

THE EDGE OF MIDNIGHT



WARLOCKS AND DETECTIVES

WARLOCKS AND DETECTIVES

"I have foresworn myself. I have broken every law
I swore to defend. I have become what I beheld
and I am content that I have done right."

- Eliot Ness (Kevin Costner), *The Untouchables*

WARLOCKS AND DETECTIVES

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DEDICATION

To the various gaming groups who
helped make me what I am:

- Greg Stolze's playtest campaigns in Syracuse.
- The Friday night Vampire squad in college.
- The merry band of high school misfits who helped me waste so much of my precious, precious youth.

You all know who you are.
Thank you for being my friends.

WARNING

This book contains adult images,
themes, and language. Reader
discretion is advised.

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INTRODUCTION

"So we're just going to go in there
and kill them?"

"No, I'm going to ask them some questions.
Then we're going to kill them."

- Detectives Diskant and Ludlow
(Chris Evans and Keanu Reeves),
Street Kings

WARLOCKS AND DETECTIVES

INTRODUCTION

The Edge of Midnight universe is based upon mystery. It wafts through her streets like creeping fog, and hides behind her locked doors and shuttered windows. Pleasant facades hold untold depths, where dark and cancerous secrets breed like rats. Duplicity and hypocrisy can be found in even the most mundane life: destructive passions, sinister ambitions, past deeds long since buried but whose bones continue to rattle in the minds of their perpetrators. And beneath it all, holding the world together like a flimsy house of cards, is the biggest mystery of all: the question of what happened during the White Light and why nothing existed before it came.

But while the heart of this universe is surrounded by mysteries, so too are there men and women willing to seek out the answers. They don't content themselves with the status quo, they refuse to let sleeping dogs lie, and they view the hypocrisy which hides them all as a sin beyond all others. Some of them work for the police department, helping to hunt down criminals who believe that society's duplicity gives them license to act as they please. Others strike out on their own, working as private detectives or vengeful vigilantes to deliver justice on their own terms. Still others seek even deeper mysteries — the questions of science and physics, which break down on the fringes of understanding and allow those who pursue such ends to wield powers that could only be described as magic.

Whether mundane or paranormal, whether hunted warlock or diligent cop, those who seek answers in this world hold its soul within their grasp. Without them, the Unified Commonwealth might slip forever into darkness, brought down by unanswered questions eating at its core. With them? Well, the shadows hold more mysteries than an army of detectives can ever answer, but a few can still be found. A few more murderers may be sitting behind bars, a few more victims may heal their wounds more readily, and while hypocrisy still remains, there will be a few more voices willing to condemn it for what it is. Sooner or later, all those little answers might start adding up to some big ones.

This book is about those brave souls who seek out the mysteries of the *Edge of Midnight* universe. Whether driven by curiosity or greed, altruism or selfishness, a nosy nature or a desire to see that nice lady's killer pay for his crimes, they turn over the rocks in this seamy little world and take careful note of what crawls into the light.

The first four chapters detail different types of "mundane" detectives and the methods by which they solve crimes. The last three are about warlocks, both in general terms and in terms of the specific organizations to which they belong.

Chapters One and Two focus on police work and the official methods by which police departments solve crimes. Chapter One contains information on police organization, basic methods of criminal investigation such as tailing and surveillance, details on crime scene examination and autopsies, and information on forensics such as fingerprinting and ballistics.

Chapter Two focuses on investigation tactics of specific types of crime such as murder and armed robbery, and the means and motives by which policemen track suspects of specific felonies. It also contains a section on what happens when cops go bad and how dirty policemen operate. The National Law Enforcement Bureau is covered, as well as the ways that the Commonwealth's "G-Men" hunt down the worst of the worst. Finally, the chapter contains a brief outline of the police procedural in dramatic terms, providing a template for GMs to use with scenarios involving police PCs.

Chapter Three focuses on private investigators, those hard-working gumshoes who sell their services to the highest bidder. It covers the ways that private eyes differ from police detectives, as well as an overview of the types of cases they typically see and their unique characteristics in the U.C. The chapter concludes with a short section on alternate private eye ideas, providing tips on breaking detectives out of the clichéd trenchcoat-and-fedora mold.

Chapter Four is about vigilantes: private citizens who take the law into their own hands. Whether they adopt the dramatic flourishes of comic book figures like Batman and Daredevil, or apply more realistic methods to confronting criminals, every conceivable way they operate is covered here.

Chapter Five contains an overview on warlocks, covering how they survive and thrive in a nation which hates and fears them. It covers their history, the ways in which they hide from the law, the various enemies they face, and the secret locations where they practice their skills. It also contains a lengthy section on crystal ball squads — special branches of the police department dedicated to hunting down warlock criminals — and a secretive branch of the Commonwealth government conducting dark experiments into the nature of magic use.

Chapter Six covers the strange art of *voudoun*, a Terminus-based religion whose practitioners can sometimes use magic. It charts the specifics of their faith and culture, the differences between them and regular warlocks, and the unique benefits and hazards which their magic use entails.

Chapter Seven contains information on the six secret societies to which warlocks belong. From the fugitive war criminals of the Order of Nu to the deceptive masterminds of Déjà Vu, all of them are covered here. The history and organization of each group is included, along with a description of prominent NPCs which the GM may insert into his or her campaign.

Finally, we've included a brief appendix containing new rules, backgrounds, and professions which have a bearing on the information in this manual.

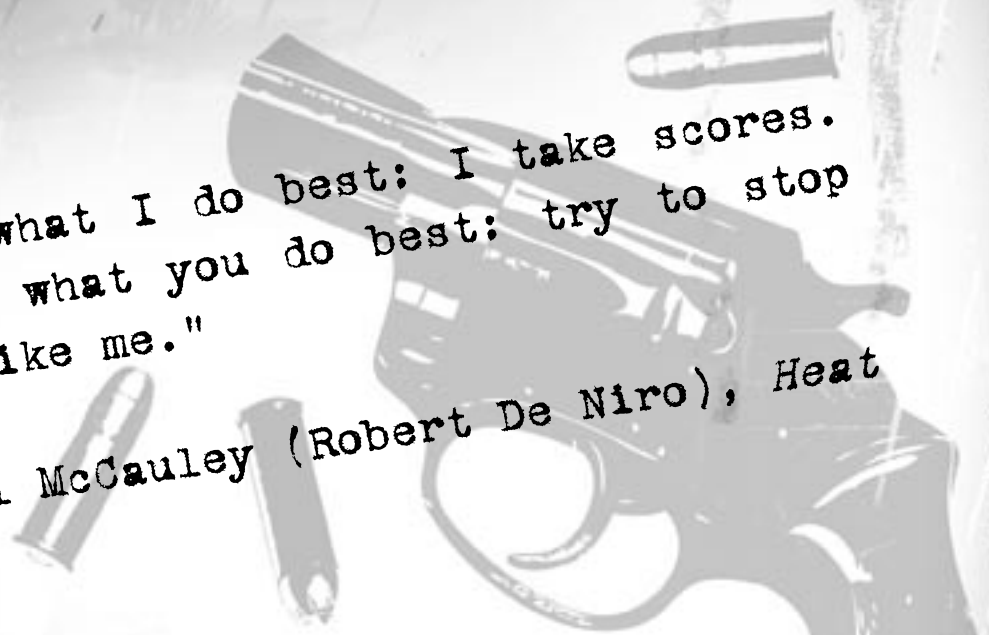
Noir protagonists will all tell you that the questions they ask are never safe. Anyone willing to hide a secret may be willing to kill in order to keep it hidden, and a long-buried truth can shake the pillars of heaven like no other force conceived. In *The Edge of Midnight*, those secrets are guarded by more than just men: for members of the Few it seems as if the cosmos itself is keeping them from the answers. But if they don't look — if they don't keep pushing until something finally gives — then life itself becomes just an empty sham.

The questions are waiting. Turn the page and see if you have what it takes to find the answers.



"I do what I do best: I take scores.
You do what you do best: try to stop
guys like me."

- Neil McCauley (Robert De Niro), Heat



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SCENE OF THE CRIME

This chapter covers the organization of local police departments in the Commonwealth, the tactics they use when investigating specific crimes, and tips on role-playing policemen as part of a *noir* campaign.

POLICE ORGANIZATION

Police departments in the Unified Commonwealth vary only slightly in their organization. Most follow a military-style chain of command, in which each officer holds a rank and work is delegated through specific units. A Chief or Commissioner oversees the entire department, overseeing various deputy commanders and answering to the mayor or city council. Beneath him lie a series of divisions or bureaus, covering either a geographical location or a particular duty. Patrol divisions are usually assigned a part of the city to cover, while detective divisions handle specific types of cases such as narcotics or homicide. Support services — covering training, communications, and clerical duties — are usually handled by their own division, as are specialty units such as riot police and canine units. (Note that there are no SWAT teams in the Unified Commonwealth; such units did not begin appearing in the real world until the late 1960s.) Each division is usually commanded by a department head, who answers either to a Deputy Chief or to the Chief himself.

Each division is further organized into units handling various duties and patrols. Geographical areas are typically divided into districts or precincts, headed by a captain and handling most crimes occurring within that area. Other divisions are broken up by the type of crime they cover, its officers assigned to units covering calls as they occur. Individual precincts usually consist of three or four “platoons,” each containing one lieutenant, two or three sergeants, and forty to fifty officers of either the uniformed or plainclothes variety. Organization within specialty divisions may be different, since such divisions often have fewer personnel and perform much more specified duties.

Regardless of where they appear within this organization, policeman are roughly divided into three types: uniformed officers, plainclothes detectives, and support staff. An overview of each type follows.

UNIFORMED OFFICERS

Uniformed officers, or “beat cops,” form the bulk of a department’s manpower. They conduct routine patrols throughout the city (either on foot or in squad cars), keeping on the lookout for trouble. They also answer calls, as when a citizen requests a police presence to either prevent an immediate crime or cap-

ture a perpetrator who has just completed one. They are the famous “thin blue line,” dealing most directly with the public and often on the front lines when any action occurs.

Each patrolman is assigned a nightstick and a firearm — usually a service revolver — while on duty. He is expected to wear his uniform at all times while on duty and to display his badge in the appropriate location (typically over his left breast: his heart). At the start of every shift, the patrolmen fall in and the watch sergeant conducts an inspection, similar to a military inspection where the department’s dress code and equipment parameters are rigorously applied. Once that is complete, the patrolmen pair off and go about their duties — walking their beat or requisitioning a car to cruise the streets.

Beat cops can be involved in a crime in one of two ways: they can either come across it on patrol, or they can answer a specific call. Coming across a crime is hardly uncommon, and can involve any number of bizarre circumstances. Perpetrators surprised by a beat patrol will usually stop what they’re doing and run at the first sign of the cops — a good indicator that they are up to no good. Victims or potential victims will often rush out at the sight of an approaching policeman, and some cops have even reported tearful murderers walking up to them to confess. Officially, patrolmen are on the streets to “provide a presence” — to deter crime or make it inordinately difficult to conduct a crime by virtue of their appearance. But within that framework, literally anything can happen. Patrolmen learn to expect the unexpected while walking the beat, and to never take anything for granted.

Answering a call is a much more specific duty and has several deliberate protocols attached to it. A call usually comes in to the station house, which routes it via radio to a patrolman in the field. The patrolman then goes to the scene to determine the situation, following a strict set of parameters upon his arrival:

- Get the information from the complainant.
- Determine if the perpetrator is still on the premises or if anyone needs help.
- Determine what weapon is involved or if there is an immediate threat.
- Determine the nature of the crime involved.
- Summon an ambulance if anyone is hurt and needs help.
- If no one is in any immediate danger, do not enter the premises. Carefully observe the perimeter, attempt to locate any entry points, and note potential exits.
- Contain any witnesses and question them for useful information. Use the time wisely, and do not rush into any situation on a whim.
- Request back-up and prevent passersby from approaching the site.

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- If a supervisor arrives, he will assume command. If the building's owner or similar party is available, he will be summoned. Once all personnel are in place, the supervisor or senior officer will determine the best way to enter.

The watchwords here are "care" and "caution." The patrolman is expected to serve as the initial investigator to the crime: gathering as much information as he can and not hindering the work of any detectives or specialists who may follow. Gathering information is paramount, and no officer should charge in until he has observed the situation and has a chance to get his bearings. Entering the crime scene — even if there is no apparent danger — may destroy important evidence or otherwise compromise the department's ability to do its job. Without knowing where the exits are, an officer can't prevent a perpetrator from escaping, and wandering in without knowing what's waiting for him is a good way to get killed. The procedure is in place to keep the situation in hand, and to respond to trouble without making it worse.

Of course, such procedure is designed for ideal circumstances, and sometimes the patrolman will not have the luxury of taking his time. If the perpetrator is present, the officer can arrest or detain him. If the perpetrator attempts to flee the scene, the officer may give pursuit. If someone is hurt, the officer can radio for medical help or otherwise attempt to get him out of danger. Securing the safety of everyone at the scene is the officer's first priority. Once that is complete, then he can go about gathering information, cordoning off the site, and generally asserting control.

Once the situation has resolved itself, the first officer to arrive on the scene must usually file a report. He may also be called upon to testify in court should the situation result in an arrest. Such files are kept on record (usually at the officer's precinct) for use in any subsequent investigation.

DETECTIVES

While uniformed police officers serve as the first response to a given situation, detectives are the follow-up punch. They conduct in-depth investigations into crimes whose perpetrators are not immediately apparent, hoping to follow the trail of clues that leads them to their man. While patrolmen make the vast bulk of initial arrests, detectives make the majority of subsequent arrests — that is, those arrests which take place well after a crime has been committed. In order to become a detective, an officer must have at least three years on the force and a record which qualifies him for promotion. Detectives rarely wear uniforms except on formal occasions, though they are expected to carry their badges with them at all times.

Detectives in the U.C. are either assigned to a specialized unit dealing with a particular crime, or else to a given precinct, in which case they handle any crimes which fall into its jurisdiction. A list of typical specialized units follows:

- **Homicide:** includes investigations of first-degree murder, crimes of passion, and voluntary and involuntary manslaughter.
- **Robbery:** includes investigations into various forms of burglary as well as armed robberies.
- **Vice:** includes investigations into the various "victimless" crimes: gambling, numbers running, prostitution, and the like.
- **Narcotics:** includes investigations into all levels of drug trafficking, from smuggling to distribution and sales. In most U.C. cities, a specific narcotics unit is a very recent creation.
- **Fraud:** includes investigations into all manner of white collar crime, as well as confidence games and financial scams.
- **Magic:** or "crystal ball squads," includes investigations into any crime which has been committed through the use of magic (see page 114 for more on crystal ball squads).
- **Internal Affairs:** includes investigations into officer-related crimes or cases of corruption within the police department itself (see page 55 for more on internal affairs).

Detectives assigned to such units generally work out of a centralized locale — police headquarters — and investigate cases throughout the city. The sheer number of cases which take place in most cities means that they can't handle everything, however. Anything which doesn't land on their plate falls to the precinct where the crime occurred. Each precinct has a squad of detectives, who work the cases in their jurisdiction. Unlike their specialty division cohorts, they must be prepared to pursue investigations on a variety of different crimes, from robbery to homicide to local graft and vice operations. Many of them complain about the specialty divisions within their city, claiming that they cherry-pick the best cases, and leave the remainder for the precinct dicks to slog through. The exact disposition of a case is decided early on, when the call is first received; the supervisor or senior officer assigns a detective to the case, who is then expected to follow the investigation through to its logical conclusion (either an arrest or an "unsolved" label). Most departments have at least a modicum of rules to determine which division takes over a given case.

A detective's job usually starts with an answering call, when a uniformed officer has secured a crime scene. Unless the case is particularly extraordinary, the perpetrator will not be apparent (obvious suspects having been pursued and hopefully arrested without requiring a detective's presence). If the patrolmen have done their job, then the scene is untouched and ready to be examined (see page 19 for more), pertinent witnesses have been located, and the situation is under control. The better the patrolmen act, the easier the detective will be able to do his job.

The detective's first step is to examine the scene for any clues. He interviews witnesses, takes written statements, and begins formulating theories on who may have committed the crime and why. From there, he conducts a follow-up investigation: gathering evidence, interrogating witnesses, and narrowing down the list of suspects. He often works closely with

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the district attorney's office, to make sure than any evidence collected will be admissible in court. Finally, he prepares any necessary search warrants, makes any follow-up arrests, maintains case files and other clerical responsibilities, and testifies in court should the case require it (and proceed that far). Further details on the specifics of investigative work can be found later in this chapter.

Detective work is a long and often thankless task. The responsibility detectives take on in the performance of their duties is huge, and usually requires a monumental amount of work. They must possess a wide array of skills — street smarts, legal savvy, forensic knowledge, and psychology, just to name a few — and if they don't do their job right, guilty criminals will walk free. The only up side to their job is that violence rarely comes into play — usually only if a nailed suspect tries to shoot his way out of trouble. Beat cops, with their constant exposure to the streets, are far more likely to be attacked than detectives.

SUPPORT STAFF

Support staff on a police department includes all personnel not involved in either patrol duties or criminal investigation. They include such mundane positions as secretaries and instructors at the police academy, but also lab technicians, medical examiners, and other experts whose knowledge can be vital to solving a crime. Riot police, canine units, and similar specialty groups serve in a support capacity as well, helping to contain large-scale unrest or bring their particular skills to bear in a case which requires them. Their ranks also include those not directly employed by the police department, but whose duties often coincide with the police, such as district attorneys and psychologists called in to evaluate suspects. They fall roughly into the following categories:

- **Clerical/Records.** Clerical personnel are responsible for maintaining the ocean of paperwork that every police department generates. Mug shots, arrest reports, evidence reports, coroner's examinations, interrogation transcripts, personnel assignments... everything needs to be organized and filed for possible referral later. Every precinct usually has a clerical officer who keeps track of its records and makes sure all of the reports are on file. Senior officers — captains and above — often have secretaries as well, who handle the clerical duties for their particular office.
- **Radio Dispatchers.** Dispatchers man the phones at the police station, and also coordinate the actions of various officers through the radio. They are essentially specialized operators, handling the communications duty for the depart-



ment. There is no 911 service in *The Edge of Midnight* (it was not implemented in our world until 1968); those wishing to report a crime must call the nearest police station and rely upon dispatchers to convey the information to officers in the field. In addition to sending units to the scene of a crime, radio dispatchers take reports from patrol units, coordinate foot and car chases, dispatch lookout bulletins and all points bulletins, maintain written logs of all calls received, and keep track of the location of every officer in the precinct. Through their efforts, everyone stays connected with each other, and members of the public seeking help can expect a swift and efficient response to their call.

- **Riot Police.** Riot police are a specialized group of police officers reserved for large-scale upheavals. They are heavily trained in military-style techniques and often employ the use of non-lethal weapons such as rubber bullets and water cannons. Their job is to break up large, violent crowds and to prevent the destruction of life and/or property. Riot police typically wear protective clothing and helmets, and carry metal shields to protect themselves from weapons and thrown objects. Batons are the preferred form of weapon, as are pepper spray canisters, shotguns filled with non-le-

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thal ammunition, and the like. Despite their stated purpose of pacification without the use of lethal force, many riot squads have been accused of excessive brutality in their tactics, and some have even started riots by turning on initially peaceful rallies and demonstration. The rise of gaunt communities has often exacerbated this trend, as riot police must use increasingly extreme means to disrupt crowds of angry leatherbacks.

- **Canine Units.** Canine units work with dogs to perform a variety of duties. Police dogs are used to track fleeing criminals, to sniff out drugs or explosives, and even to help pacify crowds in conjunction with riot police. With their superior sense of smell, they can provide invaluable assistance which no two-legged officer can hope to match. Each dog has a trainer, who is responsible for its behavior, and who guides it through its various duties. Trainers often develop a close bond with the animals under their control, and consider them “partners” as much as any human officer.
- **Lab Experts.** Lab personnel travel to the scene of the crime and conduct a thorough examination for any bits of evidence which may have been left behind. They photograph the area, take pertinent measurements, collect evidence such as fingerprints and bullet casings, and prepare such evidence for its presentation in court. In addition to field work, they spend long hours in the police lab, working to match a particular bullet with the gun that fired it or examining tire tracks to place the make and model of the car that made it. Their work in *The Edge of Midnight* is crude by today's standards, but still provides important links between the perpetrator and his crime. A detailed discussion of the type of lab work these experts perform may be found starting on page 24.
- **Medical Examiners.** Medical examiners work out of the county coroner's office, examining bodies in order to discern the cause of death. Most have degrees in pathology, and some have more general medical experience at well. They pronounce the body dead at the scene, arrange for its transport to the morgue, perform autopsies to determine the cause of death, and make formal reports to present in court if necessary. In addition to criminal cases, medical examiners investigate cases of accidental death, so as to determine the cause and thus rule out the possibility of foul play.
- **Psychologists.** In *The Edge of Midnight*, psychologists are rarely attached to police departments full-time. Most of them either work for the prison system or in mental institutions. They are brought in to assess the mental condition of suspects, victims, or witnesses, and to provide their expertise in court. They help determine whether a defendant is capable of understanding the charges against him (and is therefore fit to stand trial), and assess the personality or inclinations of various people involved in a given case. They perform a lot of tests, used to gauge a subject's intelligence, personality, emotional health, and even motor skills. Their

work can form the basis for a defendant's insanity plea... or close that possibility off for good. Psychologists can help explain the motives behind a given crime, as well as helping witnesses recall key details which may lead to the perpetrators. In recent years, the “profiling” work of Nova Roma's Valerie Garner promises to open up an entirely new avenue of psychological police work (see page 58 for more information).

- **Emergency Medical Teams.** Paramedics and ambulance drivers are rarely involved in police work directly. They arrive at the scene of a crime to provide aid to anyone who has been hurt or injured, transport the wounded to the hospital, and take the dead to the morgue for further examination. Their work sometimes makes them valuable witnesses however, and the police will consult with them if they feel their experience will shed light on a given case.
- **Attorneys.** District attorneys are responsible for building and trying cases against accused criminals. They work with the police department to ensure that the case is built in a legal manner, and that all evidence collected may be properly presented in court. They also work with detectives in the proper serving of search warrants, and — assuming an arrest is made — will try the accused in court. Their work puts them in close proximity with investigating detectives, and they cannot do their jobs unless the police are diligent about doing theirs.

Other support services may exist depending upon your campaign.

METHODOLOGY

This section discusses the various tactics which the police use to apprehend criminals. They apply to general investigations of any number of crimes; more specific investigative methods covering particular crimes can be found in Chapter Two.

SURVEILLANCE AND SEARCHES

Many times, police involved in building a case against a given suspect will follow him surreptitiously, monitor and record his activities, and gather evidence in a way which doesn't arouse his suspicions. Surveillance and legal searches are an invaluable weapon in the fight against crime, and a routine part of countless law enforcement cases.

Surveillance consists of monitoring a given suspect and/or recording his actions in the hopes of observing illegal activity. It may involve tailing a suspect through his daily routine, setting up stakeouts to monitor his home or place of business, bugging his phone or other area with a listening device, or even going undercover to impersonate a fellow criminal. Surveillance in the U.C. is quite different than in the world

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today. Many of the technological advances which make observation so easy to today's law enforcement simply don't exist, and those that do are clunky and unreliable. Most U.C. police departments resort to old-fashioned methods of following and watching, and leave the gadgets to science fiction movies.

In the U.C., conducting surveillance typically requires a court order, similar to a search warrant (see page 15). The police must submit a document to a qualified judge describing the case against the suspect, the reasons for following him, and the specific evidence they hope to procure through surveillance. This last part often becomes a sticking point; liberal-minded judges rarely sign off on police "fishing expeditions," and will not permit the surveillance to move forward unless the police can demonstrate due cause for suspicion. Many police departments get around such issues by fudging the facts, using deliberately vague wording, or flat-out lying. In addition, many departments go forward with surveillance regardless of whether they have permission or not, hoping to present the paperwork at a later time if they find something. On the surface, the court order exists to protect citizens' rights to privacy. In practical reality, the police move as they choose and stick to the rules only as long as it keeps them out of trouble.

Surveillance generally consists of three specific activities: tailing or following the suspect, staking out area where he frequents, and planting bugs or listening devices in hopes of picking up pertinent conversations.

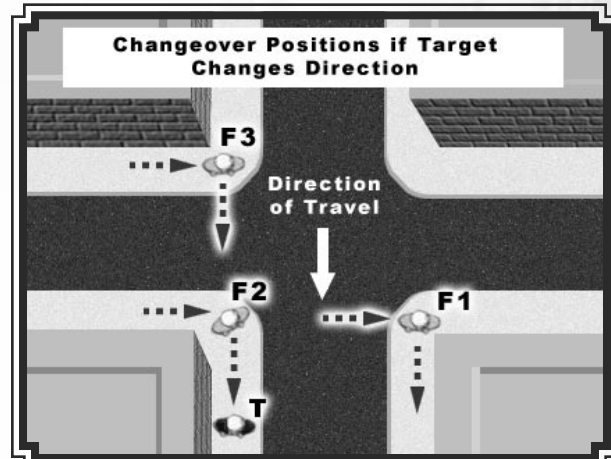
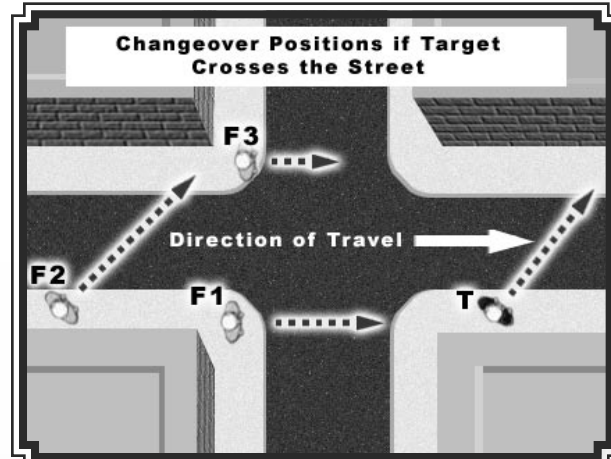
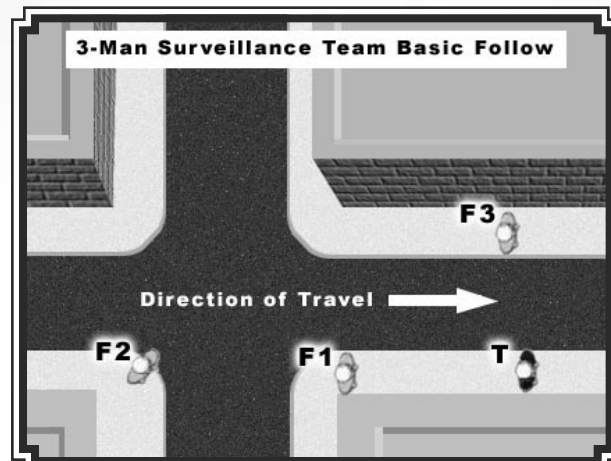
Tailing

Tailing refers to following a suspect in order to learn his social patterns and/or observe him participating in illegal activity. While police use it most often to observe specific actions (a drug deal, for example, or casing out a bank in anticipation of a future robbery), it can also provide a wealth of general information that helps shed light on who the suspect is. Police can note spending habits by watching where he eats and what kind of items he buys. They can spot illicit but legal activity such as whether he has a mistress or whether he likes to bet on horse races. If he's a suspected drug dealer, they can gather a description of his clients; if he's a known mobster, they can note his underlings or superiors. Even if the suspect's life is totally above board, tailing can provide a good overview of his habits, and allow the police to spot any deviations in his usual activity. Every officer worth his salt knows how to tail a suspect without drawing attention to himself.

Three-Man Tailing

When tailing a suspect on foot, most U.C. police departments like to use teams of three men, who periodically rotate their position to avoid detection. The first tailer will stay behind the target, keeping him in view at all times without drawing undue suspicion to himself (position F1 on the charts to the right). The second tailer remains farther back — keeping the first tailer in view but not necessarily the target (position F2). The third tailer will walk on the opposite side of the street, keeping parallel with the target and moving at the same speed (position F3). If the target crosses the street, then the first and third tailers swap their positions — with the third tailer now taking up position F1 and the first tailer now taking up

position F3 — while the second tailer now crosses the street and keeps the third tailer in view. If the target changes direction — turning left or right down another street — then the second tailer takes up the position of the first, now moving to keep the target in sight. The first tailer crosses the street and moves parallel to the target (taking up position F3) while the second tailer begins following the target directly (position F1). The third tailer then keeps the second tailer in constant view, taking up position F2.



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Within this configuration, the police will take careful note of everything the target does, where he goes, and who he speaks to. If he stops in a store, they will note what he buys and whether he is known to the shopkeeper. If he makes a telephone call, they will note how long he spoke and try to get the number he dialed (one of the tailers will take up a position in an adjacent phone if possible). If he gets into a vehicle, they will note the make, model, and license number, and then run a check on it. Anyone he speaks to or communicates with will be noted and identified, if possible. All of which may help lead the police to whatever they are hoping to find.

If properly deployed, a three-man tail provides an immense amount of flexibility while keeping the target in sight at all times. If one officer is spotted, he can easily duck out of the configuration and be replaced by another. If trouble appears, the officer has back-up in the immediate vicinity. And while each officer must take care to note and remember everything he sees, a three-man tail can be set up on extremely short notice with an absolute minimum of equipment. The only serious issues are spotting the target to begin with and making sure he doesn't realize he's being tailed (see "Spotting a Tail," below).

One-Man Tailing

One-man tailing is considerably more difficult than other forms of tailing. It usually happens either when a lone officer spots a suspect and follows him in hopes of immediately uncovering a crime, or when the police department in question lacks the resources to devote to a proper three-man tail. It follows a simple procedure — the officer spots the target and follows him while trying not to be seen — but entails infinitely more risk than a three-man tail. For starters, there are no redundancies in place; if the officer is spotted or loses his quarry, the game is up. Similarly, if the target confronts the officer, there is likely no one around to support him... which could end badly if the target has no problems killing a cop. Nor can the officer observe the target for extended periods of time, since the longer the tail goes on, the greater the chances of being spotted become.

Accordingly, officers on one-man tails opt for caution over detail. They hope only to observe the most general facts — where the target goes, who he sees, etc. — and leave anything more specific for later. They always tailor their pursuit to environmental conditions: gauging the distance from the target based on how crowded the streets are, taking note of how quickly the target walks, and so on. If trouble appears, a one-man tail always calls for back-up, and while an officer may be compelled to act alone if innocent lives are at immediate risk, few will charge into a dangerous situation without at least reporting in and waiting for the cavalry to arrive.

Vehicular Tailing

Vehicular tailing is, to quote one noted policeman, "a giant pain in the ass." It consists of following a target while he is in an automobile or some other form of transportation. It follows the same basic patterns as tailing on foot: officers will usually employ multiple vehicles instead of one, with each vehicle switching off the lead position in order to deter suspi-

cion. Each vehicle is as nondescript as possible (the ubiquitous "four-door sedan" popularized in movies and fiction) and will contain at least two plainclothes officers. The passenger will observe the target vehicle while the driver will pay attention to traffic conditions and try to keep from being spotted. If the target leaves his vehicle, one team will proceed to follow him on foot, while another will remain near the target's car in case he returns.

The difficulty with vehicular tailing comes from the unpredictability of traffic, and the comparative ease of spotting the tailing vehicle. Drivers tend to be more aware of their surroundings than pedestrians, and can more readily spot a familiar-looking vehicle in their rearview mirror. Policemen who engage in vehicular tails must have an intimate knowledge of the local streets, lest they lose sight of their target and need to catch up with him by taking an alternate route. And perhaps most distressingly, if the target spots them, then a chase may ensue... and while the police must keep the safety of nearby drivers and pedestrians in mind, the target may have no qualms about running someone over in order to escape.

Despite the dangers, vehicular surveillance is often a practical necessity. A target traveling by car or boat simply cannot be followed on foot, and vehicles provide the added benefit of carrying multiple officers in case of trouble. Before beginning a vehicular tail, departments will very carefully gauge the risks involved, determine whether a vehicle is necessary, and select officers with a knack for driving and a knowledge of departmental safety procedures. They will maintain specific pick-up points, and even change vehicles mid-tail if it helps disguise their presence. When trouble comes, departments prefer their drivers to call for back-up rather than engaging in reckless chases through the streets. Losing a suspect is bad, but endangering citizens or instigating massive traffic accidents costs a lot more than a blown tail.

Spotting a Tail

Spotting a tail generally takes experience and an unusual awareness of one's surroundings. While career criminals are naturally suspicious, it takes more than a few backward glances to spot a trained tail. It usually remains little more than a feeling: a paranoid suspicion that a face or a form has lingered in the surroundings a little too long. Smart criminals, however, have often learned the hard way to look for tailing officers, and take steps to spot anyone who might be taking too keen an interest in their affairs.

Observed targets rarely let on when they've spotted their pursuer. While nervous crooks may take flight or panic, more level-headed targets can keep their cool long enough to formulate a plan. If they run, they do so at a time of their choosing — usually when the tailer cannot conveniently pursue. If they try to shake a tail, they do so quietly, without letting the tailer know that he's been spotted. At the very least, they can lead their pursuers far away from their intended destination, drawing them into a dead end or focusing their attention on a location which has no bearing whatsoever on the case.

Even so, all but the most careful targets betray certain signs that they're on to their pursuers, and canny officers are trained to spot them in the course of a pursuit. While it may

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not salvage the blown cover, it still gives the police enough time to formulate a counter-plan, or even to move on the target if they have probable cause to do so. Some of the tell-tale signs include:

- The target constantly looks over his shoulder, or scans the crowd around him.
- The target makes unexpected changes in direction: retracing his steps or crossing the street for little apparent reason.
- The target repeatedly stops to window shop (he's usually watching for signs of pursuit in the reflection of the glass).
- The target ducks into buildings with little warning, and emerges from an exit other than the one he came in through.
- The target refrains from stepping onto buses or subway trains until the last possible instant, or makes multiple stops along a bus or subway line.
- The target removes his jacket or hat, or otherwise changes his clothes.
- The target drops a piece of paper or similar object, then watches to see if anyone picks it up.

If an officer notices these or any other countless signs that he has been spotted, he will usually signal for the three-man rotation to switch. Hopefully, the appearance of a new lead will help assuage suspicions, and even give time for the spotted officer to be switched in favor of a new tailer if necessary. Otherwise, there's nothing for it but active pursuit, apprehension, and interrogation. The tail is blown and future tails must be planned with the knowledge that their suspect is now on guard.

Stakeouts

A stakeout consists of one or more officers monitoring a given locale for signs of suspicious activity. They may be observing the locale for a specific individual, because general criminal activity may be taking place there, or because a specific crime is anticipated there and the police hope to catch the perpetrators in the act. Stakeouts generally operate in shifts and utilize at least two officers per shift.

Like surveillance tails, a stakeout requires a court order, signed by a judge and stating both the reasons for conducting the stakeout and the specific evidence the police hope to find. The specifics of a stakeout are very simple. The officers find a location where they can watch the premises unobserved, then settle down and keep a sharp eye out. In the movies, most stakeouts are conveniently located in the empty apartment right across the street, while the subjects all have gigantic picture windows allowing the entire neighborhood to see their activities. Police in the U.C. rarely have it so easy. If they're

lucky, they can find an available space nearby to serve as *de facto* headquarters, but even those locations almost never have a clear sight of the target building.

Instead, they need to make use of what camouflage they can in the immediate vicinity. The easiest method is simply to park a car across the street — unobtrusively, but with a good view of the area. Vehicles with shaded windows are preferred so that passersby cannot spot the officers inside. Vans and delivery trucks work well too, providing space in the back for the officers to sit and watch unobserved. If the subjects grow suspicious, the vehicle can be removed and replaced by another, and vehicles also provide the space for additional equipment (such as shotguns or heavy listening gear) which can't prudently be carried on the street.

Rooftops make another excellent place for a stakeout, providing a bird's eye view of the situation while allowing more ready observations of the building's upper floors. The difficulty with conducting a stakeout from the rooftops is first gaining access (requiring permission from the owner of the building in question) and avoiding being spotted (requiring careful placement of the observing officers). Rooftops also provide little shelter from the weather, and if the officer needs to move quickly, then getting down could pose significant problems.

In urban areas and busy city streets, stakeouts can be conducted much more easily. The observing officers need merely take up an unobtrusive position nearby, blending in with the crowds or appearing as an innocuous bystander such as a hot dog vendor or a vagrant. Safely shielded by the hustle and flow of urban life, the officers can then do their job unmolested, their true purpose invisible beneath the crowds.

Stakeout work is a dull and tedious business. It often involves long hours where absolutely nothing of note takes place, and yet the officer can never relax or let his guard down for even an instant, lest some vital bit of information be missed. Experienced stakeout officers train themselves to act on automatic pilot, noting incidental details without struggling to maintain the focus that constant vigilance requires. Even then, it's slow going, and few stakeout operations are mourned when they finally conclude. Officers on a stakeout generally use very simple equipment. Spying technology received a boost during the war, but the high-tech cameras and sporty gadgets of 21st century society are far away. Binoculars and 35 mm cameras are the norm, allowing the officers to monitor and record transactions from a distance. They must use them with care, however; nothing gives away an operation more quickly than snapping a conspicuous picture or being caught peeking into someone's window with a pair of binoculars.

Stakeouts usually serve to gather evidence, not to make arrests. Officers on a stakeout will act only if they actually witness a crime or if someone's safety is in immediate danger. Otherwise, they stay put, do their jobs, and wait until the case is ready before making an arrest. The exceptions are those stakeouts made in anticipation of a specific crime. Such operations usually last much less time than other stakeouts — the officers will take their positions well in advance of the criminals' arrival, and move as soon as they have evidence of the crime taking place.

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Listening Devices and Wiretapping

The war against the Order of Nu led to a number of technological breakthroughs, not the least of which occurred in the realm of espionage. When the war ended, numerous classified devices were made available on a wider scale, and police departments didn't hesitate to scoop up all manner of bugs and other listening devices. Today, they are a key component in countless investigations and provide invaluable evidence in a number of criminal cases.

Listening devices in the U.C. are still fairly crude by our standards, but by careful application and attention to placement, they can serve just as effectively. The most common form of electronic surveillance is called a *wiretap*, which involves planting a small microphone into a household wire such as that found in a lamp or light switch. A second set of wires is attached to the outlet's primary wire, which then leads back to the listening post somewhere nearby. Police like them because they are very direct, and if properly placed will not give them away. Dictaphones and tape recorders can save everything that the microphones pick up, revealing anything which might be said or done within range.

Far less common in police use is a *radio frequency bug*: a microphone which transmits its signals through radio waves picked up by a nearby receiver. Radio frequency bugs have the benefit of being mobile, so they can move at will, but their signal can be more easily detected and/or disrupted. This form of bug is still a recent invention, and police departments look upon it with a fair amount of skepticism. Their most common use has been with telephone receivers: placed within the phone's cradle, the bug can be used to transmit conversations and enable the police to listen in. The U.C. government also makes use of a *hook-switch modifier*, which essentially leaves the telephone receiver on after it has been hung up. It transforms the phone into a full-time microphone, allowing the police to listen in on the entire room even when the phone isn't being used. The technology is imperfect, however, and can be detected through careful listening.

More primitive listening devices capable of hearing through walls or windows can easily be installed as well. But such devices are bulky and must often be shifted as the observed speakers move, requiring an officer to constantly man the equipment. They work best in high occupancy buildings — offices, apartments or hotel rooms, where the police can set up shop next door to the observed area and maintain a modicum of secrecy.

Installing a bug or wiretap is a simple task, requiring nothing more than a Brains + Engineering roll with a TN of 5. Spotting a bug is considerably more difficult: Gut + Perception with a TN of 10. The GM may increase that TN by +2 if the roll to install it was particularly spectacular, or lower it by -2 if the subject has reason to suspect its presence. As with all other forms of surveillance, installing any sort of listening device requires a court order detailing the specific information intended to be gathered and why. The national government, however, has begun a secret series of illegal wiretaps in the last few years — ostensibly to seek out possible warlocks but also to spy on anyone they consider a threat. Local police lack the clout to push through such brazen abuses of civil liberties, and so must always get the signature of a judge before proceeding.

SEARCH WARRANTS

Most kinds of investigation eventually involve a search warrant. A search is legally defined in the U.C. as "the examination of property, possessions, or persons for the purpose of discovering illicit property, proof of magic use, or evidence of guilt to be used in the prosecution of a specific crime." As the law guarantees a modicum of freedom from unreasonable searches, the police must establish probable cause before conducting any such search, surveillance, or investigation. Warrants are issued by the courts as a way of determining when the police are authorized to conduct searches of any sort, what they are supposed to be looking for, and how broadly they intend to look.

A search warrant lists the sorts of items the police are looking for (weapons, clothing, narcotics, etc.) and each item must usually be justified as a legitimate part of the investigation. It also lists the specific address or vehicle which may

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be searched, and the person or persons expected to be found there. Generally speaking, nothing found outside of those parameters is covered by the search warrant, and thus may not be considered evidence in the course of a trial. A few exceptions exist — objects found in plain sight, for example, which fit the basic parameters of the search — but in general, the officers must limit themselves to the confines of the warrant. Blanket searches are almost never permitted, so experienced police officers become very skilled at phrasing their requests for warrants in a way that allows for the maximum amount of flexibility.

When a specific search of person or property is involved, the owner of the property must be informed, usually by the presentation of a copy of the warrant (either in person at the beginning of the search or left in a conspicuous place if no one is home). This is generally known as knock-and-announce, a common-law practice incorporated into modern U.C. law. The police must make an inventory of everything they seize and present it to the property owner upon leaving. The search must be carried out with respect for the subject's property, and nothing may be damaged or broken unnecessarily. Most searches are led by a "finding officer" (typically the detective in charge of the case) who directs the other searchers and speaks with the owner if necessary.

Cunning police departments have found several ways to get around the need for search warrants. The most obvious involves searching a suspect's vehicle or the contents of his garbage cans. Garbage left in cans outside of the property (i.e., on curbs waiting for pick-up) is legally defined as abandoned, and thus may be searched without a warrant. Vehicles have proven somewhat trickier. Recent court decisions in the U.C. have defined them as property, meaning that they cannot be searched without a warrant. However, traffic citations and other infractions do allow vehicles to be impounded... in which case they may be subjected to an "inventory inspection" which amounts to an actual search. Civil liberties lawyers are attempting to get such loopholes closed, but since they cross over into the operational safety of a vehicle, no definitive ruling has yet been issued.

The search of individuals falls into a similar gray area. The law permits such a search under what it calls "reasonable articulable suspicion" of a crime. In practical terms, it means that the officer must have concrete reasons for searching an individual (if he's fleeing the scene of a crime, for example).

Even then, the search must be limited to a "pat-down;" pockets and inner garments may not be turned out unless the officer feels a weapon or some other form of contraband, and an arrest may only be made if the search produces actual evidence of a crime. Of course, that won't stop a policeman from arresting a "suspicious character" on any number of trumped-up charges (threatening an officer, for example, or disturbing the peace), but without proof, the suspect will be released within 48 hours. Few policemen will bother unless the pat-down produces something they can use in court.

QUESTIONING AND INTERROGATION

Interviews and interrogations are a key part of investigative work, whether the case is a multiple homicide or simply shoplifting. Policemen will often tailor their technique to fit whomever they are speaking to — a grieving widow must be handled with more delicacy than a surly street gang member — but in all cases, the detectives seek one thing only: information. Any hint, any clue, any piece of the puzzle that will allow them to identify the suspect, will make the investigation worthwhile.

Civil rights in the U.C. guarantees protection from the more brutal aspects of interrogation. Police may never physically strike someone they have in custody, nor may they deprive him or her of basic comforts like food and water. Interrogations instead depend on verbal intimidation, esoteric threats (usually involving lengthy prison terms), and the promise of preferential treatment should the suspect cooperate. Interviews are gentler by design, of course. Unless the subject knows he's wanted, the officers will move more cautiously, act more politely, and naturally dispense with any physical intimidation. But at the same time, they still seek the same information that they would from a less polite exchange. They simply must use more subtle means to get it.

Policemen learn through long experience to take nothing for granted. Witnesses — even friendly ones — rarely divulge the whole truth willingly, and many have secrets or private concerns that they don't wish the authorities to know about. Accordingly, detectives approach everyone they interview with the assumption that he or she has something to hide. It may not necessarily be relevant to the case, but the police would rather they made that determination rather than the speaker.

Interview and interrogation techniques bear a slight resemblance to a therapy session or confession to a priest. The police must loosen the subject's tongue, either by getting him to relax and feel comfortable, or by making him feel so fearful that he will happily tell the cops everything in exchange for clemency. Listening becomes a key priority to the interviewing policemen — note every detail, check for inconsistencies or variations, and do not interrupt once the subject begins speaking. Most detectives seek to maintain eye contact throughout the interview; it tends to throw the subject off balance and reveal little mistakes when he or she is lying.

Similarly, policemen pay a great deal of attention to body language — stressors or "tells" which may inadvertently reveal whether a subject is lying or not. Intelligent criminals tend to get better at hiding their body language, much the way



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a champion poker player learns to hide his tells. But so too can experienced policemen spot tell-tale signs that a subject is not being truthful, and while they lack the reliability of a lie detector, they can still help the officers spot when they're being fed a line.

Most police investigators have developed a specific verbal patter designed to ferret out information. This is the famous "Mutt and Jeff" routine (aka Good Cop/Bad Cop), where one policeman pretends to take sides with the suspect against his partner, while the other policeman threatens the suspect with the most heinous punishment imaginable. While it remains a staple of police interrogation, few cops employ it so crudely. Rather, they tend to pepper the subject with questions designed to throw him off-balance. If the subject is innocent, he will usually stand up to such verbal acrobatics: his story won't shift because he isn't lying, and therefore he won't have to think on his feet to cover it up. If, on the other hand, he is caught in a lie, or demonstrates signs that he is withholding the truth, the barrage of questions will usually reveal his deception. It doesn't necessarily mean that the subject is involved in the crime, only that he has been deceiving the police (possibly hoping to hide another crime).

The routine softens a bit when the police have no reason to suspect the subject, but their technique retains a similar core. They find a way of engaging him or her — speaking in calm tones, mentioning a subject of mutual interest, and asking open-ended questions that invite the subject to keep talking. Again, they rarely interrupt when the subject latches onto an interesting line. They may steer the conversation towards productive ends (and presumably keep the initial questions relevant) but otherwise, they have no reason to silence someone willing to speak to them. The more he says, the more they can determine if what he is saying is valuable, and whether or not he may be lying.

This is especially important when the subject *is* lying, for it can help the detectives break through his or her defense. Most pre-planned crimes entail an alibi — an explanation (possibly backed up by witnesses) of where the subject was at the time of the crime and why he or she could not possibly be involved. Some alibis are very crude; others extremely elaborate involving timetables and prepared witnesses. But a rigorous interview can often reveal how sound it is. For example, the subject may repeat the same phrase of his explanation verbatim (suggesting a rehearsed speech) or shift the details under questioning in an effort to deflect the detectives' questions. Furthermore, innocent subjects rarely give away any untoward body language when discussing their whereabouts during the crime. Those with phony or pre-planned answers will likely become more flustered the harder the police keep hammering.

Mechanics for police interrogation can involve a variety of skills, depending on the circumstances. The skill check is usually contested, though the GM may wish it to be made straight in particular scenarios. Formal interrogations should use the Intimidation skill, while more genteel interviews will involve Streetwise, Etiquette, or even Fast Talk if the circumstances are conducive. Spotting a tell or other sign that the subject may be lying should require a Perception check, made against the perpetrator's Gut + Fast Talk. As always, these

rolls should be used to enhance or augment verbal role-playing whenever possible. Police interviews make for terrific character development, and should never be sold short in exchange for a few quick die rolls.

MAKING THE ARREST

The penultimate stage of a criminal investigation is the arrest: a suspect has been identified, a case has been built, and the police are ready to bring him in and charge him. Like every other aspect of police work, however, it must follow certain rules. Policemen may make an arrest immediately if they witness a crime themselves, which often happens with officers on patrol who may interrupt crimes in progress or arrive on the scene soon enough to apprehend a suspect. For lengthy investigations, however, they must usually receive a warrant for the arrest of a specific individual. Under U.C. law, suspects cannot be held by the police for longer than 48 hours without being formally charged with a crime. If an arrest is made without a warrant, it generally follows that the police have enough to charge the suspect within that time frame.

A judge may issue an arrest warrant upon receiving sworn testimony of a law enforcement officer stating that a specific crime has been committed and a specific person or persons is wanted in connection with it. Such testimony must usually entail probable cause, which is an explanation of the case against the suspects and an appeal to conduct an arrest. Most provinces have particular standards which define probable cause, but it usually consists of common-sense evidence that any reasonable person would agree is sufficient to bring the suspect in. One doesn't necessarily need enough evidence to convict a suspect in court, but it does need to be more than just supposition and conjecture. At some point, the police must have enough hard evidence to convince a judge that the effort is worth it.

Arrest warrants may also be issued upon the recommendation of a grand jury: a group of citizens gathered for the purposes of weighing evidence. Grand juries number between twelve and twenty-four members, depending on the U.C. province. They listen to evidence presented by a prosecutor and determine whether or not the accused should be indicted. If an indictment is issued, the judge will usually sign an arrest warrant immediately and the accused will be picked up with all deliberate speed.



LE SNITCH

Though reviled and despised, criminal informants remain a staple of many police investigations. Finding a suspect depends on good information, and sometimes good information lies only on the wrong side of the law. Sending officers undercover may help, but only to a certain extent. Unless they can speak reliably with members of the criminal underworld — and trust that the details they receive are valuable — a police investigation may never properly get off the ground.

The good news is that underworld snitches are never in short supply. Petty criminals looking to cut down on their sentences, gangland figures hoping to put the finger on a rival, or even garden variety weasels willing to rat out a friend for a few bucks... whoever they are, the underworld is lousy with them. Police officers often curry the favor of such individuals by looking the other way at their crimes, convincing them that they have nothing to fear if they play ball or simply bribing them for information. They particularly like using criminals on probation or those with lengthy prison sentences hanging over their heads. The threat of returning to prison can convince even the most defiant hoodlum to turn on his buddies, and the leverage can be used again and again as long as the snitch remains part of the criminal underworld.

But snitches can also be a nasty double-edged sword. For starters, the more they know, the deeper they are usually connected to serious underworld figures. That means their crimes are usually less easy to ignore, their reliability as witnesses is far less reliable, and if any of their compatriots realize that they are speaking to the police, they have a much higher chance of ending up dead. Snitches further down the criminal food chain have far less to worry about in such matters, but neither is their information as valuable or reliable. Police learn to strike a balancing act when it comes to their informants: weighing the severity of the snitch's crimes in relation to the value of his information, measuring the information's reliability, the number of admissible facts it produces that don't depend on the informant's word, etc. The better such a balance can be achieved, the more reliable the informant becomes.

Informants make notoriously unreliable courtroom witnesses, however (few juries will be convinced by one crook testifying against another). Snitches never like taking the stand, and unless the police have reached an immunity deal or a plea bargain with a snitch, they can never be sure if he might not renege on his word. Officers learn to parlay what they learn into more tangible pieces of evidence, and can thus use the snitch's testimony to augment a case rather than depend upon it for a conviction.

A snitch's reputation in the underworld is even more precarious, especially if he makes a habit out of talking to the police. Crooks understand the occasional need to let slip a piece of information in order to stave off a prison sentence. But woe be to any rat who puts the finger on their own operations, or turns in a partner who trusted him not to squeal. Organized syndicates take an extremely dim view of informants in their midst, and mobsters who speak to the police in any capacity at all are usually targeted for death. Everyone understands that rats are inevitable, but the line they walk can be thin indeed... and if they slip, the fall is usually fatal.

Serving a warrant must generally follow procedure as well. Officers must exercise knock-and-announce as they would with a search warrant — letting those at the site know that they are there and providing the opportunity for them to open the door quietly. They must inform the suspect that he is being taken into custody and tell him which specific crime he is being arrested for. Miranda rights — the warning police issue in our world informing accused suspects of their rights — does not yet exist in the U.C. Suspects have the right against self-incrimination, and in some provinces are entitled to an attorney, but the police are not required to inform them of such upon their arrest. They are typically handcuffed and led away in a squad car to the nearest precinct, where they are booked, fingerprinted, and photographed. They are held at the local jail until an arraignment hearing, where they are formally charged with the crime and bail is set to facilitate their release. At that point, the policeman's job is generally done. The suspect is a ward of the courts until he is freed, and while the investigators may be asked to provide testimony at the trial, the case now falls under the purview of the D.A.'s office.

(Information on trials and trial procedures can be found in the *Gaunts and the Underworld* sourcebook, pages 105-107.)

Of course, not all suspects are willing to come quietly. Police must sometimes prepare for a target who would rather go out guns blazing than submit to the ministrations of justice. This becomes doubly important when serving warrants in a gaunt district; the sight of a leatherback being led in chains to a police car has been known to spark a riot. If police feel that the suspect is dangerous and may put up a fight, they will go in in force. SWAT teams and special arrest procedures do not yet exist, but precincts will certainly dispatch multiple officers if they're expecting trouble. In extreme cases, riot squad members may be brought in to facilitate the arrest, especially in the case of gaunt suspects. Officer safety is the primary goal, with the safety of the suspect a theoretical secondary concern. If things go bad, few officers have a problem with brutalizing a suspect who resists arrest... or shooting him if they feel he poses a lethal threat.

Again, gaunt arrests have a nasty habit of turning fatal because of the leatherbacks' increased size and strength. Normal suspects do not generally pose a lethal threat unless brandishing a weapon, but gaunt claws, strength, and teeth can make mincemeat of an unsuspecting officer. Arresting police are far more willing to simply put a bullet in a gaunt suspect's head

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than risk injury or death with an arrest. Needless to say, the habit has not improved relations between police and the gaunt community.

As bad as gaunt arrests can sometimes be, however, they pale in comparison to the arrest of a warlock. Magic-using suspects can turn entire city blocks into infernos, and throw dozens of officers aside like rag dolls. In cases where the suspect is a known or suspected warlock, standard procedures tend to slide. Officers rarely bother with knock-and-announce, and instead try to take the warlock as unaware as possible. They stress a speedy confrontation, a rapid subdual, and if possible, rendering the warlock unconscious before bringing him in. Warlock arrests are the exclusive purveyance of the crystal ball squad, and generally at least two crystal ball officers must be present at the time any warlock is brought into custody. (More on crystal ball squads can be found in Chapter Five.)

SCENE OF THE CRIME

This section details the methods police use when investigating a crime. It goes step-by-step through the process, from when the call is first taken to the identification and arrest of a suspect. Many of these methods are used even when the suspect is known or has been apprehended. The searches involved can provide crucial forensic evidence which can only strengthen the prosecution's case against a criminal.

GETTING THE CALL: THE INITIAL INVESTIGATION

The crime scene is the single most important source of evidence upon which an officer can rely. It can help determine what happened, who did it, and why, as well as providing the first initial details of a suspect. How do the detectives proceed? In a nutshell, very carefully.

Patrolmen who first arrive on a scene are instructed not to disturb it, and to leave as much as possible intact for their superiors to examine. Once the area is cordoned off and the detectives or other senior officials have arrived, they may begin making an assessment of the scene. All officers involved step carefully and use rubber gloves as they work, so as not to disrupt any evidence. Their activities vary, but usually take place in the following order.

1) Take Photographs and Sketches

The officers take thorough photographs of the entire scene. They begin with wide photos taken from all corners of a room, followed by mid-range photos covering key aspects of the scene. In a building with multiple rooms, a mid-range photo is taken of each room to show how they all relate to each other. Finally, close-up photos are made covering any available evidence: from the body itself to blood spatters, shoe marks, tire tracks, gunpowder, and even pet droppings. Anything even remotely suspicious or out of place is photographed as a matter of course. Cuts, bruises, and other injuries on the body are of special importance, and are often photographed separately.

In addition, a sketch is made of the crime scene, noting key details and the position of various pieces of evidence in relation to one another. Distances and measurements are of key importance to such sketches, as are other relevant elements such as the position of the body or the pattern of powder marks. Should the investigators need those details later on, a good sketch may be the only way of retrieving it.

2) Collect Evidence

Once the officers have finished photographing the scene, they may begin gathering evidence. What constitutes evidence? Anything — *anything* — that may have pertinent bearing on the crime. It can be trace powders, residues, blood samples, or the murder weapon itself. It can be cigarette butts in the ashtray. It can be soap used by the victim to wash his hands. It can be cookies which the perpetrator ate and then neglected to clean up. It can be glass from the window he used to break in. It can be metal shavings from the wall of the safe he breached. It can even be a treatise on economic policy found on the bookshelf of a child's bedroom. If it might shed light on the crime, then it is identified, tagged, and gathered.

Every police investigator worth his salt carries a toolkit to be used for gathering evidence with him. The exact contents of such a toolkit vary, but almost always include the following:

- **Containers and Envelopes.** Of varying shapes and sizes. Used to hold evidence and carry it away from the scene. Paper bags are used for wet or damp items (which may rot if not allowed to dry out), and plastic bags for dry items.
- **Tongs and Tweezers.** For lifting and transporting evidence without leaving fingerprints. Getting evidence properly packaged without handling it is sometimes the detective's most impressive skill.
- **Tags and Markers.** For properly labeling all pieces of evidence once they are gathered.
- **Fingerprint Kit.** Powders, brushes, and lifting tape, used to capture fingerprints.
- **Chalk or Tape.** For marking the position of certain pieces of evidence (such as bodies).
- **Rulers and Measuring Tape.** For charting the size and distance of various objects within the crime scene.
- **Flashlights.** For illuminating dark or hidden areas of the crime scene.
- **Simple Tools.** Screwdrivers, picks, pliers, and scissors for removing or dislodging pertinent pieces of evidence.
- **Magnifying Glass.** For fulfilling pertinent detective clichés, and for examining objects more closely.

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- **Plaster of Paris.** For making molds of footprints, tire tracks, and the like.
- **Notebooks and Writing Supplies.** For making notes of anything and everything observed at the scene.

Smart detectives keep these items together in the trunk of their car, for use whenever and wherever they need them.



3) Take Prints and Tracks

As part of the process of collecting evidence, detectives will collect any fingerprints found on the scene, and make plaster molds of any footprints or tire tracks. Fingerprinting is dealt with in more detail on page 24. Footprints and tire tracks are first photographed using a camera on an immovable stand; the stand stays rigid in order to provide accurate information on the print's size and shape. Examining detectives will be able to determine shoe size and the like based solely on the photograph.

Once this is accomplished, the detective sprays the print with a shellac or a fixative. He then places a portable frame around the print, and pours in a mixture of plaster of Paris. When the mold hardens, he marks it with his name, the date, and the case number, and boxes it up for return to the lab.

4) Collect Small Pieces of Evidence

Suspects can sometimes be placed at the scene of the crime by the presence of carpet fibers, lost hair, and other material which isn't always easy to collect. Usually, when the remainder of the investigation has been concluded, the detectives will bring in a vacuum with special filters and go over the entire area with it. The filter collects hair, fibers, cigarette ash, and other pieces of evidence not readily spotted by the naked eye. When the vacuuming is complete, the filter is placed in an evidence bag and sent to the lab.

5) Collect Soil Samples

If the crime took place outdoors or the perpetrator gained entrance through an outside door or window, samples are taken of the soil outside for analysis and comparison.

6) Remove the Body

In cases involving a corpse, the medical examiners take the body away once the detectives are done examining it. It goes to the morgue where it will undergo an autopsy (see page 21 for more information).

7) Take Notes at All Times

Police are trained to take notes almost instinctively, copying down every conceivable piece of information for later use. During the examination of a crime scene, they will scribble notes constantly: observing the conditions, the ambient temperature, the address and telephone number of the scene... everything. Later, it will all be filed in the report they make of the incident. This is not only done for the sake of gathering information. Often, months or even years will go by between the initial evidence gathered and the time that evidence is used in court. Even the sharpest policeman would be hard-pressed to remember specific details — details which may prove vital to the case — after that much time has passed. Taking notes and filing it in the report creates documentation for the important facts, which the jury can take as gospel long after the crime scene has been cleaned up and abandoned.

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With luck, the initial investigation will provide some leads which the detectives can then follow. It will give them a decent idea of what took place and why, providing a basis for the perpetrator's motive and possible identity. If the crime is part of a larger pattern, it can establish the perpetrator's *modus operandi*, and perhaps help the police predict his or her next move. Few other sources are so rich in detail, or have so much potential to provide the vital bit of evidence which cracks the case. For these reasons and many more, the police view the initial investigation as one of the most important aspects of their job, and take as much time as they need to make sure everything is done right.

FORENSICS AND LAB WORK

Contemporary television and the movies are filled with details about the ubiquitous police lab, where hard-to-find clues (and easy plot exposition) are uncovered with diligent regularity. The reality in *The Edge of Midnight* is a little different. Sophisticated chemical analysis and high-tech DNA matching are nowhere to be seen. The police labs are often crude and under-funded, and the evidence which they provide is nowhere close to the near-psychoic brilliance of *CSI* and similar shows. Indeed, many labs are still works in progress, struggling to encapsulate new methodologies developed since the end of the war. But despite that, police lab work in the Unified Commonwealth remains an important investigative tool and can lend vital insight into a given crime.

Forensics is defined as the application of science as it relates to the law. It acts to help condemn or exonerate an accused criminal in court, and to lead detectives in promising or fruitful directions. Forensics experts are scientists in the truest sense of the word: patiently applying time-tested methods in order to isolate certain inalienable facts. Their fields can be medical, physical, chemical, or psychological, and they apply themselves with all the rigor of Nobel laureates. Many work in forensic science because it is a growing field, and because the excitement of helping to solve a crime is far better the stodgy atmosphere of university work. The police are only too happy for the help.

Lab work often serves to tie the suspect to the scene of the crime. If spent casings found near the body can be connected to his gun, or tool marks near the forced doorway match his crowbar, then the police have gone a long way towards implicating him in the crime. In addition, it establishes a data base of pertinent info, which makes it easier to identify elusive details in future crimes. A certain kind of dye, the grooving of a particular weapon... the more a forensic scientist studies such evidence, the more quickly he will be able to spot it when similar crimes take place in the future. Finally, lab work can illuminate details about the crime which would not be visible by simple observation: how close the gunman was to his victim when he fired, for example, or whether the victim was able to fight back. Such details can make the detectives' investigation infinitely easier and the prosecution of a guilty suspect all the more certain.

AUTOPSIES

Medical examiners are responsible for determining the cause of death, a key link in the chain of evidence which detectives are trying to build. An autopsy, or medical examination, takes place as soon as possible after a body is discovered. Autopsies fall into two basic categories. A *medical autopsy* is used to determine the cause of death if foul play is not suspected. A *medical-legal autopsy* is used in the case of suspicious deaths, such as murder, suicide, or sudden unexpected accidents. Needless to say, the medical-legal autopsy is much more thorough than a simple medical autopsy, and entails a much more in-depth procedure.

An autopsy is designed to establish four concrete pieces of information: the time of death, the cause of death, the mechanism of death (the condition, such as internal hemorrhaging or tissue damage, which the cause of death facilitated), and the manner of death (natural, accidental, suicide, or homicide).

Technically speaking, the autopsy begins once the coroner arrives at the scene of the crime. There, he pronounces the body dead, determines the ambient temperature and similar factors, and makes a few preliminary conclusions about the case. For example, he can usually tell if the body died at the scene or if it was moved from somewhere else, and deliver a general time of death based on the progression of rigor mortis and similar factors (see page 23 for more). Once the other investigators have finished their examination, the body is tagged and taken to the morgue, where it will undergo a formal autopsy.

Like other aspects of police work, the autopsy is a step-by-step procedure. The examiner proceeds carefully during each stage to ensure that no clues are missed.

Step 1: The Body is Examined

The examiner studies the external body closely, first clothed and then naked. Height, weight, and age are determined, and fingerprints are taken. The examiner then looks for any stains or marks, powder or dirt, fragments of glass, flecks of hair, and anything else that may provide information. Clothing is examined for any unusual rips or tears. The examiner checks closely under the fingernails; victims who struggled may have blood, clothing fibers, or the like embedded underneath. The genital area is closely examined for signs of rape. Every external feature is noted, from the wounds themselves to scars, tattoos, and birthmarks. The body may be X-rayed to reveal broken bones, bullets, and the like. It is then meticulously photographed, both clothed and naked, to document all parts of the examination. Once the clothing is removed, it is sent to a lab for a more thorough examination.

Step 2: Fluid Samples are Taken

The examiner draws blood and other fluids from the body. A toxicology test is performed to determine drug or alcohol content, evidence of poisoning, and the like.

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Step 3: The Body is Dissected

The examiner make a large “Y” incision along the front of the body, which allows him to access every part of the torso and stomach. The chest is examined for breaks or fractures in the bone. Then the rib cage is opened and the heart and lungs examined. The ME takes a sample of blood from the heart, which will determine the victim's blood type. Any injuries or abnormalities are carefully noted. The examiner then removes the organs one by one, weighs them, closely examines their surface, and takes samples of the tissue for further analysis.

With the chest now vacated, the examiner moves slowly down the torso, repeating the process with the lower organs. The liver is examined for injuries and then removed, followed by the spleen, kidneys, stomach, pancreas, intestines, bladder, and other pelvic organs. The examiner pays particular attention to the stomach: a close study of any contents (and their progress in the digestive tract) can help determine the time of death. A full stomach indicates that the victim ate only 1–2 hours before his death; if the stomach is empty and the small intestine full, death took place some 4–6 hours later; if food is found in the large intestine, it has likely been 8–10 hours or so between last eating and the time of death. Bodies with all three areas empty did not eat for at least 12 hours before they died.

In addition, urine is taken from the bladder and subjected to toxicology tests to determine the presence of poisons, drugs, alcohol, or the like.

Step 4: The Head/Brain is Examined

During the examination of the body, blood has drained from the head, allowing it to be more easily studied. The ME starts with the eyes, looking for tiny hemorrhages called *petechiae* which may be caused by choking or strangulation. The skull is examined for injuries or fractures. Then the scalp is peeled away and the skull is opened. The examiner removes the brain, studies it, weighs it, and samples it for later examination by the lab.

Step 5: The Autopsy is Completed

With the wetwork finished, the examiner compiles a file containing the reports of his findings. It includes any observations he has made during the procedure, evidence of external and internal injuries, a list of the examination of the various organs, photographs, fingerprints, X-rays of the body, and an opinion stating the official cause of death. The ME then issues a death certificate, and the body is handed over to the family for disposal as they see fit.



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In cases involving a crime, the medical examiner keeps in close contact with the supervising detectives, and provides a copy of his report to them for review.

VERY OLD BODIES

Sometimes, bodies come in after lying hidden for a long time or the authorities must exhume a body as part of an ongoing investigation. The procedures differ slightly when dealing with very old bodies (which are usually little more than bones), but can still reveal a great deal of information.

Getting permission to exhume a corpse is tricky. The police must show probable cause, and obtain an order from a judge. The family rarely cooperates with any exhumation request, and some will fight tooth and claw to prevent the desecration of their loved ones' remains. Furthermore, buried bodies are much harder to glean new clues from. The embalming process removed

all of the fluids from a corpse — destroying huge amounts of evidence in the process — and the natural process of decay renders injuries and other indicators indistinguishable.

The most reliable source of information from an old or exhumed corpse is the bones, which retain signs of injury and resist decay for quite some time. By examining the skull and facial bones, investigators can determine the race, gender, and general age of the victim. A person's diet can be determined by examining the teeth, while arm and leg bones can determine the kind of physical activity the body performed. Bones can also indicate the presence of certain diseases, and of course the presence of trauma or injuries may give clues as to the cause of death. The job of examining such remains sometimes falls to forensic anthropologists rather than standard medical examiners. Anthropologists have the training to recognize important features, and know how to study bones without unduly damaging them.

TIME OF DEATH

Determining the exact time of death is a difficult proposition, limited to a span of hours or even days. The sooner the examiner looks at the body, the more accurately he can state when exactly the victim died. Even before the autopsy begins, however, telltale signs appear which can help the detectives or the examiner state when the body died. They are listed below, along with a timeline stating roughly when they begin after the body has expired:

Moment of death: The muscles in the body relax and the body immediately begins to cool. The cooling process takes approximately 3 hours, though ambient temperature will affect the rate. Bodies in a warm location will lose temperature more gradually than bodies in a cool location. Flies will land on the corpse within 15 minutes and begin laying eggs in any open orifices.

30 minutes–4 hours after death: The blood in the body sinks to the lowest point, since it is no longer being driven by circulation. The upper portions of the body become extremely pale, while the places where the blood has pooled become discolored with purplish patches called *post-mortem lividity*.

2–6 hours after death: Rigor mortis sets in, as the muscles of the body begin to stiffen up. It begins with the smallest muscles in the face, jaw, fingers, and toes, then spreads to large muscle groups in the legs, arms, back, and torso. The entire process takes another 2–6 hours to complete. Generally speaking, rigor mortis in a physically fit person starts more quickly and lasts longer than for a weak or malnourished person.

6–12 hours after death: Post-mortem lividity becomes set as the pooled blood clots. The corneas may cloud over.

12 hours after death: The eggs laid by the flies begin to hatch, producing maggots.

18–24 hours after death: The body begins to discolor, following the same general pattern as rigor mortis. Patches of greenish-red spread out and eventually cover the entire body.

30–54 hours after death: The muscles have decayed to the point where they are no longer capable of remaining rigid. Rigor mortis disappears in the same order in which it set in (smaller muscles first, followed by larger ones).

72 hours after death: Gas caused by bacterial decay swells the corpse, forming large blisters across the body. Blood may begin to be pushed out of the body's orifices.

Bodies under water: Submerged corpses decay differently than those in drier conditions. Specifically, the body's fatty tissues transform into a waxy white substance called *adipocere*. Given time, it will replace every part of the body. Adipocere is much lighter than most of the tissue it replaces, and also larger in bulk; it tends to give bodies an irregular, bloated appearance (and explains why they float to the surface).

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Dental records are a vital part of examining old bodies, for they can provide a clear-cut identification of the victim. A dentist can perform an examination of the corpse's teeth, looking for fillings, bridges, and other telltale signs. When compared to a patient's existing dental records, they are as reliable as fingerprints. Of course, that assumes that the examiners know which records to examine; otherwise, finding the right set may prove impossible.

BLOODWORK

For purposes of this discussion, bloodwork includes both the toxicological testing of blood and the examination of stains and splatter patterns at the scene of the crime itself.

Toxicology reports in the Unified Commonwealth can reveal a great deal of evidence, though they lack the DNA identification techniques of today's crime solvers. The type of blood, the species from which the blood came, and the presence of alcohol or drugs all come out in a toxicology report. Forensics experts can also tell if a blood sample came from a gaunt, or whether the blood's owner has used magic recently. U.C. police stations routinely draw blood both from the victim and from any pertinent suspects they have interrogated for comparison purposes. Though they cannot match a single suspect to a bloodstain conclusively, it can provide compelling circumstantial evidence when added to other findings.

In addition, officers and experts at the scene can examine the pattern of bloodstains in relation to the victim. Careful study can reveal the source of the blood (the victim's or others), the angle of the attack, the distances and relative speed the blood flew, the number of wounds which the assailant inflicted, the basic weapon which created them (sharp or blunt), the movement of anyone through the scene afterwards, and the time which elapsed between the attack and the examination. All such details are duly reported and filed, hopefully shedding more light both on the crime itself and any possible suspects.

FINGERPRINTING

Each person's fingerprints are unique, making fingerprinting one of the most reliable sources of establishing a suspect's presence at the scene of the crime. In our modern society, most people know about fingerprinting from television and the movies; smart criminals will often take steps to disguise theirs by wearing gloves or taking similar preventative measures. In the Unified Commonwealth, however, criminals are somewhat less savvy, and tend to leave fingerprints more often. The National Law Enforcement Bureau maintains a huge record of almost 50 million fingerprints, which are available to local police departments on demand.



Fingerprinting begins at the scene of the crime, where detectives and/or lab technicians will dust for prints. They tend to focus on areas where the perpetrator most likely touched something, such as door handles or on the murder weapon. They will also check nonporous surfaces, since they retain fingerprints more readily than softer surfaces.

The types of prints found fall into three different categories. Visible prints are those made from stained or moistened fingers: a mechanic with grease on his hands will leave visible fingerprints, as will a killer who doesn't wash the blood off before he touches something. Invisible prints are those usually found on nonporous surfaces such as glass or smooth paintwork. They cannot be seen until dusted, and care must be taken to preserve them as evidence. Finally, plastic prints are those left in a soft or malleable substance such as soap or candle wax.

Gaunts leave fingerprints as well, but because of their condition, they are often more elongated than a normal human's prints. A good detective can distinguish a gaunt's prints from a normal human's prints with the naked eye.

Dusting for prints involves the application of special powders, which interact with the residual skin oil to reveal the print. The dust is often applied via a sensitive brush, which deposits it without disrupting the print itself, or via a specialized gadget called an *insufflator* (which 21st century science has rendered obsolete in our world). In addition, iodine and other chemicals can be used to find invisible prints on porous surfaces such as cloth or paper. Police departments in the U.C. often use a chemical called *ninhydrin*, which can be sprayed upon a document in order to render the prints visible.

With dusting, a specialized procedure must be undertaken to preserve the print. Once the print is revealed, the detective applies a special tape, which lifts it so that it may be transferred to a card and marked as evidence. The card is then taken to the lab, analyzed, and compared to the existing database to see if there is a match.

All fingerprints fall into three broad categories: loops, arches, and whorls. A loop is a pattern which starts on one side of the finger, then loops around and terminates on the same side. An arch begins on one side, rises to a peak in the middle of the finger, and terminates on the other side. A whorl doesn't start or terminate on either end of the finger, but rather forms a circular pattern within it. These three categories can be further broken down into eight basic patterns, which form the basis of the fingerprint identification system: the plain arch, the tented arch, the ulnar loop, the radial loop, the double loop, the plain whorl, the central pocket whorl, and the accidental (see the following page for more information).

Fingerprint experts examine the tiny identifying points which distinguish one print from another: ridges, bifurcations, dots, and numerous other details composing the image. The more points which match up, the more the expert narrows down the list of candidates. Some courts in the U.C. require a specific number of points to be identified, and most police departments won't regard a print as a match unless it has at least ten points in common with the one on file.

FINGERPRINT CHART



Plain Arch

A basic flow of ridges with a gentle rise in the center.



Tented Arch

Similar to the plain arch, but with a sharper angle to the rise.



Ulnar Loop

The fingerprint has loops which flow in the direction of the pinky.



Radial Loop

The fingerprint has loops which flow in the direction of the thumb.



Double Loop

The fingerprint has two separate and distinct loop formations.



Plain Whorl

The fingerprint has a circular pattern such as an oval or spiral.



Central Pocket Whorl

The fingerprint has ridges which recurve into a circular pattern.



Accidental

Unusual patterns which don't match any other classification.

WARLOCKS AND DETECTIVES

Needless to say, comparing prints is a long and tedious process. The computers which streamline 21st century fingerprinting are nowhere to be found in the Unified Commonwealth, leaving dedicated professionals to pore over file after file with the naked eye. Geographical location and the detectives' suppositions are often the only guide, and even if the list can be narrowed down, it often takes weeks of comparisons to finally come up with a matching print. That process can be sped up, however, if the police arrest a suspect. By comparing his fingerprints with those found at the scene, an expert can quickly determine whether he is the man the police are seeking. As with other forms of forensic work, fingerprinting is most effective in establishing proof after the fact, not in providing detectives with a road map to the suspect.

FIREARMS

Firearms identification, or *ballistics*, takes up a significant part of criminal lab work in the U.C. Ballistic examination of firearms can take up one of the following categories:

Comparison

Comparison matches bullets to the weapon which fired them. The barrels of all guns (save shotguns) are rifled — marked with grooves — in order to put spin on the bullet and make it fire more accurately. The results leave a distinctive mark on the bullet, which can be compared and matched up like fingerprints. Furthermore, when a weapon's firing pin strikes the bullet, it leaves another distinctive mark, and automatic weapons will eject spent shell casings which leave still further marks. The ballistics expert can match bullet with gun by firing the weapon in question, recovering the bullet, and comparing it with bullets from the crime scene. If the two match, the weapon has been identified.

Several mitigating factors can help or impede the ballistics expert in this task. The more a weapon is used, the more pronounced its stamp on the bullets it fires, and the more easily it can be identified. Theoretically, all weapons of a given make will leave the same impression on the bullets they fire, but since use varies from weapon to weapon, unique distinctions invariably crop up. It further helps if the bullets at the scene are in good shape. The "splat effect" or flattening of bullets upon impact with a hard surface, tends to distort the marks used to identify it. And of course, it is impossible to identify the weapon until it has been recovered and fired for comparison purposes. Unless the perpetrator left it behind, the detectives will need to locate it before a positive identification can be made.

Note that shotguns, which fire shells of lead shot instead of bullets, are not subject to comparison tests.

Range Determination

This determines the distance at which a gun was fired. It encompasses a number of varying factors, none of which are entirely reliable. Lab experts usually make educated estimates, rather than providing hard numbers. One common form of range determination is gunshot residue, which leaves a blast pattern on the victim if fired from a close enough range (within

a foot or so). The closer the weapon, the heavier the residue will be. Gunpowder "tattooing," in which flecks of unburned gunpowder are embedded in the victim's skin and clothes, can establish range from a bit further out — perhaps two or three feet. Tattooing and residue are almost never present at the same time.

In cases of an extremely close shot (i.e., the barrel of the weapon is in contact with the victim's skin), the violence of the shot will tear or distend the skin. The recoil of the weapon will often create a bruise as well, marking the wound for the police to find later. The firing of the bullet releases gasses from the gunpowder, which the force of a shot will drive beneath the victim's skin. In this case, the residue shows up in the autopsy.

In addition to determining the distance of the weapon, lab work can also determine the angle in which it was fired, placing the rough position of the killer at the scene. As with distance, however, this is very imprecise, and can be next to impossible without the weapon itself. If the weapon is in the hands of the police, it can be test fired, and the patterns matched with those at the scene. Without it, the best the lab can do is determine the rough parameters of the shot.

Prediction

This determines the caliber and manufacturer of a fired bullet. With so much ballistics info relying upon possession of the weapon, prediction work is used to lay the foundation if the gun has not yet been recovered (which is often the case, especially early on). Prediction work usually consists of close examination of the bullet to determine make and caliber. The results can't identify a single weapon, but can give a reasonably accurate report as to what kind of weapon it is, letting detectives know the gun they should be looking for. When and if the weapon falls into police hands, prediction work will save time when determining if it is a match.

Functionality

This determines whether a gun is capable of being fired or not. It is a very simple series of tests, typically the first administered when a weapon comes into the ballistics lab. The expert studies the basic condition of the weapon, examining the firing pin, the trigger and safety setting, and the bore of the barrel. He performs an analysis of the trigger pull to see if the suspect is capable of firing the weapon (a small woman might claim that she isn't strong enough to pull the trigger of a large caliber handgun, for example). He checks to see if the



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weapon is capable of misfiring or going off accidentally. If it is damaged, the expert will determine if he can repair it for test firing. Finally, the expert will check to see if the weapon has been modified from its factory-issue state (sawing off the barrel of a shotgun, for example, or modifying a rifle to fire in fully automatic mode). Once these tests are completed, the expert can move on to other tests in his repertoire.

Serial Number Identification

Every weapon in the U.C. has a serial number attached to it. The numbers are kept on record by gun store owners and copied into a growing database at the National Law Enforcement Bureau. Criminals and other miscreants will often file those numbers off in hopes of masking its identification. In some cases, however, a lab expert can restore them. The stamping process which creates them goes deeper than just the visual; criminals who believe the number is filed off just because they can't see it are often sorely mistaken. The expert will grind the material down to reach a strip of polished metal embedded deep within the gun's frame. He will then stain it with a combination of copper slats and hydrochloric acid. If performed properly, it will cause the gun's serial number to appear for a short time before the acid eats it away. The expert is usually ready with a camera to photograph the incriminating ID.

Gunpowder Usage

This determines if a suspect has fired a weapon within the last few hours. Firing a weapon leaves traces of nitrate on the shooter's hand. The expert will coat the hand in warm paraffin, wait for it to dry, and then treat it with chemicals which make it turn blue in the presence of nitrate. This test is difficult to perform since it requires that the suspect be on hand within a few hours after firing the weapon. It can also produce false positives; a suspect who has been handling nitrate-based fertilizer will exhibit residue as often as one who has been unloading his deer rifle at local police. As is often the case, it serves more as a useful guide than hard proof, and provides circumstantial evidence at best.

Like all other pieces of evidence, firearms and bullets used in ballistics tests are carefully labeled, tracked, and kept in storage in case they need to be produced for trial. Ballistics experts make careful reports of all their findings, and are usually responsible for returning the weapons and ammunition which they test.

STABBING WEAPONS AND BLUDGEONING WEAPONS

Stabbing and cutting weapons are considered tools, and may leave evidence behind as discussed in the "Tools" section on page 28. In addition, they leave specific types of wounds, which can provide considerable information about the manner of death. The examiner can infer the size and strength of the attacker based on the angle, location, and number of wounds. Defensive wounds — those on the hands or upper arms made as the victim attempts to ward off an attack — can lend insight into the victim's frame of mind. (Was he surprised by his

attacker? Did he have time to fight back?) Most such details can be determined by detectives at the scene, or by the medical examiner during the autopsy (see page 21).

Bludgeoning weapons leave fewer telltale marks, but have their own means of identification. Technically speaking, any heavy object capable of inflicting damage is a bludgeoning weapon. It includes billy clubs, blackjacks, baseball bats, hammers, tire irons, and anything in between. Bludgeoning damage tends to leave bruises and internal injuries, and determining where a blow strikes can tell detectives whether or not the blow was lethal. Internal damage such as broken bones, ruptured organs, and the like can be identified during the autopsy. Based on the damage inflicted, an examiner can roughly determine what kind of weapon was used, and how large and/or heavy it might have been.

FOOTPRINTS AND TIRE PRINTS

Footprints and tire prints are identified through molds which are made at the crime scene (see page 20 for more information). Both tire and shoe companies submit samples of all their brands to local law enforcement and the NLEB. The result provides a strong database of print types, to which the lab experts may refer during their examination. It is thus possible to determine the size and make of the shoe or tire, the height, weight, and gender of whoever made the footprints, and the direction in which both foot- and tire prints were traveling. It is also possible to pinpoint the number of people or cars which made the print, and therefore develop a better idea of what happened at the crime scene. Furthermore, though shoes and tires all start out the same, individual use leaves unique wear patterns, which make it possible to match a particular shoe or tire to a particular mold. The more they are used, the more pronounced the wear and the more distinct the pattern becomes. Police labs love it when criminals leave prints from well-worn shoes; it makes their job infinitely easier.

