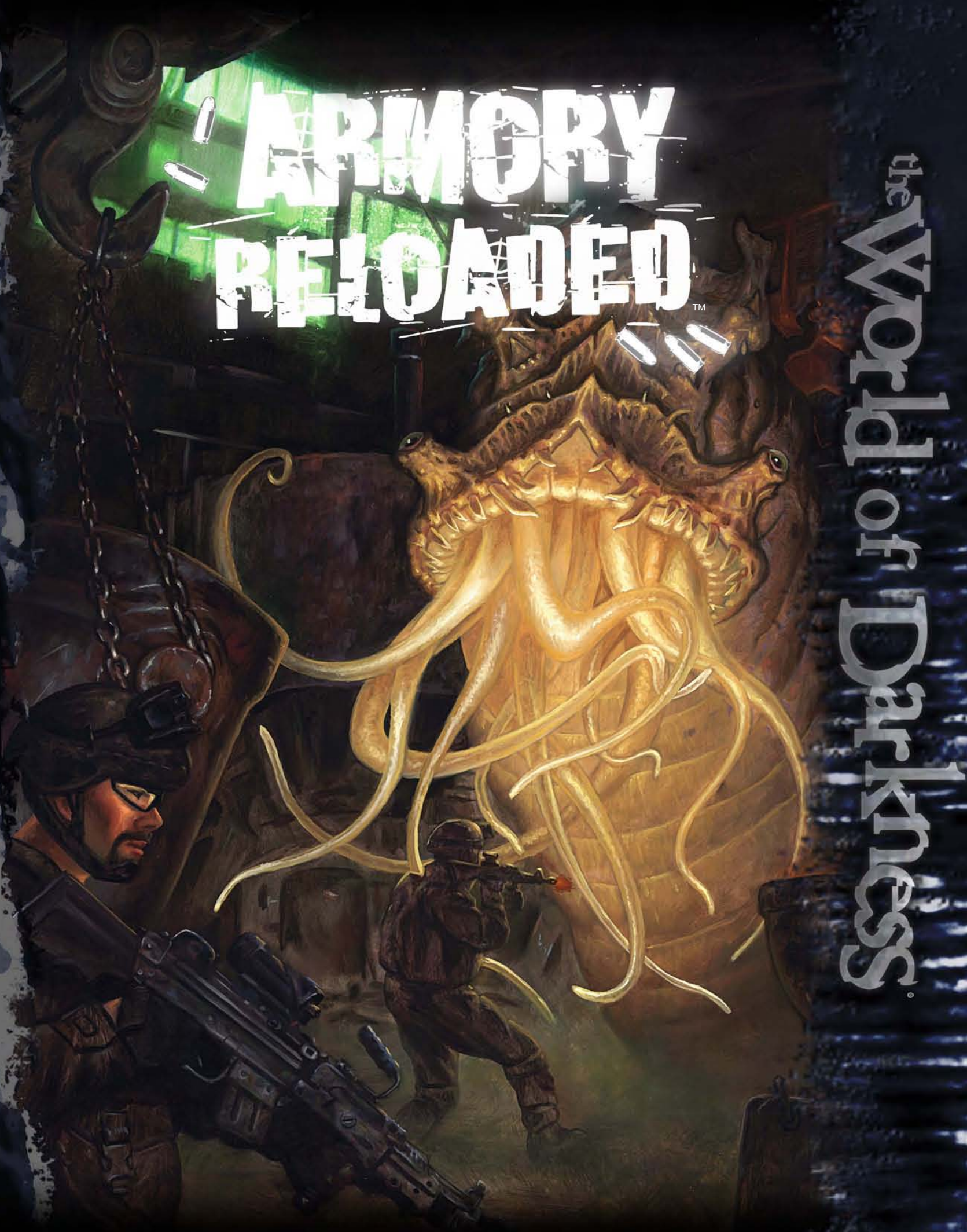
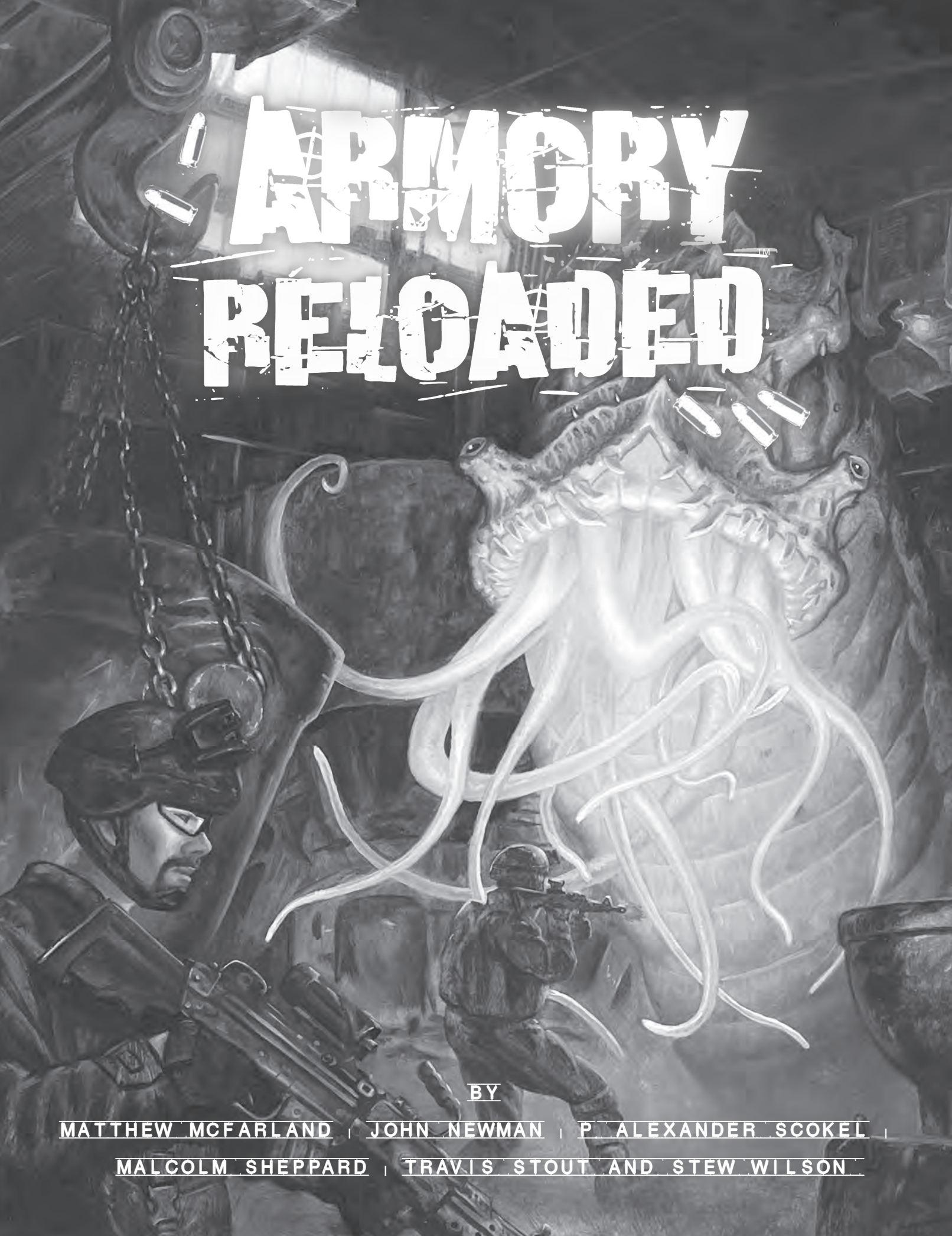
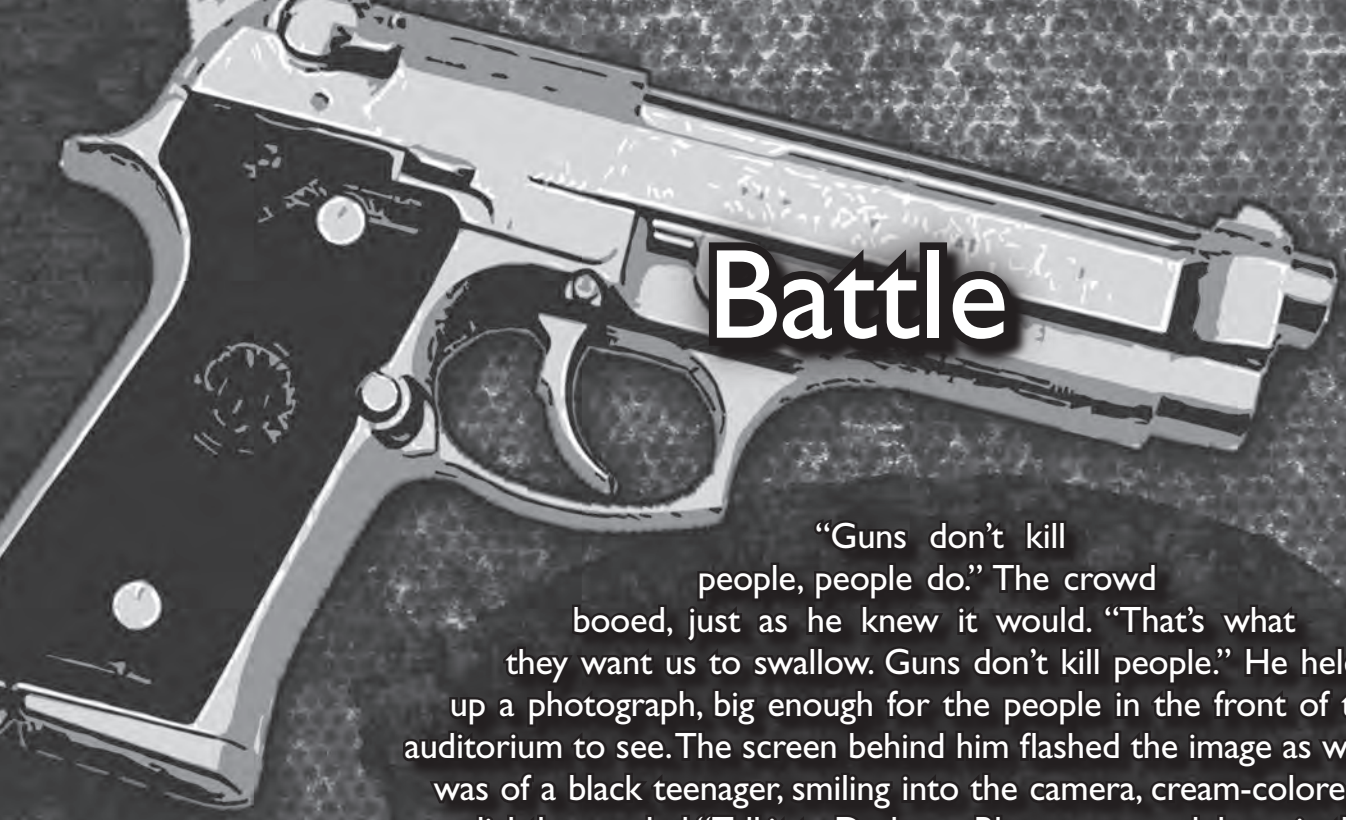

ARMORY
RELOADED™
the World of Darkness®




BY

MATTHEW MCFARLAND | JOHN NEWMAN | P. ALEXANDER SCOKEL | MALCOLM SHEPPARD | TRAVIS STOUT AND STEW WILSON



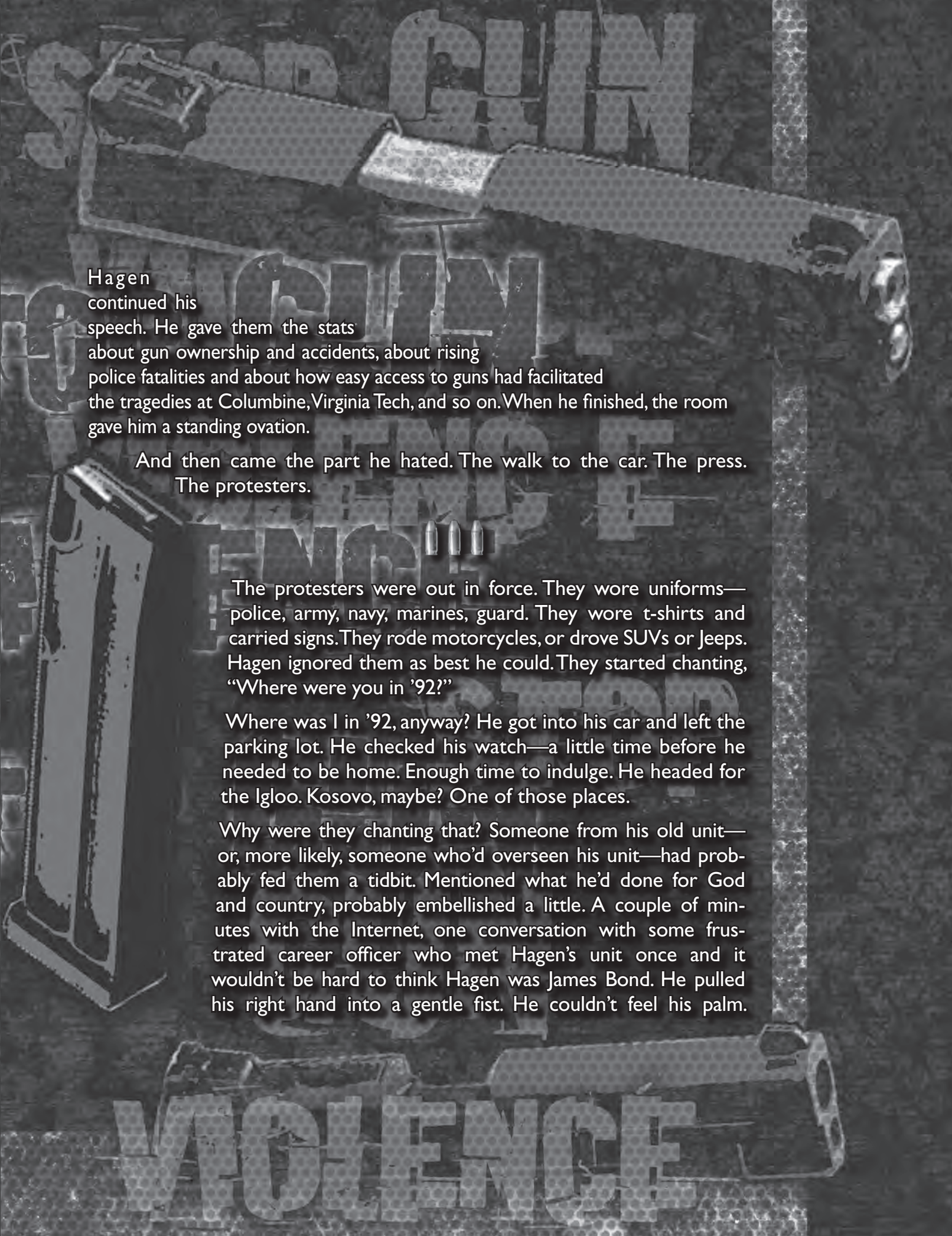
# Battle

"Guns don't kill people, people do." The crowd booed, just as he knew it would. "That's what they want us to swallow. Guns don't kill people." He held up a photograph, big enough for the people in the front of the auditorium to see. The screen behind him flashed the image as well. It was of a black teenager, smiling into the camera, cream-colored shirt slightly rumpled. "Tell it to Dashawn Blayson, gunned down in the street on his way home from school." The display flashed to a photo of a body covered by a sheet, surrounded by a pool of blood.

The image changed again, this time to a black and white picture of a blond man wearing a US Army uniform. "Tell it to Ronald Hill, shot in the back as he was putting groceries in his car in his own driveway." The image switched to one of the car. The bullet hole in the Cadillac's glass was neatly in focus, but the blood was still visible.

Hagen dropped his tone. It wasn't a whisper or a rasp. He had those, too, but for this picture he spoke simply. This one needed no embellishment. "Tell it to Janie Amund." The photo was of a four-year-old girl at her birthday party. She'd grabbed the handgun her grandmother carried in her purse while sitting in a shopping cart and it had gone off, killing the child. Every person in that room knew it. There was no need for an "after" picture, though his speechwriters had argued for one. Hagen felt it would have been in poor taste.

"Were the guns that killed these people illegal firearms? No. Every one was a legally purchased, fully licensed weapon. And every one killed an innocent person. Want to dust off the other fun little sound byte that the NRA likes to throw at us?" He paused for a few seconds to drink in the outrage in the room. "If guns are outlawed, only outlaws will have guns." The room exploded again, boos and protests drowning each other out. "The way it looks to me now, the outlaws already have them!" Applause. Tears. Yes.



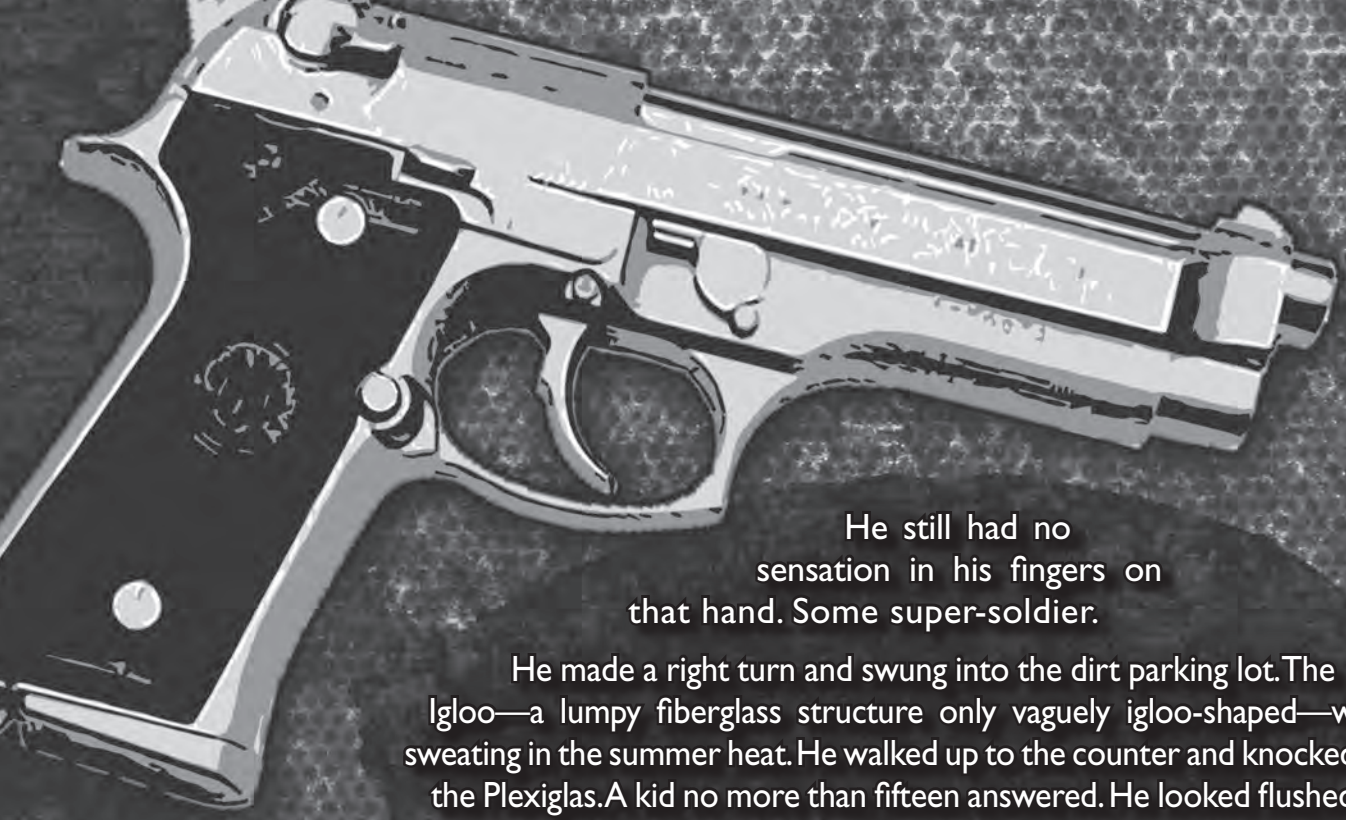

Hagen continued his speech. He gave them the stats about gun ownership and accidents, about rising police fatalities and about how easy access to guns had facilitated the tragedies at Columbine, Virginia Tech, and so on. When he finished, the room gave him a standing ovation.

And then came the part he hated. The walk to the car. The press. The protesters.

The protesters were out in force. They wore uniforms—police, army, navy, marines, guard. They wore t-shirts and carried signs. They rode motorcycles, or drove SUVs or Jeeps. Hagen ignored them as best he could. They started chanting, "Where were you in '92?"

Where was I in '92, anyway? He got into his car and left the parking lot. He checked his watch—a little time before he needed to be home. Enough time to indulge. He headed for the Igloo. Kosovo, maybe? One of those places.

Why were they chanting that? Someone from his old unit—or, more likely, someone who'd overseen his unit—had probably fed them a tidbit. Mentioned what he'd done for God and country, probably embellished a little. A couple of minutes with the Internet, one conversation with some frustrated career officer who met Hagen's unit once and it wouldn't be hard to think Hagen was James Bond. He pulled his right hand into a gentle fist. He couldn't feel his palm.



He still had no sensation in his fingers on that hand. Some super-soldier.

He made a right turn and swung into the dirt parking lot. The Igloo—a lumpy fiberglass structure only vaguely igloo-shaped—was sweating in the summer heat. He walked up to the counter and knocked on the Plexiglas. A kid no more than fifteen answered. He looked flushed, and Hagen wondered whether he was alone back there. He chuckled—this place had been around since he was a kid, and although the employees' faces changed, their habits didn't. "Yeah?" the kid said.

Hagen narrowed his brows, but let it pass. "Yeah. How about a chocolate shake?" The kid took his money and made the shake and Hagen took it to one of the decaying picnic tables behind the Igloo.

He'd been coming here since he was twelve. He'd had his first kiss here after a baseball game. He'd talked with his father about going into the army here. He'd drunk what he tearfully thought would be his last milkshake here when he'd gone vegan, and celebrated his triumphant return to sanity with one a year later. He sat at the picnic table as the sun set and clenched his right fist again, ruefully reflecting that he could feel his palm, but not his fingers, and that it never got any less disturbing.

The place was clean, he noted. Whoever the current owner was (it was still in the Waggon family—maybe their youngest, Denise, was now running it?), they kept the grounds free of litter. Hagen squinted into the west and saw a mound of paper lying under the other table. He slurped down the last of his shake and pitched the cup into the garbage, and then, figuring he'd save the kid a little work tonight, picked up the paper.

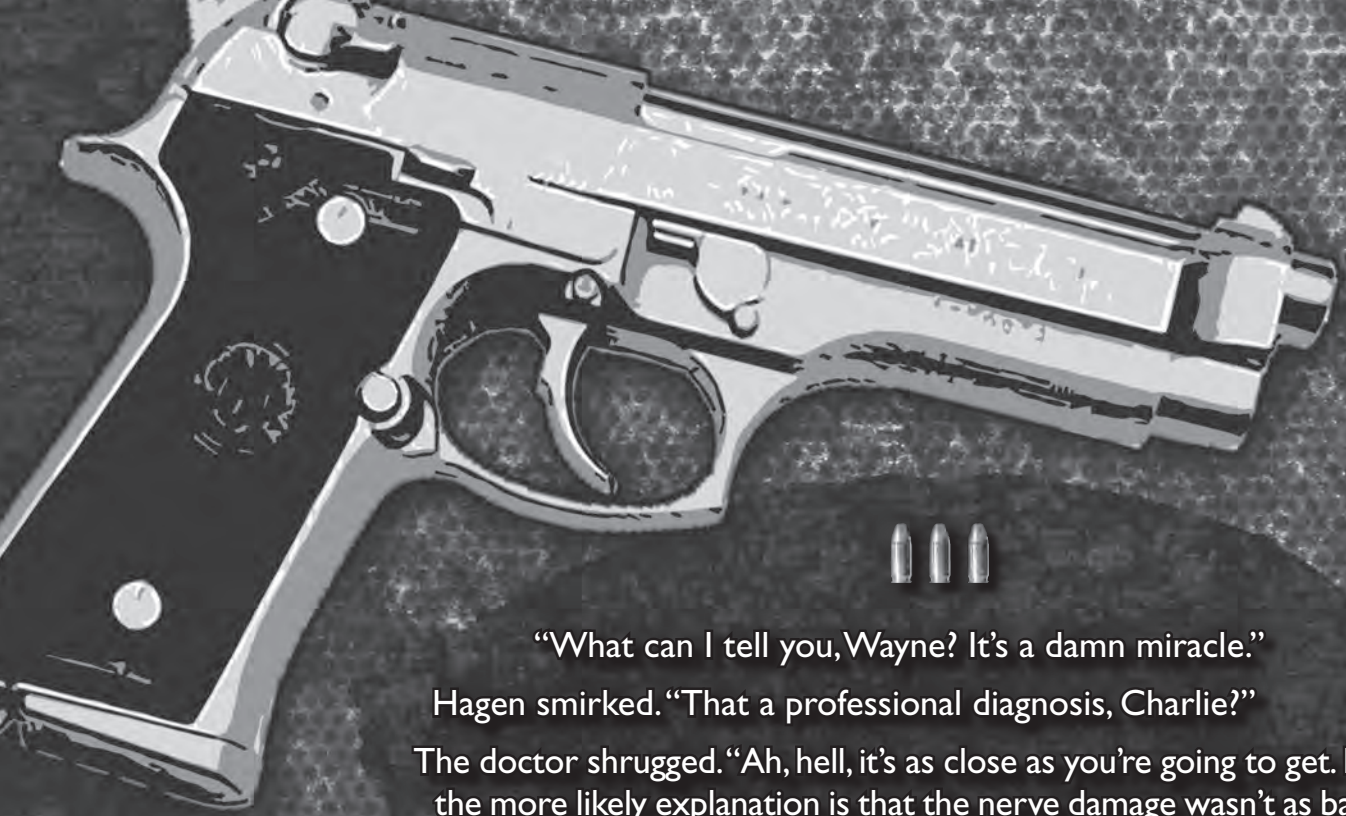
It wasn't paper, he noticed as he bent down. It was cloth. Linen, maybe or cotton—sturdy and good quality, if dirty. And there was something in it—

He could tell just
by the weight when he picked it up.
He unwrapped it, keeping his hands from touching the
metal, in case it was a murder weapon. He knew the model well. It was a Beretta 92FS. He hadn't held one in more than a decade.

He knew he should turn it in. He knew he should call the police, because people don't just leave guns lying around wrapped in cloth for no reason. He knew all that, but he still picked it up and ejected the magazine. The mag was one round short of full, and there was one in the pipe. Just the way he always carried his weapon. He'd known guys who chambered a round, and then popped the mag and inserted an extra bullet, but Hagen had always considered that greedy somehow.

Hagen slid the magazine back into the gun and put it into the waistband of his slacks. It wouldn't stay long, but it would do until he got to his car. He walked to the car in a daze, and sat there in the driver's seat, holding the pistol, trying to figure out why, now, after so many years, sensation had returned to his fingers.





"What can I tell you, Wayne? It's a damn miracle."

Hagen smirked. "That a professional diagnosis, Charlie?"

The doctor shrugged. "Ah, hell, it's as close as you're going to get. I guess the more likely explanation is that the nerve damage wasn't as bad as we thought, but you know as well as I do how extensive it was."

"Yeah." Hagen winced at the thought of the months of physical therapy, pain pills, checkups. His fingers had been the last remaining trace of the incident.

"Actually, I've got another thought." Charlie pulled his stool up close to Hagen and leaned in. "Wayne, could it be that there's some part of you that hasn't dealt with what happened?"

"Charlie, fuck off." They both laughed, but the question lingered, so Hagen answered it. "All the work I've been doing the past few years—you think that's because I'm not dealing?"

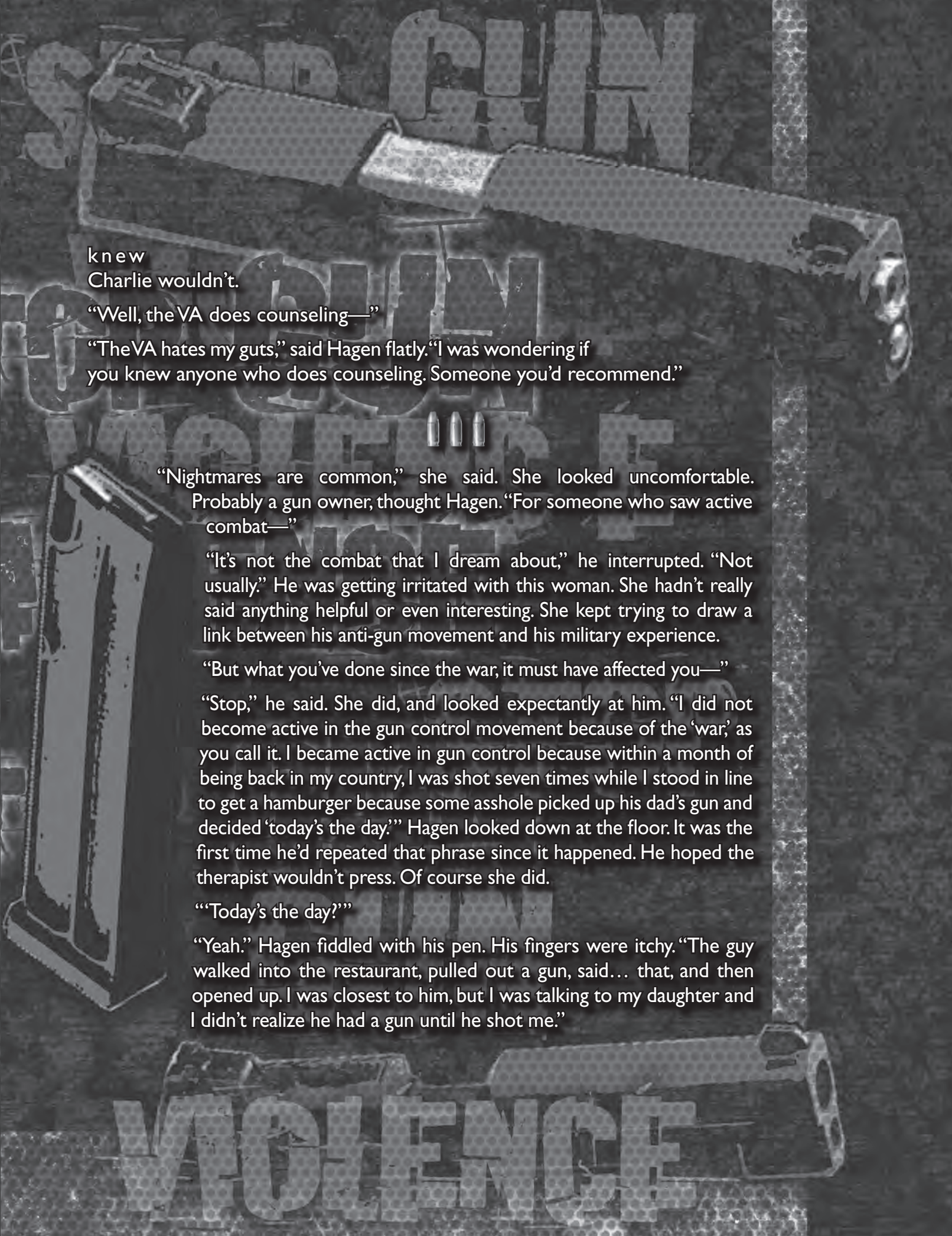
"No, I think it's your way of dealing, if I'm being honest." Charlie grabbed his clipboard and made a note. "You've never been good at saying 'well, shit happens' and going on. Now, granted, I don't know if I could do that in your position, but you've got to admit you've always run a little hot."

"I guess." He stood up and stretched. "Actually, there is something I want to talk about."

"OK."

"Not with you, though." Charlie looked hurt, and Hagen shook his head. "That's not what I mean. I just… I think I am dealing with something, but it's not what happened at the park. Something that happened when I was in the service."

Charlie nodded. He'd never served, which was one reason Hagen didn't want to tell him about the gun. He wasn't sure who would understand, but he




knew
Charlie wouldn't.

"Well, the VA does counseling—"

"The VA hates my guts," said Hagen flatly. "I was wondering if you knew anyone who does counseling. Someone you'd recommend."

"Nightmares are common," she said. She looked uncomfortable. Probably a gun owner, thought Hagen. "For someone who saw active combat—"

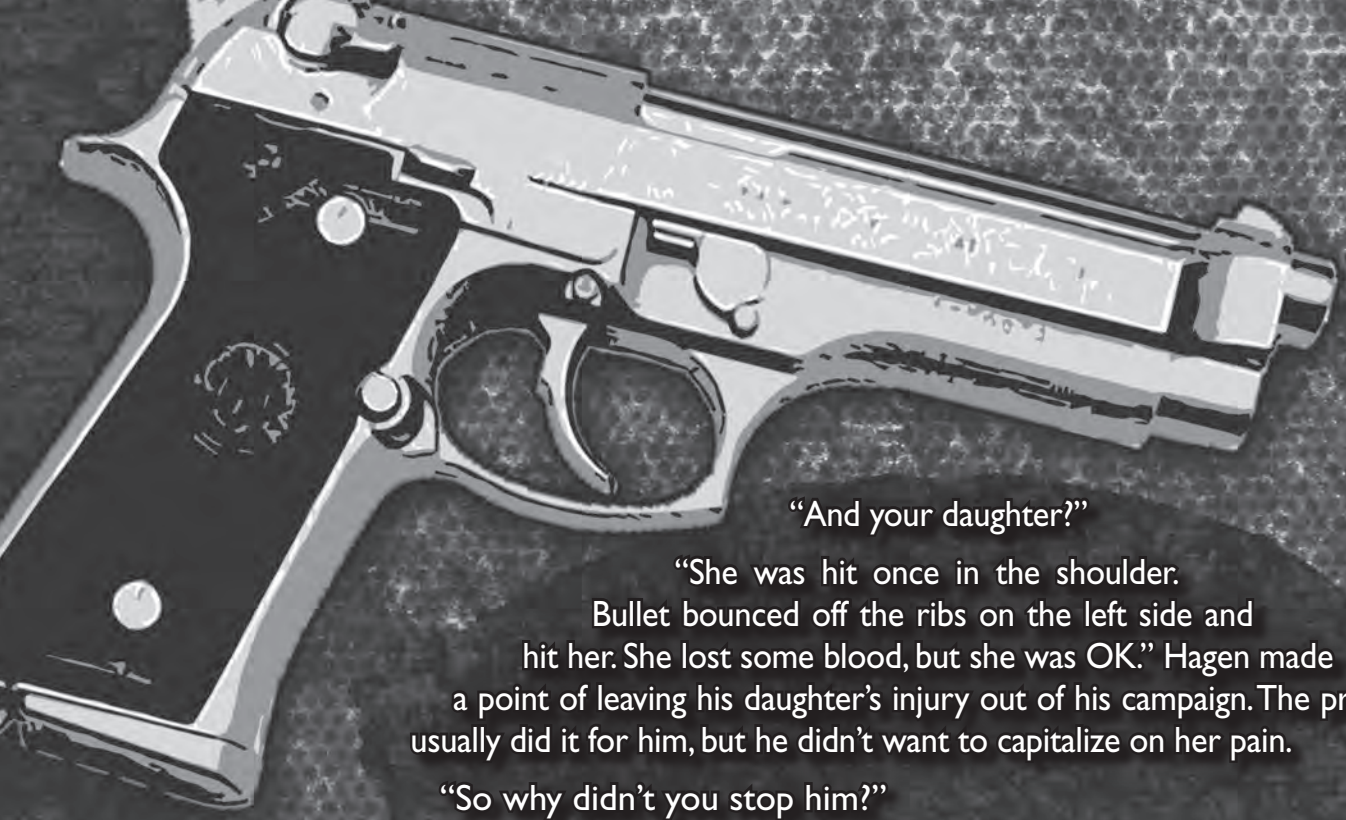
"It's not the combat that I dream about," he interrupted. "Not usually." He was getting irritated with this woman. She hadn't really said anything helpful or even interesting. She kept trying to draw a link between his anti-gun movement and his military experience.

"But what you've done since the war, it must have affected you—"

"Stop," he said. She did, and looked expectantly at him. "I did not become active in the gun control movement because of the 'war,' as you call it. I became active in gun control because within a month of being back in my country, I was shot seven times while I stood in line to get a hamburger because some asshole picked up his dad's gun and decided 'today's the day.'" Hagen looked down at the floor. It was the first time he'd repeated that phrase since it happened. He hoped the therapist wouldn't press. Of course she did.

"'Today's the day?'"

"Yeah." Hagen fiddled with his pen. His fingers were itchy. "The guy walked into the restaurant, pulled out a gun, said… that, and then opened up. I was closest to him, but I was talking to my daughter and I didn't realize he had a gun until he shot me."



"And your daughter?"

"She was hit once in the shoulder. Bullet bounced off the ribs on the left side and hit her. She lost some blood, but she was OK." Hagen made a point of leaving his daughter's injury out of his campaign. The press usually did it for him, but he didn't want to capitalize on her pain.

"So why didn't you stop him?"

Hagen raised his head. "Excuse me?"

"You could have, right? You know how to disarm someone."

Hagen nodded, never breaking eye contact. He wanted to be angry about this line of questioning, but somehow he couldn't muster it.

"So why didn't you? You weren't watching the door? Isn't that a little strange?"

Hagen nodded again. It was strange, and he'd beaten himself up about it ever since. He could have killed that stupid kid with his bare hands before he'd even raised his gun. If Hagen hadn't been the first person he'd shot, then he'd have been able to, but Hagen happened to be standing close enough that he made the most obvious target.

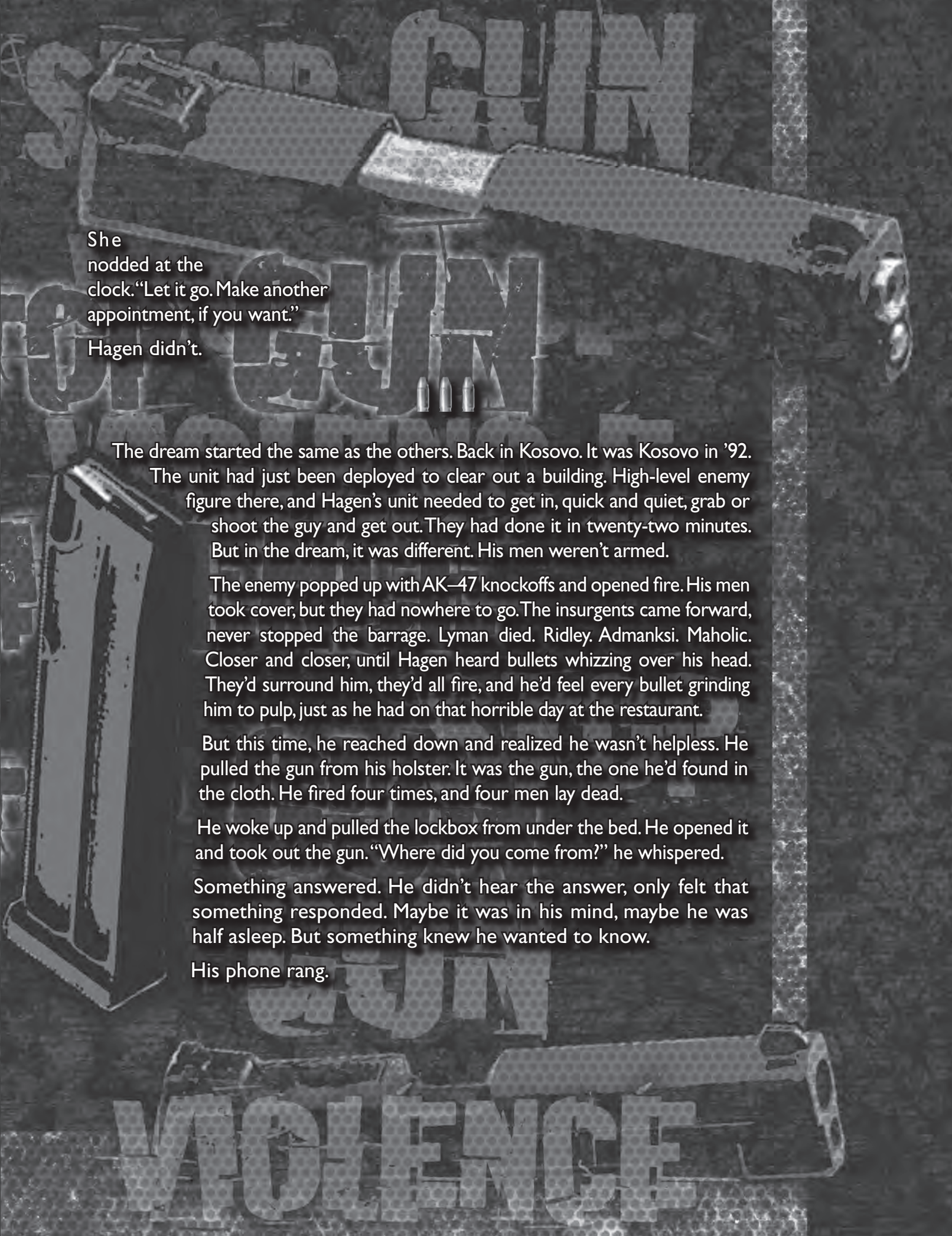
"But you missed it. And there's no reason for that."

"What?"

She took a sip of water from the bottle on her desk. "There's no reason that it happened, Wayne. You were talking to your daughter and you didn't watch a door.

But there's no reason that you should have been watching. You're not at war anymore, and you shouldn't have to watch all the time. That boy went crazy and started shooting, and you made that part of it—the gun part—into your cause because you had to do something, right?"

"Maybe."




She nodded at the clock. "Let it go. Make another appointment, if you want."

Hagen didn't.

The dream started the same as the others. Back in Kosovo. It was Kosovo in '92. The unit had just been deployed to clear out a building. High-level enemy figure there, and Hagen's unit needed to get in, quick and quiet, grab or shoot the guy and get out. They had done it in twenty-two minutes. But in the dream, it was different. His men weren't armed.

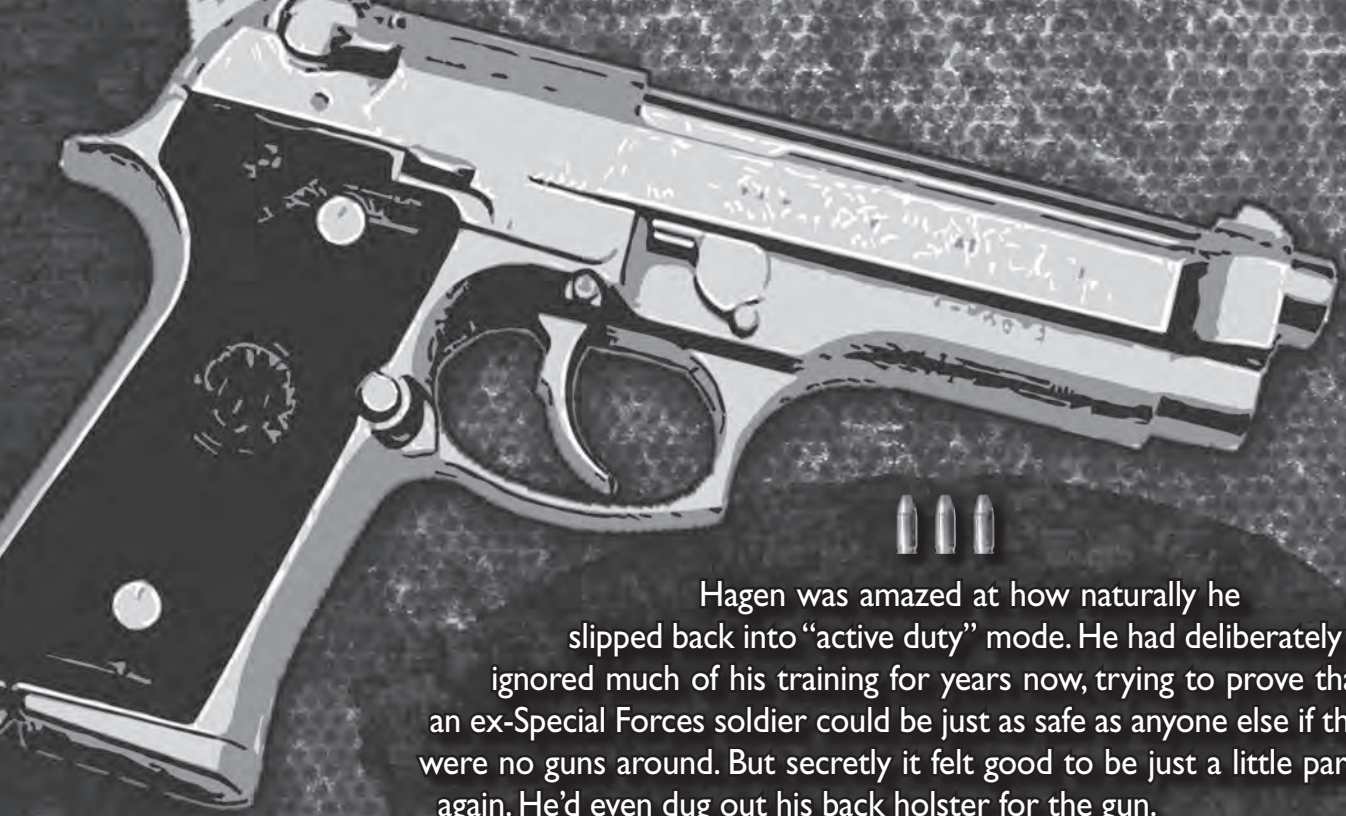
The enemy popped up with AK–47 knockoffs and opened fire. His men took cover, but they had nowhere to go. The insurgents came forward, never stopped the barrage. Lyman died. Ridley. Admanksi. Maholic. Closer and closer, until Hagen heard bullets whizzing over his head. They'd surround him, they'd all fire, and he'd feel every bullet grinding him to pulp, just as he had on that horrible day at the restaurant.

But this time, he reached down and realized he wasn't helpless. He pulled the gun from his holster. It was the gun, the one he'd found in the cloth. He fired four times, and four men lay dead.

He woke up and pulled the lockbox from under the bed. He opened it and took out the gun. "Where did you come from?" he whispered.

Something answered. He didn't hear the answer, only felt that something responded. Maybe it was in his mind, maybe he was half asleep. But something knew he wanted to know.

His phone rang.



Hagen was amazed at how naturally he slipped back into "active duty" mode. He had deliberately ignored much of his training for years now, trying to prove that an ex-Special Forces soldier could be just as safe as anyone else if there were no guns around. But secretly it felt good to be just a little paranoid again. He'd even dug out his back holster for the gun.

The guy he'd arranged to meet was pretty impressive, too. Slim, toned, probably in his forties. Everything he did was measured and careful, and he'd made Hagen's gun within minutes of them meeting. (For his part, Hagen realized the man was armed immediately, but then the man wasn't trying to hide it.) He said his name was John, but that was pretty obviously a lie. Hagen was comfortable with that. He'd dealt with this kind of man before. Hagen figured him to be a navy SEAL, maybe even a merc. He didn't seem like a hitter, though. While they were walking here, the man had watched everyone they passed by, but lingered only on the ones who looked like a potential threat. At everyone else, he smiled and nodded.

John's smile was warm, but firm. Hagen realized, after a little girl giggled at the man, that his smile was protective, and Hagen clenched his jaw. He'd been that way once, too. "This where you found it?"

"Yep. Wrapped up in a cloth." John looked around, and Hagen wondered what he could be seeing. He didn't even lower his head. "Right over there."

"Yeah, I see." John turned to him. "What kind of cloth?"

"I don't know. Linen, maybe. I didn't keep it."

"That's too bad." John looked back toward the road, but it was deserted. The Igloo was closed Sundays, and there was little else on this road. It was too hot and dry to picnic. "Can I see it?"

Hagen hesitated, but figured that if this guy wanted to kill him, he'd use his own gun. He drew the weapon, popped the mag, cleared the

chamber and handed it over. John turned it over in his hands, and then pulled out a penlight and peered into the slot for the magazine. "Oh, hell."

"What?"

John shook his head. "This is impossible." He turned back to Hagen. "Who are you? Really?"

Hagen shrugged. "No one, really. I just—"

"Bullshit, Wayne. You're someone now." John handed him the gun. "You must be, to find that."

Hagen peered into the slot, but without a light he could make out only a few scratches on the metal.

"Don't bother," said John. "You wouldn't be able to read it anyway." He chuckled. "Or maybe you can. Shit, I don't know."

"What the hell is going on?"

"There are names in there, Wayne," he said. He stepped closer, and Hagen could see he was excited, even elated. "I couldn't count them, I couldn't read them all, but I sure as shit knew some of them."

"Like who?"

"Like Lee Harvey Oswald." Hagen laughed. "Like William Bonney."

"William Bonney?"

"Billy the Kid."

Hagen shook his head. "OK, I think that's about enough."

"The list goes on, Wayne. It goes further back."

"This gun wasn't even invented until—"

"Richard the Lionhearted. Joan of Arc." Hagen put the gun back in its holster and started walking away.

"Longinus."

Hagen stopped. "Who?"

John walked up next to him and put a hand on his shoulder. "The man who stabbed Christ in the side. Longinus."

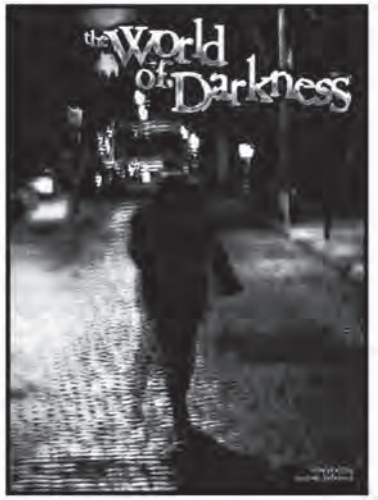
Hagen turned to face him. "I'm pretty sure Longinus didn't use a gun to stab Jesus."

John nodded. "I'm pretty sure that thing wasn't always a gun."



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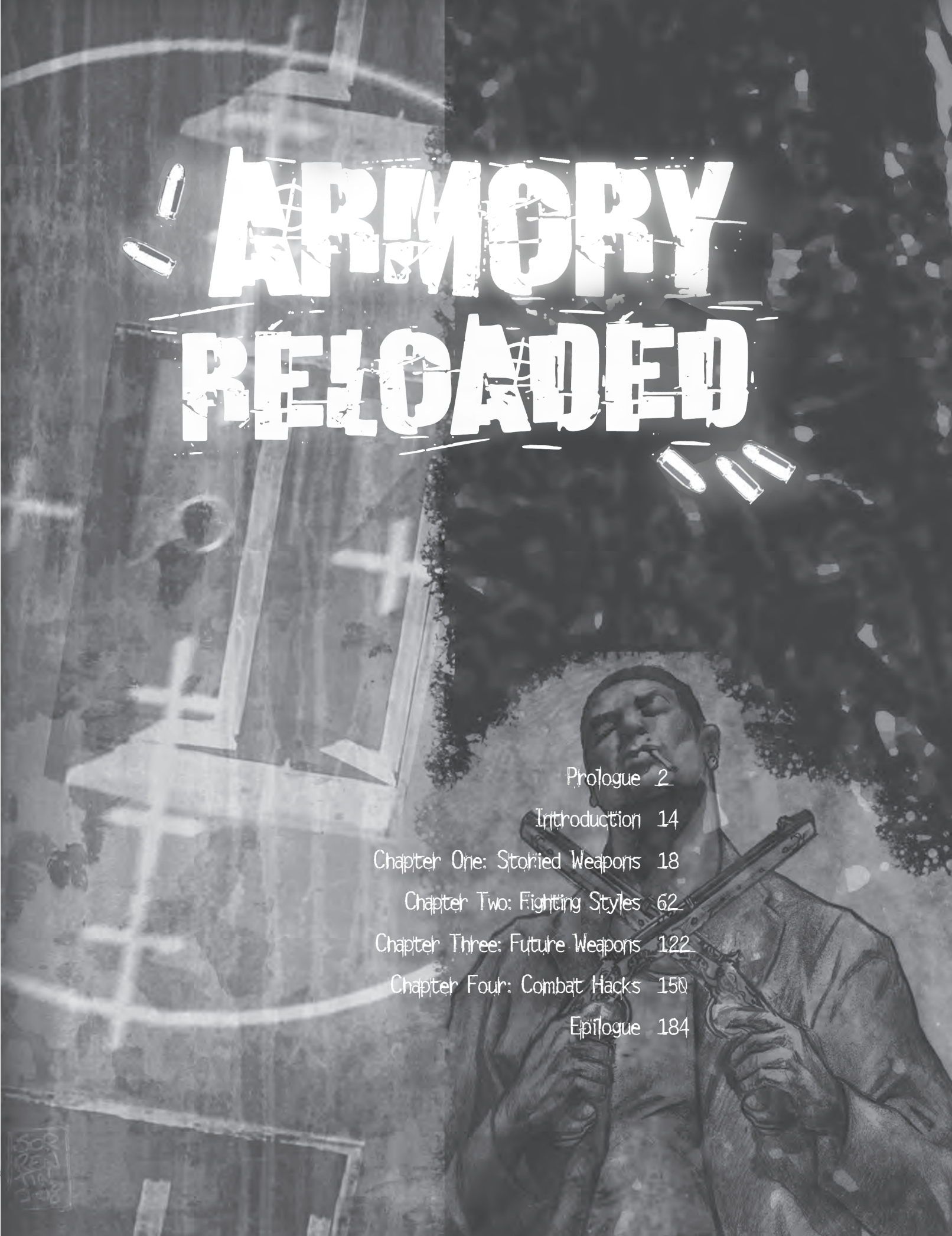
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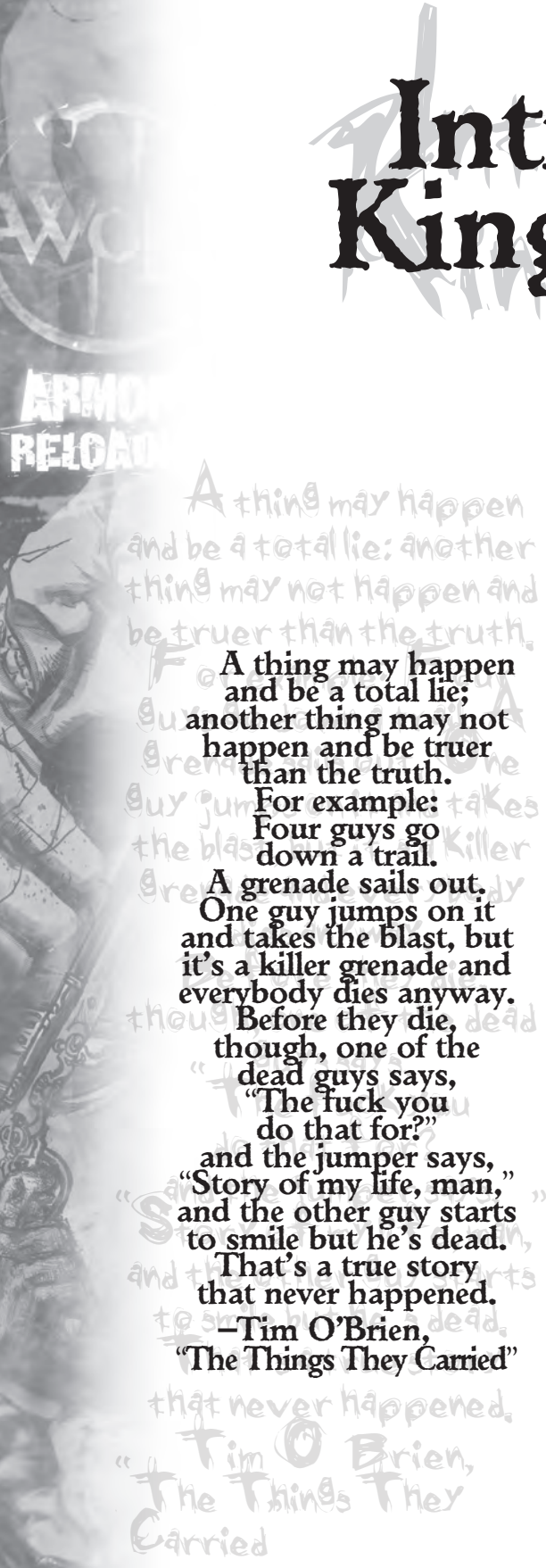
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# Introduction: King of the Hill



**A thing may happen and be a total lie; another thing may not happen and be truer than the truth. For example: Four guys go down a trail. A grenade sails out. One guy jumps on it and takes the blast, but it's a killer grenade and everybody dies anyway. Before they die, though, one of the dead guys says, "The fuck you do that for?" and the jumper says, "Story of my life, man," and the other guy starts to smile but he's dead. That's a true story that never happened.**
**–Tim O'Brien, "The Things They Carried"**

A thousand ways to kill. A *million*, even. Bullet to the brain. Knife to the gut. Bomb dropped on a house, thumbs thrust through eyes and into the brain, a broadhead arrow to the neck. Rockets. Flamethrowers. Shrapnel. Landmines. The *dim mak*.

And that's in the real world. This is the World of Darkness, where the means to murder are multiplied by a hundred. Magic spells might tear your intestines out your mouth with but the flick of a sorcerer's wrist. A vampire has an enchanted straight razor that drinks your blood with even the lightest cut. A ghost inhabits a Winchester rifle and gains in power every time it kills—hell, it killed seven people *just yesterday*.

The characters stand against the million ways to die, and have to bring some pain and death upon themselves now and again, and this book is what helps them do just that. **Armory Reloaded** attempts to provide whole new avenues to violence for characters in the World of Darkness—not just the expected guns and baseball bats, but some seriously dangerous, clandestine stuff. The martial ability to break a trachea. A gun that can fire around corners. A yellow sash that hungers to choke the lives out of its victims.

**Armory Reloaded** aims to turn the volume knob up to 11, then break it off.

## Combat Is Horror

This book may serve to jack up the action in your World of Darkness games (see below), but we want to emphasize here and throughout: combat is some scary business. Blood spattering in the mud, people screaming, the smell of cordite burning nostrils. Bombs blowing people to bits. A vampire's claws leaving a man with his guts hanging out and his wife standing ten feet away, crying so hard she breaks a rib.

We talk more about the horror of combat and of weapons in the latter two chapters of the book, but it bears repeating here how terrifying it can be. Whether it's the trench warfare of the First World War, an atomic bomb leaving human beings little more than shadows on walls, or two street gangs going at each other with nicked-up machetes, it's a brutal, nasty affair. This book seeks to present you with several new ways to adjust the knobs on combat and violence in your games so you can strike just the right notes of terror and horror.

## Action-Horror

Horror has many faces. It can be the slow creeping dread of the unknown. It can be a face full of the alien and inscrutable. It can be persistent mystery just as it can be buckets of gore splashed across a kitchen floor.

One face—and it's a viable face, perfectly fine for the right game—is that of action horror. Two vampires balance on a rusted pipe above street level, swinging fire axes at one another. A tribe of goblins swarms up over an M1 Abrams tank, trying to get at the sweetmeats (read: human soldiers) inside. A rampaging *beast-thing* takes down a platoon in Vietnam, or a SWAT team, or a mercenary band stalking the deserts of Africa. Horror is not antithetical to the crack of a rifle, the clash of swords, or the booming detonation of a bunker-buster bomb.

Okay, sure. Look at a film like *The Ring* or *Suspiria*, and you're not going to find much action-horror present. You wouldn't want to. Then again, that's not the type of story we're hoping to help you tell with a product like **Armory Reloaded**. Instead, take a look at films like *Dog Soldiers* or *The Thing*. Both very viable action-horror stories. A film like *Blade II* isn't a perfect movie (though it's the best of that series, should you ask the humble opinion of the developer of this book), but it has some terrifying vampires and still features a boatload of fantastic action. The action in a horror movie like *The Thing*, though, is very different from what you'll find in *Blade II*… and that's okay. **Armory Reloaded** aims to allow you to find the right kind of action-horror for your story, so you can have the characters and scenes hit the right tone.

Just to be clear, this book does not require owning the first **World of Darkness: Armory** book. This book features new information that isn't dependent upon that product. That being said, the two do play well together, so owning both is certainly advantageous, though by no means critical.

# How to Use This Book

At the front of **Armory Reloaded** you'll find a short story by Matt McFarland, and at the back you'll find its epilogue.

**Chapter One: Storied Weapons** offers a variety of artifact weapons that have been blessed *and* cursed by the horrors of the World of Darkness. These singular weapons—ranging from a spree-killing pistol that hungers to take life to an ancient soul-drinking sword—cannot be measured by a Cost in Resources. No, the cost to use and keep such dreaded tools is far worse, measured only in how much one is willing to sacrifice.

**Chapter Two: Fighting Styles** takes the idea of the Fighting Style Merit and digs deep into just what such a style means. It readapts several of the existing Fighting Styles in a more granular way, and adds several new core, supplemental and specialized Fighting Styles. Each Style is based upon real world martial arts training, and each is given new rules, histories, story hooks, and example practitioners.

**Chapter Three: Future Weapons** blows the lid off what one comes to expect regarding the use of weapons in a World of Darkness story. Prototype weaponry is featured here—guns that can shoot around corners, particle beam weapons, crowd control devices, knives that detonate after being buried in a victim's flesh, and countless other instances of bleeding edge combat horror. In addition, this chapter provides Storytelling advice on how to adapt such high-tech stuff for your horror games, as well as a portrait of a corrupt weapons manufacturer: the sinister Ganaducci Arms.

**Chapter Four: Combat Hacks** takes a lurching run at combat in the World of Darkness and attacks it with a pair of hatchets. The chapter dices up all elements that go into the combat mechanics of the Storytelling System, allowing you to rearrange them as your characters and story require.

## The Denizens of the World of Darkness

**Vampire: The Requiem:** Vampires refer to themselves as *Kindred*. All vampires belong to one of five different *clans*, which determine what supernatural powers they wield and some of their weaknesses. Many vampires also belong to *covenants*, organizations that fill the roles of religions, political parties and secret societies. Vampires band together into small groups called *coteries*, which might form along lines of clan, covenant, or simple acquaintance.

**Werewolf: The Forsaken:** Werewolves are born to human parents, but undergo a First Change sometime during their lives, at which point they discover their savage heritage. Werewolves refer to themselves as *Uratha* in their own language, or sometimes as *Forsaken* (those who ally themselves with Luna, the spirit of the moon) or *Pure* (brutal, vicious werewolves who wage war on their lunar cousins). Forsaken werewolves take social roles called *auspices*, based upon what phase of the moon they first Changed under, and many join *tribes* that provide training and support. The basic unit of werewolf existence, though, is the *pack*.

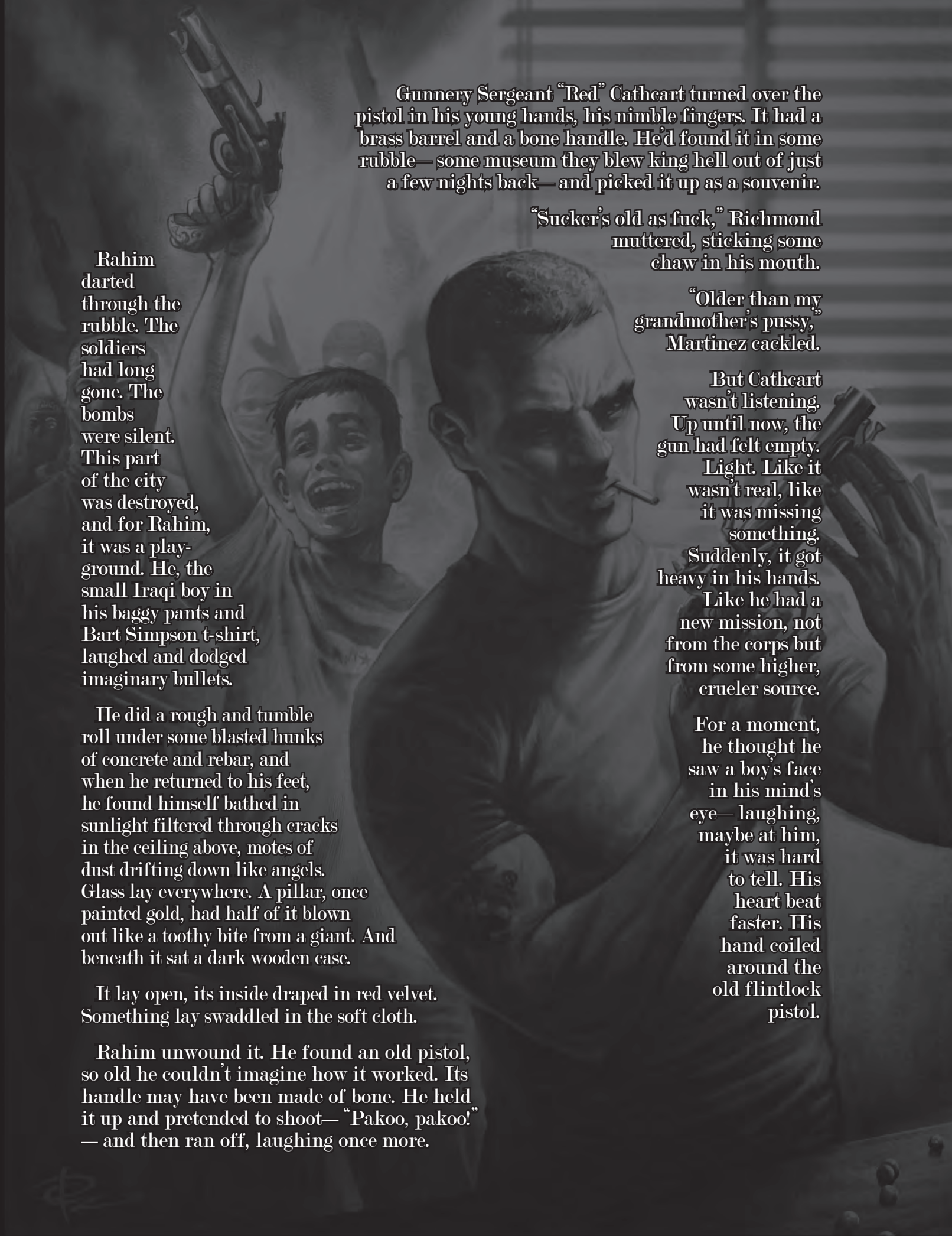
**Mage: The Awakening:** Mages are human beings who Awaken to mystical Supernal Realms and work their arcane powers through a connection to these places. Every mage walks a *Path*, depending upon which Realm she Awakened to, and some join one of five *orders*, ancient fellowships that stretch back to a forgotten city of antiquity. A group of mages is called a *cabal*, while a local organization, usually composed of multiple cabals, is called a *Consilium*.

**Promethean: The Created:** Prometheans, sometimes called the Created, are living beings made of unliving flesh. Like the Golem of Hebrew legend or Dr. Frankenstein's monster, these creatures are powerful, despised by humanity, and extremely rare. This is well, because Prometheans bring out the worst in people. Close proximity to Prometheans makes others suspicious, angry, jealous and spiteful—and all of this ill will is focused squarely upon the Promethean. Each Promethean walks a Pilgrimage, hoping to find the secret of Mortality, and sometimes these beings are lucky enough to find others of their kind and band together into a *throng*. Prometheans descend from one of several *Lineages*, based upon the first of that particular "family" to gain sentience. A Promethean's approach to his Pilgrimage is called a *Refinement*, and this approach can (and usually does) change several times before the creature finds Mortality.

**Changeling: The Lost:** Changelings are people stolen by the Others, the Good Folk, the beings from Arcadia. These hapless souls, sometimes called the *Lost*, have made their way back to the lands of their birth. Changelings are physically transformed by their time in captivity, taking on a *seeming* that informs their appearance and some of their magical capability. Changelings arrange themselves in feudal *Courts*, named after the seasons of the year and based roughly upon mystical and political outlook. Some live in fear that their tormentors will return. Others swear that if the Good Folk come for them, they will be ready. Most changelings come together into *motleys*, both for companionship and mutual protection.

**Hunter: The Vigil:** Hunters aren't supernatural beings, per se. Rather, they are human beings who have chosen or been chosen to protect humanity from the supernatural. Hunters are often obsessive and zealous, and over time can even appear quite insane (provided they survive their avocation long enough). Some hunters belong to *compacts* or *conspiracies*, organizations that can provide access to weapons, training and personnel to facilitate the Vigil. Some hunters band together into local groups, scrounging whatever they can. And some face the darkness alone.





Rahim darted through the rubble. The soldiers had long gone. The bombs were silent. This part of the city was destroyed, and for Rahim, it was a playground. He, the small Iraqi boy in his baggy pants and Bart Simpson t-shirt, laughed and dodged imaginary bullets.

He did a rough and tumble roll under some blasted hunks of concrete and rebar, and when he returned to his feet, he found himself bathed in sunlight filtered through cracks in the ceiling above, motes of dust drifting down like angels. Glass lay everywhere. A pillar, once painted gold, had half of it blown out like a toothy bite from a giant. And beneath it sat a dark wooden case.

It lay open, its inside draped in red velvet. Something lay swaddled in the soft cloth.

Rahim unwound it. He found an old pistol, so old he couldn't imagine how it worked. Its handle may have been made of bone. He held it up and pretended to shoot— "Pakoo, pakoo!" — and then ran off, laughing once more.

Gunnery Sergeant "Red" Cathcart turned over the pistol in his young hands, his nimble fingers. It had a brass barrel and a bone handle. He'd found it in some rubble— some museum they blew king hell out of just a few nights back— and picked it up as a souvenir.

"Sucker's old as fuck," Richmond muttered, sticking some chaw in his mouth.

"Older than my grandmother's pussy," Martinez cackled.

But Cathcart wasn't listening. Up until now, the gun had felt empty. Light. Like it wasn't real, like it was missing something. Suddenly, it got heavy in his hands. Like he had a new mission, not from the corps but from some higher, crueler source.

For a moment, he thought he saw a boy's face in his mind's eye— laughing, maybe at him, it was hard to tell. His heart beat faster. His hand coiled around the old flintlock pistol.

# Chapter One: Storied Weapons

**The tools of conquest do not necessarily come with bombs and explosions and fallout. There are weapons that are simply thoughts, attitudes, prejudices…**
**–Rod Serling, "The Twilight Zone"**

This is the definition of the word "storied:"

1. recorded or celebrated in history or story: the storied cities of ancient Greece.

2. ornamented with designs representing historical, legendary, or similar subjects.

Storied weapons can be weapons recorded in either history or mythology, or items ornamented with designs representing historical or legendary subjects. Often, these are weapons with place of pride in some horrific legend. Therefore, both definitions above could be considered true.

The world's full of sadists, despots, and murderers who had weapons with which they came to identify. An old Beretta that keeps showing up in the hands of students who go on to commit school shootings, a weapon that never shows up in the evidence store. The treasured machete of a Burmese warlord that burns with his lust for power. The club used to slay policemen during Poll Tax riots in the UK, still inspiring people to violent revolution. Each of these weapons has a history; each one is immortalized in the whispered tales of criminals, veterans and law enforcement. Moreover, each of these weapons has a terrible price that a wielder must pay before it will accept him.

All of the weapons detailed in this section have a cost. This doesn't measure the price in dots—these weapons are unique, acting as characters in a story like any other Storyteller character. Instead, the cost is either some ordeal that the character must go through in order to obtain the weapon—often the case for old weapons that have stringent restrictions on who may use them—or the consequences that a character must suffer for using the weapon. A character cannot avoid paying the price of a storied weapon—she's a part of the weapon's story as much as it is a part of hers. If she does try to duck out of the consequences due her, she can be sure that they will strike even worse as a result of her presumption. Whatever force empowers these mysterious weapons—whether it's the devil or the collective fears of humanity—cannot be cheated.

These weapons are both blessed and cursed, burdened by their history and drawn to the hands that might use them.

## Black Dawn

**Type of Weapon:** Beretta Model 92
**Other Names**: The Black Beretta, The Dark Dawn, The Atavism

### Description

A Beretta 92 pistol, Black Dawn is an original Beretta 92S made in 1976, in blued steel with black rubberized grips. At first glance, the gun's nothing special, but on a second glance people tend to focus on the skull etched on the slide. When a person actually carries the gun, it sits comfortingly in his hand. The grip's slightly worn, fitting to his hand. Occasionally, in the right wind, the gun carries

## Researching Storied Weapons

In each weapon's write-up, you'll find an elaborate history that details how the weapon came to be, from where it comes, and who has wielded it throughout history.

Certainly each is deserving of evocative research in-game, and characters witnessing such a weapon won't necessarily know anything about it—hence, some degree of investigation will be necessary.

The Research action (pp. 55–56, **World of Darkness Rulebook**) is always a good place to start. Assume that on this roll, each weapon needs a full 15 successes to investigate fully, with each roll equaling 30 minutes of study. However, partial successes should give partial revelation of story.

All that being said, players should be encouraged to have their characters pursue other avenues. As noted in the sidebar on p. 41, Jungle Blood can be researched with a Streetwise roll. Researching the Sword of Dracula may demand the Occult Skill. Digging up some of the red tape that once bound the Weapon of the Future could require a Politics roll.

Most importantly, research should always be a dynamic part of the story. Maybe the characters must pursue a series of clues that leads them from dusty tomb to closed-off museum wing to the file cabinets of a United States senator. And something should always stand in their way, something beyond the mere chance of failure. What if someone is competing for the information, destroying it as they find it? Are they being pursued by assassins? Even something as simple as trying to break into those aforementioned cabinets while not alerting the guards in the hallway is a great form of suspense during actions related to research.

### Storied Weapons

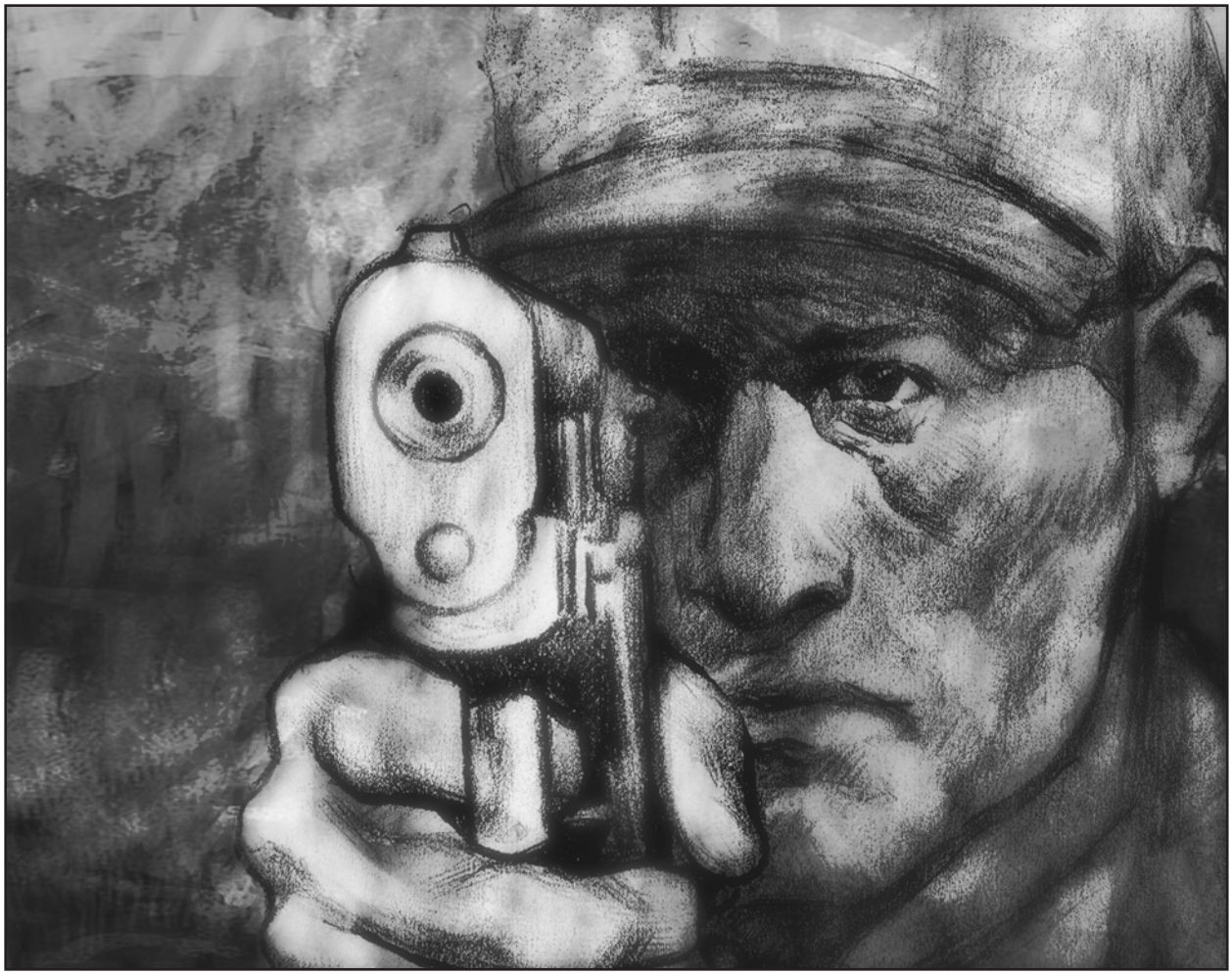
| Weapon | Type | Damage | Ranges | Clip | Strength | Size |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Black Dawn | Beretta Model 92 9mm | 2(L) | 20/40/80 | 15+1 | 2 | 1 |
| Canon's LeMat (Primary) | LeMat .44 Revolver | 3(L) | 20/40/80 | 9 | 3 | 2 |
| Canon's LeMat (Secondary) | 16 Gauge Smoothbore | 1 (8-Again) | 5/15/30 | 1 | 3 | 2 |
| Duelist's Bane | Flintlock Pistol | 1 (9-Again) | 15/30/60 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Fateweaver | Variable | Variable(L) | Variable | Variable | Variable | |
| Hognose | See p. 33 | | | | | |
| Injustice | Mace | 3(B) (9-Again) | na | na | 3 | 3 |
| Jungle Blood | Machete | 2(L) | na | na | 2 | 2 |
| Sword of Dracula | Long Sword | 4(L)+1 | na | na | None | 3 |
| Weapon of the Future (Primary) | Assault Rifle | 4(L) | 225/450/900 | 45+1 | 2 | 3 |
| Weapon of the Future (Secondary) | Grenade Launcher | 2(L)+3 | 100/200/400 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Whispering Blade | Curved Saber | 3(L) (9-Again) | na | na | 3 | 2 |
| Yellow Sash | Garrote/Strangle Wire | 2(L) | na | na | 2 | 1 |

a faint air of bourbon and cigar smoke. Black Dawn always feels like it's at the wielder's body temperature, and the whole effect of carrying the gun is like giving a handshake to an old friend—often, the wielder's only remaining friend.

### History

Made in 1976, the gun that's come to be known as Black Dawn carved a bloody path through the late twentieth century. Its story begins in the hands of Ron Griffin, a New Jersey postal worker. One day, without warning, Ron walked calmly into his post office and shot ten people dead before turning the gun on himself. He didn't speak a word to anyone. Maybe that one man's need to kill etched itself on the gun's soul. Maybe the steel used in the gun was the last to come from a factory that burned down in a mysterious fire, killing everyone within. Maybe the gun was just one of the Devil's own from the start. Nobody's sure any more. After the shooting, the pistol didn't reach the evidence locker. No policeman signed it out, and nobody gave it a second thought.

A year later, the gun showed up in the hands of a 19-year-old gang thug in Columbia, South Carolina.



The official statement notes that he got it from his father, but other people swear he bought it from the town's gun store or even found it when exploring an abandoned railroad car. He killed a lot of people with that gun, just walking down the city street and firing at any who ran from. Thing is, it wasn't gang-related. It was just murder: raw and bloody, primal and without reason. When he was done, the boy pressed the gun up against his breastbone and pulled the trigger… but unlike the postal worker, the teen didn't succeed in taking his own life. Doctors saved his life, and he could stand trial as an adult for his terrible crimes. Only after he'd been put in prison did anyone notice that the gun was missing.

The gun has found its way into the hands of other spree-killers since then: disgruntled office workers, vengeful family members, drunken bar-goers, homeless lunatics. One that stands out is the 1987 murder of twenty-five people in a botched raid on a Detroit meth lab. The murderer was Chris Rutger, a police officer who had taken the Black Dawn from his precinct's evidence locker to make a "drop gun," a weapon that couldn't be traced back to him. With the grip wrapped in tape, he claimed in court that he only ever intended to shoot in self-defense. Testimony from other officers at the scene and forensic evidence both show him for a liar. Upon entering the lab, he drew the gun and smiled softly. One of the officers heard him say "Thanks, Dad." At the time, the officers thought nothing of it. As soon as Rutger could get a good shot off, he took it. The other officers looked on in shock as he walked calmly through the lab, shooting dead everyone he encountered. One of the officers attempted to stop him, and he shot her—fortunately, the bullet hit her in the leg. Before any of the others could take him out, he put the gun into his mouth and pulled the trigger. As with the first school shooting involving the gun, Chris Rutger survived the suicide attempt. He told the court that he didn't know what came over him, that it was like the gun was an old friend of the family and he was catching up. Pulling the trigger felt good. The jury didn't believe that he was mentally unstable, and took his statement as an admission of guilt. Officer Rutger was sentenced to life in prison without parole. He killed himself after eight months in jail, finishing the job that he couldn't complete with Black Dawn. The gun was sold off at police auction, but nobody remembers the buyer. Media coverage of the killing lit up the country for two days, including the headline "Black Dawn For Detroit Police." The meeting between Ronald Regan and Mikhail Gorbachev soon drove it from the public's attention, but law enforcement took to calling the gun "Black Dawn" when they encountered it.

While most people remained ignorant of the gun's story, some people—police officers, but also armchair investigators and crime buffs—started noticing a pattern among several spree killings. They all featured a Beretta with a skull etched on the slide as the murder weapon. Further research revealed that the gun never showed up at a murder with less than ten victims, and everyone who pulled the trigger attempted to kill themselves after committing their crimes. In essence, Black Dawn is the hallmark of a spree-killer. Nobody takes the wilder reports seriously—the idea that a gun can possess people is outright ludicrous—but after a couple of beers in a cop bar, people start swapping stories about the strangest killings they've seen. Some of the stranger stories involve people who turned the gun on their fellows and killed with wild abandon, and how anyone who has the gun pointed at them just seems to freeze.

Studying the video from a department store shooting in 1998, an FBI psychologist claimed that she could see one of the victims almost from the shooter's point of view. In her paper, she notes that the victim stands motionless in front of the killer. He doesn't attempt to take cover, doesn't run, he stands still and looks the killer in the eye. Just before the killer shoots him in the head, the victim mouths a single word: "Shoot." The psychologist never published her paper (her points about the innate brutality of man were a bit controversial, to say the least), though some copies sent out for review have escaped onto the black market. Stills from the video clearly show that the gun is Black Dawn. Cops who have investigated other school shootings note that only Black Dawn makes people freeze with such regularity.

Strangely for a weapon with such a bloody past, Black Dawn killings seem clouded from the media's attention. Plenty of people die, and many more are wounded, but the story rarely goes beyond local newspapers. National news overlooks the murders, though nobody can explain why.

Walter Johnson, a documentary filmmaker who was working on a film about spree-killings and school shootings, believed that Black Dawn is an atavism, a creation of modern society that harkens back to pre-civilized days. Distilled in the gun is the essence of a simpler time when might made right and any man could be called king once he had shed enough blood. Gang wars, home invasions, and all the military conflicts of the last thirty years are all too civilized. Anyone who wields Black Dawn in anger gets drawn into its ongoing story of blood and hate and death. Every man has his limits, and most are too weak to cope with the ancient urges coming from the gun.

## Story Hooks

• Black Dawn is more than a gun, it's a symbol, hooking in to the semiotics of the American psyche. One man plays off that when the gun falls into his hands. He's the kind of guy for whom the gun's message rings true—he truly believes that the prehistoric attitude of the gun would solve a lot of the world's problems. Unfortunately, he's gathering followers. Though the men drawn to his group wouldn't necessarily survive in the new world, they're still drawn to the allure of a time when a man had to be strong and take charge. Worse, they're actively trying to make that world happen. Soon, they'll escalate into attacking the kind of social institutions that tie people together: banks and government buildings. If someone doesn't stop them, who knows how far they'll go? And in the middle of a tangled web of hate, sits one man with Black Dawn in his hand, reveling in the idea of his dreams made real.

• Someone in the strange underground network that knows the truth about Black Dawn got her hands on the weapon. Intending to save a few lives, she took it to a friend who disassembled the gun and melted it down for scrap. Destroying the gun didn't change the nature of Black Dawn. Instead of just one gun that drives people to kill, now a half-dozen trinkets move across the country. They engender the same feeling, but don't provide a means to kill—and for the first time, one has left the country. Worked into an unremarkable piece of junk jewelry sold to an Australian tourist, a piece of Black Dawn sees a new locale that's ripe for conquest. Without the signature of the gun, how can anyone be certain if any given spree-killing was linked to Black Dawn or not?

• A few people can resist the power of Black Dawn. Maybe they've got granite in their heads or the good Lord protects his own. Nobody knows for sure. But one man has it now who can resist the weapon's influence. Rather than leaving it alone, he's out to write a new chapter in the story of Black Dawn. He wants to chain the animal, to make it into a guard dog rather than a wolf at civilization's door. He's doing some rather distasteful things to get there, including executing criminals. Off on a killing spree of his own, he's seemingly unaware that the beast he's intending to chain is dragging him through blood and filth to get there. The current owner doesn't just have to ignore the beast, he has to wrestle it into submission—and he's not strong enough to do that. While he'd never admit it, he's just shooting up the city, getting rid of people he thinks of as "criminal scum"—possibly including the characters or their friends.

Unable to focus the rage, he instead lashes out at those closest to him. Finally, appalled at his own weakness, he turns the gun on himself. Of course, everybody laughed at Walter. The fact that he ascribed this common pistol some kind of diabolical persona seemed ludicrous; never mind that his documentary came off as a paranoid-schizophrenic's video-taped ramblings. Walter hanged himself. Some reels of his film are still in circulation among conspiracy and occult types.

Lisa Thomas wasn't the first woman to wield Black Dawn, but she was the most notable. In 2001, she was walking through New York City when two men bundled her into an alleyway at knifepoint. They took her purse and threw her to the ground. Looking around, consumed by fear, she found Black Dawn lying in a puddle of garbage water near her hand. She grabbed it, turned around and shot the two men dead. The unchecked force of male dominance flowed from the gun into her, but something either diverted it or stopped it outright. She carried the gun for six months, using it only for self-defense. Every time she thought that the gun might be her friend, she instead thought of her family. Though she used the gun more than once, it never overwhelmed her. In the end, she quite deliberately dropped it in an alleyway, giving the gun back to the world that gave it to her in the first place.

Black Dawn's a strictly American phenomenon. Though the gun's found its way into the hands of killers across the country, it's never left the United States of America. Three years ago, it showed up in a spree-killing incident in Alaska, though there's no record of how it got there, or whether it came back. A few unreliable witnesses believe it was involved in a particularly brutal mass-murder in Guadalajara, but nobody's substantiated their claim. The majority of spree-killings outside North America don't involve people turning on their own schools or places of work, and there the weapon of a brave loner is forever different. Only in America is the image of the gun etched into the cultural mindset by myths of the Wild West.

