NIGHT'S BLACK AGENTS

BY ENNIE AWARD WINNER **KENNETH HITE**

A VAMPIRE SPY THRILLER
BASED ON THE GUMSHOE SYSTEM BY ROBIN D LAWS

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A Vampire Spy Thriller Game by Kenneth Hite

Based on the GUMSHOE System by Robin D. Laws

[redacted] **EDITION**

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Good things of day begin to droop and drowse,
While night's black agents to their prey do rouse.
– *Macbeth,* Act III, Scene ii

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Contents

CONTENTS 2
INTRODUCTION 4
Tells 4
From Structure to Story 4
Chapters 5
Modes 5
Burn 5
Dust 6
Mirror 6
Stakes 6
DVD DVD Commentary 6
CHARACTERS 7
Choose a Background 7
Background List 7
Choose Your Investigative Abilities 7
Investigative Ability Ratings: How Good is Great? 8
So Which Investigative Abilities Should I Buy? 8
Investigative Ability List 9
Trading Points 9
Choose Your General Abilities 9
General Ability Ratings: How Good Is Awesome? 10
So Which General Abilities Should I Buy? 10
DVD Love Your MOS 10
General Ability List 11
Get Personal 11
Backgrounds: The Old Life 11
Sample Backgrounds 11
Making Your Own Background 14
Abilities 15
Investigative Abilities 16
Why No Lying Ability? 17
Getting Interrogated 22
General Abilities 25
Higher Cherry Branches 26
DVD Athletics Adds Life 26
DVD A Little Help From Your Friends 32
Personality and Dossier 35
DVD A Drive By Any Other Name 35
Sources of Stability 35
Drives 37
Personal Arcs 37
Changing Drives 40
Secret Drives 40
Trust and Betrayal 40
Maps and Legends 41
First Blood 43
RULES 44
Clues and Spends 44
Tip For Players: Containing Speculation 44
DVD Spit Straight 44
Gathering Clues 45
Simple Searches 45
Spends and Benefits 46
DVD An Empty Pool Only Makes You Mostly Badass 47
Example Benefits 48
Who Finds It? 49
Tests 49
Die Rolls 49
Simple Tests 49
Difficulty Numbers and Story Pacing 50
Option: You Never Fail 50
Continuing Challenges 51
Contests 51
Player-Facing Contests 52
Full Contests 53
Darkness 53
Thriller Chases 54
Thrills Are Everybody's Business 55
Collision is Drama, Not Physics 59
Combat 61
Mooks 61
Tasers and Stun guns 63
DVD That Said, Tasers Are Pretty Cool 63
Non-Lethal Damage 63
GRAPPLING 64
Guns Kill 64
DVD No, Really, Guns Kill 64
Death and Consequences 65
Player-Facing Combat 65
Free-For-All Combat 66
Standard Combat Considerations 66
Too Many Modifiers? 66
One Gun, Two Combatants 67
Opposing Forces 69
Thriller Combat Rules 71
DVD Hitter's Friend 73
DVD Natural 20 On A Six-Sider 74
DVD Killer App For the Killer Elite 76
Other Dangers 79
Hazards 79
Shock and Awe 81
Required Disclaimer 82
Experience and Stability 83
Optional Rule: It's Cold Inside 83
Psychological Triage 84
Head Games 84
Withdrawal 85
Heat 88
Hot Spots 89
Unofficial Heat 89
Extended Chases 91
The Stress of Pursuit 92
Recovery and Improvement 92
Regaining Pool Points 92
Opposition Pools 93
What Do Pool Points Represent? 93
Improving Your Character 94
TOOLS 95
Acquisition 95
No Go the Bagman 96
Spytech 97
Communications 97
Explosive Devices 98
Booby Traps 98
Infiltration 99
Surveillance 99
Bugs and Bug Detection 100
Vehicles 101
Special Weapons 103
Shooting 103
Very Special Weapons 105
DVD Pray and Slay 107
Special Tactics 108
Tactical Fact-Finding 108
Tag-Team Tactical Benefits 111
Tradecraft 112
The Yojimbo Option 116
Getting Captured 116
Advice to Players 117
The Bucharest Rules 117
VAMPIRES 120
Choose and Perish 120
Parameters 120
Campaign Modes and Vampire Types 121
Sanguinary Considerations 121
Building a Vampire 124
Basic Abilities 124
Vampire Agents 127
Vampiric Powers 127
Some of Your Blood 128
Vampire Forensics 129
DVD Once Bitten, Twice Shy 130
The Two-Way Mirror 131
Feats of Strength 137
Vampiric Weaknesses 138
True Faith 141
Sense Trouble 142

Vampiric DEATH AND Resurrection ... 142
Sample Vampires ... 143
The Superhuman Crew ... 147
Vampiric Forms and Familiars ... 154
Conspiracies ... 155
Conspiratorial Considerations ... 155
DVD Enemies ... 157
Campaign Modes and conspiracy design ... 157
The Conspyramid ... 158
Other Conspiracy Structures ... 161
Conspiratorial Components ... 161
CITIES ... 164
Deep Background ... 164
Backstage Europe ... 164
International Organizations ... 167
Interpol ... 167
Underground Europe ... 167
Prepping a City ... 169
Quick and Dirty City Building ... 169
Low and Slow City Development ... 171
Three Cities: Quick and Dirty ... 173
Bucharest ... 173
London ... 174
Tunis ... 175
Marseille: Low and Slow ... 176
Cities and Abilities ... 176
The Lay of the Land ... 176
Four Factions ... 177
Faction Map: Marseille ... 179
Marseille Stories ... 180
STORIES ... 181
The Thriller in Play ... 181
Rhythm and Improvisation ... 181
AVOIDING THE RAILROAD ... 182
The Operation ... 184
The Spine ... 184
Leveraged Clues ... 184
The Thriller Skeleton ... 185
The Perils of Competence ... 187
Active Operations ... 187
Your Mission, Jim, Should You Choose to Accept It ... 188
Reactive Operations ... 189
Spy a la Mode ... 190
The Vampyramid ... 190
DVD Down to Your Last Pint ... 192
The Campaign Story ... 195
The Opening ... 195
Midgame ... 195
Bringing In New Characters ... 196
Endgame ... 196
Alternate Versions ... 196
Martini, Straight Up ... 196
The Dunwich Sanction ... 197
Special Assets ... 198
(S)ENTRIES ... 201
Eyes Only Briefing ... 201
The Spine ... 201
In an Ongoing Campaign ... 201
The Job ... 201
Meeting Rudek ... 201
Questions ... 202
The Lift ... 203
Heisting the Laptop ... 203
The Escape ... 204
The Meet ... 204
The Double Cross ... 205
Anton's Crew ... 205
The End? ... 206
The Renfield Option ... 207
The Trail ... 207
Tracking the Paymaster ... 207
Tracking Anton ... 209
Belgrade: Quick and Dirty ... 209
The Payoff ... 209
The Leads ... 210
SOURCES ... 211
Vampires ... 211
Spies ... 211
Thrillers ... 212
ADDENDA ... 213
Designer's Notes ... 213
Director's Agent Tracking Sheet ... 214
Hit Threshold Modifier Sheet ... 215
Thriller Chase Summary Sheet ... 216
Thriller Chase Lead Track ... 216
Special Thriller Chase Rules Sheet ... 217
Thriller Combat Options Sheet ... 218
Blank Conspyramid Sheet ... 220
The Vampyramid ... 221
Character Sheet ... 222
Academic Abilities ... 222
Interpersonal Abilities ... 222
General Abilities ... 222
Technical Abilities ... 222

INTRODUCTION

The Cold War? Over. The War on Terror? Over for you.

You used to uncover secrets, or maybe kill to keep them. You used to serve your country in the shadows, doing things — or stopping things — that couldn't be shown in daylight or on the evening news.

Then you stopped. Maybe you got tired, or maybe you got burned, or maybe you got out while you could.

But you didn't go into the daylight. Not just yet. You stayed in the shadows, in Europe's deniable underground networks of crime and conflict, but you did it on your terms. You did a few ops, and you asked fewer questions. You worked for money in secret accounts, and for people you didn't know.

But they weren't people. It turned out they couldn't be shown in daylight or on the evening news either. Because they were vampires.

And now you know. And they know that you know.

Vampires exist. What can they do? Who do they own? Where is safe? How much is legend, and what is the truth? You don't know those answers yet. So you'd better start asking questions and picking targets. You have to trace the bloodsuckers' operations, penetrate their networks, follow their trail, and target their weak points. Because if you don't hunt them, they will hunt you. And they will kill you.

Or worse.

You must mount your own shadow war, on a secret terror that only you know exists. Stay alert, and stay awake. It's going to be a long night.

Tells

In poker, tells are those little gestures or changes of expression that tell what's in your hand. This is where I tell what's in your hands.

This game, ***Night's Black Agents,*** adapts the GUMSHOE engine to the propulsive paranoia of the spy thriller genre: not just James Bond, but also and especially films like *Ronin* and the *Bourne* trilogy. You build agents worthy of such films; tough, resourceful, clever, deadly — in a word, badass. Then you send them to kill vampires.

The Director (who plays the role usually called the DM or the GM in other RPGs), begins by building the vampires. In ***Night's Black Agents,*** the vampires and their conspiracy are modular, customizable. In one Director's world, they might fear garlic and crosses — in another Director's campaign, they might be spider-like aliens who move through hyperspace. Or both. Likewise, the Director builds the enemy network — the people and groups the vampires have already turned to their ends — to her own specifications.

Then the Director sends the vampires, and their own agents, and their pawns and tools and ghouls and monsters, to kill you. The goal — both yours and the Director's — is action, and horror, and the special thrills that only spy stories can deliver.

Throughout a typical ***Night's Black Agents*** campaign, the agents:

- Uncover the extent of the vampire conspiracy, mapping its branches and personnel
- Survive attacks by the vampires or their minions and pawns
- Discover the vampires' weaknesses and true nature
- Detect and prevent ongoing and ad hoc vampire or conspiratorial operations
- Weaken the vampire conspiracy by striking at its main branches or key personnel
- Finally, destroy the vampires at the heart of the conspiracy

Any of these goals might provide the direction, the spine, the through-line, of a scenario or adventure, usually referred to in this game as an "operation." One operation may take many sessions of game play; 2 or 3 sessions per scenario is normal.

The Director, meanwhile, plots out the structure of the vampire conspiracy, and plans both active and reactive operations to test the agents and reveal the plot. "Active" operations are the ones where the agents are moving forward against the vampires: investigating their conspiracy, thwarting its goals, and attacking it. "Reactive" operations are the ones where the vampires are moving forward: attacking some other group, infiltrating some new city, or hunting the agents directly.

Either way, the Director maps out a structure for the operation: What is the agents' (or opposition's) goal, and what is the adventure's spine? What tips the agents off to an opportunity or a threat? What information is available, and where or from whom can the agents get it? What assets does the opposition have in position? What is the end game — what happens if the agents uncover the truth in Venice, or if the vampires succeed in Helsinki?

From Structure to Story

The Director's structure notes are not a story. The story occurs as you, the players, bring the structure to life through the actions of your characters. The story

proceeds from scene to scene, where you determine the pace, discovering clues and putting them together. Your characters interact with locations, gathering physical evidence or facts on the ground, and with supporting characters run by the Director, getting actionable intel or inside information.

The first scene drops a lead and asks a question: How can we hurt the vampires here? What are the vampires planning here? You then perform legwork, collecting information that tells you more about the op. Each scene contains clues; intel or information pointing to a new scene. To move from scene to scene, and to solve the overall mystery, you must gather clues. They fuel your forward momentum.

Certain scenes may put a new twist on the operation, as the initial lead turns out to reveal a much bigger challenge, or to be a trap luring your agents into ambush. Other scenes may test your agents' speed, stamina, or savagery, making them pay a price in blood to move forward.

As clues accumulate, a picture of the operation emerges, until your characters arrive at a climactic scene, where all is revealed and the opposition confronted. A wrap-up scene accounts for loose ends and shows the consequences of your success — or, in rare instances, failure. Why is failure possible at all? Its possibility creates urgency and suspense.

Chapters

This book breaks down as follows:

Characters gives you the tools to build your agent, including his badass abilities, his shadowy background, and his classified dossier. You can also select Drives to push him forward, and build Trust with his teammates.

Rules lays out the GUMSHOE system of tests, spends, and contests. Special thriller rules for chases and combat, special horror rules for madness and paranoia, and special rules for bringing the Heat, add to the solid basics of investigation and action. If you survive, you might even get better at them.

Tools gives your agents some useful weapons, spy tech, gear, vehicles, and tactics to help them survive.

Vampires gives the Director the components to build her own personal horrors, from Serbian legend or Stoker's novel, from film or folklore or fiction. Then it helps the Director build out the conspiracy, and adds some supernatural backup to the main event. Plentiful worked examples can fuel the imagination, or get dropped into the action ready to kill.

Cities lays out the shadowy world of European crime, espionage, and terrorism. Then it helps the Director fill it up with vampires. Three sample cities get a quick briefing; Marseille gets built out and clotted with menace.

Stories guides the Director through plotting active or reactive operations, running the game, and rolling with the players' creativity. The Vampyramid gives her a robust way to plot enemy responses in dramatic fashion. Finally, it lays out some alternative approaches to the game: take out the vampires, put in Cthulhu, or give the agents some paranormal juice of their own.

(S)Entries starts your campaign with a sample operation, as things go horribly wrong in Bosnia and your agents discover the existence of vampires. Worse, vampires discover the existence of your agents.

Sources tells you what I read and watched to write and run this game, and gives you some leads to follow on your own.

Finally, **Addenda** brings together cheat sheets for the rules, character sheets for your agents, and plenty of other tools to put everyone on the same page.

Modes

Night's Black Agents is "a vampire spy thriller." That means its default setting is a world of horror and shadows, with flashes of action. Its upbeat lands on the thrills and the flavor, with espionage and problem-solving on the downbeat to set up the action.

Not every spy thriller is the same. Some deal in black and white morality, others in shades of gray self-loathing. Some chart emotional damage more intently than they do bullet trajectories. Others try to mess with your mind, and let your adrenal glands take care of themselves. They play in different idioms, styles, or modes. Many spy stories, especially series like the Bond novels and films, TV shows like *Alias* or *MI-5,* or the *Queen and Country* comics, switch between modes depending on the demands of the individual story. Others, like John Le Carré's Smiley novels or the *Bourne* trilogy of films, stick to one mode and deepen it throughout.

For those who wish to emphasize one or another idiom, we have broken out a few possible modes of play and indicated those rules and game elements most suited for them with specific icons and options. These modes can certainly be combined in any pattern the players desire, and some rules (such as Sources of Stability) work with almost all modes. The Director may decide that some rules and elements are simply not allowed in her game in order to inculcate a specific flavor of spy thriller, which is after all the entire point.

Burn

Some spy stories privilege psychological damage and the cost of heroism: the *Bourne* trilogy of films, the

TV series *Alias* and *Callam,* and the espionage novels of Graham Greene, for example. Horrors drain your soul as much as they do your blood; you look into the abyss and see the abyss welcoming you in.

In Burn mode games, psychological damage is more intense; the actions agents must take inevitably burn away their humanity. Your Stability is capped at 12, and degrades faster. Killing is never easy, and never free.

Look for the Burn icon in these rules for specifics.

Dust

The default setting of ***Night's Black Agents*** is a cinematic thriller. To recreate the gritty, lo-fi espionage world of Anthony Price or Charles McCarry, similar to the TV series *The Sandbaggers* or *Rubicon,* or films like *Three Days of the Condor,* you can "de-power" the game into Dust mode by:

- removing the MOS rules
- removing the cherries for ratings of 8+ in most General abilities
- capping Health at 10
- restricting the Thriller Combat rules or eliminating them entirely

Look for the Dust icon in those sections and elsewhere for specifics.

Most Dust mode media incorporates at least two of Mirror, Burn, and Stakes as well, but there's nothing forcing you to do so.

In Dust mode, the vampires and their agents will be far more challenging and powerful in open combat. Design, and encourage your players to design, operations that avoid shootouts unless the team has an overwhelming positional advantage, or some surprising ace in the hole.

Mirror

Many spy stories, especially in the modern era, present a "wilderness of mirrors," a world of hidden agendas and shifting allegiances. They threaten personal identity and self-knowledge, mirroring those threats in betrayal and contests between corrupt opponents where the protagonist must trust only his own moral sense — if he can remember it. This is the world of John Le Carré's Smiley novels and Barry Eisler's John Rain thrillers, of movies like *Ronin* and *Spy Games* and the *Mission: Impossible* films, of TV shows like *The Prisoner* and *MI-5*.

In Mirror mode games, your contacts and even your team are unreliable; your partners can help you with Trust, or destroy you with Betrayal. Unlike the other modes, Mirror mode games encourage player vs. player story lines or active conflict.

Look for the Mirror icon in these rules for specifics.

Stakes

Although more common in earlier spy fiction than now, some spy stories play for higher stakes. The characters derive their actions from a higher purpose than mere survival or "get the job done" ethics: patriotism, the search for knowledge, protection of the innocent, or even justified revenge. This is the world of James Bond and Jack Ryan, of Tim Powers' novel *Declare,* of films like *Taken,* of TV shows like *Burn Notice.*

In Stakes mode games, your agents have Drives that urge them forward; this rule is highly recommended for games in any mode. In Burn mode, Drives can force the characters to sacrifice themselves; in Mirror mode, conflicting agendas can escalate the drama. Even Dust mode agents often aim higher than just getting out from under the looming threat.

Look for the Stakes icon in these rules for specifics.

DVD COMMENTARY

Most of the sidebars in this book give optional rules, handy lists, or other game material. Sidebars with the DVD icon are different: think of them as the "DVD commentary track" on the game. They provide advice, hints, and tricks. Most of them come from alpha playtester Josh, whose agent Sam Vornau bled and suffered over many months of play to learn them.

CHARACTERS

Creating characters in ***Night's Black Agents*** involves the other players in a collaboration intended to put together a robust team that can handle anything the Director digs up. Each agent should shine in one or more specialties, while covering the other characters' weak spots.

The process breaks down into four broad steps:

- Choose one or more Backgrounds. You receive Cover 10 and Network 15 for free (except in Burn mode games; see p. 5).
- Choose your Investigative abilities. (These abilities **always work**. If you spend points from them, they work even better.) You receive Streetwise and Tradecraft at 1 for free.
- Choose your General abilities. (You roll a single 6-sided die and spend points to see if these work.) You receive Health and Stability at 4 for free.
- Pick your MOS (see p. 10).
- Build out your personality and dossier.

Alternatively, you can start out with your character's personality and dossier, and then select backgrounds to match it and abilities to complement those elements.

Choose a Background

For a few years now, your character has been part of Europe's shadowy underground of criminals, mercenaries, and deniable paramilitaries. Before that, you were on the rolls somewhere: MI5, DGSE, Stasi, perhaps even the CIA or Mossad. Someone recruited you out of the sunlight, and taught you to survive in the shadows.

You still retain some connections to your old life, as embodied in the Network general ability. While working for your previous employers, you built up a number of cover identities, some of which you didn't bother mentioning during debriefing; the Cover general ability represents this stash of passports, legends, and gmail accounts. Your old life also trained you in certain abilities, abilities you have further honed during your time off the books.

Pick one or more Backgrounds from the options starting on p. 11, or invent one using those options as models. Each Background package costs 6 Investigative build points and 18 General ability points. Write the ability ratings for your Background on your character sheet. Your **Network ability begins at 15;** your **Cover ability begins at 10.**

BACKGROUND LIST

Backgrounds are simply *suggested packages of abilities;* they come with no feats, exclusive class skills, bonuses, or discounts. They're shorthand for what you used to do in your old life, and what you'll likely be doing most of in an operation. Mix and match; pick one, two, none, whatever works for your character concept.

Analyst: You put it all together.

Asset Handler: You use people in the field.

Bagman: You handle the money.

Bang-and-Burner: You blow it up.

Black Bagger: You break and enter.

Cleaner: You erase your traces.

Cobbler: You provide papers.

Cuckoo: You pretend you're someone else.

Hacker: You crack it.

Investigator: You figure it out.

Medic: You heal yours; you work on theirs.

Mule: You get it across the border.

Muscle: You hit it.

Watcher: You keep eyes on target.

Wet Worker: You kill it.

Wheel Artist: You drive it.

Wire Rat: You build it.

Choose Your Investigative Abilities

Investigative abilities are central to any GUMSHOE character; they enable you to gather information and drive the plot forward. They always work if they apply at all. You get a number of build points to spend on them, as determined by the number of regularly attending players in your player group:

# of Players	Investigative Build Points
2	32
3	24
4	22
5+	20

Players who can only attend every now and then get the same number of Investigative build points as

everyone else, but are not counted toward the total when deciding how many points to allocate.

Every rating point in an ability costs 1 build point. Each Background package costs 6 Investigative build points; start by deducting these from your total. The Director and players then go through the list of Investigative abilities (see sidebar), ensuring that each one of them is covered by at least one agent.

See p. 16 for fuller descriptions of the various Investigative abilities.

Once all of the abilities are covered, you can add more rating points to your various Investigative abilities, or you may, if you desire, save the extra build points. You may use those saved points to assign yourself additional abilities, gain **Tag-Team Tactical Benefits** (see p. 111), or boost your ratings in the abilities you've chosen during the game as situations arise. When you choose to do this, you are not suddenly acquiring abilities on the spot, but simply revealing for the first time "on screen" what the character has been able to do all along.

When choosing Investigative abilities it is better to get a large number of abilities with fairly low ratings. Even a 1-point rating is worth having. You'll rarely want to spend more than 3 points on any one Investigative ability.

Don't get too nervous about your initial choices. As noted above, you can save some build points to add to abilities later on during the game as you decide more about playing your character. And as noted on p. 9, you can swap points around after a session if you feel like it.

You have lived by your wits off the grid, and were trained to do so by experts. They also trained you to recognize each other. You start the game with **1 free rating point** in each of **Streetwise** and **Tradecraft.**

INVESTIGATIVE ABILITY RATINGS: HOW GOOD IS GREAT?

Having even 1 point in an Investigative ability indicates that you're expertly trained, practiced, and well-read in that field. You are capable of broad leaps of intuition and brilliant insight; the sorts of deductions that, if you saw them in a movie, you might well dismiss as unrealistically rapid or complete. A higher rating still — 2 or 3 points — implies that you're one of the top people working on that subject. You might be famous all over Europe (or at least all over Europe's shadow underground) as an authority on the topic, and even if not (for reasons of your cover, perhaps) you can impress and interest anyone who is such an authority. Ratings of 2 or 3 indicate your character's defining abilities. Your concentration in them tells the other players (and you) something about his personality, life experience, and outlook.

Two Investigative abilities — Forgery and Languages — give you more options and specific skills the more points you have in them. They still work like normal Investigative abilities in terms of gathering clues, but you have a game-mechanical reason to buy them higher than 3.

If your game uses Familiar Cities (see p. 25), you may want to buy more points of Urban Survival, likewise.

If your game uses Tag-Team Tactical Benefits (see p. 111), you may want to buy 1 or 2 more points in those relevant Investigative abilities.

SO WHICH INVESTIGATIVE ABILITIES SHOULD I BUY?

All Investigative abilities are important, and any one of them might be crucial in a given session. Rather than any given ability being vital for your agent, however, it's far more important that the team as a whole have access to all of the Investigative abilities. Ideally, someone on the team will have any needed skill, and everyone will have something cool that they can do.

That said, consider putting at least 1 point into each of Notice and Research, two broadly useful skills in almost any operation. Human Terrain and Urban Survival are almost as handy, and great fun to play.

It's not unreasonable to expect every agent to have at least one Interpersonal ability, even if it's just 1 point in Intimidation for the shooter. If your agent depends on Interpersonal abilities, make sure to take at least 2 points in Languages so that he can likely talk to the witnesses in the first place.

INVESTIGATIVE ABILITY LIST

Investigative abilities are divided into the following sub-groups: Academic, Interpersonal, and Technical. The purpose of the sub-groups is to allow you to quickly find the best ability for the task during play, by scanning the most likely portion of the overall list.

Academic
Accounting
Archaeology
Architecture
Art History
Criminology
Diagnosis
History
Human Terrain
Languages
Law
Military Science
Occult Studies
Research
Vampirology
Interpersonal
Bullshit Detector
Bureaucracy
Cop Talk
Flattery
Flirting
High Society
Interrogation
Intimidation
Negotiation
Reassurance
Streetwise
Tradecraft
Technical
Astronomy
Chemistry
Cryptography
Data Recovery
Electronic Surveillance
Forensic Pathology
Forgery
Notice
Outdoor Survival
Pharmacy
Photography
Traffic Analysis
Urban Survival

Trading Points

One *optional rule* to knit together a team allows players to swap points among themselves. If using this rule, a player may trade 1 Investigative build point for 3 General build points from another player. (Or, obviously, vice-versa.) Thus, the cerebral analyst can give 6 General ability points to the menacing Spetsnaz veteran (for Weapons and Explosive Devices, say), and get 2 Investigative ability points from that worthy's pool (for, oh, Occult Studies). Both players get to increase their agents' "spotlight" abilities and the team becomes more stereotypical. Which is to say, narratively better.

In playtest, some groups wanted to be able to trade Network and Cover points for other abilities, leaving only one or two players to create a "spotlight" face man with a host of contacts. Use this option very advisedly, if at all. Network and Cover are very wide-ranging, useful abilities: even former SAS muscle can always use a guy to get a gun from.

Choose Your General Abilities

General abilities come in handy at the sharp end; they help you survive whatever awfulness or mayhem your Investigative abilities have uncovered. You get 70 build points to spend on them, from which you deduct the 18 General ability points in each Background you take. Like Investigative abilities, 1 build point buys you 1 rating point.

General abilities use different rules than Investigative ones, which allow for possible failure: you spend ability points and roll a 6-sided die to see if you succeed. When choosing General abilities, you'll want to concentrate your points among a few abilities, giving your agent comparatively higher ratings than you need in the Investigative category.

Although there is no set cap on abilities, the second highest rating must be at least half that of the highest rating (not including Cover or Network).

> *You want to have a Health rating of 30. This would require you to take at least one other ability at 15, and your free Network rating of 15 wouldn't count for this purpose. That would leave you only 25 points to spend on all of the other General abilities. You reconsider, opting for a lower Health rating so you can spend your other points more freely.*

As with Investigative abilities (see above), you're free to set some build points aside to add to your character during play as the need arises. If you buy a rating of 8+ in Weapons or Shooting, you can spend more build points for Special Weapons Training (see p. 77) at this time.

Every agent starts with "normal" Health and Stability ratings of 4 for free, but it's advisable to buy more points in those abilities during character creation so that your agent can stand up to the inevitable punishment to come.

In a Dust game, you begin with 55 General build points.

In a Mirror game, you begin with 65 General build points.

GENERAL ABILITY RATINGS: HOW GOOD IS AWESOME?

Where any points at all in any Investigative ability implies impressive competence, spreads in General abilities cover a wider range of capability levels. See the Opposing Forces sidebar on p. 69 for some benchmarks, or use the following guidelines:

A **rating of 0** indicates basic civilian competence, if that: you can drive a car and maybe even parallel park it with Driving 0, but you're hopelessly out of your depth in a car chase.

A **rating of 1-3** indicates that the ability is a sideline; you were trained in it at the Farm or the Institute, but you don't really rely on it in a pinch.

A **rating of 4-7** is solid but not off the charts; you're impressive enough to a civilian, and could probably beat many professionals, but you know you aren't the top of the food chain. Think of this as your "backup" skill in the cinematic thriller world of ***Night's Black Agents.***

In a Dust game, a rating of 6 might be your main skill.

A **rating of 8 or more** gets into the realm of "dedicated badass." Not only do special abilities open up when you reach a rating of 8 or more in a General ability, just doing the "normal" stuff makes you look really good and scary to observers. In the movie, that's when you get the horns coming up on the soundtrack, or the really great blue filter comes down, or the whole thing goes into bullet time.

If your agent lasts for a few sessions, and is really dedicated to being a badass, his ratings in key abilities will head into the **double digits.** This is good.

SO WHICH GENERAL ABILITIES SHOULD I BUY?

All General abilities are important, and any one of them might be crucial in a given session.

That said, you're taking your life in your own hands if you don't boost Athletics, Health, Stability, and at least one combat ability (Hand-to-Hand, Shooting, or Weapons) to 5 or 6 at least. If you plan on regularly putting your character into harm's way (and into combat scenes), consider boosting Athletics to 8 (to raise your Hit Threshold) and one or more combat abilities to 8 or 10 or even higher. Especially if you're using the full suite of thriller combat options, there's never such a thing as too many points in a combat ability.

You start out with a decent amount of Network and Cover already, although if you plan on doing a lot of social engineering, you might want to buy a few more points in one or the other.

Preparedness and Sense Trouble are good, broadly useful abilities well worth a few points for most agents. If you have the points to spare, putting 1 or 2 into Disguise and Infiltration helps breeze past minor obstacles, although you'll want to leave full-on impersonation or black-bag jobs to your team specialist.

If you are the team specialist in something, get a rating of at least 8 in your specialty. You *do* want to look like a badass, don't you?

Pick Your MOS

The acronym stands for "Military Occupational Specialty," but every player character has one, regardless of background. (Pronounced "em-oh-ess," MOS just sounds cooler than "schtick.") Select one General ability during character creation to be your MOS; it does not change. It's only polite (and fits thriller drama better) to let each player have his own MOS, rather than duplicating abilities on the team; a whole team with Shooting MOSes, for example, is also less flexible in action.

Once per session, you can invoke your MOS to automatically succeed at a given General ability. For example, if your MOS is Shooting, once per session you can automatically hit and kill a human target. If your MOS is Driving, once per session you can automatically escape or intercept another car, and so forth.

DVD LOVE YOUR MOS

When planning an op, think of MOS uses as your cornerstones. They cannot fail, and they can carry you through the trickiest part of any plan with no doubt. Plan to use your MOS on something where the consequences of failure are the most severe, or when the gap between point A and B seems the most insurmountable. Alternatively, MOS skills are "Get out of jail free" cards used to save your bacon when things have turned south.

An MOS will not automatically defeat a supernatural challenge: you might use your Weapons MOS to hit a vampire with a stake without rolling the die, but you would not automatically kill him (unless he's the sort

of vampire who automatically disintegrates if staked). Similarly, you cannot use your MOS to do something sheerly impossible: no matter what *MacGyver* may have told you, you cannot use a Mechanics MOS to defuse a nuclear weapon with a gum wrapper and a hairpin.

Your MOS does not apply in Piggybacking situations (see p. 50).

Dust games do not use MOS.

GENERAL ABILITY LIST

Athletics
Conceal
Cover
Digital Intrusion
Disguise
Driving
Explosive Devices
Filch
Gambling
Hand-to-Hand
Health
Infiltration
Mechanics
Medic
Network
Piloting
Preparedness
Sense Trouble
Shooting
Shrink
Stability
Surveillance
Weapons

Get Personal

Depending on your campaign mode, do some or all of the following to complete your character creation:

- Pick your character's Sources of Stability (see p. 35).
- Choose your character's Drive (see p. 37).
- Set your character's Trust (see p. 40).

If you haven't already done so, name your agent and provide a general workup of his career — suitably redacted for the rest of your team, if necessary. Then, in collaboration with the other players, describe how and when your team came together.

Backgrounds: The Old Life

A Background package represents your original training by whichever agency used to employ you, and more than likely indicates the skills you've offered on the black market since going freelance. **Backgrounds are simply suggested packages of abilities;** they offer no special options, discounts on build points, or other game-mechanical fillips. They exist to provide players and Directors with some shorthand guidelines, and some indication of the variety of characters possible in a ***Night's Black Agents*** campaign.

Add the points given by the Background to the relevant abilities on your character sheet; if you already have points in that ability (some Backgrounds increase your Cover or Network, for example), just add the new points for an increased total.

Feel free to add more than one Background, take the same Background twice, or otherwise manipulate them. Some Backgrounds naturally combine to create a sort of "super-Background," like Muscle and Wet Worker, or Black Bagger and Hacker, or Hacker and Wire Rat.

If you gain the same ability from more than one Background, you may either add together the ratings given in each to arrive at a higher rating, or give some of the points back, freeing up the build points to spend elsewhere. The refund remains within the ability type: it goes back to your Investigative build point total for an Investigative ability, or back into your General build points if it was a General ability.

A team of agents can comprise any set of Backgrounds, although a rough balance between "brain" and "brawn" is advisable for most campaigns.

Sample Backgrounds

No Backgrounds are exclusive to any given agency, patron, or employer: although the IRA (for example) is quite likely to have had bang-and-burners and leg-breaking muscle in its employ, such rude types can be found in the ranks of everyone from the FSB to Mossad. That said, each writeup gives some specific examples to spark player creativity. For more possible previous patrons, see the lists of agencies and organizations on p. 164.

Each Background package contains **6 points worth of Investigative abilities and 18 points worth of General abilities.** In many cases, the writeup provides some alternate abilities to swap out as a means of customizing your agent, or as recommendations for what to buy more points in further on in the character creation process. In almost all cases, feel free to buy more points in any ability given in the package; these are pointers, not restrictions. Keep in

mind, however, that (as mentioned in the sidebar on p. 8) buying more than 2 or 3 points in an Investigative ability is a fairly dramatic expenditure.

Analyst

Almost all modern spy work involves sifting through the immense amount of data available to come to some kind of useful conclusion. Much of this information isn't classified or stolen, or even picked up by spy satellites: newspapers, periodicals, and the Internet provide oceans of raw open-source intelligence (OSINT) that a good analyst can turn into useful product for his government. An analyst might also work for a university, newspaper, or strategic-studies think tank, either under cover or simply providing government-quality intelligence to the private sector.

Analysts have good minds for pattern matching; this might manifest in mathematical ability, musical creativity, or just low-level paranoia.

Specific Examples: MI5 threat analyst, Deutsche Bank econometrician, European Parliament staffer, deputy CIA station chief, journalist for *Le Figaro,* Polish Air Force operational analyst.

Investigative Abilities: Data Recovery 1, Languages 2, Research 1, Traffic Analysis 2

Alternates: Accounting, Bureaucracy, Criminology, History, Human Terrain, Military Science

General Abilities: Digital Intrusion 2, Network 5, Preparedness 4, Sense Trouble 5, Surveillance 3

Alternates: Gambling

Asset Handler

Intelligence agencies get human intelligence (HUMINT) from all manner of sources, willing and coerced, knowing and duped. These sources are called "assets," and the agent who keeps them all supplying intel is their "runner" or "handler."

Asset handlers have to juggle carrots and sticks, avoid getting involved with their assets' lives while solving their problems, and always keep an eye out for more potential recruits. Since they actually have to meet their assets on occasion, they have to be better than average at avoiding surveillance.

Specific Examples: CIA or MI6 case officer, SVR "journalist" under cover, Italian ROS major running Mafia snitches, French DRM intelligence officer monitoring warlord activity in Bosnia.

Investigative Abilities: Bullshit Detector 2, Intimidation 2, Negotiation 1, Reassurance 1

Alternates: Flattery, Flirting, Human Terrain, Tradecraft

General Abilities: Cover 3, Sense Trouble 5, Shrink 4, Surveillance 6

Alternates: Conceal, Disguise

Bagman

In the immortal words of Deep Throat, "Follow the money." Clandestine operations and criminal organizations both depend on flows of untraceable cash, either electronically or in the good old-fashioned metal briefcase. Either way, the bagman's watchwords are "keep it secret, keep it safe."

Specific Examples: Iranian VEVAK terrorist paymaster, American OTFI agent monitoring SWIFT transactions in Switzerland, FSB *obshchak* ("book-keeper") collecting tribute from Russian mafiya rings, Camorra money launderer in Monaco.

Investigative Abilities: Accounting 2, Bullshit Detector 2, Intimidation 1, Negotiation 1

Alternates: Data Recovery

General Abilities: Conceal 4, Digital Intrusion 3, Sense Trouble 6, Surveillance 5

Alternates: Disguise

Bang-and-Burner

"Bang and burn" jobs involve sabotage, usually through demolitions or arson. This skill set translates with unnerving ease to EOD (explosive ordnance disposal) and arson investigation. Bang-and-burners set and disarm everything from booby traps to car bombs to ship-scuttling charges.

Specific Examples: IRA or ETA bomb-builder, Albanian mafia arsonist, Polish Army combat engineer, Special Branch bomb disposal expert.

Investigative Abilities: Architecture 2, Chemistry 2, Criminology 1, Intimidation 1

General Abilities: Conceal 4, Explosive Devices 8, Infiltration 2, Mechanics 4

Black Bagger

A "black bag job" is FBI slang for a breaking-and-entry intrusion, usually intended to copy (or steal) documents or plant bugs or wiretaps. British spies often call break-in artists "box men," a term originating in Victorian criminal slang. By any name, it's burglary.

Specific Examples: Cat burglar on the Riviera, Bundespolizei museum security specialist, DGSE or Mossad covert entry specialist, NSA contractor.

Investigative Abilities: Data Recovery 1, Electronic Surveillance 2, Photography 2, Streetwise 1

Alternates: Architecture, Notice

General Abilities: Conceal 2, Digital Intrusion 2, Filch 6, Infiltration 8

Alternates: Preparedness

Cleaner

The cleaner removes evidence of covert activity from the scene. Sometimes that evidence is just fingerprints or surveillance tapes; sometimes, it's bloodstains or corpses. This Background, especially, combines well with others; it's a good, useful skill set for any covert operative. A cleaner's abilities also come in handy when removing a living person from the scene, either willingly or involuntarily in "hostile extractions."

Specific Examples: FSB mole in the Interior Ministry, Special Branch security operative, Camorra-connected trucking supervisor in Naples, Bulgarian NIS officer handling "renditions" for the CIA.

Investigative Abilities: Bureaucracy 2, Cop Talk 1, Criminology 2, Urban Survival 1

Alternates: Chemistry, Data Recovery, Electronic Surveillance, Notice, Streetwise

General Abilities: Conceal 6, Disguise 2, Driving 4, Explosive Devices 2, Infiltration 2, Stability 2

Alternates: Digital Intrusion

Cobbler

In British spy lingo, the cobbler makes "shoes" — false passports, visas, identity documents, and so forth. In an increasingly digital age, it's good to see solid hand-craftsmanship rewarded. These abilities also point toward counterfeiting, or any sort of image or document manipulation, as well as toward stopping such behaviors.

Specific Examples: MI6 or SVR documentation expert, Nigerian facilitator for human traffickers, Interpol document-security officer, Italian Guardia di Finanza customs inspector.

Investigative Abilities: Bureaucracy 1, Forgery 4, Photography 1

Alternates: Cryptography

General Abilities: Cover 6, Digital Intrusion 4, Disguise 2, Infiltration 4, Mechanics 2

Cuckoo

The cuckoo lays its eggs in another bird's nest, convincing the stranger to raise its chicks. Agents with this Background specialize in social infiltration; they may be "face men," long-con grifters, or former moles or sleepers planted in an enemy agency or society by their patron. This Background blends very well with Asset Handler.

Specific Examples: CIA deep cover agent of influence, SVR "swallow" trained to lure Western men into "honey traps," BND-sponsored journalist, Iranian VEVAK agent monitoring dissident expats, scoundrel preying on lonely hearts in the Greek islands, MI6 "talent spotter" looking for foreign targets vulnerable to blackmail or recruitment.

Investigative Abilities: Flattery or Flirting 2, High Society 2, Reassurance 2

Alternates: Human Terrain, Streetwise

General Abilities: Cover 3, Disguise 8, Filch 2, Gambling 3, Sense Trouble 2

Hacker

The 21st-century box man does his breaking and entering over fiberoptic cable and wireless networks. A clandestine-ops hacker alters data as well as steals it, suborning systems rather than crashing them. Real-world hacking depends at least as much on social engineering — working on human weaknesses — as it does on cybernetic savvy and l337 coding skillz. This Background combines particularly well with the Analyst, the Black Bagger, or the Wire Rat.

Specific Examples: Ukrainian industrial-espionage contractor, GCHQ codes-and-signals "wrangler," Swiss bank financial security specialist, IDF Unit 8200 cyberwarfare programmer, freelance American computer security specialist.

Investigative Abilities: Cryptography 1*, Data Recovery 2, Electronic Surveillance 2, Traffic Analysis 1, Urban Survival 1

Alternates: Accounting, Bureaucracy, Forgery, Human Terrain, Reassurance

General Abilities: Digital Intrusion 10, Disguise 2, Infiltration 2, Mechanics 4

Alternates: Network

*free from 8+ in Digital Intrusion.

Investigator

This is the straightforward, meat-and-potatoes sort of agent: given a problem, he tries to solve it. Sometimes that involves calling in the law or backup; sometimes it involves calling in a wet worker to "resolve" it; sometimes it involves calling in a Predator drone to really, *really* "resolve" it. Many investigators are reactive rather than proactive: counter-terror, counter-intelligence, counter-organized crime.

Specific Examples: MI5 or FSB field agent, French National Police inspector, Italian special anti-Mafia magistrate's officer, Triad fixer.

Investigative Abilities: Bureaucracy 1, Cop Talk 1, Interrogation 1, Law 1, Notice 2

Alternates: Criminology, Intimidation, Streetwise

General Abilities: Disguise 2, Hand-to-Hand 6, Infiltration 2, Sense Trouble 2, Surveillance 6

Alternates: Athletics, Driving, Shooting

MAKING YOUR OWN BACKGROUND

The Backgrounds provided are intended to be inspirational, not comprehensive. If they inspire you to make your own Background, more power to you! Since Backgrounds have no in-game mechanical effect, go ahead and make up any Background you like as long as the Director approves the concept. Each Background comprises 6 points in Investigative abilities, and 18 points in General abilities.

The listed Backgrounds are occupational: they narrowly track an agent's role in a team of operatives, or on a crew of "deniable assets." You could just as easily build Backgrounds intended to recall literary or cinematic models of thriller fiction, although the ones given here should take Athletics ratings of 8+ in addition:

Brainwashed Black Program Badass

Investigative Abilities: Electronic Surveillance 1, Notice 1, Tradecraft 1, Traffic Analysis 1, Urban Survival 2

General Abilities: Hand-to-Hand 8, Shooting 6, Surveillance 4

Hot Vampire Slayer

Investigative Abilities: Bullshit Detector 1, Flirting 1, Occult Studies 1, Reassurance 1, Vampirology 2

General Abilities: Hand-to-Hand 8, Weapons 10

MI6 Agent With License to Kill

Investigative Abilities: Flirting 2, High Society 2, Intimidation 1, Tradecraft 1

General Abilities: Driving 4, Gambling 3, Hand-to-Hand 4, Infiltration 2, Shooting 5

Off-Duty Cop on the Coast

Investigative Abilities: Architecture 1, Bullshit Detector 2, Cop Talk 2, Intimidation 1

General Abilities: Hand-to-Hand 5, Sense Trouble 3, Shooting 5, Surveillance 5

Medic

It's not just about the healing, although it's mostly about that. It's also about the truth serum administering, or the talking agents out of (or into) collapsing, or the spotting viral-biological threats before they hit the headlines, or the figuring out just what killed all those Triad thugs.

Specific Examples: Scotland Yard forensic pathologist, CIA "shrinker" or MI6 "inquisitor", GSG 9 trauma medic, Paris or Naples EMT, USMC corpsman, WHO or Médecins Sans Frontières hematologist, Russian Army biological warfare specialist.

Investigative Abilities: Bullshit Detector 1, Chemistry 1, Diagnosis 2*, Forensic Pathology 1, Interrogation 1, Pharmacy 1

Alternates: Human Terrain, Languages, Reassurance

General Abilities: Medic 10, Shrink 8

Alternates: Driving, Health, Stability

*includes the free 1 point from 8+ in Medic.

Mule

A mule specializes in taking things from one side of a border to another: drugs, girls, fellow agents, antiquities, defectors, stolen cars, a mysterious silver briefcase, you name it. Many mules are part of a long family line of smugglers, especially in the clan-riven Balkans and Middle East; others are part of a wide network of criminals organized along vaguely ethnic lines. Still others work for specific agencies at specific border crossings; a few have good enough cover to get them across multiple borders multiple times. This Background combines well with Watcher to create a "tourist" or "lamplighter," a long-term surveillance artist assigned to a highly mobile, high-value target.

Specific Examples: Serbian human trafficker for the Naša Stvar, bent Spanish SVA customs officer, Israeli mafia Ecstasy smuggler, SVR "oil engineer" under commercial cover, bent Louvre art restorer, MI6 "bride" courier taking documents to an agent in a denied area.

Investigative Abilities: Bureaucracy 1, Forgery 1, Negotiation 2, Outdoor Survival or Urban Survival 1, Streetwise 1

Alternates: Archaeology, Art History

General Abilities: Conceal 8, Driving 4, Piloting 2, Surveillance 4

Alternates: Cover

Muscle

Security and intelligence agencies usually use ex-military types for bodyguarding, general guarding, and the occasional "put the fear of Sarkozy into them" type mission, or to run interference on ops where the other side will be heavily armed and ready to throw down. Military intelligence agencies don't even have to go as far as *ex*-military types.

Specific Examples: GRU or Carabineri NCO, ex-Bundeswehr mercenary in Bosnia, ex-Spetsnaz bodyguard for the Tverskaya Bratva, DGSE "Active," MI6 "scalphunter," CIA paramilitary asset, FSB "nursemaid" for potential defectors.

Investigative Abilities: Interrogation 1, Intimidation 1, Military Science 2, Outdoor Survival or Urban Survival 2

General Abilities: Athletics 6, Hand-to-Hand 8, either Shooting or Weapons 4

Alternates: Explosive Devices, Sense Trouble

Watcher

Also called an "eyeball," a watcher usually comes out of counter-intelligence, and specializes in surveillance. Although electronic options are ever improving, the integrated system of shoe leather and retina still works more reliably and flexibly than any other. Watchers hang out in the generic-looking van down the street, maintain foot or rolling coverage, set up "picket coverage" to monitor choke points, and ideally keep the target in a "floating box" with watchers on all sides. This background cross-trains well with Muscle, amplifies Wire Rat or Investigator, and (added to Wet Worker) makes a good cinematic assassin.

Specific Examples: MI5 or FSB "pavement artists," Camorra "nightingale" lookout, Cannes or Berlin paparazzo, private detective.

Investigative Abilities: Electronic Surveillance 2*, Photography 2, Tradecraft 1, Urban Survival 2

Alternates: Architecture, Human Terrain, Notice, Streetwise, Traffic Analysis

General Abilities: Disguise 2, Infiltration 2, Driving 4, Surveillance 10

Alternates: Athletics, Conceal, Digital Intrusion

*includes the free 1 point from 8+ in Surveillance.

Wet Worker

The charmers in the KGB's old Special Bureau 13 coined the term *mokroye delo* ("wet work") to refer to assassinations. Neither the term nor the task is exclusive to the Russians: even agencies legally restricted from carrying out assassinations and executive murders hire plausibly deniable cut-outs to do it for them.

Specific Examples: GSG 9 sniper, FSB or Mossad assassin, Camorra hit man, IRA "hard boy."

Investigative Abilities: Intimidation 2, Streetwise 2, Urban Survival 2

Alternates: Criminology, Electronic Surveillance, Photography

General Abilities: Either Shooting or Weapons 10, Hand-to-Hand 4, Surveillance 4

Alternates: Disguise, Explosive Devices, Infiltration, Special Weapons Training (see p. 77)

Wheel Artist

Defensive, security, and stunt driving courses are not entirely uncommon, in Europe or America. Europe also has thriving motor sports, film, and kidnapping industries, all of which produce excellent drivers. While the dedicated "wheel man" is more usual in criminal conspiracies than intelligence ops, clandestine missions likewise depend on speedy exits when they don't go entirely as planned. This Background is a double threat with Watcher or Mule.

Specific Examples: Union Corse car thief, DGSE "Action Division" driver, U.S. Diplomatic Security driver, Deutsche Bank-provided chauffeur.

Investigative Abilities: Cop Talk 2, Streetwise 2, Urban Survival 2

Alternates: Electronic Surveillance

General Abilities: Driving 10, Mechanics 4, Piloting 4

Alternates: Sense Trouble, Surveillance

Wire Rat

In the clandestine world technical experts, as distinct from hackers, are almost always "nuts and bolts" electronics specialists, with a side of metal shop. Building bugs or guns into innocuous objects is another wire rat specialty in spy thrillers, as is general gadgeteering. This Background works well not only combined with the Hacker but with the Black Bagger: cutting alarms and cameras is the first half of breaking and entering. It supercharges Bang-and-Burners and Watchers.

Specific Examples: GRU or DGSE comms expert, Interpol security systems consultant, Metropolitan Police CCTV installer, MI6 bug-sweeping "ferret," Mossad technical services officer, USIA radio engineer.

Investigative Abilities: Chemistry 1, Data Recovery 2, Electronic Surveillance 2, Notice 1

Alternates: Architecture, Photography

General Abilities: Conceal 3, Digital Intrusion 2, Infiltration 2, Mechanics 6, Preparedness 5

Alternates: Explosive Devices, Surveillance

Abilities

Abilities in GUMSHOE break down into two main categories: the **Investigative** abilities you use to gather the information you need to figure out what the opposition is up to and how to stop them; and the **General** abilities that allow you to survive the investigation and win the confrontation.

The rules don't care whether your high Athletics rating comes from years of military training or just natural grace and speed. Similarly, whether you're an intuitive genius or a plodding, meticulous scholar is irrelevant in gauging your Archaeology ability. You can decide such things while personalizing your character. What matters is what you can accomplish; how you accomplished it is up to you.

Ability descriptions consist of a brief general description, followed by examples of their use in an operation. Creative players should be able to propose additional uses for their abilities as unexpected situations confront their characters.

Certain specific actions may overlap between several abilities, ideally providing many possible ways forward in the scenario and giving many players a shot at the spotlight. For example:

- you can enhance image resolution with Data Recovery, Electronic Surveillance, or Photography.
- you can analyze (or synthesize) a designer drug with either Chemistry or Pharmacy.
- you can identify a smuggled artifact with Archaeology, Art History, or possibly Occult Studies.
- you can tell what gun made that exit wound with Criminology, Forensic Pathology, or Military Science — or with an investigative use of Shooting.
- you can pick out the real leader of a Chechen gang with Human Terrain or Streetwise.
- you can bluff your way into a hospital with Bureaucracy, Diagnosis, Forgery (for a plausible ID badge), or an investigative use of Disguise.

Some abilities, like Notice and Research, are broadly useful, and will crop up constantly. Others may be called for many times in the course of one scenario, and not at all in others. When building your character, strike a balance between the reliable workhorse abilities and their exotic, specialized counterparts.

Investigative Abilities

Any rating in an Investigative ability indicates a high degree of professional accomplishment or impressive natural talent (see p. 8). If you have an ability relevant to the task at hand, you **automatically succeed** in discovering any information or overcoming any obstacles necessary to propel you from the current scene further into the story.

Each rating gives you a pool of points to spend in situations related to its base ability. You may ask to **spend points** to gain special benefits. Sometimes the Director will offer you the chance to spend points. In other circumstances she may accept your suggestions of ways to gain special benefits. (See p. 48 for more on spends.) Use them wisely; spent Investigative points do not return until the next operation begins.

Accounting (Academic)

You understand bookkeeping and accountancy procedures; you can read and keep financial records. You can:

- tell legitimate businesses from criminal enterprises
- reconstruct financial histories from old records (uncovering, say, slave-trading or smuggling)
- spot the telltale signs of embezzlement, bribes, blackmail, or shell companies
- track payments to their source
- launder funds and set up numbered accounts
- interact with bankers and money launderers as a professional equal

Archaeology (Academic)

You excavate and study the structures and artifacts of historical cultures and civilizations. You can:

- tell how long something has been buried and date its construction
- identify artifacts by culture and usage
- distinguish real artifacts from fakes
- navigate inside ruins and catacombs, including finding secret doors and hidden construction
- describe the customs of ancient or historical cultures
- spot well-disguised graves and underground hiding places
- interpret site maps and archaeological dig records
- estimate the market value of, and likely customers for, a smuggled artifact
- interact with archaeologists and museum curators as a professional equal

Architecture (Academic)

You know how buildings (and infrastructure generally) are designed and constructed. You can:

- guess what lies around the corner while exploring an unknown structure or sewer system
- deduce or discover where sewer, power, phone, cable, and gas lines enter or pass beneath a structure, and trace them within it
- rough out a floor plan and interpret blueprints
- judge the relative strength of building materials

- identify a building's age, architectural style, original use, and history of modifications
- deduce the existence of hidden rooms, bricked-over sewers, or secret crypts
- construct stable makeshift structures
- identify elements vital to the structural integrity of buildings, sewers, dams, or bridges
- interact with architects and civil engineers as a professional equal

Art History (Academic)

You're an expert on works of art (including the practical arts such as furniture and pottery) from an aesthetic and technical point of view. You can:

- distinguish real works from fakes
- tell when something has been retouched or altered
- identify the age of an object by style and materials
- accurately estimate the price of, and likely customers for, an *objet d'art*
- call to mind historical details on artists and those around them
- call to mind details of stolen or missing artworks
- interact with art collectors and museum curators as a professional equal

Astronomy (Academic)

You study celestial objects, including the stars and planets. You can:

- decipher astrological texts
- recall the phase of the moon and time of sunset and sunrise without looking it up
- use a telescope, including large reflectors
- plot the movement of stars and planets, including which ones are overhead at any given time
- predict eclipses, comets, meteor showers, and other regular astronomical phenomena
- calculate flight paths for ballistic missiles or rockets

Bullshit Detector (Interpersonal)

Not all lies are verbal. You can tell when a person is attempting to project a false impression through body language, using the human capacity to judge and sense motives and character. Basically, this ability allows you to tell if someone is lying to you, and (with a spend) make a decent guess about their motives.

This doesn't tell you what they're lying about, specifically, or see through their lies to the truth.

This ability works best on nervous, guilty, or unpracticed liars, especially civilians or petty criminals.

Certain individuals — con men, actors, expert deep-cover agents, professional gamblers, and similar — may be so adept at lying that they never set off your built-in lie detector, or overload it by being "always on." Some people believe their own falsehoods. Psychopathic and sociopathic personality types and brainwashed vampire cultists lie reflexively and without shame, depriving you of the telltale tics and gestures you use to sense when a person is deceiving you. Many of the undead, or those who have tasted their blood and been changed, will occasionally "read wrong," but will similarly fail to send any useful signals to a human watcher.

You can also use this ability to cold-read a mark for fortune-telling scams, phony séances or mentalist acts, and the like.

WHY NO LYING ABILITY?

Unlike many other RPG rules sets, GUMSHOE does not treat lying as an ability unto itself. Instead characters employ it as a tactic while using any of the various interpersonal abilities. With Bureaucracy, you tell functionaries what they want to hear. A little Flirting convinces the attractive stranger you admire her politics. Using Interrogation, you convince suspects that you're really just trying to help them out, and so on. There's a little bit of deception in nearly every successful interpersonal interaction — at least that's how it works for covert operatives.

Bureaucracy (Interpersonal)

You know how to navigate a bureaucratic organization, whether it's a government office or a large corporation. You know how to get what you want from it in an expeditious manner, and with a minimum of ruffled feathers. You can:

- convince officials to provide sensitive or inconvenient information
- gain credentials on false pretences
- find the person who really knows what's going on
- develop and maintain contacts within a bureaucracy with which you have regular dealings
- locate offices and files
- borrow equipment or supplies

- convince third parties subject to a bureaucracy that you have a legitimate work order or request

Bureaucracy is not a catch-all information gathering ability. Bureaucrats wish to convey the impression that they are busy and harried, whether or not they actually are. Most take a profound, secret joy in directing inquiries elsewhere. When characters attempt to use Bureaucracy to gain information more easily accessible via other abilities (such as Research), their contacts simply lose the request and go to lunch early. For a contact who will really stick their neck out (so to speak), use the Network ability (see p. 31).

Chemistry (Technical)

You're trained in the analysis and manipulation of chemical substances, and have a working knowledge of such related sciences as biochemistry, genetics, geology, and metallurgy. Given suitable lab facilities, you can:

- among a wide variety of other materials, identify drugs, pharmaceuticals, toxins, and viruses
- create simple explosives, incendiaries, poisons, gases, and acids
- analyze unknown substances, soil samples, minerals, alloys, compounds, gene sequences, etc.
- match samples of dirt or vegetation from a piece of evidence to a scene
- perform chemical document analysis on ink or paper
- safely handle (or knowledgably advise against handling at all) hazardous materials
- interact with physical scientists and lab techs as a professional equal

Cop Talk (Interpersonal)

You know how to speak the lingo of the police, and to make them feel confident and relaxed in your presence. You may be a current or former cop (or national police agent), or simply pose as the kind of person they immediately identify as a solid, trustworthy citizen. You can:

- coolly ply cops for confidential information
- get excused for minor infractions
- imply that you are a colleague, authorized to participate in their cases
- tell when a cop is lying to you or holding something back

Criminology (Academic)

You study crimes, and the methods for solving crimes, from laboratory techniques to psychological profiling. You can:

- recall details of past art thefts, bank robberies, serial murders, and everything in between
- plan a criminal enterprise successfully
- make accurate guesses as to the upbringing and pathology of criminals or killers based on their known modus operandi
- predict criminals' future actions based on their past behavior, researched or observed
- detail or predict the organizational structure, leadership, and activities of known organized crime rings
- note relationships between objects at a crime scene, reconstructing sequences of events
- transfer, take, and match fingerprints using the naked eye or software; you are familiar with all major fingerprint databases
- match typewritten materials to a given machine, handwriting to a known sample, tire tracks to specific models or vehicles, etc.
- bag and tag objects for forensic analysis without contaminating your samples
- perform ballistics and gunpowder analysis of bullets or other residue
- perform blood and fiber tests on crime scene evidence

Cryptography (Technical)

You're an expert in the making and breaking of codes in any language you can read, from the simple ciphers of old-school espionage to the supercomputer algorithms of the present day. Shown a code, you can guess who might be using it. Given some time and a dictionary, you may be able to puzzle out foreign alphabets, translating languages by brute force.

Data Recovery (Technical)

You use computer and electronic technology to retrieve and enhance seemingly inaccessible information or imagery on hard drives and other media. You can:

- recover hidden, erased, or corrupted computer files
- increase the clarity of audio recordings, zeroing in on desired elements

- miraculously find detailed, high-resolution images within a blurry video image or pixilated JPEG
- interpret and enhance spy plane and satellite imagery intel (IMINT), or even provide a real-time feed from a series of satellite downlinks

Actually *tasking* a spy plane or satellite involves either Digital Intrusion (at very steep Difficulty), calling on your Network, or making a big Interpersonal ability spend.

Simply discovering information (including commercial satellite imagery) in a computer or electronic database is Research; illicit use of a protected computer system or database is Digital Intrusion.

Diagnosis (Academic)

You diagnose human disease, injuries, poisonings, and physical frailties, and may be broadly acquainted with veterinary medicine as well. At a rating of 2 or more, you may have a medical license. You can:

- diagnose diseases, poisonings, and other ailments
- prescribe treatment for a treatable condition
- deliver a baby
- identify the extent and cause of an unconscious person's trauma
- detect when a person is suffering from a physically debilitating condition such as drug addiction, pregnancy, or malnutrition
- establish a person's general level of health
- identify medical abnormalities
- understand medical jargon
- interact with medical professionals as a peer

At the Director's discretion, you may be trained in a more complex specialty, as well as the sort of general practice indicated here. The Director may or may not allow very elementary Forensic Pathology ("the killer used a blunt instrument; death was instantaneous") with this ability.

Electronic Surveillance (Technical)

You're adept at the use of sound and video recording equipment to gather intelligence. Given proper gear, you can:

- trace phone calls and GPS signals
- plant secret listening devices or hidden cameras
- create ad hoc listening devices using cell phones or other street technology
- locate secret listening devices, sensors, or cameras planted by others
- make high-quality audio and video recordings
- enhance the quality of audio and video recordings, isolating chosen sounds or images

Discovering a bug on someone else is often a free core clue; discovering a bug planted on yourself or your fellow agents usually requires a 1-point spend of Electronic Surveillance or a Conceal test (see p. 26).

Actually tapping a phone line or fiberoptic cable requires an Investigative use of Mechanics. Evading electronic surveillance systems is almost always an Infiltration test.

Flattery (Interpersonal)

You're good at getting people to help you by complimenting them, as subtly or blatantly as they prefer. You can quickly size up someone in conversation and discern areas of pride or of hidden shame (both susceptible to your approach). You can get them to:

- reveal information
- perform minor favors
- regard you as trustworthy

Flirting (Interpersonal)

You're adept at winning cooperation from people who find you sexually attractive. You can quickly size up someone in conversation and develop a notion of their specific romantic or sexual tastes. You can get them to:

- reveal information
- help you in small ways
- date you

You can also spot romantic or sexual attractions or connections between other people by watching them interact.

It's up to you whether a high rating in Flirting means that you are physically alluring, winning and charismatic, or simply exude a sexual magnetism unrelated to your looks.

Forensic Pathology (Technical)

You study crime scenes and perform autopsies on deceased subjects to determine their cause and circumstances of death. You can use skeletal evidence to reconstruct the physical details (age, sex, medical condition, sometimes occupation) of the deceased.

Among other things, your examination can identify:

- the nature of the weapon or weapons used on the victim, if any
- the approximate time of death

- the presence of intoxicants or other foreign substances in the bloodstream or on the skin
- the contents of the victim's last meal

In many cases, you can:

- reconstruct the sequence of events leading to the victim's death from the arrangement of wounds on the body
- determine time (and sometimes place) of death by studying the insects at the scene (or the eggs and larvae in the body)
- perform DNA analysis on samples found at crime scenes, matching them to samples taken from targets

Forgery (Technical)

You fake things. Given time, originals (or good images), suitable materials, and work space, you can:

- create a false passport, driving license, visa, or other government credential
- forge handwriting with a sample to work from
- fake a book, pamphlet, newspaper, or other published work
- forge a painting, sculpture, or other *objet d'art*
- artificially age paper and ink
- undetectably open and re-seal a sealed envelope, document pouch, or other "soft" container
- create an attractive, if uninspired, work of art on a subject of your choosing

It takes less time and effort to create a fake credential that will never be checked: an employee ID badge for an office building, a fake police shield to get past a doorman, etc. Such fakes often prove useful in getting into places to find clues; the forged equivalents of (or equipment for) investigative use of the Disguise ability (see p. 27). They don't cost points if:

- They won't pass a cross-check (essentially Cover 0); or
- They are needed to get a core clue.

For every rating point you have in Forgery, you may declare that you're "untouchable" in one specific type of forged book, item, or document: American passports, black-letter German vampire pamphlets, late-period Gauguins, or Turkish entry visas. By narrative fiat, your work in that field *cannot* be detected as a forgery under any circumstances short of your confession. It is perfect. (That said, a perfectly forged passport with no electronic records backing it up will be put on a watch list sooner rather than later; such one-use "burn" passports essentially equal 1 point of Cover; see p. 26.)

You do not have to select your specific specialties until they come up in play, as long as you have the extra rating points. This does not represent a newly developed specialty, but rather something you just haven't bothered to mention yet. As with Driving, Languages, and other similar abilities, you may want to keep "slots" open in Forgery so that during an adventure you can reveal that you've "always" had a stash of Romanian Foreign Ministry stationery handy.

The Director is always within her rights to reject any suggested forgery as unbalancing or impossible.

Counterfeiting

Forging currency requires specialized engraving machines and one-of-a-kind inks, papers, and digital microthreads in industrial quantity, not to mention a perfect plate (or digital file) to work from. The Director will likely rule that counterfeiting is impossible for player characters. Alternatively, in the interest of "thriller reality," she might allow an agent with an open Forgery slot to hand-counterfeit 2d6 thousand euro, pounds, rubles, or dollars — at the cost of a little extra Heat (see p. 88).

High Society (Interpersonal)

You know how to hang with the rich and famous, and how to chat them up without getting security called. You are comfortable with "old money" aristocracy, with the Davos elite, with the televised chattering classes, and with the crassest of nouveau riche vulgarians and celebutantes. Yachts, Gulfstreams, and four-star restaurants are your seeming natural habitat. You can:

- dress fashionably for any occasion
- get past the velvet rope at exclusive clubs and parties, or past the concierge at a four-star hotel
- drop brand names, allude to current trends, and generally blend in culturally with rich scenesters of all types
- identify the best wine, liquor, food, jewelry, and other luxury goods
- successfully schmooze for an introduction to, e.g., a celebrity, elected official, or financier
- recall specific or relevant gossip or news about the tastes, lifestyles, or sordid behavior of a rich or famous person
- know where and when the best parties, most culturally important openings, or other gala events in any city are due to happen

- score drugs or otherwise find the seamy side (if any) of high-society functions, happening nightclubs, etc.
- interact with the rich and famous as an accepted equal

Note that this ability does *not* necessarily convey any actual wealth or fame. The Director can, if she wishes, allow an agent to use family connections or a liberated Company slush fund to explain it.

History (Academic)

You're an expert in recorded human history, with an emphasis on its political, military, economic, and technological developments. You are also an expert in the tools historians use: documents and books. You can:

- recognize obscure historical allusions
- recall important or relevant events in a given country, city, or region
- identify ancient languages and scripts
- perform textual analysis on a manuscript or book to date it or identify the author
- determine the age of a document
- tell where and when an object made during historical times was fashioned
- identify the period of an article of dress or costume
- interact with historians and similar academics as a peer

Human Terrain (Academic)

The U.S. military's new counter-insurgency strategy calls for "human terrain mapping," along with the more conventional physical terrain mapping involved in combat operations. The "human terrain" includes the "areas, structures, organizations, cultures, people, and events" of a region: mapping and exploiting that terrain comprises disciplines like anthropology, sociology, theology, social psychology, political science, and propaganda.

As a trained and knowledgeable mapper of human terrain, you can:

- identify artifacts and rituals of living cultures
- describe and predict the customs of a foreign group or local subculture
- predict the behavior of a given crowd, mob, or militant faction
- supply information about religious practices and beliefs
- quote relevant tags from the major scriptures
- recognize the names and attributes of various saints, gods, and other figures of religious worship and veneration
- identify whether a given religious practice or ritual is orthodox or heretical
- identify temples, meeting places, or other locally important structures
- analyze political and social structures — including identifying key figures, rivalries, and weak points — in a given group or society: i.e., a warlord's militia, an academic conference, a labor union, or a majority-Muslim *banlieue* in Paris.
- develop a strongly appealing political or religious message for a given subculture or society
- detect, or conspire at, election rigging

Interrogation (Interpersonal)

You extract information from subjects fearful of your authority, cruelty, or power. To use this ability, you must place the target in custody, or in a situation evocative of constraint and punishment. You might borrow an interrogation room from local cops, or construct a makeshift one in an abandoned shipping container or a disused Balkan cement factory. Through threats, persistence, and the occasional deception, you gradually establish a bond with your targets, convincing them to identify with you psychologically, and that giving up the information you seek — even if it's a confession — is their only remaining option.

Intimidation (Interpersonal)

You elicit cooperation from targets by seeming physically imposing, invading their personal space, and adopting a psychologically commanding manner. Intimidation may involve implied or direct threats of physical violence, but is just as often an act of mental dominance such as a staredown or a well-directed taunt. You can:

- gain information
- inspire the target to leave the area
- anger the target into involuntarily revealing information
- quell a target's desire to attempt violence against you or others

GETTING INTERROGATED

If an NPC is asking questions of a player character, the Director needs to step carefully to avoid breaking genre and breaking her game.

Outside a formal context, agents with Tradecraft, Bullshit Detector, or similar abilities notice someone casually pumping them, studying their body language, etc. Let the players decide whether (and what) to spill. Spends can suggest fruitful lies or half-truths, or help determine what will make the problem go away.

If the attempt is obvious or official, work it as an Interpersonal or other ability use for the agent: At a diplomatic reception, the agents can use Reassurance or Criminology to evade questions about mysterious deaths; at the police station, use Cop Talk to brush off any questions or Law to get released without interrogation.

If a lengthy confrontation is unavoidable — say, if the agents are being questioned by VEVAK operators in an anonymous basement — then it's not a contest any more, it's a plot device. (But see 26, p. 116.) Do what you must to get the story going rather than reveling in the agents' helplessness — make it a ticking clock for the inevitable rescue, or cut to a shove out of a moving van the next morning and the agents' mysterious release. Any strange bite marks show up in the meantime? Needle marks where someone drew blood?

In Mirror mode campaigns, it is within genre for the agents to give up data to advance their own agendas, or even to flip and become double agents after interrogation or capture. Even so, the Director should make sure at the beginning of the game that the players don't mind such developments.

Languages (Academic)

For each rating point in Languages, you are verbally fluent and literate in a number of languages other than your native tongue:

Languages Rating	Additional Languages
1	+2
2	+3
3+	+4

For instance, Languages 2 gives you five languages besides your native one (+2 for Languages 1, and then +3 more for Languages 2); at Languages 4, you can speak and read thirteen other languages!

You may elect to know an ancient language that is no longer spoken (Sumerian, for example), although the Director may disallow occult, antediluvian, or inhuman languages if they turn up in the course of the campaign.

The Director may allow overlap between related languages — an agent fluent in Norwegian may plausibly claim to be fluent (or at least "mostly able to get by") in Swedish, for example, without adding another rating point.

You may specify these when you create your character, or choose opportunistically in the course of play, revealing that you just happen to read, say, Basque, when circumstances require it. You are not learning the language spontaneously but revealing a hitherto unmentioned fact about your character.

To facilitate intraparty communication, all agents speak at least accented English for free, regardless of their native tongue. (If, for whatever reason, all the players select native Francophones, or Russian-speaking former Warsaw Pact operatives, or otherwise have a non-English language in common, you may disregard this conceit.) The Director may graciously offer players of native English-speaking characters one free language to balance this rule.

These language rules offer more languages per slot than standard GUMSHOE rules for the Languages ability, because the spy thriller genre embraces cosmopolitan settings and globetrotting transitions. And because "None of us speak Serbo-Croatian" adventures counter the player-facing "always get the clue" ethos of GUMSHOE. Not to mention being tiresome to run and play.

Law (Academic)

You know the criminal and civil laws of your home jurisdiction well, and are broadly acquainted with foreign legal systems. At a rating of 2 or more, you may be (or impersonate) a bar-certified attorney. You can:

- assess the legal risks attendant on any course of action
- understand lawyerly jargon
- argue with police and prosecutors
- interact with lawyers, magistrates, and court officers as a professional equal

Military Science (Academic)

You are a student of warfare, probably trained as such in a military academy. This expertise includes a knowledge of military history, strategy and tactics, and the weapons, technologies, and engineering techniques of the battlefield. You can:

- identify uniforms and insignia

- identify an unknown military or paramilitary force by examining the weapons they use
- deduce a soldier's training and assignment history from his demeanor and use of slang and jargon
- spot weaknesses in an enemy's fortifications or tactics
- note relationships between objects and damage at the scene of a firefight or battle, reconstructing sequences of events
- use Military Science as an interpersonal ability to interact with military and paramilitary personnel

Negotiation (Interpersonal)

You are an expert in making deals with others, convincing them that the best arrangement for you is also the best for them. You can:

- haggle for goods and services
- gauge likely prices of items, including what someone else will pay for them
- successfully and politely bribe a corrupt official or policeman
- mediate hostage situations or diplomatic crises
- sell something to a potential buyer
- swap favors or information with others

Notice (Technical)

You're adept at casing a scene and at finding important clues. This is the generic ability for spotting a hidden clue, general situational awareness, or noticing a non-threatening visual anomaly. You can:

- spot hidden objects or objects of interest (including bullet casings under a car, or drops of blood behind the desk) at a crime scene or other investigation site
- case a location to spot guards, cameras, rear entrances, security procedures, potential police response, weapon mounts, etc.
- note entrances and exits from rooms you're in, and who's near them
- notice signs of a previous search of the location
- find and transfer fingerprints, fiber evidence, or other physical clues in a scene

Spotting enemy surveillance or monitoring a location is Surveillance; sensing a sniper lurking in the shadows is Sense Trouble. Searching for a deliberately hidden object that is *not* a core clue is Conceal.

Occult Studies (Academic)

You're an expert in the historical study of magic, superstition, and sorcery from the Stone Age to the present. From the Templars to Voodoo to the Golden Dawn, you know the dates, the places, the controversies, and the legends. You can:

- identify the cultural traditions informing a ritual by examining its physical aftermath
- guess the intended effect of a ritual from its physical aftermath
- fake a fortune-telling session, séance, or other occult activity
- read and cast a horoscope
- supply historical facts and anecdotes concerning various occult traditions, cult groups, demons, and legends
- identify occult paraphernalia, grimoires, symbols, and codes
- identify occult activities as the work of informed practitioners, teenage posers, or *bona fide* vampires

This ability does not cover vampire lore per se, which is handled by Vampirology.

This ability does not allow you to work magic or summon supernatural entities, even if the campaign admits the existence of magic. You may believe in the occult or not; the skill functions just as well in either case.

At the Director's discretion, this ability also covers UFO lore, cryptozoology, conspiracy theory, zero-point physics, and other fringe sciences. In a campaign heavily involving such matters, the Director may instead add a Fringe Science ability paralleling Occult Studies.

Outdoor Survival (Technical)

You have worked and lived outdoors and in the wild, possibly during a rural upbringing or extensive military service "in country." You can:

- tell when an animal is behaving strangely
- tell whether an animal or plant is natural to a given area
- find edible plants, hunt, and fish
- ride a horse
- make fire and survive outdoors at night or in bad weather
- navigate overland, albeit more easily with a compass and a map
- track people, animals, or vehicles across grass or through forests

- hunt with dogs, including tracking with bloodhounds, assuming you have friendly dogs available

Pharmacy (Technical)

You are able to identify and compound drugs and medicines. You can:

- identify drugs and potions, and recognize their side-effects and contraindications
- identify a drug addict after a brief interaction
- identify poisons and determine antidotes
- given the raw materials, manufacture morphine, heroin, cocaine, Ecstasy, methamphetamine, and other controlled substances

Photography (Technical)

You're proficient in the use of cameras, including still, motion-picture, digital, and video photography. You can:

- take useful visual records of sites of interest or surveillance targets
- spot manual retouching or digital manipulation in a photographic or video image
- realistically retouch and manipulate images
- use filters and lights to capture images only visible in infrared or ultraviolet
- develop film if you're, like, stuck in 1967 or something

Interpreting satellite or aerial photo imagery uses Data Recovery or the ability connected to the imagery's subject: e.g., Archaeology for a dig site, Architecture for a terrorist compound, Military Science for a missile silo.

Reassurance (Interpersonal)

You get people to do what you want by putting them at ease. This may involve fast talk, genuine sympathy, or just a calming presence. You can:

- elicit information and minor favors
- allay fear or panic in others
- convince frightened or worried witnesses that they saw nothing unusual
- instill a sense of calm during a crisis

Research (Academic)

You know how to find factual information from books, records, official sources, and the Internet. You can ferret out information from collections of books, records, files, archives, newspaper morgues, or big piles of unsorted papers. If the information lies within, and you have access to the collection, you can find it. You're as comfortable with a card catalogue and fiche reader as with a search engine. Your smart phone address book brims with exotic and informative contacts.

This skill covers any open source intelligence (OSINT); if the information is protected, you likely need Digital Intrusion, Infiltration, or an asset in place to get at it.

Streetwise (Interpersonal)

You know how to behave among crooks, gangsters, druggies, hookers, grifters, and other habitués of the criminal underworld. You can:

- deploy criminal etiquette to avoid fights and conflicts
- identify unsafe locations and dangerous people
- recall which gang or mafia claims a given area as turf
- deal with fences, black marketeers, drug dealers, arms runners, and so forth
- successfully price illegal goods such as drugs, stolen items, or weapons
- get hired for a criminal operation
- tell when practiced criminals and con men are lying, as with Bullshit Detector
- gather underworld rumors

Every player character begins with 1 free point in Streetwise.

Tradecraft (Interpersonal)

You know how to utilize the techniques of conventional espionage agents, and how to talk to them if you must hold a meet. You can:

- set up and check a dead drop
- spot or conduct a brush pass or car toss
- determine which agency trained a covert operative by examining his tradecraft, surveillance methods, etc.
- identify good places for recognition signs, cleaning passes, etc.
- recall notorious or relevant episodes of spying, covert ops, etc.
- gather rumors in the covert ops world
- make contact with operatives without scaring them off
- convey information or threats elliptically without tipping off eavesdroppers

Every player character begins with 1 free point in Tradecraft.

Traffic Analysis (Technical)

You know how to boil down a mass of data — probably raw signals intel, a tranche of phone records, or possibly a whole lot of surveillance tapes — and extract its meaning and patterns. Given the data, you can:

- determine which numbers in a set of phone records are calling who, when, about what
- determine which cars in a city's traffic pattern are driving where, when, and how long they're staying there
- find patterns in the data flow, e.g., more murders in August, or the same museum guard on duty during all the incidents
- work out the daily (and weekly, monthly, etc.) routine of an office, military base, museum, etc. and answer questions like: When is payroll made? Who takes delivery of parcels? When does the cleaning staff arrive?
- find anomalies in the data flow, e.g., missing records or "dogs that didn't bark"
- find weak spots in security that follows a regular pattern
- identify the source of information (or disinformation) by tracking its route through the system
- assemble a communications or organizational picture of a social network such as a criminal conspiracy, academic email list, or division of border guards

Urban Survival (Technical)

You are familiar with working and living in cities, especially their seamier underbelly, possibly as the result of an urban upbringing or extensive police service walking a beat. You can:

- tell when crowds or passersby are behaving strangely
- tell whether a passerby or bystander is native to a given neighborhood
- cadge spare change, Dumpster dive, and otherwise survive on the streets if need be
- navigate an unfamiliar urban street layout and locate buildings without looking like a tourist
- find open manholes, dangling fire escapes, and conveniently unlocked doors
- interact on friendly terms with the local homeless or vagrant community
- find (or avoid) a neighborhood where you can use Streetwise to good effect

Familiar Cities

In addition, you can recall specifics (streets, restaurants, short cuts, etc.) of any city you've ever spent more than a few days in, and are familiar with its layout, police patrol patterns, etc. If you need (or the Director wants you) to track such cities, add one city for each rating point in Urban Survival you have, and one city for each separate cover you invent using the Cover ability (see p. 26). As with Languages, feel free to save "unassigned" slots and add Familiar Cities retroactively at need. Alternately (or in addition), the Director may allow you to add any city to your Familiar City list by spending 1 Urban Survival pool point.

Vampirology (Academic)

The subset of occultism dealing directly with vampires. You know the traditional lore from Hercegovina to Hammer Films, the great names, and the legendary spoor of the undead. You can tell actual vampire attacks from those of mere serial killers or the affectations of Goth wannabes.

Your popular knowledge may or may not initially apply to actual vampires, although as the campaign goes on, your Vampirology ability will apply to your monstrous foes.

In some campaigns, the Director may not allow this ability at character creation, either to maintain initial suspense or because very few spies know much about vampires. In such campaigns, players may buy Vampirology with experience after encountering vampires.

General Abilities

General abilities use a different set of rules and are measured on a different scale than Investigative abilities. Larger General ability pools mean more (see sidebar, p. 10) and give you more options and power in an action scene. You **roll to succeed** in a General ability against a target Difficulty Number. You may **spend points** from a General ability pool to increase your die roll, giving you a better chance of success. General abilities refresh during the operation, but you spend them faster during combats, chases, and other action scenes.

The two ability sets are handled in different way because they fulfill distinct narrative functions. The goal of any ***Night's Black Agents*** operation is to solve a problem — uncover a mystery, plan a hit, thwart an atrocity — and then confront the forces behind it, or at least their tools and puppets. That confrontation must be suspenseful, which is why General abilities have a possibility of failure. But the confrontation must also occur for the story to satisfy, which is why investigating the problem — in order to get to the

confrontation — must succeed. A well-designed ***Night's Black Agents*** scenario rewards players for cleverly or stylishly solving the mystery by making the confrontation more exciting, more survivable, or more intellectually interesting. (For more on scenario design, see p. 181.)

Many General abilities also function as **Investigative** abilities, either when used to gather a clue (rather than to overcome opposition) or to interact with people devoted to those abilities' use: Hand-to-Hand, for example, can be used investigatively to infiltrate a dojo or gymnasium, and to gather information or gossip from the clientele or managers.

Cherries

Almost every General ability has a **cherry,** a feature that kicks in when the character has 8 rating points or more in it. Agents can always use that special benefit, even if their pool in that ability has dropped to 0.

In Dust games, only the cherries marked with the Dust icon exist.

HIGHER CHERRY BRANCHES

Directors interested in slightly less action-y action can raise the threshold for cherries (and for special thriller options, where relevant) to 12 or more rating points. This also increases niche protection, as individual players have to spend more to specialize in their favorite abilities, rather than building full-spectrum badasses.

Even if the Director raises the level for other cherries and options, though, an Athletics rating of 8 or more still provides a Hit Threshold of 4.

Athletics

Athletics allows you to perform general acts of physical derring-do, from running to jumping to throwing grenades to rappelling down the side of a building to dodging falling or oncoming objects. Any physical action not covered by another ability probably falls under the rubric of Athletics.

** Hard to Hit**

If your Athletics rating is 8 or more, your Hit Threshold, the Difficulty Number your opponents use when attempting to hit you in combat, is 4. Otherwise, your Hit Threshold is 3.

Thriller Rules

An Athletics rating of 8+ also allows the Parkour option on p. 59 of the Thriller Chase rules and the Support Move option on p. 77 of the Thriller Combat rules, if your campaign uses them, and the Breakfall option on p. 80.

DVD ATHLETICS ADDS LIFE

If you have enough Athletics to spend, you get to use the crazy good combat maneuver Jump In (see p. 75). Between Jump In and Hard to Hit, if you don't have an Athletics of 8 you should strongly consider what your tactics to stay alive will be in the midst of a chaotic encounter. Death comes swiftly and without hesitation to agents who can't adapt when a situation doesn't go as planned.

Conceal

You can hide things from view and conceal them from search. Your methods might include camouflage, holding items out on your person, snaking things into drawers unobserved, building secret compartments into cars or briefcases, or even altering a thing's visual signature with paint or plaster.

Among other things, you can also:

- discover things intentionally concealed, including bugs, cameras, or bombs
- mask an infrared or scent signature, given suitable equipment such as insulated cloth or coffee grounds
- efficiently pat down a target or, given time, conduct a thorough strip search
- "clean" a crime scene or safe house of evidence indicating your presence there
- detect signs of a previous careful, professional search
- plant a listening device, hidden camera, or bomb

Wiring or building a bug or hidden camera uses Electronic Surveillance or Mechanics. Setting a bomb uses Explosive Devices. Discovering a camouflaged object in a reconnaissance photo is Data Recovery. Tapping a phone or fiberoptic line is Mechanics.

Discovering a hidden clue (especially a core clue) comes under Notice.

You can also use Electronic Surveillance to detect bugs and cameras, especially those aimed at other targets.

Perfect Holdout

If your Conceal rating is 8 or more, you can hide a small object (e.g., knife, detonator, phone, lockpicks, .22 caliber pistol) on your person or in your clothing that cannot be found without an X-ray or strip search.

Cover

This ability represents your stash of cover identities. It works something like Languages in play; at any time, you may reveal or remember the existence of a

cover identity that you established previously: perhaps during your old life, or while freelancing since, or even earlier during the campaign. Provide the Director with as many details as she needs to work it into the campaign. Assign each cover its own pool of points taken from your unassigned Cover pool; the "depth" of that cover identity corresponds to its point value. Tests of that identity — border crossings, gaining admission to restricted areas — will resolve as a test of that identity's pool against a Difficulty (usually 4) dependent on the level of security and on the scrutiny aimed at your false identity.

> *To monitor a suspicious artifact smuggling ring, you need regular access to the secure storage rooms of the Uffizi in Florence. "Fortunately," you tell the Director, "I still have a legend and papers for an art restorer named Bellamare, for a courier job I worked." Of your 10 Cover points, you put 4 into Bellamare's identity, leaving you with 6 unassigned points in your Cover pool. To get access to the Uffizi, you flash Bellamare's ID, spend 2 points from Bellamare's pool, and roll a 2, for a total of 4 and a success on the Cover test. "Bellamare" can come and go in the Uffizi as you wish.*

When that identity has exhausted its pool, it has been red-flagged in some security database, and the cover may fail at any time, or attract unwelcome attention from law enforcement, security agencies, or worse. A failed cover identity always attracts Heat (see p. 88). You can, of course, use unassigned Cover points or experience points (see p. 94) to "backfill" a strained Cover and add more points to its pool, if you decide it's worth it.

> *You find yourself needing to get out of Italy sooner than you'd thought. You want to use Bellamare's passport to get on a plane at Da Vinci and head for Stockholm while things settle down. Just to be on the safe side, you put 3 more Cover points into Bellamare, for a total of 5 in that identity. Getting out of Italy is crucial; you spend 4 points of Bellamare's pool to do it. You roll a 3, and the plane takes off with you aboard. When you land in Stockholm, you have 1 point left in Bellamare's pool, and 3 points of unassigned Cover left.*

Every player character begins with 10 free points of Cover. Unlike other General abilities, Cover does not refresh during or after an operation; it can only be "refilled" with experience points.

Digital Intrusion

You can enter secure databases without formal access, and read, download, alter, or delete data and records therein. Among other things, you can also:

- monitor or even take control of electronic and computerized networks and systems, such as traffic signals, a building's security system, or the RFID readers in a subway
- hack digital locks, assuming you can find access to them
- clone a cell phone's SIM card
- write viruses, worms, or other hostile code to disable a computer system
- identify security flaws in a computer system
- piggyback on existing wireless or computer networks
- transfer electronic funds, book "free" plane tickets and hotel reservations, commit credit card fraud, and the like
- provide a digital "paper trail" for a forged identity
- engage in *funkspiel:* impersonate another user's electronic "fist," sending pattern, or digital behavior
- blend in socially on hacker bulletin boards and at "Black Hat" conferences

The Difficulty for most Digital Intrusion tests against soft civilian targets is 2, especially for tests intended to provide a clue in a scene.

A failed Digital Intrusion test almost always attracts Heat (see p. 88). Even a successful Digital Intrusion test can attract Heat if it makes waves, steals valuable data (or cash), or otherwise has notable effects on the system or the outside world.

Crackers' Crypto

If your Digital Intrusion rating is 8 or more, you get 1 free rating point in the Investigative ability Cryptography. You can also encrypt your team's electronic communications against all but government-level (NSA, GCHQ, DGSE, GRU, Unit 8200) cracking.

Disguise

This is the skill of altering your own appearance, posture, and voice to be unrecognizable. Disguising others in anything more complex than a baseball cap or false mustache is good only for brief periods, as posture and body language are vital components in any successful disguise.

This ability also covers selling yourself as a different person: vocal mannerisms, altered body language,

dress and motion sense, and realistic-seeming reactions. This is how you pretend to be an arms dealer, museum official, or priest without actually having a Cover identity. (Uniforms or ID obtained with Filch or Forgery help with that, as does planted intel.) If the whole team has to dress up as priests to infiltrate the Vatican archives, use a piggybacked Disguise test to make sure nobody screws up.

Successfully disguising yourself as an actual person already known to those you're interacting with is extraordinarily difficult. (*Mission: Impossible* style face masks are not standard equipment.) Brief voice-only mimicry pits you against a Difficulty of 4. Face-to-face impersonation requires a successful roll against a Difficulty of 7 for every five minutes of sustained contact between you and the object of your impersonation.

Disguise doubles as an **Investigative** ability when used to:

- create and maintain a cover identity among the unsuspecting
- impersonate a generic figure, such as a security guard, waiter, or messenger
- briefly misrepresent yourself, such as on the telephone or in a vestibule

This Investigative use of Disguise replaces the Impersonate ability in other GUMSHOE games.

Connected Cover

If your Disguise rating is 8 or more, you can use Cover pool points during play to create a **connected cover identity.** Where a normal cover provides potential or generic access, credentials, etc., a connected cover is, in addition, personally known to a given NPC. Then, within reason, describe the nature of the NPC's previous feelings toward your new connected cover: respect, fear, appreciation, favors owed, favors wanted, etc. A connected cover identity does not require a Disguise test to "impersonate," but you may have to disguise yourself *out* of character if you don't want your new cover blown.

This is a way to get out of a tense situation: "Arpad, don't you know me? It's Suslov! We did that Trieste job together!" or infiltrate an organization once you've learned something about it: "Parenti, it's Boyle. Word on the street is you're looking for a hitter, and I'm between jobs at the moment," or get close to a target: "But surely you remember me, Clive dear — it's Sophia, from the World Bank!" The Director can reject a connected cover identity that seems abusive, but should not reject one merely because it makes her work a little harder to drop the hammer on the player.

Driving

You're a skilled defensive driver, capable of wringing high performance from even the most recalcitrant automobile, pick-up truck, or van. You can:

- evade or conduct pursuit
- avoid collisions, or minimize damage from collisions
- successfully drive off-road without bogging down or wrecking, assuming even minimally hospitable terrain
- maintain high speed under unfavorable weather conditions
- perform jumps, drifts, reverses, and other driving stunts
- spot tampering with a vehicle
- conduct emergency repairs

Driving doubles as an **Investigative** ability when used to:

- evaluate or estimate the performance or condition of a motor vehicle
- predict, evaluate, or plan highway or Autobahn routes between cities
- determine the street value, visibility, or availability of a stolen vehicle
- interact with drivers and similar gearheads as a professional equal

For every additional rating point in Driving, you may add an additional motor vehicle type to your repertoire. These include: motorcycle, transport truck, bus, construction equipment, remote-control car or robot, snowmobile, motorboat, and jet-ski. You may choose exotic types, like hovercraft and tanks, although it's best to wait until you actually have access to one to fill the slot. Like "new" Languages, a vehicle type added at an opportune moment does not represent suddenly learning to drive a bulldozer, but simply previous training or retroactive experience you've never had call to mention until now.

For aircraft and most watercraft, use Piloting (p. 32).

If you have both Driving and Mechanics, you can soup up a motor vehicle to increase its performance (see p. 103).

Grand Theft Auto

If your Driving rating is 8 or more, you can spend 1 Driving pool point to steal and start any standard civilian or police vehicle that you can drive. Armored limousines, super-luxury cars with digital keys, and other extraordinarily secure vehicles still require an Infiltration test to boost.

Thriller Rules

A Driving rating of 8+ also allows the Gear Devil option on p. 57 of the Thriller Chase rules, if your campaign uses them.

Explosive Devices

You're an expert in bombs and booby-traps. You can:

- defuse bombs and traps
- handle nitroglycerine or other dangerously unstable materials with relative safety
- given time, blow open safes or vaults without damaging the contents
- mix explosive compounds from common chemicals
- safely construct and detonate explosive devices or booby-traps of your own
- implode, or selectively destroy one part of, a structure with explosives
- set a reliably hot and destructive fire

Explosive Devices doubles as an **Investigative** ability when used to:

- reconstruct exploded bombs
- for any bomb (exploded or unexploded), determine the method and materials of the bomb-maker, and deduce his sophistication, background, and skill
- reconstruct burn patterns of a fire
- determine the method and materials of the arsonist, and deduce his sophistication, background, and skill
- interact with EOD technicians or bomb-makers as a professional equal

Conventional "all-purpose" explosives, especially military explosive devices, are standardized for safety and ease of handling in stress situations. Using a standard weight of plastic explosive and a detonator, a satchel charge, or thermite requires a Difficulty 2 test of Explosive Devices. Tossing a grenade (or a stick of burning dynamite) is an Athletics test; building a booby trap or setting a specific charge with either grenades or dynamite is much harder (Difficulty 4 or more).

Bigger Bang

If your Explosive Devices rating is 8 or more, you may spend 3 points from your Explosive Devices pool to add an extra die of damage to an explosive charge that you set, or 6 points to add 2 extra dice of damage. (See p. 68 for explosives damage.) This spend does not increase the result of your die roll.

Filch

Your nimble fingers allow you to unobtrusively manipulate small objects. You can:

- pilfer small items from desks, counters, crime scenes, or museum displays, even under the supposedly watchful eyes of a guard or policeman
- walk out openly with a briefly unguarded bulky and low-value item as if you were entitled to it; e.g., steal a security guard uniform from the locker room
- given a diversion, lift almost anything you can carry under your clothing; e.g., cut a painting out of its frame and stuff it under your jacket
- pick pockets
- slip cell keys from guards' belts, lift ID badges from lapels, etc.
- surreptitiously relieve opponents of their weaponry
- plant objects on unsuspecting targets
- switch two similar objects (like two briefcases) without being noticed

Note that disarming alarms requires either a Digital Intrusion test (to disarm computer-controlled alarm systems remotely) or an Infiltration test. Picking locks is Infiltration.

No Slipups

If your Filch rating is 8 or more, you may spend points *after* rolling the die for a test. For every 2 Filch pool points you spend *after* rolling the die, you increase the die result by 1. This *only* applies if you are undistracted and not directly observed. It never applies during a contest. You must describe the thing that almost went wrong, and weave a convincing tale explaining how your instincts and skills let you get away with your theft.

Gambling

You are conversant with the rules and etiquette of all forms of gambling, from Texas hold 'em and roulette to horse racing and numbers rackets. To win (or strategically lose) at a game of chance or sporting flutter requires a Gambling test, or a contest if played against an NPC with the Gambling ability. In addition to playing by the rules and winning, you can:

- spot cheating, either by the house or by another player
- stack a deck, rig a horse race, load dice, or otherwise cheat

Palming cards, tiles, or dice is allowed as a Gambling test; anything else requires Conceal or Filch.

Gambling doubles as an **Investigative** ability when used to:

- calculate the odds of events ruled by probabilities
- use Bullshit Detector on professional gamblers despite their poker faces
- interact with gamblers and blend in at casinos

The Director is well within her rights to disallow Gambling tests to score millions on Ascot or the World Cup. That said, an agent may well try gambling with high rollers as a means of funding the team's operations — at the risk of acquiring more Heat, of course (see p. 88).

In realistic campaigns, there is no skill to winning at many games of chance, such as roulette or baccarat: only financial resources and the will to quit when you're ahead. This ability still applies to those games where reading the other player, knowledge of the track, or calculating the odds are actually valuable: poker, blackjack, horse racing, etc.

Luck of the Devil

If your Gambling rating is 8 or more, roll a die at the beginning of each session. During that session, you may substitute the result on that die for any single die result for your agent or for anyone opposing him in a contest or combat. This new result counts as an "unmodified result" for purposes of, e.g., Critical Hits or Throws (see pp. 73 and 76, respectively).

> *You have Gambling 8, entitling you to the Luck of the Devil. At the beginning of the session, you roll a die and get a 5. Later on, you get into a gunfight with some Chechen gangsters and roll a 2 on Shooting. You can change that 2 to a 5 now, but you wait and see how the combat goes. Indeed, the next round you hit the boss Chechen but roll only a 1 for damage. You change that 1 to a 5, enough to take the thug out of action. If, instead, you had rolled a 1 at the beginning of the session, you might have changed one of the Chechens' successful Shooting rolls to a 1 at some critical point in the fray.*

The Director may, if the situation is dramatic enough, ask you to describe the unlikely event that gave you the upper hand: the sun reflecting into the foe's eyes, a "magic bullet" bounce off a rib into the throat, or a truck backing out of an alley blocking the pursuing car.

Hand-to-Hand

You can hold your own in a hand-to-hand fight, whether you wish to kill, knock out, restrain, or evade your opponent. For this purpose, "hand-to-hand" covers all sorts of unarmed combat, from aikido matches to bar brawls to muy thai kickboxing bouts.

You can also use Hand-to-Hand as an **Investigative** ability to determine where a combatant has trained, and in which martial art if any, or to interact with devotees of a given gym or dojo as a pugilistic equal.

Using brass knuckles, a sap, or a roll of coins balled in your fist is a Hand-to-Hand attack. Using anything else is a Weapons attack.

Eye of the Tiger

If your Hand-to-Hand rating is 8 or more, you can spend 1 Hand-to-Hand pool point to assess your opponent and determine his toughness. The Director will tell you if the opponent's Hand-to-Hand *rating* is within 1 point of your rating, lower than that, or higher than that.

Thriller Rules

Having a Hand-to-Hand rating of 8+ also allows the Extra Attacks (p. 74), Martial Arts (p. 76), and Mook Shield (p. 76) options from the Thriller Combat rules, if your campaign uses them, and the Breakfall option on p. 80.

Health

Health measures your ability to sustain injuries, resist infection, and survive the effects of toxins. When you get hit in the course of a fight, your Health pool is diminished. A higher Health pool allows you to stay in a fight longer before succumbing to your injuries.

When your Health pool is depleted, you may be dazed, wounded, or monster chow. For more on this, see p. 64.

You begin with 4 free rating points in Health.

In a Dust game, your Health rating is capped at 10.

Infiltration

You're good at placing yourself inside places you have no right to be. You can:

- pick locks (including handcuff locks)
- deactivate or evade security systems
- enter and hotwire a locked car
- move silently
- hide in shadows or cover
- evade visual security, whether guards or cameras
- find suitable places for forced entry, and use them

Despite its name, Infiltration is as useful for getting out of places undetected as it is for getting into them.

Use Infiltration to hide in cover or to creep around unnoticed. To hide in a crowd, to sneakily or cleverly shake a pursuer, or to stealthily follow a target, use Surveillance. To outrun a pursuer, abseil onto a roof, or climb a fence, use Athletics.

