures pursued. And knocked the damn van on its side. But that was then, and this was now, and right now, the things were shrieking. Pale, diaphanous hands peeled the metal sides of the van further back like the tin top of a sardine can.

• Blake cursed. Becky had stopped screaming and had begun babbling.

• Vanida took a deep breath. A distant thought occurred to her:

• Am I going to die tonight?

• It was a dark thought, but not nearly as strange as the one that followed:

• Maybe I will, maybe I won't, but at least it'll make some bad-ass footage for YouTube.

• Gritting her teeth, she swung the camera up and turned it on. Showtime.

Every so often, this video appears on some video-sharing site or another, and it's really creepy — it's dark and it's badly pixelated and the sound's all over the place, but *holy shit* did you see that the guy just turned into a monster and ran off? Special effects. It's got to be special effects. You can do some pretty impressive things with a half-decent video editing suite. Still. You'd almost think it was real.

Sometimes it goes viral. Sometimes it ends up on a hundred blogs or more, an embedded video and a comment: *Hey! This is really creepy. How'd they do it?*

The answer is: they didn't. You've just seen content from Network Zero, the Secret Frequency (as in, the frequency that broadcasts secrets, not a frequency that's secret). For going on 10 years now, Network Zero has been making forbidden content available on the Internet for anyone who'll pay attention. Before that, it was public access cable television. And it's all real.

Jim Harrison first went on the air in the small hours of the morning on September 22nd, 1991, in Dallas, Texas. He was an independent filmmaker who up, until a few years before, had created special effects for a dozen or more monster movies. He received anonymously in the mail three reels of film, apparently recorded in the mid-1970s, if the look and sound of the people depicted was anything to go by.

One reel of film showed what looked like an impossibly huge feral dog stalking around residential streets in what landmarks identify as Philadelphia. Another reel showed a man, unnaturally blurry and out of focus, even when the ground and walls around him were crystal clear. The film showed the blurred man dissolve into a cloud of mist. The third — weirdest of all — showed a bizarre thing made wholly of rubbery, translucent tentacles, which emerged from the ground and reached up and pulled itself into the sky. No faces were evident; he could discover no identities. As for the film, he literally cut it to pieces and spliced it back together again, trying to find out how they had done the special effects. He couldn't.

He found a public access channel and broadcast all three films a couple of nights later. He asked at the end if anyone knew about the films, and gave out a post office box number. He never found out the truth behind those films, but he received a small sack of letters from people who had stories to tell. Some even had film of their own.

That was really how it began. Jim began to broadcast regularly and, gradually, he gained contacts across the USA. He began to think he was on to something; that he was at the edge of some vast conspiracy behind all these weird sightings. He became obsessed. He barely even noticed when his wife left him.

Meanwhile, many of Jim's contacts began to go out looking for weird phenomena. By the time Jim started up Network Zero as an Internet entity, back in early 1999, he had some 74 films from different sources, each showing something truly bizarre. It went worldwide. Now, Network Zero's membership spreads across the world, from Thailand to Alaska, from Rio De Janeiro to New Delhi.

Jim's now a firm believer, even though he has never knowingly seen anything supernatural face to face. Network Zero operates on a kind of guerrilla basis now, posting videos and sound clips everywhere it can, often with no introduction or explanation. It sends them to other web communities. Sometimes it even shares the information it has gathered with members of other monster-hunting organizations — its members aren't stupid, and they're well aware that these things are dangerous, and that these other organizations exist.

Network Zero invites people to join fairly regularly. With the Web 2.0 explosion, millions of videos and podcasts exist out there, and it's not hard to find out if people are on the level. A half-dozen members spend nearly all their spare time scouring dozens of community sites and search engines, looking for



more evidence to broadcast, while others, having discovered there are people out there who believe them, work harder to find even more evidence.

All too often, the evidence finds them. Jim Harrison's enterprise is worldwide now. It's dedicated to making as many people know about the truth as possible. Maybe that's what Jim's mystery cameraman wanted.

The Enemy

In the end, the folks on the Secret Frequency want as many people to know as much of the truth as they possibly can. Some want to arm humanity against the danger in their midst. Some just want to film weird things. And some want to prove they were right all along. First and foremost, it's about getting the information out there.

This isn't to say that broadcasters on the Secret Frequency can't be militant. Most figure out that it's better to go armed after a couple of excursions, if only for self-defense. Having said that, while some do decide to give their subjects a fight, few members of Network Zero are physically fit enough to have much of a chance against a raging shapeshifter or a hungry vampire. Often, they spend time with other hunters. They let their companions know where to find the paranormal entities they're after, and give them footage of what the creatures can do. Some "embed" with hunter cells, taking footage and supplying technical backup.

Jim Harrison and his contacts don't actually know all that much about the things they're filming. They've gathered enough to know that several broad categories of creature exist, but only really in terms of behavior and abilities. It's hampered a little by the simple fact that some supernatural creatures just don't show up on film. It's a source of endless frustration that no matter how hard you try to film some things, you just get empty rooms. On the other hand, the fact that vampires (for instance) show up on film as shadowy, indistinct blurs has become such common knowledge among Network Zero's members that taking a quick bit of film or a mobile phone photo, or checking the screen of a digital handicam trained on a suspect, has often become the simple acid test to ascertain whether or not that nocturnal weirdo really is an undead bloodsucker.

Hunters

You were young in the Summer of Love, but you're not young anymore. Even so, you don't feel old as such. Timothy Leary taught you everything you know, and if people mock you for being an old hippy who dropped a little too much acid back in the day, it only helps to add to the surprise when you produce a stellar, inexplicable piece of evidence.

You get bullied at school, but who cares? You've seen things that some of the jocks will never get to see; you've survived worse things than getting your face pushed into the lockers. No one can touch you when you're using a handicam; no one can follow you when you go online. You'd think your parents would be concerned, but they never say anything. They don't give a damn. Ignorance is bliss, after all.

You've never known the love of a member of the opposite sex, but you don't care, because you know the Big Truth, and

you're obsessed with making everyone else know it, too. You've got a password to the Secret Frequency, and a message to impart.

You were doing pretty well in a decent nine-to-five office job, good prospects, a pension scheme, private health plan, all that stuff. Then you were driving home one night, and you lost five minutes of your life. You became ill the next day. You began to suffer from tension and nightmares. You started to make mistakes at work. Through hypnotic regression, you found out you'd been abducted. You made the mistake of telling someone at work, or maybe you'd already uploaded a podcast to the Net and your boss found out about it. Either way, you're not in the office anymore. You survive off savings you never had time to spend before, and you've spent the last year trying to find the truth.

You were on active service in Afghanistan, guarding a TV crew, and while you were there, you witnessed something way weirder than the Taliban — just before that TV crew got torn to pieces and you lost consciousness. When you got home with your Purple Heart (as the only survivor), you found that someone had already uploaded the crew's film to the web. Now you've got a camera of your own. And a service sidearm, to boot.

You lecture parapsychology, but times change and university administrations change with them. The current dean thinks you're a crank. He's banned you from publishing in anything he doesn't think is "respectable" enough, and he's cut down your courses to almost nothing, leaving you to lecture conventional psychology. You've got a pile of evidence on film and paper, and nowhere for it to go, except on the Net. You've got a pseudonym and a broadband connection. It's the best you're going to get.

Crews

Network Zero is home to a thousand competing philosophies and methodologies, but a few crews have emerged as dominant groups within the Secret Frequency.

Most of Network Zero is home to what are sometimes referred to as **Record Keepers**. Like journalists, they don't judge the material they capture: their job is to capture it and to record it honestly and without modifications.

The so-called **Army of Truth** takes that to the next level, however, and seeks to disseminate the truth about monsters to the ignorant public at any cost. They will rip open unwitting eyes with strange stunts, viral memes, broadcast hijacking, what-have-you. The group has its militant members, and is also home to a perhaps disproportionate number of weapons-capable individuals.

On the other end of the spectrum, you have the so-called **Secret Keepers**, a cabal of conspiracy theorists who believe the world has fallen into monstrous hands and see every bit of bad news as an emblem or action sponsored by fiendish shadows. They actually seek to keep monstrous information *out of* the public hands, believing it will only spur the monsters to cover their tracks and damage the Vigil. No, they keep the information within the group instead, "building a case" for when the time is right for revelation.

Status

Members of Network Zero get into the group through invitation, after posting something of sufficient interest on the

STEREOTYPES

Loyalists of Thule: Several of our people out in the field have hooked up with these guys in some way or another. The moment you start poking into the weird stuff, the good stuff, it's like they know. They show up and ask if they can help. The question I want to ask is how do they know? Where do they get their books? And if they're so keen on helping, answer me this: why don't they want to tell you who sent them?

The Union: It's our job to find out things. It's up to us to let people see the truth. Comes a time when letting people know isn't enough, and someone's going to have to lay the smack down on the monsters. Truth is, it isn't going to be me does that. Good thing I know a few folks in the Union. They're not so bothered about the Big Picture, but if you can get them to tag along, they'll deal with the violence part. Every time.

Task Force: VALKYRIE: The government is in on it. You think 9/11 was a cover-up? Fuck you, this is a cover-up. Every story you've ever heard about the Men in Black? All true. Suits and soldiers. Oh, and sociopaths. They're worse than the monsters. Hell, most of them work for the monsters, that's what I heard.

The Cheiron Group: 'Course, the government's in cahoots with big business. At least one of the big pharmaceuticals companies is controlled by supernatural beings. Did a doc on it last year. I'm telling you, there's a war on, and one of the sides is using business as its front. They're not Feds. Nah, they act completely differently, like it's a paycheck, you know? But it doesn't matter. See, they own the Feds.

Net. They gain Status through continuing to share information and post revelatory material on the Net.

- You have a Network Zero password, allowing you to upload video, sound and text to the site, from where it's disseminated across the Net. In the short time since you joined Network Zero, you've probably found more about back doors and web shortcuts than you could ever have learned. You get a free Skill Specialty in either Crafts or Expression in some form of media or another (web, film, digital cameras, etc.).

- Under your Internet handle, you're well known, not just among people on the Secret Frequency, but more gen-

erally among those people who have an interest in matters Fortean. You have the equivalent of two dots in the Fame Merit, applicable to topics Fortean or supernatural among members of Network Zero and Internet conspiracy freaks.

••••• You get information sent to you, meaning that you've probably gathered hundreds of videos, sound files and documents. Your library gives you a limited form of the Encyclopedic Knowledge Merit, related to film techniques and supernatural phenomena, but only as far as recorded supernatural phenomena goes. You won't know the names of vampire or mage factions, but you do know things that are dead giveaways for various different categories of paranormal creatures when they're observed.



NULL MYSTERIIS

THE ORGANIZATION FOR RATIONAL ASSESSMENT
OF THE SUPERNATURAL

"Honestly," Taylor said, staring down in the empty shot glass set before him, "I'm not really convinced lycanthropy is even real."

The man next to him perked up, blinking. Every muscle in the lumberjack's body tightened. The cords of his neck tightened like steel cable.

"What did you just say?" the man growled.

"Oh, we can talk about it. Look around you. Bar's empty, just you, me and the barkeep, and he's in the restroom. I'm Doctor Welsh, by the way."

"Fuckin' fascinating. You mind telling me what it is you're babbling about over there?"

"It's just that, well, consider ergot. Bread mold. Whole reason the Puritanical fools of Salem had to worry about witches and the devil. They ate moldy bread, they hallucinated things that weren't there, end of story. No witches. No Devil. Rational solution. Now, lycanthropy —"

The man twisted his barstool toward Taylor. It was like watching a mountain move. "Maybe you ought to stop talking, Doc."

"Hold on, hear me out. Lycanthropy...nobody's ever seen a lycanthrope, at least none that I've met. They see different things. A madman bolting through a mall. A big dog running through traffic. Someone in a costume. Those who can remember anything useful describe little more than feelings of hysteria." He toyed with the shot glass, turning it over and over again in his hand. His heart, though, was beating a mile a minute.

The big lunk's hand shot out and grabbed hold of Taylor's shirt. Damn near ripped it off with that grip. Some chest hair came free, too.

"Hemophages — of course we know they exist. Werewolves, though...couldn't it be a product of a shared hallucination? Many deranged minds? Some airborne pheromone, perhaps?" The man's grip tightened. Buttons popped. "Care to share your thoughts, Mister, ahhh, what's your name again?"

The man was about to open his mouth to say something — but he didn't get the chance. The bartender rose up behind the man and stuck a needle through the tendons of that thick neck. The man tried to lurch to his feet, but the drug worked fast: one leg crossed in front of the other and he face-planted into a table. A few teeth skittered bloody across the wooden floor.

"Messy," Taylor said. The bartender — Jim Cotton, not a Null Mysteriis associate, but a friend nevertheless — shrugged.

"Messy's fine," Jim said.

"Will you call Evelyn for me? Have her bring the truck around? There's just one last thing here I need to check..."

Jim nodded, went off to grab the phone from under the bar. Taylor crouched down and took out a small fork: a piece of silverware, sterling silver. He pressed the tips of the four tines into the flesh of the man's exposed forearm. Tiny strings of smoke drifted from the skin. Four dots, burned into the flesh.

"That," Taylor said, putting the fork away, "still demands further study."

LABEL

REFILL 0 1 2 3 4 5 PRN

Everything has a rational explanation: it's just that scientists haven't got around to explaining some things yet. The paranormal and the supernatural are just phantoms — all just normal, natural phenomena that haven't yet been observed enough for anyone to make sense of them.

Agree with that? You're on the same page as Null Mysteriis. The organization's been diligently working on explaining anomalies since the day Jean-Pierre Brattel walked out of a Parisian Theosophical Society meeting in 1893. The Theosophists' original intent had been to apply the most rigorous standards of Victorian science to the claims of religion; Brattel found this fascinating, only to discover that in practice, the Theosophists were really just another new religious movement, one of dozens. After a few meetings full of messianic prophecies, hidden brotherhoods of Ancient Ascended Masters and suspect tales of rather convenient reincarnations, Brattel decided he had enough. It just wasn't *scientific* enough. On the other hand, he felt the rationalists discounted out of hand the possibility that there might be things yet unexplained, and that science had not yet found every law of creation. He saw a need for a group to scientifically examine things that are as yet, beyond science. He wasn't alone. By the beginning of the Great War, his brainchild, *Null Mysteriis* (an abbreviation of the Latin *Nullum Mysteriis Processit*: very loosely "out of the unexplained comes nothing"), had several hundred members across Europe and North America. The tragic turn taken by the first half of the 20th century wiped out whole groups, and although Null Mysteriis, the self-styled Organization for the Rational Assessment of the Supernatural, survives into the present day, it's only since the 1970s that its membership has been anything like that of its turn-of-the-century heyday.

They're hobbyists. Apart from a few paid office staff in Null Mysteriis' world headquarters, situated in London since 1941, hardly anyone in the compact gets any money out of it. Anyone can join, but the pittance requested for membership every year pays for the admin staff's salaries, a monthly newsletter, a yearbook and maintenance on the organization's various clubhouses. A "hunter" attached to Null Mysteriis usually has a day job, often a fairly well qualified and academically adept day job. Null Mysteriis' members include zoologists, physicists, psychologists, psychiatrists, consultant doctors, chemists, sociologists and anthropologists, all of whom have minds open enough to use methods that conventional science holds in suspicion to investigate things it won't even consider.

They look at anything that qualifies as anomalous: UFO sightings and cases of reincarnation, cases of the Stigmata and cryptozoological anomalies. And more often than not, they investigate monsters. An alleged werewolf rampages across a shopping center and hardly anyone admits to having seen it: see that conservatively dressed woman who's collecting blood and hair samples from the tiles and depositing them in test tubes? She's with Null Mysteriis.

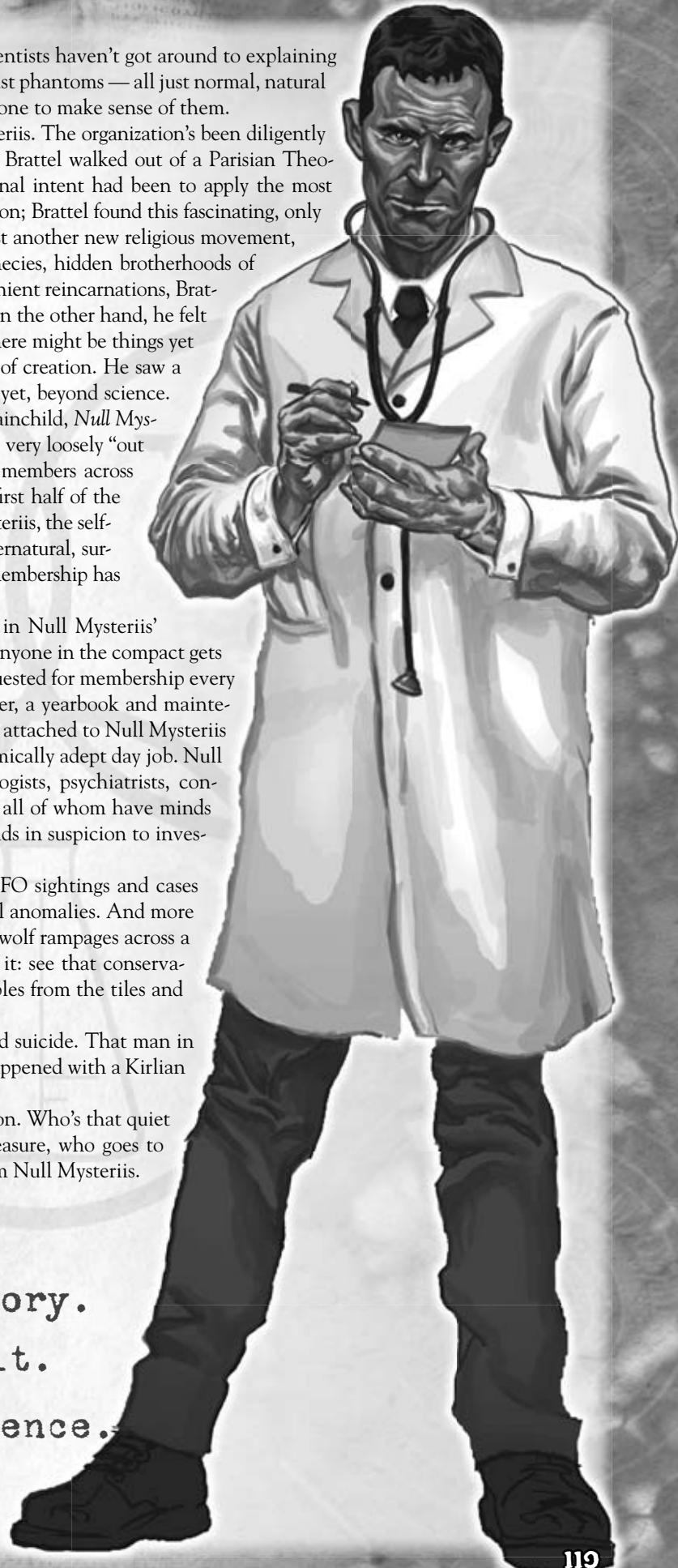
A case of alleged demon possession ends in murder and suicide. That man in the tweed jacket taking pictures of the house where it all happened with a Kirlian camera? Null Mysteriis.

A serial killer takes each victim in an impossible fashion. Who's that quiet young man with the oddly shaped meter and the tape measure, who goes to each murder site after the police have cleaned up? He's from Null Mysteriis.

For everything,
a theory.

This is not the occult.

This is science.



STEREOTYPES

Ashwood Abbey: Collective delusions are surprisingly common. Take the occasional groups of thrill-seekers who go out to hunt and kill monsters, solely for their own entertainment. They always seem to find their monsters. Does that strike you as a reasonable or likely outcome? Of course not.

Loyalists of Thule: Every so often, you meet someone who has a fount of information about the phenomena we study. Their help, willingly given, is always welcome, but they're an object lesson in how an obsession with the supernatural can make one all too gullible.

Lucifuge: Yes, I've heard myths about so-called Children of the Devil - who hasn't seen *The Omen*? But I've never seen any evidence of their existence. No, that doesn't mean they don't exist. But that's not the way it works.

Aegis Kai Doru: Let me get this straight. There's a conspiracy that's at least 2,000 years old, right? And it's got the head of John the Baptist and about a dozen other ancient holy relics, right, all hidden away and guarded by this hereditary sect? And sometimes they come out and use them to fight monsters? That's not a plausible scenario - that's *The Da Vinci Code*.

If Null Mysteriis has a failing, it's that the often august people who comprise the lion's share of its membership make the very common error of considering themselves expert in every field because of their undeniable expertise in one. Null Mysteriis' meetings can be fraught affairs, as physicists start holding forth on evolution and biologists start making pronouncements about psychology and ideology.

The problem's compounded by the fact that Null Mysteriis is currently in the middle of a schism of sorts. The current General Secretary, Scottish astrophysicist Alexander Watt, is a dyed-in-the-wool rationalist who holds that the supernatural is like quantum physics: it's something that merits scientific study, but in a cautious, tentative, sensible sort of way. On the other hand, Vincent Fielding, the Treasurer, is a charismatic psychiatrist who holds an almost gurulike fascination for many members of Null Mysteriis. He's stood against Prof. Watt for the post of General Secretary three years running now, but so far hasn't been elected. If, however, Fielding gets in this year, the winds of change are likely to blow hard. Fielding advocates much more aggressive fieldwork and the use of techniques that Watt dismisses as "pseudoscience": hypnotic past-life regressions, spirit cameras, the serious consideration of Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis, Sheldrake's morphogenic field theory, Devereux's earthlight evidence, the work of Lyall Watson, and a thousand other devices and ideas that Watt maintains will push Null Mysteriis firmly into the realm of the cranks.

Of course, some might argue they're there already. Certainly, although many highly regarded professionals in scientific fields pay regular membership dues, few of them openly admit to being members.

The Enemy

For Null Mysteriis, investigation is absolutely everything. It's not about stopping supernatural phenomena, or fighting evil. It's about knowing. The current orthodoxy among the organization is that the paranormal is neither good nor evil:

it's the result of one or more as-yet-unclassified orders of energy. And that's when the phenomenon is paranormal — it's often wholly explicable by conventional science.

But what if it isn't?

The supernatural seems, more often than not, to manifest in ways detrimental to humanity, but that doesn't make it evil. It's like radiation: everyone knows that radioactive material can kill, but at the same time, no one thinks it's consciously evil. The paranormal's often like that. If, for example, a paranormal conspiracy makes a man invulnerable but at the same time turns him into a deranged slasher, how is that different from radiation sickness, at least in moral terms?

Vampirism is a communicable illness, albeit one that somehow suspends human aging and hides life signs while making its victim vulnerable to light and dependent on a parasitic existence. Lycanthropy, likewise, is an extreme genetic condition. So-called ghosts carry the energy signatures of the living. Demons and similar apparently extra-dimensional creatures are composed of energy that could come from anything from quantum pocket universes down to geo-electricity, and given form by the perceptions of the viewer.

It's all got an explanation. If the explanation has holes, it's OK. Everything operates on the level of hypothesis. It's the best explanation that anyone's going to come by, and if someone comes along with a better one, that's fine.

All of this isn't to say that the members of Null Mysteriis can't and won't participate in the destruction of a dangerous supernatural creature. The radiation sickness analogy holds true: if an energy that gets out of hand is deadly, it mustn't be allowed to get out of hand. Likewise, if the state of vampirism makes one a blood-drinking psychopath, it may well be best, given the so far incurable nature of the disease, to put the poor soul out of his misery. Cancer may not be evil, but it *can* be cut out.

The members of Null Mysteriis are not often adept at direct violence. Subterfuge, yes. Stealth, sometimes. Far better

to approach a dangerous creature with a syringe of something potent than a shotgun or sledgehammer.

They often work alongside hunters of other compacts and conspiracies, bringing along their electromagnetic field readers and Kirlian cameras while other hunters bring Bibles, guns, grenades or holy swords. Some make contact through academic sources with members of the *Malleus Maleficarum*. Some have done contract work in their universities with people in the Cheiron Group. Of course, some hook up with members of the Ascended Ones, Aegis Kai Doru or Lucifuge, not to make alliances...but to capture and study these curious hunters with undocumented abilities.

Hunters

You spent years trying to prove the Extraterrestrial Hypothesis, and in the end you found nothing at all, and it frustrated you that many of your fellow seekers wanted to believe so much that they refused to accept evidence to the contrary, even when it was staring them in the face. You're not a professor or research scientist like most of the other members, but you appreciate the rigorous application of science and have made yourself useful in the field, because you're handy with a shotgun.

You're a professor in some very solid scientific field — evolutionary biology, perhaps, or organic chemistry — and you're about as convinced an atheist as anyone can be. There are *not* any more things in Heaven or Earth, Horatio, and you'll stake your reputation on proving it.

You lost a family member to some supernatural creature, and this led you on a dark path, a path that threatened to cost you your scientific career. Fortunately, you came across Null Mysteriis, and found that you could still be a scientist. Still, you're prone to rash decisions, and often behave violently toward things unknown — you hate and fear them, even if you don't admit it to yourself.

You got yourself a PhD by the skin of your teeth, but your heart lies with the alternatives, the fringes of science and medicine. You trade as a homeopath now, not letting people know that the PhD after your name is in physics, and finding great pleasure in going out and proving to yourself that science still has a way to go yet before it's got those universal mysteries pegged.

You used to be employed by the government, but there came a time when your masters employed you to clean up

something and not ask questions, questions you couldn't stop yourself asking. Now you ask freely.

Theories

Theories about the nature of the paranormal abound within Null Mysteriis; for every hunter, a new theory. Still, a large number of them can be very broadly categorized into one of three groups.

Alexander Watt's **Rationalists** form the majority of Null Mysteriis: it's all provable (and disprovable) with science — only some of it isn't yet, but will be one day. It just needs diligent research and sensible empirical study.

On the other hand, Vincent Fielding's **Open Minds** believe the important thing is proving or disproving the phenomenon by any means necessary — even means that some might call unscientific — and worrying about what makes it tick later. They're growing in numbers, much to the dismay of Watts' faction.

A small but similarly growing number of **Cataclysmists** rise above the methodological argument and instead react with concern to a steep rise in reported paranormal phenomena (and hence expense of unclassified energy) since the millennium, projecting that if it doesn't slow down soon, the world could be in for an cataclysm or apocalypse of some kind, and further postulating that maybe something needs to be done about it.

Status

Members of Null Mysteriis gain Status by gathering data and sharing it with the compact, maybe even publishing papers in the organization's annual journal.

• You are free (if not always welcome) to take part in any Null Mysteriis meeting, anywhere in the world. You've got some academic background. You gain a free specialty in Parapsychology, which you can apply to Academics, Occult or Science (your choice).

•• You have a wide knowledge of your fellow members, many of whom are prominently placed in academic institutions worldwide, equivalent to one extra dot in Contacts (representing a specialist in one academic or Scientific field of your choice) as well as one dot in Allies (Null Mysteriis).

•••• Having been in the field long enough, and having learned information from a broad sample of peers, you're able to make educated guesses as to the nature of supernatural phenomena. This is equivalent to the Common Sense Merit, albeit only applicable to situations where you are investigating the supernatural.



UNION

REGULAR JOES AND JANES

I don't want to have to kill nobody. You know? I got three kids, an ex-wife and a new wife. We all have bills to pay. We all have our dues and duties. We got a nice neighborhood here for the most part. Sure, you see some graffiti. Okay, you got those guys selling bootleg DVDs and whatever down out front of the zoo. But we're good people. Trying to get by.

Mikey, Johnette and I, we didn't kill that kid. I don't know how he got dead. Oh, we hurt him, sure. Dragged him into the park, pulled him underneath the jungle gym thing, and we put the lead pipe to his legs. Broke one of 'em. Not the knee, but the shinbone. And we didn't break it, not really. Just...chipped it. Kid was crying, boo hoo, woe is me, blah-dee-blah.

Sorry, asshole. Kid had to recognize, he's 17 years old. Right? You do bad shit at that age, they can convict you like you's an adult. Throw you in the slammer and melt down the key. I figure we're doin' him a favor. He wants to make a deal with a demon? To bring drugs into our nice neighborhood and try to sell that poison to our goddamn kids? Oh, hell no, chief. That's some bullshit right there. I will hit you where the Good Lord split you.

I know, he thought we weren't watching. Didn't know we had our own little neighborhood watch program going on. Well, Home First, motherfucker.

Except, shit. Now the kid's dead. Found his body in someone's trunk. Bunch of his organs missing. Some weird symbol carved in his head, and no, I don't know what symbol and I don't much care, either. You's guys want to look up the symbol, go the fuck ahead, no sweat off my back.

But I'm feelin' bad. Now, the three of us gotta figure out who killed the kid. I just better not find out it's some other hunter asshole, thinks he can come up in our business and start asserting himself. We took care of business. We police our own. We're unionized up here, and nobody better forget it.

In the States, it started with the Labor movement at the turn of the 20th century. Workers in factories and mines began to unionize, coming together to support and protect each other, the weak against the strong, the poor against the rich, the common folk against the powerful forces who would exploit them. A group of mobilized, politicized workers in Chicago discovered that the disease that plagued their children was no natural phenomenon. As they saw it, things other than factory owners exploited the masses, squeezing them dry for flesh, blood and souls just as much as grasping bosses used them for cheap labor. Alone they were weak. Together they were strong, and just as industrial action forced the fat cats to take notice, so, too, did organized resistance drive back terrible evils. The Chicago Union stayed together for a few years. When their fight was over, they disbanded.

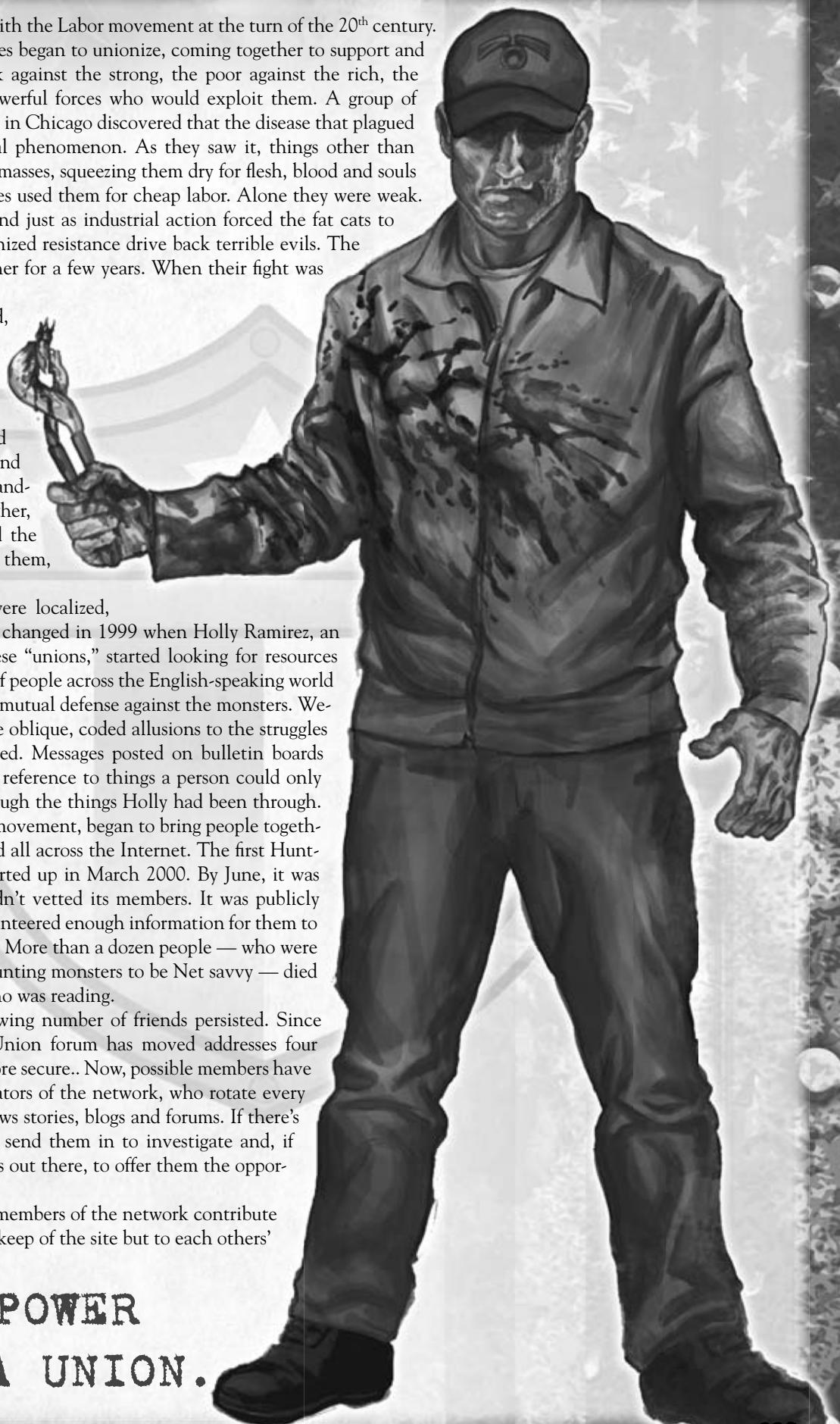
Across the Western world, the labor movement spawned more than just trade unions. It happened in England in the late 19th century, and in the 1920s. It happened in Australia in the 1930s and 1970s. Each time, as people banded together to support each other, someone or other discovered the creatures that preyed upon them, and did something about it.

For a long time, they were localized, short-lived movements. This changed in 1999 when Holly Ramirez, an active member of one of these “unions,” started looking for resources online. She found a number of people across the English-speaking world who had banded together for mutual defense against the monsters. Weblogs and online forums made oblique, coded allusions to the struggles these blue-collar hunters faced. Messages posted on bulletin boards dedicated to parenting made reference to things a person could only understand if she’d been through the things Holly had been through. Holly, a student of the labor movement, began to bring people together from all over the world and all across the Internet. The first Hunters’ Union bulletin board started up in March 2000. By June, it was gone. Naïvely, the board hadn’t vetted its members. It was publicly visible. Too many people volunteered enough information for them to be pretty conclusively visible. More than a dozen people — who were too busy with day jobs and hunting monsters to be Net savvy — died because they didn’t realize who was reading.

Still, Holly and her growing number of friends persisted. Since that disastrous spring, the Union forum has moved addresses four times, each time becoming more secure.. Now, possible members have to be invited. The administrators of the network, who rotate every six months, take notice of news stories, blogs and forums. If there’s someone in the region, they send them in to investigate and, if there really are fellow hunters out there, to offer them the opportunity to get a bit of support.

On the message boards, members of the network contribute financially not only to the upkeep of the site but to each others’

**THERE'S POWER
IN A UNION.**



efforts, paying for armaments, medical fees and funerals. Like a true union, the Union looks after the bereaved families of people who fell in the struggle. The online community has fostered a real community, with real friendships, real bonds of trust. Several people have met and married significant others through the community. It may be unofficial and ad hoc, but the bonds of human trust are powerful.

It's not so political these days, but it serves the same purpose as those men and women of Chicago so long ago: ordinary people standing together as one against those who would oppress them. The Union seems finally to be working on a worldwide basis. Holly would have been proud. The Union certainly recognizes its debt to her: there's a picture of her on a banner at the top of every forum page, linking to a page in her memory. She died fighting in 2005. Many of the Union's members knew her and would follow her, if necessary. For now, they're paying their dues.

The Enemy

The Union is so widely spread, so heterogeneous, that it's impossible to really generalize about its members' approach to the Vigil. Still, from a glance at the forums (assuming you've passed all the checks and got a password), it's fairly easy to conclude that the one thing most of them have in common is they're mainly concerned with protection of themselves, their families and their communities. It's not about ideology at all: if there is a threat, they band together and deal with it, posting in code on the bulletin board that they're going to war before they get cracking on the job at hand.

They don't really care what the monster is: they're all monsters, pretty much. Vampires, witches, beasts, demons, ghosts — they're all the same. Sometimes Union members take their vigilantism a bit further, dealing with human threats, ranging from slashers and cult members right down to muggers and drug dealers. What matters is if they pose a threat.

Until they actually harm someone, most of the Union's opponents don't really come under the radar. Although some of its members would like to be a bit more proactive, the Union is essentially reactive. If a monster doesn't come onto a member's turf, if it doesn't appear to hurt anyone, it's not worth it. It's a bit of a narrow view, but when you're most likely balancing being a monster hunter with a day job and a family, it makes a lot of sense.

The Union's online forums have a wealth of information...if only a member can find it. A sub-forum on the bulletin board archives information on many different kinds of creature, but it's split up among several hundred conversation threads, which, of course, are cluttered with conversation and tangential information. Searching is only of limited utility, since a lot of the Union forums' accepted slang terms for the different kinds of monsters get used interchangeably across different kinds of monster. Much of the information is accurate, inasmuch as it gives a pretty accurate view of what each monster can do and how often, their weaknesses, and the things that can't hurt them. But finding out what monster the forums are talking about — there's the trick. Depending on the wrong information has killed dozens of hunters over the years.

Hunters

You're a family man, balancing your own business with what you do at night. Your wife and kids are beginning to slip away from you, because you're not around, and you're beginning to make mistakes because you're way behind on sleep.

You work in a bar. People talk to you. Sometimes, when they've had a few, they let things slip and you have a job to do.

You lost your family to something terrible. Shortly after, you hit the bottle and the skids in quick succession. Almost by accident, you ended up killing off some kind of demon, and people saw you. You're getting yourself together now. You've got a job collecting trash and a place at the YMCA. Every so often, you log on at the local Internet cafe and pick up some information. No one knows the streets like you.

You're a political activist, and the monsters are just another kind of oppressor to hunt. The people in the anti-war group think you've got a screw loose. The people in the Union reckon the days of left-wing direct action are over. But what is the Union's purpose if it isn't a kind of social justice in action?

You've never thought about politics in your life. You're just a guy trying to get by. By day, you're a youth worker, trying to stop the local kids falling prey to drugs, keeping them out of the gangs, trying to do something about the poverty you see all around you. By night, you're keeping those kids safe from things that the other social workers don't even believe in.

You saw action in Iraq and you're home now, but the war still goes on; the nightmares you have of Basra have been supplemented by another nightmare that goes on and on, and you've got no choice but to fight it, because fighting is all there is, and fighting is your only chance of making it through.

Factions

The different philosophies held by members of the Union have nicknames that ascribe them more coherence than they actually have. Like any forum, the Union has flame wars and arguments. People make alliances and exchange details and thoughts privately with people they've never met face to face.

Most in the Union are **Home First** advocates: you look after your own. Your own turf, your own family, your own community. It's not about taking the fight to them. It's about keeping your part of the world safe. Having said that, members who become part of the Union community find that their part of the world soon extends to include the friends they've made through the web.

Members of **The General Strike** are much more extreme: they believe it's the Union's job to fight the forces of oppression across the world. The moral imperative, they say, is to go out and find those monsters and, when they discover them to be dangerous, kill the bastards. Not many members of the Union believe this. This is partly because, let's face it, the Union numbers a few hundred ordinary people worldwide. And also because Union members who favor the General Strike tend to get themselves killed. A lot.

Politics want to go back to the Union's predecessors, and go even beyond the General Strike: they say it's the

STEREOTYPES

Long Night: I've moonlighted for years now with a woman who belongs to the Long Night. She's mad as hell, runs on high-octane fear of some end-of-the-world scenario I couldn't hope to understand. You know what, though? I don't think I'd ever have anyone else on my side in a tight spot.

Network Zero: So one of the good people who moderate the message board has a friend who's involved with Network Zero. The Internet video station. The one with all the YouTube videos that everyone thinks are special effects. So anyway, she was telling us about the time when her buddies hooked up with the Network Zero guy for a fight and she told him to come armed. He brought a baseball bat and a handicam. Nothing else.

Malleus Maleficarum: A couple of times now, I've run into this priest who seems to be doing the same kind of thing as me. Only with, you know, papal sanction. I was brought up a good Catholic and everything, but you know, this guy scares me. He knew things. You can see it in his eyes. I think it must have driven him a little nuts. If you'd only seen what he did to that demon-thing. It was...biblical.

Task Force: VALKYRIE: Yeah, the government knows about all this. But ask yourself, do they ever actually do anything for the people? You hear rumors of this top-secret monster-hunting squad, but what are they there for? Sure, they kill the monsters, or take them away in their black helicopters and do horrible things to them in some kind of monster-Gitmo, but do they care about protecting us? No. That's our job.

Union's job to fight *all* oppression, both from the supernatural monsters and the human ones, who exploit people all over the world. Politicals are often very dangerous people — they're extreme in their views and actions. Some of them even end up on security agencies' lists of suspected terrorists. Blowing up a train car to get their message across...it's hard business, but they do what they think they must.

Status

Union members gain Status less from killing monsters — anyone can say they've killed a dozen vampires on the Net — and more from supporting others with advice, information and sometimes even material aid. The more you contribute to the Union, the more respect you get, and the more you can ask.

- You've been invited to join the Union. You've met a member face to face, and you've got access to the forums. Since you've joined, you've gained some practical ex-

perience in watching the streets in your local area. You gain a free specialty in your Local Area, applied to either Streetwise or Politics.

••• You've been out in the field with several other members of the Union and you've offered support to many others. You know what it's like to be a newbie. You may take advantage of two extra dots of Contacts, each defined as a specialist in one kind of monster.

•••• You've saved the lives of members of the Union with your help and information, and you've probably even bailed someone out of prison or helped pay for a funeral or two. What you put in, you get out. You can access two extra dots of Resources for things related to hunting, but you must be prepared to show evidence of it doing some good, or run the risk of losing Status.



AEGIS KAI DORU

GUARDIANS OF THE LABYRINTH

Guardian Oveau:

I failed. I shouldn't have. But I did.

I was standing there at the counter, looking at the case of knives and pistols beneath me, the rack of long rifles and shotguns along the far wall. The proprietor comes out of the back, carrying something in a blanket the way a fireman might carry a wounded child from a burning building. He gently sets the blanket down, unrolls the fabric.

It's just what we thought it would be. A Winchester 1886 .45-70, lever action. Walnut stock with ebony inlay. Octagonal extra-heavy barrel. Nice piece of work, but that's not what makes this one of a kind, oh no. Caliber mispointed as .40-82, that's one. Two, engraved in the butt of the stock where the buttplate should be is some kind of rune - Atlantean, if you believe Burroughs. Third, and best of all? Engraved into the case hardened receiver, "xxxx" and then a date: "02/12/2012." Some say the day the world will end.

I was about to ask the price. Before I could, the proprietor's head jerked back like he'd just been punched in the forehead. He choked. I tried to ask him what was wrong and his mouth just opened, and he coughed up a single black feather. Followed by bile and blood.

He dropped, and the front window shattered.

Next thing I know, the room's filled with birds. I swear, Oveau, I've never been that terrified in my life. They're just birds, I know. But the wings. The beaks pecking at me. Little claws scraping, all that screeching. At first I thought, well, I've got a rifle here. And this rifle is purportedly magic, used as it was by some sorcerer sheriff during days long past, and supposedly the damn thing doesn't miss. Of course, I don't have any bullets for the thing, so I think, I hope this guy's got a box of these shells sitting around somewhere, but I never got the chance to find out.

Two witches stepped into the room. Just shadows, really. White faces, but I couldn't make out any features behind the whirling birds. Couldn't even tell if they were men, women, or what.

The bird screeching reached a terrible crescendo. A hand descended from the chaos, and just gently took the rifle away. I couldn't do a thing to stop it. My muscles froze. My thoughts, it's like someone took my last dumb thought and forced it to play on repeat for the next five minutes. By the time my muscles unclenched and my brain started working again, they were gone, the gun was gone, and I had a corpse lying just a few feet away. Not to mention all the bird droppings and feathers.

It wasn't a good day.

I'll get that rifle. Don't worry.

Sincerely,

Guardian Ardell

They say there's a room somewhere under the ground, where for well over a thousand years, generations of one family have kept hidden the head of John the Baptist. It still sometimes prophesies disaster, they say. Who guards it?

They tell the story of Berenger le Saunière, a poor village priest who, all of a sudden, became fabulously rich. He left cryptic clues in the fabric of his church. The confessor would not absolve him on his deathbed. What did he find?

The story of Jacques de Molay, burnt for heresy, still does the rounds, ending with a rumor of a treasure and a curse, lost since that day. Who knows where it can be?

Does the tomb treasure of Akhenaten, heretic pharaoh of Egypt, still exist? Or the looted treasure of Troy? Or the golden chains that once bound Zenobia? Or the tomb of Gilgamesh?

The Guardians of the Labyrinth know. They are the Aegis Kai Doru, the Shield and Spear. They believe it has been their business since before history began not only to guard the magical treasures of countless lost worlds, but to use them against creatures of the supernatural realm, against whom they still nurse an ancient grudge.

They're antediluvian: they tell their initiates that they predate the great flood event common to the myth of most Mediterranean and Middle Eastern cultures. Some even call it *Atlantis*, or *Lemuria*, or *Pan*, or *Mu*. Once, they say, every one of their number could use magic freely. Even then, they were the custodians of a vast labyrinth in which the greatest magical treasures were kept.

A quarrel turned into a war, and one faction ejected the owners of that ancient maze from the island. They made plans to return, but the cataclysm came too soon, because — so the Aegis Kai Doru believe — the shape-changing people broke an ancient taboo and brought down the wrath of heaven and the spirits. The isle sank. The exiles were joined by other exiles. But they did not forgive. They blamed the disaster on those who had cast them out, and began to wage war using the few relics they had taken with them. The others had destroyed paradise, they said. That could not be forgiven.

More than a thousand years later, they had forgotten their own magic and had become the Aegis Kai Doru, the Shield and Spear, after the treasure of Troy (which some of their number absconded with when the city fell). The relics were theirs to keep and, when necessary, use to protect those people who suffered at the hands of callous witches and hungry fiends.

They maintained this purpose through the ages of Greece and Rome, the Byzantine Empire and the Renaissance, the Enlightenment and the Modern Age, all the time seeking out those objects that it was their right to protect and use.

Even now, an Inner Circle still meets in Athens, and keeps a list both of the relics found, lost and destroyed, and the witches and monsters they have killed. Few among the Aegis have ever met the purported nine who sit upon the council, but those who have speak of their fervor, of the strange look they have in their eyes, of the vast chamber of which every one of a hundred alcoves contains a thing of immeasurable value and power.

Hardly any of the Guardians get as far as the Second Initiation into the Secrets of the Aegis Kai Doru; few are even aware that the Aegis



Oh, this?
Worthless.

Ten a penny.

I keep it for...
sentimental reasons.

Kai Doru has more than the one initiation. The Aegis Kai Doru remains picky about whom it recruits, spending years at a time checking out candidates and often picking people from the same families who have been part of the Aegis Kai Doru for thousands of years. The older, higher members of the organization often show a great deal of subtlety in recruitment. Sometimes a new member doesn't even know he's joined.

The Enemy

Hardly a single magician or werewolf alive today really understands what the Aegis Kai Doru is doing or why it should still matter. But long, long ago, the progenitors of the Aegis Kai Doru made a vow so binding that it still holds today, and to undergo the First Initiation is to understand *why*. They send each initiate alone at sunset into an underground labyrinth filled with hallucinogenic vapors. Beset with visions, chased by imaginary horrors, the initiate has until dawn to find the exit. There, the Guardians stop him and make him take the ancient Vow of the Sword to destroy "they who work magic and they who change skin." An initiate who can't get out, or who ends up too mad or incoherent to take the Vow, fails the initiation.

Having said that, in the field, reality can get in the way. Sometimes a magician is simply doing no harm. Sometimes, a hunter of the Aegis Kai Doru finds the werewolves or magicians warring among themselves, and realizes that it will be better for all if one faction triumphs rather than another. Sometimes, a Guardian simply decides that he just isn't strong enough to take one of his "ancient enemies" alone.

THE MANY MAZES

Wherever the Aegis Kai Doru has a powerbase (more than just a cell or two), the conspiracy establishes a labyrinth somewhere to use in its initiation. Might be a cave-carved catacomb. Could be a snarling jumble of sewer tunnels. Or perhaps even a labyrinthine mansion with many rooms, many floors, and countless secret passages connecting them all.

The "hallucinogenic vapors" is usually as a result of some relic or another. When one is not available, they simply dose the novitiate with a hefty load of entheogenic drugs: mushrooms, ayahuasca, LSD, or some other psychoactive substance.

The Guardians have largely forgotten most of what they once knew about the witches. They have a vague understanding of the powers a mage can display (although they are often caught by surprise). They know that some werewolves are man-eaters, and some aren't, but again, so much of what they knew is now lost.

As for other creatures, local Aegis Kai Doru cells decide what to do with them on a case-by-case basis. Some horrors do little harm. Some even try to help. And some can be used or manipulated into helping the Shield and Spear get what it wants.

Hunters

You're an archaeologist — not an office-bound, dusty academic, or the kind who ends up covered up to his knees in some mud-hole somewhere. You're the kind who isn't supposed to exist, a raider of tombs and temples, one who dodges ancient enemies and more ancient traps in order to find the tools you will use to destroy evil.

You were a student of Classics, part of a strange, close-knit community that began to experiment with ancient ways of thinking and acting. One night, something went wrong and someone died. You and your friends hastily covered it up, forming a conspiracy that began to overtake your lives. At some point, your small, makeshift conspiracy became part of a larger one; the Aegis Kai Doru began to call on you to play a part in another conspiracy, fighting a small war that makes no real sense. You still don't know why, but you're terrified they'll rat you out. So you do what they say.

You're a cabbie or a postal worker, although when you're called to use the relic you guard, you adopt a different identity, telling people you're a professor of some made-up subject with a nonsense name like "Symbology" or somesuch. You don't think you play the part of professor all that well, but no one seems to have caught you. Lies suit you well.

You're an artist, probably a performance artist. You don't make a lot of money, but it doesn't matter: your riches go into your blood. You can trace your family tree back to Constantine, or Aristotle, or maybe even Jesus Christ. It doesn't make you any more powerful, but it does give you, you feel, the right to wield the weapon you guard.

Conspiracies

The Aegis Kai Doru upholds a small number of conspiracies, each with a different purpose. There may be more than just these three. It's hard to tell.

The Sword upholds the Vow, to the letter. They nurse the old grudge, specifically seeking out workers of magic and changers of skins and kill them. What does it matter if thousands of years have passed and they know nothing of the grudge? That's not the point. The point is, a vow was made, and they must be destroyed. They're militant and proactive, often wading in when other Guardians hold back. They're also the most numerous and influential among the Aegis Kai Doru's hunters.

The Temple guards the relics that give the Aegis Kai Doru its power, also attempting to locate those relics that

STEREOTYPES

Ashwood Abbey: From a decent vantage point, I observed a group of men and women arrive and then sit down to a meal with the witch. I suspected these were the whore's allies, and so I waited. The group laughed a lot. Shared plates of exotic meats and fruits, but never drinks. Nearly an hour in, the witch looked uncomfortable. Her discomfort grew, and plainly became pain. Agonized, she vomited, but her guests kept laughing even after she toppled from her chair, choking to death. The laughs never stopped. They packed up their things and put them back in a picnic basket, and left. They never touched the witch's artifacts, which are now mine.

Loyalist of Thule: They came, apparently, out of nowhere somewhere after the Second World War. Tweedy, scholarly types, the lot of them. They seem suspiciously keen to offer their help. And they're terribly curious. We'll take the help, but there's no way we're going to trust them with our secrets until we know theirs.

The Cheiron Group: You hear about the lawsuit a few years ago? Cheiron sued the owner of some Internet site that had put out the old myth about the logo being Satanic. Of course, they won. But we know what that logo means, and we know how much longer the Cheiron group existed before they ever began selling painkillers. Of course, I'm afraid of them. As should you be.

Ascending Ones: I heard a story about a group of hunters - one of our factions, in fact - who came from the Middle East. They had potions and elixirs that made them superhuman. They must have died centuries ago. It's certainly hard to credit the idea that they have anything to do with the group who appear to claim their heritage. These new "Ascending Ones" are no more than criminals and worse. Although they still have the potions. That secret should be ours.

have been lost. Often, seeking relics becomes so important to the members of the Temple that it gets in the way of the Vow. The Sword tends to look down on the Temple, but recognizes that without them, there would be no Guardians.

The Scroll keeps records of the items of power that the Aegis Kai Doru protects and uses. They test new finds in the field, learning how to use them and taking note of their properties. They're also the keepers of lore on the Guardians' enemies and their weaknesses. If they're not as committed as the Sword, it's because they often have a better idea of what they're facing.

Status

The Guardians of the Labyrinth gain Status through finding relics, discovering what relics do, and using them against their ancient enemies.

- You own at least one relic, and you have experienced the First Initiation into the Secrets of the Aegis Kai Doru. You have the option of spending Merit dots to gain the custody and use of the Guardians' Relics.

- You've spent so long doing research that it's second nature to you. You get +1 on Academics-based dice pools pertaining to relics and archaeology.

- You've experienced the Second Initiation; your senses don't work the same way. You begin to be able to sense the old enemies of your sect. You gain the Unseen Sense Merit, applying to mages (or, if you already have it applied to mages, to werewolves. If by some freak circumstance you have *both*, you can apply the new Merit to any one other kind of supernatural being).



ASCENDING ON E S

THE CULT OF THE PHOENIX

Kimya vomited. The sands before her threatened to swallow her. The skies dripped with blood, pouring fresh from the sun, which was not a sun at all but a cigarette burn. Her throat felt like it was on fire, a pillar of searing flame whirling about in the tender flesh of her esophagus. She tried to cry out, tried to plead with the visions to stop, but she could only manage to throw up again.

Farnad only laughed. Blew smoke in her face, which made it all worse. He pushed her down and rubbed a cold unguent in her eyes — it stank of pitch, and felt like acid.

"You can't handle this?" he chided her. "How will you handle the poison that enters your veins when an ifrit scratches you with one of its claws? How will your body react to the venomous blood within a ghul's body? Eh? Concentrate, you stupid girl! Do you want to die out there? You need to harden yourself. Feel the toxins inside you. Turn them to their proper task. Concentrate. Take but a moment to make yourself strong."

She tried to concentrate, tried to use her body as a mortar, her will as a pestle — the monsters had stolen everything, her son, her home, her country — and for a moment within her, something budged. It was a tiny thing, like moving a mote of dust with a hammer, but it was something.

And then it was gone, lost, and the pain was once more everything. She wept on the ground beneath the hot sun. She heaved.

Farnad patted her on the hip. "Don't worry. We will try again tomorrow. And the next day, and the next. I'll go turn on the samovar, make us some chai."



Every night the sun dies; every morning it rises again, and will do so until the end of the world. In Egypt, the great beetle Khepri rolled the new sun back across the sky; Amon-Re shone with brightness and power and died at the end of the day, to be reborn again. In the same way, the Phoenix, so the legends said, immolated itself at the end of its life only to be reborn from its own ashes, never to die.

It was in Egypt that two sects of soldiers were born, two cults that were charged from a time before memory to fight the forces of the dark. By night, the Cult of Set protected the people; by day the Cult of the Phoenix fought the forces of evil.

In time, the Cult of Set became compromised by the creatures it was fighting. It vanished, leaving only the Cult of the Phoenix to patrol both day and night. Although it was strong of spirit, its task became too much for its members. One of the founders of the cult of the Phoenix fought to find a way to keep his men fighting when lesser men reached the point of collapse. He began to brew potions.

One night, he drank a draught of his first elixir and led his men into battle. In the morning, he led his men into battle again. That evening, he could still fight, and so he continued, for a week, and then a month, and then a year, and after three years, three months, three weeks and three days, the potion wore off and he died.

Another founder created a similar potion, but this one he tempered with poison, that he would not be tempted to over drink as his predecessor had done. And so, he drank a little and instantly died.

The third man took to prayer and self-discipline: he brewed that poison-laced potion again, but made himself ready for it, and as he drank, his faith changed the poison into sweet water, allowing the power of the elixir to flow through him. And this is how the Cult of the Phoenix Ascending from the Flames, the Ascending Ones, gained their elixirs: poisonous to all but those who know the self-discipline necessary to transform the poison into a powerful transformative concoction.

Their cult continued, strictly regimented. Its form changed little from century to century. They fought the monsters that made their home in the Middle East. They ranged across the Roman Empire, and they continued through the rise of both Christianity and Islam. Both Christ and Muhammed had a profound effect on the Ascending Ones. The strict hierarchy of the Ascending Ones fit well with the hierarchical, paternalistic structure of these early religions, and although the mystic tradition survived in Europe, many of the Ascending Ones in the Middle East became Muslim or Christian, seeing the phoenix as either a parable of Allah's mercy, or as a representation of the Son of God rising from death.

As time went on, the Ascending Ones became adept at brewing and distilling not only their own poisoned brews, but others, too. Realizing that if they were to be able to support themselves as hunters, they had to find a means of reliable cash, they became among the earliest traders and cultivators of opium in the Middle East.

As the centuries wore on, the Ascending Ones waged a continuing war against the monsters, with many cells supporting themselves by manufacturing and trading drugs. As governments gradually made narcotics illegal, so the Ascending Ones found themselves taking part in organized crime, even while trying to defend the human race from the monsters. It manages to be a hard line to walk: to do battle against the darkness, it seems sometimes necessary to cloak oneself in shadow.

The Enemy

The Ascending Ones protect the human race twice over. They protect the people from the monsters, fighting the crea-

Our war is eternal.

Our sacrifices, ceaseless.

Drink this,

and be ready.

tures off or talking them out of slaying. And they protect them from the knowledge of the monsters, making sure no one knows what they do.

Although organized roughly along military lines, the Ascending Ones aren't just obsessed with killing, however. Sometimes they try to "save" the monsters, converting them to the true faith, or trying to talk them out of disastrous courses of action, since they recognize that not all supernatural beings are necessarily dangerous to humans.

Sometimes, the Ascending Ones become aware of a war brewing between the creatures, and adopt the practice of *Sulha*, the ancient Arabic form of diplomacy, where one man serves as a moving intermediary between two factions, traveling from one side to the other until he can get a solution. It's incredibly risky and doesn't often succeed, but even when it doesn't, it buys time for the hunters' friends to prepare to deal with things in a less diplomatic way.

Given that sort of contact, one might think the Ascending Ones are highly knowledgeable about the creatures they fight, but it isn't necessarily so, since the issues they deal with rarely go on any level beyond the personal: an Ascending One might well understand what makes an individual magician, werewolf or vampire tick, but that doesn't mean he knows anything about their society or even necessarily their powers.

Also, the Ascending Ones don't operate in a vacuum; sometimes business (and all the trouble that their kind of "business" brings) gets in the way. The small-scale hierarchy they use, where a small pyramid structure operates in a given region with little reference to other areas, often means that Ascending Ones don't necessarily have any way to share information with their counterparts in other areas or countries.

Hunters

You're the imam from an inner-city Islamic community. You care deeply for the people in your care, and this, more than anything, is why you allowed yourself to take a small part in the Ascending Ones' rigid hierarchy. If lives are saved, you are at peace with risking yourself.

You left Bosnia as soon as you could, because God had abandoned you and everyone else there. During the war, you saw terrible things, not all of them human. They made you part of the cult back then, and you thought you'd escaped all that, but no — they found you again.

You are an initiate into the seventh level, admitted to the third Gate, keeper of the Draught of Hermes. And in your day job, you're an accountant. You like all the weird Egyptian mysticism shit. You like drugs. You like the adrenalin rush. It's a good fit.

STEREOTYPES

Ashwood Abbey: I'll tell you about a regular customer I have. He tries everything. Sometimes even gets it in bulk, if I can supply it. Pays up front every time. And sometimes, he goes out hunting. For fun. I don't know a single other person, human or not, whom I hold in so much contempt. But I'd still take him on the hunt with me. He's a demon incarnate.

Null Mysteriis: I spent a week hunting a Djinn alongside a man who inquired endlessly into the truth behind things, but who did not want to believe in the very existence of the creature he was pursuing. He died still trying to deny the thing that was killing him. Futile.

Lucifuge: When this first began for me, I wasn't aware of what else was out there. But it's true: the end does justify the means, and if there are those who admit kinship with Shaitan himself - if only to destroy the works of evil - then so be it. We will even work alongside them. But when the work is done, if any survive, they must follow the other monsters to Hell. It is the only way.

Aegis Kai Doru: I have dealt on occasion with a woman who collects things of power, and uses them to destroy things of evil. She's righteous, but she understands neither true religion nor the realities of this world we live in. And so, she is weak.

When your brother was shot in a drive-by, you swore you'd never get into dealing, and you'd get out of the old neighborhood. You're still here, and you're dealing, just like your brother did, but you've got a reason to stay. They tell you that if you're a dealer, you're a parasite. Maybe you ruin the lives of the kids, but it's the only way you can get together enough time and money to save them from other things. There are worse things than drugs and gangs and dealers.

You met her in rehab. Rehab wasn't working for you, and she knew that. She said she had another way. A way to turn your body into a crucible, and in it your will could transform your addictions into a secret strength. Of course, she didn't tell you the cost. The first time you battled the demons in that warehouse, you were high as a kite. It would take practice, she said, even as she stitched up the gash in your side.

Factions

The Ascending Ones are so ancient and so widespread that members of its various factions probably wouldn't even recognize each other as being part of the same notional organization. There are many factions of Ascending Ones, but most are sub-groups or splinters of the three largest groups.

The **Order of the Southern Temple**, for example, grew into, and out of, a Western mystical tradition. They use the purported writings of Hermes Trismegistus as the trappings surrounding the ritual creation of their elixirs, and adopt the strictly hierarchical order of one of the traditional Western occult groups, with its odd rituals and near-impenetrable rites.

On the other hand, many of the **Knife of Paradise** maintain a strong militaristic and religious bent. Most are Christians or Muslims, through it features a strong contingent

of Jewish hunters, to boot. For them, the fight against the monsters is a holy one, and they consider themselves *Shurat*, or "having sold their souls to god." They do not reject the Egyptian mysticism, nor do they waste time squabbling about religious conflicts within the conspiracy, instead forming a syncretism where appropriate. Gnostic beliefs are not uncommon.

The **Jagged Crescent** fund their efforts through drug trafficking and gang crime. They're predominantly urban in style and attitude, and are mostly concerned with funding the efforts of their brothers. (Many end up using what they sell, too.) Of course, working the underworld is also a good way to take care of the monsters — society's darkest underbelly is home to a whole host of inhuman parasites.

Status

Among the Ascending Ones, a hunter gains Status through displaying endurance in the hunt, discipline and strength of will. Willpower is a precious commodity among those whose prowess depends on drugs.

- You have been initiated into one version of the cult or another, and now know how to control your body chemistry so that you can transform the poisonous elixirs of the Ascending ones into powerful drugs. You have the option of spending Merit dots on the ability to imbibe Elixirs.
- You have access to some of the organization's not-inconsiderable funds, equivalent to two extra dots of Resources, limited to use in the Vigil, however you conceive it.
- You gain the services of an initiate in the cult, equivalent to a three-dot Retainer.



THE CHEIRON GROUP

THE FIELD PROJECTS DIVISION

TO: Alicia Magnum (a_magnum@cheirongroup.com)

FROM: Gwendolyn Barthes (g_barthes@cheirongroup.com)

SUBJECT: Test Subject 77A-3

"Frankly, I don't even know what it is," Gwendolyn Barthes said, rubbing her temples with her well-manicured fingers. Alicia Mangum, standing next to her in the sharp-angled pants suit, took a gander at the clipboard.

"The researchers don't seem to have a solid idea, either. It bleeds. It has a heartbeat. It speaks English. It had a pocket full of thorns when we brought it in, and we've seen that before."

Gwendolyn finally started rummaging around in her purse, looking for pills. Bingo. Xanax. Happy. She dumped a couple into her hand and swallowed them dry. "Mm, thorns, right, right." The socialite shuddered. "Any use for the thorns yet?"

"Not so far, though there might be an enzyme in there to be used as an anticoagulant. We actually might test them on the subject next, go past the monkeys and the rats and see how she — er, it — reacts."

"Do you ever..." Gwendolyn's voice trailed off.

Alicia knew where she was going. "Feel bad about this? Absolutely. Right now, you look at the subject, and it looks like a young girl." And she did. Socks pulled up high. Dirt-smudged cheeks, round and ruddy. Big, broad eyes. A torn sundress. "She looks human, but then sometimes...well, you saw the video. Sad little girl in Cheiron cage one minute, but then you gas her and it's like, for just that one second, everything changes. Skin like autumn leaves. Weird little mushrooms all over her body. And those eyes — hypnotic, really hypnotic."

"She's trying to speak." Not that they could hear her from behind that heavy Plexiglas. "What has she been saying?"

"Same old, same old. 'Let me out,' lots of begging, lots of pleading. The occasional threat. But she's not human. Whole lot of things out there that aren't human, but they have their uses, just as she —"

"It," Gwendolyn corrected.

"That's the spirit, yes. It has uses, too."

Ours is not to reason why.

Ours is a fantastic pension
and health package,
however.

Back in 1999, European pharmaceuticals and medical conglomerate the Cheiron Group (TCG) engaged in a highly publicized series of lawsuits directed against a number of individuals and groups — mostly religious in nature, mostly American — who had propagated in the media the story that the company was controlled by Satanic forces. The story had come out of TCG's logo, the head of a horned, bearded man wearing a laurel wreath and superimposed over a caduceus. Various fundamentalists in the US misinterpreted the logo's classical pagan imagery as being somehow occult, and further misinterpreted "occult" as straight Devil worship. They gladly propagated the Satanic connection, at times even encouraging people to boycott the conglomerate.

Cheiron cleaned up, and one US televangelist and several small businesses ended up going bankrupt. TCG looked bit like the bad guy in some of those situations, but the company's spokespersons maintained it was necessary. Cheiron and its owned partners formed one of the foremost medical corporations in the world. Cheiron itself has been dedicated to affordable and effective medication for everything from asthma to HIV since 1904. Weide GmbH is one of the foremost producers of medical technology — scanning equipment, radiotherapy resources and dialysis machines, for example. Barthes Incorporated produces neurology equipment and puts millions each year into research into medical prosthesis. Jones-Klein-Beauchamp manufactures painkillers, and owns a number of well-known brands of sweets and soft drinks. The spokespersons pointed to TCG's unmatched record in the field of research, and the high effectiveness of treatments discovered by TCG's researchers. Cheiron was a fundamentally benevolent business, they said, and as such needed to protect its reputation.

The ironic thing was, the fundamentalists were about half right. There really is something very fishy going on with the Cheiron Group.

The central company, Cheiron Ltd, has been around for about 100 years. Company literature describes the company logo as having been designed by Cheiron's founder, Edward Barrett, in 1905. But if that's so, how come the logo appears on a sculpted medallion above the door of an 18th-century Masonic hall in London? Why does that same logo appear in a suppressed book on forbidden religions printed in Geneva in 1632? What is the logo doing engraved on the ornate helmet of a 15th-century suit of Bavarian plate armor? And, for that matter, why is it repeated perfectly as the motif on the pediment of a sunken



temple off Santorini, apparently lost well over 3,000 years ago and only rediscovered in 1987?

Maybe the Board of Directors knows. Not that anyone else can find out. No one knows for sure who the Directors even *are*. No list of their names has existed since Edward Barrett retired in 1921, and even then, he's the only Director the company has ever named. Even bearing in mind its successes in the pharmaceutical field, how on Earth does a company like Cheiron maintain such stellar stock prices without ever having a name or a face at its head?

And then you have the activities of those TCG employees who *aren't* involved in developing, manufacturing or selling wonder drugs and dialysis machines, the ones who get paid to investigate supernatural phenomena and kidnap monsters, the ones who contain the monsters, and the ones who *experiment* on the creatures (using science that really shouldn't work by any normal rules).

That, at least, is the one secret of TCG that the resources of its "Field Projects Division" are party to: they capture the monsters, and the monsters are turned into guinea pigs, ingredients and spare parts. And then they pick up a more-than-adequate paycheck at the end of the day.

And there are other, more dubious benefits, too. In an age when most of the big companies are divesting their employees and contracting them back as temps, TCG's field resources get a job for life, whether they want it or not.

Part of that is the contract. But a big part of that is the surgery. In order to make their agents more capable of facing down the creatures they have to catch for a living, TCG's staff doctors *change* them, replacing limbs and organs while adding others, making them, in a small part, the monsters they get paid to bring down. The man in the company car might have a suite of special organs melded with his flesh, but he knows that they are still company property. Cheiron owns him, literally, and there isn't any way he's ever leaving, even when he goes and inevitably gets himself killed — the contract says they get to render down *his* body in the R&D department, too.

The Enemy

If anyone challenges a field resource working for Cheiron, she's likely to mention "Directive 53." She's talking about Safety Phrase 53 in an old EEC Council Directive (67/548/EEC). Put simply, it instructs companies to avoid exposure of the public to dangerous substances and to obtain special instructions before using them.

The European Economic Community has been defunct for years, replaced by the European Union, but still, TCG claims Directive 53 as its mandate. It's one of the first sections in the Field Projects Division Handbook, a slim, plain brown paperback that serves as the bible for Cheiron's field resources.

The handbook purports to be a comprehensive guide to procedure and a brief encyclopedia of Potential Assets (which is TCG jargon for "any supernatural creature we can catch and make use of in the lab"). The parts about procedure are pretty limited in use. The parts about the monsters are all but useless: vampires, it says, drink blood and are vulnerable to sunlight. Werewolves suffer an extreme allergy to silver, it says, and goes on to say that TCG doesn't issue silver bullets.

The handbooks have no corporate insignia, no names of authors, no ISBN numbers. It has the FPD's own logo on the front (a stylization of Cheiron the hunter's bow and arrow). At no point is the company mentioned by name. It's always just "the Company." Eve y so often, one gets out into the public sphere without any real effect. They're completely deniable. Even so, Cheiron agents do try their best to keep them out of the wrong hands (read: anyone else's), and kill to get them back. Not that the handbook is all that useful. Cheiron is a massive conglomerate, with vast resources, but for all that, it's no more efficient than any other mega-corporation. Following the handbook is a good way to be killed, or worse, and quickly. Some of Cheiron's more jaded members have suggested — anonymously — that it's not that TCG is clueless. They say it's that TCG, for reasons never adequately explained, sees fit to deliberately supply its field resources with inadequate and inaccurate information.

The good news is that while the agents are probably better off not reading the handbook (but they had better not throw it away — it's still company property), they do get almost free rein as to where they go and what they do, as long as they fulfill their quota of Potential Assets found and retrieved by the company. TCG has a number of Dedicated Pickup Teams for this very purpose, all on call for when field resources have neutralized and secured Potential Assets. They make a point of not picking up still-dangerous hostiles, however, and field resources who think that Dedicated Pickup Teams are for getting them out of messes are in for a shock. Given that most DPTs comprise three guys and a van or helicopter, that makes a sort of sense.

Whether or not the capture of a Potential Asset works toward a field resource's quota really depends on whether or not TCG's R&D division considers it worth studying. They have plenty of vampires and werewolves in containment, in various degrees of health, and if they want another one, they'll ask for it. On the other hand, agents who send in something R&D has never seen before are in for a pretty big bonus.

When it comes to the competition (read: other hunters), field resources soon learn to make compromises and deals. Having said that, more often than not, TCG field operatives have no choice but to use whatever help they can get, while at the same time denying their colleagues the kill. If they don't make their quotas, it's not just their jobs on the line. Of course, no one told them that when they signed the contract.

Hunters

Whoever you are, you didn't necessarily start out working for Cheiron. You could have been hired by Barthes Prosthetics, or Allegra Pharmaceuticals, or Jones-Klein-Beauchamp and its subsidiaries, or Weide, or any of a dozen or more other companies. You thought you were taken on by a company making X-ray machines, asthma inhalers or fizzy drinks. You were in for a shock.

You were a stellar salesman and a fabulous PR executive. When they offered you a commission-based post in Field Proj-

STEREOTYPES

Network Zero: On a number of occasions now, information released on the Internet has compromised potential avenues of profit. We recommend that all field resources remain alert for members of the group responsible and take measures to secure and/or destroy any recorded media that might result from our field projects.

Loyalists of Thule: The Board of Directors requests that should any field resource identify an individual behaving in the manner described in the attached file, it is imperative that you retrieve any and all information they hold, by any means deemed necessary.

Task Force: VALKYRIE: It has recently come to our attention that the Americans do, as long suspected, have an agency of their own dedicated to much the same purpose as our own field agents. The Board of Directors does not consider them a threat; if it should happen that you encounter this agency's operatives, however, we recommend you make every effort to secure any Potential Assets and withdraw before your counterparts have succeeded in their own mission. Avoid violent confrontation if possible.

Aegis Kai Doru: Our files on the Aegis Kai Doru are restricted; however, be assured that Field Research has been assigned to investigate the organization, and we are confident that our field resources will have some progress on which to report shortly.

ects, you said, *hell, why not?* You should have read the small print, pal. There isn't a day goes by that you don't wish you were still behind a desk, glued to the phone.

You left the Marines some years ago, only to find that your only communicable skill was the ability to shoot people and pop eyeballs out with your thumbs. Cheiron hired you as a "cleaner," a man who tidies up messy situations: you didn't like it, but didn't feel you had a choice at the time. Now the only choice you have is whether you have nightmares about being in Iraq or nightmares about the monsters.

You were a cleaner, too. An actual cleaner. With a mop. A clerical error led to you (instead of someone with a name with one letter different) getting transferred to Field Projects, and you had the surgery before you figured out what was happening and they realized their mistake. Too late now. You have parts of monsters inside you, a gun you don't know how to use and a handbook that's worse than useless. You're in trouble.

You were in Mergers and Acquisitions. No one knew that you had a taste for torture, murder and Phil Collins in your spare time. You got caught out by a Cheiron Field Projects team. They realized you were a wholly natural monster, and offered you a job. You took it, but it didn't take long for you to figure it out: this is not an exit.

Field Projects Divisions

TCG is vast, but within the Field Projects Division, resources join one of the three main sub-divisions:

Retrieval agents make up most of the Field Projects Division. They're the ones who go out and hunt monsters, truss them up and call in the DPTs.

Field resources working for Recruitment look for other hunters to hire, and the best way to do that is to observe them hunting. TCG has a terrifying attrition rate, and often loses more hunters than it hires.

Field Research resources are basically spies. TCG is highly interested in those conspiracies whose members have access to unusual powers or equipment, and often sends agents to seek them out, assist them on hunts and, if they can, poach everything they can from them when the time is right.

Status

In the Cheiron Group's Field Projects Division, you get Status by getting results and sucking up to the boss.

- You have a handbook, and you've signed the contract, meaning that at some point soon, they will have implanted something in your body, if they haven't already. You can spend Merit dots on the Thaumatechnology Endowment.

- You have the clout to call for a small amount of backup, equivalent to two dots in Allies (TCG Backup).

- You've been given several massive pay raises, equivalent to three dots (or three more dots, maximum five) in the Resources Merit. Good luck finding time to spend it.

THE CHEIRON GROUP

THE LUCIFUGE

CHILDREN OF THE SEVENTH GENERATION

Dear Diary,

Every night, the same dream.

A man walks along a bridge — some old European bridge like you might find in Prague or Warsaw or wherever — and he's not old-old, but maybe in his 50s. Walks with a cane, a twisted piece of lacquered wood with a rabbit's foot on the end of it. Some gulls orbit overhead, complaining. It's maybe noontime. A bus passes. A child laughs. I see a hot-air balloon way up in the sky just over the trees and roofs.

And in the dream, I know who he is. Not his name, no, but that he's one of us.

And I know it's the night of my 23rd birthday.

And he walks, and suddenly he grips his chest, and his nose bursts with a splash of blood, and he just leans to the right and topples off the bridge, dead.

And that's that.

I was made, and he was cast into...

Well, wherever it is that we go.

So I wake up, and every time I have the dream, I find one of those little imps by the window, the thing with the leathery wings and the ruby eyes, with its many mouths upon its soft and sallow chest. Little talons scratching at the glass. It begs me to torture it, to bite it, cut it, kick it.

I don't. I didn't.

But I want to.

I hate who I am.

Damn me.

God may or may not exist, but the world has ample evidence that there is a Satan, a great Adversary, a deceiver, an accuser. As long as there has been free choice, so the Church says, Satan has sown his seed in humankind. Most Christians, Jews and Muslims understand that as a metaphor. The agents of the Lucifuge know it's more than that.

Every one of them believes that he or she is a literal descendant of Lucifer or some other Duke of Hell. The Bringer of Light and his companions have always seen fit to take their pleasure with mortals, and about once a century, the Devil has a son or daughter. They are exceptional people, prone to great evil — and great guilt. They have children of their own; the bloodlines swell and bloat. Families move and intermarry. The Devil's mark seems sometimes to vanish over the generations. But the taint of Lucifer revives itself once every seven generations, almost without fail. A woman comes of age and finds herself visited by monsters. A man finds that he can call upon cold fires that dance in his dreams. Another, visited every night by succubi who feed his desires and ask him his secrets, discovers that people who hurt him, betray him, or even annoy him suffer terrible accidents, whether he wants them to or not.

Some of Lucifer's children embrace their heritage. Some don't. And the Lucifuge exists for those who would fight what they are. It began in ninth-century Milan: a gracious lady of noble bearing employed a cadre of genealogists and occultists to list and follow the bloodlines of Lucifer across Europe, looking for the Children of the Seventh Generation, waiting for them to be born, following them through their lives until they came into their heritage. When the time came, the lady's agents would give them an offer: renounce Satan and all his wiles and fight the forces of Hell. If they refused, the messengers killed them, or kidnapped them and *made* them agree with the lady's wishes.

The cabal of genealogists are still there; so are the messengers, but now all of them are themselves Children of the Seventh Generation. Their headquarters are still in Milan, and their leader is still the same statuesque lady, looking no different to how she looked in the year 853. The only name she recognizes is *the Lucifuge*. She is the organization, she issues the commands, she brings each new Child of the Seventh Generation into her presence and reveals their destiny: to stand against Hell and all its doings, whether they want to or not.

The Enemy

The cadre in Milan checks genealogies and monitors the news worldwide. It issues requests to the Lucifuge agents to scout out odd events or strange characters, and sometimes asks the agents to find and recruit (or kill) a new child of Lucifer who has just come into his heritage.

But that's as far as it goes. Milan tells each agent who her 13 geographically nearest colleagues are, but some of those could be hundreds or thousands of miles away, particularly in the Far East, where the Lucifuge has long failed to track down many of Lucifer's descendants.

Representatives of the Lucifuge, perhaps unsurprisingly, have a much more liberal approach to tracking down monsters than some of the other organizations. In the end, Lucifer is their enemy, and it's apparent to every agent that while the creatures of darkness

Hell is
other people.



are, so the Lucifuge has said, the work of Satan, a creature of Satan doesn't have to be evil. Self-knowledge combines with a reluctance to wade in with supernatural powers the agents of the Lucifuge often hate using.

Most prefer to find out more about their quarries before they destroy them, giving the monsters a chance to reveal themselves as the Devil's enemies (and thus stave off destruction). Many reveal themselves to be otherwise. Vampires exist who claim they are descended from Belial. Some werewolves devote themselves to spirits of vice. Many magicians traffic souls with demons.

The Lucifuge's followers have, unsurprisingly, a great deal of lore concerning demons and angels. They're ambivalent toward demons. They hate them, but at the same time, many agents have small demonic companions they loathe (and who hate them in return), but who can only follow their orders. Sometimes, devils follow them around like kids with crushes on their schoolteachers, accepting whatever punishment the Lucifuge's agents inflict with a kind of perverse pleasure. Some agents of the Lucifuge can command devils and demons. Some can banish them. Some can even call demons to do their bidding.

Angels they fear. The Lucifuge's library in Milan holds vast tomes, categorizing and naming the messengers of the Divine, ranging from the world-shattering *cherubim* and *seraphim* to the enigmatic and contradictory *qashmallim*. Every so often, one of the Devil's Children runs into one of these bizarre beings. Some of them are annihilated where they stand. Some are transformed into equally weird things in their own right. Some are freed of their infernal heritage. And some learn secrets.

The one enemy the Lucifuge's agents don't ever allow to survive: the other descendants of Lucifer, the ones who know exactly what they are and who are perfectly happy with that, thank you very much. Some of them manage to get away from the Lucifuge when they're approached. Some never got

the message: the Lucifuge's genealogists aren't infallible, and quite a few of the descendants of Satan fall through her fingers. But it's awfully funny how the ones the Lucifuge doesn't know about always seem to be the ones who end up loving the darkness and claiming it for their own. They're always the ones who end up leading cults or becoming powerful diabolists with great power. The guilty ones, the ones who don't want to be the Devil's children, end up with the Lucifuge. Some of the Lucifuge's scholars mutter that someone would almost think it was intended that way. None of them say it to her face.

Hunters

You didn't join the Lucifuge. You were born into it. It's in your blood, and you always knew it. A vast network of dusty underground corridors below Milan, lined with scrolls and books filled with innumerable family trees, reveals one simple truth: Satan got around. His descendants can come from any culture, any religious background, any ethnic group. There are 666 agents of the Lucifuge, no more, no less. One dies, another joins. One joins, an agent dies.

You came into your heritage on your 23rd birthday, just like most of your comrades, all 665 of them. You have the power. Maybe you don't know it yet. Maybe you've suppressed them, driving them into your subconscious out of shame at the dreams that plague you each night, trying to ignore the weird things that happen to the people around you.

You're a young man from a Catholic family who overcompensated for shameful recurring dreams of sex and death and hellfire by taking holy orders, maybe even going the whole way and becoming a priest.

You're a club cruiser who enjoyed crushing your enemies and lovers. You had little evil friends who did whatever you wanted to whomever you wanted. Most of them were human. A couple were not. Then the others came to you and bound

STEREOTYPES

Long Night: Unexpected help came from a man who fought like nothing I'd ever seen. After the vampire was dead, we talked. He had convictions that...concerned me. I'd work with him again, but I'd be concerned not to let him see what I can do.

Null Mysteriis: The scholars have been around for a long time in some form. This lot are some of the worst. They're like puppies. They want to know about you, they want to know about the monsters and the demons. They never do anything. They just take photos, and draw sketches and type notes into those little palm top things.

Ascending Ones: The ones with the drugs? They scare me. They're very old, and they've got the same ultimate source as us, I think, only they wouldn't dream of saying so. They seem to have embraced certainty. Which is an easy way to fall right into Hell without even knowing it.

Malleus Maleficarum: Oh, I know all about them. Don't go near them. They might seek out the demons and witches, and they might be on the side of...righteousness, but they'll do terrible things, and burn those who'd help them in the process.

you in hellfire and took you to Milan, gagged and tied up, locked in a crate; then they put you in a cell and brainwashed you, and you repented, because you had no choice.

If you weren't wracked with guilt and horror at what you are when they found you, the straps and the electric shocks and the other, less earthly tortures they inflicted on you made you hate the demonic fragment of what you are, passionately, so fiercely that all you can do is oppose it.

Factions

The Lucifuge isn't organized enough to really have "factions," as such. As far as structure goes, it's the HQ in Milan and the agents worldwide. Still, as time goes on, members meet and communicate ideas, and some philosophies become popular.

The Denial represent the most numerous of the Lucifuge's agents. They're the ones who believe that simply, the Devil is the source of all evil, and they must renounce that evil forever. They watch the monsters and witches they meet to see if they too struggle with what they are. The ones who aren't committed to evil they leave be. The ones they recognize as evil they destroy without any second thought.

The Reconciliation believe they're doing the Devil's work. That is, by doing God's work in destroying evil, they, the children of Lucifer, are giving Lucifer the opportunity to be redeemed, to be readmitted into Heaven; if Lucifer becomes one of God's own, they say, Hell ceases to exist, and sin and pain end forever. The Fall of Man will be reversed. This, they say, is the Lucifuge's destiny.

The Truth are the fewest of the Lucifuge's agents. They believe that the story told them about who they are and what they should be doing is not the whole story. Who is the Lu-

cifuge really, and why does she want this to be done? What is she really up to? How come she's 1,200 years old? Is she Satan's daughter? His consort? Or Satan himself? The Truth are the ones who wonder. They fight the forces of evil because they must, but what they really want is to know the truth about their own organization and its founder. They exist in secret within the ranks of the conspiracy — or so they hope.

Status

The Lucifuge doesn't recognize ranks as such. Status comes from successfully fighting monsters and gaining trust among the other members of the organization.

- You have just joined the Lucifuge. At this level, you have been taught that you have powers, if not how to access them. You've bought into the philosophy of the organization. You may have been to Milan once, but mostly you receive instructions via telephone or email, if you receive any at all. You may spend Merit dots on the Castigation Endowment.

- You have defeated many terrible things. You've developed a reputation among your fellows for being able to keep a secret. You're in regular contact with Milan, and can visit there and consult the library any time you can get the money for a plane ticket. You have access to two extra dots of Resources, which can only be used for the purposes of the Vigil.

- You've met with the Lucifuge on a number of occasions and she has even given you jobs to do, personally. You might even have an idea who she might be, but of course, if you're at this level, you're never going to tell anyone. The Lucifuge is a four-dot Mentor.



MALLEUS MALERICARUM

THE SHADOW CONGREGACION

O'Malley kicks the thing through the bay window. It lands amid the glass, and it scrambles to get up, but Dottie's already out there, pistol-whipping the thing back to the sidewalk.

Its head rolls around on bony shoulders. Cuts form and heal upon its face. Its tongue, a serpent's tongue, whips out and lashes at the air.

"Eviction notice," the Padre says — not that he's really a priest, but he likes the garb and claims his family was somehow related by cousin of a cousin to Pope John Paul — and together he and Dottie drag the spitting lunatic into the trunk of the Caddy.

"Did I mention that the Power of Christ compels you?" Dottie says with a mad laugh, then slams the trunk shut.

O'Malley comes out — stepping right through the broken window, because, hell, why not? — already dabbing at a rough gash across his head so the blood doesn't run into his eyes. He sees the looks from his cellmates. "I've had worse, relax."

"Explain to me why we can't exorcise the thing again?" Dottie says, bouncing on the balls of her feet (she always gets so excited during a raid). "We're believers. We're part of the Witch's Hammer. We go to confession. Let's give it a shot, man."

"Don't be retarded," Padre says. "A real priest has to do this. A real exorcist. It isn't about faith, it's about the work. It's about following the formula, about getting it right. We're Catholics, fine, but we're not trained freaking exorcists over here. We have our Benedictions. They have theirs. Everybody wins."

"The Padre has it right," O'Malley says, and he's about to say something else when the trunk starts thumping and the thing inside it starts screaming at them in Aramaic. O'Malley just sighs, and adds, "We'd better go. The sooner we free this host from its demonic possessor, the better."

"Amen," Dottie says. "I'm driving."

The idea of the Inquisitor, the Catholic witch-hunter of the Middle Ages, is potent: the grim-faced man with brands and scourges, thumbscrews and chains, who burns, strangles and drowns innocent and guilty alike to find the truth. It might be easy to sigh in relief: these things don't happen anymore, do they?

Of course they do. There are still witch-hunters, still empowered secretly by the Church. The Inquisition has become the somewhat more benevolent Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The witch-hunters remain, in the form of the *Malleus Maleficarum*, the Hammer of the Witches, the Shadow Congregation.

In the 15th century, Heinrich Kramer and Jakob Sprenger published a book, a guide to witch-hunting, bearing the name *Malleus Maleficarum*. It proved influential enough to bring about the painful deaths of thousands. Within a few years, the Pope had condemned it as heretical. It didn't stop people using it, but even so, it seems a little strange that only 80 years later, Pope Paul III gave a group with the same name as the book the power to hunt the manifestations of Satan. Although not a secret, this *Malleus Maleficarum*'s foundation wasn't really public, either, slipped in as it was on the end of the same *regimini militantis Ecclesiae* that empowered the Society of Jesus, a wholly different organization with its own uneven reputation.

Why did Pope Paul found an organization based on a heretical book? Conspiracy theories abound about practically every major and not-so-major event in Catholic history, and this is no exception. Some theories say Paul was following some private agenda of his own; others reckon that the organization was founded as a dummy in order to make some kind of point, directed at the Pope's enemies.

That larger things were at work seems fairly apparent, but possibly only three people alive today know that the true founder of the *Malleus Maleficarum* was a man named Ambrogio Baudolino. Baudolino was exceptional in many ways. He was clever enough to gain the ear of his Holiness, despite not being anything more than a provincial bishop. He was talented enough to convince the Pope to set up the *Malleus Maleficarum* and think it was his own idea. And most of all, he knew about vampires. He had, in fact, been the slave of a vampire for many years, and — more evidence of his extraordinary character — had managed to break free and destroy the creature that had controlled him. Baudolino's dearest wish was that no one would ever have to suffer what he had, ever again. Baudolino gained quiet control of the organization from its very first night. He fed the newly minted witch-hunters enough information for them to find another vampire practically every time they went out.

Although the vampires learned to hide when they saw the witch-hunters coming, the *Malleus Maleficarum*'s war continued, and still continues, right up to the present day. Originally, all the Shadow Congregation's members were monks and nuns, but during the 20th century,



HERESIES MUST BE MET WITHOUT MERCY.

this restriction relaxed as monks became rarer. Now they even accept lay members, and have high-ranking contacts within many world governments and police forces, meaning that even though they don't technically have any jurisdiction, often police officers and medical professionals find themselves seconded to groups of Malleus Maleficarum witch-hunters.

Even so, the methods haven't changed much. The Malleus' witch-hunters live hard, ascetic lifestyles and devote themselves to prayer and meditation. There really isn't anything else in their lives apart from the hunt, although they make a point of supplementing their ranks with other hunters from other organizations, particularly if these companions are Catholics.

Grim-faced, they set themselves against the horrors of the world, and use the most vicious methods they know of to defeat them. If, now and then, an innocent suffers or dies while a witch-hunter is about his business, it's regrettable, but the greater good must be served.

The Enemy

This conspiracy's knowledge of the living dead is deep and wide, but has some significant omissions. While the Malleus Maleficarum understands that vampires have a society of sorts, its details are of no importance to the organization, since it doesn't really help in destroying them, except in the most general terms. It's useful to know that one faction is paternalistic and traditionalist, another is radical, a third has adopted some kind of heretical Christianity and a fourth worships Belial, but that's as far as it goes. They know that crosses and holy water don't usually work, and they know vampires fear sunlight and fire.

On the other hand, while they know a vampire's blood can be addictive and that to drink from a vampire's blood makes the drinker in danger of losing her will to the vampire, they *don't* know that under certain circumstances, a human who drinks from a vampire's blood can become immortal.

Baudolino knew that all too well, which is why he kept the fact from his followers and excised it from the records. His secret was — is — this: he's still around. Growing old, Padre Ambrogio began to use his witch-hunters to procure vampire blood for himself.

And so he remained alive, and is still alive today, not looking one day over 60. Officially, Padre Ambrogio isn't in charge of the Malleus Maleficarum: he died back in 1601, according to the records. Unofficially, Ambrogio Baudolino still controls the witch-hunters, and tries to maintain a drink of vampire blood every few days, each time from a different vampire, shortly before it dies. A handful of members of the Shadow Congregation know of the existence of Baudolino; even fewer know about the Lucifuge. The handful who know about both try not to talk about the meetings this ancient man and equally ancient woman have in Milan, once a decade.

After the vampires, the next nearest thing to a preoccupation is the question of Satanic magic: the Malleus Maleficarum has a large, detailed and occasionally even accurate bestiary of demons and devils. Warlocks earn some of the Malleus Maleficarum's attention. The witch-hunters don't strictly look for other monsters, but that doesn't mean they don't find them and try to destroy them when they do find them.

Certainly, the miraculous powers that the witch-hunters exhibit work against anyone they see fit to point them against.

STEREOTYPES

The Long Night: It's lamentable that so many who should be in the bosom of Mother Church have fallen into such grievous heresy. They don't trust us, but sometimes, the enemy of our enemy is the best ally we can have.

The Union: We're well aware of groups of perfectly ordinary people who band together for mutual defense. Some of them are good Catholics, who willingly help us if called upon, and even bring their friends. They're foot soldiers for the Lord. Sometimes, they're the best resource we have.

The Lucifuge: Documents describe a figure called the Lucifuge being active over the course of centuries. It's a hereditary title, evidently. She named herself after a Duke of Hell. But what puzzles me is why her agents should be so efficient at rooting out and destroying the very demons they should be worshiping. I am really rather curious. Problem is, the Cardinal has forbidden further investigation. It's most vexing.

Task Force: VALKYRIE: They don't think we know about them. But as long as some of them keep coming to confession, we'll know everything they do. Of course, violating the sanctity of the confessional is not something we do lightly. I hate doing it. Hate it. But...God demands it.

Hunters

You're a Catholic priest, trained as an exorcist. Your faith began to shake before you joined the Malleus Maleficarum. To be honest, it's still shaky, but you haven't had time to think about things enough for it to bother you.

You'd just come out of seminary when you discovered your brother had been murdered by something not wholly human. You investigated further, only to find that someone else within the church was investigating his death, too. You asked so many questions they came and gave you a job.

You're an academic theologian who discovered that vampires existed, through evidence that survived, hidden through the centuries. Before you could publish your findings, the Malleus Maleficarum made you an offer you couldn't refuse.

You're a general practitioner whose children both died in circumstances you don't like to talk about. The way you killed the thing that did this to them impressed a senior witch-hunter who pulled strings to make you his apprentice in the order.

You're a construction worker by trade and a married man, but first and foremost, you're a good Catholic. Which is why, when you saw someone attacking your priest one night as you headed home from the bar, you weighed in. Turned out that it wasn't a guy, it was an "it." Although slightly drunk, you still beat the stuffing out of it, and watched it crumble to dust. A week later, you got a new job. You work nights more than you used to.

Brotherhoods and Orders

Within the Malleus Maleficarum, several unofficial sub-groups exist, each with its own methodology and focus.

The **Order of St. Longinus** was named after the original bearer of the Holy Lance. The Malleus Maleficarum knows perfectly well that some vampires venerate St. Longinus (although the specifics are something of a mystery), and it's not an accident that the most dedicated and ruthless vampire hunters in the Malleus name themselves after the old saint.

On the other hand, the **Order of St. Ambrose** comprises scholars and detectives who work slowly and methodically toward finding solutions to dangerous problems, which often brings them into conflict with witches and sorcerers (who often possess knowledge that could lead to the solutions sought by the order).

The **Brotherhood of St. Athanasius**, conversely, represents a militant wing favoring swift, violent solutions to problems. The Ambrosians hit the books and sift the evidence. The Athanasians break out the guns and the firebombs. They need each other, but that doesn't stop the nigh-constant infighting.

Status

The Malleus Maleficarum grants Status to those who have a good track record in defeating and/or destroying monsters, specifically vampires.

- You've been initiated into the Shadow Congregation. You have access to the Library of Benedictions, and have the option of spending Merit dots on Benediction rites.

- You gain respect among Catholics wherever you go, without even saying who you are. You gain one extra dot in Status (the Church).

- You have access to the Church's ample coffers, equivalent to three dots in Resources specific to dealing with the hunt.



FLASH FORCE VULTURE

THE MEN IN BLACK

The sun rose bright up over the small concrete bunker. Rolls of dust blew in across the driveway. Charlie Galveston - clad in the urban camo of his Special Forces gear - lay hunkered down in a ditch, his eye pressed to his rifle's scope. His team lay a few feet away, their eyes to their rifles.

"What's the story?" came an all-too-familiar voice - a man in a dark suit and dark sunglasses hopped down into the ditch. He was all smiles.

"Hey, Suit," Galveston mumbled.

"Hey, SWAT," the man in the suit - Agent Roger Crick - said, way too cheery for 7:00 in the morning.

"This ain't your bag of tricks, Crick. We got a cult. They're military minded. Loaded down for war. Got their slippery eel fuck leader in there, too, and he's got a handful of hostages."

"Right, right," Crick said. "Billy 'Carolina' Castle. It true he can take a licking and keep on ticking?"

"That's not him," Galveston said, growing irritated. "That's Wayne Krebbins you're thinking of, and he's not a cult leader, he's a goddamn serial killer."

"Oh, sure, sure, the slasher. Mister Castle can do...what, now?"

"I dunno. Hypnotize people or some crap. We've never confirmed it."

"Right, yeah. You hoping to get a clean shot? Those windows are boarded up pretty nice."

Galveston pulled away from the scope. "The scope's on requisition. Sees right through the wood. Listen, Crick, why don't you head home? This isn't your scene. You don't like to get your hands dirty, and at some point soon this is going to get messy."

"I've a job to do."

"Job? You don't have to do a goddamn thing but leave me and my men to do their work."

"See that? In the distance?"

Crick pointed. Galveston followed the finger and saw a tiny glinting object on the horizon, and behind it, a billowing plume of dust.

"What the hell?" Galveston asked.

"That's the Channel 9 news van. Once they get here and get a sniff of what's going on, someone's going to broadcast something, and before you can say 'Branch Davidians,' you're going to have an army of media, police and the FBI up your ass, including those headcases from VASCU. Do you want that? I don't want that."

Galveston's throat tightened. "No. I don't want that either."

"Good!" Crick opened his jacket - and instead of a gun in a holster, he had three syringes that caught a band of light from the bright sun. "Then let me do my job while you do yours. The news won't be bothering you today, old friend."

Fact: in December 1927, the US Army raided a number of coastal towns in Massachusetts. The towns no longer exist. Their inhabitants vanished. Fact: in 1947, an unidentified object crashed near a USAF base in Roswell, New Mexico. Government agents waded in to clear things up. Fact: in November

1963, John F. Kennedy was assassinated. The US Government's investigation seemed reluctant. Fact: in the 1960s and 1970s, the Zodiac killer stalked northern California. No one ever caught him. Still, the killings ended. Fact: in August 1997, Princess Diana's car crashed under mysterious circumstances, killing Diana, its driver and the industrialist she was dating at the time. Was the People's Princess really the intended victim? You could go back further. Who shot Abraham Lincoln?

Conspiracy theorists would have you believe there is a great agency behind all of these events. They don't know for sure, of course. Task Force: VALKYRIE knows. They know the truth about Diana and the precise location of the Roswell pilot's grave. They know who didn't shoot Kennedy. And they know about vampires, werewolves, demons and ghosts.

It began in 1865, when a hastily organized unit of government men (led by a man named Gordon West) failed to rescue Abraham Lincoln from the clutches of a creature from outside any human frame of reference.

Realizing that for the good of the Union, they had to cover up the President's death, they

enlisted a look-alike, and without the hapless man's knowledge, hired John Wilkes Booth to follow him to the theater and do the deed before anyone noticed the difference. Ever since then, they've been protecting the

US against supernatural agencies and hiding the evidence. They've always operated outside the usual structures of the US government.

They were reformed as Task

Force: VALKYRIE in 1944 by

the Joint Chiefs of Staff, with-

out the President's knowledge,

when it became apparent that

some prominent Nazis had been

driven to allying themselves with

paranormal entities. Between

June 1944 and April 1945, TTV

joined US and British forces in the

invasion of Europe. Armed with little

more than their wits, their fists and

their guns, the newly minted task force

defeated and captured a cadre of bizarre

hermaphrodite Nazi magicians, two packs

of man-eating werewolves, dozens of walking

dead men of various kinds and more vampires

than they suspected could have existed. Half

the time, these "extra-normal entities" (ENEs),

weren't fighting for anyone but themselves, but it

didn't matter. They were a threat, and the men of TTV



were far too interested in such things to let them go just because they weren't fighting the allies.

Things kicked off then. After the Roswell incident (an early triumph for VALKYRIE's disinformation policy), TFV managed, effectively, to disappear. Its mission is to protect the USA from extra-normal forces. A handful of people at the top level of government know it exists. The President isn't one of them.

Every story of sinister Men in Black who cover up paranormal events, every account of black-clad, heavily armed Special Forces operatives who descend from black helicopters and make people vanish, every supernatural or UFO conspiracy theory comes right back to TFV. It really is the conspiracy that keeps the people blissful in ignorance.

Or it'd really like to think it is. The fact is, it's still a government agency, and just like every other government agency, the Task Force suffers from nepotism and incompetence. Sometimes it's at a level that endangers the men and women in the field. Intelligence gatherers are often as lazy as those foreign-posted CIA men who get their intel from watching the news. They've got a wide base of information about any number of ENEs, but a mountain of red tape and clearances to get through before it's readable.

And then there's the budget. Obviously, TFV is a black budget agency, but that only leads to certain irregularities, such as TFV having a budget a fraction of the size of ATF, let alone the FBI. So how can it afford the black helicopters, or that enormous underground facility in Arizona (the one you think you know about in New Mexico is as flimsy as a movie set) and the astoundingly well-funded R&D department?

And if TFV's remit is to protect the US people from ENEs, how come so much field work involves observation and kidnap rather than straight fighting? Why has it got so many ENEs stored away in that underground prison? Why do field agents who get close to certain secrets find their assignments changed without warning?

Maybe there's something else going on. TFV has a shadowy history, but what if that's just a fabrication? What if none of this is true? What if it's all really just a cover for something else entirely? Perhaps TFV's masters have a more comprehensive plan, which their agents don't need to know. On the other hand, perhaps the agency is compromised. Perhaps TFV is working for the very monsters its agents seek to defeat.

But then, that's just paranoia.

The Enemy

TFV has a firmly set procedure for dealing with most ENEs: report, observe, assess, report again, neutralize or call for backup.

Having said that, few agents stick closely to procedure when in the field. A snarling, shapeshifting beast who's just realized he's being observed isn't going to wait until the agents have assessed, reported and taken action. TFV's strict cell-based structure might technically require approval up the chain of command before breaking out the Advanced Armory, but often agents are blasé about exploiting the seemingly limitless budget. Having said that, agents who get *too* blasé have

been known to end up in an offshore prison facility, wearing an orange jumpsuit and not knowing their own names.

TFV possesses big guns, but has to balance its use of astonishing gear with the knowledge that it can't allow the public to know it exists, let alone the other conspiracies out there.

Hunters

You investigated suspicious packages for the US Postal Service. After a while, packages started coming your way that defied explanation. You kept your head, went above your superiors' heads and, when the monsters came, got out alive. The next thing you knew, you'd been recruited by TFV. The SWAT gear's heavy, but it works. The gun isn't a gun at all, it...makes this sound. You're in deep. Holy shit.

You're a veteran of Special Forces. One time in Kabul, you saw things that they frankly hadn't trained you for. You dealt with it, though, and kept the details from your CO. But somehow TFV knew about it. You were back in the US within a week and working in the field in the mainland US in a black suit and tie. It's good to be home.

You worked for the EPA, investigating health risks. You found some truly bizarre substances out there (like the greasy mold that grew in strange mandalas), all weird enough for TFV to give you a job, just so you could sign the piece of paper that said you weren't going to tell.

You were an agent of the FBI. And you knew all about UFOs. You didn't stick your nose in too much — not like that idiot in your office with his "the truth is out there" bullshit — but you kept a secret file. One day, it was deleted from your computer. The next day, you'd been transferred.

Departments

TFV divides itself into special units and departments, many of which work closely in the field with ordinary agents. Although departments such as Containment and R&D have essentially closed membership (which beggars the question: how do they recruit?), field agents can apply to join any of the following:

Project TWILIGHT concerns itself with the doings of ENEs classified as P (Para-human) and S (social), the ones that are near human or post-human and seem to operate in covens, cults, conspiracies or other underground societies. They're mostly field agents. They recognize that taking down one SP/ENE won't necessarily resolve the threat posed by their respective conspiracies, and dedicate themselves to information gathering and more circumspect activities. Some go deep cover.

Agents attached to **Operation FORT** dedicate themselves to understanding extraterrestrial and extra-dimensional phenomena. They're interested in aliens, but they also investigate fairies, demons, ghosts and alien entities that evidently hail from some other-dimensional source. They're the least scientific of TFV's agents, drawing a lot of their methodology from folklore and religion. They're often nearly as cranky as the civilians who bang on about conspiracies.

Operation ADAMSKI gets its name from a notorious hoaxer who convinced many that he was in regular contact

STEREOTYPES

Network Zero: We've been monitoring Network Zero since late 2004. It doesn't pose a threat to our work - its efforts to publicize the existence of ENEs have been largely deniable. Several ADAMSKI operatives are on their case. We advise observation with a view to recruitment or instrumentalization of connected individuals.

The Union: Vigilantes have always been an issue when dealing with ENEs, but in early 2002, we became aware of a vigilante organization with a recruitment base on the Internet. Politically, several prominent members are suspect. Files are available, should you wish to see more information. Some may be useful, however, inasmuch as they can save on valuable resources in terms of finding ENEs, and can if necessary be given to the authorities for arrest, should collateral damage ensue.

The Cheiron Group: Project: TWILIGHT has been monitoring the activities of the Cheiron Group and its related consortia since 1986, when a number of VALKYRIE agents collided with a cadre of Cheiron Group employees on a routine clean-up operation. We were unable to capture them alive, but examination of their bodies revealed unusual surgical modifications, apparently derived from ENE tissue. Efforts to infiltrate the Cheiron Group have been so far unsuccessful, but we persist in our efforts.

Malleus Maleficarum: We gained incontrovertible proof of the existence of a dedicated ENE-hunting wing within the Catholic Church in late 1944. It's efficient, well funded and supported by both the worldwide hierarchy of the Church and the communities in which its divisions temporarily base themselves. We would prefer that the Church does not know of our existence. Agents are advised to avoid likely operatives of this organization, since they pose a threat, and cannot easily be disposed of without gaining unwelcome attention.

with beings from Venus. ADAMSKI operatives work in the field, and it's their job to hide the existence of ENEs by disseminating disinformation among people who are, frankly, cranks. They distribute crudely faked photographs and footage of alien autopsies and UFO sightings to people they know will spread these stories around as gospel.

Status

Status in VALKYRIE is an odd, uncertain thing, just like it is in any other government organization. Nepotism and convenience play just as much a part in advancement through the ranks as merit.

- As a new recruit, you now have a small chip implanted in your shoulder or thigh, enabling you to operate VALKYRIE's hyper-tech arsenal. You don't get access to the best equipment and backup, you don't get told why you're do-

ing what you're doing, and you seem to get the worst jobs. Still, you have the option of spending Merit dots on TFV's Advanced Armory.

••• You've worked your way up through the ranks, either through efficiency or through simply having the right friends in the organization. You can call for a small amount of backup for a difficult job, equivalent to two dots in Allies (TFV Backup). You need to show results for it. Status can go down as well as up.

•••• You're probably too valuable to go into the field much these days, but when you do, you get the best kit, the best vehicles and the best backup. You can call on important government agencies if you get into trouble, equivalent to three dots of Contacts, each assigned to one Federal agency. Also, you know who shot JFK, and who was really in that car with Diana and Dodi.



Endowments

Hunters are not supernatural creatures. They do not command the unholy powers of the night (although the case could be made for the Lucifuge), nor do they possess inborn resistance to injury or death. Around the world, the vast majority of hunters face the supernatural armed with little more than their wits, willpower and whatever supplies they can gather from the local sporting goods store. Some hunters, though, by dint of powerful backers or stores of ancient relics or a supposed fallen angel in the family tree, have access to tools beyond those that ordinary men and women can acquire. Some would argue that these tools make them every bit as unnatural as the things they profess to hate — how much difference is there, really, between a witch who calls down lightning from the sky and a man who has implanted a swarm of insect monsters into his body to use as a weapon? Others counter that to destroy the monsters that hide in the shadows with any chance of success, a hunter needs every edge he can get.

Endowments, unlike the powers of supernatural beings, are not their own category of Trait. They are simply a new category of Merit, and are purchased with Merit dots just like any other (see "Merits" on p. 67 for the specifics of how each Endowment Merit works). Most Endowments have special rules governing their use, and safeguards in place to keep members of rival organizations from using them. These rules are discussed in detail at the beginning of each Endowment's description.

Advanced Armory

The elite agents of Task Force: VALKYRIE don't trust their lives to bizarre magical rites, weird relics, or freakish biological modification. As befits the best of the best of the United States Armed Forces, Task Force: VALKYRIE relies on cutting-edge technology and advanced warfare systems to eliminate its targets and keep humanity safe from the monsters. From bullets that rip through ghosts as easily as human flesh to rifles that spit lightning, the Advanced Armory of VALKYRIE agents gives them an edge over the creatures they hunt.

Task Force: VALKYRIE takes its operational security very seriously. On recruitment, all agents are implanted with a small RFID chip, usually secured in the meat of the hip or shoulder. All Advanced Armory devices, unless specifically noted otherwise, have a receiver programmed to recognize the frequency of this RFID at close range. If the signal is not detected, the device hard-locks and will not function. While this keeps VALKYRIE's weapons from falling into the hands of rogue hunters or, worse yet, the enemy, it can also lead to tragic losses. One strike team in Canada was completely wiped out when the coven of witches it tracked down cast a spell that disrupted electronic communications. The team's weapons, no

longer receiving the proper signal from their RFID chips, dutifully shut down and left the soldiers defenseless.

Certain Advanced Armory Merits are listed as "Renewable." The nature of modern warfare is such that a soldier chews through supplies at a high rate: ammo is fired, grenades thrown, and so on. Renewable Merits represent these expendable but vital pieces of technology, which the Task Force supplies its agents on a regular basis. Each Renewable Merit's description lists how often the top brass will supply soldiers with fresh ammo, usually once per chapter or once per story. Note that this resupply does not mean the hunter automatically receives a new Endowment; Task Force: VALKYRIE only replaces expended gear. If a sniper is normally issued two magazines of etheric rounds (represented by two dots of the Etheric Rounds Merit) but only expends one of them during the course of a session, he only receives one replacement mag at the start of the next session. Obviously, if a hunter does not begin a session in a situation where he can be resupplied, he won't receive the replacements immediately.

Finally, remember that Task Force: VALKYRIE expects detailed after-action reports from its agents and expects its weapons to be *used*. Hunters with the bright idea of selling off Advanced Armory gear and requisitioning replacements should remember that VALKYRIE controls prisons that make Fort Leavenworth look like Club Med.

Etheric Rounds (• or; Renewable)

Produced in top-secret, experimental laboratories around the country, these bullets have been bombarded with a cocktail of exotic, high-energy particles that infuse peculiar pseudo-physical properties into the lead. Etheric Rounds are delivered to field operatives in clear, plastic magazines (Task Force: VALKYRIE manufactures versions in every caliber and magazine style currently on the market) and emit a faint blue light from their tips. When fired, this light becomes as bright as a tracer round, making concealment all but impossible. The bullet is actually consumed by this light, which converts the metal into a pseudo-

HYPOCRISY

Endowments are weird. Endowments are monstrous and, in many ways, inhuman. Does this make those hunters who use them inhuman? "Humanity" here is in the eye of the beholder. Certainly too few hunters recognize the hypocrisy in the act of hunting the supernatural when they themselves wield preternatural gifts. Just the same as how many hunters track down cultists when they themselves could be considered cultists of a different sort. Players and Storytellers may recognize these ironies; hunter characters often do not. This is part of what makes such characters curiously flawed, and it's also what forces us to ask just what is it that defines a hunter's humanness?

etheric state that VALKYRIE scientists believe to be a heretofore undiscovered “fifth state” of matter.

Function: Etheric Rounds allow the hunter to inflict normal firearm damage against manifested ghosts, spirits and other incorporeal entities. They don’t count as blessed items (see *The World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 214), and thus inflict lethal rather than aggravated damage. Etheric Rounds can be used against corporeal targets as well, but the attack suffers a -1 penalty, as the pseudo-etheric harmonics are less disruptive to living tissue.

Special: The Etheric Rounds Merit is Renewable; for each dot the character has in this Merit, Task Force: VALKYRIE supplies him with one clip of Etheric Rounds for a specific weapon type (e.g. MP-5, Glock 19) every session.

A character may purchase multiple instances of Etheric Rounds, each specifying a different weapon. For example, an assault team leader might have Etheric Rounds (AR-15) ••• and Etheric Rounds (P90) ••; every session, he has three magazines’ worth of etheric ammo for his AR-15 and two magazines for his P90.

Etheric Rounds, unlike most Advanced Armory Merits, can be used by anyone, even if they lack a Task Force: VALKYRIE RFID chip.