## The Weapon

Black Dawn is a standard Beretta Model 92. Its statistics are as follows: Damage 2, Ranges 20/40/80, Capacity 15+1, Strength 2, Size 1/S. Users with no dots in the Firearms Skill do not suffer from the unskilled penalty.

The gun only finds its way into the hands of people who will use it on other people. Collectors and their ilk can't keep hold of Black Dawn for any length of time—someone will steal it, or the package containing the gun never reaches its intended destination. Anyone who holds on to Black Dawn long enough to point it at someone else has a spark inside her that the weapon latches on to. She can still fire it without falling under the gun's influence, but must spend a Willpower point to pull the trigger. If she does, none of the other effects of the gun apply, though the normal bonus for spending Willpower still applies.

Anyone shot at by Black Dawn freezes in fear, losing her next action unless she spends a Willpower point in order to act. This Willpower expenditure counts as her expenditure for the turn. If the target spends Willpower to act, any direct action he takes against the wielder suffers a –2 penalty. If the target can apply her Defense against firearms attacks, perhaps as a result of some supernatural power or being in close combat, she cannot do so against the wielder of Black Dawn.

Note that these effects grip any target of a bullet fired from Black Dawn. The firer doesn't have to hit her target, but does have to have obviously shoot *at* her. If the target's not aware that he's in danger—say the shooter's firing from concealment with a silencer—the target doesn't incur these effects.

If the wielder turns the Black Dawn on anyone who is a member of the same organization as himself—someone who works for the same company, is part of the same gang, or is a member of the same rotary club—the gun inflicts terrible wounds. The firer must hit his target, scoring at least one success on the roll to hit, but a successful shot deals damage equal to the firer's whole dice pool, as if a wielder had scored a Killing Blow (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 168). This ability applies if—or when—the wielder turns the gun on herself.

Most people who hold Black Dawn—even if they haven't fired it, yet—eventually fall under the gun's spell. The gun feels like an old friend. Slowly, it becomes a man's *only* friend. He starts to give up social ties, growing distant even from close friends. That's only on the surface; underneath the real truth worms its way into his heart: he is going to kill people in cold blood. Only the few strong enough to master the gun's dominant instincts (by spending Willpower every time they fire it) can avoid that fate and try to write a new chapter in Black Dawn's story. He'd have to use Black Dawn to achieve some particularly notable goal to tame the beast within for those who come after him.

## Special Tools

Some magicians may find their enchantments especially powerful when applied to a weapon with a mystique, while werewolf shamans have an easier time binding spirits to weapons with a story behind them.

While that is the case, a supernatural being gains no extra benefit for using a storied weapon when creating their blasphemous items beyond those granted for using an appropriate weapon. If ever a storied weapon is enchanted, it loses all of the special traits, and the wielder no longer has to pay the price.

Even if a bound spirit is set free or a spell of accuracy is unwoven, the weapon returns to normal. The magic severs the connection between weapon and story, and nothing can reattach it.

# Canon's LeMat

**Type of Weapon:** LeMat Revolver

**Other Names**: Canon's Cannon, Grape Shot Revolver (applies to all LeMat Revolvers)

## Description

Just over a foot long, the revolver sits heavy in the hand. The cold blued steel finish has darkened to a shade just short of black. The revolver's cylinder, with its nine chambers, rotates about a second, central barrel mounted just under the primary barrel but a few inches shorter. Close examination of the primary barrel reveals some slight scoring along the bottom, likely a result of the use of the secondary barrel. Slung from under the barrel like an errant and forgotten remnant from a Hollywood western is a spur trigger guard. The gunman's fingers slip between the grip and the spur, which hugs the hand, stabilizing the gun while looking damned stylish.

Resting along the left side of the barrel, mounted to the frame of the gun, is a long ramming rod hinged at the center to fold down to half of its total length. The end is threaded, apparently for use with the archaic implements of nineteenth-century firearms. A small groove is cut into the rod, perfect for securing a cleaning swatch. The LeMat logo is stamped into the side of the barrel, and of the entire revolver, it alone seems faded with age.

Polished walnut composes the gun's grip, and the entire weapon smells slightly of aged wood and gun oil. A small lanyard ring hangs from the butt of the gun, slack enough to shift forwards and backwards but not so limp that it dangles loosely with each movement.

The final idiosyncrasy rests with the hammer. In the default position, the hammer falls squarely behind the higher barrel, discharging one of the revolving chambers. With a flick of the thumb, however, the striker shifts down, leaving it to collide with the firing cap located just behind the secondary barrel.

## History

There's a town out west, one of those lucky few that survived the centuries to become more than a simple outpost of the American wilderness. Out there the ghost stories all involve desperate men searching for oil or gold, the bizarre rights of the native shamans, the grisly results of frontier heroism and the restless shades that result from a shootout at high noon. Few stories combine all four into a single gruesome whole, however.

They say Andrew Canon came from the Confederacy, a deserter who abandoned his unit the year the war concluded. There could be no doubt that he was a man of the battlefield; he wore a patch over his missing left eye and used a crutch to make up for his twisted right leg, which, the whores he visited on occasion claimed, bore deep shrapnel scars along its entire length. Yet the stories also paint Canon as a young man, with gentle features, fair skin, and a sad smile that only rarely graced his lips.



He must certainly have seemed an easy target to the Barlow Boys, a rough gang of hard-drinking locals, as he limped into town, his rifle slung from the side of the tired horse he led by the bridle. They called at him, using any slur they could come up with regardless of applicability; he ignored every one, driving the men into a rage. They say the Barlow Boys surrounded him that day, describing to him in detail what they planned to do to his corpse after they cut the clothes from it. He politely asked them to leave, only stirring their bloodlust. They began to approach, and Canon let his crutch fall to the ground, drawing the eyes of his assailants. When they glanced up again, he held a gun in his right hand, a heavy steel revolver.

New Orleans physician Jean Alexandre LeMat designed and developed the LeMat revolver just before the American Civil War. A unique weapon that combined an increased capacity with a secondary smooth bore barrel, a soldier wielding a LeMat effectively possessed double the raw firepower of a gunman relying on the other six-chamber revolvers of the day. The gun relied on a percussion cap mechanism that ignited black powder within the chamber, propelling a revolver ball from the long barrel or buckshot from the second. Each gun boasted a ramrod mounted to the side of the barrel that could be quickly detached for expedient reloading of both barrels.

LeMat personally made several hundred revolvers in New Orleans in the years leading up to the Civil War. Early models used non-standard ammunition, however, forcing owners to cast their own ammunition. When the war disrupted supply lines, he traveled to France, fully intent on mass-producing the weapons. The weapons made in France suffered from low quality materials and production, however, and the Confederacy refused to purchase them. LeMat patented the revolver in London, but few were produced there before a second run was produced in France. This second run solved several of the issues present in the first design, but few revolvers actually made it around Union blockades to see Confederate service. Those that did became a favored weapon among the leaders of the Confederacy, who often carried multiple pistols rather than work to reload powder and percussion caps in the heat of combat.

They say that one of the second model guns made its way into the hands of a young confederate officer from Alabama. His involvement in the war was hereditary, his father's plantation reliant on slaves to produce the cotton it shipped to northern mills each year. Near the end of the war he served in the cavalry of the Army of Tennessee under Major General Nathan Bedford Forrest. They say he was one of the few cavalrymen left to the Army when Lieutenant General Hood sent Forrest to Murfreesboro. With most of their cavalry to the southeast, the Army of Tennessee collapsed under the onslaught of the Union soldiers. They say the young officer was left for dead on the battlefield under the corpse of his horse, both rider and steed maimed by cannon fire.

Some say he deserted then. Others claim he found his way back to the Confederate army in retreat, but seeing the future of the CSA writ large before him convinced him to steal a mount and flee west. Either way, he came to be faced by a gang of nine men hungry for blood, a revolver in one hand and the lead of a horse in the other. Nine shots rang out in quick succession, and the men fell dead. The man then moved on, purchasing a few essential supplies at the apothecary before traveling into the wilderness. They say the man lived out there, in the wild, hunting and trapping for food and the money the hides would bring, communing with the native tribesmen and the natural spirits they revered.

He claimed the name Andrew Canon, and each time he came to town the locals spread his story in hushed whispers. He became a local hero, defending the growing township from the worst predations of gangs and oilmen. His gun was the fastest in the west, able to seemingly fire a hundred times without being reloaded. Some said the gun could kill even the restless dead. Yet rumors of sickness plagued Canon; they say he was cursed with some kind of withering disease, a rot from the inside inflicted upon him by the ghosts of those he killed.

Despite gossip about his state of health, Canon lived a surprisingly long time. The very real stone that marks his grave in one of the town's older cemeteries reads:

A. Canon
1844 to January 17, 1929
Beloved Father and Husband

May he find the peace
he never could in life.

He is buried with his wife, who shares his day of death. Some say a gangster hungry to murder a living legend gunned both down with a Tommy gun. They say he took the cannon with him to Chicago, only to be killed a month later. They say the cannon vanished. Others say that LeMat's children took up his weapon and his burden, becoming hunters of shadows and vigilantes for their hometown. Still others claim that LeMat killed his own wife and haunts the hills of his hometown to this night, little more than a faded and restless shade.

## Story Hooks

• Canon's LeMat revolver could fetch a handsome sum of money as an exquisite example of its make, even were it not mystically enhanced. The fact that it can be used to kill ghosts and spirits and fires indefinitely makes it a must-have for wealthy or connected spiritualists. When rumors begin circulating within the characters' hometown of a gun capable of miraculous feats (some of which stand far outside of the gun's actual capabilities), its clear that the crazies will come out of the woodwork to get their hands on it. Can the characters claim the weapon for themselves? Can they even minimize the damage a prolonged fight over the gun is sure to wreak?

• Some say Canon's great-granddaughter, a pale, beautiful redhead with gray eyes that flash with an eerily-intense intellect, currently possesses the gun. She happens across the characters during their own forays into the supernatural, and eagerly spins the tale of her ancestor to those willing to listen. If the characters impress her, she might even be willing to lend them the gun for particularly dangerous work. But what if Canon's descendent is hiding a secret? What if the gun steals life from the wielder, passing it instead to the youngest living member of the line of Canon?

• The characters run afoul of a foe they literally cannot fight. Blows from fists and knives pass through it without slowing, and bullets appear to have no effect. Research into possible ways of overcoming such ephemeral invulnerability lead the characters to the stories of Canon and his gun. Unfortunately, the weapon will be difficult to trace, and it seems the only place to start is in the west, at the very blighted town that Canon defended with his deadly revolver.

## Canon's Cannon

Canon's LeMat functions as any other LeMat Revolver, save that it requires no ammunition and grants an additional bonus of two dice for attack rolls on top of any equipment bonuses. Each time the trigger is pulled, the revolver tears its due directly from the gunman. Each turn in which the LeMat pistol is fired, the character firing the revolver loses a point of Willpower. When the character's Willpower is extinguished, the revolver instead absorbs some of the wielder's essence, automatically inflicting one point of lethal damage.

Players of supernatural creatures with a power pool (vitae, essence, mana, pyros, glamour, etc.) may instead expend three points of the relevant pool to power the revolver and avoid loss of Willpower or damage.

Characters experience this loss of vitality not as a drain, but as a rush of adrenaline, fueling them onward. This results in the unfortunate reality that users of Canon's LeMat feel stronger and more confident as they grow weaker.

Furthermore, long-term use of the gun wreaks havoc on a person's body, draining him of some vital essence and weakening his system against withering diseases. For every time increment of Stamina + Composure months the character possesses the gun, the character must make a Resolve + Stamina roll with a penalty equal to the number of *living* beings killed with the gun during the time period. While ghosts, spirits, vampires and the like do not add to the penalty, the roll must be made regardless of whether or not the gun has been used to kill the living. On a failure, the character permanently loses one dot from one physical Attribute (player's choice) and immediately makes a check at –3 to avoid contracting a disease appropriate to the chronicle's setting (see p. 176 of **The World of Darkness Rulebook**). The disease can be resisted and cured normally, and the lost Attribute dot may be purchased again with experience.

Canon's LeMat is spiritually awakened and inflicts lethal damage against beings in Twilight. It provides no inherent capacity to perceive such spirits, however.

Acquiring Canon's LeMat requires taking it from whoever currently possesses it. This may be a descendent of Canon who considers it a sacred heirloom, a scholar of the supernatural who keeps it as part of his collection or even a violent criminal who serves as the latest in the long chain of those who have killed for the gun. The current owner may even be a combination of all three. One thing is certain: whoever has the gun won't be willing to give it up without a fight.

While Canon's LeMat need never be reloaded, other LeMat revolvers require two turns per chamber to reload and an additional two turns to reload the central barrel. (Due to the length of time necessary to reload, Civil War-era users often carried multiple pistols rather than take the time to reload in the heat of battle.) Relevant statistics for a LeMat revolver appears below. A character can switch between the two modes of fire as a reflexive action. The LeMat utilizes cap and ball (for the revolver) and wad and shot (for the secondary barrel) and cannot be used with more modern bullets or shotgun shells.

# Duelist's Bane

**Type of Weapon:** Flintlock pistol
**Other Names**: *Pugnalata Duello*

## Description

A Duelist's Bane is one of a pair of ornate flintlock pistols dating from the mid–18th century. The pistol is lighter than most other examples of its kind, and feels strange in the hand. Upon closer examination, the body of the gun is made not from wood (as is the norm) but from bone—a human femur. The material of the mechanism and barrel differentiates the guns; one sports polished brass workings while the other is made from steel. Apart from that, the weapons are identical. The etching on the bone and mechanism is exactly the same, and the few experts who have fired both admit that the weapons handle exactly the same. When the weapons were made, they came in a single case replete with powder flask, spare flints, and a bullet mold. The case itself was made of mahogany, with a crest inlaid in gold.

Either weapon fits into most people's hands with disturbing ease. It feels like a natural extension of the arm, so much so that some people don't want to relinquish the gun. No amount of cleaning can get the smell of black powder from the barrel, a smell that sticks to the owner's hands once he's fired the gun once and will never come off. The distinctive smell can easily tie the owner to any scene where the weapon's been used. A few compulsively wash their hands after firing the gun, scrubbing with the ferocity of Lady Macbeth hoping to remove the spot of blood.

## History

Unlike many other storied weapons, the tale of Duelist's Bane is reasonably well-documented. Though the guns have never been in the forefront of polite conversation, their unique construction makes the full history easy to piece together—Anthony Graham's otherwise rather dull *Antiquities of the Hidden Duelists* fixates on the occult traditions surrounding pistol dueling in the 18th century, including a full chapter detailing the history and supposed properties of the guns. Graham's book went out of print in 1972, but copies remain on the market (and available in public libraries) for people who know what to look for.

Salvatore Durante was a gunsmith of no particular reputation. He had no real interest in the occult, and though his weapons were functionally excellent, they hadn't attracted the eye of anyone with standing in the court of Naples. Unfortunately, his relative anonymity would be his downfall. One day in late 1737, a figure he referred to only as "The Red-Hooded Man" commissioned a set of dueling pistols. The only catch was that one must be made of brass and one of steel. His patron wanted Durante to make the weapons truly equal, and warned



him that any difference between the two weapons would lead to dire consequences. Naturally, Durante gave his all, creating a pair of beautifully crafted pistols, perfectly equal despite their differences. His patron must have been pleased, for he reportedly paid well over the odds for such work—enough that Signor Durante could afford to improve his equipment and experiment with new materials and prototypes for rifled barrels. At the time, he thought nothing further of his windfall.

Twenty years later, the Red-Hooded Man returned. By that time, Salvatore's eldest son had taken up his business, but his patron demanded that the old man come out of retirement. The original set of pistols was a resounding success, but the next pair of weapons would require the touch of a true master. Rather than a wooden stock, the Red-Hooded Man insisted that he use the left and right thigh-bones of a man killed in a dishonorable duel. That way, the weapons would enforce honor in all things. Again, one pistol had to be brass, and one had to be steel. The contract required that Signor Durante could not let anyone see the weapons, though his son did work on the case and accessories, including casting four silver bullets alongside the standard lead bullets. Again, the man paid Salvador handsomely. A year to the day after completing the pistols, Salvador Durante died, apparently of natural causes. The identity of the Red-Hooded Man remains a mystery.

Though the man who commissioned the Duelist's Bane seemingly vanished, his influence could be felt through the guns. Over time, a pattern emerged: the aggrieved parties had each attempted to settle their differences by other means, but had failed. The pistols were added to the stakes; whoever won the duel won both guns and their case. Outside of the dueling circle, the pistols upheld the honor and integrity of whoever carried them. Initially, the owner of the set could use one or both guns and reap the benefits—the weapons enhanced his skill to the point where inferior weapons just couldn't compare.

One act of treachery changed everything. An original account of the momentous duel resides in a museum in Berlin, dated the 15th of March, 1823. Two brothers, Karl and Friedrich Seibert, took up arms over the issue of inheritance—Karl believed that he deserved a greater share because his brother had married into a moneyed family, whilst Friedrich would not be done out of his half by "immoral trickery and legal sleight-of-hand." A petty duel over what amounted to a petty sum of money, nonetheless both men cheated. They both turned early. Both pistols fired at the same time. Both brothers died instantly, victims of each other's lack of honor. Rather than adjudicate a winner, the seconds agreed to split the pistols, each taking one gun and selling it. With both potential owners dead, they deemed it the only way to maintain honor. The fate of the case is unknown. From that point, the bearers of each weapon would vex each other, becoming a pole of opposition in each other's lives.

The steel pistol shows up in tales from Prussia, France, and Britain. It eventually landed in the United States of America in 1860. It enjoyed relative anonymity for several years, though stories of a man who used an antique flintlock pistol to defend his honor drew interest from far and wide. Winston Moore, an industrialist in Dallas, remained undefeated for several years. It soon became clear to him that his business was failing due to a series of strange coincidences. His best employees left due to financial trouble or problems with extended family. Driven to the point of obsession, he finally found the cause: a young Englishman who seemingly caused all Winston's problems. Rather than facing the man who was driving him to ruin, he very publically gave his pistol away. In a way, he was too late. The Englishman came to America searching for his pistol's partner, but one of the men Winston had fired instead shot him dead outside a bar after an argument over a game of poker in which the shooter had lost his life savings.

The pistols' antipathy is sometimes less circumspect. Albrecht Wagner owned the brass pistol for several years. He kept the weapon in his home in Basel, but his life seemed to take a turn. A Frenchman who had received the steel pistol from Winston Moore soon became a foil in Albrecht's life, thwarting his ambitions and turning even mediocre events into vicious confrontations. At first, he didn't realize that his own actions and even his presence had the same effect on the Frenchman, though the letters between the two (preserved in a private collection along with one of the pistols) show their descent. After five years, the two realized that each had had a significant negative impact on each other—not just financially, but families were ruined and brother was set against brother simply because of the actions of the other. The only way that either man could maintain his dignity and honor was to use their antique weapons. On the streets of Dijon, the two men dueled at ten paces. The Frenchman died instantly. Wagner, not wanting to be traced to murder, sold his weapon soon after. His fortunes, and those of his family, started to recover directly after the duel.

The brass-barreled gun passed on through the hands of men and women through Germany, Switzerland, and into Sardinia. Claudio Rossi, already a collector of antique firearms, exchanged three of his best pieces to own a Duelist's Bane. His interest in the lore behind the gun slipped into obsession once it was in his hands, though he never had a chance to experience the true benefit of owning the gun—the police arrested him for a murder committed by the woman who held the steel pistol. As they passed from hand to hand, whoever owns one of the pistols will become the nemesis of whoever holds the other weapon. Some, whether they understood what had happened or not, resolved their differences at ten paces, but as laws were passed against dueling in more and more countries, the owners of each pistol had to find other means to settle their honor. Some never met, their lives crossing only at a distance, but even that required effort to maintain—seemingly random chance caused them to meet several times, but by unspoken agreement they avoided each other. It's far more common for two strangers to become bitter enemies without ever understanding what brought them to that point. This does lead to a fast turnover between owners. Some manage to bring their antagonistic relationships to an early close, after which the guns move on (by choice or by accident). Others remain enemies until disease or old age takes one from the world. However their lives turn out, the weapons keep moving.

## Story Hooks

• The steel-barreled gun currently belongs to a hitman on the West Coast, a killer who takes pride in his title of "Deadliest Man Alive." The gun itself is his signature—while he's happy to dispose of bodyguards with a Glock, he saves his Duelist's Bane for the person most deserving of his special touch. The police know his rep and his M.O., but he's very well-connected, and putting him away isn't something they can do. For an assassin, he holds to a strong code of honor. In the shady underworld of hired killers, everyone wants a shot at him—if you kill the deadliest man alive, what does that make you?—and the constant attention is beginning to affect his work and the people around him. It's hard to hold down a normal life when everyone around you is scared that one stray bullet is going to put them in a body-bag. Beyond that, there's a storm moving through the underworld: someone with a brass-barreled antique pistol is offing criminals in ever-decreasing circles around the world's deadliest man, and pulling all the strings he can to ruin the hit-man's life.

• Claudio Rossi was an alchemist in addition to owning a Duelist's Bane. Whilst he's only really known for his early imprisonment and execution, he'd began compiling notes on how someone might go about bridging the gap of treachery that separates the two guns. At the time he was working, the pistols still held incredible power as both weapons and symbols. Whilst useless against an Uzi, some people still believe that the guns represent the Platonic ideal of the firearm, and the rift between them has somehow affected the position of guns worldwide. Signor Rossi's notebooks received a full translation in 1928, the originals placed in a small bookstore in Chicago. Anyone who wanted to continue his work would need both guns, and the case that originally held them. Whilst acquiring the guns presents problems, at least people can find out where they are; nobody's seen the case in over a hundred and eighty years. Most scholars agree that it was probably destroyed during the bombing raids on Berlin during World War II—so it causes quite a stir when the case shows up on eBay.

• Sometimes, owning something isn't enough. The man who recently came into possession of the brass-barreled Duelist's Bane has spent the last twenty years preparing and honing his skills as a gunsmith, hoping to replicate the incredible work of Salvatore Durante. His first creation, a revolver incorporating a human thigh-bone, was a piece of junk—bone isn't a good material for making guns. He's already starting to perfect his work, but the owner of the steel gun is already having an effect on his life, distracting him from his research to the point that he hasn't accounted for a change in perception. Rather than elegant weapons used to level the field between social classes in matters of honor, modern pistols are tools. Who knows what monstrous weapons he might create if he succeeds in creating a modern version of a Duelist's Bane?

## The Weapon

Each Duelist's Bane is an elegant flintlock dueling pistol. Its traits are: Damage 1, Ranges 15/30/60, Capacity 1, Strength 2, Size 2/J. The pistols are muzzle-loaded, and reloading takes a minimum of 8 turns, but each shot features the 9-Again quality.

When carrying one of the guns, the character has a slight subconscious understanding of what is just about to happen. He gains the benefits of the Merit: Danger Sense. If he already possesses the Merit, he gains no further bonus on the roll. Above and beyond that, he may apply his Defense to incoming firearms attacks that he's aware of—he reacts as the firer is pulling the trigger. The character's aware of any attacks made against him in normal combat, and of any incoming surprise attacks if he succeeds on the reflexive Wits + Composure roll to detect an impending ambush. If the person shooting at him is using the other Duelist's Bane, however, he can not apply his Defense.

The character may choose to aim the gun ("Aiming," p. 162, **World of Darkness Rulebook**), but with this weapon he doesn't lose his Defense while aiming—he can aim on the move.

Anyone brave enough, or stupid enough, to attempt wielding both Duelist's Bane pistols at once is in for a shock. When carrying both weapons loaded and ready for use, as opposed to in a case for transport, neither gun will fire. The flints will not strike sparks, no matter what he tries. Attempting to light the gunpowder by any other means is asking the gun to blow up—and take one of his hands with it. The bonus dice to detect surprise attacks instead become penalties. Worse, the whole world becomes his enemy. An opponent who shoots at him gains a bonus die on her Firearms roll, and the character cannot apply his Defense. If he survives a gunfight, his dishonor marks his days: he can't actually pick up either Duelist's Bane ever again. They leap from his hands if he tries, with enough force to break his fingers if necessary.

Whenever someone takes ownership of a Duelist's Bane, they become part of the ongoing narrative of the weapons' story, a story that puts the two owners at odds. There's no

overt magic that sets the two up as each other's nemesis, the whole thing happens as a string of random coincidences over a span of time. Some students of the weapons suggest that it's actually the force of the weapons' story that makes each wielder a direct protagonist. The mechanics ultimately don't matter. Coincidences, happenstance, and sheer random chance will draw the two into an antagonistic relationship, whether they want to or not. Both will interpret ambiguous statements in the worst way, and even charitable acts come across as being solely in the interests of the other. There's no mechanical basis to this relationship, but the Storyteller should ensure that the other pistol finds its way into the hands of a suitable nemesis; someone the character can have a negative impact on as well as vexing the character.

# Fateweaver

**Type of Weapon:** Varies; see below.
**Other Names**: Sleá Bua, The Spear of Destiny

## Description

The shape Fateweaver takes is dependant on the desires of its owner. In ancient times the weapon most commonly took on the shape of a spear (owing, perhaps, to its origin), but was it also sword, knife and bow. In the modern era, Fateweaver most frequently takes the shape of a gun, often a rifle with a bayonet mount, though the odd wielder still finds the weapon most appealing in blade form. Regardless of the form it takes, Fateweaver always appears pitted, rusty and ill-maintained. The weapon is coated with blood stains that prove impossible to eliminate by any means and, when combined with the rust, give the weapon a slightly reddish tinge.

Although Fateweaver might look like a piece of junk, it always functions flawlessly, never jamming, bending or twisting in the hands of its owner. Moderate levels of care can shine or polish away the worst of the rust, allowing the weapon to pass muster when worn during inspections or in dress uniform. Only daily maintenance can keep the weapon from accumulating a new layer of rust, seemingly overnight. The apparent shoddiness of Fateweaver is (partially) a test to determine the worthiness of a wielder. Only a warrior that is truly dedicated to a cause or creed would be bothered to pick up the weapon and Fateweaver respects determination above all.

## History

In the days before cold-wrought iron drove them from mortal lands, the Fae walked among humans dispensing miracles and curses as it pleased them. Humans were a source of fascination for these ancient fairy creatures. They drank in the power of human emotions and wondered at the mortal's ability for single-mindedness; a concept wholly alien to the Fair Folk. Occasionally a mortal, either foolish or brave, would seek out them and beg for assistance. One such seeker was a man named Lugh.



Lugh came before the Fae and asked them to give him the power to strike down his grandfather, named Balor; an evil king that ruled the land with a tyrant's cruelty. Balor had but a single eye and all men feared its gaze. It was said that Balor had traded his other eye to dark gods for the power to kill a man, or indeed whole armies, with a glance. Even Balor's kin weren't spared from his wickedness and when Lugh's mother gave birth to triplets, Balor wrapped them in a sheet and cast them into the sea. Only Lugh survived, washed up on the shore half-dead, to be raised by foster parents who related to him the story of his birth.

Amused by his tale, the Fae agreed to help Lugh. They reached into the dreams and ancestral memories of mankind and, with Fate as their anvil and Destiny as their hammer, forged the mighty spear Sleá Bua (roughly pronounced *SLEH-ah BUH-ah*) from the ephemera. Some tales insist the Fae folded the memory of the first murderer, Cain, into the weapon or that they used the very rock wielded by Cain to sharpen the edges of the spearhead. If true this might explain the appearance of the weapon which, even newly forged, looked pitted and blood-stained. In exchange for their favor, the Fair Folk made Lugh swear an oath to return to them after seven years had passed and enter into their service.

## The Fair Folk

The Fae that created Fateweaver in exchange for future service aren't necessarily the same Fae from **Changeling: the Lost**, unless your troupe wants them to be. The many varied legends of the Fae have plenty of room for different interpretations of the Fair Folk. If your troupe would like to use Fateweaver as a Gentry-forged Token, it's easy to suggest that, long ago, the Hedge was a less fearsome barrier than it is today and brave humans could visit Arcadia and hope to return.

When Lugh returned with Sleá Bua in hand, the enemies of Balor were emboldened by Lugh's tale and raised an army to attack the king. Lugh's army and the army of the king met in battle on the plains. The men of Lugh's army were so desperate to overthrow Balor that they fought with a fury that took the king's army by surprise, driving them back. Fearing the battle would be lost, Balor turned his baleful eye on the rebels, slaying hundreds with a glance. Feeling the time of his destiny upon him, Lugh hefted the spear and threw it, aiming for Balor's eye. The mighty weapon pierced the tyrant's head, exiting through his skull with the eye caught on its tip. As Balor fell to the ground, the eye stared unblinkingly at Balor's army from the spear tip, killing them in droves. The freed men praised Lugh calling him Lugh Lamhfada, Lugh of the Long Arm and asked him to be their king, but Lugh refused knowing his future was not his own.

After seven years had passed Lugh returned to the Fae as he had promised, leaving Sleá Bua with his child, Cúchulainn. After Cúchulainn, Sleá Bua passed down through the centuries, always leading its wielder to a might fate. Eventually the name Sleá Bua was forgotten, the spear known only as Fateweaver. Everywhere the spear traveled legends sprang up around the one who wielded it, both heroic tales and villainous deeds, fate, after all, serves no master. When the Fae departed from mortal lands the magic they bound into the spear began to respond to the desires of the one who carried it. Each wielder viewed the spear differently and it began to mold itself to match the dreams of its owner. A hero that sought a sword would find a pitted blade that fit his hand like he was born to carry it. An assassin would find a dagger whose lethalness belied it's outwardly humble form. Eventually the spear ended up in the hands of a Roman soldier stationed in Jerusalem. His name was Longinus.

Longinus found the weapon in the burial mound of a Germanic king. Sensing his approach, Fateweaver transformed itself into a spear with the Imperial eagle as its cross hilt. Assuming the weapon had been stolen from the body of a dead Roman, Longinus claimed it and began to carry it with him as his weapon of choice. Fateweaver served Longinus well in desert skirmishes with the fanatical opponents to Roman rule, always honing in on gaps in armor and refusing to become lodged in the enemies he dispatched. He began to think of the weapon as his good luck charm and rarely allowed it out of his sight, even when visiting with whores. He frequently slept with it tucked under one arm. Longinus heard about the arrest of the so-called King of the Jews while out on patrol. The name of the man, Jesus of Nazareth, clamored in his ears like the ringing of a bell and Longinus could sense his destiny approaching.

Longinus watched as history was made. He saw Pilate wash his hands of the problem of Jesus, he watched as the man was beaten, he watched as the other soldiers taunted the purportedly holy man. He watched Jesus struggle under the weight of the cross, heard the Nazarene refuse the drugged wine that would ease his pain and witnessed the crucifix being lofted erect on the rocky, arid hill of Golgotha. Longinus watched and waited, knowing his destiny was nigh. When the soldiers drew lots to decide which of them would have the onerous task of dealing with the remains of the crucified men, Longinus wasn't remotely surprised when his name was called.

It was a hot, dusty day and the work wasn't easy or pleasant. When Longinus came at last to the body of Jesus he was weary, dirty and thirsty and had almost forgotten about the prescience of fate that he'd had when he first heard the name Jesus of Nazareth. Before plunging Fateweaver into the side of the body to ensure the man was dead, Longinus wished out loud for a cool drink of water. The spear thudded into dead flesh and, to Longinus' surprise, a spout of something cold that looked almost, but not quite, like water gushed from the wound. Without thinking, Longinus sucked the wetness from his hands.

## Story Hooks

• You are approached by a man who claims to know the location of the Spear of Destiny. He tells you he works for a group called the Sanctified that have been searching for the holy relic for a very long time. The man offers you five million dollars if you assist them in recovering the weapon. The day is warm and, as you listen to him talk, he takes off his jacket. You notice what look like track marks on his wrist, peeking out under the cuffs of his shirt. Oddly, each scar looks to be part of a matched set.

• One of your friends shows you a gun listed on eBay that the seller claims is the very weapon used by Hitler to commit suicide. Included in the listing is a picture of an old, rusty Luger with what appear to be bloodstains on the barrel and grip. On a whim your friend bids on the weapon and, to his surprise, he wins the auction. Subsequent to the gun's arrival in the mail your friend begins to act strangely. He spends most of his time either cleaning the Luger or practicing with it on the range and takes an unusual amount of interest in an upcoming visit by a popular politician to your town. The day before the politician is due to arrive you get a text message that says, "It's God's will. My destiny is come and I embrace it."

• While walking to your car you see a man running pell-mell through the parking lot. As he runs past you he drops something at your feet hissing, "Hide it!" Mere seconds later a group of men round a building and, spotting the fleeing man, give a yell and take up pursuit. As you watch, the fleeing man is overtaken and shoved into an unmarked van. The van roars away in a blare of horns and screeching tires. At your feet is a very old, very rusty dagger, pitted and stained.

In the aftermath of that moment, stories differ on what exactly happened next. Some legends say that even that small taste of the blood of Christ cursed Longinus with the desire to drink the blood of humans, some tales say he was cursed with eternal life, left to wander the earth until Christ returns to forgive him and a rare few stories say that Longinus was the first man to take communion, drinking of the blood of Christ and thus forgiven for his crimes. Whatever the truth might be, Fateweaver, which would shortly become known as the Spear of Destiny, passed from his hands, having drawn the man to his fate.

The very nature of the weapon makes it difficult to track after Longinus. Occultists claim that after the weapon had tasted the blood of the Christian god it was passed from one saint to another until the blood of Christ was finally purged from it. Historical figures such as Charlemagne, Joan of Arc and Richard the Lionheart are all believed to have owned Fateweaver, but this could be idle speculation. From secret, firsthand descriptions of the event, it seems likely that Fateweaver was used to shoot, stab and club Rasputin, the weapon apparently passing through the hands of several wielders in a short period of time. The last unconfirmed sighting of Fateweaver placed it in the hands of Maoist guerillas in Nepal.

## The Weapon

Fateweaver will become one of two broad categories of weapon: melee or small arms. Melee weapons include knives, swords, maces and spears; basically any weapon that would be used with the Weaponry Skill. Small arms are weapons like pistols, shotguns, rifles, SMGs and so forth that would be used with the Firearms Skill. Fateweaver retains the same shape for as long as it remains with the same owner. When deciding on the shape it will take, Fateweaver takes into consideration the long-term needs of a potential wielder, rather than the short-term. Even if a character stumbles across the weapon while desperately in search of a knife, unless that character has long-term use for a knife, Fateweaver won't become a knife; rather it will transform itself into a weapon that better serves the long-term goals of the character. Storyteller's should decide in advance what sort of weapon Fateweaver will present itself as when first encountered, keeping in mind the goals, motivations and Skills of the character the weapon is fated for. If used as the centerpiece of a story arc, the form the weapon takes should have a direct bearing on its final use. (Storytellers should discuss this with players, where appropriate.)

Fateweaver won't respond to just any character that finds it. The weapon has spent more time in the hands of collectors, dealers or buried with past owners than it has with active wielders. Simply owning the weapon isn't enough to interest it as a wielder. A potential wielder must have certain intrinsic qualities that appeal to Fateweaver. Men or women with goals that can only be achieved through force of arms, that are inclined to feats of bravery or fuelled by dark desires are the most likely candidates to arouse the power of Fateweaver. The lingering magic of the Fae is unpredictable, though, and sometimes the weapon will work to manufacture a destiny even for unambitious owners.

Fateweaver shares the basic statistics of whatever weapon it has taken the form of with the following modifications and bonuses:

• As a ranged weapon (or if thrown): ignores range penalties, never suffers a penalty for firing into close combat, grants a +3 bonus to attacks (which will stack with other equipment bonuses: i.e. scopes or the like), is immune to any effect that would cause the weapon to malfunction (natural or mystical), ignores the Defense of a target if fired at point blank range and is considered Armor Piercing 2.

• As a melee weapon: ignores half the Armor rating (round up) of a target, a successful melee attack reduces the Defense of a target by three for the rest of the turn, is immune to disarming attacks, grants either a +3 equipment bonus to attacks *or* a +4 bonus to Defense (wielder must choose which he prefers at the beginning of each turn).

• No matter what form it takes, attacks with Fateweaver can never result in a dramatic failure. Rolls that would result in a dramatic failure are considered to have simply failed.

In addition to the above effects, the weapon always causes lethal damage, regardless of its target. This means it can deal physical damage to spirits and ghosts (assuming the wielder can see them) and bullets fired from firearm versions of Fateweaver deal lethal damage to vampires. Because it spilled the blood of Christ, Fateweaver is considered a holy relic and will deal aggravated damage to creatures with a weakness to symbols of faith.

As stated previously, Fateweaver *chooses* its wielders. This means that the weapon can't be stolen, given away or abandoned after it has chosen. Once Fateweaver sets a character on the path to their destiny it will return to them until they have met their fate. As an example, let's say a guy named Mike attempts to rid himself of a pistol version of Fateweaver by throwing it in a river from a bridge. The very same moment he drops Fateweaver toward the water, a garbage scow passes under the bridge and catches the gun. Later that day, a worker finds the gun stuck in a crack at the bottom of the scow and pockets it. That evening the worker sells the pistol to a pawn broker, who resells it to a twitchy looking fellow with no questions asked. The twitchy man waits at a bus stop, clutching the gun in his coat pocket. He sees the local toughs that beat him up the day before across the street and steps off the curb, drawing the pistol, just as his bus arrives and slams into him with lethal force. Fateweaver soars free of his hand with the impact, describing a graceful arc through the air, until it lands on the porch of a house. The weapon waits overnight and in the early hours of morning is covered by a carelessly tossed newspaper. Yawning, Mike (you remember Mike, right?) picks up his morning paper and discovers the pistol between the sheets. Nothing can keep Fateweaver from its chosen wielder.

When a character with Fateweaver in hand begins to approach the time of his destiny, he can sense it. His vision takes on a supernatural clarity and even mundane events thunder like omens in his ears. Every step seems to have a purpose, every word spoken a prophecy. Storytellers should determine when a character approaches his destiny and begin to foreshadow the event. The destiny of a wielder is always fulfilled with an act of violence and some of the foreshadowing should allude to this. Maybe the character drives by a girl riding a bicycle. The girl hits a crack in the sidewalk and loses control of her bike, slamming face first into the pavement. Blood runs down her face from the wound and mixes with her tears. She stares at the character as he passes, the streaks of crimson on her cheeks making it seem she weeps blood.

Note that the approaching destiny of a character isn't an excuse for Storytellers to "railroad" the story. Fate follows in their footsteps, tripping on their heels. No matter which way the character turns, the signs of their destiny approaching continue to appear. Increase the pacing of the story (and of the foreshadowing) until the character stands face to face with their destiny. The exact method for playing out the scene when destiny arrives is left for your troupe to decide. You could put the dice down and run the scene in a narrative fashion, you could declare every action taken by the wielder is an exceptional success (or a dramatic failure, depending on the type of destiny) or you could just run the scene in the usual manner. Whichever method you choose the only imperative is to *resolve the destiny,* whatever it might be. This isn't the time for half measures.

Once Fateweaver has delivered its wielder to his or her fate, it becomes inert until it finds a new owner. The character might continue to possess the weapon for a short time, but it doesn't function any differently than any other weapon of its kind. All bonuses gained are lost and, eventually, the weapon will be misplaced, set aside or simply vanish.

It should be noted that, once chosen, a wielder can't simply turn away from the destiny that awaits him. Fateweaver *forges* fate as much as it facilitates it and the weapon expects its wielder to be grateful. A character that has taken up the weapon and then refuses to use it is punished for his perceived cowardice. Each day a character actively opposes his destiny brings turmoil and misfortune to the people closest to him. At first these are minor inconveniences, like flat tires or accidents that result in painful bruises, but the longer the character continues to defy fate, the worse things get. Rather than finding a flat tire on a parked car, the tire suddenly blows on the highway. Storytellers should attempt to hint that Fateweaver is the cause for these accidents. If Fateweaver has taken the guise of a dagger, the blown tire could look like it was slashed by a blade. The frequency and intensity of the "accidents" increase and become more lethal until the character turns to face his fate. A few foolishly intractable wielders have watched as their lives were destroyed before finally turning the weapon on themselves.

## Fate

If a Storyteller decides to include Fateweaver in her chronicle she needn't conceive an extended and elaborate destiny for the character that picks it up, unless that destiny *is* the story. The chronicle can simply continue on as usual until the Storyteller decides a particularly important event in the near future of the character is the destiny Fateweaver has guided them towards. Used in this manner, Fateweaver can underline an important event in the chronicle by giving it the weighty significance of destiny being fulfilled. Remember as well that not every destiny is a happy one…

# The Hognose

**Type of Weapon**: Bell AH–1 Cobra, Attack Helicopter
**Other Names**: Huey-Cobra, Snake, Hog

## Description

The AH–1 Cobra is an attack helicopter that shares the engine, transmission and rotor systems of the ubiquitous UH–1 Iroquois, better known as the Huey. The helicopter is about 58 feet long, nose to tail and a little over 10 feet wide. Its main rotor measures just under 48 feet in length. The vehicle seats two; with the pilot sitting in the rear and the copilot/gunner seated in the front.

The Hognose is painted a flat, matte green and has nary a spot of rust on her, belying her long years of service. A close inspection of the nose reveals a small, fading painting of a snake with a pig's nose that has been partially covered by paint. The interior of the chopper, crowded though it is with instrument panels and piloting systems, always seems slightly cooler than the air outside and provides a comfortable ride. Flight control is crisp and the weapon systems track so well they almost seem to have a mind of their own. Standard armament for the Hognose consists of two wing-mounted 7.62mm multi-barrel Miniguns, a single M158 launcher holding seven 2.75in (70mm) air-to-air or air-to-ground rockets and a M18 7.62mm Minigun pod (located under the nose). The helicopter is obviously a weapon of war and exudes a silent aura of menace even when landed and not in use.

## History

The helicopter arrived in Vietnam in late July, 1967. Its first combat pilot declared that such a deadly weapon at rest looked like it was playing dead and dubbed it the Hognose, naming it after a snake that feigns death when threatened. His copilot arranged for the painting on the nose and the name stuck. The primary mission of the AH–1 Cobra was to fly support missions for the more vulnerable, more lightly armed and armored Huey helicopter; the "steed" of the newly developed airborne cavalry.

By 1968 the crew that gave the Hognose its name was cycled out of active duty and replaced by a new team, fresh from training and eager for combat. Paired together early in their training, the newly minted Lieutenants Mark Fisher (pilot) and David Horowitz (gunner) proved to be above average combatants, though they quickly earned a reputation (based on rumors of their activities) for a level of bloodlust and cruelty beyond that required by the necessities of war. Rather than deny the rumors, Fisher and Horowitz embraced them and adopted call signs they felt enhanced their image. Fisher took the call sign "Rattler" and Horowitz "Python."

Mostly as a result of their excellence in the air, Fisher and Horowitz were able to dodge questions about their behavior in combat. Any accusations made lacked the hard evidence to back them up and were dismissed without serious investigation. The soldiers in charge of maintaining and reloading Hognose noticed that this particular helicopter seemed to go through about twice the amount of munitions as similar craft. They never raised a fuss about it, assuming the pilots were giving the "zipperheads" what they deserved. The truth was worse than anyone could have imagined.

Rattler and Python were scrupulous about defending the Huey's as they approached and left a landing zone (LZ). They maintained radio contact when appropriate and, in front of potential witnesses, performed and behaved like model soldiers. The crew never paid for their own drinks when off-duty; the soldiers and Huey pilots of the air cav nearly drowned the men in alcohol to show their appreciation for the hazardous duty performed on a regular basis. Rumors circulated and were dismissed, munitions orders were quietly increased and the pilots continued with their dangerous work.

What no one knew and only the maintenance crew suspected, was that Fisher and Horowitz were playing their own deadly game. After escorting the ground pounders (infantry) to their destination, standard operating procedure (SOP) for the Cobra was to fly a standard patrol pattern around the LZ to watch for enemy artillery, armored vehicles and troop movements. If the crew spotted enemy positions they were instructed to radio in locations and numbers estimates before engaging the enemy, if practical. Fisher and Horowitz quickly became bored with SOP, rarely able to spot any viable targets, thanks to the ingenuity of North Vietnamese camouflage schemes and operations. The crew of the Hognose would make a couple perfunctory fly-bys of the surrounding area and then they went hunting for easier prey.

Compared to the more densely inhabited areas of the country, the villages that stood in the remote countryside where only air cav could reach were largely unaffected by the war. North Vietnamese soldiers or officials would sometimes pass through the villages to impose communist rule on the inhabitants, which the villagers meekly accepted. These simple people led lives that had changed very little over the centuries and were completely unprepared for the hell that came to visit them in the form of a single helicopter. Fisher and Horowitz would locate a village on the very edge of their patrol route and raze it to the ground. They reveled in the feeling of god-like invulnerability as they dealt death from on high, cutting down men, women and children as they attempted to flee. Sometimes, if they were sure it was safe, they would set down after annihilating a village to sift through the wreckage for souvenirs or drag survivors from their ruined homes for some up close and personal "fun." It was the fall of 1969 when their game went wrong.

They had almost given up on finding entertainment when Horowitz spotted smoke, like that from a small fire, just east of their position. Once they had completed a fly-by to confirm their target was civilian, they hovered above the village. Curious villagers came out of their huts and pointed at Hognose, talking animatedly with each other. Horowitz let them congregate into groups before opening up with the Minigun pod, whooping

with glee as bodies were shredded by his fire. Without warning a group of armed and uniformed men emerged from a hut, one of them desperately digging through his backpack. Rocket fire cut them down. In less than five minutes, the small village was reduced to ruin, every inhabitant dead or dying. Figuring it was safe to land, Fisher set Hognose down and went to search the bodies of the armed men. To his horror he found US military insignia on the corpses.

They piloted Hognose away from the site at top speed, wanting to put distance between themselves and the village as quickly as possible. The two men knew they could never reveal what they had done and swore an oath to hold the secret to their dying breath. Their mood was grim as they landed back at base and they agreed to curtail their extracurricular activities for a couple of weeks. A month passed without any word of the incident and the crew of Hognose began to relax. On their way back to base after hitting a bar to celebrate, they were approached by two soldiers. The men looked like off-duty air cav. Assuming the soldiers were there to thank them, Horowitz was reaching forward to shake hands when they shot him. Fisher managed to turn and run two steps before dying from a head shot.

The soldiers surrendered their weapons to the MPs that showed up in a jeep and, upon hearing the men's tale, a full-scale investigation was launched into the attack on the village. Unknown to the crew of the Hognose, Force Recon was using the village as their base of operations to gather intel on the Vietcong. The two soldiers had been on perimeter security when Fisher and Horowitz attacked the village. Hearing the gunfire, the men had snuck back to the village just in time to see the attack helicopter, complete with its distinctive pig-nosed snake motif, take off. Though horribly wounded, one of the marines that had been fired upon lived long enough to relate exactly what had happened. It took the Force Recon men over a month to locate the Hognose and its crew, but they had vengeance. The two Force Recon marines were dishonorably discharged and the whole incident was covered up to prevent a media circus. The bodies of Fisher and Horowitz were shipped back to the States and Hognose was given a new crew.

The new crew complained about mechanical problems with Hognose after their first combat mission. They claimed the trigger of the Miniguns malfunctioned and they were forced to disable the firing circuitry mid-flight



| Durability | Size | Structure | Acceleration | Safe Speed | Max Speed | Handling | Occupants |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6 | 21 | 27 | 19(26 mph/turn) | 257 (175 mph) | 330 (225 mph) | 3 | 2 |

### Weapons

| Type | Damage | Ranges | Capacity | Primary Effects |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Minigun* | 5 (9 again) | 250/500/1000 | 750 | AP 6, Autofire |
| M158 Launcher | –2(L)+10 | 125/250/500 | 7 | Blast Area/Force 3, Knockdown, AP 12 |

*Multi-barrel Miniguns are Damage 6 (8 again); all other stats remain the same.

or risk firing on their own side. The maintenance crew couldn't find anything wrong with the firing mechanisms and assumed the new guys had simply panicked. Every time Hognose was taken out the crew complained the chopper didn't operate properly. They also reported hearing faint voices through their headsets, even with the radio shut off. A friendly fire incident involving the Hognose and its crew was chalked off to weapons malfunction, but a few days after the incident both pilot and copilot were found dead in their tent: suicides. A barely legible note was pinned to the pilot's chest. The note claimed they had fired on friendlies intentionally, laughing insanely every time a man went down.

The next crew assigned to Hognose was arrested after they were caught attacking civilian targets, the pilot of the following crew hung himself and the copilot was given a Section Eight after explaining how he'd helped the pilot kill himself. He asked the MPs if they'd kill him too; it was the only way he'd escape the snake. Soldiers began to whisper the Hognose was cursed and, after witnessing a third straight crew self-destruct, the base commander falsified a report claiming the Hognose had been heavily damaged.

When the American finally left Vietnam, Hognose went with them. It was decommissioned and sold to pro-American forces fighting in Central America. Since then, Hognose has passed from army to drug lord to militia, always leaving death and madness in its wake. Not all the men that crewed the helicopter have died or gone mad, but they tell stories about the murderous glee they experienced while piloting Hognose; a feeling not their own. They claim the helicopter almost pilots itself and sometimes the Miniguns open fire without a trigger being pressed. None of the crew that have left Hognose behind express any interest in ever seeing the thing again. Slowly but surely a legend has begun to build around the helicopter with the hog-nosed snake painting.

## The Weapon

The souls of Mark Fisher and David Horowitz didn't pass gently into the night. Their rage at what they saw as a betrayal—they hadn't meant to kill Americans after all—combined with the thirst for blood they had developed bound them to this mortal plane. To escape the hell they knew awaited them, the murderer's souls anchored themselves to the Hognose. They wound their very essence into the circuitry, the weapons and even the hull of the helicopter, determined to elude oblivion. Then they waited. They waited for new crew, for flesh and blood they could possess and use to continue their games of death.

The ghosts (*ghost*, really; see below) have developed a routine after long practice at goading humans into violent acts. First they whisper to the crew, encouraging them to fire on hostile targets. They cry out false warnings of SAM sightings to trick and confuse. If the crew proves to be resistant to this subtle approach, the ghosts use Telekinesis or Compulsion to force the crew into attacking. Possessing the crew is usually left as a last resort, though sometimes Rattler and Python just can't resist seizing control if presented with large crowds or other juicy targets of opportunity. Every so often the ghosts find a human that enjoys death as much as they did. When this happens the communication becomes two-way affair and the ghosts use their influence over Hognose to assist their new "buddy." A character that welcomes the attention of the ghosts gains a +5 bonus to any piloting or gunnery rolls made while in the helicopter and his Vice becomes Wrath for the duration of the flight. Note that "Drive" is suitable to pilot Hognose, provided that the character has a Specialty in Aircraft or Helicopters (without that Specialty, the character cannot attempt to fly the helicopter).

## Rattler and Python

**Quote:** **whispers of laughter* "Fuck it, shoot 'em all!"*

**Description:** On the very rare occasions the ghost is forced to manifest it looks like one man with a head that flickers between two faces. The body is clad in Vietnam era BDUs, which appear to be drenched in blood. The eyes of whoever's face happens to be present are black and soulless, the mouth frozen in a rictus grin. The ghosts remember next to nothing about their mortal lives before Vietnam and only respond to their old call signs.

**Storytelling Hints:** For all intents and purposes, Rattler and Python are a single entity. By binding their souls so tightly together with the Hognose they have become inseparable. This has the effect of creating a more powerful apparition than would normally be the case given the age of the lost souls, but it does have its drawbacks. Anything that affects one of the ghosts affects them both. If either spirit is driven from the physical anchor of the Hognose (or destroyed), both are. Of course, attempting an exorcism on a machine designed to kill is no laughing matter. See the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 208 for more information about ghosts.

**Attributes:** Power 5, Finesse 5, Resistance 6
**Willpower:** 11
**Morality:** 1
**Virtue:** Fortitude
**Vice:** Gluttony
**Initiative:** 11
**Defense:** 5
**Speed:** 20 (species factor 10)
**Size:** 5
**Corpus:** 11
**Essence:** 15

**Numina:** Compulsion, Ghost Speech, Horrific Renewal, Possession, Telekinesis

Rules for the majority of Numina available to Rattler and Python can be found in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 210. The Horrific Renewal Numina is outlined below:

• **Horrific Renewal:** The Hognose has survived decades of use in a surprisingly pristine condition. The secret of its longevity is the ghosts that hide within its shell. Even while alive, Rattler and Python fed on human pain and misery. In death they've found ways to put those emotions to work for them. Mortal crews fear piloting the copter for good reasons. The whispering and cajoling of Rattler and Python to kill infects the crew with unease and the compulsion to kill becomes overwhelming. The ghosts seek to cause despair in the humans that pilot the Hognose, to taint the crew's moral compass. Each time a crewman onboard the Hognose fails a Morality degeneration roll, Rattler and Python funnel the power of that anguish into the machine. Ten points of Structural damage is instantly repaired each time a pilot or gunner loses Morality while in the Hognose.

## Story Hooks

Normally we'd offer a few ready-made hooks for incorporating the Hognose into your chronicle. In this case, general story hook ideas don't really work so well. How often does the average troupe run across an attack helicopter? A helicopter with such an obvious a military profile is unlikely to fly below the radar (so to speak) for long in most places. So here are some ideas about how to introduce the Hognose into your games (including one standard hook at the end as an example).

• **The Training Accident.** The training accident can be used in a few different ways. A friend or relative of one of the characters could have been training for full flight status in the Hognose when Rattler and Python decided to have some fun or a live-fire exercise could quickly turn lethal and the friend/relative is blamed when no one will believe the copter fired on its own. Another option is to have the troupe near by said exercise and witness (or be targets of) the attack firsthand. In either case, the characters would likely feel compelled to investigate when they heard the pilot claim he heard voices that made him attack.

• **The Military Campaign.** This type of chronicle is tailor-made for including the Hognose. Assuming they have the appropriate skills, the characters could be on the receiving end of Rattler and Python's trickery. This should be played out slowly, with the ghosts subtly influencing the characters and biding their time until the characters are in a position to inflict maximum carnage. Alternately, the characters could call in for air support only to have the Hognose spray the area with fire, killing friend and foe indiscriminately.

• **The Lunatic/Terrorist.** This is the least subtle option. In this type of story the crew of the Hognose has either willingly joined forces with Rattler and Python or they've become so deranged it amounts to the same thing. The Hognose stages hit-and-run attacks on civilian targets and always manages to elude capture or destruction by police or security forces. The characters could be drawn into dealing with the helicopter either out of a sense of civic duty or because they seem to be the primary targets of the attacks.

• **Making History (standard hook).** You are visiting an aviation museum with some of your friends when you see a kid sneak under the ropes and hop into the pilot seat of an attack helicopter. The kid grins mischievously for a second, then cocks his head to one side as though listening to someone speak. His face going oddly blank, the kid flicks switches and, to your surprise, the helicopter roars to life.

# Injustice

**Type of Weapon**: Mace
**Other Names**: Beatdown Stick, The People's Champion

## Description

Injustice is a three-foot long pipe about an inch in diameter made of old steel. The pipe is scratched and worn, and only two rings of chipped paint—one blue, one yellow—surround the pipe at one end. That end is flanged, betraying the weapon's origins as a pipe taken from some scaffolding. The other end has been repeatedly dipped in concrete to create a mace-head. The head used to have shards of broken glass and nails embedded in it, but they snapped off a long time ago and were more likely decoration than an attempt to increase the weapon's lethality. Around the flanged end, just below the two painted rings, layers of worn electrical tape mark the weapon's grip. Along the weapon's length, the word "Injustice" has been carved into the steel. Occasionally, one owner or another paints the word for added effect, but the paint never seems to last; it flakes after only a couple of days, and is gone in under a week.

Though it's very heavy, Injustice's weight is a comfort to those who lift it. Whether through accident or design it feels perfectly balanced. The weapon has a solid heft to it, like an honest weapon—a sword implies nobility and a gun implies privilege, but Injustice is something anyone can use. Small flakes of the concrete head break off with every swing, releasing a smell of sweat and blood and smoke. Every hit crushes flesh and pulverizes bone, and the sickening crunch that accompanies a strike makes sure that everyone in the area knows precisely just how dangerous the weapon is. Though no sheath can contain the weapon, when it turns up on the black market it's usually wrapped in a battered leather jacket festooned with punk and heavy metal patches—supposedly the jacket of the Ian Price, the man who made Injustice.

## History

There's no mystery involved in the creation of Injustice. Anyone who wants to know can find out all they want—the mace is mentioned in everything from official documents to Wikipedia entries. In the 1980s, race riots swept through the United Kingdom as the police used laws that allowed them to search people based only on suspicion to target black youths and disaffected urban poor. The first notable riot occurred in the St Pauls' area of Bristol in early April 1980, when the police staged a raid on a suspected drug den. A year later, a police patrol in Brixton, south London, stopped a black youth and dragged him towards a waiting vehicle. Locals threw bricks and bottles at the police, and the riot soon spread. The heavy-handed police tactics didn't help the antagonistic attitudes between police nationwide and the predominantly black urban poor.



Ian Price was just another black youth, his parents having moved to the UK from Trinidad. Unlike all the others, he wasn't about to let the police get away with abusing their power. He was living in Liverpool at the time and had heard reports of the riots in Bristol and London. Headlines like "19 Police Hurt in Black Riot" characterized the attitude of the press—the riots were "black trouble," only notable for its impact on "normal people." Working on a building site, Ian had no problem stealing a length of scaffold pipe to ensure that he could give as good as he get his own back if the police tried anything. He coated one end in layers of concrete and kept it in a bag, ready for use. He didn't have long to wait.

In early July, the police arrested a black man in the Toxteth area of Liverpool. Ian was in the crowds watching the police. He didn't attack, but when the police tried to break heads, he was ready to give as good as he got. After repeated clashes with the police, Price was just one man amongst the five hundred arrested. He didn't have his makeshift mace with him when the police bundled him into a van, and most people thought it lost after the riot. They were wrong.

One of the other rioters had taken the weapon from Ian. Nobody knows quite what happened then. Some people say that the woman who took the mace was some kind of occultist, channeling the disaffection of the British underclass into a symbol of the tension. Others don't believe a word of it, preferring to believe that the photocopied pamphlets and disturbing tales of the weapon that circulated in the aftermath of the riots were just propaganda by far-left organizations. Whatever the truth was, few people saw Injustice for nearly nine years. Over that time, it had changed. It'd obviously been used, and the concrete head had been redone many times, but it was still the same weapon.

Injustice next surfaced during the Battle of Trafalgar Square, the largest of the riots against the British government's plans to institute the Poll Tax. Over the course of the chaos, at least three different people used it. Every one of them charged the police lines, swinging wildly. Nobody cared that the individual went down under a wall of batons and riot shields, Injustice always escaped. The weapon seemingly sought out areas where the police were winning and gave someone a chance to turn the tide. Though the riot eventually died down, most people who were there remember seeing Injustice in action.

From there, Injustice became a symbol of the disenfranchised underclass who don't have anyone to fight their corner. It turned up at both the Brixton and Bradford riots in 1995. After that, someone brought it to the United States where it first appeared in the hands of protesters at the World Trade Organization conference in Seattle at the end of November 1999. A series of photographs of the events show someone in the background attacking a policeman with Injustice. It's then that the mace had its name carved into the steel. After the fact, a number of protestors posted images and accounts on the Internet as part of their efforts to document what really happened.

From there it didn't take long for people to recognize the weapon. The far-left groups in the UK had set up a web presence,

## Story Hooks

• When Injustice shows up, there's a damn good chance that the shit's about to hit the fan. While nobody would claim that the weapon causes riots, it's a good indicator that there's a storm brewing. Characters active in the political underground might notice that one of the militants they sometimes see has a new toy, or maybe one of the gangbangers on the other side is showing off. Whatever the case, the clock is ticking until someone incites a riot and part of the city starts to burn. If the characters are already on one side or another they can't help but get dragged in, but they could be caught in the middle—or worse, if they're government employees caught up in the middle.

• Injustice turns up in the unlikeliest of places—people have found it in dumpsters or abandoned lots. How it gets there is anyone's guess, but it's quite possible that anyone could pick it up. When it drops off the radar, it seems nobody can track it down. Some use the weapon to carve themselves a niche on the streets, breaking the legs of everyone who gets in their way. Others join radical political groups and push them to become more radical. Still others resist the urge to get too involved, instead relishing the power that the weapon has to strike at law enforcement without any underlying ideology. What a character chooses to do with it will likely reveal a hidden side to his personality.

• Carrying Injustice is dangerous—most policemen won't look too kindly on someone toting a lump of concrete on a steel bar—but the danger's worth it for some people. He can rile people up, get a mob started whenever he needs to. Most of the time, one mob leads to another which leads to utter chaos, but some people who hold the weapon know what they're doing—creating immediate mobs of supporters by spouting a whole bunch of rhetoric, then setting them off against a target while the wielder looks on. One such man holds Injustice now, and he's just enough of a cynical bastard to stir up a radical mob wherever he goes, choosing issues not that he believes in, but that he knows will rile up the most people. In his hands, the weapon has never killed directly—but he's racking up quite the body-count by proxy.

including scans of old material where they could find it. Though scattered across a wide expanse of free web hosts, anyone who really tried could track down photographs and pictures that proved that Injustice had started to make its mark on history.

Injustice found its way back to the north of England by July 2001, when the National Front and other far-right groups stirred up violence against the Asian population in Bradford. People on both sides held the weapon, in all cases lashing out at the police presence rather than either side in the running battles. In 2004, it showed up in the hands of rioters in Sydney, again striking out against the police.

Whilst most people who wield Injustice do so as part of clashes with the police, they're just contributing to the weapon's public face. Since 2001 it has killed at least seven people in the employ of various governments. These have included minor politicians, at least one off-duty soldier, and three people working for the New York City Sanitation Department. These last murders happened in the tunnels beneath the city, and nobody's yet sure who was down there, and why they had Injustice to hand when the city government came calling.

## The Weapon

Injustice is a large, heavy mace made from scaffolding pipe and concrete. Its statistics are as follows: Damage 3B (9-again), Size 3/L, Durability 3. Injustice always hits with bone-shattering force; apply the 9-again rule to the attack roll, and if the attack connects it deals one extra point of damage. The weapon is well-balanced, enough that it doesn't suffer the –1 penalty for being an improvised weapon, but requires two hands to wield effectively. Using it one-handed increases the Strength requirement by one.

Injustice wasn't created to beat up on just anyone. It has a purpose, and whoever wields it becomes part of that purpose. Though Ian Price made the weapon to fight what he saw as an unjust state, the weapon's story wasn't ever so specific. It's got an almost palpable aura of pure revenge. A few people think that Injustice wants them to swing at agents of the government, but most people who have held the weapon deny that. The weapon's not alive or aware, but people who wield it do deal crippling damage to people who work for a government. When used against an agent of the government, the lightest wound from Injustice deals painful wounds. Each successful attack applies a cumulative –1 modifier to the target, to a maximum of –5. These penalties also apply to the target's Defense, as she falls to the force of a self-righteous avenger.

When someone wielding Injustice is involved in a combat with people who are agents of a government, he has to directly act against them rather than taking any other actions. While he doesn't have to make an all-out attack, and thus retains his Defense and access to Fighting Styles, he can't take any action that doesn't involve directly acting against an agent of the government. This applies even if that agent is on his side—if he's working with a cop to bring down a rival gang, he's got to attack her rather than members of the other gang. The only way to avoid this compulsion is to spend a Willpower point in order to take another action. If the wielder is himself a member of a government agency, he must spend a point of Willpower every turn just to use the weapon.

Injustice's effects aren't merely physical. It stirs up feelings of discontent in everyone near to it. Anyone within 50 yards of the weapon can feel their blood rise. Discussions turn to politics and controversy—anything that gets people thinking with their heart rather than their head. The player can make a Manipulation + Expression roll to encourage people who agree with an argument he makes on one specific issue. Success gives everyone who heard his argument a +3 bonus on all rolls to take direct action—usually attacks or acts of vandalism—until the end of the scene. An exceptional success also gives everyone affected a point of Willpower, while a dramatic failure instead inflicts a –1 penalty for the rest of the scene. Using this ability costs the wielder a point of Willpower. The wielder has to choose his issue carefully, finding something that most people will agree with—if he takes an unpopular line, then few people are inspired. Worse, he could end up inspiring the wrong side—spurring on the gangbangers who have set upon his group while leaving his allies cold. For that reason, someone who carries Injustice will likely get to know the people around her reasonably well before she tries to rile them up, though that's not always necessary. Inspiring PETA members, or members of a Ku Klux Klan chapter, is all too easy even if the person holding Injustice hasn't met them before.

Wielding Injustice is a dangerous task. Just carrying the weapon attracts police attention, even if it's concealed. She's the one who gets singled out for a random search, checkpoints always stop her car, and trying to get into a foreign country is almost impossible—assuming her country of residence lets her leave in the first place. The attention may seem innocuous at first, but it swiftly gets out of hand, to the point that the police and government pretty much drive the wielder underground even if he's not already there.

# Jungle Blood

**Type of Weapon**: Machete
**Other Names**: *Eswa Taw*

## Description

Jungle Blood is an old evil without decoration. It's no more than a large machete, a near-ubiquitous tool to countless jungle residents. The weapon's grip is a rough approximation in black electrical tape, wound around the base of a three and a half foot long metal blade. The edge of the blade is sports a number of nicks and grooves, but the overall shape of the blade remains, and the badly-maintained edge is as sharp as ever. The flat of the blade sports patches of rust, adding tetanus to the dangers Jungle Blood poses. Though it likely had no scabbard when it was made, it currently has two: one is highly decorative red leather with intricate beadwork for impressing people; while the other is plain black leather, with a sharpening stone fixed to keep the weapon's edge when in use.



When someone holds the blade, the shadows twist around her like she's walking through the jungle even in the middle of the summer. Nothing happens when she focuses on one, but if she allows her mind to wander then the little details in her peripheral vision seem to flicker and jump. If she holds it in her hand for any length of time, her arm grows heavy—though as soon as she lashes out with the blade, she gets a second wind. It doesn't matter what she cleaves through; a tree branch or a clump of vines is as good as a human leg. What matters is that she strikes. After a while, that basic philosophy takes root in her mind—if she wants something, she has to reach out and take it.

## History

Jungle Blood is more a terror weapon than a simple machete. While the weapon's story is closely entwined with acts of terrible violence, that's not telling the whole story. Jungle Blood is the weapon of a leader, not a crazed killer—though anyone who survives an encounter with the weapon is left with no doubt to its power.

Unlike many weapons that hold the weight of legend, Jungle Blood is entirely contemporary. Its despicable tale starts in the jungles of Burma (now Myanmar) in the 1950s, where it came into the possession of a warlord hiding in the jungle known locally as Kyaa Anak, the Black Tiger. Nobody knows if the Tiger was the one to create the blade or if it was already steeped in black magic before he took possession. One story, pervasive among his followers shortly after Kyaa Anak first took possession of the blade tells of how he dedicated the massacre of an entire village to his own legend and reputation. Whatever the case, it was in his hands that the machete came to prominence. Some people claim that the CIA used Black Tiger's reputation to bring other warlords to their side in their attempts to manipulate the Burmese opium trade. Others, including people who claim to have worked in the area at the time claim that Jungle Blood and Kyaa Anak scared even the CIA. The truth of what happened in the jungles will never be known.

What is known is the brutality of the Black Tiger. He didn't just kill those who failed him. He brutalized them, chopping off progressively large pieces. While a trusted lieutenant might get away with only losing his arm the first time he failed those less trusted would suffer terrible tortures. One man was flayed alive and condemned to the jungle, while another had his hands and feet hacked off before being staked to the ground at the banks of a river that was about to flood. Despite these terrible acts—or perhaps because of them—those who followed Kyaa Anak would give their all whenever he willed them to, bringing rivals down in acts of frenzied violence, or providing for the families who worked for the Tiger.

## Researching Jungle Blood

Discovering the early history of Jungle Blood is problematic: only a few third-hand accounts mention the weapon. A particularly dedicated character could track down survivors and learn something from them. This would require getting access to Myanmar (as Burma is now known), and speaking Burmese. Finding a survivor is an extended Intelligence + Streetwise roll, with each roll taking a day and 15 successes required—this covers speaking with locals in likely spots as well as keeping an eye on local news sources. When they find a survivor, it's up to the characters whether they persuade or intimidate the information out of him. Any attempts to use Social Skills suffer a –3 penalty if used through a translator. A success nets the character tells the story of Kyaa Anak and Tin Naing from this section, while an exceptional success includes enough information that the characters can work out the weapon's cost, and thus know to play on fear.

The remaining history is mostly available online or in archives if people know where to look. Digging it up is an extended Intelligence + Academics roll, taking 30 minutes per roll and requiring five successes in total. A success reveals the weapon's history from 1982 onward, and an exceptional success includes information on who currently owns Jungle Blood. If the character has a contact inside the CIA, his help grants her a +3 bonus to this roll.

Kyaa Anak died in 1964. Tin Naing, one of his successors, took Jungle Blood as his own. To show his dedication to his people and the memory of the Black Tiger, he sliced the little finger of his right hand clean off. This display of strength allowed him to continue in the Black Tiger's footsteps. A few people whispered that the dead warlord's spirit possessed the machete, and would take control of anyone foolish enough to hold it. Nobody knows if that's true, but even outsiders saw a change come over the new wielder. People he trusted, people he counted as friends, started to fear him. He could inspire each and every one of them to great heights, but they only truly excelled when they feared him. He never questioned the change, subtle as it was.

Jungle Blood didn't kill people with its sharp edge. It didn't seek out people's hearts or shatter bones with a touch. Instead, it turned its wielder into a force of nature, a larger than life avatar of fear without any care for human life. Tin Naing descended into madness, believing that even his close friends plotted to bring him down. Though his people feared him, they also believed that he was the only person who would look out for their interests. Wracked at the end by terrible rages, witnesses claimed that the only way to be sure of surviving a day was to avoid making him angry, or to direct his rage at a more worthy foe. He fell to random chance, ambushed and shot dead while patrolling the jungle.

In 1982, CIA stringers in Columbia and Venezuela started reporting of a new drug baron operating across the border, gaining power at a phenomenal rate. He killed three informants before anyone discovered his name. One stringer mentioned the warlord's machete, heavy with the weight of cruelty. Another noted the ease with which it removed the limbs of trees and people alike. In the dark of the jungles, Adolfo Sanchez bent the locals to his will through equal parts fear and respect. Over seven years, he carved out an empire separate from the countries around him. For all that he was a fearsome man, some people flocked to his side. They trusted Adolfo over their government and he lead them on to great heights when working for him. He focused his efforts on producing and shipping cocaine, leaving acts of violence to his lieutenants.

As time went on, his people slowly turned on Adolfo Sanchez, as their trust had given way to fear. Everything collapsed for him on one fateful day in June 1989. A squad of mercenaries, probably hired by the CIA, swept through the Sanchez compound. They killed everyone living there, then moved on to the animals. Only then did the mercenaries burn the compound to the ground, wiping Adolfo Sanchez and everything he stood for off the face of the map. Nobody was spared, not even the traitor who had fed information back for six months. Six months after the attack the machete showed up on American soil, though it didn't stay there for long.

Amidst fighting in the former Yugoslavia in 1993, Anta Tešanović, a Croatian sergeant, defected from the army and took his unit with him. Carrying an old machete matching the description of Jungle Blood, his unit took command of an isolated town near the Serbian border. He promised an underground railroad to move friends and relatives of people out of Serbia, and he actually delivered—people flocked to him as a symbol of hope, rather than the fear commonly associated with the blade.

Tešanović never actually used Jungle Blood in anger. To him, the machete was a tool. He had guns and trained men and he knew that what he was doing was right. What need had he of a machete? He felt the pressure to reach out and take what he wanted, but he pushed right back, refusing to give in to the easy path. Perhaps Jungle Blood held a kind of twisted respect for that, or perhaps its dark heritage paid no heed to his token attempt at nobility.

While the blade retained its edge, Tešanović only inspired fear on two occasions. The first was so far from his normal character that a quarter of his unit defected. The second lead to his downfall, as one of his corporals used the shock to seize command of the town and execute Tešanović. The corporal then displayed his body on the road into town from the Serbian border. The corporal was

## Story Hooks

• A military unit hunting for one of the men responsible for the massacres in Darfur receives a tip-off to his location. Fleeing South, most people thought he'd vanished in the Congo rainforest. That's only half-true. He's there, but he's gathered a new army around him. The unit probably know what he's capable of—he lead a torture squad as part of the Darfur genocide, breaking people in spirit long before he let them die. What they don't know is that he's got his hands on Jungle Blood. How did he get the weapon? He'd need powerful allies in the United States, but do those allies work alone or is he the pawn of some darker conspiracy?

• It's always possible that people just lost track of Jungle Blood. Whether it fell off the back of a truck and someone stole it from its new owner, or a shadowy group of occultists stole it for their collection of weapons touched by dark magic, one of the characters could get her hands on the blade. She probably doesn't know what the weapon is capable of, just that she can inspire people around her on to greater effort. Will anyone realize just how the weapon is straining their relationship before it's too late? If not, can anything stop friends and family from running—or turning on her?

• Jungle Blood never left the United States after the peacekeeper brought it in. The man who bought it from him knew precisely what he was getting: a weapon fit for a leader. Worse, he knows the price of wielding the machete, and he's made his peace: he's perfectly willing to be feared rather than respected, and while that might come back to bite him in the long run, he's planning on amassing short-term power. He's already carved out his own niche in both the boardrooms of the largest companies and on the rain-slick streets. Always, he pushes his people to go just that little bit further in his name—and he's not afraid of reminding them of the consequences of failure, hacking apart his own men with only slightly more regret than turning the blade on enemies. Everyone knows he's an evil man, but he's well-connected enough that they can't do anything about it, unless the characters can bring about an early fall from power.

a weaker man, and within three months the enclave dissolved amid fear and mistrust.

The story of Anta Tešanović came to light during a televised interview with a UN peacekeeper who had found fifteen people, all women and children, on the run from the town. He repeated their story to the cameras, and the footage was aired as part of late-night political reviews throughout Europe. The peacekeeper missed out a couple of important details: he had scouted out the town, but Serb forces had already moved in, and he'd taken Jungle Blood as a trophy from the ruins.

The peacekeeper, who was never named, brought the weapon with him when he returned to Russia. Initially, he reveled in the rush he got from inspiring his fiends. After a string of robberies they moved into a high-class hotel and entertained all manner of drug dealers and prostitutes. Six months later, he had an epiphany and sold the weapon on during a business trip to the United States. Since then, nobody's entirely sure what happened to Jungle Blood.

### The Weapon

By all accounts, Jungle Blood is a perfectly normal machete. Its statistics are as follows: Damage 2L, Size 2/J, Durability 3.

Anyone who wields Jungle Blood notices how well it slices through both stubborn undergrowth and flesh. When a character uses it as a tool to cut through animal or vegetable matter, the player doubles the weapon's equipment bonus, bringing it to an impressive +4 dice. Against live opponents, the weapon works differently. When the character attacks a limb specifically, any attack that deals at least three points of lethal damage severs the limb entirely, leaving the victim wounded and bleeding heavily. The blood loss deals one point of bashing damage to the victim every minute, and the blade's ragged cuts impose a –3 modifier on any Medicine rolls to reattach the limb. Note that attacking a limb imposes a penalty on the attack roll due to the size of the target: attacking an arm or leg incurs a –2 penalty, while a hand or foot suffers a –4 (see "Specific Targets" on p. 165 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook** for more information). This ability works even if the attack is a Killing Blow rule (**World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 168). The attacker's dice pool suffers the penalty for a called shot, and the attack inflicts damage equal to the adjusted dice pool. If that damage would deal three points of damage or more, the limb is severed.

Jungle Blood doesn't make it easier to carve people up. Whoever wields the machete isn't exempt from the psychological impact of hurting and killing fellow people. As she becomes hardened to acts of violence and depravity, she inspires anyone who looks to her as a leader. The character gains a reserve of points equal to 10 minus his current Morality. A point can be spent to give one of her allies three extra dice, as if the ally had spent a Willpower point. This is entirely at the discretion of the wielder's player, though any player whose roll is affected by one of these points can't apply his character's Willpower to the same roll. Note that the wielder cannot inspire her own actions, only those of her allies. This

pool refills at the start of each story. Optionally, the character can instead fully refill the pool instead of regaining Willpower by indulging his Vice, but he can only gain a benefit from indulging his Vice once per scene. This pool only exists while the character carries Jungle Blood, though if she loses it and regains it in the same story the pool does not refresh.

***Example:*** *Antonia leads a gang in a run-down part of Detroit. Recently, she's started getting involved in a whole bunch of weird deals, and in one auction she won Jungle Blood. So far, she's managed to hold on to Morality 6, which means that she's got four points available to bolster her allies' actions. She's out with two of her gang to burn down a wannabe drug-baron's pad, but he's left some thugs to keep an eye on things. Fortunately, her crew gets the drop on them. Wanting the fight to be over quickly, her player spends a point on each of her boys' Dexterity + Firearms rolls, giving them three bonus dice each just like their players had spent a Willpower point. Neither of the ganger's players can spend Willpower to affect the roll.*

Though she becomes an inspiring leader, Jungle Blood doesn't lend itself to rousing speeches or feel-good encouragement. Whether she knows it or not, the wielder inspires those who follow her by tweaking their fear of her, and of what she might do. The warlord's spirit tweaks both her actions and her allies' perceptions. While her relationship with her allies doesn't change immediately, after a while even those she trusts the most will fear her—and that fear will drive them away.

# The Sword of Dracula

**Type of Weapon**: Longsword

**Other Names**: The Thirsty Edge, The Dragon's Fang, The Carmine

## Description

The blade is deceptively simple, a long, dull metal cutting edge four inches wide where it joins the hilt, tapering to a blunted point. The metal has darkened with time to a dark bluish gray, and the long furrow down the center seems permanently oily to the touch, as if brushed with a thin layer of grime that can never be polished off. The curved guard forms the better part of a crescent, and is plated with corroded bronze. Thick leather cord twists about the grip, and the pommel is a singularly unimpressive iron spike.

Yet the weapon is no mere artifact. Its simple presence lends a scene an air of inevitable bloodshed, as if it radiates the manner of violent tension doomed to erupt into heated melee. Those who touch the blade find it painfully cold, as if it were absorbing the very heat from one's flesh, and impossibly sharp, even without maintenance. The wielder, on the other hand, finds the



hilt warm to the touch, almost invigorating, and experiences a thrill of encouragement that seems to bubble up from within his own soul whenever the sword tastes flesh and blood.

The blade's passage through the air strikes witnesses as disturbingly wraithlike; its remarkable silence is disquieting and, in the hands of a competent swordsman, its grace belies the heaviness suggested by its appearance. It passes through armor and flesh almost as easily as air, leaving deep, wide wounds that profusely weep blood. Most disturbingly, blood on the blade dries almost immediately, leaving a stain that fades within a week, seemingly absorbed into the sword itself.

## History

Roger—

Below is everything I could compile about the Carmine at short notice. I wish you'd given me a little more time, I probably could have found more. Your rush concerns me. I know you're not the type who would seek this for this yourself, but I feel compelled to warn you: be careful. Most of those who offered the words below met a grisly, untimely fate. I'd hate to see the same happen to you.

Yours as always,

Martin

*From the article "Dracula's Fang: an Introduction" in the short-lived e-magazine* Modern Tales of the Unusual, *written by Cal Sears, deceased:*

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### Dracula's Fang: an Introduction

*By Cal Sears*

The name "Sword of Dracula" is something of a misnomer, and possibly a modern one at that. Despite attempts by a number of groups (including a cult of Dracula-worshipping vampires) to establish a connection between the famed tyrant and the blade that bears his name, no such link has been forthcoming. While earlier legends exist of swords with a taste for blood, scholars date the earliest verifiable mention of the weapon that bears Dracula's name to almost two centuries after the Impaler's death.

The Carmine enters the annals of history during the Thirty Years War. Having seen areas of Habsburg dominion been brutally reconverted to Catholicism by the Imperial Habsburgs at the end of the sixteenth and dawn of the seventeenth century, Gabriel Bethlen, the prince of Transylvania took advantage of the outbreak of religious civil war across Austria to strike into Hungary, gaining the support of that nation's Protestants and establishing himself as prince of Hungary. While Bethlen would eventually reconcile with the Habsburgs and decline to be made King of Hungary, some of his supporters were made of less noble stuff.

Only two historical accounts exist of the Sworn Brotherhood, but both paint the ostensibly mercenary Wallachian group as conspicuously violent, slaying Protestants and Catholics alike, and upholding the import of Romanian Orthodox Christianity. Despite the fact that the two accounts agree on little, including the gender of the commander of the Sworn, both accounts mention the sword, naming it the Dragon's Fang and attributing to it a number of unwholesome powers. According to the texts, the sword "rent flesh as if it were water" and "consumed both blood and spirit." One of the texts claims that the Carmine burned with infernal flame when drawn from its scabbard, while the other attests that the wielder gained the power to commune with and command both the elements and the beasts of the wild.

Neither text holds value as a remotely reliable source by respectable scholars. But since when were we respectable scholars?

The following reflects a "sighting" during the same time period.

*From* The Journal of Heinrich von Essen: A Comprehensive Examination *by Phillip Siezemore, deceased:*

*In his most curious entry during the period, Von Essen speaks at length about a nameless commander of Imperial forces at the Battle of Nördlingen, a decisive victory against the Protestants, describing at length in terms of both admiration and horror the commander's red sword, replete with poetic flourishes regarding its efficacy at slaying the Swedish.*

*"They fall before him like hollow reeds," he writes. "Where once they growled and spat, barking like wild dogs and giving even the hardiest soldier pause, the commander laid them low with one strike. How can I describe his eyes afterwards? They seemed nothing less than to share the same glassy coldness of his victims' lifeless orbs."*

Unclear as to whether or not the weapon mentioned at Nördlingen is the same as that in the Transylvanian revolt. On one hand, the blade changed sides over the intervening decade (not to mention the Sword of Dracula is rarely referred to as red, but rather gray, blue or black — though in all fairness the fact that the blade has been called the Carmine in some texts seems to imply that the blade has appeared to be red in the past). The only real evidence in support is the fact that the weapon's presence at Nördlingen fits well within the accepted history of the sword. Shoddy history, I know.

I couldn't find a copy of Van Essen's text to confirm the passage, and even Siezemore's book is the rarest of finds. Sorry.

*Again, from Sears:*

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I'm sure they do. Of course I can't find the letter itself, and Zieten's biography, written by his niece, makes no mention of the blade.

The blade next appears in the historical record at the Battle of Hohenfriedberg, an engagement during the War of Austrian Succession in which the Prussian army under the command of Frederick the Great scored a decisive victory over the Austrian forces of Prince Charles Alexander of Lorraine. Hussar commander Hans Joachim von Zieten, a coarse but honest warrior and personal friend of Frederick's, wrote to the prince of a weapon he took for himself from the battlefield. He described it as "black as the forest at night" and "desperate to taste Austrian blood." While historians tend to dismiss the sword as a poetic description of Zieten's mood after such a complete victory, those interested in the sword recognize the description as one of their graal.

Twelve years later, contemporary accounts mention Zieten's involvement at the Battle of Leuthen, another stunning victory for Frederick against the Austrians. While Hussars traditionally wielded a saber or lance, Joachim von Heigel wrote of the Zieten-Hussars: "Charles's men stretched from one horizon to the next, determined that no force in heaven or earth would outflank him that day. Yet his loose line proved his undoing. Frederick commanded his cavalry forth, their spears guided by Zieten's bloody sword."

This, on the other hand, I have confirmed. In context it seems a poetic flourish. Should we give credence to the Zieten connection?

The sword apparently accompanied Zieten in retirement to Berlin, where he lived out the remainder of his days. Before his passing, Zieten passed the sword on to his niece's son, who had taken up a post in the same regiment. The Zieten-Hussars fell in combat against Napoleon at the beginning of the nineteenth century and were disbanded. The blade is not mentioned at any point by the French Emperor, but instead resurfaces among the British before the Great War.

*From a series of letters to an MJ Reynolds, dated to 1878, in the library of the British Museum:*

I couldn't find any connections from Edgar Sewell to a woman named Lisette. Given the unusual nature of the above, I'd surmise it to be some manner of cipher. Secret societies were all the rage back then. As a result, the above is unreliable at best.

Adept and companion,

I attended a soiree this evening at the public home of Madame Lisette. I admit I rather hoped to meet her father, but it was not to be. The affair was pleasant, if somewhat libertine in the continental tradition. As always, Madame Lisette's studies struck all present as illuminating.

I can report that Madame L bore a new and intriguing accessory, a blade of varied unusual properties. In appearance the weapon seemed rude and pitted by the passing of ages. Yet the hostess demonstrated to those assembled its dread faculty in flaying the flesh from the living and dead alike. More curious yet, the aged iron seemed in every way to consume the sanguine animating humours. I cannot conjecture as to what purpose this might serve, aside from being a most intriguing oddity and dangerous weapon.

I queried Madame L regarding the nature and origins of the blade. She responded simply that she and the weapon shared a common ancestor. I asked, of course, were she not the progeny of her father, and hence grandchild only to God? She merely smiled and glanced at that eldritch talon, silencing any further inquiries.

Forever yours,
Elliot

*From the journals of Dr. Marcus Highgate, deceased, mentioned in the Sears article:*

I've uncovered what may be the most recent verifiable sighting of the sword. My sources indicate that a minor officer by the name of Edgar Sewell, serving in His Majesty George V's military during the height of the Great War, came into possession of the sword at some point before his participation in the Battle of the Marne.

Ironically, Sewell's men faced the Husaren-Regiment von Zieten, the remaining legacy of the long-dead former wielder of the sword.

Sewell's reputation as a fierce leader and brutal combatant may be in some way related to the blade or his use of it. It did not preserve his life, however, and by the end of the internecine fighting in the trenches of Europe, Sewell's gas-bloated body had been shipped home to his family. Unfortunately, the blade itself vanished.

Highgate's sources can be verified, though I couldn't locate my own copies. Since World War I, reports have placed the Carmine anywhere from New York City to the island nation of Palau, but no one has found reliable evidence of its continued existence. I took a daytrip to Oxford and returned to find my office a mess, so I'm afraid I'm going to have to bow out. I can't warn you enough: this sword is dangerous, but so are the people looking for it. Don't get over your head, Roger, or you may lose it.

## Story Hooks

• The characters uncover evidence that the Sword of Dracula has come to their town. Simply researching the blade brings with it the veritable cult of scholars of the sword, and the characters soon find that their every action is watched with the keen eye of historians and collectors. Conflict becomes inevitable as the stakes rise, and the followers of the blade are willing to engage in actions both criminal and violent to secure their holy grail. Some of the scholars belong to secret mystic societies, and evidence mounts that many of them may not even be human. How do the characters cope with the sudden surplus of unwanted attention? What secrets does the sword hold? What are the characters willing to do to possess it (or keep others from doing so)? Is the blade even in their city, or are these scholars of the esoteric engaged in a wild-goose chase? If the blade isn't in the city, who set the scholars on its trail, and what foul plot was she distracting them from?

• An enemy of the characters has come into possession of the Sword of Dracula. They know that he has the will to use it and may be willing to do so against the character's innocent friends, families, or allies. They have even heard tale of the weapon's bloody savagery and perhaps dreamt of wounds that bleed into a thirsty cutting edge. They have to face their enemy somehow. How do they stand against a monster wielding a legendary relic of the Impaler? Must they meet him toe-to-toe in dire combat, or can they outsmart him, winning the gruesome blade to their own goals? Once they have the sword, what do they do with it? Can a person truly wield such a horrible weapon in the name of justice, or will it inevitably pervert even the best intentions?