Open Sesame

If your Infiltration rating is 8 or more, you can automatically pick or bypass any normal, commercial door lock or alarm (on buildings or vehicles) without a test. (Otherwise, the Difficulty for such a lock is 2.) Many locks require specialized tools, possession of which without a locksmith's license is a criminal offense in most jurisdictions. Complex or tricky locks may still require tests to open them speedily, to avoid noise or damage, or to relock afterward. Safes, handcuffs, security doors, and so forth always require tests of Infiltration.

Mechanics

You're good at building, repairing, operating, and disabling mechanical, electrical, or electronic devices from catapults to DVD players to key parts of a city's power grid. Given the right components, you can create jury-rigged devices, booby traps (see p. 98), or weapons from odd bits of scrap. This ability also covers using heavy machinery and equipment such as cranes or artillery.

Mechanics doubles as an **Investigative** ability when used to:

- evaluate the quality of workmanship used to create an item
- discover a hidden panel or compartment in a built object
- determine the function of a given gadget
- tap telephone lines or fiberoptic cables
- spot junction boxes, transformers, or other elements of an electrical power system
- spot non-fatal tampering with or sabotage of a device
- use any mechanical, electrical, or electronic device in good repair as intended for an investigative (clue-gathering) purpose

Swiss Army Prep

If your Mechanics rating is 8 or more, you can spend Mechanics pool points for Preparedness tests, as long as you provide a jaunty, *Burn Notice*-style explanation of how you repurposed this gadget or component. If your agent is present, you can even spend Mechanics pool points for another agent's Preparedness tests: each 2 points you spend counting as 1 point for their Preparedness test.

Medic

You can perform first aid on sick or injured individuals. For every 1 Medic point you spend, you heal 2 points of damage to others or 1 point to yourself. For more on the use of this ability, see p. 64.

Medical School of Hard Knocks

If your Medic rating is 8 or more, you receive 1 free rating point in Diagnosis.

Network

This ability represents your network of professional contacts. It works something like Cover in play; at any time, you may reveal or remember the existence of a member of your network in a given city. Assign this contact his own pool of points taken from your unassigned Network pool; that contact's capacity to locate safe houses, import guns, provide false papers, etc. will resolve as a test of that contact's pool against a Difficulty generally dependent on the level of Heat (see p. 88) and on the local jurisdiction. Finding an AKM assault rifle in Bosnia is easier than finding one in Manchester; crossing the border into Ireland is easier than crossing into Iran.

# of Players	Starting Network Points
2	12
3	8
4	6
5+	4

Your Network contacts do not necessarily know which agency you worked for, or even that you are (or were) a spy. They are simply people from before the campaign started who owe you or are otherwise disposed to help you out.

Using a Network contact (either newly invoked or previously existing) to get you out of confinement or arrest costs double the points: 2 points spent from his pool adds 1 to the die roll for your release.

Once a contact has exhausted his pool, he has left too many traces and will likely be killed or turned by the opposition. You may wind up using experience points to keep useful contacts alive.

Every player character begins with 15 free points in Network. Unlike other General abilities, Network does not refresh during or after an operation; it can only be "refilled" with experience points.

In Burn games, stark psychological isolation cuts your network back. You start with a number of free points in Network dependent on the number of regularly attending players:

In Burn games, losing a contact to the opposition also costs you 1 Stability or Interpersonal *rating* point.

In Mirror games, the Director picks one contact per session (*not* one contact per agent per session) and secretly makes one unmodified roll against that contact's pool. If the Director's roll beats the contact's pool points, the opposition flips that contact — or the contact has retroactively been an opposition asset or double agent all along. That contact might betray the character at the next inconvenient opportunity, or remain in place to covertly inform on the agent to the opposition.

Investigative Networking

Network contacts don't just do things for you; they can also *know* things for you. This is George Smiley's great skill in the Le Carré novels: he knows people who know where the bodies are buried, and he can get them to talk. You might know someone from your old agency with a good memory for case files, or a specialist at University who briefed you on a topic, or a source you ran last decade who knows the whole Libyan arms smuggling scene backwards. Think of investigative uses of Network as Research into potentially classified or dangerous information: the result might be a phone call, a forwarded data dump, or a physical copy of an asset's report. Investigative uses of Network can also resemble spends on Bureaucracy, Human Terrain, Streetwise, Tradecraft, or even, in some campaigns, Vampirology or Occult Studies.

This is a great tool to use when you're stuck. You usually can't ask a Network contact "Who's behind these killings?" but you can ask "Who investigated these killings four years ago, and what did they find out, and what happened to them?" Decide what you need to know, determine how much of that kind of information might be available to anyone outside the opposition, and create a Network contact whose business it is to know such things. In general, an investigative Network contact provides a direction to search, another source to shake down, or otherwise narrows down the field of speculation.

If you tap a Network contact for information instead of action, spend 1 point from that contact's pool. If it's a real data dump or red-hot intel, the Director may charge you 2 points; use the difference between a 1-point and 2-point investigative spend as a guideline. The Director will never charge you for a core clue delivered by a Network contact.

You can use the pool points of a single Network contact for both information and action, of course.

> **DVD A LITTLE HELP FROM YOUR FRIENDS**
>
> Network can be another one of those abilities which, like MOS, help bridge the gap in parts of your plan where you don't seem to have the right tools in your bag. Need a crooked professor of art history to pass off a forgery? Done. Civil servant willing to look the other way while you break into the mayor's office? Easy. This is the skill about pulling people out of your ass, so don't be afraid to use it that way. You can get a lot of utility out of only a few points, if you're willing to let the vampires eat your contacts when they're no longer of use to you.

Piloting

Although almost anyone can paddle a canoe or even row a dinghy, you can pilot small boats (motorboats, sailboats, dories) or single-engine light aircraft (Cessna 172 or the equivalent) with professional aplomb and serene confidence. You can:

- evade or conduct pursuit
- anticipate bad weather
- avoid crashes, or minimize damage from crashes
- spot tampering with a vehicle
- navigate by compass or the stars, read maps, and maintain a sense of direction
- maintain high speed under unfavorable weather conditions
- perform dives, spins, rolls, and other piloting stunts
- conduct emergency repairs

Piloting acts as an **Investigative** ability when used to:

- evaluate or estimate the performance or condition of an air or water craft
- predict, evaluate, or plan a flight plan or ship's course
- determine where a given air or water craft can be safely or discreetly landed or moored
- interact with pilots or watermen as a professional equal

A rating of 1 in Piloting allows you to select either small boats or single-engine light aircraft. For every additional rating point in Piloting, you may add an additional air or water vehicle type to your repertoire, such as: small boats, single-engine light aircraft, barges and tugs, helicopters, yachts, multi-engine jets, remotely piloted vehicles and UAVs, jet-skis, hang gliders, and cargo ships. You may choose exotic types, like airships, midget submarines, and

fighter jets, although it's best to wait until you actually have access to one to fill the slot. Like the additional vehicles available with extra points in Driving, you may add them opportunistically in play if you have unassigned points.

If you have both Piloting and Mechanics, you can soup up a powered craft to increase its performance (see p. 103).

Grand Theft Aero

Or, if you prefer, Grand Theft Aqua.

If your Piloting rating is 8 or more, you can spend 1 Piloting point to steal and start any standard civilian or police vehicle (air or water) that you can pilot. Military craft and other extraordinarily secure vehicles still require an Infiltration test to boost. At Piloting 8+, you can also create bogus flight plans or port documents to allow rapid departure, although they may still require Digital Intrusion to insert into the system or Forgery to make sure of all the necessary stamps.

Thriller Rules

A Piloting rating of 8+ also allows the Gear Devil option on p. 57 of the Thriller Chase rules, if your campaign uses them.

Preparedness

You expertly anticipate the needs of any operation by packing a kit efficiently arranged with necessary gear. Assuming you have immediate access to your kit, you can produce whatever object the team needs to overcome an obstacle. You make a simple test (p. 49); if you succeed, you have the item you want. You needn't do this in advance of the adventure, but can dig into your kit bag (provided you're able to get to it) as the need arises.

Items of obvious utility to a covert operation or anti-undead hit job do not require a test. These include but are not limited to: smart phones, weapons, detonators, flashlights, binoculars, batteries, gloves, zip cuffs, duct tape, rations, cigarettes and lighters, multi-tools, magnifying glasses, pocket mirrors, garlic, stakes, and crucifixes.

Other abilities imply the possession of basic gear suitable to their core tasks. Characters with Medic or Diagnose have their own first aid kits or medical bags; Photographers come with cameras. If you have Shooting, you have a gun, Digital Intrusion, you have a laptop, and so on. Preparedness does not intrude into their territory. It covers general-purpose investigative equipment, plus oddball items — a Ouija board, a baseball, a tube of Super Glue, a gas mask — that suddenly come in handy in the course of the story. The traditional "rappelling line just long enough to get me down off this building" is a classic Preparedness feat of the spy thriller genre; having it in your pack might be Difficulty 3, while having it coiled, hooked on your belt, and ready to go with a jump is Difficulty 6.

The sorts of items you can produce at a moment's notice depend not on your rating or pool, but on narrative credibility. If the Director determines that your possession of an item would seem ludicrous, anachronistic, or out of genre, you don't get to roll for it. You simply don't have it. Any item which elicits a laugh from the group when suggested is probably out of bounds.

Inappropriate use of the Preparedness ability is like pornography. Your Director will know it when she sees it.

Cache

A special use of Preparedness allows you to locate a cache of equipment stashed by you or by your former agency. See p. 95 for details.

In the Nick of Time

If you have a Preparedness rating of 8 or more, you can have also retroactively prepared specific timely actions, such as:

- a smoke bomb or incendiary going off as a diversion
- the power suddenly being cut off in the office building
- a gun smuggled in earlier and pre-positioned in the drop ceiling above you
- a traffic-snarling parade whose route you researched before the operation began
- a bomb threat evacuating the mall
- a sudden peal of church bells thanks to an earlier generous contribution
- a previous switch of the briefcase for an identical one with different contents

You must have had opportunity and the means to set up the action — which can include the help of fellow agents who "suddenly realize what you asked" when the stop lights all turn red. (This, by the way, is an excellent reason to keep pre-mission planning more impressionistic: more "blank space" available for preparation.) You must still make a Preparedness test, and you must still convince the Director that your precaution is credible. If the action required a test (of Digital Intrusion, Explosive Devices, Infiltration, Mechanics, etc.) you or your then-unwitting collaborator must make it successfully.

Sense Trouble

This ability allows you to perceive (either with sight or other senses) potential hazards to yourself or others. For example, you can:

- hear the click of a safety being taken off
- see a flittering shape cross the moon
- smell the charnel reek of a ghoul's breath in the windowless warehouse
- notice the tiny marks on the inspector's wrist
- have a bad feeling about that glassy-eyed border guard at the seemingly deserted checkpoint

Players never know the Difficulty numbers for Sense Trouble before deciding how many points to spend, even in games where Directors generously inform the players of other Difficulty numbers. Players must blindly choose how much to spend. The Director does not roll, so even a failed roll allows the group the sense that something is amiss. They just don't know exactly what this is. Think of it as the game system equivalent of tension-building eerie music in a horror movie.

The Director should never require the use of this General ability to find clues to the problem at hand. Instead, use Investigative abilities, defaulting to Notice when no ability seems more appropriate. Sense Trouble is for a scenario's action-oriented sequences. In short, if not seeing something will get you attacked, it's Sense Trouble.

Sense Trouble can also be used as the ability to specifically locate the source of an already-discovered problem: the ticking bomb, the concealed sniper, the soul-drinking rune.

Combat Intuition

If you have a Sense Trouble rating of 8 or more, you can use your Sense Trouble rating (*not* pool) instead of another ability to determine your order of action in a contest or combat (see p. 62).

Shooting

You are adept with personal firearms, including their field stripping, repair, and identification. This skill also, for game-mechanical simplicity, covers crossbows and similar trigger-operated missile weapons, as well as RPGs, squad weapons (mortars and machine guns), shoulder-fired missiles, and the like.

Operating heavy artillery requires either Driving (for weapons mounted on tanks or self-propelled guns), Piloting (for weapons mounted on air or watercraft), or Mechanics.

You can spend 2 points from your Shooting pool to attempt to hit a target at Long range with a pistol, or at up to 500 meters with a rifle. This spend does not adjust your roll; it makes it possible in the first place. (See *Extended Range,* p. 68.)

Thriller Rules

Having a Shooting rating of 8+ allows the Multiple Attacks (p. 74), Sniping (p. 77), Special Weapons Training (p. 77), Suppressive Fire (p. 78), and Technothriller Monologue (p. 78) actions from the Thriller Combat rules, if your campaign uses them.

Shrink

You can provide comfort, perspective and solace to the mentally troubled. You may be a therapist or counselor, a priest or pastor, or just a empathetic and intuitive individual. You can restore panicked characters to a state of calm (p. 84), and treat any long-term mental illnesses they accrue in the course of their operations (p. 84).

Talk It Out

If your Shrink rating is 8 or more, you receive 1 free rating point in one of: Bullshit Detector, Flattery, Interrogation, or Reassurance.

Stability

Jarring or stressful events can exert a damaging, long-lasting psychological toll. Confrontation with monsters or other supernatural phenomena might provoke outright madness. Your Stability rating indicates your resistance to mental trauma and psychic attack, along with general willpower and self-possession.

All player characters start with Stability 4 for free.

In a Burn game, your Stability is capped at 12.

Surveillance

You're good at watching and following targets without revealing your presence. You can:

- guide a team to follow a target for short periods, handing off to the next in sequence, so the target doesn't realize he's being trailed
- use telescopic viewing equipment to keep watch on a target from a distance
- find undetectable vantage points for single-point coverage by eyeball or video
- maintain a stakeout without rousing your target's suspicion

- anticipate blind spots in your coverage and plan for them, or use them to "dry clean" your own shadowers
- determine a target's regular pattern, including any chokepoints suitable for ambush or snatch jobs
- hide in plain sight or blend into a crowd
- listen at doors or windows without being overheard yourself
- spot a tail, stakeout, or other non-electronic surveillance of another person

Spotting a tail or other non-electronic surveillance of yourself might be Surveillance (if spotting the tail probably won't lead to combat) or Sense Trouble (if it will lead to combat); the Director should use her best judgment.

Use Infiltration to creep around unnoticed, and to hide in cover. To hide in a crowd or blend into the background, to sneakily or cleverly shake a pursuer, or to stealthily follow a target, use Surveillance. To outrun a pursuer, use Athletics.

The Wire

8 or more points in Surveillance grants you 1 free point of the Investigative ability Electronic Surveillance.

Weapons

You are skilled in the use of personal hand weapons such as knives, swords, or flexible batons. This ability covers most thrown melee weapons; throwing grenades falls under Athletics.

Using brass knuckles, a sap, or a roll of coins balled in your fist is a Hand-to-Hand attack. Anything else falls under Weapons.

Quincey Morris' Bowie Knife

If your Weapons rating is 8 or more, you can throw any balanced hand weapon (e.g., fighting knife, tomahawk, scalpel) at a target within Near range at no penalty to Difficulty or damage.

Thriller Rules

Having a Weapons rating of 8+ also allows the Extra Attacks (p. 74), Martial Arts (p. 76), and Special Weapons Training (p. 77) options from the Thriller Combat rules, if your campaign uses them.

Personality and Dossier

With your various abilities assigned, and most likely some idea of your background and experiences, it's time to finish putting together your character. If you'd like, of course, you can start at this end and build your agent's emotional core first, then decide what experiences might have shaped her that way. From those elements, you can work up a background or two, and then build out her abilities as they become apparent.

One interesting way to get a handle on your agent's personality is to look at her Interpersonal abilities: what does her point spread indicate she values the most? Not just the obvious signals of Intimidation or Flirting at 3; Cop Talk 3 might indicate gregarious professionalism; Negotiation 3 an openness to new experience; Bullshit Detector or Tradecraft 3 might both signal incipient paranoia.

Conversely, an Interpersonal ability left at 0 implies the agent never uses that technique: why not? An Interrogation of 0 might indicate a gentle core that shrinks from breaking a subject, a clear sadism that reduces targets to babbling inanities or psychotic defiance, or psychological scarring from the agent's previous experiences being interrogated during SERE or in Syria.

The finishing touches — brand of cigarettes, ethnic heritage, dress sense, family history, accent, etc. — can come now or emerge in play. If you haven't named your agent, or at least given him a cool-sounding alias, do it now.

DVD A DRIVE BY ANY OTHER NAME

Aside from providing mechanical depth, backgrounds can provide the hook for explaining why a character pushes deeper into the world of the vampires. Agents exist in a state of seeming contradiction — they are often not iconic heroes, but hardened operatives who have survived through a mix of preparation, patience, and pragmatism. Why, then, do they double down on the hunt when the sane thing to do would be run for the hills? Every character should have an answer to this question, be it paranoia, the safety of loved ones, or an obsessive need to eradicate That Which Must Not Be. Even if your game isn't using the Drive mechanic, this is still an essential aspect to any agent.

Sources of Stability

In campaigns using Sources of Stability, you must identify what and who keeps you sane when the stress of your life of lies, violence, and fear threatens to shred your psyche. These provide you with the strength, release, and hope to keep fighting the good fight and going back into that crypt every night.

Damages or threats to your Sources of Stability trigger immediate, difficult Stability tests (see p. 81). If you cannot tap your Sources of Stability, you cannot refresh Stability during or between operations (see p. 93).

Name your three Sources of Stability, as follows:

Symbol

This is a non-human representation of something or someone you value: a religious medal or crucifix, your country's flag or your father's dog tag, a picture of your innocent niece or a voice mail from your dead wife. Seeing it or handling it — a few minutes of meditation or reverence — reminds you of why you fight, why you must stay intact. If you do so during an operation, you may immediately refresh 1 pool point of Stability; you may do this only once per session.

If you lose your Symbol, you lose 1 *rating* point of Stability at the end of the operation if it remains lost. Some Symbols cannot be so lost; if you rally at the sight of the Union Jack, you lose no rating points of Stability if someone burns a British flag. If, however, you used a flag patch from your mate's uniform as your Symbol, you would lose the point if it got stolen.

The Symbol should ideally be connected somehow to your Drive, if only in your agent's own mind.

If your Symbol is ever proven valueless — you uncover proof that Jesus was a vampire, your country is behind the undead menace, your dead wife faked her death to go over to the other side — you immediately lose 3 *rating* points of Stability.

Solace

This is the person you seek out for human contact, to make the pain and stress recede for the time being: your current girlfriend, a friendly bartender, your old handler. A name and identifying phrase are sufficient. You may not use fellow agents on your team; they go through the same stresses you do and remind you of the horrors you confront. It's permissible, but risky, for multiple agents to lean on the same folks as members of their support network.

Relying on others is a source of strength, but also of danger. Once you come to the attention of monstrous conspiracies, they may use your loved ones against you. They may corrupt them, turn them to evil or inhumanity, or take the tried and true route of subjecting them to horrible tortures.

If you can spend six hours — of talk, quiet companionship, sex and sleep, athletic training, or other normal human interaction — with your Solace during an operation, you may immediately refresh 2 pool points of Stability; you may do this only once per session. This time must be safe from violent or supernatural interruption.

If you spend at least a day of such interaction with your Solace between operations, you may fully refresh your Stability pool. Again, this time must be safe from violent or supernatural interruption.

If your Solace ever betrays or rejects you, you immediately lose 2 *rating* points of Stability.

If your Solace is ever turned by a vampire or killed, you immediately lose 3 *rating* points of Stability.

Safety

This is the person and place you would flee to without thinking: your old trainer's cabin in the Alps, your mother's house in Scotland, your best friend's apartment in Paris, a beachfront condo in Ibiza you've bought under another name. Simply knowing that such a refuge exists gives you hope that you can some day escape the shadowy world in which you dwell. At the end of any session in which your place of Safety remains inviolate, you may refresh 1 pool point of Stability.

It is very poor tradecraft to actually flee to your place of Safety. Even if the vampires, hostile intelligence and security services, or other conspiracies don't already have the place wired, your flight there would put your would-be refuge in their crosshairs.

If you do get there, it counts as a haven (see p. 92) where you can immediately refresh three General ability pools. Any Preparedness tests you carry out there have a Difficulty that is 2 points lower than normal. In the very unlikely instance that you get there unobserved, you can refresh your whole Stability pool there, as well.

If your place of Safety has an owner or caretaker, you can activate them as a free contact (without spending any Network points) with a rating of 6. *This rating cannot be rebuilt with Network or experience points.* You can only activate this contact once during the entire life of your character.

If your place of Safety ever turns you out, or its owner (e.g., your old trainer, your mother, your best friend) betrays you, you immediately lose 3 *rating* points of Stability.

If enemies destroy your place of Safety or its owner, you immediately lose 3 *rating* points of Stability.

Replacing Sources of Stability

You can, if you wish, rebuild your Stability rating using experience points (see p. 94) after losing a Source of Stability. Once you spend any experience rebuilding your Stability, you may replace the lost Source with another of the same type: if the opposition killed your girlfriend (your previous Solace), you can meet another girl and find Solace in her arms, or find Solace confessing to a priest instead. The Director should work this new ideal or NPC into the story,

probably with a brief scene or two centered on this new relationship.

You can never replace a Symbol that has proven valueless or a destroyed place of Safety during the campaign. You can still, however, replace a lost Symbol (a burned photograph of your son) with another (a new photo of him, downloaded off his Facebook page and onto your phone).

Drives

Every agent has a Drive, a motivating factor that propels him into the storyline and motivates him to act as a thriller character ought. Drives prevent players from making boring, cowardly choices for their characters. They don't require foolish or suicidal recklessness, just the same degree of courage and initiative you'd expect from a heroic protagonist.

When playing roleplaying games, we sometimes tend to overprotect our characters, who we identify with more directly than we do the lead characters of books, movies, or TV shows. This habit can bring the story to a halt as the PCs hunker down and avoid trouble when they ought to be leaping into it with loaded guns or confident swagger. Even when you can work around this tendency, it feels discordantly out of step with the sorts of stories that inspire the game. Drives remind us to break this habit. Most of the time, a Director who realizes you've slipped into over-cautious mode and are holding up the progress of the story can spur you to action simply by reminding you of your Drive. She might explain to you why your Drive would spur you to action. Better yet, she could prompt *you* to explain it.

When invoking Drives, Directors should take care not to guide the player's specific response to the situation. The goal is to lead the player to move forward, not to force a particular choice. Avoid this by listing several viable choices, if the player has been stumped by his own caution.

If the player digs in and refuses to have his character move, the Director may assess a **stress penalty**. This reflects the agent's loss of concentration as he acts against his fundamental nature. The cost of all Investigative spends increases by 1, as does the Difficulty of all General tests, until the agent returns to form. The typical game unfolds without a single stress penalty coming into play, as players willingly follow the path they themselves have chosen.

On the other hand, if the character really dives in and lives his Drive, possibly at great risk to himself, the Director may allow the agent to refresh 1 or 2 pool points from any General ability, reflecting the inner certainty that comes of following deep-seated psychological motivations. This reward is limited to once per session per player.

Choose your character's Drive at the beginning of play, from the following list. Think of it as a key to his personality. Some of these Drives, such as Revenge and Slayer (and perhaps Programming), presume knowledge of vampires. A player might pick such a Drive knowing that it will only come into play once his agent meets the undead, or the Director might agree that the agent learned about vampires before the rest of the group (see *First Blood*, p. 94).

PERSONAL ARCS

If you'd like, also propose a specific personal arc exemplifying your Drive; some goal that your character pursues as part of (or in competition with!) his hunt for the enemy. Like your Drive, such an arc should also compel action, danger, and risk. Examples might include:

- Prove my old handler wasn't a traitor
- Prove my old handler was a traitor
- Sleep with the hottest girl I meet
- Find my father, who disappeared when I was ten
- Cheat death
- Figure out my fellow agents' true agendas and loyalties
- Find the Holy Grail
- Prove myself to my more experienced team mates
- Become a vampire
- Protect London from any more terrorist attacks
- Kill the war criminal Goran Hadzic
- Get rich or die trying
- Gain an audience with the Pope

Some Drives can be considered "general cases" of personal arcs, especially Atonement, Mystery, Programming, Restoration, and Revenge. Some personal arcs have concrete end points ("find my mother"), while others can "resolve" over and over throughout the campaign ("sleep with a smoking hot guy").

The Director should tie NPCs or other plot hooks from characters' personal arcs into the ongoing story to prevent too much drama from working at narrative cross-purposes, or slowing down the pace. If your suggested personal arc is a thinly veiled attempt at a rules crock, the Director will let you down easy and tell you to pick another one.

Feel free to propose to the Director a custom Drive that fills the same function as the ones given here. Write up an explanatory paragraph in the same vein

as the supplied Drives. If not immediately apparent, your Director may ask you to supply hypothetical examples of situations in which the Drive will keep the agent making active, interesting choices in solving the mystery or advancing the operation at hand.

Altruism

You got into the game to protect innocents from terrorists, or disease, or war, or tyranny. You're no innocent yourself now, but that only lets you know just how much innocence normal people have left to lose. Without a necessarily compromised agency telling you what to do, doing the right thing becomes not just easier, but imperative.

Is another agent acting from shadier motives? Perhaps doing the right thing isn't what everyone wants to do today.

Atonement

You did something wrong: committed a crime, betrayed your friends, killed someone undeserving, allowed someone else to die or prosper who shouldn't. Maybe nobody else would think you need to atone, but maybe those are the things you most need to atone for. Possibly you want to clear your name; perhaps you just need to clear your conscience.

You might specify your sin during character creation, or at the beginning of play, or leave it open for a dramatic revelation at any time during the game. You can tell the other players, or just the Director, or keep it to yourself. If you choose to set up your past misdeed as a mystery, be sure to drop hints along the way, to increase the impact on the other players when the secret finally comes out. Alternatively, you could wait for an interesting possibility to arise during play, and then tie your past history into the current action. Clear it with the Director first, to make sure that the facts you're adding to the narrative don't conflict with the plot you're investigating.

Did your shameful act harm another agent, or their country? If so, they may be more interested in retribution than allowing you to atone in your own way.

Comradeship

You might have been motivated by abstract or material concerns when you first dropped off the grid, but over the months or years, that all fell by the wayside. The real reason to be part of a crew, you came to realize, is for the intense bond between men and women who depend completely on each other for their lives and livelihoods. Your team might be a criminal gang, or a crew of mismatched and cynical professionals. But deep down, they're like a family to you. The ties you've forged under fire are in many ways stronger than blood. No value is more important than personal loyalty. No people matter more than your teammates. And for them to survive, you have to kill the things that want to kill them.

Mystery

You are driven to solve a mystery: this might be a personal mystery (What happened to my old partner? What happened during my missing week? Who burned me with the Agency?) or a political mystery (Were the vampires behind the Iraq War? Behind the Nazis? Behind the Templars?) or an arcane mystery (Where do vampires come from? What does the Vatican know about them?). If you have a personal connection to the mystery, your motives are relatively clear; otherwise, you have one of those brains so very attractive (and attracted) to intelligence agencies, a brain that cannot rest without solving a mystery or tearing itself apart.

The solution to the mystery may well invalidate your Symbol as a Source of Stability, depending on the Director's intentions and the grimness of the campaign.

Nowhere Else to Go

After you got out of the service (whatever it was), you were a directionless vagabond. Despite the many useful talents you picked up in your old life, you were unable to make a go of it alone. Without family, friends, or opportunity, you bounced from one low-end, no-future job to the next. This dispiriting period may have been marked by addiction, depression, or some other self-destructive behavior. Your path crossed with one or more of your teammates by random accident. (You can decide how this happened now, or wait to improvise the details of this backstory incident so that it dovetails with a storyline in progress.) Finally your real life seemed to begin, with all of those wasted years seeming merely a prelude to it. The team and their jobs have been your life; the vampires threaten that. You plan, act, and counter ferociously, as if afraid that a single failure will send you spinning back into those days of soul-crushing despair.

You do not have Safety as a Source of Stability.

Patriotism

Just because you don't wear the uniform or collect the paycheck any more doesn't mean you stop loving your country. In your own way, you're working to advance its interests and to protect it from the darkness you've seen rising. You might be trying to secure secrets for your country, or uncover traitors in its security police, or kill its enemies, or help its

military in some occupation or brushfire war. Any of those goals might be counter to your last orders or to today's official policy; any of them might involve the undead.

I Never Left

Perhaps you never actually stopped collecting that paycheck. You're secretly still working for your old agency, manipulating your friends into doing your country's deniable work. This almost always works best as a secret between you and the Director, one that comes out at exactly the wrong moment.

Programming

You are under some outside compulsion to hunt down and kill vampires: whether a supernatural compulsion (a geas, divine command, blood bond, curse, or possession) or a scientific one (covert mind control, psibernetic implants, brainwashing, or infection) the result is the same. Likely, your programmers designed your training and tactics with similar ends in mind. The specifics will depend on the Director's specific campaign details, and likely parallel the nature of the vampires and their powers in the campaign.

Depending on the details of your character history, you may not know the nature of your programming; quite possibly, you don't even know you have been programmed. Even if you know that you've been programmed, and how, you may not know by whom or why. The Director may work with you to reveal the truth as part of a personal arc, or feed you clues to follow in tandem with the larger plotline.

If your programming involves the implantation of false memories, or the suppression of true ones, their revelation will almost certainly result in a serious (5-point or more) Stability test. Similar consequences may obtain merely upon discovering the fact of your programming, if you were unaware of it, and the nature of your programming likewise.

Restoration

You want to come back in from the cold. You want to rejoin your old agency on good terms, ideally on your terms. For that, you need leverage, and product: actionable intelligence (or an asset network) that only you can make use of.

Collector (see p. 39) is a special variant of Restoration.

This is another Drive that works best as a secret, especially if the other team members are from different countries or agencies: an ex-FSB operative isn't going to risk death to get a Mossad assassin reinstated. However, if all the PCs came from the same agency, or even the same country or alliance, it's not impossible to play this Drive openly.

Revenge

Vampires hurt or killed someone you cared about deeply. Although you weren't able to stop that tragedy — and you might not have even known they were vampires at the time — you resolved to hunt them down and punish them.

Decide whether you have already succeeded in taking vengeance on them, or (perhaps more interestingly) have so far been unable to find them.

In the first instance, you were left with your rage unslaked when you finally did catch up with the vampire who killed your mother or turned your son. You realized that vampires crawl in shadows all over Europe — maybe all over the world. Still feeling empty inside, you resolved to take similar vengeance on behalf of the myriad other victims who can't do it for themselves.

In the second case, the Director will look for opportunities to weave your hunt for the bad guys into her scenarios. She may dole them out in stages, so that successful revenge against one of them puts you onto the trail of another perpetrator, and so on. Directors should be careful not to force you to choose between your vengeance and the investigation of the case at hand — they should go hand in hand. Should you finally achieve your vengeance you then, as above, choose to continue on bringing true death to those who remind you of your hated quarry.

Slayer

Once you found out that vampires existed, you knew it was your life's work to kill them. You understand that vampires are slavery, and disease, and poison, and everything that is wrong. Whether it's instinctive repulsion, religious conviction, or the hand of destiny, you can conceive of nothing more important than destroying all vampires everywhere.

Collector

Once your agency found out that vampires existed, they made it your life's work to collect intel on them. They burned you so that you could go underground — literally, if need be. Your agency wants the power of vampirism, or at least any spinoff benefits, for your country, and you want back into your old life.

Needless to say, this is almost always a secret Drive.

Thrill-seeker

You joined up thinking of Rambo or James Bond. Maybe you just wanted to prove yourself at first, but now you know the truth: there's nothing better than

surviving danger. You feel a new kind of alive when you're closest to death. Nothing beats live fire for high stakes; not sex, not sports, not gambling, not coke. Maybe your team calls you an "adrenaline junkie," but they're sure glad to have you take point. When you know where to aim, you go in guns blazing, pitying people who will never know the feeling.

Transparency

You left the service because of the stultifying, crushing, distorting secrecy surrounding the job. There are legitimate secrets in wartime, but the culture of secrecy too easily becomes a culture of corruption, breeding in the dark, of lies told to support worse lies. You want the truth to get out; you want information to be free. When you discover the truth about vampires, you know the only thing that can truly kill them is sunlight. You may have to get a lot of proof to make sure the truth is believed when you reveal it, but the game is worth the candle.

CHANGING DRIVES

It's always possible that your character will shift and deform under the stresses of the game, or that some event or opportunity will crop up that invalidates your Drive or makes another one particularly appropriate. In general, such an organic change of Drive will be obvious to both you and the Director, and changing your Drive shouldn't be any problem. For more arbitrary "I don't like playing this Drive any more" changes, consider seeking a glorious and informative death for your current agent, and starting over with a character better suited to your new desires.

SECRET DRIVES

The players may, or may not, choose to reveal their Drives to each other. Alternately, the players might reveal their Drives at the table, even though their agents do not. Conflicting Drives add much of the drama to a Mirror game; secret Drives add more drama still. If you use secret Drives, make sure to have reasonable "cover" Drives in place like Altruism, Comradeship, Patriotism, or Slayer.

Trust and Betrayal

This provides a modular system for tracking and modeling variable trust within a team of agents. While many groups can easily roleplay mistrust and jealousy, a mechanical system offers reinforcement both in game terms and around the table.

Being trusted by a fellow agent lets you help her out in a pinch — or betray her far more effectively.

Starting Trust

You begin with 5 Trust points. From among your fellow player characters, pick one whom you most trust, and assign 3 Trust to your relationship with that agent. Then pick the one whom you least trust, and assign 0 Trust to your relationship with that agent. Assign 1 Trust to each of your relationships with up to two other members of your team. If you have fewer than four team mates, the excess Trust is lost. If you have only one other team mate, you each automatically assign 3 Trust points to the other; this score doesn't change unless one of you betrays the other.

You can assign these scores in secret, or openly, going around the circle of players. It's up to the Director (who may leave it up to the players) whether the players can change their initial assignments when they see what the other players think of their agents. For hard-core Mirror games, the players assign scores in secret, reveal them simultaneously, and do not change them until after the first operation.

The team has four members: Jack, Luc, Beatrice, and Ivan. Jack trusts Luc most; he gives him 3 Trust points. Jack trusts Ivan least; he gives him 0 Trust points. Jack gives Beatrice 1 Trust point, and the other goes away. Beatrice also trusts Luc most; she trusts Jack least. Luc trusts Beatrice most and Ivan least. Ivan trusts Luc the most and Beatrice the least. The result is:

Jack	*Luc 1, Beatrice 0, Ivan 1*
Luc	*Jack 3, Beatrice 3, Ivan 3*
Beatrice	*Jack 1, Luc 3, Ivan 0*
Ivan	*Jack 0, Luc 0, Beatrice 1*

The players write these numbers on their character sheets, or on note paper.

Rather than adjusting points in play, you can use poker chips, coins, ten-sided dice, or any other easily differentiated and readily available counters. Each agent gets one kind or color of counter to indicate Trust points, and the players distribute these points appropriately.

Jack uses red poker chips, Luc blue, Beatrice green, and Ivan white. Jack has one blue chip and one white chip; Luc has nine chips, three in each of red, green, and white; Beatrice has one red chip and three blue chips; Ivan has only one green chip.

Spending Trust

During play, you may spend other agents' Trust during scenes in which your two agents are both

present. Each Trust point acts like a point spent from any pool that the spender designates: if you already have their Trust, you could spend 1 Trust point to add 1 to another agent's Shooting die roll, or provide 1 point to spend on Interrogation for that last extra piece of intel. The Director may ask for a quick explanation of how you helped out ("I toss Jack a spare clip" or "I lean over the guy Jack is questioning and inhale meaningfully on my cigarette"), or just decide that the presence of a trusted comrade is what gives Jack that little extra oomph. You can only spend Trust to enhance an ability the other agent already possesses. Like other standard point spends, Trust spends happen before the die roll.

> *Beatrice has 1 Trust point from Jack and 3 from Luc. She can spend 1 point to aid Jack during the operation, and up to 3 points to aid Luc. She cannot spend any Trust to aid Ivan, as Ivan doesn't trust Beatrice enough to benefit.*

Players can keep track of spent Trust either by crossing out the numbers on their character sheet or notes, or by tossing the right color poker chip, correct denomination of coin, etc. to the aided player.

If all characters engaging in Cooperation (see p. 51) or Piggybacking (see p. 50) have positive Trust (above 0) with each other, their die roll gets an additional +1 without any spend required.

Changing Trust

After each operation, a player may reassign 1 Trust point from agent to agent. Players may also grant up to 1 Trust point to any agent by spending an experience point (see p. 94). Trust builds slowly.

> *Beatrice has become impressed with Jack's straightforward attitude during the last operation. She transfers 1 point of her Trust from Luc to Jack; now Jack writes "Beatrice 1" in his Trust line, and Luc changes his from "Beatrice 3" to "Beatrice 2." She also uses 1 experience point to grant 1 Trust point to Ivan; if no other player adjusted their Trust of Ivan, his sheet would read: "Jack 0, Luc 0, Beatrice 2."*

No player can assign more than 5 Trust to any other character.

At the end of this process, all Trust refreshes to its new level.

Betraying Trust

To betray a character's Trust, you spend his Trust to harm or hamper him, or to strengthen yourself in a confrontation or conflict with him. Change his Trust into Betrayal, and start spending: Every 1 point of Betrayal you spend either subtracts 3 from his General ability die, or completely cancels one of his Investigative abilities for that scene. Again, the Director may ask for a quick description of the relevant interference ("Jack finds his gun is empty" or "The witness is dead before he can spill the name"). Unlike regular ability points, or even Trust points, Betrayal points can be spent *after* your victim's die roll. You can also spend Betrayal to strengthen yourself; each 1 point of Betrayal adds 2 to your own ability die roll, but only for actions that harm or hamper that agent.

> *Beatrice now has 2 Trust from Jack and 4 from Luc. She betrays them in the middle of a gunfight, revealing that she's been working for the DGSE all along. She turns both Trust pools into Betrayal; she can now subtract 6 total points from Jack's dice during the confrontation, and 12 from Luc's. Jack tries shooting her anyhow, spending 3 points. Beatrice spends 1 Betrayal to lower Jack's spend to 0; he rolls a 4 and hits her anyway — until she spends another 1 Betrayal to retroactively change that result to a 1. She now spends 2 more of her Betrayal from Jack to add 4 to her own Shooting roll back at him, and hits regardless of her die roll. She has 2 Betrayal remaining from Jack and 12 from Luc.*

Once spent, however, Betrayal can never be regained.

You gain no bonus or advantage from spending Betrayal against a character suborned, dominated, or turned by the vampires: such a character already expects such an outcome.

A betrayed agent cannot spend his betrayer's Trust, even if he wanted to. Also, for the duration of the initial betrayal scene, only the betrayer can use his MOS.

> *Beatrice jumps into the agents' car and flees the scene with the vampire serum, leaving Jack wounded. Normally, Luc could use his Shooting MOS to automatically shoot Beatrice, or at least shoot out the tires, but not this time. Perhaps Beatrice has sabotaged his rifle, or he can't bring himself to fire on a former comrade.*

Even if the characters somehow patch things up, no betrayed character can ever grant Trust to his betrayer again.

Maps and Legends

Develop at least a sketch of your agent's past. It doesn't have to be too detailed — you want to leave some room for skills and cities and NPCs to get added to your dossier in play — but knowing your agent's

past can help you come up with Network contacts, Cover identities, and other game events in an organic and natural-seeming fashion. You don't have to reveal any of your past to the other players, at least not immediately. Enigmatically dropping hints about "the Regiment" or "some unpleasant times in Afghanistan" is true to the genre, certainly. In the final analysis, whether you reveal your past will depend more on your player group chemistry than on any other factor; great games can happen with total openness or with mystifying opacity.

Coming In

When did you come in to the clandestine life, and what did you do while you were inside? Your previous experience depends, more than any other factors, on your nationality (or that of your prior employer, anyway) and your age. You might have begun with military service (as many security service agents do) or started off in intelligence or security work.

Either way, you were likely recruited in your early 20s, although plenty of exceptions exist. You might easily have served in a younger agent's war: plenty of Gulf War vets, for example, worked as CIA paramilitaries or security contractors in Iraq after 2003; plenty of Red Army Afghanistan vets got sent to Chechnya. Always remember that straightforward intelligence or counter-intelligence work remains an option throughout: you served your agency in one or two or five countries in Europe for your whole career. Check Wikipedia or other references for more details and possibilities once you decide both. The possibilities below are only probabilities.

If you are in your 20s: You came in after 9/11, or 7/7, or the Moscow theater siege. If military, you served in Iraq, Libya, or Afghanistan (U.S. or NATO), in Chechnya or Georgia (Russia), in Lebanon or Gaza (Israel), in Sierra Leone (U.K.), or in Cote d'Ivoire (France); you may have seen peacekeeping duty in the Balkans or Africa, or mercenary work in the Congo, Somalia, Libya, or elsewhere.

Your covert work likely involved counter-terrorism against Al-Qaeda, Hezbollah, Hamas, Chechen groups (Russia), or FARC; counter-proliferation aimed at Iran, North Korea, Pakistan, or Syria; or supplying insurgents in Iraq or Lebanon (Iran). Global organized crime is likely a major factor in your experience.

Your mentor, if you have one, is in his 40s.

If you are in your 30s: You came in just as the Berlin Wall fell, and probably feel like you missed all the fun despite getting to deal with sudden, global Russian mafiyas. If military, you served in the Gulf War or Somalia (U.S. or NATO], the Balkans (U.S., NATO, or Russia), the Caucasus or Central Asia (USSR or Russia), Northern Ireland (U.K.), Lebanon or the West Bank (Israel); you may have seen peacekeeping duty in the Balkans or Africa, or mercenary work in the Congo, Balkans, Ethiopia, or elsewhere.

Your covert work likely involved counter-terrorism against Al-Qaeda, the GIA in Algeria (France), Chechen groups (Russia), or FARC; straight-up intelligence work against rivals like China (U.S. or U.K.), Russia (U.S. or NATO), or the U.S. (France or Russia); or supplying insurgents in Iraq or Lebanon (Iran).

Your mentor, if you have one, is in his 50s.

If you are in your 40s: You came in under Thatcher, Reagan, and Andropov, and got the last hard freeze of the Cold War as your on-the-job training. If military, you served in Afghanistan (USSR), Panama (U.S.), the Falklands or Northern Ireland (U.K.), Lebanon or the West Bank (Israel), or Iraq (Iran); you may have seen mercenary work in Latin America, Africa, or South Asia.

Your covert work likely involved supplying insurgents in Central America, Africa, or Southeast Asia, or straight-up intelligence work against your superpower rival. Western counter-terrorism focused on the classics: Palestinian, Irish, and Latin American groups almost exclusively, with a smattering of Libyans and Iranians; Soviet bloc assets might have worked with any of them.

Your mentor, if you have one, is in his 60s, possibly retired. Your protégé, if you have one, is in his 20s.

If you are in your 50s: You came in during the Cold War. If military, you served in Northern Ireland (U.K.), the Congo (France), Afghanistan (USSR), Lebanon or the West Bank (Israel), or just possibly Vietnam or the Yom Kippur War (someone 18 years old in 1971 is 59 in 2012); you may have seen peacekeeping duty in Africa or the Middle East, or mercenary work in Latin America, Africa, Cyprus, or Southeast Asia.

Your covert work likely involved supplying insurgents in Central America, Africa, or Southeast Asia, or straight-up intelligence work against your superpower rival or revolutionary Iran. Western counter-terrorism focused on radical Communist movements in the First World (Baader-Meinhof, Red Army Faction, Red Brigades, etc.) as well as the PLO, PFLP, IRA, FARC, etc; Soviet bloc assets might have worked with any of them.

Your mentor, if you have one, is in his 70s, almost certainly retired. Your protégé, if you have one, is in his 30s.

FIRST BLOOD

The standard ***Night's Black Agents*** campaign begins with the player characters discovering the existence of vampires, or even just clues pointing to the existence of vampires, down in the shadows where the agents still dwell. That's where the story of vampire hunters naturally begins. But it's not the only way to tell that story.

You can start *in medias res,* with each agent having found out about the vampires during his previous career, only just now finding that others know of the undead threat. In such a campaign, decide how your agent found out, and what her reaction was to this nightmarish discovery. What did she do? Who did she tell? Did she get burned or bounced for turning in a crazy report about blood-drinking terrorists?

In some campaigns, only some of the agents (or only one agent) start out knowing about the vampires; the others find out during play. This works well with secret Drives, in or out of Mirror games.

Getting Out

And then you left. Were you burned out, or just burned? Did you fall, did you jump, or were you pushed? Did you leave under a cloud, under protest, or under fire? Was your cover blown, or just your career? Did you go alone, or part of a purge? Did you get an exit interview or an ambush? Did you get too close to something, or too far off the reservation? Was it office politics, or your politics, or geopolitics?

Answer the standard questions: Whose idea was it? When did you leave? Where did you go next? What were you doing right before you got out? How did you get (or give) the word? And most importantly, why did you get out? You can leave some of these answers a little bit murky; perhaps the reasons don't matter now, or perhaps you're still holding onto a high card you want to keep close to the vest. Indeed, you might not even know why your agency suddenly revoked your passport and canceled your pension.

Meeting Up

Finally, bring the player character group together. This part is collaborative, even if you do all the rest in secret: How did you meet the other player characters? Were you all recruited for the first operation in the game, or have you worked as a crew together for years? Did you all hook up at once, or did two or three of you work together before? Do you have any grudges, favors, or memories of the other agents from a while back? Only decide as much of this as feels right or natural; you can collaboratively build out the details as the game progresses once you establish some basic backstory.

RULES

Once you've built your agent, it becomes the job of the Director to enmesh him and his companions in the toils of a vampiric conspiracy. Simultaneously hunters and hunted, the agents must mount operations to discover the extent of the vampire conspiracy, to spoil ongoing vampire operations, to block or survive vampire attacks on themselves, and eventually to weaken and then destroy the vampire conspiracy. Each of these operations is the equivalent of a "scenario" or "adventure" in other roleplaying games: a discrete unit of story and action.

All of these operations — discovery, spoiling, survival, and attack — combine two elements: investigation and confrontation. (If that seems too clinical, "spying" and "fighting" make a good shorthand.) Sometimes, an operation begins with investigation — discovering your enemies' agents in a city, or casing a known opposition front — and ends in confrontation, usually violent. Sometimes, the reverse is the case: a new vampire attack is the confrontation, which the agents must survive while investigating how best to kill or divert their attacker. Some operations switch back and forth between elements, or combine them throughout.

For each element, ***Night's Black Agents*** has rules designed to keep the story moving at thriller speed.

Clues and Spends

The GUMSHOE engine, which powers the ***Night's Black Agents*** rules, separates the business of discovering information from the business of confronting (or escaping) the opposition. In espionage novels and films, the emphasis isn't on finding the information in the first place. Usually, the heroes are awash in facts and intel, trying to piece them together to deduce the opposition's plans, or to plan a counterstrike of their own.

When you do see information withheld from characters, it's seldom portrayed as a failure on the part of the competent, fact-gathering heroes. Instead the writers show an external force preventing them from applying their abilities. In a spy thriller, you might get the stonewall from your enigmatic boss, or find a witness dead when you return to question her. Information is only withheld when it makes the story more interesting — usually by placing the heroes at a handicap while they move forward in the storyline. In GUMSHOE terms, they're not trying to get an available clue and failing; they're either using an ability for which no clue is available, or the failure itself is the clue: the boss' stonewall is a Bureaucracy clue that your own agency is involved, the dead witness provides information on his killers' methods via Forensic Pathology.

Of course part of the fun is saying things like "Keyhole satellite imagery shows a heavy Revolutionary Guard presence at the black site" or "Chatter indicates an upswing in Al-Qaeda activity in Romania" or "We sweated the meeting place out of their bagman." You can still say, and do, all of those things in ***Night's Black Agents.*** It's just that GUMSHOE doesn't make you roll to succeed in doing them: those are automatic successes with (in the above examples) Data Recovery, Traffic Analysis, and Interrogation. But what do you do with that intel? What plan do you foil? What strike do you launch? The action really starts after the investigators — the agents — gather the clues.

Intelligence operations are not about finding clues. They are about interpreting the clues you do find.

Figuring out the conspiracy, or planning an operation, is hard enough for a group of analysts, without someone withholding half the pieces from them. GUMSHOE, therefore, makes the finding of clues all but automatic, as long as you get to the right place in the story and have the right ability. That's when the fun part begins, when the players try to put the components of the puzzle together.

TIP FOR PLAYERS: CONTAINING SPECULATION

Investigative scenarios often bog down into speculative debate between players about what *could be* happening. Many things *can* be happening, but only one thing *is*. If more than one possible explanation ties together the clues you have so far, you need more clues.

Whenever you get stuck, **get out and gather more information.**

DVD SPIT STRAIGHT

Spitballing about the possibilities is part of the fun of any investigative game (and a cunning Director will take notes and plan accordingly!), but don't let it hurt the momentum of what's going on at the table. Focus on connecting the dots you have, not imagining what dots might be out there. As a Director, meandering speculation is a sign that you need to throw more information at the agents — don't be stingy about it, particularly for the first few operations of a campaign.

Gathering Clues

Gathering clues is simple. All you have to do is:

- get yourself into a scene where relevant information can be gathered,
- have the right ability to discover the clue, and
- tell the Director that you're using it.

As long as you do these three things, you will never fail to gain a piece of necessary information. *It is never dependent on a die roll.* If you ask for it, you will get it.

You can specify exactly what you intend to achieve: "I use Chemistry to test the blood sample for silver."

You can convey a wider speculation to the Director: "I use Human Terrain to find a respected priest in the village who's worried about the disappearances." You sensibly guess that the town is infested, but you don't want to waste time going from NPC to NPC trying to read the Director's mind and figure out which one contains the magic plot pellet. Nor should you. In this example, if the Director planned on having the local police chief provide the info instead of the local priest, she can either change the information's source retroactively or tell you something like: "Before you can talk to Father Marko, a nervous fat man in a uniform pulls you aside. Fortunately, he's very concerned about the strangers in the old castle and eager to get your help with them."

Or you can engage in a more general informational fishing expedition: "I use Notice to search the alley," or "I use Art History to check out the portrait."

If your suggested action corresponds to a clue in the scenario notes, the Director provides you the information arising from the clue.

You're investigating the mysterious SUV that has snatched your bang-and-burn man, Desmond Fike (normally played by Scott, who is absent for the current session) off the streets of Paris. Tracing it to a garage in Montreuil, you cautiously enter.

Director: "The foundation of this garage looks strange, not your standard concrete pour job."

You: "Strange, huh? I draw on my knowledge of Architecture to see if I can tell anything about it from its style of construction."

Director: "From the characteristic slab floors and protruding line of eroded limestone along the southern edge, you suspect it sits on the remains of a medieval building: possibly Romanesque, maybe the 12th century."

Some clues would be obvious to a trained agent immediately upon entering a scene. These passive clues are provided by the Director without prompting.

Director: "As you draw closer to the SUV, you spot droplets of what looks like blood on the floor near it."

SIMPLE SEARCHES

Many clues can be found without any ability whatsoever. If an ordinary person could credibly find a clue simply by looking in a specified place, the clue discovery occurs automatically. You, the reader, wouldn't need to be a trained spy to find a bloody footprint on the carpet in your living room, or notice a manila envelope taped to the underside of a table at the local pub. By that same logic, the agents don't require specific abilities to find them, either. When players specify that they're searching an area for clues, they're performing what we call a **simple search**. To perform simple searches, they must narrow down the scope of their examination by specifying a particular area or object within the scene:

- "I look through his hard drive."
- "Is there anything in the van?"
- "Luc is checking the bottles in the surgery."

On the other hand, characters who do have relevant abilities can glean clues without getting this specific. With Notice, clues become available to a player simply by being on the scene and indicating that you're looking for them.

Scenarios suggest which clues are passive and which are active, but your Director will adjust these in play depending on how much guidance you seem to need. On a night when you're cooking with gas, the Director will sit back and let you prompt her for passive clues. When you're bogging down, she may volunteer what would normally be active clues.

Early in the series, or on a night when everyone's experiencing a collective caffeine crash, the Director might instead run the garage clue, above, like this:

Director: "The foundation of this garage looks strange, not your standard concrete pour job. Who has Architecture?"

You: "I do."

Director: "From the characteristic slab floors and protruding line of eroded limestone along the southern edge, you suspect it sits on the

remains of a medieval building: possibly Romanesque, maybe the 12th century."

For groups preferring to hide the game terms, the Director can rely on an Investigative Ability Worksheet (see p. 214 of the Addenda). Knowing from the sheet which characters have which abilities, the Director supplies passive clues without stopping to ask. Given a choice between multiple PCs who have the same ability, the Director picks either a character who hasn't had a chance to shine lately, or the one with the highest pool in the relevant ability. The Director might stick with one approach, or switch between them as the moment seems to demand. However, characters who are directly present should always take precedence over those listening in over a comlink or cell phone.

Director: "The foundation of this garage looks strange, not your standard concrete pour job." [Checks the worksheet, seeing that, of the various characters present, you have the highest Architecture rating.) Addressing you, she says: "From the characteristic slab floors and protruding line of eroded limestone along the southern edge, you suspect it sits on the remains of a medieval building: possibly Romanesque, maybe the 12th century."

The exact give-and-take surrounding the provision of clues will vary seamlessly based on the situation. Typically the Director lets the players take the lead, subtly juicing the process as needed.

For each scene, the Director designates a **core clue**. This is the clue you absolutely need to move to the next scene, and thus to complete the entire operation. Directors will avoid making core clues available only with the use of obscure investigative abilities. (For that matter, the character creation system is set up so that the group as a whole will have access to all, or nearly all, of these abilities.)

Spends and Benefits

Certain clues allow you to gain **special benefits** by spending points from the relevant Investigative ability pool. During your first few scenarios, your Director will offer you the opportunity to spend additional points as you uncover these clues. After that, it's up to you to ask if it there's anything to be gained by spending extra time or effort on a given clue. You can even propose specific ways to improve your already good result; if your suggestion is persuasive or entertaining, the Director may award you a special benefit not mentioned in her scenario notes.

Each benefit costs either 1 or 2 points from the relevant pool, depending on the difficulty of the additional action and the scope of the reward. When asking you if you want to purchase the benefit, the Director always tells you how much it will cost. Additional information gained provides flavor and options, but is never required to resolve the situation or move on to a new scene. Often it makes the agent seem clever, powerful, or heroic. It may grant you benefits useful later in the scenario, frequently by making a favorable impression on supporting characters. If you think of your GUMSHOE game as a TV series, an extra benefit gives the actor playing your character a juicy spotlight scene.

"What do I know about Montreuil?" you ask. "I have 3 points in History."

The Director answers: "It began as a monastic settlement around 780 A.D. The monastery was the main draw here until the French Revolution, when it was shut down — this is probably one of the old monastery complex buildings. Plus, it's where the French film industry began in the 1890s."

"That seems pretty sketchy. I'll bet there's more going on here, if only because this was once consecrated ground. Ideal vampire turf … I want a full information dump on this place; can I spend 2 points of History to get it?"

"Uh, sure," the Director says. She actually has two pieces of information, labeled as 1-point spends for Occult and Architecture, but History works, too, with a bigger spend.

She gives the Architecture spend first: "One of the designers of Notre Dame was Pierre du Montreuil; he may have built other works of sacred architecture in his home town for the monks." Which leads into the Occult information: "Certainly a dissident sect of Freemasons thought so when they took over a 12th-century building in Montreuil as their cult center in 1791. The Ordo Sola Obscura, the Order of the Obscured Sun. They vanished during the Occupation."

"Wait," you say: "Obscured Sun? That's got to tie into the camera obscura, which means that film thing probably leads somewhere too. Plus, who likes an obscured sun more than vampires?"

Now you have three more leads to follow: the career of Pierre du Montreuil, who may have built sorcerous or ritual crypts; the Sola Obscura and their possible heirs in modern France; and any vampiric involvement in the film industry in Paris. Plus, you're pretty sure there's a medieval crypt under here just boiling

with dark ritual power: "Everybody get those sun lamps out; when we find it, we're going into that crypt on full UV."

The Director says "That's going to take a lot of power," as she adjusts her notes to reflect that the sorcerous darkness in the crypt has lost the element of surprise.

Spending points on benefits gives often you an advantage, perhaps in a later General conflict. Thus it is to your advantage to propose cool benefits to the Director, even when they aren't specified in the scenario.

The act of spending points for benefits is called a **spend**. The Director's scenario notes may specify that you get Benefit X for a 1-point spend, or Benefit Y for a 2-point spend.

Directors of great mental agility who feel comfortable granting their players influence over the details of the narrative may allow them to specify the details of a special benefit. Any Director worth her salt will allow you to suggest a special benefit, at least.

If you wish to make a spend in a situation where the Director has no special benefit to offer you, and neither of you can think of one that pertains at all to the operation, you do not lose the points you wish to spend.

DVD AN EMPTY POOL ONLY MAKES YOU MOSTLY BADASS

Directors and agents should keep in mind that any Investigative abilities you bought can still be used, even if the pool is zero. It just means there is no chance of getting the benefits that come from a spend. Lots of empty Investigative ability pools shouldn't bring a mission grinding to a halt, but it is a signifier that some sort of climax lurks around the corner.

Even if you spend all the points in your Investigative ability pool, you still keep your rating in the ability; you still automatically succeed with it.

The mechanical role of Investigative pool points is to manage spotlight time, and as a method for the players and Keeper to signal "oncoming coolness" to each other. A player who says "Can I spend a Bureaucracy point here?" is requesting something cool for his agent to do or discover during the scene. When the Director says, "Do you want to spend an Art History point here?" she's signaling that there's something awesome available during this scene that she thinks the player (or players) would enjoy. This repartee will eventually become nearly seamless and automatic.

Inconspicuous Clues

Sometimes the characters instinctively notice something without actively looking for it. Often this situation occurs in places they're moving through casually and don't regard as scenes in need of intensive searching. The team might pass by a concealed door in a museum corridor, spot a droplet of blood on the marble of an immaculate hotel lobby, or spot a sigil against the evil eye in the graffiti on a side street. Interpersonal abilities can also be used to find inconspicuous clues. The classic example is of a character whose demeanor or behavioral tics establish them as suspicious.

It's unreasonable to expect players to ask to use their various abilities in what appears to be an innocuous transitional scene. Otherwise they'd have to spend minutes of game time with every change of scene, running down their abilities in obsessive checklist fashion. That way madness lies.

Instead the Director asks which character has the highest current pool in the ability in question. (When in doubt for what ability to use for a basic search, the Director defaults to Notice.)

EXAMPLE BENEFITS

Here are some special benefits you might get from Investigative point spends.

The benefit gives you a **potential advantage** in a future contest of General abilities:

- your Military Science spend lets you notice that the guards are unfamiliar with their assault rifles.
- your Electronic Surveillance spend uncovers a CCTV blind spot in the alley behind the warehouse.
- your Chemistry spend detects the use of additives in the SUV's fuel, implying it's been souped up by an expert driver.
- your Diagnosis spend identifies the militia as qat addicts; they'll be sleepy in the afternoon but jittery and alert all evening.

The benefit gives a **favorable impression** to supporting characters:

- your Art History spend lets you recognize and recover stolen artwork for the original owner, who will then be more inclined to help you.
- your Architecture spend discovers a hidden room where there is a hostage who can either give clues or even help with General abilities.
- once you find the hostage, you spend Reassurance to calm his nerves.
- a High Society (or Flirting) spend in an exclusive nightclub lets you infiltrate a suspect's social circle.

The benefit can lead to a **flashback** scene, which can get you more info, advance your personal arc, or just give you a cool emotional or story moment:

- you find the body of a old colleague; a Tradecraft spend lets you remember that he was a bulldog who never gave up on a file. Perhaps his records are still around here?
- a Criminology spend allows you to specify that you helped engineer a famous diamond robbery in Amsterdam a few years back.
- with a Pharmacy spend you remember seeing your partner die of that same poison in Helsinki.

Point spends can help you **resolve moral dilemmas** or **avoid cover-blowing** incidents:

- a little enhanced Interrogation will make the drug dealer rattle off his whole contact list, but you left the Agency because of that kind of thing. A 2-point spend of Streetwise or Flattery lets you subtly pump him for the same information.
- Cop Talk with the Minsk security police might get you a core clue for free, but a 2-point Negotiation will buy the same information out of the bus driver without going into a file somewhere.
- a little 1-point Flirting with the receptionist encourages her to ignore your unauthorized use of the key card.

Extra point spends might **speed up** an operation:

- a Forensic Pathology spend lets you run all of the DNA samples you gathered in the shipping container in half an hour, instead of half a day.
- a spend on Urban Survival means that you already know the layout of Gdansk, rather than having to check Google Maps in the middle of a tail.
- a Traffic Analysis spend lets you figure out where the Organizatsiya boss stashes his secret mistress, letting you hit him without his whole army of guards.

A really cool spend may even let you **refresh some Stability** points (see p. 93).

WHO FINDS IT?

Sometimes the Director knows that a clue will definitely be found during a given scene, but must decide which character does so. Most often, the clue, though easily found on a cursory examination of a scene, will be somewhat inconspicuous. The bloody footprint might be under a piece of furniture. The table with the envelope taped to it might be on the other side of the diner. Because it is mildly inconspicuous, it doesn't make sense that everybody will spot it at the exact same second.

If two or more pools are equal, it goes to the one with the highest rating. If ratings are also equal, their characters find the clue at the same time.

> *To your surprise, you find a man hiding in the crypt under the garage, wearing filthy sweats and plastic shoes, covered in bruises and dried blood, and blinking in your UV beams. He says that he was captured by vampires and forcibly drained because of his blood's special qualities. In fact, he's a complete Renfield, broken to the vampires' will and planted here as a spy and listening device. According to the Director's notes, his story is both vague and a bit too enthusiastically told — in other words, it should ping any agent's Bullshit Detector. Both your character and Beatrice have this popular and widely useful ability, but you have 1 more point in your pool than Beatrice does.*
>
> *The Director addresses you: "You get a strong sense that the guy is afraid of you, and telling a rehearsed story to boot."*

If one or more characters have a relevant ability, choose the agent with the highest current pool in that ability. If no one has a relevant ability, or no ability seems to apply to the situation, ask yourself which player seems most in need of a win. Pick either the player who has received the least time in the spotlight, or whose character has suffered the worst setbacks, during the current session.

This technique of doling out positive moments according to dramatic need can also be applied to other benefits, from lucky breaks to romantic opportunities, to which no ability clearly applies.

Tests

A test occurs when the outcome of an ability use is in doubt. Tests apply to General abilities only. Unlike information gathering attempts, tests carry a fairly high chance of failure. They may portend dire consequences if you lose, provide advantages if you win, or both.

Even in the case of General abilities, the Director should call for tests only at dramatically important points in the story, and for tasks of exceptional difficulty. Most General ability uses should allow automatic successes, with possible bonuses on point spends, just like Investigative abilities.

There are two types of test: simple tests and contests.

DIE ROLLS

All die rolls in GUMSHOE use a single ordinary (six-sided) die, or d6.

Simple Tests

A simple test occurs when the character attempts an action without active resistance from another person or entity. Examples include driving a treacherous road, jumping a gorge, sneaking into an unguarded building, binding a wound, shooting a target, planting a bomb, remembering to bring a magnet along, or resisting vampiric mental powers.

The Director determines how hard any given action is by assigning it a Difficulty Number, or Difficulty, ranging from 2 to 8 (occasionally even higher), where 2 offers only a slim chance of failure, 4 is the norm, and 8 verges on the impossible. The player rolls a single die; if the result is equal to or higher than the Difficulty, the character succeeds. Before rolling the die, the player may choose to spend any number of points from the relevant ability pool, adding these to the final die result. Players who forget to specify the number of points they want to spend before rolling are stuck with the unmodified result.

As you spend points from your ability pool, your *pool* dwindles but your *rating* stays the same.

In the game world, expenditure of pool points in this way represents special effort and concentration by the character, the kind you can muster only so many times during the course of an operation.

> *With the UV lamps fading, and the ladder into the crypt knocked aside by the howling Renfield, you need to jump for the opening above you before the roiling clouds of blackness close in. You have 8 points in your Athletics pool. Knowing that sunset is approaching fast, you decide to go all out. You spend half of your pool, 4 points, on the attempt. You roll a 5, to which you add the 4 spent Athletics points, for a final result of 9. With a mighty leap, your fingers can grip the stone edges of the opening. Straightening your arms with propulsive force, you hurl yourself balletically into the garage. Sliding the*

flagstone back over the hole is the work of moments, sealing the vampires' tool back into the blackness.

DIFFICULTY NUMBERS AND STORY PACING

Just as the GUMSHOE system keeps the story moving by making all crucial clues accessible to the characters, Directors must ensure that tests and contests essential to forward narrative momentum can be easily overcome. Assign relatively low Difficulties of 4 or less to these crucial plot points. Reserve especially hard Difficulty numbers for obstacles that provide interesting but nonessential benefits.

For example, if the characters have to sneak past the guards into the into the Bucharest mortuary in order to stage the final confrontation, assign the relatively low Difficulty Number of 4 to the task. If it seems to the players that they "realistically" ought to have a tougher time of it, insert a detail justifying their ease of success. The guards superstitiously ignore one persistent cold spot, or the agents find a sentry drained of blood by the thirsty — and impatient — monster he was guarding.

OPTION: YOU NEVER FAIL

Even a failed test might be successful, but at some other dramatic or personal cost. This is especially useful for General tests that still have to succeed for the story to progress speedily or interestingly: jumping a fence into the enemy compound, or fixing a truck to escape a remote labor camp, or winning a card game to impress an arms trafficker. You didn't jump over the fence, but you eventually clambered over it — after cutting yourself badly on the razor wire. You didn't fix the engine thoroughly, so you can only get to a deserted farmhouse before the truck overheats and throws a rod. You won the hand, but his girlfriend saw you cheat.

Often, such failed tests (of Digital Intrusion and Infiltration, among others) succeed at the cost of adding more Heat (see p. 88).

Agents are hardened adventurers, instinctively aware of their limitations and of the kinds of obstacles they face. Directors may choose to reveal Difficulties, especially for conventional obstacles like walls, commercial burglar alarms, and guard dogs. For other obstacles, the Director may give rough verbal indications of how hard a test seems to the naked eye:

- "Medieval ceilings are low, so it should be in reach if you jump."
- "You've jumped higher. And you've fallen short of lower."
- "If you can get a finger hold, it'll be a miracle."

Regardless, the Director never reveals the Difficulty of a Sense Trouble test (see p. 142).

In Dust mode, there's no such thing as a retake if you miss. Losing points is meant to grind away at resources and resolve, and agents are frequently tired or distracted, their senses unreliable. To truly evoke that feel, the Director never reveals, or even hints at, any Difficulty Numbers.

Retries

The test represents the character's best chance to succeed. Once you fail, you've shot your wad and cannot retry unless you take some other supporting action that would credibly increase your odds of success. If allowed to do this, you must spend more pool points than you did on the previous attempt. If you can't afford it, you can't retry.

You've found Desmond Fike at last! The bad news is that he's heavily sedated and chained to his own stash of plastique — armed with his own detonators, wired to the locks. Your only hope is to disarm the bomb with your Explosive Devices ability. The Director describes it as "hastily wired, but by a real pro," hinting at the bomb's true Difficulty of 4. Fortunately, you've bought Explosive Devices up to 5, so you spend 2 points on the attempt. Sadly, you roll a 1, and the Director describes the way the digital readout on the bomb speeds up and begins to emit a shrill series of beeps.

You have one more shot before the plastique goes up, taking the building (and yourself) with it. To qualify for this attempt, you must spend at least 3 Explosive Devices points. Since that's all you have left, you burn them all, muttering "When in doubt, Desmond always says to cut the blue wire. Red's too obvious, he says." This time, you roll a 2, just enough to disconnect the blue wire as the digital readout stops and blinks "00:02" over and over.

Piggybacking

When a group of characters act in concert to perform a task together, they designate one to take the lead. That character makes a simple test, spending any number of his own pool points toward the task, as usual. All other characters pay 1 point from their relevant pools in order to gain the benefits of the leader's action. These points are not added to the leader's die result. For every character who is unable to pay this piggybacking cost, either because he lacks pool points or does not have the ability at all, the Difficulty of the attempt increases by 2.

With Desmond back in play (Scott showed up late to the game session, but he brought ribs!) he can describe the route the SUV took after it nabbed him, even though his head was in a bag the whole time. (Desmond makes a 2-point spend of Urban Survival to do this, and the Director allows it because it's completely in genre.) A quick look at the map later, and you've figured out that the snatchers' boss operates out of a Masonic lodge in the 5th arrondisement.

You, Desmond, Ivan, and Beatrice plan to break into the lodge and dump the boss' computer to a flash drive. With her Infiltration of 8, Beatrice takes the lead. You, Desmond, and Ivan have 2, 4, and 0 points in your Infiltration pools, respectively. You and Desmond pay 1 point apiece, dropping your pool to 1 and Desmond's to 3. Because Ivan has no points to spend, the Difficulty of the sneak increases from 5 to 7. You might have left him behind, but he's the stereotypical Ukrainian hacker — his Digital Intrusion will come in handy if there's some sort of protection on the hard drive. Beatrice spends 4 points and rolls a 3 — exactly what you needed.

With such a close result, the Director narrates a razor's-edge victory, singling out the empty-pooled character as the one who nearly brings it all crashing down: "Entering the lodge master's office, Ivan trips the door alarm in his haste to slide behind the computer. Beatrice spins and stabs out the factory installed code on this system — the red light goes back to green and everyone gives thanks that nobody changes default pass codes."

In many instances a group cannot logically act in concert. Only one character can drive a car at one time. Two characters with Preparedness check their individual kits in sequence, rather than checking a single kit at the same time.

Cooperation

When two characters cooperate toward a single goal, they agree which of them is undertaking the task directly, and which is assisting. The leader may spend any number of points from her pool, adding them to the die roll. The assistant may pay any number of points from his pool. All but one of these is applied to the leader's die roll.

Quickly checking the downloaded files, Ivan realizes that the Masonic lodge is the headquarters — and main processing center — of a Polish human trafficking ring. The team immediately heads for the basement, to see if they can free the captives.

CONTINUING CHALLENGES

Some tasks, such as battering down a door or breaking through a complex computer firewall, simply take more time than a single test represents, whether that test takes a round or a day of effort. Or from another angle, multiple tests more accurately and dramatically represent productive, repeated effort. For these continuing challenges, assign the obstacle a pool representing the base Difficulty of doing it all at once unaided: this will generally be 8 or higher, often much higher. The tests per se use the standard Difficulty of 4.

The players may take turns, cooperate on each action, or use any other means at their disposal in a series of tests: Athletics to batter down a door, or Digital Intrusion to penetrate a firewall, for example. The points they roll and spend accumulate; when they have enough points to overcome the initial Difficulty, the task is done. No points or rolls spent on a failed test add to the total.

You're trying to shove an immense stone sarcophagus across the floor to blockade the door against the inevitable ghoul attack. The Director sets the Difficulty of moving such an enormous thing at an arbitrarily high 20. You spend 3 points from your Athletics pool of 10, and roll a 6. That's a 9 total, and the sarcophagus slowly scrapes toward the door. The next round, the ghouls are closer. Hoarding your Athletics pool in case of a fight, you spend only 1 point shoving the sarcophagus, and roll a 2. This failure adds nothing to your total, which remains 9. Panicked, you spend 5 points and roll a 3; you add that result of 8 to your total, for 17. You have 1 point left in your Athletics pool, and 3 to go before the sarcophagus blocks the entrance, and those ghouls are getting closer yet …

Some tasks are just impossible no matter how many tests you make: tearing open a vault door barehanded, for example.

This is a new rule suitable for any GUMSHOE game.

When you get there, you find a dozen girls behind a complex gate-and-grille system of Belle Epoque wrought iron. It's opened by an immense wheel that must take superhuman strength to turn. Desmond and Beatrice decide to gimmick the counter-gearing so they can pry the grille open instead. (The Director expected the team to just cooperate with

Athletics to force the wheel to turn, but this is just as cool, really.) This will be a Mechanics test, so Desmond (Mechanics 4) and Beatrice (Mechanics 3) take it. Ivan has only 1 point left in his Mechanics pool, so there's no point in his assisting, because he needs to have at least 1 point left over to pay the cooperation cost; you don't have any in yours, so you and he watch the stairs for the guards.

Both Desmond and Beatrice spend all of their remaining points. His 4 points add to the die roll as usual; Beatrice spends 3, but adds only 2 to the result. Desmond's roll is a 3, to which 4 and 2 are added for a result of 9. This beats the unrevealed Difficulty Number of 7, and the grille pops open, releasing the prisoners. With a downloaded hard drive, a van load of human intel, and a big crimp put in the bad guys' Paris schemes, this operation is over and you all head for the safe house.

Contests

Contests occur when two characters, often a player character and a supporting character controlled by the Director, actively attempt to thwart one another. In the GUMSHOE system, the Director can escalate between three separate types of contest, depending on how dramatic the scene should be.

- **Player-facing contests** are for quick, active, "one and done" sorts of contests: i.e., using Athletics to toss a grenade into a limousine.
- **Full contests** amp up the drama; they're "showdowns" or "level boss" sorts of contests: i.e., using Athletics to beat another skier to the bottom of the mountain.
- **Thriller chases** are for action set pieces; in the spy thriller genre, as the name indicates, usually chase scenes: i.e., using Athletics for a full-blown parkour chase over the rooftops of Algiers.

In theory, any contest of General abilities can use any of these three layers of contest, but in practice some contests just work better at different levels or as simple tests. Preparedness, for example, is almost always going to be a simple test; Filch will almost always be a player-facing contest; Digital Intrusion might be a hack of an unwary system with a simple test, a player-facing contest to pull off a DoS attack, or a full contest against a corporate cybersecurity professional trying to trace you in response. As the examples above indicate, Athletics might be any sort of contest, in addition to simple tests like jumping over a fence.

Combat abilities (Hand-to-Hand, Shooting, and Weapons) use the Combat rules in the next chapter (see p. 61) to overcome violent opposition. Hitting a nonliving target with a pistol or a thrown knife, for example, is a simple test — but a marksmanship competition against an opponent is likely to be a full contest.

Player-Facing Contests

Player-facing contests work exactly the same as simple tests: you roll against a Difficulty, and spend ability pool points to add to your die roll. The one exception: there are no "retries" against active opposition. If you fail, you either suffer the consequences immediately or kick the contest up to a full contest as your opponent gets a chance to counter your failed move.

It's called a "player-facing" contest because the Director doesn't roll. To see if an agent is surprised, the player makes a Sense Trouble test. To see if an agent surprises an NPC, the player makes an Infiltration test. The player character's fate — the die roll and any spent points — is entirely in the player's hands. The Difficulty in a player-facing contest is usually 4, unless the Director shifts it up or down. Often, this shift appears in her notes as either an Alertness Modifier or a Stealth Modifier. Note that these modify the player character's Difficulty in the contest.

Alertness Modifier

An opponent's **Alertness Modifier** represents its ability to sense your activities, whether through standard senses like sight and hearing, or exotic ones like echolocation, blood scent, or telepathy. When you try to sneak past it, the Alertness Modifier is applied to your base Infiltration Difficulty, which is usually 4. Where a technical hack is used to breach a secure zone, you might instead oppose Digital Intrusion against an Alertness Modifier. It also applies to Surveillance tests when you're trying to observe the opponent without being observed in turn, or when you're trying to slip their surveillance of you.

The Director might also apply an Alertness Modifier to tests of Conceal, Disguise, Filch, Gambling, or any other activity the agents covertly attempt under potential observation.

The Alertness Modifier reflects all of the opponent's sensing capabilities: natural, supernatural, and technological. A drug-addled guard, or a sleeping vampire, might have a *negative* Alertness Modifier, making your Difficulty lower and your contest easier.

Stealth Modifier

An opponent with a **Stealth Modifier** is either significantly harder or easier to spot with Sense Trouble or Surveillance. It alters the Difficulty number

for that or similar tests. In keeping with GUMSHOE's player-facing approach, the Stealth Modifier appears in lieu of an opponent's Infiltration or Surveillance ability. Instead of rolling Infiltration (or Conceal, or Filch, or Surveillance, or …) for an opponent, have an observing player character make a Sense Trouble (or Conceal, or Surveillance, or …) test against a Difficulty of 4, adjusted by the Stealth Modifier.

Full Contests

In a full contest, each character acts in turn. The first to fail a roll of the contested ability loses. The Director decides who acts first based on the contest's logic and circumstances. For example, in a chase, the character who bolts from the scene acts first. Where the characters seem to be acting at the same time, the one with the lowest rating in the relevant ability acts first. In the event of a tie, supporting characters act before player characters. In the event of a tie between player characters, the player who arrived last for the current session goes first in the contest.

The first character to act makes a test of the ability in question. If he fails, he loses the contest. If he succeeds, the second character then makes a test. This continues until one character loses, at which point the other one wins.

Typically each character attempts to beat a Difficulty of 4.

On the way to meet a contact in the Turkish national police force, you catch sight of a pale figure in wraparound sunglasses following you: a dhampir? Your Surveillance pool is 6; your tail's is 10. As the eluding character initiating the contest, yours is the first character to act. You spend 1 point, dropping your pool to 5. Your ensuing roll is a 4, for a result of 5. This beats the standard Difficulty of 4.

You describe your success: "Sidling into an outdoor bazaar, I pick up a newspaper and use it to hide my face in the crowd."

On behalf of the dhampir, the Director spends 3 and rolls a 3, for a result of 6. It's still stalking you. The Director narrates accordingly: "Its face stays pointed directly at you, even as its body eels through the throng toward your position."

You spend another point, taking your Surveillance down to 4. You roll a 6, for a final result of 7. The Director invites you to explain what you've done to dry clean your trail. "I see a small Armenian Orthodox church at the bottom of the steps. I duck inside, figuring the holy water font or the crosses will throw off the thing's vampire powers."

DARKNESS

Both spies and vampires stick to the shadows, working and killing in the dark. GUMSHOE considers only three levels of darkness worth measuring. The Director should apply bonuses and penalties only to abilities and tests with a primarily visual component: Sense Trouble, for instance, depends more heavily on sound and combat reflexes than it does on visual acuity, it might only increase in Difficulty by 1 in pitch blackness. Similarly, dogs depend primarily on smell: darkness will have no effect on their Alertness bonus or on the Hit Threshold of their foes. Night-vision optics (see p. 101) negate some or all of these penalties, although light-intensifying gear (but not IR gear) is useless in pitch blackness. The Director should make sure that no level of darkness makes getting a core clue require a spend, although if it's in a book (for example), the agent may have to wait for a light to read it.

Night: This is the level of darkness of a normal, modern city at night, an interior room during daytime with its lights off, or the countryside in bright moonlight. Opponents' visual Alertness Modifiers go down by 1; their Stealth Modifiers increase by 1. Hit Thresholds (see p. 124) go up by 1 at Near range or longer. Difficulties for visual tasks (e.g., bomb disposal, car repair) increase by 1 without good lighting nearby.

Dark: This is the level of darkness of a city street at night with no streetlights, a building at night with its lights off, or the countryside at night with no moon. Opponents' visual Alertness Modifiers go down by 2; their Stealth Modifiers increase by 2. Hit Thresholds go up by 1 at Close range, and by 2 at Near range or longer. Difficulties for visual tasks increase by 2.

Pitch Black: This is total darkness, with no light source anywhere: a sealed shipping container or an underground crypt, for example. Opponents' visual Alertness Modifiers go down by 3; their Stealth Modifiers increase by 3. Hit Thresholds go up by 1 at Point-Blank range, by 2 at Close range, and by 3 at Near range or longer. The Difficulties for visual tasks increase by 3; the Difficulty of all Stability tests increases by 1.

Flashlights: In general, agents with flashlights or tactical lights (or in a room with a flashlight lit) treat the darkness as one level lighter: Pitch Black becomes Dark, for instance. However, people's Hit Threshold goes down by 1 if they're carrying a brightly lit target into the darkness, shining a beam ahead that points to their position. This is why your savvier spies use night-vision optics (see p. 101).

The Director rolls for the dhampir, spending 2 points and rolling a 1. That's a failure. "It stops

at the top of the steps in confusion, as though you've suddenly become invisible," the Director narrates. "If it just looked in the right direction, it would have a clear view inside the church, but its face just won't point that way."

You've shed your tail, but are now in the church and can't emerge without walking right in front of the dhampir. Your choice of narration has hemmed you in; now you'll have to explore the church in search of another exit, call someone for a diversion, or try to get information that will help you defeat the dhampir.

Where the odds of success are skewed in favor of one contestant, the Director may assign different Difficulties to each. A character with a significant advantage gets a lower Difficulty Number. A character facing a major handicap faces a higher Difficulty. When in doubt, the Director assigns the lower number to the advantaged participant.

An agent scrabbling without gear up a rock face finds it harder to move quickly than the well-equipped climber he's pursuing. In this case he might face a Difficulty of 4, while the mountaineer gets the lower Difficulty of 3.

Throughout the contest, Director and players should collaborate to add flavor to each result, explaining what the characters did to remain in the contest. That way, instead of dropping out of the narration to engage in an arithmetical recitation, you keep the fictional world verbally alive.

Thriller Chases

Although contests can resolve various sorts of match-ups, in a spy thriller the most common contest is the chase, in which agents elude their pursuers in dizzying displays of combat driving or parkour, bouncing off walls and bounding over cobblestones in some picturesque European town. These rules are designed to add depth and drama to such contests, but they require more attention and creativity than other contests. The Director should use them only for major "set-piece" scenes, and come up with plenty of possible thrills, explosions, obstacles, and other high points beforehand.

For a chase that lasts an entire operation, or covers hundreds of miles, use the rules for Extended Chases (see p. 91).

The core of the thriller chase is the same as the full contest: an aggressor (the pursuer in a chase) and a defender (the runner in a chase) repeatedly test a **chase ability** (usually Athletics, Driving, or Piloting) against a Difficulty Number, usually 4. The pool of points in the chase ability is called the **chase pool.** As in any other test or contest, the participants may spend points from their chase pool to influence the chase ability die roll.

There are three major differences between a thriller chase and a full contest:

- The pursuer and the runner reveal their spends simultaneously, and then roll.
- The results are applied to the Lead; individual successes or failures do not necessarily end the chase.
- The runner may opt to raise the Difficulty number of the next chase ability test.

Other special rules and conditions may apply during thriller chases, as enumerated below.

Simultaneous Reveal

Both the pursuer and the runner select and record their spends, if any, in secret and then reveal them simultaneously. You can use notes on pieces of paper, poker chips, coins, pips on a die, or any other agreeable method of recording a spend.

Once the spends are revealed, the runner rolls first and adds his spend; the pursuer then rolls and adds hers.

The Lead

Track the back-and-forth of a thriller chase with the Lead. (See the *Thriller Chase Lead Track,* p. 216.) The goal of the pursuer is to reduce the Lead to 0; the goal of the runner is to increase the Lead to 10. Lead increments are abstract measurements of dramatic tension, not easily reducible to kilometers or yards. In some cases, the Director may reduce or increase these goals: in a twisty Damascus bazaar, or on a fog-covered steppe, a runner may only need to open up a Lead of 6 to escape; if the pursuers have air cover (a police helicopter or the like) spotting for them, an escaping car may need to get to a Lead of 14.

Beginning Lead

The Lead begins halfway between 0 and the runner's goal (usually 5), unless the Director rules that some specific occurrence increases or decreases it: "Your sabotage of their engine pays off; the gunmen have to change cars to chase you" or "You really blew that Sense Trouble; the gunmen were almost close enough to touch before you decided to run."

The Director should determine which participant is faster and which is more maneuverable, using the Vehicle Table (p. 101). If both participants have the same Speed, the vehicle further down on the table is faster, unless the agents have souped up their vehicle (see p. 103). In a foot chase, the participant with the higher Athletics *pool* at the beginning of the chase is

usually faster; the participant with the higher Athletics *rating* at the beginning of the chase is more maneuverable. In any foot chase, the less heavily armored participant is faster, regardless of Athletics.

The Director should also determine the conditions of the chase:

An **open chase** is one on flat ground, good roads, clear weather, etc. Adjust the starting Lead by 1 in favor of the faster participant. The faster participant also gets to add the difference between his Speed on the Vehicle Table (see p. 101) and that of his opponent to his chase ability die rolls; minimum +1.

A **normal chase** is one with some hills, twists, bumps, buildings, traffic, and so forth; waves or gusts challenge water- or aircraft. The faster participant gets to add +1 to his die rolls. In addition, if only one participant has a chase ability rating of 8 or higher, she gets to add +1 to her chase ability die rolls.

A **cramped chase** is one in narrow streets, rush-hour traffic, mountain roads, stormy weather, etc. Speed is less important than maneuverability in such cases. Adjust the starting Lead by 1 in favor of the more maneuverable participant. The more maneuverable participant also gets to add the difference between his Maneuver rating on the Vehicle Table (see p. 101) and that of his opponent to his chase ability die rolls; minimum +1.

Changing the Lead

The results of the two ability rolls (runner and pursuer) alter the Lead as follows:

- **Pursuer succeeds, runner fails:** the Lead shortens by 2.
- **Pursuer, runner both succeed or fail:** the Lead alters by 1 depending on whose margin of success (or failure) was greater. If the pursuer won by more or lost by less, the Lead drops by 1; otherwise, the Lead increases by 1. Ties go to the runner.
- **Pursuer fails, runner succeeds:** the Lead lengthens by 2.

The Director can keep track of the Lead on a scrap of paper, or on the handy Thriller Chase Lead Track in the Addenda (see p. 216).

As in a full contest, the players and Director should improvise and narrate the specific events that shaped the chase: “I drop from the window onto the carport roof,” or “You skid and swerve to avoid a woman pushing a baby carriage,” or “Both cars smash through the poultry plant; chickens fly everywhere, reducing visibility to feathers and nothing.”

The End of the Chase

If the Lead reaches 0 or below, the **pursuer has won.** The runner can not run any more; she may have crashed or fallen, or simply be blocked by a car or a cul-de-sac. If the runner does not wish to surrender, a combat likely begins (see p. 61).

The pursuer gets the choice of whether to go first in any ensuing combat, regardless of ability pools.

If the Lead reaches 10 (or whatever goal the Director has set) or higher, the **runner has won.** The pursuers have lost the runner; he cannot be found for the remainder of the scene unless he draws renewed attention to himself somehow.

The runner also wins if all of the pursuers have crashed, fallen, or otherwise been taken out of the chase.

Thrills Are Everybody’s Business

GUMSHOE encourages players to enthusiastically take ownership of their own characters’ badass exploits, and in a thriller chase everybody gets to chip in. Any player involved in, or just watching, a thriller chase should feel free to contribute exciting details: “You must have just smashed into a fruit stand!” “Dude, no, you leaped across the balcony and then straight-legged it off the railing!” “I bet Beatrice’s wake swamped them; that’s why they rolled that 2.” Directors should be delighted when players add scenery, bystanders, tour buses, railroad crossings, pointless unfinished stretches of highway, and two oblivious guys walking across the street holding a big pane of glass. Players should remember that their job is to help build everyone’s excitement, not to litter the scenery with “Get Out Of Chase Free” cards.

One thing that can work well, especially in groups who haven’t memorized every Bourne movie, is for the Director to create a list of ten or twelve thrilling elements for her planned thriller chase scene. Put the list (on cards or a sheet of paper) where everyone can see it: let the players riff off those to spark creativity and cooperation.

Here are some example thrilling element lists — things to run into, drive toward, or otherwise incorporate — for some reliably unpredictable chases:

European Tourist City

Open-air fish market

Chinese school group with cameras

Clueless local on a bicycle

Fountain in the middle of a traffic roundabout

Little annoying taxi

Narrow, paint-scraping alley

Open-air cafe

Architecturally significant steps or ruins that can be driven down (or up)

Telephone call box

Newsstand

Sudden delivery truck pulling out

Red tile roofs that splinter if shot and get slippery in rain

Middle Eastern Bazaar

Piles of pots on a trestle table

Street stall made of beautiful carpets

Shifty-looking national police guard

Overhanging wrought-iron balcony

Camel

Crowd of women in burqas

Narrow, paint-scraping alley

Classic big American car painted turquoise and parked in the way

Guys smoking hookahs at outdoor tables

Knife-sharpening booth

Red-hot brazier cooking something with a lot of smoke and hot oil

Grimy East European Factory Complex

Slippery floor for sliding across

Hanging iron hook on a heavy chain

Conveyor belt

Gout of steam from nowhere

Stained chemical tank

Safety doors inexplicably chained shut

Catwalk

Stack of rusting drums containing who knows what

Big old pipe wrenches

Metal trap door

Huge stamping press with big green button

Urban Highway

Passing semi-trailer

Surprisingly steep shoulder or verge

News helicopter

Tanker truck full of propane

Really expensive looking BMW

Underpass or overpass

Minivan with mom and kids

Light pole, complete with power line and mercury lamp

Sweet convertible

Oncoming traffic

Shimmering pool of water or ice on the road

Break in the concrete partition for illegal U-turns

High-tension lines

Commuter train

Bridge abutment

Raises

Turning into oncoming Autobahn traffic, speeding up on those Riviera mountain curves, or charging out onto a projecting girder in an unfinished apartment block: when you're running for your life, anything looks like a good idea.

Before the next round of the chase starts, the runner can raise both sides' Difficulty Numbers, raising them by 1. For example, if the Difficulty of the last chase round was 4, the runner can raise it to 5. This represents trying to throw off the pursuer by changing the ground rules of the chase, if only for a little while.

This raise applies to the final Difficulty set by any special circumstances: if the pursuing agent uses his Urban Survival to remember the layout of the banlieue and drop his Difficulty to 3 while the runner's Difficulty remains at 4, a raise changes the pursuer's Difficulty to 4 and the runner's to 5.

The runner (player or Director) should describe the specific action she's taking to set up the raise: "She cuts through the railway yards, the clangs and whistles of oncoming trains nearly deafening you," or "I run-and-jump my way up the corner of the apartment block," or "The thief's boat heads toward the wake of that docking freighter."

If the runner fails at the raised Difficulty, the Difficulty drops back to its previous level for the next encounter.

If the runner succeeds, and the pursuer fails, the runner may choose between keeping the Difficulty raised or lowering it for the next encounter.

If both succeed, the runner may choose to raise the Difficulty again, or keep it raised. The pursuer must agree to lower the Difficulty for the runner to lower it in this circumstance.

> *You are running from Detective Grau of the Berlin police; seeing a stand of plane trees near the office park, you decide to climb up onto the sea of identical roofs and make a parkour chase out of it. This is a raise; the Athletics Difficulty for you and Grau goes up to 5 from 4.*
>
> *If you fail, the Difficulty next round is automatically 4: a branch breaks and you crash into the alley, hitting the ground running to keep up the chase.*

If you succeed and Grau fails, you can keep the Difficulty at 5 (jumping over skylights as he clambers up slowly) or drop it back to 4 as you run across the roof.

If you both succeed, you can raise it again to 6 (hopping up on a parapet and running flat-out for the next building) or keep it at 5. Grau has kept pace with you; you don't have the luxury of slowing up … unless he's tired, too. If the Director agrees, you can lower the Difficulty to 4, but she checks Grau's pool, grins, and says "Let's keep it up here for now."

Special Thriller Chase Rules

It's not all driving fast and running dangerous: plenty more stuff goes on in a big thriller chase scene. The Director should feel free to add these elements in one at a time as she becomes more familiar with the basics of the thriller chase.

The Gear Devil and Parkour rules are particularly optional, although they will allow player characters to stay in punishing chases longer.

Although these options model thriller convention, some of them are still potentially appropriate for a Dust mode game. Such options are marked with the icon.

Attacking During Chases

Passengers in (or unruly strangers climbing onto) a vehicle involved in a chase use their combat abilities at +1 to the target's Hit Threshold (see p. 73). Remember, someone in a car likely has the equivalent of full cover (see p. 67), unless you're shooting at the driver from the car's hood. Jumping from vehicle to vehicle requires a Lead of 1 or 2 and an Athletics test of Difficulty 5 or 6, respectively. Modify this Difficulty by the Speed value of the fastest vehicle involved.

For broad dramatic purposes, consider a combat at Lead 1 or 2 to be Close range, Lead 3 through 6 to be Near range, and greater leads to be Long range. (See *Range,* p. 67.) Close range or not, you almost certainly can't use Weapons or Hand-to-Hand between vehicles or runners during a chase; if you could, it wouldn't be a chase.

The actual pursuer and runner in a chase — people driving vehicles or running full-out — can also attack, firing "Parthian shots" over their shoulder or throwing lead down range. These attacks happen at the beginning of the round, before spending for the chase ability test.

Pursuers and runners must pay 3 pool points to attack during a chase, which can come from either Shooting or the chase pool or a combination. Their target's Hit Threshold increases by 1, as does the Difficulty of their chase test in the round they attack.

Shooting out tires or tail rotors or other vulnerable parts of a vehicle requires a Called Shot (usually +3 to Hit Threshold, see p. 73), plus the additional +1 to Hit Threshold above. Unless a car has solid tires, losing one tire raises the Difficulty of all Driving rolls by 1; losing two tires results in a crash. (For solid or "run-flat" tires, losing one tire has no effect; losing two or more tires raises the Difficulty of all Driving rolls by 1.) The Director determines the specific effects of shots at other potentially critical parts of a vehicle.

Crashes and Falls

Even without bullets punching through the rear windshield, there are lots of ways to get hurt in a chase scene.

See Hazards (p. 79) for damage from crashes and falls. Dramatically, a crash or fall ends your chase scene. A fall from a great height, or a crash at high speed, may well seriously wound or kill the victim. (If an agent, probably seriously wound; if an NPC, probably kill.)

Gear Devil

Prereq: Driving or Piloting 8+

Rules aren't the only way to create an atmosphere of burning rubber and exhaust. Adopt this rule if you want to keep the chase rules simple while giving your resident gearheads a whiff of super premium.

Once per chase, a player with a Driving or Piloting *rating* of 8 or more can gain a 3-point refresh in that ability by uttering a brief narrative description of his or her actions in transportive detail:

- "I take the revs all the way into the red, and when I've buried the tach I throw her into fourth and scream down the straightaway!"
- "The characteristic stiff suspension of my Jaguar XKE keeps the center of gravity low, putting all the torque into cornering."
- "As the breeze freshens in the port quarter, I luff the spinnaker and sheet her two more points to the wind."

At the Director's discretion, such vehicular vocalization may provide a 4-point refresh when it is so incomprehensibly turbocharged that other players gape at the utterer's sheer auto-eroticism.

Souping up your gearhead chatter in advance is encouraged. Players should feel free to script out suitably hi-test utterances, perhaps on index cards.

Investigative Abilities and Chases

Before the chase begins, or between rounds in a chase, any player character — not just agents directly involved in the chase — can try to influence the contest by calling on a rated Investigative ability. This may or may not require a spend, but is usually free. In some cases, spends might extend free benefits. In any given chase, each ability can only be used once: if Beatrice has used her Human Terrain for this chase, Luc can't use his.

In general, you can handwave such involvement by using reliable comms gear; in other cases, it might be a remembered briefing or other flashback sequence.

Invoking an ability provides one of the following, at the Director's discretion:

- **Partial refresh** of the chase ability: best when the benefit is abstract or harder to quantify, or when it actually might involve a brief respite.
- **Difficulty adjustment:** best reflects positional or tactical advantages.
- **Opposition spends first:** Making the opponent reveal their spend first best reflects something that forces the enemy to slow down or become predictable.
- **Opposition pool reductions:** best when a change in the chase puts the other side at a sudden and dramatic disadvantage.
- **Lead change:** best when a change in the chase puts the agents at a sudden and dramatic advantage.
- **Special Rule setup:** allows a specific special rule such as a Swerve or Sudden Escape, either earlier or easier than normal.

Some possible uses of such abilities, and their possible rewards, include:

- "I know Spetsnaz search patterns; can I predict these Russian mob guys' next moves?" "Using Military Science lets you refresh 2 in your Athletics pool."
- "I use Architecture." "You know the plan of the parking garage up ahead; it's a standard plan. On a spend you remember where the utility stairs are." Drops Difficulty for the agent by 1 for the next round. On a spend, it stays down for each following round until the opposition succeeds at their chase ability roll.
- "We've already hacked the CCTVs here (with a previous Digital Intrusion test), so can I use Electronic Surveillance to guide Luc past the guards?" The opposition must reveal its spend first for two rounds, or more with a spend.
- "What does Vampirology tell me about being chased by vampires?" "It tells you there's a lot of running water in the Seine." When Luc crosses the Seine, the pursuing vampires have to make Difficulty 8 Athletics tests to penetrate the block (see *Blocks,* p. 140).
- "I get on the police band and start snarling their pursuit with a bunch of false leads." "That's Cop Talk, right? Every point you spend is another round after the first two that it takes them to figure it out." Drops the opposition chase pool by 3, and then 2 more each additional round.
- "I use Urban Survival to find a short cut." This simple move simply moves the Lead by 1 in the agents' favor.
- "After Ivan goes through, I'm gonna Intimidate that shopkeeper. He'd better close and lock that gate and go home early." Cutting off the pursuers' path adds 1 to Ivan's Lead.
- "Does Human Terrain tell me about any street festivals or strikes or protest rallies nearby?" "You're two rounds away from King Leopold Park, and from a Flemish separatist rally, as it happens." In two rounds, the Difficulty for a Swerve will drop by 2 for the agents.
- "Hey, can I drive this motorboat toward Camille's yacht? Surely, she's having a soiree on board on a sunny day like this. For her High Society pals, I mean." Sets up a Sudden Escape into Camille's boat party (probably involving Athletics to leap from your motorboat to her party deck) at Lead 5 instead of 7. "Good thing you wore your tuxedo on this chase. You *did* wear your tuxedo, right?" "Uhhh, Preparedness …"
- "I bet Traffic Analysis can, well, analyze traffic patterns. I want to find a more crowded street to let Luc use his superior Maneuver." "Spend a point for one traffic jam, straight up ahead." With a spend, this changes the conditions of a chase: i.e., from crowded to normal, or normal to open, if the shift in modifiers would be advantageous. With no spend, it's just a 2-point Driving refresh.