Witch Buster (•)

Many of the creatures Task Force: VALKYRIE hunts display an unusual degree of sensitivity to psychic phenomena. Witches seem to be the most adept at this sort of thing, displaying an uncanny knack for poking their noses into supernatural affairs that should be invisible to mere mortals. As witches are also among the most difficult antagonists to identify, VALKYRIE scientists developed a sort of psychic booby trap to identify potential hostiles. Official rules of engagement state that the “witch buster” is to be used to flush out known quarry that has gone to ground, but field teams often engage in a game variously referred to as “wizard baiting” or “fishing for Potters,” in which a witch buster is set up in a public but discreet location and anyone who drops by to have a look is tagged and monitored. Ever since a Glaswegian cell went a little off the reservation back in ’98 and just started killing everyone that poked around the witch buster, this tactic is expressly forbidden by VALKYRIE doctrine.

Function: The witch buster is roughly the size and shape of a hockey puck, with a sticky adhesive backing that allows it to be mounted on walls or ceilings. Powered by an ordinary lithium-ion battery, the kind that can be purchased at any cell phone store, the witch buster slowly but persistently leaks a small amount of etheric energy — theoretically, not enough to be harmful (although quite a few field agents swear oth-

ORDNANCE REQUISITION

Task Force: VALKYRIE is a small agency, and its equipment is highly unique. Most military units or departments supply their agents with needed equipment. Here, though, TFV’s budget isn’t robust and the gear is rare. What the player buys, the character has; the agency’s hunters need to be self-reliant in this regard. That said, as an optional rule at the end of a story, a VALKYRIE agent can “trade in” one piece of Advanced Armory back to the agency. Doing so gets him half the experience points that would be spent on the item (the Bleeder, below, is a two-dot Merit and would necessitate 6 total experience points to purchase, so trading it in earns the hunter 3 in return that could then be spent on other Advanced Armory items).

erwise), but enough to register on a witch’s psychic radar. In game terms, the witch buster triggers a witch’s Unseen Sense Merit (see *The World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 109).

Because their Unseen Sense Merit registers any type of supernatural disturbance, mages are the most likely to perceive a witch buster, but any character with an Unseen Sense Merit relating to ghosts, spirits, or Twilight phenomena will sense a witch buster. Supernatural powers or spells that sense disturbances in Twilight or detect ghosts or spirits will also register the witch buster as an odd, not-immediately-explicable twinge.

A witch buster has eight hours of battery life before it must be recharged. Three successes on an extended Intelligence + Crafts roll, with each roll representing 10 minutes of work, allows a hunter to tap into a building’s electrical wiring and hook the witch buster in, allowing it to operate as long as the building has power.

Etheric Goggles (• or ••••)

Ghosts, demons, and witches all have the ability to pass unseen by mortal senses. Even vampires, according to some stories, have the ability to send their minds out of their cold, dead bodies and explore the world in secret. With etheric goggles, Task Force: VALKYRIE can bring the fight to them.

Etheric goggles operate on the same principle as the etheric tracker (see p. 155), utilizing chemically treated lenses to detect entities in Twilight. Until recently, they were standard kit for field agents, but since a rash of psychosis among agents who used them extensively in the early 2000s, top brass has restricted their use.

Function: Etheric goggles look like slightly bulkier, more complicated versions of the night-vision goggles employed by the United States Armed Forces. In fact, etheric goggles serve as perfectly functional night-vision goggles, allowing the wearer to see perfectly — albeit in monochrome — in pitch darkness (see the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 140). Their primary use comes into play when the hunter flips



a pair of oddly purplish lenses down over the infrared light source on the goggles' brow, allowing the wearer to see objects in Twilight as clearly as if they were manifested physically. The process required to treat the lenses to render Twilight visible creates weird distortions of the physical world. While the hunter is using the goggles to see Twilight objects, he suffers a -2 penalty to Perception checks made to notice anything in the physical world.

For four dots, a VALKYRIE agent may requisition a more advanced model that can pick up trace etheric disturbances left behind by incorporeal creatures after they pass. These traces appear as a softly luminescent purple cloud that trails behind a spirit or ghost, enabling it to be tracked. The trail fades after 10 minutes per point of Power the spirit entity possesses. (In the case of beings that use the full nine Attribute spread, such as a Twilight-walking witch, use the highest of Strength, Intelligence or Presence.)

Etheric goggles have a battery life of six hours as a night vision device, or three hours when used to see Twilight objects.

The Bleeder (••)

Resembling nothing so much as a jackhammer with a small satellite dish in place of the drill bit, the Bleeder is one of Task Force: VALKYRIE's newest developments. The Bleeder is the latest in what VALKYRIE's scientists refer to as "crowd-safe" weaponry, designed to target and eliminate supernatural threats, specifically vampires and their servants, while presenting little threat to potential victims or bystand-

ers. Only recently moved out of the laboratory, the Bleeder has begun field-testing with a number of field ops teams around the globe.

The Bleeder fires a focused microburst of energy in a tightly constrained beam. Through processes not fully understood even by the scientists who discovered them, this energy reacts violently with the quasi-biological functions of the vampire's blood, with the net result that it evacuates the creature's body, usually in a violent manner. Laboratory tests have recorded results ranging from a minor leakage of the tear ducts to vomiting. In some test cases, the blood actually shot out of the subject's pores in a fine red mist. While not entirely eliminated, the weapon presents a minimal threat level to humans and natural animals, as they lack the critical metabolism of vampire blood.

Function: The Bleeder is treated as a ranged weapon, subject to all the normal rules for ranged combat. Attacking with the Bleeder is a Dexterity + Firearms attack, with a +3 bonus to represent the weapon's damage.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Bleeder overloads and critical components are thrown out of precise alignment. The wielder takes one point of bashing damage from the electrical surge, and the device is rendered inoperable until it is recalibrated. Recalibration requires five successes on an extended Intelligence + Science roll, with each roll representing a minute of work.

Failure: As with an ordinary ranged attack, the target suffers no damage or ill effect.

Success: Instead of inflicting damage to the target's Health, the "Bleeder" causes a vampire, ghoul, or any creature that consumes and stores blood in its own body to lose one Willpower (or the equivalent) per success rolled. This Willpower physically leaves the creature's body in rivulets or sprays of blood, with velocity and force increasing with successes. If more successes are rolled than the target has remaining blood in its system, extra successes roll over into lethal damage.

Exceptional Success: Not only does the target lose a large amount of stored blood, but it also suffers lethal damage equal to one half the number of successes rolled due to the violence with which the blood leaves its body. Blood vessels literally explode; skin and muscle are torn by the force of the exsanguination.

Special: The "Bleeder" does not have quite the same explosive interaction with non-vampiric blood, but the energy it pours out can cause premature breakdown of blood cells or the restriction of blood vessels. Against creatures without a stored pool of blood, the weapon inflicts intense headaches and malaise: successes on an attack roll are taken not as damage, but as penalties to the target's actions, to a maximum of -5 dice. The penalty lasts for five turns and is often accompanied by a nosebleed.

Equalizer Grenade (...; Renewable)

The old phrase "monsters in human skin" has its element of truth, but there are things out there in the dark that hide behind only the thinnest veneer of humanity. Sometimes, when a Task Force: VALKYRIE strike team storms some unholy nightmare's den, what looks like a few hillbillies and drifters turns into a wall of fur and muscle and savage sharp teeth. The Equalizer grenade helps to level the playing field.

Studies performed on captured monsters of various classifications have revealed a commonality amongst many: when a living creature changes its shape, no matter the method behind it, a surge of erratic brain activity buried deep in the sensory cortex immediately precedes the change. VALKYRIE scientists have speculated that this is the brain trying to process the sensory overload of radical body morphism, but the truth is countless vivisections have been unable to give any conclusive answers. Nevertheless, VALKYRIE munitions experts were able to engineer the equalizer grenade from the test data.

Function: Operating on the same principles that cause certain patterns of brightly flashing lights to induce epileptic seizures, the

FIELD MODIFICATION: THE BLEEDER

The Bleeder was designed to work on vampires and other hemovores, and Task Force: VALKYRIE scientists have had their greatest successes on implementing the technology to disrupt vampiric feeding. While not nearly as reliable, a Bleeder can be field modified to bleed the vital energy that empowers other supernatural creatures.

Action: Extended (five successes required; each roll represents one hour of tinkering).

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Science; if the hunter performing the modification does not have an Occult Specialty relating to some type of entity that uses the newly targeted form of energy, he suffers a -3 penalty on the roll.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Bleeder's components overload and melt down into useless slag, either due to user error or VALKYRIE security safeguards.

Failure: No progress is made toward the modification.

Success: Progress is made toward modifying the Bleeder to target a different supernatural energy source, such as the Essence used by ghosts, spirits and werewolves or the mana used by witches. A Bleeder will work against any type of creature that uses the energy to which it is attuned. A Bleeder cannot be modified to target Willpower. An individual Bleeder can only be set to bleed one form of power at a time. In addition, the modification reduces the weapon's damage rating to +1.

Exceptional Success: As above, but the weapon retains its full +3 damage bonus.

equalizer grenade pulses in a pattern that causes focused microseizures in that portion of the brain that seems to govern shapeshifting. The grenade is harmless to humans, and in fact to anything not attempting to alter its form, but the microseizures flood neural channels with "white noise" that effectively blocks shapeshifting.

Throwing an equalizer grenade is a Dexterity + Athletics roll (see *The World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 67). The grenade has a "Damage" of 4, but instead of inflicting Health damage, any living creature within five yards of the grenade whose Size is less than the total "damage" is unable to change its shape for five turns and must return to its natural shape. Remember that to calculate a grenade's damage, you roll a number of dice equal to the Damage, in this case 4, and add the successes to the base Damage rating (see *The World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 178).

Special: The Equalizer Grenade Merit is Renewable; once per story per instance of the Merit a hunter possesses, Task Force: VALKYRIE will resupply him with an Equalizer Grenade. If he can produce concrete intelligence that a particular quarry he's pursuing is a shapeshifter and he has already used his resupply for the current story, he may roll Wits + Politics to cut through the red tape and acquire another. Success means he receives the resupply within the week; an exceptional success gets him the grenade in one day. This emergency resupply can only be used once per story.

Equalizer grenades work against any living creature, regardless of the means by which it shapeshifts. A werewolf's innate shapeshifting, a witch's skin-changing spell, or a possessed woman's flesh warped by the demon that controls her are equally susceptible. Vampires and other undead that are not animated by anything even vaguely resembling biology are resistant to the grenade's effects. Treat an undead creature's Size as two points higher when calculating the effect of an Equalizer grenade. An equalizer grenade can only be used once; the intensity of light required to trigger the microseizures slags the electronics and turns the battery into a useless lump.

Gungnir Multi-Function Targeting System (••• or ••••)

The Gungnir System, named for Odin's never-missing spear, is the boon and the curse of many Task Force: VALKYRIE field teams. Integrated directly into the latest generation of standard armament (the three-dot version described here includes an integrated submachine gun; a four-dot version comes with an assault rifle), the Gungnir System is VALKYRIE top brass' new initiative for the future of the agency, in one fell swoop improving target identification and all but eliminating collateral damage.

The truth, according to cynical agents who have field-tested the device, is that *target* identification and *guy who's about to kill me* identification aren't necessarily the same thing, and the only way the Gungnir System is going to prevent collateral damage is by ensuring that bystanders are only accidentally killed by the bad guys.

Function: The integrated scope built into a weapon outfitted with the Gungnir System is a marvelous thing. A combination night vision scope, thermal imager, and Kirlian camera, it allows a soldier to engage targets in pitch blackness and easily distinguishes most monsters from humans: vampires, of course, are well below human body temperature, while werewolves and their ilk run hot as a byproduct of their increased metabolism. Witches, psychics and the possessed demonstrate an unusual Kirlian aura that identifies them as extra-normal. For an additional Merit dot, the scope can even have etheric goggle functionality built into it, allowing the agent to target ghosts and spirits. An LED overlay tags any known supernatural entity with its Task Force: VALKYRIE designation.

In addition to its target identification features, the scope is a top-of-the-line sighting system. Penalties for medium-range fire are negated entirely, and long-range penalties are halved. The hunter also ignores any penalty for fighting blind when using the Gungnir System.

The scope is tied directly into a fire control computer programmed to recognize the unique signatures (thermal, etheric, or Kirlian) of every supernatural creature of which Task Force: VALKYRIE has records. If the gun is pointed at a target that does not fit any target profile, the safety is automatically engaged and the gun will not fire.

In theory, this means that it is impossible for a VALKYRIE soldier to accidentally shoot a bystander during an engagement. In practice, it means that the weapon tends to refuse to fire at a monster's mortal servants, cultists, slashers and even the odd inanimate object. A cell operating under the cover of the Gulf War was wiped out by a nest of *ghūls* because the desert sun baked the stone walls of the creatures' lair to a temperature close to 98.6, causing the computers to assume the hunters were surrounded by human onlookers and refuse to fire.

Special: The majority of agents issued a Gungnir System weapon quickly learn of a field modification that strips out the safety controls while leaving the scope and target recognition software intact. This hack requires an extended Dexterity + Computers roll, with each roll representing an hour's worth of careful soldering and rewiring. The hunter must achieve 10 successes to complete the modification. Task Force: VALKYRIE comes down hard on agents discovered to have modified their weapons in this manner, with court martial the *least* severe reprimand.

VDSB (•••)

Ever since Murnau's *Nosferatu*, the knowledge that vampires are destroyed by the light of the sun has entered the pop culture lexicon, along with wooden stakes, crosses and garlic (never mind that, as far as Task Force: VALKYRIE has been able to determine, two of those are complete nonsense). While VALKYRIE's scientists have not yet found the key component of sunlight that causes such deleterious effects on the bloodsuckers, they have developed the next best thing.

Function: The VDSB (Victim-Detonated Sun Bomb) is an explosive device that is rigged to trigger via an infrared sensor and thermal imager; when an object with a core temperature of less than 94°F breaks the infrared beam, the device is triggered. Instead of an explosion, the VDSB (which looks like a generic satchel charge but contains far more complex innards) uses a combination of full-spectrum phosphorescent lights and focusing mirrors to create a blinding flash that is, from an electromagnetic standpoint, identical to sunlight. While the light doesn't actually harm vampires, it can cause a surge of panic that overwhelms their rational mind and leads them to make tactical errors.

Arming the device is simple enough, necessitating success on an instant Wits + Crafts roll. However, unless operating in total darkness, the VDSB must also be concealed, necessitating six successes on an extended Wits + Crafts roll, with each roll representing 10 minutes' worth of work. Disarming the bomb is more time-consuming, requiring six successes on a Wits + Crafts roll, with each roll representing one minute of work. Disarming the bomb is more difficult, requiring six successes on a Wits + Crafts roll, with each roll representing one minute of work. Once the tampering process starts, though, the dis-

armer only has four minutes, or four rolls, in which to disarm the device. Once that time ticks down, the device detonates if it hasn't been neutralized.

Against humans and monsters not afraid of sunlight, the VDSB is treated as an ordinary explosive. It has a "Damage" of 4, but damage is only rolled to determine whether or not the target is Stunned. Remember that to calculate an explosive's damage, you roll a number of dice equal to the Damage, in this case 4, and add the successes to the base Damage rating (see *The World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 178). Blind characters and creatures without eyes are unaffected.

When a vampire or other creature vulnerable to bright light is caught within the area of a VDSB, the effects are far more pronounced. The vampire's player must immediately make an extended Resolve + Composure roll, with each roll representing one turn. Each turn in which the vampire's player rolls at least one success, he maintains his composure for one further turn. If at any time the vampire fails to gain any successes on a roll, he flies into a frenzy of fear in which his only objective is to flee from the source of the light. He will attack anyone who gets in his way, but otherwise just tries to get away. If the vampire accumulates five successes on the extended roll, he shakes off the flight instinct and can act normally.

Special: A VDSB can only be used once before it must be refitted; the intensity of the flash burns out the light sources in a single use. Unlike the Equalizer grenade, a VDSB can be refitted in the field with a minimum of fuss. Refitting a Sig mine requires full spectrum lights available from most science-novelty or pet stores for a Resource cost of • and 15 successes on an extended Intelligence + Craft roll. Each roll represents 20 minutes of work.

Etheric Tracker (****)

Monsters, whatever their stripe, tend to be elusive. Whether it's a vampire's ability to cloud men's minds, a witch's teleportation spell, or a werewolf's really damn disconcerting way of just *disappearing* sometimes, if Task Force: VALKYRIE can't find it, they can't very well tag it or kill it. The etheric tracker is one step toward nullifying that advantage. By marking a target with a small "tag" that has been bombarded with exotic, high-energy particles similar to those underlying the creation of etheric rounds, Task Force: VALKYRIE can track its quarry even through realms beyond mortal ken.

Function: The etheric tracker consists of two parts: the main unit is roughly the size and shape of a large pistol (Size 1), which uses precisely aligned electromagnets to fire a tracking pellet at considerable velocity, embedding it below the target's skin. The pellets themselves are roughly the size of a grain of sand, and are small enough that the target must roll Wits + Composure to notice the impact. Even if it is noticed, the sensation is comparable to the bite of a small insect. A handheld scanner, the second part of the tracker, picks up the pseudo-etheric radiation given off by the pellet and displays a location on an LCD screen. Earlier models only showed approximate distance and direction; current field models integrate a GPS locator and street maps of the area, allowing the team to pinpoint the precise location of its quarry.

Since the tracker actually follows the etheric signature of the pellet and not a radio frequency or other, more earthly signatures, it can follow creatures even when they slip into an invisible, intangible state. Likewise, the pellet's pseudo-etheric nature allows it to anchor in the resonant structure of a manifested ghost or spirit as well as the flesh of a corporeal entity. The current model cannot track a target that fully departs this plane of existence, but Task Force: VALKYRIE researchers are hard at work on cracking that puzzle as well. An etheric tracker has an effective range of only half a mile, but this range is not hampered by buildings or other obstructions. A single pellet can be tracked for 24 hours before its etheric resonance fades.

Special: An Etheric Tracker comes with a full magazine of pellets, which resembles a magazine for a semiautomatic pistol filled with blue sand. The sheer number of pellets means the Etheric Tracker's ammunition is effectively unlimited. Should an agent lose his supply of etheric pellets, a call to his home office and a successful Wits + Politics roll can get him a replacement within one week, provided he can get to a population center or military base. An exceptional success sees the pellets delivered within one day.

Munin Serum (****, Renewable)

No matter how black the black ops or how covert the covert strike team, on occasion, witnesses to Task Force: VALKYRIE operations survive the initial fracas. Sometimes it's a bystander in the wrong place at the wrong time, sometimes it's the newly freed victim of a possessing entity or the liberated thrall of a warlock. Sometimes, those witnesses start to ask awkward questions. Since secrecy is one of the organization's paramount directives, the silence of these witnesses must be guaranteed. In the old days, that meant a couple of ounces of lead in the back of the head; nowadays, VALKYRIE operatives prefer to use less messy alternatives.

Munin serum — or, as it's more colloquially known, "memory cleanser" or "Brain-O" — is a cocktail of narcotics, psychedelics and memory-inhibitor drugs that can completely suppress the last six hours of a subject's memory. Extensive application of the drug can lead to addiction, illness and even death. New VALKYRIE recruits are frightened with campfire tales of agents who injected themselves with Munin serum to forget the horrific things they'd seen, only to end up wasted, cancer-ravaged addicts desperately jonesing for a taste of the high they can never quite remember.

Function: Munin serum must be administered by injection directly into the spinal column just below the cervical vertebrae. The process is excruciatingly painful and subjects are usually sedated before being treated. If an agent wishes to administer Munin serum to an aware and unwilling target, he must first successfully grapple his target. Once the target is held securely, he must succeed on a Strength + Medicine "attack" at a -2 penalty (the actual penalty is -3 for targeting the victim's head, but Task Force: VALKYRIE distributes Munin serum in large, sturdy hypodermics that count as +1 weapons).

As long as the hunter scores at least one success on this attack, he may dose the target. Each dose affects one hour of the subject's memory; a single syringe of the serum contains



six doses. (Each instance of the Munin Syndrome Merit buys the hunter one syringe.) When the serum is injected, the subject's player rolls Stamina + Composure in a contested action against a dice pool of 7, representing the serum's potency. If the subject rolls more successes, she is left woozy and disoriented, as though she had taken a potent (-3) hallucinogen (see *The World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 176). If the serum rolls more successes, the character's memory is wiped out for an amount of time corresponding to the number of doses injected. Only one resistance roll is made, no matter how many doses are injected. The subject experiences the memory loss as a similar sensation to an alcohol-induced blackout. Some refer to it as "lost time."

Special: If an individual is subject to a number of doses of Munin serum greater than her Stamina within a week or less, the toxic side effects of the drug build up to critical levels and the subject is treated as though she had ingested a poison with a Toxicity of 7 (*World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 180).

If a subject is given more doses of Munin serum than her Stamina over the course of a month without triggering the overdose described above, she must succeed on a Stamina + Resolve roll or develop the Addiction Flaw focused on the serum.

The Munin Serum Merit is Renewable; once per story per instance of the Merit a hunter possesses, Task Force: VALKYRIE will resupply him with a syringe of Munin Serum.

Mjolnir Cannon (•••• or •••••)

When facing off against the unnamed horrors of the night, Task Force: VALKYRIE agents find it comforting to know they are armed with such stalwarts of high technology as "ray guns." The Mjolnir Cannon may not be quite on par with Hollywood's offerings, but it packs a wallop that can put down rioting humans and fanged monstrosities with equal ease. This weapon, which resembles an exceptionally bulky assault rifle (Size 3), operates by firing an intense, high-frequency laser beam that ionizes the air, creating a channel of extremely conductive plasma. The gun then sends an electrical charge into this channel, and the ionized air carries the charge to its target and delivers a long-range, high-impact shock.

Function: The Mjolnir Cannon operates like a normal firearm, with a few exceptions, as described below.

Dice Pool: Dexterity + Firearms.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The gun backfires, delivering its full charge to the wielder instead of the target.

Failure: The beam misses its target and inflicts no damage.

Success: The Mjolnir Cannon inflicts bashing damage from electricity on its target. As long as a single success is rolled, the target takes the full damage from the weapon. The

REALITY IS SCARY

The weapons and devices found as a part of Advanced Armory may seem far-fetched or lingering too long in the realm of sci-fi.

The reality, however, is that the items listed here are far less fictional than we might believe. Ever see a show like *Futureweapons* or talk to somebody who's been designing weapons for the last 10 years? Plasma cannons exist. Sonic weapons are real. Stuff exists in the hands of the military that is nowhere near public - and that's the kind of stuff that Task Force: VALKYRIE gets its hands on.

man-portable version of the Mjolnir Cannon can be set to one of three settings, inflicting either 6 or 8 points of bashing damage, or 4 points of lethal damage.

Exceptional Success: In addition to taking bashing damage, the target loses its next turn.

Special: A Mjolnir Cannon has a battery rated for 16 shots before depletion. The more damaging settings consume more power; inflicting 6 bashing counts as 2 shots, and 8 bashing damage or 4 lethal costs 4 shots.

The Mjolnir Cannon has a range of 100/200/400.

A larger, vehicle-mounted version of the Mjolnir Cannon also exists, costing 5 Merit dots. The vehicle-mounted cannon is seldom issued to urban strike teams, due to its lack of concealment, but in rural areas or regions already gripped by war, it can provide vital tactical support. The vehicle-mounted version works just like its smaller cousin, with the following exceptions: the weapon has two additional settings, inflicting 10 bashing or 5 lethal damage, respectively. The range of the vehicle-mounted cannon is 300/600/1,200, and its battery holds the capacity for 50 shots. The 10 bashing setting counts as 8 shots, while 5 lethal counts as 16.

The Mjolnir Cannon is essentially man-made lightning; while that makes it a potent tool on the battlefield, it can interact dangerously when *actual* lightning is brought into the mix. The plasma channel created by the cannon attracts lightning; whenever the weapon is used in a thunderstorm, treat any failed attack roll as a dramatic failure to represent an errant bolt finding the plasma channel and following it back to the hapless hunter.

Benediction

Drawn from ancient Catholic rites that predate the Council of Nicea and from secret invocations encoded into the New Testament, Benedictions give the witch-hunters of the Malleus Maleficarum the righteous might to strike down the servants of Satan that lurk in the darkness. By invoking the name of the One True God and His Son Jesus Christ, and by pleading for the intercession of the saints, the Malleus Maleficarum can call down fire from heaven, steel their hearts against the terrors of the night and draw the poison of demonic possession from the souls of the righteous.

Benediction rituals have no levels associated with them; as long as a character has at least one dot of Benediction,

he may, theoretically, learn any and all rituals by investing the time and experience points. At character creation, he learns one ritual per dot of the Benediction Merit.

New Benediction rites may be purchased at a cost of five experience points per ritual. It takes one week to acquire a new Benediction, and the rite can only be gained through intense teaching and prayer.

The activation of Benedictions varies from ritual to ritual, but all have the following common modifiers:

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier Situation

-3	Ritualist's Morality is 3 or less
-1	Ritual incorporates no overt shows of faith
+1	Ritualist is an ordained priest, monk or nun
+1	Ritualist's Morality is 8 or higher
+2	Ritual incorporates the sacraments
+5	Ritual is performed on the appropriate saint's feast day (see individual Benedictions)

The Apostle's Teachings

According to the Bible, Jesus told his Apostles to go forth and spread the word of the faith, teaching not by forced conversion or sermonizing, but by example: the Apostles, much like hunters, cured the sick, drove out demons and ministered to the people. Today, the Malleus Maleficarum holds to those same teachings. By invoking the favor of the Twelve Apostles, a hunter may inspire others through her own good works, showing the spiritual rewards of virtue and rightness.

Cost: None.

Action: Reflexive.

Dice Pool: Composure + Benediction.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The hunter gains no benefit from fulfilling her Virtue. She regains no Willpower and cannot bestow Willpower on others.

Failure: The hunter regains Willpower for fulfilling her Virtue but cannot bestow those points on others.

Success: Instead of regaining Willpower herself when she fulfills her Virtue, the hunter gains a pool of Willpower points equal to her maximum Willpower, which she may allocate to any mortal characters in line of sight. She may give as many points as she likes to one character, or may spread the points out to many characters, but she cannot take any points for herself and she cannot increase a character's current Willpower total beyond its maximum.

Exceptional Success: As a success, but the hunter may allocate points to herself and may increase a character's Willpower point total beyond its maximum. This extra Willpower point vanishes at the end of the scene if unspent.

This Benediction is invoked as a reflexive action when the hunter regains Willpower by fulfilling her Virtue. She does not have to use this Benediction if she does not wish to, but she may only use it if she has not already regained Willpower by fulfilling her Virtue (or used this Benediction) during the current chapter.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier Situation

- +1 Character's Virtue is Faith
- +5 Benediction is performed on June 29th (feast day of St. Peter and St. Paul)

Armor of St. Martin

In the constant battle against the minions of Satan, the Malleus Maleficarum must stand ever ready. Since the modern world frowns upon the wearing of riot vests by the general population, many hunters offer their prayers to St. Martin of Tours, the patron saint of soldiers, to watch over them and protect them. Uttered before going into battle, the prayer of the Armor of St. Martin has saved many hunters' lives.

Cost: 1 Willpower.

Action: Instant.

Dice Pool: Stamina + Benediction.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The hunter's prayers are not sufficiently sincere; not only does he not receive St. Martin's protection, but he also suffers a -1 penalty to his Defense for the rest of the scene.

Failure: The hunter does not gain the benefit of St. Martin's blessing.

Success: The hunter gains an Armor rating equal to his Benediction dots. This armor does not stack with mundane armor or other forms of supernatural armor, nor does it reduce the hunter's Defense. The Armor of St. Martin does not protect against attacks that naturally inflict aggravated damage.

Exceptional Success: The hunter may spend a Willpower point to downgrade the damage from a lethal wound to bashing. This effect only downgrades the base damage from the attack; it has no effect on damage that wraps around from a full Health chart.

The Armor of St. Martin lasts for one scene.

Modifier Situation

- +1 The hunter is fighting to defend helpless innocents
- +5 The Benediction is performed on November 11th (feast day of St. Martin of Tours)

Epipodian Safeguard

Satan's servants are as subtle as they are powerful. Many are capable of warping a hunter's mind, forcing her to betray her friends and allies. By invoking St. Epipodius, patron saint of the betrayed, a member of the Malleus Maleficarum can safeguard herself against such blasphemous arts. Through the power of faith, her soul remains pure and loyal.

Cost: 1 Willpower.

Action: Instant.

Dice Pool: None.

Effect: By spending a point of Willpower and uttering a prayer to St. Epipodius, the hunter gains a preternatural resistance to mental domination, be it by spell or possession or a more mysterious force. For the rest of the scene, she adds her Benediction rating to any Resistance Attribute rolled to contest any supernatural power that seeks to control her mind. This resistance does not apply against powers that merely *affect* her mind (such as a witch's ability to conjure illusions or a demons ability to invoke terror), only those that would control her actions (such as demonic possession or a vampire's dread gaze).

Blessed Protection of St. Agrippina

Those strong in the faith can expel demons from the bodies of the possessed and even force them to depart from a place, but even the righteous warriors of God must have their secret counsels, and it does no good to banish Satan's spawn if they have already overheard your battle plans. By calling upon the blessings of the virgin martyr St. Agrippina, a hunter may create a safe space into which the creatures of the night cannot enter. Most cells of Malleus Maleficarum hunters have at least one member who knows this Benediction, and whose sacred duty it is to ensure that the group's headquarters remains protected.

Cost: 1 Willpower.

Action: Extended; each roll represents one minute of chanting and prayer. The Benediction may be "rushed," reducing the time per roll to one turn at the cost of incurring a -1 penalty on the roll. The hunter must roll a number of successes equal to the number of square yards the blessing's protection encompasses.

Dice Pool: Resolve + Benediction.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: An improperly performed ritual either draws spirits and ghosts to the location or grants such beings a temporary +1 to their Power when they are in the area.

Failure: No progress is made toward blessing the area.

Success: The character makes progress toward blessing the area with St. Agrippina's protection.

Exceptional Success: Not only is significant progress made toward completing the blessing, but the protected area's Strength also gains a +1 bonus (Benediction + 1 for a general blessing, Benediction +2 for a blessing against a specific monster).

The Blessed Protection of St. Agrippina can be a general blessing that protects against all monsters, or it may be custom-tailored to affect only a single unholy blasphemy, but at greater potency. When creating a ward against a specific

"MORTAL?"

The term *mortal* means anything that looks like a human, acts like a human and can die like a human. For purposes of this game, all hunters, no matter how strangely they are made, are considered "mortal." So are most witches, cultists and slashers. Demons, fairies, Reanimated, vampires and werewolves are not considered "mortal" for purposes of determining system effects.

creature, the hunter does not need to know the name of the entity — an obvious designation, such as "the vampire who killed Maria Buchenwald" or "the demon that tempted me with wealth and power" is a sufficiently accurate description. Specific blessings protect against *only* that particular being, though. They have no effect on any other monster.

Each blessing must be tied to some sort of physical marker, such as a fence or a line of holy water sprinkled across the floor. If anyone or anything disturbs or makes an opening in this physical marker, the blessing instantly ceases to function. A character cannot bless an area that is more than 21 yards on a side; he can protect a small house and most of its yard, a large house or most of a warehouse, but not an entire office building or city block. The Blessed Protection of St. Agrippina is generally stationary; the only way to move the effect is to move the entire structure the blessing protects. Thus, it is possible to ward a house or even a car, but not an individual person (wards must affect an area, and most people don't move the ground under their feet when they walk).

The blessing has a Strength rating equal to its creator's Benediction rating (or Benediction +1 for a blessing against one particular creature) that measures its ability to keep out Satan's spawn. This score is subtracted from the Presence (or Power, for a ghost or spirit) of any affected monster that seeks to enter the area. If the entity's Presence or Power would be reduced to zero, it cannot enter the blessed area. Otherwise, the creature can enter, but *all* of its Power Attributes (Strength, Intelligence and Presence) are reduced by the Strength of the blessing for the entire time the entity remains in the area. If any of these Attributes is reduced to 0, the monster cannot use any actions that rely on that Attribute. Monsters outside the blessed area that attempt to use supernatural powers to affect anyone or anything inside the blessed area are still subject to the blessing's Strength. Monsters *within* the blessed area at the time of its casting (such as a vampire within its haven during the day) will endeavor to flee at any cost; inability to flee causes the monster to suffer the effects as noted above.

The Blessed Protection of St. Agrippina lasts for one full day if it is performed to ward off all supernatural entities, or for a week if its blessing works against a single creature. Multiple Blessed Protections of St. Agrippina do not stack; however, it is possible to lay a blessing against one particular entity and

one against all monsters over the same area, or several separate blessings against different specific creatures. For example, a Malleus Maleficarum cell actively engaged in hunting down a particular cabal of witches might well maintain a separate ward against *each* member of the cabal, in addition to a general ward against all monsters, around its headquarters. An individual hunter may only have a single protection active at a time, thus, the example above requires the cooperation of the entire cell.

Although a monster may convince a mortal to remove or damage the physical markers that keep a blessing in place, such entities are completely incapable of affecting these physical markers directly, even if they could normally move or destroy them. A spirit affected by a Blessed Protection of St. Agrippina cannot make the area into an anchor while the protection is in place. A ward does not undo the connection between an entity and its anchor if the rite is performed on such an object, however. The spirit or ghost's Power is still reduced by the blessing, but it remains in proximity to its anchor. Such a being whose Power is reduced to zero is forced into a sort of hibernation while the blessing is active, becoming dormant and inaccessible.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier Situation

-1	The area being blessed is devoted to some profane purpose (such as a strip club or crack house)
+1	The area being blessed is consecrated ground
+5	Benediction performed on June 23rd (Feast Day of St. Agrippina)

The Boon of Lazarus

The greatest miracle Christ performed was the raising of Lazarus from his tomb after four days, showing himself to be the king of all life. By invoking the Apostolic right to raise the dead in Christ's name, a righteous hunter can restore life to those who have recently died.

Cost: 1 Willpower dot.

Action: Instant.

Dice Pool: None.

No roll is required to activate this Benediction; the hunter merely touches the body of a fallen ally and commands him in the name of Christ to rise again. The hunter may only revive a character who has been dead a number of minutes equal to his Benediction rating. This Benediction has no effect on supernatural beings, and it cannot restore the undead to life. This resurrection restores all lost Health, returning the character to full Health, but the ritual cannot reattach missing body parts, and thus cannot be used on a body that has been decapitated or chopped in half; there must be enough of the target intact to maintain life.

The sheer spiritual effort of invoking this miracle costs a dot of Willpower; even then, the resurrection is imperfect. Those who are brought back return just a little bit...off. Any character who is resurrected by this Benediction automatically gains a major derangement. The Malleus Maleficarum attributes this to the shock of witnessing the Kingdom of God, but dark rumors spread of char-

acters who have been subject to this Benediction repeatedly going completely mad. Some don't see the Kingdom of God; they see the fiery Pit. Some kill themselves for good. Others become slashers—or, if the stories are to be believed, something even worse.

Fortitude of St. George

Best known for his slaying of the dragon in the city of Silene, St. George was also a Christian martyr slain by the Roman Emperor Diocletian. He endured tremendous torments and suffering, and the stoicism with which he bore it convinced the Empress Alexandra to convert to Christianity as well. The hunters of the Malleus Maleficarum venerate St. George as one of the first of their order in spirit, if not in formal membership, and they pray to him for the courage and strength to endure the torments of their own struggles with the Dragon. Hunters invoking this ritual sometimes report feeling a presence hanging over them, watching and silently judging. Tradition holds this to be the gaze of St. George, but some have described the presence as vaguely...other.

Cost: None.

Action: Instant.

Dice Pool: Composure + Benediction.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The hunter's prayers go unheeded. The spiritual shock of such a blow to her faith causes her to lose one Willpower. If she has no Willpower points left, she suffers a -1 to all dice pools for the rest of the scene.

Failure: The hunter's prayers fail to balm her soul.

Success: St. George answers the hunter's prayers, filling her with zeal and inner strength. She gains a dot of Stamina (which increases her Health trait by one, as well). This dot remains for one scene. She can also go a number of days equal to her Benedictions score without eating or sleeping, though she still must supply her body with water. During this time, she suffers no ill effects at the hands of fatigue or deprivation. At the end of this period, she will fall into a deep 12-hour slumber from which she sleeps like the dead and cannot be awakened. A character cannot benefit from the Fortitude of St. George more than once per 24 hours.

Exceptional Success: The hunter gains one additional dot of Stamina, even if that would take her above five dots.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier Situation

+5	Benediction is performed on April 23rd (feast day of St. George)
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The Hands of St. Luke

Grievous wounds are all too common in the hunt, and often the injured warrior cannot be taken to a hospital. The soldier-priests of the Hammer of Witches know that the power of faith to heal the wounded is a greater tool than the scalpels and drugs of the modern doctor, and so they call on St. Luke the Evangelist to restore life and vigor.

Cost: 1 Willpower.

Action: Extended; each roll represents one minute of prayer and laying-on of hands.

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Benediction.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The injured character's wounds are visited upon the healer in the form of stigmata. The healer suffers one point of lethal damage as blood erupts from his palms, feet, side and brow.

Failure: No progress is made toward healing the injured character.

Success: The injured character's wounds begin to close through the power of God.

Exceptional Success: In addition to tremendous progress being made, the Benediction downgrades one aggravated wound to lethal.

Successes rolled on the extended action go toward healing the characters. One success is required to heal a point of bashing damage, while two successes are required to heal a lethal wound. The healer need not declare a target number in advance, but the character may only make a number of rolls equal to his Morality.

In order to use this Benediction, the healer must lay at least one hand on the injured party. Skin-to-skin contact is necessary. If physical contact is broken, all accumulated successes are lost and the character must begin again. A character may not use this ritual upon himself.

Modifier Situation

+1	The injured character's Virtue is Faith
+5	Benediction is performed on October 18th (feast day of St. Luke)

Sanctification of the Blessed Virgin

The enemies of the faith are manifold, and while some may be fought with sword and gun and purifying flame, some exist against whom earthly weapons are no avail. Ghosts, demonic spirits and other insubstantial terrors cannot be fought by force of arms, but rather by the strength of faith. Truly devout hunters can invoke the name of the Blessed Virgin Mary, infusing ordinary objects with the divine power of faith.

Cost: 1 Willpower (see below).

Action: Extended; each roll represents one turn of prayer.

Dice Pool: Morality + Benediction.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The object to be sanctified is shattered by the wrath of God, and the hunter loses any Willpower cost associated with the ritual.

Failure: No progress is made toward completing the ritual.

Success: Progress is made toward completing the ritual.

Exceptional Success: In addition to major progress being made, the rating of the blessed item created by this ritual is increased by one dot.

This rite allows the hunter to create a blessed item (**The World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 214). Before beginning the ritual, the hunter must decide on the dot rating he wishes to bestow on the blessed item he creates. Each dot requires three successes to create, and the maximum number of rolls is capped by the hunter's Morality. If the hunter fails, he does not pay the Willpower cost except on a dramatic failure.

Creating a blessed item with this rite costs a point of Willpower. The item remains blessed for the remainder of the

scene. If the hunter desires, he may spend a Willpower dot to infuse the item with God's blessing permanently.

Suggested Modifiers**Modifier Situation**

-2	The item being blessed is profane or blasphemous (a porn magazine, an image of Jesus sprayed with horse urine).
-1	The item being blessed is one of no particular religious significance (e.g., a baseball bat or comic book).
+0	The item being blessed is one of religious significance (a Bible, rosary, etc.).
+2	The blessed item is an actual relic of a saint, such as a bone or vial of blood.
+5	Benediction is enacted on May 24th (Feast Day of Mary, Help of Christians).

The Shepherd's Blessing

A good shepherd knows how to watch over his flock without disturbing it. Even the scent of a wolf can panic the sheep, and so the shepherd must move among the herd without being noticed. So, too, must the hunter keep his activities shrouded from the awareness of the people he protects, and even those who would aspire to protect him.

Cost: 1 Willpower.

Action: Reflexive.

Dice Pool: Wits + Benediction (but see below).

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Not only does the hunter fail to conceal himself, but he actively draws attention to his presence. People automatically notice him and try to engage him in conversation even when he tries to be unobtrusive, and even if he tries to hide, those looking for him get a +1 bonus on their rolls.

Failure: The hunter is unable to mask his presence from those looking for him.

Success: The eyes of ordinary mortals slide right off the hunter; people unconsciously acknowledge his presence but refuse to actually notice him, even if he's armed to the teeth and engaged in an act of burglary. Any overtly hostile act, such as firing a gun or shouting a threat, breaks the illusion instantly, as does speaking anything other than prayer.

Exceptional Success: As a success, but if the hunter attacks an enemy while still under the effects of this Benediction, the effect does not end until *after* the attack (meaning the target loses his Defense).

The effects of this Benediction are automatic. As long as the hunter continuously murmurs prayers under his breath (meaning he cannot otherwise speak) and takes no hostile actions, ordinary mortals simply do not see him. Even suspicious but non-threatening acts, like hot-wiring a car or picking a lock on a door, do not break the effect. Supernatural creatures and mortals actively looking for trouble (such as a patrolling cop or a private guard) may make a Wits + Composure

roll contested by the hunter's Wits + Stealth + Benediction. This roll is reflexive for both parties. If the hunter rolls more successes, he remains undetected. If the observer rolls more successes, he pierces the veil and the effect is ended for *all* characters in the vicinity.

The hunter may spend a second point of Willpower at any time to expand the effect to include a number of willing allies up to his Benediction rating. These allies must be mortal.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier Situation

+5	Benediction is performed on October 24th (feast day of St. Raphael, patron saint of shepherds).
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True Sight of St. Abel

The servants of Satan take many guises and hide behind veils of shadow and deception. Vampires' images blur and shift, hiding their depredations from the eyes of the modern world. Witnesses to the ravages of werewolves and to the foul blasphemies of witches are afflicted with the demons of madness and soon forget what they saw. By calling upon St. Abel, the patron saint of the blind, the Malleus Maleficarum pierces the protections the Devil gives his servants and grants the hunters the gift of true sight.

Cost: 1 Willpower.

Action: Extended; each roll represents one turn of prayer and supplication.

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Benediction.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The hunter fails to entreat the saint with humility and righteousness in his heart; every character who would have received the benefits of the ritual is instead struck blind for the remainder of the scene (*The World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 166).

Failure: No progress is made toward calling down the Benediction.

Success: The hunter makes progress toward invoking the saint's power.

Exceptional Success: Extraordinary progress is made.

Successes on the extended action must be allocated amongst all the recipients of the ritual's blessing. The number of blessed must be determined at the outset of the action, but the hunter need not specify the exact target number of successes. He may make a total number of rolls equal to his Morality, and must assign one success minimum to each intended target.

For the remainder of the scene, the players of all those blessed may roll Resolve + (successes allocated). Success indicates that the hunters can see monsters for what they are: if he sees a vampire, he knows it is one of the spiteful dead. If he sees a werewolf, even in its human state, he senses the feral and protean nature of the thing.

In addition, any normal monstrous masking effects fail (a vampire's reflection or image appears crystal clear, the sight of a werewolf inspires no terror or amnesia, and the vulgar magic of a warlock is plain to his eyes). The effects do function even on recorded media; a hunter benefiting from the True Sight of St. Abel will see a vampire's

TRUE SIGHT AND OTHER WORLD OF DARKNESS GAMES

For those who have access to the more in-depth rules for monsters found in *Vampire: The Masquerade*, *Werewolf: The Forsaken*, *Mage: The Awakening*, and other *World of Darkness* game lines, the True Sight of St. Abel pierces the vampiric Masquerade, werewolves' Lunacy, and the Quiescence Curse of the mages.

image clearly, even if that image is on a three-week-old video recording.

Finally, any creatures (ghosts, demons, spirits) existing in the non-corporeal state of Twilight become visible as gauzy shadows.

That said, this ritual provides no benefit against *active* powers of deception or stealth (such as the Lurker in Darkness Dread Power), only those innate traits that protect the monsters from discovery.

Example: Brother Justin has invoked the blessing of St. Abel in preparation for battle with a pair of shapeshifting hellhounds. The beasts are expecting his coming, and as he bursts into their lair, one has already taken the form of a hulking wolf the size of a horse. Brother Justin rolls his Resolve + 3 (the number of successes allocated to the Benediction) and rolls two successes. He is untouched by the moon-madness that comes from seeing such a demon in its true form, and moves to attack. Unfortunately, he has no idea the beast's fellow has employed one of its demonic powers to render it hidden to mortal eyes, and is coming up behind him with a knife...

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier Situation

+5	Benediction invoked on August 5th.
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Vade Retro Satana

The rites of exorcism exist in many forms across many of the world's religions. The Catholic Church continues to train exorcists in the art, though they try to keep that fact quiet. The current form favored by the Church is detailed in the Roman Ritual and made famous by films like *The Exorcist*. The Malleus Maleficarum uses that form of the rite, but generally prefers this archaic, medieval formula attributed to St. Benedict. It claims that the rite has a greater power than that of the Roman Ritual, and in any case, it resonates with the order's preference for the trappings of the medieval Church.

Cost: None

Action: Extended and contested; each roll represents five minutes of repeating the *Vade Retro Satana*; or contested (see below).

Dice Pool: Resolve + Composure + Benediction.

THE VADE RETRO SATANA

The text of the *Vade Retro Satana*, in Latin, is:

Crux sancta sit mihi lux
Non draco sit mihi dux
Vade retro satana
Nunquam suade mihi vana
Sunt mala quae libas
Ipse venena bibas
The prayer roughly translates to:
May the Holy Cross be my light
Let not the dragon lead me
Step back, Satan
Never tempt me with
vain things
What you offer me is evil
Drink the poison yourself

Roll Results

This Benediction serves the Malleus Maleficarum in the same way that the abjuration and exorcism actions (The World of Darkness Rulebook, pp. 213–214) serve other hunters. All the rules for those actions apply to the use of this

Benediction, which may be a contested action (if used as an abjuration) or a contested and extended action (if used as an exorcism). In effect, knowledge of this Benediction enables the hunter to add his Benediction rating as a bonus to his abjuration and exorcism dice pools.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier Situation

+5 Benediction is invoked on July 11th (feast day of St. Benedict).

Wrathful Sword of St. Michael the Archangel

St. Michael, the general of the Heavenly Host, did personal battle against Lucifer in the last days of the War in Heaven. It was by Michael's hand that the Morningstar's power was broken, and he was thrown down from the celestial city into the bowels of Hell. By praying to the mighty warrior angel, a hunter can imbue an earthly weapon with the divine power to smite the devils that haunt humankind. Few earthly implements can channel the divine power for long, but for as long as it lasts, a weapon sanctified by Michael is the most potent weapon in a hunter's arsenal.

Cost: 2 Willpower.

Action: Instant (however, the Willpower cost must be paid over two consecutive turns).



Dice Pool: Strength + Benediction.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The weapon is unable to channel the divine wrath and shatters immediately.

Failure: The weapon is not imbued with the power of the archangel.

Success: The weapon blazes with the pure white light of Heaven. When wielded against supernatural creatures, the weapon inflicts aggravated damage. The weapon can inflict a total amount of aggravated damage equal to the number of successes rolled.

In addition, it counts as a blessed item with dot rating equal to the successes rolled.

Exceptional Success: No additional effect beyond inflicting a large amount of aggravated damage.

Despite the name, this Benediction need not be used to bless a sword. Any melee weapon, even an improvised one, may be blessed with the power of St. Michael. The effects of this Benediction last for one scene, or until the weapon has been used to inflict a number of points of aggravated damage equal to the number of successes rolled on the activation roll. Once the weapon has inflicted that amount of aggravated damage, it shatters, overcome by the divine power poured into it. If the scene ends before the weapon has inflicted its maximum aggravated damage, the effect ends and the weapon is not broken. The hunter who imbues the weapon needn't be the hunter who uses it to incur damage.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier Situation

+5 Benediction performed on September 29th (Michaelmas)

Castigation

Gifted by the blood of their infernal ancestor, the hunters of the Lucifuge call upon the very powers of darkness they struggle against to make the world safe for humanity. Though the rites of Castigation are powerful, many Lucifuge fear to use them too freely, lest the seductive power of Hell ensnare their souls.

Hunters of the Lucifuge are right to fear, as the dark “blessing” of their forefather’s power can taint even the strongest soul. Whenever a Lucifuge rolls an exceptional success on the activation roll for a Castigation rite, he must roll his current Morality. If he fails, he gains a derangement associated with his current Morality rating, exactly as though he had gained a derangement thanks to Morality degeneration. If he already has a mild derangement associated with his current Morality, it becomes severe instead. If he has a severe derangement, his derangement is triggered but he suffers no further effect. The Storyteller and player should work together to choose this derangement; narcissism, suspicion and irrationality (along with their severe counterparts) are especially common.

Example: Example: Luther, a Lucifuge with a Morality of 5, rolls an exceptional success on a Castigation roll. He rolls five dice and gets no successes. Since he has no derangement associated with Morality 5, he gains the mild derangement, Narcissism. Should he raise his Morality above 5, this derangement goes away, as described on p. 93 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*.

Castigation rites have no associated dot cost; for each dot of the Castigation Merit the Lucifuge possesses, he knows one of the following rites. A character may only ever know a maximum of five of these rites at a time, but there are rituals that can allow him to “reassign” the rituals he can use (see the Castigation Merit on p. 67).

Calling Forth the Pit

According to the Lucifuge’s infernal lore, when Lucifer was cast into Hell, it was an empty, endless void. Only by the light of the Morningstar’s will was it transformed into a kingdom suitable for his demonic followers. The very act of willing the unholy city into being, however, bound up its existence with Lucifer’s. The First of the Fallen is a part of Hell now, and it is a part of him. His mortal descendants carry a bit of that connection in their blood, and through application of the proper ritual acts, a Lucifuge may draw a portion of Hell to himself, commanding the pit to either disgorge one of its demonic denizens into the earthly realm or to swallow up one of its children and drag it back to Hell.

The Lucifuge may attempt to summon a random demon or a specific entity whose name he knows. If he knows the name of a demon he tries to banish, he receives a +2 bonus to his dice pool. A named demon can even be summoned from elsewhere in the material world.

Cost: The Lucifuge must perform a blood sacrifice that inflicts 2 points of lethal damage. This damage may be inflicted on himself or on another intelligent being.

Action: Extended (10 successes; each roll requires a minute in time) to summon a demon, extended and contested to banish one. The first competitor to accumulate the required successes wins

Dice Pool: Presence + Resolve versus the subject’s Resistance.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The ritual or resistance fails outright and all accumulated successes are lost. If the attempt was a summoning ritual, the Lucifuge may try again; if the Lucifuge rolls a dramatic failure on a banishment roll, he cannot try to banish that demon again for one month. If the demon fails dramatically on a banishment resistance roll, it is immediately banished to the netherworld from whence it came.

Failure: No successes are accumulated at this stage of the contest.

Success: Successes are accumulated toward the total required. If the total reaches 10+ successes for the Lucifuge on a summoning ritual, a demon manifests in the physical world at a point specified by the hunter. The hunter has no control over the summoned demon unless he knows the Mandate of Hell Castigation ritual. If the hunter reaches 10+ successes first on a banishment ritual, the demon is swallowed up by the yawning black gulf of Hell and immediately banished from the mortal world. If the demon acquires 10+ successes first, it is not banished and is immune to further attempts for 24 hours.

Exceptional Success: Tremendous progress is made or resistance is shown. Upon an exceptional success, the entity may not return to the mortal world for one month.

Familiar

Descendants of Lucifer often attract tiny, lesser demons to themselves, willingly or unwillingly. These imps and familiars are drawn to the infernal spark in the blood of a Lucifuge, and are compelled by the divine right of Lucifer's blood to serve and obey. Some do so willingly, so slavish in their devotion to their earthly masters that they are willing to oppose the edicts of Hell. Others serve reluctantly, disgusted to see the seed of the Morningstar debase itself as a servant of humanity but nevertheless bound by their master's blood. Still others are insidious, pretending to give loyal service while seeking every opportunity to seduce their "masters" into the open service of evil.

A familiar comes in one of two forms, Twilight or embodied. The Lucifuge chooses which type he will have when he learns this rite; the only way to change the type of a character's familiar is to unlearn the Familiar ritual and then relearn it later. At the player's choice, this might represent the dismissal of one servant and the summoning of another, or the swap might represent an elaborate ritual to clothe a Twilight familiar in flesh (or release an embodied one from its fleshy prison). The altered familiar might have similar Traits in its new form, but it might just as easily be radically different in form and powers, with only the personality and memories remaining the same. A character may only have one familiar at a time.

A Twilight familiar is a spiritual entity with no proper physical body of its own. A Twilight familiar is also known as a "fetch." Twilight familiars can temporarily manifest like ghosts (see "Manifesta-

tions," p. 210 in *The World of Darkness Rulebook*), but their ephemeral bodies are otherwise invisible and intangible to the physical world. A Twilight familiar must manifest or use Dread Powers to affect anything in the physical world — except for its master, whom it can touch at will (its master can also see and speak with the familiar freely, even if he cannot see or hear into Twilight). A Twilight familiar often leaves behind a subtle sign



TWILIGHT FAMILIAR TRAITS

Attributes: 3/3/2 (allocate dots in any order among Power, Finesse and Resistance)

Willpower: Equal to Power + Resistance

Essence: 10 (10 max); the demon regains one point of spent Essence per day spent in its master's presence. A familiar can also regain spent Essence by witnessing (or causing) acts related to its Vice.

Initiative: Equal to Finesse + Resistance

Defense: Equal to highest of Power and Finesse

Speed: Equal to Power + Finesse + 5

Virtue: Choose Virtue

Vice: Any. Most familiars share their master's Vice, but not all. A familiar regains all spent Willpower by fulfilling its Vice once per chapter, just as a mortal does for fulfilling her Virtue.

Morality: Familiars have no Morality score.

Size: 5 or less

Corpus: Equal to Resistance + Size

Born of Sin: The Twilight familiar is a base creature, born of sin and capable of calling that sin out in others. The familiar can manipulate the presence of its Vice, enhancing or manipulating its manifestation in a creature, mortal or otherwise. The target need not have the same Vice as the demon; he must merely be experiencing the emotion. A character whose Vice is Pride can still feel lust for a beautiful woman, or envy of a neighbor's new car, for example. The demon cannot create a Vice where none exists.

Enhancing a Vice, making an individual feel the emotion more strongly, requires the expenditure of one point of Essence and a contested roll of Power + Finesse versus the target's Resolve or Composure, whichever is higher. The familiar can produce a moderate shift with a success; mild attraction might become infatuation, or infatuation might become full-blown obsession in the case of Lust, but mild attraction cannot be turned into full-blown obsession directly. An exceptional success, however, allows the demon to fan even the tiniest spark of Vice into an inferno. The changes last for one minute per success. The demon cannot enhance the same Vice in the same target more than once per scene.

Manipulating a Vice, changing its target, requires the expenditure of two points of Essence and a contested roll of Power + Finesse versus the target's Resolve or Composure, whichever is higher. Success allows the demon to slightly alter the target of a character's emotion. For example, a character feeling slothful toward his work might have that laziness redirected toward laziness regarding investigating those weird sounds in the basement, or a man proud of his status as a player might instead be made to focus that pride on his ass-kicking prowess - which might cause problems if he's never been in a fight in his life.

Dread Powers: Assign three dots among Dread Powers.

Ban: The familiar has one Ban, chosen by the Storyteller. (See "The Demon's Ban," p. 284.)

Anchor: The demon's master is considered to be its anchor to the material world, although there is no limit to how far a familiar can travel from its master. See "Anchors" on p. 209 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*.

When a familiar manifests, use the following modifiers:

Location	Modifier
Profane or blasphemous site (desecrated church, massacre location)	+3
Place associated with the demon's Vice	+2
Occult location (ley line nexus, pagan temple, etc.)	+1
Within line of sight of a holy symbol (cross, Star of David, statue of Buddha)	-1
Within line of sight of a church, synagogue, temple, etc.	-2
Holy ground	-3

of its presence, even when it is not manifested. A whiff of brimstone might waft from its location, or its shadow might briefly flicker in the corner of an observer's eye. Twilight familiars can take any form imaginable: most are small, impish creatures that resemble classical devils or mythological monsters, but they can be as large as man-sized. A Twilight familiar often represents its master's Vice: a Wrathful hunter might have a familiar built like a bull, all spines and blood-drenched fangs, while a Lustful character might be served in a more personal capacity by a sultry, fiery-eyed succubus or incubus.

An embodied familiar has a physical body and takes the form of an earthly creature. Many of the legendary stories of witches with cunning animal companions — cats, rats, bats — are actually references to embodied familiars. An embodied familiar often has eyes that gleam an unusual color when they catch the light or that display a peculiar intelligence. Many times, the creature's markings in some way reflect its master's appearance. A Lucifuge with an ugly scar across his cheek might attract a catlike creature with an odd stripe of a contrasting color on its jaw. This sometimes leads to the misconception that a Lucifuge can physically transform into an animal. Remember also that an embodied familiar is a demon in animal form, not a true animal; many embodied familiars have one or two unnatural traits, like paws with a sickening resemblance to human hands or a vocalization that comes close to being actual speech. If an embodied familiar is slain, its infernal spirit usually discorporates and returns to the

Hell from whence it came. Sometimes, though, it latches onto its master and feeds off his memories, drinking deep of the hunter's soul to sustain itself in ethereal form. In game terms, a Lucifuge's player may, upon the destruction of his embodied familiar, choose to immediately spend two experience points as a reflexive action to preserve the demon as a Twilight familiar. Effectively, the Lucifuge sacrifices these experience points to swap out his Familiar ritual without going through the usual extended Resolve + Occult roll. The Storyteller designs the demon's traits, with the player's participation. Each familiar begins play with at least one dot in each Attribute, with extra dots as listed in the sidebars. Twilight familiar Traits follow the same rules as those for ghosts, as described on page 208 of *The World of Darkness Rulebook*, except as noted in the Twilight Familiar Traits sidebar. Embodied familiars are treated as normal animals, except as described in the Embodied Familiar Traits sidebar.

The master and familiar have an empathic connection; each can automatically feel the emotions of the other. (Magical effects that damage or manipulate the familiar through an emotional attack don't damage or manipulate the master.) The familiar can always understand its master, no matter what language the master speaks, and vice versa.

Gaze of the Penitent

Hell is a place of fire and torment, but also, according to many philosophies, a place where the evil is scourged from the soul so

EMBODIED FAMILIAR TRAITS

Attributes: 5/4/3 (divide among Mental, Physical and Social)

Skills: 9/6/3 (divide among Mental, Physical and Social); the familiar receives a free dot in Brawl, Larceny, or Stealth

Willpower: Equal to Resolve + Composure

Essence: 10 (10 max)

Initiative: Equal to Dexterity + Composure

Defense: Equal to lowest of Dexterity and Wits

Speed: Strength + Dexterity + "species factor" (based on its animal type)

Virtue: Choose Virtue

Vice: Any. Most familiars share their master's Vice, but not all. A familiar regains all spent Willpower by fulfilling its Vice once per chapter, just as a mortal does for fulfilling her Virtue.

Morality: Familiars have no Morality score.

Size: 5 or less (based on its animal type)

Health: Equal to Stamina + Size

Dread Powers: Assign four dots among Dread Powers.

Ban: The familiar has one Ban, chosen by the Storyteller. (See "The Demon's Ban," p. 284.)

Innocuous: Embodied familiars are very good at not being noticed by others. Anyone but its bonded master suffers a -2 penalty on perception rolls to notice the familiar, unless it does something to draw attention to itself.

Through the Eyes: By spending a point of Willpower, the master of an embodied familiar can shift his perceptions to the familiar. He sees what the familiar sees, hears what it hears, and so on. He is oblivious to his own surroundings while viewing through his familiar, but still possesses tactile sensation (thus he is aware of any damage or physical sensation to his own body). Ending this viewing is a reflexive action and requires no roll.

that it might pass on to the next world. The torments of the Pit are not punishment, but an encouragement to repentance. Tortures are tailored to the soul's particular sins to remind the damned of what brought them there in the first place. Whether any soul actually escapes the iron walls of Pandemonium is a matter of philosophical debate, but Lucifuge who know this ritual are capable of drawing on that same affinity for the sins of an individual and laying them bare, wracking mortal man and unholy monster alike with the pain and guilt of past transgressions.

The Gaze of the Penitent ritual requires eye contact; if the target moves about or actively avoids making eye contact, or if he wears dark glasses, the activation roll suffers a -1 penalty. The Lucifuge must also possess a bit of blood, hair, or similar substance from the target. This corporal requirement is waived if the Lucifuge has witnessed the target committing one of the seven deadly sins in the last 24 hours.

Cost: 1 Willpower.

Action: Contested.

Dice Pool: Wits + Empathy vs. Resolve.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The hunter's power is reflected back on herself. She suffers a penalty to all dice pools equal to (10 - her Morality) for the rest of the scene. She may spend a Willpower point to negate this penalty for a turn.

Failure: The ritual fails to take effect.

Success: The target of the ritual is wracked with guilt and the imagined torments of Hell that will be visited upon him for his sins. He suffers a penalty to all dice pools equal to (10 - his Morality) for a number of turns equal to the successes rolled on the activation roll. He may spend a Willpower point to negate this penalty for a turn and act normally.

Exceptional Success: The guilt and pain last for an entire scene.

Hellfire

Hell has been associated with fire and brimstone, especially in Western culture, for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. Lucifer himself is called the Morningstar, which has implications of fiery radiance. The Lucifuge is at home with heat and flame, and through the power of their infernal parentage, some learn to control and conjure these hellish flames to scourge their enemies.

Cost: 1 Willpower or 1 Willpower and one point of aggravated damage (see below).

Action: Instant.

Dice Pool: Dexterity + Intelligence – target's Defense.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Lucifuge conjures up hellish flames from the Abyss, but is unable to control them. She suffers three points of lethal damage, as though she has stepped into a bonfire with the intensity of a torch.

Failure: The hunter fails to summon forth the fires of the Pit.

WHAT IS A DEMON AND WHERE DOES IT COME FROM?

Hunters, even among the Lucifuge, don't make much distinction between otherworldly creatures. Demons are generally something altogether different from ghosts, spirits or other entities, but for purposes of system mechanics, the term "demon" is used as a catchall for any being not originating in the mortal, physical realm. Most hunters don't know (or care) enough to distinguish fallen angels of the Pit, spirits from the spirit world, unnatural blasphemies from the Abyss, or bizarre nightmares from the realm of dreams.

Thus, when you see references to "demons" in Castigation rituals like Calling Forth the Pit or Mandate of Hell, it refers to any creature of otherworldly origin. When such a creature is banished, it returns to its natural home realm. More information on demons can be found in the Storytelling chapter, under "Antagonists."

Success: The Lucifuge conjures a bolt of unnatural, hellish fire that consumes her target. The Hellfire might look like ordinary flames, or it might be an unusual color or produce a sound like the roar of a wounded beast. The fire originates from the hunter, but may manifest in any fashion — some Lucifuge project fire from their hands or eyes; others breathe flame like a dragon. The fire inflicts one point of lethal damage, unless the target naturally suffers aggravated damage from fire (like a vampire).

By reaching deeper into her infernal soul, a Lucifuge may conjure searing, white-hot Hellfire that inflicts aggravated damage, but this fire is too hot for any mortal to contain entirely. The Lucifuge herself suffers one point of aggravated damage as the flames wreath her body.

Exceptional Success: No additional effect beyond tremendous damage.

Infernal Visions

The Luciferan blood that courses through the veins of the Lucifuge often carries with it the gift of prophecy. This "gift" is dubious at best; often the insight of this ritual comes in the form of terrifying nightmares and visions of the infernal court of their "father."

Whatever form the insight takes, the character has a connection to primordial forces in the world, ancient truths that can be seen and comprehended only in dreams. He gains insight into secrets through reverie and visions, finding answers to questions he couldn't normally get by mundane means. He might dream of a hellish future in which all he loves is burned

to ash, or he might meditate until his soul is cast, screaming, into the Abyss, to converse with Lucifer and his chief ministers, or he might just shut his eyes tight and listen to the snarled wisdom of the thing that lurks outside his window every night.

Once per game session, the Lucifuge can use his Infernal Visions ability to gain a supernatural insight concerning a question or topic. Activating this ability requires at least one hour spent in sleep, trance or an activity exclusively focused on accessing an altered state of consciousness.

Cost: None, but the nightmares associated with the visions prevent the character from regaining a Willpower point from the next night's rest.

Action: Instant.

Dice Pool: Wits + Composure. The Storyteller should roll in secret so the player doesn't know if he is receiving useful clues or meaningless imagery.

Dramatic failure: A nightmare. The character can interpret it any way he wants, but it probably leads to more trouble than solutions.

Failure: Meaningless images.

Success: One or more clues (one per success), although they must be interpreted.

Exceptional success: One or more clues (one per success), and a suggestion about their interpretation provided by the Storyteller.

The information conveyed is hidden behind allegory, symbols and archetypes. Infernal Visions rarely answer questions directly, typically relying on symbolism and imagery to convey information. A sorcerer seeking a specific person's location wouldn't see his address, but landmarks nearby could lead the way: a river, a tower or even the face of a man walking by at dusk. The answer has the potential to resolve the problem. It's a tool for the Storyteller to help drive events of the story, not the answer on a plate.

Mandate of Hell

No matter how diluted, the blood of a Lucifuge contains a tiny spark of the blood royal of Hell. By dint of their ancestry, members of the Lucifuge have the ability to master demons and bend the legions of Hell to their will. Some manifest this bond by possessing a familiar spirit, others learn to summon or banish demonic entities, but still others draw upon their infernal sovereignty to dominate lesser demons and bend them to their will. The merest glance and a harsh word of command forces demonic beings to obey their mortal masters.

Cost: None or 1 Willpower (see below).

Action: Contested or extended and contested (see below).

Dice Pool: Presence + Composure vs. subject's Resistance.

The Mandate of Hell can be used in two ways: a short, simple, one- or two-word command ("Bow down," "Kill him!") is an instant contested action. More complex orders can also be given, but this requires that the demon be stationary (either willingly or bound in the Shackles of



Pandemonium) and requires an extended action. The Lucifuge must spend 1 Willpower to enact a complex order.

The number of successes required is equal to three per "step" of the complete command. For example, the command "Go to the corner of 7th and Maple, kill the man you find there, and afterwards, return to Hell and do not return" requires 12 successes, because it is a four-step command. The demon's contested roll, on the other hand, must reach a total number of successes equal to (15 - the Lucifuge's Morality). Each contested roll represents one turn in this scenario.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The command fails and the subject is immune to all further commands from the Lucifuge for 24 hours.

Failure: A simple command fails to take effect, or no progress is made toward a more complex command.

Success: The demon is compelled to obey a simple command for one turn, or progress is made toward giving the demon a complex command.

Exceptional Success: A simple command is obeyed for a full minute, or exceptional progress is made toward a complex command.

Sense of the Unrighteous

Wickedness and sin are everywhere in the World of Darkness. More immediately, wickedness and sin are in the Lucifuge's nature, no matter how they try to deny it. Rather than seal away that aspect of themselves, some Lucifuge choose to acknowledge it and embrace it as a tool. Sin calls to sin, as the saying goes, and by meditating on his own wicked nature, a Lucifuge can develop a sense for the sins of others.

Individual hunters experience this sense in different ways. Some feel the taint of wickedness as an overpowering, nauseating stench; others see chains of sin winding around the unrighteous and dragging them down to Hell. Still others taste a foulness on their tongues or feel a throbbing pain behind their eyes or hear the screams of the damned surround them.

Cost: None.

Action: Extended; each roll represents one minute of meditation on one's own wickedness.

Dice Pool: 10 - Morality

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The hunter is overwhelmed by his own sins; he loses all accumulated successes and must spend a Willpower point every turn in which he takes an action other than retching and cowering from his own nature.

Failure: No progress is made toward reaching out to sense the unrighteous.

Success: The Lucifuge makes a metaphysical connection between his own base nature and the wickedness of the world. He can sense the presence of sin in creatures and even locations within two yards per success.

Characters with a Morality (or equivalent Advantage) of 7 or higher do not register to the character's sense. Characters with a 5 or 6 Morality register as a mild sensation — a faint odor, ghostly image, and so on. Characters with a 3 or 4 Morality register as a moderate sensation — sounds about at conversational volume, a painful but not crippling headache, and so on. Characters with a 1 or 2 Morality register with extremely strong sensations: clear, realistic hallucinations, the smell of a slaughterhouse, and so on. Characters with a Morality of 0, or unnatural creatures entirely lacking a Morality Trait, register as overpowering sensations: a blinding headache, terrifyingly real hallucinations, and the like. The Lucifuge suffers a -1 penalty to all actions for the remainder of the scene after witnessing such shocking depravity.

The Lucifuge can also sense the lingering presence of a sin committed in an area. A sin against Morality 4 registers as a minor sensation, sins against Morality 3 register as moderate sensation, sins against Morality 2 as severe sensations, and sins against Morality 1 as overwhelming sensations. The imprint of a Morality 4 sin can linger for a few days, Morality 3 sins linger for several months, Morality 2 sins for one to six years, and Morality 1 sins can linger indefinitely. Sins against Morality 5 or higher are not severe enough to linger beyond their commission.

The hunter knows the source of the sins he senses (the person in question or the precise location and approximate time where a past sin occurred), but not the nature of the sin itself.

Exceptional Success: If the player rolls five or more successes on a single roll, the hunter gains a general sense of an individual's most severe sin or the nature of a lingering past sin.

Example: *Herr von Murnau, a Lucifuge hunter with a 5 Morality, uses Sense of the Unrighteous while sitting in the audience of a play that has been connected to some strange disappearances. On his first roll, he scores three successes, allowing him to sense wickedness within six yards of his seat. Most of the audience consists of average people with a Morality of 7, and do not register to his senses. One man in the next row, though, gives off a mild sense of sin; the smell of burned asphalt mingled with sulfur. Von Murnau continues to expand his senses, rolling four more successes on his next roll. Now he can sense 14 yards, enough to reach the stage and sense the severe wickedness of the lead actor — the man flickers in his sight, sometimes appearing normal, sometimes drenched in blood and smiling blandly. Hoping to gain some further clues to go on, von Murnau rolls again, this time getting an exceptional success. Not only do his senses now reach backstage, allowing him to feel the lingering presence of a severe sin that occurred three months ago — he feels an oppressive weight bearing down on him, and hears the echoes of a woman's scream — but he also now has a general sense of the nature of those sins. He knows that the man in front of him once stole a car, the lead actor has murdered casually, and three months ago, an actress was raped in her dressing room.*

Shackles of Pandemonium

The Shackles of Pandemonium ritual allows a Lucifuge to bind a demon to a particular place by trapping it within a ritual circle. The particulars of the ritual circle vary from Lucifuge to Lucifuge — some draw a simple chalk loop with a few ancient sigils of binding; others use corn meal to draw elaborate *veves* or mark out a complete Solomonic Circle. Whatever form it takes, the circle requires 10 minutes to draw and infuse with infernal power. As long as the circle remains intact, it can lie dormant indefinitely, waiting for a demon to enter it.

A binding circle can be used like a trap, drawn in a place the demon is likely to cross, or it can be prepared in advance of a summoning (see Calling Forth the Pit, above) to ensure that a called demon can't go anywhere once it arrives. A circle can even be concealed (for example, drawn onto the floorboards under a carpet or marked in the dirt and loosely covered with brush), although this incurs a -1 penalty on the activation roll. Some Lucifuge mark the entrances of their homes with permanent circles — carved, etched or inlaid on the floor, walls, or even ceiling — to trap infernal intruders. A permanent circle is harder to break, but it must still be "reset" by performing a 10-minute ritual after a bound demon is released. A single binding circle can only bind one demon at a time.

Cost: The Lucifuge must anoint the binding circle with her own blood. This inflicts 1 point of lethal damage.

Action: Instant (once circle has been prepared, which may require a Wits + Expression roll if the Storyteller considers it suitably complex).

Dice Pool: Presence + Intimidation versus spirit's Resistance.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The binding circle is broken, and the demon gains an extra point of Resistance for the duration of the scene.

Failure: An equal number or the most successes are rolled for the demon. The binding circle is broken, and the spirit may escape.

Success: The most successes are rolled for the Lucifuge. The demon is successfully bound and cannot break free except under a few circumstances:

- If the ritualist who binds the demon releases it with the phrase, "I release you" or something similar.
- If the binding circle is broken by an outside force. The bound demon cannot break the circle itself.
- The Lucifuge must designate one other way that the demon can be freed, and she must express this method to at least two other entities within an hour of the demon's binding. One of those two may be the demon, but it doesn't have to be. If the condition is a task the demon must perform, it must be a task that can be performed within the binding circle. For example, the demon could be ordered to answer three questions truthfully if it wishes to be freed, but not to kill someone in another city.

Exceptional Success: The most successes — five or more — are rolled for the Lucifuge. When the demon is freed by any means, it is immediately returned to the netherworld from whence it came; it cannot linger to, for example, inflict revenge on the hunter.

Tongue of Babel

Once, the stories say, all humanity was united in a single language; any man could speak freely with any other, no matter how foreign. But when humankind came together to build a tower that would reach Heaven, God threw down that tower and cursed humankind to speak a multitude of tongues that divided them into nations and peoples and tribes and prevented such unity from recurring. The Lucifuge holds that the whole

thing was Lucifer's idea, one of the Fallen One's more overt attempts to reopen the War in Heaven. Whether that's true or not, the Lucifuge has carefully collected the scattered remnants of that lost primordial tongue, and through the power of its members' semi-divine blood, they can learn to speak it.

Cost: None.

Action: None.

Dice Pool: None.

As long as the Lucifuge knows this ritual, he can speak and understand every human language on earth. He actually speaks the words in the ancient tongue of the tower-builders, but a vestige of racial memory coupled with his angelic blood causes listeners to hear him speaking a language they understand. Even if he addresses multiple people with no common language, each understands him clearly, and he understands them. This ritual gives the hunter no facility with secret codes or encryptions, nor does it allow him to understand the written form of any language he cannot already read. The words must be spoken by someone who understands them, not just read out phonetically. For example, a character who doesn't speak Spanish cannot use this ritual to read a note written in Spanish, nor could he sound it out himself and gain understanding. He could, however, have a Spanish-speaker read it aloud and understand it that way. Finally, this ritual does not allow him to translate mystical languages, such as the tongue of spirits or the magical tongue witches sometimes use to enhance their magic.

Elixir

The mystery cultists of the Ascending Ones draw their power not from modern science or from the inexplicable mysteries of the occult, but from the ancient and revered practice of alchemy. By breathing in exotic incense, imbibing potions with bizarre hallucinatory effects, and even injecting potent narcotics into their veins, they unlock the higher powers of the human mind and body in order to make war on the creatures of the night.

All Elixirs utilize the same dice pool of Stamina + Elixir to activate successfully. Most Elixirs, by themselves, are extraordinarily virulent poisons. It takes physical fortitude (represented by Stamina) and the enlightened will that comes from the training of an Ascending One (represented by dots in the Elixir Merit) to transform the poison into the mind-elevating Elixir that gives a hunter power. Dramatic failures usually affect the character as though she had been poisoned (see *The World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 181), while failures usually function like a dose of some form of drug (see *The World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 176).

In order to use an Elixir safely, an Ascending One must possess the Elixir Merit at the same dot rating or higher as the Elixir she wishes to use. A character may attempt to use an Elixir with a higher rating than she possesses, but she suffers a -2 penalty on the activation roll per difference in the ratings. A character with no dots in Elixir may attempt to gain the benefits of an Elixir, but in addition to suffering the -2 penalty per dot difference, any failed activation is treated as a dramatic failure, even if the dice pool was not reduced to a chance die.

A character begins play with a number of Elixirs whose total dot ratings equal her Elixir dots, plus her dots in Status (Ascending Ones). She may choose to purchase several low-

level Elixirs or a few higher-level ones, but may not begin play with any Elixirs whose rating exceeds her Elixir Merit. All Elixirs are single-use items only. New Elixirs may be purchased at a cost of one experience point per dot rating; Practical Experience may be spent toward this purpose. It takes one day per dot rating to acquire a new Elixir, either by undergoing elaborate rituals of purification in order to receive the Elixirs from a superior or to brew them in an alchemical laboratory. An Ascending One *may* purchase Elixirs whose dot rating is higher than her Elixir dots, but the experience cost and time are doubled for any dots in excess of her Elixir rating.

The Ascending One also begins each new story with a number of Elixirs whose total dot ratings equal her Elixir dots.

Example: Alia is a beginning character with Elixir 3 and Status (Ascending Ones) 2. She begins play with five dots' worth of Elixirs; she chooses two Crocodile Tears, an Eye of Ra and a Bennu-Bird Feather. Later in the chronicle, having used up her Eye of Ra and finding herself in need of offensive power, she decides to brew a replacement Eye of Ra and a Dragon's Breath. The Eye of Ra takes one day to brew and costs one experience point; the Dragon's Breath (rated at $\bullet\bullet\bullet$) costs five experience points (three for the first three dots of its rating, two for the fourth because it exceeds Alia's Elixir Merit) and takes five days to brew.

Crocodile Tears (•)

According to old folklore, crocodiles weep to lure in prey. Feigning helplessness and vulnerability, they present themselves as tempting targets and, when animal or man draws near to investigate, they strike. The Ascending Ones learn from this story that sometimes a false show of weakness is a more potent weapon than a true show of strength.

Crocodile tears are a thick, almost jellylike liquid with a strong taste of lemons and almond. A character must drink them to receive the effect. Upon drinking the Tears, the Ascended One grows pale and shaky, with skin tightening to give an emaciated appearance consistent with grave illness.

Action: Instant.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Ascending One is treated as though she had ingested a Toxicity 2 poison. This poison may be resisted with a contested Stamina + Resolve roll subtracting the poison's Toxicity.

Failure: The character is affected as if she had taken a mild (-1 to appropriate dice pools and traits) dose of marijuana.

Success: The Ascending One appears, for all intents and purposes, as though she is at death's door, about to keel over from exhaustion or disease. A medical examination will reveal the ruse, but a visual inspection requires a Wits + Medicine

roll contested by the hunter's Manipulation + Subterfuge + Elixir. Supernatural abilities that gauge a character's strength or weakness likewise register the hunter as nearly dead if the Ascending One wins a contested, reflexive Manipulation + Subterfuge + Elixir roll against the dice pool of the power.

The hunter does suffer a -1 to all dice pools — those tremors are real enough — but she may spend a Willpower point as a reflexive action to instantly purge the effect of the Elixir and negate the penalty. Unless the character purges the effect early, the Crocodile Tears wear off in one scene.

Exceptional Success: The character does not suffer the -1 penalty to her dice pools; the illusion of deathly illness is perfect without actually impairing the character.

The successful use of Crocodile Tears does not compel an enemy to act in any particular manner, but many monsters (and even many ordinary humans) prefer to take on a much weaker opponent if they can. Crocodile Tears are a useful aid to setting up an ambush, not a guaranteed lure.

Eye of Ra (•)

The sun-god Ra sees all that transpires beneath his fiery gaze. By anointing themselves with sacred oils, the Ascending Ones gain a measure of this divine perception for themselves. While they cannot truly gain insight into everything under the sun, they can enhance their own perceptive abilities and sharpen their senses toward what is hidden.

Eye of Ra is sandalwood oil infused with sacred herbs and plants thought to aid in the sharpening of the senses. It also contains *kohl*, the cosmetic traditionally used by the Egyptians to darken their eyelids, which contains several toxic compounds. Traditionally, the oil is applied by dabbing it around the eye in the shape of the sacred symbol of the eye of Ra (also called the eye of Horus). Ascending Ones who embrace Islam over the faith of the pharaohs refer to the oil as "Eye of Jibril," and simply anoint themselves on the eyelids without drawing the eye of Ra.

Action: Instant.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Ascending One is afflicted with a Toxicity 4 bashing poison. This poison may be resisted with a contested Stamina + Resolve roll subtracting the poison's Toxicity.

Failure: The hunter is affected as though she had consumed a mild (-1) dose of heroin.

Success: The character gains a bonus to Perception rolls (either general Wits + Composure or Wits + a specific Skill) equal to her Elixir rating. The bonus lasts for one scene.

Exceptional Success: In addition to the Perception bonus, if the Ascending One passes within two yards of a supernatural creature, she may roll a reflexive Wits + Occult roll (not including the bonus from the Eye of Ra) contested by the monster's Resolve + Composure to recognize it as unnatural. She does not gain any insight into what sort of creature it might be, only that it is not human.

Breath of Ma'at (••)

Hunters must, in the course of their duties, undertake actions that righteous men would consider sinful. These acts weigh heavily upon the soul; even the Ascending Ones can be overwhelmed by sin. But Ma'at, the goddess of truth and

divine justice, knows that the hunter's cause is virtuous and that all may be forgiven. By meditating on the soothing incense of the Breath of Ma'at, an Ascending One may find a kind of peace in the rightness of his cause.

As with many of the Elixirs employed by the Ascending Ones, some hard-liners reject the Dynastic interpretation of this Elixir. They call it the Mercy of Allah, and replace the silent meditation with *Salah* prayers, claiming it is Allah the Most Merciful who grants forgiveness.

Action: Extended; each roll represents one hour of fasting and meditation or prayer.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The hunter automatically gains a mild derangement, or upgrades an existing mild derangement to a severe one. The hunter's player and the Storyteller should work together to choose an appropriate derangement.

Failure: No progress is made toward alleviating the burden of sin on the character's soul. Should the character fail to achieve the required number of successes within the maximum number of rolls, he is affected as though he had consumed three alcoholic beverages in excess of his Stamina.

Success: The Ascending One proceeds toward letting go of his sin.

Exceptional Success: In addition to extraordinary progress being made toward regaining perspective, the Ascending One gains a +1 bonus on his next roll to avoid degeneration.

This Elixir may only be employed within 24 hours of the Ascending One losing a point of Morality, and the character may only benefit from this Elixir once per story. The character must acquire a number of successes equal to (10 - the Morality level of his most recent sin). These successes must be accumulated in a number of rolls equal to less than the character's Morality, or the Elixir fails to take effect.

Should the Ascending One acquire the requisite successes, he may re-roll the degeneration roll that caused him to lose his Morality. If he succeeds, he gains the lost Morality point back as though it had never been lost. This Elixir has no effect if the character has raised his Morality through another means, such as experience points. Derangements gained from the now-lost point also diminish.

Example: Hassan, an Ascending One, burned down an apartment building to kill a vampire that nested there. Unfortunately, an elderly man was trapped on the upper floor and burned to death in the ensuing blaze. The Storyteller rules that this was an impassioned crime, similar to manslaughter, a Morality 4 sin. Hassan's player rolls three dice but gets no successes, dropping his Morality from 6 to 5. He likewise fails his check to avoid gaining a derangement, and gains a mild phobia of fire. Later that night, he prepares the Breath of Ma'at to help him realize that the woman was an unfortunate but unavoidable casualty of a righteous war. Hassan's Stamina is 2 and he has 3 dots in Elixir, for a total dice pool of five; since his most recent sin was a Morality 4 sin, he must accumulate six successes (10 minus 4) in five or fewer rolls. His first roll comes up 4, 8, 2, 6, 9 for two successes. His second roll is a lucky one, netting him three more successes. His third and fourth rolls net no successes, but he slides in under the wire with one

success on his fifth and final roll. He may now re-roll his degeneration check of three dice. This time he gets one success, and his Morality increases from 5 back to 6 as though he had never lost the point. He likewise loses the fire phobia, just as if he had never lost the Morality in the first place.

Elixir of the Fiery Heart (••)

Many of the beasts the Ascending Ones hunt are terrifying in their own right. It takes great courage to face down a deranged slasher in his darkened murder playground, or to stand toe to toe with a ravening beast the size of a car. But quite apart from natural fear, some creatures have the ability to fill the soul with abject, supernatural terror. Even the strongest heart can quail before such mystical onslaught, which is why the Ascending Ones carry this potent Elixir to steel their spirits against the terrors of the night.

Elixir of the Fiery Heart is a thin, yellowish liquid with a smoky taste. It burns the throat as it goes down, like a potent liquor, but instead of fuzzy-headed drunkenness, it imparts a kind of clinical disconnect from any sense of self-preservation. While the effect renders a hunter fearless, it also makes her prone to rash action.

Action: Instant.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Ascending one is afflicted by a Toxicity 4 bashing poison. This poison may be resisted with a contested Stamina + Resolve roll subtracting the poison's Toxicity.

Failure: The hunter is affected as though she had consumed two drinks of alcohol in excess of her Stamina.

Success: For the rest of the scene, any attempt to induce fear in the hunter (including mundane Intimidation or supernatural powers of fright) subtracts her Elixir rating from the dice pool. If the power is already resisted by one of her Traits, her Elixir rating is added to that Trait to determine the total resistance.

Exceptional Success: In addition to receiving the benefits of a success against supernatural fear effects, the Ascending One is entirely immune to mundane, non-magical fear. Attempts to intimidate her or spook her that lack supernatural force simply fail.

Bennu-Bird Feather (•••)

Supposedly plucked from the tail of the *Bennu*-bird, the Egyptian phoenix associated with Ra, this feather is ground up, along with medicinal herbs and potent opiates, into a thick, gooey paste capable of accelerating the healing process tremendously.

Bennu-Bird Feather must be smeared over a wound to have any effect, whether an open gash or a mere bruise. The unguent smells strongly of cardamom and willowbark, with an acrid, medicinal tang.

THE PHOENIX OR BENNU-BIRD

Is the *Bennu*-bird real? In making one such Elixir, how does one find a phoenix from which to pluck a feather?

It can be the focus of an entire story, of course, locating the ashen nest of just such a bird (where a single feather may lie in the cinders) or finding an actual *Bennu*-bird.

Alternatively, it might be a feather plucked from the *Goliath Heron*, a rare Red Sea heron thought to be the model for the *Bennu*-bird in mythology. Neither feather is easy to procure. It's your call, as Storyteller, what the truth is.

Action: Instant.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The hunter is afflicted by a Toxicity 2 lethal poison. This poison may be resisted with a contested Stamina + Resolve roll subtracting the poison's Toxicity.

Failure: The hunter is treated as though he has ingested a moderate (-2 to all dice pools and traits) dose of heroin.

Success: Every success on the activation roll heals two points of bashing damage or one point of lethal damage. The character has no control over this healing; more severe injuries are automatically healed first.

Exceptional Success: In addition to the immediate healing, the Ascending One heals naturally at double the normal rate (one bashing wound per eight minutes, one lethal wound per day, and one aggravated wound per four days). If the hunter has the Quick Healer Merit, he heals wounds in one third the normal time (one bashing wound per five minutes, one lethal wound per 16 hours, and one aggravated wound per three days).

A Glimpse of After (•••)

According to medieval historians, initiates into the order of the *Hashshashin* assassins would be drugged with a slow-acting poison such that they felt as though they were dying. When they were given the antidote, they awoke to find themselves in a beautiful garden, feasted and succored by lovely virgins and greeted by the grand master of the order. They were told they were in Paradise, but they would be sent back to Earth to serve the order as faithful soldiers. If they ever wanted to return to the garden, they would serve loyally and carry out the goals of the order without question. Bolstered by the thought of awaiting Paradise, these assassins fought with a fanatic zeal that gave them the ability to fight far beyond the endurance of ordinary men. While the *Hashshashin* were not a creation of the Ascending Ones, the conspiracy did sometimes convert members of the opiate-addled assassins, and with them, this Elixir.

The clear, slightly cinnamon-flavored Elixir called A Glimpse of After fills the imbiber's mind with visions of the heavenly afterlife that awaits him after death (each hunter is likely to experience his own unique glimpse of beyond — one may see a garden, another a meadow, and another an endless-yet-comforting void). These visions drive away the pain of injury and fatigue, turning the Ascending One into a nigh-unstoppable dynamo.

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The hunter is affected by a Toxicity 4 lethal poison. He may resist this poison by rolling Stamina + Resolve as a contested action versus the poison's Toxicity.

Failure: The hunter receives no benefit and is affected as though he had taken a moderate (-2 to all dice pools and traits) dose of heroin.

Success: The Ascending One is filled with a rapturous vision of Heaven that drives away the earthly distraction of torment and death. For the rest of the scene, he ignores all wound penalties. In addition, he automatically stays up and conscious if his rightmost Health box is marked with a bashing wound, and may make a reflexive Stamina roll each turn to stay up if his rightmost Health box is marked with a lethal wound (see *The World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 173). He does continue to suffer blood loss if his last Health box is marked with a lethal wound.

When the scene ends, the effects of this Elixir wear off and the character immediately suffers all his wound penalties and any effects of having his rightmost Health box filled.

Exceptional Success: In addition to the above effects, the Ascending One suffers only half damage from bashing attacks for the duration of the Elixir's effect (determine damage from the attack normally, then halve the number of successes, rounding up).

Mind-Talking Drug (•••)

Communication is a vital component of success for any hunter cell. Without the ability to maintain communication during an assault, no plan can survive contact with the enemy. Other groups rely on sophisticated radios or complex systems of hand signals, but the Ascending Ones simply brew up a vat of this mind-expanding psychotropic and inject it into the base of their neck. Once he fights his way through the hallucinations, the Ascending One finds he has the ability to read the surface thoughts of others and even to project his own thoughts into their minds.

The Mind-Talking Drug is a virulent shade of yellow, with subtle veins of a slightly darker color swirled throughout the liquid. Since it must be injected, it is usually carried in a large, sturdy syringe.

Action: Extended; five successes required; each roll represents one minute of struggling with hallucinations.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character is afflicted by a Toxicity 3 lethal poison. This poison may be resisted with a contested Stamina + Resolve roll subtracting the poison's Toxicity.

Failure: The hunter makes no progress toward sifting through the hallucinations to find the truth. If he is unable to earn five successes in a number of rolls equal to his Stamina +

Elixir, he is affected as though he had taken a potent (-3 to all dice pools and traits) dose of hallucinogen.

Success: For the rest of the scene, the Ascending One may, as a reflexive action, hold a two-way mental conversation with another character within his line of sight or scan the surface thoughts of another. Holding a two-way conversation requires a Presence + Composure roll, with one roll required of both characters for every turn's worth of conversation. If the character being conversed with is also under the effect of the Mind-Talking Drug, conversations are automatic, with no roll required.

Scanning the surface thoughts of another character likewise requires a Presence + Composure roll, contested by the target's Resolve + Composure if the target is unwilling. Even if the target has also taken Mind-Talking Drug, the roll is required for reading surface thoughts.

Exceptional Success: In addition to communication and surface-thought reading, the Ascending One can probe deeper into a subject's mind to uncover buried thoughts. This requires an extended and contested roll of Presence + Composure vs. Resolve + Composure, with the number of successes determined by the "depth" of the information. Surface thoughts passing through the target's mind require one success, something the character thinks about in passing on a daily basis (where her kids go to school) requires three, something thought about infrequently (where he went on vacation as a child) requires five, while deeply buried secrets (the name of the man she had an affair with) require 10 or more. Each roll represents one turn of psychic probing.

The effects of the Mind-Talking Drug last for one scene.

Breath of the Dragon (••••)

In the old legends, before the fire-breathing cliché got started, it was said that the breath of a dragon was a deadly poisonous fume. This Elixir, already toxic by nature, is inhaled and distilled by the Ascending One's will into a terrible airborne contagion.

Breath of the Dragon is a fine, crystalline powder of silver hue. Because it must be inhaled to take effect, many Ascending Ones either smoke it or carry a dose in a modified form of asthma inhaler.

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character is afflicted by a Toxicity 4 lethal poison. This poison may be resisted with a contested Stamina + Resolve roll subtracting the poison's Toxicity.

Failure: The hunter is affected as though he had taken a potent (-3 to all Social rolls, no bonus to Strength or Stamina) dose of cocaine.

Success: The hunter expels a small cloud of Toxicity 4 lethal poison from his mouth. The cloud is large enough to catch one victim within close combat range (about two yards). This poison may be resisted with a Stamina + Resolve roll subtracting the poison's Toxicity.

Exceptional Success: The Ascending One distills the Breath of the Dragon into an especially potent form. Add his Elixir rating to the poison's Toxicity.



Amun's Water (****)

The monsters the Ascending Ones face are at home among the shadows, lurking unseen in the night. To face them and uncover their wickedness, a hunter must sometimes go unseen as well, passing beyond sight and entering the very den of the lions. By quaffing this potion, an Ascended One veils herself from sight, becoming truly invisible. (Amun, a sun god, was often associated with the sun when it was hidden from view — in other words, at night.)

Amun's Water is a deep blue liquid the consistency of ink, brewed from deadly nightshade and the venom of an adder. It has a cloying, sweet taste, like over-sugared coffee, and as it goes down, it feels like swallowing liquid nitrogen.

Action: Instant.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character is afflicted by a Toxicity 3 lethal poison. This poison may be resisted with a contested Stamina + Resolve roll subtracting the poison's Toxicity.

Failure: The hunter is affected as though she had taken a potent (-3 to all dice pools and traits) dose of hallucinogen.

Success: The Ascended One fades from sight and becomes invisible. This is no mere psychic trick; the character is literally completely invisible. Even cameras, infrared tripwires, and the like fail to register her presence. Similarly, witnesses simply see her apparently vanish into thin air. Any hostile action, such as attacking or brandishing a weapon, immediately breaks the invisibility.

Exceptional Success: Any supernatural ability that pierces invisibility suffers a -2 to its activation roll to detect the character.

The effects of Amun's Water last for one scene.

Incense of the Next World (****)

The Ascending Ones know from the secret lore of ancient Egyptian priests that this world is not the only one. The mortal world is an island in a vast sea of other realms, and by performing the proper rites and inhaling the proper incense, an Ascended One can leave his physical body behind and let his soul journey out into the Twilight state of ghosts and spirits.

The Incense of the Next World has a strong, almost primal musk, like sweat and sex and animal skins from the dawn of humanity. It gives off a deep blue smoke whose whorls seem to suggest ancient hieroglyphs and arcane symbols.

Action: Extended; each roll represents 10 minutes of prayer, chanting and breathing in incense. The Ascending One may roll a maximum number of times equal to his Stamina + Elixir.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character slips into a deep coma and cannot awaken until he earns five successes on an extended Stamina + Resolve roll. Each roll represents one day of trying to wake.

Failure: No progress is made toward attaining the ecstatic state that allows spiritual travel. Should the Ascending One fail to accumulate the required successes before the roll limit runs out, he is affected as though he had consumed a potent (-3 to all dice pools and traits) hallucinogen.

Success: Progress is made toward leaving the body behind.

Exceptional Success: No additional effect beyond the large number of successes.

Incense of the Next World allows a hunter to completely free his consciousness from his physical form and travel mentally to distant locations while leaving his body behind. It requires 10 successes to separate the soul from the body; the Ascending One must breathe in the incense for the entirety of the extended action.

Once separated, the character can move around freely, but he is intangible and invisible, existing in the state called Twilight. He can be perceived through any appropriate means (such as an Endowment that allows a character to perceive Twilight beings). Other astral projectors or other beings that exist in Twilight can perceive him normally.

Returning to his body requires an instant action and a successful Wits + Composure roll. There is theoretically no limit to how long the character may remain in this astrally projected state, but the normal rules for deprivation apply (*The World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 175). If the hunter's physical body is tampered with while he is "gone," he may sense the intrusion with a successful Intelligence + Composure roll. The character always feels actual pain inflicted on his physical body, and may react as he sees fit. However, an astral projector's physical body may be subjected to a killing blow if the body is left unprotected (see *The World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 168).

Blood of the Cobra (•••••)

The serpent has a long and colorful history of mythic symbolism. In various cultures, it has symbolized good and evil, life and death, wisdom and deceit. In the mythology of the Ascending Ones, vampires are frequently linked to serpentine imagery, and Ascending Ones who specialize in destroying vampires are often called Serpent Chasers.

The Blood of the Cobra is an exotic compound of cobra venom, hashish and a variety of other alchemical reagents brewed into a devastatingly toxic Elixir. It must be injected directly into the vein to have an effect; most hunters use their inner arms for quick access during battle.

Action: Instant.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Ascending One is affected by a Toxicity 5 lethal poison, which may be resisted by a contested roll of Resolve + Stamina versus the poison's Toxicity.

Failure: The hunter is treated as though she had taken a potent (-3 to all Social rolls, no bonus to Strength or Stamina) dose of cocaine.

Success: For every success rolled on the activation, the Ascending One gains a +1 bonus to her Strength and Dexterity. These bonuses likewise increase Traits derived from these two Attributes. In addition, the character's blood becomes a highly toxic poison that affects vampires and mortals alike. Any creature attempting to feed on the Ascending One's blood suffers one automatic point of lethal damage per point of damage inflicted by blood loss. The Attribute bonuses last for the remainder of the scene; the character's blood remains toxic for 24 hours.

Exceptional Success: No additional effect beyond an extraordinary increase to Strength and Dexterity.

Mesmeric Vapors (•••••)

Society has always warned of the dangers of drugs. Whether strong drink, hashish, or pure Colombian coke, the manner in which they can alter perceptions has been feared and cautioned against as far back as history has recorded. Religions have railed against them, and governments have tried to find ways to use them against their enemies. But where CIA-programmed LSD sleeper agents are largely relegated to the realms of conspiracy theory web sites, the Ascending Ones have perfected an alchemical compound so intoxicating it can literally reduce a hapless victim to little more than a puppet.

Mesmeric Vapors, in their un-smoked form, resemble loose tobacco of the type used in hand-rolled cigarettes. The scent is subtly sweeter, and often seems to hint at different aromas to different individuals. Because of the nature of its use, Mesmeric Vapors are rarely used as incense; instead they are smoked like a pipe or a cigarette. The smoke given off by this compound is a pale golden color, and it hangs with an unnatural heaviness in the air, remaining still even in a moderate breeze.

Action: Contested (but see below); Stamina + Elixir versus subject's Stamina + Resolve

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character is afflicted by a Toxicity 4 lethal poison. This poison may be resisted with a contested Stamina + Resolve roll subtracting the poison's Toxicity. Anyone else who breathes in the smoke is similarly affected.

Failure: The hunter is affected as though he had taken a potent (-3 to all dice pools and traits) dose of opium. Anyone else who breathes in the smoke is similarly affected.

Success: The Ascending One breathes in the smoke of the Mesmeric Vapor and converts its toxins into a deeply psychotropic drug. In order to have an effect, this smoke

must be inhaled by another character. Ascending Ones are taught specific breathing exercises to control and focus the smoke as they exhale; the hunter may designate any one character within close-combat range as the target of the smoke. If the target is aware of the smoke, she may try to hold her breath by making a reflexive Stamina roll. Success means she gets a lungful of clean air before the smoke can affect her; failure means she is affected normally.

The affected character must make a reflexive Stamina + Resolve roll, contesting the activation roll, to resist the smoke's effects. If the victim is in combat, or otherwise in an agitated or threatened state, she receives a +3 bonus on this roll. A drugged character becomes calm, sedate and relaxed, as though she has taken a dose of opium (*World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 177). More importantly, she enters an extremely suggestible state, in which she may be given complex instructions to be carried out right away or at some triggering stimulus. This drugged state lasts for 10 minutes.

Programming a subject with a command is an extended and contested action of the Ascending One's Manipulation + Persuasion versus the subject's Resolve + Composure. Each roll represents one minute of careful, hypnotic instruction. The number of successes required is equal to three per "step" of the complete command. A triggering action or stimulus counts as a step. For example, the command "When a man says to you, 'Do you have the time?,' call the police and tell them you've witnessed a murder on Fleet St., then hang up immediately" requires 12 successes, because it is a four-step command: the conditional trigger ("when a man says to you, 'Do you have the time?'"), and three actions ("call the police," "tell them you witnessed a murder," and "hang up immediately"). Dangerous actions double the number of successes necessary per action (six successes instead of three). The subject may also be ordered to forget the encounter with the Ascending One, or to forget any actions undertaken while entranced. Either adds five successes to the required total.

If the command is to be triggered by a later action, the subject returns to normal when the command is fully implemented; the druglike effects vanish and the character remains her normal self. When the command is triggered (whether immediately or by a later trigger), the druglike state resumes. The victim will ignore or respond only as much as necessary to anything not related to her task (questions are ignored outright or answered with a single word, work and family are put aside and not told why, etc.) and generally behaves like she's stoned. Once the command is carried out, the effects end immediately.

The psychic compulsion is only effective as long as the drug holds the victim in her hypnotic state. When the 10 minutes are up, the subject snaps out of it and all successes are lost; a partial command does not take hold at all. As long as the subject is still in the trance state, another dose of Mesmeric Vapor can be applied, but this gives the subject another chance to break free of the effect with a contested Stamina + Resolve roll. As long as the

hypnotic state remains uninterrupted, the Ascending One doesn't lose any successes; he may even go and take other actions and then return to the programming action.

Exceptional Success: The subject is placed in an exceptionally deep suggestive state. Programming the subject requires only 30 seconds per roll instead of one minute.

Relic

The Aegis Kai Doru has collected many trinkets and odd relics over the centuries. Some are mere oddments — little trifles for the amusement of kings and children. In a storehouse in Naples, an impossibly intricate clockwork man can play chess against a living opponent. In the sewers under Manhattan, a rough-hewn statue stolen from a college campus silently salutes whenever a virgin passes by. Others possess power so terrible that the group can only seal them away and guard against the day some fool unleashes them on a hapless world. Deep beneath the Russian taiga, in a cave that in every geological sense shouldn't be there, three men stand guard over a crude stone altar that pulses like a living human heart. The guards have to be men — no one likes to even talk about what happened the last time a woman entered that cavern. There's a church in Morocco that isn't on any of the maps or in any of the tourist guides, and if you go there without an invitation, the last thing you'll see before you feel the knife slide into your back is a mummified head on a cushion resting on the altar, and before it all goes black, you'll swear to God the thing looked at you.

Straddling the line between the curios and the sanity-rending artifacts of a long-dead age are the Relics gifted to Aegis Kai Doru agents in the field. As much status symbol as tool or weapon, these Relics are embodiments of the trust shown to promising field operatives. To be given a Relic is a singular honor, and the shame of losing one or allowing it to fall into the hands of others is as grievous as deliberate betrayal. Members of the Aegis Kai Doru have killed themselves rather than face their peers after losing a Relic to another hunter or, worse yet, a witch. The organization itself hunts those who steal "its" artifacts with a relentless determination, sometimes spending millions of dollars and years of its hunters' lives to track down thieves. Recovery is always the primary objective, but no one in the Aegis Kai Doru raises much of a fuss if the Relic thieves end up dead.

Unlike many other Endowments, Relics can be used by anyone. Most have a ritual, spoken command word, or other obscure, not immediately obvious means required to activate them, but once an individual learns the key, a Relic will function for anyone.

One-Eyed Kings (•)

These ancient, verdigris-covered copper coins are so worn as to be nearly indistinguishable from simple metal discs. Only a faint relief on one side can still be made out: the image of a king, in a style that vaguely suggests both the Grecian and the Babylonian. This king is missing

an eye, though whether that is an intentional part of the carving or the wear of countless centuries is impossible to determine. One-Eyed Kings always come in a pair: one coin with the king missing his left eye, one with the king missing his right. The organization possesses hundreds of these coin pairs, all demonstrating the same mystical properties. Attempts to date the metal have provided wildly differing results, with ages ranging from 9,000 years to just under two centuries.

Cost: 1 Willpower.

Benefit: When the coin missing its left eye is walked over the knuckles of the right hand and then pressed over the left eye, it grants its user the ability to see whatever is happening in the vicinity of the other coin. His vantage point is roughly as though he were standing adjacent to the coin's location; if the coin is in a wizard's pocket, for example, the hunter sees things as though he were standing next to the wizard. The view cannot be changed, and subsequent uses of the One-Eyed King show the same angle and position until the coin missing its right eye is moved.

The hunter cannot hear, smell, touch or taste anything in the vicinity of the other coin. The clairvoyant connection only works one way. If the hunter tries to use the coin missing its right eye to see the location of the coin missing its left eye, he instead sees a brief, terrifying glimpse of a vast gulf of pure, black nothingness, inside which things that are not things gibber and wail for his soul. The shock causes him to lose a Willpower point

immediately, and unless he succeeds on a Resolve + Composure roll, he gains a temporary derangement that lasts until the next day. The Storyteller and player should work together to determine the nature of the derangement.

If the hunter places either of the One-Eyed King coins on his eyelid and spends a Willpower point before going to sleep, he will find its match on his other eyelid when he wakes up.



Skeleton Key (•)

It's said that no lock, no matter how sturdy, can keep out Death. Bar yourself behind doors and wards and mystical barriers all you like, but Death has a key for all of them. The Skeleton Key Relic might not literally be Death's enchanted key, but it does give hunters an uncanny ability to bypass obstacles in their path.

The Skeleton Key is a small, silver key in an archaic style, tarnished from long use. The teeth are grooved in such a way as to suggest human dentition, and the bow is an intricately detailed model of a human skull with tiny flecks of sapphire in the eye sockets. The key is always cold to the touch, even if carried in the hand or worn next to the skin for hours.

Benefit: The Skeleton Key fits any lock that uses an actual key, regardless of the type or design. It does not work on card locks, code locks, or any other form of security device. When a character inserts the key into a lock and turns it, he may spend a point of Willpower to unlock the door automatically. If he leaves the Skeleton Key in the lock until the door is closed again, the door automatically re-locks itself with no sign of having been opened. Even tamper-detection methods (such as a piece of tape run across the door and its jamb) are reset. This Relic only unlocks a door; it cannot remove a bar or wedge securing the door, nor does it allow a door that has been blocked, such as with a piece of furniture, to be unlocked.

The Skeleton Key can also open doors that have been sealed or warded with supernatural power. In addition to paying the normal Willpower point cost, the key's owner must roll Intelligence + Presence, with a penalty equal to the number of successes the caster of the magical ward earned on the power's activation roll (see below for roll results).

Cost: 1 Willpower.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The door opens, but instead of whatever should be behind the door, it opens onto someplace...else. It might be a distant (and dangerous) location on Earth, or it might be a bizarre, twisted reflection of the hunter's surroundings or a vast, seemingly endless maze of tangled brambles.

Failure: The magical ward remains in place.

Success: The door unlocks. The creator of the mystical ward automatically knows the door has been breached.

Exceptional Success: As a normal success, but the ward's creator does not know the ward has been broken.

Blood of Pope Joan (••)

Religious relics have long occupied a significant place in the minds of the faithful. From the bones of saints to splinters of the True Cross, artifacts of the faith have inspired pilgrimages, the construction of shrines and even the occasional holy war. Most relics are in the hands of various religious organizations, especially the Catholic Church, but down through the centuries, the Aegis Kai Doru has acquired several religious relics possessed of supernatural powers.

The Blood of Pope Joan reputedly comes from the only woman ever to hold the Papal office. According to legend, Pope Joan disguised herself as a man and served as Pope for two years in the late 11th century before her ruse was discovered and she was

dragged through the street and stoned. Aegis Kai Doru scholars variously claim that this blood was gathered by Vatican occultists during her menses or that it was collected from the place of her execution. A darker twist on the legend states that Pope Joan was revealed as a woman when she became pregnant and gave birth to a son, and that the blood comes from this papal infant.

Benefit: The Blood of Pope Joan counts as a level-one blessed item (see *The World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 214). In addition, werewolves suffer a -2 penalty to all rolls made against a hunter carrying this Relic. The Blood of Pope Joan's mystical ties to the moon (which lends credence to the theory that the Relic is the female pope's menstrual blood) repels the supernatural element of a werewolf's being in much the same way that the like poles of two magnets repel each other.

Eye of Hubris (••)

This quartz crystal is the size of a tennis ball and the shape of a human eyeball. Strange colors swirl within its depths, suggesting the iris and pupil of some strange, ancient being. The Eye has no active effect that the Aegis Kai Doru has discovered, but its mere presence seems to infuriate witches as it causes their spells to go awry more frequently.

Action: Instant

Dice Pool: None

Cost: None, but activating the Eye of Hubris causes the hunter to go blind in one eye for the rest of the scene, temporarily gaining the One Eye Flaw (see the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 219). The hunter does not gain extra experience from this Flaw.

Benefit: The Eye of Hubris causes magic to misfire in its vicinity. Any time a monster uses a power that is obviously magical (such as a fireball or turning into a wolf), he suffers a -2 penalty on the activation roll. Powers with no roll are unaffected. The Eye of Hubris' effects last for one scene.

Icarine Servitor (•••)

At first blush, this appears to be nothing more than a crude mannequin made of wax, about the size of a doll, with rudimentary wings made of thin sticks tied with string. Should a character anoint the figure with a dab of honey and stick a feather into its waxen head, the figure comes to a kind of gruesome life. Although extremely susceptible to heat, the Icarine Servitor can serve as a useful spy or even assassin.

Benefit: When activated, the Icarine Servitor becomes a tiny, living creature with the following statistics:

Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 2, Resolve 2, Strength 1, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2, Presence 0, Manipulation 0, Composure 1

Skills: Athletics 2, Stealth 4, Weaponry 1

Willpower: N/A

Initiative: 5

Defense: 4

Speed: 6 (Species factor 1), fly 15 (Species factor 10)

Size: 2

Health: 4

The servitor has a rudimentary intelligence that allows it to follow moderately complicated instructions. Although it cannot communicate *per se*, it is capable of recognizing any person, place or thing its activator recognizes on sight, and it can “report” anything it sees by means of a similar quasi-visual link. The servitor has no real combat abilities to speak of, but it can slip poison into a drink or cut a car’s brake line if provided with the proper tools. The Icarine Servitor is especially vulnerable to fire, and any source of flame, no matter how small, inflicts aggravated damage. A servitor destroyed by fire melts into a puddle of useless waxy goo and a tangle of twigs and strings; it cannot be animated again. If a servitor is destroyed by a more mundane source of damage, such as being chopped up or crushed, it can be repaired with ten successes on an extended Dexterity + Craft roll. Each roll represents 15 minutes.

An Icarine Servitor remains active until the next dawn or sunset, whichever comes first. Unless given explicit instructions otherwise, the servitor will try to return to its owner before the duration expires. The servitor’s owner may spend one Willpower point as a reflexive action to extend the servitor’s animation until the following dawn or sunset, but doing so causes the creature’s behavior to become increasingly erratic. One Aegis Kai Doru hunter, thinking to use the servitor as a round-the-clock bodyguard, kept it active for a week straight. On the seventh night, he died — “gas leak,” the authorities called it.

Ringsel (••)

When a truly enlightened Buddhist master dies and the body is cremated, small, pearl-like stones are sometimes found among the ashes. Tibetan Buddhism considers these Ringsel to be the physical embodiment of the master’s wisdom, knowledge and enlightenment. Most are placed in shrines, where pilgrims can visit them and venerate the memories of the masters who left them behind, but the Aegis Kai Doru have “acquired” a number of these sacred relics. Ringsel are said to have mystical properties, granting peace and wisdom to those who behold them, and even healing injuries when touched. The occultists of the Aegis Kai Doru are more interested in these mystical abilities than in the spiritual significance of Ringsel, and have been known to steal Ringsel left after prominent masters pass on.

Cost: 1 Willpower.

Benefit: By meditating over a Ringsel, a character may draw upon her inner reserves of strength to heal her body. Entering a meditative state requires four successes on a Wits + Composure roll, as described on page 51 of **The World of Darkness Rulebook**. Once the character has achieved this meditative state, she may spend Willpower to heal her wounds: one Willpower point heals one point of bashing damage, while two Willpower points heals a point of lethal damage. As usual, the character may only spend one Willpower per turn. While there is no limit to how much healing a character can receive from a Ringsel (with the exception of how many Willpower points she has), she may only use this healing gift once per day.

In addition, if the owner of a Ringsel suffers a degeneration of her Morality, she may spend a point of Willpower to have the Ringsel absorb the sin and negate the degeneration,

exactly as though she had passed the degeneration roll. Spiritual contact with such base thoughts destroys the Ringsel, turning it a foul bluish-black and cracking it in two.

Watchful Keris (•••)

According to the occult lore of Indonesia and much of Southeast Asia, the keris dagger, also called the keris, is as much a living entity as a weapon. Each individual blade is reputed to have a soul for good or for ill, and stories abound of weapons leaping from their sheaths to slay hidden enemies of their owners, or to turn on their own dishonorable masters. The Watchful Keris, while not belonging to the same class as the famed Taming Sari keris, which made its wielder indestructible, is nonetheless a useful tool.

