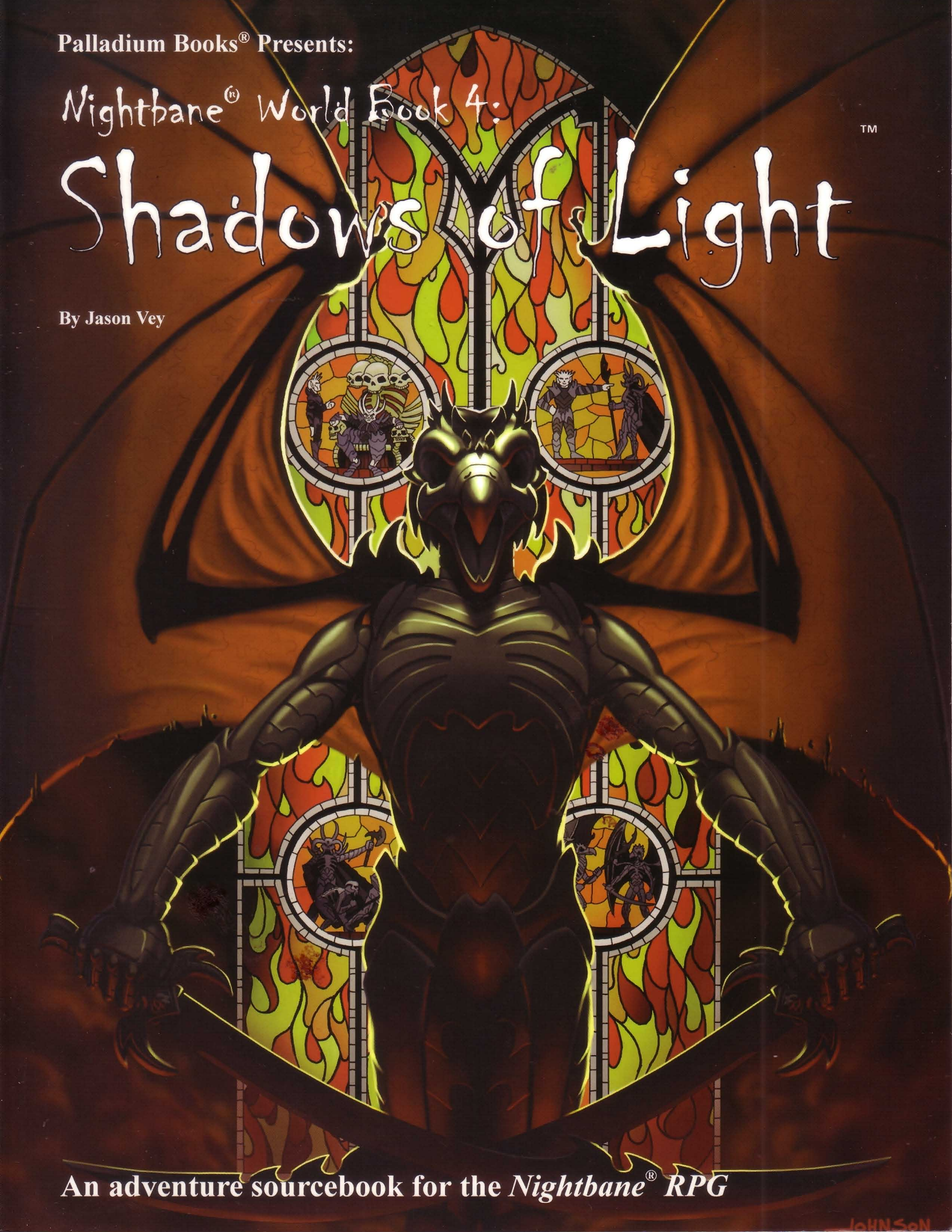
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Dedication

This work is respectfully dedicated to Susan Vey (my mom), first and foremost. You're my biggest fan, my best critic, and I always promised you I'd dedicate my first book to you, so here it is!

Kudos and dedications also have to go out to the late James "Lucky" Moran, for help and inspiration way back in the day, to Ian Fielder for all his help, comments, and criticisms of my writing over the years, to Julie, my inspiration, to Huz Vey (Dad) for always being there when I need you, Sara Vey (sis) for constant support (even when I'm being a pain), and to every last member—both current and past—of the Questors of Dragonwright, the Seekers of the Blade, and the Eternally Confused Heroes' Organization. Here's to adventures past, and to those that lie ahead, both fantastical and real!

Special Thanks to Maryann, Kevin, and Wayne at Palladium for giving me this opportunity to pursue a dream.

– Jason Vey, 2003

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Written By: **Jason Vey**

Based on and inspired by the works of C.J. Carella, Kevin Hassall and Kevin Siembieda.

Additional text and concepts: **Kevin Siembieda**

Editors: **Alex Marciniszyn**
Wayne Smith
Kevin Siembieda

Proofreader: **Julius Rosenstein**

Cover Painting: **Scott Johnson**

Interior Art: **Wayne Breaux Jr.**
Kent Burles
Ryan Csaszar
Mark Dudley
Mike Majestic
Ramon Perez
Freddie Williams II
Ka Xiong

Art Direction & Keylining: **Kevin Siembieda**

Typography: **Wayne Smith**
Maps: **Jason Vey**

Based on the RPG rules, characters, worlds,
concepts and Megaverse® created by **Kevin Siembieda.**

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– Kevin Siembieda, 2003

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Breaux

Author's Introduction

Well, here we are once again. It's been more than five years since a new **Nightbane®** book has hit the shelves. About time, don't you think?

When I published "Dark Revelations" in **The Rifter®**, it was just a collection of ideas and a short story that had been swimming around in my head for some time. When I finished it, I made the cardinal mistake that writers should avoid at all costs: I fell in love with my creation. Thank goodness that The Rifter® editor, Wayne Smith, liked it as well. It seemed to go over okay; some people really didn't like it, but most seemed to think it was pretty cool. I thought, *hey, what do I have to lose?* and queried about sending in a proposal for a full book using that material. I didn't know if it would go anywhere, but I thought the important thing was that I made the effort. Still, I found myself waiting with almost baited breath once I got the e-mail from Maryann Siembieda that they'd received the proposal. Then, finally, I got that magical e-mail with the heading "Your proposal." There was no "re:" before it, so I knew that it wasn't a reply to an earlier e-mail. I honestly started shaking. When I read the e-mail, in which Maryann informed me they wanted me to develop the sourcebook on speculation, I called everyone I knew. Sure, it didn't mean "we're going to publish you," but it meant "we want to see more," and that was enough for me.

See, in a real way, this is a big break for me. I don't care if I make a million off my writing (although wouldn't that be nice), nor do I really expect to. But I've dreamed about seeing my name on the shelves attached to a worldwide publication since I was about ten. "Dark Revelations" was a great first step. This is almost at the summit. I guess for that I owe Wayne Smith, Kevin, and Maryann a big, *big* thank you. Because if this hits the shelves, it'll be a dream come true. Then I *can* start shooting for that million (grin). So yeah, you could say I was a little bit enthused.

Then reality hit and I came to realize what a job it is to write 220 single-spaced, ten point, Times New Roman pages, all quality material! DOH!

That's a tall order to fill in anyone's glass. You may not realize this, but the amount of writing that goes into an average RPG sourcebook is quite a bit more than that which goes into your average, 300-page novel! Not an easy accomplishment by any stretch of the imagination. Just for your reference, a typical 250 to 300 page novel has between 90,000 and 110,000 words in it. At last count, this puppy was hovering somewhere around 150,000 words! Not to mention the choices a project like this brings up are pretty big. Where do we go now? Do we cover new material? Re-hash and flesh out the old? Pick up where we left off? Go in a new direction? What do the fans want? Is it even *possible,* after so long of a wait, to really please the fans, or have expectations and desires risen too high to even worry about that? The answers, unfortunately, are a lot more complex than the questions are.

See, the answer is pretty much, "yes," to all of those questions. If we don't take the game in new directions, push the boundaries and find new horizons, well, it stagnates. Stagnation leads to atrophy, and we don't want that. **Nightbane®** has a loyal and dedicated fan base who want to see the game continue on, and from the looks of things on forums like Palladium's online message boards, they want to see it supported again.

As far as what everyone wants, though, well, everyone wants something different. In fact, I really don't think it's possible to 100% please everyone. Abraham Lincoln, I believe, said, "you can't please all of the people all of the time," and that's an idiom a writer absolutely must accept as a great truism. So I try to give people what they ask for and hope that it's enough to keep 'em coming back for more. I am certain that picking up where we last left our heroes doesn't quite feel right, especially since it's been so long that everyone who plays has their own idea of what happened right after. So it's time to push it forward a little. The original game is set in an alternate future, in or around the year 2005. You don't want to push it too far ahead or people wonder about all that in between time. But there needs to be a sense of forward motion to avoid the aforementioned stagnation. So what do we do? Make it 2006. That's not necessarily long enough for any world-shattering events to have occurred (okay, okay . . . Dark Day took only 24 hours, but we won't talk about that right now), but just enough for people to pick up on it, and say, "hey, time's moving forward, what's in store for the future?"

You might think that worrying about what *year* it is seems a bit anal, and it would be, if the whole story hinged upon it. But it doesn't. It's there, hanging out, letting you know that time goes by, and people survive and continue the fight. It's setting stuff, and from what I constantly hear from fans, it's the setting that matters. Of course, you've got to have your game-expanding material, new character classes, new monsters, a new race here and there, but it's atmosphere and setting that are the bread and butter of this game. Maybe that's why it's been so long. Maybe the atmosphere and setting were just waiting for the right person to come along and snatch them up. Am I that right person? I don't know.

But I sure hope so.

It's a daunting task, giving the fans what they're looking for, finding the vision and direction that Palladium wants for the game, keeping it consistent and stable, and wrapping it up in one nice, neat little package. Well, I don't know how neat it is, but I hope you like it nonetheless.

Oh, sticking with that atmosphere thing, I'm sure that the rest of the world is on everyone's mind. What are the Nightlords doing outside of the United States? Sorry to disappoint you, but I'm not tackling that one . . . at least, not in this manuscript. But if you like what I *do* cover in this one, I have ideas for the future. Lots and lots of ideas . . . and that's not an empty promise (or threat). If Palladium Books and the fans will have me, I'd like to stick around for a while. The moment I opened the first book, I fell in love with this game, with the horror, the despair, the mystery, and yet the subtle hope that one day it might end for the better. It's now my honor and privilege to lend my own meager talents to the furthering of the game and the world. So, if I may, let me be the first person in five years to say this in an official capacity . . . welcome back to the world of **Nightbane®**.

Shadows of Light?

So now we come to the real question: What the heck is *Shadows of Light?* I believe that the title of this manuscript sums up **Nightbane®** at its core. This game is about ultimate

evil, how it pervades and corrupts and conquers everything it touches, and about those few stalwart souls who stand against it. However, the hope that rests on the shoulders of those few "heroes" is slim, for everyone has their dark side. Even the best of intentions get corrupted, their meaning lost behind fanaticism or simply behind eons of existence that have dulled and watered-down the original idea. The Dark plays upon these flaws. The Dark is the very embodiment of these flaws. The Dark draws them forth and turns them to its own advantage. And even the best of us can be evil, sometimes. That's the ultimate paradox, there can be no good without evil, but can there be evil without good? A seemingly good act can be performed with evil intent, but isn't an evil act generally looked upon as evil, no matter the intent behind it? Murder, after all, is still murder, even if it is for the good of the many. If by some miracle the Ba'al are defeated and driven back to their Nightlands holes, who will return to power? The system they replaced was in and of itself corrupt, greedy, and arguably evil, though it stood for what most believed to be noble ideals.

Player characters in a **Nightbane™** game are almost certain to have these dark sides that their enemies will play upon and try to use against them. Think about it, would it really be any fun to play a completely, one hundred percent good character? Okay, maybe, but characters with a flaw, or who hear the siren call of the Dark make for much more memorable, powerful and conflicted characters. They have doubts, selfish needs and dark emotions they must overcome to remain heroes. Even the Guardians, as you will see, have some major flaws in their outlook and ideals.

What does this mean, then? Is the war hopeless in the end? Are we all doomed to fall to darkness? Of course not. The hope is real and the Nightbane are the key. It's important to remember that the characters in this game may represent the "light" in a metaphorical sense, meaning that they strive to defeat this force of ultimate evil that has pervaded their world, even though they have a dark side themselves. Players (and sometimes, their characters) have to hold on to the ideal that it's balance they represent, a balance between these forces of light and darkness, and that the Dark and its minions have upset that balance. It's their duty and drive to restore to the world the equilibrium that has been lost. The general feeling of **Nightbane®** is the concept that, "Hey, we may not be perfect and we may not be much, but we're all you've got between the life you had and the one you're going to lose." That's the drama and charm of this game. Enjoy it and exploit it to the max.

Speaking of which, let's talk about the Dark for a moment. The Dark is, in many ways, the central character of the Nightbane universe, even more so than the Nightbane themselves. The Dark, you see, is that transient, immaterial enemy that is always there, looming on the horizon or behind (and within) that reflection in the mirror. It's behind all the evils perpetrated by the Nightlords and their minions, as well as the evil acts of other dark creatures: demons, vampires, and all the twisted monsters that mom and dad tell little Danny aren't really under the bed when the lights go out. The Dark is the manifestation of evil. It is the force of entropy at the center of the universe, drawing all things inexorably towards destruction. The Nightlords gain their power from the Dark, but there is something they don't realize: The Dark uses, but it doesn't feed. It consumes and destroys and all they are doing is bringing forth destruction more quickly.

A few gamers have wondered why it is that we haven't seen *stats* for the Dark. Well, the Dark doesn't have stats because it's not an entity, or not one that can be killed, in any case. Whether the Dark is alive or abstract, real or ideal, it is a *force*. It's beyond and outside of such things as in-game statistics. Besides, nobody knows for sure exactly what or who it is. But there's something you need to understand about the Dark before you even undertake a **Nightbane®** campaign. The Dark *can not ever be destroyed or killed.* It doesn't work that way. You can't kill evil, any more than you can kill good. Without one, there isn't the other. Just like without chaos, there's no way to recognize order, and without existence, entropy has no purpose. It's not a matter of one needing the other to exist; quite the opposite. These opposing forces do indeed exist independent of one another. However, without one, how would you ever know the other?

What's the point, you may ask. How can you fight something you can't kill? How can you defeat it if it's indestructible? Well, the philosophy behind that is relatively basic. Evil turns in upon itself. Because the Dark represents entropy incarnate, it loves chaos. It enjoys causing hardship and misery, even for those who serve it. The Dark also plays favorites, and it is fickle. The Ba'al are the current favorites of the Dark, but there are certainly other evils that catch its interests. There are demons and vampires and evil cultists and hosts of others that have been, and will, in future supplements, be explored. By exploiting this inner turmoil that is the very nature of the Dark, our heroes can hope to *win*. By forging alliances of convenience, and playing evil against evil, the heroes of Light can watch the web of darkness crumble and fall away. It might take a long time, but in the end, the cycle will continue, so long as there are those who are willing to fight the good fight.

Now, why point all this out like this? Because I think it's essential to understand the prevailing connection to the overall game world. Whether they realize it or not, every evil being out there is part and parcel of the Dark. Sure, some are more blatantly affiliated with it than others, but it's there, feeding and germinating on every type of evil. Heck, it's even possible that the Nightbane draw their power unknowingly from the Dark! The existence of the Shadow Warlocks, and of several other races and character types (some of which are explored herein) who have abilities that seem a bit too similar to Nightbane talents hint at this possibility. Remember all of that as you wonder how all the various elements of the game link together. The connecting factor through it all is the Dark. And that, my friends, is the very heart and soul of **Nightbane®**.

– Jason Vey, 2003



Using Horror Factor in the Nightbane® RPG

Let's talk horror for a few moments, shall we? In a game like **Nightbane®**, where characters encounter any and all manner of horrific and unnatural beings, the concept of *horror* is important. These are young men and women who woke up one day to find their entire world turned upside down, and not at all for the better. Riots may have taken their homes and loved ones on Dark Day, and if the looters and panicked people in the streets didn't do it, then the Nightlords certainly forced a change in the characters' lives. They have discovered deep within them the existence of supernatural (some might say *un*-natural) powers, ranging from Telekinesis or Empathy, to the transformation into a hideous monster, complete with fangs, claws, and bristling fur. Some might resemble some creature from the horror movies they watched as a child, or from their own worst nightmares. Still others might resemble angelic beings and wonder why it is that they were chosen for such awakenings. Then there are those who have no idea who they once were or where they came from, but know that there are things they still have to do. These are the types of traumas that a person never fully recovers from, so it is important to remember that for a very, very long time after Dark Day, many Nightbane will hate and despise what they've become, what Heaven (or Hell) and the Fates have done to them. And while some choose to use their powers for good, either because they see them as a blessing or because they feel that redemption is the only way to rid themselves of the horrific curse that has been inflicted upon them, there are others who turn away from humanity and immerse themselves in the bestial, dark side that festers within.

It gets even worse. As traumatic as the Becoming is, it's relatively easy, in the larger scheme of things, to accept what one has become, and perhaps what one has always been. It's much harder to accept that it happens to others. Even new Nightbane don't want to accept that there are supernatural creatures and primal forces of mystic power running amok in the world. They can barely grasp what they are. How are they supposed to deal with Guardians and Nightlords and vampires and demons and monsters and all the rest?

And there are even worse things out there, if one chooses to look.

Remember, it's much easier to come to accept (or even deny) what you are, than it is to be forced to witness the things that other people hide. For example, think of the most horrific mass murderer you can imagine, out in an alley doing his thing. Suddenly, out of the darkness comes an enormous, slavering beast with fangs as long as the man's forearms, its amorphous, green, vaguely humanoid body covered in slime and scales and boils. Wicked claws tipped with dripping venom hang from its hands. It moves towards the murderer, slowly, deliberately, growling and hissing and snapping its jaws. The murderer, himself a monster who is well aware of what he is and what he does, runs screaming into the night. He can't process what he just saw, even in light of the atrocities he commits on a regular basis. He tells himself it's not real, swears he was hallucinating, that his

mind was playing tricks on him. But he never goes anywhere near that alley again.

Life as a Nightbane, psychic, Guardian, or any of the various O.C.C.s in **Nightbane®** is difficult at its best, and player characters can and should doubt their sanity or feel shaken once in a while, perhaps once or twice every game session. In game terms, Horror Factor is designed to represent this sense of shock and terror when characters face things that nobody should ever have to face. Generally, whenever a character sees something that may terrify him, he makes a Horror Factor check. If the check is successful, he can act as normal. If he fails, he is momentarily stunned, while he mentally processes what he's facing. Sometimes, however, there are things that are just so horrific that they take more than a few seconds to process. It's very easy to say, "make a Horror Factor check – okay, you lose initiative and bonuses this round," But in a horror game, sometimes players crave a little more.

Optional Rule: Effects of Horror Factor

Below are a few optional rules for *expanding* the use of the Horror Factor roll, and the insanity system resulting from trauma and terror. This system helps to remind players that the atmosphere of the game, even in a combat situation, is more than the roll of a die and a result of "hit" or "miss." Feel free to adapt and adjust these optional rules in any of your **Nightbane®, Beyond the Supernatural®,** or even **Palladium® Fantasy** or **Rifts®** games; it should translate over without any trouble at all. And, as always, for those G.M.s out there who don't want any more rules, and for whom the current system works fine, these rules are optional. Don't use them if you don't want to, or just use what you like.

How this new approach works is relatively simple. At the G.M.'s discretion, whenever a player fails a Horror Factor roll, the character may experience *additional* (mostly temporary) effects beyond simply being stunned. In these situations, the character's reaction is so extreme that he suffers some sort of instantaneous and temporary mental or physical breakdown, causing him to behave in ways that are unusual or even out of character.