Some General abilities might also be able to affect a thriller chase, especially the Preparedness cherry In the Nick of Time (see p. 33). The same guidelines apply.

The Director may pre-plan these options into her scenario notes, or simply roll with player creativity. Most chases will involve a combination of the two.

The Director will have to determine how best to use this rule in a Dust mode game. Much will depend on the specific request; if it's practical and realistic sounding (e.g., using Urban Survival to find a short cut, or monitoring enemy comms), it's more likely to work. Invoking abilities is more likely to result in Difficulty changes or Lead changes.

Multiple Pursuers

A lone agent flees a squad of paramilitaries; sirens echo from the walls of the old city as the cop cars squeal to the scene; a team of killers hunts their target through the sewers. Many thriller chases involve more than one pursuer.

If the player characters are the multiple pursuers, treat the chase as Cooperation (see p. 51), with one agent as "lead pursuer" and any other agents actually running, driving, flying, etc. as the assistants. (This is one of those rare cases where multiple agents use Cooperation instead of Piggybacking.) Agents manning the computer back at the safe house, providing sniper overwatch, riding in the back of the van, or otherwise marginal to the actual chase cannot spend chase pool points, but can use Investigative abilities (see above), attack convenient targets, or otherwise provide support in their fashion.

If the opposition are the multiple pursuers, just add more points to the opposition's chase pool to represent additional manpower, police cars, or what-have-you. This is by far the best way to "balance" a chase against a specialist agent with a high chase pool. The Director can either decide ahead of time the total pool available to the bad guys, add pool points one or more increments at a time in response to specific incidents ("that explosion is gonna bring more cops") or timing ("one more cop car shows up for every two rounds this chase goes on"). Similarly, player character actions can restrict the opposition's available chase pool by carefully planning a chase route, distracting the authorities, or just sabotaging all the Audis in the motor pool.

Each additional pursuer contributes a given amount of pool points: this might be 2-3 (militia or thugs), 4-5 (trained professionals: cops or soldiers), 6-8 (elite professionals: SWAT or special forces), or the result of a die roll. If the agents knock out a pursuer — wreck one cop car, knock one guard off the roof — the opposition pool loses half an increment of pool points immediately.

Use the same guidelines for multiple runners.

Parkour

Prereq: Athletics 8+

A character with an Athletics rating of 8 or higher can specify that she is trained in parkour or similar freerunning disciplines. Once per foot chase, you may gain a 3-point Athletics refresh by uttering a brief, evocative narrative description of her elegant use of momentum and muscle:

- "With a flowing passe muraille, I step up off the fire escape, grab the parapet, and flip myself onto the roof."
- "Planter, air conditioning unit, dish antenna, roof gutter: tic-tac, pop vault, cat grab, and dyno. I can do this."
- "These alleys remind me of the banlieue where I first learned to harness the bodymind; I fall into remembrance even as I demitour off the balcony and lachér to the bricks below."

At the Director's discretion, especially poetic or believably obscure descriptions may fetch a 4-point refresh.

These utterances needn't be improvised; players can prepare key phrases in advance, then adapt them to the situation at hand.

COLLISION IS DRAMA, NOT PHYSICS

In spy thrillers, collisions between vehicles or obstacles either do dramatic but essentially cosmetic damage — doors come off, panels crush in, but the car keeps going — or total damage, knocking the vehicle out of commission entirely.

If the vehicle is driven by a bystander or by a secondary opponent, any collision totals the car. It spins out, flips over, explodes, or otherwise removes itself from the chase. Normally, collisions with civilian or bystander vehicles (or impermanent structures like kebab stands or phone booths) have no mechanical effect whatsoever. Rather, the players and Director use these collisions to explain failed die rolls, lost Lead, or other changes to the chase.

Every so often, though, there will be a really awesome and dramatic bystander vehicle to crash into: a tanker truck full of liquid nitrogen, or a blood bank ambulance, or a T-85 tank. The Director should assign Difficulties to the Driving roll (for player characters) or assess penalties to Driving pools (for the opposition) to avoid totaling a vehicle after such a crash. But that crash had better be worth doing math for.

Ramming

What would a chase scene be without the ominous closeup shots of the bumper and grille, cars

shouldering and jockeying for position, setting up a full-on ram attempt? This section uses "ram" to mean any attempt using a vehicle to force another vehicle off the road or to a stop during a chase: shoving, sliding, pulling up in front or alongside, nudging, or full-on T-bone ramming. The specifics depend on the Director or player, or both collaboratively. (Ramming outside a chase is just good old vehicular assault; make a player-facing Driving test and apply any damage as in Hazards (see p. 79).)

A ram attempt can only take place if the Lead is 1 or 2. A ram attempt always costs the rammer 3 points from their chase ability pool before any die is rolled.

The player always rolls, whether doing the ramming or attempting to avoid being rammed. The Difficulty for a ram attempt (whether for evasion or collision) always begins at 4. Ram rolls use only the following modifiers and rules:

On the defensive (avoiding being rammed): The player adds his vehicle's Maneuver *to the die roll* (against a Difficulty of 4), plus any other spends he makes.

- If he fails, the Lead alters in the opposition's favor by 1. Sparks fly, paint scratches, bumpers fall off, hubcaps go spinning, doors cave in.
- If he rolls an unmodified 1 and fails, he has crashed, and likely been forced off the road.
- If he succeeds, the rammer must spend 2 points immediately from her chase pool; if her pool is insufficient, the Lead alters in the player's favor by 1 for every point by which she falls short.

On the offensive (ramming): The player adds her vehicle's Maneuver *to the Difficulty* of 4, and adds any other spends she makes to the die roll. Note that vehicles with a negative Maneuver will lower their Difficulty on a ram attempt: less maneuverable vehicles are usually heavier, which is an advantage when trying to force someone off the road.

- If she fails, she must spend 2 points immediately from her chase pool; if her pool is insufficient, the Lead alters in the opposition's favor by 1 for every point by which she falls short.
- If she succeeds, the Lead alters in her favor by 1.
- If she rolls an unmodified 6 and succeeds, the other vehicle has crashed, and likely been forced off the road.

The Director can try using this rule in a foot chase for tackling, shoving, grappling, or otherwise trying to bring down a target.

Sudden Escape

If the runner has a Lead of 7 or better, and wins the exchange of chase ability tests, she can attempt a Sudden Escape instead of changing the Lead. This is something completely outside the parameters of the chase: jumping the car onto a barge in the canal, diving off the skyscraper roof and opening a parasail, or turning into a bat. The classic chase example is leaping off the overpass onto the roof of the passing train beneath. (Barely getting on the Underground train as it pulls away is not a Sudden Escape; it's what happens when a foot chase in London ends with a Lead of 10.) The runner must describe the Sudden Escape: what she's attempting, and how it will end the chase.

The Sudden Escape requires a successful test of some kind. The Difficulty of the Sudden Escape test is always at least 1 higher than the previous Difficulty in the chase: the specific test might be another Athletics test ("I shoulder vault onto the semi-trailer and land rolling"), another Driving test ("I aim the car at the raising drawbridge"), a Preparedness test ("of course I stashed my parasail on the roof before going down to the meeting"), or something else appropriate at the Director's discretion.

Success results in escape. A failure quite likely ends in a fireball or a bloody smear on the ground: double all damage from the crash or fall.

Swerve

A Swerve is a single maneuver that holds the potential to change the chase all at once: vaulting over the balcony and aiming for the big couch in the atrium below, cutting off the exit ramp and forcing the car into the construction site, trying to beat the train to the crossing, or gunning the Ducati toward the oil slick.

If either the pursuer or the runner has the higher Maneuver (or if both Maneuver ratings are the same), he can spend 3 points of the chase ability to force a high-risk swerve: all changes in Lead in the Swerve round are double normal. For instance, if the pursuer succeeded and the runner failed in the Swerve round, the Lead would shrink by 4, not 2.

This must be announced at the beginning of the round, before bids are recorded. You cannot Swerve in the first or second round of the chase.

You must describe the risky and exciting maneuver you're pulling: "I pull the parking brake and stand on the gas simultaneously; the Porsche swivels around and heads straight down the shopping arcade."

Speed bonuses (for open or normal chases) do not count toward chase ability tests made in Swerve rounds.

If the chase ends in a Swerve round, it ends in a crash or fall for the loser.

A raise changes the ground of the chase; a Swerve might open the chase wide open but could go dramatically either way; a Sudden Escape ends the chase. Don't worry too much about the narrative differences between them; in the heat of the moment, anything exciting will work for any of the three. You can always clarify exactly what happened after the dice have rolled and you find out who got away and who got pancaked.

Take the Wheel!

Turning the vehicle over to an NPC while you jump onto the villain's car or steady the rocket launcher through the sun roof requires a spend of 2 points from your chase ability. Further, on any round during a chase that the NPC is the driver your chase ability has a +1 Difficulty. (You're still the hero of the scene, so you still spend your points in a chase, even though you're not technically the one with her foot on the gas.) If you are the runner, you cannot raise the Difficulty during a chase while an NPC is actually driving the vehicle.

Very occasionally, you may find yourself in a vehicle chase with a trained professional driver or pilot as an NPC ally. This is most common in helicopter chases, where the pilot is just there to "take her down lower!" or jink to avoid incoming fire. The Director should give this trained NPC a chase ability pool (in Piloting, or sometimes Driving) and let another player (perhaps the player of the hacker who stayed back at the safe house) take the wheel of that character for the duration of the chase. Treat such allies as player characters with Health 1, unless someone is grooming a replacement character with full stats.

Switching drivers of a vehicle between player characters requires a spend of 2 points from the chase ability of either agent or both. The new driver becomes the runner or pursuer, and begins spending from his chase ability pool.

If both agents Trust each other, they only need to spend 1 point to switch drivers.

Three-Party Chases

Every so often, a thriller chase will involve three sides: cops chasing the agents chasing a dhampir, for instance. Run these as two separate thriller chases, each with their own Lead and with a separate chase pool for each faction, alternating rounds between chases. In the example above, the cops would be the pursuer and the agents the runner in one chase, and the agents would be the pursuers and the dhampir the runner in the other.

If this sounds too unutterably complex, don't plan any three-party chases. One simplification might be to run the "lesser" chase (likely the cops chasing the agents) as a full contest instead of a thriller chase: both sides just make chase ability tests against a constant Difficulty until one side fails. If the agents aren't in the middle, the chase involving the two NPC factions should be the full contest, and the chase involving the agents should be the thriller chase.

Three-party chases drain the middle faction's points like you wouldn't believe. Clever player groups may attempt to set their foes up for just such a squeeze play.

Combat

Combat is a specialized sort of contest, usually involving any of the following abilities:

- Hand-to-Hand vs. Hand-to-Hand, Hand-to-Hand vs. Weapons, or Weapons vs. Weapons: the characters are fighting at close quarters.
- Shooting vs. Shooting: the characters are apart from one another and trying to hit each other with guns.

As with full contests, the combatants take turns using their abilities. The other guy may swing first, but the fighter with the highest rating seizes the **initiative.** Unlike an ordinary contest, in a fight it is usually advantageous to strike first.

A contest proceeds between the two abilities. When combatants using the Hand-to-Hand, Shooting, or Weapons abilities roll well, they get the opportunity to deal damage to their opponents.

MOOKS

Many, many combats in thrillers feature cheap, disposable foes who reliably drop with one punch or one bullet: in a word, **mooks.** Mooks have Health pools between 1 (one-punch mooks) and 3, and Hit Threshold 3 (or even 2). They drop at Health 0.

Well-trained and professional mooks might still have high levels of Hand-to-Hand, Shooting, or Weapons, making them especially satisfying foes to cut down.

Directors should offer a ready supply of mooks who can be shot off balconies, mowed down with Autofire (see p. 72), or knocked down with a swift chop to the back of the neck in one blow.

See also special mook-related rules in *Player-Facing Combat* (p. 65) and the *Mook Shield* maneuver (p. 76).

There are no mooks in Dust mode games. Any foe can be reliably assumed to have Health 4, at least.

Unlike other contests, participants do not lose when they fail their test rolls. Instead, they're forced out of

the fight when they die, lose consciousness, or become seriously wounded (see p. 64).

Surprise

Characters are surprised when they suddenly find themselves in a dangerous situation.

Surprise NPCs by sneaking up on them with a successful Infiltration or Surveillance test. The basic Difficulty is 4, which may increase for especially vigilant foes (see *Alertness Modifier,* p. 52). A sudden, surprising combat move, such as triggering a garlic gas bomb, or a seemingly helpless victim pulling a canister of pepper spray (or a silver combat knife) may require a different test: Explosives (to trigger it at the right psychological moment) or Disguise (to seem helpless until too late), for example. Usually "surprise" tests during a combat or confrontation begin at Difficulty 5; foes are just naturally more alert at such times.

Agents avoid being surprised with a successful Sense Trouble test. The basic Difficulty is 4, which may increase for especially sneaky foes (see *Stealth Modifier,* p. 52).

Surprised characters go last in combat, and suffer a +2 increase to all General ability Difficulties for any immediate subsequent action. In a fight, this increase applies to the first round of combat.

The Director may rule that very badly surprised characters (NPCs when the agents made their Infiltration test by 4 or more points; the agents, if they failed their Sense Trouble test by 4 or more points) may also forfeit one or more rounds of actions.

Initiative

Determine whether the character who attempts to strike the first blow seizes the initiative and therefore gets the first opportunity to strike his opponent, or if his intended target anticipates his attack and beats him to the punch — or shot, as the case may be.

As GUMSHOE is player-facing, the player character's rating determines initiative in the combat.

In a melee, the agent gets to go first if his Hand-to-Hand rating equals or exceeds that of his target. An agent with a melee weapon *already drawn* can go first if his Weapons rating equals or exceeds that of his target.

In a gunfight, she gets to go first if her Shooting rating *exceeds* that of her target.

In a mixed fight (one with a gun, the other without), the gun-wielder goes first. (See *One Gun, Two Combatants* on p. 67.)

Otherwise, the opponent goes first.

In the rare instance where two PCs fight one another (when one of them is possessed, say), the agent with the higher applicable rating (Hand-to-Hand, Weapons, or Shooting) goes first. If their ratings tie but their pools do not, the one with the higher pool goes first. If both are tied, roll a die, with one player going first on an odd result and the other on even.

Hit Thresholds

Each character has a Hit Threshold of either 3 (the standard value) or 4 (if the character's Athletics rating is 8 or more). The Hit Threshold is the Difficulty Number the agent's opponent must match or beat in order to harm him. Less competent NPCs may have lower Hit Thresholds, but Camorra torpedoes, FSB agents, and similar opponents will generally parallel player character levels. Faceless mooks or hapless sentries may have Hit Thresholds as low as 2 (see *Player-Facing Combat,* p. 65).

Creatures both natural and supernatural may have Hit Thresholds of 4 or higher, regardless of their Athletics ratings. Extremely large creatures will usually have a Hit Threshold 1 lower than roughly man-sized beings of the same sort; cat-sized or smaller creatures will have higher Hit Thresholds.

In games using the full range of options and tactical rules, Hit Thresholds can vary widely. Try to rebalance those values if you can: if one combatant has a Hit Threshold of 7 and one has a Hit Threshold of 9, run their combat as if they had Hit Thresholds of 3 and 5, respectively. This keeps fights shorter and more dangerous, and therefore exciting.

TASERS AND STUN GUNS

Both tasers and stun guns use high-voltage, low-amperage electrical currents to disrupt a target's electro-motor system, functionally paralyzing them for several seconds.

A taser is a pistol-grip or flashlight-grip weapon that fires two metal darts on 7-yard wires, using compressed air. Firing a taser is a Shooting test; it can only be used at Close range (at Point-Blank range, the darts haven't separated enough for the charge to propagate). It is a single-shot weapon that takes two rounds to reload.

A stun gun isn't a gun at all, but a simple battery grip with two exposed electrical contacts. Touching the target and squeezing the handgrip releases the charge. Using a stun gun is a Weapons attack; it can only be used at Point-Blank range. (A cattle prod or stun rod can be used at Close range, like other longer weapons.) It carries hundreds of "jolts" in its battery.

Both tasers and stun guns deliver a **moderate shock** (see Electricity, p. 80) to anyone they hit. If they hit a flammable surface — a target soaked in gasoline or alcohol, for example — they may start a fire.

Whatever other effects they may have, tasers also short-circuit combat scenes, and turn fights into one-punch beats. In other words, tasers are boring. Tasers aren't invincible: three or four guys can always swarm someone with a taser, especially once they've (ahem) shot their bolt. But there's one thing you can be sure of. No matter what else turns out to be true about vampires in your particular game, they're immune to tasers. Tasers don't work on vampires, or dhampirs, or ghouls, or Renfields, or anything with so much as a drop of vampire blood in them. True fact. Try it and see.

DVD THAT SAID, TASERS ARE PRETTY COOL

What stun guns are good for, though, is keeping a low profile. A single gunshot can rapidly escalate a situation in a crowded urban center, particularly in places with strict firearms control laws. While they're of limited utility in the climactic confrontation of an operation, they're invaluable investigative tools during those minor excursions that precede it. Plus, they're handy for all sort of cinematic hot-wiring scenarios.

Dealing Damage

When you roll on or over your opponent's Hit Threshold, you may deal damage to him. To do so, you make a damage roll, rolling a die which is then modified according to the relative lethality of your weapon, as per the following table:

Weapon Type	Damage Modifier
Fist, kick	–2
Blackjack, small improvised weapon, police baton, shuriken, stake, knife	–1
Machete, heavy club, large improvised weapon, crossbow bolt, light firearm (.32 pistol or smaller, 6.5mm rifle or smaller, assault rifle, 20-gauge shotgun or smaller)	+0
Sword, fire axe, arrow, hammered stake, heavy firearm (9mm pistol or larger, .30 rifle or larger, submachine gun, 12-gauge shotgun or larger)	+1
Very heavy firearm (.50 MG, 12.7x99mm anti-materiel rifle)	+2

For firearms, add an additional +2 when fired at Point-Blank range. All shotguns add an additional +1 to damage at Close range.

Supernatural creatures often exhibit alarmingly high damage modifiers.

Characters may never spend points from their combat pools to increase their damage rolls. (Except with Autofire and Called Shots; see p. 215.)

The final damage result is then subtracted from your opponent's Health pool. When a combatant's Health pool drops to 0 or less, that combatant collapses from exhaustion or blood loss and is unable to continue fighting. Any combatants currently engaged with him in a close quarters fight can then deal another instance of damage to him.

NON-LETHAL DAMAGE

Players may always announce that their agents are using their Hand-to-Hand attacks to do non-lethal damage: choke-holds, arm-locks, body blows, and the like. Such attacks never lower a target's Health pool below -11, but merely force yet another Consciousness roll if successful. Similar conditions can apply to non-bladed Weapons attacks.

Bringing a knife or gun into a fight is a declaration of willingness to kill. There is no such thing as a non-lethal Shooting attack.

GRAPPLING

Several playtesters wanted to know about grappling rules. In GUMSHOE, grappling is functionally the same as any other type of Hand-to-Hand combat: when an enemy's Health is down to 0 (or they've failed a Consciousness roll), they're out of the fight, whether they were punched out, kicked out, or arm-locked out. Health isn't precisely "hit points," it's a dramatic measure of how much fight you have left.

Players who just want a little more flavor, riffing on krav maga or other lock-and-strike style martial arts, should use lots of Smashes (see p. 76), Called Shots to the throat or joints (see p. 73), or even Mook Shield (see p. 76) if the Director allows it. Reckless Attack (see p. 76) can also model grapples, lowering the Hit Threshold of both the grappler and the grappled.

Some players want grappling as a way to make one roll and end a fight. The way to do that? Only pick fights with civilians, or with mooks. Quickly ending a fight with a grapple against a tough, trained opponent doesn't happen: that's why MMA matches last more than six seconds. Monsters like the camazotz (p. 148) and the lamia (p. 150) get special grapple-style powers against tough humans because they're superhuman monsters.

First Aid

If you are wounded, a character with the Medic ability can improve your condition by spending Medic points. For every Medic point spent, you regain 2 Health points — unless you are your own Medic, in which case you gain only 1 Health point for every Medic point you spent. The Medic can only refill your pool to where you were before the incident in which you received this latest injury. He must be in a position to devote all of his attention to directly tending to your wounds.

GUNS KILL

The standard ***Night's Black Agents*** rules make shootouts and firefights somewhat survivable in the name of drama and thriller convention. While real life is full of chancy firefights with lucky results, a Dust mode game aims for higher and more reliable lethality.

Treat all Hurt results to humans from firearms as Seriously Wounded results. Where bruising or even hacking damage might be "shaken off," any gunshot that drops your Health pool to 0 or below does an additional +6 points of damage.

Vampires and other once-human monsters don't suffer any such extra damage from gunshots unless the Director explicitly rules that they do.

DVD NO, REALLY, GUNS KILL

Even outside Dust mode, firearms are extremely dangerous in the world of ***Night's Black Agents.*** An agent can keep barreling through a single gunshot, but that second one will almost certainly drop him to Hurt or worse. Two or three mediocre gunmen, concentrating their fire on a single target (which smart foes will), can take out almost anyone. Don't give them that opportunity. If there are multiple guns in play, cover is a necessity, as is sending your allies to flank an enemy position. Only leave yourself exposed if you are fairly certain that you can remove an opponent during your turn. Oh, and never forget the ability to Jump In (see p. 75) if you see a friend in need.

Exhaustion, Injury, and Death

Unlike most abilities, your Health pool can drop below 0.

When it does this, you must make a Consciousness Roll. Roll a die with the absolute value of your current Health pool as your Difficulty. You may deliberately strain yourself to remain conscious, voluntarily reducing your Health pool by an amount of your choice. For each point you reduce it, add 1 to your die result. The Difficulty of the Consciousness roll is based on your Health pool *before* you make this reduction.

> *Ghouls are chasing you through a burned-out church in Norway, after a surveillance attempt that did not go your way. They hit you with a harpoon, dropping your Health pool to –3. You would really rather not gather first-hand intel on ghoul feeding habits, so you must remain conscious. The absolute value of –3 is 3, so this is the Difficulty of your Consciousness roll. You spend another 2 Health points you don't have, pushing yourself on toward the sunlight outside where you left the car. That spend gives you a bonus of 2 to your roll. You roll a 4, for a final result of 6. You remain conscious and get away, but now your Health pool is down to –5.*

If your pool is anywhere from 0 to –5, you are **Hurt**, but have suffered no permanent injury, beyond a few superficial cuts and bruises. You must make a Consciousness Roll.

However, the pain of your injuries makes it impossible to spend points on Investigative abilities, and increases the Difficulty Numbers of all tests and contests, including opponents' Hit Thresholds, by 1.

A character with Medic can still restore your Health points with first aid while you are Hurt.

If your pool is between –6 and –11, you have been **Seriously Wounded**. You must make a Consciousness roll.

Whether or not you maintain consciousness, you are no longer able to fight. Until you receive first aid, you will lose an additional Health point every half hour. A character with the Medic ability can stabilize your condition by spending 2 Medic points. However, he can't restore your Health points.

Even after you receive first aid, you must convalesce in a hospital or similar setting for a period of days. Your period of forced inactivity is a number of days equal to the positive value of your lowest Health pool score. (So if you were reduced to –8 Health, you are hospitalized for 8 days.) On the day of your discharge, your Health pool increases to half its maximum value. On the next day, it refreshes fully.

When your pool dips to –12 or below, you are **dead**. Time to create a replacement character.

Health Loss for NPCs

Normal people, both bystanders and the opposition, simply (or dramatically, or messily) die, stop fighting, or go unconscious when their Health is reduced below 0. Using this rule makes combats much faster, and cuts down on accounting. The Director may, if she thinks it dramatically appropriate, decide that certain NPCs — bad guy level bosses, Sources of Stability, contacts bought with Network — use the agents' Health loss rules, but she is never required to do so.

In Dust mode, the agents are no different from anyone else. All humans lose Health mechanically in the same way. Even in Dust mode games, the Director may want to speed up combats by having most NPCs drop out of the fight after reaching Health 0.

DEATH AND CONSEQUENCES

Killing people hardens the killers, and not in a good way. The operative word is "sociopath." But if you don't harden yourself to your acts, your guilt tears at you; you see their faces at night.

In a Burn mode game, every time you kill a human being, you lose 1 rating point of Stability or 1 rating point of any Interpersonal ability. Your choice: haunted, or hardened?

You can rebuild these lost Stability and Interpersonal points with experience points (see p. 94); if so, you're consciously dedicating effort that could have gone into other pursuits to remaining human. Congratulations.

PLAYER-FACING COMBAT

The figure in the sleek black body suit creeps up behind the sentry. A knife glints in the moonlight, a black-gloved hand goes over the guard's mouth, and *sniiikt* — the sentry crumples silently to the ground. The sleek figure rounds the corner, surprising two more guards. Out comes a silenced pistol, and *phhht! phhht!* — two more bodies drop.

Combats against guards, thugs, and other mooks or minions shouldn't always take a lot of time, especially when the big fight is waiting up ahead. If the Director wants, she can use Player-Facing Combat in these circumstances. Here's how it works:

First, the player makes sure of his advantage; he rolls a test of his Athletics, Infiltration, or other "surprise" ability against the mook's Difficulty of 3. (If you'd like, you can provide the mooks an Alertness Modifier, but it's only fair to warn the players that the guards "look well trained" or "seem on edge.")

If he fails, then he must spend 2 points from whichever combat ability he plans to use (Hand-to-Hand, Shooting, or Weapons) to regain the upper hand. This spend does not affect any die rolls.

If he succeeds, or once he has regained the upper hand, he makes a single attack against the mook's Hit Threshold. (Again, usually 3. Or even 2. Remember, they're mooks.)

If that attack succeeds, the player chooses whether the mook is dead, unconscious, or disabled. (Agents using firearms can only choose "dead" or "disabled." Glocks don't fire on "stun.")

If there are more mooks present in the scene, the player may then immediately attack the next mook, at a Hit Threshold 1 increment higher than before. (If the first guard had a Hit Threshold of 2, the second guard's Hit Threshold is 3, and the third guard's Hit Threshold is 4, regardless of his actual Athletics rating.)

Player-Facing Combat ends when you're out of mooks, when the element of surprise is well and truly lost, or when the agent fails an attack. A failed attack sets off regular combat, and probably an alarm, too.

The Director is always the one who decides whether Player-Facing Combat is appropriate in a given scene, and whether a scene's opponents qualify as true mooks.

Needless to say, the Dust mode does not use Player-Facing Combat.

Free-For-All Combat

Combat becomes more chaotic when two groups of combatants fight, or a group gangs up against a single opponent. The Director abandons the aggressor/defender model. Instead, the Director determines an order of action, ranking all participants in the combat according to their *ratings* in the fighting skills they'll be starting the fight with — Hand-to-Hand, Shooting, or Weapons. Ties are broken in favor of characters with higher *pools* in those skills. If characters are still tied, player characters win out over creatures and enemies, and early-arriving players win over late-arriving players. Surprised characters (see p. 215) go last.

The time it takes to go through the ranking order once, with each character taking an action, is called a **round**. When one round ends, another begins. Don't bother recalculating ranking order every round; for speed of play, ranking order *stays where it was at the beginning of the combat* even if pool values have changed, or even if one combatant drew a knife or dropped his gun.

When called upon to act, each character may strike at any opponent within range of his weapons. Some supernatural creatures may strike more than once per round. They make each attack in succession, and may divide them up between opponents within range, or concentrate all of them on a single enemy.

Once the fight has begun, if a combatant wishes to do something else besides fight — run away, get a hammer and stake out of their pack, throw a grenade — they move immediately to the last position in the ranking order as they turn to expose their vulnerable back to the foe, crouch to go through their duffle bag, fumble for the pin, or whatever.

Monsters, thugs, and similarly callous foes may choose to use their actions to deal additional damage to downed or helpless opponents rather than engage active opponents. They automatically deal one instance of damage per action. Shooting the wounded calls for a 4-point Stability test (see p. 81) for player characters.

Agents who join a combat in progress come last in order of precedence. If more than two characters join during the same round, the Director determines their relative precedence using the rules above.

The fight continues until one side capitulates or flees, or all of its members are unconscious or otherwise unable to continue.

Standard Combat Considerations

This section sets guidelines and boundaries for firefights and other standard sorts of combats. Combat can be as complex as you want to make it, and numerous RPGs have decided to do so. The GUMSHOE rules, and ***Night's Black Agents*** specifically, set out to promote drama first, which usually means keeping action fast and rules minimal.

The next section, *Thriller Combat Rules,* adds more rules, though still in the spirit of adding more action and drama rather than gritty realism.

TOO MANY MODIFIERS?

The unavoidable downside of flavorful combat (and other) rules is more modifiers to keep track of. Some of them will wash out: if both sides have identical night-vision goggles, for example, don't bother tracking the modifier at all. But if it all seems too much to bear, just wing it based on the standard Difficulty values for any test: 2 is almost trivial, 4 is average, and 8 is nigh impossible. Apply general situational modifiers to foes' Hit Thresholds based on the agents' advantages over their opponents, ranging from -2 (the agents have all the advantages; it's a cakewalk) to +4 (the agents are screwed; it's Stalingrad, and they're the Romanians).

Armor

Armor may reduce the damage from certain weapon types. If you're wearing a form of armor effective against the weapon being used against you, you subtract a number of points from each instance of damage dealt to you before applying it to your Health pool.

Relatively concealable ballistic cloth armor that can be worn under jackets or other loose clothing reduces each instance of damage from bullets by 1 point. Except in the most wildly cinematic of games, you can't conceal any armor under a tuxedo or other fitted garment. Light body armor, such as the tactical vests worn by police officers, reduces each instance of damage from bullets by 2 points and from cutting and stabbing weapons (knives, swords, machetes) by 1 point. Military-grade body armor reduces bullet or explosive damage by 3 points.

> *You are shot by the suspicious security guard of an even more suspicious hospital. The Director rolls a 3 for the guard's damage, adding 1 point for his 9mm handgun, for a total damage of 4. You wear a Kevlar vest, reducing the damage to 2 points. Your Health pool decreases from 6 to 4.*

All armor subtracts 2 more points from shotgun damage at any range greater than Point-Blank, as the individual pellets spread out. E.g., light body armor reduces shotgun damage at Close or Near range by 4 points.

Tactical vests are heavy, hot, obvious, and uncomfortable. All of these drawbacks apply doubly to military-grade body armor: Difficulty for almost all tests except Shooting or operating military vehicles while wearing military-grade armor increases by 1. Agents can't expect to walk around openly wearing body armor without attracting the attention of the local Guardia Civil; even concealable armor is visible to an enemy who knows what to look for. The Director may, for instance, require a spend for Tradecraft or High Society if agents are dressed suspiciously; or increase the Difficulty of Surveillance tests by 1 (or more, if it's a hot day) for agents trying to look inconspicuous in concealable armor. Armor and heavy weapons prove more useful in discreet missions conducted away from prying eyes.

In choosing to make contemporary body armor highly effective against firearms, we're drawing on the portrayal of Kevlar vests in spy thrillers. We make no claims for any resemblance between these rules and real life.

Creatures often have high armor ratings. They may possess bony hides or monstrous anatomies that can take greater punishment than ordinary organisms. Most supernatural creatures are more resistant to bullets and other missile weapons than they are to blunt force trauma, slashes, and stab wounds.

Cover

In a typical gunfight, combatants seek cover, hiding behind walls, furniture or other barriers, exposing themselves only for the few seconds it takes them to pop up and fire a round at their targets. The GUMSHOE rules recognize three cover conditions:

Exposed: No barrier stands between you and the combatant firing at you. Your Hit Threshold decreases by 1.

Partial Cover: About half of your body is exposed to fire. Your Hit Threshold remains unchanged. This is also the condition if you have full cover, but only behind thin or flimsy materials like foliage, drywall, or canvas.

Full Cover: Except when you pop up to fire a round, the barrier completely protects you from incoming fire. This is also your cover condition if you've pulled some mook around to serve as a makeshift shield (see p. 76). Your Hit Threshold increases by 1.

> *Luc and Desmond (both usually Hit Threshold 4) have surprised the guards at the heliport by free-climbing up the side of the building and succeeding at an Infiltration test. For the first round of combat, the guards' combat Difficulties increase by +2, making the agents' Hit Thresholds 6.*

ONE GUN, TWO COMBATANTS

If your opponent has a gun well in hand and ready to fire, and you charge him from more than 2 meters away, he can empty his entire clip or cylinder at you before you get to him, badly injuring you. You are automatically hit. He rolls one instance of damage, which is then tripled. Yes, we said *tripled*. And, yes, the tripling occurs after weapon modifiers are taken into account. This is why few people charge when their opponents have the drop on them.

If your opponent has a pistol but it is not well in hand and ready to fire, you may attempt to jump him and wrestle it from his grip. If he has a pistol well in hand but is unaware of your presence, you may also be able to jump him, at the Director's discretion. The characters engage in a Hand-to-Hand contest to see which of them gets control of the gun and fires it. The winner makes a damage roll against the loser, using the pistol's damage modifier, including the +2 for Point-Blank range.

If you jump an opponent with an unready rifle, a Hand-to-Hand combat breaks out, with the opponent using the rifle as a heavy club.

Ammo Capacity

Characters need reload only when dramatically appropriate. Otherwise, they're assumed to be able to refill the cylinders of their revolvers or jam clips into their automatic weapons between shots.

When reloading is an issue, Directors may request a Shooting test (Difficulty 3) to quickly reload. Characters who fail may not use their Shooting ability to attack during the current round.

> *Separated from your teammates, you crawl into a condemned tenement to hole up. Unfortunately for you, the building is inhabited by a gang of lowlife meth runners. The Director decides that limited resources will increase the sequence's suspense, and declares that you have only four shots left in your Glock automatic pistol, and only one extra magazine in your pocket. Knowing her, she plans to have the meth-heads gang up on you, forcing you to roll Shooting to successfully reload as they rush in.*

Range

Although painstaking calculations of windage and angles of fire are all very well and good, to keep ***Night's Black Agents*** games at a properly slam-bang pace, we only utilize four ranges:

Point-Blank

You are literally face-to-face (or face-to-back-of-head) with your opponent, within easy arm's reach. All brawls, knife fights, and scuffles occur at this range. At this range, all firearms do an additional +2 points of damage, and all shotguns are considered heavy firearms, with a base damage modifier of +1.

Close

You are in the same room with your opponent, or within no more than 10 meters or so. A swordfight or a karate match might happen at this range, with plenty of bounding off or smashing through the furniture, but no farther; for most fights, moving into Point-Blank from Close range moves your action to the end of the round. At this range, all shotguns do an additional +1 point of damage. This is as far as you can throw an object directly at a target unless the object is specifically designed for throwing (i.e., a grenade, a javelin).

Near

You can see your opponent distinctly, perhaps across a warehouse or across the street, no more than 30 or 40 meters away. At this range, all shotguns are considered light firearms, with a base damage modifier of +0, and do no extra damage. This is the farthest range at which you can hit a target with a shotgun at all, or with a pistol or submachine gun unless you spend 2 Shooting points (see *Extended Range,* below). This is as far as you can throw any object, either in a general direction (like a stick of dynamite) or at a specific target (like a baseball).

Thrown weapons at Near range do -2 damage, and the target's Hit Threshold is 1 higher, unless you have the Quincey Morris' Bowie Knife cherry (see p. 35).

Long

Your opponent is within 100 meters. Opponents farther away cannot be reliably targeted at all, and are out of the combat. This is the farthest range at which you can hit a target with a rifle or assault rifle, unless you spend 2 Shooting points (see *Extended Range,* below).

Extended Range

You can spend 2 points from your Shooting pool to attempt to hit a target at Long range with a pistol or submachine gun, or at up to 500 meters with a rifle or assault rifle. If the rifle is specifically designed as a sniper rifle, and you have a bipod and scope, the Director may allow you to extend its range up to 1,000 meters.

This spend does not adjust your roll; it makes it possible in the first place.

Using a weapon with a scope or a laser sight removes 1 point from the cost of Extended Range. Using a weapon with both a scope and a laser sight makes Extended Range free.

Using Sniping (see p. 77) with a scope allows shots at Extended Range without paying extra points.

Extended Range also applies, in slightly different variations, to compound bows (p. 103), dazzle lasers (p. 103), slingshots (p. 104), flare guns (p. 105), and the FN 303 riot gun (p. 107).

Extended Range never applies to shotguns.

Explosives and Explosions

A spy thriller without explosions is like a day without sunshine — a pretty good setup for vampires, in other words. Explosives are great equalizers, which is why insurgent forces use them against superpowers, terrorists use them against police, and agents use them against their enemies.

Using Explosives

Setting an explosive charge merely requires using Explosive Devices; assuming the victim is on the spot when the charge is triggered, the explosion automatically goes off at Point-Blank range. To conceal a charge (e.g., in a booby trap or car bomb) requires a Conceal test. If the agents are the targets, they should be allowed a Sense Trouble test (Difficulty 4 or better, depending on the skill of the bomber) to dive (or pull their slower teammates) away to Close range.

Throwing a grenade is an Athletics test with the Difficulty set by range: 2 for Point-Blank targets, 3 for Close targets, 5 for Near targets. Rifle grenades use Shooting, at the next range increment up: 2 for Close targets, 3 for Near targets, 5 for Long range targets. Agents and dramatically significant NPCs get an Athletics test (Difficulty 6) to halve the damage from grenades tossed at them; this represents diving for cover, knocking the grenade away, etc.

If you are attempting to hurl a grenade at a specific spot (such as through a car window), the Difficulty number increases by 1 at Point-Blank or Close range targets, and by 2 for Near range targets. Rifle grenades are already fired at specific targets using the rifle's sight or designator, although the Director may assess a Called Shot modifier (see p. 72) for tricky shots.

All Difficulties are +1 for throwing non-balanced explosives such as sticks of dynamite or Molotov cocktails (see Fire, p. 105).

Explosion Damage

Explosive damage divides into six broad classes. As with the rest of these rules, these classes primarily

reflect cinematic thriller reality, with less emphasis on real-world chemistry and physics.

Class	Examples	Annihilation Range	Damage Range	Debris Range
1	pipe bomb, foam explosive	–	Point-Blank	Close
2	grenade, stick of dynamite	–	Point-Blank	Close
3	IED, RPG rocket, brick of C4, 2m det cord, land mine, Stinger missile, mortar shell, suicide vest, Claymore, propane tank, cinematic gas tank	Point-Blank	Close	Near
4	truck bomb, meth lab, AP shell, gas main	Close	Near	Long
5	HE shell, Hellfire missile, gravity bomb	Near	Long	240 m
6	suitcase nuke	Long	3 km	4 km

If you are within a device's **damage range** (but outside its annihilation range) when it explodes, you take a die of damage, plus a modifier equal to three times its class.

If you are outside of its annihilation or damage range but within its **debris range,** make an Athletics test with the explosion's class times three as the Difficulty. If you fail, you take a die of damage, plus a modifier equal to its class.

If you are within a bomb's **annihilation range** when it detonates, you will find the term grimly self-explanatory. Your team may have to remove your residual DNA with Criminology (or Conceal, if they're trying to thwart later investigation), or simply put out feelers for your replacement character.

Some explosives, like fragmentation grenades, Claymore mines, or pipe bombs packed with nails, may be designed to deliver especially damaging debris, with a damage modifier equal to twice the device's class within the debris range.

Suitable protection (inside a tank, a military bunker, etc.) moves you one range class out: e.g., if you're inside a tank hit by an RPG rocket, take damage as if you were at Close range rather than Point-Blank. Subtract any armor as normal. Inferior protection (such as being inside a car) allows you to subtract any armor against damage, assuming there's a damage roll for you to survive.

Opposing Forces

Here are a few quick examples of human foes (and one canine) that might get in between the agents and their goals, and likely suffer for it. The Director may alter these ratings as she sees fit; they are benchmarks, averages, and guidelines, not hard-and-fast absolutes.

Any of these opponents might actually be Health 2 or 3 mooks (see p. 61).

For further variety, pick one member of the opposing group and add 1 or 2 to Athletics, Health, and various combat abilities: this will be the senior NCO, commander, the tough guy in the mob, or other "level boss" figure.

Bodyguard

A specialized security provider for a wealthy or important figure: political, criminal, or both.

General Abilities: Athletics 10, Driving 8, Hand-to-Hand 12, Health 8, Medic 4, Shooting 6, Weapons 8

Hit Threshold: 4

Alertness Modifier: +2

Stealth Modifier: +0

Damage Modifier: -2 (fist/kick), -1 (flexible baton), +1 (9mm SIG-Sauer P226 pistol)

Civilian

Just another bystander. For a low-life bystander or roughneck (or a civilian with some personal defense training), raise Hand-to-Hand to 4, and add Weapons 2 (-1 damage, club or knife).

General Abilities: Athletics 3, Hand-to-Hand 1, Health 2

Hit Threshold: 3

Alertness Modifier: -2

Stealth Modifier: -1

Damage Modifier: -2 (fist)

Gendarme

Members of the Spanish Guardia Civil, Italian Carabinieri, French Gendarmerie, or other national police. Usually a military or quasi-military force; use for border guards and customs police.

General Abilities: Athletics 7, Driving 4, Hand-to-Hand 6, Health 6, Shooting 6, Weapons 3

Hit Threshold: 3

Alertness Modifier: +1

Stealth Modifier: +0

Damage Modifier: -2 (fist), +1 (9mm Beretta 92F pistol), +1 (9mm Beretta M12 submachine gun)

Armor: -2 vs. bullets, -1 vs. other (police tactical vest)

Guard Dog

A gangster's pit bull, a mafiya lord's Doberman, a government facility's German shepherd. And just maybe, a transformed vampire. Untrained dogs and wolves have lower abilities: Athletics 8, Fighting 4, Health 3.

Pack Attack: Up to three dogs can attack a single target in one round. The foe's Hit Threshold drops by 1 against the third attack.

Worrying Bite: If two bites in a row succeed against the same target, the dog's teeth clamp down, and the second attack thus does double damage. The dog need not roll to hit that target thereafter, but will continue to worry the foe, doing normal damage to him each round until killed or driven off. The dog's Hit Threshold is only 3 against an enemy clamped in her jaws.

General Abilities: Athletics 10, Fighting 8, Health 6

Hit Threshold: 4

Alertness Modifier: +3 (keen smell and hearing)

Stealth Modifier: +1 (if trained to keep silent; otherwise, -1)

Damage Modifier: +0 (bite) plus worry (see text)

Mafioso

Criminal underboss; a made man. Usually accompanied by at least two thugs (see below).

General Abilities: Athletics 5, Driving 2, Hand-to-Hand 6, Health 5, Shooting 4, Weapons 4

Hit Threshold: 3

Alertness Modifier: +0

Stealth Modifier: +0

Damage Modifier: -2 (fist), -1 (knife), +1 (9mm Glock 26 pistol)

Militia

Unorganized soldiers in the Balkans or Middle East; warlord troops; crummy guards; aroused locals with pitchforks and torches; some Third World "regulars."

General Abilities: Athletics 4, Driving 1, Hand-to-Hand 4, Health 4, Shooting 4, Weapons 4

Hit Threshold: 3

Alertness Modifier: -1 (distractible)

Stealth Modifier: -1 (undisciplined)

Damage Modifier: -2 (fist), +0 (pitchfork or machete), +0 (7.62mm AK-47 assault rifle)

Police

Street cop, plainclothes or uniform; use for private security forces. Add 2 to Driving, Hand-to-Hand, Health, and Shooting for security police such as FSB, Special Branch, or FBI.

General Abilities: Athletics 6, Driving 4, Hand-to-Hand 7, Health 6, Shooting 5, Weapons 5

Hit Threshold: 3

Alertness Modifier: +1

Stealth Modifier: +0

Damage Modifier: -2 (fist), -1 (baton), +1 (9mm Walther P99 pistol), +1 (12-gauge Franchi SPAS shotgun), tear gas grenades

Armor: -2 vs. bullets, -1 vs. other (police tactical vest)

Soldier

Regular soldier from First World military or equivalent. Lower all ratings by 1 for conscriptees or national guard. Increase Shooting by 1 or 2 for soldiers on active combat operations.

General Abilities: Athletics 8, Driving 3, Hand-to-Hand 5, Health 7, Shooting 7, Weapons 4

Hit Threshold: 4

Alertness Modifier: +1

Stealth Modifier: +0

Damage Modifier: -2 (fist), -1 (combat knife), +0 (5.56mm H&K G36 assault rifle), grenades

Armor: -3 vs. bullets or explosives, -1 vs. other (military-grade armor; includes helmet)

Special Operations Soldier

Spetsnaz, SAS, Delta Force, or similar operators. Will likely have access to as many of the Thriller Combat options (see p. 71) as the agents do. Ability scores may likewise be in the same range as the agents'.

General Abilities: Athletics 12, Driving 3, Hand-to-Hand 12, Health 8, Shooting 12, Weapons 8

Hit Threshold: 4

Alertness Modifier: +1 (+2 by night vision optics)

Stealth Modifier: +1

Damage Modifier: -2 (fist), -1 (combat knife), +1 (9mm Izmekh PB silenced pistol), +1 (9mm AS Val heavy assault rifle; with scope), grenades

Armor: -3 vs. bullets or explosives, -1 vs. other (military-grade armor; includes helmet)

Special Police

SWAT, counter-terrorist police such as GSG 9 or Moscow OMSN, or another elite police unit. Like special ops, will likely have access to Thriller Combat options.

General Abilities: Athletics 10, Driving 5, Hand-to-Hand 8, Health 8, Shooting 10, Weapons 4

Hit Threshold: 4

Alertness Modifier: +1

Stealth Modifier: +1

Damage Modifier: -2 (fist), +1 (9mm Glock 17 pistol), +1 (12-gauge Remington 870 shotgun), +1 (9mm H&K MP5 submachine gun; with scope and laser sight), flash-bang grenades

Armor: -3 vs. bullets, -1 vs. other (military-grade armor; includes helmet and face shield (-1))

Terrorist

Generic urban terrorist. Add 2 or more to Athletics for terrorists used to fleeing from police.

General Abilities: Athletics 5, Driving 1, Hand-to-Hand 3, Health 4, Shooting 3, Weapons 3

Hit Threshold: 3

Alertness Modifier: +0

Stealth Modifier: +1

Damage Modifier: -2 (fist), -1 (knife), firearm or explosives if on a mission

Thug

Muscle for a criminal organization, random guards. Add 2 to Athletics, Hand-to-Hand, and Health for a gym rat. Add 4 to Shooting for a dedicated triggerman. Rambunctious thugs may carry submachine pistols like the TEC-9 or Uzi (both 9mm, +1 damage).

General Abilities: Athletics 6, Driving 3, Hand-to-Hand 6, Health 6, Shooting 4, Weapons 6

Hit Threshold: 3 (4 for gym rat)

Alertness Modifier: +0

Stealth Modifier: -1

Damage Modifier: -2 (fist), -1 (blackjack, knife), +0 (club), +1 (9mm Makarov PMM pistol)

Thriller Combat Rules

These rules add more options and more dramatic possibilities to standard GUMSHOE combat, in the spirit of the thriller genre. They also empower tactically minded players to dominate the battlefield, as in practice players are always more interested in wringing advantage from the system than Directors are. With the extreme potential lethality of ***Night's Black Agents,*** we see this as more a virtue than a problem.

That said, extra rules mean extra work and extra decision making. If you add these options to play and find that they slow down action sequences, because you have to stop to remember the rules or for any other reason, feel empowered to remove them again. (However, the Thriller Combat Options Sheet in the Addenda on p. 218 proves remarkably helpful in play. Copy it or download it from the Pelgrane website and pass it out to all the players.) Special combat details can be important factors in evoking the spirit of spy thrillers, but not as important as keeping the combat fast and furious.

If a player designed his character based on the availability of a combat option you intend to remove, allow him to redistribute his build points.

Admit these combat options to your game on a case-by-case basis. You may feel the need for Called Shots without wanting to open the door to Suppressive Fire, or vice versa.

If you really, really like a given option and want to see a lot of it, lower its cost. For example, Directors (rightfully) in love with John Woo might reduce the cost of Two-Fisted Firearms (see p. 75) to 2 Shooting and 1 Athletics, or charge the same cost for every further two-fisted firearm attack rather than using the normal Multiple Attacks multiplier.

To keep things simple, you can rule that no character can invoke more than one combat option per round — you can't attack recklessly and then try for a multiple attack, for example. (Sniping a Called Shot happens in successive rounds.) Then again, the types of players who like lots of crunch in their combat are the ones who like to wring maximum benefit from the system by finding powerful combination effects.

In general, if the agents can use any of these special options, their dramatically important foes, level bosses, and the like can also use them.

Although these options model thriller convention, some of them are still potentially appropriate for a Dust mode game. Such options are marked with the icon.

Autofire

To keep the story moving and its main characters alive at least until the climax arrives, the action genre treats fully automatic weapons fire as much less deadly than it is in real life. (This, by the way, is also why assault rifles carry a damage modifier of +0.) Characters either remain pinned down by suppressive fire (which is realistic) or routinely outrun lines of machine gun fire (which is not). Important characters are much less likely to be hit by full-auto gunfire than they are by single firearm shots. Minor thugs, guards, and henchmen are more likely to be hit by autofire.

The following optional rules allow for a more detailed treatment of fully automatic fire. It still models genre, not reality.

If you score a hit with a fully automatic weapon, and the Director has no narrative reason to prevent you from making an easy kill, you may then spend Shooting points to do additional instances of damage to your target, at a rate of one instance of damage per 3 additional Shooting points spent. Damage is assessed after you decide how many extra instances you want to pay for.

> *Raiding the compound of a Milan narcotics kingpin, you unlimber your assault rifle and open fire on a guard. You make a Shooting test against his Hit Threshold of 3, spending 2 points to augment your roll. You roll a 5, overcoming the Hit Threshold.*
>
> *You decide to spend 6 points to purchase another two instances of damage. You now roll three damage dice, getting a 5, a 3, and a 6, reducing the guard's Health by a total of 14 points. This takes the guard from 6 to -8 Health, leaving him Seriously Wounded. You have paid a total of 8 Shooting points for the entire exchange, taking your Shooting pool from 21 to 13.*

If additional dramatically unimportant enemies stand within 3 meters or so of your first target, you may spread out your additional instances of damage between these additional targets.

> *You burst through a door and find the kingpin cowering behind a sofa, with three submachine gun toting goons waiting in front of it, shoulder to shoulder. You make a Shooting test against the middle goon's Hit Threshold of 3; you spend 1 point on the test, roll a 4, and hit. You may now pay 3 points apiece to do additional instances of damage to your initial target, or to the guys standing on either side of him. With 12 Shooting points left, you choose to hit each of them once, at a cost of 6 points. You roll three damage dice, getting a 2, a 1, and a 2. Each goon had 6 Health. Now they have 4, 5, and 4, respectively. They open fire on you.*

If you score a hit with a fully automatic weapon, and the Director finds it dramatically unsuitable to allow extra damage, the target takes only one instance of damage, as usual.

If a player character is hit by autofire from a goon, henchman, or other unimportant character, he takes only the usual single instance of damage. This restriction vanishes if players start to count on it. Saying "He can't hurt me much, he's only a mook" should lead to a swift and bloody comeuppance.

> *The three goons open fire on you. Although they're carrying TEC-9s, they're not important enough to the narrative to qualify for additional instances of damage should they hit.*

Important enemies and level bosses can spend their own Shooting points to do additional instances of damage to the agents, again at a rate of 3 points per instance, to a maximum of three extra instances.

Called Shots

In certain situations simply hitting an enemy isn't enough: you need to get him in a particular spot. You may need to hit a foe in the unarmored face, stake a vampire in the heart, blast a detonation trigger out of a terrorist's hand, or sever a feeding tube currently draining a comrade's blood.

To specify the location of a hit is to make a called shot. Called shots are harder to make than ordinary strikes. If you're Shooting, the target is smaller than the enemy as a whole. With Hand-to-Hand or Weapons, you forfeit the opportunity to take opportunistic shots when your opponent lets down his defenses against you.

When taking a called shot, you specify the desired location of the strike. If you are trying to achieve an effect other than damage to the opponent, specify this now. The Director decides whether this is a likely outcome of such a hit. If it is clearly not a likely outcome, and your character would logically know this, the Director warns you in advance, so you can do something else instead.

The Director then adds 1 to 4 points to the target's Hit Threshold, depending on the additional difficulty entailed. Use the following table as a guideline. Body locations assume a human of ordinary size. Hit Threshold modifiers for ordinary body parts of extraordinary creatures are left as an exercise for the Director. *Vehicle locations are in italics.*

Desired Location	Modifier to Hit Threshold
Large carried object (rocket launcher, laptop computer, backpack)	+1
Torso, *windshield*	+1
Chest (if attacker is facing target)	+2
Gut, *specific window, tail rotor*	+2
Head or limb	+2
Hand or foot, joint, *tire*	+3
Heart, throat, mouth, or face	+3
Weapon or other hand-held object	+3
Eye, *headlight*	+4
Chest (if target faces away from attacker)	+4

With the new Hit Threshold determined, you then make a combat ability test, as per the standard rules. If you succeed, your specified effect occurs as desired.

If you struck an ordinary person in the head, throat, or chest with a weapon, add +2 to the damage; hitting the heart does +3 damage. Neither can be combined with a point-blank gunshot, which is already assumed to hit a vital location.

If you struck an ordinary person in a joint (wrist, knee, etc.) or throat with an aimed hand-to-hand blow, lock, or kick, add +2 to the damage; hitting an eye does +3 damage. This assumes a trained, targeted strike intended to disable or cripple. You may narrate some other crippling strike to suit your own specific martial arts idiom, but the modifiers remain the same if you want to do the extra damage.

If, after this damage is dealt, the victim is already Hurt but not Seriously Wounded, you may then pay an additional 6 Shooting, Weapons, or Hand-to-Hand points (whichever applies) to reduce the target to -6 Health. (You may not have to do so in a Dust mode game; see *Guns Kill*, p. 64.) If the target is already Seriously Wounded you may then pay an additional 6 Shooting, Weapons, or Hand-to-Hand points (whichever applies) to kill the target outright.

> *Anwar, an Algerian terrorist and arms dealer, flees through the subway, with you hot on his heels. Rather than let him escape, you aim for his head as he dashes for an escalator. Anwar's normal Hit Threshold is 4, so a head shot increases the Hit Threshold to 6. You spend 4 Shooting points for a modifier to your roll and get a 4, for a final result of 8. The bullet hits Anwar in the head.*
>
> *Your Glock does +1 damage; you roll a 5 on the damage die for a total of 6. The head shot adds +2 more for a total of 8 damage. This drops Anwar from 4 to -4 Health. Anwar is now hurt; you can spend another 6 points to drop him to -6 Health, making him seriously wounded, and do so without a qualm. The Director says, "Anwar topples at the brink of the escalator, a bullet lodged in his brain."*

If agents can take called shots, their dramatically important enemies can, too.

Shooting guns out of people's hands is ridiculous in the real world. That said, some Called Shots remain appropriate even in Dust mode: shots to heads, legs, torso, and gut. Likewise, making a Called Shot with Hand-to-Hand or Weapons, even against a weapon, is fairly realistic.

DVD HITTER'S FRIEND

Some playtesters didn't notice this rule, and wanted to know why their muscle-bound wet worker always did the same damage with a punch as their pal's weedy analyst. The Called Shot rules are how you reliably get more damage from a hit than the other guy; just bulk up on Hand-to-Hand and spend away.

Critical Hits

When your unmodified die roll on an attack attempt is a 6, *and* your total result after pool expenditures are taken into account exceeds the target's Hit Threshold by 5 or more, you score a critical hit, rolling two instances of damage and adding them together.

> *Reconnoitering a brothel in Hamburg, you punch a tough guard whose Hit Threshold is 4. You spend 3 Hand-to-Hand points on the attack, then roll a 6, for a final result of 9. This exceeds the Threshold by 5, allowing a critical hit. You deal damage equal to two punches, each with a -2 damage value. You roll a 5, for a modified result of 3 damage, and a 6, which modifies to 4 damage. The guard loses 7 Health, going from 5 to -2.*

If agents can score critical hits, their dramatically important enemies can, too.

DVD NATURAL 20 ON A SIX-SIDER

Called shots (and autofire) are good ways to turn skill points into dead foes, but critical hits can better provide the big damage necessary to take down opponents who are more than human. Because of how quickly a fight can turn for or against you, it's often better to try and stack the deck for one big hit than count on whittling something down with a series of lesser blows over many rounds. Use Support Moves, Feints, and Sniping to lower an opponent's Hit Threshold to the point where rolling a 6 will bring the pain. Worst case scenario, you've almost certainly hit them anyway.

Evasive Maneuvers

By going evasive, you can opt to fight defensively, decreasing both your chance of being hit and your chance of hitting anyone else. While evasive, you duck, weave, backtrack, and otherwise concentrate on not being hit. Announce that you're going evasive at the beginning of your action for the round; doing so does not cost an action itself.

For every 2 Athletics points you spend, your Hit Threshold increases by 1, for a maximum increase of 3. When you try to hit anyone else, their Hit Thresholds against you increase by 2 for every 1 point your Hit Threshold increased. The effects last until the beginning of your next action, at which point you can renew them (provided you can afford the cost).

> *Badly pressed and running out of Hand-to-Hand points, you attempt to fend off a Renfield while waiting for other members of your team to thunder down the corridor to your rescue. You declare evasive action and spend 4 Athletics on a 2-point Hit Threshold increase, taking your threshold from 4 to 6. The Renfield's Threshold increases (against your attacks only) from 4 to 8. When Luc shows up, he can whack the Renfield with a Hit Threshold of 4.*

Extra Attacks

Prereq: Combat ability 8+

By pushing yourself, you can attempt more than one attack per round, provided that your *rating* in the ability you're fighting with is 8 or more. You cannot attempt extra attacks with a heavy, unbalanced, or unwieldy melee weapon; in general, any melee weapon (except a sword) with a base damage modifier of +0 or more requires the Director's agreement to use for extra attacks.

Hand-to-Hand or Weapons: After reaching or exceeding your opponent's Hit Threshold, you may spend 3 Hand-to-Hand or Weapons, plus 2 Health, to immediately launch a second attack. These points are not applied to your roll; they are the cost of the extra attack. However, you may still spend further points to boost that test result.

> *In an abandoned Bulgarian insane asylum, you discover a feral woman left behind by the former occupants. She bites your ankle, tearing an alarming chunk out of it. You respond by kicking her in the face. After spending 2 Hand-to-Hand, you roll a 1, just barely meeting her Hit Threshold. You roll 5 for your damage die, which, with a kick doing -2 damage, reduces her Health from 6 to 3.*
>
> *That doesn't knock her far enough from the ankle buffet, so you take a follow-up kick at her. Paying 3 Hand-to-Hand and 2 Health (well worth it, if she's carrying any kind of horrible vampire diseases) up front, you spend another 3 Hand-to-Hand to boost your attack result. Your roll of a 4 hits her soundly, and your damage die result of 6 (-2 for your kick) knocks her down to -1 Health and blessed unconsciousness.*

Shooting: After reaching or exceeding your opponent's Hit Threshold, you may spend 4 Shooting, plus 1 Stability, to immediately launch a second attack. The Shooting points are not applied to your roll; they are the cost of the extra attack. However, you may still spend further points to boost that test result.

> *You return fire against the dhampir across the nightclub floor as the chic patrons scatter. "He reels back, bleeding, stunned... then seems to recover, drawing a bead on you," narrates the Director, unnervingly. Hoping that another shot might finish him off, you buy an extra attack, paying 4 Shooting and 1 Stability. You then spend another 2 Shooting to boost your attack roll, and roll a 6, for a final result of 8. That's a hit. Your bullet slams the dhampir into the VIP room in a spray of mirrored glass and vodka bottles.*

If you have already launched an extra attack this round, the cost for yet another attack is multiplied by the total number of attacks you've already dealt.

> *And then he slowly begins to pull himself up from the wreckage. Having already made two attacks, a third attack this round would cost you 8 Shooting and 2 Stability, not including any Shooting you'd have to spend to hit the daywalking fiend again. Diving out of the club while calling for backup suddenly seems more cost-effective.*

Creatures who attack more than once per round pay no price for the privilege. They cannot gain extra attacks on top of that by spending points. In extraordinary circumstances, where dramatically appropriate, the Director may allow intelligent creatures who normally get one attack to use the extra attack rules, provided that they are also available to player characters. As NPCs lack Stability ratings, extra firearms attacks simply cost them 5 Shooting points.

Multiple Targets

If you make an extra attack against a different target from your first attack, the second target's Hit Threshold increases by 2. A third target, if any, would have his Hit Threshold increased by 3, and so on.

Two-Fisted Firearms

Shooting attacks using two guns, one in each hand, are synonymous with the action genre. They work like normal Extra Attacks for Shooting, with these differences:

- You must have pistols in both hands at the beginning of the round to use this option.
- You only need to spend 3 Shooting pool points plus 2 Athletics in order to attack with both pistols. The Athletics spend covers your characteristic action-movie diving roll, if any, or merely represents the effort involved in holding two weapons steady against each other's recoil.
- You name your target or targets and spend individually on each, then roll your attacks and damage separately. You cannot adjust your shots or switch targets in between. If you attack two targets, choose one to have his Hit Threshold increased by 2, per Multiple Targets, above.
- If you launch an extra two-fisted pistol attack in the round, you must pay 9 Shooting and 6 Athletics to do so, but again, you can attack with both pistols.

Feints

When engaged in a Hand-to-Hand or Weapons contest with an opponent, you can put him off guard with a series of false blows meant not to do harm, but to maneuver yourself or others into a better position against him for future blows. Forego an attack against your opponent. You then may spend up to 3 Hand-to-Hand (or Weapons, if appropriate) points to reduce his Hit Threshold by the number of Hand-to-Hand points spent. His Hit Threshold remains lowered until the end of your action in the following round. A target currently suffering a reduced Hit Threshold due to one feint can not have it further reduced by another. Feints are most effective when multiple agents battle a single tough opponent.

> *You and Luc have your hands full with Vulko, a Renfield hopped up on vampire blood and designer amphetamines. (The order of action is Vulko, you, Luc.) As Vulko's Hit Threshold is a daunting 7, you've been making only costly headway against him. You decide to feint against him. You give up your next attack to instead spend 3 Hand-to-Hand to reduce his Hit Threshold by 3, to 4. "I snap a kick at this trog," you say, "and then a head fake to bend him back a bit." Luc then spends 2 points on his Hand-to-Hand to hit him, a leg strike to the now-extended limb. He succeeds, dropping Vulko from 12 to 11 Health.*
>
> *The next round begins: With blinding speed, Vulko lashes out at you, hitting and taking you from 8 to 4 Health. You then spend 2 Hand-to-Hand points on your own follow-up attack on the still out-of-position Vulko, for a result of 5. That hit winds up taking Vulko from 11 to 8 Health. Now that you have completed your own action, Vulko's Hit Threshold goes back up to 7. But now Luc decides to feint...*

Jumping In

Provided you have not yet acted during the current round, you may Jump In, spending 4 Athletics or 3 points of Shooting, Weapons, or Hand-to-Hand at the end of any other character's action to take the next action. Your next action must be an attack with the ability from which you spent the points; if you spent Athletics, it may be any action or attack you like.

You may also Jump In at the end of a round, making yourself the first character to act in the new round.

> *The fight with Vulko is not going well. The order of action is still Vulko, you, Luc. Luc is hurt and out of Hand-to-Hand points; he tries to kick Vulko and fails. It is now Vulko's turn to act. You decide to Jump In. You spend 3 Hand-to-Hand points, because you plan to nail Vulko with an elbow strike. Your Hand-to-Hand drops from 10 to 7, and you now go first in the round … and more importantly, before Vulko. Until changed again, the order of action becomes: you, Vulko, Luc.*

Where two characters want to Jump In at the same time, player characters take precedence over NPCs. If two agents want to act first, precedence goes to the one who arrived closest to start time for the current session.

You may forgo your allotted action during a round, then jump in at any later point at no cost. In this case you are voluntarily moving yourself back in the order of action.

DVD KILLER APP FOR THE KILLER ELITE

Jump In. Often. It will, guaranteed, save your life or that of a comrade.

Martial Arts

Prereq: Hand-to-Hand or Weapons 8+

Characters with a Hand-to-Hand or Weapons *rating* of 8 or more can specify that they are trained in one or more martial arts. Once per fight, their players may gain a 3-point Hand-to-Hand or Weapons refresh by uttering a brief, evocative narrative description of his or her elegantly bone-crunching moves:

- "With a flowing Kata Gurama, I try to sweep him up onto my shoulder and down to the pavement."
- "Although this ceremonial sword isn't quite what I trained with for Barcelona, I'm sure it's up to a devastating lunge from sixte."
- "Using my krav maga training, I target the back of his knee with a sharp, down-angled kick."
- "Remembering the sweat and humidity of that sweltering Manila gym so long ago, I summon up all my strength for a nerve-crunching escrima strike with this rolled-up magazine."

At the Director's discretion, especially poetic or wincingly brutal descriptions may earn a 4-point refresh.

These utterances needn't be improvised; players can prepare key phrases in advance, then adapt them to the situation at hand.

Mook Shield

Prereq: Hand-to-Hand 8+

If you have a Hand-to-Hand *rating* of 8 or more, you can drag a convenient mook, henchman, or minion into the path of incoming gunfire. Spend 3 Hand-to-Hand points and then make a Hand-to-Hand attack against any mook in Point-Blank range, or 3 Hand-to-Hand and 2 Athletics and then make a Hand-to-Hand attack against any mook in Close range. (Those points do not add to your attack.) If no mook is closer than Near range, you cannot use Mook Shield.

If you succeed, all ranged attacks that miss you hit the mook instead until your next turn; the mook can do nothing. Additionally, the mook provides -4 Armor against incoming fire, losing 4 points of Health for each bullet that hits you. Holding a mook up in front of you gives you full cover, and increases your normal Hit Threshold by 1. On your next turn, you may fire a weapon, but must either drop the mook (or, more likely, his corpse) or spend 3 additional Shooting points to fire from under his arm.

Reckless Attacks

By fighting all-out, taking no precautions against being hit yourself, you can increase your chances of hitting your opponent, and your chance of being hit yourself. Spend 1 Athletics to decrease both your and a chosen opponent's Hit Threshold by up to 3 points. The minimum Hit Threshold achievable through a reckless attack is 1. Your opponent's Hit Threshold decreases only against you, but your decrease occurs against all potential opponents. The decreases last until the beginning of your next action, at which point you can renew them by paying another Athletics point.

Confident that his men will flee if their commander is taken down, you fight recklessly against the mercenary captain Van Baas. You spend 1 Athletics point and decide on a 2-point decrease in Hit Thresholds. Van Baas' Hit Threshold decreases from 3 to 1, but only against your assault. Against your comrade Luc, the captain's Hit Threshold remains 3. However, Van Baas and his mercs can attack you as if your Hit Threshold is 2, down the same 2 points from your normal Threshold of 4.

Smashes and Throws

By spending 2 extra Hand-to-Hand points before making a Hand-to-Hand attack on a foe in Point-Blank range, you can smash or throw your foe instead of merely tagging him with a blow. These 2 points do not affect the attack die; spend as normal to raise your roll if desired.

Smash

In a smash attack, you smash your opponent into or against some object — a table, a bookcase, a car hood, etc. You can define that object, subject to the Director's veto on grounds of reasonableness. Smashing a foe against something breakable or hard — a coffee table, a cement wall — does -1 damage. Smashing a foe against something hard *and* projecting — a bathroom sink, a metal stanchion, the corner of a sarcophagus — does +0 damage.

Throw

In a throw attack, you throw your foe away from you. He lands at Close range, not Point-Blank; he moves to the end of the rank order in combat. Damage from a

throw depends on the surface you throw your foe into: something breakable or hard (as above) does -2 damage; something hard and projecting does -1 damage. (Agents and special foes with Breakfall (see p. 80) take 1 less point of damage from a Throw.) This is a great way to get out of knife range while you draw a gun or grab a knife from the counter.

Throwing someone directly at a window is harder: add +2 to their Hit Threshold. Only on your unmodified attack roll of 6 (lower for mooks or really cinematic fights) do they go through an unbroken window for an additional -1 damage (from broken glass) and any further damage from the fall (see *Falling,* p. 80). Agents and dramatically important NPCs can make a Difficulty 5 Athletics test to grab the frame and avoid the fall.

Sniping

Prereq: Shooting 8+

If you have a Shooting rating of 8 or more and are armed with a rifle, you may decrease the Hit Threshold of a target for a single Shooting attack by taking at least one round to aim. If the target is aware of your presence, his Hit Threshold decreases by 1. If he is unaware of your presence, it decreases by 2.

If your rifle has a scope, you may make a Sniping attack at Extended Range without paying the normal 2 point cost (see p. 68).

Special Weapons Training

Prereq: Shooting or Weapons 8+

If you have a Shooting rating of 8 or more, you can spend 6 build points to grant yourself Special Weapons Training in one particular make of firearm: for example, a Walther PPK, .357 Desert Eagle, or Heckler & Koch MP5 submachine gun. (When taking this option during character creation, these build points must come from your budget of General build points.) In your hands, this weapon increases its damage by 1. A light firearm carries a damage value of +1, while a heavy firearm is +2. This applies not only to the particular weapon you own, but to all other weapons of that exact make. If you have special weapons training in the Fabrique Nationale P90 and your own weapon is confiscated by Chechen guerrillas, the replacement P90 you later acquire from an MI6 contact in Baku still provides you the enhanced damage rating.

You may take Special Weapons Training in one light and one heavy firearm.

Weapons and Special Weapons Training

If you have a Weapons rating of 8 or more, you can spend 6 build points to grant yourself Special Weapons Training in one particular make of weapon: for example, a switchblade, a tonfa, or a DV-2 Spetsnaz combat knife. The rules above apply.

You may take Special Weapons Training in one type of knife and one other make of weapon.

Support Moves

Prereq: Athletics 8+

If your Athletics rating is 8 or more, you may perform support moves. In a support move, you use your action to execute an Athletics maneuver, which then places one of your comrades in a superior position against an opponent. Describe, in exciting detail, how you intend action to either improve your comrade's position, or degrade an opponent's. If your suggestion seems plausible, the Director clears you to make an Athletics test. Although your Director can adjust Difficulties according to described circumstances, you usually test against a Difficulty of 4. If successful, you allow your comrade to add the difference between your result and difficulty to a Shooting, Weapons, or Hand-to-Hand roll against the designated opponent. If the comrade fails to attack that opponent as his next action, the benefit is lost.

> *In the Carpathian mountains, Luc finds himself pinned in a narrow crevasse as a bat-winged horror attempts to drain his blood. You, higher up on the cliff face, are out of Shooting points but want to assist your team mate. You describe a support move: "I rappel down and kick a loose chunk of rock so that it caroms off the thing's head!" The Director rules that this is possible and not extra difficult (though dangerous — if you fail, you'll have to pass a second Athletics test or fall and hurt yourself.) You add 3 to your Athletics roll of 6 for a final result of 9. The creature attacks Luc, its horrid lamprey mouth clamping onto Luc's flesh and reducing his Health from 11 to 5 as it swells and reddens. Now it's Luc's turn to act; he may apply a bonus of 5 (the difference between your Difficulty of 4 and result of 9) to his roll. He spends a Weapons point of his own, for a total bonus of 6, and rolls a 1, for a result of 7. This is just enough for Luc to overcome the creature's very high Hit Threshold; he then scores 5 points of damage with his ice axe.*

Sample support moves might include:

- Using a torch, crucifix, pitchfork, spear, or fixed bayonet to keep a creature at bay (or otherwise restrict its movements) while your comrade stakes it, hoses it down with a flamethrower, or shoots it. This is Athletics because it's not a direct attack, but a blocking move.

- Luring the creature into lashing out with a claw to set up your comrade's Called Shot (see p. 72) on its hand, crippling it and removing one of its attacks; or on its leg, crippling it and slowing its pursuit of your team. (You can also accomplish the same goal with Feint; see p. 75.)
- Moving its head into position (either by feinting with a torch or crucifix, or by exposing your throat or other soft target) for your comrade to smash its teeth with a Called Shot to the mouth. (You can also accomplish the same goal with Feint; see p. 75.)
- Shooting wildly, throwing sand or talcum powder, knocking over bookcases, or otherwise attempting to locate (or channel) an invisible creature for your comrade to attack.

Suppressive Fire

Prereq: Shooting 8+

If you are armed with an automatic weapon and have a Shooting *rating* of 8 or more, you can lay down suppressive fire, preventing opponents from crossing a line drawn by your weapon's bullets. Although creating a line of suppressive fire prevents you from hitting your opponents, it also prevents them from firing directly at you. It is most useful for preventing enemies from advancing or pursuing.

When you first lay down a line of suppressive fire, make a Shooting test against a Difficulty determined by the approximate length of the line you're drawing. The line must be within your weapon's range. Increase the Difficulty of crossing the line by spending extra Shooting points on the test.

Length of Line	Difficulty
Alleyway width, doorway	3
Road (1 lane), driveway	4
Road (2 lanes), warehouse doors	5
Road (3 lanes), hangar doors	6

You may then maintain the line of bullets with no further effort, provided you do nothing else, for either 2 rounds (if using a pistol) or 5 rounds (if using an assault rifle or submachine gun). Once this period elapses, you must take an action to reload, dropping your suppressive fire for one round. Then you must retake the test.

Opponents can see the line of fire; only the reckless or desperate will try to cross it.

To cross an established line of suppressive fire requires an Athletics test with the result of the gunman's suppressive fire test as the Difficulty. On a failure, the character suffers an instance of damage for the weapon type and falls back to his previous position on the far side of the fire line. If he succeeds with a margin of 0 to 4 between result and Difficulty, he crosses the line but suffers an instance of damage. On a margin of 5 or more, he crosses the line without taking damage.

> *As your comrades rush a rescued kidnap victim to safety, you stay behind on a Bosnian street to delay her former captors. You lay down a line of suppressive fire across the mouth of the alleyway you expect them to emerge from. Spending 3 Shooting points against a Difficulty of 3, you roll a 1, for a result of 4. This is enough to lay down a line of fire across the alleyway.*
>
> *The lead kidnapper, Arpad, is controlled by a vampiric worm called an adzeh, which cares little for its host's survival. It sends Arpad through the suppressive fire. The Director makes Arpad's Athletics test, spending 3 points on the attempt, and rolls a 4, for a final result of 7. This overcomes the Difficulty, which is your result of 4, by 3 points. This is enough to cross the line but not enough to avoid damage. You roll damage for your MP5; Arpad loses 6 Health from a bullet hit … but keeps coming.*

By acting in tandem with other team members, you can increase the size of your line of fire, and keep the bullets flying when one of you has to reload.

Technothriller Monologue

Prereq: Shooting 8+

Rules aren't the only way to create an atmosphere of gun grease and cordite. Adopt this rule if you want to keep the combat rules simple while giving your resident gun bunnies a taste of the fetishistic combat detail they crave.

Once per fight, a player with a Shooting *rating* of 8 or more can gain a 3-point refresh in that ability by uttering a brief narrative description of his or her actions redolent with Clancy-esque detail:

- "The rubber recoil pad of my SAIGA SWAT shotgun bounces against my body arm as I come through the door blasting!"
- "I sit at the bunker, waiting, scope trained on the doorway, my M4A1 kitted out with all the custom blessings the SOPMOD can bestow."

- "As I fire one of its trademark bursts from the HK UMP, I take a deadened, existential solace from the soulless blankness of its polymer casing."

At the Director's discretion, a technothriller monologue may provide a 4-point refresh when it is so impenetrably jargon-filled that other players recoil in awe at the utterer's ballistic enthusiasm.

In the deployment of technothriller monologue, advance preparation is no vice. Players should feel free to script out suitably purple utterances, perhaps on index cards.

Other Dangers

It's not all car crashes and gunplay. In the dangerous world of ***Night's Black Agents,*** other dangers threaten the bodies — and the souls — of the player characters.

Hazards

In the spirit of GUMSHOE, most of these environmental dangers are assessed primarily in narrative, rather than starkly biological, terms.

Acid

Not just found on monster jaws and talons, the agents might encounter acids in a drug lab, a metalworking shop, an industrial plant (either as process or as pollution), or even a postmodern alchemist's lair.

Once applied, acid does continuous damage for the listed number of rounds (or, outside combat, every few seconds) until removed or counteracted with the proper materials and a 1-point spend of Chemistry or Diagnosis. (First aid does not prepare you for acid casualties.) Roll a damage die for the first application and use that result for all future damage increments.

Acids do damage based on the area of your body exposed to the corrosion.

Minor exposure, most often to an extremity or from a quick splash, carries a -2 damage modifier (merely smoldering away at clothing or vital possessions, if less than 1 point of damage results). Lasts two rounds.

Partial exposure, a dunking of up to half your body or a bucketful thrown at you, carries a -1 damage modifier. Lasts four rounds.

Extensive exposure, such as immersion in or swallowing acid, adds a +1 damage modifier. Lasts six rounds. (Swallowed acid damages you every three rounds up to eighteen rounds, or every few minutes for an hour.)

At the Director's discretion, an acid attack might merely blind an agent until healed, making combat (among other things) impossible.

For game purposes, treat strong alkalines the same as acids. Weaker acids do less damage; subtract a further -1 or even -2 from the damage die for such substances.

Crashes

If you are hit by a car, you suffer damage equal to the Difficulty Number of the Sense Trouble or Athletics test to get out of the way that you failed (if the target is an NPC, the base damage is 5). Modify the damage further based on the vehicle's speed and type, as follows:

Collision Circumstances	Damage Modifier
average city driving speed	+2
highway speed	+4
motorcycle	-3
SUV, limousine, van	+1
Humvee, armored limousine, truck, *normal building*	+2
semi-trailer, APC, heavy truck, *abutment, bunker*	+4

If you are in a car crash, you suffer damage equal to the Difficulty Number of the Driving attempt you or the driver missed (if there was no test, the base damage is 4). If you were wearing seat belts or had other crash protection, apply a -2 modifier to that result. Add half the speed modifier from the table above; *subtract* the vehicle type modifier for *your* vehicle; add the vehicle type modifier for the other vehicle.

Personal armor allows one more point of collision damage through than of bullet damage: for instance, a tactical vest (-2 Armor against bullets) reduces collision damage by -1. Vehicle armor does not apply.

> *Your team just carjacked a black Escalade from an 'Ndrangheta courier in Turin. While making your circuitous getaway down city streets, an armored limousine with tinted windows suddenly swerves into your lane and guns right for your car. The Director tells you to make a Driving test at Difficulty 5 to avoid impact; you fail and the cars collide. Everyone in the car takes 5 points of damage, +1 for city driving speed (half of +2), -1 for your SUV's protective bulk, +2 for the oncoming armored limousine's bulk, for a total of 7 points. You and Beatrice*

had your seat belts on and only take 5 points apiece; Luc was still wearing his tactical vest from the carjacking (but not his seat belt), so he takes 6 points. Ivan, with no seat belt and no armor, loses the full 7 points of Health.

If you hit a structure rather than another vehicle, use the italicized examples in the table to gauge damage. The Director always determines any damage to the vehicles based on the dramatic necessities of the plot (see *Collision is Drama not Physics,* p. 59).

Drowning and Suffocation

If an agent has advance warning before being immersed in water or an unbreathable atmosphere, he can hold his breath. (This may involve a Sense Trouble test.)

A character holding his breath gets five rounds (or two minutes, out of combat or chases) before he starts suffocating. After that point, you lose 1 Athletics every round, as you struggle to hold your breath. After that you lose 1 Health every round as you start inhaling water, smoke, or gas.

Up to half these lost Health points (minimum 2 Health) can be restored with a 1-point Medic spend if the victim is rescued and resuscitated before she dies. You cannot resuscitate yourself with Medic.

Electricity and Other Shocks

Damage from exposure to electricity varies according to voltage. You can suffer:

Mild shock, equivalent to briefly touching an ungrounded wire or damaged electrical appliance. You lose 1 Health and are blown backward for a couple of meters.

Moderate shock, equivalent to a jolt from a cattle prod or a stun gun. You lose 2 Health and (if in combat time) your next four actions. You always lose at least one action, but may buy off the loss of other actions by paying 3 Athletics points per action.

Extreme shock, equivalent to a lightning strike. You suffer one die of damage, with a +4 modifier.

The Director should always give you some opportunity to avoid being shocked, whether it be an Athletics test to avoid unexpected contact, or a Mechanics test to spot the high-tension wire.

Falling

A fall does damage equal to the Difficulty Number of the Athletics attempt you missed (if there was no test, the base damage is 5), adding a further damage modifier as follows:

Circumstances of the Fall	Damage Modifier
through branches, awnings, or other slowing obstacles	-2
into water, if you can dive in (make an Athletics test Difficulty 5)	minus amount by which you made the Athletics test
onto normal soil	+0
into water, if you can't dive in	+1
each additional 3m of height or 25kph of speed after the first (ex: fall from 9m or out of a car traveling 75kph adds +2)	+1
onto asphalt, concrete, or equivalent	+2
onto spikes or jagged rocks	+3

Armor allows one more point of falling damage through than of bullet damage: e.g., a tactical vest (-2 Armor against bullets) reduces falling damage by -1.

On any final damage result of **hurt** or worse, you automatically break a limb.

Breakfall

If you have an Athletics or Hand-to-Hand rating of 8 or higher, subtract one-quarter of your *rating* (rounding down) from your falling damage as you slow yourself by bouncing off walls and hit with a flowing tuck and roll.

Fire

Damage from exposure to fire varies according to the surface area of your body exposed to the flame, and repeats for each round (or, outside of combat, every few seconds) you remain exposed to it.

Minor exposure, most often to an extremity like a hand or foot, carries a damage modifier of –2.

Partial exposure, to your face or to up to half of your surface area, carries a damage modifier of +0.

Extensive exposure, to half or more of your surface area, imposes a damage modifier of +2.

The Director should always give you a chance to avoid being set on fire. The difficulty of extinguishing a flame varies depending on the substance. If your clothes are simply on fire, the flames are easier to put out (Difficulty 3 Athletics test; roll instead of taking other actions; fire out in 1 round) than if you are covered in an adhesive accelerant, like the incendiary gel used in many types of **napalm** (fire burns for 2d

rounds without smothering or chemical fire suppression).

Characters in a burning building run the risk of smoke asphyxiation, which uses the drowning and suffocation rules above.

Temperature Extremes

In intense heat or cold, it can be difficult to move or think. Treat agents suffering from extreme heat or cold (in the Siberian tundra without parkas, for example) as Hurt.

Toxins

Toxins are either inhaled, ingested (including by contact or exposure), or injected directly into the bloodstream. They vary widely in lethality and in nature. A dose of household cleanser may impose a damage modifier of –2, where a sophisticated nerve gas might range from +6 to +16. Inhaled toxins tend to take effect right away. Injected and ingested toxins take delayed effect, anywhere from rounds to minutes to hours after exposure. Their damage might be parceled out in increments, and almost always prevents you from refreshing Health points until somehow neutralized.

Note that basic poison control *is* an aspect of first aid: an agent using Medic may be able to restore lost Health points (if the poison was weak or easily purged), or at least stabilize the victim until he can get to a hospital.

The Director should ideally give you a chance to avoid exposure, likely via Chemistry, Pharmacy, or Sense Trouble. Once you have been exposed, many toxins allow a Health test (listed as Test in the examples) for half damage or some other lesser effect (under Minor in the examples). If you fail the test, the Severe result occurs.

The following sample toxins are only a tiny shadow of the vast and glorious universe of poisons. Almost all of them will reliably kill or incapacitate all but the most dramatically robust of NPCs … human NPCs, that is.

Anthrax

Onset: inhaled (whether natural or weaponized); 2-8 days

Test: Difficulty 6 Health

Minor: +0 damage; lasts until treated

Severe: Hurt, +3 damage and -3 Athletics every day until dead or cured

Heroin

Onset: usually injected or inhaled; 2 rounds

Test: Difficulty 7 Health

Minor: Shaken (see p. 83) for 1-6 hours

Severe: Completely incapacitated by ecstasy; lasts 1-6 hours; Addictive Disorder (see p. 85) until cured even if you already have a Disorder

Kolokol-1

The Soviets developed this aerosolized incapacitating agent as a derivative of the opioid fentanyl in the 1970s; its use in the Moscow theater siege in 2002 was implicated in many of the 129 hostage deaths during that operation.

Onset: inhaled; one round; usually requires a successful Hand-to-Hand attack to the face or surprise

Test: Difficulty 5 Health

Minor: -5 Athletics, Hurt; lasts 2 hours

Severe: +0 damage, unconsciousness; lasts 6 hours

Snake Venom

Onset: contact or injection; 15 minutes (or five rounds in combat time)

Test: Difficulty 4 Health (higher for increased dosages)

Minor: +2 damage, Hurt; lasts until treated

Severe: +6 damage, -2 Athletics; -2 Health and -1 Athletics every hour thereafter until dead or treated

Tear Gas

Onset: inhaled and eye contact; one round

Test: Difficulty 5 Health

Minor: -2 Athletics, all tasks requiring vision take 1 extra spend; lasts until exposure ends

Severe: -4 Athletics, Hurt, all physical spends only half as effective (e.g., spend 2 Hand-to-Hand, get +1 on the die), blindness (all Shooting Difficulties increase by 2); lasts until five minutes after exposure ends

Shock and Awe

Involvement in horrific events can scar the psyche. Even non-supernatural horrors often prove emotionally destabilizing. A single day of stark violence can bring on a thousand nights of self-inflicted terrors. Once you learn enough about it, you may decide the world looks better through a bottle. Any confrontation with the supernatural — or even too much existential isolation — threatens a complete psychotic break, manifesting as a bizarre derangement of your own personal reality.

Stability Tests

When an incident challenges your grip on yourself, make a Stability test against a Difficulty Number of 4. As with any other test of a General ability, you are

always permitted to spend Stability points to provide a bonus to your roll. However, it's never a good bet to spend more points than you stand to lose if you fail. You *can* "spend yourself negative," if you think you absolutely *have* to resist that vampire, although you can *not* voluntarily reduce your Stability pool below -11.

If you fail, you either suffer some negative result (usually, giving in to a vampire or to your own mental illness) or lose a number of points from your Stability pool, in addition to any points spent on the test itself. A test that carries a potential loss of, e.g., 3 points is called a 3-point Stability test, and so on. The severity of the loss depends on the situation.

REQUIRED DISCLAIMER

This game uses the same dramatic license to depict mental illness and psychological damage as that used in spy thrillers and vampire fiction. It follows the conventions of those genres, not those of real-world psychiatric medicine. For example, actual mental illness seldom fits the specific conditions we separate out here; more often, it manifests as a complex of interconnected syndromes and symptoms. We intend no trivialization or disrespect of the real-world sufferers of mental illness, any more than we do of the real-world victims of terrorism, human trafficking, or other foundational horrors of this horror game and its setting.

Stability tests in pitch blackness are made at Difficulty 5 (see *Darkness*, p. 215); the Director may assess other environmental or situational penalties.

Incident	**Stability Loss**
🔥 You see a fresh corpse; you witness a killing	1
🔥 A human opponent attacks you with evident intent to do serious harm	2
You experience a strong unnatural sensation such as intense déjà vu, "missing time," or hallucinations	2
You witness acts of torture	2
🔥 A human opponent attacks you with evident intent to kill	3
🔥 You kill someone in a fight	3
🔥 You see a particularly grisly murder or accident scene	3
You see a supernatural creature from a distance	3
You witness an obviously unnatural, but not necessarily threatening, omen or magical effect — a wall covered in horrible insects, a talking cat, or a bleeding window	3
You learn that one of your Network contacts has been violently killed	4
You see hundreds of corpses; you witness a large battle	4
You see a supernatural creature up close	4
You spend a week in solitary confinement	4
You learn that a friend, loved one, or Source of Stability has been violently killed	4
You discover the corpse of one of your Network contacts	4
You discover the corpse of a friend, loved one, or Source of Stability	5
You are attacked by a supernatural creature, or by a friend, loved one, or Source of Stability	5
You witness a clearly supernatural or impossible killing	5
You witness or experience an obviously unnatural, and threatening, omen or magical effect — a cold hand clutches your heart, a swarm of bees pours out of your mouth	5
You kill someone in cold blood; you torture someone	5
You see one of your Network contacts killed	5
You see a friend, loved one, or Source of Stability killed	6
You are tortured for an hour or longer	6
You discover that you have committed cannibalism	6
You are possessed by some outside force, but conscious while it operates your body unspeakably	7
You speak with someone you know well who you know to be dead	7
You are attacked by a single gigantic supernatural creature or by a horde of supernatural creatures	7
You see a friend, loved one, or Source of Stability killed in a particularly gruesome manner or in a way you are helpless to avert	8
You kill a friend, loved one, or Source of	8

Stability	

Here are two Stability tests in action:

Your current Stability is 8. While staking out a dismal warehouse on the outskirts of Gdansk, you see a cadaverous figure the color of bleached bone materialize in the warehouse's dim interior. You must make a Stability test against the standard Difficulty of 4. Confident that this mere glimpse of a creature constitutes only a minor brush with destabilizing weirdness, you elect to spend only 1 point to bolster your roll. Alas, you roll a 1, for a result of 2, two lower than the Difficulty Number. Having failed, you suffer a Stability loss of 3. ("You see a supernatural creature from a distance.") Having spent 1 point on your bonus and lost another 3 to the failure, your new Stability pool value is 4.

Your Obsession, a phobia of white things caused by your experiences in Norway, may force you to flee. You make a Stability test to remain on watch, again at a Difficulty of 4. Putting 2 points into the test, you roll another 1, for a result of 3, another failure. You turn and run, but you lose no additional Stability for failing, only the 2 points you spent on the test. Your new Stability pool value is 2.

EXPERIENCE AND STABILITY

Difficulty Numbers for Stability tests also change depending on the character's attitude toward, or familiarity with, the destabilizing event. Characters who would logically be inured to a given event face a Difficulty of 3, while those especially susceptible face a 5. An agent who has had extensive training in treating injuries might, for example, face a lowered Difficulty when encountering gruesomely mutilated bodies. A soldier would get a better chance against violent attacks or killing in a fight. An agent who has gone through intensive SERE training might have a lower Difficulty to avoid cracking under torture or isolation. No character type gets a break when encountering supernatural creatures or events.

If multiple horrific stimuli occur during one scene, you make a single roll, based on the highest potential Stability loss.

You and your friend Daniel are in the Bunhill Fields cemetery in London on a cloudy afternoon looking for genealogical data on a suspected vampire. Suddenly, a pack of rats swarms from an open grave and attacks you both with unnatural ferocity and strength. You blaze away with your Glock, driving off the creatures, but not before they devour Daniel in front of your eyes, biting through his skull and slurping the insides like it was an eggshell. You make a single 8-point Stability test, the most severe of several pertaining to the incident. ("Seeing a friend killed in a gruesome manner.")

In Burn mode games, even experienced agents still suffer from the cruelties of the covert life. In other games, agents with significant field or military experience have become inured to the stimuli on the table marked with the icon; such agents don't bother making Stability checks for those. Even in non-Burn games, civilians or desk jockeys may still have to make these checks.

OPTIONAL RULE: IT'S COLD INSIDE

With players who are really enthusiastic about emulating the emotional arcs of spy fiction, you may want to try this more intense option: letting *them* decide when some emotional crisis or damage in play triggers a 2-point Stability test for their agent. Such players will sense when the pressures of paranoia, cynicism, and isolation grind their agents hardest. This may depend on the mode, for example:

Someone says they love you, but they're talking to, and about, your cover identity.

To do your job correctly, you must use, endanger, or inform on a friend, loved one, or family member.

You realize you have been under cover or surveillance for too long.

Your recent success was undone by politics or other people's incompetence.

Another agent, or one of your contacts, does something you could interpret as setting you up.

Someone you first knew as a civilian turns out to be part of the clandestine world: a spy, a mafioso, an asset, a minder.

You find yourself feeling more affection or professional sympathy for an opponent than for someone on your own side.

Your own side does something against your (and its) professed ideology and morals.

Losing It

Like Health, your Stability pool can drop below 0.

If your Stability ranges from 0 to –5, you are **Shaken**. You can still do your job, but seem distracted. If you want to make an Investigative spend, make a test with the absolute value of your current Stability pool as your Difficulty. You may deliberately strain

yourself, voluntarily reducing your Stability pool by an amount of your choice. For each point you reduce it, add 1 to your die result. The Difficulty of the Stability test is based on your Stability pool *before* you make this reduction. If you succeed, you can make the investigative spend.

If your Stability ranges from –6 to –11, you are **Shattered.** You acquire a mental illness, which stays with you even after your Stability pool is restored to normal. (See below for more.) You also continue to suffer the ill effects of being Shaken. Furthermore, you permanently lose 1 point from your Stability *rating*. The only way to get it back is to purchase it again with build points.

When your Stability reaches –12 or less, you are **Incurably Insane**. You may commit one last crazy act, which must either be self-destructively heroic or self-destructively destructive. Or you may choose merely to gibber and drool. Assuming you survive your permanent journey to the shores of madness, your character is quietly shipped off to a discreet Swiss sanitarium (or gathered up by the Agency for "retirement"), never to be seen again. Time to create a new character.

PSYCHOLOGICAL TRIAGE

A character with the Shrink ability can spend points from that pool to help another character regain spent Stability points. For every Shrink point spent, the recipient gains 2 Stability points.

If a character is Shaken or otherwise acting in an erratic manner due to mental illness, you can spend 2 points of Shrink to snap him into a state of temporary lucidity. He will then act rationally for the remainder of the current scene.

HEAD GAMES

Mental illness can be cured through prolonged treatment using the Shrink ability. At the beginning of each scenario, in a prologue scene preceding the main action, the character administering the treatment makes a Shrink test (Difficulty 4). Alternately, the agents can use Network to recruit an NPC psychologist, who makes the test using his point pool at Difficulty 3.

After three consecutive successful tests, and three consecutive scenarios in which the patient's Stability pool remains above 0 at all times, all mental illnesses suffered by the patient go away. Players may well wish to adopt quirks and features of their illness into the roleplaying and characterization of their agents, even if cured.

However, if the agent ever again acquires a mental illness, such a cure then becomes impossible.

Mental Illness

This is the long-term effect of severe Stability loss. There is no game-mechanical difference between mental illness caused by mundane stresses and mental illness caused by supernatural phenomena, and possibly no medical difference unless the Director has introduced "Vampire Encounter Disorder" or "Harker Complex" or the like into her campaign.

The first time your Stability drops below -5, you gain either Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or an Addictive Disorder. This disorder manifests after the crisis has passed.

The second time your Stability drops below -5, you acquire Obsession or Paranoia, manifesting immediately.

If you have been cured of PTSD in the interim, it returns after the crisis has passed if the triggering circumstances are broadly reminiscent of its first onset and if you fail a Stability test (Difficulty 4). If you have been cured of an Addictive Disorder in the interim, it returns after the crisis if you fail a Stability test (Difficulty 5) and feed your addiction. These Stability tests happen the night after the event, and not during the crisis itself.

Each further instance after the second in which your Stability drops below -5 raises the Difficulty of all directly mental illness-related Stability tests by 1, including the tests to resist a relapse into a disorder.

If you are cured of Obsession or Paranoia, you do not relapse until your PTSD or Addictive Disorder return *and* your Stability drops below -5 again.

> *You manifest PTSD the night after a horrific incident involving a flying monstrosity. A noted Geneva specialist then cures you and sends you back into the fray.*
>
> *Later, a firefight in a bat-filled temple to Hecate in Sicily shatters you again. You develop an Obsession (specifically a fear of the dark), which manifests immediately and sends you screaming out of the cave. The Director rules that bats and darkness are close enough to flying monstrosities to potentially re-trigger your PTSD: you roll a 4 on the Stability test the next night, making the Difficulty exactly, so it doesn't come back. Your Geneva specialist treats you as before, this time curing your Obsession.*
>
> *Unfortunately, you continue to probe the grim wilderness of mirrors — and the gruesome exsanguination death of your old handler at the hands of the Camorra shatters you once more. Since this is your third shattering*

experience, your Stability test to avoid a PTSD relapse now has a Difficulty of 5.

If you fail it, your PTSD returns, incurable; and the fourth time your Stability drops below -5, your Obsession will automatically return as well. If you succeed, the fourth time your Stability drops below -5, your Obsession won't return — but your Stability test to avoid a PTSD relapse will have a Difficulty of 6.

The Director and other players decide which disorder you receive, if the circumstances or trigger event do not make the choice obvious. For dramatic "niche protection" purposes, it's best to split them up: if one agent suffers from PTSD already, the second agent to get shattered should develop an Addictive Disorder.

🔥 In Burn mode, mental illnesses further separate you from the outside world. Add the effects listed after the 🔥 icon.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

You are haunted by dreams of the incident, and spend your days in a constant state of anxiety and alert, as if prepared for it to repeat itself at any moment. Whenever your senses register any input reminding you of the incident, you must make a Stability test (Difficulty 4) or freeze up. If you freeze up, you are unable to take any action for fifteen minutes and remain **Shaken** for twenty-four hours after that.

🔥 You must spend 2 Stability points to take the first action in a combat.

WITHDRAWAL

Going through withdrawal from a physiologically addictive substance such as heroin or alcohol takes four weeks. During this time, you are Shaken. You must make one Stability test per week, at whatever Difficulty level your addiction was when you began withdrawal. Failure drives you to relapse — if you absolutely cannot get a fix, reduce your Health by the amount of your failure. Any relapse restarts the four-week clock.