The weapon itself is a wavy-bladed knife, about a foot long, with inlaid gold and jade depictions of a watchful serpent on the blade. The curved, pistol-style grip and the weapon’s sheath are both carved from the fossilized tooth of a mammoth, cut to reveal the dentine patterns within the tooth. The grip is worn smooth from long use, but rests comfortably in the hand, almost as though it is eager to be used. The owner of a Watchful Keris often finds himself resting a hand on the weapon or absently stroking the sheath. Occasionally the knife seems to shudder, almost in anticipation.

Benefit: The Watchful Keris is a 2(L) knife. As long as its owner wears it, he receives a +1 bonus on his Initiative Trait. In addition, whenever the owner is surprised in combat (see **The World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 151), he takes an action in the first turn of combat, even if he failed his Wits + Composure roll to avoid being surprised. This action *must* be an attack with the Watchful Keris. The hunter may move up to his Speed before making this attack. If the weapon was sheathed, he finds it inexplicably in his hand, as though it leapt there of its own accord. If, for some reason, the character does not wish to attack with the Watchful Keris (perhaps he doesn’t want to immediately escalate to violence, or he is surprised by the presence of an innocent civilian at the scene of a monster attack), he must make a Wits + Composure roll or spend a Willpower point. If he restrains his urge to strike, he does not get the benefit of acting in the first turn after being surprised. (Note that being surprised still negates the application of the character’s Defense for that initial turn, regardless of how swiftly the Keris springs to hand.)

Heart of Stone (••••)

This lumpy, glassy rock is about the size of a large man’s fist. By itself, it’s harmless and completely inert — just an oddly shaped paperweight. The Heart’s true nature only becomes apparent when it’s hooked up to a sizable source of electricity, like a car battery or the electrical wiring in a house. Once you get enough current running over it, it revivifies into a living, beating heart. It takes a few days to really go to work, but once it does, it can make the victim’s life a living hell. First, people just start to want the thing the heart’s hooked up to. A man’s BMW gets more admiring glances as he rolls down the street, the realtor finds there aren’t enough hours in the day to schedule viewings of that new house on the market. After a while, though, things start to get rough. People still look longingly at the car, or the house, or whatever, but it’s tinged with

an ugly greed. Tempers grow short, and some monsters become prone to flying into berserker rages. After a while, the Heart of Stone starts to attract...things. Aegis Kai Doru calls them *erinyes*, after the Greek Furies, and they seem to be drawn unerringly to those who have been in prolonged contact with the Heart.

Cost: None, but the hunter suffers from the Fixation derangement focused on recovering the Heart as long as it is active and not in his possession.

Benefit: Hooking the Heart of Stone up to an electrical power source requires a Wits + Craft roll. Since the Heart takes some time to really get to work, it's usually employed as a hidden booby trap, couched away in the bowels of a car's engine or hidden down near the bilge of a luxury yacht. As the stone gives way to fleshy life, the heart pumps its weird, captivating energy throughout the structure or vehicle it's connected to. This results in a sequence of escalating effects:

- For the first 24 hours of the Heart's activation, nothing bad happens. In fact, the owner of the device to which the Heart is connected enjoys a +1 bonus on all Social rolls against individuals aware of his ownership. Vampires, werewolves and other monsters prone to fits of rage suffer a -1 penalty on rolls to resist their fury if the Heart's owner is the instigator. This penalty increases by -1 per day, to a maximum of -5.
- On the second day, the bonus disappears and is replaced with a -1 penalty, as people become jealous of the owner or begin to irrationally suspect him of being up to no good. This penalty increases by -1 per day, to a maximum of -5.
- Once the penalty has reached its maximum level by the sixth day, people begin to act on their jealousies and suspicions. Even ordinarily law-abiding citizens might try to carjack the victim, or break into his home just to *experience* the place. Neighborhood "watch groups" spontaneously come together to do something about "that car that's always driving around watching the kids on the playground" or "the crack house over on 19th."
- On the seventh day, the monsters start to arrive. Even the Aegis Kai Doru doesn't know exactly where they come from, but these creatures dubbed *erinyes* start skulking out of the shadows on the seventh day. They seem to be unable to identify the Heart itself as the thing that called them, but they have an unerring ability to locate those who have spent the most time in the close vicinity of the Heart — usually the victim and his family. *Erinyes* vary widely in appearance, but usually resemble squat gargoyles or bizarre mythical chimeras. One Aegis Kai Doru cell in San Francisco reported that its Heart of Stone drew tiny humanoid figures composed of various mismatched bits of taxidermied animals, each dressed in a different period costume. *Erinyes* have the following stats:

THE HEART OF STONE AND THE CREATED

Players who own *Promethean: The Created* have no doubt noticed the similarities between the effects of the Heart of Stone and certain properties of Promethean existence. Whether or not the Heart of Stone is, in fact, the calcified heart of one of the Created is left up to the Storyteller; it is possible to integrate that game's elements into *Hunter: the Vigil*. The penalties incurred by the Heart of Stone can be replaced with the four stages of Disquiet as described on page 167 of *Promethean: the Created*. The *erinyes* can use the statistics and special powers of the Pandorans described in *Promethean* or its supplement, *Pandora's Book*.

This level of integration is entirely optional; if you don't have *Promethean* or don't want to feature it in your *Hunter* game, the rules presented herein are perfectly serviceable.

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 0, Wits 1, Resolve 1

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 1, Manipulation 0, Composure 2

Physical Skills: Athletics 1, Brawl 4, Stealth (Stalking) 1, Survival 2

Willpower: 3

Initiative: 6

Defense: 2

Speed: 15

Health: 8

Size: 4

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Dam	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Bite	(B)	-	7	-
Claws	1(L)	-	8	-

Armor: 1

The creatures (and all penalties associated with the Heart) disappear immediately if the Heart is cut off from its electrical current. Sometimes the *erinyes* leave behind little stone or wood bodies. These are promptly collected by the Aegis Kai Doru and may become Relics in their own right.

Witch-Candle (****)

The name of this Relic is something of a misnomer; it isn't an actual candle, but rather a battered old pewter candlestick whose metal is carved with various gargoyle reliefs. By itself, the Witch-Candle has no inherent mystical properties (it can be used as a 1(B) improvised weapon, but that's about it). Placing a candle on the stick and anointing it with blood before lighting it primes the bizarre magic within it, but apart from the flickering shadows making the carvings appear to move in a disturbingly lifelike manner, there's still no immediate effect, until sorcery is performed in the vicinity of the Relic.

The Witch-Candle feeds on magic, especially of the variety performed by witches. When a sorcerer casts a spell anywhere within the radius illuminated by the candle (generally within the same room), the gargoyle figures come to hideous life and slither off, leaving behind a plain, unadorned candlestick. The candle-gargoyles are drawn to the caster of the spell that animated them, and attack unceasingly until they or the mage are destroyed.

Cost: The hunter must bleed onto the candle before lighting it, suffering a point of lethal damage.

Benefit: When a witch casts a spell within the light of the candle, take note of the number of successes rolled. For every success, the Witch-Candle spawns a single gargoyle (to a maximum of four), which remains animated for a number of turns equal to the successes rolled. If additional spells are cast within the candlelight while the gargoyles are already animated, whether by the same mage or by another mage, add the total number of successes rolled together to determine the number of turns the gargoyles remain animated. Likewise, additional successes continue to animate additional gargoyles (again to a maximum of four). If there are multiple Witch-Candles in the same vicinity, all the successes are applied to each Relic.

If the candle is put out, the gargoyles immediately slither back to their candlestick and lose their animation. If a gargoyle is destroyed, it melts into a puddle of foul-smelling ooze that quickly evaporates, leaving nothing but a black discoloration on the ground. Destroyed gargoyles reappear as carvings on the candlestick one day after they are destroyed.

The gargoyles have the following stats when first animated:

Attributes: Intelligence 0, Wits 3, Resolve 2, Strength 2, Dexterity 1, Stamina 2, Presence 0, Manipulation 0, Composure 2

Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Stealth 3

Willpower: 4

Initiative: 5

Defense: 1

Speed: 8 (Species factor 5)

Size: 3

Health: 5

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Dam	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Bite (B)	-	5	-	

For every five total successes on spell-casting rolls within the candle's light, the gargoyles gain one of the following benefits. The Relic's owner chooses which bonus to grant; all the gargoyles get the same bonus.

- +1 to Strength, Dexterity, and Stamina. This bonus may be granted more than once.
- Two additional Health boxes. This bonus may be granted more than once.
- One point of Armor. This bonus may be granted more than once.
- A 1 (L) claw attack.

The supernatural powers of other monsters can likewise empower the Witch-Candle, but at a reduced efficiency. Halve the number of successes for any non-mage power for purposes of determining the Relic's abilities.

Example: Elias Stark, an Aegis Kai Doru hunter, has lured a coven of three witches and a vampire into an ambush. He has set up a Witch-Candle to do the dirty work for him. On the first turn of combat, two of the witches cast defensive spells on themselves, earning two successes and three successes, respectively. The vampire attempts to cow Elias with a supernatural display of its frightful nature, rolling four successes (halved to two for the candle's purposes). The third attempts to blast Elias with a lightning bolt, rolling two successes. That makes for a total of nine spell-casting successes; all four gargoyles spring to life for nine turns, and they each gain an additional benefit because more than five total successes have been rolled. Elias' player chooses to give them a 1(L) claw attack. The gargoyles attack the monsters, who, on the next turn, try to destroy the gargoyles. Between the four of them, they roll eight successes to activate their powers (still halving the vampire's successes). All four gargoyles gain another eight turns of animation, and two more bonuses, since the total number of spell-casting successes is now 17. Elias' player gives them an additional point of Strength, Dexterity and Stamina and two more Health boxes. Things aren't looking good for the witches.

Aegis Talisman (*****)

According to Greek myth, the Aegis was the shield of Zeus himself, an indestructible goatskin buckler onto which the head of Medusa was mounted. The Relic bearing its name is a silver amulet the size of a man's spread hand, with the likeness of a Gorgon's face embossed in the center and a ring of tassels like snakes around the rim. It provides protection against both physical and mystical assault and can, if invoked with the proper force of will, temporarily paralyze an enemy with abject terror. Aegis medallions are rare, and are only given to the highest-ranking field operatives of the Aegis Kai Doru.

Cost: None or 1 Willpower.

Benefit: A character holding or wearing an Aegis Talisman next to her skin receives three points of armor against both physical and magical attack. This armor does not stack with other sources, be they natural, mundane, or supernatural in origin. In addition, by brandishing the Aegis Talisman and spending a point of Willpower, she may make a contested Presence + Intimidate roll with a +2 equipment bonus versus an enemy's Resolve + Composure as an instant action (resistance is reflexive).

If she succeeds, that enemy is paralyzed with fear for a number of turns equal to the difference in the number of successes rolled. A paralyzed opponent loses his Defense, but is not considered "completely dormant" and cannot be struck a killing blow.

Dead Man's Face (••••)

This gruesome Relic appears to be a mask made of the expertly flayed and cured skin of a human face. It's difficult to determine the face's gender or even race, as it was long ago reduced to a dried-up, brownish-tan mass. When placed over the face of a recently deceased corpse, the Dead Man's Face momentarily forces some semblance of life back into the cadaver. It's far from a true resurrection of the dead, and it doesn't seem to be calling the ghost back to its mortal coil, but Aegis Kai Doru agents have learned to appreciate the information this Relic can provide without questioning its source too closely.

Cost: 1 Willpower; in addition, the hunter gains an Obsession derangement focused on death and the dead. This derangement lasts for one week.

Benefit: The Dead Man's Face must be placed over the face of a corpse that has been dead no more than 12 hours. The hunter must spend a point of Willpower and roll Presence + Resolve as an extended action as he utters a prayer to Hades, invoking the wisdom of death to seek the light of truth. This prayer requires one success per hour the corpse has been dead, with each roll representing 10 minutes of chanting. (An exceptionally long extended action may actually increase the number of successes required.)

Once the requisite number of successes is acquired, the Dead Man's Face stretches or shrinks to mold itself like a second skin to the corpse's features. The corpse's eyes snap open, and it returns, however briefly, to a semblance of life. The corpse can speak and move its head, but the rest of it remains inert and dead. (Rumors suggest that the Aegis Kai Doru possesses similar relics that can animate a hand, or even the entire body.) This "resurrection" lasts for one minute per point of Stamina the corpse possessed while alive. As a rule of thumb, assume the corpse can answer one reasonably complex question (e.g. "What did you see before you died?") per minute.

Doru Talisman (••••)

Like the Aegis Talisman, the Doru Talisman is one of the great symbols of the Aegis Kai Doru. These rare and powerful Relics are more than just powerful tools of the Hunt; they are symbols of status and prestige within the organization itself. Few field operatives are ever given this Relic, and the number that earns both an Aegis and a Doru Talisman can be counted on two hands.

A Doru Talisman is an intricately detailed representation in pure silver of a *doru*, or a Greek Hoplite's spear. It is approximately four inches long, with a small hole bored through the back spike so it may be hung on a chain. In dim light, the spearhead sometimes shines red, as though reflecting the blood of an ancient battlefield.

Cost: 1 Willpower.

Benefit: Despite its diminutive size, a Doru Talisman is a potent weapon. By gripping the talisman in the hand in much the same manner as a full-sized spear, the Doru Talisman may

be used as a 3(L) melee weapon, with which the wielder can attack any opponent within 10 yards of himself. He simply mimics a thrust with the spear (making a normal Weaponry attack), and though the talisman may never actually touch its victim, bloody wounds like those inflicted by an actual spear appear on the victim's body.

Thaumatechnology

In the cold, sterile labs of the Cheiron Group, men are made into monsters for the greater good of humanity. Other hunter organizations might carry bizarre mystical artifacts or learn blasphemous rites of arcane power, but the Cheiron Group's agents actually *take parts of monsters and put them inside their own bodies*. Thaumatechnology Endowments are the most invasive category of Endowments, and while TCG's field recovery teams might appreciate the little edges these biomedical horrors give them, few are entirely comfortable with the concept of grafting bits of unnatural creatures to their own flesh.

While Thaumatechnology Merits resemble Advanced Armory or Relic in that each item is represented as an individual Merit with a specific dot cost, a hunter cannot just pick up a Thaumatechnology item and start using it. Thaumatechnology implants require a lengthy and fairly invasive surgical procedure to install or remove from the character's body.

Thaumatechnological Surgery

Dice Pool: Dexterity + Medicine + equipment; if the surgeon does not have a Thaumatechnology Specialty in Medicine, he suffers a -3 penalty.

Action: Extended. Three successes per Merit dot are required to install or remove a Thaumatechnology implant, each roll representing one hour of surgery.

Installing most Thaumatechnology implants requires invasive, painful surgery. For every two rolls the surgeon's player makes, the patient suffers one point of lethal damage. If the surgeon doesn't care how much damage he does in removing a Thaumatechnological implant, the time per roll can be cut down to half an hour, but the patient suffers a point of lethal damage for *every* roll. Implanting a Thaumatechnology device requires care and precision, and cannot be rushed in this manner.

A Thaumatechnology implant can be recovered from a dead patient provided it is extracted within six hours of the patient's death. Since cadavers don't care much about suffering extra lethal damage, it only takes a half hour per roll to remove a Thaumatechnology implant from a dead body.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The procedure goes disastrously awry. Not only is the Thaumatechnology implant destroyed, but the patient also suffers one point of aggravated damage per Merit dot cost of the implant being installed.

Failure: No progress is made toward implanting the Thaumatechnology.

Success: You progress toward the goal of implanting the Thaumatechnology.

Exceptional Success: Not only do you make significant progress toward completing the procedure, but also the next

THE HARVEST MARKET

A thriving black market exists for monstrous "spare parts," and some hunters unaffiliated with Cheiron work that market, selling rare specimens or limbs to TCG for big bucks. It's also a good way to get noticed by Cheiron, which has its...pluses and minuses. More information on the Harvest Market can be found on p. 202, in the Research and Development section.

time during the surgery when the patient would suffer a lethal wound, he takes no damage.

Suggested Equipment: Set of surgeon's tools (scalpels, retractors, clamps) (+1), field surgical kit (+1), military surgical kit (+2), access to surgical facilities (+3)

Possible Penalties: Lack of tools (-1 to -4), bad weather (-2), distraction from noise (-1) to imminent danger (-4)

Special: These rules are meant to be used when characters wish to recover or implant Thaumatechnology "in the field," as it were. If a hunter acquires new Thaumatechnology implants by spending experience points, assume that those implants are installed by the Cheiron Group's specialists in fully stocked medical facilities. All surgical procedures, and recovery from wounds suffered during surgical procedures, occur during "down time."

Anger Patch (•)

The Anger Patch is a small patch of a dead man's skin grafted to the base of the neck. One inch square, precisely measured, the patch is wired with twice the number of nerve end-

ings that area of the body usually has. It's hooked directly into the bloodstream, too, and it feeds from your blood all day and all night and it does one thing in return: it *hates*. The Anger Patch isn't just a square of a dead man's skin, it's a square of a *vampire's* skin. Vampires, as Cheiron scientists have observed, exhibit an instinctual territorial aggression on a scale unprecedented in nature, and with a little biomedical tinkering, the boys in the back room have figured out how to harness that.

Benefit: The Anger Patch acts as a kind of automatic vampire detector. Whenever a character with an Anger Patch becomes aware of a vampire, the patch writhes and twitches irritably, as though the muscles under the skin are experiencing a muscle spasm. The character does not need to be aware the person he's seen is a vampire — just catching a glimpse of a pale figure across the club is sufficient — but the Anger Patch, by virtue of being grafted into the central nervous system, makes the character instinctively aware of who the vampire is (or who the vampires are). The sensation lasts about a turn, just long enough to make it hard to miss.



There are two catches to relying on the Anger Patch: first, the Patch only works for a given user once for each vampire. Subsequent meetings don't trigger the visceral reaction from the patch; Cheiron scientists haven't been able to get the sensitivity of the neural connections to the point where the secondary reactions are detectable to a human host. Second, the character suffers a -1 penalty on all Social rolls against vampires. Blood-suckers just can't stand him, even if they can't quite figure out why.

Although the vampiric version presented here is the most common Anger Patch, Cheiron Group agents often hear rumors of similar devices capable of detecting werewolves, zombies, or even stranger beings. If such Thaumatechnology does exist, it functions identically to the vampire-detecting version, just focused on a different type of creature. And if such Thaumatechnology exists, assume that detecting a monster type different from vampires costs an additional two dots for the Merit. How such devices are made — and what they're made of — probably doesn't bear thinking about.

Weapon of Last Resort (• or ••)

One of the basic survival tips any hunter will give you is "never go unarmed." Thanks to an advanced study of vampiric dentition and the natural weaponry of a variety of monsters, the Cheiron Group has been able to extend this maxim to any of its agents. Whether it's an implant of weird, razor-sharp fingertips of some unearthly metal or jagged fangs ripped from the maw of a gibbering servitor demon, a Weapon of Last Resort can save an agent's life or deflect investigation of a mysterious death ("She was just ripped apart, like a bear got her or something.") As an added benefit, the natural weapons of this Endowment are easily concealable and can be taken into restricted areas.

Benefit: The hunter gains either a claw attack that allows her to make Brawl attacks that inflict lethal damage, or a bite attack that inflicts 1(L). If the character opts for the bite attack, he must successfully grapple first. For two dots, he gains both attacks.

AURA SIGNIFIERS

Condition	Color
Afraid	Orange
Aggressive	Purple
Angry	Bright Red
Bitter	Brown
Calm	Light Blue
Compassionate	Pink
Conservative	Lavender
Depressed	Gray
Desirous/Lustful	Deep Red
Distrustful	Light Green
Envious	Dark Green
Excited	Violet
Generous	Rose
Happy	Vermilion
Hateful	Black
Idealistic	Yellow
Innocent	White
Love-struck	Bright Blue
Obsessed	Bright Green
Sad	Silver
Spiritual	Gold
Suspicious	Dark Blue
Confused	Mottled, shifting colors
Daydreaming	Sharp, flickering colors
Supernaturally Controlled	Weak, muted aura
Psychotic	Hypnotic, swirling colors
Supernatural Being	A vague, indescribable "wrongness" to the

Special: Characters trying to detect a Weapon of Last Resort that is not actively being used may make a Wits + Composure roll at a -4 penalty. If the inspecting character has reason to suspect the hunter might have biological modifications of this sort (for example, he's seen this Endowment before or has crossed paths with vampires or the like), the penalty drops to -2.

Devil's Eyes (••)

It's amazing the things they can do with the human eye. Corneal transplants can repair traumatic damage to the surface of the eye, neurosurgeons can connect cameras directly into the optic nerve, and laser surgery can give you perfect

20/20 vision — and the Cheiron Group can give you the eyes of a demon that see the deepest secrets of a man's soul. Transplantation of the entire eyeball is a new field for Cheiron doctors, and Devil's Eyes are one of the early prototypes. Before the implantation, Devil's Eyes resemble golden, multifaceted orbs, like oversized insect eyes. Once they've been implanted and hooked up to a person's optic nerves, they shift their pigmentation and structure, becoming indistinguishable from the patient's natural eyes. No matter how bad the character's eyes were originally, Devil's Eyes give him perfect 20/20 vision.

Devil's Eyes aren't really "eyes" in any biological sense; while they are the sensory organs of the creature they come from, they don't really perceive the world the way a human's eyes do. To allow a person to see through the Devil's Eyes, a tiny computerized interface chip must be implanted between the optic nerve and the Eye themselves. The interface processes the visual information out of the image perceived by the Eyes, filtering out extraneous data beyond the human visual range. The result of this post-processing gives the hunter's vision a flat, artificial look, as though the whole world were a badly retouched photograph.

Benefit: By squeezing her eyes shut and rolling them in a particular way behind the lids, a character with Devil's Eyes can temporarily disengage the interface chip and receive the full, unfiltered spectrum the Eyes perceive. When active, the Eyes allow the character to perceive the emotional auras surrounding other individuals. These auras provide insight into the character's emotional state, and can even reveal supernatural influences. The Devil's Eyes revert to their natural appearance while active.

Action: Instant.

Dice Pool: Wits + Empathy.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The massive rush of information overwhelms the hunter. For the rest of the scene, she cannot turn the Eyes off and is treated as though she had ingested a potent (-3 to traits) dose of hallucinogens (see **The World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 177).

Failure: The hunter is unable to make sense of the swirling aura of colors around another character.

Success: For every success rolled, the hunter can clearly discern one aura color of one individual in her line of sight. She may allocate her successes however she likes; she might spend all of them on getting a detailed perception of a single individual's state of mind, or she might try a quick read on several characters. She discerns emotions in order of descending intensity. Aura signifiers that encompass the entire aura (that is, signifiers that are not just individual colors) are perceived automatically with at least one success. See the Aura Signifiers sidebar on p. 186 for a list of aura colors and their associations.

Exceptional Success: As ordinary success, but the total number of successes rolled is applied to all characters in line of sight.

Example: Angeline, infiltrating a cult ceremony in the Philadelphia sewers, activates her Devil's Eyes to get a sense of the congregation's state of mind. She rolls four successes and allocates two of them to the priest performing the ritual, with the remaining two allocated to the two cultists closest to her. The Storyteller

informs her that the high priest's aura is a muted, hypnotic swirl of bright green and violet, while the two nearest cultists have gold auras. The two successes for the high priest show her his obsession and excitement, while the one each for the two cultists reveals their confusion. In addition, she automatically recognizes the high priest's psychotic nature — and, interestingly, the fact that he's under supernatural control.

Lover's Lips (••)

This implant isn't literally a pair of lips and, in fact, the Cheiron Group's official designation for it is "Eros' Caress." The truth is less poetic: "Lover's Lips" are actually manufactured sacs, resembling nothing so much as a snake's venom sacs. They're made from the latest in synthetic skin technology, with just a little something extra harvested from what passes for a vampire's circulatory system. The whole thing is filled with a few cc's of blood — not necessarily the implantee's — then implanted under the jaw, right alongside the salivary gland. When the hunter massages just behind his jaw and below his ears, the blood, partially transformed by the vampiric tissue, squirts into his mouth. It tastes vile, but when someone else gets a taste of it, usually through a kiss, they suddenly become very fond of the hunter.

Benefit: When another character tastes the blood secreted by this implant, it induces a mild euphoric effect, as though she has taken a hit of morphine (**The World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 177). This euphoric state lasts only for a scene, not the (8 minus Stamina) hours of a real morphine hit. She becomes well disposed toward the implanted character, who gains the benefit of the 9-again rule on Social rolls against her for the next scene.

If a single individual tastes blood from the same character's implant more than once in a single month, she becomes mildly addicted to the taste of the blood. In addition, her affection for him deepens; he gains a +1 bonus on all Social rolls against the victim as long as she has tasted his blood within the past month. This bonus is in addition to the 9-again benefit that lasts for a scene after each taste.

An Eros' Caress implant can only hold enough blood for a single "dose" at a time. In order to use the implant again, the hunter must refill it by injecting a small amount of blood directly into the implant. The blood can be human (either the hunter's or someone else's) or animal, but a successful injection requires a Dexterity + Medicine roll to hit the implant.

Personal Defense Swarm (•••)

The Cheiron Group's scientists still aren't entirely sure how to explain the function of this implant, and the very nature of where it comes from remains top secret. Rumor has it that a team in Bucharest (or maybe Prague, or Vienna, or somewhere else) found some weird little monster that turned into an ugly little metal statue as soon as they caught it. They say the boys in the back room figured out what made it fall inert, and how to revive it. Then they melted it down into little ball bearings, coated the pieces with hypoallergenic aluminum, and jabbed them into hunters' arms.

The tiny metal spheres are embedded in the subcutaneous tissue of the forearm. A small valve, similar to the one some dialysis patients use, is implanted near the base of the palm.

After the hunter comes out of recovery, he's given a small, black satchel that contains five syringes of an extremely diluted solution of a substance rumored to be wrung from the organs of unnaturally animated corpses. Whatever that substance is, those little ball bearings feed on it. For lack of a better word, they hatch. When the hunter opens that valve in his wrist, a swarm of tiny, angry insects come boiling out and attack whatever the hunter's mad at. The bugs look like little yellow jackets — except for the fact that each one has the exact same human face.

Benefit: Activating requires only a drop from the prodigious syringe, and it takes a while for the hunter to run dry. Assume each syringe is good for five activations (for a total of 25 activations per satchel). Cheiron will resupply syringes, but it can take up to two weeks (less for those with Status 3 or more in the conspiracy).

The swarm of insect-creatures spawned by this implant has a rudimentary connection to their host's neurological systems. While they cannot be communicated with or controlled directly, they recognize their host's feelings of anger and hostility, and will attack targets that trigger those emotions. (It's best to be careful with this. One story making the Cheiron rounds tells of a hunter who found out his partner was having an affair with his wife. Their cell faced off against some shambling thing made of tatters and rags and grief given form, and our cuckolded lover let loose his PDS — which promptly killed the hell out of his cheating partner while the monster mopped up the rest of the cell.) The swarm only retains this connection while it is inert and implanted in the host; thus, it's wisest to wait until a fight begins to activate this Endowment. The swarm attacks creatures in order of the intensity of the aggression they provoke in the host, and focuses its attack on one enemy at a time until its target is dead or driven off. The swarm never strays more than 10 yards from its host.

The swarm has a radius of four yards (see the sidebar on this page) and inflicts bashing damage. It moves at a Speed of 10. The swarm remains active for 10 turns, then immediately returns to its host and squeezes back into the valve before falling inert again. If the swarm is unable to return to its host, it returns to its inert state and falls to the ground. Provided at least three quarters of the ball bearings can be recovered, they can be re-implanted with no roll (simply plug the bearings back into the shunt).

Should the swarm take damage sufficient to reduce it to less than one yard in radius, the remaining insects flee back to their host. Cheiron Group doctors insist that once the swarm goes inert, it falls completely lifeless, but that doesn't explain the fact that the things can repopulate themselves. It takes one full day of remaining inert (i.e., the hunter does not activate

SWARMS

Animals of Size 1 or 2 are generally best recorded in swarms, flocks and other groupings of the animals, as they are most effective in such groupings. This includes not just insects, but also most birds and smaller creatures such as rats.

Swarms are measured by their size in yards radius. A swarm generally inflicts one die of bashing damage to anyone within its radius. A swarm can inflict more damage by condensing. Every time the swarm condenses to cover half its full area, it inflicts one additional die of damage per turn.

Therefore, a swarm of eight yards in radius inflicts 2 bashing damage per turn if it constricts down to a four-yard radius, 3 bashing if it halves that again to a two-yard radius, and 4 bashing damage per turn if condenses itself down to a one-yard radius. Though condensing doesn't usually happen all that often in nature (save in the case of creatures such as killer bees), it is an easy enough thing for most supernatural powers that command animals to bid them to do so.

Armor is effective against a swarm only if it covers one's full body, but even then, it provides only half its rating. In addition, targets are distracted by the swarm, suffering -2 dice on all rolls while they are within the radius, even if they're not specifically attacked.

The swarm cannot be attacked with fists, clubs, swords or guns. Only area-affect attacks such as a torch affect it. Each point of damage inflicted by a flame or other applicable attack halves the swarm's size. Once the swarm is reduced below a one-yard radius, either all insects are dead or the few remaining disperse.

this Merit) to increase a depleted swarm's size by one yard radius. The swarm can be activated at less than full size, if desired.

Quick-Step (•••)

The Cheiron Group expects nothing less than success from its field agents. The Group's continued research success relies on monsters being brought in alive (well, intact, at any rate) for study and harvest. But science is a pragmatic study, and the Cheiron board of directors knows that sometimes

you just have to get the hell away and live to fight again. To that end, they developed the Quick-Step. Half-manufactured, half-grown from the ligaments of swiftly running monsters (werewolves, some vampires, certain demonic entities), Quick-Steps give even an ordinary man the ability to shatter Olympic records. It might even be enough to let him get away from the things in the shadows.

Benefit: A character with a Quick-Step implant gets a +3 bonus to his Speed. This bonus stacks with the bonus from Fleet of Foot, if applicable. In addition, the hunter gains the benefit of the 9-again rule on any Athletics rolls related to moving quickly, such as foot chases. Finally, if the character runs (moving double his Speed in a single turn), he may retain his Defense against firearms attacks.

Special: Using the Quick-Step quickly fatigues the character. Every turn in which he uses the 9-again benefit on Athletics rolls or moves more than his Speed counts as three hours without rest (see **The World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 179). Apply this fatigue at the end of the current scene, and only roll Stamina + Resolve to stay awake once. For example, if a hunter has been awake for 12 hours, then engages in a six-turn foot chase during which he gains the 9-again rule on Stamina + Athletics rolls, he is treated as though he has been awake for 30 hours. He must roll Stamina + Resolve at a -1 penalty or immediately fall asleep, and he suffers a -1 penalty to all dice pools until he sleeps for nine hours.

The character may choose not to gain the 9-again rule on his actions if he wishes to avoid the fatigue.

Twitcher (****)

It looks harmless enough — like a little stick bug made out of wires and protein sacs filled with a pink goo. It wriggles a little bit when disturbed, even before it's implanted. When they stick it in the base of your spine, it curls around your spinal column and nests there, pumping pure nervous energy into you. When your life is in danger, it twitches, massaging your spinal cord and ramping your reflexes up to a terrifying degree. That's almost worth the nightmares, and the crushing sense of paranoia that comes along with them.

Benefit: A character with a Twitcher implant uses the *higher* of his Wits or Dexterity to determine his Defense, instead of the lower of the two. When surprised, or attacked by an unseen foe, the hunter uses the lower of his Dexterity or Wits as Defense, even though a normal person would be denied Defense completely. The Twitcher has no effect on Firearms attacks except at point blank range.

Special: Each night when a character with a Twitcher implant goes to sleep, he must roll Resolve + Composure versus the implant's dot rating (4 dice). If the character earns more successes, he sleeps peacefully and regains a point of Willpower as normal. If the implant gets more successes, his sleep is wracked with nightmares of being endlessly hunted, always a hair's breadth away from death. These nightmares prevent the hunter from regaining a point of Willpower from restful sleep.

In addition, any time the character is surprised in combat, he must succeed on a Morality roll or develop a temporary Suspicion derangement that lasts for the rest of the scene.

If the character already has this derangement, it temporarily becomes a Phobia instead.

Regenerative Nodule (****)

As good as the Cheiron Group's doctors are, they aren't even close to the recuperative abilities of some of the monsters they track down. Werewolves in particular are obscenely fast healers — so fast, in fact, that sometimes their bodies overcompensate and form little cysts that Cheiron Group medics have termed "regenerative nodules." As far as the wolves know, they're harmless, but Cheiron got hold of a few through some very questionable means, and now the boys in the back room have figured out how to harness the things' potential and turn it loose on the human body.

A Regenerative Nodule looks like a rubbery lump of scar tissue the size of a golf ball. Before they put it in you, Cheiron scientists put a little plastic shunt into the core of the nodule — a tricky proposition since the incision heals over almost instantly. When it's sewn into the lining of your gut, it's almost invisible, even though you can still feel the lump. Give that lump a press, and the shunt puckers open and dumps into your system pure...well, whatever the hell makes werewolves heal so fast.

Benefit: In addition to pressing on the lump of the implant, the character must spend a Willpower point to activate the Nodule. Once activated, the nodule heals the character's injuries at a terrifying rate: one point of bashing damage heals every turn, while one lethal wound disappears every 15 minutes. This healing is reflexive, and the accelerated healing rate lasts until all bashing and lethal wounds have been healed. Once the character's Health boxes are entirely free of bashing or lethal wounds, the Regenerative Nodule is completely spent. It falls inert and cannot be activated again for one week.

The Regenerative Nodule has no affect on aggravated damage.

Special: Werewolves draw the energy to heal themselves from some as-yet-unknown metaphysical source. Ordinary people, lacking such a source, must fuel the regeneration with their own bodies. Every point of bashing damage the Nodule heals counts as one day without food. Every lethal wound healed counts as one day without food or water (see **The World of Darkness Rulebook**, pp. 175–176). If the character suffers damage from this deprivation, the Regenerative Nodule does not (and *cannot*) heal it, and still shuts down after all wounds *not* inflicted by deprivation are healed. Many hunters, while healing, eat voraciously to try to stave off damage from deprivation. Doing so necessitates the hunter gorge on food and liquid constantly (doing nothing else during the healing time) and without interruption.

Banality Worm (*****)

There are dimensions beyond this world that we perceive with our limited five senses. The Cheiron Group knows this, even if it doesn't entirely understand the how and why of such places. Sometimes, though, *things* leak through from those other worlds, and Cheiron agents find them. The resulting experiments are very...enlightening.



The Banality Worm is one such creature, crawled through a rift in the wall between this world and another. As near as anyone can tell, the realm this pale, greasy little creature came from is the very antithesis of this one, a realm of pure, absolute nothing. And in this world, it *hates* the supernatural even more than the most fanatic of hunters. Hatred of magic seems to be embedded into its very being; sorceries of all sorts tend to dissolve when directed at the Worm. It didn't take long to realize that if you stitch the Banality Worm into someone's chest cavity, magic directed at the host would unravel, too.

A Banality Worm is implanted in an extremely risky procedure directly under the host's heart. Once implanted, the creature nestles up to the warm, pulsating organ and suckles on it, feeding off the host's blood supply. Every so often, it curls around the heart and squeezes.

Benefit: The host of a Banality Worm gains an extraordinary resistance to supernatural effects. Any time a supernatural effect targets him (including the Relic, Benediction and Castigation Endowments), the effect's originator subtracts the host's Resolve from her dice pool. If the power is already resisted by Resolve, she subtracts *double* the host's Resolve.

Special: Something about having a cold, alien parasite from a realm of pure nihilism cozied up to his heart skews the host's moral perceptions a bit. Whenever he makes a degeneration roll, the host rolls one less die.

Hand of Glory (••••)

Limb transplant technology has come a long way in the last 40 years. It used to be the best you could hope for was a plastic model, like a mannequin's hand. Nowadays, provided you're willing to go on a cocktail of immunosuppressants for the rest of your life, they can actually hack the hand off a cadaver and attach it to you almost as good as new. The Cheiron Group has been at the forefront of limb-replacement research for two decades, and with the aid of Thaumatechnology had recorded successes five years before mainstream medical technology.

Then the boys in the back room got hold of a peculiar little relic a field team brought back from a raid on a demon-worshiping cult in southern France: a pickled human hand, severed at the wrist, with each finger a tiny candle. When the candle was lit, anyone who saw its light was transfixed, unable to move or speak. In one of those serendipitous moments that make the world go round, the scientists of the Cheiron Group saw a way to kill two birds with one proverbial stone.

A Hand of Glory must be affixed to the stump of a human being's arm. Occult tradition dictates that it must be a *left* hand specifically, but Cheiron Group surgeons have had equal success in transplanting either hand. What is important is that the hand come from a hanged man or woman and be at least partially pickled in a solution of bizarre alchemical reagents. By all rights, it should be impossible to graft such thoroughly necrotized flesh onto a living being without massive infection and death, but something in the nature of the Thaumatechnology allows the grafted limb to function normally. It's always a few degrees cooler than the rest of the body, and the skin is perpetually wrinkled as though it has soaked in a bath, but it is otherwise indistinguishable from a normal hand.

Benefit: Apart from restoring the use of an amputated hand, the Hand of Glory bestows upon its owner the mesmeric power of the folkloric corpse-candle. The hunter must light the ends of the Hand's fingers (he takes no damage from this, and the fire doesn't consume his flesh) to activate it. The resultant flames are preternaturally steady and unwavering, and cannot be put out save by being doused in milk. Anyone who sees the flames of the Hand of Glory risks being rendered immobile and insensate as long as the flames remain visible. While the candles burn, the character suffers a -2 penalty to any rolls related to manual dexterity using that hand. The flames are too small to inflict damage or be used as a weapon, but they can ignite flammable objects like paper or fabric.

Dice Pool: Presence + Composure vs. Resolve. The Hand's owner rolls once and compares his result to the result of all witnesses. Each time a new group of witnesses sees the Hand, the owner rolls once and compares his result to all of the witnesses'.

Action: Contested.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Hand of Glory's power is turned on its owner. He is mesmerized (see "Success" for details) until someone forcibly breaks his line of sight to the Hand.

Failure: Any character in line of sight who earns more successes on the contested action is unaffected by the Hand of Glory.

Success: Any character (including the hunter's allies) in line of sight who rolls fewer successes than the hunter is rendered immobile and can do nothing save stare, transfixed, at the Hand of Glory. The hunter may move, speak, or take actions freely without breaking the spell, as long as the flames are kept in the victim's line of sight. Remember that the victim is completely immobile and cannot turn to follow the Hand of Glory. In order to be affected, the victim must see the flames themselves, not just the light from them. If the victim is attacked, or threatened with attack, the spell is immediately broken.

A victim normally only rolls against an individual Hand of Glory once per scene. If the initial resistance roll succeeds, or if the spell is broken, that character is immune to the Hand's effects for the remainder of the scene. The Hand's owner may spend a point of Willpower to affect a given character more than once in the same scene (one Willpower is required per successive attempt per person).

Mesmerized characters have no memory of events that transpire in their presence while mesmerized. They do recall the character with the Hand of Glory being the last thing they saw before blacking out. The Hand's owner may spend Willpower to erase even this trace of his presence: for every affected character he wishes to forget having seen him, he may spend a point of Willpower when the effect is broken to wipe his presence from their minds. Provided he leaves their line of sight immediately, they will retain no recollection of him at all. This is an exception to the rule that a character may only spend one Willpower per turn.

Photographs or video recordings do not convey the Hand's effects to viewers, but live video feeds such as security cameras do.

Exceptional Success: As a success, but all affected characters automatically forget the hunter without need for Willpower expenditure.

Research and Development

The Vigil is a living thing. Strategies grow stale. Monsters adapt. New threats emerge from the surrounding shadows. This is a blood-soaked, mind-bending survival-of-the-fittest situation. Hunters who fail to adjust to the shifting conditions of the hunt are hunters who end up dead in a sewer drain or, worse, nodding off beneath a Thorazine cocktail at the local sanitarium.

Those hunters with the fortune (or misfortune, depending on one's perspective) of having membership in one of the major third-tier conspiracies have the benefit of Endowments, granting them an extra edge against the horrors of the World of Darkness. But even these Endowments are often not enough; maybe that sonic weapon won't work on ephemeral entities, or that demon's limb freaks out any time it's in the presence of the angelic. Hunters strive to modify existing Endowments and, more importantly, to come up with new devices, modifications and rituals to use on the ever-long Vigil.

This section is about researching and developing new Endowments for hunter cells of appropriate conspiracies. Wonder how to harvest demon's blood for its benefit? Need to design a hollow-point bullet whose lead reservoir is topped with fairy tears and sealed with red wax? Hope to decode apocryphal scripture to find a non-canonical ritual to the Virgin of Guadalupe? Look no further.

The Endowment Equation

Hunters in the field can create their own Endowments, and players are encouraged to integrate this into the ongoing story. The cost of an Endowment is determined by:

$$(Cost\ of\ Features) - (Discount\ from\ Frailties) - (Other\ Discounts)$$

The cost can never be below 1 Merit dot. Endowments created by players follow the same rules covered under the Endowment Merit (see p. 67). This system is intended to give players and Storytellers guidelines for the cost of a new Endowment, and then provide ideas and incentives for working the development of that Endowment into the course of a chronicle.

Endowments created through R&D cannot be purchased with normal experience points, however. The creation of an Endowment necessitates the player or cell expending its Practical Experience. The cost to purchase is equal to five times the total finalized Merit dots in Practical Experience (so, a one-dot Elixir would cost 5 total

Practical Experience, while a four-dot Thaumatechnological implant would necessitate 20 Practical Experience).

Benediction and Castigation rituals, however, are not broken out by levels of Merit, as they function differently for purposes of purchasing them. In this case, though, you still use the equation above (Features cost minus Frailty and other discounts) to determine the end Practical Experience cost, even if the rituals themselves do not feature “dots” per se.

The Storyteller may want to set limits as to how powerful or debilitating an Endowment’s Features and Frailties can be. A standard watermark is that Features should never go above 10, and Frailties should not go above 5.

All created Endowments cost at least two Willpower to activate (as opposed to many pre-existing Endowments, which often cost less), though this can be reduced to one using the “Buy Down” Feature, below.

All Endowments are assumed to work for a single turn: additional time of use can be bought with the Duration Feature.

Note that the creation of an Endowment doesn’t come out of thin air. Even intangible Benediction and Castigation rituals may require deep meditation, the abrasion of the flesh, or learning from pre-existing masters. The creation of an Endowment necessitates story, conflict and suspense — and, often enough, some good old-fashioned dice rolling, too. More information on this can be found after Features and Frailties.

Features

The following Features can apply to a researched and developed Endowment, whether one made during the course of the game or one designed between sessions (during “downtime”). Each feature has its appropriate benefit, and each benefit is ascribed a numerical cost. That cost is figured into the above equation to determine the end cost in Merit dots necessary to purchase these items using Practical Experience.

Armor (+1 to +10; +2 Special)

The Endowment, when activated, grants armor of a physical or mystical nature to the character. This armor does not stack with any other physical or mystical armor possessed by the hunter.

Examples: St. Agatha whispers to the character and gives him secret strength (Benediction), serpent scales of some mythic beast stitched beneath the skin (Thaumatechnology), a halo of pungent incense that wreaths the character (Elixirs)

Cost: +1 per point of armor that protects against bashing, +2 per point that protects against lethal damage. This only protects against mundane sources of damage (knife, bullet, crushing boulder), however. If the character wishes for this Endowment to protect against mystical or magical sources of damage, then an additional cost of +2 must be added into the equation.

Buy Down (+3)

The character can reduce the Willpower cost necessary to activate this new Endowment from 2 Willpower to 1 Willpower.

Cost: +3

Damage (+1/+3/+5; +2 Special)

When activated, the Endowment deals damage to a target. If the Endowment is based on a particular weapon, such as special ammunition for a pistol, the attack should be rolled as a normal attack with that weapon. (Example: Dexterity + Firearms.) If the Endowment is less tangible, like Castigating a demon, the attack pool should be the most relevant Attribute + Trait pool (example: Presence + Occult).

Examples: A whip cut from the tail of the Nemean Lion (Relics), the ground beneath a victim turns to hellish, scalding pitch (Castigation), a Frankenstein hand that *loves* to crush heads and break bones (Thaumatechnology)

Cost: +1 for Bashing Damage, +3 for Lethal Damage, +5 for Aggravated Damage; note that this doesn’t help apply damage to non-corporeal entities lurking in Twilight. Doing damage to them necessitates adding +2 to the Features cost on top of other damage costs.

Duration (+1 to +5)

The Endowment’s effects repeat over a certain number of turns or last for the entire scene.

Cost: +1 per additional turn, up to 5 turns total (+4). This feature may be added to Endowments that deal damage. Alternatively, the Endowment may cost +3 to last the entire scene or +5 to last an entire day, but this Feature may not be added to Endowments that deal damage.

Enhance Attribute (+2 to +6)

The Endowment modifies a single Attribute, providing a bonus to that Attribute’s use. The Attribute must be chosen at the time of the Endowment’s development and cannot change once determined.

Examples: A potent stimulant forged from the ash of a dead mage’s bones stirs one’s Wits (Elixir), gore-soaked *Lorica Segmentata* grants its hunter Strength (Relic), a rebreather mask that pumps a clarifying drug into the lungs helps the hunter keep his Composure (Advanced Armory)

Cost: +2 per Attribute bonus, to a maximum of three bonus Attribute dice (+6 cost); if the Endowment grants the bonus to a character other than its user, that costs an additional +2

Enhance Skill (+1 to +5)

The Endowment modifies a single Skill, providing a bonus to that Skill’s use. The Skill must be chosen at the time of the Endowment’s development and cannot change once determined.

Examples: A succubus tongue grafted into the mouth gives a bonus to Persuasion (Thaumatechnology), a targeting digital reticule that is projected onto the eye from a pair of horn-rimmed glasses enhances Firearms (Advanced Armory), the Angel of the Seventh Hour grants the hunter patience when performing Academics (Benediction)

Cost: +1 per Skill bonus, to a maximum of +3; if the Endowment grants the bonus to a character other than its user, that costs an additional +2

Enhance Trait (+1 to +5)

The Endowment enhances one of the following character Advantages: Defense, Initiative, or Speed.

Examples: Prayer over a throat-slit Saluki hound confers swiftness in Speed (Castigation), an ill-minted 1652 shilling worn in the shoe grants a bonus when leaping into combat with Initiative (Relics), an alien bone graft in the arm stirs the limb to work independently of the body to provide it with Defense (Thaumatechnology)

Cost: +1 per bonus; Defense may not be more-than-doubled, however.

Healing (+1/+2/+4)

The hunter is able to heal points of damage directly. Multiple points of damage may only be healed by repeating the healing action over subsequent turns (this may therefore not be coupled with the Duration Feature, above).

Examples: An MRE features a hidden compartment with revitalizing black gel (Advanced Armory), a tiny caduceus made of old nails and dried worms heals the hunter when he meditates upon it (Relics), a greasy unguent comprising angel tears and dust scraped from a holy Medina mosque salves even the worst cuts (Elixir)

Cost: +1 to heal a point of bashing damage, +2 to heal a point of bashing or lethal damage. This may not be used to heal aggravated damage, but spending +4 allows for the Endowment to “downgrade” all aggravated damage to lethal, instead.

Incur Derangement (+2/+4)

Upon activation, this Endowment causes a derangement in a target. The derangement must be chosen at the time of the Endowment’s creation.

Example: A mandala painted in sand and blood seems to shift and causes an Obsession in the viewer (Relics), a sonic “thumper” pounds the ground and causes Anxiety in those who feel the reverberations (Advanced Armory), drops of fairy blood in the eyes color the corneas in just such a way that it can cause a Phobia in those who stare too long into that gaze (Thaumatechnology)

Cost: +2 for a mild derangement, +4 for a severe derangement

Multiple Targets (+1 to +5)

The Endowment affects multiple targets, chosen by the hunter.

Cost: +1 per target beyond the first; +5 is assumed to affect an entire crowd

Re-roll (+3)

The Endowment allows the player to re-roll one of his character’s failed or dramatically failed rolls once per game session. This Feature may be bought multiple times to gain a number of re-rolls.

Examples: Anthony of Padua is the patron of lost articles and helps the hunter “reclaim” a lost roll (Benediction), a witch’s fingernail planted upon the surface of the brain gives the hunter a kind of *déjà-vu* (Thaumatechnology), the hunter calls the Devil’s eye upon him and pleads for some luck (Castigation).

Cost: +3



Sense Monster (+3)

This Endowment helps a character detect the presence of a particular type of monster. This type must be chosen at the time of Endowment creation; once determined, it can't change. (Potential monster types include, but are not limited to, changelings, demons, ghosts, mages, Prometheans, psychics, slashers, spirits, vampires and werewolves.) The Endowment somehow alerts its user to the presence of that particular monster type. This manner of warning is chosen at the time of purchase or creation and will not change once determined. This Feature may be bought multiple times to help a hunter sense more than one creature type. The radius of detection is equal to the hunter's Wits + Composure score in yards around him.

Examples: An implanted tendon from a suicide victim tightens whenever in the presence of ghosts (Thaumatechnology), a tiny red light on the side of a soldier's pistol blinks red whenever a vampire approaches (Advanced Armory), a burnished mirror makes faint cracking sounds but does not break when a sorcerer enters its reflection (Relics)

Cost: +3

Wound Attribute (+2 to +10)

The Endowment attacks a target's Attribute, forcing the target to damage that specific Attribute (which must be chosen at the time of the Endowment's creation).

Examples: A victim is overwhelmed by lust and finds his Intelligence hampered (Castigation); the hunter spits an acrid draft of adder's blood into a victim's mouth, which harms the target's Stamina (Elixir); a glistening hunk of meteorite placed beneath a person's chair causes them to stammer, with bumbling Manipulation (Relic)

Cost: +2 per penalty die assigned

Frailties

An Endowment sometimes comes with additional drawbacks necessary to access its power: a Thaumatechnological prosthetic needs to be lubricated with spectral plasm, or the character must abrade his flesh and draw blood to call the infernal will within. Choosing a Frailty allows the player or Storyteller to subtract from the cost of the cumulative Features when determining the final Merit (and thus, Practical Experience) cost for the developed Endowment.

Addictive (-2)

Use of the Endowment feels good — good enough that it's hard to resist using. Whenever confronted by a situation in which the power could *theoretically* help the character, the player must roll a Resolve + Composure roll to resist giving in. Failure on this roll indicates that he uses the item's supernatural ability regardless of the situation. Dramatic failure indicates a loss of a Willpower point (in addition to any spent on the object's activation). Any time the character fails this Resolve + Composure roll, the next instance of resistance is marked with

FLEXIBILITY

This system is far from exhaustive, and may demand that the Storyteller and player work together to find a way to achieve a desired effect and figure out the Endowment Equation. Flexibility is the name of the game.

a cumulative -1 penalty. Hence, it becomes harder and harder to resist using the object's power the more the character gives into it. To "reset" this addiction, the character must spend five days without using the object's supernatural blessing.

Examples: Its taste conjures a feeling of otherworldly holiness (Elixir), the scrap of metal from an ancient UFO crash is so shiny and so pretty the hunter just wants to touch it (Relics), you hate the tiny bundle of filament worms implanted in your jaw but you can't deny that being able to jump across rooftops is truly exhilarating (Thaumatechnology)

Discount: -2

Ill Effects (-1 to -5)

The Endowment incurs a broad dice penalty to all rolls. This penalty lasts for a full 24 hours after the Endowment's power concludes.

Examples: The eerie whine that rifle emits really gets in your head sometimes (Advanced Armory), God's mercy comes part and parcel with a surefire feeling of worthlessness (Benediction), taking the Devil's gifts to use against him makes a hunter feel diseased (Castigation)

Discount: -1 per die penalty

Price in Pain (-1 to -5)

Sacrificing oneself or another allows the character to more easily acquire the Endowment.

Examples: Those vampire teeth they implanted don't work unless the hunter bites into the meat of his own tongue (Thaumatechnology); the Elixir burns the esophagus on the way down, but that's how the hunter spits acid (Elixir); that hydria jug looks light and small, but it weighs a ton and burdens the body (Relics)

Discount: -1 for each point of bashing damage necessary to activate the item, -2 for each point of lethal damage necessary to activate the item, to a maximum of -5. Damage incurred as cost to activate is done in addition to any Willpower spent.

Shit Luck (-2)

The Endowment stirs fate to work against the character in some fashion. The next roll the hunter fails automatically becomes a dramatic failure instead.

Examples: The Devil gives and the Devil takes (Castigation), sometimes the hangman's hand works against its owner (Thaumatechnology), the Ymir Device fucks around with string theory and messes with probability *probably* more than it should (Advanced Armory)

Discount: -2

Specific Target (-1 to -5)

The Endowment only applies to a specific range of monsters. (As always, at Storyteller discretion, it may still create collateral damage against unintended targets.) Note that the increasing specificity of targets requires reasonable knowledge of the target, not random guesswork.

Examples: The bone sliver in your brain is from your adversary's creator and thus it only works on her (Thaumatechnology), the souped-up and ruggedized Palm Pilot emits a sound only werewolves can hear (Advanced Armory), the draught of *Djinn*'s blood empowers the soldier of Allah to battle those Christian vampires (Elixir).

Discount: -1 for a defined target, such as "vampires," -2 for a well-defined target, such as "bloodjacker vampires," or -3 for an individual target such as "Carmilla Incarnadine, the vampire I have stalked these long and many years"

Strange Cost (-3)

The Endowment's activation necessitates a particularly strange cost in addition to the Willpower. Maybe it requires an animal sacrifice. Could be that it needs to be "fueled" somehow with the blood, tears, saliva or sweetbreads of a particular creature.

Examples: The ritual will only bring pain to an enemy if the hunter first brings pain to an innocent creature (Castigation), miraculous tears or stigmata from a statue are necessary to contact the saints (Benediction), the Clock of Ill-Tidings only strikes midnight when love letters are burned below it (Relics)

Discount: -3

Stir Madness (-1 or -2)

Use of the Endowment incurs a mild or severe derangement. The derangement takes hold upon successful activation and lasts for a full 24 hours (though, as with all derangements, the player can roll to determine whether the character "gives in" and manifests its effects). The derangement is not necessarily chosen at the time of the Endowment's development; the Storyteller chooses whatever derangement is appropriate to the story.

Examples: Sebek's salve has a psychoactive element that cannot be metabolized (Elixir), babbling glossolalia is the price you pay when you speak to the Angel of the Presence (Benediction), one of those military-grade "No Doze" pills will fuck your shit up and *really* put you on edge (Advanced Armory)

Discount: -1 for a mild derangement, -2 for a severe derangement

Willpower Addition (-1 to -3)

A sacrifice of additional will is required to activate the Endowment.

Discount: -1 per point of additional Willpower points necessary to activate the Endowment

DREAD POWERS AS ENDOWMENTS

Later in the book, you'll find a list of Dread Powers available to the various horrors of the World of Darkness (p. 276). Can these be borrowed and turned into Endowments?

Absolutely. Assume that the dots in the Dread Power equate to the dots in the Endowment; here they have a slightly higher cost (dots x 6), but with Storyteller approval, you might still be able to add certain *Frailties* to potentially reduce the cost. In fact, any time you attempt to translate a Dread Power to an Endowment, it bears mentioning that the Storyteller needs to aid in and approve that translation.

Alternatively, feel free to look at a book like *World of Darkness: Reliquary*, whose items can be mined as Relics or to help come up with new Endowment abilities.

Other Considerations

What follows are further considerations when finalizing a developed Endowment. It is vital to work with the Storyteller when designing a new Endowment for use in game.

Activation: All developed Endowments must be activated with Willpower and, most likely, a dice roll.

Dice Pool: If a dice roll is necessary to activate the Endowment or to incur the Endowment's effect, it should be tailored in some fashion to the process necessary to use that item or ritual. A gunlike weapon belonging to VALKYRIE's Advanced Armory might necessitate a Dexterity + Firearms roll to use, or a Wits + Crafts roll to "tweak" before firing. Meditating on one's vices for a Castigation rite might demand a Wits + Resolve roll, whereas Benediction is its own trait and basking and reflecting the holy power of God might necessitate a Presence + Benedictions roll. All Elixirs already require a Stamina + Resolve roll to transubstantiate the substance into something that doesn't kill or dose the hunter.

Action: Many Castigation and Benediction rites necessitate extended rolls. How many successes are necessary, and how much time is represented by each roll? Alternatively, is it instant or reflexive? Could it be contested by a target?

Roll Results: You probably know what happens on a normal success (effect happens!) and failure (effect doesn't happen!). But how does it go awry on a dramatic failure? How does an exceptional success add to or magnify effects? Dramatic failures might cause damage or derangements. Exceptional successes might add to duration or effect (+1 to hunter or -1 to enemy). For Elixirs, failure causes some kind of drug dose, and a dramatic failure damages the body with toxins.

In-Game R&D

A hunter doesn't just say, "I think today I'm going to pray to St. Athanasius" or "I wonder what happens if I graft the eye of a witch's familiar to the back of my head" and expect a potent new Endowment to appear. It takes time. It takes effort.

It takes story.

A hunter who seeks to uncover an old (or conjure a new) infernal Castigation rite must pore through old books to find what he's looking for, or maybe he has to fly to Milan to speak to one of the conspiracy's "archivists." Then he finds out that to truly learn the rite he has to debauch himself in some way he's never before managed, and so on the flight back...well, we'll avoid the graphic details, but it's the kind of thing that would make most of Middle America blanch.

Optional System: Conflicts

Storytellers, this part is your job, but players have to play along, too: assume that for each Merit "dot" necessary to develop a particular Endowment, you should come up with one main story conflict that "blocks" the purchase of that Endowment. A conflict might be a moral dilemma, a sidetrack on the adventure, a suspenseful dice roll, an attack by monstrous forces, whatever works for the game. From these conflicts grow greater stories, which means that the development of a single Endowment can become the focus of a whole game session or story.

For example, Matt wants to create a Thaumatechnological implant that he hopes will allow his character to add +3 to her Athletics for the duration of one full scene, but it will force upon her a wretched nosebleed when activated, thus causing one lethal point of damage. To apply the Endowment Equation:

Cost of Features (Enhance Skill at +3, Duration of One Scene at +3) minus Discount from Frailties (Price of Pain at -2), you get a four-dot Merit (3+3-2) which will cost him 20 total Practical Experience points.

The optional rule is this: for each conflict the character assumes, he can reduce the final Practical Experience cost by *two*. (This is something that must be agreed upon by Storyteller and player, mind.)

Now, at present, Matt doesn't really know what the implant *is*, and his character doesn't know, either. Matt works with the Storyteller to determine the nature of the implant and how he'll get it, but that's all rolled into the story. With a four-dot Endowment, that equates to four "conflicts," which reduces his total Practical Experience by eight (the final cost being 12 Practical Experience).

The Storyteller determines that the first conflict is determining what kind of implant this actually needs to be, which forces Matt to pore through a whole *warehouse* of Cheiron records and diaries to see if he can find any tidbits of salient information. The Storyteller notes that this will require an extended Wits + Investigation roll, with 10 successes necessary and each roll equaling one hour's worth of searching.

However, the Storyteller builds a second "conflict" into the scenario: an as-yet-unmentioned time limit to that extended roll. If Matt takes longer than three hours, some guards are going to find him and tell him he can't be in there. Un-

fortunately, he *does* take longer, and his search is interrupted. He must find a way to deal with the guards — and he does, by lying and saying he'll leave, when he's really just going to hide in the half-darkness of the warehouse.

Matt finds what he needs after resuming his roll, and he and the Storyteller determine that the diaries of one Doctor Hauptherz note how werewolves are "feral" in their athleticism. And so it's decided. It only seems natural that the hunter's bones should have lycanthrope tendons grafted to them! Of course, Matt's hunter still has two more "conflicts" to confront before this can come to fruition.

The first is, well, she's going to have to *procure* those tendons, isn't she? The hunt for a suitable lupine is not an easy thing, and takes at least one exciting game session to resolve. And resolve it does, in a bloody fight where Matt's hunter takes a bad "fall" (read: she was thrown through a plate-glass window). She has her tendons, but first she has to find a Vigil-friendly doctor to patch her up so she doesn't alert the police in any way, and the Storyteller rules that this search works as the fourth and final "conflict."

Now, she just has to get these lupine tendons into surgery with her. Matt has the hunter keep the werewolf alive, too, so the cell can study the strange creature's healing habits. Of course, this will bring its own conflicts to bear into the game, which is exactly what the troupe wants: by pursuing this Endowment, new avenues of story have opened.

Appropriate Rolls

The Storyteller may deem a number of rolls appropriate to the Research and Development of a new Endowment. Note that a character seeking a new Endowment does not necessarily need to invent or build the item himself: as noted below, VALKYRIE is home to a couple of avenues that allow the character to submit requests and research and aid in development while not directly building the items of Advanced Armory himself. That always remains an option, provided the Storyteller stays consistent with the drama and conflict surrounding the pursuit of a new Endowment. Some of the rolls below are meant to provide some direction for that drama and conflict. They can be used as one point of "conflict" by the Storyteller when a character works to R&D the Endowment.

Research: Generally, use Research as it's found on pp. 55–56 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*. That said, Academics needn't be the only Skill used. Occult is apt (particularly with Relics or Elixirs), and so too is Science (particularly with Thaumatech or Advanced Armory). Extended rolls should always be given some degree of suspense: a threat approaches, a time limit ticks away, or some other complication arises.

Development: Here, development actually equates to the designing, building and implementation of a new item, usually something related to Thaumatechnology or Advanced Armory. This is an extended roll, always, and isn't something that's built swiftly and easily. Intelligence pairs with Crafts, Medicine or Science in the extended roll, with a number of successes necessary equal to three times the total Merit dots deemed necessary for this Endowment. Each roll equates to a

full week's worth of work. This only applies to rolls where the character is building the item himself. Teamwork rules can apply, with secondary actors helping to streamline the process. Once more, suspense should come into play: something attacks the lab, a time limit is in place, and if things go wrong, they do so dramatically.

Red Tape: Sometimes, a hunter has to cut through the tangled bureaucracy of his conspiracy to requisition for a new Endowment, whether one he's developing himself or one he's having the conspiracy develop for him. Chopping through red tape necessitates knowing who's in charge and how best to utilize the channels of power to get what the hunter wants. Manipulation + Politics, extended roll, with each roll equal to one day's worth of phone calls, footwork, bribes, subtle threats and maneuvering. The target number is likely different for each organization: 10 for the Cheiron Group and Task Force: VALKYRIE, eight for the Lucifuge, and six for Malleus Maleficarum, the Ascending Ones and Aegis Kai Doru (as they are less beholden to a bureaucratic structure).

Meditation: Particularly with Benedictions and Castigations, meditation is sometimes key (though some say that hidden Aegis Kai Doru Relics are sometimes revealed in dreams). Meditation is largely as found on p. 51 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, but the number of successes necessary is equal to twice the Merit dots of the Endowment. Meditation can also be fraught with danger, here: visions can turn dark (ruminating on one's own Satanic blood or God's infinite mercy and judgment can be maddening), and one might even gain a temporary derangement upon several failed rolls.

Other Rolls: Obviously, a number of rolls can be appropriate (Subterfuge for lying, Intimidation for interrogation, Computer for hacking, etc.), but they aren't necessarily tailored to the Endowments as precisely as the rolls above.

Advanced Armory R&D

If you're a Task Force: VALKYRIE agent, and you'd like a new piece of gear, you've got several options open to you. The most obvious is to file a request with TAKOMA. This is a lot like filing a prayer with God (the kind most of us get, not the front-of-the-line prayers accessible through Benediction). Developing Advanced Armory is really a matter of knowing how to hook up with suppliers and, preferably, being a bit of a do-it-yourself type.

TAKOMA

TAKOMA's generally referred to in all-caps as a matter of tradition more than sense. It's not an acronym, it's a place — Takoma Park Asset Contracting Facility (sometimes called T-PAC). TAKOMA is the organization that supervises the specialty contractors who supply VALKYRIE's conventional or near-conventional weapons. When the program was launched in 1973, these contractors were more or less created by "firing" operatives from the VALKYRIE payroll and providing them with startup funds, plus rigged contracts and grants. Agents jokingly refer to TAKOMA itself as "nuke free:" no

functional weaponry or components enter the building, being shipped directly from suppliers to cell drops. If TAKOMA's physical premises were breached, the attackers would get, at most, financial data and drop sites. Unfortunately, this means that even if you happen to know where TAKOMA is and go knock on the door, you're still going to have to wait for your damn package.

R&D: TAKOMA can't get a hunter any Advanced Armory above three dots. That said, going through TAKOMA can earn a -1 discount to the Endowment Equation, *but* the hunter must wait until the next story to get the item.

The Forseti Facility

Forseti Manufacturing is a completely legitimate business. Really. VALKYRIE tends to look at it all squint-eyed, though, because it was formed by a couple of former TWILIGHT personnel who actively recruited boys from the Union. They've built up a plant that manufactures devices that are in no way illegal and that they are zoned to produce in every way. They also redistribute a number of off-the-shelf electronic components. It's the target market — VALKYRIE personnel doing DIY — that gets them the squinty looks. Business is good, though. Seems a lot of agents appreciate being able to polish up equipment faster than TAKOMA can come through. And the odds and ends in Forseti's catalog are often just the thing to finish up a pet project.

R&D: Forseti has a lot of odd and interesting spare parts: burnt-out etheric cells, gray market shell casings, rejected or forgotten tech. But it'll cost the hunters to use Forseti. If the hunter's own Resources is at three dots or above, he can use Forseti and gain a -1 discount to the Endowment Equation. Forseti only supplies the parts; the hunter and his cell must build the equipment themselves, or find someone who will.

The Black Book

The story goes like this: VALKYRIE has a black book (some say a database) that has cases deemed "too dangerous" for its normal strike teams. The term "dangerous" can mean a lot of things, but it usually implies a loss of limb, life, or sanity. Could be a haunted oil platform from whence no agents return. Could be a high-profile monstrous target plaguing a city. Might be some spectral train that rattles down the abandoned tracks, and any hunters who go to it come back with a head full of new phobias and no memory of what happened there. These "black book" assignments are often reserved for the worst offenders within the agency: those plucked from prisons, those who have gone mad, those who hope to avert a court martial. While nobody says it aloud, these are suicide squad missions all the way. However, it's also another avenue of getting access to high-profile Advanced Armory fresh out of R&D. Take a black book assignment, and grease the wheels of progress. If the hunter makes it back alive.

R&D: Taking a "black book" assignment involves a mission more dangerous than the cell is used to. However, completing the mission (or at least returning with some modicum of information or success) earns the hunter a -2 discount to the Endowment Equation when requisitioning Advanced Armory equal to four or five dots.

Benedictions R&D

The power does not come from your hands; it is not yours by right or rite. The power does not come from the bell, the book or the candle. Those are the trappings of the mortal Church, and though they are precious and sacred beyond measure, they are not power. The power is God's and God's alone, and it is He who guides it through you. Other organizations see the Malleus Maleficarum in action, and they see "miracles on demand." They misunderstand. God grants His children miracles because they do His work, and because of the intercession of Our Lady and the other saints.

The one true God's been performing miracles as long as anyone's been keeping track. Miracles like those of the Malleus Maleficarum appear briefly in the Acts of the Apostles and extensively in Christian Apocrypha. However, it's not until the Middle Ages that any of the specific rites in use by the Hammer appear. Many of them incorporate Coptic tradition, suggesting they were influenced by Christian rites brought back by the Crusaders from Rhodes and Thebes.

Therein lies the paradox of Benediction. For all that the miracles of the Malleus Maleficarum are alleged not to rely on magic, tradition, or even faith in the modern sense, the Hammer is zealous about documenting its history and training members in the proper forms. The Malleus Maleficarum also has something of the skepticism of the modern Church, combined with the cynicism of long years on the Vigil. Spontaneous miracles are welcomed, but viewed simultaneously with suspicion. Cell members who manifest new miracles frequently and freely are likely to be targeted for inquisition, and even ecclesiastical trial (the Hammer's equivalent of a court martial).

Successful Benediction requires piety, humility, and an understanding of what you're asking of God. Developing a new rite sometimes appears as a flash of inspiration — literal, divine revelation — but it is more often a process of gradual understanding and acceptance of your vocation as a hunter.

Saintly Intercession

The saints who dwell with Christ in Heaven, and who are sometimes said to reign with Him, have greater piety and wisdom than members of the Hammer on Earth. Thus, it is right to pray to those saints, not as gods but as human beings who may plead a member's case before God. Intercession is a critical part of the Malleus Maleficarum's theology — most rites of Benediction are addressed to or at least named for particular saints. Many members of the Hammer, as well as many faithful in general, feel a particular relationship with a saint, often beginning with a feeling of sympathy for a saint's life. Sympathy is not gained easily. Often, the hunter must go to the places where the saint has been (the village center where she was stoned, the house in which he mortified his flesh, the reliquary that holds his finger bones). Some hunters use this to mean enduring the trials and tribulations of that particular saint.

R&D: Developing a relationship with a saint over the course of a story allows a -2 discount to be applied to the Endowment Equation. The subsequent rite *must* be geared toward and named after that particular saint. Saint Camillus de

Lellis, the patron saint of hospitals, should not be ascribed to a rite that brings fiery retribution, and instead would likely be bound to a rite of healing.

Mortification

The Malleus Maleficarum does not approve of mortification of the flesh. The secret articles that govern the Hammer explicitly denounce the practice. The Hammer was established to fight a war against monsters that are not only preternaturally aware of blood, but also physically superior to human soldiers. Vampires able to sniff out a flagellant and then crush his wrist within his own spiked bracelet were a significant concern. Nonetheless, acceptance of mortification within monastic communities from which the Malleus Maleficarum recruited meant that the practice was never banned outright.

R&D: A character who uses mortification to gain enlightenment in developing a new Benediction must cause himself a number of wounds equal to twice the Merit dots necessary for the Endowment over the course of a story. Giving himself all bashing damage nets him a -1 discount to the Endowment Equation, while scourging his flesh with lethal earns a -3 discount. The discount applies as soon as all damage is received (and it *must* be purposefully caused by the character's own willful hand — running headlong into a nest of vampires and suffering damage does not count). Some do not mortify the flesh, however, but deny themselves food, water and sleep for long enough to accumulate bashing damage.

The Offices of Cryptotheology

Cryptotheology bitterly divides the Malleus Maleficarum, and has since at least the 18th century. However, apparent codes within the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, apocryphal texts and even theological treatises have yielded rituals commonly practiced in Benediction. The bleeding edge of the art is cryptorevelation: the idea that God's ongoing revelation to humankind may include messages meant only for those who can decode them. The heart of the debate is the American northeast, home to some of that country's finest theological and mathematical institutions. The Hammer of Boston has funded a formal Office of Cryptotheology; the Hammer of Philadelphia has done the same, but also established a Devil's Advocate to investigate all findings before dissemination outside the diocese.

R&D: Performing homespun Cryptotheology isn't enough on its own: a hunter is as likely to find a cipher or "truth" that somebody has already discovered. The key lies in going to one of the Offices of Cryptotheology and perusing their records and then trying to fill in the gaps or discover something that hasn't been done. (Better still to cozy up to the odd obsessives who often run such offices.) Utilizing cryptotheology in such a way earns the character a -1 discount to the Endowment Equation. Utilizing cryptotheology in such a way earns the character a -1 discount to the Endowment Equation.)

Works over Faith

Serving the Lord is more than just slaying vampires, and the Malleus Maleficarum knows it, even if the fact tends to get lost in the meeting minutes and the endless nights of the

Vigil. All the hours in a day cannot be driven to judging monsters, and it's good for a hunter to spend some time helping those around him. Volunteer at a soup kitchen. Teach people to read. Help with a charity. Basically, do some good works and take some time to see why God wants you to save this world.

R&D: Performing good works equal to one "good work" per Merit dot assigned to the new Benediction does not change the Endowment Equation, but it can reduce the number of Practical Experience necessary to purchase that Benediction. Assume that the cost in Practical Experience is now two less.

Castigation R&D

Spit, skin, blood, hair. That's you. You can trace every atom of every one of those things back through your family tree. Scientists can already get halfway there with DNA and all that. They can tell which parts of you are most closely related to your neighbor or the grocery clerk or the president. They can tell you if your father is really your father, and someday soon, they'll be able to predict your reaction to that information with a statistically insignificant margin for error.

There's more to you than the good stuff, though, isn't there? Somewhere back in your family tree, somebody ate the apple. Somebody fucked the beast. Somebody followed a stranger with smoldering eyes out behind the barn. There's a little devil in you, one the science won't ever find, and that's where Castigation comes from. It comes from reaching down, away from God, away from Heaven, past the bad things your human ancestors did and into the horrifying things that your ultimate, demonic ancestor did.

In the field, Castigation looks like the worship of demons, but it's exactly the opposite. Castigation is putting demons in their place. Staring into the abyss until it has to look away.

Recovered Memory

The War in Heaven, the Fall of Lucifer, the Burning of Eden...these events left their mark on all things, including the blood of the Lucifuge. Through meditation, an agent of the Lucifuge can trace the history hidden in his blood, finding the burns of celestial fire scorched across his DNA, thus reconstructing a scene from the War. Within the Lucifuge, this is a guided exercise, with a mentor leading a pupil back through time and blood to some scene of epic horror. This is both a traditional and a modern practice; modern Lucifuge like to use relaxed hypnotism and interpret the eventual visions at least in part symbolically (as not every member actually believes that nonsense about belonging to Satan's own bloodline). More traditional practitioners use scourging and consider the visions literal; if they seem impossible, that's be-

THE BOOK OF ESCHEATON

One popular apocalyptic text is *The Book of Eschaton*. Reliable copies have been dated back to the 8th century. The bulk of *Eschaton* is the epic of a man damned by God and the ends his children will someday come to. Some Lucifuge dismiss the text as poetic gibberish, but it's well written poetic gibberish, and even describes a few demons in detail.

The author is controversial - some vampires allege he was one of them, but there's nothing in the text that gives him a name or seems to literally refer to him drinking blood. In fact, there aren't any vampires, as the Lucifuge understands them, in *Eschaton* at all. The demonological portions describe blood-drinking demons, but these creatures are clearly ethereal and subject to all sorts of sorcerous taboos.

More likely, the *Eschaton* scribe was a Lucifuge associated with an extinct Christian sect called the Black Abbey, in what is now Lithuania. He may have been consciously modeling his work on the *Revelation of Saint John*. For this reason, he's often referred to as "the Abbot" or even "Abbot," but there's no historical indication that the narrator was actually an authority figure in his community.

cause human vision is imperfect. What everyone who practices memory recovery is doing is trying to find truth in the past to better understand the damnation they have inherited.

R&D: Guided meditation (in which a mentor acts as a secondary actor to a teamwork-style Meditation) must be performed once per chapter (game session) for at least 30 uninterrupted minutes. The hunter must do this a number of times equal to the Merit dots necessary to develop this new Castigation rite. This earns the hunter a -2 discount to the Endowment Equation, but at an additional price: once the rite is earned, the character gains a mild derangement for a number of weeks equal to his Morality.

The Devil's Library

You don't need Satan's blood to have demons on your brain. Demonology has been a field of research for as long as there's been research, and "apocrypha" is the term the Lucifuge use for research on documents originating outside the Lucifucian bloodlines. While the authors of textbooks on the horrors of the pit have often been unpopular in their communities, the Lucifuge doggedly chases down every scrap of knowledge it can, whether from within the Christian world views or not. Studying demonology provides the Lucifuge

with a better understanding of both its foes and its heritage. That said, this doesn't just involve *any* book on demonology: it must be a book considered a part of the so-called "Devil's Library," a rare, single-print book that defies reproduction and appears to truly contain gems of wisdom regarding God, the Devil and demons. These books are singular and should necessitate a whole story to find.

R&D: Possessing and studying a true tome of demonology allows the hunter to take a -2 discount to the Endowment Equation. However, if he cannot possess the book and can only get in a scene of study, he can still reduce the Practical Experience of the new Castigation rite by two.

Deals with Demons

You're not supposed to deal with demons — you're supposed to command them. Ask anybody: they'll tell you that's rule one of Castigation. Except that it turns out to be more rule one of the Lucifuge. Sure, you make compromises with them here and there, and some monsters (like vampires and witches) are far enough away from classic demons that they can almost be treated as peers. But actual bargains? Where *you* do service for *them*? It's frowned upon. But effective. Demons can reveal each other's hot buttons and weaknesses, in exchange for services that are usually as small as they are loathsome.

R&D: Deals with demons offer discounts of -1 per level at which the act required would no longer require a degeneration roll, and may not be greater than 4 or the character's current Morality, whichever is less. For example, a character with Morality 6, asked to perform an act that would require a roll for degeneration at Morality 4, would receive a -2 discount in learning a rite.

Elixirs R&D

Alchemy is, in many ways, the transmutation of one substance into another: lead into gold, life into death, poison into nectar. Elixirs are one result of alchemy, and depending on who you talk to, is either a mystical gift given through Egyptian mysticism (or in particular the works of Hermes Trismegistus) or a bit of divine wisdom passed from Allah to the faithful alchemists of early Islam. Developing a new Elixir means knowing the recipe (you can't just dump drain cleaner and Phoenix feathers into a mason jar and hope for the best, just like you can't throw all the ingredients in a kitchen cabinet together to make a tasty stew) and it means testing that recipe so that the crucible of one's body is so infused with faith or mystical power it turns a drug or a poison into a divine blessing.

Note that once an Elixir is actually discovered, it can usually be recreated by a successful extended Intelligence + Occult roll, with a number of successes necessary equal to twice the dots in that particular Elixir. Each roll is equivalent to an hour's worth of creation (often using mortars, pestles, beakers, burners and all appropriate reagents). However, creating an Elixir is precarious: the hunter only has a number of hours (rolls) equal to his own score in Elixirs before the process falls apart.

This process applies to recreating all known Elixirs, those found in this book and subsequent supplements.

The Golden Tablets

The Ascending Ones keep something known as the Golden Tablets: a list of the names of the world's alchemical masters, both long dead and still kicking. They'll let anybody with Status 3 within the group have a look, but anybody with Status lower than that will have to work to get a peek. See, the hunters of the Ascending Ones really aren't alchemists. They take the potions and smear the unguents. They inhale the smoke and inject the toxins into their arms or eyes. But they themselves are not manipulating the divine, they're just the faithful receptacles — the crucibles in which the divine is made manifest. So, developing an Elixir is, for most Ascending Ones, a quest to find the journals of a dead master or, preferably, a still-living master from whom to learn potent new recipes that lie outside the grasp of most current Ascending Ones. A still-living alchemical master, however, doesn't necessarily look at the Ascending Ones favorably (if he knows of them at all). Earning the favor of one always takes work, often in the form of some task (some need corpses or body parts, others require a collection of truly bizarre reagents).

R&D: If the hunter gets a look at the writings and drawings of an alchemical master and has a full scene to study them, he can reduce the Practical Experience necessary to purchase his new Elixir by two. Alternatively, working with an alchemical master earns a -2 discount to the Endowment Equation, but as noted, the master will surely demand the services of the hunter in some fashion before granting access to his wealth of knowledge or creating the Elixir that a hunter demands.

Commune with the Ancient

Entities exist that are beyond the pale of man and that ken things humanity dares not know. In the desert, a *Djinn* made of whirling hematite lives in the darkest canyon. In the sewers, a many-armed demon sits atop a throne of rats. Atop a watertower an angel sits, a *qashmal* being of divine fire whose body is wreathed in the very wisdom he possesses. These beings can impart their teachings, whether by having them teach a hunter or by pinning them to the ground and pulling their manifested bodies apart bit by bit until they give up the goods (some Ascending Ones even claim that they have gained wisdom from such creatures by *eating* them).

R&D: In addition to doing whatever needs to be done regarding such an ancient being (finding it, convincing it, hurting it, eating it, and so forth), the hunter must also accept a temporary inhuman burden. Being in such close proximity to an alien and celestial creature is not healthy. The next roll to resist degeneration (whenever it comes, be it one day or 10 years later) is made at -2 dice. In accepting all of this, the hunter earns a -2 discount to the Endowment Equation necessary to create this new Elixir.

Drugs and Poisons

Willfully imbibing substances that cause bad trips or toxic reactions *can*, for some, lead to a mode of enlightenment. This is not a traditional way, and it's worth noting that some religious hunters frown on the consumption of narcotic substances, while others swear by it. The results can be damned

enlightening. Sometimes, an Ascending One consumes a substance that rocks her soul right off its foundations. While only the most perverse or adventurous will actually enjoy the experience, the skewed perspective's really something, and it can go a long way toward understanding how drugs and poisons course through the body and can hopefully be shaped by one's will and faith.

R&D: A significant drug trip or poisoning experience can lead to enlightenment. Assume that for every dot in the Elixir, the hunter must suffer for two hours of drug trip or must take two points of damage from the poison. If he seeks to create a three-dot Elixir, a six-hour heroin "adventure" (called "chasing the dragon") will do the trick, as well 3 damage from poison taken in tandem with a three-hour acid trip. This reduces the total Practical Experience expenditure by two.

Relic R&D

You can't create a new Relic, or if you can, the Aegis Kai Doru hasn't figured out how. What it can do, however, is find hidden Relics, or draw new power from discovered (and potentially inert) ones. That might mean following the writings of some heretic cenobite or piecing together the esoteric scraps of a shredded map to find an as-yet-unfound Relic. It might mean taking a sigil-carved Viking Age torc and trying to research its history or somehow "provoke" it into a reaction (pouring blood over it, whispering entreaties to whatever might be trapped within, even attempting to harm it).

The Artifact Trade

Dealers who do occasional business with the Aegis Kai Doru look for the oldest, strangest objects they can find...or do their best to manufacture reasonable forgeries. Aegis cells and libraries have quite a backlog of acquisitions, and even most genuine artifacts don't possess any unusual abilities. Under those conditions, fakes can pass undetected forever. However, truly *lucrative* Relic trading comes from having a product you can demonstrate, or at least point to alleged demonstrations of. The Antikythera Warhead has never been activated, nor has the Hauser Clock, but certain natural disasters correlate with their provenance. For the dealer, provenance is money. Being able to deliver a historied, demonstrated Relic is worth so much it's not even worth counting in cash...provided whomever you took it from isn't waiting outside. For the Shield and Spear, Relics are next to useless without a *lot* of information about where they came from. Like the Lucifer, they're willing to lay out a lot of money to acquire them on principle, and so that no one else does, but nothing beats hard, historical data.

R&D: If the hunter has Academics or Occult at three dots as well as three dots of Resources, he can attempt to find what he's looking for from reputable gray- or black-market antiquarians. That's not to say the cost will always be so plainly in cash, but most deal that way. Approaching a new Relic in this fashion earns the hunter a -1 discount to the Endowment Equation.



The Warehouses

They're not always actual warehouses (though in bigger cities, they are). Some are small caches or storehouses. Some are steamer trunks or abandoned champagne caves. Whatever the form, the result is always the same: a hoard of artifacts that *may* or *may not* be actual Relics, and if they are, nobody's figured out just what the hell they do. Obviously, the agents of the Shield and Spear don't just throw any old thing into the warehouse on the hope that it has potency. All the objects in a warehouse are suspected by in-the-know hunters to have some level of power, but that power at present is contained and hidden and nobody's been able to draw it free in demonstration yet. Hunters looking for a specific Relic or a specific ability may find it here, if they play their cards right. Of course, this involves research and testing. But anybody with Status in the conspiracy is allowed access to the list of warehouse locations, and actually coaxing a Relic to power can provide a boost to one's standing within the group.

R&D: Through research and experimentation, the hunter may use one of these "dormant" Relics as his new Endowment. He gains no bonus to the Endowment Equation or to a lowered Practical Experience cost, but he *does* gain an automatic free dot in Status (Aegis Kai Doru) if successful.

A Voyage of Horror and Mystery

Here's the thing. Some Relics necessitate Herculean (or Sisyphean) adventures to find: a cell gets trapped in the catacombs beneath a Syrian prison; a hunter enters an old silver mine and is besieged by gas-mask-wearing Nazis with spiders for faces; the group must break into an alarmingly well-guarded casino or museum to steal a prominently displayed piece of antiquity.

R&D: If the characters devote at least one chapter (game session) per dot in the new Relic to procuring that Relic, they earn a -2 discount to the Endowment Equation. They have to risk life and limb at least once, though — some even say that, abstractly, some Relics *know* when such attention has been given to them, and they only work for those willing to pay the price to find them.

Thaumatechnology R&D

Implants given to Cheiron Group agents are either highly experimental or already failures. The Group is after marketable medical technologies, primarily for the consumer health-care market. There are ongoing defense-oriented projects, but they're low priority compared to the lucrative open market. Simply put: farming werewolves (and their prodigious healing abilities) to treat cancer is where the big budgets go, not equipping three guys with acid blood. The synergy between the two (acid-blooded guys corralling werewolves) is what keeps Thaumatech coming down the pike to the hunters.

Hunters are both test subjects for the more military-oriented Cheiron projects and the field agents who acquire sample parts. The Cheiron Group is not, as far as any cell

members know, able to mass-produce such implants. The small production scale does allow some personal relationships to form between surgeons and operatives; some teams even have their own "sawbones" to help build and graft new implants in the field.

The Harvest Market

Cheiron is clear about this: it does not use black-market organs, limbs, blood, any of that. That's the official line. That's the end of that, right? Wrong. They damn sure *do* use the black market, and in specific, they pump clandestine funds and requests to an unofficial and unconnected network of hunters who act as procurers, buyers and sellers of such gross medical wares (and these hunters tend to have one dot in Status within TCG and are often themselves fitted with gutter-level Thaumatech). Most Cheiron agents don't know about this, or if they do, it's something veiled in suspicion. But a hunter who knows how to ask the right question, work the streets a little, and maybe pad the right hands with some Euros could gain some phone numbers. Once you're in, you're in. If you know the Perun boys who are good at getting bags of strange blood and wraith-plasm, then you now know the City 17 cell that has a preternatural talent for harvesting zombie parts.

R&D: Hunters first have to somehow uncover and gain access to the purveyors and "merchants" of the Harvest Market. Once they do, they can buy all sorts of off-the-wall stuff, though usually at a cost that goes well beyond money. Using the Harvest Market to develop new Thaumatech earns the hunter a -1 discount to the Endowment Equation.

New and Inspiring!

The World of Darkness is home to a number of creatures that can be categorized in some fashion. Cheiron has little interest in these. Certainly, they need large numbers of such monsters for broad applications, but what they really want is something *new*, something to inspire their surgeons (some of whom consider themselves *artistes*). A tree whose bark is etched with human faces and that weeps bloody sap when wounded? An actual, honest-to-God *true fairy*? A real Yeti? Procuring something truly singular and off the books is a good way to get a spectacular implant: possibly something pulled off the unique creature itself.

R&D: When developing Thaumatechnological Endowments of four or five dots, bringing in a new creature for harvest allows the hunter to spend three less Practical Experience on that Thaumatech.

Scraps

Some Cheiron agents get the experimental stuff, but at least the limbs and bile and blood come from a reputable or trustworthy source. Sometimes, though, Cheiron is glad to... *get creative* with parts that maybe spent too long out in the field before coming into the office, or bits that have proven troublesome in the past but, hey, they have a few lying around in the freezers. If a hunter is willing to utilize these scraps and truly spare parts, they're likelier to give him greater access to R&D.

R&D: Using less-than-quality “parts” for a Thaumatechnological Endowment means the hunter suffers a persistent Flaw while the item is attached. Choose from any of the Flaws found on pp. 218–219 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**. Any flaw can apply, with the Storyteller’s agreement (consider that even something like “Notoriety” can apply if the tattoos on the arm you just implanted belonged to a notorious serial killer — and those tattoos seem to resist being concealed). In accepting this flaw, the character may halve the Practical Experience necessary to develop the new Endowment.

The Peleus Guild

Cheiron was the wise half-horse, half-man who gave medicine and healing to man (and who gave immortality to Prometheus), and once saved a hero by the name of Peleus from attack by a band of maddened centaurs. The surgeons, academics and scientists who belong to the internal and unofficial Peleus Guild are the most gifted the conspiracy has. And they, like Peleus, were saved by Cheiron. Some might have been addicts. Others were crippled or near death, and Cheiron saved them with top-grade Thaumatech. All consider themselves indelibly in debt to the organization and will, for a price, help a hunter develop just the Thaumatechnological Endowment he so desires. The true number of members within this internal “secret society” remains unknown, though most suspect it doesn’t go beyond a couple dozen individuals.

R&D: The hunter must take one of the Peleus Guild as a four-dot Mentor (spending the experience points as is proper). Doing so also necessitates impressing the individual, of course, though before that the hunter must first *find* the Peleus Guild. Once the Mentor is in place, *any* new Thaumatechnological Endowments the hunter develops from that point forward are done with the help of that mentor, and thus earn a -2 discount to the Endowment Equation.

Org Creation

The compacts and conspiracies listed in this book are by no means exhaustive. They’re meant to serve as examples: yes, maybe they all exist in your **Hunter: The Vigil** story, and together they form a rich and bloody tapestry of political intrigue and human violence. Alternatively, it’s possible your story only features a handful — or even just one — of the organizations listed. If you feel a story featuring *only* the schemes and actions of the Cheiron Group is the one way to hammer home the tale you hope to tell, then by all means, do so.

In this section, however, we provide you briefly with the resources necessary to create your own hunter compact or conspiracy. Whether you create this organization as a Storyteller hoping to put these guys as characters into your world, or whether you create it as a troupe of players building upon the motives and needs of a nascent cell, you should find everything you need below.

Compact or Conspiracy

First step: how big and how old is this hunter organization going to be? If it’s relatively local, it’s probably a second-tier compact. A compact *can* be ancient, mind you (imagine a group of Ethiopian hunters in the city of Axum, whose sole purpose over the last thousand years has been to guard the Ark of the Covenant from monstrous hands), but isn’t globally reaching like the third-tier conspiracies.

Conspiracies are often ancient (though some can be relatively new, à la Task Force: VALKYRIE), and are certainly far-reaching. While their numbers may not be enough to comprise a genuine army, they still likely go well beyond the city limits, and very possibly beyond the borders of one’s country, as well. In addition, conspiracies have access not only to common resources, but also to Endowments: secret (and often supernatural) weapons with which to hold back the forces of darkness.

Common Purpose

Yes, it’s *possible* that hunters band together just to stay alive. In a city truly besieged by a seemingly endless tide of monstrous corruption, hunter cells may need no other purpose beyond “survive,” and then “take back our city.” A compact known as the Detroit Seven might comprise seven hunter cells from wildly different backgrounds who, in the vein of the Candle Compact, have managed to put aside all differences for now to turn the tables on the creatures of the World of Darkness.

Usually, though, that’s not enough.

Take a peek at the hunter organizations in this book. They have shared purpose. Null Mysteriis seeks to study and explain the paranormal. The Long Night aims to push through this monstrous Tribulation so that Christ may come and bring mighty Armageddon. The Cheiron Group sees monsters as resources, and gladly harvests their parts to make new skin creams, chemical inhibitors or prosthetics (and from this, one could suggest that their common purpose is to *make money*).

What is it that binds the hunter cells together? To what dogma do they hew? Is it political? Are they anarchic firebrands who seek to break the monsters’ tainted grip on big government and big business? Could they have a religious function, like a group of hunters who believe themselves the incarnation of angels, or a conspiracy of men who cling to a Manichaean party line (all flesh is evil, thus corporeal monsters must be destroyed to release their spirits)?

It’s even possible that they only hunt one manifestation or “type” of monster. The Foes of Belial only hunt demons. The Jacksonville branch of the American Ghost Hunters Alliance hunts...well, only ghosts. The Sons of the Mind might be a group composed of the children of cult members and victims who have banded together to put a stop to the various cults and sects that call the American heartland home.

Shadows of History

How long have these hunters been doing what they do? Maybe they’re a relatively new phenomenon. Task Force:

VALKYRIE has really only been around for the last couple of centuries, and the Cheiron Group is apparently pretty recent, too (though certainly some whisper that their origins are far more ancient than they're letting on). Hell, maybe your organization is *really* new, having just formed in the last year or two (which makes for great conflict because the group will still be finding its feet).

Alternatively, the compact or conspiracy may go back a millennium or more. Could the ancient Nibiru or Aves Minerva (p. 18) still be around in a modified form? What kinds of hunter organizations might have grown up out of the fall of Rome, the rise of any of the Manchu, the destruction of Pompeii, or the burning of the White House?

Identify the origins, and from there, examine just what the hunters have been doing. Have they been so on track that they've never diverged from their initial goals? Or, as is more likely, has time slowly blown the group off course, so much so that some of their original motives and aims have been lost?

The Enemy

How do they deal with the inhuman fiends of the World of Darkness? One hunter group might approach one monster differently than the next: a compact of African *okomfo* (shrine and temple guardians) might believe that witches represent a malicious threat because they are humans who have accepted evil spirit magic into their hearts — but they might *alternately* offer sympathy and aid to vampires because they are sad, dead creatures whose monstrous natures were not of their making.

It's also worth looking at "monsters" from a general perspective. Is the group overall vengeful and violent, cutting a fiery or gory swath through the armies of evil? Do they approach the Vigil as something that necessitates prudence and patience, resorting instead to stealthy techniques and investigation to answer their problems? Might they actually be capable of some mercy? Monsters are awful, yes, but some can be saved, and some might even be open to an alliance (however tense and tenuous such an alliance might be).

The Hunters

Where do the hunters of the organization come from, originally? What shared backgrounds do these hunters possess? It's easy to see how the Malleus Maleficarum is an easy draw for penitent and blue-collar Catholics, while the Long Night is likelier to open its arms to more fundamentalist and evangelical Christians. Those of Ashwood Abbey are hedonists and deviants, drawn into the cult either by desire or even through blackmail. So what is it that roughly unifies the hunters of your nascent compact or conspiracy?

It could be something simple, such as all the members of the group are mothers and fathers: this so-called Children's Crusade compact might devote its energies to saving the innocent children of the world from the depredations of darkness, and so the common theme among hunters is that they're parents. Alternatively, if the organization is something altogether more criminal (maybe they want to break the monstrous monopoly over the black market), it

might pull in hunters from all manner of criminal backgrounds: thieves, chop-shop workers, dealers, fences, leg-breakers and so forth. Certainly that means the Criminal Profession is a common denominator, but within that, you have a lot of flexibility.

Another question regarding the hunters isn't just who they are, but how they join. Hunter organizations don't advertise. Maybe the org knows that a lot of supposedly "damaged goods" are people who have had to deal with the hidden monsters, and so they concentrate recruiting efforts on rehab, self-help groups, even prisons. If it's a group devoted to ancient mysteries, then it stands to figure that the recruitment pool is likely to include academics, researchers, lecturers, occultists, museum curators and the like.

Do they recruit with open arms, advertising a kind of communal brotherhood? Or do they blackmail hunters into joining, or outright lie so that the poor fools don't know what they're getting into until they're already hip deep in it?

Factions

Does your compact have separate factions? It has to be relatively large to support a large number of factions, but even small groups might be split into two philosophies or follow two separate leaders within the group. Some factions don't communicate with one another and have little central leadership, meaning they're ultimately free to do as they choose, with little ramification. In other groups, factions are shepherded by some focal figure or reigning hunter cell, and so they work in tandem to accomplish goals. On a simple level, one faction might be devoted to research while another uses that research to accomplish a more active goal (the destruction or rehabilitation of the offending entities, for instance).

Stereotypes

The default approach is that the hunter compacts and conspiracies exist as a limitless series of unknown variables. It's all gray. Maybe the topmost executives of the Cheiron Group are aware of the existence of Task Force: VALKYRIE, but their body of "knowledge" is probably 75% wrong or just plain made up. Lesser groups might not even *know* about the other groups. Sure, a cell of Union boys finds that another hunter cell has violated its turf to steal some kind of ancient Canopic jar from the museum. They don't know jack about the Aegis Kai Doru, or the Loyalists of Thule, or the Ascending Ones — all of whom could've been the organization commanding that the sacred jar be stolen in the first place. The organizations exist behind a gauze of mystery, though you can dial that up or down as you see fit. (In Philadelphia, the groups are a bit more aware of each other, due to the occasional revisiting of the Candle Compact, for instance.)

It's important to discern not only what your organization knows regarding the other groups, but also what it thinks of them. Could the hunters of the Long Night make instant allies, or might their religious outlook be in direct opposition to your nascent group's approach to the Vigil? Have the hunters

of your organization long sought to put sleeper agents into the bureaucratic machinations of the Cheiron Group to uncover not just that conspiracy's secrets, but the organization's actual purpose and history?

Systems

Your compact or conspiracy may have some systems concerns to consider upon designing the fundamental elements of this new hunter organization.

Status

The hunters of your organization gain benefits at one, three and five dots of Status within the group. Within the narrative, each dot of Status ultimately contributes to a larger role within the organization, just as it does within any group. However, it's the system benefit we're discussing here.

The benefits of Status generally lean toward providing further Merit-type benefits (adding free Allies, Contacts, Retainers, Mentors, Resources and so forth) upon gaining Status. A compact whose hunters all belong to a kind of "secret police/good old boy" network (meaning they're all cops or related to cops) will likely find that increased Status gives them a greater connection to police-related Allies and Contacts (other police, the mayor's office, FBI, internal affairs, so forth). Some Merits aren't really appropriate, of course: gaining rank within an organization is unlikely to magically allow one's mind to possess an Eidetic Memory or braid their muscles in such a way that

Strong Back mysteriously manifests. Social Merits are common. Other "teachable" Merits work, too — Fighting Styles, for instance, or even Holistic Awareness or Meditative Mind (both of which could be cultivated as a part of the org's ethos and approach to the Vigil).

It's also possible that the hunter has access to free Skill Specialties (maybe the aforementioned "secret police" compact has access to a Politics Specialty dealing with "getting around laws").

For hunters of a third-tier conspiracy, the first dot of Status goes toward allowing that hunter to purchase the Endowment of that organization (see below).

Endowment

If your group is a third-tier conspiracy, it's likely that the hunters of that group have access to an advanced or supernatural resource unique to that organization. The Endowment should thematically reflect everything you've dictated up until this point — the hunters' motives, the group's history, its ultimate purpose and theme. A high-tech crew might have all manner of secret ciphers and code-breaking hacks, while a conspiracy driven by Manichaean thought might rely on ritual texts excavated at Ismant el-Kharab (part of an oasis south of Cairo). It would, of course, be inappropriate if the high-tech cell relied on the excavated texts...unless they were able to procure a modern program code by deciphering the ancient writings found within.

Mechanically, Endowments are Merits, and are bought with experience points or Practical Experience accordingly.

Flesh Trade Pt IV

PAGE 01 OF 03	UTC RELEASE TIME		PRECEDENCE		CLASS		SPECIAL		INFO		CIC		ORG-MSG IDENT	
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The address led them back into south Kensington, to an old wreck of a tenement surrounded by derelict buildings and rubble-strewn lots. Jack killed the van's lights a couple of blocks early and eased slowly to the curb about 30 yards away. Barely a handful of streetlights were working near the old tenement, and pools of deep shadow were plentiful.

"No way anybody's living in that shithole," Dean said, eyeing the building. The ground-floor windows were boarded up, and most of the rest were little more than gaping holes, letting in the freezing rain.

Vince tried to stifle a yawn. It was almost 1:30 in the morning. "Somebody's in there," he said, pointing at a trio of windows facing the street along the top floor. They were covered by curtains - or bed sheets, for all Vince could tell - and backlit by a dim, yellow glow.

Dean shook his head. "I don't like this. Why would these guys use the same alias to buy their hideout? I thought you said they were pros."

"Who knows?" Gabreski shrugged. "Maybe they didn't have a choice. They're still pretty new to this country. Building a good alias takes time and money. Karl, any idea how long Lermontov's owned the building?"

The reporter was sitting on the floor behind the driver's seat with his laptop open in his lap. He'd been typing steadily since they'd left Blackfriar's. "Something like three months. Dude bought the warehouse shortly afterward."



"Okay, so they've only been in business for a short time," Vince mused. He wondered how Agent Carver had heard about the Russians' activities so quickly. How much did Carver know that he wasn't sharing?

You're talking about mass murder.

What did they do with the bodies?

Is there anything else I need to know?

A nagging suspicion pricked the hairs on the back of Gabreski's neck. Shifting in the seat, he drew his pistol and checked the safety.

"Let's do this," he growled. "Andrea, you sure you're good to go?"

The female detective was already at the sliding door, her gun hanging loose in her right hand. She insisted the paralysis had almost completely gone. "You damn sure aren't going in there without me."

"That's my girl," he said. "Okay, everybody knows the drill: we go in fast, grab the first Russian that looks like he's got a clue, and we get out. Let's go."

Gabreski was the first one out, catching a gust of wind and sleet full in the face. The shock snapped him awake and sharpened his senses. Teeth bared, he crouched low and came around the front of the van, falling in behind Jack Dean as the group dashed across the dark street.

Dean fished a small flashlight from his jacket as they swept up the steps of the tenement and pulled open the heavy metal door. A reek of old cinders, rotting wood and feces gusted out, hitting them in the face.

The foyer of the old building was full of shit, both figurative and literal. A cleared path through the debris led across the floor and to a flight of crumbling stairs. Dean shone the light up the steps, pausing to gather his nerve before ascending.

The wooden risers creaked and popped with each cautious step. Vince grimaced inwardly at the echoing racket that preceded them up the stairwell. He wished he could tell Dean to kill the light and conceal their position, but it was the only way they could navigate the treacherous stairs.

At the fourth floor, just shy of the top, Dean paused to let the others catch up. They waited, struggling to control their breathing, and listened intently for any signs of activity on the floor above. Vince heard the slow squeak of footsteps and some muffled sounds that might have been voices. Behind that, a strange, thready note rose and fell over the other sounds - some kind of music perhaps, or singing? Vince couldn't be sure. Whatever it was, it set his teeth on edge.

Dean looked to Vince for the go signal. Vince glanced back at the others, making sure everyone was ready. Andrea was right behind him, then Raimundo. Then, right behind the gang leader, was Karl.

Vince's eyes widened. Hadn't he told the kid to stay in the van and keep an eye on the suit? He couldn't remember at this point. Maybe he'd just taken it for granted that the reporter wouldn't be dumb enough to want to come along. It was too late to argue about it now.

Gabreski tapped Dean's shoulder, and the detective led the way up the last set of stairs. The top-floor landing was piled with even more trash and broken furniture than the other levels; the current occupants looked like they'd been busy renovating in the last couple of months.

Vince saw only one door they could reach from the stairs, ahead and to the left. Paint peeled from its wooden surface, and faint yellow light leaked from beneath the jamb. Now he could clearly hear muffled voices on the other side.

The door looked pretty stout, but the wall and doorframe hadn't been reinforced. Vince motioned for Dean to stand aside. He took a deep breath, took four long steps and put his boot against the door, just beside the tarnished brass knob.

Wood splintered with a brittle crunch and the door burst inward. Vince dashed through, pistol ready. "Philadelphia PD!" he roared. "Get on the fucking floor!"

He found himself in a large, rectangular room, stretching off to the right. His boots scuffed on layers of worn, moth-eaten rugs, caked with years of dust and grime. Flickering yellow lantern light played across the surfaces of old, wooden furniture: tattered couches and high-backed chairs, sagging bookshelves and dark, hulking cabinets. Frayed curtains hung from the tall window opposite the door.

An old woman sat in one of the chairs to Vince's left. She wore a black, severe-looking dress and a lace shawl wrapped around her head and shoulders. Her skin was white as parchment, and her large, bulging eyes shone like polished marbles in the dim light. Long-fingered hands fluttered in shock; Vince saw that the nails were thick and sharp.

A gaggle of young children were sitting on the piled rugs around the grandmother's feet. They wore new jeans, clean shirts and expensive shoes. Dark blood covered their pale hands up to the wrists and was smeared across their pointed chins. The bodies of a half-dozen large rats were piled on the floor between them, their bellies chewed open and the guts torn by small, clawed hands.

The children bared pointed teeth and let out a chorus of terrible, inhuman howls.



Chapter four



Hunters are human. They are mortal beings, given over to the foibles and frailties of that condition. But that doesn't stop hunters from being different. A soldier experiences things in war that separates him from those who have not, just as a firefighter rushing into a burning building or a detective driven to track down an elusive serial killer have some spark within them that marks them as unique. Hunters are similar. They're human, but choosing the Vigil is about choosing the madness of truth, the danger of the hunt. As such, hunter characters are given over to systems unique to their calling. This chapter explores and defines those special systems.

Practical Experience

It's frightening and brutal, but it's true — the *raison d'être* of a hunter is to confront the horrors and mysteries of the World of Darkness. **Hunter** characters earn experience points as described on pp. 216–217 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook** — for the learning curve, for roleplaying, for facing danger and so on. Those experience points can be used to purchase anything on the character sheet (with one exception, discussed presently). But for killing monsters, for fulfilling their chosen task and keeping the Vigil, they earn Practical Experience.

Practical Experience is not doled out exclusively at the end of a chapter or a story, the way normal experience points are. Instead, in any scene in which hunters face a supernatural creature, they have a chance to receive Practical Experience. The scene doesn't have to be explicitly combat oriented. A scene of tense discussion and exchanged threats can also net a cell some Practical Experience, as would a scene of direct investigation, such as following a creature back to its lair. The scene does have to be a confrontation, or at least contain the very real possibility of one. It's possible, if unlikely, that a cell of hunters develops a rapport with, for example, a vampire looking to cure his condition, or a werewolf who has taken a vow never to harm a human. In such an instance, scenes with these characters — scenes with no risk — do not give the cell a chance for Practical Experience.

At the end of the scene, the Storyteller compiles a pool of Practical Experience points. The base number in the pool is equal to the number of hunters involved in the scene (including any Storyteller-controlled hunters). From there, the Storyteller makes the following adjustments:

+1 for every exceptional success roll when acting directly against a monster (opposed Social rolls, Stealth rolls and, of course, attack rolls count; reflexive resistance rolls do not)

+1 for every dramatic failure rolled during the scene, regardless of what kind of roll it was. Dramatic failures resulting from failed risk rolls (see p. 66) count toward this total. Hunters can learn just as much from dangerous failure as from success — maybe even more. The trick, of course, is surviving these failures.

+1 if the monster(s) displayed powers or abilities that were a) supernatural in nature and b) new to at least half of the group (rounding up). The Storyteller is the final arbiter of whether this bonus applies, and the players are encouraged to keep notes on what their characters witness to make this judgment easier.

+1 if the cell used a Tactic successfully.

"Oh man, you fuckin' trashed the fucker. You scrambled his sorry self, look at that, you did, you laid him out like fuckin' shredded wheat."
- Tim O'Brien,
"The Things They Carried"

+1 if the Tactic had never been used “in the field” (that is, against a real monster) before.

+1 if the cell saved the life of at least one person during the scene, not counting other hunters.

+1 if the hunters drove the creature off.

+2 if the hunters immobilized or captured the creature.

+2 if the hunters used a creative new approach or strategy with success.

+3 if the hunters killed/destroyed the monster, or permanently rendered the creature harmless (for example, giving a slasher a lobotomy that “rewires” his urge to kill, or truly redeeming a monster by forcing/helping it to become human).

-1 if any bystanders (that is, neither monster nor hunters) came to harm.

-1 for any instance of the group working against itself — friendly fire, one-upmanship, etc. (Storyteller’s discretion).

-1 if any member of the cell fell victim to a mind- or emotion-influence power.

-1 if any member of the cell put anyone else (hunter or otherwise) in direct danger.

-1 if the cell attempted but failed to perform a Tactic.

-2 if any bystanders were killed (not cumulative with the “coming to harm” penalty, above).

-2 if the hunters were forced to flee (if a retreat was part of the plan from the beginning, this doesn’t apply).

-2 for every derangement gained or provoked (meaning the player failed the character’s roll to resist a derangement during that scene).

-3 for each hunter killed.

Add It Up

Once the Storyteller has added up all the modifiers, he asks the players what their characters have learned about monsters during this encounter. This information needs to be

based on their direct observation (inferences *can* be acceptable, though, of course, hunters need to be wary of relying on them) during that confrontation. The information also needs to be new. Once the cell has learned that vampires are weaker if they haven’t fed for a long period of time, it can’t get Practical Experience for that piece of information again. As such, it’s important for someone, either the Storyteller or a player, to keep a log of brief statements enumerating what the cell has learned. Doing so has several benefits, beyond the immediate one of keeping straight what the cell has gained Practical Experience for learning. The players can use this list to figure out where the gaps in the cell’s knowledge lie, and the Storyteller can use the list to avoid repetition.

The Storyteller can accept a maximum of one suggestion per player for this portion of the Practical Experience pool. When all of the suggestions are in, the Storyteller totals the points and reveals the total to the players.

Keep It, Bank It

The players can divide the points in any way they see fit. Practical Experience can be placed in a “bank” for later use in buying Tactics, or can be given to individual characters. If it is banked, however, it cannot be used for increasing character’s traits or regaining Willpower, unless all the players agree to “withdraw” the points. Practical Experience belongs to the troupe, not to any one player. This applies to new characters who might come to join the cell: upon joining, they have access to the group’s Practical Experience, but only if all parties agree to make it available. Otherwise, it stays “banked” for the cell’s group use.

Spending Practical Experience

Practical Experience can be spent in one of three ways.

- A player can spend a point to regain Willpower. See p. 66 for more details.
- A player can spend Practical Experience to increase Skills and Merits (including Endowments), but not Attributes.
- A troupe can spend Practical Experience to purchase Tactics for a cell, or to train a new member to use existing Tactics.

Example: A cell of four hunters tracks down a vampire’s blood-addicted servant. As far as the hunters know, this wretched being is weak and sickly, diseased from years of supping on nothing but the blood of the undead. They corner him in an alley, hoping to squeeze him for information...but they get more than they anticipated.

The servant attacks when he can’t escape and wrestles with one of the hunters. The hunter tries to break free of the grapple, but wrenches his shoulder in the attempt (the player rolled a dramatic failure). The other

ALL ABOUT TIMING

You may feel that ending a tense tactical scene with an out-of-game discussion about Practical Experience interrupts the flow of the narrative. If that’s the case, go ahead and either discuss it at the end of the session instead of the middle of it, perhaps even relegating it to a discussion over email later that week.

If you go this route, though, both Storyteller and players should still endeavor to take some quick notes immediately following the tense scenario to help jog the memory at the end of the chapter or before the next one.

WOW, ISN'T THAT A LOT?

In the example, which isn't an especially momentous battle, the characters gained 10 Practical Experience. Doesn't that mean that Hunter characters can rack up Skills and Merits (individually) and Tactics (collectively) at a frightening rate?

Yes, if they pursue monsters scene after scene. But remember, hunters don't have an easy way to heal damage, and if they don't take time to rest and recuperate, they're going to be badly injured or killed. The Practical Experience system is written to encourage risk-taking, yes, but also to encourage hunters to plan their encounters as much as possible, to calculate their risks and to have a strategy going in.

If you find as Storyteller that the system grants too much Practical Experience for your troupe's taste, reduce the final tally by half or one quarter after all the modifiers are in. You could also simply be more stringent with the learning curve aspect (perhaps accepting only one statement from the whole troupe, rather than one per player) or not count Storyteller characters toward the total.

characters engage in a tense standoff as the creature holds the hunter immobile, until one of them manages to put a bullet into the servant's head and kill it.

After the fight, the Storyteller starts with a pool of four Practical Experience (one for each character). The troupe rolled one dramatic failure and one exceptional success (the shot that killed the creature), so the Storyteller adds two to the pool (six). The blood-slave didn't display any supernatural abilities that the characters haven't seen before; it was much stronger than they'd guessed, but in the past they have seen frail-looking monsters prove to be much mightier than their frames would indicate. The cell didn't use Tactics and no bystanders were involved, and they killed the creature (+3 for a total of nine).

On the other hand, the Storyteller feels that the bullet that killed the creature, well placed though it was, could just as easily have killed the hunter the slave was grappling (the shooter's player risked Willpower, and so a failure probably would have sealed the already wounded character's fate). The Storyteller states this counts as putting another hunter in direct danger, and the players agree that while the gamble paid off, it wouldn't be a tactic they'd repeat. This strips two points from the total.