Think about the things that happen to you when you're scared. Your palms sweat, you have trouble breathing, and your heart feels like it's beating a mile a minute. You may even have trouble standing; your knees turning to Jell-O. You want more than anything to get out of there, and if you've ever been scared for your life, you know that it gets to be more than you can control. How terror manifests itself in an individual is different for each person. Sometimes it's rage, sometimes panic, sometimes a cold, rational indignance. The reaction is something buried deep within our collective consciousness, something primal and basic, a "fight or flight" reaction. One of those circumstances where the intellect shuts down and instinct or gut reaction takes over. In general, such circumstances are left up to the G.M.'s discretion, but as a rule, *if a character fails a Horror Factor check by **five** or more points*, there should be some sort of lingering or immediate terror effect. Effects from failing a Horror Factor check are determined by rolling on the table below. Alternately, the G.M. can *choose* an effect he or she deems appropriate:

Table:
Random Effects of Failing a Horror Factor Save

01-08% Faint! The character passes out for 1D4 melee rounds, and if the source of the horror is still present upon reawakening, must make another save vs Horror Factor (at –2) or faint again!

09-16% Run! The character takes off, running to get away from the terror as fast as he can. If anyone gets in his way, he will attempt to simply barrel them over. Failing this (if stopped from running), he must roll again on this table and respond accordingly. The character recovers in 1D4 melee rounds, but suffers the usual H.F. combat penalties the entire period.

17-24% Scream! The character stands frozen just screaming like a child. Standard Horror Factor penalties apply (loses initiative and one attack, and may not defend against the source of the horror's first attack that round). Unfortunately, the character's screams are certain to draw outside attention to the scene. Continues to scream for 1D6 melee rounds, but can take action (run, hide, fight), only all combat bonuses and skill performance are half. Afterward the character cannot talk above a whisper (strained vocal cords) for 4D6+10 minutes.

25-30% Attack subject of horror blindly: The character(s) flies into a rage, desperate to destroy the thing that has so terrified him. +5 on initiative and +2 to strike and damage, but is so consumed with destroying the "thing" that all bonuses to *defend* (parry, dodge, disarm, roll with impact) are *halved* and all non-combat skills are forgotten. Lasts for 1D4 melee rounds.

31-33% Mindless aggression: The character goes berserk, blindly lashing out at the nearest target, including friends, allies, and innocent bystanders. The main goal is to destroy the horror, but all those within reach are considered possible threats. Lasts until restrained or 1D4 melee rounds *after* the source of the character's terror is gone.

34-41% Throw up: The individual's "gut" response is to vomit, retching uncontrollably for 1D4 melee rounds. While in this state, the character cannot attack, and is -6 to dodge, parry or take any evasive action. He must make an unmodified roll of 14 or higher to remain standing or to stagger away at 10% his normal speed capability.

42-49% Lose control of bodily functions: Exactly what this entails is probably better left to the imagination of the G.M. and players, but suffice to say, it doesn't smell pretty. Standard Horror Factor failure penalties apply plus lasting embarrassment until a change of clothes can be made.

50-57% Freeze: The character is actually paralyzed with fear. Cannot move, talk, or act in any decisive manner, and must be physically pulled from this terrified stupor. If the creature or source of the horror attacks the character, roll again on this table for the character's reaction. Otherwise, the character just stands there, frozen and shaking for 2D4+2 melee rounds.

58% Heart attack: The character is so utterly horrified that he actually suffers cardiac arrest. Tightness in the chest results, coupled with severe pain down the left arm. Has difficulty breathing, and must make an unmodified roll of 16 or higher to

remain conscious each round. Performing *any* strenuous activity reduces the character's P.E. attribute by 1D6 points. If P.E. drops to zero, or a saving throw is failed, the character falls unconscious and is very near death. Requires medical attention to survive; standard severe injury/coma rules apply.

59-67% Hyperventilate: The character has difficulty breathing, as though he or she were suffering an asthma attack. Unless he can sit down and calm down, must roll a 14 or higher on a D20 to remain functioning. A failed roll means the character can barely breathe, cannot speak more than two words per melee round, speed is reduced to 1D4 points, all combat bonuses are ignored, skill performance is -80%, and has only one melee action/attack per round. If the roll to save is five or less, the character loses consciousness. This result is not life threatening, and characters who pass out from hyperventilation begin to breathe normally and reawaken in 1D6 melee rounds. Otherwise, hyperventilation remains until the object of horror (or the character) is removed.

68-70% Insanity (temporary): Roll on the "Insanity resulting from trauma" table in the **Nightbane® RPG**, page 45. This condition lasts 1D8 weeks, after which the character slowly recovers.

71-72% Insanity (long term): As above, but insanity lasts 1D12 months.

73% Insanity (permanent): As above, but insanity is permanent.

74-82% Hysterical blindness: Character cannot see! Victims of hysterical blindness are -9 to strike, parry, and dodge. Condition lasts 1D4 hours.

83-92% Cry, beg: The character resorts to begging for his life and the lives of his comrades. Will fight to defend himself, but too horrified to take openly aggressive acts (defensive actions/simultaneous attacks only). Afterward, has a phobia appropriate to the experience. 01-30% permanent insanity, 31-00% lasts for 2D4 months.

93-100% Regress: Character falls to the ground, lays in the fetal position, and whimpers like an infant. Wants nothing more than to hide in a corner, curl up into a ball, and disappear. Unable to act in any fashion. Condition lasts 1D4+4 rounds or until removed from the situation. Afterward, has a phobia appropriate to the experience. 01-50% permanent insanity, 51-00% lasts for 3D6 months.

A few notes about expanded Horror Factor and insanity. Using the table above to expand and enhance the experience of failed Horror Factor saves can bring a great deal to the game. However, if overused it can quickly lose its impact. Thus, it should only be used when an opponent or situation is truly mind boggling or terrifying. This is especially true in the case of insanities. Insanity, while it can often be played for comic effect, should be something that adds that extra air of tension to a horror game, another random element that could cause anyone to snap at any time. If characters are developing insanities right and left, it quickly loses its flavor. In addition, in the case of insanities, if a character already has a temporary insanity, and rolls a result of "long term insanity," this doesn't necessarily mean he should develop a second insanity (though one might). Rather, come up with a means to intensify the already existing one, and extend the duration to long term. This is a good rule of thumb to apply to most random tables whenever a redundant result is rolled, use that result to *modify* the existing condition, rather than repeating it. Modify it how? Well, that's up to you.

G.M.s, don't be afraid to re-roll, or even *pick* appropriate results based on the situation. I'd encourage G.M.s to be *random* in the adjudication of the table. It keeps players on edge, never aware of what's coming or how their failure is going to affect them or the group. Random adjustments or arbitrary choices based on the situation also serve to throw a wrench into the plans of those players who memorize tables.

New Skills

Locate Librarian (Rogue/Espionage categories): This skill represents the ability to locate the Nocturne Librarian of a given city (for information on Nocturne Librarians, see the section on the Nocturnes). For the character's home city, a character is +20% to a roll to locate the Librarian. For cities visited regularly, the roll is straight with no penalties or bonuses. For cities visited at least once, characters are -15% to their skill roll. Finally, cities never before visited require a great deal of leg work, a successful Streetwise roll, and then a Locate Librarian roll at -40%. G.M.s who don't wish to water down the process of finding a Librarian to a simple roll can use this skill as a means of guiding Nocturne characters to the proper contacts, who then can drop names and locations, or a string of clues for the characters to follow through the use of the skill. **Prerequisites to this Skill:** Lore: Faction (Nocturnes) and Streetwise. For those Nocturnes with the Collector skill package, the prerequisites are not required, although they are helpful (+5% to locate). **Base Skill:** 20% +5% per level of experience.

Lore: Faction (Technical category): Characters possessing this skill have an intimate knowledge of the inner workings, mythology, and legends surrounding a specific faction. Such information as the history of the faction, known leaders, mythical figureheads, methods of operation, bases of operation and safe houses, etc., are all available through the use of this skill. This skill must be taken separately for each individual faction the character has knowledge about. At the G.M.'s option, this skill can be added as an R.C.C. or O.C.C. skill for any character starting the game as a member of a faction, but only for the faction to which the character belongs. In such cases, an R.C.C./O.C.C. skill bonus of +15% may apply. **Base Skill:** 30% +5% per level of experience.

Lore: Secret Societies (Technical category): Those characters possessing knowledge of secret societies know all the myths, rumors, and background of the most notorious secret societies, their historical roots and precedents, if any, and have some idea how these societies operate. This skill applies to cults, secret religions, brotherhoods, and full-blown societies. Note that the skill is a Lore skill, meaning that knowledge gleaned from this skill applies to myth and legends (and rumors) surrounding a given society, not necessarily facts or details about current day operations or members. Just how reliable a bit of knowledge is, as always, is up to the G.M. **Base Skill:** 25% +5% per level of experience.



The World after Dark, 2006

A new year has dawned. Maybe just a year like any other in the grand scheme of things. People get up, kiss their families, go to work, have lunch, come home, have dinner, go to bed, lather, rinse, and repeat. Things go on as they always have. Technology still advances at a crawl, there is still an unspoken feeling that Big Brother is watching. N.S.B. headquarters and agents are a more common sight than ever, and most people quietly lament, but openly accept the loss of personal freedoms that came with the Preserver Party's reign.

But there's a dark undercurrent that goes unnoticed by the world at large. Every day, average men and women don't come home. People question these disappearances less and less, because they are learning that if one questions too loudly or pushes too hard, they might be the next one who doesn't come home. So most people accept the disappearances, mourn their losses, and move on or wait for their loved one to return to them.

In a surprising number of cases, the missing person is reunited with his loved ones within one week's time. Some of those who return have a lame story, but most claim to have no memory of the lost week. There are usually tiny idiosyncratic differences in their personalities and/or holes in their memory. So the individual is back home safe, but somehow different. Sometimes frighteningly so.

There are still those who fight against the Dark, who know its secrets and know about the subtle takeover of the world by hostile alien forces. Some of the opposition groups are much as they have been since the beginning. **The Resistance**, for example, still carries on its crusade against the Nightlords, doing whatever is necessary to disrupt the operations of their sworn enemies. **The Underground Railroad** still seeks to help new Nightbane understand their nature and place in the world. The Warlords are still brutal and criminal, and battle the Ba'al on their own terms, in their own territories. But other factions are beginning to show the stress of the invasion, slowly degrading from within. The **Lightbringers**, once the bastions of hope and light, are slowly falling to a fanatical sect that is spreading through the organization like a cancer. This sect claims that the vampires are the true threat, that the Nightlords are the problem of the Nightbane. They insist they must take their war to the undead, and if Armageddon results, then so be it. It appears that an intra-faction war may be brewing within the ranks of the **Guardians**. The Dark has even crept into these white knights, corrupting a few into the Fallen, horrific corruptions of everything that the Guardians once stood for.

Still other factions are growing, slowly cementing their power bases, solidifying their positions, and beginning to plot more major offenses against the Nightlords. **The Spook Squad's** Pandora Project and Paranormal Activities Bureau have re-opened an old United States project for the creation of psychic agents, called MK-ULTRA (the Squad's version is called MK-ULTRA II), and has exhibited great success in producing focused and specialized agents that can be grouped into crack commando-like squads for special and black ops. **The Nocturnes** gather more information and lore, and endeavor to build a nationwide network for themselves to enable them to use the other factions to defeat the Nightlords once and for all, and stop the activities of Vampire Intelligences on the Earth.

For the Nightlords, things are pretty much unchanged. In most cases, their power base is stronger and more secure than ever. Lilith still rules the Devil's City, and her *Nightlands* television series is ranked as the highest rated show of the 2005 season. Magog still stands as the viceroy of the Midwest, and engages in his arrogant campaign of genocide that threatens to blow the lid off of his own existence. Both are still subservient (to their eternal annoyance) to Moloch. (For more on both Lilith and Magog, including complete stats, avatars, and plans, see **Nightbane® Book 2: Nightlands.**)

Rumors of insurrection. There are rumors that several small towns in the Midwest have managed to throw off the yoke of their oppressors and become independent, though no one has been able to confirm these rumors, not even the Seekers, and the grapevine has it that none who have set out to investigate have returned. Thus far, the theories abound, but facts are few.

- One rumor has it that a few towns in Iowa have managed to drive out all of the agents of the Nightlords, including Dopplegangers, Night Princes, cultists, N.S.B. agents, the works! These towns maintain a powerful militia of Nightbane, human psychics and mystics, and plan to use the area as a base of operations to spread their free territory!

- Another rumor tells of a strange artifact (some say an ancient, crashed Void Ship) that was unearthed in an underground cave in Missouri, discovered by a farmer, and the entities within this ship drove out the minions of the Dark. But the people of the town haven't been the same since, and all those who visit exhibit a strange obsession with the community and the vessel, and refuse to leave.

• The rumors were deliberately started by a few communities in Kansas with the hope that they would draw a veritable army to their aid and become a sort of manufactured prophecy. It may or may not be working, but an enormous resistance effort is forming out that way.

• The rumors of freedom are in fact a trap! The Nightlords are firmly in control of the entire Midwest, and idealistic stories such as these are used to draw out the enemy and destroy them!

• An equally common thread in the rumor mill refutes all of these, insisting the rumors are all poppycock, nothing more. That no one to date has shown the type of power one would need to maintain a free territory, and such tales are nothing but a fantasy or a pipe dream probably spread by the Underground Railroad to lure young Nightbane away from the battlefront. Anyone who goes looking for a free town in the Midwest is likely to get himself killed. That's why none have come back.

The Immortal faction. Perhaps stranger than these rumors is the emergence (or re-emergence, as they would have us believe) of a *new faction* comprised of creatures who resemble Nightbane, but who exhibit powers that simply cannot be possessed by Nightbane. According to the grapevine, while Nightbane must exert will power to transform to and from their Morphus form, it seems that these creatures can drop their mask of humanity at a thought, but must actually expend potential psychic energy to return to their human facade. The creatures refer to themselves as *Athanatos,* an ancient Greek term that roughly translates to "immortal." There has been speculation that the Athanatos are a branch of the Nightbane that took a different evolutionary turn centuries ago and has remained secretive until now. Other theories suggest that the Athanatos are Nightbane who have unusual talents that mimic human psychic powers. Still other theories hold to the idea that the Athanatos are a different species entirely, and that they know things about the history of the Nightbane and the Ba'al that no one else knows. If we give them the chance, the believers say, the Athanatos might hold the answers the Nightbane seek, and may be able to give them the keys to defeating the Ba'al once and for all, for even these angelic-appearing creatures concede that it is likely the Nightbane hold the keys to victory against the Ba'al. Their own crusade, say the Athanatos, is one of an overall battle of good vs evil, light vs dark.

The Athanatos also have a strange genesis tale that speaks cryptically of an ancient war of Light and Darkness in which they, the Ba'al, and the Guardians played a major role. While many dismiss this as an apocryphal version of the war that drove the Ba'al from the world in the first place, others pick out the names Lilith and Moloch in the tale, and observe the role they play. The placement of these familiar figures, they argue, points to a race of sorcerer-kings that even *pre-dated* the Nightlords, which the Ba'al overthrew and drove to their own prison. If this is so, does it mean that there is an evil as great as the Ba'al out there, festering, waiting for its own chance to move in? Some scholars point out that there are many great evils in the universe, and that the Ba'al are just one, but since the Ba'al threaten the Earth at this moment, we shouldn't let ourselves be distracted with other *possibilities* of evil. Others echo this sentiment, reminding everyone that the quickest way to summon an unwanted spirit is to talk about it.

The Guardians, too, know something about the Athanatos, although they're not talking, so it's unclear exactly what it is they know. One thing is certain; Guardians and Athanatos can sense each other, much like Nightbane sense one another. Given that the Athanatos and Nightbane can also sense one another, does this mean that there is some strange connection between the three races? Even the Athanatos don't seem to know, for nowhere in their grand history does it mention such a link, and every last one of them seems to have a different explanation.

The first "public" mention of the Athanatos among the underground is considered to have appeared in a new excerpt from **The Wanderer Diaries** that appeared on the Internet in mid January of 2006. The Nightbane, at first, took great hope from the reappearance of the diaries, which had mysteriously disappeared from the net around May or June of 2005. Rumors abounded that the Wanderer had been captured and killed, and that the best link the Nightbane had to their own past was forever lost. When the diaries suddenly reappeared in all their glory, celebration tore through the ranks of the factions. Then the word began to spread about these *new entries,* with such a fantastical tale that many feared the Wanderer had gone senile or insane. The more these entries are studied and analyzed, however, the more they seem to ring horribly true. When a few Athanatos revealed themselves from within the very ranks of the Underground Railroad (U.R.) and confessed that they had hidden among their Nightbane cousins for years, it created a wave of panic and paranoia that almost drove the Athanatos back into hiding. For all that the Railroad knew, the Athanatos were minions of the Nightlords sent to infiltrate and destroy them all. In the end, the revealed Athanatos simply disappeared, and the U.R. allowed themselves to forget what they'd seen. The revelation was so brief it went almost unnoticed, and many Nightbane within the U.R. still aren't aware of the existence of the Athanatos, and most outside don't know they exist. Every once in awhile, though, a member of the U.R. sits down, re-reads those new passages from the Wanderer Diaries, and shudders.

The Wanderer Diaries

January 3, 2006: *In the beginning . . .* How many religions and philosophies start with this phrase? It's on my mind today, so hopefully you'll forgive me if I prattle a bit before coming to the point. That is, after all, what a diary is for, isn't it? Prattling on while you try to get your thoughts straight? And today my thoughts are on faith and creation.

Creation is essential to the answers sought by those who hold to faith in their search for truth. It is sad that we Nightbane have no true knowledge of our own beginnings, for were there answers to be had, even answers within widespread and organized mythology, then perhaps our lives would not seem as bleak as they do. A new year has dawned, and finds things much as they have been since Dark Day. The Lords of Night continue to oppress and conquer in secret, their fascist empires holding tight sway over humankind the world over. Still, the Nightbane battle against these invaders and I, myself, still strike from the shadows at every opportunity to disrupt their operations in any small way I can.

Over the past year I have journeyed through space and time by way of the Astral Plane, looking for an answer – any answer – to the question of our existence. It is with a heavy heart that I begin this New Year with no new revelations. I have been as far back and forward in time as I care to go. I have seen horrors and wonders in the future that await the world no matter which path they choose, for the future is as malleable as soft clay, constantly changing, shifting, molding, and it seems every time I visit, the world is completely different from the last. Or perhaps journeying into the future is not truly possible for this same reason, and I have but found myself in one of infinite parallel Earths. I have seen worlds where technology has come to fruition to defeat the Ba'al with weapons unlike any you can imagine. All too often in these worlds, this same technology is then turned upon the rest of us who are not like them, not like the normal humans, and the world is "purified" of "alien or monstrous infestation." I have also seen worlds where this same technology worked in the favor of the Nightlords, where mankind is subjugated once and for all to the dark whims of these black villains. I have heard the pitiable cries and laments of men and women used as cattle, prey, slaves, playthings, and toys, subjected to the foulest of tortures and the most horrific of torments. Even in these societies, the lot of the Nightbane is the same. The Ba'al work to destroy us and drive us out so that we are no longer a threat.

I have also seen worlds where technology fades and dies, driven into obscurity by the ever-lurking presence of the NSB and the agents of the Ba'al. In these worlds, man turns from science to magic and psychic powers. Our fate is somewhat better in these worlds, where mankind comes to better understand us, and yet somehow we are still feared and mistrusted, sometimes even hated and despised, hunted along with the Nightlords, even driven back to the Lands of Night with them, to our ultimate destruction. In these worlds many of us live in secret, thriving in (sometimes literally) underground communities and walking among mankind, pretending as though we are not what we are, forsaking our nature and heritage for survival. I have seen this and wondered which is worse, to be utterly destroyed, or to survive at the cost of one's identity?