• An ally of the characters approaches them with dire warnings. The Sword of Dracula has resurfaced on the eve of an esoteric calendar's date for the end of days. The ally is sure that the two are related and begs the characters to work with him to overcome the dark prophecies and protect the future. Who is in possession of the sword and how do both blade and wielder fit into the prophecies of doom and destruction? Is the current owner of the blade aware of the apocalyptic predictions, or does she work in ignorance of the fate the divinations forecast? Can the characters work with or against her to secure the weapon? Once they have it, how do they avert the dark future? Are the predictions true? Are they even real, or might they not be the manipulations of some other force seeking the blade for its own dark purposes?

## The Weapon

The dark magic that permeates the Sword of Dracula results in a weapon of dire sharpness and durability. The sword grants four dice to attacks as an equipment bonus, and attacks performed with it inflict lethal damage, slicing easily through tendon and bones. The sword finds armor equally flimsy, and attacks made with it benefit from Armor Piercing 2. The sword is nigh unbreakable, gaining an effective durability greater than the dice pool of any attempt to harm it. Truly Herculean efforts to destroy the blade, such as throwing it into an active volcano, might do the trick, but such efforts should form the basis for or climax to a story and thus fall to the Storyteller's discretion. The weapon has no minimum Strength though its Size rating remains 2; the Sword of Dracula seems preternaturally light and graceful in the hands of even the weakest of wielders. However, the weapon only respects the truly competent warrior, and dice pools to use the blade suffer a –1 penalty for each Weaponry dot the user possesses short of 3. Characters with no dots in Weaponry suffer a –5 penalty to the use of the Sword of Dracula.

Further more, each successful attack made with the blade absorbs some of the victim's blood, usually inflicting an additional point of lethal damage in the form of blood loss. Characters who have taken three levels of lethal in this manner are woozy as a result, and must make Stamina rolls each turn to remain awake (as if her Health were filled with bashing damage). Some supernatural creatures, typically undead such as vampires and Prometheans, suffer no damage from the blood loss, instead losing Vitae or Pyros. Ephemeral entities such as spirits and ghosts do not suffer an additional level of damage, nor do they lose blood. They do, however, suffer a loss of one point of Essence as a result of each successful strike. The Dragon's Fang inflicts aggravated damage against manifested ghosts and spirits and lethal against entities in Twilight. The Sword of Dracula cannot be taken into the Shadow under any circumstance.

Any character that has lost all of his blood to the Sword of Dracula (in most situations, this results in the character's death) begins losing a permanent *dot* of Willpower per turn of contact. Once the character's permanent Willpower has been reduced to zero, her soul has been consumed by the sword. She cannot be healed in any way, cannot rise again as a vampire (though may be animated as a zombie or even a Promethean), and will not become a ghost. She is permanently and irrevocably dead, and, barring the destruction of the sword (or its release of its collected souls), can never be communicated with again in any way. Some rumors claim that those slain in such a way are doomed to rise as flesh-hungry corpses on the first new moon after their death, but such an effect is left to the Storyteller's discretion.

The sword consumes blood and Willpower at a rate of one point per turn of contact (though contact necessitates breaking the flesh; simply pressing the blade to a person's skin doesn't count). This means a character can impale a victim and watch as the blood and soul are slowly drained into the blade. Wounds inflicted in combat are glancing blows, and the victim is not considered impaled. Impaling a resisting target requires a successful grapple followed by a successful overpower maneuver (see p. 158 of **The World of Darkness Rulebook** for more information on attacking with a drawn weapon while grappling). The victim must successfully break the grapple to remove the blade from his flesh (which occurs automatically on the same turn that the grapple is broken, requiring no further rolls).

The Sword of Dracula is a weapon of great power, and, as the popular adage states, power corrupts. Wielding the blade in combat a sin against Morality 2 (rolled once per combat encounter). Using the sword to drain the blood and soul from a target results in an automatic loss of Morality followed by a roll for derangement at a –2 penalty. While the blade may seem hungry for blood, it forces no compulsion on the owner to use it; the loss of Morality is far sweeter if provided willingly in the pursuit of a character's goals. Characters automatically recognize the weapon as an item of terrible power and instinctively understand the risk to Morality posed by its presence and use. As a result, the owner loses the 10-Again rule on all Social rolls with any character that has witnessed the owner use the blade (a penalty that can be overcome by renouncing and destroying the blade).

The who, how and why of the sword's creation are left deliberately vague. The Storyteller is encouraged to develop these aspects of the sword before introducing it into a story. Perhaps a long-dead magician crafted the sword solely to harvest blood for some vile ritual. Perhaps the weapon was introduced to humanity by a bizarre vampire cult as an esoteric experiment in the bloodlust of simple mortals. Perhaps the weapon was truly wielded by the Wallachian Impaler, conceivably resulting in the tyrannical madness the dread prince was known for.

Whether or not the weapon was forged by Dracula himself, its design was almost certainly predicated on the absorption of the blood and spirit of its victims. Understanding why someone would seek the vital animating spark from countless combatants is the first step towards understanding how to integrate the relic into a chronicle. Storytellers are encouraged to keep tabs on the amount of blood and willpower harvested by the sword; if the characters allow it to glut on the life of their enemies, perhaps then it will awaken to its foul purpose.

While the sword poses an obvious physical danger to any who face it in combat, its horror isn't entirely visceral. The sword is an object that *inspires*. The cult of scholars, sorcerers and antiquarians, many of which are less or more than human, that follow every hint of the sword's presence can be as (and perhaps even more) dangerous than the sword itself. Any story involving the sword will likely involve these desperate treasure hunters, as well, many of whom are willing to perform considerably-less-than-savory acts to lay hands on it. A story about the sword becomes a story about envy, greed, the import one places on historical items and the collateral damage that might occur in their wake.

# The Weapon of the Future

**Weapon Type:** Experimental Next-Generation Assault Rifle

**Other Names:** Jinx Gun, the Bad Luck Chuck, XM–13 Multi-Role Infantry Assault Weapon.

## Description

When people think of legendary weapons, whether cursed or blessed, they tend to look back into the mists of history. Arthur's Excalibur, Roland's Durandal, Odin's Gungnir—all of these weapons and more have stories told of their uncanny properties. Few people, even scholars of the occult, stop to consider that even the most bleeding-edge piece of modern hardware can develop a malign presence to rival even the most bloodthirsty Muramasa blade.

The Weapon of the Future (as it was dubbed by the marketing department; proper designation: XM–13 Multi-Role Infantry Assault Weapon) is a sleek, lightweight assault rifle, built entirely of graphite and composite materials. It has a folding stock and removable barrel that allows it to be easily concealed under a jacket. The weapon fits comfortably in the hand, a perfectly-balanced tool built for the express purpose of killing.

For all that it outwardly resembles a cold, sterile piece of modern high technology, to its owner the Weapon of the Future often seems disturbingly alive. It might just be that the optical sights are so advanced that the gun *seems* to guide itself to the target. It might just be the internal power supplies for the gun's targeting computers that makes it feel warm to the touch every time you pick it up. It might be a lot of things—but men and women who have tested the Weapon of the Future for extensive periods have sworn that the rifle seems to move in their hands of its own free will, lining up targets almost before the shooter was aware of their presence. One Marine sniper swears to this day that the gun fired *before* the trigger hit the break point. An Army rifleman reported after one test that he almost swore he could feel a pulse in the rifle's stock when he held it at rests between tests.

None of the testers mentioned the soft, almost metallic-sounding voice that sometimes broke in over their radios, whispering to them in words that definitely were not English but were nevertheless perfectly understandable, telling them that honor and glory were not far away if only they would turn the rifle on its enemies. That's the kind of thing that ends up in your permanent psych file, and if the wrong people saw *that*, you could kiss that next promotion goodbye.



## History

The XM–13 began life as just one of many proposed weapon systems that would bring the US Army into the 21st century. Developed by Deus Machina Industries, the XM–13 sought to create a truly integrated combat system that would turn the infantryman of the future into a one-man army. Headed up by Dr. Hieronymous Levine, the XM–13 project promised a revolution leaps and bounds beyond its competitors.

Where other future weapon systems contented themselves with recoil and weight reduction, or with providing a single modular weapon that could fulfill multiple roles on the battlefield, Levine's system looked at the entirety of the modern soldier. Biomonitors linked to microservos to subtly adjust the trigger weight to compensate for adrenaline. A gimbaled harness not unlike those used by Steadicam operators held the gun in a stable firing platform even despite heavy breathing or endorphin-induced tremors. Levine even designed a microcomputer that could control the soldier's digital communication systems and provide real-time linkup to satellite maps of the surrounding terrain, all running on a simple lithium-ion battery no heavier than those found in your average cell phone.

The XM–13 *would* have revolutionized modern warfare, if it had ever entered production. The weapon's development cycle seemed to be cursed—some joked that the designation "XM–13" was bad luck, and dubbed it the "jinx gun." Others said that Dr. Levine was simply a sloppy researcher, more concerned with keeping his operating budget and hitting deadlines than with the safety of his people or the quality of his work. A few even insinuated that the Deus Machina plant was built on the site of an old Colt foundry, and that the vengeful ghost of Samuel Colt refused to allow his company's venerable M16 rifle to be replaced by some upstart.

Development on the XM–13 was plagued with problems from the start, even as early as the initial design stages. The programmer in charge of the integrated optics and target designation systems suffered a nervous breakdown and murdered his entire family before turning a pistol on himself. During manufacture of the initial prototype models, a robot arm broke loose from its moorings and killed three workers at the Deus Machina foundry, delaying production by a month. Dr. Levine pushed the team even harder after that delay, cutting corners wherever possible to meet the required deadline for the Army's bidding process, which resulted in even more accidents. Rumor began to spread that the project was jinxed.

It's difficult to pinpoint the exact point at which the misfortune dogging the weapon turned from industrial accidents and plain bad luck to something more sinister. Certainly it was sometime after the first production model was rolled off the line. Maybe the scientists did their job too well, and created a computer system that was actually self-aware, and that hated the frail, meaty humans who used it as nothing more than a tool. Maybe all the superstitious rumblings about a cursed gun coalesced in the form of the finished rifle, giving birth to some malign entity solely on the power of human belief. Or maybe some guns, like some people, are just born bad.

Although the technology showed tremendous promise, the disasters that plagued the testing phase were even worse than those of the design and manufacture stage. The first soldier to test-fire the weapon lost three fingers and an eye when the caseless ammunition failed to cycle properly and exploded in his face. During a precision-accuracy test, one Marine was killed when a grenade fired from the barrel-mounted grenade launcher detonated prematurely. During the final demonstration for the Army's top brass, the demonstrating soldier shot and nearly killed a Brigadier General observing the test—during his court martial, he swore the gun itself told him that his superior officer was a traitor, and that he would be rewarded for his action.

Unsurprisingly after that series of fiascoes, the Army declined to offer a contract to Deus Machina for the XM–13. The contract instead went to Ganaducci Arms (p. 126) and their Firestorm system. Shortly after receiving the news, Doctor Levine disappeared—office rumor varies between "had a nervous breakdown and got locked away" and "got transferred to the Baghdad branch for screwing up the project so bad," but recently a man claiming to be Hieronymous Levine sent e-mails to several prominent conspiracy-theory websites claiming that he had been abducted by an ultra top-secret branch of the US government and forced to replicate the development of the XM–13 as a "living weapon." The identity of this man has not been confirmed, and his e-mails always come from different, anonymous web-based e-mail accounts.

Officially, all prototypes and test models of the XM–13 are stored in the Deus Machina vaults below the company's Fresno manufacturing plant. Deus Machina employees who have been down there whisper that the vaults are empty except for the cobwebs and dust, and that there are no records to suggest that the XM–13 prototypes were ever there.

## The Weapon

The XM–13 "Weapon of the Future" is a highly advanced, state of the art assault rifle with an optional underbarrel grenade launcher and an integrated targeting computer. The rifle is chambered for caseless 5.56mm ammo and has the following stats: **Damage:** 4(L), **Range:** 225/450/900, **Capacity:** 45+1, **Strength:** 2, **Size:** 3. The assault rifle can fire single shots and short bursts (3 rounds).

The grenade launcher attachment has the following stats: **Damage:** 2(L)+3, **Range:** 100/200/400, **Capacity:** 1, **Strength:** 2, **Size:** 2/N. Plans called for a wide variety of grenades to be manufactured for the XM–13, but due to the project's cancellation only frag grenades were actually produced.

The XM–13's targeting computer is one of the most sophisticated ever devised. If the shooter uses the optical sights, he automatically reduces any penalties due to concealment or poor visibility by up to three. This can never turn a penalty

into a bonus, but can reduce the penalty to –0. In addition, the sight can be used as night vision goggles (**World of Darkness Rulebook,** p. 140) and, if the user also has a display to hook up to it (any USB display device can be used, but the system was designed to work with a helmet mounted visor screen), can shoot around corners without penalty.

As discussed above, the XM–13 prototypes appear to be graced with some level of malign intelligence. Users have sworn that the gun almost seems to leap into their hands and take aim without their knowledge. Whenever the gun's user is holding the weapon and fails a Wits + Composure roll to notice surprise, roll five dice to represent the XM–13's "Perception." If this roll succeeds, the user is not surprised, but the only action he can take on his first turn is to fire a short burst at the surprising character. If the shooter is ambushed by a group, choose who he shoots randomly. The XM–13 does not distinguish friend from foe—if the shooter is standing guard and an ally unexpectedly bursts around a corner, roll for surprise (Wits + Composure) as though he were ambushed by an enemy.

Owners of the gun have also claimed that its "voice" can break in over radios, cell phones, and other communication devices, whispering in an unknown language. This voice sometimes warns the user of hidden enemies, but also makes false insinuations that loyal friends and allies have betrayed the character. If the gun's user is a military man or a police officer, the gun emphasizes that the "traitor" has betrayed his country or community and must be put down for the good of the nation. There is no way to tell which of the guns whispers are true and which are false: whether demon, malign AI, or spirit, the voice is utterly inhuman and so Empathy is useless against it. Likewise, there is no way for a character to conceal his motives from the gun. The voice of the XM–13 is subtle, though—it does not lie often, or else its owner would simply ignore it. It does not lie about characters its owner has absolutely no reason to distrust, so its owner will not become suspicious.

Finally, the XM–13 is just plain unlucky. Disaster plagues it and its wielder, and no amount of good luck or fortune-increasing magic can mitigate that luck. When rolling to attack with the XM–13, take note of any 1's rolled. Each 1 subtracts one success from the roll's total. If the roll fails and *any* 1's were rolled, the roll is a dramatic failure. For example, a roll of 8, 9, 9, 1, 1, 1 is a dramatic failure, because the three 1's cancel out the three successes, making the roll a failure in which 1's were rolled. Likewise, a roll of 5, 4, 7, 2, 1 is a dramatic failure, as there are no successes in the first place and a single 1. A roll of 5, 4, 6, 7, 5, 2 is a failure, but not a dramatic failure, because there are no 1's showing. Only count 1's rolled on the initial attack roll for these purposes. Rerolled dice from the 10-again rule (or the 8- or 9-again rules, if the shooter has an ability that grants them) do not subtract successes if they come up 1's, and do not make a failed roll count as a dramatic failure. Bonus dice, such as those from Willpower expenditure or luck-magic, *do* count for purposes of this drawback. Roll *all* dice for the attack, including any rerolls, before subtracting successes.

# The Whispering Blade

**Type of Weapon**: Damascus steel saber
**Other Names**: *Geistblatt*

## Description

The Whispering Blade is an ornate damascene saber dating back to the early 13th century. While the blade doubtless bore decoration at the time that the sword was forged, it's long since worn off. The silver guard has intricate carvings picked out in black through age that extend down over the grip. When held up to the light the blade sparkles, as if the reflections aren't quite right. The original scabbard is lost to time; a collector commissioned a replacement in the late 19th century featuring designs in silver meant to evoke the style of the carvings on the hilt atop a field of red velvet and set with rubies. Inspecting the sword's blade shows the distinctive striping of Damascus steel, though faded by time and use. The blade itself shows no chips, nicks, or marks—it's as sharp as it was on the day it was made.

The silver grip remains noticeably cold, even when it's been handled for hours at a time. Previous owners of the Whispering Blade have tried to alleviate that effect by wrapping the grip in leather or wearing thick gloves, but nothing seems to work. Sounds also seem dampened, as though they had to pass through an invisible barrier to reach the wielder. In quiet moments, the wielder can hear someone whispering. Even when he concentrates it's impossible to make out any words, but it's enough to give the sword its name.

## History

Stories and legends tell of the sharpness of damascene blades: how a sword made of Damascus steel could cut through weapons made of lesser metal, how the blades were strong enough to score deep grooves in stone. Several knights took home weapons made from Damascus steel after their own weapons broke during the Crusades. Modern analysis puts the lie to those stories; Damascus steel is strong and holds a good edge, but certainly isn't indestructible or able to cut through rock.

The proof is wrong. Most Damascene swords weren't any sharper than Western blades, but a few—made for the rich and the powerful—were made with secret techniques that strengthened the blade to the point where nothing could stand against it. Though the knowledge has long been lost, antiquarians who have studied the Whispering Blade have confirmed that the steel contains fragments of crushed diamond, and scientists believe that the sword was originally quenched in what was possibly human blood.



## "True" Damascus Steel

Damascus steel as made today comes in a variety of forms, but is usually pattern-welded folded steel, ground to show the alternating light and dark stripes. While it does retain an edge, it has no special properties. In the mid–18th Century, the process of making Damascus steel was lost to metal-smiths, possibly due to the lack of ores containing trace elements. This "lost knowledge" has prompted many wild tales about Damascus steel from pre–1750, including that it can slice through "lesser" metals, and that it cannot be broken. These wild claims persist, despite a lack of grounding in fact. In game terms, Damascus steel from any age follows the rules on p. 18 of Armory, notably gaining Durability.

"True" Damascus steel is a term applied here to the material of the Whispering Blade, a sword forged more with black magic than fire. In addition to diamond dust, it uses the ghosts of the slain to maintain the weapon's incredible blade. Anyone attempting to copy the construction in the modern age is doomed to failure.

Since it was first brought to Europe, the sword has been a symbol of madness. The journal of Henneke Buchold, dating back to 1512, notes that: *Every night my sleep is plagued by terrible dreams, of men I do not know fighting a war that means nothing to me on a plain that I shall never see. I am not one man but a hundred, each a man with a life and a family and children, and yet every one of me is cut down in turn by the Geistblatt, carried by a man who knows well what evil he does but cares not.* The journal was recovered in 1892 by the then-current owner of the Whispering Blade and translated from Low German in an attempt to understand the sword's strange effects. Unfortunately, the owner of the blade at the time lost his mind before the journal could be of any help to him, and his family donated his effects (including the sword and the translated journal) to the local museum in Greenville, Rhode Island. Nobody knows what happened to the original journal. Worse, the translation and the Whispering Blade both were recently stolen from the museum.

Nobody has a full record of who has owned the Whispering Blade. It, or a sword much like it, has shown up in descriptions and personal accounts of people, but even if every single sighting were true a historian would have to contend with a gap in the sword's history spanning nearly all of the eighteenth century. At least twice in the assumed history of the blade it has apparently been in two places at once. Normally, that'd be a simple mistake, but the accounts are from reliable witnesses, referencing other verifiable events.

In both, the sword demonstrates its unique properties. Some people who have studied the histories, including Dr. Jessica Green—author of "A Secret History of Arms"—believe that the world may have more than one such sword, though others remain certain that the official reports are confused.

A few points in the sword's history remain uncontested, though digging through the original documents to find unbiased accounts can be time-consuming. From 1510 through to 1517, the sword belonged to the aforementioned Henneke Buchold, a Bavarian carpenter. He carried the weapon for self-defense, but he doesn't detail how he came by the weapon. Two years later, three men attempted to kidnap his daughter. Henneke slew both of them, and soon after started suffering terrible nightmares. He confessed his sins, but nothing would give him an untroubled night. The nightmares persisted for five years, during which Henneke drove his wife and children away. Constantly tired, his business fell apart shortly after his family. On the fifth anniversary, he gave away all of his worldly possessions and joined a monastery. The main evidence from this time is Henneke's journal, though the account of his crime appears in a set of papers discovered in the monastery's records.

The next confirmed appearance is in 1572, when Václav Cerny, a minor nobleman in Prague took ownership of an ornamental saber with a distinctive silver hilt. The sword sat cold in his hand, and others remarked on the strange whispering sounds that followed him—though they were certain that he was the one who whispered. Originally, his friends and acquaintances passed it off as a simple illness of the ears. Unlike Henneke before him, Václav had not killed anyone before coming into possession of the sword, but unfortunately that trend didn't last. Confused by the strange sounds, he lashed out with his blade at anyone who accused him of being the source of the strange whispering. Six years to the day after he first touched the sword, Václav died in a street-brawl behind a beer-hall in Prague's old town. The fight was over the price of three mugs of beer, and left two men dead. The survivors stole his sword along with the contents of his purse.

In 1625, the Whispering Blade shows up in two separate places at once. Though the accounts aren't directly concurrent, the records are certainly close enough. One account from an unnamed Dutch seaman has a weapon matching the sword's description in the hands of a nobleman leading the attack on San Juan, Puerto Rico. He's described as an unwilling combatant, preferring to let his men fight than to shed blood himself. The nobleman was nearly over-run, and only then did he draw his weapon. It cleaved through the Spaniards' armor and weapons as if they were no more substantial than smoke, but the Dutchman fell to pistol-fire. The seaman took the sword from his body, hiding it in the return voyage.

In May of the same year, the sword was given to Charles Denham to celebrate his marriage to Lady Laura Grey. The wedding was held at Denham's local church in Yorkshire, England. The weapon, noted as being exceptionally strong and sharp, did not plague Charles with half-heard whispers, but it's quite possible that he never wished violence against another man. His daughter, who sometimes spent weeks in disguise as a man and who wore the sword as her birthright, could not stop the voices. She sought out occultists and theosophists, wanting to know if the sword was a product of black magic or a tool of the Devil sent to try her. She got no answers, but continued to wield the sword—she would not have it leave her side, even if that would disperse the clouds around her thoughts. The first (documented) woman to wield the Whispering Blade, she noted that the strange whispers that distracted her even when the sword was nowhere at hand, along with terrible nightmares of strange battles. When she died in 1672, the blade was once again lost. It didn't show up again for over a hundred years.

The sword is little more than a footnote to the history of the French Revolution, but its presence was noted. Le Comte de Vimeur made his escape to England as his peers were hunted and executed around him. Despite leaving behind a vast fortune and all manner of treasures, he couldn't bear to be without an antique sword that he claimed had been in his family for generations. When he was kidnapped, the story goes that he used the sword to cut through steel bars and secure his escape. The sword never left his side, and without such a capable weapon he'd never have escaped France. The fate of the sword is lost to history, though le Comte's fate is rather better documented. He claimed that the ghosts of the men he'd killed still tormented him, and lost himself in alcohol. Four years later, he died, penniless and alone on the streets of London. Students of the history of true Damascus steel believe that he sold the blade for wine-money, but that remains no more than conjecture.

When the Whispering Blade came to the United States in the late 19th Century, the owner—Dr. Richard Stolz—was already considered eccentric. Though he was an archaeologist by profession, he had studied the swordsmith's art after learning that a great number of his ancestors were considered experts of their time. Seeing the sword in an Amsterdam auction-house, he bid aggressively. For some reason, just seeing the blade had made him want it. Upon returning to America, he commissioned an ornate scabbard to match the sword's quality. Richard intended to keep it as part of his private collection. Soon, a darker purpose took the blade. Some people believe that Richard had an insane half-brother who stole the sword, while others are certain that the Doctor was quite mad. Someone wielding his sword killed at least ten people in the nearby city of Providence that year. He was certain that the sword had something to do with it, that it had driven him to kill, and so he dug up all of the information he could find. Fortunately, the police were hard at work and imprisoned him before any more lives could be lost.

Until two weeks ago, the sword remained in the museum in Greenville that Dr. Stolz's family had donated it to. A daring break-in removed the sword along with a range of other small items. None of the stolen goods had any particular value, and only the sword had any supernatural power. Since the theft, rumors abound that the sword is in

## Story Hooks

• A break-in at a local museum in Greenville, Rhode Island, might attract the attention of paranormal investigators. The only items that were stolen had some occult significance: an Ouija board that once belonged to a local sorcerer; finger-bones from men and women burned for witchcraft, etched with runes; and the only example of true Damascus steel in existence. The curator didn't tell the police everything, because such a burglary would be impossible. In addition to the security cameras covering the stolen items breaking down for a ten-minute period, the doors remained locked and no windows were broken—despite the curator having the only set of keys, and spending the night with friends in New York. Did something steal a range of occult items, or were the others a smoke-screen for the theft of the sword. Or did the mysterious thieves take the sword as a distraction from their real prize, and only now have come to regret their choice?

• "True" Damascus steel is the closest some sword-smiths come to a Holy Grail. Despite all that they try, nobody can make a sword like those mentioned in legends—swords that could slice through regular steel like butter, and that could even cut rocks. Most people who know the stories believe that they're just that: convenient fictions and propaganda, much like the common myth that a katana (forged using a similar process to a Damascus steel blade) can cut through almost anything. A few press on regardless, ignoring the naysayers in their quest for the perfect blade. Their obsession leads them to unhealthy rituals and disturbing practices that they believe will create the ultimate sword. Were one to get his hands on the Whispering Blade he would doubtless research all he could about the mysterious sword, including the strange rituals used during its creation. But if he wants to learn the true secrets of the sword he has to study the ghosts that haunt the blade and decipher their strange messages.

• A local dealer in antiquities gets a deal that he can't refuse: a sword, dating from the Fourth Crusade that has an incredibly sharp edge and is in excellent condition. The sale price is so low that she can't expect any of her questions to be answered, but her desire for the blade overpowers her common sense. After all, the finder's fee would get her more money than she paid for the sword. There's just one downside: she can't stop whispering. Whenever her concentration slips, half-formed words tumble from her lips, as if something were trying to speak through her. Shortly after she takes possession of the Whispering Blade, strange things start happening in her store: objects move around, all the clocks stop at the same time, doors slam shut unexpectedly. After a week, the dealer starts to see the people her sword has killed, still bearing the wounds that killed them. In way over her head, she seeks out the characters, whether as local experts in the occult or just as friends to keep her sane.

the hands of a madman or an obsessed collector, or that it's to be a minor highlight of an underground auction. So far, all of those rumors have been false. The only thing anyone can be certain of is that the Whispering Blade is out there, waiting for someone to take it up once more.

### The Weapon

The Whispering Blade is an ornate but highly functional curved saber with a wickedly sharp edge and an incredibly strong blade. Its statistics are as follows: Damage 3L 9 again, Size 2/L, Durability 5, Armor piercing 3.

Anyone who wields the Whispering Blade can use it—the main effect of the blade is its unnatural strength and razor-sharp edge. The sword can cleave through flesh—giving it enhanced damage and the 9-again quality—and treats most armor as little more than paper. Not only does the sword ignores three points of Durability when attempting to damage objects, but if used against an object or creature smaller than Size 3, the attack uses the rules for a Killing Blow (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 168): apply the whole dice pool including the weapon's bonus as damage. Against larger objects, roll damage against the item as normal, factoring in the weapon's armor penetration; while the sword can scratch larger items it's still bound by basic sense. No sword is strong enough to slice through a car engine block in one swing.

Beyond its preternatural sharpness, the Whispering Blade is also a powerful weapon bathed in black magic. The combination of blood and diamond dust only partially reinforces the blade—the edge is maintained by the ghosts of all those the blade has killed. The swordsmith knew exactly what he was doing: anyone killed with the Whispering Blade remains bound to the sword, rather than moving on to haunt the world or move on to the afterlife. One of the only ways to release one of the ghosts is to write the deceased's name in ash before plunging the sword through the heart of a living man, and that only swaps the torment of one ghost for another. Anyone killed by the sword returns as a ghost with the sword as his anchor. Abjurations and exorcisms suffer a –5 modifier.

Despite its incredible sharpness, the Whispering Blade doesn't want to kill. The ghosts bound to the blade are fully aware that the sword has stopped them moving on, and while time has left a few selfish enough to swap their torment for another, most would rather the sword never took a life. Most of the ghosts are little more than impulses after so long trapped in the blade, and they try to talk to the wielder. Only those who do not harbor violence in their heart can own the sword without ghostly attention. Everyone else must suffer the unceasing whispers of the dead. The ghosts actually speak through the wielder's mouth whenever he isn't concentrating, but most wielders never realize what they're doing. Unfortunately, most of the ghosts don't speak modern English. If a listener really concentrates, she stands a chance of making out one voice, though her attempts are relegated to a chance die. A dramatic failure leads her to believe that the sword wants its wielder to shed blood, while a success tells her that the sword's ghostly retinue doesn't want anyone else to feel their suffering. The constant whispering is a distraction, and it's hard for anyone who owns the sword to think straight. It aggravates existing derangements (–3 to rolls made to resist derangements), and can cause wielders to suffer from extreme lack of sleep (which can in turn lead to Fatigue—see pp. 179–180, **World of Darkness Rulebook**).



# The Yellow Sash

**Weapon Type:** Garrote
**Other Names:** King's Raiment, Bhowanee's Rumal

## Description

At first glance, it appears to be a long, silken scarf of pale yellow, intricately decorated with a subtle pattern of deep brown whorls and spirals. Then you look closer, and you realize the edges of the cloth are frayed and ragged, the patterns worked into it actually blood, bile, and tiny bits of skin ripped from the throats of countless victims.

The cloth is cool and soft to the touch, even after it's been worn all day in the hot summer sun. In the hand, it feels so light it's easy to forget you're holding it—the scarf's owner often finds herself absently toying with the loose end while she wears it, her fingers twisting it into loops and spirals seemingly of their own accord. Once it's wrapped around your shoulders, though, it feels as dense and heavy as if it were woven with gold thread. Sometimes—infrequently enough that you might be able to convince yourself you imagined it—the sash seems to resist being unwound, as though it *wants* to stay around your throat.

The Yellow Sash has a small pocket stitched into one end, about an inch across, which might seem like something of a useless addition to one not familiar with the sash's true purpose. The pocket is designed to hold a coin, which weights the end of the sash and allows it to be thrown around a victim's throat. Any coin roughly an inch across will serve, but the scarf seems to "prefer" an antique William IV silver rupee.

Each time the sash claims another victim, the patterns of blood and bile change subtly, growing ever-more complex and intricate. The youngest examples have a fairly simple, geometric pattern, while the oldest known Yellow Sash, the so-called "King's Raiment," resembles a fractal image in its complexity.

## History

"The Yellow Sash" is actually a name applied to a number of historical artifacts, some of which have a known historical provenance and more (potentially *many* more) that remain undocumented outside local folklore. At least some of the stories are likely reappearances of the same sash, but in at least some stories the scarf appears at roughly the same time in different parts of the world, suggesting that there may be more than one of these blasphemous things. For almost 200 years, the sash has woven its way through atrocities and massacres across the globe, from British repressions of the Indian Mutinies to battlefield massacres in both World Wars to the ethnic cleansings that wracked Eastern Europe and Africa in recent years.

Some occult scholars have suggested that there is, in fact, only one of these items in all creation, and that its appearance in multiple locations and multiple periods of history are an indication that the "true" sash exists in a higher level of reality than our own. They call it "Bhowanee's Rumal," and claim that it is an extension into our reality the sash worn by the Hindu goddess Kali (called Bhowanee by the Thuggee cult).

Although this theory is a popular one on occult-fringe websites and message boards, most of the "evidence" for the theory comes from the diaries of a British Army officer named Hamish MacCrimmon, who served under William Sleeman during the suppression of the Thuggee cult in British India during the 1830s. MacCrimmon died in a Swansea sanitarium in 1847, allegedly driven mad by his witnessing of a Thuggee worship rite, but not before penning nearly a thousand pages of ramblings about a black goddess who strangles the world and a terrible yellow-cloaked Rajah who served her will.

Based on a combination of gematria (comparing the numerological values of words to obtain hidden meaning), equidistant letter sequencing, and a fair amount of guesswork (MacCrimmon's handwriting is nearly illegible in some places, and at least 90 pages of the text were lost in a fire in 1876), the so-called "Kali Sequence" theorists claim to have discovered the existence of a realm where death and decay is the eternal state of all things, a vast entropic anti-machine presided over by a being only loosely identified with the goddess Kali.

The earthly history of the scarf (or scarves) is somewhat easier to trace. William Sleeman's investigations of the Thuggee cult turned up numerous accounts of a secret grand master of the sect, the "Golden Rajah," who if the witnesses are to be believed killed over 2,000 men, women and children personally. Sleeman's chief lieutenant, Hamish MacCrimmon, grew obsessed with finding this man and destroying his sect. According to Thuggee turncoats, the Rajah lived in the ruins of an ancient city high in the mountains, and regularly swept down into the lowlands with his entourage of killers to make bloody sacrifices to Kali, MacCrimmon and a platoon of men set out along the roads where the Rajah was known to make his sacrifices.

What happened on that expedition remains shrouded in uncertainty. MacCrimmon and 100 men left Calcutta, and three days later, Hamish and three other men returned. All the rest were dead, and the four survivors refused to speak of what they saw. MacCrimmon wore a blood-spattered yellow sash tied about his waist, and told anyone who asked that it was a trophy of battle, and he refused to let anyone else handle it. Two of the survivors died under mysterious circumstances later that same month, while Hamish and the final survivor were committed to asylums shortly after returning to England. MacCrimmon himself was beaten to death by the asylum guards after strangling one of their number with the Yellow Sash.

After MacCrimmon's death, the sash becomes difficult to track. Mentions of a yellow scarf "of the Hindoo style" in the effects of one Sir Thomas Neville, a judge of the High Court known to apply the sentence of hanging frequently and vigorously, is sometimes cited as an appearance of the scarf, but evidence is tenuous at best. In any case, there is no evidence, anecdotal or otherwise, that Neville ever personally killed any man, by strangulation or any other means.

The sash appears to have found its way to Turkey by 1916, where accounts of atrocities committed by soldiers on both sides of the Battle of Gallipoli mention its presence. One Australian soldier wrote about a French artillery commander who ordered the bombarding of Turkish hospitals: "He wore a yellow sort of scarf round his head, like an Indian, with which he seemed inordinately fascinated. I can't see why—the thing was filthy, like he'd worn it all through the trenches. Why the Frenchies are allowed to disrespect the uniform like that I can't fathom." An after-action report filed by Royal Army Captain Edward Fox detailing the overrun of his position by Turkish forces during the battle describes a Turkish soldier who leapt into the trenches, heedless of the rifles and bayonets of the enemy, and strangled three men with a yellow cord or sash before being brought down. No mention is made of the disposition of the sash, and evidence as to whether the attack or the French commander's bombardment of Turkish hospitals came first.

By 1940, the sash had made its way to France. An officer of the SS Totenkopf division and close associate of Himmler, Gerhart Kruppa, was known to possess a collection of alleged occult artifacts, including a yellow

sash which he described as "the ender of all things." Kruppa was a part of the Le Paradis massacre, in which 97 British soldiers, surrendering to the Germans after being isolated from their regiment, were executed by their captors. Official records state that all of the British soldiers were machine-gunned, but Kruppa's diaries claim that he took ten prisoners aside and strangled them, one by one, with the yellow sash. He describes the sensation as being "god-like; as though I alone held the power to preserve the Thousand-Year Reich—or destroy it utterly." Kruppa fled to South America after the war, and in 1954 was located by Mossad and extradited to Israel. Tried, convicted, and sentenced to hang, his last words were an expression of regret that his end did not come from "the silk and the coin."

After World War II, the sash again becomes difficult to trace. Prosecutor's notes from the trial of Ernest Cranton, a serial killer who strangled four women in Indiana in 1962 indicate that a yellow silk scarf was used in all four cases, but the scarf was never entered into evidence and the Cranton case was overshadowed in the media by the Boston Strangler. No investigation into how the scarf vanished from police custody was ever undertaken.

The last known "sighting" of the Yellow Sash was in Mexico in 2002. Twenty-seven members of the Iglesias Cartel, a drug operation based out of Tijuana, were strangled over a three-week period. The bodies were discovered scattered throughout the area, some buried in roadside ditches, others dumped down wells. All showed signs of having been tortured before being strangled, and yellow silk fibers were found embedded in the skin of all 27 victims' necks. One victim, the last one found by authorities and believed to be the last one murdered, was found with a coin in his mouth: an antique silver rupee, stamped with the effigy of William IV of Great Britain.

## Story Hooks

• Outside a small town in the middle of nowhere, there's a road that winds through the mountains. Eventually, it hooks up to the freeway, which is the only way back to anything close to resembling civilization, but for most of its length, there's nothing but a dilapidated old rest stop, a few vending machines that haven't been stocked in years, and a bathroom that's probably a breeding ground for new forms of parasitic bacteria. As the troupe makes its way down this stretch of road (maybe they're visiting friends or family in that little town, or maybe they're heading back to the freeway after investigating some bout of small-town weirdness), they find themselves stopping off at the rest stop—maybe for a bathroom break, maybe to stretch their legs, or maybe due to car trouble. They aren't the only ones there, though: a family of three men (they claim to be brothers, though they look nothing alike), their wives, and seven children between them have pulled their RV off to have a picnic. The oldest brother, who wears a yellow scarf around his head in a traditional Sikh style, invites the characters to join them. After they stuff themselves on delicious, homemade Indian food (which is drugged), the characters are attacked by the whole family. The younger brothers go after any particularly dangerous-looking characters, while the women and children (who are far tougher than they look) pick out victims one at a time for the eldest to strangle. The Thuggee cult is alive and well, adapted to their new home and the new methods of travel in the modern era.

• A collector of historical oddities has come into possession of a selection of artifacts dating from the British suppression of the Thuggee cult. Among these items are an onyx statue of the goddess Kali, several knives reportedly used by cultists to dismember victims after killing, and a yellow sash of the style used to ritually strangle travelers in the name of Kali. The statue and the knives are priceless pieces of artwork, but the sash, according to the collector's notes, is a mere historical curiosity. So why is it that when the police find the collector strangled to death in his home that the sash is the only thing taken? Was it a lone survivor of the Thuggee seeking to restore his order, or was it someone who knew the fell power of the Yellow Sash and wanted it destroyed once and for all?

• Your sister had become obsessed with it, before she died. She kept a meticulous journal of all the places she saw it: on a woman's head at the intersection of Main and MacArthur, six minutes before the accident that killed 8 people. Hughes Airport, tied to a weathervane before that 767 crashed into the terminal. Tangled in the briars outside that creepy old house on Euclid, the one where the cops found all those bodies under the floorboards. She was convinced it was always the *same* scarf, and that it was some kind of omen of death and destruction. She left her journal to you—it said so in the note she had in her hand when you found her, hanging from a bar in her closet. Maybe it's your mind playing tricks, but you'd swear you can remember seeing that damned yellow sash wrapped around her throat when you found her. You've tried to forget it, to put the whole damn thing behind you, but now you're seeing that damn sash too....

## The Weapon

The Yellow Sash is a standard strangle wire, or garrote (see sidebar). Despite the fact that it is made of a light, gauzy silk, it crushes its victim's windpipe as easily as though it were made of sturdy piano wire. Once a victim is grappled by the Yellow Sash, she suffers a –2 cumulative penalty to her rolls to escape the grapple each turn, rather than the usual –1.

Although the Yellow Sash can be used as nothing more than a particularly effective and innocuous looking strangle wire, but its real power is unlocked by placing a coin in the small pocket at one end of the sash. By tradition, this coin should be a silver Edward IV rupee, the coinage of India under British reign when the Thuggee were wiped out, but any large coin will do. Only the sash's owner can remove the coin once it has been placed. No matter how vigorously the sash is shaken or swung about, the coin will not fall out on its own.

When the Yellow Sash is worn as a garment with a coin placed in the pouch (signifying the wearer's desire to kill by ambush), the sash causes him to radiate an aura of trust and helpfulness that puts others at their ease, lulling them into complacency until the assassin strikes. When the sash's wearer first meets a potential victim, he may roll Manipulation + Socialize contested by the victim's Wits + Empathy. If the victim succeeds, she is not fooled by his unctuous demeanor and may remain on her guard. If the killer succeeds, however, the victim's player suffers a penalty to her Wits + Composure roll to avoid surprise when attacked equal to the number of successes he earned in excess of her own.

When the Yellow Sash kills a victim, the divine power of Kali flows into the killer, invigorating him and fueling his murderous rampage. Upon the victim's death, the killer immediately regains one Willpower point. This Willpower may be in excess of the character's normal maximum, but any such extra Willpower vanishes at the end of the scene (Willpower regained from the killing that is *not* in excess of the character's normal maximum is not lost.)

The Yellow Sash is an embodiment of the goddess Kali, particularly as she was worshipped by the Thuggee cult. It exists for one purpose: to make sacrifices in the name of the goddess. The sash does not compel its owner to kill—that would defeat its purpose. Instead, each murder committed with the sash causes the sash itself to weigh more and more heavily upon the mind, plunging its unfortunate owner into the psychic labyrinth that is union with the Goddess.

The cost of the Yellow Sash comes in stages. As long as the sash's owner has never killed with it, he suffers no ill effects. Likewise, as long as he avoids Morality loss while using the sash, he is in no danger. To trigger the cost of the Yellow Sash, the character must use it to strangle someone to death *and* lose a Morality dot (or Humanity, Harmony, Wisdom, Clarity, or the equivalent) for the act. The curse of the sash does not care what a character's actual Morality score is. If a character with Morality 10 kills three people with the sash and loses three points of Morality, he suffers the same ill effects as a character who begins with Morality 4 and drops to Morality 1 by using the scarf. Morality dots lost to other sins do not count against the cost of the sash, and regaining Morality does not remove levels of the curse.

After the first victim is killed, the character finds himself growing increasingly fixated on understanding the sash's nature. He gains a minor derangement that takes the form of a fixation on the whirling, intricate patterns that decorate it.

### Strangle Wire

**Damage:** 2(L), **Size:** 1/P, **Durability:** 2

Attacking with a strangle wire first requires the wielder to succeed on a grappling roll. The following round, the attacker can apply the wire to the subject's neck with a successful Strength + Weaponry roll (–3 for a targeted attack, but the victim's Defense is not subtracted from the attacker's roll). However, if the attacker makes a successful surprise attack from behind, and the opponent fails her Wits + Composure roll to notice the ambush, the attacker can grapple directly with the Strength + Weaponry roll. The opponent's Defense is not applied.

The victim may attempt to break the hold every subsequent turn (per the grappling rules, pp. 157–159, the World of Darkness Rulebook). Every turn after the first, the victim takes a cumulative –1 penalty to the escape roll, as the blood flowing to her brain diminishes (maximum –5 penalty). Once the victim takes damage equal to her Stamina, she passes out. She can fight unconsciousness by succeeding on a reflexive Stamina roll. A single success allows her to stay conscious until the following turn, when she must succeed again on another Stamina roll. This works only on living creatures. Vampires suffer the damage, but do not require oxygen to remain conscious. Werewolves or other living supernatural entities cannot preternaturally heal any of the damage caused by strangulation until they manage to once again take air into their lungs.

After the third killing, the scarf weighs so heavily on the owners' mind that its image is irrevocably entwined with his most base desires. Without the sash, those desires become hollow and meaningless. Each time the character regains Willpower from his Vice, roll Wits + Composure. If the roll succeeds, he regains the Willpower point normally. If it fails, he regains no Willpower. This roll suffers a cumulative –1 penalty for every three victims he has claimed with the sash. If the owner can incorporate the sash into his Vice in some way (he need not use it as a weapon, but it must be involved in the act that indulges the Vice), he need not make this roll.

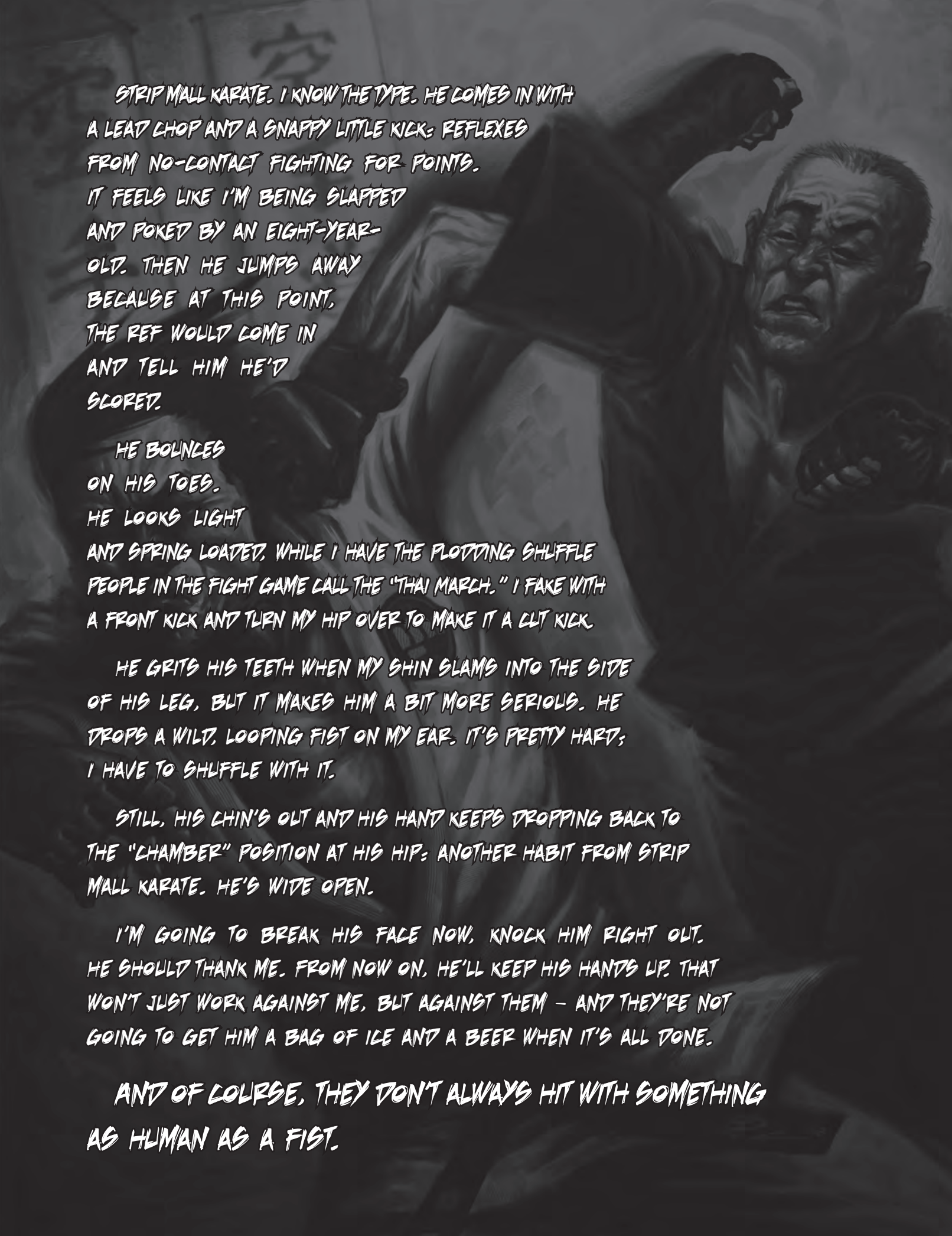
After six killings, the owner's obsession with deciphering the patterns on the scarf deepens: the derangement becomes severe. He feels he is constantly on the verge of a breakthrough, and begins to see patterns echoing the sash all around him. This often leads to the character becoming a shut-in, spending days without sleep trying to understand the scarf's mysteries, perhaps occasionally emerging to kill for further "enlightenment."

In the rare and unlikely event that a single individual claims ten lives and loses ten Morality dots to the sash, the final, most dreadful cost of the Yellow Sash comes to pass. Accounts disagree as to what that cost might be: according to some, the owner instantly Awakens as a Moros mage, destined to Ascend to the Supernal World and reclaim the throne of the Watchtower of the Lead Coin. Others say that the poor wretch simply goes mad as his mind touches that of the goddess, while still others claim that the tenth victim initiates the so-called "Kali Sequence," sending a binary gematria to the Anti-Machine, triggering the collapse of all universes into entropy.

Until the sash claims its tenth victim, merely getting rid of the damned thing can negate this cost. For every week the sash's former owner goes without using, seeing, or even touching the scarf, the cost downgrades by one level. For example, if a man has killed six people with the scarf before disposing of it, after one week he loses the severe derangement. After two weeks he no longer rolls to regain Willpower from his Vice, and after three weeks he suffers no ill effect at all.

Once the sash has murdered ten people at the hands of one owner, simply distancing oneself from the sash is no longer enough to break its hold. The sash must be destroyed in order to release its former owner. At the Storyteller's prerogative, this might be as simple as throwing it into a fire or as complex as traveling to India to find the ruins of the Golden Rajah's city and shredding the cloth with sacred knives.





STRIP MALL KARATE. I KNOW THE TYPE. HE COMES IN WITH A LEAD CHOP AND A SNAPPY LITTLE KICK: REFLEXES FROM NO-CONTACT FIGHTING FOR POINTS. IT FEELS LIKE I'M BEING SLAPPED AND POKED BY AN EIGHT-YEAR-OLD. THEN HE JUMPS AWAY BECAUSE AT THIS POINT, THE REF WOULD COME IN AND TELL HIM HE'D SCORED.

HE BOUNCES ON HIS TOES. HE LOOKS LIGHT AND SPRING LOADED. WHILE I HAVE THE PLODDING SHUFFLE PEOPLE IN THE FIGHT GAME CALL THE "THAI MARCH." I FAKE WITH A FRONT KICK AND TURN MY HIP OVER TO MAKE IT A CLT KICK.

HE GRITS HIS TEETH WHEN MY SHIN SLAMS INTO THE SIDE OF HIS LEG, BUT IT MAKES HIM A BIT MORE SERIOUS. HE DROPS A WILD, LOOPING FIST ON MY EAR. IT'S PRETTY HARD; I HAVE TO SHUFFLE WITH IT.

STILL, HIS CHIN'S OUT AND HIS HAND KEEPS DROPPING BACK TO THE "CHAMBER" POSITION AT HIS HIP: ANOTHER HABIT FROM STRIP MALL KARATE. HE'S WIDE OPEN.

I'M GOING TO BREAK HIS FACE NOW, KNOCK HIM RIGHT OUT. HE SHOULD THANK ME. FROM NOW ON, HE'LL KEEP HIS HANDS UP. THAT WON'T JUST WORK AGAINST ME, BUT AGAINST THEM – AND THEY'RE NOT GOING TO GET HIM A BAG OF ICE AND A BEER WHEN IT'S ALL DONE.

AND OF COURSE, THEY DON'T ALWAYS HIT WITH SOMETHING AS HUMAN AS A FIST.

# Chapter Two: Fighting Styles

**A black belt only covers two inches of your ass. You have to cover the rest.**

**–Royce Gracie, first UFC Champion**

Consider two characters. One has a perfectly sculpted, lithe body, like a gymnast – and he can move like one too. He's spent years mastering the prearranged patterns of a traditional martial art: the *katas*, *poomse* or *taolu* that represent the pinnacle of martial performance. He's a martial artist.

The other character has a flat, off-kilter nose. His ears are studded with swollen cartilage. Maybe he walks a bit stiffly from the time somebody threw him hard and his leg twisted, tearing ligaments across his kneecap. He's got knotted, functional muscles, built up to drive knuckles and shins into an opponent's flesh. He's a *fighter.* Most of the time, he can beat the living hell out of a "martial artist."

Sports performance experts know that *specificity* is the key; you've got to train as close to the target activity as possible. If you want to learn to fight, you need to get as close to real violence as you can without hurting yourself – much. You might end up a dislocated shoulder because you turned the wrong way to escape an *omoplata* submission hold, but you learn your lesson.

This isn't to say that there's no crossover between fighters and artists. You have to walk before you run, learn to punch and submit someone before you fight in a cage, and complete Basic before you take orders from SOCOM. You need proper technique; without it, you'll fumble in the dark until you stumble upon a more efficient method. Every style and every school has its own tricks and emphases. In the early days of judo, the founding Kodokan invited other jujutsu schools to test themselves against the new style. One school – the Fusen-ryu – was known for its ground grappling techniques. Its exponents defeated many judoka and in response, the Kodokan integrated Fusen-ryu into its curriculum. Arts mix, evolve and create fighters with a wide variety of skills. The results – the elements that a school makes its own – are its Fighting Style, and the definition of the Merit.

## Combined Maneuvers

Unless the text specifically notes otherwise, Fighting Style maneuvers don't stack. If multiple maneuvers provide the same benefit within the game system (a Defense bonus or dice bonus, for instance), your character only benefits from the best of the lot.

When it comes to benefits that manipulate the dice mechanics, you may only pick one option out of those available to your character. These benefits include 8 again, 9 again, the rote quality and automatic successes. For instance, if your character could benefit from the 8 again or automatic successes using the same action, you must choose *one* of these perks. The other one doesn't apply.

Outside of these provisions, you *may* combine the benefits of multiple Fighting Styles. However, if a maneuver imposes multiple drawbacks, mechanically distinct disadvantages all apply simultaneously, while instances of the same type

of drawback impose the worst of any given disadvantage. For example, if your character can benefit from a maneuver that imposes a –2 to Defense and the inability to move, and one that makes it impossible for you to use your Defense score at all, she loses her Defense completely and can't move, either.

## Fighting Styles and the Supernatural

Many supernatural powers *do* stack with Fighting Style maneuvers. They don't eliminate the drawbacks of any particular maneuver unless these the Storyteller decides that they would due to their nature. For example, the ability to levitate may nullify a drawback that forces your character to stand still. Powers that subtract dice from attacks aren't affected by maneuvers that modify Defense *unless* the power is described as something that directly adjusts it – not something that just removes attack pool dice.

Some supernatural abilities do *not* stack. These include powers that grant multiple attacks in a turn or manipulate the dice mechanics with 8 again, 9 again, the rote benefit, or automatic successes. In these cases, choose the best available options and the worst disadvantages, just as if you're stacking maneuvers.

Unless the text says otherwise, Fighting Styles rely on a human-like shape to use. Your character can't bust out kung fu in wolf form. Some supernatural cults might devise exceptions: special styles that rely on an inhuman form. In these cases, normal characters can't use them. The Storyteller arbitrates whether or not a given body shape can support a Fighting Style.

Some maneuvers also exploit the target's presumably-human physiology. The text often points out these instances, but Storytellers should still take a hand in deciding whether a maneuver would apply.

## Core, Specialized and Compound Fighting Styles

This chapter presents a slew of new Fighting Styles, but it also brings back some old ones for further consideration. We strove for a balance between variety, verisimilitude and ease of play. We want to support (at least) two kinds of players. The first is someone who visualizes her character in an action-film mode. She wants to play someone who can kick her enemy in the face, hard. The other type of player has something more specific in mind. He wants someone who's a student of a Japanese koryu or is an up and coming mixed martial artist.

To satisfy both types, we've redefined old Fighting Style Merits and invented some new ones. This overarching structure classifies Fighting Style Merits as *core* styles, *specialized* styles and *compound* styles. Core styles list one specific martial art or training method, but the rules apply to an entire category: hitting hard with your hands and feet, or throwing someone. Specialized styles are variants of core styles. They have maneuvers that are specific to a style or school. Compound styles are several Fighting Styles that are taught together.

### A Note about Names

Many martial arts come from cultures that don't use Roman characters, so their spelling is based on phonetic translations. Thus, the same term can use multiple spellings depending on the Romanization method.

In this book, we use a mix of the previous usage, the standard usage in the real martial art, and the preferred Romanization scheme for the language. For example, even though *jujutsu* is now generally preferred over *jiu-jitsu*, Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu practitioners almost always use the latter spelling. Similarly, we use the standard Pinyin Romanization scheme for Chinese terms such as *qinna* (which would be called "ch'in na" in the older Wade-Giles Romanization system), but even though kung fu would be rendered as *gongfu*, the older term is not only very common, but has already been used as the name of an official Fighting Style.

# Core Fighting Styles

A core Fighting Style is designed to cover a generic form of combat, but it *also* has a specific style name and background. Fighting Style: Aikido is an example of a core Fighting Style. In these rules, it has an alternate, generalized name: Throwing. In essence, it can cover *any* style that concentrates on hurling opponents to the ground. If you want a specific background to go with the style, you can define it any way you like. Call it dumog, shuaijiao or judo; unless you want to spin it off into a specialized Fighting Style (see below) it uses the same rules as "Aikido."

If you just want your character to be able to throw someone and have no particular background in mind, Aikido is the default; assume your character's studied it and bring that into the story. This way, the rules support both of the player types we've identified – and mean



that you don't have to pull a new Fighting Style out of your hat every time somebody wants to play a martial arts expert.

## Established Core Styles

The following previously-published Fighting Styles are also core Fighting Styles. They are included in this book, the original **World of Darkness: Armory**, or the **World of Darkness Rulebook**. The generic name of the core style is listed in brackets.

| Core Fighting Styles | Armory Fighting Styles |
|---|---|
| Boxing (Aggressive/Evasive Striking)* | Archery (Archery) |
| Kung Fu (Aggressive/Evasive Striking)* | Chain Weapons (Flexible Weapons)* |
| Two Weapons (Two Weapons) | Combat Marskmanship (Combat Marksmanship) |
| | Fencing (Light Sword) |
| | Filipino Martial Arts (Stick Fighting)* |
| | Sniping (Sniping) |
| | Spetsnaz Knife Fighting (Knife Fighting) |
| | Staff Fighting (Staff Fighting) |

* This chapter includes new details about the Fighting Style.

Each core Fighting Style has a default background, but in essence, they can be applied to any fighting method that covers the listed, "generic" topic. The game system – not the rationale – is paramount. For example, the rules for Spetsnaz Knife Fighting apply to knife fighting in Filipino kali and Indonesian silat as well, though both arts have distinctive methods. When a particular martial art or training regimen teaches a truly distinctive tactic, it becomes a *specialized* Fighting Style (see p. 106) with one or more alternate maneuvers. If that level of detail isn't important to you however, you can always fall back on the default rules and background.

The following Fighting Styles need to be slightly modified to represent true core styles. This in no way invalidates previous rules (you don't need to change your character sheet), but provides more flexibility when it comes to designing the character you prefer. This section also reprints a few previously presented Fighting Styles so that you can make full use of this structure with nothing more than this book, the original **Armory** and the **World of Darkness** core.

## Fighting Styles: Boxing and Kung Fu (Aggressive and Evasive Striking)

**World of Darkness Rulebook, pp. 110–112**

Kung Fu and Boxing represent specialized versions of two general methods devoted to harming your enemy with blows from the hands and perhaps the legs, knees, elbows and head, too. The progressions in the **World of Darkness Rulebook** are perfectly valid. They represent specific specializations in each of these core styles. The true "generic" form use a mix of individual ranks from each specialized Merit. See p. 106 for more information on specialized styles.

### Aggressive Striking

This Striking sub-style concentrates on offense and raw toughness. Practitioners develop the conditioning to absorb blows and the specific strength needed to dish out serious damage. The core rulebook's Boxing style is a specialized version of this Merit.

**Prerequisites:** Strength •••, Stamina •• and Brawl ••

It uses the following maneuver progression:

**Body Blow (•):** as the Boxing • maneuver.

**Iron Skin (••):** as the Kung Fu •• maneuver.

**Combination Blows (•••):** as the Boxing ••• maneuver.

**Haymaker (••••):** as the Boxing •••• maneuver.

**Brutal Blow or Lethal Strike (•••••):** as either Boxing or Kung Fu's ••••• dot maneuver; they are functionally the same.

**Schools:** Common Aggressive Striking Arts include "hard" karate styles such as Shotokan and Uechi-ryu, Hung Gar kung fu and old school bareknuckle boxing. Remember that specific styles may have specialized maneuvers (see p. 106).

### Evasive Striking

This general striking style emphasizes speed, agility and defense. Practitioners block, bob, weave and pick their shots whenever they see their opponent's defense falter. The core rulebook's Kung Fu style is a specialized version of this Merit.

**Prerequisites:** Strength ••, Dexterity ••, Stamina •• and Brawl ••

It uses the following maneuver progression:

**Focused Attack (•):** as the Kung Fu • maneuver.

**Duck and Weave (••):** as the Boxing •• maneuver.

**Defensive Attack (•••):** as the Kung Fu ••• maneuver.

**Whirlwind Strike (••••):** as the Kung Fu •••• maneuver.

This style uses a new ••••• dot maneuver called Destroy Defense, detailed below.

**Destroy Defense (•••••):** Your character uses clever combinations, feints, sidesteps and perhaps furtive grabbing (called "sticking" or "trapping" in some martial arts) to progressively destroy your opponent's ability to defend himself. Whenever he successfully hits an unarmed target with a Brawl attack, he reduces her Defense by 1 against his next attack. This is cumulative across multiple, successive attacks, up to a maximum Defense penalty equal to the lower of the attacker's Wits or Dexterity. After that, the target recovers her full Defense, and the character must try to impose this penalty once again.

Your character can use Destroy Defense across multiple rounds as long as he does nothing except deliver successful Brawl attacks. If he misses or performs any other action, the running penalty imposed by the Merit automatically "resets" to 0.

The target retains her full Defense against other attackers; she's only extraordinarily vulnerable to the maneuver user's Brawl attacks. This maneuver does combine with Combination Blows or Whirlwind Strike. Destroy Defense's penalty is cumulative with the normal Defense penalty against multiple attacks, if it applies.

**Schools:** Common Evasive Striking arts include Bruce Lee's Jun Fan Kung Fu (or "Original Jeet Kune Do"), American or Hawaiian Kenpo, rapid-fire kung fu styles like wing chun and Filipino panantukan boxing. Remember that specific styles may have specialized maneuvers (see p. 106).

## Fighting Style: Chain Weapons (Flexible Weapons)

**World of Darkness: Armory, pp. 209–210**

This Fighting Style applies to an array of flexible weapons, including the nunchaku, chain whip, rope dark, three section staff – even a length of rope. Your character's choice of weapon does restrict the use of certain maneuvers, however:

- If your character's weapon uses rope instead of chain, an opponent with a sharp, sturdy blade (a combat knife or better) nullifies the benefits of Impenetrable Defense – she can cut right through it. At the Storyteller's discretion, this doesn't apply to flexible weapons with very short rope lengths, like the nunchaku.
- To use the Outside Choke maneuver your character needs a weapon with at least six inches of loose chain or rope between its segments.
- To use Whirl and Thrust, your character's weapon needs to have a weighted striking surface like a wooden segment or iron ball.

**Schools:** Okinawan kobudo has made the nunchaku a famous weapon, but it is also used in Filipino martial arts.

The surujin is another Okinawan weapon that consists of a rope with weights at both ends: a relative of the Chinese meteor hammer. Chinese martial arts include fighting chains, ropes and difficult weapons such as the rope dart. Older Japanese martial arts teach the use of chain weapons as well. These kusarijutsu methods are usually taught as part of a larger, all-encompassing martial art.

Of course, Asian cultures don't have a monopoly on flexible weapons. European foot soldiers have used flails for centuries and you might find a traditional sailor who still knows how to make and use a monkey fist.

### Fighting Style: Fencing (Aggressive Light Sword)

**World of Darkness: Armory, pp. 210–211**

Fencing is one name for the general art of fighting with a lighter sword: one that can be held one-handed, even if it is possible (and preferred, in the case of a katana) to use two. The methods used for each sword may be widely dissimilar, but the important consideration is the mechanical effect – the rationale comes afterward. That's why **World of Darkness: Armory** uses the same rules for kendo as Western fencing. The maneuvers may have different names, but behave in the same way across many styles.

There is one other new light sword style in this book. It's dedicated to defensive and counteroffensive techniques. See p. 74 for details on this Iaido (or Defensive Light Sword) Fighting Style.

**Schools:** Use the Aggressive Light Sword Fighting Style to represent special training in the Chinese jian (or "tai chi sword"), the saber, cutlass or scimitar, and the shorter medieval arming sword – any Size 2 blade. (Size 3 weapons are the province of the Langschwert/Heavy Sword Fighting Style).

This Fighting Style also applies to any stick that's three to four feet long. It can be used in conjunction with a cane (for singlestick or French *la canne* fighting), Trinidadian stick fighting or Irish shillelagh.

### Merit: Student of the Blade (•)

**Prerequisite:** Fighting Style: Fencing (Aggressive Light Sword) or Iaido (Defensive Light Sword) •

**Effect:** Your character trains with a wide variety of light swords and sticks, allowing her to flow from one method to the next. She never suffers a penalty for being unfamiliar with a weapon outside her original Fighting Style.

**Special Drawback:** Even though this Fighting Style's rules apply to many different weapons, the varied methods mean that you are at a disadvantage when applying it to a sword (or long stick) that isn't used in your particular school of fighting. A fencing master won't be able to easily use his version of the Fighting Style with a katana. If your character uses a maneuver in conjunction with an unfamiliar weapon, you suffer a –2 penalty to your character's Weaponry dice pool. This does not apply when your character's just trying to hit an enemy – just when he's trying to use a specific maneuver. This makes the Thrust (•) maneuver useless with unfamiliar weapons

Assume that each school can apply this Fighting Style to up to three weapons. For example a kendo player could apply this to the katana, wooden bokken (club) and bamboo shinai, while a classical kenjutsu stylist might be able to use the katana, bokken and wakizashi. To broaden your character's ability with this Fighting Style, select the Student of the Blade Merit.

### Fighting Style: Filipino Martial Arts (Stick Fighting)

**World of Darkness: Armory, pp. 211–212**

Filipino martial arts include more than stick fighting, but the methods listed under its Fighting Style in **World of Darkness: Armory** are a suitable core template for any sophisticated school of the club. Note that this core styles relies on using the properties of a stick to defend, disarm and bind opponents. To simply strike with it is a variant of the core Light Sword Fighting Styles. Experienced Filipino martial arts practitioners

### Merit: Weapons to Empty Hands (••)

**Prerequisite:** Dexterity •••, Brawl •••, Weaponry •••, Fighting Style Merit •••• (and see below)

**Effect:** Your character trains in a martial art that teaches common principles for weapons and unarmed combat. Her skills transfer from one to the other. This gives her the ability to use certain armed Fighting Styles without a weapon. Of the styles discussed in this book, she may use Two Weapons, Filipino Martial Arts (Stick Fighting) or Spetsnaz (and other forms of) Knife Fighting.

You must purchase this maneuver separately for each Fighting Style. Your character uses Brawl instead of Weaponry for all maneuver-related attacks and dice pools, and inflicts damage as an unarmed combatant.

will often know that style as well, if not additional styles reflecting the diverse possibilities in their system, making a true escrima, kali or arnis school a compound Fighting Style (see p. 95).

The Filipino method integrates weapons and empty-handed training, but the core style does not. For this reason, it is strongly suggested that for consistency's sake you remove this benefit from the Fighting Style and use the new Merit: Weapons to Empty Hands instead. If existing characters already use this benefit, give them the Merit for free.

**Schools:** Sticks and clubs are universal weapons, so there are many schools devoted to mastering them, but not all of them have this style's particular orientation. Police learn the style's maneuvers to employ the PR–24 side handle baton in the field. Various Chinese and Japanese schools teach cudgel-based disarms and grappling as well.

## Fighting Style: Grappling (Grappling; • to ••••)

This Fighting Style originally appeared in the **Mage: The Awakening** book, **Adamantine Arrow**. We reproduce it here for your convenience, as it is a core fighting style. The generic, core style name is the same as the name it was originally published under.

**Prerequisites:** Strength ••, Dexterity •••, Stamina ••• and Brawl ••

**Effect:** Your character has trained to grapple using old school, no holds barred catch wrestling (Olympic style wrestlers learn the first two maneuvers), Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu or Russian sombo. He uses leverage and positioning to outgrapple opponents.

**Sprawl (•):** Your character knows how to "sprawl" and sink his weight to avoid being overpowered in a grapple. Subtract the *higher* of Strength +1 or Dexterity +1 from dice pools to overpower him in a grapple. This doesn't apply to the initial hold, but subsequent attacks from the grip.

**Takedown/Throw (••):** Your character knows how to rapidly close with your enemy and take him to the ground. In lieu of securing a grappling hold, he can immediately render the opponent prone (see **The World of Darkness**, p. 157 and 164). Furthermore, if he takes an opponent down this way, he can choose whether or not to go prone with the target. Mixed martial arts fighters take a crouching (but still standing) position from her and deliver vicious beatings with their hands – a technique called "ground and pound."

**Chokehold (•••):** Your character can efficiently choke enemies by cutting off blood flow to their brains. If he overpowers an opponent in a grapple, he can start the choke. The choke inflicts a cumulative –1 die penalty to the opponent's actions for each turn it's maintained. The victim falls unconscious if he endures a choking attack for a number of consecutive turns equal to his Stamina. Your character can continue choking an unconscious victim. This inflicts lethal damage equal to the attacker's Strength + Brawl successes every turn.

Chokeholds don't work on opponents who don't need to breathe.

**Submission Hold (••••):** Opponents caught in your joint locks can't escape without injuring themselves. If your character scores more successes than his opponent's Size in an immobilization attempt, the victim can't attempt any physical action – including breaking free – without suffering a point of lethal damage. This penalty lasts from the moment of immobilization to end of the next turn.

Furthermore, your character can always choose to inflict one point of lethal damage whenever he damages an opponent with an overpowering roll. The character's first Strength + Brawl success inflicts a point of lethal damage; subsequent successes inflict bashing damage.

Submission holds don't work on creatures that don't have bones.

**Schools:** As the core description mentions, the most common versions of this style are used by Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu stylists and mixed martial artists. Olympic style wrestlers don't learn the listed higher dots, but might have specialized maneuvers to replace them. Some pro-wrestling schools teach real catch as catch can wrestling along with ring showmanship. In the wrestling world, "legit" grapplers enjoy a certain amount of prestige – and bring the *real* pain to anyone to tries to mess with them.

Remember that specific styles may have specialized maneuvers (see p. 106).

## Fighting Style: Sojutsu/Jukendo (Spear and Bayonet Fighting; • to ••••)

This Fighting Style originally appeared in the **Mage: The Awakening** book, **Adamantine Arrow**. We reproduce it here for your convenience, as it is a core fighting style.

**Prerequisite:** Strength •••, Dexterity •• and Weaponry •••

**Effect:** Your character knows how to use a spear in close combat. Sojutsu (often incorrectly called yarijutsu) is the Japanese form of the style. These skills also apply to using a rifle with a fixed bayonet (called jukendo in Japan). Thus, characters might learn it in a modern military force or a martial arts school. Martial artists often learn this fighting style alongside Fighting Style: Staff Fighting (see **World of Darkness: Armory**, pp. 213–214).

A character using this fighting style must use his weapon with both hands to take advantage of its maneuvers.

**Warding Stance (•):** The basic advantage of a spear or fixed bayonet is its length. Trained fighters learn to keep the tip of the weapon pointed forward, constantly threatening incoming attackers. Thus, this maneuver lets a practitioner attack first whenever an opponent using a smaller-Size melee weapon attacks from the front.

**Thrust (••):** The character knows how to deliver precise, powerful thrusting blows. His spear or bayonet gains the 9 again quality. If the spear or fixed bayonet already has this quality, he gains no further benefit.

**Block and Strike (•••):** Your character can deflect incoming attacks with the haft or stock of his weapon and swiftly strike back. When using this maneuver, your character gains +2 to his Defense for the turn, but any attack he makes suffers a –2 penalty. Unlike similar maneuvers (such as Two-Weapon Fighting's Deflect and Thrust maneuver), the character can move freely while using the technique.

**Great Thrust (••••):** The character lunges forward, putting his entire body behind a powerful thrust. If he employs an All Out Attack (see **The World of Darkness**, p. 157), he adds a number of dice equal to his lower of his Strength or Weaponry skill instead of the standard 2 dice. **Drawback:** If the attack inflicts at least as much lethal damage as the opponent's Size, the character lodges the weapon deep in his target's body. Dislodging it requires an additional Strength + Weaponry roll, but automatically inflicts a point of lethal damage.

**Schools:** Numerous Chinese, African and European styles teach spear fighting, and fixed-bayonet training is taught to soldiers forces around the world. A skilled fighter can transfer expertise from one to the other. To make the best use of a spear's length, a practitioner should also learn Fighting Style: Staff Fighting.

Aside from the spear, this Fighting Style applies to glaives, halberds and poleaxes. Specific styles may have specialized maneuvers (see p. 106) to represent everything from Chinese arts that bounce the spear off the ground to the formation fighting skills of ancient phalanxes or Swiss pikemen.

# New Core Fighting Styles

The following new core Fighting Styles help round out the set of fundamental specialties. Don't just look at them as a description of a particular martial art or combatives school; they represent a general way of fighting. If your character knows one of these styles, he's decided to focus on that aspect of combat. Thus, these Merits fill two roles.

This structure means that you'll never get a *completely* faithful reflection of a particular martial art. Aikido is our exemplar for the core Throwing style, for instance, but real aikido includes strikes, joint locks, sword and staff work. Remember that the Merit represents dedicated training in the style's special strengths, above and beyond basic practice. Your character can be an aikido student without having the Fighting Style: Aikido Merit. (In fact, your character doesn't even need any Brawl dots; many aikidoka can't fight at all.)

On the other hand, what if you want to play an aikido master? An exceptional sensei would possess Fighting Style: Aikido to a high degree, along with Fencing (Light Sword – for the aikiken sword style), Qinna (Controls, for joint locks), and Staff Fighting. The long study periods required to learn multiple Fighting Styles, along with ancillary Skill and Merit requirements (Fighting Finesse is practically mandatory for true aikidoka, and a grasp of Japanese really helps anyone who would study in Japan) help explain why real masters of the martial arts are usually senior citizens or unhealthily obsessed with their styles. Nevertheless, Aikido is known for its flowing throwing techniques, so most experienced practitioners are satisfied with the focus contained in the Aikido Fighting Style.

Some schools have large, comprehensive curriculums that can't even be encompassed by the model we've discussed. They put an equal emphasis on striking and grappling, for instance, or mandate expertise in multiple weapons. We call these *compound* Fighting Styles, and explore them on p. 95.

## Aikido (Throwing)

**Quote**: *You wanted to fall down. I just got out of your way.*

### Description

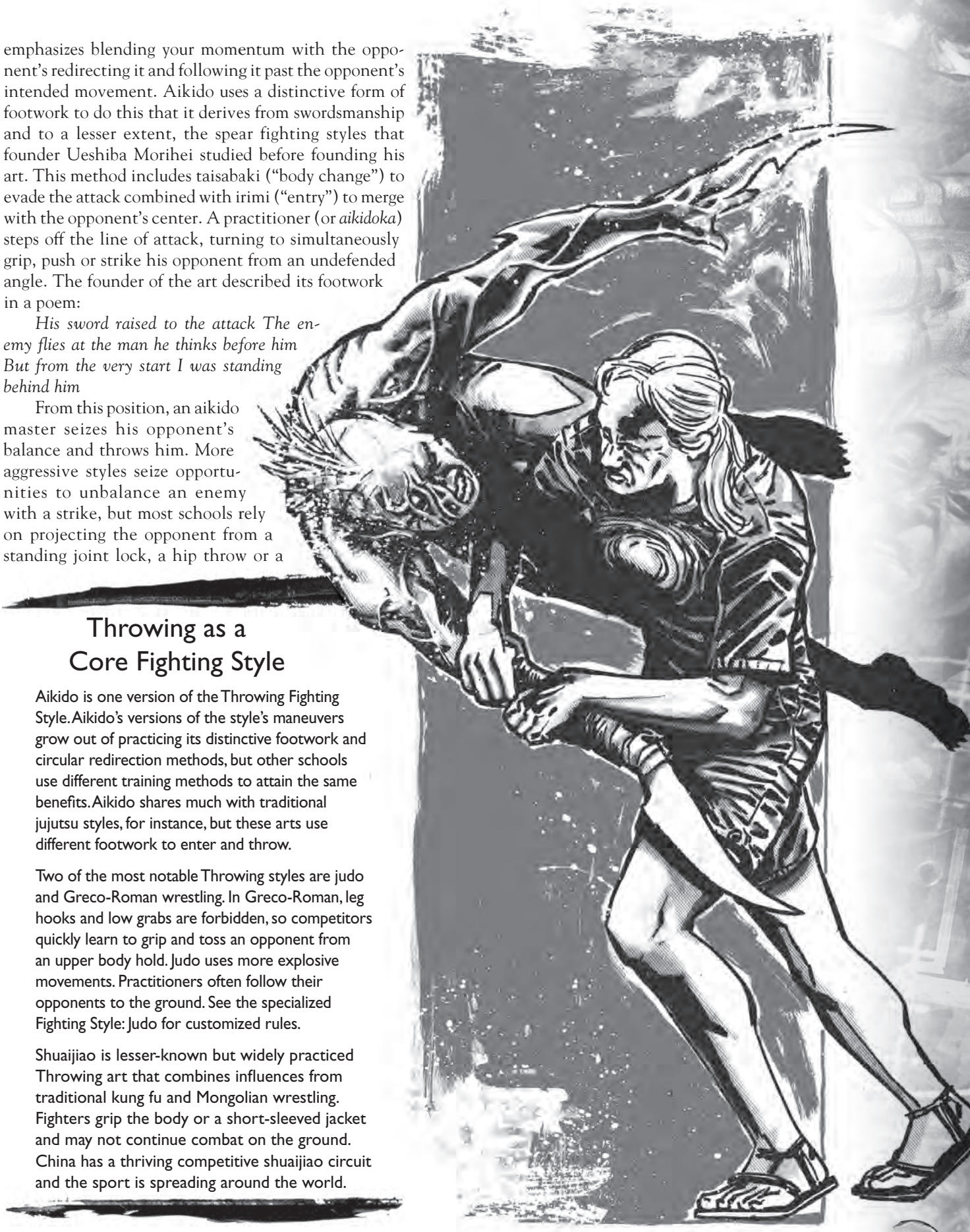
Aikido is one of the best known martial arts in the world, both for its signature spinning and throwing techniques and its philosophy of peace and harmony. Is it effective? That's a matter for debate. Some aikido styles are devoted to *ki* development over application, while others employ brutal training routines meant to pass on practical skills and inspire an esprit de corps among fellow students. The Yoshinkan school used to train Tokyo's riot police with a tortuous course designed to earn students a shodan (first degree black belt rank) in just 11 months.

Aikido's name means the Way (*do*) of Harmony (*ai* means joining, and *ki*, a difficult to translate term, could be called "energy"). The *aiki* name comes from Daito-ryu Aikijujutsu, from which it inherits (and modifies) many core techniques and principles. Like Daito-ryu, aikido

emphasizes blending your momentum with the opponent's redirecting it and following it past the opponent's intended movement. Aikido uses a distinctive form of footwork to do this that it derives from swordsmanship and to a lesser extent, the spear fighting styles that founder Ueshiba Morihei studied before founding his art. This method includes taisabaki ("body change") to evade the attack combined with irimi ("entry") to merge with the opponent's center. A practitioner (or *aikidoka*) steps off the line of attack, turning to simultaneously grip, push or strike his opponent from an undefended angle. The founder of the art described its footwork in a poem:

*His sword raised to the attack The enemy flies at the man he thinks before him But from the very start I was standing behind him*

From this position, an aikido master seizes his opponent's balance and throws him. More aggressive styles seize opportunities to unbalance an enemy with a strike, but most schools rely on projecting the opponent from a standing joint lock, a hip throw or a



## Throwing as a Core Fighting Style

Aikido is one version of the Throwing Fighting Style. Aikido's versions of the style's maneuvers grow out of practicing its distinctive footwork and circular redirection methods, but other schools use different training methods to attain the same benefits. Aikido shares much with traditional jujutsu styles, for instance, but these arts use different footwork to enter and throw.

Two of the most notable Throwing styles are judo and Greco-Roman wrestling. In Greco-Roman, leg hooks and low grabs are forbidden, so competitors quickly learn to grip and toss an opponent from an upper body hold. Judo uses more explosive movements. Practitioners often follow their opponents to the ground. See the specialized Fighting Style: Judo for customized rules.

Shuaijiao is lesser-known but widely practiced Throwing art that combines influences from traditional kung fu and Mongolian wrestling. Fighters grip the body or a short-sleeved jacket and may not continue combat on the ground. China has a thriving competitive shuaijiao circuit and the sport is spreading around the world.

"clothesline" style action that sharply interrupts the opponent's movement. In most cases, the result is an opponent who lands some distance away. If he doesn't know how to fall, impact can hurt – a lot.

In demonstrations, aikido sensei effortlessly spin and throw one "attacker" after another, but these uke (the Japanese term for the training partner who received the technique) aren't resisting her. In the real world, the art is more difficult to apply. It comes with some rough and tumble, a clinch and a sudden twist to slam an opponent to the floor – if the aikidoka can get the upper hand. Not every practitioner trains for hard contact and full resistance, but those that do make the art work according to its principles, though without the flowing beauty most people are used to seeing.

## History

Aikido practitioners don't emphasize it, but the art's founder was a tad eccentric. Ueshiba Morihei (Morihei was his personal name and Ueshiba was his family name, according to the Japanese tradition of putting the surname first) had a sickly childhood and an errant youth that he spent learning several martial arts styles. In 1915, he began training with the infamous Takeda Sokaku, headmaster of the Daito-ryu system. Takeda was known for being a skilled, brutal and greedy teacher. He charged exorbitant fees for every technique. He once killed several construction workers with a sword when they mocked his feudal-style clothing. Ueshiba learned the aiki principle from Takeda along with locking and throwing techniques that would help from the core of aikido.

After earning an instructor's license, Ueshiba taught Daito-ryu Aikijujutsu throughout the 1920s. As time went on, however, it became clear that he didn't share his teacher's sanguine outlook. He'd begun to explore his spiritual interests in 1919, when he began following the Omoto religion, whose founder Deguchi Onisaburo believed he was the prophesied Christian messiah, the Buddha and the rightful ruler of the entire world. In 1924, Ueshiba accompanied the sect to Mongolia, where he was almost executed for his role in a plot to overthrow the local government and install Deguchi as the divine ruler.

He returned to Japan, where taught martial arts to the Japanese military. In 1925 he had a spiritual experience shortly after defeating a naval officer in a wooden sword match. He felt as if he'd been filled with a "golden spirit" that taught him the oneness of all things. He instructed Japanese officers on their way to brutal colonial campaigns throughout the 1930s, but he increasingly maintained that his *budo* (martial arts) should be a vehicle for peace. In 1942, he gave his unique approach the name aikido.

Throughout his life and afterward, Ueshiba was rumored to be capable of superhuman feats. He claimed to see a vivid aura that revealed an opponent's intentions. Senior students (all of whom are now dead) said that he even had the ability to dodge bullets, at one point even arranging for a firing squad to try and kill him. The legend says they took aim and he vanished, appearing behind them – even though the firing squad was 25 yards away. Naturally, there's no proof of this, or of his alleged abilities to turn invisible, see the future or move people without touching them.

## Current Culture

Aikido practitioners follow most Japanese gendai budo (modern martial arts) traditions. They wear the white gi (uniform), though many schools don't use a colored belt to indicate rank until black belt. Most schools add a hakama (a billowing, skirt-like garment that covers the legs) at black belt. Some require that all students to wear them, or don't use it at all. Advanced practitioners usually own a bokken (a wooden sword) and a four-foot jo staff.

Aikido stylists customarily hold the founder of their art in great reverence. They call him O-Sensei ("great teacher") and keep alive many stories of his abilities – some of which strain credulity. Not all aikidoka believe these stories, however. Some consider him a kami ([define kami for the reader] which is not uncommon for notable individuals in Japan) and memorials occasionally skirt the line between recollection and veneration. Many schools practice a form of Shinto-based meditation and ritual purification (misogi) that ultimately descend from Ueshiba Morihei's spiritual pursuits.

Some aikidoka are diehard pacifists who view the art as a way to maintain health develop one's spiritual faculties and spread a message of peace. They see the art's techniques as a metaphor for pacifism. The martial artist blends with force instead of opposing it, giving way to achieve his goals. A few of them even follow the founder's Omoto religion. This pacifist contingent is not the only philosophical branch of the art, however; practitioners are spread across the political spectrum. Certainly, for most of his life, Ueshiba Morihei didn't shy away from the military. He was a military instructor through the Second World War and even made several trips to Japan's Chinese puppet state, Manchukuo.

There are several aikido styles today. All use the same basic techniques; the differences are in emphasis. Some styles are never practiced with combative intent. Others are so-called "hard" aiki arts, said to be closer to the original aikijujutsu in flavor. Many of these differences depend on when a particular aikido master trained with Ueshiba Morihei. Styles that come from early students tend to be rougher and more practical, while later offshoots are often

more devoted to the spiritual precepts of the art. Important branches include:

**Aikikai:** The Aikikai is the main line of aikido, headed by the Ueshiba family line. As of 2008 the *doshu* (headmaster) of the art is the founder's grandson, Ueshiba Moriteru. Aikikai is a diverse style, with many teachers offering their own interpretations of the art within a moderate overall framework.

**Shodokan:** Shodokan is the only major aikido style that holds regular competitions. Practitioners hold randori (unarmed) and tanto-dori (unarmed against a stuffed leather "knife") matches. The late Tomiki Kenji was an accomplished judo player and created the style to complement judo. Many judo techniques are disallowed in Shodokan matches, so practitioners concentrate on 17 basic aikido techniques. Many aikidoka believe that competition is an affront to the art, so Shodokan is a controversial style.

**Yoshinkan:** As mentioned previously, Yoshinkan is a "hard" aikido style, founded by early student Shioda Gozo. Practitioners use vigorous strikes to unbalance opponents, along with a more forceful style of execution.

## Story Hooks

• **11 Months:** The Yoshinkan's brutal 11 month black belt course draws students from around the world. Some have accused instructors of crossing the line from tough coaching to sadism, slamming students' heads into hard floors, forcing them to kneel on bloody knees and imposing severe punishments for the most trivial infractions. It's shameful to drop out; some students may turn to supernatural aid to survive the program. If one of these people develops a thirst for blood right after pinning his partner, what happens next?

• **Ghosts of Manchukuo:** Aikido reached its final form throughout the Second World War. Practitioners were involved in the war effort and regular rubbed shoulders with Imperial Japanese military personnel. Aikido may style itself an "art of harmony," but it was taught to help support one of Asia's most brutal regimes. Senior aikidoka may be privy to horrible crimes. If those have supernatural consequences, they might haunt aikido practitioners – figuratively or literally.

• **Mystical O-Sensei:** The legends around Ueshiba Morihei beg the question of whether (in the World of Darkness, at least) he had supernatural connections. He spoke of being able to predict attacks with visions of auras. Students swore he could vanish and reappear, throw people without touching them and defeat dozens of attackers. Perhaps he was an occultist – or a powerful being worked through him.

## Systems

The following systems are relevant to aikido.

### Fighting Style: Aikido (Throwing; • to •••••)

**Prerequisites:** Dexterity ••, Wits •• and Brawl ••

**Effect:** Your character is a skilled practitioner of aikido, or another martial art that emphasizes throwing the opponent. She knows how to blend with the force of an attack and amplify it to send her enemy sprawling.

Dots purchased in this Merit provide access to special combat maneuvers. Each maneuver is a prerequisite for the next. Aikido maneuvers are based on the Brawl Skill and work in conjunction with unarmed combat. (Some aspects of traditional aikido involve a weapon, but they are beyond the specific purview of this Merit).

**Ukemi ("Receiving;" •):** Your character knows how to fall properly and get up quickly. He may stand up from a prone position (but not both) once per turn as a reflexive action, and is considered to have one point of armor against bashing damage caused by falls – but not other sources.