The Storyteller tells the players they have seven points of Practical Experience as things stand, and asks if their characters

have learned anything worthy of more. The player whose character was injured states he was under the impression that vampire blood had no effect on those who drank it beyond inducing loyalty (something the cell learned in a previous encounter), but it seems it can also increase a slave's strength. Another player offers a lesson of "vampires are immune to bullets, but their servants aren't." The third player says her character learned that blood-slaves don't have access to the mind-controlling powers of their undead patrons, and the final player notes that someone who has drunk from a vampire does not rise up as a vampire himself (a theory that the cell had bandied about previously). The Storyteller decides that all of these statements are viable except the second one, as the cell has seen that vampires are in fact not immune to bullets, just resistant, and the hunters didn't have any reason to assume the creature shared that resistance (especially based on the first lesson — the cell was surprised to see the creature's strength, after all). The extra three points take the total to 10. The players decide to "bank" six of the points, and have each of their characters take one for personal use (raising traits or regaining Willpower).

Tactics

The monsters of the World of Darkness stay secretive for good reason. One human being isn't dangerous, even if he has training or will. Four human beings can be an inconvenience, but if they're frightened or disorganized, even a relatively weak creature can pick them off. But a group of humans who have studied their foes,

discussed their plans and practiced what they will do until it becomes muscle memory? Those humans are deadly, and that kind of organization is what monsters fear the most.

Of course, that kind of organization exists — that's what the Vigil is. Successful cells of hunters (that is, the ones that survive for any length of time) develop *Tactics*, specialized maneuvers to damage, hinder and even learn from supernatural creatures. A cell can teach a new hunter how to use a Tactic, and one of the major benefits of belonging to one of the compacts or conspiracies is that cells can share information, including *Tactics*.

Tactics require practice and discipline to execute correctly, and they don't bestow supernatural alacrity or strength on the hunters who use them. Just as policemen instinctively checks the corners when clearing a building with his partner, just as a doctor relies on his nurse to hand him the proper tools in surgery — even a basketball player checking his peripheral vision for an opening makes for a good comparison. *Tactics* only work if every member of the cell does his job.

In game terms, *Tactics* make use of the teamwork rules found on p. 134 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*. Those rules are summarized here. In addition, *Tactics* add a few more permutations, which are also explained.

MONSTER AMONG US

What happens when a player takes on the role of a monster in a predominantly Hunter game? If the Storyteller allows this situation, he (and the troupe) must be prepared for the fact that violence might ensue, and characters might well die. Yes, a cell of Null Mysteris hunters might welcome the chance to sit down with a mage and discuss how magic works. Of course, they might decide they'll get further with an autopsy. In this instance, it's probably best to remind everyone involved that character death is a possibility - once - and proceed from there. Storytellers, be fair, don't favor either side, and don't feel compelled to make it easier on the lone supernatural character. Players, be true to your characters, but remember that this isn't a video game, either.

- One character is the *primary actor* for the Tactic. The player of that character makes the *last* roll in the Tactic, the one that ultimately determines whether the Tactic succeeds or fails.
- All other characters are *secondary actors*. They make their rolls before the primary actor.
- Any successes on a secondary actor's roll add to the primary actor's dice pool. A failure adds nothing, and may have additional effects (see individual Tactic descriptions). A dramatic failure imposes a -4 penalty on primary actor's roll, *in addition* to any of the effects of a failure.
- A player can choose to risk Willpower (see p. 65) as either a secondary or primary actor, with all the benefit and risk that entails. A player can also spend Willpower normally, of course.
- A player with Professional Training ••••• *cannot* turn a Tactics roll into a rote action, even if it uses one of the character's Asset Skills.

Response to Tactics

Players and Storytellers familiar with other World of Darkness games might wonder how Tactics work when employed against creatures that can think, reason and respond. After all, many of these Tactics are predicated upon the monster taking certain actions — suppose it doesn't? Worse, suppose one player is taking on the role of a vampire (*à la Vampire: The Requiem*), and the Hunter characters decide to enact a little Controlled Immolation?

There's no easy answer here, and in a situation where Tactics-using hunters battle intelligent monsters, the onus is on the Storyteller (as the only one with all of the information at his disposal) to make everything make sense. Tactics are not magic spells, and they do not automatically counter any supernatural power that creatures possess. For instance, several Tactics, such as Dentistry, Net and Staking, rely on the hunter pinning the

monster down. A monster that can change into liquid form is going to escape that Tactic in short order — and that's appropriate. The hunters can learn from this situation, gaining more Practical Experience and perhaps devising a Tactic that *can* defeat the creature. The Storyteller needs to consider what powers a monster has and how they will interact with the Tactics the cell possesses. The players, likewise, need to trust the Storyteller to play fair by them and not add powers to monsters just to counter Tactics the Storyteller didn't see coming.

Learning, Creating and Modifying Tactics

Tactics are purchased with Practical Experience. The cost for Tactics can be spread around a cell. A Tactic can be purchased for any number of hunters, regardless of how many hunters are required to actually perform the Tactic. That Tactic can then be taught to other cells. Tactics can also be developed independently of a teacher (this, in fact, is how tier-one cells usually gain Tactics, since they can't rely on a larger organization to teach them). The distribution of cost when purchasing a Tactic isn't important. If a five-member cell wishes to learn a Tactic costing 10 experience points, they could each pay two, or one of them could pay all 10, or any other combination. Once the cost has been paid, all the hunters know the Tactic and are theoretically capable of teaching it (see the restrictions on teaching Tactics, below).

Hunters do not need to meet the prerequisites for a Tactic in order to learn it, but they do need to meet those prerequisites before they can use the Tactic. Learning the theory behind a Tactic and practicing it in a safe environment are much easier than actually performing it against a real monster. For instance, a hunter with no dots in Brawl can learn the Hamstring Tactic, but won't be able to help the cell use the Tactic in the field until the player spends the experience points to buy a dot of Brawl for that character.

From the perspective of the story, a hunter cell can acquire a new Tactic in one of two ways: by learning it from another hunter, or by creating it. Cells can also modify Tactics they already know, which is considerably easier than creating or learning new ones.

Creating Tactics

Creating a Tactic is the most common way for tier-one cells to acquire Tactics, though tier-two and three cells can certainly do so as well. A cell that observes or hears about another cell using a Tactic and decides to figure it out itself is, in effect, creating the Tactic. This system also works well for Tactics that the players design, and some discussion on this topic is included here, too.

In order to attempt to create a Tactic, someone in the cell needs to have the required traits to be primary actor for the Tactic. The other characters don't need to have the pre-

requisites to learn the Tactic, though they will need to purchase them before they can *use* the Tactic.

From the perspective of the characters, creating a Tactic is a matter of training, experimentation and luck. The hunters first need to figure out exactly how the Tactic is going to work. Are certain types of terrain going to make it unusable? What equipment is necessary? How many people are required to make this work? In game terms, the players of the hunters devising the Tactic need to roll Intelligence + the highest Skill required for the Tactic. This is called the *conceptualization roll*. For instance, if the cell is devising the Corral Tactic (p. 218), the conceptualization roll is Intelligence + Intimidation, whereas if they are devising the Dentistry Tactic (p. 220), the roll would be Intelligence + Brawl. In the rare event that a Tactic doesn't require a Skill, the conceptualization roll can be an Attribute task (see p. 122 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). This roll can be made by one character or as a teamwork action. In any event, regardless of whether this roll succeeds or fails, the cell progresses on to the next stage.

The next stage is fine-tuning through practice. The hunters need to be able to rely on muscle memory and composure in order to apply the skills they use in a practice run while actually fighting a supernatural horror. Take the number of successes from the conceptualization roll and subtract them from the Practical Experience cost of the Tactic (Corral is 14 Practical Experience). The resultant number is how many hours *each individual hunter* must spend practicing the Tactic. (If the conceptualization of Corral earned five successes, then nine hours would be necessary to practice.)

The players must each roll Stamina + Resolve (the *practice roll*) before practice begins. If the conceptualization roll failed, the character must not only practice the full amount of time, but also suffers -3 dice on the practice roll.

Success on the practice roll indicates that the character weathers the mental and physical rigors of tireless practice (even if the practice is gained in hourly drips and drabs). Failure or an inability to complete the necessary hours for training hinders the hunter's understanding and application of the Tactic, as noted below.

The next step? Spending the Practical Experience, and then...the field test, where the cell puts the Tactic into action (hopefully against a lesser opponent, but such is the life of risk hunters lead — many aren't afforded the chance to test Tactics against weaker adversaries). Those hunters who either failed the practice roll or could not commit the requisite number of hours to practice suffer a -3 to any Tactic-based rolls during the enactment of the Tactic. This penalty remains for all uses of the Tactic until the cell succeeds on the Tactic *at least once*. Once the cell properly performs the Tactic, that penalty ends for the hunter (as the character finally "gets it").

While the process of creating a Tactic can be reduced to a series of rolls, it might be more satisfying to the players to discuss the Tactic in character, play through a scene or two of practice, and then "debrief" to figure out if it's really going to work in the field. The Storyteller can and should grant positive modifiers to the conceptualization roll for logical discussion, identifying problems and fixing them preemptively, and lateral thinking.



STORYTELLING TACTICS: SHOW, DON'T TELL

Tactics have the potential to become dice-rolling exercises, and thus not very exciting, if the Storyteller and the players don't work together to keep them evocative. Consider these two presentations of the Cripple Claws Tactic.

Tell:

Storyteller: *OK, you got more successes than he did, so you do three levels of damage to him, and his hand is useless for the scene. It's his turn now, so he reaches out with the other hand and grabs you by the face. Take four aggravated damage.*

Show:

Storyteller: *OK, you got more successes than he did. You swing the bat at his fingers and feel it strike something. He pulls his hand back in surprise, but the nails you put in the end of the bat catch his fingers and shred the skin on his hand. He shrieks in pain.*

Player (in character): *"Watch out! Don't get cocky, he's still -"*

Storyteller: *And that's all you get out. He reaches behind him with his good hand and claps it over your face. You feel the skin over your cheekbones loosen, and then start to slough off. Take four aggravated damage.*

The same is true for learning Tactics. You don't have to describe what every roll means, but a quick scene here and there - describing what the characters are doing, how they're responding to the physical demands of learning the Tactic, what feelings it spurs in them to know that they'll have to actually do this in the field - goes a long way toward making Tactics more than just strategic exercises. Moreover, inserting tension into the mix (something that interrupts the necessary practice, perhaps) helps to keep the process dramatic and evocative.

If, on the other hand, the players would rather just forgo the dice rolls entirely, the Storyteller can allow the cell to purchase the Tactic at full cost and then apply the modifier to the first "field use," as if the practice rolls had failed. This is quicker, bypassing the dice rolling and allowing the troupe to get right to the action.

Note: None of the rolls involved with creating Tactics can benefit from risked Willpower (p. 65) or the Professional Training Merit (p. 67).

Teaching Tactics

One of the main advantages to membership in a conspiracy or compact is that older, more experienced members can teach Tactics.

In order to teach a Tactic to a group of hunters, the teachers must have *all* the prerequisite traits for that Tactic, including the ones that are only required of some of the participants. For instance, a hunter wishing to teach the Cripple Claws Tactic must have Composure 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 1, Firearms 3 and the Disarm Merit. While all the students don't have to have the prerequisites to learn the Tactic (though they do in order to use it, as mentioned above), one of them needs to have at least the prerequisites to be the primary actor for the Tactic. Otherwise, the group just doesn't have the knowledge base to learn the Tactic.

In place of conceptualizing the Tactic, the teacher must explain how the Tactic works to the cell. The teacher's player rolls Intelligence + Expression, while the cell members' players roll Wits + Composure. If the teacher's roll fails, the students' rolls suffer a -3. If the teacher suffers a dramatic failure, the students cannot learn the Tactic from this teacher — he simply cannot explain himself in an appropriate manner. If a student fails her roll, she will have difficulty grasping the Tactic. Rolls made during the learning process are *learning rolls*; the learning roll is the only one that the teacher makes.

After the teacher has explained the Tactic, the students make *practice rolls*, as explained above under Creating Tactics. In this case, each individual hunter subtracts successes gained on the learning roll from the total number of Practical Experience necessary to learn the Tactic: the resultant number is how many hours that particular hunter must practice to "lock down" the Tactic (and this number might be different for each hunter). As above, each hunter is subject to the Stamina + Resolve practice roll to determine how well they can commit to the rigors of training: failure on the initial learning roll incurs only a -2 penalty to the practice roll, however.

The last step is spending the Practical Experience and enacting the Tactic in the field. Failure on the practice roll or failure to commit the requisite hours incurs a -3 roll for that hunter during the Tactic. That penalty remains for the hunter until the Tactic can be performed once successfully.

Example of Learning and Devising a Tactic

A cell of hunters belonging to Null Mysteris, after losing a member under a werewolf's fangs, decides to learn the Dentistry Tactic. Fortunately, a high-ranking member of the organization is available to teach the cell. The teacher needs to have the following traits: Strength 2, Weaponry 2 and Brawl 2 or Brawl 1 with a Specialty in Grappling. Someone among the students needs to have the traits to take on the

role of primary actor, which means he must have Strength 2, Brawl 1 and Weaponry 2.

The teacher gathers the cell (four hunters) together and explains the principle behind the Tactic, what to watch out for when using it, what kinds of weapons work best, and some rudimentary grappling techniques. The Storyteller rolls the teacher's Intelligence + Expression and succeeds, while each player rolls Wits + Composure for his character. Three of the four hunters gain two successes each, but the fourth has a hard time grasping how the Tactic will look in the field (meaning, he failed the roll).

The characters then meet in an abandoned warehouse and, using mannequins to simulate the targets, practice the Tactic for several days. The three hunters who succeeded subtract two from the total Practical Experience cost for Dentistry, 14, which gives them 12, the total number of hours these three must practice the Tactic. The fourth, however, failed, and must spend a full 14 hours of practice. Each player rolls Stamina + Resolve for the character to lock down the Tactic in his muscle memory; the player who failed the learning roll suffers a -2 on this roll, but succeeds nonetheless. One hunter fails to succeed, however, and another must attend to family matters and cannot put in the requisite hours before the Tactic's first use.

When the cell finally goes to enact the Tactic, these two hunters suffer a -3 to any rolls necessary to perform Dentistry. Thankfully, the Tactic is still successful, meaning these two won't suffer that penalty when next they enact this particular Tactic.

Later in the chronicle, one of the characters from the Null Mysteriis cell meets up with an unaffiliated (tier-one) cell of hunters. The character doesn't have all the prerequisites for Dentistry and thus can't act as the teacher, but he can help these green hunters figure it out for themselves. He spends a few hours describing it to the tier-one cell and then leaves them to their own devices. The tier-one hunters (a cell of five) sit down and figure out the logistics of the Dentistry Tactic: they need at least one member who can be primary actor (Strength 2, Brawl 1, Weaponry 2) in order to puzzle it out, and all the other members need to possess Strength 2, Weaponry 1 and Brawl 2 or Brawl 1 with a Grappling Specialty to actually use the Tactic (though not to learn it). The teamwork conceptualization roll (Intelligence + Brawl) succeeds with four successes, and so the hunters meet to practice it, each for 10 hours total (14 minus the four successes gained).

The practice rolls (Stamina + Resolve) all succeed this time, and the characters all put in the time at varying points. They can now take this Tactic to the field with no penalties for any of the hunter participants.

Modifying Tactics

What if a cell already knows the Cripple Claws Tactic, and wants to use the same principles to *sever*, rather than smash, an enemy's hand? Likewise, it wouldn't be hard to use the strategies at work in Staking to get a rag soaked in chloroform over a creature's mouth (it might actually be easier).

If the cell doesn't know the Tactic and is just creating a modified version of an existing one from scratch, the normal systems for creating a Tactic apply. The players and the Storyteller need to decide on the appropriate rolls, systems, results and so on for the Tactic, just as if it were a wholly new one.

If the cell already knows a Tactic and just wants to fiddle with it a bit, it has to spend the time to train with the new version (Tactics, as you might have noticed, only work with practice, practice and more practice), but the rolls to conceptualize and practice it don't apply. However, each player must roll Intelligence + [highest Skill used in the Tactic] to let these modifications "sink in." If this roll fails, the first time the Tactic is used in the field, the player suffers a -3 modifier to his character's roll for the Tactic, as the hunter starts to perform his role for the old Tactic and then rights himself. Additionally, the cell must expend Practical Experience equal to one third of the Tactic's original cost as appropriate for that cell, rounding down. So, an Aegis Kai Doru cell that modifies Cripple Claws into Sever Hand would need to spend three Practical Experience to represent its new version of the Tactic (since that Tactic would cost 10 Practical Experience). If a Loyalists of Thule cell did the same thing, it would require four Practical Experience.

Designing Tactics

The players will, of course, want to design new Tactics for their cells, and this is to be encouraged. The following section presents some thoughts on how to design a Tactic that is effective enough to be useful and highlights the themes of *Hunter: The Vigil*.

When designing a Tactic, consider the following questions:

- **What is the effect of the Tactic?** How do you envision the Tactic working? What does the Tactic really do — does it blind an opponent? Make the opponent unable to call for help? Protect the cell from a specific kind of attack?
- **What traits are required to make the Tactic work?** Most Tactics have at least four dots of prerequisite traits. Usually, a Tactic requires at least one Attribute at two dots. Characters who are deficient in that Attribute can't meaningfully contribute to the Tactic. Also, some degree of Skill is normally required, even if that Skill isn't tested during the Tactic. Athletics is a common Skill prerequisite, as a small amount of prowess in this area indicates that a character has some sense of body positioning and balance — often necessary when carrying out Tactics.
- **What kind of action does the Tactic require?** Most Tactics are instant actions, and many are contested. If the action is contested, what will the Storyteller roll in opposition? If not, what checks are in place to ensure the creature has some chance of escaping the Tactic (these can be represented by negative modifiers, such as those for specifying targets in Cripple Claws and Staking)? Tactics can theoretically be reflexive actions, but reflexive Tactics should be restricted to actions that don't affect monsters and don't require much movement or activity from the hunters. Remember, a reflexive action still allows the character to take another instant action during the turn, so quite apart from the question of how much someone can really accomplish in three seconds, adding reflexive actions can bog the game down with die rolls.

- **How many participants does the Tactic require?** At minimum, a Tactic needs two hunters. Ideally, a Tactic should be something the whole cell can participate in, but some Tactics are actually hindered by extra bodies in the way. Consider how many people could realistically help in the endeavor, and decide if participants above the minimum bestow a bonus, a penalty, or no modifier (beyond the extra successes they might contribute).

- **What are the dice pools, and what do they represent?** What do the secondary actors do that facilitates the primary actor's action? How does the primary actor's roll make the Tactic work? In Controlled Immolation, the secondary actors use weapons to keep the monster in place so the primary actor can immolate it. The dice pool for the secondary actors is therefore Wits + Weaponry (not Strength + Weaponry because the secondary actors aren't attacking, merely responding to the monster's attempts to get away). Remember that successes on the secondary actors' rolls add dice to the primary actor's, and that the primary actor's roll is what determines the success or failure of the Tactic.

- **What are the roll results?** Considering the effects of dramatic failure on a Tactic is important, because if a player risks Willpower on a Tactic as the primary actor and fails (see p. 66), the result is considered a dramatic failure. Dramatic failures on combat-related Tactics almost always wind up harming one or more hunters — the greater the potential for damage to the monster, the more damaging the effects of the dramatic failure should be. Tactics that use explosives or fire have the greatest possibility for horrible dramatic failure, for obvious reasons.

Failure on the Tactic roll means that the Tactic's effect isn't achieved, but consider what it means for the target, as well. Does the target have a chance to turn the tables, or to escape? Can the Tactic be attempted again next turn, or do the hunters only have one shot at this particular strategy? Success, of course, means the Tactic went off correctly. Think about what that means in both story and game terms. Cripple Claws allows the cell to ruin a creature's hand, but since the effect is so localized, the Tactic only inflicts a certain amount of damage in terms of Health. If the effect is contested, make sure to note whether the hunters win on a tie, or whether the Tactic roll's successes must exceed the monster's successes. Finally, for exceptional successes, decide what else might be appropriate. Remember, though, that by risking Willpower, hunters can lower the threshold for exceptional successes from five to three (provided the Tactic causes no damage), and so exceptional successes will happen more frequently. That doesn't mean you shouldn't make them impressive, just be aware that they aren't as rare as they are in other situations.

- **What is the cost in Practical Experience?** Costs for Tactics are computed this way: The base cost is 10 Practical Experience, +1 for every dot of traits that are required of all participants for the Tactic. If a second-tier compact

teaches the tactic, members subtract three points from that cost. If a third-tier conspiracy teaches it, members subtract five points. This is because second- and third-tier organizations have resources and time to devote to perfecting and teaching Tactics, so they tend to spread more quickly.

Tactic Complications

Below are some other considerations for Tactics that might arise in your chronicle.

Shifting Membership

What if a four-member cell learns Controlled Immolation, and then one member dies or leaves the cell and another takes his place?

Remember that while a cell pays for a Tactic in Practical Experience, each member of the cell knows how the Tactic works and can theoretically teach it. To act as a teacher for a new cell, a hunter needs to have *all* the prerequisites, but if a group is teaching an individual or a smaller group (say, three hunters teaching two), these restrictions are waived.

Instead, use the following system: any new hunters have to have the prerequisites to perform their intended function in the Tactic (primary or secondary, but not necessarily both). The new hunters have to spend the usual amount of time learning the moves for the Tactic, and their players must make practice rolls as though the hunters were learning the Tactic from a teacher. After this, players must spend Practical Experience equal to the number of new hunters learning the Tactic.

Unfamiliar Hunters

Suppose a Task Force: VALKYRIE cell meets up with a lone tier-one hunter in the course of a hunt, and they join forces, at least temporarily. The TFV hunters know the Hamstring Tactic, and as luck would have it, so does the newcomer. Can they enact the Tactic as usual?

No, because Tactics are practiced with a specific group of people, and hinge on that group working like a well-oiled machine. That said, the loner can certainly *attempt* to help. In this kind of situation, *all* hunters receive a -2 modifier to their relevant rolls for the Tactic. At the Storyteller's discretion, if the hunters all belong to the same organization, the penalty might be only -1. If they all learned from the same teacher, there might be no penalty at all.

Note, too, that just because a hunter doesn't know a Tactic doesn't mean he can't contribute. The loner might not participate in the Hamstring Tactic, but might hang back and act as lookout or sniper.

Learning Quickly

A Tactic takes several hours to really get down pat, but what if the hunters just don't have that long? The cell notes that the strange dogs with the eyes that glow electric blue seem to be following them now, and the members really want to get Controlled Immolation down before sunset...which is in six hours. Is it possible?

Remember that the hunters can bypass the hours necessary to practice, but in doing so all accept a -3 penalty to the Tactic's use, and this penalty remains until they successfully perform the Tactic at least once.

Tactics Descriptions

Below are 15 sample Tactics that hunter cells can purchase with Practical Experience. The format for these Tactics is as follows:

Tactic Name: This name is a placeholder, a descriptive term to make it easier for the players to identify what a given Tactic does. Cells of hunters often come up with different titles for their Tactics, so that in the thick of battle, someone can yell a code phrase and start a Tactic without telegraphing any intent to the opponent.

Prerequisites: Any prerequisites that participants must have, arranged thusly: *All*: All participants in the Tactic must have these traits. *Partial (X)*: At least (X) hunters involved in the Tactic must have these traits. If a hunter must have a given set of traits to be the primary actor, this is indicated. Note that not all traits required for a Tactic are necessarily part of its dice pool.

Requires: The number of hunters required to perform this tactic. Having extra hunters can bestow a bonus for some Tactics, but for others, having too many participants can actually be a hindrance, levying penalties.

Dice Pool: The dice pool(s) associated with the Tactic, arranged thusly: *Primary*: The dice pool for the primary actor. *Secondary*: The dice pool(s) for the secondary actors.

Action: The type of action the Tactic requires. Most are instant and contested.

Description: A look at the Tactic in action, how much setup it requires, and what the hunters actually do in order to pull it off.

Organizations: An explanation for why a particular organization favors this Tactic. This results in a cheaper cost to purchase the Tactic, noted below.

Potential Modifiers: Situations that might alter the dice pool for the Tactic. This section notes which of the participants the modifier affects; some only affect the primary actor, while others affect all hunters involved.

Roll Results: The effects of dramatic failure, failure, success and exceptional success as they relate to the *primary actor*'s roll only.

TACTICAL FATIGUE

A cell can only perform one Tactic per day without restriction. Performing another Tactic in the same 12-hour period incurs a -3 penalty to all those who participated in the first Tactic. This penalty can be obviated by the expenditure of Willpower, of course.



To Purchase: How much Practical Experience the Tactic costs. Some organizations can purchase certain Tactics at a reduced cost; these differences are noted here. The formula for determining the cost of a Tactic is explained on p. 216.

Controlled Immolation

Prerequisites: All: Composure 2, Stamina 2, Survival 1. Partial (1): Firearms 3 or Firearms 2 with a Specialty in Flamethrower or Athletics 3 or Athletics 2 with a Specialty in Throwing (primary actor). Partial (3): Weaponry 2 (secondary actors).

Requires: 4; up to 6 grants a +1 per extra hunter to secondary actors, more than 6 levies a -3 penalty to primary actor.

Dice Pool: Primary: Dexterity + Firearms or Athletics (immolation); Wits + Composure (control). Secondary: Wits + Weaponry (immolation); Wits + Survival (control).

Action: Instant.

Description: Setting monsters on fire is a time-honored way to kill them. Modern inventions like flamethrowers make immolation even easier, but chemicals that ignite and burn well have been around for centuries. The biggest problem with the method, of course, is that fire is indiscriminate in what it consumes. This Tactic allows the hunters to torch a monster and hopefully avoid losing the rest of the neighborhood in a conflagration.

Controlled Immolation is composed of two separate teamwork actions. In the first (the immolation action), the hunters must surround the monster. The secondary actors are armed with long, pointed weapons (usually spears or javelins, but pitchforks and even long wooden poles work). They force the monster to remain within a wide circle. The primary actor then steps forward and fires the flamethrower, douses the monster in flammable chemicals or otherwise immolates the creature.

After the creature is on fire, it suffers damage as appropriate to the type of fire used (see Fire on p. 180 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*) each turn. The hunters continue using the Tactic, however, as this prevents the creature from stopping the flames by rolling or spreading the fire to other areas. The dice pools change to their “control” values. The primary actor for the first part of the Tactic does not necessarily have to be the primary actor for the second part. This action can be taken each turn until the creature is dead or the hunters wish to put out the fire.

Organizations: The Long Night knows that the servants of Satan are bound for the fires of Hell eventually, so there's no reason not to give them a head start. That said, bringing Hell to Earth isn't the goal, so the fires need to be rigorously contained. The Ascending Ones, masters of potions and elixirs, know many different chemical methods of ignition, and use them to great effect against the supernatural.

Potential Modifiers: Large, open space (+1 to all participants); hunters have fire extinguishers (+1 to secondary actors, control action only); small, enclosed area (-1 to all participants, control action only); monster is seemingly unaffected by fire (-2 to all participants, control action only); no fire extinguishers (-2 to secondary actors, control action only); secondary actor(s) has a lower Initiative than the primary actor (-3 to all participants).

Roll Results:

Dramatic Failure: *Immolation:* The immolation method fails catastrophically. A flamethrower might explode, while chemicals or mystic incendiaries might simply fail. *Control:* The fire spreads out of control. In a small space, the characters might suffer fire damage immediately. If they can escape, they probably risk losing Morality for setting the fire.

Failure: *Immolation:* The immolation attack misses, but might light the surrounding area on fire at the Storyteller's discretion. *Control:* The creature manages to extinguish the flames.

Success: *Immolation:* The target catches fire and starts taking damage as appropriate for the type of fire. This damage continues each turn until the fire is extinguished. *Control:* The creature remains ablaze, and the fire does not spread beyond the contained area.

Exceptional Success: *Immolation:* The fire is especially well placed and inflicts an extra point of damage each turn. *Control:* The fire is entirely contained; no further rolls to control it are necessary and the cell can extinguish it whenever it wishes.

To Purchase: 15 Practical Experience, 12 for the Long Night, 10 for the Ascending Ones.

Corral

Prerequisites: All: Intimidation 2, Resolve 2. Partial (1): Intimidation 3 or Firearms, Brawl or Weaponry 3.

Requires: 3; 4 or more bestows a +1 to the primary actor's roll; 8 or more bestows a +2.

Dice Pool: Primary: Presence + Intimidation. Secondary: Strength or Presence + Intimidation.

Action: Instant and contested; target rolls Resolve + Composure (resistance is reflexive).

Description: Having a fight with monsters in full view of witnesses is unwise. Likewise, sometimes hunters need to drive a monster toward a given area, in order to spring a trap, lock the creature in a cage, or simply prevent innocents from being harmed. The Corral Tactic allows the hunters to frighten a monster into running, and direct its retreat in a direction advantageous to the cell. Note, though, that some monsters can fly, vanish into shadows or take advantage of other escape tactics that hunters cannot counter. This Tactic does not prevent the monster from doing such things, if it is able.

While all hunters involved in this Tactic must be intimidating, at least one has to be downright scary, either because he carries himself like a dangerous person (Intimidation or Brawl 3) or because he has a large weapon or firearm and clearly knows how to use it (Weaponry or Firearms 3). This person does not, however, have to be primary actor.

Organizations: The Union often has the numbers to make this Tactic especially effective. One cell, using shotguns and homemade flamethrowers, drives the monster into whatever cul-de-sac the organization has set up. The second cell, waiting in said cul-de-sac, springs the trap. The heavily armed members of Task Force: VALKYRIE, always under admonition to spare the lives and sanities of normal citizens, likewise find this Tactic important.

Potential Modifiers: Hunters are armed with a weapon that the monster fears, such as fire for vampires (+2 to pri-

mary actor); hunters have fought and defeated this particular creature before (+2 to primary actor); hunters know the area well (+1 to secondary actors); creature is already wounded (-1 to creature's resistance roll); hunters are visibly wounded (-2 to applicable hunters); hunters are visibly unarmed (-2 to applicable hunters); secondary actor(s) has a lower Initiative than the primary actor (-3 to all participants).

Roll Results:

Dramatic Failure: The creature isn't swayed by the hunters' intimidation attempts and is under no compunction to flee in the direction in which the hunters try to herd it. In fact, it realizes where the "line" is weakest (the hunter with the lowest Health, the best way to escape, etc.).

Failure: Either the primary actor's roll fails, or the monster's resistance results in more successes. The monster isn't frightened by the hunter's attempts and can act as it sees fit.

Success: The primary actor's roll has more successes than the creature's. The creature is frightened for its survival and flees in the direction the hunters wish. If the creature has not taken its action this turn, or has taken an action but not moved, it can move up to its Speed rating or twice its Speed rating (see p. 164 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**) immediately. Note that this Tactic can thus backfire if the creature is considerably faster than the hunters!

Exceptional Success: The primary actor's roll has more successes than the creature and is an exceptional success. The creature is terrified of the hunters, and its priority is escape and preservation rather than offense. Every turn, the Storyteller rolls the creature's Resolve + Composure. If the roll fails, the creature can do nothing except move or Dodge.

To Purchase: 14 Practical Experience, 11 for the Union, 9 for Task Force: VALKYRIE.

Cripple Claws

Prerequisites: All: Composure 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 1. Partial (1): Disarm Merit or Firearms 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 + Weaponry or Dexterity + Firearms. Secondary: Dexterity + Athletics.

Action: Instant.

Description: A hunter only has to face a creature with talons once before he learns to fear the hands of a monster. Some creatures have literal claws; others can warp flesh or cause disease with a touch. Witches and other spell-casters sometimes rely on hand gestures to make their spells work. This Tactic allows the cell to target the hands of a creature, making them useless for attacking or fine manipulation.

This Tactic requires that the creature's hands be extended enough for the primary actor to take a swing or a shot. The secondary actor(s) therefore act as bait, trying to get the creature to reach. The secondary actors move in close, goading the monster into attacking, and then move out of reach quickly, affording the primary actor a clean shot. Of course, combat being the messy situation that it is, the secondary actor might wind up being clawed or otherwise damaged in the process. That doesn't prevent the Tactic from working, but it can hinder the effort.

The primary actor can swing at the monster's hand with a melee weapon or a gun. He makes a normal attack roll, applying the damage modifier from the weapon and the monster's Defense as usual. If the hunter is using Firearms, remember that shooting into melee carries additional penalties (see p. 162 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). No matter what other modifiers apply, the primary actor suffers a -4 penalty for specifying a target (see p. 165 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**).

If a secondary actor's roll fails, he does not get out of the way of the monster in time. When the monster's next action arrives, it can attack that hunter without applying the hunter's Defense. This does not affect the primary actor in any way (other than not granting the player extra dice, of course).

Organizations: While any martial group of hunters can benefit from this Tactic, the Loyalists of Thule find that limiting a creature's ability to manipulate its surroundings is a superb way to reduce its killing power, but leave it alive for study. Likewise, the Aegis Kai Doru developed this Tactic to put weapons such as swords and spears to best use.

Potential Modifiers: Hunter is especially attractive to the monster, such as a wounded and bloody hunter tempting a vampire (+2 to secondary actor); monster strikes a secondary actor (-2 to primary actor); secondary actor(s) has a lower Initiative than the primary actor (-3 to all participants); monster grapples a secondary actor (-5 to primary actor)

Roll Results:

Dramatic Failure: The primary actor misses and strikes one of the other hunters. The primary actor's player makes a second attack roll (without applying the dice from the secondary actors), subtracting the secondary actor's armor but ignoring Defense. Damage is applied normally.

Failure: The attack misses, and the creature suffers no penalties.

Success: The attack hits and the creature takes one point of damage per success (type dependent on the weapon used), up to a maximum of three points of damage. In addition, the creature's hand is ruined — fingers shattered, severed or blown off, bones crushed, or nerves and muscle burned or shredded. That hand is severely hampered for combat (-5 to all attack rolls with that hand) and completely useless for fine manipulation until all damage from this attack heals.

Exceptional Success: If the primary actor used a bladed weapon or a high-caliber firearm, the hand is completely severed. The attack inflicts five points of damage.

To Purchase: 15 Practical Experience, 12 for the Loyalists of Thule, 10 for Aegis Kai Doru.

Deprogramming

Prerequisites: All: Intelligence 2, Empathy 1 or a Specialty in Psychology (in either Medicine or Academics). Partial (1): Manipulation 2, Persuasion 1 (primary actor).

Requires: 2, maximum of 3 hunters at any one time; see below.

Dice Pool: Primary: Manipulation + Persuasion. Secondary: Presence + Empathy (secondary actors).

Action: Extended and contested.

Description: A disturbing number of creatures of the night can alter the thoughts and emotions of mortals. Sometimes this

power is subtle — a hunter first comes to respect a vampire, then to admire her, then to love her. Sometimes, the power is much more overt. A siren song from afar, and suddenly a hunter would lay down his life for the singer. The Moral Support Tactic (see p. 226) offers some protection against such powers before the monsters have a chance to use them, but sometimes a cell has to talk a member down from such a power. Likewise, some cells use moles, hunters that are sent to infiltrate cults or cabals (usually subjected to double-blind techniques so they don't know enough to betray their cells) and then debrief and deprogrammed later.

At least two hunters can act as deprogrammers. One talks with the victim, breaking down his self-esteem, then building it back up, explaining rationally what is happening one moment and then growing violent the next. Some cells claim that this shock to the emotional system snaps the hunter's own mental defenses back into relief, but in actuality, the primary actor is brainwashing the subject. The secondary actors stay in the background and lend support to whatever the primary actor is saying or doing.

One roll is made every hour. The subject resists with Resolve + Stamina + a number of dice equal to the successes achieved on the monster's roll to mentally control or influence the hunter (if the Storyteller doesn't know this number, she should assign a modifier based on how powerful the creature is). The subject doesn't seek to achieve a specific number of successes, only to match or exceed the deprogrammer's total. Sooner or later, the subject is going to break...or wind up going mad, or being rescued by his supernatural "patron," or snapping and attacking his fellow hunters.

The deprogrammer seeks to achieve a number of successes equal to the subject's Resolve + Composure + [the same modifier applied to the subject's roll, as described above].

While only three hunters can deprogram at a time, secondary actors can be switched out at any time. The primary actor can be switched, but the first deprogramming roll after the switch suffers a -2 (primary actor).

Organizations: All cells of hunters, regardless of organization, fear the power of monsters to alter their minds. This Tactic, therefore, is a favorite of any cell that fights monsters with a propensity for doing so, rather than being a favorite of any particular organization.

Potential Modifiers: Deprogramming hunter has been subjected to the same kind of mental control in the past (+3 to appropriate hunter); subject was given commands that are out of character for him, such as to harm or betray his cell (+2 to primary actor); subject's Morality is 7 or higher (+1 to primary actor); subject was given commands that he wanted to follow anyway (-2 to primary actor); subject's Morality is 5 or less (-1 to primary actor).

Roll Results:

Dramatic Failure: If the subject suffers a dramatic failure at any point in the proceedings, he falls catatonic or incoherent for a number of hours equal to 10 - [Resolve + Composure]. He then wakes up with a mild derangement, but is free of the mental control. If the deprogrammer suffers a dramatic failure, he believes the subject to be completely cured, when in fact no progress at all has been made.

Failure: No successes are accumulated toward the total.

Success: Successes are accumulated toward the total. If the subject's player rolls more successes than the deprogrammer's, the deprogrammer's successes are *not* counted toward his total. That is, the deprogrammer only counts successes toward his total when his player's roll for the hour turns up as many as or more successes than the subject's. If the deprogrammer's player achieves the total described above, the subject is free of the mental control. The subject's player must immediately roll Resolve + Composure. If this roll fails, the character develops a mild derangement.

Exceptional Success: Considerable successes are accumulated. If the subject beats the deprogrammer's successes *and* achieves an exceptional success, successes equal to the subject's Stamina are *subtracted* from the deprogrammer's total. If the deprogrammer's successes equal or exceed the subject's *and* the deprogrammer achieves an exceptional success, the subject's player suffers a -3 penalty on his next resistance roll.

To Purchase: 13 Practical Experience, 10 for any tier-two cell, 8 for any tier-three cell.

Dentistry

Prerequisites: All: Strength 2, Weaponry 1, Brawl 1. Partial (1): Weaponry 2 (primary actor). Partial (1): Brawl 2 or Brawl 1 with a Specialty in Grappling (all secondary actors).

Requires: 2; up to 4 adds one die to secondary actors per extra hunter. Maximum 4 for this Tactic.

Dice Pool: Primary: Strength + Weaponry. Secondary: Strength + Brawl.

Action: Instant.

Description: The bite of a monster can have any number of hideous effects. Apart from rent flesh, some monsters carry disease. Some, reportedly, can pass on their monstrous condition with a bite. Vampire bites, according to some sources, are even addictive. The Dentistry Tactic provides some protection against monster bites by knocking out teeth or breaking the jaw. All that's required is a hunter with a lot of muscle, and another hunter with a heavy weapon of some kind. Blades work, but hammers and bats are more popular.

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 has been grappled and one secondary actor successfully overpowers the creature, all 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 Strength + Weaponry (adding the weapon's damage modifier as usual), swinging his weapon at the creature's maw.

Note: Some hunter cells, particularly within the Aegis Kai Doru, use a variation on this Tactic that targets a creature's nose rather than its mouth. Animalistic monsters like werewolves rely heavily on scent to track and navigate, and removing that ability can be a major tactical advantage. Dentistry can be used this way without learning a separate Tactic; simply reverse the "Success" and "Exceptional Success" results, below.

Organization: While this Tactic might seem a bit brutal for the scientists of Null Mysteris, it makes perfect sense to them: a creature that can no longer feed on humanity is not a threat (at least not in the short term). The Aegis Kai Doru, on the other hand, finds a sadistic pleasure in using this Tactic to silence spell-casters in a most painful manner.

Potential Modifiers: Hunter's Size rating is greater than the target's (+1 to applicable secondary actor); creature does not have teeth (-1 to primary actor); primary actor's weapon is Size 3 or more (-2 to primary actor); secondary actor(s) has a lower Initiative than the primary actor (-3 to all participants).

Roll Results:

Dramatic Failure: The primary actor misses and strikes one of the other hunters. The primary actor's player makes a new attack against that hunter (without applying the dice from the secondary actors), subtracting armor but ignoring Defense. Damage is applied normally. The creature automatically escapes the grapple.

Failure: The hunter misses — the weapon slips and doesn't affect the creature hard enough to inflict any damage, or maybe the primary actor just freezes up. In any case, the creature can immediately try to escape the grapple (see p. 157 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*).

Success: The creature suffers damage equal to the successes that the primary actor's player rolled (damage type depends on the weapon in question). In addition, the creature cannot make bite attacks or speak intelligibly until all damage from this attack heals.

Exceptional Success: In addition to the greater amount of damage, the monster is either blinded or rendered unable to smell by the massive insult to its face. This effect lasts until at least half of the damage inflicted by the attack (round up) heals. If the monster is unable to heal through supernatural means, these effects are permanent.

To Purchase: 14 Practical Experience, 11 for Null Mysteris, 9 for Aegis Kai Doru.

Disappear

Prerequisites: All: Stealth 2, Composure 2. Partial (1): Expression 2 (secondary actor).

Requires: 2 or more.

Dice Pool: Primary: Dexterity + Stealth. Secondary: Presence + Expression.

Action: Instant and contested; opponent rolls Wits + Composure (resistance is reflexive).

Description: Sometimes plans go badly and hunters have to disappear. Red and blue lights appear from nowhere. A monster's reinforcements can be heard howling in the distance. A building catches fire, or a storm knocks out power to an area. Whatever the catalyst, the cell needs to escape, to blend into the scenery. That's the time to enact this Tactic.

Note: this Tactic reverses the usual teamwork rules a bit, insofar as it has several "primary" actors who receive support from one, lone secondary actor.

One (or more) of the cell accepts a terrible risk and takes on the role of the decoy. This hunter (the secondary actor) distracts the monster's attention while the others retreat and hide.

Once the others are out of sight, the decoy hunter finds his own hiding place, if possible. Often, though, he simply runs, trying to make it to a populated area before the monster catches up with him. The Storyteller's roll for the monster (Wits + Composure) is then compared to each of the primary actors' rolls.

Example: A cell of hunters is in a fight, but not doing so well. The creature it is fighting looks more or less human, but its eyes are black, glassy and empty, and it seems to be able to pull shards of glass from nowhere. Bleeding and in pain, the hunters decide to Disappear. There are four hunters: Kim, Barry, Greg and Mal. Kim is the fastest of the four and (perhaps because of this) the least injured, so she takes on the role of secondary actor. Her player rolls four successes on a Presence + Expression roll; Kim waves her hands in the air and screams at the creature to get its attention. Meanwhile, the other players roll Wits + Stealth + 4 dice (for Kim's successes). Barry, Greg and Mal sprint in different directions, trying to find cover (their players roll two, three and six successes, respectively). The Storyteller rolls the monster's Wits + Composure and gets three successes, so Mal and Greg get away. Kim and Barry, however, are still viable targets, and the creature pulls another shard of black glass from the shadows...

Potential Modifiers: Secondary actor is especially attractive to the monster, such as a visibly bloody hunter tempting a vampire (+1 to secondary actor); secondary actor has wounded monster in the past (+1 to secondary actor); nearby area has a great deal of cover (+1 to +3 to primary actors); nearby area is densely populated (+2 to primary actors); primary actor is especially attractive to the monster (-1 to appropriate hunter); nearby area is sparse and open (-2 to primary actors); no other people in the area (-3 to primary actors); secondary actor cannot speak (-3 to secondary actor).

Organizations: Network Zero isn't made up of warriors, soldiers or fanatics. It's made up of people who are trying to broadcast the truth to the world, and as such, the members often find it necessary to scatter and hide. The Ascending Ones also find this tactic useful, as a sudden rainstorm can wash away ointments and leave them without some of their greatest weapons, or a protracted chase can deplete their stores of potions too quickly.

Roll Results:

Dramatic Failure: The monster is not fooled, and takes note of where all the hunters have fled. It can attack any of them as it sees fit.

Failure: The Storyteller rolls more successes for the monster than a player does for a primary actor. The monster sees where that particular hunter has gone.

Success: The primary actor's player rolls more successes for the hunter than the Storyteller does for the monster. The monster's attention is focused on the secondary actor long enough for the primary actors to hide. If all the primary actors equal or exceed the monster's successes, the secondary actor is the only character the monster can see.

Exceptional Success: The primary actor's player rolls more successes than the Storyteller and rolls an exceptional success. The monster is confused by the sudden whirlwind of activity and not only loses the primary actors, but the secondary actor as well. If more than one primary actor is in-



volved, the secondary actor's player can make a reflexive Wits + Stealth roll. If this roll succeeds, the monster loses the secondary actor.

To Purchase: 14 Practical Experience, 11 for Network Zero, 9 for the Ascending Ones.

Exorcism

Prerequisites: All: Resolve 2, Composure 2, Occult 2. Partial (1): Morality 7, Occult 3 or Occult 2 with a Specialty in Possession or Religion (primary actor).

Requires: 2 or more.

Dice Pool: Primary: Resolve + Composure. Secondary: Stamina + Expression.

Action: Extended and contested (see below).

Description: (Note: this Tactic is based on the Exorcism system found on p. 214 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, but is modified in many ways)

Ghosts can possess the bodies of the living for their own purposes, and hunters know this. But the shades of the unquiet dead aren't the only beings capable of usurping control of others: spirits from planes of reality unknown to most mortals, unholy creatures that could legitimately be called "demons," and even powerful sorcerers can displace a person's consciousness. The exorcism system from the *World of Darkness Rulebook* is designed to work solely on ghosts, while this Tactic functions on any form of supernatural possession. It does *not* function, however, on hypnotic suggestion, emotional manipulation or other forms of mind control. Only when the victim's mind is intact but displaced can a cell attempt Exorcism.

Exorcism requires the target to be immobile. It's possible to hold the target in place, but any hunters involved in doing so cannot participate in the Tactic itself. The better option is to restrain the target by tying him down. The secondary actors must chant, pray or simply concentrate on freeing the target from the possessing entity. The primary actor, meanwhile, carries out the ritual in whatever manner he has been trained. A Catholic hunter has a very different ritual method of freeing a person from possession than a secular hunter from Null Mysteriis, and these ritual differences *can* impose modifiers on the process (see below).

Unlike most Tactics, Exorcism is an extended action. The entity possessing the target rolls Power + Resistance (if a ghost or a spirit), or whatever the activation roll is for the possession ability (if some other kind of supernatural creature). Successes from the primary actor's rolls are compared to the entity's successes for each roll. The party with the fewest successes in each roll loses Willpower. When one side or the other is reduced to 0 Willpower, the contest is over. Note that secondary actors *cannot* lose Willpower as part of this Tactic (though they can, and probably should, spend the 4 Willpower to enact the Tactic). The primary actor can risk Willpower on only one of the rolls for this Tactic (since it's only possible to risk Willpower once per scene; see p. 65 for more information), and so it makes sense to wait until the character is running low on Willpower before attempting this.

Organizations: The Long Night and the Malleus Maleficarum are the organizations that most often teach this Tactic. Both are more cognizant than most that the minds of men can be invaded and displaced by the servants of Hell, and both are confident they have the power to cast out such demons.

Potential Modifiers: Primary actor has one of the possessing ghost's anchors handy (+3 to primary actor; only applicable for ghosts); form of the ritual is appropriate to the possessed individual, such as a Catholic ritual being enacted on a Catholic or Christian victim (+2 to primary actor); primary actor spends at least 10 minutes instructing secondary actors in appropriate chants or prayers before beginning (+1 to secondary actors); loud or distracting environment (-1 to all participants); target has been possessed for more than one day (-1 to primary actor for each day after the first); target willingly accepted the possession (-5 to primary actor).

Roll Results:

Dramatic Failure: The possessing entity *appears* to flee — windows break, the bed rattles and other dramatic effects occur. However, the entity is still curled up in the target's mind and can reassert control at any time.

Failure: The possessing entity's roll garners successes equal to or in excess of the primary actor's. The primary actor loses a point of Willpower. If this was the primary actor's last Willpower point, the Exorcism is over as the primary actor collapses, drained and emotionally broken.

Success: The primary actor's roll garners *more* successes than that of the possessing entity. The possessing entity loses a point of Willpower. If this was the entity's last Willpower point, the target is immediately free of the possession. This doesn't stop the creature from attacking the hunters, but of course, it doesn't have any Willpower to draw on.

Exceptional Success: Either the possessing entity or the primary actor rolls more successes than the other *and* achieves an exceptional success. The loser loses two points of Willpower instead of one. If this event wins the Exorcism for the hunters, the possessing entity is driven from the area and cannot attack the hunters (if the entity is a ghost that is bound to the area, it retreats to an anchor and lurks there for at least a scene).

To Purchase: 16 Practical Experience, 13 for the Long Night, 11 for the Malleus Maleficarum.

Hamstring

Prerequisites: All: Dexterity 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 1. Partial (1): Strength 3, Weaponry 3 (primary actor).

Requires: 2; 5 or more levies a -2 penalty to the primary actor.

Dice Pool: Primary: Strength + Weaponry. Secondary: Presence + Athletics.

Action: Instant.

Description: The Hamstring Tactic is one that hunters use just before a retreat, or when they wish to prevent a monster from fleeing. The Tactic reduces a monster's capacity for speed by damaging its leg, severing muscles and shattering bone. Hamstring works by mechanical damage, rather than relying on putting the monster in pain. Monsters don't always feel pain, but if the creature's tibia is sticking out of its lower leg at a 90° angle, it isn't going to be sprinting any time soon.

Hamstring functions similarly to Cripple Claws (p. 219). The secondary actors present targets for the monster, while the primary actor flanks the beast and strikes its leg with a weapon. The primary actor needs to inflict enough damage to the creature to make a shattered mess of the leg in order for the Tactic to work, and legs aren't exactly fragile — muscle and bone are both quite thick here. As such, in addition to any other applicable modifiers, Hamstring suffers a -5 modifier to the primary actor to compensate for specifying a target (see p. 165 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*) and for cutting through or smashing the muscles and bones.

If a secondary actor's roll fails, he does not get out of the way of the monster in time. When the monster's next action arrives, it can attack that hunter without applying the hunter's Defense. This does not affect the primary actor in any way (other than not granting the player extra dice, of course).

Organizations: Union members often use the Hamstring Tactic to prevent a monster from disappearing into the night, then step back and open fire with a variety of guns or surround the creature and beat it to death with instruments both sharp and blunt. The Lucifuge, on the other hand, finds it worth the extra risk to prevent a creature from running so that it can determine if the monster is a true demon, something worthy of ritual sacrifice, or merely a lesser imp.

Potential Modifiers: Primary actor uses a bladed weapon of at least Size 3 (+1 to primary actor); secondary actor is especially attractive to the monster, such as an obviously bloodied hunter facing a vampire (+1 to primary actor); monster is Size 6 or larger (+1 to primary actor); primary actor is especially attractive to the monster (-1 to all participants); monster is Size 4 or smaller (-1 to primary actor); primary actor's weapon inflicts bashing damage (-2 to primary actor); small, enclosed space (-3 to all participants); secondary actor(s) has a lower Initiative than the primary actor (-3 to all participants).

Roll Results:

Dramatic Failure: The attack misses the monster, but strikes another hunter. The primary actor immediately rolls an attack against the nearest hunter (without applying the dice from the secondary actors), subtracting that hunter's armor but ignoring Defense. Damage is applied normally.

Failure: The primary actor either misses or loses his grip on the weapon and doesn't inflict any damage.

Success: One point of damage (type determined by the weapon) is inflicted per success. In addition, the creature's Speed is reduced by three quarters (for bipedal creatures) or one half (for quadrupeds). This effect remains until all damage from this attack has healed.

Exceptional Success: No effect other than the greater amount of damage.

To Purchase: 15 Practical Experience, 12 for the Union, 10 for the Lucifuge.

Harvest

Prerequisites: All: Intelligence 2, Composure 2, Occult 2. Partial (1): Occult 4 or Occult 3 with a Specialty in the type of monster being harvested (vampires, werewolves, etc.). Partial (1): Medicine 2 (primary actor).

Requires: 3; more than 5 imposes a -1 penalty on all participants.

Dice Pool: Primary: Composure + Medicine. Secondary: Wits + Occult (one secondary actor); Strength + Brawl (all other secondary actors).

Action: Instant and contested; target resists with Strength + Brawl (resistance is reflexive).

Description: Whether for scientific research, arcane rituals or just because they want a trophy, hunters often have reason to collect samples of monsters. Unfortunately, the physical matter of a monster often changes once the creature dies. Vampires crumble to dust, their blood and bones becoming naught but ash. Werewolves revert to human form, and their skin and muscle is indistinguishable from any other person's. This Tactic, though, takes a sample from a still living (or extant, at least) supernatural creature, and thus allows the hunters to use it.

This is a complicated Tactic, and requires coordination and concentration. At least one secondary actor must grapple the target creature (rolling Strength + Brawl; refer to p. 158 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook* for rules on multiple people grappling the same opponent). At that point, another secondary actor, who must remain uninvolved in the grappling but stay close enough to observe the proceedings, advises the primary actor on how to proceed (this character must have Occult 4, or Occult 3 with a Specialty in the type of monster being harvested). Then the primary actor, armed with the necessary tools (a syringe, a bone saw, a specimen jar, etc.), takes the sample and seals it up.

What complicates this, of course, is that the monster doesn't cooperate. The creature thrashes against the hunters, and that means taking the sample requires a steady but quick hand. As such, Harvest is a contested action.

Organizations: The thrill-seeking "hunters" of the Ashwood Abbey have been employing the Harvest Tactic for decades in their quest to find new and interesting ways to use the bodies of supernatural beings for their decadent pleasures. The much newer (but better equipped) Cheiron Group quickly realized that this Tactic was an absolute must for its work — the organization might even attempt to "tag" certain creatures and release them, allowing it to track them down to Harvest again.

Potential Modifiers: Hunter's Size rating is greater than the target's (+1 to applicable secondary actor); well-lit area (+1 to Occult secondary actor and primary actor); monster is naked (+1 to primary actor); hunters have Harvested this particular creature before (+2 to primary actor); monster is fully dressed (-2 to primary actor); secondary actor(s) has a lower Initiative than the primary actor (-3 to all participants); material being sampled is difficult to obtain — brain tissue, cerebrospinal fluid, a piece of a particular organ, etc. (-5 to primary actor)

Roll Results:

Dramatic Failure: The hunter taking the sample gets too close to the monster just as it breaks the grapple. The monster can execute an immediate, reflexive attack on the primary actor, subtracting Armor but not Defense. Damage is applied normally.

Failure: The monster's roll garners more successes than the primary actor's. The hunter is not able to take a viable

sample — too much blood splatters on the ground, or the skin sample is mangled beyond use. The hunters can attempt the Tactic again, but the attempt will cost the participating hunters 1 Willpower apiece to try again.

Success: The primary actor's successes equal or exceed the monster's successes. The hunters take a sample of the monster's blood, skin, bone, flesh or whatever other material they require. The hunters can attempt to take more material next turn, but doing so requires the expenditure of 1 Willpower per hunter (representing the extra effort), and the creature has the chance to escape the grapple.

Exceptional Success: The primary actor's successes exceed the monster's and the player achieves an exceptional success. The hunter takes the sample, and the cell can attempt to use the Tactic again next turn, but can either forgo the Willpower cost (see Success) or so fully immobilize the monster that it gets no chance to escape the grapple.

To Purchase: 16 Practical Experience, 13 for the Ashwood Abbey, 11 for the Cheiron Group.

Identification

Prerequisites: All: Wits 2, Occult 1, Empathy 1, Investigation 1. Partial (1): Empathy 3. Partial (1): Occult 3 or Occult 2 with a Specialty in Identifying Monsters (either of these characters can be the primary actor).

Requires: 2; more than 2 bestows a +1 to the primary actor for each extra hunter.

Dice Pool: Primary: Intelligence + Empathy or Occult. Secondary: Wits + Investigation.

Action: Instant.

Description: Before the hunt can begin, the hunters need a target. This Tactic allows a cell to identify a supernatural being from a normal human. It doesn't allow the cell to discern what kind of supernatural being the target is (though it probably gives them a direction for further research), only that the target isn't quite normal. The secondary actors make observations about the target, noting body language, behaviors, tics and habits. They report these to the primary actor, who makes a summary judgment about the target, supernatural or not.

Secondary actors can make a number of observations over the period of a day. Each secondary actor can make one roll per dot of Investigation in a day, at a rate of one roll per scene, but can only "keep" one of these rolls for purposes of reporting to the primary actor (probably the one with the most successes).

Organizations: Cells of all three tiers and all organizations make use of this Tactic. Misidentifying a target can lead to murder, after all.

Potential Modifiers: Target has a number of supernatural "indicators," as allergy to sunlight, no reflection, restrictions on behavior or diet, unconscious effects on the emotions of those around it, etc. (+3 to secondary actors); target is a werewolf (+2 to secondary actors); target is possessed by a spirit, ghost or other non-human entity (+2 to secondary actors); secondary actor speaks face to face with target (+2 to appropriate secondary actor); hunter has the Unseen Sense Merit and the target is of a "type" that would set off his Unseen Sense (+2 to appropriate

hunter); hunters have encountered this type of creature before (+1 to all participants); hunters have never encountered this type of creature before (-1 to all participants); target is a mage (-1 to secondary actors); target has few or no supernatural “indicators”—kin to werewolves, servant to vampires or mages, etc. (-2 to secondary actors); target is a normal, non-supernatural human being (-2 to secondary actors), primary actor has never seen the target himself (-3 to primary actor).

Roll Results:

Dramatic Failure: The cell misidentifies a normal human being as a monster, a monster as a normal human being, or a monster as a different type of monster. Even this latter eventuality can have disastrous results — suppose the hunters identify a pale, black-clad mage as a vampire, and attempt to break into his home during the day when the “vampire” is sleeping?

Failure: The primary actor is unable to make a conclusive decision. The cell can enact this Tactic again, starting from scratch.

Success: The primary actor correctly determines whether the target is some kind of supernatural being. Note that “supernatural being” covers a wide range — in addition to monsters such as werewolves and vampires, this Tactic might also identify mortals with the Unseen Sense Merit (see p. 109 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). Further study is definitely advised.

Exceptional Success: The primary actor not only correctly identifies the target, but if the target is a supernatural being, the cell receives a +1 bonus on the first Tactic it uses on the target or on the first Research action it takes on the target.

To Purchase: 15 Practical Experience, 12 for any tier-two cell, 10 for any tier-three cell.

Measurements

Prerequisites: All: Wits 2, Science 2. Partial (1): Academics 2 or Computer 2. Partial (1): Science 3.

Requires: 2 or more.

Dice Pool: Primary: Intelligence + Science. Secondary: Wits + Stealth.

Action: Extended (each roll represents one turn of scrutiny).

Description: In order to defeat (or use, or even redeem) monsters, hunters often to wish to learn about them. The Measurements Tactic allows the cell to collect this data, using any number of methods. Photography, sound recording and thermal imaging all simply require the right kinds of instruments, but hunters have used this Tactic to achieve more sophisticated measurements. By measuring how fast a creature moves from a stationary position, they can make a guess at adrenal function and body strength. By how quickly it responds to stimuli, they can draw conclusions about its sensory apparatus. Using Measurements benefits from some setup time, but given the right equipment, the hunters can draw data on the fly, as well.

The Storyteller needs to decide how to present the acquired data to the players. Telling the players that the mon-

ster is “stronger than a human being of comparable size” isn’t terribly useful, but knowing that a creature has “at least Strength 5” might be. Of course, the way the players hear the data and the way the characters hear it are quite different. The Storyteller might tell the troupe, “Based on the data, the creature could probably tear a door off the hinges quite easily. In terms of game mechanics, that’s roughly Strength 5 or 6.” Some troupes, of course, might not want to hear the game mechanics side of things, preferring to just interpret the data in character, and that’s fine, too.

The secondary actors hide in the area, taking readings, running cameras and producing stimuli, if necessary. The primary actor interprets this data as it comes in, making adjustments to the machinery, if any, or giving instructions to the secondary actors. Measurements can be sustained over a number of turns, but if the target ever has a reason to become suspicious or if one of the secondary actors fails the Wits + Stealth roll, the Storyteller can make a Wits + Composure roll for the monster. If this roll succeeds, the monster notices the hunter whose Stealth roll failed, and can attack or flee as it sees fit. Note that Measurements *can* continue in combat with a monster, as long as at least one secondary actor is available to feed data to the primary actor.

Organizations: Finding a Null Mysteris cell without this Tactic would be difficult. The organization constantly collects data on the supernatural, even branching into discredited pseudoscience like aura photography and electronic voice phenomena. In the World of Darkness, these methods might actually have some merit. The Cheiron Group, too, makes extensive use of Measurements, looking for capabilities of the supernatural it can ape with its Thaumatechnology Endowments.

Potential Modifiers: At least an hour of prep time in the area (+3 to primary actor); state-of-the-art equipment (+1 to +3 to primary actor); secondary actors are communicating with primary actor through text or another silent method (+2 to secondary actors); secondary actors communicate with primary actors via radio headsets (+1 to secondary actors); cell has studied this particular monster before (+1 to primary actor); hunters are communicating through normal speech (-2 to secondary actors); monster is in combat with hunters (-2 to primary actor); sub-par or outdated equipment (-1 to -3 to primary actor).

Roll Results:

Dramatic Failure: The data that is collected is dangerously misleading. If the cell faces this monster or another like it without a successful use of this Tactic, the Storyteller has a pool of 10 penalty dice. These can be parceled out against the hunters during their first confrontation with the monster in any combination the Storyteller wishes, but each die is used only once. For instance, the Storyteller might apply a -5 against one hunter’s attack, a -2 against another’s attempt to hide, and a -3 against a third hunter’s attempt to flee.

Failure: No relevant data is collected. The data might be redundant, or maybe a power hiccup prevented the data from being stored.

Success: Data on the creature is collected. The hunters can later analyze the data (this requires at least three hours of study), after which the hunters have a pool of dice equal to twice the suc-

cesses acquired for this Tactic that can be applied to any rolls made during the confrontation with that particular creature.

Exceptional Success: No bonus aside from the greater number of successes.

To Purchase: 14 Practical Experience, 11 for Null Mysteris, 9 for the Cheiron Group.

Moral Support

Prerequisites: All: Resolve 2, Empathy 1. *Partial* (1): Presence or Manipulation 3, Empathy 2 (primary actor). Requires: 2 or more.

Dice Pool: *Primary*: Manipulation or Presence + Empathy. *Secondary*: Wits + Expression.

Action: Instant.

Description: A monster might be able to tear a man's arm off or bite through his throat, but the truly terrifying ones are those that can control his thoughts and feelings. Hunters have long been aware that many creatures of the World of Darkness can do this sort of thing — some even cause memory loss by their very presence. The Moral Support Tactic, hopefully enacted *before* it becomes an issue, gives a cell some protection against this kind of attack.

The secondary actors exchange words of encouragement and support, psyching each other up, as it were. The primary actor then says a few words to the cell: last-minute advice, reminders about Tactics, or just an admonition to "kill the bastards." The cell can then enter a dangerous situation knowing that the members have each other's backs. While this isn't a foolproof method of preventing infiltration or mind manipulation, it's certainly better than nothing.

Note, though, that moral support does *nothing* to help with existing mental manipulation. If a vampire catches a hunter out alone and implants a hypnotic suggestion, this Tactic does nothing to remove or weaken it. The hunter is protected from other mental incursions, but the prior one stands.

Organizations: All the organizations make frequent use of Moral Support.

Potential Modifiers: Hunters have been together for more than a year with no alterations in membership (+5 to all participants); hunters have been together for more than six months with no alterations in membership (+3 to all participants); hunters have been together for more than three months with no alteration in membership (+1 to all participants); cell's last encounter was a victory (+1 to all participants); primary actor is the recognized leader of the cell (+1 to primary actor); cell's last encounter was a defeat (-1 to all participants); primary actor is not the leader of the cell (-1 to primary actor); a member of the cell has died within the last month (-3 to all participants, cumulative); a member of the cell has become a monster or otherwise betrayed the cell within the last month (-5 to all participants, cumulative).

Roll Results:

Dramatic Failure: The cell is demoralized. Each member loses a point of Willpower, and all Tactics rolls suffer a -2 penalty for the next 24 hours.

Failure: The cell isn't in synch today, for whatever reason. No special protection from mental attacks.

Success: For the next scene, successes on the primary actor's roll are added to the hunters' Resistance traits for purposes of countering mental and emotional supernatural attacks. For example, the primary actor rolls three successes. If a vampire attempts to mind-control a member of the cell during the scene and the usual resistance roll is Resolve, the appropriate player rolls Resolve +3.

Exceptional Success: As above. In addition, the characters are inspired by the primary actor's words, and ready to go into battle. Each participant regains one Willpower point.

To Purchase: 13 Practical Experience, 10 for tier-two compacts, 8 for tier-three conspiracies.

Net

Prerequisites: All: Wits 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 1. *Partial* (1): Athletics 3 or Athletics 2 with a Specialty in Throwing, Roping or Whips (secondary actor). *Partial* (1): Survival 3 or Survival 2 with a Specialty in Knots (primary actor).

Requires: 3 or more.

Dice Pool: *Primary*: Dexterity + Survival. *Secondary*: Strength + Athletics (one secondary actor); Strength + Brawl (all other secondary actors).

Action: Instant.

Description: The Net Tactic serves to capture a monster alive (or still kicking, anyway). The Tactic doesn't necessarily use a net. Some cells use reinforced rope, chains, handcuffs, plastic bar-locks or whatever else is handy to secure their captives. Use of this Tactic doesn't preclude monsters from changing shape to slip their bonds, but for creatures without such capabilities, the Net Tactic is a good way to bring a non-lethal end to a confrontation.

To enact this Tactic, one of the secondary actors throws the net, rope or other restraining implement around the monster (Dexterity + Athletics - monster's Defense). The other secondary actors quickly rush in to wrestle the monster to the ground (Strength + Brawl), and the primary actor ties knots or closes locks in strategic places to keep the monster from breaking free. The monster can, of course, attempt to break free once tied (see below), but while bound, the hunters can perform a killing blow on the monster if they wish (see p. 168 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*).

Organizations: The Loyalists of Thule would much rather capture a monster for experimentation, interrogation or just observation than kill it (most of the time). The Lucifuge, also common users of this Tactic, want to be sure the creature they are about to send back to Hell isn't really on their side — or couldn't be made to join it.

Potential Modifiers: Monster is surprised, as described on p. 151 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook* (+3 to secondary actors); high-quality binding materials (+1 to +3 to primary actor); monster is wet, slimy or otherwise slick (-2 to all participants); secondary actor(s) has a lower Initiative than the primary actor (-3 to all participants).

Roll Results:

Dramatic Failure: The monster breaks free of the grapple and can make a reflexive attack on any one of the hunters, applying the hunter's Armor but ignoring Defense. The binding material is lost or ruined and cannot be used again. Alternatively, the monster might pretend to be securely trussed, but break free at any time.

Failure: The primary actor fails to tie strong knots and the monster can attempt to escape the grapple on its next action. If the cell wishes to finish the Net Tactic, one of the secondary actors must devote an action to securing the binding material (Dexterity + Larceny), after which the primary actor can try again (but with no extra dice from the other characters).

Success: The monster is tied up securely. It can attempt to escape, however. The Storyteller rolls Strength + Athletics or Dexterity + Larceny with a penalty equal to the primary actor's successes. If the monster uses Strength + Athletics (trying to break the bonds), it must inflict one level of Structure damage on the binding material (see Breaking Objects, p. 136 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*). If the monster uses Dexterity + Larceny (trying to wriggle out of the bonds), the players roll Wits + Composure in a contested action against the escape attempt. If any player's successes exceed the monster's, the hunter notices the attempt and can take any action she sees fit (attack the monster, strengthen the bonds, etc.).

Exceptional Success: No bonus beyond the greater number of successes.

To Purchase: 15 Practical Experience, 12 for the Loyalists of Thule, 10 for the Lucifuge.

Profiling

Prerequisites: All: Intelligence 2, Stealth 1, Investigation 1. Partial (1): Academics 3 (primary actor). Partial (1): Investigation 2. Partial (1): Computer 2.

Requires: 2 or more.

Dice Pool: Primary: Intelligence + Investigation. Secondary: Wits + Investigation.

Action: Instant and contested; target resists with Wits + Stealth (resistance is not reflexive).

Description: Most monsters were human at one point. That means they had human identities, were given birth certificates and Social Security numbers and left paper trails. Some even have criminal records. Such monsters are practiced, though, at covering their tracks, but learning who a monster is (or was) can be instrumental in defeating it. In order to do that, hunter cells work up a profile of the monster and use that profile in their research into the monster's past. However, this profile requires in-the-field investigation.

Secondary actors for this Tactic roll Wits + Investigation. These are instant actions, and can be made across multiple scenes. A secondary actor can make one roll per scene a number of times per day equal to his Investigation rating and "keep" the best result for inclusion in the primary actor's dice pool. If the monster is aware that it is being followed and monitored, or just assumes it always is and behaves accordingly (many monsters are indeed this paranoid), the secondary actors' rolls are opposed by a roll of Wits + Stealth for the monster. The secondary actor needs to meet or exceed the monster's successes in order for his action to be successful, otherwise the monster spots the secondary actors and might attack, flee, call in help, or take whatever action is appropriate.



Once the secondary actors have collected their data, the primary actor rolls Intelligence + Academics to synthesize the information and develop the profile. Someone in the cell needs to have Investigation 2, and someone needs Computer 2 in order to assist with this task (if the primary actor has all these traits, he can assemble the profile without further assistance). Once the profile is assembled, the cell has a valuable tool for tracking down the monster.

Organizations: Network Zero is more interested in exposure than combat, and this Tactic allows it to “out” prominent monsters in their area. Task Force: VALKYRIE, beholden as it is to official protocols, needs to know who a target really is before it moves in for neutralization.

Potential Modifiers: A member of the cell has Contacts: Police or Government (+2 to primary actor); the monster has a paper trail — birth certificate, credit history, etc. (+2 to primary actor); someone in the cell has Computer 3 or higher (+1 to primary actor); monster isn’t native to the region (-1 to primary actor); monster doesn’t photograph (-2 to all participants); monster isn’t native to the country (-2 to all participants); monster wasn’t born human or has no official documentation (-4 to the primary actor).

Roll Results:

Dramatic Failure: The primary actor misidentifies the monster, but believes he has a positive lock. The cell might attack the wrong target, or might simply begin researching him and waste a great deal of time, depending on how trigger-happy they are.

Failure: The profile is faulty and misleading. Using it as a research aid produces no bonus, and increases the time required for research by half (45 minutes per roll rather than 30).

Success: The primary actor assembles a working profile. The cell can then begin a Research task (see p. 55 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*) into who the monster is and what history is available, applying a bonus equal to the successes on the Tactic roll. Note that this doesn’t allow the hunters to find information that doesn’t exist; a prominent local businessperson might be a spirit-possessed cannibal, but if that’s never been written down anywhere, the characters can’t find it by research alone.

Exceptional Success: In addition to the hefty bonus to the Research roll, the time required for research is reduced by one third (20 minutes per roll rather than 30).

To Purchase: 14 Practical Experience, 11 for Network Zero, 9 for Task Force: VALKYRIE.

Staking

Prerequisites: All: Strength 2, Brawl 2. Partial (1): Strength 3, Weaponry 2 (primary actor). Partial (1): Medicine 1 (secondary actor).

Requires: 3 or more; 4 or more bestows +1 to secondary actors, more than 5 imposes a -1 penalty to the primary actor.

Dice Pool: Primary: Strength + Weaponry. Secondary: Strength + Brawl; Wits + Medicine (secondary actor with Medicine 1).

Action: Instant.

Description: The iconic monster-hunter image, perhaps, is the impassioned vampire-killer driving a stake into the undead fiend’s heart. Over the years, hunter organizations have experimented with crossbows, wooden “bullets” and other methods, but nothing works quite as well as holding the bloodsucker down and putting a sharpened stick between his ribs or clean through his breastplate. This Tactic works on other creatures besides vampires, of course, but it tends to have more permanent effects.

The secondary actors tackle the target and hold it down (Strength + Brawl, creature’s Defense does apply). One secondary actor then rolls Wits + Medicine, indicating to the primary actor where to strike (if the primary actor has Medicine 2 or more, this part of the Tactic can be skipped, as the stake-wielder knows where to aim the point). The primary actor then positions the stake over the heart and hammers it home.

Organizations: Ashwood Abbey has a long history of drinking vampire blood, and its members enjoy the Victorian feel of this Tactic, anyway. Some cells will stake a vampire and then leave it, paralyzed, in a perverse form of “counting coup.” The Malleus Maleficarum also makes frequent use of this tactic, but usually follow it up with decapitation and stuffing the vampire’s head with garlic (if the head doesn’t immediately dissolve into ash).

Potential Modifiers: Stake is tempered or made of sturdy wood (+2 to primary actor); stake is rotted or flimsy (-2 to primary actor); secondary actor(s) has a lower Initiative than the primary actor (-3 to all participants); Wits + Medicine roll fails (-3 to primary actor); monster’s heart has shifted within its body (-3 to primary actor).

Roll Results:

Dramatic Failure: The monster shifts and the point of the stake winds up aimed at another hunter. The primary actor rolls a normal attack (without the extra dice from the secondary actors) against another hunter, applying the hunter’s armor but ignoring Defense. Damage is applied normally. Alternatively, the Storyteller might rule that the monster has snatched the stake out of the primary actor’s hand and can make a reflexive attack on a hunter, or can bite one of the hunters and drink his blood.

Failure: The hunter fails to penetrate the monster’s chest. The hunter can try again next turn, but the monster can, of course, attempt to escape the grapple in the meantime (see p. 158 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*).

Success: The monster suffers one level of damage per success (lethal to vampires, but aggravated to living things — a stake in the heart is usually fatal!). A vampire, of course, becomes paralyzed until the stake is removed.

Exceptional Success: No bonus other than the extra damage.

To Purchase: 14 Practical Experience, 11 for Ashwood Abbey, 9 for the Malleus Maleficarum.

Equipment

Hunters need every edge they can manage. Gear is one way a hunter gives himself that edge. Below you'll find equipment that might help a character who walks the tireless Vigil.

General Gear

What follows is a list of more generalized equipment a character might take on the hunt. Each comes with rules and descriptions to help a player envision how such an item might be used on the Vigil.

Battering Ram

Durability 3, Size 3 or 5, Structure 6 or 8,
Cost •• or •••

A forced-entry tool that operates on the same principle as the siege devices once used to batter down castle doors, today's battering ram is a hardened steel cylinder with shock-absorbing grips. Small models are designed for one-person use; add the ram's Damage rating of 3 to the user's Strength + Stamina roll to force a door open. Larger models (•••) can be handled by two to four people (depending on Size) and allow the use of Teamwork rules (*World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 134). Secondary actors roll Strength + Stamina; each success adds a bonus die to the primary actor's Strength + Stamina roll. Those successes are added to the ram's Damage rating of 4.

Luminol (1 can)

Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 2, Cost •

This aerosol spray can contains the chemical reagent Luminol, which reacts with the metals in human or animal blood. Simply spray it on a carpet, on clothing or on any other surface that's suspect, then turn down the lights. The chemical will interact with minerals in even a small trace of blood, causing a blue luminescent glow that lasts for about 30 seconds. Aside from forensic investigators, the product is also used by animal hunters to follow wounded prey; monster hunters might find it similarly useful (providing a +1 or +2 equipment bonus to attempts at tracking or following injured quarry, depending on the volume of blood being shed). Even an area that's been carefully cleaned of visible bloodstains will generally retain enough traces to activate the chemical. False positive results are quite possible, though: the chemical reacts to other substances besides blood, including plant enzymes, copper, iron, human or animal urine and fecal matter and household bleach (so cleaning up a bloody area might leave enough bleach behind to mask the presence of any residual blood). Besides helping characters find a specific clue, like possible blood spots all across the overcoat of a suspected slasher, the spray can provide a +1 equipment bonus to appropriate Investigation rolls. However, the chemical can obscure or interfere with other types of chemical tests, imposing a -1 penalty to future forensic-type investigations at the same site that rely on chemical detection. Storytellers might require a Wits + Dexterity roll for characters to apply the spray correctly to a large area, with each success equaling sufficient coverage of one square foot of space.

Body Bag

Durability 2, Size 5, Structure 7, Cost ••

Not every use of this grim item need involve the transporting of corpses. As a foldable, airtight, waterproof, nonporous container that can hold up to 250 pounds, a body bag can be effective for hauling or storing almost anything. Some even come with handles to make the burden easier to carry, adding a +1 bonus Strength + Stamina rolls if the contents weigh more than a character can easily lift (*World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 47). They're also useable for confinement: because the zipper isn't operable from within the bag, a character inside is essentially trapped until he can inflict damage in excess of the bag's Durability. Such attacks are made at a -2 penalty because of the tight space, and the character forgoes his Defense while so imprisoned. A crueler and more potent threat than confinement, though, is suffocation. With the bag sealed, the character inside can last for as many turns as he can hold his breath (based on his Stamina, see *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 48) before passing out.

Digital Recorder

Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 2, Cost • to ••

With no moving parts and no tape to break or get tangled, digital recorders are an increasingly popular choice for capturing sound during a field operation. High-end models offer more than 100 hours of recording time, while inexpensive consumer versions provide two to five. Most are small enough to be easily concealed, or can be kept in a pocket or strapped to clothing for hands-free recording. Some hunters carry them as a matter of course on missions, so they or their comrades can review the recording for any encounters the wearer may have been supernaturally induced to forget. Because the data from a digital recorder can be downloaded onto a computer for processing, initially inaudible sounds can sometimes be isolated or amplified: roll Intelligence + Computer; +1 bonus if the recorder is a professional-grade model, with penalties depending on the faintness of the sound (-1 if it was a whisper, -2 or more if it was fainter than that) and the noisiness of the environment (0 in a perfectly quiet room, -1 with conversations going on, -3 for heavy traffic nearby). Each success reveals five seconds of previously inaudible sound.

Duct Tape

Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 2, Cost •

The utilitarian value of a roll of duct tape is hard to overestimate. It can be used to make emergency repairs, to seal leaks, to improve the grip of a tool or weapon, to mark or tag an area or item, to leave a trail in unfamiliar territory, and even to restrain a monster or its human slave. Where appropriate, duct tape adds a +1 to +2 equipment bonus to some uses of the Crafts skill, such as repairing items or rigging weapons (Wits + Crafts, see Rigging Weapons, p. 253). Unless the tape is a very minor component of the repair or construction, items repaired or rigged with duct tape only function for a number of uses equal to the successes achieved during the creation or repair process. After that, the tape wears out or breaks. A character restrained by duct tape may

break free or slip out by making an extended Stamina + Strength roll, with a -3 penalty, and accumulating success in excess of the tape's Structure (Durability 1 + Size representative of the amount of tape used for the restraint). Each roll represents one turn of struggling. Dramatic failure indicates the character can make no more attempts for the scene.

Earplugs

Durability 1, Size 0, Structure 1, Cost •

Some monsters attack you physically, others attack your mind. A hunter's own strengths can be turned against her comrades, should her will be overwhelmed by the hypnotic power of the enemy. One admittedly limited defense against this is to wear earplugs, so the commands of a would-be dominator go unheard. Of course, the strategy also leaves the hunter deaf to most everything else. Some hunter cells develop sign language or other ways of communicating so they can operate effectively when one or more of them is operating "in the quiet." Others use the tactic as a precautionary measure when guarding or interrogating a captured monster (the interrogator doesn't wear the plugs, but other hunters in the room do). A character wearing earplugs must make a reflexive Wits + Composure roll at -3 to perceive any sound louder than a shout, and can't hear anything softer. Noise-canceling earphones (Cost ••), which emit "white noise" to eliminate ambient sound, have a similar effect, except that they impose a -4 penalty for hearing noises. Wearing plugs, though, adds an element of surprise: a monster used to instant obedience may be caught off guard for a few important moments, giving a hunter time to act (or escape). Plugs small enough to fit inside the ear require a Wits + Composure roll to be noticed.

Electromagnetic Field (EMF) Detector

Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 2, Cost •

Available at hardware stores and electronics hobby shops, this is a handheld device that measures electromagnetic fields produced by electrical appliances, power lines and similar sources. Some are also equipped to pick up radio waves, microwaves and other types of electromagnetic activity. Designed as a tool for electricians, engineers and other professionals, these meters have become popular among ghost hunters, on the theory that ghosts have an electromagnetic field (see "Ghostbusting," above). Hunters might also use them to discern the presence of electrical activity where there should be none — perhaps that abandoned cabin isn't so abandoned — or to find hidden electronic equipment. Understanding

GHOSBTBUSTING

Manifested ghosts don't produce temperature or electromagnetic anomalies by their mere presence, but some have abilities (Numina) that might do so (directly or as a side effect). Ghosts may also trigger such phenomena when they shift from Twilight to manifested state or vice versa, or when gaining Essence. Roll the ghost's Power + Finesse; each success will cause one spike in a heat- or EMF-sensing device (assuming the device was pointing toward the ghost at the right moment). Some such anomalies, like the "cold spots" sometimes described by occult investigators, may persist for the rest of the scene, continuing to register on sensory equipment even after the ghost has moved on. A manifested ghost lacks enough substance to trigger a motion detector, but Storytellers may rule that a passing ghost will perturb the environment enough to set one off with one or more success on a reflexive Power + Finesse roll. Storytellers are encouraged to develop further rules for ghost detection as needed: knowing that something is present but can't be seen can be more unsettling than not knowing if there's anything there at all.

Unless using an appropriate Numen, manifested ghosts can make only the faintest of sounds. Such noise may be picked up by recording equipment, especially if the signal's filtered, amplified or digitally processed. The result is known to paranormal investigators as electronic voice phenomena (EVP). Most ghosts don't create EVP unless they choose to, but some manifest and generate EVP as part of a trancelike cycle they follow.

Spirits operate within similar parameters, except that not all of them can manifest, and some Twilight spirits affect the physical world by their presence (a fire spirit might make a room warmer, for example).

the implications of the detector's readings, beyond the simple presence or absence of an electromagnetic field, generally requires some expertise in electronics.

Electronic Sound Amplifier

Durability 1, Size 2, Structure 3, Cost ••

Sold under all sorts of “magic ear” type brand names, this is essentially a sound-amplifying microphone that picks up noise from up to 50 feet away. The listener aims it at a source and hears the amplified signal through a pair of headphones. The device is somewhat indiscriminate in what sounds it picks up; unless the source is in mostly quiet surroundings, a successful Wits + Dexterity (or an appropriate Skill) roll is needed to position the microphone at just the right angle (until the target moves, requiring another roll). Penalties might range from -1 in a city park to -4 on a busy subway station platform. A barrier between listener and subject requires the user to make a successful Wits + Skill roll (e.g. Crafts or Investigation) to be able to pick up a signal, with a -1 penalty for each Structure point of the impeding object.

EMT Shears

Durability 3, Size 1, Structure 4, Cost •

Used by paramedics and emergency workers, these short, blunt scissors are capable of cutting through seat belts, heavy fabric, plastic, even light-gauge metal. Their stainless steel blades and angled handles provide superior cutting power, enabling rescuers to remove clothing from injured patients or extricate them from entanglements. Scuba divers also carry them to cut through netting or monofilament. EMT shears ignore an object’s first Durability point when used as a cutting tool. The target object or its edge must fit between the blades (which typically have about five inches of cutting length).

Fangbuster

Armor Rating 1-3, Strength 1, Defense 0, Speed 0, Cost

• to •••

A vampire doesn’t have to take her meal from the victim’s jugular. But for whatever reason — maybe it’s a convenience; maybe they’re just influenced by the same pop-culture images as everyone else — many go right for the neck when it’s feeding time. Hunters who operate in vampire territory often choose to defend themselves against this tendency with a protective collar of some sort, especially if overt body armor is inappropriate or not practical. In most cases, the neck guard is designed so it can be concealed by clothing — a turtleneck sweater, a scarf — so the attacking bloodsucker won’t aim for a different body part. Usually this device is created by modifying something else, like a piece of protective sporting gear or a few metal-studded leather dog collars. Some hunters with appropriate Skills fashion higher-rated neck guards from high-impact plastic, or the same materials used for military or police body armor. The item’s Cost is equivalent to the item’s Armor rating when it comes to protecting the neck.

Flash Paper (pack of ten sheets)

Durability 0, Size 1, Structure 1, Cost •

A favorite gimmick of stage magicians, flash paper is composed of the highly combustible substance nitrocellulose. When ignited, the paper burns quickly, producing a bright, sudden flame that flares out without leaving smoke or ash. Professional entertainers find the dramatic visual effect to be a crowd pleaser, but it’s the ability to reduce a written message or diagram to nothingness in an instant that appeals to security-

conscious hunters. Flash paper’s flammability makes it a fire hazard, which is why it’s usually stored in water or kept damp until needed (requiring it to air dry for an hour or so before use). Some hunters have been known to use flash paper (or its flash string/flash cotton forms) to identify possible vampires by attempting to trigger their reflexive fear of fire. If exposed to an ignited piece of flash paper at close quarters, a vampire must achieve two successes on a Resolve + Composure roll (-1 penalty if surprised) to avoid backing away in fear or even fleeing the area in terror. This reaction is likely to be brief, but the vampire may lash out at anyone in his way, so it’s a dangerous card for a hunter to play.

Flashlight Baton

Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 2, Cost •

Sometimes a few extra pounds makes all the difference when you’re chasing down something that doesn’t want to be caught — or running from something that’s determined to catch you. A flashlight baton, also called a flashclub or “flub,” is a flashlight that, by virtue of its weight, balance and rugged construction, can also be used offensively as a club or baton. Thus it not only spares a hunter from carrying an extra piece of gear, but also serves two fundamental needs of the hunt: illumination and weaponry. Most are designed for police or military use. Since their manufacturers don’t generally advertise that their products can administer a beating as well as take one, users find the right brand through word of mouth or discover it by trial and error. Some hunters rig their own by modifying a flashlight that’s not up to the task right out of the box. Flashlight use removes penalties for acting in darkness; see the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 140, for details. When used as a weapon, the flashclub has a Damage rating of 2(B), and doesn’t suffer the usual -1 penalty for improvised weaponry.

Dirtbag

Durability 1, Size 4, Structure 5, Cost •••

Ghosts and spirits are picky about where and when they show themselves, as anyone who’s spent all night babysitting some motion detectors in a supposedly haunted house well knows. Though hunters don’t know exactly why these unseen entities choose to appear in some places and not others, some environments seem to be more conducive to the phenomenon. One enterprising hunter cell decided that instead of seeking out ghost-friendly habitats, it would find a way to make existing areas more ghost friendly. Through trial and error, the hunters developed a technique for collecting and packaging supernaturally graveyard soil active into so-called “dirtbags,” containing enough earth to cover a six-foot-by-six-foot-square area. Spreading the entire bag upon the floor or ground lowers the manifestation modifier of the area by a factor of 1 (to maximum of -3; see the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 210) for 24 hours. Of course, that doesn’t guarantee that a ghost will choose to manifest, or that any are present. The soil must be spread by hand, or with silver-plated tools (or any hand tool, if spread by a character of Morality 7 or greater). Once in place, the dirt loses its properties if moved elsewhere. Characters can purchase dirtbags from hunter cells who know how to collect it properly at the Cost listed. Harvesting one’s own graveyard



soil requires finding a cemetery that's particularly old, haunted or cursed (extended action requiring five successes on an Intelligence + Occult roll) and knowing how and when to collect the soil so that it will retain its occult properties (another research project, requiring six successes with Intelligence + Occult). The collection techniques typically present multiple inconvenient but not insurmountable challenges for soil collectors: the soil can only be collected by moonlight, it has to be near the grave of someone who died by violence, it must be harvested by someone of high virtue, etc. On top of that, the collectors must cope with security systems and legal consequences of attempting an act of grave desecration — which is why many hunters are willing to pay for the product and let others handle the legwork.

Glowsticks

Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 2, Cost •

These plastic tubes contain chemicals that create illumination when mixed together (usually by shaking the tube or twisting or breaking open a part of it). Glowsticks come in a variety of lengths, from a few inches to a foot or more. Though they're not reusable and can't be turned off once activated, they do have several advantages of other light sources: they're cheap, they're light, they're wind- and waterproof, they don't have batteries that will fall out when you need them most. And they're immune to supernatural effects that disrupt electronics. Besides using them for light in dark places or to signal each other, hunters also lay them on the

ground or floor to help them find their way out of unfamiliar territory, or clip them onto their clothes so they can keep an eye on each other at a distance (using different colored sticks helps makes it easy to tell who's who). Some hunters will try to splash the luminescent contents onto their quarry to make a monster easier to follow in low-light conditions (negating penalties to a chase or shadowing attempt). This requires breaking or cutting the stick, as they're designed not to be opened. Several small or one large glowstick affects tasks performed in darkness in the same way as a single flashlight, as long as the action takes place within its circle of illumination (about three yards in diameter). Novelty-grade glowsticks last one to three hours; those made for law enforcement or commercial purposes can last up to 12 hours. Glowsticks that emit infrared light, and hence can be used with IR-sensitive imaging systems, are available to law enforcement and military users or from gray-market sources.

Headset Communication System

Durability 1 Size 2 Structure 3 Cost •• to ••• (per headset)

Essentially a set of walkie-talkies with voice-activated microphones, these devices are a godsend for a hunter cell that needs hands-free communication while on a mission. Most have a stated range of up to 200 feet, but that's under ideal conditions. With multiple intervening objects and potential sources of interference, their effective range might be reduced by half or more. As a rule of thumb, the radios can penetrate items up

to Durability 3 without loss of signal; after that, the receiving party must make a Wits + Composure roll to understand the message, with a -1 penalty per Durability point beyond those first three. Untrained or undisciplined use of the system can result in everyone talking at once, especially when the shit hits the fan. This in turn can make communication more of a liability than an asset (possibly requiring characters to make a successful Resolve + Composure roll to avoid losing a turn to the five voices screaming in their ears). With the proper equipment, the signals sent by the headsets can be received by an outside eavesdropper, or jammed. Higher-end models come with special features, like separate channels for private communications between two users, or scrambling functions that make the signals harder for outsiders to acquire. A headset system provides a +1 Equipment bonus to Tactic use where appropriate.

Inspection Mirror Kit

Durability 1, Size 1-2, Structure 2-3, Cost •

Hunters find themselves poking into all sorts of dark corners and crevices, and not all of them are metaphorical. A mirror kit includes several mirrors of different shapes and sizes, and a set of telescoping (up to five feet long) and angled rods that attach to them. The various combinations allow the user to view around corners, beneath objects and into spaces that are too small or perilous to be reached by direct observation. In some cases, they might be used for surveillance, with the target's Perception roll contested by the user's Stealth Skill. Depending on the situation, a mirror kit may provide an equipment bonus to an Investigation attempt, or simply allow the character to apply the unmodified skill to an otherwise unobservable area.

Ladder, Caving

Durability 3, Size 7, Structure 10, Cost •

Essentially an updated version of a rope ladder, this steel-cable and aluminum-rung ladder is designed for use in cave exploration or other technical climbing situations. It's also suitable for urban exploring and rescue situations. The ladder can hold up to 300 pounds and stretches to about 30 feet, but weighs just three pounds or so and can be rolled up to fit into a three-foot by one-foot carrying bag. The ladder must be anchored, usually done by attaching its looped ends into secured anchors that have been driven into the rock face or masonry (securing each anchor requires a successful Strength + Athletics or Strength + Crafts roll). Use of the ladder grants a +4 equipment bonus to climbing attempts (Strength + Athletics).

Ladder, Multi-

Durability 2, Size 6 or 4 (folded), Structure 8, Cost ••

When pursuing, surveilling or investigating a being that can scale sheer walls, leap several dozen yards or otherwise move in an unconventional manner, a multi-position aluminum ladder can make a hunter's mission a little easier. A multi-ladder consists of multiple hinged and jointed ladder frames that slide and lock together, granting the ladder a dozen or more configurations. Typically it can be used as a "leaning" extension ladder of up to 20 feet in length, or as an A-frame stepladder of up to six feet. It can be used on an uneven surface like a staircase, by adjusting each side to

a different height, or as a scaffold, providing a horizontal surface up to six feet off the ground. The ladder can hold up to 300 pounds, folds to a compact five feet by three feet and weighs about 30 to 40 pounds; not the most practical object to be toting around on foot, but worth keeping in a cell's van or pickup truck. Along with a +4 climbing bonus, a multi-ladder can add a +1 equipment bonus to the use of certain Skills, including rigging traps.

Motion Detector

Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 2, Cost • to •••

Also called a motion sensor, this device is designed to detect an object or person passing through its field of view. Passive motion sensors operate by picking up the infrared radiation emitted by the human body: a rapid change in temperature will trigger the sensor, while vampires, zombies and other creatures that don't maintain human body temperature will not. Other detectors function by sending an active signal — like a laser beam, microwaves or sound waves — which echoes back to the detector at regular intervals. If the signal is broken, the echo pattern changes and the sensor trips. Some motion detectors contain built-in alarms; others are connected to a separate unit that collects data, sends an alarm signal or activates some other device. A typical motion sensor has a range of 30 feet and covers an arc of about 110°. Attempts to foil a passive motion detector require eight successes or more (depending on the quality of the device) on extended Dexterity + Stealth roll. Each roll represents 15 seconds of time as the character moves slowly at the edges of the detector's monitored space. Defeating an active detector generally requires use of the Larceny skill (see the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p.74).

Multi-tool

Durability 2-3, Size 1, Structure 3-4, Cost •

A hunter who's setting out to do some specific act of sabotage or surveillance will bring the particular tool set he needs. But any given field mission might unexpectedly require some wires to be cut, bolts to be removed or screws to be loosened. Rather than carrying an entire toolbox, packing a multi-tool is a more practical way for hunters to be prepared for some improvised assemblage or deconstruction. A typical model has a wire cutter, several Phillips and flathead screwdrivers, a file, a small saw, needle-nose pliers and a few blades that could be used as weapons (Damage rating 1L with -1 penalty as an improvised weapon). More expensive versions have a higher Durability and more functions. Depending on its quality and components, a multi-tool can add a +1 or +2 equipment bonus to the use of Crafts and related Skills.

Rear-View Glasses

Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 2, Cost •

Typically marketed as a cheap novelty, these sunglasses have a mirrored coating on the outside edge of each lens, allowing the wearer to view behind herself without turning around. They're not exactly like having eyes in the back of your head, but they do grant a +1 bonus to reaction rolls when the wearer is about to be ambushed or threatened from behind. They can also provide an equipment bonus to attempts and shadowing or observing

BEYOND THE VISIBLE

Electromagnetic radiation with a wavelength longer than the red end of the visible spectrum of light is designated as infrared. While this infrared "light" is sometimes equated to heat, that correspondence is not correct. Infrared radiation that's closest to the visible spectrum is described as near-infrared. These wavelengths are picked up by night-vision equipment, including night-vision goggles and camcorders with "night-shooting" capabilities. Such viewing systems amplify the infrared lighting emitted in moon- and starlight, and might be assisted by their own built-in infrared light sources. Far-infrared radiation is emitted by all objects in proportion to their temperature, and is detected and recorded with thermal imaging (thermography) equipment. When a hunter wants to follow a monster home at night, night-vision equipment makes it easy. When a hunter wants to know if he's following a walking corpse with no body heat, thermal-imaging equipment makes it possible. A hunter who doesn't do his research before acquiring his equipment may find he has the wrong gear and now is pretty much shit out of luck.

For details on Night Vision and Thermal riflescopes, see "The Scoop on Scopes, p. 248. For details on night vision goggles, see *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 140.

an unknowing target, as they make it easy to pretend that one's attention is elsewhere. Instead of switching his attention back and forth, a character can choose to focus all her attention on the rear view, effectively allowing her to see everything happening behind her but rendering her vulnerable to surprise from the front (with no bonus to reaction rolls). Anyone who takes a careful look at a character wearing these glasses will notice their mirrored edges with a successful Perception roll, though they might not realize their significance.

Rescue Whistle

Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 2, Cost •

A low-tech method of calling for help, signaling danger or otherwise sending a noisy message, whistles allow one to produce a loud noise with less effort (and hoarseness) than using the human voice. Some hunter cells use them the way army units once used bugles, with distinct calls for everything from "attack" to "regroup" to "S.O.S." Rescue whistles have several advantages over the type used by lifeguards and soccer coaches. They float, and their "pealess" design — i.e., no little

ball inside — allows them to function while wet. Their sound is particularly loud and piercing, with a range of up to a mile. Anyone in range will hear the sound with a reflexive Wits + Composure roll; -1 penalty incurred for each quarter mile from the source. Unless the ambient noise level is excessive, no roll is required if a character is within a half mile and deliberately listening for the whistle.

Slick

Durability n/a, Size n/a (covers about 36 square feet per dose), Structure n/a, Cost ••

The exact recipe for creating a bucketful of slick is a carefully guarded secret among hunter cells that trade the substance for favors or equipment. Its makers likely have multiple ways of creating the stuff, involving various oils, chemical surfactants and other fluids. When spread across a hard surface, slick renders it nearly frictionless. Anyone attempting to cross a slick-covered floor is subject to a knockdown effect, requiring a successful Dexterity + Athletics roll to maintain his footing (see the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 168). Large areas may require multiple rolls. Objects that have been coated with slick are difficult to grasp, with a Wits + Dexterity roll required to keep hold of them. Because slick dries fairly quickly, characters receive a +1 bonus to their rolls for each 15-minute period that the substance has been exposed to air. Hunters who learn the "slick recipe" can create it from components found at most hardware stores. Creating a single dose (about a gallon) is an extended action that requires 12 successes with Dexterity + Crafts or Intelligence + Science; each roll represents a half hour of work. Slick must be kept in an airtight container until used. After two weeks, any unused slick breaks down and becomes ineffective.

Stink Tag

Durability n/a, Size n/a, Structure n/a, Cost •••

Hunters use this substance — a sticky fluid with a persistent, noxious odor — to tag an enemy with a powerful, unmistakable and extremely unpleasant scent. One batch of stink tag equals about a quart of fluid, and a lesser volume is not potent enough to be effective. Splashing an opponent with the stuff requires a successful Dexterity + Athletics roll, mitigated by the target's Defense. Once hit, the target is marked by the powerful odor of the stink tag, which adds a +1 bonus to attempts to track him for the next 12 hours, and -1 penalty to the target's use of any Social Skills for a number of days equal to the successes achieved by the attacker. (The penalty is -2 if the target is interacting with a being that has enhanced olfactory abilities.) During that time, the smell is obvious to anyone who comes within conversation range of the tagged victim, making it easy for hunters to identify a disguised enemy later on. Only extreme measures, like a chemical bath, will eliminate the odor completely enough to mitigate its effects. The scent tag easily penetrates mundane clothing, but Storytellers may rule that head-to-toe protective gear keeps the scent from reaching the target's skin. The recipe for creating stink tag is known to only

a small number of hunters; its consequent scarcity is reflected in the item's Cost. Characters who learn how to make it pay one dot less; the creation process requires basic amateur chemistry tools and six successes on an extended Wits + Craft roll, with each roll representing an hour of work. Potential ingredients include musk glands from various animals, secretions from pungent plants like skunk cabbage, commercial-grade glues and solvents, and chemicals such as cadavarine produced by rotting flesh.

Thermal-Imaging Camera

Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 2, Cost •••

This is a camcorder-like thermographic camera that depicts far-infrared radiation in a display that shows temperature differences as bands of color. The camera displays moving, real-time video images, and may or may not be capable of recording the imagery. A typical thermographic camera is sensitive to temperatures of -20° F and above, can detect temperature differences of 2° or more, and can read a human-sized target from up to 2,400 feet away. Proper use of thermographic cameras for professional purposes, like medical imagery or home inspection, requires advanced training. Hunters' needs aren't as precise, but reflections, thermal shadows, background radiation and other factors can make a thermal image difficult to interpret. Except in a simple scenario, such as a single subject against a thermally uniform background, the Storyteller may require an untrained user to make a successful roll of Intelligence + Skill (e.g. Science, Medicine) to interpret the image correctly. In some cases, the number of successes might determine how much detail is gleaned. In other situations — a ghostly message written on a wall by the icy fingers of an unseen hand — the details may be immediately obvious.

Thermal Scanner

Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 2, Cost ••

A less expensive alternative to a thermographic camera (above), this is a handheld unit that measures temperatures and displays the results in a digital readout. Most thermal scanners have a range of about 10 feet or so, though if not used up close, it can be difficult to tell exactly what area is being read by the device. The scanner can detect surface temperatures from -5 to 500+ degrees Fahrenheit. Besides locating temperature anomalies that might indicate supernatural activity (see "Ghostbusting," p. 230), a thermal scanner can help hunters recognize an illusion for what it is, enable the detection of concealed electronic equipment by the heat it produces when active, or reveal hidden doorways or passages that are thinly disguised and lead to a warmer or cooler area. Note that some supernatural creatures have abilities that can disguise their abnormal temperature signatures.

Talcum Powder (Bottle)

Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 2, Cost •

Available at any pharmacy or supermarket, a bottle of talcum powder (or baby powder or something similar) is another innocuous, lightweight and versatile addition to the kit bag of a supernatural investigator. Sprinkled over the floor or ground, it prevents any solid but invisible presence from walking through the area without leaving a visible disturbance (Storytellers might allow a Dexterity

+ Stealth roll, with five successes required to step through without leaving a footprint). It provides ghosts and spirits with a medium for communication, should they lack the capacity for more robust interaction with the physical world. It can improve one's grip at a critical and palm-sweating moment (+1 equipment bonus when climbing, for example). Some hunters mix the talcum with powdered silver or iron, creating an irritant for certain supernatural creatures (roll Resolve + Composure to avoid an obvious flinch reaction if the powder contacts the skin).

Ultraviolet Ink and Portable UV Lamp

Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 2, Cost •

Hunters have many uses for so-called invisible ink, which is imperceptible to the naked eye but fluoresces when exposed to the ultraviolet (UV) rays emitted by a "black light" bulb. Need to get information to a cell member whose mail isn't secure? Write an ultraviolet message on top of a mundane correspondence. Need to place a territorial or warning mark that only other cell members can find? Paint on the wall with ultraviolet pigment. Want to leave guide marks so you can find the critical gravestone or the way out of an elaborate sewer system, but don't want them removed or obscured by vandals, caretakers or the enemy? Draw your arrows with ultraviolet ink. Effective use of ultraviolet ink requires that the intended recipient knows where to look for the message. And since anyone who possesses a UV lamp — or anything that can perceive UV light — can read what's written, cautious hunters combine the tactic with the use of code. In a few cases, hunters gone rogue have continued this practice, leaving behind taunts and clues for their former allies.

Weatherproof Matches (Box of 25)

Durability 1, Size 0, Structure 1, Cost •

Rare is the experienced hunter who doesn't keep some kind of fire-starting device with him. A lighter or a book of kitchen matches could be a last-ditch method for generating illumination in a dark environment, or it might be used to signal to one's teammates when other communication methods are unavailable. In extremis, a single lifesaving match might be enough to start a fire that will drive back a monster or divert it toward an ambush or trap. On the other hand, a fire that won't start when it's needed could mean death or disaster. Canny hunters tilt the odds in their favor by carrying windproof matches, which have larger heads that provide a strong, wind-resistant flame. Most windproof matches are waterproof as well, and so will light when wet or in the most severe of weather conditions. The matches are available from camping supply vendors and typically come in a box of 25. Note that these are safety matches, which means they'll only light when used against the special striking surface on the box. Where appropriate, an equipment bonus provided by weatherproof matches ignores any weather-related penalties.

Wheel Immobilizer

Durability 3, Size 3, Structure 6, Cost ••

Famously used by city parking authorities to incapacitate the vehicles of scofflaws, these wheel "boots" are also available

WHAT TO LEAVE BEHIND

While gearing up with the proper equipment is critical, it's just as important for a hunter to consider what not to bring. Should a hunter find herself detained by security guards, the police or other authorities, the items found on her person will have a big impact on how she's treated. Knives, firearms and other weapons, especially if they're unlicensed, illegal or just far beyond what the average person would carry for protection, will immediately raise the stakes and torpedo any chance for a trespasser to be let off with warning. Lock picks, forced entry tools and surveillance gear are also likely to inspire harsher treatment (and leave fewer options for explaining your way out of the situation). Drugs, illegal or otherwise, will all but guarantee a trip downtown for a hunter who's caught by law-enforcement personnel. Beyond the possibility of arrest or other legal complications, such items may bring the hunter to the attention of an adversary who has agents on the lookout for potential threats. Ultimately, every hunter should think carefully about what she carries when she walks out the door, and whether the utility of each piece of equipment is worth the consequences of getting caught with it.

to civilians and private security forces to deter vehicle theft. Or, for the hunter who doesn't want his quarry making an automotive getaway, to stop someone from driving off at an inconvenient moment. The device fits over the wheel of a passenger car (larger models will fit vans or trucks) and locks into place, rendering the auto non-drivable and the tire and wheel non-removable. The lock is difficult to pick, imposing -2 penalty. Attempting to break the boot off can result in damage to the wheel or tire: the character can take extra care and suffer a -2 penalty to the damage pool, or half of all damage will be transmitted to the wheel. If the wheel (Durability 2, Size 2, Structure 4) suffers two or more points of Structure damage, the car becomes non-drivable until that wheel is replaced.

White Noise Generator

Durability 1, Size 1-2, Structure 2-3, Cost • to ••

White noise is analogous to white light, in that it's said to contain all the frequencies perceptible to the human ear. In practice, this may not be strictly true, but a close approximation can nonetheless be useful. White noise devices are often used to enhance privacy, because the sound will interfere with or mask out the sounds around it. This makes it difficult for eavesdroppers to overhear anything said within the white noise generator's area of effect (from 50 square feet to 5,000 square feet,

depending on the size and complexity of the model). Use of a white noise device imposes a -1 to -3 penalty on eavesdropping attempts, whether in person or through a listening device. Those within its sphere of influence will find it hard to hear outside noises, though, possibly inhibiting Perception rolls. Creating white noise doesn't necessarily require high technology; fans and air conditioners do it all the time (though one would have to stand very close to them to gain any privacy benefits). Natural sources of white noise include wind, storms and surf.

Window Punch

Durability 2, Size 1, Structure 3, Cost •

Sold as a safety device to anyone concerned about being trapped in their car underwater, this is a handheld, spring-loaded tool that extends a blunt spike at the push of a button. Pressed against a car window, it instantly shatters the glass (a typical car window has Durability 1 and Size 3; the punch ignores 1 point of glass Durability and inflicts 3 points of damage). It's also effective against other types of glass, but users who don't take precautions must make a successful Wits + Dexterity roll or receive a point of bashing damage from flying glass shards (unless, as with car windows, it's safety glass designed to break into harmless fragments). Remember that reinforced glass will have higher Durability, and the window punch only ignores the first Durability point.

Mental Equipment

A hunter doesn't just pack weapons in the field — or at least, she shouldn't. Werewolves have heightened senses that allow them to track their prey, and witches can scry far-off places from the safety of their lairs. The hunter buys her advantages in the hardware store and on eBay, but that doesn't make her any less effective. Computers give her access to far more information than any single library, as well as to networks of hunters across the world. Cell phones, especially smartphones, pack numerous gadgets into a portable frame, many of which can be very useful when on the move. Tools for various crafts allow her to improvise customized weapons and equipment for the hunt, often capitalizing on known (or assumed) weaknesses. A well-stocked workshop also offers heavy blunt instruments for when monsters come to a hunter's door. Libraries and collections of rare books — especially those held in old universities — may hold the clue to the spells of a wizard, or the means to release a demon back to Hell.

Mundane equipment doesn't grant die bonuses past +3, and items that grant such a bonus are fine examples of their kind. A gamer's top-of-the-line computer, or a sys-admin's beautifully cared-for 486 — still connected to the Net, with an uptime of over five years — might offer such a bonus. Equipment at that level isn't just well made; it's got a story, a history of its own, maybe even a name. Like a sniper names his rifle, a handyman names his multi-tool. The only real difference is that one's a hell of a lot easier to replace than the other.

What follows is a list of equipment that largely modifies rolls made with Mental Attributes or Skills.

Computers and Communications

Personal electronics form a spectrum from cell phones to desktop computers and beyond. Just about every modern phone can run small applications, snap photographs, access the Internet and take notes. Portable devices are of more immediate use on the Vigil, but stationary machines have their uses, hosting online communities and providing off-site backups for mobile clients.

Cell Phone

Durability 1, Size 0, Structure 1, Cost •

Modern cell phones have digital cameras and basic note-taking functions along with their phone and messaging capabilities. A decent price plan (affordable with Resources • or higher) offers large numbers of free minutes — a boon to any hunter cell. Along with wired or wireless headsets, a conference call allows all members of a cell to stay in instant communication. When silence is of the essence, short messaging offers a viable alternative to voice.

In addition to allowing instant communication, modern cell phones can access the Internet. While typing web addresses and search terms on a phone keypad is a nightmare, it can save the hunter a journey back to base. She subtracts three dice from Academics or Occult rolls based on Internet research, but can make those rolls while watching a cult conduct a blasphemous ritual.

Smartphone

Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 2, Cost ••

Smartphones can run third-party programs in addition to whatever the phone manufacturer bundles with it. While that doesn't seem like much of a difference, it can be. Storing reference books on memory cards allows a hunter to carry around an occult encyclopedia in his pocket, and search it in seconds. One hunter developed software that turns a smartphone's camera into a thermal camera. While staring at the screen of a phone isn't exactly acceptable behavior at a society dinner, it does allow hunters to spot the strange thermal pattern of vampires in a crowded room. The latest version takes two pictures, one in the normal spectrum and one thermal, adding two dice to any rolls made to identify a vampire for what it is. Werewolves have a slightly higher heat signature; a hunter using the camera can make a Wits + Occult roll to identify one for what it is. Another program overloads the external speaker, producing high-pitched noise designed to disorient werewolves and creatures with heightened senses. If a target with heightened senses isn't expecting it, he loses his next action, though using it more than three times destroys the speaker and may damage the gadget's other electronics.

Most smartphones have a QWERTY keyboard. While not full sized — and thus not ideal for typing

— it makes messaging and Internet use a lot easier compared to a cell phone. It also allows a dedicated user to attempt most Computer rolls, though at a penalty. Internet research and computer use suffer a -2 penalty due to the small screen size and relatively slow cellular connection. A smartphone also offers all the communications benefits of a cell phone.

Portable Computers

Durability 2, Size 1 to 2, Structure 2, Cost ••• to ••••

The laptop/desktop divide is less important in the modern age than that between portable computers and non-portables. Smaller laptops and UMPCs (Ultra-Mobile PCs) allow a hunter to work wherever she can rest her computer; their small frame and power requirements mean they don't have the same capabilities as larger machines. A portable computer adds its rating to most Computer rolls and, with a wireless Internet connection, allows a character to make Academics or Occult research rolls with no penalty.

While they're portable, these computers can't get an Internet connection just anywhere — if a risen corpse doesn't have a wireless Internet connection in its cave, a laptop's useless for research. A local coffee shop, or the street outside an apartment block, is still likely closer than a hunter's base. With a data card or a connected cell phone, she can get online anywhere that has signal in the air. Laptops that give no bonus (but no penalty) cost ••. A better model that adds +1 to Computer rolls, as well as Academics or Occult rolls for research purposes, costs •••. High-end models cost ••••, offer the same bonus, and are only Size 1.

Desktop Computers

Durability 2, Size 3, Structure 2, Cost •• to ••••

Desktop computers, and desktop-replacement laptops, are what most people think of as normal computers. The only restriction is cost — and for software, any hacker worth his salt can find less-than-legal copies. With an always-on Internet connection, a hunter's desktop becomes a place where he can store and access information that he may need on his hunt, giving him access to useful research wherever he is. He can also host community web sites without any external agents getting involved — especially useful for sharing plans about killing people with silver bullets or kidnapping a cult leader.

A cheap desktop computer (Cost ••) gives a +1 bonus to all Computer rolls, as well as Academics and Occult research rolls — and a character likely has more time available for extended

GHOSTS IN THE MACHINE

A few online hunter communities bear memorials to members who have died, collecting all the information available about their passing. These digital graveyards can be very sobering, detailing the deaths of fellow hunters — but they can also contain very useful information. How did she die? And where?