I will not even attempt to describe the horror of the worlds where the Nightlords have won through magical means. What I have not yet found, sadly, is that elusive paradise in which the Ba'al are driven from the world thanks to a concerted and combined effort on the part of humans, Nightbane, Guardians, and other supernatural races. A world where after the war is done, all can live in peace side by side. Our life and our path, I fear, is one of solitude and loneliness. I have seen it before. Large gatherings of our kind inevitably attract attention, and attention leads to destruction. Even now, in these dark times when Nightbane must band together for survival, I see the grim promise of destruction. Look at the Warlords, who come far too close to flaunting their supernatural heritage, an open target for those who would do us harm. I understand that strange gathering known colloquially and rather quaintly as "Club Freak" is also becoming more and more popular in large cities among the Nightbane residents. I would warn against this as well. I under-



stand the call, the desire, the need to be with others like yourself, but truly ask yourselves this question: Is that beautiful angelic creature whose perfect complexion is marred only by the nails in her skull *really* anything like your rather lycanthropic form? Certainly, there is kinship among the Nightbane, though our roots are hidden even from us, we sense we may be of the same bloodline, but more than the vast differences in our appearance and attitudes, think whether it is worth a few moments with others like you at the cost of our entire people being slowly exterminated as more and more "Club Freaks" are sniffed out and snuffed out.

Some may accuse these writings of holding within them as much danger as any Club Freak or Warlord gang. I imagine they are correct. However, these diaries are as often dismissed as fiction or the demented ravings of a madman as they are accepted or believed to be truth. The strength of these documents lies in their anonymity, in the security that only those who can relate personally to the truths within can ever accept them for what they are. To anyone else, they are little more than an entertaining bit of fiction to be read in the bathroom and tossed into the wastebasket. I suppose my connection could be traced, my location discovered by a clever hacker as I upload the files on the internet, but such a hacker would have to be faster than any I have ever known.

Perhaps I shouldn't preach after all. I write because I too crave companionship and recognition, but to gather in groups of hundreds at dance clubs seems reckless to me. I understand that while it may not be a life we asked for, any of us, danger defines our existence. Without it, what truly would be left to separate us from the maudlin, humdrum existence of ordinary humans? Certainly the danger of perishing under the Darkblades of a Hound squadron is more preferable to this old Nightbane than the prospect of failing at a humdrum human life and wasting away next to a dumpster in an alley somewhere, a bottle of Night Train tucked securely in a ragged paper bag resting on my chest as I sing to old friends that only my gin soaked brain can see or hear. I suppose it is a trade off.

So I write. An anonymous voice on the worldwide web. I write because there are so many more of us since Dark Day that it is not possible for elder Nightbane to seek out and properly educate neophytes as it once was. Some lucky Nightbane still find mentors, but what about those who endured their Becoming with no one nearby to help them to understand their new place in the world? No one to help them cope with the horror of what they are or what to do? For these poor souls, my words may be the only thing that helps keep them from the Dark or death. For this reason, if for no other, I continue my work and whether or not some elder Nightbane believes I am truly as ancient as I claim, none can claim that the words I put down are incorrect or not helpful to young Nightbane with no teacher or friend. Better my words than slavery and death under the yoke of the *Ba'al-ze-neckt.*

Fighting my battles as I can, and teaching those who will listen, my New Year's resolution is to drive the Ba'al from our world at any cost.

January 4, 2006: Today I write with new information for those who would use it. Today I look to a larger subject than the Ba'al, to the evil that lies beneath them, the demonic and shadowy monster that powers them and drives them to do evil. Today I look to the Dark, the force that inexorably corrupts and wastes and destroys everything it comes into contact with, including, it seems, the Earth.

Fear not, I am not suggesting that the Dark is all-powerful or unbeatable, but I do find myself more philosophical of late. Last year, while hiding from a Nightlord patrol in the sands and mountains of Iraq, I discovered a cave. Within this cave I discovered a series of truly ancient clay pots. Curiosity overcame me and I looked into these pots. Inside were scrolls of dry and cracked parchment, covered with ancient writing, a library of ancient knowledge. As near as I could tell, the language was some ancient and prehistoric hybrid or forerunner of Hebrew and Aramaic, not uncommon for writings of this type. I was overcome with excitement, and carefully gathered up the treasure.

I could not translate the scrolls myself, for the script was far beyond my ken, so I turned to a close confidante with ties to the Seekers. An individual willing to translate the scrolls and consult me before sharing the information with his brethren. For the past several months I have waited, eager to hear word from him. Yesterday that day came. I awoke to a pounding on my door. There, outside in the snow, was my friend, soaked to the bone, shivering and terrified. I ushered him into my house and sat him by the fire. As I put the water on the stove for tea, he began rambling on about ancient and lost histories that provide startling and frightening tales of the great war that has raged throughout the ages. The war of which the Ba'al and Nightbane are but one facet. He began rooting through his knapsack (waterproof, thank goodness) for the fruits of his labor. From the undoubtedly enchanted bag he produced several three-ring notebooks full to bursting with leaves of paper upon which he'd scribbled the translations of the scrolls. I teased him about his old-fashioned nature and with a deadly serious look he informed me that computer disks were too easy to misplace or lose. For him, these binders were easier to keep track of and easier to go over. I conceded his point, if only to get to the information he'd brought. I could transcribe them to disk later, after all. But even I was not prepared for what he offered.

The war my friend spoke of is the war between the very forces of Light and Dark. On Earth, here and now, this war manifests as the epic and shadowy battles between the supernatural forces that hold the fate of humanity in the balance – the Nightbane and our allies, against the Ba'al and their unholy legions. What worried me was how evasive my friend was about the accurate meaning of the scrolls. I am ancient as our race goes, but "thee's" and "thou's" confuse me as much as the next, and the scrolls seemed filled with inconsistency, contradiction, and symbolism. My friend refused to speculate on the true interpretation of the writings, nor would he allow me to look through the binders myself, though I caught glimpses of many notes in the margins. What little he did see fit to share with me, however, was fascinating.

It is perhaps fitting and also a bit strange that I began my diaries for the new year with the words "In the Beginning," for the ancient scrolls I discovered hearken back to times far more ancient than any I have found the means to visit. They talk of seduction, corruption, the lure of the flesh, and the utter devastation and destruction of an entire people. They hint at the first comings of certain champions of light and darkness that

stalk the world these nights, and discuss other warriors who may even be *Nightbane*, though of this I am uncertain. Have I discovered the story of the Ba'al, and the beginning of the war we now fight? If so, there is much to be feared, for the scrolls tell of the existence of the Dark in the times far before man recorded his history in pictures on walls. They talk of civilizations long gone and the rise of the Ba'al from an order of even more ancient sorcerers, alien creatures who fell prey to the whispers of the Dark and failed. How ancient, truly, is this evil that we face? How far back do its beginning go, if indeed it has a beginning, and does it have an enemy? Or is that us? The bane of the night? The bane of the Dark? We will, perhaps, never know.

I awoke this morning to discover my friend gone, all his binders of translation gone with him. He left a note instructing me not to contact him again, and to forget I had ever found the scrolls – as if I could. The Seekers, it would seem, have determined that this information will not be allowed to go public. I have been betrayed, and without proof of the scrolls, all I have to offer are tales that could easily be dismissed as the insane rantings of an old man. Of one thing I am certain, though, someone out there has my scrolls and, perhaps more importantly, the translations, giving me a new mission. If such writings are so Earth shattering as to be deemed secret by the Seekers, I must find them and make them public. Be assured, one way or another, I will uncover the truth and share it with you, my brethren. It is our right to know the secrets that lie within the Scrolls of Light and Darkness and I will try to bring that truth out of the shadows and into the light of day.

Dark Revelations

The Wars of Light and Darkness

What follows is the history of the Wars of Light and Darkness as accepted by the Athanatos and told to many newly revealed Undying. Nobody knows if it is true, but recent rumors suggest ancient scrolls have fallen into the hands of the Seekers that could blow the lid off of the mystery of the war between the Celestials and Infernals, and the war between the Nightbane and Ba'al. Outside of possibly a few members of the highest levels of the Seekers, however, nobody has access to the documents or knows the whole truth. All that is certain is that the Athanatos are as mysterious as the Nightbane, similar enough that they may be cousins to the rumored manifestations of the Formless Ones, but different enough to give pause to that theory as well. Their own sense of history makes the Athanatos tend to be very high and mighty, and regard their own secret conflict as more important than that of the Nightbane. Consequently, the Athanatos look down upon the war with the Ba'al as somewhat trivial and expect others to accept the magnitude of their personal conflict, though none of them can offer any sort of evidence to support the validity of the beliefs that drives them. In fact, given that certain aspects of it contradict the commonly held origin of the Nightlords, many Nightbane in the know dismiss the Athanatos *creation myth* as drivel and pompous arrogance.

The following is, in fact, little more than the Athanatos creation myth, loosely supported by a few connecting factors, but in no way corroborated by any known historical documents, and is contrary to many ancient texts and long held beliefs. It is *pre-history* that supposedly takes place centuries before the Nightbane first appeared on Earth, in the days leading up to the birth of the Nightlords, the Vampires, and the Guardians, when the Dark first made its presence known in the world.

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"There is a war going on. It is a war of cosmic proportions that could affect the entire universe, and it is centered here, on Earth, and on alternate Earths in millions of dimensions. It is an eternal war, of which the battles here are but one small front. You may be familiar with the Nightbane and the Ba'al, or the shadow agencies of the former CIA, FBI, and NSA who employ psychics in their personal battles against the Preservers and the NSB. As you battle for day to day existence in the world of night, you shall encounter many creatures; the *Nightbane*, always alone and searching for answers they may never find, whose innermost soul, loves, passions, and fears are etched upon their unearthly countenance; the *Guardians*, creatures of light who are as inhuman as they are just; *demons* from the nether realms of Hades and Dyval which some call Hell; as well as creatures of the Astral Plane and darker, more mysterious places. There are also Vampires and their shadowy minions, and then there are the Ba'al: The Nightlords who rule this planet from the shadows through their avatars and puppets. It is they who threaten the existence of all who live on this planet, and it is they who must be defeated.

"Like any war, you may find yourself forming unusual alliances that under most circumstances you would never consider. But as you live your life, fighting for whatever cause you choose, know that you, me, the Nightbane, even the Ba'al are but symptoms of a greater cancer. The war I speak of is the war between the forces of Light and Darkness, Good and Evil. And you, whether you like it or not, have just been recruited to one side or the other. Welcome to your worst nightmare.

"This war has raged for eons and rages worse than ever in these nights as doom criers, psychics, and those who simply need something to hold on to, interpret the signs of every religion and philosophy's doomsday or Armageddon prophecies. Whatever the cause, one thing is becoming clear to many people, mortal and immortal alike – things are changing, and something has got to give.

"The war between the Dark and Light revolves around the simple struggle between good and evil, Light and Darkness. Two diametrically opposed concepts of life and purpose. This particular war between good and evil began millennia ago, with the sins of a group of creatures now known as *Gregorians*, but once called *Grigori*, who left their ancient posts as observers and gatherers of knowledge to become something they were never meant to be. They were not especially powerful creatures

in the grand scheme of things, but they were eternal, with no physical bodies, and the ability to communicate only through understanding and interpretation of ideas and concepts through a sort of hive mind.

"In the days before knowledge, before language and reason, there was only darkness and elements and compounds, the building blocks of life that had yet to give birth. As the sun rose and set on this world, these compounds lay inert, dormant, waiting for a certain spark to cause them to join and react in just the right way to grow, to *evolve.*

"From the darkness of ignorance came the *Grigori,* travelers out of space and time. The Grigori were creatures of pure energy, in tune with the elements of Earth, Air, Fire and Water, and sharing a collective consciousness and a hunger for more knowledge. They went throughout the universe largely unseen, harming no one and simply observing with their basic emotions. The few races living that could detect the Grigori had many names for them, such as, *They who Watch, Observers, Watchmen, Watchers,* and similar, for that was their purpose and calling. The Grigori avoided people who could see or detect them, for they understood that their knowledge was absolute to these simple beings and could serve to corrupt and destroy if given too freely. The name of "watcher" suited the Grigori, however, and indeed it has been speculated that "Grigori" may mean "watchers" in some alien tongue. Though the battle between light and darkness has always been ongoing, from the time the first world experienced its first dawn, the war at this point was at a low boil, and the Grigori had no place nor interest in such battles. As Light pulled itself from Darkness, they laughed in admiration. As worlds were born and died, they gazed in wonder. Thus, the Grigori were content to be. But that would not last. Contentment gave way to longing, for the Grigori have one thing in common with the Nightbane, they are ancient and without a history of their own. That lack of history became a hole in their spirit. Indeed, above all else they were a race of beings without a known beginning. None among them knew from where they came, or how they came to be. So they traveled and studied and watched in desperate hope of finding the elusive answer to their own existence and why they were.

"So it was that in time a number of Grigori came to our world. It was only a passing glance these travelers gave Earth, for what on a world of ooze and metallic and mineral elements held any interest for those who sought the mysteries of existence? What possibly could?

"That glance, however, revealed a sort of primordial ooze which held within it compounds that had the potential to *live.* The Grigori were surprised and enthralled. Would elemental energies arise from these compounds to form the new brethren of the Grigori race? They found themselves enraptured by the wonders before them. It was with great, baited pause that they perceived physical forms at long last pulling themselves from the slime of creation, taking first to the waters, and then crawling hesitantly upon land. The creatures were not energy, were not akin to Grigori, but were fascinating nonetheless, for creation of new life from nothingness is the rarest of wonders. So the Grigori watched for millions of years as ooze turned into beast and beast into sentience. Perhaps, thought the Grigori, in time the evolution of this world might reveal the secrets of their own existence. Never before had a group of Grigori spent so long observing a single planet. Never before had one held such wonder for them.

"Perhaps this was the tragedy that lured them to their downfall, for the Grigori became so fascinated by the creature that came to call itself *human,* that they discovered deep within themselves desires they had never known existed. They were, nevertheless, irrepressible. The Grigori, for the first time, ceased to worry about the corrupting influence of their vast knowledge and became almost obsessed with desire to be among the humans in order to observe more closely, but also to guide and teach them. Perhaps these desires were fostered out of wonderment or fascination. Perhaps they were born from some buried sense of parental responsibility. It is not inconceivable that the Grigori came to cherish these tiny mortal beings. The Grigori suddenly found they didn't want to wait hundreds of millions of years longer for the humans to evolve into something . . . perhaps, something like them. The question remains: Were the Grigori hungry for an answer, or bored but unable to move forward without one?

"Whatever the reason, the Grigori felt within them the kindling spark of that which became a burning desire to teach and guide. They came from their distant posts throughout the cosmos to be among the humans. The fact that the humans were not advanced enough to communicate with the Grigori was a cause for consternation. At first, the Grigori were content to be near to the creatures. In time, however, they discovered subtle ways to manipulate the humans. At first, through brief whispers and impressions, then through dreams as they discovered the psychic potential of the humans. From among the humans emerged men and women later hailed as prophets, saviors, and heroes, even so-called giants and gods of the ancient world came into being. The Grigori, so enamored with mankind, and proud of their newfound ability to communicate, were ignorant of the potential damage they were causing to the natural evolution.

"Subtle contact through dreams and inspiration weren't enough, however. If the Grigori were to see if humans held the answers to their own beginnings in evolution, they reasoned they must somehow find a way to take physical form to interact with humankind directly. So they turned inward, pooling their collective knowledge and calling out to Grigori all over the cosmos for assistance. Many Grigori warned against the notion, but warnings of *'do not do this,'* were quickly drowned by, *'You do not understand. We have no choice.'*

"The Grigori from other worlds, who had not yet been exposed directly to the wonders of what was taking place on Earth, understood their brothers' excitement, but still warned in favor of caution. The damage that could be caused here, they argued, was potentially disastrous to their race and the universe at large. Fortunately, the Earth-bound Grigori finally conceded and agreed that only a certain community of humans should be exposed to them. This community could be taught and guided, and time would show if they had the potential to move beyond their mortality. The only question that remained was how? How would the Grigori interact? The first idea put forth was to choose only those gifted humans who could already detect and communicate with them, but this notion was discarded quickly. Such humans were far too few in number, and they were aberrations from the norm. The Grigori needed to know if ordinary humans had an *innate* capacity for higher development.



"The Grigori had another issue to face. To interact directly with humans, they had to forsake life as beings of thought and energy and become creatures of the physical world. The Grigori discovered that by stoking the sparks of any one of the four basic elements, and then combining this heightened nature with the nega-element of death, they could achieve physicality. Unfortunately, the transformation was permanent. There was no way back to a Grigori's natural energy form once the transmutation was undertaken. While the new physical form was imbued with vast (by human standards) power and awesome appearance, it lacked the freedom to travel across the cosmos. Contact with the Grigori collective was also severely compromised and while information could be sent back and forth, the physical Grigori would not be able to work or commune directly with their energy brethren. In this sense, communication was one-way, with the collective aware of the experiences of their physical brothers, but not the other way around. For the first time in their existence, those in the physical world would have to deal with individuality and separateness. Not a single Grigori in the history of the race had ever experienced this state of being, and none could predict how one might deal with the separation.

"There were two things, however, that the Grigori could not have known to take into account in their preliminary studies and preparation: human sensation and emotion.

"The first Grigori to set foot upon the Earth were immediately overcome by the intensity of physical sensation – sight, sound, smell, taste, hearing – and overtaken by the new sensations, they fell into a coma from which they would never awaken. It seemed more preparation was necessary, and the collective returned to study, but expedited study, for they could not risk the bodies of their brethren being found by mankind.

"Before long, a second delegation of Grigori came to the world, led by a powerful and charismatic individual who called himself *Belial*. These Grigori spirited away their comatose brothers and hid them away from the world. Then, the newly transfigured Grigori turned towards their new mission. They went among the humans of a single community, one that was well isolated from other people and remarkably self-contained. These simple people cowered before the magnificence of the Grigori, for even as creatures of the physical world, they were strange and magnificent. Some of the humans attacked in fear, but soon accepted the superhuman beings now among them.

"As the physical Gregorians began to live among and teach the humans, a force of utter blackness stirred and quietly took notice. The Dark knew that when a supremely powerful species interferes with the intrinsic development of primitives, it is only a matter of time before things go wrong. Emotions can be a powerful agent, more addictive than any drug. It was only a matter of time before the devil let loose on the left shoulder would brutally murder the angel on the right, as the Grigori struggled with their new found emotions and exhilarating sensations. The Dark would watch and wait for the right moment to strike.

"The signs of trouble came early, but were somehow missed or ignored by the vast majority of their race. The attention of the still immaterial observers was focused entirely on the experiences of their physical cousins, and they came to appreciate the challenges and wonders of physicality and the struggles of humankind. Those who walked among men taught their mortal pupils to imagine and build. Under the guidance of Belial, the First Civilization came into being. Their hallmark, a great city of art, culture and science with towering spires of gold and silver and jewels. This city was hidden and separated from most other humans by a huge mountain chain, so that the rest of humankind could not be corrupted by the Grigori experiment.

"Indeed it seemed that humankind did have the potential to achieve greatness, and this potential seemed limitless. With every gentle push by the Grigori, the humans climbed to a new plateau on the evolutionary ladder, and this First Civilization achieved glories never again duplicated by humankind. The city stood for thousands of years, the heart of a great Empire, and the Grigori were filled with *pride* at their accomplishments. As this feeling spread to the collective, ever more Grigori underwent the transmutation to the physical, that they might feel the ecstasy of the flesh and share in their brothers' triumphs. Before long, the original mission was completely forgotten, and the Grigori became competitive, each trying to outdo the others with the achievements of *his* humans. Buildings grew taller, artwork more inspired (and decadent), and all manner of accomplishments sought and eventually achieved. And in the thick of it all, Belial reigned head and shoulders above the others.

"The physical and base became the obsession of the Earthbound Grigori and it soon became clear that they were no longer guided by wisdom or higher motives. Worse, humans were worshiping the Grigori as *gods,* and the physical Grigori reveled in it. Particularly Belial, who had set himself up as king of *all* gods, and ordered a lavish palace built in the heart of his city where he could reside and adjudicate the affairs of both men and Grigori. In their pride, They Who Walked Among Men even accepted credit for the creation of the world and began to call themselves *Gregorians.* It seemed they had all but forgotten their celestial origins and eons of quiet observation. Worse, at this point, the Earthbound Gregorians far outnumbered the spirit-like Grigori.