HANDWRITING, INKS, AND DOCUMENTS

Document examination, already an odd science in our world, becomes all the odder in the world of *The Edge of Midnight*. Many experts in the field deal in historical documents, and can determine things such as a document's age and where it came from. In the U.C., where the past is a fog and precious little evidence exists of the time before the war, such experts are virtually nonexistent. Instead, experts in the field work solely in contemporary documents, examining things such as watermarks and paper types rather than age. Indeed, it is difficult to find any forensic report which details a document's age beyond a few years or so.

Documents examined during the investigation of a crime tend to focus on whether the material is common or rare (if it's rare, it can be traced more easily), and on the composition of any inks or markers upon it. An examiner can determine what kind of marker was used, who manufactured the paper, and what kind of general use it serves (notepaper, typing paper, etc.). This is of particular significance when dealing with possible magic use. Books containing magical information are

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highly prized by the warlocks who possess them, and they often store them in different locales than they would other books. A tome which is especially dry or clean raises suspicion, as does paper made of particularly durable material.

In addition to types of paper, most document experts are knowledgeable about typewriters, and can readily identify different makes and models based on type text. A typewriter's keys are extremely difficult to alter, and the patterns they leave on the letters become more distinct the more a particular typewriter is used. Experts can match the typewriter to the documents it produces as absolutely as a fingerprint or any of the other traces discussed in this chapter. All the detectives need to do is find it.

Handwriting samples often prove the most useful in cases involving documents. The task of examining them falls into two broad categories. Handwriting identification is the type most favored by police. It is a hard science, dealing with the signals and signs which mark each person's handwriting as unique. Loops in the "l"s and "o"s, the way a writer crosses the "t," and similar marks are unique to every writer. In the era of the 1940s, it is very difficult to fool a handwriting identification expert. Cheap tricks such as switching one's hand when making a signature still leave telltale signs which cannot be masked. Even tracing a signature rarely works, since tracing often betrays moments of hesitation which the handwriting expert looks for. It takes a skilled forger to pass a phony piece of handwriting off as someone else's... or even to disguise his own.

While handwriting identification is considered a pure science, handwriting analysis is much less clearly defined. It consists of attempting to define the writer's personality traits based on samples of his handwriting. Proponents claim that it can identify a person's race, age, gender, and intention based on handwriting examinations. Police departments know better, and few of them consider handwriting analysis a reliable method of investigation. They do, however, lend some credence to determining a writer's education and provincial background through the use of particular words, slang, etc. They also grant credence to determining a writer's basic emotional state at the time: an agitated or nervous writer, for example, will betray evidence of that on the page. For these reasons, handwriting analysis is sometimes utilized in the examination of a particular sample, though more for guideline purposes than to produce even circumstantial evidence.

TOOLS

From a forensics standpoint, the only thing separating a tool from a weapon is whether it was used against the victim. A crowbar, for example, is a tool if it was used to force a safe door open, but a weapon if it was used to bludgeon the guard's head in. The distinction matters mainly in where and how the tool's marks are found, and what that can tell the police about the crime itself.

Tool marks can identify what kind of tool has been used, similar to the methods used to determine weapons. A screwdriver leaves a different impression than a claw hammer, and

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different types of screwdriver are distinct from each other. By examining a mark under a microscope, it is possible to pinpoint the exact tool which caused it (provided that tool is available for comparison purposes, of course).

Lab technicians much prefer that the mark itself be preserved by investigators and sent to the lab intact. Often, this entails detaching the mark from its surrounding material — taking extreme care not to warp or distort it in any way — and taking it all en masse to the lab. When this cannot work, the investigators will take a mold using dental molding or a similar substance, and bring it back to the lab that way. Basic facts can be determined from there, with a match likely made as soon as the detectives uncover the particular tool.

TRACE EVIDENCE

Trace evidence is defined as extremely small matter which can serve as evidence. It is usually gathered from the crime scene or the victim, and compared with similar samples taken from the suspect or his surroundings. Trace evidence includes but is not limited to the following:

Dirt and Soil Samples

Dirt and soil samples serve the same purpose as hair and fiber samples. If the suspect came into contact with local soil — when burying the body, for example, or jimmying an outside window at the crime scene — he may have taken some with him on his hands or shoes. Similarly, he may have deposited soil from his own home or an area he frequents. Soil samples also include the presence of artificial minerals, such as cement or roofing tar. Investigators at a crime scene carefully catalogue the presence of any dirt which the perpetrator may have left or inadvertently taken with him, and send samples to the lab for analysis. The investigator should take care to label exactly where the dirt came from, and in what condition it was found (moist, dry, etc.).

Soil samples are usually examined by a forensic geologist, who can determine different types of soil and explain the distinction between one form of dirt and another. As usual, the evidence is more circumstantial than definitive, but it can form a causal link between a suspect and the scene of the crime.



Dyes and Stains

Fibers from dyed clothing or samples of ink can help narrow the field of possible suspects. A stain or marking found on the suspect may be enough to tie him to the scene, or at least bring more circumstantial evidence to the table. In addition, some banks in the Unified Commonwealth have begun using exploding packets of dye, which are placed among the money being stolen in a robbery. The packet discharges after a certain period, staining the money and anything in the vicinity. Forensics labs can spot the presence of such dyes on skin or clothing; even after multiple washings, traces of the dye remain. (They are also irritate the skin, which makes handling the stained money extremely difficult.) At the moment, only higher-end banks in New Eden, Nova Roma, and Central City are using dyes, but the practice may spread to others as the device becomes cheaper.

Fireclay

Fireclay is a specialized form of soil, consisting of fine sand, clay, and diatomaceous earth (which originates on the ocean floor). It is used within the walls of safes to protect the contents from fire and heat. When a safe is blown, the suspect will almost certainly come into contact with fireclay, especially if he used explosives or other messy methods of entry. A good forensics expert knows what it looks like under a microscope, and can sometimes spot it on a suspect's shoes, skin, or clothing. Fireclay has a unique signature, and while its presence cannot determine the precise safe, it is rarely used in any other context. A suspect with fireclay on his clothing will have a lot of explaining to do.

Glass

Pieces of glass at the crime scene can reveal some very interesting details if properly examined. Not only can lab experts determine the make and type of glass from analysis, but the presence of glass dust and/or fragments on clothing can help tie a suspect to a crime. By examining the pattern in which glass has fallen, it is possible to determine how the glass was broken (suggesting whether the break-in was an outside job, or simply doctored to look that way). Bullet holes in glass can determine the direction and angle of fire, and any fragment larger than dime-sized can be dusted for fingerprints. Finally, the glass of automobile headlights is distinct, and broken fragments found at a crime scene can determine the make, model, and year of the suspect vehicle.

Hair and Fibers

Human beings shed hair at a rate of 100 to 125 a day, and sometimes in the commission of a crime, the perpetrator will leave a few behind. Similarly, fibers from clothing or carpets can be inadvertently deposited at the scene — or a perpetrator will take hair or fibers with him when he leaves — providing clues for the investigator who finds them. Of course, such evidence is often extremely difficult to pinpoint, requiring painstaking searches and more than a little luck. Hair and fibers can be found in the carpet or floorboard (often requir-

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ing a filtered vacuum to pick up), beneath the fingernails of a victim, intermingled with clothing (suggesting close proximity and perhaps a struggle), and the like. The lab examines them closely under a microscope to note as many details as possible.

Hair and fibers are used more to limit the list of possible suspects than to focus on one particular suspect. Besides the color and the use of dyes, it is possible to determine a suspect's race, general age, and whether or not he received a haircut recently. Gaunt hair is coarser and more wiry than human hair and can be identified fairly readily. Fibers fall into similar categories. The lab can determine the exact type of material, the color, the presence of pollen or dust particles, and any dyes or stains which may mark it. While hairs and fibers almost never conclusively link a suspect to a crime, they can provide strong circumstantial evidence. If fibers matching those in the carpet of the suspect's apartment are found at the scene of a crime, it may go some way towards eliminating reasonable doubt in a jury's mind.

Paint Samples

Paint samples occur in a few limited scenarios, but can prove extremely useful if found. The most common appearance of paint samples is during a hit-and-run or similar crime involving an automobile. If the car crashes into anything — people, walls, lightpoles, etc. — it will leave trace amounts of paint behind. Forensics experts can usually determine the make and model of the car in addition to its color (different automobile companies use different methods to bake on paint, most use slightly different colors than their competitors, and cheaper cars tend to use fewer layers of paint than more expensive ones).

A somewhat less common occurrence involves the presence of paint or varnish dust in the air. If it's at the crime scene, the perpetrator will likely take it with him. If it's somewhere else, it may be carried with the suspect and deposited at the crime scene. Similarly, paint marks may be found on a criminal's tools if they were used to jimmy open a door, a window, a bank vault, or the like. Finally, if a body is moved and contains traces of paint or varnish, it may lead back to the location of the murder.



Pollen, Leaves, and Flowers

Plant life can link a suspect to a crime scene as much as soil or dirt can. The presence of leaves or flowers is a rarity at a crime scene, but sometimes traces of pollen or the like can mark a suspect's clothes. A forensic biologist can examine any evidence, and determine the type of plant involved, as well as details such as the pollen's state of maturity, or the time elapsed since a leaf was taken from a tree. Forensic botany is most useful if a relatively rare plant is involved, narrowing the locations where it may have come from.

Sealants and Adhesives

Like tape, glue and other sealants can be analyzed for make and type. If the police are lucky, they can tie it back to a particular suspect.

Tape Types

The National Law Enforcement Bureau keeps a record of every type of tape manufactured in the U.C. If any samples are found at a crime scene, they can determine the exact make of it, and which stores in the local area carry it. Often, this is a wild goose chase: duct tape is available at any hardware store, and most other forms of tape can be easily purchased over the counter. Occasionally, however, it is sufficiently uncommon that detectives can track it to the point of sale and determine a suspect from there.

In and of themselves, each piece of evidence generated by lab work is very circumstantial. Defense lawyers often hammer that point home in making their cases. But the individual pieces start to add up, and the more ways the lab can tie a suspect to a given scene, the more and more likely it appears that he committed the crime. A defendant might be able to knock out one, or two, or even several pieces of evidence — the blood type matches a lot of people, the sneaker marks are from a common brand, the soil sample was mishandled by the lab — but if the evidence stacks higher and higher, it becomes increasingly difficult to deny. Lab experts are most valued in the courtroom, where all the information and techniques described in this section come through to point the finger at the presumably guilty party.

Forensics is a valuable resource in the investigator's arsenal. It is not, however, a conclusive form of inquiry. It can focus the investigation on a specific field of suspects or point the detectives in a fruitful direction. But it cannot produce a suspect out of thin air, nor can it conclusively name him as the perpetrator. At best, it serves as a roadmap directing the investigators, and once they have a man in custody, it can provide strong circumstantial evidence against him. But the job of finding, tracking, and arresting a suspect is still in the hands of the detectives... and often requires a lot of good old-fashioned leg work.

CHAPTER TWO
THE LONG ARM
OF THE LAW

"Sure, I know. It's a free country and
I ain't got the right. But I got a badge.
What do you got?"

- Lt. Schrank (Simon Oakland),
West Side Story

THE LONG ARM OF THE LAW

This chapter includes a basic overview of felonious crimes and the approach most law enforcement agencies take to them, as well as specifics on the NLEB and tips on running scenarios based around police investigations.

THE SIX BIG QUESTIONS

Every police investigation centers around six basic questions: Who? What? Where? When? How? Why? Some of these questions are answered at the crime scene, as the evidence there is analyzed. The rest is up to the police to determine by following up on clues, interviewing witnesses, interrogating suspects, and the like. During the initial investigation at the crime scene, the detectives begin to formulate a hypothesis about what happened. They base their suppositions on the evidence at the scene, but also on common sense assumptions and police instincts. If the safe is peeled open and the jewels taken, it's fairly obvious what happened. If the body was poisoned, what happened might be less apparent, but an autopsy will soon reveal evidence of foul play.

In addition to establishing the nature of the crime (what happened), the initial investigation will likely produce a time-frame (when it happened), a location (where it happened) and a basic methodology (how it happened). From there, the questions fall to the two most difficult and around which the bulk of the subsequent investigation centers: who did it and why. From the beginning, the police begin compiling a list of suspects and their possible motives. The establishment of motive often goes a long way towards determining a suspect; if the detectives know why a crime was committed, it's a pretty short jump to figuring out who. Most investigators spend a fair amount of time working various theories about the motives to a crime. If the theory holds water and corresponds with the evidence, it forms a good basis on which to proceed. Multiple theories are possible, but usually the police will narrow it down to the most likely or least far-fetched. On some occasions, however, the motives are obvious; cases of theft and larceny are often self-evident (though they sometimes have alternate motives), and you don't need to be Sherlock Holmes to figure out why someone would want to steal a lot of money. In such cases, the detectives focus on finding the suspects, who may not be immediately apparent and whose identity is less transparent than their motives.

The methods used to track down the whos and the whys vary based on the particular type of crime being investigated.

LARCENY, BURGLARY, AND ROBBERY

These three categories represent different forms of theft. Larceny is simply the wrongful taking of property with the intent to possess it. Burglary is theft which entails breaking into a building with the intent of stealing something inside. Robbery is theft by force, using violence or the threat of violence to take directly from the victim. Together, these three

crimes occupy the bulk of a police department's time. Sadly, comparatively few of them are ever solved. Unless they are caught in the act or sufficient leads can point the police to them, it is extremely difficult to connect a careful suspect with the crime.

In addition to their other investigative work at the scene of the theft itself, the officers will hash out the perpetrator's activities at the scene: how he gained entry, how he approached the stolen object, whether he used any tools, and whether he took any precautions against detection. If a pattern can be established, it may be easier to spot the thief in the commission of other crimes (burglars, in particular, leave a "signature" behind, establishing the suspect's *modus operandi*). They also look for signs of a staged entry or evidence that the victim himself may be the perpetrator. Many supposed victims of theft actually committed the crime themselves, as a form of insurance fraud or some other means of making money. If the detectives are lucky, the crime scene will deliver enough clues to let them establish a viable suspect.

In conducting their subsequent investigation, the detectives retain detailed information about the objects being stolen. They have descriptions, sketches or photographs, individual markings such as serial numbers or monograms, and even a list of identifiable materials from the crime scene such as dust or bloodstains, which may be on the item. Insurance companies sometimes contribute to this process, especially if the item in question is expensive or rare; they may have more reasons than the owner to want the stolen items returned. The more readily witnesses have the stolen object in mind, the more likely they are to recall seeing it at some point after the theft.

Thefts don't always leave witnesses (unless armed robbery is involved), but when they do, the police follow up with them diligently. The victims themselves are considered witnesses, since they can provide details about where the items were before the theft and what sort of protective measures were in place. Beyond that, anyone who saw the crime or noticed any strange behavior from anyone in the vicinity of the crime is questioned. The detectives look for the presence of known thieves in the vicinity. They ask if anyone had any grudge against the victim (and who may have used the robbery as a means of revenge). They ask if anyone unusual appeared in the days and weeks leading up to the robbery. They ask if anyone in the vicinity was wearing any unusual clothing, such as gloves in the middle of summer. They ask if there were any unusual automobiles at the scene, and if so what their characteristics were (color, make, etc.).

During these questions, the detectives pay close attention to the witness; if he betrays too much knowledge or is caught lying, he may become a suspect himself. And there's always the chance that the witness is simply an attention-getter, claiming false knowledge of the crime in order to gain some kind of self-validation. The detectives' questioning is often designed to reveal these facts, as well as establishing pertinent details from legitimate witnesses.

Witnesses in armed robberies are a little different than witnesses in more mundane burglaries. They have seen the suspect and can provide a description, even if it's only basic attributes. On the other hand, they are often traumatized by

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If armed robbery was involved, they check gun shops or illegal weapons suppliers. If the robbers used explosives, they check with local manufacturers and see if the explosives can be traced. Hopefully, one of these threads can produce a lead, or even just a description of a suspect which the detectives can then pursue.

Stolen money creates its own problems, though it also has several unique ways of thwarting the thief as well. Obviously, it can't be traced the way a stolen object can, and the investigating officers can't look for a particular type of object either. On the other hand, suspects who have stolen a lot of money often leave large red warning flags by either spending it imprudently or finding some obvious means of storing it. Officers can check with local banks to see if anyone opened a new account using a large amount of cash. They check with auto dealers to see about new purchases, also made with cash. Some thieves will spend a lot of money on clothes or jewelry; others will use it to gamble or pay off old debts. Canvassing local businesses can sometimes turn up an idiot who is spending too much too quickly, and leaning on certain dens of iniquity might net a suspect's name as well. The police aim to close off as many avenues of spending as possible so that, even if the perpetrator escapes with the money, he'll have a devil of a time spending it. Smart thieves will safely store their money where it can't be traced, and have some means of masking it which prevents scrutiny. Organized crime syndicates are particularly good at laundering stolen money, and professional thieves can sometimes pay them to render their cash untraceable (see the *Gaunts and the Underworld* sourcebook for more information about organized crime).

the event, and the details they provide may be inconsistent or misleading. Detectives often work to calm them in hopes that they can retain viable information about the perpetrator.

Again, questioning the witnesses doesn't always reveal enough information, and indeed many thefts have no witnesses at all. Despite that, the police still have resources. Most stations maintain *modus operandi* files detailing the methods used by known thieves. A thief whose style matches the crime may be sought out and questioned, or witnesses may be prompted into providing more information if they see pictures of possible suspects. The detectives may also check any avenues of disposing of the goods: fences, pawnshops, or criminal associates who may be willing to pay for the stolen property. The more valuable an item is, the harder it is to move, and the more limited options a thief has. Police who can zero in on those options stand a good chance of finding the perpetrator.

Possible Suspects

Suspects in theft tend to fall into five or six logical categories. Others exist, but they are more unusual and often depend upon the specific circumstances of the crime

- **Professionals** perform thefts for a living. Their crimes are often well-planned and net considerable profits; they don't take risks unless the rewards are worth it. More on professional thieves can be found in *Gaunts and the Underworld*.
- **Debtors** are gamblers who have lost a great deal of money or those with more honest debts who simply cannot conceive of another way to pay them. Those who lose money quickly often need to gain it back just as quickly. Their crimes are often tinged with desperation and require a quick turn-

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around which they haven't thought through. Careful police can often catch them through their carelessness — if not for this crime then the next time their luck runs dry.

- **Loiterers** are those who have no business at the scene of the crime, but who remain in the vicinity regardless. Loiterers are often petty thieves acting either on impulse or as part of a hastily constructed plan.
- **Those With Ready Access to the Property.** Anyone who can enter and exit without arousing suspicion is looked at askance by investigating officers. They often entail people the victim knows who commit the theft out of spite or some measure of revenge. It includes servants, employees, family members, and even the victims themselves, who stage the theft as some manner of fraud.
- **Addicts** are those who steal to feed a drug habit. Addicts commit crimes of opportunity with little planning or foresight, and content themselves with whatever they can take.

Police can usually limit the pool of suspects simply by determining the objects stolen and the *modus operandi*. Cases with identifiable suspects among the victim's acquaintances are easier to investigate than those perpetrated by unknown criminals, and professionals are generally harder to catch than amateurs.

Once a suspect is identified, police focus on three areas of proof, any one of which may be sufficient to prompt an arrest:

- 1) **Find whatever was stolen.** If the suspect has possession of the stolen item in his home or place of business, it goes a long way towards proving his guilt.
- 2) **Place the suspect at the scene.** The suspect may have left trace evidence at the crime scene, or either he or his vehicle was spotted by witnesses. This may not mean much if the suspect was well-known by the victim or had an legitimate reason to be at the scene. But if you can't prove he was there, then it becomes much more difficult to prove he was a part of the theft.
- 3) **Demonstrate that the suspect sold or attempted to sell the stolen item.** This is often the holy grail of theft investigations for the police. If the suspect profited from the crime, it tends to put a big "guilty" sign around his neck, particularly if he lacks a legitimate reason for suddenly having an additional amount of money. Even if he wasn't directly involved in the theft, it still implies participation, which can lead investigators to the fence, a possible buyer, and any number of other ne'er-do-wells.

A more generalized discussion of interrogating suspects and making arrests can be found starting on page 16.

VICE

Vice investigations constitute the myriad "victimless crimes" which infest most large cities. They include illegal gambling, liquor distribution, prostitution, pornography, and the like. In the Unified Commonwealth, vice also includes narcotics cases in some areas, since illegal drugs have not yet become enough of a problem there to merit their own unit. In some U.C. cities, vice has been folded into an overall organized crime unit, which covers both the mobsters who dominate such crimes and the freelance operatives who deal in the remainder.

Vice crimes don't often have a crime scene; since all the participants are "willing," no one wants the police involved, and since nothing is taken and no bodies are present, the notion of collecting evidence doesn't apply. On the other hand, it is much easier to catch offenders in the act, and prosecution can be based on the officers' actual testimony, rather than more unreliable witnesses or evidence chains. Vice cops make excellent undercover operatives: posing as hookers or their johns in order to foil a prostitution ring, scouting out underground card rooms in anticipation of shutting them down, and appearing as an addict in order to put the local seller out of business. Unlike other investigations, there is less pressure on wrapping up a vice case quickly. Once they learn the location of any illicit activity, the police can observe, gather evidence, and wait until they have an iron-clad case before moving in.

Vice laws vary from city to city, and methods of enforcement are sometimes a matter of whim. In Paradiso, for example, gambling is legal. In Central City, the laws are much stricter, but limited largely to fines, while gambling in Nova Roma can sometimes lead to prison terms. Most vice units concentrate on the largest and most brazen perpetrators in their district, or on those cases which involve larger criminal elements (such as organized crime).

Gambling

Gambling has several legal definitions, and enforcement varies from precinct to precinct. Technically, a Wednesday night poker game is gambling, but is it illegal? Police departments use two criteria when deciding to pursue an investigation.

- 1) **Is the gambling taking place in a public locale?** Gambling in public parks and other locations is considered a nuisance and police tend to prosecute violators more stringently than they would in another locale. It also helps them to crack down on three-card monte scams and other forms of street hustling.
- 2) **Is someone making a profit off of it regardless of the outcome?** Bookies, underground betting parlors, and mob-run card games all collect a fee, regardless of which team wins, which horse finishes first, or which player produces an inside straight. Legal casinos are entitled to make money with their operations, but outside of Paradiso, such an operation is considered graft and vigorously prosecuted. Indeed, determining profitability is the quickest way to earn a gambling conviction and most vice officers pursue it as the primary target of their investigation.

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If either of these criteria are met, the vice squad may attempt to build a case. They focus on careful surveillance of the locale in question — going undercover if possible — and on the formation of a viable paper trail. The trail must provide an account of the profits based on the enterprise, and a clear indication that they were earned through gambling. As such, many gambling investigations also involve accountancy fraud, and often employ the services of accountants to help prove wrongdoing.

Liquor and Narcotics

Liquor is legal in the U.C. (and there is no record of any prohibition period), but strict rules govern its regulation. Most liquor sellers must be licensed and adhere to certain codes, such as never selling to minors or only selling during certain hours of the day. The police usually treat violations with fines, but repeat offenders may receive community service or jail time. In addition, the U.C. taxes liquor which travels between provinces or arrives from foreign lands. A lucrative smuggling business has sprung up by slipping untaxed liquor bottles into major cities. The NLEB is engaged in strenuous efforts to shut them down (see the section on page 56 and the *Gaunts and the Underworld* sourcebook for more).

Drugs are another story entirely. The U.C. still doesn't consider the drug trade a major problem — certainly not the way contemporary America does — but the precipitous rise in the narcotics trade is cause for considerable concern. Selling or trafficking in illegal drugs carries stiff penalties, and law enforcement agencies across the country are devoting more and more time to stemming the flow of these noxious substances.

Very little attention is paid to the demand side of the drug problem, at least at present. Rehab clinics exist — mostly expensive organizations catering to the wealthy — but otherwise no real drug prevention programs can be found. Instead, most police departments work on stemming the supply, either by intercepting shipments before they arrive or by arresting the dealers and distributors who traffic in them. The most effective means of building a drug case is to document the "buy" or the transaction in which certain amounts of drugs trade hands. As with gambling investigations, undercover work plays a large part in this, as officers incognito seek to induce a sale or transaction which they can witness.

Undercover narcotics work is growing increasingly dangerous, however: drug dealers are far more willing to respond with lethal force than gamblers or bookies, and though they vehemently deny it, elements of organized crime are slowly becoming involved in the drug trade. Most mobsters would rather shoot a cop than face the lengthy prison stint that drug dealing entails. Accordingly, officers who go undercover usually do so for either short amounts of time (which results mostly in low-level traffickers and street dealers) or else spend extensive periods "off the reservation," with very little contact with their fellow officers. They work to build a case by identifying major players, determining the source of the drugs they produce, and facilitating a sting, which gets them to buy or sell drugs while the police are watching.

Buy which result in arrest come in three different ways:

- 1) **First-Hand Buys** entail an undercover officer involved in the transaction. It contains his or her direct account of the deal, which proves much easier to prosecute in court
- 2) **Second-Hand Buys** entail the officers directly observing a transaction that doesn't involve their participation. The police must usually establish probable cause before they are allowed to conduct such an operation.
- 3) **Third-Hand Buys** entail the officers using an informant or somebody unconnected with the police department to make the buy. This is the least reliable because many informants are often criminals themselves. But as the drug trade grows increasingly sophisticated and dealers become more wary of arrest, it is sometimes the only way to secure an indictment.

Documentation of any deal is paramount when building a case. Police departments in the U.C. lack sophisticated monitoring devices such as portable cameras, and must often make do with either first-hand participation or still photos taken during the buy. Another potential problem comes in the form of *entrapment*, which is defined as undue coercion to participate in the deal. Defense attorneys handling cases involving first-hand buys are quick to leap upon entrapment as the means to get their clients off. The police are slowly learning to counter it in their methods, namely by acting with care and not pushing the dealer unduly.

The officer must also give some thought as to when he makes an arrest. The popular notion is that he makes the bust as soon as the deal is concluded, with policemen charging in from all directions the minute they have what they need. In some cases, this is true, but in others, they will let the perpetrator go in order to arrest him later. This usually occurs when the officers want to go over the evidence they have just assembled during the deal in order to make sure the arrest will stick. They will keep tabs on the perpetrator, monitor his activity, and move in only when they're sure their evidence is solid. Only when the suspect presents a flight risk or when they have no ready means of following him will they move in immediately upon completion of a buy.

Prostitution

The world's oldest profession has long been a target of vice squads throughout the U.C. Unfortunately, there is comparatively little that can be done to stamp it out. The demand for prostitutes is as old as history itself, and as long as someone is willing to pay for sex, someone else is willing to sell it. Most hookers view arrest as an occupational hazard, and while the punishments are tangible, the majority are minor enough to be endured before returning to a life on the street. Policemen, for their part, take a fairly lax attitude towards arresting prostitutes. It's easy enough for a cop posing as a john to arrest a propositioning hooker, and while the cops often harass street walkers in various ways, most have more important cases to pursue.

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The most common form of prostitute in the U.C. is the street walker, who loiters in public areas and approaches clients with offers for sex. Street walkers are often runaways who live very harsh and brutal lives. Some fall under the sway of pimps, who collect a portion of their earnings in exchange for “protection” and food and lodging. Pimps often abuse the hookers in their stable, and rarely allow them out of their influence for even short periods of time.

In addition to street walkers, higher class prostitutes or call girls cater to the rich and powerful. Call girls usually operate from their own residence and build up a list of clients, who contact them when they want a “date.” Though more financially independent, call girls suffer psychological scars similar to their street walker brethren and often feel trapped in their life. But few of them are controlled by pimps and most have enough steely business sense to survive on their own.

Johns are also inclined to seek out prostitutes in brothels, which are buildings housing multiple hookers where they can service their clients in relative comfort. Most brothels take care to keep their girls clean and disease-free, and offer them a percentage of the take in exchange for their services. Brothels are uniformly illegal in the Commonwealth, but the successful ones are quiet and very hard to detect.

The police have an odd relationship with all three types of prostitute. They regularly harass street walkers, who serve as a public nuisance when they gather and are often signs

of a deteriorating neighborhood. On the other hand, because of their proximity to street life, they often hear things which beat cops will not and therefore become an excellent source of information. Often, a give-and-take relationship will develop whereby the hookers keep their ears to the ground and reveal what they know in exchange for being left alone to do their jobs. When arrests come, they usually come as a form of warning or irritant, not with the hope of getting the prostitute to change her ways.

The other two forms of prostitution receive far less initial attention by the police, but tend to suffer much more harshly when they are arrested. Brothels and call girls keep a lower profile than street walkers, and often take steps to stay hidden. When the police pay attention, they usually have a strong reason to do so, and therefore have an interest in making the arrest stick. They gather evidence with the goal of shutting the operation down, not simply inconveniencing the practitioners. Their relationship is thus far less symbiotic, and most cops will either ignore such operations completely or actively work to build a case against the perpetrators.

Bribery and pay-offs are an all-too-common problem when dealing with prostitution. The pimps or call girls will simply pay the police to look the other way, and the cops — focused on more pressing crimes — will happily take the loot. See page 53 for more on police corruption.



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Gaunt Prostitutes and Johns

The number of gaunt prostitutes is extremely small, though it owes more to the general fear against their kind than their appearance. Gaunts are often in desperate straits financially, and may turn to prostitution as a means of survival. But the market simply isn't large enough to support them. Instead, they become madames within a brothel or work as protection for normal prostitutes. It isn't unusual to see female gaunts working as de facto pimps, taking a percentage of the girls' fees in exchange for keeping them safe. The arrangement is often much more harmonious than those with normal pimps; the "gauntess" will brutalize girls who hold out on her but will refrain from rape or other forms of coercion, and indeed sometimes forms matronly bonds with the street walkers she protects.

Conversely, there are an inordinately large number of gaunt males who pay for the services of a prostitute. Gaunts find the females of their type as ugly as normals do, and while affectionate bonds develop as normal between males and females, one-night stands are practically nonexistent. As a result, many gaunt males go to prostitutes (and quite a few females seek out gigolos as well). Some hookers refuse to service a gaunt, fearful of the damage their draining aura may cause. Whether or not they are able to enforce this depends on the quality of their protection and the amiability of the gaunt in question. On the other hand, gaunts are widely believed to be incapable of bearing children... eliminating a significant concern about the possibility of sexual congress.

ASSAULT

Assault is defined as a willful attempt to inflict injury upon another person. It can be further codified into different categories, most notably assault with a deadly weapon, in which the possibility of death is involved. Police departments deal with a large volume of assault cases: almost as many as theft. Assaults can stem from domestic disputes, acts of revenge from associates or employees, bar fights, disgruntled strangers, or even fakers looking to cash in on an insurance policy.

When answering an assault call, the policeman's first job is to substantiate the charge. Most serious assaults leave marks of injuries which are examined by a physician and then photographed for use later. Sometimes bruises and other marks don't show up for a few days, so the police will often wait 48-72 hours and then take another set of pictures of the victim. The results often reveal much more graphic and telling signs.

Once the authenticity of the charge has been established, the policeman's first job is providing medical help to the victim. He will question the victim as closely as his or her condition allows, but a serious interview will usually wait until a doctor has had a look and pronounced the victim capable of answering questions. In the meantime, the investigators fall back on the standard routine of police work: going over the crime scene in search of evidence, questioning any witnesses who saw the assault, and developing a profile of the likely suspect. If the suspect is known (often the case in domestic disputes and similar incidents), he will be questioned, interrogated, and, if sufficient evidence exists, arrested. When the

victim is feeling better, he or she will often return to the scene of the crime with the officers in order to reconstruct the chain of events and possibly provide some clue which the officers missed.

Since there is usually no monetary gain in assaults, the police search for motives based on emotional reactions. This almost always means that the victim had some prior dealing with the suspect, either because he knew the suspect or because he had reason to interact with him in some way. If the victim cannot readily identify the suspect, the police will often check his or her background to see if anyone had reason to attack him or her. They will ask about employees, former lovers, disgruntled servants, or even strangers with whom the victim may have argued in a bar. Someone with a history of antagonistic behavior against the victim immediately becomes a suspect, and must often provide an alibi for the time in which the assault occurred.

If a weapon was used, police will go to great lengths to identify it. The attending physician can help determine the weapon by the nature of the wounds, and forensic evidence at the scene may do so as well. Besides identification by the victim, weapon use is the most reliable way of connecting a suspect to the crime, and officers with a suspect in mind will seek out any weapon he or she may have which matches the evidence at their disposal. They will also look for a previous history of that weapon tied to the suspect, including scars on the victim, threats the suspect may have made with it, and the like. Because witnesses are often reluctant to testify in court (they fear reprisals, cannot readily relive the trauma of the event, etc.), evidence of a weapon is often the most dependable cornerstone of an assault case.

Assaults also include rape, which constitutes unlawful carnal knowledge of the victim, and which is dealt with in much the same manner as conventional assaults. The main difference is in the form of physical evidence left behind, such as bodily fluids, which do not appear in conventional assaults.

KIDNAPPING

Kidnapping is the unlawful abduction of someone for purposes of ransom, holding him hostage, or claiming him as a reward. It often involves the National Law Enforcement Bureau; a kidnapper who crosses provincial boundaries automatically invokes the jurisdiction of the NLEB, who have an entire division devoted to kidnapping cases (see page 57). Kidnapping also has one of the highest rates of capture among all felonies; the necessities involved in kidnapping allow the police to monitor and track the perpetrators. Sooner or later, they almost always make an arrest. The only question is what happens to the poor abducted soul.

Kidnapping can stem from a variety of motives, all of which necessitate different methods of crime solving.

Ransom

The most obvious form of kidnapping entails the abduction of a wealthy individual for the purposes of collecting a huge amount of money. The kidnappers will study the abductee's schedule and patterns, noting the best time to move against

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him. They will set up a location to hold him, preferably somewhere that they don't usually frequent and which has a secure room for holding their hostage. When they strike, they try to move as quickly as possible, grabbing the victim and departing the scene with a minimum of delays or obstacles. They will usually either try to blend into the surroundings — wearing outfits that won't raise suspicion — or deliberately disguise themselves by wearing masks and gloves.

Once they have the victim, they will issue a ransom demand, either through the mail or by contacting family members via telephone (smart kidnappers will use a pay phone or otherwise mask their origins). A drop-off is arranged, and the kidnappers usually specify terms which will allow whoever collects the ransom to escape unharmed (usually by threatening to kill the hostage if anything impedes him). What happens next depends upon the kidnappers. Many will release their hostage as agreed upon, but others will kill him or allow him to die. Hostages who try to escape may be killed, while families and police who do not obey instructions may prompt the kidnappers to execute their victim in retaliation. Most of

the time, however, it's not in the kidnappers' best interests to let the hostage die. Not only does it make collecting the ransom more difficult, but it raises the penalty of their crime should they be caught. Kidnappings which escalate into murder are often subject to the death penalty.

The pattern of ransom kidnappings gives the police ample opportunity to gather evidence against the perpetrators. Their first priority is keeping the victim safe, which means playing along with the kidnappers as much as possible. They often use proof of life as a bargaining chip, agreeing to the kidnappers' demands in exchange for hearing the victim's voice on the phone or receiving photographic proof that he hasn't been harmed. Beyond that, they allow the scenario to unfold as it will... but they use every contact with the kidnappers to glean more clues about who they are and where they might be keeping their victim.

It starts with the initial abduction. The officers will work the crime scene as usual, seeking traces that the kidnappers may have left behind: fingerprints, bloodstains, broken glass, and the like. They pay particular attention to tire tracks and vehicle descriptions: a kidnapping is nearly impossible without a getaway car, and the officers focus relentlessly on gleaning as many details as they can. Witnesses will be questioned to gain a sense of the kidnappers' *modus operandi*. Their entry and exit can speak worlds about their relationship with the victim (a kidnapper who knows the area or who bypasses locked doors probably had the help of someone on the inside). Family

members will be thoroughly grilled as well, providing details such as possible medical conditions and other threats to the victim's health.

Each subsequent time the kidnappers make contact — providing instructions, setting up the ransom, etc. — the police have another opportunity to gather clues. The ransom note may contain powders or other evidence betraying a possible location. Phone calls can often provide an area code, and recordings can be made of the caller's voice (remember that *The Edge of Midnight* universe lacks the sophisticated jamming devices of the 21st century). When the drop-off takes place, even more details can be gleaned: the collector will be photographed, his vehicle noted, and his getaway monitored as closely as possible. The police may even be able to track him back to the victim, though they must obviously proceed with caution. If they feel they can find the victim quickly, they will make an arrest on the spot. Interrogation can often convince the collector to betray his compatriots, turning state's evidence rather than face trial and punishment alone.

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Even when the drop-off goes as planned, the kidnappers rarely stay free indefinitely. Once the victim is returned, he or she can provide more details about the culprits: the length of the car ride after the initial abduction can help determine a location, and even blindfolded captives can help identify the number of captors and their rough relation to each other. Because kidnapping requires multiple accomplices, there is always the possibility of fracturing under pressure, especially with the ransom delivered and the money now needing to be divided up amongst them all. Many kidnappers fail to develop a plan of action once the money is delivered, and will make foolish mistakes which lead the police right to them. The smart ones have taken steps not to be identified, and have plans to either flee the country or hide the money. The others are usually spotted and picked up within a matter of weeks.

Kidnappings for ransom are growing increasingly prevalent in the Borderlands... especially in places where U.C. companies have large operations. Negotiations are often made by private security firms working for those companies, rather than the local police. Kidnapping is a business expense for such companies, and they will weigh any ransom against the possibility of getting it back and the value of the victim as a business asset rather than a human being.

Political Hostages

Sometimes, the purpose of a kidnapping is not ransom, but rather a means of forcing the government into a specific course of action. Some kidnappers will take hostages to earn the release of an imprisoned friend or family member. Others will do it to force a new law into effect or to overturn an unjust one. Cabals of warlocks have been known to plot kidnappings in order to facilitate a change in government policy towards magic. Even if they don't gain their stated goals, the publicity of the kidnapping could bring attention to their cause.

Political kidnappers are easier to identify than those simply seeking a ransom, because their motives are openly stated and their goals are easier to pinpoint. On the other hand, political kidnappers are often much more fanatical than those seeking a ransom, and more willing to kill the hostage if things don't go their way. Because their demands can only rarely be met (the U.C. has a stated policy of never negotiating with political kidnappers), the police must move very carefully in order to extradite the victim safely.

In most cases, the kidnappers want nothing more out of the hostage than a bargaining chip. While they will sometimes target specific individuals (judges, for example, or other prominent public figures), anybody will do. The only thing that matters is that the authorities will negotiate to gain their safe return.



The National Law Enforcement Bureau handles politically motivated kidnappings almost exclusively. They show less concern for the life of the hostage (who is often killed upon fulfillment of the kidnappers' demands regardless) and focus more on identifying and isolating the perpetrators. In general, the longer a situation lasts, the more likely that it will end peacefully, so negotiators aim to draw the kidnapping out as long as possible. They will delay fulfilling demands, extend negotiations with the hostage-takers, and chip away at their resolve by making small concessions. At the same time, they need to appear as if they are negotiating in good faith, lest the hostage-takers do something rash. So they walk a fine line, accommodating the kidnappers as best they can while making sure that the lines of communication remain open. As time goes on, the kidnappers will become more willing to cut their losses, agree to lesser demands, and even release the hostage unharmed.

Meanwhile, efforts to track the kidnappers continue unabated. As with ransom kidnappings, the police use every point of contact as an opportunity to gain more evidence. In these situations, the police concern themselves more with where the kidnappers are than who they are. Because there is less certainty that the hostage will not be harmed, it is imperative to find him as soon as possible. When and if the police pinpoint a location, they move quickly to isolate it and keep it under surveillance. If they believe the hostage is in immediate danger, they will assault the location as soon as possible, hoping to overwhelm the kidnappers before they can act. Otherwise, they will sit back and wait, choosing the safest moment to move against the kidnappers.

Though political kidnappers rarely gain their stated goals, their actions can provide more modest rewards. Publicity from the act can lead to more supporters, who will donate time and money to their cause. Minor demands, such as cash or the release of a single prisoner might be fulfilled, and if they play their cards right, the kidnappers might even be able to wriggle free of the police. Though the U.C. discourages political kidnappings by taking a hard-line stance against it, there will always be elements who see it as a force for change. The more benefits they can gain from it, the more like-minded individuals will be willing to engage in similar crimes themselves.

Cults

There are very few cults in the Unified Commonwealth; those who do exist live isolated lives far out in the countryside, content to ignore and be ignored by the rest of society. Occasionally, however, they will seek out new recruits... and when they can't find who they need from conventional methods, they will resort to kidnapping.

A cult is generally defined by three specific criteria:

- 1) The presence of a single charismatic leader, who enunciates the group's philosophy (and ultimately subsumes it beneath his own personality).

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- 2) The absolute obedience (sometimes coerced) of its membership through a combination of verbal persuasion, physical and psychological manipulation, and social isolation.
- 3) The exploitation (sexual, financial, and otherwise) of its membership by the leader and his inner circle.

STOCKHOLM SYNDROME

Stockholm Syndrome (called Imprinting Syndrome in the Unified Commonwealth) is the curious phenomenon when an abducted victim identifies with his or her captors. Left isolated and alone, the victim begins to depend upon the kidnappers for his or her very life. The kidnappers have ultimate power over the victim: controlling the supply of food and water, and able to kill him or her at any time. When the kidnappers threaten, but fail to kill an abductee, the relief associated with the incident creates intense feelings of gratitude (as well as fear that such threats will eventually be made good). The two combine to form a fierce desire to make the kidnappers happy, to appease them, and to get on their “good” side. The victim begins to identify with his or her captors, developing a close emotional bond that overcomes any feelings of hate or resentment. The need to survive becomes greater than the impulse to loathe his or her captors, and so the victim begins viewing the kidnappers in positive, almost angelic terms. He assists them in their activities, provides helpful details about family members negotiating a release, and even visits them in jail or raises funds for their defense once they have been apprehended.

Stockholm Syndrome normally takes a few days to develop and occurs in response to four specific conditions:

- 1) Direct threat of death from the kidnappers (and the belief that they can carry out that threat).
- 2) An inability to escape.
- 3) An isolation from outsiders, leaving the kidnappers the only form of human contact.
- 4) An overt display of kindness or sympathy from the kidnappers.

Stockholm Syndrome doesn't occur in every kidnapping case, or even most of them. The NLEB's Behavior Division estimates that only one out of every ten kidnapping cases develops Imprinting Syndrome (the real world's FBI places the number at about 8 percent). Bureau agents are trained to look for symptoms of the condition, however, and sometimes make psychologists available to “deprogram” the freed hostages.

In and of itself, these characteristics are not strictly illegal, but they open the way to abuses that may earn law enforcement attention. Cult leaders generally exercise total control over the members' environment through extended preaching, peer pressure, and physical distance from civilized society. Within that context, it becomes difficult to distinguish a genuine kidnapping from simple charismatic persuasion.

Cultists look for very specific victims to recruit. They target those who appear lost or ill at ease, those with a strong desire to belong, or those who can be easily swayed. The abduction is intended not to produce a ransom or external goal, but rather to subvert the victim into joining the cult. They subject him or her to various brainwashing methods such as sleep deprivation and denial of food and water. They seek to invoke confusion by overloading the victim with information, and turn him or her against family members by claiming that they don't have the victim's true interests at heart. They also take steps to evoke Stockholm Syndrome (see nearby sidebar) and create feelings of utter dependence towards the cult and its members. Once the victim has become a member, he transfers his money and other assets to the cult's name, and cuts all ties to the outside world.

Like political kidnappings, cult-based abductions usually fall under the jurisdiction of the NLEB. Unfortunately, there is often little they can do if the victim becomes indoctrinated. Though circumstantial evidence provided at the crime scene may be sufficient to prosecute a kidnapping charge, it is difficult to achieve a conviction without the willing participation of the victim. If he appears to truly want to stay with the cult, he is breaking no laws and the police cannot act. Furthermore, many cults of this sort tend to move around a lot, and their presence in the dilapidated villages of the U.C. countryside can be hard to track. Since cults often earn the attention of law enforcement through more overtly illegal activity, detectives targeting a cult will usually search for other crimes to pursue — fraud, for example, or illegal smuggling — rather than depending upon a brainwashed victim to support a kidnapping charge.

Instead, it usually falls to the families of cult members to procure their loved ones' release. Since cults, by their very nature, rarely allow members to just leave, the families must prepare elaborate “rescue” operations which ironically resemble more traditional kidnappings. They monitor the cult's activities, stake out its headquarters, record the movements of the indoctrinated family member, and carefully plan the right moment to seize him or her and steal away. Once they have recovered their loved one, they must engage in a lengthy deprogramming process in order to convince him or her to return to a normal life. During this period, the cult may attempt to regain its lost member, either through verbal coercion or direct abduction. Family members often use bodyguards or other forms of protection, and rely upon physical seclusion to prevent this from happening. Needless to say, the legal distinction between one side of the equation and the other becomes very blurry during such incidents. While law enforcement usually remains on the family's side (i.e., whichever side exhibits the most “mainstream” qualities), there is often little the police

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can do directly. They tend to let such incidents be, intervening only when direct complaints are made or they have more tangible reasons to move against a given cult.

Gaunts

Gaunt-based kidnappings refer to those in which a gaunt is the target rather than the abductor, and in which his condition is the reason for the abduction. (Other types of kidnappings involving gaunts usually adhere to one of the templates outlined on the previous pages.) The fundamental shift in identity triggered by the onset of gauntism often leaves former friends and family members in a state of baffled anxiety. The person they knew is gone, replaced by a monster who often has little or no idea who he is. In the face of such a drastic shift, it's not unheard of for more reckless relations to abduct the newly transformed gaunt in an effort to "return" him to his previous life. Such cases often follow the same outline for cults as above, with the kidnappers attempting to "deprogram" the gaunt in order to get him to remember his former status in life. Such efforts rarely end well; gaunts inclined to renew their former identity need no coercing to stay, and those forcibly held often become agitated and violent. The gaunt's increased strength may catch unprepared abductors by surprise and require

reinforced holding facilities that hasty kidnappers may not have planned for. More than a few cases have ended with the death of well-meaning abductors who inadvertently pushed their former gaunt "friend" into a murderous rage.

Other cases have even less altruistic motives. Family members ashamed of the "disease" which has struck their relation will imprison him far from human sight, in an effort to hide his condition or prevent others from learning about it. The transformed gaunt is declared missing or dead, only to be locked in a basement or cellar where none save the immediate family can see him. Sometimes, the family will actually have their transformed relation killed, but such cruelty is rare, even in the *Edge of Midnight* universe. More often, he is simply regarded as deformed or disfigured — worthy of life, perhaps, but unable to interact with "civilized" people and left in severely confined quarters... presumably for the rest of his life. The lucky ones receive a modicum of creature comforts — and some even come to accept their condition — but others are kept in squalid filth, denied even basic considerations of safety and well-being. Such kidnappers tend to guard against escape more readily than those acting out of misguided compassion: with less concern for the gaunt's health come stouter and more permanent forms of restraint.



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Regardless of the motive, very few of these cases are ever reported. Gaunts often disappear during their original transformation, and tracking or locating even a modest percentage of them becomes an exercise in futility. Even if it weren't, law enforcement agencies are loathe to devote precious resources to a leatherback victim, and the lack of ransom demands or similar contact keeps the police from becoming involved. The best hope a gaunt kidnap victim has is if he has found a surrogate family of fellow gaunts. They take losing one of their own very personally, and will often move heaven and earth to track down their comrade... with murderous repercussions for anyone holding him against his will. Barring that, however, gaunt kidnap victims are left to either plan an escape on their own, or to submit to whatever misguided whims their former kith and kin subject them to.

Organized Crime

For the mob, kidnapping is purely a business proposition. They engage in it either to earn some quick money or to leverage a foe or opponent into doing their will. The former is fairly uncommon, since it involves a lot of time and effort, and draws an undue amount of law enforcement attention in their direction (especially from the NLEB, who are less easily corrupted than local cops). Most syndicates will engage in it only with the guarantee of a speedy ransom, or as part of some grander money-making scheme. Far more common is kidnapping as a form of blackmail: abducting a spouse or child in exchange for a specific activity. Kidnapping in this manner is usually employed against members of law-abiding society. Mobsters rarely kidnap fellow underworld members — it's easier just to shoot them — and targeting a fellow mobster's family is often an invitation to open war. But for clerks, policemen, and elected officials, threats against loved ones can often coerce them into deeds they would never consider in any other circumstances. What better way to kill a new anti-crime bill being put up to a vote, or ensure that a nosy cop looks the other way when an important shipment is coming in? A favored use of kidnapping involves testimony against a

known mob figure. If the criminals can keep a witness from taking the stand, or coerce a jury member into voting "not guilty," they're often more than willing to risk a kidnapping in order to see it through.

Mob kidnappings thus tend to be brusque and no-nonsense. They will prepare a vehicle or two to use: usually large, nondescript, and stolen so as to leave no links to the kidnappers. They will follow the victim and learn his or her routine, then strike during the most opportune moment: usually when the victim is in transit from one place to another. They will block his or her path, use weapons to frighten away any bystanders, and force the victim into the kidnappers' vehicle. Most victims are quickly bound and blindfolded, then left that way for the duration of the kidnapping so as not to identify their captors. They will be placed in basic accommodations, but the mob rarely considers their comfort. When released, they will be dropped off far from any available help and ordered to keep quiet about their ordeal lest they suffer further abductions in the future. Killing a kidnapping victim is frowned upon — if for no other reason than it adds "murder" to the kidnappers' rap sheets — though if it must be done, it takes place quickly and without mercy. The corpses can either be hidden or dumped, depending on the message the syndicate wishes to send. Far more common than death is mutilation — the severing of an ear or finger to be sent back to the victim's family. Nothing produces desired results faster than grisly proof that one's wife or child is undergoing torture.

When the mob undertakes a kidnapping, they go out of their way not to involve the police. Kidnappings are comparatively easy crimes to solve, and if the law suspects that a large crime syndicate is behind it, they will expend a huge amount of resources towards capturing the culprits in hopes of bringing the whole organization down. Luckily for the kidnappers, they can often use their leverage with the victims' families to ensure that the police never become involved. The most obvious means is to threaten the victim if anyone makes contact with the police. If the victim is already involved in criminal activities, it becomes even easier, since he likely doesn't want the law nosing into his affairs. With the police out of the equation, the syndicate can then proceed in a workmanlike fashion: either releasing the victim once his relation does as they instruct, or killing him as a warning not to defy their will.

If the police do become involved, it rarely goes well for the mobsters. Law enforcement can monitor their interactions with the victims' families as described at the beginning of this section, and swoop down to collect any members of the syndicate who show their faces at the rendezvous points. The only recourse mobsters have is the code of *omerta* which binds them to their syndicate. Individuals will simply keep quiet and face lengthy prison terms rather than turn over their colleagues (and the victim if he or she is still alive). With kidnapping a national offense, however — leaving arrested mobsters to face national prisons rather than provincial or local jails where they likely have more clout — keeping silent may be more difficult than it would for a lesser crime.



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Tongs

Unlike their mobster cousins, Golden (Asian) Tongs delight in the use of kidnapping. They often hold much greater control over their local communities, and thus can dictate the circumstances of the kidnapping much more effectively. They rarely abduct outsiders, preferring to focus on fellow Golden, who rarely interact with the outside world and have little recourse when one of their own is kidnapped. The goal of a Tong kidnapping is usually money: either cash, controlling interest in a business, or as a form of punishment for failure to pay protection money on time. The kidnapping itself is conducted as publicly and flamboyantly as possible. Home invasions are common, as the Tongs kick down the victims' door, brutalize his family, and drag him off into the night after causing as much damage as they can. Restaurants make another favored locale: removing the victim at gunpoint while threatening waiters and patrons with horrible death should anyone be foolish enough to follow them. In addition to sowing confusion, such displays help enhance the Tong's fearsome reputation, and with few bystanders willing to speak to the police, they can indulge in it with little fear of repercussion.

Furthermore, Tongs rarely interact with the victim's family for any extended period of time during the kidnapping. They issue their demands during the initial abduction, trusting that any panicked relations will hear them and comply post-haste. There is rarely any timetable set; whatever the Tongs want, they want it now, and the longer the families delay, the more likely they will never see their relation again. Even if they acquiesce to the Tongs' demands, there is no guarantee that their loved one will ever be returned. Many Tongs will simply kill their victim rather than take the trouble of holding him or her, trusting that the families will act in good faith to give them what they want. Others use their victims' death as a means of spreading fear in the community, and ensuring that future kidnappings won't meet any resistance.

Police treat Tong kidnappings with the same mixture of frustration and ignorance as they do any other Tong-based crime. With few windows into the Golden community, standard law enforcement methods rarely turn up anything promising. The locals can't or won't speak to them, the streets are a tangled maze marked by signs in a foreign language, and the kidnappers have any number of bolt-holes in which to hide... most of which they know like the back of their hands. Until local law enforcement can gain greater inroads into the Commonwealth's Golden districts, kidnapping will continue to be a staple of criminal activity there.

More on Tongs can be found in the *Gaunts and the Underworld* sourcebook.

Other Kidnappers

Mentally deranged kidnappers have been known to abduct victims to abuse or murder them. Because they are strangers, they have no connection to the victims, and because they do not have ransom demands, they do not make contact with the family or the police. Sometimes, the kidnapper is a vagrant who doesn't even have a reliable address to trace. The victim

simply disappears, his body found months or even years later. Police consider these among the most difficult and unspeakable crimes to solve, because evidence is so rarely in abundance.

In addition, parents undergoing a divorce may sometimes abduct their children if they fear they will not receive custody. They will simply gather him or her up and drive off, distancing the child from the remaining spouse. Some will attempt to set up new lives for themselves, using false identities and the like. More than a few do it out of concern for the child's safety (if the other parent was abusive, for example). Regardless of circumstances, the police view such cases as kidnappings, and will pursue and prosecute them as such. Generally the best method involves sending out descriptions of the parent and child, along with the car they were driving and any other details. If a friend or family member is in a position to help the fugitives, the police will set up surveillance in the hopes that the two will show up. Without ready means of support, the parent will have to re-enter society in some form or another in order to earn money. When he or she does, it becomes much more likely that someone will notice them, and if a description of parent and child has been widely circulated, it increases the chances that the police will be able to track them down.

MURDER

Murder is the oldest and simplest form of crime: the taking of another human life. It can be committed in any number of ways, and no two murder cases are exactly alike. Police departments put a high priority on murder cases; not only are they the most extreme form of crime, but they are the crimes most likely to stir fear in the local populace. The press sensationalizes murder cases, and the longer one goes unsolved, the more the police appear incapable of doing their jobs. While some murders can be swept under the rug (usually those involving gaunt victims or members of the underclass), others require swift and immediate resolution lest the authorities suffer a lasting blow to their reputation. The ability to prevent intended homicides and to capture those who commit them is one of the hallmarks of an efficient police force.

The law divides murder into three basic categories:

- 1) **Unintentional homicide**, or "involuntary manslaughter," is defined as the killing of a human being during the commission of a non-felonious crime or the commission of a lawful act conducted in an unlawful manner likely to involve death. It typically involves some measure of negligence on the part of the accused, but is otherwise regarded as unintentional. (This differs from accidental death, where the accused is determined not to be at fault and is thus free from prosecution.) Common forms of manslaughter include automobile accidents, the illegal discharge of a firearm, or engaging in any threatening activity while under the influence of alcohol.

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- 2) **Second-degree murder**, or a “crime of passion,” is defined as the killing of a human being as a result of sudden emotional distress caused by immediate circumstances. It includes so-called domestic killings (arising from an argument between spouses), barroom arguments, and in some cases, vehicular deaths caused by an emotionally agitated driver.
- 3) **First-degree murder** is defined as the killing of a human being “with malice aforethought;” in other words, a death in which previous planning was involved. In most U.C. provinces, it also involves killings which occur during the commission of a felony such as an armed robbery.

The first two types of murder are infinitely easier to solve than the third. Without pre-planning, the perpetrator makes sloppy mistakes and rarely covers up the evidence sufficiently. He will often flee the scene on impulse without the resources to make a proper getaway or the wherewithal to keep a low profile. In the case of unintentional homicide, the perpetrator may not even suspect he has committed a crime, and can be arrested quite easily after the D.A. determines that he has a case. Obviously, the police much prefer such crimes to more careful and premeditated killings.

In many cases, forensics can help determine whether the murder was premeditated or not. Medical examiners look for injuries that speak to sloppiness or excitement: multiple gunshot wounds suggesting haphazard aim or stab marks driven particularly deeply. Crimes of passion rarely entail any effort to hide the body, or when they do, the body is disguised in the quickest and most expedient manner possible. Bloodstains will be copious and open, and little effort will have been made to secure the premises. If the suspect is a relation, a quick round-up of family members will determine who is missing, while other types of second-degree murder (those stemming from bar arguments or work-related issues) often take place in public with plenty of witnesses to identify the suspect. A simple examination of the crime scene is often enough to determine whether the murder was premeditated or not, and if it wasn't, then locating the suspect is usually only a matter of time.

As with all crimes, speedy capture is vital when tracking the suspect of an unintentional or second-degree homicide. Besides the obvious need for swift justice, such cases are far more likely to end in a suicide or attempted suicide. The killer, faced with the enormity of what he has done and the extreme probability of capture, may opt to end his own life rather than face the music. Homicide investigators try to move quickly in order to prevent such an act from occurring.

Pre-Meditation and Motive

First-degree murder takes up the vast bulk of homicide investigators' time, both because of the heinousness of the crime and because the killer likely took steps to conceal his identity. Detectives must work with fewer clues in order to track a suspect more dedicated to evading capture. If their quarry is smart enough, it may take considerable manpower to build a proper case against him... and in many circumstances, the killer might never be captured at all.

The first priority when investigating a murder case is to identify the motive. If detectives can determine why the victim was killed, they can go a long way towards determining who killed him. This process starts with the initial investigation, and the first batch of clues immediately provides telling signs of why the killer acted as he did. In the first place, it separates those crimes where murder was the main goal from those in which the murder happened incidentally in the progress of another crime. During any investigation of a murder scene, police officers are trained to look for signs of *adjunct homicide* — that is, signs that the murder was a secondary or unintentional goal. Burglars and thieves will sometimes kill those who spot them in the course of a robbery lest they be identified and charged, while rapists and sex offenders have been known to kill their victims for similar reasons. Signs of adjunct homicide appear quite readily: money will be missing in the case of a robbery, for example, or the victims' body will carry signs of sexual assault. Some murderers are clever enough to leave phony evidence of adjunct homicide behind as a way of throwing pursuers off the scent. Few, however, understand enough about investigative technique to cover up all the clues, and while uninterested inspectors may never look past the obvious motivations, the truly diligent will invariably spot signs of deeper scheming.

Once adjunct homicide is ruled out, police focus on murder as the suspect's primary motive and begin to disseminate who might want the victim dead and why. Generally speaking, a premeditated homicide is motivated by one of two things: love or money. In the first case, a killer acts because he feels it will bring him the love of a desired individual or allow him to be with a given individual. A mistress who murders the wife to be with the husband is a strong example of this motivation. The second case is even simpler than the first: someone has figured out a way to make a great deal of money, and the plan won't work until the victim lies cold and stiff. Gang lords who ruthlessly wipe out their rivals are a good example of this motivation. (Barring psychotic imbalance, few first-degree murders are motivated out of pure hate; if one dislikes someone, one can find numerous ways short of homicide to separate oneself from him, and even in cases where the victim was deeply hated, the killer usually needs further motivation to drive him to murder.)

Motives in first-degree murder tend to either show up right away, or lie hidden deep beneath the surface. Those which announce themselves immediately can usually be attributed to who the victim was and how he was slain. Criminals engaged in turf wars, for example, might be executed by rival gangs, while public activists may be killed for political reasons. In such cases, police turn away from identifying a single suspect, and instead to look for which one of a number of suspects had the means and methodology to conduct such a killing. The public profile of the victim and often spectacular cause of death provide for greater resources and manpower than normal... offsetting the increased difficulty in singling out a specific suspect among a larger number who may have wanted the victim dead. (See the section on page 46 for more information on gangland homicides.)

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If the motive isn't immediately apparent, however, it behooves the investigator to continue digging for facts. While clues found at the initial crime scene may provide some help, it often means a long and methodical search through the people and institutions closest to the victim. Spouses and family members will be interviewed in hopes of learning about the victim's habits and activities. Business records will be scoured over, and coworkers interviewed as well. In each case, investigators keep the fundamental question of motive in mind. Why might someone want this person dead? Did the victim owe someone a lot of money? Did he have a mistress? Was there an insurance policy taken out in his name? Did he have an enemy at

work? Canny investigators will often note how things change once the victim is out of the way. Does his wife suddenly run off with another man? Does his business move forward with an important piece of work that he was obstructing?

In addition, detectives will pay careful attention to any deviation in the victim's behavior prior to his slaying. Maybe he changed his working habits or took a long and unexpected trip. New people may have come into his life, leading to a shift away from previous family or friends. He may have been depressed or moody... or conversely, might have suddenly seemed happier or more satisfied. Spending habits can lend insight into this arena as well. Did the victim suddenly come into a lot of money? Or conversely, was he facing mounting debts or some other fiscal crisis which may have necessitated drastic behavior? With each question answered, the picture of the victim's life becomes clearer, along with new threads of investigation that may lead to a suspect.

"Accidental" Killings

One of the quickest ways to get clear of a murder is to make it look like an accident. If the authorities rule that the victim perished by happenstance, then there is no investigation and the killer can walk away scot-free. Accordingly, many cases of first-degree murder involve a certain amount of cover-up, as the killer attempts to disguise the cause of death or frame it in such a way as to throw off suspicion.

Careful forensics and vigorous interrogation make the best weapons against such tactics. Few murderers know what signs a canny medical examiner can spot in an instant, and even if they do, hiding them can be a supremely tricky business. For example, a murderer may try to disguise his killing by burning the house down with the victim's body inside. If properly prepared, it may appear as an accidental blaze, with the victim perishing in the fire. But medical examiners know that death by fire involves a scorched throat and lungs as the victim breathes in flames or superheated air. A body with no such signs was obviously killed before the blaze started, and therefore murdered.

Similarly, a vigorous interrogation technique can spot flaws in the suspect's version of events. Policemen interrogating a possible suspect will often withhold key information in hopes of getting the suspect to slip up. For example, say the coroner examines the victim of a gunshot wound and determines the direction and proximity of the weapon when it was fired. The suspect presents a story whereby the victim was handling the gun and it "just went off." But his description fails to take into account the angle and distance of the weapon, casting severe doubt on his version of events.

Not every death is murder of course, and fatal accidents happen every day. But police departments are paid to be suspicious and few detectives will accept an accidental cause of death without a thorough examination. No one commits first-degree murder without a plan to throw off suspicion, and unless they have a patsy set up to take the fall, an "accidental" death is the most appealing means of getting away with it. The police know better than to take first impressions for granted.

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Gangland Hits

The criminal underworld is no stranger to violence, and most organized syndicates embrace murder as the cost of doing business. Rivals may become too dangerous to let live, underlings may need to be executed as an example to others, and witnesses may need to be silenced permanently before they can reveal what they know to the police. Criminals usually either commit the murder themselves or hire a professional hit man to do it, but unlike other types of killing, they all bear certain identifiable characteristics.

Traditional “gangland-style” executions consist of the victim being driven to his knees and then either shot in the back of the head or bled out by slitting his throat. Such murders take place after abducting the victim and driving him to a quiet, out-of-the-way locale where he can be killed without attracting

witnesses. If the killers have no wish to send a specific message to the victim’s family or associates, they will typically bury the body, or take other steps to ensure it isn’t found. (The victim himself will often be forced to dig his own grave before being killed.) Sometimes, however, the execution is intended to serve as a warning or the killers wish the underworld to know why they executed the victim. In that case, they leave the body somewhere where it will likely be found and marked with a specific sign to indicate his sin. For example, if he failed to pay off his gambling debts, he might have coins stuffed into his mouth, or if he insulted a given don, then his tongue will be cut out and left in a pickled jar next to him. Some criminal organizations will carve a symbol into the victim’s body as a sort of calling card, while others will cut off the victim’s hands and knock out his teeth to prevent identification. Signs of torture may be apparent, especially if the killers had plenty of time to go about their work.

Such patterns generally occur only when the killers have the luxury to move with care, to abduct their target before killing him if possible, and to choose the execution site with an eye on quiet disposal. Sometimes however, their target is cautious enough or dangerous enough that they cannot depend on killing him at their leisure. Instead, they must use less reliable means of execution — more akin to political assassination than an underworld slaying. The victim must be taken by expedient means, often quickly and with a rapid escape planned by the killers. Targets are often killed in public places, since their homes and hideaways are too well-protected to justify the effort. The killer may infiltrate the area as a seemingly innocuous employee — a waiter at the victim’s restaurant or a bellboy at the hotel he frequents. Or he may simply approach the target so quickly that no one has time to react (the infamous “drive-by shooting,” for example, entails the killers pulling up in a car and showering the area with bullets before speeding away). Whatever the method, the goal is simple and straightforward: ensure that the target is dead and escape from the area clean.

For execution-style murders, crime syndicates usually task lower-level members of their own organization to pull the trigger. The killers tend to be torpedoes — simple men who know how to follow orders and have no qualms about the nastier aspects of the job. Their bosses provide strict directions and trust that they won’t screw anything up (if they do, they may very well end up beside their victim). Sometimes, a criminal syndicate will have a specific member whose sole job it to conduct such hits, but not always.

Political-style assassinations, however, usually demand much more finesse. It takes planning and patience to locate the right time and method for the task, and an amount of creativity which the typical flunkie simply doesn’t possess. Certain crews maintain a full-time assassin in their ranks, charged with conducting killings against those too clever or powerful to be removed lightly. That level of efficiency comes with a hefty price tag, however, and most crews rarely have need of such services often enough to employ someone full time. Instead, they will hire a freelance hit man to do the job

THE 48-HOUR RULE

The 48-hour rule refers to the single most important period in a murder investigation: the 24 hours preceding the victim’s death, and the 24 hours afterwards. The former focuses on the victim’s movements and locations immediately before his death: where he went, who he saw, what he may have been doing, and why. The police will scour every detail from this time period with methodical precision. Any location he visited will be explored and examined with a forensics team if necessary. The people he saw will be sought out and interrogated, with an emphasis on what the victim was up to and how he may have acted. Some detectives draw up a formal timetable charting the victim’s movements and activities. They will focus intently on any blank spots in that timetable, since whatever took place then likely has considerable bearing on why the victim was killed.

Similarly, the period immediately after the victim’s death holds the most potential for useful investigation. The crime scene is still fresh and uncontaminated by any passersby. The killer is likely still flush with his deed and has not yet had time to collect himself. Witnesses can recollect events with greater accuracy, and law enforcement can bring its resources to bear very quickly. Detectives put a great deal of stock in doing as much as they can during this period. If they can emerge with a motive and a suspect (if not an actual arrest), then odds are good they will be able to bring in their man. If they can’t — if the first few hours stretch into days, and then weeks — the trail will grow colder and clues will become increasingly hard to find. Without the introduction of new evidence, such cases become more and more difficult to solve, until the police essentially give up and file it away. With new homicides being committed every day, and most police forces stretched to their limit, such unsolved cases rarely see the light of day again. Experienced homicide detectives thus try to move as quickly as they can, and always adhere to the 48-hour rule.

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— contracted for a specific target, given a timetable and any other parameters, and then left to conduct the killing as he sees fit. Competent hit men are highly prized within the underworld community, and their status as outsiders usually keeps them safe from “unprofessional” retaliation. (More on hit men can be found on the next column.)

In dealing with these kinds of murders, police tend to focus specifically on causes, using the evidence left behind as signposts directing them to the victims’ past actions. If no symbol exists but signs of a gangland-style hit persist, then they look for connections the victim may have had to a specific organization... and whether he was killed by a rival gang or by members of his own as a part of some internal power struggle. If the execution was public, then they search for people who may have known the victim’s schedule and those who may have had access to the murder scene. They pay particular attention to new faces — people hired just a few days or weeks before the murder, or those who haven’t been seen since the killing. For deaths where the killer is not immediately present — a long-range sniper’s shot, for instance, or dynamite wired to the victim’s car — then they still seek out anyone who may have had access to the proper equipment (mechanics who may have worked on the car, window washers with a line of sight to the murder spot, etc.). In many cases, the suspect will similarly have started work just a short time before the murder, or was seen lurking around in places where he shouldn’t have been. Regardless of the specifics, it can provide the only concrete leads the police are likely to get.

Unfortunately, gangland executioners tend to cover their tracks extremely well, and while police may have strong suspicions about who pulled the trigger, they rarely have any hard evidence to go on. Even if they land a killer, the mob usually assigns such duties to low-level footmen acting at the behest of superiors, leaving the police with a small fish in custody while the bigger fish get away. The mobsters’ code of *omerta* will keep killers silent about who gave their orders, and prison stays for organized criminals tend to be much less onerous than their unconnected brethren. (See the *Gaunts and the Underworld* sourcebook for more information on mob culture.) All of which makes capturing gangland killers an exercise in frustration to the police.

Furthermore, if the victim was himself a criminal or had extensive underworld ties, then the police are more reluctant to devote excessive attention to it. In their minds, the victim got what was coming to him, and while they may make overtures of pursuing it, they’ll often let it slide in favor of more “pressing” cases. Obviously that changes if the victim was a comparative innocent (a trial witness, or example) or if innocent bystanders were killed during the execution. They may focus on the murder as part of a larger effort to bring down a particular underworld player, or be forced to search harder for the killer if the public outcry is loud enough. But without more pressing factors in play — and with the inherent difficulty in ferreting out killer of such skill — most departments will quietly place the incident on the back burner, and move on to cases they stand a better chance of solving quickly.

Hit Men

When criminals (or aspiring criminals) need somebody taken out of the way, they can either do it themselves or hire a hit man: a professional willing to kill for profit. Career criminals use hit men as a way of establishing an alibi and to separate themselves from the deed, while one-time criminals use them in order to avoid the ghastly business of committing murder themselves. Amateurs in the business rarely last long. They leave clues behind at the murder scene, botch important details (such as making the death look like an accident), and turn over their employers at the drop of a hat when caught. The true professionals — those who excel at taking lives — learn both how to do the job properly, and to leave few signs of their passing behind them.

The use of a hit man in a murder begins with the establishment of a contract, whereby the desired specifics of the murder are stipulated and the chosen fee is agreed upon. The hit man will mention any ethical codes preventing him from killing certain types of people (such as women or children), while the contractor will specify any potential obstacles in carrying out the hit. These contracts are rarely written down — usually confined to oral conversations and sealed with little more than a handshake — and of course, cannot be legally enforced without bringing both parties up on criminal charges. Each side relies upon the honor of the other to proceed... and, more practically, on the often fatal repercussions of welshing. Professional killers have no issues turning on their clients if they feel betrayed, while those who fail to complete their contracts may find evidence against them placed in the hands of the police (or worse, becoming the target of a hit themselves). Many hit men demand at least a portion of their payment up front, as a guarantee of good faith once the deed is finally done.

When a contract is agreed upon, the hit man will prepare for the assassination attempt. He will monitor the victim’s activities and select a method most conducive to his client’s wishes. He will secure suitable equipment for the job — often discarded after completion of the hit — as well as a secure headquarters from which to act. Some prefer low-rent hotels and flophouses, which provide ample cover and have employees who don’t wish to pry too closely in their tenants’ affairs. Others will secure a separate safe house in an obscure or isolated locale, such as a cabin in the woods. The best hit men prepare a back-up hideaway, and will always have several separate caches of money and travel tickets. If something goes wrong, they need to be able to depart the scene quickly.

When he has studied the victims’ habits and movements, the hit man will decide upon the right time to act and the right method of execution. Low-grade killers will devote comparatively little time to such thoughts, preferring to do the job as quickly and expediently as possible. Experts will plan things much more carefully, and prepare contingency plans for any number of unforeseen eventualities. Most hit men develop a wide variety of means to kill their victims, ranging from gunshot wounds to poison to feigned automobile accidents. Every client demands some different means of doing the job, with different parameters, different specifications, and different intended consequences upon a successful hit. In addition to

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skills with weapons, hit men often develop a working knowledge of toxicology, as well as basic anatomy to better pinpoint appropriate means of assassination. An ability to pick locks often comes in handy, as does a knack for blending into crowds. In some cases, a contractor wants the body destroyed or rendered unidentifiable, in which case the hit man must develop some means of getting rid of it unobserved. Most of them have at least a modicum of military or law enforcement training, and the war against the Order of Nu imparted the necessary skills to a large number of surviving veterans.

Assassinations generally fall into two categories. A public hit can take place anytime and anywhere. The client doesn't care if the hit is observed, and doesn't worry about hiding the motives. Public assassinations are often the easiest to perform: the hit man's only real concern (besides executing the job successfully) is escaping the scene without being identified. The other method is a clean hit (also called a covert hit), in which the killing leaves no witnesses to testify and/or the act appears to be a suicide, accident, or other circumstance besides murder. Clean hits require much more planning and have many more opportunities for complication. If something goes wrong, it's often very difficult to correct things properly. Clean hits usually cost considerably more than public hits.

Most hit men kill strictly for money. They have no emotional attachment to either their victims or their clients, and while

assassination requires a certain sociopathic detachment, they rarely act out of mental imbalance. Freelance hit men tend to work exclusively in assassination; though some will engage in other crimes — or even take certain legal jobs such as body-guarding — the increased profile of such activity increases the chances of getting caught. A professional hit typically costs between \$1,000 and \$10,000 dollars, though amateur bottom feeders will take on a job for significantly less (and with a proportionately higher risk of getting caught). Some will act out of loyalty to a particular client, but most keep their transactions on a financial level. The smart ones move their money through a middleman, arranging for anonymous bank deposits in off-shore accounts rather than bundles of cash which can be more easily confiscated. The less direct contact they have with their clients, the better for all concerned.

Organized criminals form the bulk of a professional hit man's clientele list. Mobsters like using hit men because it guarantees a certain level of professionalism while simultaneously giving members of the mob a chance to establish airtight alibis. They can also conduct retaliatory actions if the hit man fails to complete his assignment, and sever ties with the hit man if he attracts any legal attention. Those outside the ranks of organized crime usually contract a killer either in hope of a financial windfall (such as when the victim has

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a large insurance policy or will provide an inheritance to the contractor) or else as a way of ending a romantic relationship. For obvious reasons, they usually require the hit man to make it look like an accident.

Gaunts, too, have begun making use of hit men: most often to redress an injustice which they feel the legal system cannot or will not help them with. Since gaunts rarely have the funds to hire a first-rate killer, their efforts tend to be sloppier than most... though a number of very skilled gaunt hit men are willing to do such work at a discount.

Warlocks have found contract killing to be an extremely lucrative profession. Their magical abilities can cause all manner of messy deaths, and the lack of weaponry involved makes it easier to approach the victim undetected. The often spectacular effects of magic tend to frighten and confuse any bystanders, and the money will allow a warlock to better hide his tracks from pursuing law enforcement officials. The dangers of such activities are self-evident (use of magic in the commission of murder automatically makes the killer eligible for the electric chair) but warlock killers are some of the best-paid criminals in the underworld. Furthermore, contract hits carry with them a fearsome reputation, providing invaluable street credit to the warlock committing them and ensuring that backsliding fellow criminals think twice before crossing him. Several of the U.C.'s most notorious hit men — including Simon Navarre, Eli Gutierrez, and the enigmatic figure known only as the Magic Man (see *The Naked City* sourcebook, page 27) — are practicing warlocks.

Experienced hit men are extremely difficult for the police to track. With no tangible connection to the victim, they lack the easy signs of motive, and if they cover their tracks sufficiently, they leave few clues behind for investigators to follow. Most detectives dealing with a contract killing will instead pursue the hit man's client, hoping that more tangible evidence of means and motive will lead them to a killer. If the victim was himself a criminal (and there were no innocent bystanders caught in the crossfire), then the police will usually assume he had it coming, and refrain from pursuing the killer too deeply. Sloppier hit men prove much easier to hunt down, however; not only do they leave tell-tale signs at the scene, but they will often spend their money indiscriminately, leaving a financial trail for investigators to follow. Detectives will accordingly monitor car dealerships, local jewelry stores, and other high-end businesses for unusual activities (much as they would following a bank robbery or similar crime).

Contract killings usually fall within the purveyance of local police. If the victim and/or suspected mastermind belongs to a specific criminal organization, then the hit will be folded into any ongoing investigations into that mob. Hit men whose methodology can be identified over multiple assassinations are usually referred to the NLEB; a killer who acts in multiple cities and provinces is technically considered a serial killer, and falls under the jurisdiction of national law enforcement. And of course, any evidence of magic used in the commission of a contract hit will be turned over to the local crystal ball squad, who often make the capture of such criminals their highest priority.

Serial Killings

Most examples of premeditated murder presume that the killer is at least modestly rational: that is, acting more or less out of logic and self-interest. This implies an easily definable motive and a reliable series of behavioral patterns which the police can use to track the subject. Sometimes, however, the killer has no rational motivation. He's driven by instincts he cannot control or by mental imbalances which no rational mind could presume to grasp. Insane murderers can prove a terrible conundrum to the police, who must piece together the fragments of a shattered mind. If the killer is cunning and able to disguise his murderous urges, it might be months or even years before he is caught.

Thankfully (at least from an investigative standpoint), many insane killers act out of compulsion. They don't plan their murders well and may lack the intelligence to properly think the matter through. The police can catch up with them fairly rapidly, and while the killer may temporarily evade capture by staying on the move, he simply doesn't have the resourcefulness to stay hidden for long. Examples of this kind of killing include spree murders (killing a large number of people in a short amount of time), mass murders (killing a large number of people in a single location), and lone cases of murder driven solely by psychological compulsion... though none of those categories are solely limited to the mentally unbalanced.

Far more difficult to capture is the serial killer, which the NLEB has only begun to categorize and study. It defines the term as someone who murders three or more victims in temporally unrelated incidents. The murderer acts out of a psychological need rather than logical rationale. Serial killers usually employ predatory methods in finding their victims (similar to hunting game animals) and are often motivated by sexual and/or sadistic motives. Unlike more compulsive killers, these murderers act very carefully, choose their victims with foresight and intelligence, and leave little behind for investigators to follow.

Beyond that, very little is known about serial killers' motivations, methods, and means of evading capture. The Bureau has recently formed a Profiling Division (see page 58) aimed at "better understanding the criminal mind." Their work is rapidly being taken up by serial killer cases (referred to as "multiple psychosis" murders in official documents) which may help shed further light on the issue as time goes on. (Serial killers have always existed in the real world, but they did not become a serious focus of law enforcement until the early 1980s. The U.C. is somewhat ahead of us in this arena, but still lags behind our modern understanding of the crime.)

For now, police must content themselves with slow, painfully frustrating investigations, attempting to parse the motivations of a mind which defies rational understanding. They often consult with psychologists in an attempt to learn what they can, but unless they catch a major break, they must infer a great deal from the nature of the victims and hope to find the suspect before he strikes again.

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The NLEB believes that most serial killers started early in life, through systematic abuse or other psychological imbalances. Many of them display warning signs at an early age, such as starting fires or tormenting small animals. In each case, murder fulfills some specific need in the killer: a primal urge which ultimately dictates his behavior. That need is unique to the specific serial killer, but the NLEB has grouped them all into several broad categories:

- **Decadent or hedonistic killers** act out of primal emotional stimulation. Some kill as an extension of the sex act, achieving a greater sexual thrill by the process of murder. Others gain a comfort by conducting killings in a specific manner (dressing the victims up as dolls, for example). Still others do it for the sheer visceral excitement, attaining an adrenaline-based high which is not specifically sexual, but which proves equally addicting. Such killers are defined more by their methodology than by their type of victim, with clues to their motivation left in the cause and circumstances of death.
- **Missionary killers** are less overtly psychotic than simply filled with hate and rage at a particular societal demographic. They feel that members of this demographic are evil, less than human, and in many cases the cause of all of society's ills. (Gaunts are a common target, as are members of socially undesirable occupations like prostitutes.) While they lack the subconscious psychological compulsions that drive other serial killers, their methods are often indistinguishable. They choose members of their target community as a

means of lessening the "stain" on the world or as a way of instilling fear and terror in other members of that community. If possible, such killers will focus on prominent community members — either public spokesmen or anonymous members the killer sees on a regular basis. Some missionary killers will simply make do with whatever individuals are unfortunate enough to cross their paths. Their killings are acts of overt prejudice, designed to subjugate, marginalize, and even destroy the minority in question.

- **Visionary killers** are driven by active delusions or hallucinations (those who believe God tells them to kill, for example, or those suffering from paranoid fantasies of persecution). Visionary killers tend to select specific types of victims based on race, gender, or other definable qualities. Their victims will conform to the particulars of their delusions, and the deaths they cause serve some tangible function in their ongoing fantasies (for instance, believing that gaunts are "tormented souls" and that killing them frees them to go to heaven).
- **Domination or control-based killers** suffer from a need for complete power and control over their victims. They often exhibit a crippling lack of self-esteem, haunted by feelings of utter helplessness. To compensate, they abduct and brutalize their victims as a means of expressing control. Torture and physical abuse are common, but often serve to simply reinforce their insecurity rather than satiate their more overtly sadistic compulsions. Sexual abuse is similarly motivated as an expression of power, not of lust as it would be in a decadent killer.
- **Copypat killers** emulate the behaviors of another serial killer — usually one whose depredations are covered in the press. They murder as a means of gaining fame or attention: hoping to be held responsible for the other killer's deeds, and thus reap a share of the media spotlight. Less dangerous copypats will simply take credit for the earlier killings, rather than conducting killings of their own.

EXCUSE VS. EXCULPATION

Legal terminology draws a firm line between an excused crime and an exculpated crime. Excused crimes are those in which the defendant himself possesses a status or quality which renders prosecution inappropriate (a defendant who is ruled to be insane, for example, or a child who does not understand the consequences of his actions). Exculpable crimes are those in which the specific circumstances permit the exoneration of the defendant (a homicide committed in self-defense, a man stealing medicine to heal a sick family member, etc.) The subtle distinction allows judges to differentiate how the law is applied, and thus how cases involving extenuating circumstances may be ruled. The implications for law enforcement officials (and scenarios involving them) should not be lightly dismissed. A murderer ruled insane (an excused crime) might be sent to a lunatic asylum for the reminder of his life... fitting justice for his crimes some would say. But the same murderer ruled to be acting in self-defense (an exculpable crime) will likely be set free... possibly prompting cries for revenge among the victims' survivors and sending the long hard work of the arresting officers straight down the drain.