Addictive Disorder

You develop a serious addiction, most likely to alcohol or drugs, but anything within reason is possible: pornography, gambling, stimulants, even anti-depressants. When you do not have a supply available, you must make a Stability test (Difficulty 4) to proceed with the current operation rather than chasing your fix. When presented with an opportunity to gratify your addiction, you must make the same Stability test to resist the opportunity. Gratifying your addiction will likely cost you temporary Athletics or Health points, raise Difficulties, or interfere with many Investigative abilities, at the Director's discretion.

🔥 Your addiction distracts you from the job; to make an Investigative spend, you must also spend 1 Stability point. However, you can refresh 2 points of Stability by engaging in your addiction between operations.

Obsession

You develop an obsession: this may be obsessive-compulsive disorder, a phobic obsession with rats or falling, a manic obsession with religion or blood, or any number of other possibilities. You and the Director should decide on your obsession based on the trigger events. When presented with an opportunity to indulge your obsession, you must make a Stability test (Difficulty 4) to resist.

Further, take 6 of your rating points away from any abilities and put them in a new Obsession pool. You can only spend these points furthering your obsessive interest:

- **Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder:** spend Obsession points only on Conceal, Preparedness, or Notice. You must make a Stability test to resist cleaning or ordering your surroundings, e.g., staying behind to straighten up all the shell casings.
- **Phobia:** spend Obsession points only to run away or hide from the fear-object. The Director may allow you to spend points in combat with them as Berserk Mania, below. If phobic about a specific group (Americans, doctors, Muslims) you must spend 1 Stability to use any Interpersonal ability with them, even if a successful Stability test allows you to resist attacking, ranting at, or fleeing them.
- **Mania:** spend Obsession points only to directly study or steal the mania-object.
- **Berserk Mania:** spend Obsession points only to Jump In (p. 75) and on Reckless Attack (p. 76). Not compatible with PTSD; all Surveillance and Infiltration Difficulties increase by 1.

The Director should make sure you don't game the system. (Not allowed: "I use the points for Shooting because of my obsession with being badass.") You may *not* spend these points on any Stability test.

You must put 1 experience point into your Obsession pool every time you are awarded experience.

🔥 🔮 You must spend 2 of your fellow agents' Trust points to give them 1 point's worth of aid.

Paranoia

Your fear of unseen enemies, looming danger, and betrayal by your own side has surpassed occupational hazard levels. You must now make a Stability test (Difficulty 4) to resist taking ridiculous and time-consuming counter-measures, accusing allies of betraying you to Them, or otherwise giving your fears full rein. Not just the Director but also your fellow players can call for such a test at any time in the session that they choose.

On the bright side, you can now spend Stability points on Surveillance tests.

Your obvious fear and nervousness, and frequent conversational asides about Them, add 1 to the cost of all Interpersonal spends; add 1 to the cost of all Academic spends as your research and thought patterns tangle. You can no longer spend experience on your Network pool, or to improve any already created contact.

You can only Trust one of your fellow agents; all other Trust you have is lost.

Other Conditions

The following mental illnesses present slightly larger obstacles to focused, dramatic play — and a few more options for specific character moments and personal arcs — than the four standard conditions above. They are all relatively common in espionage fiction, and some even appear in spy thrillers or episodes of spy-themed TV shows. Amnesia and Multiple Personality are, in their way, practically iconic conditions in and of the genre.

The other thing that these conditions have in common is their strong connection with Gothic and vampire fiction and films; Renfield in Stoker's novel is only the first in a long line of schizophrenic vampire servants. (Vampires also often instill erotomania in their victims; use Obsession (with a specific love object, usually the vampire or her symbolic equivalent) to model that.) What vampires can do, of course, mind-controlling conspiracies and even shadowy government agencies can also do, making them all excellent possibilities for a Mirror-themed game.

The conditions with the word "disorder" in the title (Borderline Personality Disorder and Depressive Disorder) are the rules equivalents of PTSD and Addictive Disorder, above. In campaigns using them, they can manifest in agents after the first drop of their Stability to below -5. If cured, the initial Stability test to avoid a relapse has a Difficulty of 4 in both cases. As with PTSD and Addictive Disorder, they manifest the night after the trigger event.

The other conditions (Amnesia, Multiple Personality, Schizophrenia) are the rules equivalents of Obsession and Paranoia, above. In campaigns using them, they can manifest in agents the second time their Stability drops below -5. As with Obsession and Paranoia, they manifest during the trigger event.

Amnesia

You cannot recall some aspect of your past. Amnesia that simply blocks out all details of the trigger trauma is insufficient from a rules perspective; the loss of memory, while troubling, is not equivalent to Paranoia, Schizophrenia, or the other mental illnesses listed in this section. Realizing you have amnesia localized to one event carries a potential 3-point loss of Stability; more if the event seems central to your life, such as your recruitment, or if it involved some major change in your circumstances, such as the loss of a teammate or limb.

Fortunately for game balance, traumatic events can cause psychogenic amnesia, the mind's deliberate attempt to hide from any dangerous past — including your name, friends, and life up to the event's aftermath. This is also the sort of amnesia that government black programs instill in their trained assassins, if you and the Director want to go in that direction.

Given the character-specific nature of amnesia, and the myriad possibilities both story and symbolic in an amnesiac agent, you and the Director should work closely together to create amnesia that works for the game. Keep in mind: when you give up control over your character's past, you give it to the Director. She has carte blanche to weave all manner of horrific or dangerous hooks in there.

Whatever the length of your blank period may be, amnesia has the following game effects:

You cannot recall anything from the blank period, including establishing Network contacts, invoking retroactive Languages, filling vehicle slots for Driving, adding familiar cities with Urban Survival, etc. You cannot recall anything about the trigger incident or forces connected with it.

You gain Mystery as an additional Drive, if you didn't already have it, focused on the real truth of your blank past; you must make a Stability test (Difficulty 4) to pass up a lead to it. Once cured, amnesia does not return. You either become catatonic if shattered again while suffering from an initial disorder, or you develop some other second-stage mental illness: Obsession, Schizophrenia, or Paranoia. ("They are conspiring to erase my memories" makes a good start on the last two.)

You must make a Stability test (Difficulty 4) to act first in a contest with someone you don't recognize —

what if they're important somehow? If your blank period covers more than just a single trigger trauma, you have no Symbol as a Source of Stability.

Borderline Personality Disorder

You react impulsively, and usually angrily, to any sign of disrespect or invasion of your personal boundaries. You have sudden mood swings, ranging from fear of being left alone to chronic boredom to rage against yourself or your so-called friends. When you perceive an insult, neglect, or violation of your personal space, you must make a Stability test (Difficulty 4) to restrain yourself from lashing out verbally or even physically.

Your emotional and interpersonal options are limited to Bullshit Detector, Interrogation, Intimidation, Streetwise, and Tradecraft. These are the only Interpersonal abilities that you can spend pool points on *or* improve with experience points. The opposition has +1 on its roll to flip any of your Network contacts (see p. 118).

Depressive Disorder

You fall into dull, deadened melancholia. You have trouble sleeping, getting out of bed, motivating yourself, and thinking optimistically. You feel sluggish, drained of energy. You are increasingly haunted by suicidal thoughts, and by feelings of utter worthlessness and guilt. You can never act as the aggressor in a contest; in group combats or chases, you are always last to act. You must make a Stability test (Difficulty 4) to avoid or retreat from any life-threatening situation; if you fail, you plunge in without regard for self-preservation.

Your Hit Threshold is 1 lower than normal, to reflect both your sluggishness and your carelessness in danger.

You can accept less Trust than other agents; your total Trust received must be at least 2 lower than the next-least-Trusted character.

Multiple Personality

Some psychologists go so far as to question the existence of multiple personality disorder, now more commonly called Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID), considering it an artifact of sloppy clinical practice and tabloid cable movies. Be that as it may, it is such a perfect metaphor for spy games in the Mirror mode that if it didn't exist, the Director would have to invent it.

Your personality has fragmented under stress, into your "primary" (the character on your sheet) and one or more additional personalities, or "alters." Create your alter or alters in collaboration with the Director. They should reflect different sides of you: e.g., a helpless child, a psychopathic cannibal, a wise but feeble priest. Their histories and natures may reflect a trigger moment; for example, if you became shattered upon discovering the mutilated corpse of an old enemy from across the Curtain, the new persona might share his personality, general history, and imagined appearance. An alter may very well have a different Drive than your primary.

Truly Mirror-devoted Directors may reveal that your original personality is either disguised as an alter, or still buried under the rubble and you have no primary at all. Other highly disturbing possibilities include an alter who has a different allegiance, or an independent agenda, or plans to usurp primary status or become a vampire.

When under stress, you must test Stability (Difficulty 5) or allow an alter to take control. If you have detailed more than one alter, the Director decides which one appears, based on the triggering situation. The alter remains in control for 1-6 hours, or until a different stressful situation arises. In the latter case, if your primary is best equipped to deal with the new crisis, you regain control with no test required. If another alter is better suited, that persona takes over. Stability tests to avoid a personality switch occur only when you are in your primary, unless some enemy is attempting to switch you for interrogation or other purposes.

While in an alter, you have access to only those abilities that you and the Director have assigned to her, with whatever penalties seem appropriate. (Sweet little child alters, for example, cannot spend any combat pool points, must always declare their actions first and go last in combat, and injure themselves or allies on an unmodified die roll of 1.) You cannot use Network to invoke new contacts unless something weird is going on. You cannot fill new retroactive slots in Driving, Languages, etc. without creating a new alter. Pretending to be one of your personae while another persona is in control is a Disguise test (Difficulty 5); for each point of Disguise you spend on it, you must spend a point of Stability as well, which does not add to the Disguise test.

You must always have at least one "innocent" alter, one who does not kill and has not killed: a child, a mother, or the like. Switching away from this alter into another persona always costs you 2 Stability.

Schizophrenia

You are plagued by hallucinations, both visual and auditory — "hearing voices" is the classical symptom of schizophrenia. You may also suffer from delusions ranging from confusion of identity ("I am Princess Diana!") to mind control. ("The computer was drinking my thoughts, so I smashed it.") Your speech

can be slurred and disorganized, even breaking down into completely aphasic "word salad." Your social affect is flat and you scare people, either by inappropriate giggling or jerking, or for no apparent reason.

The Director should supply hallucinations connected with the events of the campaign, of an increasingly surrealistic and impossible nature; you must make a Stability test (Difficulty 4) to resist believing in and responding to those hallucinations. Particularly cruel Directors will include real and dangerous vampiric manifestations among the imaginary ones; perhaps in your campaign, schizophrenics are more sensitive to the undead?

Directors interested in realism should note that schizophrenia appears to be a separate neurological ailment not necessarily connected with traumatic events. It may still manifest as a result of drug or alcohol abuse, or supernatural events, of course.

Add 2 to the cost of all Interpersonal spends, and 1 to the cost of all Technical spends. Add 2 to the Difficulty of all long-term (more than a few minutes) General tasks. This does not include combat or chases.

When you use Network to invoke or create a contact, the Director secretly makes a roll. On a 5 or a 6, your contact does not actually exist, although the Director pretends he does. You may unknowingly impersonate the contact in communications with other agents, or secretly do things the contact supposedly did. Once other agents begin disbelieving in him, the contact turns persecutory and hateful. Even if he really does exist. Perhaps especially then.

Heat

Running all over Europe shooting vampires attracts attention from governments, police agencies, and other unsympathetic official observers. ***Night's Black Agents*** represents this attention, and the concomitant investigations and pursuits, with the abstract value of Heat.

Gaining Heat

The agents begin with 1 Heat, indicating their presence in at least some police file, surveillance footage, agency dossier, or criminal database. The entire crew of agents has one Heat score in common; they are each others' "known associates," and the actions of one agent redound on them all.

They gain additional Heat through their own actions. By and large, the more dramatic and overt their activities, the more Heat they bring down on themselves. Deniable, covert activities generate less Heat. Use the following table to interpolate Heat gains during an operation:

Agent Action	Heat Gain
Arson in a derelict or deserted area Burglary or mugging Trafficking in black-market goods Car chase Car theft Failed Cover identity Fleeing arrest Gambling with high rollers; generally keeping a high profile Spending Excessive Funds noticeably (see p. 96) Successful, notable Digital Intrusion Killing a known criminal or terrorist	+1
Explosion, arson, or other major property damage in industrial or lower-class residential district Armed robbery Counterfeiting Weapons or narcotics trafficking Police involved in a car chase Unsuccessful or obvious Digital Intrusion attempt on government database Jailbreak Unsuccessful or obvious Infiltration of government facility Killing a police officer or agent of an enemy government Killing a civilian	+2
Explosion, arson, or other major property damage in business, tourist, or upper-class residential district Armed robbery or other criminal act with automatic weapons Trafficking in radioactive material or other WMD precursors Really enormous or excessive car chase Hijacking Kidnapping Prison escape Unsuccessful or obvious Infiltration of military facility Killing a police officer or agent of an allied government Killing an official or influential civilian	+3
Killing a police officer or agent of the local government	+4

Assassinating a head of state	+5

Taking successful and sensible precautions to minimize the evidence, lower their profile, or otherwise cover up the agents' actions reduces Heat by -1: e.g., cleaning the crime scene (usually Conceal), blanking the CCTV network (Digital Intrusion or Electrical Repair), disappearing the body completely (spend of Urban Survival or Forensic Pathology, or a few hours with a hot furnace), rapidly dumping or laundering that stolen vehicle (Forgery for papers and Mechanics for VIN, etc.).

By contrast, if the conspiracy has control of or contacts in local law enforcement, they can drop a dime on the agents and increase their Heat by +1. (In general, though, if the vampires know where the agents are, they send a pack of ferals, not the Policija.)

Anything that gets the attention of the national media, or of a major political figure, adds a further +1 Heat.

Any of the above acts on a larger than normal scale adds at least a further +1 Heat: e.g., trafficking in truckloads of drugs, mass murder, arson in the Louvre, assassinating Vladimir Putin.

With the above caveat, only one action usually brings Heat in a given session: if the agents engaged in a car chase down the Kurfürstendamm with a fleet of cars and a stolen tank, don't bother adding the Heat for the security guard they mugged.

That said, there is no maximum level of Heat.

HOT SPOTS

Particularly ambitious Directors, or players who like drawing on maps, can keep track of their ongoing Heat by jurisdiction: a crew of agents might have Heat 5 in Dublin and Berlin, but only Heat 2 in Moscow. This is probably more trouble than it's worth, but it undeniably adds a thrill of verisimilitude for players who like that sort of thing.

Unlike the normal Heat rules, agents have different Heat for each country they might enter; use the guidelines under Changing Jurisdiction in *Losing Heat (see p.* 88*)* along with subsequent agent actions to determine those differing levels as needed. The effects of Heat on black markets (see p. 90) occur everywhere. Heat in any given country drops off only by shifting blame and protection; elapsed time only lessens Heat by -1 no matter how much time goes by. A coup d'etat or other major change of government might change Heat scores, but that is unlikely in modern Europe.

The Effects of Heat

The more Heat you have on you, the more likely the long arm of the law is to take a gratuitous swipe at you.

Once per operation, one player rolls against the agents' current Heat level. He may spend from any justifiable General pool to affect this roll. For example, he might say "I'm using Digital Intrusion to alter our photos in the Lisbon police database" or "I'm using Disguise to darken everyone's skin a shade or three" or "I'm using Surveillance to make sure we always take the route with less police presence." Which player makes this roll may shift between operations, or remain the same; it's the players' mutual decision.

Kindly Directors allow this roll at the beginning of the operation, or when the agents enter a new city. Cruel Directors call for this roll the first time the agents come under potential police scrutiny, or right after the agents' first failed test or contest. Extra-cruel Directors call for this roll right in the middle of a fight scene.

If the player beats the Heat, then the agents avoid *additional* police scrutiny during that adventure. Character actions during that operation may still raise Heat, including actions taken to affect the Heat roll (such as hacking the Lisbon police database). Character actions (or failed tests) may still draw a police response, but if they keep their heads down they attract no *extra* attention during the operation.

UNOFFICIAL HEAT

By default, Heat only applies to government and police agencies and official intergovernmental bodies like Interpol or the BIS. They are the only groups in the real world who maintain sufficiently widespread and interlinked databases, and have the dedicated personnel, to be able to track covert agents and their activities.

However, the Director might add a second Heat value for other specific non-vampire but potentially multinational enemies such as the Russian mafiya, Crédit Lyonnais, or the Vatican, if they turn up regularly in the campaign. It's usually easier, however, to simply apply a modifier: if the agents are in Milan and they've previously ticked off the Camorra, failing a Heat roll by more than 1 point brings attention from the mob *and* the Carabinieri. This represents bribed officials, leaks, or other public-private coordination (official or otherwise).

If the player fails the Heat roll, then at some point during that operation the authorities will cross the agents' path and attempt to interfere. The shape of this interference is up to the Director: a failure may always represent the same dogged CIA agent tracking

them, or it might lead to a SWAT raid on their safe house, an attempted arrest, a tail by the local MI6 station, or just a whole fleet of cop cars joining the chase scene. A failed Heat roll always sets up some kind of confrontation scene with the authorities: a chase, a contest, a snatch job, a warning, or a combat. This can be as dramatic or as compact as the Director wants.

Modeling the increased isolation of the Burn mode, or the actual competence of real-world police authorities, players roll for Heat once per session, not once per operation.

Although Heat normally tracks the conventional authorities' response to the agents, those authorities may well pass on information to the vampires, or cooperate with them even more directly. In some locations, the authorities may even be fully suborned nodes in the vampire conspiracy.

Heat and Difficulty

If the agents are in a jurisdiction particularly ill-disposed to them — somewhere they've killed someone, embarrassed the cops, or blown up something scenic — use the higher of their Heat number or the normal Difficulty for all suitable General tests: Infiltration to sneak past cops, Digital Intrusion to break into government computers, Cover tests to cross borders or board airplanes, Network tests to arrange gun deals or safe houses, etc. A failure automatically brings government or police attention, regardless of its other effects. A failure on the Heat roll that still exceeds the normal Difficulty might half-succeed: the gun dealer shows up with the weapons they need, but so do the cops two minutes later.

Heat and the Black Market

Use the rules above to interfere with Network deals for guns, explosives, or what-have-you. For buys made with Streetwise spends, total the deal-making player's Streetwise *rating* and the number of Streetwise pool points he's spending on the deal. (Yes, this double-counts those points.) If the Heat is higher than that total, then the dealer plans a double-cross. This does not (usually) represent selling the agents out to the cops, but rather criminals' innate ability to smell desperation on a potential mark.

Give the agents an opportunity to make a spend to notice the double-cross (e.g., Pharmacy to notice cut drugs, Military Science or Shooting to notice poor quality guns) or make a Sense Trouble test to detect the ambush.

Losing Heat

The agents can lose Heat in four ways:

- Elapsed time: Police searches become less intense over time.
- Changing jurisdiction: Police searches are hard to coordinate across borders.
- Protection: Police searches can always be redirected by powerful parties.
- Shifting blame: Police searches stop if the cops get a plausible collar.

Elapsed Time

With the best will in the world, no police force (secret or otherwise) can concentrate on one crime or one criminal gang for too long. Other business, bureaucratic retaskings, and personnel burnout slowly lower the level of Heat attached to a given outrage. After 72 hours without police or official sightings or contact (including no failed Heat rolls), or without leads in general, Heat drops by -1. After a further week, Heat drops by -1 again. After three months without such contact, Heat drops by -1 more.

Changing Jurisdiction

If you can manage it with all that Heat on you, leaving the jurisdiction currently bringing the most Heat prevents the cops from coordinating the search for you. Even France and Italy cannot often cooperate on low-level Mafia investigations; practically no Western force can get police assistance of any kind (including fingerprints, arrest records, or even identity confirmation) from the Russians.

Although the Director may move these numbers around to suit the specific case, in general, Heat drops off by country: -1 for closely associated countries or law-enforcement agencies (the U.K. and Ireland, MI6 and CIA, or Russia and Belarus), -2 for mere fellow members of the EU or other customs unions, -3 for other countries, -4 for particularly remote or isolated countries (Bosnia, Transdnester, Malta, Turkish Cyprus). Heat with the CIA or other American agencies drops off based on NATO membership rather than EU membership; similar concerns apply to other non-European governments.

Protection

If fugitives can't escape, maybe they can make deals. The simplest way is to build an influential figure in the pursuing agency or its senior ministry (e.g., a Ukrainian Interior Ministry official to call off the Kiev police) with Network points. Such a protective contact must succeed in a contest of her Network pool against the current Heat; the Heat drops by the amount her roll exceeded the current Heat.

Your team is implicated in a fire and explosion at Stonehenge that got major media attention,

resulting in Heat 5 from the Special Branch. Beatrice allocates 4 points from her Network pool to create a contact in the Home Office, Graham Wilkes. She then spends 3 points from Graham's pool and rolls against the Heat of 5. She rolls a 4, for a total of 7, exceeding the Heat by 2; the Heat drops by 2 from 5 to 3 as Graham makes a few calls and subtly redirects the investigation.

The other way to get protection is to do a favor — usually a distasteful, deniable mission — for an NPC with the power or position to quash the current Heat. The Director may supply such a person after the agents have been arrested, or the players may proactively seek out the NSA station chief or a Russian mafiya boss to make a deal. The specifics of the mission, and the amount of Heat a given NPC can remove, are up to the Director. Of course, such patrons don't always let useful pawns go after one mission, and if crossed, they can often raise the Heat to really uncomfortable levels.

For some protection in some jurisdictions, bribery is all it takes; getting the excessive funds required may still involve distasteful, deniable missions for slimy patrons.

In a wildly cinematic game, the agents can get plastic surgery, have their fingerprints and vocal cords altered, and otherwise completely remake themselves. This requires excessive funds (see p. 96), a minimum Cover 5 legend, and three months of isolation in a top-quality medical and rehabilitative facility.

In Burn or Dust mode games, protective patrons created with Network must spend 2 points for every 1 positive modifier to the Heat die roll, just like patrons purchased to release agents from jail.

Shifting Blame

The final way to lower Heat is to pin the blame for the agents' actions on someone else. Giving the police a better answer can be as simple as moving the guns around and rearranging the bodies with a Criminology spend to make a massacre look like a fallout among gangsters (done in time, this can prevent Heat from even coming on), or it can require Digital Intrusion to change surveillance footage, Infiltration to plant evidence, and Criminology (again) to find a suitable patsy. A proper frame job may be an operation in itself, with Difficulties throughout at least equal to the current Heat.

How much Heat such machinations eliminate depends on the agents' thoroughness and speed, and on whether the police or other investigators are honest or lazy or predisposed to look elsewhere: "Of *course* it was al-Qaeda that beheaded the Romanian ambassador."

Extended Chases

Things used to be so simple. If the bad guys are chasing you, all you need to do is get across the border. Cross that line, and they can't follow you, like a vampire blocked by flowing water, right?

It's not like that any more. The vampires aren't the only ones who went transnational.

An extended chase is one that takes place over several days and at a much greater distance than a normal car-chase or foot pursuit. It might take up an entire operation, or even several ops. The question isn't whether or not the agents can sprint out of the alleyway before the exit's blocked, it's whether or not they can make it to the border checkpoint with a valid exit visa, and whether they can drop off the radar of a pursuing government, mafia, or conspiracy.

Mechanically, it uses a combination of Heat and Lead called Hot Lead. The agents' Hot Lead score starts at 7, minus their Heat at the beginning of the chase.

Changing Hot Lead

When the team crosses a border without being tracked, their Hot Lead increases by 1, or 2 if they do so in an unexpected way (unusual modes of transport, smuggling themselves across, throwing their pursuers off the scent). If the agents run into difficulty with border officials, are observed by the enemy, or are being shadowed, their Hot Lead doesn't change.

Hot Lead also shifts after successful thriller chases, combats, and encounters with the enemy. If an agent outruns the Carabinieri in her stolen sports car, or the team ambushes and wipes out all the assets currently trailing them, increase the team's Hot Lead by 1. If that sports car gets blown up by the 'Ndrangheta and the team is forced to hike across country, or the agents leave too much forensic evidence (or a wounded asset, Network contact, or comrade) behind, their Hot Lead may drop by 1.

In some cases, agents can test other abilities to increase their Hot Lead: Digital Intrusion to hack into Interpol databases and alter their files, Network contacts to divert pursuing assets, Surveillance to spot and photograph all their pursuers, and so forth. The Director must agree that such a test (possibly run as a full contest against a pool equal to 12 minus the current Hot Lead) might plausibly aid in evasion of hot pursuit. As with chases and combats, a success in that contest increases the team's Hot Lead by 1, while a failure drops it by 1.

Testing Hot Lead

Whenever the team enters a new area (a new country, city, region), they must test their Hot Lead against a Difficulty set by the Director. If this test is successful, the agents are ahead of their pursuers; if the test fails, then they're heading into an ambush or the pursuers have already blocked off the usual escape routes. The Difficulty ranges between 3 and 8, and depends on where the agents are and how many assets their pursuers can get into position. It's a lot easier for MI6 to run you down when you're on British soil than when you're in Warsaw, and Warsaw is easier than some hick town in the middle of China. The CIA has more assets than MI6, which has more assets than a Russian mob or the Bulgarian NIS.

Like any test, the agents can spend points from their Hot Lead pool to boost their chances of passing the test.

Spending Hot Lead

Agents can also spend Hot Lead to buy time for rest and recovery, or for doing things that aren't directly related to fleeing the country.

For example, doing any of the following costs 1 point of Hot Lead:

- Shopping for supplies with Streetwise
- Establishing a haven (see page 92) to refresh three General Ability pools
- Healing a Hurt character with Medic
- Extended research
- Searching for rumors and information
- Any major (3+ hours) delay, like waiting for a flight, or hanging around hoping a contact shows up

More time-consuming actions cost 2 points of Hot Lead, such as:

- Healing a Seriously Wounded character with Medic
- Any serious (8+ hours) delay, like carrying out an unrelated op, or waiting for a delayed rendezvous
- Spending time with a Solace (see page 36)
- In Dust mode, healing more than 3 Health points with Medic costs 2 points of Hot Lead.

THE STRESS OF PURSUIT

Being on the run is stressful and tiring, and even the best agent can slip up after several days on the run. Extended chases of this sort cost each fleeing agent 1 Stability pool point each day.

Running Out of Hot Lead

If the agents' Hot Lead is reduced to 0, then the enemy has zeroed in on them, and can throw significant assets at them. This should be a credible threat, at least including enough special forces, SWAT personnel, opposing agents, or Renfields to equal the number of agents in the party.

If they escape that confrontation, they either add 2 to their Hot Lead and the chase continues, or, if the Director feels it's dramatically important and somewhat plausible, the agents manage to disappear in the cordite smoke. They add +2 to their Heat, but at least the current chase is over … for now.

Winning the Chase

If the agents get their Hot Lead up to 10, then they're far enough ahead to disappear. The extended chase is over.

Recovery and Improvement

Agents wear themselves down over the course of an operation, drawing on reserves of inner strength and focus built up over years of training and life-or-death decisions. And assuming they make those decisions correctly, what does not kill them may make them stronger.

Regaining Pool Points

Spent points from various pools are restored at different rates, depending on their narrative purpose.

Refreshing Investigative Ability Pools

Investigative ability pools are refreshed only at the end of each operation, without regard to the amount of time that passes in the game world. Players seeking to husband their resources may ask you how long cases typically run, in real time. Most groups finish scenarios over 2-3 sessions. Players may revise their sense of how carefully to manage point spending as they see how quickly their group typically completes an adventure.

Directors running extremely long, multi-stage operations may designate certain story events as breakpoints where all Investigative pools are refreshed. For example, a thorough investigation tracking an artifact smuggling ring from London galleries to Swedish financiers to Moscow museums to Ukrainian archaeological sites might allow refreshment of Investigative pools after each layer of the organization is rolled up.

Refreshing General Ability Pools

At the Director's discretion, you may be able to refresh 1 or 2 pool points from any General ability by

following your Drive into danger or story complication.

Whenever the agents are able to reach a temporary haven — a bar, an all-night diner, a car trip, a church, a safe house — in which they're free from danger and horrific manifestations for an hour or more, they may refresh up to three General abilities, except for Health and Stability. (Think about the next scene: if it's likely to be a fight or a chase, refresh Athletics or Driving and two combat skills.) They lose all refreshed points if their supposed place of safety is penetrated or reveals itself as a place of hazard.

The agents get only one opportunity for this accelerated refreshment per session.

Additionally, pools for the physical abilities of Athletics, Driving, Hand-to-Hand, Piloting, Shooting, and Weapons fully refresh whenever 24 hours of game-world time elapses since the last expenditure. The remaining General abilities refresh at the end of each operation, like Investigative abilities. General ability points spent investigatively still refresh just like General abilities.

The Cover and Network abilities *do not refresh.* They can only be "refilled" with experience points.

OPPOSITION POOLS

In accordance with GUMSHOE's narrative-based style, opponents refresh ability pool points according to how often they appear. A foe not encountered for 24 hours or more may replenish all of his ability pools, with the exception of Health, which he recovers at a rate of 1d6 points per day.

If the agents encounter a foe later in the same day, such as by tracking her to a safe house, she can refresh all her ability pools to a maximum of half their total rating, again with the exception of Health, which she can not refresh at all.

The Director may refresh such a foe's Health with a narrative explanation (she stopped off at an emergency room, she had a medic on her squad), but in general, player initiative in harrying a foe should be rewarded with that opponent's weakness.

Many vampires or their kindred regenerate Health in special (and unsavory) ways, or at an accelerated rate, or both. They use their own rules rather than these general guidelines.

Refreshing Health

The Health pool refreshes over time, at a rate of 2 points per day of restful activity. (**Seriously wounded** characters heal at a different rate, over a period of hospitalization; see p. 64.) Use of the Medic ability can restore a limited number of Health points in the course of a session (see p. 64).

Refreshing Stability

If you suggest a spend for your agent, and the Director and other players agree that the result was especially impressive, you may roll one die and refresh that many Stability points to reflect your agent's restored confidence in herself.

Use of the Shrink ability permits limited recovery of Stability points in the course of a session (see p. 84).

In campaigns where the teammates' personal lives or beliefs are a matter of background detail only, an agent's Stability automatically refreshes between adventures.

If you have an Addictive Disorder (see p. 85), you can refresh 2 points of Stability by engaging in your addiction between operations.

WHAT DO POOL POINTS REPRESENT?

Pool points are a ludic abstraction, representing the way that each character gets his or her own time in the spotlight in the course of an ensemble drama. When you do something remarkable, you expend a little bit of your spotlight time. More active players will spend their points sooner than less demonstrative ones, unless they carefully pick and choose their moments to shine.

Remember, all characters are remarkably competent. Pool points measure your opportunities to exercise this ultra-competence during any given scanario. Running out of points simply means it's someone else's turn to be awesome.

Pool points do not represent a resource, tangible or otherwise, in the game world. Players are aware of them, but characters are not. The team members' ignorance of them is analogous to TV characters' obliviousness to commercial breaks, the unwritten rules of scene construction, and the tendency of events to heat up during sweeps.

We represent this most purely in the case of Investigative abilities, which are the core of the game. Their refreshment is tied to a purely fictional construct, the length of the operation.

However, where a pool could be seen to correspond to a resource perceptible to the characters, we handle refreshment in a somewhat more realistic, if also abstract, manner. Characters' ebbing Health scores are perceptible to the characters in the form of bruises, cuts, pain, and general fatigue. Stability is less tangible but can be subjectively measured in the characters' moods and reactions. Physical abilities, also tied to fatigue and sharpness of reflexes, are also handled with a nod to the demands of realism. Combat fatigue and adrenaline poisoning degrade Shooting and Hand-to-Hand; stress and distraction likewise for Explosive Devices or Medic.

Sources of Stability and Refreshes

In campaigns using Sources of Stability, the agent can restore a limited amount of Stability during each session of play: 1 point by drawing strength from his Symbol, and 2 points for a six-hour interaction with his Solace.

Spending a day with your Solace refreshes your Stability fully between operations. If your Solace is missing, dead, far away, or otherwise unavailable, you cannot refresh Stability at this time.

Improving Your Character

At the end of each operation, each player gets **2 experience points** for each session they participated in. (This assumes a small number of 3-4 hour sessions; if you play in shorter bursts, modify accordingly.) Players who had characters die in the course of the investigation only get points for each session involving their current character.

These experience points can be spent as build points to increase either Investigative or General abilities. You may acquire new abilities or bolster existing ones. If necessary to preserve credibility, rationalize new abilities as areas of expertise you've had all along, but are only revealing later in the series.

Remember that Cover identities and Network contact pools can only be rebuilt with experience points; they never refresh.

You can save build points up for Special Weapons Training (see p. 77), Tag-Team Tactical Benefits (see p. 110), or other special options, if available in your campaign.

You may also reassign 1 or 2 build points from one ability to another, justifying it as skill atrophy: "I've let my Photography become quite rusty, what with all the Gambling I've been doing." This may reflect in-game experiences, or just your changed priorities for the character.

You can also use experience points to add Trust (see p. 40).

TOOLS

This chapter covers the tools that agents (and their players) can use during the course of the campaign. Some of these tools are physical items: silver bullets, bug-sweepers, or Aston-Martins. Some of them are tactics and techniques for in-game action and player strategies.

Acquisition

Over the course of the game, agents will accumulate (and destroy) prodigious quantities of stuff. Where does it all come from? The Director should make sure the answer to that question is interesting, or short, or both. Sometimes (like in *Ronin*) a gun deal goes wrong; sometimes (as in *The Bourne Identity*) a cache of equipment reveals more than just spare ammo; sometimes a visit to the equivalent of Q Section or Whistler is part of the players' expectations. Those are interesting. But note that *Ronin* doesn't then follow up with a second gun-buying scene where everything goes right; we never see where Jason Bourne gets his sniper rifle; Q doesn't list everything in Bond's pockets. That's keeping it short. In general, the Director shouldn't add anything interesting unless it also involves an already named NPC or advances one other storyline: either the main investigation, a character's personal arc (see p. 37), or a specific opposition counter-measure.

The following answers mostly keep it short, with a few suggestions for interesting sprinkled in.

Handwave It

This is not your first rodeo. Your agents have been operating in the shadow world for years; they already have some gear available to them in at least one relatively secure stash. You can assume possession of pretty much any conventional genre-appropriate item that Preparedness doesn't cover — for the rest, there's Preparedness.

Cache

You've stashed gear against just such an eventuality, or you know a dead drop where your agency used to put unregistered guns, spare bugs, etc. Make a Preparedness test at Difficulty 6 to locate such a cache. You can spend Network pool points on this test as well. The Difficulty is 4 if the cache is in one of your Familiar Cities (see p. 25). The cache may be guarded by the enemy, by police, or by your old agency if the Director thinks the game could use a little challenge; or it could be clear sailing if the important thing is to get gear in a hurry. When you open the cache, every player can spend 1 Preparedness pool point to name one piece of equipment that you stashed there: you may name two pieces of equipment for free. A cache can include one vehicle. This equipment may or may not be top of the line, fully reliable, or well maintained: a roll of 1 while using cached equipment might cause a malfunction or jam at the Director's discretion. (A day's repair or maintenance work by an agent with Mechanics, Shooting, Driving, or other appropriate ability removes this disability.) Like other Preparedness tests, the Director may veto a suggested piece of cached equipment on the grounds of ridiculousness.

Buy It

If the gear is legal — laptops, sporting ammunition, high-power UV lamps, car batteries, a panel van, that sort of thing — you can just buy it. Precursor materials for napalm, horse tranquilizers, electronics for bugs — all kinds of stuff just sits on store shelves right now. Agents may be able to use Chemistry, Electronic Surveillance, Pharmacy, or other abilities to figure out open sources for dodgy gear, or a quick investigative Disguise to impersonate someone who can legally purchase it.

Illegal or gray-market gear takes Streetwise (or a suitable Network contact) to locate. The Director may simply let that suffice to acquire the desired goods, require a Streetwise spend (for large quantities of merchandise, multiple or military weapons, or *very* illegal goods), or actually play out a meetup that might involve an ambush, a recruitment offer, a sting, a cheat ("these aren't fully automatic"), or some sort of double-cross.

In general, the higher the Heat (see p. 88), the more likely a black-market deal is to go sour. Likewise, if the criminal element the agents are dealing with has actually been penetrated or suborned by the opposition, a double-cross of some sort (even if only planting a tracker on the goods) is more likely.

In a normal ***Night's Black Agents*** game, the characters either have insufficient funds, steady funds, or excessive funds. These are narrative considerations and nothing more: the Director may decide everyone's been spending too much, and suddenly you have insufficient funds until you rob a bank or sting a millionaire to replenish the steady funds well. Or the agents may decide they really need their own Gulfstream jet for an operation, so they have to knock out a heroin ring to get a few sessions' worth of excessive funds.

Insufficient Funds

Agents can only buy or handwave cheap, conventional gear: anything else, they have to find in a Cache, steal, build from cheap parts, or source with the Network ability. They can't afford more than one or two standard-issue weapons (9mm pistols, usually) on the black market even with a Streetwise spend. If they want silver bullets, they can only get enough silver for 1d6 rounds without knocking over a jewelry store. They have to stay in safe houses in crummy neighborhoods, or in cheap motels or rooming houses. They can't buy fake passports or same-day plane tickets, or otherwise move freely; their actions are constrained. If they buy a vehicle for cash, it is a beater: slower and less maneuverable than other cars.

To get steady funds, even for one or two operations, requires doing a job for cash or loot. This is the default condition in a Dust mode game unless the agents have taken action to change it, or the Director and players have worked out an explanation for the group's funding.

Steady Funds

Agents can buy, handwave, or get parts to make pretty much anything a normal, middle-class European can buy. Their Streetwise spends get a weapon for everybody, and maybe one special weapon or loadout. If they want silver bullets, they can round up enough silver for one magazine per agent. They can stay in normal hotels, rent short-term apartments, get forged passports, make same-day plane reservations, and buy a decent used car with cash. Their movement and actions are only constrained by happenings in the campaign, or by Heat.

They might get their funds from a pre-existing slush fund, from one big job (a major sting, a casino heist, etc.), from repeated low-level credit card fraud (using Digital Intrusion), or even from the "confiscated" cash found in their operations. The Director throws in the odd briefcase of nonsequential twenties (euros, pounds, or dollars) as "treasure" and it's all good. This is the default condition of a ***Night's Black Agents*** game.

In a Burn mode game, the agents may occasionally have to do "outside jobs" of the sort they did before the campaign began in order to keep their funds steady: robberies, assassinations, renditions, etc. The Director should add such tasks at points that heighten campaign tension, or after the agents have spent a lot of funds on a previous operation.

The agents may actually have a steady paycheck from some outside source: the CIA, the Vatican, or some other interested party. In a Mirror mode game, the source is questionable, secret, or only known to one agent; in a Stakes mode game, the crew may actually be on somebody's books, or get the occasional reward from the people they help along the way.

Excessive Funds

The agents can buy lots of high-end gear, specialized electronics, and custom lab equipment, or get a really big-ticket item: a jet, a yacht, a Renoir, a racehorse. (Unless their funds are *really* excessive, a purchase like that knocks everyone back to steady funds for awhile.) Their Streetwise spends get rocket launchers or radioactive material, if available. If they want silver bullets, they can drop enough silver to get 1d6+1 clips per weapon. They can stay in four-star hotels, rent houses, charter a plane, and buy a luxury car with cash. Their movements might very well generate Heat (usually +1 per excessive expenditure or swank entry; see p. 96), especially if their enemies are among the rich and connected.

This kind of funding almost has to be the result of a dirty deal with someone, if it continues on a steady basis.

NO GO THE BAGMAN

Some players love keeping track of their character's funds, down to the last silver piece … I mean, 50p coin. If you have such a player in the gaming group, let him do so. Prices for most of this stuff are available on the Internet, or in other "modern-day" RPG supplements. Track the rise and fall of your accounts as a side game unrelated to the main story, referred to only in bantering asides; otherwise everyone else gets sick of it.

If the only such player in the game is the Director, she should restrain herself. Keeping track of income and outgo slows the game down and invites a major genre clash: budgeting is seldom a feature of spy thrillers or of vampire stories. Even in heavily bureaucratic, Dust mode series like *Sandbaggers,* the budget is invoked in the abstract as a narrative constraint on the characters' actions; line item accounting seldom becomes the focus of the story.

Make It

Assuming you have the correct tools (which can be bought or handwaved for agents with Mechanics), materials (see *Buy It*) and workspace (likely through Network), you can build or upgrade most of your needed gear: even hand-making a firearm's bolt from scratch takes time, knowledge, steel, and a drill press, but it's not impossible. Most things — from silencers to surveillance equipment to silver bullets — are

considerably easier to kitbash together from parts. Agents may need to make just a Mechanics test against a set Difficulty (given pre-existing parts), or to also spend points from related pools (Chemistry, Driving, Electronic Surveillance, Shooting, etc.) to kitbash or scratch-build gear. A test of Explosive Devices or a Forgery spend is all that's needed to make a bomb or a passport; merely possessing Pharmacy lets an agent concoct common drugs, with quantity, specificity, or rapid production possibly requiring a pool point spend.

As a very general rule, making things takes hours (napalm, silver bullets, silencers, kitbashed surveillance gear from cell phones or other electronics), days (specialized surveillance or comms gear, identity documents, computers from parts, stable explosives, single-action "zip gun" style pistols, flamethrowers), or weeks (vehicles, firearms, complex machines, a duplicate of the safe). These are just guidelines: it's possible to assemble an entire 9mm Sten submachine gun from scrap metal in six hours, given tools, a bolt, and a barrel.

Source It

The easiest and fastest way to get something is by using the Network ability to build a contact who has it. If you need a safe house, build a station agent or site minder with Network; if you need a vehicle, build the bent motorpool boss at a local trucking yard with Network; if you need a Stinger missile, build an arms dealer with Network. In all cases, your contact will need to make a roll to actually come through for you, but that's why you spend the points.

This may still — and often does, for arms or fake IDs — require the expenditure of cash. As a general rule, the result from your Network is twice what the equivalent Streetwise spend would get you.

Network deals by definition go sour less often than Streetwise does, but every so often your contact has been turned, takes Heat (see p. 88), or is just under opposition surveillance.

Steal It

The last way to get what you want is to take it from whoever has it. A Filch test is often faster, cleaner, and cheaper than any of the alternatives. For gear or goods stored somewhere with high security (such as most gun shops, police stations, jewelry stores, etc.) the agents may need to mount a mini-op to rob the joint, complete with Digital Intrusion, Infiltration, Surveillance, and even Hand-to-Hand tests against security.

Spytech

Who doesn't love gear?

In contests of Infiltration, Surveillance, and so forth, generally superior gear (military-grade against civilian-grade; First World gear against Soviet bloc gear; cutting-edge electronics against 20th-century electronics) grants the side using it a team pool (see p. 109) of 4 or more points. Getting such a gear edge on a prepared, well-funded foe usually requires a separate operation to either raise cash or directly obtain specialized equipment tailored for the specific mission.

Miniaturizing or disguising spytech as something else — a pen, jewelry, a watch, a cell phone — requires Mechanics (or Conceal, to hide already miniature gear inside an innocuous item), tools, and at least a day of work.

Under each general heading, **Standard Equipment** lists the sort of things that can be handwaved, openly bought or easily kitbashed, or supplied with Preparedness unless the Director wants to emphasize access to equipment as a specific element of a given operation.

Specific call-outs go to spy thriller equipment that either requires more effort to justify, or just cries out to be included.

Communications

Communications equipment seldom requires any special ability to use at a basic level. In-vehicle comms fall under Driving or Piloting; an agent with Electronic Surveillance or Mechanics can use most other comms gear effortlessly and effectively.

Jamming equipment is generally controlled. Agents need to build it (days and a Difficulty 5 Mechanics test, plus a 1-point Electronic Surveillance spend) or source it from a Cache or Network contact, as such things are uncommon in the black market.

Standard Equipment: Bluetooth headset, CB radio, cell phone, frequency-switching gear, glow stick, GPS receiver, headphones, laptop computer, microphone, multi-band receiver, notebook, pen or pencil, penlight laser, police scanner, radio transmitter, scrambler or DES, walkie-talkie, waterproof marker, wireless modem.

Comms Laser

Uses a modulated tight-beam laser to send a message safe against jamming or interception except by opponents directly in the laser's line of sight. It can also only communicate with allies or receivers directly in the laser's line of sight; aiming at any but a predesignated spot requires a Shooting test.

Satellite Phone

Relays calls or data transmissions through overhead communications satellites independent of the local cellular network (or lack thereof).

Tactical Earbud

Transmits wirelessly to either a single radio or laptop (usually left in a nearby van or safe house) or to a pocket radio or smartphone on the agent's person. It usually has a 3km range; the single earbud combines earphone and (via bone induction) microphone. If selected in a Cache, there are enough earbuds for every agent.

Voice Stress Analyzer

This software supposedly detects the "micro-tremors" in a voice (live or recorded) that reveal tension or falsehood. In game terms, allows the use of Bullshit Detector on recorded or remote subjects.

Explosive Devices

Simply pressing the red button when the bang-and-burner tells you to takes no special skill. Using anything more sophisticated than that requires at least minimal Explosive Devices (Difficulty 2 for conventional military equipment; see p. 98) or a tolerant and forgiving Director.

Detonators can be easily built (Difficulty 4 Explosive Devices test), with or without blasting caps. Sourcing dynamite and blasting caps may require Streetwise, Network, or a Cache, especially if the agents tend to run through a lot of the stuff. Sourcing plastic explosives or grenades definitely requires the above. Once sourced, however, an agent with Explosive Devices can be assumed to have some in his pack on an op without resorting to Preparedness.

Standard Equipment: Blasting caps, bleach, candles, cell phone, chlorine, detonators, duct tape, electrical tape, fertilizer and fuel oil, fireworks, gasoline, hand or road flare, lighter, matches, radio transmitter, remote control, smoke bombs, wire cutters, wires of many colors.

Det Cord

Detonating cord, or Primacord, is a centimeter-thick cable made of high explosive under a fiber-and-plastic sheath. When ignited, it detonates nigh-instantaneously. It can be used to connect multiple charges for simultaneous implosions, to cut through a girder, to booby trap a stretch of road, or to open a really stubborn crypt.

Specialized "cutting cord" has a shaped charge inside the cord; its primary use is to blow openings in walls or to blow open heavy doors or vehicles.

Flash-Bang Grenade

A "nonlethal" grenade for police and SWAT use, the flash-bang does just what its name implies: explodes with a brilliant blinding flash and a deafening bang. Your unprotected foes make a Health test at Difficulty 8 and remain blinded and deafened (giving you surprise; see p. 62) for a number of rounds equal to their margin of failure on the test. A flash-bang detonation near inflammable materials (cloth, paper, volatile chemicals) may cause a fire.

Vampires may be immune to flash-bangs, like any other change in atmospheric pressure.

BOOBY TRAPS

To set a booby trap for an opponent requires two tests. You roll both of them when the enemy encounters the booby trap: a Conceal test to see if he notices the trap (modified by his Alertness Modifier), and a Mechanics test to see if the trap worked. Damage is at the Director's discretion: a trip wire might do no actual damage, but allow a round of surprise (see p. 62) or tumble the target down a flight of stairs (+0 damage or more). A really good result on the Mechanics test should generally create a more effective, or more damaging, trap.

Agents expecting a booby trap can make a Conceal test to spot the trigger mechanism; agents not expecting traps make a Sense Trouble test (usually at a higher Difficulty). The Director modifies the Difficulty based on the abstract skill of the opposition (akin to a Stealth Modifier) and rolls damage based on trap type as above. Agents can disarm a trap with a quick flick of the combat knife, a thrown brick, or with Mechanics; the Director should tell the players of agents with Mechanics which option is safe.

Some traps can use alternative tests: agents planting or disarming a bomb use Explosive Devices rather than Mechanics. To spot a car bomb, for example, an agent could make either a Driving, Conceal, or Explosive Devices test.

Haste in setting, disarming, or checking for traps raises the Difficulty by +1 (in a hurry) or +2 (in a chase or combat).

Foam Explosive

Too impatient for Infiltration? Just spray a little of this stuff along a door frame, into a car trunk lock, or whatever you'd like to open. It looks like shaving cream and goes off like low-powered plastic explosive (Class 1) when detonated with a blasting cap.

Extrudable explosive resembles toothpaste instead of shaving cream, but the theory is the same. Available in foil tubes or caulk-gun cartridges.

Simulators

Some of these devices simulate bomb explosions; others resemble fireworks but make a much more realistic gunfire sound when they go off. Used on movie sets, and memorably in *Ronin.*

Infiltration

Most standard infiltration equipment requires either Infiltration or no special ability to use. Vigorous use of ropes, grapnels, etc. often requires an Athletics test.

Those neat counterfeit plastic fingerprints in the movies that let you fool a palm or fingerprint scanner don't actually exist. Neither do contact lens printers that let you fool retina scanners. If they did, agents would need to acquire them with a Cache or Network. That said, plenty of biometric security is less than perfect: people have fooled fingerprint scanners with such high-tech devices as cellophane tape, Gummi bears, and breathing hard. Consider it all part of the Infiltration ability, possibly with an added Filch or other test to lift someone else's fingerprint without their knowledge.

Standard Equipment: Anti-tire spike strip, bolt cutters, bridges and bypass circuits (for electronic alarms), caltrops, camera phone, camouflage clothing, compass, cordless drill, crowbar, duct tape, fingerprint powder, flashlight, gas mask, glass cutter, glow stick, go-bar (for breaching hinges and lock plates), grapnel, industrial cleanser (for destroying DNA evidence), laser-detecting spray, lockpicks, map or blueprint, parachute, rappelling kit, rope, scent-masking clothing, spray paint, tactical light, wire cutters.

Climbing Hoist

A fuel cell and a powerful motor reel the agent up a rope, approximately one story per round. It requires a Mechanics test to be emplaced and braced at one end of the rope.

The cool grapple-gun version in movies requires a Difficulty 5 or higher Shooting test to anchor at the top. If the grapple-gun just fires a line without a hoist, then no Mechanics test is needed, but an Athletics test is usually required to climb up quickly, efficiently, and quietly. Difficulty varies with the height to be scaled.

Document Scanning Bar

A half-inch wide cylinder that scans a document while rolling across or passing over the page. Includes a flash drive for storage and uploading. Or, sure, you could just take a picture with your phone and Photography.

Human Fly Cups

High-powered vacuum cups allow an agent to scale even the sheer glass walls of modern skyscrapers without ropes. Using them requires a *minimum* Difficulty 6 Athletics test.

Lockpick Gun

Uses brute force to open a lock by pushing small metal rods into the pins and tumblers. Works on most commercial locks; high-grade, specialized, or custom-built locks thwart its relatively clumsy mechanism. Agents with Open Sesame (see p. 31) don't need one.

Rebreather

Real-world rebreathers resemble normal SCUBA gear; cinematic rebreathers look like bulbous harmonicas. Either way, they recirculate the swimmer's air, fixing the CO2 and extending underwater time to 4 hours with no telltale bubbles. Using either sort of rebreather is tricky and exhausting, adding +2 to the Difficulty of the swimming Athletics test.

Signaling/Targeting Laser

Useful for signaling aircraft passing overhead or for designating a target for an air strike or drone attack; 15km range. Hitting a precise target is a Shooting test.

Surveillance

Using most surveillance equipment requires either the Electronic Surveillance or Mechanics ability, although anyone with Conceal can plant a device. Some of the equipment in this section (such as NVO and Wolf's Ears) require no special ability to use.

Phone taps, cellular scanners, cellular jammers, bug detectors, and miniaturized surveillance gear (transmitters, tracking beacons, microphones, and cameras) need to be built from innocuous parts or sourced with Network or a Cache. (In general, they're not common enough to be available with Streetwise.) Once sourced, however, an agent with Electronic Surveillance can be assumed to have such equipment in his black bag or wire rat kit without Preparedness.

Standard Equipment: A/V transceivers and transmitters, binoculars, Bluetooth headset, camcorder, camera, cell phone, cordless drill, digital recorder, directional microphone, GPS receiver, keystroke logger, laptop computer, map, parabolic microphone, police scanner, replacement license plates, RF detectors, tape measure, temperature gun (useful for reading someone's absence of body heat from across the room), tracking beacon, white noise generator.

BUGS AND BUG DETECTION

Any covert audio surveillance device is a "bug," although the term also gets applied to covert video surveillance devices, and to normal devices cheated or subverted by exterior surveillance. For example, it is possible to not only covertly listen in through cell phones and landlines, but to hack the onboard emergency response system in a modern car into providing constant audio surveillance of the car's occupants.

Most bugs are likewise attached (usually physically) to an existing audio pickup in the target area: a telephone receiver, the microphone in a computer, an intercom system, or the like. Phone taps are specialized bugs designed only to monitor telephone calls on a given line. They can be installed anywhere along the line, possibly even blocks away at the phone junction box. Tapping a fiberoptic cable requires specialized software to discriminate among the hundreds or thousands of calls or accounts using it.

A bug, audio or video, combines a receiver (a camera, microphone, or combination) with a transmitter (usually radio, but occasionally WiFi, microwave, laser, or other system). These can be very small: a video bug can be as little as 2.5mm across, and an audio bug can be pinhead size or smaller. Some audio bugs — "spike mikes" — work from the other side of the target's wall, using either the wall's electrical system or the wall itself as a parabolic receiver.

Bugs are either active or passive. An active bug transmits what it "hears" with its receiver; a passive bug records what it hears. With an antenna (any non-grounded metal on site, such as a curtain rod, couch spring, or filing cabinet), bugs can transmit farther than the kilometer or so that they can unaided. Some passive bugs simply make tape or digital recordings; to recover the intel, the agent must physically retrieve the recording. Most passive bugs "go active" at a given interval — ideally when the target is out, or asleep — and burst-transmit their recording to a remote receiver. Some active bugs and many passive bugs "snuggle" their transmissions alongside a normal, expected signal in the room: a television or computer monitor, for example.

Detecting a bug is far easier when it is active; this usually involves using RF gear to find any radio transmissions in the area. Some active bugs can even be detected by moving a normal radio near them; their transmission interferes with the radio's tuner, resulting in a squeal of distortion. Detecting a passive bug involves detecting the ultrasonics emitted by the recorder or the heat source of its battery; this is very difficult in a room full of electronic equipment.

Successfully planting a bug can be done with **Electronic Surveillance** or (for self-contained bugs that do not need any local wiring or receiver to work) with a test of **Conceal**; the Difficulty for the latter will vary with the type of bug (e.g., a higher Difficulty to conceal an active bug for long) and the type of location to be bugged. A bug dramatically needed to provide specific clues for one operation uses Electronic Surveillance; planting a long-term bug in a "fishing expedition" requires a spend or a Conceal test or both.

Successfully detecting a bug requires either a Conceal test or a 1-point spend of Electronic Surveillance along with any necessary equipment. Usually, if Electronic Surveillance gives a core clue, it tells the agent that someone else is being bugged; finding bugs planted on yourselves is often useful, but is almost never a core clue. Thus, finding a bug on another target may not require a spend; finding a bug on yourselves almost always does.

Acoustic Gunshot Sensor

Now in wide deployment in Afghanistan, this device fits on a shoulder and weighs under 200g. It uses four external microphones (which also detect the shock waves from passing bullets), a GPS receiver and compass, and fiendishly complex software to compute the trajectory, caliber, and origin point of any gunshot: it can filter out background noise or shots fired by nearby friendlies. The result — the location of the enemy shooter — pops up on a small screen in one round. If you're using Sense Trouble to find a sniper, an AGS adds +3 to your roll.

Larger models (about the size of a car battery) date from the 1990s, but are easier to kitbash; current NATO mil-spec AGS systems need to be sourced with Cache or Network.

Fiberoptic Scope

This fiberoptic cable connects to a tiny (2.5mm) passive video camera at one end, and plugs into a transmitter or video display at the other. Agents can snake the cable under doors, into a safe or briefcase, through a hole in the wall or floor, through pipes or wires, etc. and observe an interior space without being seen.

Fume Sponge

This sensitive tissue absorbs the chemicals, odors, volatiles, etc. in a given room, including smoke, dust, and contaminants. It can detect specific targets by their cologne or body odor, specific chemicals by their signature, or the presence of spilled blood in the room. Depending on what it finds, the result requires

Chemistry, Criminology, or Forensic Pathology to analyze.

Laser Microphone

Reads the vibrations of window glass to resolve sounds or speech inside the room. Specialized software can filter out music, other conversations, or other ambient sound. A laser mike cannot be detected by bug detectors, though it can be thwarted with white noise or very heavy curtains.

Night Vision Optics

Against a foe without night vision, using NVO (night-vision optics) gives agents the possibility of surprise, and a likely team pool to boot (see p. 110). NVO is likely to lower Difficulties for Surveillance and Sense Trouble tests at night. Older East Bloc models use built-in IR illuminators, making them stand out brightly to anything that can see in infrared. Other models either enhance ambient light or see solely in false-color infrared: useless in utter darkness or against beings with no body heat, respectively.

All of these NVO options are available in scopes for rifles or pistols; a detachable "starlight scope" makes a decent jury-rigged night-vision monocular.

Penetrating Radar

This handheld imaging radar penetrates solid matter from up to 3 meters away. It can be used to detect underground spaces, buried power lines, land mines, artifacts, walls inside mounds, and so forth. It can also see through walls and detect motion: terrorists inside buildings, vampires inside coffins, etc. It can image the space up to 20 meters behind organic matter (brick, soil, wood, drywall, etc.) but only 30-35cm behind denser matter (concrete, rock, etc.). Metal is opaque to it.

TEMPEST Monitor

This system intercepts the radio waves broadcast by computer monitors, including ATM screens, laptop monitors, medical readouts, and CCTV screens. (High-security monitors and screens might be TEMPEST-hardened.) It can read any screen within 300 meters; it requires an antenna, a receiver box, and a laptop running software to process and read the signals.

Wolf's Ears

Trade name for an acoustic awareness system: in plain English, it simultaneously amplifies noises at a distance and damps out gunshots and other potentially deafening sounds nearby. Used by hunters, and completely legal to buy and own in most countries, it's built into a pair of headphones with directional mikes on the outside. It's a little clunky and obvious to use as a surveillance device, but needs must when the devil drives.

Depending on the specific sound, it may lower Difficulty for Sense Trouble or Surveillance tests (or raise Alertness Modifiers) for the wearer by 1 or 2 points at the Director's discretion.

Nobody in spy thrillers ever goes deaf despite the cacophony of gunshots fired past their heads, so its acoustic damping only comes in handy against banshee wails, flash-bangs, or other dangerous sounds: lower the Difficulty of related Health or Stability tests by 1 or 2 points.

Vehicles

This game handles vehicles, as GUMSHOE does most things, with abstractions intended to promote drama rather than simulations intended to promote gritty realism.

Acquiring a civilian ground or water vehicle should be fairly easy: agents can use a Cache, Network, or Streetwise (for stolen cars with laundered plates and tags), simple theft (using either Open Sesame (p. 31) or Grand Theft Auto (p. 28)), carjack it, or just buy the thing used for cash. Keeping a stolen vehicle (without laundering it yourself using Forgery, and probably Mechanics to change the VIN number), or one that has been "made" by traffic cameras or other police agencies, will bring Heat (see p. 88). Fortunately, Europe has an excellent mass transportation network — and the next city will have just as many chop shops, unsecured parking structures, and used car lots as the last one did.

Acquiring an aircraft, or any sort of military or quasi-military vehicle, almost always requires Network, and the aircraft may be a "loaner" signed out under a false name for "flight training" or something innocuous. Failing that, stealing an aircraft should almost always be its own op, or at least involve some Infiltration or Grand Theft Aero (p. 28).

Vehicle Table

The Vehicle Table is arranged in increasing order of speed. Within a given Speed rating, faster vehicles appear after slower ones: for example, a Humvee is faster than a horse, although both have Speed -1. These Speed ratings assume roads; under off-road conditions, ground vehicles drop to the next lowest Speed rating. The exception is vehicles with an off-road capacity (marked OR in the notes). They retain their Speed rating when off-road, and are considered faster in an off-road thriller chase contest than any non-OR vehicle in their rating band. For example, a car (Speed +0) driven off-road is Speed -1, and slower than all Speed -1 vehicles with OR capacity: ATVs, horses, APCs, dirt bikes, Humvees, and tanks.

Vehicle	Speed	Maneuver	Notes
construction equipment	-2	-3	OR, Armor -4
foot		+2 (+3 if Athletics 8+)	OR
bicycle		+1	
sailboat		-1	
ATV	-1	+1	OR
snowmobile		+0	only in snow
scooter		+0	
horse		+1	OR
cabin cruiser		-1	
APC		-1	OR, Armor -4
jet-ski		+1	
dirt bike		+1	OR
speedboat		+0	
HMMWV (Humvee)		-1	OR, Armor -3
battle tank		-3	OR, Armor -10
bus		-2	
airboat	+0	+0	
armored truck		-1	Armor -5
fire truck		-3	Armor -1
semi-trailer		-2, -3 fully loaded	
van		-1	
SUV		+0	OR
limousine		+0, -1 if armored	Armor up to -4
pickup truck		+0	some models OR
ambulance		-1	
motorcycle		+1	OR
car		+0	
civilian helicopter		+1	
police car		+0 or +1	
UAV (Predator drone)		+0	
single-engine prop plane		+0	
police helicopter		+1	
cigarette boat	+1	-1	
racing motorcycle		+0	
sports car		+1	
helicopter gunship		+0	Armor -4
racing hydrofoil	+2	-1	
racing stock car		+0	
Formula 1 race car		-1	
ground-attack aircraft	+4	-2	Armor -4

Vehicle Armor

A conventional civilian ground vehicle provides armor as follows against bullets:

Windshield, tires: -0

Doors or panels: -1

Engine block: -4

Hiding behind the whole body of a car provides Full Cover (see p. 67).

Remember to apply the additional -2 to damage from shotgun shells at Close range or farther.

The Armor listing in the Vehicle Table adds to the above: e.g., a Humvee door has -4 Armor against bullets. Windshield and tire armor increases only with specially reinforced windows (Armor -2) or solid "run-flat" tires (no additional Armor, but the only effect of a bullet is +1 to Driving difficulties). Double all Armor ratings (windshields become -1) against clubs, arrows, knives, etc.

See Attacking During Chases (p. 57) and Called Shots (p. 72) for rules about shooting out tires and other specific attacks on vehicles.

Souped-Up Vehicles

Agents (or teams of agents) with both Driving and Mechanics can soup up a motor vehicle given access to an auto shop, parts, and a day of time. They must succeed in a Difficulty 4 test of Mechanics. A souped-up vehicle counts as the faster vehicle in a thriller chase contest (see p. 54) against any other vehicle of the same Speed.

With an auto shop, parts, and a week of time, agents (or teams of agents) with Driving and Mechanics can likewise increase the maneuverability of any vehicle; it counts as the more maneuverable vehicle in a thriller chase contest against any other vehicle of the same Maneuver rating.

Substitute Piloting and the appropriate facilities to soup up boats and planes.

Gearhead players may suggest other specific modifications: oil-slick sprayers, nitrous oxide injection systems, etc. The Director should assess a Mechanics Difficulty and a time requirement; most such add-ons provide a "free" Swerve (see p. 60) in a thriller chase.

Special Weapons

In the movies, all you really need to kill a vampire is a pointed stick. Maybe that's true in your Director's game, too — but better safe than sorry.

Many standard weapons can be openly bought with little or no trouble: machetes, baseball bats, a sledgehammer and wooden stakes, and fire axes. Collectible weapons like katanas take more money, and usually more time. Although laws vary by jurisdiction, buying even hunting weapons in Europe almost always requires licenses, identification, and other prime opportunities for Forgery and Digital Intrusion.

Acquiring military weapons or armor usually takes a Cache, a Streetwise spend, or a Network source. Even buying legal equipment like bullet-proof vests usually involves a lot of paperwork of the sort agents would rather not commit themselves to. Forgery makes an interesting way to get around such restrictions, at least in the short term, as long as none of the restricted gear gets left behind at a crime scene.

Getting weirdly specialized gear such as silver-plated katanas, compound hunting bows, or wooden-headed crossbow bolts almost always requires either theft, Streetwise, or building it yourself. Even a normally reliable Network contact may balk at providing dragon's breath rounds, or simply be unable to lay his hands on wolfsbane or silver bullets.

Shooting

In most of Europe, buying any ammunition other than hunting ammunition (.22LR or equivalent, some shotgun ammunition) is strictly controlled. Back to Streetwise you go, then.

Bows

The compound bow (a bow using pulleys and cables to increase effective pull) has the same effective range as a rifle: Long. Like a rifle, users can pay 2 points from Shooting to make a shot possible at ranges up to 500 meters (see p. 67). Both crossbows and "longbows" now use compound bow design.

Armor removes an additional -1 damage from wooden-tipped arrows or bolts.

Agents (and dramatically important foes) can use Sniping (p. 77) with a bow. Even in Dust mode games, a modern bow might have a scope, rangefinder, and wind gauge.

Dazzle Laser

Weighing about 6kg, and about the size of a submachine gun, a dazzle laser fires a blinding green laser beam into the eyes of a target at up to Long range. (Users can pay 2 points from Shooting to make a shot at up to 1,500 meters.) It does not require a Called Shot to hit the eyes, but the target must be looking toward the laser. If hit in the eyes, the target makes his choice of either a Health or an Athletics test (Difficulty 8) to avoid being blinded for the remainder of the scene. Optical protection (like most modern NVO gear) lowers the Difficulty of the test to 4. Firing it into the eyes of a vehicle driver also adds a Difficulty 6 Driving test to avoid an immediate crash.

Like the taser (see p. 63), this weapon tends to short-circuit combats, and is similarly peculiarly powerless against vampires. However, it's just *awesome* at masking cameras and other visual surveillance devices.

Dazzle lasers are standard anti-riot equipment in China, but have been banned for export by the UN. That said, a good Network source may know where to get one, and building one takes only hours if you can get a laser and a battery pack.

Heavy Weapons

Crew-served weapons like mortars and machine guns are surprisingly available in black markets around war zones: the former Yugoslavia, the Caucasus, and the Middle East. Even the IRA, ETA, and other old-school Western European terrorist groups stockpiled such weapons during the Cold War: some may still wait in a remote farmhouse or neglected urban cellar. Mortars are fairly simple to build, being merely tubes, simple ranging equipment, and back plates — ammunition is the real problem.

Mortar shells can also drop gas, smoke, incendiaries, or cluster bombs, as well as the more usual high explosive.

Laser Sight

A low-powered targeting laser attached to your gun projects an ominous red dot onto a target at ranges up to 750 meters (250 meters in daylight). If you can see it, you only need to spend 1 point for Extended Range (see p. 68), and the Hit Threshold you need to nail your enemy goes down by 1; if your foe can see it, you lose surprise. But your partner, if you have one, gets a free point or two of Intimidation to spend on the target.

In fog or smoke, the laser beam becomes visible, and makes an excellent pointer to your position; your Hit Threshold decreases by 1 against ranged enemy fire.

Infrared or ultraviolet laser sights are only visible to foes who can see those frequencies; your Hit Threshold doesn't drop against other foes.

An ultraviolet laser sight might well burn vampires vulnerable to sunlight, or at least set off a smoldering pinhole (see p. 106).

Scope

A scope mounted on your firearm decreases the cost of Extended Range by 1 point (see p. 68). Using a scope while Sniping decreases the cost of Extended Range to zero.

For "starlight scopes" see Night Vision Optics on p. 101.

Silencer

Gun nuts will talk your ear off about the wide range of silencers possible, only they'll call them "firearm sound suppressors." In game terms, they're all the same thing: using a silencer makes any incidental gunfire quiet enough to probably not spoil your Infiltration, Surveillance, or other test. If you fire a silenced weapon while on a covert op, the Director should add 1 to your Infiltration or other test Difficulty if your opponent has a positive Alertness modifier. At the Director's discretion, repeated silenced gunshots (such as from a submachine gun) may force another test of Infiltration or just retroactively push that first test's Difficulty up into failure territory.

For agents, a silenced gunshot anywhere in Near range lowers the Difficulty of their Sense Trouble test by 1.

Silencers don't work at all on revolvers.

They are illegal in most countries (although Finland *requires* them for hunting weapons); acquiring silencers usually takes a Cache, a Network contact, or a Streetwise spend. Agents with Mechanics and Shooting can build them in a few hours' time from a few common parts (rubber washers and PVC pipe, mostly), although they don't look as cool and burn out after several shots.

In the real world, firearm sound suppressors still leave plenty of noise left over for anxious neighbors. With a normal detachable suppressor, a 9mm gunshot normally audible 500 meters away can still be heard from 60 meters. To unobtrusively shoot someone in the next room, you have to turn up the TV really loud, and probably fire through a pillow or cushion to boot. Even listeners with a negative Alertness modifier add 1 to your test Difficulty; others add 2. On the bright side, your Sense Trouble Difficulty drops by a like amount.

Slingshot

A slingshot worn braced on the wrist, made of modern materials, can hurl a ball bearing (-1 damage) at targets up to Near range. Users can pay 2 points from Shooting to make a shot at Long range (see p. 68). The best thing about a slingshot, besides the ready availability of ammo, is its nearly complete silence.

Special Ammo

Man, are there a lot of different types of ammunition. This is just a sampling; the Director or especially gun-happy players should feel free to add as many as their hearts can stand. Getting specialized ammo should always require a spend, or at least some serious hand-loading time.

Armor-Piercing: Reduces all Armor ratings by half, rounding down: e.g., -2 or -3 Armor becomes -1 Armor; -1 Armor becomes -0.

Depleted Uranium (DU): Used in U.S. .50-caliber sniper rifles during the 1980s and 1990s (and in U.S. tank guns and vehicle-mounted autocannon still), DU ammo sets off a Geiger counter, but is not dangerously radioactive. The danger comes from a super-heavy bullet tearing through a hard target: against an unmodified Armor of -3 or better, DU ammo acts like incendiary ammo. Against any hard target (metal, mummified flesh, ceramic armor, chitin, concrete, etc.), DU ammo does +1 damage, ignoring armor. Otherwise, treat DU ammo as really cool-sounding armor-piercing ammo. Must be hand-loaded in any caliber smaller than .50 (12.7mm).

Dragon's Breath: Trade name for 12-gauge shotgun shells that replace the shot with a zirconium-based incendiary. Firing the shotgun creates a gout of flame out to Near range that burns for the next two rounds. Fire Dragon's Breath shells from a pump shotgun only: an automatic shotgun will cycle the still-burning shell out onto you at best, and at worst set its own chamber on fire. Needless to say, they are very bad for your shotgun's action: a Shooting roll of 1 jams the gun unless you spend 2 Shooting pool points. Must be hand-loaded (1 shell per hour) with a Difficulty 5 Explosive Devices test, or acquired from a Network contact with U.S. arms sources.

Hollow-Point: Soft-nosed bullets that mushroom on impact; they do more damage to unarmored targets (+1 to normal damage). They can be hand-loaded to contain poison, mercury (to cause tumbling), silver nitrate, garlic oil, radioactive tracers, holy water, wood splinters, white phosphorus, or any other liquid or particulate. Increases all Armor ratings by one: e.g., Armor -1 becomes -2.

Incendiary: Contains a small amount of white phosphorus. If an incendiary round hits a fuel tank, ammo dump, or gas leak — explosion! (Usually Class 2 or 3; see p. 68.) They do not ignite flesh or clothing under normal circumstances. Firing an incendiary ("tracer") round also leaves a bright streak pointing right at your own position: Your Hit Threshold drops by 1 against incoming fire for the next 2 rounds, but so does that of your target if you hit.

Rubber: Usually made of plastic now. Used by riot police; doubles all Armor ratings. Does normal damage, but cannot reduce any target below Hurt.

Shotgun Slugs: Instead of a traditional cased round full of pellets, shotguns can fire solid rifled slugs. These increase damage by +1 and range to Long. Armor protects against shotgun slugs as normal bullets, not at -2. Shotguns no longer gain additional damage at Close range, however.

For silver bullets, see pp. 105 in *Very Special Weapons*.

Very Special Weapons

Once agents determine that they're fighting vampires, they may pursue more arcane and unusual sorts of weaponry. Some, none, or all of these may work against whatever vampires the Director has created for her campaign.

Fire

For most of these, see *Fire,* p. 80.

Flamethrower

Western and Soviet-bloc armies phased out flamethrowers in the 1970s, in favor of single-shot incendiary grenade launchers or thermobaric warheads for rocket launchers. Getting an actual mil-spec flamethrower requires a Network contact with deep roots in Third World militaries or very forgotten arsenals.

Fortunately, building a flamethrower is relatively simple: a pressurized tank of something flammable, a steady mount for the flame (ideally far from the tank), and a valve-and-trigger mechanism. A few days and a Difficulty 5 Mechanics test can put together something with roughly the same performance as a Cold War vintage weapon: fired at Close range, it inflicts +0 damage (partial exposure) on a Shooting hit, and -2 damage (minor exposure) on a miss by 1. A second consecutive hit on the same target at Close range does +2 damage (extensive exposure). At Near range, it only does +0 damage on a hit. Firing a flamethrower at Point-Blank range is a great way to get set on fire yourself while carrying a tank of napalm — not recommended.

Home-brewing napalm from gasoline and common household chemicals is easy enough with a spend of Explosive Devices or Chemistry. It takes a few hours to mix enough for a good tankful (five to ten shots). Napalm burns (and does damage) for 2d rounds unless chemically suppressed.

Flare Gun

This single-shot weapon shoots a bright-burning flare that does +0 damage on impact and burns for -2 damage for 1d rounds. It can only reliably hit a target at Close range, but (in a nod to genre convention) you can spend 2 Shooting points to fire it at a Near-ranged target, and 4 points to fire it at a vehicle-sized target at Long range. (As with other Extended Range options, these points do not add to the Shooting roll.) Fired into the air, the flare flies about 300 meters, hanging and burning for a minute or so, and removing

all darkness penalties (see p. 215) for 2 rounds, and lowering them only to Night for 3 more.

Hairspray and Lighter

This low-fi flamethrower combo can only be used at Point-Blank range. It does +0 damage on a Shooting hit. On a roll of 1, it fizzles or explodes: Director's choice.

Thermite

An aluminum-based pyrotechnic that, when activated, burns incredibly hot (over 2,600°C) for a brief period (1 round per 100g). It cuts through steel, slags iron, burns underwater, and ignites anything flammable nearby. Set it on a car hood: it burns through the engine in six or seven seconds!

Ultraviolet Light

High-UV lamps might damage vampires like sunlight, assuming sunlight damages vampires in the first place (see p. 138). You can buy or kitbash UV bulb assemblies for most commercial lights. "Beaming" a vampire is a Shooting roll; like laser sights, using a light beam as a weapon lowers the Hit Threshold for both your target and yourself by 1.

Mini-flashlight: Close range; maximum damage -1.

Standard Flashlight: Close range; maximum damage +0.

Large Tactical Light: Near range; maximum damage +1.

Floodlight: Long range; maximum damage +2.

UV Laser Sight: Long range; maximum damage -1.

Maximum damages are suggestions only, based on beam intensity and size; individual Directors can and will change these values at their whim.

Metal

Something of a catch-all category; except the widely-available silver nitrate, all must be sourced with a Cache or built.

Meteoric Iron

Sure, why not? Iron weapons are more brittle than steel weapons; they break on a second Weapons die roll of 1 in any combat. You can also hand-load meteoric iron shot in a shotgun shell with a Difficulty 2 Shooting or Mechanics test. Obtaining genuine meteoric iron almost certainly requires a museum robbery — which will alert any vampires who are actually vulnerable to "star iron" or extraterrestrial matter.

Silver

Not, as it turns out, a particularly easy metal to melt using normal hand-loading equipment. To melt jewelry or coin silver into bullets requires a blowtorch, high-temperature molds, and about an hour for 20 brass-jacketed silver rounds. (Unjacketed silver rounds foul rifling very fast.) It is, however, only a Difficulty 3 Mechanics or Shooting test. Hand-loading silver pellets into shotgun shells is even easier: a Difficulty 2 Mechanics or Shooting test.

Coating a sword, knife, or set of brass knuckles with silver requires electroplating or annealing equipment, a blowtorch, and a day of work with Mechanics.

It's up to the Director whether silver alloy (as opposed to pure silver) does full damage, half damage, or nothing whatsoever against the undead.

Silver Nitrate

Dissolve silver in nitric acid: that's silver nitrate. It's an extremely caustic liquid, but readily available in chemical supply houses (in a solution of water or alcohol). It can be loaded into hollow-point bullets, or used to refill tear gas canisters. It dissolves plastic: no water balloons, paintball rounds, or water guns. To creatures vulnerable to silver, it may do ongoing damage similar to snake venom (see p. 81).

Wire Garrote

A razor-sharp, thin wire filament used to slice through a target's throat; the attacker holds onto wooden handles on the ends, loops the wire over the victim's head, and yanks hard. This is a great way to kill things that can only die from beheading, assuming you can sneak up on them in the first place. Good luck with that.

Using a wire garrote requires surprise and an attack from behind: agents would get a Sense Trouble test to notice a garrotiste approaching. Sneaking up on a victim is an Infiltration test; getting close enough to loop a garrote over the neck adds +2 to the target's Alertness modifier.

The actual garrote attack is a Weapons attack using a Called Shot to the throat (+3 to Difficulty; see p. 215), doing +3 damage (+1 damage to any other body part). After the first hit, consecutive attacks on the same target automatically succeed, assuming the attacker isn't thrown off with Hand-to-Hand or otherwise discouraged. (The Director may assess a Hit Threshold penalty for strikes on a target directly behind you.)

Using a thong, electrical cord, or other garrote does +0 damage to the throat and does not behead the victim.

Water

In addition to the devices under *Liquid Projectors* below, consider using tactical liquids in syringes, hollow-point bullets, water balloons, ice cubes slipped into beverages, perfume atomizers, or the old "bucket over the door" trap.

Holy Water

If it works at all, holy water is freely available from the font of any Catholic or Orthodox church, although it may take an Interpersonal spend to get more than a half-liter or so from any one font. For what it's worth, an agent ordained as a Catholic or Orthodox priest can consecrate water with a few seconds of prayer. It's up to the Director whether the "bless the sink and hit the fire alarm" method works, or if the agents have to consecrate (or replace) the water in the building's water tank before tactically drenching its inhabitants.

DVD PRAY AND SLAY

Craig played a Polish priest who worked with Solidarity and the CIA in the 1980s, which meant we could have holy water on demand. This was great fun the first time we did it, but it eventually got a little rote. Directors and players should both think hard before putting vampire cleanser as close as the nearest faucet.

Liquid Projectors

Use the Shooting ability to operate devices to spray liquid (or thick, powdery gas) at targets.

Fire Extinguisher: A standard wall fire extinguisher holds about 20 shots of CO2, chemical fire-suppressant, or (if you've refilled it with Mechanics) garlic powder, holy water, silver nitrate, or what-have-you. Shoots out to Close range.

Pepper Spray: Fires mace, tear gas, or capsaicin (the active ingredient in chili peppers); all have the same effect as tear gas (see p. 81) until the eyes are cleared with water and towels. Pepper spray may be even more effective on dogs or creatures with supernaturally effective smell; raise the Difficulty of the Health test to 7. A spray canister can easily be refilled with holy water, silver nitrate, or other supernaturally effective liquids. Usable only at Point-Blank range, and requires a Called Shot to the face (+3 to Hit Threshold, see p. 124).

Super-Soaker: Even the most powerful air-pumped squirt gun only shoots out to Close range. Refilling it in combat is essentially impossible unless the combat includes a few minutes of down time. Unless the agents have actually killed a vampire this way, the Director may require a Difficulty 4 Stability test to bring a squirt gun to a firefight.

Paintball Gun

Available in pistol or "rifle" configuration, this is how you deliver a liquid target downrange without feeling entirely like an idiot. Not very far downrange; paintball pistols have a range of Close, paintball long arms have a range of Near.

While most agents will refill paintballs with holy water, garlic oil, or similar substances, don't neglect good old luminous paint. A glowing, paint-spattered target lowers its Hit Threshold (and the Difficulty of Surveillance or other tracking attempts) by 1.

FN 303: This anti-riot air gun uses the same basic technology as a paintball gun, and looks even cooler. It can fire a baton round (-1 damage), a short wooden stake lathed to fit [+0 damage], paintballs containing whatever liquid seems apropos, or pepper-spray balls. It's fully automatic, with a 15-round drum magazine. Its range is Near, but a 2-point Shooting spend can up that to Long (see p. 68). Best of all, it's standard equipment in many American and European police departments, so it's potentially available with Network, Cache, or Streetwise.

Tranquilizer Gun

Like other air-powered guns, "trank guns" have shorter ranges than normal firearms: Close for pistols, Near for long arms. Obtaining darts and liquid anaesthetic to fill them usually requires a quick Filch or a Forgery-Disguise combo; they're not common items on black markets. The precursor drugs, however, are common enough that a quick Streetwise and a Pharmacy spend will allow agents to brew something that works roughly as well as Kolokol-1 (see p. 81) assuming the dart hits flesh or thin clothing.

It may, of course, not work at all on vampires.

Wood

Almost all the organic materials listed here are cheap and easily available anywhere in Europe or the world.

Garlic

Garlic grows wild all over southern Europe and the Middle East; an Outdoor Survival spend lets you gather plenty in any season but winter.

Allicin, the odoriferous compound in garlic, forms only when the garlic plant is injured. Manufacturing pure allicin requires sophisticated biochemical equipment, a 2-point Chemistry spend, and a *lot* of garlic: about 100 cloves per gram of allicin. Allicin is metastable, completely breaking down in 1 to 6 days.

Hawthorn

The hawthorn, or *Crataegus monogyna,* grows wild all over Europe, the Mediterranean coasts, and in

Asia west of Afghanistan. A 2-point Outdoor Survival spend lets you find a hawthorn tree in a few hours of searching.

The same rules (although different geographic ranges) apply to white oak, ash, aspen, mistletoe, mulberry, rowan, willow, yew, or any other possibly efficacious type of wood.

Stakes

Note that just poking or stabbing someone with a sharpened piece of wood does -1 damage; pounding the stake in with a hammer takes both hands and does +1 damage.

A smoothbore gun such as an antique musket can fire a full-on wooden stake lathed to fit, as can a grenade launcher capable of firing baton rounds (most of them) or a manual-action shotgun. (Load a blank cartridge in the breech as normal, shut the gun, slip the stake down the muzzle until it mounts in the open shell.) Damage is +1; Range is Close (shotgun or musket) or Near (grenade launcher). Reloading a stake always takes one round.

Wolfsbane and Wild Rose

Also known as monkshood, *Aconitum lycoctonum* is quite poisonous. A Pharmacy or Outdoor Survival spend lets you brew a wolfsbane infusion with the same effects as snake venom (see p. 81) if ingested. It grows wild in mountainous regions of Europe and Turkey (2-point Outdoor Survival spend to find and safely harvest in quantity), and is a common enough garden plant to be available in spring in garden shops.

Wild roses are commoner and more widespread; 1-point Outdoor Survival spend to find and harvest in quantity during the summer. Available year-round in garden shops, but the Outdoor Survival spend is still needed to tell wild roses from domestic hybrids.

Wooden Bullets

Hand-loading a metal-jacketed cartridge with a wooden slug is a simple, if time-consuming task with either Shooting or Mechanics; spend 1 point of either to load up to 20 rounds per hour. You need a wood-working lathe to turn out the slugs in bulk; hand-carving and hand-loading drops the speed to 5 rounds per hour. Damage drops by 1 point, and range drops by one increment: pistols and SMGs fire out to Close range, rifles out to Near range. Extended Range (p. 68) can take pistols back up to Near and rifles back up to Long.

If even a toothpick to the heart can kill a vampire, you can hand-load a frangible wooden round; any armor stops it cold, and its damage drops to -2 regardless of caliber. But any chest hit counts as a heart hit.

This assumes that, unlike the TV series *Ultraviolet,* no super-secret vampire-hunting government agency is turning out bullets made of "reinforced carbon" or "organic polymer" or other doubletalk. If the Director is running that kind of campaign, she'll know what these magic bullets do already.

Special Tactics

The other half of the agents' arsenal of special weapons is the panoply of special tactics for using them. Some of these tactics require setup earlier in the operation; others need a reliable partner to work effectively. The rest is good, old-fashioned tradecraft.

Tactical Fact-Finding

Melding thriller combat with problem-solving espionage, fights in ***Night's Black Agents*** feature opportunities to apply Investigative skills to the battlespace. These opportunities can occur during interstitial investigative sequences, or during the fight scenes themselves. In keeping with the acronym-heavy spirit of a spy thriller, these opportunities are called TFFBs, for Tactical Fact-Finding Benefits.

Each TFFB has the following four elements:

- the Investigative ability used to gain the advantage
- the action required to find the information
- the tactical circumstance under which the benefit comes into play
- the nature of the benefit

Although the most obvious ability to yield a TFFB is Military Science (p. 22), the other Investigative abilities can also yield plenty of useful information.

- Interpersonal abilities can elicit (or wring) valuable tactical data from allies, witnesses, shady middlemen, prisoners, and enemy operatives.
- Human Terrain can predict where the enemy will make a stand, or indicate likely key personnel.
- Forensic Pathology and Criminology can determine an unknown monster's attack pattern.
- Traffic Analysis can estimate the reaction time of any off-site reinforcements, or even the size of the current garrison.
- Cryptography cracks the tactical information in encoded enemy communications.
- Urban Survival could determine dead ends or escape routes to herd targets toward or away from.

- Electronic Surveillance, after an Infiltration exercise, might secure a floor plan of the site to be raided — as might Bureaucracy.
- Architecture could discover possibly unguarded entry points such as sewer mains.

These clues may be garnered in a scene previous to the fight in which they become relevant. Alternately, the players may get the chance to gather a clue in the middle of a fight.

Sometimes they get the benefit simply by taking part in the battle. On other occasions they may have to do something to trigger the benefit — wear Lexan neck-protectors, blow up a load-bearing column, set a communications jamming device in place.

Benefits of tactical investigation may take the following forms:

- **Refreshes:** one or more agents gain a refresh of a set number of pool points in a designated ability or abilities; points that would put their pools higher than their ratings are ignored. Refreshes are best used when the benefit's triggering circumstances occur in mid-fight, and when the benefit is abstract and hard to quantify.
- **Team pool:** the whole team gains access to a shared pool of points in a designated ability or abilities. Any player can spend them as though they were her own; once expended, they do not refresh. If the scene ends with team points unused, they disappear. Team points are best used for situations of broad and abstract benefit, where the agents enjoy a tactical advantage from the outset of the armed conflict.
- **Difficulty adjusts:** The Difficulty of a specific action decreases for the team, or a team member, or increases for an enemy or enemies. The most obvious example is an decreased effective Hit Threshold for one's enemies, or an increased effective Hit Threshold for oneself. Changes in difficulty can apply to many circumstances; Hit Threshold adjusts best reflect positional advantages, where the agents are better able to conceal themselves from incoming fire, or force enemies to expose themselves to it.
- **Enemy pool reductions:** When the benefit's triggering circumstance comes into play, the opposition loses a particular number of points in one or more pools. Pool reductions are best used to reflect a change in battlefield conditions putting the enemy at a sudden and dramatic disadvantage.
- **Surprise**: The agents are able to begin the fight with one or more rounds during which the enemy is unable to return fire or perform other actions. In their first available action, the enemy is at +2 to all Difficulties. This applies to situations where the agents are able to leverage tactical information to suddenly launch an attack against unprepared adversaries.

Some situations may warrant a combination of advantages — a Difficulty reduction plus a number of team points, for example. The Director should be prepared to substitute more appropriate benefits when creative players wring different and unexpected tactical circumstances from their tactical fact-finding.

In a standard GUMSHOE scenario, an opportunity to enhance later tactical success with an Investigative ability generally requires a spend, because it confers an advantage that is only tangential to the solution of the central mystery. In some ***Night's Black Agents*** operations, the acquisition of tactical advantage *is* the central mystery. Here they should not require spends.

Fact-Finding and Combat Sequence

Prevent tactical fact-finding during a fight from slowing the action to a crawl by integrating it with the turn sequence.

Right before the fight, each player gets the chance to query a single Investigative ability. When an appropriate ability is named, the Director supplies the tactically beneficial information. Invoking a particular ability yields all information arising from it; there is never any benefit to repeating an already-used ability. Facts found are usually free, though the rare example providing an extraordinary tactical benefit may require a spend. If so, the Director invites the player to make the spend; players do not have to ask if spends are available.

Except in odd circumstances where it is possible to meaningfully interact with enemy combatants while they're trying to kill you, and the occasional "taunt him into revealing his position" Intimidation test, Interpersonal abilities are typically of little use in mid-fight fact-finding.

Each player also gets to invoke another ability at the top of each action during the fight. Drawing on an Investigative ability does not cost an action. Players should spend their off-turn time picking the ability they want to use. Directors are within their rights to rule that a player who dithers over his ability choice can't attempt tactical fact-finding that round, but should not penalize him by also skipping over his combat action, or making it more difficult.

As with Investigative ability use during thriller chase scenes (see p. 54), the Director may pre-plan these options into her scenario notes, or simply roll with player creativity. As players become more familiar with the game system and with the specific metaphysics of the campaign, most combats will eventually involve a combination of the two.

Example TFFBs

From downloaded commercial satellite imagery, the agents can use **Data Recovery** to locate the refrigerated railroad car holding the sleeping vampire. With a test of either Digital Intrusion (to hack the railway routing system) or Mechanics (to physically switch the junctions and tracks in the proper sequence), they can send the car onto a remote siding. (The Difficulty is 4 for the Mechanics test, 5 for the Digital Intrusion test — onsite sabotage is always the best.) If they succeed in isolating the car from assistance or escape, the team gains a pool of 12 points to be used for any General ability during their inevitable assault, not to mention diminishing the number of their foes.

Note the triggering action (using satellite imagery), ability (Data Recovery), tactical circumstance (rerouting the car) and benefit (team pool).

Having located a vampire cult center, the group may assess the site using **Archaeology**. If so, they discover signs of a Roman catacomb underneath it. If they attack through the catacomb, they can, on a Difficulty 3 Explosive Devices test, blow a hole in its ceiling — which is the cultists' floor. The targets come raining down into the catacomb, injured and unready, their Health pools reduced by 4 apiece, ceding the team one round of surprise.

The triggering action is the decision to assess the site's history, the ability Archaeology, the tactical circumstance is blowing the catacomb floor, and the benefit is the lowered Health pools plus one round of surprise.

Using **Streetwise** to mingle with peripheral members of a Corsican drug ring, one agent can discover that the ring's leader calls himself L'Ours, and that he can be recognized by his hulking, bearlike physique. When they engage his gangsters, every agent can gain a 4-point refresh of any combat ability when L'Ours is killed, demoralizing his men.

Triggering action: asking the right questions of the gangsters; ability: Streetwise; circumstance: killing the leader; benefit: refreshes.

Having determined that some unknown monster is preying on the docks of Antwerp, the team establishes covert **Electronic Surveillance** of likely target areas. By analyzing the footage, they can determine the beast's capacity for damage — and perhaps some potential weaknesses. ("Note that it stayed out of the street light. Does it hate light? Sodium? Electrical fields?") When they actually go after the thing, they will start out with a team pool of 8 points to use for any General ability during the upcoming combat, along with an estimated Athletics and Hand-to-Hand value (as with Eye of the Tiger, p. 30) for it, some notion of its Hit Threshold, and leads to potential weaknesses if any.

Triggering action: rigging the site for the ability (Electronic Surveillance) and analyzing the footage; circumstance: going after a scouted creature on scouted ground; benefit: team pool and intel.

Training Flashbacks

Flashbacks to training and briefing provide a fun way to convey information to the players as if their characters already know it. This allows everyone to jump into the scenario and skip the usual overdose of introductory exposition.

In early fight scenes, especially those conducted *in media res*, training flashbacks can allow the Director to provide TFFBs to players without putting them through prior investigative sequences. These might grant benefits for free, simply to add interest to a fight scene, without an ability use or triggering action.

> *The Director begins the session with a bogey-hunt encounter against a vorthr, the tomb-guarding horror known in later English as a "wraith." As the action begins, the enemy security team already lies dead on the frozen Norwegian soil, having fallen to the agents' blazing guns. Now the agents have to deal with the creature inside the Viking burial mound.*
>
> *The Director says, "As you watch through your gunsights, you remember your discussion with Professor Larssen back in Oslo. The vorthr, he said, has a consuming hunger for human flesh, and the local peasants would occasionally sacrifice strangers in front of the barrow." Flashing back to the battlefield, the players are now given a chance to realize that the creature wants to feed on the corpses of its slain defenders. By standing aside, they prompt the entity to turn its back to them as it buries its fangs in the first of the dead men. They then get a reduction in its Hit Threshold and a round of surprise against it.*

Alternately, it might occasionally be dramatically appropriate for training flashbacks to require abilities and thoughtful use of triggering actions. The later in the operation a training flashback occurs, the more the players should have to work for its benefits.

Tag-Team Tactical Benefits

Agents who work together repeatedly in the field develop a rapport that elevates their skill above the normal, training-ground level. They also develop tactical routines and methods customized to each other's strengths and specialties. Specifically, two comrades in arms can work together for a Tag-Team Tactical Benefit.

One agent, the **winger,** makes an Investigative ability spend. His partner, the **striker,** gains a temporary pool ("temp pool") of extra points in a General ability to spend in this scene at a ratio of 3 General ability pool points for every 1 Investigative ability pool point spent by the winger. (The striker must have a rating in that General ability.) This temp pool, when added to the striker's normal pool, can exceed the striker's rating in the ability, but any excess points are lost at the end of the scene. The winger's spend may reflect work done before the current scene.

> *The day before, Desmond prepares a special propellant compound for Ivan's sniper rifle bullets for an upcoming ambush. When the ambush scene begins, Desmond (the winger) spends 2 points of Chemistry; Ivan (the striker) gets a temporary pool of 6 points in Shooting to use in the scene.*
>
> *Ivan has a current Shooting pool of 8 and a Shooting rating of 12; adding his 6-point temp pool gives him a current Shooting pool of 14. After the ambush, his Shooting pool returns to 8, or lower if he has spent more than those 6 temp points.*

Players gain specific Tag-Team Tactical Benefits by spending build points, either during character creation, or from experience (see p. 94). Each half of a tag team must spend 1 build point; the team can define the specific tactical benefit at that time, or retroactively in play. The Director can always reject a suggested benefit as out-of-genre, implausible, or abusive.

You can only get a tactical benefit from a teammate who you trust. For each Investigative ability pool point the winger spends, the striker receives a temp pool equal to 1 plus his Trust of the winger.

> *Beatrice has given Jack 1 Trust, Ivan 0 Trust, and Luc 3 Trust. If Beatrice is the striker, her tag-team temp pool from working with Jack is 2, and her tag-team temp pool from working with Luc is 4. She cannot get a tag-team temp pool by working with Ivan.*

Sample Tag-Team Tactical Benefits

The following examples list the winger ability and then the striker ability, along with the specific tactical situation the benefit models or covers.

- Architecture and Explosive Devices: set charges or fires correctly to bring down a building or destroy a specific room.
- Electronic Surveillance and Disguise: providing voice tracks, conversational topics, and other intel.
- Electronic Surveillance and Infiltration: locating and mapping the security systems before the break-in.
- Notice and Conceal: "cleaning" a crime scene or safe house of your team's traces.
- Flattery and Gambling: being the shill in a game.
- Human Terrain or Military Science and Shooting: spotter and sniper.
- Any Interpersonal ability and Filch: distract the guards during a theft.
- Any Interpersonal ability and Infiltration: distract the guards during an escape or insertion.
- Intimidation and Shrink: deprogramming a mind-controlled victim.
- Reassurance and Stability: "We've been through worse, right?"
- Tradecraft and Surveillance: finding an enemy spy trying to evade surveillance.
- Urban Survival and Infiltration: figuring out a good getaway route.
- Urban Survival and Surveillance: driving a target into a choke point or dead end.

It would be a harsh Director indeed who didn't allow Vampirology to come into its own in these rules.

- Vampirology and Disguise: pretending to be bait, or eluding vampiric senses.
- Vampirology and Shooting: building anti-vampire hand-loaded ammunition.
- Vampirology and Surveillance or Sense Trouble: spotting a vampire in a crowd.
- Vampirology and Weapons: finding the heart and staking it.

What Tag-Team Tactical Benefits Aren't

It's not impossible that a specific situation could be modeled as a variant of the above rules. However, most often that variant can be better addressed with another rules option:

- **Cooperation** (see p. 51) covers shared effort in a single non-combat General ability. That said, the striker in a tag team makes an excellent "leader" in a Cooperation test of that ability, since she likely has plenty of points to spend on the effort.
- **Invoking Abilities During Chases** (see p. 58) is a kind of improv version of Tag-Team Tactical Benefits, except a single agent can invoke his own Investigative ability where appropriate. In general, this is better for situation-specific and improvised ability use; like TFFBs (below), it's also usually a better deal.
- **Leveraged Clues** (see p. 184) usually cover using two Investigative abilities in tandem. In other cases — for example, a "good cop, bad cop" use of Reassurance and Intimidation to break a terrorist — both parties should just suck it up and spend the point. The Director may rule, for example, that the results provide what a 2-point Interrogation spend would have.
- **Support Moves** (see p. 77) cover multiple team members executing a common battle plan, such as "we all hold him down and you behead him." Again, in such a case the beheader benefits from being the striker tag-teamed with a Vampirology-using winger.
- **Tactical Fact-Finding Benefits** (see p. 108) deal with most "one-off" or mission-specific plans. The Director should use player input in such cases to design a TFFB; remember, a TFFB doesn't involve spending build points to get, normally doesn't require spending Investigative points, and usually garners more points or a better advantage.