"The remaining members of the cosmic collective sent forth a cry for assistance to the rest of their race, but help was too slow in coming. Truth be told, matters had already spiraled out of control, for the Gregorians of Earth had embraced the delights of manipulation and power over others. In their competition with each other, they went from teaching humans about art and science to teaching them sorcery and war. The Gregorians gorged themselves in stimulating emotion – lust, envy, anger, hate, sorrow, rage, domination and revenge being among the most intoxicating. The Gregorians, not constructed to assimilate such emotions, became slaves to their own passion and desire. They taught their worshipers to also embrace these craven feelings and helped them to build terrible weapons and master dark sorcery, and encouraged war. Teaching and guidance were kicked to the wayside as the Gregorians used their formidable powers to rule, use, and control the humans of the First Civilization to satisfy their own dark desires.

"Never was this more apparent than when the Gregorians began to use childbirth for their own glorification. Humans had the capacity to *procreate,* giving the Gregorians the means to produce heirs and increase their holdings and power, and leave physical tokens of affection with their human worshipers. They took to themselves human women as wives and concubines and dreamed of the new race of superhumans they would now breed. It was not long, however, before the Gregorians realized that they could not produce offspring, for their own physical forms were but imitations of humanity, and not truly compatible with mortal beings. From this painful realization came envy and anger as the certainty arose that humans possessed innate capabilities the Gregorians never possessed. Drunk on their own power and superiority, some Gregorians came to hate humanity as a result, and caused great pain and suffering wherever they went. They found their only joy in the demonstration of their impotent superiority over humankind. Never realizing that their ever-deepening pain, self-inflicted by envy, could never fill the emptiness of their souls no matter how much suffering they might inflict.

"It was the Gregorians who had an affinity for the element of Earth who found a way. They discovered the secret of implanting an unborn human fetus with a tiny shard of their Gregorian essence, and thus transform mortal flesh into *Athanatos, the Undying.* And thus, the first of us were conceived and set above the normal humans, but not quite upon the level of our Gregorian progenitors.

"Over time, our kind grew to become men and women of renown, heroes of myth and legend. We were warriors born and bred, each of us with an affinity for one of the elements and a knack for the special skills of the Gregorian that sired us.

"At first, the Gregorians – truly the Fallen – were proud of their progeny, and saw in us perhaps an even further stage of human potential and development. It is possible, though we may never know, that in that brief period of time when the Athanatos first trod upon the sands of the First Civilization, the Gregorians remembered their original mission and purpose. It is possible that in those first years there was a chance to undo the harm that had already been done by our erstwhile forebears. But even the spawning of the Athanatos did not quell the anger of those who had fallen from the light, for the Athanatos were not true sons and daughters in their eyes, but merely pale imitations of offspring. Humans touched by their shadowy divinity while gestating in a human womb. All the Fallen saw in us was the potential for ever more power and dominance by using us as pawns. So it was that we were bred as generals, taskmasters, avengers, enforcers and slave drivers to oversee the humans of the First Civilization. For you see, germinating within the breasts of the Fallen Gregorians was a blackness born from the Dark. A cold blackness dedicated to misery, pain, and chaos. The Dark had crept in without anyone taking notice and took root within the Gregorians, forever separating them from their Grigori brothers who were still beings of thought, energy and light. Gregorians, the Dark from within whispered, are gods meant to rule over mortals and use them as pawns for their own machinations and desires. So it was that these Gregorians brought to the world the concept and essence of evil.

"The Gregorians used the Athanatos to spawn entire armies among the mortals, and subjugate all who would stand against

them. Immortal even in physical form, the Gregorians found they could not kill one another, so it seemed the violence and hate would have to be felt by their human surrogates throughout the ages.

"Yet while the Dark laughed and armies clashed, there remained some Gregorians who were not overcome by the temptations of the flesh. Gregorians who remembered their original goal and saw within the Athanatos a glimmer of hope. Having tried in vain to draw the Dark out into the Light, the Uncorrupted created their own armies of Athanatos in the desperate hope of balancing the scales and defending the humans against the minions of their evil brethren. The response was reactionary and nothing more. The Uncorrupt were paralyzed with confusion and misunderstanding. How had the experiment gone wrong? What horror had their curiosity and emptiness wrought? How could they reconcile the horror they had helped unleash into an unsuspecting world? Worse, the violence and bloodshed had drawn the attention of Demons, Deevils, Alien Intelligences, and would-be gods.

"One thing was clear: The horror and evil were the fault of Gregorian irresponsibility. They had forsaken their place in the cosmos as watcher spirits and through interference and selfishness had brought evil among mortals. They were now obligated to fight the battles their ignorance had begun.

"The Gregorians split in to two factions. One tried to recapture the ideals of goodness and make right what the evil ones had wrought. These were the **Luciphim**, the Sons of Light who sought vengeance in the name of justice and retribution against the wicked. The other, dark faction became known as **Obscuruphim**, Sons of Darkness, and were considered to be the essence of evil and all that is unholy. They thrived on and propagated hatred, envy, and rage, and engaged in murder for passion and torture for aesthetics. With their demonic allies and the Dark behind them, the Obscuruphim gained much ground, for not only did they have the greater numbers, but they obeyed no code or rules, reveling in cruelty and brutality.

"It was during these earliest days of evil that Belial, the lord of the Obscuruphim, spurned the advances of a human woman called Lilitia. Belial had seduced and taken Lilitia as a consort and prolonged her life. For over a century she sat by her lord's side, enjoying immensely the attentions and evil deeds of Belial, until one day a young girl by the name of Everynia caught Belial's eye. Everynia was so enchanting that Belial instantly forgot all other women. He brought Everynia into his home and whispered into her ear secrets that no mortal had yet been privy to. Secrets of creation and destruction and sorcery and power. "But what of me?" Lilitia cried. "I was your first, your most devoted! What secrets will I be granted?" And in this manner, Lilitia became an annoyance to the dark lord. Still, he tolerated her, perhaps from some misguided and remaining sense of loyalty, or perhaps because he simply did not care. Whatever the reason, for some time Belial was unmoved by Lilitia's ranting and jealous rage. But when Lilitia took direct action against his beloved Everynia, hurling deforming magicks at the girl, Belial finally had Lilitia sent away, banished into the desert, where she stayed for forty years, seeking vengeance and sustaining herself through lost and unholy means.

"With Lilitia went a single servant, a young man named Ankharu, who was utterly and completely devoted to her, and who burned with hatred for those who would wrong his mistress. It is said that there in the desert Ankharu made contact with a force of evil that would for the rest of Earth's history become a plague upon the world, of bloodthirsty Children of the Night who could never walk beneath the Sun. The element of surprise on their side, these Night Children descended upon the city of Belial and overran it. Belial himself abandoned the city with his trusted lieutenants and Athanatos children for a grand city of one of his allies. There, Belial quickly reestablished his dominance over the other Obscuruphim.

"Lilitia was overjoyed at the conquering of the city, and looked upon Ankharu with new admiration, but Ankharu, who was once so devoted to Lilitia, was inexorably changed. He was self-obsessed, evil and found a new master in his supernatural intelligence, the source of his power. Lilitia was abandoned again. She swore vengeance against Belial, the Gregorians, and all of Ankharu's Children of the Night, but after Belial was driven from his city she faded into the shadows, directing her powers in more subtle ways. She let the children of her former servant roam free to feed and wreak havoc as they would, so long as their concerted efforts did not draw so much attention that her dark actions were discovered and she be punished before she could have her vengeance.

"In time, Belial gathered up a great army and re-took his city, driving the undead Children of the Night into the mountains where they cowered from the light of day and came down to steal babies in the dead of night. Many of the more clever undead hid among the people of the city, living quietly and feeding in secret, awaiting the day when Belial finally fell and the world would be theirs.

"Soon, it came to pass that Everynia was with child, and whispers of her infidelity circulated through the Gregorian ranks. For truly, it still was impossible for a Gregorian and a human to procreate. Belial, though, was so blinded by his passion for the woman that he called the pregnancy a miracle, and decreed a penalty of death for any who whispered that the child, named Molek, was not his. Everynia, for reasons unknown, refused to allow Belial to implant the Gregorian Essence into the fetus to turn it into an Athanatos. To this day, it is unknown whether the child's father was human, Athanatos, or something much darker. But it had power, and grew to ensconce all of the secrets that Belial had imparted to Everynia. As the child grew, he became known as **Ba'al ze neckt**, the Lord of Night, loyal counsel to his known father, Belial. The other corrupt Gregorians recognized the advantage of Molek's allegiance to his father, Belial, and every Gregorian now sought to have his own cabal of Lords and Ladies of Night at his beck and call in the war. Few, however, had the potential to grow in power as Molek did, and a greater sorcerer had never lived. Some say that Molek helped to temper Belial, and ruled his own provinces with a just, but firm hand. And that it was his magicks that warped his mind and twisted his sanity. Others say he was evil from the beginning, and always used his magicks for sacrifice and destruction in the name of Belial. It is possible that none will ever know for certain. What is known is that Molek stood beside his would-be father, Belial, to learn all he could from the Gregorian King.

"Truly, it seemed that all was doomed to be lost for the Luciphim, and the hosts of the Dark would overrun and con-

sume the world. As a final blow, the Corrupt Gregorians began to recruit other humans into their service, men and women of great power who could be instructed in the darkest arts. These human sorcerer kings and queens came, in time, to rival even the Gregorians in power, and slowly, gradually, gently, the Dark began to court the direct attention of humans. The Dark saw the fatal flaw within the Gregorians' ranks and knew that while they were a beginning, they were not the means to an end. The Gregorians were without focus, simply enmeshed in their emotions and decadence. The Dark knew where the beginning of its new regime lay.

"One night, Molek, who had grown into the powerful young ruler of the city of Belial, walked the beaches of the civilization, contemplating his rise to power. It was then that the Dark came to him, and offered him all the power he desired, and more. The Dark revealed to Molek that Belial was not his true father, but a pretender, and showed Molek that he could be greater. Molek felt betrayed, angry, and vengeful towards Belial, who had never revealed this truth to his surrogate son. In the end, Molek accepted the Dark's offer, and became *Moloch.*

"Elsewhere, deep in the desert, the woman Lilitia sat in bitter exile. For years, she had been hunched there, calling upon the darkest of arts to preserve her youth and beauty. For decades, she sat, biding her time and waiting, letting her hate fester until, finally, the dark forces she called upon took notice, and a tiny voice in her head spoke to her. The voice was barely a whisper, but she heard it as clear as she had ever heard anything. 'Go to Moloch,' it said. 'Seduce him and win his heart and all that you desire will be yours.' Lilitia came out of the desert, reborn as Lilith.

"Lilith gathered her meager possessions and journeyed back to a city of decadence and sin, where women like herself were used and degraded for the pleasures of men. The place was representative of everything she hated, and she settled there, patient, waiting, keeping a low profile and hiding from the minions of her former lovers, Belial and Ankharu. Using her magic, she warped the minds of a poor family, who came to believe that Lilith was their long-lost daughter, and took her into their home.

"Belial's forces were constantly spreading, and soon it came to pass that Moloch was the ruler of this city. Late one night, Lilith looked from her window and saw Moloch walking the streets alone and without fear. She was astonished by the power that emanated from him. Here was the man who would overthrow Belial and take hold of this civilization as his own. If she played her cards right, she could sit by his right hand as his queen.

"It didn't take long. Lilith, a mistress in the arts of seduction and matters of the heart, won Moloch easily. He took her into his house, keeping her hidden from his mother and Belial. Lilith, already practiced in the dark arts, took to Moloch's teachings quickly and became *Ba'al*, like him. And then, in the night, Lilith crept into Everynia's bedchamber and murdered the woman. Using her powers over reality, she did away with the



wounds and made it appear as though Everynia had died in her sleep. She returned to Moloch's side, and quickly learned to use her powers to disguise her own features so that Belial didn't recognize her. Slowly, she planted the seeds of dissension in Moloch's mind. She gradually convinced Moloch of Belial's overconfidence, and ineffectual leadership, and showed Moloch how he could overwhelm Belial and control the entire First Civilization.

"Others among the Gregorian's pupils followed, forming a secret cabal, and through Moloch, the Dark whispered promises to the Ba'al. Promises of power greater than the Gregorians could ever impart. The only cost was their souls. Many of the Ba'al sold themselves immediately, hungry for more power. No longer human but something far more and yet far less, the Ba'al pretended to serve their lords and rose to ever greater positions of power, directing the armies of the Gregorians who could now step back and enjoy the bloodshed and slaughter they orchestrated for their own enjoyment.

"The next blow to the Obscuruphim came when out of the dawn stepped the Children of Light, who wielded light as a weapon and as medicine and who allied themselves with the Luciphim against the minions of the Dark. Upon Belial's desertion of his Great City, the Children of the Night roamed the ruins freely and unrestricted. Human men and women were kept in pens, enslaved, bred, and used as cattle and entertainment.

"Then, one night, it was said that a blinding beam of light struck down from the heavens, destroying most of the Children of the Night instantly. Out of this radiance came the Children of Light, who rode from the skies in strange vessels of energy and claimed to serve the eternal enemy of the Dark, a force that came to be known simply as the Light. They poured out into the Great City, and at that moment, the leader of these Children of the Light swore an oath to hunt down the Children of Night wherever they might bare their fangs.

"The time for Lilith's vengeance was at hand. As the Luciphim made a stand with their new allies by their side, other forces of Light came to their aid, to stand against the minions of Darkness in a great war that spilled over onto countless worlds across the Megaverse. The remaining Grigori, now very few in number, helped to direct the war from far above the Earth by sharing tiny tidbits of their own knowledge with the forces of Light. They were desperate to undo the damage their kindred had wrought, but this seemed unlikely, and even their direction of the forces of Light served to accomplish little more than evening the odds and balancing the scales once more. But what price was paid for balance? Violence and bloodshed, with neither the good nor the evil gaining ground, and before long, it seemed all traces of life would be wiped from the cosmos, one world at a time.

"And then, something incredible happened, one day, the Ba'al simply vanished. Without their warlords and most powerful sorcerers, the Obscuruphim panicked and in that moment of panic, the forces of Light moved upon them in a great and concerted final attack. In a fevered frenzy they cut through the legions of Darkness, one rank at a time, driving the hosts of night before them, concentrating them to the very center of the civilization. A perimeter was set, and the forces of darkness were trapped and under siege.

"The greatest puzzle was how to utterly defeat the Corrupt Gregorians, who were immortal and unkillable. Great sorceries came into play, and new incantations designed to destroy of the Obscuruphim were unleashed, but nothing worked.

"It was then that the Ba'al returned, walking with brevity and cockiness into the ranks of the Luciphim. They demanded to meet with the Gregorian and Athanatos generals and offered a solution. With the unlikely alliance cemented, a great and powerful spell was designed. Evil, it would seem, turned in upon itself and simply collapsed from within. Good would finally win the day. At the last moment, however, the Ba'al betrayed their erstwhile Luciphim allies and ever so subtly altered the incantations. A great flood of magical waters rose up and covered the entire First Civilization, and as it did so, the Ba'al took flight for higher grounds where they would be safe. The magic of the waters, however, drowned all of the humans and Athanatos to the last, and as the stories tell it, utterly dissolved the First Civilization until nothing was left, not even a trace.

"The Gregorians, good and evil, were banished forever. Nobody knows what happened to them, but the most common belief is that the good Gregorians, realizing as the waters rose that they had been betrayed, worked an incantation of their own that had been prepared for the eventuality. Some even claim they found a way to became Grigori once again, even though that was said to be impossible.

"The Obscuruphim, it is said, were banished to some dark realm of shadows from which they could never escape. The Children of Darkness were all but destroyed and what passes for their souls now inhabits the Astral Plane. Some of the undead supposedly escaped and this is how they walk among the shadows of the modern world, hunting and feeding while they await the return of their lord.

"The Children of Light, too, retreated from the advancing waters and survived, though their numbers were significantly diminished.

"The Ba'al rose to become the sorcerer kings and queens of an even greater civilization, and it is said that the grandeur of the Nightlords' kingdom far outshone that of the Gregorians. Their day wouldn't come until hundreds of years later, when their own children rose up and drove the Nightlords, in turn, from the world and into the Nightlands.

"So it was with the destruction of the Gregorians that the First Wars of Light and Darkness came to an end. Our story, however, does not end there. How could it? If all of the Athanatos were destroyed beneath those magical waters, how then do we still stalk the modern nights?

"No one knows for certain how, but hundreds of years later, Athanatos simply began appearing once again, and a great leader of our people, the first of the New Generation who called himself Michael, taught the sacred history that I have told here, to all that came after. Why we began to reappear, and where we come from is still unknown, but some say that the waters did not destroy those very first Grigori who were so overcome by emotion and sensation that they fell into a coma. That they yet sleep hidden deep within the earth. If this is true then perhaps it is they who dreamed us into existence in those ancient days and who dream us into existence still. We may never know for certain. We do know that our kind played a minor role in the final banishment of the Ba'al to the Nightlands, but that was not our

battle and our tales of that time are sparse. With our return, the wars continued and continue to this night, though the lines have become blurred. No longer are the Athanatos dedicated to light and dark along path lines, and one does not hear the terms "Luciphim" and "Obscuruphim" as allegiance to good or evil, but rather as divisions of a path.

"A new division was necessary, and now we call ourselves *Celestials*, and the children of darkness are known as *Infernals*. Yet still we live in disassociation with one another. Still we live in secret, for if the Ba'al were ever to discover that we exist, we would be hunted to extermination. They would bring their vengeance down upon us with horrific fury, for in their eyes we surely would represent a sign that the Gregorians may someday return and cast them from their tenuous thrones. So long as we are secret, we are no threat. It is typically among the Nightbane that we now walk, for within their ranks we can safely hide.

"I understand if you need time to absorb and accept your place in our new world. I, like you, am a Defender, and as such it is our place to guard the innocent from harm, including such secrets as you now know. So take your time, watch over your loved ones in secret as you come to terms with your existence. But tell no one, for this knowledge comes with a price. Those who are not of our kind, but know our truths all too often meet untimely deaths at the hands of the Ba'al and of our less ethical brethren. Keep this in mind and choose your friends wisely. That is all I can tell you for now. When you are ready, I will find you. Good luck, and watch your back. I might not be there all the time."

The Athanatos

Joseph stared at Daniel in horror as his mentor tore the head from the NSB agent, then cast it aside and kicked the body over the side of the building where it landed with a "bang!" atop a dumpster. The cries of fear below reached Joseph's ears, followed by the clumsy scurrying of a homeless man making for deeper shadows.

Daniel was just standing there, panting, exhilarated from the thrill of the kill. Joseph fell to the ground. His dorsal fin crumpled painfully, but he ignored it. He was already getting used to his Gregorian manifestation, the body of a giant bipedal sea horse.

"What's the matter with you?" Daniel said without turning, though the almost imperceptible rustling of his silvery wings communicated his annoyance just fine.

"You just murdered that man!"

Now Daniel turned, and it was obvious before he spoke that Joseph was about to get a harsh lesson in his new life. "So?"

"So!? What did he do to you?"

Daniel unfurled his wings and glided across the rooftop to stand before Joseph. The elder Athanatos jerked Joseph to his feet and looked him straight in the eyes. Joseph met Daniel's gaze, saw the almost unholy fire burning there, and was afraid again.

"What did he do?" Daniel repeated. "He was in charge of that little squadron of beasties we just fought in the alley. More than that, he was a bad guy."

"And what are you, then? You just killed him! I mean, we're supposed to be – "

"Angels? Is that what you think? Yeah, appearances can be deceiving, can't they? Kid, we ain't angels. We're Athanatos. I'm a Scourge. It's my job to make sure that guys like this don't walk away. And you . . . you better get used to it, 'cause it's your calling, too."