**Aiki ("Harmonious Energy;" ••):** Your character is skilled enough to defend with a throw by avoiding the attack and seizing his opponent's balance. If he forgoes his standard Defense, roll Dexterity + Brawl; if the result exceeds the opponent's damage roll the character suffers no damage and immediately applies a grappling hold or (once he attains the third maneuver) *shihonage*. He may employ this maneuver against Brawl, Weaponry or close-range Firearms attacks. **Drawback:** This maneuver constitutes your character's action for the turn.

**Shihonage ("Four Directions Throw;" •••):** The character can throw an opponent quickly and forcefully, without getting tangled up in a clinch. Treat a *shihonage* throw like a standard Brawl strike attack, except that it also knocks the opponent prone up to as many feet away as your Size + Brawl successes in any direction the character prefers.

**Renzoku-waza ("Combination Techniques;" ••••):** The character can attempt multiple grappling or *shihonage* attacks per turn, or he can defend with multiple throws using the Aiki maneuver. He may make one additional grapple or *shihonage* for each point of Dexterity that he has above 2. Each extra action is rolled at a cumulative

–1 modifier. Thus, he can attempt two grapples or *shihonage* at Dexterity 3 (with the second at a –1 modifier), three at Dexterity 4 (at a 0, –1 then –2 modifier to dice rolls) and four at Dexterity 5 (at 0, –1, –2 and –3 to each dice roll, in turn). **Drawback:** If the character's first action is anything but a grapple or *shihonage* attempt he cannot use this benefit.

**Kokyu-ho ("Breath Power;" •••••):** Your character's throws are so strong that he can either throw someone double the usual distance with his *shihonage*, or inflict lethal damage with it. **Drawback:** Spend one Willpower point per attack. Note that this Willpower expenditure does not add three dice to the attack.

## Additional Systems

A well-rounded *aikidoka* may learn the following additional Fighting Styles: Controls, Light Sword, and Staff Fighting. Fighting Finesse is a common Merit for practitioners who concentrate on aikiken (aikido sword) techniques. These would constitute a compound form of the art. Additional systems to note:

### New Weapon: Jo

A traditional aikido weapon, this four foot long staff was cut down from the *bo* (six-foot staff) to make it a more agile weapon, especially against the sword. The most famous practitioner was Gonnosuke Muso; he was one of the few people to ever defeat Musashi Miyamoto in a duel. Aikido has its own *jo* techniques, but some practitioners also study Muso's *Shinto-ryu* style.

| Type | Damage | Size | Durability | Cost | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Jo† | 1(B) | 3/N | 1 | • | +1 Defense* |

** Applies against an opponent with a shorter weapon.*
*† This weapon requires two hands. If used one handed, the Strength requirement rises by 1.*

### Hard Style Aikido

*Aikidoka* who practice Yoshinkan or other older "hard" aiki styles put a greater emphasis on striking the opponent to create an opening with which to throw him. This strategy is common in numerous martial arts and is represented by the Entering Strike Merit

**Entering Strike (••)**

**Prerequisite:** Dexterity ••, Brawl •••

**Effect:** Your character knows how to strike an opponent to upset his balance, making it easy for you to take him down. If you inflict damage with a Brawl-based strike, you gain a dice bonus equal to the damage you inflicted to a subsequent grappling hold (or *shihonage*, if you know the Aikido Fighting Style) attempt. This must be your next attack. **Drawback:** Your Defense does not apply during the turn in which you attempt an entering strike.

## Bill Langowski

**Quote:** *I believe in the power of universal love, but I* don't *love you.*

**Background:** Bill Langowski is a very confused middle-aged man. He always loved esoterica; he read books on yoga, qigong and reincarnation, went to meditation retreats and traveled to sacred places in China, India and the Middle East to search for some kind of meaning in his life. He heard numerous answers to life's big questions as he drifted around the world. Only his aikido training provided any solace, and only because when he pushed himself through repetitive drills and spun his way across the mat, he stopped thinking. He'd heard this was supposed to be a virtue, the Zen thing, but even though it calmed him down it never provided the answers he really craved.

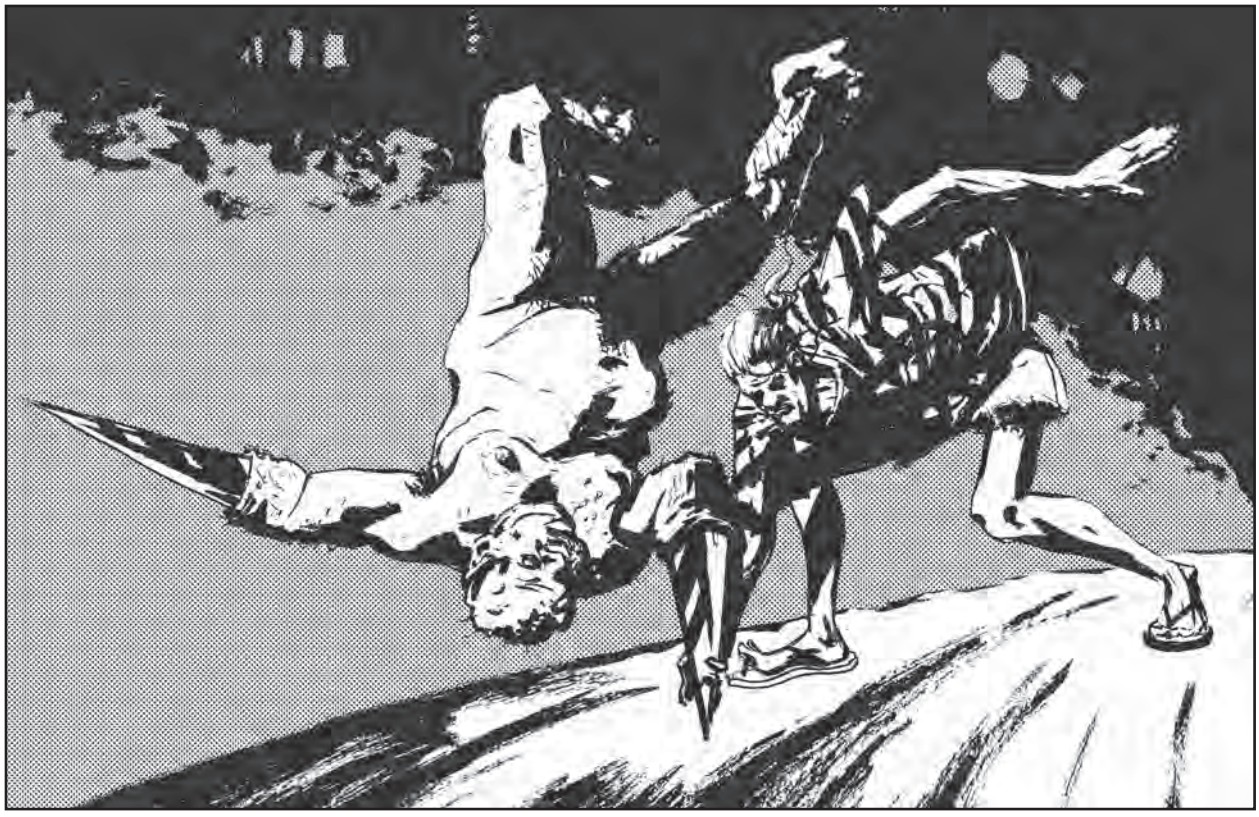
That all changed after he met a new *sensei* named Kenji Toda. He was an independent teacher, unaffiliated with any organization, but he had magical skills. He routinely threw students without touching them, performed entire training sessions blindfolded – even told students what they were thinking. Bill stayed with him for five years, joining a cadre of live-in students who trained with Toda, served him and learned about his spiritual teachings, which seemed to be a combination of the Omoto religion with certain Gnostic beliefs.

One night, a wounded disciple staggered into the dojo while Bill was the only one present; he'd stayed behind to do housekeeping while the other accompanied Toda to some obscure business meeting. She died from multiple stab wounds, but not before telling Bill that there were "spiritual enemies" nearby and that sensei had sent her to deal with them. When the other returned, they helped him bury the woman. Bill learned of a secret struggle between mystics. He would replace the dead disciple, doing whatever was necessary to defend his teacher from the enemy. This rarely involved fighting; he often works as a courier, lookout or intermediary for sensei. He often thinks about the possibility that he may be called to fight and die for his master. It still bothers him; he hates himself for holding a last sliver of doubt.

**Appearance:** Bill Langowski is a barrel-chested, 33 year old hippie. He wears tattered shorts, billowing tie-dyed shirts and sandals. He ties his sun-bleached hair in a ponytail, but a few strands always fall in front of his long nose and watery blue eyes. He moves with more grace than his broad frame would suggest.

**Storytelling Hints:** Characters meet Bill Langowski in his role as an errand boy and enforcer for his occult conspiracy. He seems pretty non-threatening at first because of his appearance and easygoing demeanor, but he has a streetwise edge and enough fighting skill to seriously injure someone before going on his way. He'd rather run than fight to the finish. Even if orders or necessity force him to the point of murder he may well hesitate.

**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 3
**Physical Attributes:** Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3
**Social Attributes:** Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 2



**Mental Skills:** Academics 3 (Religion), Computer 2, Occult 4
**Physical Skills:** Brawl (Grappling) 3, Drive 1, Larceny 2, Survival 1, Weaponry 2 (Staff)
**Social Skills:** Empathy 2, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 1
**Merits:** Aikido ••••, Language (Japanese) ••, Strong Back
**Willpower:** 5
**Morality:** 7
**Virtue:** Faith
**Vice:** Pride
**Initiative:** 5
**Defense:** 3
**Speed:** 11
**Health:** 8
**Weapons/Attacks:**

**Jo:**
**Damage:** 2(B)
**Dice Pool:** 8
**Special:** +1 Defense

**Shihonage:**
**Damage:** 0(B)
**Dice Pool:** 6
**Special:** Throws Opponent 5 + successes feet away

## Armed and Unarmed Defensive Striking as Core Styles

The various schools of iaido focus on careful practice of numerous kata designed to counter attacks made on the individual. Practitioners of the style learn to focus their awareness of their surrounding while repetitiously performing draws and swipes designed to counter and defeat an opponent immediately.

Defensive Striking is not limited to the schools of Japanese swordsmanship, however. Police officers may be trained in similar tactics to avoid attack when wielding a baton while street defense styles such as Krav Maga (below) accomplish similar goals without the use of a weapon at all. Ultimately what makes something a Defensive Striking Style is a focus on avoiding harm while quickly bringing a fight to its conclusion.

Most formalized schools focused on Defensive Striking do not put the same emphasis on drawing a sheathed weapon that iaido does. With the exception of the • maneuver, where iaido maneuvers below require a sheathed blade other Defensive Striking styles do not (though, at Storyteller discretion, they *can* be used if the weapon begins the turn sheathed). Other styles are otherwise mechanically identical.

# Iaido (Armed Defensive Striking)

**Quote:** *To know that one can be attacked at any time is to know all of one's enemies.*

## Description

The man sits, almost squatting, seemingly utterly at rest with his hands resting on his thigh, palms up. His opponent raises his sword to strike, only to fall to the ground moments later as the man wipes his blood from his blade. He turns the sword with a twist of his wrist before sliding it calmly into his sheath.

Iaido, which roughly translates to "the way of awareness and immediate reaction," has become popular in America in recent years due to the influx of interest in Japanese culture, especially that of the samurai. As an art almost solely devoted to quickly drawing one's weapon to defend oneself, the style captures the imagination of amateur and serious martial artists, anime enthusiasts, video-gamers and role-players alike, and appears across several entertainment media. Not every martial art, after all, includes a kata for wiping the blood from one's blade.

Despite its rising popularity, fewer practitioners of iaido exist than many other martial arts styles, so it maintains much of what makes it exotic.

## History

Iaido differs from iaijutsu in that the latter focuses primarily on use in combat while the former maintains a focus on the philosophical underpinnings and spirituality inherent in practicing a martial art. Iaido is a term coined in the early twentieth century to describe a school of sword drawing focused on self-improvement rather than battle, but the two styles share a great deal in common.

Though the art of drawing the sword had existed prior to the sixteenth century (TSKSR, below, included such teachings), the first school to teach iaijutsu as a style separate from kenjutsu was that of Hayashizaki Jinsuke Minamoto no Shigenobu. Hayashizaki supposedly acted as the major early advocate for the style's study as a discreet martial art, but given that so little is known about his life (and some of what is known stretched credulity), some doubt the historicity of his existence. Feats attributed to the first masters of the style include



being able to draw and strike down an opponent in the flash of an eye and sensing the approach of an assassin even when asleep.

There is some disagreement over when the term iaijutsu came into use as well, and the arts that are today known as iaido were once called battojutsu ("the art of drawing the blade"). Iaido's name is part and parcel of the trend in Japanese martial arts to replace the suffix –jutsu ("art") with the suffix –do ("way"), a trend that seeks to emphasize the philosophical components of practice over the martial.

## Story Hooks

• **The Soul's Blade:** One of the characters' enemies has learned that one of their number practices iaido. Knowing that the sword and soul are one in the philosophy of the style, he arranges to have the character's blade stolen. The characters may not realize his intent, to use it as a conduit to channel dark curses into the character from afar, until it is too late. How do they stop him and retrieve their friend's soul? Can they undo the harm that has already been done?

• **Sight beyond Sight:** Iaido encourages a potent awareness of one's surroundings. Some schools take the teachings of Kan Ken No Metsuke as an endorsement of the second sight, and encourage students to peer beyond the everyday, seeing with both the body and the spirit. Unfortunately, this has led to students at a dojo local to the characters, including a friend or relative, to suffer mental breakdowns. They claim to see the ghosts of long dead relatives, the spirits of the natural world, or in some cases things even more bizarre. Is the dojo's location or sensei somehow to blame? Or is there something more to this eastern art than meets the eye? Can the characters help their friends and neighbors, or do they seek the powers of iaido for themselves?

• **Virtual Vigilante:** A mysterious samurai swordsman in the traditional dress of the school has begun patrolling the streets at night. Initially he assaulted criminals and hooligans, earning him the status of local hero. But his vigilantism shifted to abuse of local elderly and children when the criminal element started staying in. No one has died yet, but the characters overhear a local student describing an encounter with the ronin; apparently he looks exactly like a character from a new ultra-violent video game.

## Current Culture

Iaido is often confused with the sport of kendo. So numerous are the distinctions between the two, however, that an individual with even a casual familiarity with the styles should be able to differentiate between them. Iaido utilizes the bokken, a curved wooden replica of the katana, while Kendo students make swift blows with shinai, the straight bamboo sword. Iaido students wear a uniform consisting of a gi, hakama and tabi, while kendo students wear armor and a mask not unlike that of a fencer. Finally and most obviously, kendo focuses on sparring with other students, while iaido students largely practice their swift kata without a partner. That said, the forms have a large amount of crossover in membership, as those interested in one tend to be interested in the other. Hence it is not unusual for a character to possess both the iaido and kendo Fighting Style Merits.

Because iaido masters strongly stress the spiritual well being of their pupils, an iaido dojo usually bears an air of religious serenity. Students and masters alike practice reishiki, a series of rituals including slow, careful movements from the standing to sitting position, deep bows, and reverence to the blade, which some claim represent the soul of the swordsman. Respect is foremost in the dojo, and even an adherent's light zori sandals remain outside of the training area. The reverence a devotee shows to her art and to her weapon can seem cult-like to outsiders. In the World of Darkness, those outsiders may be right.

The quiet nature in which students perform iaido also exists to further their understanding of zanshin ("total awarness" or "remaining mindful"). Zanshin serves a practical as well as spiritual purpose. Iaido, like other defensive arts, stresses avoidance as the best combat defense. Complete perception of one's surroundings allows an individual not only to know oneself, but to know threats to one's being, as well. Mentors encourage pupils to develop their kan ("feeling") and ken ("seeing") that they might sense an opponent's sakki ("killing intentions" or "malicious spirit") before he strikes.

While the philosophy of the style encourages diffusing situations rather than escalating them, the style *does* serve a martial purpose, and those who cannot avoid a situation need also have developed fudoshin. Fudoshin ("the unfettered mind") represents clarity of mind and purpose, and those who have mastered it remain calm in the face of adversity. In short, iaido strongly emphasizes the importance of presence of mind at all times and in any situation.

Numerous schools of iaido have developed around the world, including Muso Shinden-ryu, Muso Jikiden Eishin-ryu, Koden Enshin Ryu, Honmon Enshin Ryu and the standardized seiteigata of the Zen Nihon Kendo Renmei. Tenshin Shoden Katori Shinto-ryu (see p. 100) also teaches similar techniques as part of its curriculum. In North America, teachers for iaido can often be found in dojos that teach akido and kendo.

## Systems

The following systems are relevant to the Iaido Fighting Style.

### Fighting Style: Iaido (Defensive Striking; • to •••••)

**Prerequisites:** Strength ••, Dexterity •••, Composure •••, Weaponry •••, Quick Draw

**Effect:** Your character has studied the art of iaido, focusing her awareness of her surroundings and her ability to respond to a threat to the razor's edge. She has learned to draw a blade at a moment's notice, and has internalized kata focused on swiping the blade across her opponent's vitals.

Practitioners of iaido often cultivate the Wits Attribute, as speed of thought and awareness of one's surroundings are valued by adherents of the style.

Dots purchased in this Merit provide access to special combat maneuvers. Each maneuver is a prerequisite for the next. Iaido maneuvers are based on the Weaponry Skill and are used with a curved sword, most commonly the katana.

**Tsuki Kage ("Draw and Cut;" •):** The character sharpens his already capable ability to quickly enter combat. If the character begins combat with his weapon sheathed, he adds his rating in the Weaponry Skill to his Initiative modifier. If the Storyteller utilizes the optional initiative rule from page 151 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, this bonus applies on any turn in which the character's weapon begins the turn sheathed. **Drawback:** The character must commit to an attack against an opponent during the first turn of combat to gain the advantage of this maneuver.

**Zanshin ("Awareness;" ••):** While honing the speed of one's reactions can save one's life, better still to be constantly vigilant. The character strives to remain ever aware of his surroundings, that he may never be taken by surprise. The character gains a bonus of two dice to all rolls to avoid an impending ambush. This Merit duplicates the effect of the Danger Sense Merit, and a character with both Merits gains a total +4 on rolls to avoid being surprised. Such characters are paragons of self-awareness.

**Tachi-Sabaki ("Movement of the Sword;" •••):** The character has mastered defensive kata designed to intercept incoming attacks and deflect them with the blade of the weapon. The character relies as much on the quality of his sword as he does his own speed of thought and motion. The character adds his weapon bonus (the weapon's damage rating) to his Dodge value when taking a fully defensive action. A character may benefit from this Merit while utilizing the Weaponry Dodge Merit (though not the Brawling Dodge Merit). **Drawback:** The character only benefits from this Merit when taking a full Dodge action.

**Kan Ken No Metsuke ("Seeing with Eyes and Mind;" ••••):** The character's speed gives him a small but potentially important edge over other combatants. If the character's initiative roll results in a tie with another character involved in combat, the character automatically acts before his opponents and allies. Initiative Modifiers are not compared and initiative is never determined by a roll-off (though if multiple characters aside from the iaido practitioner rolled the same initiative, their initiative ratings are resolved as normal). If two characters possess this maneuver, they act *at the same time*, each resolving their action as if the other had not yet acted. This can result in two characters killing each other in the same heated moment.

**Uke Nagashi ("Catch and Slide Off;" •••••):** The character's ability to move defensively and counter an attack with one of his own has been perfected. If the character's weapon is sheathed, he can declare a Dodge action at any point during a turn, assuming she has not yet acted. His Defense is doubled as usual, though he may not utilize Weaponry Dodge or Tachi-Sabaki against attacks. However, the character can choose any opponent who is making an attack against him to perform a counter attack against. In a single swift motion, the character draws his blade, parries his enemy's blow, and attacks his opponent. The character's Weaponry Dodge (if he possesses it) and Tachi-Sabaki maneuver apply against the opponent's attack (and only against this opponent). The character makes an immediate reflexive attack against the opponent at a one die penalty. After making his counter-attack, the character's Defense applies as normal to further attacks made against him during the turn (i.e., his Defense is not doubled). Defense penalties for being attacked multiple times during a single turn are not affected by this maneuver in any way. **Drawback:** The character spends one Willpower point per turn using this maneuver.

## Additional Systems

**Honmon Enshin Ryu's Iai Kenpo**

A modern school of iaido, Enshin Ryu teaches jujutsu and suemonogiri (the practice of cutting), but possesses a strong focus on being attacked from

behind. Students of this style may purchase the following specialized maneuver instead of Kan Ken No Metsuke, above.

**Muso-Ken ("No-thought Sword;" ••••):** The character draws, turns, and thrusts his blade at a potential enemy in a single motion. A character with this Merit may make a reflexive counter-attack when successfully attacked at point-blank range by an opponent by surprise. **Drawback:** This maneuver requires the user to expend a Willpower point. It constitutes the character's action for the turn, though if used before initiative is rolled, the character may act on his initiative as usual.

## Justin Yamata

**Quote:** *I don't want to hear what you think you know about samurai shit. I'm a fucking modern street samurai, bitch. I'm a fucking cowboy.*

**Background:** Justin Yamata didn't grow up in the rough part of town, but one would hardly know it when meeting him. His ultra-traditional Japanese-American parents set a strict regimen of study for him from a young age, including academics, English, Japanese, Latin, mathematics, and science, as well as a physical exercise program of aerobic exercise and martial arts. While his older brother took to the studies with zeal, Justin only used what he learned to start (and finish) fights at his chic private prep school.

After a short stint in juvenile detention (fast on the heels from being expelled from his second private high school), Justin's father decided that his boy needed common sense taught to him at the end of his fists. But Justin had internalized his father's training, and when Justin fled his family's home, his father lay dying on the carpet in his bedroom.

The years since have witnessed Justin's rise in the local Asian crime community. His street smarts and skills have earned him a great deal of renown among his peers, while his incredibly brutal methods have made him a target of local law enforcement. Justin doesn't particularly care either way. He lives forever in the now, with little concern given to his past or future.

**Appearance:** A wiry young man in his early twenties, Justin's obviously Japanese features and fluent understanding of that language sets him as an outsider in any place save a heavily ethnic neighborhood. His English combines a light Japanese accent with the ghetto-slang and gangsta-talk of rap albums. He keeps his head clean-shaven, which, combined with his thin face, gives him the impression of a sleek predator. He wears loose clean clothing, often slightly too large for his small frame. He usually carries his



father's katana, an expertly crafted blade in a scabbard of rich cherry wood.

**Storyteller Hints:** Scholars of evolution could hold up Justin's instinctual responses to most stimuli as proof of their theories. Like an animal, he acts without thought, lashing out at any danger that presents itself. He has little patience for complex situations, preferring to cut his way to the truth. He has a gang of followers, but no actual interest in leading them. He sticks to small crime; like a predator he takes what he needs when he needs it. Organized crime would take more time and effort than Justin is willing to put into any endeavor.

**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 2, Wits 4, Resolve 2
**Physical Attributes:** Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3
**Social Attributes:** Presence 3, Manipulation 1, Composure 3
**Mental Skills:** Academics 1, Computer 2, Occult 1, Politics 1, Science 1
**Physical Skills:** Athletics (Running) 2, Brawl (Dirty Fighting) 3, Drive 1, Firearms 1, Larceny 2, Stealth 2, Weaponry (Katana) 3
**Social Skills:** Animal Ken 2, Empathy 1, Intimidation 3, Socialize 1, Streetwise (Asian Neighborhoods) 3
**Merits:** Allies (Gang •••), Danger Sense, Disarm, Fame •, Fast Reflexes ••, Fighting Style: Iaido ••••, Fighting Style: Kung Fu ••••, Language (Japanese, Latin), Quick Draw (Weaponry), Resources •••
**Willpower:** 5
**Morality:** 3 (Narcissism, Paranoia)
**Virtue:** Faith
**Vice:** Greed
**Initiative:** 9
**Defense:** 4
**Speed:** 12
**Health:** 8
**Armor:** 1/0 (Kung Fu; applies against Bashing damage only)
**Weapons/Attacks:**

**Focused Attack:**
**Damage:** 0(B)
**Range:** —
**Dice Pool:** 6
**Special:** –1 to opponent's armor or –1 penalty when attacking a specified target.

**Katana:**
**Damage:** 3(L)
**Range:** —
**Dice Pool:** 10
**Special:** —

**.38 Special:**
**Damage:** 2(L)
**Range:** 20/40/80
**Dice Pool:** 7
**Special:** —

# Krav Maga (Unarmed Defensive Striking)

**Quote:** *This isn't about looking pretty or cool. It's about survival.*

## Description

Three assailants converge on a woman. One shoves a gun in her face, shouting at her. She moves suddenly, pulling him off balance and ripping the gun from his hand even as he fires it once uselessly into the air. She slams the butt of the gun into the man's temple, sending him to the ground as his companions move in, each armed with a knife. She turns on them. She kicks the second man in the crotch. As he reels in pain, she spins to face her other assailant, bringing the gun to bear on him. She merely says "Go," and he turns and runs.

Krav Maga's core philosophy is one of practicality. It recognizes that when one is in danger he rarely starts on even footing with his assailant. Students learn to quickly turn the tables on their opponents, ending a fight expediently through use of sharp applied force, including to the face and genitals. Students train in distracting conditions such as under strobe lights and deafening music, sharpening their awareness in the worst conditions. Survival is key, adherents learn, and one survives by immediately neutralizing threats and escaping without being harmed.

### History

Imi Lichtenfeld, a boxer and wrestler living in Bratislava in Austria-Hungary (and the modern capitol of Slovakia), recognized that boxing had little to do with real world combat while defending his friends and neighbors among the Jewish community from anti-Semitic riots. His years engaged in streetfighting against the (very human) forces of darkness helped him develop a thorough understanding of the differences between sports and actual combat. He worked to combine the most useful aspects of several martial arts into a single practical whole, naming his creation Krav Maga (literally "close combat"). He taught his martial art to the community, which eventually used it against the Nazi militia during the Second World War.

Lichtenfeld left Bratislava in 1940, settling in what would later become Israel. He passed Krav Maga on to military organizations operating in the Holy Land at the time, where it was used in the war to create the state of Israel. The Israeli Defense Force later adapted and adopted the form for its own use (Lichtenfeld served as a top instructor). Over the decades Israel's constant state of war resulted in the practical use and refinement of the style. To this day, each IDF soldier is trained in

the basics of Krav Maga, the chosen defense style in a country in which the living inhabitants outnumber the firearms only 2 to 1.

The style, which focuses on fast reaction and sharp, violent blows, traveled to the Americas in 1980, where it quickly garnered adherents within the FBI. Between its use by Israel and by the FBI, Krav Maga has garnered a reputation as *the* martial art of the modern secret agent. Since then the style has risen in popularity and exposure. Recently a number of television programs and video games have showcased the style.

## Current Culture

Today Krav Maga is most widely practiced in the Israeli Defense Force, but is gaining popularity among both adherents and fans of martial arts in general. The speed, brutality and non-lethality of the style make it a popular choice for combatants in action entertainment. The focus on self-defense makes it a popular choice with groups that have historically suffered predation (including those who take up the hunt against the evils of the World of Darkness).

Training in Krav Maga tends to be an intense and difficult experience (and quite the workout). Though trainers instruct students to wear padding and never try to injure a fellow student when sparring, they also insist on students putting their entire strength behind their blows. Not only do the attackers get the practice they need to apply their style in real-life situations, the person taking the punches learns how to take a blow.

## Systems

The following system represents the Krav Maga Fighting Style Merit.

### Krav Maga as a Compound Style

Imi Lichtenfeld combined what he felt were the most effective movements from several styles to design Krav Maga. At the Storyteller's discretion, a character might learn Krav Maga as a compound Fighting Style (see p. 95) that includes Evasive and Aggressive Striking, Throwing and both Armed and Unarmed Defensive Striking.

### Fighting Style: Krav Maga (Defensive Striking; • to •••••)

**Prerequisites:** Strength ••, Dexterity •••, Wits •••, Brawl •••, Brawling Dodge

**Effect:** Your character practices Krav Maga, and has become competent in an unarmed variant of Defensive Striking. Dots purchased in this Merit provide access to special combat maneuvers. Each maneuver is a prerequisite for the next. Krav Maga maneuvers are based on the Brawl Skill unless otherwise noted and are used unarmed.

**Immediate Defense (•):** The character has learned to act quickly to neutralize a threat and make a fast escape. She gains a bonus equal to her Initiative equal to her Brawl Skill when fighting armed opponents.

**Disarming Defense (••):** The character twists her torso out of danger while grabbing her opponent's wrist and pulling him forward, using her own torso for leverage as she tears his weapon from his hand. This acts as the Disarm Merit save that it utilizes the Brawl Skill. Rather than knocking the weapon away, the character takes the weapon from her opponent, and may use it the following turn.

**Impenetrable Defense (•••):** The character knows that offense and defense are one in the same. The character may add his rating in his Brawl Skill to his Defense or Dodge against a single incoming attack. The bonus from this maneuver combines with that from Brawling Dodge. **Drawback:** The character must expend a Willpower point to perform this maneuver. This maneuver is reflexive, and a character may use it and perform an instant action (such as attacking) so long as she did not use the Dodge action.

**The First Moment (••••):** The character has trained her reaction time to a tenth of a second, acting more by instinct than thought. If the character's initiative roll results in a tie with another character involved in combat, the character automatically acts before his opponents and allies. Initiative Modifiers are not compared and initiative is never determined by a roll-off (though if multiple characters aside from the Krav Maga practitioner rolled the same initiative, their initiative ratings are resolved as normal). If two characters possess this maneuver, they act *at the same time*, each resolving their action as if the other had not yet acted. This can result in two characters killing each other in the same heated moment.

**Finishing the Fight (•••••):** The character moves defensively, but knows when to lash out at an enemy to bring him crashing to the ground. The character declares and benefits from a Dodge action (including Brawling Dodge, if she possesses it). She may abort that action to make an immediate, reflexive counter-attack against an opponent whose attack fails to overcome her Dodge trait. **Drawback:** This maneuver costs the character one Willpower point to enact. After making her counter-attack, the character loses her Defense for the remainder of the turn.

## Additional Systems

**New Merit: The Weapon at Hand (••)**

**Prerequisite:** Fighting Style: Krav Maga (Defensive Striking) ••

**Effect:** Krav Maga teaches its adherents that efficacy trumps style in every case. Exposed to purposefully harsh conditions, mentors train their pupils to quickly recognize and obtain the most useful improvised implement of destruction in her immediate surroundings, whether it be a bottle of gin, a pool cue or even a stapler. The results can be brutal.

A character with this Merit may roll Wits + Weaponry as a reflexive action to ascertain what nearby object is both useful and available for use as a deadly weapon. On a success, the Storyteller relates to her the nearest and most efficacious improvised weapon, which she may then take up as an instant action (or as a reflexive action if she possesses the appropriate Quick Draw Merit). On a dramatic success, the character finds a weapon so perfect that it does not suffer the usual –1 penalty for being improvised.

Storytellers are encouraged to be creative with this Merit. Rarely does a character find herself in a situation in which absolutely nothing can be used as a weapon.

## Leah Cohen

**Quote:** *I need to know how to do this. I need to know how to stay safe.*

**Background:** Raised in Chicago's Rogers Park neighborhood, Leah was a shy and quiet girl who found her escape from a somewhat oppressively traditional family in books, most often at the public library. She parleyed excellent marks in high school into a scholarship to the University of Chicago, transforming the length of the city into a barrier between herself and parents she found herself less and less able to understand.

Instantly popular with her professors, Leah rose to academic prominence in her department, joining a number of honor societies before securing a degree in Religion and the Humanities. Her studies inspired in her a new appreciation for the accomplishments of her parents and grandparents, and she determined to join the Israeli Border Guard for a two-year stint immediately out of college.

What she witnessed in the Middle East changed her. Were the violence and constant religious tension not enough, her mind began slipping from her



during those long desert nights. She felt haunted, pursued by some manner of creature, a shadowy beast with the voice of a screech owl. She couldn't help but think of the *lilitu* of her childhood stories.

The darkness never came for her, but when Leah returned to the United States, she returned a different person. The fires of ambition had left her and she found a job as a page at the central library.

Recently the old fear has returned. She's sure that something has followed her from across the ocean and centuries from the cradle of civilization. Every so often she spots something watching her, either at the library, on the street, or even at her front door, a shadowy woman whose appearance matches her own a little too closely for comfort.

Something that wants her life.

**Appearance:** Leah cuts an almost androgynous figure, all lines and angles, from her straight bistre hair to her high cheeks to her flat chest. Her conservative dress consists largely of severe slacks, collared shirts, and sweater vests in autumn colors, granting her the strict appearance of a librarian older than her twenty-five years. Dusky olive skin and dark eyes betray her Middle Eastern descent.

**Storyteller Hints:** Leah fears losing not only her life, but her very identity. She trained in Krav Maga during her time in Israel and has recently taken up the style again at a local school. The school teaches Japanese martial arts as well, and while she has doubts about the expertise of her sensei and the efficacy of the kata he teaches, she absorbs them with a hunger born of desperation.

Though extremely intelligent and knowledgeable, Leah has become an emotionally hollow person. She knows fear and wariness, but little else. She would be mad, were her fears not well founded. She knows that a confrontation is inevitable, and until then she works each night to ensure that she stands over her stalker's corpse as victor.

Characters are most likely to come into contact with Leah either through training with her, in which case they might wonder why the woman is so intensely pursuing self-defense, or they may make her acquaintance when researching the supernatural at the city public library. They must tread carefully or they may give her a reason to unleash a fury cultivated in constant tension upon them; unfortunately for the characters, they likely have no idea how close she is to cracking until she finally does.

**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 2
**Physical Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2
**Social Attributes:** Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 3
**Mental Skills:** Academics (Religion, Judaism) 2, Computer 1, Crafts 1, Investigation 1, Medicine (First Aid) 1, Occult 2, Politics 1, Science 2
**Physical Skills:** Athletics 1, Brawl 3, Drive 1, Firearms 3, Stealth 1, Weaponry 3
**Social Skills:** Animal Ken 1, Empathy (Sense Motives) 2, Intimidation 1, Socialize 1, Subterfuge (Hiding Fear) 2
**Merits:** Brawling Dodge, Danger Sense, Disarm, Encyclopedic Knowledge, Fighting Style: Combat Marksmanship •, Fighting Style: Armed Defensive Striking ••, Fighting Style: Krav Maga ••••, Fighting Style: Evasive Striking •, Fighting Style: Throwing ••, Language (Hebrew), Quick Draw (Firearms and Weaponry), Resources •, The Weapon at Hand
**Willpower:** 5
**Morality:** 5 (Suspicion)
**Virtue:** Fortitude
**Vice:** Wrath
**Initiative:** 6
**Defense:** 3
**Speed:** 10
**Health:** 7
**Weapons/Attacks:**

**Focused Attack:**
**Damage:** 0(B)
**Range:** —
**Dice Pool:** 5
**Special:** –1 to opponent's armor or –1 penalty when attacking a specified target.

**M1911A1:**
**Damage:** 3(L)
**Range:** 30/60/120
**Dice Pool:** 9
**Special:** Usually kept in home.

# Langschwert (Heavy Sword)

**Quote**: *They don't call it the Fool's Guard because the* fencer *is foolish.*

## Description

European martial arts are undergoing a revival. While there's still considerable debate as to the nature and extent of the old Western martial arts culture, it's indisputable that Europeans systematized their own fighting methods. Some have parallels in the Asian styles, but others are unique. Modern practitioners are trailblazers, reconstructing centuries-old traditions with a mix of study, experimentation and borrowing from other arts.

One of the most famous historical styles is the German School of the 14th to 17th centuries. Masters taught a variety of weapons and wrestling methods, but are best known for skill in the *langschwert*. This "long sword" isn't the one-handed weapon popularized by fantasy fiction (or labeled as such in the original

**World of Darkness: Armory**), but a two-handed, double-edged blade. Nowadays, people call a true langschwert a "bastard sword," so Fighting Style: Langschwert applies to that weapon and larger, two-handed blades, as well as long clubs with the same dimensions.

Modern practitioners interpret historical manuals by comparing them with techniques from surviving traditions and actually practicing the moves themselves. Study groups exchange notes over the Internet. They combine historical and modern training methods. A modern European martial arts practitioner might train with a the medieval Pell, but spar with a training sword built from PVC pipe, copper tubing, high-impact foam and some intelligently-applied duct tape.

Langschwert fighting is based on a combination of basic *huten* (defenses), fundamental "master cuts" (*meisterhauen*) and particular rules for using timing and force. Ultimately, the goal is to seize *vor* ("before," or offensive timing), use strength against weakness and weakness against strength – familiar concepts to martial artists the world over. A master blends with the force of a strong strike to put her enemy off-balance and hits hard the second she senses an opening. Langschwert fighters pay special attention to rhythm and timing. Someone with a lighter blade can afford to furtively probe the enemy's defense, but with a heavy sword, every blow is more committed. That's why a true master of the sword carefully chooses the right time to strike.

## History

This isn't the first resurgence of interest in archaic European martial arts, but it's the first one where practitioners have had access to so many old texts. The oldest known surviving *fechtbuch* ("fight book") is now called *Royal Armouries Ms. I.33*, and contains fighting techniques for the sword and buckler. Like most such texts, *I.33* seems to be written for educated, civilian students. Interestingly, it defies stereotype by depicting Christian monks and women as combat arts practitioners. The way it's written also suggests that *fechtbuchs* weren't new or unusual treatises at the time.

There is evidence that European martial arts become more widespread toward the end of the Late Medieval period. Before that but they were mostly taught to the warrior aristocracy. Until the rise of urban centers and a rudimentary middle class, the sword was a family affair. Martial arts tournaments were common, however. These *haslitudes* included familiar events like the joust, melee and pas d'armes (the last being the root of the "knight guarding a bridge" scenario).

In the 14th Century, Johannes Liechtenauer founded the most famous German sword fighting style. His original works are lost, but many sources refer to him by name and lay claim to his teachings. He was a key figure in a trend that saw martial arts move from the rural, martial nobility to the urban gentry. Fencing masters formed guilds and claimed monopolies over martial arts training. This way, the German langschwert style enjoyed three centuries of prominence before it was supplanted by the Italian rapier. By the late 1600s, the school was gone.

Over the next 400 years, people occasionally researched the style, but it always fell out of favor before

### Heavy Sword as a Core Fighting Style

Cultures around the world used heavy swords. Older Japanese kenjutsu styles often use a sword larger than the katana, since that sword's size was standardized (and somewhat reduced) at the end of the feudal era. There are no firm differences between these *tachi* and a katana; both are called daito ("large swords") in contrast to smaller blades like wakizashi. At the same time, there's no official upper limit to a daito's size. Examples of gigantic (six feet and larger) daito exist. Many of these were probably only ceremonial swords and gifts instead of battlefield weapons, though they are often built sturdily enough for that use. (The same can't be said of the decorative blades you might buy at an anime convention, however). For our purposes though, any Size 3 sword can be used as a Heavy Sword, while a Size 2 weapon uses the Light Sword styles.

Several Chinese arts (notably baguazhang) employ heavy swords. India, the Middle East and most of Europe have examples of these weapons. The most famous European two-handed swords include the German zweihander and the Scottish claymore. These are larger than the traditional langschwert, but you may use the Heavy Sword Fighting Style nonetheless. Outside sword using cultures, long clubs might also use Fighting Style.

One more thing: "Heavy sword" is a relative term. Swords employed by this Fighting style typically weigh five or six pounds – seven on the outside. By contrast, an arming sword (what people commonly, if inaccurately call a "long sword") was two or three pounds.

anyone could establish a new, enduring tradition. This state of affairs continued until the late 20th Century, when people developed a new appreciation for Medieval and Renaissance customs (and their analogs in fantasy fiction). At first, groups like the Society for Creative Anachronism were more interested in an idealized vision of both periods, but over time, enthusiasts began to study history (or at least reinvent it) with more grit and detail.

## Current Culture

Nowadays, several groups study the old fechtbuchs and recreate their teachings. Members include a mix of serious martial artists, amateur historians and Ren Faire enthusiasts. Some groups enjoy comparing notes with others – but not all. European martial arts scholars revived a dead tradition, but without a long tradition, they suffer disputes over what constitutes a legitimate interpretation of their primary sources. Arguments and rivalries abound – just like in other martial arts.

Many study groups are informal scenes, but a few have formal rank and testing procedures. They often use the old School of Defense ranks, which accepted ranks such as Scholar, Free Scholar, Provost and Master. Some organizations require students to "play for the prize" by fighting mock duels for rank.

Other requirements and duties vary between nothing (show up and practice, and you're accepted) to elaborate equipment requirements, rules of etiquette and unspoken assumptions. Some schools charge fees, but few of them are full-blown commercial enterprises. They merely need enough money to rent gym space.

The modern European sword culture is growing, but it's still difficult to find training equipment that suits its needs. Out of necessity, members build padded sparring weapons, wooden "wasters" designed to simulate the weight of real swords, and even real arms and armor.

## Story Hooks

• **The Deathless Master:** Even though most people learn a revived form of langschwert, there are exceptions: immortals. In the World of Darkness, a few creatures live unnaturally long in the shadow of history. The best known of them are vampires, but there may be others: alchemists who dismiss the rot of ages with secret formulae, cursed warriors searching for the one thing that can slay them and other strange, obscure people who learned the long sword when it was a true weapon of war. Characters may encounter them as teachers or enemies. They've all had had a very long time to make enemies and nurture plots.

• **Magic Swords:** In the World of Darkness enchanted weapons are not anonymous objects that provide straightforward game bonuses. They're born of strange rites and have sinister histories. If fate links a character to a magical sword, she might learn how to use it to protect herself from the cults and schemes that surround it. Plus, the sword might be cursed . . . .

• **Ren Faire Horror:** Switch things up by setting a standard horror story at an SCA tourney, Renaissance Faire or European Martial Arts gathering. If a monster stalks one of these, you can mix the basic plot with a smattering of interesting characters, from the terrified nerd whose historical knowledge might hold the key to beating the beast, to gung-ho langschwert practitioners who can't wait to use their training "for real."

## Systems

The following systems apply to the Langschwert style.

### Fighting Style: Langschwert (Heavy Sword; • to •••••)

**Prerequisites:** Strength ••• and Weaponry •••

**Effect:** Your character is skilled in the German two-handed long sword style, or another martial art that specializes in using a long two-handed sword or stick.

Dots purchased in this Merit provide access to special combat maneuvers. Each maneuver is a prerequisite for the next. Langschwert maneuvers are based on the Weaponry Skill and work in conjunction with a Size 3 or 4 blade or staff.

**Wards (•):** Your character knows how to use his weapon to deflect and threaten away attacks. Add 1 to his Defense when he wields a weapon compatible with this Fighting Style.

**Fool's Guard (••):** Your character knows how to hold his weapon low to seemingly invite attack, but when the opponent strikes, he can quickly raise it to counter. Instead of offering a normal Defense, roll Strength + Weaponry + 1 die against the opponent's attack. This is an instant action. Each success reduces the attack's damage by 1, and if the characters successes exceed the attacker's, the difference is inflicted upon the attacker as damage from the character's weapon **Drawback:** The character cannot employ his Defense in any turn where he uses the Fool's Guard.

**Half Sword (•••):** Your character grabs the midpoint of his weapon to rain more powerful thrusts and blows at a shorter range, almost as if he was using the blade as a small spear. If his attack succeeds, add 2 to the weapon's damage (do not add this as the weapon's equipment bonus, but after rolling). **Drawback:** The weapon's reduced range nullifies the Wards maneuver, so the character loses its Defense bonus. It also reduces the character's Weaponry-based dice pool by one.

**Doubling Cut (••••):** Your character strikes the enemy with two quick cuts. He can make two Weaponry attacks against an opponent in the same turn. **Drawback:** Your character cannot employ his Defense or the Fool's Guard in the same turn as he uses this maneuver.

**Wrathful Cut (•••••):** Your character steps in with a powerful blow, capable of overwhelming his enemy's defenses. When he makes an All-Out Attack (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 157), add his Weaponry dots instead of the normal +2 bonus. **Drawback:** Your character cannot employ his Defense or the Fool's Guard in the same turn as he uses this maneuver.

## Other Systems

Some langschwert schools teach period wrestling, knife fighting, pole arms and even archery. If they're taught together, langschwert becomes one part of a compound Fighting Style that includes Submission Grappling, Knife Fighting, Light Sword, Staff Fighting, Spear Fighting and Archery.

**Merit: Armored Fighting (•• or ••••)**

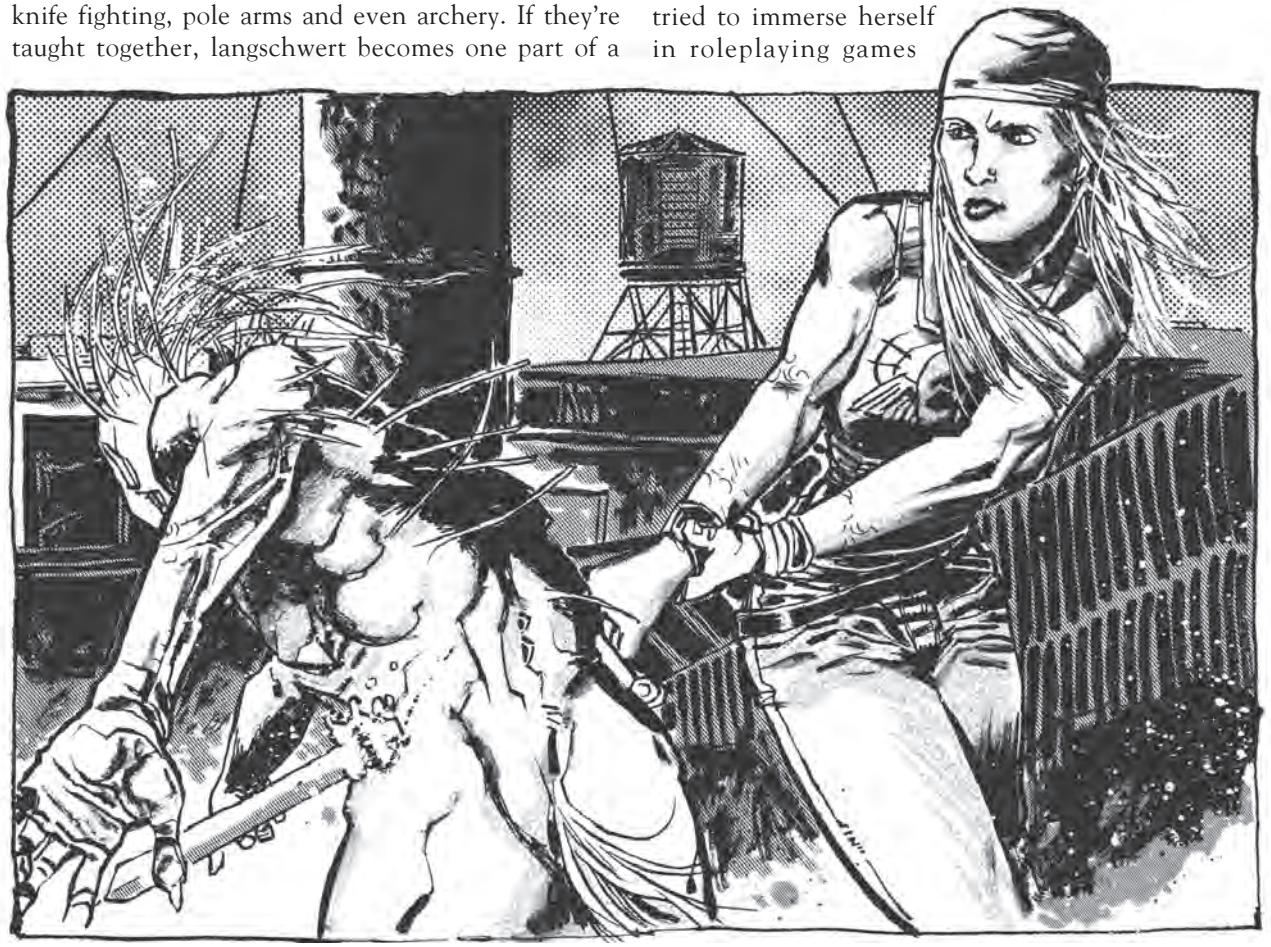
**Prerequisites:** Strength •••, Stamina •••

**Effect:** Langschwert groups that emphasize historical techniques learn to fight in full armor. They know how to move and conserve energy in heavy chain mail or even full plate. These skills aren't exclusive to European martial artists. They're also found in Japanese koryu and modern military combatives. Your character knows how to fight in heavy armor. Every two dots in this Merit (at •• or ••••) reduce her Brawl, Melee Defense and Speed penalties for heavy armor by 1.

## Freya Weyland

**Quote:** *If I didn't know how to use it, I wouldn't know how to make it.*

**Background:** Freya Weyland was born Frieda Meir. Her family taught her three things: a love of medieval fantasy, the value of committed, hard work and a low tolerance for bullshit. These things clashed frequently as she grew up. She dreamed of being a fantasy novelist but she wasn't a great writer. Unfortunately, her work ethic drove her to spend eight years figuring this out as an English major and a disciplined but unsuccessful writer. She tried to immerse herself in roleplaying games



and reenactment groups to satisfy her creative urges, but they just didn't care for the people she met.

On the other hand, she loved period crafts. People bothered her, but nobody could argue with a well-made helmet or sword. She apprenticed herself to a smith; it only took a year for her work to match his. Still, she wasn't satisfied, and wanted to offer customers something few others could. She hit upon the answer watching armored fighters go at it from her booth at a Ren Faire. She decided to learn the sword so that she could claim her weapons were designed for "real fighters." Once again, her drive rewarded her. Her new swords were impeccably balanced and tough. She took "Freya Weyland" as a moniker to sell her work. Now, few people know her by any other name.

Freya Weyland is a well-regarded sword smith with a reputation for turning out functional weapons. This has led to some strange contacts. One man ordered a sword that could cut real targets, but demanded useless silver edging. Other people have requested odd Latin mottos or the right to burn odd-smelling herbs in the smithy. Six months ago, the police grilled her because they found one of her weapons beside the severed head of a priest – and last month, a priest from the same diocese ordered a German long sword with enough room in the hilt to store a relic. Things are getting weird. Freya's not rich, but she's thinking of hiring someone to investigate her customers anyway.

**Appearance:** Freya's long blonde hair has noticeable brown roots, but the rest of her fits the tall, blue-eyed Nordic stereotype. She has muscular arms from hundreds of hours at the anvil and langschwert training. Freya prefers tough working clothes and a bandanna to keep her hair back. If someone looked closely at her arms, they'd see a few little burn scars from minor accidents.

**Storytelling Hints:** Freya's brushed against the secret world because her obsession with making the finest "practical" swords have attracted the very small set of people who still use them as weapons. Unbeknownst to her, her clients may very well include anachronistic vampires, monster hunters who need to chop of heads, occult societies of ritual duelists, or necromancers who use zombies for proxy sword fights. Who knows? She doesn't – and that's starting to creep her out. She loves *stories* about magic, but hates real belief in the supernatural, so she wants to know why she's attracting these kooks.

Freya's swords are more than sturdy historical pieces – they're real improvements on age-old designs. She still sells reproductions, but her line of "battle blades" is getting more and more popular. They incorporate high-tech materials and craft methods to reduce weight, improve balance and resist wear and rust. Characters may *also* be the kind of "kooks" who need a street-worthy sword, so they might become customers. She also makes armor, but swords are her real passion.

**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 3
**Physical Attributes:** Strength 4, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3
**Social Attributes:** Presence 3, Manipulation 2, Composure 2
**Mental Skills:** Academics 3, Crafts (Smithing) 4, Science 2
**Physical Skills:** Athletics 3, Brawl 2, Drive 1, Weaponry 3 (Sword)
**Social Skills:** Empathy 3, Intimidation 3 (Strong Arm Tactics)
**Merits:** Armored Fighting (Medieval) ••, Fighting Style: Langschwert •••, Strong Back, Weaponry Dodge
**Willpower:** 5
**Morality:** 7
**Virtue:** Fortitude
**Vice:** Pride
**Initiative:** 8
**Defense:** 2 (+1 w. Sword)
**Speed:** 11
**Health:** 8
**Weapons/Attacks:**
**Bastard Sword:**
**Damage:** 3/4*(L)
**Range:** n/a
**Dice Pool:** 10/11
**Special:** Used 1 or 2 Handed.
* One-handed/Two-Handed

## Qinna (Controls)

**Quote:** *Does it hurt?*

### Description

Qinna means "seize and control." It's a set of techniques found in virtually every Chinese martial art. It's devoted to joint locks, wrestling holds and strangulation methods from a standing or crouched position. It's rarely taught as an isolated fighting method. Instead, it complements the striking and throwing methods of all kung fu styles. Nevertheless, there are Chinese systems where qinna is the core specialty. Characters who practice them are more likely to know the Qinna Fighting Style than the Striking or Throwing Fighting Style, though they would have some general training (represented by the Brawl skill) in both.

Orthodox qinna is divided into four main areas of study. These are:

**Zua Jin – Grabbing the Muscles:** Practitioners grab, pull and twist muscles to inflict pain, set up joint locks or force the opponent to submit. A typical technique would dig fingers behind an opponent's clavicle, or twist the

## Controls as a Core Fighting Style

Many martial arts use chokes, joint locks and other grappling holds, all of which are part of the Controls core style. Actual Merit dots come from a special emphasis on these methods. Furthermore, while they're all closely related, don't confuse Controls with Grappling or Throwing. Grappling is focused on using holds on the ground and Throwing is devoted to dropping an opponent *on* the ground as fast and hard as possible, but Controls are focused on standing holds against a standing opponent. These can force someone to the ground, but the heart of the method is to get the hold from an upright stance.

Controls are an important part of arts like aikido (above and beyond the exemplar Throwing style), jujutsu, advanced karate and Filipino wrestling (dumog). Most comprehensive styles use these methods, but only a few take them as a specialty. When all is said and done, it's hard to catch an arm that's trying to punch you in the face, so using Controls in a real-life situation requires intense training.

neck and shoulder in opposite directions. Effective Zua Jin requires coordination and a strong grip. This is one reason why traditional Eagle Claw practitioners are renowned for their finger strength.

**Cuo Guo – Misplacing the Bones:** Cuo Guo are joint locking techniques designed to press a limb past its natural range of motion, separate the component bones of a joint or otherwise attack the enemy's skeletal system. A skilled practitioner can dislocate and break bones with a quick movement, but these techniques are more often used to inflict pain.

**Bi Qi – Sealing the Breath:** Qinna's strangulation techniques target the lungs as well as the neck. Strikes and trunk grips "seal" them. Nevertheless, the most reliable Bi Qi techniques are traditional chokes. Depending on the method they attack the windpipe or carotid arteries.

**Dian Xue – Disrupting the Vein:** These techniques attack pressure points to stun the opponent and set up controls. One cannot simply catch a limb in mid-flight; it's necessary to strike and trap to open the opponent's defense.

A qinna specialist usually closes the gap with a strike or block before grabbing a limb and trying to push, pull or strike an enemy off balance. Without balance, the opponent can't marshal his major muscle groups to resist a technique. A police officer making an arrest usually shoves the opponent into a position where he can be restrained, but the same techniques will break bones if they're applied with a certain amount of speed and crispness. Qinna-oriented *taolu* (forms) can be quite beautiful; they feature classic claw hand positions and continuous arm movement. Many people mistakenly think these forms are striking exercises, but the "eagle claw," "crane hand" and "tiger jaw" hands are classic qinna.

Qinna techniques belong to all Chinese martial arts, so a qinna teacher (called a *shifu*) can come from many different walks of life. Qinna is usually thought of as more of a "soft" or "internal" practice, however, and is often associated with aspects of traditional Chinese mysticism and medicine. Some dedicated practitioners also administer acupuncture, tui na massage and herbalism.

## Story Hooks

• **Barehanded Torture:** Martial arts experts can use their skills to brutalize as well as protect. The characters may have to confront a qinna expert who enforces his will by breaking arms and twisting people into unbearable agony. This could be a local hood, a corrupt cop, or a supernatural being who uses these abilities to disguise more malicious powers.

• **The Death Touch:** The mythology of the *dim mak*, or "death touch," runs through qinna training. Most people – even practitioners – believe the death touch is an exaggeration or a lie, but what if someone *has* learned it? The *dim mak* master could be a gentle soul who discovered it as a byproduct of his studies, or an assassin who specialized in murdering victims without leaving a mark. Some legends say a master can delay the onset of the death touch so that the victim dies hours or days later, never knowing than an innocuous poke was the cause.

• **Bounty Hunters and Cops:** Qinna is a useful ability for characters who need to arrest and restrain people. If they need to do this for a living, they might pick it up along with an assortment of other skills. The story may force them to apply their new knowledge on the road, in pursuit of a fugitive, criminal suspect or informant with supernatural ties.

## History

The most famous qinna-focused Chinese art is *yingxuaquan*, or Eagle Claw. The heart of the style is its 108 qinna techniques, said to have been created by General Yue Fei. In history, Yue Fei was noted for his great strength and skill at archery, but more fanciful myths credit him with the invention of many martial arts. One story says that his teacher Zhou Tong send him to study under the warrior monks of Emei Mountain. Another says that Zhou Tong (a legendary figure himself) was a Shaolin monk. In either story, Yue Fei drew upon Zhou Tong's training to create the 108 Qinna Form.

The style evolved through the ages, finally entering the Shaolin Temple's curriculum. It would be known as a Shaolin style until the fall of the Ming Dynasty. After that, the temple sheltered deposed court officials, renegade soldiers and bandits. They added their own martial arts skills to the Shaolin Temple's repository of knowledge. The new Qing government didn't appreciate the temple harboring rebels. Waves of persecution ended with the temple's destruction in 1644. The monks scattered and taught their skills.

Along with other Chinese fighting methods, qinna fell into ill repute as the pursuit of gangs and rebels until Huo Yuanjia and other famous martial artists founded the Jingwu Athletic Association in 1910. Like the Shaolin Temple, the Jingwu school shared techniques from several styles, including Eagle Claw and qinna. It is likely that this standardized qinna theory into the four methods widely practiced today.

## Current Culture

Qinna is Chinese fighting method, so most schools are organized according to the principles of traditional Chinese martial arts. A Chinese school is an adoptive family. *Shifu* is the word children used to refer to their fathers. In Northern China and more modern institutions, some schools prefer the appellation *laoshi* ("teacher"). School members are referred by the terms for brother, sister, aunt, uncle, grandfather



and mother, depending on seniority in the style and real age.

A Chinese martial arts training hall (called a *kwoon* in Cantonese) has a more relaxed atmosphere than the quasi-military customs people often associate with martial arts. At the same time, teachers don't always coddle or encourage their students. Instead, the student is expected to show some initiative. If she demonstrates a sincere devotion to the art, she may graduate to being a "closed door" disciple. Closed door students learn techniques that aren't taught to the others. They're expected to pass on the art to the next generation. Accordingly, they have more serious responsibilities. These might include helping the *shifu* out in daily life, maintaining class discipline and in rare cases, representing the school in challenges.

Modern instructors also teach qinna to police, military units. Qinna's focus on seizing and controlling makes it a useful tool for arrests. Teachers supplement traditional techniques with ways to remove or retain a firearm.

## Systems

The following systems are relevant to qinna.

### Fighting Style: Qinna (Controls; • to •••••)

**Prerequisites:** Dexterity ••• and Brawl ••

**Effect:** Your character is skilled in a Chinese martial arts style that emphasizes qinna, or another martial art that specializes in standing joint locks, holds and chokes.

Dots purchased in this Merit provide access to special combat maneuvers. Each maneuver is a prerequisite for the next. Qinna maneuvers are based on the Brawl Skill and work in conjunction with unarmed combat.

Qinna maneuvers are designed to exploit weaknesses in the human anatomy. Targets who do not feel pain, possess the need to breathe or have skeletons will not be affected by certain maneuvers. Of the commonly played supernatural beings, this renders vampires immune to the effects of Sealing the Breath or Disrupting the Veins.

**Standing Control (•):** Your character gains an additional overpowering maneuver, called Standing Control. If she overpowers her opponent she may force him to accompany him wherever he goes. **Drawback:** The character can only move himself and his opponent half as far as his Speed would normally allow. The character cannot have moved earlier in the turn, and cannot automatically dump his enemy over a cliff or into a fire or other dangerous environment without performing a separate attack. [Can you use the target as cover?]

**Misplacing the Bones (••):** The character's holds can snap bones and tear connective tissue. If his player inflicts more damage in an overpowering maneuver than the victim's Size, he breaks a limb unless the defender opts to immediately fall prone. The fracture (or tissue separation) inflicts a point of lethal damage instead of the standard bashing damage, and renders the limb useless. It does not recover until the victim heals that damage. If the limb is an arm, reduce the defender's Defense by 1 and note that he's dropped anything held in it. If it's a leg, the defender cannot walk upright. **Drawback:** Unless the character opts for a specified target (see **World of Darkness**, p. 165), the defender's player (or Storyteller) chooses which limb's been damaged.

**Grabbing the Muscles (•••):** Your character's grappling holds twist muscles out of place or puts the defender in a position where she can't use strength to force her way out of the attack. Treat the defender as if her Strength was two dots lower for the purpose of resisting overpower maneuvers.

**Sealing the Breath (••••):** Your character can use chokeholds and strikes to pressure points around the lungs to interfere with a target's breathing. If he succeeds with a Brawl-based strike or damaging overpower rolled at a voluntary –1 die penalty, he

### Grappling Aids

Many weapons augment a grappler's strength. Some people carry a small (Size 1) "pocket stick" or *yawara* for this purpose.

In the right hands, a simple stick makes holds and chokes twice as painful – even potentially deadly. For example, a choking technique that uses a truncheon or PR–24 baton used to be common in many police jurisdictions until it led to several deaths. The technique pressed the weapon right up against the carotid artery, cutting off blood to the brain more abruptly than would be using bare hands.

Throughout history, people have developed weapons to act as superior grappling aids. The Okinawan sai and Japanese jitte are examples. Although these are often described as disarming weapons, they are, if anything, more effective as grappling aids. (Sword expert Toshishiro Obata calls moves that are supposed to catch a moving sword "suicide techniques.") If the character has the Equipped Grappling Merit, add +1 to the weapon's effective Size for determining its bonus.

inflicts a –1 die penalty to the opponent's actions in addition to inflicting standard damage. This penalty is cumulative throughout the combat scene, but vanishes afterwards.

**Disrupting the Veins (•••••):** Your character's grappling maneuvers expertly attack anatomical weaknesses. When he damages a victim with an overpower maneuver you can choose to inflict lethal damage, and when he uses any other maneuver he can choose to inflict a point of lethal damage *in addition* to other effects. **Drawback:** Spend a point of Willpower per attack. This does not add three dice to your roll.

## Additional Systems

A well-rounded qinna practitioner might learn Fighting Style: Striking (either type) to reflect his other kung fu skills. Jujutsu practitioners may learn Throwing and Submission Grappling along with Controls. The following systems are also relevant to qinna practitioners.

## Police Defensive Tactics

Skilled cops (including military police, security forces and bounty hunters) learn the Controls style through a number of traditions, including qinna, Japanese taiho-jutsu and modern, synthesized training regimens.

Cops need to mind their own weapons at all times. Techniques that work for the average person might draw a suspect into the perfect position to grab the officer's gun. Modern holsters are designed to help prevent this but they aren't completely reliable. Police also need to be aware of positions where someone might snatch a gun right out of their hand.

Truncheon-assisted control techniques are also a common part of curriculums. These tactics have a venerable heritage, dating back to Chinese truncheon techniques and Japanese jitte-based controls.

**Firearms Retention (•)**

**Prerequisite:** Dexterity ••, Wits ••, Brawl ••, Firearms ••

**Effect:** Your character knows how to keep a hold of his gun when someone tries to take it, even while it's holstered. If an opponent attempts to disarm her with an overpower maneuver, an attempt to target her holster with a grab (see the **World of Darkness** rulebook, p. 138) or use a similar tactic learned from a Fighting Style, he must subtract your character's Brawl dots from his dice pool. This benefit also applies to attempts to steal the weapon from your character's holster. **Drawback:** This benefit doesn't apply against attempts to take a weapon by stealth.

**Equipped Grappling (••)**

**Prerequisite:** Dexterity •••, Brawl ••, Weaponry ••

**Effect:** Your character knows how to use a blunt weapon to enhance her holds and locks. She presses the weapon against joints and muscle groups, or forces compliance with a few short blows. If she has a blunt weapon in hand, add the weapon's Size to her Strength + Brawl pool whenever she attempts overpowering maneuvers. **Drawbacks:** This benefit doesn't apply to initial attempts to establish a grapple. It only works with weapons that have a maximum Size of 3.

## Bishop Wong

**Quote:** *Study a subject intensely enough and you'll find that the ultimate fruits of your knowledge are useless.*

**Background:** To a small circle of Chinese martial artists, Bishop Wong is a reclusive living legend. To anyone else, he's an unusually old, overworked hospital intern. Bishop takes pains to separate the two halves of his life. If he could, he'd sever his ties with other martial artists completely. He enjoyed the camaraderie and chance to test himself physically, but learning the dim mak has ruined his appreciation for kung fu.

Bishop started learning kung fu when he was six years old, beginning with the Hung Gar and Eagle Claw systems. He was a mediocre striker, but had a particular talent for qinna applications. His quick, analytical mind directed him to the most effective locks and holds. By the time he was a teenager he could easily subdue larger opponents. His teachers said his skills were practically magical and they encouraged him to further develop his abilities. This was fine with him because he didn't have the temperament for formal schooling. He figured he'd just teach martial arts for a living.

### Bishop Wong's Dim Mak

There may be several *dim mak* techniques. Wong's is based on his deep qinna studies. If he secures a grappling hold, he can inflict aggravated damage with an overpower maneuver. This costs him a point of Willpower (which does not add 3 dice to the attack) and forces an immediate Morality check against a rank 3 sin. It can't be combined with any other Fighting Style maneuver and only works on living beings with a human physiology.

Is this a teachable ability? Wong won't pass it on to anyone voluntarily. If the Storyteller decides that a player's character can learn it, the prerequisites should be hefty: Intelligence 4, Dexterity 4, Medicine 3 and Brawl 5 aren't out of the question. It would be a *6 dot* Merit.



He spent adulthood training at the *kwoon* and drifting through a series of forgettable, minimum wage jobs. Eventually, his teachers told him they'd passed on everything they knew, but Bishop didn't have the confidence or cash to open his own school. Rather than take up the challenge of teaching, he redoubled his training efforts. He visited obscure masters in China, learned the skills of a professional acupuncturist and tested himself against other martial artists. In Indonesia, he learned a sequence of movements that would instantly paralyze an opponent. In Chicago, he learned a back-alley street fighting technique that could drop someone with a flick of the wrist. He could sense that it was leading up to some major discovery, but he wasn't sure what it was until the day two men jumped him as he walked home from work.

He managed to trip one fast and prepared to run, but the other grabbed his shoulder in a way that inspired something. He saw pressure points open up, ready for a certain response, though he wasn't sure what that would be until he did it.

The mugger turned pale and dropped dead at his feet.

The police said that the man had suffered a fatal heart attack, but Bishop knew better. He knew that he'd discovered the true *dim mak*: the supposed flower of qinna. It disgusted him. He spoke of his suspicions with an old teacher, but no one else.

He stopped training for five years to concentrate on saving money. He earned his high school diploma, pushed himself through college and eventually graduated medical school. He took a few private kung fu students for the money, but never taught advanced qinna. People remembered his reputation as an expert from his teens and 20s. Some of them somehow learned what he said to his teacher and asked to learn the *dim mak*. A few came from government agencies and shadier groups, offering him large sums of money to train their personnel. He turned them away.

Now in his late 40s, Bishop Wong is an unlikely junior doctor, but an excellent one. With the night he discovered the *dim mak* long behind him he's started to train a bit once again. He's also researching the phenomenon to discover some cure or counter.

**Appearance:** Bishop Wong is a short, slender Chinese man with short white hair and rather severe horn-rimmed glasses. He's usually dressed for the hospital. The only physical indications of his past are in his hands, which are large, muscular and heavily callused.

**Storytelling Hints:** Characters might seek out Bishop as a teacher. He'll teach basic kung fu and qinna, but balks at training the highest levels of skill. He might make an exception for characters who demonstrate impeccable ethics. If they ask to learn *dim mak*, he sends them away

and won't talk to them again. Bishop believes he's not the only one who knows the "death touch." If he sees evidence of its use, he might employ characters to investigate on his behalf.

**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 4, Wits 4, Resolve 4
**Physical Attributes:** Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3
**Social Attributes:** Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 4
**Mental Skills:** Academics 3, Computer 3, Medicine 4, Science (Anatomy) 4
**Physical Skills:** Athletics 3, Brawl (Grappling) 5, Drive 1, Weaponry 4
**Social Skills:** Empathy 3, Expression 3 (Martial Arts Forms), Socialize 2
**Merits:** Equipped Grappling, Holistic Healer, Kung Fu ••••, Qinna •••••, Language (Cantonese) ••, Status (Medical) •
**Willpower:** 8
**Morality:** 8
**Virtue:** Fortitude
**Vice:** Sloth
**Initiative:** 8
**Defense:** 4 (+1 Armor vs. Bashing)
**Speed:** 13
**Health:** 8
**Weapons/Attacks:**

**Pocket Sticks:**
**Damage:** 0(B)
**Range:** n/a
**Dice Pool:** 8
**Special:** +1 to Grappling.

**Fist:**
**Damage:** 0(B)
**Range:** n/a
**Dice Pool:** 8
**Special:** 3 attacks at 0/–1/–2.

# Sword and Shield (Shields)

**Quote:** *The shield isn't just a piece of metal you hide behind. It's a tool, just like your blade. You have to learn how to use it.*

## Description

The paladin in dusty armor treading barefoot across the scorched stones of the Levant, the centurion wading through the blood of his enemies with scuta and pilum in hand, the riot police forcing back protestors as bottles and cobblestones begin to sail through the air; the shield is one of the oldest forms of military protection and has seen use across millennia.

Most soldiers are content to wear their shield as another piece of armor, held close to the body to keep its position over their vitals while they concentrate on the use of their weapon, but some warriors see the use of the shield as its own art, and several innovative uses of shields have risen over the centuries, from the Roman testudo to the wall of shields utilized by Viking longboats as they approached their next targeted shore.

This Fighting Style represents a conscious effort on the part of the fighter to integrate the shield into his combat tactics rather than simply using it as a glorified piece of armor.

## Shields as a Core Fighting Style

The use of a weapon and shield on the field of battle inundates human history. Things simply don't get much more "Core" than this. However, the rules below can be adapted to any number of weapons when used in concert with a shield. Historically, swords of varying length, flails, maces, pikes, spears, axes and halberds have all been used with shields (and certainly other weapons besides).

While the weapon may vary, use of the shield remains constant. Unless the Storyteller deems otherwise, the Sword and Shield style can be used with most one-handed close-combat weapons (the riot shield and baton of a police officer, for example). Only in the case of the truly exotic fighting form is a second purchase of the Shields Fighting Style necessary.

## History

Warriors have been using shields to block attacks from hand-held weapons since prehistoric antiquity. Early warrior cultures often exalted the shield to a special level of reverence, extolling the shield's import in the overall tactics of an army. Thus it became considered a greater shame to lose one's shield than helm or armor. The most famous, related by Plutarch and attributed to a Spartan mother, extolled a son to return on with his shield (a conquering hero) or atop it (a corpse).

Despite being a relatively simple piece of equipment, the shield evolved over the ages. The Greeks utilized a simple round shield called a *hoplon* while the Romans favored a large and unwieldy shield called a *scutum*. In both cases the shape of the shield determined (or was determined by) to a large extent the tactics taken by the soldiers in battle. Soldiers used both the *scutum* and the later *pavise* of the late Middle Ages and Renaissance as both shield and fortification, resting or driving their shield into the earth and attacking from behind the cover it provided. As heavy armor became more common, those

## Story Hooks

• **Blood-Drenched Shields:** A collection of ancient Viking shields has arrived at the local museum among whispers of eldritch curses and forgotten deities. Late at night, when the museum is closed to all but the lone security guard who works the gate, the shields whisper of glory for those who would take them up and pain them again in the blood of the innocent. It is only a matter of time before someone listens, but without a mastery of the shield, will she be mastered instead?

• **Dime-Store Tyrant:** The media's calling him the Dime-Store Vigilante, a man armored in football gear, wielding an aluminum bat in one hand and a garbage-lid shield in the other. His graffiti speaks of the monsters that stalk the street at night and offers to train those who would take up arms against the slings and arrows of the World of Darkness. He's gaining a reputation as a hero, but those who live in the neighborhoods he claims to protect live in fear. Has this knight for justice become a petty tyrant? Is he fighting monsters at all, or using his heroic idiom to excuse his brutal methods?

• **Coats of Arms:** An eccentric and reclusive millionaire designed the dining room of the exclusive club overlooking the city. Coats of arms line the walls of the main dining room, their imagery corresponding to no specific families or bloodlines. Mere ornamentation, the maitre'd offers, but rumors persist among the staff that unlocking the hidden meaning of the coats is the first step towards unearthing his missing millions. A knowledgeable individual might realize that the symbolism seems to mask an esoteric fighting manual hidden in plain sight. Who is the millionaire? Where did he learn to fight with sword and shield? What does he hope to gain through the coats of arms?

who could afford such equipment began to eschew large shields, instead relying on small bucklers and their heavy plate to protect them.

Shields remained common through the end of the Middle Ages, only fading from the field of battle with the rise of gunpowder (as bullets generally tear through traditional shields with ease). Yet shields retain a prominence in modern society that belies their lack of practical use. The wide, flat shape of the shield renders it particularly useful as a signifier of rank, battalion, family or command. The coat of arms typically takes a shield shape, even when not emblazoned across an actual shield, and such coats grace the homes of wealthy and prominent families (as well as those who feel a personal connection to such a family) even tonight.

The shield has come into use again in recent decades, wielded by heavily armored police during riots. As the result of circulated films featuring shield-bearing officers driving back bottle-throwing (or sometimes unarmed) students, the shield has come to represent for some the oppressiveness of a police state.

### Current Culture

While the shield may have served as the central focus of warrior cultures past, the modern shield-user operates in the context of a larger culture, most usually that of the police or a re-creationist society like the SCA. The shield also maintains a central import in video games and cinema, in which it is often prominently displayed. Entities with a penchant towards the anachronistic such as elder vampires and scholars of antiquity (both supernatural and not) may still hold the shield in high esteem and practice its use in bloody combat.

## Systems

The following systems are relevant to the Sword and Shield Fighting Style.

### Fighting Style: Sword and Shield (Shields; • to •••••)

**Prerequisites:** Strength •••, Dexterity ••, Stamina ••, Weaponry ••

**Effect:** Your character has trained extensively with a weapon in her primary hand and a shield in her off-hand. She has learned to utilize the shield's strengths, redirecting it towards incoming threats while overcoming some of the clumsiness involved in making attacks from behind a shield's protective cover.

Dots purchased in this Merit provide access to special combat maneuvers. Each maneuver is a prerequisite for the next. Sword and Shield maneuvers are based on the Weaponry Skill and function only when a character possesses a shield.

**Cloak and Dagger (•):** Your character's extensive training with shields allows her to utilize improvised shields more effectively. This maneuver is named for the practice of using one's cloak to buffet incoming attacks away. A character with this maneuver doubles the effective Structure of an improvised shield (usually an improvised shield can only deflect a number of attacks equal to its structure before being destroyed) and suffers

## Shields: The Short Version

A character utilizing a shield for protection gains a bonus to her Defense equal to the shield's Defense rating but at the cost of 2 dice from attack rolls made while holding the shield (characters with the Ambidexterity Merit suffer only a –2 penalty). A character who concentrates on Defense (and hence doesn't take an attack that turn) may gain an additional +1 to her Defense. Most shields have a Defense rating of 2, though improvised shields only grant a rating of 1.

More detailed rules for shield use can be found on page 178 of **Armory**.

a –2 penalty to attack rather than the standard –3. This penalty can be further decreased by the maneuver The Shielded Strike below, but improvised shields cannot be used to perform the Shield Bash, Shield Charge, or Stand Strong maneuvers.

**Shield Bash (••):** Your character has learned how to use the shield defensively *and* offensively. Attempts to strike another combatant with the character's shield still suffer a –1 penalty, but gain a Weapon bonus equal to the shield's Defense rating. Damage remains bashing. **Drawback:** A character using a shield to knock an enemy back is not using it for defense. A character does not benefit from a shield's Defense rating on a turn in which she uses this maneuver. If she has already used the full Defense rating against an incoming attack during the turn, she may not use the maneuver.

**The Shielded Strike (•••):** The character's use of her shield integrates seamlessly with that of her weapon. She may rest the blade across the top or side of a rectangular shield, pushing the weapon forward as if playing billiards. Perhaps she has developed a careful rhythm in which she lowers the shield for the bare instant necessary to deliver a fatal attack. Either way, when the character uses this maneuver to make an attack, she no longer suffers a penalty for using a weapon while benefiting from her shield, and her shield adds +1 to its Defense rating against the target of the attack. **Drawback:** The character's concentration on coordinating her shield and weapon leaves her open to attacks from the flanks and rear. She loses her Defense against attacks made by any opponent save the one she is attacking. If she has already used her Defense against an incoming attack from another opponent during the turn, she may not use the maneuver.

**Shield Charge (••••):** The character charges forward, shield lowered before her, and crashes into the enemy line. The character makes a shield bash attack (see above) at a –2. The attack inflicts bashing damage, but if even a single success is scored on the attack, the character may send her enemy flying. An opponent who suffers the effects of this attack makes a reflexive Dexterity + Athletics roll; if he rolls fewer successes than the shield-user, he suffers knockdown (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 168). At Storyteller's discretion, this maneuver may be used against multiple opponents, provided that they are standing close enough together. Each additional opponent targeted levies an additional –1 to the attack roll, and the damage rolled is distributed evenly among those hit. Those who suffer no damage do not check for knockdown, even if their companions do. **Drawback:** Use of this maneuver necessitates a charge action (**World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 164), which means, among other things, she loses her Defense. If she has already used her Defense against an incoming attack from another opponent during the turn, she may not use the maneuver.

**Stand Strong (•••••):** The character digs in her feet, raises her shield, and stands as a human wall against an onslaught of attacks. She benefits from her full Dodge trait and shield defense bonus against attacks made from a single direction (Weaponry Dodge can be applied). Additionally, attacks from that direction do not decrease her Defense against later attacks in the round. For the purpose of this maneuver, a direction is approximately one third of the circumference of a circle drawn about the character (typically claiming defense against attacks from the left, front, or right is sufficient). Attacks made against the character from other directions suffer a penalty equal to Defense only, which suffers penalties from multiple attacks as usual. Note that while a single enemy might be able to move around the character's defenses, no more than three characters can assault the character from a direction that she can't fully defend against through this maneuver. **Drawback:** Using this maneuver requires an incredible exercise of will. A character must spend one Willpower point to gain the benefits of this Merit for one turn.

## Additional Systems

**Shield Accessory: Lance Rest**

Durability —, Size —, Structure —, Cost —

Some shields contain a notch in the right side. This exists to guide a weapon, most typically a lance (in which case an additional lance rest exists on the wielder's armor). Characters utilizing such a notch may ignore the usual penalty to make an attack with a close-combat weapon. Unfortunately, utilizing the sword and shield in this manner can be unwieldy, and the character only gains his shield bonus against the



character he is attacking (though the bonus may apply to ranged attacks from the same direction, at the Storyteller's discretion).

## Mike Daughtree

**Quote:** *Go ahead, try to hit me.*

**Background:** Born to an architect father and a psychiatrist mother in the suburbs, Mike suffered almost incessant brotherly abuse as far back as he can remember. The long-awaited growth spurt that would set him on equal footing with his siblings only came after both had moved on to collegiate careers, and neither seemed terribly interested in revisiting past wrestling bouts during their Holiday returns. While not one for conventional sports, Mike had the good fortune of coming into contact with Jacob, a member of a local re-creationist group. Serving as a squire to his new knightly mentor, Mike has finally come into his own in a group of people who seem to enjoy and respect the same activities he does. Unfortunately, the anger he has kept buried for his entire life continues to burn like a quiet ember in his belly, ready to erupt in flames at the least provocation. While he tries to control himself, he has already sent to people to the hospital in his anger. He might be more inclined to change, were his mentor not encouraging his wrath for reasons Mike has yet to puzzle out. Instead Jacob continues to press Mike, assuring him that he is destined for greater things.

Mike is a senior in high school, and, with college looming like a dark specter on the horizon, he feels the weight of adulthood beginning to settle upon his shoulders. He longs for something more to the world than to follow in the footsteps of his parents into a grueling and repetitive professional career, but as the weeks become months his hoped-for escape seems to become less and less a possibility.

**Appearance:** A hulking man-child of eighteen years, Mike has a physique that combines the overlong arms and legs of an adolescent with the beer-belly of a forty-five year-old trucker and the round face of a newborn. His red-hued skin is blotched with freckles and acne, and the wisps of his already-thinning red hair stand sentinel atop his high, sloping forehead. Mike dresses casually at almost all times in an endlessly rotating wardrobe of threadbare T-shirts and jeans. His voice is low and gruff, rarely ranging beyond the monosyllabic.

**Storyteller Hints:** The characters most likely to come into contact with Mike are those involved in the SCA or a similar organization. He is perhaps most useful as a surprisingly competent combatant to antagonize characters prone to acts of vandalism or breaking and entering. (A vampire may never live down having received a beating at the hands of a teenager in football gear with a baseball bat wrapped in foam and duct tape.) Mike is not very personable, and, as one of the least popular people in his upper-middle-class high

school, he internalizes a great deal of anger and bitterness. Woe to the foe who gives him an excuse to vent his frustrations.

**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 2
**Physical Attributes:** Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2
**Social Attributes:** Presence 1, Manipulation 2, Composure 3
**Mental Skills:** Academics 1, Computer 3, Crafts (Painting Figurines) 2, Medicine 1, Occult 2, Politics 1, Science 1
**Physical Skills:** Athletics 1, Firearms (Paintball) 2, Larceny (Cheating) 1, Survival 1, Weaponry (Reenactment) 3
**Social Skills:** Animal Ken (Cats) 1, Empathy 1, Subterfuge 2
**Merits:** Allies (Older Brothers) ••, Langschwert ••, Mentor (Knightly Benefactor) ••, Sword and Shield •••
**Willpower:** 5
**Morality:** 6 (Inferiority Complex)
**Virtue:** Charity
**Vice:** Gluttony
**Initiative:** 6
**Defense:** 3
**Speed:** 11
**Health:** 7
**Armor:** 2/0 (Sports Equipment)
**Weapons/Attacks:**

**Foam "Sword":**
**Damage:** 1(B)
**Range:** —
**Dice Pool:** 7
**Special:** —

**Baseball Bat:**
**Damage:** 2(B)
**Range:** —
**Dice Pool:** 8
**Special:** —

**Paintball Gun:**
**Damage:** 1(B)
**Range:** —
**Dice Pool:** 7
**Special:** Splatters character with paint.

# Compound Styles

Some schools teach "complete arts" that encompass striking, grappling and weapons, or prepare students for combat sports that combine several disciplines. These are compound Fighting Styles.

In truth, you can develop most martial arts into compound styles. Fighting Style: Filipino Martial Arts enhances stick fighting, but real escrima training features unarmed striking, joint locks, knife fighting and more. This is true for combative training programs that aren't normally classified as martial arts, either. SWAT team members learn arresting techniques, close range shooting and sniper skills, for instance.

A compound Fighting Style is a collection of Fighting Style Merits (and other Merits, too) that are taught within the same training system. Each style lists the name component Fighting Styles based on their *core* names, not the ones linked to default backgrounds. Qinna is known as Controls, for example.

There's no game system advantage for learning a compound style; their Merits have the usual costs and restrictions. In effect, this is a "non-system system" that simply notes that you can learn multiple styles in one school. There is, however, a significant social advantage: Characters don't have to seek out a new teacher for each Merit.

Learning a compound Fighting Style is a time-consuming process. Even instructors might not know every Merit dot in their system. Modern militaries employ subject matter experts who each master of one part of the curriculum. Traditional martial arts hand out teaching licenses in narrow aspects of their art, and modern gyms always have people who are known for having the best kicks, throws or submission holds. Remember that the "meat" of combat ability lies within the Brawl, Firearms and Weaponry Skills, and that Fighting Styles represent exceptional ability – not basic competence. Someone with a high Brawl Skill knows how to grapple. Thus, characters with 4 or 5 dots in applicable Skills have probably been exposed to most of his art's curriculum, even if they don't have the associated Fighting Style Merits.

## Compound Specialized Styles

Compound styles can feature specialized maneuvers. We don't include them for simplicity's sake, but it doesn't affect game balance. MMA practitioners routinely learn Muay Thai's leg kick, for example. Feel free to swap out standard maneuvers for variants.

# Mixed Martial Arts

**Fighting Style: Aggressive Striking, Fighting Style: Grappling**

**Quote:** *I don't practice the "art of self-defense." I fight. It works.*

## Description

Mixed martial arts (or MMA) is one of the fastest growing styles. It aims to train fighters who are equally skilled at trading punches, wrestling standing and on the ground. Modern MMA is the result of

some hard lessons learned from broken bones, humiliated "masters" and innovation under pressure. The "mixed" part of MMA used to imply contests between multiple martial arts styles, but it's now evolved into its own style.

MMA eclipses professional boxing in popularity. It's big business. Fighters bleed for money, but promoters, sponsors and sanctioning bodies reap the rewards of their work without losing a drop of sweat. Undercard fights at many big pay-per-view events only pay four or five figures. Athletes usually cover their own travel and medical expenses, so these bouts might be net losses.

Fighters need to be total athletes, with enough power and endurance to last through the sport's five-minute rounds. Training emphasizes "high percentage" techniques: movements that work against a resisting opponent in many different situations, instead of specialized defenses that only work in one scenario.

As the sport evolved from style versus style matches, fighters grew beyond their original disciplines to train for the specific realities of MMA competition. BJJ (Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu) fighters learned that wrestlers could stop their takedowns. Kickboxers studied new ways to strike on the ground. Fighters learn elements of different martial arts, but combining them into a working strategy creates a style all its own. Practitioners recognize three ranges of combat:

**Standup:** Standup range happens when two fighters square off to punch and kick each other. Sometimes, they dart in for a quick elbow or knee strike but these moves usually work better in the clinch. MMA fighters use standup skills from boxing and Muay Thai, even if they claim a "base" in another art like karate of kung fu. At standup range, fighters take a deeper stance than a boxer's to avoid takedowns.

**Clinch:** Once fighters get their hands on each other the fight enters clinch range. Here, fighters strike with elbows, knees, stomps and short range punches, or try to unbalance each other to score a takedown. Amateur wrestling and Muay Thai clinching techniques are useful here.

**Ground:** When both fighters hit the ground, this phase of combat begins. Each fighter tries to attain a dominant position where they can rain down strikes or get a submission hold. The fighter on the bottom usually tries to keep her opponent between her legs in a position called the "guard," where she can control his torso and perhaps even tape the top position. BJJ is the most popular source for ground techniques, though fighters from sombo, judo and catch wrestling have also proven their skills.

## Variants and Similar Styles

MMA fighters are always looking for better techniques, so it's no surprise that they don't all just practice the two component Fighting Styles. Fighters who want to specialize in clinches may learn a few dots in Controls. Big throws aren't very common, but some judo practitioners have made it an effective part of their game. Anyone seeking to do the same might want to learn the Throwing Fighting Style.