Tradecraft

Being a spy means mastering, or at least becoming familiar with, a wide variety of tricks and tactics meant to provide you with a secure, reliable intelligence network and degrade that of your enemy. In the game, some of that tradecraft can be handwaved or subsumed under a single ability use; other tactics and methods lead into or even define whole scenarios.

With all tradecraft techniques, if they provide core clues for an operation then they require no spend by the agents from the relevant Investigative ability. If they merely provide additional confirmation, short-cuts, protection, or any other secondary benefit, the Director may rule that a spend is necessary.

Covert Communication

Any spy network is only as good as its communications. Distributed groups following a common ideology can occasionally score one-off victories, but for real coordinated action, a network's cells and strategists need to be able to talk — ideally, without anyone else listening in. If at all possible, networks communicate through **cut-outs,** messengers tasked anonymously for one-time meets or passes, who get details from burner phones, classified ads, or the Internet, and thus can't identify either end of the chain. Sometimes, a face-to-face rendezvous is possible, established either by routine ("someone will always be at the mausoleum to take a message") or by signal ("carry a copy of the *Financial Times* to work if you want a meeting and we'll text you the time and place"). But those approaches are risky and labor-intensive; most communication must happen at a remove.

Brush Passes

A brush pass occurs in person between two members of a network. Either or both carry something — a document, a message, an envelope full of bills, a flash drive — and without obviously making contact, brush past each other and exchange it. This might involve actual contact, or a drop somewhere in the other's view: a trash can, a parked car, a bookshelf in the library. A brush pass into (or from) a vehicle is also called a "car toss."

Depending on the specifics, carrying out a brush pass may involve tests of Driving, Filch, or Surveillance (if actively opposed by enemy agents) or merely invoking Tradecraft (under normal circumstances). Noticing an opposition brush pass falls under Tradecraft. Intercepting a brush pass definitely takes some planning, and possibly a chase.

Dead Drops

A dead drop is a way to pass information without ever physically encountering the recipient. One party puts the information somewhere; the second party retrieves it later. Dead drops are usually pre-arranged: "the fifth tree from the north corner of the park" or "the third pew from the back." The dropper usually stashes the information in a non-magnetic container secure from moisture, such as a plasticized mailing envelope, a film canister, or a lipstick tube. Some agencies use hollow plastic or aluminum spikes that can be shoved into the ground with a simple step, and buried by kicking leaves or dirt over them: the retriever goes to a pre-arranged set of GPS coordinates or follows a beacon triggered only by a specific cell phone signal.

Carrying out a dead drop is usually a simple matter of Tradecraft, although shedding any shadows on the

way to the site (or choosing the right time to retrieve the drop) might require Surveillance tests. Noticing an opposition dead drop, likewise.

"Digital dead drops" post information somewhere on the immense spaces of the Internet: chatrooms for Hindi singles, fan forums for Peruvian pop starlets, Craigslist Zagreb, or just a seemingly random set of URL numbers. At least one al-Qaeda group posts its dead drops as drafts to a Gmail mailing list to which all the members have admin privileges: they can read messages that haven't actually been sent anywhere, and thus avoid NSA surveillance of packet-switching nodes. Other document-sharing sites no doubt have similar features. The information may stay up for an hour, a day, or a week before automatically being taken down by a specialized sweep or by the asset handler.

Setting up and concealing a digital dead drop is a relatively simple test of Digital Intrusion; retrieving information from it takes nothing more than the URL or login and access to any computer for the length of a download. Finding an opposition digital dead drop requires government-level SIGINT capabilities, or (far easier) breaking someone who knows which site to check, or subverting their computer, smart phone, or Internet accounts.

Steganography

This term, meaning "hidden writing," goes back to the earliest printed books. To escape omnipresent censorship, scholars concealed their text in elaborate codes, anagrams, and allusions: Trithemius concealed his work on codes in a book seemingly about magic! Modern digital steganography hides data inside other data: a picture of someone's grandson, a techno MP3, a piece of freeware, a pirated copy of *Twilight*, when "solved" with the correct algorithm, rearranges its ones and zeroes into a more significant message, image, or the like.

Cryptography or Data Recovery (or both) lets agents crack steganography; Digital Intrusion lets them construct it.

Covers and Legends

To move freely without inviting suspicious observation, spies need cover identities, or "legends." Agents use the Cover ability to use pre-existing legends stashed away against just such an emergency. If the agent's Cover pool is completely tapped out, the Director might allow her to hand-build a cover using Digital Intrusion and Forgery. Such a cover won't be as good as one prepared by an agency's documents section: for each 2 points of Digital Intrusion or Forgery spent, the new legend gets Cover 1, to a maximum pool of 3.

Breaking an enemy's cover identity usually involves either Research or Traffic Analysis to turn up weird holes or patterns in their legend and its connections (or lack thereof) with vital statistics and other databases.

Cuckoo's Eggs

Infiltrating an enemy network, or working yourself close to an enemy, is almost always a long-term action involving any number of Interpersonal abilities, Human Terrain (to identify organizational openings or weak spots), and the odd spot of Disguise. (If an agent has a Connected Cover (p. 28), that's a short cut.) Seldom do any of those abilities immediately deliver core clues in an operation: planting yourself or another agent as a "cuckoo's egg" infiltrator may, however, set you up to receive core clues or (more likely) to mount an active operation against the target. The Director may handwave the entire social infiltration process with one scene, or make the would-be cuckoo earn prime placement with a few scenes (and possibly even Interpersonal point spends) spaced out over the course of the session like an episode of *Mission: Impossible* or *Leverage.*

Asset Handling

Rather than infiltrate an enemy network themselves, intelligence operatives often try to recruit assets already in place or who can more easily work themselves into position. Asset recruitment is a three-stage process: identify a likely asset, contact him, and flip him to your side.

Identify: Finding a potential asset might be as easy as picking a picture off the surveillance video, or it might involve Human Terrain analysis of the target organization to specify a potentially fruitful subject. High Society might supply the name of a jilted girlfriend, Streetwise provide hints of restive gang subordinates, or Traffic Analysis give the phone number of someone everyone in the target organization has called in the last month. The Director might give a range of possibilities, or just feed one "core clue" name to the players.

Contact: Making contact with an asset can happen in any fashion, but usually while the asset is either vulnerable or comfortable: eager and needy, or lulled into false security. Figuring out the right Interpersonal approach to an asset is part of the fun of the spy game; suitable Research or previous Surveillance can give tips and pointers.

Flip: Turning a contact into an asset is the tricky part. Traditionally, assets flip for one of four MICE: Money, Ideology, Coercion, or Ego. In a normal ***Night's Black Agents*** game, Coercion will be your go-to strategy: figure out something to hold over your asset's head, show him his weakness, and twist. Those three steps

can be three nice little scenes in a mini-op that nets you an asset. That said, a Director interested in the changeup will occasionally trail a possible Ego or Ideology flip past you, the latter especially in Stakes games. Of course, in Mirror games, an Ideology flip might not stay flipped! A Money flip usually needs excessive resources (see p. 96), but if the agents can help a capo to rise in the Genoa mafia by wiping out a Corsican rival, that gives a suitable Money-style reward — and the Coercion can come when they threaten to tell the Union Corse that he ordered the hit.

Asset Running

Once you've got an asset, you can spend 1 Interpersonal pool point (of whatever sort you and the Director agree is appropriate) to get information from him; you can spend 2 Interpersonal pool points to make him do something risky for you. If you spend Tradecraft, you can gain information or cooperation covertly (although if your asset is under pressure, you may need to make a Surveillance test to avoid blowing his cover). If the Director plants a core clue with your asset, getting that information from him never requires a spend.

The difference between an asset and a Network contact is that an asset might betray you, lose his nerve, screw up, or otherwise turn things interesting and dangerous. Network contacts are more reliable: but then, they cost Network points to create, and assets don't.

Adversary Mapping

The ongoing goal of intelligence operations is to uncover the opposition's network, facilitating its destruction, rolling up, or isolation. Agents typically conclude a given investigation by updating their adversary map, a speculative org chart identifying the apparent relationships between the members of the vampire conspiracy. Adding one or two names, or a suggestive surveillance photo, to the adversary map, counts as a victory regardless of how the rest of the operation might have gone. By understanding the relationships between your foes, you know where to lean on them, who to expect to respond, and which seemingly innocuous Eurocrat to kidnap for further intel.

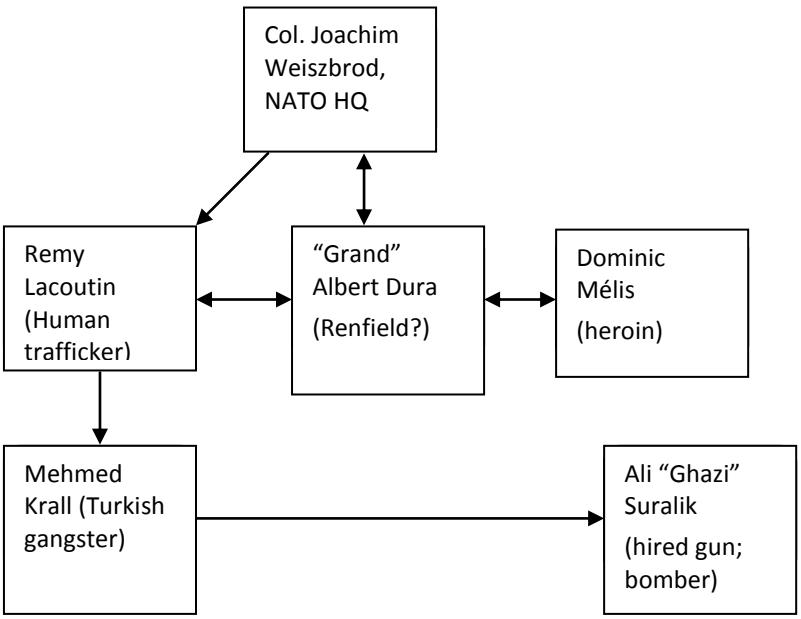
Spending Human Terrain and Traffic Analysis points may get an outline or a generic structure up on the map; agents conduct individual Surveillance tests, asset interviews, and even whole operations to fill in the specifics. Then, Human Terrain and Traffic Analysis can confirm the targets' place on the map and suggest new directions: "Someone has to be running the money to these guys," or "There are a lot of connections to the NATO air base in this signals tranche: maybe we should be looking for a Renfield officer there." The adversary map begins to suggest possibilities on its own; the clever Director will roll with those suggestions and only occasionally guide the players with specific intel.

The Director and players should collaborate to construct an adversary map for the campaign: pinning Xeroxed photos and index cards to a cork board, drawing it on a tablet or iPad, or otherwise creating a visual aid to remember past progress and focus future investigations. The players should add cards or notes to the map for any specific vulnerabilities, dangers, or other operational concerns they uncover. The Director will already have a "bird's eye view" adversary map in her notes; this is the Conspyramid (see p. 158). The adversary map the players construct will follow the Conspyramid in general structure, although some levels may have more or less discrete data: a box on the Director's Conspyramid may merely say "Trieste smuggling ring" while the players have identified four or five specific NPCs and their roles in that apparat.

Once the players have filled in a given section of the adversary map, they get a team pool (see p. 110) for ops of any kind (surveillance, penetration, flipping, or good old ultra-violence) against a target in that section. As a rule, they receive 2 pool points in any General ability or abilities per mapped connection to the target. Add a pool point if an Interpersonal spend has suggested a fruitful approach or attack strategy. (Flirting discovers he likes redheads; Cop Talk indicates he's under pressure from a reformist magistrate.) The Director may adjust this up or down; in general, the higher on the org chart, the bigger the pool bonus per connection.

The specifics of the adversary map may also suggest more directed Tactical Fact-Finding Benefits: a girlfriend, a lawyer's office, a parking garage used for meets and drops. Points gained from such TFFBs add to the team pool from adversary mapping.

Sample Adversary Map: The Brussels Conspiracy (so far)



This sample adversary map uses arrows to denote communication: a one-way arrow means that the "pointy end" can't communicate with the other party at will; a two-way arrow means that both parties can communicate at will.

When the agents mount any operation against Mehmed Krall, they receive a 4-point team pool; if they take on Remy Lacoutin or Albert Dura, they get a 6-point team pool. An operation against "Ghazi" Suralik only gets a 2-point team pool, but his isolation on the org chart may imply that the agents can arrange a TFFB intended to cut him completely off. Moving against Dominic the heroin dealer should probably wait until the agents can map his role in the conspiracy more thoroughly — but they have a 2-point team pool for any surveillance or other intel-gathering operation in the meantime.

Pressure

Another good way to weaken an organization — either for its own sake, or to pop loose a potential asset — is to put it under pressure. This can also force the target group to reveal its own assets, its hidden strengths, or its emergency strategies. If, for example, you've tapped the city's cellular network, sudden pressure on a foe can reap a rich harvest of Traffic Analysis as everyone in the gang calls their boss for instructions, and then their bosses call key subordinates to coordinate a response.

Pressure can involve a direct attack, an indirect attack on allies or sources of funding, exposure of criminal or terrorist activity to the police or other officials, or any combination or repetition of the above. Pressure can also be "pull," setting up a tempting opportunity and seeing who bites, or egging the target on to overreach.

THE YOJIMBO OPTION

Everybody has enemies. Criminals, terrorists, and ambitious corrupt Eurocrats are no exception. One strategy for indirect attack on a conspiracy target is to recruit the target's competition, pursuers, or resentful victims. This recruitment can also be indirect: attacking your target's rival, and making it look like your target was responsible, is a great way to trigger a blowback aimed at your actual enemies. You might "accidentally" tip off the rival about your target's vulnerable operations — or feed false intel to the rival and lure him into a vampiric ambush as a diversion from your own operation. Or you might openly suggest an alliance with the rival to take down your mutual enemy — how much of your plans (or of the truth) you reveal is, of course, up to you.

Capture and Interrogation

When all else fails, there's good old kidnapping. This requires a target (usually identified by Human Terrain, Streetwise, Surveillance, or Traffic Analysis), an extraction plan (planning and carrying out a snatch job is usually the meat of a whole session or even a whole operation), and a secure location for interrogation (set up with Network, or possibly mapped out with Urban Survival and staked out with Surveillance). If it works, a grab is an excellent way to get current intel and (if the snatch alerts the opposition) a look at the target group's responses.

The actual interrogation requires an isolated or controlled space and a secure hold on the prisoner. Using the Interrogation ability automatically extracts a core clue, if any are available, although it might take hours or even days if the subject is trained or conditioned to resist. (If a subject had a core clue, other Interpersonal abilities can often get it faster without kidnapping.) For intel the Director doesn't deem "core," spends still probably turn up something actionable — a name or two for the adversary map, for instance — unless the target actually doesn't know anything, thanks to compartmentalization, or vampiric mind-wipes, or the Director running a Mirror mode switcheroo.

Truth Serum

In the real world, some intelligence agencies use some specific barbiturate cocktails, including scopolamine and sodium thiopental, to assist interrogation. These drugs induce a general sense of well-being, lowered inhibitions, and (under proper guidance by an interrogator) a tendency to rattle off anything and everything on their mind, truthful or not. In effect, "truth serum" acts just like getting someone really, really drunk or high.

In spy thrillers, truth serum works much more reliably; after an injection of "sodium pentothal," the interrogator can pry reliable answers forcibly out of a writhing victim. Real-world Russian defectors claim the FSB uses a flavorless, odorless truth serum called SP-17 that also erases memories of the interrogation.

The Pharmacy ability does not cover mixing truth serum from scratch. If the agents want truth drugs, they need to steal them from an agency medical facility or source them with Network. Using truth serum speeds up the Interrogation ability, assuming someone present has the Shrink ability as well.

Needless to say, even a drop of vampire blood entirely counteracts truth serum.

In Dust mode games, using barbiturates in interrogation requires a test of Medic and a test of Shrink, to judge dosage and guide the questioning. The Difficulty depends on the subject's conditioning and training.

GETTING CAPTURED

Getting captured is a time-honored genre habit for the thriller spy, from James Bond to Sydney Bristow. By and large, players absolutely *hate* for their characters to get captured: losing an arm is preferable to losing a few days in the box. Directors should get player buy-in at the beginning of the game: if capture simply isn't an option, then it simply isn't an option. Ignore this sidebar.

This sidebar also doesn't cover getting jailed by the proper authorities. Use Network to create a contact who can spring you: a superior officer, a member of the host country's spy service, a rich and influential citizen or clout-heavy scumbag. Spend (at double the normal point cost: 2 points adds 1 to the die roll) and roll. Done and done.

Okay. So you've been captured. By the real opposition. Here's our GUMSHOE promise: **If you are captured, you will learn something you want to know.** If your agent is captured by the opposition, you can ask the Director one question about *any* aspect of the opposition. The answer will appear in the session in which you asked it. If at all possible, it will appear in prison with you: a Rolodex on the desk, a computer monitor left on, a confession by a fellow inmate, a conversation overheard, a quick scene played out in the course of your inevitable escape.

And you *will* have a chance to escape. That, too, is time-honored spy thriller tradition. The Director may turn your prison break into a whole session's operation, coordinating with the other players' agents on the outside. Or she may just let you show off your skills in a taut combat scene and a remarkably easy Infiltration test or two. If the dice go against you (hard to believe, especially since your Hand-to-Hand, Shooting, and Weapons probably refreshed during the hour it took you to get processed; you and your team can try again during your (less secure) transfer: you're obviously too dangerous to be left where you were.

None of these awesome things apply if you, the player, didn't show up to the game. Then, the Director can grab your character off the street and set up a fine rescue operation for the other players to carry out, and you don't get any answers or any spotlight time.

Mirror mode games turn on the possibility of betrayal, including betrayal as a result of brainwashing (or conversion) while captured. Thus, capture (on-screen or off-screen) is more common in Mirror games. In general, mature players who savor betrayal are more philosophical about being captured, but make sure ahead of time anyway.

[[END SIDEBAR]]

Advice to Players

The purpose of playing ***Night's Black Agents*** is to collaborate in telling a horror spy thriller. In this collaboration, it's the players' job to feel the horror, to uncover the spy stuff, and to help keep it all thrilling. It's the Director's job to make the players' jobs possible in the first place. Both the Director and the players benefit from agreeing on and internalizing what the game is supposed to look and play like.

The default campaign structure for ***Night's Black Agents*** is this:

- In the first operation (also called a "scenario" or an "adventure") a team of shadowy operatives discovers that vampires exist.
- This discovery marks them for death, or worse, at the vampires' hands.

In order to avoid this fate, the team must:

- mount operations designed to uncover the extent of the vampire conspiracy
- avoid being hunted and attacked by vampires
- mount operations designed to weaken, and eventually destroy, the vampire conspiracy

Such operations include:

- discovering and then spoiling vampire operations
- specific attacks on vampiric assets, and
- once the team knows enough, attacks on the vampires themselves

In many spy games, the players work for a boss — M, the voice on the tape, D Ops — who gives them assignments that happily coincide with the Game Master's pre-planned adventure. In ***Night's Black Agents,*** the "assignments" often come from the players themselves: they have an agenda of their own, and between the adversary map and loose ends from previous operations, they usually have an immediate goal in mind to further it. If the Director has to "assign" a job, it usually looks something like: "You've discovered that this specific vampiric asset is coming to kill you, or is already killing a lot of innocent people. Maybe you should try to stop it."

The Bucharest Rules

The "Moscow Rules" guided Western agents through Cold War operations in the Soviet bloc. In the thriller world, they're a little staid, so we've replaced them with a few "Bucharest Rules" to get the game going: techniques or concepts to take on board that can help maximize your own fun.

You Can Win

Yes, this is a game of horror, in which your agent might well be slaughtered, exsanguinated, or buried in a Slovakian cement factory. That will *definitely* happen if you do nothing, so you might as well do *something*.

Take the initiative: pick the most appealing offense and execute it. Will something horrible happen? Of course it will — it's a horror game! Something horrible will happen no matter what your plan is. At best, you'll find one that requires desperation and daring, and might still cost you your lives. But no fun whatsoever will happen unless you choose something to do and do it.

So be bold and seize the initiative. Pick the type of terrifying risk you're most able to confront and go

after it with both hands. Who knows? Maybe you'll surprise the Director, if not the opposition. As in any game, the Director will allow any halfway credible approach you come up with a good chance of success, and will place nasty obstacles in your way to make your success more exciting. Pick something quickly, grit your teeth, and send your agent into that cement factory.

Put it in Drive

If you still find yourself unable to justify some near-suicidal plan, think of your Drive. Come up with some reason to Drive yourself into danger, and maybe pick up a nice refresh for doing it along the way. Look to your Drive as a source of action and inspiration, and use it to decide which near-suicidal plan is right for your agent.

With Great Ability Scores Comes Great Responsibility

Nobody wants to watch a movie where Bond doesn't seduce the girl, or Jason Bourne doesn't beat the crap out of some mooks, or Ethan Hunt doesn't wear that cool face mask. You've got the same responsibility to your audience, and to your team. Look at your best ability scores, both Investigative and General. Play those high numbers right, and you play to win; and better yet, to a win where you look cool. If you're stuck for an approach or a plan, think about how to use your spotlight abilities to make what you want to happen, happen.

If you haven't used your MOS yet, figure out somewhere you can use it for a guaranteed win.

When Stuck, Get More Intel

If you are legitimately stuck, and not just rejecting perfectly viable courses of action, don't just stick close to home hashing over your options. Whenever you get stuck, **get out and gather more information**. Ask yourself what you need to know in order to formulate a plan. Then figure out how to get that information, and go out and get it.

Follow the Money

Nobody works for vampires for their health. Even if the hard core of the conspiracy is bonded in heretical Cathar baptism, somebody has to pay for all the robes and chalices. Hit bagmen, and obvious sources of income like rich scumbags, casinos, or drug rings. Comb financial records to find suspiciously well-off civil servants; find out who *actually* bought that medieval icon or Etruscan tomb amulet. Even if vampires don't cast shadows, their money does.

HUMINT is Key

Many groups are reluctant to use their Interpersonal abilities, figuring that they can get into less trouble by sticking purely to physical clues, or by downloading data in a well-lit hotel room. This is a disastrous mistake. Talking to assets, witnesses, experts, and informants is by far the best way of gaining intel about the situation. With information, access, and assets, you can find that coveted way in that will set up a kill shot for you. Remember to use Investigative Networking (see p. 32) in a pinch if you're stuck.

Build Your Own Network

Agents have Network pools and the ability to create assets for a reason: to give you the tactical flexibility and strategic depth your enemies already have. Use those qualities to the utmost: think "who could help me here" and build, buy, or break that person. In the best-case scenario, you have lots more eyes on the opposition, feeding you lots more intel. In the worst-case (or most cynical) scenario, your network becomes a string of Judas goats: when the vampires take out your assets, they leave more clues for you to follow.

Keep Moving Forward

Expect to find only one major clue per scene. Although you shouldn't be too quick to abandon a scene for the next one, most groups make the opposite mistake, returning endlessly to the same few places or witnesses, hoping to scrape more info out of them. If you find a clue that leads you somewhere else — go there! Chances are, once you're there, you'll find another clue, that will in turn lead you to a new scene, with a further clue that takes you to a third scene, and so on. Unsuccessful groups endlessly re-sniff the same ground. Successful ones follow a trail, just like successful secret agents.

Leave Room to Maneuver

This is not a game of micro-managing your time or resources; it's a thriller. Between the Preparedness ability and the In the Nick of Time cherry (see p. 33), you can assume you've done something right, when you should have done it. If you drill down and insist on playing out every minute of your op, you will only bore and irritate the Director, and you won't leave room for any changeup on your part. This has bad consequences both for your agent and for your fun. Don't worry about shooting ahead to the good stuff: you can always retroactively use Investigative abilities during the fight or the chase if need be. Take an overview: determine what you need to accomplish, and in broad strokes, how you can accomplish it. Then let the Director color in the scary and the dangerous part.

Remember, You're the Badass Here

When you created an agent, you cast a character — a hero — in a story. A story about a badass who fights vampires. Sure, some people curl up into a ball and whine that vampires don't exist. Those people are called "non-player characters." Or "lunch."

Paralysis is boring. When you create your agent, or develop her personality during play, think about realistic ways to portray her as proactive and resourceful and dangerous — as, in a word, badass — even in the face of bloody horror.

Players in horror games — and spy games! — often make the mistake of thinking solely about how realistic their responses are. Instead, make interesting choices and then find a way to make them seem plausible. An interesting choice is one that keeps your agent moving fast, kicking tail, and looking good.

Always Know Where the Exit Is

Sometimes what you needed to find out is that you can't hit them there. Not yet, anyway. You don't get extra experience points for finishing the dungeon: you can call a mission suddenly gone deadly a "probing raid" or a "reconnaissance in force" and live to fight again another night. Don't count on the Director's kindness to leave your agent alive: do your part to get him out of the fire. You can count on the Director to give you more clues, more intel, after your agent runs Traffic Analysis on the hornet's nest his near-suicidal assault stirred up, or uses High Society to find out which Hungarian financier shows up to the conference with a bodyguard — or a bullet wound — all of a sudden.

VAMPIRES

Now, it's the opposition's turn.

This chapter presents a series of questions to answer and decisions to make for the Director. Why do vampires exist? Where do they come from? What are their powers? How do humans stop them? When did they begin to corrupt Europe – or mankind as a whole? Who do they control? This chapter also presents a wide variety of answers to those questions, and options for those decisions. The Director builds her vampires, and their conspiracy, from those answers and choices, and from her imagination and creativity. Thus, no two games of ***Night's Black Agents*** will have exactly the same vampires, so the players won't know what to expect even if they expect vampires.

CHOOSE AND PERISH

A Director worried about player buy-in might ask her players to paint in some details of their chosen vampires. She can simply ask them to list a sort of vampire from film or fiction they'd like to hunt and kill, or let them read the Parameters section below and answer in those terms. However she solicits their opinions, she should make each player write their vote on a separate card or sheet of paper, and go over the responses herself without revealing the results. This secret ballot should maintain some tension, and may prevent early disconnect if nobody was prepared for alien hyperspace vampires and everybody wanted to kill Spike or Edward Cullen.

Parameters

As a starting point for design, consider the following four general types of vampires: Supernatural, Damned, Alien, and Mutant.

These are not mutually exclusive by any means: a mutant vampire virus could have come from outer space or from Hell; all supernatural phenomena might be fundamentally demonic or, following Lovecraft, fundamentally misunderstood alien science. Is the "astral vampire" a supernatural being, or a paraphysical one? Especially in modern fiction, vampires can partake of all four types: evil infected humans who follow alien physical laws that eerily resemble vampire folklore. Much of the fun of postmodern horror comes from blurring these boundaries, and the Director should feel free to do so. Nevertheless, much of the thrill of Gothic horror comes from playing into the tropes and stereotypes of the genre, so the Director shouldn't necessarily discard the default version or traditional answer for a given vampire.

The symbols in front of each type recur through this section, providing just such a default answer, or general guidelines for vampire creation within each type.

Supernatural

Vampires are the result of magical or other supernatural activities on Earth: spirits, ghosts, necromancy, witchcraft, and the like. Their markers are strange superstitions, often surrounding childbirth and burial customs; their emphasis is hunger. Most folkloric vampires are supernatural: a person born with a caul on a Saturday, or one whose family allows a cat in the room with his corpse, might rise as a vampire.

Damned

Vampires are the work of Satan or other explicitly demonic entities opposed to mankind and God. They may be demons who possess corpses, revenant suicides or heretics, or humans who made a specific pact with the Devil before death. Their markers are holy symbols and symbolism; their emphasis is seduction. Starting in the 17th century, most literary and legendary vampires are damned.

Alien

Vampires are alien beings, or earthly beings who nevertheless follow different laws of physics. Such "paraphysical" vampires might be alien invaders, psychic phenomena, corpses animated by alien science, or just "humans" from another dimension. Their markers are various uncanny effects; their emphasis is invasion. The alien vampire begins with H.G. Wells and the birth of science fiction in the late 19th century.

Mutant

Vampires are earthly beings infected or changed by (or into) some freak of nature. Such "parabiological" vampires may be mutants, constructs of some black program, humans adapted to future conditions of plague or global cooling, insane humans obsessed with blood, or sentient diseases that possess their hosts. Their markers are medical symptoms; their emphasis is infection. The mutant vampire begins with Enlightenment skeptics connecting vampirism and tuberculosis, and flourishes in science fiction and addiction horror.

CAMPAIGN MODES AND VAMPIRE TYPES

Although any vampire type works with any campaign mode, and vice versa, some symbolic and thematic alignments exist. The general considerations below also apply to the various modes in significant ways.

In games focusing on emotional damage and cost, agents face the agony of staking their own friends and loved ones. This works best if vampires actually come back from the dead, if vampirism can "infect" civilians, and if they retain some aspects of their old humanity: part and parcel of supernatural and damned vampires, and some mutant vampires.

In Burn mode and Dust mode games, vampirism should probably be incurable to emphasize those modes' characteristic themes of loss and powerlessness, respectively.

Realistic, low-fi games fit the tone of either "realistic" mutant vampires or the grimier sort of supernatural vampires. Some alien vampires play well in "realistic" campaigns, also. That said, the sharp contrast between gray realism and crimson Hammer horror makes damned vampires a vivid contender in Dust mode games. Realistically, other observers would likely have spotted a large vampire population before the agents uncover them. In Dust mode games, either keep the number of vampires minimal, or add at least one underfunded vampire-hunting group or agency.

Damned vampires foreground questions of allegiance and seduction, just as Mirror mode games do. The invasion themes of alien vampires also fit well, as do vampires who choose their own fate: necromancers, unorthodox epidemiologists, and psionic vampires. Vampires in Mirror mode games should definitely be able to pass for human, raising the "who do I trust?" question every time an agent gets briefly separated from the party after sundown. Factions of vampires can betray each other, or hire the agents under false flags to stake their foes; a very helpful option for Mirror mode games.

Games of belief and motivation work well when the vampires themselves are motivated by an ideology (as with damned vampires) or are simply existential threats (as with alien and infectious-disease vampires).

Sanguinary Considerations

Even before you begin to build your vampires mechanically, take some time to consider the phenomenon of vampirism in your campaign. What kinds of stories do vampires highlight? What do they make possible, or impossible? Your campaign vastly alters if there is only one true vampire in the world working through a horde of Renfields, instead of six enormous vampire clans tracing their descent back to ancient Dacia wrangling over their own internal politics.

Origin

Although the type of vampire you use covers the more general question of vampire origins, the specifics also matter. Where in the world do vampires originate, and when did they emerge? If they emerged millennia ago, why haven't they taken over completely yet? If they only recently began awakening (from hibernation, or from nowhere), why now? One common reason for vampires' sudden activity: humanity suddenly poses a threat that needs to be broken. Perhaps human technology finally makes vampire slayers truly deadly, or human pollution threatens the vampires' food supply, or some human agency (the NSA, the Vatican, the FSB) has suddenly uncovered the vampire conspiracy. Vampirism might be caused by performing a certain recently translated ritual, or by touching a recently unearthed artifact (or meteorite), or by some environmental effect with a very long periodicity: a comet, the blossoming of some rare Balkan plant, or the position of the sun against certain stars.

Supernatural vampires might have returned in force thanks to the recent wars in the former Yugoslavia: perhaps shelling or looters opened one vampire lord's grave, or so many wrongly buried dead awakened that vampire cults quiescent since the end of World War I have reformed again. The age of genocides might have roiled up the spirit world, or otherwise provided an incentive for the rise of vampires. With the advent of globalization, supernatural vampires might have stalked out of anywhere from Slovakia to Suriname to Szechuan to Senegal, ready to rule the world.

Any given black magician with ties to the espionage world — from Aleister Crowley to Heinrich Himmler — might have awakened a demonic vampire early in the last century. It may be a time spoken of in prophecy (human or vampiric), or infernal or vampiric politics might have driven one conspiracy of vampires slightly further into the open. Damned vampires might originate with Elizabeth Bathory (1560-1614), Vlad Tepes (1431-1476), Gilles de Rais (1404-1440), or Judas Iscariot.

Alien vampires may have come to Earth with a passing comet in 1956 or 1985, or have only reawakened recently as the stars come right. They likely spread out of that first contact, be it Tunguska in Russia or Roswell in the U.S. Psychic vampires may have always existed among us, but only recently risen to clandestine power in the wake of Soviet and

Western "remote viewing" and other ESPionage experiments. Alternately, those experiments may have *created* them.

The vampire plague may be a recent mutation, like AIDS or Ebola, or it might be a lingering recessive genetic pattern that only flourishes at wide, near-random intervals like the 17th century and now. If vampires are constructs, they may have been built by Nazi, Soviet, or CIA experimentation in the 1940s or 1960s; if they are self-created, they may have come from one inspired maniac with a successful terrorist blood cult.

Spread

How far have vampires spread? This question is related to the size and scope of the vampire conspiracy, but not inextricably so: you could have a single clutch of eight alien vampires still living in the meteor crater in Poland where they landed 5,000 years ago whose servants have infiltrated the whole world. It's more closely related to how often and how prolifically vampires reproduce. If everyone bitten by a vampire automatically rises again, then vampires spread globally after only a few generations. If vampirism is harder to acquire or propagate, then it might still be restricted to one bloodline, one cult, or one vampire, even after millennia.

Vampires exist in the lore of cultures all around the world; each locus (Balkans, West Africa, Caribbean, Mexico, Japan, Southeast Asia, India, China, etc.) could hold its own vampire conspiracy, or be one cell in a global alliance. Most legendary vampires stay close to home, but it only takes one jiangshi brought to Berlin by the SS or one vrykolakos who rose to power in the EU to bring his kinfolk along and change that.

Damned vampires may have spread along with Christianity, or be restricted only to the foulest of heretics and sinners. Traditionally, damned vampires must choose to convert a victim, which keeps things close.

Alien vampires are often restricted by Earth's environment, or by the position of the stars, or by some other factor preventing them from conquering the world. It may be impossible for alien vampires to fully spread their true nature to Earthly life, forcing them to work through constructs and the occasional Renfield whose genetics allow such modification.

Mutant vampires always hold the threat of a vampire epidemic, leading to a vampiric apocalypse. (As the term "apocalypse" indicates, damned vampires occasionally pose a similar threat.) If vampirism piggybacks on a similar disease such as AIDS or tuberculosis, look at global infection patterns for a sense of how it, too, might spread.

Numbers

How many vampires are there? In general, the more powerful the vampire, the fewer of them there should be, just for narrative purposes. As an absolute hard upper limit, a stable predator-prey ratio (assuming that virtually all missing persons and unsolved murders are actually vampire killings) equates to 1 vampire per 2,000 humans: about 4,000 vampires in London. A more likely upper limit derives from predator behavior patterns; assuming vampires hunt like wolves, an urban area (rich hunting ground) supports 1 vampire per 60 sq km: about 40 vampires in London.

Folkloric vampires generally come one to a town or district, with very occasional "vampire epidemics" sweeping through the local graveyard. These attract vampire slayers, such as the agents.

Damned vampires tend to sort themselves into neat hierarchies, with six and thirteen being popular base numbers: e.g., 13 arch-vampires, each with 13 vampire vassals, each leading a coven of 13 cultists or Renfields. A large city might have 3, or 6, or all, of the vampire vassals assigned to a given "diocese."

The number of alien vampires depends on how many arrive at any one time, and how often. A single ship or meteor impact might deliver a handful, a few dozen, or a few hundred vampires. If one such "arrival" occurs every millennium, there might be hundreds or thousands of vampires on Earth now, unless some earlier group of agents culled them.

Mutants or psychic vampires might be one in a million, or one in a billion. Black programs seldom build more than some nice round number of vampires: 50 or 100, tops. A vampire virus might rack up numbers like syphilis (about 200,000 cases in Europe now) or Ebola (2,305 cases globally since 1976).

Variations and Divisions

How many types of vampires are there? Are they all bloodlines of a common ancestor, or are they rival species competing for the ecological niche of human predator? While the default vampire conspiracy assumes only one kind of vampire, and only one conspiracy, you can make the underlying typologies and politics as complex as you think the players can stand. One warning: Players can usually handle a maximum of five factors in any setting, and only keep track of about three of those at once. If you have rival vampire conspiracies, think hard about limiting the number to three main bloodlines and two lesser

sources for “rogue vampires” or one-off weird horrors.

Supernatural and damned vampires, drawing as they both do on folklore, legend, and tradition, more often come in wide varieties. (Literary vampires more often assume a single type, often a composite of many traditions.) These may vary by location, by specific creation ritual, by bloodline, or by demonic faction; they may be allied against humanity (or the Church) or roiled by infighting or both.

More tightly bound to pseudo-rational logic, alien and mutant vampires more usually come in a single sort, although a creative Director can do a lot with variations on a theme. Alien vampires usually stay otherworldly and monolithic, while mutant (or psychic) vampires who begin as humans tend to fission into competing alliances.

Life and Death

Vampires, traditionally, are things between death and life, feeding on life to stave off death. From this basic myth come scores of variations: most vampires feed on blood, but others feed on spinal fluid, breath, sex, emotions (anger, fear, lust), memories, youth, feces, food, or psychic power. Of all these, blood just plain works best thanks to centuries of fiction and millennia of symbolic weight; even if your vampire feeds on will force or souls, consider using blood as the medium or host for the meal.

Are vampires truly dead? Do they breathe, emit body heat, circulate blood, heal, feel emotions, react to toxins, excrete, have sex, notice the passage of time, sleep, dream? Can they return from the dead, even if beheaded or burnt, if something goes wrong (or right)? The general unlife cycle of your vampires will drive their plans, their housing arrangements, and their feeding patterns: does a vampire gangster keep girls around as a larder, a status symbol, a harem, or all three?

Again, supernatural and damned vampires have much in common. Both folklore and literature remain open to the notions of sterile, dead vampires and of vampires brimming with unnatural lusts and appetites. Most vampires of these sorts have at least symbolic relationships with (or similar abilities to) ghosts, ghouls, and other creatures embodying death.

Alien vampires likely exist on some level neither alive nor dead: a biochemistry suited to deep space, a sensorium evolved for fifth-dimensional perceptions, feeding habits that leave psychic wounds or weirdly altered blood chemistry in their wake. Humans can only barely comprehend (and still likely misunderstand) their lives without biotechnological brain surgery or psychic contact.

Psychic vampires are the most likely to feed on emotion or neural electricity; the sensation of having one’s blood drained may, of course, be a particularly delectable repast or just a good way to weaken resistance. Psychic vampires may otherwise live as normal humans, kept alive by body-switching or somehow psionically regenerating their own nerve tissue. Most mutant vampires are not truly dead, but changed or metamorphosed into other life forms, albeit life forms that may hibernate, blanch, stink, and otherwise resemble corpses.

Humanity

Many vampires were once human, before they rose from the dead, signed a pact with Satan, were bitten, were infected, or what have you. To what extent are they still human? Do they retain their human memories and desires? Human loyalties and hatreds? Can they pass as human, or do they depend on magic, or psionics, or heavy coats and hoodies to move around the city? These questions provide motivations for the conspiracy, and some constraints on its resources. On a similar note, and of some interest in both spy and vampire fictions: are vampires preternaturally seductive or otherwise attractive, or do they have to get by on power and wealth like human conspirators?

Folkloric vampires prey on their families and neighbors in life, often as cruel or brutish parodies of their living selves. Supernatural vampires usually have one or two features (stinking breath, red eyes, no reflection) marking them as revenants. Supernatural vampires are almost never sexually attractive, although they may be quite sexually ravenous.

Damned vampires often explicitly target their old enemies for revenge, and their old loved ones for corruption: they have been enlisted in the Devil’s service with their human flaws intact or even magnified. Even ancient vampires still crave earthly power, sex, and the other forbidden joys of a sinful life. By parallel with the seductive sins of lust and gluttony, damned vampires are often extraordinarily attractive to even strong-willed humans.

Alien vampires were never human; they operate through Renfields and other human cut-outs, but no more understand us than we understand ants or migratory birds. Their human servants and ghouls may retain old beliefs, twisted into strange new shapes by alien influence. Psychic vampires, at least those who began as humans, resemble damned vampires: arrogantly willing to use human frailties as weapons. Both alien and psychic vampires can often make themselves irrationally irresistible through telepathy.

Mutant vampires often drown their old humanity in a sea of madness or fever; they take on a crowd identity rather than pursuing individual dreams. Mutant vampires might exude pheromones, or send instinctive fear-flight signals like other contagious organisms do.

Cure

Besides beheading or a stake to the heart, is there a cure for vampirism? Specifically, one that returns vampires to a human, living state? Searching for such a cure may be the personal arc of a single agent (see p. 37) or the overarching goal of the whole campaign. Most stories — folklore and fiction alike — don't provide any such option, but some hold out hope if the victim has not yet truly died and risen again as a vampire.

Chinese esoteric medicine uses a poultice of sweet rice to draw out vampire poison; similar treatments with garlic, wild roses, etc. might cure a vampire bite, especially if the victim isn't dead yet. A specific magical spell might also reverse vampirism, although it likely requires (at least) the blood of the vampire who bit you.

If vampires are demonic entities, exorcism should expel them from the bodies they possess, although this may only allow the sufferer to die with God's grace. In *Buffy,* a Romany spell could restore the soul to a vampire body; such rites might hold their own risks or hidden conditions. Drinking from the Holy Grail might completely restore a vampire to humanity. Parodying apostolic succession, some later vampire fiction claims that killing a vampire restores those he has turned to their human state; again, this usually only applies to those not truly dead and reborn.

If alien vampires can "turn" humans at all, curing their victims likely depends on the aliens' specific nature, or on the specific paraphysics of their infestation. Psychic contamination might be curable by ECT or radiation, or at least containable by drugs.

If vampirism is a disease, its cure may be readily apparent to an open-minded hematologist, just one brilliant insight away, or impossible without a decades-long research program. Medical cures (or at least suppressants) sometimes apply to other sorts of vampirism, especially in recent movies. Another cross-disciplinary vampire cure is whole-blood transfusion; like other cures, it sometimes only works on those who have not fully transformed into the undead.

Building a Vampire

With at least a general notion of your vampire type, and some possible answers to the big questions in mind, it's time to actually build the standard vampire for your campaign. Your builds still don't lock you into anything. Even if your vampires all come from one source, you can have high-powered vampire lords and low-powered vampire vassals; different bloodlines or magical experimentation can give one vampire the ability to turn into a bat even if no others can. Renfields and dhampirs can have different (usually lower-powered) sets of abilities, with fewer weaknesses as compensation.

Basic Abilities

All vampires (and indeed, almost all unnatural foes of any kind) have three basic abilities: Aberrance, Health, and Hand-to-Hand. Aberrance replaces Athletics, measuring whatever inhuman force powers monsters. The latter two are the same as those of agents and other human characters. For ease of bookkeeping, these abilities and their function in vampire design will remain standard throughout this section.

Aberrance

Any time a human character would use Athletics, a vampire character likely uses Aberrance. (This ability name originates in ***The Book of Unremitting Horror,*** which provides wonderfully godawful monsters for a ***Night's Black Agents*** campaign hitting themes of social despair or decay.)

This ability rating determines the base Hit Threshold of the vampire, just like Athletics for a human: an Aberrance rating of 8+ means a Hit Threshold of 4.

Supernatural speed, size, and so forth may further adjust Hit Threshold, of course:

Vampiric Power or Condition	**Hit Threshold Modifier**
Distortion (p. 135), Temporal Distortion (p. 129)	+1 or +2
Invisibility	See p. 130
Paranormal combat senses or awareness (batlike sonar; wolflike hearing; generic Alertness Modifier +3)	+1
Sheerly arbitrary bestial toughness	+1
Sheerly arbitrary vampiric badassery; for vampire lords or bosses	+1 or +2
Transformed into animal	Use animal Hit Threshold as base
Vampiric Speed (p. 133)	+1 or +2

For the purposes of these rules, Aberrance also serves as the point pool for any special vampiric powers: turning into mist, throwing a car, summoning rats, suddenly appearing by the bed, and so forth. If you'd prefer, you can change the name of this ability for vampire characters to Blood, Daemon, Might, Puissance, or something else that strikes you as more apropos. Or leave it as Athletics. Or just call it the Vampire Pool.

At the Director's discretion, vampires can pay for special attack options such as Extra Attack (see p. 74) with Aberrance instead of Health.

Health

Again like other foes, a vampire's Health pool determines how long it can act before dying, sinking into torpor, turning to stone, or otherwise being removed from the battle space. Unlike other foes, doing damage to a vampire may be much harder, or the vampire may refresh Health rapidly, or both.

By default, normal attacks can only take a vampire to -11 Health; only a bane can kill a vampire.

Health is also the ability pool that vampires refresh by drinking from their victims. (See *Drain,* p. 128.)

Vampires who can transfer Health points into pool points in another ability such as Aberrance or Hand-to-Hand at will are *much* more dangerous than vampires who have to wait until the next scene or the next night to refresh those pools.

Hand-to-Hand

The basic vampire attack ability.

Weapon Type	Damage Modifier
Human fist, kick, bite, head butt	–2
Claws or extended canine teeth; sucker or crushing tongue; short thick or blunt horn	–1
Long talons, bony spikes, fangs (wolf, lion, tiger); toothed sucker mouth (like a lamprey); crushing tentacle; short sharp horn or tusk	+0
Long, sharp cartilaginous or bony ridge (like a shark's spine or alligator's tail); mouthful of razor-sharp teeth (like a shark, piranha, crocodile, or moray eel); thick crushing tail; long, spearlike horn or tusk	+1

Even a kick or a punch from a vampire might do much more damage than unarmed humans can inflict, thanks to vampiric strength. Most vampires at least have extended canines; many also have true fangs, talons, or other extra-damaging body parts. Bites and head butts count as Hand-to-Hand attacks.

Add a further +1 to damage for a very strong, animalistic, or brutal vampire: such a vampire would do -1 damage with a kick and +0 damage with a claw strike. If he had long talons instead of claws, his swipe would do +1 damage. Even "normal" human NPCs might get this bonus, if they were steroidal hulks, frenzied madmen, heavyweight boxers, or Olympic wrestlers.

Add a further +2 to damage for a supernaturally strong vampire: she would do +0 with a kick, +1 with a claw strike, or +2 damage with a bite if she had fangs like a wolf. A supernaturally strong Malaysian penanggalan, attacking with her exposed intestine, would do +2 with each squeeze. (Not including damage from her caustic bile. Penanggalan are really, really nasty.) A Japanese samebito, or were-shark, with a long cartilaginous ridge along his forearm or shin and a mouthful of shark teeth, would be able to swipe or bite for +1 damage normally, or +3 if he was also supernaturally strong.

Even if other vampire powers cost Aberrance points to use, Hand-to-Hand attacks don't, at least up to the +2 bonus above. The Director can, of course, add further levels of supernatural strength and concomitant damage bonuses, but may wish to charge for those like other feats of vampiric strength (see *Strength,* p. 136 below).

Vampires will be very, very likely to use Called Shots (p. 215), Critical Hits (p. 73), Extra Attacks (p. 74), Mook Shield (p. 76), Reckless Attacks (p. 76), and Throws (p. 76) if available to player characters in the campaign. *Buffy*-style boss vampires may even be able to use Martial Arts (p. 76) for a one-time Hand-to-Hand refresh.

Vampiric Armor

Although it may be supernatural, vampire flesh seldom costs any Aberrance points to "use" as protection. Vampires that resemble or incorporate some natural creature have armor similar to that creature:

All of these values are default values provided for the convenience of the Director. Feel free to alter them in any direction you see fit, especially the "alien" armor types listed as "-3 or more" in the above table.

Some vampiric protections, such as those listed below, stem from the actual nature of the vampire's flesh rather than any outer covering, although the two could combine: a scaly, rubbery lamia might take a cumulative -3 against melee weapons with firearms doing half damage with a further -1 modifier. Depending on the vampire, specific types of weapons

or attacks (silver bullets, holy water, wooden stakes) might still do normal or even aggravated damage (see *Banes,* p. 139).

Armor Type	Protection
Tough skin, scales, fur (wolf)	–1
Leathery or mummified skin; hide; bone; thick fur	–2
Shark skin; thick hide; very thick fur (bear, yeti)	-3
Chitinous exoskeleton; polypous matting; unearthly integument	-3 or more
Very thick hide (crocodile, rhinoceros)	-5
Thick hide plus blubber or fat (whale, elephant)	-6

Vampires who don't breathe take no damage from Drowning and Suffocation (see p. 80) or any inhaled toxin. Vampires who don't circulate blood take only one round's damage from injected toxins, even if that toxin can normally hurt them, which toxins usually can't. Vampires are usually immune to tear gas, although some Mutant vampires might still suffer blinding and eye-watering effects.

Remember that even "normal" vampire flesh may regenerate (see *Regeneration*, p. 135).

Corpse: Draws protection from the resilient nature of dead flesh: no blood to lose, suffers no shock. No armor, but all weapons do half damage; firearms do only 1 point of damage even at Point-Blank range; shotguns firing shot do only 2 points of damage. Called Shots only effective at single weak point (eyes for most creatures, head for zombies). Car crashes and falls do half the minimum possible damage.

Fluid: A liquid being, such as an ooze, a shoggoth, or a biotech medium; or a swarm of tiny insects or worms. All physical wounds simply flow closed; fire, electricity, and acid do normal damage.

Immaterial: Exists wholly or partly outside material space, or is a projection, shadow, hologram, mist, or ghost. Physical attacks do no damage; fire does 1 point of damage (from heat or light). Depending on the specific nature of the thing, electricity, magnetism, microwaves, radiation, or sonic attacks might disrupt it.

Rubbery: Unnaturally resilient or clay-like flesh, possibly backed up by tightly coiled muscle and minimal (or very efficient) blood flow. -2 against melee weapons; firearms and projectiles do half damage. Called Shots effective on eyes, head (assuming conventional skull-brain arrangement). Car crashes and falls do 1 point of damage.

Stony: Made of stone or some similarly hard matter; small pieces might spall or chip off. Immune to any weapon doing less than +1 damage normally; heavier weapons do -2 damage to it. Usually immune to normal fire and electricity; possibly vulnerable to acids or other chemical attacks. Has -5 armor against car crashes and falls, which might crack it.

Unfeeling: Whether due to a fully redundant nervous system, robust alien cell design, or an inability to truly feel human pain, the vampire never becomes Hurt by physical attacks (except, possibly, from banes), and automatically makes all Consciousness rolls. She can still fight while Seriously Wounded.

Other Abilities

Some vampires will also have a Weapons ability, especially those who remember their human lives as Wallachian warlords. Centuries of practice combined with undead stamina (no need to breathe!) can raise such ratings to fearsome levels. If a vampire is intended as such a weapons master, her Weapons ability should be double the highest Weapons ability among the player characters. Very (+1) or supernaturally (+2) strong vampires might get their damage bonuses for melee weapons attacks: a supernaturally strong vampire could do +3 damage with a sword, for example.

Some vampires might even have Shooting, whether medieval crossbows or firearms recalled from their former life. Vampires in constant war against werewolves (or other vampires) may need to keep their Shooting up out of self-defense, just like vampire hunters do!

It seems somehow undignified for vampires to have high Driving ratings, but preternatural perception and reflexes could justify them. Piloting is dodgier, given the traditionally ambivalent relationship between vampires and running water.

Vampirized spies and other skilled humans might have pools in Conceal, Infiltration, Surveillance, or other abilities useful for contests. If they have an unnatural edge over and above the relevant Awareness or Stealth Modifiers, they can usually spend Aberrance pool points in the contest as well.

VAMPIRE AGENTS

"I want to play the good vampire." If it were up to me, nobody would ever get to play the good vampire ever again in any medium. It is, sadly, not up to me.

As written, vampires are, obviously, much more powerful and versatile than human agents with the same fund of points. Further, the vampire powers are not balanced against each other, because in ***Night's Black Agents,*** vampires are intended to be scary enemies rather than game-mechanical constructs.

If a player absolutely insists on playing a vampire agent, and you as Director have made the foolhardy decision to contravene my whim on the topic, make sure he suffers all applicable vampire weaknesses and an incurable Addictive Disorder (p. 83) for human blood. In addition, player vampires draw special attention from enemy vampires; this may affect their Difficulty in contests of Surveillance, for example, if vampires can always spot their own in a crowd. Humans or player-character vampires in general must buy each vampire power as a separate ability with their fund of General ability points; rather than power them all with Aberrance, they must use the pool for the specific ability to power it. This especially includes each separate mental attack; the Director should also break, e.g., Mesmerism down into its component abilities: Entrance, Deepen Slumber, Command, Sway Emotions.

In addition, "being a vampire" (with whatever standard benefits and free powers that conveys in terms of armor, strength, talons, etc.) costs 20 build points at character creation. Player characters who get vampirized during the course of the campaign but do not fall completely under their sire's sway (thus becoming NPCs) must spend those points from experience as they slowly turn. They may shift points from their existing abilities to new vampiric power abilities at the Director's discretion (one new ability per session, for example). The Director can always rule any given vampire powers off limits to agents, even if enemy vampires have them.

Another option is to allow player-character Renfields (see p. 152). This is far less unbalancing, because the package of specific abilities and bonuses falls more closely under the Director's control.

However it works, though, the Director should remember that the purpose of the game is horror and mystery: being — or being on the same team as — a vampire should expose players to *vastly* higher levels of both.

Beginning as or becoming a vampire almost certainly removes a Symbol as a Source of Stability, and may make true Solace impossible as well.

Every use of vampiric powers also requires a 4-point Stability test to embrace one's essential inhumanity.

Human agents cannot give Trust to vampire or Renfield agents.

Vampiric Powers

Vampires, by and large, can do a lot of weird stuff. Historically, this is because Enlightenment-era scholars accreted all manner of specific pieces of local folklore into a "generic" description of vampires, a tradition gleefully followed by horror writers and movie makers ever since — and potentially, by this game. Your vampires might be able to do all, some, or none of these things, depending on your sense of horror, the game's challenge level, or a desire to feed (or frustrate) player familiarity. The suggestions for given vampire types under the various powers are just that: suggestions. You can rationalize anything you'd like — alien vampires might be able to command wolves thanks to biotech implants, or supernatural vampires might be able to teleport because they're "actually" Unseelie faeries.

Rather than try to unnecessarily point-balance all these various powers, and to streamline bookkeeping during combats and other tense vampire scenes, just assume that using any of these powers during a scene costs a vampire 2 Aberrance pool points. A really impressive use — lifting a truck instead of a car — costs 3 points; a relatively minor use costs 1 point, or nothing.

Indicate a power that costs nothing to use (as Regeneration might, and Drain usually does) by listing it under "Free Powers" in the vampire's stat block or index card.

Awareness

Whatever **Alertness Modifier** you give a vampire costs no points to use. It might range from +0 for a mere revived corpse or infected human to +3 for an apex predator. Vampires might be able to smell blood, hear pulses, or have other non-visual awareness powers. The Chinese jiangshi is blind, but it can smell breath and navigate by sound: holding your breath and staying perfectly still masks you as long as you can manage it (make a Difficulty 4 Athletics test; you remain still as many rounds as the total of your roll and spend; eventually, Suffocation rules on p. 80 kick in).

For a specific feat of awareness — e.g., tracking a specific agent by smell — spend the vampire's Aberrance pool points to raise the agent's Infiltration or Surveillance Difficulty, or in a contest of Surveillance. You don't need to give the vampire a

specific Surveillance pool in such cases, just spend from Aberrance.

Any attempt to hide from or escape a vampire while bleeding is made at +2 to Difficulty. Merely being covered with blood only adds +1 to the Difficulty.

Animal Senses: Various earthly animals can sense vibration or electrical fields, smell heat, discern individual flowers or people by smell or taste, use sonar, track targets across bare rock by scent alone, continuously plot three-dimensional vectors, hear into the ultrasonic, sense emotional states of other species, detect dropping atmospheric pressure before a storm, follow magnetic fields, and visually resolve tiny objects from hundreds of meters away. Alien vampires, or supernatural vampires somehow kin to beasts, might be able to do any or all of these things. Mechanically, these are usually just special cases of high Alertness Modifier, but a specific individual feat might cost Aberrance to use, or allow the vampire to spend Aberrance in a specific contest or test.

SOME OF YOUR BLOOD

Remember also to decide on the mechanical aspects of blood drinking. Can vampires drink animal blood, and if so does it still power their abilities? How about donated medical-supply blood, with its artificial anticoagulants and stripped platelets? Has the conspiracy developed blood substitutes of any kind? Any of these might merely satisfy a Requirement (see p. 142) instead of providing any other benefits, or cause actual Health loss. Drinking anything except fresh (or human) blood might lower Aberrance or Health by half or some other fraction, or otherwise prove less than adequate.

And what about humans drinking vampire blood? How much is necessary to spread Infection (see p. 130), create Dominance (see p. 130), or provide a Renfield with powers? The defaults in fiction range from a single drop to several pints; 1 Health point seems like a good compromise. Do those effects last a lifetime? Until noon? A scene? Generally, the more blood, the longer the effect, but "a drop is forever" has plenty of precedent and symbolic weight. Can agents get any benefit from drinking vampire blood? (None compared to the disadvantages of being bossed around and tracked by vampires, one devoutly hopes.) Can vampire blood (intentionally or inadvertently consumed) be replaced by transfusions, chelated with silver salts, purified with holy water or garlic oil injections, or sweated out in rehab?

Clairvoyance: Supernatural vampires see through the eyes of their familiar beasts: rats, cats, or owls. Damned vampires see through the eyes of those whose blood they have drunk, or those who have drunk their blood. Alien vampires might be unconstrained by earthly dimensionality, seeing through time or around curved space. Psionic vampires use ESP or remote viewing.

Darkvision: Vampires who can see perfectly in the dark might see by some alien spectrum or simply by magic. They take no penalties from Darkness (see p. 215). This is usually a free power.

Infravision: Ability to see by infrared. At air temperatures above 22°C, infravision can resolve even inanimate objects in total darkness. This might be a symptom of the vampire disease (negating penalties for Darkness, but forcing reciprocal penalties for bright light) or a consequence of the vampire's wolflike nature. This is usually a free power.

Drain

By default, a vampire can drain Health from a victim and add it to his own Health pool. Very powerful vampires can increase their Health by as much as they can drink; others might have a cap on potential Health: 11, 13, 17, or some other number, or perhaps double their previous Health.

This almost always requires either a willing or unconscious victim, or a successful Hand-to-Hand bite attack. By default, Health damage from the bite adds immediately to the vampire's Health; further bites to the same victim in successive rounds automatically succeed.

This is almost always a free power, although an alien vampire or one that must materialize to feed might actually have to spend Aberrance to do so.

Addictive Bite: The vampire's bite is addictive; perhaps it's highly pleasurable, or simply creates a strong physiological addiction. Treat being bitten by a vampire as a dose of heroin (see p. 81). This may be a free (and automatic) power, or the vampire may have to choose to addict the victim.

Heat Drain: Either because the vampire has a low body temperature, or because its grasp resembles the chill of the grave, its icy physical touch chills the victim to the bone. A prolonged touch of flesh to flesh (this may require a successful Hand-to-Hand attack) does +0 damage to the victim's Athletics pool; once drained to 0, the target takes damage from his Health pool. This only costs 2 Aberrance points per victim, not per attack; the drained Athletics points do not add to the vampire's pools.

Psychic Vampirism: In Theosophical lore and later fiction, psychic vampires drain victims of emotion, drive, or "vital force." Psychic vampires might drain Stability, Athletics, or Health, transferring all drained points to their Health. The victim of a psychic drain

cannot regain Stability or use her Drive until the next operation. Psychic vampirism may work like a normal drain, or like a mental attack (see p. 132).

VAMPIRE FORENSICS

In many vampire stories, vampire bites remain open, obvious oozing sores; easy to spot with almost any ability, although naïve doctors call them insect or animal bites. But in others, vampires can lick the wound closed (or it closes preternaturally rapidly), leaving only minute traces under UV light or close examination. The Director should determine if vampire bites on a living victim are:

- obvious
- detectable automatically with Diagnosis (or Forensic Pathology or Vampirology)
- detectable with a spend of Diagnosis (or Forensic Pathology or Vampirology)
- detectable with a test of Medic (or Shrink), possibly with Vampirology also required
- any of the above, but only by those who have already seen (or been bitten by) a vampire, or exposed to vampire blood, or figured out a foolproof test for vampire bites
- essentially undetectable

She should make the same determination for blood tests to determine the presence of vampire blood. Are vampire blood cells invisible in a microscope? Does a contaminated victim's blood fluoresce (or combust) under UV light? Does it react explosively to holy water; do the red blood cells flee a tincture of garlic oil? Or perhaps any medical tech notices that there's something wrong with this blood sample: its cells keep dividing like leukemia cells, or T-cell counts are off the charts, or it's obviously inhuman (resembling wolves' blood, say, or based on silver instead of iron). Maybe vampire contagion mimics (or is a mutant form of, or is carried by) some other disorder — AIDS, porphyria, leukemia, TB, Ebola, or plague — which masks the signs of vampirism to the unwary.

Like detecting vampires (see *The Two-Way Mirror,* p. 131), the easier and more convenient the test for vampire victims, the faster and more efficiently the players can narrow down the scope of vampiric influence.

In Mirror mode games, vampire bites and blood should be difficult to find or diagnose for certain. False positives are almost as much fun as false negatives; either might come up on snake-eyes, or at the Director's whim.

Remote Drain: Some vampires can drain Health from victims without physical contact, or even without being in the same room. These are often psychic vampires, but other possibilities exist: the aswang feeds on children sleeping under a roof it perches on, or a vampire fashion model might feed on the lust people feel looking at her (magically created) image. Model a remote drain either as a Hand-to-Hand attack (if physical resistance might prevent it) or a mental attack (see p. 132).

Field Effects

In addition to cold spots, reflection-free mirrors, nervous animals, shadows that don't match visible light sources, and other traditional vampire spoor, vampires may cause other weird effects by their mere presence.

The Director should play these effects for all the chills they can support (usually a 2- or 3-point Stability test, mechanically), because sooner or later, the players will figure out how to use them as early warning signs. At the very least, such effects likely lower the Difficulty of Sense Trouble tests for experienced vampire-hunters or those with ratings in Vampirology.

With the possible exception of Memory Haze, field effects are usually all free powers, occurring automatically in the vampire's presence.

Blood Will Tell: Wounds in a vampire's vicinity never stop bleeding (lose 1 Health every two rounds). Other medical effects might include fevers, nosebleeds, sweating, etc. Agents make a Health test at Difficulty 4 to shrug them off for now.

Memory Haze: The vampire's image not only disappears from mirrors and photos, but from the human memory. Unless the agent specifically records the encounter in time (a minute? an hour?) she forgets all about it, replacing it with a screen memory of owls or bushy-haired strangers. This causes a 3- or 4-point Stability test only when realized; see *Amnesia,* p. 86.

No Reflection: Vampires cast no image in mirrors, windows, or other reflective surfaces. See *The Two-Way Mirror* box, p. 131. Vampires may also cast no shadow, if they can go about in sunlight. Some vampires may spend 2 Aberrance points to cast a reflection deliberately.

Stifling Air: People in a room with a vampire automatically begin slowly suffocating (see p. 80) as it thickens and fouls the air.

Temporal Distortion: Immune to or somehow outside death, the vampire twists time and causality around itself. Being around a vampire might cause déjà vu, computer glitches, Doppler shifts, cell phone hang, or quasi-hallucinatory "frame drop" sensations. Like Distortion (see p. 135), this effect increases the

vampire's Hit Threshold by +1, as bullets or punches sometimes hit where the vampire was or will be instead of where it is. Laser sights (see p. 104) do not lower Hit Thresholds of temporally distorted vampires.

Infection

Vampires can infect the living, turning them into vampires as well. Options for infection include:

Vampires infect those they kill — when the victim dies of vampiric blood loss, she rises again the next day (or after a parodic three days) as a vampire. In some cases, the vampire must feed from the same victim three nights in a row to infect them. This is usually a free power, or even an automatic consequence.

Vampires infect only those who drink their blood. Those who die after drinking vampire blood rise again as vampires. The act of feeding vampire blood to a mortal creates a connection between vampire and drinker that may have other supernatural (or paraphysical) effects. This may be free, or the vampire may have to feed the drinker 1 Health point worth of blood.

- Vampiric disease carriers likely infect by blood or bodily fluid contact, much as an STD transmits. This is usually free and involuntary.

DVD ONCE BITTEN, TWICE SHY

A Director who plans on allowing vampirism to be transmitted by a single bite will need to either:

- allow some sort of treatment regimen for wounds taken in combat,
- carefully restrict the times when the players come into direct conflict with a bloodsucker, or
- be prepared for a lot of replacement agents as bite victims are hastily discarded by their comrades.

Unless you're running a strong Mirror mode game, in which case "Did he get bitten?" becomes a major source of tension.

Dominance

Vampires dominate those they infect, turning them into vassals, servants, cultists, or slaves. This happens automatically to NPCs; infected player characters who don't become NPCs must make a 7-point Stability test against a Difficulty of 8 or gain an Obsession with serving the vampire who turned them (see p. 85). Acting against the dominant vampire requires a Difficulty 6 Stability test. If the infected agent's Stability ever drops to -12, he becomes an NPC vassal of the vampire.

Plague: Many vampires of Balkan folklore spread tuberculosis, plague, or other diseases by their breath or touch. Infecting a target usually requires a successful Hand-to-Hand attack; base the effects on anthrax (see p. 81).

Invisibility

The Difficulty to detect an invisible being depends on circumstances:

Condition	Difficulty Modifier
Location cannot reasonably be discovered	+5
Has just spoken or made noise	+3
Has noticeable odor	+3
"It's somewhere in those shadows!"	+3
Has manipulated a physical object or left visible traces (footprints, blood spatter) in the last few seconds	+2
Tiny part can be seen (one eye, bloody fangs)	+2
Can be detected by dogs in scene	+2
Can only be seen in a mirror, through an IR sight, etc.	+2
Form partially outlined or coated with dust, snow, blowing sand, paint	+1
Is touching the agent	+1

This Difficulty modifier applies to Surveillance and Sense Trouble tests, as well as to the creature's Hit Threshold. Any weapon scope that doubles as a vampire-spotting device (such as a modified IR scope for an exceptionally cold vampire) cancels the Hit Threshold penalty for invisibility: for that weapon, the target's Hit Threshold is the same as it would be if it were visible. Contrariwise, a laser sight (see p. 104) cannot lower the Hit Threshold of a target the shooter still can't see.

Any vampire invisibility technique might be selective: the monster is invisible to everyone except her target, or to the agent she is trying to spook into firing, or to schizophrenics, or to prepubescent children. This selectivity might be automatic or deliberate.

Cloak of Darkness: Demonic vampires summon all-concealing shadows and lurk within them. This increases the local Darkness by two levels: e.g., Night becomes Pitch Black, or a normally lit room becomes Dark. By convention, flashlights and other artificial lights cannot pierce these shadows although sunlight burns them away, but feel free to change this.

THE TWO-WAY MIRROR

According to Bram Stoker, vampires cannot be seen in mirrors. Stoker played on the superstition that mirrors reflect the soul (which is why breaking them is bad luck) to indicate the soulless condition of Dracula. Since Stoker, vampires have variously been invisible to mirrors, cameras, motion detectors, and electric eyes. In *Ultraviolet,* electronics can't even transmit vampires' voices! An Internet-age version of the myth might have vampires' names or biometric data simply disappear from digital records: only ink and paper can record their existence.

However you decide to riff on this trope, keep in mind that making vampires invisible to anything — mirrors, cameras, ultraviolet light — also creates a reliable vampire test. The same applies to any other vampire characteristic that can be reliably detected at range: low body temperature, variations in local gravity or magnetic field strength, glowing eyes, no shadow, etc. Invisibility to imagery, or extra visibility on specialized imagery, both allow the agents to identify vampires and hunt them more effectively.

Vampires can counter some of these conditions with heated clothing, zinc oxide sun block, tinted contacts, lead-lined or Faraday-caged limousines, or specialized software. Consider allowing vampires to spend 2 Aberrance points to cast a reflection or shadow or otherwise show up in whichever imagery they normally confound, or vice versa. (If you do this, it's only fair to let the agents see it happen at least once — ideally, right after they've gotten a trifle overconfident about their perfect vampire un-imaging system.) This is also where Renfields come into their glory: as humans, they still respond to everything short of a blood test normally.

But the bottom line is this: In general, any sure test for vampirism, especially one that can be performed at a distance, is a great tactical asset for the agents. And at the end of the day, rewarding the players for thinking tactically might be more important to the campaign than "realistically" thwarting the agents with vampiric countermeasures.

In a Mirror mode campaign, the players should never be entirely sure who is a vampire and who isn't. Like facial recognition software, vampire detection should either be imperfect, unsure, easily spoofed, or all three.

Cloud Men's Minds: Psionic vampires convince witnesses that they see (and usually, smell and hear) nothing. This creates a vampire that can *only* be seen by cameras or mechanical detection systems! Sometimes this works on dogs; sometimes animals are immune to psionic suasion. Depending on the vampire's power, she may have to spend 2 Aberrance pool points per scene, or 2 points per witness. A more powerful version of this power applies *automatically* to anyone with a Stability pool lower than the vampire's current Aberrance pool. Agents who suspect such an invisible vampire in their midst must make a Difficulty 6 Stability test to convince themselves to see him.

Indescribable: The vampire simply cannot be perceived by the human eye or kept in the human memory (see *Memory Haze,* p. 129). Loved ones forget the very existence of those whom vampires turn, or confabulate screen memories of comforting deaths for them. This is the super-sized form of Distortion (see p. 135); its mechanics follow the automatic version of Cloud Men's Minds, above; this is usually a free power. UV light, a specific drug or infection, or specially polarized lenses may "fix" the vampire's image, or the agents may simply never actually see the things they ultimately hunt. (Perhaps the Director runs a combat and then immediately narrates: "You look up surrounded by spent shells. Some of you are bleeding badly. You have no idea how you got here.") This is a great effect for a Mirror mode game, in which the agents are never quite sure of anything; compare *Amnesia,* p. 86.

Turn Invisible: Supernatural vampires return to spirit form, visible only to horses, dogs, cats, and those with the Sight. Alien vampires don't "turn invisible" but merely stalk through some corner of hyperspace or rotate out of earthly dimensionality.

Magic

According to Abraham van Helsing, Dracula could command the wind and waves, grow and shrink at will, teleport, create fogs and storms, and "come on moonlight rays as elemental dust." Some of this is not due to Dracula's vampiric nature, but his long training at the Scholomance, the Devil's school under Lake Hermannstadt in Transylvania.

Hence, the Director can have vampires that can do *anything.* As a nudge toward genre constraints, a "non-traditional" vampire magic ability (growing and shrinking, say, or calling storms) costs 3 Aberrance pool points per use. Many magical effects may cost more than that. For a fully magical campaign, with magic as an option for the agents, the Director may want to use the Magic ability and some of the spells

(including Idiosyncratic Magic) from the ***Trail of Cthulhu*** supplement ***Rough Magicks.***

Folkloric vampires know basic folk magics: the Evil Eye, curses and blights, and treasure-finding. Stoker's Dracula went out treasure hunting on St. George's Eve, guided by witch-light; other vampires know how to bottle souls, change the weather, predict deaths, or create magical (or poisonous, or both) food and drink.

Demonic vampires have the magics of Hell at their command: not just communion with demons, but other dire ritual sorceries. Hell is also very big on treasure-finding, along with magical flight, scrying enemies, and building unholy structures. Later damned vampires (especially in comic books) have a wide variety of balefire blasts, astral projections, telekinetic punches, divination abilities, and rituals to remove vampiric weaknesses at their disposal.

Alien and psionic vampires seldom use magic, although mental attacks (see p. 132) or weird hyperscience could produce most of the same effects. Alien vampires can alter time and space, twist gravity, or control electromagnetism.

Mental Attacks

In a game foregrounding psionic abilities, such as a *Necroscope*-influenced campaign of psychic spies and telepathic vampire handlers, or a *Carrion Comfort*-style war against psionic vampires, it may be worth defining these abilities more specifically: see ***Fear Itself*** and ***Mutant City Blues*** for two sets of psychic powers tweakable for ***Night's Black Agents.*** (See *Special Assets*, p. 198, for a variant heading in that direction.) In most games, however, only the vampires will have mental attacks, all of which will affect the agents' minds — their Stability pools.

Given the player-facing ethos of GUMSHOE and the wide variety of mental attacks a vampire might use, all vampiric mental attack abilities use the same general system.

First, the vampire spends *at least* 2 Aberrance pool points and the Director rolls a die and adds the result to the spend. If her total is greater than 4, the attack occurs. The Director then describes the sense of the attack to the player: "You feel an unnatural, almost bestial anger course through your veins" or "You feel icy fingertips rifling through your thoughts" or "You find your memory of the last hour fading" or "Your gun seems impossibly heavy." If the player decides to resist, he makes a Stability test with the Difficulty equal to the total result of the vampire's roll plus her spend. If he fails the test, the vampire's attack succeeds.

> *You are on the other side of the door from the vampire Iliyevna. For now, the door is locked. The Director spends 2 points from Iliyevna's Aberrance pool and rolls a 4 on the die, for a total of 6. She says, "You find your hand drifting toward the lock. You can almost imagine that you've already opened it. Something wonderful is on the other side of the door." The Difficulty for your Stability test to resist Iliyevna's mesmerism is 6.*

Mental attacks are easier if the vampire has fed on the target (+1 to resistance Difficulty per feeding) or has fed the target her blood (+3 to resistance Difficulty).

> *If Iliyevna has fed on you twice, your Difficulty for the above Stability test is 8. If she has not fed on you but you have drunk her blood, your Difficulty is 9.*

The Director may introduce other modifiers: e.g., if vampires' mental attack only works by eye contact, the resistance Difficulty may drop during chases, firefights, or other similarly interfering circumstances. If it only works by touch, it may require a successful Hand-to-Hand attack to perform in combat.

For weaker vampires, the initial 2-point Aberrance spend *does not* add to the die roll, although the vampire can spend *more* Aberrance points and add them as in a normal test.

Vampiric mental attacks against NPCs automatically succeed if the victims have no Stability score provided, or if the Director rules they should.

The ability to enter, influence, or read dreams appears in many vampire legends around the world. Folkloric vampires often seem able to eerily calm their victims, or to impel them to suicide. Vampires from Bulgaria to Japan can plunge sleepers into deep insensible torpor, the better to molest or drain them.

Damned vampires send temptations that instill lust, terror, anger, gluttony, or despair in their victims. Especially after Stoker, mesmerism and mind control are vampiric hallmarks. Demonic vampires attack the sanity of targets; a wave of madness is like a telekinetic blast (below) but does damage directly to Stability.

Psionic vampires have the whole range of possible mental attacks. Explicitly alien vampires, like other aliens, are associated with hive minds, mesmerism, memory wipes, mind blasts, mind reading, and telepathy. Horrific alien vampires often project powerful psionic illusions to disguise themselves as humans. Colin Wilson's *Space Vampires* could possess targets after sexual contact, make puppets of their victims, and jump from body to body.

Mutants and constructs might also become, or be designed as, psionic vampires. More specific to the parabiological theme are attacks like emotion sense, pheromone or endocrine control (on the vampire or on others), paralyzing pain or ecstasy, and a panoply of weird sensory or neurological effects. Infectious attacks require touch or at least breath to activate.

Send to Sleep: This mental attack (which might also, or instead, be magical or toxic) puts the targets to sleep, or if already asleep, sends them into a deep trance slumber. Such torpid sleepers awaken only after a direct attack, and only if they are player characters. Vampires with Mesmerism listed as a power can do this on one target as a normal mental attack; against a roomful of targets, use the rules for Cloud Men's Minds (see p. 131).

Telekinesis: TK uses different rules. It works like vampiric Strength (see p. 136), like a Weapons attack for thrown items, or like a Shooting attack if aimed at a foe as a psionic slam, punch, or blast. Damage of a psionic blast or telekinetic punch attack is +0; the vampire may increase that damage by +1 per 2 additional points of Aberrance spent to increase damage. These points *do not* modify the Shooting roll; if the blast misses, those points are wasted. Telekinetic attacks can definitely smash and throw (see p. 76).

Movement

Vampire movement depends on the vampire's form and nature. Vampires might thus default to being faster and more maneuverable in a foot chase than human foes (regardless of Athletics) or to being slower and less maneuverable. Vampires with weird, inhuman anatomies — alien spiders or giant bats, say — might be slower but more maneuverable. (See *Beginning Lead,* p. 54.)

Balkan and Chinese vampires are usually slower than living people, being bloated or rigor-stiffened corpses. However, some folkloric vampires (such as the werewolf-like vrykolakos) have the speed of a predatory animal.

Almost all vampires of modern film and fiction are faster than humans, thanks to the demonic energy powering their muscles.

Alien vampires might be almost sessile, or skitter through mere three-dimensionality at incomprehensible speeds. Or both, like the Weeping Angels from *Doctor Who*.

Much like zombies, infected human vampires might move with feverish speed or with deliquescing slowness.

For a related power, see *Turn to Mist* (p. 136). See also the jump Difficulties under *Feats of Strength* (p. 137).

Apportation: With a slightly more Gothic feel than simple "teleportation," apportation allows a vampire to suddenly (or slowly) appear in or disappear from a given location. Vampire spirits might materialize out of dust, blood, trash, or other matter in a room, or simply solidify the air. Alien vampires might simply uncoil into Euclidean geometry, or shudder through hyperspace.

Usually, apportation can only occur at Near range, within 40 meters or so, but alien vampires especially might be able to apport over longer distances.

Apportation takes at least one round in combat. If it's not obvious, it still triggers a Sense Trouble test for the agents in that location.

In general, vampires can only apport into or out of a place that fulfills some other condition. For example:

- their coffin or crypt
- a place holding their native earth
- a place marked with a vampire sigil
- a room they have been previously invited into
- the presence of someone they've bitten or infected
- a corpse, or a corpse's eyes
- somewhere containing their characteristic animal: e.g., into a rat-infested room, or out of a wolf's cage at the zoo
- the shadows
- a mirror
- a pool of spilled or spattered blood

Parabiological vampires generally can't apport. However, human-based vampires might be able to move so very stealthily and subtly that they seem to vanish or appear from nowhere. Like movie slashers, vampires can go through almost any unlocked door or window in mere seconds as long as nobody is looking at the opening. Using "slasher movement" a vampire can increase his Stealth modifier by +1 on the agents' Sense Trouble, Surveillance, or similar test for every 2 Aberrance pool points he spends to enter or escape a room.

Levitation: Vampires can hover in mid-air. A levitating vampire can rise or float at whatever speed the Director thinks is appropriate: slow walking speed or flickering near-instantaneity seem to be the most common defaults.

Spider Climb: Vampires can climb sheer walls, walk on ceilings, and otherwise cling to any surface by one hand or two claws. In thriller combat, a vampire with

Spider Climb loves to cling to the ceiling like Leon in *The Professional* and drop onto foes (Sense Trouble at Difficulty 7 the first time, and Difficulty 5 thereafter) for a round of surprise (see p. 62).

Tunneling: Many Balkan vampires can dig themselves out of their graves or into another one with unnatural speed and stealth. A wormlike alien vampire might be able to tunnel through the soil as easily as it oozes along the ground. An underground ambush from a tunneling vampire uses the same rules as a Spider Climb ambush, above.

Vampiric Speed: Ever since F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu,* cinematic vampires have moved with unnatural celerity. Preternaturally fast reflexes, inhuman space-devouring movement, or enhanced time sense: any or all may play their part. By default, a "fast vampire" increases her Hit Threshold by +1 or +2. This usually doesn't require an Aberrance spend, but if vampires "normally" move at only human rates or slower, the Director might make the vampire spend 2 Aberrance points per +1 to Hit Threshold; this increase could last for the duration of the combat, or for one round.

Other uses of vampiric speed do require a 2-point spend from Aberrance:

- closing range from Long to Close or Near to Point-Blank in one round, and attacking; or moving from Close to Long or Point-Blank to Near in one round.
- closing (or opening) a foot chase by 2 Lead increments without a test.
- making more than one attack in a round. Even with the 2-point Aberrance spend for each attack, this is much cheaper for vampires than for agents using Extra Attacks (p. 74). That's what vampiric speed gets you.
- making a Called Shot (p. 72) in melee combat with no increase in Hit Threshold. Useful for vampires with higher Aberrance than Hand-to-Hand or Weapons scores.
- Jumping In (p. 75) or Mook Shield (p. 76); each costs the vampire the standard 2 Aberrance pool points, or only 1 if the Director wants to make vampires even more dangerous.
- using Player-facing combat (see p. 65) against all the NPCs in a scene, regardless of their degree of mookery. A horrifically fast vampire might lower such foes' Hit Threshold by -1 per 2 additional points of Aberrance she spends in the scene.
- flawlessly parrying any one Hand-to-Hand or Weapons attack before damage is rolled. If the vampire is unarmed, this involves knocking aside the attacker's hand or arm with a blow. Catching and immobilizing the attacker's hand or arm requires a Hand-to-Hand Called Shot at +2 to the attacker's Hit Threshold (see p. 73) and usually an Extra Attack.
- catching an arrow, bolt, or bullet out of the air; catching a bullet also requires a Hand-to-Hand test against a Difficulty equal to the opponent's Shooting total.

Wings: The vampire has, or can sprout, wings suitable for flight. Although the Director can modify these numbers, the default winged vampire has a Speed of +0 (somewhere between a car and a police helicopter) and a Maneuverability of +2 for the purpose of chases. Simply possessing wings is a free power; sprouting wings costs 2 Aberrance pool points.

Necromancy

Necromancy usually happens "off screen," but agents might watch it happen in horrified silence, learn of it by interrogating vampire cultists, or capture evidence of the practice by means of a cunningly placed bug.

Vampires can communicate with the dead by "deathspeech" or ritual magic, or raise them as zombies, or convert corpses into other servitors such as ghouls or vorthr. This almost always requires at least proximity to the corpse, unless the corpse was killed or drained by the vampire.

Psionic vampires gain information from the dead by psychometry: touching their organs and viscera to gather impressions. Alien or mutant vampires might gain information by eating a brain, absorbing the memory RNA, and interpreting it as a vision or dream.

Possession

Vampires can completely take control of a human body, looking out through its eyes and operating its limbs. Being possessed triggers a 7-point Stability test. Vampires might be able to possess anyone they make eye contact with, anyone they have previously possessed, anyone they have fed on, or anyone who carries their blood. They may be able to possess a puppet at a distance (usually only after possessing once in person). The vampire's original body might continue to act normally, or lay torpid and empty.

Noticing that a person is vampirically possessed might require a Sense Trouble or Shrink test, or just a spend of Vampirology. While vampirically possessed, the puppet may have some or all vampire powers or weaknesses (especially Compulsions or Dreads, see p. 141); detecting vampire possession might be as easy as a splash of holy water.

Possession is usually a mental attack using the rules on p. 132, but the extreme nature of possession lowers the Difficulty to resist by 2. Fair warning: some players *hate* to be possessed. Freeing oneself from vampiric possession may be impossible (it usually is for NPCs), or at best require a full contest of the puppet's Stability against the vampire's Aberrance.

Agents may be able to invoke their Drives for a refresh in this contest, especially Drives like Programming, Revenge, or Slayer.

Body Jumping: A vampire spirit can jump from body to body by possession. The longer it remains in a given body, the more vampire powers and weaknesses that body accumulates. The vampire might leave "empties" behind as enigmatic corpses, or switch bodies with its target. A vampire who switches bodies with her target (instead of just drinking her target's soul) usually leaves her old body out in the sunlight to burn up (or otherwise kills it) before the new tenant realizes what's going on.

Hive Mind: Possessing a new body adds its mind to a gestalt consciousness, hive mind, or demonic Legion. All vampire bodies know what any vampire body knows. They can perfectly coordinate their attacks on enemies: for each extra hive mind in a combat, one foe's Hit Threshold decreases by 1.

> *Beatrice, Luc, and Desmond are fighting two hive mind vampires. The Director lowers one Hit Threshold (Luc's) from 4 to 3. If they are fighting four hive mind vampires, the Director can lower all of their Hit Thresholds from 4 to 3, or just have all the hive minds focus on Luc, lowering his Hit Threshold from 4 to 1 (the minimum). If they are fighting eight hive mind vampires, the Director can lower Beatrice's and Desmond's Hit Thresholds from 4 to 2* and *lower Luc's from 4 to 1.*

Regeneration

Even when you can do damage to a vampire, its unnatural flesh heals and regenerates. A powerful vampire can even regenerate from its own ashes, if exposed to enough blood. Damage from some sources (usually banes; see p. 139) does not regenerate, or only regenerates at normal human healing speed.

Regeneration is almost always a free power, although regrowing a severed hand or leg, or reassembling smashed fangs, might cost 2 Aberrance points to do during a scene. Normal regeneration that costs Aberrance should default to simply transferring Aberrance points to Health on a 1 for 1 basis, unless the Director wants particularly weak vampires.

The following regeneration options are in rough order of effectiveness:

- all damage regenerates (Health pool refreshes completely) immediately
- all damage regenerates at the beginning of the next round
- all damage from physical weapons (not from fire or acid) regenerates immediately; or at the beginning of the next round
- half of all damage regenerates immediately; or at the beginning of the next round
- an arbitrary amount of damage (e.g., 3 Health, 2 Health) regenerates immediately; or at the beginning of the next round
- all damage regenerates in a few minutes, or between scenes, or the next sunset, or some other interval outside combat time

Refreshing damage immediately makes it very hard to kill a vampire without explosives or banes. Refreshing damage at the beginning of the next round or longer allows a coordinated assault (usually with heavy firearms and Extra Attacks) by the agents to take a vampire down to -11 Health before it can recover.

Taking a vampire to -12 Health and true death requires a bane.

Resurrection Only: In some cases, a vampire only regenerates after being killed again. A dead vampire can be revived by any number of expedients: necromancy, moonlight, blood, striking the corpse, removing the stake from the body or otherwise disturbing any anti-vampire precautions.

Shapeshifting

Basic shapeshifting such as retracting or extruding fangs or claws, or assuming or concealing the "facies daemonica" (like *Buffy*-style vampires do) costs no points.

For whatever reason, horror convention maintains that werewolves lose their clothing in a transformation, but vampires keep their clothing. If you decide that transformed vampires leave clothing behind, expect the agents to run rigorous forensic tests on it, empty any wallets, and otherwise exploit this opportunity.

Distortion

The boundaries between the vampire and the rest of the world are unclear; attackers and other observers find it difficult to precisely resolve her position, form, and trajectory. Vampires are blurred in mirrors and photographs, mere smears in IR scopes, and return meaningless jumbles of numbers from rangefinders or GPS trackers.

This might be a permanent state of vampiric nature, it might be canceled only by sunlight or UV light, or it might be a power the vampire can activate at will. In the latter case, model rules for its use on Cloud Men's Minds (see p. 131).

While distorted, the vampire's Hit Threshold increases by 1 or 2.

The vampire is: a ghost, spirit, tulpa, or demigod, or just magically hard to see. If the latter, it might be a charm or amulet that gives it that power.

The vampire partakes of shadow, or flickers like hellfire.

The vampire is so repulsive or horrible or just plain *wrong* that the eye and brain recoil from directly perceiving it.

The vampire exists at multiple points simultaneously, like a quantum particle. Sunlight (or being staked into one location) collapses its state.

The vampire is: a mathematical approximation, a dimensional rift, not entirely in our universe, partially or transiently transparent to light and other EM radiation, not time-bound and thus appears scattered along its time curve at once, or the clump of matter surrounding a quantum singularity.

The vampire psychically unhinges those who perceive it, either deliberately or as an automatic effect of its alien mental field. Entirely automatic systems might record an undistorted shape, or the vampire might confound digital minds as well.

The vampire is a hallucination. Vampire "victims" are serial killers or suicides with a *folie a deux* or other neurological conditions in common. That neurological condition, or the virus causing it, may be sentient.

Mimic Form: In addition to drinking a victim's life, the vampire can "drink" the victim's form. This might require the death of the victim, or merely the consumption of 1 or 2 Health points. The vampire keeps his own statistics and side-effects (even in the form of an innocent girl, the vampire still casts no shadow, for instance).

Some of Anne Rice's vampires can even mimic skills they see performed; model this by letting the vampire spend Aberrance to modify any General ability roll (*after* a spend of 2 Aberrance to activate this power). This may or may not require drinking Health from the subject to be "mirrored."

Turn to Creature: The vampire can transform into one or more creatures associated with it: wolf, bat, swarm of rats, etc. Transformation takes one combat round. In some versions, transforming into a beast heals all wounds. While in beast form, the vampire may retain some, none, or all of its vampire powers. Witnessing a vampire transforming into an animal triggers a 4-point Stability test.

Turn to Mist: The vampire can transform into mist or a cloud of flies, or assume a translucent spirit form or a night-black shadow form, or dimensionally translate itself into intangibility. It can flow through tiny cracks or keyholes, and is immune to all physical damage. (Fire may still do 1 point of damage.) It may or may not require an Aberrance test to flow against the wind. In general, a mist has a +2 Stealth Modifier.

Turn to Monstrous Form: The vampire can change into an unnatural, monstrous form, usually one with more armor, higher damage, and so forth. This might be a demonic shape, an alternative alien carapace, or a mutant syndrome presentation. Use one of the monsters in *The Superhuman Crew,* p. 147, or from ***Trail of Cthulhu***, or invent something awful.

Stealth

Whatever **Stealth Modifier** you give a vampire costs no points to use. It might range from -1 for a shambling corpse to +3 for a being of congealed shadow.

Stealth and Invisibility overlap; see p. 130.

For a specific feat of stealth — e.g., silently drinking from a girl in the agent's bed, fading into the shadows of a crowd — spend the vampire's Aberrance pool points to raise the agent's Sense Trouble or Surveillance Difficulty, or in a contest of Surveillance. You don't need to give the vampire a specific Surveillance pool in such cases, just spend from Aberrance.

Strength

Vampires are stronger than humans; this might be a necromantic achievement, demonic gift, alien musculature, or mutant hormones supercharging muscle fibers.

See *Hand-to-Hand* on p. 30for the effect of basic vampiric strength on damage. To add still more damage past that level, spend Aberrance: each 2 points spent adds another +1 to damage.

As a general rule, any feat of supernatural strength — lifting and throwing heavy objects, leaping three stories vertically, ripping off window bars or car doors, smashing through a door, snapping rifles in half, throwing a man across the warehouse — costs 2 Aberrance points. Really impressive feats cost 3 Aberrance points.

If you want more rigor, or need guidelines for a specific contest, see the *Feats of Strength* box on p. 137. The Difficulties in that table assume medium-strength vampires; they may be more suited to

dhampirs, ghouls, and other part-vampires in some campaigns.

Feats of Strength

A fast-paced thriller doesn't usually stop for contests, which is why the default rule is "spend 2 Aberrance points and it happens; 3 if it's really impressive." But sometimes the specifics of vampiric strength come into play in combat, such as when the vampire is throwing heavy objects (damage equals a die plus the vampiric strength Difficulty to lift it) or trying to batter down a door. Some vampires (and even more vampiric subcreatures) are strong enough to have a chance at a feat, but not enough to completely handwave things with a 2-point spend.

For such occasions, consult the following table.

Feat of Strength	Aberrance Difficulty (with vampiric strength)	Athletics Difficulty (with human strength)
Lift 100 kg (manhole cover, gravestone, grown man, Sidewinder air-to-air missile)	1	4
Lift 150 kg (linebacker, Hughes M242 chain gun autocannon)	2	6
Lift 200 kg (piano, solid wooden desk, full fuel barrel, empty Dumpster, bear, crocodile)	3	8
Lift 300 kg (motorcycle)	4	12
Lift 400 kg (street light, kiosk)	5	impossible
Lift 500 kg (telephone pole, statue)	6	impossible
Lift 600 kg (sailboat)	8	impossible
Lift 800 kg (U-Haul trailer, full Dumpster)	10	impossible
Lift 1000 kg (car, one end of a Jersey barrier or helicopter, one corner of an empty shipping container)	15	impossible
Throw person 3m	4	12
Throw person 6m	6	impossible
Throw person 9m	8	impossible
Throw person 12m	12	impossible
Smash through window with bare fist	1	5
Jump 3m (2m vertical)	4	8
Jump 6m (over a car)	6	12
Jump 10m (two stories vertical)	8	impossible
Jump 20m (over a fence)	12	impossible
Break down normal door unaided*	2	8
Break reinforced door unaided*	4	12
Break steel door unaided*	8	20
Tear off car door	8	impossible
Bend steel jail bars	8	impossible
Tear open vault door	12	impossible
Stop oncoming car	10	impossible
Stop oncoming train	20	impossible

* Using a go-bar lowers the Difficulty for breaking down a door by -3. Breaking down a door can be done as a Continuing Challenge (see p. 51).

As always, these are default guidelines; the Director can change any of the vampiric strength Difficulties as she sees fit.

Summoning

Vampires can summon assistance from dark and hateful powers, or from the low and crawling beings of the night. As a general rule, summoning something more powerful than the vampire (a demon lord, an alien mother ship) takes a ritual lasting several minutes (in combat, 30 rounds minus 1 for each point of Aberrance spent by the vampire); summoning something less powerful than the vampire (a swarm of rats, a ghoul) takes a command lasting a few seconds (in combat, 4 rounds minus 1 for each point of Aberrance spent by the vampire).

A vampire might summon:

- thugs or an escape helicopter or inbred Balkan clansmen, summoned telepathically
- nearby corpses, including dead agents, as zombies (p. 107)
- those he has fed on, or who share his blood
- monstrous servitors from the Superhuman Crew section, p. 147
- demon lords or lesser imps

- wolves, rats, flies, or other fell creatures (see p. 154)

Response time to a vampire summoning is very rapid, or even immediate, unless the agents have taken precautions to isolate the combat space. On his home ground, any vampire who can summon assistance has such assistance pre-positioned and ready to go. Vampires automatically command the obedience of any summoned aid except demons, who can get shirty.

Venom

Some vampires — especially the serpentine lamia of the Romantic imagination — inject venom with their bite. Use snake venom (p. 81) as a model for vampire venom. Some vampire venom may have explicitly addictive, aphrodisiac, hallucinogenic, or other sorts of effects: use the toxin rules or mental attack rules, whichever seem more thematically appropriate.

See also *Infection,* p. 130.

Biological vampires may inject poison, or their filthy bite might cause blood poisoning.

Anaesthetic: Contact with vampire saliva — by bite, kiss, spit, or lick — resembles being dosed with a strong barbiturate. Possible effects include:

- the victim feels no pain from any bites
- the victim loses all memory of the attack except perhaps as a pleasurable dream, or as a sexual or drug encounter; agents recall details with a Difficulty 6 Stability test (see *Memory Haze,* p. 129)
- equivalent to a dose of Kolokol-1 (see p. 81)
- equivalent to a dose of truth serum (see p. 116); agents resist with a Difficulty 5 Health test

Spit Venom: Some vampires spit their venom (or venomous blood) like cobras; range is Close. Spit blood can also obscure camera lenses, act as acid on surfaces, or (with a Called Shot to the eyes) blind foes (+2 to all visual Difficulties, including enemy Hit Thresholds) until treated with Medic.

Voice

Vampire voices might be infernally seductive murmurs, alien chittering, or the cold, hollow tones of a dead loved one. You can model most vocalized attempts at enthrallment or manipulation using the Mental Attack rules (see p. 132), even if the power has no "psionic" component but is simply a matter of pleasing (or grating) tones like a cat's purr or a panther's snarl.

Howl: Model a vampire's howl that causes fear (like a banshee's wail) using the Mental Attack rules, although a howl usually takes less time than mesmerism. Build a vampire howl or roar that actually smashes windows or furniture, hurls objects, or physically batters the listener (used by some of Anne Rice's vampires) like Telekinesis (see p. 133).

Infrasound: In addition to its uses as secret communication (usually free), infrasound depresses and irritates human listeners. Treat an infrasonic "push" (suicidal compulsion, berserk trigger, etc.) as a Mental Attack. Being in the same room as a vampire using infrasound could trigger (or temporarily cause) Borderline Personality Disorder or Depressive Disorder (see p. 87).

Mimicry: The vampire can imitate any human voice (or perhaps any sound) it hears. If this power costs points at all, it should cost 2 Aberrance points per scene, not per use or per target. Listeners who suspect that they are hearing vampires instead of friends must make a Difficulty 4 Stability test to convince themselves.

Ultrasonics: In addition to feats like shattering glass or harassing guard dogs, vampires can use ultrasonic whistles or bursts to communicate without being overheard. This is usually a free power, possibly connected to the vampire's bat-like nature; ultrasonic attacks and stunts cost 2 Aberrance.

Vampiric Weaknesses

Vampiric weaknesses are almost as variegated as vampire powers, and for much the same reason. In some cases, older vampires have fewer weaknesses than new-fledged bloodsuckers, or the effects of banes and such are lessened. Alternately, every new vampire power might also add a complementary vampire weakness as the flesh and soul of the beast continues its corruption.

As with everything else in this section, the Difficulties and other rules effects given are default answers to speed vampire creation and game play. If you want weaker or stronger vampires, change them accordingly. One set of numbers might apply to full-blooded vampires, while less onerous Difficulties plague Renfields and dhampirs.

Sunlight

Folkloric vampires attacked at night because that is when evil spirits were up and around, not because they had any particular aversion to the sun. Indeed, Polish and Russian vampires hunted from noon to midnight. In the 19th century, fictional vampires from Coleridge's Geraldine to Stoker's Dracula walk about in the sunlight all the time, although LeFanu's Carmilla prefers to sleep late into the afternoon. Stoker's Dracula cannot use any of his vampire

powers in daylight, including his preternatural strength.