SOCIAL NETWORKS

Web sites such as MySpace, Facebook, LiveJournal and Twitter allow people to form online communities about shared hobbies and interests. Hunters effectively share the perfectly sensible hobby of wanting to rid their world of monsters, and so it's only common that they use these networking sites to facilitate cross-cell communications. Whether they hide in the member's area of the Iowa Cat Fanciers group or wear a public face similar to the wizard-hunting Mercury Club, all hunters need to keep safe in their online interactions. Though many shout these rules to all other hunters they encounter, only a few actually practice what they preach.

Don't use your real name. Also, don't refer to where you are beyond the nearest major city and your state or country. Despite everything, social networks are only as secure as the people who host them. Assume from the start that a monster can read what you say, and plan accordingly.

Don't use your home computer. The IP address assigned to each Internet-connected computer gives a local area (even if it's just "AOL/Northern Philly"). From there, a determined hacker can break into the Internet provider's systems and match that IP to a specific customer, including name, address and bank account details. Use a public terminal, Wi-Fi hotspot, or a prepaid cellular access card for a laptop.

Do share information. Lurking on a community and never sharing anything may look suspicious. Share plans, tactics and strategies for dealing with monsters. Make plans or blueprints for improvised monster-hunting technology - Makezine.com is a good format to follow.

Don't piss people off. Stupid as it sounds, hunters are already a paranoid lot, and driving a wedge between yourself and other hunters online is the easiest way to find a pissed-off cell of hunters tracking you down as a liability.

TRACING BACK

A character who uses any computer to make an Internet-related extended roll may find herself traced. Most computer users are never traced, or if they do, it's only by software that wants their bank details or shopping habits. A hunter, on the other hand, can find herself with powerful enemies. A dramatic failure when researching a particular monster online may bring that monster's attentions on her. If she is canny, uses different access points or uses a proxy server (common practice for hunters with Computer 3 or more), she stands more of a chance of staying safe.

The monster may not know how to use computers, but he may well have minions who can. If so, they must pit their Wits + Computer in an extended roll. A minion must acquire a number of successes equal to the hunter's Intelligence + Computer, taking 10 minutes per roll - and can only make one roll for each roll the hunter made in the course of her research. If he rolls a dramatic failure, he gets the wrong location. If the extended roll is a success, the minion knows enough to trace the hunter back to a region - a specific town or city - when that hunter next makes an extended roll online. On an exceptional success, he knows where the hunter's computer is.

rolls when she's at her own desktop. A machine that adds +2 to Computer and Research rolls and that can host a web site is more expensive (•••), and a powerful machine with a wide range of software adds +3 to applicable rolls but costs ••••. A hunter can also pull up information useful for all other Mental Skills, though rather than providing a bonus using a computer in this way drops the penalty for unskilled use of a Mental skill to -1.

Investigations

All manner of tools are useful in an investigation. Whether a hunter needs to crack the code of an ancient vampire's diary or listen in on a pack of werewolves plotting their latest rampage, she'll be better off with tools to help her. Most surveillance and investigation equipment add dice to Investigation rolls, while others give a character capabilities he wouldn't have otherwise.

Crime-Scene Kit

Durability 2, Size 3, Structure 2, Cost •• to •••

Most fans of detective shows know a crime-scene kit. In addition to latex gloves and Ziploc bags, this briefcase-sized kit (••) includes clear tape to take fingerprints, cotton

swabs, tweezers to avoid fingerprinting samples, white cloths for contrast, a large magnifier, a laser pointer (often used for tracing the trajectory of shots), a powerful flashlight and, quite likely, a digital camera. As opposed to forensics equipment, a crime-scene kit is used by the detectives or scientists on the scene. The kit has to help them find and isolate evidence for later processing by a forensics lab, and provides clues enough that a good detective knows in broad strokes what's happened before the lab gets back to him.

More expensive kits also include a broad-spectrum lamp that shines into the ultraviolet and infrared spectrums as well as visible light, which makes it easier to see trace amounts of reflective substances, from semen to soundproof paint. The lamp also increases contrast, making it easier to see depressions in carpet or scratches in a wooden floor — assuming the detective isn't checking the room after a forensics team has trampled over the carpet. These kits are correspondingly pricy (•••), and usually only serve to point out things that forensics teams will find later.

A crime-scene kit adds two dice to all rolls to examine a crime scene (*World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 59). The more expensive light points out things that a normal kit couldn't (a +3 bonus), and if the detective is the first one on the scene, his roll becomes 9-again.

Cryptography

Cost •• to ••••

Codes and ciphers can be a hunter's best friend. While a monster may infiltrate an online community, if all the juicy data is encrypted, the creature gets nothing of any use. Conversely, a hunter who intercepts a secret message — be it email, a letter, or tattoo on the skull of a messenger — stands a much better chance of stopping the monster if he knows what it says.

A character has two ways of encoding a message. Ciphers, formally known as cryptosystems, transform a message into another form, from Caesar's simple alphabetic cipher, which maps A to N and Z to M, to the key-based Vigenère, to current computer cryptography. Code words, on the other hand, are innocuous-sounding phrases that mean something different to people "in the know," such as a nurse paging Dr. Brown to summon security when dealing with a violent patient. The former can be broken without inside knowledge; the latter can only be guessed at.

Ciphers count as a kind of "negative equipment" when it comes to uncovering the underlying message. Cracking cryptography requires an Intelligence + Investigation roll. A simple homespun code such as a Caesar cipher (no Cost) subtracts one die, standard computer cryptography programs (•••) give a -2 modifier, and top-of-the-line military technology (•••••) removes three dice from the attacker's attempt — and can't be cracked without time and powerful computers. Codes require

an Intelligence + Investigation roll to break, with a modifier based on the size and secrecy of the organization. A hospital or theater would be -1, military codes would be -2, while the code words of the Murder Barons, only used around members and their victims, would apply a -4 to the roll.

Occultism

All good occultists need tools. It's impossible to read tarot cards without a deck, and an authentic Ouija board attracts spirits in a way that a shopping-mall knockoff can't quite manage. Books and computer databases give occultists a chance to remember far more things than they could hold in their heads. In addition, certain supernatural creatures show up via means of occult detection that most people dismiss as pointless.

Divination Tools

Durability 2, Size 1, Structure 2, Cost • to ••

It's important for a good occultist to put on a show. No matter how seriously he takes his own work, an occult investigator knows that nobody's going to be impressed by a shiny, just-opened pack of tarot cards. The older and stranger his divinatory paraphernalia, the more convincing. And that's the key: "convincing." See, the only problem with divinatory tools is that none of them actually work—at least, not without real magic or divine favor to back them up.

That's not something most occult investigators concern themselves with. Unlike their other tools, divination equipment—be it an original Rider-Waite tarot deck in a decorated leather case, or a quartz-crystal ball—is there to impress clients. In the presence of good-quality fortune-telling tools, many people open up just that little bit more without realizing it. The occultist thus has an easier time cold reading them, and from there, an easier time making a show of telling their future or past.

Quality divination tools add their bonus dice to both Wits + Empathy rolls to cold-read a target and to the Manipulation + Occult roll required to put on a good show. Most only offer a one-die bonus, but an investigator's favorites soon show a bit more promise, adding two or even three dice. The cost of the item is commensurate to its bonus.

Energy Meters

Durability 2, Size 2, Structure 1, Cost ••

Energy meters exist for a wide range of energy sources claimed as useful by occultists. From the etheric energies captured by Kirlian photography to orgone and even psychokinetic energy, an energy meter purports to indicate abnormal amounts of the energy in the background. Most of them are junk: no more than a few circuit boards scavenged from a dead clock radio, wired together and sold on for a vast profit. A few show surprising results. They capture the presence of ghosts, and UFO landing sites cause the meters to spike for weeks afterwards.

An energy meter monitors a radius up 15 yards (depending on energy interference). If a paranormal energy source enters

THE OUIJA

Does the Ouija board actually work? It can, yes. Even a flimsy mass-produced toy store model can do the trick, and the fact that a cardboard version is as useful to this process as an ornate board over 100 years old is of concern to many hunters.

Using the Ouija board helps a ghost or other non-corporeal entity communicate. It can communicate without the Communication Numina (p. 210, *World of Darkness Rulebook*), but necessitates that the entity succeed on a Finesse roll, a roll penalized by -3 dice.

Using the Ouija board alone...well, some say the rumors are true, and that doing so leaves you open to harm by the entities. The entity's Finesse roll is only penalized by -1 die, and in return, gains +1 to any Numina rolls made against the character using the board alone.

that space, the meter spikes. The meter is a simple yes/no device; a hunter can't get a "closer" or more accurate reading. The precise range is up to the Storyteller, and should vary. Characters in possession of an energy meter shouldn't know the range of their equipment until they have plenty of time and a known supernatural phenomenon to experiment with. Most energy meters spike on the presence of ghosts, mages, and in areas where UFOs are reported to have landed. A character using one has the equivalent of the Unseen Sense merit relating to ghosts, Fortean phenomena, and mages, though precisely what sets it off depends on the meter.

Kirlian Camera

Durability 1, Size 2, Structure 2, Cost ••

A Kirlian camera photographs people's auras. While for most people, these "auras" are nothing more than a handy side effect of the world, some supernatural creatures show up as unnatural to such photographic techniques. Outside of vampires (who appear distorted on Kirlian photography, much as they do on any other photographic medium), the horrors of the World of Darkness share an aura that somehow seems "off" or "wrong." The only exception to this is that these cameras highlight manifested ghosts in the images they capture (though rarely as anything more than a blob, orb, or smear of light).

The pictures can also reveal ghosts and other supernatural creatures, if the character frames the shot right (requiring a Wits + Occult roll).

Social Equipment

Social interaction doesn't exactly conjure an image of equipment proper. If a hunter wants to be stronger, he buys a weight bench. If a hunter wants to multitask and sharpen his cognitive

processes, he purchases a computer or similar. If a hunter wants to get on better with others or more effectively get his way, what does he do then? The World of Darkness is composed of all kinds of monsters, and among its legions are purely social beasts that require a different sort of hunting. Below are some suggestions for Storytellers and players to expand their arsenal in a less traditional fashion. The equipment found below is meant to modify and aid in the application of a hunter's Social Skills.

Animal Training Equipment

The forces of darkness are rumored to hold sway over the lesser beasts to use as their eyes and ears. The Malleus Maleficarum knows, however, that God granted Man dominion over the creatures of the earth. Whether it's as a Union man's best friend or a Task Force: VALKYRIE's K-9 partner, hunters of all stripes have use for animals. The Long Night has snake handlers in its ranks; some Ascending Ones keep Saluki hunting dogs or believe cats can protect them from the Underworld; the Ashwood Abbey still sends messages via crows and falcons; and it's even rumored that the Cheiron Group has developed a psychically controlled cockroach. Without any supernatural powers to subvert their companions, hunters are left to do things the old-fashioned way.

The following equipment provides bonuses for handling and training animals using Animal Ken. Animal handling refers to the physical manipulation or guidance of an animal that may not have any training, such as picking up a wild snake or moving a pig from one pen to another. The full system for animal training can be found in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 179.

Clicker

Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 2, Cost •

A clicker is the modern face of Pavlov's bell in a palm-sized device that *clicks* when squeezed. This device was developed to help with training dolphins, but has quickly caught on with other domesticated animals. The method is known as "operant conditioning" and the assertion is that by applying an auditory clue to a preferred behavior and rewarding the animal accordingly, the animal will want to perform that action again. Eventually, the hunter won't need to supply any reward at all, just "click" and the animal's brain assumes its own reward based on the acquired conditioning. The animal learns by intent and not simply by rote. A clicker (or whistle or other preprogrammed aural or visual signal) grants +1 to training rolls. Once the hunter has successfully trained a behavior into the animal, the clicker grants +2 on rolls to produce the desired reaction from the animal thereafter. Note that the noise is just a signifier of the desired behavior. The reward that follows positively reinforces that behavior and is a necessary component to the training. Food isn't the only sort of reinforcement the trainer can provide; depending on the level of acquired trust, simple affection will suffice.

Leash

Durability 2, Size 1, Structure 3, Cost •

Animal training begins with control, and a leash (or lead) is the most common implement to guide and restrain an

animal as small as a ferret to as large as a horse. The hunter gains +1 on rolls to train or handle the animal. If the animal wishes to get away from its handler, it must succeed on a contested Strength roll at a -1 penalty. Equivalent examples include tethers for falconing, or bits and reins for horses.

Harness

Durability 2, Size 2, Structure 4, Cost ••

A harness attaches around the animal's trunk and undercarriage, giving superior leverage and control to the handler. An agitation harness, for instance, is designed to retain control over "working dogs," such as security and K-9 units. The harness keeps the airway clear and allows the animal a full range of movement for biting and attacking on command. A harness grants a +2 on handling rolls (this bonus supersedes the leash bonus listed above and does not stack). If the animal wishes to break away from its controller, it must succeed on a contested Strength roll at a -2 penalty. Equivalent examples include yokes for livestock or hoods for falconing.

Reinforcement

Cost •

Reinforcement is just a fancy name for an edible treat such as jerky, feed or fish. Typically used as a reward for desired behavior, this method is the most intuitive and commonly used by pet owners. Use of reinforcements grants a +1 bonus to training and general animal-handling rolls like gaining the trust of a strange animal.

Alternatively, reinforcement can be used offensively as well: the old trick of bringing a steak to distract and dope guard dogs is an absolutely valid strategy. Many animals are only as smart as their last meal, especially if the animal is commonly neglected. It takes an extraordinarily well-trained animal to pass up the opportunity for a free treat even when it is well fed. The hunter pits his Wits + Animal Ken (with +1 dice from for the reinforcement) in a contested roll versus the dog's Wits + Composure. If the animal succeeds, it is not distracted by the offering and will continue pursuit as normal.

Whip

Durability 3, Size 2, Structure 1, Cost •

Spare the rod, spoil the dog. Not all animal owners aim to coddle a creature for companionship and good behavior. Some don't see the point, and some are just looking for a beast as mean as vinegar and twice as bitter. Meanness is generally acquired: the animal does not attack because he is afraid or angry, but rather by command. Using whips, batons or switches allows the trainer to apply half his Weaponry pool (rounded down) to training rolls. However, animals mistreated in such a way can become unpredictable, turning as fast as a swift wind. Two consecutive failures on contested training rolls (the animal scoring higher than the trainer) translates to the animal attacking the trainer. Depending on the nature of the animal, however, it may act out in other ways, like wrecking property, attacking a third party, or developing worse behavior than before the training. Some trainers destroy such animals; others keep beating the training into them. If the animal lives, future attempts to train the animal can be performed at a -2 penalty. Other methods to train animals through purely negative

reinforcement include confinement in small spaces like trunks or closets, feeding them gunpowder or pepper, starving the animal, or using Tasers to rile them. If any of these methods are employed, then the same system of consecutive failure leading to a dramatic failure per the above should be applied.

Badges and Professional Identifications

The old joke says you can go anywhere with a clipboard and a jumpsuit. The truth is close. An official-looking set of credentials certainly opens a lot of doors and quiets a lot of questions. Monsters, their associates and more urbane cultists are likely to cooperate with mortal authorities or agencies — even if only temporarily — to save themselves a lot of hassle later. Heaven help the hunter who's discovered faking it, but for short-term cons, a badge can work like a social skeleton key.

Police badges make optimal cover, of course, but are not the end-all, be-all when it comes to sticking your hunter's nose where it doesn't belong. Press passes have a similar but distinct utility; she may not be able to poke around a car and plant a tracking device, but a hunter claiming press credentials might find it enough to talk her way into an invitation-only stockholder dinner or access police records regarding an ongoing investigation. Easier to forge and harder to authenticate are civil authority identifications, like those of building inspectors, asbestos surveyors and utility representatives. Never underestimate the invisible people who pass through sensitive areas all the time without ever raising suspicion. After all, what threat does a meter reader pose?

Of course, police badges don't just fall off trucks, and plausible forgeries are hard to come by. If a hunter doesn't have the appropriate Profession or dots in Status, he's going to have to manufacture or get his hands on a forgery. Forgeries likely require dots in the Allies, Contacts or Status Merits, or may necessitate the Computer or Streetwise Skill to pull off. A bad copy might pass a cursory "flash and pass" inspection, but the second anyone asks to see that again, the hunter better know where her exits are.

Identifications are a good way to gain entrance to locations normally forbidden to the general public, access records, secure interviews, or simply throw a little weight around as appropriate. Contrarily, a Professional Engineer license or union card isn't going to win a hunter any dates, or get a stranger to give him money without a pretty good reason.

Costs below reflect a black and "gray" market price. Obviously, one cannot purchase such identifications at the local Wal-Mart.

Passable Forgery

Cost •

A passable forgery adds +1 to appropriate Subterfuge, Intimidation or Persuasion rolls. A failure will make the target irreparably suspicious and the advantage immediately swings in his favor. Any rolls made to continue the ruse after an initial failure suffer a -2 penalty. A dramatic failure where mon-

sters are involved usually leads to body parts being mailed to the hunter's cellmates.

Civilian Identification

Cost ••

A real deal or competent forgery of civil authority identification (Union Representative, Officer of the Court, Professional Inspector) are good for +1 to Subterfuge-, Persuasion- or Manipulation-based rolls for gaining access to non-public or prohibited areas. The Union swears by this method to gain access to basements and crawlspaces, leaving doors unlocked, tapping phone lines, or shutting off valuable utility services (like electricity or telephone) just prior to a raid.

Press Pass

Cost •••

A Press Pass won't grant access to search or seizure, and it won't get a hunter into a sub-basement to "check the pipes." But it might open a few doors with a +2 to appropriate Persuasion and Subterfuge rolls, and +1 to Intimidation. ("Fuck off? Can I quote you on that...?") The fear of bad press is fairly prevalent in today's society, and even someone's undead master might give a little to get a little when it comes to cooperating with the media (alternatively, he might "give" the hunter's body to the swamps, but that's the risk). A hunter should be careful not to identify her employer (real or fake), or it will be that much likelier to come back to her. A common trick is to identify whatever parent company or conglomerate ultimately owns the paper or station, as it will at least take a while to sift through the bureaucracy long before it gets back to her. In that time, she should make sure that her cell has taken the necessary measures to ensure the monster won't be a problem...ever again.

Police Badge

Cost •••

A master forgery or a real gold shield nets a +3 across the board for all applicable rolls, such as to intimidate someone, access private property, interview a person on the spot or request somebody bend the rules in the hunter's favor. A real badge will have the state or county shield, the city or city code, the badge number and usually the precinct number listed on the badge itself. As with the above, this does present an opportunity to track back to the hunter's doorstep if she's a real cop, especially if she suspects a monster might have connections within the force. A police badge should not be considered a blank check; due process is still a consideration. A forceful and confident demeanor, however, can get a lot of leeway out of someone not entirely canny with what their rights are. A badge isn't just a social bludgeoning tool, though. With a smile and quiet assurance, a hunter can get a few more details out of a witness who thought she was done answering questions last night, or a peek at the hotel register from a week ago.

Drugs

Disinhibitors and hallucinogens: tools used (and some say developed) by the intelligence community at one time or another. They have their uses to the clever hunter who doesn't mind crossing a few moral lines. Whether to aid in

interrogation, hypnosis or simply to render a target unconscious, plenty of narcotics are cheap and accessible if a hunter knows where to look. The drugs discussed below are variations on this theme of “lubricating the gears” with regard to imposing a hunter’s will over her target. Disinhibitors have a way of eroding resistance, both to outside suggestion and one’s own impulses. Hallucinogens are capable of putting a target in such a state that he loses his sense of consequence (and sometimes reality itself), making him all the more pliable to interrogation and manipulation.

Truth Serum

Cost ••

Many drugs are touted as so-called truth serums, like Sodium Pentothal (sodium thiopental), amyl nitrate or Belladonna extract. This isn’t an entirely accurate moniker, though they do wear down a target’s will and he becomes significantly more susceptible to suggestion. The subject becomes less able to deceive simply because he lacks the will or creativity, rather than a bona fide compulsion to speak the truth. The hunter is as likely as not to get whimsically useless answers or nonsensical stream-of-consciousness associations from her target if she’s not particularly skilled at controlling the subject.

Truth serums apply a -1 penalty to all Social Resistance rolls per 7 mg dosage to a maximum of three doses (-3 dice) before a target should be treated as if suffering from an overdose (Toxicity 3; *World of Darkness Rulebook*, pp. 180–181). Subterfuge rolls, however, find the penalty doubled (to a maximum of -5 dice).

Street Narcotics

Cost • to ••

Not all hunters can have the Cheiron Group’s means, or access to a prescription pad like some established Null Mysteris members. Some street-level versions of drugs have similar and sometimes more potent effects, like getting a subject to blurt out truths he would otherwise guard with his life. Flunitrazepam, more commonly known as Rohypnol (a.k.a. Roofies or the Date-Rape Drug) is a common street disinhibitor. Ecstasy, LSD, Ketamine or Dust (dried embalming fluid) could all be used to similar effect, albeit with less predictable results.

Rohypnol is the most readily available, least conspicuous and most effective method available to the average blue-collar hunter. For the first two hours under the influence, the target becomes socially pliable and open to suggestion. However, his behavior will become increasingly erratic, clumsy and short-sighted, as if extremely drunk (see the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 177). For the next two hours, the target suffers a -4 penalty on all Social rolls and cannot spend Willpower (Storytellers may rule that weaker substitutes, such as Ketamine, garner a lesser penalty and allow for Willpower expenditure).

Complete memory loss is a common side effect in drugging victims. A target who wishes to recall the events of his blackout must make an extended Resolve + Composure roll with 10 successes necessary. Each roll counts as one day of worrying at the missing memory. If the subject has not suc-

ceeded within five days, then the memory is gone, or at the very least will require extensive therapy to recover. (Therapy, in fact, can add +2 dice to the aforementioned Resolve + Composure roll.)

That said, disinhibitors are sometimes unpredictable and can cause very aggressive behavior in their targets. When used against some monsters, it can induce horrific episodes within the beast and it might devolve into a mindless fervor, destroying everything — and everyone — in its immediate vicinity. This proved fatal when several Union members thought they could get smart with a demon they dosed at a bar and followed, stumbling, into an alley. Their next of kin are provided a small pension, but nothing replaces a father or sister.

Polygraphs and Lie Detectors

Numerous methods of so-called lie detection are available to the right budget and means. The most common are polygraphs. Polygraphs monitor physical responses like breath rate, blood pressure and sweat output during the interview process. While these physiological signs are common signifiers associated with lying, they can also be signs of being hooked up to a strange machine while someone asks awkward questions intended to blindside the subject. Multiple downsides exist with using a polygraph. They require multiple points of contact (which means the target is either willing or immobilized already), space and a trained proctor to read the results. That isn’t to say they’re entirely useless; just ask the Cheiron unit that discovered a demon in its midst when it failed to register any response on a routine polygraph. It didn’t save Jansen or Michalski, but countless others were spared thanks to that minute’s warning.

The following lie detection equipment is designed to aid a primary actor in an extended Interrogation Teamwork roll (see the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 134). The interrogator must succeed on either a Manipulation + Intimidation (tough interrogation) or Manipulation + Persuasion (honey rather than vinegar) roll as the secondary actor. Successes gained are added to the equipment operator’s Intelligence + Science + equipment roll, which is contested against the subject’s Manipulation + Subterfuge rolls. (The Subterfuge roll is only necessary if the target is lying, however; otherwise, the roll isn’t contested.)

Web-Based Analysis

Cost •

Recently, web programs have become available that will monitor voice modulation and heart rate over a phone line. The hunter gets what he paid for, but it does work, especially on a budget. A few bold Network Zero reporters have tried this method to monitor telephone interviews in search of a valuable recorded slip up. However, as the first of those intrepid broadcasters learned, it is very traceable. The web-based analysis adds +1 to the operator’s chances of sussing out a lie.

HAUTE COUTURE: FASHION AS EQUIPMENT

Cost • to •••

It is difficult to get around the fact that most social interaction begins and ends with the superficial. Lots of people love to distract themselves with pretty baubles and trendy clothing, and many monsters are just as shallow, if not more so. Whether it's the designer they wear, the bling they flash, or the toys they buy, looks matter.

While the title implies high society, it's worth noting that one man's plus is another man's minus. Wearing the latest in named fashion with a Louis Vuitton purse and \$20 grand of diamonds around her neck might serve a hunter well at a vampire's posh soiree, but will net her nothing but disdain and mugging at the other end of town. Accordingly, if she wears a leather jacket and do-rag, she'll get a lot more done on the wrong side of the tracks, but won't get past the doorman at the country club. Bonuses and/or disadvantages to appearance are all about what's appropriate to the situation.

It tends to be expensive to stay on the bleeding edge of fashion trends, and the bonuses are spread out accordingly. By keeping up with time and tide, a hunter might gain a +1 bonus on Presence pools per point in Cost spent (though only when dealing with the appropriate crowd, as per Storyteller prerogative). Many of the more social monsters get used to being the prettiest thing in the room, and a good way to draw their attention - and ire - is to draw attention away from them. The members of the Ashwood Abbey delight in this form of baiting and trapping. Get a monster's attention, snub him, get him to follow and jump him with five hedonist buddies. Can it backfire? Sure. One hunting party thought they had hooked a vamp, but when they caught up to her on the street and smashed in her pretty little face, it revealed an even prettier face underneath, as if through cracked porcelain. The only survivor claims there was a bright flash of light and the "taste of singing" in his throat.

This bonus for being part of the in scene with one group doesn't always stand to follow within other cliques. As mentioned above, brandishing a Polo shirt and Rolex watch to the country club is going to get the right sort of notice by the right sort of people; wearing the same outfit to Fetish Night at a goth club is going to do the exact opposite. At the Storyteller's discretion, apply an appropriate die penalty (-1 per dot of Cost) for the wrong situation as you would the bonus for the right situation. If a hunter's dress earns him +1 at the golf course, it earns him -1 at the punk club.

Analog Polygraph

Durability 1, Size 3, Structure 4, Cost •••

Analog polygraphs consist of a bulky metal box that feeds reams of paper across its surface, with three suspended arms like record needles hovering over the pages. These arms record the rate of the subject's breath and heartbeat, as well as the sweat at their fingertips. Contacts are placed at points of circulation, a stethoscope tube is wrapped around the trunk of the subject and clips are applied to his finger. While outdated, these machines still work reliably for what they were built for. The polygraph adds +2 to the operator's pool to detect lies.

Digital Polygraph

Durability 2, Size 2, Structure 4, Cost ••

More compact, and slightly more mobile, are digital variations of polygraphs. No paper is needed and a hunter can digitally record the exam on a laptop. These digital versions are easily transportable in a backpack or in a car, especially compared to their analog cousins. The cell will still have to subdue the subject and attach the contacts as normal, but the test is more secure from environmental concerns. The operator adds +2 to the dice pool to tell if the subject is telling the whole truth, but gains 9-again to the roll.

Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI)

Durability 5, Size 7, Structure 12, Cost •••••

An MRI is a large, clinical-looking cylinder, with a retractable gurney that moves the patient in and out of a largely featureless central chamber. MRIs are significantly less dangerous than an X-ray and are capable of far more specific data. If the target suffers from claustrophobia, however, she almost certainly should roll Resolve + Composure to retain her cool, or she will need to be sedated. Accordingly, it's quite a large machine, used as a non-invasive method to photograph the humors inside a still-living creature. As the name implies, the machine targets the subject with a large magnet that causes the hydrogen molecules in the bloodstream to line up in such a way



that radio waves can be bounced off them, recording a sub-dermal image. Sometimes, dyes, most commonly gadolinium, are used to provide extra contrast. Recently, strides have been made to adapt MRI technology in the study of the human brain to achieve a far more accurate system of lie detection. Not the most cost-effective method, but by monitoring impulse migration, specifically in the

Caudate Nucleus, medical research believes it has discovered a near-perfect method for detecting mistruths (seeing the lie even as it "forms"). The Caudate is the brain's filter, and studies have revealed that even the least stressful and whitest of lies has to pass through this node in the brain and registers on the screen. Of the available methods of lie detection, fMRIs promise to be the most

THOSE DAMNED DAMNED

Many of the interrogation methods listed above, like drug-assisted coercion or lie detection, often rely on very biological reactions. The undead are not especially prone to such reactions, but a little human ingenuity goes a long way in circumventing this problem.

Behavioral "tells" (not to be confused with a hunter's Tell) are still giveaways in younger vamps not so "long in the tooth," and a haunting spirit is as bad a liar in death as he would have been in life.

Some hunters have found dosing a person and getting a vamp to feed from that person's blood can transfer the effects of most narcotics. Often called "Poisoning the Well," this secondhand effect is often diluted by the step removed, and older vamps are going to require significantly larger doses. This can be considerably harmful and sometimes fatal for the unwitting intermediary in question. If at all possible, the hunters would be wise to dose a known collaborator, sycophant, or cultist, thus killing two birds with one stone.

A possessed body - whether "claimed" by the restless dead, a demon, or something stranger - should be just as susceptible to drugging, given that it is bound to a physical body. Caveat: more than one unit has fallen prey to deceitful spirits who play at being disoriented until they can take advantage and make their escape - or make slaves of their would-be captors.

reliable. The problem is that an MRI is an incredibly unwieldy piece of machinery, requiring precision, space, an operator and either a willing or completely subdued target. Plus? Expensive. Not exactly field capable, but incredibly useful if a Task Force: VALKYRIE cell has managed to capture a target for future interrogation or suspects its unit has been compromised; or if the Null Mysteris wants to prove its point by shooting holes in an opponent's account of the "facts." Certainly, Cheiron has more than a couple of these devices on hand for its agents, too.

During an MRI, any questions must be asked from a separate room, which means that for the most part, Intimidation cannot come into play with regard to the secondary actor's roll; he can only use Manipulation + Persuasion. The magnet within the machine is 10,000 times the normal magnetic force of the Earth and any metals in the vicinity can and will behave accordingly, including piercings, some eyeglasses, or the metal bolts attached to a patchwork man. For all the trouble, time and money tied into these machines, they are exceptionally conclusive. The MRI adds a +4 equipment bonus to appropriate dice pools.

Disguises

Identity Box

Durability 1, Size 2, Structure 3, Cost •••

A hunter without any natural aptitude for disguise can still create a useful facade by utilizing a specialized kit, called an identity box, created by a fellow hunter with the right knowledge and expertise. ID boxes come complete with everything needed to assume a temporary new persona: clothing, identification, simple makeup, even mundane objects that will support the falsehood should the hunter be searched (a reporter disguise includes notes from a recent interview; a vagrant disguise includes a meal schedule card from a local soup kitchen). Clothing and accoutrements are appropriately worn and lived in, adding authenticity. Written instructions on how to apply the disguise and some key tips on acting the part ("doctors always check their watch after talking to you for more than a minute") round out the package. Using an identity kit grants a +3 equipment bonus to skill-based disguise attempts (Subterfuge + Wits, *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 87). If used by a character with no Subterfuge skills, the ID box enables a disguise attempt using Wits + Manipulation, with a maximum dice pool of 4 (no equipment bonus for using the ID box, though). In the latter case, observers get a second chance to spot the fake should the character do anything to call attention to himself. Identity kits don't enable characters to impersonate a specific individual, nor do they obscure a character's features enough to prevent him being recognized; for those functions, a Disguise Kit (below) is called for. It's possible to use both tools at once, with separate rolls required for observers to see that the character is not really a nurse, and is the same guy who was spotted skulking outside the hospital yesterday. A hunter who needs an identity kit has to put the word out through his local contacts, specifying the type of disguise he needs and his physical characteristics (from shoe size to hat size), then wait a week or two before it's ready for pickup. Rumor has it that some cells have created identity boxes for passing oneself off as a vampire, werewolf or other monster. But the heightened senses of such beings make such attempts extremely risky.

Professional Makeup Kit

Durability 1, Size 2, Structure 3, Cost •••

Some hunters find the use of a good makeup kit to be invaluable, as a good disguise can keep the trail from leading back to his door. With various bases, powders and latex, a hunter can perform a surprising amount of obfuscation with a limited budget, manufacturing distinguishing features to create false leads. The authorities go looking for a man with a ragged scar across his cheek, while the hunter goes home and simply washes his face. The hunter rolls Dexterity + Subterfuge and gains +2 dice when attempting to apply false features. Efforts to remember the hunter require a Wits + Intelligence roll contested against the successes of the hunter's disguise. If the target succeeds, it is able to provide enough other relevant details to identify the hunter.

If infiltrating the monster's lair is a tactic the hunter has in mind, prototype boxes have been created, but few are willing to take the chance to field-test them. Hunters discover quite quickly that the extra senses of the enemy are not easily fooled, but with a few simple additions they might pass a cursory inspection. Trying to pass among the undead? The hunter should use a chalky base to apply an unearthly pallor and swallow some blood to give their breath just the *hint* of rot. If a particularly ballsy Aegis Kai Doru wants to infiltrate a wolfman cabal, she should give herself a dirt bath and preferably some animal musk, if available. Demons are widely (though perhaps incorrectly) believed to have two different-colored eyes, and cosmetic contacts could help pass as the unholy. Attempts to pass as something monstrous necessitate the same Dexterity + Subterfuge roll, but suffer -2 dice.

Weapons

Are there hunters who pursue the Vigil armed with nothing more than a video camera or some musty scrolls and tomes? Yes. Are there hunters who want nothing more than to put a bullet, knife, stake or chainsaw through every supernatural being they can find? Damn straight. Most, though, fall between the two extremes: ready to take up arms of one sort or another to defend what they hold dear, willing to use proactive violence against a paranormal threat that can't otherwise be stopped, but all too aware that coping with inhuman horrors often requires more resourceful tactics than shooting, stabbing or bludgeoning the enemy. Below are some tools of the trade for hunters who anticipate violent confrontation, unavoidable or otherwise. For more details and options, see the *World of Darkness Rulebook* and *World of Darkness: Armory*.

Firearms

Revolvers

A firearm that holds its rounds in a rotating cylinder, a revolver has a lower ammunition capacity than other handguns, but provides reliability and durability in exchange. Many shooters start with a .22 LR revolver; its small size and affordability make it a good weapon to train with. Hunters looking to buy cheap handguns that from extra-legal sources are likely to come across a .38 Special. Besides being exceptionally common and easy to explain ("I keep it for self-defense, officer") the .38 Special is easy

REVOLVERS

Type	Damage	Ranges	Capacity	Strength	Size	Cost
.22 LR*	2	5/10/20	6	0	1	•
.38 Special	2	20/40/80	6	1	1	••
.357 Magnum	3	30/60/120	6	2	1	••
.44 Magnum	3 (9 again)	35/70/140	6	3	2	•••

* Special: Does not gain the 10-again benefit.

PISTOLS

Type	Damage	Ranges	Capacity	Strength	Size	Cost
Glock 22	2	20/40/80	10+1	2	1	••
Glock 26	2	10/20/40	10+1	2	1	••
9 mm Luger	2	20/40/80	15+1	2	1/S	••
.45 autoloader	3	30/60/120	8+1	2	1/S	••
Desert Eagle	4	50/100/200	7+1	3	1/L	••••

RIFLES AND SHOTGUNS

Type	Damage	Ranges	Capacity	Strength	Size	Cost
Hunting Rifle	4 (9 again)	200/400/800	4+1	2	3	•••
Sniper Rifle	4 (9 again)	250/500/1000	10+1	2	3	••••
Plinking Rifle	1	30/60/120	5+1	1	2	•
Weatherby Mk. V	5	250/500/1000	2+1	3	3	••••
M1 Garand	4 (9 again)	225/450/900	8+1	3	3	•••
KAC SR-25	4 (9 again)	125/250/500	20+1	2	3	••••
Assault Rifle	4	150/300/600	42+1	3	3	•••
Pump-action shotgun	4 (9 again)	20/40/80	5+1	3	3	••
Sawed-off shotgun	4 (9 again)	15/30/65	5+1	3	2	••

ALTERNATIVE SHOOTERS

Type	Damage	Ranges	Capacity	Strength	Size	Cost
Dart Gun (pistol)	0*	10/20/40	1	1	2	••
Flare Gun	-1L*	20/40/80	1	1	1	•
Slingshot	0B*	5/10/20	1	1	1	•
Taser, Ranged	-1*	1/3/7	1	1	1	••

* See text for notes or special rules.

THE SCOOP ON SCOPES

Shooters who need a closer look at distant targets may choose to mount a telescopic scope to their rifle or shotgun. Use of the scope allows the shooter to ignore range penalties for medium-range targets, and halves the penalty for long-range targets (Durability 1, Size 2, Structure 3, Cost •). A night vision scope not only magnifies the target, but also amplifies near-infrared light (see "Beyond the Visible, p. 234) to allow shooting in darkness. The user ignores Fighting Blind penalties; long-range penalties are reduced to -3 (Durability 1, Size 2, Structure 3, Cost ••). An option favored by Special Forces and other pro shooters is the thermal scope, which visualizes the body heat of the target. The scope reduces long-range penalties to -1 and eliminates penalties for medium range. If used in darkness, range penalties are normal, but the Fighting Blind penalties do not apply (Durability 2, Size 2, Structure 4, Cost •••). Of course, this assumes the target has body heat; against a vampire or zombie, the scope functions as a non-thermal telescopic scope.

to conceal, simple to use, and light in both weight and recoil. Among hunters wanting more force, the .357 Magnum is favored for its balance between size, power and recoil. And hunters who want a revolver that offers even more stopping power and an even bigger intimidation factor might choose .44 Magnum, provided they have the strength to wield it and can handle its recoil.

Pistols

These handguns feed ammunition into the chamber from a magazine in the handle, and allow the user to fire one shot each time the trigger is pulled. They're more prone to mechanical failure than revolvers, but many shooters favor them for their greater ammunition capacity, faster reload time and easier concealment. The Glock family of semi-automatic pistols is made with a polymer frame that makes them extremely durable. The Glock 22 is arguably the world's most common police sidearm. The Glock 26, built to a smaller scale, is a favorite choice for a concealed or backup weapon. Variations on the 9mm Luger are available at just about any gun store in the world, since the model takes the most common caliber of handgun ammunition worldwide. The various .45 autoloaders offer more stopping power, but hold less ammo. The very definition of "hand cannon," the Desert Eagle is a large, powerful, heavy, high-maintenance handgun. It's an uncommon choice, but not unheard of for a hunter who has money to spend and a liking for a high-profile weaponry.

Rifles & Shotguns

Long-barreled firearms not only allow the shooter to attack from a distance, but the hunting and recreational shooting models are also generally sold with fewer restrictions or regulations than other gun types. For simplicity's sake, hunter and sniper rifles can operate under similar principles, with the primary advantage of the latter being an increased range and ammo capacity. More specific rifle types include low-powered backyard or "plinking" rifles, the big game rifle Weatherby Mk. V, the old-school service rifle M1 Garand and the covert-op favorite KAC SR-25 (sale to civilians highly regulated). Assault rifles are used by soldiers, tactical police units, militias and anyone else with a need to spray an assload of bullets in the space of a few seconds. Depending on where a hunter operates, he may find that acquiring and carrying one attracts unwanted attention. Shotguns are devastating at close range, their wide barrels capable of throwing heavy, low-velocity ammunition that shreds whatever's in the way. Pump-action shotguns offer larger ammunition capacities, greater reliability and lower cost than other models. Sawing off the barrels or replacing the stock with a pistol grip will make a shotgun easier to conceal; the former decreases the gun's range and the latter raises the Strength requirement to 3.

Alternative Shooters

Name any handheld object with a trigger or a payload, and chances are some hunter somewhere has tried to use it against the enemy. Here are some less conventional weapons that might be for a creative — or desperate — hunter.

Dart gun: used primarily for animal control and zoological research. Does no damage but delivers a dose of tranquilizer upon a successful hit. Modifying a dart to contain a different substance requires a successful Dexterity + Crafts roll with a -2 penalty; failure results in destruction of the dart and loss of its intended contents. A character or creature hit with a tranquilizer dart must succeed on a Stamina + Resolve roll to stay conscious, with a bonus of (Size -3) to the roll and a -1 penalty per each additional dart. Unconsciousness lasts for 10 minutes per dart.

Flare gun: designed to alert would-be rescuers; when used offensively, it inflicts a flat four points of damage (Damage 1, with +3 damage bonus for its flame.). On an exceptional success, combustible items on the victim will catch fire, inflicting one point of lethal damage per turn until extinguished (see p. 180, the *World of Darkness Rulebook*).

Ranged Taser or stun gun: 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 the character to make an additional attack that automatically succeeds with a fixed 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.

BLADES

Type	Damage	Size	Durability	Cost	Notes
Kitchen Knife	1 (L)	L	1	•	Improvised weapon; max damage 2
Combat Knife	1 (L)	1	3	•	
Throwing Knife	1	1	2	•	Range Aero
Bottle/Broken Bottle					
Fire Ax	3 (L)	3	2	•	two-handed weapon
Hatchet	1 (L)	1	2	•	

BLUNT INSTRUMENTS

Type	Damage	Size	Durability	Cost	Notes
Club	2 (B)	2	1	n/a	Includes baseball bat, nightstick, etc.
Telescoping Baton	3 (B)	2	3	•	Collapses to Size 1
Sap	1 (B)	1	2	•	Stun effect
Sap Gloves/Brass Knuckles	1 (B)	1	3	•	Use Strength + Brawl

Handheld Taser/stun gun: Has a similar effect, except that the user makes a Dexterity + Weaponry roll to hit the target. No damage is inflicted, but successes count toward the knockout effect mentioned above. The user must make successive Dexterity + Weaponry rolls to continue applying the electricity; successes on each round are subtracted from the target's efforts to break away (Strength + Brawl, one success ends the attack).

Slingshot: not the toy carried by Dennis the Menace, but the type designed for hunting; inflicts a maximum of one point of lethal damage unless aimed at the eyes or some vulnerable spot (see *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 165, for targeted shot rules); attacks use the Athletics Skill. Some hunters find slingshots useful for eliminating an out-of-reach light or a security camera.

Handheld Weapons

Below, melee weaponry that a hunter may find...useful in combat.

Blades

A hunter caught off guard might grab a kitchen knife for defense; as an improvised weapon, suffers a -1 penalty to attack rolls (they're weighted for use on a cutting board, not in combat). A knife that's not reasonably large and sufficiently sharp can never do more than 2 damage, and will break and become useless if it inflicts more than 3 damage in a single attack. Many a hunter arms himself with a combat knife, which could be anything from a fighting knife bought off the Internet to the blade Dad

brought home from the war. Throwing knives are weighted for, well, throwing; as aerodynamic objects, their short range in yards equals double the thrower's (Strength + Dexterity + Athletics -1; see *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 67). Ordinary knives (and other weapons) suffer a -2 penalty if thrown. A fire ax is designed for breaking through doors, but it's well balanced enough to be used without an improvised weapon penalty. Similarly, a hatchet suffers no penalty if used for combat instead of chopping firewood. Both are easy to purchase and appeal to hunters who like gear that does double duty. Ubiquitous in any bar fight, a bottle will break if it inflicts more than two or more points of bashing damage in a single attack, after which its damage becomes lethal. The next time it imparts two or more points, it breaks again and is unusable.

Blunt Instruments

It's hard to imagine a weapon that's simpler or more reliable than a club, which is why so many hunters arm themselves with some variation of it: a baseball bat, hardwood or metal cane, walking stick or nightstick all make suitable weapons when needed. Improvised clubs, such as table legs, pool cues, ax handles, crowbars and two-by-fours, suffer the usual -1 penalty. Creating a balanced club from an improvised weapon is a use of the Crafts Skill, but characters can identify an appropriately balanced (penalty free) club with a successful Intelligence + Weaponry roll (if trying to select a potential weapon from a pile of fallen tree branches, for example). A wooden stake is treated as an improvised club, except when used to "stake" a vampire through the heart: that requires a targeted attack (-3 penalty) and five lethal levels to drive it

deep enough to do the job. A modern variation on the club is the telescoping baton, a spring-loaded steel cudgel that expands from Size 1 to Size 2. A sap is a small bag of leather filled with lead shot; if its attack causes Damage in excess of the target's Stamina, the target is stunned and loses his next action. Sap gloves are leather gauntlets with steel plates or shot sewn inside them, and function like brass knuckles, adding power to a punch (roll Strength + Brawl for attacks). The wearer suffers a -1 penalty to any actions requiring manual dexterity.

Vehicles

Even hunters whose efforts are concentrated solely in their own neighborhood will need to leave it from time to time to conduct surveillance, do research or get rid of something that's best disposed of far from their home base. Not everyone can afford a specialized vehicle for the Vigil, and many cells have to make do with whatever wheels their members happen to own or have access to. But as the examples below suggest, a little ingenuity and modification can go a long way. More vehicles are described in the *World of Darkness Rulebook* (p. 147).

City Cab

Hunters who operate in a city have a distinct advantage if they have access to a marked, licensed taxicab, as the vehicles can go almost anywhere without arousing suspicion. They're useful for surveillance, escape or even to take an unsuspecting target to an unexpected destination. While vehicle types used as taxis vary widely, most cabs in North America and Europe are full-sized cars, typically a Ford Crown Victoria or Mercedes Benz model. Taxicabs are usually fitted with a polycarbonate partition between the front and rear seats (Durability 3, Size 4, Structure 7). Drivers use a two-way radio (Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 2) to communicate with a central office; the radios don't allow drivers to communicate with each other directly.

Secure Sedan

Private security firms often make use of these customized versions of mid-sized automobiles; hunters with means may purchase their own, while others acquire them secondhand (or confiscate them from the enemy). From the outside, these vehicles look unremarkable. But ballistic material and armor provides an increased overall durability, with windows upgraded to Durability 4, Structure 7, doors upgraded to Durability 6, Structure 9 and the gas tank to Durability 8, Structure 10. The tires contain inserts allowing them to function if pierced (-1 penalty on Drive rolls, 10% speed penalty). Windows are usually tinted for privacy.

Cage Van

Transporting things that don't want to be transported is part and parcel of a hunter's job description. One solution is to take a seemingly ordinary delivery van and modify the cargo area to handle unwilling passengers. The exact method varies — some hunters simply weld a steel cage to the inside of the van, while others opt for panels of high-impact polycarbonate; generally, the confinement area has Durability 4, Size 4, Structure 8.

Standard procedure includes reinforcing the floor and roof as well (Durability 4, Size 5, Structure 9), and removing inside locks and door handles. Some hunters add some layers of soundproofing (-1 per layer to Perception rolls for someone outside the vehicle to hear noise from inside).

Messenger Bike

Not every message can be sent by email or fax, and some parcels need to reach their destination sooner than overnight. And that's where the urban bike messenger comes in. Part courier, part cyclist and part daredevil, messengers choose all sorts of bikes to carry out their deliveries. The cycles used by experienced riders do tend to be customized in similar ways, however. They're rugged, toughened to handle potholes, curb jumps and the occasional taxi bump. They're light, with any unneeded gears or other components removed and the essential equipment replaced by lightweight versions whenever possible. And they're nimble, tricked out so the rider can weave through thick traffic or a swarm of pedestrians as needed. With a custom rack and some bungee cords, a bike messenger can handle 50 pounds of cargo or more, including burdens as unwieldy as a TV set or a stack of pizza boxes. Messenger bikes tend to look battered and ragged: most owners don't consider the bike's appearance to be a priority, and a bike that looks like a piece of junk is less of a target for thieves. Some bikes are so covered with scrapes, rust spots and grime that they effectively blend into the urban environment (-1 to perceptions rolls for noticing the unattended bike). A character riding a bicycle can maintain speeds above its Safe Speed for a number of minutes equal to twice her Stamina + Resolve; after that, each minute or fraction thereof of high-speed pedaling inflicts one level of bashing damage. A character who isn't pushing herself can maintain Safe Speed for a number of hours equal to her Stamina + Resolve, after which she must rest for half that length of time. Maneuvers with such vehicles use Athletics rather than Drive. See *World of Darkness: Armory* for more details on human-powered vehicles.

Improvised Equipment

Sometimes, a hunter can't find what he really needs at a store. He needs something now, and damn the price, legality and sanity of his endeavor. Some hunters improvise equipment out of whatever they have in hand, using crowbars or pipe wrenches as clubs — something that a cell in Austin, Texas, put to good use when faced with a swarm of cat-faced parasites that crawled out of a subterranean tunnel. Wherever a hunter faces a monster, there's going to be something she can grab and use as a weapon.

Beyond household objects used as weapons, some hunters actively make their own monster-hunting tools. Whether he's a handyman, mechanic, or electronics geek, he can usually make something worthwhile, given some time. The equipment provided in this section isn't unique. Cells and individuals share their plans over the Internet, suggesting refinements and stories of when their kit worked right. Often, when a piece of equipment goes wrong, nobody hears about it firsthand.

VEHICLES

Type	Durability	Size	Structure	Acceleration	Safe Speed	Speed	Handling	Occupants	Cost
Cab	4	14	18	14 (19 mph/turn)	103 (70 mph)	176 (120 mph)	2	1+4	***
Secure Sedan	6	12	18	19 (26 mph/turn)	110 (75 mph)	169 (115 mph)	2	1+3	***
Cage Van	3	17	20	7	(9 mph/turn)	73 (50 mph)	132 (90 mph)-1	1+1	***
Modified Minivan	3	15	18	16	(16 mph/turn)	95 (65 mph)	154 (105 mph)3	1+7	****
Messenger Bike	3	3	6	Equals rider's Strength	Equals rider's speed +5	Equals rider's speed+15	3	1	*

FASTER, KILL, KILL, KILL

Want combat to be more lethal in your Hunter: The Vigil game? Try this solution:

A player only rolls his hunter's attack pool (Attribute + Combat Skill such as Strength + Weaponry or Dexterity + Firearms) without the weapon's damage bonus. Successes are added automatically to the item's as-written damage bonus, and this is the damage done. For example, Gabreski takes a shot with his 12-gauge, so his player rolls seven dice (Dexterity + Firearms), and earns three successes after the 9-again effect. He adds those three successes to the shotgun's damage rating, which is 4, for a total of seven lethal damage - more than enough to end an average human's life. You can apply this to Weaponry rolls, Firearm rolls, or both.

Also, don't hesitate to remind players that they can risk Willpower to gain dice or apply the 9-again rule to attack rolls.

Finally, if you want amped-up explosives, consider this: to raise the stakes, consider any large objects within the blast area - including walls and ceilings - subject to the explosion. If the explosion damages them in excess of their Durability points, add two extra dice to the damage pool. Example: Gwendolyn is tracking a slasher in a parking garage when a bomb set by her opponent goes off. The explosive has a damage rating of 3. As per standard rules, anyone within an explosion's blast area takes damage equal to the explosive's Damage rating in addition to successes rolled with its dice pool. So Mel is subject to 3 Damage points automatically. She's also exposed to the bomb's dice pool of 3, which the Storyteller rolls, achieving 1 success. This raises the damage taken by the hunter to 4. However, there's a parked car in range of the explosion, Durability 3, exceeded by the bomb's 4 Damage points (3 automatic + 1 rolled success). This adds another two dice to the explosion's damage pool as chunks of the damaged car fly in all directions. The Storyteller rolls a 2 and an 8, so Mel loses five Health points total. She's beginning to regret not calling the rest of her cell for backup.

Systems

Some improvised weapons can be likened to existing weapons — a cricket bat is like a wooden club; a kitchen knife is a knife — in which case, use the weapon's statistics with a -1 modifier (see **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 136, for rules on improvised weapons, and p. 170 for weapon statistics). Other items, from a swung chair to a thrown microwave oven, use the lower of the item's Durability or Size as the weapon's damage, with a further -1 modifier.

Characters who can keep their wits about them when a monster corners them stand a better chance of finding something that can help them live. By taking a full turn action, a player can roll Wits + Weaponry to identify possible implements of violence. An exceptional success even allows her to ignore the -1 penalty for improvised weapons.

Monster-Hunting Tools

Some items seem designed to kill monsters. While a hairspray flamethrower is all well and good against people, its burns are far more dangerous to vampires, to whom fire deals aggravated damage. Likewise, a Taser that can disrupt a werewolf's neuroelectric impulses and keep it from shifting is very valuable. Costs for the following weapons indicate the price and rarity of the component materials; most of them still need construction. Statistics for these weapons are on page the following page.

Concentration Trap

Hunters who maintain a safehouse need a little insurance against uninvited guests. While surveillance technology is all well and good, most jurisdictions frown on using explosives to stop monsters finding a cache of quasi-legal (at best) weapons. The concentration trap is a fixed installation using motion sensors taken from a burglar alarm and as many big speakers as the group can get their hands on, hooked up to a powerful stereo. The stereo pumps out a wide range of high-volume audio, from ultra-low frequency (known to produce hallucinations, and the domain of the infamous "brown note") up through concentration-destroying high-pitched normal noise, into ultrasound to inflict more pain on creatures with sensitive hearing.

When someone triggers the trap, everyone within 25 yards must make a reflexive Resolve + Composure roll, subtracting the trap's Damage rating. On a success, the intruder suffers only a -1 penalty to rolls regarding hearing for the scene but is otherwise fine, and an exceptional success negates this penalty. Failing the roll means that the character loses her next turn in addition to the Perception penalty, and a dramatic failure means she loses three turns. Creatures with enhanced hearing subtract their Perception bonus dice, as their sharp senses work against them.

Hairspray Flamethrower

Combining a can of hairspray and a lighter is a swift ticket to instant fire. Normally, it's a dangerous thing to try (blowback could easily blow up the can), but when faced with a blood-crazed monster, fire is often the best weapon. While some hunters grab any aerosol, those with a few seconds to think tend to grab hairspray as it's flammable and comes in

large cans. A few go so far as to modify the valve, hoping to make their weapons more reliable, but it doesn't work. The only thing that makes the weapon more reliable is a strip of duct tape to hold the lighter in position.

Attacking with a hairspray flamethrower uses Dexterity + Athletics. The flame is of Torch size (base 1 damage) and gasoline intensity (+2 bonus) for ranges up to a yard; hence, a hunter can only do a maximum of three points of lethal damage. On an exceptional success, however, combustible items catch fire and the victim takes one point of damage until extinguished. On a dramatic failure, the can explodes with Blast Area 2 and Damage 1 (**World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 178). A full can of hairspray contains fuel for 10 attacks. The Storyteller should roll a die for cans that are just lying around to find out how many attacks are left.

Bad Odor Bomb (or "BOB")

This weapon deprives a monster of its supernatural senses, making it a lot easier for a hunter to get away. She must mix a specific combination of strong-scented oils and perfumes — working in a well-ventilated area with breathing protection — and seal them in easy-to-break ampoules. When fleeing from a werewolf, or some other creature with an enhanced sense of smell, she throws a couple at a nearby wall, trashcan or even the werewolf following her. The sudden burst overloads the monster's sense of smell. When any creature with an enhanced sense of smell encounters an exploded sense bomb, further tracking rolls suffer a penalty equal to the device's Damage rating, and lose the ability to re-roll 10s. If the hunter hits her pursuer with the bomb, the creature subtracts one success for every 1 rolled. The Scent Bomb counts as an aerodynamic object for purposes of throwing (**World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 67), but doesn't confer any bonus to hit.

Taser Glove

The charging circuits used in camera flashguns can make functional stun guns. The advent of cheap disposable cameras gives enterprising inventors access to a lot of flashguns. This weapon combines two, strapping the pared-down circuit boards into an arm holster. The contacts that would normally connect to the bulb are left bare, one poking through each knuckle of a motorcycle glove. While it takes a while to charge (five turns), hitting someone with the glove readied adds the bonus of a Taser to a normal punch — the target suffers one penalty die per point of bashing damage caused to all Physical rolls, to a maximum of -3 dice. This penalty is reduced by one every subsequent turn until the penalty has been nullified. Once discharged, the glove recharges in five turns. It takes a reflexive action to activate or deactivate the four circuits. A fresh pair of batteries gives enough juice for five hits.

A relatively common modification used by many hunters ups the number of circuits to four, and swaps out the capacitors for beefier models. The four switches are wired together, and the whole thing runs off a larger power pack. These gloves increase the maximum penalty to -5. They also discharge enough power to disrupt the electrical impulses that

MONSTER HUNTING WEAPONS

Type	Damage	Ranges	Capacity	Size	Cost	Notes
Concentration Trap	4*	25	n/a	5	•••	*
Hairspray Flamethrower	-1L*	1*	10*	1	n/a	Fire
Sense Bomb	2*	n/a	n/a	1	n/a	•• *
Taser Glove	-1B*	n/a	5	2	•/•••	Stun *
Zip-Stake	0L	n/a	n/a	2	•	Unreliable *

* See text for notes or special rules

RIGGING WEAPONS

Dice Pool: Wits + Crafts + equipment

Action: Extended (4-10 successes necessary; one roll equals 15 minutes of work)

Board with a nail? Whirling lawnmower blade? Makeshift spear from a mop handle and a chef's knife? Simple weapons ("pointy rock taped to chair leg to make club") need only four successes, but the more complicated the weapon, the higher the successes necessary to complete it. Add in electricity and moving parts, and it requires 10 successes, easy.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: In addition to using up his supplies, the character breaks one of his tools. Further Crafts rolls have a -1 penalty until the character can replace the item.

Failure: The character makes nothing.

Success: The character finishes the weapon.

Exceptional Success: The character makes a weapon of surprising quality and can now ignore the -1 penalty associated with improvised weapons.

govern a werewolf's primary abilities — a shapeshifter cannot take on another form on the turn after he's been hit by the glove. The extra work requires expensive materials (Cost •••).

Zip-Stakes

Though cornering a vampire in its lair is all well and good, putting a stake through the chest cavity of any person is hard as fuck. Actually striking and penetrating the heart requires both accuracy and a surprising amount of power. Some hunters build a zip gun around a 20-gauge shotgun shell, and use the shell to propel a sharpened wooden stake the length of the gun's barrel, where retaining pins would hold it in place. Others put a blasting cap in the tip of a hammer so that when it strikes down on a metal-butted stake, it gives the hit a little extra juice. These garage-engineered charms work, though unpredictably.

When using this weapon, roll Strength + Weaponry as normal. Due to its unreliable nature, do not reroll 10s, and subtract one success for every 1 rolled. A dramatic failure means the wielder loses a finger *at best*. However, the penalty for targeting the heart is reduced from -4 to -2 for the purposes of using this weapon. Three lethal damage must occur in a single attack for this device to properly pierce the heart.

Flesh Trade Pt V

PAGE 01 OF 03	UTC RELEASE TIME		PRECEDENCE		CLASS		ROUTINE		CIC		ORG-MSG IDENT 0470730Z
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The howls filled Vince's ears and turned his blood to ice. In his mind, he was back in that darkened warehouse, watching Darnell writhe in the grip of something that had no right to exist. A shudder wracked his body; his hand tightened on the grip of his pistol, and he realized he was taking aim at an eight-year-old boy. A child with bloody hands and a snarling, fanged mouth.

He screamed, torn between fear and disgust. The grandmother squalled something in a language he didn't understand, and the kids scattered, weaving among the tattered furniture as they fled deeper into the room.

A gun boomed over Vince's shoulder, punching a hole in the wall opposite the doorway. Vince ducked, cursing, and the old woman leapt at him with a feral snarl.

"Get the fuck back!" Gabreski shouted, leveling his pistol at the woman's face, but the hag didn't even flinch. She reached for his throat with her clawed hands, hissing like a snake, and yet he couldn't bring himself to shoot. Someone screamed a warning behind him - it might have been Andrea, or maybe Raimundo, but it was the touch of those ragged nails against his skin that finally shocked Vince into action. He lashed out with a left fist, striking the woman in the cheek and smashing her backwards onto a tattered sofa.

Dean jostled past Vince, forcing his way into the room. "Go, go!" Jack yelled in Gabreski's ear, and the detective started moving. A quick glance behind him showed Andrea dashing through the doorway with Raimundo on her heels.

Jack took the lead, rushing off in the direction the kids had gone. Vince followed, swinging farther out to the left. There was an open doorway along the wall to the right and a gaping hole torn in the wall immediately ahead - the Russians appeared to be in the process of opening up the adjacent apartments as well.

The howling of the children had faded off to the right, joined by angry shouts and frightened, almost bestial cries. Vince's skin crawled at the sound.



Gabreski waved Jack to cover the door to the right as he moved up to the ragged opening ahead. Candlelight glimmered fitfully in the darkness beyond.

Vince stepped to the edge of the crude threshold and saw a small room that had been emptied of furniture, save for a salvaged dining table set against the far wall. Four women in severe black dresses knelt on the filthy, water-stained floor before the table, clutching handkerchiefs and watching Vince with frightened, tear-streaked faces. A tall, very old portrait hung on the wall above the table, depicting a fierce-looking man in some kind of medieval attire. The eyes of the man in the painting were dark and unsettling, like the fevered stare of a madman.

A body lay upon the table, bathed in candlelight. It was wrapped in a hand-stitched shroud of white linen, covering everything but the corpse's pale, wrinkled face. The body was that of an elderly man. His face was contorted, as though in terror or pain. Burnished coins covered his eyes. Blotches of fresh blood soaked the linen around the corpse's throat.

"Talk to me, Vince!" Jack yelled over his shoulder. The detective's freckled face was pale, and his hands were trembling. "What are we doing?"

Vince backed away from the hole. A sense of unreality swept over him, blurring the edges of his perceptions. He shook his head savagely and yelled, "Keep going!"

Jack muttered a curse and stepped through the doorway. Beyond lay a short, narrow hallway, heaped with stacks of broken furniture. The kids' incessant howling was coming from somewhere at the far end of the hall.

Gabreski saw two doors immediately to either side of the doorway. Vince swept left, while Andrea dashed in and went right. At virtually the same time, they kicked in the door in front of them.

"Police!" Gabreski shouted, adding to the cacophony, and found himself standing on the threshold of a small, lantern-lit room arrayed with a trio of narrow beds. Unlike the rest of the apartment, the bedroom was so neatly kept that the sight of it was actually jarring. An old woman and two girls, both obviously pregnant, cowered in the far corners of the room. They screamed and cursed at him in Russian; the elderly woman had a small book in her hand, which she hurled at Vince with a sulfurous curse.

More shouts and screams sounded behind Vince as Andrea stumbled onto yet more of the Russians. This isn't an apartment, it's a damn nest, Vince thought, feeling a twinge of panic. The farther in they went, the worse the situation became.

Three loud, flat bangs echoed from the far end of the hall. A bullet hit the wall six inches behind Vince, then Jack let out a pained shout. A man's voice, hoarse and angry, bellowed something in Russian.

Gabreski whirled just in time to see an older man rushing at them out of a cloud of blue powder smoke. An antique revolver wavered in the man's liver-spotted hand.

"Put the fucking gun down!" Vince yelled, centering his weapon on the old man's chest. Jack was staggering backwards, his left hand pressed to his side.

The barrel of the revolver swung towards Gabreski. A flash, and another bullet droned past Gabreski's head. Splinters from the doorframe stung his left ear.

Then Raimundo charged through the doorway behind Vince, blasting away at the old man. The Russian's body jerked as 9mm rounds tore through his chest and abdomen, even as his lifeless body toppled to the floor. The gang leader kept firing until his clip was empty and the trigger was clicking on an empty chamber.

For half a heartbeat, the apartment was silent, stunned by the racket of the guns. Then everyone began to shout at once. Screams and angry wails split the air; Vince could see figures moving at the end of the hall, past the drifting curtain of powder smoke.

"What the fuck is the matter with you?" Vince yelled, nearly shoving Raimundo off his feet.

"Motherfucker was shooting at me!" Raimundo shouted back. The young Hispanic bounced back until he was nearly nose to nose with the much bigger man. "The hell did you think I was going to do?"

Gabreski saw Jack leaning against a rickety bookshelf, gasping for breath. From the look on Jack's face, he guessed his vest had stopped the Russian's bullet, but left him with a bruised rib instead. Andrea was covering the far end of the hall; from her savage expression, she looked like she was ready to shoot everyone and let God and the Devil fight over who got what.

"Goddamnit," Vince snarled. Things were getting rapidly out of hand. "Let's go. Everybody out. Now!"

A knife came whirring out of the shadows at the far end of the hall and struck Andrea handle first; she spat a stream of curses and fired three rounds well above head-height down the hall. Gabreski grabbed Raimundo's arm and all but threw him back the way they'd come, then tapped Jack on the shoulder. Dean nodded, and the three cops beat a hasty retreat before they found themselves surrounded.

Screams and panicked wails rose from the corpse room as Vince covered their retreat. He glanced toward the hole and saw Karl inside the room, taking pictures of the portrait with his

cell phone camera. The women were cowering beneath the corpse-draped table with their hands over their faces, held at bay by the .45 automatic held loosely in the reporter's left hand.

Vince's eyes went wide. He stuck his head inside the room. "Where the hell did you get that gun?"

The reporter shot Gabreski an irritated look. "The gun shop. Where did you get yours?"

"Time to go, smartass," Vince fired back. "We've worn out our welcome."

Karl snapped one more picture and backed quickly out of the room. Vince grabbed him by the arm and together they hustled out of the room and back into the echoing stairwell.

Shrieks of anger and pain chased after them as they fled into the night.



Vince caught up to Raimundo just as they reached the van. He grabbed the kid by the shoulders and bounced him hard off the vehicle's side. "Who the hell said you could go in there and shoot that old man?"

Raimundo whirled about and tried to push back, but he might as well have been shoving at a wall. "Motherfuckers owed me for Manuel!" he snapped. "What was I supposed to do, let him shoot me?"

"You should have let us handle it," Gabreski said, but the protest was half hearted at best. He honestly didn't know what to think anymore. The vision of those snarling kids still haunted him. Were they kids? Were they even human? He had no idea.

Karl was standing off to one side, keying frantically on his cell phone. Jack had his back to the van's passenger door, his face drawn with pain. Andrea stepped between Vince and Raimundo and pulled open the van's cargo door. "If you lovers want to keep fighting, do it inside," she said. "We're too exposed out here."

Gabreski gave her a look, but he had to agree - they were vulnerable. He climbed into the van and was glad to shut the door on the world outside.

"Well, that was a fucking waste of time," Raimundo said. "What now?"

Vince put away his gun and rubbed his eyes, trying to banish his fatigue. "The Russians we wanted weren't there."

"And how do you know that?" the gang leader said with a sneer.

Gabreski glared at the kid. "You think guys like that hide behind old men and kids? No way." Vince thought over what he'd seen in the apartment, and nodded. "They'll be here soon, though. We gave their nest a good kick, and they'll come running as soon as they find out." He pointed at the driver's seat. "Get behind the wheel," he told Raimundo. "We need to change position in case one of the people upstairs saw where we went."

Andrea fumbled around in the back of the van and held the half-empty bottle of rum to Jack. "You think there's a third location?" she asked Vince.

Gabreski nodded. "Must be. They can't go back to the warehouse; it's crawling with uniforms by now. And they didn't run back here. They've got someplace else where they're holing up."

Karl's phone chimed. The sound was absurdly cheerful in the icy darkness of the van. Vince glared at the reporter. "What the hell was that all about back there?" he said.

"That picture? On the wall in that fucked-up room? I swear I've seen it before." He stared intently at the phone's tiny screen and his fingers danced on the tiny keys as he sent another text message. "I sent the photo to a guy I know, asking for confirmation." There was another chime, and Karl's eyes widened. "I knew it. I fucking knew it."

Suddenly Karl had everyone's undivided attention. Vince felt a creeping sense of dread. I laughed at this kid for years, he thought. And it turns out he was right all along.

"Care to let the rest of us in on the joke?" Vince said.

Karl ran a hand through his hair and leaned back against the side of the van, his eyes closed in concentration. "Khaurov," he said. "Maxim Vladimirovitch Khaurov. A sorcerer, supposedly, who was hounded out of Moscow by Ivan the Terrible in 1550. Before that, he'd been an advisor to the Muscovite Princes for...well, a hell of a long time." When the reporter opened his eyes again, his expression was haunted. "It's said he could foretell the future, and could bring down curses on Moscow's enemies. In exchange for human sacrifices."

"People were sacrificed to him?" Vince said. "You've got to be kidding me."

"Not to him directly," Karl replied. "He claimed to have entered into a pact with the denizens of the underworld - demons, basically - who shared their knowledge with him in exchange for human flesh."

Gabreski stole a glance at Andrea and Jack. From the looks on their faces, he could tell they were thinking back to the horrors they'd seen at the warehouse. "So, what happened to this guy?" he asked.

"Well, Ivan thought of himself as a progressive kind of tyrant, and he didn't have any patience for sorcerers, so he tried to have Khaurov arrested. Maybe he saw it coming, because when Ivan's soldiers turned up, they found Khaurov's house in flames, and the sorcerer was gone. No one knows what happened to him after that, although some scholars speculate he fled either to Siberia, or all the way to the Black Forest in Germany." Karl shrugged. "Doesn't really matter. No one ever saw Maxim again, but about 10 years after Ivan died, a guy showed up in Moscow claiming to be Khaurov's son. Before long the guy was tight with the new Tsar, and there are anecdotal reports of mysterious disappearances among Moscow's citizens during this period."

The reporter leaned forward and held out his hand for the bottle of rum. Jack stared at Karl for a moment, then handed it over. Karl nodded in thanks, took a good swallow and passed it back. "Khaurov's son must have learned his lesson after what happened to Maxim, because he kept things on the down low. Got rewarded with a title and some estates by the Tsar and became rich. Within about 30 years, the Khaurovs were one of Moscow's most powerful - and secretive - families. But the rumors continued. Powerful nobles who sought Khaurov's favor prospered, and their enemies tended to disappear - along with their wives and children. And this continued, more or less, for the next 300 years. Descendants of Maxim Khaurov became great soldiers. Not necessarily great generals, mind you, but there was a Khaurov present at every major battle the Tsars ever fought."

"They surrounded themselves with death," Andrea said quietly.

"Yeah. Funny thing, that," Karl said. "Anyway, the Khaurovs and the Tsars had some kind of falling out in the late 19th century, and their influence at court waned. And we all know what happened to the Romanovs in 1918. The Communists took over - and lo and behold, a guy named Arkady Khaurov turns up as a senior officer of the Cheka, the Bolshevik secret police." The reporter pulled a cigarette from his jacket pocket and lit up. "Things get kind of fuzzy after that," he said, blowing a stream of smoke at the van's ceiling. "The Soviets were damn good at hiding what went on inside the halls of power. But some people think the Khaurovs continued their dealings with the underworld right up until World War II, and possibly beyond. It's believed that the family lost most of its wealth during the war, and there are lots of occult scholars who will tell you that the last of the family died at Stalingrad in '42."

"Apparently not," Vince said.

"Yeah. Apparently not," Karl said. "I've heard of reports of people claiming to be members of the family turning up all the way into the '90s, but nobody could confirm anything."

"Now they're looking for a new start here," Gabreski said. "And they've brought their demons with them."

Karl gave Vince a long, speculative look. His dark eyes were troubled.

Then everyone jumped as a deep voice croaked from the darkness at the back of the van.

"They aren't demons," the man in the business suit said. "They're ghouls. Eaters of the dead." He rolled over with a groan. "And I'm the only chance you've got to stop them."





CHAPTER FIVE

Hunter: The Vigil — a Storytelling game of light in shadows.

What does that mean, exactly? Light in shadows? To find the answer to that, it's first necessary to look at the word *vigil* and see what it means, or *could* mean, in the context of a Storytelling game.

Vigil. From the Latin *vigilia*, or a period of waking from sleep.

Vigil. A religious tradition marking the eve of a holy day necessitating that one remain awake as a devotional exercise.

Vigil. A ceremony of watching over the gravely ill or remembering the dead, with participants often carrying candles or other sources of light.

Vigil. An act of observation or surveillance.

All of that, every last definition, applies to hunters and their task at hand.

They have been, metaphorically (and for some, literally), roused from slumber, their eyes now open to the truth. They may never close their eyes again, may never descend into ignorance.

It is a devotion. It is a ceaseless exercise. For some it's religious in the sense that they are scrupulously and habitually committed to it ("I religiously awaken every morning and check that the gun under my pillow is loaded"), while for others it's religious in a sense of faith and divinity ("God give me strength to heal those creatures that can be healed and destroy those that cannot").

For many, it genuinely involves remembering the sick and the dead, those hunters who have been wounded or lost. One could even suggest that, hey, many hunters really *do* watch over the dead: the walking dead, the hungry dead, the spectral dead. The Vigil is, for many, a certain act of watchfulness and observation: eye toward the foul fiends and grief-struck monsters, monitoring them for movement, for danger, for knowledge.

And for all hunters, it's very much about carrying that candle into darkness.

Candle Burning Down

Let's be honest. A candle doesn't provide a whole hell of a lot of light. It's a meager flame, guttering and smoldering. It provides a faint halo of illumination against an overwhelming blanket of night. And that, appropriately, is how hunters generally feel. Even the ones who have the backup of big agencies and anomalous equipment and whole libraries of knowledge...well, as soon as you step out into that dark night, all bets are off. Everything is clouded, cloaked, concealed. A hunter might have bright fluorescence in his lab or shooting range, but out on the streets or in the dark forests, he doesn't have naught but that tiny little fire to keep him safe, aware and warm.

Oh, but the metaphor continues: a candle is temporary. Some burn bright. Some burn meager. But they always burn down. That's how a lot of hunters feel, that their time on this earth is temporary. The light has a limit, and they can only do so much good in that time before the wick hisses and the flame winks out. Doesn't help that many hunters burn the candle at both ends, so to speak, engaging in an unmitigated hunt that wears them down because they just can't stop, can't take a breath, can't sleep for fear that their laxity (or a lack of *vigilance*) will give the monsters just enough of an edge.

Prism of Light

It sounds nice. It sounds positive. *Light in shadows*. By the sound of it, all hunters are out there doing a good thing, fight-

So: terror on top,
horror below it,
and lowest of all,
the gag reflex of
revulsion.
- Stephen King,
Danse Macabre

ing the righteous fight, gathering great knowledge. Candle in hand, halo around the head.

For some, it's true. And most certainly *believe* it's true. Few hunters last long on the Vigil without thinking themselves just, without believing their hunt tried and true. Sadly, they can't all be righteous, can't all be heroes. Many are selfish. Others are cruel. A lot go mad. Plainly stated, hunters are a fucked-up bunch. Considering what most of them have seen and done, though, can you blame them? A teenage girl loses hours of her life and wakes up in her bathtub with a tattoo of three dots on her hand and later learns that she's pregnant? A husband watches the respirators hiss and click as they provide his wife and children with breath for weeks after they were put in the hospital by some red-eyed, needle-mouthed thing? A business executive takes a meeting one day where a passel of her uncles and aunts tell her that she's got the blood of the Devil in her and, would she like to come to Milan and oh, sorry, her water is spiked with Rohypnol? After experiences like that, how can you not be just a teensy-tiny bit fucked in the head?

But still, even the most selfish, most damaged, most obsessed hunters still bring a light to the shadows. Some carry the small candle, illuminating one patch of darkness (or one page of a mysterious book) at a time. Others carry a burning torch with which they'll burn the forest down until the monsters flee the conflagration. The most broken of the bunch come to the hunt with the light of a goddamn bomb, white and hot and swift, taking out five innocents for every one

monster. The light takes many forms and intensities. Every hunter carries his candle differently.

Of Mystery and Horror

Mystery and horror create the Vigil, and they spur it on ceaselessly. The World of Darkness bleeds out, revealing elements of the awful (horror) and elements of the weird (mystery). Both of these aspects drive hunters.

Think about it. Horror is a confrontation with the wretched and grotesque, an in-your-face look of a deformed vampire using someone's neck-blood like a water fountain or a rampaging beast tearing through a mall crowd right toward you. A half-decayed corpse stumbling around, its limbs tugged by puppet strings made from spider web? An ogrish *oni* out of Japanese myth gnawing on one bloody bone while sitting atop a nest made of skeletons? A beautiful woman who peels off her face to reveal a dozen littler faces beneath, some of them cackling, some of them crying? Shock. Revulsion. Horror.

How does horror drive the hunt? Easy. A character can't deny it. Can't stomach it. Will not suffer it to live. When the candle's light shines on something so awful it sears itself into one's memory, it sometimes seems the only way to scrub clean the mind is to *do* something, to take action against it.

Hunter is certainly a game of horror, and the Vigil is a horrific duty, no matter how prepared someone is or how much government funding they've got propping them up. A decent encounter with the supernatural



STORY HOOK: BEING SHUT DOWN

Over time, the characters have amassed a web of connections, contacts, allies, friends and helpers. Their Vigil may never go smoothly, but it's a lot easier than when they were working alone right at the start. And now, things are starting to go wrong. People are showing up dead, or not showing up at all. Information from previously reliable sources is leading the cell into traps. In the case of tier-two and -three cells, their immediate superiors are being systematically killed or turned against the characters.

The enemy has not only infiltrated the cell's informal network, but the hunters' foes are also in the process of utterly destroying it and leaving the characters isolated. The characters need to act fast: will they move to support their remaining allies and protect them from harm? How many secrets will they need to reveal in the process? How will the characters trace the mysterious attackers, and what unconsidered connection ties the characters' contacts together? The enemy must be exploiting it somehow.

should inspire horror on some level, even if the monster itself isn't hostile.

Remember that "horror" is not "terror." The idea isn't to send the characters screaming into panicked flight (though that certainly has its place...), but to inspire a sense of fear and disgust by what plays out before them. This can range from sick, deep fear at the gore spattered across a monster's lair, or a sense of sincere revulsion at a "friendly" creature's predicament, such as a malformed vampire that wishes harm to none but still drinks blood because it must. Horror isn't just about blood and gore, though that's certainly a visceral way to portray it. It's about the awful sinking feeling a hunter gets when he realizes the world is a brutal place, and humankind, for many monstrosities, is little more than a food source, a supply of slaves, or a box of toys.

It's easy to overdo horror. Keeping it on the right level means keeping it personal. Look into the characters' backgrounds and see what will speak to their fears, such as phobias or nightmares or genuine worries about friends and loved ones. Target those "weak" points carefully (threatening them occasionally, sure) but focus more on creating scenes that resonate with those aspects. A family man who finds his neighbor's children cowering in a room crawling with yellow jackets (with the parents lying dead, bloated from anaphylactic shock under the dining room table) is struck with horror, but he's struck by

the motivation to do something. He cares about these kids. Maybe he'll make them a part of his own family. Suddenly, his Vigil is defined: protect these children from harm at any cost.

So, then, how does mystery define the Vigil? Fact is, the World of Darkness is home to some truly weird shit. This world does not work according to the rules that everybody expects. Some things are askew, off kilter, just crooked enough to inspire some to question, others to obsess.

Late at night, a power-company worker tries to fix a blown transformer atop a telephone pole and sees something on the next pole down, and...it's got numbers for eyes and it seems to be feeding from the wires and...it's gone. Did he see anything at all?

A teen girl sneaks into an old bookstore and pages through naughty romance novels for a cheap thrill, but she gets to the last page and it's folded over, and she lifts the flap and sees a language that isn't English, can't even be *human*, and suddenly she feels a flash behind her eyes. A gaunt, pale face in the darkness turns toward her and says, "Ah, you," and then she's back in the bookstore. The page in front of her is normal, written in English, not folded at all. What does she do?

A guy driving home from a sales meeting sees a spherical craft in the sky, sunlight glinting off it. A housewife looks outside and sees a black van parked in the neighbors' driveway, and men with gas masks and nets throw something into the back before they speed away. A jobless slacker keeps getting UPS packages and contained within each

is a porcelain mask modeled after his own face, each wearing a different expression.

Mystery gets under the skin. Horror answers the question in bold, stark lines, but mystery only leaves questions where one prays for answers. A character sees something like that and must pursue it, must peel back the layers until some kind of satisfaction can be had. (Of course, therein lies the problem with the Vigil, and why it tends to be endless: one answer never suffices, and only opens the door to more questions. For some, madness lies that way, but hey, that's the hunt.)

Portraying mystery in a **Hunter: The Vigil** game necessitates invoking strange little coincidences, appearances or events — odd clues, ciphers, names, configurations of numbers, ghostly appearances, whispered threats: whatever works to stir a character to say, "What the hell was that?" (Of course, portraying mystery also means, as Storyteller, knowing the answers to those mysteries. They don't have to be easy answers, or *comfortable* ones, and they can just as easily invoke more questions. But as the saying goes, don't let more snakes out of the bag than you're able to kill.)

Horror is a shove through the door, a kick to the gut. Mystery is the tickling itch you can't help but scratch, the crooked painting you simply must adjust. Both form the backbone of the hunt. And the best way to keep a Hunter game interesting is to not use either one in exclusion of the

other: while some games may lean toward something more gut wrenching than mind-boggling (or vice versa), both elements can become tiring over time. Balancing the two moods against one another creates for a vivid, driving story.

A Candle is Lit

Running a Hunter: the Vigil chronicle can be a momentous task. Sure, it's just a game, but many Storytellers find a troupe has more fun after a good degree of planning and plot consideration takes place. What is there to plan? What needs considering?

As much as or as little as a Storyteller wishes, of course. But here are a few core aspects to muse upon while you shape your chronicle.

The Inciting Incident

In novels and movies, an inciting incident is the event within a beginning chapter or scene where the mood, pace and plot is set for the rest of the piece. The exposition is done, and the flesh is peeled back to reveal the meat of the matter. In hunter terms, the scales of the real world are pulled away from the characters' eyes, and they stand witnessing a horrific and mysterious truth.

A first encounter with the supernatural needs to be exciting and interesting. First impressions count. Tailoring an encounter to individual characters and backgrounds is something good Storytellers will often do, and here that goes double. But beyond that, remember this is the first session of a larger story or chronicle. The first chapter of a story and the first act of a play don't set out to blow their plotline load so nothing else lives up to it — they seek to latch on to the audience with some engaging hooks and set the scene for more to come. Mystery and horror, working in tandem to grab the player by the lapels and force him to stir his character to action.

Plan these scenes with an eye for how characters might react, even if you know as a veteran Storyteller that players may just take route A, while you diligently planned for paths X, Y and Z. Here are some aspects to keep in mind as you shape and run these moments. These aspects are not exclu-

sive to one another: the beginning of a story can make use of one, some, or all of them in a single inciting incident.

Loss

Characters with nothing to lose are boring. They're shallow, they're difficult to interact with, and even harder to write into a chronicle. Even when such clichéd characters feature in movies and novels, the journey of the story always gives them something to lose and something they wish to hold onto: love, friendship, money, power, sex, whatever. Everybody wants something. And everybody fears either losing that something or never getting to have it in the first place.

In the opening encounters with the supernatural, it needs to be clear to the characters that they are dealing with forces that can do serious harm. Joining the Vigil is giving your life over to an existence where every hunter endures constant danger (and note that danger to one's physical self is only part of — and, in many ways, the least of — a hunter's worries). In that respect, a confrontation with the unknown not only needs to be horrific, but it must also threaten some aspect of the characters. In short, horrors of the World of Darkness need to demonstrate how characters will or could lose that which they most treasure.

Loss, or the threat of loss, urges the Vigil forward. A lonely woman loses her father to something that preys on him at the old folks' home, and that stirs her to action. A banker logs on to his account to find that something has drained his substantial offshore funds and has left him an email attachment of a strange occult sigil, which drives him to pursue that which he has lost. A college student finds that something masquerading as him has made a butchery of his life, and as a result, he's lost his friends and maybe even failed an important exam — he must try to reclaim what this mimic stole from him (and then find the mimic and...deal with it).

Loss can affect the creatures of the World of Darkness, too, and this can hook a hunter character. It's a decent method of hammering home the human facets of a monster (if, indeed, they even have any): if the characters see clearly that the creature has just lost something (a werewolf howling a dirge to his fallen mates or a sorcerer having lost his family to a deal with a demon), it might bring them into the Vigil a different way, from an angle of both curiosity and compassion.

Revenge

The need for vengeance is a common motivation for hunters to take up the Vigil. People suffer great wrongs at the hands of monsters and, mixed with a little fear of the unknown, you have a potent recipe for hatred. Families killed. Lives shattered. Hunters rise up out of the ashes with an eye to payback.

For Storytellers, this is pure gold. Truly memorable encounters (especially in the initial scenes) can provide enemies that players just love to hate, and that their characters love to hunt. Being mindful of frustrating players with repeated failures aside, a recurring archenemy who always displays a thematic or atmospheric new power can become an exciting nemesis (and, of course, in game terms, someone the characters will grow ever keener to hunt).

ALL SCENES?

This advice given here is targeted for the characters' first scenes with supernatural creatures, but it's worth bearing in mind that these pointers will work equally in most other scenes as well.

At the core of these aspects are the considerations Storytellers would do well to make when planning any interactions between the hunters and the chronicle's antagonists, so feel free to come back to these tips when planning out several scenes. Don't see them as bound entirely to the prologue.



An enemy who inspires the need for revenge has to tap directly into the characters' fears of loss (see above), and their past experiences with it. If the creature has harmed them in the past, and in truly unsettling ways, they will want that creature dead or otherwise out of the picture. If the monster has eerie and unearthly ways of threatening them each time, their hatred will build, flavored by fear and the need to see this creature finished with once and for all.

Introducing a chronicle's main recurring antagonist in the opening inciting incidents is a tactic used in many novels and movies. Storytellers shouldn't fear using it themselves, so long as the presentation is fair and doesn't predetermine utter failure on the characters' behalf. In fact, them earning an initial success against the adversary (they destroy something of his, or put out one of his infernal eyes) gives him a reason to keep coming back for more, too, with the burgeoning hunter cell becoming *his* adversary as much as he is theirs.

Hope

The Vigil isn't hopeless. It's certainly hard, and no one would argue that walk away alive and happy into a healthy retirement, but it's not a path devoid of hope. For example, the Aegis Kai Doru has prospered unseen for centuries now, and those hunters have been leaving their mark (albeit a mark hidden from mortal eyes) on the world since its ancient founding. All compacts and conspiracies stir a kind of hope: hunters standing together. Even lone hunters and isolated cells may establish legacies for other groups to follow their

notes and work, or might devote time to training replacements in the event of any worst-case scenarios.

Hunters *can* make a difference. They leave an impact through their work, both in the immediacy of the nightly hunt, and in the sense of a greater legacy. A lone cell may never topple the great vampire lord of the Big Apple, but its systematic destruction of many of his subjects will bleed into the collective consciousness of vampire society in New York City, and the bloodsuckers of the East Coast all start to sweat a little if they ever have to visit NYC on "business."

An inciting incident can bring hope to the forefront, showing characters that they can make a difference (because if an inciting incident is too frustrating or damning, why pursue the Vigil at all?). Solving a small mystery or destroying a lesser foe (or making a minor victory against a larger more persistent adversary) shows a nascent cell that the Vigil is not a fruitless struggle. On the other hand, *too much* hope goes against the themes of the World of Darkness, and no struggle takes some of the blood and fire out of a **Hunter: The Vigil** story. If they put a powerful foe down in the opening volley of the chronicle, that sets the wrong tone and steals the conflict's thunder. (Remember: in life we strive to avoid conflict, but in fiction we need conflict to drive the tale's telling.)

In short, no story arc should pit the hunters against foes they are unable (and will continue being unable) to harm in any way. Through a chronicle, and even sometimes during a scene, the hunters should somehow have the capacity to do some harm to their enemies. If the antagonist is much too

powerful for the cell (and many are likely to be just that — at least at first), then even minor harm can feel like a decent victory. To continue the vampiric example above, the elder lord might lose one of his undead children in the ensuing fire-fight, and is increasingly unstable and emotionally wrecked from then on as a by-product.

Hope can take a more immediate form, of course. The hope of rescue is a classic element when dealing with humans at the mercy of monsters. In the opening scenes of a chronicle, few things will bind a group together as a mutual need to save someone from an inhuman creature's clutches. Similarly, few motivations for beginning the Vigil are as emotionally compelling as wanting to rescue a loved one...or put their reanimated remains to peaceful rest.

Choose Your Own Vigil

The Vigil itself is not a clear-cut path for any who walk it. There's no code of laws and ethics laid down that must be followed — though, admittedly, the authority of the tier-three organizations and their operational mandates come close. Ultimately, however, it's a path hunters walk guided by their emotions, their morals, and their belief in what needs to be done. Is there a right or wrong approach? Different cells will say yes, while many others will have no idea. Most hunter groups, from the lowest, most isolated cell to the best-funded, best-equipped Cheiron strike-team, splice these approaches together. It's a moment-to-moment thing, a game plan that comes on the fly, or on a case-by-case basis. Different creatures need to be hunted in different ways.

And, for as many ways as hunters have to approach the Vigil, a Storyteller has as many options when determining the elements that will go into a **Hunter: The Vigil** story. The book has a lot of elements in play, allowing you to define the story as you and the players see fit.

This can be done in one of two ways:

a) You as Storyteller come to the table with the game and play-style already defined, and the players can create characters based on what you lay down. The advantage to this is that some troupes want to be entertained and don't want to have to come "prepared," or alternatively, want to just jump right into the story and get moving on character creation. The disadvantage is that some players might feel railroaded into a game-style in which they have little interest. If they wanted to play a combat-heavy blood-and-retribution style of game, and the Storyteller puts forth a game based on occult investigation, desires clash. Entertainment wanes. What fun is that?

b) You as Storyteller ask the players what they want, and they tell you. They say they want a game of desperate struggle or a game about government conspiracies, and you comply. The advantage of this is that it puts the players in control and, let's be honest, it's the players and their characters who should always, always, always be the focus of the game. The disadvantages are that you as Storyteller might not be prepared to run what they want (and some level of compromise

may need reaching), or that the players would maybe prefer that you just tell them what's up instead of making them do all this damn work (because, hey, isn't that *your* job?).

Neither approach is more valid than the other. It's simply something that a troupe needs to sit down and talk out.

The following section details some of the possible approaches to lend some color to a chronicle, and highlights a few ways in which hunters deal with the supernatural.

Theme and Mood

Storytelling games rely on theme and mood to contribute to the story. Some rise naturally into the tale without conscious effort on the part of Storytellers and players: as each chapter resolves, it contributes these aspects unconsciously. Other times, it's something that the Storyteller or the players put forth knowingly, saying up front, "This game is about this and feels this way," or, "My character represents this abstract idea and has this certain air about him." (Definitions for theme and mood can be found on pp. 190–191 in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**.)

What themes are apt for a Vigil story? Hundreds of potential universal ideas or lessons can be presented in a Hunter game. Something simple like, "Men are as corruptible as monsters," or something a bit more complex like, "Confrontations with the unknown inevitably contribute to madness." Your theme will answer questions: can hunters be heroes, or are they monsters? What is the nature of humanity, and is it possible that an undead creature can be more "human" than a mortal hunter? Theme could highlight moral complexities, ethical paradigms or mystical philosophies.

Building in a theme means consciously evoking that theme in important moments in-game. If the theme is that exposure to the unknown stirs madness, then you have to demonstrate how this is true. An attack on a vampire's haven leaves the hunters feeling dizzy and "off kilter," and maybe you ask them to make Resolve + Composure rolls not to freak out or do something out of character. When one hunter goes home to his wife a day later, she may note he doesn't "look right," and she points out his shaking hand or the unconscious way he's chewing at his lip and drawing blood.

Mood, on the other hand, is less complex and ultimately more pervasive. Does your story take a tack of violent struggle? Of creeping paranoia? Pyrrhic victory? Brutal heroism? Omnipresent evil? Mood necessitates you contribute to it in a way of *showing*, not *telling*. You don't say, "Your characters feel paranoid." You say, "As you enter the warehouse, you see a camera with a red light recording all that you do," and you hammer that home again and again. Later they feel "eyes at their back," and at home, they receive strange phone calls with nothing more than clicks and incomprehensible whispers coming over the receiver. You don't need to tell the characters how paranoid they're feeling because you showed them: and oh, they feel it.

Theme as Conflict

A hunter character shifts his locus of control from external to internal. Humankind is largely externally controlled,

STORY HOOK: STRANGER PASSING THROUGH

Nothing works anymore. Everyone is having the shittiest luck. Characters' cars are breaking down; their houses' plumbing is costing a fortune to repair; they're on the edge of getting fired for problems at work that aren't even related to their extra efforts on the Vigil. Tempers are short and everyone's blood is up. And no one knows why.

A creature whose mere presence corrodes the world around it has moved into the area. Until it is located and chased away or destroyed, everyone near the creature suffers runs of bad luck in social situations and malfunctions in man-made items. As the erosion continues, people nearby begin to fall ill, with either cancer...or perhaps the first signs of a plague...

and the monsters are one invocation of that. Monsters prey on humanity without its knowledge. They pull the puppet strings. They control the secret highways and byways of humankind. Hunters, though — they've kicked over the log and seen what squirms underneath, and the locus of control shifts from being controlled by outside forces to attempting to take control of one's own life and, frankly, cut the goddamn puppet strings. **Hunter** is about characters taking their own destinies in their hands and, by proxy, working to give the rest of ignorant humankind a similar benefit. This, however, is not easy, and it pushes hunters into constant conflict.

Theme can be expressed as this conflict, meaning that one particular type of conflict dominates the game. This conflict isn't at the expense of other types — no, other types of conflict exist, but one simply takes prominence. What follows are these non-exclusive themes-as-conflict.

Hunter versus Monster: The most obvious conflict of the game is of one or several hunters versus one or several monsters. It's the most common and, arguably, the purest approach to the game. Monsters exist. They do harm whether purposefully or on accident, and they must be dealt with. Hunters work to undo the influence of monsters, whether by killing them, neutralizing them, capturing them or curing them.

Hunter versus Human: Humanity can be just as fiendish as any monster, and sometimes hunters have to deal with that. Maybe they wage war against a local gang. Or maybe a local monster they thought was the true problem actually has a collar around its neck and a leash gripped tightly by all-too-human hands. Some might argue that the World of Darkness is what it is not because monsters exist, but because humankind's iniquity and sin leaves the door open for such horrors to intrude. In this conflict, hunters find that humans are the true bane of their existence, whether humans are criminals, law enforcement or the anonymous hands of a callous bureaucracy or government.

Hunter versus Society: Similar to hunter versus human, this is about how the Vigil is a secret thing and how society is ignorant to it. By being ignorant, it stands in the way. Hunters break laws or exist outside social norms and so society works against them. In this case, society isn't evil, just...well, dumb, or self-interested. Hunters work perhaps to enlighten society, which is no easy task, or maybe tries to navigate within society without being "outed" as not being the family men or professionals they pretend to be.

Hunter versus Hunter: Every cell does things differently. Some hunters *within* a cell do things differently. And quite often, hunters find their Vigil against the monsters is either disturbed by other hunters or actually becomes a Vigil against monstrous hunters. This can be an ideological clash: Catholic gun-toters go toe to toe against the Satanic agents of the Lucifuge. This can be a clash of principle, where one cell determines that a hunter has gone rogue or is simply too willing to harm innocents and must be put down like a rabid dog. This can even be a competition:

many hunters hunger for resources and knowledge (esoteric secrets and powerful artifacts) and they struggle to get to these rewards first. Hunters, sadly, have all too much reason to work against one another.

Hunter versus Organization: Some hunter organizations are faceless and cruel. Some are righteous but unforgiving. And sometimes a cell works against one of these groups. Could be that the cell works from within to carve out a place for itself or to bring the whole goddamn conspiracy crashing down around its ears. Maybe the cell works from outside the group and tries to limit its influence by plundering its resources or poaching its territory. This is less of a personal struggle (as noted by hunter versus hunter) and more of a single cell fighting against some kind of coalition, perhaps providing some kind of insurgency. They might be fine with the hunters of that compact or conspiracy on a personal level, but as a group, they gotta go.

Hunter versus Cell: Yes, it's possible that a hunter struggles with his own cell. Maybe it's doing things he cannot support, perhaps even sliding down that morally slippery slope while he watches the others tumble toward corruption. And he works to save them. Or maybe he's something of a double agent — a Cheiron Group spy or a Network Zero "embedded" clandestine journo who exists within the cell as a matter of deception. Maybe he even wants to bring the cell down. (Careful with this conflict, though. Players need to be comfortable that a mole or plant is in their midst, and might rather prefer to play a game where the conflict is not within its own supposedly safe cell.)

Hunter versus Life: Life is not easy for any hunter. Bills need to be paid. Family needs attention. A one-night-stand can lead to a sexual partner accidentally discovering just what it is the hunter *actually* does with his time. This isn't so much the hunter against a cruel or punishing society; this is just the shit a hunter has to deal with while on the Vigil.

STORY HOOK: AN UNPLANNED PREGNANCY

One of the female characters, or a female relative of a cell member, has become pregnant. Since the pregnancy was confirmed, strangeness dances around the expectant mother. The enemies of the Vigil converge on her, not to harm her but to protect her. The cell finds that its duties are harder than ever before, due to the added pressure of supernatural numbers drawn to the mother. Something dark has occurred here - the pregnancy isn't natural. It might even be a hybrid of some kind...

The characters research all they can and seek to hide the mother from the watchful eyes of the creatures surrounding her in the shadows, but it isn't enough. A second faction of inhuman creatures emerges - and these monsters seek the mother's life, wanting her dead so the baby will never be born. The cell must learn the reasons behind both factions' movements and decide which one (if either) is in the right.

Life demands. Can the hunter balance his hunt against this? Even a hunter who belongs to a bigger compact or conspiracy still has life issues to deal with: family problems, bad dreams, a gambling addiction, whatever. This conflict is about those issues being a persistent presence in the cell's day to day.

Hunter versus Himself: A big one. Hunters can be pretty fucked up. Many are heroes, but all of them are flawed in some fashion. Some go mad. Some find their Morality whittled away by the constant horrors of the hunt. The struggle outside pales when compared to the struggle within. A hunter who thinks he's the Devil's own son has that to deal with. An agent who takes a shot at a fleeing beast accidentally clips and kills a woman crossing the street with a baby carriage, and has to live with that for the rest of his awful life. A hunter who's done terrible things in pursuit of knowledge finds that his comfort level with such atrocity grows and grows, until he's only got a tiny little light inside overwhelmed by encroaching personal darkness. Hunters always have to deal with what goes on inside their heads and their souls. Fear, paranoia, obsession: these dark specters live within the heart and mind, and can be a thousand times more dangerous than any monster on the outside.

The Vigil's Many Masks

Violence. Mystery. Horror. Investigation. Think of these elements in play as having sliders, and you can amp them up or tone them down like volume, bass, treble. What follows is an examination of these elements and how you can "tweak the settings" a bit to tell the type of story *you* want to tell, evoking the themes and moods you desire.

Broken Bones and a Bouquet of Bullets

The level and nature of violence in your game is an important consideration. For the most part, violence lurks at the core of the Vigil. Even a pacifistic cell dedicated to observation and study will eventually trade fists and gunfire with the enemy when its presence is detected. Hunters hunt. And for many, "hunt" takes the same connotation as a guy who takes a .30-06 rifle out and bags a big buck in the woods. For them, the Vigil is a duty, a duty to set things right. Violently.

But not every game is going to be like that. Some games will feature little to no violence at all. A merciful cell of Long Night hunters doesn't charge into the beast's lair with guns drawn and torches waved about. They have their Bibles. They have their hopes. And they have nothing else.

So, how do you want to approach violence in your game? The default level is that it's ever present and brutal. The characters, by and large, are not elite-trained martial arts specialists, and even those with access to quality training and special weapons (or abilities) are still often outgunned

when facing their prey. Even the flashiest Endowments are little more than an edge for smart hunters to use to their advantage.

In this style, punches land with dull smacks to faces and blur the senses for a few panicked heartbeats. Pulses hammer and blood runs cold, while expert fingers slam in another magazine of that "special" ammo. Bones break and cause people to cry out. Blood loss makes people dizzy. Doing this night after night, the bruises add up into ugly patches or permanent scars. Here, violence has consequence. Hunters don't heal easily. The monsters usually do. Hospital stays are long affairs.

Alternatively, violence may take on a hyper-realized, almost action-movie style. Hunters kick open doors, shot-guns taking out hunks of mortar and banister. They blow holes through the chest of some keening beast. They wince at the flash and bang of an explosive going off somewhere. Here, hunters really might be elite-trained bad-asses: ex-Special Forces guys with high-end VALKYRIE armory, or a cell of Lucifuge agents calling upon the unholy forces of darkness to force the fiends to squeal and kneel. Violence has less consequence. Monsters may have less Health to blow through. You might decrease the healing time of hunters or give them pluses to attack rolls or Defense scores to keep combat fast, furious, evocative.

Going the completely opposite direction, violence might be so overwhelmingly dangerous that it's one shot, one kill. Hunters better know how to take cover or approach a perilous situation quietly because fire burns fast and because even a bullet in the leg can cause enough systemic shock to kill the hunter within an hour. You might double damage done.

You might halve hunter's Health scores. You might even suggest that the players create two or three hunter characters because, hey, at least one of them is probably going to take a dirt-nap sometime during the story. And that's okay — if you let the players know this before the game begins. Don't spring an overly lethal game-style on them out of nowhere.

Investigation and Mystery

The Vigil isn't just about hunters breaking bones and having their own bones broken. Hunting is as much about the chase as it is about catching the prey. Hunters use many avenues of research as part of the Vigil, all in the name of learning about the hidden enemies of humanity. How much will investigation play into your game? Is it the key to all enduring mysteries, forcing characters to pore through books and to scour crime scenes to find some truth? Or does investigation play as small a role as, "You find a note pinned to the exsanguinated body, and on that note is a taunt, a threat and an address. Time to hunt."

If you're going to invoke a game where investigation plays a significant role, you've got a few things to consider. First, mysteries have to have answers and clues must be found. You can't drop clues that characters won't find (it stalls the game) and you can't posit mysteries that simply have no answers at all (it frustrates the players). Yes, clues can be hard to find and mysteries may not always have *clear* answers, but payoff is always necessary.

So, what avenues of investigation exist for hunter characters? For some, the most obvious (though potentially the least reliable) is research into mythology and folklore. Poring through library books and countless search engine links will lead to a bevy of mythological information, much of which is diluted by centuries of interpretation from the source. Mythology provides a larger cultural context for monsters, and it's cool to provide players with things they find (maybe even taking the players themselves through a very real Google search to see what might come up as a result) to show the universal nature of a monster or mystery.

Even something as ubiquitous as a vampire has a hundred variations across a range of cultural folklores and mythologies, and a thousand other entities that bear enough of a resemblance to confuse any would-be scholar. The hopping demons of Asian folklore taste mortal blood by extending their edged tongues and licking sleeping people. These are equally as vampiric as the bone-pale undead that so dominate Western perception, based primarily, of course, on Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. Yet they suffer different banes, feel agony at different wounds or are repelled by different rituals.

Folklore tends to be more local, and allows you to maybe give glimpses into regional stories or even get the characters out on the street, asking questions of the townsfolk or neighborhood vagrants. This information doesn't have to be utterly reliable (though some gems of truth should lurk within the misinformation), but that's okay. Misinformation stirs suspense and conflict (more on that in a minute). Point is, mythological and folkloric interpretations of monsters and the mysteries that surround them can be a goldmine of story fodder.

DON'T GO IN THAT ROOM!

Here's another way to define suspense: when characters do something you don't want them to do. In a horror movie, you see the girl about to open the closet door, and you know the killer likes to hide in closets and, frankly, so should she. But she does it anyway, and you cringe and grit your teeth waiting for the ax to fall. Boom. Suspense.

How does this play out in a game? Could be that the characters witness a Storyteller character do something he shouldn't: they're trying to be quiet, but the guy freaks out and starts weeping loudly, possibly drawing the attention of the monsters. And sometimes, one of the player's own characters can be the driving force doing something that the rest of the players know to be a bad, bad idea: he tries to leap a distance he really can't make, his derangement comes to the fore during a tense situation, he says the wrong thing to the wrong person. Again, suspense.

Another angle of investigation comes from examination of a scene. At a horrible crime, characters might sneak past police tape to do a little snooping of their own, lifting up floorboards or shining a black light over the scene to look for spots of blood. If this is an investigation-based game, make sure to be prepared for scenes like this. While not every examination of a scene is going to yield big answers, it should always contribute a little something to the story at hand, whether it gives a clue about a victim or infers a telling character trait about a potential antagonist. Maybe they find a love letter tucked between mattress and box spring, shining a surprisingly human light on what they expected was an otherwise fiendish monster (and maybe they use that letter to find the intended recipient). Maybe they find something weird that only begs more questions: a tooth with hair wrapped around it stuck in a doorframe, or a foul-smelling, greasy residue that cannot, at present, be easily identified.

Clues, at an examination, should first always answer a question and stir new questions. Moreover, a clue should always be findable, especially if it's something that remains necessary to advance the plot. It either needs to be obvious, necessitating no roll to find, or characters need to have enough impetus (hints, really) to pursue the investigation until something meaningful is found. If you plant on the scene an audio tape that should urge the cell toward another avenue of investigation, and not finding it means the story stalls... well, what's the point of that? Maybe another character tells them where to find it. Maybe one of them had a dream that hinted toward the tape's location in a heating vent. It can't

just rely on dice rolls. A bad bounce of the dice and the tale languishes.

Investigation can also be a social aspect of the game. Characters' jobs are probably the main ways in which they will encounter the supernatural, and thus the jobs offer a prime angle of investigation. Characters can use their various contacts and workplaces to investigate and encounter the supernatural.

Take seedy jobs, for example. Hookers. Stripper in back-alley bars. Beggars. Drug dealers. Hired thugs. Criminals. Anyone who comes into contact with the city's "underside" in a lifestyle commonly associated with poverty, decadence or lawlessness is likely to encounter the inhuman creatures that hide in the teeming press of humanity there. These are the kinds of people who often fall between the cracks and might be damn eager to answer some of the cell's questions.

Point is, a hunter's Profession can open avenues of telling interviews: a Scientist asks a buddy of his to take a look at this slide smeared with the aforementioned greasy residue, or the Cop sees if his Detective friend can do some handwriting analysis on that love letter. A Journalist has fertile ground when researching the presence of the supernatural, and knows how to get into hard-to-access places or talk to hard-to-access people by flashing a press pass and promising to promote the "truth."

Even outside of one's Profession, social encounters make for great investigatory fodder. A few well-placed lies at a party to draw out those who might know something (Subterfuge)? A series of questions asked at the point of a gut-level knife (Intimidation)? Painting an image of one's monstrous attacker (Expression), hanging it up at a local gallery and then feeling people out to see what their reaction is (Socialize)? Investigation doesn't necessarily rely on forensics or microscopes, after all.

One more thing to keep in mind about using investigation in a game:

Investigation needs to be suspenseful. Don't rely on investigation to be resolved with a couple of dice rolls or an otherwise simple solution. Investigation needs to be driven by suspense. How?

You have a few ways available. First, a series of clues increasing in weirdness or horror become compelling. As a character finds these clues, he's effectively peeling back inch after inch of the awful layer, revealing the awfulness underneath. This can inspire a visceral level of suspense where a character isn't comfortable with what she's finding, but cannot stop just the same.

Second, the persistent threat of danger. Could the vampire be coming back to his haven while they investigate? Maybe they hear the doorknob rattle, or footsteps scuffing the concrete outside. What about that distant siren approaching? As it gets closer, they have to worry — could it be for them? Maybe the environment itself is threatening: floorboards so weak they could give away at any moment, or a clue seems to sit plainly

across a room draped in webs and the venomous spiders that live in them. The threat of danger tells a character that she might have a time limit for uncovering clues and that she is putting her own life at peril by pushing for the truth (certainly one possible theme of the Vigil). Maybe the footsteps outside was just the wind, and maybe the siren passes without incident. But it got the characters' hearts racing and, by proxy, the players'.

This Monstrous Heart

To reiterate: hunters hunt. And the various horrors and mysteries of the World of Darkness are generally the targets of that hunt. When you approach a game, it's important to know how monsters fit into the whole equation. How will you present them in comparison to what the players and their characters expect? On one hand, if they want a combat-heavy "all monsters are monstrous" game, you want to give them that. Alternatively, it's important to have the game pump in unexpected situations that demand a reinvigoration of strategy or a newly complex moral quandary. If all the cell wants to do is coat every creature in a blanket of napalm, what happens when it meets one who looks like a little girl, or whom one of the cell members knew when "it" was a "him"?

Below are some considerations about how you use the various fiends and creatures of the World of Darkness in your *Hunter: The Vigil* game.

The Inveterate Adversary

Every night the cell hunts, they see her: the trembling ghost girl with twigs in her hair and blood on her hands, and she cries out to them, but before they can answer, she's gone. And every night after seeing her, they have the nightmares.

The pitiless prick — a vampire whose business they keep "interrupting" — left a note pinned to the pillow of Roger's daughter. It said nothing but her name, signed in elegant calligraphy, written in what might be blood.

They kill them again and again. Once or twice a year, they rise up and set up their altars and sacrifice slabs in various abandoned buildings, and the VALKYRIE strike forces go in and clean house. But the goddamn Cult of Unihi-Pili (the Cult of the Earthbound Soul) keeps rising with new members, year after year.

Recurring enemies work very well in a Vigil game. It keeps a cell vested in the story at hand, because its members want to see the monster pay or feel genuine fear when his name comes up in conversation. A true adversary is a foil of sorts to the cell: he's either everything the members are not, or he's a creature (or a group of creatures) that is, frankly, a little too close for comfort. (Cults work elegantly this way, given the relative irony that most hunter cells, compacts and conspiracies could be called cults. Certainly too close for comfort with an irony only some hunters see.)

STORY HOOK: ENEMY WITHIN

For some time, the cell has been exposed to the enemy through a route it had not predicted. Perhaps a character's daughter is dating a vampire and only now starts to show signs of physical weakness from serving in his blood cult, or perhaps a husband's curious distance is now revealed as ghostly or demonic possession, and not something simple like an affair with the secretary. Whatever the truth, the cell has been compromised, and it's been that way for a while now.

The link to the enemy might appear to be completely in the dark about his or her connection to the Vigil's enemies, but the cell needs to act to remove this potential threat. In cases of outside interference (such as the daughter's boyfriend), more direct measures can be taken. In cases where the compromise is more internal (such as possession), there's no telling what the enemy now knows about the cell, and the solutions to the problem are likely to generate stories in and of themselves.

An adversary can appear in every session, or may recur once every two or three sessions (arguably a more suspenseful approach, given that the cell will constantly fear and perhaps hunger for his recurrence, creating good tension). The adversary can certainly be violent or work in subtle ways against the cell: plundering the members' bank accounts, calling the police on them when they hunt other monsters, leaving bait and traps for them. An adversary needn't be directly confrontational, though, and can represent a persistent mystery: a ghost whose restless mission must be unraveled bit by bit, or a demon that offers genuine information session after session, but also "hooks" the players with various pact-bound tasks at the same time. Neither of these are necessarily confrontational or violent, but they still count as recurring foes.

Be careful with the adversarial approach: it can grow dull if every session is focused on this particular enemy. That tedium can grow if the cell seems unable to affect its foe in a meaningful way or if he always just one-ups it. While certainly he needs to be a difficult foe and conflict is healthy for a story, it's important that the troupe doesn't feel frustrated with inability.

Also worth noting: sometimes it's best to let the cell define its own adversary. If the characters go up against a monster you maybe didn't think was so important, watch their reactions. If they botch an investigation or attack or react in a particularly zealous or curious way, keep that adversary around. They've made the first move and have "spawned" what may become a foe who haunts their every move from there on out.

Monster of the Week

"They're birds," Azif said, "but they have beaks like a pickax and all-too-human eyes. They seem to be awfully present at car accidents. I don't like them, so mobilize the others. I want a feather sample."

The beast-men rolled into town in a red conversion van with window art of a black dragon on the back. They came in howling, killed a bunch of folk and left howling even louder. Are their names important? Only for the headstones.

The cell stopped to get a bite on the road and heard two truckers talking over a couple of steak-and-egg plates. They said off Exit 53 was a mine. Haunted by ghosts or something worse. The hunters were curious. They took that exit.

Well-planned recurring villains might be the spine of a chronicle, but not every creature the hunters encounter is worth showing up every session. Sometimes it can be fun, thematic and perfectly in step with the chronicle arc for a new threat to roll into town and need some fast investigation and/or an immediate takedown.

Introducing side-antagonists like this is a great way for Storytellers to keep things fresh and keep increasingly experienced characters aware that they don't know as much as they think they do. From a Storyteller's perspective, these encounters can be considered one-hit wonders, where the storyline takes a break and some pure action comes into play. More than that, though, it's a cool way of gauging the kinds of encounters and antagonists to which a troupe's players and characters respond. And particularly memorable encounters could spawn continuing storylines.