Only rarely are serial killers motivated by truly rational justifications. While certain contract hit men and other career criminals may engage in serial killings, the necessities of more mundane crimes preclude the fundamental compulsions which drive "classical" serial killers. Because their motivations are more rational, police can more easily track them by classifying them as something other than a serial killer. The question of their sanity thus rarely becomes a pertinent factor in the investigation, arising only during trial when the defense must present its case.

Serial killings frequently begin with a pre-crime stressor: a trigger or specific event which compels the killer to act. In an effort to cope with whatever urges are driving him, he develops a means of compensation, which invariably ends in murder. It may be pre-planned and involve meticulous detail, or it may be a random deed brought about by stressful conditions. Whatever the reason, the act of killing becomes a catharsis for the murderer. It represents emotional fulfillment,

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sexual release, freedom from debilitating psychotic imagery... and most importantly (assuming he isn't immediately caught), proof that he can do it again.

Serial killers are often hard to distinguish in the early stages; their first few murders don't always develop into a pattern, at least not until they have perfected their "techniques." Furthermore, once the kill has been made, the killer undergoes a "down time," as his satiated compulsions begin to build again. Unless viable evidence arises linking the crimes, police will often treat early murders as separate incidents.

Soon enough, however, a viable pattern emerges. The killer's initial escape from justice leads to a *maintenance cycle*, whereby he commits additional murders in order to attain the same pleasure/relief associated with his first. In each case, he attempts to recreate the same conditions, either by choosing similar victims, by orchestrating the murder in the same way, or by engaging in the same ritualistic patterns. Each new murder provides a fresh respite from whatever mental traumas drive him to kill, allowing him to return to his "normal" life as the cycle begins again. Many serial killers collect trophies from the crime scene, ranging from the gruesome (body parts of the victims) to the merely personal (knickknacks or photographs). Trophies retain a vicarious "charge" associated with the incident, which the killer uses during his down time to relive the events. Eventually, however, this period of respite ends as negative stressors (either triggered by outside events or arising cyclically in the killer's own mind) drive him towards release again.

The cycle will continue for as long as the killer can commit murder and get away with it. Most serial killers (at least those who aren't caught in the early stages) are smart enough to act with caution, planning their murders carefully and leaving no evidence behind. Law enforcement's rudimentary understanding of the phenomenon often aids the killer, for without proper investigation and coordination over all the agencies involved, important details may be missed. Capture comes only when the police have enough clues to predict when and where the killer will strike next, or can attach a firm name to the disparate details which each new crime scene provides.

Ironically, with each new successful kill, the police's job becomes easier. New evidence becomes available and new details suggest common links (and perhaps a concrete identity) that may not have been visible before. The killer himself may contribute to this process as well. Repeated success often leads to increased sloppiness or the perilous belief that the police simply cannot catch him. Though some can go on for years or even decades, their chances of capture grow the longer they continue their activities.

If the killer remains localized, his crimes are the purveyance of the local police, though they often consult with the NLEB for aid. Many serial killers, however, cross civic and provincial boundaries in the search for new victims (the diversity of locales can help hide their tracks and people in new cities may be less wary). If two killings in different territories are conclusively linked to the same murderer, then the NLEB takes over the investigation as a matter of course. How-

THE INSANITY DEFENSE

The so-called insanity defense comes into play when the killer is considered mentally unbalanced or so deranged that he cannot be certain of what he has done. It is usually applied as a legal argument in an attempt to commute the sentence or to transfer the perpetrator to a facility better able to deal with him. The U.C. defines insanity very strictly under these circumstances: if the perpetrator understands that his actions are against the law and remains conscious of the act as "something he must not do," then he is not considered insane. Only those with no discernible realization of their actions or who behave under delusions which they cannot control can be said to be insane. (This is referred to as the "M'Naghten Rules" in our world, and the "Perceptive Reasoning Rules" in the U.C.) In criminal cases involving an insanity plea, the onerous is on the defense to prove that the perpetrator did not understand what he was doing when he committed the crime.

Those ruled to be insane must generally undergo psychiatric treatment at a facility determined by the court. They are not held for any specified period of time, but rather remain in the facility until the supervising physician determines that the defendant is no longer a threat. Depending on the severity of the crime, however, that could be many years, and the worst offenders may never be released.

Temporary insanity is the argument that the defendant was legally insane at the time of the incident, but has since regained his senses. Originally an obscure form of defense, it has gained increasing popularity in the years since the war. Returning veterans suffering from all manner of post-combat trauma often pled temporary insanity when accused of a crime, and juries tended to give them a fair amount of leeway in consideration of their war experiences. The trend has begun to reverberate outward, and is now used by accused criminals with no war record.

The difficulty with temporary insanity entails concrete proof. Psychologists and court experts can only examine the defendant after the incident, so determining his state of mind during the commission of the crime depends largely upon eyewitness accounts. Even then, the line between temporary insanity and a simple crime of passion (which can be prosecuted as second-degree murder) is extremely difficult to discern. Pre-existing conditions figure strongly into any case, but most police feel that the plea represents an attempt to evade responsibility. Its recent success in the Commonwealth courts suggests to them that the system may no longer be worth honoring, and that "instant justice" out on the streets is a more effective way of enforcing the law than risking a temporary insanity plea.

WARLOCKS AND DETECTIVES

ever, they often still rely on local investigators for leg work and manpower. When coupled with the stresses of the case, and the often brutal manner in which the victims are slain, it makes for some nasty jurisdictional squabbles. Local cops balk at being relegated to clean-up duty, and jockey for more substantive workloads alongside "superior" NLEB Agents. Until the Bureau devotes more resources and manpower to serial killings, inter-departmental friction will always be a part of serial killer cases.

Cult-Based Killings

The relative rarity of cults in the U.C. means that murders attributed to them are even scarcer. Yet when they do crop up, their grisly and often sensationalistic details give them a huge media presence. Police often devote extensive resources to solving such killings solely because of their prominence.

Cult murders usually involve multiple killers acting out of some common perception of their particular group's philosophy. They do not normally fit the definition of insanity proscribed to serial killers, though the cult leader or similar figure may possess such qualities. Rather, the cult's shared beliefs — reinforced through indoctrination and forced social conformity — drive them to commit these deeds. Murder of an outsider can help cement a cult member's ties to his fellows (the shared guilt makes a powerful form of control), and some extreme cults force members to kill as part of their initiation rites. Other cults conduct murder as part of some specific ceremony dictated by the ethos of their leadership. Regardless of the exact reason, these sorts of murders still retain certain ritualistic qualities, such as the use of a particular weapon, clothing worn, placement of the body, treatment of the victim before the incident (such as injecting him or her with drugs), and so on. Such incidents often lead law enforcement to pursue the killers as they would a serial murderer, using the common qualities to track and capture the perpetrators.

More problematic than the murder of an outsider, however, is murder which takes place within the cult itself. Cult members may be singled out for disobeying their leader, trying to escape, or other forms of "misbehavior." Alternately, the cult may select members possessing certain desired qualities (eye color, skin color, gender, etc.) to be sacrificed in some ritual or another. Such incidents are almost never reported, and indeed law enforcement rarely learns about them until long after the fact. Thankfully, they are extremely rare. Cults thrive on the obedience of their membership, and killing one of their own deprives the cult of a useful asset. Disobedient members can be disciplined in less permanent ways, and ritual sacrifices can be culled from the larger populace without losing a member in the process.

The sole exceptions to this are incidents of so-called mass suicide. Certain cults perpetrate the notion of an upcoming doomsday, when civilization will be consumed by apocalypse. The only way to escape such an upheaval is to kill themselves: usually in a ritualistic fashion which enables them to "transcend" to a better world. Other cults invoke mass suicide as a form of protest against some fundamental form of evil in the world, or as a means of escape when they feel that enemies (either real or imaginary) have them hopelessly surrounded.

Cults with exclusively gaunt members have proven particularly susceptible to such beliefs: destroying themselves in the hope that whatever waits beyond this life will be better.

From a law enforcement standpoint, these cases usually consist of cleaning up the mess, determining the reasons for the mass suicide, and moving on. The exceptions are those cases in which they have trapped or cornered the cult and inadvertently provoke a mass suicide. If they move too recklessly or display force too brazenly, they may trigger such a display as a part of the cult's mutual dementia, and what started as a simple arrest may quickly deteriorate into a bloodbath. No policy is currently in place to guide such confrontations, since they haven't yet numbered enough to warrant formal study, but as time goes on, the NLEB is beginning to see the need to treat such cases cautiously.

Of more interest to the police are incidents of mass suicide wherein the leader or other high-ranking cult member survives. In such cases, the incident often entails a great deal of money being made. The dead members have signed their finances over to the leader or he stands to gain in some other way from the willing destruction of his "flock." Though a few have tried to argue that the incident constitutes freedom of religion, the law treats their cases as murder: survivors who either instigated the mass suicide or benefited in some tangible financial way may find themselves prosecuted as if they had pulled the trigger themselves.

Murders committed by cult members for reasons unassociated with their beliefs are not treated as cult-based murders, and are usually directed to the pertinent local police department.

Justifiable Homicide

Justifiable homicide represents the dividing line between killing as a criminal act and killing as an unavoidable consequence of circumstances beyond the murderer's control. It provides for the exculpation of the defendant and the dismissal of all charges against him. Justifiable homicide usually takes place in one of only two circumstances:

- 1) A police officer in the course of his duty, who is forced to kill a suspect threatening his life or the life of another.
- 2) A private citizen who is defending himself or his property, and who has a real and quantifiable fear of being killed if he does not respond with lethal force.

In addition, soldiers who kill as a part of combat duty and judges who order executions of convicted criminals are considered to have committed justifiable homicide, but such incidents rarely appear within criminal cases. (Judges are considered instruments of the law, and therefore protected in the discharge of their duties. Soldiers may be held accountable in extreme circumstances, but otherwise are compelled to obey the orders of their superiors, and similarly not accountable for their actions.)

Justifiable homicide among police officers is not uncommon on the mean streets of the U.C., but it has become a source of recent controversy. Theoretically, use of force is permit-

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ted only as a last resort... and should be applied only when all other options have been exhausted. While the police are charged with protecting the citizenry from harm — and those duties may often involve killing a perpetrator who proves a genuine and immediate threat — at other times, it is used as a flimsy excuse to cover up panicky or unnecessary force... or worse, as motivated revenge killings designed to eliminate “worthless” or “dangerous” criminals without due process of law. Many police departments employ a “code of silence,” whereby questionable or even criminal actions are ignored in order to protect the department as a whole. The judiciary often gives considerable leeway when gauging whether an officer-related homicide was justifiable or not. Officer testimony often holds sway over contradictory testimony from private citizens, and the officers’ better understanding of the legal apparatus allows incriminating evidence to simply disappear. As mentioned elsewhere, this has become a particular sticking point among the gaunt community. Leatherbacks’ increased strength and stamina means that officers are more willing to use lethal force against them when it might not otherwise be necessary... and the courts have proven more than willing to give police the benefit of the doubt. Numerous gaunt riots and acts of civil disturbance have begun when an officer who killed a member of the gaunt community was exonerated in court.

Justifiable homicide in the case of civilians is much more cut and dried. The U.C. legal system permits the use of force in defense of one’s home or business, or if the killer or any nearby citizens are in immediate peril. Different jurisdictions vary, however, on when lethal force is permitted. There are few permanent standards, and the definition shifts from province to province, but generally, the homicide is justified only if the defendant clearly had no other reasonable choice. Unlike policemen in similar situations, the loyalty of the law enforcement apparatus rarely interferes in the process, making it much easier to determine the facts of the case. If a killing undergoes this sort of deliberation and is found not to be a justifiable homicide, it is usually categorized as manslaughter or second-degree murder and prosecuted accordingly.

DIRTY COPS

It’s a old cliché — the cop who eats at the same restaurant and never pays for his meals, the patrolmen looking the other way at the mob-run gambling den, the little bundles of bills quietly dropped off where the detectives asked. Police corruption is never pretty, but it’s a fact of life in the Commonwealth... and the line separating good cops from bad can be blurry indeed.



To a certain extent, corruption is inevitable. With finite resources and manpower stretched thin, the police naturally give top priority to the biggest problems. The need for under-world information sometimes means cutting deals with informants (see “Le Snitch,” on page 18), and the inability to permanently deal with vices like prostitution and gambling means that police will often look the other way in favor of more pressing crimes. Even a little bribery can be shrugged off. Officers with families to raise might take the odd kickback or two, and still count themselves on the side of the angels.

So too does departmental loyalty extend to bending the rules when cops do wrong. A patrolman who watches his partner gun down an armed robber might fudge a few details, knowing that the robber was dirty even if he didn’t draw first. A narcotics officer who retrieves millions in stolen drug money might peel a few bills off the top of the stack, as a “reward” for his task force’s hard work. Such incidents may seem relatively harmless, and few officers can resist temptation now and then. Many of them accept it as part of the job, and don’t think themselves any less dedicated by bending a few rules here and there.

The more one indulges in that, however, the harder it becomes to say no when something bigger comes along — when the distinction between petty pay-offs and full-bore corruption can no longer be recognized. The slope grows steep and slippery, and far too many U.C. police officers find themselves sliding down it without once realizing how compromised they have become. Small wonder that career criminals think of the police as just another gang.

Police corruption is formally defined as a misuse of official authority for legal and financial gain. A cop who runs a gambling parlor in his off-hours and doesn’t tell any of his fellow officers is not technically engaged in police corruption, but the same cop who uses his on-duty buddies to guard the street outside is. The act must involve some misuse of the officer’s professional authority to be considered police corruption.

Corruption further falls into one of two basic categories:

- 1) **External corruption**, which involves illegal actions between a police officer and an outsider.
- 2) **Internal corruption**, which involves illegal actions within a police department, usually conducted by officers trying to protect their own.

The first category invariably involves money. It consists of pay-offs to officers, either in exchange for ignoring criminal behavior or for rendering services in an official capacity for exclusively private benefit (guarding a rich man’s home without official authorization for example). It also includes discounts on goods and services given to the police, such as free meals or off-the-books tickets to a ball game. Whatever the circumstances, the end result is additional money in the officer’s pocket gained through a misuse of his authority.

Such incidents have always been a part of police work, whether it’s a wealthy suspect who wants the investigation to go away, or a mob boss who pays the desk sergeant for timely information on major raids. The recent rise in narcotics use in the U.C., however, has increased the difficulties tenfold.

WARLOCKS AND DETECTIVES



With so much money to be made, dirty cops have begun wetting their beaks as never before. Not only do they accept bribes for ignoring major players and shipments, but they routinely pocket funds seized in drug arrests and worse: distribute the drugs themselves for profit. In terms of raw dollars, bribery of narcotics officers has now eclipsed that of all other policemen put together. The nature of the drug problem is still poorly understood by those in charge, but while they dither, it spreads its tendrils deeply into the very forces devoted to stamping it out.

For all the problems it causes, however, external corruption is comparatively easy to deal with when compared with internal corruption. While external connections can be picked up by cops from different departments, and the offending officers arrested as part of a larger case (with the chief passing them off as “a few bad apples” in the process), internal corruption is woven into the very fabric of the department itself. The “code of silence” prevalent among all U.C. police departments enforces a strong sense of brotherhood between officers. You don’t rat out a fellow cop, even if he’s dirty. You don’t break trust with the men and women who watch your back out on the street. And if something goes wrong or there’s trouble afoot, you’re expected to protect your fellow officers at all costs... even if it means breaking the law you’re sworn to uphold. This policy is especially troubling because it often extends to good

cops as well as bad. Those uninvolved in wrongdoing are still reluctant to speak out on what they know about fellow officers. Not only does it breach the department’s unspoken *esprit des corps*, but it may become dangerous if it persists. Cops who routinely inform on fellow officers have a nasty way of being killed in the line of duty...

Internal corruption usually involves some kind of a cover-up for breaking the law. An officer who commits murder in the line of duty, fails to follow proper procedure during an arrest, or otherwise oversteps his bounds can often depend on his fellow officers to support a more favorable interpretation of events. To a certain extent, such incidents are accepted as a part of “good police work.” A criminal shot while resisting arrest is no longer a threat to society, and saves the city the expense of a trial to boot. Though callous, that attitude reflects the tough reality on the streets, where criminals need not behave by the same rules of conduct as police.

There comes a time, however, when a cop’s bad behavior fails even the feeblest test of right and wrong — where he acts as little more than a thug with a badge. Commonwealth history contains countless incidents of cops running protection-for-hire rings, selling drugs and stolen property confiscated from precinct houses, and even committing murder to silence witnesses to their wrongdoing. In almost every case, they had

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the support of at least a few fellow officers, who altered paperwork, confounded investigators, and lied under oath in order to keep their comrade safe. That behavior doesn't just spring up overnight; it comes in increments, from years of bending rules to avoid legal inconveniences and misplaced loyalties allowing the corrupt to get away with it. If justice comes, it can utterly destroy a department, removing not only key officers, but devastating the morale and effectiveness of the good policemen left behind. For this reason, many departments would rather deal with cases of internal corruption quietly... which, of course, only perpetrates the very code of silence which allowed it to flourish in the first place.

POLICE BRUTALITY

Police use of force is a delicate issue, though less so in *The Edge of Midnight* than in our own world. The lack of watchdog groups and similar oversight means that the police can get away with more than they can in our contemporary reality, and while the press is always happy to jump on a story of police brutality, such incidents are reported far less frequently than some 21st century readers would expect.

Basic police procedure states that officers may use as much force as they deem necessary to apprehend a suspect, and no more. They may also use what force they deem necessary to defend themselves and to protect any civilians under their jurisdiction. Lethal force is only acceptable when there is immediate threat to the officer or a civilian; it may not be used to prevent escape, unless that escape would constitute an immediate threat. Use of excessive force can lead to a variety of consequences, including suspension from the department, demotions or monetary fines, and in the most flagrant cases, criminal charges being filed.

That being said, there are a variety of ways to inflict harm which don't constitute deadly force. As a consequence, recalcitrant suspects are often choked, throttled, and otherwise pounded to within an inch of their lives. Modern day means of pacification such as stun guns and tasers don't exist. The night stick is the only means a policeman has of subduing someone. No one questions a few extra bruises when a suspect is brought into the station, and complaints about police brutality often fall on deaf ears. Police on the hard streets learn to do what they need to in order to stay safe and worry about the niceties later; the saying goes "better to be tried by twelve than carried by six."

As mentioned elsewhere, the line becomes even blurrier when dealing with gaunts, who may resist arrest fiercely and often require multiple officers to properly subdue. In many cases, the mere fact that the suspect is a gaunt can justify the use of deadly force, and numerous officers would rather shoot an angry leatherback than try to subdue him by hand. Gaunt activists claim it is just one more example of brutality against their kind. The police say that gaunt criminals are too dangerous to be treated with kid gloves.

Even in more mundane circumstances, however, excessive use of force is depressingly common. The police code of silence and the "us vs. them" mentality fostered by law enforcement as a profession makes it very easy to justify brutal acts, and

systematic failures within the structure of a given department often make matters worse. Policemen who engage in excessive force will encourage brethren to do the same, thus locking them all in mutual complicity. Similarly, a command system which insists on rigid adherence to orders from a superior actually increases the chance of abuse, since lower-ranking officers will simply claim they did as they were told.

Citizens brutalized by the police often have little recourse. Public perception of the system remains positive and few attorneys wish to take the risk of "putting the department on trial" for the sake of a petty criminal who "got a little roughed up." While internal affairs divisions try to vet the most egregious cases, most victims of police abuse must simply nurse their wounds and live with it. The resentment this fosters creates far more problems than it solves. Retaliatory actions against specific officers is not unheard of, and gaunt ghettos and similarly deprived areas will periodically explode into violence when police abuses become too much to bear. This, of course, only feeds law enforcement's belief that violence is often necessary to save lives and keep the citizenry protected.

INTERNAL AFFAIRS

The task of policing the police falls to one of the most indispensable bureaus in the department. Internal affairs concerns itself solely with crimes committed by policemen in the course of their duty. It ensures that the public retains confidence in law enforcement by ensuring the department's integrity, and by removing so-called "bad apples" from the ranks of authority. An internal affairs division usually conducts investigations into any of the following incidents:

- A private citizen who makes a complaint against a member of the department.
- The Chief of Police who authorizes an investigation due to charges or suspicion of misconduct.
- An officer who discharges a firearm or engages in a chase during the course of his duties.
- A suspect who is injured or killed while in the custody of the police.

Naturally, most rank-and-file officers take a dim view of IA divisions looking into their conduct, and while most agree in theory that oversight is necessary to maintain the public trust, their largesse quickly dries up whenever any IA detective comes sniffing around their cases. Most internal affairs divisions are based out of the department's central headquarters, and they rarely venture to local precincts except in the course of an investigation. They don't fraternize with other officers, and every arrest they make earns them a little more enmity within the department. Most of them, however, view their duties as essential police work, and while it may hurt them to bring down a fellow cop, they know that the department as a whole will be better off for their efforts.

THE NATIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT BUREAU

Every day, criminals get bolder. They hunger for more fame and more money, and they don't care who gets hurt in the process. While the local police do what they can, they can only do so much against machine guns and greedy warlocks. As if that wasn't bad enough, even the smartest beat cop needs help. Whether it is warlocks or organized crime, keeping the peace isn't as simple as making sure that nobody steals from the apple cart. Criminals like Jack Drago and the Patterson brothers make more money than the Praetorian Speaker himself and their operations aren't just a few thugs with slouch hats carrying blackjacks. Putting these bad guys out of business requires more resources than the local police can muster. That's where the National Law Enforcement Bureau comes in: protecting the citizens of the Unified Commonwealth from gangsters, from warlocks, and occasionally from themselves.

HISTORY

The true origins of the Bureau are lost to the mists of memories caused by the White Light. Most people remember that the Bureau is a relatively new organization within the government. It was formed shortly before the war to combat the rise in organized crime, then shifted its focus during the war to hunting down spies from the Order of Nu and keeping the peace while the boys were off fighting. Shortly before the White Light, a new Bureau director was appointed: a man who has since become synonymous with the operations of the NLEB. His name is Edmund Mercer.

Mercer came into power as the public backlash against warlocks was climbing to a fever pitch. The local police departments were outmatched against the menace. Mercer used every warlock crime in the paper to talk tough about taking on warlocks, then backed it up with action from the NLEB. He was also smart enough not to overdo the calls for witch hunts in case the anti-magic laws didn't pass, though his cautiousness may have cost him. While the Bureau picked up a lot of momentum and public support thanks to Mercer's appeals, they lost the exclusive rights to prosecute warlocks to the local crystal ball squads. It was the first slight Mercer had to endure and because of it, the Bureau has been notoriously hard on fugitive warlocks in custody.

NLEB actions against organized crime have been more successful. Mercer has tried all sorts of unorthodox tactics with the syndicates, since old-fashioned means never worked when the local cops tried them. Uncover operations, wiretaps on known mobsters, and unique means of prosecution have all played a role in his approach. Agents working with the Tax Department endeavor to see if charges can be brought against the mobs for tax evasion, and wiretapping has uncovered associates and lieutenants whom no one knew existed before. The Bureau seems unafraid to try any long shot against the mobs.

One of Mercer's major successes is making it seem like his Agents are untouchable. While local police fall under the sway of bribes and kickbacks, few if any NLEB Agents appear to compromise themselves for the long green. If there is one thing Mercer hates more than warlocks, it is a dirty Agent. Rumors echo in the halls of Nova Roma about Agents who Mercer sent on suicide missions because he knew they were on the take. If such tales are true, the tactic is working. The NLEB has yet to be implicated in a corruption scandal.

Mercer's popularity is not universal. There is often strife between local and national law enforcement because of his bullying tactics. Mercer has made a lot of enemies and therefore so has the NLEB. He's still strong enough to stay afloat, but it's only a matter of time before his star begins to dim. Because of this, rumors circulate that Mercer also has plenty of blackmail material to keep his enemies at bay. The government prefers bureaucrats but Mercer is a personality and the papers love him. Whether or not his dirty laundry is as extensive as people believe, few are willing to test him and try it out.

Strangely enough, many of Mercer's foes in the mob would prefer to see him stay on top. A lot of the nation's high level crime lords respect his methods and have adapted them in their clashes with rivals. "Uncle Eddie," as he is known to mobsters, is a worthy adversary compared to the unpredictable beat cops, and they'd rather face a straight fight with him than some bloodless bureaucracy breathing down their necks. The crime families might prefer the enemy that they know to one with new ideas — and if they could play a role in keeping him in office, his debt to them would be an even sweeter bonus.

ORGANIZATION

The National Law Enforcement Bureau makes its home in a building a few blocks south of Freedom Square in Nova Roma. It is a concrete testament to sharp corners and square edges. Many native Nova Romans navigate through the city by using its distinctive style as a landmark. The building itself is relatively new compared to the ones around it. Rather than renovate the offices of an existing building, the Bureau built their offices from the ground up. The effect on the skyline draws the eye to it, compared to the older buildings that surround the site.

From there, Mercer and his cronies coordinated operations in every city in the U.C. Each city has a local office that reports directly to the national office. Each local office has around a dozen or so personnel working there. The majority are administrative support drawn from the local populace. The rest are special Agents, who typically range in number from two to four. While the Bureau prefers Agents with local connections, most of their field personnel start out in Nova Roma before being sent on their current assignment. The Agent with the most seniority unofficially outranks the other Agents and often handles relations with local law enforcement. Each office is overseen by a Chief of Station, who serves as the liaison between the local authorities and the Bureau itself.

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The senior Special Agent handles the relationship with the local police. Bureau policy is to stay friendly with the locals since they are the chief sources of information on crimes in the area. The application of diplomacy varies from city to city. Most cities are at least on cordial terms with their local Bureau office. When personality clashes occur, the smart chiefs apply some old fashioned good cop/bad cop techniques. The bad cop tries to get whatever the home office needs to get done, while the good cop soothes any busied egos or trampled procedures that occur in the process.

Relationships with the crystal ball squads are another matter. Mercer feels that all crimes violating national laws (like the Anti-Sorcery Act) come under the jurisdiction of the Bureau. Gateway went over his head when they created the first crystal ball squad, and thanks to its success, the other local squads don't seem to be going anywhere soon. Squabbling between the NLEB and local warlock cops is a common occurrence and more than once, both sides have shown up at the same crime scene expecting to take charge. Generally speaking, the NLEB gets its say only if the crime in question is truly national, while local crystal ball squads handle the rest.

Mercer has responded by essentially absorbing Nova Roma's squad, which is now made up of the senior warlocks in the NLEB. Officers transferring from crystal ball squads to the Bureau are a rare sight in Nova Roma, and those who do are often stuck in the lower ranks with no hope of advancement. Rumors abound that Mercer either transfers them to a local office ASAP or puts them on administrative duty until they beg to be transferred.

Most Agents of the Bureau are stationed at the main offices in Nova Roma. Agents with little experience are usually sent out into the field for a year or two before settling at a local office. The ultimate career goal for most of them is to come home to Nova Roma. Seasoned agents then go to work for one of the national divisions or task forces. The terminal point of an agent's career is to head of one the national task forces. In theory, the only place to go up is to the director of the NLEB, but Mercer isn't going anywhere anytime soon.

The NLEB features dozens of divisions covering hundreds of different types of crime. Below are some of the most famous ones. Note that the heads of each task force can easily be replaced with pertinent PCs if appropriate to the campaign.

- **The Organized Crime Division** is more commonly known as the "Gangbusters," thanks to the national radio program of the same name. The media gives them a lot of attention, and most people think of them when they think of the NLEB, since its conflicts with the various mobs throughout the Commonwealth grab big headlines. Spending time as part of the Gangbusters is almost a requirement if you ever want to be promoted to the head of another special task force. When a spot opens up, a lot of favors get cashed in as Agents from all over the country jockey to fill the slot.
- Special Agent Bonnie Scholz heads the **Kidnapping Division**. She is the highest ranking woman in the NLEB, and her division is often called "Bonnie's Boys" around the water cooler. Agent Scholz and her team investigate

INTERDEPARTMENTAL COOPERATION

In the constant search for information, communication may be key. A file sitting on some officer's desk may hold vital details about a case being pursued across town. Unless it can be shared, it becomes useless. Civic police departments work to counter this by centralizing everything. Any paperwork filed by any officer in the city is duplicated and a copy is sent to the central station where any policeman can theoretically examine it. Naturally, it makes for a massive bureaucracy, and while it can help winnow out vital bits of information, it also takes time and resources to filter through.

A more efficient means of sharing information is much more old-fashioned: cops simply talk to each other. They network with officers in other departments, get together for a beer after their shift, compare notes, and keep each other in the loop about important cases. If information on a case can be found in another precinct, it always helps to know someone there who can fill you in. Even if there's no direct connection, it never hurts to work the case through with another officer; a fresh perspective can help shed new light on previously exhausted details.

Not all such interchanges are friendly. Rivalries often develop between departments, and particular cops who don't especially like each other may treat the exchange as little more than a professional courtesy. This is especially true in regards to the NLEB. Local cops hate it when the Bureau sticks its nose in their turf, and while smart Agents on permanent assignment would do well to curry favor with the cops in their city, relationships are often tenuous at best.

Even so, all cops recognize the value of an information network. While a certain amount of bargaining may take place, it always pays to help out a fellow officer when he comes asking for a file or a helpful tip. You never know when you might need his help for a change, and the more you can cooperate, the easier it becomes to catch the bad guy.

kidnapping cases that cross jurisdictional lines. Bonnie received national attention when she broke the Baby Silver kidnapping five years ago. The Kidnapping Division is the smallest division at the NLEB. The majority of the Agents who worked the Baby Silver case have stuck with Scholz due to her loyalty and thorough methods. Because of this, Bonnie's Boys are often thought of less as a division and more as a family.

- **The Cross-County Division** is often referred to as the Highwaymen in the media. These Agents concern themselves with keeping the lines of commerce open. On the lonely roads and rail lines between cities, it's very easy for trucks to be hijacked and rail cars to come up a few boxes short.

INTERNATIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT

Law enforcement beyond the U.C.'s borders is a tricky conceit at best. No one thinks much of the nations across the seas, and rarely do the Commonwealth police consult with their sister organizations in those distant lands. A few treaties remain on the books and the national government theoretically maintains diplomatic contact with other countries, but they rarely filter down to either local law enforcement or the NLEB. If a foreigner commits a crime in the Commonwealth, he is arrested here and charged here. Any criminal record he may have elsewhere matters nothing to U.C. cops, and there have as of yet been no incidents where an overseas government has asked for jurisdiction. Let the Commonwealth take care of its own, most cops say. They have enough crooks here without importing any from overseas.

The Borderlands nations are a different story. Their governments have more direct contact with the U.C., and criminals hoping to evade pursuit will often flee to the Borderlands which makes cooperation with their law enforcement officials much more necessary. Even so, contact with Borderlands law enforcement is far more difficult than it should be. National police forces dislike Yankee cops telling them what to do, and when a criminal is captured south of the border, he is far more likely to be punished by local authorities than extradited and returned to the Commonwealth. Corruption on both sides makes trust difficult to come by, and while international connections do exist, they remain strained and uneasy at best.

Ironically, the national government has improved the situation a great deal. Each diplomatic corps in each of the four Borderlands nations has a full-time liaison with the local police. He maintains a list of wanted U.C. fugitives who may be hiding south of the border, keeps tabs on smuggling cases and other trans-national concerns, and relays any requests from Borderlands law enforcement to those in the Commonwealth. The practice has strengthened ties somewhat, and even allowed for a few joint operations to take place between multiple countries (most of them in Belatacan, which shares a border with the U.C.) The national government hopes that such efforts will help make a difference, and even lead to the formation of a true international task force someday.

In addition, those cities in close proximity to Borderlands nations work hard to keep up good relations with their sister organizations to the south. Paradiso's police department maintains close ties with the Policia National offices in the Belatacan city of Bota Grande, while Terminus PD is working feverishly to make inroads with the corrupt government of Iberana in hopes of shutting down gambling and drug smuggling operations stemming from Terminus crime lords.

The Highwaymen make sure that shipments get where they need to go. The interesting thing about this division is that in addition to criminal activity, they must also often deal with legitimate businesses smuggling illegal substances across the country. The Highwaymen got their name from a recent bust where warlocks were using a certain shipping company to smuggle themselves south of the border.

- **The Treasury Division** refers to itself as "The Buckstoppers," but only its Agents seem to get the joke. They track and stop counterfeiters and similar forms of fiscal fraud. These Agents spend the least amount of time in Nova Roma. If they aren't involved in a counterfeiting case, they are often brought in to consult on large-scale bank robberies. The Treasury Division also handles crimes involving large value items, such as works of art or precious gems. In these cases, an Agent is assigned to assist whichever department would normally handle the case.

PROFILING

The NLEB has recently opened a radical new division in its services. It began with just a single Agent, Valerie Garner, who had a long background in psychology before joining the force. She has pioneered a method whereby evidence presented at the scene of a crime can provide telling details about the perpetrator's background, *modus operandi*, and physical appearance. Her colleagues initially laughed at her until suspect after suspect turned out to be just like her treatises predicted. Soon thereafter, the science of profiling was born. Though still small, the Profiling Division currently employs about a dozen Agents, with Garner at the head. They are rapidly developing techniques that will take Commonwealth law enforcement into the future.

Garner's technique focuses on investigative methods — viewing evidence at the scene and basing conclusions on inferences from there. It begins by gathering pertinent materials from the crime scene, and conducting an extensive background check on the victim or victims. This differs somewhat from more traditional background checks in that the profiler is interested in every detail, not just those directly pertinent to the case: who the victim was, where he or she grew up, what friends and family were like, and what kind of hobbies he or she indulged in. For a profiler, the more information he or she receives, the better.

Once the data has been gathered, the profiler begins organizing it for analysis. This can entail many methods, but usually involves a large chart built for prominent display. The profiler lists important details, organizes them into groups, and attempts to place them in some kind of sequence where they can begin to make sense. Through that process, the profiler can assess the information, develop a timetable of the crime and its immediate precursors, and begin to determine the criminal's patterns of behavior.

The profiler can then draw up certain general characteristics about the criminal and his possible motives in perpetrating the crime. The profile can include any number of details, but unlike the sort of profiling often shown on television and

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in the movies, it's not perfect. Details can include things like gender, race, level of education, marital status, sexual proclivities, drug use, and the like. It cannot determine names, addresses, or other forms of specific information that will make the police's jobs much easier. It serves best as a series of guidelines — a few important characteristics which might help the investigators narrow their search. But with resources often stretched thin, such details can mean the difference between making and breaking a case.

Garner's methods focus on five key pieces of information, which she and her fellow profilers are trained to look for:

- 1) **Personal Behavior.** Garner believes that certain similarities recur in a perpetrator's behavior; in other words, the way he conducts a crime will be similar to the way he goes about the rest of his life. A serial killer's victims might all resemble his mother, for example, or a bank robber might target branches managed by a particular racial minority. Garner assumes that criminals respond to their victims the same way they responded to those around them growing up and in their lives away from the scene of the crime.
- 2) **The Scene of the Crime.** The criminal invariably chooses when and where to strike. The location, situation, and precise timing of the crime may reveal a great deal about how he lives and operates. If the crimes entail a quick getaway, he likely has access to a car. If they all take place at night, he might have a day job or somewhere he needs to be during regular work hours.
- 3) **Observed Characteristics.** This includes a wide variety of information, designed to cover a number of pertinent characteristics. It basically entails information that suggests how the criminal went about committing the crime. Do the signs speak of a highly organized mind, which went through a lot of planning beforehand? Or a spur-of-the-moment impulse, conducted with little thought of the consequences? Signs of sexual activity (or lack thereof) can make suggestions about the perpetrator's motives, while the violence of the crime can shed light on how excited or calm the criminal may have been (and possible signs of drug use as well). Profilers find such information invaluable when preparing their reports.

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4) **Professional or Amateur.** Evidence at the scene of the crime can further suggest how often the perpetrator may have committed similar crimes. If he moves with deliberation and covers his tracks, he may be a career criminal. If, on the other hand, his actions are sloppy and inconsistent, he may be conducting them for some entirely different reason. Crimes conducted by the same person often exhibit similarities that can not only predict when the criminal will strike next, but can help explain his motives and background as well.

5) **Familiarity with Law Enforcement.** Finally, profilers look for evidence that the criminal may be covering his tracks or deliberately removing certain pieces of evidence that may prove helpful to the police. If he does, it suggests that he knows something about how investigators may be hunting him and how to hide his activities to boot. Particularly clever ones may even try to misdirect the police, rearranging the crime scene to give a false impression or disguising the means by which the victim was killed. In addition to any other information they provide, such signs are usually evidence of a habitual offender: one who has had time to hone and perfect his technique.

Using these factors as a starting point, profilers can compose a reliable approximation of the suspect's appearance, habits, and *modus operandi*. Again, these details are rarely concrete, and entail a good detail of inference and educated guessing. It has never been an exact science, and profilers are quick to point out that their work may produce multiple options instead of just one. As a tool, however, it is rapidly proving invaluable to the NLEB, and even a few local police departments have begun considering the addition of a profiler to their ranks of officers.

(Garner's techniques are based on those of David Canter, a real-life psychologist who pioneered the method as a consultant for Scotland Yard. Those interested in learning more about profiling would be well-advised to seek out his works.)

Valerie Garner

Attributes: Brains 8, Brawn 4, Build 4, Gut 6, Moxie 3, Smoothness 4.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Brawl 2, Bureaucracy 5, Drive 2, Evasion 3, Firearms 3, Lore (Psychology) 9, Medicine 6, Perception 8, Puzzles 6.

Backgrounds: Alert, Education.

Profession: Academic 1, Investigator 3, Profiler 4, White Collar Worker 1.

PURPOSE

Before the NLEB came into play, criminals looking to escape the long arm of the law often just had to make it to the city limits to get away clean. Pursuits into the country inevitably ended in favor of the criminal. Smart criminals set up hidey holes in the small towns that dot the landscape and spread the big city money around to keep the locals quiet. Violent criminals lured police into ambushes and shot their way to freedom. Even if a criminal was caught in another city, squabbles between which police department would get the credit for the collar often kept cases from proceeding for years. During these delays, criminals often figured out which palms needed greasing to get out.

One of the major advantages the Bureau has is that it keeps pressure on the criminals. Hideouts can be found, but criminals can never be sure that a stoolie won't rat them out to the NLEB. When stolen goods are sold, the Bureau can track the transaction through the money that changed hands. Criminals under pressure are more likely to make mistakes and the Bureau pounces upon those mistakes. Keep someone on the run long enough and he will eventually get tired. The Bureau reinforces the belief that nowhere is safe with every high-profile bust or front-page photo of the bloody end of a gangster's life.

The Bureau also coordinates operations with local law enforcement and makes sure everyone is on the same page. It knows that not every officer is on the take, and contains the damage of those who are through public pressure and private arm-twisting. The Bureau keeps its hands off local police, but it also tries to steer clear of corrupt cops. Agents are encouraged to use their abilities to take cases away from dirty cops and inform their superiors of their suspicions. In a city like Terminus, where the majority of the police are taking money from somebody, the Agents often just handle the case themselves. Unsurprisingly, most Agents do their best to avoid assignment to Terminus.

Local law enforcement often resents the NLEB presence in a city. The Bureau is perfectly fine with this perception. If the local cops don't like Agents mucking about in their affairs, their dislike can band them together. Thanks to the Bureau, jurisdictions are generally friendlier with one another, preferring to handle things themselves than turn it over to the boys from Nova Roma. Most of the time, the local cops and the Bureau office get along fine, but when an Agent is sent in from the Home Office, he or she should expect a little grousing from the cops on the beat.

The Bureau oversees enforcement of national law as well. It is usually content to let local law enforcement handle the day-to-day issues, but if a case involves a large dollar amount, chances are that the Bureau will get involved. In these cases, Bureau involvement is left to the discretion of the local Station Chief. Legally, the Bureau can take over whatever case it deems necessary. Once a case is out of a local detective's hands, the best he can do is "advise." If he continues to investigate, he can be brought up on obstruction of justice charges.

If a local department doesn't have the manpower, it can also call upon the resources of the Bureau to help it out. High-profile cases often become so when someone important is in-

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volved. Lawyers will insist on NLEB assistance and the local cops will reluctantly bring in an Agent. Public pressure is also a motivating factor. If a crime remains unsolved for an extended period of time, bringing in the NLEB gives the appearance of forward movement on the case.

A major sticking point is the Anti-Sorcery Act. While technically a national law, most jurisdictions have crystal ball squads that handle the majority of warlock-related crime. When a warlock blows town and shows up somewhere else, the Bureau has jurisdiction and pursues that warlock with a vengeance. Some Agents take advantage of this and will paint fugitives with the warlock brush even if they have no magical abilities. Because the NLEB pays special attention, that Agent can count on extra resources in the pursuit of the fugitive. Of course, these Agents are also aware they'll be in big trouble if the fugitive is brought into custody and doesn't have any special abilities. In these cases, the criminal is often "shot while resisting arrest."

One of the big responsibilities of the Bureau is battling the growth of organized crime. Thanks to the likes of Jack Drago, criminal enterprises are building ill-gotten empires on blood and money. The Bureau wants to keep these gangs as disorganized as possible. In addition to keeping tabs on the movers and shakers of organized crime, the Bureau does its best to keep the gangs at each other's throats. The Agents know that they'll never win in a stand-up fight, so they often let information slip to a rival gang in the hopes that the bad guys will take care of themselves. This gray tactic doesn't generally get advertised in the press, but the field stations engage in it regularly.

One of the least-glamorous functions of the NLEB is also one of its most important. The Bureau offers training in advanced law enforcement techniques to local police and detectives. Year-round classes cover everything from improving interrogation techniques to firefight tactics. These classes usually take a long weekend and many cops use it as an excuse to get out of the office for a few days. The city budget usually handles cost, but if a policeman pays his own way to Nova Roma, cities with tighter budgets will often split the cost with the officer.

METHODS

Keeping an organization like the Bureau on top of what's going on in the U.C. is a balancing act like no other. Edmund Mercer is a juggler without equal, but the other men and women of the Bureau deserve some credit as well. They are one of the few national organizations that must consistently focus on the local level. While each city has a station with Agents on the street, asking a dozen people to keep tabs on a whole city is a fool's errand. Instead, the Bureau must use other tactics.

The Agents attached to the stations in each of the cities are known as Station Agents. They primarily work the city that they are assigned to and pass any information back to their headquarters in Nova Roma. Very little communication passes between stations directly, which means that an Agent can't call from Paradiso to Gateway directly to tip off the local police about an incoming fugitive. Agents who circumvent the protocol get disciplined. Everything is supposed to go through Nova Roma to be analyzed and recorded, but that extra step can be the difference between a collar and a getaway.



WARLOCKS AND DETECTIVES

Agents with no specific geographical territory are called Special Agents. They make up the majority of the active law enforcement personnel of the Bureau. Special Agents are headquartered in Nova Roma but travel quite frequently to aid both local law enforcement and station offices with cases. They generally use the train ride to familiarize themselves with the case and spend the first day or so establishing a relationship with their contact. The Station Agent acts as the liaison be-



tween the local cops and the Bureau, but most Special Agents consult directly with the local detectives, and ask only to be kept in the loop as the investigation continues.

Mercer considers organized crime to be his primary concern. Station Agents are his first line of defense against the mob. This is why most local Agents let the Special Agents have their way. The Station Agent isn't going to stop monitoring a prominent local crime figure because someone else is investigating him. The local Agents compile information against the local mob while the Special Agents do their work. Their info keeps Mercer happy and serves as the primary source of information that the analysts back in Nova Roma sort through. The more dirt Mercer gets on the mobs, the happier he is.

Some Special Agents specialize in undercover work. While they don't have an official division, they live in Nova Roma when they are not in the field. Mercer uses them primarily against the mobs. Because they come right from headquarters, they are often put out in the field without letting the local cops know. If the Station Chief is on good terms with Mercer, he might get a heads-up as well. But more than a few local busts have gone south because one of the perpetrators turned out to be an Agent in disguise.

Undercover Agents have to be careful in their relationships with the local police as well. A criminal who keeps getting let out on technicalities will make the syndicate suspicious. Good relationships with the local police allow for better theatrics to sell the Agent's authenticity, such as staged breakouts and fake extraditions. An undercover Agent has to be half actor and half policeman.

Bureau Agents have the ability to transport criminals between jurisdictions. Their powers override local law enforcement, so if the Agent says the collar has an outstanding warrant in another city, that's where the crook will be prosecuted. This is one of the most delicate situations that Agents have to deal with. Police can be very territorial and taking a collar away to some other city is a quick way to sour relations between the Bureau and the local police.

Luckily, Mercer's reputation for honesty within the Bureau is well-noted. Local cops can be bought, but many syndicates think that Agents are untouchable. While some are on the syndicate payrolls, Mercer does his best to keep their names out of the paper. He doesn't want a flashy arrest splashed on the front page. If an Agent comes under suspicion, he arranges for another Agent to set up a sting. If the bad Agent bites, he is quietly let go and swept under the rug. If the Agent doesn't take the bait, Mercer will wait until different allegations arise and try again.

The Shopping List

The Bureau's most recent innovation came from a discussion between Mercer and the owner of the *Nova Roma Crier*. Mercer expressed an interest in using the media to track and hunt criminals rather than glorify their exploits. The two collaborated on a series of stories detailing the ten fugitives from justice that Mercer most wanted behind bars. The stories were unflattering and harsh, detailing the ugly truths of criminal activities with a dash of exaggeration to paint the perpetrators in a negative light. It was a win-win situation for both sides.

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New leads and information poured in, and three of the profiled individuals were either caught or killed within six months. The paper saw a boost in circulation since readers loved the salacious crimes printed in clinical detail. The Public Enemies Series, or the "Shopping List" as it is known around the Bureau, officially started this year. The Bureau updates the list whenever a public enemy is caught or killed. The criminals are not ranked in a specific order, since Mercer is afraid it would lead to competition between members on the list. Even so, some of the lesser-known members on the list feel a sense of pride being ranked next to the likes of Jack Drago.

MEMBERS

Edmund Mercer: The Man Behind the Curtain

The fate of the NLEB is linked to the man at the top. While not exactly the face of the organization, anyone who talks about it invariably talks about him. Everyone who knows his name has a strong opinion about him. The big mobs may not like "Uncle Eddie," as they often refer to him, but they respect him. He understands how to get things done. He knows that law enforcement is a dirty business and he doesn't have clean hands. Mercer has been accused of lowering himself to the level of the mobs, though his penchant for honesty and keeping the Bureau's nose clean suggests that he has brought them up to his level instead.

Mercer came into his position shortly before the White Light. His career as a government man was well-balanced, suggesting someone who knows when to uphold the law and when to bend it to get things done. He has a particular skill for bending it in a way that keeps him in the clear. He is a bureaucrat like Picasso was a painter.

The press often calls him "the last of the lone rangers," and Mercer does not refute the claim. He is not a stickler for procedure. If a criminal has caught his eye, he will send Agents into the jurisdiction to bull their way past the local cops to get the collar. Mercer maintains wiretaps on a majority of public figures ranging from Jack Drago to Scott Le Clerk. Reporters salivate at the thought of getting their hands on the extensive files that Mercer has compiled on these figures. Mercer splits his time between the NLEB offices in Nova Roma and his own personal offices on the 28th floor of the Imperial Building in New Eden. These "dirty laundry files" are believed to be in one of those two locations.

Edmund doesn't care about the law so much as he cares about the protection that it affords. He has amazing instincts for warlock- and gaunt-based crimes. While field Agents may not have the up-to-the-minute information that the local law does, Edmund's men often surprise the municipal bulls with how much they know about the city. Mercer's information network is second to none, and he spends a lot of his waking hours keeping his network running: making sure that no one threatens the interests of the national government.

If Mercer has a weakness, it's that he hasn't learned to delegate. He's not above flying out to a field office and personally dressing down an Agent who has blown an operation. Most men his age are thinking about retirement and having a building named after them. Mercer is still on the streets. He is well-protected when he ventures out into the field, but there are quite a few powerful people who might be willing to take a shot if they could get a plan together. No one ever does. The real question isn't if he can be gotten to... it's what happens if the shooters miss.

Of course, any man who deals in the secrets of others has his own, which can be used to pull the strings of the NLEB or even bring it down if applied correctly. What follows is an excellent array of skeletons arranged for Mr. Mercer's closet. Some, all, or none may be true, and the GM is free to add any of his own which he feels may work for his campaign.

The halls of power ring with rumors of the excesses of the men in power. The reporters make a decent living off the base business that comes to light in Nova Roma. The most salacious stories are the ones that the papers consider suicidal to print. A peculiar rumor that Edmund has been unable to shake involves certain exotic tastes in the girls that he likes. A lot of the elected officials in Nova Roma indulge, but Mercer is the only one who indulges in gaunt women. Some versions of this rumor go so far as to say he has a gaunt mistress, who has designs on using him to secure greater freedoms for her people.

Members of the various secret societies surrounding warlocks often postulate which societies the NLEB has infiltrated. Mercer himself is rumored to be a member of everything from The Men of Dunswick Street to Jack Drago's mob. Most warlock society members believe that Mercer wants to destroy them. If he had a nickel for every person who thought he was a warlock, he could buy each of his Agents a solid gold service pistol and have enough left over for the Imperial Building in New Eden. Those individuals who believe Mercer had something to do with the White Light number a close second.

One of the most entertaining rumors about Mercer and sorcery states that his mastery of science extends so far that he is able to bestow these abilities onto those he feels worthy. If that were the case, then it stands to reason that he could remove those abilities just as easily. These same rumors often peg Mercer's blood as the source of Antidox — extracted by government agents and distilled to a pure essence. It sounds more like the plot of a drive-in movie than a credible piece of Nova Roma gossip, but the number of people in the capital who believe it is shocking.

Some members of the Few believe that Mercer is the one person alive unaffected by the White Light. He remembers everything — from who he was before to why it all happened — and his obsession with monitoring people isn't about law. It's about knowing how much everyone else knows about the true nature of the world. In a second-hand universe, they believe that he is the only genuine article. If true, the story makes him either a great ally to the Few or their most powerful enemy.

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Edmund Mercer

Attributes: Brains 8, Brawn 3, Build 4, Gut 5, Moxie 7, Smoothness 4.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Brawl 1, Bureaucracy 6, Etiquette 7, Evasion 2, Firearms 4, Intimidation 5, Lore (Law) 10, Perception 7, Puzzles 3.

Backgrounds: Wise.

Profession: Officer of the Law 5, NLEB Agent 5, Politician 5, White Collar Worker 4.

ROLE-PLAYING THE INVESTIGATION

Sometimes a dead-eyed P.I. or a smart-aleck dilettante detective with more money than sense just isn't enough to get the job done. Sometimes, you need a guy who punches the clock instead of racing against it. Instead of a guy who bends the rules, you need someone who enforces them. Sometimes the steady, official, stubborn crunch can wear down a problem that flair, cynicism, or even magic can't dent.

Sometimes, you need a cop.

The *Edge of Midnight* world is a mystery full of mysteries, some of which draw in dogged investigators through simple curiosity. For them, that's fine. But the mysteries that cut — the cases that haunt — are the ones where someone got hurt. The most compelling mysteries aren't about the unknown, but about the concealed. They're less a search for knowledge than for justice. Someone got hurt, something got hidden, and there it's going to fester unless someone cares enough to drag the ugliness into the light. It's seldom glamorous and a lot of people don't particularly like it when someone else's problem shows up on their front stoop. But without the cops digging in those dark places, it's all too easy to forget why we have laws. "Look here," the cop says. "Without laws, men can be beasts. So when you step out of line, civilization's there with a gun and a badge to push you back in. No exceptions. No excuses. We're all in it together."

No one wakes up in the morning hoping that the cops are going to have to come to his house. But if he didn't know they were there if he needed them, he'd never get to sleep at night.

THE OUTLINE OF THE POLICE DRAMA

The police drama is a staple of film and TV because people love to watch them, and people love to watch them because they're compelling, suspenseful, and (when done right) show something deep and true about humanity by putting people in unbearable positions and watching how they try to bear it.

Mediocre police drama is formulaic, but the formula's a formula for a reason: it works. In your game sessions, don't feel bad about following the formula. Your players, their reactions,

their attachment to their characters, and the unique setting of *The Edge of Midnight* are all powerful features drawing in their interest. If anything, having a script they halfway know can be an excellent way of making them feel involved, useful, and smart. If, after a couple of doses, the formula does start to pall ("Yeah, it's another 'perp of the week' session") there are a variety of ways to spice it up. That's what most good police drama does. But before you run, you walk, and so here are the steps.

- **The Crime.** Someone does something wrong, then covers it up. The PCs may or may not be present for this. Regardless, the criminal gets away and it's up to the cops to identify the fugitive and bring him to justice.
- **At the Scene.** Crimes leave traces, and the places they leave the most telling ones are the crime scenes. Looking at the scene after the fact is the most common entry point for police officers, as they begin to theorize about what happened.
- **The Investigation.** Once the theories are on the table, it's time to test them. Cops interrogate suspects, track down witnesses, check their contacts, consult with experts about mysterious clues, and hit the newspaper morgues to see if history's repeating itself.
- **False Leads and Red Herrings.** The theories can't all be true, and at some point the police inevitably think they're close, only to have the door slammed shut in their faces. A few reverses are par for the course.
- **"They're Getting Too Close!"** The cops have been pushing, and now it's time for the crooks to push back. Whether it's a panicky attempt to off the senior detective or a sly frame slipped around another suspect, the original criminal gets involved in the crime again. Doing so necessarily creates more clues.
- **The Smoking Gun.** Finally, the police put it all together. Armed with evidence from the original crime or from the perp's cover-up attempt, they know who did it and can get a warrant.
- **Busted!** How does the final bust go? Does the crook go quietly, or try to shoot his way to freedom? No way to know beforehand.

That's the skeleton. Let's look a little closer and see how the meat wraps around the bones.

THE CRIME

There are a few questions you need to answer about the crime itself. First off, does it involve the PCs? Are they there when it's going on, or do they come in later? Do you want to play it out?

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If it involves the PCs but they aren't there, it means someone's messing with their home, putting a bomb in their car, kidnapping their wife, or the like. That's serious, and not too smart. Cops don't like it when someone messes with a cop, so that crime is going to jump right to the front of the "solve me first!" line. It also means that in the "Investigation" phase, a lot of the focus is going to be on criminals who the cops have tangled with previously. It can be a chance to revisit imprisoned foes, none of whom are going to be terribly eager to help the cops but all of whom have motivation to get out of jail on good behavior. For them, of course, the perfect solution is to seem reluctantly helpful while actually setting the cops up for a big hard fall. (That's the "False Leads and Red Herrings" phase.) Or they can send the good guys after the bad guys, get a tip to the bad guys, and figure that either the PCs win (in which case the rat has their gratitude) or the bad guy wins (in which case the rat has his gratitude and the PCs are dead). People in prison have lots of time to think about stuff like this.

On the other hand, if the crime involves the PCs and they're present, it probably means they get a call about a crime in progress and respond because very few criminals want cops there when they're breaking the law. (The exception is when they're mastermind types trying to put a frame on someone, or doing the crime when they're seemingly in clear view across town.) This means that the scene afterwards is going to be chaotic, and more likely to yield good clues because the crook didn't have the leisure to sweep up afterwards. Add to that the PCs' eyewitness observations, and they already start with a leg up on a more typical investigation. This means that the GM may want to put some kind of time limit on it ("we have to find the shooter before he can skip town!") or make the PCs focus less on finding out who the criminal is and more on finding him, period.

One option that's a little different is to play out the crime without the PCs present. Just give them control of various witnesses and/or victims and have the situation go down. This starts things off with a bang, obviously, and it gets the players involved. It also makes the next few steps go more smoothly because, since the player has been there, the character knows what to look for and which questions to ask. The drawback is that, even when they're playing characters who are normally second-string, many players want to come out ahead and feel bad when their doomed temp character goes under the band-saw. Furthermore, players are just plain unpredictable.

Whether you want to have the PCs witness the crime or come in later, whether you play through it or start with "At the Scene," you need a crime that makes sense. You need a good set of answers to the following questions:

- **Who did it?** This is the obvious one.
- **What's the crime?** Theft and murder are probably your meat and potatoes. Some players may be sensitive about rape or molestation, so don't try and take them there without permission and then convince them that it's fun. Armed robbery is good for a "PCs are present" setup. Kidnapping is also a good one.

- **What was the motive?** Greed? Revenge? Envy? Madness? Sadism? Need?
- **How was it carried out?** Was it a simple head-bash murder, or an intricately plotted locked-room theft? Was it a crime of passion, a momentary inspiration, or a meticulously planned expert heist?
- **What clues got left behind?** This is the big one. You need clues. Lots and lots of clues. Be prepared to saturate the players with evidence, because the fun of the mystery is figuring it out yourself. You need to have lots of clues ready to feed the PCs so that they can. More on this can be found under "The Investigation."
- **Who called the cops?** Was it a frightened eyewitness, an anonymous tipster, the victim, or a curious neighbor? Whoever called is, almost always, a good candidate for a suspect and/or key witness. But that's really more of a concern "At the Scene."

AT THE SCENE

If you opted not to play through "The Crime," this is your first impression, and you want to make it a grabber. Even if it isn't your opener, it's your chance to build on the first scene's splash, and your best opportunity to give the players rich, meaty description. Later on, you're going to need to adapt to their actions on the fly. Here, that's a much smaller concern, especially if this is the first scene. Tell them what they see in great detail. They're investigating a crime scene, so they should want loads of description. Use lots of senses, odors, peculiar sounds, the feeling of what's underfoot — you can insert something meaningful anywhere.

Remember all those many clues you thought up before? Hand 'em out now. Don't make the players roll if they do anything that might vaguely yield the goods. From the perspective of moving the story forward, there are two options: they find the clue and progress, or they don't and... what? If you don't have an answer that's as interesting as pushing the story, you don't have motivation to make them roll.

In *The Esoterrorists*, Robin Laws suggests this sort of approach with a refined degree of yield, which is good because it draws interest if the players know that their involvement is the difference between a bare minimum of clues and a clue piñata. So instead of rolling to see if the game goes on, roll to see if the PC is merely competent or awesome. Suppose the clue is the victim's driver's license and a set of car keys. That's what the PC gets if he searches and fails. If he succeeds, he also notices that the license says "For ID only" and indicates that the victim was too blind to drive. This is something that would have come out in "The Investigation," but knowing it right away tells the PCs that those keys aren't the victim's. So whose are they? A good roll has forestalled a potential misunderstanding and pushed them closer to the killer's identity.

Another way to avoid a situation where one failed roll grinds everything to a stop is to put the onus on the players, instead of the characters, and the best way to do this is with

COLD CASES

Even if they don't solve the mystery, it's possible to have a satisfying conclusion to the case. Harder, though. You simply need to substitute something else for the reward of a job well done. Maybe one of their red herrings leads to another crime entirely, one that's more prestigious or more satisfying. They never found out who was after the mysterious Xavier Manuscript or what it contained, but they did bust a pervert who was all over his underage niece. In the dirty *noir* world, you take your victories where you can get them.

Another option is to have the police captain dress them down and assign them another case. It happens to real detectives all the time. Many heroes, especially in a morally ambiguous framework like *The Edge of Midnight*, aren't heroic by always prevailing, but by getting up every time they're knocked down. Losing one is going to make the next win sweeter, and dealing with failure reveals more about character than a lifetime's worth of victory parties.

In addition "cold" doesn't mean "closed." It means there are no more leads being actively pursued. It doesn't mean that the same peculiar *modus operandi* isn't going to recur in six months, or that some other witness can't come to light later, or that the suspect's missing girlfriend won't get picked up in Central City on a petty larceny charge and offer to sing for a lighter sentence.

A good P.I. still only follows the trail as long as he's paid. But a stubborn cop is forever.

props. I'm an untrained dilettante with a laptop, and in about an hour, I knocked out four full color U.S. drivers' licenses. They wouldn't pass close scrutiny (or even casual scrutiny), but that doesn't matter. I wasn't giving them to a suspicious bouncer. I was creating a cool object to players trying to believe in the story.

Newspapers wadded in a fist with a single word scrawled on them, cryptic coded documents, hollowed-out books with keys inside them, journals who refer to people only by their initials... all of these are gold because they allow the player to take the exact actions his character would: examining them closely to pick out meaningful details. Anything from a little black book full of 555 phone numbers to a hammer with "blood" and matted hair on the claws can hook 'em and hook 'em good.

Whether you establish the scene by weaving clues into your description or by handing out props, your goal "At the Scene" is twofold. First, you have to point the players in the right direction. Second, you have to simultaneously point them in several wrong (but exciting!) directions. They don't need answers at this point. They need a very long list of answerable questions.

THE INVESTIGATION

The strategies of investigation are myriad and manifold. Hitting the books at the library to see if the victim or a suspected perp showed up in the papers is a good avenue. Having Alice from the station do it is even better, because it's hard to dramatically role-play looking through a newspaper morgue. Ditto criminal records, law documents, and the like. The PCs shouldn't need to describe going to the courthouse to plunder the filing cabinets. Police underlings and the fast forward button were made for that sort of thing, and I'd push them towards underlings. That way you (the GM) can have the underling show up with the relevant information at a good time to either clarify or obscure the issue. As a bonus, if you have time between sessions or have anticipated the request, you can have prop newspaper clippings, legal documents, and court reports to give them.

Lab work can be another case for hand-waving — the characters simply ask the coroner and later get a report. If a PC is the coroner, you need to know what he's looking for in order to give it to him, carefully sticking to the earlier idea of letting the roll determine whether he gets the information he was looking for, or that and a little extra. A third option is a scene where the PCs talk to the coroner, allowing for give and take and responses to data.

The most dramatic type of investigation, however, is interrogation. You ask questions and the blonde with the gams crosses them and replies. This is where the PCs are going to do a lot of interacting with NPCs, pressing them hard to see what juice drips out. Going undercover with Disguise and Fast Talk is exciting because if they screw up they're in trouble. Hauling people in and using Intimidation is intense. Playing at good cop to see if you can get a witness, suspect, or friend of the perp on your side is an intriguing test of social skills. All of it is better than just rolling to wade through red tape.

The answers that arise from the investigation lead to further investigation, and can lead to a second crime scene. They follow the address on the victim's matchbook to his girlfriend's house, only to find that she's missing too. When her body washes up at high tide, that's another corpse to search.

As with "At the Scene," be generous with clues and partial successes. The investigation should never grind to a halt for lack of information. The PCs shouldn't run out of questions. The challenge isn't to find the one datum you need in a sea of falsehood, but to determine which truth you need out of many.

Investigation games are about tension, so every scene should be a concrete step towards a solution... or it should be a setback.

FALSE LEADS AND RED HERRINGS

Up to this point, it's been almost entirely about giving out clues and pushing the investigation forward. At the beginning, that's important. If the PCs don't feel like they're making progress or that an end can be achieved, they get discouraged and lose interest. But if it's a cakewalk all the way through, they get the feeling they're being led to a predestined victory, and

CHAPTER TWO: THE LONG ARM OF THE LAW

they also lose interest. So your GM job is to control the pacing of the investigation. If they're getting too close too soon, slow 'em down. If they're stuck, open a new avenue of investigation. Depending on how long you want to flog them from pillar to post, you may offer good info and bad multiple times each. That's all good, until they start to get frustrated, and even a little frustration is okay. You want them frustrated enough to redouble their efforts, and then you try and angle for your end-game. You don't want them frustrated enough to throw their hands up and quit.

How do you generate positive frustration? With false leads and red herrings. You feed them information that looks suspicious, but is either misperceived, or a lie, or irrelevant. Everyone has secrets, especially in *noir*; so everyone has a reason to be cagey when the cops are asking questions. Poking around someone's desk can provide evidence that the person hated the victim and had the opportunity to do the crime. The PCs may fall upon one suspect and really think he did it, only to have an ironclad alibi show up. Sometimes, suspects hide their alibis until desperate. ("I couldn't have killed her because I was seducing my niece at 8:00 PM on the 17th.")

Ideally, you want to have about three prime suspects on the table, and let the PCs knock one out fairly early. Then you have a manageable way to keep them going back and forth until everyone's ripe and ready to burst.

"THEY'RE GETTING TOO CLOSE!"

The PCs have inevitably barked up a couple of wrong trees in the course of their investigation, but if they've touched upon the real culprit at all, you have an excuse to put this scene in play. This is where the villain panics and gets sloppy. He tries to kill one of the PCs, or lies in order to frame the other prime

suspect (or perhaps the suspect they'd already dismissed), or he plants some evidence. Whatever and however he does it, he leaves clues that point to him. He drops an incautious word that reveals something he couldn't have known about the scene. He leaves a fingerprint. He strikes right-handed when the other suspect has no grip strength on that side. Or it could just be the bad luck of trying to bump off the key witness when the PCs are already visiting her.

Here you can have your action, as the disguised villain (or more likely, a few hired guns) ambushes a detective or attacks a witness under police protection. If chase scenes are more your style, you can have him spotted trying to kill a witness (or steal a prime piece of evidence, or break into the detective's home to leave a message or get dirt) and follow up with a chase, either rooftop or automotive. Should the PCs catch and/or kill the villain in the course of it — hey, great, you've got your resolution and your smoking gun all rolled into one. But let's assume he gets away.

THE SMOKING GUN

Between "Investigation" and "Red Herring" scenes, you can push the PCs away from the conclusion, or lead them closer to it. Your success at pushing them away and their success at closing in should always, of course, depend on how well they play. But you can only let them run so long before you need to either fish or cut bait.

One option is to let the case go cold. If you've given them lots of clues and they ignored or fumbled all of them, this is an option (see the sidebar on the previous page for more). But be aware of how much harder solving the mystery is on the other side of the GM screen. You see right through the false leads because you know they're false. To the players, however, ev-



everything seems equally important until investigated, and unless you're really good at signaling dead ends, they may spend hours of play time banging their heads against something that you thought would only fool them for fifteen minutes. Every group is wildly different, but as a rule of thumb, I'd recommend being ready to deploy twice as many clues as you think they could possibly need to solve it.

But it doesn't need to come to that and, in most cases, probably shouldn't. If the players have followed diligently, and shown equal measures of thought, skepticism, and persistence with the leads, at some point the case should break. They should find something that seals the deal: the fingerprinted murder weapon, the long-sought eyewitness, the suspiciously-timed insurance document, the missing motivation for murder, or the fraudulence of a previously-ironclad alibi. Give them something they can take to the district attorney. If it comes gift-wrapped with several ancillary facts that dispel red herrings or clear previous suspects, that's sweet icing, but the coffin-nail evidence is your cake.

If the perp panicked and pulled a "They're Getting Too Close!" maneuver, that could be your smoking gun, exciting climax, and (possibly) bust rolled into one. Poorly-wrought thrillers often go for this three-bagger by having the villain compulsively explain his plan right before turning his gun on himself, or leaping to his doom, or pushing the switch on the death-trap from which the hero escapes and into which the villain falls while trying to kick the hero back in (as the hero tries to save him, usually).

Don't let that cliché snap closed on your ankle. If the perp loses his cool, tries to silence the witness for good, and winds up smoking a pistol-lead cigarette, don't spell things out for the players. They've got the clues and the dead crook, for Pete's sake. Give them some time to mull things over and then have the chief call them in and ask, "Before I hand you over to Internal Affairs so they can grill you about firing on a well-respected banker, would you care to explain what the hell happened up there at the Devil's Head Observatory?"

If they have a good explanation, the chief looks nonplussed, then asks if they can prove it and (when they can), he gazes out the window and quietly says, "This damn city," or something equally existential before subtly indicating that the Internal Affairs thing is looking more and more *pro forma* by the minute. They feel like geniuses and he offers them some of the scotch from his lower filing-cabinet drawer.

If they don't have a good explanation, the chief asks pointed questions and, as he does, the players hopefully realize the good answers. This is their last chance to dope it out before he sends them away in disgust. If the characters really need to know how it all fits together — enough that the players are willing to sit through it — an NPC from the D.A.'s office can explain the current theory.

All that assumes that the dead criminal is, in effect, the key piece of evidence. (I suppose you could do something where the perp leaves an incriminating suicide note rather than let an innocent man fry for his crime, but it would take a very good GM to keep the PCs from being bystanders to the main action.) He doesn't have to be. If they finally find the kidnab victim or the missing greenbacks and it points in only one direction, the time has come for arrest warrants and raids.

BUSTED!

There are a couple of ways police busts tend to go down: quiet and loud.

The police have no interest in a fair fight, especially when they think they're chasing a flight risk or (worse) someone who's armed, dangerous, and cornered. So for typical low-level scum, it's a couple of uniformed officers with some alert backup nearby (but not, y'know, alarmingly visible). For your higher grade felon (whether that means "rich" or "loaded for bear"), it's a couple of innocuous plainclothesmen. For wealthy perps, the cops go to the door with, "Let's not make a scene in front of the neighbors, just come down to the station and we'll straighten this out" on the tips of their tongues. For the crazy violent, it's more likely to be, "You know we've got fifty guys out there ready to send a battleship's weight of lead crashing through your walls and windows. C'mon. The governor really means it about prison reform this time." Either way, the area's sealed off and a lot of cops are ready to swing into action.

Role-playing games tend to emphasize the loud end of the dramatic closure spectrum. The villain cracks and engages the killswitch on his gravity machine, or howls, "You can't cage me! I'd rather die!" and starts firing wildly. He starts a high-speed chase towards Dead Man's Curve or flees on his yacht into a gathering storm. Those are all great. You want the last scene to be a vicious fistfight in the orphanage where no one dares shoot because that evil psycho wrenched open the gas main and one spark's going to send it sky high? Go baby go.

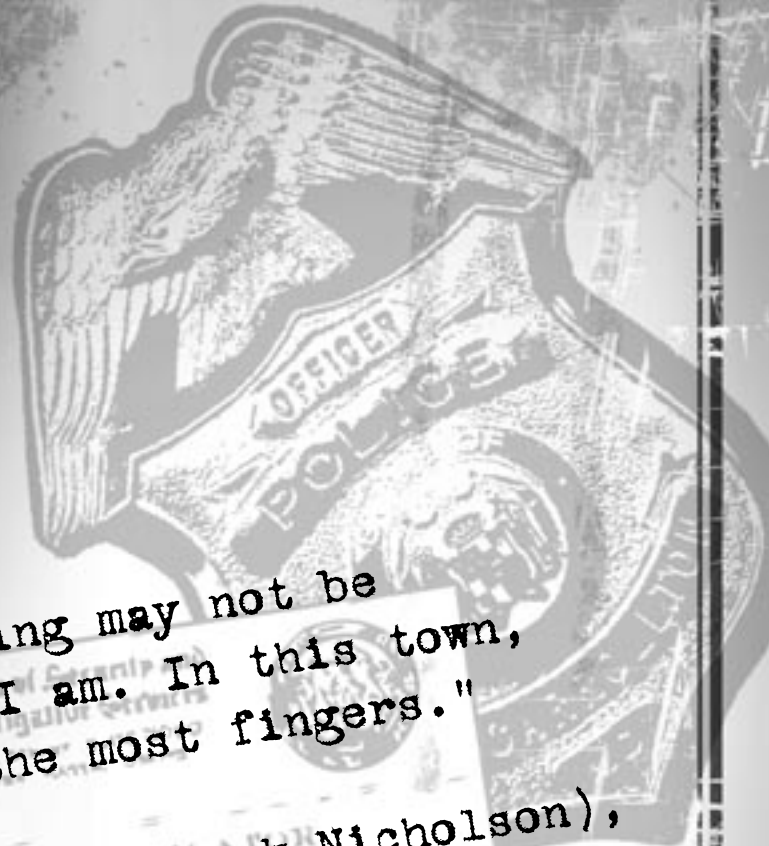
But another option is quiet resignation, especially if there already was an exciting, physical conflict in the "They're Getting Too Close!" section. The *noir* genre is full of murky, underplayed endings where the love interest client demurely goes off to her murder trial while the P.I. says, "I'll wait for you," and no one can be sure if he's sarcastic or not.

These can work just as well as the gun-fight-on-a-burning-oil-derrick approach. If you had a hella good action scene already and can't top it, subtle may be better. When the suspect is confronted and goes with no resistance beyond asking if the cuffs are really necessary, that can be a decisive triumph. It doesn't just validate the PC's prowess, it validates the entire system he represents. If he's had to struggle against crookedness and corruption the whole time, he didn't just outthink some scumbag. He proved that the idea of justice for all is more than a quaint platitude.

Furthermore, the moment of surrender can be a decisive time to show what made the criminal cross the line. This is as close as the PCs are going to get to looking into naked darkness. What the criminal reveals at his weakest moment is precious. Does he deny to the end? Does he respond with brittle cynicism, promising that his lawyers will free him, that no jury will condemn him, that his money will protect him? Does he desperately bargain? Reveal a madness that was so, so carefully concealed? Or does he try to somehow justify his crime? "I didn't mean for him to die, but he wouldn't be quiet!" "No, it's not like what you think, I loved those girls!"

That kind of raw humanity isn't for everyone, but if you take it seriously and give it the heft it deserves, it can be more intense than any chase scene or gunplay.

CHAPTER THREE DETECTIVES



"What I do for a living may not be very reputable, but I am. In this town, I'm the leper with the most fingers."

- J.J. Gittes (Jack Nicholson),
The Two Jakes

ALBERT NEVILLE
1658 COLLEGE ST.
BOSTON, MASS.

DETECTIVES

Few *noir* campaigns would be complete without the addition of a private investigator. The rumpled gumshoe with the fedora and the trenchcoat — his battered morals bolstered by the fact that he answers to no one but himself — has come to represent everything people think about when this genre comes to mind. Private eyes can be found in multitudes across the Unified Commonwealth, and as official law enforcement slips further into corruption and complacency, their services may be the only thing the citizens can depend on to see that justice is done.

But how much do people really know about what they do? And how do their activities in the U.C. differ from those in real life?

In strictest terms, a private investigator is simply the sum of his job description. He works for private citizens or businesses, conducting research and investigations as an official representative of his employer. The term encompasses both self-employed detectives working for no one but themselves, and those retained full-time by businesses or large firms. Whatever their particular circumstances, they exist primarily as an instrument of whoever pays them, not as a representative of the public trust.

Most P.I.s must obtain a license before opening for business. (People who don't have such a license aren't technically private eyes; they're just snoops.) Every territory in the Commonwealth has its own licensing criteria, but most are fairly similar. The investigator must pass a written exam detailing how the law applies to his specific activities and what kind of legal status he possesses when doing his job. Large P.I. firms offer apprenticeship programs, designed to help would-be investigators learn on the job while applying for their license. Previous jobs may help considerably as well. A private eye with a military or law enforcement background is much more likely to do better on the exam than one without, and the influx of veterans from the war has swelled the ranks of the U.C.'s private eyes considerably.

A P.I.'s license simply states that the holder has the right to present himself as a private eye, and that clients can expect a modicum of competence when soliciting his services. If he carries a gun, he is expected to receive the proper licensing for that, and to inform any clients of his right (or lack thereof) to do so. Beyond that, the investigator has nothing to differentiate him from any other citizen: only the ability to do his job and get results without crossing any legal lines.

While a considerable number of P.I.s in the U.C. work solely for themselves — the independence and freedom of movement are part of job's attraction — many also work for specific businesses who have need of their services. "Loss-prevention agents" perform investigative work for private firms, looking into incidents of employee graft, fraud, or robbery of a business-owned store. Hotels and casinos employ similar "in-house detectives," who keep an eye on customers and investigate petty crimes (as well as protecting guests from any

criminal activities). Large law firms often keep investigators as full-time employees, as do credit collection services. In the former case, the P.I. gathers details about the firms' clients or foes, compiling information pertinent to upcoming cases and confirming or refuting any details which the police department may have already determined. In the latter, they hunt down those whom the collection service has been tasked to find: reprobates, swindlers, and those who have borrowed far more than they are able to pay back.

Such positions lack the romance and flexibility of the investigator who works for himself. On the other hand, they provide a steadier paycheck and permit the P.I. the luxury of an established routine. Many work-for-hire investigators, weary of low-rent divorce cases and sleazy peeping tom jobs, will eagerly sign on to a more established business as a means of providing stable employment. They have access to more resources if needed, and tend to receive a warmer welcome from the police when interacting with them.

On the other hand, that makes them utterly beholden to whoever they work for, acting at the beck and call of their bosses and doing more or less what they're told, regardless of any ethical implications. Self-employed private investigators, while adhering to little more than their own ethics (and the dictates of law enforcement) have the flexibility to act from their own conscience. In the compromised world of *The Edge of Midnight*, that often proves far more reliable than cushier work from a larger employer. They can always take cases from businesses or law firms if they wish, while retaining their independence and holding onto whatever values their profession allows them to retain. (More on in-house detectives can be found on page 85.)

The romanticized image of a man who stands by his word, who does what's right, and who can act without the compromise of a corrupt bureaucracy above him forms the appeal of hiring a private investigator. Many potential clients come to the P.I.'s door only when they have exhausted all other options — when police, employers, and even family members have let them down. Unscrupulous investigators will happily take advantage of that and cook up some story that will milk their clients of money rather than providing genuine help. The rest, however, view themselves as the last line of defense in a corrupted world, the one person ready to do a dirty job the right way and see that justice is done.

LEGAL AUTHORITY

Strictly speaking, P.I.s have no legal authority. They cannot conduct searches, interrogate suspects, or make official arrests. Many have a license to carry firearms, but they are bound by the same laws which govern private citizens, and if they ever shoot anyone, they may find themselves charged with murder. They must make citizens' arrests without the authority of the regular police, and if they do so without providing evidence to back up their charges, the perp may simply walk out of the police station five minutes after the P.I. brings him in. Good investigators learn proper ways around such limitations: the vagaries of the law which allow them to do their jobs without getting on the police department's bad side.

CHAPTER THREE: DETECTIVES

Much of the legal gray area concerns a citizen's right to privacy, and under what context a P.I. may violate that right. Regular law enforcement operates under a specific set of rules which governs when they can and cannot intrude upon another person's home or business. If they violate it, then the evidence they obtain may not be admissible in court. For P.I.s, that question becomes much more complicated. Since they are not agents of the law, they need not adhere to the same limitations... and yet the means by which they go about gathering evidence may itself be constituted as a crime should they fail to meet certain legal obligations.

Take, for example, the notion of *pretexting*, which many Commonwealth P.I.s adopt as a matter of course during their investigations. This involves passing oneself off as a law enforcement official, fire inspector, journalist, or the like. The P.I. will present false identification as a means of gaining access to a home or person, then explore or question a suspect under the pretext of official business. Such tactics can produce a great deal of useful information... at the cost of violating numerous laws. Falsifying official identification is illegal in most parts of the Commonwealth, as is impersonating a police officer. Gaining access to certain kinds of information — such as phone records, bank statements, or financial planning — under a false pretext is a violation of national law as well, and even if the P.I. can avoid jail, his license will almost certainly be revoked. Numerous methods of investigation involve similar pitfalls, from wiretapping (illegal for private citizens) to criminal assault (a felony unless extenuating circumstances are involved).

However, chances are that such legal vagaries don't matter much to a P.I.... at least, not if he doesn't have to prove his case in court. He answers to his client rather than the law, and evidence which may not be admissible to the police will still be more than enough to convince a cuckolded husband or defrauded business partner. In such circumstances, pretexting becomes a valuable tool, as does illegal surveillance, breaking and entering, and similar forms of malfeasance. The investigator need only prevent his deception from being discovered, then present what he has learned to his client without elaborating on any of the details.

For this reason, many P.I.s approach their clients very carefully. If they are expected to produce evidence that will stand up in court, they need to acquire it in a safe and legal fashion. They must seek public information rather than private files, move in accordance with the laws against unlawful entry, and never present themselves as someone other than who they really are. Some will even go so far as to notify the police of their activities, which comes in handy when trouble arises and keeps the cops from interfering with an otherwise fruitful investigation.

If, on the other hand, the client has no intention of pursuing the issue in court — if he or she just wants information to satisfy his or her own questions — then the investigator can act with far less regard for legal specifics. The only thing that matters is proof: concrete evidence that will confirm or deny the client's suspicions no matter how it was obtained.

The same holds true when gunplay becomes involved. Most prudent investigators have a license to carry firearms, and never hesitate to bring their weapon whenever they think trouble may arise. But unless they can prove self defense, any discharge of a firearm will prompt close inspection by the police and may result in arrest if the investigator isn't careful. So again, they seek out the loopholes. They look for specifics in the law that permit the use of weapons in self-defense, and adhere to circumstances where their weapon won't draw undue attention. Private eyes don't like being shot at any more than anyone else, and will seek out jobs that they can accomplish without gunplay if it can be helped. This is much more difficult in *The Edge of Midnight* universe than our own, more mundane, reality. The grittier edges of the Commonwealth, and investigators' status as *de facto* protectors makes them far more likely to see combat than their counterparts here. Even so, the more they can avoid such circumstances — and the more knowledgeable they are about legal circumstances which allow them to use their weapons — the happier they tend to be.

A good P.I. learns to make the best use of legal loopholes and technical circumstances. They become his best friend on the job, allowing him to conduct his investigation with confidence and circumvent the ramifications of operating outside the law. Whenever he does so, it's all the more important to maintain a strict code of personal ethics: to know the difference between right and wrong, regardless of which legalities he may bend or break. P.I.s who can't adhere to their own code quickly slide into moral malaise, and soon come to resemble the very criminals they are often hired to stop.

METHODOLOGY

Private eyes have very few formal methodologies. Their tactics vary from case to case and detective to detective, married both to personal preferences and on-the-fly particulars of whatever circumstances they find themselves in. Nevertheless, certain tried-and-true methods do emerge from most reputable private eyes, helping them to do their job more efficiently and provide their clients with the best possible services.

The first thing a good P.I. does is sit down with his client and discuss the case in detail. Together, they need to determine first if the case can be solved, and whether it contains any legal or ethical ramifications worth considering before the P.I. will agree to it. Some P.I.s have no problems breaking the law at their clients' behest: arranging frame-ups for a case



WARLOCKS AND DETECTIVES

of marital infidelity, for example, or planting stolen items on someone for the police to find. Others draw strict lines about the kind of cases they will undertake and make sure their client understands the limits of their abilities. Private dicks aren't miracle workers: they can't create perfect airtight cases where none exist or definitively finger a suspect where years of thorough police work have failed to turn anyone up. If the P.I. thinks he can succeed at the case, he informs his client of what it will take. Otherwise, he suggests another course of action — speaking to the police, for example, or simply making peace with whatever unsolved mystery the client is presenting. Sometimes, the client may insist that the P.I. take the job regardless, in which case he can do little save accept the money and try his best (or not even try, in the case of less scrupulous P.I.s). But before any formal investigation begins, he needs to gauge the possibility of solving the case and make sure the client understands what he or she is in for.