Vampires smoldering and disintegrating in the sun comes from the movies: specifically, from *Nosferatu* (1922) and *Mark of the Vampire* (1943). Anne Rice's vampires catch fire in the sunlight thanks to their combustible blood; the vampires on *Ultraviolet* actually explode in the sun.

Herewith, a menu of possible sunlight effects:

- nothing
- prevents use of all vampire powers; or all powers except strength
- effect is prevented if vampire touches his native soil
- prevents vampire from regenerating damage, especially including damage from sunlight
- must be shining on vampire in order for something else to kill him
- vampire is Hurt (p. 64) by exposure
- turns vampire to dust when vampire reaches -11 Health
- turns vampire to dust when vampire reaches -1 Health
- turns vampire into a corpse; night or darkness or moonlight revive her
- does damage based on exposure, like fire (p. 80)
- does damage based on intensity: shade or indirect sunlight (-1); dawn, dusk, heavy clouds or fog (+0); through windows, weak sunlight, partly cloudy (+1); full or tropical sunlight (+2). Feel free to vary these damage modifiers: precedent exists for any of the above to do no damage, or at most to make the vampire sparkle a bit as dead skin flakes catch fire.
- damage it does can never be healed or regenerated
- explodes vampire (as a class 2 explosion; see p. 69)

Any of these might happen immediately, or only after the vampire fails a Difficulty 6 Aberrance test to remain in the sunlight. This test (or the damage) might recur every round, every minute, every scene, or every hour. Cloaks, motorcycle leathers, or other concealing clothing might be fully effective, or at least provide -1 or -2 armor.

If only the ultraviolet light in sunlight kills vampires, polarized glass (as in tinted windows) or a high SPF sunscreen might protect them.

With some tweaking, these effects might apply to any bane.

Banes

A bane is something that can kill a vampire. Most banes come from vampire folklore; some come from fiction and film. Almost any bane can be justified as particularly toxic to an alien life form or mutated human. Some banes are already weapons (silver bullets, beheading by sword, stake to heart) or act as environmental hazards (sunlight); others must be "weaponized" by the agents (garlic, holy water). Model damage from environmental banes on acid (p. 79) or fire (p. 80). The specific damage effect of a given bane varies; here are some options:

- does minimal damage automatically (compared to non-bane attacks, which do no damage)
- exposure has the same effect as Hurt (see p. 64)
- does normal damage
- does an additional +1 (or more) damage
- penetrates or ignores vampiric armor or protections
- does double normal damage
- does damage and also turns a vampire to dust (or a corpse, or stone, etc.) if it reduces the vampire to -1 (or -12) Health
- any damage done cannot be regenerated (that scene, that night, or ever)
- any damage done kills the vampire

See also the list of options in the *Sunlight* box on p. 138.

Some banes work like toxins: in general, treat those vampiric banes as anthrax or snake venom (see p. 81). Leave damage unchanged, or accelerate toxic progress.

Bane effects can be combined: e.g., holy water may only do minimal damage, but the vampire can never regenerate or refresh those Health points.

Specific banes may affect different vampires, or different monsters, in varying ways, or under varying conditions: e.g., a silver bullet might kill a vampire in the sunlight but not in darkness, but have no effect on a ghoul, and only wound a Renfield like a normal bullet.

Vampire banes from various sources include:

- beheading
- crucifix, holy wafer, or other holy symbol or sacred object (burns like red-hot metal for -1 damage; +0 damage to the face)

- dead man's blood (injected or accidentally ingested)
- death of his vampire creator or sire
- drowning (in holy water, running water, or otherwise)
- enchanted or blessed blades (to the heart, throat, or anywhere)
- exorcism
- fire
- garlic: treat a cloud of aerosolized allicin as tear gas, p. 81
- holy water (see box, p. 107)
- iron (meteoric, "cold," or other)
- killers from a specific lineage or magical tradition; killers born with a birth caul; dhampirs
- lightning
- needles, spikes, or impaling weapons in general
- sacred bullet fired into the coffin (in Romany lore; mentioned in *Dracula*)
- severed spinal cord
- silver
- stake to the heart (see box, p. 140)
- sunlight (see box, p. 138)
- ultraviolet light
- vampire antivenin, blood thinners
- wood (or only one specific wood: ash, aspen, blackthorn, hawthorn, linden, maple, mulberry, peach, rowan, white oak, willow, or yew)

Holy Water

In vampire movies and novels, the heroes seldom go into battle armed with Super Soakers. This is because it looks faintly ridiculous. To give a game-mechanical reason to avoid looking faintly ridiculous, consider this option: Holy water only does damage on the first "hit." Its damage is caused by its holiness, not by its volume: one splash of holy water does an arbitrary amount of damage (+0, say). After that, the spiritual wound is "cauterized" and the vampire loses no more Health, although he may bellow blasphemies and smolder in satisfying fashion.

Modeling holy water on acid (p. 79) or tear gas (p. 81) may seem logical, in other words, but it's dramatically all wet.

Stakes and Beheading

Staking or beheading a vampire in combat requires a Called Shot to the heart or throat (both +3 to Hit Threshold; see p. 62) with the proper weapon. Stakes may have to be made of some specific wood (ash, hawthorn, oak, etc.); beheading requires a slashing or chopping weapon (axe, katana, wire garrote). Remember, stabbing someone with a sharpened piece of wood does -1 damage; pounding the stake in with a hammer takes both hands and does +1 damage.

Any successful such Called Shot might be instantly fatal, or only kill the vampire permanently if it reduces her to -1 or -12 Health.

Staking or beheading an apparently sleeping person, or a dead body, is different. Without adrenaline and combat stress doing your thinking for you, such an attack requires a Difficulty 4 Stability test. The value of the test depends on how well the agent knows (or knew) the target, and on how human and alive the vampire appears.

Target Vampire Is or Was	Potential Stability Loss
stranger	4
associate, Network contact	5
friend, loved one, Source of Stability	6 (Difficulty 5 test)
vampire appears dead	+0
vampire appears asleep	+1

The Director may waive this Stability test for agents who are either hardened assassins, or who have successfully staked or beheaded two or three vampires already. However, it should always take a Stability test to stake or mutilate a friend, loved one, or Source of Stability.

Blocks

This is something that blocks the passage, attack, or influence of a vampire. It may be an absolute bar, or she may be able to penetrate it with a successful Aberrance test against Difficulty 8. Penetrating a block may still do damage: +1 per incident, or per round spent across the block. Many banes (fire, holy water, iron, sunlight) also act as blocks.

Vampire blocks from various sources include:

- aloe vera
- blood of a black dog
- broom across or behind the door

- cigarette smoke
- crucifix, icon, or other holy symbol
- garlic
- hawthorn
- holly
- incense (consecrated)
- juniper
- neem-tree leaves
- 90° angles
- not invited into the room
- peach-wood
- prayers, sacred texts, etc. written across doorframe; if pasted to vampire's forehead, the vampire cannot move
- rowan
- running water (usually open water like rivers, not water pipes)
- salt
- shoes turned backward
- sticky (glutinous) rice
- wild rose (or fresh flowers in general)
- wolfsbane

TRUE FAITH

According to some later vampire fiction and film, crucifixes (or other holy symbols) only repel or injure vampires if the wielder has "faith" or "true faith." This is not just theologically dodgy, but mechanically problematic: agents' religious faith (and the purity thereof) are not susceptible to rules systems. The Director who introduces "true faith" as a requirement suddenly must adjudicate what, precisely, that means in game terms.

One possibility: an agent with a religious symbol as her Symbol or a priest or other clergyman as her Solace has sufficient faith to power vampire-thwarting crucifixes.

Compulsions

A compulsion is something the vampire feels a powerful, even supernatural urge to do, but is not strictly necessary for his continued existence (unlike a requirement, below). This might be a side-effect of vampiric magic, or OCD caused by a vampire virus. To avoid a compulsion, he must make a Health test against Difficulty 6. Vampires cannot regenerate Health points spent on this test until the next night.

Vampire compulsions from various sources include:

- count (at normal human counting speed) any spilled seeds he sees
- drink blood if seen or smelled; failure on the Health test means the vampire stops and drinks if possible or makes Reckless Attacks (see p. 76) on any target between herself and fresh blood. Younger or feral vampires may have an even higher Difficulty.
- kill infants or children
- lie down and sleep at sunrise (or noon)
- may only move toward target indirectly or obliquely
- solve or answer riddles or puzzles
- untie any knots encountered (this takes 1d-2 rounds per knot)

Dreads

Dreads are things the vampire hates and fears instinctively. To confront or move toward a dreaded object, she must make an Aberrance test against Difficulty 6. Even if she can overcome her dread, she must make a Health test against Difficulty 6 to do anything but try to destroy it, if possible. Vampires cannot regenerate Health points spent on this test until the next night.

Vampires also dread many banes (fire, sunlight) and blocks (garlic, hawthorn, wild rose).

Vampire dreads from various sources include:

- bright light of all kinds
- cats
- chicken eggs
- churches, or consecrated ground in general
- crucifix, icon, or other holy symbol
- dogs
- hemlock
- mirrors
- sound of bells
- Wormwood

SENSE TROUBLE

Here are some possible things your Sense Trouble test might tell you about a vampire. If the Director seeks to reward holders of Vampirology, she may lower the Difficulty of such a Sense Trouble test for agents who also have ratings in that ability.

- "Her breath is appallingly foul."
- "The man in the café doesn't seem to cast a shadow."
- "In the light of the club, the hairs on her arm look almost greenish-white."
- "When he shakes your hand, you feel stubble in his palm. Weird, huh?"
- "Through the binoculars, you can see the guard dog crouch down and back away growling from the old man."
- "The grass where that one guard is walking is brown and dead. The rest of the lawn seems healthy."
- "Suddenly, you hear a high-pitched whinny, almost a scream, from across the street. The horse pulling that tourist carriage is shying and pulling at the traces; the driver seems dumfounded."
- "That is the most unconvincing spray-on tan you've ever seen in your life. And you've been to Germany."
- "As she crosses the hotel lobby, you notice that her heels don't click on the marble floor."
- "There are tiny, finger-sized holes in the earth on one particular grave."
- "The club is sweltering, but while you're dancing with her, you're somehow pleasantly cool the whole time."
- "You notice that the inspector's eyebrows meet in the middle."
- "Don't worry, nothing's there. You can see the whole subway platform in the security mirror, and nothing whatsoever is there."

Requirements

A requirement is an action (or sometimes a material) necessary for the vampire's continued survival. Usually, drinking blood is such a requirement. Every day the vampire goes without his requirement, he loses 1 point (or more) of Health or Aberrance. When Aberrance reaches 0, the vampire is Hurt (p. 64).

Some vampires can substitute, if inadequately: e.g., drinking animal blood might prevent the loss of Health, but would not refresh missing Health points.

Some requirements might be weekly (every Friday) or monthly (every new moon); failing to keep such a requirement might cause more drastic point losses.

Health or Aberrance lost due to missed requirements cannot be regenerated or refreshed without those requirements.

VAMPIRIC DEATH AND RESURRECTION

Whatever the bane, whoever the slayer, somehow the vampire is killed. This might be at Health -1 or at the failure of a Consciousness roll (fundamentally unliving, vampires don't have human vitality once their consciousness snuffs out), or at Health -12 just like all other major characters. When it dies, any number of effects might occur:

- vampire turns into a normal-seeming corpse
- vampire turns into a corpse seemingly dead since its original human death: a 4-week-old vampire becomes a bloated dead body, while a 400-year-old vampire becomes a skeleton
- vampire falls into a deep torpor resembling a coma
- vampire turns to stone
- vampire corpse reverts to its true form
- vampire explodes into maggots; each maggot must be killed to prevent resurrection
- vampire disintegrates into dust or flakes into ash

But as any cursory examination of Balkan legendry or Hammer films indicates, vampires can come back from even the true death. A dead vampire rises again if exposed to some stimulus: black magic rituals, moonlight, radiation, or (especially) enough Health points worth of blood to restore it to -11 (or 0) Health.

Vampire requirements from various sources include:

- cocktail of vampire drugs
- drink blood
- drink vampire blood
- exposure to moonlight (or light of a specific star, or cosmic radiation undamped by sunlight)
- possession of vampire artifact
- repeated magical ritual, demonic oath, etc.

- return to place of origin (original crypt or grave, meteor landing site, demonic crossroads)
- sex
- sleep in grave earth each night
- sleep in his native soil each night

To stop such blasphemous resurrection, would-be slayers must take specific precautions. Usually, they must also follow these precautions to prevent those dead of vampire attacks from rising again as new-fledged vampires in their own right.

Such precautions, gathered from various sources, include:

- boil or soak body in vinegar
- burn whole body to ashes, scatter ashes in running water
- bury body at a crossroads, or under a doorway
- cut off head, fill mouth with garlic or holy wafers
- fire a sacred bullet into the coffin
- put a brick on the chest, beneath the jaw, or inside the mouth
- put a sickle or nails in the coffin
- remove heart and burn it
- sprinkle poppy seeds over the grave
- stake body into coffin and leave stake (or spear, or distaff, or iron rod) in body
- throw vampire's garment into running water weighed down with rocks
- tie the coffin shut with knotted cords
- turn body face downward (stake through spine, or not)
- walk around the gravesite smoking a cigarette on the anniversary of the vampire's death
- wild rose branches laid across grave

Removing the stake or wild roses, or otherwise reversing a precaution, causes the vampire to rise again the next night.

It's up to the Director whether a rating in Vampirology includes or identifies the "real" version of the anti-vampire precaution; it almost certainly includes all manner of folkloric or literary remedies. The agents may have to make it up as they go along. Note that completely burning a corpse requires solitude, a very hot fire (a crematorium, industrial furnace, acetylene torch, pottery kiln, or ample thermite), and several hours.

Sample Vampires

Using the broad design questions and specific vampire traits above, this section provides four variations on the vampire. Drop these fully worked examples of vampire creation into your campaign, or use them as baselines to develop your own versions.

Vukodlak

When an evildoer dies unpunished and lays undiscovered for 40 days, he rises again as a vukodlak. The vukodlak attacks and murders people, drinking their blood and devouring their flesh; some of its victims become vukodlak themselves. Some vukodlak deliberately destroy food and crops, or spread blight and disease. As it grows more powerful it sprouts wolf fur and claws; one of its eyes shrinks to a pinpoint as the other one swells to the size of a goose egg. It is especially powerful during eclipses, during which it eats the sun or moon in ghost form. By then, it has lost almost all its human connections or emotions, existing only to destroy health and life.

The total solar eclipse of February 15, 1961 passed over Sarajevo, Belgrade, and Bucharest; it charged up the local spirit world and the vukodlak began to walk. With the outbreak of war in the former Yugoslavia, the number of unburied, unpunished evildoers skyrocketed. Vukodlak moved into abandoned or shelled-out neighborhoods in Bosnia and Kosovo, and then out into other urban wastelands across Europe. Most European cities now have a vukodlak clan turning ever more people ever less human.

Vukodlak

Pinning down any one specific set of vampire beliefs as definitive is a fool's errand. This is a general assembly of vampire folklore from Muslim or heavily Islamicized Balkan cultures; the name "vukodlak" is Bosnian. Similar legends apply to the lampir (also Bosnian), the kukuthi or lugat (in also-Muslim Albania), the ala (in European Turkey), and the varkolak (in Bulgaria).

During a partial or annular eclipse, vukodlak double their Aberrance and Health pool; during a total eclipse, they quadruple it. A vukodlak can refresh up to double its Health pool during a scene by slurping down Health points from its victims. A vukodlak's Weapons and Shooting pools are left over from their human existence; they do not improve them after death.

Vukodlak cast no shadow. They can be detected by pure white or pure black horses. Fully changed vukodlak must wear sunglasses, hoods, or otherwise conceal their eyes to seem human at all. They can be prevented from rising by beheading and hamstringing the body, or by burning it to ash.

General Abilities: Aberrance 11, Hand-to-Hand 7, Health 7, Shooting 5, Weapons 5

Hit Threshold: 4

Alertness Modifier: +0

Stealth Modifier: +1 (lurks in ambushes)

Damage Modifier: +1 (fangs or talons)

Armor: -1 (fur); all weapons do half damage; after armor, firearms do only 1 point of damage and shotguns firing shot do only 2 points of damage (Corpse, p. 126)

Free Powers: Drain, Infravision

Other Powers: Astral Projection, Blight Crops (magic; 3 points), Infection (those killed by vampire power), Mimicry (friendly voice calling target by name), Plague, Tunneling (in rat form), Turn to Creature (rat, black eagle)

Banes: beheading, fire, silver, stake to the heart, wolfsbane

Compulsions: astrally project during eclipse, count seeds

Dreads: wolfsbane

Requirements: drink blood

Children of the Dragon

Vampires began when Vlad Tepes, the Impaler, made a pact with Satan while in captivity in Hungary in 1466. He, and his descendants, became vampires of the Linea Dracula: the lineage of the son of the Dragon. Vampires retain human hungers and sins, but do not eat, drink, or breathe. They can create new vampires, but such "assigns" are less powerful, and cannot turn others; by long habit, the Linea usually only turn their brides or most faithful retainers. After a century or so, the Linea got out of the habit of having children, especially since children of the Linea became rivals for its power. Between that habit, a grotesque internecine war in the 16th century, and the devastation of Eastern Europe in 1944, there are probably only 250 full vampires in the world, and approximately 1,000 assigns.

The Linea remains split into two factions: those who follow the returned Vlad Tepes (beheaded in battle in 1476; his head disappeared with the fall of the Ottomans in 1918, and his body vanished from the Bucharest Historical Museum in 1940) and those who follow Count John Dracula (of the "Hungarian" line, from Vlad's second wife Ilona). The Impaler's return during WWII restarted the internecine war. His strength and supporters are in Romania, Russia, and the Balkans in general; the Hungarian line dwells in Western Europe and elsewhere in the world.

An assign who has not died and been reborn returns to humanity upon the death of her sire; no other cure for vampirism is known, although alchemy and magical lore in general might provide one, as might powerful relics like the Holy Grail.

Linea Dracula Vampire

This is a full-blooded vampire, a descendant of Vlad the Impaler. As a general rule, add +3 to Aberrance and +2 to Hand-to-Hand and Health for every 50 years of unlife. (Thus Vlad himself would have Aberrance 50, Hand-to-Hand 33, Health 33.) The Weapons ability reflects an aristocratic love of armed combat for its own sake; more recently born Linea vampires might also have Shooting.

Linea Dracula vampires cannot be seen in mirrors or on camera; they cast no shadow. They can be prevented from rising again only by separating the head from the body: even a burned vampire revives with blood on its ashes.

General Abilities: Aberrance 17, Hand-to-Hand 11, Health 11, Weapons 13

Hit Threshold: 7

Alertness Modifier: +3

Stealth Modifier: +3

Damage Modifier: +3 (sword), +1 (bite; extended canines), or +0 (fist, kick)

Armor: -1 (tough skin); Unfeeling

Free Powers: Drain, Infravision, Regeneration (all damage from physical weapons regenerates at the next sunset; can regrow limbs or eyes in a year)

Other Powers: Addictive Bite, Apportation (into any place holding his native earth or any room he has been invited into), Clairvoyance (assigns or those he has bitten), Cloak of Darkness, Dominance, Infection (those who drink vampire blood only), Magic, Mesmerism (eye contact or voice), Necromancy, Send to Sleep, Spider Climb, Strength, Summoning (rats, wolves), Turn to Creature (bat, wolf; only at sunset or midnight), Turn to Mist, Vampiric Speed

Banes: beheading, stake to the heart, sunlight (prevents use of all vampiric powers)

Blocks: cannot enter a room without being invited, crucifixes and holy objects, running water, wild roses

Compulsions: kill and drain a fallen enemy

Dreads: crucifixes and holy objects, garlic, mirrors

Requirements: drink blood, must sleep in his native soil each night

Vampiric Assign

This is a spouse or servant turned into a vampire by one of the Linea Dracula. As a general rule, add +2 to Aberrance and +1 to Hand-to-Hand and Health for every 100 years of unlife. (Thus Neaga, princess of Wallachia and wife of Vlad's great-great-grandson

Mihnea the Islamicized, turned in 1560, would have Aberrance 19, Hand-to-Hand 9, and Health 11.) Fewer of the brides of the Linea train in Weapons; the family retainers, however, often have Weapons and Shooting at 16 or better.

Assigns cast no shadow, but do cast reflections. The reflection shows pain and torment, which is why they still dread mirrors. They do not rise again after being killed by a bane.

General Abilities: Aberrance 11, Hand-to-Hand 5, Health 7, Weapons 7

Hit Threshold: 5

Alertness Modifier: +2

Stealth Modifier: +1

Damage Modifier: +0 (dagger) or +0 (bite; extended canines) or -1 (fist, kick)

Armor: -1 (tough skin)

Free Powers: Drain, Infravision

Other Powers: Addictive Bite, Cloak of Darkness, Mesmerism (eye contact or voice), Spider Climb, Strength, Vampiric Speed

Banes: beheading, crucifixes and holy objects (+0 damage; +1 on face), stake to the heart, sunlight (prevents use of all vampiric powers)

Blocks: cannot enter a room without being invited, crucifixes and holy objects, running water, wild roses

Compulsions: obey sire

Dreads: crucifixes and holy objects, garlic, mirrors

Requirements: drink blood, must sleep in her native soil each night

Ancient Stones

Vampires are silicon-based aliens existing mostly outside our conventional Euclidean geometry. Their perceptions are not time-bound; they see all times as simultaneous. In our dimension, they usually resemble immense pieces of stone. Under specialized UV wavelengths, they are perfect giant statues; they "imprinted" on the DNA of homo sapiens, the first sentient beings to perceive them in our dimension. Human blood refreshes their imprinting on our dimension and also "awakens" them slightly, enough to perturb local energy fields; even in stone form, they slightly warp time and causality around themselves. Perceiving their own perception sets up a feedback loop, distracting them from the Euclidean world: hence, mirrors (and especially liquid mercury) keep them dormant. Exposed to very specific wavelengths of radiation, they can "rotate" enough of their perception into our dimensionality to move and act; exposure to sunlight collapses their quantum state explosively.

They fell to Earth in the Sahara grasslands about 8,000 B.C. during a period of volcanic darkness; they extended some of their matter into local tribesmen and animals. These became their vampiric servants, alien matter linking them to a continuum outside time, dimensionality, and death. Over millennia, as populations moved north into deglaciating Europe, they took the alien stones with them, burying them in caves and mounds. The stone beings' parts became separated: heads and limbs and livers and hearts, linked to prophecy and blood sacrifice. The servants became a self-perpetuating elite, sometimes a cult, slowly dwindling with occasional flare-ups as their embedded alien perspective gradually made human concerns irrelevant. Advances in physics and computer control have opened the way to artificially awakening the alien stones, rejuvenating the cult into activity across Europe and the Mediterranean.

Alien Stone

Fully awakened, an alien stone is a being of unfathomable power, potentially capable of altering gravity and space-time within tens of miles. Even partially awakened, a stone head causes a 5-point Stability test just by perceiving a human. They have an essentially infinite ability pool for their powers; it refreshes constantly all along their dimensional lifeline. They can only be destroyed by powerful shaped charges breaking up their fundamental geometries, or by being exposed to sunlight.

They can be detected by the distortion they cause in local time and gravity.

Alertness Modifier: -3 (looking in mirror) or +3 (in the presence of fresh blood)

Armor: -5 (stone)

Free Powers: Clairvoyance (through even one molecule of their matter), Darkvision, Drain, Infection (those who ingest their matter), Levitation, Mental Blast (does damage to Stability; see p. 64), Necromancy, Prophecy, Regeneration (all damage regenerates instantly), Summoning (infected), Temporal Distortion, Time Warp (shift any being they perceive perceiving them into another time when the stone also exists)

Banes: sunlight (explodes as Class 6 explosion)

Blocks: chaotic streams (running water, random charge fluctuations, anything else that cannot be perceived as a whole), liquid mercury, mirrors

Compulsions: answer questions after blood sacrifice

Perfectus Petri

These are the immortal human cultists who have become *perfecti* — their blood completely altered to alien matter and tuned to exodimensional

frequencies. (The name comes from Catharism, one of the many cults the alien stones have inspired.)

The perfecti cannot be seen in mirrors or on camera, except in very specific wavelengths of light (some very expensive digital cameras can be set to photograph them). They can be prevented from rising by reducing the body to rubble and dust and dumping it in running water.

General Abilities: Aberrance 10, Hand-to-Hand 16, Health 20, Weapons 5

Hit Threshold: 5 (6 in darkness)

Alertness Modifier: +2 (+3 in the presence of fresh blood)

Stealth Modifier: +1 (silent, inhuman motion; +2 in darkness)

Damage Modifier: +2 (fangs) or +1 (claws)

Armor: -3 (mineralized alien flesh); Unfeeling

Free Powers: Darkvision, Drain, Regeneration (all damage regenerates at the beginning of the next round), Temporal Distortion

Other Powers: Apportation (rotate through other dimensions), Cloud Men's Minds (2 per scene; automatic on targets with lower Stability pool than vampire's Aberrance pool), Infection (those who ingest alien matter, usually by drinking vampire blood), Levitation, Mind Control (eye contact), Necromancy (any body that held alien matter while "alive"), Spider Climb, Strength, Turn Intangible, Vampiric Speed

Banes: fire (damage does not regenerate), sunlight (explodes as Class 3 explosion)

Blocks: chaotic streams (running water, random charge fluctuations, anything else that cannot be perceived as a whole)

Dreads: mirrors

Requirements: drink blood

Marburg V

Vampirism may have emerged previously as a natural mutation of the Marburg virus, latent in the blood of the Egyptian fruit bat; this may be the origin of the vampire legend. But today's vampires were created by Dr. Aleksei Valentinov of the VECTOR Institute in Koltsovo, near Novosibirsk in Russia. The premier biological warfare research center of the USSR, VECTOR worked to weaponize the Marburg virus, a haemorrhagic fever similar to Ebola.

In 1988, Dr. Nikolai Ustinov died after accidentally injecting himself with a strain of Marburg called "Marburg U" in his memory: this strain caused muscle pain, shallow breathing, red eyes, black vomit, delusions, bloody sweat, lack of clotting, blood volume loss, and inflamed salivary glands. Researchers in Africa found that up to 60% of Marburg U victims who survived had no memory of ever being sick.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, Dr. Valentinov (a veteran of the former Soviet psychic research program) adapted Ustinov's work using newly available Western genetic engineering techniques and developed Marburg V, named after himself. Rather than a plague weapon to decimate enemy populations, Marburg V would remake its host into a biological weapon in human form. Valentinov faked his death and left Russia behind; he slowly infects those he can use in his new apparat. Valentinov is mad, but recognizably so: he craves power and wealth, and perhaps he also has a specific political agenda. Marburg V might be curable: USAMRID has developed a potential Marburg vaccine.

Marburg Vampire

Every human biochemistry reacts differently to Marburg V. Pick three of the "other powers" for each vampire. Marburg vampires can use biofeedback to transfer points between their general ability pools at the beginning of a round; they must go last in any round they do this in. To "Marburg V" a human template, add +5 to Athletics (changed to Aberrance) and Health. Some of Valentinov's recruits are former Spetsnaz troopers, with pre-Marburg abilities as Special Operations Soldier (see p. 70).

Those infected with Marburg V die in bubbling agony without Valentinov's special cocktail of boosters and suppressants (treat as anthrax with a Difficulty 9 Health test). Over the long term, the cocktail must be tailored to each vampire's individual genetic profile. Valentinov usually brainwashes sufferers during this incubation period.

Marburg vampires have ruby red irises and elevated body temperatures, but seem otherwise human; all of them appear about 25 years old regardless of their age when infected. So far, no Marburg V recipient has returned from the dead. That we know of.

General Abilities: Aberrance 9, Hand-to-Hand 5, Health 9, Shooting 5

Hit Threshold: 5 (hotwired reflexes)

Alertness Modifier: +1

Stealth Modifier: +0

Damage Modifier: -1 (fist, kick); higher with Strength

Armor: none unless bought as one of the three powers

Free Powers: Drain, Infravision, Plague (body fluid contact; see above), Unfeeling

Other Powers: Apportation (as "slasher movement," p. 133), Blood Will Tell, Heightened Senses (smell blood, hear heartbeats), Memory Haze, Pheromone

Control, Regeneration (2 Health per round, free), Send to Sleep, Spit Venom, Strength (tests mandatory for feats of strength; see box, p. 136), Vampiric Speed (only for Extra Attacks, Jumping In, or Mook Shield at 2 Aberrance each)

Banes: any normally fatal attack; garlic (strong allergy; treat exposure as tear gas *plus* one instance of acid damage)

Compulsions: drink fresh blood, obey Valentinov

Dreads: bright light (sunlight makes Marburg vampires Hurt), garlic

Requirements: cocktail of boosters and suppressants to prevent complete deliquescence (administered weekly)

The Superhuman Crew

It's not all vampires all the time. Hollywood marketers and actual folklore agree on at least one thing: where there are vampires, other monsters are seldom far behind. This section provides a few of these, selected with an eye toward specific story and horror functionality. The abilities and powers given are likewise aimed at providing a wide variety of potential threats for ***Night's Black Agents*** games, not at replicating specific creatures from anthropological field reports.

The writeup indicates where one monster's stat block can feasibly map onto another, but feel free to change those stat blocks up at will. Especially rotate vampire powers around: maybe your ghouls have wings, and your lamiae are hard-core combat monsters. Add powers at will: do all vampire-spawn have mesmerism? Distorted forms? The ability to turn into mist or alien holograms?

The default assumption is that these monsters share a basic origin with their vampire cousins: supernatural vampires have folkloric monsters in their shadows, damned vampires come with fellow demons, alien vampires bring uncanny life forms to Earth, and mutant human vampires imply the horrific results of animal testing. Thus, they may share the same powers, banes, dreads, signifiers, etc. as your vampires — or they may be able to operate more freely, as a good servitor should. Modify those sections of the stat block with even more abandon.

Elements in *italics* are present in some legends about the creature, but are not the baseline version.

The writeups provide multiple explanations for each creature; any or none of them might be true, or "true legend," in your campaign.

Finally, any of these creatures might be the true form of the actual vampires in your campaign. In such case, consider increasing their ability scores and perhaps adding a few standard vampiric powers and weaknesses.

Adzeh

The adzeh (or adze) of Ewe lore in Ghana is a kind of insect-demon, drinking the life from men, beasts, and crops indiscriminately. Sometimes it appears as a stunted, ebon dwarf; generally, it takes the form of a large firefly.

This vampiric insect or worm might be the true source of vampirism, or an organism created (or summoned) by a master vampire to provide vampiric power to (or command and control of) human servants. It may be found as one insect commanding a swarm of blood-drinking flies or mosquitoes (see p. 154; change damage to -1) or as a "brain bug" inside the ear, eye, mouth, or brain of a controlled human or corpse.

As a **brain bug**, it gives its human host the various traits and powers below and increases the host's Athletics, Hand-to-Hand, and Health by +5 (or more, if adzeh-style possession creates full vampires, as in *Necroscope*). The Turn to Creature power may simply be the adzeh flying out of the now-abandoned body; if so, it is a free power.

Removing an adzeh from a possessed human immediately reduces the human to -6 Health and triggers a Consciousness roll.

General Abilities: Aberrance 10, Hand-to-Hand 6, Health 6

Hit Threshold: 8 (4 if a worm), or 5 against a sprayer, flamethrower, or other area effect weapon

Alertness Modifier: +1

Stealth Modifier: +2 in insect form (+0 for possessed humans)

Damage Modifier: -1 (fist for possessed humans); +0 (bite in human form, or in insect form against helpless, mesmerized, or sleeping victims); -1 (face suck in worm form); -2 (bite in insect form)

Armor: none in human form; as insect swarm, immune to all physical attacks (Fluid, p. 126) except aerosolized chemicals and fire; as individual insect or worm can be crushed with a hard blow doing any damage

Free Powers: Drain, Infravision, Unfeeling (on possessed humans)

Other Powers: *Mesmerism (buzzing voice),* Necromancy (by possessing a corpse), Possession (brain bug; might work as Body Jumping or Hive Mind with a swarm of adzeh), Regeneration (3 Health per hour in human form; as insect or worm, can resurrect itself a number of times equal to the Health it has drained), Spider Climb, Strength (tests mandatory for feats of strength *except* jumps; Turn to Creature (insect or insect cloud), *Vampiric Speed, Wings* (free in insect form)

Banes: fire

Blocks: *standard vampiric blocks for campaign*

Compulsions: obey sire or creator

Dreads: *standard vampiric dreads for campaign (on possessed humans)*

Requirements: drink blood, palm oil, or coconut water

Bhuta

In Hindi, *bhut* means "ghost," and the shadowy bhuta has characteristics of a ghost, a vampire, and a demon. In India, worshippers placate a bhuta at a shrine or temple called a bhutastan or bhandara; it may possess a priestess and speak through her there. The traditional bhuta eats feces and offal; fresh flowers or neem-tree leaves keep it at bay. Some legends say that the fearsome shapeshifting rakshasa are actually bhuta, or vice-versa. Another Indian spirit-vampire, the vetala, can possess corpses or bats; it traditionally knows magic and necromantic lore.

This bhuta emphasizes the legendary "shadow" aspects of the bhuta; it's suited for any vampire or creature more ghost than corpse: a hologram, a dark-matter entity, or a malevolent mirror spirit (Apportation between reflective surfaces; Distortion instead of Cloak of Darkness; Mesmerism; no wings). The conspiracy may use bhuta to conduct surveillance or as assassins.

The bhuta's Hit Threshold and Stealth Modifier are *cumulative* with any penalties for Darkness (see p. 215): e.g., in a Pitch-Black shipping container, the bhuta's Hit Threshold is 7 at Point-Blank range.

For a full-on **shadow vampire**, add Infection, Mesmerism, and Strength, and increase Aberrance to 10 or more, changing blocks, dreads, etc. to match standard vampiric traits for your campaign. Powerful bhuta or shadow vampires can shift Health points to Aberrance or vice versa at the beginning of any round.

In some Indian vampire legends, you can detect a bhuta or someone possessed by a vetala by the fact their feet do not touch the ground.

General Abilities: Aberrance 7, Hand-to-Hand 10, Health 11

Hit Threshold: 6 in shadows or darkness; 3 in the lighted open

Alertness Modifier: +1

Stealth Modifier: +3 in shadows or darkness; +1 (silent) in the lighted open

Damage Modifier: +0 (talons and fangs); +0 (Heat Drain)

Armor: physical weapons do no damage; fire does 1 point (Immaterial)

Free Powers: Darkvision, Drain, Heat Drain (drained points *do* add to bhuta's Health pool), *No Reflection,* Spider Climb

Other Powers: Apportation (between shadows), Cloak of Darkness, Necromancy, *Plague,* Possession, *Reassuring Illusion (disguises itself in a form drawn from the victim's mind; rules as a mental attack), Turn to Bat,* Wings

Banes: *consecrated arrow or bolt (also pins it in one place, lowering Hit Threshold to 3),* sunlight (damage by intensity as on p. 138 every round), *ultraviolet light (damage as on p. 106 every round)*

Blocks: *consecrated ground,* fresh flowers, neem-tree leaves

Compulsions: disrupt funerals, *drink mother's milk,* feed on viscera

Dreads: burning turmeric, *swastika*

Requirements: drink blood or consume other organic matter at body heat (steaming viscera, fresh feces)

Camazotz

The "death bat" of Zapotec lore and Mayan myth, the human-sized camazotz is the toughest of the world's legendary bat-monsters. It resembles a large, powerful man with the head and wings of a bat; it delights in beheading its victims and drinking from the spurting neck.

It makes an excellent combat-monster form for vampires to assume, or a dangerous hunting servant to send on an agent-killing run. It need not look like Man-Bat from the comics; its key attributes are flight, tracking skill, toughness, and high ability scores. It might take any sort of alien shape: In playtest, it appeared as an enormous (7-meter wingspan) wing, which the players named the "jäger." And really, *really* hated.

Beheading Claw: To behead a victim with its beheading claw requires killing damage with a Called Shot to the throat; thus, this attack is mostly used on NPCs who die at Health 0.

Dive Attack: An camazotz with maneuvering room can dive-bomb its target, attacking and then flying back to a rooftop or to hover at Near range in the same round. This free use of Vampiric Speed does not cost 2 points.

Grab: Against agents, it grabs a foe in its talons with a successful Hand-to-Hand attack doing only half damage, and drills its proboscis into its victim the next round. This grab lowers Hit Thresholds of both camazotz and target as Reckless Attack (p. 76); target breaks free with a Difficulty 5 Athletics test instead of combat. The camazotz can spend Aberrance to increase the Difficulty of this test, or Hand-to-Hand at

2 points per point of increased Difficulty. The camazotz can fly off with a grabbed foe.

General Abilities: Aberrance 11, Hand-to-Hand 23, Health 14

Hit Threshold: 4 (fast but large)

Alertness Modifier: +2 (+9 to detect someone whose blood it has already tasted or smelled)

Stealth Modifier: +2 (in flight); +0 (on ground)

Damage Modifier: +2 (talons and fangs, or grab); +3 (beheading claw); +5 (draining proboscis)

Armor: -2 (leathery skin); further -2 vs. melee weapons, firearms and projectiles do half damage after armor (Rubbery; see p. 126)

Free Powers: Dive Attack (see text), Drain, Infravision, *Regeneration,* Wings

Other Powers: Cloak of Darkness, Levitation, *Sonar,* Spider Climb, Strength, *Summoning (flock of vampire bats),* Tracking (can follow any blood it has tasted or smelled over any distance; oceans and air travel interrupt the trail), *Turn Invisible,* Vampiric Speed

Banes: *standard vampiric banes for campaign*

Blocks: *standard vampiric blocks for campaign*

Compulsions: obey sire, return to lair (or suitable cave, warehouse, railroad car, etc.) by sunrise

Dreads: *standard vampiric dreads for campaign*

Requirements: drink blood

Dhampir

The word dhampir comes from the Albanian for "teeth-drinker," but in Romany lore it refers to the half-breed offspring of a vampire and a human. Other Balkan cultures use other terms, such as the Serbian vampirovic or the Bulgarian vampirdzhiya.

In both Romany folklore and popular culture, a dhampir often acts as a vampire-slayer, using his special powers to protect normal humanity. The Romany dhampir has no bones, making him extremely flexible: he can fit through any space a large snake can fit through. He can also detect vampires, even invisible ones, either innately or through some ad hoc ritual.

Dhampirs are sometimes immune to vampire bites or mesmerism; NPC dhampirs can be immune by fiat, while player dhampirs may take Vampire Resistance (conferring +2 on any roll to resist vampiric bite addiction or mental attacks) as a power, if the Director allows such things. A scientific-minded campaign might make dhampir blood a general vaccine or treatment for vampirism — to be gathered, if need be, without the dhampir's cooperation!

In ***Night's Black Agents,*** the dhampir likely appears as a more-powerful sort of Renfield: a vampiric vassal capable of moving about and using a wide range of vampire powers in the sunlight. Add Drain to the free powers list, and add any other core vampiric feats as other powers.

This stat block generally reflects Romany legend with a soupcon of *Blade,* creating something already pretty scary as a vampiric servant. An even more dangerous dhampir, the **daywalker**, has all the powers and traits of a full vampire, with no banes, blocks, or dreads; it has only the requirement to drink blood and a compulsion to obey its sire. However, unlike vampires, dhampirs and daywalkers usually do not come back from the dead.

Dhampirs may have much higher combat abilities, whether they go around whacking investigators for a vampiric conspiracy or vampires for the King of the Gypsies.

General Abilities: Aberrance 12, Hand-to-Hand 6, Health 12, Shooting 6, Weapons 6

Hit Threshold: 5

Alertness Modifier: +2 (+4 to detect vampires)

Stealth Modifier: +1

Damage Modifier: +2 (sword), +0 (stake), +0 (bite; extended canines) or -1 (fist, kick)

Armor: all physical attacks and impacts do -2 damage; immune to toxins

Free Powers: Infravision, No Shadow, Regeneration (half of all physical damage regenerates at the beginning of the next round)

Other Powers: Boneless Flexibility (see text), Detect Vampires, *Spider Climb, Strength (tests mandatory for feats of strength; see box, p. 137), Vampiric Speed*

Banes: beheading, fire, stake to the heart

Blocks: cannot cross a church threshold

Compulsions: *keep the Sabbath,* obey (or kill) sire

Requirements: drink blood (as Addictive Disorder)

Feral Vampire

This is a new-turned vampire similar to the upior of Poland, reveling in his new strength and half-maddened by his new thirsts. A single feral vampire is a tough but beatable foe for a standard party of agents; a pack or nest of ferals is a real problem.

Feral vampires may well hunt in packs if the vampire population is relatively high and turning humans relatively common or simple.

Pack Attack: Up to three feral vampires can attack a single target in one round. The foe's Hit Threshold drops by 1 against the third feral. Combined with their free second attack, this makes ferals fearsome and deadly foes in close combat.

General Abilities: Aberrance 9, Hand-to-Hand 9, Health 9

Hit Threshold: 5

Alertness Modifier: +2

Stealth Modifier: +1

Damage Modifier: +1 (talon), +0 (bite; extended canines), -1 (fist, kick)

Armor: -1 (tough skin); firearms and projectiles do only half damage after armor

Free Powers: Drain (to Health cap of 18), Infravision, Regeneration (all damage refreshes next sunset), Unfeeling

Other Powers: Extra Attacks (see p. 74; first extra attack is free, further attacks in a round cost 2 Aberrance or Hand-to-Hand points each), Spider Climb, Strength (tests mandatory for feats of strength; see box, p. 137), Vampiric Speed

Banes: standard vampiric banes for campaign, *may do more damage faster*

Blocks: standard vampiric blocks for campaign (+2 to Aberrance test Difficulty to pierce)

Compulsions: drink fresh blood, obey sire (+2 to Health test difficulty to resist)

Dreads: standard vampiric dreads for campaign (+2 to Aberrance test Difficulty to confront)

Ghoul

Technically, a ghoul is anyone who eats corpses, although the word comes from a desert demon of Arabic legend, the *ghul*. That demon ate human flesh and drank blood, often taking the shape of a beautiful woman to lure fresher meat. Famously strong and fast, a ghul would resurrect itself after being struck a second blow.

As later Persian and Western fiction did, this ghoul writeup combines the undead with the wild dogs that preyed on corpses in the Middle East into canine-featured, pack-traveling cemetery monsters. In ***Night's Black Agents,*** ghouls typically act as muscle for the local vampire, or as "guard dogs" for a strategic or valuable mausoleum, sewer nexus, subway platform, or other underground location. They needn't be canine; ghouls might be enormous flesh-eating beetles (Armor is -3 carapace), rapacious fish (giant barracuda), or purely alien constructs of energy and found matter.

If you include werewolves in your campaign, you can use the ghoul as a basis for their hybrid **wolf-man** form, though likely with much higher (12+) ability scores. (Abilities for the pure wolf form are on p. 155.) As a default, remove Heat Drain, Plague, Spider Climb, and Tunneling; possibly increase Strength to standard levels (2 points for any feat) and change Regeneration so that all damage refreshes immediately; change banes to silver and wolfsbane, add a dread of wolfsbane, remove blocks and compulsions.

Pack Attack: Up to three ghouls can attack a single target in one round. The foe's Hit Threshold drops by 1 against the third ghoul. Combined with their special bite-and-worry and their free second attack, this makes ghouls fearsome and deadly foes in close combat. Adding any of the italicized powers makes them even more dangerous.

Worrying Bite: If two bites in a row succeed against the same target, the ghoul is worrying the poor bastard with her mighty canine jaws, and the second attack thus does double damage. The ghoul need not roll to hit that target thereafter, but will continue to do normal damage to him each round until killed or driven off. The ghoul's Hit Threshold is only 3 against a foe clamped in her jaws.

General Abilities: Aberrance 9, Hand-to-Hand 9, Health 9

Hit Threshold: 4

Alertness Modifier: +2 (enhanced smell; +0 in daylight)

Stealth Modifier: +1

Damage Modifier: +1 (talon), +0 (bite; extended canines) and worrying (see text)

Armor: -1 (tough skin); firearms and projectiles do only half damage after armor

Free Powers: Infravision, *Regeneration (all damage refreshes next scene OR after every other instance of damage),* Unfeeling

Other Powers: Extra Attacks (see p. 74; first extra attack is free, further attacks in a round cost 2 Aberrance or Hand-to-Hand points each), *Heat Drain, Mimic Form (either Shapeshifting or a mental attack to assume an illusionary human form), Plague, Spider Climb, Strength (tests mandatory for feats of strength; see box, p. 137),* Tunneling

Banes: *fire,* sunlight (ghoul is Hurt by exposure)

Blocks: cannot eat normal food, *crimson thread, the name of God, Passover bread*

Compulsions: obey sire

Dreads: *bells and other loud noises*

Lamia

The lamia is a female vampire, usually with some serpentine features, who seduces young men, granting them their heart's desire (poetic gifts, political power, amazing sex) in exchange for blood. If they have children, she demands their lives; she hates children (and child-bearing women) and enjoys killing and draining them. The vampire conspiracy uses

lamiae as honey traps, agents of influence, and asset handlers.

Lamiae always have one feature out of the ordinary: serpentine eyes, scales down the back of one leg, forked tongue, bright green hair, a second mouth under her hair, a deformed foot. Modern lamiae likely haunt the body-modification and transhumanist communities, where such strangenesses are less remarkable.

This version borrows primarily from Keats' (and Tim Powers') version of the Greek mythological monster and the Irish (and Manx) leanan sidhe, but there are lots and lots of vampires who conform either to the succubus or child-killer archetype or both: the cihuateteo and langsuir (of Mexico and Malaya) are both revenants of women who died in childbirth, they turn to birds instead of (or in addition to) snakes. An alien lamia might be a mantis-like predator emitting hallucinogenic pheromones, or resemble a psionic black-widow spider.

The **mara** (known all over Northern and Central Europe) became the "night-mare," choking the life out of sleepers; she was immaterial until she began crushing your chest in the night. Some mara turn into horses or moths. For such a ghostly lamia, add traits from the bhuta and the murony: Apportation, Distortion, Levitation, along with the Immaterial armor quality (see p. 126). Her attack is a crushing pressure on the torso (Called Shot at +1; only against a supine or prone foe; armor does not protect) but otherwise mechanically resembles the lamia's strangling grasp. Some mara drink blood; others drink the foe's breath (Drain from both chest crush and Stifling Air attack).

Lamiae cast either no shadows or serpentine shadows.

Strangling Grasp: With a successful Hand-to-Hand attack, the lamia can grab a foe by the throat and squeeze for +0 damage. This can either be treated as a Called Shot (+3 to Hit Threshold) or a feat of vampiric speed like a striking snake (2 Aberrance points, no Called Shot needed). After the first successful attack, she automatically does +0 damage to her victim each round. To free oneself requires two Difficulty 5 Athletics test successes in a row in lieu of attacking. The lamia's Hit Threshold is only 3 against an enemy she is currently strangling.

General Abilities: Aberrance 10, Hand-to-Hand 4, Health 10

Hit Threshold: 5

Alertness Modifier: +2

Stealth Modifier: +2

Damage Modifier: +0 (bite; fangs); +0 (strangling grasp)

Armor: -1 (porcelain skin) or *Stony (p. 126)*

Free Powers: Anaesthetic Bite (victim remembers pleasurable sexual encounter), Darkvision, Drain, *Psychic Vampirism, Regeneration (as standard for vampires in campaign), Remote Drain*

Other Powers: Addictive Bite, *Cloak of Darkness, Cloud Men's Minds,* Enter Dreams, Infection, *Levitation, Magic,* Memory Wipe, Mesmerism (eye contact or voice), Mind Probe, *Plague,* Send to Sleep, *Spider Climb, Spit Venom,* Stifling Air (as mental attack), *Turn to Deer, Turn to Mist, Turn to Snake, Turn to Statue,* Vampiric Speed, Venom, *Wings*

Banes: beheading, *destruction of its magic cauldron (loses all vampiric powers), iron,* sunlight (prevents use of all vampiric powers)

Blocks: cannot enter a room without being invited, *cannot escape her grave if stones are piled on it,* moly flower

Compulsions: attack childbearing women, *dance to snake-charming music, gaze at own reflection,* kill children

Dreads: moly flower

Requirements: drink blood, *human "mate"*

Murony

From Romanian vampire lore, the murony (or moroi) is a vampire who astrally projects himself out of his grave (or out of his house; Romanian "living vampires" gain vampiric power as a down payment on turning into vampires at their death) to drain the life from his neighbors. Traditionally, defeating the murony involves discovering the thing's corpse and beheading it, burning its heart, or both. A similar outbreak of spectral vampirism plagued rural Rhode Island in the 19th century. The obayifo of Ghana and the asema of Suriname hunt in the same fashion after removing their skins, but are always "living vampires."

The murony spirit may take the form of a "standard" vampire, or of any vampiric animal. It often resembles a cloud of glowing fireflies or dust mites, or just a glowing blob like a will-o-the-wisp. If the murony's corpse or host body has powers of its own, use the dhampir, vukodlak (see p. 143), or some other corporeal monster to reflect those; this covers only the spirit form of the murony.

The murony can transfer Health points he has drained to his body while in its grave. When the murony rises the next night, his Health reverts to its base level regardless of how much he drank the night before.

This writeup can also serve as the basis for a **ghost**, either alone or in combination with the bhuta. Like the bhuta, it might be a hologram, extra-dimensional sending, or alien cloud-creature.

With a higher Hand-to-Hand ability pool, the murony becomes appallingly dangerous.

General Abilities: Aberrance 16, Hand-to-Hand 6, Health 6

Hit Threshold: 5

Alertness Modifier: +0

Stealth Modifier: +2

Damage Modifier: +0 (blood drain or heat drain); +0 or -1 (hurled object)

Armor: physical weapons do no damage; fire does 1 point (Immaterial)

Free Powers: Darkvision, Distortion, Drain, *Psychic Vampirism, Remote Drain*

Other Powers: Heat Drain (drained Aberrance *do* add to its Health), Illusionary Shape, Levitation, Plague (damage from disease adds to murony's Health), Send to Sleep, Stifling Air (damage adds to murony's Health), Telekinesis

Banes: none in spirit form; destroying its body by beheading, staking, and filling the mouth with garlic (or burning the heart in wine) destroys the murony spirit

Blocks: *bitter herbs (ingested by the victim; must overcome block to keep feeding), crucifixes and holy objects,* garlic

Compulsions: *count millet seeds (rice, sesame seeds, etc.)*

Dreads: *crucifixes and holy objects,* garlic

Requirements: drink blood, must return to his body at cock-crow or noon

Renfield

In a sidelong tribute to Dwight Frye's unhinged performance in the 1931 *Dracula,* people forget that in Stoker's novel Renfield was a homicidal maniac, a dangerous killer. In ***Night's Black Agents,*** any human servant of the vampires is a "Renfield," and is also likely to be a dangerous killer. Like Renfield in the novel, these assets are promised "life," and usually have a drop or two of vampire blood in their veins to seal the bargain and grant them some level of supernatural power.

Renfields pass as human to anything except a full blood workup (see *Vampire Forensics,* p. 129).

Use any set of ability scores you think works for a given asset (see *Opposing Forces,* p. 69) and then add a total of 10 points to their abilities to indicate vampiric doping, and +1 to their Alertness Modifier. Increase melee damage modifiers by +1 across the board for fanatic strength.

Then add any two of the free powers below, and any one of the other powers. Or more, but Renfields aren't supposed to be boss monsters. Use player character abilities as a guideline for Renfield ability scores. Ideally, players will wonder if the Renfield is actually a Renfield, or just a really dangerous (well-trained, PCP-filled, whatever) human.

This template started with the Police stats on p. 70.

General Abilities: Aberrance 9, Hand-to-Hand 8, Health 9, Shooting 8, Weapons 7

Hit Threshold: 4

Alertness Modifier: +2

Stealth Modifier: +0

Damage Modifier: +0 (butterfly knife or flexible baton) or -1 (fist, kick); +1 (9mm pistol)

Armor: none (or -1 as a free power)

Free Powers: Enhanced Hearing (e.g., heartbeats, pulse; +2 Difficulty to evade), Infravision, Regeneration (2 Health per round), Tracking by Smell (+2 to Difficulty to evade), Unfeeling

Other Powers: Apportation ("slasher movement"), Cloud Men's Minds, Heat Drain, Mesmerism (eye contact or voice), Spider Climb, Strength (tests mandatory for feats of strength; see box, p. 136), Summoning (rats or spiders), Vampiric Speed (Extra Attacks, Jumping In, Mook Shield, or +2 to Hit Threshold for a scene; all 2 Aberrance each)

Blocks: In a campaign in which *any* vampire contamination radiates unholiness, crucifixes and church thresholds may block even Renfields (-2 to Difficulty of Aberrance test to pierce, even then).

Compulsions: *drink blood (as Addictive Disorder),* obey master

Strix

The Romans feared these night-flying witches in bird form. Like the lamia, the strix began as a child-killing monster, later gaining vampiric traits. Striges (the plural) work magic; like the birds they turn into, they are often part of a flock or coven. Striges are also cannibals in their human form. The Philippine aswang and the Portuguese bruxsa are similar, although the aswang is not especially cannibalistic.

Striges can turn into ravens, owls, crows, or blackbirds; their ability pools remain the same in either form. For a more dangerous strix, the act of shapeshifting fully refreshes all its pools; it can only refresh thusly once per scene. Alternate striges might have any sort of form, from images on rows of TV screens to scuttling dog-sized cockroaches.

Use striges as black-baggers, lookouts, mules, and watchers of the conspiracy, or as its sorcerous backup, or both.

Shadow Attack: A strix can attack its foe's shadow and damage or Drain that foe. Treat this as a general -

1 to enemy Hit Thresholds in all but Pitch Black conditions.

Soul Egg: A strix hides its soul in an egg somewhere. As long as that egg is unbroken, it cannot be permanently killed, but resurrects the next night or (if burned to ashes) the next new moon.

General Abilities: Aberrance 13, Hand-to-Hand 4, Health 5

Hit Threshold: 4 (human), 5 (bird)

Alertness Modifier: +1 (human), +3 (bird)

Stealth Modifier: +0 (human), +3 (bird)

Damage Modifier: -2 (fist, kick), -1 (peck and claw combo)

Free Powers: Darkvision, Drain, Hive Mind, *Remote Drain,* Shadow Attack, Soul Egg, Wings

Other Powers: Clairvoyance (flocks of birds anywhere in city), Cloak of Darkness, Magic, Mesmerism (eye contact or voice), Necromancy, *Send to Sleep,* Summon Birds, Turn to Bird, Vampiric Speed

Banes: sunlight (cannot change shape)

Blocks: *hawthorn, standard vampiric blocks for campaign*

Dreads: *garlic*

Requirements: drink blood, eat human flesh

Vorthr

The Old Norse word *vorthr* means "warder" or "guardian." It applied to an animated corpse guarding a barrow, not unlike Tolkien's barrow-wights. The word *vorthr* became "wraith" in English, but using the Norse word avoids the ghostly implications of "wraith."

In ***Night's Black Agents,*** a vorthr is a very powerful undead creature assigned to guard a target of supreme importance, such as the vampire lord's true crypt, the Ark of the Covenant, or similarly high-value targets. Although the name is Norse (and many of the vorthr's powers are taken from the similar Norse revenant known as the draugr), in your campaign a vorthr might be a mummy, golem, robot, really big ghoul, zombie cave bear, hell hound, shoggoth, or any other mighty guardian. Switch up its powers at will, in other words.

For example, a **mummy** would have Strangling Grasp (as lamia, p. 150) instead of talons, would have no Drain, Extensible Arms, or Extra Attacks, and would likely add fire to its banes.

If a vorthr's powers depend on its location, its ability pools are halved outside its barrow or other guarded zone. They might also depend on some enchanted object, or on one hand or eye being filled with vampire blood. Destroying such a focus also halves the vorthr's abilities. By contrast, some draugr became more powerful in winter; double their ability pools then.

In Norse legend, some draugr could only be defeated with bare hands. To prevent a draugr from rising again, it must be beheaded and the hero must leap between the head and body before it hits the ground (Difficulty 6 Athletics test). Then the body must be burned to ashes and scattered at sea.

Extensible Arms: A vorthr can extend its arms and make a Point-Blank talon or weapon attack from Close range.

General Abilities: Aberrance 13, Hand-to-Hand 24, Health 17, Weapons 12

Hit Threshold: 6

Alertness Modifier: +1 (+3 in barrow)

Stealth Modifier: +0

Damage Modifier: +3 (sword); +2 (talons)

Armor: -3 (thick, mummified flesh); all weapons do half damage; after armor, firearms do only 1 point of damage and shotguns firing shot do only 2 points of damage (Corpse, p. 126); or *Stony (see p. 126)*

Free Powers: Darkvision, Drain, Extensible Arms, *Psychic Vampirism (eye contact), Regeneration (all damage from physical weapons regenerates at the beginning of the next round in barrow)*

Other Powers: Cloak of Darkness, Extra Attacks (2 Aberrance points each), Heat Drain, *Magic, Spider Climb, Stifling Air,* Strength, Tunneling, *Turn to Mist*

Banes: *bare-handed attacks,* beheading (only at -11 Health), *own sword*

Blocks: *standard vampiric blocks for campaign*

Compulsions: guard site

Requirements: return to barrow or guarded site

Zombie

The zombie is a reanimated corpse, usually with no additional vampiric powers. Vampires send them into battle or keep them handy as guards.

Traditional Haitian zombies can be laid to rest with salt; it appears in italics as a possible bane or compulsion. George Romero added the infectious bite to zombie lore; the italicized Infection power models those zombies.

To upgrade their threat level, use pack attacks as with ghouls (p. 150), or give zombies Hive Mind.

Grab: A zombie may grip and cling to its foe with its rotting hands. This is a Hand-to-Hand attack that does no damage, but lowers Hit Thresholds of both the zombie and its target as Reckless Attack (p. 76). If a grabbed target forgoes combat in a round, she can try to break free with a Difficulty 5 Athletics test instead.

General Abilities: Aberrance 5, Hand-to-Hand 7, Health 7, Weapons 2

Hit Threshold: 3 (2 for slow zombies; 4 for fast zombies)

Alertness Modifier: -1

Damage Modifier: -1 (bite); +0 or -1 (improvised weapon); grab (see text)

Armor: all weapons do half damage; after armor, firearms do only 1 point of damage and shotguns firing shot do only 2 points of damage

Free Powers: *Infection (every 10 minutes after being bitten, the victim must make a Health test against a Difficulty equal to his total bite damage; if failed, the bite does double damage; when victim dies, he immediately becomes a zombie; fire sterilizes the wound)*

Banes: destruction of the brain (Called Shot at +2; must do at least 2 points of damage), *salt*

Compulsions: *eat brains, lie down and die upon tasting salt, move toward loud noises,* obey master (bokor, vampire, etc.)

Vampiric Forms and Familiars

These are only a few of the animals most commonly associated with vampires. Balkan vampires could also infect (or be infected by) horses, chickens, and sheep; Polish and Russian legend features vampire moths; the asema of Suriname turns into a pig; LeFanu's psychic vampire in "Green Tea" takes the shape of a hideous monkey.

In general, animals suffer no darkness penalties (see p. 215), although the Director may assess a +1 to opponents' Hit Thresholds in Pitch Black conditions for animals highly dependent on sight, such as birds or apes.

An attack by a rabid animal, or by a seemingly maddened swarm of animals, may trigger a 4-point Stability test.

By default, a transformed vampire uses its own normal Aberrance and Health pools, rather than those of the beast form. These templates use Athletics to represent normal or servitor beasts.

Bat

Blood-drinking vampire bats are native to South and Central America; elsewhere, bats eat insects or fruit. Most bats are only the size of a mouse, or a squirrel at the largest. A transformed vampire is usually larger, and likely does much more damage with its bite, at the very least.

For a flock of 10 bats, raise Bite and Health by 2; lower Hit Threshold to 3 to represent a target-rich environment. Increase Bite by 2 and Health by 3 for each additional 10 bats, and damage by +1 for each 20 bats. Every hit against a flock kills 1 bat and disperses 5 others.

General Abilities: Athletics 3, Bite 1, Health 2

Hit Threshold: 4 (tiny and fluttery)

Alertness Modifier: +2 (sonar)

Stealth Modifier: +1

Damage Modifier: -3 (bite)

Cat

Japanese gaki and Bengali chordewa transform into cats; many European demons and sorcerers (including vampires) are closely associated with cats. Following the film *Let the Right One In,* cats may also be mortal enemies of vampires.

For a horde of cats, use the algorithm for a bat flock, above.

General Abilities: Athletics 6, Fighting 3, Health 4

Hit Threshold: 4 (fast)

Alertness Modifier: +2 (keen sight)

Stealth Modifier: +2

Damage Modifier: -2 (bite)

Flies

A swarm of flies (or other insects) cannot be effectively hit. As long as targets remain inside the cloud, each victim takes a constant increment of damage:

Insect Swarm	Damage Increment
Bees, wasps, hornets	-1
Biting flies, mosquitoes	-3 plus possibility of disease
Locusts, mantises	-2, block sight as below
Moths	None, but block sight and raise enemy Hit Threshold by +1
Spiders	-2 plus possibility of poison

Being inside a cloud of angry insects triggers a 3-point Stability test; those who fail must also attempt to leave the cloud.

Flame weapons (white phosphorus grenades, flamethrowers) might be able to damage or disperse a cloud of flies briefly. Only chemical clouds or strong winds can permanently disperse an insect swarm.

Owl

The ancient Babylonian lilitu, the Romanian strigoi, and the Malaysian langsuir all transform into owls. Owls are big, scary animals: great horned owls will even attack humans.

An owl with maneuvering room can dive-bomb its target, attacking and then flying back to a perch or to hover at Near range in the same round.

General Abilities: Athletics 10, Fighting 7, Health 7

Hit Threshold: 4

Alertness Modifier: +3 (keen sight and hearing)

Stealth Modifier: +3 (near silent flight)

Damage Modifier: -1 (beak and claw combo)

Rat

Values before the slash are for a single, bloated rat; values after the slash are for a swarm of 10 rats.

Increase Fighting and Health by 2 for every 10 additional rats; increase damage by +1 for each 30 rats. Every hit against a rat swarm kills 2 rats and disperses 8 others; if the fight continues for more than two rounds, dispersed rats rejoin the swarm.

General Abilities: Athletics 3/5, Fighting 2/3, Health 2/3

Hit Threshold: 4 (small and nimble)/3 (target-rich environment)

Alertness Modifier: +1 (keen smell)

Stealth Modifier: +1 (small)/+0 (numerous)

Damage Modifier: -2/-1 (bite); may be infected

Serpent

In Romany lore, the serpent is the most fearsome vampire animal due to its poison and Satanic connotations. The legendary lamia is sometimes depicted as part snake; the Reptoid mesmerists of conspiracy lore are serpent-people who drink blood and devour human flesh.

These ability numbers are fairly abstract and apply to dramatic thriller snakes, be they poisonous snakes (cobra, adder, fer-de-lance) or constrictors (python, boa, anaconda). Vampire snakes may have both sorts of abilities. Vary Health by size; Athletics increases for very large constrictors.

A pit full of snakes has the same statistics, with an additional 3 Health per 10 snakes. It refreshes 2 points of Fighting per round until escaped or destroyed; each hit kills 1 snake and drives off 3 others.

Venom: A successful bite or spit injects snake venom (see p. 81) into the target.

Constrict: A successful Fighting attack constricts the target. A human target gets a Difficulty 4 Athletics test to keep one arm (ideally one holding a weapon) out of the coils. Once a constrictor succeeds in its first attack, it does its crush damage to that target automatically each round until killed or driven off. A constrictor can only attack one target at a time. To free oneself requires two Difficulty 5 Athletics test successes in a row. The constrictor's Hit Threshold is only 2 against an enemy in its coils.

General Abilities: Athletics 7, Fighting 15, Health 6

Hit Threshold: 4 (surprisingly elusive)

Alertness Modifier: +0 (vibration sense)

Stealth Modifier: +2 (+0 for rattlers)

Damage Modifier: -2 (bite or spit) or +1 (crush)

Armor: -2 vs. blunt or fist attacks, -1 vs. blades or fire, none vs. arrows or bullets (thick scales)

Wolf

This is a vampire wolf, or a pack alpha. Average wolves have Athletics 8, Fighting 6, Health 3. In the novel, Dracula commands wolves but turns into a dog (see p. 70).

Represent a pack of wolves with individual stat blocks; up to three wolves can attack a single target in one round. The foe's Hit Threshold drops by 1 against the third attack.

Worrying Bite: As ghoul (see p. 150). The wolf's Hit Threshold is only 3 against a foe clamped in its jaws.

General Abilities: Athletics 10, Fighting 8, Health 6

Hit Threshold: 4

Alertness Modifier: +3 (keen smell and hearing)

Stealth Modifier: +1

Damage Modifier: +0 (bite) plus worry (see p. 70)

Armor: -1 vs. any (fur)

Conspiracies

Just as no two Directors will build the same vampires, no two Directors will design the same vampire conspiracy. The conspiracy shows up in the spy thriller genre primarily to provide something for the hero to solve and shoot until the final showdown with the main bad guy. Players in RPGs are less passive than viewers of a film; they like to have puzzles to solve, to give themselves direction and just for the sheer fun of the intellectual exercise. In ***Night's Black Agents,*** figuring out the shape of the vampire conspiracy doesn't just help the players have fun and map their own next moves, it helps the Director play with the larger arc and feel of the game.

Conspiratorial Considerations

A conspiracy comprising one vampire, a pariah clan of gypsies, and the occasional suborned madman creates a different game than one positing secret

monstrous control of the entire structure of global order. Both can be terrifying; both can be thrilling — but both require knowing what you're doing to make them so. While you can always "pull back the camera" to reveal a bigger conspiracy behind the one the agents just took down, you run the risk of anticlimax and player burnout. Building the conspiracy you want to run with from the beginning makes more sense.

Like vampire design, conspiracy design involves answering some basic questions at the outset. How long has the conspiracy existed? What do they control? What can they do? Why do they conspire, with whom, and who knows about it already? Reflect the vampires you've already built in the answers to these questions, and project the game you want to run through them.

Longevity

Does the vampire conspiracy date back to ancient Babylon, or to a UFO crash in 1988? This question ties in with the question of vampiric origins (see p. 121). Real-world conspiracies fall apart or divert themselves as their leadership dies off; vampire conspiracies don't have that problem. Conspiracies deriving from eternal Hell or time-insensitive aliens can last a very long time indeed, plotting in slow motion for literally inhuman and unguessable reasons.

A vampire conspiracy is most likely at least as old as its oldest vampire. In general, the longer the conspiracy has existed, the more power it has accumulated: a 2,000-year-old cabal of vampires would have to be lazy and merciful indeed to avoid at the very least utterly dominating their primary homeland or hunting ground. To build a weaker, but still ancient, vampire conspiracy requires either a power struggle within the cabal or a major disaster or attack from outside. A coterie of vampires harvesting Moscow might well have lost their hold during the fire of 1812; a mutant blood parasite controlling ancient Egypt could have fissioned during the Crusades.

Amplitude

Does the vampire conspiracy settle for dominating the trade in Etruscan antiquities, or do its tendrils reach from Irish banks to Turkish military academies? The size of the conspiracy directly affects game play: a smaller conspiracy contributes to a unified feel and a straightforward story line, while a larger conspiracy supports longer-term, more varied gaming. Many players find vast conspiracies ridiculous; other gamers find the paranoia immense cabals foster more terrifying. If you're going to go big, make sure you've got plenty of scares in your toolbox: lean heavily on the implications and horror of omnipresent surveillance and cruel, callous, implacable forces waiting for the last pieces to fall.

The questions of vampire spread (see p. 122) and numbers (see p. 122) influence, but do not determine, this one: most vampires in the world might be one-off singletons, or a single clutch of psionic vampires might control the entire former Soviet bloc.

Magic

Do the vampires have access to zero-point technology salvaged from Lemurian ruins? Do they command werewolves or other sub-creatures, or talk to the dead? What other supernatural, sorcerous, or alien resources does the conspiracy control? The default assumption is that all the conspiracy's weirdness comes from the vampires' nature; but if the vampires are soldiers of Hell or ninth-dimensional alien invaders, that still leaves a lot of potential out there.

Adding more magic, or black technology, or pyramid power, risks weakening the "real-world" tone of the spy half of the game. This is a concern even in games far from Dust mode; a cinematic spy thriller is still not a fantasy. Make sure that whatever else the conspiracy has, it's uncanny and unsettling first and foremost.

Intentions

Does the conspiracy want to reduce all humanity to cattle? Open the gate to Hell? Or just slowly suck the continent dry? Plot the vampires' actions with an eye to their ultimate goals. Against the backdrop of contemporary Europe, the vampire conspiracy must first respond to the state. Real world conspiracies fall into one of three categories, all of which can easily reflect vampirism:

Parallel state: The conspiracy parasitizes the state, using it as a shell or tool to protect itself and often increase its own power: e.g., corporations or trade unions, criminal syndicates, military-industrial complexes, national bureaucracies. Parallel-state vampire conspiracies use the state as a Renfield, or as a sheepdog for their fold. Vampires with strong ties to humanity (see p. 123), or those with entirely abstract or parochial concerns, tend to this approach.

Replacement state: The conspiracy subverts the state, with the intention of replacing it: e.g., revolutionary parties of the right or left, agents of foreign powers, transnational bureaucracies. Replacement-state vampire conspiracies seek outright power, possibly out of personal ambition or to secure specific sites or capabilities that only the state controls. Vampire madmen (infected, damned,

or psionically hubristic) and Bond-style vampire villains fit here.

Anti-state: The conspiracy attacks the state, with the intention of destroying it or forcing it to surrender: e.g., terrorist groups, cults. Some anti-state conspiracies want to become replacement states, but not in the short term; some (especially ideological or religious movements) explicitly reject the primary role of the state. Anti-state vampire conspiracies might want to drink deep from humanity's fear, rule a post-collapse neo-medieval wasteland, or unleash Kali-Ma on a crouching Europe. The anti-state agenda especially suits demonic or alien vampires.

Allegiances

Did the conspiracy work with the Soviets? Did it clear the way for the Nazis? Or did it cringe or flee from both? Decide if the vampires have any loyalties (past or present) to any human group, or carry enmities or grudges likewise. Ex-Nazis (or Stalinists, or Templars) might turn up as vampires, or the conspiracy may constantly try to undermine the government of Turkey, subvert the Jesuit Order, or kill members of the Merovingian bloodline. This doesn't demand humanity from the vampires; their allies might well tend toward the inhuman. Tying the vampires to human groups provides the agents with direction, and the players with setting identification; just make sure your exciting horror game doesn't turn into a tiresome political lecture.

DVD ENEMIES

Directors should also consider any opponents of the conspiracy, whether they are beaten, dormant, or actively operating as well. At some point, the agents are bound to ask "who else knows about this?" and there should be an answer at the ready. Darker games will have nothing but the corpses of those who tried and failed — in other circumstances the agents might discover tiny pockets of resistance that they can ally themselves with, or even an organized counter-conspiracy that they can become a part of. Again drawing upon the realistic spy half of ***Night's Black Agents,*** it can stretch credulity for there to be a millennia-old conspiracy of genius vampires that have survived the vast span of history, only to be undone by some plucky ex-CIA officers armed with nothing more than a couple of guns and a Eurail pass.

Exclusivity

Is this the only vampire conspiracy? The only occult conspiracy? The only one likely to mess with the agents? This plays off the question of vampire variations (see p. 122), and the same concerns apply here: adding more factions to the setting gets players lost and frustrated faster than you think it will. This is also where you should determine how much, if anything, any other mortal group knows about the vampires: the Vatican, the NSA, or the Dutch multinational owned by Abraham van Helsing IV.

CAMPAIGN MODES AND CONSPIRACY DESIGN

Although any conspiracy can work with any campaign mode, and vice versa, some alignments ease narrative flow and assist with player buy-in.

The emotional cost of Burn mode games is starkest when the conspiracy includes those the agent loves or feels loyal to: not just parents, mentors, and former lovers, but groups she identifies with her Symbol or Solace. The conspiracy might even be colorably acting to benefit something the agent is loyal to: a vampire-riddled MI5 still defends Britain, after all, and exposing it will definitely harm the Crown. When adding a node or a member to a conspiracy, try to ensure at least one agent will recoil at discovering it. Adding magic or other strangeness can contribute to the agents' isolation, but keep the cost personal: using it carves away humanity.

The default conspiracy in a Dust mode game is of recent origin (post-1945), medium size (key figures in several national security establishments and corporations), and has no magic or other strange sidelines besides vampirism. Especially in Dust mode, large or ancient conspiracies are not alone: they will have fissioned into rival sects, attracted knowing enemies, or both.

Almost imperatively, a Mirror mode conspiracy includes at least half the agents' former patrons, or key figures therein. Supposed enemies of the conspiracy are at least as likely to be stalking-horses or false-flagged dupes, or have their own upper ranks thoroughly infiltrated by vampires. The Mirror mode especially rewards vast conspiracies: everyone and anyone might have a vampire tattoo, or follow orders from someone who does. The Mirror mode also supports magic or similar extras; if reality isn't real, then you can never know who someone is.

This works best if the conspiracy has truly alien or archaic goals: replicating Martian biology on Earth, or restoring the Corvinus bloodline to the throne of Hungary. If the agents can't trust their former allegiance, they have to at least be able to recognize the insanity of their foes.

In pure Stakes mode play, the conspiracy is allied with, or gladly utilizes, the agents' enemies, or obvious bad guys: Nazis, Stalinists, al-Qaeda. Even if it has pawns in their own former agency, those pawns are double agents, not symptoms of deeper rot.

The Conspyramid

Now it's time to build a conspiracy. Lay out a conspiracy structure with six levels; each ascending level has fewer, more important nodes. A node might be a gang, a cell within an organization, a facility or institution, a powerful individual, a whole subverted agency, or anything else that might be part of the vampire conspiracy. The vampires may only have subverted the node's leader, its main cadre, or key personnel within the node. In general, each node will have its own penumbra of guards, lackeys, underlings, investigators, or other assets not explicitly indicated on the chart.

The lines between the nodes indicate command, communication, and control: who can tell whom what to do for the vampires. If you'd like, draw various kinds of lines to indicate various specific options: only one-way communication, post-hypnotic or false-flagged command, partial or unwilling control, etc.

The following examples are generic guidelines. A vampire conspiracy rooted within the medical establishment might have a single key researcher at Level 5, and the Belgian health ministry at Level 3. But in general, the higher the level, the more powerful the node:

Level 1

Street-level power: street gang, parish church, branch bank, shop or small business, warehouse, stringer or informer, NCO or squad, police precinct, museum department, professor or scholar, government office, power station.

Level 2

City-level power: citywide racket or gang, cathedral or bishop, major bank office, factory or medium-sized company, labor union, journalist or TV producer, attaché or consul, captain or platoon, police department, museum, library, hospital, NGO chapter, university department, millionaire, power plant, local ISP or telecoms branch, mayor or city government department, party boss, legislator or MP.

Level 3

Provincial power: one racket in major criminal organization, large company, broker or merchant bank, trucking company, industry-wide union, TV station or newspaper, deputy chief of station, colonel or battalion, military base, security police office, university, major museum, research hospital, airport, prison, influential NGO, governor or provincial or state government department, presidential or ministerial aide.

Level 4

National power: nationwide criminal organization, archbishop, corporation, national bank, shipping line, airline, TV network or chain of newspapers, chief of station or ambassador, general or corps, military research facility, telecoms company, billionaire, transnational NGO (e.g., Red Cross, Amnesty International, Greenpeace), head of security police, minister or cabinet department head.

Level 5

Supranational power: major international criminal organization or major crime lord, cardinal, multinational corporation, multinational bank, multinational press corporation, major figure in EU, IMF, NATO, or Russian government.

Level 6

The vampires, or their core leadership cadre. This might be one Prince of the Vampires, or the central board of XSanguin, LLC. Individual vampires might exert power at lower levels as supervisors or key links in the chain. Vampires might be or run lower nodes all by themselves, especially if the vampire conspiracy is itself hierarchical, as might be true of a conspiracy modeled on the Church or the Mafia, or one existing since medieval times.

Using the Conspyramid

The Conspyramid is an arbitrary diagram, not a full-scale table of organization for the vampire conspiracy. Its nodes and lines are abstractions, not hard-and-fast requirements. They exist for three basic reasons.

Narrative Planning

The Conspyramid lets the Director sketch out the future trajectory of the campaign. If you come up with a great adventure idea set on a Greek island, the Conspyramid gives you an idea of what clues and pointers further up the chain that operation will uncover. Lines of control indicate potential directions out of that node's op and into the next. Planting a chain of clues or informative ops is easier when you know approximately where they point, what you should plant to point there, and where they ultimately need to lead. By establishing benchmarks, you can pace your campaign more reliably: if the agents have started planning strikes on Level 5 nodes, you need to amp up the danger and start foreshadowing the big finish.

Also, you can invent operations based on the nodes you've decided will come into play: if one of the nodes is a derelict Russian Army base in Kaliningrad, you can start thinking of things that might lead there,

and plan out a great fight scene for that location. Or alternately, figure out what the conspirators in that base are doing to advance the vampires' goals, and where the player characters might run across those activities. Think of the nodes as providing a menu for adventure locations, opposition, and clues.

Creative Integration

Leave one or two arms of the Conspyramid blank (or sketch in new arms) and you'll have a place to insert elements you invent later on in play. By relating them to your earlier structure, you can see where you should leave clues and trails between older and just-invented elements, knitting your new ideas into the game. If you can fit a new element into the structure the players have begun perceiving, it plays less like an arbitrary plot shift and more like a new discovery.

These new elements don't have to come from you alone. Sometimes player speculation is so brilliant (or hoses the agents so badly) that you retroactively make it correct: if the players are constantly worried that GSG 9 is a vampire hit squad, put it in the Conspyramid (Level 3 or 4 sounds about right) and start leaving deliberate clues in that direction.

Mechanical Support

You can use the Conspyramid to inform player deductions using Human Terrain and Traffic Analysis when building an adversary map (see p. 114). The Conspyramid also assists in answering questions posed as a result of player character capture (see p. 116), fills out convenient logbooks or phone trees, and gives you at least some answers any other time when agent abilities might logically deduce what the opposition looks like.

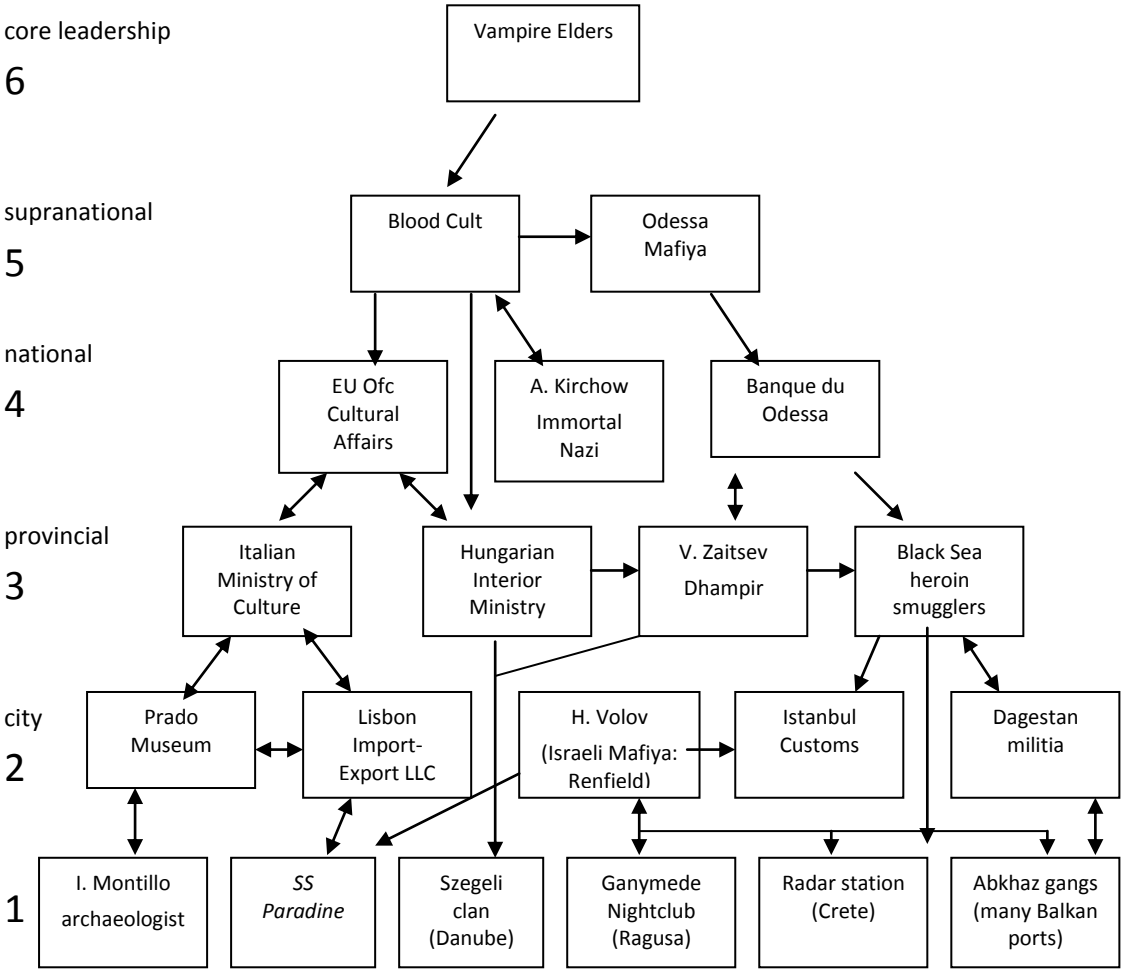
It also provides a rough guideline in play to Difficulties of obstacles and to abilities of opponents:

For a given obstacle, the **Difficulty** equals its **Conspyramid Level +3.** For example, a Digital Intrusion test on the hard drive of a Level 2 mob accountant has Difficulty 5; that same test against a satellite control system run by a Level 5 aerospace company has Difficulty 8.

Generic opposition forces have combat or other relevant **abilities** equal to **Conspyramid Level +1 (x2).** In other words, go up one Level, and multiply that number by 2. For example, Level 1 foes have Shooting 4, Level 3 foes have Surveillance 8, Level 5 foes have Hand-to-Hand 12. If you want to figure off-the-cuff Alertness or Stealth modifiers for the opposition, divide the Conspyramid Level in half, rounding down: Level 1 foes have +0, Level 2 or 3 foes have +1, Level 4 or 5 foes have +2.

These are, of course, rough ad hoc guidelines, intended for off-the-cuff rulings and quick-start combats. Feel free to switch them up to better suit story or dramatic considerations. However, generally increasing foes' capabilities as the agents get closer to the vampires and as the campaign gets closer to the climax makes both logical and dramatic sense.

Sample Conspyramid



This sample conspiracy has two main arms: the art and artifact smuggling group centered in the Prado Museum in Madrid, and the heroin route from Dagestan into Odessa and the Mediterranean. Herschel Volov, the *SS Paradine,* and Valdemor Zaitsev link the two. Kirchow is a roving troubleshooter. For muscle, it depends on either the Szegeli clan of smugglers and thieves in the Danube basin (Austria, Hungary) or the Abkhaz gangs in various Balkan and Mediterranean ports.

Funds come from the bank and the heroin ring (abetted, probably, by Ecstasy smuggling by the Israeli mafia); blood may come from willing Szegeli sacrifices, or from human trafficking as a sideline by the Odessa mafiya.

Conspyramid as Story Map

Rather than a hierarchical chart accurately depicting power flows in the conspiracy, you can also think of the Conspyramid as a narrative road map to the final scene of the campaign. The changes in Difficulties and opponents' abilities now serve a purely dramatic, rather than a partly simulationist, purpose.

To clarify this, turn the Conspyramid on its side, with Level 6 (now Column 6) pointing to the right edge of the paper. The campaign's narrative arc moves from the left side of the page, where any number of possible leads exist in Column 1, toward the right side of the page, the destination: the final confrontation with the vampire lords. Links between boxes no longer indicate power or control, but represent the clues and connections the agents might find and follow as they move through the story. If they get thwarted or stumped, they can move along the column or back to the left, pick up another thread, and see if they can follow that one farther.

OTHER CONSPIRACY STRUCTURES

Not every conspiracy looks like the classic pyramid built out of pawns and players. In the real world there are lots of other possible designs, some of which might apply to your campaign.

Distributed conspiracy: A central group creates broad policy and general goals that independent cells carry out to the best of their abilities. Besides a network of couriers, necessary specialists, and perhaps a few roving field commanders, there is no direct connection between the head and arms of the conspiracy. Outside funding sources and co-opted protectors tie separately into the central directorate or individual cells. This is the model, more or less, used by al-Qaeda; it can easily adapt to a vampire death-cult or psionic cabal. Plant intel for the agents to find with every two or three cells: the name of a messenger, the last place the hematologist was seen. Over the campaign, these tiny clues build toward the location of the central vampire leadership.

Multicellular conspiracy: There is no hierarchy. Small groups and individuals generally associated with the conspiratorial underground come together on a purely ad hoc basis to carry out individual plots, then separate. Power players (who usually have their own source of funding and a small cadre of soldiers) can bring these temporary alliances about more regularly or even deal themselves in on a particularly tempting strike, but have no permanent sub-structure of vassals or captains. This model is how Hollywood works and, more relevant to the topic of conspiracy, how the Russian mafiya operates. A setting with numerous vampires, each with their own local power base, could use this model. Defeating this conspiracy requires the agents to choke off the nodes' supply of money or blood, and to withstand the ever-more-frenzied counter-attacks until the underground collapses into civil war.

Shell conspiracy: The conspirators move from node to node at will; each node is a hollow shell connected to a myriad of possible other nodes, any of which can serve as a control node if activated. Nodes might even compete with each other while not under direct control: the conspirators don't care, because efficiency of the network is not their concern, security and invisibility are. This model maps financial-governmental conspiracies like BCCI, Eural Trans Gas, or TotalFinaELF. Vampires that can easily assume new identities, or those who work best through human puppets, can turn any set of interlinked groups into such a conspiracy. Defeating it requires the agents to predict where the vampires will castle to, and to then isolate and destroy that node.

Truncated conspiracy: The conspiracy is very compact: directorate and assets, over a thin but wide scattering of dupes. The Treadstone conspiracy in the *Bourne* movies works along these lines: Brian Cox and David Strathairn at the top, the doctors and assassins below them, and the rest of the CIA as tools. The three conspiracies in *Ronin* are if anything even more truncated: the IRA conspiracy is two people (plus a crew of hirelings), and the CIA conspiracy is two people (de Niro and his handler); the Russians have two whole nodes (Nice and the ice rink) and a few murderous assets. This model works for short campaigns, or for campaigns in which rival conspiracies fight each other; there's less to keep track of in both cases. Alien vampires or mutant vampires might work this way: the vampire and a ring of protectors move fluidly through Europe killing their enemies, dealing with Russian oligarchs for protection or funds, or chasing a silver briefcase. In a campaign like this, the agents have to catch up with the conspiracy, find out what it's willing to risk death to get at, and use that to force a showdown.

Conspiratorial Components

Every vampire conspiracy is different, but they all work within the same world, constrained by the same basic needs and limits as Exxon Mobil, the Chinese Communist Party, Greenpeace, or any other organization. Think of the vampire conspiracy as a LEGO fortress: built to its designer's whims, but constructed from a common pool of blocks and pieces.

Universal Nodes

Vampire conspiracies almost always require three elements to function: money, blood, and protection.

The conspiracy usually spends money to acquire blood and protection, making its funding source its weakest link, requiring more protection.

Funding Sources

Banks (Level 2-5) are great sources of capital, especially if you own them. Looting your own bank provides a quick payday, but runs the risk of outside interference in the form of pesky regulators or even hostile takeovers by rival banks. It's wiser to float long-term sweetheart loans or use the bank's financial muscle to buy out or suborn other profitable ventures. Banks also provide access to governments, corporations, and other useful targets.

Casinos are money launderers' dreams: legitimate businesses that deal in millions every day, almost all of it in cash or the equivalent. The "skim" from a large casino (Level 2-3) can fund conspiracy operations on a lavish scale, up and down the Conspyramid. Casinos provide a bonus in blood, attracting plenty of desperate victims at all hours of the day or night.

Drugs are the easiest and most lucrative commodity to smuggle, with the advantage of illegality keeping prices high and competition restricted. Europe's annual cocaine and heroin trade combined total well over $50 billion. (Russia consumes another $13 billion in heroin alone.) A vampire conspiracy likely controls at least one drug ring, either in one major city or all along a trafficking route. This drug ring may be technically franchised from an organized crime group (OCG) with the vampires having only the local concession for heroin or Ecstasy (Level 1 or 2), or the vampires may control the OCG as a (Level 3 or 4) node in the Conspyramid. Like casinos, drug trafficking offers the conspiracy a steady supply of victims, although their blood may be unattractive (or even poisonous) to chemically sensitive undead. If it controls its own mafia, the conspiracy can also smuggle other commodities (native soil, antiquities, silver, plutonium) along the same routes and through the same entry points their narcotics traverse.

Blood Sources

Depending on which sources you trust and how you define your terms, **human trafficking rings** run between 200,000 and 700,000 people through and into Europe every two years, over three-quarters of them destined for the sex trade. (Most are women or girls; about 60% come from the former Soviet Union or Eastern Europe.) Triad "snake-heads" and other **labor smugglers** use similar illicit routes and entry points to move millions more (mostly Africans, East Asians, and South Americans) into Europe's black and gray labor markets: sweatshops, dockyards, agriculture, factories, and other off-the-books work for undocumented aliens. Sex workers and other slaves are easier to drink and drain; illegal workers are generally in better health with fewer drug problems.

Either way, a vampire conspiracy that taps into underground human cargo and labor flows has plenty of necks to drink from: a human-trafficking ring, like a drug ring, might be a local client (Level 1) or an entire regional mafia (Level 4). Human trafficking is another good funding source, assuming the vampires don't drink all the profits: sex slaves are a billion-dollar commodity in Europe, and both the illegal immigrants and their employers pay the smugglers, tens of thousands of euros a head. Like drug trafficking, human trafficking routes can also carry other vital or covert shipments.

Other blood sources include **blood banks** or **medical charities,** but those invite plenty of government scrutiny and offer fewer opportunities for rakeoffs. They will likely tap out at Level 1 or 2.

Protection Sources

Conspiracies of thieves and murderers, even supernaturally powerful ones, need some sort of shield from the prying eyes of society and law enforcement. Thus, the Conspyramid (like any organized crime ring) almost always co-opts at least one high police official in any city where it regularly operates. (He and his cronies are a Level 1 or 2 node, depending on his rank and influence.) Many European countries have two or even three national police forces: a **national criminal police** force (like France's Police Nationale or Croatia's Policija), a **national military police** (like Italy's Carabinieri and many nations' Gendarmerie), and a **national security police** (like the FBI or FSB). The vampires have their pick of jurisdictions, in other words: even if one local office is strangely incorruptible, there will be others to look the other way and cover up the mysterious exsanguinations. In some cases, the vampiric co-optation may extend so far that the whole city **police department,** or even the whole force, is functionally a node (Level 3 or 4) of the Conspyramid: many analysts believe that most Italian police forces are exactly that for the Camorra and other mafias, and the FSB for the Russian mafiyas likewise.

If the security police or **intelligence agencies** of a given nation are in position to protect (or interfere with) the vampires' activities, they too will be targeted, which means they will be owned or neutered by the vampires. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union at one time or another completely penetrated MI6, the FBI, and key elements of the CIA (among other agencies) with relatively little in the way of cash outlay and with no supernatural powers whatsoever. (*Unless* …) A vampire conspiracy actually intertwined with or controlling a national government

will naturally begin by controlling its security and intelligence services; they can then extend those services' power domestically and expand their reach to protect drug rings or other criminal activity. Many democracies have parliamentary or congressional **oversight committees** that monitor the security agencies; controlling or suborning those committees (or key deputies or staff) is, if anything, even easier than controlling an intelligence service directly.

Other Nodes

Add other nodes depending on the vampires' nature and the goals of their conspiracy, and on the intended flavor and themes of the campaign. A Conspyramid built around Templar remnants and smuggled art will have a different feel than one built around immortal Nazi war criminals and covert bioweapons labs; a campaign centering on projected coups d'etat and human trafficking by military-industrial shadow committees will have yet a third flavor.

Some other possible nodes include:

- Cult, inside or outside an established church or sect
- Occult organization, Masonic lodge, UFO contactee group
- Archaeological institute, museum, academic department
- Art dealer, auction house, gallery
- Informational security nodes, which might just be one cinematic Ukrainian hacker or a team of cybersecurity consultants
- Pharmaceutical lab, hospital, research facility
- Dockyard, customs warehouse
- Labor union, political party, ethnic or single-issue pressure group
- Waste disposal company
- Telecommunications company, TV network, newspaper (as unofficial intelligence arm)
- Private intelligence analysis contractor
- Cycle gang, private security firm, local mafia (as muscle, usually)
- Real estate combine (simply a source of money and power, or to secure specific properties for the conspiracy)
- Mining company, gray-market factory
- Airline, shipping line (both very useful for smuggling)
- Military unit

You can combine these nodes: a cult might recruit exclusively from one brigade of the military; the mafia may have suborned airline personnel to enable antiquities smuggling by the auction house; etc. These nodes are like mini-conspiracies inside the Conspyramid; they might predate it or be specialized creations serving a dedicated purpose.

Most of these nodes can run from Level 1 storefronts to Level 4 power players, depending as much on how important they are to the conspiracy as a whole as on how much clout they wield in the mortal world.

CITIES

So much for the background; on to the setting. You can set your ***Night's Black Agents*** adventures anywhere: a black-program prison in Lithuania, a desolate megalithic site in Brittany, the whisper-silent frozen woods of Lapland, a tramp steamer in the Adriatic. But many — perhaps even most — of your operations will at least start in a city. Cities provide anonymity for vampires and spies alike; they are feeding grounds and hunting grounds. Cities are where power concentrates, power that vampires manipulate and spies investigate. Urban settings are integral parts of the spy thriller tradition: hunts through famous landmarks, chases into crowded marketplaces, firefights in factories and office buildings alike. Cities are just plain thrilling locations, and your game will be richer for including them.

Similarly, you can establish your vampire conspiracy in the sweltering new cities of East Asia, the war-ravaged frontiers of Africa, or the placid suburbs of North America. But you have to start somewhere — as do we. So we started in Europe, with a look-in at the surrounding coasts of the Mediterranean. Spy thrillers began in European settings, in the drawing rooms of E. Philips Oppenheim and the anonymous offices of Eric Ambler. Vampire stories, likewise: *Dracula* famously features a thrilling chase from London to Transylvania complete with a boss fight at the end. Even now, Europe plays a starring role in the new James Bond and Jason Bourne film franchises; in the real world, it combines spies, organized crime, and cool gear quite like nowhere else.

Deep Background

Your Europe can be as realistic as you care to make it. The agents come from a world of shadow loyalties, where spies deal with criminals to trap terrorists, and the other way around. Intelligence agencies "on the same side" — even in the same country — routinely block, or even blow, each other's operations, for reasons of national policy or institutional pique, to say nothing of outright treason or corruption. You can add fictional agencies like the IMF or SD-6, revive extinct ones like SMERSH, or simply allude to some sort of connection to "the Ministry." You can do the same with criminal rings, terrorist groups, or even whole countries if you like. Most thrillers try to keep at least a façade of realism, but how thick you want to make the scrim is up to you. The next two sections serve as jumping-off points for European espionage and illegality, not as hard-and-fast definitions. They are intended to get you up to speed, to give you some names to drop and some targets to shoot.

Backstage Europe

Although this section lists the main intelligence actors in Europe, it is far from exhaustive. Some countries (those with primarily domestic intelligence and security concerns) are not listed, and even some agencies in the listed countries are missing, mostly due to space limitations. Hit Wikipedia or elsewhere on the Net to dig deeper for any given country or agency.

Bulgaria

During the Cold War, the First Directorate of the Committee for State Security (KDS) actively cooperated with the KGB, murdering dissidents abroad and famously abetting the attempted assassination of the Pope. Its successor, the **National Intelligence Service (NIS)** performs extraordinary renditions and provides other assistance to CIA anti-terrorist campaigns.

China

China's **Ministry for State Security (MSS),** colloquially known as the Guóanbù, performs both intelligence and security functions for the Communist regime. In Europe, its activities focus on industrial espionage and monitoring Chinese students and residents abroad. Typical MSS practice is to flood the zone with hundreds or even thousands of short-term, low-level assets gathering a "mosaic" of OSINT and HUMINT to be analyzed in Beijing. The Seventh Bureau of the Bu Er, or (more formally) **Military Intelligence Department (MID)** hosts China's famed cyberintelligence teams of hackers, cryptanalysts, and spyware programmers.

France

France's security and intelligence apparatus rivals America's for intentional bureaucratic tangles. Broadly speaking, the **Direction Générale de la Sécurité Extérieure (DGSE)** handles foreign intelligence (its clandestine, paramilitary arm is **Division Action**) while the **Direction Centrale du Renseignement Intérieur (DCRI)** serves as the primary domestic security directorate. Both engage in technical and industrial espionage against the U.S. and other nominal allies, as well as more conventional intelligence missions. The **Direction du Renseignement Militaire (DRM),** the French directorate of military intelligence, concentrates on operational intelligence for the French military; it operates wherever French forces do (currently

Bosnia, Libya, and various African states). France's **Police Nationale** (the former Sûreté) generally takes the lead on organized crime investigations, although the intelligence arms often horn in on international cases, and the national customs police **Direction Nationale du Renseignement et des Enquêtes Douanières (DNRED)** has primary jurisdiction over smuggling, cybercrime, and counterfeit money.