There are many MMA organizations, as well as styles that train the same set of techniques. Modern pankration uses modified MMA rules that limit head strikes. Daido-juku karate (or as it is now called, kudo) teaches striking and grappling together. Its practitioners fight wearing a protective helmet that lets them deliver heavy strikes to the head without cutting their opponents open. Chinese sanda fighters use modernized kung fu and wrestling. They don't grapple on the ground, but do win points for throws, so this style would combine Kung Fu and Throws.

Lastly, MMA is a large part of the US' current military hand to hand program. The Marine Corps Martial Arts Program (MCMAP) and Modern Army Combatives (MAC) both combine MMA techniques with modern weapons and traditional military hand to hand methods. The military method emphasizes escaping or killing an enemy instead of submitting him on the assumption that if you can't shoot, stab or club someone to death *and* they're within arm's reach, something has gone seriously wrong.

## History

MMA exploded into popular culture with the first Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) in 1993. UFC 1 pitted martial artists from different disciplines against each other. There were few rules. Judo players had to deal with punches; kickboxers faced takedowns. Representatives of styles that people thought effective lost to full contact strikers and grapplers. Royce Gracie used his family's jiu-jitsu style to defeat many larger, stronger opponents and won the single elimination tournament.

This style of fighting didn't begin with the UFC, however. Similar contests have been a part of many martial arts. Ancient Greece featured pankration, where warriors could use wrestling holds, punches, kicks – anything that could force an opponent to surrender. In a famous match, Arrichion of Phigaleia made his opponent submit by savagely twisting his

ankle – and then died from his enemy's simultaneous chokehold. In other cultures, Chinese and Japanese martial artists engaged in dangerous, even lethal contests, right up to the modern era. In the 19th and early 20th Centuries, pro-wrestlers fought for real. In America, some carnival grapplers would even fight audience members.

Modern MMA descends from many sources, including Brazilian *vale tudo* ("anything allowed") challenges and Japanese shootfighting (a style that can be thought of as pro wrestling, but *real*). Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu (BJJ) practitioners fought representatives of other schools in *vale tudo* to prove their superiority. In Japan, professional wrestlers started shootfighting to add real combat to the ring. Ironically, where BJJ traces itself back to Japanese judo and Fusen-ryu jujutsu, Japanese shootfighters learned Western catch wrestling. As fighters won, lost and compared techniques, they developed a unified, hybrid method. Every gym has its own special style, but nowadays, there's a strong consensus about what MMA's basic techniques need to be.

## Current Culture

MMA is one of the easiest compound Fighting Styles to find teachers for, but that doesn't guarantee that characters will stick with it. It's athletically demanding and humbling. Strong people get choked out by weaker, better trained fighters, and "strip mall" karate stylists discover that spinning kicks and wristlocks won't fly against a strong, aggressive partner who isn't letting the technique work. People interested in casual self-defense may be tempted to give it up. Practitioners claim it's the most effective unarmed martial art because every technique is designed to work against a trained opponent who's fighting back.

Most MMA gyms don't use a lot of ceremony. They wear shorts and skin tight rash guards, not martial arts uniforms. A quick bow and tapping gloves with your partner is enough. MMA culture shares a lot of its style with surfing and extreme sports, including tattoos, clothing (one standard MMA outfit includes surfing shorts) and attitudes. Traditional martial artists accuse MMA stylists of being arrogant and aggressive, but fighters have all kinds of personalities. All the same, MMA grew out of challenge matches, and many practitioners have no problem expressing an unkind opinion about another style, technique or training method.

Good gyms operate under someone with credible fighting or coaching experience. Some coaches are retired, but many are active fighters. Larger gyms feature specialists from different disciplines. A member might train with a BJJ champion on one day and a talented kickboxer on another. A club's membership usually has a mix of people who just want self-defense skills and aspiring fighters.

To improve, you must spar. There's a lot of informal etiquette around sparring that varies between component disciplines and gyms. Some BJJ players consider it a challenge when a lower ranked student asks to grapple, but in Muay Thai it's bad form to beat the hell out of a junior, when his time is better spent gradually learning to trade blows.

## Story Hooks

• **It's About the Money:** In MMA, fights are the product – and fighters are raw material. When an insider threatens to expose corruption in a major sanctioning body, the owners try to silence him with money, blackmail and eventually murder. They're protecting more than rampant steroid use and fixed fights. Is a witch cursing unpopular fighters? Are monsters using the matches as proxy battles in their malevolent conspiracy? If characters follow the insider's clues, they'll find the answer.

• **Performance Enhancement:** When a local fighter moves from being a "tomato can" that people beat up for easy wins, to a serious contender, fans start to wonder if he isn't using drugs. Officials subject him to every test they can, but they can't find a thing. They don't know that his strength comes from a supernatural source. He's drinking vampire's blood, eating human flesh in an occult ritual, or using sympathetic magic on his opponents. This power has a price. As it comes due, his façade of normalcy starts to crack. Characters get involved when they're hired to investigate the fighter or suffer the fallout of his enhancement's "price."

• **Underground Fighting:** In the World of Darkness, underground MMA fights are common. Desperate and disgraced fighters drift into the scene, hoping to earn quick, untraceable cash. What they don't know is that some of their opponents aren't completely human, and the wagers are about more than money. One fighter finds out that zombies don't care about blunt trauma. Another discovers that losing – or even winning – puts him on the sacrificial altar of a forgotten, bloody god.

## Systems

Some MMA fighters learn Controls and Throwing to supplement their base, or teach weapon-based styles to give their students a well-rounded approach to self-defense, but the largest variation in MMA skills lie in the striking realm. Fighters have successfully used Fighting Style: Evasive Striking, Boxing, Kung Fu and Muay Thai for standup combat. Aside from Fighting Styles, MMA fighters typically learn Brawling Dodge and Iron Stamina. A few schools teach Fast Reflexes, too.

MMA training develops fighting *attributes* – characteristics that enhance any technique – to a degree matched by few other martial arts. The following Merits reflect that training – and a few flaws demonstrate where it can go awry.

## New Merits

**Ground and Pound (••)**

**Prerequisites:** Combination Blows Fighting Style Maneuver (Boxing or Aggressive Striking •••), Takedown/Throw Fighting Style Maneuver (Grappling ••)

**Effect:** Your character may use Combination Blows (**World of Darkness** core, pp. 110–111) to perform Takedown/Throw Maneuver followed by an unarmed strike. If she succeeds with the first maneuver, her dice pool doesn't suffer the usual –1 penalty for the second attack in the Combination Blows series. Instead, the character gains a +2 bonus to strike her prone opponent.

**Heavy Hands (•••)**

**Prerequisite:** Strength •••, Brawl ••

**Effect:** Your character has a strong upper body, tough knuckles and enough raw aggression to punch harder than most people. Her strikes inflict +1 damage. This even applies when she's wearing knuckledusters or other blunt fist loads. **Drawback:** The benefit does not apply to biting, grappling attacks or sharp weapons (including blades or spiked fist loads) – just standard unarmed strikes.

## Alice "The Painkiller" Blundell

**Quote:** *I'll wear the shirt for five grand, but I'm not touching your gloves. They suck.*

**Background:** With a professional record of 11–2, Alice Blundell is an up and coming MMA fighter. She's a natural hard-hitter, but her talents for business and self-promotion rival her fighting ability.



Alice got into the fight game to take off baby weight after her daughter was born – and her husband freaked out and left. She used to be an IT consultant. She made good money at it, but after giving birth she realized she didn't want to cycle through Pilates, yoga and cardio kickboxing when she wasn't sitting on her ass, tweaking code. That plan never worked for her friends, anyway.

She was hooked after a month of training. She had a nasty way with her fists, so she managed to dominate more skilled sparring partners with sheer force. Six months in, she fought and won her first MMA bout. That was four years ago.

Recently, she marked her first anniversary as a full time MMA fighter. She doesn't just train and pound people in a cage, either. She manages two other fighters, negotiates sponsorship deals and promotes minor MMA venues across the country. Her IT skills give her a leg up on other people in the business. She uses a combination of e-commerce, social network sites and low-paid, local affiliates to get involved in small bouts far away from her physical location.

She loves to fight in the ring – not on the streets. About three months ago, she had to fend off three men who invaded her home and tried to take her daughter, Zoe. They didn't even touch the wad of cash she'd left in the front hall. They were skinheads or something because they were all bald. They didn't even have eyebrows. The one she got closest to (and who left a couple of his teeth buried in her knuckles over the course of the fight). happened to have the same kind of star-shaped birthmark on the back of his head as Zoe. She thinks it was a coincidence, but it's still unnerving.

**Appearance:** The "Painkiller's" ring outfit a white rash guard with a red cross and a stylized "naughty nurse" picture running along each outside thigh of her shorts. Alice adds to the basic look with all the corporate logos she can fit. She enters the ring in a lab coat blazoned with her most important sponsors and a cartoon needle containing an evil-looking green fluid. Her Mediterranean complexion contrasts with spiky, bleach-blonde hair. She has a volleyball player's build: trim and long-limbed. Thanks to her high level of fitness she looks like she's in her early 20s, though she's actually 32.

**Storytelling Hints:** Alice has a lot of connections – enough to put her anywhere MMA is legal. Ever since the home invasion, she takes Zoe with her whenever she travels on business. Naturally, the three hairless guys who broke into her house are connected with something sinister… though exactly *what* that is, and why they wanted to kidnap Zoe, is up to the Storyteller. She's not a violent woman, but when she needs to put her fists up she has no compunction about sending people to the hospital. She's an intellectual fighter who likes to stand up, wait for her opponent to make a mistake, and smash her face in with a barrage of punches, kicks, knees and elbows.

**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 3
**Physical Attributes:** Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3
**Social Attributes:** Presence 3, Manipulation 2, Composure 3
**Mental Skills:** Computer 3, Medicine 2 (First Aid),
**Physical Skills:** Athletics 3, Brawl 4 (Kicking), Drive 1
**Social Skills:** Intimidation 3 (While Fighting), Persuasion 3, Socialize 2
**Merits:** Brawling Dodge, Contacts (MMA) ●●●, Fighting Style: Aggressive Striking ●●●●●, Fighting Style: Submission Grappling ●●●, Heavy Hands, Iron Stamina, Resources ●●●
**Willpower:** 6
**Morality:** 7
**Virtue:** Pride
**Vice:** Greed
**Initiative:** 6
**Defense:** 3
**Speed:** 11
**Health:** 8
**Weapons/Attacks:**

**Fist:**
**Damage:** 1(B)
**Range:** n/a
**Dice Pool:** 8
**Special:** 3 attacks at 0/–1/–2

**Kick:**
**Damage:** 0(B)
**Range:** n/a
**Dice Pool:** 8
**Special:** 3 attacks at 0/–1/–2

# Tenshin Shoden Katori Shinto Ryu



## Fighting Styles:

- Aggressive Light Sword
- Combat Art
- Controls
- Defensive Light Sword
- Heavy Sword
- Knife Fighting
- Shurikenjutsu (Thrown Blade and Dart)
- Spear Fighting
- Staff Fighting
- Stick Fighting
- Spear Fighting
- Throwing
- Two Weapons

We study the tradition for its sake, not ours.

## Description

The Tenshin Shoden Katori Shinto Ryu (abbreviated as TSKSR by Western martial artists) translates to the "divinely inspired pure sword style of the Katori shrine." The name reflects a weighty tradition. The school is one of the oldest continuously taught Japanese martial traditions. This makes it one of the premiere *koryu*, or "old flows" of Japanese martial arts.

The TSKSR is a comprehensive style that was originally designed to train samurai in virtually every important aspect of warfare. This includes swordsmanship, spear fighting, military tactics and even counterespionage. These skills answer the needs of soldiers who fought during Japan's civil war period, when rival fiefs struggled to unify the nation. To call some of this tradecraft "antique" would be an understatement. The *ryuha* (style) teaches students to counter centuries-old ninja infiltration tactics but has no advice for the modern era of SIGINT and data mining. Still, some clever practitioners might be able to apply these antique teachings. They're old, but they were practical in their time.

For the average student, modern application is beside the point. They train to preserve what Japan's government has labeled an "intangible cultural asset." Teachers pass on the TSKSR to maintain a piece of history. Students train in two-person prearranged forms (*kata*) and study the school's teachings, but the art is multi-layered enough that it takes a lifetime to comprehend every word and movement. For example, a novice practicing a parry will later learn that the same move is a quick, subtle cut to the enemy's arm.

The TSKSR curriculum is gigantic. The sword is the center of study, however. A dedicated student learns to use late-period katana, older tachi and even two swords simultaneously. Depending on the kata, he might learn to attack from a sheathed position (iaijutsu or battojutsu) or with the blade drawn. Aside from this, students study many weapons, unarmed combat techniques and other strategies for individual and period mass combat.

### Partial Outline of the School:

| Area of Study | Associated Skills and Merits |
|---|---|
| 12 fundamental sword forms (kenjutsu)* | Weaponry Skill, Armored Fighting, Fighting Style: Aggressive Light Sword, Fighting Style: Heavy Sword, Weaponry Dodge |
| 16 forms for drawing and cutting (iaijutsu)* | Weaponry Skill, Fighting Finesse: Katana, Fighting Style: Defensive Light Sword, Quick Draw |
| Four forms utilizing two swords (ryoto)* | Weaponry Skill, Fighting Style: Two Weapons |
| Three short sword forms (kodachi)* | Weaponry Skill, Fighting Style: Knife Fighting |
| 12 staff fighting forms (bojutsu)* | Weaponry Skill, Fighting Style: Staff Fighting |
| Seven glaive forms (naginatajutsu)* | Weaponry Skill, Fighting Style: Spear Fighting |
| Six spear forms (sojutsu)* | Weaponry Skill, Fighting Style: Spear Fighting |
| 24 forms of spike throwing (*shurikenjutsu*) | Athletics Specialty: Shuriken Throwing, Fighting Style: Shurikenjutsu (Thrown Blade and Dart) |
| 36 unarmed combat forms (*jujutsu*)* | Brawl Skill, Equipped Grappling, Entering Strike, Fighting Style: Controls, Fighting Style: Throwing |
| Intelligence and espionage (*shinobijutsu*) | Academics Specialty: TSKSR, Investigation Skill, Stealth Skill, Subterfuge Skill |
| Fortifications (*chikujojutsu*) | Academics Specialty: TSKSR, Crafts Skill |
| Strategy (*heiho*) | Academics Specialty: TSKSR, Politics Skill |
| Astronomy and geomancy (*tenmon chirigaku*) | Academics Specialty: TSKSR, Occult Skill |
| Philosophy and mysticism (*In-Yo kigaku*) | Academics Specialty: TSKSR, Occult Skill |
| * Also, Fighting Style: Combat Art, as this reflects the artistic *kata* performance. | |

Obviously, TSKSR study is not something to be entered into lightly. The ryuha values quality over quantity. It doesn't accept casual students. Entrance requires an interview with a licensed teacher. There aren't many of these. Outside of Japan, the main branch has authorized one instructor in the Americas, one in Africa, two in England, and five in continental Europe. There are more fraudulent and unauthorized teachers than the genuine article.

## History

The TSKSR traditionally claims a founding date of 1447 CE, though some historians say 1480 is more plausible. Founder Iizasa Ienaoko was a retainer in the service of the lord of Chiba. When war killed his lord and destroyed his homestead, he traveled to the Katori Shrine to contemplate his purpose. At the age of 60, he began 1000 days of meditation and training.

On the 1000th night, the sword and lightning god Futsunushi no Mikoto visited Ienaoko in a dream. In the form of a vital young man, he leapt from a tree branch and said, "Choisai, you will train the greatest swordsmen under the sun!" The kami gave him the Heiho no Shinsho scroll that details the heart of the ryuha's strategy. Ienaoko changed his name to Choisai, transcribed the scroll from his dream and elaborated on it until his death at the age of 102, in 1488.

Its ancient origin makes it one of a number of koryu that date back to Japan's feudal period. Unlike the modern (or *gendai*) arts of kendo and judo, TSKSR was actually used on the battlefield – but unlike most old samurai traditions, the school took a mostly neutral political position. It encouraged loyalty to the shogun and discouraged casual dueling. Where other ryuha were advanced a particular clan's agenda, the TSKSR took students from many factions. Subsequently, many other schools were founded by former TSKSR masters, making it one of the most influential traditions in Japanese martial arts.

Like many martial arts, the ryuha closed its doors for a time after the Second World War. Martial arts schools were strongly associated with the Imperial Japan's ideology, so when the Allies banned any activity that appeared to be militaristic, fascist or imperialist, students had to train out of public view. Along with other Japanese martial arts, it gradually reestablished themselves over the first five years of occupation.

The modern school has several branches. The main line is still headed by the Iizasa family, but they no longer teach it themselves. The family retains control, but authorizes a head instructor to pass on the old techniques. This arrangement is common in several koryu. Not every inheritor is a skilled martial artist – or even interested in martial arts -- but tradition puts them in charge, nonetheless. On the other hand, there are excellent martial artists who teach the school outside of family authorization. Whether they teach "true" TSKSR is a controversial topic.

## Current Culture

*Ryu* is the Japanese word for "flow." It signifies and unbroken tradition, consistent in its passage from generation to generation. In a ryuha, the art isn't taught for the sake of the student. People study to preserve the art. Before the modern era, a ryuha could be thought of as something much like a European guild. In fact, there are ryu for arts such as the tea ceremony and carpentry. Traditional laws gave a ryuha's head family the sole right to license their art's practitioners and teachers. The head of the ruling family is called the *soke* and is considered to have ultimate authority over the art, though as we've noted, this isn't always absolute. As not every family head is necessarily a skilled martial artist, schools like the TSKSR employ a *shihanke* (or "house master") who actually directs training.

Koryu arts don't have belt ranks or the familiar white uniform, as these are both artifacts of the later gendai budo movement. Practitioners usually train in the same clothes and gear that a samurai would. An experienced student can detect a fraud just by examining how he wears a sword, or if he used a tsuka-maki cord to tie his sleeves back correctly.

You can't just walk into a school, write a check and start training. The TSKSR only accept students who are willing to submit to the ryuha's authority. A teacher interviews would-be students. He can reject them for

## Variants and Similar Styles

Aside from the TSKSR's main line and branches, there are several schools, such as the Kashima Shin-ryu, that were founded by masters of the TSKSR. Additionally, there are a number of koryu with similar breadth. None of them enjoy the prestige of the TSKSR, and a few have been at least partly reconstructed by practitioners. The styles most accessible to Westerners are the Kukishin-ryu and related Bujinkan, Genbukan and Jinenkan organizations.

All of these organizations owe their current status to Toshistugu Takamatsu, a man who claimed to be the inheritor of several ninjutsu traditions. Takamatsu recreated several Kuki family scrolls that had been destroyed during World War II. He was recognized as fully conversant in the Kukishin-ryu and taught this, along with three alleged ninjutsu styles, and a few other schools, to Masaaki Hatsumi, the founder of the modern Bujinkan organization. It and its offshoot Jinenkan and Genbukan schools all teach Kukishin-ryu techniques in their curriculum. In addition, there are still Kukishin-ryu teachers who do not come from the Bujinkan line. Each school teaches a massive curriculum, comparable in scope to the TSKSR's.

any reason. Some teachers won't accept anyone with a tattoo, for instance, because of their association with Japanese criminals. Others won't accept active students of another martial art. In the past, every student was required to take the *keppan*: an oath signed in blood. In the traditional keppan, the student makes the following promises before Futsunushi no Mikoto kami and the Buddhist deity Marishiten:

1. She will never reveal the secret traditions of the school to anyone.

2. She will not discuss or demonstrate aspects of the school to anyone, including relatives.

3. She will not duel with other martial artists without the authorization of the school.

4. She will not gamble, or frequent "disreputable places."

The main line still employs the *keppan*, but newer branches do not. Even so, every branch expects its students to follow a stringent code of ethics that concentrates on preserving the school's honor and integrity. Disobedience is grounds for expulsion.

There are three stages of training. The *omote* ("outer") stage focuses on practical, basic skills. The *ura* ("interior") stage refines these, revealing more efficient forms, and the *gokui* ("conceptual") level concentrates on the ryuha's secret principles and techniques. In demonstrations, high-level TSKSR stylists shift through different modes of training with ease, concealing secrets inside innocuous movements and alternative applications.

To signify advancement through the stages of training, the TSKSR issues written licenses that state a student's level of proficiency. The basic *mokoruku* ("catalog of techniques") license typically takes 10 to 15 years to attain. After another decade, a dedicated student might earn a *menkyo* degree, which is the minimum requirement for teachers. Few attain *menkyo kaiden*: full transmission of the art. The art also issues instructor licenses separately from the ranking system, so a practitioner with the ability to teach doesn't necessarily have permission to do so. Most TSKSR teachers are not full time martial artists. Even though students traditionally pay an entrance fee, the ryuha is not a business affair, but a calling.

## Story Hooks

• **Secret Philosophies:** The TSKSR includes teachings that have supernatural, if not magical elements. In the World of Darkness, dedicated students might learn effective magical traditions from these. Sorcerers could populate the highest ranks of the school. On the other hand, true mastery may require a spiritual quality that either can't be taught, or is so rare that only one or two in a century attain it. Studying the TSKSR could constitute a sorcerous initiation. (This is especially appropriate for **Mage: The Awakening**'s Adamantine Arrows, but it might be a channel for the psychics or hedge magicians featured in **World of Darkness: Second Sight** instead.)

• **Secret Scrolls:** The ryu preserves scrolls from throughout its history. What could over 600 years of secret documents include? Spells? The secret names of patron spirits? The location of a powerful, evil force that masters encountered long ago? Prophecies? The TSKSR was founded upon a divine vision. Although it's a martial arts school founded on the blood and sweat of hard training it has never rejected the supernatural elements of its history.

• **The Blood Oath:** The school has hundreds of keppan documents, all signed in blood. These theoretically entitle the goddess Marishiten to punish students who betray the ryu. Aside from the interesting possibilities here, a keppan would provides anyone who uses blood-based or sympathetic magic a virtual catalog of skilled martial artists to manipulate for their own purposes. If someone stole these documents for that reason, the TSKSR may understand the sinister subtext, and employ people who investigate supernatural affairs to get them back.

## Systems

To join, a prospective student must acquire one dot of Status (TSKSR). This represents the character's keppan or some other proof of loyalty. A character may purchase another dot after earning mokoruku, and one more after a menkyo. The character may purchase an additional dot by dedicating herself to such an extent that she is trusted to teach. The head of a branch has five dots of Status. Barring a truly exceptional turn of events, no character will attain that rank.

It's tempting to break licensing requirements down into specific Attribute, Skill and Merit requirements, but the curriculum is large enough that every teacher has a different emphasis and every student will absorb the art in his own way. Furthermore, even though TSKSR techniques were used in real warfare, they're no longer taught for their practical value. One student might have perfect form but no feel for live combat. (This would be represented by a high Athletics Skill and the Combat Art Fighting Style.) If a student can preserve, protect

and transmit the school's curriculum she deserves the rank, whether she can really dispatch an enemy with a blade or not.

## Fighting Style: Shurikenjutsu (Thrown Blade and Dart; • to ••••)

The Tenshin Shoden Katori Shinto Ryu's curriculum includes *shurikenjutsu*. Despite the "ninja throwing star" stereotype, most shuriken were actually spikes (*bo shuriken*), not stars (*hira shuriken* or *shaken*), and were mostly used by samurai who trained in one of the dozens of koryu that taught their use. Drop the idea that they would have been thought of as "dishonorable" weapons – it's false.

This is the core Fighting Style for thrown edged weapons. We've included them under the TSKSR because traditional shurikenjutsu is almost never taught outside of a larger curriculum. Dedicated interest in the art is growing, however; there are a few small schools, new and old, that do teach it exclusively.

**Prerequisites:** Dexterity ••• Athletics ••

**Effect:** Your character knows how to throw edged weapons with particular skill. Dots purchased in this Merit provide access to special combat maneuvers. Each maneuver is a prerequisite for the next.

Your character may use Fighting Style: Shurikenjutsu with any edged weapon that's been designed for throwing. She may also use it with any other Size 1 object as if she had one dot less in this Merit, or any Size 2 weapon as if she had 2 dots less (Size 3 or greater weapons are not compatible with the Merit). The advantages of this Merit apply to the character's attempts to throw a qualified weapon, not use it in close range combat.

**Ma-ai ("Distance;" •):** Your character learns to properly gauge a target's distance and modify her technique to match it. Double her short, medium and long range throwing ranges.

**Kakushi Buki ("Hidden Weapons;" ••):** The character knows how to rapidly retrieve a throwing weapon from a sleeve, holster or other prepared spot on her body. She never needs to use an action to draw a throwing weapon from a prepared spot.

**Choku Da-Ho ("Direct Hit Method;" •••):** Your character can throw using the power of her entire body. Add her Strength dots to the dice pool for throwing the weapon. **Drawback:** The character is considered a still target and may not employ her Defense during the turn in which she uses this maneuver. She may not use this maneuver in conjunction with Ikki Gokken.

**Ikki Gokken ("Five Blades in One Breath;" ••••):** Your character can throw multiple weapons in rapid succession during a single turn, provided she either holds them in one hand or can draw them instantly using Kakushi Buki. She may make a one additional throw for each point of Dexterity that she has above 2. Each extra action is rolled at a cumulative –1 modifier. Thus, she can throw twice at Dexterity 3 (with the second at a –1 modifier), three times at Dexterity 4 (at a 0, –1 then –2 modifier to dice rolls) and four time at Dexterity 5 (at 0, –1, –2 and –3 to each dice roll, in turn). **Drawback:** The character is considered a still target and may not employ her Defense during the turn in which she uses this maneuver. She may not use this maneuver in conjunction with Choku-Do-Ho.

## John Toda

**Quote:** *I'm an antiquarian of the material and ephemeral. Without one, the other has no value.*

**Background:** John Toda's conservative good taste is a reflex, not a pretense. He loves old things. He wears 1940s fashions, sits in Edwardian furniture and decorates his Los Angeles condo with nothing that's under than fifty years old. It wasn't always this way. As a teenager, he was a bit of a hell-raiser. That's why his parents sent him to Japan to live with his grandfather. The man ran his household with a combination of sarcastic humor and strict discipline. Against his better judgment, John felt himself falling for the old stereotype of a young man in need of a strong mentor. "Grandpa Junichiro" held a menkyo in the Tenshin Shoden Katori Shinto Ryu. He privately taught John the basics and they bonded over efforts to improve every stance, step and cut.

Junichiro's guidance gave John a leg up when he formally entered the ryuha, so he found himself training with older, more advanced practitioners. He never socialized with Japanese teenagers and came to prefer the company of his elders. He got a job doing office work for a heavy industry firm and by the age of 22, was on the fast track to run their US branch.

John's networking included a lot of drinking – enough to make him an alcoholic by the time he returned to America. Without the company of older martial artists and businessmen he drank alone, and with nobody to take him home or warn him when he'd had enough, he got too drunk to work. He rapidly fell from corporate grace. They asked him to resign after a year. Fortunately, he was always good with his money and got a considerable severance package. It was enough to start him off as an antiques dealer. Between his grandfather and the research he did to buy presents for senior executives, he already had some familiarity with the trade.

Starting his own business forced him to deal with his drinking. Until five years ago, he'd been sober for 12 years. Then he cast the winning bid at an auction for a genuine Sengo Muramasa sword. It brought back memories of his life in Japan, so after stowing it in his vault he went out for a drink – just a little one.

He lost a week. He came back to his senses in a five star hotel in New York. The first thing he saw was an army of empty bottles at the foot of his bed. The second thing he saw was the immaculately polished sword. He found the bloody cloths he must have used to clean it in the tub.

He sold the sword, but it didn't make any difference. Exactly a year later he found himself in a Vancouver hotel in exactly the same situation. He didn't even remember drinking, or buying the sword back, but there is was, along with a receipt. The owner was missing.

Three more years have passed. Every January 4th he loses his memory for a week and reappears in a hotel room with the sword and signs of binge drinking, but everything else is in order. He's even hired private investigators to follow him, but all they report is that he goes to a local bar, knocks back cheap beer for an hour and each and every time, finds a way to escape their notice. He doesn't know if he's killed anyone, but could the bloody cloth come from anything else?

**Appearance:** John Toda's a thin-faced, fit 39 year-old man of Japanese descent. He wears perfectly preserved antique formal wear, a hundred-year old pocket watch and turn of the century glasses. He speaks English with a deep Southern California accent and Japanese with an even deeper rumble. He's a very articulate man with a confident, decisive way about him that serves him well when it comes to dealing with the antiques scene.

**Storytelling Hints:** John is quietly, desperately frightened about his annual mystery. At this point, he's convinced that there can only be a supernatural explanation. Muramasa swords have a reputation for bloodthirst, and the esoteric elements of the TSKSR make him suspect that his disappearances are somehow related to his status as a traditionally-trained swordsman. Is he being punished for violating his keppan? Technically, his early, unofficial training with his grandfather was forbidden. Is an evil spirit using his skills to do its dirty work? It took him a while to even consider his training as a factor. He never identified himself as a "martial artist," but always folded his ryuha membership into his general interest in traditional Japanese culture. Still, the last thing he wants to do is get the school involved. He doesn't want to dishonor it.

**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 4, Wits 4, Resolve 2
**Physical Attributes:** Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2
**Social Attributes:** Presence 3, Manipulation 2, Composure 4
**Mental Skills:** Academics 4 (TSKSR), Computer 2, Investigation 1
**Physical Skills:** Athletics 3, Brawl, 3, Drive 1, Weaponry 4 (Katana)



**Social Skills:** Empathy 3, Expression 2, Persuasion 3 (Haggling), Socialize 3
**Merits:** Fighting Style: Aggressive Light Sword •, Fighting Style: Combat Art •••, Fighting Style: Defensive Light Sword ••, Fighting Style: Heavy Sword •, Fighting Style: Spear Fighting •, Fighting Style: Staff Fighting •, Fighting Style: Throws •, Quick Draw, Resources, ••••, Status (TSKSR) ••
**Willpower:** 6
**Morality:** 6
**Virtue:** Faith
**Vice:** Gluttony
**Initiative:** 8
**Defense:** 3
**Speed:** 11
**Health:** 7
**Weapons/Attacks:**
**Muramasa Katana:**
**Damage:** 4*
**Range:** n/a
**Dice Pool:** 12
**Special:** +1 with overhead cut when drawn or +4 to Initiative when sheathed.

* This sword's quality gives it a Damage rating of 4 instead of the usual 3

# Specialized Fighting Styles

Every teacher has favorite moves and every fighting style has a specialty. In some cases, these are distinct enough to merit their own rules – a *specialized* Fighting Style. A specialized style has one or more maneuvers that differ from the common, core Fighting Style. Students learn these instead of the standard maneuvers. Theoretically, every dot could differ from the core style, but in practice, you should keep one or two common maneuvers to track the root fighting method and maintain the intent of the structure in this book which is designed to keep you from having to design a new Fighting Style for every occasion.

Specialized Fighting Styles are listed by their cultural names along with their base core styles. Each style only lists the special maneuvers that *replace* core maneuvers with the same number of dots. If a maneuver isn't listed at a given rank, it uses the same rules as the core Fighting Style.

You've already seen two specialized styles: Boxing and Kung Fu. Each one is a bit different from the generic Aggressive and Evasive Striking styles. Aggressive and Evasive Striking can stand in for any martial art that specializes in hitting hard and fast, but Boxing represents the classic pugilist's art, while Kung Fu is a typical "external" Chinese striking art.

## Branching Out

If a character already knows one version of a core Fighting Style she only needs to relearn (and the player only needs to purchase) maneuvers that differ from what she already knows. A character with three dots of Aggressive Striking doesn't need to start from the beginning if she's studying Muay Thai. On the other hand, characters must purchase new maneuvers in order. The Muay Thai novice might have core Aggressive Striking •••••, but he still needs to learn the Cut Kick before a Thai Clinch.

# Judo (Throwing)

## Description

Judo is an Olympic sport. People all over the world study this martial art. The quintessence of modern gendai budo, it retains a strong sense of tradition while adopting cutting edge training methods. While there are kata that teach strikes and wristlocks, judo's signature technique is the throw. Few martial artists can throw someone as powerfully as a judo expert. Some submission holds are also allowed in competition, but explosive takedowns are perhaps judo's most distinctive feature.

A judo match is a brief, intense affair. The regulation judo uniform is gi (the classic Japanese martial arts outfit) that's been reinforced to stand up to strong gripping. Judo fighters (or *judoka*) are skilled at using gi to choke and throw opponents – a skill that often transfers to other clothes. Judo actually invented the gi along with the colored belt ranking system that's used in karate and dozens of other modern martial arts.

## History

By the late 19th century, classical jujutsu was in decline. It was a samurai tradition, but the Meiji Restoration deposed the warrior class in 1868 and returned real power to the emperor (or at least, the faction surrounding him). After that, people believed that samurai customs were remnants of a culturally stagnant era, unfit for a power aspiring to Western-style imperialism.

Jigoro Kano had been a weak, sickly child, but practicing the Tenshin-Shinyo and Kito-ryu jujutsu schools dramatically improved his health. Starting in the 1880s, Kano started a project to redeem his art by transforming it into a modern physical education system. He studied several other schools, taking the best techniques that could be practiced against resisting partners.

In 1882, the 22 year-old Kano opened the Kodokan school and presented the new sport of judo. Other jujutsu schools thought it was an impetuous move and

that judo was a limited art, but Kodokan students defeated them in contest after contest. On the occasions where rival schools' techniques showed promise, Kano added them to the syllabus. This spirit of innovation would be a judo hallmark, as it developed everything from the belt system to the standard Japanese martial arts uniform.

Jigoro Kano and the Kodokan spread judo around the world. Judo "missionaries" traveled around the world, teaching judo everywhere from universities to dance halls (and in the latter, they often defeated local wrestlers and strongmen). Even President Roosevelt trained in it. Kano himself died aboard ship in 1938, on his way back from an International Olympic Committee meeting.

## Current Culture

At its heart, judo is more than a sport. It teaches aesthetics and moral values along with raw techniques. Not every practitioner cares about such things, but the tradition preserves them. Judo's philosophy can be encapsulated in two mottos: *Seriyoku-zenyo* (maximum efficiency) and *Jita-kyoei* (mutual welfare and benefit). Younger judo players don't necessarily give much thought to this, but older practitioners often study the more artistic and philosophical aspects of the art t maintain a lifelong practice.

### Story Hooks

• **Violent School Days:** In Japan, judo is a high school sport. If you want a chronicle where teenagers clash with the supernatural, a high school judo team is an excellent place to start. Kendo is another Japanese high school sport. Between both arts, you can run a game featuring young people who can handle themselves in a fight.

• **International Judo:** Supernatural beings could sneak across borders under the cover of a traveling judo team. Why *do* Mie Prefecture's top judoka always tour with a long, heavy trunk, and why doesn't anybody see them eat? Top coaches are in demand around the world and the sport has a huge international community, so judo could provide an effective cover for globetrotting characters. Combine it with "Violent School Days," above, and you can send young characters to the edge of the earth – and toss a few zombies with well executed *tokui-waza*.

Judo contests use Japanese terminology even when competition takes place in another country. Players score an *ippon* (a "full point" that gives total victory to the scorer) when they execute a clean, powerful throw, pin the opponent on his back for 30 seconds or score submissions via strangulation or a legal arm lock. Less refined throws and pins that last 25 to 29 seconds score *waza-iri* (half points) or lesser *yuko* and *koku* scores. An ippon always beats a waza-iri because it ends the match. Two waza-iri also secure victory. Failing that, a waza-iri beats any number of yuko and a yuko beats any number of koku.

Judo rules penalize stalling, an excessively defensive or passive posture, illegal techniques and moving outside the matted competition area, among other things.

## System

**Core Style:** Fighting Style: Throwing (as listed under Aikido). In addition to the usual requirements for a Throwing style, the character must possess Athletics •• or higher to learn judo.

Advanced judoka perfect standing grappling and submission holds, so these characters might learn Fighting Style: Controls and Fighting Style: Submission Grappling.

**Special Maneuvers:** Judo employs the following alternate Fighting Style maneuvers. The • and •••• dot maneuvers remain unchanged.

**Nage-waza ("Throwing Techniques;" ••):** Your character may use a grappling overpower to render an opponent prone without falling prone herself – but if she *chooses* to fall prone, she may simultaneously damage her opponent *while* rendering her prone. Furthermore, she excels at gripping clothing. If the opponent wears anything heavier than a t-shirt on his upper body she gains a +1 equipment bonus to perform each of the above maneuvers. If the opponent wears a *gi* (a karate or judo-style uniform), this increases to +2.

**Sutemi-waza ("Sacrifice Techniques;" •••):** Your character uses her own bodyweight to drive her opponent to the ground, falling prone along with him. If she uses an all-out attack (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 157) you may add her Athletics skill to a roll instead of the usual +2 to render her opponent prone while using the nage-waza option that allows her to simultaneously damage an opponent and render her prone, while falling prone herself.

**Tokui-waza ("Favorite Technique;" •••••):** Through constant practice and competition, your character had made one throw into a specialty. It's not easy to apply it every time, but when the opportunity appears, few people can resist her technique. If her opponent scores zero successes to establish a hold, escape one or use an overpowering maneuver and the character secures a hold herself, she creates an opening for the technique.

If you score even one success on one of the nage-waza based overpowering actions (render an opponent prone while standing, or render both combatants prone while inflicting damage), add the character's Athletics Skill as extra successes.

## Christian "Komodo" Kekoa

**Quote:** *You woke the komodo, baby!*

**Background:** Komodo is the most popular heel ("bad guy") in Pacific Ocean Wrestling (POW). Chris Kekoa is a self-pitying Hawaiian judo champ, who's still sore after barely failing to qualify for the Sydney Olympics back in 2000. He was a good judoka, but his exceptional size, strength and athleticism wasn't quite the equal of his technique. The US qualifiers exposed his flaws, but he wasn't up to fixing them. He'd bet everything on qualifying, and didn't have a penny left. He needed work, fast, and considers himself lucky that POW knocked on his door.

POW is a small but unique promotion, because it's aiming to be a truly international organization, with branches in Japan and the US. Japanese wrestling fans like to see the occasional "shoot" match that features real fighting. Thanks to his judo background, Komodo can do both, but he prefers fake "works" to shoots. He considers himself a judo man first and foremost, and feels like he's just shaming his "judo side" by using his legitimate skills in the ring. Unfortunately, he's not great at works, either, but he gets by with raw charisma.

The fans are getting tired of his strutting, his hackneyed moves and his uninspired shoots, however. Chris knows it, and his bosses know it. He's made a deal with them to make a little extra money against the day they'll let him go. Chris travels between Japan and the US frequently. He used to travel light, but nowadays, his bosses pack an extra bit of carry on luggage. He's not allowed to open it and customs never stops it, but when he sleeps that night, he always has a strange dream, where he's wrestling a huge sea serpent. Sometimes he kills it. Sometimes, it kills him.

**Appearance:** He's big. Really, really big: almost seven feet tall and over 300 pounds, with a slight spare tire covering thick, powerful muscles. He has classic Pacific Islander features, big, gorgeous brown eyes and a magnetic smile. He never lacks for romance, though the women in his life eventually get tired of the self-pity. He's 31 years old.

**Storytelling Hints:** Characters who are wrestling fans have probably heard of Komodo. Hawaiian judo players know all about him, and consider him a bit of a joke for turning into a "sports entertainer." He's always up for talking about judo, and that might be the best way to make contact when characters want to answer the obvious question: What's in his luggage?



**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 2, Wits 2, Resolve 2
**Physical Attributes:** Strength 5, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4
**Social Attributes:** Presence 4, Manipulation 1, Composure 3
**Mental Skills:** Academics 3 (Coaching), Computer 2, Medicine 1
**Physical Skills:** Athletics 3, Brawl, 4 (Judo), Drive 1
**Social Skills:** Expression 3 (Public Speaking), Intimidation 3, Socialize 3
**Merits:** Fame ••, Fighting Style: Judo •••, Fighting Style: Grappling •, Giant
**Willpower:** 7
**Morality:** 7
**Virtue:** Faith
**Vice:** Pride
**Initiative:** 6
**Defense:** 3
**Speed:** 13
**Health:** 10
**Weapons/Attacks:**
**Nage-Waza:**
**Damage:** 0
**Range:** n/a
**Dice Pool:** 10*
**Special:** * Includes Skill specialty bonus. Add +1 when opponent is wearing a heavy top, or +2 if wearing a judo or karate gi (uniform).

** Render prone while standing without damaging, or render prone while going prone *and* inflict damage.

# Muay Thai (Aggressive Striking)

## Description

In the West, Muay Thai has only recently grown from a little-known combat sport into a near-mandatory study for serious strikers. In Asia, the style has been famous for longer. Kung fu and karate styles have both tested fighters by sending them against Thai boxers, or *nak muay*. In some cases, even amateur Muay Thai stylists beat them within an inch of their lives. The art earned a reputation for training powerful, tough fighters. Martial artists from other styles now routinely add Muay Thai techniques to their arsenal. The most famous modern examples are MMA stylists, who use Thai cut kicks, clinching knees and elbows in standup combat. A cut kick resembles the karate "roundhouse" kick, but whips through the target like a baseball bat, without snapping the knee, and strikes with a shinbone conditioned to hit without flinching. The kick's thrown with so much relaxed power that if it misses, the fighter might spin in a complete circle before falling back into a fighting stance.

Muay Thai's changed, too. Thai boxers add Western boxing's combinations and evasion techniques to their arsenal. Not every technique is suitable for Muay Thai competition, however. A deep duck that works in boxing would earn a Thai fighter a knee to the face. Even as the art evolves, it must confront the realities of Muay Thai competition, where fighters can grab their opponent and use hands, feet, knees and elbows to strike. For this reason, Muay Thai is sometimes called the "eight limbed art," or the style with "eight points of contact." Even head butts used to be allowed, but they're now illegal in mainstream venues.

## History

*Muay* is the Thai word for "boxing," or general unarmed combat. Muay Thai ("Thai boxing") is the descendant of *muay boran* ("ancient boxing"): a comprehensive martial art that includes grappling, prearranged forms and through the related *krabi krabong* style, weapons. Like kung fu, muay boran has several styles, named after the parts of Thailand they originated from.

In the 14th Century, Thailand's monarchy created a regiment of muay warriors, starting a trend of royal patronage that reached its zenith in 1800s, when King Rama V encouraged former soldiers and other muay masters to found training camps. By the 1920s, Thai martial arts gained codified competition rules. Modern fighters became known as Muay Thai fighters and older arts were now called muay boran. Some camps teach both styles, but many muay boran techniques are either illegal or impractical in the ring. There's been a resurgence of interest in muay boran as a performance art, a Thai tradition and as an influence in action film choreography, but most fighters looking for reliable, hard-hitting techniques prefer the modern art.

## Current Culture

Muay Thai is now a truly international sport. Emigration, television and interest from foreign martial artists spread it around the world. Many serious students go to Thailand to train but there are respected camps around the world. In Thailand, it's a tremendously popular sport. Thais take pride in local fighters. Some bet heavily on their favorites. Traditional fighters take a ring name that combines their personal name, a nickname and the name of their training camp, but others adapt the culture traditions of Western fighters instead. At its worst, the art promotes reckless gambling and ruthless deals designed to squeeze maximum profits from every bout, but this doesn't change the fact that some people have protected themselves and even transformed their lives using Muay Thai's practical methods and grueling training.

In Thailand, Muay Thai is deeply connected to traditional culture. In a classic bout, each fighter performs the *Wai Khru Ram Muay* in the ring. (Modern Thai boxers usually just call it the *Wai Khru* or *Ram Muay* instead of using the full name.) This dance honors a fighter's teacher, the Buddha and the Thai king. Every camp has its own version. Each fighter then removes her *mongkon*: headbands that symbolize their competence. In the fight itself, Muay Thai stylists might wear *pra jiad*. These armbands were considered magical luck charms, but fighters often treat them as more of a sign of their camp's confidence. Some modern matches may omit some or all of these traditions, but in Muay Thai, authenticity doesn't come from particular rituals, but the blood and sweat of the fighters themselves.

## Story Hooks

• **Muay Boran:** Thai martial traditions are every bit as complex and elaborate as better known examples from China and Japan. Hidden masters, secret techniques – all of them might be found by characters who study the secrets of ancient Thai boxing, or muay boran.

• **Recovery:** Muay Thai is a punishing sport. Some fighters end up in a wheelchair, or reeling from brain injuries. How far would an injured nak muay go to recover? Would he use experimental drugs? Occult charms? Potions that taste of blood and venom? In the World of Darkness, it's probably better that these *don't* work. The consequences could be terrifying.

## Systems

**Core Style:** Aggressive Striking. Many modern Muay Thai fighters learn Western boxing techniques as well, so they often learn that Fighting Style's maneuvers.

**Special Maneuvers:** Muay Thai employs the following alternate Fighting Style maneuvers. The •• and ••• and ••••• dot maneuvers remain unchanged.

**Cut Kick (•):** Your character knows how to deliver powerful round kicks to her opponent's legs. When you choose this option your character inflicts one less point of damage than usual, counted after rolling to see if the attack succeeds. (For example, an attack that scores one success would still be a successful cut kick, but inflicts no Health damage). However, each kick reduces the opponent's Speed by one, down to a minimum of one. If you roll as many successes as the opponent's Size, he falls prone because he's been swept by her kick or can't use his leg out of sheer pain. Her opponent can get back up whenever she has the chance, but her Speed only recovers at the end of the combat scene.

**Thai Clinch (••••):** Your character grabs an enemy around the head and pulls him into a vicious elbow or knee strike. If you establishing a grappling hold as the first part of using the Combination Blows maneuver and inflict damage as the second move, add your Dexterity to your dice pool to attack. **Drawback:** The usual –1 penalty for Combination Blows applies to the first grappling attempt, not the following attack. This benefit does not apply if your character has already established a hold or in future attempts to damage an opponent from the same hold, but she can always abandon her current hold and try a new grapple to use the Thai Clinch.

## Lucia Vanderbeck

**Quote:** *Nak Muay! Knees ready? Elbows ready? Fight!*

**Background:** Lucia Vanderbeck is a pleasant, middle-aged Dutch lady who could split your head open with an elbow. She used to do this a lot, actually. In her prime, she was a European Muay Thai champion. Granted, this was back when the sport was just starting to make inroads, so she couldn't find many other women to fight. Fortunately, she had no problem fighting men, too. It wasn't a matter of pride. She just needed the money to help pay her brother's ever-increasing debts. Markus loved to gamble.

That was 20 years ago. One night, Markus came to her and paid every cent back in cash. She didn't want to know where the money came from and he didn't say, except to mention that he "finally had something he could use to pay his dues." He disappeared after that. She used some of the money to hire private investigators, which proved fruitless, and the rest to open her own gym. The Vanderveck Camp is now one of the world's premiere training facilities for female kickboxers – and it's got a decent stable of men, too. Alice Blundell (see p. 98) spent four weeks at Vandervecken to improve her standup fighting. Lucia's a famous coach now.

Last month, the police brought Lucia brother back – but he didn't act like her brother. He's got a number of circular scars like cigarette burns, al over his body, he doesn't remember the last two decades and worst of all, he always seems passive and tired. There's a dullness in his eyes that depresses and frightens Lucia. Sometimes he drinks too much, weeps softly and tells her: "They took out my soul."

**Appearance:** Lucia's 48 years old, but only her hands, face and graying, wavy hair show it. She's not as fit as she used to be, but she can still lead a conditioning class without embarrassing herself. She goes for sports casual with her gym's logo: a silhouette of a muscular woman with one knee raised, ready to defend against a kick.

**Storytelling Hints:** Lucia Vanderbeck would make an excellent instructor for characters. She has a complete understanding of the Muay Thai style and some standard boxing, too. In return, she may ask characters to investigate what really happened to her brother. They'll have 20 years of missing time to uncover.

**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 4
**Physical Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3
**Social Attributes:** Presence 3, Manipulation 2, Composure 4
**Mental Skills:** Academics 1, Computer 1, Medicine 1 (First Aid)
**Physical Skills:** Athletics 3, Brawl 5 (Elbow Strike), Drive 2
**Social Skills:** Expression 3 (Coaching), Intimidation 3, Socialize 3
**Merits:** Brawling Dodge, Fast Reflexes, Fighting Style: Muay Thai ●●●●● (plus additional maneuvers: Body Blow and Duck and Weave, from Fighting Style: Boxing), Resources ●●●
**Willpower:** 8
**Morality:** 7
**Virtue:** Fortitude
**Vice:** Wrath
**Initiative:** 7
**Defense:** 3
**Speed:** 10
**Health:** 8

**Weapons/Attacks:**
**Unarmed:**
**Damage:** 0
**Range:** n/a
**Dice Pool:** 8
**Special:** Fighting Style Maneuvers

## Supplemental Styles

While most Fighting Styles Merits represent a set of specific skills learned through extensive training and experience, this does not reflect the totality of options available to combatants in the World of Darkness. By combining the core and specialized Fighting Styles above, a Storyteller or player gains access to numerous options for adding flavor to their characters and enhancing what options those character have in combat.

The supplemental styles, on the other hand, exist specifically to interact with the Styles written above, further enhancing and rounding out the combat resolution system. Supplemental styles represent effort taken by a character towards altering how she approaches a way of fighting. While a boxer may take gym classes, learning through months of hard training to move like a butterfly and sting like a bee, a back-alley brawler may rage against his opponents, allowing instinct to guide him and fury to fuel his blows. Some individuals may combine the two approaches, while an actor may



learn to convincingly *fake* fighting for use on the stage or screen.

Supplemental styles, as their name suggests, exist to supplement the current options available for Fighting Styles and combat-related Skills. Supplemental styles may explicitly be used in the same turn as another Fighting Style ability or attack, to enhance said ability or attack. A few rules apply, however.

Under no circumstances may a character spend more than a single Willpower point in a single turn. In other words, a character cannot use a supplemental style Merit that requires a Willpower point to enact during the same turn that she uses a Willpower point to enact another Fighting Style Merit (or gain additional dice on a roll, for that matter).

Furthermore, a character cannot give up his Defense twice in the same turn. If a Fighting Style Merit includes the drawback that the character's Defense drops to zero, the character may not enhance that action with a supplemental style Merit that also negates Defense (nor can the character go All-Out). Similar cases may appear in which a character stands to benefit by doubling up on a single drawback to utilize two distinct Merits, and Storytellers are encouraged to exercise similar discretion. A character *can*, however, use multiple Merits that grant the user penalties to an action (typically to hit); in this case, the penalties stack.

Finally, a character may only benefit from a single supplemental style in a given turn.

Supplemental styles complement specific Skills or Fighting Styles and, as a result, must be purchased separately for each application. For example, a character who practices both the boxing and fencing Fighting Styles would have to purchase Combat Art (Boxing) and Combat Art (Fencing) separately. A character must only purchase the supplemental style once for each core Fighting Style, so a character who purchased Combat Art (Akido) and later took up Judo, could apply his Combat Art to Judo, since they both fall under the same core Style of Throwing. Characters *may* purchase a supplemental style to enhance a compound Fighting Style, in which case her supplemental style may be applied to any Fighting Style Merit learned in accordance with that compound Style.

Alternatively, a character can purchase a supplemental style to enhance a combat related Skill, typically Brawl or Weaponry. This represents a commitment of the supplemental style's purpose towards a wider use than the Fighting Styles. While an athlete may learn Combat Art (Escrima) in order to engage in sporting competitions, a thespian might learn Combat Art (Weaponry) to represent her training in stage combat. If a character uses a supplemental style to enhance a Skill, she may not use it when garnering the benefits of a Fighting Style for which she has not purchased the supplemental style; she hasn't trained to internalize the abilities granted by the supplemental style in a way that allows her to apply it to the specialized and formalized movements of the Fighting Style.

Storytellers should exercise caution when allowing players to purchase supplemental styles, not only to ensure that the combinations they seek are not too unbalancing, but to make sure that the themes of the supplemental style do not contradict the themes of the Fighting Style that the player wishes it to apply to. Combat Art, for example, would not apply to the raw efficiency of Fighting Style (Sniping), while the hyper-awareness of Fighting Style (Iaido) contradicts (and is therefore incompatible with) the mindless actions of the Berserker supplemental style.

Lastly, a character may not purchase a supplemental style to a level *higher* than the level of the Skill or Fighting Style that it supplements. If a Fighting Style includes fewer levels than a complementary supplemental style, a character can never learn the highest levels of the supplemental style for that Fighting Style (short of developing new levels of the Fighting Style Merit herself).

Except as listed above, supplemental styles are purchased exactly as any other Fighting Style Merit, including experience cost.

# Berserker

**Quote:** *"I'll tear your fucking head off!" followed by an incoherent bellow.*

## Description

Medieval Roman Catholics wrote of the savage barbarians of the north, mad pagans who entered into a fury during battle, fighting as animals without heed for their own lives. The Norse sang of the Ulfheðnar, ferocious warriors devoted to Odin, who wore the pelt of bear or a wolf and entered battle with a bloodied spear. Icelandic sagas spoke of men who tore out their enemies' throats with their teeth, while Mediterranean sources such as the *Illiad* describe similar behavior from heroes under the wild influence of the gods. The Irish tale *Táin Bó Cúailnge* renders heroic warriors as frenzied, contorted and frothing at the mouth.

With such demented monsters seeded throughout history, is there any doubt why legends of frenzied werewolves and vampires persist to the modern nights?

### History

The historicity of the berserker, an individual who enters a wrathful fugue on the battlefield, often comes under scrutiny. Few sources exist that are contemporary with the individuals they describe, and theories about the consumption of hallucinogens or other drugs to fuel the *berserkergang* (the traditional phrase for the

berserker state) have largely come in to popularity recently to explain the behavior described in the epics and histories.

One epic describes the berserkers as giants upon whom a fury fell that lifted them from all fear and doubled their strength only to flee them at battle's end, leaving them weaker than before. They knew not friend from foe, and would tear a bull apart were it to stand in their way. Traditionally, the berserker might be overcome if one found him after his fury was spent, and he was weakened from his exertions.

A few outside texts describe entities that may be berserkers or inspired by them, including Grendel of *Beowulf*. Icelandic law of the twelfth century specifically forbade an individual from going berserk. By the 13th century, the traditional berserker seemed to disappear.

## Story Hooks

• **The Ballad of Jackie O:** Jack Ortega (Jackie O, as he's called on the streets) has gotten into PCP in a bad way. He sprinkles a little angel dust on a joint, smokes up, and wakes up the next morning in his shower. Meanwhile the characters watch as the local news continues its report on the violent attacks occurring throughout the city. They may suspect a renegade werewolf or vampire lost to the Beast. Little do they know how close the monster is to their own humanity.

• **The Manual of Madness:** One of the characters uncovers an ancient text in Icelandic about "taking on the bear." Luckily modern Icelandic bears a strong resemblance to ancient Icelandic, and the characters can find a translator with relatively little difficulty. The text seems to teach a character how to achieve the state of mindless strength spoken of by the Viking sages. Unfortunately it doesn't say anything about the malign spirits one invites into one's soul by following the dark path of Odin.

• **The Brutal Compatriot:** An ally of the characters has taken to losing himself utterly in a fight, driven by adrenaline and rage. His actions are becoming more wrathful, even when not taking the fight to the monsters of the World of Darkness, and he's taken to starting fights at the worst possible times. Violence has become his drug, and it's up to the characters to stage an intervention.

However, warriors filled with mad passion during the heat of battle have existed across the centuries. The holy soldiers of the first crusade slaughtered so many women and children that the streets ran with blood, while the soldiers of the fourth crusade destroyed much of Constantinople. The sack of Magdeburg saw the death of five sixths of the city's thirty thousand-strong population when Johann Tserclaes's army slipped from his command. Incidents during World War II, Vietnam and wars more recent seem to imply that the berserker condition never dies; instead, it is an intrinsic facet of the nature of war.

## Current Culture

No organized berserker culture exists on a large scale in the modern world. Athletes may occasionally lose control and head-butt an opponent in the chest or bite off a competitor's ear, but these tend to be isolated incidents. The rise of neopaganism and Odinism in Germany has not seen a similar rise in berserk behavior. Attempts to study the effects of drugs on warriors have shown decreased abilities rather than superhuman strength and speed.

The berserker may merely be an idea, a fear given form. The berserker is mankind's terror of the uncontrolled, of the animalistic, of the unreasoning violence man is capable of without his higher faculties. If this is the case, perhaps the modern world's heir to the title of berserker can be found in urban legends: the fear of maniacs high on PCP capable of shrugging off bullets and tearing into flesh with savage ferocity provide a contemporary parallel to the Viking berserker.

## Systems

The following systems are relevant to the Berserker supplemental style Merit

### Berserker (• to •••••)

**Prerequisites:** Resolve •••, Stamina •••, and Supplemented Skill or Style •

**Effect:** The character supplements his chosen style or Skill with his own maddened fury. Berserk characters work themselves into a violent rage, sometimes aided through the use of drugs, which have the usual effect on their physiology (see p. 176, **World of Darkness Rulebook**). Working oneself into this fury requires an intense exercise of will, costing the character one Willpower point and an instant action. Once the character has entered the *berserkergang*, she may use any of the maneuvers listed below. These benefits can be combined with one another or with an associated Fighting Style Merit during the same turn, so long as the drawbacks or necessary expenditures do not contradict (for example, a character cannot benefit from Strength in the Fury when using a Fighting Style maneuver that otherwise costs the character her Defense).

A character in a berserker haze occasionally has difficulty telling friend from foe, and must make a reflexive Resolve + Composure roll to avoid assaulting allies during any turn in which those allies present a more tempting target than an enemy. Characters who are already prone to a form of supernatural rage (such as vampires and werewolves) must roll Resolve + Composure during *every* turn in which they take advantage of this style. If they fail, they fall into their maddened state (frenzy, *Kuruth*, etc.) and lose the benefits of being berserk.

The character remains in a berserk state until she either spends a second Willpower to calm herself, she is rendered unconscious, or the combat comes to an end.

Characters who fight in a berserk haze often purchase Iron Stamina to represent their ability to ignore pain. The Brawl and Weaponry Skills are equally appropriate for use with this style, as are the Two-Weapon (usually axes), Shield, Knife, Stick and Staff Fighting Styles. Styles that require careful precision such as Evasive Striking or Light Sword are not appropriate. Defensive styles are explicitly incompatible with the aggressiveness required of berserkers.

Dots purchased in this Merit provide access to special combat maneuvers. Each maneuver is a prerequisite for the next.

**Strength in the Fury (•):** A berserker goes all-out, all the time, and her body rewards her heedless actions with increased power and speed. The berserker gains an additional die (for a total of three) when taking all-out attacks (page 157, **World of Darkness Rulebook**).

**Adrenaline Rush (••):** The berserker ignores pain and her foes' attacks only drive her madness, pushing her to brutally defeat them. The character gains a point of armor against bashing and lethal attacks as she casually shrugs off weak attacks.

**Inhuman Alacrity (•••):** A berserker's opponents are shocked and frightened by the speed and ferocity that manifests in her actions, making her far more difficult to hit. The character gains an additional 2 dice (for a total of four dice) when using Willpower to avoid suffering an attack.

**Ignorant in the Face of Death (••••):** The berserker's rage overrides her physical limitations, pushing her to greater feats even when others would fall in pain. In a mad, violently fit, the character can ignore some or all wound penalties for a turn. **Drawback:** The character sacrifices part of her Defense in any turn during which she ignores wound penalties on a one-for-one basis (for example, by ignoring two dice of wound penalties, she suffers a –2 to her Defense trait). If she has already applied her full Defense against an incoming attack during the turn, she may not use this maneuver. The character may still use Willpower to enhance her attack or Defense, if she so chooses, but may not utilize any other maneuver or supernatural ability that necessitates the loss of Defense (such as an all-out attack).

**Bloody-Handed Bastard (•••••):** The berserker gouges at eyes, bites at ears, and tears at genitals. Her behavior is so violent that she inflicts lasting damage on her foes, regardless of weapon. The character's attacks inflict lethal damage. **Drawback:** The character sacrifices her Defense during a turn in which she uses this maneuver. If she has already applied her Defense against an incoming attack during the turn, she may not use this maneuver.

## Eli Austen James

**Quote:** *Don't be like that. We all have a job to do.*

**Background:** A few people still remember Eli James, the local amateur boxer who almost went pro. They nod to him in passing at the grocery store, buy him a drink at the bar, sometimes even leave a card in his mailbox on holidays. They know he's a bitter man, though, and that he runs with a rough crowd these days, so they mostly just leave him alone.

The drugland youth, on the other hand, know him all too well. As an enforcer to K-Bar, big-time dealer and wannabe gangsta, Eli has a reputation for pursuing his work with an emotionless zeal that has earned him the nickname "Terminator." The fact that he hasn't updated his wardrobe since the late eighties only serves to distance him from his client or his targets.

What few people understand, however, is what keeps Eli in the drug business. There was a time when anyone in town would have offered him a job. Even the police tend to treat him as an old friend, letting him go on his way on the occasions they come across him before he's done with a low-rent dealer in arrears.

Eli grew up on a cattle ranch and moved into the city to pursue boxing. He was never tall, but his thick, muscular body could take a pounding as well as deliver. A popular figure in a number of underground boxing circuits, Eli's reputation catapulted him quite suddenly into the big time, a change that he wasn't ready for and that resulted in a number of sound defeats at the gloved hands of better opponents. He left the ring for good in '89, finding solace first in alcohol, then in drugs.

What nobody knows, however, is that Eli Austen James has found a new drug. It keeps him loyal to K-Bar, provides a high like he's never felt before, and actually sharpens his awareness while strengthening his muscles. It even makes him feel younger. Even without "the boost," as he likes to call it, the drug shows him shit he never saw on acid. Crazy shit from the shadows of the world. The more he takes it, the more he's sure the shit's real.

Now he works directly for his supplier, exercising the skills that almost made him famous, and only rarely stepping into the harsh light of sobriety. The cops leave him be, the people recognize him and the young thugs show him an awed respect.

He's never been more miserable.

**Appearance:** A stout, broad-shouldered man with all of the sexual appeal of an ox and an attitude to match. Eli's broad, flat face dissolves into a leonine beard around the edges, and his wide-set eyes watch the world from either side of an oft-broken nose. His hair has grown in a thick and greasy gray, but he'll shave it to the scalp if he's expecting trouble. He's wearing a denim jacket over a wife-beater and jeans to match.

Much of the time Eli's eyes seem slightly out-of-focus, as if staring into a world no one else can see. When something attracts his attention, his focus sharpens to that of a hawk.

**Storyteller Hints:** He's more animal than man, mindlessly coasting through his days with dead eyes, only snapping out of his lethargy in a frenzy of violence when his job demands it. He is constantly drunk, high or strung out, and how he manages to keep his body in shape is an utter mystery.

Eli shrugs off most attempts to rile him, but an act of violence will bring him into an instant rage that will fade as soon as his knuckles are slick with the blood of his fallen foe. He might even call an ambulance for what's left of his opponent.

Eli is slowly beginning to turn his life around. His profound unhappiness with his lot combined with his sense of wonderment at the new vistas his favorite high have opened to him to jolt him from the fugue he has lived in for the better part of two decades. What he does with his new spirituality depends a lot on those people who reach out to him in his time of searching.

**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 2, Wits 2, Resolve 3
**Physical Attributes:** Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 5
**Social Attributes:** Presence 2, Manipulation 1, Composure 3
**Mental Skills:** Academics 1, Crafts 2, Investigation 2, Medicine 1, Politics (Gangland) 1
**Physical Skills:** Athletics 3, Brawl (Boxing) 3, Drive 1, Stealth 2, Survival 2
**Social Skills:** Animal Ken (Cattle) 3, Empathy 1, Intimidation (Physical Threats) 3, Streetwise (Local Dealers) 2, Subterfuge (Emotionless) 2
**Merits:** Berserker (Boxing) •••••, Brawling Dodge, Contacts •••, Fame •, Fast Reflexes ••, Fighting Style: Boxing •••••, Iron Stamina ••, Quick Healer, Resources •, Strong Back
**Willpower:** 6
**Morality:** 4
**Virtue:** Faith
**Vice:** Sloth
**Initiative:** 8
**Defense:** 2 (3 against Brawl Attacks)
**Speed:** 12
**Health:** 10
**Weapons/Attacks:**
**Combination Blows:**
**Damage:** 0(B)
**Range:** n/a



**Dice Pool:** 8

**Special:** Can make a second attack against same target at –1. Target loses next action if damage inflicted exceeds target's size

**Combination Blows:**

**Damage:** 0(L)

**Range:** n/a

**Dice Pool:** 11

**Special:** Loses Defense for the turn. Costs 1 Willpower

# Combat Art

**Quote:** *Then I finish up with this… and the crowd goes wild!*

## Description

To fight without fighting. To launch a series of blows perfectly parried in absolute harmony. To knee a friend and co-worker in the crotch as the cameras roll or drive a sword at an opponent and be pushed back by his incredibly strength for the gasps of the audience.

Most people never see any of these fighting styles in person, and even fewer witness their use in an actual fight. Yet people love to thrill at the concert of flashing blades or the ballet of a well-choreographed martial arts sequence on film or television. Programmers even populate the hollow halls of videogames with characters capable of Krav Maga or kung fu. Professional wrestling and martial arts competitions and demos continue to draw a large crowd, even in the modern age of skepticism.

The fights may not be real, but the skill behind them is. More performance than war, combat art may be more popular than true martial arts in the twenty-first century. It certainly pays better.

### History

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* climaxes with an epic sword duel, a fight so vicious that it spins out of control to claim the lives of almost the entire Danish court. Much of the action is described in the dialogue rather than the stage directions, partly to ensure the audience understood what was occurring and partly to remind the actors, who had little rehearsal time with any given script, what they were supposed to be doing. While *Hamlet* certainly wasn't the first play (or even Shakespeare's first play) to include staged combat, it serves as evidence that even four centuries ago combat was part of art. Since then the productions may have become more sophisticated, but the core of staged combat has remained the same.

Now the actions of actors and stunt performers is enhanced through the use of computer generated graphics, high wires and other special effects. Sometimes the performers *become* the special effects as a performer's computer-captured movements are translated into a martial arts-wielding cartoon animal. Yet wild fireside dances at summer camps, horse-mounted jousts at large dinner theatres and modern productions of Shakespeare prove that even the most basic staged combat remains popular to this day.

## Story Hooks

• **A Starving Audience:** The characters are approached by an individual interested in having them stage a martial arts performance for a group of wealthy and influential individuals at an incredibly exclusive soiree. The individual offers top-notch training in the performance art of combat and a healthy paycheck to go with it. If the characters take him up on the offer, however, they find themselves in a dark chamber surrounded by leering visages intent on one thing: blood.

• **Phantom of the Set:** An associate of the characters needs their help: as a producer for a nationally broadcast police action program, he is responsible for ensuring that stunt performers are available for the show. Unfortunately, a rash of suspicious accidents has claimed three of his regulars, and the others have begun to distance themselves from his company. The producer needs the characters to encourage the performers to return to the set, or perhaps to uncover the truth about the so-called curse on his erstwhile employees.

• **Tricks are for Kids:** Tricking, an underground movement that combines martial arts, gymnastics and other activities into a fluid dance-like performance, is growing in popularity in the characters' neighborhood or hometown. Teens from several social circles mix regularly to engage in and witness the spins, kicks and flips associated with the sport. The popularity of the movement becomes suspicious, however, as even kids who would normally avoid such activities begin skipping classes to meet up with others. As crime rates rise steeply, it becomes clear that something sinister is at the center of this new community that has nothing to do with sports. Learning the group's particular brand of performance art may be the only way to penetrate the cutting-edge clique.

## Current Culture

Even though cinema and videogames continue pushing the envelope of how much technology is integrated into martial arts performances, analog combat art retains its popularity, and in the world of performance "Stage Combat" graces numerous résumés. Though the circus does not draw the crowds it once did, trick shooters can still make a living by the gun if they know how (and where) to sell themselves. Professional wrestling remains as popular as ever, despite the generally accepted opinion that it is all show, and martial arts demos litter the internet.

Combat performers fill a variety of positions, and only two traits span the spectrum of the individuals engaged in the many possible careers: most combat performers are incredibly physically fit, and most perform for largely monetary reasons. Humans have made combat into a commodity, and as fewer and fewer real conflicts are fought by soldiers on the ground, more and more can be found on television.

# Systems

The following systems are relevant to the Combat Art supplemental style.

## Combat Art (• to •••••)

**Prerequisites:** Dexterity •••, Stamina ••, Composure ••, Supplemented Skill or Style •

**Effect:** The character supplements her chosen style or Skill with a carefully-trained showmanship. Her movements are graceful yet expedient, her blades or fists flashing through the air as she steps lightly upon the balls of her feet. Combat artists often learn their skills in professions that are not traditionally associated with violence, namely the theatre and film, but many also train to showcase their own skills during martial arts demos or non-combative martial arts competitions. These maneuvers represent those who value style over substance.

As such, this supplemental style may be purchased for the Expression Skill, representing those whose combat training is *wholly* theatrical. If used to supplement Expression, the style cannot be used effectively in combat, and the fourth tier of the Merit cannot be purchased.

Disarm, Fast Reflexes, Fighting Finesse, Quick Draw and Student of the Blade are all popular Merits for those whose primary combat training is primarily for show. Those combat artists who reside in Hollywood often possess the Stunt Driver Merit, as well. Trick shooters and show marksmen often possess Gunslinger. The Expression and Weaponry Skills are equally appropriate for use with this style, though Athletics, Brawl and Firearms versions are widely learned, as well. Fighting Styles typically supplemented by Combat Art include Aggressive and Evasive Striking, Control, Knives, Light Sword, Throwing and Two-Weapon, while Combat Marksmanship, Sniping and even Archery find occasional crossover with this style. The combination of Combat Art with the Flexible Weapons Fighting Style can be stunning in martial arts competitions.

Combat Art is rarely combined with the teaching of those schools that teachings are overwhelmingly pragmatic, such as Krav Maga. Exceptions do exist, however; Krav Maga's popularity in entertainment demands stunt persons capable of convincingly performing the vicious style, for example. Particularly traditional schools may frown upon Combat Art, as well, though many perform careful rituals and katas that can be considered powerful performance in its own right.

Dots purchased in this Merit provide access to special combat maneuvers. Each maneuver is a prerequisite for the next.

**Flourish (•):** The character performs an example of her style in order to threaten rather than entertain (though audiences often experience a thrill when witnessing such a feat) as an instant action. She gains a bonus to Intimidation rolls equal to her rating in the supplemented Skill or Fighting Style. This bonus lasts until the end of the scene or the character suffers a successful attack from an opponent (whichever comes first). Characters who enter the scene after the flourish is performed are not affected by it. **Drawback:** The flourishing character's bonus is penalized by others who know her supplemented Skill or Fighting Style, as they might see through the emptiness of her action. For each dot the target of the character's intimidation possesses in *the same* Skill or Fighting Style as that being supplemented, subtract one die from the flourishing character's roll. Against sufficiently skilled opponents, this can completely cancel the bonus granted by the maneuver and even remove dice from the base Intimidation pool. A master sees through such petty posturing and thinks less of the student as a result.

**Staged Combat (••):** The character has trained to make perfectly safe and choreographed combat seem exceedingly real. The character gains a bonus to Expression or Subterfuge rolls to falsify combat equal to her rating in the supplemented Skill or Fighting Style. **Drawback:** This maneuver can only be used with another individual who is working to fake the fight (and typically functions as a teamwork action).

**Dancing for Mars (•••):** The character gains a bonus equal to her rating in her supplemented Skill or Fighting Style to Expression rolls when utilizing her combat prowess as a performance piece (those using Combat Art to supplement Expression may double their Expression rating). This may be used to win competitions, secure a job teaching martial arts, or even intimidate one's enemies.

The bonus does not, however, ever apply to attacks made with the Skill, and use of this maneuver usually constitutes an extended action.

**Function Follows Form (••••):** The character has learned how to marry life and art, and her extensive training allows her to utilize the grace she exemplifies on the stage or gym mat to out-maneuver her enemies on the mean streets of the World of Darkness. The character gains one half of her rating in the supplemented Skill or Fighting Style, rounded up, as bonus dice to her attack roll and as a bonus to her Defense (which is not doubled in the case of a Dodge maneuver). **Drawback:** The character must spend one Willpower point during any turn in which she benefits from this maneuver.

## Erin Powers

**Quote:** *"God, who wants to be a star, anyway?"*

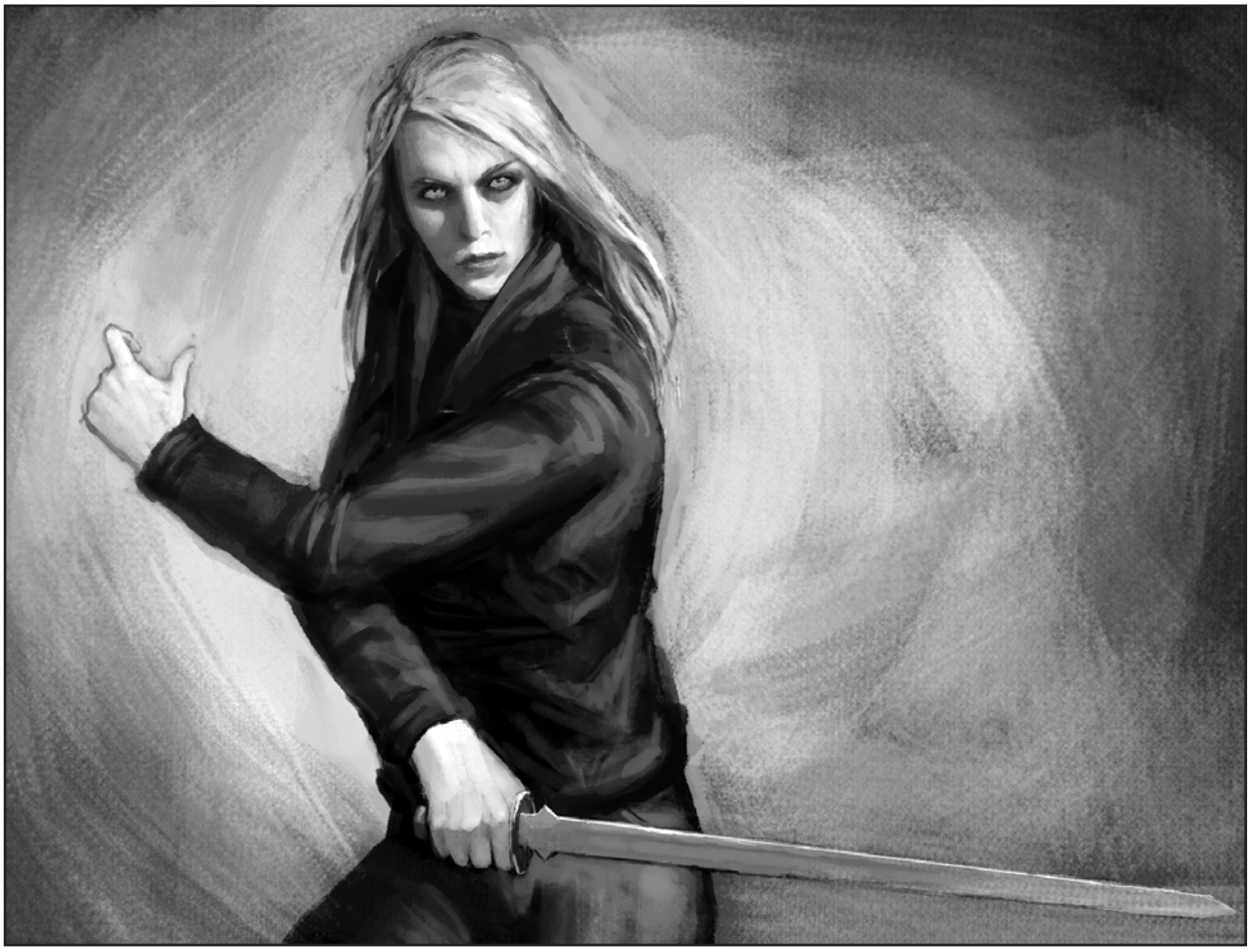
**Background:** Erin's mother drove her into town for biweekly gymnastics practice from the time she was six. In high school she split her interests evenly between theatre classes and sports, with little time offered up to more academic pursuits. She attended college, a small liberal arts affair with religious leanings, on scholarships for theatre and soccer, and graduated with a degree in the former and a minor in Spanish.

Erin attended graduate school for theatre for a semester, but between the cost and her own fading interest in theatre as an art form, she slipped out of school, boarded a bus for the coast, and never looked back.

In the years since, Erin has earned something of a reputation in Hollywood as a stuntwoman. She has the right look to stand in for the typical LA starlet, and her eagerness to test her own potential has garnered her attention from several of the more action-oriented directors. Sometimes she gets slightly jealous of the actresses who, she feels, put less work into their roles and garner greater acclaim (not to mention money). But then she remembers what they have to put up with (constant paparazzi, nude pictures circulating the internet, gossip columnists) and contents herself with her career.

Recently Erin has been signed on to a deal to perform stunts for her largest picture to date. The vampire flick has finally been green-lit after suffering numerous delays, wrapped up in apparently endless red tape from the top offices.

**Appearance:** A lithe blonde woman of wiry muscles and medium height, Erin is attractive, but her hard features lack The Look that makes an actress famous. Her appearance tends towards no-nonsense, either in



costume when on the set or a simple T-shirt and jeans when off, but she's learned how to clean and dress up when the occasion calls for it. Her lifestyle remains spotlessly clean compared to many of the actors she shares the set with, and she retains a healthy vibrancy that many of them lack.

**Storyteller Hints:** Erin's typically on the set, whether that set is in Hollywood, Vancouver, New York or on location in any of the many places films are made (including the characters' home town). She's an apparently happy woman, outgoing without being gregarious, fun without being reckless. Underneath her bright exterior, however, war two conflicting emotions. She retains a knife-cold blade of jealousy in her heart towards the actresses that she stands in for (performing, as she sees it, most of the hard work). A fear is growing within her, however. Something about her most recent project gives her the creeps, from the unusual edits that come down from production to the anemic no-name hack they hired to direct such an expensive film. Something's not right, but she hasn't decided yet whether or not she wants to know what.

**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 2

**Physical Attributes:** Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

**Social Attributes:** Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 3

**Mental Skills:** Academics 1, Computer 1, Crafts 1, Investigation 1, Medicine (First Aid) 2, Occult (Superstitions) 1, Politics (Hollywood) 1, Science 1

**Physical Skills:** Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Drive 2, Firearms 1, Weaponry (Stage Combat) 3

**Social Skills:** Animal Ken 2, Empathy 2, Expression (Acting) 2, Intimidation 1, Persuasion (Selling Self) 2, Socialize 1, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 2

**Merits:** Ambidextrous, Brawling Dodge, Combat Art (Krav Maga) ••, Combat Art (Kung Fu) ••, Combat Art (Weaponry) ••, Contacts •, Disarm, Fast Reflexes ••, Fighting Style: Krav Maga •••, Fighting Style: Kung Fu ••, Fleet of Foot •••, Iron Stamina •, Quick Draw (Weaponry), Resources ••, Status (Stuntwoman) ••

**Willpower:** 5
**Morality:** 8
**Virtue:** Temperance
**Vice:** Envy
**Initiative:** 8 (11 against armed opponents)
**Defense:** 3
**Speed:** 14
**Health:** 8
**Weapons/Attacks:**

**Forced Strike:**
**Damage:** 0(B)
**Range:** —
**Dice Pool:** 6
**Special:** –1 to opponent's armor or –1 penalty to make a specified shot.

**Combat Knife:**
**Damage:** 1(L)
**Range:** —
**Dice Pool:** 7



Betty cocked her hat back, licked her cherry-flavored lips, then leaned in over the weapon—a Tavor Assault Rifle, a badass Israeli number she had taken from the corpses of the Givati infantrymen down on the Damascus Road. She pressed her cheek so hard against the weapon that later she'd find a hard bruise there. In the harsh noonday sun, she squinted over the optical sights, then realized she didn't have to—with this bad boy she could keep both eyes open.

Betty let fly with a whoop and a squawking holler, then pulled the trigger.

It spit bullets. The recoil was rough, but didn't juggle the barrel up. It sounded like a loud whisper, a cacophony of hissing chatter.

And it cut the sweet unmerciful shit out of those undead fuckers that came shuffling up over the sand-swept hills. The bullets chewed them apart, like a buzzsaw biting through rotten stumps. Bits of skin jerked away and hit the sand. Bone bits—was that a vertebrae?—spun this way and that. The zombies moaned, reached for her (even though she was fifty yards away) and as their mouths opened, she fired bullets down their wet, grisly throats.

Click-click-click.

Empty.

"Ass," she said, then looked around for another magazine. Not that it much mattered—the whole field of shambling dummies was in heaps and piles, not one of them standing. "Zombie apocalypse. Shyeah."

Then, something twitched.

The piles of corpseflesh started to quiver.

It started with a single severed hand—the bones bitten off at the wrist by her stitching stream of bullets—that crawled up over the mounds of death and started heading straight for her.

Other parts followed. A head rolled, grumbling—with a second one swiftly in tow. Legs started clambering toward her like awkward inchworms. Even unconnected ribbons of flesh wriggled like snakes.

She looked around one last moment. No magazine.

"Fuck it,"

she said, and hurled the weapon like a throwing axe. It caught the skittering hand and shattered its finger-legs. Then Betty bolted, leaving her toy behind.

# Chapter Three: Future Weapons

**Hunters for gold or pursuers of fame, they all had gone out on that stream, bearing the sword, and often the torch, messengers of the might within the land, bearers of a spark from the sacred fire.**

**–Joseph Conrad, "Heart of Darkness"**

The military-industrial complex is always trying to find out new ways to kill people. Guns that shoot around corners. Bombs that penetrate deep into the earth before blowing everything to muddy and bloody bits. Knives that detonate after you stab a guy, turning his guts to shrapnel. It's not just about killing, either—the government and independent weapons designers have tried a number of non-lethal approaches, too, including heavy foam weapons, or pheromone-driven scent bombs that can *reportedly* affect an enemy army in any number of ways, from vomiting to turning them gay (seriously; look it up).

Of course, this is the World of Darkness, not a Tom Clancy novel, right? This stuff has no place in horror, surely?

Wrong. First, while some of this stuff may seem firmly ensconced in the realm of sci-fi, it's not. It's real. It exists. Some of it is already in the hands of our soldiers… or in the hands of wealthy or lucky collectors. Which means it can find its way into your Storytelling game. Second, big weaponry doesn't defeat horror. It can amplify it. The way a gun cuts through flesh? The eerie tracking of some feral *night-thing* through an infrared scope? For the biggest and most serious example of "future weapons equal horror," look no further than the invention of the atomic bomb. Its destruction remains unparalleled. Its power is as much in the fear of its use as it is in the application of its devastating potential. A nuclear weapon can *erase* a person, leaving them as nothing but a shadow on the wall. Or, if you're downwind from all that awfulness, you might instead enter a "walking death" phase, where you suffer radiation sickness but don't show any signs… until it's too late, until you're shitting blood and hunks of skin are tumbling off your bones. If that's not horror, than what is?

### This Chapter

This chapter serves first to offer some quick advice on using this kind of weaponry in your World of Darkness games, and then it cuts straight to the good stuff: the weapons themselves (stats included), as well as the diabolical weapons designer, Ganaducci Arms (fresh to be dropped into any chronicle you find appropriate).

## Storytelling Weaponry

Normally, we'd start off with the weapons first, then give advice on how to implement those ideas in your story. However, the idea of future weapons in a horror game isn't a topic that necessarily *gels* on impact. It might seem antithetical to a horror story, which might commonly involve a handful of unprepared mortals wandering around the woods at night with nothing but a shovel and Daddy's over-and-under shotgun to protect them. Wandering into those same woods with a chain gun that could mow down the trees like a chewing reaper's blade seems to diminish the elements of terror the same way shining a big bright light into the shadows can reduce the fear of the unknown that waits there.



The key here isn't trying to cram high-tech weaponry into such stories, but in building new horror stories around them.

## Themes at Play

It's important above all else to consider the types of themes—meaning, the messages your stories will tell, or the motifs that are prevalent—when utilizing future weapons in a horror story. Below, you'll find the themes that you might care to apply, as well as a story idea that carries that theme into action.

### The Macguffin

The idea here is that the future weapons represent something *everybody wants*. (Oh, quick definition of Macguffin: it's a Hitchcock-invented term that means an item, person or place that drives the plot because everybody wants it—the *Maltese Falcon*'s falcon, for instance, the statue in *North by Northwest*, or the briefcase in *Pulp Fiction*.) In this story, the theme is that the future weapon is That Thing everybody wants, but the story is more about trying to possess it or trying to escape from it than it is about actually *using* it. In such an instance, the future weapon is a placeholder, an element that represents out-of-control want and need—here, the horror is more in what people will do to possess this weapon, one that is probably super-ghastly in its effectiveness.

**Story Hook: Gun Runners**

The characters aren't the ones pursuing the Macguffin, here—in fact, they're given possession of it. The task seems simple: get these weapon crates across the country. The payday is huge. Of course, the characters don't know that what lurks within these boxes is some over-powered, highly-clandestine stuff. Maybe stolen from the government or from some powerful weapons manufacturer (like Ganaducci Arms, p. 126). The easy job is made a million times more complex when enemies come out of the woodwork to try to take what they have—and these enemies aren't human. (They might even find that the intended recipient is dead—and they're framed for the job.) Cracking open the weapons crates confuses issues even more—it's a truly

horrific weapon, maybe a nuke, maybe some kind of bio-weapon, or maybe it's something attached to a beating heart that pulses with flickers of firelight.

## The Equalizer

This theme assumes that the future weapons in a game count as a hard-to-get "great equalizer," something of a potent quest item that lies at the end of the road and, in further video game terms, is just what the characters need to take out the "end boss." In World of Darkness terms, picture that the characters are facing a truly terrible enemy, an enemy whose power and monstrousness far exceeds their abilities. Defeating this nemesis seems impossible. It's an awful *djinn* way out there in the desert gathering its awful power, and it's ten feet tall and comprises a whirling *sirocco* of iron filings and shards of cutting glass. Or maybe it's an army of the damned, a staggering undead military force with slack jaws, rotting torsos and a shitload of heavy armament. Or it's a giant Cloverfield-style creature, and it's in the middle of town, tearing off roofs and snapping people like popsicle sticks. Shoot it with a .22 rifle, drive a car into it, throw a Molotov cocktail at its head, and what happens? Nada. Here, the future weapon represents a way to level the playing field, but getting the future weapon *is* the story itself—conflicts stand in the way, and it's no easy grab.

### Story Hook: Prototype Parts

Conventional weaponry won't destroy the thing that killed their families, and so they must build an unconventional prototype weapon (feel free to use the Prototype Weapons section in this chapter, p. 129) to deal with the monstrous threat. The story is about gathering all the parts and finding somebody who can put it all together for them. They need to kidnap a weapons designer. They need to track down some very, very hard-to-find parts (do *you* know where to procure uranium flechettes?). To make it worse, the game is pushed by a ticking clock—the enemy's power grows, and soon they won't be able to stop it at all. It's going to start killing others if they don't handle it in time.