Research

Assuming he takes the case, the private eye usually begins by conducting research. Publicly available government records can provide information on land purchases, payment of taxes, arrests, birth and death certificates, the licensing of businesses, and even vital statistics. Newspaper archives may contain stories about the client or possible suspects, while the courts have records of any cases held within their jurisdiction. Even the public library can produce intriguing results, especially if the case entails widely studied subjects such as art or history. Thorough research can be a gold mine to a diligent P.I., establishing key details about the case and helping him to set up timelines, alibis, and even possible motivations if any crime has been committed.

The key to making that work however, lies both in knowing how to get such information, and what to make of it once you have it. Few citizens bother with public records — which have no impact on their day-to-day lives — and wouldn't know where to start looking for them. Private eyes, on the other hand, quickly learn exactly where they can find the details they need... and more importantly, which official can lead them through the Byzantine maze of red tape required to find it. Private eyes also know how to search personal archives and documents off-limits to the public, either by obtaining the proper documentation, or by hustling their way past whatever gatekeepers watch over them. (The placement of a judicious bribe or the right bit of coercion can work wonders as well, especially if you know who is vulnerable to such pressures.)

Just as important as locating such information, however, is sifting through it to find the details pertinent to the case. Many private eyes spend hours poring over obtuse and complicated documents simply to find one or two sentences which may have bearing on their work. The ability to separate the wheat from the chaff becomes second nature to a good detective: that carefully developed instinct which can spot the right tidbit amid a sea of unimportant facts and figures. P.I.s learn not only how to analyze the data they find, but to present it to their clients as well, and to transform it into concrete leads that they can then apply to the remainder of their investigation.

Physical Surveillance

When most people think of detective work, they think of physical surveillance: watching hotel rooms and businesses in search of that elusive unfaithful husband or crooked business partner. Private dicks conduct surveillance much the same way official police do, though their lack of civic authority means that they must move more carefully. First they need to find the right target: a suspect, a location, or some combination of the two. They can then follow and observe as appropriate, taking care not to be spotted and gathering data through whichever means are most expedient. Sometimes, it simply means watching carefully and seeing who comes and goes. If the client needs more concrete proof, then the P.I. may need to take photographs or gather evidence such as fingerprints or shoe marks.

Regardless of what is required, it often means long and tedious hours sitting and watching. Most private eyes will use their cars for such duties, since automobiles are unobtrusive and can be moved quickly if need be. Sometimes, they can rent a room nearby which has a view of the targeted property or individual. If worse comes to worse, the private eye can simply observe it on foot, finding a nearby hiding spot on the street and moving when and where it is appropriate. Some P.I.s have developed little tricks to help them out with such duties without having to sit and watch for hours on end. Wedging a scrap of paper into the jam of a door, for example, can tell them if someone leaves the location (if the paper has dropped to the floor, it means someone has opened the door in the time since it was placed there). Similarly, a cheap watch placed under a car's tires will tell the detective exactly when the car drove away (the tire will smash the watch, freezing its hands at whatever the time in question was). Well-off detectives will hire associates, or simply pay off locals in the neighborhood to watch a certain location. Some can even piggy-back on police surveillance simply by gaining access to the pertinent records. Eventually, however, even the most cunning detective will find himself having to watch a location himself, spending long hours in cramped conditions to catch a few precious seconds of vital information.

To further complicate matters, P.I.s cannot legally trespass on private property while conducting their surveillance. Entering the premises itself may constitute breaking and entering, and while the P.I. may learn enough to satisfy his clients by breaking the law, nothing he discovers there will be admissible as evidence. Accordingly, P.I.s must often take care to remain in public spaces at all times: street corners, parks, or nearby cafes. They can augment their abilities in these circumstances by relying on equipment such as cameras and binoculars. Though such devices contribute to the profession's infamous "peeping tom" reputation, there are no laws against using them in public places, and they can aid the P.I. immeasurably when going about his work.

Other surveillance methods tread the lines of legality more delicately and require care on the part of the private eye. Monitoring telephone conversations is against the law without a warrant, though a private eye with the proper devices can certainly do it so long as the police never find out. Breaking and

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entering is possible as well, allowing the detective to gather as much evidence as he wishes if he doesn't mind explaining himself if he gets caught. An easier method is to speak to the landlord or a similar figure, who may allow the private eye inside legally. The downside is that it may tip the suspect off if the landlord mentions it to anyone, but it does avoid the question of legality.

Similarly, the detective may "bait" the suspect into a public area or somewhere where the detective has legal jurisdiction: using a prostitute to entice a cheating husband into a hotel room, for example, or hustling important papers into a public location where he can legally take a peak. Though sleazy and disreputable, such tactics often solve significant investigative problems, and many form the conclusion to successful cases. A detective who has seen enough to ascertain a suspect's guilt may use such scenarios to secure iron-clad evidence, waiting with cameras or audio recorders to catch every minute of it. The issue of entrapment sometimes comes into play, but Commonwealth courts have proven extremely lenient in that regard. So long as the detective can prove that his actions were legal and came at the behest of a client, then entrapment claims tend to fall by the wayside. Numerous sleazy detectives have used these precedents to hustle suspects into incriminating circumstances as a way of wrapping up a case.

The P.I.'s client can often prove useful when it comes to surveillance as well. Cohabitation laws means that he or she can give the detective access to a property or business, searching for whatever files or information may be located there. A client can provide keys and alarm codes to areas he owns, while tipping the P.I. off to any known locations where a given suspect may be found. Such information usually only comes when the client knows the suspect in question — normally cases involving spouses or business partners rather than missing persons or stolen property — but few detectives will say no to a boost when they can get it.

Most of the time, however, the detective must content himself with legal surveillance from the street, using whatever means he can to get a better look without breaking the law. No one ever said detective work was glamorous.

Questions and Interviews

By far the easiest technique for a detective to gather information is simply talking to people: asking questions and conducting interviews with witnesses or possible suspects. Those present at a crime, those whose regular lives bring them into contact with a suspect, and those in the vicinity of a suspicious location may have a wealth of information which a diligent detective can entice from them. Interviewees can-



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not be legally coerced to speak with private eyes, however, nor can they be compelled to testify by the P.I.'s word alone. They do so at their own discretion, and if they don't feel like talking, then a private eye has no (legal) recourse but to leave them be. Sometimes, that doesn't matter. The interviewees are more than happy to speak with the private eye, either because they have some vested interest in the outcome of the case or because they simply don't see any harm in revealing what they know. Other times, however, the interviewee will clam up: because he doesn't like talking to strangers, because he sees no reason to help a P.I. out, or (most frustratingly) because he clearly knows something important and fears the consequences if he ever reveals it.

Accordingly, most P.I.s adopt a friendly, approachable persona, which they can use to make interviewees feel relaxed and willing to confide in them. They learn to radiate trust and authority, as well as using a confiding tone that lets subjects lower their guard. In this sense, they are very much like police investigators, who affect similar mannerisms in the course of their own work. Unlike policemen, however, private eyes have no authority to back up their investigation, so an approachable demeanor becomes even more important.

Fortunately, private eyes aren't always under the same time pressure as policemen, so they can build up a subject's trust more gradually. They might stop by a restaurant or diner near an area pertinent to the case: grab some lunch and a cup of coffee and maybe chat up the waitresses or the regulars. They do this without any specific idea of what they may be looking for and to no immediate purpose beyond general friendliness. That pays dividends, however, if one of their new friends happens to have been in the neighborhood on the night of the crime or runs into the suspect coming in and out of his apartment every day. A witness might be far more willing to open up to that friendly guy from the diner than some stranger who suddenly shows up asking a lot of questions. Private investigators tend to develop such a rapport very easily, and spend a number of seemingly useless hours currying trust in possible interview subjects.

There are less scrupulous methods as well, of course. A private eye can assume the identity of someone else: usually a public official who can cause a great deal of trouble if the interviewee doesn't come clean. He might also pretend to be a member of the underworld, who represents a large and frightening criminal syndicate with whom no interviewee would wish to tangle. In either case, fear becomes a powerful motivator, and will draw the interviewee out not through charisma but through the threat of dire consequences should he leave anything unmentioned. And, of course, totally unscrupulous private eyes can simply drop all pretense and threaten to pound the interviewee unless he tells the P.I. everything he knows. Using false pretenses to procure information is generally illegal, but can produce results where subtler forms of interrogation will not.

Generally speaking, most good detectives adopt a healthy mixture of friendliness and menace, learning which interviewees respond best to the carrot and which to the stick. The questions themselves vary in tone and presentation, though they usually follow the same line of logic that police question-

ing follows (see page 16), and the private eye needs to develop a very strong bullshit detector to ferret the truth out of any answers from evasions, distortions, and half-remembered gossip.

As important as the interview itself is knowing who to interview and why. While the police have the manpower to canvas an entire area asking questions in the wake of a crime, the shamus usually has just himself and maybe one or two colleagues. So P.I.s must choose their interview subjects carefully, with an eye both on who might carry pertinent information and how reliable they could be. Relatives, business partners, and friends of the suspect are one thing — easy to find and often able (if not always willing) to reveal a great deal of information about a given suspect. Less obvious but often even more fruitful are service or support people whose jobs keep them in close proximity to key suspects or locations. Bartenders, chambermaids, janitors, and postal or delivery employees have a way of vanishing into the background: going unnoticed by people yet in a position to see and hear a great deal. Most of them are happy to talk (a few bills under their nose will do it if nothing else), and detectives learn to hunt them down in the early stages of an investigation as a matter of course: sometimes even before speaking to the principals.

A healthy sense of intuition and an eye for detail play into who the detective chooses to interview. Though he will often try to speak to as many people as possible, time and leg power will only take him so far. So he focuses on times, dates, and places, looking for those in a position to know something and asking questions designed to produce the most amount of information in the least amount of time. Unlike the police, who tend to gather oceans of data before methodically sifting through them, the detective must learn to follow what threads he can during the questioning. Every fruitless answer is a little more wasted effort, which few P.I.s can readily afford. Consequently, when a lead does present itself, detectives know how to exploit it quickly and efficiently, moving in pursuit of the answers they hear while discarding elements deemed impertinent to the case at hand. Similarly, they will refrain from interviewing subjects whose potential for useful information is low, holding off until more promising subjects have been questioned. Issues of how to spread their finite resources play a strong part in the detectives' interviewing skills, and most learn quite quickly who holds the right kind of answers and who is merely a waste of time.



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TYPES OF CASES

Private eye cases in the Unified Commonwealth vary wildly according to need (and the particular P.I.). Obviously, they make a wonderful hook for involving the player characters in some grand plot, and the majority of cases they take on in the course of play may be exciting indeed. Most of the time, however, they are often very mundane, and when those special cases do arrive, they often come cloaked in the auspices of another run-of-the-mill snoop job. A brief overview of the most common kinds of investigative work follows.

Fraud and Financial Infidelity

These cases form the meat and potatoes of many investigators' caseloads. They consist of examining business or personal records for signs of fiscal mischief: employees skimming profits for personal use, defrauding investors in a bank or brokerage, doctoring accounts, swindling customers, and otherwise engaging in theft through the auspices of legal business. In and of itself, it's rarely romantic work: the investigator must examine desiccated tax forms, profit reports, bank statements, and accountant's ledgers in an effort to determine any fiscal malfeasance. He usually needs proof that can hold up in court, which means no short cuts, and the evidence required to earn a conviction can only be found beneath mountains of paperwork. It pays the bills, but the drama quotient for such cases remains distressingly low.

More often than not, however, financial graft can springboard into crimes of a much more sinister nature. The heart of any fraud case entails money... and, more importantly, someone who wants a lot of it without playing by the rules. Those engaged in it are often defrauding someone close to them — a business partner, a friend, or a family member in the case of personal finances — and their reasons for doing so are often unsavory. High living on swindled money leads to undue indulgences, which leads to gambling debts, debauchery, addiction, and infidelity. And with one legal line crossed so cavalierly, it becomes much easier to cross the next one. While many cases of fraud produce nothing more than a pathetic nebbish quietly filching from his employers, some become the basis of a darker and more violent investigation with fraud serving as either motive or means, which the private eye must uncover before he gets to the meat of the case. They're rarely welcome when they appear, but can produce good press and a grateful client (as well as a terrific *Edge of Midnight* scenario) when they do.

Marital Infidelity

After business fraud, a cheating spouse is the most common type of case undertaken by a private investigator. Suspicious wives or husbands may believe that a third party has invaded their marriage bed... or just want to go on a fishing expedition to find grounds for a divorce. Marital infidelity cases are fairly cut and dried: much like fraud cases, but with less respectability and more seamy details thrown in for good measure. Private eyes get much of their bad reputation from divorce work, fighting down the sleazy, demeaning image of peeping through windows with spyglasses at the sight of two people in

flagrante delicto. But to paraphrase one famous P.I., if one half of a couple ends up in an investigator's office, it means that both halves are miserable. The shamus simply puts them out of their misery.

The standard procedure is to follow the suspected husband or wife, taking care not to be seen and simply waiting until a paramour shows up. The detective then takes photographs of the unfaithful couple (with or without clothes, depending on how close he can get), performs a perfunctory investigation to determine the identity of the other man/woman, and presents the findings to his client along with the number of a good divorce lawyer. Occasionally, the investigation requires a more detailed approach: interviews with those who may have seen the wayward spouse in the company of another, examination of restaurants or hotel bills, and so on. But usually, the quieter the detective can go about his work — and the less people who know about it — the better.

In cases where no infidelity can be proven, the detective may be asked to find other grounds for a divorce. Cruelty towards the spouse, desertion for a given length of time, and physical inability to perform sexual intercourse are all reasonable grounds for legal divorce, and a private detective can help procure evidence proving one or more conditions in the same manner with which he proves infidelity. He simply watches and waits... preferably with a camera or recorder on hand to cover what transpires. Sooner or later, the right amount of dirt will show itself.

And for detectives without appreciable ethics, it's easy enough to create dirt of one's own. Lovers appear so readily to an unhappy spouse: a pretty girl, a handsome man, a few whispered lines over drinks, and a nearby hotel room complete with large windows to better keep the close-ups in focus. Private eyes practiced in this sort of chicanery usually employ a regular operative for the purposes of seduction. Others can do it on the fly by hiring a prostitute. It makes for a doubly efficient scheme when you introduce blackmail into the mix: forcing the compromised spouse to pay for the pictures, then turning around and giving the negatives to the cuckolded wife or husband. It tends to be easier to trap men this way than women, though anything is possible if the marriage is unhappy enough.

And like financial infidelity, cheating spouses sometimes lead to crimes of a much more dramatic nature. Jealousy, covetousness, the thousand slights of a lengthy relationship, and the smoldering remnants of the love and passion which brought the couple together can lead to stunning, unpredictable behavior. Abandonment, theft from a mutual bank account, and



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physical violence are not uncommon. The cuckolded spouse may attempt to kill either or both members of the cheating couple, while the cheating spouse may dispose of either his or her legal mate (in order to start fresh) or the third party (in order to eliminate evidence of infidelity). Private eyes have a way of exacerbating those tensions when they investigate a divorce case, and need to move carefully lest their work trigger the worst of all possible responses.

Insurance Fraud

Insurance fraud falls under the same general category as business fraud. In this case, it applies to feigned accidents or damages filed through an insurance claim in order to gain

more money than the destroyed asset was worth. It happens surprisingly often, with schemes ranging from junked-out automobiles passed off as classics after being wrecked in a phony accident to faked injuries used to claim exorbitant damages. Thousands of would-be hustlers seek to bilk insurance companies using whatever means are available, and payouts on phony claims often run into the millions of dollars per year.

To combat this, the companies turn to private eyes. The biggest insurers employ their own team of investigators, who know how to sniff out phony claims and what tricks fraudsters use to pass the deliberate off as accidental. Smaller firms can't afford to employ full-time private eyes, and so must hire independents to do the job... especially on big cases which might wind up costing them a great deal of money. Private eyes also work well in facilitating communication with law enforcement: phony claims are illegal and may escalate into serious charges like arson and even murder. The P.I. can establish a rapport with the official investigators in charge of the case, lending his expertise while keeping abreast of whatever evidence they find in order to ascertain what happened.

Insurance fraud cases need to remain above the board whenever possible. The companies need evidence that is admissible in court and want their case to be as airtight as possible before accepting or rejecting any claims. The onerous for that falls on the investigator, who must look for verified and officially validated information in order to support his case. That doesn't mean that some P.I.s won't falsify data — planting evidence to suggest that a genuine claim is actually phony — only that they must go about it carefully. Fire inspectors and police officers will often examine the same evidence, and a crooked shamus can find himself charged if he doesn't see to every detail. Accordingly, most low-rent private eyes stick to easier scams, leaving high-end insurance investigations to those who can devote skill and resources to it.

The insurance racket doesn't get any easier on the honest side of the equation. Fraud can be impossibly tough to prove if the perpetrator knows what he's doing, and if the claim doesn't involve any obvious illegalities, then the private eye must work without the benefit of the police. Ferreting out a swindle involves a combination of forensic examination and harsh interviewing skills. The latter is ostensibly easier, but requires a certain sort of investigator to accomplish properly. He needs to ask direct questions and remember every detail that the claimant provides. If facts don't jibe or information varies, he needs to spot the vulnerability and exploit it. The dynamics of the interview differ slightly from police interrogations because the claimant is under no obligation to speak (though he may be denied his claim if he doesn't) and the burden of proof lies more on him



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than on the insurance company. An investigator who suspects the claimant of fraud can move more confidently on it than a policeman, scaring the man away from filing a claim rather than conducting the laborious process of proving the man's lies.

Physical evidence, on the other hand, must be far more concrete. This can be difficult in the cases of personal injury, which often rely on doctor's testimony and remain subject to the vagaries of medical quackery. Traditional P.I. tactics of tailing and surveillance often produce the best results, hoping to catching the claimant walking on a supposedly injured leg or removing a cast when he thinks no one's watching. A smattering of medical knowledge helps the P.I. immeasurably in such circumstances as well: understanding the extent of the supposed injury and knowing the symptoms that a genuinely hurt man might exhibit.

Other forms of insurance fraud can be detected through examination of the scene in question. Automobile wrecks leave specific signs that suggest what really happened: skid marks, the direction of indentation, the pattern and direction of broken glass, and so on. The claimant's testimony becomes very important in automobile cases because it has to jibe with the evidence on the ground. Details which vary from source to source will provide an opening for the P.I. to prove fraud. Investigators also look into the condition of the road itself during the crash, the existence of local safety laws, and a background check on anyone involved in the accident which might suggest deliberation. (It needn't necessarily be a history of accidents; indeed a historically safe driver involved in an accident with no obvious cause immediately garners more suspicion than someone with a much spottier driving record.)

Arson and property destruction depend upon similar examinations, though the claimant's testimony is usually easier to forge (most of them claim that the fire "just started"). Investigators start by reading the scene from the outside, looking for signs of forced entry or burn patterns which might indicate the origins of the fire. They then move to the ground floor interior, which usually suffers the least damage in a fire and thus likely holds the most evidence. They look for signs of accelerants or other fuels, the likelihood of oxygen reaching a given point, and areas where the fire most likely got started. In particular, they look for multiple points of origin, rather than a single point: though some accidental fires (like those started through electrical shorts) can have multiple points of origin, most start in one place and spread. If multiple points can be established, it casts strong suspicion on the claimant's case.

Other details tend to reveal themselves during an investigation into an arson site. The position and direction of v-patterns can suggest whether a fire progressed naturally through available materials or was encouraged with rapidly burning accelerants. Charring which runs particularly deep through a piece of wood raises eyebrows as well (natural fires tend to go through a little more than an inch of wood for every hour of burn). Distortions in glass, blister marks, and scorching patterns can also suggest where and how a fire was started. Most suspicious of all is holes in the floor — seemingly natural burn

areas which can help aid a fire on its way. Since most flames burn upward and outward, the presence of holes in a floor give rise to uncomfortable questions. So too do arson investigations hinge on the background of any suspects: knowledge they may hold which could lead to a fire, destruction of certain specific areas which may have held key documents or insured property, and any connections with electricians, fire officials, or known arsonists that can explain how and why a fire took place.

Evidence of more general insurance fraud arises through the same methods. A cut rope holding heavy objects, signs of tampering with coverings or protective gear, a thief who has a past history with one of the claimants... insurance investigators learn to spot these with lightning precision. The worst of it comes in cases of untimely death, where the survivors of a beneficiary stand to receive a substantial payout. Murder staged as an accident becomes particularly unseemly if money is involved, and while the police may be willing to accept the surface details, a P.I. has the motivation to dig further and see if dear old dad simply fell down the stairs or if he was encouraged.

An investigator sufficiently skilled at fraud cases becomes very much in demand. Insurance companies pay handsomely for saving them money and P.I.s who consider themselves on the side of right get an immense amount of satisfaction uncovering arsonists, killers, or even just scam artists looking to make a quick buck. It also provides them with respectability that seamy divorce cases or hand-me-down criminal investigations can't. Their skills are viewed with increased legitimacy and their clients make a habit of turning to them in times of need. If you can do all that and maintain your independence, you've basically reached the pinnacle of the private investigator's life.

Theft

Theft differs from financial infidelity mainly in the particulars. Both cases entail the loss of money or valuables, but while fraud disguises it behind seemingly legal business transactions, theft is much more overt. There's nothing subtle about walking in and taking something, and not every victim wants to wait for the police to get their act together. Indeed, with theft cases, people usually approach private eyes after the police have conducted their own investigation and turned up nothing. Or the stolen object holds little intrinsic value (thus making it a low priority for the cops) but carries considerable personal value to the person who has lost it. And all too often, people will go to a P.I. because they don't want the police to know about the theft at all: either because it involves embarrassing details or because it could implicate them in a crime.

Straight-out theft cases rank among the most difficult for private eyes to solve. Like the police, they need to move quickly: the longer it takes to find a suspect, the farther and farther away the stolen object gets. Since P.I.s lack the manpower of the police, they can't act with the same amount of thoroughness, and unless the stolen object had some intrinsically unusual quality, the chances of anyone seeing it or remembering it become remote in the extreme. Ironically, the easiest theft cases involve those with objects stolen years ago, long after

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everyone else has given up. It still doesn't always end successfully, but the passage of time means that whoever took it has long since considered himself safe and relaxed his guard.

P.I.s pursue theft cases much the same way that the police do: interviewing pertinent witnesses, examining available evidence, assembling suspects based on possible motives, and attempting to track the object by determining who would want it and why. If the stolen object holds enough value, then the thief needs to find someone capable of moving it — a fence or someone practiced in the art of handling such goods. If it holds particular value to the thief himself, then the P.I. needs to determine why and who might have sufficient motive to steal it. In this, he follows most of the tactics that official policemen use (see Chapters One and Two for more). The only difference is that he must do it all on his own. He cannot make use of lab reports without going through the police, his manpower is limited to himself and whoever he pays to help him, and if the thief catches wind of him, it's a hell of a lot easier to outrun a single private eye than the entire police department. Theft cases thus tend to move much more slowly than they would with the police.

The only real edge private eyes have over the police in such cases is their unofficial status. Because they don't carry a badge, their demeanor tends to arouse less suspicion, and people prove more willing to talk to them without fear of harassment or arrest. Their lower profile means that the thief himself may not notice a P.I. the way he would notice a cop, and if he spends his all his time worrying about blue uniforms and wailing sirens, he might not stop the diligent gumshoe quietly nailing his coffin shut. In sensitive cases or those whose clients don't wish to draw attention themselves, the advantages of a low profile easily outweigh the comparative strengths of going to the police.

Missing Persons

People disappear all the time, and not all of them do so illegally. A vanishing husband or a long-absent mother creates as much anxiety in the minds of those left behind as an abducted child or a kidnapped heiress. Yet if no evidence of a crime presents itself, the police usually can't do much besides tell the concerned party to file a missing persons report. For those for whom that isn't nearly enough, a private eye can take the case. The devotion he gives to it easily dwarfs that of an indifferent police department, and even in cases which involve the legal authorities, it helps to have another pair of eyes in the mix.

The difficulty with missing persons cases is that the answers may not be what the client wishes to hear. If it's an abduction or kidnapping, then the police are usually involved, but those which fall on the shamus's lap are rarely so cut and dried. The missing person may have no desire to be found, hav-

ing cut ties to his previous life in order to start a new one. He may be on the run from someone — he owes a gambling debt to mobsters, for example, or fathered a child out of wedlock — and his rediscovery may elicit attention from the wrong quarters. He may have committed a terrible crime and left so that its taint would not smear his loved ones. Or he may simply be dead: any missing persons investigation invariably entails a search of the John Doe section of various morgues.

The ugly details which may surface often prompt private investigators to be brutally honest with their clients before undertaking such a case. They explain that they may learn things about the missing person that the client doesn't want to know and that reassurance — the absolute knowledge of what happened — may not bring peace. The P.I. himself needs to retain cold, objective clarity during the investigation, opening himself up both to the most horrid possibilities and to the fact that the client may not wish to hear them no matter how many times he or she may have said otherwise.

A missing persons investigation begins with a background check of the person himself. The P.I. can use the person's social security number and bank accounts to access certain corridors of information, such as when he or she may have last cashed a check, or where he or she may have applied for a job. Past acquaintances need to be followed up on: old girlfriends, former business partners, people who may have known the missing person in vastly different contexts than the P.I.'s client. The investigator focuses on motive first and foremost. If the missing person ran, then what was he running from? If he was taken, then who took him and to what end? The answers to those questions invariably form a trail to follow: if not leading to the missing person himself, then at least to tangible proof about where he might have gone.

In the process, the investigator often uncovers far more about his subject than anyone may have suspected. People have secrets, hidden sides that they never reveal even to their nearest and dearest. A mistress or shady business deal may only be the tip of the iceberg. Some missing persons build entire lives for themselves: personae, homes, friends, and acquaintances who never touch the subject's "legitimate" life in any way. The investigator must uncover these secrets if he wishes to successfully close the case, but the ripples their discovery may cause can reverberate far wider than anyone might have anticipated.

On a more practical level, the investigator needs to focus on a viable trail, which either means someone who saw the missing person or spent money which can be traced back to him or her. The former holds more importance if the missing person was abducted — no matter how careful the kidnapping, somebody somewhere saw him, and the detective needs to find out who. The kidnapper's means and motives might point out where the subject may have been seen, while the missing person's background could unveil clues about who might have spotted him or her last.

If the subject went missing on his or her own, then someone has obviously seen him or her as well. However, they likely don't know who he or she is, and if there's no obvious signs of distress (the missing person wasn't being forced into a car



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or under clear duress), then the eyewitness might not think anything more of it. That makes eyewitness accounts hard to come by at best. Even the most self-sufficient person needs money to operate, however: secret bank accounts, hidden cash, the sudden purchase of unusual items like a car or a far-away piece of property. A check of the subject's valuables and net worth can provide vital clues both as to where he might have gone and how he might have gotten there. In the simplest terms, some things never change: a businessman used to living the high life will rarely submit to existing in squalid conditions, while a poor man lacks the resources to live beyond his station. Looking for them in areas which match their financial level can help narrow the search considerably... and if they do move higher or lower in economic status, then their relative unfamiliarity with their new surroundings will stick out like a sore thumb.

Once a trail is established, the investigator can construct a timeline of events covering where the subject was and who saw him at any particular time. If the trail is reasonably hot, this might not be necessary, but for older cases or cases where the subject has covered his tracks, a timeline makes an invaluable way to turn up more leads. Knowing where he was on a given day means knowing where people may have seen him, which can provide evidence as to what he may have been up to. Each new thread may lead to a final clue providing the subject's whereabouts... or even just freshen the trail by providing a new direction in which to turn. A timeline helps the detective sort those options out, giving the puzzle a framework into which the pieces fit.

If kidnapping or some other form of crime was involved, the investigator must invariably call the police. Withholding such information may be construed as aiding and abetting, and even if it isn't, official involvement can usually only benefit the P.I.'s client. Exceptions occur when the kidnappers stipulate no police involvement, threatening to kill the victim if they detect any sign of official law enforcement. In these circumstances, a private eye can move more stealthily and with greater delicacy, allowing an investigation to take place without alerting the kidnappers. Otherwise, the police must invariably become involved, and the gumshoe's investigation will more or less dovetail into theirs. This can benefit the P.I., since the police have more resources than he does and he'll get paid for his services regardless. But oftentimes, the police will end up claiming the credit for the detective's hard work and fold his discoveries into "their" investigation. Nevertheless, P.I.s rarely have a choice in the matter, and those with their client's best wishes in mind will always summon the authorities when the evidence becomes strong enough to merit their attention.



Success in missing persons cases is defined solely from client to client. In some instances, it means simply providing definitive information on the subject's whereabouts (an address or phone number) and allowing the client to proceed from there. Sometimes, the investigator needs proof of death, which means a body or a recognizable grave. If the subject is still alive, it may require a photograph proving his or her whereabouts. Generally speaking, the more information a detective can provide, the better.

Sadly, many missing persons cases can never be satisfactorily concluded. The subject died and was never found, or has covered his tracks well enough to keep even the most diligent pursuer from finding him. When the trail reaches a dead end, the detective can only submit what he knows to the client and advise him or her from there. Most scrupulous P.I.s will avoid taking more money after it becomes clear they can't continue the investigation any further, though more than a few will happily feed their clients false hopes in order to keep the money rolling in long after it becomes clear that the case will never be resolved.

A more delicate ethical dilemma arises in the event that the missing person is found (either alive or dead). The detective must then determine how and what to tell his client. He's obligated to reveal everything he knows, of course, but the complexities of the situation may demand a certain amount of prudence. Some clients may not wish to know specific details — they only require closure on the situation. Others may be eager to hear every detail, but lack the emotional stability to handle grim or unsavory new facts. The detective may choose to spare his client that pain by distorting or withholding information that he doesn't feel is pertinent. He may also do so if he wishes to protect the missing person's good name: heretofore unknown personal details may besmirch an otherwise sterling reputation or cause distress to the client.

Sometimes, the missing person himself will implore the detective to keep quiet. He might do so to spare his searching loved ones pain, but more often, it he does it to hide embarrassing circumstances or to prevent being charged with a crime. He could pay the detective off in order to maintain his secrecy... or use nastier methods like blackmail or even murder. Peripheral figures may have their own reasons for keeping the subject on the missing list, and will use similar means to deter the detective from his course. The sleaziest P.I.s will take money from both sides, feigning a continuing pursuit of the missing person while simultaneously collecting pay-offs to help keep him hidden. Those with more decency will simply accept payment and close the case, or even refuse the bribe and stay true to the client who hired them in the first place.

In any case, the detective must determine for himself what will serve his client best, and then couch his findings in the most expedient manner possible. It sounds easier than it is. Volatile emotions may spring to the surface upon the location of a missing loved one — anger, fear, jealousy, pain — and some may be directed at the detective himself. He must learn how to cage things in such a way as to give the client as much peace of mind as possible... or at least keep him or her from

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doing anything foolish. Proper presentation of the evidence becomes as important a part of a missing persons case as locating the subject himself.

It's also worth noting that missing persons cases tend to lead detectives to some very serious questions about the nature of the world and its possible causes. Clients whose relatives disappeared before the war are usually much more peaceful and accepting of the circumstances (when they remember the missing person at all) than those pursuing more recent disappearances. And the timeline construction that most detectives use in missing persons cases becomes suspiciously vague when covering the years before the end of the war. More than a few routine cases of this nature have resulted in detectives joining the ranks of the Few. Some even feel that the missing person they seek may have all the answers, and that finding him or her will be the solution to the grand and troubling question plaguing the *Edge of Midnight* universe. Whether such is the case is up to the GM, of course, though too often, it ends in disappointment, despair, or even madness.

For ideas on running a missing persons case from the other side of the equation, check the "Fugitives" section of the *Gaunts and the Underworld* sourcebook, pages 96-104.

Other Unsolved Crimes

Private eyes work other sorts of crimes as well: those which the police have given up on, but remain enticing enough for the surviving victims to seek the answers anyway. It includes anything from finding a local shoplifter to solving a murder, and encompasses the same techniques which policemen use in solving similar crimes (see Chapters One and Two for more). The only difference is that the private detective has only his own resources to call upon, and can act with fewer considerations towards civil liberties (so long as he doesn't get caught breaking the law himself).

Most such cases turn out to be dead ends regardless. The police have already scoured the evidence for any possible leads, and the detective's more limited capacity puts him at a much bigger disadvantage when working through the same material. Most people who approach detectives for unsolved crimes cases are desperate or delusional, believing that the stalwart private eye can somehow pull a miraculous solution out of his hat where so many others have failed. P.I.s need to get such notions out of their clients' heads before beginning work; a reminder that many qualified people have already gone through the case and turned up nothing helps to diminish expectations somewhat and prepare the client for a likely letdown if the detectives' efforts come to naught.

On the other hand, those dissatisfied with the efforts of the police in a given case may find detectives much more motivated (and thus more effective). Corruption, ennui, or simply an overwhelming workload lead many policemen to toss difficult cases aside: providing a perfunctory investigation before labeling it unsolved and filing it away to be forgotten. Their techniques may suffer from sloppiness or distraction and their conclusions may be based on standard assumptions rather than specific details of the case. A shamus, with no other crimes to solve and a commitment to focused investigation, can prove much more effective than masses of unmotivated

police officers. He will spend considerably more brain power on the problem and search more thoroughly for a culprit than any overworked public servant. The increased focus makes his intuitive leaps more accurate, and he can hound recalcitrant witnesses or suspects with much greater fervor. For clients interested in genuine justice, private eyes make an extremely attractive alternative.

This becomes doubly true when the victim is a gaunt or a similarly disaffected individual. Police bigotry and the general difficulty of investigations in the gaunt district means that crimes against leatherbacks are rarely handled properly. Most cops just assume that some other gaunt did it and file it away since the crime didn't involve any "real person" anyway. Private eyes willing to work with gaunts often find the work easy — solving cases in a day which the police have refused to move on for months — and the clientele extremely appreciative of their efforts. (They have their own means of gaining satisfaction after the detective has definitively fingered a suspect.) With no one else to turn to, gaunts can provide all manner of unsolved crimes for a detective to work on, and while they rarely have much money to offer in compensation, the loyalty fostered can be worth its weight in gold. You never know when 300 pounds of grateful leatherback will come in handy.

Detectives may also undertake unsolved crimes — or rather, investigations in progress — on behalf of law firms or defense attorneys preparing for a specific case. In such circumstances, their clients want greater control over the investigation. The P.I. acts as their eyes and ears, looking for new clues and examining existing evidence to help their case. The police rarely treat them kindly, but Commonwealth law dictates that the defense has the right to see any evidence presented in court, which means that P.I.s can conduct their investigation freely and without harassment provided they do not interfere with the police.

Detectives who take such cases act under much closer direction from their clients than they would otherwise. A legal firm or defense attorney typically constructs a strategy of how to proceed — the case they intend to make and the things they require either to make it stick or to discredit the opposition's case. Accordingly, the detective will set out with something of a "laundry list:" things to look for that will assist his clients' case. Oftentimes, this means gathering evidence objectively just as they would in any other case, then sifting through it to look for positive or encouraging details. Alternately, a P.I. may pursue new, independent lines of reasoning, seeking evidence that isn't a part of the case as it stands, but which may be important in establishing his client's version of the facts.



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Such investigations can easily veer into dishonesty, especially if the client has no problem presenting doctored evidence (or destroying evidence that aids the other side). But so too can they serve to balance the excesses of a corrupt police department, or prosecutors so eager for a conviction that they will crush innocent defendants beneath their heel. A good defense attorney is sometimes all that stands against such forces, and private eyes serving their cause can spell the difference between the exoneration of an innocent man and years of imprisonment for a crime he didn't commit.

Bodyguarding Work

Private detectives in the real world almost never engage in bodyguarding or protective work. That is left to private security firms, whose personnel are more equipped to handle the rigors of the job and who rarely need the investigative expertise provided by private detectives. In the *Edge of Midnight* universe, however, detectives have become something more than simple crime-solvers. They represent justice for sale: a reliable means of seeking answers, yes, but also a measure

of protection and safety in a world where the police no longer make such guarantees. Bodyguarding work thus becomes a natural extension of a private eye's job, as normal as any other case.

Most people think of protection jobs as very prominent and public. The detective stays close to his client at all times, watching the area for signs of danger and acting to thwart it when it appears. The image of the tuxedoed heavy, sticking to his client like glue and roughing up anyone who comes near him is the norm. That comprises part of bodyguarding work — even most of it, if the detective is physically imposing enough — but the real meat and potatoes of the job remains deceptively under the surface.

A detective tasked with protection duties must not only react to impending threats, but anticipate those which have not yet occurred. It involves many of the skills which P.I.s use in other cases, and in many ways represents a mystery to solve all its own. It begins in the most generalized sense: watching for unanticipated threats and working to negate them. The detective checks out the buildings where his client will be: possible entrances and exits, vantage points which might give a shooter good line of sight, hidden areas where a weapon might be stored, and signs that locks or bolts have been tampered with or disabled. He usually plans an escape route if an attack occurs — a safe path out of the building and to a waiting vehicle or secured location.

When the client arrives at the scene, the detective must watch those in the area for signs of possible attack. How do other people in the vicinity behave? Are they unduly fixated on the client? Are they deliberately trying not to draw attention to themselves or fidgeting with pockets that may conceal a weapon? Observational skills and the ability to spot small details become paramount, as does the ability to approach a suspect quietly and get him out of the way without causing a scene.

When more specific information is required, the detective can conduct background checks to determine the identity of possible attackers. He can vet guests at parties the client will be attending, or check incidental employees such as cooks or hotel clerks who may be in a position to do the client harm. He can track down the location of old enemies or those with a known grudge against the client to make sure they're not in town. If an anonymous individual is sending death threats or the like, the detective can set about deducing his identity and location before he becomes a real danger. Private eyes are uniquely suited to such work — even the police can't act if no real crime has been committed — and impressed clients may utilize them again and again, providing regular work in exchange for the peace of mind a good bodyguard can bring.

Combat duties play a far larger role in bodyguarding work than they do in more traditional detective cases (though they won't be needed if the P.I. does his job right). The instant a threat is detected, the private eye must first secure the safety of his client, using nearby cover, pre-planned escape routes, and his own body if necessary to keep him from harm. Following that, his next priority is disabling the attacker — with force typically — and determining the exact number of addi-

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tional threats. Once the attacker/s have been disabled and the client placed in a safe locale, the detective needs to determine the reason behind the attack, who might have ordered it, and whether future attacks from the same source are forthcoming. He often works hand-in-hand with the police in such matters, and treats the investigation as he would any other crime.

Detectives can learn most of the techniques required for bodyguarding work in the course of their normal profession. The specifics differ little, and beyond making an imposing presence when the client wishes it, a detective need add nothing new to his repertoire. The sole exception comes during an actual attack — those terrifying, heart-pounding moments when the threat is real and the danger is immediate. Gumshoes may know how to handle themselves on the mean streets, but the intensity of such moments beggars belief and even experienced tough guys may freeze in the face of it. Actual combat experience becomes much more useful in such circumstances: veterans of the war never forget what it feels like to be shot at, and if they couldn't react to it with fast and decisive action, they never would have survived long enough to come home. Detectives with service records thus find it easier to get jobs as bodyguards and prove more adept in those rare moments when the body in question is in real need of guarding.

Misc.

Beneath the umbrella of bigger cases, many P.I.s offer basic services which can be completed in a comparatively brief amount of time. They can conduct basic background checks on people: providing information such as former employment, military service, education history, birth and tax records, and any time spent in prison. Employers in high profile jobs appreciate such information when evaluating those they wish to hire, as does the odd paranoid girlfriend with money to burn. On a simpler level, such searches can confirm things like medical licenses, doctoral degrees, and past employment, and help ascertain that people are who they say they are. (The simple act of background probing is a key factor in why so many private eyes are members of the Few: when every check on everyone you make peters out sometime around the end of the war, it starts to raise eyebrows.)

Private eyes also provide simple surveillance operations, offering to tail and watch someone for a given period of time. They need not look for a specific motivation and their surveillance doesn't have to fall under the auspices of any particular case. But if you want someone quietly followed, for whatever reason, a private eye knows how to do it properly.

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Finally, private investigators possess the resources to track items which might not necessarily be stolen, but which require careful watching as they move through the country's transit system. Cargo shipments and classifications, the disposition of a particular automobile, address changes, and the folding of a destination business... all require follow-ups of the sort detectives are well-trained to provide, and which can be accomplished with a few phone calls and perhaps a trip down to the local docks. Jobs like these become the bread and butter of private eyes looking for a little quick money: easy to accomplish, perfectly legal, and rarely entailing getting beaten up in a sleazy bar by guys who don't like your looks.

TYPES OF PRIVATE EYES

While everyone loves the iconic image of the rumpled shamus in his fedora and trenchcoat, the stereotype may grow thin after a time. Luckily for us, private eyes don't have to conform to the one-note caricature. Films and literature have provided a wide array of detective types that defy the usual expectations, and *The Edge of Midnight* provides a few unique alternatives of its own. Some of the more common variants are presented below.

Accidental and Amateur Detectives

The setup is classic. A mild-mannered but sharp-witted lawyer receives a mysterious letter from an old friend. "If you are reading this," it begins, "I am dead." And so begins the adventuring career of the pluckiest of sleuths, the accidental.

Accidental investigators never imagined they'd be called upon to solve a mystery, recover a loss using not-wholly-legal means, or otherwise right a wrong. That's what the police are for. But the accidental investigator has his work thrust upon him. Perhaps he receives the aforementioned letter. Perhaps a loved one dies suspiciously or is robbed, and the police can do nothing.

And so the accidental investigator sets out to do what needs to be done himself. Unfortunately, he's often ill-equipped to deal with actual investigation, at least at first. His "detecting" skills may be limited to little more than a keen eye for detail and a keener sense of justice. Fortunately, when properly applied, those two traits are all most successful investigators really need.

If things get rough, the accidental investigator may find himself (or herself) at a distinct disadvantage. After all, these detectives come from walks of life not generally characterized by violence, and so an accidental investigator character is advised to be careful. Of course, this personal lack is readily filled by other characters, and it is here that a role-playing party can be constructed. A lawyer may know a simple but honest palooka who he helped with some divorce papers and can be called on for a little backup in recovering his niece's rent money. Perhaps a cab driver has known a couple of street toughs for years, and can ask them for some help finding his missing uncle. Walter Moseley's Easy Rawlins had an especially dangerous friend with the ironic nickname "Mouse" who proved quite capable of doing violence on his behalf.

Ironically, the biggest pitfall on the path of the accidental investigator is success. After all, once the incident that drove him to take action is dealt with, there is little reason to continue. Indeed, solving the mystery may well have taken the accidental investigator so far beyond his personal comfort zone that he will flee back to his normal life at the first opportunity. Some accidental investigators, however, find that righting one wrong makes them notice others. Beyond those other wrongs, in fact, lies the Big Wrong — that undefinable, intangible wrongness at the heart of life in *The Edge of Midnight*. Being awakened to the injustice in the world may set the accidental investigator down the path of further investigations, struggling to fit his new sense of duty into his previously tidy world. Tasty role-playing opportunities abound here, as the accidental investigator segues into the amateur investigator.

An amateur investigator is as described—not a professional investigator. He holds a normal job, though it is likely one that can afford him some time flexibility. A factory worker, for instance, is required to be at his duties for ten to twelve hours every day, which leaves little time for actual investigating. A doctor, however, can cancel his afternoon appointments if needed. A lawyer, accountant, stockbroker, or banker can take a long lunch break to check out a lead. An athlete can cut out of practice early. A cabbie can simply turn his duty light off, and go wherever he needs to. Easy Rawlins was a landlord, with no real office hours to speak of, and so had time to participate in investigations as needed. The amateur investigator's "office" is his legitimate business office, found by people who heard that he "tends to help out with, y'know, stuff, when folks got a, y'know, problem." From there, he can follow whatever cases and whatever clues come his way.

There are several concepts to keep in mind when playing an accidental or amateur investigator:

- 1) Always wonder why the police are so useless. After all, if they were doing their jobs properly, you wouldn't need to stick your neck out the way you do. Of course, the police may have a good reason (or a few hundred good reasons that are buying the chief's wife a nice mink coat) for not helping with the task at hand, and that may serve as a spark for future scenarios.
- 2) Always be ready to take action. Whether naturally proactive or not, investigators in this vein are usually fair-minded people who generally desire the righting of wrongs, and are placed in situations where action is required. Don't be afraid to take it.
- 3) Be concerned for your personal safety. Even if you're a physically capable guy (or gal), you don't want to fight — you just want to get to the bottom of the problem at hand. If you think you have a potentially violent situation on your hands, call the cops. Or your friends.
- 4) Always remember your friends. Amateur investigators may be plucky individualists, but they're also savvy enough to know that they're probably going to need help. If you need

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to go someplace or do something, and you're not absolutely certain that it'll be safe, call a friend to go with you, even if it's just to "wait in the car." A friend in the car can respond a lot faster to gunshots, shouting, or alarm bells than a friend on the other end of a pay-phone listening to you scream for help.

Wealthy Detectives

Not every detective needs to operate out of a fleabag office with a chunk of wood holding up one corner of his desk, a bank book containing more red entries than the Bible, and a secretary constantly grouching about how little she's being paid. Indeed, there's nothing stopping the intrepid player from creating an investigator who is moneyed in his own right. Dashiell Hammett may have created Sam Spade, after all, but he also created Nick and Nora Charles.

Wealth is often difficult to grasp as a role-playing opportunity. Players and GMs alike tend to view the idea with distaste, since it can often feel like a crutch... or at best a bit of *deus ex machina*. Fear that a wealthy character can hijack the story by buying his way past plot obstacles or skipping investigation by waving his wallet is sometimes justified. The reality, however, need not be so bleak.

When considering creating a wealthy investigator, think about exactly what wealth does and does not get you. It is important first to note that "wealth" does not mean "money," as will be discussed later. Wealth doesn't buy success, but it does buy access. Where a street P.I. may be wondering how he's going to afford lunch, you dine "at the club" or have a private chef as part of the staff at your estate. Likewise, while the street P.I. may need to call his reporter buddy to get the latest dirt, you can invite the City Editor for an evening of cards and cigars to discuss the latest string of burglaries plaguing the city. Powerful people respond to other powerful people, and wealth brings a measure of social power. (However, just because your contacts have higher status, they are not at your beck and call. Indeed, a P.I. can burn a beat reporter and get little more than dirty looks in return. Betraying the confidence of the mayor will likely have far more dire repercussions.)

Wealth also allows an investigator to have hobbies. These can range from eccentricities like stamp or coin collecting (Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot was a fastidious gourmand) to full-bore obsessions like annual big game safaris (Rex Stout's Nero Wolfe spent four hours of every day in his plant rooms cultivating prize-winning orchids). Most conveniently of all, wealth makes a ready and easy reason for a group of players to create characters with ties to one another. A wealthy soci-

ety detective can easily have a driver, a valet, an assistant (or three), a wife/partner, or even just a stable of hirelings who do stakeouts and tails. Wolfe was assisted by his primary legman Archie Goodwin, and had three to five additional men he hired when needed. Nick Charles had Nora. Sherlock Holmes had his brother Mycroft, as well as the redoubtable Doctor Watson ready to assist him.

The principal limitation of wealth is simply that it does not allow you to buy your way out of trouble, eliminating steps of an investigation via your wallet. The fact is, most wealthy people — even in real life — don't have access to large blocks of cash that they can wave around anonymously. Wealthy people can't really say things like "I'm buying this building!" in order to avoid prosecution for breaking and entering. For one, they don't have the money laying around to make such a purchase. For another, even if they did buy the building, what would they do with it? Too many such purchases (perhaps even one), and the character's wealth goes away. Most importantly, wealthy characters have reputations to maintain, and if they just go throwing money around for no sound reason, that reputation may be jeopardized.

Wealthy investigators in the sort of time period described in *The Edge of Midnight* need have only slightly more "walking around money" than their street-level counterparts. The rest is tied up in banking, stocks, real estate trading, and so forth. Working from that basic assumption means that a wealthy investigator is effectively just like a hardened street dick. He just wears nicer suits.

And remember: you may have enough money to run the occasional bribe and retain a good lawyer, but you don't have more money than the mob.

One of the more interesting factors surrounding playing a wealthy investigator is that your jobs are more or less the same as those of a normal P.I. Finding a murderer, recovering a stolen valuable, or otherwise righting a wrong are classic story threads, and are impossible to avoid. The distinguishing facets lie in the manner in which those jobs appear, who is offering them, and why.

Wealthy detectives are wealthy enough to not need to hang out a shingle. Rather, trouble comes to them via a network of friends and society acquaintances, not from a listing in the phone book. Sherlock Holmes never advertised: people just heard of him. Poirot was either sent for specifically (his reputation preceding him) or was traveling through an area in which a crime was committed. Nick Charles was roped into investigation by his wife.

Your jobs and the people offering them may also be basically the same — a grieving widow, a suspicious reporter, or a worried gambler can all darken the doorstep of a detective, rich or broke. The wealthy detective, however, may either know his employer directly (the grieving widow can easily be his wife's cousin), or his employer has been directed to him by other society acquaintances (the worried gambler may be the friend of a chum from "the club," directed to you because of your skill in such matters and especially your discretion).



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When playing a wealthy detective, that form of motive becomes extremely important. After all, he probably doesn't need the money. Indeed, he may do most or all of his work for free. Given that, what motivates such people? Wealthy detectives are willing to take on cases because they enjoy them, because they find something intriguing about them, and because the prospect is more entertaining than their other options. However, the most readily available motivation, especially in *The Edge of Midnight*, is duty. This can be as simple as civic pride or the realization that the police can't help (or cannot be involved because of the "potential for scandal, you see") or as complex as the Byzantine social structure of the rich and powerful, where investigating the matter helps out a "chum" in some tangible way.

More immediate to *The Edge of Midnight*, however, is that persistent nagging notion that something's wrong with the world — something all the money in Croesus' vaults can't fix, and something that has to be looked at, like it or not. That burgeoning need to act, even when your help will go unrewarded monetarily, is a cornerstone of *noir*, and can fit nicely into the worldview of a wealthy detective.

Full-Time Detectives

"Full-time" detectives refer to those who draw a steady paycheck from a single employer. Their investigative work consists solely of cases brought by a single firm, in pursuit of their interests and at their discretion. Few independent operators consider them "real" P.I.s, connected as they are to biased and often corrupt institutions. But a steady paycheck can mean a lot to the right detective, and if he plays his cards right, he still might do a fair amount of good.

Most full-time P.I.s work for either one of two companies: legal firms or insurance agencies. In both cases, their assignments entail cases which the business has taken on and which hinge on the discovery of facts which outside agencies may not be willing to pursue. The police have their own theories which might not benefit the defendant they want to put away, but you can be sure his legal team wants their own search for the facts. And while bored public officials might rule a traffic death as accidental, an insurance agent can smell murder as soon as the policy hits his desk. Smaller companies can keep independent operators on retainer, but the big ones often hire their own detectives for salaried wages, ensuring that a



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competent investigator isn't bogged down with other cases. Occasionally, the district attorney's office will use full time private eyes, but because they work so closely with the police, it's usually easier just to assign a cop to find out whatever they need to know. In addition, hotels and casinos employ house detectives to investigate incidents that take place on their premises. But such detectives are often little more than bodyguards, protecting customers and employees in the event of trouble and conducting investigations only in uncommon circumstances.

Cases run the gamut from divorce to murder and can entail any of the variations which independent detectives investigate. Full-time work tends to be much more focused however, involving just a few specialties rather than a grab-bag potpourri of different cases. Divorce lawyers only need evidence proving infidelity or otherwise exonerating their client in court, and while defense lawyers may represent those accused of a number of crimes, the case must still involve specific details which the detective merely needs to confirm or refute. Insurance

detectives enjoy the widest variety of possible cases; defrauding an insurance company can take any number of possible forms and involve crimes the likes of which most people can scarcely conceive. Theft, arson, destruction of property, assault, reckless endangerment, and murder all become money-making enterprises with the judicious use of an insurance policy. The companies need cunning and resourceful men who can not only smell a rat in a number of different circumstances, but have the wherewithal to prove it. Still, the work can be repetitive, and full-time P.I.s have a tendency to see the same basic circumstances over and over again. As a consequence, their skills become much more focused: able to handle a few case types much better than the average independent P.I., but lacking in flexibility and more easily flustered when out of their element.

A steady paycheck contains other compromises as well. The whole truth is of less interest to a full-time P.I.'s employer than simply facts which they can use. Sometimes, this isn't a problem: an innocent man accused will welcome proof that he didn't commit murder, while a thief or arsonist trying for a little insurance fraud richly deserves to have his claim thrown out. But investigators who

concentrate too hard on proving what their company wants to believe may overlook key details which will turn around and bite them in the ass. Some piece of evidence which they didn't consider turns up in court, or some overlooked fact ends up costing the company millions in payouts. Full-time detectives must watch out for those details, even as they pursue a line of reasoning which favors their employer, and if bad news turns up in their investigation, they have the unpleasant task of breaking it to their bosses (who aren't necessarily inclined to hear it). The fewer scruples their employer has, the more difficult this process becomes. Full-time detectives working for disreputable firms will routinely be asked to falsify evidence, cover up inconvenient facts, and engage in as many underhanded tactics as they can get away with.

Even the worst of them must still work with the police, however, who usually control the crime scene and have access to evidence which the full-time detective needs to examine. A good working relationship becomes crucial to their ability to

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do the job, even if they find themselves on the opposite sides of the coin. It's easiest for insurance investigators, whose aims typically coincide with the police and who can go a long way towards proving a felonious crime in the process of investigating far more mundane fraud cases. Lawyers' detectives have it much tougher. Though obligated to share any evidence they have with the defense attorney, the police are naturally reluctant to aid any crooks they catch in securing a release. Evidence has a strange way of disappearing when lawyer P.I.s ask for it, and investigators who trod on police toes tend to run into all manner of unforeseen difficulties. Good P.I.s who work for defense attorneys learn to steer clear of the cops during their investigation, approaching them only when they know exactly what they need and asking for it with as little fanfare as possible.

With corruption tough to avoid and the urge to cut corners quietly supported by the P.I.'s employers, an unscrupulous dick may find even more trouble waiting for him if he wishes it. Insurance investigators learn the system inside and out: every possible trick comes past their desk and every possible form of fraud works its way through their system. Because they know so much about how the system works, they can identify its blind spots and — if they're smart enough and lucky enough — engineer a little fraud of their own. They'll need an accomplice, of course: someone to purchase the policy and file the claim when the time comes to collect. But the investigator can direct his or her way through the fraud itself, point out the details that police and the insurance company will look for, and plan the perfect way to pass a fraudulent claim off as a legitimate accident. It becomes far more likely if the company itself routinely engages in chicanery — doctoring evidence to dismiss legitimate claims and the like — because the investigators on their payroll clearly lack the scruples to think better of it. If played perfectly, it can make the P.I. and his accomplices wealthy... or land them all in prison for a very long time.

Upstanding full-time private eyes needn't worry about such matters of course. And their lives hold plenty of excitement without having to add any of their own... especially in *The Edge of Midnight*, where everyone is playing an angle. Even the most stalwart full-time P.I. must sometimes grapple with compromise, however, and decide when the case fits the best interests of his employer and when it obscures a more important truth. That's part of the price of a steady paycheck, and sooner or later, every company P.I. must pay it.

Bodyguard work rarely comes up with P.I.s based in insurance or legal firms. It's simply not a part of their job description. Hotel detectives and casino investigators, however, must adopt it as the primary function of their job. Rousting the deadbeats and removing sore losers is far more prevalent than thefts or similar crimes, and if your proclivities tend towards the cerebral end of investigations, you'd better find someplace else to work. Gaunt P.I.s looking for full time employment often find it in flophouses and low-rent gambling dens, where they keep the good customers safe and the bad ones out of management's hair.

More formal investigations take place only when the business in question gets robbed, or a customer splits without paying his check. They never concern themselves with any crime which doesn't affect them directly: murders, assaults, and the like are the purveyance of the police, and beyond answering any questions they might have, house dicks aren't expected to do much more than help mop up the blood. If it affects the bottom line, on the other hand, they may actually have to perform some investigative work, which usually entails tracking down recalcitrant customers and pounding them until they return what they took. More elaborate crimes against the hotel or casino may require extensive investigations (along with more formal requests for help from the police), but frankly, that isn't such P.I.s' strong suit. As it is, most of their duties remain more or less in the protection/legbreaking game... further exemplifying the tendencies of full-time detectives to focus on niche work.

From a role-playing perspective, full-time detectives make an excellent way to attach a P.I. to another character. Connection through work (whether high-end or low-rent) gives them an instant synergy, and even if the P.I. moves on to independent work, a past as a full-time employee somewhere forms a terrific hook. Another notion is for the full-time P.I. to work with another character in fleecing his employers: a past crime which they got away with once, but which may come back to haunt them when they least suspect it. Straighter full-time P.I.s can always make use of their company's resources, providing representation to accused PCs or access to their files and documents. Such links provide an intriguing alternative to more traditional private eye characters, and can provide ready connections to possible scenarios.

Warlock Detectives

Warlock detectives are surprisingly rare, considering magic-users' taste for mysteries and need to figure things out. Private eyes make a more ethical alternative to crime, and the police are willing to turn more of blind eye to sorcery if it comes from someone they know is working on the side of the angels. But warlock proclivities make it difficult to stir up customers; those who come to them are often criminals themselves, and the cases the warlock needs to take tend to drag him into illegal dealings regardless of his original intentions. The pull of magic addiction makes things difficult as well: a warlock may become too consumed with his own research to bother with his clients' case. Those warlocks inclined towards detective work usually join the local crystal ball squad (which offers them proper legal protection) rather than take their chances as an independent operative.



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However, those warlocks who do become private eyes have a rare combination of integrity and subtlety which allows them to flourish. They typically have some genuine ethical reason for pursuing the study of magic — something other than magic for its own sake. They might see it as a way to help other people: empowerment unbound by human institutions and thus wielded as a force for good. They might have pursued magic as a member of the Few, seeking the answers to the world's darkness in hopes of perhaps reversing it. Or they might simply be iconoclasts, practicing magic because the powers that be told them not to and falling into detective work as a similar way of thumbing their nose at traditional authorities. Whatever the reason, they see magic as a means of doing good in the world, or expressing some part of their philosophy beyond self-gratification. Otherwise, they wouldn't be detectives: it's far easier and far less risky to simply devolve into common criminality and be done with it.

Going hand-in-hand with that is need to keep quiet about one's abilities, something most warlocks understand but which needs especial consideration when working as a private detective. Warlocks in the underworld always have a few people who know about their talent and they can flash their abilities copiously while on a job or to intimidate those around them. Similarly, members of crystal ball squads are licensed users who don't risk prosecution by revealing who and what they are. But warlock P.I.s lack those comforts. Clients may be unwilling to hire them if they know about the warlock's magic proclivities, while policemen will lean on them heavily if they get any whiff of magic use. Licenses can be cancelled out of hand, criminal prosecution remains a constant threat, and criminal warlocks could target the P.I. as a "traitor" to their cause without the protection afforded by membership in a crystal ball squad.

The only way to avoid such misery is by keeping one's magic use completely below the radar. That means presenting a façade of normalcy at all times: refraining from demonstrating magic in front of any witnesses, avoiding public perusal of forbidden books or formulas, and disguising the appearance of the mark whenever it shows up. One warlock shamus compared the effort to contracting a venereal disease: "you have to deal with it all the time and the neighbors can't ever find out."

Accordingly, most warlock P.I.s keep their own company: operating alone and refusing to employ even incidental assistance unless that person can be trusted with the warlock's life. They keep contact with their clients to a minimum — usually just an introductory meeting with subsequent communication covered over the phone — and interview witnesses only under circumstances where they hold all the cards. Connections with the cops tend to come through crystal ball squads, some of whom may know the detective's true nature and who can use him to keep tabs on the underworld in exchange for leniency. The detective must explain off appearances of the mark as illnesses or drinking binges, and carefully govern where he decides to use his abilities during a case. This can put him at a considerable disadvantage, negating the very hard-won power that might otherwise give him an edge in an unpleasant confrontation. It only takes one slip to destroy years of care and effort, and turn an otherwise upstanding private dick into a hunted criminal.

Is the pay-off worth it? Successful warlock P.I.s would say so. If judiciously applied, their abilities give them considerable benefits over normal P.I.s. Magic allows them to enter areas unseen (opening locked doors with telekinesis or floating up to open windows on an upper story), to detect or preserve vital pieces of evidence (hardening crumbling pieces of parchment with Tensile magic, clearing long-hidden hiding places within seconds), and to follow suspects or witnesses in ways no one would suspect. Their hard-won skills at keeping quiet give them an edge in more mundane areas as well, which allows them to move with incredible inconspicuousness and slip quietly away whenever trouble arises.

They can breach the underworld a little more readily as well, especially if the case involves magic use. Warlocks know of secret locales hidden even to other criminals: underground libraries, secure experimentation facilities, and rotating hide-aways for others of their kind that normal investigators never think to check. Their nose for magic allows them to scour unusual locations and approach individuals that even other criminals shy away from. Their powers can be used more openly against underworld figures as well, giving them an edge in the strong-arm department so long as no one rats them out to the cops. Warlock P.I.s learn to work such angles to their benefit, allowing them to approach criminal interests from a different perspective than either normal private eyes or the police.

They also know something about keeping secrets and their natural inquisitiveness means that they can both ask the right kind of questions and spot any details that don't fit into the bigger picture. Detective work tends to prompt fewer questions as to methodology, which means that warlocks can use their skills far more readily than they might on most other jobs, and their success rate ranks substantially higher than private eyes without magic in their corner. If life as a crook holds no appeal and helping the police hunt your own down with the crystal ball squad is unacceptable, private investigation stands as one of the only ways to make an honest living with magic use.

Warlock P.I.s tend to specialize in missing persons and stolen property cases: they have a nose for following trails and ferreting out information long since lost. Surveillance work remains fairly easy for them as well, leading to a large number of divorce and business fraud cases. They shy away from high profile work (for obvious reasons) and from work which entails extended interaction with the police or similar organizations. Small, one-man jobs fit their style best: those which entail no long-term contact with anyone and which can be either wrapped up very quickly or abandoned with a minimum of fuss from the clients.

Some warlock detectives maintain offices like other private eyes, but in many cases, they are only fronts: places to give the façade of respectability and to meet with clients only if absolutely necessary. They prefer to hold meetings in public places such as restaurants or street cars, and to rotate "offices" regularly, never meeting in the same place twice. If possible, they conduct the particulars of their business through a front man who can handle the details of the case and get it to them without any undue contact. It keeps their clients from picking up on too many details and prevents the warlock from feeling boxed in: a feeling every magic-user knows by heart.

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And even the best of them eventually develop a fallback plan for when and if their true nature is discovered: either an honorable means of continuing to make a living (in the best case scenarios) or a fast ticket out of town and away to somewhere safe (in the worst).

Gaunt Detectives

In a lot of ways, gaunts make almost ideal private detectives. Many of them lack jobs or other appreciable ways of making money, which gives them considerable free time to pursue cases of interest. Gaunts can't turn to law enforcement with any hope of having their grievances addressed, which makes private justice the only answer in many cases. They possess a dogged determination, are tough to rattle, and have little to lose by defying the powers that be, making them loyal to their clients and reliable in seeing the job through. Gaunt investigators rarely garner any high class work, but for people willing to look past initial prejudices, they can be a bargain second to none.

A number of gaunt P.I.s got into their line of work as their own clients so to speak. Having lost something precious to them or being hurt by some mysterious figure for reasons they couldn't understand, leatherback P.I.s couldn't go to the police for restitution. Instead, they sought out the answers themselves, hoping to identify their enemy, recover their stolen possessions, or simply gain some satisfaction that the normal

authorities couldn't be bothered to give them. Some may have been interested in who they were before the change, hoping to reconnect with former family or at least provide some reliable facts to help center their identity. Having succeeded at their initial task, they found they had a taste for it, and without further job prospects to clutter their schedule, they could open up for business with little difficulty.

Few gaunt investigators operate with a license, and those who do treat it as an afterthought at best. Getting one isn't hugely difficult, merely time consuming and filled with the sort of prejudicial sniggers that all their kind must endure. Their clients generally don't care — consisting either of those whom “higher class” detectives won't help or fellow gaunts themselves — which makes a license seem like little more than a waste of time. Some gaunts will use a normal human proxy or stand-in to help smooth things over with their clients, in which case they follow through with a license or other necessities. The rest simply make do with what they have, taking their lumps from the law when necessary (and when is that different than any other time in their lives?) but otherwise soldiering on without the formalities of other private dicks.

Because they can't use regular sources to drum up business, they rely on word of mouth — mostly among their fellow gaunts, but also among normals who respect the need to stay in touch with the leatherback community. They work cheap, naturally, and often accept payment in sturdy goods or favors rather than cash. Money buys their loyalty as well as any other private dick, but the precarious nature of life in the gaunt

districts gives them more flexibility in determining the value of their services.

Case types vary wildly, depending on the P.I. himself and the sort of clientele he engenders. Gaunt clients will come to them with all manner of grievances — from theft to missing friends to murder — and most leatherback P.I.s will accept cases from their brethren without question as a sign of loyalty. More subtle cases, involving finesse or social interaction, become harder. Subtlety, of course, is not gaunts' strong suit. Neither is the delicate handling of evidence, which corrodes quickly under their aura and can be rendered useless in a matter of minutes. Good leatherback P.I.s know better than to store important files or material evidence in their districts, and will find a safe location elsewhere — a storage service, a sympathetic normal, even a locker at the bus station will do — to keep such materials. Cases hinging on lengthy searches through public records rarely come their way; nor do those involving extended interviews with anyone besides their fellow gaunts. Leatherbacks have few inroads into the police department, meaning that they rarely cooperate with the cops in any capacity. Their lack of access to a police laboratory or forensic analysis can put the kibbutz on a depressingly large number of cases.

On the other hand, if the client doesn't require quiet, gaunt shamuses can do wonders. Their large size and intimidating demeanor can coax information out of even the most recal-

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citrant witness, while their anonymous faces allow them to blend in with the right crowd fairly easily. Many gaunt P.I.s who pull a lot of surveillance duties will dress up as some kind of menial employee — a garbage collector, a janitor, or the like — and find that no one bothers to take notice of them. When things get too hot, they can disappear into the gaunt districts, blending in with their fellows and evading all pursuit. A good gaunt detective knows how to parlay these inherent abilities into his work, and if he applies them judiciously, can quickly build a string of successful cases.

More demeaning private eye work comes their way with even less prompting. Bodyguarding duties are a regular standby for gaunt P.I.s. Wealthy normals enjoy the intimidating atmosphere gaunts provide, and like others of their kind holding service jobs, no one seems to notice them once the initial shock of their appearance fades. Bodyguarding work also allows them to look around in places where they might not otherwise be welcome — office buildings, wealthy estates, the playgrounds of the rich and famous — and make connections there that may pay dividends if more formal investigative work takes them back there in the future. Most bodyguarding duties are similar, requiring an eye for detail and an ability to notice things out of place that shouldn't be. And of course, when the bullets start flying, who better to duck behind for safety than six-and-a-half feet of irritated leatherback?

A similar sort of paying job has arisen among gaunt P.I.s of late. They can act as a strange kind of "big game guide" for the leatherback districts, escorting normals in, showing them around, and leading them through areas where they wouldn't last two minutes without someone looking out for them. The normals may be looking for a particular location, a stolen object, or perhaps a former loved one who succumbed to the disease and now occupies the crumbling tenements with his or her fellow leatherbacks. Or they may simply be "slumming it," looking for excitement and danger among the gathering places of society's monsters. Either way, they expect the gaunt P.I.s to show them wherever they want to go, stay close in case of any trouble, and to "vouch" for them should any other leatherback take exception to their presence.

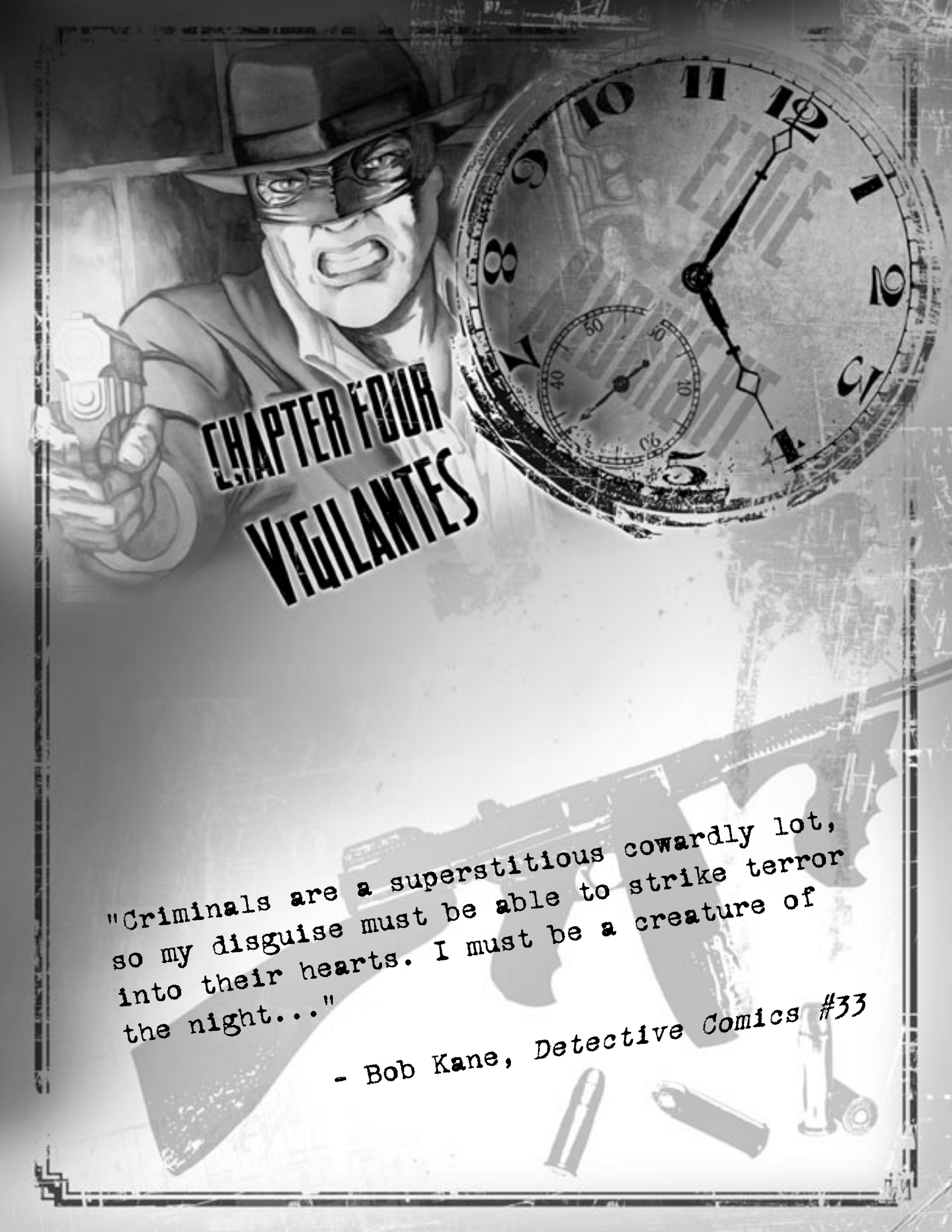
Though they run the risk of alienating fellow members of their community, many gaunt investigators eagerly accept "guidework" as an easy paycheck. They often lead their clients to safe or non-sensitive areas: places where the normals can get a feel for the districts without risking any permanent damage to the P.I.'s reputation. Rich kids looking for kicks rarely know any better, and normals with more serious concerns are never escorted in groups larger than one or two. A piece of the gaunts' payoffs can go to whichever bar owner or block leader whose territory they have intruded on, and while trouble with rival leatherback gangs can rear its ugly head, most gaunts grudgingly accept the presence of outsiders in such a capacity. The police have begun picking up on these types of jobs as a means of making inroads into the gaunt community, and a few leatherbacks currently in uniform started out as private investigators with a knack for guidework.

Whether it be this or more traditional bodyguarding jobs, gaunt private eyes have more of a leg up than many of their fellow leatherbacks. Their job title affords them slightly more respectability than some anonymous face on the corner, and while they lack proper accreditation, a few begrudging words of praise from a normal who knows them can go a long way. In both cases, the work grants them more familiarity with parts of their home city, while helping them network and make connections with potential clients unafraid to associate with their kind. Those who do their jobs well enough may slowly work their way to more "proper" investigative work: hardly ideal but often the best they can expect.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, gaunt detectives also hold an edge when it comes to speaking to their fellows, whom they can approach with ease and who trust them more readily. Janitors, cleaning staff, garbage men, and the like often see a great deal, but their invisible status means that normals rarely think to question them. Even if they do, gaunt mistrust of normal institutions means that they'll likely clam up and refuse to say a word, even under duress. A leatherback detective, however, possesses an instant bond of trust which he can use to winnow information out of any of his fellow gaunts — quickly, easily, and without needing to apply high-pressure tactics. Indeed, gaunt social networks tend to be much stronger in general than normals', meaning that the P.I. may even know or have dealings with such a witness outside of the case. Successful solutions to their clients' problems often hinge on such tiny details, and who better to secure it than someone the witness can truly confide in?

Gaunt criminals, too, are more apt to speak to a leatherback P.I. than they are to either a normal shamus or the police. In this case, the prejudice of normals works to the private eye's benefit: everyone thinks of gaunts as crooks by default, so the detective has nothing to lose. The link with members of the gaunt underworld can pay huge dividends, especially if the gaunt's particular case has no overall impact on the criminal's operations. The connection runs both ways of course, which can lead upstanding gaunts into trouble if they're not careful. Underworld kingpins can use them to keep tabs on the police, run errands in exchange for favors, and even conduct mob operations themselves (depending upon their scruples). Crime figures like Jack Drago even use "private detective" as a euphemism for some of their thugs, and the stigma has not been lost on law enforcement officials who have to deal with gaunt P.I.s.

But gaunts run such risks regardless of how they work, and if he can keep his nose clean, a leatherback detective can derive immeasurable benefits from a working relationship with certain members of the underworld. Every private investigator, gaunt and normal alike, takes the same chances: moving in the gray areas between do-gooder and crook. The line may be thinner for gaunts, but they are more used to walking it. The more experienced at it they become, the better they get, and the best even find that odd sort of vindication which every private detective strives for: the notion of true justice on nobody's terms but theirs.



CHAPTER FOUR VIGILANTES

"Criminals are a superstitious cowardly lot, so my disguise must be able to strike terror into their hearts. I must be a creature of the night..."

- Bob Kane, *Detective Comics* #33

VIGILANTES

The euphemism is “private justice:” an individual, either believing himself wronged or losing faith in official law enforcement’s ability to protect the innocent, takes matters into his own hands. He may act out of noble ideas or plain old fashioned revenge. He may execute an elaborate campaign or just show up one day with a shotgun and open fire. Whatever the motive, he seeks to do what the police can’t or won’t, and what civilized society has deemed unacceptable. He’s a vigilante: admired by some, condemned by others, but inextricably a part of the *noir* world.

Vigilante characters make excellent player characters for *The Edge of Midnight*. Their methods, motivations, and actions feed into *noir*’s basic themes, and if properly developed, can become a compelling part of any campaign. Vigilantes run the gamut from psychotic loners to noble philanthropists, and adopt methods ranging from canny detective work to wholesale murder. The main defining factor is that they operate outside the bounds of official law enforcement: performing what they perceive as just actions against criminals without the sanction of a rank or a badge. Beyond that, their motives and methods are unique to each individual; no two are exactly alike.

MOTIVATIONS

Like any other characters, vigilantes need a reason to do what they do. Specifically, they need a reason to 1) lose faith in the police and courts’ ability to adequately do justice and 2) a desire to take on those duties for themselves. Both aspects stem from extreme circumstances — something powerful enough to affect the individual’s view of the world and faith in institutions which the bulk of society takes for granted.

The simplest motivation stems from the loss of a loved one. The trauma inflicted when a beloved spouse or relative is killed in a violent crime can fundamentally shift an individual’s emotional state, leaving wounds that never completely heal. Those injuries grow worse when the people responsible are never found... or worse, when the police locate them but cannot secure a conviction. The individual is left with a sense of profound outrage — unaddressed by an imperfect system which cannot grant him or her the restitution that any rational person would deem fair. The scars fester and the thought of criminal thugs operating with impunity becomes too much to bear. The afflicted person must take steps to redress the imbalance or live with the pain for the remainder of his days.

Other vigilantes possess much less personal motives. They see crime not as an attack against them in particular, but against society in general. The read about gangsters on the loose or murders committed in broad daylight and wonder how the police could be so blind. Or they see signs of it themselves as they go about their daily routine — not directly affecting them, perhaps, but still causing a blight on their city or neigh-

borhood. When these vigilantes choose to act, they strike not at individuals (as those with more personal motives do), but at criminals as a class, hoping to affect change through sheer will what the instruments of society clearly cannot accomplish.

Some vigilantes act as a means of atonement, making up for past sins by striking out against criminals and evildoers. They may have begun life as criminals themselves or simply ignored criminal actions because it benefited them to do so. Whatever the reason, guilt and remorse caused them to turn against their former cohorts, bringing the scum down by using their own methods against them. A few vigilantes act simply because they made a promise to someone — not necessarily the victim of a crime — to act when no one else would. Finally, there are vigilantes who themselves belong to legitimate law enforcement, but who act outside of their official capacity in ways which they cannot while on duty. Such vigilantes may not utterly disregard the justice system, but merely feel that there are times and places when the rules can be set aside.

Whatever the reason (and whether partial or total) the vigilantes’ loss of faith in duly designated law enforcement represents a uniquely *noir*-ish distrust in society as a whole. The larger instruments are corrupt and compromised: manipulated by callous lawyers, presided over by incompetent officials, enforced by policemen who often act as little more than a gang themselves. The values of such a system no longer mean anything: the ethics and rules it embodies have been shattered beyond repair. Justice, if it even exists, comes not from institutions, but from individuals. The larger apparatus simply isn’t dependable anymore.

And this is where the second half of a vigilante’s motivation comes in. For just as he has lost belief in society’s capacity to do good, he retains a fervent belief in his own ability to make a difference. He can strike out against those who do wrong, he can remove the parasites that suck the city dry. All it requires is a willingness to bend the rules that evildoers flout with impunity: to get down in the gutter and fight the bastards on their own terms. The war overseas produced a whole generation of men who knew how to use weapons, move quietly, and meet complicated objectives in a virtual moral vacuum. The new gaunt underclass possesses strength undreamed of, while warlocks and magicians pursue power beyond the laws of nature itself. Why should any of them feel afraid to use those abilities in the service of what they believe is right? The world may not be just, but justice can be found... so long as those searching for it are willing to pay the price.

The ability to act outside the law in pursuit of strong beliefs gives rise to another key part in a vigilante’s motivations: the willingness to decide for oneself the difference between right and wrong. Laws ostensibly exist for the common good: determined by mutual consent and enforced through the public will. The vigilante, however, breaks that social contract in favor of his own particular code of ethics. He acts because he feels that wrong has been committed, and in his eyes, his deeds are fully justified. He neither asks for nor expects the consent of others.

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Accordingly, vigilantes' activities vary by whatever personal code they adopt. Some have a very strict sense of right and wrong, adhering to ethical standards and striving not to cross whatever invisible lines they set for themselves. They will never intentionally kill, for example, or will seek to find legally admissible evidence of a criminal's guilt rather than assuming it straightaway. Others, however, have no such compunctions. They strike without thought of the consequences, acting on murky motivations and caring only about exacting their pound of flesh through any means necessary. Between them falls a vast swath of gray area, with one end occupied by bona fide lunatics executing jay walkers or "potential" criminals and the other by well-intentioned citizens who bend a few procedural rules in order to get things done. Regardless of where a vigilante falls on that scale, however, his own particular ethics serve as the ultimate guide. Right and wrong is something he feels in his guts, and when he acts, he does so with the belief that he is helping to make the world a better place.

The issue touches on one of the fundamental distinctions for a vigilante character: does he seek justice or does he seek revenge? Justice is defined as due punishment for a specified crime: restoring the balance created by an act of wrongdoing. As such, it tends to focus on the criminal in question and his particular actions. What has he done? Has he paid for it? Can his crimes be undone or must he suffer in turn for the suffering he has caused others? Vigilantes interested in justice — true justice — weigh such matters heavily, and act against a criminal only after determining the proper amount of punishment for his particular actions. Such vigilantes often pay more attention to the niceties of the law, and may even work to build a legal case against their targets rather than inflict punishment themselves. They also act with deterrence in mind, working to prevent criminals from inflicting further harm instead of punishing them for the harm they have already committed. (Classic comic book superheroes tend to embody this form of vigilantism.)

Revenge, on the other hand, stems not from the criminal's behavior, but from the vigilante's own. It is an attempt to inflict harm commensurate to the pain the vigilante himself feels: be it the carefully orchestrated destruction of all the criminal holds dear or the simple act of bludgeoning him to death with a baseball bat. Whether crude or elaborate, it feeds primarily on the vigilante's own emotions, inflicting pain as a means of easing his own. In the process, justice may be done of course and bad people may get what's coming to them. But that matters less to the vengeance-driven vigilante than silencing his own demons — inflicting punishment so that he will feel less punished himself.

Finally, motive also plays a part in how long a given vigilante operates, and what his ultimate goals are in doing what he does.



One-Shot Vigilantes

One-shot vigilantes have a single specific target, typically someone who hurt them or those close to them. They act to punish the criminal or bring him or her to justice, and then hang up the spurs. One-shot vigilantes tend to be more personally motivated than other types of vigilantes, and focus more on revenge than justice. They also tend to have either a great deal to lose (a normal life waiting for them when they are done) or nothing whatsoever to lose (with revenge against their tormentors the only thing left to fight for). Long time role-players slip easily into the role of one-shot vigilantes, and often do so whenever a given villain or antagonist appears on the scene. Such adversaries can be dispatched as quickly as one gaming session, though not always. Especially canny or well-entrenched criminals may take years to fully undo, as the vigilante moves slowly and carefully to bring them and their associates down. A *noir* version of *The Count of Monte Cristo* could occupy an entire campaign and take decades of game time in the pursuit of revenge. Whether their quest lasts a day or a lifetime, however, one-shot vigilantes have concrete, identifiable figures they wish to punish, and their scope doesn't usually expand beyond that.