Some believe the Athanatos to be distant cousins (after a fashion) of the Nightbane. Indeed, the two races seem to have much in common. The Athanatos, like the Nightbane, are supernatural shape shifters with great and mysterious powers. Also like the Nightbane, they are people who live normal lives until one day their true nature is revealed to them and they find themselves drawn into a great war that they never asked for, and may want no part of, but must participate in nevertheless. Like the Nightbane and Guardians, the Athanatos are major players in the war for control of the Earth. Athanatos, like the Nightbane, have no true knowledge of their origins either. Yet despite these similarities, the two species are quite different.

Athanatos are effectively half-Gregorian, men and women whose mothers were implanted with just a tiny shard of Gregorian essence while the child grew and developed in the womb. Exactly where this Gregorian essence came from is a mystery to even the eldest Athanatos, for according to their own history, the Gregorians were driven from the world millennia ago. Shadowy legends speak of sleeping Gregorians, creatures unable to cope with the onslaught of sensory input from their physical forms who reside in a comatose state, dreaming for all eternity. Many Athanatos believe that it is through these dreams that Gregorian essence still finds its way into the world and touches those special and chosen unborn children who are destined for something more. It's the nature of Athanatos to be grandiose and as some Nightbane put it, rather uppity about their supernatural origins. The truth of the matter is that these tales are myth and legend, and have as much provable substance behind them as the legends of the Nightbane's relationship to the Formless Ones. That is to say, it's all theory. There's no proof outside of ancient stories handed down from generation to generation.

While many Nightbane fight for survival and out of instinct, the Athanatos have adopted a word-of-mouth tradition that gives them a higher calling in the grand scheme of things, and one that naturally pumps up their own self-importance. To the Athanatos, even the mighty Ba'al are but pawns and puppets of the true powers behind the eternal conflict between Light and Dark, good and evil. While many Athanatos seek to defeat the Nightlords, they acknowledge that even if the Ba'al are elimi-

nated, the war between good and evil is never-ending and shall continue.

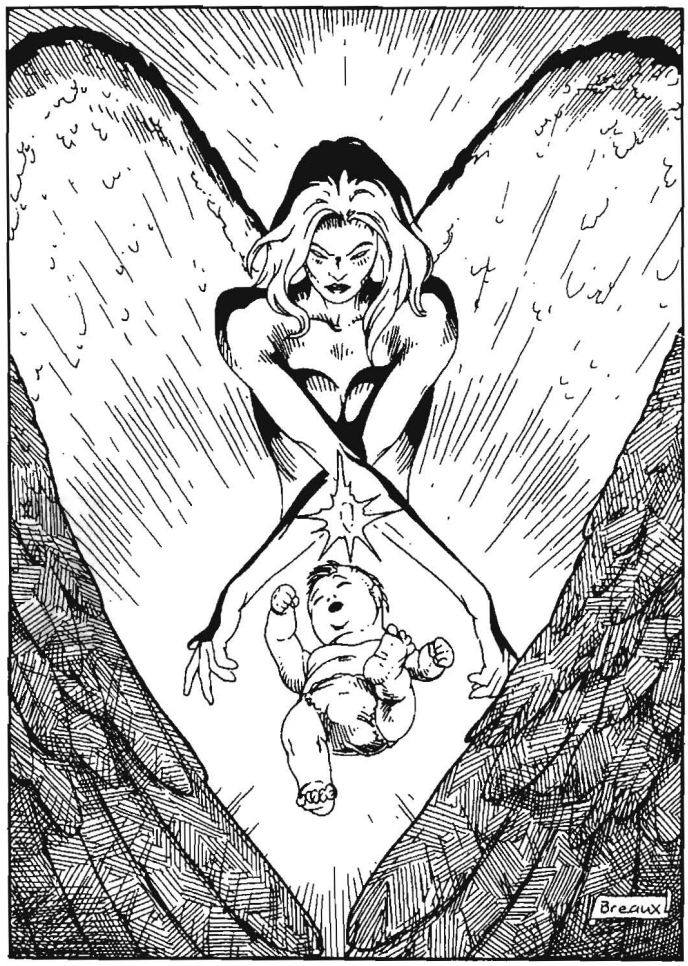
There is a power of ultimate evil behind the Nightlords, and surely the Ba'al are not the only soldiers or pawns of the Dark. After all, how threatening would the Dark be if a cabal of powerful sorcerers on one small world were its only resources? To that one planet, perhaps pretty threatening. In the grand scheme of things, however, not very threatening at all. The Ba'al are extremely powerful, but it stands to reason that even if the Ba'al are at the top of the pyramid as far as minions of the Dark, there must be others out there, skulking in the shadows, looking to serve and destroy.

There is also an old axiom that where there is dark, there must be light. Figuratively speaking, perhaps the Nightbane are the light meant to oppose the Dark. Or perhaps there is another force out there, quietly waiting, subtly manipulating events on its own to oppose evil. Take the Guardians, for example. Nobody knows who they truly serve, but they are creatures of light, and seemingly driven to do good and stomp out the forces of evil. Is there a Light to oppose the Dark? Legends speak of the Guardians hailing originally from a world of eternal light, the Lightlands, the polar opposite of the Nightlands.

These are the questions that keep Athanatos going, fighting for whatever cause they choose to champion. They are wild cards in the truest sense of the word, since as a race they have no overriding drive to fight for or against the Nightlords. Every Athanatos chooses his own path, and as such they find themselves one of the most divided and splintered of all factions in the war for Earth after Dark Day. Indeed, among the ranks of Athanatos there are factions within factions, each often vying for control and domination of others, while at the same time claiming allegiance to a higher source of good or evil. It is a chaotic and disorganized society the Athanatos live in, and many find that it is only through maintaining strict codes of behavior and ties to their individual and chosen paths that they can survive at all. Perhaps more than any other creature on Earth after Dark Day, the Athanatos are locked in an eternal struggle for survival, even among their own kind. They are a race who has lost its way and is seeking resolution, and yet they are so guarded and slow to trust that they may never find the answers they seek.

The Revelation

Athanatos live their lives as ordinary humans until sometime in their teens or early twenties, an event somewhat resembling the Nightbane Becoming occurs. This event is known among Athanatos (who are rather fond of Apocalyptic imagery) as *The Revelation.* The Revelation differs from the Becoming in several important ways. First, it is never a truly spontaneous event as the Becoming which often occurs without warning. Instead, a new Athanatos requires the touch of a kindred essence to stoke the flame that smolders inside. To do so, a focused and conscious effort is made on the part of an elder Athanatos, who directs a portion of his own energy towards the budding new Athanatos to help him reach a new level of awareness and power. Elder, more experienced Athanatos *sense* when a young one is ripe for the change and are compelled by instinct, or some mystical sensing ability, to seek him or her out. Whenever possible, the Elder will try to first meet and speak with the young



one to help prepare him for his new life. This means most Revelations happen in a quiet place where the new Athanatos and his prospective mentor can talk and form a bond as teacher and pupil.

Other times the Revelation occurs during a moment of severe stress, anguish, or danger – stoked by the Elder's "touch" but unrevealed until that critical moment. Here, again, it is helpful if an Elder has already made contact or is waiting in the wings to take action. For instance, perhaps a prospective Athanatos is running from a pack of Hounds. An elder has tracked him down and helps the young one escape. They break down an alley where no innocents can see them. The Hounds close in, the elder concentrates, and suddenly the new Athanatos bursts forth in all his glory. Together the two finish off the Hounds. Then the explanation begins.

Often, enemy factions seek to destroy the child before the Revelation occurs, in an effort to deplete their enemies' numbers while weak and unprepared. Sadly, they all too often succeed, for even a moment of life threatening danger is not usually enough to cause the spark of Gregorian essence to burst into flame unless he has first been "touched" – primed – by an Elder. There are rare occurrences when the Revelation (and transformation) occurs on its own, usually when the individual is exceptionally self-aware or extremely good and kind. In each of these instances, however, the Revelation happens under duress, usually triggered by an enemy pre-emptive attack or unexpected danger or crisis in which innocent lives are in jeopardy. On rare occasions, a Fallen One/Obscuruphim, deliberately triggers the Revelation to make for a more interesting kill, but this too is a rarity.

As one might expect, the realization that one is a supernatural being is a shock. Once the surprise of the Revelation has worn off a bit, instruction and indoctrination into Athanatos life commences. The young Athanatos is taught the story of the Wars of Light and Darkness, of the Celestials and Infernals, of the Grigori, and about his new formed body, divine purpose, and special abilities. Eventually, when the Elder believes the young one is ready, he is introduced to other members of the faction and its allies, and is briefed on the enemy and the role he is expected to play in the war. Slowly but surely, he inevitably comes to accept his place in the grand scheme of things, and adapts to a new life as a Celestial or Infernal warrior.

Perhaps the hardest part of the life of a fledgling Athanatos is accepting that one can *never* return to the life he once knew as an ordinary human. It is far too dangerous for him, the Athanatos' faction and especially his mortal friends and family. Most Athanatos who attempt to return or remain linked to their old lives wind up dead or hurting someone they love dearly. Often, young Athanatos *secretly* visit and watch over their former loved ones for a time, never revealing their presence and weeping silent tears as the acceptance of what they have become and the nature of their new life slowly sinks in. These Athanatos are referred to as *Psichi Prostatis*, or "Protector Spirits," by others and are usually left alone out of respect – even, oddly enough, by their enemies. Perhaps the pain of the transition becomes an integral part of who and what the Athanatos is, and so it has grown into an unspoken law among the Athanatos that a Protector Spirit is off limits as a target for attack. These melancholy "Prostatis" are prone to emotional outbursts as they reconcile their soul with the conflicting emotions and acceptance of their Gregorian nature. Some never achieve reconciliation and simply fade away, unable to cope with what they are and unable to return to what they once were. These poor creatures are known as *Lost Souls* and typically live as hermits in deep, secluded wilderness areas, away from all other intelligent life forms. As time passes, many become insane recluses, others eventually found by another Athanatos and are usually put down out of pity and remorse.

The vast majority, however, learn to cope with their condition within a relatively short time span, usually a matter of months. Gregorians tend to choose strong and hearty souls for the sharing of their essence and do not often misjudge the future character of the child they choose to join their ranks. Often the sense of serving a higher purpose helps them come to terms with their supernatural nature, but other times it is the thrill of battle or revenge, or personal glory or just quiet acceptance. Sometimes it's a grudging, uphill battle with the Elder mentor guiding or nudging them every step of the way. In any case, most Athanatos eventually grow to become soldiers in the war between Light and Dark and fight with pride and conviction.

The Hosts and Paths

The Host

No two Athanatos are exactly alike. They are as diverse as the stars, but all fall into one of several general categories or one's *Host*. This grouping partially represents the type of Gregorian who imbued the individual in the first place, but more importantly, also determines the Elemental leaning of the Athanatos in question. Like the Gregorians that serve as progenitors of the Athanatos, all are attuned to one of five major elements: Earth, Air, Fire, Water, and Death. This attunement manifests in the form of psychic abilities and certain mystic powers. It also determines certain aspects of the Athanatos' *Gregorian* form. The groupings are as follows:

Choma – Spirits of Earth

Pyros – Spirits of Fire

Hydros – Spirits of Water

Aeras – Spirits of Air

Necrosis – Spirits of Death and Darkness. These Athanatos are not spawned by Watchers, per se, but by demonic entities from the Astral Plane known as *Necrophim* (see **Nightbane® Book One: Between the Shadows** for more information on the Necrophim). Strangely, Necrosis Athanatos tend to grow to be as powerful as, or even more powerful than, their Necrophim progenitors. This leads one to wonder if the Necrosis are true Gregorians or something related but different.

The Path

The Path represents the general code of ethics, morals, and psychological makeup of the character. According to myth, the paths were originally based on specific ancient Athanatos who fathered or represented a particular set of moral behavior and philosophy. At one time the Paths were named after those ancient Athanatos, but it has since become taboo to speak the names of these great and revered beings.



Those who foster the causes of evil follow the paths of *the Fallen*, Athanatos who have been seduced by the Dark are known collectively as *Obscuruphim,* or "Children of Darkness." Those who fight the Dark are known as *Luciphim*, or "Children of Light." The Gregorian Paths and what place they fulfill in Athanatos society are listed below. An Athanatos' Path is also similar to one's O.C.C. because it grants class skills, "other" skills, combat abilities, and in some cases, mystical powers such as magic and/or additional psionics.

The Obscuruphim:

Scourges – Warriors and bloodletters.

Necromancers – Sorcerers and black sorcerers (all Necromancers are Necrosis).

Seers – Prophets and psychics.

Magii – Scholars and scientists.

Deceivers—Masters of illusion.

The Luciphim:

Valiant – Crusaders and warriors.

Defenders – Guardians and protectors of the innocent.

Vindicators – The vindicators and adjudicators of the guilty and spirits of righteous retribution.

Infiltrators – The agents and messengers; lords of the Earth (all Infiltrators are Choma).

Druids – Lords and Ladies of nature.

Path Note: One's path is a *predisposition* toward the Light or Dark, as well as a general viewpoint. Just because an Athanatos' path is technically classified as Obscuruphim does not necessarily mean he is evil or intentionally serving the Dark. It just represents his predisposition and general moral outlook. The same holds true for the Luciphim; not all of them are good and noble. Take, for example, the Scourges and Valiant. Both classes are warriors. The major difference is thus: *As a general rule,* a good Valiant would defeat a foe in combat and show mercy, perhaps bidding his opponent to view his defeat as an opportunity for redemption. The good Scourge, on the other hand, seeks to utterly stamp out his evil enemies and shows no mercy, believing that redemption is a pipe dream for the weak.

The Athanatos Factions

The battle between Light and Dark is fought between two opposing factions and their allies (witting or unwitting). The factions are aptly named the Celestials and the Infernals for one seeks enlightenment and balance while the other burns with hatred, revenge and other base emotions. It is a bitter, brutal, and painful war that all too often turns friend against friend and brother against brother, for the line between good and evil is rarely clear cut, and each side has its share of pawns and unwilling champions. It is a battle of shades of gray where power corrupts and vengeance can lead one astray. Some Athanatos who begin on the Celestial side drift over to the Infernal. Likewise, violence and brutality can take its toll, causing Infernals to seek redemption or find a change of heart.

Both factions of Athanatos use intrigue, manipulation, and power games to further their cause, but the motives often differ widely. Infernals, for instance, double-deal, bargain, brutalize and threaten in order to get what they want. Celestials are more subtle and use persuasion, guidance and conscience. Both sides agree upon one thing, however. The world at large must never discover their existence. Should a force such as the Nightlords ever learn the Athanatos exist, they would wage a war to wipe them from the face of the Earth. Or so the Athanatos' sense of their own self-importance and divine place in the universe would lead them to believe. In fact, many are convinced that they are more important in the vanquishing of the Dark than the Nightbane.

All Athanatos serve a faction, whether willingly or unwittingly, officially or honorary. Athanatos that by and large further the cause of good are *Celestials*, those who serve evil and the Dark are Infernals. Most player characters will probably be *Celestial Athanatos*, battling alongside Nightbane against the tyranny of the Nightlords. In fact, many Athanatos pass themselves off as Nightbane with Morphus forms of *Unearthly Beauty*. That the Nightbane sense Athanatos as kindred spirits helps them to maintain their masquerade.

Within the two major factions, the battle is broken down further into factions named after the Paths that by and large serve the two ideologies – Obscuruphim Paths for Infernals, and Luciphim Paths for Celestials.

Athanatos Racial Character Classes

The Athanatos are an enigma, and their very presence tends to be unsettling to most supernatural creatures. The Ba'al hate them almost as much as they hate the Nightbane, and so they hunt them just as fiercely. Consequently, the Athanatos tend to avoid congregating with others of their kind, rarely gathering in groups of more than two or three at a time and hiding among the Nightbane, using their gifts to blend in. It would seem that the Guardians know something about the Athanatos, their origins, and who they are, but as always, the Guardians aren't talking.

Creating the Athanatos

Creating an Athanatos is basically the same as any other character. As with any supernatural creature, there are some different choices to make and tables to roll on, but all in all, the process is very similar to that of creating the Nightbane.

Alignments: Any, though the character's Path is likely to have a strong bearing on it.

The Eight Attributes: Determine these as normal, rolling 3D6+3 for each attribute and recording the totals. Adjustments can be made later for the Athanatos' Gregorian form, but in human form these are the attributes to use.

Attribute Requirements: No Athanatos may have any attribute less than 11 in their human form.

Choosing a Path: Choose a Path (O.C.C.) for your Athanatos. Record special abilities and skills from this path. Paths are described later in this section.

Hit Points: Hit Points are determined by adding the roll of 1D6 to the P.E. attribute number, plus 1D6 per level, as standard.

S.D.C. is determined by the roll of 2D4x10 plus the P.E. attribute number. Athanatos (even in their human form) are much more resistant to physical damage than most people.

P.P.E. and I.S.P.: Each Path and Host provides the Athanatos character with P.P.E. and I.S.P., both recovered at a rate of 10 per hour of rest or meditation, and 1D4 points per hour of activity. Close proximity (within one mile) to a ley line doubles the recovery rate.



The Gregorian Manifestation

The Gregorian essence that is a constant smoldering ember within the soul of an Athanatos cannot be easily quashed once it bursts into flame. The life of many Athanatos is a tortured, solitary existence as a result. Even among Nightbane the Athanatos cannot often find comfort, for their unexpected and uncontrolled shifts all too often draw unwanted attention from civilians and especially NSB agents, which means the Nightlords.

The Gregorian is the "true" form of the Athanatos. It works in much the same way as the Morphus of the Nightbane. However, things for Athanatos are a bit more complicated. An Athanatos cannot hide from his true nature as easily as a Nightbane, so they are constantly at risk of exposure during times of danger or duress. However, the Athanatos has a greater degree of control over shifting from one form to the other. First, the Athanatos can draw upon portions of his Gregorian-self without undergoing a full transformation. To do this, the character must pay 10 P.P.E. for each feature he wishes to manifest (i.e., claws, eyes, wings, etc.). Manifestation of an individual feature requires one melee action per feature. Shifting into full Gregorian requires no expenditure of P.P.E., but takes one full melee round, unless a successful M.E. roll is made (same as Nightbane), in which case the shift takes *one action.* Secondly, an Athanatos in danger or under almost any form of extreme stress (anger, lust, intense fear, etc.) must make an M.E. save to resist his Gregorian form manifesting on its own. If this save is failed, a minor but still noticeable transformation takes place – eyes might glow with a wicked fire, for example. If the Athanatos fails to make a successful save by rolling under his M.E., and is not able to remove the source of the stress within one melee round, he must make a second M.E. roll at a -4 penalty to resist undergoing a *full Gregorian manifestation.* It gets worse. While causing the Gregorian to manifest is a simple matter of thought and will, once even a small piece of Gregorian is manifested, the Athanatos must expend 20 P.P.E. to shift back to human form.

Powers of the Gregorian Manifestation:

Note: All abilities and bonuses of the Gregorian Manifestation are in addition to those from the Host and the Path.

Attribute Adjustments/Bonuses: An Athanatos' power is dramatically increased in his true form. Add 10 to the Athanatos' P.S. attribute, which becomes Supernatural in Gregorian form. Also add five to P.E. and P.P. These adjustments apply when an Athanatos' height or two or more Gregorian features are manifested.

Hit Points and S.D.C.: In full Gregorian form, all Athanatos double their existing Hit Points and add 2D6x10+60 to their S.D.C. Roll the bonus S.D.C. once, at characters creation, not each time the Gregorian manifests. That number is the same from that point forward.

Natural A.R.: The full Gregorian form provides a natural resistance to damage. In an S.D.C. environment that resistance is a Natural Armor Rating (A.R.); each Host form will provide a specific A.R. On Rifts Earth and in other Mega-Damage settings, A.R. is not applicable, but Hit Points and S.D.C. are combined and become M.D.C. when the creature is in full Gregorian form, otherwise one third in human form.