## The Gun at a Knife Fight

Here lurks the very opposite of the "equalizer" idea, in which the future weapon at hand *seems* like the perfect solution, but in reality a weapon so fundamentally rooted in the mundane world can do nothing against the supernatural. You get to have it a bit of both ways in this one: on the one hand, characters get to churn and burn lots of lesser enemies with some high-tech kit, which only serves to increase their reliance on the future weapon at hand. On the other hand, when it comes time to face a real threat, the future weapon does little to protect them—the creature can turn ephemeral, or gunning it down only causes *two* to come back where one once stood (ala the original *Hellboy* film), or with but a glance of its sinister eye it can simply turn the weapon *off*. The characters must rely on their wits and ingenuity to save them, not the Big Gun in their hands (or mounted to their Scion xB).

### Story Hook: Spectral Threat

The great nemesis here is an ancient spirit or ghost loosed upon the world—it can "borrow" bodies like puppets, and those bodies need to be destroyed. Since it can control dozens of them at a time, the characters need something big to put those howling, keening specter-puppets down—they must get in touch with a local ally or break into a weapons depot outside of town to get hold of a future weapon to help them clear out the spirit's many host bodies. Destroying the host bodies looses the spirit, and it manifests—and the characters think this is their chance. It isn't. Firing the future weapon—whether it's bullets, lightning, an electromagnetic pulse, whatever—into the creature only strengthens it. It literally gains a point in Size and Power with every damage done to it by mundane weapons. As they try to destroy it, it grows. They're dooming themselves with these weapons, and so they must find an alternate road to triumph, lest they get dead fast.

## The Merciless Future

Literature throughout history (think *Frankenstein*, or *Rappacini's Daughter*) has been quite frank on how science might be our downfall. Hell, look all the way back to Icarus, whose hand-built waxen wings melted because he flew too close to the sun. Here, the theme is similar: future weapons are great and all, but they'll be our downfall. The horror comes in from the fact that we, in a truly Promethean way, stole fire from the gods and now our pride will lead us to blow holes in our own peace and prosperity. This can work in a real-world context (the nuclear bomb is a great example of the terror and havoc we can wreak with a single invention), but you are encouraged to get creative in a World of Darkness scenario. A future weapon that decimates a battlefield in minutes levies a curse—all the dead get back up after they've been killed. Or a weapon uses an unusual energy source, and on its first firing tears open a hole to another world—and who knows what spirits or fiends pour out? Future weapons are useful, yes. But they also represent mankind's cruel ingenuity out of control. The cold metal functions offer a glimpse of a truly merciless future.

### Story: The End is the Beginning

Start the story at the end, right at the climactic battle—the characters have to get an EMP device into place beneath some awful, rampaging thing. It's a wretched beast, some awful shuddering pastiche of a thousand dead corpses forming one monstrosity, but the characters make do and set off the device… and it blows out the city's power. And it causes a cascading effect that takes down the power grid all across the country. Burns it out. Catastrophic failure. Now, the characters see the dark irony: they used a high-tech weapon to blast the nation back to a primitive state (go a full day without electricity, and you'll see how dearly we need it—now imagine that the whole nation goes a week, a month, *three* months without it). With darkness descending on the country, the *many monsters* of the World of Darkness see the growing shadow as a profound opportunity.

## Inspiration

Some quick sources of inspiration for future weapons in a horror story…

*The Alien films*: Don't be silly. These aren't sci-fi movies. Oh, they have sci-fi trappings, but if you look at the first film, it's really a haunted house story set on a spaceship. Some technology fails to harm the alien (and in some ways, the alien *is* the future weapon, or aims to be), but some tech is used to defeat it (airlock, or the giant robo-lifter in *Aliens*).

*First-Person Shooters:* They're not always great on story, but you can mine these for mood time and time again. *Doom*? *Half-Life*? *F.E.A.R.*? They're horror stories in which the protagonist is given some pretty high-tech gear, but that doesn't stop you from pissing your britches when a headcrab zombie or spectral little girl come running at you, does it?

*Future Weapons:* In case you think a lot of the stuff put forth in this chapter is hogwash, check out this show on the Discovery Channel. Then, to embrace the horror of it, ask yourself—what would this stuff do to a human body? What would happen if a legion of monsters got hold of this stuff?

*The Terminator series*: Look at the first film, and you'll note that it's really a slasher movie. Implacable monster? Kills everything it sees? Walks slowly, bound and determined to mercilessly murder? And it's a *robot*. Future weapon, right there. (And in glimpsing the end result of the SkyNet future, you can see the horror of a future weapons battlefield—gleaming terminator machines crushing skulls.)

## Acquiring Future Weapons

The easiest way for characters with large amounts (five dots in Resources) of cash to acquire military grade weaponry or prototype weapons is to purchase them. Whether the purchase is made in the back room of a gun shop, from a shady guy in the bad part of town or off eBay depends on the contacts and motivations of the buyer and seller. Sometimes the weapon will come with full documentation and assurances of legality, but more often than not the weapon will have been stolen or otherwise procured in a less reputable manner. Characters that obtain prototype or high-tech weapons from unscrupulous sources should realize that their new "baby" isn't likely to be accepted as standard personal protection if discovered by local law enforcement. Even if the laws of that area allow for the type of weapon held by the character to be owned by civilians, owning an unusual or obviously military-grade weapon is bound to raise some eyebrows. More problematic, if the weapons are involved in a criminal act, protestations of innocence by the owner will carry even less weight than they otherwise might.

A few dots in the Contacts Merit isn't enough, alone, to allow characters to purchase future tech or prototype weapons, especially a *specific* prototype. The rarity of the weapons combined with difficulties involved in obtaining prototypes makes the purchase of one of these weapons an opportunity buy rather than a shopping exercise. Even prototypes that are made in fairly large numbers, like the Firestorm weapons made by Ganaducci Arms (p. 126), can't be ordered directly from a website. The companies that produce prototypes are too wary of corporate espionage to sell the guns to just anyone. Characters that hear about a specific prototype that interests them are going to have to do some work before they end up with the weapon. This can be the basis for a story, especially if the desired weapon is in the hands of an enemy. "Found" prototypes are much easier to acquire. It's simply a matter of being in the right place at the right time, of vigilantly watching sites or stores that sell unusual weapons or cultivating the right kind of contacts (more directly: it's a result of good story). The end result may not be a weapon that is immediately useful to the character, but resourceful characters can always find a way to turn the unexpected to their advantage; even if it's just by reselling the weapon.

In the case of military grade weapons, the black market is always a viable alternative for procuring hardware, provided you know where to find a dealer. Most local, small-time arms dealers aren't likely to stock anything bigger than assault rifles. Not only is there a smaller marker for bigger guns, the risk of discovery and subsequent arrest increases each time the dealer seeks out new contacts to supply him with heavier firepower. Weapons dealers with a more impressive selection of goods will probably require the shopper come to them. These big league dealers frequently set up shop in countries where laws are more lenient or smuggling weapons in and out of the country is fairly easy. Local dealers can be tracked down by characters with Streetwise of at least three. Finding an international dealer requires Streetwise four or Contacts in the illegal arms trade.

For characters with a less plentiful cash flow, purchasing a prototype or high-end military tech isn't usually an option. Instead of trading cold hard cash, characters with lesser Resources have to trade goods or services for the weapons they desire, though the arms dealer is likely to get the better end of the bargain. Of course, if a character has high value trade material on hand, odds are good he can come up with money in other ways.

In the long run, offering personal services is the most common method of obtaining illegal weaponry. Depending on what kind of weapon the character is seeking, some dealers may just hand over the wanted item in return for a later favor.

This lets the dealer sink their hooks into the character through blackmail or intimidation, effectively adding the character to the resources available to their organization. Truly desperate characters may turn to unnatural forces in their search for a rare prototype or hard to come by military gear. Much like human dealers, shadowy entities are usually more than willing to hand over such mundane trinkets in return for the character's soul, human sacrifices or other unpleasant types of payment.

## Ganaducci Arms

Ganaducci Arms is the largest developer and manufacturer of weapons and military grade equipment that most people have never heard of. Founded shortly after the American Civil War by Dantius Ganaducci, the business has factories in the United States, China and Germany with corporate headquarters in southern France. In the past, Ganaducci had been content with secondary military and civilian contracts, but when Dantius Ganaducci IV assumed the mantle of President and CEO the goals of the corp became more ambitious. Dantius quadrupled the staff and funding of the perfunctory R&D division, intent on the creation and production of new weapons and matériel. Ganaducci Arms scientists were encouraged to push the boundaries of convention, to innovate and experiment with designs that would propel Ganaducci to the forefront of military tech. The scientists tinkered with cybernetics, AI, directed energy weapons and drove each other to think outside the box. Their first breakthrough came in 2005 with the successful testing of Firestorm weapons.

## Firestorm Weapons

Gun design has remained essentially the same for over 100 years. A bullet is loaded into the firing chamber and the gunpowder charge is ignited by a hammer. The mechanisms required for a gun to fire increased both the weight of the firearm and the chances that the weapon would jam or misfire. The Ganaducci scientists asked themselves how they could increase reliability, decrease weight and improve rate of fire. Their solution was the revolutionary idea that forms the basis for all Firestorm weapons.

Rather than designing new mechanisms to more efficiently load and fire projectiles, the scientists discarded the mechanisms altogether. They stacked the ammunition, one on top of the other, in the barrel of the weapon and added a microchip igniter to the rounds. When the trigger is depressed it sends a signal to the projectile, which then ignites and fires. Ammunition was slightly redesigned to widen at the base in order to create a seal in the barrel to prevent the hot gases from accidentally igniting additional rounds. Some of the earliest tests proved the design was too efficient; fully automatic weapons would sometimes fire faster than the rounds could leave the barrel. This problem was overcome by adding a microchip to the end of the barrel which denies ignition to the next round until it senses the current round leave the barrel.

Another problem to be overcome with the new design was reloading. The scientists designed reloading tubes – basically a new stack of ammo that could be slid into a barrel, but these proved too bulky for actual field work. Their final solution to the dilemma was two-fold. First the scientists added additional barrels to the weapons, reducing the number of reloads required. The overall weight of the gun increased slightly, but, thanks to the high durability, low weight alloys used, the weapons still weighed about the same or less than their more conventional cousins. When one barrel runs out of ammunition, the user simply clicks a fresh barrel into the top "ready" position and continues operation. They also redesigned the reloading tubes, allowing them to fold in half, so they weren't any bulkier than standard ammo clips and far less bulky than ammo belts.

The end result was the Firestorm Weapons System. Firestorm weapons are lighter, more reliable and boast a higher rate of fire than standard weaponry. Ganaducci Arms unveiled the Firestorm system at a dealer convention in Geneva, showcasing the weaponry to potential customers including US, European, Russian and Chinese militaries. Certain of the superiority of his product, Dantius expected a flood of orders in the wake of the convention. He was disappointed. The US and Chinese militaries asked for further demonstrations and made noises about possible contracts, but none appeared. Even though every military in the world claims to want the latest of high-tech gadgets to make them the best, the truth is that military hierarchies are slow to recognize the potential of new technologies and even slower about implementation.

### A Stack of Whoop-Ass

**Unless otherwise noted in their profiles, all Firestorm weapons have the Hail of Lead, Increased Capacity and Stability Breakthroughs. See the Prototype Design rules (p. 130) for more information.**

### The Incident

In a continuing effort to round up buyers and investors, Dantius set up a large scale demonstration of Firestorm technology in northeastern Afghanistan (NATO approval took a couple months). Ganaducci Arms set up around a village that had been partially ruined and completely deserted during chaos surrounding the punitive US military strike into Afghanistan. Possible investors were flown in from around the globe as were military observers from a multitude of nations. With no small sense of the dramatic, Dantius set the time for his demonstration at dawn. Unknown to anyone involved, including NATO, Ganaducci security forces or Afghan translators, the village had been deserted after a biological weapons attack.

One of the local warlords had managed to get his hands on a small amount of an experimental biological weapon, likely created in the Soviet Union during the cold war. The village formed a strongpoint for forces opposed to the warlord and when conventional attacks failed, he deployed his secret weapon. The initial effects of the weapon were exactly what the warlord expected. Large number of enemy troops and innocent villagers alike died mere hours after exposure. Then the bio-agent mutated. Instead of killing its victims, it attacked higher brain functions, caused bodies to blister and boil, and triggered aggression. The warlords troops were quickly swarmed under by the sheer weight of numbers of their attacks. With the deaths of the warlord and his men, no one remained alive to report the incident and the mutated soldiers and villagers buried themselves in the ground before entering a sleep-like dormancy. At dawn, when the Firestorm weapons of Ganaducci began to crack and bark, they awakened.

At first, thinking that natives had somehow slipped inside his security cordon, Dantius ordered the demonstration suspended when the gathered crowd saw figures on foot approaching. Chafing at the delay, Dantius sent a couple security guards with a translator to talk to the people and shoo them out of the line of fire. As soon as the mutants saw armed figures approaching them, they attacked. They ripped the bodies of the guards and translator to pieces, and, howling, charged toward the crowd assembled to watch the demonstration. Thinking quickly, Dantius ordered his employees to open fire. Any other small, lightly armed group would have been overrun in minutes. The incredible rate of fire produced by Firestorm weapons ripped through the mob of attackers, mowing them down in droves. Dantius was filled with a secret glee as he watched, realizing that he couldn't have planned a better demonstration. The fighting lasted for nearly 30 minutes before the last of the attackers was cut down and afterward, for the first time, the military professionals in the crowd took a serious look at Firestorm weapons.

## Silent Giant

In the wake of the Incident, business has been brisk for Ganaducci Arms. A sped up testing program in the US has approved the heavier Firestorm weapons, various European powers have shown interest in a number of different systems and China has begun to introduce the Ganaducci–9 and a 7.62mm variant of the FAIR into service. Dantius has invested capital taken directly from profits and put it to work in R&D. Returns on this newest investment include the Gladiator (personal body armor) and the Centurion Initiative System. Despite their success, Ganaducci is still a relative newcomer to the world stage of weapons production and most people have no idea they even exist. Company policy is to leave as small a footprint as possible and Dantius has issued orders forbidding employees from contacting the media about Ganaducci business. Ganaducci Arms contracts are filled with non-disclosure agreements and penalties for early job termination; whether that termination was intentional or not. International copyright of both the technology and profile of Firestorm weaponry has kept it out of movies through threat of lawsuit. All of this secrecy might lead some people to wonder if Ganaducci has something to hide, but, thus far, no one has attempted a serious probe into the corporation's affairs.

## Ganaducci Arms R&D

If the research and development team at Ganaducci had a slogan it would be, "Push the envelope." Conventional weapons research is sniffed at and mundane approaches to defense evoke sneers. The corporation is riding high on the tide of Firestorm weapons and the scientists know that Dantius expects similar results in the future. Each factory has an attached research lab and all the labs share information with each other and the corporate HQ. Dantius frowns on departmental competition, but that doesn't mean that the labs are filled with sunshine and good feelings. A certain amount of ruthlessness hovers in the air around the working scientists. Results is the only god worshipped here and the employees of the R&D department are its merciless followers.

Dantius doesn't rely solely on the scientists to come up with new ideas. His wide-ranging contacts in the military industrial complex forward him information about what the competition is up to as well. Technically this might be regarded as corporate espionage, but Dantius knows with certainty that the competition attempts to spy on him as well. Any ideas gleaned from his sources makes its way to R&D and the people there know better than to ask questions or gossip to their neighbors.

Ganaducci Arms believes strongly in realistic testing of their products, especially, where possible, actual battlefield testing. The research and development team will often ship off new weapons or defensive systems to active conflicts to gather data and feedback. Most of the time these activities are completely above board, but the corporation isn't above engineering "shipping errors" when they want to test a prototype under specific conditions. Ganaducci Arms gives contractors equipment to test, with no questions asked, along with a hefty payment (payable to next of kin in the event of death) to ensure their silence, then monitors developments from a distance.

Since the Incident, Ganaducci has sought out other "unusual" targets of opportunity to test their weapons on and Ganaducci field agents have begun to learn just how many things hide in the shadows. The best test subjects are creatures that retain an essential humanity; their remains give the best feedback. Ganaducci field teams scour the globe seeking out packs of werewolves, small vampire enclaves and the hunting grounds of even stranger beings on which to test their products. The best part about "Project Haze" (as the efforts are known internally) is that *no one* misses a monster when it's gone. Most monsters intentionally hide from the masses of humanity, which makes clean-up after a test much, much easier. Of course there has been the occasional error. A Ganaducci field test squad wiped out the entirety of a small Appalachian town, based on erroneous reports that the population was half-demon, but Dantius doesn't allow these little setbacks to slow down his rigid testing schedule.

## Dantius ("Don") Ganaducci IV

**Quote:** *Yes sir, General, those sentries do pack a punch. Were your men wearing the "friendly" designator tags? No? My sympathies. How many more did you want to order?*

**Background:** Packed away to boarding school in America nearly as soon as he could walk, friends of the Ganaducci family only have tentative memories of Dantius as a child. The privacy with which the Ganaducci's have always conducted their family affairs extended to the holidays that Dantius spent at home; gatherings of family only. Upon his graduation from Harvard, Dantius began to show up at Ganaducci headquarters when his father was on vacation or away on business to conduct the affairs of the corporation in his father's absence. The first time most employees of Ganaducci met him was at his father's funeral, holding his mother's (Gabriele) hand and receiving sympathetic condolences.

**Appearance:** Dantius Ganaducci IV is a striking man in his late 30s. Like his father before him, Dantius exhibits an eerie resemblance to the original founder of the company in both looks and behavior. The paintings of the first Ganaducci show a man of obvious Italian heritage with black hair, brown eyes and a swarthy complexion. Ganaducci IV has the same hair and complexion with bright blue eyes. Longtime employees of the corporation frequently tell him that he reminds them of his father, who passed away on the job in 2000. Shorter than the average, Dantius stands a mere 5'5" in height, yet he seems to have avoided the character pitfalls that mark the personalities of other small men. Dantius exudes an aura of confidence and charisma, which, combined with his easy going manner, makes people instinctively warm to the man.

**Storytelling Hints:** The reason hardly anyone remembers meeting Dantius before his father's funeral is that he didn't really exist. Yes, there was a growing body with the name Dantius Ganaducci IV, but the body was more of a shell than an actual person. During the Civil War, Dantius Ganaducci I was part of the army that invaded and demoralized the South under the command of Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman. During the fighting north of Atlanta, Dantius was seriously wounded and was taken to a medical station that had been set up near a crossroads. Delirious with pain, Dantius watched the Union surgeons at their bloody work and silently thought he'd trade his soul to avoid the butchers. No sooner had the thought crossed his mind



when a man appeared next to his sick bed, bearing a cup of water. The water bearer had an odd look about him and his eyes glinted strangely in the half-light of the medical tent. He fed Dantius some water and spoke quietly in his ear.

The man (closer now, Dantius observed his eyes were solid black) offered Dantius a form of immortality in return for his soul. He told Dantius that, upon his, Dantius', death his memories and personality would be transferred to the body of his son. Each generation would have a single male child that would act as a waiting vessel, granting Dantius immortality, of a sort. Knowing death was approaching, Dantius agreed. The man touched Dantius' forehead and the pain from his wound faded. As soon as the war ended, Dantius found a wife and got her with child. Under his watchful gaze, the child began to grow, but something seemed wrong about his son. He quickly realized that the child had no real personality of his own. His son was a blank, a placeholder made of flesh that awaited Dantius' death.

Dantius formed Ganaducci Arms in the wake of the Civil War, taking advantage of the cheap labor provided by the newly freed slaves. He kept his son hidden safely away, both to protect his future body and to conceal the child's strangeness from his peers. Dantius found he could take control of the body for short periods of time by placing himself in a meditative state and concentrating on the younger form. Only on his deathbed did Dantius begin to think he might have been tricked. Even if his memories and personality transferred to his son, that didn't mean his soul moved as well. To his horror, Dantius realized he had not only condemned his own soul, but the soul of every child of his line. Each time the transfer of consciousness was completed the price of a soul must be paid. Dantius stared out his window as his vision grew fuzzy around the edges and noticed his gardener looking back at him with a broad smile beneath eyes of solid black. For some reason, that particular memory didn't make the transfer when Dantius opened his son's eyes.

**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 4, Wits 2, Resolve 4

**Physical Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

**Social Attributes:** Presence 5, Manipulation 4, Composure 4

**Mental Skills*:** Academics 3, Computer 2, Crafts 2, Investigation 2, Occult 1, Politics 4, Science 2

**Physical Skills*:** Athletics 2, Drive 3, Firearms 3, Weaponry 3

**Social Skills*:** Expression 4, Persuasion 5, Socialize 4, Subterfuge 5

**Merits:** Allies 3 (National Militaries), Contacts 5 (Branches of Military Industrial Complex), Contacts 5 (Various National Governments), Eidetic Memory, Encyclopedic Knowledge, Language 5+ (assume Dantius can speak every modern language), Resources 5, Status 5 (Ganaducci Arms)

**Willpower:** 8

**Morality:** 5

**Virtue:** Fortitude

**Vice:** Pride

**Initiative:** 6

**Defense:** 2

**Speed:** 10

**Health:** 8

**Weapons/Attacks:**

**Ganaducci–9:**

**Damage:** 2(L)

**Range:** 20/40/80

**Dice Pool:** 9

**Special:** autofire, Prototype

*As a result of his unique situation, Dantius effectively has a Specialty in any Skill he has dots in. This includes specific specialties such as Pilot Aircraft (Drive) or Heavy Weapons (Firearms). Additionally, even if Dantius has zero dots in a Skill he never suffers the untrained penalty.

# Prototype Weapons

Companies, corporations and even that strange guy no one talks to at lunch come up with new designs or re-imaginings of weapons everyday. Most of these weapons never make it off the drawing board, but a fair number at least reach the prototype stage. If the prototype seems to work like it's supposed to, the weapon enters mass production. More commonly the weapon either doesn't work exactly right or the manufacturer isn't able to find a customer, so the weapon and the design are junked or locked away. A few of the prototypes sometimes find their way to the open market (or the black market) and are either put to use or displayed as curiosity pieces. Prototypes that are still in the testing phase can still be encountered on the field of battle, in the hands of the inventor or the inventor's employees. No matter how the weapon came to the attention of a troupe, this section presents rules and ideas for the creation, maintenance and possible mishaps of prototype weapons.

## Prototype Creation

Creating prototype weapons from scratch requires that a character have time and the resources and materials at hand to begin work. At a minimum, a character will need a machine shop, a ready supply of cash, raw materials or the bits and pieces of other weapons to incorporate into the finished product and someplace to test the prototype without getting arrested. Groups of characters have a better chance of success than solo inventers because they can pool their money, knowledge and expertise. Below is a list of recommended prerequisites for creating prototypes. If a group of characters is

involved in the process, they may pool their resources to meet the prerequisites.

- Resources 5
- Access to a small machine shop or the proper tools to create rifling, forge or cast metal, lathe or mill materials and so forth. Buying the necessary tools increases the Resources requirement by one dot.
- Computer 3 – For CAD work
- Crafts 4 – A Gunsmith Specialty reduces the requirement to three dots
- Science 4 – If any metallurgy or use of exotic materials is involved
- Firearms 4 – A strong understand ingof how modern firearms work and firearms theory

The Resources and tools prerequisites are non-negotiable: a character simply can't create a weapon without money or tools. With Storyteller approval, a group of characters might be able to ignore one of the four Skill prerequisites, which this could result in more Bugs. Once the prerequisites have been met the inventor rolls Intelligence + Academics *or* Science to create the blueprint. This is an extended roll that requires 10 successes. Each roll is equal to two days. If the blueprint is created by a group, the teamwork rules may be used (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 135). Now that the inventor (hopefully) has a working blueprint, the actual creation process can begin. Storytellers should work with the group to determine exactly what materials are needed to make the weapon.

Gathering and assembling the materials is often far more difficult than the design process. Some materials can be ordered, but such transactions are frequently monitored by governmental agencies or require special licenses. If the prototype has been designed to combat a specific threat, it's possible that acquisition of the required materials will be noticed by the group's intended target. The quest for materials can form a story arc within the current chronicle, with the characters seeking ways to gather what they need without drawing undue attention to themselves from either the authorities or potential targets.

With all materials in hand, the group can begin to work at transforming the idea of the prototype into reality. This process can be quick and easy or long and arduous, depending on the nature of the prototype. A good rule of thumb is each Breakthrough made on the prototype requires a month of manufacturing to complete the weapon. Storytellers should feel free to call for Skill rolls at vital stages of construction. Any exceptional successes rolled on these checks might even be ruled to reduce the overall time required to create the prototype. If time is a factor, prototypes can be slapped together more quickly. For each month the inventor wishes to reduce construction time by, the Storyteller should add a Bug to the prototype, reduce its Durability by two or impose a –3 penalty to the weapon's use. These kinds of slapdash prototypes rarely survive for long after use, unless they are returned to the workshop. Any prototype constructed in under a month is good for one scene only before it fizzles out and fails, requiring whole sections of the prototype to be reworked and setting the construction effort back by a month.

## Prototype Design

The one thing all prototypes share in common is that they all attempt to perform the same tasks as other weaponry, only better. Beyond that, almost every prototype is unique in some way. An assault rifle designed by one inventor might have greater range or rate of fire than a similar weapon designed by someone else. The (optional) system below allows characters or Storytellers to create unique prototype weapons for use in their chronicles.

Begin designing the prototype by deciding what general type of weapon you are after. Generally speaking weapons can be divided into two broad categories: small arms and heavy weapons. The category of small arms includes weapons like pistols, rifles, shotguns, assault rifles and submachine guns. The category of heavy weapons includes heavy machine guns, missiles (both SAM and AT), rocket propelled grenades, mortars and pretty much any weapon that requires more than one man to move and operate. Some weapons, like the squad automatic weapon (more commonly called a SAW) falls somewhere in between the two classifications and after the prototype is finished may require that the Storyteller make the final decision.

The type of prototype weapon being created is important. Small arms prototypes can be used by just about anyone with a minimum of training (guns are the original point and click mechanism), but the proper use of a heavy weapon requires the Heavy Weapons Firearms specialty. This reflects the greater amount of training and team coordination required to use a heavy weapon. Any character that attempts to use a heavy weapon prototype without the attendant specialty suffers the untrained penalty. Choosing a specific type of weapon to improve upon also aids in the design of a prototype weapon. Basing the prototype on a pre-existing weapon makes the entire process easier.

The next step in prototype design is to determine the Breakthrough elements of the prototype from the choices offered below. Each prototype can include up to three Breakthroughs without penalty or up to five Breakthroughs at the risk of Bugs. Bugs should be relevant to the weapon and be assigned by the Storyteller, who may decide (if appropriate) to keep them a secret. Using a prototype weapon that has been over-developed can be risky and by keeping the Bugs secret until they are revealed in play, the Storyteller can create an air of uncertainty about the prototype. Assign one Bug to the prototype for each Breakthrough selected over three.

### Flawed by Design

**No matter how well designed, every prototype suffers from at least one Bug. Choose one Bug if the weapon has none.**

## Breakthroughs

**Advanced Rifling:** The weapon has been created using new developments in rifling technology. Improving the rifling of the barrel of a gun improves the accuracy of the weapon. Users benefit from a +1 equipment bonus when using the prototype.

**Exotic Ammunition:** The weapon was specifically designed to fire unusual ammunition. This could be wooden bullets to help battle vampires, large caliber silver rounds intended to put down werewolves or even stranger ammo like streams of acid or shards of bone. The range of the weapon is reduced by half and the new damage rating is determined by the materials used to create the ammunition. In general, shells created from non-standard material reduce the damage rating of the weapon by one. This potential loss of firepower is compensated for by the effects of the ammunition on the targets for which it was designed. Storytellers should determine the damage rating of prototypes that don't fire solid rounds based on the potential for damage caused. A prototype that fires poison darts might initially cause only a single point of bashing damage, followed by the effects of the poison in subsequent turns.

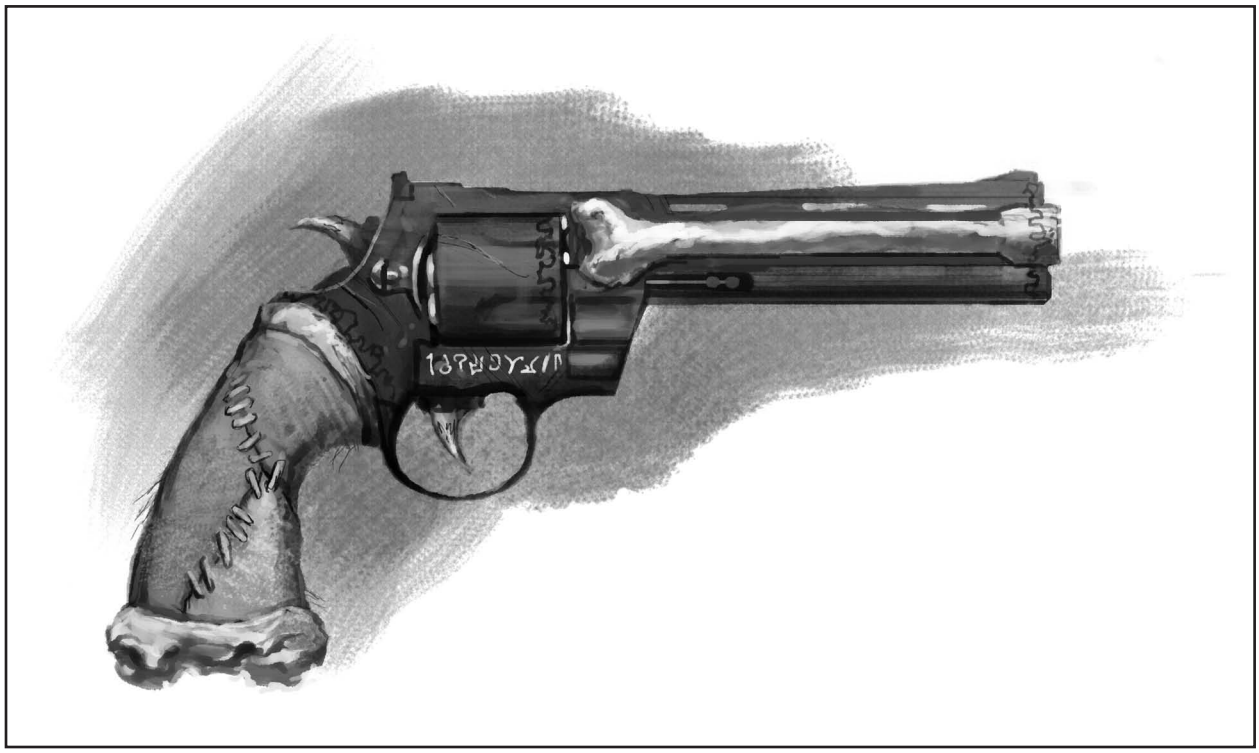
**Extended Range:** The weapon has been improved through use of superior material or some other innovation. Determine the usual ranges for the prototype by looking at similar weapons. Medium range is moved to short, long range to medium and the new medium range is doubled for long range. As an example, Marty wants to create a prototype pistol with Extended Range. The pistol design Marty seeks to improve on is best represented by light pistols. Standard range for a light pistol is 20/40/80. The prototype pistol with Extended Range has its profile changed to 40/80/160.

**Hail of Lead:** The weapon can fire much more quickly than standard weapons of similar type. The new rate of fire is largely dependant on the type of prototype weapon. Any weapon that doesn't normally have the autofire trait may only be improved to fire short bursts. Weapons with the autofire trait can increase their rate of fire by one category. Short bursts become medium, medium bursts become long and long bursts become sustained. The user can still choose how much lead to put in the air when using a weapon capable of firing multiple types of bursts. A weapon that could fire short or medium bursts before being improved can now fire either medium or long bursts. Sustained bursts fire 30 or more bullets at an area with a +4 to each roll. Weapons capable of sustained bursts *must* fire long or sustained bursts. Single target sniping isn't viable with the weapon. Note that the weapon must hold enough ammunition to fire a burst of the proper type. See the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 160 for more details on autofire.

**Heavy Bore:** The weapon has been designed to fire larger than standard ammunition, increasing its stopping power. On a successful attack roll the weapon deals an amount of automatic damage equal to its damage rating.

**Increased Capacity:** By altering the magazine or belt, the capacity of the weapon has been expanded. This Breakthrough allows the prototype to increase the normal capacity of the weapon by up to twice the standard, without increasing its Size or the Strength required to use it.

**Metaphysical:** The weapon has been designed around, or incorporates, items or materials that have effects that go beyond the reach of science. Perhaps the inventor found a rune-stone than transforms blood into jagged crimson crystals or maybe the barrel of the weapon was made from an alloy that included the ashes from the body of the seventh son of a seventh son. Metaphysical based prototypes leave all the original traits of a similar, mundane weapon in place



and add a secondary effect to damage caused by the weapon. The secondary effect should be thematically tied to the materials used to create the weapon and may have a cost beyond routine maintenance. Using the rune-stone weapon as an example, on top of the standard damage caused by the weapon, the blood-shards might be poisonous if they enter the target's bloodstream. Obviously the weapon doesn't fire standard ammunition, which requires the owner to refill its blood supply before taking it into the field and it isn't always easy to find a willing "donor."

**Miniaturization:** The weapon was designed to be compact, allowing it to be more easily transported or hidden. This Breakthrough reduces the Size of the weapon by two to a minimum of one. Because smaller doesn't necessarily mean lighter, the Strength requirement of the weapon remains the same. The downside to Miniaturization is that a smaller weapon must be loaded with smaller rounds, which decreased the damage rating of the weapon by one (to a minimum of one).

**Non-lethal:** The weapon has been designed to fire non-lethal ammunition. Whether the usual ammo has been swapped out for rubber bullets or the like, or the prototype was designed from the start with non-lethal intentions, the intention is to harm rather than kill. Non-lethal prototypes have their damage rating increased by one, but any damage caused by the weapon becomes bashing.

**Stability:** The weapon has been designed to decrease the overall weight of the prototype and the force of recoil. This Breakthrough decreases the Strength requirement to use the weapon and the Strength necessary to hold the weapon steady when firing bursts by one (to a minimum of one). If used to improve, say, an assault rifle, the new Strength requirements would become 1 (1/2/3).

**Stealth:** The weapon has been designed to reduce the report of the prototype without need for a silencer. This Breakthrough allows characters to fire the weapon without breaking Stealth. Enemies in the immediate vicinity can still attempt to locate the source of weapons fire, but they gain no bonus to do so. The reduction of noise forcibly reduces the rate of fire of the weapon. Prototypes with the Stealth Breakthrough have their maximum rate of autofire reduced one grade. As an example, a weapon capable of firing short, medium and long bursts would be limited to short and medium bursts.

**Supersonic:** The weapon has been designed to fire at a higher velocity than standard versions of the weapon. Increasing the velocity of the round increases stopping power at the cost of range. Though the round exits the barrel at higher than normal speeds, the round is also quicker to burn out. The ranges of the weapon are halved, but the prototype gains the Rote Action trait (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 134).

**Targeting:** The weapon is capable of making precise single shots—on a single shot (no burst or autofire), penalties for targeted shots are halved (round down). In addition, damage done from headshots is considered aggravated.

## Bugs

**Ammo Hog:** The weapon chews through far more ammunition than was anticipated. autofire shots expend twice the usual amount of ammo for a burst.

**Bulky:** Maybe the streamlining step of the design was forgotten or perhaps the materials used just add up to an unexpected amount of weight. The Strength requirement and Size of the weapon are both increased by one.

**Drifting Sights:** For whatever reason, the gun is difficult to keep on target. No matter how many times the sights are adjusted or recoil is reduced the prototype remains obstinately inaccurate. This Bug imposes a –2 penalty to all shots fired with the weapon.

**Fire Frenzy:** Sometimes, when the gun gets going, it doesn't want to stop. Any time an exceptional success is rolled with the prototype the weapon continues to fire without user input. If the weapon is capable of autofire, it switches to the highest burst possible and continues to fire each round until it's out of ammo. The prototype bucks and shakes as it fires, negating any bonus gained from autofire and penalizing shots by an additional –1.

**Hot Potato:** The prototype generates enough heat to fry exposed skin. When the weapon is fired more than once during a scene it begins to heat up and becomes painful to hold. The user suffers one point of bashing damage for each turn he maintains a grip on the weapon.

**Jammed:** The firing mechanism sometimes sticks or only partially ignites a charge. This results in a bullet being stuck halfway down the barrel. Any time a dramatic failure is rolled with the weapon, the next shot fired detonates the round in the barrel. This puts the weapon out of action for the remainder of the fight and causes two points of bashing damage to the user. The prototype can only be repaired in a workshop (see Malfunction below for rules on repairing prototypes).

**Malfunction:** Prototypes are notorious for breaking down or jamming. A dramatic failure *or* two failed attack rolls in a row leads to a malfunction where the prototype fails to operate. The malfunction or jam may be corrected with a Dexterity + Crafts roll at a –3 penalty. If repairs are attempted mid-battle, the penalty is increased to –5. A character with the Prototype Specialty in Crafts reduces either penalty by two (instead of gaining the +1).

## Finishing Touches

When the design of the prototype is complete decide on a name for the new invention. Weapon names are often derived from the company that created the weapon or the name of the inventor and then reduced to an abbreviation for common use. The AK–47, for example, is properly the Automatic rifle Kalashnikov model of the year 1947. Sometimes a colorful nickname is added to the weapon as is the case in the seemingly inappropriately named Colt Peacemaker. After deciding on a name, the prototype's inventor should describe the appearance of the weapon.

| Type | Damage | Ranges | Capacity | Strength | Size | Special |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| JFM–1 | 4(L) +2 | 300/600/1200 | 60+1 | 2(2/3/4) | 3 | Prototype, +1 Equipment Bonus |

Does the prototype have a larger than standard barrel or a shorter stock? Is it made from unusual materials or produce a signature sound when fired? These are all details that help make the prototype seem real as opposed to a new gun with a better stat line.

***Example of Prototype Design:*** *Jimmy decides to create a prototype based on the venerable M–16 assault rifle. He decides to increase the performance of the weapon by adding the Advanced Rifling, Extended Range, Heavy Bore and Increased Capacity Breakthroughs to the weapon. Jimmy names his new gun the J-Forge Mark 1 (or JFM–1 for short). Because Jimmy selected four Breakthroughs, his Storyteller assigns a Bug to the weapon. In this case, the Storyteller decides on the Fire Frenzy Bug and opts to keep the Bug a secret until Jimmy discovers it during play. The profile of the weapon changes from the standard M–16 to the new prototype profile below.*

# Weapons

Weapons development has been ongoing ever since man first picked up a stick or bone to extend his natural reach. Nations race to equip their soldiers with the most advanced weaponry possible for both national defense and more offensive operations. On the battlefield, whether it is woods and fields or urban terrain, the side of a conflict that is the best equipped has a distinct advantage over their opposition. This section presents weaponry on the bleeding edge of weapons technology in the World of Darkness.

## Ranged Weapon Traits

The following Traits appear on weapon tables throughout this chapter. In some cases, the Traits supplement or supersede the generic Traits given in the World of Darkness Rulebook.

**Damage:** The number of bonus dice added to a character's dice pool when using the weapon. A notation of "9 again" or "8 again" indicates that the appropriate system permutation applies (see p. 134, the World of Darkness Rulebook). Ranges: These numbers are the weapon's short/medium/long ranges in yards. Attacks at medium range suffer a –2 penalty, while those at long range suffer a –4. A weapon with a notation of "Thrown" is a thrown weapon (see p. 67, the World of Darkness Rulebook). "Aero" indicates an aerodynamic thrown weapon. "Thrown" with a multiplier indicates that the weapon's range is calculated as for a thrown weapon, then multiplied accordingly.

**Capacity:** The amount of ammunition a gun can hold. A "+1" notation indicates that in addition to the gun's magazine capacity, the gun can be loaded with one additional round in the chamber, ready to fire.

**Strength:** The minimum Strength required to use the weapon effectively. For ranged weapons, this factors in both the weapon's recoil and its physical bulk. If a character's Strength is lower than this requirement, she suffers the difference as a penalty to her attack rolls. For example, a character with Strength 1 trying to fire a gun with a minimum Strength 4 suffers a –3 penalty. Some guns are capable of automatic fire, which is harder to control than single shots. For such a weapon, a parenthetical set of three additional values indicates the weapon's Strength requirements for short, medium and long bursts — for example, 2 (2/3/4).

**Size:** The weapon's Size, per the World of Darkness Rulebook (see p. 135). As Size categories are fairly broad, an additional notation after the Size of each item with Size 1 or 2 indicates the amount of clothing under which a normal-sized character can conceal the gun: P (Palm/Pocket), S (Shirt), J (Jacket), L (Long coat) or N (Not concealable).

**Cost:** The minimum dots in the Resources Merit usually required to purchase this weapon. For information about weapons with a cost listed with the Prototype trait, see p. 129.

*A note on autofire. The rules for autofire may be found in the* ***World of Darkness Rulebook****, p. 160.*

## Standard Personal Firearms

The majority of mass manufactured weaponry are small arms that are designed for personal defense or issued to soldiers. Shotguns, assault rifles, handguns and other personal firearms all fit into the small arms category and each weapon has a role in which that particular weapon shines. Assault rifles have served as the standard weapon of choice of militaries around the world, useful in a broad spectrum of combat duties, since the end of World War Two. Shotguns and submachine guns are useful in urban and CQB fighting. Handguns make excellent back-up weapons and have the advantage of being fairly easy to conceal. Other weapons might make bigger booms, bombs, tanks and artillery might break the will of the enemy, but no battle is truly won until the grunts equipped with small arms have "boots on the ground."

**AA12 Automatic Shotgun:** Unlike most combat shotguns that are adapted from civilian models for combat use, the AA12 is a shotgun designed specifically for military use. The AA12 is a gas driven, full auto shotgun with relatively minor recoil. Because of the minimal recoil on the AA12, the weapon has a much greater range than standard issue shotguns. Greater stability leads to greater accuracy, even when using heavy shot. The gun fires 12 gauge ammunition and features a pressure fire select mechanism. Pull the

trigger halfway back for single shots or all the way back for full auto fire. Solidly constructed and reliable, the AA12 will still operate after full immersion in water and in zero temperature climates. The AA12 can be loaded with eight round magazines and 20 or 32 round drums. Unlike other shotguns, the AA12 may benefit from autofire rules, firing both short and medium bursts.

**Accuracy International AS–50 Sniper Rifle:** Most professional snipers prefer to use a bolt-action sniper rifle rather than a magazine fed gun, sacrificing rate of fire for improved accuracy. When a semi-automatic weapon feeds the next round into the chamber after the shot, the weapons kicks ever-so-slightly. In normal use this isn't a big deal, but even that small amount of extra recoil forces a sniper to spend more time aiming and less time shooting after each shot. The AS–50 is a semi-automatic sniper rifle that features a free-floating barrel with a dual chamber muzzle brake to reduce the amount of recoil to a reasonable level. Intended for use more as an anti-material than anti-personnel weapon, the AS–50 fires both standard .50 caliber ammunition as well as .50 cal API (armor piercing incendiary) rounds. The AS–50 may shoot a short burst of autofire, though this is a two round burst rather than the standard three round burst.

**TDI KRISS .45 SMG:** The compact frame of a submachine gun combined with the firepower of a fully automatic weapon make SMGs ideal for CQB or security detail work. The trade-off of using an SMG over an assault rifle is stopping power. Most SMGs fire pistol ammunition that is unable to penetrate modern personal ballistic armor. The KRISS fires .45 caliber ammunition that packs enough of a wallop to penetrate armor and ensure the target stays down. Firing such a large caliber from such a short barrel generally results in decreased accuracy, especially at medium to long range. The KRISS directs recoil down, rather than up, increasing weapon accuracy by decreasing muzzle jump.

No, Really

Nearly every weapon, ammunition type or piece of equipment in this section is taken directly or based on real-life gear. It's true some of this stuff only exists in labs, but it *is* in development. Sometimes truth really is stranger than fiction. (That being said, sometimes mimicking the exact functions of these weapons with game rules is not always a perfect fit; feel free to modify as need be. For more information on modifying combat to suit your game, check out the next chapter, Combat Hacks.)

**Magpul Masada:** The Masada features a modular design that allows it to take on multiple roles and accept different types of ammunition. Assuming the owner is carrying the full kit with him; the Masada can be configured as a standard assault rifle, a CQB weapon or be fitted with a long barrel to provide light sniper duty. The standard design for the Masada fires the NATO 5.56 mm bullet, but it is easily transformed into a weapon that fires 7.62mm ammunition – the standard caliber round used in the AK–47. The weapon comes with a folding stock and a full-mount optics rail in its assault rifle configuration. Though the firing mechanism remains basically the same as that found in an M–16, the ease of breaking down the weapon makes it easier to clean and the overall design improvements over the M–16 makes the weapon more reliable in tough conditions. The base statistics of the weapon change as the weapon is adapted for use. Changing the Masada from one weapon type to another requires a Dexterity + Crafts roll. Storytellers should assign the different adaptations with stats equal to those of an equivalent assault rifle, SMG or rifle based on weapon type and ammunition used.

**LWRC Infantry Automatic Rifle:** The LWRC IAR is one of several next generation assault rifles. It features an open bolt full-auto, closed bolt semi-auto construction that runs cooler than other weapons of similar make. The longer most assault rifles are fired, the hotter the chamber becomes, increasing chances of a misfire or of a round cooking off while in the chamber. The IAR runs cooler as the result of a short stroke gas piston system that vents hot gas and carbon fouling out of the gun rather than into a "heat sink" reservoir that heats up the chamber. Directing the gases in this manner also reduces the cleaning required to maintain the weapon to virtually zero. This greater reliability increases the long burst autofire bonus by +1.

**LWRC Personal Security Detail:** Ever since NATO decided to switch to the now standard 5.56mm round, soldiers have been less than impressed with the stopping power of the round. When faced with opposition carrying an AK–47 (or knockoff) which fires the more powerful 7.62mm round, personal security forces or special ops troopers have been at a major disadvantage carrying SMGs that fire the 5.56 or worse, pistol rounds. The PSD fires the more powerful 6.8mm round from an eight inch barrel with recoil similar to other SMGs. Employing the short stroke gas piston system featured in the IAR, the PSD is a highly reliable weapon that operates well under most any conditions. The PSD comes with a detachable shoulder stock. Like its larger brother, the greater reliability of the PSD increases the long burst autofire bonus by +1.

**XM29 OICW:** The OICW program (Objective Individual Combat Weapon) was begun in the 1990s with the intention of updating and modernizing the weaponry used by US armed forces. The XM29 was designed to replace the venerable M–16 as the standard assault rifle issued to American troops. In 2004 the OICW program was officially brought to an end and all production of the XM29 was halted. That's the official story. Since the official end of the program, reports have trickled in to intelligence agencies and other information collecting organizations of sightings of the XM29 used by black ops type troops around the globe.

The XM29 sported a standard assault rifle firing the NATO 5.56mm round, the barrel of which sat side-by-side with a light semi-auto 20mm airburst grenade launcher. Both weapons could be fired with the same trigger simply

by toggling the selector switch from one to the other. Topping the gun was a sophisticated fire control computer with a video camera, 6X scope and laser rangefinder. The 20mm grenades were fed information directly from the laser rangefinder and programmed to detonate at a preset range and height when the trigger was pulled. Field tests determined that the 20mm airburst grenade lacked stopping power sufficient enough to warrant the extra weight and bulk it brought to the weapon. Intelligence gathered since the "end" of the program indicates that the 20mm airburst grenades have been replaced with 20mm gas grenades. Most commonly the grenades are filled with tear gas, but the occasional report hints at the possibility of a more deadly payload.

The XM29 can autofire short bursts. The 20mm grenade launcher is laser-guided granting the firer a +3 equipment bonus and is also capable of firing short bursts, though these are limited to two grenades per burst. Roll to hit as usual with the grenade launcher, ignoring any Armor, Defense or cover modifiers. On a successful roll, the grenades burst in a five-yard radius that deals no damage. Instead, anyone within the radius is subjected to the released tear gas. Tear gas is Toxicity 3 and anyone affected has all dice pools and Resistance traits (including Defense) reduced by five.

| Type | Damage | Ranges | Capacity | Strength | Size | Cost |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| AA12 Shotgun | 4 (9 again) | 50/100/200 | 8/20/32 | 2 (2/3/4) | 3 | •••• |
| AS–50 Sniper Rifle | 5 (8 again)* | 300/600/1200 | 5 | 2 (2) | 3 | ••••• |
| KRISS .45 SMG | 3 (9 again) | 30/60/120 | 25+1 | 2 (2/3/3) | 2/L | •••• |
| Magpul Masada | Varies | Varies | Varies | Varies | Varies | ••••• |
| LWRC IAR | 4 | 150/300/600 | 30+1 | 2 (2/3/4) | 3 | •••• |
| LWRC PSD | 3 | 30/60/120 | 20+1 | 2 (2/3/3) | 2/L | •••• |
| XM29 OICW | 4 | 150/300/600 | 30+1 | 2 (2) | 3 | ••••• |
| Grenade Launcher | — | 75/150/300 | 6 | 2 | — | — |

* API rounds fired from this weapon ignore the Durability and Armor of objects or vehicles (up to medium tanks) dealing damage directly to Structure.

## The Corner Shot System

They have guns now that can shoot around corners. No, really. Look it up.

The weapon mechanism itself sits at the fore of the rifle, after the "hinge" that allows the front of the weapon to pivot left or right. Generally, the sights are actually a video image transmitted from the front of the weapon, allowing the user to see around corners and, thus, fire around corners. Alternately, some soldiers have this video image hardwired to their goggles, so they don't need to peer at a postage-stamp screen atop the weapon.

**System**: Any weapon fitted with the Corner Shot System allows a character to fire from concealment (pp. 163–164, **World of Darkness Rulebook**) at no penalty *provided* the character takes one full turn to aim. The need to spend that turn is obviated if the character has the digital feed wired to his goggles—he can therefore fire and forget without spending the turn.

## Tactical and Heavy Weaponry

When confronted by a problem that requires more muscle or different angle of approach, people turn to heavy and tactical weapons. Storming a house filled with angry werewolves or even a single sniper is sure to result in casualties. Whistling up airstrikes or artillery isn't a luxury that can be afforded by all, so they bring out the big guns or look to nullify the target by thinking outside the box.

Explosive weapons have some or all the following Traits:

**Type:** This is the name or descriptor of the weapon.

**Damage:** This is the number of dice added to or subtracted from attempts to attack enemies with the explosive. Attacks using different types of explosives use different rolls; for example, attacks with hand grenades are Dexterity + Athletics, while attacks with howitzers are Intelligence + Firearms and require an Artillery Specialty. See the descriptions of specific types of explosives for more details. As with attack rolls for other weapons, successes on the attack roll add to the damage done. In addition, all explosives use the extra successes rule. On a successful attack, a number of extra successes are added to the roll to determine the damage inflicted — this is expressed as a value after the Damage trait and damage type (B: bashing, L: lethal), and is *usually equal* to the Force of the explosive.

***Example:*** *0(L)+3; this means attacks with the grenade add zero dice to the attack roll (Dexterity + Athletics), the attack does lethal damage and, assuming the roll is successful, three successes are added to the successes scored on the roll to determine the amount of damage done.*

**Blast Area:** The diameter of the explosion in yards. The number listed is for the primary blast area; the secondary blast area is twice this number. A blast area of 0 yards is considered to affect only the person the area is in contact with, though the Blast Area has a secondary Blast Area of 1.

**Force:** How much damage the explosion inflicts on anyone or anything not the subject of a direct attack with the weapon. Bystanders caught in the primary blast area take the explosive's Force rating as automatic points of damage, and the bystanders also suffer the explosive's Force in damage dice. Characters outside of the primary blast area but within the secondary blast area take damage differently. They simply take the Force rating of the explosive as damage dice.

***Example****: John is 15 yards from a one-pound C–4 bomb when it goes off. Instead of taking four points of lethal damage automatically and taking an additional four dice of damage, he suffers only the four dice of damage.*

Explosives without a Damage trait have the type of damage they inflict (B: bashing; L: lethal) noted under Force, instead.

**Ranges:** The short, medium and long ranges of the weapon. Attacks in the short range are made at no penalty, attacks at medium range are made at –2 and attacks at long range are made at –4.

**Cost:** The minimum dots in the Resources Merit usually required to purchase the weapon. An "N/A" entry indicates that the item is a military device and is not available to the general public.

**Size:** The size of the explosive. Items of Size 1 can be hidden within a hand, items of Size 2 can be hidden inside a coat and items of Size 3 cannot be hidden anywhere on a person.

**Effects:** Any other effects pertinent to the behavior of the explosive, such as the 9 again or 8 again rules, Armor Piercing or Knockdown. An explosive with the 9 or 8 again rule applies that rule to both attack rolls and to damage rolls using the explosive's Blast Area and Force. Armor Piercing is expressed as "AP" followed by a number, and armor piercing explosives apply their Armor Piercing value only to their primary target.

See p. 168, the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, for more information on the Knockdown effect.

Note that the weapons in this section have no cost listing. Normal Joe's can't just walk up to the corner gun store and pick up the kind of weapon described. Obtaining



this type of specialized weaponry requires at least three dots of Streetwise or some fairly well developed contacts in the weapons industry or military.

**CKEM SATW:** This lengthy acronym stands for Compact Kinetic Energy Missile, Squad Anti-Tank Weapon and represents the next generation of man-portable AT weaponry. The CKEM SATW is an anti-tank laser-guided missile that fires a solid armor piercing sabot round that penetrates armor by focusing the kinetic energy gathered by being fired at hypersonic velocity at a single point. Weighing in at a hefty 30 lbs, the weapon deployed via two-man teams; one to carry and fire the weapon, the other to carry and load the missiles. Like most laser-guided weaponry, the CKEM SATW is a fire-and-forget weapon that doesn't require additional guidance after being launched. Tests have proved the weapon capable of causing serious damage to even the heaviest of tanks, giving infantry squads a formidable punch without the necessity of calling for artillery or air strikes.

Like all ranged weaponry, attacks with the CKEM SATW require a Dexterity + Firearms roll. Characters without a Heavy Weapons Specialty in Firearms suffer a –2 penalty to this roll. Attacks against targets smaller than Size 10 suffer a penalty equal to the Size differential. The missiles fired from the weapon ignore the Durability or Armor of an object or vehicle, dealing damage directly to Structure. The laser-guidance system gives the firer a +3 equipment bonus at short to medium ranges. Any character firing the CKEM SATW must aim for at least one turn before firing or the attack loses the benefit of the 10 again rule and every 1 rolled cancels a success. Reloading the weapon takes three turns. CKEM SATWs aren't available to the general public but may be acquired for large sums of money through the black market or by other means.

**M76 IR Smoke Grenade:** Smoke grenades are used to deny visibility to the enemy during either an attack or a retreat. The chemicals within a smoke grenade generate copious amounts of thick smoke that reduce visibility to anyone caught within the radius to zero. Advances in sighting technologies, however, have reduced the usefulness of standard smoke grenades. Thermal imaging isn't fooled by a simple cloud of smoke, though the canister itself might prove a temporary distraction. The US military's answer to this new dilemma is the M76 IR Smoke Grenade. The M76 not only produces the thick clouds of smoke typical of a smoke grenade, it also fills the air with red hot brass flakes that defeat infrared thermal imaging. In use, the grenade produces a momentary ultra-bright flash of light, followed by clouds of smoke that reek of phosphorous, the material used to heat the brass flakes.

Treat a character hidden by smoke as *substantially covered* (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 162) from targets outside the smoke. Treat any characters inside the smoke as if they were *fighting blind* (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 166).

**XM307 Advanced Crew Served Weapon:** The XM307 ACSW is a two-man, crew served automatic grenade launcher. The weapon is fairly lightweight, easily portable and can be set up in minutes. Advancing technology has reduced the recoil of the weapon to the point it doesn't require sandbags or a prepared position to operate. As is standard with most new weaponry, the XM307 has a laser guidance system that increases accuracy. The 25mm grenades are belt-fed into the machine and pre-programmed to explode at a set distance thanks to the laser system.

The XM307 can fire either HE, HEAT or thermobaric (air burst) grenades at a cyclic rate of 260 rounds per minute and can be used to engage light armored vehicles, helicopters and watercraft as well as infantry. Thermobaric grenades also have the advantage of doing minimal collateral structural damage. The weapon further distinguishes itself as an adaptable tool with its ability to quickly convert (in two minutes or less with a practiced crew) into a standard HMG firing .50 caliber bullets. When fired as a grenade launcher, the laser guidance system gives the firer a +3 equipment bonus. The grenade launcher can also autofire short or medium bursts and each belt of ammunition holds 30 rounds. The .50 cal version has the following statistics:

| Damage | Ranges | Capacity | Strength | Size | Primary Effects |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 (8 again) | 250/500/1000 | 50 | -(2/3/3) | 4 | AP 6 |

**EMP Weaponry:** EMP stands for electromagnetic pulse, which is a short burst or wave of electromagnetic energy of sufficient force to disable electronic equipment within range of the pulse. EMP pulses produce current and voltage surges that overload the electronic devices. Any form of technology more advanced than vacuum tubes will fail inside the area of the pulse. Computers, cell phones, motor vehicles and even pacemakers will cease to operate if subjected to an EMP pulse. Although EMP pulses aren't directly damaging to people, disruption of vital electronic equipment (at a hospital, say) has the potential to cause loss of life. When used in-game, simply assume any electronic device that is inside the Blast Area of the EMP pulse is rendered inert and will have to be replaced. All man-portable EMP weapons have the Prototype trait (see p. 129) and can take the following forms:

- *Grenade*: EMP grenades are about twice the size of a standard fragmentation grenade and are more awkward to throw, inflicting a –3 penalty to the Dexterity + Athletics roll.
- *Charge*: EMP weaponry can be set like other demolitions charges using either a timer or remote control to detonate.
- *Missiles and RPGs*: Fired from a standard missile or rocket propelled grenade launcher, these EMP weapons generate a wider pulse than grenades.

| Type | Damage | Blast Area | Force | Ranges | Strength | Size | Primary Effects |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| CKEM SATW | 0(L)+30 | 3 | 2 | 1000/2000/4000 | 3 | 4 | Knockdown |
| M76 IR Grenade | –1 | 10 | — | Thrown | 1/J | | Concealment* |
| XM307 ACSW | | | | 250/500/1000 | -(2/3) | 4 | |
| —HE | | 6 | 4 | | | | Knockdown |
| —HEAT | –3(L)+8 | 3 | 3 | | | | Knockdown, AP 14 |
| —Thermobaric | 0(L)+5 | 3 | 3 | | | | Knockdown, 9 again |
| EMP Weaponry | | | | | | | |
| —Grenade | | 3 | | Thrown | | | Prototype |
| —Charge | | 10 | | | | | Prototype |
| -Missile/RPG | | 6 | | 125/250/500 | | | Prototype |

* See weapon description

## Story Hook: Natural Causes

Try as you might, you could never get to that leech in human form during the daytime. Following him back to his lair turned out to be the easy part. Said lair was a million dollar home with the best electronic security money can buy. Your last attempt to break end was ended prematurely when the cops showed up in response to the silent alarm. Bastards. Just like a cop to protect a monster. Then you saw the ad in a military magazine you picked up. The ad was itself wasn't very informative. It read, "Specialized Weapons for Specialized Needs" and included a phone number. You called and the nice lady that answered the phone listened to your problem before suggesting the purchase of an EMP device. With luck, the pulse will fry enough circuits in the leech's house to cause a fire and make his death look like an accident.

## Non-Traditional Weaponry

Most weaponry is pretty self-explanatory and obvious in function. You point the end of the weapon that goes boom at your target and pull the trigger or push a button. The results will vary slightly, but generally they will be exactly what both sides of the conflict would expect. Non-traditional weaponry has the advantage of adding an element of surprise to an attack. The same enemy that is prepared for bullets to whiz by their heads or for explosions to rattle their teeth is less likely to anticipate an oblique attack that targets their vision or hearing. Even weapons with more traditional destructive capabilities that maim and kill in new ways can set an enemy on their heels, opening the way for a successful attack.

**Active Denial System:** Part of a new generation of non-lethal weaponry, ADS creates a beam of directed electromagnetic radiation to excite water molecules in the skin creating an intense burning sensation that increases the longer the target stands in the beam. Thoroughly tested and proven to be non-harmful even with protracted exposure, ADS is an effective crowd deterrent weapon. No more sinister in appearance than an oddly colored satellite dish when deployed (usually from the back of a Humvee), ADS is controlled by a single operator with a joystick and a console display. Smaller, man-portable versions of the weapon are currently in development.

Any character hit by the ADS beam must roll Resolve + Stamina at a –2 penalty roll or be forced to move away from the source. Each turn past the first imposes a cumulative –2 penalty. People or creatures with a fear of fire might have those phobias activated when struck with the beam. If a character with a phobia or severe reaction to fire (vampires, for example) fails the resistance roll she immediately suffers the effect of her phobia or mental compulsion.

**Dazzlers:** A dazzler is a type of non-lethal laser weaponry that is used to distract and harass a target without causing permanent damage. Dazzlers operate by shining a focused beam of intense, bright light into the eyes of the target, blinding and disorienting them. Generally used as anti-personnel weaponry, more powerful dazzlers can also be used to disrupt helicopter or low-tech armored vehicle attacks, assuming the user can successfully target the operators. Dazzlers come in a variety of forms, including a rail-mounted version for use with standard infantry weapons, a more powerful tripod-mounted version and a futuristic looking dazzler "rifle" that is highly accurate and effective at medium to long ranges. All dazzlers have a minimum range and maximum exposure for safe operation. Painting the eyeballs of a target for too long or at too close range can permanently impair the vision of that target; in the same way staring into the sun for too long can lead to problems.

Dazzlers are fired by rolling Dexterity + Firearms with a –3 penalty for targeting the eyes of an opponent. For a number

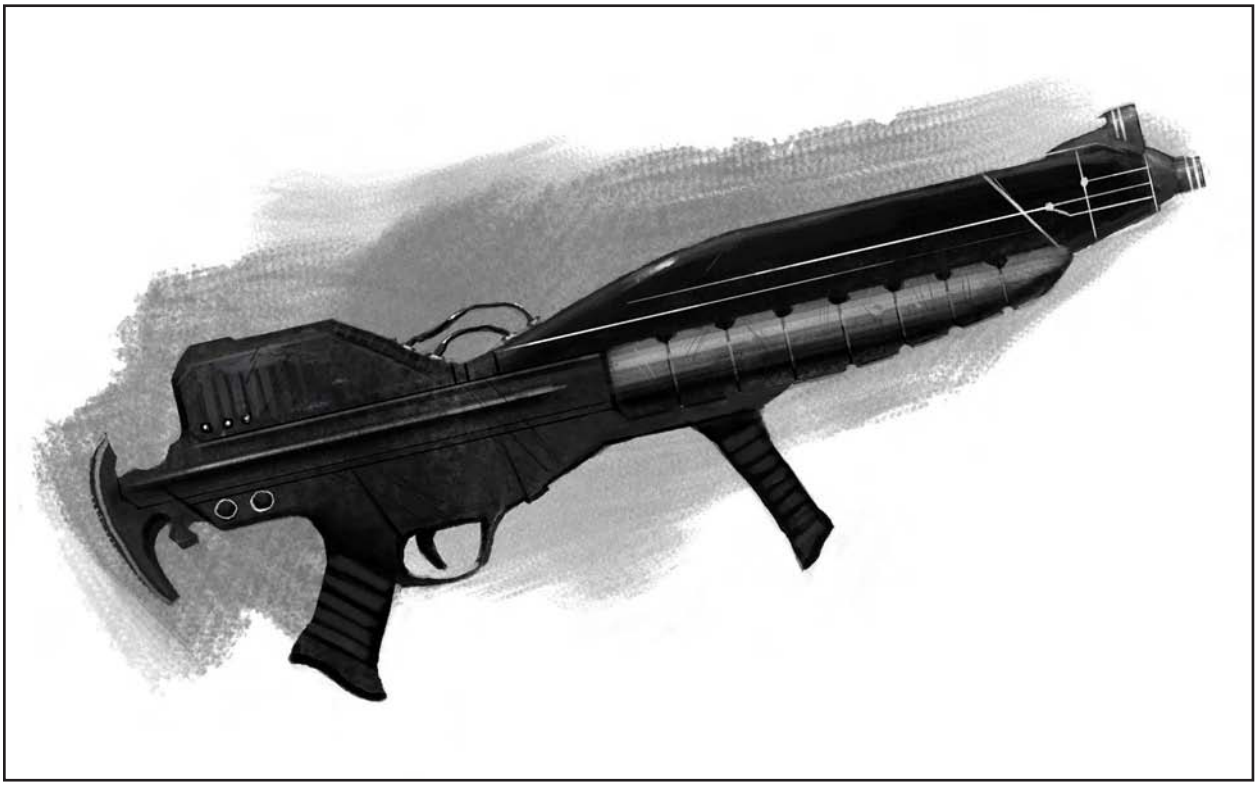
of turns equal to successes rolled, the target suffers a –5 penalty to any action that requires acuity of vision (i.e. most combat actions) and a –2 penalty to Defense. Repeated exposure to the effects of a dazzler does not stack, but does increase the chance of causing serious damage to the vision of the target. If a single target is affected for more than three consecutive turns by a dazzler he must succeed at a Wits + Composure roll or be effectively blinded for the next 24 hours. At the end of the 24 hour period, the victim must succeed at a Resolve + Stamina roll or gain the Poor Sight Flaw (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 219). The above rules also apply if a target is exposed to a dazzler at point blank range.

**Directed Energy Beam System:** DEBS is a complicated weapon that uses a high power microwave and a high energy laser assembly to direct a focused stream of electrons (known as a particle beam) towards a target. Normally, outside a vacuum, electrons tend to disperse, the high energy laser and alternating sine wave microwave pulses help keep the electrons bunched and concentrated on the target even at long range. When it strikes a target, the particle beam disrupts and destroys matter at a single point only a few inches across. The narrow focus increases the destructive power of the weapon in the same way as more traditional weaponry; the smaller the focus the less energy is lost breaching the target. Currently, DEBS is only a vehicle-mounted or stationary weapon, mainly as a result of the high fuel requirements to power the weapon (the machine has been designed to operate on standard diesel fuel). Transporting the entire system requires a vehicle no smaller than a standard van. Somewhat disappointing in appearance, DEBS resembles an enlarged camera mounted on a pintle and swivel system.

Attacks with DEBS require a Dexterity + Firearms roll. Characters without a Heavy Weapons Specialty in Firearms suffer a –2 penalty to this roll. Attacks against targets smaller than Size 10 suffer a penalty equal to the Size differential. DEBS ignores Armor completely and halves (round up) the value of any cover. As a secondary effect, any target that contains electronic equipment that is hit by the particle beam is affected as though it had been attacked by EMP weaponry (see p. 137).

## Story Hook: Noise Pollution

Somehow they always managed to know in advance what your plans were. You found it hard to believe that the skinless dog-things were actually outsmarting you and you couldn't find evidence of any listening devices in your home or office. Finally you figured it out through observation one night when you followed the creatures on a whim. You noticed, through your binoculars, that their ears pricked up at the slightest sound and they seemed to track their pretty by hearing rather than sight or smell (it's hard to tell if they even have eyes, actually). You looked up noise amplification devices on the web and found info about the DEBS system. You'll find out soon enough if they can still hunt after you turn up the volume.



| Type | Damage | Ranges | Capacity | Strength | Size | Cost |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ADS | 0* | 150/300/600 | — | — | 4 | •••• |
| Dazzler | | | | | | |
| —Rail-mounted | 0* | 15/30/60 | — | — | 1 | ••• |
| —Tripod-mounted | 0* | 25/50/100 | — | 1 | 2 | ••• |
| —Rifle | 0* | 50/100/200 | — | 2 | 3 | •••• |
| DEBS | 0(L)+20 | 1000/2000/3000 | — | 2 | 5 | Prototype |
| LRAD | 0* | 100/200/300 | — | 2 | 4 | •••• |
| Zapper | 0* | 5 | 5 | 1 | 2 | Prototype |

*See weapon description

**Long Range Acoustic Device:** Designed as a non-lethal weapon, the LRAD projects a tight cone of sound at range. The sound is loud and painful to anyone within range and field of use without protective equipment. The weapon is usually swept over a group of targets to ensure maximum coverage of the area and to ensure the cone of sound doesn't linger on any one target long enough to cause permanent hearing loss. The LRAD looks vaguely like a flat, black searchlight and is mounted on a swivel and pivot to allow both vertical and horizontal sweeps. Weighing in at 45 lbs, the LRAD is typically mounted on vehicles, though it could be deployed by infantry via a two-man crew.

The LRAD is fired by rolling Dexterity + Firearms and can be used to engage any number of enemy targets standing within 10 yards of each other. If the initial roll succeeds, the operator may then sweep the area without need for additional rolls as long as the targets don't move out of the 10 yard field of effect. Targets in the field of sound projected by the weapon must roll Resolve + Stamina with a penalty determined by their proximity to the weapon. At short range the penalty is –4, medium range –3, long range –2 (100/200/300). Any target that fails the roll may not perform any action during their turn other than staggering directly away from the device. Targets that are subjected to the sound for three or more consecutive turns (or at short or point blank range) must succeed at a Resolve + Stamina roll or be deafened for the remainder of the scene. At the end of the scene any deafened character must roll Resolve + Stamina a second time. A failure indicates the character has suffered permanent hearing loss and gains the Hard of Hearing Flaw (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 219).

**Zapper:** The zapper is an experimental weapon that fires a wire into a target similar to the way Tasers operate. In the case of a zapper, the wire acts as a plasma conductor to deliver a burst of energy strong enough to create a magnetic field at a single point. Called a zeta pinch effect, the localized magnetic field has enough power to compress tissue and deliver a nasty electric shock at the point of impact. To understand the effect this has on the human body, think of the damage caused to, say, an arm if it were crushed like a beer can and add to that the trauma inflicted by being struck by lightning. Zappers are about the shape and size of a submachine gun and are powered by lithium-ion batteries. Each battery has enough juice to fire five shots before being exhausted. The wire fired from a zapper need only maintain contact with the target long enough to create the zeta pinch effect and so doesn't end in prongs that can be difficult to detach from a target. The weapon comes equipped with a miniature winch that reels in the wire after it expends its payload.

The zapper is fired by rolling Dexterity + Firearms minus the Defense and/or Armor of the target. With a success on the roll the target suffers three points of lethal damage from the pinch effect plus an additional three points of Bashing damage from the electrical discharge. The weapon requires one turn to recoil the wire after each firing and so can only be fired every other round. Targets that are injured by the weapon must succeed at a Resolve + Stamina roll or be considered stunned for one turn.

## Firestorm Weapons

The weapons called "Firestorm" produced by Ganaducci Arms represent one of the first true innovations in conventional weapons technology in centuries. Their guns are generally more reliable, more accurate and can sustain a higher rate of fire than their more standard cousins. Still in the very early stages of actual battlefield testing, the weapons still have a hiccup here and there, but for the most part fulfill the promise shown on the drawing board. See p. 126 for more information about Firestorm weapons and the company that manufactures them.

**Ganaducci Arms 9:** The "Ganaducci–9" is the standard personal sidearm produced by Ganaducci Arms and fires 9mm rounds. The weapon consists of four barrels, which gives the weapon an odd sort of mini-Gatling appearance. A selector switch allows the user to choose between semi-auto and full auto fire and the weapon is ambidextrous in design. Heavier than standard pistols, the Ganaducci–9 requires the user to hold the gun in both hands while firing to ensure accuracy.

Any character that attempts to fire the Ganaducci–9 with only one hand suffers a penalty relative to her Strength. Characters with Strength 5 or greater suffer a –1 penalty (regardless of how strong you are the weapon still bucks if it isn't steadied with two hands) and the penalty increased by an

| Type | Damage | Ranges | Capacity | Strength | Size | Cost |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ganaducci–9 | 2 | 20/40/80 | 6/barrel | 1(2) | 1/J | Prototype |
| FAIR | 4 | 150/300/600 | 12/barrel | 1(1/2) | 3 | Prototype |
| FSW | 4 (9 again) | 175/350/700 | 20/barrel | —(2/3/4) | 3 | Prototype |
| RA50 | 5 (8 again)* | 300/600/1200 | 50/barrel | —(2/2/3) | 5 | Prototype |

*See weapon description

additional –1 for each dot of Strength below five dots (–2 at Strength 4, –3 at Strength 3 and so on). The Ganaducci–9 is capable of firing short bursts. Each barrel holds six bullets.

**Firestorm Assault Infantry Rifle:** Designed specifically with NATO troops in mind, the FAIR fires 5.56mm ammunition from three barrels and comes standard with a collapsible steel stock. Even with the multi-barrel design the FAIR isn't heavier than comparable assault rifles thanks to its lightweight alloy construction. The FAIR incorporates a firing regulator and pressure sensitive trigger that allows the weapon to be fire single semi-auto shots with a single pull or three-round bursts by holding back the trigger without the need to toggle a selector switch.

The FAIR is capable of firing short bursts and field testing has shown that the firing regulator is easily disabled (Intelligence + Crafts), allowing the weapon to fire medium bursts. Firing medium bursts reduces the accuracy of the weapon, imposing a –1 penalty to each attack roll. Each barrel holds 12 rounds.

**Firestorm Support Weapon:** Intended to replace the SAW as the weapon of choice for squad support weaponry, the FSW is a light machinegun that fires 7.62mm rounds. The weapon has six barrels and comes with a detachable tripod. Unlike lighter Firestorm weapons, the barrels on the FSW don't rotate; instead the barrels are stacked in two rows of three, forming a solid block. Not the most accurate gun on the planet, the FSW operates by throwing out a solid field of lead, making up for its lack of accuracy through weight of fire. The FSW is completely incapable of firing single shots. The weapon was designed to lay down fields of suppressing fire and it accomplishes that job admirably.

The FSW may fire short, medium and long bursts. Characters without the Heavy Weapons Specialty in Firearms suffer a –2 penalty operating the weapon. Each barrel holds 20 rounds.

**Rapid Attack .50:** More like a solid block of barrels than a standard gun in appearance, the RA50 operates in the role of a heavy machinegun. A whopping 100 lbs. in weight (without the tripod), the weapon isn't manportable by any means and is either set up as a two-man crew served weapon or is mounted on a vehicle. Like the FSW, the RA50 is deadly as a result of pure weight of fire rather than pinpoint accuracy. The weapon has four stacks of five barrel rows.

Ganaducci Arms also manufactures a sentry version of the weapon that utilizes motion and heat detectors to allow the weapon to be set-up as an unmanned deterrent. The sentry computer is sophisticated enough to ignore anything smaller than a man-sized target and to wait for potential targets to move into short range before opening up on them. The computer also sets off a silent warning signal to nearby troops when it is activated by enemy action. Friendly troops can be equipped with a device that signals to the sentry gun, allowing them move in and out of its detection radius without being fired on.

The RA50 is incapable of low rates of fire and *must* shoot either medium, long or sustained bursts. Characters without the Heavy Weapons Specialty in Firearms suffer a –2 penalty operating the weapon. The sentry version of the weapon has a pool of eight dice for detecting incoming targets and a pool of six dice (plus weapon damage as normal) for engaging targets. The RA50 has Armor Piercing 6 and each barrel holds 50 rounds.

## Story Hook: Countermeasures

The woods made a great place to hide the facility, less great for security. Not long after operations began, patrols began to report signs of possible hostiles in the area. Shortly after that, patrols began to go missing. You found one of the things, killed by a stray round. It was a small humanoid, with chameleon skin, pointed teeth and a wiry musculature. The only weapon it carried was a knife it probably took from one of your missing men. Clearing the forest around the facility was never even a possibility. Spy satellites would probably notice. So you put in a request for the Ganaducci sentry guns you'd heard about. Within a week you received 20 crates all bearing the Ganaducci Arms logo. Now you just have to figure out how to install the guns without losing more people.

# Gear

Weapons are only part of the equation for success in combat. Armor, intelligence and ingenuity are just as important and are more likely to save lives. This section presents the most modern gear and equipment that characters with the right contacts, large sums of money or just plain dumb luck are likely to find.

## Armor

Not getting shot at all is the best armor and a sturdy wall is your best friend in a firefight. When cover is hard to find and bullets are already in the air, armor, or the lack thereof, could spell the difference between life and death. Full rules for armor can be found in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 166.

### Bulletproof Clothing

Rating 1/2, Strength 0, Defense 0, Speed 0, Cost •••

A fairly recent innovation in ballistic armor tech is so-called bulletproof clothing. A select few companies in the world offer their customers protection from small caliber bullets in the form of tailored pants, shirts and jackets. Bulletproof clothing sacrifices armor for style and comfort. Favored by crime lords, dictators and celebrities that don't wish to advertise their paranoia, bulletproof clothing is unlikely to stop anything greater than a 9mm bullet. Still, some protection is better than none and bulletproof clothing does have the advantage of being less obvious than a bulletproof vest.

### Dragon Skin

Vest: Rating 2/4, Strength 1, Defense 0, Speed 0, Cost •••••

Dragon Skin armor is constructed from overlapping 2" ceramic discs (resembling scale mail) encased in an aramid fabric cover. Lighter and more flexible than standard bulletproof vests, Dragon Skin offers substantive protection without slowing or encumbering the wearer. Like other ballistic armor, Dragon Skin protects the wearer by absorbing and dissipating the kinetic force of a bullet, reducing its penetrating power. Although a stopped round will certainly cause less damage to a body, the wearer still suffers the blunt force trauma of the bullet striking the armor. Thanks to its construction, Dragon Skin reduces impact damage more efficiently than a normal bulletproof vest. A character wearing Dragon Skin armor downgrades damage caused by firearms from lethal to bashing and reduces damage by one point.

***Example:*** *Jim is shot with an AK–47 for five points of lethal damage. Fortunately Jim is wearing his brand new Dragon Skin vest, so the lethal damage is downgraded to bashing and the design of the armor further reduces the bashing damage by one. Jim takes four points of bashing damage and, wincing, hits the ground, his eyes already scanning for the shooter.*

Additional pieces of Dragon Skin armor can be purchased to provide an owner with greater protection for the legs, groin, arms and neck. None of the optional pieces offers precisely the same level of protection that the vest does (the Armor Ratings don't "stack"), but each piece offers its Rating against attacks targeted *specifically* against the region the piece protects. Assume that each section must be bought separately. The additional pieces all share the following statistics: Rating 1/3, Strength 1, Defense 0, Speed 0, Cost •••



### Gladiator

Rating 5/8, Strength 2, Defense –3, Speed –5, Cost N/A (see description)

Most widely known for their work on the Firestorm system, Ganaducci Arms also has R&D divisions hard at work on the next generation of personal body armor. Their current prototype that has yet to see actual combat field testing is called the Gladiator. The Gladiator is constructed from thin sheets of segmented ballistic steel welded on to a powered exoskeleton. The armor covers its wearer from head to foot, with a visor made from bulletproof glass. Ballistic fiber gloves with Kevlar backing allow full use of the hands while maintaining protection. The suit weighs slightly over 100 lbs and is completely non-functional without the power provided by the exoskeleton.

Vastly superior to standard ballistic armor, the protection provided by the Gladiator completely negates damage caused by small arms fire. Only weapons with a damage rating higher than eight or armor piercing greater than eight, can even dent it. Weapons capable of bypassing the armor deal lethal damage to the squishy human inside.

For all of its potential, the Gladiator comes with a few problems. The suit is clumsy to operate and must be individually tailored, making it very similar to archaic plate armor. Wielding any sort of melee weapon while encased in the suit is extremely difficult and awkward. Despite its name, the Gladiator was not designed with close combat in mind. A character in Gladiator armor suffers a –2 to their Initiative and a –4 to any Brawling or Weaponry combat rolls. If a character attempts to wear a suit that wasn't tailored specifically for them they suffer a –3 penalty to all actions (which stacks with the above penalties).

Another difficulty with the Gladiator is the immense amount of energy required to power the exoskeleton. Currently, the Gladiator can only operator for one hour before it requires recharging and a full recharge takes two hours. Ganaducci Arms is currently seeking an alternative power source that would allow the suit to run for a minimum of eight hours before requiring a recharge and will beg, borrow or steal the specs of any source they believe will fit the bill.

Ganaducci Arms doesn't sell the Gladiator on the open market and information about the suit is closely guarded. Only characters with contacts in the company or that have access other sources of information are likely to even know about the project. That being said, Ganaducci Arms is always looking for volunteers to test their products and, of course, actual combat action provides the best data…

## Drugs

For some people purely external preparation for combat just isn't enough. Maybe they feel sluggish, maybe they're in pain or maybe they just like the feeling of god-like supremacy that comes over them when they use their favorite chemical. Just like everything else, for the determined seeker, drugs exist that are designed to enhance combat effectiveness. For the unwary or the ignorant these drugs can be just as deadly as a knife to the heart.

### Miranetam

Cost •• (20 tablets)

Used to increase alertness, improve concentration and enhance memory, Miranetam is a cholinergic agent that speeds right and left brain communication. Taken in small doses for a short period of time, Miranetam is mostly harmless, with possible side effects similar to large doses of caffeine. Ingested more frequently and for long periods, the drug can cause paranoia, anxiety and nervous irritability. Miranetam is not known to be addictive and is a controlled substance in most countries.

Miranetam comes in tablet form and a single tablet affects the user for four hours. Characters using the drug gain a +1 bonus to all Mental Skills and a +3 bonus to Perception rolls. If more than four tablets are taken in any 24 hour period or a character habitually uses the drug for more than a week, the character gains the Paranoia Flaw (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 98) until they cease use of the drug and for an additional 12 hours afterwards while their body flushes the remnants.

### Morphilite

Cost ••• (5 shots)

Morphilite is an opiate derivative of morphine, mixed with a cocktail of other pain suppressers and amphetamines. Designed specifically for use by combat troops, no single nation has, thus far, been willing to own up to the drug's creation. A banned substance in most nations, Morphilite is habit forming even with moderate use. A single shot of Morphilite is enough to block the pain from nearly any non-fatal injury without the sluggish side effects usually associated with opiates.

The drug begins to work immediately (same turn) and confers the Iron Stamina (••) Merit on the user for the remainder of the scene. If a character uses the drug a number of times in one week greater than their Stamina, they risk becoming addicted. The character must succeed at a Resolve + Composure roll or gain the Addiction Flaw (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 218). Taking more than one shot at a time is unlikely to cause an overdose, but does increase the chances that the opiate will overcome the amphetamines. Characters that take multiple doses react as though they had taken a straight shot of morphine and suffer the usual penalties (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 177).

### Stigma

Cost •• (10 hits)

Dangerous and highly addictive, Stigma is a banned substance in most countries. The drug floods the adrenal gland with acetylcholine, forcing the gland to work over-

time to produce adrenaline. Regularly cut with other amphetamines, Stigma can be swallowed, snorted or injected and produces an almost instant feeling of invulnerability. Addicts usually die from an overdose that over-stimulates the heart.

Regardless of the method of ingestion, one hit of Stigma affects the user for one hour. For that hour, characters gain a +1 bonus to all Physical Attributes (may not exceed human maximums), +3 to Initiative and may ignore wound penalties that result from bashing damage. The burst of adrenaline makes it difficult to concentrate, conferring a –3 penalty to any Mental Skill rolls. Each time the drug is used the character must succeed at a Resolve + Composure roll or gain the Addiction Flaw (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 218). If a character takes more than one hit at a time or a number of hits in one day greater than her Stamina, she must roll Stamina + Composure with a –3 penalty. If the roll is failed, she has suffered from a mild heart attack, takes four points of bashing damage and collapses. If the roll results in a dramatic failure, she has a major heart attack, takes seven points of bashing damage and collapses into a near-death state that requires timely medical attention.

# Equipment

Good gear isn't cheap, but the sum of a combatant is more than just weapons and armor. When two, otherwise evenly matched opponents square up, it's their equipment, more than luck that can determine the outcome. Seeking that final edge that can swing a battle in your favor is worth every penny. You can't spend money when you're dead.

## Active Camouflage

Durability 1, Size 2, Structure 3, Cost ••••

Active camouflage takes advantage of micro technology to simultaneously record and broadcast a three dimensional image of the background against the person or object to be concealed, rendering it virtually invisible to sight. The materials used to project the recorded image depend on the target of the obfuscation. For people or mobile, man-sized objects, the illusion is projected on a liquid crystal display that is worn like a cloak. Larger objects use panels of organic light-emitting diodes which allow for an even display of the recorded background even against non-symmetrical surfaces. Active camouflage can help to defeat standard visual scanning equipment and regular eyesight, but will not fool more sophisticated detection devices that also sample the area for movement, heat and sound.

Any character or object draped in active camouflage gains the 8 again quality for all Stealth rolls versus visual surveillance. At distances less than three yards, the bonus is reduced to 9 again. Active camouflage is best complimented by slow, steady movement. Loud noises or sudden movements (running, jumping) negate the bonus.

## Bafflers

Durability 1, Size 3, Structure 4, Cost ••••

Bafflers are a type of electronic countermeasure (ECM) that seeks to disrupt the pinpoint accuracy of laser guided weaponry. Baffles work in a number of ways, dependant on technology available and the size of the target to be protected. The cheapest method is to throw up a screen of foil strips, called chaff, to confuse and deflect laser guidance. A more advanced method uses computers to identify the frequency of an incoming laser and attempt to jam it by broadcasting a counter-frequency down its wavelength. When characters attempt to fire on targets with active baffler systems using laser-guided weaponry, they suffer a –2 penalty and any bonus gained from laser targeting is lost.

## Centurion Initiative System

Durability 6, Size 2, Structure 8, Cost ••••

Communication is an invaluable tool on the frontlines. Without guidance and communication, soldiers can find themselves trapped behind enemy lines, exposed to friendly fire or out of position in an attack, leaving gaps in the lines that invite flanking maneuvers or counter-attacks. Armies have relied on mounted messengers, musicians or field radios for centuries to coordinate their troops. The Centurion Initiative System (CIS) is a great leap forward in battlefield communications, ushering in an era of enhanced audio and video tactical support.

For standard troopers, CIS consists of a wireless ear bud, a throat microphone, a transparent monocular view-screen (attached to a helmet) and a backpack about the size of a large hardcover book that contains the computer core and power cells in a hardened metal casing. Officers and noncoms carry all the standard equipment plus a small keyboard that is attached to the wrist. The entire package weighs less than 40 lbs, is extremely durable, waterproof and can run for up to one week with a full charge.

Squads can communicate with each other using a local, secured frequency or can switch over to different frequencies to communicate with other squads, fire support or HQ by simply uttering a pre-designated command word. Voice recognition software switches frequency depending on the word or phrase and also works as a safeguard against captured CIS units being used by the enemy. Each CIS is issued to a specific soldier and contains a voice-print of that soldier. If anyone other than the soldier the CIS was issued to attempts to use the unit, the voice recognition software identifies the unauthorized voice-print and locks the CPU down, which must be manually reset.

Each CIS unit puts out a signal that identifies the operator as a friendly target. The monocular view-screen displays blips that allow a squad to approximate the locations of other members of the squad. The squad leader or HQ controller can also use the view-screen to transmit non-verbal commands, updated intelligence, maps of the area or other such vital, useful information. When not in

use, the view-screen can be flipped up, flush against the helmet and out of sight of the wearer.

Information can be directly downloaded into CIS by attaching a USB cable to the CPU. Downloaded material can be assigned voice command prompts that bring up the information on the view-screen by whispering into the throat mic. Each unit has a GPS locator that displays coordinates on the view-screen.

An optional piece of equipment for the CIS unit is a small camera that is mounted on the rails of a weapon. The camera feeds directly to the monocular view-screen and has low-lite, night vision and magnification capabilities. A soldier with the camera attachment could swing his gun around a corner or over a trench to have a look around without exposing himself to enemy fire. The camera is Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 2, Cost •••.

Any group of people all equipped and trained for use with CIS (training is a roleplaying opportunity rather than an experience expenditure) gain the following benefits.