Career Vigilantes

Career vigilantes, on the other hand, focus on crime as a larger entity, not merely the acts of a few individuals. They may seek to rid a particular block or neighborhood of illegal activities, or they may seek out perceived wrong-doers wherever they lurk. But they see their work as a full-time calling: something they do because no one else can or because the powers that be will never allow true justice to do what needs to be done. Accordingly, they rarely ascribe personal motives to their actions. Though they may be driven by the pain of loss or by seething emotions at the perceived lack of institutional effectiveness, they fight against overarching societal ills — a battle they can never hope to entirely win. They tend to act with the bigger picture in mind, focusing on extended campaigns and criminal kingpins rather than rank-and-file thugs. Those with more modest goals will concentrate on locales rather than organizations — a particularly crime-ridden part of the city, for instance — but in all cases, they will never cease their activities until crime itself becomes a thing of the past.

Inadvertent Vigilantes

Inadvertent vigilantes don't set out to fight crime. They don't suffer the pain of losing a loved one and while they may have been the victims of crimes themselves, it rarely extends to anything beyond the odd theft or two. Most of them would never think of breaking the law, or of lashing out when a threat emerges. But then comes a watershed moment — a point when the wrong thug singles him out or he passes the one crime in progress that he simply can't let be. He strikes without warning — often surprising himself as much as his would-be assailant — and whether through wartime experience, adrenaline, or dumb luck, manages to stop the criminals cold.

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In and of itself, such incidents rarely have a long-term impact. If the newspapers get wind of it, they may lionize the inadvertent vigilante as a hero, while the police may choose to charge him if he broke any obvious laws, but otherwise, it passes out of mind within a few weeks or so. The changes it can create in the vigilante himself, however, are much more profound. The flush of attention and rush of empowerment he feels may prompt him to repeat the incident... or at the very least to be more assertive in his dealings with those who harass him. Neighbors might flock to him as a protector in their midst, or shun him as a deranged lunatic, cutting him off from human contact. Some inadvertent vigilantes may snap, stalking new "criminals" to punish or simply falling into insanity. Others try to go on about their lives as best they can, reconciling who they were with what they have now become.

Then there are those for whom one sort of vigilantism evolves into another. They start out with one goal in mind, but once they have punished those they feel have wronged them, they cannot stop — moving from a one-time vigilante to a career vigilante. Or they become inadvertent vigilantes following an unexpected incident, but find that the rush of "stopping the bad guys" is too much to ignore. What started as a simple twist of fate comes to define them as they seek out new criminals to punish.

The same pattern holds true in the opposite direction. A career vigilante might believe himself fighting a long-term social problem, only to find that his true nemeses are a very specific group of underworld kingpins. Once he takes them down, the fervor which drives him seems to diminish, transforming his never-ending struggle into an attainable goal against a limited number of wrong-doers.

TACTICS AND METHODS

Regardless of how or why a vigilante chooses to operate, he needs to formulate a plan if he hopes to succeed. The police will arrest him if he gets caught committing an illegal act, while the criminals he pursues aren't just going to line up and let him pummel them unconscious. While some vigilantes can simply walk up to their targets and start shooting, the immediate ramifications don't enter their minds, thus rendering their careers uncomfortably brief. If a vigilante hopes to accomplish his goals without getting caught or killed, then careful planning is in order. The vigilante must first determine his overall intentions and then develop the means by which they can be achieved.

Intention Towards Criminals

The most basic question of overall goals concerns the vigilante's attitude towards crime and criminals in general. Does he hope to punish wrongdoers for their sins, deter crime

through his actions, or work to legally convict the criminals he confronts? Each goal entails different methods on the vigilante's part.

Punishing wrongdoers is the easiest, at least from a tactical standpoint. The vigilante simply pinpoints known criminals or those he believes guilty of wrongdoing and selects an ideal point to physically confront them. He may wish to catch them in the act of a crime or simply attack them at the most convenient opportunity. If his intentions are lethal, he needs to determine how he intends to kill them and any compatriots or underlings who are in the vicinity. If he merely wants to harm them, he needs to think about how they will react to the injury and whether it will deter their activities in any way. Regardless, the vigilante focuses on the criminals themselves in these cases, inflicting punishment directly as restitution for their misdeeds.



CHAPTER FOUR: VIGILANTES

Deterrence entails much more than simple combat. Not only must the vigilante physically punish wrongdoers, but he should make them fearful of committing further crimes. It entails methods similar to the way gang members establish their “turf,” engender a reputation among the underworld, demarcate “territory” where wrongdoers risk running into the vigilante, and instill enough fear in both the criminals he confronts and those who know him only by reputation that they think twice about breaking the law. Vigilantes with this goal prepare a more complex campaign than those simply out to beat up the bad guys: acting with their long-term impact on society in mind.

Legal conviction is much more difficult than the other two goals, but has tangible advantages. It focuses more on investigation than confrontation: gathering evidence against criminals which the authorities can use in court. The vigilante serves as a private investigator of sorts, only with himself as a client (in many ways, there is little discernible difference between such vigilantes and regular P.I.s). It requires adherence to legal niceties in how the evidence is obtained, and at least one person in official law enforcement willing to act on whatever the vigilante finds. On the plus side, the vigilante gains use of the legal system’s broader powers which, if cannily applied, can accomplish much more than he can alone. Moreover, law enforcement officials tend to go easier on vigilantes whom they perceive as a benefit to their work. On the downside, it sometimes ties the vigilante’s hands as much as it does the police, forcing him to adhere to the very procedures which he presumably became a vigilante to escape.

Of course many vigilantes adopt all three goals in the pursuit of their work: striking out directly at the underworld while seeking to halt future crimes and bringing criminals to officially sanctioned justice whenever they can. This becomes particularly true in the case of long-term vigilantes, who must adopt ever-changing goals during their tenure and utilize tactics to match.

Targets

With a notion of overall goals in mind, the next question becomes who (or what) the vigilante targets in his efforts. Some of that depends on his reasons for becoming a vigilante: whether he chooses to concentrate on the individuals who harmed him or broaden his reach to include criminals everywhere. Targeting individuals usually means familiarizing oneself with the underworld: identifying the movers and shakers, noting which gangs control which turf, and keeping a sharp eye on the police wanted posters. Specific acts of crime matter less to the vigilante than the perpetrators, whether it be local punks or high-ranking crime lords like Jack Drago. His methods thus work first to identify likely criminals, their backgrounds, and their routines, and then to move against them at a time designed to create the biggest impact (either in the commission of a crime or at a point which gives the vigilante some kind of advantage). Small-time or short-term vigilantes focus on troublemakers in one particular area, while career vigilantes look for ringleaders, mob bosses, or serial offenders who cause widespread damage. The more successful the vigilante, the higher up the food chain his targets stand.

FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE

The popular image of a vigilante falls into two or three easily recognizable stereotypes: the ex-cop or marine who just wants to be left alone until punks push him too far, the brooding loner lashing out against criminals as a way of assuaging his own psychic pain, the former family man turned bitter outcast at the unjust loss of all he holds dear. But with the above motivations in mind, vigilantes can come from almost any background. David Slade’s film *Hard Candy* presents a fourteen-year-old girl as a terrifyingly effective vigilante, while the Stephen King short story “Dolan’s Cadillac” recounts the vengeance of an elementary school teacher against the mob boss who murdered his wife. The motivating factors behind vigilantism can strike anyone, as can the will to act and the cunning to not get caught. Player characters looking to play vigilantes might consider looking beyond the easy stereotype to create a more unusual (and memorable) figure.

If the criminals themselves are not his target, then the vigilante likely focuses on a particular area: a neighborhood, a borough, or even an entire city. Instead of specific criminals, he looks for acts of criminality within that area — focusing on places likely to be robbed, known gang turf, areas of dispute between crime lords, and the like. Anticipation and response become key with this type of vigilantism, either by staking out places likely to be hit, or predicting where criminals will strike and moving to intercept them. Vigilantes rarely play favorites in such scenarios, but rather target anyone who breaks the law within “their” territory. In many ways, they become little more than gang members themselves: seizing turf and defending it against criminal rivals. The only difference is that they do not prey on those they believe to be innocent citizens (though whether they frighten such citizens as much as any criminal is another question).

Again, many vigilantes blend aspects of both approaches, focusing on both high-crime neighborhoods and known offenders who may work there. They may emphasize one over the other (“protect the gaunt district” vs. “bring down the Carelli mob”), but in practice, the twin foci undergo a great deal of overlap.

Patrolling

If the vigilante doesn’t have a specific crime or criminal he wishes to thwart, he can simply patrol a given area: keeping an eye out for trouble and moving in when he spies a crime in progress. Though unfocused, patrols help him establish a presence on the city streets, and can be particularly effective in deterring criminals from a given territory. Patrolling also works well for vigilantes just starting out in their careers, especially those fighting crime in general rather than a particular set of criminals.

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Classic comic book vigilantes often patrol on foot, using the shadows to hide their presence or moving across rooftops in order to afford themselves a view of the streets below. Such tactics often lack response time — which is vital during a patrol — but can also let the vigilante move places where vehicles can't and escape into the surrounding area without leaving a trace. Patrols on foot work well if the vigilante knows where a given group of criminals intend to strike or his patrol area is extremely limited (within a few blocks). Moving across rooftops requires honed athletic skills (it can be a long way down) and/or equipment such as grappling hooks, but for the vigilante who can manage it, it provides a number of benefits. Few people look to the rooftops when expecting an attack, and the vantage point of higher buildings allows for a commanding view of the surrounding streets.

If foot patrols prove impractical, vehicles make a good alternative. They provide speed and power, allowing the vigilante to move quickly if his prey is spotted and escape easily before the police arrive. Vehicles can serve as a weapon too — especially against criminals who must escape on foot — and their pursuit power means that the vigilante can follow any wrongdoers who attempt to flee the scene of the crime. The downside is that they are extremely conspicuous and can be seen coming from a fair ways off. Identifying features can lead the police to a vigilante if he's not careful, and even removing the license plates still leaves the make and model obvious to any witnesses or passersby.

Vigilantes who use vehicles tend to make them as inconspicuous as possible, picking nondescript sedans with plain or unadorned markings. Those with the means may use multiple vehicles to confuse onlookers and keep criminals from identifying their car. Others might steal (or at least “borrow”) cars for patrol use, though that may attract unwanted police attention as well. Repainting vehicles and switching identifying elements like hood ornaments can also help reduce the chances of being spotted.

The pattern of patrolling depends on the individual, as well as the area being patrolled. If the vigilante is pursuing a particular criminal, he may patrol known haunts or places where the criminal “works” (parks, alleyways, etc.) Alternately, he might simply track a given criminal through his patrol area, waiting until the miscreant makes a move and then swooping down to catch him in the act. For more generalized patrols, the vigilante will pinpoint areas likely to see criminal activity — low-end liquor stores, prominent banks, alleys or parking lots with a history of street crime, etc. Regardless of where he patrols, however, he needs to know the area like the back of his hand. Cross streets, side streets, fire escapes giving access to the roof, doorways into which one can duck, manholes and entries into sewer systems... the better the vigilante knows the area, the more effective his patrolling will be.

Baiting Criminals

Though patrolling makes a good routine for vigilantes in need of a target, it sometimes pays to bring the targets to them. A smart vigilante can bait criminals by appearing as a defenseless victim or occupying a store front begging to be robbed. When the crooks show up, he turns the tables on them, using whatever means is appropriate to his *modus operandi*. Baiting criminals takes patience and can often amount to a lot of wasted time, but it can also prove effective if the vigilante knows his targets well enough.

If the vigilante intends to present himself as a target, then he requires a good sense of disguise and knowledge of who is likely to come after him. He needs to appear helpless, vulnerable, and (most importantly) carrying something of value. If he hopes to catch a particular criminal, he needs to know the

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type of victim that criminal prefers and the usual areas where that criminal strikes. When the attack comes, he needs to be ready for it, springing into action before his would-be assailant can flee. If he uses a location instead of his person, it needs to appear authentic (i.e., not a set-up) and similarly contain something of value to a criminal. Even then, there's no guarantee that the crook will ever come calling, ruining whatever preparation he might have made.

If the vigilante doesn't want to put himself in harm's way, he can always use somebody else as bait — either willingly or unwittingly. The other person draws the criminals' attention while the vigilante watches from nearby — shadowing him or her, or staking out a targeted location — and moves in when the miscreant shows himself. This can be extremely effective, provided that the vigilante trusts his bait to work with him and doesn't mind putting someone like that in harm's way. Unwitting bait must be tailed carefully, so that neither he nor the criminal is alerted to the vigilante's presence. As with other types of baiting, this works best if the vigilante knows the habits of his intended prey and can predict with reasonable accuracy when and where (and who) a criminal will attack.

If the vigilante knows the details of a given crime, he can place himself there as bait: appearing as an innocent shopkeeper or a security guard during a robbery, taking the place of an intended murder victim, or the like. This has the benefit of removing a potential innocent from harm while placing the vigilante in an ideal spot to nail the criminals cold. On the other hand, it requires intimate knowledge of the crime in question (which the vigilante can act on simply by showing up at the right time) and a willingness on the part of the intended victim to change places with the vigilante. Despite that, such tactics provide vigilantes with a strong element of surprise, and when correctly played, can deliver a recalcitrant thief or would-be killer right into his hands.

Investigation/Anticipation

A vigilante's overall effectiveness often comes not from "fishing expeditions" like patrolling or baiting, but from the same methods the official police use to catch a perpetrator: investigation. While pummeling muggers and avenging oneself upon a known criminal are one thing, a long-term vigilante needs to be certain he has the right culprit before dispensing justice. He also needs to know if the criminal he hunts is acting alone, or follows orders from a larger group of miscreants. Certainty comes with the tried and true methods of investigation: determining facts, pinpointing suspects, and moving only when the vigilante is certain he has the right man.

In most ways, this follows the same path that private investigators use. Vigilantes pound a lot of ground, talking to witnesses, interrogating snitches, and searching for evidence. They may do this overtly or in disguise, through personable questions or dangling a perp off a skyscraper by his ankles. But the questions he asks are much the same, designed to finger whoever committed the crime and where the punk might be found. Vigilantes may choose to tail particular criminals from a distance, learning their patterns and hangouts while conducting surveillance unseen. This usually comes later in

the investigation, once a suspect has been acquired, but can produce a wealth of information as well as details about the local underworld in general which can be useful in later investigations.

Evidence analysis is much trickier, since it often entails access to the crime scene and resources comparable to those of a metropolitan police department. Vigilantes can get around this through a number of methods: exploring the scene after the police have left, bribing or coercing officials in crime labs, stealing case files from investigating officers, or perhaps even setting up a makeshift crime lab of their own. Generally speaking, however, such methods are rarely dependable over the long term. The vigilante must depend on old-fashioned methods of street work, asking questions, and ferreting information from individuals — the price for operating outside the law.

On the other hand, vigilantes don't need to cleave to the same legal technicalities as either official police or private investigators. Trespassing, coercion of witnesses, evidence obtained on dubious or shaky credentials... none of that would pass muster in a court of law, but the vigilante can use it however he pleases. If he knows a suspect to be guilty — *knows*, regardless of whether or not he can prove it legally — then he's free to act. Mistakes happen, of course, but the immediacy of acting without concern for bureaucratic necessities forms the core of most vigilantes' ethos. They move quickly, they strike hard, and punishment is immediate and severe.

Almost as important as investigations into past crimes is anticipating and preventing future crimes. Indeed, in many cases, that's why vigilantes do what they do: to stop a given criminal from harming anyone the way the vigilante himself was harmed. Properly anticipating a crime entails a thorough knowledge of the local underworld: major gangs, high-ranking syndicate figures, and an understanding of which lowlife is involved in which sleazy undertaking. The vigilante needs reliable information on what's going on, and who may be planning something big in the future. He also needs to know where given criminals congregate, which gangs use which areas, and how small acts of crime tie in to the bigger picture. Snitches and informants become a key part of the equation, providing tidbits in exchange for bribes (or the simple luxury of not being hospitalized). Particularly ambitious vigilantes may engage in undercover work as well: posing as a criminal in order to get close to a large gang and take them down before they launch a major crime.

The dangers of such activities are those which the police know all too well. Nothing exists in black and white, and stopping major crimes often means tolerating smaller ones. Vigilantes may find themselves choosing the lesser of two evils, or supporting one group of criminals against the other. The moral vagaries of a complex world rarely sit well with a vigilante's sense of absolutes, but it becomes necessary if he hopes to continue his activities for longer than a few weeks or so. The more he knows about the streets where he operates, the better he becomes at ferreting out big-time crimes before they start. Affecting change on a large scale sometimes means compromising on a smaller scale, a fact which every vigilante learns sooner or later.

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Combat

Unless he focuses entirely on investigation (in which case, he's probably just a garden variety P.I.), sooner or later a vigilante must confront criminals directly. Most consider it one of the perks of the job: no fuss, no muss, just find some bad guys and pound them flat. As with everything else, however, that goal entails more subtleties than may initially appear. In the first case, the vigilante must tackle the question of lethal force. Does he wish to subdue the criminals he encounters, inflict grievous bodily harm, or make sure they never commit a crime — or do anything else — ever again?

Those with no compunctions about killing often resort to the most straightforward of weapons. Rifles and handguns, which can be fired at a distance and used without risking close combat, make an attractive option. Most veterans of the war received extensive training in firearms, and vigilantes with such a background simply treat criminals like “the enemy” they once fought. Ambush tactics, sniper shots from afar, and weapons fired from moving vehicles form the basis of their attacks, which sows confusion in the targets' cohorts and allows the vigilante to escape without fear of retaliation.

Some killer vigilantes prefer to get in close, however: to throttle the criminal with their bare hands or feel a miscreant's last breath as he spits it in their faces. Though often psychotic (and taking a great deal of risk), they also tend to have the skills to back up their desires and can figure out how to get in close without drawing undue attention. They usually favor either bloodletting weapons like knives or their own bare hands (the sheer visceral satisfaction of strangulation appeals to their fundamental rage). Vigilantes adopting this tactic tend to concern themselves with one particular criminal or group of criminals — it reflects a deep-set personal connection between them and their underworld victims. Murder becomes an act of revenge for them, which ends once their target is in the ground. Those who continue to use lethal measures against criminals are often severely unhinged, and rarely last long before either the police or the criminals they hunt end their rampage for good.

For less homicidal vigilantes, things become more complicated. They are often outnumbered and need to incapacitate their opponents without inflicting permanent damage. Accordingly, they choose the time and place of the attack carefully, moving to strike with surprise and neutralizing their victims before anyone can react. As with more homicidal vigilantes, they often attack from ambush. Firearms can still be an option, though they must be utilized delicately. Hunting rifles equipped with tranquilizer darts or shotguns packing salt rock or bird shot can damage without killing, and more lethal armaments can work too if the shooter knows what he's doing.

Barring that, non-lethal vigilantes must resort to melee weapons: typically blunt objects like bats or clubs, as well as their own two fists. Those with more resources find additional ways to enhance their combat edge. Smoke bombs can obscure them from sight, allowing them to attack with surprise, while snares and similar traps can end the fight before it begins. Some vigilantes like to use tear gas. Not only can it stop

dozens of opponents at once, but the gas mask provides an additional advantage by hiding the vigilante's face. Unarmed combat includes the use of brass knuckles or martial arts techniques from the Golden Empire... some of which are designed to battle multiple opponents at once. Fear and confusion serve as excellent allies in combat as well, which is where a good street reputation comes into play. Criminals who believe the vigilante to be unstoppable may panic and make mistakes, helping to eliminate the advantage which their greater numbers may give them.

Though stressing non-lethal tactics complicates the vigilante's life in the most direct sense, it can pay dividends in other areas. The police, for example, are less likely to pursue a vigilante who doesn't kill, while more citizens may be inclined to look on him as a savior rather than a menace. If the vigilante makes a mistake — fingering the wrong person for a given crime — then a simple beating is easier to redress than a homicide. Finally and most importantly, non-lethal tactics help differentiate a vigilante from the criminals he preys upon. The dividing line may be thin sometimes, but refraining from killing makes as firm a barrier as any.

RESOURCES

In order for vigilantes to operate for more than a short period of time, they need resources and support. Life doesn't stop just because you embrace a blood vendetta: food costs money, rent must be paid, and nosy neighbors can't be allowed to detect an ominous change in habits. General resources provide a vigilante with the leverage to pursue his agenda, while specific resources make his work that much easier.

Money often necessitates a job, which the vigilante needs to maintain in order to keep up appearances as well as provide cash. His crusade becomes a sort of extracurricular activity, undertaken in his off-hours or during points at which his job is not a priority. On the plus side, a day job can provide useful alibis in case the vigilante needs them, though employers and coworkers may start to ask awkward questions if signs of his activities appear more than once or twice. It also provides money to keep the bills paid and perhaps a little extra to invest in the vigilante's crusade.

Some vigilantes have sufficient resources to pursue their vendetta full-time, either through savings or from a sponsor who provides funding for them. Conversely, unemployed vigilantes lack even basic resources to function, but have nothing but time to go after criminals in any manner they choose. Those funds — whether copious or nonexistent — have a direct bearing on how the vigilante approaches his work. Vigilantes without money tend to utilize a direct approach, using old fashioned investigation methods and contenting themselves with whatever leads surveillance and questioning can turn up. They tend to use the same equipment over and over again, and will ignore any evidence which requires more than a hard eyeball to study. On the other side of the coin, vigilantes with plenty of resources can utilize any number of goodies, from microscopes and forensic equipment to armor-plated ve-

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hicles capable of battering the opposition into dust. They must watch the evidence they leave behind, however, for expensive equipment is more easily tracked than mundane devices. A wealthy vigilante who utilizes specialized gear may find the police calling if he leaves something behind and it has a paper trail leading back to him.

Regardless of how much funding a vigilante has, he requires at least two specific resources in order to function: access to medical care and a safe haven from those who may hunt him. The second part of the equation is the easiest to facilitate. In order to be safe, a haven need only be secret: that is, no one must know it is connected to the vigilante. He can facilitate this simply by taking care not to be followed when he returns there: adopting circuitous routes, changing clothes to throw off tailers, and keeping the entrance to the lair duly hidden.

Beyond that, the haven need only be large enough to secure his possessions and private enough not to draw attention from the neighbors. If he uses a car, it needs a garage. If he has a makeshift crime lab, then it needs the space to store all of the equipment comfortably. It can be the vigilante's normal home, provided that he lives alone or any other occupants don't mind his extracurricular activities. More prudent vigilantes may set up a haven away from their normal haunts, which won't lead

the police to them if it is uncovered. A tenement apartment, a public storage space or the like works well within the city. It can be secured against intrusion fairly easily and the Commonwealth has enough shifty figures that odd comings and goings aren't liable to draw much attention. Alternatively the U.C.'s vast reaches of near-abandoned wilderness provide all manner of potential hideaways for a vigilante on a budget. Anything from a foreclosed farmhouse to an entire township is just waiting to be claimed: providing privacy, security, and seclusion to store one's gear and plot one's next move.

Medical attention becomes more difficult to find than a good hideout. Vigilantes run the risk of injury or death every time they step onto the streets, and even the best get hurt sooner or later. When they do, they can't simply call a doctor. Hospitals often ask uncomfortable questions, while gunshot wounds and the like usually necessitate the filing of a police report. Underground medical care exists — doctors who have lost their licenses or those willing to provide attention with no questions asked — but vigilantes run a risk there as well. There's nothing preventing a bent doctor from going to the criminal underground with what he knows about his patients, making every visit a potential threat that the vigilante cannot afford to ignore.

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The best solution is a trusted friend with medical knowledge, someone who can stitch up cuts and remove bullets without alerting anyone else. Though unusual, such figures are not as uncommon as they may seem. Veterans of the war against the Order of Nu included a number of combat medics — men and women without formal medical degrees, but skilled at bandaging cuts and sewing up holes. Most of the injuries sustained in a vigilante's work are combat-based, making veteran medics ideal for healing them. If the vigilante trusts someone with such skills enough to be treated by him or her, it solves a major problem.

Other options include self-medicating — dangerous, but possible if the vigilante has the right knowledge — or simply disguising the injuries with a clever cover story. Treating injuries oneself often becomes a necessity even if the vigilante has other options. Bandages and first aid kits can be safely purchased without raising undue attention, while more serious medication requires little more than a plausible story or a prescription pad. Smart vigilantes keep copious medical supplies where they can get at them easily, and learn how to use them on the job, if not earlier.

Once the vigilante has established a safe haven and reasonable access to medical care, his remaining supplies can vary wildly. Some vigilantes make do with little more than the clothes on their back, while others try to gather more gear than they can ever hope to use. Practical equipment costs little and can be found without undue difficulty. Radios tuned to the police band make useful tools for patrolling vigilantes. Not only can they alert him to crimes in progress, but he can gauge officer response time and flee the scene before legitimate law enforcement shows up. Vigilantes particularly concerned about the police may wish to carry additional deterrents as well: caltrops to spike the tires of patrol cars, smoke bombs to obscure vision, and the like. Grappling hooks and climbing rope may be needed if the vigilante intends to scale any buildings, while lock picks make entries easier without drawing undue attention to oneself. Some vigilantes carry handcuffs or other restraining devices as well, in order to hold the criminals they catch. Equipment carried on the streets needs to be portable and easily moved, while anything stored elsewhere needs to have a practical application away from the scene of the crime.



Outfits and Costumes

Vigilantes sometimes form a crossover point between what most people consider *noir* and pulpier or more outlandish genres. Characters like Batman and the Shadow straddle that line perfectly. On the one hand, their abilities and motivations belong firmly to the world of *noir*. Yet other elements of their personae — let's call them the "cape-and-tights" elements — feel too far-fetched for that genre, emphasizing more innocent or optimistic viewpoints. Obviously, GMs can take any approach they wish with their campaigns, but if you want to include those sorts of figures in *The Edge of Midnight*, carefully consider what aspects of the template to emphasize.

The main question centers around the use of a costume. Bright and cheery vigilante outfits evolved out of the four-color world of comic books, where the need to pop off the page often trumped more practical considerations. Such ostentatious tactics have little place in *The Edge of Midnight*. Prance around in bright yellow out there, and you'll end up cold and stiff on a morgue table while snickering coroners make jokes about your fashion sense. Which isn't to say it can't be done effectively. One of comic-dom's grittiest and most *noir*-ish vigilantes — Daredevil — dresses in bright red to this day. And the judicious use of a specific outfit may serve purposes more conducive to straight *noir*. Players with vigilante characters might be inclined to adopt one for the benefits it brings, including (but not limited) to the following:

- **Anonymity.** Barring an arrangement with the powers that be, vigilantism is illegal, and those who practice it often find themselves hunted by the law. Moreover, the criminals they hunt may target a vigilante if they know who he is, or attack those close to him or her. Masks can hide facial features while gloves prevent the vigilante from leaving fingerprints, thus preserving his identity and allowing him to go about his work. More mundane accoutrements, such as a fedora pulled low over the eyes, often serves the same purposes. Other aspects of the outfit may lend themselves to disguise as well. A notable piece of clothing, such as the Shadow's bright red scarf or even a sigil on the chest, will draw attention away from the vigilante's face and leave witnesses talking about flashy but frankly irrelevant identifying characteristics.
- **Camouflage.** In the mean streets of the U.C., you need every advantage you can get. Dark clothing allows vigilantes to blend in with the shadows, to move without being seen, and to disguise their presence until the moment comes to strike. Many U.C. citizens are war veterans who learned the advantage of silent movement and difficulty being spotted. They can easily apply those skills to life as a vigilante... starting with the outfit they wear. Other forms of camouflage stress not the inability to be seen, but rather the inability to be noticed. Mundane outfits which blend easily into a crowd, or which can be flipped around to appear as something else (such as a reversible coat or the like) make it easily for the vigilante to escape notice once he completes his immediate task.

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- **Defense and/or Offense.** Body armor can deflect bullets or block punches, giving the vigilante an edge when he is outnumbered. Brass knuckles can be built into the fingers of gloves, while booted feet can break bones when they kick. Actively defensive and/or offensive gear often adds bulkiness to an outfit and can limit flexibility, but it also brings a significant advantage when the fists start flying.
- **Notoriety.** Fear can be a vigilante's greatest weapon, and the notion that he might be out there can deter far more crime than the comparatively few times he actually confronts the bad guys. A symbol or distinctive outfit helps to cement his image in the minds of criminals and law-abiding citizens alike, spreading word of his deeds and encouraging his enemies to keep a low profile when he's around.

Accordingly, vigilantes who adopt costumes tend to utilize one or more of these considerations into their designs. Whether it's a ratty old trenchcoat or a cunningly designed piece of clothing, it must serve a logical and justified purpose. If it does, then the natural *noir* elements of the setting will remain intact without losing the unique flair that make costumed vigilantes such an appealing part of this genre. (If you need a practical example, Christopher Nolan's *Batman* movies are an excellent template for stressing practicality in a vigilante outfit. Every element of Batman's costume serves some logical purpose in those films, and while *The Edge of Midnight* lacks the high technology of his universe, the same principles can easily apply to vigilantes who operate there.)

VIGILANTES AND THE POLICE

Sooner or later, every vigilante must deal with the police. Those interested in just one target need to deter suspicion once they enact their vengeance, while long-term vigilantes must take steps to avoid being caught and arrested in the course of their "work." In some ways, the police represent an even greater adversary than criminals: after all, you can't get rid of them by beating a few of them up.

When dealing with the police, the vigilante must first take stock of how badly they want to catch him. This more or less directly hinges on his *modus operandi*, and whether the police view him as an active threat or merely a nuisance. (Sometimes, they may even consider a vigilante an ally, though such occurrences are rare; details can be found in the next column.)



Just as he watches the underworld to get a feel for his quarry, so too must he watch the police department to learn how many waves his activity is creating and the quality of officers assigned to his capture.

Vigilantes perceived as playing "within the rules" — who respect the law and whose actions aid the police rather than hindering them — are generally treated with kid gloves. A man or two may be assigned to bring them in, but generally speaking, the cops will leave them be in favor of more substantive criminals. Vigilantes who push more boundaries, interfere with police business, or exhibit dangerous or unpredictable behavior are subjected to considerably more attention (oftentimes treated as criminals themselves). Those who commit murder or crimes directed at anyone other than known underworld figures will find police searching for them around every corner, stymieing their efforts at private justice by forcing them to dodge detectives and patrol cars alike.

The question of police corruption plays a role in this equation as well. Some vigilantes take to the streets because official law enforcement has become thoroughly compromised by the very crooks they're presumably supposed to catch. In such circumstances, the police may be nothing more than a cat's paw: used by the criminal kingpins who control them to bring down a vigilante who might be causing some real damage. Other times, police may be targeted by the vigilante precisely because they are involved in corruption, and he knows that none of their fellow officers will lift a hand to stop them. To the vigilante, a bad cop is just another type of criminal — worse in many ways because he carries a badge. And whether the police are good or bad, they can present a huge problem when they turn on him in force.

Dealing with the police can take one of two forms. Either the vigilante can reach an agreement with them, or he can take steps not to get caught. The first option is infinitely more difficult, but it can also prove more rewarding. Either officially or informally, the police let the vigilante know that his presence will be tolerated so long as he obeys certain rules and adheres to at least the principles of law. They can do this through open support, surreptitious aid, or simply by ignoring his activities in favor of more "pressing" crimes. Sometimes, it need not be the entire department, or even senior leadership. If the vigilante works exclusively within a given precinct, for instance, he need only earn the favor of the cops within that precinct. Or if a task force has been assigned to catch him, but the inspector heading it up thinks the vigilante is doing the right thing, then somehow he never quite gets around to making an arrest. Sometimes, it need only be an understanding with a single officer: someone who can feed him information, let him look at evidence such as coroner's reports, and conveniently misplace any files implicating the vigilante in a crime.

The intangibles of such an arrangement tend to benefit the vigilante the most. Specifically, he doesn't need to worry about the police interfering with him, and can get down to the business of catching the bad guys. He can act more effectively, and move without constantly looking over his shoulder for a squad car. Furthermore, if he has an active alliance with one or more police officers, it gives him access to resources he

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might not otherwise possess: morgue and fingerprinting files, evidence, witness testimony, and the like. The connection can work both ways as well. Having found an incriminating piece of evidence, the vigilante may be able to slip it to an ally in the police department, setting the weight of the law in motion against the criminal. Such alliances, when they occur, require a great deal of trust, and form only after years of activity in which the vigilante has proven himself to be an asset rather than a liability.

Without such a cozy arrangement, the vigilante must take steps to ensure that he is neither identified nor caught. His choice of outfit and equipment can go a long way towards assuring this (and are addressed in the appropriate sections on the previous pages). More importantly, the vigilante needs to know when and where the police may strike at him. He should have their response time noted so that he can flee the scene of any crime in progress once the police are alerted. He should know the streets well enough to make use of any available escape routes, including rooftops and sewer systems as well as ways to access both. Most importantly, he needs to keep his “normal” life separate from his activities as a vigilante, so that investigators who get too close won’t find any leads to track him back to his home or family. A separate hideaway where he keeps his gear, avoidance of ordinary haunts while he is operating as a vigilante, an adamant refusal to discuss his activities with friends or family members... all of these help insulate the vigilante from the police as well as criminals, providing an extra layer of protection should the law get too close.

COPYCAT VIGILANTES

Success sometimes breeds problems of its own, which can turn around and bite the vigilante in ways he least suspects. A copycat — someone who emulates the vigilante’s techniques and even adopts his persona if applicable — can cause any number of headaches. Copycats generally emerge in situations where the vigilante receives a lot of press, and where his methods are perceived to be having some effect. Many of them simply seek attention, using their antics to get coverage in the press and perhaps a share of the “fame” and “glory” which the original vigilante has earned. Others are more imbalanced; they walk a fine line between lucidity and madness for years before word of the vigilante’s activities pushes them over the

edge. Such figures begin acting out their mania under the “guidance” of their “muse,” often adopting a love-hate attitude towards the figure which inspired them in the first place.

Either way, copycats spell bad news for any self-respecting vigilante. They’re uncontrollable, acting according to their own dictates rather than the vigilante’s. He may be blamed for their activities, earning indictments from the police who assume that imitator and original are one and the same. A copycat may also lack the skill and experience of the original vigilante, leading to bungled assaults which incense the criminal underworld. At worst, a copycat may directly sabotage a vigilante’s own activities, fouling up operations that took months to conceive and leading their mutual enemies right to his door.

Dealing with copycats takes finesse, though the exact approach varies from vigilante to vigilante. Some copycats can be talked into giving up their pursuits, either by impassioned admonitions, logical arguments, or simple threats. The vigilante will simply need to locate the copycat and convince him of the error of his ways. Barring that, he needs to distance himself from the copycat’s activities: pointing out the differences to the police and/or press will help, as will ensuring that the copycat’s *modus operandi* differs significantly from his. In the worst case scenarios, he needs to stop the copycat himself. The vigilante simply targets the copycat the same way he would any other criminal, and shuts him down by exposing him, by thwarting his “crimes,” or (in the most extreme cases) by simply killing him.

Almost worse than the external problems they cause, however, is the internal dilemma which copycats can evoke. After all, the copycat is simply doing what the original himself has done: more ineptly, perhaps, but in essence no different. If the vigilante has the right to do what he does, then so too does the copycat, right? Most vigilantes will use flimsy excuses to shut the imitator down, or draw arbitrary lines separating the “professional who knows what he’s doing” from the “amateur who will get himself killed.” For the more thoughtful vigilante, however, a copycat may create a serious crisis of conscience, prompting the vigilante to look very carefully at his activities and ask himself if they are truly justified. It may prompt him to hang up the spurs, or even turn himself in to face justice in the courts. On the positive side, it may also prompt him to act with more care, adopting a methodology or code of ethics that more rigidly separates him from some nut in a mask. Either way, copycat vigilantes are a good fulcrum to introduce some personal role-playing into a vigilante character, and help him better define who he is.

In rare cases, a copycat proves competent enough to succeed at his work: putting criminals out of the way and becoming a genuine asset in the vigilante’s quest. The vigilante can either adopt a tolerant role in such circumstances — allowing the copycat to operate in “his” city without harassment — or actively recruit him as an ally. Such circumstances are covered under the “Vigilante Groups” section, on page 105.



CHAPTER FOUR: VIGILANTES

CROSSING THE LINE

The work of a vigilante exacts a terrible psychological toll. Crime is omnipresent in modern society, and the weight of taking it on single-handedly can inflict massive psychological damage. Short-term vigilantes feel it too, as successful acts of vengeance fail to heal the vigilante's inner wounds. In such circumstances, it becomes very easy to cross the line: to become what one beholds and to go from a force of justice to a mad dog who needs to be put down.

Where that line lies depends on the vigilante, of course. Some might argue that the simple act of killing constitutes an irreversible descent, transforming a seeker of justice into a murderer. Others would point to increasingly erratic techniques, psychological imbalances intruding into the vigilante's normal life, or a growing death wish where the vigilante takes increasingly reckless risks for little appreciable gain. Mental instability means an inability to make rational decisions, which will end a vigilante's career permanently more often than not.

Beyond that, a vigilante most definitively crosses the line whenever he violates any of his given code of ethics. Whether he starts believing that the end justifies the means or he simply abandons whatever principles were guiding him, each time he does it, it becomes easier and easier to do so again. Eventually, he becomes capable of anything: falsifying evidence, doctoring crime scenes, even killing someone he knows to be innocent in order to prevent his secrets from being revealed. His actions thus lose any semblance of righteousness, turning him into a variation of the very criminals he presumes to hunt.

Another sign that the vigilante may have gone too far is the inability to distinguish innocent from guilty. Everyone is guilty of something of course, especially in *The Edge of Midnight*, but a sense of proportion still needs to pervade. Otherwise, the vigilante begins executing people for parking violations or dropping them off of rooftops for cheating on their taxes. The definition of wrongdoing — the perceived injustice which the vigilante hopes to set right — has to stay clear in his mind, and he has to retain a succinct separation between criminals and those on whom criminals prey. If he can no longer make that distinction, then society itself becomes his enemy and he needs to be stopped.

Bigotry and racism can play a role in that as well. A vigilante who focuses on minorities as a class or assumes that all members of a particular demographic are criminals has lost the perspective required to go about his work. He will target anyone who meets a particular physical description, punishing them for crimes both real and imagined. In the *Edge of midnight* universe, this usually means gaunts, whom racist vigilantes will cheerfully terrorize in the name of the public good. Other racial minorities suffer far less than they might in the real world due to the social advances made by the war, but they too can be targets of wayward vigilantes. Warlocks make exquisite (though dangerous) targets for vigilantes, since magic practice as a whole constitutes a crime and most citizens would applaud anyone who sees fit to dispatch such figures. In all of these cases, however, the vigilante focuses on appearance or habit rather than actual deed: mistaking crime

for the suppositions and projections within his own head. That inability to discriminate may be the clearest sign that a vigilante has lost his way.

When it happens, it rarely ends well. Police and other officials who may have once supported him now turn on him, viewing him as an active liability. Citizens' groups may target him as well, seeking to protect their own from the "mad dog" who can no longer tell right from wrong. Criminals have less reason to fear him, for his lack of discrimination makes it harder to pinpoint them, as well as allowing them to stir up public resentment against him. In some cases, the vigilante can right the ship, either through a crisis of conscience or a return to his former ways. Otherwise, the police will eventually catch up with him. Or his criminal foes. Or a normal citizen whom he wrongfully targets, but who has decided to push back himself. Impaired judgment and increasing psychological instability make the end come that much sooner.

Such themes make excellent fodder for *noir* storytelling, as a vigilante sets out to make things right, only to lose sight of his goals amid an increasing morass of moral intangibles. Whether he can fight his way out of it and/or right some of the wrongs he has committed becomes the purpose of his struggle underlying his more overt battle against individual criminals. Not only does it add depth to what might otherwise become a simple case of pounding bad guys, but it allows the player to



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more deeply explore the lines that divide right from wrong, and how crossing them can sometimes be easier than it seems. Particularly grim campaigns may use the notion as a capper, with a vigilante character finally succumbing to his demons and being hunted down by cop and criminal alike.

VIGILANTES IN THE EDGE OF MIDNIGHT

Vigilantes in the *Edge of Midnight* universe tend to follow the one-shot pattern. They appear in pursuit of a particular wrong to make right: some villain or group of villains against whom they intend to dispense personal justice. Some are caught in the process, or else gunned down trying to complete whatever goal they set for themselves. Others vanish into the night, dispatching their targets and escaping back to the doldrums of their normal lives. Long-term vigilantes are much more uncommon. Few have the staying power to truly make a name for themselves, and most are either caught or give up after a brief period of time in the media spotlight.

Of the U.C.'s six biggest cities, only two show any preponderance for vigilante activity. Vigilantes appear in New Eden from time to time, bolstered by the city's famously tough image and emphasis on self-reliance. Citizens know the dangers of street crime in every neighborhood, and more than a few take measures to protect themselves when trouble comes calling. Most of the time, such cases stem from particular inci-

dents, in which a mugger or purse snatcher found his would-be victim feistier than he thought. The media has a field day every time it happens, but the perpetrator is usually forgotten once charges are dropped and/or a conviction is reached. Few vigilantes in New Eden endure longer than a couple of weeks.

In Terminus, however, the problem is much more pronounced. An impotent police force coupled by organized criminals who run the city like their own private fiefdom means more and more ordinary citizens stepping forward to do what the regular authorities can't. Some appear much as they do in New Eden, striking out only when attacked and acting in the name of self-defense more than any larger vendetta. As time passes, however, and the city sinks further and further into the crime lords' grip, purveyors of private justice are on the rise. Whether they can make any permanent dent in the underworld remains to be seen, but the best of them are cunning, tenacious, and here to stay. In time, they may be the only forces of genuine law and order left in the city.

Other parts of the U.C. see vigilante activity from time to time, though it is often limited to a few deranged individuals. Crime can be found in all of them, however, which means they all hold the ingredients for creating a vigilante figure. Central City features several prominent organized crime rings, feeding on law-abiding citizens with gambling, prostitution, and the rapidly expanding drug market. The Tongs of Gateway often resemble vigilantes themselves, though their engage-

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ment in various illicit activities causes as many problems as it solves. Paradiso features plenty of individuals hungry for the limelight, and a mysterious figure who seeks out evil makes a great way to get your name in the paper. Of all the U.C. cities, only Nova Roma makes a truly poor ground for vigilantism. The city's draconian emphasis on order has little room for "freelancers," and citizens who take the law into their own hands usually ending up sharing a cell with the very criminals they hoped to punish.

VIGILANTE GROUPS

Not all vigilantes operate in solitude. Some band together in groups, either to face a common threat, to protect a given area, or simply to pool their resources more effectively. Groups of vigilantes are especially appealing as player characters because they allow for the cohesion of a proper party and don't force any non-vigilante characters in the group to go against their core concept.

At their best, groups of vigilantes resemble modern-day neighborhood watch programs: obeying the laws and adhering to the admonitions of police at all times. They act merely to keep an eye out for trouble, and refrain from direct action unless it becomes absolutely necessary. Most of them call the cops rather than confront criminals directly, and even those who don't (such as gaunt groups) act only enough to subdue the criminal and hold him for formal arrest. On the other end of the scale sit those vigilante groups who are little more than angry mobs. They act with reckless abandon, governed by collective mania and often targeting anyone convenient in addition to whichever criminals they hope to apprehend. Such groups invariably run afoul of legitimate law enforcement very quickly, resulting in riots and general civil unrest.

Methods

Vigilante groups tend to operate according to two basic formulae. The first divides the work into specialized subsections, each taken up by one or more group members. Someone with a knack for analysis, for example, may study clues or evidence left behind in a crime scene, while a driver will maintain the vehicles and ferry the group members wherever they need to go. Bruisers prowl the streets seeking wrong-doers, and those with medical knowledge stand ready to stitch up any wounds which their comrades receive. The benefits of this arrangement allow each member of the group to focus on his or her strengths without having to take on tasks which are beyond him or her. It makes a good template for a character party as well, giving each player an area to shine while contributing to an overall goal.

The other kind of group shares responsibility for all activities among its members. Duties are divided by time or schedule rather than by task: each member will patrol the neighborhood on a given night, for example, or if equipment needs to be repaired, they all pitch in to do it. Neighborhood watches tend to fall under this kind of organization, adopting schedules and assigning tasks which allow everything to get done

without any single member having to shoulder the entire load. In more melodramatic cases, the vigilante group can adopt a single personae — one masked figure existing to punish the wicked — which all of them contribute to by their participation. This works especially well in playing up the vigilante's omnipotence, as "he" can appear in multiple places at once or catch up to a miscreant more quickly than any normal man.

Regardless of which methods they adopt, vigilante groups provide tangible benefits to their members. The redistribution of responsibility makes the team far more effective than one man operating alone, creating a de facto organization to turn to in times of trouble. A group allows its members to maintain a normal life more easily and lie low if need be without worrying that the "work" will slack off. It also provides them with more legitimacy should their activities be uncovered: a lone vigilante can be dismissed as a nut, but an organized group suggests that the problem they face goes beyond delusional instabilities. Finally, vigilante groups provide the stability and support that can deter or prevent their members from developing long-term psychological problems. While a lone vigilante may eventually succumb to his demons, members of a group can back each other up, bolstering their goals with whatever justifications they have adopted and even pulling a less stable member aside for awhile while someone else takes up the slack.

WARLOCK VIGILANTES

At first, it may seem odd that any warlock may choose to become a vigilante. After all, they are law-breakers themselves — in fact, their very existence is considered a crime. Why would they want to help the very authorities charged with their capture? Warlocks' obsessive pursuit of knowledge means little time for more frivolous activities, further reducing the odds that one of them may turn to vigilantism. Those interested in justice typically join a crystal ball squad, which sanctions their magic use and allows them to use their abilities in the pursuit of a greater good (see page 114 for more).

Yet there are still some out there who devote themselves to private justice, using magic to hunt down more mundane criminals and make them pay for their wicked deeds. In such cases, the desire to become a vigilante precedes the need to practice magic: the latter becomes a tool used to conduct the former. Warlocks wield power undreamed of by their fellow man — one of the reasons why they are so feared — and such power can be extremely enticing for someone interested in fighting back against underworld.

Warlocks who choose to become vigilantes are extremely dedicated to their cause. They must keep the fires of anger burning through years of study and training, first finding the texts and fellow warlocks willing to teach them, and then evading the authorities as they hone and polish their abilities. Every day they study is a day spent deferring what they perceive as righteous vengeance. On the other hand, they often possess the dedication to endure such hardships without complaint: patiently biding their time until the planted seeds come to fruition.

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The results are often worth the wait. Skilled warlocks are a vigilante's dream: able to somersault across rooftops, move with the speed of sound, turn ordinary clothing into bullet-proof armor, and inflict harm in a staggering number of ways. They go a long way towards evening the odds when faced with a larger group of criminals, and the spectacular effects they produce will put the fear of God into all but the hardest members of the underworld. For someone dedicating his life to true justice against criminals, the advantages can be hard to resist.

On the other hand, police tend to notice warlock behavior far more readily than they would a normal vigilante, and tend to be far less tolerant of such activities as well. Warlock vigilantes automatically fall under the purveyance of the local crystal ball squad, which has magic of its own to counteract the vigilante's abilities. Criminals, too, sometimes employ warlocks, eliminating the vigilante's hard-won edge. Most warlock vigilantes must work alone as well, and their operations run the constant risk of being abandoned as they flee for their lives ahead of some fanatic task force hell-bent on bringing them in.

There are deeper problems, too, which the warlock vigilante must face. The risk of magic addiction looms larger and larger the more one engages in such activity, and for a vigilante, magic use becomes a regular occurrence. The warlock's growing urge to flaunt his powers helps contribute to any lurking mental instabilities, and may prompt him to exact increasingly harsh penalties for increasingly trivial crimes. The inevitable development of a mark can help identify him as well, leading to a quick arrest (if he's lucky) or a brutal death at any number of hands.

Warlock vigilantes thus tend to be few and far between: far scarcer than their magic-using brethren in the criminal underworld and easier to track than those sensible enough to keep their heads down. Those who manage to survive and thrive usually work only in the short-term, orchestrating a one-time act of vengeance unrivalled in its destructive fury. The few who can make a lengthy run at vigilantism are some of the toughest and most resourceful people in the entire world, with the discipline and sheer force of will to marshal their powers again and again against the Commonwealth underworld.

GAUNT VIGILANTES

In many ways, to be a gaunt and to stand on the side of the law is to be a vigilante. Leatherbacks cannot depend on regular police support in their neighborhoods, and with poverty and crime overrunning the gaunt districts, they must turn to each other as the only means of protection. Violence is common in the districts, as are vicious, embittered individuals with scores to settle. Most gaunt areas have at least one vigi-

lante group, acting to protect their neighborhoods or districts where the police won't. The trouble is, many of them engage in criminal acts as well, and the line between well-meaning law-abider and *de facto* gang often grows very tenuous indeed. Still, gaunts rapidly grow accustomed to self-policing their territory and gaunt vigilantism becomes par for the course when living among them.

Gaunts have several tangible advantages and very few disadvantages when it comes to pursuing private justice. Their natural strength and endurance makes them ferocious combatants, and their vampiric aura can drain the life out of any normal criminal who tangles with them too often. Their monstrous faces make for a natural disguise — few normals can distinguish one leatherback from another — and the despairing pits of the gaunt districts make a perfect place to hide. The police won't follow them there and fellow leatherbacks rarely inform on one of their own. Few gaunts find gainful employment, which provides a vigilante with plenty of free time to plot his anti-criminal excursions, and in the worst districts, he can easily find a few like-minded compatriots willing to help him out.

The drawbacks arrive during the more subtle parts of vigilantism. Gaunts often lack even the most basic resources and while they have many of the physical abilities required to do the job, more sophisticated crime-solving endeavors elude them. Evidence succumbs to their corrupting effect quite quickly, as do any tools used to examine or study their clues. Gaunts have a difficult time working undercover, and while criminal gangs may allow one to infiltrate their ranks, the task becomes much more difficult when the criminals are normals or if they intermingle with "decent" non-gaunt society. Like warlock vigilantes, police tend to frown on gaunts overstepping their bounds, and while the cops rarely interfere with activities in the gaunt districts, vigilantes who cross into normal parts of town will find the hammer of the law falling hard upon them.

Gaunt politics tends to pull vigilantes in as well. Many of the criminals they target are gaunts themselves, who may have backing among residents of the vigilante's local area. Violence against one gang member means violence against them all, and retaliatory block wars can get started under the most trivial circumstances. A gaunt vigilante hoping to do some good in his neighborhood may succeed only in sparking a vicious clash between rival factions, resulting in extended bloodshed and further misery. (On the other hand, triggering such a war between two equally vile foes becomes much easier in the gaunt district... and makes for an excellent scenario for a *Yojimbo*-inspired player.)

Despite such difficulties, gaunt vigilantes are fairly common amid the misery-infested districts of their kind. In some cases, they even make for a strange sort of constabulary, replacing ordinary law enforcement with a system all their own. Individual gaunt vigilantes are less common than vigilante groups — the nascent leatherback culture stresses communal ties too strongly to let a single individual go it alone — but they certainly possess the right mixture of qualities to keep their numbers steady. Until and unless the police make a greater effort to stem crime among gaunt society, every leatherback has the potential to someday try it himself.



CHAPTER FIVE WARLOCKS



"Exact science, Mr. Angier,
is not an exact science."
- Nikola Tesla (David Bowie),
The Prestige



WARLOCKS

Basic information on warlocks and magic can be found in Chapters Three and Five of the *Edge of Midnight* core rulebook. It is recommended that you be familiar with those chapters before reading this one.

What would you give for power? How much would you be willing to sacrifice in order to demonstrate absolute control over yourself and your environment? And not just political power or personal power, where wealth and charisma allow you to bend other people to your will, but direct, sudden, tangible and absolute power. The power to throw someone through the wall with a thought. The power to float like a feather or fly like a bird. The power to reshape metal with the force of your mind or start an inferno by snapping your fingers. Would you give up your job for that? Your friends? Your family and everyone dear to you? Would you challenge the might of your nation's government, defy the law of the land, and consign yourself to life as a fugitive? Would you endure looks of suspicion from those around you, shrug off whispered threats from bus stops and street corners, and go to sleep every night knowing that someone may come to kill you before you wake?

In the world of the *Edge of Midnight*, some people would. They're called "warlocks."

Now take that equation from the other side. What if someone in your neighborhood had the ability to punch through your wall like it was cardboard? What if he could ignite the gas main under your street just because he took a mind to it, or fling a four-door sedan hundreds of yards in a fit of pique? Would you want that person living next to you? Working in your office? Passing by the playground where your kids are on the swings? What assurances could that person give you that would assuage your concerns? What promises could he make that you'd be willing to accept? And how enthusiastically would you support a politician who promised to make you safe from him no matter what?

The *Edge of Midnight* has those people too. They're called "everyone except warlocks."

Put the two on a collision course and bad things happen.

The existence of warlocks and the abilities they demonstrate consumes the U.C. like nothing else. They unnerve normal people not just with the wondrous powers they can demonstrate, but by how easily those powers can get out of hand. As addiction to magical abilities takes its toll, warlocks become more and more erratic, their powers more and more apt to cause widespread devastation. It makes a great headline for the morning newspapers (complete with four column photos of the aftermath) while providing an excellent "enemy" for officials in Nova Roma to point their fingers at.

And yet they cannot simply eliminate magic, nor can they pretend that people won't continue to seek it out. Ignoring the problem only makes it worse, while a zero-tolerance policy drives many otherwise harmless warlocks into acts of criminality. Furthermore, sorcery has proven to be extremely useful in the past. Power can accomplish much if properly controlled,

and loathe as they are to admit it, the nation's leaders know that without warlocks, the fight against the Order of Nu might still be going on today. Like so many other problems, magic use in the U.C. has no easy solution... and none of the ones they've tried so far seem to be working very well.

Warlocks themselves claim that magic use is vitally important, of course. While some revel in it as a means to exercise staggering abilities, others treat it as a form of scientific inquiry like any other. Magic use occurs because of holes in the fabric of creation: edges of the universe where physics stops working the way it's intended to. Why is that? What causes normally reliable concepts like gravity and magnetism to simply drop away the harder one looks at them? The answers to such questions may help solve the fundamental riddles of the universe: a holy grail for any scientist made tantalizingly real by the presence of magic in his or her midst. If responsible people (read: whoever's speaking) don't seek such answers, then less responsible people might... and God knows what kind of apocalypse they will unleash if they ever find them.

The push and pull between those two needs has raged since the end of the war, and will likely continue for quite some time to come. Every warlock places himself in the middle of that from the first moment he tries a spell to the end of his days. It comes as part of the price for magic use and he needs to be willing to fight for it if he wishes to continue in his ways. How and why he picks up that gauntlet becomes a defining part of his character.

The roots of the warlock issue run even deeper than the overt difficulties mentioned above. Even if one could overlook the damage that warlock abilities cause or the unease they generate among normal people, their existence strikes at the very base of Commonwealth culture. In simplest terms, people of the U.C. don't trust intellectuals. Theirs is a democratic nation, founded on the belief (however naïve) that all men are created equal and that no single human being is inherently "better" than any other. Their entrepreneurial economy thrives on the myth of the self-made man: the idea that anyone can become wealthy through hard work and a little inspiration. Conversely, they despise elites of any sort... and intellectuals are most definitely an elite. Smart people read books which the common man has no use for and grasp notions which the average person cannot contemplate. By definition, there are fewer of them than there are of the average citizen, and simple hard work does not guarantee entrance into their ranks.

That would matter much less if intelligence simply meant better job options or a proclivity for quiet research. Indeed it might even be respected, since brains and hard work theoretically walk hand-in-hand (at least according to the U.C.'s Protestant ethics). But when you add magic to the mix, the vague sense of distrust balloons to monstrous proportions. No longer is the physics lab or science classroom a harmless realm of intellectual inquiry. Suddenly, it holds powers undreamed of — powers which anyone can theoretically learn, but which only a few possess the mental capacity to truly understand. It's like handing a grenade launcher to the top 10% of every high school class in the country and telling the rest, "Good luck, you're on your own." Suddenly, not all men are created equal any more.

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Anti-magic politicians are quick to exploit that dynamic: they adopt a populist approach, claiming to represent the common man and seeking to “protect” him from a dangerous elite which ruthlessly exploits an “unholy advantage.” They paint warlocks in conspiratorial terms and conjure images of hateful magic-users — jealous of the country’s prosperity — seeking short cuts that rob decent, good-hearted folk of their rights to fairly compete. The criminalization of magic practice and the large number of warlocks subsequently working on the wrong side of the law provides further fuel to the fire, as does the unfortunate fact that the Order of Nu was led by a band of warlocks. It makes fine copy, it helps politicians get elected, and every time a new law or ban on magic use is enacted, a considerable portion of the public stands up and applauds. Until and unless warlocks can prove otherwise, their foes will always have plenty of ammunition to shoot at them.

And warlocks themselves rarely alleviate such suspicions. Many use their powers solely for personal gain, while others must consort with criminals just to stay out of jail. Even those with law-abiding aims carry significant chips on their shoulders, made worse by the persecution they must constantly endure. Many were bullied while growing up too, and magic use often first appears during adolescence — when slights real and imagined are inflated to earth-shattering proportions. Take a quiet, studious child, tormented by his peers and seemingly unable to fight back. Then tell him that — simply by reading and studying just as he has always done — he can gain the ability to throw lightning bolts from his fingers or pin people to walls with shards of jagged metal. Suddenly, that child starts making a list and everyone is on it. When he grows up and his powers become manifest... it’s payback time. Persecuted warlocks can easily transfer that hate to the police or government, and make no bones about striking back in deadly and spectacular ways. All of which merely contributes to the stigmata against their kind, forcing law-abiding warlocks further underground and hampering their efforts to be accepted by the mainstream.

“HIDE YOUR GIFTS OR HIDE YOURSELF”

Magic use is illegal in the U.C., save only by licensed practitioners. If you don’t want to work for the government or hunt down your own with a crystal ball squad, you run the risk of arrest and prosecution for your gifts. Warlocks have a handy phrase to posit the alternatives: “hide your gifts or hide yourself.”



The first choice entails leading a secret life: practicing in seclusion and never revealing your magic use to any but your most trusted associates. On the surface, you want everything to be normal. You hold down a job, have a spouse or a family, and show no signs of interest in magic use. If you have books, you hide them — either in some secret place in your home or far away where your family or house cleaner will never find them. You practice only while alone, excusing yourself and inventing some kind of cover story such as a club or mundane hobby. You lie when asked about your activities, you keep silent when discussions of physics or science arise. When a mark appears, you call in sick; when another warlock is arrested, you keep mum. You may even belong to an anti-warlock group and lobby the government for tighter restrictions against “those people.” All of it serves as a smoke screen to divert attention and suspicion away from your dirty little habit.

Like gambling or alcoholism, such a secret becomes extremely difficult to hide. Little signs pop up here and there, and the urge to practice it away from safe locations may be too great to resist. You might start using it in little ways around the house, just to see if you can... increasing the chances of getting caught. You may seek out fellow warlocks who understand your plight, some of whom may be much more deeply involved in overtly criminal acts because of it. The mark is extremely difficult to ignore, and unless the warlock prepares carefully, he may need to reveal it to his spouse or family member. The stress of a double life often becomes too much to handle, and “secret” warlocks often fall further and further away from the very ordinariness they wish to convey.

A few strike the right balance, either maintaining their double life indefinitely or restricting their magic use to the odd dabbling. The rest are consumed by their desire, taking greater risks until exposure reveals them for what they are. (Tabloid columns always have a few stories about “happy, normal people” destroyed by a secret magic addiction.) From there, they either clean up or join the ranks of their brethren who chose the second option: hiding themselves.

A secret life involves stifling restrictions, constant fear, and scandalous consequences in the event of exposure. Many warlocks would rather die than accept such a fate. Instead, they make no secret about who and what they are, embracing their magic use and cheerfully paying the social price. Invariably, such warlocks must go into hiding themselves, abandoning friends and family for a life on society’s fringes. Employers will not hire them if they learn about their proclivities. Associates are reluctant to speak with them, and they may not be welcome in stores or restaurants. Even worse, the police may open a file on them or subject them to random harassment, just waiting for them to slip up. Any trouble with the law — any at all — and the warlock faces a harsh and lengthy jail term at the very least.

The social pressure invariably drives warlocks underground, forced to live among junkies, criminals, and similar undesirables. Many become criminals themselves as a means of making ends meet. The rest must work doubly hard at whatever jobs they find, or even pay extortion money to their employers lest they be ratted out. Solitary work suits them best:

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graveyard shifts as security guards or short-order cooks at all-night diners where they can be left alone and no one pays them much mind. It's difficult, but it spares them the ignominy of breaking the law and allows them a few precious hours each day to indulge in their abilities.

UNIVERSITIES

Magic originally found its most fertile breeding ground in schools and universities, where professors and students had the wherewithal to explore the boundaries of physical sciences. They rarely flaunted their abilities openly, but it was a poorly kept secret, and most of them were smart enough not to display their talents outside of laboratory conditions. The Twelve Days of Chaos (see *The Edge of Midnight* core rulebook, page 108) changed all of that. Science departments became a central focus of rioting crowds, who looted labs, burned buildings, and beat known professors to within an inch of their lives (regardless of whether they practiced magic or not). When it subsided, many teachers were released from their jobs, even those with tenure and unparalleled respect in their fields. Administrators leery of the spreading violence tried to avoid further outbreaks by gutting their science departments, dealing

a serious blow to academic progress and leaving untold numbers of physicists, chemists, and engineers out on the streets looking for work.

Today, most science departments are a shell of their former selves. Remaining teachers fear pushing concepts that are too advanced, lest they be accused of sorcery and fired (or worse). They teach fork-and-spoon ideas, well-researched and devoid of anything that might smack of more esoteric theories. A few brave souls push further than that, while rebellious students look into "forbidden" texts as a way of striking a blow against their elders. Underground societies have sprung up on a few campuses (mostly in Gateway and Paradiso, far away from the roving eyes of Nova Roma). But the constant threat of government inquiries and further crackdowns keeps them from advancing too quickly, and fear of exposure leeches energy away from otherwise fruitful studies. Small wonder that the U.C., once renowned for its scientific advances, has stagnated in such fields since the end of the war.

As for the teachers and scientists who lost their jobs following the Twelve Days of Chaos, many of them were absorbed into government positions. They now conduct research on behalf of various divisions in Nova Roma, developing anything from new fertilizer to missile guidance systems. Some work

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for think tanks more loosely attached to the government, kept on a longer leash but still ultimately serving the same master. And a few even conduct research into sorcery at the behest of the government: those identified as warlocks are offered a research position as a way of staying out of prison. They belong exclusively to the Department of Strategy, ensconced in secret labs and underground testing rooms where their keepers probe the limits of their abilities to see what makes them tick. (More on the Department of Strategy can be found on page 66 of *The Naked City* sourcebook and page 120 of this volume.)

Those who resisted employment by the government had a far worse time of it. If they couldn't practice sorcery, they fell into menial jobs: forever besmirched by association with magic. A lucky few found teaching posts in elementary schools and elsewhere, while the rest were forced into drudgerous positions as janitors and garbage men. For those who did practice magic, prospects looked somewhat better... provided they were willing to break the law to do it. Criminal organizations welcomed anyone with their particular talents and, eager for revenge against the system which treated them so poorly, they happily agreed. Today, they stand as some of the biggest criminals in the Commonwealth, running syndicates of their own or hiring out their services as freelance law-breakers. (The most prominent is Eddie Silver, leader of one of Central City's biggest mobs, who began as a professor at Laird University before a crackdown forced him into a life of crime. See pages 11 and 24-25 of *The Naked City* sourcebook for more.)

Thus does the government enable the very scourge it hopes to destroy, alienating otherwise harmless warlocks and creating enemies where once none existed.

THE SECRET NETWORK

In order to combat such prejudices, warlocks have been forced to band together. Though trust is difficult to come by and paranoia keeps everyone wary, warlocks must depend on each other if they hope to find any safety and pursue their research in peace. Some join more formal sorcerous orders, which have the benefit of a structure and numbers to keep themselves safe. They are dealt with at length in Chapter Seven. The rest rely on hearsay and rumor, lending trust to one or two valued colleagues and pursuing whatever nebulous havens exist for their kind.

Beyond basic necessities such as food, shelter, and perhaps a menial job for cover, a warlock needs three things to practice his art: books of scientific and magical knowledge, a library to study them in safety, and a testing ground where he may refine his craft without fear of discovery or arrest. All of them can be found, provided the warlock looks hard enough... and is willing to do business with the people who control them.

Books

Books are the most precious of these resources, but also the easiest to use and conceal. They range from simple pamphlets describing the basic principles of magic to profound scientific treatises delving into the minutiae of high-end physics. Most of them have been banned in many communities (though the U.C. embraces freedom of speech, local boards and committees

have no problems burning them in the streets), and possession of one casts deep suspicions on the owner from both the law and any fellow citizens who catch word of it. Even so, they can be printed and distributed with a disturbing amount of ease. Warlocks with access to a printing press can instantly create hundreds of cheap copies and scatter them to the winds. Many warlock texts consist solely of such treatises: basically photocopies, crudely bound and with handwritten embellishments from a helpful printer who wanted to add his own bit of knowledge to the pile. Original works — formally bound and printed before anti-magic hysteria took hold — are infinitely more valuable, and both the warlocks themselves and their foes view them as rare prizes. The knowledge they contain is more reliable, not cluttered with post-publishing changes or visible only through shoddy printing errors. Their importance can be felt in the efforts of both sides to find them, and in the punishments the law hands down to those who possess them. Someone with a file sheaf of fourth-generation copies, for example, may be given a slap on the wrist, while a warlock found with an original text in his possession will be sentenced to prison time or worse.

Warlocks who get their hands on original books don't tend to keep them long, or if they do, they take steps to hide them completely. Hidden compartments and loose floorboards in a warlock's home are bound to hide the odd book or two, while some warlocks write down key details in the margins of more innocuous books. Warlocks who insist on keeping their books often build up large collections, which become even more difficult to keep concealed. The canny ones disperse them over a number of sites, ensuring that the collection as a whole will remain intact even if the authorities discover one or two individual texts. More mundane methods include keeping them in secret rooms or hiding them more brazenly through false covers.

If the warlock has no wish to hold onto a forbidden book, he simply studies it until he has grasped the concepts (and applied them to his magic skills) and then passes it on. He will leave it somewhere untraceable, such as a bus locker or buried in a key location, and allow others to locate it. If he knows another warlock he can trust, he may pass its location on to him or (if he's really daring) mail the book directly. Otherwise, he may leave certain clues to its whereabouts, scrawled in seemingly harmless graffiti or scribbled in the margins of used paperbacks somewhere. The clues can become quite complicated and warlocks may spend years piecing the puzzle together in order to track down a single prized volume.

Libraries

Actual warlock libraries are extremely rare, and those which do exist are jealously guarded by the sorcerers who created them. A few warlocks, however, embrace the scientific notion that all knowledge should be shared and dedicate themselves to developing safe havens where others of their kind can study and learn. These secret libraries can take almost any form, though only practicing warlocks can ever get in the door. (Many of the safeguards require appropriate magic use to reach. For instance, one warlock library stands at the top floor of an abandoned Gateway tenement building whose

THE SEARCH FOR THE TRUTH

Magic in *The Edge of Midnight* entails exploring the boundaries of the physical universe. Warlocks poke at the edges of understanding, reveling in those points where the fabric of how things are supposed to be comes unraveled. The questions that lead them to those points and the knowledge that comes with seeing the flaws in the laws of physics naturally lead to deeper issues... issues about why physics works the way it does and if perhaps the universe itself is some kind of flawed creation.

Non-warlocks who ask such questions invariably gravitate towards the ranks of the Few. Yet warlocks who, as a class, are far more likely to explore those troubling ends, have no greater percentage of the Few in their numbers than any other demographic. Why? The addiction caused by practicing magic on that level — the all-consuming need to grasp raw power in their hands — tends to shut out curiosity about anything else. Many warlocks falls victim to selfishness as well: ignoring the past for what they hope to achieve in the present. And it takes a certain level of progress in order to fully grasp the implications of magic — something dabblers and dilettantes (say any character without a rank of 3 or higher in a given scientific skill) lack the understanding for (though they could still stumble on it through more mundane questions like anybody else).

Warlocks who do belong to the Few tend to see magic in more philosophical terms than their peers. They speak of the mysteries of the universe and the benefits of knowledge rather than the ability to blow things up real good. Of course, some of them are involved in unsavory activities and others have no compunctions about using their powers to gain a little creature comforts, but they rarely look at it that way. Scientific principles remain at the core of their being: if they didn't care about them, they wouldn't care to find out what's wrong with *The Edge of Midnight* universe and their magic would thus serve no real philosophical purpose beyond the odd flashy light show.

Membership in the Few also serves as a convenient excuse to cover up one's addiction to magic. If you're pursuing deeper truths and trying to uncover the source of your world's misery, well then, it's okay to throw a car around once in awhile or heat a doorknob to the melting point, right? Magic addiction among warlocks who belong to the Few is only marginally higher than that of other warlocks, but when coupled with the ominous implications they uncover about *The Edge of Midnight* universe, it does lead to more instances of insanity and mental breakdown. The Few are tough by their very nature, but the twin burdens of magic and endless existential pondering can exact a brutal cost: warlocks who walk that path successfully are among the most resilient people on the planet.

stairs have long since rotted away. In order to reach it, you need enough skill in Gravity magic to float up the collapsed stairwell.) The texts may be stacked on shelves as in a normal library, or dispersed in some secretive way like microfilm or tape recordings. Most are designed for fairly rapid transport, allowing the library to be packed up and moved if word of its existence reaches the wrong ears. Folding shelves which can be detached via handles and moved in a hurry are a common sight. And while warlocks may study there, they are usually forbidden from practicing magic on site. It draws unwanted attention to the location and it may damage the books.

Testing Grounds

For outright expression of the lessons the libraries hold, warlocks must find somewhere where they can practice in safety. The dangers of magic and the very visible consequences in case things go wrong require both isolation and a proper sense of safety. Fortunately, the U.C.'s countryside contains vast tracts of abandoned wilderness, and a warlock with the time to get there can find any number of ideal spots to hone his skills to perfection. The key phrase there is "time." Such areas must be far away from any sort of habitation, requiring lengthy drives and the possibility of becoming lost as well... a lot of effort if you simply want a couple hours of testing your new theories.

Consequently, secure testing grounds within easy reach of the city have sprung up as well. The best feature amenities such as soundproof walls and thick fixtures made of stone or concrete: more than enough to hide the presence of even the most spectacular effects. Simpler examples include hastily fortified basements and even just rooms with no windows in the center of a building. Sensible warlocks make use of junkyards or city dumps, where human contact is minimal and destruction much less likely to call any attention to itself. (Ironically, most gaunt districts would make excellent testing grounds... were it not for all the gaunts there. They are bereft of law enforcement and full of crumbling detritus that serve both as practice fodder and concealment for any aftereffects. Pity the locals are physically pained by magic use and would descend en masse on any warlock stupid enough to announce himself in their presence.)

Not only must warlocks watch out for unwanted visitors when using testing grounds, but the very circumstances of secrecy can cause unforeseen problems. Underground rooms can collapse on top of the warlock if his abilities inadvertently weaken their foundations, while areas without sufficient ventilation can lead to suffocation as fire effects rapidly consume the available oxygen. Open areas side-step these problems, but run a greater risk of discovery, and the constant fear of being spotted limits the effectiveness with which a warlock can practice. Those sites which find the right balance of factors — urban locale, proper concealment, and adequate safety features — are almost as prized as original books, and their loss may be felt by the warlocks of an entire city if the authorities compromise it. (Crystal ball squads have been known to set up testing grounds to allow warlocks to gather there before catching them in the act: a practice referred to as "honey-potting" in the warlock community.)

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Control of these locales transforms the already murky warlock world into an absolute minefield. Those with a library, book or testing ground can gain valuable connections (and not a little leverage) by allowing other warlocks to use them. Trusted friends mean increased safety and someone to turn to should the crystal ball squad come calling. That same equation may make other warlocks wary, however. What price will the owner of a secret library exact for access to his texts? What hoops will the warlock need to jump through in order to get the address of a safe house or the keys to a reliable testing ground? No one can be sure if the person they're talking to is a legitimate ally or a member of the crystal ball squad trying to ensnare them in a vicious trap. Paranoia runs rampant which, when coupled with the increasing mental instability that magic addiction brings, can turn otherwise friendly warlocks against each other. Reliable resources devoid of any skullduggery are as rare as gold and twice as valuable.

And warlocks aren't the only people with fingers in this particular pie. Organized criminals set up testing grounds or libraries as payment for services rendered by a warlock. Their connections also allow books and similar forbidden objects to reach warlocks safely, and the protection they offer keeps such elements safe from prying eyes. Enterprising crime syndicates can set up such locations as a way of luring warlocks into their service, leveraging them to assist in robbery, smuggling, and even contract killing. The bait may ensnare other warlocks as well: those hoping for a reliable place to study in peace and who don't learn the cost until it is too late. Of course, mob bosses need to exercise care with warlocks, since they can cause far more damage than a normal dupe, but many find that playing straight with a harried magic-user pays off

handsomely in the long run. A grateful warlock may be happy to cause a little mayhem at the mob's behest, and might even do it for much less money so long as the intangibles are worth the risk. The syndicates' involvement in warlocks' underground networks speaks further to the supposed "corruption" which magic brings, giving anti-warlock forces another stick with which to beat their harried targets.

Whether mob-owned or individually controlled, whether well-established or temporary, the testing grounds, libraries, and book drops used by the warlock community constitute an invisible web linking them all together. Every serious magic-user belongs to it in one form or another, forming a link in a grand chain even if he's not consciously aware of it. Dilettantes poke at it briefly before moving on to the next fad, while politicians in Nova Roma speak of it as an insidious conspiracy growing stronger each day. But no matter how much law enforcement tries to destroy the web forever, it simply reforms with new threads to replace the old. Compromised locations are re-established elsewhere, drop boxes and mailing addresses switch to more reliable destinations, and for every warlock forced to recant his ways or give them up lest the addiction grow too strong, another waits to fill his place — eager for the quick path to power or the unimaginable enlightenment which magic use purportedly brings.

MAKING PEACE WITH THE SYSTEM

A life on the run takes its toll from even the most stalwart individual, and dirty little secrets have a way of consuming the very façade they're intended to protect. Such are the choices for the serious warlock: the price he must pay for his power. That is, unless he decides to submit to the very system which persecutes him: to play for the home team and assist the government in understanding (and perhaps even destroying) his own kind.

Other warlocks refer to them as traitors and Judas-goats, and often respond to them with a fury that no non-warlock opponent would ever face. But if you find a life of crime repugnant, if you have no wish to spend the rest of your life looking over your shoulder, and if you want very badly to practice your art without hiding it in the basement like some kind of sickness, you usually have no other recourse. Society has carved out a few precious niches where practicing warlocks are tolerated, and as long as you do as you're told, that gilded cage has its share of benefits.

The easiest and most viable way to live openly as a warlock is to join your local crystal ball squad. Otherwise, you can offer your services as a researcher to the national government, or else use peaceful means to lobby for your rights. None of those paths is easy, but they often beat the alternative.



CRYSTAL BALL SQUADS

In the days before the anti-magic laws, the papers were filled with lurid tales of warlocks rampaging across the country. Organized crime realized how useful warlocks could be in their turf wars. High society dabblers overdosed on the power and threw themselves off of skyscrapers expecting to be able to fly. While the White Light ended the external threat of the Order of Nu, the warlocks running around the U.C. threatened to tear the country apart. Warlocks themselves weren't automatically bad, but the people gaining notoriety for their kind were certainly selfish, greedy, and in some cases, sociopathic. For every story about a good or altruistic warlock, there were a dozen that illustrated the wickedness and debauchery of their kind.

Enter the crystal ball squads.

HISTORY

The first major shift in the nation's attitude came in Gateway, where mayor Archibald Loomis was fed up with the way warlocks were running rampant within his city. At the time, the rumblings of the Anti-Sorcery Act had reached City Hall. Loomis couldn't wait for the slow gears of the national government to grind out something to protect his constituents. He came up with the initial idea after remembering that home-grown warlocks had assisted the Allies during the war. Why couldn't the same thing be done on a smaller scale? Why not set up a group of warlocks tasked specifically to capture other members of their kind? The police commissioner initially balked at the idea, but Loomis won him over with a cold convincing argument. When the next magic-user cuts down a pair of officers during a getaway, who will the public mourn for? Two good cops dying in the line of duty, or just a couple of warlocks the world is better off without?

As expected, the press mocked the idea within moments of the unveiling. Religious leaders pointed to it as a further example of the unraveling of Gateway's morality and how Loomis should be impeached for his hubris. Political opponents were outraged that Loomis would not only condone sorcery, but use taxpayer money to fund it. Headlines like "Fight Fireballs with

Fireballs" and "Loony Loomis Creates Crystal Ball Squads" ruthlessly ridiculed the move. Initially, it seemed that Loomis had laid a colossal ostrich egg with his progressive idea and everyone was waiting for it to crack.

But then something funny happened. Within a week, three of Gateway's most notorious warlocks had either been placed in custody or put in the ground. Thomas "Tommy Gun" Guinado was apprehended after a spectacular battle that started in his favorite restaurant and raged all the way up Constanza Street. Oscar Gutman went quietly, promising to supply a list of everyone that he sold magic books to in exchange for a reduced sentence. Anabelle Nowinski went out swinging, taking two members of the newly formed squad with her in an explosion on a train bound for Paradiso. Each of these warlocks were well known to the public: notorious criminals who flaunted the law with seeming impunity. Nowinski alone was responsible for the deaths of at least four Gateway police officers before her end at the hands of the crystal ball squad. The efficiency of the squad had been proven and public opinion changed. The name "crystal ball squad" stuck, but it was no longer a term of derision. The members became overnight celebrities and even detractors had to concede that they were a necessary evil.

At the same time, however, the national climate took a change for the worse. What was once simmering resentment towards warlocks soon became outright hostility. The backers of the Anti-Sorcery Act rose to prominence in Nova Roma. Loomis's experiment, though successful, was soon faced with a backlash, threatening to outlaw the crystal ball squad almost as soon as it had established itself. The *Gateway Lighthouse* article that proclaimed the passing of the Act also wondered if it spelled doom for the city's nascent crystal ball squad.

But Mayor Loomis was not about to let his pet project be destroyed by anyone. He knew the squads were his ticket to another term in office, so he lobbied hard for their exemption from the new laws. He argued that anyone with any warlock abilities would become an outlaw and that nobody would have the ability to stop them. If all magic was outlawed, the squad could not use its abilities to serve and protect the populace. While warlocks could now be prosecuted for using magic publicly, that didn't help the police who would be sent in to capture these individuals. The government had planned for special licenses for individuals who they felt they needed to work as warlocks. Why not let that go forward and use magic to help the Commonwealth destroy it? Loomis's public appeals brought his idea into the national eye. He wanted it primarily for his boys in the squad, but the government saw potential in the idea. The rules behind licensing were very strict, but they could be adjusted depending on the political climate. When the anti-magic fervor lessened a bit, the government announced that they would consider licensing warlocks. The first recipients (and the only one to get their license without going through the lengthy approval process) were the members of Mayor Loomis's crystal ball squad.

Soon afterwards, the other U.C. cities found themselves in a race to make their own anti-magic units. Paradiso was the next city to form a squad. The date naturally coincided with the release of Privateer Picture's star-studded *The Wicked*



CHAPTER FIVE: WARLOCKS



Ways of the Warlock, a piece of flagrant agit-prop with as many inaccuracies about the warlock condition as a real warlock could stomach. Terminus was next, followed by Central City a day afterwards. Nova Roma created a squad a few months later, though most citizens viewed it as a place for the NLEB to cherry-pick their own pet warlocks. New Eden was the last city to develop a crystal ball squad, after a heated battle between the newly elected mayor (who ran with the idea as one of his big campaign promises) and the police commissioner (who was the nephew of the previous mayor).

The struggle for the identity of the crystal ball squads began one of the most heated political rivalries of the time. National Law Enforcement Bureau Director Edmund Mercer wanted any and all warlock investigations to fall under the banner of the NLEB. Mercer was (and still is) a huge supporter of the Anti-Sorcery Act, and he felt that the Bureau was the only organization with the resources to apprehend warlocks properly. Mayor Loomis saw this move as another

grab for power on Mercer's part, one that would hurt his brainchild more than it helped. Luckily for him, the NLEB had its hands full with the mob. Agents weren't impervious to warlock abilities any more than a regular beat cop, and their lack of knowledge about the local magic scene could cost them dearly. Local warlocks were better informed about their cities and could match outlaws in power. After a brief debate, the national government agreed with Loomis, and attached an amendment to the Anti-Sorcery Act which called for the creation of crystal ball squads. It also gave Mercer his first real defeat, which he has yet to forgive.

ORGANIZATION

The crystal ball squads of the major U.C. cities are very small compared to the amount of press that they receive. Most squads include around a dozen people. Of that number, roughly half are warlocks. The squads are based out of the main precinct house in the city. The headquarters is often a good tip on how the squad is perceived by the populace. The Terminus squad has a separate building across the street from the main precinct, donated by "private citizens" without government support. The New Eden squad is run out of a musty sub-basement of the central precinct, dubbed "The Crypt" by the local press. Paradiso and Gateway have more legitimate accom-

modations, however, akin to those of any other police division.

The warlocks are the stars of the show in the squads. They have to have squeaky clean records and no ties to the criminal warlock community. Getting on the squad means being held to a much higher standard than most departments use for the regular beat cops. Warlocks are illegal, so many police don't trust them on general principle. While the press will eat up the legal warlocks angle, the squads are still new enough that they encounter a lot of resentment from the regular police. Many of these officers spent years collaring warlocks. Asking them to share an office with one is going to take time.

Even warlocks need to have warrants typed up and paperwork filled out. In addition to investigating officers, each squad has an adjunct policeman who handles all of the clerical and administrative duties. These officers are usually the ones coordinating investigations with the rest of the police force. Top squads like Gateway and Paradiso have warlocks in these capacities to allow contact with non-warlocks on a daily

WARLOCKS AND DETECTIVES

basis. People are less likely to fear something they see and talk to every day. Still, it's hard to find a warlock with good typing skills, or a good typist who dabbles in theoretical physics, so many other crystal ball squads use non-warlocks in that capacity. Most crystal ball squads have a few non-warlock detectives as well: solid officers with a good track record for collaring warlock criminals and who don't mind working with magic-using partners.

Crystal Ball Squads by City

The following is a brief overview of the crystal ball squads in the six major U.C. cities. GMs are welcome to replace any of the NPCs mentioned with player characters if appropriate.

Central City's crystal ball squad is led by Maxine Tabb. She realized early on that Jack Drago has little love for warlocks, so her squad targets the warlocks of the rival Scarelli mob almost exclusively, leaving the rest to do as they please. The word on this policy is out, and freelance warlocks are flocking to Central City. The ones brave enough to deal with Scarelli are finding their paydays getting better and better as his regulars are put behind bars by Maxine's dogged pursuits. The ones who don't get mixed up in the Scarelli mob find that they aren't bothered unless they do something obviously illegal.