Combat: Each Host has its own natural weaponry that can be used in melee combat. Some have talons on their hands, some have a special attack touch, etc. These specific abilities are listed with each Gregorian form. The forms also have special powers, ranging from Nightbane Talents to psionics to some spell-like abilities. At 3rd level, all Athanatos gain the ability of Psi-Sword, which can be utilized in human form provided at least one Gregorian feature is manifested.

Regeneration: Each Host has the power to regenerate a certain amount of damage per melee round. This regenerative power differs between the Gregorian forms/Hosts, but is universal and functions even when comatose, as a natural healing

mechanism, provided the character has made a successful save vs coma/death per each round. A failed save vs coma means no regeneration that round and standard effects for coma. Thus, it is possible, though difficult, for an Athanatos to die from blood loss or internal injury while comatose. If an Athanatos' heart is removed, however, the creature can *not* regenerate and is *permanently dead.* Athanatos also die if their cumulative damage drops more than their P.E. number below zero, just like any other character. Most importantly, the character's natural regenerative process *does not function during strenuous activity*; in order for the process to work, the Athanatos must remain still and rest or concentrate on healing. This means *any* action taken, even a defensive action such as a parry, negates regeneration. Thus, it is all but impossible for Athanatos to use their power of regeneration while engaged in combat. Once removed from combat, however, many Athanatos can heal extraordinarily fast if they can find a quiet place to meditate.

Limited Invulnerability: Athanatos are immune to supernatural transformation, including all forms of magic, vampirism (cannot be turned into an undead) and lycanthropy.

Flight: In *full* Gregorian form the Athanatos can fly at a speed of up to 70 mph (112 km). He can maintain high speed for one minute per P.E. point or ten minutes per P.E. point for a relaxed pace of 35 mph (56 km) or slower before needing to rest.

Extraordinary Vision: This is an ability that can be used as a manifested Gregorian feature in and of itself, only the character's eyes glow with an eerie light that changes color to reflect the element to which the character is tied. For example, a Pyros' eyes burns with holy (or unholy) fire, a Hydros' glows blue or crystal clear like a shimmering pool of water, etc. With this power manifested, the Athanatos sees in daylight as though he were a hawk, and sees in darkness like an owl.

Sense Athanatos: Like the Nightbane, they have the power to sense others of their kind. Their aura is similar enough that Nightbane also sense them, but mistake Athanatos to be fellow Nightbane. Athanatos, however, can sense the difference between the two species. In addition, Athanatos and *Guardians* can sense one another, and immediately know each other for what they really are!

Powers of Light: Almost all Athanatos have powers of light similar to some of those possessed by Guardians. They can generate light equivalent to sunlight exactly as Guardians can, at the same P.P.E. cost, including the ability of *Super Regeneration*, but cannot generate Shields of Light or fire Beams of Light.

Athanatos can also cause a small, glowing ball of light to appear in the palm of their hand. Once created, the ball can be placed in the air in the immediate vicinity of the Athanatos (usually above the head) and remains there for its full duration, following the Athanatos as he moves. This glowing ball has the same effect on undead/vampires as a holy symbol (cross). It costs 30 P.P.E. to manifest and lasts one round per level of experience. **Note:** The Necrosis Host do not have these powers over light. Their powers of death and darkness are detailed fully in their section.

Physical Stature: In their Gregorian form, most Athanatos are giants. The only exception is the Aeras Host, who are far shorter in stature than the others. Modifications to the height of the Athanatos while in Gregorian form are listed under each type of Host body.

Trigger Revelation: An Elder Athanatos (minimum seventh level experience) can sense when a young man or woman is a potential Athanatos ripe for Revelation. When the time is right, the Elder can focus his energies on the young one (expending 100 P.P.E. in the process) and trigger the first manifestation of the Gregorian form. Such a decision comes with great responsibility, for it usually falls upon the Elder to guide and teach the newly revealed Athanatos. Not all Athanatos are such good Samaritans, however, and some trigger the Revelation as a means to torment or destroy potential enemies (young Athanatos in the midst of their first Manifestation are almost always confused and frightened by their unexpected transformation), or simply to foster the chaos that ensues from transforming the youngster and leaving him to his own devices. Others have good intentions but soon realize they are not up to the challenge of being a mentor and leave the young one to fend for himself. **Note:** Athanatos age at roughly the same rate as Nightbane: one year for every hundred years of life.

Why Play an Athanatos in Nightbane? The best of both worlds! The Athanatos combine the mystery and horror of the Nightbane with the outlook and higher purpose of the Guardians, and if an Athanatos could overcome his own arrogance and self-importance, he might help others find the common ground they need to defeat the Nightlords and free the Earth. At the same time, the Athanatos is also, by and large, one of the lonelier character types in *Nightbane.* While they have divisions, Paths, Hosts, etc., each Athanatos walks his Path alone, in his own way, because their strange code mandates that they keep their existence a secret, even from other supernatural creatures, and gathering in numbers certainly risks revealing themselves to the other warriors in the continuing Wars of Light and Darkness. Most are arrogant and consumed with their own self-importance, yet at the same time, committed to their cause and sad about the state of the world and their very existence. The Athanatos are the perfect tragic heroes. They have a myth that answers the "where do we come from" question, but have chosen a lifestyle and quest that makes them stand apart from the world and even avoid interaction with their own kind. They also have a unique perspective on the war, based on their (questionable) history. In their minds, they know where the Ba'al come from and think they know how the whole problem started, and that they are destined to play a role in its conclusion.

The Hosts

The Host/Gregorian Form

Choose or roll randomly for the Athanatos' Host, which determines his or her Gregorian transformation. Random tables are as follows:

01-24% Choma

25-45% Hydros

46-68% Aeras

69-90% Pyros

91-00% Necrosis

Please note, if a player is creating an *Infiltrator* or a *Necromancer*, there is no need to roll, as their Host is predetermined (Choma for Infiltrators, and Necrosis for Necromancers). Players should be allowed to *select* their Host rather than roll randomly for it, if that is what they want.

Mega-Damage Conversion Notes: When Athanatos are converted from an S.D.C. to a Mega-Damage setting, such as **Rifts®**, damage inflicted by punches and magic (and certain psionic powers) becomes Mega-Damage die for die. Hit Points and physical S.D.C. are combined to become M.D.C. when in full Manifestation; one third that number when in human or predominantly human form.



Aeras

Description: Celestial Aeras Host are seen as the epitome of compassion, strength, and tolerance. They are peaceful, gentle and kind, with a soft spot for children, mothers and pregnant women. They are the healers of the Athanatos and actively seek to ease pain in others.

Infernal Aeras are embittered about their stature in their ranks and jealous of those who wield power, even humans. Consequently, they regularly use their innocent appearance to seduce and undermine people in power out of a sense of revenge (i.e., "if I can't have power you can't either) or in an attempt to grab power for themselves (usually through a surrogate).

Attribute Bonuses: Add an extra 1D6 to M.A. and P.B. This is a one-time bonus applied at the time of character creation and applies to both Human and Gregorian forms.

Natural A.R.: 11

S.D.C.: Add 1D4x5 to S.D.C. while in full Gregorian form.

Horror/Awe Factor: 10

Full Gregorian Appearance: Subtract two feet (0.6 m) from height, and 1D6x10 pounds (4.5 to 27 kg) from weight. The Aeras Gregorians look childlike and innocent. Their skin is smooth and unblemished, has a pink flush to it, and a pair of small, white wings protrude from their back, giving them something of a cupid or cherub-like appearance. When angered their eyes crackle with yellow flame.

Individual Features: 1-3 of the following features can be manifested independently as a partial transformation. More than three features brings about a full manifestation.

Altered Height (provides Athanatos attribute bonuses).

Wings (can fly 70 mph/112 km).

Eyes (with Extraordinary Vision).

Claws (provides Supernatural P.S. and claw damage).

Neural Touch (hands and arms crackle with electricity that stuns).

Body Appearance (childlike; includes S.D.C. bonus).

Combat: The Aeras is not the most effective member of the race when it comes to melee combat. Their tiny claws do only 1D6 damage plus Supernatural P.S. damage. However, they make up for their lack of damage potential with their devastating *Neural Touch.*

Neural Touch: By expending 10 P.P.E. the Aeras Athanatos can send a jolt of electricity into a victim's nervous system, which works in much the same manner as a stun gun or tazer. Victims are incapacitated unless a successful save of 15 or better is made. Victims who fail to save are -6 to strike, parry and dodge for 1D4 melee rounds. Worse, if the attacking Aeras rolls a "Natural 20", or any critical roll (depending on hand to hand skill), victims are -5 to save from the attack and the jolting touch causes them to collapse on the ground and lay there, dazed, for 2D4 melee rounds, unable to lift a finger to help or defend themselves.

Psi-Sword: Appears as a sword of crackling electricity; same as the psionic power.

Regeneration: 1D6x10 points of damage for every melee round of *rest.*

Special Abilities: The Aeras has power over the element of air. Thus, at first level an Aeras gains the psychic power of *Electrokinesis.* For every two levels thereafter (3rd, 5th, 7th, etc.), the Aeras may choose one of the following: Healing Touch, Ectoplasm, Exorcism, Induce Sleep, Summon Inner Strength, Increase Healing, Deaden Pain and Psychic Diagnosis.

At 5th level, the following powers may be chosen instead of those above. These powers are equivalent to the psionics and/or spells listed in the **Nightbane® Role-Playing Game:** Mind Bolt, See the Invisible, Cloud of Slumber (spell), Call Lightning (spell), Energy Disruption (spell), Summon Fog (spell), and Restoration (spell).

I.S.P.: M.E. attribute number, plus the roll of 2D4x10. Add 1D10 per level.

P.P.E.: P.E. attribute number x2 plus 6D6, plus additional P.P.E. gained from the Athanatos' Path.

See Path for O.C.C.s and skills.



Choma

Description: The Choma are seen as the epitome of nobility, quiet courage, and physical power. They tend to keep a tight lid on their emotions, which makes them seem cold and haughty to outsiders. In truth, however, their cold logic and pragmatism is a defense mechanism intended to hold their explosive emotions and personalities in check. Over the ages, Choma have inadvertently hurt countless numbers of innocent bystanders by letting loose their emotions in a torrent of rage, frustration or sorrow, for once uncorked, the Choma has great trouble keeping himself in check and not flying into a merciless frenzy. Infernal Choma, therefore, are feral beasts who embrace their seething feelings and unleash them like wild animals to devour their enemies and revel in destruction and chaos.

Attribute Bonuses: Add 1D6 to the character's initial P.S. attribute. This is a one-time bonus applied at the time of character creation and counts for both Human and Gregorian forms.

Natural A.R.: 15

S.D.C.: Add 1D6x10 to S.D.C. while in full Gregorian form.

Horror/Awe Factor: 11

Full Gregorian Appearance: Add 1D6 feet (0.3 to 1.8 m) to height, weight doubles, skin turns a golden color and well-defined muscles ripple all over the Choma's body. Hair is bright and shiny as if spun from gold and almost as radiant as the sun. When angered the eyes glow with flecks of metallic gold. Wings of an eagle sprout from the back and give the Choma the power of majestic flight (though the ability to fly is as much magical as anything else).

Individual Features: 1-3 of the following features can be manifested independently as a partial transformation. More than three features brings about a full manifestation.

Altered Height (provides Athanatos attribute bonuses).

Wings (can fly 70 mph/112 km).

Eyes (with Extraordinary Vision).

Claws (provides Supernatural P.S. and claw damage).

Body Appearance (gold skin and muscles – provides Athanatos S.D.C. bonuses).

Combat: In Gregorian form the Choma's fingertips become shards of stone, like sharp shale that is as tough as diamonds. These claws do 3D6 damage in addition to the usual Supernatural P.S. damage, and can cut through the toughest or hardest substances (the only exception is diamond) at the rate of one foot (0.3 m) per melee round; triple for lighter materials. Closed fist punches or kicks do 2D6 damage, a diving strike does 4D6 damage but counts as two melee actions.

Psi Sword: Appears as a blade made of diamond with a faint light that glows from within. Basically the same as the psionic power; same damage.

Regeneration: The Choma regenerates 1D6x10 points of damage every for melee round of rest or inactivity.

Special Abilities: The Choma has power over the land and physical objects. Thus, at first level the character gains the psychic power of *Telekinesis*. (**Note:** If the G.M. and players have access to the *Heroes Unlimited* main book, the super ability Control Elemental Force: Earth may be substituted for

the Telekinesis ability, but I recommend attaching an I.S.P. cost to the abilities so as not to unbalance the game. For suggestions on what I.S.P. costs to attach to which powers, simply compare the super ability with the psionic powers of Pyrokinesis, Electrokinesis, and Hydrokinesis, and assign what you feel are appropriate costs based on those powers.)

For every two levels thereafter (3rd, 5th, 7th, etc.), the Choma chooses one power from the following: Summon Inner Strength, Levitation, Resist Fatigue, Resist Hunger, Resist Thirst, Healing Touch, Psychic Purification, Object Read and See the Invisible.

Upon reaching 5th level, of the following powers may be chosen in lieu of those above. These powers are "Master" Psionics and are described in **Nightbane, Book 2: Between the Shadows™:** Telekinetic Punch, Telekinetic Kick, Bio Manipulation, and Super Telekinesis.

I.S.P.: M.E. attribute number, plus the roll of 2D6x10. Add 1D10 per level.

P.P.E.: P.E. attribute number x2 plus 4D6, plus that gained from the Path.

See Path for O.C.C.s and skills.

Hydros

Description: The Hydros are the rarest of all the Athanatos. Celestials are creatures of justice and vindication also known as "hammers of the innocent." On one hand, these paradoxical beings are gentle, peaceful and kind, on the other there are things that set the Hydros off on such a primordial level that they are compelled to stamp them out without mercy. These "things" include gross injustices in which the weak and innocent are tormented or killed, often en masse. A Hydros who witnesses such an injustice can't usually rest until the perpetrator is brought to justice, usually at the end of his sword. Thus, Hydros are champions of the downtrodden, and the protectors of the defenseless.

Infernal Hydros usually seek to control and dominate through subtle manipulation rather than brute force, but are ruthless and relentless. It is exceedingly rare to find a Miscreant or Diabolic Hydros, for most Infernal Hydros live by a twisted code of ethics and honor, making them Aberrant evil. Many even treat their underlings with more than a modicum of respect and fairness.

Attribute Bonuses: Add an extra 1D6 to P.E. attribute. This is a one-time bonus applied at the time of character creation and applies to both human and Gregorian forms.

Natural A.R.: 15

S.D.C.: Add 1D4x10 to S.D.C. while in full Gregorian form.

Horror/Awe Factor: 15

Full Gregorian Appearance: Add 2D6 feet (0.6 to 3.6 m) to height, and 1D6x10 pounds (4.5 to 27 kg) to weight. The Hydros Gregorian is perhaps the most startling transformation to behold, for they do not resemble human beings at all, but rather, humanoid *sea horses*. Skin is scaly and golden brown, with armored plates running from their pointed, dragon-like snout down their back. In place of wings are fins and the beings appear to swim through the air when they fly. These fins must be manifested in order for the Hydros' flight power to function. When angered, the eyes of a Hydros shine with an



eerie bluish-green as if it were the diffused and reflected glow from a light placed at the bottom of a deep, rippling pool.

Individual Features: 1-3 of the following features can be manifested independently as a partial transformation. More than three features brings about a full manifestation.

Altered Height (provides Athanatos attribute bonuses and A.R.).

Fins (can fly 70 mph/112 km).

Eyes (with Extraordinary Vision).

Bone Arm Blades (provides Supernatural P.S. and blade damage).

Drowning Touch (hands and arms become pseudo-reptilian in appearance).

Body Appearance (humanoid sea horse; includes S.D.C. bonus).

Combat: In Gregorian form, the Hydros have no claws, but spikes jut from their forearms resembling arm blades made of bone. These blades inflict 2D6 damage in addition to the usual Supernatural P.S. damage. In addition, the Hydros may expend 10 P.P.E. to utilize a power known as the *Drowning Touch*. Victims of this touch must save vs non-lethal poisoning (16 or better) or immediately begin suffering the effects of drowning. Their lungs fill with fluid and all bonuses, skills and combat rolls are reduced by half. Additionally, the attack reduces (temporarily) the P.E. attribute number by 2D6 points every melee round. When the P.E. number reaches zero or below, the victim falls unconscious. Once unconscious all the fluid that filled the victim's lungs oozes out through the mouth and skin within one melee. From here the victim remains unconscious for 1D6 hours, during which time lost P.E. is recovered at a rate of 2D6 per hour.

Psi-Sword: Appears as a translucent blade of ice; basically the same as the Super-Psionic ability and does the same damage.

Regeneration: The Hydros regenerates 1D6x10 points of damage every melee round or rest or inactivity.

Special Abilities: The Hydros has power over the element of water. Thus, at first level a Hydros gains the psychic power of *Hydrokinesis*. For every two levels thereafter (3rd, 5th, 7th, etc.), the Hydros may choose one power from the following: Summon Inner Strength, Ectoplasm, Presence Sense, Sense Evil, Resist Thirst, Increase Healing, Deaden Pain, and Sixth Sense.

At 5th level, the character can make his selection from the above or those presented here. These powers are equivalent to the spells listed in the **Nightbane® RPG:** Breathe Without Air, See the Invisible, Extinguish Flame, Banishment, Healing Touch, and Resurrection.

I.S.P.: M.E. attribute number, plus the roll of 2D4x10. Add 1D10 per level.

P.P.E.: P.E. attribute number x2, plus 6D6 and points gained from the chosen Path.

See Path for O.C.C.s and skills.



The Pyros

Description: The Pyros Athanatos symbolize courage, conviction, and strength of will. They are quick to anger and often difficult to control in group settings and volatile situations. Pyros are action oriented and take risks that may border on the foolhardy in their eagerness to prove their valor or extract revenge. However, much like fire, the Celestial Pyros' temper burns hot but brief, so they rarely hold lasting grudges and prefer to settle things in the heat of the moment.

Infernal Pyros can be an unrelenting enemy whose hate smolders deep below the surface and needs little outside help to stoke the embers of anger, envy, hatred and revenge. Unlike the Celestial Pyros, an Infernal can hold a grudge for an eternity and remembers every indiscretion leveled at him and by whom. When the opportunity for revenge (on any level) presents itself, the Infernal Pryos takes it, relishing in the satisfying warmth of the moment.

Attribute Bonuses: Add 1D6 to the character's M.E. attribute. This is a one-time bonus applied at the time of character creation and applies to both Human and Gregorian forms.

Natural A.R.: 14

S.D.C.: Add 1D4x5 to S.D.C. in full Gregorian form.

Horror/Awe Factor: 12

Full Gregorian Appearance: Increase height to 7 feet (2.1 m), but weight stays the same. The Pyros are tall and wiry, bordering on lanky. Skin is a deep metallic bronze. Hair becomes a fiery red and seems to writhe and flow as though a constant wind were blowing through it. The eyes of a Pyros burn with divine fire when he is angry. Wings are a metallic silver or bronze. Weight does not affect flight (the ability to fly is as much magical as anything else, though the Pyros' wings must be manifested to do so).

Individual Features: 1-3 of the following features can be manifested independently as a partial transformation. More than three features brings about a full manifestation.

Altered Height (provides attribute bonuses and A.R.).

Wings (can fly 70 mph/112 km).

Eyes with Extraordinary Vision.

Claws (provides Supernatural P.S. and claw damage).

Fiery Touch (3D6 damage plus normal human punch damage; 1D4).

Body Appearance (bronze skin and musculature; provides Athanatos S.D.C. bonus).

Combat: In Gregorian form the Pyros sprouts claws of red hot metal. These burning claws do 3D6 damage in addition to the usual Supernatural P.S. damage (a touch alone does only the 3D6 damage). In addition to the initial damage, there is a 50% chance of igniting combustibles with a mere touch. The Pyros can control the intensity of this fire damage in increments of 1D6, from none (very warm) to the maximum (3D6). Also, there is never blood loss from fire damage.