Germany

With a legacy of totalitarian security forces from the Nazi Gestapo to the Communist Stasi, Germany rigorously delimits its intelligence agencies. Despite this resolution, Germany's **Bundesnachrichtendienst (BND),** the Federal Intelligence Service, began as a splinter group of Abwehr, SD, and SS operatives recruited by the CIA to spy on the Soviet bloc. The BND takes primacy not only in external intelligence operations (focused on HUMINT and close cooperation with Mossad) but in SIGINT, and in combating organized crime and WMD proliferation. The **Bundesamt für Sicherheit in der Informationstechnik (BSI),** or Federal Office for Information Technology Security, covers not only government information security, but the information security of the German banking industry. Germany's internal security agency, the **Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz (BfV),** or Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, limits its remit to counter-espionage and monitoring and infiltrating extremist groups, leaving international crime, counter-mafia work, national criminal record-keeping, and anti-smuggling operations to the **Bundeskriminalmt (BKA).** The elite counter-terrorist special forces unit **GSG 9** is a police agency of the **Bundespolizei** (**BPOL,** responsible for border, embassy, and transportation security), not a military unit.

Great Britain

The British intelligence apparatus is, for the most part, clearly delineated and quite competent. The Security Service, **MI5,** handles domestic intelligence, counter-espionage, and other threats to the Realm. The Secret Intelligence Service, **MI6,** the fictional home of James Bond and George Smiley, conducts external intelligence operations. Less well-known are Britain's all-source military and security intelligence group **Defence Intelligence** and its SIGINT, cybersecurity, and cryptanalytic arm **GCHQ** (Government Communications Headquarters). In general, British espionage agencies rely more heavily on HUMINT, with networks in some areas of the Middle East going back a century or more. Founded in 1883 to combat Irish terrorism, the **Special Branch** of London's Metropolitan Police is now officially called the Counter Terrorism Command or SO15. Its mission remains the same: thwart terrorism in London and coordinate police work with MI5 and other intelligence services.

Iran

Iran's secret police and intelligence organization, **Vezarat-e Ettela'at va Amniyat-e Keshvar (VEVAK)** is also known as VAJA, MISIRI, and MOIS depending on the source. It assassinates dissidents at home and abroad, assists Iran-allied terrorist groups (especially Hezbollah), traffics in WMD precursors, and monitors expatriate Iranian populations, as well as carrying out more conventional intelligence functions. The **Qods Force** is the Iranian Revolutionary Guard's special forces unit; it operates outside Iran advising allied militaries, carrying out deniable operations, and assisting terrorist groups.

Israel

Israel's external intelligence agency, **Mossad,** punches considerably above its weight in the espionage world. Its operations include kidnappings, assassinations of PLO and Hamas leaders, extraordinary renditions of Nazi war criminals, and sabotage of WMD components intended for enemies of Israel. It maintains generally good relations with the BND and MI6, as well as the CIA. Its katsas, or case officers, can draw on hundreds of sayanim, non-Mossad local friendlies (usually Jews) who support Israel. **Shin Bet** (officially called Shabak or the ISA), the Israeli domestic intelligence arm, handles counter-terrorism with the help of the "Duvdevan" and Sayeret Matkal special forces units of the IDF. **Unit 8200** is the Israeli SIGINT and cyberwarfare brigade under the Israeli military intelligence directorate, **Aman.**

Italy

Italy's intelligence agencies have been reshuffled twice in the last 40 years, following an attempted neo-fascist coup by elements of the military intelligence service (SID) in 1970 and the revelation of massive internal surveillance, intimidation of the press, and black operations against leftist politicians and magistrates by the SID's successor SISIMI in 2007. Currently, Italy's external intelligence agency **AISE,** domestic security agency **AISI,** and information security agency **DIS** operate under (theoretically) strict parliamentary control. Anti-Mafia investigations usually fall to the **ROS,** a special operations unit of the **Carabinieri,** Italy's military national police. Their work overlaps with another military police agency, the **Guardia di Finanza,** tasked with combating narcotics and financial crimes.

Poland

Immediately after the Cold War, Poland reorganized its intelligence services to eliminate the old SB security agency. Continued allegations of corruption, arms smuggling, and malfeasance associated with Soviet-era officials caused a further reshuffling of the civilian agency UOP in 2002 (now split into the **Intelligence Agency (AW)** for external intelligence and the **Internal Security Agency (ABW)** for internal security) and the military intelligence agency WSI in 2006 (now split into a counter-intelligence arm, **SKW,** and an intelligence arm, **SWW.** Polish agencies of all sorts have worked closely with the CIA and NSA in Iraq and elsewhere, starting as early as 1990.

Romania

Romania is another former Communist state with strong intelligence links to the U.S. intelligence community, mostly through its **Foreign Intelligence Service (SIE).** The **Romanian Intelligence Service (SRI)** is a domestic intelligence service, the successor to the feared Securitate of the Cold War era. Romania's Interior Ministry has its own criminal intelligence service, the **General Directorate for Intelligence and Internal Security (DGIPI).**

Russia

After the fall of Communism, the new Russian government reorganized the KGB into two agencies. Many old KGB hands simply retired, setting themselves up as fixers and bag men for the newly powerful Russian mafiyas; some of these new gangsters keep powerful connections in their former service. The **Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR)** took over the foreign intelligence portfolio of the old KGB First Directorate, and rapidly extended its power over Russian foreign policy and development. Every Russian business overseas, especially Gazprom and Aeroflot, provides cover to SVR agents, who engage in assassinations of dissidents, bioweapons espionage and smuggling, and conventional espionage. Even more power fell to the heirs of the KGB Second Directorate, the internal security and counter-espionage agency now known as the **Federal Security Service (FSB).** The FSB incorporates the border police as well as domestic surveillance, counter-intelligence, counter-terrorism, cyberwarfare, cryptology, and export control functions. It carries out targeted killings of Chechen and other terrorist leaders, and commands two units ("Alfa" and "Banner") of Spetsnaz special forces.

The **Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU)** of the Russian General Staff dwarfs them both. With six times as many spies in the field as the SVR, control of a global SIGINT network (the Sixth Directorate of the GRU operates listening posts in at least 60 Russian embassies, as well as enormous facilities in Cuba and Vietnam), a network of 130 satellites for ELINT and IMINT, and 25,000 Spetsnaz special ops troops under its command, the GRU is probably the single largest, most powerful intelligence organization on the planet. Like the SVR, the GRU carries out targeted killings both at home and abroad. Many of its agents are "illegals," running networks in host countries with no diplomatic or other government cover.

Sweden

Sweden unifies its domestic and foreign intelligence under its **Military Intelligence and Security Service (MUST).** Within MUST is a specific espionage office, the **Office for Special Acquisition (KSI),** which works with foreign intelligence agencies, especially the CIA and Shin Bet. In 1973, crusading journalists revealed a secret agency called **IB** within the Swedish armed forces, dedicated to infiltrating Sweden's neighbors (especially Finland), penetrating the Soviet Union, and monitoring radical groups in Sweden. IB has never been dissolved.

Turkey

The **Milli Istihbarat Teskilati (MIT)** is Turkey's intelligence and security organization. Formerly a military command, it is now over 90% civilian, although it still competes with the Ministry of Interior's domestic intelligence and security office, **KDSM,** on terrorism and internal security operations. The MIT plays a key role in Turkey's post-Cold War expansion of influence into the Middle East and the former Soviet bloc. Formerly, MIT recruited almost exclusively from family members of MIT officers; this is slowly changing.

Ukraine

Ukraine's **Foreign Intelligence Service (SZRU)** split off from the controversial **Security Service of Ukraine (SBU)** in 2005. Scandals, accusations of cronyism (the SBU director owns Ukraine's largest TV network) and botched serial killer investigations have dogged the SBU since Ukrainian independence. More seriously, the SBU may well have attempted to thwart Ukraine's "Orange Revolution" and return the country to the Russian sphere.

United States

The U.S. has 16 major elements in its intelligence community, and a dizzying number of ad hoc offices, committees, bureaus, and oversight boards. In addition, almost 2,000 independent contractors do some intelligence work for the U.S. government. It spends about $80 billion a year on everything from satellite launches to bribes for foreign officials; over 100,000 people work directly for some arm of U.S.

intelligence. The primary U.S. intelligence actors in Europe are the **Central Intelligence Agency (CIA),** America's foreign intelligence agency; the **National Security Agency (NSA),** America's SIGINT, cybersecurity, and cryptanalysis agency; and the **Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA),** which has increasingly worked around a CIA seen as obstructionist and incompetent by the Pentagon. Other key U.S. intelligence players in Europe include the **Office of Terrorism and Financial Intelligence (OTFI),** which monitors terrorist finances in European banks; the **Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI),** the U.S. domestic intelligence, counter-intelligence, and criminal intelligence agency, which works overseas to combat organized crime, terrorism, and cybercrime; and the **Diplomatic Security Service (DSS),** the State Department office tasked with counter-intelligence, embassy protection, passport fraud, and international fugitive pursuit.

The Vatican

From 1944 until at least 1956, the Vatican's intelligence arm in Eastern Europe was the National Military Union (NZW), an anti-communist Resistance movement in Poland; its successor (if any) is unknown. Various writers have argued that the **Sovereign Military Order of the Knights of Malta (SMOM),** an international hospital and ambulance service (and the successors of the Knights Hospitaller), also serves as a Vatican intelligence gathering system tied to the CIA. Others have fingered a theological internal-affairs brotherhood set up by Pope Pius X called Sodalitium Pianum, the conservative clerical movement Opus Dei, the Congregation for the Defense of the Faith (formerly the Inquisition), or the Pontifical Russian College for evangelism and ministry to Russian Catholics as the "real" Vatican spy service.

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Despite many well-meaning attempts, there is no truly multinational intelligence, police, or security agency in Europe. Many national bureaus or military services diligently attend inter-agency cooperative meetings; some of these groups even have permanent staff. Existing multinational bodies like NATO, the BIS, or the EU have intelligence committees or counter-terrorism and anti-mafia committees, again with permanent staff analysts. The UNDOC (UN Office on Drugs and Crime) serves as a sort of clearing-house for research; the closest thing to U.N.C.L.E. in the real world is probably the **Budapest Group,** a cooperative OSINT effort of 14 EU countries.

INTERPOL

The International Criminal Police Organization, better known as Interpol, has been in operation since 1923. Originally headquartered in Vienna, it fell under Gestapo control during WWII; since then, its base has moved to Lyon, France. It exists to coordinate police activity and information between its 188 member nations: an American FBI agent in Greece can coordinate with the Interpol liaison in Athens rather than trying to untangle the maze of local jurisdictions. Interpol keeps databases (especially fingerprints and stolen documents) and rap sheets on criminal activity supplied by its member police forces, emphasizing cross-border crime. All that said, there aren't Interpol cops chasing down criminals or making arrests; an Interpol "red notice" merely requests an arrest warrant from the local authorities.

Underground Europe

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, European organized crime has exploded in power, influence, and wealth. Much of this growth stems from the rise of the Russian Mafiya, and from the sudden opening of the "heroin road" from Central Asia through the Balkans to Central Europe. Increasing European economic and political integration has fed this trend as well; cross-border crime battens on more open cross-border flows of people, goods, and capital. Terrorists interested in funding their activities find ample opportunity for fanatics used to violence in such an environment; the linkage between terror groups and mafias goes back to the Italian Carbonari in the 1820s.

Intelligence agencies trying to track — or enable — clandestine movement across borders have a natural interest in smugglers of drugs, humans, or weapons. They nurture assets and alliances within criminal groups when they don't actively cooperate with them. The links between the FSB and the Russian mafiyas, or the MSS and the Triads, are well documented; the CIA is far from the only intelligence agency accused of padding its black budget by providing "protection" for drug traffickers. In short, players in the shadow world of underground Europe may be spies, crooks, or terrorists — or all three, depending on who's paying.

Terrorist Groups

Since 9/11, security and police agencies in Western Europe have made over 2,300 arrests for terrorist activity or conspiracy; in 2007 alone, terrorists planned almost 600 attacks (most of them thwarted) in those countries. **Al-Qaeda** and its Islamist front groups and allies are headline hogs, but old-school terror groups like the Basque **ETA** in Spain, the

Kurdish **PKK** (in Germany and anywhere else Turks live), and **Hezbollah** still set off bombs, or kill and kidnap targets. The Algerian Islamist **GIA** mounted a decade-long bombing campaign in France in the 1990s; it still operates under a lower profile. Old IRA bombers train young Macedonians; former Stasi paymasters keep their smart phones full of contacts in Italy and Lebanon.

The Russian Mafiya

The "Russian Mafiya" is something of a misnomer. There is no overarching criminal organization linking all of Russia's various criminal societies; rather, there are several thousand independent groups scattered all over Russia and the world that share a common past. The Soviet prison system bred a hardened aristocracy, the *vory v zakone,* or "thieves in law." The *vory* ran criminal gangs all across the USSR from inside the gulag, gangs that included various black-market operations in their smuggling activities. During the Brezhnev era, the Communist Party made a deal with the black marketeers in order to keep a semblance of a civilian economy functioning at all. When the USSR fell, the Party bureaucrats and their black-market contacts kept the system going at home, bringing in mostly KGB officers to provide hard currency and connections in the West, and demobilized Afghan war vets for muscle. The new mafiyas looted the Soviet vaults of diamonds, gold, oil, and anything else that would sell; the KGB set up the deals overseas and took their percentage. Roughly $2 billion per month flowed out of the old USSR into the mafiyas' bank accounts; by now, something like 80% of the banks in Russia are mafiya-owned, and two-thirds of Ukraine's economic activity likewise. The Russian mafiyas used this tsunami of cash (and those Afghan veteran killers) to buy and murder their way into the major criminal enclaves all over Europe, especially the French Riviera.

The various *bratva,* or "brotherhoods," of the Russian mafiya operate independently, coming together on an ad hoc basis for operations and then dissolving again: a true multicellular network (see p. 161). The biggest player is the **Solntsevskaya Bratva** out of the Solntsevsko neighborhood in Moscow; others include the **Tamborskaya Bratva** in St. Petersburg, the **Podolskaya Bratva,** the **Izmailovskaya Bratva** operating as far afield as Mexico, and the **Tverskaya Bratva.**

The Italian Mafias

America's Mafia, La Cosa Nostra, descended from Sicilian criminal families who emigrated to the United States. The relatives they left behind still run the **Sicilian Mafia,** trafficking heroin and arms and keeping a thumb on Italian politics and business despite a thirty-year anti-mafia campaign by a handful of brave magistrates. A different offshoot of the Sicilian Mafia in Calabria became the **'Ndrangheta,** an extended network of family clans that exploded in power after taking over the cocaine traffic in Europe in the 1990s. The 'Ndrangheta has a lucrative sideline in smuggling nuclear waste for illegal disposal in Third World countries. The **Camorra** began in Naples in the 18th century as a protection racket for illegal street gamblers; it now controls every aspect of the city and surrounding province. Its famous garbage monopoly pales next to its grip on heroin, prostitution, protection, and racketeering. A loose network of clans, its internecine wars kill around 100 people a year. Other regional mafias control Apulia and the Veneto, like other Italian mafias busily acquiring legitimate businesses in Italy and elsewhere to launder drug profits, with the connivance of local officials. All Italian mafias participate in the immense trade in illicit antiquities and art centered in Italy.

Other National Mafias

An estimate by the national police of the Netherlands tallied around 300 national or ethnic organized crime groups in that country; most of these groups have branches or connections all over cosmopolitan, urbanized Europe. Currently the **Albanian mafia** dominates the heroin routes up through the Balkans from Turkey and the sex trade in Britain, the **Nigerian mafia** controls human trafficking from Africa, the **Bulgarian mafias** are key players in human trafficking from Eastern Europe, the **Naša Stvar** (the Serbian mafia) keeps its hand in human trafficking and arms dealing, and the **Israeli mafia** (non-hierarchical and non-ethnic, including Arabs and Russians) dominates diamond smuggling and Ecstasy trafficking, but such roles and domains seldom remain hard and fast for long. The **Union Corse,** for example, once ran the famous "French Connection" in the heroin trade; it has been relegated to second-banana status by the Italian and Russian mobs in the Riviera since the 1990s, and a flood of Afghan heroin has driven the Corsicans' North African connections out of the market. Now, Moroccan gangs run hashish into Europe alongside illegal African immigrants bound for sweatshops or simply for undocumented labor wherever they can get it.

The Chechen mafia, the **Obshina,** has an enviable reputation for bloody, vengeful violence that allows them to punch above their weight wherever they go in Europe. They do not require actual Chechen descent for membership, although the connections between Chechen warlords and Islamic terrorism make them natural allies of al-Qaeda and kindred groups in Europe.

Other Organized Criminal Groups

The heirs to London's Krays and other East End gangs of the 1960s and 1970s are called the Firms; the **Clerkenwell Firm** in North London remains perilously atop the roost for now.

Various outlaw motorcycle gangs in Northern Europe and Scandinavia — and increasingly in Bosnia and the Balkans — serve as muscle and local drug lords, with sidelines in bank robbery and arms dealing.

The Chinese Triads have had a presence in Western Europe since the 19th century; then as now, their base is extortion of local "Chinatown" businesses and sweatshop labor supply. The **14K** and **Wo Shin Wo** Triads have drug, counterfeit and knockoff consumer goods, and lumber smuggling operations in Britain, France, and the Benelux countries; Triad "snakehead" people-smugglers hook up with Serbian mobsters to ship arms and gems to and from Burma and other interdicted countries. Triads also operate underground casinos and clubs in Europe, both as money laundering operations and as narcotics distribution points.

Japan's **Yakuza** launders money in Europe through Japan's heavy foreign investment there; its local operatives (mostly contract killers and negotiators) work out of Europe's largest Japanese communities, in London and Düsseldorf.

Prepping a City

You can include cities as stops in a story, more scenery or hook than anything else. Or you can knit them into the fabric of the conspiracy and the adventure, making the setting a constant factor in the game. Both of these approaches have their rewards: quick-and-dirty city building releases dazzling flashes of color, variety, and exoticism, while low-and-slow city development unlocks deeper layers of intrigue and increasing rewards of familiarity and control for players and Director alike.

Quick and Dirty City Building

You can begin quick and dirty city building either with the city or with the conspiracy. Beginning with the city may give you an idea of just what the vampires might be planning there, while beginning with the vampires' plan puts you on the alert for urban details that mesh with it. In my experience, switching back and forth between the two works best; start with the vampires if you have a neat idea, if not, look at the city until a neat idea occurs to you. Then look at it the other way around; find something neat about the city you can tie to your vampire plot, or try to find the vampires in the stuff you've already read about the city.

Vampires in the City

If you already have an idea of what the next operation should be, and you've picked the city based on player input or random stabbing at the Michelin atlas, then you're good to go. Skip to the next section, build the city, and then come back here to the OPFOR heading for final casting.

If not, start seeding your city: roll two dice. The lowest die is the level of the Conspyramid normally active in the city. If you come up with a 1, you may want to have a slightly higher-level conspirator visiting the city — but just running with a gang war in the streets of Ljujublana or Bilbao might be enough for a good night's action. You can always plant a clue to a higher level in the last scene if need be.

Check your Conspyramid; if something on that level seems like it might fit with the city, go ahead and put it in. Even if nothing matches precisely, you can insert branch offices, roving inspectors, hit teams, couriers, convoys, or anything else you like into the story: the Conspyramid is a sketch, not a straitjacket. Figure out which node they lead back to or originate from, so you know where to start aiming clues.

Activity

Now decide what the vampires are up to here and now. If you don't have an idea right away, go for one of the three easy standards: money, blood, or weirdness. If you can't decide which, roll a die.

Money: The vampire conspiracy controls something lucrative in town: a drug ring, a casino, a mobbed-up bank, an art gallery, a bonded customs warehouse. Figure out what makes big money fast here; the vampires secretly run it.

Blood: The vampire conspiracy runs human trafficking through this city, or keeps a big string of prostitutes or sweatshop workers here. Look into docks, transit corridors, red-light districts, and industrial slums. Or perhaps the vampires can harvest blood or sex or life energy from their massively popular nightclub, sports arena, or other meat-market gathering place.

Weirdness: This city has some magical significance, or a torpid master vampire, or a ley nexus, or a gate to Hell, or a viral research lab, or a crashed UFO, or some other reason that the vampires need to keep a post here. This will likely depend on the specifics of the vampires' nature. This category is also where you put a human cult that worships or otherwise serves the vampires, or the equivalent: psionically brainwashed pods, infection pools deep in the ghetto or banlieue, Chinese neighborhoods dominated by a jiangshi.

OPFOR

Now that you have a pretty good idea of how high up the bad guys go in the conspiracy, and possibly what it is they're after here, go ahead and sketch out three layers of opposition forces: the city boss, the henchman, and the mooks. This gives you, at the most basic, six scenes: a hook scene to discover the mooks, and then a fight; a surveillance or chase to track the henchman, and then a fight; and a final clue scene to find the city boss, and a final fight. Don't do this every time, or the game will get stale, but don't be afraid to lean on it if you absolutely have to run something in an hour. Spend your creativity coming up with scary details and horrible specifics about the vampires' plan.

City Boss: Who runs the conspiracy's activities in the city? Don't go into too much detail; just figure out who she reports to, what evil thing she does personally, and what her immediate plans are. If she controls some other monster, or has vampiric powers of her own, decide that. The city boss may be some operative from out of town, or the city boss may resent the outsider, giving you a possible story twist. Think of one or two clues that can point toward a node in the Conspyramid, and place them with her.

Henchman: Pick this guy based on who would be fun to fight; he's the "level boss" for this operation. He's who the city boss counts on to run things and put out fires, more right-hand man than Igor. Maybe he's a Renfield with two ghouls, or maybe she's a bloated and powerful strix with eyes on every statue in the city. This is where to add color and a bit of strangeness: a vampiric Oddjob. Even if he's a normal human, he should be dangerous: the captain of the local SWAT team, a Mafia-connected club owner, a sociopathic millionaire. If the city boss represents a Conspyramid level of 4 or higher, there is probably more than one henchman in play.

Mooks: Base these guys on the vampires' activity. If it's human trafficking, they're mafia thugs; if it's a cult, they're cultists; if it's drugs, they're gang bangers and corrupt cops. Toss in enough to get the players sweating, and figure out how they stumble across the agents or vice versa. This can be as simple as tagging Streetwise ("Word on the street is that fresh girls come into Aki's place every Saturday morning") or calling for a Sense Trouble test ("Those Chechens have been watching you ever since you came out of the church with a full water bottle"). If you have time, plant a subtler clue in the players' path, tied to the specific conspiracy activity in the city, that leads to the mooks.

The City Around the Vampires

If you open more than one book or go to more than two websites while building a city in quick and dirty style, you're working too hard at it. (Full disclosure: I always work too hard at it.) You can get virtually everything you need for a single-operation city from Wikipedia, Google Maps, and a *Lonely Planet* or *Rough Guide* travel book. In the alpha playtest, my players joked that ***Night's Black Agents*** was a three-corebook game: the GUMSHOE rules, *Lonely Planet Western Europe,* and *Lonely Planet Central Europe.* Don't worry about stereotyping or exaggerating your city: that's the whole point of quick and dirty city building. Make an impression, splash some local color around, and get to the big chase or fight.

If you'd like to do a little more work, Google the name of your city along with suitable keywords like: *riot, UFO, cult, gang, killer, terrorism, mafia, spy, gun,* or (what the heck) *vampire.* You're not likely to get a whole adventure plot dropped into your lap, but your creativity may be sparked.

At its most basic, your quick and dirty city writeup has three elements. By the time you've done enough clicking and browsing to fill out those three elements, you should be able to come up with three possible story hooks. Of those, one will probably look like the best, especially in conjunction with the local vampire conspiracy you've sketched out before or alongside the city.

Population

This figure, available from the city's Wikipedia entry, gives you a basic sense of how big, crowded, and anonymous the city is, and how big and well-equipped its police force is likely to be.

Conflict

This is a little tougher: pick one conflict that might epitomize the city, and write it down. This is more of a pointer to possible story development and complication, but it's important to at least swing at thinking of the city as a place where other stories are happening too. Is the country or city in the throes of an election? Are the police corrupt or resented? Is new economic development wrecking old neighborhoods? Is there an active terrorist or separatist campaign going on? Soccer riots, sectarian battles, crusading reformers, radical mosques: any or all of it can be grist for your mill. Check Google News for your city, and look for the angriest or most aggrieved headlines.

If you're still stumped, check the city's ethnic balance. Most cities in Europe have a substantial immigrant population and a political party or street gang (or both) who resent it. If you're really stumped, make something up: the Albanian mob is moving in on the Camorra's action here, and gang war is about to break out over the heroin trade.

Now put the vampires on one side of the conflict, and you have a natural source of HUMINT and possible allies.

Backdrops

This is easy; come up with some places that look neat for fights or meetings or chases or just establishing shots. These might be the tourist landmarks right there in the *Rough Guide,* or they might be places highlighted in the city's Wikipedia entry, or they might be strange-looking buildings you spotted on Google Earth.

Do a Google Image search for your city and see what comes up on the first two or three screens. What really catches your eye?

Don't neglect the obvious possibilities that almost every city has: cemeteries, docks or railway yards or airports, parks, picturesque ruins, bridges, embassies or consulates, military bases, sewers and subways. Again, Wikipedia or Google Maps might point you toward something promising, or a single simple search can turn something up. Tourist guidebooks will give you swanky hotels, fashionable nightclubs, and ornate museums. All those places will have websites, if you really want more visual stimulation or just neat handouts for the players.

List backdrops until it starts to seem like work, then stop and print out a decent Google Maps map of your city. Mark any key locations on it, making stuff up that seems like it might be right if need be. If you have a player from Thessaloniki, she can correct you if you get something wrong; otherwise, don't bother checking the precise grid coordinates for the casino you decided was on the east side of town.

Three Hooks

Now from what you've already got, and what you've decided the vampires are up to, write down three story hooks tied to your city. This is another place to try a Google News search, this time looking for weird, violent, or sleazy headlines.

You will usually have at least a few specific ideas, but here are some general ones if you're really stuck:

- Conflict at backdrop
- Vampire activity moving into backdrop
- Vampire activity stoking conflict for gain of money or power
- Vampire city boss killing or suborning lead agitator in conflict
- Defector from one side of the conflict threatens the vampires somehow
- Someone important (to the players, to the city) vanished from backdrop
- There is a powerful thing in the museum, or a flash drive with the plans, or a memoir that can break this whole thing wide open
- Foreign visitor or local journalist (involved in conflict?) accidentally stumbles over vampire activity
- Something from the city's history turns up unexpectedly and both sides of the conflict (and the vampires) scramble to control or claim it

In general, given elements A, B, C, and D, a hook looks like this: A opposes B over C; D is neutral or holds the balance. Those elements might be vampires, objects, backdrops, civilians, clandestine agencies, terrorist cells, factions, gangs, or anything else.

Go back to the OPFOR section on p. 170; who would be on which side of the conflict? What backdrops would they logically frequent? Put some flesh on those clichéd bones, pick the one you like the best, and start running with it. Remember, the city only has to last for one operation, and that can be as fast and furious as it needs to be to keep the players from peeking behind the scrim.

If you're overflowing with great ideas for your city, on the other hand, consider laying down a long and technical deep background for it.

Low and Slow City Development

In most cases, quick and dirty is good enough: you can get one or two killer operations out of a city, and move on to the next lead (or flee the last enemy) in the next city. But some campaigns, and some cities, demand a deeper creative (and research) commitment. You can certainly start with a quick-and-dirty writeup, and probably should. But you will want to add more. Perhaps you fell in love with the city while doing the initial research; perhaps it's your home town and you know it really well; perhaps you just watched a TV series set there or read a book about it. Or maybe you've designed a conspiracy centered on a specific city: the vampire lord is buried in Cairo, or the Nazis were vampires so lots of adventures are destined to happen in Munich, or everything always points to Bucharest.

For those cities, and those stories, you can build low and slow. Treat the city like a pot of chili: keep it simmering, keep adding spices and meat, and you'll never go hungry for stories. You will never be "done" with a low-and-slow city: you can always add another detail, look up another odd fact, find another neat location for a dead drop or an ambush, introduce another informant or victim or both. Each new element brings its own story along with it; work up what happens in the sequel, too. These cities can support multiple scenarios or long campaign arcs,

with only the occasional side trip to the countryside or the capital.

Lay of the Land

Get a sense of your city's geography, including its human terrain. If it has a "north side" and a "south side" or any other clearly demarcated neighborhoods, boil them down to an unfair generalization and then start working on exceptions. You need to be able to point your players in specific directions, and toward specific landmarks; a low-and-slow city needs to feel more real and more tangible than a quick chyron and an establishing shot. Leave the backdrops in the background for now; invent or discover locations you can tune for your story purposes and make sure they fit wherever you've put them.

Gateways

All that said: Your city is a stage. It is designed to support stories, to give them a place to happen and let the lights shine on them. Find the metaphorical "stage doors" of your city; where do strangers enter? Not just airports, railroad stations, and ports (although at least one of those are likely to become crucial settings going forward) but locations that draw strangers: museums, government facilities, tourist destinations, archives. For anyone (or anything) that enters your city, figure out which gateway makes narrative and symbolic sense.

Marketplaces

Where do the agents (or anyone else) go to get what they need? Where do the agents make gun deals; where do the vampires feed? Figure out the local markets for blood, money, and weirdness; figure out the vampires' angle on all three. Crowds are markets, selling anonymity and blood; where do crowds reliably gather in your city? Find or define stadiums, tourist attractions, and riot-prone parks.

Define or discover where in your city sex, drugs, guns, and high-end consumer goods are bought and sold. Remember that markets exist in information, too: what street, specifically, has the word on the street? A city with multiple neighborhoods or varied demographics may have more than one gathering place for information and crowds. As a rule of thumb, every other NPC source should meet the agents in a new location; set up a rhythm of familiarity and variety to encourage the players' familiarity not just with the map of the city but with its informational geography. Reward player visits to familiar locales with information and clues.

Home Turf

Once the agents are settled in somewhere, start building out their home turf. What's their neighborhood bar or bath-house or mosque like? Who are they likely to meet there? Who would stand out? If the agents have local Solaces, where do they live? Where do they meet the agents?

Factions

If the only presence in the city is a single, monolithic vampire conspiracy, that impoverishes the story, much as growing nothing but one crop tires out the soil. If each operation goes after the same conspiracy, you need the variety that different quick-and-dirty cities can provide. Low-and-slow cities, almost by definition, have more going on than a branch office of Vampires, Inc.

But definitely start with your conspiracy; figure out which nodes in your Conspyramid are present in the city and begin sketching in their key players. Be guided by the Rule of Four: players can't remember more than four details at a time. So the conspiracy here should have a maximum of four levels, usually from street level (Level 1) up to national (Level 4), but you can skip a level or assume a generic mass of gangbangers and thugs are always available down around Level 1 to fill out a mook squad.

Now figure out which key players aren't team players. Which henchman aspires to greater things? Which boss has her own plans that she hasn't necessarily told Level 6 about? In such a gathering of conspirators, it should almost be axiomatic that at least one of them is running their own conspiracy of some sort, if only as insurance against their conspiring rivals.

Other Conspiracies

Now add three more underground or background players. (Rule of Four again: Four factions, tops. "Independent players" need to have some relationship to one of the main factions, even if it's "kill them on sight.") They don't have to be vampires, or even know that vampires exist: what they do have to be is plausibly involved in multiple spy stories in the city. Ideally, they are too big, too distributed, too protected, or too powerful to eliminate in a single operation.

Some examples of other conspiracies to add:

- Rival vampire conspiracy
- Rival occult conspiracy: werewolf serial-killer ring, magical coven, UFO contactee church, etc.
- Insanely powerful single being with many local assets
- Anti-vampire conspiracy
- Multinational corporation connected to crime or espionage

- Major intelligence network: not local, or not official (e.g., CIA, GRU, MI6, MSS)
- Major criminal network: rivals to organized crime groups within Conspyramid
- Major terrorist cell

Stories

Player buy-in is strongest with a good initial set-up. Of the four factions, if two are enemies of the agents, one is a clear villain, and the fourth is a potential ally, that gets stories going immediately. The players might decide to approach the ally, kill off the villain, or begin investigating their enemies: three possible operations immediately present themselves. If you need a little push or a pull, tie one of the factions to an agent's past, previous patron, or Drive. In a Mirror mode game, pick one faction to be running an agent's Solace. Providing the personal connection brings the setting alive.

If you haven't yet, figure out some conflicts for your city, as on p. 170. Put the main conspiracy on one side, and figure out which of the other factions backs the other side. For at least one conflict, keep your main conspiracy neutral or in the background, promote two of the secondary conspiracies to antagonists.

Figure out each faction's ultimate goal: stories can come from thwarting or aiding it, or from picking up the pieces as goals collide. The main conspiracy should have more than a goal. Provide them with something closer to a plan: do this, to set up that, to bring about the third thing. At the very least, that provides you with three potential operations.

Seeds

With your main story arcs and ongoing conflicts established, start growing scenes and even whole operations from story seeds. Story seeds spark at least one session's worth of action and investigation; three or four scenes, minimum. These can be narrative relief, "one-off" defeats of lone horrors or isolated nodes of the conspiracy, or you can tie them into another operation or the primary story line. Story seeds come from two sources: specific physical locations, and unusual events. As you research your city, you will encounter lots of both: some cities, like London or Prague, soon appear to be entirely constructed of weird, horrific, or evocative places and times.

Specific physical locations can inspire specific activities or single scenes: a car chase down the Spanish Steps in Rome, an eviscerated corpse discovered at the old Checkpoint Charlie in Berlin, a lightning storm playing around the spires of the Sagrada Familia in Barcelona. Find evocative locations the way you find backdrops (see p. 171), but think of them in relationship to the city at large, and to the ongoing story you've set there. The relevant questions for the Director to ask when nurturing such a seed: "What did the vampires do there?" "What happens to the agents there?" If somewhere in your city triggers your imagination, you have a highlight point for a more conventional operation, or even the catalyst for a scenario that goes in a direction you wouldn't have considered just thinking about the factions or conflicts.

Unusual events comprise not just standard thriller elements — defections, bombings, daring robberies, assassinations — but also standard horror elements — serial killers, hauntings, cults, and UFO sightings. They might not be so unusual at first blush: a siege by Napoleon's troops, an outbreak of the Black Death, or an annual festival of the Three Magi on Epiphany. But all of them are implicitly bound up with stories, and those stories might as well be about vampires. Use those stories in the same way you use seeds from locations: in relation to the city and to the ongoing story. The relevant questions for the Director: "What if it was vampires?" "What did the vampires gain or lose by it?" "What does it make the vampires do today?" Adding a historical dimension to your city deepens your stories; adding an uncanny element makes them more interesting and, paradoxically, more real.

Three Cities: Quick and Dirty

These three writeups provide the "City Around the Vampires" part of a quick and dirty city build. (Belgrade makes a fourth quick and dirty city example, on p. 209.) The "Vampires in the City" section depends on your conspiracy, and on your vampires.

Bucharest

Bucharest is the capital of Romania, known before its devastation in WWII and its brutalization by the Communist regime as the "Paris of the Balkans." The Dâmbovita River (mostly channelized in concrete banks) runs through it, and a chain of lakes marks the northern edge of the city center. Like Rome and Moscow, Bucharest also boasts seven low hills.

Population

1.9 million (somewhat larger than Philadelphia)

Conflict

Over the last several years, Bucharest has seen riots and protests over everything from a cutoff of heat and power to the impoverished Ferentari neighborhood (home to Bucharest's Gypsy population), to public benefit cuts for police, to

disputed elections, to animal cruelty laws, to football matches, to gay rights. A congeries of agitated factions pressures Bucharest's impulsive, politically independent mayor.

Backdrops

Curtea Veche: The "Old Court" holds Bucharest's oldest church (1546) and the ruins of the original palace built in 1459 by Vlad Tepes, the Impaler. Urban legend claims his dungeons and escape passages undergird the whole district.

Palace of the Parliament: The second-largest building in the world (after the Pentagon), a "House of the People" planned in sumptuous detail by Romania's Communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu but left unfinished after the Revolution. It has 12 floors, 3100 rooms, and a warren of underground passages and garages, including a nuclear survival bunker 20 meters down.

University Square: A remnant of Bucharest's 19th century glory days, including the Bucharest National Theatre, the Museum of Bucharest (in the former Sutu Palace), the Coltea Hospital, and the University itself. Bucharest's intellectual heart and used-book district.

Three Hooks

- Earthquakes centered in the mountainous Vrancea district northeast of Bucharest shook the city in 1802, 1940, 1977, and 1986. The 1940 earthquake damaged Vlad Tepes' supposed gravesite, Snagov Monastery, and coincided with the disappearance of his body from the Bucharest National History Museum. Is the vampire conspiracy behind the ongoing seismological charting of Vrancea, tracing some vampire lord's slow waking?
- After the 1989 revolution, Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife Elena were buried in pseudonymous graves. Two sites in the Ghencea Civil Cemetery were identified as theirs in 1990, now sporting crosses, roses, and candles burning around the clock — socialist sentimentality, or anti-vampire vigil? In July 2010, the bodies were exhumed for DNA tests; the agents need to find out who stole those samples.
- Among the 250+ kilos of nuclear material confiscated by the Romanian security police between 1989 and 1996 (in over 70 arrests) were 32 kg of "red mercury," a legendary substance desired by nuclear terrorists, techno-alchemists … and vampires. The agents get a lead on the whereabouts of this specific batch, seized in Pitesti west of Bucharest in June 1995, but who fed them that lead, and why, and what exactly does red mercury do?

London

London is the capital of England and of the United Kingdom. The Thames River dominates local geography, and divides its northern and southern halves. Since Anglo-Saxon times at least, its West End has been wealthier and more elegant than either its East End or South London.

Population

8 million (the same as New York City)

Conflict

London is the center of political and economic life in Britain, and thus a focus of espionage (Russian dissident Aleksandr Litvinenko was poisoned in London in 2006), protest movements (such as the anti-austerity mass demonstrations in 2011, which attracted 500,000 people; or an anti-police brutality march later that year that spiraled into rioting and arson all across the country) and terrorism from the IRA to al-Qaeda. London has long had a famously open attitude to foreign radical activity; long before London was called "Londonistan" for its many Islamist mosques, it hosted anarchists and communists from Marx on down. The 7/7 bombings of 2005 are only the most dramatic and successful recent terror plot in the city.

Backdrops

30 St. Mary Axe: Also known as "the Gherkin," this 40-story glass-and-chrome skyscraper bulges weirdly above the City, visible from Whitechapel and elsewhere in the East End. Its primary tenant is Swiss Re, an insurance firm.

British Museum: Home to the Elgin Marbles, the Rosetta Stone, the Sutton Hoo mask, 140 mummies, and seven million other antiquities and artifacts. Its 100+ galleries wind for 3.2 km; around and below them twists a labyrinth of storage rooms and offices.

London Eye: This Ferris wheel towers 135 meters above the south bank of the Thames at Lambeth. Each car holds 25 people, taking about 30 minutes for a complete rotation.

Three Hooks

- On April 16, 1922, three men reported being attacked by an invisible vampire in Coventry Street, Piccadilly. Possibly connected: Highgate Cemetery in North London is haunted by a vampire spirit. Most sightings

occurred between 1963 and 1974, but at least one encounter dates from 2007.

- According to Stoker's novel, Dracula purchased an estate in Purfleet, east of London, called "Carfax." A tranche of Purfleet real-estate records from the 1880s has just surfaced, but those who handle it die, their anemic corpses showing throat wounds. This *has* to be a vampire trailing his coat for the agents … unless Stoker's novel somehow holds a nugget of fact.
- The tabloids report a rash of "werewolf" sightings on the Central and Victoria Underground lines near Hyde Park, and in Hyde Park itself. Plotting the reports on a map indicates their center is the Russian Embassy — but are the ghouls (if that's what they are) shadowing or serving a diplomat there?

Tunis

The capital of Tunisia, Tunis lies between two lakes. A causeway and deepwater channel dredged through Lake Tunis on the east connects it to the Mediterranean at the port of La Goulette. The city slopes from hills on the west down to the lakeshore.

Population

728,000 (about the same as Charlotte, North Carolina)

Conflict

Protest movements all across Tunisia beginning in 2010 unseated its longtime dictator Zine el Abidine Ben Ali. A series of successor and caretaker governments also faced riots and protests; elections in October 2011 installed a primarily Islamist government. Supporters of the old regime remain in Tunis, currently keeping a low profile; other groups seek to infiltrate the new government.

Backdrops

Bardo Museum: Housed in a former royal palace, the Bardo features ancient Roman mosaics, as well as Carthaginian idols and classical busts and bronzes. Galleries close and reopen unexpectedly.

Carthage: The ruins of this ancient city (and its Roman-era successor) lie along the shore northeast of Tunis, interspersed with luxury villas and hotels. The mass grave known as the Tophet holds the remains of 20,000 infants sacrificed to Moloch and other Carthaginian deities.

The Medina: The medieval center of Tunis now houses only 15,000 people; the Zitouna Mosque and National Library rise above its legendary souks and crooked alleys, thronged with tourists. Even foot chases here count as cramped (see p. 55).

Three Hooks

- The Bardo Museum holds many clay funerary masks used by the Carthaginians to keep predatory spirits away from the dead. Could their twisted visages also repel modern vampires? If the vampires resemble the Ancient Stones (see p. 145), agents will also be curious about the crude face carved into a shapeless rock ball in Gallery 4, tentatively dated to early Carthaginian times.
- Tunis was the headquarters of the PLO from 1982 to 1991, with significant staff remaining until 2003. Agents here may relatively inconspicuously investigate leads on conspiracy trails that lead to modern Palestine and Israel, or point back to Soviet support for Middle Eastern terror networks.
- The period after a revolution is prime time for spies and asset recruiters. Officials and informers of Tunisia's State Security Division, or Mukhabarat, peddle government secrets (not only their own government, either) in exchange for protection, while foreign agencies jockey to insert their own pawns into the new government's Interior Ministry. In the turmoil, any information the Mukhabarat had about vampires or the conspiracy surfaces if the agents use the right bait.

Marseille: Low and Slow

This writeup takes one city, specifically Marseille on the south coast of France, and looks at it through the lens of ***Night's Black Agents.*** I picked Marseille because of two movies: *The French Connection* (of course) and an undeservedly obscure 1974 Michael Caine thriller called *The Destructors*. Both deal with the murky areas where crime and politics intersect; they make good story material for tracking down a conspiracy such as *The French Connection's* heroin ring, or planning an op. (*The Destructors* is also called *The Marseille Contract*; the CIA hires a deniable assassin to get at a crime boss.) Marseille also shows up in thrillers from *Traitor* to *Transporter*; its gangs are legendary and its port, the fourth-largest in Europe and the busiest in the Mediterranean, has been notorious for smuggling since medieval times.

CITIES AND ABILITIES

Where, precisely, agents use their General abilities can affect the Difficulty of the test. In some cases, it's as simple as language skills: if nobody knows Albanian, tests like Disguise, Gambling, and Surveillance become more difficult in Tirana. Sometimes, local conditions alter the Difficulty: it's easier to get across the border into Belgium than into Belarus whether you're testing Cover or Infiltration. Network tests for police cover-ups are easier in corrupt cities like Naples; harder in more transparent cities like Stockholm. Similar modifiers apply to attempts to score weapons (easier in war zones, harder in Britain) or drugs (easier in wealthy cities and ports; harder in provincial towns). Infiltration and Surveillance are both more difficult in cities with heavy CCTV coverage like London, if your enemies have access to the feed. Which they always do.

In general, goose the Difficulty up or down by 1 for local conditions, in addition to any adjustment for the specific nature of the challenge.

This writeup does not spend a lot of space giving general details about Marseille: you can get those the same place I got them, Wikipedia and the *Rough Guide to Provence.* Instead, it gives a worked example of how to translate a real-world city into a hub of vampiric danger and conflict. Also as a nod to space considerations, this section assumes one specific vampire conspiracy, the Children of the Dragon from p. 144. Most of these details and suggestions should be easily twistable to any vampire conspiracy you invent; ideally, they'll point you toward your own monstrous creations.

The Lay of the Land

Marseille is the third-biggest city in France, about the size of San Francisco. Sited on the Mediterranean coast known as the Côte d'Azur, it is an industrial city, not a Riviera playground. It is also the oldest city in France, founded by Greek colonists around 600 B.C. as a trading post in the wilds of Gaul. It has been an entrepôt and crossroads ever since: now, almost a quarter of Marseille's population is Muslim, mostly immigrants from North Africa. Very broadly, the north of the city is industrial or Muslim; the south of the city is commercial and French; but Marseille integrates its immigrants (and its poverty) more thoroughly than most French cities.

Gateways

Symbolically, since the vampires come from deeper in Europe, their minions and agents more likely arrive at the main train station, the Gare Saint-Charles, an immense Second Empire pile with a sparkling new high-speed rail terminal linking Marseille to Paris in three hours. (This is also where the shuttle from Marseille-Provence Airport drops off passengers.) Some may also come in from the east on the highways from the Riviera.

Other influences and strangers come in from the sea. Marseille's original port, now the Old Port, is mostly for tourist and fishing traffic. A ferry service from Corsica, Sardinia, Algeria, and Tunisia lands at the Gare Maritime, a railway station in the 2nd arrondisement to the north of the city center on the Joliette Docks, begun in the 1830s as a new port. In the postwar era, the New Port expanded much further north into a modern shipyard and container port, the end point of the original "French Connection" heroin trade. Since 1990, it has fallen on harder times as European integration increasingly allowed shippers to bypass Marseille's legendary crime syndicates and powerful unions. More recently, Joliette has gentrified as the docks redevelop in glass and steel offices. Thus, it can represent not only the influx of immigrants but the decline of old Marseille in the face of vampiric invasion.

Markets

Tourists throng the Old Port, providing cover for agents and food for vampires throughout the 1st arrondisement. The locals reliably (even fanatically) gather at the Parc Channot stadium on the south side of the city for OM (Olympique de Marseille) football matches. The nearby Palais des Sports hosts boxing, skating, and other events; excellent cover for attacks of any kind.

Marseille's nightclubs attract their own predators and prey; anything from German techno to American country music to Moroccan rai can pump out into the streets almost anywhere in the city. The red-light district near the Opera House in the Old Port caters to

tourists; more industrial-scale dives near the New Port serve sailors and workers likewise.

Marseille shops at the Centre Bourse shopping center, or along the slightly gone-to-seed grand avenue known as the Canebière ("Hemp Street"). The hemp traffic has moved out to districts like Clos le Rose, where hashish and cannabis gangs sell and war over drugs and weapons. The street market in the Cours Julien sells everything else, from antiquarian books to fresh flowers and herbs.

Shoppers for information stop at La Mistral, a gangland watering hole in the 2nd arrondisement, reasonably neutral turf for the Corsican and Italian mafias. Others might trawl the park around the Porte d'Aix, a triumphal arch erected to celebrate the conquest of Algeria, now a gathering point for Marseille's young Muslim men.

Four Factions

For two centuries, Corsican families ran the port in Marseille, very much including smuggling and other criminal operations. In the late 1980s, the Italian mafias began to move in on the Corsicans' turf, but stumbled due to combined onslaughts by French authorities and Russian mobsters. Since 2000, almost all the key Corsican crime figures have been killed or forcibly retired by … well, in this setting, by vampires.

The Vampires

Radu the Bloody, a full Linea Dracula vampire, runs the vampires' operations in Marseille. He charts an uneven course between Vlad Tepes and Count Dracula, both of whom are represented by Russian mafiya bratvas elsewhere on the Riviera. Radu is the *pakhan* (boss) of the Dagestany Bratva (mostly Russians from the Caucasian enclave of Dagestan), his main muscle in Marseille. His *sovietnik* (consigliere) **Enzo Corvino** is an (Italian-Hungarian) assign, loyal to John Dracula's line; Radu's *obshchak* (bookkeeper) **Shimon Kurusets** is one of Vlad's assigns. Both have imported feral vampires (see p. 149) as deniable assets stashed in mafiya warehouses. To compensate, Radu keeps a tight hold on his four brigadiers, all Renfields: they run his extortion, theft, murder, and prostitution operations. Kurusets controls the local Georgian mafiya, run by **Tanel Onyani;** it handles human trafficking and heroin. For his part, Corvino has the local DNRED office completely penetrated, and runs other contacts in local law enforcement (mostly bribed rather than Renfielded).

Radu's plan is simple: kill or co-opt the underworld power structure in Marseille, turning troublesome outsiders like the Camorra over to his tame French law enforcers to build their credibility and power base. With that complete, he can begin directing Dracula capital into the suddenly cooperative unions and suddenly modern port facilities, until Marseille becomes the funnel for everything going into or out of Europe in the Mediterranean.

Goals

Radu wants to cement his control over Marseille, and to keep both Vlad and John off his neck. Corvino and Kurusets want each other purged; both try constantly to infiltrate and suborn the other's network. Nobody wants the whole city to explode in internecine war.

The Lamia

A cult of a black goddess identified with Persephone, queen of the underworld, thrived in Marseille under the Greeks and Romans. In 472 A.D. the Catholic Church transferred the cult to their own "sacred whore," St. Mary Magdalene, who according to pious legend fled to Marseille out of Egypt, bringing with her Lazarus, returned from the dead. The Basilica of St. Victor, Marseille's oldest church, south of the Old Port on the site of the former Roman cemetery, venerates a mysterious Black Madonna with torchlight processions on Candlemas and pastry ships sold in the stalls during festivals. Farher south, on the highest point in the city, the Basilica of Notre-Dame de la Garde kept its own Black Madonna known as La Brune; the neo-Byzantine church itself is *la bonne mère,* the "good mother" of Marseille.

All these tales and legends try to name the ancient lamia dwelling in Marseille. The North Africans (who poured into the city beginning in the 1950s with the *pied-noir* white settlers and continuing today with Muslim Moroccans, Algerians, and Tunisians) call her **Aisha Qandesha** after a legendary succubus in Moorish lore. That name may descend from Astarte Qadesha, the Carthaginian sacred whore and "goddess of the city," or Marseille's lamia may indeed be that goddess, come over the sea from Africa before the Romans.

In 1792, the French Revolutionaries profaned all the churches in Marseille, and Aisha Qandesha could stretch outside her crypts unconfined by ritual and relics. She took root in La Panier, the city's oldest quarter, north of the Old Port. When Napoleon's gifted subordinate General **Jean-Baptiste Kléber** was assassinated in Cairo in 1800, the dictator had his mummified body held in Marseille's Chateau d'If island prison to avoid popular disquiet. Aisha resurrected him to be her guardian and warden, a wise precaution after the resacralization of the churches penned her up again in 1807.

Her other main servitor is **Marco Sfalgi,** a Renfield who has worked as an archivist for one or another government department in Marseille since the Restoration of 1814. He knows every dirty

supernatural deal that has ever gone down in the city; Aisha keeps him immortal as a reward for his service.

Through cutouts, Kléber ran the waterfront for her; after she transferred her affections from the Union Corse, his main tool became La Brise de Mer ("wind from the sea"), a Corsican gang of daring robbers. Radu's men have killed her main lieutenants "the Belgian" (in 2000), "the Gremlin" (in 2006), and "the Big Blond" (in 2008), and hit the Corsican heads of the gang in 2009. To recruit new blood, Aisha will have to resurface — with Radu waiting in ambush.

Goals

Aisha wants Radu (and the Linea Dracula) out of Marseille. More generally, she wants Marseille to return to its former glory. Kléber wants power again; Sfalgi may want to switch to the winning side.

The Spies

Vichy France maintained a secret intelligence apparat disguised as L'Entreprise des Travaux Ruraux ("Rural Work Enterprise"), an agricultural engineering office. This **TR Group** considered Germany "Enemy One" and Britain "Enemy Two," and rounded up agents of both powers, along with Communists and independent Resistance fighters. Captain Paul Paillole commanded the TR Group from Marseille, which continued operations even after the south fell under direct German administration in 1942. Its interrogations of Communists, Nazis, and British agents revealed the scope of the Linea Dracula conspiracy (at that time tearing itself in two after Vlad Tepes' 1940 resurrection) and uncovered evidence of Aisha Qandesha's existence. The TR group assisted the Nazis in their dynamiting of the La Panier quarter in January 1943, sifting through the rubble for their own purposes.

After the war, the TR Group worked with the terrorist OAS until the de Gaulle coup of 1958. It then reached a modus vivendi with the Gaullist security state, and cultivated good relationships with other intelligence agencies on all sides of the Cold War. (Its hefty sheaves of evidence of collaboration by influential French politicians helped not a little.) It allied itself with other mystically minded clandestine organizations, especially Italy's P2 Lodge of Masonic conspirators. **Lorca Vitale** is P2's man in Marseille; he masterminded the attempted takeover of Marseille by the Camorra and the Genoese mafia in the 1990s under former capo Michele Zaza. With the Italians knocked out by the Russians and the French government, Vitale depends on the TR Group for support.

The TR Group has brought in the Chechen Obshina to destabilize the Russian mobs, and to investigate rumors of Caucasian occult practices that might prove helpful to their ongoing researches.

Goals

The TR Group wants to learn about the occult truths of the world, and then use those truths to gain power over France, Europe, and North Africa. Vitale wants to get an independent power base using the Camorra or 'Ndrangheta or anyone, really. The Chechens want to take over Marseille's underworld.

The Terrorists

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) cannot believe this is so difficult. On paper, Marseille should be a glorious flashpoint in the war against the infidel: the city almost voted in the quasi-fascist and xenophobic Front Nationale, while a quarter of the city is Muslim, and the immigrants are (like most everywhere in France) poorer and more radicalized than the population at large. But Marseille stubbornly refuses to explode: alone of French cities, it had no outbreaks of riots and car torchings in 2005; its current right-wing Gaullist mayor remains committed to pro-immigration policies; its Muslim leaders even loudly denounced the burning of the Or Aviv synagogue in 2002! Much work needs to be done here; it is as though some malevolent jinn drowns the work of the true Faithful in this city.

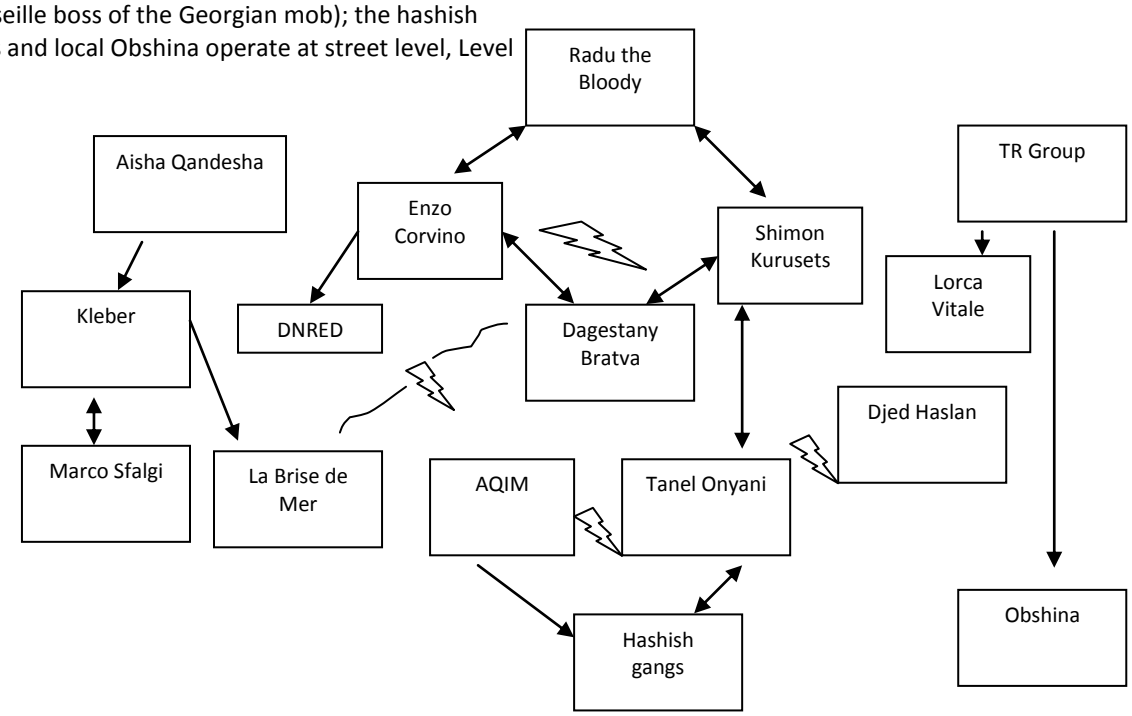
On the bright side, the flow of hashish into the city will more than fund all Al-Qaeda operations in France once AQIM soldiers take the trade away from the Georgian mobsters currently sitting on it.

Goals

Carry out spectacular acts of terror that will awaken the jihad in France. Right after taking over the hashish trade, which will open up a flood of new recruits and financing.

Faction Map: Marseille

This is not an adversary map, although it contains the broad outlines for three of them: Aisha Qandesha's faction, the TR group's "truncated conspiracy," and the Vlad Tepes faction's network. In the larger campaign, the main Conspyramid comprises both factions of the Children of the Dragon, with Vlad Tepes and John Dracula warring over which one of them gets to run Level 6. Radu the Bloody is a Level 4 node; below him the Dagestany Bratva is Level 3 (active all along the Riviera); Tanel Onyani is Level 2 (Marseille boss of the Georgian mob); the hashish gangs and local Obshina operate at street level, Level 1.



Like the adversary map on p. 114; the arrows indicate communication flow. One-way arrows indicate one-way communications (Kleber can reach La Brise de Mer, but not vice-versa); two-way arrows indicate two-way communications flow (Radu the Bloody and the heads of the Dagestany Bratva all have regular ways to reach the other). This map adds a new feature, the lightning bolt showing ongoing conflict. The big war is between the Dagestany Bratva and La Brise de Mer. (Corvino and Kurusets are covert rivals.) Both Djed Haslan (a rival Georgian gang boss) and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) are trying to push Onyani out; AQIM already has its own soldiers in the hashish gangs.

Marseille Stories

With this background, developing stories in Marseille is as simple as picking any two actors and finding something to fight over. Agents will likely develop their first contacts in French agencies connected either to the TR Group or to Enzo Corvino or both; proactive agents may notice the weirdness surrounding Aisha and the Corsican mobs. Old Cold War and WWII trails lead into the TR Group; modern-day War on Terror and counter-mafia leads point into the current hashish war.

Seeds

These tidbits of lore and history turned up during my research. Any of them might be the kernel of a good vampire plot, or the delicious backstory to an otherwise conventional hit, robbery, or other operation.

- The poet Arthur Rimbaud showed every sign of lamia marriage: instability, drug use, visions, torrid affairs, brilliant creativity from a young age, neglect of his family, violent attacks, and early death from a horrible wasting disease. He also gave up poetry and moved to Ethiopia to run guns before dying in Marseille in 1891. He could have gone to Ethiopia seeking a cure for lamia attention, chasing the legends that the Ark of the Covenant rests there.
- The modern Tarot took shape in Marseille in the 16th century. Legendary Marseille gangster Jackie "Le Mat" ("the Fool") Imbert survived 22 gunshots (the number of Trumps in the Tarot) on Candlemas 1977, rising to become Marseille's godfather until his arrest in 2004 for his part in a Russian mafiya cigarette smuggling ring.
- Marseille was a ducal seat of René d'Anjou, 15th century Count of Provence and (according to conspiratorial lore) chief of the Prieuré de Sion. Any plot involving the Holy Grail can start right here.
- The Chateau d'If is a former prison on an island about a kilometer off the shore of Marseille; it housed the fictional Count of Monte Cristo and several centuries of genuine political prisoners.
- Kléber was not the only mummy in Marseille; the crypt of the Basilica of St. Victor contains numerous mummies and sarcophagi brought from Egypt during Roman times, including the body of St. Maurice. Even in the 17th century, women and female animals were forbidden to enter the crypt because it might somehow blind them.
- Numerous Egyptian mummies also dwell in Marseille's Musée d'Archéologie Méditerranéenne, including a mummified crocodile. The museum also holds an enigmatic Celto-Ligurian idol depicting a two-faced god.
- France's national anthem, "La Marseillaise," was the fighting song of the Revolutionary brigades from this radical city. Its verses call for struggle against *sang impur,* "impure blood."
- On October 9, 1934, the Macedonian terrorist Vlado Chernozemski assassinated King Alexander I of Yugoslavia in his motorcade in Marseille, an event pregnant with possibility for Balkan horror and fascist conspiracy alike. This was the first assassination captured on film, which means it likely doesn't show the vampires involved.
- If you prefer your deaths wholesale instead of retail, it seems likely that the Great Plague of 1720, which killed 100,000 people in Marseille and the surrounding countryside, heralded the arrival of a particularly pestilent nosferatu.

STORIES

Night's Black Agents is a vampire spy thriller game. We've covered spies pretty thoroughly up front, and we just did the same for vampires. Now, it's time to take on the thriller, and maybe a little of the game.

The first section discusses the fundamental rhythm of the thriller, the beat between danger and information. Then, in the true thriller spirit, it jumps right into advice on improvising adventures guns blazing. If you're an experienced GUMSHOE game master, you'll find this departure from the straightforward trail of clues is the key twist in ***Night's Black Agents.***

If you're new to GUMSHOE, you probably want to skip ahead to p. 44, and the section that discusses the basic structure of an operation: its spine, the role of core clues, and the event skeleton you can build scenarios around. Then you can come back up here and see how to ignore all that stuff.

Finally, the third section discusses campaign design. ***Night's Black Agents*** campaigns differ from those in many roleplaying games, in that they have a natural end point: the final confrontation with the vampire lords. This, and the villain-response algorithm embodied in the Vampyramid, make useful intel for new fish and old hands at GUMSHOE alike.

The Thriller in Play

Thrillers have been defined as "mysteries in which the reader already knows the answer." Without intellectual suspense to sustain them, they depend on, well, thrills to keep the reader turning pages, or the viewer in his seat. This is slightly unfair to the thriller: from Eric Ambler to Barry Eisler, and from *The Thirty-Nine Steps* to *Ronin*, plenty of thrillers have added in the mystery element. But it's true that you don't need a puzzle, a trail of clues, and a hidden villain to make a thriller work. You need only an increasingly exciting series of challenges, be they intellectual or martial.

In **Night's Black Agents,** an operation might resemble a regular mystery:

- Which of the delegates to the trade conference is a vampire?
- Who is behind the assassination?
- How are the stolen paintings being moved out of Italy?
- What does the Tverskaya Bratva want in Lyon's hospitals?

Or it might just offer thrilling danger, with the only mystery being how to win or escape for now:

- Kill the vampire at the trade conference.
- An assassin is stalking your allies.
- If you steal these paintings first, you get loot and the vampires don't.
- Bust up the Tverskaya Bratva apparat in Lyon.

Or, as these examples indicate, you can combine the two, and emphasize one or the other aspect of a given operation depending on player interest and Directorial creativity.

Either way, the key insight for telling stories in the thriller genre is this cycle:

> **In the thriller, the reward for danger is information; having information points you into danger. When the hero rests, add more danger.**

For example: in the film *The Bourne Identity,* Bourne gets his box from the Swiss bank (information), but by so doing alerts the Swiss cops (danger). He heads to the U.S. embassy (rest) but must then escape it (danger); while in the embassy, he picked up his getaway, Marie, who takes him to his old apartment in Paris (information). By entering it, he alerts the assassin Castel (danger) and the Paris cops (more danger) but gets away with leads to the hotel and the boat (information).

Rhythm and Improvisation

This cycle of danger and information is the heartbeat of ***Night's Black Agents.*** In other GUMSHOE games, players likely follow clues from scene to scene; in ***Night's Black Agents,*** they're as likely to escape from one scene into another after a car chase or a gunfight in the warehouse. Even proactive thriller players tend to go not from clue to clue along a trail, but after targeted foes in a series of limited-scope investigations ("Where's their headquarters?" "Where's their weak spot?") and assaults using the intel from those investigations. This is just fine; the adversary map and the plethora of intel available with canny use of Network contacts and other abilities are designed to speed up the investigative sinew so the players can get to the stylish black bag job or vamp-dusting shoot-'em-up.

Allow players to leapfrog scenes by acquiring information they're meant to get later any time that pacing permits. If you're early in a session when the threat of leapfrogging occurs, and you're not confident you can improvise enough new intervening scenes to make a full evening's entertainment, block

the players' efforts with a fight or other diversion. If you're zooming toward evening's end, leapfrogging may prove a blessing — just be sure to squeeze in all of the necessary ancillary information the players might miss by skipping ahead.

You can often juggle around scenes in the middle of an operation with no ill effect to the storyline. When this is the case, it's always better to let the players dictate pacing than to force them back into the order of events envisioned by the scenario.

The scenario is only the blueprint. The building happens during play.

AVOIDING THE RAILROAD

By its very nature, an operation with an actual goal, or one that actually accomplishes or resolves something, will resemble a "railroaded game." The agents begin at one point, and wind up at another, regardless of who laid the track. But most players don't mind moving forward if they got to work the throttle and toot the whistle.

Here are some tips to keep the clatter of the rails down where your players don't notice them:

Don't read right from the scenario. Paraphrase things, put them in your own words; your colloquial diction sounds more organic than my canned text.

Riff off the players in interpersonal scenes. Respond to agent dialogue, respect the emotional content. As long as the clue comes out, don't worry about being true to your notes or the scenario.

Encourage the players to flesh out details of the setting. "What's in the casino like?" "You tell me, you're the one with Gambling 8." "Is there a boat at the pier?" "There is; describe it to me." "What time is it now?" "When did you leave the hotel?" Only very rarely will player contributions overwrite your clue trail; if they do, you can gently contradict them and move on: "You'd think there would be a big mirror behind the bar, but it's actually a big photograph. Weird, huh?"

Tailor NPCs and situations to the agents. If an agent is a health nut, have his contacts wind him up by setting the meet in a McDonald's. If an agent (or a player!) likes brunets with swimmer's bodies, have her meet just such a man at the resort.

Introduce story elements giving players opportunities to **flesh out their agents' backstories.** Weave old friends, assets, mentors, patrons, and rivals into your supporting casts, even outside the Network ability.

Awakening the Players

A common complaint about investigative scenarios is that they "railroad" players into tightly following a slavishly predetermined story path. Although you rarely see the opposite complaint voiced, a significant number of groups flail in confusion when not steered in an obvious direction. Be ready for moments where players feel overwhelmed, either because there are too many choices to choose between or, more likely, no obviously risk-free choice.

Let players weigh options for as long as the discussion seems lively and fun. If you see the group get frustrated and unable to make a collective choice, gently insert yourself into the discussion. Summarize the various suggestions made and direct the discussion toward a conclusion. Maybe go back to the adversary map and see if any investigation offers lots of free pool points. Guide the players in eliminating choices without nudging them to a preferred answer. This detachment is easier to attain when you don't settle on a preferred answer yourself.

When in doubt, base the plan on the agents' strengths: their MOS, their highest ability pools, and their Drives. Remind them of the Bucharest Rules (see p. 117): they are badasses trained to dare and win the shadow wars. Got a wet worker with Shooting 15? What gets easier with a sniper involved? Got a black bagger with Infiltration 14? Maybe the plan should involve a break-in. Think of it like you're writing an episode of an ensemble caper show like *Leverage*: the hitter's gotta hit, the hacker's gotta hack, the shooter's gotta shoot.

Remind the players that the only way forward in espionage work is to gather more intel. Send them out on that, run a little Surveillance contest or an Interpersonal scene, then drop intelligence that conforms to their strengths into the agents' lap. A Human Terrain spend tells them the Bulgarians will scatter if their boss is gunned down. An Architecture spend gives them a mostly disused coal tunnel into the basement. This is especially important in the early stages of the game, before the players internalize their own awesomeness.

Reward intelligent play extravagantly; give out TFFBs (see p. 111) like candy. *Don't* punish the players for skipping ahead: if they learn you won't hose them for not playing out every minute of a three-day stakeout, they won't insist on it. Montage the heck out of those Digital Intrusion or Research moments. (In the alpha playtest, we called those "thrilling scenes of men typing.") Encourage the players to leave lots of loose space in their own plan for In the Nick of Time Preparedness stunts (see p. 33). Speed and pacing are key. Once the players form a hypothesis, or decide on a necessary first step, send them out to test it in the field as soon as you can. There, they encounter danger and win new information that lets them move forward into more danger.

With a little coaching, your players will quickly take on board this problem- solving methodology. Your players will learn to take the initiative, abandoning the "wait for clues" passivity trained into them as they were run through more predetermined scenarios.

Operations On the Fly

It's entirely possible to improvise your way through fun and exciting operations you create as you go. If you're wired to think on your feet, you may find it easier to build an adventure this way. Improvised games require you only to keep the backstory in mind: what the vampires are up to here and now, and why. Anything the agents do while sniffing around can let them stumble over this backstory; any plausible clue can be found by the kinds of cinematic super-spies your players embody. The flow of investigative scenes arises from the actions undertaken by the players.

You don't have to anticipate what the players will do. Instead, you wait for them to do it, and build scenes and dispense clues accordingly.

Notes on the Underground

When first teaching yourself to improvise mystery scenarios, start by jotting down rough notes, using the thriller skeleton on p. 185 below. Later you may prefer to keep everything in your head, but at least a flow chart style diagram is helpful. The longer the interval between your rough plotting process and the actual game, the more likely you are to forget crucial details.

Before you start, nail down the backstory in detail (use the *OPFOR* section on p. 170 of *Quick-and-Dirty City Creation* if you can't think of a suitably nefarious plot), and create your introductory hook scene. You can then go on to create provisional ideas for the other elements of the skeleton. You can follow these as written, or set them aside in favor of more interesting possibilities that arise spontaneously in play.

The first approach is easier to keep straight in your head and may be preferable for beginning improvisers. The second allows you to harness the spontaneous energy that flows from spur-of-the-moment group creativity.

Roll With It

First of all, don't sweat any uncertainty you may be feeling. It's common, and will go away once you plunge in. When in doubt, take a deep breath, break down your options, and ask yourself which one is the most interesting at the moment. Once you've made that choice and brought it out in play, you can then concern yourself with building on it to spur further interesting developments down the line.

Strong improvising is about reacting to input. Each choice you make builds on the previous ones. Soon your scenario will manifest a sense of momentum all its own.

Three Scenes Ahead, Or None

When running a mystery scenario, it helps to think two or three scenes ahead of the players. It's often useful to have a possible climactic sequence in mind, too. Think up a good Twist (see p. 170) and a suitably horrific Final Reveal (see p. 186). That allows you to foreshadow enough to make the ending appear to be a logical outgrowth of the scenes that preceded it.

Don't let the possible plot forks you have in mind become too fixed in your imagination. Instead, keep them provisional, so that you can turn away from them and substitute new choices more in keeping with player input.

Never fall in love with your fallback. Mentally separate what has actually been revealed in play from the background facts you believe, at the moment, to be true. If player interest suggests it, always be ready to abandon facts not yet introduced, however vivid they may seem to you.

Say Yes to Coolness

Improv people have a saying: never negate. As Director, your more long-winded version is "If their version is cooler than your plan, say yes and praise their cleverness." Embrace unexpected possibilities and build them into the storyline. If the players really hate an NPC, make him a vampire, or a messy victim. If the players worry that the oil tanker is full of blood, it probably is. If the agents decide to try calling in a Predator strike on Castle Dracula, set off the explosion and then send the CIA after them.

It's not necessary to turn the narrative on a dime with every piece of player input. The key is to avoid a scene in which nothing happens, or in which your scene is less interesting than the one suggested by the player. When a player says that there's probably a survivor of those experiments still living in the abandoned bioweapons lab, it's lame of you to leave the lab empty, or keep the players out of the lab entirely because they don't have the ability to understand the records. Extracting useful information from a maddened blood-nurse is more fun, and more plot-advancing, than not. This doesn't mean, however, that she won't try to escape, or burn the place down.

Leading and Following

Improvisation is a technique, not an ultimate goal. Occasionally you'll find that it's more entertaining for all involved if you seize the narrative reins and steer them in a particular direction. This will tend to happen more near the end of a scenario, when you're trying to wrap all of the threads together into a coherent and satisfying conclusion.

Again this is a matter of responding to the mood and attitude of the players. When they're actively engaged in the story and throwing out fun suggestions, follow their lead. When their creativity hits the wall, pick up the slack. Improvisation is an organic process of give and take.

The Operation

A straightforward operation can be seen as a series of scenes arranged in a straight line, with multiple ways to move from each scene to the one following it. Improvisation consists of reacting to the players by switching the order of scenes around, or interpolating new scenes in this order. This is simple to write and run, but difficult to hide.

The Spine

A looser structure will still consist of an investigative line, in which the agents pursue a series of core clues until they achieve a resolution of some sort. This is called the **spine.** In your notes, it can consist of large sections of fleshed-out narrative, or a barebones list of the elements that need to occur to create a minimally satisfying narrative. See the introduction to the operation included in this book, *(S)Entries,* for a sample spine.

Surrounding the spine and giving it body is a skeleton of individual scenes. Most of those scenes deliver either information or danger or both. Some of them might just be quick investigation scenes: bluff your way into the building, check the records on an unattended computer, get a core clue, and you're gone. Some might be slightly longer interactive scenes: either an Interpersonal ability moment with an NPC, or a "mini-op" involving a quick General ability test or two to get that core clue. Some are good old fight scenes or chase scenes; the only goal here might be to escape, or the opposition might have useful intel on them, if only in the form of a cell phone memory. But make sure any core clues in a fight scene are available without a win!

Some scenes provide information which may be useful in understanding and solving the central mystery, but aren't strictly necessary to reach the conclusion. They often provide context and detail, or hit theme and flavor elements you wish to emphasize. Some might feature only one agent, who sees something scary, or advances a personal arc, or shares a poignant moment with a Solace.

Core Clues

Most scenes present at least one piece of information necessary to figure out the opposition plot, leading to the climactic scene. As noted on p. 44, that piece of information is the **core clue.** A core clue typically points the group to another scene, often another core clue scene.

Avoid hard sequenced core clues, which can only lead to one another in a single order. You're constructing *one* way to move through the story to another core clue, not the *only* way. In play, you may find yourself placing the core clue from one scene in another, improvised scene inspired by the logical actions undertaken by the players. (This is also true of published scenarios, by the way.) Planning a spine ahead of time guarantees that there's at least one way to navigate the story, but should not preclude other scene orders.

Likewise, ensure that any clue, especially any core clue, is available not only to players using the ability specified in the scenario, but to any player who provides a credible and entertaining alternate method of acquiring that clue. The scenario is a foundation to work from, which ensures that there is at least one way to move through the story. It should never be regarded as the only way to get to the resolution. A group of players will often come up with better ideas than one Director or writer ever could. Give yourself permission to go with them.

If you like, try mapping out your operation, putting scenes in boxes connected by clue arrows. A good, robust adventure has more than one arrow into any scene, and more than one route from hook to climax.

LEVERAGED CLUES

A standard feature of spy drama is the crucial fact which, when presented to the interrogation subject or tight-lipped contact, causes him to suddenly break down or open up. In GUMSHOE, this is called a leveraged clue.

This clue comprises two sub-clues: the use of an Interpersonal ability on an NPC, and the mention of another, previously gathered, prerequisite clue. When using leveraged clues, stay alert for any player mention of the prerequisite clue during the Interpersonal scene; players don't always think of using all the leverage they have. Or, hint to the player with Interrogation that the terrorist might soften up if you hit him with the result of that Accounting clue you gathered earlier. "Well, since we already know about Samir, you're not really protecting anyone any more …"

Floating Core Clues

It can be useful to structure a scenario with one or more free-floating core clues. These typically advance the story from one distinct section to another. Where an ordinary core clue is linked with a particular scene, a floating clue can be gleaned in any one of several scenes. The Keeper determines during play which scene gives up the clue.

Floating clues allow you to control the pacing of a scenario. They allow the characters to play out all of the fun or interesting experiences in one section of the scenario before the story takes a dramatic turn. For example, you might want them to separately meet all of the suspected ghoul hybrids before they, and the agents, get trapped at night in the abandoned cement factory. To achieve this, withhold the core clue that moves the agents to the cement factory until after they've met all of the relevant supporting characters. That way, you prevent them from leaping ahead into the narrative without getting all the information they need to fully enjoy what follows.

Likewise, a floating clue allows you to perform like a ruthless editor, skipping unnecessary scenes when you need to kick the narrative into a higher gear. Let's say you've chosen five possible scenes in which the agents might logically get a necessary core clue. You figure that this phase of the adventure should take about an hour. If the players breeze through the scenes in ten minutes apiece, you can save the core clue for the last scene. If they linger, taking twenty minutes per scene, you'll want to make the core clue available after the third scene.

Player frustration level usually serves as a better trigger for a floating core clue than a predetermined time limit. If they're having obvious fun interacting with the vivid supporting characters you've created, or being creeped out by charnel shadows, you can give them more of what they want by saving the core clue for the final scene. On the other hand, if you see they're getting bored and frustrated, you can slip in the floating clue earlier.

The Thriller Skeleton

Here's a "standard" ***Night's Black Agents*** operational skeleton, wrapping a mystery inside a thriller. For each element, we present some possible specific scenes. Never be afraid to let any of these scenes involve a fight, chase, contest of Infiltration or Surveillance, or other confrontation.

The Hook: The event, problem, or opportunity that attracts the agents. Takes place against one backdrop (see p. 174). Start the story as far into the action as you can, without making major tactical decisions for the players. Opening with a fight scene is always good.

- The agents follow up a clue from a previous operation and insert themselves into an ongoing situation.
- The agents proceed to investigate the next item on their adversary map.
- The agents receive or develop a piece of intel that indicates vampire activity.
- The vampires threaten an asset of the agents, or make some other move that draws their attention.

The Curtain: The agents check out the hook based on their initial suspicions. The investigation yields a core clue (and possibly various red herrings) but no confirmation of their suspicions. The investigated individuals present a credible front of innocence; the opposition begins to respond. A good place for a chase or infiltration.

- The agents pick a side and begin pushing.
- The agents cast a broader net looking for connections.
- Their suspect asks them for help against the vampires.
- The agents infiltrate the suspect organization.
- The authorities notice weird goings-on and start interfering.

The Wakeup: The agents suffer a jolt of horror, most often a horribly mangled victim or attack by vampiric forces. If you haven't had a fight scene yet, here's a good place for one.

- The situation escalates bloodily.
- The agents discover something horrible.
- The agents' source turns up dead, turned, or otherwise informatively creepy.
- The infiltrated agent discovers something horrible and must be exfiltrated while keeping her cover intact.
- The vampires attack.

The Stall: One line of inquiry goes cold, and usually dead. *This is an optional floating element; only deploy it on B-plots or when the agents have enough clues to start another line of inquiry.*

- Political pressure clamps down on the conflict.
- The subject of the agents' investigation disappears or turns up dead.
- The agents' informant disappears or turns up dead.

- The infiltrated agent harvests nothing but "chicken feed" and "chaff."
- The vampires roll up their operation and pull out of the city.

The First Reveal: Usually as a direct result of the danger from the Wakeup, the agents gain information leading them closer to the true or main opposition. This likely leads to more investigative scenes, surveillance of a target, or an infiltration.

- The escalated situation makes someone nervous, who makes a mistake or seeks out the agents to switch sides.
- The horrible sight links to another event, perhaps in another city; the agents investigate it.
- The agents dig into their source's background or recent movements.
- The infiltrated agent develops her sources.
- Analyzing the vampire attack indicates something about the vampires.

The Blowback: The antagonists move directly against the agents, as a consequence of the investigation so far. *This is an optional floating element, which can be inserted as needed into the action, often more than once.*

- The other side threatens or kidnaps someone the agents care about.
- The investigation leads to an attack or assassination attempt.
- The other side informs on the agents to the authorities.
- Something from the Vampyramid (see p. 190).
- Thriller chase; the agents are running from the vampires or the authorities.

The Twist: That further investigation in turn leads to an upending of the agents' assumptions, and a switch in the chessboard. A common Twist scene eliminates a red herring. While not a core clue in itself, it helps clear the board for the true solution, and often adds in more bloody death.

- The agents switch sides, or start pressuring their erstwhile allies into riskier moves; setting up a possible Yojimbo option (see p. 116).
- The scope expands: the vampire conspiracy goes deeper in time, or wider in space, than the agents understood.
- Someone they now suspect has previously made contact with the agents' allies.
- The agents start developing a strike on the vampires based on this new revelation.
- The vampire asset within the authorities reveals his existence.

The Relief: The agents gain unexpected aid or information, putting them back on the path to victory. This may be as a result of their investigation (they dig up the hidden witness) or as a result of the blowback. ("Only Inspecteur Delarue knew we would be in the park that night.") *This is an optional floating element, which can be inserted as needed into the action.*

- The agents break into their increasingly distracted and overstretched enemy's headquarters and dig up intel on their channel to the vampires.
- Another enemy of the vampires offers to help the agents with intel or muscle.
- A Network contact fills the agents in on a key piece of their old agency's history; a flipped asset (see p. 113) begins cooperating.
- The vampires overplay their hand, possibly killing someone the agents had wrongly fixed on.
- The agents can hack into the authorities' database now that they know who they're looking for dirt on.

The Final Reveal: The agents learn what's really going on — and it's worse than they imagined. This reveal may happen during a running fight, or through a series of confrontations.

- Both sides of the situation had vampiric influence.
- The vampires prove to have some horrible defense, or an extra monster or ability previously unsuspected; the agents escape from this fight with their lives, barely.
- The evidence for the Final Reveal comes from three or four separate assets, interrogated, sweated, bribed, or coerced during the scenario.
- If nothing from the Vampyramid has happened yet, something from the Vampyramid happens.
- The infiltrated agent shows signs of vampire contamination.
- The authorities are hot on the agents' trail; the agents need to keep moving while planning their counterstrike.

The Setup: The agents carry out a necessary action before the confrontation can occur. *This element doesn't always occur; when it does, it's usually driven by player ingenuity rather than Keeper pre-planning.*

- The agents have to socially engineer a final bloody showdown.
- The agents scramble to accumulate enough mistletoe, Dragon's Breath rounds, or other arcane gear to blow through the new defense.
- The agents case, drill, and otherwise plan an assault on the vampires' base.
- The infiltrated agent sets in motion her plan to disrupt the opposition.
- The agents flip one of the vampires' key assets in the police force.

The Confrontation: The agents clash decisively with the forces of evil, hopefully thwarting the vampires' current operations in this city at least. The climactic scene occurs near another backdrop. The result should point the agents at two or more new operations.

- Final bloody showdown turns into vampiric ambush.
- The vampires pull out their horrible defense before it can be trapped and destroyed; the agents are left in possession of the field.
- Major assault on the vampire base, possibly attracting more official attention in the form of cop cars and Heat.
- The agents ambush a vampire asset, planning a snatch-and-grab followed by holy-waterboarding.
- The vampires try to extract their agent from the police headquarters; the agents stop the attempt.

This is a framework to fall back on when needed, not a blueprint you have to stick to. Any given element may encompass one scene, a number of scenes, or be only part of a scene. Relief may be needed earlier in the story; red herrings in the stretch may help you pace scenario events to match your time frame. Often, you can combine the First Reveal and the Twist into one development. Above all, you're responding to player initiative, nudging but not pushing plot developments into as much structure as seems mutually satisfying. It's helpful while planning the Hook to think ahead to what the Twist and Final Reveal might be.

Only rarely will the resulting adventure precisely match this structure. However, using it to think ahead will help prepare you for the messier, but more vital and interactive, operation that does result when the players start engaging with your game.

THE PERILS OF COMPETENCE

Because it grants greater narrative control to players, MOS auto-success makes scenario creation more difficult for Directors. You can't write a scene that protects a character or assumes an escape. Another way of stating this is that it strips you of the hallmark crutches of a poorly structured, non-interactive scenario.

Just as you should always remind your players that their characters are cinematically competent, you should remember it yourself. This can take a huge burden off you, if you let it: if you can imagine how Jason Bourne or James Bond could get a clue, you can figure out how your players can get it.

Floating Events

Adding structural flexibility to the spine are one or more floating events, which can be inserted as needed into the action. The Stall, Blowback, and Relief are examples of such events; others include a scene involving an agent's personal arc or Drive, an interaction with a Source of Stability, a crash meeting or other scene laying the groundwork for a future scenario, a delayed consequence of a previous operation, or an uncanny event tied to a location or specific date. The players may add their own elements to the scenario, often by venturing on a "mini-quest" to obtain some crucial intel, gear, or other resource to carry out their plan. The Setup is an example of a potentially player-added element.

Active Operations

In "active" operations, the agents move forward against the vampires: investigating their conspiracy, thwarting its goals, and attacking it. They depend first of all on leads, which come from one of two places: the spoor of vampiric activity in a given city, or from previous investigations and the adversary map. Always leave the players a lead, or ideally more than one.

When you've decided what the conspiracy is doing in the city, decide how that spills over. What knock-on effects does it have? Who does it piss off? Leads needn't just be blood-spatters in a hotel room or flows into an online bank account, they can be a frightened archaeologist or a staffer for a new anti-mafia magistrate. Put those leads in the path of the agents: "Something's going on here, and I'd like to help you stop it." If you haven't, pull up a map of the city on Google Maps, and let the players' tactical brains run around a bit.

Figure out, in broad strokes, what the agents need to know to find the conspiracy's local node, and then to bloody it. Give the players pointers in both directions,

and then toss in a fight or two to get their dander up. Try to keep things open and impressionistic; don't hose the players for not micro-managing their time and resources. Remember, you want to encourage bold, even brash, thriller play as much as you want to encourage smart planning. The game mechanics simulate smart planning, even if no such thing went on: the bold thriller play is mostly in your hands.

Nine Active Missions

These nine basic goals can each support an operation on their own. Or, an operation might mix and match: make a Sneak to set up a Hit; make a Heist to Flip a target; Hunt the foes to their lair and Destroy them. An episode of *Leverage* is almost always a Sneak-Heist-Destroy combo; the *Bourne* trilogy is Uncover, Hunt, Flip. The components seem simple, because they are. Thrillers are not complex stories; they are exciting ones.

Destroy

The agents must destroy the local conspiracy apparat. Stat out the apparat, and start crossing off mooks. This may involve destroying a physical location, especially if the bang-and-burner hasn't had spotlight time recently. Figure out the official response, if any, to a loud destruction. The destruction can also be mental, moral, or social: *Mission: Impossible* used to specialize in these ops.

Flip

The agents must flip an asset to their side: a key local authority figure, a vampire asset, a spy or mafioso with some useful edge. Decide why they want to flip her, and decide why she might flip, and what's stopping her. Provide a conspiracy handler or watcher who must be evaded, tricked, or eliminated.

Heist

The agents must steal something, in a subtle burglary or a guns-blazing holdup. Provide the thing to be stolen, and its security. As a bonus, figure out who else wants the thing, and what they'll do once the agents breach its security.

Hit

The agents must kill someone. This can be a simple sniping, or a gang rumble. Provide the target and his security, plan a weakness in one or both.

Hunt

The agents must find someone, either a potential asset or a vampire conspirator. Does the target want to be found? Who else is hunting the target? Can the target fight back? Stat out the target and any rival hunters.

Rescue

The agents must rescue someone from the conspiracy, or from the authorities. This is essentially a Heist with a human target. Map it like a Heist, but give the target a real personality and motivations if you can.

YOUR MISSION, JIM, SHOULD YOU CHOOSE TO ACCEPT IT

Even the most proactive players sometimes just want to be given a treasure map by a guy they met at the tavern — er, download a dossier from a contact on an anonymized Web site. About two-thirds of the way through my alpha playtest, the players used Network to build "the NSA officer who we can give redacted intel to in exchange for targets to hit next." (They also specified that she should be played by Rebecca Pidgeon. I have odd players.) If you haven't got an ongoing anti-vampire (or anti-cover-conspiracy) organization in your campaign, you can still offer the players a voice on the tape.

Especially if the agents have accumulated Heat, some official might figure out that these particular dangerous sociopaths can be pointed at even worse sociopaths. A steady stream of assignments, some of which (or all of which) lead to the vampire conspiracy, can originate from, say, a BND deputy director who wants deniable assets who he can use to wipe up al-Qaeda or frustrate the FSB.

And if you were planning to introduce the Vatican's top secret anti-vampire death squad nestled in the Knights of Malta anyhow, well, here's your chance.

Yes, *of course,* the agents are being set up. The question is by whom? MI6 trying to corner the market on supernatural power? A Communist hard core of the GRU who hate vampires on materialistic principle? A conspiracy of multinational banks, looking to wipe out undead competition? Or, sure, by the vampires.

Sneak

The agents must infiltrate a secure location; to get intel, plant bugs, or set up a Heist. This can be social infiltration of an enemy organization, or physical infiltration of a hidden base, or the same op could involve both. Map the target (socially or physically), and settle in for some good old-fashioned over-planning. If it gets really out of hand, tell the players that for every half-hour of game time they spend planning, you're doubling the security, raising Difficulty numbers by 1, or adding one more Renfield.

Trace

The agents must find something, possibly something that went missing long ago: a painting, a dossier, a defector, a treasure. This is like a long-form, investigation-heavy Hunt; it can lead to a Heist at the end. Set up a GUMSHOE trail of clues, working backward from its current location. Then add rough strangers or rival trackers along the way.

Uncover

The agents must uncover a mystery: what the conspiracy is up to in Riga, who killed their asset in Edinburgh, whether the pharmaceutical company is actually in league with the vampires. This again is solid GUMSHOE territory; figure out the solution, then plant clues around the periphery, and point the agents to one of those clues. This often leads to an updated or expanded adversary map.

Reactive Operations

In "reactive" operations, the agents respond to vampire actions. The vampires are moving forward: attacking some other group, infiltrating some new city, or hunting the agents directly. The agents pick up the story either because it attacks them or because they see the ripples from the shifting power dynamics.

Setting the hook for a reactive operation is almost exactly the same as when plotting an active operation. Leads can be crime scenes or informants; the agents might track chatter or bank transfers or just notice a new pattern of exsanguinations. A move by the vampire conspiracy generates even more turmoil and counter-moves, just because it's new: irritated thugs pushed out of the sex trade, or cops suddenly stonewalled by their superiors. The rhythm of the reactive operation is the same as for an active op: information, danger, information — it's just that the vampires lead, so the initiative is always with you. (So it might look like danger, information, danger.) Proactively drive the story forward: figure out what the vampire conspiracy wants, and then get some Renfields to start making it happen. Throw off plenty of clues as it does, and feed those leads to the agents through their Network contacts, assets, or Sky News.

For direct moves against the agents, use the Vampyramid (below, p. 190). For everything else, there's *Nikita.*

Reactive Mission Design

You can build a perfectly good reactive operation just by reversing the nine active mission types on p. 188. The vampires take the role of the agents; the agents become the opposition or rival group. You still need to sketch out, map, or stat up the target; you also need to figure out what assets the vampires have devoted to this op. The result might be a generic Protect mission, or it might develop its own variations. In most reactive operations, discovering why the vampires want the target is the agents' real victory condition, because it helps them deduce where the conspiracy will aim next. Some examples follow:

Counter-Destroy

The vampires aim to destroy the existing human trafficking network in Amsterdam and replace it with their own. The agents may want to stop the vampire assault and destroy the human traffickers themselves, or keep some very unsavory assets owing them favors.

Counter-Flip

The vampires want to flip the local prefect of police, using money, sex, or just vampiric turning. The agents may want to stake the seducer, kill the prefect after he flips, or flip him themselves and run him as a double agent.

Counter-Heist

The vampires want to steal an idol of Zalmoxis from a museum (or an eccentric private collector, or a Bulgarian mafioso, or a sorcerous cult) so that they can channel the god's eldritch power. The agents may want to destroy it, heist it themselves ahead of time, use it as bait, or just bug it.

Counter-Hit

The vampires want to hit the archbishop, who is far too open-minded about the supernatural. The agents likely want to protect His Eminence, perhaps while sifting his files on such matters. Or the agents have to protect a moving target: perhaps His Eminence is on his way to Rome. In some campaigns, the archbishop might become an asset, or a source of intel and missions himself.

Counter-Hunt

The vampires are hunting a money-man who escaped with the flash drive. The agents want the drive, but might not care about the money-man. Or, if the target is more sympathetic, the agents have to help her disappear and shut down the hunters; a high-speed Rescue.

Counter-Rescue

The vampires want to rescue a Renfield from a super-max prison facility. The agents want to hit them on the way in … or better yet, on the way out, since the Renfield is out in the open now.

Counter-Sneak

The vampires want to sneak a lamia into the Davos summit. The agents need to find the lamia and disrupt the sneak without blowing their own cover. If they can sneak their own agent into the summit, or flip an asset there, that's a bonus. The agents might be hired (or secretly volunteer) to provide security to a lab, museum, or brokerage house; their goal might be their own sneak, a heist, or just to hit the vampire's sneaker.

Counter-Trace

The vampires want to trace a bloodline of hereditary dhampirs, or a shipment of precursors for an advanced vampire serum. The agents want to trace such things themselves, eliminate the conspiracy's investigators, and ideally muddy the trail completely. Provide the agents with their own leads to the target, or with conspiracy assets the agents can interrogate for leads.

SPY A LA MODE

When designing or running an operation, here are some elements to involve depending on the game's mode. Not every episode needs to lean on these directly, or the feel gets old and tired, but if you haven't done something non-mechanical with the mode in a while, color in one of these.

Endanger or involve the agents' friends, Sources of Stability, or Network contacts. Depict some aspect of civilian life the agent can no longer share; play an emotional scene with a Solace or a retired partner, mentor, or rival.

Provide solid intel, ideally from a source who's fun to play: an avuncular defector, a sweaty snitch, a jumpy burglar, a cynical cop. Tie the operation into recent headlines. Google Earth, jammed-up bureaucracy, and grit are your keystones here.

Promise secrets, or hint at a dual allegiance in their asset network. If an agent has a secret Drive, feed it. Has anyone betrayed someone in the last two operations? If not, someone should betray someone in this one. Slide in a red herring, if you haven't done that in the last three operations. In general, Mirror mode games respond well to secrets; open out a little of the conspiracy, give a lead to somewhere unexpected.

Tease and involve the agents' Drives. Threaten their Symbol either directly or metaphorically. Make the vampire conspiracy really awful here; make the authorities visibly less so.

The Vampyramid

The Vampyramid provides a dramatic response algorithm for the vampires, guiding their reactions to the agents' assault on their security and their plans. It creates a more natural-seeming story than just a storm of attacks or weird inanition; it helps drive the narrative along an organic arc, providing story momentum in between the agents' active plans. Its personalized attacks give the agents a little more skin in the game than simply busting up human trafficking rings or terror cults. By creating more vampire actions, it also opens up the space for more clues, forensics, witnesses, and intel-gathering opportunities. The Director can use the Vampyramid constantly, for a brief story arc, or solely for inspiration. All of these rules, options, and actions are general in nature: if you have a better specific idea, or a twist to pull, or just want to ignore or skip something, go right ahead.

The vampires' response begins with any one of the options along Row One: the Director can select whichever sounds the most intriguing, or one that best fits her sense of the conspiracy's methods. From that option, the arrows point toward the most natural escalations: a conspiracy that begins with an attempt to frame an agent will likely move into either killing the agent's enemy (probably under very suspicious circumstances) or isolating the agent from his allies.

Although the writeups below refer to "the agent" for simplicity's sake, almost all of these options can be carried out against either one agent or the agents as a group, or against their associates. In Mirror mode games, the vampires will usually only operate against one agent. In Burn mode games, they will more often approach or threaten Sources of Stability, Network contacts, and other established "friendly" NPCs.

The vampire response moves up the Vampyramid as the agents' investigation begins to impede or interfere with the vampire conspiracy. An action by the agents against one level of the Conspyramid "unlocks" the corresponding row of the Vampyramid: e.g., once the agents begin harassing Level 3 of the Conspyramid, the vampires escalate up to the options on Row 3 of the Vampyramid. The vampires can always use an option on Row 1, regardless of whichever rows have already been "unlocked." Once an option is used, cross it off: multiple attempts to frame an agent (or whatever) become boring.

Note that some actions, like "Suborn a Network Contact" or "Rat the Agent Out to the Authorities" appear nowhere specifically on the Vampyramid, but are subsumed into specific other options or have their own mechanics (see *Network,* p. 31, and *Heat,*

p. 88). Usually, such actions are either really good ideas, or reliably raise the tension.

The Vampyramid includes monsters in italics; these represent potential assets the vampires bring onto the board as the situation becomes more grave. The Director can ignore these suggestions, switch them up, or otherwise alter them to suit her own personal cast of monsters. Some monsters are more adaptable: Renfields, dhampirs, and lamiae can carry out virtually any of these options, depending on their specific powers.

Row One: Reflex

Offer Payoff: Some seemingly unconnected node of the conspiracy offers the agent a handsome payoff to walk away. In a Burn mode game, the contact may allude to the existence of the agent's place of Safety (see p. 36). This also provides the players with a clue to another node of the conspiracy.

Frame Agent: The conspiracy frames the agent for some crime, in whatever fashion seems believable. Agents with amnesia (see p. 86) are *perfect* for this. This raises the Heat on the agents by the amount indicated in the Heat table (see p. 88); it may or may not be connected to an offer to reduce the Heat in exchange for walking away.