One-shot threats like these can still offer some fun and new lines of investigation. A cell's standard routines for uncovering the truth about its regular types of targets might avail it nothing, necessitating new research methods. In cases like this, a new line of pursuit might even shed fresh light on older targets that the cell still struggles with, allowing the Storyteller to add to the main plot arc and the established antagonists even while focusing on this new threat.

They can also offer some fast and deadly encounters where a lot can be on the line in a short time. They go up after a rabid pack of bloodsuckers and one of them is put in the hospital, which messes with their original mission of trying to cut out the heart of that giant spider living in the sewers for their Cheiron bosses. One-off encounters are fast, mysterious and not without the potential for loss and sacrifice.

Allies in the Darkness

He shook the witch's hand, waiting for it to burn or leave a mark. It didn't, at least not on the outside. Still. The enemy of his enemy and all that garbage...

The hunters knew the street and knew not to cross it. It didn't look any different over there, but it was different. Fucking with the Mercy Street lupines was in nobody's best interest. And they didn't fuck with the Washington Avenue cell in return. That was the deal, and had been for going on 10 years now.

She wept, wondering at what she'd unleashed. The angel with fire for hands offered to "wipe the slate clean" of her enemies if only she'd but ask, and oh, she asked. And in the distance she saw the smoke from too many fires.

Every underdog gets outclassed, outnumbered and out-gunned sometimes. Hunters are the underdogs from the moment they start the Vigil, and they face an uphill struggle where the enemy holds the high ground. Hunters will often need help, no matter how well funded or capable they are, and sometimes that help just doesn't come.

At least not from conventional directions.

Most cells will never admit to this, but there's a divide in each group of hunters where they will tolerate allying with the enemies of the Vigil. For some cells, the divide pulls up sharp early on: these are the hunters who will listen to a monster's screams for help as long as it keeps babbling useful information. The moment its wails become useless, the hunters open fire. For other cells, well, they could work with a vampire, or a cultist coven, or a werewolf pack, as long as they are united against a greater threat to both groups.

These alliances are tense and temporary at best, and fraught with potential misunderstandings and betrayals no matter how calm everyone's trigger fingers might be. The moment the hunters learn something about their new allies that doesn't sit right in their minds, the agreement can be broken with a sudden eruption of violence or a meticulously planned double cross. Many alliances end in hospital visits or funeral services.

But what about real, genuine friendship? That can happen, depending on the Storyteller's presentation of various monsters in the chronicle. Creatures with a human (or humane) streak can become firm allies, perhaps even with players portraying the monsters.

It's not impossible. It's difficult, sure, and the themes of the respective game lines can become diluted to make room for concepts and struggles that some characters aren't designed to handle, but the similarities can rock for some troupes. Take a cell that includes a vampire who's secretly turned on his own kind: that group has the ethical minefield of the vampire's descent into degeneration and inhumanity, coupled closely with the humans' acquisition of various derangements as they, too, commit sins against their own Moralities. A chronicle that deals with these twin themes and does them justice probably isn't cheapening or diluting anything.

Remember always to keep alliances and friendships with the darkness tense and uncertain. They may stay true to the alliance, but one side always has a tiny seed of nagging doubt. Tension and suspense keep such relationships vivid and interesting. The vampire fails to show for his Wednesday-at-midnight meeting? The cell finds a strange list in the witch's belongings and their names are on it? The demon they deal with so frequently now has eyes of a different color? Suspicion mounts.

Redemption

The "thing" wailed and gnashed its teeth, pulling clumps of its stringy hair out in brutal hunks. It bemoaned its crimes. The hunter lowered his rifle. For now.

"The witch will repent," Hanrahan said, prodding the bruised face of the sinner woman. She said something behind her electrical-tape gag. Hanrahan gestured to Riley to pull it off, see if she was ready to commit to the holy life.

With its forked tongue and lyrical voice, the creature became a poet, inspiring euphoria instead of hatred, singing instead of killing. One of the hunters sat in the audience on that first night, and has been in the audience ever since. Just in case.

The Vigil throws every cell a few surprises now and then. One of those will occasionally come in the form of a creature that doesn't relish its inhuman existence. Perhaps it was once human and laments its changed state, or perhaps it merely wishes it could dwell in the world without needing to harm others. Whatever the truth of the matter, it can be one hell of a shock when a monster approaches the hunters and seeks their help, or begs for a means of redemption.

The cell is faced with an immediate dilemma. Many cells consider the Vigil to be focused on removing these threats, and this usually means a *permanent* removal, via the indelicate application of brutal violence. Letting these creatures continue to exist is anathema to most cells' cause, no matter what tier of influence they fight from. But...we're talking *redemption* here. A creature that sincerely wishes to make amends for its past harm, or wishes to find some way to reconcile its lost humanity. Characters might well ask themselves: "Are we right or wrong to kill this creature?"

A fair question. The Vigil isn't often broken down clearly into good and evil or black and white (though some hunters like to see it that way), and these situations are deep into the moral gray area between what's right for some cells and wrong for others.

Potential redemption takes many forms. Redemption *can* come as a mercy killing, even one a fiend asks for. It can come as some kind of neutralization: surgery, perhaps, to damage the part of the monster's brain that drives it to its wretched acts, or focused prayer or chants to keep its urges imprisoned. Some creatures simply offer to help: they know their nature cannot be revoked, but they also know it's possible to do some right by helping the cell. Others...they *do* seek the revocation of their monstrous state. They want a cure.

This is likely impossible in most cases, but it presents a unique opportunity for the cell to act differently, to approach the Vigil in a purer, more human way. A ghost may be given the chance to resolve some issues and move on. A bloodsucking fiend may be given the chance to do right by the families of those she drank dry and killed. A demon might, like the hunters of the Lucifuge, be offered the chance to destroy others of its ilk.

Can an actual revocation of the monstrous state exist? Depends on the nature of hope in your World of Darkness, and that can be unique to your game. You may rule that the monstrous state cannot be truly cured or repealed. Or you may rule that if the cell works hard enough and close enough with the creature at hand, it *can* be possible, even if it necessitates great sacrifice on

the part of all involved. So, how does one "cure" vampirism? Or lycanthropy? Traditionally, werewolves are what they are, unable to extricate the beast from the man, or vice versa. But folklore may provide an ancillary solution: the werewolf, buried in the ground for a day and a night with a mouthful of wolfsbane, may jump-start the process and it goes from there. The werewolf must make further sacrifices. The hunters, too, must protect him from other hunters who might destroy him, or keep him safe from those shapeshifters who consider him a traitor to their skin. Plus, finding out the cure is likely to be a story arc in itself, filled with investigation, interrogation and the forces of the enemy opposed to the characters, either to prevent their success or to keep the secrets the hunters now seek.

Even with the right knowledge and whatever components are necessary for the redemption, there's the very real threat that the creature might change its mind at the last moment. When confronted with the chance to become human, many monsters will balk in those final moments, not wishing

STORY HOOK: THE SICKNESS

Immortality. Superhuman strength. **Regeneration of injury.** Some creatures possess these powers and more besides. They never seem to fall prey to disease, and no wounds slow them down for long. If there's anything to envy about the creatures of the night, it's their ability to just keep going, to survive almost anything. The characters find they need that ability themselves, when one of the cell falls ill with a degenerative or terminal disease, such as Alzheimer's or cancer. Understandably, players might feel aggrieved at this "death sentence" on their character, so Storytellers should either clear it with them first or target one of their loved ones.

The "cure" doesn't come easy. A vampire's or werewolf's blood is not a component that will cure much of anything on its own (unless at Storyteller discretion) and it might be that a dizzying range of body matters from various creatures needs to be combined to halt the disease's effects. And that's presuming, of course, that it works at all. Just because the characters heard of the miracle cure from someone doesn't mean it's guaranteed to work. If it fails, there's hot-blooded vengeance to be taken. And if it succeeds, there's no way of knowing just what changes such a ritual could induce within the patient...



to risk the change or “weaken” themselves, after all. Vampires suffer because of their inner demons and eternal hunger, but they are immortal and possess great powers. When faced with the moment one has to surrender the blessings along with the curses, a creature might turn on those who sought to help it. (Not to mention that the vampire may, upon turning human, turn into a very human corpse and shrivel as if long dead and long buried.)

Of course, a monster that comes seeking redemption might, in truth, only be seeking a way to get safely within claws’ reach of the characters. They are monsters, after all.

The Tiers

The tiers are presented as separate enough that hunters from across the board need never meet, but also linked enough that some blending is possible if the Storyteller and the players are interested in such. Ultimately, most cities include a strange and purposefully conflicted mix of hunters from all tiers, from the lowly first-tier cell to the mid-range second-tier organization to the larger, grander and stranger third-tier agencies. How will you deal with the tiers in your Vigil story?

One Tier Only

Could be that you want a game comprising only hunters of a single tier, and that’s perfectly fine. One of the reasons to

do this is to highlight the potential themes and moods that come with each tier.

A first-tier “cell-only” game is a game about hunters surviving the night to night. Maybe it’s a couple of friends who once made a pact with a demon and wriggled free to end it. Maybe it’s a support group of some folks who have been touched by the paranormal and cannot shake free of its grasp. Could be some hunting buddies who were once happy to shoot deer, but now have found more interesting and more dangerous game.

The “cell-only” game is about the expressly local, about hunters with minimal resources who struggle to keep their lives in check with the Vigil. Other cells might exist, but none belongs to any larger groups. All are ragtag. Some might take the form of street gangs, carving out hunks of territory.

A second-tier “organization-only” game is still more local, but sees hunters with greater resources and alliances. It’s also a game that can become more political, as each group strives to balance its own Vigil against the presence of the others. Even if you choose to use only a single hunter organization in the game, politics exist *within* the group, too. Haughty members of Ashwood Abbey might work to make life rough for some novitiates, or a Union cell might get embroiled in a struggle for the political leadership of their parent org. Keeping a game focused on this tier still ensures that hunters are universally human and without any Endowments that smack of the supernatural (of course, what some hunters — like those of the

KEEPING THE GROUP TOGETHER

Tensions fly thick and fast between many hunter groups, and any Storyteller will dread those scenes when it becomes apparent two characters just can't work together any longer. Such chronicle-threatening moments usually arise from those words: "It's what my character would do" or "My character just can't be in the same room as him anymore."

There's a way around this, a way to patch it up until a stronger and truer solution presents itself through roleplaying. It's by no means unique to **Hunter** games, but is especially appropriate to Vigil chronicles. The fact is that hunters are in a lot of danger a great deal of the time. A group's cohesion and unity relies not so much on desire and friendship, but rather necessity. The glue binding the characters together is composed of many elements, but the primary ingredient is the fact that they're likely as good as dead if they try to perform the Vigil alone - especially if they've gathered a number of past enemies from their efforts within a cell. The still-living enemies of the cell would no doubt delight in the chance to pick off a lone wolf that's strayed from the safety of the pack.

Abbey — do in pursuit of the hunt cannot be easily called "human," but therein lies the question of what truly defines a hunter's humanity).

Going third tier with the overarching hunter agencies sees a greater struggle with more potent resources and meaner politics. Third-tier cells might work in opposition to one another. They might infiltrate each other. Cells have to contend with top-down leadership that often seems misguided or outright wrong. Here you've gone beyond local institutions and could easily turn your Vigil game into a globe-hopping horror adventure: raiding tenebrous tombs in Kolkata; storming a village of bloodsucking terrorists outside Kabul; tracking a prized specimen through the villages and cities of eastern Europe.

The other option is, of course, assuming a city or game in which all tiers come into play. While you may not get to focus on themes and moods particular to each tier so easily, it does create a more dynamic and dangerous political situation. Hunters are not lone wolves in this type of story: they work together, against one another, but never in exclusion. The political atmosphere in a city bursting with hunter cells and groups is tense. In many such sto-

ries, hunters will spend as much time working to harm their hunter opponents as they do hunting actual monsters. And there's nothing wrong with that.

The Motley Cell

Will you allow a cell of mixed hunters, that is to say, characters belonging to various compacts and conspiracies working together? Or will you ask the players to all create hunters from one tier, compact or conspiracy? Neither approach is invalid. Having them create hunters from one group is easy, and helps keep you focused on the themes and conflicts unique to that group.

That said, a mixed or motley cell can certainly work, though it might at first seem a difficult task to manage. How can it work?

Friends Forever: Maybe the hunters have all joined disparate groups, but they've been friends for so long (or at least "hunting buddies") that it doesn't matter. Their loyalty is to one another, regardless of what their bosses say.

Failure to Communicate: Some hunter orgs don't manage their people very well. It's commonly recognized among hunters on the Vigil that the hunter is not his conspiracy or compact. Sure, Cheiron Group is a lofty European medical conglomerate, but a cell of its hunters may easily go against type. This is because the larger groups are sometimes too large to really keep an eye on its people (not to mention a limited "hiring pool"). The US government may only keep an occasional eye on the lone clandestine VALKYRIE office in a given city, and that gives the hunters free rein. In particular, it gives them the chance to partner up with those from theoretically opposed groups.

On the Same Team: Not every hunter group stands in opposition to every other hunter group. Hunters from the Malleus Maleficarum and Long Night make easy allies. The Loyalists of Thule like to work with damn near everybody, as do Null Mysteris (though both for differing reasons). These groups don't always have competing ideologies or goals, and so they can take up the Vigil together. It's possible even that their overarching leadership demands they work together, perhaps to accomplish a common goal.

Hush-Hush, on the QT: Some hunters work clandestinely, joining cells under false pretenses. Many of the agencies like to send hunters to work undercover with other cells. Some do it without direction and, like the Loyalists, just aren't keen on announcing their allegiances. Others do so against their org or conspiracy's wishes, just looking for some allies outside their own groups (though it still likely means they don't telegraph their membership). Some cells are composed of several hunters who, frankly, don't know a grain of actual truth about one another. For some, it doesn't matter, as long as they follow the Vigil together. For others...well, a seed of suspicion can grow into a carnivorous plant pretty fast, eating up any hopes of working together in the future.

STORY HOOK: THE CRUSADE

The characters know there are other cells out there in the city and, frankly, they need the help now. Whether it involves appealing to the bastards in another neighborhood or standing before the freaks in another third-tier organization, the hunters have to go somewhere for aid. The Vigil has taken a turn for the worse lately, and the cell is beaten, bloodied and bruised from all the effort. Something big is happening in the shadows. The enemy is up to something.

The characters see the patterns and sense the oncoming dangers. If they try to unite the local cells into a loosely gathered fighting force, there's a chance everyone will survive. But cells are going missing, and time is running out. Gathering the "crusade" force to take back the night needs to be done now, before the characters' cell is the next one to vanish.

Common Enemy: Even hunters who don't share Vigil ideology or who might hate each other under other circumstances can find that changes when a common enemy threatens them or the city's innocents. Could an agent of the Lucifuge and a Malleus Maleficarum priest work together? Sure, if the threat warrants it. Most hunters recognize that even those hunters with whom they violently disagree are still, after all, on the Vigil. They share that, at least. And when the monsters come calling, maybe it's time to put down petty things. And when the monsters are put into the ground...well, maybe it's time to pick those petty things back up and resume old hatreds.

Ascending the Tiers

The deal with ascending the tiers is that it is and isn't a "promotion." A character has access to greater support, better organization from above, new edges in the Vigil via Endowments, but it also comes with a loss of freedom. Before, when the Vigil was just a group of friends banding together to survive, they ran their own show and did things their way. Maybe that worked for them, but as a character goes up the three tiers, that freedom evaporates. While the third-tier organizations obviously allow their agents to live their own lives, characters within the branching arms of these brotherhoods are bound by new codes of conduct and are forced to keep dangerous secrets. It also means they might not be able to do things a certain way anymore. In this instance, with great power comes a great need to toe the party line.

That disclaimer aside, it can be an extremely satisfying chronicle arc if the Storyteller and the troupe run the characters ever upward through the various paths of "established" hunter organizations. Characters will attract the attention of local agents representing one or more of the third-tier groups and, over time, will be asked to join if they show the right stuff.

Some great stories can be told (and some fantastic group dynamics will emerge) if characters begin their rises in different directions, with a good spread of organizations now backing up the cell. It's likely, however, that the group will be sponsored and recruited by one third-tier organization and rise through the ranks that way. Again, depending on the hunters' experiences, they might revel in the added support,

find conflict with the group's outlook, or simply chafe under the new rules imposed upon them.

First, of course, they need to attract the attention of the agencies. That means they need to hunt. Moving from a first-tier group up to a second one is the initial step, and its main difficulties depend as much on luck as skill. To reach tier two, a cell needs other cells that think the same way. Alliances need to be formed, outlooks confirmed and goals agreed upon. That in and of itself is likely to be a nightmare of organization, with the various cells meeting up, testing the waters around each other and treading the line between rivalry and friendship. Classic roleplaying opportunities, though, and it's fun for some troupes to be engaged in setting up something larger than their own characters.

Once the alliance is formed and the cells have a unifying theme, their actions become increasingly likely to attract third-tier attention because of their increase in efficiency. Here's where the real tensions start. Up until this point, the characters are still ruling the roost. Even if they join (rather than form) a loose second-tier coalition of cells, they still have a great deal of free rein and are probably working better than ever with the added support of men and women just like them, who all see the truth.

Then along come the "altered" hunters, claiming to do the same work as these "salt-of-the-earth" types, but doing it in mysterious and secretive ways. At first, the contact between the lower and upper tier cells is likely to be hesitant, with the third-tier hunters revealing very little of their sponsors, employers or their Endowments. It's a difficult balance; trust will be thin on the ground between the factions anyway, and coming across as overly mysterious is going to lead the low-tier hunters into suspicions that the organized cell perhaps aren't as human as they claim to be. And the problem here is that, in some cases, that's relatively true. Some Endowments blur the line between man and monster, hunter and prey.

If and when the offers of joining come, they're likely to be after several tests, either formally offered to the low-tier cell (which is then provided with targets to hunt) or just as a judgment of its skill on the Vigil (as the third-tier cell observes and sees how the others do).

Actually getting into the third-tier outfits is not something to be sneezed at. It has serious impacts on a character's life: some good, some bad. Storytellers and players can get a lot of mileage out of the adaptation story arc, where the characters come to terms with their new positions and get to grips with the unfamiliar new Endowments. Potential encounters could even include the revelations when facing foes that the enemies of the Vigil can, in some ways, seem more human than the characters since they allowed themselves to be altered.

Storytellers can play this up, or focus the pathos elsewhere. With increased support and the advantages of tier-three equipment and Endowments, the characters are free to pursue some truly serious bad guys. If the moral implications of fighting fire with fire don't hold any appeal, the troupe might relish the chance to explore conflicts with utterly inhuman, utterly monstrous foes, the likes of which the characters simply couldn't have handled back in their low-tier days. It can make for some dramatic stuff: consider the cell that *finally* has the edge it needs to go after the chronicle's major antagonist, whereas previously it could never hope to harm him. Being able to stand before him on an even footing will hold a lot of appeal for a cell.

Descending the Tiers

Just as the ascent has its share of pluses and minuses, so too does the descent. On the surface, it might seem like a demotion or a retirement of sorts, and to say no hunter walks this path for those reasons would be a lie. Of course they do. Some can't hack the big leagues. Some just grow weary of the life.

Others, though? Some abandon the organizations because of a conflict of interest or a clash of outlook. When a character can no longer stomach the orders he's given, he finally snaps and leaves. As an example, the Lucifuge are probably likeliest to hemorrhage members in this manner. Just look at what they do and what they think, after all (of course, they claim you can't really remove your own infernal genetics, but

one can still leave the group's employ). Operating practices and beliefs like those have got to wear down a heart after a while. It becomes harder and harder to see just who is the "good guy," and deep down, that's something most hunters see themselves as, even if never in such simplistic terms.

Also, on a personal level, some people just *don't want* in-human bio-implants screwing around with their bodies; they don't want half-understood cybernetics attached to their organs and bones, and they sure as hell is hot don't want to learn anything that could even be considered a nod in the direction of "black magic." Power just isn't worth the sacrifice to some characters, and that's fine. It's a cool, natural (perhaps even sensible) reaction and shouldn't be punished by a Storyteller or the other troupe members.

So characters descend the tiers. The disadvantages are obvious and immediate. A lack of support, a lack of funding and a lack of those eerie new skin grafts and magic tricks that made hunting a little easier. But here are the plus points:

Firstly, freedom. Characters no longer need to justify their actions to superiors and are free to use whatever methods in the hunt they desire. They gain the ability to choose their own targets and hunt their own way. That's got to hold some appeal for many hunters who've grown tired of asking "How high?" when told to jump. A character might now exorcize his rage and seek to make amends for all those times wretched creatures had to be studied instead of destroyed, on the whims of some lab technician or robed cult leader. Now the hunter really breaks out the attack, and makes up for years of restraint and study. No mercy, anymore. Time to *hunt*.

That coin has a flip side. A character may have spent years hunting and destroying various entities, never learning what he wished to learn and instead finding all factual information about the Vigil's foes flowing ever upward to the organization's leaders, with little filtering back down. No one likes to be in the dark. No one likes being lied to. Such a character is now free to conduct his business as he sees fit, studying the

STORY HOOK: A CONCERNED CITIZEN

An anonymous tipster contacts the characters, detailing thorough information on one particular foe (or type of foe) the characters are hunting. It could be scholarly lore and observations from someone who appears to be meticulous researcher, or just decent word-of-mouth from someone who seems to be in the know when it comes to monsters and street smarts. The "source" never meets the characters, just contacts them by letters, packages and emails. But one thing is obvious: the source knows far more than he should. He's one of the enemy, too.

But...the things he's saying are useful. Damn useful. Years, decades (centuries?) of research all dripping down into the hunters' hands. It makes the Vigil easier, and makes taking down enemies a lot faster when the cell knows their weaknesses and habits inside and out. But how long can a cell work from this information while knowing it's the pawn of the enemy? Other hunters will come for them, sooner or later. And who is their mysterious patron? How does he know enough about the cell to contact its members personally by name and address?

STORY HOOK: THE VIGIL AS VIRUS

The Vigil is, in its own way, contagious. A cell chases a rabid "thing" into an alley. It takes most of the cell members down, but a vagrant hiding behind a dumpster sees it all and he goes and tells his friends, and they band together, deciding they need to watch their backs and the streets. Months later, they track the "thing" to the edge of a rooftop, and Blacktooth Billy buries a rusted crowbar in its head and it tumbles off the roof, crashes onto the hood of a delivery truck and then bounds off, leaving a trail of bubbling blood. The delivery driver and his new hire sit, wide eyed, and they talk about it, and they know something must be done, and now they're on the Vigil, too. Hunters beget hunters. The Vigil stirs itself. Try playing a game that carries the chain of events from character to character, seeing how the Vigil evolves and shifts when carried by hunters with different perspectives. Some hunters may die. Others are born out of the tragedy. Like a phoenix, the Vigil always rises again from the ashes, a wrathful bird of fire.

prey rather than being part of a task force formed to shoot first and shut up later, without ever asking any questions.

And, of course, a clear conscience is a powerful lure. No longer spending time with other people who are growing increasingly inhuman through the Endowments is something that many descending hunters will relish. In cases where they've left extremely altered cells, they might even hunt their former allies, believing they've gone too far.

Something that shouldn't be overlooked is the urge to not only do things a character's own way, but to set up an organization founded on those principles the character follows, and based around the methods he uses to hunt. A great many hunters who descend the tiers do so not because of nay real displeasure with their current lot in life, but because they're experienced, they know their stuff, and they're confident they can found an organization that will do things better than the others.

This is also fertile ground for great Storytelling. A chronicle focusing on the trials of establishing an organization from the ground up might make for some killer gameplay, including winning other cells from across the tiers as allies, and maneuvering around any rivals left behind in the old company. Added to this the founder(s)' constant need to keep hunting and prove they know what they're doing, and a Storyteller has been handed a potent mix of possibilities.

The easiest model to apply against your new Endowment is to use the one followed by Advanced Armory, Relics and Thaumatechnology: each item/ritual/ability is assigned a number of dots equal to its potency, and each can be bought as a separate Merit. Alternatively, you may instead find the more complex systems of Benedictions, Castigations and Elixirs to your liking for mimicking.

Dread Powers

Monsters have a diabolical array of powers with which to control, harm and torment mortals. What follows is a series of powers that can, as the Storyteller requires, be given to any creature found in your **Hunter: The Vigil** game. Throughout, certain "types" of creatures might be noted as having inclinations toward some Dread Powers over others, but the Storyteller remains final arbiter over whether a monster has access to a certain Dread Power. It helps to mix and match, to keep hunter characters never feeling comfortable in their knowledge.

Note that when dealing with non-corporeal entities (ghosts, bodiless demons, other spirits), use of these Dread Powers necessitates replacing the Attribute roll with the entity's Power, and the Skill roll with the entity's Finesse. In addition, such non-corporeal adversaries spend Essence, not Willpower.

Agonize (• to ••••)

Cost: 1 Willpower

Action: Instant

Dice Pool: Presence + Intimidation + Agonize - target's Stamina

Effect: The monster spends Willpower and concentrates. The target is wreathed in hellish flames, or bathed in electricity or bombarded by a deafening chorus of screams and demonic roars. However it manifests, the victim is in agony for as long as the creature concentrates. The monster must maintain line of sight with the target, and cannot do anything but move up to its Speed whilst concentrating. If concentration is broken, or line of sight is blocked, the power ends and

the victim is released. Otherwise, the power lasts a number of turns equal to dots in Agonize.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Dread Power cannot be activated for the rest of the story.

Failure: The monster fails to inflict pain on the target, but may spend another Willpower next turn and try again.

Success: The target suffers virtual wound penalties equal to successes rolled (to a maximum of -3). The target cannot be knocked unconscious by this power, but remains conscious, in sheer agony for the rest of the scene. The target can still apply Defense to an attack, but doing anything else is nigh impossible. Each turn, the target may attempt a Resolve + Stamina roll to break free; success ends the Dread Power.

Exceptional Success: The target must make a Resolve + Composure roll to be able to do anything other than stand and scream.

Once released, the character finds she is physically unharmed, at the Health level she was when caught in this power.

Dice Pool Modifiers

-2 Target has the Meditative Mind Merit.

Balefire (• to ••••)

Cost: 3 Willpower

Action: Instant

Dice Pool: This power requires no roll

Effect: The creature wreaths itself in a green flame that lasts for the rest of the scene. Anyone who performs a successful close-quarters attack on the creature suffers one point of lethal damage per dot of Balefire possessed. The fire flicks out and burns those who get that close.

Against supernatural creatures such as vampires and even incorporeal entities like other demons, Balefire inflicts aggravated damage.

Confuse (• to ••••)

Cost: 1 Willpower

Action: Contested; resistance is reflexive

Dice Pool: Presence + Intimidation + Confuse; target rolls Resolve + Composure

Effect: The monster spends 1 Willpower and glances at the target to activate this power. A successful attack overwhelms the target with vertigo and confusion.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The monster can't use the power again for the rest of the scene.

Failure: The power fails to activate, but the monster may try again if it spends more Willpower the following turn.

Success: The target is struck by a wave of mental confusion and vertigo, which overwhelms all higher thought processes. The target loses the 10-again quality on Mental rolls,



and 1s rolled subtract from any successes gained. This includes perception rolls and dice pools based on Resolve. This confusion lasts until the end of the scene.

Exceptional Success: The effect lasts until the following sunrise or sunset, whichever comes first.

Dice Pool Modifiers

+2	Environment is already hectic and filled with activity.
-2	Target has the Meditative Mind Merit.

Crushing Blow (• to •••)

Cost: 2 Willpower

Action: Instant

Dice Pool: None

Effect: All bashing damage that this creature deals with his body (fist, foot, head, elbow, whatever) is instead done as lethal damage. This power lasts until the end of the scene.

Damnation (• to ••••)

Cost: 3 Willpower

Action: Extended and Contested; each roll represents one hour in which both parties struggle mentally against one another; if this struggle is at any point interrupted or broken up, the struggle ends

Dice Pool: Wits + Occult + Damnation vs. target's Resolve + Composure

Effect: The target affected by this Dread Power can't regain Willpower except through indulging her Vice. She also cannot regain Willpower through fulfilling her Virtue — she can still act virtuously, but no mechanical reward awaits.

Fulfilling the Vice regains Willpower normally. Fulfilling the Vice in a way that leads to a degeneration roll regains all spent Willpower, regardless of whether the degeneration roll succeeds or fails.

The number of successes required by the demon is the target's Morality times three.

The curse lasts for one lunar month. However, if the creature who cast Damnation to begin with is destroyed during this time, the curse ends early.

Dement (• to ••••)

Cost: 1 Willpower

Action: Extended and contested; resistance is reflexive

Dice Pool: Presence + Occult + Dement vs. target's Resolve + Composure

Effect: This Dread Power assaults the target's mind with nightmarish visions, breaking down the target's sanity. If the creature wins the contest, the target gains a mild derangement chosen by the Storyteller for one day equal to the creature's dots in Dement. If the target already possesses a mild Derangement, it is upgraded to its severe version instead.

Drain (• to ••••)

Cost: —

Action: Instant

Dice Pool: This power is not rolled

Effect: The most dreaded power of vampires, other than turning mortals into monsters like them, is the ability to suck the life out of their victims with a bite. That said, this life-leeching ability is said to be possessed by a number of horrors: soul-stealing witches, jubilant succubi, or some accursed shapeshifters.

This Dread Power draws forth either a victim's Willpower or Health. The monster must physically touch the target (see "Touching an Opponent," the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 157). The demon spends an Instant action to attack the target with this power.

The trait being drained (Health or Willpower) is chosen by the Storyteller, and may not be changed later. Vampires typically drain mortals' Health through blood loss, though some drain Willpower points instead; either way, they drain with their bite, requiring that they must first spend an action grappling an opponent, and then spend the next turn's action biting the victim while the victim is restrained. (See pp. 157–159 in the *World of Darkness Rulebook*.) The victim may struggle each turn unless held in place with another power, such as Agonize, above, or Ecstasy, below.

The amount of the trait drained each turn is determined by the monster's dots in Drain. The monster gains those drained dots as Health or Willpower per turn.

Variant: The monster drains a sleeping victim of her restful sleep. The victim loses a number of hours of sleep equal to the monster's dots in Drain. Each hour lost converts to 1 Willpower for the monster. The victim loses her Willpower for that morning, and must roll Stamina or suffer the effects of Fatigue as if she'd not slept for 24 hours (see p. 179 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*). She must also sleep the following night an extra number of hours equal to those lost the previous night, or the fatigue penalty will remain. The monster may only drain a given victim of sleep once in any given night.

Dread Attack (• to ••••)

Cost: None or 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: None, though attack rolls must be made to utilize this power's benefit.

Action: Instant

Effect: Vampires have fangs, werewolves have claws, and a slasher never quite lets go of that first machete. The Dread Attack covers anything that cuts or rends, and is hard or impossible to separate from its owner. Whether or not it's physically a part of the monster, a Dread Attack always finds its way back to his hand, and almost as often into the gut of his prey. This Dread Attack is always accessible; a vampire's razor appears in her hand as swiftly as her fangs extend. In combat, the character deals +1 point of lethal damage for each dot in this ability.

Examples include a vampire's fangs, a werewolf's powerful jaw and claws, a fiend's whipping tail, a slasher's favorite cleaver (which always seems to appear in his hands). If the Dread Attack modifies one's bite, then a grapple is no longer necessary to do damage with that bite.

Note that any creature whose example of a Dread Attack is not a part of his body (the aforementioned slasher's cleaver,

for instance) necessitates 1 Willpower point to "summon" the weapon reflexively to hand. Some other creatures may also need to expend Willpower to push talons through fingertip flesh or fangs through gums.

Ecstasy (• to ••••)

Cost: 1 Willpower

Action: Instant

Dice Pool: Presence + Intimidation + Ecstasy - target's Stamina

Effect: The monster spends Willpower and must physically contact the target in some way, by touching her or exhaling a spray or vapor in her face (different monsters achieve this effect in unique ways). The monster has to achieve surprise to use this power (see "Surprise" in the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, pp. 46 and 151, and "Touching an Opponent" on p. 157). Vampires apply Ecstasy as they feed, merely requiring a successful bite attack. Using Ecstasy to feed costs vampires no Willpower.

This power transfixes the victim with a flood of undiluted pleasure.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Surprise is lost. The Dread Power does the opposite of its intended effect and causes horror and fright in the victim. The monster cannot succeed on Social rolls with that individual until the next sunrise or sunset, whichever comes first.

Failure: The monster fails to inflict Ecstasy on the target.

Success: The target is transfixed with Ecstasy and cannot act for the rest of the scene, unless she is attacked violently (a vampire's bite can be done without intimidating attack). She must attempt a Resolve + Composure roll each turn to break free at a penalty of the dots in Ecstasy.

Exceptional Success: As above, except that the victim must roll Resolve + Composure penalized by the dots in Ecstasy to avoid becoming addicted to the power (she gains the "Addiction" Flaw; see the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 218).

Dice Pool Modifiers

+2 Target already has the Addiction Flaw.

Fury (• to ••••)

Cost: 2 Willpower

Action: Contested; resistance is reflexive

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Persuasion + Fury versus target's Resolve + Composure

Effect: The target explodes into a wild frenzy of fury. The target goes berserk and attacks everyone and everything in sight, and cannot be reasoned with. All attempts, by mundane means or supernatural, to coerce or control him are at a dice pool penalty of -2. The target's moral center is overwhelmed by this fury, and he will attack with murderous intent.

When the target emerges from his wild fury, he is likely to feel great remorse and confusion over his actions. The target is likely to have to make a degeneration roll if he was induced into a frenzy amongst a crowd of people, for example, but gains +2 to that roll (as some part of him recognizes his distance from the atrocity).

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The subject cannot be affected by this power from any source for the rest of the night.

Failure: The power fails to activate.

Success: The power triggers as described above. The target remains in a frenzy for a number of turns equal to the monster's Resolve + Composure score.

Exceptional Success: In addition to the above, the target also loses 1 Willpower point.

Dice Pool Modifiers

+3	Environment is volatile, and could explode into violence.
+2	Target has the Vice of Wrath.
+1	Environment is tense, but not volatile.
-2	Environment is calm and peaceful.
-2	Target has the Virtue of either Fortitude or Temperance.

Giant Size (••••)

Cost: 1 Willpower per point of Size gained

Effect: The creature's Size (and its Health, if corporeal, and Corpus, if non-corporeal), increase by the points of Willpower spent (to a maximum of +5). Apart from increasing Health, dots in Giant Size also add to Intimidation dice pools. It lasts for one scene. It has, however, one drawback: for every point of Size gained, potential penalties from targeted attacks drop by one.

Gremlinize (• to ••••)

Cost: 1 or 3 Willpower

Action: Instant

Dice Pool: This power requires no roll

Effect: The creature simply needs to touch the device, at which point the machine ceases to function for a number of turns equal to the dots in Gremlinize. Simple objects such as knives, door hinges and syringes are immune. Guns aren't. If the machine affected is of greater Size than dots possessed in Gremlinize, the cost to activate this power becomes 3 Willpower, instead.

Hypnotism (• to ••••)

Cost: 1 Willpower

Action: Contested; resistance is Reflexive

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Expression + Hypnotism versus target's Wits + Resolve

Effect: The target is entranced by the monster's voice, or gaze, or even scent. The monster needs only to hold the target's attention long enough to implant a verbal suggestion.

That suggestion could be simple, such as "Take your clothes off," or complex, such as "Go to Riley's bar, wait until you see a brunette in a blue dress and ask her if she's a Libra." A suggestion can't overtly involve violence, such as "jump in front of that bus" or "shoot at those cops."

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The target sees right through the trick, and can't be hypnotized again by this monster for the rest of the scene.

Failure: The creature may try again next turn.

Success: The target obeys to the best of her ability.

Exceptional Success: The target goes so far as to believe the suggestions are her own idea in the first place.

Impress (• to •••••)

Cost: 1 Willpower

Action: Instant

Dice Pool: Presence + Expression + Impress, penalized by the highest Resolve in the area. If this Resolve can be affected, all others in the area are affected automatically

Effect: The monster projects an aura about her, making her the center of attention to everyone affected in range of the effect. The wave expands outwards at a rate of yards per turn equal to the monster's Presence in a hemisphere centered on the fiend. This lasts for one scene. Everyone caught in the area has the chance of being affected.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The monster's attempt to sway the crowd fails utterly. She may not attempt to use this power on the same crowd at any time during the course of the night.

Failure: The monster's attempt fails to activate. She might try again in the following turn with the expenditure of another Willpower point.

Success: The effect expands outwards as described above. As a result, the monster gains a number of bonus dice to Social rolls equal to successes rolled, though this bonus only applies to those affected by Impress.

Exceptional Success: All affected also lose a Willpower point.

Dice Pool Modifiers

+2	Boring environment (e.g. a waiting room).
-1	Hectic, noisy environment.
-2	Targets' Resolve is higher than the monster's Presence or Power.

Judgment of Guilt (•••••)

Cost: 3 Willpower

Action: Contested; resistance is reflexive

Dice Pool: Presence + Manipulation vs. target's Morality

Effect: The target is faced with her own past. This Dread Power assaults the target's mind with visions dredged up from the darkest part of the target's own mind. Like Dement, this attack erodes the target's moral core; unlike Dement, this is a straightforward assault on her Morality and sanity.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The target not only fails to suffer any extreme visions of moral decay, but seems suddenly bolstered and righteous, gaining +1 to any rolls made against the creature.

Failure: The guilt fails to fall upon the target.

Success: The target revisits every action that prompted a degeneration roll in her past (assume that, unless the Story-

teller declares otherwise, this counts toward those rolls made in this particular story). She must make these degeneration rolls all over again, except this time, the result is not lost Morality but dice penalties. The target suffers a -1 dice penalty for each failed degeneration roll as she is plagued by constant waking visions and nightmares of her guilt.

Exceptional Success: The target also gains a mild derangement of the Storyteller's choice.

Lurker in Darkness (• to •••••)

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Stealth + Lurker in Darkness

Action: Reflexive

Effect: The monster gathers ambient shadows around her, slipping out of sight. Successes add to the creature's Dexterity + Stealth dice pool. She can move at a Speed up to twice the number of dots in Lurker in Darkness, or her own Speed, whichever is lower. She can take no other action whilst concealed.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The monster draws all eyes toward itself.

Failure: The shadows fail to gather at the creature's behest.

Success: The effect expands outwards as described above. The monster can only be seen by those actively looking for it with a Wits + Investigation roll. This roll is contested against the successes earned on Lurker in Darkness' activation.

Exceptional Success: Those looking for the monster suffer a -2 penalty to the Wits + Investigation roll.

Dice Pool Modifiers

+1	Nighttime.
-1	Bright lights (for example, fluorescence).
-3	Sun is shining upon the monster.

New Face (• to •••••)

Cost: 2 Willpower

Action: Instant

Dice Pool: Presence + Empathy

Effect: The creature can mimic the facial features of someone he's already met with supernatural accuracy. Bones may shift. Skin may darken or lighten or even gain appropriate pockmarks. This isn't a perfect transition, but it allows her to add a bonus equal to dots in New Face to any Wits + Subterfuge Disguise attempts.

Ride Corpse (••)

Cost: 1 Willpower

Action: Instant

Dice Pool: Presence + Occult

Effect: The creature is able to take over a human corpse as its host, effectively becoming one of the shambling dead. Bodiless spirits aren't the only creatures who possess this power: any awful monster of the night can mystically transfer its soul to a corpse for a time, provided it has this Dread Power. During this time, if the monster has a body of its own, its body lies dormant (as if comatose).

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The creature transfers its senses into the corpse...and then finds it can't animate the corpse. It lies trapped in the body for a full 24-hour period.

Failure: The creature cannot forge a mystical connection with the corpse.

Success: The creature's soul transfers to the corpse for a number of hours equal to its Resolve score. The creature still has access to all his Skills, but all Attributes suffer the loss of one dot while inhabiting the corpse. In addition, Speed is halved (round down). The creature feels no pain when the corpse is damaged. The corpse body has 10 total levels of Health, but can only take *five* points of damage before penalties start to mount (to a maximum of *-5*). If the body is destroyed, the creature snaps back to its own body (or, if it has no body, is left bodiless and ephemeral in Twilight). Note, however, that if the creature's *actual* body is harmed while torpid, it automatically exits the corpse body and returns to its own.

Exceptional Success: As above, but the creature retains his Speed.

Sleep (• to ••••)

Cost: 1 Willpower

Action: Instant and Contested

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Persuasion + Sleep vs. target's Wits + Stamina

Effect: The target passes out for a number of turns equal to 10 minus her Resolve score. Use of this ability necessitates eye contact.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The monster can't use this power on a target again for the rest of the night. The target even feels like she's hopped up on double espressos, and may go without sleep if she chooses.

Failure: The effect fails to catch. The creature may try again in the next turn, spending another Willpower to do so.

Success: The creature earns more successes than the target. The target falls into a light slumber from which she can be awakened easily: any noise beyond the ambient or touch to her person will startle her from sleep. She will, upon waking, suffer a *-1* penalty for the rest of the scene, as she is otherwise plagued by grogginess. Note, however, that she can avoid falling asleep



EMPTIED OF WILL

Most of these powers necessitate spending Willpower (though if you own any of the other core books, such as *Vampire: The Requiem* or *Werewolf: The Forsaken*, you may choose to translate this to Vitae, Essence, or whatever works for the individual creature type). So what happens when a creature expends its last bit of Willpower?

Assume that any creature that does so devolves instantly to actions that serve its Vice. In addition, hunters may find they have an edge: Tactics used against creatures spent of will gain +1 where appropriate.

(and taking the penalty) if the target's player chooses to reflexively spend a Willpower point at the time of Sleep's activation. Once asleep, however, Willpower cannot save her slumber.

Exceptional Success: The target cannot spend the Willpower to prevent slumber. In addition, she can only be awakened via injury to her person.

Shadow Harvest (•)

Cost: —

Action: Extended; each roll represents one hour of gathering

Dice Pool: Wits + Occult + Shadow Harvest

Effect: The monster spends at least one hour lurking around graves under a clear, strong full moon, gathering shadows. Each success rolled gifts the monster with 1 point of Willpower, which the creature can either spend at the time it's gathered or collect in some kind of container (burlap bag, metal briefcase, blue-glass bottle). The Willpower doesn't appear in any physical form; it's as light as air. The creature can, once per day, withdraw a number of points equal to his Shadow Harvest score.

This power carries with it a dreadful drawback; corpses beneath those headstones are more open to possession by malignant demons and might emerge the following night as vampire Bloodjackers (see p. 316).

Strange Form (• to

Cost: 3 Willpower

Action: Instant

Dice Pool: Wits + Occult

Effect: The creature takes a strange form, usually that of an animal (though some may shift into other things: objects, atavistic throwbacks, mythical beasts, creatures out of folklore or fairy tales). The creature can add dots to his Attributes equal to twice the dots purchased in Strange Form. He can increase this further by reducing dots to other Attributes, gaining one dot in an Attribute per dot lost in another Attribute. (If a demon possesses Strange Form at two dots, he can add a total of +4 dots across his Attributes, so he adds +2 to Wits and +2 to Strength, but he also takes a loss of -2 to Intelligence, because in this form, the creature's mind devolves to a more feral state. Because of this, the beast can

add another +2 to his Attributes, which he splits between Wits and Strength, with both now having a total of +3).

Unless specified otherwise, this cannot take a creature's Attributes beyond six dots per stat. Note that many traits — Speed, Defense, Health, Initiative — may change accordingly.

Strange Form also allows the creature to gain or lose Size equal to half the dots (round up) spent in this Dread Power.

The transformation lasts for a single scene, though an additional Willpower point can be spent to extend it by one scene per point spent.

Tendrils (•••)

Cost: 2 Willpower

Action: Instant

Dice Pool: This power requires no roll to activate

Effect: The monster attacks with some kind of tendrils: whips of shadow or blood, spectral limbs, life-choking vines, or even briny tentacles. These tendrils can be used to attack and do lethal damage with a Dexterity + Brawl roll. Alternatively, the monster can make the same Dexterity + Brawl roll at a -3 penalty, performing a targeted attack against the subject's mouth. Upon success, the tendrils force themselves into the victim's mouth and throat. The target must make Stamina rolls for suffocation, as per "Holding Breath" in the *World of Darkness* Rulebook, p. 49. The tendrils manifest for up to one scene.

Drawback: Manifesting these tendrils requires intense concentration: the creature's Defense is at -1 while they are active. The tendrils can also be attacked directly (-3 to the attack in addition to the monster's now-diminished Defense): a single lethal level done against them disperses them.

Terrify (• to

Cost: 1 Willpower

Action: Instant and contested; resistance is reflexive

Dice Pool: Presence + Intimidation + Terrify versus target's Resolve + Composure

Effect: The monster spends an action engaging the target in eye contact and activates this power, making this roll. If the attack succeeds, the target flees the scene as quickly as possible, via the nearest available escape route. She will not stop running until she reaches a location she considers to be safe.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The target is unimpressed by the monster's attempt to frighten her. In fact, it emboldens the target, and she may gain a point of Willpower.

Failure: The monster fails to frighten the target, but may spend another Willpower in the next turn and try again.

Success: The result for success is described above. If the target cannot escape (or spends a point of Willpower to remain), she suffers a penalty to all rolls equal to the creature's dots in Terrify. This effect lasts for one scene.

Exceptional Success: The effect so terrifies the target that she also loses one Willpower point.

Unholy Attribute (• to ⚡)

This power grants a monster incredible potency in a single Attribute. The monster spends Willpower to boost that Attribute by the number of points invested in Unholy Attribute. This bonus lasts until the end of the scene. Monsters using this power recalculate appropriate traits (Speed, Health, Initiative, Defense) using the new Attribute score.

Demons

The power and the glory are His, forever and ever. I want them back.

Let's start by clearing something up. A lot of monsters either claim to be "demons" or are called as such by ignorant occultists. Some hunters are sure the whole lot of unnatural nasties are Satan's own spawn, and it's hard to argue with them. Indeed, the powers of the Lucifuge are effective against most spiritual and infernal adversaries (see *Castigation*, p. 164), implying they're fundamentally the same.

That said, some things are definitely, irrefutably demons. They are creatures born of iniquity, forged raw from the fires of sin and vice. They're also selfish and deceptive, so it's hard to get a straight answer from one as to its actual origins. Most, of course, claim a diabolical pedigree: born in Hell as servants of Lucifer or formed as angels who chose to follow the Morningstar in his War against Heaven. Others refute such tales as being a part of "The Great Lie," and instead claim to be anything from old gods to trapped spirits, from the "shadow side" of humanity to "poor, misunderstood" beings.

That said, this is the story *most* demons tell: in the time before time, there was a terrible war fought by wonderful beings. No one *really* knows why (remember: the only beings who claim to remember also cultivate reputations as liars and manipulators). The stories are all similar, though. A garden destroyed. A tower shattered. A city of clocks stopped one by one. And the beautiful, brilliant creatures who created them? Each put to the sword by their brothers.

The leader of the fallen soldiers was banished to oblivion, where he created form from void, something from nothing, a city from chaos. His soldiers, the ghosts and ashes of angels and heroes, free fall forever between Earth and this Hell.

After that, the tale gets a little fuzzy. A good majority of demons claims they are or were brought to earth by human will, able to stick around because man is so mired in his sins. They cling to this place because it feeds them and because Hell isn't pleasant for anybody, even them. Some, though, claim that *this world* is the repugnant punishment and that they're just here doing the work of their masters, still trapped in the mists and fires of the Abyss.

The theory is that the demons that exist on this plane are only a frighteningly small majority of what exists beyond the physical world. Are the rest in Hell, or whatever infernal realm from which they come? Seems to be the case. Some occultists (be they vampire, sorcerer or even Lucifuge hunger) are capable of summoning demons trapped in Hell back to this world. Many demons, though, arrive here by mysterious means, either thrown

into this world by beings too powerful to enter themselves, or having sneaked through some tiny crack in the borders between the material world and that of the Abyss.

The Truth about Demons

The following rules apply across the board to all demons.

- Demons do not possess a Morality score. Certainly they adhere to some kind of diabolical law and codes of infernal sanity, but those inscrutable commandments remain outside the knowledge of man.
- Demons *do* possess a Virtue, but this is something of a ruse. The demon gains nothing from his Virtue. For some it is the "mask" it wears when it wants to appeal to a human's more honorable sensibilities, while for others it perhaps represents what the demon once felt or embodied during its more beatific existence.
- Demons possess a Vice, but they do not gain Willpower via this Vice as humans do. Instead, they gain Willpower (or Essence if the demon is bodiless) whenever in the presence of a human performing an action in service to that particular Vice. Any time the demon is in the presence of someone serving the demon's Vice, the demon gains a point of Willpower. However, if that someone *shares* the demon's Vice and commits an act that gains the character Willpower by serving that Vice, the demon gains an *additional* point of Willpower. (A succubus gains by stirring one to Lust, but gains even more by stirring the truly Lustful to new levels of submission to his sin — in the latter example, the demon feels more "connected" with the act.)
- If a demon is without Willpower or Essence, it can be banished or summoned all the more easily: rolls to do so gain a +2 bonus.
- Demons are broken out into three tiers, or degrees of damnation: Lesser, Greater and Elder. These are described in detail, below.
- All demons have a True Name. This name is rarely easy to find (and often less easy to pronounce). Knowing a demon's True Name gives a person some power over that demon, providing +2 to *all* rolls made against the demon.
- All demons are subject to a Ban: a weakness in their makeup, which hunters can exploit. Some demons are repulsed by burning sage, or are blocked from possessing anyone wearing a strip of red ribbon, or cannot abide the sound of singing from within a church. The more powerful the demon (Lesser, Greater, Elder), the more strident the Ban becomes.
- Every Greater or Elder demon has one Fiendish Flaw that marks it as an infernal being (found below).

Fiendish Flaws

All Greater and Elder demons radiate *one* of the following effects:

The Disruption: Plants wilt. Meat spoils. Cell phones or other electronic devices spit static or act strange. These demons have one such effect. These demons tend to be sad, pathetic things, given over to mournful wails coupled with acts of self-aggrandizement.

The Fury: Temperatures rise in their presence, and flames grow larger and hotter. They tend to be angry creatures, spitting wrath and invective.

The Imperfection: These demons are marred by a single, truly imperfect feature: one ear puffy and rough like a hunk of cauliflower, one eye of a truly strange color, a cleft palate, webbed fingers, a strange scar or brand, or so forth. They can cover it up, of course, which makes their infernal nature sometimes hard to detect. They seem to loathe humans.

The Malodor: Some give off a particularly odd smell, not pleasant, though not necessarily *unpleasant*, either: the whiff of brimstone, a too-sweet smell of honey, the acrid tang of spent gunpowder, a reeking of brine, the musk of spent sexual fluids. These tend to be creatures of odd passions and obsessions and like humans quite a bit.

The Pall: Flames dim in their presence and a chill fills the room. Curiously, these demons are often the most coherent of their ilk, explaining their war on God in terms both digestible and sympathetic.

The Demon's Ban

All demons suffer from one or more "Bans," and this is something a demon *must* do (a "Ban of task"), or something that a demon *cannot* do or cannot abide (a "Ban of torment").

A *Ban of task* necessitates that the demon react in a certain way given a particular stimulus. Examples include: "Must answer a question truthfully if given an offering of blood," or "Must pick up every shiny object the demon sees on the ground," or "Must not harm those of Morality 4 or below."

A *Ban of torment* is restrictive in a different way, in that it necessitates a negative reaction given a certain stimulus. Examples include "Cannot enter holy ground," or "Cannot speak in the presence of a ringing bell," or "Cannot cross a line of salt upon the ground."

If the demon willfully denies its own Ban (necessitating success on a Resolve + Composure or Power + Resistance roll) or is otherwise forced to deny it (dragged onto holy ground or duped into harming someone it otherwise cannot), the demon takes one lethal point of damage and loses two Willpower (or Essence) points. This loss continues if the creature continues per turn if the demon is forced to endure the breaking of its Ban over and over again.

Obviously, hunters who discover a demon's Ban are given great power in that they have new avenues of manipulating the creature. That said, discovering a demon's Ban should never be easy, and could be the focus of an entire story.

Lesser demons have *one* Ban, Greater demons have *two* Bans, and Elder demons have *three* Bans.

Lesser Demons

Invisible lampreys that stir a man to gluttony. Ruby-eyed imps chuckling at you in the dark. A chatelaine familiar carrying a glass of blood on a silver tray and wearing a pair of bright cufflinks that reflect his master's eyes.

Why are Lesser demons lesser? In the occult view, it's often believed that there exists a kind of "great cosmic chain of being," a sort of spiritual hierarchy to which all spirits must abide. This isn't the only view, though. One idea suggests that some demons are weaker as a form of punishment: power has been taken from them for some transgression or another. Another idea suggests they are "new" demons, comparatively speaking, and can claw their way up the hierarchy as the centuries and millennia progress.

Lesser demons are, for all intents and purposes, familiars of a sort. They might serve a human master (hunter or witch), or they might serve another monster (unsummoned demon, vampire, werewolf, etc.). As such, use the familiar creation rules found on p. 166 — this counts for both familiars who exist in the non-corporeal state of Twilight and those familiars who are persistently made manifest in the material world.

Twilight familiars can Materialize in the physical world by rolling Power + Finesse. The creature can appear for one hour per success, but it costs the familiar 3 Essence to do so. At the end of time or upon its physical destruction, the creature goes back to its anchor (which is often its master, but may be a physical place or object; see **World of Darkness Rulebook**, pp. 209–210).

Bedshaker (Lesser Demon)

Quote: *Lie back and think of England, love.*

Background: This lustful little imp lurks in Twilight, generally beneath the bed of its master or its target (and if it can't fit beneath the bed, the closet will do). It has little memory or personality of its own, but it knows what it likes. And it likes all things lascivious.

Appearance: Rarely does a Bedshaker manifest itself: if it does, it's not much more than a pair of green eyes, like a cat's eyes, in the dark.

Storytelling Hints: The Bedshaker likes to stir sexual, lustful thoughts in those who slumber above or nearby: it always tempts, picking at one's peccadilloes and making them think thoughts that, frankly, they enjoy thinking. Of course, as one gives in more and more, one's actions in bed go from the vanilla to the adventurous, and soon to the outright torturous.

Greater Demons

An incubus who stirs your dreams to grotesque passions. A man in a sharp-angled suit who offers you a glimpse of a long-forgotten book. A vengeful thing with broken wings that charges from a dark alley, claw hammer in hand.

For the most part, they look human. Something always marks these Greater demons as "off," though. Part of that comes from the Fiendish Flaw (above), but it's something... else, too. When a hunter's eye is turned away, the demon's form and shape might seem to shift or distort, like an image seen in a fogged mirror. A successful Wits + Composure roll (minus the demon's own Resolve) allows the hunter to catch a momentary glimpse of the creature's true nature, however it appears: eyes of fire, halo of rotten meat, wings of greasy raven feathers, rusted smoldering shackles dangling around wrists.

BEDSHAKER LESSER DEMON

True Name: Each has a different True Name.

Attributes: Power 2, Finesse 4, Resistance 2

Willpower: 4

Essence: 10 (10 max)

Initiative: 6

Defense: 4

Speed: 16 (Speed factor 10)

Virtue: Hope

Vice: Lust

Morality: None

Size: 3

Corpus: 5

Ban: A Bible cannot be anywhere in the room with a Bedshaker demon.

Dread Powers: Hypnotism 3

Special

Familiar: See "familiar" powers under *Castigation*, p. 166.

Out of all demons, hunters are likeliest to deal with and see Greater demons. This is in part because they pass as human, as noted, but it's also in part because these demons have quite a lot to offer hunters willing to take the bait.

Greater demons can offer hunters a truly Faustian bargain, able to provide any character (human or inhuman) with two things: information or assets (in the form of Merit dots). The system for forging such a pact with a Greater demon is this: for every question answered or for every Merit dot provided, the hunter must perform one task that the demon demands.

Tasks range from the deceptively simple ("Next time your wife gets lippy, give her a slap across the mouth") to the truly complex ("Climb atop the watertower that overlooks Broadacre Square. Take this rifle. Kill seven women with it"). Each task likely reflects the demon's own Vice and will endanger the hunter's Morality score, forcing him to commit an action that would necessitate a degeneration roll. Tasks almost always have a built-in time limit set by the demon, and usually necessitate somewhat immediate (within the week) action.

What does the demon get? First, it gets tasks performed that may suit its needs, especially if one of those tasks is the elimination of a supernatural rival. Second, for every one task performed, the demon gains two points of Willpower.

What does the hunter get? If it's information, he gains one answer to a question. Demons will answer most normal questions for free, of course, but as the gatekeepers of knowledge, they seem capable of answering questions they don't really know the answers to. The knowledge only appears to the demon once the question is asked as part of the bargain.

If it's Merit dots, the hunter can gain Merit dots in any one of the following Merits: Allies, Fame, Resources, Retainer, Status and Striking Looks.

The tasks demanded by the Greater demon can be as easy or as forbidding as the demon chooses, and the hunter knows the terms before he seals the pact. That's the curious thing: these pacts really aren't all that tricky, though hunters like to think they are.

Sealing the deal necessitates some form of physical contact demanded by the demon: a kiss, a spit-and-a-handshake, a swapping of blood. Once the deal is sealed, the hunter gains the benefits immediately, even before having committed to the tasks.

So, what happens if the hunter bails on the tasks? Ah, that's the trick, and it's something the demon never makes clear. For every task the hunter either ignores or fails, the hunter loses one dot of Willpower and suffers one aggravated level of damage that forms a scarified sigil recognizable by *all* demons. In addition, *all* demons gain +1 dice for every task ignored or failed when performing any Dread Power against the hunter. Is there any way to trump this curse? Some say that if you can just get the demon to agree to nullify the effects, it'll happen as swiftly as the demon desires. At present, hunter lore doesn't have any better suggestions.

Outside the ability to grant such a pact, Greater demons can be created using the standard character-creation rules for humans, and begin with five dots of Dread Powers, but can go up from there. Their Attributes can also go to six dots instead of five.

Be aware that Greater demons do not have a non-corporeal or Twilight form: they are material creatures who take

MISTER WHITE GREATER DEMON

True Name: Anamalech

Fiendish Flaw: The Pall

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 2, Resolve 6

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 4, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics 1, Computer 1, Investigation (Crime scene) 4, Occult 3

Physical Skills: Athletics 1, Brawl 1, Drive 1, Firearms 2, Stealth 4, Weaponry (Cane) 3

Social Skills: Empathy 1, Intimidation 2, Persuasion 3, Streetwise (2)

Merits: Contacts 4 (police, forensics, morgue, journalists), Eidetic Memory, Fast Reflexes 2, Fresh Start

Willpower: 9

Morality: None

Virtue: Justice

Vice: Wrath

Initiative: 7

Defense: 2

Speed: 10

Health: 8

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Cane	1(B)	na	7	-1 Improvised

Bans: Must investigate a murder scene for at least one hour (Ban of task). May not kill a human being unless in self-defense (Ban of torment)

Dread Powers: Balefire •, Confuse •••, Hypnotism ••

Special

Forensic Reminder: By spending a Willpower point, Mister White can cause forensic evidence to return from obviation or to appear more readily. His breath restores fingerprints on glass. Bloodstains blossom again in his shadow, and skid marks reappear at accident sites. Animals expose the corpse of a monster returned to its human form. Once restored, such evidence is indelible; efforts to wipe away blood simply result in it appearing again; a body re-hidden turns up in a dumpster next to police headquarters.

the form of flesh in this world. Banishing them may still send them screaming back to Hell, but they are *physically* drawn back into the Abyssal realm.

Mister White (Greater Demon)

Quote: *What a shame. To avenge a murder, you committed murder. A gross injustice.*

Background: In his dreams, Mister White is a heartbeat against perfect silence. In his dreams, Mister White has been allowed to go home to Hell, an empty hell with none of these

awful sinners. When he is awake, however, Mister White seems a broken old man. He calls himself "Detective Max Robinson, retired," and that's how people think of him. But he is no man, he is a demon. And he abhors murder.

The reality is this: he doesn't know if there ever really was a Max Robinson, or if it's been him all along. The memories are clear, though: Max Robinson was a homicide detective. He found killers...usually a room away from their bloody victims. Sometimes, the work was harder than that. Sometimes he was called upon to hunt a man down, or to fix a crime scene so a

killer couldn't lie his way out of proper punishment. The job was grinding. It cost him his marriage. He remembers that, still. (Did he live these events as a demon? Or is he now a demon masquerading as the dead detective? The conundrum puzzles him.)

Whatever the truth, he's a demon now, and he's come to recognize that the idea of murderous revenge disgusts him (and, in a quiet way, thrills him). Murder, then, is an abomination, a deliberate disruption of what should be a fair process, a process driven by a kind of *clockwork reality*. Mister White shudders with revulsion at the very idea. He shivers; he leans on his cane. Murder cannot go unpunished. The system must be maintained. Wrath begets wrath.

Appearance: A harrow-faced old man with black eyes. His long form leans on a tall cane. Bits about him seem eerily white: the teeth, the eyes, the never-dying jasmine flower pinned to his chest.

Storytelling Hints: Mister White seems to be a charming, slightly bumbling old man. Mention the crime of murder, however, and White turns cold and crystal clear. He'll readily identify himself as a police detective or private investigator, and Max Robinson's memories give him the ability to convincingly impersonate either.

Under the right circumstances, Mister White might present himself as an ally, helping a cell uncover information otherwise long gone. He's good with questions, and he's happy to offer answers — especially those that help identify a murderer or a murderous creature. Of course, this also makes him uniquely threatening to hunters. As a cost for answering questions, he'll demand that the hunters take violent retribution out on those they seek. When they do so, he'll expose them to the authorities, because he feels that this is plainly his job.

Elder Demons

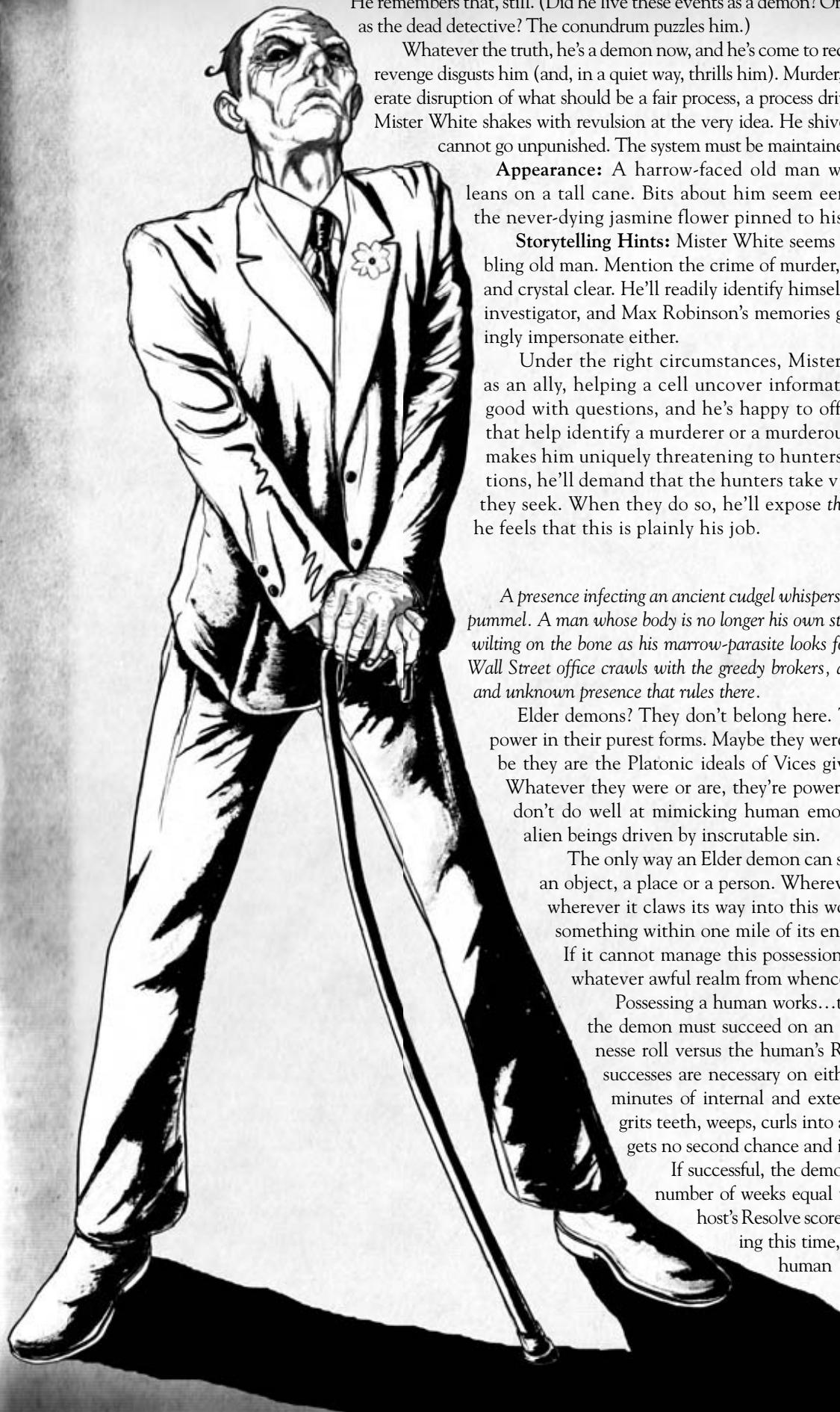
A presence infecting an ancient cudgel whispers for you to use it to beat, bludgeon, pummel. A man whose body is no longer his own stumbles down the highway, his skin wilting on the bone as his marrow-parasite looks for a new place to "settle." A busy Wall Street office crawls with the greedy brokers, all unwittingly serving the invisible and unknown presence that rules there.

Elder demons? They don't belong here. This world cannot sustain their power in their purest forms. Maybe they were Archdukes in the Abyss. Maybe they are the Platonic ideals of Vices given form and flesh and motive. Whatever they were or are, they're powerful, they're unnatural, and they don't do well at mimicking human emotions or motivations. They are alien beings driven by inscrutable sin.

The only way an Elder demon can stay in this world is by possessing an object, a place or a person. Wherever that demon is summoned, or wherever it claws its way into this world, it must possess someone or something within one mile of its entry, within one hour of its entry. If it cannot manage this possession, then it is cast back to Hell or whatever awful realm from whence it came.

Possessing a human works...temporarily. To possess a human, the demon must succeed on an extended contested Power + Finesse roll versus the human's Resolve + Composure score. Ten successes are necessary on either side. Each roll equates to 10 minutes of internal and external struggle (the human wails, grits teeth, weeps, curls into a fetal ball). If the demon fails, it gets no second chance and is tossed back to its origin realm.

If successful, the demon can stay within the body for a number of weeks equal to the demon's Power minus the host's Resolve score, to a minimum of one week. During this time, the demon feels imprisoned: the human is completely under his control but the demon cannot access any of his Dread Powers.



During this time, the human starts to break down physically and emotionally. He suffers one bashing damage per day and cannot heal (so they eventually accumulate to lethal damage as bruises turn to actual rot). Also, once per week the victim gains a new mild-level derangement. If the human physically expires during this time, the demon is free and once more has the “one mile, one hour” restriction. Alternatively, the demon can flee the body at any time, but still suffers from that restriction.

Possessing an object is a bit easier and more permanent, if the demon so chooses. The demon must succeed on an extended Power + Finesse roll equal to the object’s points in Structure. Each roll is equivalent to five minutes. The demon can only possess objects that are suited to its Vice, figuratively or literally: a demon of Greed might possess a credit card or a cash register, while a demon of Wrath might find home in a sword or rifle. This, of course, makes for easy Willpower gain: the demon is likelier to be in the presence of its Vice expended. While in an object, the demon can communicate freely with anybody touching it. It can use Dread Powers on any within a number of yards equal to the demon’s Power + Finesse score. However, rolls made in service to a Dread Power are subject to a -2 penalty, because possessing an object is still a somewhat imperfect state for the demon.

What an Elder demon *really* wants is to bind itself to a place. Then, and only then, does the entity have access to its full power (and then some). The demon can only bind to a place thematically or literally appropriate to its Vice: a demon of Lust binds itself to an underground sex club, a demon of Pride inhabits the offices of a fashion magazine, and a demon of Wrath might possess the house where a man murdered his cheating wife and his unappreciative children. The demon can possess a location equal to half its Power (round down) in square miles.

Once bound, the demon can have full access to all its Dread Powers and they can be used against any who walk upon the spoiled ground or within the now-unholy structure. Here the demon can also manifest *automatically* for a full scene once per day and night (though this manifestation cannot leave the boundaries of its structural or territorial “body”). This costs nothing and requires no roll. It cannot manifest for longer than a scene in a given 12-hour period.

While bound to a place, the demon cannot be harmed by mundane attacks — even attacks that destroy the literal

structure and foundation of the place fail to damage the demon itself. The only exception to this rule is damage caused by blessed items (*World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 214), or damage done as the result of the invocation of the demon’s Ban.

The demon becomes very hard to root out once it’s bound to a place: any and all exorcism or banishment attempts are performed at -3 dice. If the demon can be extricated and unbound from the place, it gets no second chance and is drawn back into the hungry Abyss.

Elder demons are created with traits similar to Twilight familiars (p. 166) or ghosts (*World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 208), except they’re...bigger. Assume that the demon’s Attributes (Power, Finesse, Resistance) go up to 12 dots instead of 5, and they have 20 to 30 points to spend between those three Attributes. They also have a maximum Essence of 25, and begin with 10 points of Dread Powers (though they can also have Numina, like ghosts, with each Numen assumed to cost 2 Dread Power dots each). They can, however, go up to 20 points in Dread Powers at their peak.

The Neighborhood (Elder Demon)

Quote: *You want, you need, you want, you need.*

Background: This is a bad neighborhood. Not bad because it’s poor, or because it’s too close to a sewer line. This is a bad neighborhood because it’s full of bad people. Bad people who *covet* one another, all day, every day.

It didn’t start with the demon, oh no. It started small, just one apartment where a man gazed out of his window and spied on a neighbor relaxing in front of a big-screen TV, a TV he wanted so badly. Then Sally downstairs shot her husband for hogging the dope, dope that was hers by right, damnit. This is a neighborhood of conflicting extremes, of haves crammed up next to have-nots. It’s a neighborhood of Envy, which made it a perfect home for the Elder demon known as Bekard-Ardad. With the demon bound to the neighborhood, the Envy that has taken root now blossoms into horrid life.

Beneath the surface of this seemingly peaceful neighborhood is a mass of heinous crimes to rival the run of any soap opera. The neighborhood (as the demon) works to keep the perpetrators of envious and covetous crimes safe...but always in the most subtle possible way. The murder weapon rolls into a gutter, the detective is interrupted before he can examine the closet, the hunters’ car is stolen with the evidence in the trunk, and so on. The neighborhood is also capable of more sophisticated tricks, like sudden fires or disappearing doors, but it uses those effects only where more subtle ones will not suffice.

Storytelling Hints: The neighborhood is the embodiment of classic urban and suburban fears: a place claustrophobically familiar, yet detached and anonymous enough that victimization carries no consequences. This is the setting of Hitchcock’s *Rear Window*, or the quiet street where Kitty Genovese was murdered. All the familiar signals of safety are here: friendly neighbors, well-lit streets, regular police patrols. Where they

USING THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Bringing the cell to The Neighborhood shouldn’t be hard at all. Luring a cell in should usually be as simple as providing a strange incident, or a crime that needs solving. Or, if you’re real tricky, lure them in using envy: does an Aegis Kai Doru member hold envy over a fellow hunter who possesses a Relic he feels he rightly deserves? Fine. That “fellow hunter” lives in The Neighborhood.

THE NEIGHBORHOOD ELDER DEMON

True Name: Bekard-Ardad

Fiendish Flaw: The Disruption

Attributes: Power 10, Finesse 5, Resistance 10

Willpower: 20

Essence: 25

Initiative: 15

Defense: 10

Speed: 0 when not manifested, 20 when made manifest

Virtue: Fortitude

Vice: Envy

Morality: None

Size: 10 when manifested, five square miles otherwise

Corpus: 20

Bans: Cannot physically harm one whose Vice is Envy (Ban of torment); cannot abide the sting of holy water (Ban of torment); must always be truthful to those with no points in the Resources Merit (Ban of task).

Dread Powers: Animal Control Numen (••), Damnation •••••, Fury •, Telekinesis Numen (••)

serve any purpose, though, it's to maintain the quiet of the neighborhood. Someone may hear you scream, but no one will come to your rescue.

Note that Bekard-Ardad does not hate its residents. If anything, it loves them. Loves them (and their covetous urges) so well it won't let them get caught. In every room, from every window, it watches them, shelters them, mothers their jealous hearts.

Cults

In a dark barn down a closed-off road are the owls with the human eyes. The farmers who gather there worship these owls and bring them food, and in return reap a bountiful harvest. The owls like little girls best. Halfway across the world, in Rome, a broad cabal of blind librarians lives beneath the Vatican, eating pages from sacred books. And in the big city, you might find a butcher's shop owned by vampire ghouls, a sewer tunnel dammed up by servants of some half-dead sorcerer, or the lust-maddened keepers of some infernal legacy.

Cults exist. Some of them twist existing religious or scientific dogma into something deeper, darker, more dangerous to those within and outside the cult. Others are far more flagrant and diabolical, serving monstrous lords or otherworldly deities. A cult might be born from a rehab clinic. A cult might be born from the belly of a serpent cast to the Earth by the gods in the heavens.

But all told, cultists are just people. They have pulses. They breathe air. And they are irretrievably devoted to their cause.

Two Flavors of Madness

Cults appear in two broad types. One type of cult serves one or several monsters (be it something that walks the earth or something that lurks in some "other" realm), while another cult is purely human and has crafted its own dogma.

The first type serves its monster in various ways. The adherents may bring it food. They may do its dirty work. They may simply worship it. The fiend gains something, whether as blood (drained as wound levels) or as Willpower (granted as one point per 10 cultists worshipping the monster, gained once per week). Cultists here can gain up to five dots of Dread Powers if the monster so chooses: note, however, that only rarely do *all* cultists within such a group gain that benefit. Usually it's only reserved for the leaders or those who truly "please" the beast.

The second type cobbles together its own insane dogma (think Jonestown, the Branch Davidians, the Aum Shinrikyo cult), though it may *believe* that its members serve some kind of god or being. Cults of this stripe may be religious, scientific, political, social, academic — anything, really. Cultists of this type do not manifest Dread Powers nearly as often, though some still develop strange powers as a provenance of their devotion to the cause. Any time one of these cultists degenerates after having performed in action in service to his cult, he may gain a new dot in a Dread Power, though he may never gain more than three dots total (not three dots in a single Dread Power, but comprising all Dread Powers).

Sample Cult: Sodality of Licentia

The rebuilt former church at the top of Lomax Street is the top nightclub in town. Licentia's has been the top nightclub in town for four years, consistently beating off stiff competition.

What makes Licentia's so strong in the volatile nightclub industry is its clientele, a select list of A-listers, business and political potentates who funnel money into the club. After a few sessions at Licentia's, even the most hard-line prude finds it hard to disagree with its popularity.

Peddlers of Sin

Three High Priests comprise the Inner Core of the Sodality of Licentia. Cynthia Lomax, Walter Sorvino and Michael Palmer were a group of failing grad students who stumbled upon an old book in the college library. Michael stole the book, and it promised them all they needed to turn their failing grades around. It didn't require much. Just for them to get together in the basement of the old ruined St Martin's Church and spill a little blood.

The ritual succeeded. The demon Licentia, Daughter of Sitrí, Caliph of Sin, entered the world. Of course, it allowed them to turn their grades around...but they stopped caring soon enough.

That was four years ago. Michael has disappeared. Walter never leaves the basement of the nightclub, and only Cynthia sees him nowadays.

Nightclub Scene

The dance floor of Licentia's is heaving most every night. A handful of DJs are on permanent call and the club cycles them around, apart from DJ Centi, who takes to the floor every Tuesday night. Other than the occasional vampire dropping by to feed, very little occurs here that is other than it seems.

The club's not without its little scandals: drugs, minors getting past the bouncers, violating noise regulations. The club manages to stay on top of the worst problems. Nobody has died of an overdose in the bathrooms yet, and any minors are spotted and ejected before they can order any liquor.

Tuesday nights, though, are a different matter. That's when the club holds its private evening, for Sodality members only. Those are the nights when DJ Centi takes to the stage, and the crowd *just... goes...mad*. Ecstasy takes hold. Clothes are cast away. Something takes hold of them: a rabid lust, a drug-hungry grip, and each Tuesday night, a little something leaves them.

People have sold their cars to get tickets for Tuesday nights.

Joining the Sodality

Joining the Sodality is very difficult. The DJ personally seems to select candidates, picking ones who either share her Vice, or who have some sort of guilty secret already. She also never seems to pick anyone who has Resources less than three dots.

Once picked, DJ Centi spends a week alone in the basement with each candidate, making sure they'll be pliable and willing.

Of course, before they go into that basement, they don't know the DJ is actually Licentia, the demon. But they learn that soon enough.

High Priestess Cynthia Lomax

Quote: *Here's a ticket for Tuesday night. Bring a friend. I don't care if she's a virgin. She won't be Wednesday morning.*



CYNTHIA LOMAX

HIGH PRIESTESS

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 5, Manipulation 3, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Academics 4, Crafts 2, Politics 3

Physical Skills: Brawl 1, Drive 3, Firearms 1

Social Skills: Empathy 2, Persuasion 3, Socialize 4, Subterfuge 3

Merits: Ambidextrous, Barfly, Danger Sense, Direction Sense, Fame 1, Resources 5, Striking Looks 2

Willpower: 8

Morality: 6

Virtue: Justice

Pride: Envy

Size: 5

Initiative: 7

Defense: 3

Speed: 10

Health: 5

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Glock 17	2	20/40/80	6	

DJ CENTI

GREATER DEMON

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 4, Resolve 5

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 5, Manipulation 4, Composure 5

Mental Skills: Academics 2, Politics 2

Physical Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 2

Social Skills: Empathy 2, Expression (Turntables) 5, Intimidation 2, Persuasion (Seduction) 5, Socialize (Sense of Humor) 5, Subterfuge 5

Merits: Inspiring, Striking Looks 4

Willpower: 10 (she gains a Willpower point whenever she spends a night in Cynthia's presence, and she also refills her pool during the Tuesday night "ceremony")

Initiative: 9

Defense: 4

Speed: 12

Virtue: Charity

Vice: Lust

Morality: No Morality

Health: 10

Dread Powers: Agonize **, Ecstasy *****

Ban: Licentia cannot abide damage done to Cynthia (Ban of task); Licentia cannot abide damage done to the book (Ban of task)

Background: Daddy rejected her when her second boyfriend turned out to be a girlfriend. Cynthia never cared whether her partner was male or female, as long as she got what she wanted. Her lovers, however, could never satisfy her for long. College was a string of failed relationships, each leaving Cynthia hungry and depressed. It's what put her grades into a failing state. When on-again off-again Michael came and showed her the book and a way to pull herself out of this academic nosedive, she took it. She didn't know what it would summon. But now she does, and she has found a lover — the demon, Licentia — who never grows dull.

Appearance: Cynthia's been ridden hard and put away wet, as the saying goes. She was once pretty, that much is clear. Still is, in a way. But she's fraying at the edges, her eyes belying a harrowed, thousand-mile stare.

Storytelling Hints: Cynthia plays things cool, but inwardly her connection to the demon has cost her dearly; for all her radiant looks, Cynthia has internally aged years (hence her lower Health score). Worse, she can feel little pains inside, little signs of internal breakdown...all of which she ignores. For now. Thing is, she's growing more and more scared about it. If ever it's revealed that she's not only falling apart but that she's now barren and incapable of *ever* having children, her attitude about this whole deal might just change.

DJ Centi (Greater Demon)

Quote: *Pretty little thing. Let me make you happy.*

Background: The succubus remembers a time when she was not what she is now, a creature of lust and nightmare. She remembers a time in a garden where things were pure, where the waters tasted sweet and shame was not yet an idea. But she only remembers these things when she sleeps, and waking returns her to this nightmare that she loves so dearly. This is a world she can milk of its power, a place where sin lies before her like the reins of a horse: she merely needs to grab them, tug tight and take a ride.

Appearance: She's...too perfect? No lines in her face. Eyes too big, too bright. Lips so lush, they're almost impossible. It's her demon side, of course. And it's terribly captivating.

Storytelling Hints: Licentia is smart. She's funny. And she's pretty. Of course, it's all too good to be true, and soon as she catches a *whiff* of threat from anybody, she'll do anything in her power to prevent anyone from damaging her hold on this club or these people. She knows that some of her cultists are quite expendable, thank you, and she'll callously throw them into harm's way to protect herself. (The exception to that rule is, of course, Cynthia.)

Sample Cult: Pâté de Foie Gras

These "epicurean clubs" have been springing up all over town. A restaurant has to pay through the nose to get one of those little Epicurean Club stickers in the window. Epicurean Club memberships are for the *very* elite.

Once a month, an Epicurean Club-licensed restaurant has a closed session for its exclusive membership only. Billed as "the rarest food under the sun," members can expect to dine heartily

on rare delicacies such as Beluga caviar, Fugu, Pacha, Balut and Sardinian Casu Narzu, washed down with Tieguanyin tea and a foreign imported wine containing pickled baby mouse fetuses.

And then there is the liver pâté dish, the highlight of the whole evening. And all who sample it agree; the flavor of fat-tened liver, served on tiny crackers, is exquisite almost beyond comparison. The price of this rare liver is unbelievably expensive, and neither the recipe nor specimens of the pâté can be released to members. They are not allowed to take the pâté home in their handbags, and in fact, members are frisked and searched before leaving the premises.

The Inner Circle

The Inner Circle knows why it must keep the recipe a secret. All the prized pâté comes from a small home farm out of town, where it is made. The Inner Circle is composed of half-a-dozen chefs of impeccable pedigree. Two of these chefs are TV celebrities in their own right, with endorsements and their own TV series.

Most investigations surrounding this inner circle of powerful chefs (be they performed through interviews or by following paper trails) lead to a place called Briarwood Farm.

Briarwood Farm

Briarwood Farm occupies much of the floor of the valley in which it sits. It's quiet and seemingly deserted most nights, except when the occasional deliveries of meat arrive, in unmarked black trucks that offload their cargoes around the back.

Hunters who follow the trucks will discover three rows of eight sheds around the back. Inside each shed are four rows of four cages, large enough to house a human being sitting down. These cages are filthy and each shed stinks of human refuse and sweat.

Several cages hold a single human child, naked, bound and sitting in filth, with a tube rammed down his or her throat. Hoppers above regularly disgorge food into those hoppers, while IVs drip appetite stimulants into them.

Herein lies the secret of the exquisite livers: they come from human children, force fed to bulk up those livers like geese being prepared for *pâté de foie gras*. At the Storyteller's behest, if any characters have eaten this pâté in the past, they might suffer a temporary derangement as a result (Depression, Phobia, Suspicion and Avoidance are likely illnesses).

The Cultists

The cult itself comprises a large number of "foodies," all of whom are glutonously devoted to the Epicurean Club movement. They are rabid. They are hungry. Many are snobs, though more than a few are quite eager to bring others into their "world of taste," too.

It's important to know that only the inner circle of chefs actually *know* what goes on at Briarwood Farm. Most of the cult's "ground troops" are just wealthy or supercilious individuals who think they're dining on the best of the best; were they to discover what they were truly eating, most could not in good conscience continue (and many would go mad). A few, though, might only become more ardent...

THOMAS SALVATORE

CULT LEADER

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 5

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 3, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Academics (Travel) 4, Crafts (Cooking) 4, Medicine 3, Science 3

Physical Skills: Brawl 3, Survival (Tracking) 3, Weaponry (Meat Cleaver) 2

Social Skills: Animal Ken 2, Persuasion 3, Socialize 4, Subterfuge 3

Merits: Allies (police) 2, Barfly, Contacts (local farms, local media), Fame 1, Iron Stomach, Natural Immunity, Resources 4

Willpower: 8

Morality: 1

Virtue: Prudence

Pride: Gluttony

Health: 10

Initiative: 7

Defense: 3

Speed: 12

Weapons/Attacks:

Weapon	Damage	Dice Pool
Cleaver	2 (L)	9

Thomas Salvatore (Cult Leader)

Quote: Try some of tonight's Special, Signor. You'll love it.

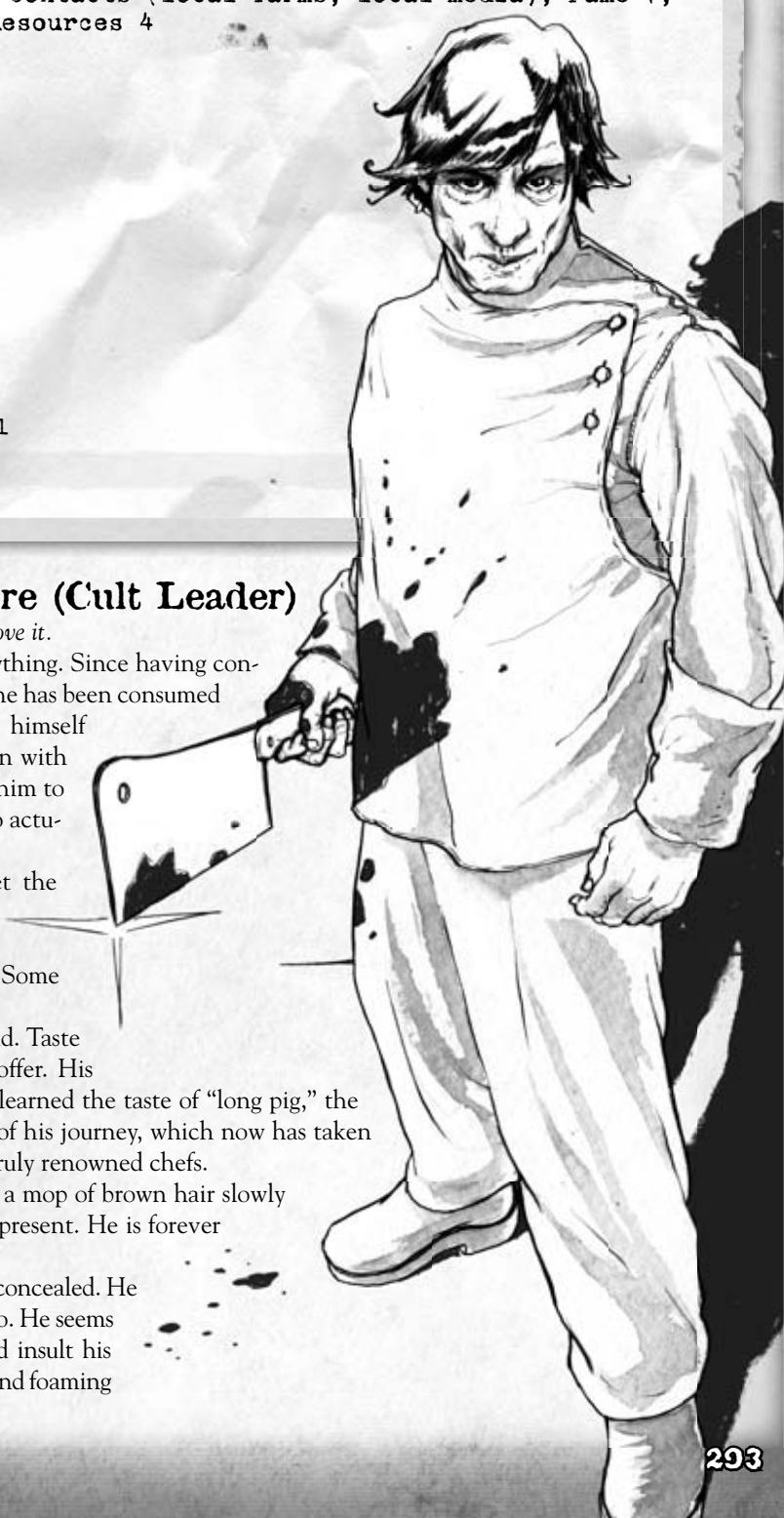
Background: For Thomas Salvatore, taste is everything. Since having consumed a simple oyster with a spritz of lemon as a child, he has been consumed by the possibilities of epicurean delight. He believes himself one of the world's "supertasters," that is to say a person with an abnormal proliferation of taste buds, thus allowing him to experience a wider range of subtleties when it comes to actually tasting food.

But for all his desires, he could never quite get the "trick" to cooking. Sure, he made friends among many popular and renowned chefs, as he is something of an affable sort. But his restaurants never quite took off. Some fizzled out. Others were spectacular failures.

And then he took some time off to travel the world. Taste what the farthest-flung reaches of the world had to offer. His travels brought him to Papua New Guinea, where he learned the taste of "long pig," the succulence of human flesh. It was only the beginning of his journey, which now has taken him to Briarwood Farm and a position at the table of truly renowned chefs.

Appearance: He is a small, unassuming man with a mop of brown hair slowly peppered with faded gray. His smile is small but ever-present. He is forever clad in his chef's coat.

Storyteller Hints: Salvatore's madness is very well concealed. He speaks quietly. He's friendly enough, though not overly so. He seems humble (and in a way, he really is). Draw him out and insult his food, though, and one might see the rabidity in his eyes and foaming at the corners of his pursed lips.





Slashers

Not all horrors that walk the streets of the World of Darkness are so easily categorized. Some are very human seeming, indeed.

Slashers are humans who are compelled to kill. Some are very human: charming maniacs, reclusive geniuses, emotionless brutes. Others manifest supernatural powers: shrugging off attacks, wearing faces that shift and warp, manifesting needled teeth or hooked claws. They go on murder sprees that end only when *they* do. They leave behind maddening puzzles that drive those who solve them to the brink themselves. Some kill only once, but in just such a brutal way that their crimes stay in the minds of the community.

What causes a slasher to be made or born? A few are driven insane by physical changes. Being born disfigured or crippled is just the start; they grow up isolated from other people, picking up strange quirks and believing that the rest of the world must suffer for being so perfect. Whether she plans elaborate death-traps designed to highlight her victim's flaws or rampages with machete and chainsaw, she will have her revenge. In a few cases, her deformity may give her some benefit: incredible strength, impervious skin, or powerful healing abilities, for example. The majority doesn't have any upside to their terribly warped bodies, and instead put themselves through incredible physical and mental training. A slasher's mind may be as warped as her body, but she has a focus that other killers lack.

Strange circumstances can twist humans in other ways. A Cheiron Group experiment with prosthetics or CIA brain implant destroys the test subject's sense of self, leaving an amoral sociopath in a body that's no longer fully human. The boy haunted by the image of an abusive mother is determined he will never be a bad boy again, no matter how many people he must kill to stop them telling. The devil gives a man consumed by vengeance one last chance to make the bastards pay, but he must slaughter five innocents before he's allowed a shot at the man who killed him — and if he misses, he has to take another five lives. A woman goes everywhere with her brother/lover — she's cut off his limbs and stuffed him in a sports bag. She kills and cooks city folks, just like mother used to make. The man who has a girl in every city, but always moves on after consummating their relationship — it's never the same for him if his paramour has a pulse.

Slashers who are normal humans, save for their peculiar mental conditions, are created as normal human members of their Profession. Some of these slashers were hunters, and thus have access to the full range of options available to hunters. Slashers have very low Morality, or even Morality 0. Several change their conception of what is right and wrong (see Appendix: The Code). Other slashers are cursed with stranger abilities. As well as superhuman strength, they often possess natural armor or the ability to regenerate damage. Several also return to their own bodies after death, crawling out of the ground to continue their reign of blood and death. Every slasher is unique, and should have abilities relevant to their condition.

Some Slashers are mortal serial killers, while others gain access to Dread Powers. Only rarely does a Slasher possess more than three dots in Dread Powers, and they are *always* geared to helping him kill, kill, kill.

EMILY THE TALISMAN

Profession: Laborer

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 3, Composure 2/4

Mental Skills: Academics 1, Crafts (Clothing) 3, Medicine (First Aid) 1, Occult (Ghosts) 2

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 1, Larceny 2, Stealth 2/4, Survival (Urban) 2, Weaponry 2/(Straight Razor) 4

Social Skills: Empathy 3, Intimidation 1, Persuasion (Kids) 3, Socialize (Neighborhood) 2, Subterfuge 2/4

Merits: Iron Stamina, Fast Reflexes 2, Professional Training 2, Resources 2, Striking Looks 4

Willpower: 4

Morality: 2

Virtue: Hope

Vice: Wrath

Initiative: 5/9

Defense: 3

Speed: 11

Health: 7

Derangements: Fugue, Irrationality, Multiple Personality (traits marked in *italics*)

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Straight Razor	1(L)	5/9

Emily, the Talisman

Quote: You hurt Bobby. Kyle won't let you hurt Bobby. Would you like to meet Kyle? I have him right here.

Background: Every city has them: suburbs that stretch for miles. They cover perfectly good land in cookie-cutter houses, separated by mile upon mile of white picket fence. Emily Gillen lived in one of those homes. She had what she thought was a perfect life. Her husband, Kyle, was the local mechanic, and the two of them had two sons: Bobby and Steve. Like anything perfect, it couldn't last. Kyle got out of work early one day. Driving through an intersection, an 18-wheel truck plowed through his SUV. Emily was out shopping, close enough to see the scene while they were cleaning up fragments of brain and bone from the tarmac. Later, they told her he died instantly. She could see their lies.

Two nights later, she started clearing out Kyle's belongings. She hadn't worked out what she was going to tell Steve and Bobby — they were still staying with their grandparents. Taking his old pearl-handled straight razor in hand, she heard a whisper through her tears. Kyle told her about the driver who had

killed her. He told her everything. The driver lived only three streets away. Just killing him wouldn't send a lesson to all the other bastards who'd leave a wife without a husband: she had to make him pay. That evening, she kidnapped the driver's daughter. Tying the girl to a chair in her basement, Emily took the razor and carefully sliced off the girl's face. Emily then pinned it back to her head upside down, with two-inch roofing nails. She sent photographs to Daddy, who thought he could buy his daughter's life. Emily knew better. She killed the girl over eight days, egged on by Kyle's ghost. She hasn't stopped there.

Kyle wants vengeance for his death. He tells Emily about the reports the cops buried, the ones that show the real blood alcohol level of the truck driver. Turns out his brother works in City Hall and pulled a few strings. Everyone involved is guilty of letting Kyle's killer goes free — but Kyle knows who they are. He tells Emily. She takes their children. She's never fast. It takes her at least four days to torture and kill one of their children, but it's worth it. She's sending a message from beyond the grave.

Appearance: Emily's the model of a Stepford wife. There's no other way to put it: she's beautiful. Chin-length blonde

hair frames her perfect complexion; her cute nose defines her elegant face. Her eyes are brilliant blue, and she stares with intensity that other people sometimes mistake for piercing intelligence. She dresses on the conservative side of fashion, favoring designer blouses and pleated skirts. Despite not having the figure she had 12 years ago, she still turns heads among both the neighborhood's teenagers and their fathers both.

When she holds Kyle's straight razor, she changes slightly. She stands straighter, holds eye contact and asserts herself in a way that she normally never would. The world doesn't matter when her darling speaks to her. This sense of detachment gives her an otherworldly air that few people can truly understand. She tortures and kills with clinical precision, following a complicated recipe with human ingredients.

Storytelling Hints: When she's not holding her darling's razor, Emily Gillen is as normal as anyone can hope to be. She's worried about her children — but nobody who has lost a partner would be any other way. After so long, she's coming to terms with Kyle not being around, but she's not bothered with finding another man. After all, her husband's still with her. She's nice to people who know her, but doesn't join in with community activities like she used to. Emily no longer goes to PTA meetings or cares for the Neighborhood Watch. On the other hand, the Watch is far more concerned with missing children than burglaries and traffic deaths.

When Kyle tells her to do something, she projects herself. She's no longer the good, submissive wife that her parents told her to be. Her husband's voice gives her a confidence she didn't have before — the confidence to do whatever she must to carry out his wishes. Emily's far more cool and detached than she is without Kyle — she doesn't fully know what she's doing, even as she peels the skin from a teen's chest, or carefully stimulates exposed nerves to generate excruciating pain. Normally, she snatches her victim in broad daylight. She carries them to her basement without others really seeing her. By the time the blur of motion ends, her victim's secured to a chair in a soundproof basement. She'll do whatever Kyle wants her to do without a single question.

A cell investigating her may think Emily suffers from multiple personality disorder — it certainly explains the discrepancies in skills when Kyle is with her. Some things just don't add up. There's no way she could know some of the things she knows without Kyle's ghost. He can go places and see things with strong resonance to him, which is how he knows about the suppressed report. A cell has to decide between dealing with Emily and Kyle together, or banishing Kyle's spirit and treating Emily for her derangements.

The Resurrection Man

Quote: *I'll kick your fuckin' head right off!*

Background: The story of Alex Kincaid is one etched in blood and hard black pencil. Dark mutterings in his neighborhood attributed his diminutive stature to his mother's amphetamine habit and his absent father. Many a time at school he was tormented with drawings of what the other boys thought his dad looked like: a twisted wreck of a man — his mom had to be off her face to sleep with him. He had to take care of himself at home: washing clothes, buying food and cooking for a mother who would otherwise have starved

to death. His only connection with other people was when he was at school, and that was a nightmare. Every day a gang of boys would punch and kick him, and use him as the butt of lewd and hateful jokes. Alex ignored them.

One day, the other kids went too far. After delivering their usual pounding, one pulled a knife and said, "Run." Alex ran, but didn't get far. The others just wanted to scare him, but they tackled him at the wrong time. His skull hit the ground with a loud crack, driving fragments of bone into his brain. Alex died instantly. It was his 15th birthday.

The boys who had chased him hid Alex's body and did their best to make his death look like an accident. Though they were scared of anyone finding out, people took their explanation at face value. They split up after graduating from high school, spread out across the country and had families of their own.

But Alex has found them. And he goes to these communities one by one, and he kills in the name of those who hurt him. Alex stalks these towns, minister of a religion based on blood and bone and hate and pain. Though he never visits his classmates twice in a row, they know he'll come back eventually. Only his original killers can put Alex Kincaid back in the ground (see below).

Appearance: Short and misshapen, in life Alex just never fit in. His arms didn't quite bend right and his legs were different lengths. Add in a lopsided face, and though he didn't have learning difficulties, he was set for a life of mockery. Thanks to his addict mother and missing father, he dressed in thrift-store handouts and rarely had a chance to cut his brown hair. He never had time to take care of himself properly. Despite his best efforts, he never fully developed physically; he weighed just over 100 pounds when he died.

When he rises from the grave, Alex remakes his body anew. He retains his misshapen limbs and strange legs, though they don't seem to hinder him. Taller than he was, he usually clears six feet in height. While he's still rail thin, he moves with an unstoppable power and his eyes are jet black. Every time he comes back, he sports a different set of stitches across his body, as though the devil has sewn together the corpses in the graveyard to give Alex Kincaid a physical form once more.

Storytelling Hints: Alex exists to kill, but he's not a rampaging monster. When he arises, he takes time to familiarize himself with his surroundings, working out hiding places and escape routes. He knows, instinctively, who his targets are and does his research on them first. This way, he knows who he's going to kill, where they are most vulnerable and when he can strike without anyone noticing. He doesn't kill instantly — instead, he picks a time when he can torture his victims first, stringing them up and beating or flaying them while they can see their blood dripping.

Alex knows someone will discover him. When they do, he just changes target, going after the witnesses next and trying to maximize the neighborhood's fear without dying. He's never successful. Eventually, a group of parents and police officers — the bigger boys — shows up. He flies into a rage then, killing everyone and everything in a shocking display of blood and violence. He leaves his original attackers until last. They must witness what has become of their new lives. The only way to put Alex Kincaid back in the ground is for one of his

THE RESURRECTION MAN

Profession: None

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 5, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 6, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 1, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Crafts (Weapons) 2, Investigation 2, Medicine (Anatomy) 3, Occult (Afterlife) 3

Physical Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 2, Firearms 2, Stealth 5, Survival (Urban) 4, Weaponry (Improvised) 5

Social Skills: Animal Ken 1, Intimidation 4, Streetwise 1

Merits: Ambidextrous, Fighting Style: Two Weapons 3, Iron Stamina 3, Natural Immunity, Weaponry Dodge

Willpower: 7

Morality: 1

Virtue: Justice

Vice: Wrath

Initiative: 5

Defense: 2 (in all forms)

Speed: 13

Health: 8

Special

Irony's Curse: Alex cannot lose his last point of Health to damage unless the person dealing that damage was a member of the gang who killed him. Whatever the cause of damage - be it flamethrower, chainsaw or explosion - Alex does not lose that last point of damage if someone else causes it. This restriction is not in place if all his original killers are dead.

Resurrection Man: Alex isn't fully human any longer. In addition to possessing superhuman strength, he does not bleed when he suffers aggravated damage, and does not need to sleep.

Eternal Slaughter: However he dies, Alex's body does not remain. When someone hurts a child in the neighborhood of one of his killers, Alex will return. He does not return to haunt the same person twice - he must visit another of his killers first - and he must spend six months dead before returning to terrorize the land of the living once more. When he comes back, his traits return to those above. The only way to keep him dead is for all of his killers to die while he is slumbering between killings, or to kill him once all of his killers are dead.

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Machete	3 (L)	14

original attackers to deliver the final blow — something Alex makes sure they know.

The Enemy Within

A hunter may believe that his greatest foe is the monster within his crosshairs, but he may discover that he is, himself,

the object of another hunter's Vigil. Whether through conflicting interests, overlapping territories, misperceptions or other extenuating circumstances, hunters can often be one another's worst enemies.

Turf Wars

Hunter cells often have a particular focus. Some may specialize in protecting a specific location, whether this is an assignment from their organization, an especially supernatu-

rally active site (like the center of vampiric presence in the region), or a locale that has particular significance for them (a church or their families' neighborhood, for example).

Others focus on hunting a particular monster type. These can also be assigned jobs, for which their group sends them where they are most needed, or a particular cell might follow its prey's trails in a nomadic pattern that leads the cell across the globe.

When the non-territorial hunters' Vigil takes them into the home turf of more territorial hunters, conflict often ensues. Accustomed to dealing with their enemy through brute force, cunning tactics, high-tech equipment and overwhelming might, hunters are often quick to act and slow to communicate when their information sources detect an interloper in their territory or an already established force in the way of their current assignment. Far too often, one hunter cell makes assumptions — often fatal assumptions — about another without ever realizing that they are, at least nominally, on the same side.

The Enemy of My Enemy is My Enemy

In a similar vein is the problem of coinciding targets, especially in cells with differing goals. One cell may be hunting the vampire that slew the family of one of its members family, with the sole goal of destroying the monster so it cannot kill again. Another may be on assignment to obtain necrological samples (or undead specimens for captive experimentation) from whatever vampiric entities it encounters. Yet another cell may have researched this particular creature's history back for several hundred years, and have hopes of gaining valuable (and potentially profitable) insight and information from it regarding particular historic events to which it may be the only (un)living witness. It's possible the cell even counts the monster as a rough ally. Three different cells, three very different (and potentially mutually exclusive) goals. The recipe for conflict is clear, even in the unlikely circumstance that all three are in communication with one another and are aware of each other's goals.

Drawing the Line

While most hunters believe themselves to be firmly in the "good guy" camp, desperate times require desperate actions. A hunter's devotion to the Vigil can spur him to acts of such great destruction or seeming callousness that outsiders are unable to distinguish his deeds from those of the monsters he hunts. This can affect the player's characters in two ways. First, they may find themselves the target of another cell or individual hunter who has, for one reason or another, decided they are the subject of his Vigil.

Alternatively, they may find that another hunter (or cell) has become as much as or more of a threat than the monsters they have been hunting, and may decide to focus their hunt upon their former brethren.

Sample Hunter Antagonists

The following section includes sample hunter profiles that can be used as antagonists, as secondary protagonist

characters, or in some cases, as both) in a *Hunter: The Vigil* game. Storytellers are encouraged to use the given examples as is, or as a base for their own specific hunter characters.

Along with samples of stereotypical Vigil characters at each of the tier levels, examples are given of hunters who have just begun their Vigil or who have left the hunt, either voluntarily, or because they have deviated so strongly from the Vigil they are little more than monsters themselves.

New Recruit

Every hunter was once new to the Vigil. Sometimes cells form when a group of hunters takes up the Vigil at the same time and bands together for protection and camaraderie. Other times an established cell may recruit a new member to bolster its numbers or because of a particularly valued skill the newbie possesses. In this case, it's normal to watch out for the new member until he has his feet under him, although ultimately, the Vigil is a dangerous obsession and no hunter remains on it long without being able to protect himself.

For cells with ties to various compacts and conspiracies, new recruits are sometimes assigned to existing cells to give the newcomer some experience without exposing him or her entirely to the dangers of the Vigil. Some cells welcome this "fresh meat," either for the skills they provide or because they make good bullet fodder. Other cells resent being put on baby-sitting duties with new recruits, and do everything they can to make the newcomer's Vigil a living hell.

Likewise, some new recruits fairly shine with potential, enthusiasm and a desire to prove themselves to the more experienced cells they've been recruited into or assigned to. Others seem to bristle with resentment, expecting to be treated as an equal without the need to prove themselves to those with more time and experience on the Vigil.

Marcy "Mouse" Danner

Quote: "Yeah, I knew that."

Background: To hear Mouse talk, she's been everywhere and done far more than her mid-20s age would seem possible. She claims to have a BS in Military Science, and to have done eight years in various branches of the US military: "Special Ops, Rangers, Seals. You name it, I've done it." For all her purported experience outside of Task Force: VALKYRIE, however, one thing is clear to those whose cell she's been assigned to — as a hunter, Mouse is inept at best.

It's not that she doesn't have skills. She's a crack shot with a rifle, and when she shuts her mouth long enough, she's capable of understanding and carrying out complex tactical orders in a stealthy and efficient manner. But getting her to shut up long enough to listen to orders, let alone preventing her from arguing with them or demanding her own suggestions be heard, is a challenge that's led to her being "placed" and "replaced" in more hunter cells than any other new recruit in TFV.

Task Force: VALKYRIE recruited her after she'd done everything she could to remain in the Army but had every psych appeal denied. They must see something in her worth fostering, because they've continued to place her with new cells, but rumors are be-

ginning to circulate that this might be as much to test the mettle of the cell as to give Mouse another chance. Or that nepotism is at work somewhere in the chain of command.

Appearance: Mouse is never seen out of “uniform.” Even on weekends or when off duty, she wears BDU-type clothing, combat boots and a heavy field jacket when the weather demands. She wears her hair short and neat, in a cut that can be styled with a towel. While she’s barely five foot six in her boots, she’s got enough attitude and muscle to make most folks think twice about messing with her. She also tends to be armed, with both weaponry and at least one firearm, at all times.

She spends all her spare time attempting to improve herself to be what she thinks of as the perfect hunter. She reads books on military history, watches the Military Channel on TV and works out to excess, granting her a stocky but buff physique. One of her favorite activities is practicing at the shooting range.

Storytelling Hints: Mouse really wants to prove herself as a hunter. Ever since she was given a dishonorable discharge from the Army for trumped-up (she says) charges of psychological instability, she’s done everything she can to prove she has what it takes to succeed with Task Force: VALKYRIE. Unfortunately, she often tries too hard to prove herself, which gets in the way of her actually learning how to work with a cell and, thus, succeed as a hunter.

Mouse is argumentative, opinionated and loud. She always seems to have a “better idea” than the one presented by authority figures, as if she believes she can impress them by showing off her intellect and arguing against their plans. She’s very well studied in military history and tactics, and many of her plans are actually sound, but the way she presents them makes it difficult for others to accept them.

Tier One

Tier-one hunters do not work for (and are unlikely to be aware of) any sort of hunter-specific organization. They may not know that any other hunter cells exist, seeing themselves as the singular candle standing against the darkness. This leads to a very “us versus them” mentality, with “them” being anyone or thing other than run-of-the-mill humanity. Thus, when the path of a tier-one cell crosses that of another (potentially a more organized cell), someone might react with hostility rather than meet in a spirit of cooperation.

Tye Masterson

Quote: “Most folks are sheep. They’re too dumb to even know the wolves are out there. That’s why there’s got to be Guard Dogs like us.”

Background: Tye Masterson did 10 years’ hard time for the murder of a man who never died. He took the fall when an acquaintance who owed him money went missing not long after a heated discussion that was, unfortunately, witnessed by the man’s friends. It didn’t take more than a look at Tye’s arrest record for drug charges, assault and larceny to convince the jury that even if he didn’t actually murder the missing man, society would be well served by placing him behind bars.




**MARCY
“MOUSE” DANNER**

Profession: Soldier

Organization: Task Force: VALKYRIE

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 2, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 2, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Academics 2 (Military History), Investigation 1, Medicine 2 (Triage), Politics 1, Occult 1

Physical Skills: Athletics 3 (Running), Brawl 3, Drive 1, Firearms 3 (Sniper Rifle), Stealth 2, Survival 2, Weaponry 3 (Knife)

Social Skills: Intimidation 3, Socialize 1, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 2

Merits: Danger Sense, Ambidextrous, Brawling Dodge, Disarm, Fast Reflexes 2, Fleet of Foot, Iron Stamina 3, Quick Draw

Willpower: 5

Morality: 6

Virtue: Fortitude

Vice: Pride

Initiative: 7

Defense: 2

Speed: 13

Health: 8

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Knife	1(L)	-	7	-
Rifle	5(L)	200/400/800	13	Has telescopic sights



A decade in prison for a crime he didn't commit only honed Tye's drive to discover what truly happened to the man he was accused of killing. He began investigating the day he was released, and did not let up until he found himself face to face not with the man's killer, but with the man himself. Stunned, he discovered that the alleged "victim" had faked his own death to clear the way for his new life as a monster. Tye's righteous indignation at having spent a decade in hell so that someone else could cut ties to his former life was the spark he needed to find focus in his life, and the same drive that put him on the trail of his "victim" soon catapulted the once-petty criminal onto a new path — that of a hunter.

He's been the leader of the Guard Dogs, a motorcycle gang that consists mostly of those who served time with him, for several years now. By welcoming in those who seem capable of understanding the truth that lies behind the shield of disbelief most humans carry around, Tye has turned the Guard Dogs' focus toward the Vigil, gradually honing the gang into an effective cell.

Appearance: It would be difficult to pick Tye or the rest of the Guard Dogs out of a crowd at the neighborhood biker bar. He's clean shaven and bald, but the rest of the Dogs vary

from crew cuts to ponytails and everything in between. Standard Dogs' uniform consists of jeans, sometimes topped by biker's leather chaps, steel-toed leather boots, t-shirts (with varying messages, most of which are profane) and denim or leather vests or jackets. Their appearance is comfortable and utilitarian. It not only serves as a layer of light armor, protecting them physically from harm, but the "we're a biker gang" advertising also chases away all but the most determined of opponents, allowing them to concentrate more fully on their hunt without having to mess with "the little guys."

Storytelling Hints: Tye and the rest of the Guard Dogs are territorial hunters. They keep their area, and the roads surrounding it, free from supernatural or human predators. Tye sees any encroachment on his turf as a personal affront, and views obvious predators (whether supernatural, human, or even other hunters who don't defer to his dominance) as a threat to his territory. Although most of the normal folks who live within the area he claims see him and his gang as a nuisance or a threat, they actually avoid crime or harm to the locals unless totally necessary in the cause of the hunt. Tye doesn't know much about the occult, just enough to know there's stuff out there that the straights don't believe in, and

TYE
MASTERSON**Profession:** Criminal**Organization:** None**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 3**Physical Attributes:** Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4**Social Attributes:** Presence 3, Manipulation 2, Composure 2**Mental Skills:** Crafts (Repair/Build Motorcycles) 3, Investigation 1, Occult 1**Physical Skills:** Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Drive (Motorcycles) 3, Firearms 2, Larceny 1, Stealth 1, Survival 1, Weaponry (Chain) 3**Social Skills:** Intimidation (Dominance Games) 4, Persuasion (Bullying) 2, Streetwise 4, Subterfuge 1**Merits:** Contacts (Biker Gangs) 1, Safehouse Size 1, Safehouse Cache 2, Professional Training 1**Willpower:** 5**Morality:** 4**Virtue:** Justice**Vice:** Pride**Initiative:** 5**Defense:** 3**Speed:** 11**Health:** 9**Weapons/Attacks:**

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Chain	2(B)	-	9	-
Lt Revolver 1(L)		20/40/80	5	-

Armor: 1

what they don't believe in, they can't protect themselves from. He and the Guard Dogs provide that protection, often to those who see them as the danger.