Psi-Sword: Appears as a blade of fire.

Regeneration: The Pyros regenerates 1D8x10 (or 2D4) points of damage for every round of rest or inactivity.

Special Abilities: The Pyros has power over the element of fire. Thus, at first level a Pyros gains the psychic power of *Pyrokinesis*. For every two levels thereafter (3rd, 5th, 7th, etc.), the Pyros may choose one power from the following list: Summon Inner Strength, Empathy, Impervious to Fire, Impervious to Cold, Resist Thirst, Healing Touch, and Empathic Transmission.

Once the Pyros reaches 5th level, one of the following powers may be chosen in lieu of those above. These powers are equivalent to the spells listed in the **Nightbane® RPG:** Fire Bolt, Circle of Flame, Fire Ball (improved from Pyrokinesis version, see spell description), Compulsion, Globe of Daylight and Blinding Flash.

Heat Vision: See the infrared and ultraviolet spectrum of light, as well as heat radiation similar to thermal optics.

I.S.P.: M.E. attribute number, plus the roll of 2D4x10. Add 1D10 per level.

P.P.E.: P.E. attribute number x2 plus 6D6, plus those gained from the chosen Path.

See Path for O.C.C. and skills.

The Necrosis

Description: No one knows how the Necrosis came into being, their origin a mystery. Were the Necrophim once Gregorians? Do they provide the Necrosis with their Supernatural heritage, or is it some other, unseen force at work here? Some have even wondered if the Dark is directly responsible, though that would be out of its character.

Like the Necrophim (see **Nightbane® Book One: Between the Shadows™**) they emulate, the Necrosis Athanatos are seen as the shadow of perversion, outside of nature and representative of the nega-elements of death and decay. They are cold and calculating, merciless in combat and ruthless in the pursuit of their ends. Very few Necrosis are Celestials for it is said that the very nature of the corrupt essence within them bends them towards evil and darkness from birth. It is also from the Necrosis that the history of the Athanatos has its roots.

Attribute Bonuses: Add 1D6+3 to the character's P.P. This is a one-time bonus applied at the time of character creation and to both human and Gregorian forms.

Attribute Penalty: Subtract four from M.A. to represent the aura of death that surrounds them at all times.

Natural A.R.: 10

S.D.C.: Add P.E. attribute number x2 to S.D.C. when in full Gregorian form.

Horror/Awe Factor: 13

Full Gregorian Appearance: Unlike other Athanatos, Necrosis are roughly human in size and build. There is no adjustment to their height or weight. Skin and hair are jet black and eyes when angered glow a menacing red like hot coals. Wings are leathery and bat-like (must be manifested to fly).

Individual Features: 1-3 of the following features can be manifested independently as a partial transformation. More than three features brings about a full manifestation.

Wings (can fly 70 mph/112 km).

Eyes (Extraordinary Vision & Nightvision).

Chainlike Appendages (provides Supernatural P.S. and chain damage).



Body Appearance (black skin and hair - includes S.D.C. bonus).

Combat: In Gregorian form the Necrosis does not have claws, but rather grows chainlike tendrils from his wrists which can be used as a whip or flail, inflicting 2D6 points of damage, in addition to the normal Supernatural P.S. damage.

Psi-Sword: Appears as a shaft of crackling black energy; fundamentally the same as the psionic power.

Regeneration: The Necrosis regenerates 1D6x10 points of damage every melee round.

Special Abilities: The domain of the Necrosis is darkness, death and decay. Thus, at first level, the character gains the power to *Shadow Meld* as per the spell but at half the P.P.E. cost and gains the *Nightbane Talent* of *The Shroud.* Thereafter, for every other level (3, 5, 7, 9, etc.), the Necrosis can choose one of the following spells or psionic powers: Summon Inner Strength, Inflict Pain, Detect Good (as Detect Evil, but reversed), Death Trance, Ectoplasm, Deaden Pain, and Empathic Transmission.

Once the Necrosis reaches 5th level, the following powers may be chosen in lieu of those above. These powers are equivalent to the spells listed in the **Nightbane® RPG** and **Nightbane® Book 3: Through the Glass Darkly:** Reanimate Flesh, Bloodward, Traitorous Hand, Domination, Horrific Illusion, Call Ectoplasm from Others, Apparition, Life Drain, The Druid's Head, and Destroy Undead Flesh. And at level eight, the following spells are also accessible: Create Zombie, Minor Curse, Sickness, Fatal Growth, and Restoration.

Nightvision: Can see in absolute darkness (doesn't even need starlight) for 2000 feet (310 m).

I.S.P.: M.E. attribute number, plus the roll of 2D4x10. Add 1D10 per level.

P.P.E.: P.E. attribute number plus 3D6x10, plus those gained from the chosen Path.

See Path for O.C.C. and skills.

The Paths

For the purposes of game mechanics, the character's R.C.C. is the Athanatos *Host* form. The *Path* is the O.C.C. in that it provides the character with his skills, training and life orientation as an Athanatos, along with a special ability or two thrown in for good measure.

Experience: Athanatos use the Nightbane/Guardian Experience table. Every Athanatos uses the same experience chart, regardless of their Host or Path. However, Athanatos are genetically *predisposed* towards a certain set of aptitudes based on the spark of Gregorian essence within them.

Special Abilities: Each Path grants its followers a set of special abilities that modify, add to, or, in some cases, supercede those of their Host. Thus, the combination of Host and Path lead to a unique individual, different from every other Athanatos.

O.C.C. Skills: A list of skills automatically awarded to every Athanatos who follows that Path.

O.C.C. Related Skills: Additional elective skills and areas of training acquired through schooling and/or one's mentor. Represented as a list of categories from which the player may choose skills for his character. Each category will have a one-time bonus that is applied to each new skill chosen from that list. Athanatos characters choose eight O.C.C. Related Skills at level one and an additional skill at levels 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, and 13.

Secondary Skills: Secondary Skills are areas of interest and expertise that the character has "picked up" on his own – hobbies, independent study, etc. As a general rule, Secondary Skills are chosen from the same list as O.C.C. Related Skills, but do not enjoy the benefits of the one-time bonus listed in parentheses next to each category (i.e., don't apply the listed bonus). Each character may choose four Secondary Skills at first level and one extra at levels 3, 7, 9 and 12.

O.C.C. Abilities and Bonuses: The special powers, bonuses, magic, psionics, etc., that set each Athanatos apart from the next. Record these abilities on your character sheet in the appropriate area. Note that some abilities are not available until later levels, and some increase in power as the character grows.

Paths of Darkness – The Obscuruphim

Deceivers

Magii

Necromancers (Prerequisite: Must be Necrosis)

Scourges

Seers

Paths of Light – The Luciphim

Defenders

Druids

Infiltrators (Prerequisite: Must be Choma)

Valiant

Vindicators

Obscuruphim Paths

Deceivers

The Path of Deceivers is, not surprising, the least trusted or respected by all others. It is in their very nature to lie, cheat, trick and manipulate others, and most are self-serving backstabbers who believe the end justifies the means.

They are natural illusionists, more so even than the Infiltrators, though the two often serve similar purposes. While the Infiltrators, however, use their abilities to function as spies and information gathering, Deceivers use their powers towards whatever end best suits them or the faction they are working for at the time. Deceivers are regularly hired as assassins, thieves, con artists and front-men, and any who knowingly hire or work with a Deceiver must constantly wonder about their companion's true agenda and whose side he is on.

O.C.C. Skills:

Literacy: Native Language and two others (+25%).

Language: Native Tongue at 98% and two others (+25%).

Lore: Demons and Monsters (+10%)

Lore: Religion (+10%)

Choose any three Espionage skills (+15%).

W.P. Modern: Choose two.

W.P. Ancient: Choose two.

Hand to Hand: Martial Arts or Assassin, if evil or Anarchist.

O.C.C. Related Skills: Choose eight skills at level one and an additional skill at levels 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, and 13.

Communications: Any (+10%).

Domestic: Any.

Electrical: Basic Electronics only.

Espionage: Any (+10%).

Mechanical: Basic Mechanics only.

Medical: Any (+5%).

Military: None.

Physical: Any.

Pilot Skills: Any (+5%).

Pilot Related: Any (+5%).

Rogue Skills: Any (+15%).

Science: None.

Technical: Any (+10%).

Weapon Proficiencies: Any.

Wilderness Skills: Land Navigation only.

Secondary Skills: Standard, from above list. Choose four Secondary Skills at first level and one extra at three, seven, nine, and twelve.



O.C.C. Bonuses and Abilities: +2 to save vs Horror Factor +1 additional at levels 3, 6, 9, and 12. +3 to P.S., P.P., and P.E. when in Gregorian Host form.

Psionics: Deceivers are natural psychic illusionists. As such, they gain *Psi-Illusionist* abilities as they increase in level, though not the full range that members of that class do. At every level of experience, the Deceiver may choose a *single* power from the Psi-Illusionist abilities, up to his own level of experience. These powers are in addition to powers from the Deceiver's Host form. For full explanations of these powers, see the **Psi-Illusionist P.C.C.**, described elsewhere in this book.

I.S.P.: 2D6x10 to initial I.S.P. plus 2D6 per level of experience, in addition to I.S.P. from the Host form.

P.P.E.: Nothing extra.



Magii

This is the Path of scholars. The Magii study science, lore, and mysticism, and are probably the most diverse users of magic among all the Athanatos. Like the Seers, they usually prefer not to be on the front-lines; rather they remain hidden and watch and act from the shadows, using their knowledge and skill in the arcane arts to aid their allies and destroy their enemies. However, a Magii locked in melee combat is a capable fighter and spell caster, and should never be underestimated or foolishly trifled with.

O.C.C. Skills:

Literacy: Native Language and two of choice (+25%).

Language: Native Tongue at 98% and two other of choice (+15%).

Lore: Demons and Monsters (+20%)

Lore: Vampires (+20%)

Lore: Geomancy and Ley Lines (+20%)

Lore: Nightbane (+20%)

Lore: Nightlands (+20%)

Lore: Religion (+20%)

Astronomy (+20%)

Cryptography (+10%)

W.P. Modern: Choose one.

W.P. Ancient: Choose one.

Hand to Hand: Basic

O.C.C. Related Skills: Choose eight skills at level one and an additional skill at levels 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, and 13.

Communications: Any (+5%).

Domestic: Any.

Electrical: Basic Electronics only.

Espionage: Intelligence only (+5%).

Mechanical: Basic only.

Medical: Any (+15%).

Military: None.

Physical: Any except Acrobatics or Gymnastics.

Pilot Skills: Any (+5%).

Pilot Related: Navigation only.

Rogue Skills: None.

Science: Any (+15%).

Technical: Any (+15%).

Weapon Proficiencies: Any, except Heavy.

Wilderness Skills: None.

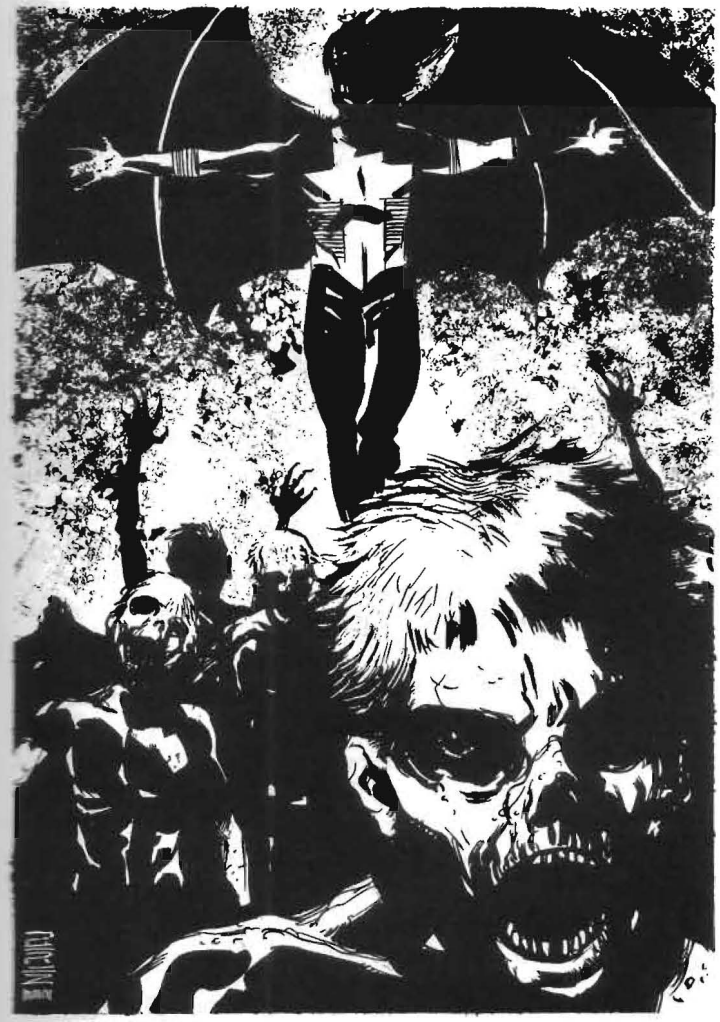
Secondary Skills: Standard, from above list.

O.C.C. Bonuses and Abilities: +3 to save vs Horror Factor +1 additional at levels 3, 6, 9, and 12. +1 to P.S., P.P., and P.E. when in Gregorian Host form.

Magic: The Magii have access to *all* spell and ritual magic no matter the specialization (this includes Fleshsculptor, Mirror Mage, and other schools of magic). In addition to their Host granted spells, at first level of experience the Magii may select a *total* of 6 spells, chosen from levels 1-4. At each level thereafter, the Magii may select one new spell from any level up to his own level of experience. This selection is always in addition to any special abilities granted by the Host form. Also, the Magii may choose to cast any spell as a *ritual*. Doing so adds 1D4 hours to the casting time of the spell, but doubles range, duration, damage and power.

P.P.E.: Add 4D6x10 to initial P.P.E. in addition to P.P.E. provided by their Host form.

I.S.P.: Nothing extra.



Necromancers

The Necromancers are sorcerers of the darkest arts. Every Necromancer is a *Necrosis*, and thus has none of the powers of light that other Athanatos possess. Rather, they gain the enhanced access to spells of darkness that other Necrosis gain, as well as several other powers over darkness and death.

Celestial Necromancers are rare, but they do exist. These tortured souls seek to reject the darkness that is so much a part of their essence, using it towards beneficent ends in an (some would say futile) attempt at atonement.

O.C.C. Skills:

Literacy: Native Language (+25%)

Language: Native Tongue at 98% and one other of choice (+15%).

Lore: Demons and Monsters (+10%)

Lore: Vampires (+10%)

Lore: Geomancy and Ley Lines (+10%)

Disguise (+10%)

Math: Basic (+15%)

W.P. Modern: Choose one.

W.P. Ancient: Choose one.

Hand to Hand: Expert (no other option available).

O.C.C. Related Skills: Choose eight skills at level one and an additional skill at levels 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, and 13.

Communications: Radio: Basic only (+5%).

Domestic: Any.

Electrical: Basic Electronics only.

Espionage: None.

Mechanical: Basic only.

Medical: Any (+10%).

Military: Any (+5%).

Physical: Any (+5% where applicable).

Pilot Skills: Any (+10% to Automobile, Motorcycle, Truck only).

Pilot Related: Navigation only.

Rogue Skills: Concealment, Palming, and Prowl only (+10%).

Science: Any (+5%).

Technical: Any (+10%).

Weapon Proficiencies: Any, except Heavy.

Wilderness Skills: Any (+5%).

Secondary Skills: Standard, from above list.

O.C.C. Bonuses and Abilities +3 to save vs Horror Factor, +1 additional at levels 4, 8, and 12. +1 to P.S., P.P., and P.E. when in Gregorian Host form.

Special Ability: Animate Dead: Necromancers possess the fearsome ability to animate dead bodies and control them for brief periods of time. One body/skeleton can be animated per every level of experience. This is done by creating a ball of Black Light in the palm of the Necromancer's hand then letting it float to hover above his head. The ball lasts for two melee rounds per level, then vanishes, at which time all animated corpses crumble to dust. Each dead body has 80 S.D.C. and is +3 to strike and parry, but does not dodge. Animated bodies may utilize guns and hand weapons if so commanded by the Necromancer who controls them, but shoot at -2 to strike. If the Necromancer is within 300 feet (91.5 m) of the dead he controls, the corpses are +3 to save vs a Turn Dead counterattack/spell.

Special Ability: Anti-Arcane as per the Nightbane talent, at 3rd level.

P.P.E.: Necromancers add 1D4x10+24 to those provided by the Host form.

I.S.P.: Nothing extra.

Scourges

The Scourges are known by the other Paths as *warriors*, with an emphasis on "war." Bloodletting is their life, the heat of battle their ecstasy and triumph. Scourges are relentless, ruthless and empowered by the joy and pleasure of combat. They use every dirty trick and tactic in the book, believing in the old adage that "all is fair in love and war" – well, in war anyway. Many Scourges have grown up on the streets, and may be lone wolves or a member of an organized gang. All are violence personified, quick to action, vengeful and always ready to solve any problem with combat.

There are Celestial Scourges, but they are as ruthless and savage as their Infernal brothers. Most Celestial Scourges engage in a crusade to utterly destroy all Infernals or serve as hardcore agents of doom or retribution. Most claim redemption



is a crock, so exactly why they fight to obliterate their Infernal kin is unknown, and gives other Celestials pause to wonder if they are not insane, and certainly one should never turn their back on a Scourge. When one finds a group of Scourges operating together (and/or in partnership with other Athanatos or Nightbane), it is usually as a member of brutal fighters organized into ultra-violent street gangs that make even the Warlords tremble. Thankfully, the solitary nature of Athanatos keeps these gangs to a bare minimum, and indeed, many a lone Scourge has been known to rise to the leadership position in individual gangs.

O.C.C. Skills:

Literacy: Native Language (+25%)

Language: Native Tongue at 98% and one other of choice (+15%).

Detect Ambush (+5%)

Demolitions (+10%)

Physical: Choose two, excluding a Hand to Hand skill.

W.P. Modern: Choose three.

W.P. Ancient: Choose three.

Hand to Hand: Assassin (if evil or Anarchist) or Martial Arts.

O.C.C. Related Skills: Choose eight skills at level one and an additional skill at levels 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, and 13.

Communications: Radio: Basic only (+5%).

Domestic: Any.

Electrical: Any except Electrical Engineer (+5%).

Espionage: Sniper, Tracking, Counter-Tracking only (+10%).

Mechanical: Basic, Auto Mechanics, and Weapons Engineer only (+10%).

Medical: First Aid only.

Military: Any (+10%).

Physical: Any (+5% where applicable).

Pilot Skills: Any (+15% to Automobile, Motorcycle, Truck only).

Pilot Related: Navigation only.

Rogue Skills: Any.

Science: None.

Technical: Any (+10%).

Weapon Proficiencies: Any.

Wilderness Skills: Wilderness Survival, Hunting, Track Animals, Skin and Prepare Hides only (+5%).

Secondary Skills: Standard, from above list.

O.C.C. Bonuses and Abilities: +2 to save vs Horror Factor, +1 additional at levels 4, 8, and 12. +4 to P.S., P.P., and P.E. when in Gregorian Host form.

Special Ability: Blood Bath as per the Nightbane elite talent, but the Scourges obviously don't need to meet the prerequisite. Rather, the activation cost for Scourges is 16 P.P.E., and when they activate this talent, large open wounds erupt on their bodies, from which the blood sprays.

Special Ability: Serrated Claws: The claws of the Scourges are serrated, inflicting an extra 1D6 damage.

P.P.E.: Add 1D4+10 P.P.E. to those of the Host form.

I.S.P.: Nothing extra.