Shadow Agent: The conspiracy shadows the agent, attempting to discover his patterns, associates, safe houses, resources, etc. This sets up a contest of Surveillance; the conspiracy may not particularly care if their surveillance is noticed. If they do care, using striges (in bird form, or looking through the eyes of the city's pigeon or crow population) keeps things on the down low, although agents may still get a Sense Trouble to think the birds are creepy or notice that some of them don't seem to cast shadows.

Shadow Source: The conspiracy shadows an agent's Source of Stability or Network contact, almost always obviously. This is an attempt to drive them into panic, allowing the conspiracy to map the agents' threat routines. The fear might drain points from a Network contact's pool, or make a Solace unable to refresh the agent's full Stability. A 4-point test of Shrink may be necessary to restore the source's usefulness.

Yojimbo: The conspiracy sends a genuinely unaffiliated attacker after the agent: a contract killer, the cops, a gang working on a malevolent tipoff, or an adzeh-possessed secret policeman. The goal is to get the agents embroiled in a fight with some other force, allowing the conspiracy to monitor their skills and attack a weakened foe later. Agents' investigative abilities may let them track their attackers back to the conspiracy anyhow.

Probing Attack: The conspiracy's street-level soldiers ambush and attack the agent. This probably won't kill the target, but will help the conspiracy assess the threat, and possibly identify sources of weapons or special gear. A Renfield, strix, bhuta, or other invisible asset may be tasked to observe the fight to perform just such an assessment; the agents' Sense Trouble may make them aware of that observer.

Row Two: Containment

Kill Enemy: The conspiracy just goes ahead and kills an enemy of the agent. This might be intended to frame the agent, to stir up a vendetta (as in Yojimbo on Row One), as a gruesome bribe, or just to create the illusion of some third force at work. If the agents already strongly dislike an NPC, kill that one. (Even if he's a conspirator, the vampires might consider him an acceptable sacrifice.) A pack of ghouls or ferals are reliably capable of killing just about any enemy the agents might have, and might leave really interesting forensic evidence behind to drive the investigation forward.

Isolate Agent: The conspiracy isolates an agent, either by burning him with his contacts, killing members of his Network until he refuses to risk any others, or (in Mirror mode games) by driving wedges between one agent and the others. In a deep Mirror game, the conspiracy might arrest or kidnap an agent, hold him for 24 hours, and then release him just to make the other agents suspicious. A more subtle conspiracy might just jam contacts' cell phones, have the police deport them, or otherwise drive the agents' resources away. A Renfield or other skilled field operative is usually the point man for such an attempt; beating him restores the Network to previous functionality.

Threaten Safety: The conspiracy threatens an agent's place of Safety, either overtly (with a raid or search) or subtly (by buying the neighboring property, or suborning its caretaker). If the conspiracy cannot realistically know any agent's place of Safety, they threaten the agents' current safe house. They may hint that the Network contact who set them up in it is unreliable, send in a bhuta black-bagger, or simply order a SWAT team into it guns blazing.

Red Herring: The conspiracy plants a lead pointing to someone else as the locus of vampiric evil: the Vatican, the CIA, a perfectly innocent cycle gang. Make sure that the lead can point back to the conspiracy after the agents have triggered the trap or otherwise discovered their error. With deft roleplaying, the agents may even get an ally or two out of the process.

Hard Feint: The conspiracy strikes at an agent to provoke a response — one coordinated to distract the agents from a conspiracy operation elsewhere. Ideally, the response also gets the agents in trouble with the local authorities, raising their Heat. The need

for coordination implies a Renfield, dhampir, or other tough, reliable, versatile asset, possibly with ghoul backup.

Row Three: Deflection

Offer Protection: The conspiracy offers the agent lowered Heat, protection from his other enemies, or even from the conspiracy. In Mirror mode games, the conspiracy conveys this offer through a trusted associate: an old handler, a family member, or a Solace. This might be the work of a shapeshifter or illusionist like a lamia, or of a dhampir who has worked day and night to suborn the agent's circle of trust.

Double Agent: The conspiracy plants a double agent in the agent's circle: possibly a previously created Network contact, a plant "rescued" from some conspiracy brothel, or someone who approaches the agents with meaty intel on the conspiracy's plans. Using an adzeh to possess a previous contact, or sending a daywalking dhampir or Renfield in as the double agent, seems like the mot juste here. If the vampires have access to mind control of any sort, this is where the agents should start wondering about everyone they meet.

Bait and Switch: The conspiracy trails false intel and leaves the agent holding the bag and overextended: a shipping container that contains dead girls instead of the Black Grail; a tempting contact who turns out to be a deluded wannabe; a nonexistent Russian mafiyoso "Keyser Söze'd" into existence by rumor and mesmerism. This might be intended to make the agents question their Network, their deductions, or each other. It may be combined with an attempted ambush or arrest. As with the red herring, the moment the agents realize their error should also point them in a useful direction: the supplier of the girls, the wannabe's "psychiatrist," the two crimes actually committed in the name of the imaginary *vor.*

Haunt Agent: The conspiracy puts the full court press on an agent. Every supernatural trick in the book gets unleashed in an attempt to simply drive the agent into retirement or insanity or both. (This may be accompanied by rumors spread through the agents' Networks that they've gone around the bend.) A ghostly asset like a murony or bhuta is ideal for this assignment; something the agents can't simply shoot off their back.

Row Four: Embrace

Offer Drive: The conspiracy offers to fulfill one agent's Drive, resolve their story arc, or otherwise take them off the board happy and well-rewarded. In a Burn mode game, refusal might lead to deliberate attack on their Drive; in a Mirror mode game, refusal might still lead to rewards just to mess with the agents' team mates. Classically, this is a job for the lamia, even if the agent doesn't want to write Romantic poetry.

Double Cross: If the conspiracy has a double agent from Row Three, the traitor leads the agents into an ambush or lets a major target get away. If the agents are down on funds, the conspiracy hires them to do a false-flagged job and then reveals who they've been suckered into working for again. This is also when a full-on assault on an agent's Symbol pays off in Burn mode games; someone incarnating it betrays the agent foully, as above.

Kill Solace: The conspiracy shadows the agent to his Solace and kills her in front of him. Using a pack of ghouls or ferals sends exactly the right message of horror and helplessness.

DVD DOWN TO YOUR LAST PINT

Launching a vampiric counterattack which is devastating but not lethal to the climactic operation is a delicate balancing act. Putting players back to the midgame when they thought they were wrapping up can be dangerous to the overall morale of the game. In advance, then, it's best to make sure that either:

- a bare minimum of what the agents need to launch their operation survives
- the vampires overextend themselves; or
- an otherwise closed avenue of possibility opens up.

If introducing new options at this late point in the game, you'll need to make sure that the prior legwork still remains valuable, lest the players feel like all their hard planning was for naught.

Row Five: Entrapment

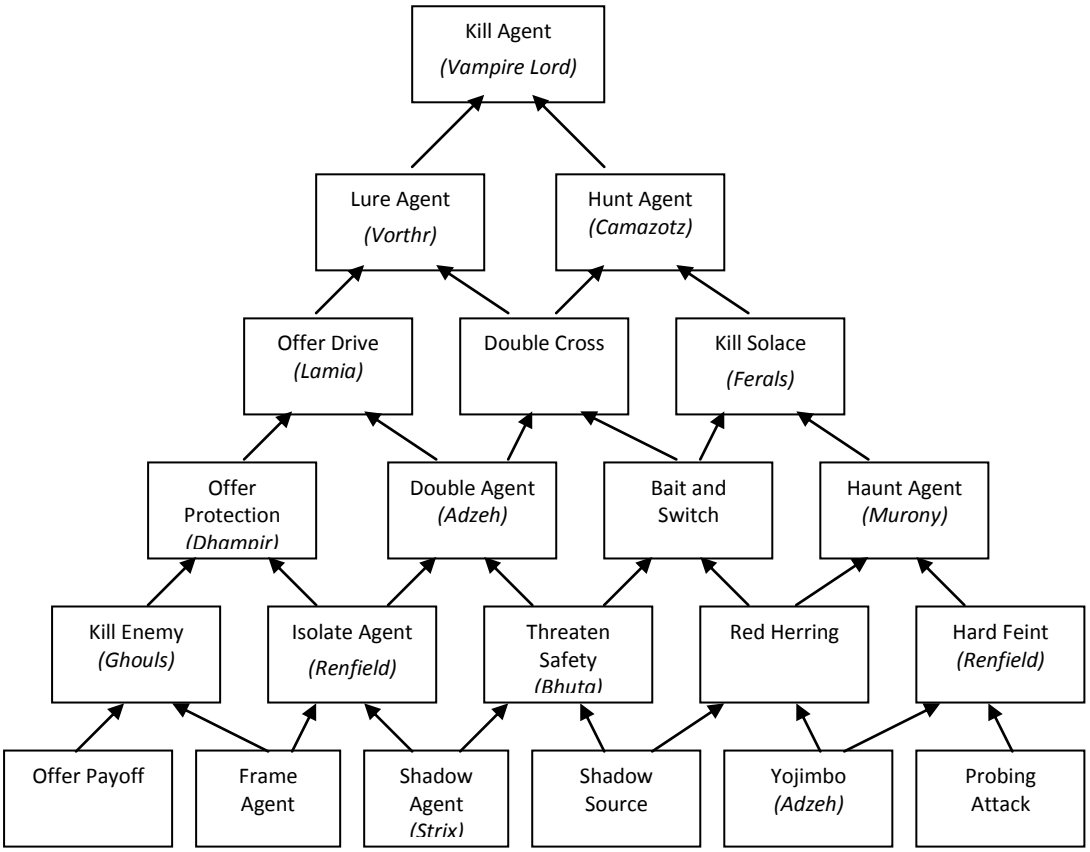
Lure Agent: The conspiracy lures the agents to their capture, draining, and turning. At this stage of the game, this usually involves actually exposing some important target — a legendary crypt, the true Castle Poenari, the alien craft — and loading it up with vampiric puissance. This sort of target gets a vorthr guard, at the very least. If the agents survive the ambush, they have major leverage and the campaign moves into its end game.

Hunt Agent: The conspiracy hunts the agents down with the intent of killing them or capturing, draining, and turning them. The conspiracy tries to time this for a period when the agents are exposed, deep in unfamiliar country, and under heavy Heat preventing them from buying extra Dragon's Breath rounds. Then the vampires unleash the camazotz or equivalent hunter, as ghouls chivvy them into its toils.

Row Six: Destruction

Kill Agent: As the agents prepare their final assault on the vampire lords, the conspiracy gets inside their decision loop and strikes first with all the might they can muster. If the agents plan to hit the ceremony on Halloween, a dhampir firebombs their ammo stockpile at noon on October 29 and the vampire lord attacks that night. Reach to the utmost in planning the preemptive assault of an immortal, unspeakably cruel warlord, then carry it out. Make the players feel like they've earned that hit on Halloween, either by driving off every single assault on their preparations, by keeping letter-perfect tradecraft and operational security (lots of contests of Surveillance and Infiltration), or by weathering the worst the vampires can throw at them.

Vampyramid Diagram



The Campaign Story

The default campaign story for ***Night's Black Agents*** is as follows: A team of agents discovers the truth about vampires. They hunt the vampires, and are hunted by them, until a final confrontation destroys the vampire conspiracy or the agents die trying. (See p. 155for a more detailed version of this campaign structure.) This story follows a dramatic arc, from introduction to climax, that maps fairly well to the three phases of a chess game: opening, midgame, and endgame. Each of those stages has its own feel in a roleplaying game, especially in this one.

The Opening

In the opening, the players are learning the ropes, getting to know the rules of the game world and of the campaign. This is where they learn to use the adversary map, and the constraints of the mode they've selected. Point out tag-team tactical benefits (see p. 110) they could gain; help them remember their MOS. You need to provide guidance, even hand-holding, until they get their narrative legs under them and realize just how badass their agents are.

That said, it's very useful to have one real harrowing scare early in the opening, presenting one vampire as an extremely credible, extremely dangerous threat. In the alpha playtest, I did this when the agents watched a vampire destroy a whole palazzo full of Serbian gangsters — pregens played by the players as disposable PCs.

Narratively, the opening usually begins with the "cherry" or introductory operation, in which the team discovers that vampires exist. If you begin the campaign in medias res, perhaps the opening is actually about the team's formation, or their joint origin story playing out. The vampires' response to the introduction should make it plain that the agents are dead men running, unless they can figure out who, where, and how to hit back. This is the first act, in screenwriting terms: the threat is established.

The opening usually lasts through the first two levels of the Conspyramid. It might include a brief hint or reveal of Level Six, though providing no clear route to the top for the agents. It also usually includes enough combats or other informative danger to let the agents (and their players) begin to outline the "rules" of the setting's vampires: garlic, crosses, hyperspace, bloodlines, or what-have-you.

Midgame

The midgame is my favorite part of any campaign. The players have internalized the rules (both mechanical and narrative) and start working to crock them in their favor. They have settled into their characters, they start playing their quirks and taking risks. They become proactive; they know the game world well enough to have their own agendas, and can plot their own solutions to the problems they encounter. This is when they start to surprise you, and that's the fun of running an RPG for me. Work with them, get into a rhythm and response that feels right.

This is where, if you wish, you can throw in some new element: werewolves, the NSA's web of goetic demon-summoning satellites, a rival conspiracy or vampire faction, or the Fourth Reich. This is the equivalent of the "season break" in a TV show, one that adds a new "Big Bad" or villain arc, or makes Spike into a good guy. Done in midgame, it doesn't confuse the players, it excites and challenges them. You can generally toss in one new element at the beginning of the midgame, and another at the end. If you don't do that, get a good Level 4 or Level 5 villain out of mothballs and start making the challenges personal. The agents have earned specific attention from the vampire lords by this point; it's a compliment when things get a little more serious.

Narratively, the midgame is marked by rising action on all levels. The operations have wider scope; the conspiracy unleashes a camazotz or a flock of striges because the agents have worked out tactics (and raised their ability ratings) to beat even a pack of ferals or a pair of Renfields. The vampires start taking counter-measures against the agents' anti-vampire measures; this balances the players' increasing confidence in the vampiric "physics" (or metaphysics) of the game world. The players have a sense of the conspiracy's main structure; they are targeting its limbs and weathering its counter-strikes. In screenwriting terms, this is the second act: the contest with the threat.

The midgame runs through the next two levels of the Conspyramid. The agents mount real threats to, or even destroy, nodes on Levels Three and Four. Agents' personal arcs are all on track, and fully intertwined with the conspiracy by now. This is where Burn mode games start to eat away at the agents' networks and Stability; begin corroding those if you haven't. Dust mode agents should be assembling whole networks, calling in favors for debilitating strikes at the conspiracy. This is where Mirror mode games enter the real wilderness; introduce at least one major NPC betrayal if the players don't cross each other. The players have definite ideas about the structure on Levels Five and Six, and may even have most of their adversary map filled in, but must take real risks to get traction there.

BRINGING IN NEW CHARACTERS

In a horror game, mayhem suffered by the protagonists is not an impediment to forward movement. ***Night's Black Agents*** characters, especially in Dust mode games, are not good life insurance risks. The player turns to his defunct agent's Network contacts, to NPCs created as part of his personal arc, or to a previously unmentioned squad mate from his years in Afghanistan. He creates the agent as normal, but begins by placing 1 build point in each ability not covered by the other agents on the Investigative Ability Worksheet (see Addenda, p. 214). Give the new agent enough extra build points to equal the experience earned by the other players.

New players are added in in much the same fashion, as contacts of existing agents. They use the same number of Investigative build points as everyone else originally did, not the lower number applicable to the group's new size.

Endgame

The endgame begins when the players or the vampires resolve to end things once and for all. If your players have been proactive hunters, give them an opportunity to cut off the head of the conspiracy — if they're willing to risk their own destruction. If they have started to hunker down and look for a place to hide, give them an opportunity to get out clean — after one last operation. Players with a real sense of the tragic (especially in Mirror mode games) may set themselves up for the endgame by plotting betrayals, selling out to the CIA or the Chinese, or simply trying for a final suicide run.

Every operation until the final confrontation should emphasize the looming danger. The conspiracy is all around, the vampires are pulling out all the stops. In Burn mode games, the agents' contacts start running for the hills and diving for deep cover. In Dust mode games, the agents start losing resources and protection. In Mirror mode games, people start selling the agents out for whatever protection they can get. For every solid piece of intel about the vampire lords (and there should be plenty of it coming in by now), exact a cost: burn a Network contact, kill a Solace, raise the Heat. The villain from the midgame should be everywhere; often, a boss fight with him is what sets off the endgame one way or another.

In screenwriting terms, the endgame is the third act: the resolution. One way or another, someone is going down. The players should be using every single trick or asset they've accumulated to set up one final confrontation with Level Six of the Conspyramid, while you bleed them in a war on Level Five. Go as slow as you can, while not slacking off on the tension and inevitability of the end. If you don't think you've given the players enough intel, give them one last betrayal: someone on Level Five wants to cut a deal with them, ideally an actor you've foreshadowed in the midgame. (It's odd how easy it is to scare your players by making it clear that at least some of the villains fear them.) It's very tricky to pull the endgame off, and if you muff it, it's very hard to go back to midgame and start over. It's almost better to kill the agents and let the story end with a noble failure. For the final scenario, figure out a big, high-powered adventure, lay a trail of clues to it, and let it rip: a run-and-gun bug hunt through Castle Dracula, a ritual awakening of an antediluvian vampire beneath the Kremlin, a standoff and shootout in the Colosseum.

Alternate Versions

Directors can alter their vampires, their conspiracies, and their modes of play to suit their individual visions. They can also alter the game itself. Herewith, three possible drifts of the core ***Night's Black Agents*** "setting" suitable for straight spy stories, Cthulhoid horror, or psionic action.

Martini, Straight Up

In this build, there are no vampires, just spies, mafiosi, and terrorists. You can set the mode as usual, and play for James Bond wildness, Tom Clancy brinksmanship, or John Le Carré whispers. The agents aren't rogue criminals, they're part of an existing national intelligence or security apparatus.

Investigative Ability Changes

The main difference in the rules concerns the abilities. Spies aren't actually wide-ranging technical polymaths, but specialists in gathering information. Remove the following abilities; if they come up in play, use Network to recruit a civilian expert on the topic, or just use Interpersonal abilities to schmooze one:

- Art History
- Astronomy
- Chemistry
- Diagnosis
- Forensic Pathology
- Occult Studies
- Vampirology

The following abilities also disappear, but other abilities absorb some of their coverage:

- Archaeology now falls under History (for historical data), Human Terrain (for specific important ruins), or Urban Survival (for modern cities with ancient foundations).

- Architecture now falls under Urban Survival
- Flirting becomes a subset of Flattery
- Photography now falls under Electronic Surveillance and Data Recovery

Reduce initial Investigative build points as follows:

# of Players	Investigative Build Points
2	25
3	20
4	18
5+	16

Bureaucracy (General)

Finally, Bureaucracy now becomes a General ability. It can be used investigatively as normal, but it also creates your pool for tests to get your own agency (or a theoretically allied agency) to do something for you: retask a satellite, cancel a dangerous mission or funding probe, authorize the rescue of a captured asset, lower your Heat by 1, release a classified file to you (or bury one away from someone else), send in SEAL Team Six, or anything else. In other tests, you may try to thwart or prevent your agency from doing something it has decided on: trade a prisoner, investigate your network, bug an embassy.

A standard task that you have clearance for is Difficulty 3; something you have to pull strings to get is Difficulty 5; something you have no business asking for is Difficulty 7. Raise Difficulties by 1 for other agencies of your own government, and by 2 for agencies of other governments. It will often be more convenient to build Network contacts in other governments than to actually go through channels.

The Director may build NPC bureaucrats who oppose you often enough to get their own pools, and set the parameters for your operations based on the results of full contests of Bureaucracy.

Bureaucracy is an ideal ability for continuing challenges (see p. 110); you make one test per operation, with a bonus or penalty depending on your performance (and lack of Heat) on the mission.

Bureaucracy only refreshes at the end of an operation; it cannot be refreshed in a haven (see p. 92).

If the agents have attracted Heat during an operation, they cannot spend build points earned as experience from that operation on Bureaucracy.

In Burn mode, success by a margin of 1 or less in a Bureaucracy contest means the Director will task your team to do something unpleasant in return.

In Dust mode, all Bureaucracy Difficulties increase by 1.

In Mirror mode, the agency starts with 2 Trust points from each agent. To reverse the results of a failed Bureaucracy test, an agent can give the agency 1 more Trust point during an op. When, er, *if* the agency betrays the player characters, its (NPC) operatives spend the agency's Trust pool to harm the PCs (see p. 41).

The Dunwich Sanction

There is a secret enemy in the shadows, but it is nothing so comforting as vampires. The secret enemy is, instead, reality itself.

The agents might be part of a large, ignorant government bureaucracy or a covert conspiracy within it that knows the truth. Or they might be part of an official agency with a sub rosa tasking to oppose the forces of the Cthulhu mythos, as in Charles Stross' "Laundry" novels. Or, in standard ***Night's Black Agents*** fashion, they might be burned or bolted operatives who uncover the existence of ancient, alien forces inimical to man, and hunt the cults that serve them.

This build requires a copy of the game ***Trail of Cthulhu,*** published by Pelgrane Press. It adds the Sanity ability and rules from that game, as well as the following abilities, mostly from ***Trail of Cthulhu***:

- Cthulhu Mythos
- Fringe Science (as noted under Occult Studies, p. 23)
- Geology (comes out from under Chemistry)
- Physics
- Theology (comes out from under Human Terrain)

Otherwise, build characters as ***Night's Black Agents,*** not as ***Trail of Cthulhu*** Investigators.

It does not necessarily add any of the other rules from that game, although since both ***Trail of Cthulhu*** and ***Night's Black Agents*** use the GUMSHOE system, they inter-operate.

If the agents are members of a modern-day Project Covenant (***Trail of Cthulhu,*** pp. 207-209) or its equivalent in another country (or are otherwise still government operatives), use the Bureaucracy rules from *Martini, Straight Up,* above (see p. 196). Since Project Covenant includes assets in the Smithsonian Institution, among other unlikely government bodies, use the ability list from this section, not from that frame's straight-spies list.

Vampires may still exist, as independent supernatural actors (Lovecraft's villainous revenant wizard Joseph Curwen required fresh blood, at least early in his reanimation) or as servitors of Mordiggian, Nyarlathotep, Hastur, or any variety of gods and titans.

Special Assets

In this variant, the vampires aren't the only paranormal game in town. As in Brian Lumley's *Necroscope* series, which famously pits psychics against Soviet-bloc vampires, the agents also have access to magic or psionics or some other wild talent. Again, this may be an official "black program" like the U.S. Army's Project Star Gate (made famous in *The Men Who Stare At Goats*) or the alleged SVR "Blue Star" teams; or it might be a rogue, unofficial, or independent operation.

Paranormal powers are special General abilities. Build points for paranormal abilities come from the pool of General build points. The first rating point in any paranormal ability costs 5 build points; after that, build points for that ability become rating points as normal.

> *Jack wants to get Remote Viewing. He spends 7 build points, and gets Remote Viewing with a rating of 3. The first rating point costs 5 build points; the next two each cost 1 build point.*

Using a paranormal ability is like any other General ability use: roll a die, add any points you spend, and compare the result to the Difficulty. However, you *must spend* at least 2 points from your ability pool if you can. If you have insufficient points in that pool, you must spend points from your Stability pool instead. Points spent from your Stability pool do not add to the die roll, however.

Shocking revelations or other uncanny phenomena accompanying paranormal ability use will more than likely trigger further Stability tests (likely 3- or 4-point potential losses).

While using a paranormal ability, you cannot use any other ability except as specifically noted in the ability text. You cannot use any paranormal ability while in combat or in immediate physical peril.

After using a paranormal ability, you must make a Difficulty 5 Health test or immediately lose 2 Health *and* become Hurt for the rest of the scene. (If you are already Hurt, you become Seriously Wounded.) This represents a profound, bone-deep exhaustion approaching shock, not an actual injury.

Paranormal abilities do not refresh until after an operation.

Although the following two sample paranormal abilities are both information-gathering by nature, the Director should refrain from making core clues within an operation depend solely on the result of a paranormal ability test.

Necrophony (General/Paranormal)

This is the ability to speak with the dead; one who has this ability is called a "medium." The conversation lasts until the medium uses any other ability (except Interpersonal abilities used with the spirit), or until the scene ends, or until the Director decides the contact should break because there's no juice left in the conversation.

As a general rule, the Difficulty for Necrophony with a specific entity is 8, with modifiers as follows:

Condition	Difficulty Modifier
Entity unwilling to communicate	+2 or higher
Night	-1
Ouija board	-1
Dead person was known to sitter at séance	-1
Clothing or other possession of dead person available to medium	-1
Medium is at dead person's gravesite	-1
Spirit guide present to assist medium	-1
SPIRICOM Mk IV or superior psychotronic equipment	-2
Formal séance or other necromantic ritual (usually requires Occult Studies spend)	-2
Dead person was known to medium in life	-2
Spirit is angry, powerful, or insistent	-2
Bones or other relics of dead person available to medium	-3
Spirit invited to possess medium (requires 4-point Stability test)	-3
Spirit guide of medium	-4
Communication with any spirit present, not a specific spirit	-4

If the spirit possesses the medium, other agents present may use Interpersonal abilities with the spirit.

Often, the dead refuse to break contact. The medium must make a Necrophony test against a base Difficulty of 3 to blot out the voices of the dead, or to refuse to contact an importunate spirit. To throw off a possessing spirit that refuses to release you, make a

Necrophony test at Difficulty 5. More powerful spirits (very angry ghosts, Voudun loa, etc.) increase these Difficulties.

Vampires may be able to detect attempts to speak to the spirits of the dead that they have vampirized, or that they already control or command in some way. The medium then resists any resulting vampiric Mental Attack at +2 to Difficulty.

Remote Viewing (General/Paranormal)

This ability, as practiced by the U.S. Army's Project Star Gate program, is not a psychic power so much as a training regimen that maximizes both its users' innate psi abilities and their analytical subconscious. In fine, it is militarized clairvoyance, the ability to see things unknown to the viewer at a distance. It does not allow the viewer to find a specific person or object; rather, it reveals anything present at a specific set of map or GPS coordinates. You can use remote viewing (RV) to view the inside of a locked building, specific room, or sealed vault, assuming you have the coordinates.

The more specific the coordinates, the more specific the information: in practice, trying to remote-view any site larger than a square mile returns nothing but blurs. Switching coordinates (including "zooming in") during a remote viewing session requires a new test roll. A session lasts between one and six hours.

Difficulty does not vary by range, but by the amount of intelligence returned by a given session. After spending points from your Remote Viewing pool, roll the die, apply any modifiers, and check the total Difficulty achieved against the result column. Each result includes the earlier Stages: e.g., a Stage Three result also returns the information available at Stages One and Two.

Remote Viewing Circumstance	**Difficulty Modifier**
Viewer has visited the site in person or in Stage Six viewing of target	-3
Viewer has excellent IMINT: surveillance footage, ground photos; *or* previous Stage Three or better viewing of target	-2
Viewer has good IMINT: real-time satellite or aerial footage	-1
Viewer has adequate IMINT: satellite or aerial photos	+0
Cold "coordinates only" viewing without IMINT	+1
Site has anti-RV precautions (Tesla coils, astral wards, etc.)	+2 or worse
Viewer is distracted by loud noises or other stimuli	+2
Remote Viewing Intelligence Result	**Difficulty**
Stage One: Perception of site's general nature: e.g., "structure," "water," "event"	4
Stage Two: Basic sense perception of site or target: taste, temperature, sound, color, quality of light	6
Stage Three: Dimensional perception of site or target: height, length, depth, angle, curvature; site or target can be sketched with an appropriate spend (e.g., Architecture, Military Science)	8
Stage Four: Complex and abstract information about target: chemical composition, mechanical intentions, orientation, dollar value, relationship to outside world, etc.	10
Stage Five: Viewer may "interrogate" the vision; Director answers any one question about the target for 1 Remote Viewing point	12
Stage Six: Full three-dimensional imagery of target, assuming the viewer can draw, render, or otherwise model the target with an appropriate spend (e.g., Architecture, Forgery, Mechanics, Military Science); Director answers two more questions about the target for 1 Remote Viewing point.	15

Other GUMSHOE Powers

The range of possible extranormal abilities is greater even than the range of vampiric powers; the Director will have to pick and choose with some care to avoid drowning out the vampires or making the agents too powerful too soon. Conversely, the agents might (instead or in addition) be investigating mutants, super-soldiers, or other foes using these powers, a la *X-Files* and *Fringe.*

These powers might all spring from the CIA's MK-ULTRA or other agencies' similar mind control programs, requiring psychotronic equipment or drugs (administered to the user or to the target or both) to use.

Some other powers from other GUMSHOE games and books are especially suitable for spy thriller games.

Ashen Stars: Dreamsight, Pathway Amplification, Timesight

Fear Itself: Aura Sight, Messenger, Premonitions, Sensitive, Synchronicity

Mutant City Blues: Emotion Control, Enter Dreams, Environmental Awareness, Illusion, Impersonate, Induce Aggression, Induce Fear, Induce Mental Disorder, Memory Alteration, Nondescript, Observe Dreams, Possession, Precision Memory, Psionic Blast, Read Minds, Telekinesis, Telepathy, Tracking

Trail of Cthulhu: Hypnosis, Idiosyncratic Magic. Directors may require agents to buy the Magic ability (as defined in ***Rough Magicks***) before using Idiosyncratic Magic.

In general, use the paranormal ability rules in this section, rather than those in those books.

(S)ENTRIES

This operation is designed to serve as an introductory adventure for a ***Night's Black Agents*** campaign, revealing the existence of vampires to the agents, providing them with possible leads on the conspiracy, and making them targets of vampiric reprisals. It can be run as an operation in an ongoing ***Night's Black Agents*** campaign with some adjustments (see box).

Eyes Only Briefing

This section summarizes the operation for the Director.

- A Canadian Air Force general, Malcolm Lennart, has stumbled upon the vampire conspiracy.
- A conspiracy paymaster hires two fixers: Georg Rudek, to hire a crew (the agents) to steal the laptop; and Anton Dedopovic, to pay off the agents and secure the laptop for the conspiracy.
- Unknown to the conspiracy, Anton Dedopovic has a worsening kidney disease; he has also deduced the vampiric nature of the conspiracy. He uses the agents' pay to hire his own gang, planning to double-cross them, take the laptop, and trade it for vampiric immortality.
- This probably doesn't work; the agents track Anton or the paymaster or both to Belgrade.
- The conspiracy paymaster may be a Belgrade gang boss named Danilo Brigovic, or someone above him, depending on your sense of drama and realism. The degree of overt vampirism on display at this level likewise so depends.

The Spine

The operation begins with the agents **Meeting Rudek** in Dubrovnik, Croatia. He answers any questions, and facilitates their entry into Bosnia, where they can set about **Heisting the Laptop** from NATO HQ in Sarajevo. After their **Escape** into the Serbian zone, they meet up with Anton Dedopovic and drive into his **Double Cross** at the deserted cemetery in Gostilj. Regardless of **Anton's Fate,** the agents turn up additional motivations (or additional weirdness) when **Policing the Scene.** Whether they try **Tracking the Paymaster** or **Tracking Anton,** the trail leads to Belgrade and a **Payoff,** quite possibly in the form of confrontation with the deeper horror.

IN AN ONGOING CAMPAIGN

If *(S)Entries* isn't the first operation in your campaign, or if you've begun your series *in medias res* with the agents already hunting and hunted by a vampire conspiracy, Anton Dedopovic himself tips off the agents about Lennart's investigation. He can do so directly, or through an NPC or agent contact you've already established in the game. His plan, just like in the default scenario, is to get the agents to steal the laptop, ambush them, and sell it to the vampires in exchange for immortality. The only difference is that he plans it ahead of time as an ambush rather than as an opportunistic double-cross.

In an ongoing campaign, the lift becomes easier because the agents will likely be happy to let Lennart carry his data to the presumed safety of Canada, as long as they have their own copy. They may even attempt to recruit the general into their own network, which in all likelihood results in one or two more adventure leads and ends with a mysterious plane crash.

The Job

The player characters are contacted by Georg Rudek, a fixer well known to (and trusted by) at least one agent. Rudek isn't a money man; he puts jobs together for people who pay him for his people skills and for their own anonymity. He has a shadowy background in Balkan intelligence that became a nice sideline in arms dealing during the wars in Bosnia and Kosovo. Now, he lives a life of low-profile leisure in various Mediterranean fleshpots.

Encourage the players to describe how they receive word of the job, and from whom: does Rudek contact one player, who recruits (or rouses) the others? Or does he get in touch with all of them individually? Does he call on a burner phone, leave word with a trustworthy bartender, send a text or email, post to an anonymous chatroom? What are they doing when they get the word? Milk this scene a bit, whether it's the "getting the team back together" sequence or the "assembling a picked crew" sequence.

Meeting Rudek

Rudek sets up the rendezvous for a meeting room in an anonymous chain hotel in Dubrovnik, Croatia, wiring any necessary funds, tickets, and so forth to the agents. If they're feeling suspicious, they can come in earlier and scout around; there's nothing more nefarious going on than German businessmen cheating on their wives and taxes. When the big day

comes, it's almost an anticlimax. The staff barely even rise to the level of obsequious; as long as the agents don't start shooting in the lobby, nobody pays them any mind whatsoever.

Rudek, a thickset fellow in his late forties, greets the agent he knows with a shoulder clasp and politely vague inquiries about health and career: "Glad to hear that thing got cleared up. Let me know if I can help again." To agents he doesn't know, he is affable but professional. After making sure the room is clean, and that everybody has a water or other beverage of their choosing, he opens a large-screen laptop and lays out the contract.

"My principals … whom I suspect are not our ultimate employers in this matter … need something from this man. Specifically, his laptop computer."

On Rudek's laptop, the screen shows a sixtyish man in a uniform that **Military Science** recognizes as that of a general in the Canadian Air Force.

"Brigadier-General Malcolm Lennart has just completed his NATO tour and is returning home to Canada from NATO HQ Sarajevo next week. He commands a logistical planning unit; I suspect he's been looking into some purchasing records or political deals that don't stand close inspection." (**Law** or **History** provides another possibility: that Lennart has stumbled across the paper trail of a Serbian or Croatian war criminal.)

"But whatever it is, he doesn't seem to have filed any reports on it, which implies that he's keeping the evidence close to him. A quick black-bag job on his office in Naples didn't turn up any relevant paper files; my principals believe that he keeps everything on that laptop … which, in defiance of security regulations, he removes from his office and takes with him to his personal quarters every evening."

"Let me be clear: merely getting copies of the data on the laptop will not be considered success. The general must not retain his own copies, and he absolutely must not take those files out of Bosnia in six days. Your job is to secure that laptop, and to make sure that no backup exists for it. For that, you will be paid €100,000 apiece; half now in any account of your choosing, and half on delivery."

Rudek pauses. "Although this is just my conjecture, I suspect our employers don't want the general killed, just in case that draws attention to whatever malfeasance he was investigating. Merely missing data or lost computers, however, will make the general's lapses of security the issue instead."

"Once you've secured the laptop, you will call a contact number, then rendezvous with Anton Dedopovic on the Serbian side of the partition line. He will pay you the balance of your fee in cash and take it from there." Rudek slides a flash drive across the table to one of the agents; it holds a basic dossier on Lennart and satellite photos of Camp Butmir, the military base that hosts both NATO HQ Sarajevo and EUFOR, the European Union force training the Bosniak military and occasionally rousting war criminals. It also provides GPS coordinates for the rendezvous with Dedopovic, a Belgrade phone number to call when the job is done, and a basic recognition code. To another agent, he slides the keys to a Jeep Cherokee: the prestige choice of UN workers and mid-level Russian mobsters alike.

Assuming the agents agree to the contract, Rudek happily turns to the question of payment, electronically transferring funds from a Vienna bank to any account or accounts the agents specify. (With a 2-point **Criminology** or 1-point **Accounting** spend, an agent recognizes the bank as one owned by the Russian mafiya.) He also offers to throw in a weapon apiece "on the house," to arrange for any other gear the agents need here in Dubrovnik, and the use of his people in crossing the border into Bosnia from Croatia.

Questions

The players likely want more information than this summary briefing contains. Depending on the flavor you're aiming for, Rudek might provide it freely if asked, or they might have to run it down on their own.

Brigadier-General Lennart

Lennart has a perfectly normal-looking career jacket for a Canadian general officer: squadron command, liaison with the USAF, base command, NATO posting. His expertise is logistics; routing flights and supplies from base to field and vice versa. The only anomaly in his file is his sudden transfer to Sarajevo: by rights, he should have finished out his NATO tour at NATO HQ Naples. His transfer five months ago might have been intended to stymie his investigation, or he might have requested it himself to get access to records of the Bosnia and Kosovo missions. (**Military Science** will yield any of this information. Agents can likely get access to the transfer file by some means: spends of **Bureaucracy** or **Network,** or even **Digital Intrusion** (Difficulty 5) into NATO personnel records. The Director should decide whether Lennart was sidelined or following up a lead. If her conspiracy has a strong Balkan component already, Lennart was following a lead; if not, he was sidelined.)

There is nothing in his file indicating anything like specialized computer training. Thus, it's likely that he hasn't dumped copies of his investigation file somewhere online — not to mention that such copies would be an even graver security breach than taking a laptop home. (Investigative use of **Digital Intrusion**)

Neither Rudek, independent investigation, or Network contacts can give anyone a handle to exert pressure on Lennart: he doesn't drink anything stronger than beer, lets the Canadian Forces retirement plan manage his modest investments, votes Liberal, and his long-term girlfriend in Red Deer, Alberta (to whom he remains faithful) is similarly clean.

Anton Dedopovic

By contrast, Anton Dedopovic is a piece of work. A killer and rapist during the war, after the Dayton Accords he became a big wheel in the Naša Stvar, the Serbian mafia. He is wired a million different ways in Serbia and the Serbian zone of Bosnia; his main interests are human trafficking and heroin, but he serves as a useful cut-out for any number of operators in the former Yugoslavia. (This is common knowledge to Rudek and any agent with experience in the region; **Tradecraft** and **Streetwise** provide the same intel, and add that he usually "stays bought," at least for the length of a given operation.)

With a 1-point **Criminology** or **Tradecraft** spend, one more piece of intel seems relevant. Dedopovic has been seen in Switzerland on more than one occasion, and the word on the street is that he might be trying to use a Swiss clinic or private hospital to set up a heroin ring in that country. (In fact, Dedopovic has been trying to find a cure for his kidney disease.)

The Rendezvous

The GPS coordinates provided by Rudek lead to an Orthodox cemetery east of Gostilj, a small town north of Srebrenica in the Serbian zone of Bosnia (**Research**). If the agents want to scout it before the heist, Rudek will note that they lose two days driving there and back to Sarajevo and risk running into a roadblock. **Tradecraft** tells them that entering the Serbian zone, unless done completely covertly and invisibly, will most likely alert Dedopovic. If the players insist on trying it, give them a roadblock (five Militia, per p. 70) that allows them to pass with a spend of **Intimidation** or **Military Science** (or a 4-point test of a suitable **Cover**) but absolutely reports them to Dedopovic's contacts.

Dedopovic has Vladek, his sniper (see p. 205) staking out the cemetery; he is in satellite phone contact with Dedopovic but under orders to avoid contact with anyone before the laptop theft. Noticing Vladek in the hills requires a Difficulty 6 **Surveillance** test; tracking him down and forcing a confrontation requires a contest of **Surveillance.**

The Lift

Getting from Dubrovnik to Sarajevo, at least with Rudek greasing palms ahead of time, is as simple as taking a drive. The only trick is to make sure to take the slightly longer route (about 240 km) via Mostar; going the other way risks running into a roadblock in the Serbian zone. Rudek has arranged rooms at an airport hotel, but if they wish the agents can get a safe house with a **Network** contact (Difficulty 4). The hotel is actually less conspicuous, although squad-level groups of tough-looking strangers are not particularly unknown in Sarajevo even at this late date.

Heisting the Laptop

Run the heist in as free-form a fashion as you feel comfortable with. This isn't actually the centerpiece of the adventure, so don't worry if it feels a little anti-climactic. The contrast with the later scenes will work just fine.

The Target

Lennart lives in a modest town house in the western Sarajevo suburb of Ilidza (8 km from downtown, 4 km from the base); he has one local woman to cook and clean. She does not live on the premises, but comes in while he is out. The security system is good, but not amazing: Difficulty 4 **Infiltration,** but an alarm rings on the base as well as at the local police station.

His office is in a building at Camp Butmir, half a kilometer south of Sarajevo International Airport; the base is about a third of a kilometer west of the border of the Republika Srpska, the Serbian zone of Bosnia. At any given time, the base has uniformed personnel from ten or a dozen different nations on it, along with local civilian government officials and workers. With any plausible uniform and halfway decent credentials (1-point **Forgery** spend or Difficulty 3 **Cover**), getting on base should be relatively simple: Difficulty 4 **Disguise,** or even a 2-point spend of **Military Science** or **Intimidation** works.

Getting access to Lennart's office is harder. His adjutant, Captain Sebring, has followed Lennart from post to post, and knows exactly who is and is not supposed to be in the office. As mentioned earlier, Lennart keeps his laptop secured in the office during work hours, and then takes it with him.

Lennart's Schedule

0600 Lennart wakes up, works out in his home, showers.

0645 Lennart's staff car shows up to drive him to Camp Butmir.

0700 Lennart arrives at his office at Camp Butmir.

1100 Lennart has lunch brought into his office.

Usually, Lennart works in his office alone. On occasion, he attends staff meetings or other briefings, but leaves as early as possible.

1800 Lefffingwell leaves his office; staff car drives him.

1830 Lennart stops for dinner at a restaurant or arrives home.

2000 Lennart arrives home from the restaurant; works or reads.

2300 Lights out.

On his last day, he is scheduled to catch a Canadian Air Force flight at 1500 hrs out of the military field at Sarajevo International Airport. His last scheduled day at the office includes a final review on the parade ground, a staff meeting, and lunch with his fellow officers.

The Boost

Any plausible plan should work. In playtest, the agents got a video bug into the office with **Infiltration** and **Electronic Surveillance,** matched the laptop model with **Data Recovery** (zooming in on the bug display), bought the same model laptop and duplicated Lennart's with **Conceal,** and made a switch during Lennart's final day at the base with a cocktail of **Interpersonal** abilities and **Filch.** They decided they wanted to wait until the last minute so that the general wouldn't notice the substitution until he landed in Halifax.

Other possibilities include (with the relevant abilities):

- Stealing or switching the laptop at night (**Surveillance** to avoid military and police security drive-bys, **Infiltration,** and **Filch**).
- Stealing or switching the laptop from the office while Lennart is in a meeting or otherwise out of the office (**Infiltration, Filch,** probably **Military Science** and **Disguise** or **Cover**).
- Hitting Lennart's staff car during his drive to or from work or the airport and stealing the laptop outright (**Driving, Hand-to-Hand,** likely **Disguise,** possibly **Shooting** or **Explosive Devices**).
- Hacking the laptop, downloading all its files, and then introducing a worm to destroy the hard drive (**Digital Intrusion,** probably along with **Infiltration** and **Electronic Surveillance**).
- Poisoning Sebring with a "stomach bug" and pretending to be Lennart's temporary adjutant (**Pharmacy, Infiltration, Filch, Disguise, Military Science**).
- Poisoning the general off base, stealing an ambulance, and pretending to be EMTs (**Pharmacy, Infiltration, Filch, Disguise, Diagnosis,** and probably **Driving**).

And so on. In general, Difficulty ratings for these tests should hover around 5; Lennart is obviously on edge, and NATO security is not a joke. Spends will be required for Investigative abilities. Hacking into Lennart's laptop has a Difficulty of 6, as does breaking into his office.

The active opposition, if any, will mostly be Soldiers and Police from p. 70.

The Escape

If the agents have gone in hard, escaping the scene with the laptop may involve them in a chase. If you use the Thriller Chase Rules, crossing the border into the Serbian zone provides the fleeing agents with a 2-point refresh of their **Driving** or other relevant pool, as pursuing NATO or Sarajevo police have to request clearance for pursuit. (If the agents proactively invoked their **Human Terrain** or **Urban Survival,** make it a 4-point refresh.)

Otherwise, the agents can cross the unmonitored border with ease. One stolen car later, they're on their way to the rendezvous. Dedopovic has assets in the base and at the hotel; unless the agents have taken great care to cover their tracks, he knows either when the laptop is stolen or when the agents leave the hotel.

The Meet

It's about a four-hour drive to the cemetery, which lies on one slope of a mountain valley with a ridge between it and the town. In short, very isolated. One paved road leads in from the north and loops around the cemetery. Reconnoitering it on a good map (1-point **Research** spend) or a satellite photo (**Data Recovery**) notes that a back trail leads out of the cemetery along the mountain face, east-southeast toward the Serbian border 10km away.

A caretaker's shack and a few bullet-scarred mausoleums are the only structures; the rest is rank grass, juniper and sloe bushes, and eroded headstones. One stretch nearer the road has newer graves with concrete crosses in a row: Serbian war dead.

A black Jeep Cherokee is parked near a crossroads at the middle of the cemetery, its headlights aiming down the north road. At least three figures are visible standing near the Jeep; two of them have assault rifles. (In addition to Vladek and Slobodan, Anton has as many thugs as there are agents hired by Rudek.) Anton's blue BMW is parked behind the caretaker's

shack; it's not immediately visible as the agents drive in.

The Double Cross

Here's how Anton hopes it goes down:

The agents drive into the cemetery and get out at the crossroads, holding the laptop. They give it to Anton in exchange for a briefcase full of newspaper cut to resemble currency packets (each with a single €20 note on top). When he sees the exchange made, and ideally while at least one agent has his hands full of briefcase, Vladek snipes the most threatening agent; Anton's thugs gun down the others. Anton then trades the laptop to his contact in exchange for vampiric immortality.

That is not how it will go down unless the players are the most trusting and unlucky gamers in the history of gaming.

How It Goes Down

As the agents drive into the cemetery, request a Difficulty 6 **Sense Trouble** test from the agent riding shotgun. If that agent fails, the party will be surprised by the ambush (see p. 215). If that agent makes it, he spots something that looks like a scope glinting in the hills to the west.

If the agents immediately turn their car around, Vladek will shoot out their tires (Hit Threshold 6, or 5 with Sniping) and the ambush is sprung early. Slobodan and three thugs jump into their Jeep and start chasing the agents, firing assault rifles out the window with abandon. Anton and any other thugs wait to pick up Vladek and then head to cut off the agents on Serbian back roads they know perfectly.

If the agents already had somebody dismount and creep into the hills, it's only a Difficulty 4 Infiltration to sneak up from the east; it's Difficulty 6 to sneak past Vladek on the west. Failing that test gets you shot at; again, the ambush is sprung early.

If the agents get to the crossroads, they can see Anton, Slobodan, and a semi-circle of thugs. A 1-point **Diagnosis** spend notes Anton's puffy face and hands, his glittery eyes, and his alternately harsh and thready breathing: he is not healthy. Any Interpersonal read on him (**Bullshit Detector, Streetwise**) notes his fixation on the laptop (if it's visible) but nothing else: he's a practiced hard case.

At almost all costs, Anton and his men try to recover the laptop. If Anton is the only survivor (or if Vladek has bugged out) and the agents are still shooting, he reluctantly flees to his car, peels out, and prepares to hit the agents later. Anton's car has run-flat tires (see p. 57), but is not additionally armored.

ANTON'S CREW

Anton Dedopovic

Anton's high Health is a high dramatic survival rating; his actual physical health is, as indicated elsewhere, not good.

General Abilities: Athletics 7, Driving 6, Hand-to-Hand 6, Health 10, Shooting 5, Surveillance 6, Weapons 5

Hit Threshold: 3

Alertness Modifier: +0

Stealth Modifier: +0

Damage Modifier: -2 (fist), -1 (knife), +1 (9mm Glock 26 pistol)

Vladek, the Sniper

General Abilities: Athletics 8, Driving 5, Hand-to-Hand 5, Health 7, Shooting 10, Surveillance 9, Weapons 5

Hit Threshold: 4

Alertness Modifier: +2 (night vision optics)

Stealth Modifier: +1 (+2 in sniper hide)

Damage Modifier: -2 (fist), -1 (combat knife), +1 (9mm CZ99 pistol), +2* (8mm Zastava M76 sniper rifle)

Armor: -2 vs. bullets, -1 vs. other (tactical vest)

* If the campaign uses this rule, Vladek has Special Weapons Training with his M76.

Slobodan, Boss Thug

General Abilities: Athletics 9, Driving 3, Hand-to-Hand 8, Health 8, Shooting 5, Weapons 5

Hit Threshold: 4

Alertness Modifier: +0

Stealth Modifier: -1

Damage Modifier: -2 (fist), -1 (blackjack), +1 (9mm Makarov PMM pistol)

Anton's Thugs

Anton's thugs are classic mooks. Their low Health lets them take two punches or one gunshot, on average, before folding. If the agents seem to be having too easy a time of it, raise their Health scores to 6.

General Abilities: Athletics 6, Driving 3, Hand-to-Hand 6, Health 3, Shooting 6, Weapons 4

Hit Threshold: 3

Alertness Modifier: +0

Stealth Modifier: -1

Damage Modifier: -2 (fist), +0 (7.62mm Zastava M70 assault rifle)

Tracking Vladek through the hills will be a real challenge: he can see and shoot any agent, while any agent who wants to spot him on the move toward

Gostilj must make a Sense Trouble test at Difficulty 5, or worse if the agents have no night-vision equipment. With four unobserved rounds of action, he can escape the cemetery area and take cover in Gostilj.

The End?

One way or another, the ambush ends. It's entirely possible that it ends with Anton and all his men dead.

Anton's Fate

This is a wild card, depending on the fall of the dice and the craft of the players.

Anton is Dead

In such cases, the players may be happy to wash their hands of the problem and go on with their lives, blissfully unaware of the vampire menace.

Run "Policing the Scene," below. The weirdness may or may not get the agents (or their Drives) engaged.

Alternately, suitable Drives or simple greed may get them to hunt down the other half of their pay for the theft (see *The Trail,* p. 207).

If they still have the laptop, investigating its contents (see *Leads,* p. 210) alerts the vampire conspiracy and gets the agents marked for death. Indeed, they may be marked for death just for holding on to the laptop. A dhampir (or equivalent horror) attacks them at the next likely juncture, and they find out about vampires anyway.

Anton is Alive Without the Laptop

The agents may still hunt down the other half of their pay or investigate the laptop, as above.

Whatever they do, Anton recruits a new crew of bigger, tougher, shootier thugs and comes after the agents. At some point, "What does this freak want with the laptop?" becomes a burning question: further investigation reveals Anton's intensifying kidney disease (specifically, membranous glomerulonephritis), and perhaps his interest in vampires.

Anton is Alive With the Laptop

The agents may still hunt down Anton and the other half of their pay, as above.

If the players let it go, word gets out that the agents let some puffy-faced Serbian gunsel rip them off; future gun buys and other deals turn uglier.

Rudek then contacts them with word of Anton's whereabouts in Belgrade and offers free guns, papers, vehicles, transport, and other logistics for a hit, claiming it's bad for his business to let that kind of behavior stand. In actuality, the vampires (through a cut-out) have hired Rudek to hit Anton just before Anton's planned meet with them. They plan to send the agents in to soften up Anton, and then send in an actual vampire (see *The Payoff,* p. 209) to kill all the survivors and take the laptop, neatly tying off all the loose ends. In this version, not all the agents may survive, but those who do definitely have a motive to find out what's going on!

Policing the Scene

After the fight, there is a little time to check the area over for any further clues. Automatic weapons fire in the hills doesn't seem to alert the authorities in the Serbian zone as much as you'd think it would.

There are two possible indicators of weirdness afoot: wild roses and dying words. (Three, if you feel you need the *Renfield Option;* see box.)

Wild Roses

If the thugs' Jeep hasn't left the scene, it proves to have a big pile of wild roses in the back, piled on top of the spare ammo and tire iron. Anton's BMW, likewise, has wild roses in the trunk, wrapped in a plastic sheet.

If both cars are gone, **Notice** spots two wild rose branches in the road, fallen from the Jeep as it sped off.

Either way, **Outdoor Survival** identifies them as wild roses, not as grafts or cultivars. They obviously haven't grown locally.

Any agent with **Vampirology,** or with a 1-point spend of **Occult Studies,** knows that in Serbian and Transylvanian lore, wild roses laid across an opening prevent a vampire from using it.

Note: If the vampires in your campaign are not blocked by wild roses, but by some other similarly strange and portable item such as garlic or silver wire, substitute that item for the roses. If the only effective blocks are extremely outré or simply not practically portable in such a case, or if you just don't feel like giving the players a useful block this early in the campaign, use the roses anyway. In that instance, Anton was misled by his Balkan superstitions into believing the roses would block vampires.

Dying Words

The ravings of a dying thug (or of Anton!) make another good way to get something weird injected into the story. Even if all the thugs got cut down in a hail of gunfire, one of them still lives long enough to choke out a few hints, after suitable persuasion. ("I'll step on your wound" or "I won't let him step on your wound"; **Intimidation** or **Reassurance** both work.)

Some sample ravings:

- "Anton's dying, but he says he's gonna live forever."
- "Trade it for eternal life, for the blood."
- "Roses keep them away. Can't cross."
- "Eyes burning. Can't look away. They're the devil." (Substitute similarly outré and evocative raving tailored to your campaign's vampires.)
- Any other suitable lead for the Trail, below.

A lead to the Trail counts as a core clue; other ravings require a spend.

🔥 In a Burn mode game, actually healing the thug with **Medic** (whether it saves the thug's life or not) removes the need for a further spend; the thug spills everything he knows.

THE RENFIELD OPTION

If you really want to juice the supernatural component of this opener, add a Renfield. This agent of the vampire conspiracy might be watching from the hills, ready to swoop in and take the laptop when the time looks right.

Or he might be held captive by Anton's thugs in a mausoleum, handcuffed and wrapped around with wild roses (or other blocks) to boot: Anton's betrayal of his vampire bosses began by bagging their erstwhile watcher/handler. (A nearby agent with **Notice** hears him scraping inside the tomb trying to escape.) In this case, Anton might already have drunk some of the Renfield's blood; put a spot of blood on Anton's chin (2-point **Notice** in the headlights) and a lot of blood on the Renfield and in a nearby collapsible mess-kit cup. This might, depending on your campaign's vampiric metaphysics, give Anton a Renfield-style power.

The key is for the Renfield to manifest at least one weird, vampiric power during the scenario. This might be a combat power during the firefight (Spider Climb, Vampiric Speed or Strength; 5-point Stability test on first witnessing) or the ability to talk clearly even with a severed throat (3-point Stability test on first witnessing).

The Renfield might also utter a useful threat: "You will not survive the Master; his talons envelop you even now" or "The Cult of the Blood Moon will shine on your graves, fools!"

Build your Renfield according to the guidelines on p. 152 and your vampires' nature and powers.

The Trail

This section presumes the agents want to find the unknown actor who hired Anton and Rudek. Since Anton turned out to be a double-dealer, this figure (the "paymaster") owes them the other half of their fee.

Tracking the Paymaster

Some of the details of tracking the paymaster, and indeed his identity, may depend on your campaign's conspiracy. Hence, this section provides general leads and scene sketches for you to adjust or ignore as necessary. There are four main threads the agents can pull: the Belgrade phone number they were given, the bank account that paid them, Rudek (who presumably dealt with either the paymaster or an intermediary), and Anton's associates in the Serbian mafia, the Naša Stvar.

Phone Number

The Belgrade phone number does not show up on any ordinary search. A Difficulty 5 **Digital Intrusion** test identifies it as a Serbian civil defense number attached to a bomb shelter. Its exchange uses mechanical relays, not digital switches; getting the numbers it called is impossible. However, by hacking into every cell phone provider in Serbia with a Difficulty 7 **Digital Intrusion** test, the agents can get all the phone numbers that called that number in the last month. **Traffic Analysis** on that data set gives the agents a lead to Danilo Brigovic, a boss in the Naša Stvar (see below, p. 208).

Actually finding the phone requires penetrating either a Serbian police station (Difficulty 6 **Infiltration** or Difficulty 5 **Disguise** plus 1-point spend of **Cop Talk**) or the medieval tunnels underneath Belgrade (Difficulty 4 **Infiltration** plus 2-point spend of **Architecture**). If the Director has such things in her arsenal, a pack of ghouls works well here.

Watching or tapping the phone (**Electronic Surveillance**) eventually leads to a Serbian police sergeant in the pay of Danilo Brigovic.

Bank Account

Tracing the funds through the Russian mafiya bank involves three Difficulty 6 **Digital Intrusion** tests (Vienna bank; London shell corporation; Isle of Man dummy company) and a 2-point **Accounting** spend. Any failure along the way brings a Russian mob hit team down on the agents, along with whatever vampiric enforcers you see fit. The money trail leads to a Level 3 node in your Conspyramid.

Rudek

The best way to find Rudek is through a **Network** contact; he's in Beirut. (Other methods may work.) Getting into Beirut under suitable cover may take some time; Rudek is probably dead when the agents find him.

The vampires kill Rudek within twelve hours after any of the following events:

- Word of Lennart's laptop theft reaches any tendril of their conspiracy.
- The agents access any of the databases indicated by Lennart's files.
- Anton attempts to shake the vampires down for eternal life.
- The agents call or contact Rudek as they normally would. (This presumes either that Rudek foolishly checks with the paymaster for guidance, or that one of Rudek's men sells him out.)

Rudek's death may provide clues in its own right: ballistic or fiber evidence (**Notice**) might lead to some assassin within the conspiracy (**Criminology**), or his means of death might be weirdly supernatural (**Occult Studies**), or he may just have two holes in his throat and no blood left. His smart phone, computer, or little black book may hold leads (**Traffic Analysis**), or be burnt to a cinder (but **Data Recovery** might be able to work miracles, or **Chemistry** reconstruct burnt paper).

Another alternative: Rudek sits behind a ring of wild roses (or other suitable block), dying of thirst and going mad. Or perhaps he shot himself rather than be mesmerized or turned. Much depends on your vampires, and the nature of your conspiracy.

If the agents covered their tracks well in Sarajevo, keep their grubby hands off the laptop for now, killed Anton in the cemetery, and practice good tradecraft, Rudek may well still be alive. If they hurry.

What, precisely, he knows depends (again) on the specifics of the vampire conspiracy, and how long you sense the players are willing to follow the thread. He may only be able to point to an intermediary node in the Conspyramid like Danilo Brigovic (see p. 158), or he might be able to finger the paymaster directly (go to *The Payoff,* p. 209). In the latter case, the agents should have to "earn" that lead by defeating the (possibly supernatural) hit team that arrives to kill Rudek.

In a Mirror mode game, the vampires leave Rudek alive. Instead of pointing them toward the paymaster, he sends them into a death trap full of vampire monsters. When the agents walk into the trap, make sure the players realize that the winning move is running away immediately, and start the hunt there.

Naša Stvar

Finding either Anton or the paymaster through the Naša Stvar is just a *Taken*-style sequence of "shooting your way up the food chain." Any agent with **Streetwise** can find a Naša Stvar ring somewhere in Serbia or Montenegro; **Intimidation** works after the requisite gunplay, pointing the agents to the next link in the chain.

After however many such episodes you deem necessary (two is the minimum if Brigovic is the paymaster; one suffices if Brigovic points them further), the agents reach Danilo Brigovic, a mafioso based in Surcin, a western suburb of Belgrade. He has a lucrative cigarette smuggling business (**Streetwise**; a 1-point Streetwise or **Criminology** spend reveals he's also a "person of interest" in a number of missing persons cases and suspected mafia killings; 2-point **Criminology** spend knows he also smuggles weapons and is protected by the Serbian government) that pays into the vampire conspiracy in exchange for protection or other services from some node therein (likely a Level 3 node, depending on your campaign specifics). Brigovic is the actual money man who arranged the Lennart laptop theft; depending on your campaign structure, he might be an intermediary for someone higher (see *The Payoff*), a Renfield or dhampir, the figurehead for a pack of striges, or be a Level 3 (or higher!) node in the Conspyramid in his own right.

In addition to any supernatural muscle (if any) he commands, his outfit is very well armed. If the agents attack him in his villa, or at his cigarette warehouse, his men will all have night vision optics, body armor, top-of-the-line firearms including light machine guns (+2 damage), tear gas and flash-bang grenades. If he has vampiric access, he keeps a pack of ghouls (if they exist in the campaign) under his warehouse; he feeds them enemies or anyone who he needs to conveniently disappear.

He is actually weakest on his party barge *Red Eagle* (Belgrade has 20 or 30 barges in the Sava and Danube doubling as casinos, nightclubs, and bars), where his men can only pack pistols and SMGs (+1 damage), and where he can only be accompanied by six or seven goons. Depending on the campaign, his vampiric allies may not be able to cross the running water onto the barge, leaving him weakened. That said, getting off the barge through a ring of Serbian Gendarmerie patrol boats will be tough.

If the agents don't come in hard, but instead present their claim and warn Brigovic about Anton, he will pay them the balance of their fee in cash and put them on a plane out of Serbia (Belgrade's Nikola Tesla Airport is in Surcin) going anywhere they'd like. (If they don't leave, he'll have the Serbian government put them on the plane; he can bring Heat 5 in Serbia for a week.) Then, he will alert the conspiracy to their whereabouts.

Tracking Anton

Any attempt to track Anton begins with the Naša Stvar (as above); once the agents have found Anton, letting him lead them to the paymaster is just good tradecraft.

Once found, tracking Anton shouldn't be much of a challenge (Difficulty 4 **Surveillance** or beat him in a contest; plant a tracker on his BMW with **Electronic Surveillance**), but he has definitely recruited a new gang of thugs including Vladek (if he escaped) or a substitute. The Serbian army produced *a lot* of snipers in the last 15 years, and Anton pays better than the Serbian army pension plan.

Anton has many and various contacts in the Belgrade police force and the Serbian Ministry of Internal Affairs; *any* police or Gendarmerie contact with the agents (except **Network** contacts) in Serbia, the Serbian zone of Bosnia, or Montenegro warns Anton.

It takes Anton as long as you think dramatically interesting to hunt down the paymaster, or to set up a meet for his blood swap, using his own contacts.

BELGRADE: QUICK AND DIRTY

Belgrade is the former capital of Yugoslavia and remains the capital of Serbia. Sitting at the junction of the Sava and Danube Rivers, its core (on the east bank) sits on low hills contrasting with the flatlands around it. Low mountains rise to the south.

Population

1.2 million (about the same as Dallas, Texas)

Conflict

A rickety machine of pro-European democrats runs the city, badly weakened by Serbia's forced acquiescence to Kosovo's independence. The ultra-nationalist, ultra-Orthodox group Obraz mounts protests and riots over Kosovo, gay rights, and Western interference.

Backdrops

Andergraund Klub: Belgrade is the biggest party city in Eastern Europe, and the Andergraund is one of its hottest clubs. Located in a warren of caverns once used as air-raid shelters, it hosts DJs, drug deals, and live concerts.

Nikola Tesla Museum: Dedicated to Serbia's native electrical genius, full of high-powered oscillators, resonators, and other things to spark, thrum, and explode. Its 160,000 pages of Tesla's papers and 2,000 books and journals may contain ways to confine, destroy, or accelerate vampirism.

Skadarska: The "bohemian neighborhood" in the Old Town, with art galleries and chic hotels alongside bistros, traditional restaurants, taverns, and strolling bands. A legally car-free area, it counts as a cramped chase (see p. 55).

Three Hooks

- Nikola Radosavljevic shot twelve people (killing 9) looking for "magicians" in 2007 in the Serbian border town of Jabukovac. He is currently in a Belgrade prison mental hospital. The agents need to talk to him, or break him out; he (unwittingly?) holds a key clue to the vampires' activities.
- An Obraz splinter cell is killing feral vampires (see p. 149; or other low-hanging blood-drinkers) and gay people, believing (based on *True Blood* and Anne Rice novels) that the two are one and the same. The agents might try to redirect them or run them, or get blamed for their actions.
- Vlad Tepes' patron John Hunyadi, the king of Hungary, died of "the plague" in Belgrade in 1456 just after raising the Turkish siege. A newly discovered chronicle hints that Vlad was in Belgrade during the siege, and indicates that he may have left something behind; something the agents want to find.

The Payoff

The specifics of the paymaster depend, again, both on the nature of your vampires and of your conspiracy. The paymaster might be Danilo Brigovic, especially if the players are getting tired of following their money all over the Balkans.

The most efficient and dramatic result makes the paymaster a vampire, lamia, or other obviously supernatural entity. That said, you may prefer to keep things deniable and opaque a little longer; the paymaster might be another Renfield or just a Ukrainian banker with tiny, mostly healed wounds on his neck and connections to a very disturbing brothel.

If your Conspyramid can't support a node in Belgrade, you can send the players wherever the paymaster should be, or you can send the paymaster to meet with Anton in Belgrade.

Either way, the paymaster likely travels with a Renfield or two and a retinue of bodyguards. If not, the paymaster is a full-fledged, powerful vampire, confident in her ability to kill anything in her way; maybe she only travels with a busload of Vietnamese boys to drink from, and a few thugs to handle them.

If the paymaster is a vampire, build her according to your campaign's vampire pattern; for this introductory showdown, use the Linea Dracula Assign (see p. 144) as a metric.

The Leads

After all is said and done, the agents hopefully retain Lennart's laptop.

What, precisely, it holds depends on your Conspyramid, but should be something juicy enough for the vampires to potentially kill Rudek over it. Ideally, Lennart's research led to any number of possible connections; after a 1-point **Traffic Analysis, Human Terrain,** or **Criminology** spend, sketch part of your Conspyramid for the players' adversary map and figure out how Lennart uncovered that aspect of the conspiracy.

Some example "universal joint" leads might include:

- Evidence of diverted blood supplies from NATO military medical stocks.
- Evidence of secret flights out of NATO air bases in Italy or the Balkans.
- Evidence of financial corruption or human trafficking involvement in NATO member governments.
- Evidence of diverted arms stocks from "phantom missions" in Afghanistan or Libya.
- Evidence of a secret death squad operating out of NATO bases.
- Evidence from Soviet or Nazi or al-Qaeda files held by NATO intelligence-sharing archives.

Lennart assembled his dossier by a "trawl through everything" method: examining all the files he downloaded and connected will take weeks or even months, and provide plenty of leads for the campaign going forward. You may even want to make the Lennart Dossier a resource similar to a Network contact available to any agent with access to the file. The Lennart Dossier has 4 points in its pool, usable for investigation into conspiracy activities involving NATO or its member governments. Agents can tap that pool per the Investigative Networking rules (see p. 32).

You can "refresh" this pool by transferring points into it from Digital Intrusion, Traffic Analysis, Research, Accounting, or Law; this represents further research on your part to flesh out Lennart's conclusions or firm up his speculation. Refreshing the pool (or otherwise trying to get access to any of the databases Lennart consulted) requires a Difficulty 6 Digital Intrusion test to avoid alerting the conspiracy, which monitors those sources much more intently knowing that Lennart's laptop is still out there.

SOURCES

I wanted to write this game because I love vampires, spies, and thrillers, and not a lot of things blended the three. Only the British TV series *Ultraviolet,* about a covert vampire-killing death squad, comes even close.

But here are the other absolutely key touchstones for ***Night's Black Agents:***

The *Bourne* trilogy of films by Doug Liman (*Bourne Identity*) and Paul Greengrass (*Bourne Ultimatum, Bourne Supremacy*) reinvented the spy thriller for the 21st century, combining brains, brawn, and a brilliantly naturalistic façade that concealed the rock-solid thriller choreography within.

John Frankenheimer's movie *Ronin* presents devastatingly perfect action scenes in the context of the post-Cold War world; its freelance operatives are exactly the model I had in mind for the player characters.

John Steakley's novel *Vampire$* is, amazingly, almost the only great novel about a team of professional vampire hunters. The John Carpenter movie version is, instead, a decent remake of *Rio Bravo*; the sequel is actually somewhat closer to the feel of the book, though not much.

Tim Powers' *Declare* is the great novel of occult espionage, presenting the career of Kim Philby amid the tale of an op against the djinn of Mount Ararat. His *The Stress of Her Regard* is his great vampire novel, set in the early 19th century around the lives of Byron, Shelley, and Keats. *Three Days to Never* is occult espionage again, in 1980s California.

Vampires

With a very few exceptions, I leave the vampires to you here, just as I do in the game. Whatever your favorite vampire, you can build it and kill it. The greatest vampire movies (*Horror of Dracula, Near Dark, Let the Right One In*) don't have a lot of overlap with the game; the ones that do (the *Blade* trilogy, with its global vampire conspiracy and hosts of Renfields) aren't the greatest vampire movies.

I've already mentioned the alarming lack of vampire-hunter novels, though I will recommend Dan Simmons' *Children of the Night* for its post-Cold War Balkan vibe, and his *Carrion Comfort* for its conspiracy of psionic vampires. *They Thirst,* by Robert McCammon, and the graphic novel *30 Days of Night,* by Steve Niles and Dan Templesmith, are both salutary depictions of vampires as monstrous predators, a perspective more honored in the breach nowadays. The old *Tomb of Dracula* Marvel comic does have a great (if never fast enough) vampire hunting team, including the original Blade.

For factual vampires, I knew I could count on J. Gordon Melton's *The Vampire Book,* but Matthew Bunson's *Vampire: the Encyclopaedia* surprised me with its depth and utility. Theresa Bane's *Encyclopedia of Vampire Mythology* was a late addition to my library, but its glorious arcana poured a rich candy shell onto the proceedings.

Spies

This is not where I tell you to read everything by John Le Carré, Len Deighton, Alan Furst, and Charles McCarry. Although you should. (Also, you should watch the greatest spy show of all time, *Sandbaggers,* and read Greg Rucka's pastiche of it in comics form, *Queen and Country*.) This is where I try to take the tens of dozens of spy novels I read, and movies and TV shows I watched, while writing this game and pinpoint a few that might be specifically useful or relevant to playing it.

Steven Spielberg's film *Munich,* about a team of deniable Mossad assassins going after the masterminds of the 1972 Munich terror killing, is a harrowing Burn mode film applicable to all maniacal hunters of monsters.

The TV show *Burn Notice* is much less harrowing (though it revels in emotional damage aplenty), but shows lots and lots of freelance-spy operations. Watch enough episodes (no hardship), and you'll internalize the rhythm. Other "caper" shows (*Leverage, White Collar,* etc.) can give you the same feel, albeit with less spy business; the old *Mission: Impossible* TV series broke it down even further.

William Gibson's almost-spy novels *Spook Country* and *Zero History* also deal with independent assets and operatives in the post-9/11, post-Web world; their cool, detached tone and geeky details both bear fruit for players and Directors.

Raelynn Hillhouse's novel *Outsourced* likewise hits the freelance operative world, though in a more conventional spy-novel register.

If you can ignore the complete narrative and dramatic collapse of the AMC TV series *Rubicon,* the conceit of a down-at-heels independent intelligence analysis firm tracing the shadow government is very useful for Directors looking for Dust mode tone and theme.

I was shocked that there simply isn't a good, accessible book on real-world nuts-and-bolts espionage and tradecraft, and precious little in the way of post-9/11 intelligence apparatus assessments,

either. (Unless you want to read an endless stream of politicized hair-pulling disguised as intelligence analysis, that is, all of it narrowly and venomously parochial to boot.) Thankfully, this is an RPG, not a CIA training manual, so the stuff you crib out of spy novels will work just as well, even in Dust mode.

There were rather more good books on transnational crime; I especially recommend three. Brian Freemantle's *The Octopus* is exactly the book I wanted for this project — an overview of organized crime and terrorism in post-Cold War Europe — with the annoying caveat that he wrote it in 1995. Misha Glenny wrote *McMafia* in 2008, but it attempts to cover the whole world of organized crime in fewer pages. Still, it's great stuff when it slows down. Roberto Saviano goes the other direction: his book *Gomorrah* drills down into Naples and the Camorra. But for the real inside dirt on modern mafias, it can't be beat.

Thrillers

Luc Besson's badass thriller-procedural *Taken* really belongs up in the top paragraph. Its story of a driven agent maiming, torturing, and killing his way up the ladder of a vile conspiracy is ***Night's Black Agents*** on fast-forward. Fernando Meirelles' *The Constant Gardener* (adapted from a lesser Le Carré novel) likewise adopts post-*Bourne* pacing for a smart thriller-mystery unraveling an evil pharmaceutical company with tendrils in the corridors of power.

Three lesser thriller flicks offer useful takeaways in style, plot, or feel: *The International* is a slick corporate takedown, *The Killer Elite* (the one based on Ranulph Fiennes' clunky novel *The Feather Men,* not the weird Sam Peckinpah thing) has an evocative core story of dueling illegal mercenary groups, and in *Eastern Promises* David Cronenberg guides you into the Russian Mafiya, bringing lots of violence and claustrophobia.

The TV series *Nikita* (very distantly adapted from Besson's superb thriller *La Femme Nikita*), starring Maggie Q as a former agent hunting the secret apparat that created her, is surprisingly good, and like *Burn Notice* offers plenty of operational examples for players and Directors. If your vampire conspiracy gets gonzo, J.J. Abrams' series *Alias* offers similar pointers, and plenty of glossy style.

While neither of them are particularly great, both Andy Diggle and Jock's comic *The Losers* and Sylvain White's movie adaptation of it are dead-on burnt-agents-hunt-their-evil-patron thrillers on exactly our pattern.

There are even more thriller novels than there are spy novels, and the same caveats apply. I recommend the John Rain thrillers by Barry Eisler; his assassin hero provides excellent instruction for player-agent hit planning. On a similar note, Tom Cain's *The Accident Man* is a great one-off about an assassin who finds himself enmeshed in the conspiracy that killed Princess Diana.

And yes, if somehow you haven't, go ahead and read all the Robert Ludlum you can stand. Sure, his stuff reads like Perry Rhodan: The Reagan Years, but it's page-turning goodness with almost exactly the veneer of detail and plausibility you want in a belief-suspending vampire spy thriller. There's a reason everybody else stopped doing it their way and started doing it like Robert Ludlum.

ADDENDA

Designer's Notes

With the possible exception of Dave Arneson, no RPG designer creates alone. For this project, I deliberately tried to borrow or adapt best-of-breed ideas and mechanics from all over the roleplaying map, to accompany Robin's inspired central GUMSHOE engine.

My clearest and biggest debt is to Elizabeth Shoemaker Sampat's superb game of emotional shear-damage and burnt spies, ***Blowback.*** The Vampyramid comes right out of her Push Pyramid. Her game also inspired much of the detail and tone, some of the Burn mode, and the basic skeleton of Quick and Dirty city building.

I built the Trust and Betrayal mechanics from a combination of Timothy Kleinert's diamantine ***The Mountain Witch*** and Malcolm Craig's brilliant ***Cold City.*** The MOS came from several places, among them John Wick's slick ***Wilderness of Mirrors.***

Heat emerged, after some banging about, from the Plot Stress mechanic in the FATE system as implemented by Chris Birch and Stuart Newman in their glorious ***Starblazer Adventures.*** Its other godparent was Luke Crane's excellent ***Burning Empires,*** which also informed and infused Quick-and-Dirty city creation and conspiracy design, though perhaps not as much as I wanted it to.

I took nothing but solace (and maybe just a bit of Solace) from Ron Edwards' definitive Story Now "spy vs. guy" game ***Spione.***

Everything else about spies I backstopped with Patrick Kapera's amazingly robust and comprehensive RPG ***Spycraft.*** If you could do it in his game, I needed to at least think about how to do it in mine.

Much coverage of the vampire-hunting stuff (and the tag-team tactical benefits) came in large part from the greatest vampire RPG ever: Chuck Wendig's ***Hunter: the Vigil.*** Speaking of vampire games, I had the unenviable task of boiling down the urban-gaming genius of Will Hindmarch's ***Damnation City*** sourcebook into about two thousand words.

And finally, for any game involving real-world adventure and the persnickety details thereof, no gamer or game designer should ignore the HERO system and ***GURPS.*** I mined ***Dark Champions, The Ultimate Skill,*** and ***GURPS Gun Fu, GURPS Tactical Shooting, GURPS High-Tech, GURPS Covert Ops, GURPS Special Ops, GURPS SWAT, GURPS Action, GURPS Undead, GURPS Monster Hunters, GURPS Blood Types,*** and ***GURPS Horror*** both for mechanical inspiration and to make sure I was adequately covering the ground that Steve Long, Hans-Christian Vortisch, Shawn Fisher, Bill Stoddard, Greg Rose, Brian J. Underhill, Sean Punch, PK Levine, and Lane Grate had all ably mapped before me.

My thanks to all of them.

Director's Agent Tracking Sheet

Player					
Agent					
Previous Patron					
Drive					
Health					
Stability					
Symbol					
Solace					
Safety					
Cover Pool					
Network Pool					
Contact 1					
Contact 2					
Contact 3					
Contact 4					
Accounting					
Archaeology					
Architecture					
Art History					
Astronomy					
Bullshit Detector					
Bureaucracy					
Chemistry					
Cop Talk					
Criminology					
Cryptography					
Data Recovery					
Diagnosis					
Electronic					
Flattery					
Flirting					
Forensic Pathology					
Forgery					
High Society					
History					
Human Terrain					
Interrogation					
Intimidation					
Languages					
Law					
Military Science					
Negotiation					
Notice					
Occult Studies					
Outdoor Survival					
Pharmacy					
Photography					
Reassurance					
Research					
Streetwise					
Tradecraft					
Traffic Analysis					
Urban Survival					
Vampirology					

Hit Threshold Modifier Sheet

In games using the full range of options and tactical rules, Hit Thresholds can vary widely. Try to rebalance those values if you can: if one combatant has a Hit Threshold of 7 and one has a Hit Threshold of 9, run their combat as if they had Hit Thresholds of 3 and 5, respectively. This keeps fights shorter and more dangerous, and therefore more exciting.

Athletics Ability Rating

Athletics 8+ Hit Threshold 4

Athletics 7- Hit Threshold 3

Cover

Defender is exposed: -1

Defender is under partial cover: +0

Defender is under full cover: +1

Darkness

Darkness Level	Range			
	Point-Blank	Close	Near	Long
Night			+1	+1
Dark		+1	+2	+2
Pitch Black	+1	+2	+3	+3

Illuminated

If you are carrying a lit flashlight, spattered with glowing paint, lighted up by a laser sight, or pinpointed by firing (or being hit by) a tracer round, your Hit Threshold goes **down:** -1

Surprise

Surprised attackers: +2

Thrown Weapons

Attacker throwing weapon at Near range: +1

Injury

Attacker is Hurt: +1

Attacker is blinded (tear gas, dazzle laser, etc.): +2

Defender is blinded: -2

Called Shots

Desired Location	Modifier to Hit Threshold
Large carried object (rocket launcher, laptop computer, backpack)	+1
Torso, *windshield*	+1
Chest (if attacker is facing target)	+2
Gut, *specific window, tail rotor*	+2
Head or limb	+2
Hand or foot, joint, *tire*	+3
Heart, throat, mouth, or face	+3
Weapon or other hand-held object	+3
Eye, *headlight*	+4
Chest (if target faces away from attacker)	+4

Mental State

Attacker is Shaken: +1

Depressive Disorder: -1

Chases

Attacker climbing on a vehicle: +1

Attacker is passenger in a chase: +1

Attacker is pursuer or runner in a chase: +1

See also **Thriller Combat Options:** Evasive Maneuvers (p. 74), Extra Attacks (p. 74), Feint (p. 75), Mook Shield (p. 76), Reckless Attacks (p. 76), Throws (p. 76), Sniping (p. 77) and

Vampiric Powers: Distortion (p. 135), Hive Mind (p. 135), Invisibility (p. 130), Shadow Attack (p. 152), Temporal Distortion (p. 129), Vampiric Speed (p. 133).

Thriller Chase Summary Sheet

Determine Starting Lead

Halfway between runner's goal and 0

Open chase: Adjust Lead by 1 for faster participant

Normal chase: No change

Cramped chase: Adjust Lead by 1 for more maneuverable participant

Chase Roll Procedure

- The pursuer and the runner reveal their spends simultaneously, and then roll.
- The results are applied to the Lead; individual successes or failures do not necessarily end the chase.

Chase Roll Modifiers

Faster participant:

In open chase add difference in Speed to all chase rolls (min +1)

In normal chase add +1

Higher skill in chase ability:

If only participant with ability 8+ add +1

More maneuverable participant:

In cramped chase add difference in Maneuver rating to all chase rolls (min +1)

Changing the Lead

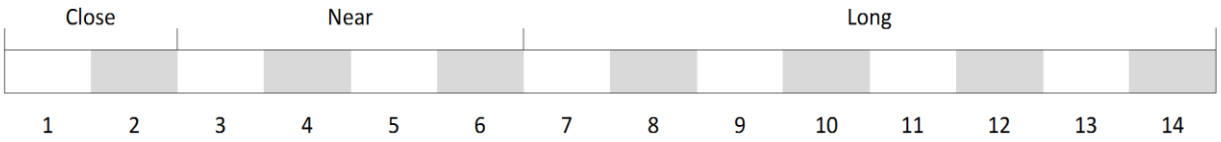
The results of the two ability rolls (runner and pursuer) alter the Lead as follows:

- Pursuer succeeds, runner fails: the Lead shortens by 2.
- Pursuer, runner both succeed or fail: the Lead alters by 1 depending on whose margin of success (or failure) was greater. If the pursuer won by more or lost by less, the Lead drops by 1; otherwise, the Lead increases by 1.
- Pursuer fails, runner succeeds: the Lead lengthens by 2.

Raise

Before the next round of the chase starts, the runner can raise both sides' Difficulty Numbers, raising them by 1.

Thriller Chase Lead Track



Special Thriller Chase Rules Sheet

Unless specified, both runner and pursuer can use these rules. Required ability levels are for ability *ratings,* not current pool size.

Attacking During Chases

- Spend 3 from chase pool (no spend needed for passengers)
- +1 to Hit Threshold of target

Gear Devil

- Requires Driving or Piloting 8+ and descriptive phrase
- Grants 3-point refresh once per chase

Parkour

- Requires Athletics 8+ and descriptive phrase
- Grants 3-point Athletics refresh once per chase

Ramming

- Lead must be 1 or 2
- Spend 3 points from chase pool
- Player always rolls against Difficulty 4

Ram rolls use only the following modifiers and rules:

On the defensive (avoiding being rammed): The player adds his vehicle's Maneuver to the die roll (against a Difficulty of 4), plus any other spends he makes.

- If he fails, the Lead alters in the opposition's favor by 1.
- If he rolls an unmodified 1 and fails, he crashes.
- If he succeeds, the rammer must spend 2 points immediately from her chase pool; if her pool is insufficient, the Lead alters in the player's favor by 1 for every point by which she falls short.

On the offensive (ramming): The player *adds* her vehicle's Maneuver to the Difficulty of 4, plus any other spends she makes. (Heavier vehicles lower Difficulty.)

- If she fails, she must spend 2 points immediately from her chase pool; if her pool is insufficient, the Lead alters in the opposition's favor by 1 for every point by which she falls short.
- If she succeeds, the Lead alters in her favor by 1.
- If she rolls an unmodified 6 and succeeds, the other vehicle crashes.

Sudden Escape (Runner Only)

- Requires Lead 7+ and success in chase round contest
- Make another General test at Difficulty 1 higher than previous contest

Success: escape the chase instead of changing Lead

Failure: crash or fall, double damage

Swerve

- Requires equal or higher Maneuver rating; must be in third+ round of chase
- Spend 3 points from chase pool
- Ignore Speed bonus on next roll
- Next Lead change is doubled
- If chase ends, loser crashes or falls

Take the Wheel!

- Spend 2 points from chase pool
- NPC driver takes over; your chase rolls at +1 Difficulty
- If runner, cannot Raise while NPC is driving

Thriller Combat Options Sheet

Required ability levels are for ability *ratings,* not current pool size. Spends to activate abilities never add to die rolls.

Autofire

- Spend 3 Shooting per 1 extra damage die rolled on the target
- Spend 3 Shooting per 1 extra target within 3m of initial target

Called Shot

- Increase Hit Threshold of foe depending on specific target
- Increase damage depending on target and on whether you used a weapon (gun or melee) or hand-to-hand attack.
- May then spend 6 points from attack ability to move foe from Hurt to Seriously Wounded or from Seriously Wounded to dead.

See full table and rules on p. 72; additional damage not cumulative with +2 for Point-Blank gunshots:

Called Shot To	Hit Threshold Modifier	Additional Weapon Damage	Additional Unarmed Damage
Chest (from front/backj)	+2/+4	+2	--
Eye	+4	+2 and blind for 2 rounds	+3
Head	+3	+2	--
Heart	+3	+3	--
Joint, Groin	+3	--	+2
Throat	+3	+2; beheaded if cutting attack drops foe's Health to 0 (or -12)	+2

Critical Hit

- If attack die roll is a 6 **and** you exceed target Hit Threshold by 5+
- Extra die of damage

Evasive Maneuvers

- Declare at beginning of your action, does not use your turn, lasts until beginning of your next action
- Spend 2 Athletics per +1 to Hit Threshold, max +3
- Your attacks suffer a -2 penalty per +1 to your Hit Threshold

Extra Attacks

No melee weapon (except swords) with damage modifier over -1 can have Extra Attacks.

Hand-to-Hand or Weapons

- Requires Hand-to-Hand or Weapons 8+ and successful hit
- Spend 3 Hand-to-Hand or Weapons plus 2 Health for second attack

Shooting

- Requires Shooting 8+ and successful hit
- Spend 4 Shooting plus 1 Stability for second attack; 8 Shooting and 2 Stability for third attack; etc.

Multiple Targets

Second target's Hit Threshold +2; third target's Hit Threshold +3; etc.

Two-Fisted Firearms

- Requires pistols in both hands at beginning of action
- Spend 3 Shooting plus 2 Athletics to attack with both pistols
- Name target or targets (+2 to second target's Hit Threshold, as above) before firing; you cannot switch in between shots
- Spend 9 Shooting plus 6 Athletics to attack again with both pistols

Feint

- Give up your attack for a round
- Spend 1 Hand-to-Hand or Weapons per -1 to foe's Hit Threshold; max -3
- Applies to all attacks (including allies) until end of your next round

Jumping In

- At the end of any other character's action, if you have not yet acted
- Spend 4 Athletics or 3 Shooting, Hand-to-Hand, or Weapons
- Immediately attack with the ability you spent from (or with any ability, if you spent Athletics)
- Change in combat order is permanent unless someone else Jumps In

Martial Arts

- Requires Hand-to-Hand or Weapons 8+ and descriptive phrase
- Grants 3-point Hand-to-Hand or Weapons refresh once per fight

Mook Shield

- Requires Hand-to-Hand 8+

Mook in Point-Blank range: Spend 3 Hand-to-Hand and attack

Mook in Close range: spend 3 Hand-to-Hand and 2 Athletics and attack

If successful, you grab the mook and:

- All ranged attacks against you that miss hit the mook
- Mook provides -4 Armor against attacks that hit
- Must drop mook or spend 3 Shooting to fire a weapon

Reckless Attacks

- Spend 1 Athletics to lower Hit Thresholds of both you (against all attacks) and one target (against your attacks); max -3.
- Lasts until beginning of your next action

Smashes and Throws

- Spend 2 Hand-to-Hand and attack foe in Point-Blank range; if successful
- **Smash:** against breakable or hard object, -1 damage; against projecting and hard object, +0 damage
- **Throw:** foe lands at Close range, moves to end of combat order; thrown into breakable or hard object, -2 damage; thrown into hard and projecting object, -1 damage
- **Throw at Window:** +2 to foe's Hit Threshold; on roll of 6 (lower for mooks) they go through window; -1 damage from broken glass plus fall; Athletics test (Difficulty 5) for name NPCs and agents to avoid fall

Sniping

- Requires Shooting 8+ and taking one round to aim with a rifle
- **Target aware of you:** Hit Threshold -1
- **Target unaware of you:** Hit Threshold -2
- **Your rifle has a scope:** Extended Range attacks (see p. 68) are free

Special Weapons Training

- Requires Shooting or Weapons 8+
- Spend 6 *build points* for additional +1 damage to one make of weapon
- **Shooting:** may take SWT for one light (+0 becomes +1) and one heavy (+1 becomes +2) firearm
- **Weapons:** may take SWT for one knife (–1 becomes +0) and one other make of melee weapon

Support Moves

- Requires Athletics 8+
- Make Athletics test vs. Difficulty 4, describe support move
- Margin of success applies as bonus to ally's next attack roll

Suppressive Fire

- Requires Shooting 8+ and an automatic weapon
- Make a Shooting test against a Difficulty based on the width blocked to foes by fire: 3 (alleyway) to 6 (3-lane road; hangar doors)
- You can maintain the line without rolling for 2 rounds (pistol) or 5 rounds (assault rifle or SMG); then you must take one action to reload

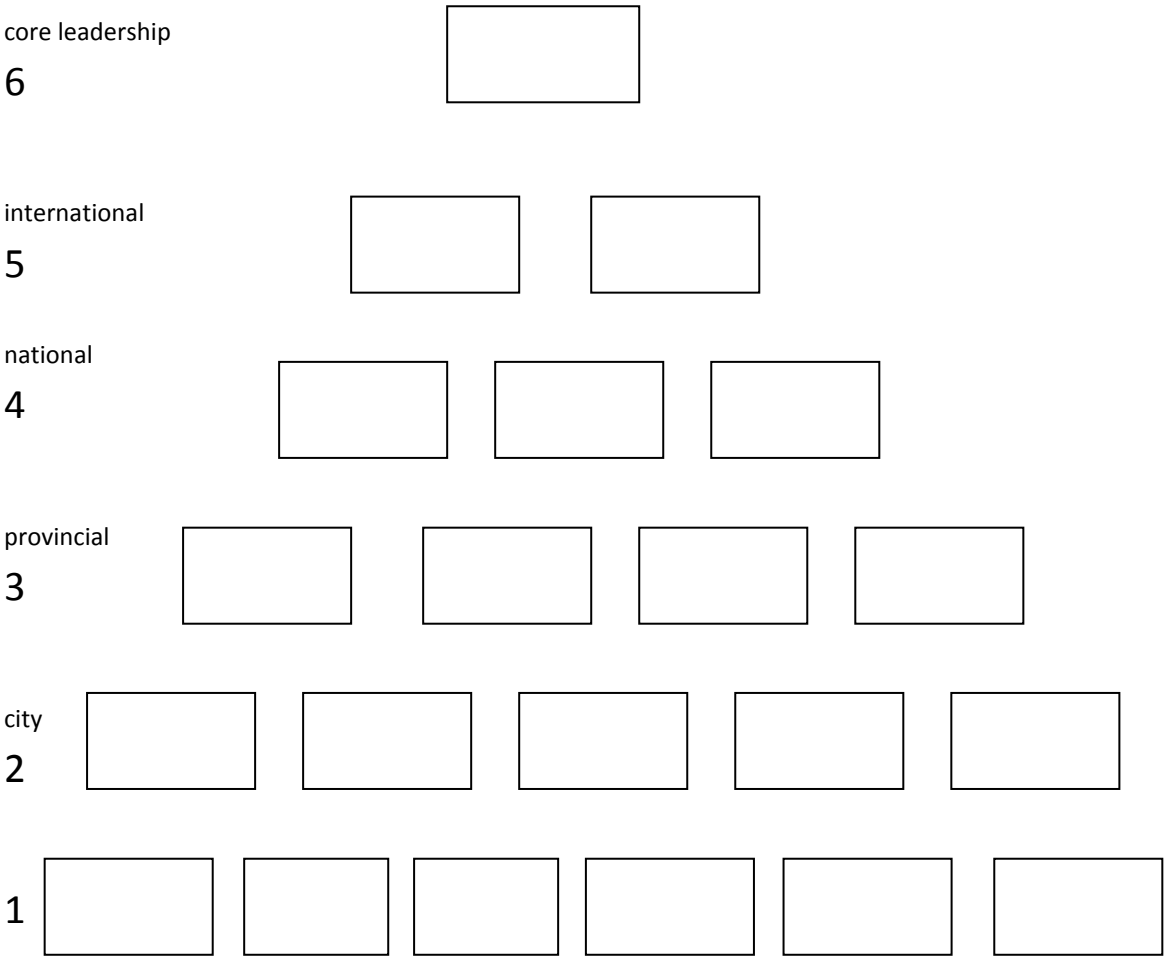
Foes must make Athletics test against your result to cross:

- **Failure:** damage and they stay put
- **Success by 0-4:** damage and they cross
- **Success by 5+:** cross without damage

Technothriller Monologue

- Requires Shooting 8+ and descriptive phrase
- Grants 3-point Shooting refresh once per fight

Blank Conspyramid Sheet

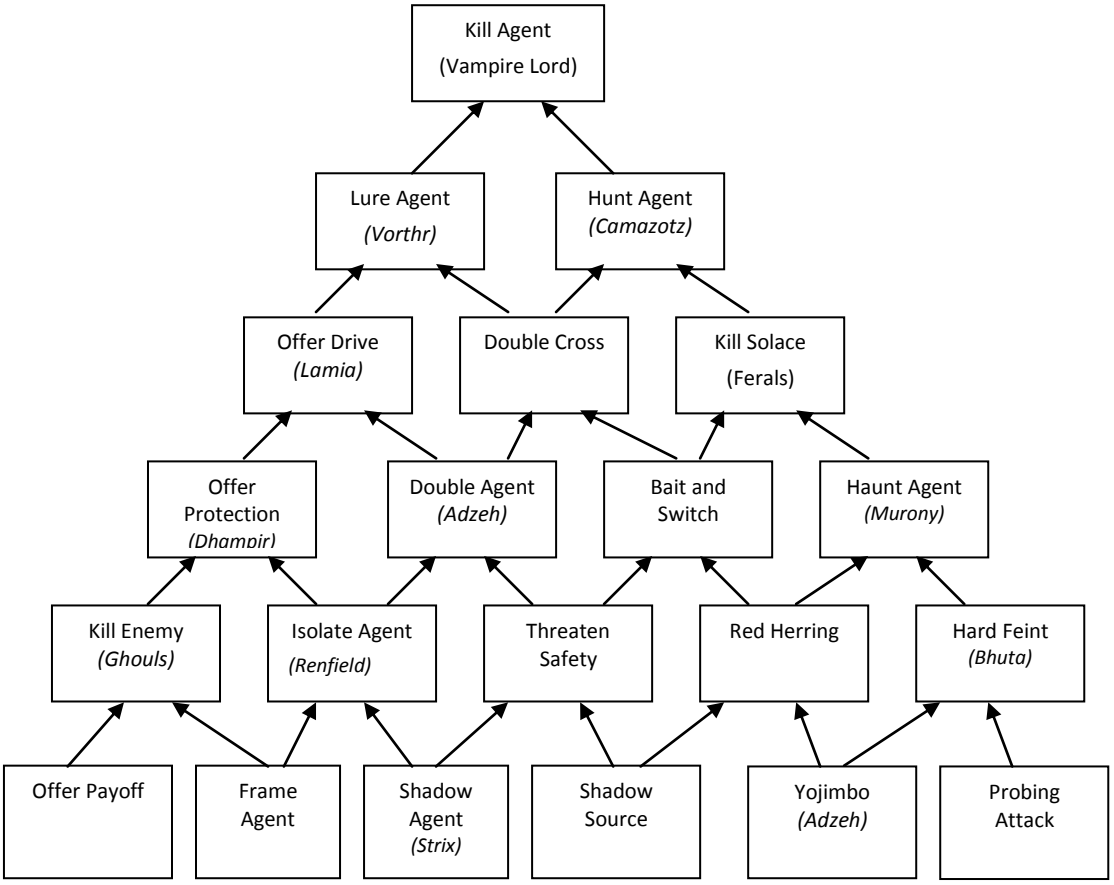


Obstacle Difficulty: Conspyramid Level +3

OPFOR Abilities: Conspyramid Level +1 (x2)

- Alertness and Stealth Modifiers: Level/2 (rounded down)

The Vampyramid



Character Sheet

AGENT		COVERS	Stability				Health			
Name:			-12	-11	-10	-9	-12	-11	-10	-9
Background:			-8	-7	-6	**-5**	-8	-7	-6	**-5**
Previous Patron:			-4	-3	-2	-1	-4	-3	-2	-1
Drive:			**0**	1	2	3	**0**	1	2	3
TRUST			4	5	6	7	4	5	6	7
			8	9	10	11	8	9	10	11
			12	13	14	15	12	13	14	15

Academic Abilities	**Interpersonal Abilities**	**General Abilities**
Accounting	Bullshit Detector	Athletics
Archaeology	Bureaucracy	Conceal
Architecture	Cop Talk	Cover
Art History	Flattery	Digital Intrusion
Criminology	Flirting	Disguise
Diagnosis	High Society	Driving
History	Interrogation	
Human Terrain	Intimidation	
Languages	Negotiation	
	Reassurance	
	Streetwise	Explosive Devices
	Tradecraft	Filch
	Technical Abilities	Gambling
	Astronomy	Hand-to-Hand
	Chemistry	Infiltration
	Cryptography	Mechanics
	Data Recovery	Medic
	Electronic Surveillance	Network
Law	Forensic Pathology	Piloting
Military Science	Forgery	
Occult Studies		
Research		
Vampirology	Notice	Preparedness
Familiar Cities	Outdoor Survival	Sense Trouble
	Pharmacy	Shooting
	Photography	Shrink
	Traffic Analysis	Surveillance
	Urban Survival	Weapons

SOURCES OF STABILITY	**NETWORK CONTACTS**	
Symbol:		
Solace:		
Safety:		
Tag-Team Benefits:		
Special Weapons Training:		