The last large city to get a crystal ball squad was New Eden. The chief was reluctant to bring warlocks onto the force, but with the popularity of the squad in Gateway, public opinion forced his hand. The crystal ball squad here is young, hungry, and still has plenty to prove to the other boys in blue. While the tension between the regular beat cops and their new magic-using colleagues isn't hostile, it is, at the very least, uncooperative. One bright spot is that the regular police force in New Eden shares the same bias against the NLEB office in town. This attitude has brought the crystal ball squad and the local NLEB Agents closer together.

The squad in Nova Roma is essentially run and controlled by the NLEB. All of its members have ties to the Bureau. Many are former Agents themselves, with one or two token local cops to keep relations cordial. NLEB Director Mercer has little love for warlocks in his organization. While he doesn't discriminate against legal warlocks, many who do join the NLEB find themselves stuck in low-level positions with a very rare chance to go out into the field. They often transfer to the Nova Roma squad to get any action. Luckily, the squad here is one of the largest in the country with around fifteen members.

The first crystal ball squad is still the most famous: Gateway's. All of the other squads in the U.C. run from their model. The city took a gamble that paid off. The Gateway squad is probably the closest a city government can get to an unqualified success. Mayor Loomis was counting on riding the popularity of the squad to a third term in office. However, recent rumblings from the press have suggested the leader of the squad, Lt. Newton "Mac" Maclane, is thinking of running for office himself... and he will likely have the backing of warlock Councilman Casper Lang if he does (see page 186–187 of the *Edge of Midnight* core rulebook for more on Casper). If he wins, Gateway could be the first city in the U.C. with a licensed warlock mayor.

Terminus technically has a crystal ball squad. There are offices in the main police building and the papers will occasionally report the arrest of a warlock due in some part to the squad's effort. Anyone in the city will tell you that Déjà Vu has the squad firmly in pocket, however. The captain of the squad has been seen at the strange masquerades thrown by Papa Miroir in his decaying hideouts. Warlocks coming into town not willing to pay "fines" to the squad or sign on with Déjà Vu often go missing soon after they arrive. Miroir has many friends on both sides of the law, and the squad is a big ally in his attempt to gain control of the city.

Paradiso is a city used to being in the limelight. When Gateway made a big splash with its squad, the mayor was incensed. Nobody upstaged The City Where Dreams Are Made. He called in markers from his friends in the studios and raided the warlocks on their payroll (many working in visual effects departments). The Paradiso crystal ball squad is made up of some of the most powerful warlocks on the West Coast. Unfortunately, what they have in power they lack in police procedure. The mayor appointed his nephew to run the squad, hoping that the familial connection would let him keep a tight leash around his pet project. But the nephew's general incompetence outweighs any hope of personal control. The good news for criminal warlocks is that in Paradiso, it's easy to get the crystal ball squad to chase its own tail. The bad news is that if you're caught, you're probably going to end up in a coffin instead of a jail cell, because the warlock cops don't like to fill out paperwork here.

PURPOSE

The number one priority of the crystal ball squads is to enforce the Anti-Sorcery Act in local jurisdictions. According to the law, any crimes committed by magic are patently illegal and as such, are referred to the local crystal ball squad. While the laws are national laws and technically the purview of the NLEB, they leave the enforcement in the hands of the local squads. This jurisdictional split is the result of some nasty squabbling between NLEB Director Edmund Mercer and Gateway Mayor Loomis during the first few months of the Gateway squad's existence. The national government eventually decided in favor of Mayor Loomis and his handling of the situation. It doesn't matter if the warlock ripped off a bank vault door or suped up his getaway car with some Kinetic abilities. Any evidence of magic use puts it into the hands of the local squad. If they need help from the NLEB, they'll call.

The squad captains in each city tend to play a little more fast and loose with this ruling. They don't want to alienate either side by taking investigations away from the police or the NLEB. The captains have come up with two unofficial categories for crimes done by magic. It's a functional compromise to keep eyes on the streets instead of cops squabbling in an office over jurisdiction. Crystal ball squads investigate the crimes where magic was the primary method of commission. The regular police get the case if magic was used as an accessory to the crime. There are a few cases that blur these lines and do cause a scramble for who gets the collar, but that's always the case no matter if it's warlock versus mundane or Homicide versus Vice.

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Crystal ball squads investigate crimes where magic was used in the commission of the crime itself. If someone was killed by magic, they get the case. If someone melts the tires of an armored car and accomplices force the doors open, they get the case. The general rule is that if the crime couldn't have been committed in a particular manner without a warlock, it goes to the crystal ball squad. Another thing to consider is how big the magical effects were. The flashier the magic, the more likely it is to go to the squad. A warlock who can snap bridge cables is very likely to make short work of a police cruiser or two, meaning that you better bring in somebody capable of matching that power. A clash between warlocks may be brutal and destructive, but it will hopefully be resolved quickly.

When magic is used as an accessory to the commission of a crime, the regular police handle it. While using magic is technically a national crime, in many cases, it is an incidental use after the fact. Warlock accessory to a crime includes using magic to evade pursuit or to gain access to the crime scene (such as floating yourself up to a window to break in). The cities with good squad/police relations will still bring in a warlock to confirm magic use. Crystal ball squad investigators can't detect the magic itself, but they are trained more extensively in noticing details that point to magic use.

The crystal ball squads also keep tabs on known warlocks in the city. This offers the squad a batch of the usual suspects to round up whenever a magic-based crime is committed. Being aware of which warlock knows what sciences can speed

up an investigation immensely. Even if the culprit on the list is not guilty, he can probably point the squad down the right back alley. Many warlocks prefer getting caught by the crystal ball squad since they feel the squad will give them a fair shake. If a regular cop finds out that you can throw a brick at him with your brain, he's very likely to draw down on you just to be safe.

Most squads also keep a few warlocks on their list free and clear of any trouble from the law. Some are active informants, gladly selling out their warlock brethren for a few bucks or dropped charges. Others are clueless patsies, waiting to be brought in on trumped-up charges and either quickly convicted or sent back onto the streets to get to the places the crystal ball squad can't reach.

On many of these "black magic lists," the squads keep names of people who could be warlocks but have exhibited no actual abilities. The cops don't jump at every accusation like they used to, but they don't exactly forget it either. Someone who could be a warlock could just as easily be a criminal of another stripe. Crystal ball squads also keep track of known associates of warlocks. While the squad can't do anything official, showing up at a person's office and shaking things up can make an illegal warlock's life miserable.

The most recent initiative undertaken by the squads is the infiltration of so-called "secret societies" made up of warlocks. The squads have been aware of groups like Theta 73 for a while, but some have recently sent in undercover officers to get

more information on such groups. The squads were inspired by the NLEB's attempts to get Agents inside various organized crime rings. Such operations are generally known to a very select few individuals, usually the squad captain, the undercover officer, and possibly one or two more members of the local police. Squads which are friendly with each other have exchanged officers into different cities for more authentic cover stories.

One of the unspoken goals of most crystal ball squads is to change the public perception of magic. The warlocks who serve and protect don't like being lumped in with the rest, so they do what they can to go above and beyond what people think of their kind. They know that with every magic-based murder or big magic event, that goal slips farther away. A warlock



MAGIC USE IN THE LINE OF DUTY

One of the real perks in belonging to a crystal ball squad is the ability to use magic openly in the course of one's duties. Officially, departments frown on magic use, since it reminds the populace of the uncomfortably thin line between licensed warlocks and criminal warlocks. But the sheer intimidation factor of a cop using magic can balance out those concerns admirably, and when the criminal in question is a magic-user himself, it's often the only way to bring him down.

Crystal ball squads use magic under the same rough rules that other officers discharge their firearms. If the squad member feels it's necessary to protect a member of the public from harm, to collar a fleeing criminal, or as an otherwise unavoidable means of engaging in an investigation, he can use magic. He must file an after-action report each time, explaining why he did it and what results were obtained. Technically, the law requires rigorous justification for even a whiff of magic, but with most city squads, the reports are a formality. Superior officers will let squad members be as long as they don't "spook the herd" too much and exercise reasonable restraint.

Crystal ball squads also receive dispensation to practice their magic the same way another officer might spend time on the shooting range. The department secures a particular location for the squad's use — usually an abandoned lot or somewhere far from prying eyes — where members may come to hone their techniques. As with on-duty magic use, they must file a report each time they do this, explaining how long they spent practicing, what magical abilities they used, and the pertinence of those abilities to their work. Practicing grounds for crystal ball squads are off limits to anyone but squad members themselves, and woe be to any outsiders caught trespassing.

joining the force knows that he walks a very fine line. The rest of the warlocks call him traitor. The regular cops think he's corrupt. Most of the world is very frightened of him. When the crystal ball squads can show the world that there are mere men and women behind the badges and the wands, their jobs may largely be done.

METHODS

Recruiting warlocks into the crystal ball squads is a tricky business. If a captain recruits already-practicing warlocks into the ranks, he is rewarding criminal activity. If he teaches willing subjects to become warlocks, he's spreading an illegal practice and is technically a criminal himself. Even if apprentices get their license, what prevents the officer from learning the basics and then abandoning his post a few weeks later? This dilemma has faced squads from day one and still stings

them whenever an officer goes rogue or picks up heat from nasty press. How can you find a single warlock who balances these ideas, much less a squad of a dozen or more?

When someone applies to be part of a crystal ball squad, he must disclose whether or not he is currently a warlock. If he doesn't have warlock powers, he's typically assigned to the administrative side of the squad. Squads prefer to train members who have been in the squad rather than outsiders. When warlocks do join the squad from outside, they are offered amnesty as long as they have never used their magic in the commission of another crime. If evidence crops up later to the contrary, the officer is immediately taken into custody. The Nova Roma squad is even tougher on this guideline than those in other cities. Squad members in Nova Roma must sign a document stating that if evidence comes to light implicating them in illegal warlock activities previous to their time on the squad, they consent to termination and being dosed with Antidox.

The crystal ball squads occupy a strange place in the world of law enforcement. Most departments keep them separate but equal to the regular force. The squad members aren't brought in on a case until the regular police decide there is magic involved. That means that some departments will bring in the squad at the last possible moment, afraid that the warlocks are going to muck things up. The New Eden squad has suffered this fate a few times, brought in on a dead-end case and then blamed as the reason the investigation is cold.

The squad is primarily given cases where magic was used to commit a crime. Generally, the more high profile the crime, the more of the squad's resources are assigned to solving the case. The regular police generally wash their hands of any cases turned over to the squad. When the squad gets a case, it is up to them to break it. The police are still generally cooperative, but the warlock detectives more or less need to make the collar on their own. Most of the time, the warlocks are perfectly fine with this arrangement. Warlocks prefer solitude and independence, and this translates to police work as well. If the rest of the department ignores them, so be it. They have their fellow squad members to depend upon. In most cases, they feel that's all they need.

The squad also consults on cases where magic was used during the commission of another crime. In these cases, the use of magic is secondary to the crime itself. The regular police keep these cases for themselves. At the detective's discretion, they may bring in a crystal ball squad member as a specialist to help with the magic side of things. While the squad detective can offer suggestions and opinions, any official movement on the case must go through the police department itself.

Often, the line that divides the cases handled by the squad and those handled by other police is a very thin one. Many times, departments wanting to keep a collar under their banner will declare a crime in which magic was used as an accessory to some other crime. It's quite the political game sometimes, and can lead to a great deal of friction. In jurisdictions where the NLEB may be involved, things get worse. Hardball tactics over proper jurisdiction engender a lot of bad feelings, and in towns where the squad and the other cops are especially divided, jockeying for a case is almost a daily occurrence.

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This dance gets even more complicated when a case involves magic used in a subtle way. Not every warlock relishes the idea of murder by lightning bolt. The victim is still dead if it looks like a freak electrical accident instead. Thanks to the effectiveness of crystal ball squads, warlock killers are starting to wise up and make their spells look like accidents and bad luck. While such cases fall under the auspice of the crystal ball squads, it can take some time before the police even realize a warlock was behind a crime. The politics in dealing with such occurrences may be the first real obstacle that crystal ball squads encounter in their meteoric rise.

Detecting magic, therefore, has become an area of great interest to the squads. The methods as they now stand are usually due to top-notch detective work rather than counter magic or mystic mumbo-jumbo. The squads collaborate with forensic labs and crime scene investigators to pick up on the subtle clues left by magic on the scene. Glass breaks differently when shattered by Kinetic energy instead of a hammer. A lack of accelerants or fuel in an arson case points to a warlock lighting the fire. A crystal ball squad member has been trained to look for signs like these, and a smart beat cop will at least check with his local squad when considering such evidence.

Many crystal ball squads are working on ways to tie a specific spell back to a specific warlock. If fingerprints and ballistics are valuable methods in linking crimes to criminals, the squads hope that someday they will be able to do the same thing with magical effects. Admissible proof has eluded them so far, though their efforts have made great strides in establishing the general *modus operandi* of well-known warlocks.

Some warlock cops have also tried to study the *voudoun* styles popular in Terminus. Rumors abound that masters like Papa Miroir are able to link a specific spell back to the caster. Unfortunately, due to the general suspicion of *voudoun* practitioners (as well as the close relationship between the Terminus squad and Déjà Vu), such attempts to use that ability as a crime-solving device have so far been fruitless.

NPCs

Ward Fremont: Captain of the Paradiso Crystal Ball Squad

Open up the society pages of any Paradiso newspaper and you will see the name Ward Fremont in bold. Fremont spends a lot of time in the public eye at movie premieres and charity dinners. He has a lot of pictures taken with notable people hanging on the walls of his rarely-used office. The officers on his squad like his hands-off leadership style, since tracking warlocks requires much different tactics than tracking bank robbers.



Fremont spent most of his time before joining the force as a technical advisor for the studios. He made sure that the actors on *The Wicked Ways of the Warlock* knew how to walk the walk and talk the talk. He landed the spot after his uncle the mayor called in a few favors and got Fremont a license to use magic. Such licenses are rare outside law enforcement and the military. Because of this, the press often suggests that Fremont's squad is soft on warlocks with connections to the rich and famous in Paradiso.

The truth is that Fremont is soft on everybody. In the haste to set up Paradiso's crystal ball squad (and take the spotlight off Gateway), the city council made a political choice instead of a practical one. Fremont has decent skill as a warlock but next to none as a policeman. His connections to the mayor's office have kept him in business and other warlocks find it easy to dodge his patrolmen. Under his leadership, Paradiso's crystal ball squad has become a textbook example of all sizzle and no steak.

Fremont thinks the best service that he can do is to keep himself in the public eye. The more mentions in the paper he gets, the more prejudice against magic use will decline. After all, if glamorous movie star Lola Fontaine can shake hands with a warlock, they can't all be bad. Fremont knows his station and is doing the best that he can with the methods that he knows. He hopes that one of his officers will develop into a stronger leader. If that happens, Fremont will gladly step down and do what he does best: get his picture taken.

Ward Fremont

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 6, Build 5, Gut 6, Moxie 7, Smoothness 4.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Athletics 5, Brawl 6, Bureaucracy 5, Etiquette 6, Evasion 4, Fast Talk 6, Firearms 3, Gravity 3, Intimidation 5, Kinetics 3, Melee 3, Perception 3, Stealth 3, Streetwise 1.

Backgrounds: Magic License, Magical Aptitude.

Profession: Officer of the Law 1, Politician 3.

Nicole Devane: The One Good Apple

There are two things Terminus is known for: *voudoun* and corruption. The newest member of the Terminus crystal ball squad hopes to change those perceptions. She is the only member of the squad who doesn't use *voudoun* style in her magic and she is, for the time being, not taking any money from Déjà Vu.

Devane's appointment to the task force was intended to quiet the agitators of the city's press. A botched raid had left two men dead and implicated the crystal ball squad in tipping off the warlocks who escaped. Nicole was brought in from Nova Roma as an olive branch to the department's critics. She had a few cases under her belt and could always be trotted out as an example of the squad's desire to improve itself. At the same time, what could one person hope to do in the oppressive heat of Terminus to stop the inevitable?

WARLOCKS AND DETECTIVES

Devane has shocked her superiors with her successes. The majority of them have been against warlocks who don't belong to Déjà Vu, or those who were small time enough to minimally impact the organization with their loss. Nicole is biding her time. She knows she can't count on help from her fellow officers, but she is quietly building a case against the most blatantly corrupt officials. When the time comes, she plans on calling in all of her markers in Nova Roma to send in the NLEB and sweep away the worst of them. In return, she will be named head of the crystal ball squad. After this astounding victory, her newfound power will allow her to deal with the rest of the scum in the city.

And yet, Terminus may still get a hold of her. She has found herself attracted to a handsome young executive whom she met at a recent masquerade ball. Her thoughts keep returning to the dangerous eyes beneath his feathered mask and how dashing he looked in his tuxedo that night. Nicole has spent a lot of time trying to discover the man's identity to no avail so far. But she's still a cop and cops don't give up so easily. Is hers a tale of true love blossoming, or was he sent by one of her enemies in Terminus to destroy her?

Nicole Devane

Attributes: Brains 6, Brawn 4, Build 5, Gut 6, Moxie 6, Smoothness 4.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Athletics 6, Brawl 6, Bureaucracy 4, Evasion 4, Firearms 5, Gravity 4, Intimidation 5, Magnetism 2, Melee 3, Perception 3, Pick Lock 2, Puzzles 4, Stealth 3, Streetwise 4, Tensile Energy 6.

Backgrounds: Magic License, Magical Aptitude, Mean Streets.

Profession: Blue Collar Worker 1, Officer of the Law 2, Rogue Scientist 2, Street Tough 1.

Lonnie Vidal: The Tired Detective

Lonnie came out of the stockyards of Central City. His father was a rail man, and his mother worked at a diner that fed the train crews who came through the city. Lonnie knew he could live that life easily, but something inside him wanted to do more. He wanted to be something better. He joined the Central City police force at a very young age and spent a lot of time in the poor and gaunt neighborhoods. Vidal built up a rapport with the gaunts, even as they began taking over the railway jobs that men like his father held.

He accepted the position on the crystal ball squad because he believed in Maxine's Tabb's plan (see page 116). Illegal warlocks in the employ of the Scarelli mob were a top problem when the squad was formed. Those first few years were right out of the radio dramas. Good men died and worse men went to jail. Lonnie learned magic as part of the job, and was promoted to detective thanks to his connections with the gaunts. They wanted Scarelli eliminated just as badly as he did. His history with the gaunts made his magic use easier for them to bear, and he remains one of the few warlocks who can walk the city's

gaunt districts without fear. He was always careful using his abilities around them, and they repaid him for his discretion and friendship with full support. Two or three times, Boss Scarelli was only minutes away from capture at his hands.

But time wears on a man's beliefs. Maxine still chases after Scarelli, but the city hasn't changed. The gaunts still look up to him, but he wonders if he is worthy of their loyalty. He is starting to realize why most of the old cops he knew when he joined the force retired as drunks or got fat from the years they were on the take. He's a bit surprised that Jack Drago hasn't called him up and offered him a bribe. Lonnie isn't sure what his answer would be if that happens.

Lonnie Vidal

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 6, Build 6, Gut 6, Moxie 4, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 30.

Skills: Athletics 6, Brawl 6, Evasion 4, Firearms 5, Intimidation 5, Kinetics 4, Melee 3, Perception 3, Stealth 3, Streetwise 7.

Backgrounds: Magic License, Magical Aptitude, Mean Streets.

Profession: Officer of the Law 1, Street Tough 3.

GOVERNMENT RESEARCH (DEPARTMENT OF STRATEGY)

Some people believe that the national government had this in mind all along when the Twelve Days of Chaos took place. They engineered the riots, drove the scientists out of their ivory towers, and scooped them all up to make more direct use of their knowledge. If that is the case, it succeeded admirably. The national government now has a large number of the country's most prominent warlocks on its payroll, allowing them to control their sorcery and find ways of curtailing or eliminating it in everyone else.

The Department of Strategy in Nova Roma has an entire division dedicated to magical research: off the books and subjected to zero public scrutiny. Here, warlocks in the employ of the government push their powers to the breaking point, while being subjected to various pokes and prods from more mundane scientists. Their research embraces a plethora of topics: the physical principles which make magic possible, the way increased knowledge can exploit those principles, means of controlling or shutting down the mind's ability to warp reality, and practical application of warlock abilities for government use.

The program encompassing their activities has no name; it is filed under a shadowy branch of research with the innocuous label Program #6695. Those involved in it have cover stories about the work they do: unspecified weapons research or

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intelligence analysis of a far more mundane variety. They operate out of a hidden sublevel of the STAR headquarters building in Nova Roma (see *The Naked City*, page 65), accessible only through an “executive” elevator found in an otherwise normal wing of the massive complex. The sublevel itself is a warlock’s dream: catalogued books on scientific theory, rescued from public burnings or appropriated from arrested warlocks; laboratories built of reinforced steel and concrete designed to allow warlocks to test their abilities in all manner of ways; monitoring equipment to gauge specifics of temperature, torque, and density; and a biological research facility where warlock blood and skin samples can be analyzed. Thick files detail recorded warlock sightings, specific incidents of magic use, details on appearances of the mark (complete with photographs), and a list of every warlock known to the national government. For magic users forced to eke out a precarious existence on the fringes of society, such a facility would be like Shangri-La.

Unfortunately, access is nearly impossible and indeed, the only warlocks who know it exists are those on the Department of Strategy’s payroll. Most of them were offered the job following arrest, threatened either with signing on to the program or spending the rest of their lives in prison. In practical terms, they remain imprisoned even now. They are well-paid for their services and can request any creature comforts they wish, but must live in government-sanctioned homes under constant surveillance. They may not leave the premises without permission, and then only with an armed escort of NLEB Agents. Their documentation has been confiscated: passports, driver’s licenses, even Nova Roma bus cards. Chauffeured sedans take them to work at the STAR building every morning and drive them home every night. None of them have the keys to either the labs themselves or even their own homes.

In exchange for this existence, they are expected to be at Program #6695’s disposal for whatever experiments the Department of Strategy sees fit to conduct. They must submit to rigorous verbal interviews about the nature of their powers, the effects they can create, and the formulae they have developed to help further their “enlightenment.” They may use the library under supervision, and then only those texts which their handlers deem necessary. Tests and experiments take place on a daily basis, allowing them to revel in their power but usually pushing them past the limits of their abilities and leaving them spent and exhausted. Doctors subject them to medical exams both before and after any testing: performing blood cell counts, studying reflexes and stimulus response, and various other forms of anatomical unpleasantness.

If a mark appears, things get even worse: the department promptly isolates the warlock for a brutal battery of examinations of the phenomena, including painful biopsies of affected tissue. The department’s archives are filled with glass jars holding tiny vestigial hands, glowing patches of skin, and eyeballs which continue to shoot tiny arcs of electricity long after they have been detached from their owners. Nor is such treatment the worst punishment the department can inflict upon its warlock subjects: Antidox emerged under Program #6695, after all, and they had to test it on somebody...

WHO ARE THE NINE?

SPOILER ALERT: Don’t read this sidebar unless you are familiar with the great mystery at the heart of *The Edge of Midnight* as detailed in Chapter Nine of the core rulebook.

As everyone in the U.C. knows, a cabal of nine warlocks created the White Light which brought an end to the war against the Order of Nu and secured victory for the Unified Commonwealth. As only the Few suspect, that act also marked the beginning of the *Edge of Midnight* universe, and the nine warlocks have not been seen or heard from since. According to canon, that’s because they don’t exist: not in the Commonwealth anyway. They were the nine men most responsible for the creation of the atomic bomb, whose detonation in Los Alamos in 1945 created the Commonwealth and the remainder of the *Edge of Midnight* world. The U.C.’s citizens sense them as a sort of collective memory: imprinted along with their identities and now treated as a combination of forgotten history and folk legend.

The Few are extremely interested in them, however, and may be pursuing them as a part of their ongoing quest to unravel the secrets of their world. While they themselves cannot be found, certain artifacts and papers of theirs may have crossed the void, giving hints of their existence and perhaps the hope to continue looking. A brief list of their names is below; all of them played a key role in the development of the atomic bomb. Players and GMs interested in learning more about their lives can find countless books, articles, and internet sites about them.

- **Hans Bethe:** German-born theoretical physicist whose work involved calculating the critical mass necessary for a nuclear explosion.
- **Niels Bohr:** Danish scientist, who escaped Nazi occupation in 1943 before working on the Manhattan Project.
- **Arthur Compton:** American scientist whose efforts centered on the enrichment and manufacture of uranium.
- **Enrico Fermi:** Italian who worked on the creation of the first nuclear pile at the University of Chicago.
- **Ernest Lawrence:** American professor of physics at UC Berkeley, noted for the creation and development of the cyclotron.
- **Robert Oppenheimer:** Leader of the Manhattan Project and chief architect of its research.
- **I.I. Rabi:** Polish-born physicist and confidante of Oppenheimer.
- **Leo Szilard:** Hungarian-born physicist who developed the notion of a nuclear chain reaction.
- **Edward Teller:** “The Father of the Hydrogen Bomb,” who pushed for a fusion weapon during his work on the Manhattan Project.

WARLOCKS AND DETECTIVES

For all those horrors, most warlocks who work for the department do so willingly. Their work affords them comforts they could never hope for on the run or in prison. They're allowed to practice their craft and even better: to try to understand the secrets from which it stems. Their addiction to magic keeps them in line no matter what cruelties their masters subject them to. A few even buy into the patriotic malarkey the department periodically spouts at them: believing that their work helps strengthen the Commonwealth and protect it from its enemies.

The doctors and bureaucrats who oversee the department's warlocks (and conduct the bulk of the research) view their charges as exotic zoo animals. They push the warlocks as far as they can, endeavoring to collect the maximum amount of valuable data without snuffing the "resources" out for good. Most are die-hard patriots who accept the harsh realities of their work as the price their country demands for security, and many possess fearsome skills with firearms and personal combat in addition to their scientific proclivities. Along with the warlocks themselves, they have produced an impressive body of work about the magic phenomenon. Those details which they feel the public can handle get filtered down through various means, either to serve as fodder for some anti-magic demagogue or as "tips and tactics" send to local crystal ball squads. The steady stream of information from Program #6695 ensures that its funding (under the Commonwealth's Clandestine Resources budget) remains undisturbed.

Those politicians who know about the program are told that it seeks to find the causes of magic in hopes of eliminating it forever. This isn't entirely untrue: the development of Antidox took place under Program #6695's auspices and similar anti-magic advances periodically emerge from its depths. But more

practical members of the government see it as an invaluable resource. Magic is unmatched by any other human endeavor, and only a fool would ignore its potential. Save the "scourge that must be destroyed" patter for the voters and those politicians too naïve to see the world as it is. Program #6695 will be there as long as magic itself exists, producing methods and even weapons which the government always has a use for. Indeed, whispered rumors among the upper echelons of the U.C. intelligence community speak of a super-secret cabal of warlock agents attached to the program, performing assassinations and similar black-bag operations for the government. Some even believe that their ranks include the warlocks who created the White Light so many years ago: now serving the Commonwealth with even more insidious deeds...

Whatever the truth of such rumors, the national government is not quite as repulsed by magic use as its most outspoken members maintain. As long as it serves "national interests," those in power happily pursue the very research they condemn to their rank-and-file citizenry. They can thus hunt down individual warlocks and keep the masses happy while simultaneously reducing independent "competition" to tolerable levels. The arrangement serves them well, and if the odd subject in Project #6695 acts up and needs to be disposed of, then so what?

There's always more where he came from.

OTHERS

EX-WARLOCKS IN GOVERNMENT EMPLOY

While practicing warlocks in the government are confined to Program #6695, a number of former warlocks work for the government as well, performing scientific research of all varieties. Most of them were professors and researchers, ousted during the Twelve Days of Chaos and forced to turn to the government in order to find work. Unlike those in Program #6695, they are prohibited from practicing magic of any sort. They were mostly just dabblers to begin with and had little in the way of skills that the government could use. They have agreed to renounce their magical practice and limit their scientific inquiry to more mundane matters. Consequently, they are given much more freedom than warlocks in Program #6695. Most have government "bodyguards" who travel with them 24 hours a day to ensure that they don't break the rules, but otherwise, they live quiet mundane lives, allowed to work in their chosen field in exchange for something resembling normality.

Of course, there are a few slips now and then. Some can't resist levitating a few objects in the privacy of their homes or heating up soup without turning on the stove. Their handlers discourage it, but as long as they keep it under wraps and it doesn't compromise their identity, they're allowed occasional indulges. In essence, they're no different than any other upper class dilettantes, whose magic use is tolerated because of their connections.



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WARLOCK RIGHTS MOVEMENTS

If working for the crystal ball squads isn't your thing, and you have no interest in letting the government get its hands on you, your only recourse to live openly as a warlock is to lobby for your rights. The Twelve Days of Chaos produced most of the legislation making magic use a crime. Pro-warlock lobbyists work to erase those laws and restore what they call "the country's healthy interest in intellectual discourse." Though it's an uphill battle, they've managed to make a certain amount of headway.

Most pro-warlock movements are based in Gateway, where tolerance is high and many of the anti-magic laws on the books aren't enforced. The first crystal ball squad was formed here and one of its Councilmen, Casper Lang, is an open warlock (see page 186 of the *Edge of Midnight* core rulebook). Under Lang's auspices, a number of pro-warlock movements have sprung up, pressing for more relaxed laws and even an overturning of the Anti-Sorcery Act.

Their efforts are limited largely to political maneuvering. They don't enjoy much popular support and indeed their members are often targets for anti-warlock extremists. They make up for it with considerable funding (a number of warlock criminals back their cause) and by Machiavellian tactics of unparalleled skill. Their verbal rhetoric is matched only by their ability to dig up dirt, which they use both to press for the release of incarcerated warlocks and to ease back on the police attention paid to magical crimes. Were it not for their efforts, things would be ever worse for warlocks than they are now, with hefty prison sentences for even the most minor transgressions.

They make little headway with the national government; magic is staggeringly unpopular in Nova Roma and though they have offices in the capital, they rarely go out of their way to advertise the fact. Instead, they focus on individual cities, adopting a "divide and conquer" approach which seems to be serving them well. Their leaders believe that a backlash is inevitable and the dirty tricks they employ (to say nothing of their questionable funding) casts a dark cloud on their motivations regardless. But for now, they remain something of a safety valve for those who feel that magic deserves fair treatment under the law, working to keep the harassment of warlocks to an absolute minimum.

There are currently three warlocks rights movements in the U.C., all based in Gateway. Citizens for Scientific Enquiry is the largest. It is an open political organization which sponsors letter-writing campaigns and public education on magic use in addition to direct political lobbying. The League of Academics for Fair Play is more militant, advocating civil resistance and boycotts should the laws remain unchanged. They lack any appreciable numbers, but their membership is more willing to make trouble if things don't go their way. The final group, Veterans for Warlock Rights, feels that the nation owes warlocks a debt of gratitude for ending the war against the Order of Nu, and that the U.C. government needs to respect it. They are very small, but their membership consists largely of non-warlocks who fought in the war, which gives them leverage which the other organizations lack.

All three of them are above-the-board groups: publicly registered with established offices, proper tax returns, and lists of active members. Though they happily engage in underhanded political shenanigans, their activities remain largely legitimate. More radical warlocks who don't wish to use political niceties to demand their rights simply become criminals: using their abilities to stick it to the powers that be or causing direct agitation through acts of destruction. The heads of the lobby groups say good riddance to such tactics. Those who cause any permanent damage are quickly hunted down, and most warlocks agree that terror tactics do far more harm to their cause than good. Better to remain an anonymous criminal, acting quietly to take what society won't give them or a vocal but comparatively well-behaved political activist, than to give fodder to their enemies by embodying the worst of warlock stereotypes.

WARLOCK ENEMIES

Like any other persecuted minorities, warlocks have their share of foes. Whether self-aggrandizing demagogues or angry mobs, whether self-described vigilantes or gaunt mobsters with a grudge, someone's always ready to snuff magic-users on general principles. The prevailing political winds favor those opposed to magic use, and while murder is still murder, warlocks always have worse things to worry about than public exposure and jail time. Some of their biggest headaches are covered below.

(Note that this section covers groups which oppose warlocks as a class; individual warlocks can get anyone angry at them for all kinds of reasons.)

COMMUNITY CONSCIENCE

A number of different anti-warlock groups congregate throughout the nation, most notably the Praetorian's League of Citizens which lectures in schools about the dangers of magic use. Community Conscience, however, steps directly into the heart of the fray. They act as a sort of neighborhood watch, keeping an eye out for warlock activity and attempting to enact citizens' arrests when they spot signs of magic use. It's unspeakably dangerous work, but they feel it's necessary in order to safeguard their homes and children from the warlock scourge.

Community Conscience began in Nova Roma, with a small group of former police officers upset at the spread of magic use. While they felt that the Anti-Sorcery Act was a good start, they also believed that such laws would come to nothing without vigilant citizens to help enforce them. The four men and one woman established a patrol routine, whereby they would watch for sorcerous activity within their neighborhood, note those who displayed signs of magic use, and look for criminal application of magical abilities. In the days before the formation of crystal ball squads, they were the only people out there who knew definitively what to look for.

WARLOCKS AND DETECTIVES

PERFORMERS, CHARLATANS, AND FRAUDS

With magic a reality in the *Edge of Midnight* universe, a curious social phenomenon has arisen. Stage magicians and illusionists — those who use cunning tricks to present the appearance of actual magic — have slowly withered away from the U.C. social scene. No one wants to see a man in a tux pretend to levitate a woman when the local crime kingpin can do it for real... and start a riot in the process. Furthermore, the fear and panic engendered by the spread of real magic has had ugly consequences on those who only pretended to practice it. Stage magicians were often targeted along with the genuine article and without the ability to defend themselves like actual warlocks could, more than a few were shot, stabbed, or hanged before anyone in authority took notice.

Since then, stage performers have more or less abandoned their practice. The atmosphere has softened, but the desire to pay for visual illusions simply doesn't exist anymore. Those illusionists who stick to their craft play it out on the low-rent carny circuit — wowing yokels for a few measly dollars — or else shifting them to card sharking or similar petty crimes. Even on the most miserable stage, however, they often need to explain to their audience that their tricks are illusions, and that what they do has nothing to do with the scientists and physicists busy perverting the laws of nature.

The one area exempt from this phenomenon is that of mentalism: the supposed ability to read minds, predict the future, or contact the dead. Warlocks make no claim to such powers, and the spiritual realm remains as much a mystery to them as it is to anyone else. As such, mentalist displays don't spook the herd nearly so much, and a good mentalist act (which is always phony) can clean up with nightclub performances and superstitious marks aplenty. Mentalists tend to make use of sophisticated trickery to pass their abilities off as genuine. The act typically involves guessing the identity of objects while blindfolded (an elaborate verbal code delivered by the mentalist's assistant clues him in); intuition and guesswork used to reveal details about an audience member's past or future; and occasional sleight-of-hand props to display the presence of "spirits" in the auditorium. Even then, however, the mentalist must take care lest his performance slide too far into the realm of "real magic," and the effects he uses to entertain (or swindle) his viewers are mistaken for something far worse.

Every now and again, a non-warlock will attempt to pass himself off as a real one, either as part of an elaborate con or as a way of demonstrating power which he doesn't necessarily have. Either way, it's a dangerous proposition. If he lacks any abilities, then he won't be able to defend himself if his ruse is exposed or some edgy mob decides he's for real and tries to burn him at the stake. When such a fallacy is called for, however, it pays to go to a stage magician to do it. Real warlocks don't come cheap (they can make far more money committing bigger crimes) and a decent stage magician often has the know-how to pull off a feigned illusion that looks just as convincing. With a little preparation, he can duplicate almost any recognizable warlock effect, and most grifters of this sort have the showmanship to sell it without the audience looking too closely. Given the state of their profession and the fact that even the best must limit themselves to low-rent jobs in traveling sideshows, phony warlocks show up far more often than many people think.

Their efforts soon gained newspaper attention after the arrest of a local gambling kingpin who had been using magic to rig the games in his underground casino. The publicity led to an influx in membership, followed by more arrests, more publicity, and official endorsement from a number of government institutions. Praetor Patrick Deacon called them, "the finest example of Commonwealth citizenship I have ever seen," and awarded the five founders the nation's highest civilian medal in gratitude for their efforts. Community Conscience currently numbers over five thousand members, with multiple branches in every city.

Cocky warlocks snicker at their efforts, worrying more about crystal ball squads or the NLEB than some hokey citizens' group. But more than a few have ignored the quiet members of Community Conscience at their peril, and their eventual arrest and imprisonment came at the hands of the very "nuts" they laughed at so naively. Community Conscience advocates passive observation and investigative techniques stemming from their founders' law enforcement background. They tell their members to watch and listen: to keep their eyes open, but say nothing. Gather evidence unobtrusively, never draw attention to yourself, and don't act against a warlock until your case is

solid. They're the little old lady who keeps peeking out the window, the guy on the corner walking his dog, the couple necking in the back seat of that sedan down the block. They wear ordinary clothes: their group sports no overt symbols beyond the odd Commonwealth flag pinned to their lapels. They disguise their snoopish behavior behind neighborhood friendliness. Their members are known but not publicly advertised. They blend into the scenery with uncanny skill, waiting until the perfect moment before dropping the net.

Taking on a warlock is no mean feat, which is why Community Conscience stresses self-defense and anti-magic preparation. Anyone who wishes to join must undergo a six-week course in physical fitness, as well as a class on signs of magic use and ways to prevent a magic attack. They often conduct these seminars in conjunction with the local police or crystal ball squad, offering them free in churches or community centers to anyone who wishes to attend.

From there, the Community Conscience member is given an assigned area to watch, along with a schedule and list of hours when he or she is expected to be "on duty." Though Community Conscience always makes its presence in a neighborhood public (through posted signs and contact information for lo-

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cal leaders), it admonishes its members not to advertise their presence. They're asked to walk a route, establish a vantage point, or otherwise "keep an eye" on their assigned block, looking for signs of warlock activity or people out of the ordinary. When one member reports a possible warlock, the local leader focuses all attention on him: rerouting patrols to cover his area, posting members within constant sight of his house, and keeping an eye out for incriminating activity.

When it arrives, their first step is to call the police, who usually send a crystal ball squad over if the report feels genuine. In the event that the police can't arrive in time, however, Community Conscience takes it upon itself to initiate a citizens' arrest. Here is where their training and preparation (hopefully) pay off, allowing them to successfully confront and subdue the warlock. In some cases, they don't have any problems: the warlock is not sufficiently skilled to cause a tremendous lot of trouble, and if Community Conscience can bring sufficient numbers to bear, then he may simply surrender without a fight. Occasionally, however, their quarry proves far more dangerous, and the warlock would certainly prefer to knock over a few enthusiastic amateurs than deal with the real trouble of the crystal ball squad. Police warn Community Conscience about such incidents — which have resulted in more than their share of mayhem and death — and plead with them to let the authorities handle the warlocks they flush out. Such is the vigor of the group, however, that they don't always listen.

Community Conscience is organized by neighborhood, with a selected leader coordinating ten or fifteen other members in education, patrol, and arrest duties. City districts and the

cities themselves each have senior overseers, who handle complaints, talk to the press, and keep in touch with the police and city councils. Officially, they have no powers beyond those of normal citizens, but their structure has allowed them a measure of efficiency which continues to impress. Their neighbors often consider them pests, and the intrusive nature of their work has resulted in complaints and lawsuits in the past. More than a few of their targets were simply victims of false gossip, or at best magical dilettantes experimenting for cheap thrills. Foes accuse them of fostering the very atmosphere of fear they were set up to prevent, and encouraging neighbors to spy on each other like some kind of fascist dictatorship. But every time a warlock is arrested due to a tip-off from their members, the extremes they sometimes go to are quietly shoved under the rug. Registration of new members has slowed for now and their surveillance misses a number of different neighborhoods. Warlocks who know, however, learn to keep an eye out for them, and never take "just another nosy neighbor" at face value.

VIGILANTES

Far worse than groups like Community Conscience are those individuals who don't stop at harassment and citizens' arrests. The Twelve Days of Chaos fed mass panic the likes of which the U.C. had never seen, and while the overt mayhem may have died down, the madness and fear of that period remains in the hearts of many citizens. Some are unwilling to simply let the police handle things. When they spot a warlock, they move on him: quickly, quietly, and with murderous certainty.

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Anti-warlock vigilantes usually act in small groups, no larger than four or five, and then only when they suspect a specific person of magic use. Their attacks are intended to frighten the warlock at the very least, and often do much worse. In practice, they almost always strike by surprise. Once they identify a warlock, they study his movement, learn where he lives, and choose a means of assault that prevents the warlock from turning his magic against them. Drive-by shootings are a favored tactic, as is sniper fire from a distance. More passively, anti-warlock vigilantes have been known to toss Molotov cocktails through house windows, or roll grenades under doors. Anything which can't do the job in a few seconds is out: if the warlock has time to identify his attackers, things tend to get nasty.

On the plus side, police often pay little attention to the murder of a lone warlock. Their investigation is perfunctory and unless a suspect turns up right away, they hang it on a convenient gaunt crime lord and file it away as unsolved. If the warlock was an upstanding member of the community, the investigation may be more rigorous — with his magic treated as a dirty secret like gambling or marital infidelity. Vigilantes who kill a non-warlock by mistake will see the hammer of the law fall swiftly and brutally, though if they believe in their cause enough to kill for it, they may consider it a risk worth taking.

Warlocks themselves rarely go to the police of course (assuming they survive a vigilante attack). Secretive ones risk exposure while known warlocks prefer to handle the problem themselves. Vigilantes who miss their chosen targets rarely get a second chance. The warlock either changes locales quickly, or has the wherewithal to hunt the vigilantes down... and he usually gets more than one shot to finish them off properly.

No large groups of anti-warlock vigilantes exist, though public anti-warlock sentiment means that a few individuals are always around. Their activities tend to be limited to a single incident or two, though some — driven by unhappy circumstances in their own lives or an unflinching belief in the righteousness of their cause — repeatedly hunt down any warlock who crosses their path. Otherwise, their crimes remain almost random, fed by the odd bit of hysteria in the newspapers but often undetectable. Anyone who hates warlocks has the potential to try to kill a warlock, and with public feelings the way they are, the list of warlock haters is disturbingly long.

GAUNTS

(Note: the following section is reprinted from the *Gaunts and the Underworld* sourcebook. We've added it for your convenience, since it has bearing on warlocks and their relations with the U.C.'s other principal outcasts.)

It's no secret that magic is particularly harmful to gaunts, who suffer sharp pain whenever sorcery is used in their presence. It's also no secret that gaunts and warlocks often rub shoulders in the U.C. underworld: gaunts forced to by economic necessity, warlocks because the magic at the center of their existence has been outlawed by the Unified Commonwealth. Needless to say, it's a recipe for disaster. Leatherbacks are acutely aware of their weakness to magic, which an enterprising warlock can exploit to his advantage.

Furthermore, the two sides have no wish to retreat from the one social niche available to them, and refuse to surrender the criminal underworld to yet another band of oppressors. To gaunts, warlocks are encroaching on the sole piece of territory which they feel they own, while presenting a real and tangible threat that they cannot easily counter. As a result, gaunt criminals react very harshly to warlocks in their midst, and entire syndicates have gone to war just because the leatherback in charge views the merest presence of some magic-user as a threat that cannot be ignored.

Warlocks, for their part, have nothing in principle against gaunts. Many of them may be biased or prejudiced, but no more so than any other normal. However, they too feel that the underworld is the only part of society which accepts them for who they are. Magic addiction runs strong within their veins; they could no more stop practicing sorcery than they could stop breathing. Other criminals value their spectacular powers and pay them well, which allows them to continue their pseudo-scientific research. As covered in the *Edge of Midnight* core rulebook, normal gangs fearful of being subjugated by stronger, more powerful gaunts will use warlocks to help even the odds. As long as the rest of society persecutes them, warlocks need such support as much as gaunts do. They're not willing to turn tail just because their work gives the leatherbacks pause.

In addition, criminally-inclined warlocks are apt to use their magic to maximum advantage when confronted with gaunt opposition. It's a sign of just how powerful their magic can be: who wouldn't feel an adrenaline rush as a colossal leatherback collapses in agony because of a few muttered mathematical formulae? Warlocks view that as the only edge they have on leatherbacks, and are thus prone to use it as often as they can. The smarter ones keep it in reserve, hiding their powers until they need them, but the nature of magic addiction is such that few can hold out without flashing their abilities at least a little bit. The gaunts' natural hostility towards warlocks makes them especially nervous; many otherwise mild-mannered warlocks will immediately treat leatherbacks as the enemy, anticipating some outburst or attack which may or may not come. They tend to shoot first and ask questions later, hoping to keep the gaunts "in their place" before some leatherback decides to kill them on general principles. (Some police departments have picked up similar habits, and will occasionally use members of the crystal ball squad during the arrest and/or transport of prominent gaunt criminals.)

The division between gaunt and warlock is a major factor in the U.C. underworld. Criminal gangs on either side which have no other reason to fall into conflict will tear at each others' throats, battling to the death merely because they share the same city. Warlock hit men will actively lobby for gaunt targets, eager to earn extra capital by taking down the "unstoppable" leatherbacks. Gaunt crime lords will often turn their puppets against the "scourge" of magic in their midst, manipulating politicians into launching crusades against the local warlocks. In a few cases, repeated clashes have led to tentative peace, with both sides affording each other enough respect to get by. But they are far more the exception than the rule; most of the time, dominance by attrition is the order of the day.



"We ain't all Baptists down here, sonny."
- Toots Sweet (Brownie McGhee),
Angel Heart

VOUDOUN

One of the strangest manifestations of magic in the *Edge of Midnight* universe involves that of *voudoun*: an ancient animist religion which holds sway in Terminus and the swamplands around it. Though hardly common, its sects and cults remain a central part of Terminus culture... and some of its practitioners exhibit warlock powers of frightening intensity. The Baron's Men — considered by some to be the de facto rulers of Terminus — claim warlock abilities through the practice of *voudoun*, as does Déjà Vu and several additional gangs. Numerous other priests and priestesses of the faith demonstrate warlock magic of similar strength.

How does this happen? Beyond *voudoun*, all warlocks claim to be scientists first and foremost. Their magic stems from exploiting certain little-known quirks in the universe, and has neither spiritual nor supernatural origins. How is it that an illiterate *houngan* priest can carve up a sacrificial chicken and invoke the same abilities which take other warlocks years of difficult research to understand? And if it does stem from divine forces as many *voudoun* warlocks maintain, then why can't it be seen in other faiths, whose membership is far more numerous and whose followers are often at least as devout?

The question haunts and confounds magical theorists, who believe they understand the core underpinnings of the practice and yet whose every notion is undermined by plain-speaking *houngan* lurking in the shacks and bayous of Terminus. Most warlocks maintain that it's all a con: that the *houngan* actually possess as much education as any scientist and use the trappings of their faith to disguise the origins of their powers. Look deep enough, they claim, and you'll find the physics manuals right next to the ju-ju bags and chicken feathers. *Houngan* scoff at such dismissals as representative of the very prejudice and oppression which their religion has defied for centuries.

ORIGINS AND BASIC TENETS

(Note: though largely based on *voudoun* in the real world, this should not be construed as a formal religious study. A number of details have shifted or altered for the sake of dramatic expediency and our version of *voudoun* has bearing in the *Edge of Midnight* universe only.)

According to practitioners, *voudoun* began when the world was new: the first major religion to develop in the whole of human history. Its roots stretch to tropical lands far across the sea, where the faithful sought to understand God through interaction with spirits or *loa*. Their beliefs endured for centuries, carried to the lands which would one day become the Unified Commonwealth as part of the slave trade. In plantations and cotton mills, its practice flourished, taking on darker elements as a means of fighting back against oppression. *Voudoun* became an ingrained part of the culture: something that separated the black slaves from the whites who controlled them and a form of spiritual empowerment which outsiders could never touch.

When the Commonwealth outlawed slavery, the faith spread to different nooks and crannies of the country's southern half, along with Borderlands nations such as Iberana and Santo Baltasar. In many places, it intermingled with Catholicism, and its *loa* spirits took on the aspects of saints and similar Catholic figures. Today it claims nearly one million practitioners in the southern U.C. and an equivalent number in the Borderlands.

Specific beliefs vary from sect to sect. *Voudoun*'s traditions remain largely oral, passing from one member to another and written down only infrequently. It lacks a formal holy scripture like the Bible or Koran, and particulars depend almost solely on who you're talking to. While warlocks claim the *houngan* priests and *mambo* priestesses stay in close contact with each other, there is little sign of formal organization among their ranks, and beyond their espousal of the same basic tenets, they rarely congregate in numbers greater than nine or ten. Elder priests often take on a number of *hounsins* (apprentices), who learn the folklore and means of invoking the spirits before moving on and attracting congregations of their own. Beyond that, it falls to each individual group to determine the exact manner of its practice, the *loa* it invokes, and the observances and holidays to which it adheres.

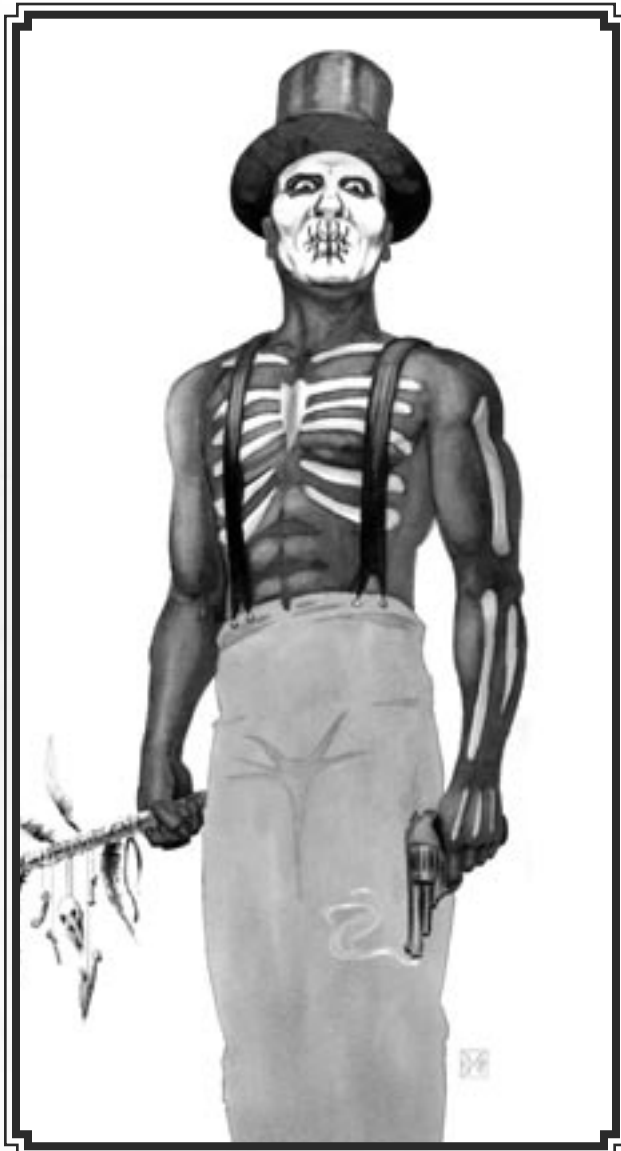
All *voudoun* practitioners believe in a single God, who created the universe and everything in it. This differs very little from Judaism, Christianity, and similar monotheistic faiths. The difference lies in how *voudoun* believes God manifests Himself on earth and the means by which He communicates with His faithful. Countless spirits, called *loa*, move invisibility through the world, influencing and shaping the destiny of everyone in it. By calling upon these *loa* and invoking their favor, *voudoun* practitioners believe they can gain boons such as health, protection, and good fortune. They don't believe that anything takes place by accident: fate, destiny, and the mercurial will of intangible *loa* silently pull the strings of all our lives. They don't view this as a sinister or evil thing. On the contrary, they celebrate the vast tapestry of interconnectedness which it represents, and see the *loa* as largely benevolent forces connecting them to their fellow man, the world around them, and the great God who created them all.

Rituals take place in a *hounfour* or *voudoun* temple. It can be anywhere from a basement in somebody's home to a clearing in the woods. It requires only the requisite blessings and enough space to hold all worshippers. At its center stands a pole called a *poteau-mitan*, representing the crossroads between the natural world and the spirit world where the *loa* can congregate. An altar may be found nearby, which holds candles, images of important *loa*, and minor offerings such as tobacco or bowls of rum. Formal rituals vary from sect to sect. Each has their particular days of worship and a particular group of *loa* to whom they pray. Occasions for gathering can range from specific seasonal holidays to births and weddings to admonitions for good luck or the end of a particular calamity which affects the entire community.

Rituals themselves follow a basic template regardless of setting or circumstance. Worshippers partake of a feast or meal beforehand, followed by the creation of a *veve* or sacred pattern on the floor of the *hounfour*. The pattern is created

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with a substance deemed favorable by the congregation's *loa*: usually cornmeal or flour, but occasionally composed of similar substances as well. The worshippers gather around it and begin to chant while banging on drums and other noisemakers which have been ritually purified before the ceremony begins. The *houngan*, *mambo*, and *hounsis* in attendance dance and call out invocations to the *loa*, entreating them to come and listen to the admonitions of the faithful. (The exact *loa* invoked depends on the circumstances and the group in question.) An animal will often be sacrificed — goats, sheep, chickens, or pigs are typical, but the animal is always favored by the *loa* the gathering seeks to invoke. The beast's throat will be cut with a sacrificial knife and the blood offered up to the *loa*. (The bodies are cooked and eaten after the ceremony. *Voudoun* practitioners do not consider this an act of savagery, but one of practicality: the *loa* typically hate waste and the sanctity of the ceremony ensures hygienic conditions to allow the meat to be consumed.)



At the climax to the ceremony, the invoked *loa* supposedly appears and takes control of one of the dancers. He or she falls to the ground and then rises again, possessed by the summoned *loa*. The *houngan* or *mambo* (or one of the *hounsis* if the *houngan* or *mambo* is possessed) will then ask questions of the spirit, seeking guidance and requesting blessings for some event or another. The possessed dancer speaks in the *loa*'s voice and behaves as the *loa* would until the proceedings are concluded, at which point he or she falls again and then regains his or her senses. This generally concludes the ceremony.

Lesser ceremonies usually include offerings to the *loa*, either at a *houngan* or at smaller shrines in homes, cemeteries, or public gathering places. Through them, *voudoun* practitioners hope to guide their destiny, live in favor of the spirits, and lead lives of fulfillment and happiness.

FETISHES AND CHARMS

Voudoun ascribes magical properties to a number of fetishes and charms: mostly herbs, roots, and animal parts believed to curry favor with a particular *loa*. They may appear in *voudoun* potions, as formal offerings to the *loa*, or as mixtures to be consumed during specific ceremonies. They may also be carried by the faithful on a long-term basis. To outsiders, they seem strange and fearful, but most followers of *voudoun* place them in the same category as rosary beads or a lucky rabbit's foot. It represents their faith in a tangible way, offering them comfort and a little spring in their step as they go through their daily lives.

Sometimes, such charms are strung around the wearer's neck, or used as the basis for bracelets and other types of jewelry. Practitioners may also carry them in a *mojo bag* (also called a *gris gris* bag), which can be closed with a drawstring and contains whichever lucky fetishes they believe will aid them. The number and type of fetishes one could find in a *mojo bag* are almost beyond counting. Some of the more prominent examples include:

- Alligator skull: for safety and protection.
- Bat's eye: for protection of one's money.
- Bat's heart: for good luck, especially when gambling or playing cards.
- Bell: a small brass bell can be used to invoke *loa*.
- Black cat's eye: for protection from curses.
- Black cat's bone: for passing unseen or returning a lost lover. Also serves as an all-purpose good luck charm.
- Chicken feet: for focusing a wide variety of powers, either positive (bringing love or good fortune) or negative (keeping those who receive it from speaking).
- Coffin nails: for increasing the potency of the other charms.
- Grave soil: for cursing one's enemies.
- Rattle: for summoning *loa*.
- Sea horse, dried: for blessing homes.
- Swallow's eye: for increasing the potency of visions, particularly in love.
- Swallow's heart: for good luck, especially in romance.

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- Wolf's eye: for protection from harm.
- Wolf's heart: for good luck, usually carried in a green bag with green lodestones.

In addition, countless herbs, roots, and resins supposedly hold various powers, and most mojo bags contain a healthy sampling of each.

Veve

Other charms resemble more traditional forms of jewelry. Symbols of specific *loa* — called *veve* — concentrate spiritual energies, and are often used in ceremonies by *houngan* and *mambo*. Rank-and-file members of the faithful often carve them onto small pieces of wood or metal and secret them on their person. Others will tattoo them on their bodies so that they may never be deprived of them. *Veve* generally serve some positive effect — providing protection on journeys, good luck in money or romance, satisfaction in one's job, or the like — but a few act as curses and are intended to be placed upon the practitioner's enemies.

Whether used for good or ill, however, all *veve* depend upon secrecy. No others must know about the charm, and those who use them take care not to display them to anyone else. (They must use guile when placing a negative *veve* on someone they don't like, and the effect will end whenever the victim discovers it.) To keep them potent, the user must make regular offerings to whichever *loa* the charm calls upon; in keeping with the notion of secrecy, such offerings must always be made after sunset, and only on nights of the full moon.

Voodoo Dolls

Voodoo dolls make a common charm among the faithful as well. They represent specific people whom the user knows, marked with a piece of cloth or hair from the subject and thus said to contain a part of his or her essence. The user can then use the doll to affect a change in the subject's attitude or lifestyle. Popular culture holds that voodoo dolls serve only negative purposes (the old pins-in-the-eyes routine), but many represent family members or loved ones, and are used to call down romance or good fortune on them.

In the expression of these beliefs, *voudoun* remains no different than any other mainstream religion, and most practitioners chafe under the negative stereotypes which they believe have been perpetuated against it. Its interconnections with Catholicism make the argument hard to deny. In essence, the *loa* differ little from angels and devils in the Catholic faith, and *voudoun* followers liken their favored spirits to saints. Indeed, many *loa* have formal counterparts in specific Catholic saints and image-conscious *houngan* maintain that entreating a *loa* is identical to entreating the corresponding saint for the same reason. (The departed spirits of particularly revered leaders are said to become *loa*, just as Catholic saints are, and they join the pantheons of other spirits for whatever community reveres them.) Though demonized in popular culture and *Paradiso* movies which depict them as barbaric devil worshippers, the analogies crumble when one examines how the religion actually works. *Voudoun* practitioners hold jobs, pay their taxes,

and raise their children just like anyone else. They root for the same sports teams, vote for the same politicians, and hope and dream for the same better life. The differences are there, but they remain far less insurmountable than their detractors would have the public believe.

It's when magic becomes involved that things get more difficult.

VOUDOUN AND MAGIC

Many practitioners of the *voudoun* faith view warlock sorcery as "black magic:" something dirty and sinful, which no upstanding *houngan* holds truck with. It arises from misusing the *loa*'s favor, and twisting their gifts to selfish or unnatural ends. Those who practice magic argue otherwise, just as other warlocks do. They claim it merely represents the favors of the *loa* like any other, and that their dedication and zeal simply allow them to make more direct use of otherworldly forces than those with less devotion. But few listen, of course, and *houngan* warlocks must sometimes act in secret lest the wrath of the greater community fall upon them.

It certainly doesn't help the religion's reputation, and *voudoun* receives a great deal of negative attention that it might otherwise avoid were such a stigma not so visible within its members. Press stories love to play up the image of the dark witch doctor, flashing Thermal or Kinetic energy from his hands while he curses his enemies. The stereotype holds just enough truth to tar every member of the *voudoun* faithful, and the more intolerant members of U.C. society latch upon it as a means of banning the entire religion. Christian preachers blast the sins of "devil worshippers" from the radio, and lobbyists and citizens' action committees periodically try to make practice of *voudoun* illegal.

In each instance, they focus less on the principles or practice of the religion and almost solely upon the use of sorcery. They point out that no other faith evinces powers like *houngan* and *mambo* do, and cite the use of "magic" in the faith's (otherwise benign and certainly non-sorcerous) rituals as evidence that they are all in league with the rest of the warlocks. Nova Roma in particular, has periodic fits of intolerance, and politicians who routinely bang the anti-sorcery drum will often cite *voudoun* as a means of varying their little song and dance.

Unfortunately for them, banning *voudoun* remains a practical impossibility. The faith lies too deeply in Terminus's culture — backed up by centuries of tradition — as well as smaller enclaves elsewhere in the U.C. to make any kind of a ban effective. Religious rights groups remain poised to launch lawsuits whenever anti-*voudoun* legislature rears its ugly head, and while few mainstream citizens approve of *voudoun*, most see no reason to persecute it on basis of association alone. The fact that most *houngan* and *mambo* demonstrate no sorcerous abilities at all — and indeed decry magic use as loudly as anyone else — carries a great deal of weight in Terminus. Even if it didn't, most residents chuckle at the thought of the national government trying to enforce any ban on *voudoun* they might be foolish enough to enact. They couldn't be bothered to fix the area's real problems; how could they begin to root out something like this?

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It falls to the *voudoun* community itself to ban magic use among its members... which can be difficult considering its fractious nature and lack of central structure. Upstanding *houngan* discourage it among their followers and can usually keep it from flourishing within the confines of their local community, but their influence rarely extends beyond that. On the plus side, sorcerous powers require a great deal of faith and devotion to manifest, which means that few *voudoun* practitioners can use them even if they wanted to. *Voudoun* sees a much smaller percentage of “dabblers” among its members, and that, combined with the admonitions of wise or respected *houngan* is enough to keep it out of most communities.

On the other hand, when it does manifest, it has a way of drawing attention to itself. *Houngan* warlocks can demonstrate their faith in ways which non-warlocks can only dream of, and the stunning light shows they invoke lead to almost blindly fanatical devotion among their followers. Magical abilities appear as a concrete demonstration of religious faith — nonexistent among other religions and unprecedented in their seeming manifestation of the divine. A canny *houngan* who possesses such abilities can wield immense personal powers over his followers, demanding all manner of sacrifices and creating a cult of personality around himself to control entire towns. Ceremonies led by such figures tend to involve a

ZOMBIES

Zombies are a big part of *voudoun* in popular culture, but like most other aspects of the faith, they have been blown largely out of proportion. According to myth, they are the reanimated corpses of the dead, given new life again by the spells of evil *houngan*. The myth holds great power and fearful superstitions about zombies can be exploited for personal benefit. The biggest example in our world is Haitian dictator Papa Doc Duvalier, who claimed that his private army consisted of zombies. He also dressed up as Baron Samedi during *voudoun* ceremonies, formally cursed his political enemies (he claimed that Kennedy’s assassination arose from such a curse), and prophesied that he would return from the dead to reclaim his country. He hasn’t, at least not to date, but the tactics helped cement his rule and even after his death, guards stood over his tomb to make sure others wouldn’t steal his body.

The creation of zombies in *The Edge of Midnight* entails scientific rather than magical means. Victims are fed a potion consisting of numerous different elements, including paralytic poison from the puffer fish, which disrupts speech and motor skills. The victim’s pulse and heartbeat slow to nearly undetectable levels, taking on the aspects of death. He is then buried for a short time and dug back up, now theoretically under the control of the *houngan*. The effects of the drugs combined with the trauma of the experience (and often the psychosomatic beliefs of the victim as well) make the new zombie lethargic, hollow-eyed, and responsive to commands... which the *houngan* can play up as supernatural enthrallment to his will.

Such instances remain rare, blown up by rumor and popular culture to far more frightening proportions. The number of real-world cases remains limited (even in Papa Doc’s time they were more propagandistic than factual), and the exact method of zombie creation has only recently become anything more than fearful superstition. *The Edge of Midnight* universe differs little in this regard. Zombies are somewhat more prevalent, as *voudoun* holds slightly greater sway and the number of *houngan* willing to engage in such barbarity is higher, but it has no more basis in the supernatural than it does in our world. *Houngan* who know the formula for the potion simply gather the right materials and feed it to their victims, cloaking it in religious trappings and claiming zombie creation as an extension of their otherworldly abilities. Such claims become more impressive if the *houngan* can throw lightning around or crush bricks — a little razzle dazzle can sell any con — but it remains a scientifically created condition, aided by drugs, psychological suggestion, and plain old-fashioned balderdash.

Which isn’t to say cunning *houngan* can’t make the most of it. More than few have become *de facto* Papa Docs in their local communities, and the presence of zombified guardians in their various criminal enterprises makes a chilling impression on those who see them. The ingredients of their potions become a source of great concern to them, since some are rare and others (like puffer-fish poison) patently illegal. They pay good money for those willing to provide them with what they need, and smugglers with the right connections might turn a pretty penny from them for comparatively little risk.

Some sects of *voudoun* hold that gaunts are all essentially zombies, killed by the disease and given new life by unclean spirits. Gaunts scoff at such notions, but those who belong to the *voudoun* faith find that others treat them with more fear and respect because of it. Some even use the mystique to become *houngan* themselves, though of course their condition prevents them from practicing sorcery. Accordingly, the belief has flourished among the more ignorant sects, and the appearance of the odd leatherback as a zombie slave or possessed corpse keeps the fallacy alive. Agreements between gaunts pretending to be zombies and *houngan* priests practicing warlock abilities mark one of the few occasions where leatherback and magic-user have cooperated for any length of time.

Zombies remain far more the exception than the norm in *voudoun* circles. *Houngan* with even the slightest trace of ethics decry the practice and even many criminal *houngan* stop short at what their faith considers an assassination of the soul. Those who do can be found in outlying villages of the U.C.’s southern swamps, abandoned jungles of Iberana, and a few of the darkest and most forboding neighborhoods of Terminus... places where even the city’s criminal warlords fear to tread.

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lot of gratuitous magic use, and they rarely hesitate to strike out against disobedient followers with it — claiming that it's a "curse" from angry *loa* and couching it in the trappings of *voudoun* black magic.

Thus do *voudoun* warlocks find themselves on the same path to criminality that their normal warlock counterparts do. Having established power in such a manner, they have no qualms about using it to further their goals in other ways. Brothels might spring up, consisting of faithful (and pretty) girls and delivering a cut of the profits to their *houngan* overlord. Theft and smuggling soon follow, as well as assassinations of those whom the *houngan* views as a threat. Before long, the community looks like nothing so much as an organized crime syndicate... with the added benefit of fanatical devotion among its members which even the most draconian criminal mob cannot match. Even those *houngan* who refrain from such temptations still command an unholy amount of control over those beneath them, and some don't even bother distinguishing themselves from the godlike spirits in whose name they presume to speak.

Not every *houngan* warlock follows such a path, of course. Some prefer a more solitary life, devoting themselves to the spirits and viewing their powers as simple rewards for faithful service rather than a means of power or control. Certainly, they may stray into criminality, but their actions resemble those of any other mundane criminal with a modicum of faith, rather than as an excuse for messianic delusions. Others truly try to walk the righteous path with their abilities, which they consider gifts from the *loa* which must be used for the betterment of all. (Otherwise, the *loa* may grow angry and curse the warlock for his hubris.) But sorcery is no less addictive to them than it is to normal warlocks, and with throngs of the faithful willing to obey them as a god, the urge to use it can overwhelm even the most principled priest or priestess.

Despite that, some *houngan* can use their warlock powers in a beneficial manner, coming to the aid of parishioners and doing what they perceive to be the spirits' good works. They rarely expect acceptance for such deeds — the combination of religious intolerance and fear of sorcery makes their path difficult indeed. But no one ever said such a path was easy and amid the corrupt bayous of Terminus and its environs, they become the closest things to spiritual saviors most people have.

THE CAUSE

Voudoun in *The Edge of Midnight* represents the concentration of all the old pagan religions which so many of its inhabitants practiced thousands of years ago in their former lives. Their memories were wiped during their centuries in the Void, and their identities utterly annihilated, but for the most devout, some tiny shred of their core beliefs remained. The ancient gods they worshipped, the spirits and powers which they believed controlled the cosmos... some small spark of that belief remained. And when they were thrust into *The Edge of Midnight* universe, their newly formed identities instinctively searched out some sign of their old faith.

They found *voudoun*. It flourished in the swamps and bayous of Louisiana, growing even stronger on the islands of the Caribbean. It was old, with roots going back to the dawn of man and spirits that — while they didn't always perfectly match their old gods — bore enough resemblance to certain archetypes that their instantly developing identities took hold of it. *Voudoun* thus flourished in the newly created universe, and just as scientists could find the loopholes in its physical laws and exploit it to create magic, so too could the high priests and priestesses use the power of their faith to exploit the same loopholes.

In essence, both they and more "normal" warlocks have noticed the same imperfections in the world. They see the way things bend when they shouldn't and which formulae point to the cracks in the world's foundation. But while traditional warlocks view it in dry, desiccated terms (desiccated in theory rather than effect of course), *voudoun* priests see it as the living, breathing extension of their faith. They are gateways to the spirit world, through which *loa* can pass and affect the world of men. By invoking such *loa* and channeling their essence through offerings and sacrifices, *houngan* believe that they can work miraculous powers.

Ritual plays a vital role in this process. The *houngan* must not only keep the *loa* happy with regular sacrifices, but call upon them for specific aid when preparing to use their powers. If the spirits are pleased with their entreaties (and the quality and regularity of their offerings), they will grant the *houngan* the powers he desires. If not, he must regain their favor as quickly as possible, lest his powers be lost forever.

Practically speaking, there is little difference between *voudoun* magic and that practiced by more traditional warlocks. They utilize the same mechanics and produce the same effects. *Houngan* and *mambo* couch theirs in the trappings of faith, while traditional warlocks explain it away as science, but both stem from the perception of the existing flaws in *The Edge of Midnight* universe and the ways in which one can exploit it to spectacular effect. Traditional warlocks gain that insight through rigorous study and practice, while *houngan* find it through intense internal devotion, but the end result is the same. The most apt comparison is that of a classically trained actor and a Method actor. Classical performers draw upon formal disciplines of diction and technique, while Method actors draw upon their instincts and experiences. But the two are simply different means to the same end, and the if the final performance works, one never worries about how they came about it.

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MAGIC AND LOA

Voudoun rituals are conducted as a means of making contact with the *loa* spirits. Priests view their magic as an offshoot of that relationship: rewards granted by the *loa* upon those they favor. As such, warlock sorcery becomes an extension of faith, bound in the trappings of *voudoun* and practicable only when couched as a religious phenomenon. How does it manifest specifically? In game terms, nothing changes. The mechanics and rules are no different for *houngan* warlocks than they are for normal warlocks. However, because their magic is bound up so tightly in their faith, they must often utilize specific prayers to make the powers manifest. Experts believe it to be psychosomatic — similar to the trances they enter when conducting their rituals — but regardless of how it works, most of them need to exhibit elements of *voudoun* if they wish their magic to function. (See page 174 of *The Naked City* or page 175 of this volume for the pertinent rules.)

This comes out most directly in the use of charms and fetishes. *Houngan* often invoke fetishes from a mojo bag when using their magical abilities outside of ceremonies. They will pull the desired item and cast it forth, uttering a short prayer to the *loa* before the magical ability takes effect. (See page 129 for more on mojo bags.) Terminus's crystal ball squad has learned to look for signs of *voudoun* at crime scenes — a chicken's foot or cat's bone cast amid the rubble, or residue from various roots and powders — to help narrow down the list of possible suspects.

In addition, many *houngan* also fetishize their marks as a sign of the *loa*'s favor. Rather than disguising it when it appears, they will draw attention to it with jewelry or body paint and invoke it whenever someone needs proof of their abilities. Some even go to great lengths to regain them after they fade, and the presence of a permanent mark is a sign of great respect in the right circles. (Wider social stigma and ease of identification by the cops be damned.) They flash it and reveal it to their victims just before activating their magic — letting those around them see their inhuman eyes, for example, or gulping great draughts of milk or wine just before unleashing some spectacular effect. Even if it doesn't "channel the spirits," as many of them claim, the psychological impact can be devastating, resulting in fear and panic among the more superstitious foes facing their wrath.

Most importantly, however, the *houngan* must always call upon the *loa* before activating a magical effect. He makes formal entreaties during ceremonies at his *hounfour*, surrounded by followers and supposedly able to communicate with the spirit much more clearly. If the *loa* smiles on him, it will keep watch wherever he goes and spring into action when he has a need. Even then, however, he must give at least a whisper of thanks: if he cannot acknowledge the *loa*, then the effect it generates will be meaningless in his eyes.



SAMPLE LOA

The *voudoun* faith has literally hundreds of *loa* spirits, varying wildly by locale and particular congregations. Ancestors of a particular clan may be worshipped as *loa*, while an obscure and forgotten spirit in one region may be a pillar of the faith in another. A *houngan* could invoke any of them to secure the abilities he wishes to wield, though he often has favorites, of course, whom he devotes much time and ceremony to entreating.

Below are a series of sample *loa*, representing some of the major figures in the *voudoun* faith. The list includes a brief physical description of the *loa*, a breakdown of the style and manner of proper sacrifice to them, and the aspects of magic which *houngan* warlocks ascribe to them. Players are also free to develop any "patron *loa*" of their own as they wish: those whom their *houngan* characters entreat with sacrifice and who aid them in whatever magic they see fit to perform.

Agwe

Agwe is a spirit of the sea and, more specifically, those who sail on it. *Voudoun* followers invoke him for blessings on their sea voyages and with water-related work such as fishing expeditions. He is often depicted as wearing a naval uniform and carrying a pistol or similar firearm. Like the sea, he can be calm and benevolent or terrifying and wrathful, though he is usually depicted as a helpful *loa*.

Sacrifices to him take place on a boat or a pier: somewhere where there is water nearby. A conch shell is blown and offerings of food or champagne are placed in tiny, brightly colored boats and set afloat on the water. If the boats sink, the sacrifice has earned his favor and will extend his protection over any ocean-based endeavors of the worshipper. If they float without sinking, the offering has been rejected and the worshipper must try again.

Houngan warlocks use him to invoke Gravity energy, causing objects to sink like a stone or float like a boat.

Baron Samedi

Samedi is a *loa* of the dead, standing at the crossroads between worlds where the souls of the departed travel on their way to the next life. He embodies many of the popular images of *voudoun* with his emphasis on corruption and decay. He is depicted as a tall black man dressed in a top hat, dark glasses, and a skull painted on his face. (Many *houngan* take to dressing up as Samedi as a means of frightening their followers into obeying them.)

He is summoned by having at least three people formally invoke him in a cemetery. He supposedly holds knowledge of the dead and can summon departed spirits to answer any questions if the summoners have pleased him. It is also said that he takes whatever he touches with him when he departs. *Houngan* in Terminus typically use a cow's hoof during ceremonies, which they use to shake hands with the Baron when he is summoned: when he departs, he takes the hoof with him rather than the *houngan*.

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In terms of magical effects, Baron Samedi holds sway over the realm of Tensile energy, which the *houngan* characterize as death and decay. They can reduce objects to dust with but a thought or harden their clothes to defy blows and attacks through him.

Dambala

Dambala is the spirit of the serpent, one of the strongest and most important of all the *loa*. He is associated with creation, and some *voudoun* circles consider him the father of all the other *loa*. White is his color and he is usually depicted as a great encircling serpent.

He prefers simple invocations to more elaborate ones, and sacrifices of white foods such as eggs or white-feathered chickens. *Houngan* use him as an intermediary to the great God, whom they consider too remote to invoke directly. For magical effects in *The Edge of Midnight*, he is summoned to produce any kind of energy... so long as the *houngan* use it to create or strengthen rather than destroy.

Ezili

Ezili (or Ezili Danto) is a spirit of love and devotion, similar in certain ways to the Greek goddess Aphrodite. In her positive aspects, she is beautiful and compassionate, extending her grace to all below her. She can also become

jealous, however, and her negative aspects depict a shallow sense of entitlement: using her beauty to get what she wants. She typically appears as a beautiful and voluptuous woman dressed in blue and gold, whose body is marked with wounds. In her right hand, she holds an iron knife and in her left, a child whom she keeps close to her side at all times. Sacrifices to her cater to her vanity and capriciousness. Her favorite sacrifice is a black pig, though she also prefers rum and cigars like many other *loa*.

She holds sway over the realm of Magnetic energy — the energy of attraction — and *houngan* invoke her whenever they wish to use Magnetic-based effects.

Loko

Loko is a benevolent spirit of growth and vegetation. He is often shown in the form of a butterfly and claims both trees and sanctuaries as his protectorate. He conveys knowledge to those who communicate with him, which makes him extremely important to *houngan* who practice magic. He is also the protector of doctors, and supposedly tells them which herbs are useful in healing. Any time a *houngan* wishes to cure an injury or fight a disease, he invokes Loko.

Some sects also portray him as a judging god, for he maintains an even temper at all times and can pass sentence with fairness and impartiality. He moves with the speed of the wind,

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and the sound of rustling in trees and branches supposedly heralds his arrival. Trees hold especial significance for him and rituals carrying his favor typically use them. Sacrifices (black and white goats are favored) are made within sight of a tree, and offerings are hung in straw bags from the branches.

In terms of magical effects, Kinetic energy is his realm: granting warlocks the power to move like the wind or manipulate anything passing through the air.

Ogun

Ogun is a *loa* of war, associated with fire, conflict, and metalworking. *Houngan* invoke him as a figure of survival: proud and mighty, willing to fight anyone who would challenge him. He supposedly brings them justice, which traditional *voudoun* followers invoke in his name. Criminal *houngan* use him as a way of punishing snitches or those who talk out of turn. He uses fire to create tools to help him in his battles, and is usually depicted as a powerful man in green, wielding a machete or a saber.

The ceremony invoking him offers up animal sacrifices on his behalf: typically a white goat or a red rooster. Quieter invocations use rum or similar drinks placed at an altar in his name.

In terms of magical effects, *houngan* invoke him to work Thermal energy — creating fire and heat — and also Tensile energy when used to strengthen tools and other weapons.

Papa Legba

Legba is a guardian of the crossroads, not entirely unlike Baron Samedi, but serving a more protective and benevolent purpose. Like Dambala, he serves as an intermediary between human beings and the great God of all creation. Standing at the gateway to the spirit world, he holds the keys that will open the doors and allow *houngan* and *mambo* to communicate with other spirits. As such, most ceremonies begin by invoking him and making prayers and offerings in his name. Images depict him as a friendly yet seemingly frail old man with a lame foot and a walking stick. He is also strongly associated with the sun.

Papa Legba's protective aspect manifests with travelers and those preparing to take trips. Evil spirits often gather at a parting of the ways — considered a time for great mischief — and thoroughfares hold incredible potential for energy both good and bad. A proper offering to Papa Legba helps to ward off the evil and promote the good in such locations. Sacrifices include vegetables and meats grilled over an open fire.

Spheres of magical influence include both Thermal energy (representing the strength of the sun) and Magnetism (representing the lines of energy intersecting across the globe).



Sango

Sango is the *loa* of thunder and lightning, of storms, and of the sky. He holds a great deal of power in the *voudoun* pantheon, and farmers often pray to him to bring rain to their crops. He was believed to have once been a mortal king and sometimes appears as an aspect of Ogun, who controls similar spheres of power. Images depict him clothed in red, hurling axes of lightning bolts at friend and foe alike (for friends, his lightning is strengthening or empowering; for enemies, not so much). Though Sango often embodies chaos and disorder, he also stresses the value of self-control: not denying inner turmoil, but learning to master it and use it for positive ends.

Sacrifices to Sango include horses, turtles, and pheasants (killed with an axe, his preferred weapon), and are usually accompanied by the lighting of candles. His sphere of magical energy is Electricity of course, and *houngan* also invoke him when using Kinetic energy.

Ti-Jean Petro

Petro *loa* stem from the horrors of the colonial era: the blood and violence of slavery, the rage and injustice of bondage, the pain of whippings and overwork, and the savagery of revolution against wicked captors. They embody wild negative emotions, and ceremonies represent them through arrhythmic and uncontrollable poundings of the drum.

Ti-Jean Petro — also known as Prince Zandor — holds sway over the world of black magic: of curses and hexes designed to inflict pain on another person. Upstanding *houngan* never invoke him, but those who embrace the darkest aspects of their religion claim that he can deliver great power unto them. He appears as a little man dressed in red and hopping on one foot, and when enraged, he becomes a fright to behold. Most sects ascribe a cannibalistic aspect to him — stories tell of Ti-Jean hiding in trees and leaping down to devour passersby — which has led to the false belief that *voudoun* is a cannibalistic religion.

Rites to Ti-Jean take place in the black of night and only among the most thoroughly corrupt of *voudoun* sects. They pray to him for vengeance against their enemies and for protection from other *loa* when invoking their black magic. Sacrifices involve copious amounts of blood-letting, and the worst entail murder as well as animal sacrifices. *Voudoun* warlocks ascribe no single type of magic to him, but claim that he can grant them any ability they wish.

Yemanja

Yemanja (also known as Mami Wata) is a goddess of the waters who holds sway over the rivers and seas, as well as motherhood and concepts of fertility. Like the water, she is mercurial and can change at whim: seven different physical forms mark her manifestations, each marking a different aspect of her temperament and the gifts she offers. She may grant anything from safety during bad weather to success in commerce to the death of one's enemies. Her image varies from a haggard old crone to the most beautiful woman in the world, though she usually wears blue clothing to signify her connection to the water.

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Worshippers sacrifice fish and water fowl to her, and she also favors sweet liquids such as syrup and molasses. Modern worshippers in Terminus often leave offerings of cola beverages to her as well. *Houngan* invoke her when they wish to use kinetic energy — representing her ever-changing aspects.

PLAYING HOUNGAN

The image of *houngan* is as a primitive witch doctor: covered in bones and feathers, chanting some eerie spell, and holding a ceremonial knife in his hand as he prepares to cut some poor animal's throat. *The Edge of Midnight* universe is one of modern sensibilities, however, and like other religions, *voudoun* has shifted to keep up with the times. *Houngan* and *mambo* characters often reflect such changes, both in their appearance and in their interactions with the world.

Houngan believe that the spirits chose them for their position — that they were selected by the *loa* and that their own wishes never entered into it. Many of them cite the emergence of magic abilities as a sign that the *loa* opened this path for them, while others point to a lengthy period of sickness or fever in which they saw the *loa* and heard their wishes. Whatever the case, it usually entails a life-changing event, one which drives the character towards communion with the spirits as a means of reaching harmony in his existence. Most follow initiation from there at least to the *hounsif* level, which grants them the protection of the spirits and allows them to acknowledge this new phase in their lives. Almost all of them remember the circumstances which led them to that path quite clearly, even if it took place before the White Light. It's that important to their spirituality.