Tier Two

Hunters at tier two are affiliated with organizations that, while small and most often local in scope, offer their members an invaluable leg-up in the hunt. Unlike first-tier hunters, those who belong to tier-two organizations have "backup" beyond their own cell. Unfortunately, however, this doesn't always mean they know that hunters outside of their own organization exist, or that they're kept aware of the whereabouts and assignments of other cells, even within their own organization.

Angelina "Angel of Truth" Rodriguez

Quote: "This is the Angel of Truth, bringing you this week's dose of reality. Keep your eyes on the screen, folks — you don't want to miss this clip. It's called 'Giant Snakeman Versus Super Soldier.' Is it real? I'll let you be the judge."

Background: Since high school, Angelina (or "Lina") knew what she wanted to do with her life. She headed the school newspaper, chaired the yearbook and, by her senior year, was interning at the city news station. Lina's life took a turn when the reporter she was assigned to told her he was going on a secret assignment. The reporter thought he was investigating a new drug he'd overheard some kids discussing. Little did he know he'd stumbled onto a supernatural creature that was feeding the raver-kids its solidified blood. The next day, the reporter turned up dead in his apartment. The coroner said it was suicide, overdose of an unidentified drug, but Lina knew it must have had something to do with his secret story. She managed to get her hands on the video he'd taken, and found herself witnessing enough to be certain why the reporter was killed. Fearing she might be next, Lina set up a "dead-man's switch" video that would hit the world's most popular Internet video clip site if she didn't input a password each morning. She kept living her normal life, interning at the news station, but was constantly looking over her shoulder, certain the creature

ANGELINA "ANGEL OF TRUTH" RODRIGUEZ

Profession: Journalist

Organization: Network Zero

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 4, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 3, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics 1, Computer 3, Investigation (Undercover Video) 4, Occult 2, Politics 1

Physical Skills: Drive 2, Larceny 1, Stealth (Trailing) 3, Survival 1

Social Skills: Empathy 2, Expression (Video Blogging) 4, Persuasion 3, Socialize 3, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge (Assumed Persona) 3

Merits: Danger Sense, Eidetic Memory, Language 3 (Spanish), Professional Training 2 (Blogger), Fame 1 (as Angel), Mentor 2 (Editor of newspaper), Status (Network Zero) 2

Willpower: 6

Morality: 7

Virtue: Prudence

Vice: Lust

Initiative: 5

Defense: 2

Speed: 9

Health: 7

that had killed her mentor was going to show up at any point to finish the job. With her newly opened eyes, she realized there was lots more going on in the world than the average viewer was paying attention to, and soon other supernatural footage joined that of the original monster film.

Somehow Network Zero got access to the undisclosed videos and, recognizing a potential recruit, contacted Lina. Once they'd convinced her they weren't connected to the thing that had been feeding the ravers its blood, they encouraged her to edit the tapes to remove her identity, and make them public. With the organization's help, she created the persona of the "Angel of Truth" and began not only airing her own videos on the Internet, but also those of other Network Zero operatives as well. Most of her viewers think they're watching a tabloid-style work of fiction, but some, including a sizeable audience of hunters, know that what they're seeing is real.

Appearance: Lina is of Hispanic descent, with warm skin tones and dark hair. She's short, but refuses to wear heels to make up for it. Too many hours spent sitting at a desk and too many fast-food meals have pushed her naturally curvy form to the edge of "pleasingly plump," but her inherent vivaciousness carries her weight well.

At work, she wears her thick, curly hair down and perfectly coiffed, heavy makeup applied with care and clothing

appropriate for a news environment. She's been called on to substitute for the weather girl several times, and is always looking for her big break, so she is careful to look "camera ready" at all times.

Although she's appeared online for several years now as "Angel of Truth," only her voice (studiously devoid of any Latina accent) is connected with the clips. She wears her hair braided back tightly and no makeup while "scouting" for Network Zero stories.

Storytelling Hints: Lina's not a pacifist, but she's certainly no fighter. Short of the average human ability to flail at an attacker, she's essentially useless in a fight, which is one of the reasons she stays out of them. Telephoto lenses are her friend.

As Lina, she's still hoping (after a seemingly interminable internship) to one day make a place for herself as an on-the-scene reporter or even an anchor. But she knows the stories she records for Network Zero would get her laughed out of the station at her day job, so she keeps the two very separate. She's always known that her role in life is to capture the truth and get it to the public and, as the Angel of Truth, that's what she does.

Unfortunately for other hunters, she doesn't really differentiate between "monsters" and other hunter cells, especially


**FATHER VASILI
HORAN**
Profession: Religious Leader**Organization:** Malleus Maleficarum**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 4, Wits 2, Resolve 4**Physical Attributes:** Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3**Social Attributes:** Presence 4, Manipulation 2, Composure 5**Mental Skills:** Academics 3 (Catholicism), Investigation 3, Occult 4 (Demons), Politics 2**Physical Skills:** Athletics 3, Brawl 2 (Grappling), Drive 1, Stealth 2, Weaponry 2**Social Skills:** Empathy 4, Expression 2, Intimidation 3, Persuasion 4 (Conversion), Socialize 2, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 1**Merits:** Benedictions 4 (True Sight of St. Abel, Sanctification of the Blessed Virgin, Vade Retro Satana, the Shepherd's Blessing, the Balm of St. Rapheal, Armor of St. Martin, Hands of St. Luke), Fast Reflexes, Status (Malleus Maleficarum) 4, Unseen Sense**Willpower:** 9**Morality:** 5**Virtue:** Faith**Vice:** Wrath**Initiative:** 8**Defense:** 2**Speed:** 11**Health:** 8**Weapons/Attacks:**

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Lt Revolver 1(L)		20/40/80	6	

those that exhibit obviously supernatural abilities themselves. She's just as quick to report on covert operative groups as she is to feature stories about werewolves, vampires or other monsters, much to the delight of her viewers and the chagrin of those caught on her cameras.

Tier Three

Those in charge of a tier-three conspiracy have the advantage of a large-scale network of operatives at their beck and call. The information provided by these agents allows the "higher-ups" to direct agents at their whim and to keep tabs on the location and duties of those within the group. Unfortunately for those on the operative level, this intelligence is not openly available to those further down the conspiracy's chain of command, and many tier-three cells go in as blind to the situation as tier-one or -two groups.

Not only is information most often not shared between the various tier-three groups, but many of them are also either actively at odds with each other or (at least on the operative level) oblivious of each other's existence, making it not only

possible but common for different organizations' agent teams to be assigned to similar or overlapping projects.

Father Vasili Horan

Quote: "Not all who bear swords against our enemies are our kin. The Devil wears many faces."

Background: As a boy, Vasili Horan was tormented with visions and nightmares of hellish beasts and creatures that could bestow eternal damnation with a touch. In each of the dreams, he struggled, but failed to combat the monsters' attacks. He woke up screaming every night for weeks, which turned to months, which turned to years. The dreams faded as he grew older, but strongly influenced Horan's decisions to enter the seminary and eventually become a Catholic priest. Unfortunately, while his rector, bishop and fellow students believed him to be among the most pious men they'd ever met, Horan knew differently. The dreams returned, and Horan took them as a warning of his own inherent evil nature waiting to take over should he drop his guard. The pressure of attempting to avoid any possible sin (and keep those he was unable to avoid

committing a secret, lest others know his weakness) eventually took its toll on the priest, and late one sleepless night, he confessed his fears to his bishop. Unfortunately for Horan, his superior was less holy a man even than Horan feared himself to be. The bishop assigned him penance of a profane nature, and when Horan refused his attentions, he used his political might within the church to have Horan excommunicated and defrocked on trumped-up charges. Horan gave a formal statement about not only the bishop's obscene invitations but also the nature of the visions that had driven Horan to confession in the first place. When word of the visions reached the *Malleus Maleficarum*, the organization sought out the former priest and recruited him to its numbers.

Appearance: Father Horan is a dignified and stern man, with closely shorn grey hair and thick brows that sweep over piercing grey eyes. His posture is ramrod straight and his mannerisms are slow and deliberate. When he speaks, his voice can be soft and supplicating or a fire-and-brimstone bellow of damnation.

Since joining the *Malleus Maleficarum*, Father Horan has once again taken on the trappings his defrocking once forced him to set aside. While he has not been formally re-accepted by the Catholic Church, he feels his role within the *Malleus Maleficarum* provides a more direct connection between himself and God than he received in his former role as a servant of the Church. As a hunter, he feels that he has been not only accepted but recruited directly to God's cause and, as such, regained his right to wear vestments. When not directly on a hunt, he dresses in an impeccable black suit and shirt with a clerical collar. When hunting, he dons the full formal vestment of a Catholic priest, from the white linen alb and braided cincture (belt) to the blood-red chasuble (cloak) and stole.

Storytelling Hints: Father Horan is one of the group's most potent weapons: a zealot who not only believes he has God's backing, but also has the miracles at his fingertips to prove it. He brooks no sin in himself or others, although he sees the hunt as its own divine act and, as such, lying, stealing or killing in the call of the Vigil is justified. Horan attempts to give his targets the opportunity to repent and confess their sins before delivering them directly to their maker to negotiate their own eternal fate. Although not part of a formal hunter cell himself, Horan is often assigned to assist less experienced *Malleus Maleficarum* cells in the pursuit of foes that require his particular skills — demons, fallen angels, evil spirits, ghosts, the restless dead and unholy humans who think to act where God's soldiers have domain (like the profane members of the *Lucifuge*, the dilettantes of *Ashwood Abbey*, and any hunter groups who do not act in what his organization sees as God's best interest).

Pariahs

Although "fatality" is certainly on the list of dangers for the hunter career path, not all hunters die in the line of duty. Some slip away from the Vigil and attempt to carve out a niche of normalcy for themselves out of the line of fire. Unfortunately for most, the world is full of monsters, and even if

their organizations are willing to release them from their duties, few of their former foes are as understanding. Many hunters consider a "pariah" to be little more than a suicide attempt from a hunter who's given up the ghost. Others see leaving the Vigil as a betrayal, labeling hunters who have given up the hunt as quitters, unable to hack it, or even as traitors who, knowing what is out there, turn their back on their brethren and those who rely upon them for aid against the darkness.

Duchene "Duke" Malovash

Quote: *"I don't do that anymore. So don't ask, because you wouldn't like my answer."*

Background: Duke joined the military at the age of 17 and served in the Marine Corps in both the Korean War and the Vietnam conflict. He excelled in field command and frontline situations, inevitably earning rank promotions for bravery, leadership and performing successful missions. Unfortunately, off the field he just couldn't seem to stay out of trouble. Once he was Stateside, he'd inevitably get antsy without an enemy at hand and pick fights or get into trouble with the Military Police — all to the consternation of his beloved wife, Geri, who began to dread the times when there wasn't some military conflict to keep her husband busy.

By the end of his military career, he'd attained the rank of Master Sergeant several times, and upon his retirement was approached to join Task Force: VALKYRIE, which felt it could offer him an unending career conflict. Duke told Geri he was working for a covert government task force (which was, in its own way, true) and for the first few years, it seemed VALKYRIE would be a godsend for the couple. It kept Duke busy and focused...and out of trouble. As time passed, however, it became obvious to Geri that something wasn't quite right with this "task force" he had been assigned to. As the hunt took its toll on Duke both physically and emotionally, Geri grew increasingly withdrawn from her spouse as his Morality spiraled downward. The Vigil consumed Duke so deeply that he didn't notice, however, clinging instead to the memory of their relationship as it used to be.

Twelve years into his tour with the task force, something went wrong that Duke could not ignore. The official reports claim there was an aborted mission and the target traced Duke back to his home — and to Geri. Some of the cell, however, noted how far gone Duke had become in the months before her death, wondering if it was truly an outsider who did the deed.

Although his retirement from the Task Force wouldn't become official for a number of months, Duke's Vigil ended the day that he woke to find Geri's dismembered body still lying in bed beside him. Since then, he's waited for the enemy to come finish the job, but it's been 15 long years now and Duke's still alive.

Appearance: Always slim, Duke's wiry form has paid the price of many decades of service to various military units. He's no longer as strong, fast or resilient as he once was, but a lifetime of combat readiness has left him still able to keep up with most young "punks" he runs into. His body is scarred and worn, like a vintage rifle. But like a well-maintained an-

DUCHENE "DUKE"
MALOVASH**Profession:** Soldier**Organization:** None (formerly Task Force: VALKYRIE)**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 3**Physical Attributes:** Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2**Social Attributes:** Presence 3, Manipulation 2, Composure 4**Mental Skills:** Academics 4 (Field Tactics), Crafts 2 (Improvised Traps), Investigation 3, Medicine 3 (Field Triage), Occult 5 (monster group dynamics), Politics 3 (US Military)**Physical Skills:** Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Firearms 4 (Rifle), Stealth 2, Survival 3, Weaponry 3 (Knife)**Social Skills:** Intimidation 2, Persuasion 2 (Orders), Subterfuge 2**Merits:** Contacts (Task Force: VALKYRIE) 1, Fast Reflexes 2, Quick Draw, Unseen Sense**Willpower:** 7**Morality:** 5**Virtue:** Prudence**Vice:** Sloth**Initiative:** 9**Defense:** 3**Speed:** 12**Health:** 7**Weapons/Attacks:**

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Rifle	5(L)	200/400/800	13	-

tique weapon, he's still capable of causing great harm. Duke still sports the high-and-tight crew cut he wore throughout his military career. His skin is leathery and mottled with sun-spots where it has been exposed to decades of harsh climates, and pasty fish-white where it has not. His eyes are as sharp as they ever were, and he looks at the world over an eagle-beak of a nose that he once claimed had the ability to "smell trouble coming." Both upper arms have been marked with now-blurred purple-blue ink tattoos: the eagle, globe and anchor of the Corps on the right, and a pin-up of a woman in a grass skirt (demure by today's standards) on the left.

Storytelling Hints: After his wife's death, Duke left Task Force: VALKYRIE, but he still lives in the tiny town and the little house that he and Geri had retired to after the Marine Corps. To those who have no idea about his past, Duke's little more than a feature of the town. He goes about his daily business with an automaton's precision. Inevitably, every few years someone from the Task Force stumbles across his existence and seeks him out for "just one more job." His answers are always the same. He's done with the hunt. He's left the killing and the death behind him. Unfortunately for Duke, he seems to have left any enjoyment he got out of life behind as well.

Over the years, Duke's once-flagging Morality has slowly returned to a fairly normal human level. He's regained most of his sanity along with it, and it's possible that characters who approach him for advice may be able to receive information or education from him, although it would take something pretty significant (like having the identity and whereabouts of Geri's killer presented to him) in order to spur him back into physical action once more.

Rogue Hunters

The hunt requires dedication and focus. Sometimes, especially for those hunters who belong to compacts and conspiracies, something happens to shake that devotion to the Vigil. Perhaps they're pulled in another direction, perhaps they lose faith in the hunt, or they're caught in the web of influence of someone (or something) that deviates from their path. Regardless of the reason, they find themselves no longer going in the same direction as their former cell members and organizational higher-ups. Some retire from the hunt in this case (see Duke Malovash as an example, above), but others just find that their Vigil shifts, attaining a new or additional focus.

SEBASTIAN RADCLIFFE

Profession: Academic**Organization:** Aegis Kai Doru**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 5, Wits 3, Resolve 3**Physical Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2**Social Attributes:** Presence 3, Manipulation 3, Composure 4**Mental Skills:** Academics 5 (Linguistics), Computer 3, Investigation 4 (Research), Occult 3 (Lycanthropes), Politics 2, Science 2 (Lycanthrope Biology)**Physical Skills:** Athletics 1, Brawl 1 (Self Defense), Drive 1, Larceny 1, Stealth 1, Survival (Urban) 1**Social Skills:** Empathy 1, Expression 3 (Scholastic papers), Persuasion 1, Socialize 1, Subterfuge 1**Merits:** Contacts (University), Eidetic Memory, Encyclopedic Knowledge, Professional Training 3, Relic 1 (See Kirkstede's Lenses below), Status (Aegis Kai Doru) 3**Willpower:** 7**Morality:** 6**Virtue:** Hope**Vice:** Sloth**Initiative:** 6**Defense:** 2**Speed:** 9**Health:** 7

Some rogue hunters break away from their former lives, going missing and presumed dead or AWOL from their cells and/or organizations. Others retain a covert double-life, continuing their Vigil alongside their cellmates while also engaging in other “projects” that their team knows nothing about.

Sebastian Radcliffe

Quote: “I didn’t use to believe in love at first sight. Then I met her.”

Background: Sebastian’s Master’s thesis on pre-Babylonian dialects was enough to garner him the attention of the Aegis Kai Doru. After brief training, he joined a cell that was investigating lycanthropic society, specifically their rituals and language. It was exciting work. Over several years (and with the unwilling assistance of several werewolf captives), the team believed it was coming closer and closer to cracking the cryptic tongue that the lycanthropes used to communicate amongst themselves and in their profane ceremonies.

To aid in their work, Sebastian was given a Relic — a pair of glasses that, when worn, allowed the mind to read faster, retain more of the information read and draw conclusions from it more quickly and accurately. Unfortunately for Sebastian, not long after he began using the Relic, the glasses’ former owner woke from a centuries-long slumber and sought to reclaim her former possession.

None of Sebastian’s training in the brutal and fierce ways of the werewolf did anything to prepare him for Lisebethe’s subtle manipulations. In short order, he was completely under her thrall. He reports to her not only on the activities of himself, his cell and its lycanthropic targets, but also whatever else he learns about the cells of Aegis Kai Doru. Lisebethe’s control of Sebastian is so encompassing that he doesn’t even realize he’s being used — he fancies himself in love with a delightful goth-girl who cares enough about him to take a genuine (if sometimes naïve) interest in his research and work.

Appearance: Sebastian is a slightly overweight man in his mid-20s. He’s spent his entire life in academia, and has little in the way of physical skills beyond basic self-defense taught by the organization. His vision is naturally good, although he’s taken to wearing the Relic glasses whenever he’s doing research. He tends to wear jeans and button-down shirts with the tails untucked to better hide his “spare tire.”

Since meeting Lisebethe, he’s begun to take more care with his appearance, cutting his normally scraggly hair into a neat, short style and making certain his socks match and his shirt is clean. He tries for her, but doesn’t really have a great fashion sense.

Storytelling Hints: Sebastian is has no idea that he is utterly under Lisebethe’s supernatural influence. She has exerted her vampiric dominance over him, and uses her supernatural

will to brush away any concerns or contradictions that might pop up in his mind about her. He goes about his work for the Aegis Kai Doru, and in his spare time, helps her with “homework” projects (he assumed she was a college student looking for tutoring when they first met, and she has fostered that misconception since). Although he is, in his heart, entirely loyal to the organization and his cell, he is acting as an unwitting mole for Lisebeth, providing whatever information she desires about his activities. Lisebeth has allowed him to retain the Relic glasses, knowing that in his hands they are a more useful tool than if she reclaimed them.

Relic: Kirkestede's Lenses (•)

Looking more like a pair of monocles attached together with a hinge that bridges the nose, Kirkestede's Lenses is an example of the integration of early technology in eyewear with supernatural enhancement. Credited to Henry of Kirkestede, a 14th-century English librarian, the bronze and quartz glasses do nothing to aid the wearer's ocular ability (in fact, they obscure it slightly beyond reading distance). They do, however, aid dramatically in a researcher's duties.

Benefit: Anyone donning the glasses and spending a point of Willpower in concentration gains +2 on all research related rolls for that scene. Likewise, their reading (and comprehension) speed is doubled for the scene, effectively halving the time period required for any extended research action. (See “Research,” pp. 55–56 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). And finally, any challenges to memorize material read during a scene where the glasses are worn and activated are made at a +2 bonus. (See “Memorizing and Remembering,” pp. 44–45 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**.)

Unfortunately for aspiring scholars, using the Lenses has drawbacks as well. A character wearing the glasses, whether activated or not, is at a -2 penalty for all actions requiring sight at anything other than close reading distance. As well, he is at a -4 penalty to reflexive rolls against being surprised.

Fallen Hunters

The Vigil often calls hunters to jobs no human was meant to do. Mentally, emotionally, physically and morally, the duties of a hunt take a heavy toll on every hunter. Some weather it better than others. One of the benefits of belonging to a cell is having others who understand the downward spiral and can help buoy a hunter before he slips entirely beneath the suffocating surface of moral degeneration. Unfortunately, not every hunter has the camaraderie of her cell when the fateful moment arrives, and the line between hunter and monster is crossed without the benefit of her fellow hunters to urge her back from the darkness.

Serena, the Siren

Quote: “Hush, now...Don't worry, this won't hurt.”

Background: Serena's first 30 years were right out of a storybook. She married her high school sweetheart and studied to become a child psychologist. After graduation, they purchased a house in the suburbs, bought a dog and had a couple of beautiful children. Her husband even retired to stay

home with the kids while she set up her private practice. Everything was going great until the day Billy showed up on her appointment list.

Billy's family had been horrifically slaughtered by an unknown assailant who, miraculously, left the seven-year-old unharmed. As Serena questioned the child, he became irritated and began answering her in a voice that was much older than his own. Deep scratch marks appeared on his skin without any tangible cause, and when Serena called for assistance, the boy leapt at her, sinking nails and teeth into her shoulder before falling to the ground, unconscious. Shaken, she remanded the boy back into child protective services custody, and recommended that he be committed to a mental facility for observation.

That night, as Serena watched the video tapes of the counseling session in her home office, something attacked her from behind, knocking her unconscious. She awoke to the sounds of arcane chanting and furniture being overturned. As she crawled from her office to the sounds of the fight, a hunter cell was trapping the evil entity that had possessed Billy into a glowing orb. Unfortunately for Serena, the Loyalists of Thule squad arrived too late. The creature had killed her entire family — her husband, two children, even the family pets — in their sleep.

Serena was brought to the Loyalist facilities, where she was indoctrinated into the organization and given the opportunity to protect others from fates such as the one that had befallen her (and Billy's) family. Any cell Serena joined, however, seemed cursed with bad luck, losing twice as many members as the average cell. She grew to believe that she had been tainted by the creature possessing Billy's bite, and that she drew bad fortune to the group. Each loss bore heavier on her psyche until the day when the entire rest of her cell was killed on a mission that Serena herself escaped without a scratch. The death of her cellmates broke the last threads of sanity Serena possessed, and she lost all grasp of reality. She has turned from hunter to monster, believing herself to be a living omen of doom. She haunts the dark alleys and dangerous places of the city, doling out death as she sees fit, often with no discernible rhyme or reason to outsiders.

Appearance: Serena is lithe and slim to the point of gauntness. Always athletic, after her family's death she began exercising constantly as a means of dealing with the guilt of being a survivor. She has honed her body to an incredible degree, and this, coupled with her absolute lack of a sense of self-preservation, makes her a formidable foe in hand-to-hand conflicts.

Serena dresses all in black, wearing her hair cropped short and no makeup. She chooses utilitarian clothing designed not to interfere with her self-perceived duties.

Storytelling Hints: Serena is quite mad. She no longer thinks of herself as a person, but rather a walking embodiment of fate, as undeniable as death itself. She goes about her work with a sense of pride and duty, taking pleasure in making the end as swift and merciful as possible for her victims. The method she uses for choosing them, however, is a mystery that she alone knows the answer to.

During her time in the Loyalists, she learned a variety of martial skills, but she also makes strong use of her psychologi-

SERENA THE SIREN FALLEN HUNTER

Profession: Vagrant

Organization: None (Formerly Loyalists of Thule)

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 4, Resolve 5

Physical Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 5, Stamina 4

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics 3, Computer 2, Investigation 2, Medicine 5 (Psychology), Occult 2, Science 2

Physical Skills: Athletics 4 (Running), Brawl 4 (Strangle), Firearms 2, Larceny 2, Stealth 4, Survival 3 (Urban), Weaponry 4

Social Skills: Empathy 3, Intimidation 1, Persuasion 2, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 4

Merits: Danger Sense, Fast Reflexes 2, Fighting Finesse, Fleet of Foot 2, Fresh Start

Willpower: 8

Morality: 1

Virtue: Fortitude

Vice: Pride

Initiative: 10

Defense: 4

Speed: 16

Health: 9

cal training, anticipating others' reactions to ensure each situation hews as close as possible to the way she's planned it.

While she has no compunction at all about killing innocent men, women or children, she prefers not to steal from her victims. She lives in abandoned buildings and either eats at food banks or kills animals (rats, cats, dogs, rabbits) in the countryside.

Siren takes small trophies from each of her victims as a form of remembrance. An earring, a lock of hair, a child's toy — each is carefully archived along with the rest of her collection in a duffel bag that she carries with her when traveling.

Pretenders

Hunters with any kind of broad perspective are most aware of five different kinds of Pretenders: monsters that pass easily for human beings. The easier a monster thinks it blends in, the more likely it is to come out and mingle...and that's where canny hunters spot them.

That doesn't mean these creatures are the most common, or that hunters can properly tell the difference. They're the things that wear human skin, their own or otherwise. They're the beasts that lurk in your grandmother's bed.

Throughout these entries, you'll find the Inside Track on each monster. This is information that hunters might piece together, given unlimited resources, reliable informants and an unending Vigil. In other words, it's full of ambiguity and

lies, and also some truths the monsters themselves don't know or understand. In addition, you'll get a brief glimpse into how a given pretender society might exist at tiers similar to hunters (tier one being very personal, tier two being broader but still local, and tier three being something more widespread or even "global").

Finally, you'll find a section on just how to kill the monsters. There are a few tried and true tricks for each. Places to start for people who kill. In practice, though, a successful cell is going to have to devise its own tactics and weapons for each adversary.

Changelings

She is everything you want. She is absolutely mad. And she is not your daughter anymore.

People go missing every day. Runaways, abductees, deadbeats, whoever. Sometimes they come back. There are smiles and tears and years of therapy. Happy endings get Oprah, sad ones get Dateline. But sometimes they come back *wrong*, and that's who changelings are: beings that hunters believe have been taken away and replaced (or possessed) by spirits from the darkest fairy tales.

The changelings live and look like us, but they're not human anymore. Catch one with the edge of your eye and you'll see his curving horns or pointed tail, the gifts and scars given him by his otherworldly masters. Changelings are alien things of madness and beauty, offering glories with one hand

and picking your pocket with the other.

They've servants, too, "fetches" who live their ordinary lives while the Changelings celebrate strange festivals and accomplish their inscrutable work. Who are these things, rebuilt, released and unleashed upon the unsuspecting world? They don't know, and hunters shouldn't presume to.

Powers of Dreams and Nightmares

All changelings are bound to one particular emotion, and they can gain Willpower from prominent displays of that emotion (and a "display" necessitates some kind of action, not just a vocal expression). Roll the changeling's Wits + Resolve to determine how many Willpower points can be gained (one success equals one Willpower point). This can be done once per day.

Changelings can also invade the dreams of mortals: simply by spending a Willpower point and touching the sleeper, the changeling can do damn near anything with a dream: turn it to a nightmare, infuse it with meaningful (or meaningless) prophecy, convey messages, make it lusty, or anything her mind can concoct.

Common Dread Powers include (but are not limited to) Ecstasy, Dement, New Face, Strange Form, Unholy Attribute (Dexterity, Manipulation, Wits).

Inside Track

Changelings do have otherworldly "masters," but their relationships with these regents are convoluted, at best. Most changelings claim to have escaped or been freed, but the mighty Fairies don't really seem the type to lose track of either. Get a changeling talking and things get even more confusing. If the Fairy Kings are as omnipotent as they seem, why the abductions or the vanguards? Is the entire changeling phenomenon a front for something more bizarre? Certainly a lot of what they describe sounds more than a little like alien abductions. Changelings might even be the free agents they claim...making them among the most unpredictable and dangerous foes a hunter can face.

Some are hunting each other, others are mobilizing armies...and exactly who's going to end up skewered on those fairy-spears changes from sentence to sentence and season to season. There's a good chance that the glitter-junkies are the first wave of an ultra-terrestrial invasion force...and it's almost impossible to tell whether they know it or not.

Even though they look human, most changelings exhibit off-kilter traits: some exude feral musks, some are large and brutish like ogres, others still seem to attract flies or have madness in their gazes. Glimpse them sideways and you might see the maggots for eyes, the bristling fur at the nape of the neck, the green hands big enough to palm and crush a hunter's head.

At tier one, changelings are a largely unique phenomenon. They don't really work together. They're either monsters masquerading as their old human selves or they're instead trying to reclaim some semblance of a lost life, like a ghost that grows restless with hopes unfulfilled. They tend to fall to the bottom of the barrel, at this tier, though: homeless, addicted,

crazy, criminal, or otherwise in some gutter or another.

At tier two, changelings gather together in what they call "freeholds," groups who work to protect themselves. They form small, militant bands or roving packs of dream-stealers. It's less about ideology here and more about getting what they want or protecting themselves from worse creatures.

At the third tier, they seem to form what might be considered Courts — some based on the seasons, some based on directions or other temporal distinctions (night, day, moons, months). They submit to the will of strange fairy lords and carve out little kingdoms of madness and beauty. These kingdoms seem to connect to kingdoms of other cities, forming a broad global "monarchy" of sorts...but one wonders, does that mean a great Fairy King or Queen lords over all the changelings of the world? What could such a figure of alluring horror want with this world?

Plucking Their Wings

Changelings seem to be human and seem to die like humans, but that doesn't mean they're easy to deal with. They're slippery. Clever. They know how to hide, how to make deals, how to get others to protect them. Changelings have a weakness: iron. Iron doesn't cause them more damage than anything else, but it bypasses all Defense and armor (both mystical and mundane).

That said, some changelings seem to have bans like demons. Changelings with Willpower scores of 8 to 10 take one Ban (Ban of task, Ban of torment, as under "Demons" above) per dot of Willpower (to a maximum of three, one at 8, one at 9, one at 10). These bans are often tied to some kind of folklore about fairies: cannot abide the sound of bells, must do the bidding of someone who says their name backward, cannot cross a door marked with an iron horseshoe, etc.

Shakes

Quote: *You want to share a butt, hear a story?*

Background: Shakes runs the register at the Food Lion. Allegedly, anyway. Co-workers cover for her a lot — about half as often as they gossip about her.

Everybody knows there's something wrong with Shakes. That's why they call her that. She shakes all the time, even when she's turkey-bowling with the night stockers. Like there's just this chill she can't get rid of, or like something unseen keeps tickling the back of her neck. Maybe it's that little cigarette burn there. Some of her co-workers think she's a junkie. Others figure she has some bad shit back home. She doesn't talk about it, and she always seems just a little too fragile to ask. Who'd want to make Shakes cry?

Every so often, though, someone does ask. They don't show up for work the next day. They don't show up for work again ever. And if you catch her at the right moment, you'll find Shakes smoking a cigarette by the meat freezers, crying until it's a little stub and she stamps it out on her arm. Just to feel warm.

Shakes — Camilla Lucille Freeman — is one of those missing girls who'll never be found. At 12 years old, she was taken to another world by an angel made of icicles and hoarfrost, and she spent five long years studying at his frozen feet and learning his strange sorceries. They were all meaningless rhymes, at least to her. Every day, the angel threatened to crack the icy floor beneath her,



“SHAKES”



Mental: Intelligence 2, Wits 4, Resolve 2

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2

Social: Presence 3, Manipulation 3, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Crafts 1, Investigation 2, Medicine 1, Occult 1

Physical Skills: Athletics (Flee) 3, Larceny (Pickpocket) 4, Survival 1

Social Skills: Empathy 2, Expression 2, Persuasion 1, Socialize 3, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 1

Merits: Allies (other changelings) 3, Danger Sense, Direction Sense, Fleet of Foot 3

Willpower: 4

Morality: 7

Virtue: Hope

Vice: Sloth

Health: 7

Initiative: 6

Defense: 2

Speed: 14

Dread Powers: New Face 2, Lurker in Darkness 2, Strange Form (Ice-encased limbs, +3 Dexterity, +1 Strength) 2

Special

Knock, Knock: Shakes can use any door to earn her escape. She simply knocks on the door, spends a Willpower point and steps through. Hunters might see a glimpse of thorns or a dark forest, but if they follow through, they go wherever the door is supposed to go (bathroom, closet, outside, whatever). Shakes, though, went...somewhere else. She can appear out of any door this way, too, though only doors she's actually been through previously.



to entomb her with all the others she could see, their breath clouding the ice, smeared by fingerprints and desperate faces.

He never did, though. She never gave him the chance. One day, her 17th birthday, she snapped off one of the angel's icicle toes and stabbed herself through the heart with it. Her heart's blood was red and hot and endless. It melted away the floors and the prisoners and all of her prison, and Camilla found herself shivering not far from home.

Appearance: In her own washed-out way, Shakes is beautiful. The dishwater hair, the dreamy eyes, the skin that never seems to blemish. And she's little, too—five foot two and rounded in a way that makes everybody want to look out for her.

Storytelling Hints: Shakes still has the icicle in her heart. That's probably why she shivers. Or maybe it's because she knows what happens when she opens up. She can't resist

telling her story, not when someone asks. She cries hot tears and she opens her heart, and her poor audience can't help but listen and feel the icy stab in their own heart. Is she just manipulating them? Or is she honestly this sad?

The Reanimated

Some things should not be attempted.

This is the deal: sometimes, a rough semblance of life can be charged into a days-dead corpse or even a collection of ill-stitched parts, and that monster will tear its way free from the examination table, and smart money says that the creature won't be happy. It doesn't know who it is or where it came from; it only knows that somehow, the spark of life has been cast into it and yet the soul to go with it hasn't. They're hol-

low men and women, in no way the body they inhabit; in all ways a simple being straight out of that Mary Shelley novel.

Most pretenders take power from something outside themselves. Vampires steal our blood. Changelings are transformed by passages through paradises and labyrinths—probably the same places from which mages call forth their evil. The Reanimated, though, are different. They don't need to eat...trash or twigs'll do them as well as a Big Mac. They don't tire...just lair up a while to figure where they're going.

In a word, they're powered from *within*, and that's what makes them so horrible. Inside each Frankenstein's monster is a little reactor of hate and destruction, an unquenchable fire that slowly burns the world around us. Everywhere they go, these golems and zombies cause strange events and leave spiritual scars.

Anybody who gazes upon one can't help but feel the pity, the hate, the rage. Is it so sad that you just want to beat its poor face in with a shovel? Is it just so unnatural that its only future lies on the autopsy table? Is it just so pretty you want to hold it and hug and it until you've wrenched its head off its neck? The Reanimated stir emotions that are unnatural. They surely don't mean to, because those emotions seem pointed at *them*. Worse, at rare times, a hunter will see the creature for what it really is...dead skin, sloppy stitches, porcelain face...but only for a moment. The difference this time? So can everyone around you.

Powers of Reanimation

Reanimated don't need to eat anything but what's in front of them (roadkill, garbage, moldering leaves), don't suffer from diseases and don't worry about penalties caused from fatigue. Worse, they can heal levels of damage by feeding electricity into their own bodies (which makes sense when you picture Frankenstein on the slab, lightning coursing through his mortified flesh). One damage from electricity heals a bashing point, and two damage from electricity heals a lethal point. Note that, when healing or using any Dread Powers, the Reanimated lose any human illusion and appear as the grotesque, stitched monstrosities they truly are.

Common Dread Powers include (but are not limited to) Giant Size, Strange Form, Terrify, Tendrils, Unholy Attribute (Resolve, Stamina, Composure)

The Inside Track

The Reanimated are actually human bodies reanimated through any one of many arcane or alchemical surgeries. Sometimes, they're made by human beings, most often as proxies for lost children or lovers. Other times, they're made by their own kind, who have an almost obsessive desire to create partners and companions.

Some are huge, furious brutes, like Frankenstein's monster. Others are broken succubi with alabaster flesh almost as smooth as graveyard marble. Quite a few of these cobbled-together living corpses seem to seek a human life or a human soul (which, to a hunter, might be worth a moment of sorrow, or might just stir further revulsion), but just as many are happy to let the world rot around them...possibly even seeking to tear it all down themselves.

Most Reanimated gather at the first tier — they wander alone or in rough groups, passing through towns and cities like so many shades and mad wanderers. Their goals are so intensely personal and morbidly quixotic that they can become very curious antagonists in a story because of their desires.

At the second tier, the Reanimated maybe start to gather. They start to develop philosophies; they trade writings and leave weird messages for one another scrawled on walls. They entertain something called "The Pilgrimage," some sloughing journey toward becoming more or less like humanity. They might tie themselves to mortal sorcerers or alchemists, even other so-called "demiurges" who would or could give life to more Reanimated.

The Reanimated at tier three represent an organized movement, degrading zombie armies following their alchemy-based philosophies (refining death into life, the soulless into the souled). Because of their effects on the world and people, they must truly gather en masse and, by dint of this, cause massive riots, cataclysmic weather and swift decay on a widespread scale.

Setting Things Right

Hunting the Reanimated is easier than one might think. Hunters can get friends, the police, even a whole community on their side, with only the flimsiest of lies about what it is they're hunting. And the hunters might start to believe their own lies, and why is that, exactly? Because the Reanimated aren't meant to exist. They should be dead, and this gross contravention of natural law leaves both people and the world around them hating them unnecessarily.

Anybody who comes into contact with a Reanimated must succeed on a Resolve + Composure roll versus 10 minus the creature's own Resolve + Composure pool (to a minimum of 1 die). If the human succeeds, he is *not* filled with detestation and abhorrence toward the monster. If the monster succeeds, he stirs within the human a powerful loathing that manifests as any number of dark emotions (hatred, abuse, mob justice, tainted love, utter disgust). The human must act on those emotions (think the torch-bearing mobs pounding on the doors of Castle Frankenstein). Whole communities can rise up swiftly and suddenly to destroy or cast out such a creature. In a way, it gives hunters the edge, but sometimes those dark emotions linger if they can't put the creature down.

This is made worse by the fact that any place a Reanimated stays in for more than a day starts to "go bad." Bad weather rolls in. Items and buildings start to rot. People get cancer. The longer the creature stays, and the more of them that stay there...well, the worse it gets. Then again, this makes it easy to find where such a being might be hiding. Just look for the hurricane's eye or the most decrepit building in town.

Putting down a Reanimated isn't easy. They're tough, strong, or just know how to stay hidden. But some hunter stories say that fire does the trick really well. For as much as electricity heals them, fire seems to do quite the opposite (doing aggravated damage).

That said, if a hunter can stomach it, Reanimated make surprisingly good informants. They tend to be starved for human conversation, and are willing to ramble on a long while. And because they tend to create and attract unnatural events, they can often



SEWER BILLY



Mental: Intelligence 2, Wits 2, Resolve 4

Physical: Strength 4, Dexterity 2, Stamina 5

Social: Presence 2, Manipulation 1, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Investigation 1, Medicine 2, Occult 2

Physical Skills: Brawl (Grapple) 4, Larceny 1, Stealth (Darkness) 3, Survival 3, Weaponry 2

Social Skills: Empathy (Women) 4, Intimidation 4

Merits: Giant, Meditative Mind, Strong Back, Strong Lungs

Willpower: 8

Morality: 6

Virtue: Temperance

Vice: Lust

Health: 11

Initiative: 6

Defense: 2

Speed: 11

Dread Powers: Tendrils (Whips of liquid mud), Unholy Attribute (Stamina) 4

Special

Ghost Touch: By spending a Willpower point, Sewer Billy can see, commune with and even touch all ghosts or non-corporeal entities as if they were physically manifested.



provide useful information and a broad (if skewed) perspective on the World of Darkness as a whole.

Finally, the Reanimated make great distractions and patsies. While the mob's chasing Frankenstein with a torch, who's going to notice you burning down Dracula's nightclub?

Sewer Billy

Quote: I'm keeping quiet down here. Please leave me alone.

Background: Billy awoke in a murky pond, his mud-streaked face covered in algae, his half-rotten fingers bitten by fish and worms. He remembers nothing before that moment, and is mostly content to keep it that way.

He's been wandering this earth for a good five years now, leaving depression and slothfulness in his wake. Wherever Billy goes, things seem to shut down. Electronics don't work right. Cars have trouble starting. Entropy takes hold.

Lately, he's been made his lair in the nest of tunnels beneath the city, confident that nobody would know of his presence. Two problems with that: first, over time, the sewer tunnels have begun to degrade and now foul runoff is bubbling up

all over the city; second, he thinks he's fallen in love. See, this girl who works at the movie theater counter not far from his favorite sewer drain, well, it's driven him to the surface more than once to gaze at her from afar. But people don't seem to like that. Soon, they might come after Billy. Soon, hunters may be born out of this hatred.

Appearance: He's doughy, dirty, bald and he smells. Whenever he uses a Dread Power, his corpselike features become more prominent, and his face seems made of blood, bone and mud.

Storytelling Hints: Billy's not a bad "man," but he gets sad and he gets angry and he just wants somebody to love. Maybe he can come to terms with the fact that nobody loves him, or maybe he'll just start breaking necks.

Sorcerers and Witches

He looks like he's down. Look again, for what falls may rise and the witch always lies.

Sorcerers and magicians think they're human. Witches don't suffer the hungers of the undead or the scars of the lost, so the bastards think they're just like every other hunter. Obviously, they're wrong. They've built towers of Babel and signed their names where only God's belongs. They gather in filthy cloisters and work gory rites...all in the name of human potential. As if there's anything human about twisting time to vanish your rivals or crushing minds to fill your purse. The wizards have vast powers and use them to satisfy their basest desires.

Most speak openly of the pursuit of knowledge, of their holy quest to unlock the secrets of the cosmos and all that lies beyond. But they pry secrets from the mouths of rivals with pliers, study for years under honored masters and then stab them in the back. Vampires hunt out of hunger; witches stalk each other for power. And the bastards are proud of it.

Powers of Magic

Who knows where a witch gets his power? One magician says he gets his power from some lost and fallen civilization: Thule, Mu, Hyperborea, Atlantis. Another says he earned his from brokering deals with dragons or demons, while a third says he was given his at some watchtower made of thorn or bone. Some seem to avoid all that nonsense and carve their own paths to magic: hoeing hard rows with secret rituals and esoteric ceremonies.

Magic, for the most part, can be duplicated as a number of the Dread Powers contained within. Some sorcerers can cast the Dread Powers as they read. Others, though, must first perform some strange ritual or ceremony to achieve the effect: burning a lock of the target's hair before using Dement, forming a hand out of wax and then burning it to use Agonize, and so forth. Assume that these lesser witches must perform a ritual like this the scene before performing the Dread Power, or otherwise are unable to achieve the desired effect.

Common Dread Powers include (but are not limited to)...well, pretty much any of them. Magic is frighteningly limitless to those who know how to control it. Of course, magic requires the expenditure of one's will to achieve, and will is not limitless...

Inside Track

For many mages, the powers they wield seem to divide them into several different camps or paths (but aren't limited to these):

Necromancers: These witches rule the dead with words of lead. Anger one, and end up not only haunted, but with the very matter of the earth turning against you. Despite their beating hearts, necromancers are implacable foes to anything that lives.

Priests: Deft hands with the sterile forces of physics or the primal magic of life, these creatures allege loyalty to higher powers...but are as cruel and fractious as any of their kind.

Psychics: They look like you. They talk like you. But they can, with naught but a thought, see the past, speak to ghosts, predict the future or snap your wrist bones by blinking.

Ritualists: They carve their magic out of occult tradition and otherworldly ritual gleaned from bad books and weird web sites. Their magic is not theirs: they steal it for a time, forcing it to heel with brutal or bizarre ceremonies.

Warlocks: Masters of nature and fate, wizards red in tooth and claw. They command as familiars the beasts of the woods, and hunt their prey as savagely with packs of demons or hounds.

At tier one, a witch exists unconnected to any community except maybe those within her cabal. They work for themselves or for some larger purpose, but this cause isn't supported by any. Many are selfish, existing as obsessed academics in the ivory towers of gilded educational institutions or as dark-hearted occultists grasping into the dark for true power.

At tier two, the sorcerers likely gather together in odd guilds of magic and academia. Some might work out of shared laboratories or libraries; others form occult covenants to protect or exploit mystical spaces (graveyards, standing stones, famed murder sites, a series of tunnels said to be carved out by some goliath parasite). Their grasp for power is perhaps just as selfish, but it is supported by more than one cult or cabal.

At tier three, who knows how the deeply this occulted crusade has rooted itself in the everyday goings-on of global concerns? Magic is, in theory, a limitless power, and the orders and armies of magicians likely exist at every stratum, tugging the puppet strings of political figures, business icons, celebrities and socialites. While at this level, the individual sorcerer may still be capable of doing good, when working in huge agencies, it becomes difficult for any kind of righteousness to shine through. Selfishness takes the helm as magic subtly warps the world.

Blowing Out the Lamp

Witches talk about their "winding ways" and "silver ladders" — the path to ultimate power they'd all like to find. When a hunter needs to knock 'em back a step or down a rung, surprise is key. Whether the cell is dealing with violence, meticulous scheming or social manipulation, a mage's greatest powers all come from preparation.

What can they do when they're prepared? Anything. As in "anything" anything. Move mountains. Banish people to custom-built hells. Multiply cancers in the blink of an eye. And that's all without phoning a friend.

Veteran hunters give this advice: once a wizard has his evil eye on you, do what you'd do with any other dangerous stranger. Get out in front of as many people as possible, and draw some attention to yourself. By some stroke of luck, wizardry doesn't work so well in public. When mages try to use their abilities in front of the general public, higher forces sometimes try to strike them down. Even been known to save hunters the first time or two. Though others conspiratorially whisper that magic sometimes works in ways you can't see, as invisible as a breath of poison gas; strange coincidences occur, such as someone flicking a cigarette onto a trickled stream of gas (whoosh!) or a witch whose lottery tickets always come up winners. Caution's still a good idea, though, since death by magic's a bad way to go and magic isn't always flagrant in its witchery. A lunatic witch turns your insides out. A wise one makes that murder look like natural causes.

Often, negotiation is the better part of valor. Mages tend to be willing to make bargains, especially if they get something out of the deal. Stuck between a witch and a hard place, offer anything. Then start hoping you never get asked for it.

Cabal: Radio Free Death

Late night, not many cars on the road and not much on the radio. You've got miles to go before you sleep, and somehow you end up tuned into one of the jazz stations. Jazz fades to blues and the highway rhythm evens out to fit, and you start to think about your own problems. About him, about how it shouldn't be that way. About how you could have done better by him or better than him or both at once. The horns and smoky voices are keeping you company on the long drive and, well, guess there's room for your sorrows in the passenger seat.

And that's when the DJ comes on, smooth and comforting like the crackle on a vinyl record.

...and I guess he's not the only out there missing somebody, am I right? I'd like to thank that caller, and let anybody out there feeling that ol' ache in their heart know they're not alone. Lot of good men and women out there, and we've all done some wrong things, caused some pain. And that's all right. Let's just share that. I've got a request from Cindi out in Bethesda, and she wants her man to know...

Some more tracks. Maybe the occasional schmaltzy pop number in there, but it's not so out of place, not among the songs about heartbreak and regret, and maybe you never really gave it a chance before. You start to wonder if you can set things right. He won't take you back, no, and she won't forgive you, but, you know, maybe...

...late, I know, and I hope you don't mind me saying I think God's with each and every one of us tonight. Not being pushy, but, well, we could all use a little nudge, couldn't we? When we can just keep coasting, or we can take things into our own hands. Do a little something to make the world better. And maybe stop the pain...

He's right. They didn't deserve what you did. The tears are stinging, must mean they just started. And the lights are going by, one by one, the radio guy's right. You're just coasting. Your headlights reflect off the end of the guardrail.

...a little nudge from, well, you don't want to hear me talk about the Lord. A higher power, maybe. And I think he wants you to take that leap. Go ahead.

And you signal. You swerve left, still perfect calm as the car tumbles down the hill and through the trees. And the last thing you hear, right before that branch goes through your skull, is that smoky, comfy voice.

...WRFD, Radio Free Death, signing off.

Listen to the Radio

The Voice of the Afterlife wants its audience to cross over. Really. Things are better here. Outside the physical world of heartbreak and love and pain. Peaceful. Ever have a breakup, then hear that one song that tells the whole story? That's what it's like, listening to Radio Free Death. And the razor or the pill bottle or whatever will hold the same attraction it did that one wonderful awful moment.

The suicide signal strikes a perfect balance between the human emotional spectrum and the broadcast regions assigned by the FCC. Which really makes it sound like something VALKYRIE or Cheiron would have cooked up as an experiment. Turns out, though, it's the work of a necromancer cult that thought it knew exactly what it was doing.

Some witches believe their powers come from the ruins of the towers with which their ancestors laid siege to Heaven. Correspondence plays a big role in their ritual, which brings us to the brainchild of Carl Hager. Hager was the kind of kid who would always design bigger than he could build. As a kid, he always needed more Legos. As an engineering student, he always needed somebody else to work out the pesky details. The story of his initiation as a necromancer doesn't really bear repeating; let's just say that it was a difficult time, and his girlfriend had recently crossed over.

Carl knew from other wizards that there was a basic framework to the spirit realms, and he started to approach it his own way; as a structural model. The forces involved were esoteric, of course, but they could be modeled. Provided he found someone to do the math. That was Amy Winter, a confirmed technocrat and Carl's link to that ambiguously defined mystical brotherhood.

The project took shape over a few years: the Watchtower of Lead, Stronghold of Death and Unending Peace, could be modeled in a primitive, three-dimensional reality...and then the real thing could be superimposed on creation. Instead of scraping magic in bits and pieces from higher realms, Carl, Amy and their growing cult could tap mystic power right from the source.

They drove a few miles out of town and reconstructed an abandoned radio transmitter. The project was large, and it required floating some dubious checks to some confused contractors, but it got finished. One appropriately dark and stormy night, they held a ritual in the old control room, 10 feet underground. They fired up every dial, they chanted their words of power...

...and it worked. Within the established parameters, anyway. The transmitter was an accurate model of the Watchtower of Death...but the Watchtower itself is still no more than a ruin. A lonely, hungry ruin. The five witches became part of the conduit, with all the power they could ever want, but only the tower's primitive needs to guide them, and only their human shells to channel it.

**CARL HAGER****Mental:** Intelligence 5, Wits 4, Resolve 4**Physical:** Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2**Social:** Presence 1, Manipulation 2, Composure 2**Mental Skills:** Academics 2, Computer (CAD) 3, Investigation 2, Science (Engineering) 4**Physical Skills:** Brawl 1, Larceny 2, Stealth 3, Survival 1, Weaponry (Common Tools) 1**Social Skills:** Empathy 4, Expression 1, Intimidation 3**Merits:** Iron Stamina, Quick Healer, Toxin Resistance, Unseen Sense (Ghosts)**Willpower:** 6**Morality:** 3**Virtue:** Faith**Vice:** Envy**Health:** 7**Initiative:** 5**Defense:** 3**Speed:** 10**Dread Powers:** Judgment of Guilt 5, Ride Corpse**Special**

Summon Specter: All the Programmers may summon the ghosts of people lured by the Station at will, at a cost of 1 Willpower per scene. The ghosts serve the Station through the Programmers, and receive a +3 Manifestation bonus as specified in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 210.

Radio Free Death is a living thing, and it's claiming more victims every week. Suicide rates have increased — they're spiking, even for this time of year. To those with a prosaic mindset, it's just the world getting worse. To hunters, especially cells that watch numbers closely, there are obvious reasons to consider a supernatural source.

Tech and Consequences

Radio Free Death is essentially a pirate station, overriding a weak area of the AM spectrum in the area around the city where your chronicle takes place. The signals themselves are real, and anybody can pick them up — but only people with the right mix of melancholia and death wish can hear anything but static.

Network Zero hunters are ideal candidates to track the mystery of the pirate station, as are any first-tier hunters. All it takes is figuring out the right spectrum. Task Force: VALKYRIE has the equipment right there on the shelf (fresh from Operation: SOLOMON's signals intelligence work in Iraq) and Cheiron's got the budget to blow if it thinks the effect can be controlled.

Finally, there's an awful lot of plain old electricity in the air around the transmitter, and that freaks out the weather patterns a bit. It could also tip off or mislead ghost hunters using EM measurement devices.

The Programmers

Carl, Amy and their cabal haven't fared well. On the one hand, they're wired right into the source of their magic. On the other hand, it's overridden their faculties almost completely, and it's starting to do a job on their bodies' basic functions. They're not zombies, by a long shot, but they've become the Programmers, slave-priests of the Station and the Watchtower.

Their skin is, in patches, waxy or dry but uniformly white, and their eyes gaze out of deep, yellowing hollows. In contrast with the Station's smooth, seductive voice, they rarely speak, instead communicating telepathically or with hand signals.

Carl Hager**Quote:** *quiet mumbling***Background:** See above.

Appearance: Carl is pasty, with dark eyes beneath dark eyebrows. If he weren't solid, you'd think him a ghost. Teeth and nails too yellow, lips too pink, skin too ashen.

Storytelling Hints: A hunter might see sadness in Carl's eyes. There's no telling if this is what he really wanted or what he truly thought would happen, but he seems lost to it, mostly resigned, but with a spark of *what have I done?* And yet he still zealously serves the necro-signal.

Vampires

When you hunt a vampire, make a list. Write down everything it'll hurt you to lose. And when all those things are gone, eat your gun before you find out what they're taking next.

Van Helsing. Beowulf. These hunters help define the literature of the Vigil. And who did they hunt? Men who feasted on other men, who overcame death just to spread it around. When the sun sets and the night comes, the living dead appear and claim the city for their own. They're human, all right, but with humanity stripped down to the sharp edges and killer instincts. They're faster, they're crueler, and damn it, they're prettier.

Vampires want to be safe and well fed, the same basic needs their prey have. But they have to go pretty far to fill those needs. Most of them need human blood, and they've only got a few hours a night to get it. They tend to look for stability: regular Lucys to tap and Harkers to handle their business. They often make these people into half-vampires, blood-junkies who can still walk around in the daylight. Those are the targets you compromise. Addiction and affection are powerful forces, but a manipulative hunter can turn a mortal servant into a double agent.

The worst thing about vampires is how well they understand people. Death's only brought into relief their few attachments to life, and they know too well how to manipulate those attachments in others.

Powers of the Blood

All vampires have the Drain Dread Power, with dots in that determined roughly by their age (for every 50 years dead, assume they gain an additional dot in Drain). Most drink blood, but some seem capable of consuming other elements (memory, dreams, flesh) to gain Willpower, instead. They use Drain, therefore, to gain Willpower to fuel their Dread Powers. Note that each Willpower taken in this way (via the bite) incurs one lethal damage. (See "Bite," p. 157, **World of Darkness Rulebook**.) Vampires can spend Willpower to heal, meaning they effectively repair their own bodies by consuming the bodies (blood) of others: one Willpower heals two bashing or one lethal; aggravated cannot be healed. Oh, and bullets only cause bashing damage to vampires.

Common Dread Powers include (but are not limited to) Agonize, Ecstasy, Fury, Hypnotism, Impress, Unholy Attribute (Dexterity, Stamina, Strength).

Inside Track

Vampires hate each other for life and love each other to death. They're loners crammed together by their fear of what's beyond the city lights and the fact that sometimes they need somebody with whom to hold hands. They call themselves the Damned and they call each other assholes. Once upon a time, there were seven dynasties of vampires. Today, the blood of the Damned is a great deal more muddled, but still flows in distinct, cursed lines...

Lovers: Tempters and seductresses, the kind that drag you out of seedy bars and drain you in your own backseat.

Good at getting physical any way you count it, they'll dodge your bullets, snap your neck, break your heart.

Savages: Cults of the wild, Zen thugs and experienced beatdown artists. They run free through the wild and run the city like it is the wild. If you feel their breath on your neck, it's because they want you to.

Bloodjackers: Most vampires are dead men preserved forever. Bloodjackers are something worse...mad corpses that keep walking past the point of decay and putrefaction. When their own bodies finally give out, their bite may spread the curse to another. Even other vampires seem to fear their blackened teeth and yellow owl eyes. (Think the howling things of *28 Days Later*, mindless but blood hungry.)

Horrors: They scare you. No, sorry, you don't get a choice. If you're not disgusted by their putrid odors or grotesque manners or thousand unique deformities, then they'll just reach inside your head and find something that does scare you. And beat your lizard-brain with it until you're a quivering mass of skin and bone and not much blood.

Aristocrats: The bosses of the bunch, or so they think. Sharksuit suits, shark-sharp teeth. Everyone falls at their feet — man or beast, living or dead.

While these seven have become little more than bickering families, vampires find common causes and reasons to work together. They gather with monsters of like mind, others who have overcome hunger and instinct to find some purpose (however grim) beyond themselves.

At tier one, vampires are little more than hardscrabble monsters who travel in packs and coteries. At this level, they have little social structure, and are mostly individuals either giving into the blood-thirst or trying as they might to resist it.

At tier two, vampires gather in small societies and cliques, usually bound only to the city in which they're formed. Small pagan cults, epicurean bloodlines, street or biker gangs, cabals of greedy moneymen, strange undead scientists, what-have-you.

Tier three sees the local phenomenon growing to a more global phenomenon: vampires bound up with the Catholic Church (or who at least believe themselves to be predators in the name of God), widespread adherents to some wretched blood-drinking goddess, a universal conspiracy of vampiric bankers, an army marshaling at the command of what they believe is Vlad Tepes or Dracula himself, and so on. Here, vampires control more, they're endemic, they're like a plague that exists invisibly and thus are very hard to remove.

Killing the Dead

Once a hunter knows what they are, she'll want to know how to kill them. Start with anything that hurts a human being, but keep in mind it probably won't work as well. Bullets rip up vampires real nice, but it's not like the bloodsuckers need those organs. Plus, most of the walking dead have mind-affecting powers...and even if they don't get you with 'em, they'll probably be able to sway any bystanders to their side.

If you can manage, stake the bloodsuckers before they know you're there. With their hearts properly pierced, they're

**COLNEL
GABRIEL DITILLO**

Apparent Age: Late 20s, obscured by layers of scar tissue.

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 4, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 4, Composure 5

Mental Skills: Academics 2, Investigation 2, Medicine (Field Medicine) 4, Occult 1, Science 1

Physical Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Drive 2, Firearms (Military Firearms) 4, Larceny 1, Stealth 3, Survival 4, Weaponry 3

Social Skills: Empathy 2, Intimidation (Enforcing Discipline) 5, Persuasion 5, Socialize 2

Merits: Allies (drug cartels) 3, Brawling Dodge, Fighting Style: Boxing 4, Contacts 2 (street gangs, DEA agents), Resources 4, Status (vampires) 3

Willpower: 6

Morality: 3

Virtue: Temperance

Vice: Wrath

Health: 10

Initiative: 6

Defense: 2

Speed: 10

Dread Powers: Crushing Blow, Drain (blood) 3, Dread Attack (fangs and claws) 3, Terrify 2

Special

Come to Me: Gabriel can summon anybody he's met simply by spending a Willpower point and succeeding on a Manipulation + Persuasion versus a subject's Composure. If he wins, that person will come to him any way they can, as fast as they can. They can spend a Willpower point to resist that for one night, but the summons comes again the following night.

catatonic and usually unable to strike back — though the vigilante are always careful of booby traps. Vampires are paranoid, and probably ready for tougher customers than hunters.

After that, dismemberment and fire. Cremation's double good — kills the monster and eliminates valuable forensic evidence. After all, some vampires still have legal identities of some legitimacy or another. (Note that fire does aggravated damage against vampires.)



Colonel Gabriel DiTillo

Quote: *Are you loyal to me? Can you be loyal to this face?*

Background: Some men are beloved, even when brutal. Argentine President Juan Peron was one such figure, and young Gabriel DiTillo grew up worshiping the Great Man. Peron's career was built on being everything to everyone, on promising a Camelot Argentina. He turned a soap opera actress into a goddess on Earth, and made sure his enemies were painted as the vilest of villains. Peron taught his own Golden Path between Capitalism and Socialism.

In 1949, during Peron's first presidency, DiTillo saw the president speak. Twelve years old, he strained to hear; he jostled his way to the front of a sweaty, excited crowd. And he saw two things: the president and an advanced jet aircraft, fresh off the assembly line. The sweat-shining man and the metal-shining plane. DiTillo became a believer. The next month, he moved to the city.

Industrial work was hard, and management badly mistreated the "black shirts," or rural workers. DiTillo joined the Army instead. Turned out he didn't mind hard work, as long as it was rough work, and he boasted that he'd never age as long as he had more scars than wrinkles. When exactly Gabriel became a vampire is up for debate. Suffice it to say that it doesn't seem to have changed his temperament overmuch.

Certainly, it was sometime in his late 20s, most likely during one of the several military coups that swept the country during the late 1960s and early 1970s. He claims to have been part of the unit responsible for Peron's escape into exile in 1955, but this is unlikely. What can be established is that he was leading a quasi-independent unit nicknamed Los Manos Negras by 1964, and that he was equally effective crushing insurgencies in urban and rural areas. The discipline and efficiency of his troops was respected throughout the Argentine army and the region, and he made several trips to the United States as a tactical consultant and for supplemental training — always on his own timetable. What Peron grasped at with a nation, Gabriel achieved with a small band of men. Utter worship, utter loyalty, utter domination. He was also renowned for the gruesome ends his rivals came to, and for the "forests of death" he would leave behind when Los Manos Negras swept through an area.

Colonel DiTillo's mistake was childhood loyalty. He supported Peron's abortive return to power in 1973. The return was a disaster, and most of his compatriots left the country in exile or coffins. Gabriel and some of Los Manos Negras left in both. Supported by allies in the United States, he was able to relocate pseudonymously to a wealthy American suburb, with a substantial bankroll.

For several years, Gabriel was able to maintain a steady role as a political consultant on South American affairs. However, as his mortal contacts have aged and died, he has found himself in less and less demand. Even his own scarred skin has failed to hide his lasting youth. Several of his Manos Negras still serve Gabriel as "The Colonel." Some are ghouls, others vampires, and even mortal security are kept addicted to his dead blood.

At great expense, the Colonel maintains three brides, or "Evitas," as he likes to refer to them. They are perfect,

statuesque, more dolls than women, each as identical as his merchants can provide. His jealousy keeps them within his mansion grounds, though they're known by the guards to be restless. The Colonel can't be too careful, though; each suffers his unique curse. No cut can be healed without an act of will, and any healed skin scars and festers. A single cut from a broken glass can spell death for an Evita.

The mansion, as secure a palace as suburban America can provide, is a beautiful Georgian complex, conveniently located to the city the cell operates in. Aside from his personal luxuries, the Colonel has invested his wealth in real estate, drugs and buying respectability from his local Kindred. That last was no mean feat, but Gabriel found that money has a way of soothing blood, just as blood has a way of easing debts.

Appearance: The Colonel is a tall, wide man in the habit of wearing expensive suits and dark glasses. He suffers a unique affliction of the blood that causes his skin to become a scarred, discolored mess if it receives even the slightest scratch. This doesn't seem to make any impression on him at all, but he ruthlessly curtails the activities of his brides in order to preserve their perfection.

Storytelling Hints: Gabriel is an experienced and patient military officer. Of course, he's also an experienced and patient military officer who is used to crushing the spirit of not only his opponents, but those who hear the stories of him doing it.

Werewolves

Every time I hear that howl, I have to pray hard not to crumple like a cup and piss my pants. You'll know it, too, when you hear it.

Werewolves have walked among men since the dawn of time. They hunt in the shadows, stalking human prey and bringing it down with tooth and claw. Though these werewolves can wear the skins of man and wolf, only in their twisted hybrid form is their true nature revealed. This wolf-headed form combines incredible muscle with sharp teeth and deadly claws, and only the rare human lives to describe what he saw. A werewolf is a consummate predator even in his human guise, and other people notice the air of danger that surrounds him. While most myths concerning werewolves place them in the wild places where humans don't tread, those myths are false. Most cities have a number of packs of werewolves walking their streets, looking for someone to hunt.

Powers of Tooth and Claw

Mechanically, a werewolf is defined by its ability to shapeshift, which takes a full turn to accomplish:

- As a wolf, she gains Dexterity +2, Stamina +1, Size -1, Initiative +2, and Speed +5. A wolf can track by scent, receiving 4 bonus dice to Perception rolls, and dealing lethal damage with a bite. Manipulation rolls made to interact with humans fail automatically.

- As a huge half-human, half-wolf hybrid, she gains Strength +3, Dexterity +1, Stamina +2, Size +2, Health +4, Initiative +1, Speed +4, bite and claw attacks that deal lethal damage (see Dread Attack, below) and Armor

THE MADNESS OF THE UNNATURAL: LUNACY

Some creatures are so unnatural that the human mind barely holds together when gazing upon its lunacy. The werewolf is one creature that inspires such a reaction, though only in the hulking hybrid form. A hunter's reactions on seeing a truly unnatural monster (including a werewolf in hybrid form) depend on her Willpower rating - any actions she takes for the rest of the scene, apart from trying to get the hell away in the most direct way possible, suffer a penalty of $(10 - \text{her Willpower})$ divided by 2. If her Willpower is below 5, she will block the event from her memory - though with the advent of closed circuit television and camera-phones, she can still gather evidence of what really happened. Below Willpower 10, she must be reminded of the event to bring it back to mind at all, though she doesn't try to deny that it happened or rationalize her experience.

This fear isn't normal. The hunter seeing a hybrid-form werewolf *knows* that it is coming to eat him. An impossible beast that he hasn't ever known was possible is coming to tear his body apart and drink the marrow from his bones. Conditioning can help him work through the fear, represented by spending experience on Willpower. Alternatively, when facing a hybrid werewolf, the hunter with the highest Willpower can roll Resolve + Composure. For every success, his cellmates add one to their effective Willpower with regard to actions only - his inspiration can't help them remember what happened. Hunters who increase their Willpower in this way can't raise it higher than the leading hunter's Willpower - 1.

Many hunters only remember their encounters with hybrid-form werewolves in nightmares and on film. This is the real trouble with werewolves, more than the very real threat of death - even the hunter doesn't really remember what happened. For some, this is the true horror: not remembering what killed your friend or destroyed your home, even if you were right there.

1/1. She ignores wound penalties, and she does not roll for unconsciousness. She cannot use complex tools, or engage in complex Mental or Social tasks — instead, every turn she must either attack or move toward a visible enemy. The only way to end this frenzy is to assume one of her other forms.

All werewolves regenerate one point of bashing damage per turn, heal lethal damage as if it is bashing (one point every 15 minutes), and take aggravated damage only when hit with a silver weapon or bullet — not through mere contact.

Many werewolves have more esoteric abilities that enhance their role as an apex hunter, from knowing a target's name by looking to shattering a human-made object with a hard stare. Some also practice a kind of primal ritual magic, invariably using a lot of blood, bone and meat. Often, during such a ritual is the best time for a cell to strike.

Worth noting is that the world is also home to various *therianthropes*: men who become not wolves, but other animals (cats, roaches, fish-men, crows, and so forth). Basic rules apply, but you may seek to tweak the numbers to more aptly represent different beast types.

Common Dread Powers include (but are not limited to) Dread Attack (Claws, Fangs), Fury, Gremlinize, Lurker in Darkness, Strange Form, Unholy Attribute (Strength, Dexterity, Wits)

The Inside Track

Most werewolves are born to their state, but they do not change until another wolf bites them. These "hereditary" breeds have formed two groups. One is tied to the moon, as in Western werewolf folklore. They venerate their mad goddess and she gives them power — but they're also more likely to understand compromise with humans who show a similar dedication to the hunt. Members of the other group are savage fanatics of all stripes, from priests of blasphemous religions to extreme survivalists who spurn human-made creations. Both kinds join packs, groups closer than even a cell of hunters. Stranger things exist than just these beasts — witches who lose themselves to primal savagery when dressed in a sacred wolf-skin, wolf packs that ape humans and learn how to take their shapes, or strange spirits that possess humans and twist their bodies into nightmarish shapes. Whatever their source, hunters invariably refer to avatars of savage fury as "werewolves."

At tier one, werewolves travel in packs and they don't deal with one another except to *kill* one another. Think of them as like small street gangs, carving out slices of territory in much the same way a hunter cell might at this level. They have their cut of forest or city block to deal with, and that's that.

At tier two, werewolves start forming ideologies or tribes: one group seems sworn to stand vigilant over sacred land-

JACK CROSS

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 4 (7/4), Dexterity 3 (4/5), Stamina 3 (5/4)

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 2, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics 3, Crafts 2, Investigation 1, Occult (Werewolves) 2, Politics (Business) 2, Science (Engineering) 1

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 4, Stealth 2, Survival (Urban) 2

Social Skills: Animal Ken 2, Empathy 1, Intimidation 4, Persuasion 2, Socialize 1, Streetwise 2

Merits: Allies (Werewolf Pack) 3, Brawling Dodge, Contacts (Hunters, Business) 2, Language (Wolf), Resources 3, Tactics 3

Willpower: 6

Morality: 6

Virtue: Fortitude

Vice: Envy

Initiative: 6 (7/8)

Defense: 2 (in all forms)

Speed: 12 (16/17)

Health: 8 (12/8)

Dread Powers: Dread Attack (Claws, Teeth) 2, Lurker in Darkness 2, Unholy Attribute (Wits) 3, Unholy Attribute (Strength) 1

Special

Werewolf: Jack is a hereditary werewolf, and has all the traits described above. Traits that change depending on form are given for his human form, with the altered values presented as (hybrid/wolf) immediately after.

Ritual Healing: Jack's pack gathers around a member who has been grievously wounded, but not killed. They spend a night singing in a guttural, unknown language while ritually cleansing the injured werewolf's wounds. Each member of the pack may spend one Willpower. The injured member heals one point of aggravated damage per point of willpower spent.

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Bite (Dread Attack)	2 (L)	13 (Hybrid)/11 (Wolf)
Claw (Dread Attack)	2 (L)	13 (Hybrid)

scapes or areas of Fortean interest, while another is obsessed with "pure blood" and werewolf eugenics. This group is composed of shamans of the rust, while that group devotes itself to the glorious spoils of blood-spattered war.



Tier three shows werewolves who have truly found solidarity with one another. They form a nation of sorts. They have their kings and generals, marshaling soldiers made of rippling flesh and teeth stained pink from days-swallowed blood. These mighty nations believe in their

causes so profoundly that they cannot stay off the radar for long, and hunters will pale when realizing that it's not just one city block they control, but a whole damn city, or an entire highway, and the awful demons and spirits those werewolves summon seem to herald an end to the world as all humans know it. An apocalypse born of wild hearts.

Jack Cross

Quote: *Don't think of it as murder. Think of it as competitive acquisitions.*

Background: His friends said there was always something predatory about Jack Cross. He wasn't just competitive; that, they could deal with. He had to win, and when he did, he lorded it over his peers. That didn't stop with high school. Throughout college, he set himself constant goals and stalked victory. The only thing worse than losing to him was being around him when he lost. He powered his way through college, destroying his exams — and killing a professor who dared to fail him. That professor was the first person to die by Jack's claws in the light of the moon.

Jack graduated in time to take over a failing dot-com. He got a lead from a friend, and through a combination of his intimidating presence and outright threats, he gained majority control. Other werewolves now hold positions inside Cross Technological, from board members to security guards. The firm is more than just a cover — in many ways, it acts like a werewolf. Cross Tech is a predator. Its board isolates useful or weak companies and piles on the pressure, driving them to either dissolve or accept a hostile takeover. If a few human cattle have to fall to make his company's prey collapse, they're necessary casualties. As an up-and-coming industrialist, he's a face at charity dinners and other social gatherings — while everyone finds him a bit scary, they also find him a bit...sexy? He's always on the lookout for his next prey, and when he finds it, he hunts.

Appearance: Cross grooms himself to be every inch the powerful businessman. He capitalizes on his body language and feral nature with immaculately pressed suits and a series of ties featuring subtly unsettling designs. Even when he's off duty, he's never seen without an expensive watch and a pair of cufflinks. He stands six feet tall and broad at the shoulder, muscles rip-

pling on his powerful frame. He's normally tanned, and his face sports a wide range of old scars — more after every hunt. Black hair sprouts from his head in a mane down to his shoulders, and a thick layer of stubble graces his chin every morning. Every move he makes exudes "Alpha Male," from his stance to the way his deep brown eyes focus on people's throats.

In his hybrid form, Jack stands nine feet to his shoulder, rippling with powerful muscles and covered in a thick layer of black fur. Razor-sharp teeth jut from monstrous jaws, and he retains the habit of staring at the throat of the person he targets. As a wolf, he's a burly black wolf with a penchant for running through shadows faster than the untrained eye can follow.

Storytelling Hints: In person, Jack Cross is a complete bastard. He doesn't hold with sweet-talking his way past people — he's not the sort to debase himself before humans. Instead, he hits them full on. He gets up in people's faces, shoulders back and chest out, looking like he's barely holding back from lashing out. Even when he's being nice, there's an air of hostility, and he capitalizes on every sign of weakness. The other werewolves in his pack aren't quite so bad, though they do what he says without question.

Jack isn't a mindless beast. He and his pack hold a territory much like a pack of wolves, straying from it only to pursue their prey. If something threatens their territory, they hunt it down and kill it. While many of their targets are human, the pack has hunted a number of stranger targets. Jack himself has been the target of several hunter cells. One cell didn't realize that werewolves hunt in packs, and died after mounting a sloppy attack. The other saw a very different side to the boardroom werewolf. He discovered their investigation late on, and only when they approached him did he realize the skills they had. He isn't stupid, and knew that killing them would be very bad for him. Instead, he offered them a job. Although the relationship between cell and pack couldn't be called cordial, they share information on targets and stay out of each other's way. This is how Jack prefers to deal with his opponents — if he can use them, then he offers them a deal. He'll capitulate to any number of demands, but he enjoys setting his "loyal" hunters against those who hold out against him. He tests each cell's ability though a number of false fronts and shell identities that make finding the real Cross significant work for an investigator.



"The man visited by ecstasies and visions, who takes dreams for realities is an enthusiast; the man who supports his madness with murder is a fanatic."
- Voltaire
(François-Marie Arouet),
"Fanaticism," 1764

Hunters hunt. It's what they do.

For some, this is extremely literal — guns drawn, bullets blazing, the hunter tracks her prey and puts an end to its profane existence. For others, the pursuit is more figurative, capturing and studying the supernatural, or gathering resources and information to help protect the people, places and things important to the hunter. Regardless of the theme of the individual game being played, **Hunter: The Vigil** presents some unique challenges in terms of Morality.

Murder, Death and Destruction

Simply put, if hunters are held to the same Morality ratings as non-hunter humans, a **Hunter: The Vigil** game has the potential for the characters to degenerate into low-Morality lunatics in a very short span of time (and that may very well be a game you want to play). If characters are forced to make degeneration rolls for killing a vampire, werewolf or other monster, as they would for killing an innocent human, a dedicated hunter cell is quickly going to find itself making degeneration rolls on a regular basis, and the chances are high that the Storyteller will be spending more time herding the derangement-swamped characters as they rampage across the game setting than actually running any sort of scenario. Any or all of the following alternative methods may be utilized to soften Morality-taxing scenes or game sessions:

The Code: The Vigil changes a person. "The Code" (below) details an alternative set of game rules that can be used to adapt a hunter's Morality away from the human standard and into a Vigil-specific Code over time. While this system has its own drawbacks (social penalties and hunt-specific derangements known as Tells), it works well with a kill-heavy game, allowing characters to continue their hunt long after the normal Morality system would have sent them spiraling into madness.

Monsters Don't Count: As discussed earlier in the book, **hunters may not identify superhuman monsters as human.** Storytellers may take this perspective into consideration, ruling that assaulting or killing monsters doesn't count as a Morality sin at all, and not requiring hunters to make any sort of Morality degeneration roll for actions taken against a monstrous foe. This ruling skews the Morality scale in a major way, and Storytellers who utilize it should be cautioned that it lifts one of the major weights of consequence of hunter characters' actions, but may allow for a more "heroic" game.

It's Not Like They're Really People: Slightly less extreme than the Monster's Don't Count theme is the idea that, while taking a sinful action against a monster may be bad, it's nowhere near as morally damning as taking the same action against a normal human. This Morality variation gives characters bonus dice (+1 to +3 depending on how inhuman the monster is) whenever the player rolls for degeneration for an action related to that monster. A Storyteller might give a player a +1 bonus to a degeneration roll for an action taken against a seemingly human magic wielder, +2 for a sin against a humanoid lycanthrope, and +3 extra dice when making a roll for slaying a human who's already dead (vampire, ghost, Reanimated, zombie).

Do Nothing: The Vigil is a morally perilous journey, and holding strictly to the standard human Morality scale only emphasizes that dan-

"Monsters ain't human, son, not even the ones that look like it. No matter how much they beg or scream, no matter how much they bleed. They just ain't. If they was, they'd feel bad about being monsters and kill themselves, and save us the trouble."

ger. Appointing oneself judge, jury and executioner is a path fraught with risks—physically, emotionally and spiritually. By forgoing any of the options that soften these dangers, players may have the opportunity to address a broad variety of moral issues themselves: where do you draw the line between duty and obsession? How does the punisher avoid becoming as bad as the criminal? And, finally, when the body count rises, what separates the hunter from his prey?

Moral Quandaries

Below you'll find other optional modifiers you can use to adjust the nature of Morality and how it affects hunters in your story. The more you use this, the less of a slippery slope the World of Darkness becomes for those on the Vigil. Nothing wrong with that, of course, but if you're trying to achieve a theme where the world is hard and one can only assuage guilt by tearing it out and stomping it dead...then use of these options only serves to reduce that theme's impact. Alternatively, if you're trying to tell a story where hunters are heroes holding back the night with their candles of righteousness, then it's all the more appropriate to reinforce that theme with any or all of these optional modifiers.

Self-Defense

When it comes to assault or murder, self-defense can be shaky moral ground for hunters to walk. While a human homeowner may feel justified in claiming self-defense as grounds for killing the potential murderer/rapist/thief who broke into his house, does a hunter who frequently goes actively seeking out monsters in their lairs make the same claim if the creature returns the favor? Can a hunter claim self-defense if he's spent weeks tracking down a creature that then tries to kill him? What if the hunter's original intention was information gathering, capture or other non-violent neutralization, but the situation turned bad and termination became the best or only option?

Storytellers should give players whose characters commit a Morality sin in self-defense a bonus to avoid degeneration if the particular target they assault or kill has made it clear that it intends on doing

the same (or worse) to them or another innocent. The character may gain a +1 to the degeneration roll when committing a sin in an act of self-defense or protection.

That said, if the hunter premeditates and "assumes" malicious intent on a creature that has not presently manifested an actual threat, then the hunter gains no such bonus to his degeneration roll.

Virtue and Vice

If the hunter performs a sin in service to his Virtue, he may earn a +1 to a degeneration roll if the Storyteller deems it appropriate. A hunter kills a witch because he believes the Bible is awfully clear on that point and he is himself a churchgoer, so he may earn a +1 to the roll because of his Faith Virtue. A hunter who pilfers funds from some bank account to divide the wealth

DRAWING THE LINE

When using either the "Monsters Don't Count" or "It's Not Like They're Really People" options, however, care must be taken in determining exactly where the line between humans and monsters lie. Is "monster" a definition of biology? Should a human with the ability to cast spells or who possesses a magical item that gives him supernatural power be considered human or monster in terms of Morality ratings? Is it a definition of behavior? Which is more monstrous, a werewolf who has never killed anyone, or an entirely human slasher who has slaughtered dozens of innocents?

Storytellers who make this choice must make the determination for their own games, but should expect to encounter a wide variety of what ifs as play progresses. Generally speaking, if the thing is completely inhuman in appearance and behavior (a blood-drinking sentient fog, a yowling hellhound), Morality needn't figure into it.



among the families of those harmed by a local vampire predator might get a +1 to the roll because of his Charity Virtue.

If the Storyteller deems it so, this can also go the other way: a hunter committing a sin against Morality in service to his Vice may *lose* a die on a degeneration roll. An Ashwood Abbey hunter who cannot help but taste the flesh of a suffering Reanimated is perhaps committing an atrocity in service to his Gluttony, and thus takes a -1 penalty to the roll.

Survival

Sins committed in attempt to meet basic survival needs are given a bonus to avoid degeneration, as opposed to those committed out of greed or other non-survival motivations. If done out of sincere need (the hunter hasn't eaten all day, has nowhere to sleep in the middle of a rainstorm, etc.), the character might gain a +1 bonus to resist degeneration.

Duty

Society appoints certain individuals to fulfill unsavory or morally ambiguous duties on its behalf, and while taking an immoral action in the line of duty is still morally taxing, the fact that the individual has been appointed to perform said duties helps to assuage the moral impact of the sin. In no small part, this is because the individual (and society at large) believes that the organizations the individual serves are working in the best interest of society, or are serving the "greater good." These perceptions are not always accurate, but they do a great deal

to mitigate the weight of Morality for actions taken in such service. Publicly, these roles include police officers, soldiers, doctors and veterinarians, rescue service workers, high-level security (such as the Secret Service), prison guards and the like. Moral sins committed in what could reasonably be argued as "the line of duty" may be granted a +1 bonus to resist degeneration. Thus, a soldier who shells a building on the direct orders of his superior officer might gain a bonus die to resist degeneration for the intentional mass property damage.

Since Morality is an internal, rather than an external, scale, it is not society's views of a person's right to commit the crime that affects this modifier, but the person's impression of his or her right to do so. Thus the player of a tier-three organization member might justifiably claim that his character's role as a medical researcher gives him the bonus to avoid degeneration on sins related to medical experimentation (torture) by virtue of it being part of his expected role within the organization. Roles of a hunter within his individual hunter cell do not qualify as duty in this circumstance; it must be an outside organization, large-scale company or the like.

Sin Puppets

Insanity, depression, post-traumatic stress syndrome and other "circumstances beyond their control" are sometimes used as legal defenses against a person's accountability for his criminal actions. In the World of Darkness, supernatural powers, abilities, items or influences can con-

THICK GRAY LINES

Hunter Morality exists in a world of varying shades of gray. Even if everything seems very black and white to the character, situations often involve a wide variety of mitigating factors, some of which are apparent to the player and some that are not. It would be impossible to create specific rules modifiers to cover every possible permutation of motivation, drive, justification and situation that might arise during a Hunter game. Instead, players and Storytellers are encouraged to use this opportunity to explore their own perspectives on the possible Morality modifiers that arise during their game, and to use the given modifiers as suggestions and frameworks upon which to create their own judgment calls for each individual situation. Ultimately, these guidelines and how they are used in any given game will help shape the theme of the story told. If a Storyteller is fairly lenient on allowing players to argue for modifiers to a broad variety of Morality situations, their characters will not feel the grind of the Vigil as heavily. If, however, a Storyteller rarely allows circumstantial bonuses to avoid degeneration, the weight of the hunt will fall much more quickly and heavily upon the characters' shoulders.

tribute to an individual's inability to consciously choose their actions in the same ways. These circumstances only influence Morality degeneration when they are involuntary, however. Committing a Morality sin while under the influence of a voluntary substance or situation is no defense against the moral weight of the crime.

When a person commits a Morality sin while she is influenced or controlled through no choice of her own, however, the Storyteller may allow a +1 bonus against degeneration. Maybe a person was mind controlled. Perhaps she was dosed with some kind of drug. In the World of Darkness, humans can end up as puppets to external forces, and this may earn the character the proper bonus.

This modification is only valid if the person committing the deed is aware that he is being controlled or influenced. A Morality rating weighs the person's sense of internal morality, and it cannot take into consideration factors the person is not aware of.

The Code

Morality, as explained in the *World of Darkness* Rulebook, is the baseline code of ingrained ethics unconsciously accepted

by the bulk of humanity. It is both a scale of good and evil as well as a marker of one's own ethical sanity, a ruler by which humankind judges its own actions and the actions of others as beneficial or harmful to the rest of the herd. While each individual culture and era may have some variations and exceptions to these baseline rules, for the most part, Morality represents a general human consensus on what actions are acceptable to the group as a whole.

But, as the book also notes, Morality is not an absolute value. For "normal" humans, this non-absolute quality is represented by a static Morality scale upon which any individual's rating at any given time may raise or lower as a person grows. As a hunter experiences and is challenged by different situations, his Morality may change as well. A man may struggle to become more virtuous (as defined by the Morality scale) or may be driven by desperation to actions that undermine his basic moral code, leading him to reject his old values and accept "sins" that he would formerly have eschewed.

While hunters are human, over time they start to lose a sense of...normalcy. Their obsession with the Vigil drives them in ways that divide them from the bulk of humanity. This is, in no small part, what gives them the strength of will to rise above base human potential and provide challenge to the monstrous threats of the World of Darkness in ways that a "normal" human simply could not. This obsession is more than a power source, however. It is like a raging river or an unrelenting storm in the hunter's psyche and, like any other powerful force, it pushes constantly against whatever it finds there, bending, warping, or eating away at what was once an immovable solid.

Because of the effects of the Vigil's drive, it is possible for hunter Morality to be mutable in ways that "normal" Morality is not. Rather than just strengthening or degenerating on a static scale of sins, hunter Morality can develop its own deviations, ethics and mores that supplant those of non-hunter humans. These variations, collectively called "The Code," represent the inherent effect that a hunter's Vigil can have on his *individual* belief system.

The Code is offered here as an optional addition to *Hunter: The Vigil*. While it is certainly not necessary to use this system in any given Hunter game, it does offer Storytellers and players an additional layer of differentiation between hunters (especially those who have undergone lengthy or powerful experiences while on the Vigil) and "normal" mortals. By having each individual hunter's own personal Code gradually and yet inexorably shift his Morality away from the human norm, this system emphasizes the cost of the hunt in social and moral terms as well as the obvious physical dangers.

The mechanics of the Code are deceptively simple at heart. As a hunter progresses on her Vigil, her obsession with the hunt pushes her, at various points, to take actions that are a sin on the normal Morality code. At these times, called Trigger Points, the

player may decide that her character's Morality changes, and one of the "sins" associated with the normal human Morality rating is changed to an edict that applies directly to her particular Vigil. The original "sin" is no longer a part of her Code; it is replaced by a new sin, just as limiting, but more specific to her experiences and goals. Further along in the Vigil, another Trigger Point may be reached, and another of the hunter's Morality sins might be replaced by a Vigil-specific mandate, gradually customizing the basic tenets of not only how she behaves, but also how she views the world around her. The process seems simple, and yet, as Morality stands at the heart of humanity's definitions of what it is to be human, altering one's Code represents a life-changing event.

While this change can be suggested by a Storyteller at certain points that he feels appropriate, it should not be forced upon a player. Ultimately, it is the player's choice (with the Storyteller's approval) as to whether her character should make the Morality Degeneration roll in a Trigger situation or whether her character's Morality Code has shifted.

Trigger Points

Changing one's basic moral Code does not happen casually. Humanity, for the most part, holds to a relatively narrow moral code for a reason, and certain acts have been held as sins by the majority of the world's major spiritualities, religions and laws throughout history. These actions are predominantly those that cause dissent between individuals (stealing or destroying others' property), or injure others (rape or murder). The widespread presence of these acts is harmful to human society, pitting man

against man and breaking down the social ties that allow people to live, work and grow together as a group. Deviations from this moral code are a threat to the social structures upon which human society is based. Sociopaths — those who emotionlessly deviate significantly from the agreed-upon core mores of human society — represent a danger to individuals and to society as a whole. In a world built upon certain core assumptions, rejecting those assumptions can have far-reaching consequences.

Hunters, however, are privy to information that the general masses do not have and, as such, are forced into making choices about how best to serve their own interests (be they selfish or altruistic) that mainstream humanity simply does not have the perspective to understand, let alone condone. This insight and their unnaturally dedicated reaction to it means that hunters are driven in ways "normal" humans are not. This preternatural focus and sharply honed obsession is what makes it possible for their moral Code to change when even the most fanatic normal human is tied to the general Morality scale.

Even hunters, however, do not change their Code on a whim. Code changes come at specific times when a hunter is faced with the choice between pursuing the hunt and taking an action that is a Morality sin (whether or not it is a sin at his current Morality level) or abandoning (at least temporarily) the hunt to avoid the sinful action. When the hunter chooses the hunt over Morality, they are said to have come to a Trigger Point, and the player may choose to change the hunter's Code, replacing one normal Morality sin with a sin more appropriate to the hunter's obsession.



Example: Emma's Malleus Maleficarum cell managed to take out most of the sorcerer's coven in a recent strike, but the leader escaped. After several weeks of research, investigation and prayer, they've found and lost the leader time and time again, but have finally tracked him to a seedy motel. Emma is on stakeout when the sorcerer makes a break for freedom. Emma calls for backup while moving to intercept him. She guns the throttle on her SUV and speeds across the motel parking lot, but before she reaches him, an elderly cleaning woman begins pushing her laundry cart across the lot and the warlock throws the shocked laundrywoman to the ground in front of Emma's vehicle and turns to run down an alley. Emma is left with a choice: swerve to avoid the prone woman and possibly allow her quarry to escape, or follow him and possibly harm the woman. Emma remembers the children the coven sacrificed for their dark arts, and how difficult it has been to track the warlock thus far. She guns the SUV, running over the elderly woman on her way into the alley. The sorcerer is trapped in the dead end, and Emma stomps on the accelerator, jumping clear of the vehicle just before it slams into the brick wall, crushing the witch and ending his profane life in an explosion of tangled metal and broken glass. She ascertains her target is dead before running back to check on the laundrywoman. She finds, however, that the woman has died as well.

After the scene is over, the Storyteller takes Emma's player aside for a private roleplay scenario, where he describes visions Emma has over the next few days. Some involve a golden sunbeam breaking through a stormy sky, its glowing beam illuminating the still-burning wreckage of her vehicle. From the clouds overhead, angelic children's faces (those of the warlock's sacrificial victims) smile down approvingly. Others show the scene where the cell found some of the sacrificed children's bodies — only, in her vision, their bodies are all replaced with that of the elderly woman, her throat slit and naked body wracked into a dozen different posthumous positions of pain.

Emma sees these visions as a gift from God, reassuring her that her actions were necessary to prevent greater evil that would have happened if the warlock leader had escaped.

The Storyteller tells Emma's player to write "Morality 4 — Suffer a witch to live" on the appropriate line of the character sheet, thus effectively replacing the old tenet, "Impassioned crime (manslaughter)." This represents one tenet of her Morality shifting, modifying her Code in a way that will likely act to further hone and fuel Emma's hunt in the future. In the future, she will not make a degeneration roll when she accidentally kills someone; however, until her Morality drops below 4, at any opportunity when she has the opportunity to kill a witch (warlock, magic user) and does not, she will roll for degeneration. Of course, this will lead to further issues of Morality (killing a witch may still count as planned murder)... but she'll blow up that bridge when she gets to it.

Pulling the Trigger

Not every violation of a tenet of the standard human Morality Code is going to become a Trigger Point for a Code

MAKING THE CHANGE

While the example given for a Morality Code change includes a private roleplay session between the Storyteller and the player, such a process is a suggestion, not a requirement. Some troupes or characters will not require (or even desire) a great deal of subplot roleplay with regard to their Code changes. Should it suit the Storyteller and player, such a change can be an instantaneous evolution of the character's Morality, a change that simply happens as the story progresses, rather than one for which the story pauses.

In addition, not all of those private detours need to involve visions, heavenly or otherwise. It is just as feasible for a character to undergo a hardening of his heart and get a tattoo with "Suffer Not a Witch to Live" on his bicep. A member of the Abbey might find social reinforcement for a newfound Code tenet, whereupon her "club friends" congratulate and reward her for some action that titillated them. A Lucifuge might get a personal handwritten missive from the agency's eldritch persona. These can certainly justify a shift in The Code.

change. Only acts taken in the direct pursuit of the Vigil qualify, as they are the situations in which the hunter's obsession pushes him sufficiently hard to break away from the standard Morality system. Shooting an innocent bystander in the attempt to take out a werewolf qualifies as directly hunt related. Shooting the bartender who gave you bad information as to the werewolf's whereabouts does not. Changes to a hunter's Code are driven by the irresistible push of the Vigil's obsession, and happen in situations where the hunter's desperation to hunt overwhelms his normal moral standards. Acts that are indirectly related to the hunt (stealing weapons for a later attack, beating up an individual to get clues as to a monster's whereabouts, etc.) are simply not driven by the same fiery desperation as those that occur mid-hunt, and thus, while they may violate a hunter's Morality Code (and thus require degeneration rolls), they simply do not have the inherently Vigil-spurred power necessary to permanently change a hunter's Code. As a simple guideline, in general, if no monster is present in the scene, the situation is probably not appropriate for a Trigger Point.

Even during a hunt, certain actions are simply not morally significant (or significantly different from the mainstream of humanity) to prompt a deviation from the mainstream Morality Code. Even if it is a violation of the hunter's current Morality rating, level 9 and 10 Morality sins are rarely significant enough to act as a Trigger Point. They are simply too common an ac-

tion — the average human (at Morality 7) commits such “sins” on a fairly regular basis, and to violate them, even when spurred by the Vigil’s promptings, is just not a consequential enough act to differentiate a hunter from a non-hunter mortal.

Generally speaking, sins against Morality 7 and 8 also fail to be significant enough to act as Trigger Points, but circumstances sometimes contribute a particularly meaningful situation that might allow for these acts to have enough import to serve as a catalyst for a Morality Code change.

Below that? It’s anyone’s game. A hunter may find himself able to morally justify stealing a vehicle in pursuit of a fleeing creature, burning down a warehouse that acts as home to some wriggling nest of otherworldly parasites, or taking the life of any who dares support the cancerous networks of the leechlike vampires. The more emotional the act (manslaughter and murder often stirring intense emotions), the likelier it can act as a Trigger Point.

Trigger Points and Degeneration Rolls

Trigger Points sometimes (but not always) come at a time when the hunter has violated his current Morality Code, times when players would normally roll a degeneration roll (see p. 91–92 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*). If Emma had been at a Morality rating of 4 or higher, the situation in the example above would normally require her player to make a degeneration roll. Her player (using the optional Code rules) decides to use this circumstance as a Trigger Point instead. While a Trigger Point does not cause a character to move to a lower moral state, costs still accompany the choice: social penalties when dealing with normal humans and Tells (see below for the negative ramifications of Morality Code changes).

At the Storyteller’s behest, some Trigger Points needn’t be tied to degeneration rolls. If Emma had been at a Morality rating of 3 when she made the decision to risk serious injury or death to the bystander in order to kill the warlock, the “sin” would have been insufficient to normally require her player to roll for degeneration. However, since it was clearly a violation of a sin on the Morality scale (although one to which Emma had already inured herself), the Storyteller could still have allowed the situation to become a Trigger Point, if Emma’s player so desired. Because they do represent a significant deviation from humanity’s mainstream mores, players should avoid layering Trigger Point after Trigger Point upon a hunter character for minor deviations. Such changes are not without a price, and while a single change to a hunter’s Code may not overly impact the character, cumulative changes will undoubtedly do so.

Alternatively, at times a hunter character might enter into a situation where, although he has committed no exact Morality sin, his Morality has obviously been impacted in a way that would seem to justify a Code change. A neophyte hunter joins the Malleus Maleficarum because he is a devout Catholic and its recruitment pitch seems to mesh well with his religious upbringing. Then the organization indoctrinates him into the group by way of arduous flagellations and water-

boarding. The hunter is clearly the victim, and has committed no Morality breach himself, and yet this torturous initiation might well be justification for a Morality Code change. Should it make sense to the Storyteller, the normal rule about Trigger Points being directly related to Morality sins might be waived in this type of circumstance.

Examples

Below, a handful of quick examples of how a hunter might shift the Code, and why.

- Violet Pigeon, a local hunter belonging to a ragtag “neighborhood watch” cell (tier one), has long recognized that equipment and other necessities are hard to come by when they already spend so much on gear, rent, food for their families and all that. Worse, the members of her cell have disproportionate resources; when one could feed his family, he put a bullet in the roof of his mouth. This was a Trigger Point for Violet. She now replaces the Morality 7 sin of “Petty theft (shoplifting)” with a new sin of “Failure to share resources with cellmates.” Now, she can steal...but whatever she does better be disseminated amongst those cell members who need it.
- Duncan Scarborough belongs to the local Ashwood Abbey chapter. He’s a bit new at this, and still feels a great deal of guilt over what they do. One night, he’s sharing blood with a vampire — the Kiss feels so utterly *sublime*, after all — but just when he’s in the throes of ecstasy, the vampire drops the façade. The bloodsucker tries to blackmail him, says he’ll tell Duncan’s family just what their esteemed son has been up to. Duncan freaks, attacks the vampire and, by some sick luck, destroys the thing by taking its head. The Storyteller allows this as a Trigger Point: instead of having to roll for degeneration with this being a Morality 4 sin (impassioned crime), Duncan’s player subtly changes the sin to only count toward *humans*. The language, finely altered, now reads Morality 4, “Impassioned crime (manslaughter) against *humans*.” Over time, Duncan may find that the Code shifts further, and that all the sins only “count” when they’re performed against normal, everyday human beings. (Or, alternatively, the Storyteller may allow Duncan’s player to change them all in one fell swoop, but this, of course, necessitates taking a number of Social penalties and hunter-specific Tell derangements...unless the Storyteller lets him get away with just one.)

- Agent Trotsky heads a Task Force: VALKYRIE infiltration unit. Fact is, shit gets blown up all the time around them: as much as they’d like to be stealthy and subtle like their peers, it always ends up that collateral damage builds. At one point, Trotsky’s faced with a conundrum: some demon cult is holed up in a compound, and to flush them out, it’ll be necessary to start a fire and burn the whole building down. Of course, doing so is a Morality 5 sin (intentional mass property damage). But failing to do so keeps the cult embedded. Trotsky lights the fire. This works as a Trigger Point. Trotsky can, at the Storyteller’s approval, replace that sin with a new one. Since the good agent is so patriotic,



Trotsky's player chooses the replacement sin of "Failure to protect American interests." Unfortunately, the fire gets so out of control it kills the cult instead of flushing it out. So, while Trotsky has replaced the one sin, the Agent still has to deal with the Morality 4 sin of impassioned crime, manslaughter. A degeneration roll is imminent.

The Price We Pay

Changing one's Morality is an epiphany of epic proportions. It is a realization that something a character has been taught since infancy is wrong. It is as significant as discovering that the color one has thought of as blue since birth is, in fact, red. And once the change has been made, while the rest of the world still calls it blue, the hunter will never hear, see or think of it as anything but red, ever again.

Regardless of whether it obeys them or not, humanity as a whole recognizes certain rules, identifying particular actions as "good" or "bad." These form the basis of the human Morality scale. A Mafia hit man may deal with murder on a daily basis, but he still recognizes, deep down, that killing is "wrong" by society's standards, even if he has shielded himself from that knowledge with layers of justifications, excuses and explanations. For a hunter whose Morality Code regarding murder has changed, however, that common rule has not just been violated — it has been warped, supplanted by a different value that humanity, as a whole, does not share.

External Costs

For a hunter to deviate from that common recognition in a single "sin" is enough to start to crack the façade of normalcy. It means that his Vigil has forced him off the path the rest of humankind walks. With each successive change in the hunter's Code, the aforementioned cracks spread, spider-webbing and growing wider, until the semblance of normal humanity is all but absent.

In terms of game mechanics, each deviation is represented by a cumulative -1 Social penalty (to a maximum -5 dice) when dealing with other mortals. Every time the hunter's Code shifts away from normal human Morality, interacting socially with other human beings becomes more difficult, until, at later stages, the hunter is likely to be viewed by non-hunters as a monster himself.

This penalty does not affect interactions with other hunters, regardless of whether the other hunter's Morality has shifted or not — those on the Vigil inherently understand the pressures the hunt puts upon one another. It also does not affect supernatural creatures that are on any other type of Morality system. Unless the Storyteller declares otherwise, it does not affect relationships with current Allies or Retainers, though the penalty may still be invoked when dealing with contacts (who are rarely close to the hunter and do not consider him friend, ally or supervisor).

Internal Costs

Each shift also brings with it a crack in the hunter's own psyche — regardless of drive, a hunter is, at heart, human himself. Thus, the same obsession that drives him away from the rest of humanity also warps him internally. This damage is represented by the accumulation of hunt-related derangements. Each time a tenet of the hunter's Morality Code shifts away from the human norm, he automatically gains a derangement specifically suited to the shift in ethics that has occurred. These derangements, as detailed below, differ from standard derangements in that they manifest only in relation to the hunter's Vigil.

Tells

Tells are derangements that relate directly to the hunt. While they may, in their more severe forms, intrude upon the hunter's non-Vigil activities, situations and thought processes, they are always a direct result of a change in the hunter's Code and tie into her Vigil in some way. Psychologically, Tells represent the damage that breaking from mainstream humanity's Morality causes in an individual. As such, they begin as minor derangements, but as the hunter's Code grows progressively different from that of "normal" humans, her Tells grow (either deeper or greater in number, or both) until the hunter is as morally different from normal humanity as the creatures she hunts.

Unless otherwise specified, Tells potentially manifest during stressful moments on the Vigil. At which point, the character must succeed on a Resolve + Composure roll or otherwise manifest the Tell as described.

Example Tells

Calling Card: Stealth and secrecy are invaluable tools to the hunter. Those with the Calling Card Tell, however, must roll a successful Resolve + Compose in order to keep from leaving some significant mark of their presence on the scene of a successful hunt. It may be an item (a certain playing card, a red rose or a linen handkerchief), or a symbol (an initial inscribed somewhere on their victim, a sigil drawn on the wall, or a progressively larger number of "tick marks" that quantify the hunter's ever-growing tally of successful hunts). Some hunters even use situational Calling Cards; their victims may be arranged in a particular pose (kneeling as if in prayer, arms crossed over their chest or face down) or location (placed behind the wheel of a car, tied to a chair or hung from a noose, even if they were not killed there).

Minor Calling Card Tells involve a single mark or symbol and are limited only to major successes on the Vigil (which might include executions, captures, computer system hacks, even a tomb raid).

Major Calling Card Tells: the hunter begins leaving his mark more often. While on stakeouts, he might find himself absentmindedly carving it into a windowsill, doodling it on scratch paper while researching or otherwise incorporating it into his non-hunt activities.

Denial: When a hunter cracks, his mind reverts to a pre-Vigil stage, adamantly refuting the existence of the supernatural. Like normal humans, he blames all phenomena that have

no logical explanation on fraud, hoax or misunderstanding. While the average human exists quite happily in this stage, it can be dangerous, or even deadly, for someone who has previously dedicated himself to hunting the same creatures he now cannot bring himself to believe exist.

Minor Denial Tells affect the hunter's belief in or acceptance of a single supernatural aspect — magic from mages, say, or the existence of vampires. During times of extreme stress, the player must make a Resolve + Composure roll. If he fails, his character is struck with a moment of "clarity" — he suddenly believes that his former acceptance of the particular supernatural aspect was a delusion, one that has now been revealed as false. While the Tell is active, it is "obvious" to him that the killer he is stalking has merely used stage magic to fool him into believing that she was capable of casting magical spells or shapeshifting into an animal form. Logic simply dictates there is no other possible explanation. This newfound "logic" can be debilitating or even deadly, both to the hunter and to his cell. A hunter who no longer believes his prey is a vampire (or that vampires even exist) will not apply the knowledge, caution or Tactics he normally would to apprehending such a creature — it makes no sense to avoid being caught in your killer's gaze, to use "sunlight" grenades or apply the Dentistry Tactic when she is "obviously" just a deluded human with a flair for Gothic fashion. This may very well make him a major handicap to his cell — a hunter who, at any given stressful point, loses his ability to accept the true nature and capability of their foe is likely to put the entire group at risk. Minor Denial Tells only affect a particular subset of the supernatural. However illogical, the Tell-affected hunter may be completely comfortable with the existence of elves, demons and ghosts, but adamantly deny the existence of vampires.

Major Denial Tells erode the hunter's belief in *all* supernatural creatures and phenomenon while the Tell is active. When a character with the Major Denial Tell fails his Resolve + Composure roll in situations of stress, he will create "logical" explanations to argue away any evidence of the supernatural he encounters. The mage's spell was an illusion, carefully orchestrated trick or simply coincidence. The vampire's blood drinking is a symptom of porphyria. Evidence of a half-man/half-wolf is merely a portfolio of creatively doctored photographs and video. Things he personally witnesses with no explanation may be shrugged off as his eyes deceiving him, hallucinations from lack of sleep, or simply "Well, I don't know what it could have been, but it wasn't a monster. Monsters don't exist." If confronted with absolutely undeniable evidence that cannot be ignored or explained away, a hunter with the Denial Tell may actually enter a catatonic state, hiding himself from that which he simply cannot accept. For all that it may manifest as a pre-Vigil state of ignorance, the Denial Tell is actually an active coping technique, and cannot simply be brushed aside by providing evidence to contradict it. While the Major Denial Tell is active, the affected hunter's psyche simply can no longer accept the existence of the supernatural, and will go to any length, including shutting down completely, to avoid it. He suffers a -3 penalty to any Tactic or Endowment roll that relies on the acceptance of the

MAKING THE SHIFT

Many of the standard major derangements offered on pp. 96-100 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook** can be modified to work as Tells. By focusing the standard major derangement specifically on the hunt, it can be converted into a minor Tell. Expanding the focus out into non-hunt activities, or seriously ramping the intensity of the Tell during hunt-specific activities, will increase the derangement to major Tell level.

Characters with the Multiple Personality Tell, for example, develop a secondary personality that takes over during stressful points in the hunt, relieving the core persona of the responsibilities of coping with dealing the deathblow, witnessing the murder scene or inflicting unpleasant-yet-necessary torture to gain the vital information. Hunters with the Paranoid Tell, on the other hand, treat everyone as if they are potential traitors. Their equipment and computer systems are laced with multiple layers of dead-man switches, detection programs and sensors to prevent them from being used (or invaded) by anyone but their owner. The equipment and safehouses of hunters with **Paranoia** Tells are often as dangerous to unexpected friends as to foes.

Since Tells are limited in scope, manifesting specifically in hunt-related situations, most minor derangements are too inconsequential to transfer well to a Tell. Because of this, it is recommended that Storytellers look at major Derangements if they wish to modify an existing derangement into a Tell.

supernatural. This has some leeway: he might, for example, be convinced to drink an Elixir ("It's an energy drink, you look dehydrated") or operate a piece of Advanced Armory as long as it seems like a normal gun or tool, but he will completely ignore any supernatural aspect of the Endowment and will actively scoff at anything that seems too "wonky."

Hypochondria: Vampires create more vampires by sharing blood. Lycanthropy is a disease. A zombie's bite will slowly turn its victim into one of the shambling dead. Folklore is full of legends about the supernatural "contaminating" humanity in one fashion or another. Hunters with the Hypochondria Tell become paranoid about the possibility of becoming a monster themselves, on a physical level. Their fear of infection makes it difficult for them to interact directly with non-human monsters on any level that might result in fluid transmission (bites, open wounds and the like).

Those with a *minor* Hypochondria Tell prefer to avoid "messy" hunt scenes, either doing their work from a distance, or surrounding themselves with multiple layers of protection from potential contaminants while on the job. They must make a successful Resolve + Composure roll to enter into such a scene without "adequate" protection. Being forced to enter such a scene causes a -2 penalty to all rolls in that scene if the character feels improperly guarded.

At *major* Tell levels, this fear develops to the point where they undertake protective measures on a regular basis — "just in case." The major-level Hypochondria Tell may also convince them they have become infected with some kind of disease (perhaps even "becoming" a monster through such an infection). He may think he caught smallpox from a vampire's lips, or some kind of "animal flu" from an encounter with a feral shapeshifter. If the character fails the Resolve + Composure roll, he believes himself sick and acts like it, suffering a -2 penalty to *all* Physical rolls for the next 24 hours.

Overkill: A bullet or two, properly placed, is enough to take down any human target. You can never be sure, however, when dealing with monsters. Characters with the Overkill Tell have learned that lesson (often the hard way), and are pathological about being certain their targets are truly down for the count. In any situation with the potential for recrimination, they must make a successful Resolve + Composure roll to avoid going to extreme lengths to prevent the situation from backfiring on them, even if it means exposing themselves to new dangers in the process.

Minor Overkill Tells manifest as a simple "need to be sure" when dealing with their quarry. Marksmen might double-tap their victims, and insist on checking their prey for signs of "faking it" or "playing possum." More hands-on hunters might insist on cutting off the head of their prey

(few monsters can survive such an injury), cremating the body or feeding it into a wood chipper. The hunter cannot rest until this has been completed: if he fails to sufficiently destroy the monster to his satisfaction, every night for one week he will suffer nightmares focused upon the creature's return and vengeance. He cannot regain Willpower any morning after a night where such a horrible dream is experienced.

Major Overkill Tells take on a berserker tone. A hunter with the major Overkill Tell goes beyond the body in front of him and must take one full scene to ensure that "all traces" have been wiped clean. He'll overturn tables and chairs to make sure the creature's "corrupted blood" didn't somehow spawn a hellish copy; he might set fire to the house; it's even possible that he'll go after any of the creature's human allies within sight to ensure that the fiend's soul didn't somehow jump into their puppet bodies.

FORCING THE ISSUE: TELLS AND DERANGEMENTS

Care should be taken when using the Tell or derangement system. Bestowing a potentially emotionally charged personality flaw upon a player's character can be extremely uncomfortable to the player and may change his enjoyment of the game if he is not comfortable with the changes to his character. While violent themes are often inherent to a *Hunter* game, combining them with sexual themes or defining their focus for a character may be something that a player finds distasteful or offensive.

While playing *Hunter: The Vigil* is a great way to explore the effects of certain situations and influences on the human condition, it is first and foremost a game and as such should be a source of entertainment and enjoyment for all involved. A player should never be forced to take on a Tell or derangement that runs contrary to their enjoyment of the game. Storytellers are encouraged to have frank discussions with their players about comfort levels and game theme perimeters before bestowing any Tell or derangement upon their characters.

Sadism: Most hunters see the Vigil as a duty, spawned by need rather than pleasure. For those with the Sadism Tell, however, satisfaction in a job well done crosses the border into sadistic pleasure in seeing one of "those monsters" suffer as they've made others suffer. Not content to merely kill or neutralize their quarry, hunters with the Sadism Tell seek to cause the most pain, suffering and humiliation they can to those they hunt, sometimes even forgoing a kill for the sake of extending their own pleasure in their enemy's torment. Some characters will have particular focuses for their Sadism Tell — a penchant for medieval-style torture devices, or a preference for destroying a target's family members before delivering their deathblow. Others will simply use whatever means and opportunity are available to deliver the most pain — physically or emotionally — possible to their victims.

A character with the *minor* Sadism Tell must make a successful Resolve + Composure roll to avoid physically or emotionally tormenting her quarry when given the opportunity. This only lasts the moment, and the hunter's sadism toward

that particular monster needn't carry past the scene (unless the player so demands).

Once the Tell becomes *major*, the Tell mutates to the point where the torment of her victims, rather than the Vigil itself, becomes her focus. She may violate orders to kill or turn her quarry over to her agency, choosing instead to keep them for her own "experiments," or may endanger her own life or the lives of her fellow cell members in order to get the opportunity to deliver a few extra moments of pain to her victims. When failing the Resolve + Composure roll, the character makes it her mission to bring cruelty to a creature or a creature's ally, and this takes her well beyond the scene at hand.

Sexual Deviancies: In the human body, sex and violence trigger similar chemical releases. Both are adrenaline based and increase with testosterone in the system. Some studies have suggested that a link exists between a heightened reaction to sexual stimuli and a similarly heightened aggressive reaction (such as is developed when the Vigil takes precedence in one's life.)

For hunters with the Sexual Deviancies Tell, the blurred line between aggressive and sexual reactions is wiped away by the hunt. A *minor* Sexual Deviancies Tell might develop as an acute state of arousal during or immediately after a hunt (which might lead to some interesting reactions from the Tell-struck hunter's cell-mates). A successful hunt might take on figurative (or literal) orgasmic manifestations. The hunter suffers a -1 to all rolls until she can manage some kind of sexual release (potentially an orgasm, though other modes of satisfaction can be determined).

A hunter with a *major* Sexual Deviancies Tell finds that the hunt's sexual overtones begin to overshadow any other aspect of the Vigil. Hunters with this Tell must make a successful Resolve + Composure roll not to engage in sexual contact with the target of their quarry (or fellow members of their cell) while actively pursuing or having completed a hunt, regardless of the inappropriateness of the situation. Many members of the Ashwood Abbey are victim to this Tell, although whether they join the organization because of its influence or gain the Tell because of the activities their membership exposes them to is a matter of conjecture.