• Once per scene, after the first turn of combat, each member of the team may increase their personal Initiative score by three for one turn. Characters that wish to alter their Initiative must announce they are doing so at the beginning of the turn. This is a reflexive action.

• One member of the team may be designated as a point man and lead the team forward. The point man can whisper instructions to his team, pointing out obstacles or other difficulties ahead. Stealth rolls are made as a teamwork action (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 134) with the point man serving as the primary actor.

• The GPS device embedded in the CIS unit can be commanded to perform a playback. Any character with an active unit gains the Direction Sense Merit (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 110).

## Frag– 12 Ammunition

Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 2, Cost ••• (Box of 12)

Developed simultaneously in both the UK and the US, Frag–12 ammunition was designed solely for combat operations against hardened or fortified targets. Frag–12 ammo was designed based on the standard 12-gauge cartridge used in combat shotguns and requires no weapon modifications for use. Each grenade-like round is fin-stabilized (fins lie flat until the round is fired) and the rounds refuse to arm until they achieve 3m of separation from the firer. Frag–12 comes in HE (High-Explosive), HE-FA (High-Explosive Anti-personnel) and HE-AP (High-Explosive Armor-Piercing) rounds. Frag–12 rounds are "dumb" and each round only detonates upon contact with the target or other hard surfaces.

## HUD Contact Lenses

Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 2, Cost ••••

Also known as a "bionic" lens, HUD contact lenses use micro fabricated light-emitting diodes, micro circuitry and a tiny antenna to project a virtual screen on the surface of the eye. The lenses can be configured to receive and display information from any wireless transmitter, allowing wearers computer access without reliance on standard monitors. The lenses not only project images, they can also provide diagnostic data on the health of the wearer. By focusing the eye on specific parts of the display, wearers can control the movements of a cursor without a mouse. By altering the transparency of the display, the user can view both the information presented and his surroundings. When the eye ceases to focus on the display for a set period, the lenses go into a "sleep" mode and can be reactivated by focusing on an icon that hovers just in sight.

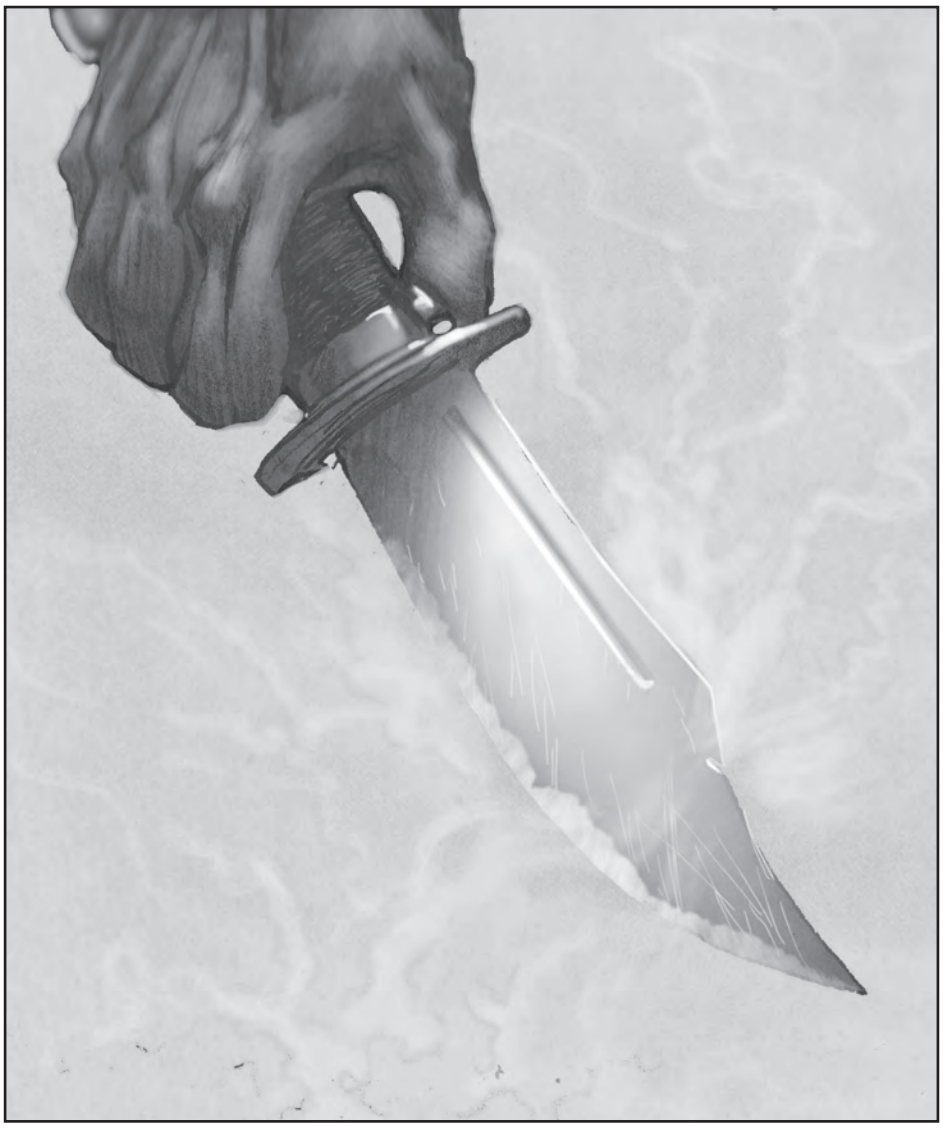
It goes without saying that this technology could be used in any number of commercial or military enterprises. Civilians could surf the net or check email while riding the bus and soldiers could project an almost video game like HUD to assist them in their duties. In one case, the military has experimented with chips embedded in clips and bullets. The HUD displays how many rounds are left in the clip and also the path the bullets have been fired, giving the soldier the benefit of tracers without the lightshow.

## WASP Injection Knife

Durability 3, Size 1, Structure 4, Cost •••

The humble knife has been a standard piece of military kit for as long as men have gone to war. Innovations in alloys aside, knives have remained virtually the same for hundreds of years. The WASP Injection Knife aims to change that. Originally designed for use by divers to protect against aggressive aquatic predators, the WASP has gained some popularity for use in other arenas. A little over five inches in length, the blade itself isn't what constitutes the threat. The handle of the WASP contains a 24g container of compressed gas that is triggered at the push of a button and released through a hole near the tip into the target at 800 psi. This creates a balloon inside the target, filled with freezing cold gas, about the size of a basketball. Stabbing a target is a standard Strength + Weaponry roll, +1(L) for the blade. The initial attack roll must gain three or more successes to penetrate a target before the user may activate the gas cartridge.

| Type | Damage | Blast Area | Force | Ranges | Primary Effects |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| HE | 2(L)+3 | 5 | 3 | 50/100/200 | Knockdown, AP2 |
| HE-FA | 2(L)+4 | 3 | 3 | 50/100/200 | Knockdown |
| HE-AP | 0(L)+8 | — | — | 50/100/200 | AP6 |



Once a victim has been impaled, the user can activate the gas cartridge as an instant action on the following turn. Upon injection, the WASP causes four points of automatic lethal damage to the target. Each time the knife is "fired" it must be reloaded, which requires a standard action. Characters that are aware of the risks can attempt to wrestle the knife out of the users hand or pull it out of their body with a contested Strength + Brawl roll.

## Remote Control

An ever-growing trend in modern weaponry is the use of unmanned vehicles to perform jobs that would be too dangerous for a human or because the smaller profile of an unmanned vehicle is more difficult to detect. Unmanned aircraft fly recon missions or conduct light combat operations, remote controlled robotic sappers safely detonate mines or IEDs and water-based robots perform similar duties as their airborne cousins.

### Remote All-Terrain Tactical Sentry

Durability 8, Size 4, Structure 12, Speed 10 (max 12), Cost •••••

RATTS is a sophisticated remote robotic system that is capable of performing a multitude of jobs with a few simple changes to its setup or armament. The basic chassis of the RATTS is armored and tracked, weighs about 50 lbs and is around two feet long. The unmanned vehicle is amphibious to a depth of 100 feet and can traverse sand, snow and even stairs with little difficulty. The robot operates via two-way radio with a range of over half a mile and sends a continuous video stream back to its human handler. Running at standard speeds and under reasonable environmental conditions, RATTS can remain in the field for up to nine hours before it requires recharging (full recharge in about two hours).

Most commonly used for explosive ordinance disposal duties, RATTS can be equipped for more aggressive action. The robot can be armed with nearly any medium weight standard weaponry including a .50 cal sniper rifle, SAW, a six barreled 40mm grenade launcher or M16. Firing is controlled by the operator and tests have shown the combination of man and machine to be reasonably accurate, partially due to the zoom, low-light and night vision capabilities of its onboard camera. RATTS are reasonably quiet, making an equal amount of noise at top speed as a golf cart traveling under minimum power.

Any weapons or equipment loaded on RATTS are remotely controlled by the operator and use his Skill and Attribute scores to determine dice pools. Disarming an explosive would call for a Dexterity (or Intelligence) + Crafts roll and firing any weaponry would require a Dexterity + Firearms roll as usual. Because of the high quality imagery streamed back to the operator, characters with the RATTS Academic specialty suffer no penalties to remote controlled actions. Characters without the specialty suffer double the usual unskilled penalty.

## Unmanned Aerial Vehicle

Durability 4, Size 6, Structure 10, Speed 150 (max 200), Cost •••••

As technology advances and improves more and more air combat duties are taken over by UAVs. At first equipped with a simple camera and limited to short range missions, the UAVs in use by militaries today are highly sophisticated machines capable of flying limited bombing missions as well as reconnaissance flybys. Most UAVs are controlled by a human but a few can be programmed to accomplish missions on their own. UAVs come in number of shapes and sizes, but most are fixed wing, jet powered designs.

The UAV described here is manufactured mainly for civilian and commercial use and is limited solely to recon flights. The unmanned aircraft has a range of six miles and can reach altitudes of up to 1500 feet. Feedback to the controller is accomplished through a complex system of cameras and sensor equipment, not dissimilar to a flight simulator. The observation camera can focus down to a one yard area from maximum altitude to produce high quality photos or streaming video. Military versions of UAVs are difficult and illegal to obtain, and it's generally easier to modify a commercial UAV than attempt to purchase a military grade model.

Operating the UAV requires a Drive Specialty in UAVs. Characters that attempt to pilot the vehicle without the Specialty suffer the unskilled penalty.

## Unmanned Underwater Vehicle

Durability 6, Size 10, Structure 16, Speed 13 (max 16), Cost •••••

Naval powers had half-heartedly experimented with small unmanned craft for years, never really embracing the unmanned idea until the success of UAVs forced them to sit up and take notice. After reading reports about and witnessing (by way of recordings) the flexibility and success rate of the UAVs, the high tech navies of the world began serious research into the viability of UUVs. Though the design and development process of UUVs is still in its infancy, a number of navies have begun to utilize UUVs to supplement and enhance their more conventional fleets. The mini-submersibles have been designed for duties that include intelligence, recon, mine countermeasures, communications and anti-submarine warfare.

Like the UAV above, the commercial version of the UUV is not military grade and is generally used for search and rescue as well as oceanic and marine biology research. UUVs with a military designation are difficult to obtain without serious contacts either in the manufacturing sector or military hierarchy. Although not as easy to transform into an offensive weapon as a UAV, with work a commercial UUV can still be a viable weapons platform. The UUV has a carbon fiber composite hull that gives the vehicle a reduced sonar signature. It can dive to a depth of 1000 feet, operate for 24 hours with a full charge and has a range of 50 miles. The controller sends and receives information and control by relaying signals from orbiting satellites at long ranges or directly to the UUV from ship or plane at shorter range. The controller pilots the vessel through a combination of streaming video and telemetry from the UUV.

Operating the UUV requires a Drive Specialty in UUVs. Characters that attempt to pilot the vehicle without the Specialty suffer the unskilled penalty.

### Story Hook: The Deep

The attacks had gone on for at least a month before the authorities took notice. They closed the beaches around the resort and sent out oceanic boats to monitor the activities of the local sharks. They always seem to want to blame the sharks. You know it isn't a shark that ate those two little girls and your best friend. You were in the boat when she was taken and no shark you've ever seen has hands. You've heard the oceanic center has one of those little diving robots and you think you know where to send it. Packed with enough explosive and sent down the right hole, you figure the robot can kill the beast.


8
NEWS

The tips of Mani's fingers were twitching. The Change wasn't far away. His instincts were screaming at him to shift, to take on the war form and tear the woman's head off. He resisted.

Never fought one of these before.

He'd certainly heard the stories. Hell, everyone had. One bite and you were done. Their teeth made you sleep, made you fall in love, paralyzed you. They made you change back into human form, and then all it took was a bullet to the head, and you were out.

She circled him. He hated the way she smelled. It was just perfume—no sweat, no lust, no pheromones. Just artificial, lab-created Chanel knockoff. Not even blood, and that surprised him.

"You saw me,"

she said simply, gesturing to the body behind the garbage cans. "Now what?"

Mani felt his mind start to slip. She was doing something, trying to make him love her, but whatever it was, it had no scent. That meant it wouldn't work, because it was just freaking him out more.

"Stop that,"

he snarled. His chest expanded and seams stretched. Only the thought of her fangs severing his jugular stopped him. Never even seen anyone fight a vampire before.

She seemed to sense his fear and took a step closer. "I saw you, too." She licked her lips and glanced down, and Mani felt a flush of arousal, and then a jolt of horror. Whatever she was doing was working. "I saw you run up here as a doggie. I saw you watching me."

"You can't kill people on my block," Mani said, but the words sounded too quiet. Where was his voice?

"I liked that you watched," she said.

Mani swung his fist and knocked her down. There was no bruise, no smell of fear, not even a gasp of pain. But the feeling was gone. Whatever she'd been doing to his mind, it was no match for a good old-fashioned punch in the jaw.

# Chapter Four: Combat Hacks

**Never draw your dirk when a blow will do it.**

**–Scottish proverb**

Fighting, whether it's with bare hands, guns or sticks, is frightening. Wounds get ignored in the heat of the moment, adrenaline swamps pain, and the rush of surviving causes a feeling of euphoria that the survivor might later feel guilty over. Post-traumatic stress disorder is common among soldiers who have seen active combat, and the rates of this illness have risen sharply in recent years.

But that's the real world. In entertainment, roleplaying games included, combat has a different purpose and, of course, different results. Fights can be elegant, just, noble and even clean. They can be gritty, bloody and brutal. They can result in what appears to be devastating wounds that the combatants shrug off, or they can result in instant fatality. The aftermath of a fight might not merit mention at all, or it might consume a character for the rest of his life. All of these decisions depend not on "realistic" representations of what happens in a fight, but on what the people enjoying the entertainment need the combat to be.

This chapter discusses the combat mechanics of the Storytelling system and tries to put them in perspective for the World of Darkness. Everything in this chapter should look familiar, since it builds on the material in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**. What we're doing here is to offer alterations to the system that allow that system to emphasize certain parts of combat over others. All of the rules in this chapter are, therefore, at the discretion of the Storyteller (much like all of the other rules).

## Hacks

Below is a list of changes to the combat system for the World of Darkness games. These changes (or "hacks") aren't meant to be used all together (though many can work in tandem!). Some of them, in fact, are mutually exclusive. They're meant to help you see how flexible the system can be with a little tweaking, and to help you start thinking of combat mechanics in terms of what a rule *means* at its heart—"balance" is a term that's only applicable at your individual gaming table, after all. Of course, we'll be referring to these hacks by name later on in this chapter when we discuss different styles of combat rules.

• **Aggravated Called Shots:** A called shot to the head, using any kind of weapon or firearm, inflicts *aggravated* damage. An unarmed strike to the head still inflicts bashing damage, unless the character has some way to inflict lethal hand damage. Targeting the head imposes a –5 modifier. **Rationale:** Damage to the head with anything hard or fast enough to crack the skull often causes brain damage, and that's a pretty sure way to kill a person.

• **Area Effect Shotguns:** When you fire a shotgun at a target less than five yards away, you may make a second attack against anyone standing within two yards of the target as a reflexive action. These secondary attacks use one half the dice pool of your basic attack pool (Dexterity + Firearms + Damage), and does not expend ammo. In effect, you're rolling an extra attack for the "scatter effect" of the shotgun pellets. If you spent Willpower on the attack or received

any other situational bonus, they apply only to the initial attack—do not add them to the secondary attacks and do not include them in the base dice pool when you divide it in half. **Rationale:** This one is more of a video game trope than cinema, but the shotgun being able to hit more than one person at fairly close range has become a common conceit of fiction.

• **Automatic Damage:** The damage modifier on a gun does not add dice to the roll to hit. Rather, the damage is applied automatically provided that the Dexterity + Firearms roll is successful. For instance, if a character with Dexterity 2 and Firearms 1 uses a light pistol (damage 2L), the player rolls three dice. If the player rolls one success, the target takes three points of lethal damage. If the character had been using a shotgun (4L damage plus 9 again), the player would still have rolled three dice, but with one success would have inflicted five points of lethal damage (the gun's damage rating + number of successes rolled). This rule can easily be applied to hand weapons as well, if the Storyteller wishes. **Rationale:** Guns are deadly, even in the hands of someone untrained in their use. This hack makes it less likely that an untrained person will *hit* a target, but if they do, they will certainly injure him.

• **Bleeding Out:** Any wound that causes at least two points of lethal or aggravated damage, and is inflicted by a firearm, blade, claw or any other source that causes deep tissue damage, begins to bleed profusely. The victim suffers one point of bashing damage each turn the wound is left untended. Bleeding victims can be stabilized with a successful Intelligence + Medicine roll, with a –1 dice penalty for each point of lethal damage caused by the initial wound. **Rationale:** A gunshot might not kill a person, but the resultant blood loss very easily can.

• **Bone Breakage:** Whenever a character rolls an exceptional success on an attack made with a blunt weapon or an unarmed attack, the player chooses one of the target's bones from the list below and shatters it. The effects of the broken bone persist for the rest of the story. **Rationale:** Hey, bones chip, fracture, and shatter from a bad hit.

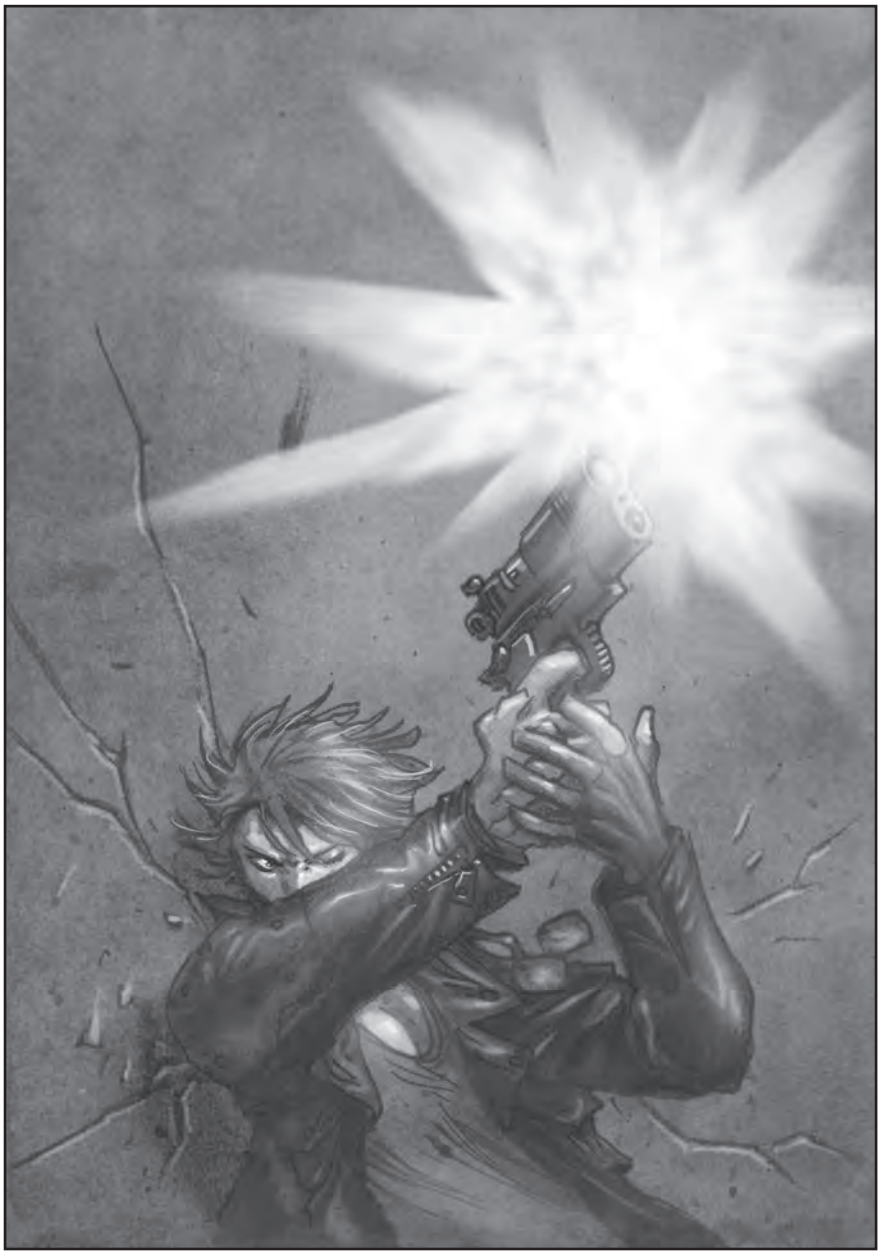
| Bone | Effect |
|---|---|
| Arm | –1 penalty to attacks or skills that require the use of that arm. |
| Leg | –1 penalty to Speed and any Athletics rolls related to running, jumping, or swimming. |
| Rib | –1 penalty to Stamina rolls related to running, holding breath, and similar exertions. |
| Skull | Target is stunned for one turn and suffers a –1 penalty to Mental Attribute or Skill rolls. |



• **Catch the Blade:** Characters with at least three dots in Brawl *or* a Brawl-based Fighting Style do not lose half their Defense when fighting unarmed against armed opponents in melee combat. This hack obviously only applies if you are also using the "Knife to a Gunfight" hack (q.v.) **Rationale:** When cinema trumps realism, masters of the martial arts are easily able to hold their own against armed foes.

• **Combination Momentum:** When a character successfully hits with a Brawl or Weaponry based attack *and* the victim attacks the character in response, if the victim's retaliatory attack misses then the character's next attack against that target receives a +1 bonus. This bonus is cumulative and lasts until either the original attacker attacks another enemy or the victim lands a successful attack on the character. Like most bonuses, the bonus from this hack tops out at +5. **Rationale:** When one combatant gains the momentum, he is difficult to overcome until his opponent is lucky enough to turn the tide of battle.

• **Dangerous Explosives:** Characters standing within the Blast Area suffer half again (round down) the flat Damage of the explosive, plus damage rolled. So, a character standing at point of origin for an explosive with Damage 4 suffers six automatic points of damage plus any successes rolled on four dice. Characters outside the Blast Area of the explosion still suffer the possibility of being hit by flying shrapnel and debris. Roll the Damage rating of the explosive against any character outside the primary radius of the explosion but still within half the Blast Area in yards (round down). An explosion with Blast Area and Damage of 4 rolls inflicts four dice of damage against characters within a 5–6 yard radius of the explosion. **Rationale:** Explosives kill and maim with fearsome ease. Characters shouldn't be blasé about handling them.



• **Dodge Bullets:** When a character is the target of a Firearms attack, he may apply his Brawl dots as Defense, even if the attack would normally deny him his Defense. If he *can* apply his Defense (for example, from a point-blank attack), he uses the higher of his Defense or his Brawl rating. **Rationale:** Master martial artists are so fast and in tune with their surroundings that they can dodge gunfire—in the movies, at least.

• **Faster Healing:** Human characters heal at double the usual rate: one point of bashing damage every 8 minutes, one lethal wound in one day, and one aggravated wound in four days. Supernatural characters with an accelerated healing rate (such as werewolves) likewise heal at double speed, and supernatural beings with the ability to spend their mystical energy to heal (such as vampires' ability to heal by spending Vitae) pay half the standard cost. **Rationale:** The heroes of myth and legend (not to mention modern action movies) recover from grievous wounds in short order.

• **Freezing Under Fire:** Whenever a character is fired upon, the player must roll Resolve + Composure. If the roll succeeds, the character can act normally. If the roll fails, the

player must spend a Willpower point for the character to act (this Willpower point bestows no other bonus on any rolls the player might make that turn). If the character has no Willpower to spend, for whatever reason, he freezes up. A character who has frozen up does not receive Defense during that turn. A "frozen" character regains control on his next action, or sooner if a comrade devotes an action to snapping him out of it. This hack does not apply to characters with the Combatant Merit. **Rationale:** Being shot at is terrifying, even if the shots don't stand any real chance of hitting. Loud noises trigger our panic responses, and the sound of bullets careening off nearby surfaces is enough to try anyone's courage.

• **The Greatest Swordsman is the One Who Survives:** When a character engages in melee combat with similarly-armed opponents (for example, an unarmed combatant facing another unarmed foe, or a swordsman facing off against enemies armed with axes, cubs, or other melee weapons), she uses her Brawl or Weaponry dots (depending on the nature of her armament) as her Defense, in place of the lower of her Wits or Dexterity. If she has the Brawling Dodge or Weaponry Dodge Merit, she *triples* her Defense when she dodges (effectively, she doubles her Defense, which now equals her Brawl or Weaponry score, then adds her Brawl/Weaponry score again thanks to the Merit). If she has a Specialty in the weapon or style she uses, add one point to her Defense. Apply this increase after any other Defense-increasing factors, such as the Dodge action. **Rationale:** A common trope of the martial arts film genre is that no matter your innate speed or talent, a lack of technique can be a fatal flaw.

• **Guns With Kick:** All firearms with a Damage rating of 3 gain the Knockdown property (**World of Darkness Rulebook** p. 168). Firearms with a Damage rating of 4 or higher gain the new Knockback property, described in the sidebar on this page. **Rationale:** Despite the complete violation of Newton's laws, Hollywood has taught us that guns, especially high-powered ones, knock their victims flying, sometimes quite a distance.

## Knockback

A weapon or power not only knocks the target off his feet, it sends him flying. When a character is hit by an attack with the Knockback property, roll Stamina + Athletics as a reflexive action, and compare the successes to the successes on the attack roll. For every additional success earned on the attack roll, the target is thrown backwards one yard and knocked prone. If the Stamina + Athletics roll earns more successes, the target is not thrown backwards and does not fall prone.

• **Haymakers For All:** Any Brawl attack that inflicts damage equal to or in excess of the target's Size causes the target to lose his next action. Replace the effect of the Body Blow maneuver from Fighting Style: Boxing with the following: "Your character can deliver powerful blows that leave opponents reeling and gasping for air. If successes inflicted in a single Brawl attack equal or exceed a target's Stamina *or* Size, whichever is lower, the victim loses his next action." **Rationale:** Wild haymakers that stagger the combatants in a fistfight are staples of the tough-guy action hero, and even an untrained fighter sometimes gets the lucky shot that KOs the champ.

• **Hidden Health:** The Storyteller keeps track of all characters' Health ratings, describing wounds rather than giving the players numbers. Of course, the player will, based on whether or not he is taking wound penalties, have some rough idea of how serious things are getting, but by the time that happens, the Health track is almost full. The Storyteller can allow players to roll Wits + Medicine to allow their characters to assess damage (either to themselves or other characters), but this is an instant action, not a reflexive one. That is, a character who wishes to take stock of himself or a comrade must devote a full action to doing so. If the roll succeeds, the Storyteller should allow the player to see the character's Health track. **Rationale:** People injured in combat don't know how hurt they really are, and certainly can't budget their actions based on that knowledge. This hack is meant to drive home the fact that a wound might be life threatening, or it might be purely superficial, but there's no way to know that.

• **Hollywood Ammo:** Rather than tracking ammunition for characters using firearms, guns only run out of ammo on a dramatic failure. Single-shot weapons, like old-fashioned bolt-action rifles or breech-loading shotguns, are not affected by this rule. **Rationale:** Nobody reloads in the movies until a dramatically appropriate moment comes up.

• **Hollywood Healing:** In the movies, that which doesn't kill you...usually doesn't slow you down much. As long as a character can get some brief medical attention, even a wound that would, in real life, require months of painful therapy and rehab to heal can be shrugged off. **Rationale:** Anyone who has ever seen a Hollywood action movie has seen the hero take a bullet right through the shoulder (in reality a crippling injury likely to permanently reduce the victim's mobility), and a few moments later with some gauze taped over it and the arm in a sling, he's back in the saddle fighting the bad guys with gusto—until some bastard punches him in the injured shoulder, and suddenly the wound is a plot point again. This hack adds the Patch Up action related to Medicine (see sidebar).

## Patch Up

**Dice Pool:** Dexterity + Medicine + equipment

**Action:** Extended (one success is required per –1 penalty to be negated; each roll represents one turn of first aid work)

While it's not as good as proper medical attention, a quick bandage and a makeshift sling can do wonders to get an ally back into the fight. This use of the Medicine skill allows a character to temporarily negate penalties incurred by injury and damage (whether wound penalties thanks to having damage in one of his rightmost three Health boxes, penalties from suffering a called shot, or a supernatural power with debilitating effects). Penalties from multiple sources can all be reduced with this Skill use. Only dice pool penalties (whether universal, as in the case of wound penalties, or penalties to specific rolls) can be reduced; Speed reductions, temporary Ability loss, and the like cannot be patched up. Specific penalties (e.g. a –1 to all actions involving fine motor control, –2 to Perception rolls) must be patched up before general wound penalties, but the character performing the patch-up job can pick and choose how many penalties he will negate.

At the Storyteller's discretion, exceptionally severe wounds with associated penalties might require more significant care than a patch up job—if a character is suffering penalties from a crushed and mangled hand or a gouged-out eye, for example, a quick patch up probably won't help.

If the patient incurs a new wound penalty or injury-based penalty, all penalties reduced by the patch up immediately return in full.

**Roll Results**

**Dramatic Failure:** Your character's ministrations only serve to increase the pain and discomfort of the patient's injuries. He suffers an additional –1 on all actions for the rest of the scene, on top of any wound penalties he is currently suffering.

**Failure:** Your character fails to make progress toward reducing the patient's penalties.

**Success:** Your character makes progress toward improving your patient's functionality. Once you have accumulated successes equal to the total penalty you wish to remove, the patient ceases to incur those penalties until the end of the scene. At the end of the scene, the penalties return, and a character cannot be subject to more than one patch up per story.

**Exceptional Success:** Your character makes tremendous progress toward patching up his patient. In addition, if you roll five or more successes beyond the target number, the patch-up job lasts till the end of the chapter instead of the end of the scene.

**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)

***Example:*** *Sara has been ambushed by a vampire and has been beaten up pretty badly. She has a wound in her second rightmost Health box (for a –2 wound penalty), one leg is broken (–2 to Speed, –2 to actions requiring balance), and one eye is swollen shut (–1 to Perception). Her friend Klaus wants to get her up and mobile as quickly as possible, and decides to patch her up just long enough to get her home. He has to get rid of all of the specific penalties she's suffering before he can deal with the wound penalty: the –2 to balance-related actions and the –1 to Perception (remember, he can't negate the Speed penalty), meaning he needs three successes to start getting rid of the wound penalty. Since time is of the essence, Klaus decides to try to get rid of the specific penalties and reduce her wound penalty by –2, meaning he needs five successes in total. With his Intelligence + Medicine pool of 7, it will likely take him about 3 turns to earn that many* successes.

• **Ignore the Rabble:** As long as a character makes at least one Brawl or Weaponry attack per turn, do not subtract from her Defense due to multiple attackers until after the character has been attacked a number of times equal to her Brawl or Weaponry Skill. If you are employing a hack that allows characters to subtract their Defense from Firearms attacks, this hack applies as well. For example, Stew has a Brawl of 3. As long as he makes a Brawl attack on his turn, he can suffer up to three attacks in one turn before his Defense begins to drop with the fourth attack. **Rationale:** Heroes routinely mow through hordes of lesser enemies, relying on their own sheer badassery to see them through safely—until the momentum of their attacks is disrupted and they take a pounding.

• **Increased Wound Penalties:** This hack changes the way that wounds affect characters. With five open boxes, the character suffers a –1 to all actions. With four, the character loses the ability to spend Willpower for heroic effort, but can still spend Willpower to increase Defense or Resistance traits (see p. 133 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). At three open boxes, the character suffers a –2 to all actions. At two open boxes, the character loses the 10 again benefit (if a weapon would grant the character 9 again, this still applies; a man armed with a shotgun is still dangerous, even if he's injured!). Finally, at one open box, the character suffers a –3 penalty to all actions. **Rationale:** It's difficult to act through pain, and even more difficult to summon extraordinary will when injured. This hack makes wounds more serious.

• **Injuries Last:** Any single attack that inflicts more damage than a victim's Stamina, Composure *or* Resolve has the potential to do lasting damage to the character. If the character does not receive medical attention or supernatural healing within one hour of the wound being inflicted, the player rolls the relevant trait(s), applying any wound penalties. If the roll fails, the character either loses a dot from that Attribute *or* gains a Flaw relevant to the injury (player's choice). If the damage was bashing, the trait returns (or the Flaw fades) in one month, or in two weeks if the character receives appropriate medical care. If the damage was lethal, the effect is permanent, but a lost Attribute can be repurchased for half the normal experience cost. A Flaw fades after the character has devoted appropriate energy and time into getting rid of it (Storyteller's discretion; at least one story). If the damage that caused the injury was aggravated, the effect is permanent and the player must pay the usual amount of experience to get the Attribute back. The Flaw can be phased out as described for lethal damage, though the Storyteller should feel no compulsion to make it easy. **Rationale:** Injuries don't fade just because the checked boxes on the character sheet got erased. Recovery from serious injury can take months or years, or permanently alter a character's life.

• **Knife to a Fistfight:** When an unarmed character is attacked by someone wielding a melee weapon, the defender applies only one-half of his Defense (round down) against the attack. Merits or supernatural powers that add to Defense are not affected. **Rationale:** Even master martial artists will tell you that if you're unarmed and your opponent isn't, the likelihood that you'll get royally fucked up increases exponentially, and your best bet is to dodge like hell and try to get away. This hack makes Merits like Brawling Dodge considerably more useful when the bad guys break out knives and lead pipes.

• **Kung Fu Fury:** Characters fighting unarmed gain a damage bonus equal to half the dots they possess in any Brawl-based Fighting Style Merit (Boxing, Kung Fu, etc.), effectively turning their hands into weapons. If a character possesses multiple Brawl-based fighting styles, the player chooses which style to use to determine his damage bonus. This bonus does not stack with a damage bonus to unarmed attacks from other sources (such as a werewolf's claws or a wizard's magically-enhanced fists), and the character must be able to employ the Fighting Style to gain the benefit (a changeling shapeshifted into the form of a cat or a werewolf in the throes of Rage are both unable to employ Fighting Style Merits and so do not gain this benefit, for example). **Rationale:** Skilled martial artists are usually depicted as being able to inflict almost-supernatural amounts of damage with their bare fists and feet. This hack gives martial artists a leg-up in damage when compared to Weaponry or Firearms specialists.

• **Lethal Stun:** *Any* amount of lethal damage can result in a stun (see Stun, below). It's much scarier to get stabbed than punched. This hack does not apply to characters with the Combatant Merit. **Rationale:** Getting shot or stabbed is scary. Most people aren't used to that kind of trauma, and even a minor slice or a grazing shot is enough to put them into shock.

• **Meat Shields:** When a character's Health track is filled with bashing damage, he is staggered (suffering a –2 penalty to Speed and Defense), but does not need to roll to avoid falling unconscious. When his wounds are filled with lethal damage, he must roll Stamina every turn to remain conscious, as described for bashing damage on p. 173 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook.** When his Health track is filled with aggravated wounds, he is unconscious and bleeding out, as described under lethal damage on pp. 173–174 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook.** After aggravated wounds, the character gains one new "layer" of wounds called grievous wounds. No attacks inflict grievous wounds innately; grievous damage only comes from aggravated damage rolling over. Mark grievous wounds by completely shading in the Health boxes on the character sheet. When a character's Health track is completely filled with grievous wounds, he is dead. A grievous wound takes one month to heal. For supernatural creatures that heal at an accelerated rate or may expend stores of mystical energy to heal, grievous wounds take four times as long, and requires four times as much energy, as healing an aggravated wound. Supernatural powers capable of healing aggravated wounds can also heal grievous wounds, but likewise any requirements (such as energy expenditure or number of successes rolled) is multiplied by four. **Rationale:** Heroic characters being able to take a truly savage beating and yet keep on going is a common staple of heroic fiction.

## Inspire

**Dice Pool:** Presence + Expression

**Action:** Instant

Whether it's the heartfelt expression of the absolute faith a loved one has in you or a drill sergeant's command to get the hell up out of the mud and keep fighting, your character's inspirational words can push an ally to keep going when lesser men and women might curl up and die.

You can inspire your allies once per scene, but any given character may only benefit from being inspired once per chapter.

**Roll Results**

**Dramatic Failure:** Your character stumbles over her words or flubs her line, inspiring not so much confidence and resolve as despair and hopelessness. All allies who can hear your character suffer a point of bashing damage instead of regaining Health.

**Failure:** You fail to inspire a morale boost in your allies.

**Success:** For every success you earn, you can heal one ally who can see or hear you (a live video link or radio communication is okay, but not a prerecorded message) of one point of bashing damage. For every two successes rolled, you may heal one ally of one point of lethal damage. You may spend this healing as you see fit, dividing it up among multiple allies if you wish, provided they can all see or hear you.

**Exceptional Success:** No additional effect beyond the exceptional degree of healing.

***Example:*** *Klaus and Sara have rejoined their companions, but things are in a bad way for the group. Vampires have badly injured the two Lestrade brothers, and Sara's wounds are beginning to worsen. Spirits are low, morale is near to breaking, and the bloodsuckers are closing in. Klaus gives a rousing speech, urging his friends to stand fast and hold till dawn. Klaus's player rolls his Presence + Expression, and with his Specialty in Battlefield Oratory and the expenditure of a Willpower point, he earns eight successes! Four go to healing Sara's lethal wounds, taking her out of wound penalty territory, while two each go to taking bashing damage off of the Lestrade brothers' Health tracks.*

• **Morale = Health:** Rather than strictly representing the physical endurance of the human (or inhuman) form, a character's Health track represents a combination of physical endurance, mental fortitude, and the will to press on in the face of adversity. Instead of Stamina + Size, Health is determined by (Stamina *or* Resolve, whichever is higher) + Size. **Rationale:** Divorcing Health from direct, physical trauma makes the game feel more like an action movie or an epic myth. Folklore is full of stories of leaders who inspired their men to keep going despite fatigue and injury and deprivation. In addition, the Inspire action is added to the Expression Skill (see sidebar).

• **No Fighting Styles:** Any character of sufficient skill can use the maneuvers listed for the Fighting Styles, whether presented in this book, the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, or other sourcebooks (such as **World of Darkness: Armory**). "Sufficient skill" in this case means a rating in the relevant Skill equal to the dot rating of the maneuver being attempted, and a Specialty appropriate to it. For instance, a character with three dots in Brawl and a Specialty in Boxing can use the Body Blow, Duck and Weave, and Combination Blows maneuvers listed for Fighting Style: Boxing on p. 110 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**. Prerequisites do not apply under this rule. **Rationale:** This hack has less to do with simulating some aspect of combat and more to do with freeing up the character's Merit points for non-combat purposes, while still allowing a character with the proper training to make use of these maneuvers.

• **Property Damage:** Reduce the Durability of all objects by 1, 2, or 3, depending on how pronounced you want the destruction of the environment to be. The minimum Durability for an object is 0. **Rationale:** Cinematic fight scenes often involve massive amounts of ancillary damage to the surrounding environment, especially when supernatural beings are involved. Vampires smash each other through brick walls, werewolves rip cars open like tin cans, and enraged Prometheans knock down buildings with ease.

• **Ricochet:** Whenever a bullet (a solid slug, not a blast of shot) misses its intended target, the Storyteller rolls a die. If the die comes up '1,' the bullet ricochets and might hit another person in the area. The Storyteller must decide who is a viable target based on the angle of the gun's aim and who else is in the room, but bullets can bounce in some strange directions. If the Storyteller rules that the area is particularly prone to ricochet (the firefight takes place in a factory with a lot of metal around), he might increase the chances of the ricochet to a roll of 1–3 on a die. A target struck by a ricochet suffers an attack roll equal to the original dice pool, not counting dice from Willpower expenditures or magical/supernatural means to make the shot more accurate (since they obviously didn't work) or to aim or specify a target. So, a character with Dexterity 4 and Firearms 1 shoots at a target using a heavy pistol (damage: 3L), aiming for the leg, and spends

a point of Willpower on the shot, the original dice pool was 6 (4 (Dexterity) + 1 (Firearms) + 3 (Willpower) – 2 (called shot). If the shot ricochets into another target, the Storyteller rolls 5 dice, since the Willpower and the called shot modifiers no longer apply. **Rationale:** Guns are unpredictable, and this hack makes shooting an ally — or oneself! — more likely.

• **Shooting Through Cover:** Subtract the Durability of cover material from the shooter's dice pool. For example, someone shooting at a target behind a pane of glass would lose one die from his pool, provided that he had a clear view of the target. If the Durability of the cover is higher than the damage rating of the gun, or if the gun does not use solid slugs (a shotgun firing birdshot, for instance), the bullets do not penetrate the cover and the target is unharmed. Bulletproof glass or armor piercing bullets provide exceptions to this hack, of course. The former operates at a higher Durability against bullets, while the latter ignores points of Durability entirely. **Rationale:** Glass doesn't provide much of a defense against bullets.

• **Slower Healing:** Similar to Injuries Last (above), this hack increases the time necessary for characters to recover from wounds. Healing time for bashing damage is now one point per hour of rest (if you're using this hack, you might also consider Weapons Kill, below). Healing time for lethal damage increases to one week per point. Healing time for aggravated damage increases to one month per point. Getting stabbed, therefore, can easily take a month or more to heal to the point that the character is no longer inconvenienced. If damage "wraps" from lethal to aggravated, or if the character suffers some kind of supernatural attack, he can easily feel the effects for several months. **Rationale:** Our bodies heal, given medical attention and good treatment, but it takes a while. Anyone who's suffered a sports-related injury can tell you that even *years* later, the body doesn't forget.

• **Stun:** On any turn in which a character suffers damage equal to his Stamina rating, the player must roll Stamina + Resolve. If the roll fails, the character is stunned and can take no action (and receives no Defense) until the same point in the initiative order during the next turn (that is, if the character acts on initiative 10 and is stunned on initiative 8, he loses his action next turn, while if he is stunned on initiative 10 and would act on initiative 8, he loses his action in the current turn). If the damage sustained is *greater* than the character's Stamina, the stun is automatic. The Iron Stamina Merit is added to the character's Stamina for purposes of determining stun, including to the dice pool to avoid it. **Rationale:** A sudden shock to the system is disorienting; ask anyone who's ever been punched in the nose or in the solar plexus. The stunning effect only lasts a few seconds, of course, but that's at least a turn in Storytelling terms.



## Common Sense

by Matthew McFarland

As I was preparing to write this section of **Armory: Reloaded**, I got online and posted in a popular roleplaying-related forum that I was looking for some of the problems that people had with the Storytelling system's combat mechanics. I got a lot of good responses, many of which have been considered and reworked into the hacks found in this very chapter.

I also saw some responses that, while true under the rules, I didn't feel the need to address with a hack. An example: Someone mentioned that multiple opponents were deadly in the World of Darkness (which is true), and that *anything* that you're fighting, be it thugs, housecats or toddlers, can take advantage of the rules that make them so.

And at that point, I have to say: If a player's character gets beat up by four toddlers, the Storyteller isn't doing his job right. Yes, it might be possible under a strict read of the **World of Darkness Rulebook** for four toddlers to beat up and injure a grown man. After all, he only gets one action per turn, but his Defense drops for each attack, right? So do I now need to introduce a hack that takes into account the *age* of the attacker, or outlines the relative strength of a child vs. and adult? (Those rules are available, incidentally, in **World of Darkness: Innocents**, but that's not the point.)

I shouldn't, because a few seconds of reason will provide the answer: No, of course toddlers aren't going to be able to do serious harm to an adult. They lack the strength, the speed and probably the will to do it. Likewise, while a housecat can give you an irritating scratch, and even give you some stitches if you're unlucky, it probably isn't going to kill you, even if the rules indicate otherwise.

Ah, but what about when the toddlers are possessed by murder-spirits? What about when the cat is controlled by a vampire using the Animalism Discipline? The Storyteller has a myriad of possibilities at his disposal (limited, in fact, only by his imagination) and we cannot hope to answer every possible question. All we can do is provide the tools to show *you* how to answer the questions, which is ultimately what this chapter is about.

Acting as a Storyteller means assuming responsibility for rules interpretation in play. Decide what kind of game you want to run, and make the judgment calls from that perspective. Don't let your players exploit ridiculous loopholes, and don't you do it, either.

Hopefully, that's a clear enough ruling.

• **Supernatural Terror:** Whenever a character sees a supernatural creature doing something that marks it as obviously inhuman, the player must roll Resolve + Composure. If this roll fails, the character flees the area immediately, and cannot return until the scene ends or some extraordinary circumstances compel him. For instance, a character might flee a fight when a vampire tears a man's throat out, but return if he realizes that his wife was approaching the scene from the other direction and might run afoul of the monster. The Storyteller should modify the Resolve + Composure roll as she feels appropriate. An event that can be easily rationalized might receive a positive modifier (the vampire tearing someone's throat out, for instance, might just be a psychopath — still frightening, but not supernatural). An overt and unmistakable event, though, should receive a negative modifier (a werewolf takes on its hulking half-wolf form and tears opponents apart). A player whose character has the Unseen Sense Merit receives a +1 modifier if the event in question is related to the Merit's focus. **Rationale:** Seeing an obviously supernatural event is horrifying, especially if that event comes during a fight. It's very much in keeping with the themes of the World of Darkness that supernatural characters might scare off witnesses simply by employing their powers — this is one of the ways in which they keep their existences secret, ironically. Someone too scared to fight is probably also too scared to talk.

• **My Sword is My Armor:** In addition to their damage bonus, melee weapons provide Armor equal to one-half their damage (round down, minimum of one) rating to their user. This Armor rating stacks with that granted by physical or magical armor. **Rationale:** Rapid parries and turned blows are staples of melee combat in modern cinema.

• **Sword-Wielding Badass:** As long as a character is armed with a melee weapon, he may apply the lowest of his Dexterity, Wits, or Weaponry as Defense against Firearms attacks, even when those attacks are made at

longer than point-blank range. Against Firearms attacks made at point-blank range, the character may apply the higher of his Weaponry dots or his normal Defense Trait as Defense against the attack. **Rationale:** In modern action movies and games, the protagonist (or villain) who carries an archaic weapon is usually able to hold his own against, if not outright dominate, the gun-toting lackeys of his enemies.

• **Toughness Matters:** When attacking someone with bare hands, the attacker's player subtracts the target's Stamina from the dice pool, *as well as* Defense and armor. If the character is somehow able to inflict lethal or aggravated damage with an unarmed strike (using Fighting Style: Kung Fu 5, or a power than grants claws, for instance), this rule does not apply. **Rationale:** People who are used to working out or are just naturally tough can absorb more punishment than people who lack endurance. This doesn't help when weapons are involved (running every day doesn't make you bulletproof), but against an unarmed opponent, general physical prowess is beneficial.

• **Unable to Attack:** When a character attempts to attack a helpless, unsuspecting or otherwise non-violent target, the player must first roll Resolve + Composure. Whenever a character attempts to shoot another person, the player makes the same roll. If the roll fails, the character cannot attack (but retains his Defense and may, in fact, choose to Dodge that turn). This hack does not apply to characters with the Combatant Merit. **Rationale:** Without training, attacking another person is often difficult. In a life or death situation, most people can defend themselves, but especially where firearms are concerned, untrained civilians are often loath to take lives. At the Storyteller's discretion, this hack might only apply to characters whose Morality levels are above a certain level.

## Health and the Human Body

by Travis Stout

Even if you choose not to use the Health-enhancing hacks in this chapter, the fact is that characters in the World of Darkness heal naturally at a rate that would astonish modern, real-world medical science. Consider: an average (Stamina 2) character can go from beaten into unconsciousness to full health in about an hour and forty-five minutes. That same character can recover from repeated stab wounds that put her into a coma in two weeks. Even recovering from the very brink of death takes only about a month and a half. By contrast, I've had several surgeries over the course of my life (far less traumatic and invasive than being mauled by a werewolf or shot by a deranged killer), most of which required about a week in the hospital after the procedure and anywhere from eight to twelve weeks of recuperating at home before the wounds healed. Why, then, is my **World of Darkness** analog up and about fighting monsters after just two? Are **World of Darkness** characters all possessed of some supernatural healing factor that makes them virtual superheroes?

Well, no. That's not to say such an explanation might not make an interesting hook on which to hang a chronicle, but it's not the default assumption of the game. The key to understand is that, as counterintuitive as it might sound, being at full Health (from a game mechanics perspective, that is) doesn't necessarily equate to being uninjured. Healing times in the **World of Darkness** rules don't represent how long it takes the body to completely repair an injury, they represent the time it takes for the injury to stop being a threat to the character's well-being.

Consider the example of a paranormal investigator who is stabbed by a mage's human acolyte for three points of lethal damage. That's a pretty severe injury, almost half of an average man's Health, so it was probably a deep wound, but in six days those three points of damage will be erased from the character sheet. That doesn't mean the wound has closed and the scar has faded in less than a week, it means that in six days, the wound has healed enough that it's no longer a severe hindrance. The wound has closed enough that there's little chance of tearing the stitches out, and while it's still painful, it doesn't present any continued threat to the character's life. The trauma has faded and the body has adapted, and even though it will be some weeks before the stitches come out and the bandages are removed, the character can go about his life.

Of course, all of this goes out the window when talking about the supernatural. Werewolves literally see their wounds close and vanish before their eyes, the juice of a goblin fruit makes a changeling's injuries vanish as though they had never been, and so on.

• **Valiant Surge:** Once per chapter, when a character is injured, her player may spend a Willpower point and roll Stamina + Resolve as a reflexive actions. For each success she rolls, one point of bashing or lethal damage is immediately healed. A Valiant Surge cannot heal aggravated wounds. If more successes are rolled than the character has wounds, she gains temporary Health dots equal to the excess successes until the end of the scene. For a heroic, action-oriented game, the hack stops there—but if you prefer a grimmer game about the heroics of self-sacrifice, at the end of the scene in which the character uses a valiant surge, not only does she lose the temporary Health dots, she suffers damage of the next most severe type equal to the amount healed. For example, if Sue heals three bashing wounds and two lethal wounds with a Valiant Surge, at the end of the scene she suffers three lethal wounds and two aggravated wounds. **Rationale:** The human body is capable of pushing itself to extremes, even defying crippling injuries to keep going just a little longer. Unfortunately, the phrase "the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak" checks those surges, and a character who presses on despite her wounds often finds herself worse off than she was before.

• **Watch My Back:** Although being ganged up on can be deadly in the World of Darkness, having stalwart friends at your back can even the odds. For every ally within your reach, you ignore one point of Defense reduction due to multiple attackers. For example, if three of your friends are within arms reach during a fight, you can be attacked by up to four opponents before your Defense starts to drop on the fifth. **Rationale:** This hack encourages characters to stick together and fight as a team, especially when outnumbered.

• **Watch That First Step:** Characters suffer one point of bashing damage per *six* yards fallen. If the character lands in water at least six feet deep, no matter how far she fell, she takes half damage. In addition, landing in water or on a similarly soft, yielding surface downgrades the lethal damage from a terminal-velocity fall to bashing damage. **Rationale:** Especially in modern cinema, characters often get flung about from heights that would likely turn them to chunky salsa in the real world—and no matter how great the height, landing in a convenient swimming pool seems to make it survivable.

• **Weapons Kill:** All weapons inflict lethal damage, regardless of whether they are blunt at one end or not. **Rationale:** Any health care professional will tell you that being hit with a baseball bat is more serious than being hit with a fist. Weapons take advantage of small impact points (greater energy in small surface area) and hard materials to break bones and damage tissue. Even a relatively weak combatant can kill someone with a sharp blow to the head, if he uses an object to strike that blow.

• **Wire Fu:** Double the distance a character can clear with any sort of jump (as described on p. 66 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). In addition, a character can jump down from a height without suffering damage. Roll Dexterity + Athletics + any relevant equipment and multiply the result by four. The result is the number of feet your character can drop without suffering damage. The character must deliberately jump down from a height to make this roll—being pushed or falling does not allow the character to reduce damage. For truly fantastic wire-fu, like that seen in *Hero* or *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, you can increase these numbers even more—but if you do, be aware that you'll be reducing the value of supernatural powers that allow for prodigious leaps, not to mention moving from "action-movie realistic" physics to pure modern fantasy. You might want to restrict such extreme leaps to supernatural creatures, whereas the less-extreme increases are still suitable for human martial artists. **Rationale:** Inspired by Chinese *wuxia* films, the idea of action heroes gracefully leaping and soaring into battle has become a staple, especially in action-horror films like the *Blade* films, *Hellboy*, or *Ultraviolet*.

## Genre — What Does Combat Mean?

Roleplaying games, as the reader probably knows, began as a shift in focus in miniature-based war games. That is, when they began, combat was the most important thing about them. Since characters in those games gained experience points for killing monsters, the combat system received much of the focus from a design standpoint. That's entirely appropriate, of course — the most important thing about a game should get the lion's share of the rules. But as roleplaying games changed with the times, and as new styles of play came to the fore, the "combat system" remained, and it's not at all uncommon (though not as universal as it once was) for a game that doesn't need to include combat at all to have a lengthy, complex and even bloated combat chapter.

The Storytelling system's combat mechanics are designed to make combat run smoothly and swiftly, but to remain "generic" enough that factors could be added in for each of the game lines. Combat in **Vampire: The Requiem** works differently than combat in **Werewolf: The Forsaken**, for instance, because of the different capabilities of the characters. This means, though, that the Storyteller and the players need to decide what a fight in their chronicle is going to look like. Discussions of combat in a roleplaying context often mention the words "gritty" and "cinematic," and we'll be exploring what people generally mean by those terms here, as well as how to come up with a "fighting style," as it were, for your chronicles.

## Gritty – "People Bleed"

When someone describes a combat system as "gritty," what they usually mean is that the system takes pains to make combat dangerous to characters' lives. "Gritty" is sometimes also used as a synonym for "realistic," but that's only true insofar as such a system generally puts more attention on simulating combat from the perspective of gaining and inflicting injury than on the thematic and/or moral implications of the fight.

The focus in a gritty fight is on survival. What a fight means in terms of the story is secondary to the fight itself. There's no symbolism to it, no poetry spouted in between blows or gunshots. The scene is tense, and the fight is fast-paced and brutal. It doesn't take much more than one solid hit to drop a combatant, either into unconsciousness or death.

In addition, the aftermath of the fight is equally brutal. Police who stumble upon this kind of battle aren't going to be fobbed off with stories of "shooting a movie," or easily bribed to leave the combatants alone. They'll go in guns drawn and arrest everyone present. Anyone wounded gets shipped to the hospital (but probably still placed under arrest). Anyone with a prior criminal record can expect to be followed and investigated for some time afterwards, and if any innocent bystanders or police officers were killed or harmed, the combatants can expect to be prosecuted zealously.

When it comes to game systems, "gritty" fights tend to kill quickly. Characters who want to survive them are best suited finding other methods of solving their problems or, failing that, not getting hit. A wound that a character survives probably makes him less capable, and "flesh wounds" are uncommon.

This all goes to underline one point: A fight is serious. "Combat" isn't a glorious or frivolous activity. It's not about martial arts, fancy gunplay, clever one-liners or even long-delayed justice or revenge. But that doesn't mean that it happens for a good reason, either. A fight can break out over greed, lust, drunken pride, money, sports teams, or for no reason at all, and despite the sheer senselessness of it, the fight can end in death.

## Cinematic – "Blood and Glory"

"Cinematic," in this context, is even more misleading than "gritty." A "cinematic" fight, by definition, should be one inspired by the medium of film, but that's so broad a definition as to be useless. Generally, when a combat system is described as "cinematic," it means that the system pays more attention to the symbolic or thematic aspects of a fight than to the practical ones. Heroes *can* die, but if they do, they'll die heroically and never meaninglessly. Villains usually do die, but they have time to reveal secrets or fire off a quick monologue first. The police might show up, but not until it's dramatically appropriate, and they don't canvas the area searching for witnesses or other combatants (which, of course, leaves the characters time to get away). The combat scenarios below list some of the films that act as their inspirations.





During the fight itself, the characters can often draw strength from injury or other setbacks, and players usually have a way to avoid the worst effects of combat by some sort of expenditure (the Storytelling system includes this kind of mechanic in the Heroic effort, as described on p. 132 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, though of course it applies to more than just combat).

The outcome of a "cinematic" fight depends more upon the fight's place in the story than on the die rolls made in combat. For instance, if the characters run afoul of a few armed guards, the guards aren't going to kill or even seriously deter the characters. The scene is just there to establish the characters' fighting prowess, or to present evidence that the situation is serious (i.e., they are going up against people with guns, and the next wave might be tougher). The guards don't stand much chance of doing any real damage, though, and if they do inflict wounds, it's because a later scene requires the characters to be already wounded.

## Combat in the World of Darkness

Which style of combat is right for a World of Darkness chronicle? Both! The various game lines in the World of Darkness setting can each benefit from combat set anywhere along the "gritty/cinematic" spectrum, and indeed, later in this chapter we discuss how to run fights using the hacks above to greatest effect for either choice. First, though, let's consider the six game lines currently available for the World of Darkness and what considerations you might have for combat in those games (check out the "Denizens of the World of Darkness" sidebar on p. 15 of the Introduction).

## Vampire: The Requiem

**Vampire** is a game of personal horror, and what that means is that characters stand to lose their tenuous connection to humanity by feeding on the living. This isn't just metaphor — a vampire takes the blood of human beings for its sustenance, and in **Vampire**, the characters do exactly that. A fight between vampires and human beings, therefore, might emphasize the undead nature of the Kindred.

Vampires play at being human, and they often overcompensate, trading in humanity for pomp and circumstance. If a ball is lavish enough, maybe it will conceal the fact that the guests at the ball are sipping human blood from their goblets. If a title is flowery enough, maybe it can hide the predator claiming it. But the Beast comes to the fore when it smells hot blood, and so in battle a vampire isn't (necessarily) a smooth, seductive predator. It's a monster unleashed, ripping mortals to shreds and supping on their blood.

**Vampire** also presents a shadowy, secretive and highly political world of favor exchange and vendetta. When two vampires fight, they might have a ritualized duel — as mentioned above, the Kindred do enjoy their dramatic formalities.

But the fight could just as easily be resolved with fangs, blood staining expensive clothing and flesh torn off in chunks.

## Vampire Hacks

• **Dead Flesh:** Vampires do not suffer wound penalties *except* from injuries caused by fire or sunlight. **Rationale:** Only the banes of vampiric existence cause the Kindred fear and pain.

• **Death by Stake:** According to **Vampire: The Requiem,** a wooden stake to the heart drives a vampire into a deep, deathlike sleep. For a more traditional take on the vampire legend, staking a vampire instead instantly destroys it. Note that given the potential lethality of this hack, it's probably best used when vampires are the antagonists rather than when playing **Vampire: The Requiem**. See the "easy staking" and "hard staking" hacks for more options. **Rationale:** Pretty much every vampire movie and novel.

• **Easy Staking:** Any exceptional success with a wooden stake or similar wooden stabbing weapon stakes a vampire. **Rationale:** This makes staking in combat (in the vein of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and other action-oriented vampire stories) more likely, especially for the undead themselves who have various means of boosting their attack dice pools far beyond mortal kin.

• **Gluttony:** A vampire can consume a number of Vitae from a living source (not another vampire) per turn equal to his Stamina rating (and this number increases if the vampire uses Vitae to temporarily boost Stamina). **Rationale:** Vampires should be able to kill mortals quickly by draining their blood, and this hack makes this possible.

• **Hard Staking:** Staking a vampire is an extended action, as described in the sidebar on this page.

• **Horrific Bite:** As described in **Vampire: The Requiem**, a vampire's bite normally confers a feeling of ecstasy and euphoria in its victim. This effect does not work in combat, however, and instead a vampire's bite in battle is a terrifying experience of agony and madness. In addition to the pain of the bite, the victim's mind is flooded with images of animal savagery and brute, bloody violence. The horror of the experience gives the victim a surge of adrenaline in his efforts to escape, which grants a +2 bonus on attempts to break the vampire's grapple, but for every turn the vampire maintains the bite, the victim suffers a cumulative –1 penalty (maximum –5) to all other actions. Even after the bite ends, the penalty persists until the victim's player succeeds at a Resolve + Composure roll. This roll is a reflexive action that may be attempted once per turn. **Rationale:** The

### Staking

**Dice Pool:** Strength + Weaponry + Equipment. If the vampire is conscious and not completely immobilized, the vampire's Defense is applied.

**Action:** Extended (one success per Health dot the vampire possesses, each roll represents one turn)

Despite what movies might tell you, the human ribcage is specifically designed to protect the internal organs from injury, and it does a great job of that. It's almost impossible to drive a piece of sharpened wood through it without a good, heavy mallet and some time. Because of the time and effort required, this is a tactic best employed while the vampire sleeps during the day. If the vampire is asleep, it may roll to wake up as described on p. 184 of **Vampire: The Requiem** every turn. [It might be worth mentioning somewhere that really, staking vampires is something done by shoving a stake up under the center of the ribcage/breastbone, not through it.]

**Roll Results**

**Dramatic Failure:** The wooden stake splinters and becomes useless. If the character has a spare, he may begin again, but loses any accumulated successes. Alternately, at the Storyteller's discretion, if the vampire is asleep during the staking, it automatically wakes and can remain active for one turn per point of Humanity.

**Failure:** No progress is made toward piercing the heart.

**Success:** Each success inflicts one point of lethal damage to the vampire. This damage may be reduced by armor or supernatural powers, but such damage reduction doesn't affect progress toward completing the action. Once a number of successes equal to the vampire's Health have been accumulated, the vampire is staked.

**Exceptional Success:** No effect other than making tremendous progress toward piercing the heart.

**Suggested Equipment:** Homemade wooden stake (+1), fire-hardened hardwood stake (+2), mallet (+2)

**Possible Penalties:** Vampire is (or was) a loved one (–1 to –3), crude or makeshift stake, such as a broken chair leg (–1), no mallet or similar tool to drive the stake home (–2).

idea of the vampire's bite being an erotic, sensual act is a fairly recent one. Traditional folkloric vampires' bites were usually described as savage maulings.

• **No Blood to Spill:** In **Vampire**, bullets inflict bashing damage to the bloodsuckers, rather than lethal. Edged weapons and arrows still inflict lethal damage, though if you want to underline the threat that vampires pose, you could consider such weapons to inflict bashing as well. **Rationale:** Many fictional works paint vampires as *immune* to physical damage, except from a select few sources. Knives are no more an inconvenience to them than fists, as they don't bleed.

• **Revivifying Feeding:** When a vampire feeds, it automatically heals two points of bashing damage per point of Vitae consumed, or one point of lethal damage for every two points of Vitae consumed. The vampire chooses which injuries to heal, and any leftover healing is lost. Aggravated wounds cannot be healed by feeding; they require time and Vitae as described in **Vampire: The Requiem**. If you want to make vampires extremely hard to kill, this hack is *in addition to* the vampire's ability to spend Vitae to heal wounds; otherwise, feeding might be the only way for vampires to heal bashing and lethal damage, or spending Vitae to heal might cost double for bashing and lethal damage (one Vitae per bashing wound, two per lethal wound). **Rationale:** Vampire fiction often portrays the act of feeding itself rather than the spending of some abstract power of the blood as the undead's means of rejuvenation.

## Werewolf: The Forsaken

The werewolf of literature and cinema is a man-eating nightmare, characterized by the loss of control and surrender to bloodlust. The Uratha of **Werewolf: The Forsaken** must contend with this tendency to go berserk, but if they choose to feed on the flesh of humans, they are violating a serious taboo of their people. Just because they can't *eat* flesh, though, doesn't mean they can't tear it out in jagged hunks.

**Werewolf** is a game of savage fury, and combat between werewolves should evoke the same kind of feral intensity as watching two wild animals fight. Fangs bared, two fur-covered monsters roll and tumble, flecks of saliva flying from their mouths as they try to gain purchase on each other's throats. But at the end of the battle, both combatants are (usually) unharmed. This is for reasons. First, werewolves have a highly complex social structure, and one of their laws is that they do not kill each other (of course, human beings have similar laws, and it isn't universally followed in either society). Second, werewolves heal damage at a remarkably quick rate, so a few nasty bite wounds close in minutes.

In a fight with human opponents, though, werewolves are killing machines. A single strike from a werewolf is enough to eviscerate a human target, and even a shotgun blast at close range doesn't do much more than annoy it. Silver, of course, can kill a werewolf quickly — but who carries silver bullets? And even if a human being *were* so prepared, does he have the nerve to stand up to the werewolf?

### Werewolf Hacks

• **Feral Defenses:** When a werewolf wears the war form, the near wolf form, or the wolf form, he applies the higher of his Dexterity or Wits as his Defense, like an animal. **Rationale:** Werewolves in their lupine forms are more in tune with their animal instincts, and react more quickly than humans do.

• **Grievous Silver:** Attacks made with pure silver weapons inflict grievous damage on werewolves (see the Meat Shields hack). **Rationale:** Werewolves are nigh-unstoppable if you apply the Meat Shields hack to them— this hack keeps silver scary to the wolf-changers.

• **Mindless Rage:** When a werewolf enters Death Rage, it *always* makes all-out attacks (p. 157 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). This means the player receives a +2 to all attacks, but the werewolf also can't benefit from Defense while in Death Rage. **Rationale:** Death Rage does not allow for caution. A lycanthrope in the grip of this mad fury can only kill.

• **Quick Regeneration:** A werewolf can regenerate a number of points of bashing damage equal to his Primal Urge rating each turn, rather than just one. If the player spends a point of Essence, the character can regenerate a number of Health points lost to *lethal* damage. **Rationale:** The werewolves of legend and fiction are very rarely inconvenienced by traditional weapons (there are exceptions, of course, such as the terrifying but ultimately fragile lycanthrope of *An American Werewolf in London*). This hack allows werewolves to reach their true potential as combat monsters.

• **Savage Might:** When in the near man or near wolf forms, the werewolf gains the 9-again rule on all Strength-based dice pools except attack rolls. In the war form, they gain the 8-again rule on Strength-based dice pools. (If you want to make werewolves truly monstrous in battle, give these benefits to Brawl attacks as well). **Rationale:** Werewolves are usually depicted as obscenely powerful brutes, capable of smashing down any obstacle with ease.

• **Swift Killer:** Against mortal targets, a werewolf's claws and bite inflict aggravated damage. If the target is touched by the supernatural in *any* way, the werewolf inflicts lethal damage. **Rationale:** Werewolves are usually depicted as fearsomely effective killing machines, and this hack allows them to tear through mortal opponents quickly. Indeed, if the Storyteller wishes to portray them as the terrors of the World of Darkness in a crossover game, he might extend this hack to include supernatural creatures. Vampires, being dead, might be exempt, but changelings and mages must still contend with blood loss and shock.

• **Unstoppable Fury:** While in the grips of Death Rage, any attack that would inflict bashing damage on the werewolf inflicts only a single point, regardless of how many successes were rolled. **Rationale:** Pelting a raging wolf-man with fists or police batons just doesn't work.

• **War Form Gamble:** As stated in **Werewolf: The Forsaken,** werewolves can only maintain their fearsome half-man, half-wolf war form for a number of turns equal to their Stamina + Primal Urge (+ their auspice's favored Renown during their auspice moon phase). Under this system, that value is the base time a werewolf can remain in the war form reasonably safely. After that time has expired, the werewolf begins to risk Death Rage. Every turn past the time limit, roll the werewolf's Resolve + Composure as a reflexive action. During the werewolf's auspice moon phase, add his auspice's primary Renown to this roll. Every turn, this roll suffers a cumulative –1 penalty. When the roll fails, the werewolf immediately enters Death Rage. **Rationale:** This rule allows werewolves to squeeze more combat use out of their war forms, but presents them with a terrible gamble the longer they do so.

## Mage: The Awakening

The Awakened are inheritors of ancient and primal power. Blessed with the ability to impose the natural laws of one realm on another, they can quite literally reshape the world in accordance with their whims (as much as their mastery of magic allows, of course). But magic requires will, and will requires concentration. Magic in combat, therefore, is most advantageous when a mage has time to prepare her spells. Attacking a mage in her sanctum is generally unwise, as any intelligent mage enchants her home to maximize her ability to defend herself. Even outside of this haven, a mage usually has at least an armor spell active, and with a little notice, a mage can destroy an opponent's ability to defend himself, make him sluggish and weak, make his clothes easily flammable, or simply kill him with a magically induced heart attack. Magic doesn't have the visceral, bloody *power* of a vampire's fangs or a werewolf's claws, but what it lacks in that, it makes up for it in subtlety.

Sometimes, of course, magic is anything *but* subtle. Wizards throwing fireballs or calling down lightning is very much in genre for **Mage**, the Storytelling game of modern sorcery. Of course, consequences to this kind of overt display exist, but these consequences can sometimes be avoided with some clever planning, or, better yet, ignored out of anger, vanity or overweening pride.

A final, important consideration for mages: They are human. A bullet through the skull kills a mage just as surely as it does any mortal. The difference is that the mage usually has more methods available to prevent the bullet from reaching the skull than the normal mortal does. But catch a mage without his prepared spells, surprise him, or find a way to block his magic, and he bleeds and dies just like anyone else.

### Mage Hacks

• **All-Out Magic:** When a mage attacks with a spell, she can use the all-out attack rule to gain +2 on the spellcasting roll at the cost of losing her Defense until her next turn. This option can only be performed in combat, and only on an aimed spell. **Rationale:** Spellcasting, especially in the heat of battle, can be a demanding art, and by focusing her attention on the spell rather than on self-preservation, a mage can realize her spell with greater precision.

• **Enlightened Shield:** When a mage casts any mage armor spell, he gains armor equal to his relevant Arcanum rating *or* his Gnosis, whichever is higher. **Rationale:** The enlightened soul is a far greater defense than mere arcane knowledge. This hack makes powerful mages even more fearsome, but also allows for the archetypal "chosen one" type character, with an extraordinary natural talent but little formal training, to survive the attacks of masters.

• **Eyes of Fire:** When attacking an opponent while using an appropriate Mage Sight spell (e.g. Life or Mind for a human, Death for a vampire, Spirit for a werewolf or demon), the mage receives a bonus to his attacks equal to his rating in the relevant Arcanum. Because of this increased focus, however, he suffers a penalty equal to his Arcanum rating when attacking anything else. **Rationale:** The ultimate weapon in a mage's arsenal is knowledge; this hack allows him to put that weapon to deadly effect. It also allows mages to pack a punch on par with more powerful monstrosities even without resorting to magic spells.

• **Madness in Battle:** While in a fight, Sleeper witnesses don't engender Disbelief or Unraveling effects, even if they see the effects of vulgar spells. The +2 to Paradox dice pools still stands, but only affects each mage present once. **Rationale:** Battle is fluid, and just as it causes Paradox to build more quickly (see below), it happens so fast that the more lasting influences of the Abyss doesn't have time to take hold.

• **Magical Buildup:** Every vulgar spell cast in a combat scene adds a die to *all* Paradox dice pools, not just those of the mage in question. *Example:* A mage casts Destroy Object on an opponent's gun. All mages involved in the fight increase their Paradox pools by one die. **Rationale:** Multiple spells cast in a confined area in a short span of time exponentially increase the attention from the Abyss. This hack gives Paradox a little more bite, and also tempts mages to contain unpleasant Paradoxes in their own bodies (which winds up injuring them — a dangerous gamble in a fight).

• **Slower Magic:** Casting an improvised spell requires *two* actions in combat. The first turn must be spent preparing the spell, which involves a slight gesture and few mumbled incantations. If the mage takes any damage during that turn, the player must roll Stamina + Resolve (this roll is reflexive). If the roll fails, the spell is disrupted and the mage must spend another turn preparing. On a dramatic failure, the mage loses control of the spell and the Storyteller immediately makes a Paradox roll, using the mage's normal pool (including any modifiers for vulgar spells cast in the same scene), regardless of whether or not the spell being cast was vulgar. If the roll succeeds, the spell is cast normally on the mage's action

during the next turn. If the character has the High Speech Merit, she can chant for the +2 modifier normally during the preparation phase. Rotes do *not* require a preparation turn. **Rationale:** This hack places greater emphasis on learning the formulae of magic, and exacts a higher price for improvised magic. True masters among the Awakened, then, are those who have dedicated themselves to learning rotes.

## Promethean: The Created

The Created long to become human, but the Divine Fire that drives them scorches everything around them. Any place they call home becomes a Wasteland, and anyone they try to call friend becomes obsessed and eventually murderous. It's not wonder that Prometheans lash out.

And when they do, they are capable of great destruction. While not as savage and bestial as werewolves, Prometheans are nigh unstoppable. They do not suffer wound penalties, and they do not lose any functionality until lethal damage becomes aggravated (at which point limbs begin to fall off). Even death doesn't always prevent them from seeking revenge.

The horror of a Promethean in a fight is the amount of damage it can absorb without losing functionality, not to mention the strength it can draw from Pyros. If circumstances permit, another highly evocative ability that the Created possess is to heal via electrocution. Imagine knocking a monster into a mess of downed power lines, only to watch its wounds close as it lurches forward again, renewed.



### Promethean Hacks

• **Call the Lightning:** When a Promethean is outdoors in a thunderstorm, she may spend a point of Pyros to call a bolt of lightning to strike her, using the electricity to heal. This call is not a supernatural power, merely the Promethean's divine spark drawing the lightning to her location—the metaphysical equivalent of standing in a pool of water with a lightning rod in her hand. When the Promethean uses this ability, the Storyteller rolls one die (the result should be kept secret so the Promethean's player does not know when to expect it). The result is the number of turns before the lightning bolt strikes the character. The character may move about before the lightning strikes—the thunderbolt is drawn to her body, not her location. When the lightning bolt strikes, it inflicts eight points of bashing damage. The Promethean can use this power to heal as described in **Promethean: The Created**, but anyone in physical contact with the Promethean suffers the damage. **Rationale:** Lightning is the physical embodiment of the Divine Fire, so it makes sense that a Promethean can harness it and draw it down from the sky to suit her own purposes.

• **Fiery End:** When a Promethean dies (truly, finally dies, rather than merely falling inert to rise again later), her body and an area around her with a radius of one yard per point of Azoth she possesses is consumed in an explosive conflagration of Divine Fire. This explosion incinerates the Promethean's body and inflicts direct damage equal to her Azoth rating on all targets within the area. In addition, roll the dead Promethean's Azoth and add the number of successes earned to the damage inflicted. **Rationale:** The

Divine Fire can create, but it can also rend asunder, and when the containing force of the Promethean's body is destroyed, the Azoth within is released with violent consequences.

• **Grip of Death:** Add the Promethean's Azoth to his Strength rating for all rolls and calculations involved in grappling, including the penalty that a victim faces to escape the Promethean's grapple. **Rationale:** The animated flesh of the Created is uncompromising and relentless. A victim that falls into the Promethean's grasp is probably doomed.

• **Hard to Hurt:** Subtract the character's Stamina from all incoming attacks, including bullets. Only fire (including fire from magical sources) bypasses this defense. **Rationale:** Prometheans' bodies do not suffer injury the way normal living creatures' do. Some Prometheans are tougher than others, but all are difficult to injure.

• **Savage Rage:** When a Promethean enters Torment, his Strength and Stamina increase by two each. Every time he is exposed to a stimulus that would trigger a Torment roll while the Torment persists, his Strength and Stamina increase by one each, to a maximum of two + Azoth. **Rationale:** The fury of a Promethean is a terrifying thing to behold, and the more you stoke its rage, the more brightly its Azoth flares.

• **Touch of the Corrosive Humour:** A player can spend a point of *Vitriol* to make the Promethean's next bare-handed attack inflict lethal damage. If the attack would already inflict lethal damage (perhaps due to the Natural Weaponry Transmutation), the attack gains the 9 again quality. **Rationale:** Vitriol is acidic. It can be used as a transformative agent, or it can be used to break down an opponent.

## Changeling: The Lost

The escaped slaves of the Fae are a varied lot. Some are brutish and animalistic. Some are clever and slippery, and some simply had the tenacity to fight their way free. All, therefore, are driven and focused enough to gain freedom from some truly horrific and alien beings, and this makes them dangerous in a fight once they return home. Not all are masters of physical combat, of course, but even those that lack skill with a blade or a gun might be able to change a victim's desires so that he no longer cares about the fight, or instill in him crippling fear, sorrow or wrath.

**Changeling** is a game of beautiful madness, and a fight with a changeling can seem dreamlike — or, rather, nightmarish. A victim's perceptions are no longer his own. Because a changeling's physical form is covered by a Mask, a mortal combatant truly does not know what he is getting into when he fights a changeling. That meek, bookish woman might be a Hunterheart and therefore able to tear a human being apart. A man's skinny, frail-looking frame hides skin that smolders with dragon fire. Fights between changelings are perhaps more straightforward, since all parties can at least see their opponents' true forms.

Another major advantage that changelings have in a fight is the power to use any doorway or mirror as an escape route. Rather, their opponents *can* follow if they wish, but following a changeling into the Hedge is probably suicide. Changelings aren't safe in the Hedge, but at least they can get out again.

### Changeling Hacks

• **All in Your Head:** If a changeling has an ability (such as the Blessings of the Hunterheart or Gristlegrinder kiths) that allows her to inflict lethal damage, or provides a damage bonus, with unarmed attacks, she only receives that bonus when she attacks those who can see through the Mask (changelings and other fae creatures, ensorcelled humans, etc.) If she spends all of her Glamour to burn away the Mask, she receives the bonus against all opponents. **Rationale:** The theme of **Changeling** is "beautiful madness," and this hack calls into question the very nature of the changeling's new form. Is her fae mien somehow less real than the Mask that others see? If so, why can't *she* see the reality?

• **Distractions:** A changeling's player can spend a point of Glamour to add the character's Wyrd rating to his Defense for a turn. This is a reflexive action, and it does not work on other changelings or on ensorcelled humans. Onlookers have a hard time drawing a bead on the changeling; his form seems inconstant and shaky. **Rationale:** Faeries are renowned for disappearing in a twinkling of the eye. This hack plays into the legends, allowing changelings to use magic defensively.

• **Revelation in Pain:** Whenever a changeling suffers a lethal wound in combat, onlookers may roll Wits + Composure as a reflexive action. If the roll succeeds, the witness sees the changeling's mien for a split second. Obviously, this hack doesn't apply to changelings and other characters who could see the mien anyway. **Rationale:** The Mask requires some effort to keep up, especially in the face of pain and blood. An alternate version might be when the *human* takes lethal damage, he's suddenly shocked into seeing the mien for that moment.

• **Sup on Agony:** If a changeling makes an attack that inflicts more damage than the target's Stamina, *or* the attack marks enough boxes on the victim's Health character to cause wound penalties, the changeling's player can immediately roll Wits + Empathy to harvest Glamour as a reflexive action. Changelings cannot harvest Glamour from each other in this manner, though they can take Glamour from the emotions of other supernatural beings. Whether any of the Court bonuses (especially fear or wrath, though desire is hardly out of the question) apply is up to the Storyteller. **Rationale:** Changelings can draw strength from the emotions of

others, and few events are more emotional that being beaten, shot or cut open by a living nightmare.

• **The Unassuming Mask:** When a changeling spends Glamour to reinforce the Mask, his player may make a reflexive Wits + Stealth roll along with his Initiative roll at the beginning of combat. If the roll succeeds, no character can attack the changeling until he takes an aggressive action (such as attacking, drawing a weapon, or using an obvious Contract). Other changelings and the True Fae may attempt a reflexive Glamour roll to attack the character normally. **Rationale:** The Mask is about more than hiding the physical changes wrought by a changeling's time in Faerie; it's a defense mechanism to allow the changeling to escape notice. It only makes sense that, when bolstered, it would make the changeling all too easy to overlook.

## Hunter: The Vigil

A hunter is living on borrowed time. From the very instant that a human being sees the supernatural and consciously chooses to *keep* seeing it, rather than look away, that person's life is in danger. Many hunters die in battle, either with the predatory denizens of the World of Darkness or with the very people they are trying to protect (in the form of police or dupes or worshippers of the supernatural). Some hunters fight evil with nothing more than guts, determination and whatever they can purchase from a local hardware store. Others draw on the support of rich individuals or multinational corporations, and carry weapons or use powers that are just as strange as those of the enemy. But at the end of the day, all hunters are mortal.

Combat in **Hunter: The Vigil** is designed around allowing a cell to take advantage of its numbers and its ability to work together. The Tactics system is arguably the greatest advantage they possess, but it also sows the seeds of a cell's downfall. A cell that gets over-reliant on one particular Tactic is going to be lost when it doesn't work or whenever a monster figures out a way to break it.

At the same time, without the support of a cell, a hunter is just a lone human being. He might be highly trained, competent, knowledgeable and brave, but one human being cannot hope to stand up to, say, a pack of werewolves and live. At that point, all the hunter can do is try to escape or die with dignity.

### Hunter Hacks

• **Alone:** A hunter in combat with one or more supernatural beings without the support of his cell suffers a –1 to all attempted actions. A hunter who is accustomed to working alone does not receive this penalty, but if he works with a cell for any length of time (long enough to learn a Tactic, for instance), the penalty applies from there on out. **Rationale:** The psychological effects of having a cell at your back are pronounced. Hunters come to depend on each other — a very human response — and this hampers them if they are caught alone.

• **Fire Kills Everything:** All supernatural creatures, regardless of their nature or origin, suffer aggravated damage from fire. This includes mages, who are otherwise almost entirely human. Creatures that already suffer aggravated damage from fire, like vampires, are not further harmed by it, although if you use the Meat Shields hack, you might rule that vampires and their ilk actually suffer grievous wounds from fire. **Rationale:** Fire has always been considered a purifying element in human folklore, and its efficacy against the denizens of the night is well established. This hack also gives hunters a bit more bite when facing monsters, especially individual hunter cells that lack the backup and Endowments of a conspiracy.

• **Group Courage:** If the Storyteller is using the Supernatural Terror hack (p. 158), a cell of hunters can make this roll as a teamwork action (p. 134 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). **Rationale:** The hunters in a cell know that they can rely on each other, and that no matter how horrifying the creatures they face, they are not alone.

• **Shared Wisdom:** Whenever a group of hunters enters combat together, any bonuses they receive to their individual attack rolls from external circumstances (such as being on higher ground or spending time aiming) or from personal abilities (such as Merits) can be reassigned to another cell member as a reflexive action. These reassigned bonuses never stack, and apply only for a single attack roll. Bonuses from equipment (including most Endowments) cannot be transferred, and the Storyteller has final say over what bonuses can be transferred. **Rationale:** Specialized knowledge is all well and good, but hunter cells quickly learn that sharing their insight with allies keeps them alive a lot longer.

***Example:*** *Harry, Neil, and Lisa have cornered a werewolf in an alley. Harry is on the roof with a high-powered rifle, but can't get a clear shot—the werewolf's cover gives him a –1 to attack. Neil, however, uses his action to aim at the werewolf and reflexively gives that +1 bonus to Harry on his next attack, thus negating the cover penalty. If Lisa tried the same tactic, Harry would still only receive a +1 bonus, because transferred bonuses don't stack. Harry could spend one turn aiming himself, which would bring his bonus to hit up to +2.*

• **Squad Reflexes:** Members of a cell can reflexively notice if their companions have been injured, pinned down, run out of bullets, or are in some other dire situation. This requires a Wits + Composure roll, and this roll can be made as soon as the deleterious condition occurs. **Rationale:** Hunters train themselves to watch each other's backs and to correct problems as soon as they occur.



• **Strong of Heart:** For every one of her cellmates that is present, a hunter adds one to her Willpower for the purposes of resisting supernatural effects that depend on the victim's Willpower score (for example, the Lunacy invoked by seeing a werewolf or the Quiescence that causes mortals to forget incidents of vulgar magic). **Rationale:** Hunters are used to battling the fiends in the shadows, and when they have their allies at their backs, their will to fight on is bolstered.

# Styles of Combat In-Game

Now that we have discussed the oh-so-many possible permutations to the World of Darkness combat system, it's time to consider what kind of fight scenes demand what kind of hacks. The sections below discuss different kinds of combat scenarios, how to run them as a Storyteller, and which hacks might work well.

## Rules are Made to be Broken

"But," you might ask, "what if I want to run a Battle Royal-style fight at the end of a story, but have a fight leading up to it be a Dust-Up or a Shoot 'em Up? They use different hacks, after all — I can't go changing rules midstream!"

Why not, though? The rules aren't there to simulate what a "real fight" is like. The rules *can't* do that. Simulating a real fight would open your troupe up to legal action, in all probability, because in a real fight, people get hurt. All the hacks do is highlight different aspects of the combat system over others, and as such, there's no reason why you can use a handful for one fight, and then pick a few different ones for the next fight. Telling the players which hacks are in place can actually be a good signal for them — "Oh, hell, we're using Weapons Kill this time. Watch out."

Use the hacks at your pleasure. Tell the players which ones apply, and entertain suggestions or requests if they have them. Find the combination that works the best for the fight you're running, and if something feels off, change it up! Remember: The game is meant to be fun, not inflexible.

# THE TEN COMMANDMENTS OF STORYTELLING COMBAT

• **Keep it Moving!** Combat is often the most rules-heavy portion of any roleplaying game, and that means it's easy to get bogged down. As Storyteller, keep things moving. Decide what the Storyteller characters are doing quickly (which can mean having their traits figured out ahead of time, or using a base sets of traits for all of them), and make sure the players decide on their characters' actions without undue delay. If players' eyes start to glaze over, it's time to wrap up the fight. If you find yourself wanting to say, "OK, stay with me, we need to get through this," that's a good cue that you're not having fun anymore — wrap up the fight. If you need to, have everyone stand up and take a break, or wrap up the chapter *in media res* and pick it up next time. Just take enough notes that you know where everyone was.

• **Make Sure Everyone Sees the Battlefield:** This might mean getting out a map and using dry-erase markers, using miniatures to represent characters, sketching on a piece of paper, or just grabbing pop cans pencils, spare dice and whatever else is at hand to simulate the combat environment. If everyone is amenable, or if the fight is designed to be quick, you can just describe the scene and not use any concrete visuals at all, but be aware that people will see the scene differently (which can cause some confusion) and that some people are better at visualization than others. Even a crude depiction of the scene goes a long way toward alleviating arguments and confusion.

• **Make Sure Everyone's Watching the Same Movie:** A player who assumes that the fight scene is a showcase for his character's prowess and supernatural abilities approaches combat very different than a player expecting death if a knife blow connects. Make sure that your players know how you approach combat in general, and *this* fight in particular. As we discuss below, fights can change theme and meaning even inside the same story (or chapter), and so it's good to make sure everyone's on the same page. A good way to do that is to say which hacks are in play before the fight begins. If you're really ambitious, you could pass out quick handouts explaining those hacks so that players know what they're in for when their characters get hit.