A community and followers tends to arise from there as a matter of course. The *houngan* or *mambo* likely began life as a member of a *voudoun* community and is well known among its members. Those who don't are recommended by trusted *houngan* and thus gain a bond with their followers that they would not possess otherwise. Their faith remains the central tenet in their lives, and while some hold jobs as a means of making money, most either find practical extensions of *voudoun* to earn a living or hold jobs with sufficient flexibility that they may depart to care for followers or attend to the business of their faith on a moment's notice.

In Terminus itself, many of them work in occult shops, selling fetishes and charms to the faithful as a way of generating extra income. Others adopt therapeutic occupations: giving advice, telling fortunes, or engaging in physical therapy such as massage. A few even work as cooks or butchers in a slaughterhouse. Whenever possible, their faith extends into their jobs, even used as a promotional element to drum up business (from members of the faithful or from tourists interested in a little bit of "authentic Terminus voodoo"). When it doesn't, then they tend to move on quickly, adopting jobs for a few months until they find something more suited to their temperament. Most *houngan* and *mambo* accept donations from their followers, though (assuming they have any morals) they do so only reluctantly in the case of poor congregations.

None of this requires any particular trappings or outfits, and *houngan* often dress and behave as any other member of their community. *Voudoun* has always emphasized secrecy — particularly in the Commonwealth, where it was the forbidden religion of the slaves for so long — which means that signs of its priesthood are usually contained in an odd necklace, bracelet, or lucky charm. Only in the deepest parts of the bayou do they still resemble their ancient forefathers — decked out in savage splendor and ruling over isolated communities like some contemporary version of Conrad's Kurtz. Criminal *houngan* often flash more overt signs of their faith as well: usually as a scare tactic, which hasn't done much for *voudoun*'s reputation among outsiders. But for the rest, painted faces and elaborate symbols are for ceremonies or those few holidays such as Marti Gras where such trappings are expected.

Houngan and *mambo* retain close ties to their community whenever possible, and remain nearby where they can tend to any illnesses or crises. In return, they foster the loyalty of their flock, who will step in to help them if called to (though like any other ally, such aid has limits). A few *houngan* adopt a wandering lifestyle, moving from place to place or engaging in some kind of spiritual journey at the behest of the *loa*. They rarely stay long in one location, however, and interact with fellow practitioners infrequently at best: their spiritual condition demands solitude.

Houngan criminals retain this sense of community, though it takes on far darker tones. Other *houngan* regard them as black magicians and perversions of the spirits' will, but in some cases, they simply fell into crime the way so many other minorities did. It gave them money and safety for their community while providing opportunities that mainstream society would never grant them. The harshness and cruelty they develop differs little from other criminals, augmented only by misunderstandings about their faith and the terrifying powers they can manifest as warlocks. They tend to engage in so-called harmless vices — prostitution, smuggling, and petty theft — though many of them stand at the forefront of the emerging drug trade through contacts with fellow *houngan* in the Borderlands.

The bayous and swamps can hide huge caches of narcotics or stolen goods, accessible only by locals under the thrall of a given *houngan*. Many can leverage that into comfortable positions as middle men. They arrange for the deals between buyer and seller, ensure the safe transfer of product, and take a hefty piece out of the profits while leaving it to others to take the heat. The arrangement works surprisingly well, and many more "upstanding" *houngan* criminals gravitate towards it as a means of providing money for their followers without otherwise blemishing their good name.

A precious few *houngan* work as hit men, accepting outrageous fees to formally "curse" someone before taking direct action to ensure that the curse comes true. It proves extremely effective, and such *houngan* can often command a hefty price amid the constant savagery of the Terminus underworld. They often dress the part for clients before meeting them, and have developed a routine which has very little to do with actual *voudoun*, but which so frightens and impresses most clients that they will happily pay whatever the *houngan* wants just to get out

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of there alive. When the target dies of mysterious causes soon thereafter, it cements the *houngan*'s reputation, allowing him to command even higher fees the next time someone needs him.

Crime organizations with *houngan* in charge resemble those of other organized syndicates in many ways. Criminal priests often recruit followers from their congregation to serve in their schemes, trusting in loyalty and fear of retribution from the *loa* to keep them in line. In exchange, the priests keep those around them safe, protecting their neighborhoods the way more formal organized crime families do. Their bonds are tighter for the faith that forges them, and oftentimes the *houngan*'s criminal enterprise becomes a matter of religious doctrine to those beneath him. *Houngan*-run criminal organizations rarely reach very high. With the exception of Déjà Vu, the large gang which controls much of the outlying bayou beyond Terminus, they remain limited only to their village or neighborhood and never expand beyond the *houngan*'s personal congregation. But they can be tenacious and notoriously difficult to root out if trouble arises. Most pay tribute to large groups as a way of keeping the peace, and in return are left alone to do business as they see fit.

Larger organizations sometimes employ *houngan* as spiritual advisors: most notably the Baron's Men, whose guru Valmont holds unspoken influence over their leader, Remy Favroux. Other bands consult with *houngan* as a means of keeping faithful members of the organization happy, though they rarely involve the priests in anything illicit beyond that. It only furthers *voudoun*'s sinister reputation, however, especially when sorcery becomes involved.

While upstanding *houngan* work hard to distance themselves from such activities, their own nature and temperament often works against them. Like other members of their faith, they remain insular and secretive, distrustful of outsiders and unwilling to share more than the most general pleasantries. They do believe that the *loa* affect all people, however, and can be moved to aid or hinder outsiders if they think that the spirits wish it. *Houngan* members of the Few translate this to mean aiding anyone else who has asked the same questions as they have, believing that the *loa* wish them all to unravel this great mystery. They are accordingly very loyal to fellow members of the Few, and may vouch for them among their followers or give them access to secrets that few outsiders have ever seen.

And like other warlocks, those who practice real magic must take care to whom they reveal their abilities. Fellow believers tend to take it in stride and the abysmal state of Terminus law enforcement means that the police rarely bother with otherwise harmless priests. But fear and intolerance can be found everywhere and just because *houngan* enjoy revered status among their own doesn't mean that some anti-magic crusader won't knock on their door with a Molotov cocktail some night. They lack the need for books and other telltale signs of warlock habitation, however, and their communities stay out of the public eye, which often offsets their need to reveal their abilities as a matter of faith. Many of them have enough sense to keep their heads down regardless, and don't test their followers' goodwill by flaunting magic outside of ceremonial purposes.

WARLOCKS AND DETECTIVES

Houngan are rarely interested in interacting with normal warlocks, at least directly. The two camps know of each other, of course, and antipathy between them sometimes bubbles to the surface (often as a part of Terminus's never-ending crime wars). But they rarely have cause to communicate with each other and tend to stay out of each other's way. Normal warlocks scoff at what they feel is a cultural fluke, while *houngan* refrain from interacting with mainstream culture to begin with. The only exceptions are a few dedicated normal warlocks interested in discerning the cause of the *houngans'* powers. If they can learn how *voudoun* practitioners are able to do what they do without scientific knowledge, they may be able to find the root of magical power — the source of whatever caused the universe to fracture the way it did. Such warlocks approach *voudoun* communities like anthropologists: observing their traditions, studying their folklore, and witnessing magic practiced during ceremonies and the like. They are often met with hostility, though a few *houngan* understand what they are doing and allow them to remain in hopes of perhaps teaching them more about their faith. They represent the only tenuous links between the two principle segments of U.C. sorcerers.

VOUDOUN WARLOCKS IN THE UNIFIED COMMONWEALTH

95% of all U.C. *voudoun* activity takes place in Terminus and its environs. The faith never spread any further north and the misty swamps around the southern port retain the ideal cultural mix conducive to such spiritual beliefs. Beyond that, their presence is extremely limited: perhaps two or three groups in any given city, tucked away amongst the crumbling neighborhoods where members of the faithful dwell and ignored by all but the most diligent souls who search for them. A smattering of *houngan* can be found in the abandoned U.C. countryside, taking congregations with them to empty towns where they claim the spirits have guided them. They take on strange aspects of their religion, breaking off from traditional practices and forming their own bizarre amalgamation of *voudoun* spiritual beliefs. The number of practicing sorcerers within their ranks is extremely low, numbering perhaps a dozen total throughout the remainder of the Commonwealth. Their numbers are simply insufficient to produce any more than that.

A single exception to this rule (besides Terminus itself) is New Eden. The city's neighborhoods saw a moderate influx of southern immigrants before and during the war, moving to the northern city in search of jobs. *Voudoun* came up with them, and in the lower-class ghettos of Eden Isle, it took root. Today it commands some fifty to sixty thousand members, most gathered on the fringes of Matty's Lantern with a few more in the mainland neighborhoods. *Houngan* practice here amid jazz clubs and underground bars, mixing the local music culture with their own beliefs and traditions.

The faith differs slightly here from that down south, but it lacks much of the malevolence which criminal *houngan* bring to it in Terminus. The largest congregation is based around a night club called the Gris Gris, which specializes in "Terminus jazz for New Eden cats." The owner, Mommy Sinclair, is a *mambo* priestess and hosts ceremonies at the club every Friday night before opening it to the patrons. The musicians, dancers, and waiters at the club all belong to her congregation and while she keeps her *voudoun* position a secret, most of the neighborhood is aware of what goes on there. While she would never involve herself or her club in anything illicit, several of her employees have begun trying cocaine, and they may move up to dealing if they can secure a large enough supply of it. Should she ever learn of this, her wrath would be terrible indeed, and her sorcerous skills are powerful enough to ensure that any damage she inflicted would be permanent.

In addition, she's smart enough to keep her ears to the ground; many of the staff listen in on patrons' conversations and pass anything interesting on to their *mambo*. She has amassed quite a few tidbits and might be willing to part with them for the right price. Upscale citizens never come to the Gris Gris, but it's a popular hangout with criminals, and the open door policy makes it favored by gaunts in nearby Matty's Lantern. There are enough interesting faces in the crowd — and enough secrets behind them — to provide all kinds of fascinating information.

Other *voudoun* communities in New Eden adopt a similar structure, with a *houngan* or *mambo* conducting ceremonies in a neighborhood business and quietly attracting followers from nearby. They keep to themselves and never speak up, but if you turn down the right alley, you might find yourself in a *houngan's* occult shop, or have your palm read by a *mambo* who presents you with a chicken foot when your reading is through. Their sorcerers stay away from the bohemian enclaves of Fairway, content to let normal warlocks take the heat off of them. While some still pine for Terminus (and a few have begun exploring the possibility of starting a smuggling or drug running partnership with the gangs down there), the majority are glad to be in a less corrupt city, where they can still practice their faith if they keep their heads down.

Voudoun south of the border remains a strong and vibrant force, though it must deal with official persecution far more than it does in the Commonwealth. Most Borderlands governments have worked to stamp out the faith, driving its members deep into the jungles or to isolated villages where no one else can find them. Here it has flourished, however, and while the odd army patrol will root out a *voudoun* village, its membership remains second only to the Catholics in terms of numbers. The strongest communities can be found in the interior of Iberana, where they aid the guerillas battling against the military government. The mountains of Santo Baltasar and the slums of Chihoutle also contain solid *voudoun* populations, though like all their kind, they rarely go out of their way to advertise it. (See Chapter Six of *The Naked City* for more on Borderlands nations.)



CHAPTER SEVEN WARLOCK ORGANIZATIONS

"I suppose you think you raised hell."

"Sister, when I've raised hell
you'll know it."

- Verna Bernbaum and Tom Reagan
(Marcia Gay Harden and Gabriel Byrne),
Miller's Crossing

Per aspera

ad astra

WARLOCK ORGANIZATIONS

This chapter contains a discussion on the various secretive groups established by warlocks and/or concerning the use of sorcery. They number six, arranged alphabetically on the pages below. Further information can be found on pages 112–114 of *The Edge of Midnight* core rulebook.

Note that many of the NPCs discussed in this chapter may be replaced with player characters if appropriate.

BLACK WALKERS

The White Light ended the war. Everyone knows that. Many of the first solid memories that people have are coming home from overseas. The Order of Nu was cast down and destroyed. There were ticker-tape parades and parties from sea to shining sea. Warships made their final voyages to bring home their soldiers. The factories turned to producing peacetime goods. The war was over and people could get back to their lives. Husbands got regular jobs where they weren't getting shot at. They wore grey flannel suits to work instead of uniforms. The sacrifices paid off. The Commonwealth way of life prevailed and everyone lived happily ever after.

But not everyone could return to normalcy after the war. There were still plenty of horrors in the half-dreamed memories that came back with the fighting men and women. Many submerged those awful visions in booze. Others found their lives of violence hard to forget and ended up on the wrong side of the law. Even the ones who could keep their lives together often found themselves crying for no reason on certain nights. The war scarred soldiers who never suffered a wound and never spent any time in a field hospital. One of these disenfranchised soldiers was Harlan Stoeger: everyone called him Honcho.

Honcho returned from the war with a troubled mind. He had a girl and a decent job in a Central City factory, but he kept waking up nights in a cold sweat and he couldn't keep his temper in check. It sometimes felt like there was a pressure building inside his head that he had no idea on how to release. One day, while shoveling down lunch at a local greasy spoon, he saw an advertisement for someone selling a surplus army motorcycle. He went down to see the owner after work that day. A flood of memories from the war came back during his test ride. Honcho bought the bike, headed for the edge of town, and never looked back.

He soon found other men like him on the road, and they discovered a common bond in how they couldn't settle down. They called themselves the Wanderers, sewing patches on their jackets like they were a military unit. They rode from town to town, picking up whatever work drifters like them could find. They modified their bikes so that they would run like the ones they remembered from the war. They got into trouble here and

there as local police regarded them with suspicion. They found that their welcome in the big cities was short-lived. The towns that dotted the fringes of the U.C. were more inviting, but they soon realized that they were not alone.

The village of Callisto was about an hour's drive east of Paradiso, near the border. When the Wanderers rode into town, they didn't realize it was under the protection of the Bombers: a warlock criminal gang run by Roman "Romey" Ciulia. Romey spent his time playing like he was a big shot from the big city. Over the course of a week, the Wanderers and the Bombers butted heads a half dozen times. Every time something happened to one of the gangs, they would retaliate and up the ante. Brash words soon became bloody fists.

Finally, after a dozen busted windows and a trashed motorcycle, Honcho and Romey led their men in a winner-take-all rumble. The townspeople held their breath as the gangs faced off on Main Street. Between the bikers zipping past at break-neck speed and their warlock foes hurling spells at anything that didn't wear their colors, it looked like Callisto would be wiped off the map. But when Honcho and Romey finally got their hands on each other, a strange calm overcame the fighting. It was here, in the chaos of combat, that an important memory was triggered. Honcho and Romey had fought side by side together in the war. They put a stop to the fighting and adjourned to Ma's Diner to put together what it all meant.

When the men who had nearly killed each other rode out of Callisto, they were now the Black Walkers. They all got a tattoo of the letter B on their bodies to symbolize their newfound brotherhood. The Black Walkers combined the best qualities from both previous gangs. They were mobile like the Wanderers, so when the heat got too bad they could saddle up and head out of town. They also learned the skills of the warlocks for protection, which soon became very profitable. There are plenty of opportunities for outlaw warlocks with no ties to the local scene, and Romey proved to be an excellent teacher.

The warlock community isn't sure what to think about the Black Walkers. Some don't believe they actually exist. To them, the Black Walkers are a boogeyman to scare warlocks straight. Another theory is that the Black Walkers were made up by the authorities as a scapegoat for the warlock cases that they couldn't solve. The legend has grown to such a degree that some warlocks either don't believe in the Walkers at all or fear their power completely.

The Walkers made their name by being responsible for high-profile murders from around the country. Peyton Barnes was discovered hanging from a noose that had been nailed to the floor. His legs were pointed at the ceiling as if he had been pulled upward until his neck had been stretched. He was two days away from testifying against the Patterson brothers, Gateway's most notorious crime figures. Linda Ball was a teller who made off with \$25,000 from her bank. The money was found soaked in blood: it had served as the murder weapon, whipped around her body at whirlwind speeds. Luke Nowinski was found burned to a crisp... except for his face, which was easily identifiable. The police aren't sure why he died this way, but the Walkers never kill without a reason (even if it's just a lot of money).

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ORGANIZATION

The Black Walkers are a small group compared so many other warlock societies. Honcho prefers it this way, since it's easier for a small group to ride in and out of town if the heat comes on strong. The number of the core group expands and contracts from eight to sixteen depending upon the current fortunes of the gang. There are eight members who stick with the gang through thick and thin, as well as a few more who count as wannabes, hangers-on, and possible recruits. There are several dozen other men and women currently sporting the Black Walker tattoo. The majority of them ride with the pack, but one or two will take root in a city to keep the Walkers keen to the scene.

The decision-making of the Walkers comes down to Honcho. The other members can advise, bribe, threaten, and cajole, but Honcho is the leader of the pack. Romey's word seems to hold some greater weight in these decisions, but he's generally just happy showing off his warlock skills in whatever endeavor Honcho thinks up. Some members have left the organization over disagreements. Honcho lets them, but he also expects them to keep their mouths shut about their lives on the road. Those who don't receive a very unpleasant visit from Romey.

Honcho is the brains of the Black Walkers. He is not book smart but he is very savvy. Keeping together a group like this for a week — much less a few years — is a testament to his intelligence. Honcho has an intuitive understanding of when to ride someone and when to back off. His gut tells him when a city is ready for them and when it's time to leave. The Walkers

may not always agree with him, but they will always listen to what Honcho has to say. He has yet to steer his men wrong. In those rare cases where a Walker was caught or killed, it was seen as the fault of the ex-Walker rather than any bad decision. Honcho wants that opinion to stay the prevailing one.

Romey is the gang's major muscle, though you wouldn't think so to look at him. His short, pudgy stature and jovial air play against the usual hatchetman type. Romey's muscle comes from his abilities as a warlock. He doesn't care who knows he's a warlock, and he's willing to burn himself out quite severely to display his power. The rest of the gang thinks he's crazy, though opinion differs on the extent of his madness. Luckily for Honcho, Romey listens to the big man and seems to enjoy playing second banana. As long as Honcho feeds his desire for murder and mayhem, Romey won't be going anywhere soon.

The other Walkers are a varied bunch. All of them are here because they tried living a normal life and found out that they couldn't. The only core female member of the gang is Lula, Honcho's main squeeze. The oldest original member outside of Honcho and Romey is a man who everyone calls Whiskey. He was an auto mechanic in Callisto who wanted to become a warlock. While the gang expects each member to keep his bike up and running, Whiskey often helps out the members who aren't as mechanically sound. Some of the other members enjoy blowing into town and raising hell. Most want to learn the ways of the warlock, and Romey's eclectic teaching style is the best way to teach them. As long as they saddle up when Honcho needs them, he gives them free reign over what they do in their spare time.



WARLOCKS AND DETECTIVES

The first step in becoming a Black Walker is stealing a motorcycle. Even if the new member already owns one, this crime shows Honcho that he or she is serious about joining the gang. Generally, one of the other Walkers follows the recruit during the crime to ensure the bike is really stolen. Those members who end up with two bikes invariably sell the one they don't want and blow the money on a party for the rest of their new-found brothers.

Once the recruit has his own bike, he becomes what the pack refers to as a "crawler." The term has multiple origins. The crawler is an insect and many of the senior members treat him as such. The crawler is also a baby and must be protected but also educated. The crawler is on the path, but not yet a Walker. Crawlers naturally handle the menial tasks that the rest of the Walkers can't be bothered with, ranging from scoring booze for the gang's current hideout to hauling a wounded Walker to an illegal clinic. Crawlers aren't treated with the same respect as Walkers, but they are also still able to leave voluntarily. Those who do, however, are not allowed back in the gang ever.

Making the jump from a crawler to a Walker is a subjective process. Crawlers become Walkers whenever Honcho says they are. A Walker called Hazy Davy stole a police motorcycle while the cop was writing a parking ticket to become a crawler. Honcho told him he was a Walker on the spot. The average crawler takes anywhere from six months to a year to become a Walker. There is a bias towards crawlers who already have some magical talent and/or who fought in the war. Those figures spend much shorter times as crawlers. Romey doesn't teach magic to crawlers either, though other members are willing.

Walkers looking to leave the road can retire if they play their cards right. Honcho will usually let a good man go if asked, but that Walker must agree to assist his brothers whenever they roll into town. While Honcho doesn't keep tabs on former members, there are a surprising number scattered throughout the U.C. Even if they expect help from someone who skipped town, chances are that another one will pick up the slack. These stationary Walkers also act as Honcho's eyes and ears in the cities, keeping him informed of the good, bad, and ugly going down on the streets.



PURPOSE

There is a big difference between the Black Walkers and groups like Theta 73 or the Silent Scepters. The Black Walkers have no higher purpose. There is no grand plan or secret scheme that the Walkers strive for. The only reason the group has been together for this long is the volatile mix of Honcho's leadership and Romey's power. While each man has his own ideas as to what's best for the gang, they generally follow Honcho's lead. Those men who don't fall behind either Honcho or Romey end up one of two ways. If they are lucky, they are just out of the gang. Otherwise, they end up as a dead body on the side of the road.

Honcho started the Black Walkers because he didn't want to live a conventional life. He wanted to be able to pick up stakes whenever it pleased him and move on to the next city with no problems. It wasn't long before he realized what it would take to get him this kind of lifestyle. Honcho needed money: lots and lots of money. He started selling the services of warlocks beneath him because they fetched a nice price to the syndicates that needed them. Now that his gang has a reputation, he can drive up the price quite a bit. Honcho will still get his hands dirty if the price is right, but he likes the luxury of being able to pick the best man for the job.

At this point, Honcho lets the other Walkers handle most of the dirty work. He takes his cut off the top and lets the other warlocks do what needs to get done. New Walkers receive the least when a job goes off well. Honcho encourages loyalty to his older members by taking less of a cut. New Walkers will usually see around 25% of their payment get kicked upstairs, while old hands tithe about 10%. The only Walker who collects all of a payment for a job well done is Romey. Honcho isn't crazy enough to take any money from his right-hand man.

The Walkers benefit from their mobility in other ways as well. Overhead costs that hit other syndicates like bribes, maintaining hideouts, and paying soldiers don't come into play with the Walkers. Each member is responsible for his own finances. If a Walker's money runs out while they're on the road, it's up to him to get more or borrow some from another rider. The tenets of brotherhood will usually stretch for a small loan until the next town, but most Walkers don't like owing anything to anybody. The idea of freedom is why they joined the gang.

Romey's purpose for the gang is much different. He wants to be the most powerful warlock in the world. Whenever the papers run a story of a warlock run amok, he wants his face there right next to the perpetrator of the crime. A psychologist sitting down with Romey would have a field day with his narcissism and similar psychological problems. Honcho placates his ego because it's easier than arguing. Romey has also gotten the gang out of trouble just as many times as he's gotten it into trouble. And although he would refuse to admit it to anyone outside Honcho, Romey feels that Honcho is the only man in the world that he can trust.

Romey is the main reason the Walkers have the fearsome reputation that they do. He encourages his students to push themselves hard to be both brutal and creative. Any warlock can kill some slob with a terminal velocity fork to the neck.

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But a Walker should put a utensil in each of that poor fool's vital organs. Romey likes to razz his fellow warlocks when he thinks they've gone soft. He knows they can't outmatch him but he wants to see them do things to make themselves more like him. Romey also encourages the Walkers to commit crimes aimed at other warlocks. He himself has personally attacked crystal ball squads in Paradiso and Central City.

This lust for power drives the Walkers to look for so-called magic items across the U.C. Yet Romey's actual collection of books and artifacts is very small. He generally finds an item, learns what he can from it, and then destroys it so nobody else can use it. To him, an already-read grimoire is as useful as an empty beer can. Many within the warlock community would be livid if they knew the texts that Romey has used and trashed. Romey figures if anyone had a problem with it, they would have come to see him by now. Even if they did, he would teach them a few free lessons on the real use of power.

Thanks to the one-upmanship that Romey's teaching encourages, the Walkers often have to deal with burned-out brothers after a big job. The Walkers on city duty are ideal for these sorts of situations. Honcho tries to split up the casualties as best he can, since having a half-dozen hallucinating warlocks at the same address is a recipe for disaster. Crawlers are also

a big resource for sick duty, especially if it becomes necessary on the road. If a Black Walker used enough mojo to render himself useless, chances are that the gang has some enemy in hot pursuit. All the Black Walkers will be needed for defense, so it's up to the crawlers to find a good hideout until the worst blows over.

Recently, the Black Walkers have noticed other gangs on the road with a similar style to their own. It seems that the dissatisfaction with the post-war world isn't unique to warlocks. These gangs currently pay tribute to the Walkers whenever they cross paths, but Honcho knows that there will be a day when some young kid on a motorcycle will take his shot at the big bad Black Walkers. War, it seems, follows him wherever he goes.

METHODS

The Black Walkers prize their freedom. They take great pains to stay mobile and keep moving from town to town, city to city. They aren't quite the national threat that the syndicates are, but they are getting bigger every day. A big part of their mystique is the ability to vanish after a big operation goes down. This keeps the syndicate hands clean when they get hired and perplexes the police charged with investigating. The ideal operation is one where they make a big splash in the papers but nobody gets pinched. The Black Walkers do what they need to do and then fade out like a recording.

Each Walker is expected to maintain a vehicle and keep it ready in case of a quick exit. The traditional vehicle is the motorcycle. Motorcycles are easy to maintain and more fuel efficient than cars or trucks. The disdain for four-wheeled vehicles extends to the lingo that has grown around the Walkers. They call cars "cages" because of the lack of freedom they provide the rider. Inside a cage, you can't feel the wind or hear the roar of the engine. If the Black Walkers need a car for some reason, they usually steal it.

Staying connected to the happenings of the cities is important for the Black Walkers. The syndicates need contact points to hire the bikers. The gang also needs ears to the ground to let them know when civilization is hostile to their interests... or if some new means to advance their magical abilities has appeared. This role is filled by the Walkers who give up the road: called mothers by the gang. Depending on who you ask, it's either a knock or a compliment. "Mother" implies a feminine aspect that the member couldn't handle on the road. But it also implies a degree of protection and connection back to the gang.

Mothers usually keep a low profile wherever they've settled. This takes getting used to after the wild and free lives on the road. They keep their warlock powers hidden (if they use them at all), though many continue to engage in research as part of their commitment to the group. Many mothers decide to settle down after they have a close call with the law. Others have burned out and can't ride very well thanks to too much magic, drugs, or injuries. They settle into menial jobs that let them keep tabs on things going on the city. Night janitors, auto mechanics, and bartenders all make good jobs for mothers.



WARLOCKS AND DETECTIVES

No matter what one's current status is within the gang, they are all bound by a code of silence. If anyone is caught, captured, or arrested for a crime connected to the Walkers, the poor soul is expected to stay quiet about the organization and take the blame for himself. In exchange, the brother gets to stay alive and come back to the gang when he's out. This also applies to talking about business in front of civilians. Walkers don't brag about their accomplishments or their toughness to anyone but each other.

Violating the code of silence is a sure ticket to a bad end. Honcho is very specific in policing the Walkers' reputation. He doesn't take kindly to loudmouths or squealers. Minor violations get a stern look and a few grumbles from the boys. Stronger violations require disciplinary actions that involve two or three of the Walkers dusting up with the blabbermouth. Extreme violations are handed over to Romey and dealt with at his pleasure. The threat of Romey hanging over the Walkers keeps them in line. Most of the Walkers have seen what he does to people when he's in a hurry. The images of what might happen to someone when Romey has the time to indulge his sadistic side induce shudders.

The syndicates generally retain good relations with the Black Walkers. Mob bosses understand the importance of having some reliable guys on call for extra muscle. The fact that they are warlocks to boot makes the Walkers very valuable. Finding warlocks can be a difficult proposition for a crime lord. It either requires wooing one away from a competitor or finding one who hasn't been tapped yet. While the Walkers don't come cheap, they do have a proven track record and a reputation to uphold. Gang members are also known for holding true to their original contract: Honcho frowns upon double dealing in his gang.

The syndicates also use the Black Walkers as couriers in between the major cities. Messages are just a phone call away, but the Walkers will be more than glad to handle illegal substances for a fee. In the case of drugs, a Walker will often take a cut of the product itself to sell on his own. The Black Walkers are cultivating drug markets in the areas that the syndicates can't reach, like between the cities and in the territories of rival mobs. Thanks to the innovation of plastics, Black Walkers will often put the contraband inside a container that can be dropped into the gas tank of the motorcycle.

The Walkers do more than just hire themselves out to the syndicates. A large portion of their income comes from the small towns that exist on the outskirts of civilization. They typically run through a town and if it's not needed as a staging area or a hideout, they will rob the local bank or hit the local businessmen up for protection. These crimes are what the Walkers do to keep from getting bored.

The Walkers currently occupy an interesting position in the eyes of law enforcement. While they operate as a moving gang, the word from the Bureau is that the Walkers are still too small potatoes to go after in a big way. The Bureau doesn't want to devote resources to a matter they consider too small and unimportant. Some Agents even go so far as to claim the Walkers are a myth. The cynical politicians think that Mercer is dragging his feet on purpose. After the birth of the crystal ball

squads, he wants to wait until the Walkers are too big to be readily controlled, and then let the local police come crawling on hands and knees to him for help.

NPES

Honcho: The Leader of the Pack

Honcho went out for a ride on his motorcycle and never looked back. His girl had just told him they were going to have a baby and he couldn't handle it. He's justified his actions plenty of times since then, but at the heart of the matter, his decision to walk away from responsibility still haunts him. As a result, the gang rarely visits Central City and when it does, Honcho keeps a very low profile.

Honcho feels more like a father to Romey than a brother. The hazy memories he has of Roman from the war are good ones, so something terrible must have happened to turn him into the high-strung thug that he is today. Honcho collects things here and there from before the war, but if they can't help him immediately, he discards them. He knows that without him, Romey would go down rather quickly, but he also knows there's no way the warlock would settle down anywhere.

Honcho's skill as a warlock is adequate, though he very rarely uses it. At this point in his leadership career, he prefers to send other Walkers out to do the dirty work. He's not completely hands off and still has his share of bar fights and run-ins with the law. But if he gets hired by a syndicate to kill someone with magic, he usually sends someone else to do it. Honcho spends most of his time plotting his next move.

Honcho looks the part of the outlaw biker: black leather jacket, grease-slick hair, blue jeans, and boots. He enjoys the thrill of being able to ride into a town or a city and have people look at him with a mix of fear and envy in their eyes. His tattoo is near his heart, which is precisely the role he takes within the Black Walkers. If Honcho were to be killed or imprisoned, the Black Walkers would quickly die.

Harlan "Honcho" Stoeger

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 4, Build 5, Gut 8, Moxie 5, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Athletics 4, Brawl 3, Contortions 5, Drive (Car, Motorcycle) 7, Evasion 6, Engineering 3, Fast Talk 7, Firearms 4, Intimidation 4, Kinetics 4, Magnetism 5, Perception 5, Pick Lock 5, Stealth 2, Streetwise 5.

Backgrounds: Black Walkers, Lucky, Magical Aptitude, Racer.

Profession: Con Artist 3, Rogue Scientist 1.

Romey: The Warlock Without a Cause

Romey Ciulia is a squat firebrand who contrasts with his leader in almost every way. Honcho is the strong, silent type. Romey will talk your ear off even if he's burning you to death. Honcho tries to keep the peace amongst the Walkers. Romey

CHAPTER SEVEN: WARLOCK ORGANIZATIONS

riles them up and has probably had his nose broken by every member of the group at least once, Honcho included. Romey is the perfect opposite of Honcho, which may be why they fit together so well within the Walkers.

Romey's first memory is of using warlock powers in the war. The bits and pieces that he's scrambled together make him think that he was one of the joes that the U.C. used to fight the Order of Nu's sorcery by training warlocks of their own. When he got back from the war, the way warlocks were treated rubbed him the wrong way, so he signed on with a Paradiso criminal syndicate as quickly as possible. The syndicate quickly tired of his rambunctious ways and tried to rub him out. Romey skipped town and took up in Callisto, claiming that he still belonged to his old mob. He got word that the syndicate knew about his little bluff the day Honcho and his Wanderers came to town. He expected to go out in a blaze of glory in the fight, which he preferred to having to face the music in Paradiso. Instead, Romey got a second lease on life. The Walkers are exactly the type of gang that he wants, but he leaves all the logistics to Honcho.

He never saw sorcery as a path to knowledge or enlightenment. He just loved hurting people with it. His commitment to magic is absolute, but stems solely from his desire for power. The other warlocks in the gang tend to follow his example. Romey has a penchant for wearing strange hats wherever he rides. His current cap is an old war helmet with a spike poking out of the top. He also loves trick riding and uses his sorcery to pull off amazing motorcycling feats to impress and intimidate onlookers. Romey is also the only Black Walker who doesn't carry a regular weapon. He's defeated too many guns, blades, and clubs with magic to put much faith in them. He hasn't met anyone who's been able to overpower his sorcery, so why shouldn't he use his biggest gun all the time?

Romey Ciulia

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 4, Build 5, Gut 6, Moxie 8, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Athletics 4, Brawl 3, Drive (Car, Motorcycle) 5, Electricity 4, Engineering 3, Evasion 4, Fast Talk 7, Firearms 4, Intimidation 8, Kinetics 8, Perception 4, Pick Lock 5, Stealth 2, Streetwise 6, Thermal Energy 6.

Backgrounds: Black Walkers, Magical Aptitude, Racer.

Profession: Rogue Scientist 2, Street Tough 3.

Lula: The Corrupted Innocent

Lula always dreamed big. She remembers going to the movie theater every Saturday before the White Light and watching every movie they showed. She never thought it strange that Callisto had no movie theater, because after the war, when her daddy didn't make it back, she had to help her family earn its keep. She took a job at the Main Street Diner, where her blonde hair and slim build got her good tips from the ogling truckers and salesmen who passed through. Sometimes they offered to take her to Paradiso and help her with her movie career, but she knew better. She did, at least, until Honcho came to town.

She was on his bike when the Black Walkers rode out of town. In him, she saw all of the romantic dreams of freedom and rebellion fostered on that movie screen. He was everything she felt life should be. She knew he wouldn't take advantage of her and she loved him for it. Every day was an adventure and every town was a chance for her to be the actress she always knew she could be. She's played the good girl gone bad, the femme fatale, and the lost runaway, and she's loved every minute of it. She knows she can disarm anyone with her good looks and few people suspect her as a member of the Black Walkers. Her tattoo is a small letter on the back of her neck, usually hidden by her hair.

Unfortunately, she has also studied at the feet of Romey, and his cruel laughter has infected her. She spends her time away from Honcho finding some poor sucker who wants to fix her. She plays up to him, teasing and tormenting, doing her best to pull him into her world instead of the other way around. The saps always try something noble, like facing down Honcho or calling the cops. She laughs as she breaks their hearts, right before the rest of the Walkers tear him apart. Romey is quite taken with her antics and occasionally tries to make her his. She's rebuffed him every time, but some of the Walkers wonder if Lula is the one thing that can break the bonds of brotherhood between Honcho and Romey.

Lula

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 3, Build 4, Gut 4, Moxie 8, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Athletics 6, Disguise 4, Drive (Car, Motorcycle) 5, Electricity 4, Etiquette 4, Evasion 3, Fast Talk 6, Firearms 5, Lore (Gossip) 4, Perform (Acting) 6, Thermal Energy 2.

Backgrounds: Black Walkers, Charismatic, Magical Aptitude.

Profession: Femme Fatale 3, Rogue Scientist 1.

DEJA VU

While the word "warlock" conjures up images of mystics and occult symbolism, most magic-users consider themselves men and women of science. Their studies came about in research labs and university libraries. Many find the occult trappings attributed to them foolish, or at the very least uncomfortable. However, there are some who relish the idea that the warlock's power comes from some supernatural source: who believe the stories about voodoo priests and pursue them as alternatives to dry scientific theory. Many of them drift towards Terminus, where the shadows live and the idea of strange powers and other worlds seems much more real. Those with the right style and connections end up with Déjà Vu, an organization of warlock criminals who embrace the power of *voudoun* as a means of perfecting their art.

WARLOCKS AND DETECTIVES

In the streets of Terminus, the name Déjà Vu is tantamount to the Devil himself. Anytime a large caper goes down and the cops have no one to finger, it usually ends up credited to this organization. While many of the city's criminal syndicates use warlocks in their operations, Déjà Vu prides itself in using them almost exclusively. The warlocks vastly outnumber the regular joes in the gang, and some stories even whisper that they consist solely of warlocks... and some of the most powerful in the world to boot.

The man behind the curtain is Papa Miroir, born Simon Dickinson to a modestly notable aristocratic family. He was the black sheep of the Dickinson family, always ending up in the paper thanks to a wrecked car or some poor young girl he was seeing who ended up in a family way. When he was sent off to university, he fell in with warlocks, and while he was a mere dabbler at that point, he recognized the usefulness of his abilities. Most folks in Terminus remember Simon Dickinson's parents dying tragically. Thanks to the White Light, nobody remembers the specifics. What folks do remember is Dickinson himself, returning from the war and looking to shame the Devil with his sins.

The infamous debut of Déjà Vu took place during Marti Gras six years ago. Dickinson, like many of the old money families in Terminus, sponsored a krewe in the big parade. The

theme of the float was déjà vu. The krewe incorporated a lot of strange elements into their design, as well as some subtle but crowd-pleasing sorcery. It was here that Simon Dickinson first adopted the identity of Papa Miroir. He laughed behind his mask and ate up the cheers of the crowd. Had it ended like that, the idea behind Déjà Vu would have been just another fuzzy memory of Marti Gras: transgressive, debauchurous, and ultimately dismissed.

But Papa Miroir had no intention of letting the notion drop. A few days later, one of the city's prominent bagmen was found hanging from a fire escape. The metal bars were bent around his neck like a noose and he wore a mask like one of the men of the Déjà Vu krewe. A few days later, the First National bank downtown was robbed at midnight. The vault door was ripped from its hinges and carefully laid in front of the door. A hat similar to the one worn by Papa Miroir was set carefully in the center. More crimes followed and it soon became obvious that the float itself served to predict the crimes that Miroir's quickly rising syndicate were performing.

Anticipating Déjà Vu's next felony has become something of a sport amongst law enforcement and crime reporters in Terminus. They analyze the specifics of the float, recall the effects that projected from it, and try to figure out how it

will translate into some other daring robbery or murder. Papa Miroir hasn't repeated the parade trick, establishing it as a precedent to throw off investigations, but some members of Déjà Vu adopt the gimmick and take it to heart, seeing it as a way to taunt the police with their brilliance. Others use it to draw suspicion away from upcoming capers. No matter what, Déjà Vu crimes always have a bit of theatrical flair going for them.

Soon after his initial antics, criminals of all kinds were beating down Papa Miroir's door to join up. Miroir had a very open-door policy, which surprised many of his initial crew. In this, there was method to his madness as well. The more criminals who claimed allegiance to Déjà Vu, the easier it became to keep the heat off when Papa Miroir planned another big score. Con men and grifters used supernatural hustles for ages, from phony psychics cold-reading marks to elaborate stores with warlock-based special effects. With his criminal operations growing each day, Papa Miroir



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felt it was a good time to start cashing in on those ideas from the other side. There was so much confusion in the streets — so many antics by official gang members and ambitious pretenders alike — that the real goings on of the outfit remained nicely hidden.

The actual warlocks who work in Déjà Vu find themselves in a rare position. In other syndicates, warlocks are looked upon with a combination of fear and pity. They made men fear the abilities the warlock possessed but also meant that the warlock wouldn't be going far in the organization. Even if the warlock got ambitious, a quick call to the crystal ball squad would take care of any problems. The reverse is true in Déjà Vu. Papa Miroir surrounds himself with some of the best sorcerers in Terminus. No matter how clever, brutal, or profitable a criminal may be, if he doesn't have mojo, he'll never make into the group's inner circle.

Simon Dickinson initially maintained the identity of Papa Miroir to keep him free and clear of his crimes should he ever be caught. Lately, he has been spending more time behind Miroir's mask, and the other members of his coterie are beginning to wonder if it's all going to his head. While there are "true believers" amongst them, those who have been with the organization the longest have noticed the changes. Perhaps he's truly become Miroir, forgetting his old life in favor of a false identity. Perhaps years of sorcery have taken their toll. Perhaps he's beginning another elaborate con, one so challenging that he can't bring his organization with him. Only Papa Miroir knows for sure and only he has read the cards.

ORGANIZATION

The part of Déjà Vu that most people are familiar with isn't even part of the true organization. Criminals know that working with the top dog is better than working against him. Plenty of freelance operatives claim to throw in with Déjà Vu to trade on its name. The smart ones pay their dues to the organization every now and again: nothing formal, but tribute often arrives at one of Papa Miroir's "hideouts" in varying degrees from small, unmarked bills to a new stolen car every three months. Those crooks not smart enough to pony up are usually the first ones Papa Miroir feeds to the cops.

The real members of Déjà Vu keep a loose watch on the criminals drawing on their name. The ones who don't play by the rules don't get warnings. If they do something to offend Miroir, they are usually taken care of very quickly. This self-policing attitude is one of the aspects that the Terminus PD likes about Déjà Vu (other than the payoffs). Lately, Papa Miroir has been more capricious with what offends, but he plays pretty fair for the most part.

When a criminal joins up with the actual outfit, he usually ends up in one of four branches: originally named by the NLEB to try and make sense of the group's underlying structure. They broke Déjà Vu down along the lines of the suits of the tarot deck. Miroir and his inner circle comprise the Arcana. While Miroir and his advisors don't use the names, they have evolved into a street slang for members to recognize each other (as well as rooting out the wannabes). The NLEB also assigns face cards to members of the gang who are known warlocks.

The Cups make up the social strata of the organization. They are the ones who hold the favors and run the blackmail that keeps members out of jail and on the streets. They usually hail from the higher levels of polite society. More than a few bored rich kids were inspired to follow Simon Dickinson's dabbling in crime. They often flaunt their magic use openly, though they rarely engage in overt criminal activity beyond that. Those Cups who aren't well-known in the society pages tend to be the type with friends in low places. They keep tabs on the unwashed that orbit the real members. Those with high ranking magic skills are well-protected, since it is difficult to find a skilled warlock who hasn't acquired some strange quirk from his or her abilities.

The members concerned with the supernatural trappings of the crew are called the Wands. When a criminal is suspected of being a warlock, he ends up in this category: *houngan* priests, confidence men, and criminals who have perfected supernatural elements as a part of their *modus operandi*. Many "Madame Zorbas" are put here, as well as forgers selling bogus journals of famous warlocks and the like. There are plenty of marks willing to pay for a taste of magic, and they become easy touches because they can't go to the police afterwards, lest they confess their pursuit of the exotic and the illegal. Wands with warlock abilities are often terrifying to see in action. Many of the members of the Arcana started out as Wands.

Déjà Vu stays flush with cash thanks to the Coins. If it's illegal and it makes money, the Coins will give it a try. One of the most famous scams run by a Coin was raising funds for a "gaunt orphanage" for children whose parents had become gaunts. Most outfits wouldn't try something like this because of the gaunts in their employ. With Déjà Vu being relatively gaunt-free, they were able to innovate. Ironically, Jack Drago started up a similar organization — used as a money laundering front, but also serving a legitimate purpose as an orphanage — shortly after the story of the scam broke. Drago apparently took the scam personally and doesn't treat visiting Déjà Vu members well.

When the warlocks need muscle, they turn to the Swords. The Swords are usually a step above the usual thugs who work the goon squad duties. They're very adept at working with warlocks. When things get rough, most opponents will wisely attempt to eliminate the warlock, since magic powers are unpredictable and scary. The Swords act to protect the magic-users in the organization. They also serve collection duties and as button men when the group needs someone eliminated. The Swords are the epitome of the "kind word and a gun" philosophy, and the most lethal combination of smooth talkers and violent fighters in the city.

The movers and shakers within Déjà Vu are called the Arcana: the one title Miroir has used himself. He refers to his close friends less and less by their names and more by the Major Arcana card which they best embody. Not all of the Arcana are represented, and Miroir has changed the names of various members if they fit a different card that day. Everyone in the Arcana is a warlock of some stripe. Most of them put up with Miroir's eccentricities. He's made them a lot of money and protected them when they were in danger. Sooner or later,

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though, he's going to snap. When Miroir finally loses his grip, Déjà Vu will fall apart. Most of the Arcana are smart enough to make plans for that eventuality.

Déjà Vu theoretically works by trafficking in the so-called "victimless vices" such as gambling and prostitution. While this is the official policy, the real world often intrudes and causes individual members to branch out into more violent crimes. A casino needs a big starting bankroll, so the owner sets up a bank heist to get the money. Agents of the city's brothels hang out at the bus and train stations looking for fresh young things to step off the bus. While the syndicate spins the idea that they are only hurting people who want to be hurt, the truth is never easy.

Each of the quarters of Terminus is serviced by its own Déjà Vu casino. While the small-time games are left to the street operators and the freelancers, each of the full-service casinos kicks its winnings up to Miroir. The advantage that his casinos hold over the others is a good reputation: an idea he borrowed from the Baron's Men and enhanced with his own unique style. The games they run are relatively straight, and any crookedness that creeps in is usually the fault of a greedy dealer or some other individual. Miroir does his best to make sure his games stay straight, and anyone caught cheating is barred from the group's underground casinos.

The most luxurious gambling den in the city is in the Acadian Quarter. The grand old house is known simply as "The Plantation" and caters to the elite of Terminus society. Tops and tails are a must to get in the door... not to mention a bank account in at least six figures. Moonlighting members of the Terminus Orchestra perform classical pieces in elegant surroundings as the games play on. The atmosphere

is reserved, not the rowdy energy of a back-room card game that most other gambling dens exhibit. Large amounts of money are won and lost at the tables here. Most gamblers will spend the entire evening in one seat, with the tabs settled at the end of the night.

Brothels are also a big money maker for Déjà Vu. There is something about the city that brings out the sinner. The girls who make their living this way come from a variety of backgrounds and are generally well-treated compared to other members of their profession. It's still not a life most enter by choice, but it beats many of the alternatives. Some are trying to get up enough money to make it out to Paradiso to become movie stars. Others have run afoul of loan sharks or drug dealers and need the money to stay alive. Even in such refined circles, the life of a lady of the evening is nowhere near as romantic as some make it out to be.

Papa Miroir's pride and joy in this branch of his operation is called the Reflection Room. The waiting area

is lined with mirrors from floor to ceiling. The furniture is antique and allows the customer to sit and admire every angle of the girls in the lineup. The rooms are also decorated in an old-world style, to recall a more genteel time. Those patrons willing to part with more money can stay in a room that shares the reflective properties of the foyer.

Miroir has a soft spot in his heart for the grifter. The fear-some reputation he himself engenders is in part a hustle, and its success has taught him the value of a good swindle. There always seems to be a short con, like three-card monte or a shell game, going on every street corner in Terminus. People are often made to forget the idea that they can't get something for nothing. Easy money is a crime that even the staunchest churchgoer finds tempting. Some of the biggest swindles in history have gone down in Terminus, from the Count Gratzl gaff to forged works of art "recovered" from the Order of Nu's war treasury. And many of them have Déjà Vu at the heat of it all.

There is an indistinct warehouse near the docks that many of the confidence men in the city use to set up their store, known to grifters across the country as "The Showroom." The store is where the grifters take the mark to convince him that the scam is legitimate. Whether it's a fake betting parlor or an art gallery, the Showroom can easily be adapted to whatever front the con men need to present. Some gangs, like the Yellow Hustlers, blindfold their marks for "secrecy," and take them to different parts of the Showroom done up to look like different locations.

The most recent addition to the vices that fuel Déjà Vu is illegal drugs. The harsh realities of life in Terminus are sometimes too much to take. Heroin has hit in a big way in the city

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and its reach stretches from the streets to the four poster bedrooms. Other drugs have solid markets, but heroin is growing the most rapidly. Many of the blues musicians that Terminus is known for are dabbling in the drug, and the blues clubs are quickly becoming a perfect sales and distribution network for the syndicate to use. The group's smuggling operations control much of bayou beyond Terminus. Papa Miroir believes that drugs are the future and may hold the key to wresting control of the Terminus underworld from more powerful rivals like the Baron's Men and the Roughhousers.

The word on the street is that Papa Miroir is in the market for an even deadlier drug: Antidox. The drug that removes the capability for warlocks to work their mojo is a very closely guarded secret of the U.C. government. Word has reached Miroir, however, and he wants some for himself. While the thought of a juicy payday for delivering a shipment to Miroir is one thing, even juicer are the rumors as to what Miroir wants it for. Some say he wants to try and recreate the formula to use on his rivals. Some say he wants it to hang over the heads of the Arcana to ensure their loyalty. Some even say that he wants to use it as a recreational drug, to prove that his abilities are stronger than anything some chemist in a lab coat can whip up. It's a high risk/high reward caper that only the foolish or desperate would try. In other words, it's perfect for Déjà Vu.

METHODS

When Simon Dickinson became Papa Miroir, he initially did so to take advantage of a unique situation. He wanted to dabble in an entirely new brand of wickedness. Dickinson didn't want to bring shame upon the family name if he were found out, so he took inspiration from masked heroes and villains in literature and created an entirely new persona. Papa Miroir became the epitome of sin, giving people access to the vices that they denied they had and laughing all the way to the bank.

Dickinson was inspired by the terrible days when the anti-magic laws were still being debated. Anyone known as a warlock was seen as a second-class citizen, and yet he saw all sorts of powerful men and women dabbling in the arts. Dickinson wore his darkened morality on his sleeve, but it sickened him to see the same people coming to the scholar's meetings where he learned magic, then turning around the next morning and denouncing warlocks as bad people. A person is good or bad. Nothing else makes it so.

This is the driving force behind Miroir's decree of victimless vices. Miroir truly believes that you can't cheat an honest man. Profiting off of those who seek out crime is no sin. At least when they do so with him, they fund Miroir's activities to root out the treachery in society. While Miroir doesn't believe in Heaven, he believes that the sooner people realize how much bad there is there in the world, the sooner people will start being honest with themselves. It's not virtue or vice that makes the world a terrible place. It's the lying and the self-deception.

Often, Déjà Vu targets those who crusade for good while concealing some dark secret in their past. Even in his current state, he gets an extra bit of joy from bringing down peo-

ple caught by their own self-righteousness. Miroir corrupts reformers, pays off judges, and outs warlocks simply because he can. It doesn't matter if it destroys lives or puts people in danger. They aren't truly innocents if they have secrets to keep. He knows this better than anybody, hiding his identity behind a top hat and festival mask. The only true keepers of any secrets are the spirits.

As Miroir was a theatrical choice, so too was the use of flamboyant robberies and murders (disguising the group's real money-making operations) and the embrace of the *voudoun* style of magic. Dickinson thought that the warlocks he studied under didn't need any more bad press, but people expected bad things out of *voudoun*. By playing into their expectations, he hoped to draw those negative opinions away from "regular" warlocks. It was a continuation of his ideals: by admitting that he was a bad guy, he was free to do bad things to expand his empire.

More and more, Dickinson spends his days under the mask and the hat of Miroir. Many of the Arcana fear that the years of practicing magic have whittled away Dickinson's sanity. A few believe Miroir thinks his grand experiment hasn't worked, and he doesn't want to go back to a world that lives with two faces. The true believers say the *loa* spoke to Miroir and he only truly understands their power now that he is washing away his former self.

Larger criminal organizations long to wipe them out, but Miroir is simply too clever for them. However, most observers believe that if Papa Miroir were to be eliminated, Déjà Vu would fall apart. Many criminal syndicates live and die on the strength of their leadership, but the charismatic Miroir is such an integral part of the outfit that it would vanish within a few days without him. This fear of losing it all has driven Miroir to hide out in his plantation for weeks at a time. When he meets with others, he meets only in dilapidated shacks in the swamps and bayous. Rumors abound that Miroir is thinking of faking his own death just to see who comes to his funeral. He is also curious to see who would try to assume leadership of his organization and how much bad blood would wash the streets of Terminus. The few advisors he's mentioned this plan to think it's ludicrous. There's no guarantee that whoever would take over would relinquish power once Miroir returned. Deep down, he agrees with their objections. It's a shame that someone striving for brutal honesty in the world doesn't trust his own organization.

As Miroir's influence has expanded, other *voudoun* practitioners have come under the protection of his organization. The true believers within Déjà Vu are some of the scariest warlocks in Terminus, if not the world. They think of Miroir as a prophet and a spiritual leader. He will show the other warlocks the error of their ways. Even when presented with the idea that he started out as a regular warlock, they brush off the argument. What better way to understand the Devil than by walking a mile down the road with him? They believe he understands the mysteries more than any other has since the White Light.

Other *voudoun* priests and priestesses often look upon Déjà Vu with a combination of pity and envy. Ask John Q Public about *voudoun* and he'll usually mention Déjà Vu. Along with Valmont of the Baron's Men and a few other prominent *houn-gan*, Miroir and his coterie are the public face of Terminus's unique magic styling.

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Déjà Vu now stands at a crossroads. An organization that started out as a way for criminals to profit using the veneer of *voudoun* has itself become the premier organization of *voudoun* warlocks. Miroir has felt this change coming for some time and it is ultimately his decision where he goes next. Will he embrace his role as the embodiment of every awful stereotype attributed to *voudoun*, or will he continue to punish those he feels need punishing? Only time, and perhaps the spirits, will tell.

NPCs

Ramon Garcia: The Cooler

Ramon came into Déjà Vu from overseas. His memory is no better than anyone else's, but he remembers a war being fought in his homeland. His side didn't do so well, so he came to the U.C. with the clothes on his back and some skill in the art of Kinetics. He vaguely remembers being a professor of some sort before the war. Now that the war is over, he'd like to go back someday, but that will take money.

He fell in with the organization while looking for work in Terminus. Ramon found one of the group's illegal casinos when things got desperate. He went inside and used his mojo on the roulette wheel. He was smart enough not to make a big bet that paid off. Instead, he spread his money around in between his wins at the roulette wheel but always made sure to come home with more than he spent. It was a good little con, but Ramon didn't realize that the house always wins in the end.

The casino picked up on Ramon's little trick. Luckily, the owner saw an opportunity where others would see a dead body in the swamp. He let Ramon keep his winnings and gave him enough to pay for room and board. In exchange, Ramon now works for the house, making sure other warlocks don't try little tricks like his. He is also sent to end the lucky streaks of any other suspicious gamblers by sitting at their table and making sure the cards, dice, or wheel fall the right way. Ramon would like to get out, someday, but he's not sure if he can.

Ramon Garcia

Attributes: Brains 8, Brawn 4, Build 4, Gut 6, Moxie 3, Smoothness 7.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Brawl 2, Evasion 3, Fast Talk 1, Firearms 4, Forgery 6, Kinetics 6, Lore (Economics) 4, Perception 5, Puzzles 4, Stealth 4, Streetwise 4, Tensile Energy 4.

Backgrounds: Déjà Vu, Lucky.

Profession: Con Artist 2, Gangster 1, Rogue Scientist 2.

Madame Zoraska: The Phony Psychic

Madame Zoraska knows. Ask anyone who has come to her parlor. She has an uncanny knack for connecting with the spirits and she does so without that spooky voodoo stuff. She has advised businessmen, movie stars, investigators, and at

least one of Terminus' mayors with her connection to the spirit realm. There's a lot of energy contained in the frame of this small gypsy woman. Clearly, this is what attracts the spirits to her.

In truth, Madame Zoraska came to Terminus as Bernice Whitman. She had run quite a few short cons but her arrival sparked a grand idea for a long con. She traded off of the city's reputation with the supernatural and began doing business under the name Madame Zoraska. She's very good at sizing people up and a master of the cold read. She asks her marks leading questions and watches as they give her the information she needs to make her money. More often than not, the mark wants to believe in her powers because nobody pays for a psychic if they're not ready to believe her. One of her most popular tactics is to get a mark hooked and then be unavailable for the next meeting, or canceling because of "the drains of communing with the spirits." She gets the mark whipped into frenzy, until he's willing to pay well and above her usual fee just to speak with her.

While she has no warlock abilities, she has become one of Déjà Vu's most appreciated members. Her success has spawned countless imitators, but none put on the show quite as well as Madame Zoraska. What began as some moaning and eye-rolling has become quite the display of theatrics. She will often send marks in need of actual warlocks toward one in the organization. It's her way of paying her tribute. Madame Zoraska may even one day become more famous than Papa Miroir, and she has some ideas about what she'd do if she ever did. If that happens, Déjà Vu may come to an interesting crossroads.

Bernice Whitman, "Madame Zoraska"

Attributes: Brains 6, Brawn 3, Build 3, Gut 6, Moxie 7, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 15.

Skills: Appraise 6, Brawl 2, Disguise 5, Etiquette 5, Evasion 6, Fast Talk 8, Firearms 3, Forgery 4, Stealth 4, Streetwise 7.

Backgrounds: Charismatic, Déjà Vu, Lucky, Small.

Profession: Con Artist 2, Thief 1.

Gabe Mosely: The One Good Cop

The person who first said, "honesty is the best policy" had clearly never been to Terminus. The majority of cops here know which side of their bread has butter, and it's clearly the side closest to groups like Déjà Vu. The one shining example of honesty is a detective in his mid-40's who should be a captain by this point in his career.

The first thing Mosely remembers after the White Light is how he and his partner found the money in the trunk of what looked to be an abandoned car. It was in the high five figures with no claim on it. His partner looked at him eagerly. They could put half the money in their squad car and still bring in an impressive amount. Except Gabe couldn't. Not even after his partner drew down on him. Especially not after Gabe gunned

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down his fellow officer after being wounded. That money was most certainly blood money now and he wanted it out of his life. He got a commendation that he keeps in his desk, next to the picture of his dead partner. For the next five years, the other cops wouldn't go near him. They knew he wouldn't be flexible. They knew he wouldn't play ball.

When he was finally promoted to detective, he was put in charge of the Special Warlock Crime Division. While it sounds impressive, the crystal ball squad consists of himself, a few rookie officers, and a number of corrupt detectives on the take. He knows that the task force is a joke and he's sick of being a punchline. His successes have been few and far between. It's tough working against both a crime syndicate and the police who are supposed to be protecting the citizens from them. But there have been successes and the press is beginning to take notice. While he isn't much of a public speaker, he's hoping that his record will speak for him. While *Déjà Vu* has the protection of the *loa* and the spirits, they shouldn't have the protection of the law. It's only a matter of time before he breaks a case that gets Miroir's attention. How he will fare after that, only the spirits know for sure.

Gabe Mosely

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 6, Build 7, Gut 7, Moxie 4, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 35.

Skills: Athletics 5, Brawl 6, Bureaucracy 2, Evasion 4, Fast Talk 6, Firearms 6, Melee 5, Perception 6, Pick Lock 4, Puzzles 4, Sleight of Hand 4, Stealth 4, Street-wise 4.

Backgrounds: Alert, Rugged.

Profession: Investigator 1, Officer of the Law 2.

THE MEN OF DUNSWICK STREET

The lies that the Men of Dunswick Street tell begin with the name. The group is not comprised solely of men, nor are all the members from Dunswick Street. The name hints at the group's origins, which were in the newsroom of the Gateway *Lighthouse*. They are supposedly warlocks, though only a few members would consider themselves such. More accurately, they are men and women who know the truth but prefer to perpetrate the lies. They use the truth for their own mysterious ends.

It all began with a story that was barely worth covering. Three years ago, St. Andre's Cathedral underwent a series of renovations. The faithful attended a consecration ceremony on Easter Sunday that involved Cardinal James Norris. Jake Westbury was the reporter assigned to cover the ceremony. He knew his coverage would be buried in the back pages, but he was fresh out of school and just happy to be working as a writer. He was the first to notice the rifleman hidden in the

incomplete balcony, amid the unassembled mess that would soon be the pipe organ. The reporter crept up to the loft, surprised the shooter, wrestled the rifle away, and kept him at gunpoint until the police arrived.

The shooter told Westbury a strange story while they waited. He claimed that Norris was his father, but he remembered him by another name: Jack Kelly. The shooter had several photos as evidence. When he first approached Norris, the Cardinal claimed he didn't have a son, and the man snapped. He was escorted from the archdiocese's offices and told never to return. The man started to dig but couldn't find anything of substance. The hall of records was filled with volumes of blank pages. The library held books that referred to places which didn't exist. What did it all mean? The madness of it all pushed the man to a desperate ploy — if he killed Norris, he would be on the front page of every paper in the nation. Then he would tell the world what he had found.

Westbury quietly listened until the cops rounded the man up, then he filed the story. Silas Goldfarb, city editor, called Jake into his office. He shut the door and told the young man that he wasn't going to print the story. Westbury was furious. He launched into a tirade about the freedom of the press and how people had the right to know the truth. Silas shook his head sadly. He told Westbury he had known about this for years now. What good would it do to ruffle people into a panic about the so-called truth? Would things be any better or worse if everyone knew that the past somehow... well... didn't exist? He unlocked a drawer in his desk and handed Westbury a scrapbook with other stories like his. He told Westbury to look it over and come back tomorrow with his opinion.

When Westbury returned, he had a plan. If it was all true — if the world he was in was a sham — then what was the point of playing nice? All the rules didn't mean anything. Heaven and Hell were vacation brochures. If that was the case, then Westbury would become the big fish of the pond. Secrets have power, but they only have power when they stay secrets. Silas began to understand and suggested that he contact the people affected by the stories in the scrap book.

Some of them balked at Westbury's idea. They said it was blasphemy. Even with the cold hard truth in front of them, they still thought they could do something good. These poor souls couldn't understand what it all meant and didn't deserve their knowledge. When one of them threatened Westbury... it got out of hand. The murder quickly shredded whatever humanity that Jake had but it solidified his resolve. Accidental death moved to the deliberate kind when other people he contacted balked as well. If he wasn't a real person, then the ones who died weren't people either. Silas soon fell in with him, first by disposing of the evidence, then by participating in the murders themselves. They told each other that they were making the best of a bad situation.

By the time they finished going through Silas's book, the Men of Dunswick Street had gained around two dozen members: mostly Asians from the local Golden community who felt they had little to lose and much to gain by signing on to the organization. The rest of the people they had confronted with the truth either fled or met inauspicious ends at the hands of the group. Their members have since spread throughout the social

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strata of Gateway. From the riches of the Hill to the worst back alley in the Gaunt District, one of the Men of Dunswick Street is watching.

The founders of this organization have gone in two wildly different directions. Jake Westbury holds court at the Janus Room every night. A wide variety of people jostle for time at his table. Now a senior editor at the paper, his influence extends into the city above and beyond what he's brokered as one of the Men of Dunswick Street. The information he has as the leader of Dunswick Street gives him an edge on the other papers, which in turn, feeds him more information for Dunswick Street. Westbury sits at the same table every night, with his distinctive horn-rimmed glasses and white dinner jacket. Rumors suggest that he has a phone line installed directly to the table.

Silas, on the other hand, quietly retired from the paper. He spends his days quietly collecting headlines from papers across the country. He is intrigued by the mystery of it all. The information that he feeds Jake keeps Dunswick Street running. He spends most of his time sifting through it all in the hopes of connecting the dots to something bigger. Silas was never a good front man, and gladly gave that honor to Jake. The stacks of papers and other evidence in his home are strangely comforting. They are specks of something concrete, unlike the world they currently live in. With his basic needs attended to by Dunswick Street, Silas can devote his time to answering the one final question: why was this world created?

The spread through Gateway has been slow, but the Men of Dunswick Street know they aren't going anywhere. Every day, someone else discovers the truth. Every day, someone wakes up from the walking dream to discover that they don't like what they see. Every day, the Men of Dunswick Street find these people and make them an offer. Join us, and we'll see how far we can control this dream. Refuse us, and one day you'll walk into a fog bank and never come back.

ORGANIZATION

Imagine a spiderweb spreading through the streets of Gateway. Each strand is connected to someone. Every time somebody touches someone else, a new strand is created. The Men of Dunswick Street are this web, endeavoring to touch everyone in the city even if they don't recognize it. Even though the Men of Dunswick Street are small in number compared to something like the NLEB, the people involved are connected far more closely. Nothing happens in the city without one of the strands picking up the vibrations. Inevitably, whatever is sitting in the center of the web picks up on those vibrations.

At the center of the web sit two men. Jake Westbury is the face and *de facto* leader of the organization. He makes the major policy decisions and decides when the group itself must take action. He decides when a lead is followed upon. When one of the members comes across an important artifact, like a photograph or a scrap of paper, he does his best to get it to Jake. Part of the reason Jake spends so much time in the Janus Room is because of the almost constant flow of information in and out. The members of Dunswick Street fade in next to the powerful individuals that lobby for a few minutes of his time.

Silas Goldfarb also sits at the center. Though he rarely takes an active hand in what Dunswick Street does, he is just as important to the organization as his partner. Thanks to his amazing memory, Silas is able to put together the bits of information that he receives in ways nobody else could. Silas remembers that Councilor Mackey takes his lunch on Tuesdays in the same place, so when he orders in, something must be going on. He draws conclusions from the smallest pieces of information. These deductions have an uncanny knack of being correct. Silas's home is piled high with newspapers, file folders, and all the evidence that the World Is Not What It Seems.

A web like this requires anonymity for the members of Dunswick Street. No members know more than one or two others. When they meet, they are required to wear masks obscuring their identity. Jake keeps his in a specially made briefcase at the Janus Club, donning it anew every time another member comes to him with information. He assigns leadership of each cell to a single individual, called a Coister, who is identified by the color of his or her mask: "Mr. Blue," for example, or "Ms. Jade." Jake and Silas are both known as "Mr. Dunswick," and no one has yet caught on that they are two different people. Their build is similar enough to hide the differences and they have both learned to speak in the same air of silky menace. Jake is so enchanted with the success of this ploy that he has members wear masks whenever they conduct any overt act of theft or robbery. It makes good copy for his paper and the masks they leave behind are an excellent calling card for the police.

When members work together, it is their discretion as to how much information that they share with one another. Dunswick Street is not an intelligence agency and recognizes that people who are familiar with each other are often better suited for a job than total strangers. Besides, figure the members, Mr. Dunswick will most certainly know what information that they've shared anyway. While Silas does most of the heavy lifting when it comes to connecting the dots, he is also smart enough to realize that letting others theorize about a problem can help engender a new solution.

Each cell is given a domain to watch over. This domain may be physical such as a neighborhood or an important building like city hall. It can also be more general, such as "the police" or "the railway stations." Generally, a person receives a domain that is easy for him or her to monitor. Dunswick Street also supposedly has members watching over the influential members of the city. Who is under watch is known only to Jake and Silas, but Mayor Loomis's office has certainly been compromised.

If a member is killed or captured, Dunswick Street severs all ties immediately. This is a policy that they don't discuss beforehand, but all members understand the importance of secrecy. If possible, a new member in the same domain is found and the name is reused. Otherwise, Jake cuts his losses and readjusts elsewhere in the web. Jake is smart enough to keep files on all the members and is an expert at the smear campaign. If the member stays quiet, Jake will help to get them out of trouble. If he tells the cops about the secret society and other such business, those pictures that the captured member didn't want his wife to see get out.

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The Men of Dunswick Street have no particular ranking system. This cultivates a culture of us vs. them. “Us” being individuals who are onto the Big Secret and “them” being the rest of the world waiting to be sheared. Some members get very contemptuous of people unaware of the true nature of the world around them. These members often take it out on the innocents. Jake tacitly encourages this practice, as it was born out of the fatalistic discovery that he made when he and Silas founded the group. If anything, the long-standing members are the ones more likely to subscribe to the premise. If you are in, you are treated like an equal and someone who knows the score. If you are out, you are someone waiting to be used.

PURPOSE

The Men of Dunswick Street have no higher purpose. Theirs is the most selfish agenda. They want to take advantage of the world of illusion that is the Unified Commonwealth. They want to be the barkers who count the money at the end of the night after the last kid has gone through the house of mirrors. If it all burns down, they will have been kings of dust and queens of ash. This attitude of looking out for number one starts at the top with Jake Westbury and flows down to the rest of Dunswick Street.

Westbury is in charge of those members in it for the money. Secrets fuel blackmail and information can be quite valuable. For every hint of the world’s true nature, a thousand more mundane secrets cross Jake’s desk: mistresses and gambling debts and rendezvous with nubile young men. Traffic accidents that were never reported. Drug shipments that disappeared from police impound. Every scrap has a name at the bottom of it and every name can be squeezed to produce a suitably pleasing response. The money from blackmail has since expanded into other operations: robbery, heroin dealing, and worse. The blackmail and secrets finance Jake’s opulent lifestyle. Whatever is left over is parceled out to the rest of the membership. The more things one does for Jake, the more Jake does in return. The newer members spend most of their time at Jake’s beck and call. He is the man with the money, and the finest liquor can drown out the sorrow that comes from knowing the world around you is a lie. If it weren’t Dunswick Street’s center of operations, the Janus Club would have closed down years ago.

The members wanting to solve the bigger mystery are generally drawn to Silas. Even if they don’t know him by name, they are smart enough to realize that Dunswick Street is too big to be a one-man operation. Piles of information make it back to Silas’s mansion. Every member of Dunswick Street has spent time on courier duty. In addition to the newspapers from every part of the country, members send him typewritten reports of unusual activity whenever it occurs. Surprisingly, Silas does not keep these files secure. He reckons that someone curious enough to read the file as he’s carrying it on the cable car might provide some insight that he overlooked.

Collecting the information that fuels the Men of Dunswick Street is no easy task. Each member is asked to provide a written report on anything he thinks is connected to the Big Mystery. Some members very rarely contribute; others see connections in every shadow. While Silas ultimately sorts out what he can use from the noise, it all has to get to him first. Jake also has to make these reports, so those in his good graces can get away with tipping him off and letting him pass the info onto the brains of Dunswick Street. Most members are never truly certain if what they’ve provided is useful. Jake and Silas prefer it that way.



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Sometimes a written report won't do. If possible, members of Dunswick Street are also instructed to take any direct evidence of the truth with them. Members have committed strange crimes to get these pieces. They have orchestrated break-ins where bookshelves are emptied but jewels are left on the dresser. They commit stick-ups where the wallet is found two blocks away with the pictures removed but the money intact. Jake even authorized a hijack of a mail truck in search of ten very specific letters. These pieces end up in Silas's basement, which is beginning to look like the strangest curio shop ever built. The warlocks within the society say they feel that these items have some power connected to them. It may not be magic, but the items feel different. The non-warlocks usually write this off as posturing.

The Men of Dunswick Street know they are not alone in the discovery of the truth. There are other people searching for something and they occasionally find themselves at cross purposes with the organization. Jake's philosophy on the subject is hard. In his eyes, there are two sorts of people in the world: the Men of Dunswick Street and everybody else. Anyone digging around for the truth is a threat that needs to be neutralized as quickly as possible. Whoever they are, they get a chance to join Dunswick Street if they are discovered. If they join, they may continue their research as long as the information keeps trickling in to the center of the web.

For those people not willing to join, life gets difficult. Jake has a very cavalier attitude towards murder. Everyone in the world is a reflection of what they are supposed to be. To him, there is no murder here. At worst, it's breaking a mirror. When someone refuses membership, Jake would prefer if he took care of business right then and there. He understands that the opportunity may not present itself and that some members aren't hard people. But someone still has to do the deed.

If Jake had the time and the energy, he would take care of these killings himself. Instead, he requests three members at random to join him for a drink at the Janus Club. When everyone arrives, each member gets an empty glass set at his or her place. The members are expected to stay the entire evening. As the other members come and go, they drop a single black marble into one of the glasses. At the end of the night, Jake tallies up the marbles, and whoever has the most is made responsible for plugging the leak. In the case of a tie, the more recent member gets to do the wetwork. The assassin has seven days to complete the task. If he or she fails, three more members are brought in for a friendly drink, with the failed murderer as the subject of the night.

The Men of Dunswick Street's chief rival for information on the truth are the members of the Few. These men and women have also discovered the illusion of the world, but for some

foolish reason, they want to take the high road and make things better. The Few are the one source of friction between the founders of the organization. Jake wants them stamped out as quickly as possible since they are a real threat to his power. Silas thinks they are useful for information and can be played as suckers and patsies for the times when Dunswick Street's influence can't fix problems caused by its machinations. Until the two leaders can come to a consensus, the Few will continue to challenge Dunswick Street's web of secrets and intrigue.

METHODS

The biggest resource the Men of Dunswick Street have is the influence of the press. There are plenty of reporters who owe their jobs to either Jake Westbury or Silas Goldfarb. While these connections aren't as fanatical as some of the ones inside the organization, sending a reporter to attack someone causing the organization grief is a specialty. Reporters have to eat, and even the ones with integrity will spend a little time chasing after a bone thrown by Jake Westbury. Even if that lead turns out to be false, they might dig up something else to put on the front page.

Jake isn't above planting completely false stories in the news. Someone forced to deny a planted story still looks guilty. Front-page news get back-page retractions, and scandal damage is hard to reverse. Even if the target is able to beat back accusations, dogged reporters may have time enough to find some real dirt. Some reporters have decried the loss of integrity of the *Gateway Lighthouse* since Westbury took over for Silas. What once was a smart, tough paper has been infected with a serious case of yellow journalism. Westbury laughs at the notion. Newspapers are published because they make money, and reporters crying about sensationalism are just sad because their paper didn't think of the story first.

One of Westbury's favorite tactics is painting enemies with the warlock brush. He never directly accuses, since that would be technically illegal. But a target's connections to known warlocks are often brought up. Warlocks within the organization do their best to cozy up to the target. In desperate situations, they may fire off a spell and then feign innocence. If the seeds of the deception take root, warlock accusations may spring up and the police will get involved. Even when the police complete their investigation, the subject has been dragged through the mud. The more prominent the man, the more damage an accusation like this will do.

Westbury masterfully knows the difference between slander and libel. Slander is making false statements about a person in a temporary way. Libel is doing so through a permanent medium. While they are both technically defamation, slander is more difficult to prove. Westbury always claims to be misquoted or that what he said was taken out of context. The paper is wary of libel, since that involves legal entanglements that tie up reporters, money, and the most valuable of newspaper resources: time. This is the one piece of this false world that Jake takes seriously. He knows that if he weren't the major editor of a paper, his influence would be reduced to almost nothing. If anybody comes after the paper, the paper hits back hard.



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Officer Frank Neumeier was a victim of Westbury's greed for secrecy. He was one of the officers on the scene when Jake stopped the sniper. Jake wanted to make sure that the cop didn't know anything, so the paper published a story claiming that the officer had been thrown off the force in New Eden for corruption before the war. The records didn't exist, and the officer honestly couldn't remember what happened to him before the war. Rather than be a burden, Neumeier boarded a train for Terminus and was never seen again. The other members of the Men of Dunswick Street think that Jake got on the train with him, but the cop never made it off alive.

Thanks to the Neumeier story, the police have taken an interest in Jake Westbury. They haven't discovered the extent of his connections, but they want to know what he's up to. For now, they are placated with his story that he's merely a concerned citizen acting in the best interests of Gateway, but the cops who knew Frank Neumeier are asking questions. The answers may be enough to finally uncover the faces behind all those masks.

The Men of Dunswick Street see no reason to tussle with Gateway's criminal syndicates. The Pattersons have quietly adopted a "live and let live" attitude towards Dunswick Street and most of the Eastowne Tongs have done the same. Jake is canny enough to return their courtesy in kind. The syndicates think Dunswick Street is some whackjob warlock coven. Dunswick Street doesn't want to get mixed up in the gang wars that bubble beneath the streets of Gateway. If Jake hears about something that might mix in with his investigations, he lets the mobs know that he pays very well for unusual stories. A lot of them are probably bunk, but he lets Silas worry about sifting through the trash. While gaunts aren't allowed in a classy place like the Janus Room, Jake pays the same amount of money for info from that sector.

NPCS

Jake Westbury: The Big Man

Jake Westbury lives a life that any joe on the street would envy. He wakes up in a penthouse that looks out over Gateway Bay. A driver takes him to his job at the *Gateway Lighthouse*. There, he makes and breaks the lives of local public officials as the city desk editor. Lunch is taken at a variety of prestigious eateries on the tab of influential men seeking his counsel. Jake spends his afternoons making sure that the next day's paper goes out under his expectations. He always takes his dinner at the Janus Club, though no above-the-board acquaintances know of the real business he conducts there. The driver takes him home, and the process begins again the next day.

Westbury's life is an example of being careful what one wishes for. The secrets that he has cultivated as one of the Men of Dunswick Street have turned him from a hungry reporter into one of the idle rich. Westbury dreamed of being a big man when he grew up. But now his life has almost no challenge to it. He could try to extend his influence throughout the Unified Commonwealth, but he's not sure that will make things any better. Westbury is standing on the shoulders of those he has ruined. The view was not worth the trouble.

In the quiet moments of the night, after scattering away the supplicants and removing his mask, Westbury goes to the bar and orders a gin and vermouth. It's the drink he ordered before he became what he is. As he sits and drinks, his mind wanders. What does it matter if he's the king of a world of lies? He's spent the past few years destroying the lives of people because they weren't real to him. He fooled himself into thinking that the pursuit of power would fill the void that he felt when he discovered the truth about the world. The empty feeling is still there, but it's only grown stronger in the years that he has ignored it.

Jake Westbury

Attributes: Brains 8, Brawn 3, Build 4, Gut 7, Moxie 6, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Bureaucracy 8, Etiquette 6, Evasion 6, Fast Talk 7, Firearms 2, Intimidation 6, Lore (Secrets) 8, Perception 7, Puzzles 7, Sleight of Hand 3, Stealth 5, Streetwise 4.

Backgrounds: Alert, Men of Dunswick Street, Wise.

Profession: Investigator 2, Wealthy 4.

Silas Goldberg: The Quiet Menace

Silas Goldberg's life is much different than the other founder of the Men of Dunswick Street. Jake is sharp enough to take on anyone who comes at him or the organization. Silas is just happy he got a chance to retire early and settle a few debts with some old enemies during his run at the paper. To his neighbors in his well-to-do neighborhood, he's just a rich eccentric who smiles whenever he gets his paper in the morning. Nobody knows what he does for a living.

Make no mistake in Silas's innocence. His hands are bloody from plenty of people he needed to silence to keep the secrets hidden in his scrapbook. Even the lives that he's ruined don't weigh upon him very much. They ultimately don't matter. All the people here are just shadows of their former selves. That means that killing them holds no more meaning than crushing a piece of cardboard. Everyone in the world is already dead to some extent. What happens now is just the flotsam settling at the bottom of the sea.

There is one last secret that Silas kept for himself. The ceiling-high stacks of newspapers in his mansion aren't just there to make money or blackmail the rich. Goldberg has a hunch that somewhere in the world, there is a doorway home. Maybe it's somewhere beyond the ocean, or in one of the places that everyone knows about but nobody has been to since the White Light. He has started a new collection. Hidden within the clippings is a madman's map out of this world of distorted phantoms. If the world he's in is made of shadow, something must be producing the light. He knows that he may be crazy and that going back may not be an option. But he also knows that he's going to die trying, because he has nothing else to live for.

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Silas Goldberg

Attributes: Brains 9, Brawn 3, Build 3, Gut 7, Moxie 6, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 15.

Skills: Bureaucracy 8, Etiquette 6, Electricity 5, Evasion 6, Gravity 7, Lore (Secrets) 8, Perception 7, Puzzles 9, Sleight of Hand 3, Stealth 5, Streetwise 4.

Backgrounds: Education, Magical Aptitude, Men of Dunswick Street, Wise.

Profession: Investigator 4, Rogue Scientist 2, Wealthy 4.

Vernon Maxim: The Watchmaker

There is a small shop in a quiet part of Gateway. Inside the shop sits an old man on a thin stool. He goes by the name of Vernon Maxim, a jeweler of excellent skill. The diamonds shine brightly and the watches in the cases tick perfectly. He does a brisk business with those men and women with fine tastes in jewelry, but his real purpose is what keeps him in business. His name amongst the Men of Dunswick Street is Mr. Onyx, but he is more commonly known as the Watchmaker to his customers.

The Watchmaker is a peerless manufacturer of custom weapons. If someone wants a gun with personalized grips, pearl handles, and an extended magazine, Maxim is the man to see. The majority of the Men of Dunswick Street seek weapons of a more covert nature. Maxim can make guns that are virtually indistinguishable from a mass-produced counterpart, but which have no serial numbers or identifying features. Left at the scene of the crime, they can't be traced to other crimes. He can also replace the barrel and firing pins on a gun to change the ballistics information. The Watchmaker also makes gadget weapons upon request. He has done everything from a gun hidden in an umbrella to a stiletto in a pair of eyeglasses.

He primarily serves the interests of Dunswick Street, but he is not above making weapons for somebody who can match his high prices. In many cases, he accepts a commission with the intent of reporting the identity of his customer back to Dunswick Street. He keeps no record of these transactions. Vernon trusts his sharp memory, which verges on the photographic. He will give up this information willingly but doesn't volunteer it unless asked.

Vernon Maxim

Attributes: Brains 9, Brawn 3, Build 4, Gut 4, Moxie 3, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Engineering 9, Etiquette 4, Evasion 6, Fast Talk 7, Firearms 9, Intimidation 6, Perception 7, Puzzles 7, Sleight of Hand 6, Stealth 4, Streetwise 4.

Backgrounds: Education, Marksmanship, Men of Dunswick Street.

Profession: Academic 2, Gunman 2.

THE ORDER OF NU

The general public believes the Order of Nu to be no more. The war destroyed their attempts to build an empire of warlocks. The White Light broke their back and the menace of the Order would never darken the doorstep of the U.C. again. But even as the victory parades faded into foggy memory, survivors seeped into the shadows. Pieces of the Order collected in the alleyways of the cities. Sinister seeds planted themselves in the small towns that dotted the highways. The Order of Nu was once strong enough to take on the Unified Commonwealth, and it hopes to be that strong again. In the meantime, it waits.

Defining the history of the Order is a difficult task, since it began and ended before the White Light. Most of the remnants stay hidden from each other out a mix of paranoia and self-preservation. With the Order the theoretical target of the White Light, memories of it are especially scarce. These sleepers are unable to compare notes on what their dream-like memories recall about their masters. In those rare occasions where members of the Order gather, they are less concerned with the history of the Order than with its future.

There are a few details that the members agree upon. The Order came about due to unrest about the state of their nation. There was a period of economic depression that threatened to spread throughout the world. One of the countries overseas installed a very charismatic leader who espoused the need for warlocks to be in power. Once they were in charge, they brought the country back from ruin. However, they were also not content to stop there and started fighting with other foreign powers. The Order slowly expanded overseas until the Unified Commonwealth was finally pulled into battle. The White Light ended the war, and survivors either fled to the U.C. or were already here as sleepers and espionage agents.

Individual members have different memories beyond those basic details. The differences start with their long-gone leader. Not everyone remembers if he was a warlock himself. While it makes the most sense that a society of warlocks would be led by one, none of them can remember their leader displaying any magical power. No photos of him exist either. For someone so charismatic, and the head of a major nation to boot, the lack of photographic evidence is worrisome to the Order. Was the White Light so powerful that it erased him from history?