"There is a general air of somberness about it, increased perhaps by the...weeping willows you meet at every turn."
- Lt. Col. A.M. Maxwell,
describing Philadelphia in his travel narrative *A Run through the United States*, 1841.

Philadelphia is the Washington, DC, that should have been, the New York City that could have been. It was once the most important city on the North American continent, the "Athens of America," the incubator for the American Revolution and the first capital of the nation that followed. Seated at the confluence of the Delaware and Schuylkill Rivers, the city was the principal port of entry for new arrivals to the New World, the geographical center of the 13 colonies, and the first social, commercial and political center of the United States of America. But as the nation grew, Philly became overshadowed by other East Coast municipalities, leavening a trace of resentment into its citizens' notoriously crusty attitudes toward outsiders who don't give their town its due respect. A city of immigrants, tradesmen and merchants from its very beginning, Philadelphia has a storied history of innovation and corruption, racial tension and religious diversity, artistic expression and demoralized self-loathing.

And mystery. A blue-collar 'burg tightly tied to the country's origins and host to architecture and relics from every era since, Philadelphia is a city with more than its share of mean streets and deep shadows.

Its most telling quality may be its fragmented anatomy; like the 13 colonies themselves, from its earliest days, Philadelphia's various neighborhoods have stubbornly maintained their distinct identities. Some have invisible borders that have been honored for 100 years or more, with long-term residents who guard their secrets carefully. Layered over these homegrown mysteries are customs and traditions brought by wave after wave of immigrants from all over the planet. In the World of Darkness, Philadelphia is a place where supernatural factions hold tight to their territories and distrust even their own kind — *especially* their own kind. Mirroring the mortal population's contempt for central authority, the inhuman denizens of Philadelphia have proved consistently difficult for their would-be leaders to govern. And complicating the attempts of any vampire lord or witch queen to establish dominance is the X-factor represented by the city's active hunter cells, whose unexpected offensives tend to upset the balance of power at critical moments.

Theme: The Revolution Will Be Compromised

Philadelphia is a place where every change comes with an unexpected price, where every success contains the seeds of a future disaster. Lead a group of colonies in the overthrow of a far stronger nation, and watch your city decline into corruption and irrelevance. Establish a thriving, tourist-friendly center city, and see other parts of town suffer from a spiking murder rate. Vote out a crooked politician and find a replacement who turns out worse. For hunters, too, victory is never total and almost always requires the sacrifice of something considered untouchable. A hunter in Philadelphia should be prepared to make tough choices, and must hold tight to his ideals or see them sacrificed in a rush of blood and adrenaline.

Mood: NIMBY

NIMBY: Not in My Backyard. Territoriality is a central conceit in Philadelphia; both hunters and their adversaries look to their own neighborhoods first. Sometimes this works to a hunter's advantage — a monster caught outside its own borders may be unable to access its resources or allies, and its peers may leave it to its fate rather than step out of their comfort zones to help. More often, though, a NIMBY

**"Philadelphia isn't as bad as
Philadelphians say it is."
- 1970s-era billboard aimed
at boosting civic pride.**

attitude makes it hard for one hunter group to convince another to care about a threat that doesn't have an impact on its domains. What's worse, hunter groups themselves have been known to come to blows over turf issues, distracting them from the Vigil and leaving innocents undefended.

An Occult History

The Delaware River Valley was first visited in the early 1600s by Europeans who found the area hosted bands of Native Americans known as the Lenape, or Leni-Lenape. The natives' matrilineal clans ranged throughout modern-day New Jersey, north to the New York harbor area, east into Pennsylvania and south to northern Delaware. The lifestyle of the Lenape included small-scale agriculture and mobile

hunting and gathering. Contact between European explorers and settlers and the Delaware Indians, as the invaders called them, eventually resulted in disease and decline for the Lenape. Despite shrewdly balancing their alliances with different European nationalities and later providing troops to the rebel colonies' Continental Army, over time the Lenape people would be crowded westward as the newcomers made the continent their own.

Philadelphia received its charter as capital of the colony of Pennsylvania in 1682. A proprietary colony, Pennsylvania was owned and governed by British admiral William Penn, rather than controlled directly by the British crown. Penn, a Quaker who'd experienced religious persecution, envisioned a city in which residents of different faiths could live together

THE MYSTIC BROTHERHOOD

In 1694, one of Philadelphia's many German immigrants was mystic and occultist Johannes Kelp, a.k.a. Kelpius, who settled with his followers in the valley of the Wissahickon Creek in what would become northwest Philadelphia. The group called itself the Contented of the God-Loving Soul, and spent its time in prayer, meditation, sacred music-making and other activities in keeping with its belief that the end of the world was nigh. The members also gained a reputation for alchemy, ritual magic, numerology (the number 40 was particularly important to them, though the reason is lost to history) and other suspect practices. The Cave of Kelpius, where their leader was said to meditate, can be found in present-day Fairmount Park (if one knows where to look). Nearby is an eight-foot monolith that states Kelpius was the first American master in the Rosicrucian brotherhood.

Story Seeds:

Behind the Veil: Perhaps Kelpius and his followers were not true mystics, but deluded pawns of a shadowy faction of mages dedicated to creating bogus occult groups as a way of protecting true magic. A Philadelphia hunter belonging to Null Mysteriis or the Loyalists of Thule might uncover evidence that the Mystics were being manipulated by some other agency. That knowledge would make them a target of today's mages, whose response might range from destroying the evidence to altering the hunter's memory to assassinating the hunter with extreme prejudice.

Search for the Stone: The Mystics were reputed to have created an alchemical philosopher's stone, which was thrown into the Schuylkill River by their last surviving member (as an all-male celibate doomsday cult, longevity was not one of the group's attributes). Whatever it was they made, it's back, and the city's supernatural players are scrambling to get hold of it. If the Mystics hoped to use alchemy as a defense against supernatural assaults, the object may be a powerful weapon for whatever hunter cell tracks it down.

and worship freely. He also conceived a capital that was like an English country town, with homes spaced far apart and separated by parks and gardens. The lots Penn laid out were quickly split into smaller parcels by their owners, creating smaller streets and a more congested city than he had perhaps hoped. But the city did achieve an atmosphere of religious tolerance, which attracted immigrants of varied religious persuasions. (It should also be noted that slaves were brought to Philadelphia from its very earliest days, despite the Quaker religion's opposition to the practice.)

With its diverse population and central location, early Philadelphia was also an irresistible temptation for supernatural beings from Europe or elsewhere who desired a foothold (or hiding place) in the so-called New World. Lacking the Puritan authoritarianism of Boston or the plantation mentality of Jamestown, Philadelphia was a place where mingling between different social strata yielded easier access to a range of allies, pawns or victims. And a careful vampire, werewolf or mage could reasonably expect that occasional strange or quirky behavior might be overlooked in the stew of different languages, customs and practices increasingly on display as Philadelphia grew from a riverside settlement into a busy port city.

Yet even in its early days, Philadelphia presented its own kinds of challenges to those who settled into its shadows. The city's various sub-communities kept careful watch over their domains and were quick to come to the defense of their own. As hardy immigrants who'd risked much to establish a new life, Philadelphia's residents tended to be quite capable of policing their territories and responding to a predator in their midst. A neighborhood of, say, recent arrivals from Germany may have brought with them some ancient practices for identifying werewolves (some of which actually worked). A community of Quakers could turn their penchant for cooperation into a common defense against a troublesome spirit. A band of fishermen, hearing strange cries drift over the river at night, could come together and trawl the Schuylkill for the creature that lured some of their peers to their doom. Though precious few documents describing the activities of these proto-hunter groups have survived, a modern-day cell that acquires some extant fragment may find that its predecessors faced many of the same challenges of today's hunters. Such records might also contain strategies or techniques applicable to today's Vigil.

Revolution

War changed everything for Philadelphia. As the place where the Declaration of Independence was drafted and signed, where the First and Second

Continental Congresses held their sessions, and where strategy for the War of Independence was planned, the city was a high-priority target for British forces. Battles fought in and around the city included the Battle of Brandywine in 1777, after which the city was occupied by the British. The founding fathers bolted, the famous Liberty Bell was evacuated (to keep the British from melting it down into bullets) and the city was stripped of anything that might be of value to the enemy: blankets, clothing, cattle, food. Philadelphia's residents found themselves trapped in a city overcrowded with refugees and British troops; a blockade by American forces kept supplies scarce and tensions high. Philadelphia remained occupied until the following June, when the British withdrew to defend their position in New York City. It was perhaps the only time in history when a preference for New York over Philadelphia worked in the city's favor.

The war also took its toll on the city's monster hunters, at least those not serving in the Continental Army. Those within the occupied city found themselves coping not only with privation, British occupation and the horrors of war, but also vulnerable to the predation and manipulations of the unseen denizens of night and shadow. Innumerable spirits found themselves able to enter the material world, its boundaries weakened by strife and tears, which in turn attracted spirit-hunting werewolves, who barely noticed those

humans caught between them and their quarry. Vampires grew strong on the blood of the weak and dying. Mages exploited the minds and bodies of ordinary people made weak by pain and loss. Devils were seen walking the streets openly; a milky serpent 20 feet long was said to convene with its worshipers beneath the State House. Shadow wars for territory and resources erupted between and within supernatural factions.

In response, the city's human population pushed back as best it could. They held clandestine meetings in churches, in shops, on street corners and in row-home attics. Their city would not become a playground for the unholy or a fiefdom for the inhuman. For the first time, hunters of different backgrounds and social classes began to reach out to each other and offer cooperation. Large-scale, citywide resistance was not possible, given the meager resources and minimal knowledge available to these groups. But cells began to form in response to individual need, with each able to call on several others for aid at critical moments. These hunters didn't succeed in making their city anything close to monster free. But their efforts made it impossible for any single monstrous cohort to establish dominance, and denied their supernatural enemies the free rein over Philadelphia's citizenry they might otherwise have seized. (See "The Chestnut Street Compact," p. 22.)

B. Franklin, Printer

It's hard to imagine an America, let alone a Philadelphia, without Benjamin Franklin. Aside from his critical role as a founding father and statesman — it was his diplomacy that convinced France to ally with the colonies against the British, just as one example — Franklin left an indelible mark on his city, creating everything from its first volunteer fire company to the University of Pennsylvania. Here are some suggestions for storytellers who'd like to reference one of Philadelphia's greatest icons in their chronicles:

Lightning in a Bottle: Franklin's experiments with electricity went far beyond his famous kite-in-a-thunderstorm discovery. It's possible that one of the lightning rods he invented captured more than electricity, and that one of the primitive batteries from Franklin's collection still contains a residue of the mysterious, universal force known to a few scholars of the occult as "Pyros." Uncased from its shielding and on display in the Franklin Institute, that battery could attract all sorts of strange creatures and sorcerers who can sense its power. Hunters will have to identify the battery as the source of the problem, and find a way to nullify or destroy it without releasing the chaotic energy and making things worse.



APPENDIX TWO: PHILADELPHIA: MONSTER HUNTING IN THE CITY OF BROTHERLY LOVE

The Manuscript: Franklin considered himself a printer above all else. He also founded the first lending library in the colonies, hoping to establish a culture in which farmers and shopkeepers might be as educated as any European nobleman. Among the thousands of books, pamphlets, newspapers and other documents printed by his shop or preserved by his library may be any number of items of interest to a hunter cell: instructions for an exorcism ritual, blueprints revealing secret rooms and tunnels beneath the city, a map detailing the location of some powerful occult totem, the physical description of a still-at-large vampire. Depending on the circumstances, a cell may need to track down a missing manuscript (or the plates that printed it), decipher it, keep it out of supernatural hands, or all of the above.

Secret Society: In 1743, Franklin founded the American Philosophical Society, a scholarly organization dedicated to “All philosophical Experiments that let Light into the Nature of Things, tend to increase the Power of Man over Matter, and multiply the Conveniences or Pleasures of Life.” The APS still meets today. But what if Franklin also founded a parallel, secret society to delve into the dark mysteries that populated his city and stalked its countryside? A modern-day hunter cell may uncover evidence that the American Anagogic Society once existed, but are they still around? Finding them could yield a powerful ally. Or it may lead the hunters to manipulation and betrayal by a shadowy organization with an unknown agenda.

Young Nation, Declining City

After the 1783 Peace of Paris brought the conflict to an end, Philadelphia continued its prominent role in the growth and development of the former colonies. In 1787, Philadelphia hosted the convention that produced the United States Constitution. It would become home to the United States Navy Yard, the first US national bank, the first US mint. The city remained capital of the new nation until 1800; after that, its growing network of roads, canals and railroads evolved Philadelphia into the country’s first major industrial center. In 1854, the districts surrounding Philadelphia were incorporated into the city proper, in an attempt to increase the city’s tax base and make it easier for Philadelphia authorities to enforce the law. The consolidation created the city’s modern borders, dissolving 29 municipal authorities and bringing their former jurisdictions under the direct control of the city’s mayor. This set a pattern for two recurring themes in Philadelphia history: neighborhoods with distinct, almost insular, identities; and an ebb and flow of power between the office of the mayor and the other centers of municipal power (especially the city council). As the 19th century proceeded, the city lost its prominence as a port, though its importance as an industrial and financial center continued. And Philadelphia’s rise in population was accompanied by crowded slums, anti-immigrant violence and widespread government corruption.

As Philadelphia slowly transformed itself from a colonial city into an industrial metropolis, the importance of the Vigil faded from the consciousness of the city’s first generation of defenders. Hunters, those who didn’t lose their lives or sanity to the struggle, turned away from their calling and attempted to carve out a normal life. Few new hunters were recruited to replace them;

cells broke up with no provisions for establishing any ongoing cadre of defenders. At the same time, the city’s supernatural population became better at disguising its activities. The Age of Enlightenment gave way to a continuing progression of scientific and technological achievement. Ghosts and monsters became the stuff of stories, or even spiritual pseudoscience, not actual threats that the ordinary person need concern himself with. As a consequence, much of the folk tradition and arcane knowledge Philadelphia’s first hunters had gathered was lost or abandoned. This trend would continue for the next several decades, so that by mid-19th century, Philadelphia was effectively without organized defense against monstrous threats.

That said, the city’s passage into 19th century did pose problems for its non-human residents. As the city became more crowded, disputes and outright combat between rivals became more common. The first wave of monsters, who’d carved out and carefully defended their territory for decades or more, found that newcomers and second-generation residents were less than respectful toward “traditional” borders. Changing times brought iconoclastic new ideas into supernatural societies. And monsters who’d been transformed from Philadelphia stock brought with them their city’s rebellious nature and distrust of authority. As a result, Philadelphia’s supernatural factions were mostly too occupied with their own internal struggles to take much advantage of the absence of active hunter cells.

In the second half of the 19th century, supernatural inhabitants of Philadelphia achieved relatively stable relations with each other, and consequently became bolder in their dealings with humanity. Vampires made their strongest efforts yet to infiltrate the city’s social elite; they became more adept at manipulating city government (although even they sometimes struggled to find city councilors or political bosses whose strings weren’t already being pulled by someone else). Packs of rogue werewolves dared to break their kind’s taboo against consuming human flesh, and were known to run nighttime “hunts” through the streets and alleys of the old city. Mages who once kept up a mundane facade began to use the trappings of spiritualism and occult-themed social clubs, enabling them to pursue their goals openly while seeming like harmless eccentrics. As if in response, the first organizations and agencies began to establish a strong Philadelphia presence a few decades later. The Philadelphia branch of the Ashwood Abbey claims to have held its first meeting in 1903, with members drawn from railroad moguls and shipping magnates seeking an escape from the city’s notorious “dullness.” Evidence suggests at least one of the founding members was an ex-ghoul, a former vampire thrall seeking the blissful taste of vampiric blood without the consequent enslavement. Many Abbey members were patrons of the Philadelphia Museum of Art — the same is true today — and the construction of the museum’s current home in 1919 included chambers to house the Abbey’s “special collection” of depraved artifacts.

Modern Times

Philadelphia shoved its way into the 20th century with the ignominious label of “corrupted and content.” The crooked politics that dominated city government were widely

AMERICAN PLAGUE

In 1793, the largest yellow fever outbreak in American history struck Philadelphia, killing 10% of its population - about 5,000 people - over the course of five months. The virus was brought to the nation's (then) capital by refugees from the Caribbean, and transmitted by the mosquitoes that thrived in Philadelphia's marshy clime (and in the standing water found in its sewers, cisterns and wells). National government disbanded for the summer; George Washington, Alexander Hamilton and other notable patriots fled to the countryside to escape contagion. Lacking a germ theory of disease, many experts of the day blamed corrupt city morals for outbreaks of this and other urban afflictions. Those infected with the disease endured several days of muscle pain, shivers and high fever. Then, cruelly, symptoms subsided for a day or so, only to be followed by jaundice, vomiting, bleeding, kidney failure and death. Eyewitnesses to the Philadelphia plague report private homes converted to hospitals, and patients with raging fever running naked through the streets.

Story Seeds:

The Carrier: While vampires were immune to the effects of the plague, some no doubt picked up the yellow fever virus while feeding on its helpless victims. Now one of the bloodsuckers from that time has awakened from an extended slumber and is unknowingly passing the still-active virus to Philadelphia's unfortunate citizens. The germ's incubation within vampiric fluids has altered it just enough to keep doctors from identifying the cause of the deadly syndrome. Hunters with family members who are infected and hospitalized may recognize that the victims show signs of vampire attack. Capturing, interrogating or identifying the vampire in question may lead to an effective treatment or vaccine. But can the vampire be convinced to stop transmitting it? Could she stop even if she wanted to?

Are You My Mother? During the horrible months of the plague, the city was awash with rumors of husbands abandoning wives and parents abandoning children. At least one of those stories was true, and now the restless ghost of a fever-stricken child wanders the streets in search of its parents. When some kids on their block then disappear, lured away or taken by the ghost to be her playmates, hunters must find a way to make contact with the ghost-child and negotiate or force the release of the children. Confronting the ghost means the hunters endure nightmare visions of the plague-ravaged city, or suffer painful recreations of the fever's symptoms. They may also have to contend with cultists who want to exploit the ghost for their own purposes, or an extremist hunter cell that wants to eliminate the ghost without regard for the missing children.

known, but most citizens considered this an unchangeable fact of life. Reforms would occur in fits and starts in the century's first few decades, though it took the stock market crash of 1929 and subsequent Great Depression to dislodge the prevailing authorities. As in other cities, labor unions arose and demonstrated their power, and their efforts inspired ordinary men and women to rise up against supernatural oppression as well. A pyrrhic victory achieved by the hunters of those days occurred in 1932, when predation by vampires in the city's increasingly crowded slums drew the attention of several blue-collar hunter cells, which began to coordinate efforts with like-minded groups throughout the city. After several bloody skirmishes, the hunters managed to end the threat with a "controlled burn" strategy that destroyed a

church and a few warehouses in the process. Unknowingly, their efforts tipped the odds against a vampire prince who'd nearly established citywide authority over his kind. That despot's near success left the city's vampires more determined than ever to resist any future power grabs. Another success story occurred in 1936, when an alliance between Unionlike cells and a determined Lucifuge cadre ended werewolf attacks that had plagued the city for decades.

Philadelphia's industries contributed to America's efforts in two world wars, but in the second half of the century, its factories fell victim to new economic realities. Many shut down forever, not only triggering unemployment, but also turning whole neighborhoods into unlivable zones of closed-down storefronts, unwanted

housing and abandoned, unusable industrial wastelands. Affluent residents began moving to the suburbs; those lacking in economic resources had to contend with substandard housing that had barely been upgraded since the 19th century. The 1960s and 1970s brought riots, drug addiction and rising crime that further demoralized the population and degraded the city's reputation. The 1980s added mob warfare and near bankruptcy to the city's woes. As always, monsters that saw human beings as their prey or playthings were quick to take advantage of the rising violence and despair. Many hunters fell to vampires and mages who manipulated the criminal element for their own purposes. Others lost their free will or sanity to ghosts and spirits attracted by the discord. Hunters of today who are survivors from that time, or were taught by those survivors, tend to be particularly strident in their Vigil. They carry physical and psychic scars and always have one last nasty trick up their sleeves.

As often happens, the direst moments also contained seeds of hope. Restoration and revitalization projects begun in the 1970s and 1980s began to attract more visitors to the city in the 1990s. That decade also saw a boom in hotel construction, as well as the construction of a new convention center. More recently, the city's population decline has slowed, as condominiums and rejuvenated neighborhoods make Philadelphia a more popular residence for working professionals. Today Philadelphia is a city in the process of reinventing itself, with an interesting mix of struggles and success stories. It has a lively arts scene, countless tourist-friendly museums and historical sites, many distinguished colleges and universities, and a unique assortment of appealing neighborhoods with lots of allure for visitors or permanent residents. It's also burdened by one of the highest murder rates in the country, rough racial tensions and a steady stream of political scandals.

Shadows of Philadelphia

Today's Philadelphia is the sixth most populous city in the United States, with an estimated population of 1.4 million. Air travelers are served by Philadelphia International Airport, which handles both domestic and international flights. Train schedules include service from New York City and Washington, DC, with high speed and commuter lines for fast travel to major northeastern cities. Several major interstate highways converge in the Philadelphia area, allowing easy access by car — except for the congestion and jammed traffic, especially during peak commuter hours. In town, many residents and visitors make use of the extensive public transportation system operated by SEPTA (the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority), consisting of commuter rail, subway, elevated train, streetcar and bus routes. Philadelphia is very walkable and bikeable, with many of its most famous attractions concentrated in or near the Center City area.

At a Glance: The Philadelphia Vigil

Philadelphia represents a curious specimen of hunter culture. First, as both the birthplace of the American Revolution and the famed Chestnut Street Compact, it stands as a theoretical "shining example," even when that doesn't hold true in reality. Second, Philadelphia is a crowded confluence of cells, organizations and agencies. It's rare that any one group fails to claim some kind of dominance. In Philly, though, while they aren't always so keen to work together (and sometimes violently clash with one another as much as they do with the stalkers and feeders of the night), they have managed a kind of "rough around the edges" coexistence. Below is a snapshot of Philadelphia orgs and agencies in their balance of power. Note that a Storyteller needn't utilize all of these, and may instead choose to represent a city that is easily in the grip of one group or another.

Ascending Ones: *On the rise.* With the shifts in Philadelphia's immigrant population over the last decade, it's becoming easier for the Ascending Ones to find support and resources to stage operations in the city. Whether the group can carve out a lasting territory of its own remains to be seen.

Ashwood Abbey: *In transition.* After a long history of indolence and passivity, new members work to exploit the monsters in all new heights of hedonism. That said, the Abbey has never been big on doing any dirty work that doesn't bring instant gratification and will likely rely on more industrious hunters to help it lay the groundwork for its mysterious goals.

Aegis Kai Doru: *Frustrated.* Time and time again, the Guardians have tried to impress upon other Philadelphia hunters that dangerous Relics found in the city belong to them. It never seems to sink in. As a result several, important artifacts have slipped through their fingers over the years and fallen into the hands of other unworthy hunter groups, as well as into the hands of enterprising sorcerers. Recovering them remains a primary goal.

Cheiron Group: *Growing stronger.* Having spent the last decade establishing economic dominance over the city's many competing pharmaceutical concerns, Cheiron's Philadelphia sub-corp is now highly profitable and poised for greater success. With a new director hungry to impress her superiors, TCG Philly is bent on identifying and harvesting any unique supernatural phenomena it can get its hands on. If that means pushing some other hunter group out of its way, so be it.

The Long Night: *Persistent.* The Long Night operates several mission-style community centers in North Philadelphia and elsewhere throughout the city's poor and working class neighborhoods. Its hell-in-a-handbasket outlook resonates well with the disenfranchised and economically disadvantaged of Philadelphia. The centers offer genuine charitable services. But they also attract potential recruits, and give the Long Night an ear to the street.

The Loyalists of Thule: *Scattered.* The Loyalists have not had good luck in Philadelphia. Early on, they ignored the

city entirely, missing their chance to build a network among the city's large population of German Americans. Their later attempts to do so ran afoul of anti-German sentiment that rose in Philadelphia before and during the Second World War. They're an underrepresented, disrespected underdog among the Philly's hunter groups. Then again, Philly is the city of underdogs.

The Lucifuge: *Stable.* The Lucifuge has never had any special affinity for Philadelphia, nor has it any cause to avoid it. Its presence in the city at any give time depends on the particular interests of its individual members. At present, Seventh Children enjoy goodwill from other Philadelphia hunters, especially Union members, thanks to their help routing an epidemic of demons a few generations ago. Philadelphia hunters have long memories.

Malleus Maleficarum: *Weakening.* Possibly because Philadelphia has always been a religiously tolerant city, the Hammer has been unable to find fertile ground for its strident ideas. Propped up by the wealth of the archdiocese of Philadelphia, local Malleus Maleficarum cells usually include clergy temporarily transferred to Philly from other locales. Which means there's potential for a resident true believer to advance quickly through the ranks.

Network Zero: *Populous but disorganized.* The Secret Frequency may be the most diverse hunter organization in the city, attracting everyone from preteen nerds to working journalists to the guy who sleeps in the park during the day but sneaks into the library at night to surf the web. On the other hand, its "membership" lacks a consensus on what membership even means. Time will tell whether the Network's various affiliates will coalesce into something more robust (some are trying to broadcast on pirate radio band called RVLT, "the Revolution," calling for unity among hunters and a return to the days of the Candle Compact).

Null Mysteris: *Strong.* Philadelphia's many colleges, universities and hospitals, and the city's central location relative to other east coast institutions of higher learning, have made it an attractive location for the scholars of Null Mysteris. The University of Pennsylvania not only hosts a larger Null Mysteris contingent than any other college in the country, but it also frequently hosts meetings and colloquiums attended by members from all over the world.

Task Force: VALKYRIE: *Lean and mean.* Emaciated by staff and budget cuts, the city's remaining TFV agents choose their missions carefully and operate with swift and deadly efficiency. Out of necessity, they're more likely than their counterparts in other cities to work with civilian hunter groups, but such alliances are often brief and guarded. To some hunters, TFV is as shadowy and frightening as any werewolf pack or witch coven.

The Union: *Consistent.* Its blue-collar roots and everyman outlook have always made the group a good fit for the average Philadelphian; even before the Union became an organization in name, the city had a long history of ordinary folk rising up against supernatural oppressors. As in other cities, the group's decentralized structure and informal ties makes it a challenge for its many cells to act as a whole. Still,

I walked the avenue till my
legs felt like stone
I heard the voices of friends
vanished and gone
At night I could hear the
blood in my veins
Black and whispering as the
rain
On the streets of Philadelphia
- Bruce Springsteen, Streets
of Philadelphia

once roused to action, Philly's Union is a force to be reckoned with. Any unaffiliated hunter cell in the city that achieves a measure of success is likely to be noticed by the Union, and perhaps offered membership.

Welcome to the Neighborhoods

"City of neighborhoods" is a label Philadelphia's often tagged with, and it's an apt one. The city's usually described as having seven distinct areas: North, Northeast, Northwest, West, South and Southwest Philadelphia, with Center City in the middle. Each of these districts has its own characteristics and unofficial but widely agreed-upon borders, but each also contains multiple neighborhoods with borders and identities of their own. South Philadelphia, for example, contains at least 20 such neighborhoods, with the exact number depending on who's doing the counting and how long they've lived there. Philadelphians are not necessarily hostile to those from outside the neighborhood, but most have no trouble telling who's local and who's from the other side of town (or out of state). As an optional rule, characters who are not Philly natives or long-term residents suffer a -1 penalty to Social or Investigation rolls in a residential neighborhood if their questions go beyond what a typical tourist would ask. Conversely, characters from the same neighborhood (not just the district) gain a +1 bonus. Note that Philadelphians themselves don't refer to, say, the Southwest "district." They'll just say "he lives in Southwest Philly."

West Philadelphia

Bordered on the east side by the Schuylkill River, West Philly is filled with the row houses for which the city is famous, some dating back to the 19th century. It also harbors many historical sites, numerous specialty restaurants, the Philadelphia Zoo and the University City area, which contains the University of Pennsylvania, Drexel University, the University of the Sciences, and other institutions. Among its curiosities is the White Dog Café, an eatery that also hosts community events. The building was once home to

PHILEXICON

Every city has its own slang, and Philadelphia is no exception. Here are some local idioms that might be useful to hunters from out of town.

Abe, The Abe: The Ashwood Abbey.

Birds, The: The Philadelphia Eagles pro football team. Other pro sports teams include the Phils (Phillies, baseball) and the Sixers (76ers, basketball).

Down the Shore: Vacationing on a New Jersey beach.

Einhorn: A monster who hides murderous or bloody activities behind a disguise of social respectability and personal charisma. The term is used mostly by the Ashwood Abbey; it derives from the last name of a Philadelphian who murdered his wife and hid her body in a trunk. See also "Unicorn," below.

Enmee: Supernatural threats as a whole, the Enemy.

Fullaelfya, Fluffy, Fuldaelfya: How residents refer to their city. Spoken quickly with slurred syllables.

Grounder: A walking corpse or zombie; sometimes applied to vampires.

Goat: A ghost or spirit. Likely began as "ghost" spoken with a Philly accent, but now used by Philadelphia hunters as a deliberately distinct term.

Hoagie: A submarine sandwich or sub.

Inky: Local newspaper, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

Jeezo: Hunter with a strident religious, usually Christian, outlook.

Lucy: The Lucifuge.

Mahoff: The leader or most powerful of a group of monsters.

Misty: Null Mysteriis.

Netzo: Network Zero.

Onion, The: The Union.

Presto: A mage; sometimes applied to any supernatural being with overt magical abilities.

Pavement: Sidewalk.

Phene: Philadelphia Extra-Normal Entity. A Task Force: VALKYRIE term some other hunters have picked up.

Scapple: To put down a monster with overwhelming force. ("I'll draw him out, you guys scapple him with the sledgehammers as soon as I'm clear.")

Shaggy: A werewolf, or any animalistic monster.

Sow-philly: South Philly.

Sugger: A vampire (from "bloodsucker").

"There's That News Van Again": Warning that a communication channel is not secure, or that someone in the vicinity may overhear sensitive information. From an old advertisement promoting a local TV news show.

Unicorn: A term with different and potentially conflicting meanings among Philadelphia hunters. Ashwood Abbey members use it in the same sense as

PHILEXICON (CONTINUED)

"Einhorn" (see above), and also to refer to the monster that is the target of a specific hunt or operation (where chapters from other cities might use the word "fox"). Other Philly hunters sometimes use the term in that way, but more often use it to refer to a monster the speaker doesn't believe exists, or a suspected monster the speaker believes is just an ordinary person. ("When are we gonna stop wasting time watching this unicorn?")

Wit, Witout: Among the general public, a term for ordering cheesesteaks (e.g. a cheesesteak "wit" = with onions). Among hunters, a way of describing an area as under supernatural threat or not. ("Be careful going down that alley, this whole block is wit." "Relax, the cemetery's been witout since those Jeezos blew through here last month.")

"Yo!": Informal greeting, hello or hey.

Yunk: Resident of the neighborhood of Manayunk.

spiritualist Madame Helena Blavatsky, and so may be a place of pilgrimage for occultists, New-Age posers and — assuming there was truth to her teachings — mages.

Evelyn L. Yee, PhD, Null Mysteriis Associate

Evelyn Yee had a happy life. She was a professor of English who was well liked by her students and respected by her peers. She taught on the same campus as her husband, Malcolm, a zoologist whose outgoing, impulsive nature was

a natural balance for her quiet bookishness. Then Malcolm was lost during a research expedition on the other side of the world, gone without even a body to recover. Evelyn, crippled by grief, dropped out of her life for a while. Eventually she moved across the country to start over, taking up an adjunct teaching position at the University of Pennsylvania.

As it turns out, she's not yet ready to let Malcolm go. She'd always been aware of her husband's interest in fringe science, in cryptozoology, in folktales that hinted at unknown creatures hiding from, or even hidden within, human civilizations. But she didn't comprehend how deeply his commitment to exploring outside the mainstream really was until an organization calling itself Null Mysteriis contacted her. Finding out that the group had funded his doomed excursion and that they consider Malcolm not dead, just "out of contact," has both opened old wounds and fostered an unbearable hope inside her. Offered a position on Null Mysteriis' roster, she took it. At first, her only goal was uncover the truth of her husband's fate, but she's since become infected with the same passion to illuminate dark corners that motivated Malcolm. Her most recent project involved categorizing a number of language-related abnormalities cropping up in the city. She's led her cell of Penn graduate students on data-collection missions into some of the roughest parts of Philly — and she's beginning to think she's more like her husband than either of them realized.

Vanida Quaker, Network Zero Freelancer

A sophomore pursuing a degree in film and video at the University of the Arts, Vanida was taking experimental video samples in the wooded spaces of Cobbs Creek Park when she noticed an anomaly that kept showing up on the soundtrack. Using the software on her laptop to isolate and amplify the odd noise, she found it was the sound of a man weeping. Subsequent recordings at the same site yielded the same anomaly, even though there was no one present making the sound — at least, no one visible. Since then, Vanida



范尼达·昆克
NETWORK ZERO FREELANCER

Profession: Artist

Organization: Network Zero

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 2, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Academics 2, Computer (Editing) 2, Investigation (Video) 4, Occult 3

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Drive 1, Stealth (Hiding) 3, Weaponry 1

Social Skills: Expression (Spoken Word) 2, Persuasion 1, Socialize 1

Merits: Allies (University) 3, Fleet of Foot 3, Meditative Mind, Status (Network Zero) 1

Willpower: 5

Morality: 7

Virtue: Justice

Vice: Pride

Initiative: 5

Defense: 3

Speed: 13

Health: 7



has collected several dozen examples of what she calls the “invisible voices.” In a few instances, she seemed to put an anxious voice to rest by passing its message on to the intended recipient. Vanida’s increasing obsession with these phenomena, and her subsequent involvement in Network Zero, has not come without cost. Inattentiveness to her studies has caused her to lose most of her financial aid package, so she’s had to reduce her course load and take on a string of low-wage jobs. Returning to more conventional projects is not something she’s considering, though. Especially since she can still hear the sound of the Weeping Man every night. She believes that until she finds out what he wants, she always will.

Antagonist: Rods and Orbs

Like ball lightning or a will-o’-the-wisp, these “creatures” seem to straddle the line between mindless phenomenon and self-aware beings. A few accounts by spiritualists of the early 1900s match their description, but it wasn’t until the 1990s that consistent reports about them began to appear in annals of the paranormal. Difficult to see with the unaided human eye, they’re sometimes glimpsed as faint shapes on film or video or with electronic imaging equipment. As their names imply, they appear as spherical or cylindrical translucent forms that resemble artifacts caused by lens

flaws or software glitches (and some say that’s all they are). Network Zero hunters in Philadelphia have reported that the things sometimes appear in or near areas where ghosts have been sighted. Afterwards, the reports state, a ghost that’s been sighted repeatedly for decades is never seen again; or, if it was a particularly active and communicative ghost, it appears as a faint blur that speaks only nonsense. Null Mysteris has found that people with prolonged or repeated exposure to rods and orbs sometimes develop problems speaking or writing, or comprehending written or spoken language. Such effects are temporary, though they’re disturbing to those so afflicted.

Although (probably) not spirits, rods and orbs exist in an immaterial, twilight state, and can be harmed by anything that harms such beings. Magic or magical abilities that have other effects on twilight beings — spells for controlling or communicating with a spirit, for example — do not affect them, however.

Attributes: Power 2-4, Finesse 3, Resistance 3

Willpower: 5-7

Initiative: 6

Defense: 3

Speed: 15

Size: 2

Corpus: 5

BROTHER THAD MORGAN
ANTAGONIST

Profession: Academic

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 3, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 3, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Academics (Theology) 3, Computer 2, Investigation (Library) 3, Occult (Demonology) 3

Physical Skills: Firearms 2, Larceny 2, Stealth 1

Social Skills: Empathy 2, Expression 2, Intimidation 1, Persuasion 3, Subterfuge 3

Merits: Eidetic Memory, Inspiring, Language (Latin) 3, Meditative Mind, Unseen Sense (Demons)

Willpower: 4

Morality: 4

Virtue: Faith

Vice: Sloth

Initiative: 4

Defense: 2

Speed: 9

Health: 8

Dread Powers: Balefire 1, Confuse 1, Hypnotism 1

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
.32 revolver	3	20/40/80	7	

Orbs and rods have the following Numina abilities:

Manifest: The entities can manifest for one scene with a successful Power + Finesse roll, with similar environmental modifiers as ghosts and spirits. Their “visible” form is nevertheless difficult to see, requiring a reflexive Perception roll (Wits + Composure or appropriate Skill). Orbs or Rods must manifest to use the Numina below.

Omen: Orbs sometimes impart messages to humans regarding other supernatural beings. Roll Power + Finesse; with one or more successes, the target experiences a brief hallucination in which some string of nearby text — a street sign, a newspaper headline — is rearranged to form a message. If no text is available, the target will hear the message as a disembodied voice. The message will relate to a supernatural that’s nearby: IT WAITS BELOW; BEWARE THE ONE IN RED; THE DEAD WALK, etc. If no such monster is near, the message will concern to the mental state of the target or some nearby person: SHE LACKS CONVICTION; YOUR CONCERN BLINDS YOU.

Tongue Tie: Rods can inhibit a human’s ability to read, write or speak. Roll Power + Finesse against the target’s Resolve + Composure. Success indicates that for the rest of the scene,

a successful Intelligence + Resolve roll is required for the target character to perform any action that involves speaking, writing or reading (one category only). Should that roll fail, the character can make repeated attempts, but each subsequent attempt takes one minute of torturous mental struggle. Should the Rod’s initial roll achieve an exceptional success, the effect of the Numen lasts for one day, while dramatic failure by the Rod leaves the target immune to this Numen for one day. Recipients of this effect describe feeling overwhelmed by a powerful concept they can’t articulate, so much so that it’s hard to focus on anything else. In one case documented by Network Zero, a Philadelphia man spent years trying to express the thoughts the Rods left in his brain by creating lettered tiles describing “the dead resurrected on Jupiter,” which he set directly into the asphalt of various Philly streets.

Antagonist:
Brother Thad Morgan

Thad Morgan teaches Theology at West Philadelphia Catholic High School. He’s a warm man, ruddy cheeked, and with small eyes tucked behind round glasses. He’s quick with a joke or a compliment. He coaches girls’ softball and helps administer the school literary magazine.

He's also an accomplished demonologist, knowledge gained from a life as a descendant of one of Hell's many archdukes. Doesn't that make Thad one of the Lucifuge? No, because he chooses to serve the sins of Lucifer and walk the paths of Hell — though, that said, Thad isn't yet aware that he has any other choice.

Thad does not perform great evils himself; instead, he facilitates the evil of others, a task given to him in dreams by the infernal specimens waiting behind the dark curtains of the Abyss. He works behind the scenes to help absolve the sins of priests or teachers who performed any kind of "clergy abuse" upon students. He occasionally interjects diabolical teachings into his Theology classes: just enough to plant seeds of doubt without drawing the attention of the higher-ups (and he's performed enough favors for illicit administrators to skirt pretty close to the edge). He sometimes even makes sure that heretical or demonological rituals end up in the hands of students (some of whom go on to summon demons or become enthralled to them).

Mind you, Thad hates that he does this. He believes he has no choice (and in many ways, he doesn't, given the attention he gets from other demonic descendants). However, if presented with an option to join the Lucifuge, it's possible Thad could turn on his ancestry and help right the wrongs he's committed. Then again, would the Lucifuge even grant him such an option?

South Philadelphia

South Philly has seen its share of immigrants, from the Italian and Irish families who began settling there in the 19th century to today's populations from Asia, Russia, the Dominican Republic and other areas of the world. While some areas, notably those near Center City, are experiencing gentrification and skyrocketing real estate sales, much of the area remains a place of residential neighborhoods, pizzerias, ethnic grocery stores and family-owned restaurants. South Philly's borders also include the massive sports complex that hosts the Philadelphia Eagles, Phillies, 76ers and other pro sports teams, and the open-air Italian market featured in the Rocky films.

Joey "The Grocer" Carcione, Union Steward

The son of Italian immigrants, Joe Carcione came back from serving his country in the Second World War to find that a blight had struck his old neighborhood. People were sick and afraid, two children had been found dead in their beds, a parish priest had thrown himself in front of a garbage truck. The trouble seemed somehow related to a disease-ridden walnut tree growing on the corner of his block, so Joey and some of his friends and neighbors got rid of the thing. When a vampire came looking for the tree, Joey gathered some of his cousins and brothers, most of them also war veterans, and they took care of that thing, too. This led to a series of skirmishes in which Joey and a determined cadre of neighborhood allies took up the Vigil in earnest, defending first their own neighborhood and later striking at supernatural threats elsewhere in the city. As their skills and commitment increased, their cell came in contact with others. Those unions rose and fell, but Joey's group



stood firm, and naturally became Philly's Union core when that group began uniting across cities.

Too old to go out on missions anymore, Joey runs a neighborhood grocery store and hoagie shop a block away from the house where he was born, selling steak sandwiches at the front counter while his hunters in the back room plan raids and discuss strategy. Joey is a legendary advisor to the city's Union-affiliated hunters, and is often consulted by other cells as well. His longevity notwithstanding, Joe's Vigil has cost him dearly. His body is burdened by old injuries and his mind is plagued by frightful memories. Joey's wife left him two decades ago, unable to comprehend his strange calling. And just five years ago, the hunt claimed his oldest son, Geno. As his comrades-in-arms describe it, Geno was leading the cell up the back stairs in an empty house suspected of sheltering a werewolf, when he stepped through an ordinary-looking door and ...vanished. The hunters who followed a few seconds behind found the room silent and empty. Geno has not been seen since. Yet on the 13th day of each month, Joey receives a handwritten letter in the mail, a white sheet of paper with the following phrase written in black ink: SATOR AREPO TENET OPERA ROTAS. And he's certain the handwriting is Geno's.

Antagonist: The Dead Milkman

It's been quite some time since a legion of white-clad deliverymen made predawn deliveries of bottled milk to Philadelphia's stoops and porches. One of those bygone milkmen was Nate Fenstermacher, an unassuming mensch who never missed a day of work in 30 years. He died on the job, of a heart attack that left him sprawled out on Jim and



Jen Hogan's front steps with his rack of bottles set neatly beside him (putting them down gently so he wouldn't leave any broken glass was Nate's last act). His interment in St. Anthony's cemetery, two blocks down and three blocks over from the site of his demise, should have guaranteed him the long rest he deserved. Instead, a cabal of witches called Nate and some of his fellow corpses from the grave to serve as their lackeys. When the schemes of those magicians came crashing down around them, Nate should have lapsed back into true death like the rest of the zombies. But he stayed on the job, walking his old route in the hours before sunrise, hiding from the living for the rest of the day. Instead of milk bottles, he carries vessels of enchanted glass left behind by his former masters. South Philly hunters have put him to rest many times, only to find him shuffling through the neighborhood a few months later. He's never been violent, but residents who find a strange-looking glass bottle on the porch some chilly morning would be best advised to leave it alone.

Location: The Shipyard

Located in South Philly on the Delaware River, this facility was the first Navy shipyard in the United States, and remained in service from 1801 to 1995. It's currently owned and operated by a commercial shipping company, which rebuilt the facility and uses it to construct cargo and tanker vessels. More interestingly to hunters and others concerned with supernatural phenomena, the shipyard was the site of the so-called Philadelphia Experiment, allegedly conducted by the military in October of 1943. Also known as Project Rainbow, so the story goes, the experiment utilized classified

magnetic field-manipulating equipment to bend light around a small US warship, rendering it temporarily invisible. The effect is said to have also briefly teleported the ship in space and time. Some crewmembers literally vanished, others were killed or injured and many survivors were stricken with permanent schizophrenia or other mental illnesses. Whatever happened, the area in and around the shipyard exhibits the following properties:

At certain times of the year, the barrier between the solid world and the spirit world becomes especially thin, and ghosts and other non-corporeal entities have an easier time passing from their world to ours. Something about the area makes them uncomfortable, though, and most try to leave the area as soon as they can.

Sometimes, doors open, and inside is a long road bordered by a dense, thorny thicket. The sound of galloping horses grows louder. If the door stays open, the riders soon emerge to steal those nearby back to the strange hedge maze.

Witches have found that the area is a fortuitous place for magic involving space and or time. They can sometimes be found here conducting ritual magic or using the area as a mystic jumping off point to parts unknown. Sorcerers performing Dread Powers in this area gain +2 to any related roll.

Center City

Although geographically the smallest of Philadelphia's major districts, Center City looms large in the city's history, culture and economy. Bordered by South Street to the south, the Schuylkill and Delaware Rivers to west and east, and Vine Street to the north (or, some say, Spring Garden Street), it's the area that comprised the original Philadelphia prior to the 1854 consolidation. Center City includes streets walked by Franklin, Jefferson and other founding fathers; the Old City area, where Penn and his Quakers began the colony; City Hall; and Independence National Park, where visitors can view the Liberty Bell, Independence Hall and dozens of other historical artifacts and landmarks. The Benjamin Franklin Parkway, which begins at City Hall, runs through the Museum District to front of the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the southeastern tip of Fairmount Park. Center City is Philadelphia's downtown and central business district, containing most of the city's skyscrapers and some of the most expensive real estate in Philadelphia. While most of the city has seen population declines in the past several decades, Center City is an area of rapid growth in both its business and residential populations.

One Liberty Place is the tallest completed building in the city (and the state). It was the first building in Philly to exceed the height of the William Penn statue atop City Hall, supposedly incurring the "curse of Billy Penn," which has kept Philadelphia's major pro sports teams from winning any league championship since the skyscraper's 1987 construction. Its 61 floors might hide anything from a Cheiron Group boardroom to the ritual chamber of a wealthy necrophiliac cult.

Penn's Landing is the waterfront area, where William Penn is said to have docked in 1682 (he didn't). Its piers host many festivals and special events. For supernatural creatures that don't need to breathe or can survive underwater, it's an

APPENDIX TWO: PHILADELPHIA MONSTER HUNTING IN THE CITY OF BROTHERLY LOVE



MICHAEL MORYKEN UNIT COMMANDER LIBERTY UNIT



Profession: Soldier

Agency: Task Force: VALKYRIE

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Crafts (Demo) 2, Investigation 2, Politics (Military)

Physical Skills: Athletics 4, Brawl 2, Drive (Rough Terrain) 3, Firearms 3, Stealth 1, Survival (Harsh Climate) 3

Social Skills: Intimidation 3, Subterfuge 2

Merits: Disarm, **Fighting Style:** Boxing 1, Professional Training 2 (third Asset Skill: Crafts; Contacts in Requisition, Survivalists), Status (TFV) 3, Stunt Driver

Willpower: 7

Morality: 4

Virtue: Faith

Vice: Wrath

Initiative: 7

Defense: 3

Speed: 11

Health: 9

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Assault Rifle	4	150/300/600	10	

Armor: 1/2



excellent entry point to the city, or a place to drag unwary victims to a watery grave.

Philadelphia's Chinatown dates back to 1870, but has lost ground to Independence National Park, the Pennsylvania Convention Center and other projects. It remains a prosperous neighborhood rich in Asian culture, and possibly a place for city hunters to gather arcane information or meet with recent immigrants who bring hunting techniques from their own countries.

Rittenhouse Square is an open space park dating back to William Penn's original city plan. The affluent area around it includes some of the most expensive real estate in Philadelphia. The Ashwood Abbey maintains a chapter house here, though it's mostly used as a *pied-à-terre* for members who want to spend time in Center City. The Abbey's meetings

and "special events" are generally held in member residences elsewhere in the city or surrounding suburbs.

Elfreth's Alley is the oldest continuously inhabited residential street in the country. A well-known landmark, it's probably too well trod by tourists to host any active ghosts. But its cobblestones and older buildings might contain clues to any number of mysteries.

The Franklin Institute is a science museum filled with various exhibits and artifacts, as well as an observatory, an IMAX theater, a planetarium and the mainstay of grade school class trips since 1954: a giant, walkthrough model of a human heart. Its traveling and permanent exhibitions could include any sort of occult or weird science story seed, from a forgotten tesla invention to a Victorian ectoplasm gun to the notebook of an angel-summoning mathematician.

Michael Moryken, Unit Commander, Liberty Unit, Task Force: VALKYRIE

He never intended to be the head of a covert government action squad that uses next-generation technology to wage war against things that shouldn't exist. But in some ways, Commander Moryken is well suited to the job. He has no family and no close friends; he avoids romantic entanglements and other social relationships that might distract him from his work. His idea of a relaxing evening is to spend a few hours testing a new caliber of Etheric Rounds against a captured NoCoE (Non-Corporeal Entity) down in the active target range, then catching up on the latest postings on the TFV secure infoblog. Most of his superiors consider commander Moryken an ideal TFV field commander. A few are certain he's one bad day away from becoming a sociopath.

What no one but Moryken himself knows is that most of his emotional core has been inaccessible to him, locked away since age 21, when he stopped to help a stranger change a tire somewhere on I-95 south of Philadelphia and found himself at the mercy of something not human. That stranger offered Michael a deal: give up a piece of yourself and live, or stay whole and die. He chose the former, and when it was over, he found himself divested of the ability to form meaningful connections with the people around him. He knows he should care about the needs and feelings of others, but only with intense effort can he summon any empathy even for family members or longtime associates. It was his search for the thing that did this to him — a being he calls "The Driver" — that eventually drew him to TFV. His hope is that his service will bring him into contact with the thing that victimized him. His fear, and increasingly certain hunch, is that the thing was once a hunter itself.

Liberty Unit

Philadelphia's TFV branch was placed in the city during the 1976 US bicentennial celebrations, with orders to "defend the nation's historical treasures from extra-normal threats, and operate proactively to eliminate the same." But no such threats ever materialized, so in the subsequent decades, Liberty Unit has suffered repeated budget and staffing cuts. Today the entire unit consists of Commander Moryken and three field agents. Their public office space is located in an unassuming building near City Hall. Training facilities, an armory, specialized holding cells, medical and science labs, secure storage space and other resources are housed across the street in the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania. Originally a Masonic Temple dating back to colonial days (Ben Franklin, George Washington and other notables belonged), the building retains its Masonic facade, but was co-opted for use as a covert government operations center decades ago. For most of its history, Liberty Unit has followed a tradition of going on unauthorized "fishing expeditions" in various SAZs (supernatural activity zones) in and around the city. This practice, a way for Liberty's highly trained and underutilized agents to evade boredom and gain field experience, sometimes ends in disaster. A notable example happened in May of 1985, when a since decommissioned agent decided to gouge out her own eyes with a wire coat hanger after glimpsing something hidden beneath a stairway in a West

Philly row house. A few days later, the entire block was destroyed by fire in a confrontation between police and a cultlike political group based in the neighborhood. There's no evidence that the city government's use of explosives against said group was engineered by TFV. But then again, there wouldn't be.

Alicia Mangum, Senior Associate Director of Biotech, Keystone Pharma LLP

A rising star in one of the Cheiron Group's many sub-corporations, Alicia was fast-tracked to promotion not because of pharmaceutical knowledge or scientific background, but because of the skill she demonstrated as a project manager, corporate law savant and strategic planner. She earned her law degree, MBA and three Bachelor's degrees by age 24, and her first year at Cheiron saw her achieve three promotions and bring five major projects to successful completion (under budget). Her transfer to Philadelphia also initiated her first real exposure to the nature of Cheiron's operations. During the tour of the R&D labs, she excused herself once, vomited in a ladies' room toilet, then demanded to accompany the field team on its next target acquisition assignment to determine their resource utilization efficiency ratio. Since then she's proved equally ruthless at harvesting nonhuman bio-samples and maximizing quarterly profit margins.

Alicia is not all business, though she likes her subordinates to think so. She comes from a wealthy Southern family and has found it easy to maintain a cordial, good working relationship with Philadelphia's Ashwood Abbey chapter, but turned down its offer to join because she's repelled by its self-serving, hedonistic outlook. She believes that the work of the Cheiron group can be of benefit to humankind, and that finding and exploiting the weaknesses of monsters is a service for the greater good. Turning a profit while doing so is just good business. For the present, she's able to overlook the fact that the Cheiron Group's research pretty much has just one beneficiary, and that's the Cheiron Group. Sometimes she thinks about the human-seeming creatures confined in the company's Southwest Philadelphia holding and R&D facility, or the unknowing victims of the monsters at large in the city. And that's when she takes a deep breath and closes her office door. Then she buries herself in spreadsheets and annual reports, or flips open her iPhone and schedules a field mission.

Antagonist: Zipperhead

He's a tall, lean, ripped-jeans-and-leather-wearing relic of the 1970s, complete with old-school tattoos and safety-pin piercings. Zipperhead takes his name from a self-inflicted scar that runs from the nape of his neck up over the crown of his head and to the top of his forehead. When he's feeling particularly frisky, he covers the scar with an actual zipper sewn into his skin. Zipperhead's vampiric existence — his Requiem — began some 30-odd years ago, when he was stabbed and robbed while staggering home from a punk-rock gig on South Street. Instead of bleeding to death in an alley, he was transformed into one of the undead by a vampiric skank who had tired of hunting alone. Since then his fortunes have

APPENDIX TWO: PHILADELPHIA MONSTER HUNTING IN THE CITY OF BROTHERLY LOVE

ALICIA MAGNUM KEYSTONE PHARMA LLP

Profession: Professional

Agency: Cheiron Group

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 4, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics 1, Computer (Smartphone) 2, Investigation 3, Occult 2, Politics 1, Science 1

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 1, Drive 1, Stealth 1

Social Skills: Empathy 1, Intimidation 3, Persuasion (Good Business) 3, Socialize 3, Subterfuge 3

Merits: Fleet of Foot 2, Professional Training 3 (3rd Asset Skill: Science; Contacts in Surgeons, Legal Department, Harvest Market), Status (Cheiron Group) 2, Thaumatechnology 2 (Lover's Lips)

Willpower: 6

Morality: 6

Virtue: Prudence

Vice: Greed

Initiative: 5

Defense: 2

Speed: 11

Health: 7



risen and fallen a dozen times over; he's dwelled in an Old City church basement, an abandoned boathouse on the banks of the Schuylkill, several crack houses, a Society Hill luxury suite and, up until a year ago, in a warren of unused subway tunnels and concourses beneath the Center City streets. He shared that space with a few dozen of the most feared and savage vampires in the city, an extended family of demon-worshiping, carnage-loving degenerates.

And then one night, Zipperhead opened his eyes to see his chamber fill with a blinding white light. When it passed, he crawled out of his hole to find all his bloodthirsty associates had been reduced to ash. Stumbling through the passages that led to the street, he rounded a corner and found himself facing something that looked like a corona of flames surrounding a single unblinking eye. Strangely, he felt no fear, no mindless panic at the danger of fire. He stared into the silent eye until the apparition faded away, then walked calmly into the cool night air. Since then, Zipperhead spends most of his nights

in the South Street area, stalking the tourists who flock to the once-edgy, now phony, neighborhood. With the zeal of a desert prophet, he tries to explain to his fellow vampires what happened down there, or at least his understanding of it. He tries to convince them that a new power is coming to the city, and that those who don't make some sort of accord with it will be wiped out utterly. Few believe him, but there's no denying that the widely discussed incident has left Philadelphia's vampires shaken, anxious and prone to overreact to threats. Zipperhead's survival of the mysterious slaughter has earned him a hallowed status among some of his peers, who are quick to cover up his careless feeding habits or come to his defense — as more than one hunter has found out.

Location: The Müitter Museum

This museum, owned and operated by the Philadelphia College of Surgeons, has the stated purpose of educating future doctors about anatomy and human medical anomalies. Its collection is certainly a valuable scholarly resource. Almost

ZIPPERHEAD
ANTAGONIST

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 3
 Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3
 Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 4, Composure 4
 Mental Skills: Crafts 3 (Forgery), Investigation 3, Occult 1,
 Physical Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 4, Stealth 3, Weaponry 3 (Knives)
 Social Skills: Expression 4, Intimidation 3, Persuasion 4, Socialize 4, Streetwise 4
 Merits: Danger Sense 2, Fighting Style: Two Weapons 3, Allies 3, Resources 2
 Willpower: 10
 Morality: 4
 Virtue: Hope
 Vice: Gluttony
 Initiative: 8
 Defense: 3
 Speed: 12
 Health: 8
 Dread Powers: Drain 2, Hypnotism 2, Unholy Attribute (Strength) 3



MERIT: STATUS (MÜTTER MUSEUM)

Effect: You're known to the second staff of the Mütter Museum, which allows you to access their collection of unique occult-related objects, and their expertise in the trafficking of occult items in the city of Philadelphia. Note that even though the museum specializes in medical oddities items, they must keep abreast of all sorts of occult item trading in order to acquire what they want.

• **Guest.** Once or twice a month, you can ask the staff a question relating to the trade in occult oddities in the city and get some kind of answer, including "We don't know."

• **Docent.** You can ask such questions once a week. You may browse limited areas of the collection under staff supervision.

• **Friend.** The museum informs you whenever a new item comes into the collection. Also, you're permitted to purchase certain objects from the Museum's surplus, and they'll spread the word to their contacts if you want something they don't have or can't release.

• **Member.** You're regularly invited to participate in silent auctions of rare and valuable objects. You can access the collection at will, and you can bring items to the staff for identification or appraisal.

• **Patron.** You can borrow items from the collection, and every so often, an object is offered to you as a gift. If you need, say, a werewolf skull or an obstetric tool used by 16th-century witch-hunters to abort infants sired by

all its visitors, however, come to be shocked, grossed out and/or titillated by the incredibly bizarre, morbid and disturbing specimens on display there. Among the museum's 20,000 objects are a five-foot human colon that once contained 40 pounds of fecal matter; sliced, preserved sections of a human head; numerous bones, skulls and skeletons showing the effects of various traumas and diseases; and a woman's corpse that was transformed into a soaplike substance by an unknown chemical reaction. There are also objects that have never been on display and never will be. Weird glyphs formed on the surface of a madman's brain. Implike, fetal creatures suspended in jars of formaldehyde. Petrified human hearts, livers and lungs that have tiny eyes and rows of jagged teeth. To see these and even stranger items, or even be allowed to purchase them, one must be invited by the museum's "second staff," all of whom are unaffiliated hunters. More than once, acquisitive groups like the Ashwood Abbey or Aegis Kai Doru have tried to gain control of the museum, only to have their attempts rebuffed by other patrons wanting to retain access to its treasures.

North Philadelphia

Factory shutdowns, urban blight and other downturns of the late 20th century have hit Upper and Lower North Philadelphia harder than any city district. To many city residents, North Philly is synonymous with poverty, high crime and collapsing infrastructure. As in other regions of the city, it would be inaccurate to paint all of North Philadelphia with too broad a brush. Some blocks are experiencing gentrification or have been preserved as historic districts, Temple University has been working to improve the surrounding area, and the northernmost neighborhoods of Olney and East and West Oak Lane are thriving. But for the most part, the population of North Philly is burdened by severe social issues. Much of the city's high murder rate is due to blood spilled here, fueled by drug use, gang activity and easy access to cheap handguns.

Isaiah Bellamy, Long Night Deacon

In the middle-class West Philly household where Isaiah Bellamy grew up, church was just a Sunday morning prelude to the Eagles kickoff. But teaching at Temple University with North Philadelphia the epicenter of a rising homicide rate made Professor Bellamy want to give more than lip service to Christian charity. Soon he was volunteering at a Long Night mission seven nights a week. Their fundamentalist rhetoric didn't affect him much — until the night he witnessed a savage street battle between gang-bangers and a pack of werewolves. That horror triggered a religious reawakening for Isaiah, and now he's a Long Night believer with a growing cell of ex-gang members backing him up.

Isaiah's group calls itself M5:5, after the Bible verse from the Book of Matthew: "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." The name is the group's way of remembering the ones they fight for. Isaiah feels that serving the Long Night gives the alienated young males of North Philly a positive channel for their energy, whether they're protecting their neighborhoods from demons or distributing



food and medicine to the poorest residents. But sometimes his faith in the Long Night ethos wavers. What if these aren't the End Times? What if his boys should be thinking about education, about employment, about building a new life? Where exactly is he leading them?

Antagonist: Imakillya

Some say they've seen him from the corner of their eye, the broad-shouldered man in the dark, hooded jacket. He wears a gold chain with a medallion shaped like a .38 special. He stands in the crowd as an argument breaks in a nightclub parking lot. He watches from a doorway as an angry young man buys a handgun from the trunk of someone's car. He hangs back as two drug dealers approach each other on a contested street corner. He keeps his hood up, but if anyone dared to look into his shadowed face, they'd see no eyes, no features, just a rippled mass of flesh and a slash of a mouth that holds row after row of gold, jagged shark teeth. The murderous entity that calls itself Imakillya isn't responsible for the blood in North Philadelphia's streets, but it's grown powerful by feeding on the homicides, and will do whatever it can to perpetuate the cycles of violence.

Imakillya exists in an invisible, immaterial form, unless using the Materialize Numen below. Like all spirits, it's sustained by Essence, a subtle mystic energy that it gains at a rate of 1 per day. The spirit can draw additional Essence from the site of a recent murder (roll Power + Finesse, gain 1 Essence per success). When not materialized or fettered (see below), the spirit loses 4 points of essence per hour. Should its Essence fall to 0, the spirit enters a state of slumber.

IMAKILLYA ANTAGONIST

Attributes: Power 10, Finesse 9, Resistance 11

Willpower: 21

Essence: 25 max

Initiative: 20

Defense: 10

Speed: 24

Size: 5

Corpus: 16

Numina:

Blast: Roll Power + Finesse + 2 dice per point of Essence spent; each success inflicts a point of lethal damage on the target. This damage manifests as knife cuts or bullet wounds, even though he has no knife or gun.

Harrow: Roll Power + Finesse, contested by the target's Composure, to overwhelm the target with feelings of murderous hate for 1 turn per success. Costs 1 Essence.

Living Fetter: Roll Power + Finesse vs. the target's Resolve + Composure; allows the spirit to link to a living being and stay in the material world without losing Essence. The spirit must stay near its fetter. Costs 2 Essence to establish the link.

Materialize: Roll Power + Finesse to appear in material form for one hour per success.

Ban: Imakillya cannot harm, or come within 15 feet of, any mortal with a Morality of 8 or greater. He cannot enter any space where five or more mortals of Morality 8 or higher have congregated within the previous seven days for religious worship or any cooperative effort.



Antagonist: Therese Ross, the Old Wolf

Recent decades have not been kind to the werewolves of Philadelphia. About 70 years ago, werewolf packs that transgressed against the laws of their kind inspired a potent counterattack by some well-organized hunter cells. The destruction of those renegades triggered shame and fury that rippled through the city's werewolf community and spiraled into ruthless battles for honor and territory. The distraction left the city vulnerable to incursion by the wolves' ancestral enemies, and to spirits that should have been the werewolves' prey. As a consequence of this, in the 1970s, the wolves lost control of the 4,100-acre Fairmount Park, land that had been their territory even before the arrival of the Europeans.

Therese Ross is a veteran of the Fairmount Slaughter — which took three of her packmates as well as her left eye — and countless nameless skirmishes since. Her people call

her the "Old Wolf," and she's the most renowned of the wolf people in the city, but that kind of status doesn't count for as much as it used to. One day, she's vowed, she'll see Fairmount back in the werewolves' possession. But until the time is right, she's putting her energy into guiding young wolf packs toward the values and priorities of their forerunners. It's tough going: today's werewolves came up in a time of heightened violence, and consider a death fight the default response to the most superficial of quarrels. While they fight and kill each other, human hunters pick off the weak and foolish; meanwhile, a powerful murder-spirit stalks the North Philly streets with no fear of predation by the wolfmen. Lately, Therese has heard rumors of a newcomer to her territory, a human leader who's bringing discipline and purpose to the violent youths of the streets and directing them to defend their own neighborhoods. She wonders if a truce between man and wolf might be soon be possible, or if she should strike now before the humans



THERESE ROSS ANTAGONIST

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 4, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 2 (5/2), Dexterity 4 (5/6), Stamina 4 (6/5)

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 2, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Investigation 2, Medicine 2, Occult 1

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl (Claw) 4, Stealth 3, Survival (Urban) 3

Social Skills: Animal Ken (Dogs) 2, Empathy 1, Intimidation 4, Streetwise 2

Merits: Holistic Awareness, Fast Reflexes 2, Fresh Start, Natural Immunity, Toxin Resistance

Willpower: 6

Morality: 6

Virtue: Justice

Vice: Pride

Initiative: 8 (9/10)

Defense: 4

Speed: 11 (15/16)

Health: 9 (13/9)

Dread Powers: Dread Attack (Claw, Fang) 3, Fury 3, Gremlinize 3

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Bite (Dread Attack)	3 (L)	12 (Hybrid)/10 (Wolf)
Claw (Dread Attack)	3 (L)	12 (Hybrid)



reorganize and take the offensive. For their part, hunters of North Philly talk about a huge, gray-furred wolf-beast that's missing an eye. Drop your weapons and flee, the story goes, and the monster will not pursue; try to fight and it will tear you to pieces in a heartbeat.

Location: The Old Factory

For over 100 years, the building was home to one manufacturing concern or other; its vast machines churned out everything from barrel staves to buttons to extruded plastic multi-lumen tubing. Then shifting patterns of economy and production sucked the life from the industrial complexes of North Philly, and the Factory became one more rusting, crumbling hulk in a blighted urban dead zone. But the half-collapsed behemoth isn't as lifeless as it seems. On some nights, weird vibrations can be felt in the empty lots and abandoned row homes around it. A flickering blue briefly illuminates one or more windows. A faint hum, like atonal music, emanates from somewhere deep within. Perhaps its years of bustling

activity left behind some kind of psychic fallout. Perhaps the building itself was in some sense bereaved by its reversal of fortune. For whatever reason, the Factory called out to a locus beyond space and time, a deeply wounded non-place that occultists call the Abyss. The Factory's loneliness and brokenness resonated with that crack in reality and drew down its weird power. Now the Factory uses that power to do what it once did: to assemble, to construct, to create.

In place of the steam whistle that once summoned its workers to the line, the Factory emits a subtle, steady signal that calls to those who feel broken in body or spirit, those who wish to be made into something new or greater. And they come, they find a way into the bowels of the Factory, they subject themselves to peculiar machinery and painful reconstruction. Some remain, serving the Factory and protecting the machines. Others stagger away, trying to make a new life to match their altered bodies and doctored minds. Hunters are as yet unaware of the Factory's existence. But some have encountered the woman whose clockwork bird-

heart creeps out at night to steal the breath of her neighbors. Or the cancer patient whose tumor has been replaced by plastic gears that control his arms and legs. The question is should they be considered victims or threats?

Northwest Philadelphia

Many residents of Philly's northwest section were drawn there by the area's suburban feel, affluent neighborhoods and popular shopping and restaurant districts. The Northwest's hilly terrain includes the Manayunk Wall, a steeply inclined street that takes a heavy toll on bicycle racers in the annual Philadelphia International Championship. The Wissahickon Creek passes through here, creating a wooded valley that's part of the city park system.

Jared Witherspoon, Ashwood Abbey

A resident of Northwest Philly's affluent Chestnut Hill area, Jared saw his lifestyle go from rich to super-rich when Pennsylvania's Gaming Control Board approved a subsidiary of one of his family's companies to build and operate a casino in the city of Philadelphia. Expectations of its success have already opened doors for Jared. Like an invitation to join the Ashwood Abbey, which struck him as an intriguing opportunity for making new social contacts. For his initiation Jared volunteered to capture "some little gremlin thing" that had been sighted at the casino's construction site. It seemed a stimulating challenge. But while on the hunt, Jared found himself caught in a nightmare: a skull-faced demon-thing riding a giant spider was chasing down a mob of weird animal-people, and he was trapped in the middle.



THE SPECIAL COLLECTION

Almost every member of Philadelphia's Ashwood Abbey chapter keeps some occult trophies and souvenirs at home. But more potent and valuable items belonging to the club as a whole are stored in a hidden basement of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The chapter's sergeant-at-arms is the only one who can access them, and they're never loaned out to individual members. The following are a few of the items known to be in the collection at present:

The Greek Fragment: This is a piece of statuary, ostensibly the thighs, groin and abdomen from some faux-Grecian sculpture of an athlete or god. According to club records, the fragment came to life twice in 1917, allowing Abbey members to take full advantage of the anatomically correct creature's seemingly limitless stamina.

The Unspeakable Pâté: Club lore states that these few ounces of meat paste are the grisly fare of Philadelphia serial killer Gary Heidnik. Among other horrible acts, Heidnik mixed the ground-up flesh of one of his victims with some dog food, and fed it to the captives he kept in his basement. The Abbey claims that consuming a small portion of the paste will summon the victim's ghost, or perhaps Heidnik's (he was executed in 1999).

The Lively Gibbet: This is a kind of articulated metal frame, dating to the 18th century, designed to display the cadaver of an executed criminal as a deterrent to other wrongdoers. The Abbey purchased it from the Mütter Museum a decade ago, after a member discovered how to activate the device's enchantment. If a body less than three days dead is placed inside the Gibbet and the proper incantation spoken, it becomes animated as a zombie. Abbey members have no shortage of creative ways to make use of a walking corpse. The Aegis Kai Doru has claimed that the Gibbet belongs to it, but so far has been unable to convince or coerce the Abbey into giving it up.

APPENDIX TWO: PHILADELPHIA MONSTER HUNTING IN THE CITY OF BROTHERLY LOVE

And then, time stopped. The bizarre creatures froze in mid-flight; the dust and litter kicked up in the fray hovered motionless in the air. Two columns of blue-white flame erupted before him; Jared fell to the ground but could not turn away. Inside each blazing light, he saw a vision of the casino to come: in one, the place attracted twisted and inhuman beings from all over the city, which came there to exploit and prey upon unsuspecting victims. In the other, the casino was ground that horrors feared to tread, where the dark predators were exposed to the light and burned by its radiance. The timeless moment ended; Jared found himself retching onto the pavement, surrounded by the charred and smoking remains of the demonic hunter and its would-be quarry.

Jared hasn't shared all the details of that incident. At first, he couldn't, as he found himself unable to speak a single word for three days. When his voice returned, he told of the fire-pillars — the Messengers, as he calls them — but kept the visions to himself. The Abbey was thrilled by Jared's story, and quickly acknowledged him as a bold go-getter who could take the club in new directions. And that suits Jared just fine. Because he understands that he'll have to choose one or the other of the two visions. And he senses that to make either come true, he'll need to seize control of the Abbey and use it to coordinate — or corrupt — the activities of Philadelphia's hunter factions. He's not sure yet which path he's going to follow, but that's all right. A hunter has to be patient, after all.

Antagonists: The Johnson Family Cult

They moved to Philadelphia just a year ago, but it didn't take long for the Johnson clan's friendliness and good

nature to convince everyone that Barbara, Frank and their three teenage kids were the best thing to happen to the neighborhood in years. Even their dog is friendly and polite. But the Johnson household has another, unseen resident: a shadowy, once-human thing that clings to the attic rafters and dominates their lives. They call it "Uncle Spider," or sometimes "Uncle Chuck."

Out of fear, loyalty or blind faith — probably a mix of all three — the Johnson family accepts the edicts of Uncle Spider without question. It, or he, claims to once have been Charles Carroll, a distant ancestor of the Johnsons and a signer of the Declaration of Independence. According to the Uncle, he was granted a revelation by a giant spirit-serpent that dwelled deep beneath Independence Hall: a complex mythology in which all creation is represented by 13 transcendental manuscripts. Five such books have already been written, and it's Uncle Chuck's task to shepherd the Sixth Manuscript into existence. Doing so requires the sacrifice of dark energy — "atramentous ink," as he calls it — to the manuscript's metaphysical authors: Black Hood, Finger Crow, Just Heart, He of Wood and the others.

And so their Uncle sends the Johnsons all across the city on a twofold mission: first, capture supernatural creatures and bring them home, to be gradually drained of their power in a prolonged ritual of confinement and torture. Second, bring home new "family members" (hunters, usually) who will be brainwashed into carrying the Johnson family name and who will serve Uncle Spider with pride. With Uncle Spider's guidance, the family's developed a useful expertise in identifying and stalking the weak and inexperienced among both monsters and hunters.

System: Uncle Spider gives his family some of the energy taken from their captives. For each point of Health "taken" from a supernatural prisoner, a family member can raise his or her Stamina or Strength for one scene on a point-for-point basis. They can also use one stolen point to heal two points of bashing damage or one point of lethal damage. Five points can heal one point of aggravated damage (this takes two nights). They can store up to five "stolen points" at a time, but this can only be replenished from another "gift" from their uncle.

Antagonist: The Manayunk Man-Eater

A former industrial center that's reinvented itself into a neighborhood of upscale restaurants, condos, boutiques and nightclubs, Manayunk is a lively area with lots of choices for eating, drinking and socializing. One fairly popular dining spot is Stella's, a small, upscale eatery tucked away on a Manayunk side street. Famous for its strip steaks and crab cakes, Stella's boasts fine dining in a semi-casual atmosphere. It's a comfortable, welcoming restaurant housed in a former church, with an understated decor enhanced by a few surviving stained-glass windows. And it's run by a magician who feasts on human souls.

Stella's is owned and operated by a woman named Esther Blake — or, at least, that's the name that appears in the public records. She's reclusive for a restaurateur, rarely seen by her





customers, preferring to keep a low profile and let her manager and staff act as the public face of the business. What her diners don't realize is that she interacts with them on a more intimate level. Esther is a witch who follows a forbidden path, one that enables her to extend her own power and lifespan by consuming the souls of others. Through the influence of a magical artifact, certain food served from her kitchen leaves a temporary mark on the souls of those who consume it. Esther can later reach out and, with some effort, rip the branded soul loose from its body. The stolen soul might be consumed immediately, or saved for future need (usually in a basement storeroom, disguised as bread, wine or some other foodstuff). For the being left behind, nightmares about being eaten alive initiate a slide into madness that leaves the victim a near-mindless husk. Such soulless shells are likely to end up in an institution, or possessed by ghosts or spirits. Because Esther is careful to take only a few souls per year, her actions have so far gone unnoticed by her fellow mages or the wider community.

Anyone who eats one of the "special meals" rolls Resolve + Composure vs. Esther's magic dice pool of 8. If she wins, the target's soul is marked for one day per success. During that time, she can attempt to steal the target's soul. This is a contested, reflexive action pitting the target's Resolve against Esther's 8-dice pool. She must achieve a cumulative number of successes greater than the subject's Morality, and can only make four rolls before the connection to her victim is lost. If the target achieves more successes than Esther at any point, the spell fails. If Esther wins the conflict, the target soul is hers. The victim loses a dot of Morality for each week his soul

is gone; at Morality 1, he begins to lose Willpower dots. A character whose soul is stolen usually experiences recurring nightmares that may provide clues to what's happening: glimpses of an old church, the shadow of a tall woman in black, an oven filled with human-shaped bread. Victims of soul theft will return to normal if they eat or drink the stolen soul in its disguised form. Other mages may be willing to help restore a victim to normal — but might think twice if that victim is a known hunter who's injured or killed their brethren.

Northeast Philadelphia

The Northeast is considered to have upper (Far Northeast) and lower (Lower Northeast) sections. Its southernmost segment, Kensington, includes some of the poorest neighborhoods in the city, as well as the working-class and increasingly gentrified Fishtown area. Farther north, one can find the neighborhood of Fox Chase, which contains the Fox Chase Cancer Center, several historical sites, and the woodlands and wetlands of the 1,600-acre Pennypack Park. The Northeast is also home to many shopping centers, including a favorite of discount shoppers from across the state, the Franklin Mills Mall. In the 1980s, high taxes and political disaffection triggered a secessionist movement in Northeast Philadelphia, but the attempt to sever the Northeast from the city was unsuccessful.

Antagonist: The Russian Mob

The Russian immigrant population has boomed over the last 20 years, filtering down through the southern end of Bucks County and through areas like Bensalem. With the downtrodden immigrants came those who might seek to exploit the system, or worse, just exploit the immigrants themselves. Enter the Russian mob.

They're not monsters, though certainly monsters both human and inhuman lurk among them. They run drugs. They manage prostitutes. They have a couple of contract killers among their numbers. (Oh, and true story: just last year, the FBI discovered that these guys tried to taint \$250,000 in currency with the staphylococcus bacteria; while it was called "terrorism," it was really about trying to dissuade thieves from touching their money.)

They join with the monsters — often unknowingly — to prey upon the unwitting. A human slavery ring might bring in Ukrainian girls whose wombs play host to terrible things. Boxes of coffee and canned goods hide secret shipments of vampire's blood. A mob boss whose son is murdered contracts with a witch to get revenge on the killer. Hunters might come across the mob this way, or they might just get in each other's way — it's a big territory, and only so many guns and so much money to go around.

Antagonist: The Philadelphia Ghost-Finder's League

They're not strictly an antagonist, but they're not really... hunters, either. No, this ragtag group of amateur ghost hunters (who, like Null Mysteriis, seek a scientific explanation for the supernatural but don't have a fraction of that compact's

THE BLOOD MUMMER

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 4, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 5, Stamina 4

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 2, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Crafts (Suit Modifications) 3, Investigation 2, Occult 4

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl (Bite) 4, Larceny 2, Stealth 4, Weaponry 4

Social Skills: Empathy 1, Expression (Dance) 5, Intimidation 3, Streetwise 1

Merits: Danger Sense, Direction Sense, Fast Reflexes 2, Fighting Style: Two Weapons 4, Unseen Sense (Vampires)

Willpower: 5

Morality: 0

Virtue: Fortitude

Vice: Gluttony

Initiative: 10

Defense: 4

Speed: 14

Health: 9

Armor: 2

Special

Altered Blood: Oscar's blood sustains him with no need to eat, drink or sleep. His blood offers no nourishment to vampires, though it's not harmful to them. (It also renders him immune to most of the effects from drinking vampire blood.) In order to survive, Oscar must regularly consume both human and vampire blood. Oscar must ingest five pints of human blood every two weeks or so, and one pint of Vampire blood per month; if he fails to do so, he takes two points of bashing damage per day. This damage can only be healed if he fulfills his blood-ingesting requirement. Characters possess one pint of blood per Health level. The blood must be fresh, never from a hospital's supply. Lacking a tongue, Oscar can't drink liquids in the conventional sense. His preferred method is to inject the blood directly into his body, but in a pinch, he can pour it down his throat.

The Mummer Suit: Shortly after his rebirth, Oscar created this bizarre assemblage out of materials stored in his cell's safehouse - and the skin, bones and blood of his fallen team. When he wears it, the suit becomes a part of his body. He suffers no penalties from



THE BLOOD MUMMER (CONTINUED)

its bulk, and it cannot be removed from him by normal means. It also has the following properties:

- The costume holds up to 10 hidden concealed knife blades; Oscar can place one in his hand as a reflexive action. The costume also contains several medical syringes that he can manipulate at will. If Oscar scores a success while attacking with a syringe, the target will either be injected with a toxin (Toxicity 3-5+ exceed the toxicity rating on a Stamina + Resolve roll to avoid damage) or suffer a point of bashing damage as the syringe removes a small amount of blood.
- Once per scene, Oscar can activate a mesmeric effect by making a series of steps and hand motions. Witnesses must contest Resolve + Composure vs. Oscar's Presence + Expression. Those who fail are transfixed and must remain motionless for the rest of the scene, after which they have no memory of what occurred. The trance is broken if the victim is threatened or attacked.
- The costume's mystical properties must be rededicated every 30 days with a ritual that requires Oscar to anoint it with human and vampire blood. If Oscar takes any lethal damage while wearing it, the costume must be repaired as part of the next monthly ritual. This requires him to incorporate skin and bones taken from a hunter as part of the ritual.

Derangement: Hysteria. Oscar cannot tolerate hearing his own voice. If exposed to a recording of it, he must succeed on a reflexive Resolve + Composure roll or flee the area. Since he's now mute, the only way to acquire such recordings is by contacting his former friends or family (who believe he died with the rest of his friends in the "fire" that destroyed their clubhouse).

resources) is based out of Holmesburg in the far Northeast, and often gets in the way of the other hunter groups. It gets a call or hears a story about some folklore, and shows up with its little digital recorders or digital thermometers and aim to "prove" the existence of the unseen world. The reality is the members of the League throw themselves into danger. Oh, sure, most of what they investigate is bunk. But even one out of 10 encounters gone wrong is too high a ratio. And yet the hunters don't really want these amateurs mucking up their business, either. Worse, these poor fools often need rescuing, mind-wiping or exorcisms. Some end up missing, and it only seems to deepen the group's curiosity — a curiosity that will kill them as surely as it killed that cat.

Southwest Philadelphia

A varied area, Southwest Philly includes both blighted areas and well-kept residences, immigrants and long-term residents. Its most southern neighborhoods border Philadelphia International Airport, oil refineries, gas tank farms and abandoned lots used for illegal dumping. Part of the area overlaps with a national wildlife refuge that preserves 200 acres of tidal marshland, featuring walking trails and opportunities for canoeing and fishing.

Antagonist: The Blood Mummer

For most of his adult life, Oscar Rizzo was involved with the Oak Street Defenders, a small club of mummers — elaborately

masked and costumed dancers and musicians who compete in Philadelphia's New Year's Day parade. Oscar's group was small and they never won any prizes, but they put on a good show.

They were also hunters.

The club was a perfect cover for the Vigil, giving members plenty of excuses for spending time away from family and friends. And for a while, the cell was successful, scoring victories against dangerous threats in its neighborhood and assisting some other cells elsewhere in the city.

But Oscar let his guard down. He met a woman who was the slave of a vampire the cell had recently thwarted. She brought him to her master, who mesmerized Oscar, gave him a gun and sent him to incapacitate his teammates. First, though, they cut out his tongue with a straight razor and laughed. When Oscar came out of his trance, his friends were dead on the safehouse floor and vampires were lapping the blood from the slits in their throats. They saved Oscar for last, draining him dry and leaving him to spend his last moments thrashing in the bloody effluence of his fallen comrades.

He shouldn't have survived. But it was the blood. The blood of his friends, the blood of the monsters who'd fed on them carelessly. The spilled blood mixed with broken vials of some strange liquid given to the group months ago by a hunter from out of town. And as he lay dying, Oscar smeared the black mixture onto his lips, felt it crawl down his throat. It sustained him. Healed him. Made him into something new.

RICHIE HOMACKE HOG ISLANDERS CELL

Profession: Laborer

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 4

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Crafts (Jury Rig) 3, Investigation 2

Physical Skills: Brawl (Straight Punch) 4, Drive 1, Firearms 2, Larceny (Plain View) 3, Stealth (Unassuming) 3, Weaponry 1

Social Skills: Intimidation 3, Persuasion 1, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 2

Merits: Iron Stamina 2, Safehouse (Cache 1, Secrecy 1, Size 2, Traps 1), Strong Back 1, Torture Suite 1

Willpower: 7

Morality: 6

Virtue: Fortitude

Vice: Wrath

Initiative: 6

Defense: 2

Speed: 10

Health: 9

Oscar is not a vampire, nor is he one of their ghoul thralls. But he uses blood, human blood and vampire blood, to keep himself alive. To enchant the bone-and-cloth mummer's costume he created for himself. And to help him wreak havoc on vampires, their human pawns and any hunter who lets an undead bloodsucker slip through his fingers.

Location: Fort Mifflin

Fort Mifflin began as a British fortification; it was used by the Americans to defend Philadelphia during the Revolution, and fell back into British hands during the city's occupation. Later, the fort was used to hold Confederate prisoners during the Civil War. It remained in use by the US Army until 1952. Today Fort Mifflin contains 14 restored historic buildings, including some underground chambers just recently discovered. The site is often called one of the most haunted places in America; tales of creepy sensations, odd noises and frightening supernatural encounters have been told by visitors for decades. Public tours recount stories of the restless dead reputed to haunt the grounds, including the Faceless Man, the Blacksmith and the Screaming Woman. What not even the supernaturally aware realize yet is that Fort Mifflin

isn't just a haunting ground for ghosts; it's a place where they're imprisoned and kept from attending to the unfinished business that keeps them in the living world. Ghosts from different periods in history, from all over the city, have found themselves trapped within Fort Mifflin's walls. What force or entity imposes this internment on them is unknown. But sometimes the confinement drives them to madness, fury or desperate cries for help.

System: As a former battlefield, Fort Mifflin allows ghosts to manifest with a successful Power + Finesse roll, with a +3 bonus (and the standard penalty of -1 for each mortal witness besides the first). The unique nature of the place prevents ghosts from attempting to manifest more than once per day. Furthermore, a ghost can only attempt to communicate by either visible or audible means, never both at the same time; a ghost cannot use the ghost speech Numen while visibly manifested, for example. No Fort Mifflin ghost can leave the grounds under its own power, so they cannot visit their anchors to regain Essence. They do gain Essence when mortals remember them, attend to their graves, recognize their manifestations. (This means that the fort's older ghosts, less likely to experience such occasions, are stingy about spending

Essence.) A ghost is released from confinement at the fort if its anchor is brought onto the premises; some of them are aware of this, others are not.

Richie Homacke, Hog Islanders Cell

Richie's built like a fireplug, got a face like a bulldog. But for the most part, people ignore him: he pushes a mop at the Philadelphia International Airport. As a janitor, he's easy to ignore. And as the head of the custodial staff, he has access to all kinds of places in the airport.

Of course, all kinds of *things* come into the airport, and that's the problem. Some of them come through baggage: vampires in body bags or sealed crates, cursed relics in metal briefcases, demons in pet carriers. Some of them come as passengers: witches departing for Beijing, cult leaders shipping off to the Heartland to proselytize their bizarro dogma, human hosts possessed by invading parasites hoping to spread their monstrous infection all over the damn country. Richie's head

broke a bit with 9/11, and it was hard not to see the Devil's face in the plume of smoke, and even now it remains difficult for him to not suspect some monstrous conspiracy. So now he does his part: any of the monsters who get off the plane or try to get on, well, Richie'll stop them however he has to.

Of course, he's not alone. The Hog Islanders (so named for the island on which the airport sits: Hog Island) are his cell, and all the hunters work at the airport. Ruthie Jackson's a plane mechanic. Jerry Johns works baggage. Anthony Bonansinga is on security. They don't just stop the monstrous influence, either: Richie's pretty sure most of the hunter orgs and agencies are up to no good, too. He doesn't like how they try to stake a claim in the airport, so he stops them — not with violence...not usually.

Richie's got a lot of family and a lot of friends. But all of them worry about him. He's willing to work longer and longer hours for less and less pay. And his conspiracy theories — especially the ones he brings up at Thanksgiving or Christmas dinner — get wilder by the year.

Flesh Trade Pt VI

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For a moment, everyone stared wordlessly at the suit's grim, bruised face.

Vince glanced at Andrea and Jack. They glanced back. Then Gabreski started to chuckle. Jack joined in, and soon everyone - Karl and Raimundo included - were laughing like madmen.

The suit was not amused.

"Listen to this guy," Vince said, wiping tears from the corners of his eyes. "Some Russian pistol-whipped him, shot his guys and took his money, and he's our only hope?"

Raimundo leaned forward in the driver's seat, still giggling, and pressed his forehead to the cold steering wheel. "Wow. I guess we're pretty fucked, then, huh?"

That touched off another jag of hysterical laughter. The suit just stared at them, torn between bemusement and anger. He held up his hands. "Any of you comedians want to take these off?" he said, showing them the handcuffs.

Vince stifled another chuckle and shook his head. "That's not how the game's played, tough guy. From what I saw in that warehouse tonight, you're looking at multiple counts of first-degree murder. They still execute people for that around here."

The suit's eyes went wide. "I didn't kill anybody!"

All the humor drained from Gabreski's face. "You were there to buy the organs the Russians carved out of those poor people," he snapped. "That makes you just



as guilty of their deaths as the bastards who did the deed." He folded his thick arms and fixed the man with a steely glare. "You want to stay off death row, you'd best tell us everything you know about your Russian partners."

"Look, it's not like that," he protested, wilting beneath the detective's remorseless stare. "I mean, I wasn't actually there to buy anything from them. It was all a setup."

"No shit," Vince growled. "We saw the whole thing. You and your buddies were going to rob the Russians at gunpoint."

"No, goddamnit!" the man shouted. "You've got it all wrong! I was undercover, posing as a buyer. We were trying to get close to the Russians and bust up their operation."

Gabreski scowled at the man; he hoped he wasn't giving away the sudden sense of unease that gripped him. "Is that so?" he replied. "You got a badge under that jacket somewhere?"

Vince nodded to Andrea, who crept forward and began patting the man down. He cursed himself inwardly for not searching the guy earlier. The whole night seemed like a blur at this point. He checked his watch. It was just past two in the morning.

Andrea came up with a wallet and a smart phone in the man's jacket pocket. "No gun or badge," she said, checking the wallet for ID. "Out-of-state license. Says his name is...Robert Humphrey."

"I'm not a cop," Humphrey admitted. "I never claimed I was. I work for a company in Chicago called Pharmacological Solutions."

The news made Karl sit up straight. "Whoa. That's interesting."

"You've heard of these guys?" Vince asked.

"Hell, yeah," the reporter said. "They're a wholly owned subsidiary of a European pharmaceutical conglomerate called the Cheiron Group." Karl eyed Humphrey as though he was an especially venomous breed of snake. "They've been tied to dozens of paranormal incidents across the globe."

"Says who?" Vince asked.

Karl shrugged. "You know. People. Guys I know." He pointed to his laptop. "If you could get me somewhere with a wireless connection, I could show you the reports. It's the Information Age, dude. Some of us are keeping track of this kind of stuff."

Vince turned his attention back to Humphrey. "So what were you after with these Russians?"

The question seemed to surprise the man. "To get the ghouls, of course. We've been after them for years."

"According to -" Vince caught himself before he mentioned Carver's name. "According to one of my contacts, the Russians have only been in the country for about a year."

"I'm not talking about here," Humphrey said. "The Iron Curtain was the best thing that ever happened to the creatures of the night. You wouldn't believe the kinds of things that found sanctuary in Eastern Europe and Russia after World War II." The suit pushed himself upright with a grimace. "It took our Russian subsidiaries almost 10 years to track down the Khaurovs. They'd been pretty marginalized during Stalin's time, and were in exile way out in Siberia. But they still served the monsters that Maxim made his pact with, back in 1520. When our agents caught up to them, they had been living like nomads for years, traveling from one village to another and digging up the local cemeteries to feed the few ghouls that were left."

"So when things got too hot in Russia, they packed up and came here," Vince said.

Humphrey nodded. "That's what we figure. They'd pretty much worn out their welcome in Europe, and our guys were closing in. Apparently someone in the family must have had some contacts in the Mafia, who put them on a ship at Vladivostok."

"Okay, so what the hell are these things?" Karl asked. "Are they diabolical entities, or just some kind of cryptid?"

The suit shifted uncomfortably, clearly uncertain how much he was willing to share. "Well, no doubt you're familiar with the legends," he began. "Ghouls are creatures that haunt graveyards and feed on human flesh. Reports from Siberia suggest they're physical entities, rather than malevolent spirits -"

"Oh, they're solid, all right," Andrea growled. "Seven feet tall and bulletproof, with teeth like sharks."

Humphrey nodded. "We've heard that their skin dissipates the force of bullets, much like Kevlar. Also, their saliva contains a mild neurotoxin that causes temporary muscle paralysis." He shrugged. "We think that's primarily a defensive weapon, because they appear to be more interested in carrion than live prey."

"One of them carried off a friend of mine," Vince said. "Last I saw of him, he was still alive."

The news brought Humphrey up short. "Oh." His gaze dropped to the van's rusted floor. "Well, it's worth noting that many of our assumptions are secondhand at best."

"You're a shitty liar, Humphrey," Gabreski said. "Why would they want Darnell alive? You've at least got a theory, right?"

Humphrey considered the question for a moment. "The ghouls are in a strange land, with strange customs. They may want what your friend has in his head."

"They want to learn what he knows?"

"In a manner of speaking, yes," Humphrey said. "Maxim Khaurov claimed that the ghouls possessed tremendous knowledge and insight. We...well, we think they can glean information from their victims by metabolizing living brain matter."

Vince felt his knees turn to water. "Oh, Jesus," he whispered.

"Listen, that's just a theory," Humphrey said quickly. "There's an awful lot we don't know about these creatures. My team and I were tasked with capturing one of the ghouls and bringing it back to Chicago for study."

After what Vince had seen inside the warehouse, the idea that Humphrey was going to bag one of those monsters like a deer and drag it back to Chicago seemed absurd. "What went wrong?" he asked.

Humphrey shrugged. "The Russians were even more paranoid than we suspected," he said. "I was wearing a radio to keep in touch with my team. They must have picked it up somehow." His hand rose to the bruise on his forehead. "I didn't even know I was in trouble 'til one of those goons walked up and hit me." He looked up at Vince. "I guess my guys came in after me, huh?"

Gabreski nodded. "They tried. I don't think any of them made it out."

"Shit," Humphrey said quietly. "Listen, we're on the same side here. You want to hunt these things down and rescue your friend. Fine. I want to help."

"Really," Vince said. "And how exactly do you plan on doing that?"

"I know more about these creatures than anyone else here," he said. "And I've got something that can counter their venom."

"Okay," Gabreski said. "I'm listening."

For the first time, Humphrey managed a weak smile. Once again, he held out his shackled hands. "How about a show of good faith?"

Vince sighed and dug his keys out of his pocket. "Knock yourself out," he said, tossing them over.

Humphrey unlocked the cuffs and rubbed at his chafed wrists. "Before we left Chicago, we were issued some autoinjectors containing a drug that would counteract the worst effects of the ghoul toxin. We left eight spare injectors back at the hotel. Take me with you and you can have them."

Vince didn't like it. He turned to Andrea. "What do you think?"

She scowled back. "When that fucker bit me, my arm locked up in seconds. If the Kevlar hadn't stopped most of the bite, who knows what might have happened?" She sighed. "We need that stuff, Vince. Just in case."

Gabreski tried to rub the weariness from his eyes. "Okay, Humphrey. You win. Since you're such an expert, maybe you can tell me how many of these bastards we're dealing with."

"Six of them," Humphrey replied. "No more. Plus the Russians, of course."

"We know how to deal with the Russians," Gabreski said in a cold voice. He reached over his shoulder and tapped the back of the driver's seat. "Raimundo, drive this van down to the end of the block and back us into the alley by that boarded-up market. Then I want you to call your *hombres* and get us some guns. Not any of that spray-and-pray gangbanger bullshit, either; I'm talking assault rifles."

The gang leader laughed and shook his head. "Hey, man, what makes you think we got that kind of hardware -" Raimundo caught the look in Gabreski's eye and gave up the act. "Whatever you say, vato," he replied, and reached for the ignition key.



Vince sent Humphrey off with Raimundo to get what they needed; he didn't think the suit would try anything cute in a car full of Siete Muertos soldiers.

He also hoped that Humphrey would keep Raimundo honest. It wasn't much, but it was all he had.

Sometime after 2:30, the sleet turned to snow. Andrea and Jack sat in the back of the van, talking quietly. He guessed they were passing the bottle of rum back and forth, too, but he didn't make an issue out of it. Instead, he sat in the driver's seat of the van and tried to keep warm as he watched the street outside the apartment building.

Darnell was almost certainly dead by now. He knew it, deep down in his bones. There was no point in sitting out there in the cold, waiting for the Russians to show. It wasn't going to bring Waters back. The only thing he stood to gain was revenge. An eye for an eye.

Gabreski would take what he could get.

The knock at the van's cargo door took him by surprise. He hadn't seen the gangbangers roll up. Raimundo and Humphrey climbed into the van, carrying a pair of duffel bags that smelled of gun oil. Dean helped the gang leader unpack and check the weapons while Humphrey climbed into the vehicle's passenger seat. He'd changed into a pair of jeans and a dark jacket, and carried a large, nylon case, which he tucked into his lap.

"Got everything we need?" Vince asked. He had a feeling the case contained more than just autoinjectors.

"All set," Humphrey said, peering out at the snow. "Looks like a completely different street now."

Vince nodded. After everything that had happened in the last five hours, he didn't think he would ever be able to look at his hometown the same way again.

"I wonder what the Feds would think about you guys," he mused. "Agents of a foreign conglomerate operating death squads on American soil? If Homeland Security ever catches wind of what you're doing, you'll wind up at Gitmo, or worse."

"Death squads?" Humphrey barked, incredulous. "Please. And what makes you think the Feds aren't doing the exact same thing?" He shook his head. "You've got no idea what's really going on out there, Detective. With luck, this is the most of it you'll ever see."

Vince thought about that for a long while.

Finally, at nearly four in the morning, a familiar trio of Suburbans appeared out of the white haze and raced down the deserted street. Gabreski straightened in his seat. "Okay, people, here we go."

Using the night-vision goggles, he watched half-a-dozen men climb out of the SUVs and rush into the old building. Within minutes, a steady stream of women and children began filing out of the building into two of the waiting Suburbans. "Looks like the rats are leaving the nest," he murmured.

"Yeah, they've had a lot of practice at this," Humphrey said. "They'll have a couple of safehouses set up to hide the kids and their mothers in case they're discovered. They don't dare put them at risk."

"Why is that?" Vince asked.

Humphrey gave Vince a strange look. "What do you think the ghouls get out of the deal with the Khaurovs?"

Gabreski frowned. "Bodies. What else?"

"You saw them up close. Do you think they need help getting their food? No, the Khaurovs supply something much more important. Breeding stock."

"Jesus," he whispered. Vince recalled the horrors he'd seen inside the apartment and felt his guts churn.

"Yeah," Humphrey agreed. "Don't imagine for a moment that the Russians are the ones in charge here - they're slaves, at best."

The Russians emptied the tenement within minutes.

"Two of the Suburbans are taking off."

Humphrey nodded. "Let them go. They're not the ones we want."

Reluctantly, Vince nodded and continued to watch the third SUV. Sure enough, 10 minutes later, the six Russians returned, carrying a pair of shrouded figures. "They've got two bodies with them," he said. "Probably the old guy we saw when we entered the apartment, plus the man Raimundo shot." He glanced at Humphrey. "Are they -"

"Sacrifices," Humphrey said. "We cost them a lot of food earlier tonight. Their masters will expect them to make amends."

Vince watched the men load the bodies into the back of the Suburban. As the SUV pulled away from the curb, Gabreski eased the van onto the street and headed after them.



To Vince's surprise, the Suburban led them back to the warehouse. Heedless of the yellow crime-scene tape covering the building's doors, the Russians unloaded the two bodies and slipped quickly inside.

"They're heading for that damned hole," Vince grumbled.

"Back in Moscow, the ghouls made their home in the city's sewers," Humphrey said.

Vince thought back to the broken bricks jutting from the walls of the rough-hewn pit. But were they actually bricks, he wondered, or cobblestones? "They've broken into the city's old sewer network," he said. "Those tunnels have been abandoned since at least the 1900s."

"We'd better get moving, then," Humphrey said. "Unless you want to spend hours hunting these things through a pitch-black maze."

Within minutes, they had gathered their weapons and headed out into the early-morning snow. They all carried rifles supplied by Raimundo's gang: M-16s and AK-74s, along with a couple of clips of ammo per person. Vince knew from experience that the bullets they fired could drill a hole through plate steel at 30 yards.

Gabreski took the lead as they reached the warehouse. Using the night-vision goggles, he peered through the open doorway and looked for signs of movement. Seeing none, he stepped inside and made his way to the pit.

The Russians had lowered a pair of aluminum ladders into the hole. In the pale green glow of the goggles, Vince could see the hole was about 15 feet deep, and connected to a brick-lined tunnel that ran underneath the building.

Shouldering his rifle, Vince made for the nearest ladder and descended into the tunnel.

The air inside the passageway was cold, and stank of rotting meat. A faint glow down the passageway to the right suggested the receding light of lanterns or flashlights. Moving carefully and quietly, Vince set off after them.

As it happened, they didn't have very far to go. The stench of decay grew stronger. Vince fought to keep his gorge down. He'd been close to rotting bodies before at one murder scene or another, but this was far worse than anything he'd ever encountered.

He realized he was getting closer to the glow up ahead. The Russians had come to a stop. Faint voices echoed through the darkness.

Vince raised his weapon. Crouching low, he continued to edge his way forward.

Up ahead, the tunnel seemed to widen into a larger chamber. Vince could see the glow of lantern light flickering on old, stained, brick walls. A man's voice said something in Russian.

A voice answered. It was guttural and deep, and completely alien. Vince's skin crawled at the sound. Suddenly, the rifle in his hands seemed entirely inadequate.

A small part of his mind pointed out that he didn't have to go any further. He could turn around and make his way back to the surface, and forget everything he'd seen. He didn't have to die like Darnell.

But he would be damned if he let those bastards get away with what they'd done. Tightening his grip on the rifle, Vince crept to the end of the tunnel.

For a moment, all he could see were the bodies. They were everywhere, piled in heaps around the edge of a central spillover reservoir. A thick miasma of decay hung in the dank air.

He didn't see the ghoul until it reared up beside him with an ear-splitting screech.

The monster lunged for him, reaching for his throat with broad, powerful hands. Vince screamed, hurling himself backwards. Claws tore open the front of his jacket.

He brought up his M-16 and opened fire. The ghoul staggered, outlined in the strobing orange flashes of muzzle fire as the high-velocity rounds ripped through its torso. Vince held the trigger down and walked the burst upwards until a bullet punched through the underside of the monster's chin and blew out the back of its skull.

As the ghoul's body toppled to the paving stones, Vince felt a change come over him. Fear gave way to a cold, hard certainty.

The tables had turned. He was the hunter now.

Jack and Andrea rushed past him, up to the edge of the pit. A pistol cracked; Dean ducked low and fired a burst from his rifle. Screams rose from below.

Andrea let out a bestial snarl and sprayed the pit with fire.

A dark shape scuttled out of the pit like a spider, off to Andrea's right. Raimundo ran past Vince and fired from the hip, hitting the monster again and again. It writhed and snapped its jaws at the fusillade of shots, then fell back over the edge.

Gabreski gathered his wits and rushed forward, clambering over the bloated bodies strewn in his path. Men were screaming in the pit now, begging for mercy in broken English. Something screeched in defiance, but the sound was quickly lost in another storm of automatic fire.

Vince reached the edge of the reservoir. The Russians lay among their shrouded sacrifices, their corpses adding to the charnel house they'd helped build. One ghoul remained, glaring hatefully at the humans who had invaded its lair.

The creature's jaws gaped in a hissing snarl - then it turned and ran for the mouth of a nearby passageway.

The three detectives opened fire at the same moment. A storm of high-velocity rounds tore the creature to pieces. Vince, Jack and Andrea fired until their magazines were dry.



They found Darnell's body along with the rest of the illegals at the floor of the reservoir. It looked as though he'd put up a fight, for what it had been worth. Gabreski shut the man's dead eyes and said a small prayer, as if it maybe mattered.

Vince counted the bodies of the ghouls they'd killed. He found only five. This hunt wasn't over. A small voice inside him asked, will it ever be over?



The snow was still falling as Gabreski and the others emerged into the early-morning light. As the others made their way back to the van, he dug out his cell phone and made a call. It was answered on the first ring.

"Agent Carver."

"You set us up," Gabreski said. The cold wind on his face matched the ice in his veins. "This had nothing to do with the illegals. You were sending us after the ghouls all along."

"I told you this assignment required some very special talents," Carver replied. "I'm glad to hear you were up to the job."

"Who do you really work for, Carver? You're not Homeland Security."

"No. I'm part of something...deeper. A Joint Task Force created a long time ago by the United States government. And we're always on the lookout for good people like you and your team."

Vince took a deep breath. "One of my guys is dead, Carver. He had a wife and a kid."

"I'm sorry to hear that, Detective." Carver's regret sounded genuine. "His family will be taken care of. Our organization has a very generous compensation package for its dependents."

Gabreski closed his eyes. He could see the trap. "What if I tell you to shove your job offer up your ass?"

"Well, that would be regrettable, of course. And we would be unable to care for your dead teammate's dependents, as a result."

"Yeah, that's what I figured," Vince said. "What about the investigation into my team?"

"It will be shelved, citing national security issues. As long as you're part of the task force, you're shielded from criminal prosecution in the US. Of course, my organization will want to give your entire team an evaluation before this offer is extended to the rest of them, but I'm sure that will be just a formality."

Vince wondered what Carver would think about Raimundo and Karl. As far as he was concerned, they were part of the team now. The gang leader would love to hear he could give the cops the finger.

"Okay, Carver. You've got a deal. I expect you'll live to regret it," Vince said.

The agent actually chuckled. "I said the very same thing myself, once upon a time," he said. "Go home. Get some rest. We'll be in touch."

Vince hung up the phone and turned his face to the wintry sky. He felt the snow on his cheeks. It was gritty, like ash.

The detective looked back at the old warehouse, then studied the narrow street. Nothing looked the same anymore.

It was a whole new world.



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HUNTER

THE VIGIL

Name: _____
 Player: _____
 Chronicle: _____

Concept: _____
 Virtue: _____
 Vice: _____

Profession: _____
 Cell: _____
 Compact/Conspiracy: _____

ATTRIBUTES

POWER	INTELLIGENCE ●●●●●	STRENGTH ●●●●●	PRESENCE ●●●●●
FINESSE	WITS ●●●●●	DEXTERITY ●●●●●	MANIPULATION ●●●●●
RESISTANCE	RESOLVE ●●●●●	STAMINA ●●●●●	COMPOSURE ●●●●●

SKILLS

MENTAL (-3 unskilled)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Academics	OOOOO
<input type="checkbox"/> Computer	OOOOO
<input type="checkbox"/> Crafts	OOOOO
<input type="checkbox"/> Investigation	OOOOO
<input type="checkbox"/> Medicine	OOOOO
<input type="checkbox"/> Occult	OOOOO
<input type="checkbox"/> Politics	OOOOO
<input type="checkbox"/> Science	OOOOO

PHYSICAL (-1 unskilled)

<input type="checkbox"/> Athletics	OOOOO
<input type="checkbox"/> Brawl	OOOOO
<input type="checkbox"/> Drive	OOOOO
<input type="checkbox"/> Firearms	OOOOO
<input type="checkbox"/> Larceny	OOOOO
<input type="checkbox"/> Stealth	OOOOO
<input type="checkbox"/> Survival	OOOOO
<input type="checkbox"/> Weaponry	OOOOO

SOCIAL (-1 unskilled)

<input type="checkbox"/> Animal Ken	OOOOO
<input type="checkbox"/> Empathy	OOOOO
<input type="checkbox"/> Expression	OOOOO
<input type="checkbox"/> Intimidation	OOOOO
<input type="checkbox"/> Persuasion	OOOOO
<input type="checkbox"/> Socialize	OOOOO
<input type="checkbox"/> Streetwise	OOOOO
<input type="checkbox"/> Subterfuge	OOOOO

OTHER TRAITS

MERITS

OOOOO
OOOOO
OOOOO
OOOOO
OOOOO
OOOOO

HEALTH

○○○○○○○○○○

WILLPOWER

○○○○○○○○○○

MORALITY

10	██████████	○
9	██████████	○
8	██████████	○
7	██████████	○
6	████████	○
5	██████	○
4	████	○
3	██	○
2		○
1		○

FLAWS

TACTICS

Size _____

Speed _____

Initiative Mod _____

Defense _____

Armor _____

WEAPONS

DICE MOD

EQUIPMENT

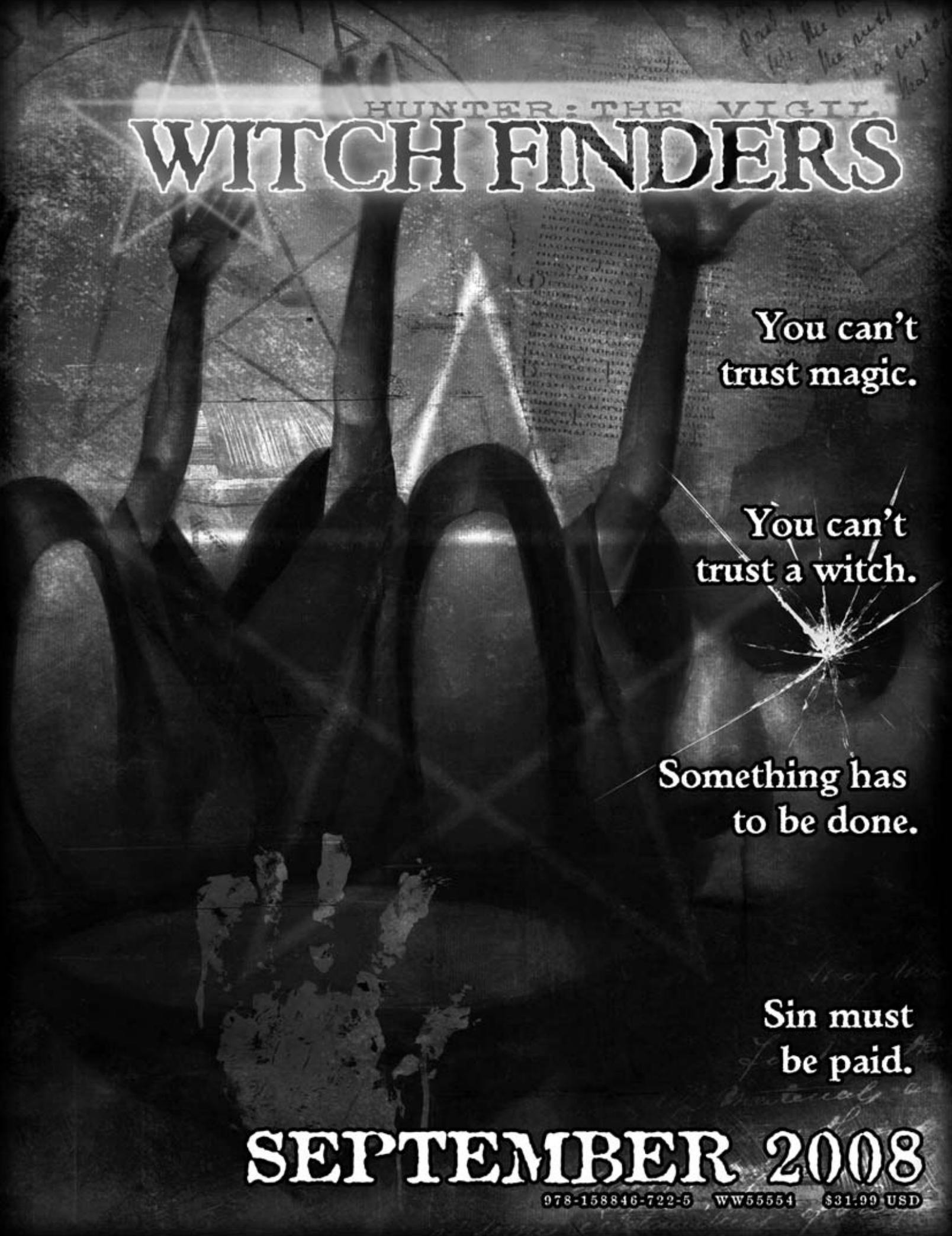
DICE MOD

Experience

Attributes 5/4/3 • Skills 11/7/4 (+3 Specialties) • Merits 7 • (Buying the fifth dot in any area costs two dots) • Health = Stamina + Size • Willpower = Resolve + Composure • Size = +5 for adult humans • Defense = Lowest of Dexterity or Wits • Initiative Mod = Dexterity + Composure • Speed = Strength + Dexterity + 5 • Starting Morality = 7

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You can't
trust magic.

You can't
trust a witch.

Something has
to be done.

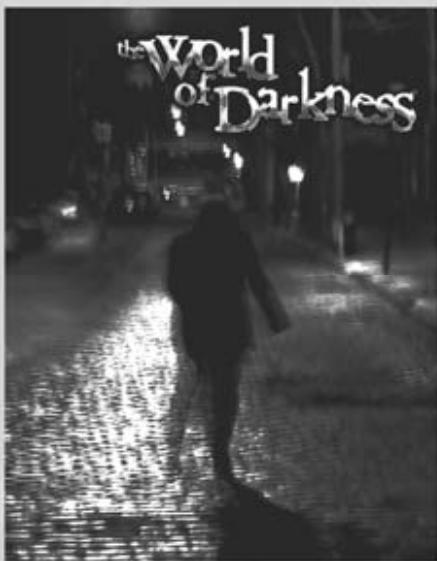
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