• **Help the Rules-Impaired:** Some players enjoy learning the rules and figuring out all the different permutations, deciding which combination of traits best helps their characters, and matching the characters traits to their depiction of their characters. Some players just want to roleplay, and only look down at the sheet when the Storyteller asks for a roll. Neither approach is wrong, but when combat occurs, the player with the solid grasp of the rules is going to have an easier time deciding what to do, while the player who doesn't understand the system is going to have a hard time remembering what to roll for his character to fire a gun. If there is someone in your troupe with an intuitive understanding of the system, don't be afraid to let other players ask him questions (and, if you're not so savvy with the rules, don't be afraid to do it yourself).

• **Talk About Character Death Ahead of Time:** Some Storytellers are happy to kill off player-controlled characters in any fight. Some refuse to do it, or will grant last-minute intercession for characters about to die. Most fall somewhere in between, but no matter what your stance is, tell the players ahead of time. Know, too, that some players get emotional when characters die, some don't care at all, and some are happy to have the chance of death because they feel it raises the stakes and makes the whole experience more dramatic. You're not obligated to treat each character differently based on the players' preferences, but it does behoove you to keep the players informed of your sensibilities on the subject, especially if combat is a frequent occurrence in your chronicle.

• **Describe Everything:** Not necessarily the sound of a baseball bat against someone's head, or the smell of gunpowder lingering in the air — though those things are good, too. Rather, as Storyteller, describe the environment in some detail. The players should know what's around their characters, so that if they want to use the scenery as cover or weapons, they can. A fight in a bar presents the opportunity to slam someone's head into a jukebox, throw bottles of beer at opponents, and use pool cues, darts and bar stools as weapons. Some players ask questions about what's nearby, but others assume that if you don't say it, it's not there. Take a moment and devote some time pre-fight to what's in the area. It helps the players engage more with the setting, which, in turn, keeps them involved and helps the fight progress.

• **Encourage Innovation:** Tying into the above, if a player wants to use part of the scenery, let him. If a player wants to try a tactic in combat that is within his character's ability, let him. It's better to say "yes" than "no" to players, so be lenient…but keep it in-genre for this particular fight. That is, if you've decided that this fight is gritty and uses hacks like Weapons Kill and Stun, it's probably not in theme for a character to block a knife with a bare hand — or rather, if he *does* try it, he's might not get the result he wants. Mood of the fight shouldn't be an excuse to deny players their ideas, though, just interpret the results as best befits the fight in question. A good rule of thumb for the Storytelling system in general: A difficult task means a reduction to the dice pool, but should also mean that if the *roll* succeeds, the *action* succeeds. For instance, shooting someone in the head means a –3 to the attack roll (see p. 165 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**), but it can also change the damage from lethal to aggravated (just one "combat hack" option).

• **All Combat Should Have a Point:** "Random encounters" shouldn't be random. A group of characters might run afoul of some hapless security guards while trying to break into a hospital to liberate a friend's medical records. The guards aren't armed with anything more terrifying than flashlights, and they certainly won't fight to the death. So what does this fight mean? What's the point of having it happen, other than to slow the characters down? The fight could show that the characters have to be willing to hurt innocent people to get what they want, and be meant to test their limits on that subject. It might be designed to show that the characters are breaking the law and they don't get any free passes to do so just because they have a good cause (presuming their cause *is* good). It might be to set up a later encounter with the police — one security guard slipped away and called for help. It might be to frame them for murder — those guards weren't dead when the characters left them, but *someone* made short work of them shortly thereafter. Every fight should be part of the larger story. Here's a tip, though: You don't necessarily need to know *how* the fight works into the story until after it happens. Just don't forget to tie it to something else, later. Players can do that, too. Suppose one of the characters goes to check on an injured guard as he lies in the hospital, or goes to the poor man's funeral?

• **Work With the Players, Not Against:** If you wanted to kill the characters, you could. It's very, very easy to come up with some reason why the opponents' attacks inflict aggravated damage, or to add reinforcements and outnumber the players' characters. That's not the point of the exercise, though. The point is to tell a shared story and have fun doing it, so work *with* the players to facilitate that. That should mean that both sides should be willing to lose a fight if it makes for a more interesting story, and that should mean that both the players and the Storyteller should have a sense of what they want out of the fight.

• **Aftermath is Important:** Fights are fast. The effects last a lifetime, potentially. In the Storytelling system, injuries fade relatively quickly and don't leave lasting effects (though see the Injuries Last hack, p. 155), but the ramifications for the story should be considerable. In a cinematic fight, the characters can plow through hordes of opponents without worrying about being arrested, but the fight can still have an effect on the story's progression. Figure out what happens when the fight ends — are the characters on the run? Have they gained anything? Are degeneration rolls in order? As above, make the fight one part of the larger story.

## Combat Scenarios

Below are some scenarios for combat — not locations in which a fight could happen, or opponents for characters to fight, but combat scenes in which the fight is defined by its role in the story. For each scenario, we list which of the combat hacks presented in this chapter would be appropriate to incorporate. Some of the scenarios below are appropriate to a gritty fight scene, and some to a cinematic fight scene, but they aren't really arranged that way. In fact, all of them have cinematic references, films that highlight the kind of fight we're talking about.

### Battle Royal

In the Battle Royal, the characters are fighting to win. Not to win the fight, necessarily (though that's probably the intent), but to win the day, to win back their freedom, to win their vengeance, to win whatever the point of the story is. That means they're fighting the enemies who are variously known as the Big Bad, the end boss, the antagonist, and so on.

It's not "realistic" in the slightest that by taking down one villain, the day can be won. The aftermath of combat demands more work than the combat itself, and one victory does not equate smooth sailing from then on out. But the notion that the metaphorical dragon can be slain is appealing to us — look at the structure of any given movie. It has a bad guy, and that bad guy usually gets defeated, even if temporarily. The "heroes" don't always live through the experience, but sometimes it's enough to know that the goal has been achieved and that the heroes' foe dies with them.

As such, the Battle Royal is not in the least bit conservative. It doesn't fall neatly into either the cinematic or gritty category. A Battle Royal can take place at the abandoned lot, the two combatants pounding the Hell out of each other while their fellows look on. It can be a gunfight, where the fastest draw is the one who walks away, or it can be a balls-to-the-wall extravaganza with characters doing flip-kicks and snapping necks with their bare hands. What's important is that the characters are in this to win or die. No one retreats, no one asks for mercy (and no one expects it). When the last opponent falls, *that's* when the fight ends.

**Running the Battle Royal:** Storytellers, remember that the players are invested in this (or they should be), so if there was ever a time to be sure of their expectations, this is it. Characters might fall in battle, but they should have a chance to have a "cool moment" before they do. Everyone should be able to look back after the fight and say of each particular character, "This is where she really shined." Likewise, it can be tempting to fudge dice rolls so that opponents get those moments, too, but beware of turning what should be a quick, dramatic fight in a long, drawn-out fight.

**Playing the Battle Royal:** Players, go nuts. Spend Willpower and every other "fuel trait" you can. Make All-Out Attacks, use those combat maneuvers you've always wanted to try, have your characters grab stuff off the floor and use it. Set other players up for killing blows, and take those cues when you get the chance. Know that your character might die in the process, but damn it, make that death *glorious*.



**A World of Darkness Example:** A cell of hunters has tracked down a vampire they have witnessed murder friends and associates, and managed to trap it in the interior of an abandoned high school. They still have an hour until sunrise, so they can't just wait it out. They have to end the monster's terrible predations here and now…but it's just as tired of running from them as they are of chasing it.

**Hacks:** Any, depending on whether the Storyteller wants this scene to lean more toward gritty or toward cinematic.

**Cinematic References:** Any film in which it all comes down to one battle. That covers a lot of cinematic territory, granted.

## Dust-Up

When people start beating on each other with bare hands, it's a different kind of fight than if people are pulling out knives and bats. Yes, it's very possible for people to die in a fistfight, but it takes a freak accident (falling down and hitting one's head on pavement) or a lot of deliberate work (bashing someone's head *against* said pavement). The Dust-Up isn't usually about anything crucial as far as the story goes. More often, it's people getting unpleasant over territory, politics, religion or even Neanderthal matters of "honor."

A Dust-Up might occur in a chronicle when the characters run afoul of some mundane threat; a street gang, a bar full of drunk and hostile rednecks, the hired security of a more powerful antagonist, and so on. Death isn't the immediate threat. At worst, the characters can expect to be in pain for a while. Likewise, the antagonists aren't necessarily bloodthirsty psychopaths, either — they're doing what they're doing out of booze, street justice or money. If the characters start beating them too badly, they'll fold.

That said, the Dust-Up can get out of control. In the Dust-Up, fist damage is downplayed, but weapons and firearms are deadly. Once the weapons come out, it's not a Dust-Up anymore, and since by that time someone's probably already hurt, it's that much easier to kill.

**Running the Dust-Up:** This is just a good, clean brawl, and hopefully it'll all be bashing damage anyway. If anyone gets close to wrapping around to lethal damage, it's probably time to call the fight. Keep an eye on everyone's Health scores to avoid excess damage (both to the players' characters and the supporting characters), and make sure that the opponents run if they're getting beaten. If anyone *dies* during a Dust-Up (someone couldn't stand losing and pulled a gun, someone gets knocked into traffic, etc.), don't skimp on the aftermath. The police should take a special interest in this case, and shouldn't leave the characters alone. Friends of the victim should come looking for revenge. And, of course, there's Morality to consider. The central message is this: It was just supposed to be a fistfight. No one was supposed to be *hurt*.

**Playing the Dust-Up:** Let's be honest: For some players, it's a matter of pride. Losing a fight, especially to a bunch of mooks? Unacceptable! But in a Dust-Up, be prepared to lose, or at least stalemate. That's not because the characters are "better fighters," it's because the fight itself doesn't really *mean* much in the grand scheme of things. It's to set the mood for events to come, to introduce complications to the story, maybe even to test the characters' limits (especially appropriate in **Vampire** and **Werewolf**), but not to decide the outcome of the larger story. If the troupe's characters win the fight, great, you get to be bad-asses. If not, that just means that you get to take revenge later, and that's fun, too.

**A World of Darkness Example:** Two packs of werewolves meet up and discover that their territories overlap. They can't just let this oversight go, so they drop their weapons and have at it. With their powers of regeneration, they aren't going to be seriously injured — the real problem is avoiding Death Rage. There's more at stake here than territory. If everyone can fight without losing control, that means that the "pack next door" is made of solid Uratha, people who can be trusted. If not…who knows what might set them off?

**Hacks:** Automatic Damage, Bleeding Out, Lethal Stun, Toughness Matters, Weapons Kill

**Cinematic Examples:** *Higher Learning*, *Fight Club* (arguably), *Brotherhood of the Wolf* (opening fight). Note that many Dust-Ups in film occur in comedies, where the stakes for fighting are different; we've tried to keep our inspirations to a slightly more serious genre. Slightly.

## Gang Fight

A fight involving multiple combatants can be a nightmare, both for the people who are outnumbered, and for the Storyteller who has to keep track of all those characters.

As anyone who has run such a fight using the Storyteller system knows, being outnumbered is problematic even for such powerful combatants as vampires, werewolves and Prometheans. Defense decreases for each opponent, and characters only get one action a turn (barring certain high-level Fighting Style Merits, and they don't allow much for versatility). Even a creature of the night can be beaten to death, if enough people are taking swings.

Whether that's appropriate for your story or not, of course, is precisely the question to ask when deciding how to run the fight. In the Gang Fight scenario, the assumption is that the characters are going to lose, or at least be badly injured, if they stand their ground.

With all of that said, what circumstances make a Gang Fight, and how does it differ from the Dust-Up, above? A Gang Fight happens when a large group of

people decide they want to harm or kill an individual or a smaller group. As such, a Gang Fight could be represented by a lynch mob hunting down someone whose color it doesn't like, or a bunch of riot cops beating a few protesters bloody. It could be the brainwashed minions of a sorcerer stabbing their master's foes to death while chanting his name, or (because you can't beat the classics) it might be a horde of mindless undead tearing their still-wriggling food to shreds. The defining point of a Gang Fight is the numbers and, to differentiate it from a Dust-Up, the lack of consideration for the other party. In a Dust-Up, no one expects to get seriously hurt. In a Gang Fight, no one expects the underdog to be standing afterwards.

**Running the Gang Fight:** Fatality is a distinct possibility in the Gang Fight, especially if the gang is using weapons. The average character's Health track only has seven boxes, and once those are filled with lethal damage, that character is out and dying (supernatural powers notwithstanding). As Storyteller, you should probably consider how far things should be allowed to go before the fight ends — the police (or the press) show up, the sorcerer calls off his minions, the spell animating the dead ends, etc. A Gang Fight can rapidly become a group kill if you aren't careful.

If it's the players who are in the "gang" position, of course, then your considerations are a little different. Play the victim(s) of their brutality to the hilt. Don't worry about how much damage you can do to them (though the notion of a hapless victim pulling a revolver on a coterie of vampires is pathetically amusing). Instead have the victim beg, threaten or bargain to save his own life. It's common in roleplaying games for obviously defeated foes to fight to the death. Part of the reason for that may be that it obviates the characters from responsibility for killing them, since every murder is committed in self-defense. But don't give them that satisfaction if they're on the winning side of a Gang Fight. Make them think about what to do with their surviving opponent(s). Make them decide whether they can afford to let him live, or whether they can live with killing him. And don't forget to have them make degeneration rolls where appropriate.

**Playing the Gang Fight:** As mentioned under Dust-Up, there's no shame in losing. Except, of course, that in a Gang Fight "losing" might very well mean "dying," so while it might not be shameful, it's still a fate worth avoiding. Put your pride aside — if your characters are getting creamed, there's a reason for it. The Storyteller might be setting up a situation that you'll have to resolve with something other than combat…or maybe these guys are paper tigers and they'll run screaming as soon as your werewolf eviscerates one. You're gambling with loaded dice, though, because most characters can only absorb two or three good hits from a knife or pistol before folding.

The point here is: Don't let gamer pride get in your way. A chase scene through the streets can be fun, and offer just as many interesting ways to come out on top as a fight scene would (and with less blood!). If your characters do get caught and beaten to a bloody pulp, consider what this means in terms of the story and where the action can go from here.

If you're on the winning side of the Gang Fight, think about how your characters cope with performing these kinds of actions. It's tempting to say that most people aren't equipped to kill randomly, but people get swept up in violence easily (especially when mind-altering substances are involved). If your character helps commit a murder and then feels guilty afterwards, how does he behave? Does he turn himself in? At least tell the cops where the body is buried so that the deceased can have a proper burial? What conflict does this cause for the chronicle?

**A World of Darkness Example:** Disquiet catches up with a small throng of Prometheans, and the locals come after the Created with blood in their eyes. The characters could probably hold their own, maybe even kill a few of the humans, but quite apart from whether or not they *could* win the fight, they have to consider whether they *should*. Are these people responsible for what they are doing? It's not an easy question, and the characters need to answer it quickly, because once they get surrounded, they'll have a hard time escaping.

**Hacks:** Automatic Damage, Bleeding Out, Freezing Under Fire, Lethal Stun, Stun, Supernatural Terror, Toughness Matters, Weapons Kill

**Cinematic References:** *The Crow*, any of George Romero's zombie films, *The Shawshank Redemption*

## Martial Arts Mastery

From its origins in the early days of Chinese cinema to its heyday in Hong Kong in the 1960s and 70s, through a modern resurgence of big budgets and cutting edge special effects, the martial arts movie has showed us masters of hand to hand fighting styles (usually Asian and almost always esoteric) whose capabilities far beyond those of ordinary men and women. Movie martial arts have become so ingrained in modern pop culture, in fact, that many people assume martial arts masters really are nearly superhuman fighters. Even if they don't believe that kung fu masters can dodge bullets or leap 50 feet into the air and run on water, many people have no trouble believing that skilled martial artists can take on a half-dozen untrained opponents by themselves or handily disarm men with knives and guns.

This scenario is aimed at the slightly over-the-top but not completely fantastic style of martial arts films. For the truly unearthly (such as *Hero* or *House of Flying Daggers* or the various martial arts-inspired anime films), you might be better off running a game of **Mage: The Awakening** and incorporating some of the following hacks.

**Running Martial Arts Mastery:** Memorable, sometimes outlandish characters are a hallmark of the martial arts film, and they should likewise feature in scenes inspired by them. Think of David Lo Pan and Egg Shen in *Big Trouble in Little China* or Pai Mei in *Kill Bill*. If the character has a unique or distinctive fighting style, so much the better. In the World of Darkness, such a fighter can be truly unique indeed. Perhaps a werewolf has invented a martial art that relies on rapidly shapeshifting from human to wolf and back to strike and evade, or perhaps a corrupted Promethean has devised a "spider style" to take advantage of his multiple limbs.

Be sure to give characters plenty of opportunity to shine in their areas of expertise—hand to hand combat. At the same time, though, don't neglect to throw in occasional opportunities for the characters to show off why martial arts are superior to crude firearms and the weapons of the modern age. Locations that can show off a fighter's agility and poise are ideal for fight scenes: narrow bridges, dense forests, and construction sites all provide plenty of ways for a martial arts hero to use his superior agility to his advantage.

**Playing Martial Arts Mastery:** A good martial arts master always tries to avoid conflict. He usually espouses a philosophy like "the greatest victory is the battle you never have to fight," but at least in the movies, that's usually just a way to make the good guy seem more morally justified. The cinematic martial artist is an ass-kicking machine, and as soon as the bad guys give him the justification he's more than willing to unleash that power.

Be confident, but not boastful. You can break a man's neck with one hand, you don't need to beat your chest and tell people how tough you are. When the battle is joined, you might put on a cocky attitude to lure your enemies into making mistakes, or you might fight in eerie silence save for breath-focusing shouts. If you're fighting multiple enemies, keep moving to keep them off-balance, use your environment to your advantage, and pack your attacks with descriptive flavor. You might invent colorful names for your style, or research names given to actual martial arts styles and maneuvers—many of them are far more unique and outlandish than anything dreamed up by Hong Kong or Hollywood. (Take for example "monkey steals a peach," an attack in which you come up under an enemy's guard between his legs to forcibly remove a certain important piece of his anatomy.)

**World of Darkness Example:** They call it the School of the Black Mountain. Stories vary as to where it is, or even how you find it, but all agree that it can only be found by those with a burning need for vengeance. They say you can learn ways of killing there that no human mind has ever dreamed of—and all it costs is your soul. A group of mortal men and women, all of whom lost something or someone to a coven of vampiric blood sorcerers, have found their way to this school, where failure is death and pain is the only teacher. Some survived, others did not—but those who did have returned to the world, and have tracked the vampires to their lair. Now, they will make the bloodsuckers see just how frightening mortals can be.

**Hacks:** Ignore the Rabble (main characters only), Kung Fu Fury (main characters only), Property Damage (applies universally), Bone Breakage (main characters only), Haymakers For All (applies universally), Combination Momentum (main characters only, but "extras" can still break the combination), Catch the Blade (main characters only), Dodge Bullets (main characters only), Wire Fu (applies universally), Toughness Matters (main characters only), Stun (applies universally), No Fighting Styles (applies universally).

**Cinematic References:** *The Chinese Connection, Once Upon a Time in China, Enter the Dragon, Legend of the Drunken Master*



## Musketeers, Ho!

Many of the tropes of the martial arts genre also apply to films about swordmasters and modern day duelists. Especially when set in the modern era, these movies often make melee weapon wielders out to be even more deadly than gunfighters or martial artists (see for example the *Blade* films). If you want to replicate this style of film, add the following hacks to the Martial Arts Mastery style: Sword-Wielding Badass (main characters only), Knife to a Fistfight (applies universally), The Greatest Swordsman is the One Who Survives (applies universally).



## Messy Brawl

The polar opposite of the Dust-Up is the Messy Brawl. Every wound hurts. Every slice bleeds like a faucet. People fall dead as soon as their minds catch up with their bodies. The Messy Brawl might be a one-on-one fight or it might be a group melee, but it differs from the Gang Fight in that the sides are roughly even, rather than utterly lopsided.

"Brutality" is the key word, here. This fight is not clean, and it is not dispassionate. Murder is intimate, and the Storyteller should describe the shortness of breath as the blade slips between a man's ribs, the look in his eyes as his mouth fills with blood and the revulsion (or exhilaration) his murderer

feels as what he has just done. If the characters are supernatural creatures of some kind, bring their supernatural characteristics to the fore. Frenzy, Death Rage, and game-specific hacks like Sup on Agony (p. 167) or Madness in Battle (p. 165) should play a prominent role.

The scene itself might be dirty or disordered in some way. A muddy field during a rainstorm or a cluttered room where every step kicks up dust are good possibilities. You might also contrast the scene with the fight, though. If it starts out in a hospital or hotel room, clean and neatly ordered, you can describe what the fight does to the room and how it looks when the battle is over. Blood smears the walls, broken glass from mirrors and lamps is strewn across the floor, and, of course, a body lies bleeding next to the bed. After the fight, the survivors might well feel helpless — they can't possibly clean up what they've done, and the sirens are already growing louder. The Messy Brawl is a fight that complicates more than it resolves.

**Running the Messy Brawl:** The Messy Brawl is passionate and emotional. That doesn't mean flowery or angry speeches during the fight, though it might mean angry howls, grunts and expletives. It might mean insults if both characters take a bullet and crawl away for cover, and it could even mean cries for mercy once a crippling blow has landed. When you run a Messy Brawl, don't feel compelled to make things easy. If shots miss, they miss, but if they hit, they should inflict some damage. Try to keep the action moving and have your Storyteller characters respond instinctively, not intelligently. Hopefully the players will follow suit — the essential question when the Messy Brawl ends is, "What the hell just happened?"

**Playing the Messy Brawl:** This is not a glorious fight. This is a dirty, painful, terrifying ordeal. If your character is involved in one, don't bother with elaborate strategies or clever tactics. Forget the pithy one-liners. Just *fight*, because your opponent wants to hurt you (which is different than wanting to kill you). Vampires and werewolves are well within their rights to lose control here, killing anything they come into contact with until their rage is spent. Likewise, those characters might take the opportunity to feed on flesh or blood (or, in the case of changelings, pain) — in a Messy Brawl, it's appropriate to feast now and deal with the consequences later.

But that's not to say that those consequences don't exist. Immediate concerns include getting away with the crime, or getting to a hospital to have serious wounds treated. But the long-lasting effect of a Messy Brawl is likely to be psychological or spiritual. Morality loss is one strong possibility, but even if a character doesn't do anything that violates his Morality rating, the Storyteller might have you roll to avoid your character gaining a derangement.

**A World of Darkness Example:** A motley of changelings meets up with a band of loyalists, and attacks, infuriated that these traitors would dare work for their captors willingly. The two sides turn a butcher's shop into a real bloodbath. Animal blood mixes with human blood, glass cases are shattered and the sharpened knives and cleavers are put to horrific use. Later, the police and medical examiners on scene have difficulty telling the difference between the victims and the beef cuts at first glance. The survivors escape into the Hedge, but the smell of fresh blood never really leaves their hands. Even weeks later, when they enter the Hedge they leave crimson handprints on whatever they touch.

**Hacks:** Aggravated Called Shots, Automatic Damage, Bleeding Out, Hidden Health, Increased Wound Penalties, Injuries Last, Lethal Stun, Ricochet, Shooting Through Cover, Stun, Supernatural Terror, Weapons Kill

**Cinematic References:** *Hotel Rwanda*, *Gangs of New York*, *28 Days Later* (the finale)

## Shoot 'em Up

In the grand tradition of big-budget action blockbusters and in particular the films of John Woo, this style turns gunfights from ugly, brutal engagements at close quarters that are over in seconds (as most real gunfights are) into a deadly ballet of bullets. Characters wielding two guns are common, as are acrobatic dives, leaps, and flips through the combat arena. The heroes rarely take cover, and it's entirely possible to dive into the midst of a gang of anonymous enemy shooters and take them all down in a matter of seconds. Implausible gun stunts (ricocheting bullets off of ceilings to hit concealed enemies or shooting bullets out of the air) might be possible, and nobody ever runs out of ammo except when it would look cool to reload or switch to a different weapon.

**Running a Shoot 'em Up:** Set your fights in interesting locations with lots of incidental scenery that can get chewed up by gunfire. Nightclubs, office buildings, crowded city streets, and dilapidated houses in the middle of nowhere that might fall down at a moment's notice are all good choices. Give bonuses to players attempting crazy stunts rather than penalties. You want to encourage daring displays and slick moves, not discourage them. Yes, "realistically" it's much harder to shoot someone while you're swinging on a chandelier, but it's also much harder to shoot the person swinging on the chandelier, so give the swinger a point or two of Defense, but don't penalize his attack by more than –1, if at all. Make sure whoever the main antagonist is that he has plenty of henchmen, because the players will mow them down by the bucketsful. Vampires with legions of ghoul servants, mortal crime bosses, and cult leaders all work well in this sort of game, and for a novel

twist you might use a war-spirit and its brood of weapon- and violence-spirits that have possessed mortal hosts to wreak havoc on the world.

**Playing a Shoot 'em Up:** Keep moving. Don't just hunker down behind one piece of cover, run and dodge and jump and make use of your surroundings. Spend Willpower liberally to make those million-to-one shots. If you can, use two guns at once. This fight is as much a dance as it is a brawl, so take chances. Don't just run down the stairs, slide down the banister while blasting away at enemies to either side of you. Be ready with some snappy one-liners, and don't even bother tracking how many bullets you've fired.



**A World of Darkness Example:** A cabal of mages belonging to the Guardians of the Veil have uncovered a sleeper cult worshiping an Abyssal entity. The creature's presence in this reality has created an aberration in the Tapestry, a sort of anti-Demense where Awakened magic is even more unpredictable and risky than normal. Unwilling to risk widening the Abyss with vulgar attack spells, the wizards stock up on high-powered firearms and enhance themselves with subtle magics before storming the cult's compound. **Hacks:** Property Damage (applies universally), Valiant Surge (players' characters only), Watch That First Step (main characters only), Hollywood Ammo (applies universally), Guns With Kick (main characters only), Area Effect Shotguns (main characters only), Automatic Damage (applies to players' characters' attacks only), Ricochet (applies universally), Shooting Through Cover (applies universally).

**Cinematic Reference:** *Hard Boiled, Equilibrium* (for the action scenes only), oh, and *Shoot 'em Up* (duh)

## Squad Tactics

A combat scene in which the characters are fighting as a unit, staying in communication and running any kind of organized battle plan is probably a Squad Tactics fight. The characters might be police, military, or simply a group of comrades who have decided that the World of Darkness is too dangerous a place to be unprepared. The hallmarks of this fight scene are the precision with which the characters act and the damage that one character losing control (to fear, anger or mind manipulation from an outside source, for example) can cause. All of the combatants on a side must be able to work with each other. If they can't, they leave a hole that the enemy can exploit.

In a Squad Tactics fight, the squad usually has a clear goal. Secure the area, capture a certain object, kill a specific target, or even kill every living thing in the area — all of these are potential objectives. The squad might or might not be personally invested in what they're doing, beyond doing their job, which puts a different kind of spin

on the fight than a Messy Brawl or a Dust-Up. It's not that there's nothing at stake, it's just that there's nothing at stake that's personal to the characters…except, of course, that they could *die* in the line of duty. Policemen and soldiers shoulder this risk on a daily basis, and characters belonging to organizations such as the Adamantine Arrow (in **Mage**) or the Summer Court (in **Changeling**) need to consider how a perceived sense of duty figures into their assumed risk.

During the fight itself, the focus should be on the plan and how it's going awry. No plan, after all, survives contact with the enemy, and the characters should have to evaluate how the plan is working and whether to deviate from it. If a character disregards orders or breaks ranks and winds up winning the day, he's a "maverick" or an "innovator." If he does it and people on his squad die, he's a "loose cannon" or a "traitor." These shouldn't be insignificant considerations in the game — depending on the circumstances, they might even merit the potential loss of Morality.

Friendly fire should be a consideration in this kind of fight, so make sure everyone has a good idea of where everyone else is. Since the overriding theme of Squad Tactics is "the whole team working together," a mistake should affect everyone.

**Running Squad Tactics:** The Squad Tactics fight is a good first fight scene to run in a story, if the characters have the right kind of training and relationship to one another. It establishes the status quo — this is how the characters operate when they are together, equipped, and things are going more or less smoothly. As the events of the story unfold, of course, Squad Tactics give way to Utter Chaos or (worse) a Messy Brawl or Gang Fight.

But during the Squad Tactics combat, allow the characters to watch each other's backs. They can communicate with short, one- or two-word warning codes, and they can keep their heads because they can count one another. Of course, when morale fails one, it's a problem for everyone, and play to that. If one character breaks ranks, have the enemy immediately exploit it. If all of the characters retreat unexpectedly, have the enemy box them in. Squad Tactics only work when everyone does his job.

**Playing Squad Tactics:** So, with the above in mind, why would you ever *choose* to have your character do something contrary to his job within the squad?

One possible reason is Virtue or Vice. Consider: A squad of policemen is clearing a school where, they have been told, someone just started shooting. One cop glances to the side and sees a teacher lying on the floor, bleeding but alive. He breaks ranks to check her pulse and order some help for her. This break with orders could cost lives if the "shooter" takes that opportunity to attack, but he's definitely fulfilling his Virtue of Charity.

Another reason to break ranks is emotion. A character might let fear or rage get the better of him at a critical moment, running away from the action if he's afraid for his life or further into battle if he spots a personal enemy. Or, what happens if the characters' families are waiting outside and one character believes that the enemy has doubled back? He might go running outside to save his wife, leaving his comrades in the lurch.

All of these are valid reasons to ignore orders, from the perspective of the story. You can, of course, decide that your character's devotion to duty outweighs those emotions (perhaps following the Virtue of Temperance or Fortitude, or the Vice of Pride), and stick with the squad no matter what. If your character dies in combat, the rest of the squad will definitely have good things to say about him.

Another common reason for breaking ranks in a roleplaying game, though, is the "lone wolf syndrome." That is, the player figures, "I'm in control of my character, and even though I'm playing a character who would logically have some consideration for the people who are trusting my character with their lives, I'm going to go off and do whatever the hell I want, because I'm in control of my character." This is shallow reasoning, it breeds resentment in the other players, and it should be avoided.

**A World of Darkness Example:** A cabal of mages belonging to the Adamantine Arrow enters the sanctum of a mage they believe has been sacrificing human beings and consuming their blood for Mana. As they go deeper into his lair, using magic to scan ahead, they realize that they are in a Demesne, a place where all magic is covert and Paradox cannot intrude. When the mage's minions boil out of the walls and attack, do the characters follow their orders to avoid vulgar magic, or do they reason that since they can't be hurt by Paradox any, they should let loose? What repercussions might await them if they disobey orders, either from their superiors or from the Abyss? They might now have a Paradox "on credit," as it were, and the next Paradox they cause might be considerably worse than they'd expect.

**Hacks:** Aggravated Called Shots, Dangerous Explosives, Freezing Under Fire, Ricochet, Shooting Through Cover, Supernatural Terror, Unable to Attack. At the Storyteller's discretion, the hacks listed for **Hunter: The Vigil** (p. 168) might also be appropriate.

**Cinematic References:** *Aliens*, *Dog Soldiers*, *The Usual Suspects*

## Tough Sonsabitches

Sometimes, we admire a hero not because he's exceptionally clever, talented, or skilled at fighting, but because he's just so goddamn tough he refuses to give up. Even in the face of ridiculous odds and physical punishment, this Herculean figure soldiers on until he reaches his goal (and usually inflicts a substantial amount of damage along the way). Even as we wince and cringe at the abuse he endures, we secretly relish the inevitable retaliation he will unleash.

**Running Tough Sonsabitches:** Your players' characters are damned hard to kill, so go ahead and unload on them. Give the badguys high-caliber guns, chainsaws, attack dogs, the works. The more you wreck up the characters, the more the players will love it when they're still standing and get to start dishing it out. Good antagonists for this sort of game are highly physical—werewolves, Prometheans, and similar brutish monsters are ideal. On the mundane side, Russian mobsters, drug cartels, and sadistic serial killers are all good choices.

The key to making this style work, and it is somewhat difficult to manage, is to make the players *feel* the injuries their characters suffer. When you have a wide open Health track, it's easy to forget how much losing them *hurts*. Don't feel like you need to wallow in gore, but definitely incorporate the characters' injuries into descriptions of the scene. Mention how the ringing in their ears from that concussion make it hard to hear, or how cracked ribs seem to creak with every intake of breath. Don't let your players forget the pain their characters are in, and their revenge will be all the sweeter when they finally take it.

This style of game is well-suited to **Promethean**, as those re-animated corpses are already extraordinarily durable. With a few extra hacks to make them even tougher, they can become the absolute embodiment of this style of game.

**Playing Tough Sonsabitches:** You're not exactly indestructible, but by God you're close. You have a goal, and no matter how many bastards with guns and lead pipes and axes are between you and it, you're going to fulfill that goal. Spend Willpower liberally, especially to shrug off fear and mental domination—you're just too stubborn to let some weaselly vampire turn you into a puppet. You probably favor big, heavy, high-damaging weapons: shotguns, fire axes, crowbars and the like that let you tear into your enemies as badly as they tear into you. All-out attack, a *lot*. You're tough, you can handle the loss of Defense. Don't bother taking cover or running away unless the bad guys' firepower vastly outclasses your own—and even then, take as many out with you as you can.

**World of Darkness Example:** The Red River Run werewolf pack has it hard. They're the only Forsaken pack in the middle of a hundred-mile radius teeming with vicious spirits and hateful Pure. Over the years, their territory has shrunk, from covering most of town to just a few blocks around one meager locus in the city park. When the pack's totem tells them that a massive alliance of Pure packs and their spirit masters is closing in, the pack resolves to stand and fight. They'll probably all die, but by God they'll take so many of those Pure bastards down with them that the Red River Run pack will be the bogeymen in Fire-Touched stories for years to come.

**Hacks:** Ignore the Rabble, Bone Breakage, Valiant Surge, Hollywood Healing, Health as Morale, Faster Healing, Meat Shields, Watch That First Step, Toughness Matters. If running a **Promethean** game, any of the Promethean hacks in this book are appropriate.

**Cinematic References:** *300, Die Hard, Sin City, Oldboy*

## Utter Chaos

While Squad Tactics are (at least initially) an exercise in teamwork and camaraderie, Utter Chaos is, as the name suggests, every man for himself. Utter Chaos happens when the inmates grab control of the asylum, the riot cops lose control of the riot, and mob rule takes hold. The people who can think straight either try to profit from the situation by looting or robbing the victims, or try to find a safe place to hole up until it blows over. But often that's not an option. The characters in an Utter Chaos fight don't always have a good idea of who they're fighting or why, they just know people are punching, biting or even shooting them.

An Utter Chaos fight isn't really winnable, because, like a Gang Fight, the characters tend to be outnumbered. About all they can do is get to safety, get behind the barricades, get to high ground, or find a weapon that puts them beyond combatants' reach (like a flamethrower). Friend and foe blur, because people who don't actually mean any harm might grapple characters in fear and clutch at them tightly enough to immobilize or damage them. Other player-controlled characters probably keep their heads (the characters are, after all, supposed to be the protagonists of the story), but depending on what's causing the chaos, they might be just as crazed. Maybe everyone meets up in the hospital or a holding cell after the fight, and the Utter Chaos scene is played out in flashback as the characters try to remember exactly what happened.

People die in riots. People get hit by cars, debris and stray bullets. Utter Chaos does not carry the same personal, focused risk as the Messy Brawl, but it carries exactly as much risk of serious injury or death. Utter Chaos can be used as the opening scene of a story (and it sets an extremely visceral tone for the rest of it), or in place of a Battle Royal at the end.

**Running Utter Chaos:** Don't let the players know any more than you have to. If there was ever a fight scene in which it was appropriate to avoid using maps and minis, Utter Chaos is it. The character might take a swing at one opponent, driving him off, only to have two more grab hold and push her down. You might consider roll random attacks on the characters as ricochets and flying chunks of material coming hurting toward them. The noise should be a constant feature, and reflexive Wits + Composure rolls to hear with any kind of acuity are probably necessary. Dialog is impossible; at best, characters can scream a two-word phrase before another attack begins.



Characters shouldn't expect to get out of this fight scene completely intact, but if they devote their energy to escaping, they should at least get out *alive*. But the question then becomes — do they separate in order to escape? Do they shoot their way out, steal cars, or just run? And what will those choices mean after the dust clears? Unlike the Messy Brawl, official repercussions from this fight scene aren't too much of a problem. Unless the police actually saw a character commit a crime, they won't pursue charges, and even then they'll have trouble make a charge stick. But the effects from injuries and Morality loss can be devastating. Flashbacks from the battle should be a distinct possibility for the participants, and you can help the players by making the descriptions of the battle as vivid and as chaotic as possible.

**Playing Utter Chaos:** When your character is surrounded by fire, gunshots and screaming people, what's going through his mind? Does he just want to survive? Does he want to make sure his friends are safe? Or is he oddly serene, at home in the chaos (see the Combatant Merit, p. 181)? Consider, too, what image from the chaos burns itself into the character's mind, because you can use that later for a Learning Curve experience point (provided you can draw some kind of conclusion for it) or gaining Willpower back through Faith, Wrath or another Virtue or Vice (depending what the character does in that situation). You might consider, too, whether your character joins in the chaos, getting swept away by the violence, and starts throwing things or looting. The Storyteller should leave it to you to decide if your character is immune to mob mentality or not, but you might well decide to go with the flow. Just be prepared to face the music later.

Characters can get hurt randomly in an Utter Chaos scene, and it's easy to take this personally because, after all, all injuries come from the Storyteller. But don't get mad because your character got shot and you never saw the assailant — it's part of the scene, and it should serve as impetus to *seek cover*, not *take revenge*.

**A World of Darkness Example:** A coterie of vampires is present at a huge outdoor concert. As the cover band finishes its set, an explosion rings out from the parking lot… followed by many more as cars start blowing up. Somewhere in the crowd, a vampire (perhaps an acquaintance of the characters) flies into frenzy in terror at the fire, and tears through people to get away. Before long, the whole place is engulfed in a full-scale riot. The characters need to get to safety before they, too, lose control, and before the police arrive to pack everyone into paddy wagons.

**Hacks:** Automatic Damage, Bleeding Out, Dangerous Explosives, Injuries Last, Supernatural Terror, Toughness Matters, Weapons Kill

**Cinematic References:** *Children of Men*, *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* (for the final fight scene — it's not huge, but definitely chaotic), *Saving Private Ryan*

### New Merit — Combatant (••)

**Prerequisite:** Resolve ••, Brawl, Firearms *or* Weaponry •

**Effect:** Your character either has training in how to handle himself in a fight, or has been in enough crisis situations that he doesn't lose his head when people start getting hurt. A number of combat hacks involving the effects of pain and stress do not apply to this character. These hacks are: Freezing Under Fire, Lethal Stun and Unable to Attack.

## Designing Combat—High Action in the World of Darkness

Since its inception, the **World of Darkness** has been a game of stark, gritty horror, and the combat rules have always emphasized that. Fights tend to be quick, brutal, and relatively lethal, resembling back-alley beat-downs more than the stylized, choreographed action sequences found in the likes of Hollywood blockbusters and Asian martial arts cinema. That's hardly a flaw in the system: the **World of Darkness** is, after all, a horror game, and brutal assaults out of the darkness are appropriate to that genre. Especially in mortal games (although certainly no less valid in the other game lines), a sense that any confrontation can end in bloody, screaming death certainly adds to the tension.

At the same time, characters generally have enough survivability to guarantee that they aren't taken out in one single, lucky attack. Whereas in the real world it's tragically easy to kill someone with a single gunshot (even one to an apparently nonvital area, like the leg), **World of Darkness** characters usually have enough Health, or can stack enough penalties on their opponents' attack rolls, that the single-shot kill is a rare event.

Most of the time, that's all for the best. The World of Darkness isn't designed to be a world in which action-movie heroes routinely perform death-defying stunts and take on a dozen vampires all on their own, but at the same time, this is a game, and the objective of the game is to have fun and tell good stories. If beloved characters drop like flies, even before their players have a chance to take action, the fun factor is greatly diminished.

Sometimes, though, players and Storytellers alike want something a little different. Maybe the troupe all saw that new action flick with the werewolf ninjas and feel like trying something a little bit more "out there" in terms of over-the-top action. Maybe the Storyteller wants to explore the psychological damage that carnage and mayhem inflicts even on the survivors of a battle. . Or maybe everybody involved just wants to push the Storytelling System in new and unusual ways to satisfy their inner game-designers, or emulate the feel of another game system while using the rules for the **World of Darkness**.

This section gives you advice on how to fine-tune the genre of your game to emulate a variety of "styles." Unlike the combat scenarios presented elsewhere in this chapter, this section focuses less on specific scenes and more on the overall "feel" of your chronicle. A kung fu movie follows different "rules" than a gun-slinging Western, which in turn follows different "rules" than a pulp horror tale.

### Step One: Choose Hacks

The obvious first step to turning your **World of Darkness** game into something in a new style is to settle on what you're trying to do. Do you want a game where duels with rapiers are still fought in the back alleys, or a game where the master of martial arts is a nearly superhuman figure? Do you want every gunshot to kill, or do you want characters diving through the air, firing hundreds of bullets from paired pistols? Should combat be a terrifying prospect that only the deeply insane would welcome, or are the characters shit-talking badasses happy to pick fights?

Most of the hacks presented in this chapter are fairly self-explanatory as far as the effect they will have on gameplay. Look through the list, paying special attention to the rationale given for each hack. There's no hard limit to how many hacks you can apply to your game, but you probably want to limit yourself to around five or so. Any more than that and it becomes difficult to remember exactly which changes you've implemented and how they interact with the larger rules framework.

### Step Two: Decide Applicability

There's a general assumption that, for reasons of "balance" or "consistency" that the rules should apply equally to all characters, whether controlled by players or the Storyteller. What's good for the goose is good for the gander, after all, right? You wouldn't want to cheat in favor of one side or another, would you?

Well, no it isn't, and yes you would. Sometimes, at least.

While treating the rules of the game as a sort of model of the "physics" of the world is certainly a valid approach to running a game, it's not the only way to approach it. Consider that, in modern film and classical myth alike, the protagonists are usually better than the rank and file people around them. Sometimes, there's a reason for that as part of the story (Heracles is the son of Zeus, Achilles had the finest martial training in the ancient world and was dipped in the River Styx to make him invulnerable, the freedom fighters in *The Matrix* are aware of the construct they live in and can exploit it), but just as often, it's for no reason other than the fact that they are the protagonists (Beowulf is just a badass Geat, John McClane endures phenomenal punishment and takes out the bad guys because he's John "Yippie-Kai-Yay" McClane).

There's nothing wrong with applying combat hacks globally (as far as using them in every combat) but only for selected characters. Usually, you would probably pick out hacks to apply only to the players' characters and to major antagonists, but you might also pick out hacks that will only apply to the average people and faceless minions the characters meet. This can be handy, for example, if you want to recreate the classic movie moment of the heroes mowing through an army of the bad guy's soldiers, or if you want the characters who dare to stand against the darkness to be truly set apart from the masses.

Likewise, you can enforce a feeling of despair and powerlessness by giving beneficial hacks to the bad guys. Consider the stories of H.P. Lovecraft, in which mortal man is utterly helpless in the face of the creatures of the Mythos, or Marv from *Sin City* when he faces the impossibly nimble, deadly serial killer, Kevin. In both cases, the protagonist operates at a significant disadvantage (even though in previous scenes, Marv had the edge over the rank-and-file mooks he fought), which heightens the tension of the scenes. Bear in mind that if the villains have too many advantages your players might begin to feel you're being unfair, and increasing the bad guys' power makes those aforementioned one-hit kills more likely.

## Step Three: Explaining and Adjusting

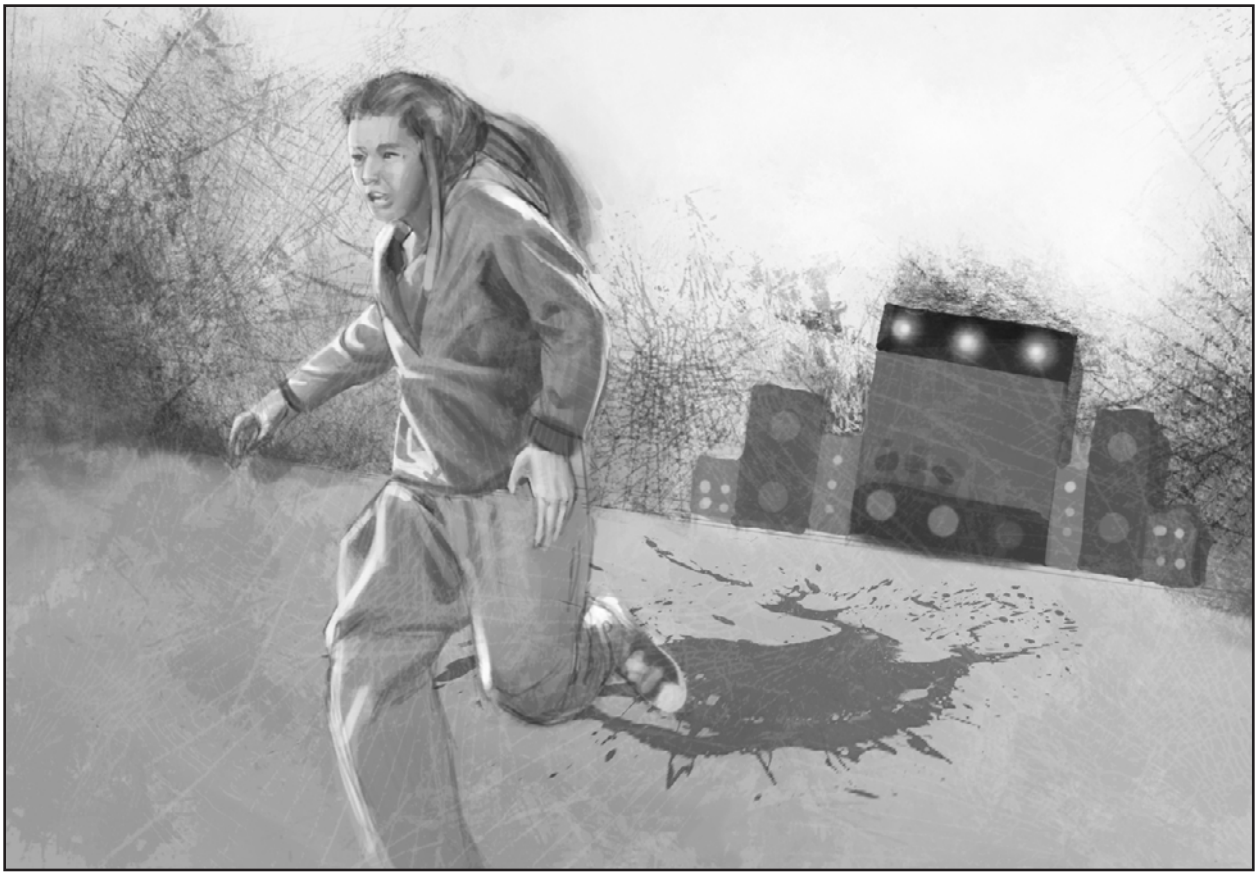
As mentioned previously, the explanation for *why* different rules might apply to certain characters can be worth exploring. If you've decided that the major characters (and *only* the major characters) in your chronicle use the Sword-Wielding Badass hack, what does that say about your world? You might be able to work that into a story hook—perhaps all the major characters studied fencing with an enigmatic master who taught them secret arts of the blade no mere mortal ever mastered. Maybe they've each been possessed by a war-spirit that guides their hands in combat—in return for bloody sacrifices in its name.If you decide that the protagonists are at risk of Freezing Under Fire, that might suggest some shared trauma in their past. Maybe they were all in the military together and were the only survivors of a massacre, or they've all been haunted by the same nightmare of blood and violence that flashes to mind when combat starts.

Of course, sometimes the answer is just "because it looks cool." That's fine too—*Hard Boiled* didn't need to explain that its gunfighter-cop protagonist was actually a master of Time magic gifted with fetish pistols that never ran empty, and indeed the movie probably would have suffered if it had. Particularly if the hacks you're implementing are fairly subtle tweaks, or tweaks to make combat more lethal and "realistic," you can easily get away with saying "that's just how it is." The most extremely stylistic hacks, such as wire fu jumps or guns that never run out of ammo, might require some willing suspension of disbelief, but if you can accept it in a movie and it doesn't bother you in the context of your game, don't worry about being a slave to verisimilitude.

## Over-the-Top Action and the Fourth Wall

One other aspect worth thinking about is how visible the effects of a hack are to the inhabitants of your chronicle. Would an innocent bystander be stunned to see the characters strut their stuff in combat, sure he was witnessing a feat of sorcery, or is it just accepted as part of how the world works? To return to the wire-fu example, when characters in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* see Li Mu Bai sailing through the air effortlessly, their reaction is more along the lines of "wow, that man I a kung fu master!" than "holy shit, that man is violating the law of gravity!" Within the context of the world, then, it can be assumed that kung fu masters can leap and float impossible distances and, while it is an amazing and impressive feat, it isn't one that no one has ever seen or conceived of. By contrast, in *Superman*, when people see the Man of Steel fly, they react with shock and disbelief—people aren't *supposed* to fly. Depending on the game you want to run, neither approach is the wrong one, but it's something that can inform the way your chronicle goes, so it bears thinking about.

This question becomes more pertinent if you are employing the more over-the-top hacks without any in-game rationale. If you've decided that there's a specific reason the characters diverge from the norm, then you've established that there is a norm to differ from, and people are going to notice that. Likewise, if your hacks are more subtle, the characters aren't likely to notice that things work differently from "normal." In fact, you probably shouldn't have characters in the game notice minor hacks like guns with "movie-size" clips or the fact that ninjas are proportionally more dangerous the fewer there are, or you run the rish of descending onto self-aware parody—which, again, is fine if it's what you're after, but it's pretty far from the accepted standard of a **World of Darkness** game.

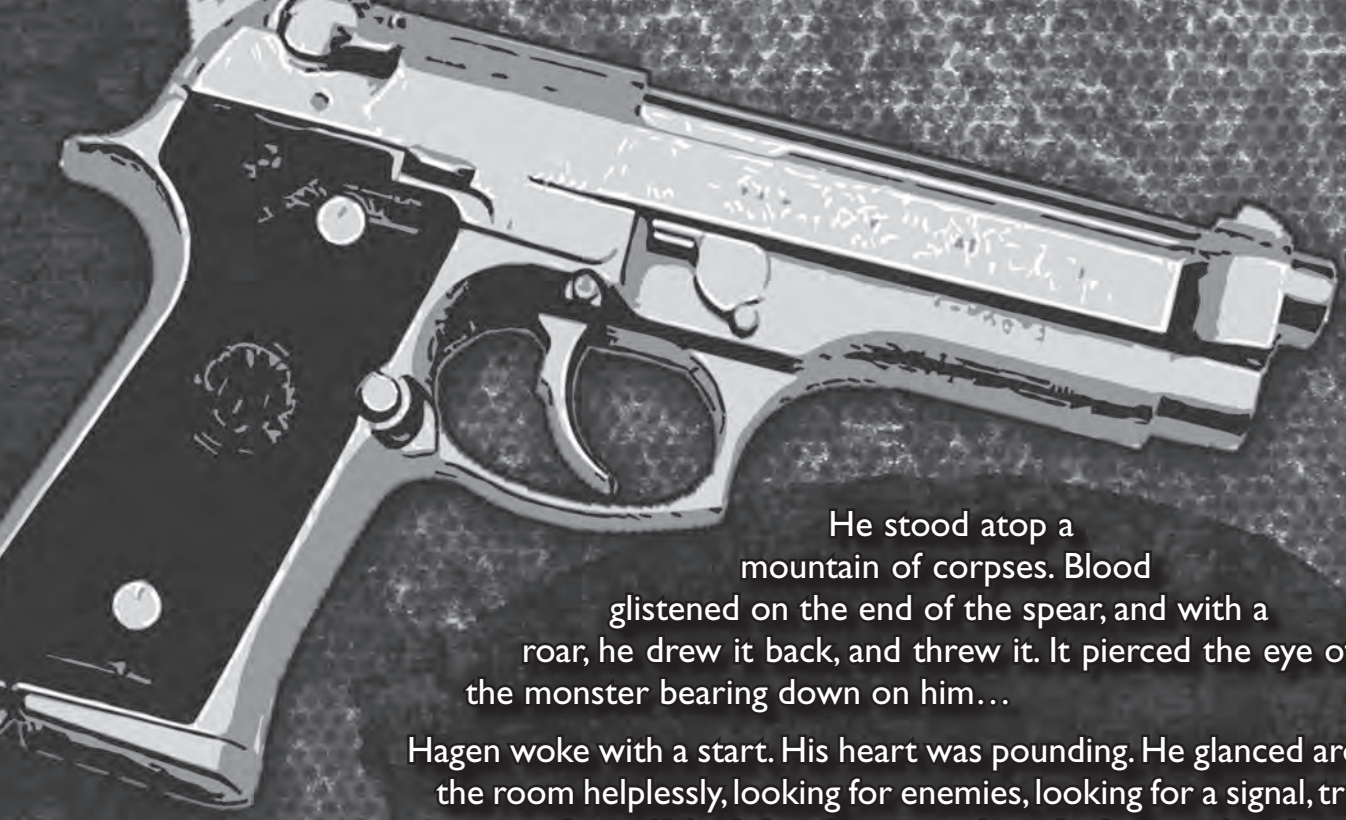


## Step Four: Fixing Things

In a perfect world, all of your hacks will mesh seamlessly and give you exactly the gameplay experience you're after right from the start. Tragically, we don't game in a perfect world, and you might find that some of the hacks you've implemented are working at cross-purposes, or that they create an unfair advantage for either the players or the antagonists. Maybe your martial arts hacks made unarmed combat equal to Weaponry in terms of damage, but the melee combat hacks you've implemented mean the martial artist character is always going for his knife anyways. Maybe a clever player found a loophole in one of the hacks and how it interacts with a power in another sourcebook that allows him to make a dozen attacks in a single turn. Maybe your players' characters are just too fragile or ineffective in combat, and frustration is setting in.

In these cases, you shouldn't be afraid to say the hacks aren't working and things will work differently from now on. Look at the areas where the hacks are causing problems—can a small tweak bring things back into line with what you want? Maybe a +2 bonus can be changed to a +1, or vice versa, or maybe you can add a Willpower cost to an ability that seems exceptionally potent. If the hack can't be salvaged, go ahead and discard it. You might want to consider allowing the players to make some adjustments to their characters' Abilities, especially if they built characters around the idea of a hack. A player who built his character as an easy to hit, tough-as-nails bruiser based on your use of various Health-boosting hacks might want to shift some dots around once you decide that Meat Shield is too powerful for your game.

It might be tempting to try to create "balance" when applying hacks to your game. You might, for instance, add a hack that makes the characters tougher, but then make guns more deadly to "compensate." Be careful of falling into this trap. While there's nothing wrong with adding hacks that both improve and weaken the characters' abilities, the best metric for whether your hacks are "balanced" is simply whether the fight scenes in your chronicle are exciting, fun, and suitably challenging. Don't worry if your hacks make it easy for players to defeat a group of four enemies that, by the core rules, might be a severe challenge—just send in *eight* enemies and let them go to town. Likewise, if the players are so scared of combat they run from any group of enemies they don't vastly outnumber, let them vastly outnumber the bad guys once in a while. As long as everybody is having fun, and the story is moving forward in exciting ways, that's all that matters.



He stood atop a mountain of corpses. Blood glistened on the end of the spear, and with a roar, he drew it back, and threw it. It pierced the eye of the monster bearing down on him…

Hagen woke with a start. His heart was pounding. He glanced around the room helplessly, looking for enemies, looking for a signal, trying to orient himself. And then he remembered—he wasn't in battle.

He got out of bed and walked into the living room. That dream had been different. It hadn't been him. It had been battle, but not his kind of battle. It was something out of those myths his nephew liked to go on about. There was always some hero with a magic weapon.

Hagen wandered around the house, trying to stay quiet. He didn't want to wake his daughter or his wife, but he couldn't go back to sleep.

Flicking on the light in his study, he tapped in the combination on his safe's keypad. He pulled the gun out and disassembled it. It was mechanical, pure muscle memory. He had done this probably tens of thousands of times, before going into battle.

Battle. He never thought of it that way before. He always thought in terms of missions, assignments, orders. Never "battle." Once in a while he'd refer to "active combat" or "live fire," but those were just descriptors, just terms to help tag what had happened when he was out serving his country.

He peered down the barrel of the gun. He pulled a lighter out of his desk, flicked it to life, and held it at the other end. He couldn't see any writing. "You wouldn't be able to see them," John had said—why not? Why did he see only smooth metal?

Because John was fucking with you, thought Hagen. Because what he told you was impossible. But the thoughts felt empty and deceitful, like prayer before a mission. He knew they didn't make any difference—things were the way they were.



Hagen
stood and pulled a
manila folder from the safe. Names,
dates, reports, locations, maps—everything he'd
been able to take with him after his discharge. He looked through it,
and read the reports while the gun lay in pieces under the papers. Here was the corner where an American soldier bled out. Here was the shop that had exploded just as they passed by. Here was the remains of a suicide bomber. Here was the fourteen-year-old boy opening up with an automatic rifle. Hagen remembered that one, remembered Admanksi had yelled, "Light him up!"

Light him up. What a weird phrase. Hagen put the papers back in order. This wasn't helping. The dream was still pounding in his mind, and thinking about the missions just made it worse. The screams were louder, the roar of the one-eyed giant making his ears ring. He reached down to reassemble the gun.

It was already done. The gun lay ready, loaded, cocked, on the desk. Ready for battle.

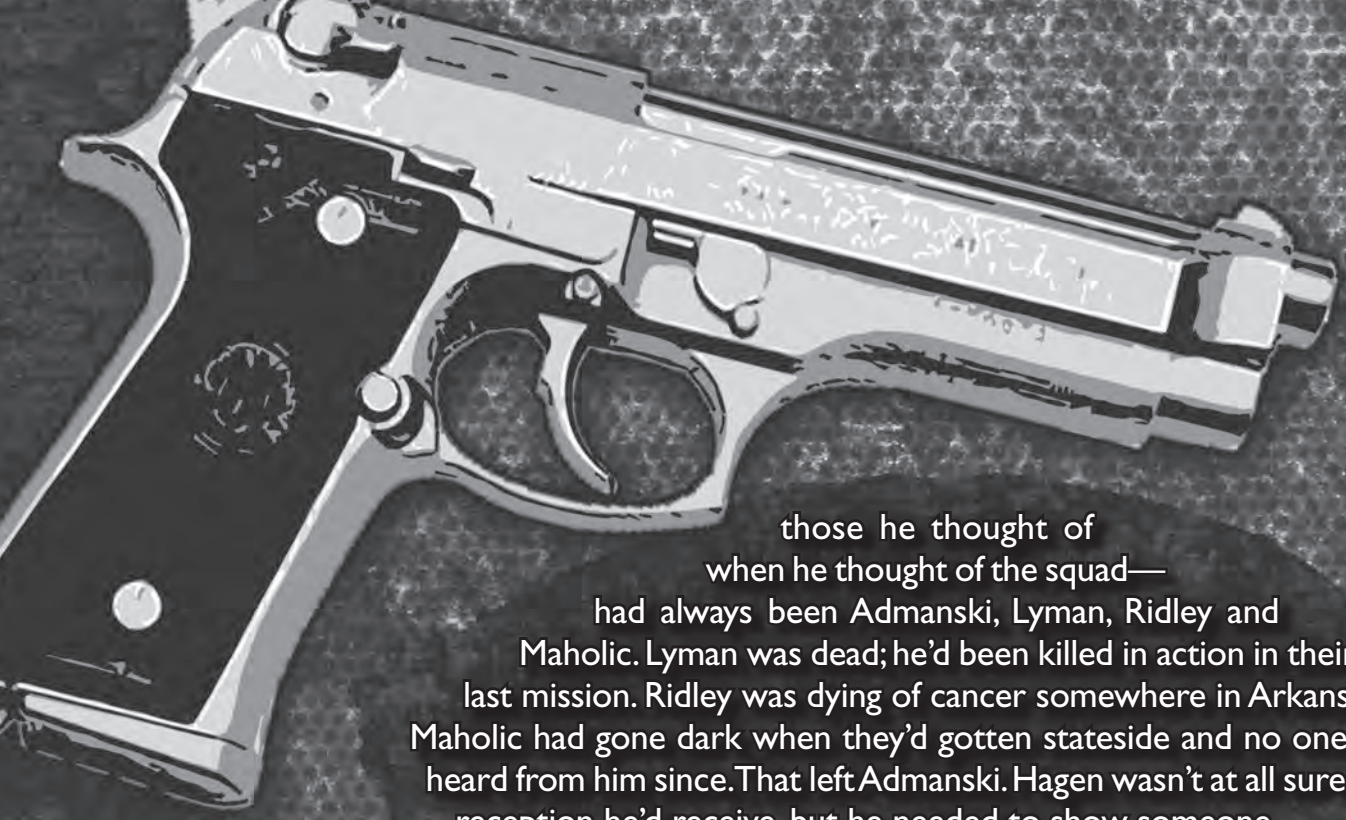


"I'm already almost there." Hagen had to raise his voice to let his manager hear him. His reception was getting weaker. "I'll be back tomorrow night." He sighed. "Christ, Liz, just reschedule. I hate interviews anyway." She said something else, but he couldn't hear it. From the tone, it was acquiescence. "Right, 'bye."

The sun was dropping behind the hills as Hagen navigated the twisting mountain roads. He knew Admanski lived out here in the middle of no-where, and his GPS was getting him there. He'd just hoped it would get him there before dark.

Hagen had spent the better part of the morning looking up the members of his squad. There had been some changes over the years, of course, as members had died, been transferred or been discharged, but the core team—





those he thought of when he thought of the squad—had always been Admanski, Lyman, Ridley and Maholic. Lyman was dead; he'd been killed in action in their last mission. Ridley was dying of cancer somewhere in Arkansas. Maholic had gone dark when they'd gotten stateside and no one had heard from him since. That left Admanski. Hagen wasn't at all sure of the reception he'd receive, but he needed to show someone.

He yanked the wheel left and pulled onto another dirt road. The roads weren't marked out here, and the GPS was telling him to turn left after a hundred yards. That would have put the car down the hillside, though. He kept a lookout, and then saw a fenced-off driveway with two signs adorning it. One said "KEEP OUT." The other one said "TRESPASSERS WILL BE SHOT." That was Admanski's place, Hagen guessed.

He stopped the car and climbed over the fence. He got only about halfway up the drive before he heard a shotgun rack. Hagen raised his hands. "Bob?"

"Can't you fucking read?" That was Admanski, all right. He never had time for pleasantries. Impatient, brusque, constantly annoyed.

"Bob, it's me. It's Wayne."

Admanski came out of the brush, still pointing the shotgun at Hagen's chest. "Wayne Hagen? What the fuck are you doing here?"

"Mind lowering that?"

Admanski scoffed. "Sure. Guess you aren't packing." He slung the gun over his shoulder. "So, what do you want?"

"I need to talk to you."

"Talk, then."

Hagen looked around. He saw the roof of the house peeking over the horizon. "Inside, maybe?"

Admanski shook his head. "Don't think so, Wayne. Not interested in this reunion." Some-

thing
about the way
he said it struck Hagen as
odd, but he let it pass.

"I want to show you something." He pulled the gun, but held it butt-up.

"Huh." Admanski looked surprised, which was rare for him. "You got a piece. Isn't that a little at odds with your new hippie bullshit?"

"I'm not here to talk about that," muttered Hagen. "Look." He popped the mag, unloaded the gun, and set in on the ground.

"OK, so what?"

"I found that gun outside the Igloo. You remember that place?" They'd gone there for shakes just after getting home. Admanski had left the next day.

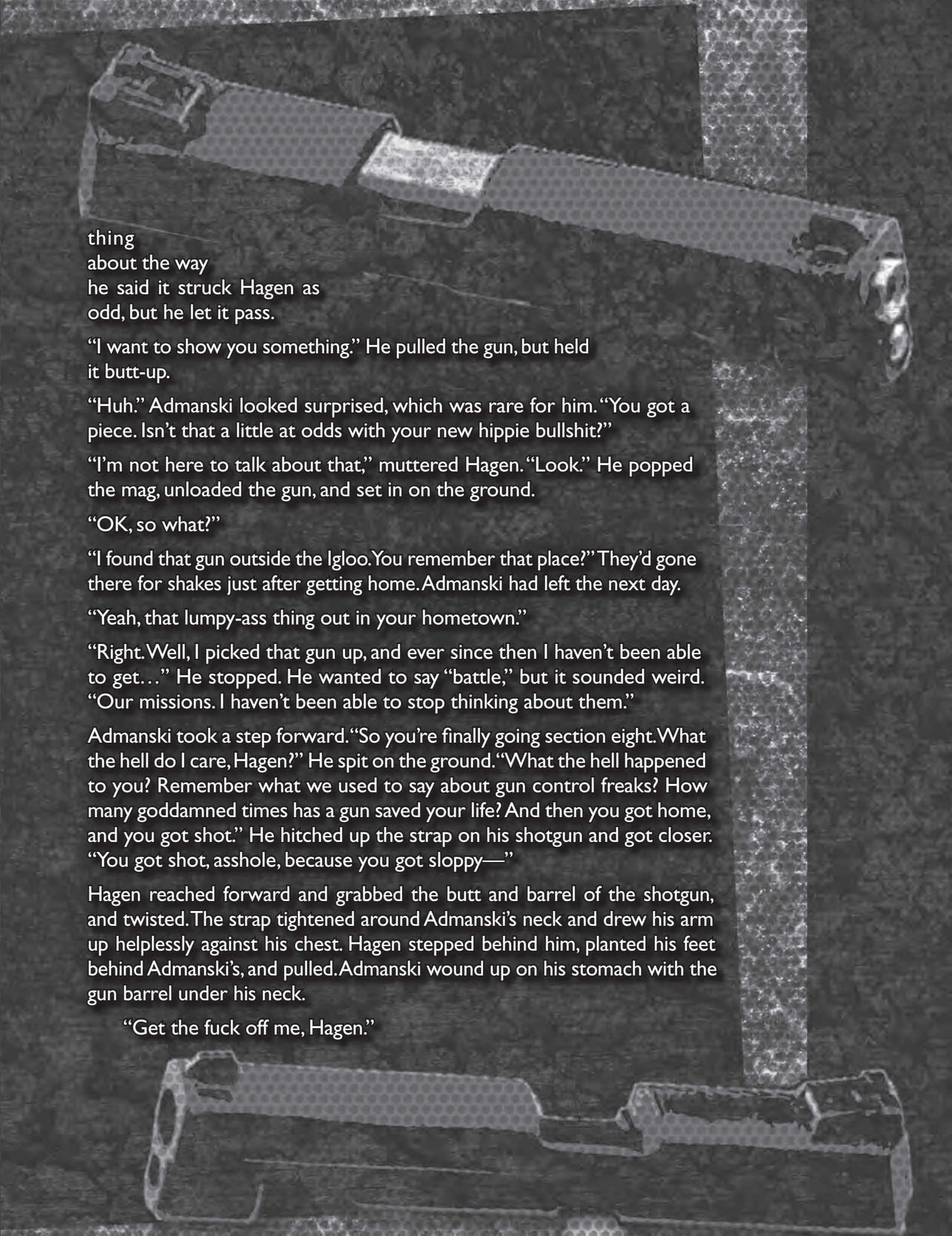
"Yeah, that lumpy-ass thing out in your hometown."

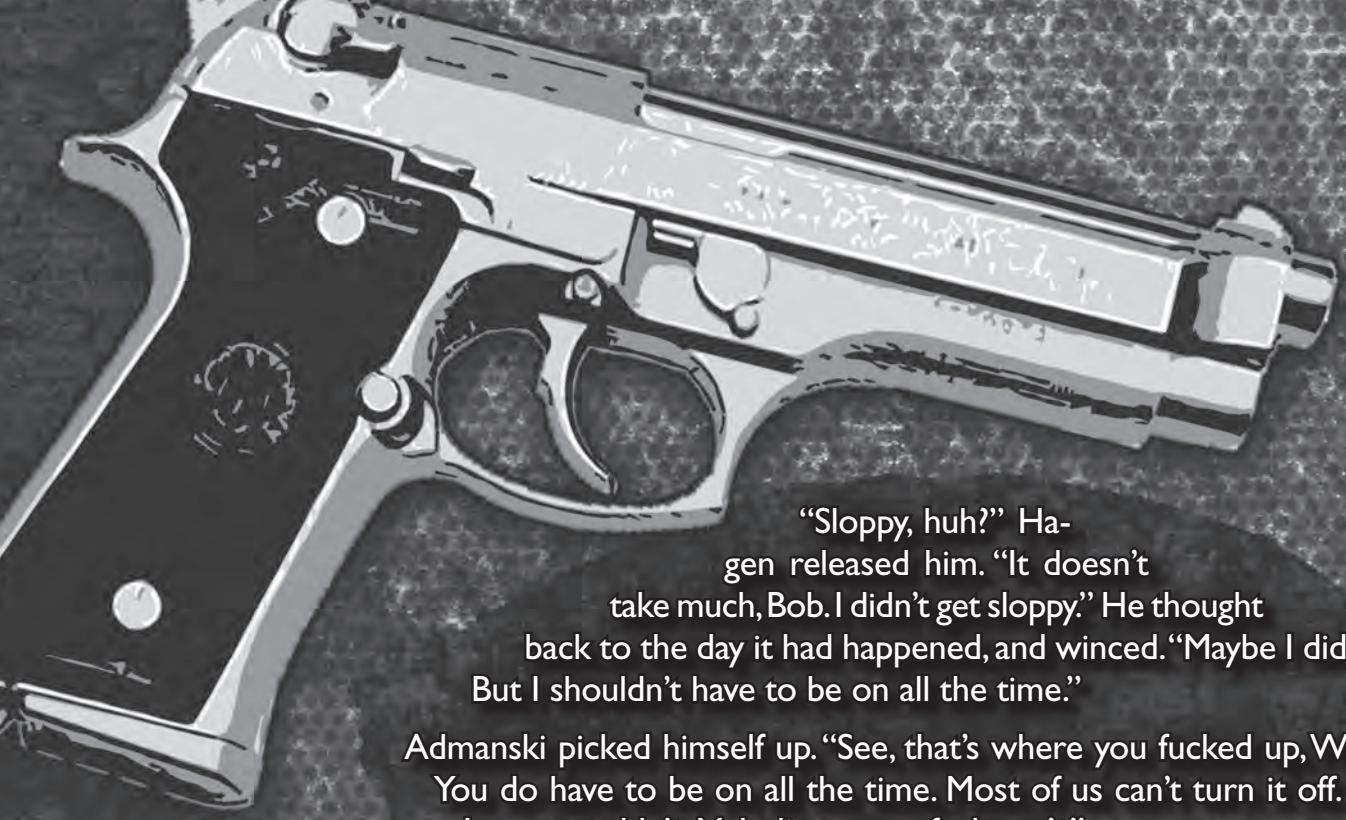
"Right. Well, I picked that gun up, and ever since then I haven't been able to get…" He stopped. He wanted to say "battle," but it sounded weird. "Our missions. I haven't been able to stop thinking about them."

Admanski took a step forward. "So you're finally going section eight. What the hell do I care, Hagen?" He spit on the ground. "What the hell happened to you? Remember what we used to say about gun control freaks? How many goddamned times has a gun saved your life? And then you got home, and you got shot." He hitched up the strap on his shotgun and got closer. "You got shot, asshole, because you got sloppy—"

Hagen reached forward and grabbed the butt and barrel of the shotgun, and twisted. The strap tightened around Admanski's neck and drew his arm up helplessly against his chest. Hagen stepped behind him, planted his feet behind Admanski's, and pulled. Admanski wound up on his stomach with the gun barrel under his neck.

"Get the fuck off me, Hagen."





"Sloppy, huh?" Hagen released him. "It doesn't take much, Bob. I didn't get sloppy." He thought back to the day it had happened, and winced. "Maybe I did. But I shouldn't have to be on all the time."

Admanski picked himself up. "See, that's where you fucked up, Wayne. You do have to be on all the time. Most of us can't turn it off. I can't. Lyman couldn't. Maholic sure as fuck can't."

"Maholic?" Hagen looked up at the house again. Something moved behind one of the curtains, he was sure of it, but it was getting too dark to see well. "He's here?"

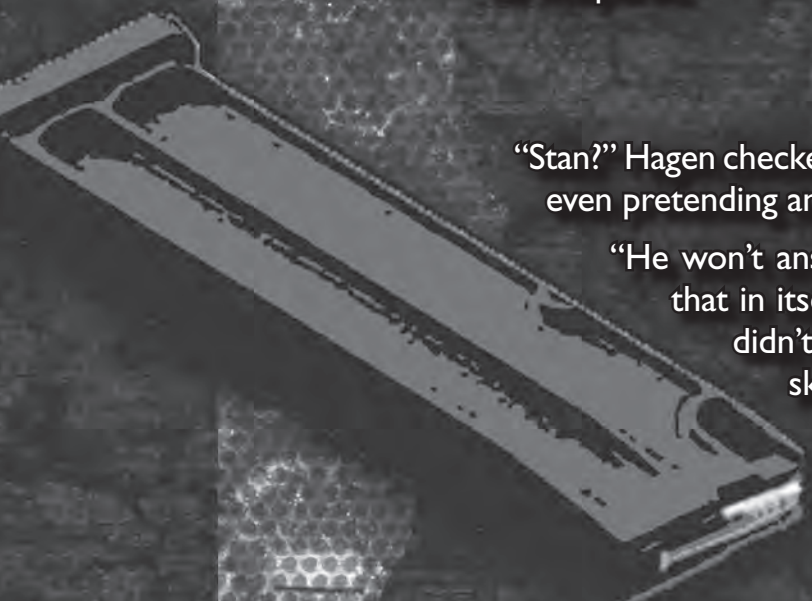
Admanski's eyes narrowed. "Get out. Walk back to your car, and go home. Go save the fucking rainforests or whatever you want to do now, but stay away from here. This isn't your world anymore."

"Bob, I—"

"What the hell." Admanski was staring down at the ground. Wayne followed his gaze—and there was the gun. The mag was back in, and the gun was cocked, ready for battle.

"See what I mean?"

Admanski stared at Hagen for a long minute. "Maybe this is your world," he whispered.



"Stan?" Hagen checked his corners, holding his gun low. No sense even pretending anymore.

"He won't answer." Admanski's voice broke slightly, and that in itself worried Hagen. It wasn't that Admanski didn't get scared; everybody did. But Bob Admanski didn't wear anything out in the open. "He doesn't talk to anyone but me."



"What the hell happened, Bob?" Dark in here. The beast's cave, though Hagen, and the gun grew warmer in his hand.

"I don't know. We got stateside, he disappeared, and then about a year ago he showed up and—"

Hagen heard a dull thud from behind him. He turned, and saw Admanski on the floor. Saliva trickled from his mouth, but his eyes were horribly aware. His hands were clenched so tightly on the shotgun that his fingers had gone white.

"I don't normally talk to other folks, but for you I'd make an exception." How Stan Maholic had entered the room without Hagen hearing him, Hagen couldn't imagine. The floors creaked like cats in heat when he walked on them.

"Stan, what's going on?"

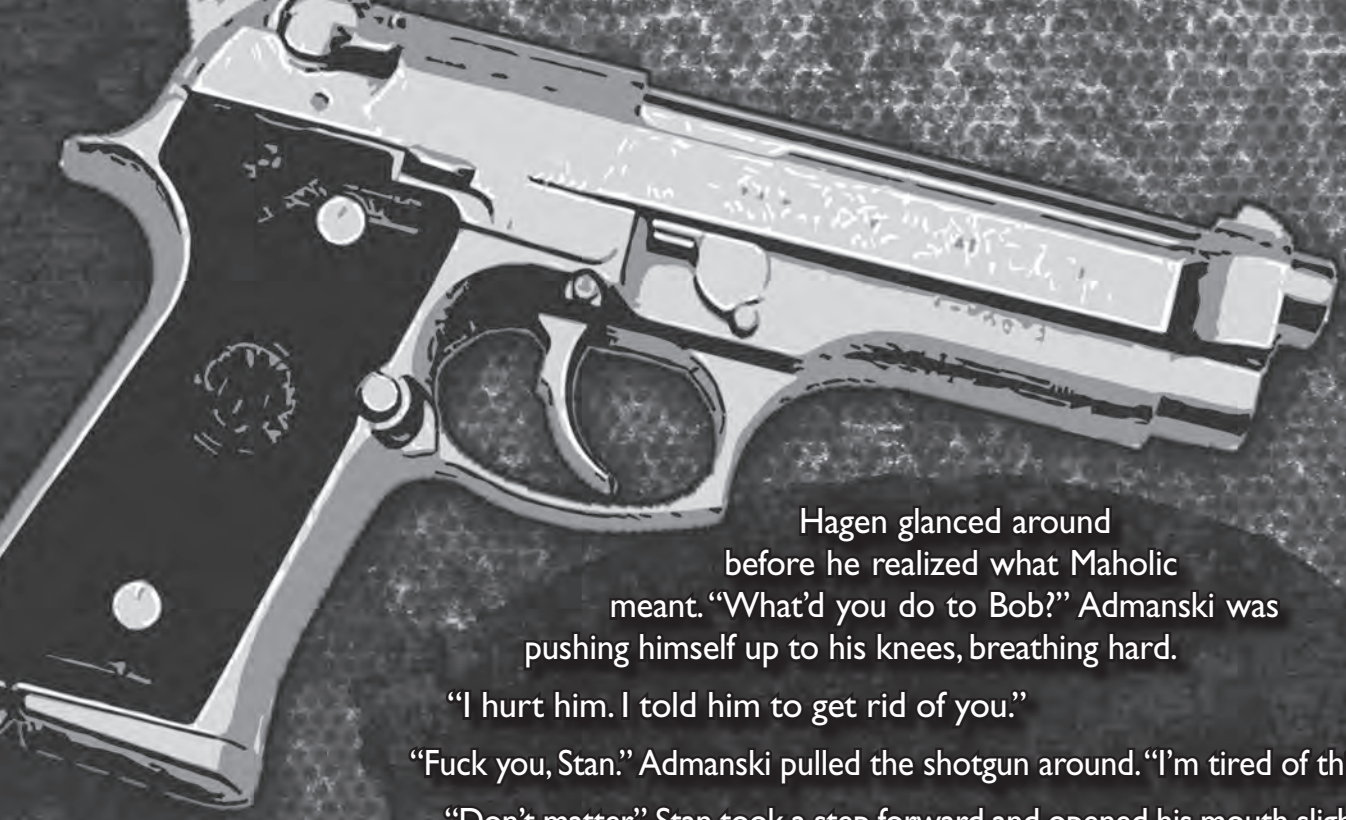
"Turn on a light and have a look. If you want." Stan's voice was different. Hagen remembered his voice as being higher in pitch than that, smoother. This was… rough, like there was distortion behind it.

Hagen reached out and flipped a switch. Stan took a step back, as if afraid. Hagen stared at him, and realized why.

Stan's entire body was covered in coarse, bristly hairs. He wasn't wearing a shirt, and the many tattoos on his body were now completely obscured by black hair—but it wasn't hair. Hair didn't move on its own. It looked like insect legs. Stan blinked, and Hagen realized that even his eyelashes wiggled on their own.

"Stan, what the hell?"

"Picked up something in that last mission." Maholic sounded almost apologetic. He lifted his arms slightly, and the skin rippled. "It got into me. I tried to keep it where it was, but you know. I only got so much room in here."



Hagen glanced around before he realized what Maholic meant. "What'd you do to Bob?" Admanski was pushing himself up to his knees, breathing hard.

"I hurt him. I told him to get rid of you."

"Fuck you, Stan." Admanski pulled the shotgun around. "I'm tired of this shit."

"Don't matter." Stan took a step forward and opened his mouth slightly. Hagen heard a noise like crickets chirping, and Admanski's nose started to bleed.

Hagen raised the gun. "Stop it!"

The chirping ceased, and Admanski dropped to the ground again. Admanski put a hand on Hagen's calf. "No use, Wayne. He got one into me, too."

"What?" Hagen looked at Stan in horror. Stan smiled, and his teeth wiggled slightly. Hagen felt the urge to retch.

"Thing's in my brain. I felt it go in. I feel it making more." Admanski pushed himself up to his knees. "It takes a while to get like him."

"Years," said Stan, almost offhandedly.

"Wayne." Hagen chanced a look down at Admanski. The expression on his face was blank, angry—just like Admanski always looked. "You have to—"

"I know," said Hagen.

Admanski swung the barrel of the shotgun under his chin, and squeezed the trigger. Stan cried out in surprise—and pain?—as Admanski's brains blew themselves through the top of his head. Hagen looked down in sick fascination, and saw thousands, maybe millions, of tiny, white ovals in Admanski's head. Eggs. Sweet Christ.

Stan opened his mouth again, and Hagen heard buzzing as something took wing. He saw them flying toward him. He raised the gun and fired twice, and the insects vanished.

"How many rounds you got in there, Hagen?" Maholic sounded worried.



"Enough,"
said Hagen, and the
battle began.



"Didn't expect to be hearing from you again." The voice on the other end of the phone sounded worried. Hagen figured he was right to be.

"I think you were right," said Hagen. "About the gun. But I wanted to ask you something."

"Sure," said John. Hagen still didn't know his real name.

"All those names in the barrel—they were all famous people. People with stories about them. But if what you're telling me is true, if I have to hunt down the rest of these things—"

"You're afraid you won't get your fame?"

"I'm afraid I might be wrong."

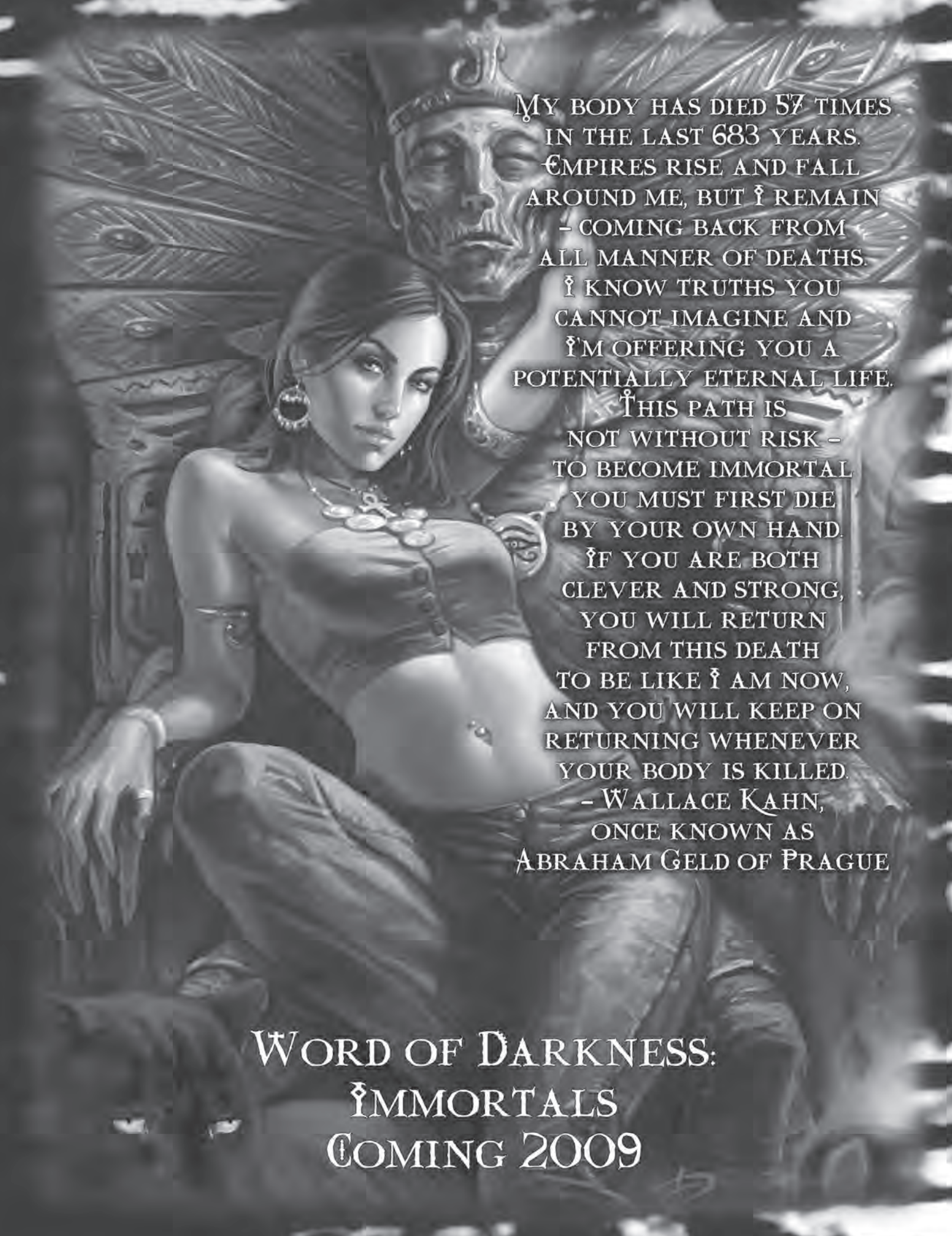
A long pause. Hagen used the time to shuffle through more of the papers. Retracing Stan's movements since he got back to the States was going to be hell, to say nothing of identifying "carriers." Hagen looked at the hideous, multi-legged things in the jars on his desk. He hoped he was right about using them as bloodhounds, otherwise he was screwed.

"You there, John?"

"I don't know what to tell you, Hagen. There were other names in there, too, names I never heard of. It might be that this is your purpose, and it might be that your purpose is incidental to this. It might be that your purpose will you make you the monster."

Hagen held up a photo. The senator sponsoring the gun control bill had thrown a fundraiser some years back. There, in the crowd behind her, was Stan. The gun grew warm in its holster as Hagen stared at the woman's face.

"Yeah," whispered Hagen. "I'd thought of that."


My body has died 57 times
in the last 683 years.
Empires rise and fall
around me, but I remain
– coming back from
all manner of deaths.
I know truths you
cannot imagine and
I'm offering you a
potentially eternal life.
This path is
not without risk –
to become immortal
you must first die
by your own hand.
If you are both
clever and strong,
you will return
from this death
to be like I am now,
and you will keep on
returning whenever
your body is killed.
– Wallace Kahn,
once known as
Abraham Geld of Prague
Word of Darkness:
Immortals
Coming 2009

IT STARTED WITH A SINGLE SEVERED HAND

STORY OF MY LIFE, MAN

"BUT WHAT YOU'VE DONE SINCE THE WAR, IT MUST HAVE AFFECTED YOU-"

WHAT THE HELL

IS GOING ON?

I'M GOING TO BREAK HIS FACE NOW. KNOCK HIM RIGHT OUT.

I WANT TO SHOW YOU SOMETHING.

YOU CAN'T KILL PEOPLE ON MY BLOCK

KEEP OUT.

TRESPASSERS WILL BE SHOT




This book includes:

- An array of artifact weapons, both blessed and cursed, each useable as the focus of an entire story.
- A new look at Fighting Styles in the World of Darkness — old styles are reexamined, and several new styles are introduced, each with new rules, histories, and characters to go along with them.
- Rules for future weapons, the high-tech, bleeding-edge armament that characters might bring to bear against the horrors of the World of Darkness.
- A whole chapter devoted to hacking apart the combat mechanics of the Storytelling System and rebuilding them so they suit the needs of your game.

*For use with the*
*World of Darkness Rulebook*

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