The White Light itself is a source of mystery for the Order as well. Some remember it as a last-ditch effort by the U.C. to win the war. It was an unproven gambit with unforeseen consequences. Others recall that the Order had already lost and that the White Light was merely a display of the U.C.'s power. The White Light decimated the number of warlocks in the world to their current numbers, which is but a fraction of what they were before.

The majority of the Order of Nu today live solitary lives. Some try to hide their guilty past, while others bide their time and wait to rebuild the Order. Many members are warlocks, but some newer recruits joined to learn at the feet of those who nearly took over the world. The Order doesn't actively

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recruit, but the world is filled with people who love a good mystery. There is currently no great plan to reform and storm the halls of power. The current plan is to survive. The longer the public thinks the Order is dead, the longer the Order will have to regain its strength.

In those rare cases where a member of the Order is discovered, the whole matter is kept very quiet. The general public doesn't need to know that the Order still exists. The panic that might result would be more than the local police could handle. If a member of the Order were officially arrested, he would be considered a war criminal and turned over to the military. The tribunal would be brief and the death sentence perfunctory. The more expediently the matter is handled, the better it is for all parties concerned. The members of the Order know full well they are committing treason through their membership, and expect the worst if they get caught. Suicide is not an uncommon solution to an impending arrest.

The national government knows that members of the Order still exist. In fact, there are two scenarios involving the Order of Nu that chill the power brokers to the bone. The first is a rumor that the architects behind the White Light consulted with turncoat warlocks from the Order. Allied warlocks weren't powerful enough to cause the White Light, so they needed the Order to essentially destroy itself. Even though there is no physical evidence to back up this idea, quite a few men in power remember a plan to shelter turncoats in exchange for their cooperation on a large project.

The other large fear is that the Order has slipped a snake into the halls of power. Their selected candidate — a politician of some note — quietly waits for the right time to strike and destroy the U.C. from the inside. It only took one man to make the Order of Nu a formidable opponent once. That leader's successor could easily be hidden in the ranks of the government.

Unsurprisingly, Edmund Mercer, head of the NLEB, isn't taking the Order lying down. While he knows that setting up an official task force would be political suicide, he has pulled together an unofficial coalition of Agents, spies, and informants to collect as much information as they can on any Order of Nu activity within the U.C. While he hasn't had any major breaks in the case, Mercer knows how to bide his time. He may be the one man who can wait out the Order.

ORGANIZATION

The central organization of the Order no longer exists. The membership inside the U.C. consists of tattered remnants scattered into dozens of tiny groups. These shards have not truly reorganized themselves, since they know that any attempt would be quickly and ruthlessly stamped out by the Commonwealth. Anything even marked with the Order of Nu's infamous symbol is supposed to be destroyed per national law.

There are five categories into which Order members fall. Each is less a branch of the Order and more of a philosophy on how they can thrive and endure within the borders of their enemy.

Sleepers

Sleepers are unaware of their affiliation with the Order previous to the While Light. They may live for years blissfully ignorant of their connection. Even so, something at the back of their mind knows that things aren't quite right with them or the way they remember their lives. In many ways, realizing that they have a connection with the Order feels like becoming one of the Few. Members often feel like they know something just isn't right with the world and that they may have had something to do with it.

At some point, the sleeper makes the discovery of his or her previous allegiance. He or she may have jarring memories or stumble upon a hidden stash of Order memorabilia. Sleepers still have to cope with the realization that they are connected to one of the most reviled organizations in the world. Every sleeper has a unique reaction to the revelation, but the Order is more concerned with what they do once they realize the truth. Any member is preferred above a non-member, even if that member refuses to believe who he or she was. It's only a matter of time before they return to the Order or else eliminate themselves in some way.

The first instinct that many sleepers feel is the need to run. By distancing themselves from their connections, they can absolve themselves of guilt. They remember the horrible things they did and do their best to forget. Some actively go on the road and try to forget their current life, afraid that the people they love and respect will turn on them when they discover what's hiding in their basement. Others seek out their pasts like the Few, and may end up joining those ranks because of the questions they can't answer.

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Some sleepers revel in their new-found wicked ways. They reach out to new members who are unconnected to the past. Not everyone in the U.C. will run to the police when confronted by the existence of the Order of Nu. A mysterious person is very sexy. A dangerous person can be even sexier. These members know that some people that can be brought to view the Order's ideas. Warlocks make the ideal targets, but these members of the Order also realize how seductive learning magic can be. And who better to learn the ways of the warlock than the most infamous warlocks in history?

Spies

Many of the members of the Order who survived the White Light did so because they were spies working to gather information during the war. This role hasn't changed much, even if these spies no longer have to report to anyone. Collecting information is still a very useful skill to have. Spies are aware that it is the only skill that keeps them alive. The spies are useful to anyone needing information, be it the local mob boss

or the government itself. A good information broker will always remember who his buyers and sellers are, as that is profitable information itself.

Saboteurs

Another branch of the Order of Nu on the shores of the U.C. when the White Light hit were members charged with disrupting the daily life of the country. The most direct operatives worked militarily. They blew up fuel depots, destroyed factories, and did what they could to slow down the war machine. Many of these agents now work as strong-arm men for the syndicates, or as freelance troubleshooters who silence witnesses and bury the bodies. A few work more subtly, by showering public figures in scandal and betrayal. Both methods work toward the same goal of shattering the public's trust in their elected officials. This weakness is presumably how the Order came to power before, and many saboteurs presumably hope to repeat the process again.



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Fanatics

The freedoms of the Unified Commonwealth allow for every man, woman, and child to express his or her opinion. History records the Order of Nu as universally reviled. There is a small minority of people who aren't convinced that the Order was all bad. They may be historians who don't understand what the Order did wrong. Warlocks with Order ties are often of this opinion. Everyone remembers the Order did bad things, but details and specifics are scarce. This wing of the Order also contains those who believe that history as the general public understands it is a lie. To the lunatic fringe of this group, the U.C. government caused the White Light by accident and made up the Order of Nu out of whole cloth as a scapegoat for their terrible blunder. Any rational person should accept that the current government covered up a mistake rather than casting a warlock spell so powerful that it wiped an entire group of people off the face of the earth.

Masters

The most dangerous members of the Order are the ones known as the Masters. These are the members unwilling to hide and wait for the right moment to strike. They want to manufacture that moment and reassert the power the Order once had. They are willing to risk their lives to reforge those connections between members, bring sleepers back into the fold, and turn the Order from a scattered band of fugitives to a reborn power in the land of the enemy. They are the closest thing to leaders the current version of the Order has and without them, the Unified Commonwealth's victory would be complete. The Masters are the deadliest type of Nu, with the information-gathering abilities of a spy, the persuasiveness of a corrupter, and the ruthlessness of a saboteur.

PURPOSE

When the Order began, it had one purpose: to lead by example. Its members wanted to show how wonderful the world could be if it submitted to the rulership of warlocks. Warlocks could create wealth, push the advances of science, and end the conventional wars of man with their powers. Nobody knows when this ideal grew corrupt or how it led to a larger war. It could be that people don't like being told how to live their lives. Or it might have been the clash between theory and practice, when ideas that looked good on paper came into contact with humanity's natural selfishness, greed, and lust for power. Surviving members of the Order believe it had the keys to paradise, but lost them when it picked up its sword.

And they still believe in these ideals. Warlocks will be the leaders of the future. Their powers rank them above their fellow man by default. The anti-magic laws and the superstitious mindset that permeates the Commonwealth will fade with time. As more and more people dabble in magic, warlocks will look to men and women who aren't afraid to lead and use their great understanding of power for the good of all people. Of course, these leaders will come from the Order: returning triumphantly to lead a society that now understands their earlier methods. The old will become new, as symbolized by the infinity marker emblazoned on their flag.

The membership of the Order is scattered throughout the country. They generally keep to themselves out of safety. A few small covens of Order warlocks exist, and at least one entire town is made up entirely of Order recruits. The general idea is to bide time until the moment is right to rise to power. That does not mean that members of the Order sit idly by and wait for the signal. They still must feed themselves, pay rent, and live life. Order members do their part to subtly insert their philosophies in day-to-day life. It may be speaking well of warlocks or writing a newspaper column decrying the corruption of the local government. The Order of Nu is not inactive.

Recruiting still occurs, though not at the level other organizations use. The Order of Nu knows that the time for it to rise again may not come in this generation. These progressive members look to those taking an interest in the history of the Order and slowly bring them into the web. The new members of the Order may not have the power of the older members, but they bring with them the fire of youth. They don't remember the defeat of the War or the perfect homeland erased by the White Light. They haven't joined to bring back what they've lost. They have joined to put their mark on the future.

Another avenue that the Order uses to seek power is the infiltration of other secret societies. The Order of Nu is made up of some of the best liars in the world. Serving two masters is no sweat. Since the Order is relatively static, most of the members in another society simply collect information. Thanks to the widespread belief of the destruction of the Order, other societies couldn't even imagine that the Order of Nu has compromised their meetings. The double agents often sell harmless information to those who ask, keeping the really juicy stuff for themselves.

The one organization the Order of Nu has had difficulty infiltrating is the NLEB. Mercer's paranoia and devotion to secrecy have paid off, and his men seem to excel at sniffing out members of the Order of Nu and locking them out. The Bureau hasn't made a big deal about discovering these warlocks. Mercer knows good blackmail material when he sees it, and the threat of exposing these ties is a powerful force to motivate someone to work for the Bureau in an "unofficial" capacity. The dance continues every day, with a few members discussing how effective a campaign to uncover Mercer's knowledge of the Order of Nu would be.

The secrecy of the Order is important to its current incarnation. There are those within it dedicated to preserving that secret. There is no official meeting place, but members will make sure that the only information outsiders learn is the kind the Order wants them to know. These members will often maintain contacts within the police and the media to make sure that no word of their activities leaks out.

Not only must those who discover the truth be dealt with, but the offending member must also be punished. The Order believes itself too civilized to murder a fellow member no matter what that transgression might be. Quite a few members would like to get their hands on a few doses of Antidox to illustrate to foolish warlocks the folly of their hubris. The Order believes in consigning members who transgress to fates worse than death. Members fallen out of grace have experienced

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everything from their bank accounts being emptied to waking up one day to discover their husband and children missing. Suicide in these cases is yet another indicator of the former member's weakness, and therefore, the rightness of the punishment.

A few members of the Order devote themselves to the search for their homeland, which the White Light literally seems to have wiped from the earth. The majority of these members live in the cities of New Eden and Nova Roma. The frustrations that other travelers write off weigh heavily upon them. They don't understand why there aren't boats bound for destinations across the ocean. They collect nautical maps, searching for the place where the Order once ruled supreme. Someday soon, they may set off on an expedition for the edge of the map, and perhaps, the edge of the world...

METHODS

The Order of Nu must work subtly, even more so than any other secret society. Being a member is considered treason by the national government and punishable by death. That's assuming that the authorities don't decide on a little street justice when they catch you. The trial would just be a waste of time and money; taxpayers would be just as well served with a slug between the eyes. Every day the Order exists is a day that a member could die. The Order keeps quiet for now, expanding at a glacial pace throughout the country. The methods they use are deliberate, and cautiously control the Order's growth.

The Order was founded not as a mustache-twirling group of evil masterminds, but as warlocks looking to use their powers for good. They wanted to lead by example, using their power for the betterment of all. They felt that by becoming the leaders of their country, they could illustrate how becoming a warlock was the next step of civilization for humanity. Warlock abilities were a tool, no different than the combustible engine or the wheel. Unfortunately, the world wasn't ready for the Order's radical change. Their charismatic leader had no choice but to defend his philosophy.

A large demand exists on the black market for Order of Nu memorabilia. Anytime something becomes forbidden fruit, there are those tempted to take a bite. Interestingly, this is one criminal enterprise the syndicates steer clear of. The smaller mobs can be tempted by some one-time deals on Order of Nu gear, but the big boys just say no. Because of this, anyone looking for such relics will generally come into contact with a current member of the Order, even if that allegiance isn't shared with the buyer. Few completely innocent men and women have access to Order of Nu items. Getting a hold of a war souvenir is often the first step for an eventual collector.

There is a fine line between wartime souvenirs and illegal materials. A few soldiers brought back weapons from the war. The long-handled pistols were distinct to the Order, and they occasionally turn up in gun collectors' displays and attics. The field knives used by the Order are prized by their owners as well: they were supposedly sharpened by magic. The Order knife is used by those skilled in close combat as well as those

who want to look like they are. Generally, anything that isn't directly marked with the Order's symbol is either frowned upon or directly illegal.

The really popular items are the ones marked with the Order's distinct symbol. The sideways connecting loops — once a mathematical symbol for infinity — now represents the harsh regime of the Order. Collectors fight over objects emblazoned with them and the authorities destroy them. Those interested in such contraband invariably come to the Order's attention: they're a rich ground for potential recruits, and many have already accepted some of the Order's ideas. Also, if they prove unreceptive to joining, the Order has blackmail material on them, which keeps its existence safe even if it reaches out to a collector.

Warlocks are the other large recruiting pool that the Order seeks out. They prefer the kind that the syndicates scuffle over. The Order prizes power, but it really looks for a warlock who plays it cool. Within their ranks, magic-users are leaders, not outcasts. Flashy displays of power do not become them. The best combination is a warlock with power and subtlety, but such warlocks are very rare indeed and not all of them cotton to the Order's ideals. Discreet warlocks can be taught to be powerful. The reverse is rarely true.

Learning at the feet of the Order is also a powerful recruitment tool. The Order still has a reputation as the most powerful group of warlocks in existence. Those willing to sacrifice anything for power could easily seek out the Order to learn sorcery. The Order is willing to teach, but members rarely do so without speaking of their true allegiance. Once the warlock is hooked on the lust for power, he can be strung along with promises of greater skill and ability. Members of the Order often treat these students in a similar manner to the collectors. They are groomed as potential members, but if things get too hairy, the Order cuts the apprentice loose while the true members make their escape.

Members do have a way to contact one another if necessary. Thanks to the resemblance of the Order's symbol to that of the number eight, most members are aware of the Eight Code. Rather than marking things that belong to the modern Order with the distinct infinity symbol, members use variations on the number to tip off those in the know that something or someone is connected to the Order. The number is innocent enough so that someone unaware of the code would just think of it as a bit of graffiti or some innocent doodling. Members of the Order will take a more interested look at something marked with an eight out of nowhere.

The numeral eight is the most obvious reference to the code, but using it by itself is generally too suspect. The number 88 is a favorite of Order codemasters. A safehouse in Nova Roma is located in Apartment 808. August 8th is often given as a birthdate for any false papers a member has. When two members meet in public, one member will often buy eight of something, like flowers, as a sign to the other member he is supposed to meet. One of the more innovative ciphers developed by the Order during the war was the "piano code." Messages hidden in sheet music are decoded by playing them on a piano, which has 88 keys. The receiving agent has the answering cipher, which tells him which key means what letter. To the untrained eye, the message looks like poorly written music.

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NPCs

"Juliette:" Ruination of Warlocks

Juliette is her most recent name. She takes a different one whenever she comes to a new city: always something aristocratic and slightly foreign. It is all part of her charm. Juliette is the mysterious woman who knows how to draw a man to the edge of destruction. She is the crucible through which a warlock enters the Order of Nu.

Juliette remembers a few details about her time in the Order overseas. The men were handsome. The warlocks were powerful. For a brief, shining moment, they achieved a perfect society. Then the war came. Foolish fear and pride rose up against the benevolent dictatorship. Juliette volunteered her talents. What she lacked in sorcerous power she made up in seductive charm. The Order quickly understood her usefulness and sent her to the Unified Commonwealth. Her goal was to recruit warlocks for the cause.

Even after the White Light, Juliette remained a believer in the Order. Her methods have changed, but she still looks for warlocks willing to die for the cause. She tests their mettle by pushing them to increasingly desperate acts. Once she locks onto a warlock, the poor bastard will either join the Order or die trying. Juliette delights at the things she can get men to do with a smoldering glance. Men have killed for her. Men have stolen for her. And so, so many men have died for her.

Not everything is for the cause of the Order, however. Every warlock that she has seduced has taught her a little bit more about magic. She is well on her way to becoming a powerful warlock in her own right. When the time is right, she will seek out other members of the Order who survived the war. She knows they are out there and she knows that someone has to take the initiative and organize them if they are to rise again. Who better than the Order's most beautiful spy?

"Juliette"

Attributes: Brains 6, Brawn 3, Build 4, Gut 6, Moxie 6, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Disguise 5, Electricity 5, Etiquette 6, Evasion 6, Fast Talk 6, Melee 2, Sleight of Hand 5, Stealth 4, Streetwise 4.

Backgrounds: Charismatic, Fanaticism, Magical Aptitude, Order of Nu.

Profession: Con Artist 1, Femme Fatale 3, Thief 1.

Walter Mayberry: Sheriff of Shady Oaks

Small towns dot the landscape outside the cities of the Unified Commonwealth. They seem to be vanishing as more and more people move into the great metropolises. One of the most pleasant is the village of Shady Oaks: the picturesque example of a quiet little slice of perfection. Houses pleasantly sit behind picket fences. A banner proclaiming the next big holiday

soiree stretches across Main Street. Townsfolk tip their hats to each other and smile politely at strangers. Tough guys used to the rattle of streetcars get unnerved by the clean and quiet streets.

Most of the credit for the perfect streets of Shady Oaks can be attributed to the town's single law enforcement officer. Walter Mayberry looks like he walked out of a Paradiso western and into the small jail next to Barry's Malt Shop. His pronounced mustache fits his drawl perfectly. Whenever someone visits town for more than an hour, Mayberry will chat him or her up politely. His friendly nature and good ole boy act can open up the most cynical city slicker. Walter doesn't want any troublemakers in his town, and isn't afraid to come down hard on anyone he thinks will cause a fuss. If honey doesn't work, Walter has plenty of vinegar in reserve.

The truth behind Shady Oaks is simple. The majority of townsfolk belong the Order of Nu. New arrivals to Shady Oaks who stay longer than a day or two are usually given a choice: join or leave. If the newcomer leaves, Walter takes a posse to make sure he doesn't make it to the next town.

The outcasts collected here over the years do their best to put up a good front. It's not always perfect; some of the members have been cast in roles that they have no talent for whatsoever. Beggars can't be choosers, but when the town doctor shows up and can't properly diagnose a condition, someone will get suspicious. On the plus side, the undertaker has learned quite a few things since he came to town, and Mayberry's as sharp with a pistol as he is with Kinetic magic.

Walter Mayberry

Attributes: Brains 6, Brawn 6, Build 5, Gut 6, Moxie 4, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Athletics 5, Brawl 6, Evasion 4, Fast Talk 4, Firearms 5, Gravity 4, Intimidation 5, Kinetics 5, Melee 3, Perception 3, Stealth 3, Streetwise 4.

Backgrounds: Fanaticism, Magical Aptitude, Marksmanship, Order of Nu.

Profession: Officer of the Law 2, Rogue Scientist 1.

Mr. Thirteen: The Subtle Master

The mastery of warlock abilities possessed by the Order of Nu is part of their mystique, but even an organization with such power needs a quiet hand sometimes. It may be to eliminate a problem without drawing attention, or perhaps recover a member of the Order who incapacitated herself after a spectacular display of her warlock powers. In those cases when the Order needs something done silently, they have the man known as Mister Thirteen waiting in the shadows.

Mister Thirteen doesn't talk much, but his name generates a lot of talk amongst the Order. They say he's one of the oldest members, hand-picked by the leader himself. They say he taught the first members how to be warlocks. They say he caused the downfall of the Order when the charismatic leader proved too unstable. They say he taught Papa Miroir every-

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thing he knows about *voudoun*. They say he told the Order of Nu about the White Light, but they laughed at him until they saw the flash. They say a lot about him for a small black man with graying temples and dark sunglasses. Thirteen never says a word. They say he gave up his voice for more power. If he isn't the most powerful warlock on the planet, that's just because he doesn't like to brag.

He may just be a boogeyman for boogeymen, but every warlock knows a story about Mister Thirteen. They all know his appearance. He wears a black porkpie hat and always has his sunglasses on. If Mister Thirteen is watching you, you must be doing something noteworthy. Sometimes he's a proud of your work for the Order. Sometimes he's an omen of disaster. And if he ever smiles at you and takes off his sunglasses, it is too late. You are already dead.

Mr. Thirteen

Attributes: Brains 8, Brawn 4, Build 4, Gut 6, Moxie 3, Smoothness 7.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Appraise 4, Brawl 2, Evasion 3, Electricity 8, Firearms 4, Forgery 6, Gravity 8, Kinetics 9, Perception 5, Puzzles 4, Stealth 4, Streetwise 4, Thermal Energy 9.

Backgrounds: Fanaticism, Magical Aptitude, Order of Nu.

Profession: Academic 3, Rogue Scientist 3.

Norm Whitman: The Man Who Knows Too Much

If you would have asked Norm Whitman six months ago what he would do to break into the national scene as a big-time reporter, he would have said anything. Ask him today, if you can find him, and Norm will tell you he would do anything to go back in time and punch himself in the mouth.

Norm was a freelance writer who bounced around the various papers in New Eden. He wrote everything from obits in the *New Eden Minute* to the more-fiction-than-fact pages of the *New Eden Apple*. One of his regulars tipped him off to a nervous warlock who said he had a big story to spill. Norm set up the meeting, but was blown off. He called up his contact to complain and found out that the man had been messily killed by magic use.

Rather than let the story lie, something made him track down the nervous little warlock anyway. He finally made contact in a train station on the edge of Paradiso. The warlock spilled the story: he had been a member of the Order. Juliette had tried to seduce him to keep him quiet, but the warlock's proclivities ran contrary to her wiles. When she found out he wasn't falling for it, she tried to have him killed. The warlock soon found out that anyone he told about the story was killed by the Order of Nu.

Norm was ready to laugh it all off until he saw the next day's headline. The train the warlock had boarded for parts unknown had been derailed by a massive spell. Someone was looking for the warlock. Someone with big mojo. Norm started

sweating. How many people had seen them together? Who did he know who would rat him out? Even if he did write up the story, who would believe it without any evidence? Norm needs to find someone to protect him while he decides what his next step is going to be.

Norm Whitman

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 3, Build 3, Gut 7, Moxie 6, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 15.

Skills: Bureaucracy 5, Contortions 4, Etiquette 4, Evasion 6, Fast Talk 7, Firearms 2, Perception 7, Performer (Writing) 3, Puzzles 5, Sleight of Hand 3, Stealth 5, Streetwise 4.

Backgrounds: Alert, Small.

Profession: Investigator 2.

THE SILENT SCEPTER

The history of the Silent Scepter is intertwined with the Knights of the West, a fraternal organization familiar to most citizens of the Commonwealth. Many prominent businessmen are part of the Knights. Deals worth millions of dollars have gone down over a handshake and drinks at the club. All the major cities have a Knights club downtown. The Knights are known as a charitable organization, funding civic projects from soup kitchens to Discovery Day parades. The Knights seem to have been around almost as long as the Commonwealth itself.

Some say that the Knights formed during the revolution were the ones who formed the Commonwealth. They were the men who stood up to the oppressive rule of their colonial masters and banded together in secret to form the Commonwealth. As popular opinion bolstered the revolutionaries, their brotherhood became bolder and bolder, until the revolution became the war for the Commonwealth. Once the new nation had attained independence, the Knights stayed together, turning their efforts to improving the way of life for citizens. Because of this, the Knights boast a membership that has included Praetors, company presidents, men of industry, and those whose names still reside on the buildings and streets from Nova Roma to Terminus.

Enemies of the Knights (often those denied membership) tell a much darker tale. They claim that the Knights were formed by a cabal of sorcerers, in many ways similar to the Order of Nu. They realized early on that they would get farther if they consolidated power and opened a front for their activities. What better front than a charitable organization? The Knights of the West became the facade behind which money was laundered and recruits were vetted. Those who showed magical potential were taught to be warlocks. Those who didn't were left in the dark to keep a respectable face on the organization.

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Of course, talking about history when the White Light is involved is always a challenging prospect. Nobody can nail down any hard facts or dates. Membership in the Knights is remembered in broad terms: people remember former Praetors who have been Knights, but specific names (other than the ones currently in the Senate) are hard to come by. The modern history of the Knights begins, like almost everything else, shortly after the White Light. By this time, the Knights had been organized into four branches. The Knights of the Column lead the other three: they're generally the branch to which most businessmen belong. The Knights of the Sword benefit policemen, firefighters, and veterans of the war. The Knights of the Shield are the youngest branch, started to address the economic problems before the war. They run many soup kitchens, orphanages, and other charities on the street level. The fourth branch, no longer in existence, was the Knights of the Scepter. They were devoted to good works through the use of magic.

While many Knights considered the Scepter the black sheep of the family, the Scepter Knights worked twice as hard to improve the image of warlocks in the public eye. They refused to recruit, they dedicated themselves to great public works, and they often donated much of their money directly back into the community rather than paying for "fund-raising" dinners like the other Knights. Construction projects like Gateway Park and the Imperial Building would have taken much longer without Scepter warlocks guiding the construction. While being a warlock was still considered bad news, the Scepter offered a veneer of respectability. Even the criminal gangs who dealt in sorcery would steer clear of Scepter projects.

The hysteria surrounding the Anti-Sorcery Act began to wear on the Knights of the Scepter. The press began to make associations between the Scepter and the Order of Nu. Words like "fifth column" and "warlock havens" began to dog the Scepter in every news story attached to them. It was during this media blitz that the terms "warlock" and "witch" came to be commonly used by the public. Soon, public projects found protesters or, in a few extreme cases, attacks. A favorite tactic of movie studios looking to destroy the career of a rival studio's upcoming star was to leak some association with the Scepter and let the public turn on them. Rumor has it the same studios kept tabs on those employees who dabbled in sorcery or were suspected of doing so. This "spellbook," as it was dubbed by famous Paradiso gossip columnist Sid Rake, ruined the lives of many, even if they were only slightly connected to it.

The bad press started to affect the rest of the Knights. The protests spread to other good works. Anyone associated with a warlock was looked at with an unfavorable eye. The Knights had to do something drastic. At the height of the Senate hearings, the Master of the Scepter, Leo Kazan, made a startling admission. He confirmed many of the rumors that had been circulating about the Knights of the Scepter. It was his testimony that cemented the passage of the Anti-Sorcery Act. Kazan was the first warlock to be sentenced to death, which occurred at 12:23 AM. (Superstitious warlocks will often buy drinks at this time of the night as a small tribute to Leo.) The Knights of the Scepter were disbanded soon afterwards, and any members, be they warlock or not, were barred membership from the remaining Knights of the West.

Many warlocks kicked out of the Knights felt it was the latest in a series of great injustices towards their kind. They felt the need for an organization to protect themselves, especially with magic now being heavily regulated. Magic is a hard habit to break. No matter if a warlock went legit, joined a mob, signed on with a crystal ball squad, or made a living as best he could, he should still be able to call on any of the Scepters as a brother to help him out. They may have been tossed from the halls of power, but they still had each other. The Knights of the Scepter were dead, but the Silent Scepter was born.

PURPOSE

The Silent Scepter exists primarily as an underground organization to protect warlocks. At the core of their beliefs is the idea to better the world through magic, but this is often a secondary goal to protecting themselves. No matter what side of the law the warlock is on, a warlock is still a fellow warlock. The Scepters often come off as a black and white organization trying to work in a grey world. Things are tough right now, but the Scepters hope that if they can keep it together, a day will come where they can come out of the shadows and make sorcery legal again.

While this is an excellent goal, the execution has proven to be very difficult.

The Silent Scepter's main goal is to aid other members as best as they can. While the Scepter isn't as prestigious as it once was, it still has many contacts and favors to call in from the old days. Scepters can travel to other cities knowing that they will find a warm bed and a few bucks upon their arrival. They can get a feeling for how strict the bulls are on anti-magic laws. Most importantly, they can practice their craft in safety and secret. Warlocks ostracized and feared by society at large have a family to fall back upon with the Scepter.

The brotherhood becomes strained thanks to the anti-magic laws. Many times, Scepters are on opposite sides of the law, and helping out a brother can jeopardize your standing in society. The tension between the expectations of the Scepters and real life can stretch good men to the breaking point. Even worse, it can make bad men do their dirty work more efficiently. The ranks are occasionally rocked by blackmailers threatening to name names to the press. These members are quickly expelled, but when you score fifteen large from a prominent industrialist whose daughter dabbles in wicked thermodynamics, who cares if the club won't return your calls?

The Scepters also strive to aid other warlocks in need. The members were part of a charitable organization for many years. It's hard giving up doing good work. But it also bolsters goodwill outside the organization. Every warlock the Scepters shelter from the crystal ball squads is a potential new member. This isn't to say they'll give away the store to someone off the street. In a hard decision between one of their own and an outsider, they will generally side with the member, but the Scepters know how it feels to be outcast and do what they can.

While this often earns them the gratitude of the warlocks that they help, it also brings them into conflict with other warlock organizations in the world. Warlocks are smart enough to provide a united front to outsiders. But petty jealousy and

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the demons of human nature come out in the shadows of the warlock community just as they do anywhere else. So far, the squabbles between these organizations have been minor. But it's only a matter of time until the Scepters possess something one of the big players wants and a warlock war will flare up.

Scepter members are encouraged to continue the legacy of the Knights by doing public works as well, though this is often downplayed in more subtle ways than most warlocks are used to. They supposedly no longer exist, so most members who work for the public good do so anonymously. Some Scepter members turn to vigilantism, while others do their best to become noble outlaws by robbing from the rich and giving to the poor. The real trick is doing so without drawing undue attention to the organization. There are few hearts of gold left in the word of *The Edge of Midnight*, but many of them belong to the Silent Scepters.

Not every warlock who upholds this tradition is content to play it quiet. Rumor has it the infamous "Honeymoon Bandits," a couple who posed as stranded motorists to lure unsuspecting marks and rob them, were also members of the Scepter. They would pay off members in the cities with their ill gotten gains to hide out under the protection of Scepter warlocks. While this is an extreme example, there are a few Scepters who support the basic notion as fighting the unjust system that runs the whole circus.

One of the biggest secrets of the Scepters is their continued allegiance with the Knights of the West. While distancing themselves publicly from former members, many Knights keep in touch with their one-time associates. One never knows when they'll need the services of a warlock, and one who hasn't fallen in with the criminal underworld is a definite plus. Some warlocks have actually made quite a decent living as problem-solvers for the influential men they once considered brothers.

Kazan's confessions were half-showbiz, half-martyrdom. He knew that if the hysteria continued, the Knights of the West would be destroyed and warlocks would be killed across the country, laws or no laws. Kazan felt that the sooner the laws were passed, the sooner the Commonwealth would stop scrutinizing warlocks, and they could go back to making the world a better place. He hoped that by admitting to the accusations (many of which were false), he could shift the blame to one person and die knowing that he saved others from his fate.

It is unclear whether Kazan's sacrifice has worked. Things are better than they might have been. Warlocks, while illegal, are protected by the law and have access to fair trials. Lynchings and burnings aren't as common, but the Scepter hasn't made much headway in getting the laws repealed. The longer the laws are on the books, the less likely it is they will go away, and the more likely it is that a rift will grow between those who supported Kazan's decision and those who think it was a mistake. Until warlocks can walk in the light again, the jury is still out on the effectiveness of Kazan's sacrifice.

ORGANIZATION

The Scepter has a presence in all the major cities in the Unified Commonwealth. It is the closest thing warlocks have to a truly national organization. In practice, however, the Scepter chapterhouses act independently of each other. After the passage of the Anti-Sorcery Act, there hasn't been a national threat big enough to unite them. The difficulty of traveling between cities also keeps the Scepters to themselves. While the Scepters believe in the tenets given to them during their time as Knights of the West, they usually do their best to stay independent of each other, lest the public (and the NLEB) discover that they aren't quite dead.

Central City

Central City is known as a blue collar town and its Scepters are no different. They continue the charitable mission of their forbearers, right down to running a soup kitchen out of their chapterhouse. They call themselves the "Hamilton Street Saints," although they aren't connected with a church. The soup kitchen also offers beds for the night, so warlocks on the run will have to get used to sleeping next to street people while staying in Central City. The members have meetings in the offices of the old theater where they run the soup kitchen, and of course, their front organization disavows all magic use.

The city has a reputation for getting its hands dirty, and the Scepters are no different. They have a very close relationship with the organized crime families who use warlocks. Charity alone won't pay the rent, and the soup kitchen has become a front for the Scarelli syndicate as well. The money laundered through the soup kitchen goes into the accounts that pay for all sorts of terrible things happening across the city. Some of the Scepters don't like this, but the master of the house views it as a necessary evil. If the link between the mobs and the Scepters were discovered, it could blow the Scepters back into the spotlight.

Gateway

Snoop's Row is home to private eyes of all stripes. From the down-on-his-luck gumshoe to the upscale investigator, this infamous part of Gateway gives you plenty of tools for digging up dirt. The Scepters here know that the snoops are a threat to their security, so they keep their chapterhouse right under their noses. Private eye Del McCoy operates an office upstairs from Golden Kitchen, one of the best Golden food places in the city outside of Eastowne. The arrangement allows for clients to come and go with regularity as well as fellow Scepters. While McCoy doesn't usually let warlocks crash in his office, he does have a great knowledge of motels, flophouses, and other dubious housing arrangements where an extra few bucks installs an instant no-questions policy.

McCoy Investigations is under scrutiny from another organization. The owner of Golden Kitchen is not what he seems. He has installed a listening device in Del's office. Del is also loose-lipped around delivery boys and restaurant staff. Someday, the organization controlling the Golden Kitchen will come calling to Mr. McCoy. On that day, he will have a tough choice to see where his loyalties lie.

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New Eden

The Knight-designed Imperial Building hosts the chapterhouse in New Eden. It is located on the famously non-existent 13th floor. Brothers can access the floor by pressing the 12th and 14th floor buttons simultaneously. The chapterhouse is the largest that the Scepters possess, as it occupied the majority of the floor. The large size allows for magic experimentation and training, but the chapterhouse is sparsely decorated otherwise. Old furniture sprinkled throughout is used either as targets for practicing warlocks or sleeping arrangements by ones hiding out from the law. It's a very shadowy and dimly lit place, but it's safe and it lets warlocks practice their trade without much interference.

The secrecy of the New Eden safehouse has recently been threatened. A killer is stalking the hallways of the Imperial Building. The police haven't made the connection yet, but someone has been killing his way up the floors. He started with the old newsstand owner on the ground floor and has made it up to the sixth floor. If the killer makes it to thirteen, will one of the Scepters be killed? If someone dies, it may be a clue to the identity of the killer. He either knows about the Scepter safehouse, or perhaps is a Scepter himself.

Nova Roma

Nova Roma is the mother of many secrets. The Scepters here are no strangers to the halls of power. Their chapterhouse is located less than two blocks away from the Senate building. The editor of the *Nova Roma Crier* is a member of the Scepters, which may surprise some due to the paper's hard-line anti-magic bias. The space hidden under the paper's presses are hardly worthy of the name chapterhouse, but the Scepters here are smart enough not to meet in a specific location more than once. Most meetings are held at a rotating series of hotel rooms and public places, with members referring to each other by code names taken from legend. The press rooms are used for out-of-towners and for local members who have run afoul of the law.

While the editor keeps up an anti-magic sentiment to deflect suspicion, this doesn't mean that the Scepters here are sitting idle. The next time elections roll around, they will have found their way into the employ of a few candidates. With the pictures and evidence in their possession, they know they can swing the vote in ways the polls can't. While it may not be nearly enough to get the laws repealed, the Scepters know they have to play dirty to change the world. They are quickly pushing themselves into dark territory, and it may not take much to go from blackmail and bribes to murders and cover-ups. It's all for the greater good, but so many terrible things are.

Paradiso

The Scepters in Paradiso live the good life. Their chapterhouse is based out of one of the mansions in the Harrison Hills, donated to the Knights of the West long ago by a famous actor whose name was lost to the White Light. When the Scepters separated, they quietly took ownership, since the Knights had plenty of places to spare in Paradiso. The secluded locale

is perfect for the purposes of the Scepter. However, warlocks coming in or going out are expected to fit in. Sorcerers used to living on the streets often get cleaned up before shacking up at this safehouse.

To the general public, the mansion has more than a few ghost stories attached to it. The supposedly empty place exhibits strange noises, weird phenomenon, and unusual comings and goings at all hours of the night. The neighbors would call in an investigation, but many of them are frightened of what the cops might discover going on behind their own closed doors. Warlocks unaccustomed to the finer things in life might be tempted to filch some of the mansion's finery and pawn it. If the police ever catch on, it could be a way of undoing the entire safehouse.

Terminus

The good folks in Terminus know that many of the visitors to their city come for a taste of *voudoun*. The twisting streets near the hotels offer fortune tellers, knick-knacks, and enough superstitious flavor for even the most jaded traveler. Of course, real warlocks wouldn't be caught dead in stores like Master Jake's Juju, which is precisely why the chapterhouse runs it. They also aren't foolish enough to keep the chapterhouse on site. The physical chapterhouse is located across the street, in the basement of a seafood restaurant. It used to house a gambling parlor but now serves as a meeting place for the Scepters. Fugitives are housed in the empty apartments above the restaurant.

From there, they have built quite a formidable little empire. Like Déjà Vu, they traffic in information, though unlike that other organization, they don't use it to further other criminal activities. The Silent Scepters and Déjà Vu have existed in Terminus for many years now. Their relations have been polite, if strained during times where the more flamboyant members of Papa Miroir's organization brought unwanted scrutiny. The Scepters in Terminus stay out of their way, but also generally don't offer help when needed. The members of Déjà Vu already have someone watching their back, so the Scepters stay away. However, if something came to the attention of both parties that everybody wanted, things could break down very quickly. There are rumors, of course, of a briefcase turning up in the swamps near Terminus containing the secrets of the world.

METHODS

Joining the Silent Scepters is not something done lightly. The chapterhouses keep to themselves for a variety of reasons, including avoiding a raid from the cops. The world thinks the Scepters are disbanded, and the Scepters are happy to let it go on thinking that. Leo Kazan was a good man, and if the Scepters were revealed, his sacrifice would be in vain. Secrecy is very important to the Scepters, and after what happened to them during the Twelve Days of Chaos, they have a right to a little paranoia.

The lowest rank of the Silent Scepter is the page. Some masters use pages as gophers and bagboys. Others use them as fodder and dangle knighthood in front of them in exchange for suicide missions. Most pages have been with the Scepters from six months to a year.

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Pages eventually become squires and get assigned to current knights. Squires are often used and abused like they were when they were pages, but knights are supposed to be teaching them how to use sorcery for the greater good. The Masters are the ones who choose knight/squire pairings, which are often made because of political necessity rather than personality compatibility. Some masters relish pairing law enforcement knights with criminal pages and vice versa to teach both sides a lesson. Once the knight is satisfied that the squire can stand on his or her own, that squire becomes a knight.

Most Scepters stay at the rank of knight. They are usually given a wide berth and told not to interfere with other knights. Because of the unique situation caused by the Anti-Sorcery Act, this is often easier said than done. Scepters on the opposite sides of the law squabble quite often, and some end up in the middle of gang wars. Numerous criminal syndicates employ warlocks, and if two sides of a mob war both have Scepter affiliation, that can cause plenty of problems for everyone.

Generally, the oldest member in a city becomes the Master Knight of the Chapterhouse. The Master lives at or near the chapterhouse, and is the ultimate authority as to who partakes of the Scepter's charity and who does not. The Master Knight is the leader of each cell and is protected whenever the Scepters get in danger. The importance of the Master Knight to the organization is paramount. The few times one has been arrested has illustrated a major weakness in the organizational structure. In those cases, the rest of the Knights will hop the first train for a new city to protect their identities.

The Scepters only accept currently practicing warlocks. While you can learn to focus and practice your magic, the Scepters will not instruct anyone who doesn't already have a little bit of scientific know-how. The practice cuts back on infiltrators and undercover agents. It also is a small insurance policy if the Scepters ever end up back in the limelight. They can at least say that they were helping already established warlocks rather than creating new ones.

When the Scepters decide that something requires their attention, they generally assign it to the smallest amount of members possible. The less members they risk, the less likely the cops will find out about them. In those times when they can't get a volunteer to do dirty work, the Scepters call a meeting. The members arrive and take a small stone from a pile near the door. The main room is for congregating and, when the task at hand is a nasty one, last minute wheeling and dealing. The Master of the house calls the members to order, and the members go, one by one into the next room, where a table has been set with containers holding each member's name on it. The member places the stone in the container of whomever he or she wishes to complete the task. Once everyone has chosen, the Master and a randomly chosen member count up the stones. Whoever has the most does the deed.



NPES

Artie Murphy: Fugitive Cabbie

They say that the only thing that outnumbers the rats in New Eden is the cab drivers, and that's just because cab drivers are less picky eaters. You can get a cab any time of the day or the night. Between cabs and the subway, New Eden is one of the easiest cities in the U.C. to get around in. Behind the wheel of one of these cabs sits Artie Murphy, an old hack with an ulcer, a knack for keeping his mouth shut, and a membership in the Silent Scepter.

Artie originally joined the Knights of the West back when ran a successful restaurant. He had a pretty good life before the anti-magic backlash began and his restaurant became the victim of an arsonist. To this day, he believes it was because he was a warlock. When the Scepters went into hiding, he left his wife and daughter in Central City to protect them. He's been driving his cab for five years now and is one of the best in the city. He has no traffic violations and any parking tickets get paid promptly. He runs an honest fare and doesn't take kickbacks from club owners to steer folks to their venues. While he doesn't carry a gun like some of his more paranoid brethren, he is pretty handy with the baseball bat that he carries in the trunk.

He also provides the Scepters with an excellent set of ears. People riding in cabs often forget that there's a person up front, especially when that person doesn't chat the fare up for a better tip. Artie quietly listens and writes down everything he hears in a small, coded journal that he keeps in his glove compartment. At the end of his shift, he goes home and transfers anything important to the Scepters. His small apartment is choked with his journals, detailing the hopes and dreams of thousands of residents of New Eden. If one of the Few could get access to those journals, he might learn some very interesting things.

Artie Murphy

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 4, Build 5, Gut 6, Moxie 5, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Appraise 2, Brawl 5, Drive (Car, Motorcycle, Truck) 8, Electricity 4, Engineering 5, Evasion 5, Kinetics 3, Intimidation 4, Melee 4, Streetwise 3.

Backgrounds: Magical Aptitude, Mean Streets, Racer, Silent Scepter.

Profession: Blue Collar Worker 2, Rogue Scientist 1.

Del McCoy: Detective With a Past

Many of the saddest stories on Snoop's Row are from the detectives themselves. Nobody ever wants to grow up and become a private detective. It's not as glamorous as it is in the movies where every case begins with a leggy dame and ends with a slug of whiskey. It's a lot of long hours going through people's trash in both the figurative and literal sense. Still, for Del McCoy, it's a step up from what he used to do, and who he used to be.

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McCoy's real name is Nick Marekalas. He was an enforcer for the Scarelli mob who had picked up some warlock skills while in the joint. He was making a name for himself as a decent gunsel and up-and-coming warlock when he was recruited to help with a bank heist. The heist went bad, and McCoy found himself staring down the wrong end of a police revolver. Not knowing what else to do, he reached out with his magic and dashed the cop's head against a nearby fire escape. As he got into the getaway car, he threw up. He had felt the rush of sorcery before, but something about killing the cop made it more intense. He knew he had to get out.

McCoy had contacts within the Silent Scepters and used them to escape Central City. They gave him a new name, a new face, and a new occupation. The Scepters needed someone on Snoop's Row to be their eyes and ears, and McCoy proved to be a good fit. As rough as some of the cases can get, he feels that he's helping people, even if it's only to see the awful truth. He's developed his warlock's abilities, but will never take another life with them. He also knows that his old friends in the Scarelli mob are probably looking for him. One of the things his new job has taught him is that the past always catches up with you, no matter how fast or far you run.

Del McCoy

Attributes: Brains 6, Brawn 4, Build 6, Gut 4, Moxie 3, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 30.

Skills: Brawl 6, Demolitions 3, Drive (Car, Truck) 3, Evasion 5, Firearms 6, Intimidation 4, Lore (Sport) 4, Melee 4, Pick Lock 5, Stealth 4, Streetwise 5, Tensile Energy 6.

Backgrounds: Magical Aptitude, Mean Streets, Rugged, Silent Scepter.

Profession: Gangster 1, Investigator 2.

Nancy Drake: Good Cop

Lady cops have a hard time. The ranks still think that it's a boys club and, if you're a woman on the team, that you've either slept your way in or aren't interested in men. Nancy Drake has worked hard to get where she is and she didn't take the expected routes. She did it through hard work and ability... and a little magic never hurt. She's an unregistered warlock in the ranks of the police. It's a dangerous position to be in, but a common one within the ranks of the Silent Scepters.

She joined up with the Silent Scepters shortly after signing on with the force and was surprised to see many individuals on the other side of the law as part of her brotherhood. It was a match that worked for her. The other Scepters helped her out as best they could. They fed her rivals to boost her arrest records. They protected her from warlocks whom she incarcerated. They helped her increase her abilities and taught her how to use them to subtly enhance her skills as a cop. When she made detective six months ago, she felt very proud.

But now things are changing. A few of the Scepters want to pull Nancy's strings on the inside of the precinct to throw out charges and convince witnesses to become more forgetful. Nancy has gone along with for now, but her actions are weighing heavily upon her. She's seen the cops on the take in the department and doesn't want to become like them. Sure, they've grown fat on the riches of the underworld. Her payoff is her power. She's thought about joining the crystal ball squad, but she's afraid those same Scepters she's been reluctant to help will expect even bigger favors from there. Every day that passes is a day where the web tangles tighter and she'll have to make a hard decision. She can cut herself out and run, or she can rat out the Scepters and strive to be a good guy again.

Nancy Drake

Attributes: Brains 7, Brawn 4, Build 4, Gut 6, Moxie 4, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Athletics 5, Brawl 6, Bureaucracy 5, Electricity 3, Evasion 4, Firearms 5, Intimidation 5, Melee 3, Perception 3, Pick Lock 2, Stealth 3, Streetwise 4, Thermal Energy 5.

Backgrounds: Magical Aptitude, Marksmanship, Mean Streets, Silent Scepter.

Profession: Officer of the Law 1, Rogue Scientist 1.

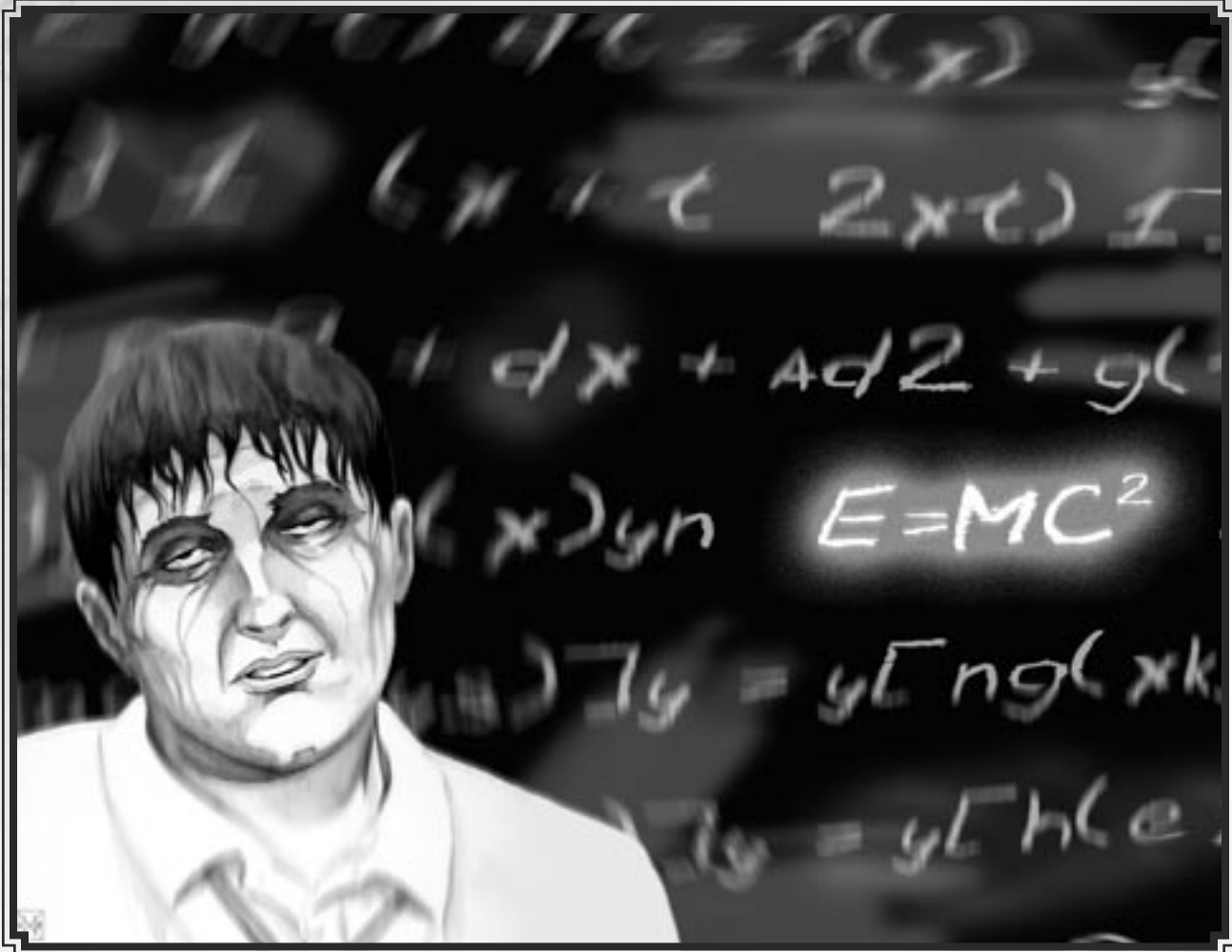
THETA 73

While the powers over the laws of science that some men and women possess seem like magic, they are not. Even though the world uses terms like "warlocks" to describe those with an advanced understanding of the laws of physics, it is the wrong term to use. Those in the know often call themselves "scientists," a practice that has started to taint that word with those who would use their abilities to throw cars at each other. While many of these scientists are content with using their powers for their own selfish gain, some of them are trying to push the limits of their already fantastic abilities. The best of these innovators belong to a group known as Theta 73.

Theta was originally conceived by Dr. Emil Hoffman as a small social club within Marshall College where he taught physics. It started as a place to discuss the advanced scientific techniques they were studying. While most warlocks jealously guarded their secrets and techniques, the first members of Theta 73 worked with each other and soon found their powers growing.

Theta also provided a support network as the social climate turned against warlocks and scientists. What once was a closed-door social club slowly became a secret society. Hoffman moved the meetings off campus and began accepting students as well as faculty into the mix. The university started to feel the pressure of naming names, and Hoffman soon found himself out of a job. This series of events only strengthened

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his resolve, and he devoted himself to Theta 73 full-time, even going so far as to fake his own death to throw the crystal ball squads off his scent. In many ways, Dr. Hoffman died that day, only to be replaced soon by Theta Alpha... or as most members refer to him, the Doc.

The professor knew that he needed something to keep everyone together. It was not enough that Theta 73 was there to teach and expand the minds of its members. It needed something to work towards: a goal that was attainable, yet long term in scope to allow the organization to grow. Without this goal, the group would fracture and break apart. The smaller groups would be easier to corrupt, and within a few years, all the bright young scientists groomed by Theta 73 would be dead, behind bars, or worse.

The answer came to Hoffman late one evening. He was in the throes of a nasty post-casting effect when he had a vision: the White Light shot out from him as he stood at a blackboard in front of a classroom of faceless students. He wasn't sure if it was a memory or a dream, but he was sure of one thing. The equation that filled the blackboard was the same equation that caused the White Light: the biggest fractioning of

the scientific laws he had even seen. The symbols glowed with power. Then the White Light happened again, erasing it all. But upon awakening from his fever dream, Dr. Hoffman remembered one side of the equation: Theta 73.

Hoffman restructured the group following that night. The purpose of Theta 73 was clear. They would reverse the damage done by the White Light. The hazy memories and the upswing in gaunts would be a thing of the past with the best and brightest minds working on it. Theta 73 organized into smaller cells where members would only refer to each other by code names made up of Greek letters. That way, if a member was compromised, they couldn't give up fellow names, addresses, or information. This practice worked for the most part. Most Theta cells are unaware of other cells operating in the same city.

The society keeps to itself and prefers to stay out of the shadowy dealings of other societies. While it would seem that the outlook of the Silent Scepters would fit nicely with Theta 73, neither side is willing to reveal themselves to the other. It is possible that a warlock might hold membership in more than one society but the risks generally outweigh the benefits. If the individual was found out, being kicked out of both groups would be the least of his problems.

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The members of Theta 73 also steer away from working for the syndicates. Most members of the society are more interested in honing their abilities than using them for personal gain. Not everyone is so nobly minded, but freelance spellcasting is very rarely done. The syndicates find it easier to locate warlocks on the street looking for a quick buck than pursue some egghead... even if the egghead is the best warlock on the block.

Law enforcement sees Theta 73 as a relatively harmless group compared to organizations like Déjà Vu or the various crime families that use warlocks. While their very existence violates the Anti-Sorcery Act, they usually don't draw attention to themselves or hurl lightning down the middle of the street. The crystal ball squads thus keep their hands off unless a cell does something that draws attention to itself.

ORGANIZATION

Theta 73 reorganized a few years ago after Dr. Hoffman was nearly arrested due to his violations of the law. He took some time after the incident to look at what the organization had become and how to best protect it should something like that happen again. He knew that Theta had to continue on in the event of his death. He wanted the group to be able to function no matter how many members were compromised, even if the only remaining member was fresh out of the classroom. The Great Equation had to be solved. When he finished his sabbatical, he reorganized the academics beneath him into something resembling a biological organism.

The organization is broken up into three-member cells. Each member within a cell knows three members: the other two members of their cell and one member of an additional cell. This structure limits damage done by a member captured by law enforcement. At worst, two cells are compromised before other members can move to close the wound. Only Hoffman knows for sure how many cells exist in the U.C. Each major city has at least one, with Hoffman's Theta Alpha cell on the move for his own safety.

Each cell is designated with a scientific Greek name. The cell at the top is officially Theta Alpha, but is sometimes referred to as "Theta Prime" or "Prime." Every other cell uses this naming structure, from "Theta Beta" to "Theta Omega." When a new cell is created, it is randomly assigned a new name, rather than the next sequential one, since that would be a way for outsiders to track how many cells comprise Theta 73. When a cell has been compromised, that designation is taken off the table for at least a year.

A lesser-known facet of this idea is referring to fellow cell members by three-tiered names. Each cell member chooses a letter that he feels best represents himself. Each full name is the name of the cell along with the designation. So members of Theta Beta would be known as Theta Beta Alpha, and so on. This is a very formal practice and in the realm of written communication, the first letters of the words are used. Some cells will even create a fictional personae with the initials of their code names.

Not all the cells are as concerned with security as Hoffman is. Many cells have shared real names and even full names with each other, trading security for efficiency. Working with friends is a lot easier than with someone who you only know by some stuffy code name. But if the hammer comes down, not only are those people at risk, but so are the friends and family of those people. The organization doesn't want to endanger innocents, which is why it resorted to such methods in the first place.

When a cell is compromised, the other members are expected to go to ground. If they can get word to other cells of their fate, so much the better. The ideal member has an emergency kit with false papers, cash, and a change of clothes ready to go at his home or workplace. Most members only aspire to this level of preparedness. It has been a few years since there was a major shake-up in the membership of this type. Hoffman tries for a mix of paranoid and laid-back types, but he hasn't been dealing with personnel for the past year.

After a week passes, the members in hiding can attempt to contact the organization. This usually means getting a message to a current member. Theta 73 uses a simple code. The letter or telegram is addressed to Dale Patterson and includes a brief note about travel. The majority of the note is idle chat about the weather and old friends. Sometimes a member will draw suspicion away from herself by alluding to her current situation in the letter. At some point, the letter always mentions a destination. This destination is never the same as the location of the member on the lam. What is important is the direction of the location from where the recipient is located. If the location is north, the heat has subsided and the member is going to attempt some contact. If the location is west, the heat is still on, and the member will try back again in a week. If the location is east, the recipient needs to contact them for some reason to hand off sensitive materials. South marks the hiding member as a lost cause and he will make no further attempt to contact the organization.

Most members of Theta 73 spend their free time working on the Great Equation, but there is a troubling trend of members using their sorcery to moonlight for other purposes. Pursuing science for the greater good is a noble goal, but it doesn't pay the rent. The organization expects no dues, but is also unable to help a member financially except through personal contributions. The lure of a big score can be very enticing to a scientist. One night's work with a bank vault can net more than ten years slugging away at a teaching job.

Dealing with troublesome members is generally left to higher-ranking members of the organization. In the past, Hoffman himself would handle any troublemakers, but various factors have made that an unfathomable choice. Displeasure is generally expressed through social means, like ignoring the bad cell or spreading rumors about the troublesome member. In extreme cases, another cell will be brought in as a "Censure Committee" and told to fix the problem as best they can. Depending on the temperament of the cell members, this can mean anything from floating a tip to the local crystal ball squad to an out-and-out hit. The scariest part about the Censure Committee is that it is randomly determined every time one is called out. Any cell could be called to serve censure and the bad cell won't know until it was too late.

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PURPOSE

The society has a two-tiered purpose. The first is to push the boundaries of what scientists understand about their abilities. While most organizations are very careful about making their members more powerful, Theta 73 is interested in seeing where their limits lie. Scientists of every stripe are a part of the organization: one of the few that will teach these abilities to outsiders. More often than not, these outsiders soon become members of the organization, either through a desire to repay their teachers or a thirst for more knowledge.

As a scientist becomes more and more powerful, he is tasked to the second tier of the Theta program, where he begins working on the Grand Equation. This is what the majority of the members of Theta 73 are supposed to be doing with their spare time. The difficulty lies in the difference between theory and application. As much as Theta 73 tries to apply scientific method to what others call magic, much of their research is steeped in trial and error. While they are more academic about their procedures, this does not render them immune to the backlashes that occur.

Getting a group of professors, doctors, and other intellectuals to think along the same lines is hard enough, but add in brains addled by the buzz of magic and the organization doesn't exactly work at peak efficiency. While every member has a personal spin on how to go about solving the Great Equation, there are three main theories that are currently in vogue. The more eccentric members of Theta 73 have their personal theories as well, many of which incorporate ideas from all three schools of thought.

The first school of thought runs off of a simple scientific principle. If every action has an equal and opposite reaction, then there must be a way to somehow reverse the White Light. Many scientists believe that this was the original intent of Dr. Hoffman. With Hoffman's isolation, this school is left without its main proponent, but it also has the most research behind it. Most of the longest-lasting members have worked under this theory and they believe the other two main theories were birthed from discussions about it. Scientists pursuing this theory often become obsessed with collecting pieces of the world from before the White Light. For these theorists, finding information on the White Light project itself is a risk worth dying for. If they can discover how they did it, they can engineer a way to undo it. A small group within this school also believes that Hoffman's vision was a deliberate fail-safe engineered by the minds behind the White Light to use in case something went wrong with their "project."

A second theory gaining popularity is an attempt to replicate the White Light itself, with the effects of the second White Light counteracting the first. This often puts them at odds with the scientists of the reversal theory. There is no guarantee that a second White Light would counteract the first and, for that matter, it might put the world in even worse shape than it's already in. Proponents of this school counter that reversing the Great Equation is no guarantee either. Also, the engineers behind the White Light clearly used it in desperation. Whatever they used it against — be it the Order of Nu or something worse — could return and plague the world again.

Reproducing the White Light is no mean feat. In addition to jealously guarding any info they have on the men and women responsible for this work, these scientists have to convince their most powerful members to be ready to do something that has only been done once before. To keep the academic rivalry on a low boil, the scientists pursuing information on the White Light concentrate on the people who made it happen. Were they all warlocks? Are they still alive? Where are they now? Do they even remember what they did or why they did it? The popular theory is that those at the center of the White Light must have taken the effects of memory loss the worst, so amnesia cases are often looked at with intense scrutiny. Even if the subjects show no scientific capability, they are often guided by a member of Theta 73 in the hopes that they will awaken their memory and provide insight into the Great Equation.

The newest school pursuing the Great Equation looks to achieve its goals through the application of a new school of science. If the laws of physics can be broken by someone with enough scientific knowledge, ambition, and will, the next frontier is to find someone able to control the laws of time and space. If that discovery happens, the members of this school will do whatever they can to convince that individual to travel back to the moments before the White Light and stop it. This school has two major obstacles to overcome. Besides lacking scientists who can achieve these abilities, they need data to make sure that their colleague knows what to do and where to go once that scientist gets into position. This school has a lot of younger members backing it, since it's the newest theory to come out of the think tank.

Since the first step in this method is developing a new science, most members seek out those few who have gained skill in more than one science. While many of these individuals are a mess of addiction, enemies, and old scores to settle, those who still have their wits about them are valued by Theta 73. The study of how someone manifests exceptional scientific knowledge is most important to this group. The study of time itself is relatively new to the community.

METHODS

Theta 73 finds a large number of recruits in the same places that it did when it began. The universities of the Commonwealth walk a fine line between teaching science and inspiring warlocks to push the boundaries themselves. While these august institutions survived the backlash of the Anti-Sorcery Act, there is still a stigma attached to them. The term "college boy" has a very negative feel to it in certain parts of the Commonwealth. This world has yet to come to the point where education beyond a high school diploma is necessary.

Of course, nowadays these institutions are monitored by crystal ball squads. Universities have officially washed their hands of "rogue scientists," but many young students come to school looking for such teachings. Common mythology teaches that the best way to become a warlock is to either run with the mob or apprentice to a professor. The opportunities to learn sorcery from a professor on the topic are more rare than the detective stories would have you believe, but they are there. Many of the professors who do offer to teach are members of Theta 73.

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Professors are unique in that they are not part of the three-person cell structure that the rest of the group shares. They are the ones most open to being exposed by law enforcement. They keep themselves at a distance, since the recruits are the ones most likely to be connected to the law. The professors are the closest thing that Theta 73 has to a public face, but they generally don't seek out recruits. Members seek out the professors to learn more about science. If someone shows ability but doesn't confide in a professor, he or she is generally left alone. These rogue scientists are usually no help to the Great Equation and no amount of indoctrination will change that.

Professors also have more than two apprentices. Smart professors keep their students unaware of one another to limit the damage should exposure occur. The organization prefers it this way. Hoffman has learned the hard way that secrecy is the only guarantee of safety. The cell system was adopted out of unfortunate necessity. How many apprentices taken at one time is left to the discretion of each professor. More apprentices allow for a greater pool of candidates, but also run a higher risk of discovery.

When a professor feels that one of his apprentices is ready to join the organization, he gives the apprentice a test. Again, the professors have a lot of leeway in how these tests are applied. Some offer a literal test: a written, essay, or oral examination. Some send their apprentices on an errand that has some effect on the Great Equation. The more eccentric professors will send their apprentices on a strange journey to prove how loyal they will be to the cause. When the apprentice passes the test, the professor sends word to his contact within Theta 73 and the new member is assigned to a cell.

Most professors recruit locally. Theta 73 has the resources to move a new recruit, especially if he or she wants to find a job in the academic sector. Outside the organization, the members of Theta 73 hold considerable sway in the world of academia. Not every member is a teacher, but quite a few draw salaries from schools while working on the Great Equation. Once a member passes the test, his professor withdraws from his life. Often, to the outside world, a sense of a "falling out" occurs to hide the connection between the two individuals.

Members are expected to contribute some work to the Great Equation on a regular basis. Enforcing this idea is problematic. The usual route of papers and lectures aren't considered safe by the organization, since papers can be discovered and used as evidence. Often a cell is devoted to one of the theories of the Great Equation but has trouble getting information to other cells of a similar mind. Sharing does occur, but can be painfully slow. Those members unwilling to wait for this process will use whatever methods they can to correspond with other scientists. Anonymous telegrams, missives in unmarked brown packages, and briefcases left in bus station lockers have all endangered the secrecy of the organization.

Cells where individual members are divided on how to proceed on the Great Equation have their own challenges. In these cases, two of the three scientists will share a theory and the third is pushed to the fringe of their work. If the fringe member is the one with the connections to the larger body, he

can do a lot to discredit the findings. If the majority holds that distinction, the fringe member is often painted in an unflattering light. Few cells would go so far as to try and get a rival removed, but some of the campaigns waged in these fights make death seem like a peaceful alternative.

The academic world breeds rivalry, and Theta 73 is not immune to these tendencies. In fact, Dr. Hoffman often encourages competition between cells, because he feels that motivation makes for better results. Rewards often come in the form of more information and more weight given to a member's opinion on a subject. Unlike crime families, which compete for money, most of the competition in Theta 73 is about prestige and standing. Doing solid work on the Great Equation is the fastest way to the top... and a chance to debate your ideas with Dr. Hoffman himself.

NPCS

Dr. Emil Hoffman: The Fugitive Visionary

Everyone has flashes of memory from before the White Light. Dr. Hoffman's flashes troubled him. A great bonfire of burning books. A man in a black uniform going over his papers. Soldiers storming his laboratory. A perilous plane ride to someplace warm. These visions haunt his dreams and overwhelm him during his fugues from using his abilities. Back when he was teaching physics at Marshall College, he would often drink himself to sleep to keep from dreaming. He came to a grave realization late one night after dinner at a history professor's house.

Emil Hoffman believed he was a member of the Order of Nu. He had somehow escaped the chaos overseas and started a new life in the Unified Commonwealth. Had he escaped with the help of the government? Did he trade his knowledge of sorcery for amnesty? Was he a member of the team that created the White Light? The questions ate at him worse than the visions. His work suffered and he was on the verge of suicide when he had his vision of the Great Equation.

His transformation of Theta 73 was almost derailed when an NLEB task force attempted to arrest him at the New Eden Train Station. He used his skills in a desperate escape and hasn't been the same since. The recovery from the rush of throwing baggage carts at the police left him incomprehensible for the better part of a year. Someone meeting Hoffman today would be hard-pressed to recognize the visionary man of science sold to recruits of Theta 73.

Hoffman has been on the run for the past few years. He primarily travels with the other members of his cell. He spends his nights writing in his journals, which are a mish-mash of advanced mathematics, dream retention, fiction, and day-to-day entries. While he no longer oversees the administration of the organization that he created, the lucid parts of his ramblings are disseminated to the brighter bulbs in the group to be picked over.

WARLOCKS AND DETECTIVES

Dr. Emil Hoffman

Attributes: Brains 8, Brawn 3, Build 4, Gut 6, Moxie 4, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Brawl 2, Bureaucracy 5, Drive 1, Electricity 3, Evasion 3, Gravity 7, Kinetics 10, Lore (Physics) 9, Medicine 4, Perform (Public Speaking) 3, Puzzles 5, Stealth 4, Tensile Energy 9.

Backgrounds: Education, Magical Aptitude, Theta 73, Wise.

Profession: Academic 3, Rogue Scientist 3.

Professor Daniel Martin: The Maverick

Dan Martin embodies a new type of recruiter for Theta 73. The tweed-coat-and-elbow-patches set are a dying breed. Martin came back from the war with a new passion for life after seeing all that death. He finished his degree and set out teaching at Thirsby University in Gateway. The way he taught ruffled plenty of feathers. He let his students call him "Dan," sat on the desk in the classroom instead of behind it, and was even suspected of dallying with some of his students. In another time, he would have been thrown out on his ear, but Martin was well-liked by the crystal ball squads that started in Gateway. His good relationship with the police was a welcome change of pace from earlier years, so the school continued to let him teach.

Martin was brought into Theta 73 by one of his students. He had never contemplated becoming a warlock, but his experimentations sold him on the idea. He spent two years in a regular cell, but when an opportunity to become a Theta 73 professor presented itself, he took it. To him, pushing the boundaries of science is humanity's best ticket to putting some brightness back in this world. By teaching the best people he can find how to use sorcery, he puts that power in the right hands.

Lately, Professor Martin has started down an interesting path of study. He wants to know why sorcerers suffer from the mark after using their abilities. He has a few students documenting their reactions after using their abilities, but he needs more data. He may soon start his own experiments using his own abilities. While knows about the danger of addiction, he thinks he can handle it. All those burnouts on skid row didn't have his intellect or willpower, after all.

Daniel Martin

Attributes: Brains 7, Brawn 3, Build 4, Gut 6, Moxie 4, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Brawl 2, Bureaucracy 5, Drive 1, Electricity 4, Evasion 3, Gravity 4, Lore (Physics) 8, Medicine 4, Perform (Public Speaking) 3, Puzzles 5, Stealth 4, Thermal Energy 3.

Backgrounds: Education, Magic License, Theta 73, Wise.

Profession: Academic 2, Rogue Scientist 3.

Marion Pratt: Rogue Schoolteacher

You wouldn't see a sorcerer looking at Marion Pratt. She's a pretty little schoolteacher who lives a quiet life in the suburbs. She has a handsome young husband who works in an office downtown. The ladies in the PTA like her. Her chocolate chip cookies are the best-sellers at the school bake sale. Of course, she's also precisely the person that anti-warlock propaganda points to as a corrupting influence of the children... which is precisely what she's doing.

Marion found herself a widow after the war. She had married her high-school sweetheart and he died protecting the country. She took a job as a stenographer at Marshall College and overheard Dr. Hoffman's arguments with other faculty members. She spent her off-hours consuming any science text that she could. When she became the first woman member of Theta 73, nobody was more surprised than she.

Marion's newfound warlock powers troubled her somewhat. She could do amazing things but for what purpose? With the announcement of the Great Equation, she found that purpose. She wanted to remember her first husband's name again, no matter how badly it hurt. But she also knew that Theta 73 was still a boy's club. She would do her best work if she stayed away from the rivalries and petty politics of power. So she moved away from Marshall College and settled down in a new city with a new name.

She teaches in her own way. She wants her kids to know that scientists aren't bad people. While she would never teach a child even the most rudimentary basics of sorcery, she does send lists of promising science students up the ladder. Marion hopes that those kids will eventually attend a school where a Theta 73 professor resides and can bring him or her to the fold. She toes the line in public, but is a little less restrained in her own home. Her new husband is unaware of her affiliation, though he has begun to wrongly suspect she's having an affair. Those strange absences are her meeting with the rest of her cell.

And certainly, Marion doesn't look the type to be having an affair. Though blandly pretty, she has taken steps to downplay her good looks. She wears her wavy hair in a tight bun and her horn-rimmed glasses are thicker than they need to be. Though pleasant and charming, she has a habit of grinding her teeth, and the stress of her work sometimes makes her a bit snappish. She does her best to compensate for it, however, and years of teaching elementary school has given her plenty of patience.

Marion Pratt

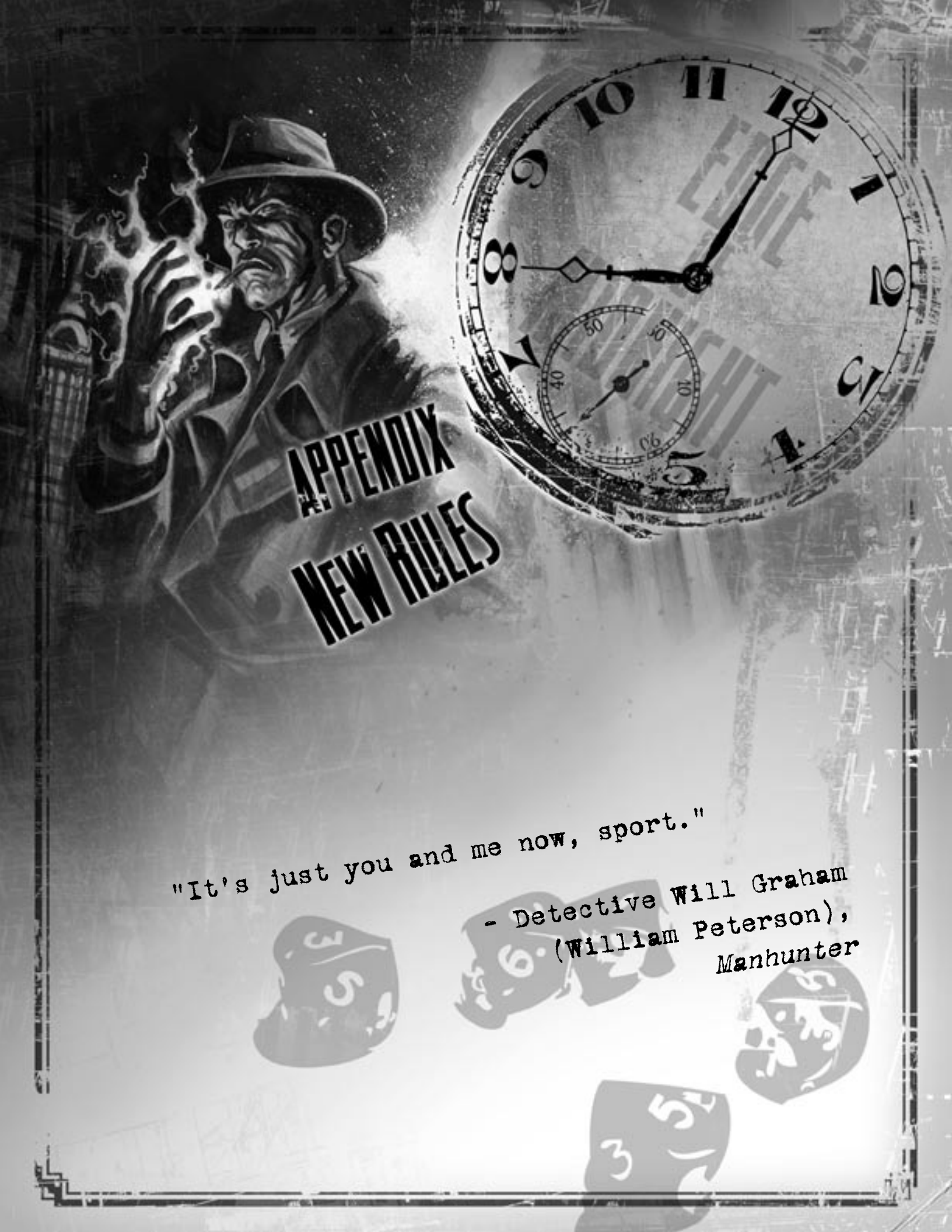
Attributes: Brains 6, Brawn 3, Build 3, Gut 6, Moxie 7, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 15.

Skills: Bureaucracy 2, Disguise 5, Etiquette 8, Evasion 4, Fast Talk 4, Gravity 3, Lore (Warlock History) 4, Perception 4, Sport (Tennis) 6, Thermal Energy 5.

Backgrounds: Education, Magical Aptitude, Theta 73.

Profession: Rogue Scientist 1, White Collar Worker 1.



APPENDIX NEW RULES

"It's just you and me now, sport."

- Detective Will Graham
(William Peterson),
Manhunter

WARLOCKS AND DETECTIVES

NEW RULES

The following pages contain a few new rules pertinent to other areas of this sourcebook.

NEW BACKGROUNDS

Rules for backgrounds can be found on pages 25–29 of *The Edge of Midnight* core rulebook.

Black Walkers

You belong to the Black Walkers secret society, dedicated to seeking new ways of advancing your power.

Prerequisites: Magical Aptitude background or Rogue Scientist profession, Gut 5+.

- Gain 1 additional scientific skill (maximum 10).
- Damage from magical attacks against you is a number of d10 equal to the level of the attack minus 2 (minimum 1). Damage from magical attacks you make against other people is a number of d10 equal to the level of attack minus 2 (minimum 1).
- You gain a free motorcycle, which you may use as you wish (see pages 34–35 of the *Edge of Midnight* core rulebook).
- Wanted: Membership in this organization is illegal. If you make a critical failure on any roll when interacting with the police, the government, or the press, the GM may opt to have your opponent recognize you as wanted by the law.

Deja Vu

You are one the *voudoun* sorcerers of Déjà Vu, battling for supremacy among the Terminus underworld.

Prerequisites: Moxie 5+.

- Gain 1 additional scientific skill (maximum 10).
- Gain skills based on your suit, as follows: Cups: +2 Etiquette or Streetwise; Wands: +1 any one scientific skill; Coins: +2 Appraise or Forgery; Swords: +2 any one combat skill.
- While concentrating to maintain a magical effect, you may take an additional simple (non-combat) action by making a Brains + pertinent scientific skill check, with a TN equal to the level of the magical effect being generated.
- Wanted: Membership in this organization is illegal. If you make a critical failure on any roll when interacting with the police, the government, or the press, the GM may opt to have your opponent recognize you as wanted by the law.

Men of Dunswick Street

You belong to the Men of Dunswick Street, using the secrets of the universe to increase your personal power.

Prerequisites: Alert background, Gut 5+.

- +1 Investigator.
- Choose a “domain:” a single section or neighborhood of Gateway which you have connections to. When using Bureaucracy, Etiquette, Fast Talk, Intimidation, or Streetwise checks pertaining to your domain, you may treat any partial success as a full success.
- +2 Bureaucracy.
- Jaded: You just don’t believe that things work out in this world. You receive 1 fewer luck die than normal each session.

Order of Nu

You are a secret member of the Order of Nu, struggling to keep the ideal of a warlock-based homeland alive.

Prerequisites: Magical Aptitude background or Rogue Scientist profession, Brains 8+.

- Gain 1 additional scientific skill (maximum 10).
- +2 Fast Talk.
- +2 Lore.
- Hated. If any person learns of your membership in this organization, the GM may rule that he will attempt to report you to the police or the press. He may even try to kill you outright if he has the means.

Silent Scepter

You belong to the Silent Scepter, dedicated to using magic to protect your fellow warlocks.

Prerequisites: Magical Aptitude background or Rogue Scientist profession, Moxie 5+.

- Gain 1 additional scientific skill (maximum 10).
- Once per session, you can call in a favor. This can cover just about anything, from borrowing a car to getting crash space to getting bailed out jail. Keep in mind, though, that the bigger the favor is, the worse your Indebted drawback will be.
- The TN for any contested roll you make in an effort to stop a magical effect being generated by another warlock is treated as if your own scientific skill was 2 ranks higher than it actually is (maximum 10).
- Indebted: You trade in favors. While you can call on them when you need them, others will also call on you. Once per session, the GM can make a request of your character, which you must do your best to fulfill. This request should be of the same caliber as the last favor you requested.

APPENDIX: NEW RULES

Theta 73

You belong to Theta 73, attempting to solve the Great Equation and otherwise advance the cause of science.

Prerequisites: Magical Aptitude background or Rogue Scientist profession, Brains 8+.

- Gain 1 additional scientific skill (maximum 10).
- +2 Puzzles.
- Isolated: Your membership in this secret society alienates you from your fellow man, and yet you have few contacts within the society. On any roll in which you attempt to get assistance from an NPC, the GM can choose to turn a partial success into a failure.

Voudoun Warlock

(This background was originally published in *The Naked City* sourcebook. It is reposted here for your convenience.)

While your magic is based on the same physical loopholes as more typical warlocks, you have cloaked them in the trappings of *voudoun*. Whether you truly believe in *voudoun* or not is up to you, but *voudoun* warlocks have found that practicing magic is much more difficult without the trappings of their religion.

Prerequisite: Magical Aptitude background.

- Provided you have access to the right materials and take a moment to chant the proper incantation (requiring one simple action for each magical effect generated), the TN for you to generate any magic effect is reduced by 1. In all other circumstances, the TN for you to generate any magic effect is increased by 1.

PROFESSIONS (ADVANCED)

Advanced professions work exactly like basic professions as outlined in pages 29–34 of *The Edge of Midnight* core rulebook. The only difference is that they require a basic profession as a prerequisite before they can be taken. Note that one need not belong to a certain advanced profession in order to practice it. Like regular professions, they represent the way your character does things, rather than the specific occupation he or she holds.

Coroner

The coroner works for the local medical examiner's office, examining bodies to help determine the cause of death.

Prerequisite: Academic profession.

- Once per session per level, the coroner may determine a pertinent fact about a person's death which no one has yet noticed by examining the body or the available evidence. He may, for example, determine the exact kind of poison used, or how close the gun was when it went off. No roll is necessary and the effort is automatically assumed to be successful.
- All coroners have access to police files and may examine material off-limits to non-law enforcement personnel.

Forensics Detective/Profiler

Forensics detectives work at the scene of the crime: examining evidence left behind in hopes of finding clues or narrowing down the list of suspects. Their inquiries are entirely scientific in nature, based solely around the study of fingerprints, hair fibers, and the like. Profilers are a specialized type of psychologist, specializing in criminal motives and the compulsions that drive men to break the law. They work within the NLEB, a nascent program devoted to tracking down serial killers.

Prerequisite: Investigator or the Officer of the Law profession. Profilers must also possess Lore: Psychology, rank 3 or above.

- Once per session per level, a Forensics Detective or Profiler may learn one useful piece of information about a suspect or a crime scene. He must examine the available evidence for a period of one hour per piece of information to be learned. For a Forensics Detective, the information must be able to be derived from scientific evidence. For example, he could determine the number of suspects involved, what weapons they used, or even the color of their hair, but not specific names or current locations. For a Profiler, the information must be derived from psychological conjecture. For example, he could determine the kinds of places the suspect frequents, the methods he uses, or a rank in one background, attribute, skill, or profession per use of this ability, but not specific names or current locations. The GM has the final say on what kinds of information can be gleaned (though it must always be useful to the character in some way).

NLEB Agent

These agents work for the National Law Enforcement Bureau, solving crimes of national importance such as counterfeiting, inter-district kidnapping, and the like.

Prerequisite: Investigator or Officer of the Law profession.

- Once per session per level, you may authorize a search of the national archives in order to retrieve a bit of knowledge. This search takes 1–5 days (1d10/2, rounded up); the results are considered a successful use of the Lore skill, based on the particular Lore specialty required. The GM can rule, however, that certain pieces of knowledge cannot be found, even in the national records, and thus are unavailable. Such "blank spots" do not count against the use of this ability.

Police Detective

Police Detectives are the plain-clothed investigators who work major crime scenes. Homicides, armed robberies, and similar crimes fall into their jurisdiction, and they usually work cases where the culprit is not readily apparent.

Prerequisite: Investigator or Officer of the Law profession.

- Once per session per level, a Police Detective may unearth a witness to some event he finds interesting. He may for example find the only guy willing to testify that Jimmy the Knife killed the shop-keep or he may find someone who saw the mob boss's girlfriend meeting with the cops. The witness's attitude towards the Police Detective is up to the GM.

WARLOCKS AND DETECTIVES



"What are you going to do?"

"Just one last thing, and then it's done."

- Michael and Michael Sullivan
(Tyler Hoechlin and Tom Hanks),
Road to Perdition