Seers

The Path of the Seer is that of a prophet and psychic sensitive. Their visions of the future and sensitivity to the true nature of things make them valuable assets to both sides of any conflict. For the most part, Seers prefer not to be on the front lines, instead using their unique insight to guide their comrades and deceive their foes. Still, their unique abilities to sense danger and the presence of other creatures nearby make them formidable warriors and intelligence officers and they can be deadly when they find themselves backed into a corner. Seers use their powers to sniff out weakness in the enemy as well as work to undermine them, trick and manipulate them (and others) to achieve their ends. Infernal Seers are just all the more ruthless and sinister in their manipulations.

O.C.C. Skills:

Literacy: Native Language and one of choice (+25%).

Language: Native Tongue at 98%

Lore: Demons and Monsters (+20%)

Lore: Geomancy and Ley Lines (+20%)

Lore: Religion (+20%)

Cryptography (+10%)

W.P. Modern: Choose one.

W.P. Ancient: Choose one.

Hand to Hand: Basic (no other options available).

O.C.C. Related Skills: Choose eight skills at level one and an additional skill at levels 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, and 13.

Communications: Any (+5%).

Domestic: Any.

Electrical: Basic Electronics only.

Espionage: Intelligence only (+5%).

Mechanical: Basic only.

Medical: First Aid only (+10%).

Military: None.

Physical: Any except Acrobatics or Gymnastics.

Pilot Skills: Pilot Auto, Truck, or Motorcycle only.

Pilot Related: Navigation only.

Rogue Skills: Streetwise and Seduction only (+10%).

Science: Any (+15%).

Technical: Any (+10%, but +20% to Language and Lore skills).

Weapon Proficiencies: Any, except Heavy.

Wilderness Skills: None.

Secondary Skills: Standard, from above list.

O.C.C. Bonuses and Abilities: +3 to save vs Horror Factor +1 additional at levels 3, 6, 9, and 12. +1 to P.S., P.P., and P.E. when in Gregorian Host form.

Psionics: At first level a Seer chooses three powers from the Sensitive category. For every level thereafter, they choose one additional Sensitive power. In addition, at levels 2, 5, 8, and 12, the Seer gets one power from either the Physical or Healing category. At levels 5, 9, and 13 the Seer gets one power from the Master Psionic category. Seers are considered Master Psionics and any psi-abilities are in addition to those granted by their Host form.

Special Ability: See Truth, same as the Nightbane Talent, at third level.

I.S.P.: Seers add 1D6x10+50 to initial I.S.P. in addition to I.S.P. from the Host form.

P.P.E.: Nothing extra.



Paths of the Luciphim

Defenders

This is the Path of the protector and nurturer. These Protector Spirits are so empathetic and caring that most Defenders won't hesitate to leap in front of a hail of bullets to shield a child, or sacrifice himself to save his comrades. This is a character capable of convincing those who have lost hope to try again and lead troops to greater victory and others to achieve the impossible (or at least try to). The Defender is often the first to volunteer to hold the enemy back in order to buy others the time to escape, trade himself for innocent captives, and throw himself into harm's way to protect others. These "cheerleaders" seem to always have a positive outlook and words of encouragement and inspiration. Oftentimes a Valiant looks to a Defender for moral support in times of tribulation.

An Infernal Defender shares all these qualities but uses his gifts of inspiration to incite greed, conflict, hatred, revenge and war – instigating wickedness and suffering against rivals and enemies.

O.C.C. Skills:

Literacy: Native Language (+25%)

Language: Native Tongue at 98%

Lore: Demons and Monsters (+10%)

Lore: Religion (+10%)

Lore: Vampires (+10%)

Military Etiquette (+20%)

Paramedic (+10%)

Public Speaking (+15%)

W.P. Modern: Choose two.

W.P. Ancient: Choose two.

Hand to Hand: Expert; no other options available.

O.C.C. Related Skills: Choose eight skills at level one and an additional skill at levels 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, and 13.

Communications: Radio: Basic only (+10%).

Domestic: Any.

Electrical: Basic Electronics only.

Espionage: Any (+10%).

Mechanical: Basic Mechanics only.

Medical: Any (+20%).

Military: None (except O.C.C. Skills above).

Physical: Any.

Pilot Skills: Any (+5%).

Pilot Related: Any(+5%).

Rogue Skills: Any.

Science: None.

Technical: Any (+10%).

Weapon Proficiencies: Any.

Wilderness Skills: Any (+10%).

Secondary Skills: Standard, from above list.

O.C.C. Bonuses and Abilities: +4 to save vs Horror Factor +1 additional at levels 2, 4, 8, and 12. +2 to P.S., P.P., and P.E. when in Gregorian Host form.

Special Ability: Healing: Defenders are healers and have psionic powers to match. At first level the character gets *Empathy* and chooses three powers from the Healing category of psionics. One additional Healing power is selected for every other level of experience. In addition, at levels 2, 5, 8, and 12 a Defender chooses one power from either the Physical or Sensitive category. At levels 5, 9, and 13, the Defender gains one power from the Master Psionics category. They are considered Master Psionics and all psi-abilities are in addition to those from the Host.

Special Ability: Shadow Shield: As per the Nightbane Talent, at 3rd level strength; does not advance in power.

I.S.P.: Add 1D6x10+80 to I.S.P. This is in addition to I.S.P. from the Host form.

P.P.E.: Nothing extra.

Druids

Often referred to as "Tree Huggers" or "Feral Ones" by other Athanatos, the Druids are at one with Nature. Many Druids begin their new Athanatos existence as Protector Spirits, and then gradually come to realize that while mainstream society doesn't have anything to offer them anymore, there is still a place for them in the cosmos. Far from Lost Souls, the Druids are the protectors of nature and possess some striking abilities that no other Athanatos has. Many are Choma, but not all. There are Druids attuned to fire, air, and water, and even those attuned to death, for all of the elements are a part of nature, after all. It is the Druid Athanatos' place to make sure that the circle of life continues unhindered, and to defend nature in all its forms and functions. The Nightlords are the ultimate destroyers of nature, and vampires are the ultimate perversion. For this reason, many Druids journey back into the cities to do battle against their mortal foes. Necromancers are also hated by Druids, particularly Celestial ones.

O.C.C. Skills:

Language: Native (98%)

Literacy: Native Language (98%)

Speak and Literate in one other language of choice (+10%).

Wilderness Survival (+25%)

Tracking (humanoids, +20%)

Track Animal (+20%)

Dowsing (+15%)

W.P.: Choose one Modern and one Ancient.

Hand to Hand: Expert.

Hand to Hand: Expert may be upgraded to Martial Arts (or Assassin, if evil) at a cost of one O.C.C. Related Skill.

O.C.C. Related Skills: Choose eight skills at level one and an additional skill at levels 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, and 13.

Communications: Radio: Basic only.

Domestic: Any (+10%).

Electrical: None.

Espionage: None.

Mechanical: Basic Mechanics only.

Medical: Any (+5%).

Military: None.

Physical: Any.

Pilot Skills: Any (+5%).

Pilot Related: Navigation only (+10%).

Rogue Skills: Any (+5%).

Science: Any (+10%).

Technical: Any (+5%).

Weapon Proficiencies: Any.

Wilderness Skills: Any (+20%).

Secondary Skills: Standard, from above list.

O.C.C. Bonuses and Abilities: +2 to save vs Horror Factor +1 additional at levels 3, 6, 9, and 12. +3 to P.S., P.P., and P.E. when in Gregorian Host form.

Psionics: Empathy, Sixth Sense, Healing Touch, and Telekinesis. Considered a Major Psychic.



Special Ability: Animal Metamorphosis: Athanatos Druids have the ability to change from their Gregorian or human form to that of an *animal* that they share an affinity with, called a "totem" animal. This animal type should be randomly determined by rolling on the Nightbane "Animal" Morphus table, but the Druid automatically transforms into a full animal of the type to which he is attuned. There are no partial animal transformations among Druids. Transforming into the animal requires the expenditure of 25 P.P.E. and the form lasts for up to one hour per level of the Druid. The Druid can cancel the transformation and return to his Gregorian or human form at any time. Metamorphosis (both to and from the animal form) takes one melee round.

Special Ability: Lord/Lady of the Wild as per the Nightbane talent, applicable to their totem animal at 3rd level.

P.P.E.: Add 2D6x10 to initial P.P.E. in addition to those provided by the Host form.

I.S.P.: Add 6D6 points to I.S.P. in addition to those provided by the Host form.

Infiltrators

Also used as couriers by other Athanatos, the Infiltrators are the swiftest, sneakiest, and, in some ways, the most dangerous of all the Paths. They are the spies and messengers who work undercover to expose and undermine enemy factions and operations. Many Infiltrators hang around on the fringes of several other factions, waiting for an opportunity. That opportunity may be to sell their services as spies, undercover agents, saboteurs or assassins, or to assess the strengths and weaknesses of a particular group so they can sell the information to an enemy or to undermine that group whenever it is so desired. Infiltrators are eternally curious and constantly making note of potentially valuable details. The danger in using an Infiltrator, especially an Infernal one, is that whatever you've bought can just as easily be turned against you. Many Infiltrators have no loyalty to any side or faction and work for whomever offers the pay (and/or perks) or happens to strikes their fancy.

O.C.C. Skills:

Literacy: Native Language and two others (+25%).

Language: Native Tongue at 98% and two others (+25%).

Lore: Demons and Monsters (+10%)

Lore: Religion (+10%)

Tracking (humanoids; +25%)

Military Etiquette (+25%)

Streetwise (+20%)

Disguise (+20%)

Intelligence (+20%)

Surveillance Systems & Tailing (+20%)

W.P. Modern: Choose two.

W.P. Ancient: Choose one.

Hand to Hand: Martial Arts (or Assassin, if evil or Anarchist).

O.C.C. Related Skills: Choose eight skills at level one and an additional skill at levels 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, and 13.

Communications: Any (+10%).

Domestic: Any.

Electrical: Basic Electronics only.

Espionage: Any (+20%).

Mechanical: Basic Mechanics only.

Medical: First Aid only (+5%).

Military: Any (+10%).

Physical: Any.

Pilot Skills: Any (+5%).

Pilot Related: Any.

Rogue Skills: Any (+10%).

Science: None.

Technical: Any (+10%).

Weapon Proficiencies: Any.

Wilderness Skills: Land Navigation only.

Secondary Skills: Standard, from above list.

O.C.C. Bonuses and Abilities: +2 to save vs Horror Factor, +1 additional at levels 3, 6, 9, and 12. +3 to P.S., P.P., P.E., and +2D6 to Spd. when in Gregorian Host form.

Psionics: Telepathy, Sixth Sense, Suggestion, Alter Aura, and Mind Block.

Special Ability: The Shroud same as the Nightbane talent, at 3rd level.

Special Ability: Alter Appearance. By spending 25 P.P.E., the Infiltrator can alter their physical human appearance (but not Gregorian form) to resemble anyone they have seen of either gender, or can perform general appearance alterations as they wish. This ability functions as the Disguise skill at 80% efficiency when trying to mimic a specific person, and the Infiltrator must have seen the person he is attempting to mimic at least once. When performing non-specific alteration of features, the skill works at 98% efficiency. The altered appearance lasts until the Infiltrator expends 10 P.P.E. to return to their normal form. Changes in size are restricted to six inches (10 cm) maximum, and weight alterations only within 50 lbs (22.5 kg). Only the physical appearance is altered, not the voice.

I.S.P.: Add 2D6x10+30 to I.S.P. from the Host form.

P.P.E.: Add 6D6 to the P.P.E. of the Host form.

Valiant

The Valiant tend to be the military commanders, generals and tacticians of the Athanatos. It is they who lead, or seem destined to lead the various Athanatos factions and their allies in conflicts. Valiant are always honorable and will never break their word of honor, even the Infernal ones (80% of whom are Aberrant alignment). It has been said that if you've got to depend on another being for survival, a Valiant is always a good one to have at your back. When an unlikely alliance between Celestials and Infernals is necessary to combat a common enemy, like vampires or demons, it is the Valiant on both sides that forge and lead the alliance. Of course, once the conflict is over, the alliance is done, and all parties go their separate ways. The next time they meet, they may be mortal enemies, and the Valiant will show them no favor or mercy for past truces or alliances.



O.C.C. Skills:

Literacy: Native Language (+25%)
Language: Native Tongue at 98%
Lore: Demons and Monsters (+20%)
Lore: Religion (+20%)
Strategy/Tactics (+25%)
Military Etiquette (+20%)
Streetwise (+10%)
Wilderness Survival (+10%)
W.P. Modern: Choose three.
W.P. Ancient: Choose three.
Hand to Hand: Martial Arts

O.C.C. Related Skills: Choose eight skills at level one and an additional skill at levels 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, and 13.

Communications: Any (+10%).
Domestic: Any.
Electrical: Basic Electronics only.
Espionage: Any (+10%).
Mechanical: Basic Mechanics only.
Medical: Any.
Military: Any (+15%).
Physical: Any.
Pilot Skills: Any (+5%).
Pilot Related: Any (+5%).
Rogue Skills: None.
Science: Any.
Technical: Any (+10%).
Weapon Proficiencies: Any.
Wilderness Skills: Land Navigation, Hunting, and Track Animals only.

Secondary Skills: Standard, from above list.

O.C.C. Bonuses and Abilities: +3 to save vs Horror Factor +1 additional at levels 3, 6, 9, and 12. +4 to P.S., P.P., and P.E. when in Gregorian Host form.

Special Ability: Demon Smite: By expending P.P.E. the Valiant can inflict great amounts of damage to undead, demonic, and evil supernatural creatures, including Hounds, Hunters, and most minions of the Nightlords. It is unknown whether or not this ability would work against the Ba'al, but presumably it would. Still, no Valiant has tried it and lived to tell the tale. To use this power, the warrior must make physical contact (*touch*, bare-handed, no weaponry) with the target. If the touch is successful (can *not* be combined with a normal punch, the Valiant must channel the power through his fingertips and thus must *touch* his target and maintain contact) then holy light seems to stream from the target's eyes, mouth, and ears to form an aura around the target. This attack inflicts one point of damage per each point of P.P.E. spent direct to Hit Points (two points of damage for every P.P.E. when used in an M.D.C. environment against a Mega-Damage creature). The channeling of energy takes some time, so using this power uses all of the character's attacks for the melee round in which it is attempted. Use of this power also nullifies the Valiant's automatic parry for the round. Since the power requires physical contact and channeling of power, it can be parried as normal. Successfully parried attacks have no effect on the intended target, the Valiant loses two melee actions, but the P.P.E. is not spent. **Note:** This power does not work against other Athanatos (Valiant know this instinctively).

P.P.E.: Add 2D6x10+66 to the P.P.E. provided by the Host form.

I.S.P.: Nothing extra.

Vindicators

The Vindicators are hunters of the guilty, punishers of the wicked, and bringers of vengeance. Most see things in black and white terms, are quick to judgement and quicker to take brutal action to punish. Infernal Vindicators are extremely dangerous, taking personal insult at the smallest slight and exercising a punishing vengeance through pain, terror, brutality and torture, if not actually inflicting the final punishment of death. Infernal Vindicators in the company of their own kind are most often found traveling with Scourges and/or Infiltrators. Celestial Vindicators prefer the company of the Valiant, who temper their rage and lust for revenge.

O.C.C. Skills:

Literacy: Native Language (+25%)
Language: Native Tongue at 98%.
Lore: Demons and Monsters (+20%)

Lore: Religion (+20%)

Tracking (+25%)

Military Etiquette (+25%)

Streetwise (+10%)

W.P. Modern: Choose three.

W.P. Ancient: Choose three.

Hand to Hand: Martial Arts or Assassin, if evil or Anarchist.

O.C.C. Related Skills: Choose eight skills at level one and an additional skill at levels 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, and 13.

Communications: Radio: Basic only (+10%).

Domestic: Any.

Electrical: Basic Electronics only.

Espionage: Any (+10%).

Mechanical: Basic Mechanics only.

Medical: First Aid only (+5%).

Military: Any (+10%).

Physical: Any.

Pilot Skills: Any (+5%).

Pilot Related: Any (+5%).

Rogue Skills: Any (+5%).

Science: None.

Technical: Any (+10%).

Weapon Proficiencies: Any.

Wilderness Skills: Land Navigation, Hunting, and Track Animals only (+15%).

Secondary Skills: Standard, from above list

O.C.C. Bonuses and Abilities: +5 to save vs Horror Factor +1 additional at levels 3, 6, 9, and 12. +6 to P.S., P.P., P.E. and Spd when in Gregorian Host form.

Special Abilities: Powers of War: Vindicators are in top physical form to carry out their missions of punishment and revenge. To help them in their work, they get psionic powers to assist them. At first level, select three powers from the Physical category. For every 2 levels thereafter they choose one additional Physical power. In addition, at levels 3, 5, 9, and 12, the Vindicator gains one power from the Sensitive category *and* one power from the Master Psionics category. Vindicators are master psychics.

I.S.P.: Add 2D6x10+50 to I.S.P. in addition to those provided by the Host form.

P.P.E.: Nothing extra.

Shadows of Tophet

Reapers, They Who Walk In Shadow

Reapers have very little memory of their lives before they came to be the monsters that they are. For most, consciousness begins after their first kill, when they have been transformed into primal hunters imbued with a compelling drive to commit murder and drain their victims of P.P.E. Other than basic personality traits and their name, all a Reaper feels or remembers is a powerful hatred for one to four general types of people who share a certain trait or quality (i.e., hates all rich people, or poor people, or Chinese, or business people, or redheads, or rappers, or gamers, etc.), along with a dim recollection of why they hate such people. Reapers, you see, can only derive maximum nourishment by killing the object of their own morbid obsessions. They get only 1D4 P.P.E. from victims who do *not* fit their profile, and nothing from animals.

The precious P.P.E. that they steal from their victims through murder enables Reapers to live, feeding on P.P.E. rather than food and water. It slows the aging process for them and gives them superhuman power, but this need to drain the P.P.E. from living men and women becomes obsessive far beyond their own actual need for P.P.E. What Reapers don't realize is that they have been transformed from ordinary mortals into living conduits for a creature known as a *Mircalla.* They are too simple-minded to know or care about the particulars, but they are now bound to the Mircalla and feed it when they feed. Thus, they are the "kept" who serve the "Keeper," the Mircalla, as predators disguised as ordinary humans, but driven by instinct and bloodlust. Thus, the doubled P.P.E. at the moment of death is absorbed in its entirety by the Reaper, but half of that energy is actually funneled to their Keeper, a Mircalla trapped in the Astral Plane. This is why a Reaper never seems satisfied by a single kill and is driven by hunger as much as instinct to kill again to sate its endless cravings. This is the only way the Mircalla can get its P.P.E nourishment, through a weird symbiotic relationship with mortals. Being gluttons, the Mircalla want as much P.P.E. as they can get, as often as they can get it, making their Reapers (each Mircalla has many to feed it) night hunters constantly on the prowl.

The Hunger

Reapers are victims of their own avarice and hunger for power or revenge. Most begin life as ordinary humans who, at some point in their lives, turn to a dark power to grant them magic or superhuman abilities so they may work evil to extract revenge or become wealthy, famous or powerful. The Mircalla,



who is wicked, self-serving and insane, lies and promises those who seek it out undreamt of power and the means to all their desires. All one has to do is willingly open himself to it and accept part of its essence to be transformed. This links the individual to the Mircalla and transforms him into a Reaper. The only catch is that the Reaper is not what the Mircalla promised, turning the vile individual into a predatory animal who serves the Mircalla's hunger. Though transformed into something more than human, the mortal becomes a slave to hunger and a servant to a greater monster. It is a transformation that cannot be reversed unless the Keeper is slain, and that is nearly impossible.

If a Reaper does not consume sufficient P.P.E., it falls into a *feeding frenzy*, killing anyone and anything nearby to obtain nourishment. A feeding frenzy is a rampage which almost always leads to the Reaper's own death by attracting too much attention to itself or causing the fiend to act carelessly and reveal its true nature and location. Every day a Reaper goes without feeding it loses 2D6 P.P.E. from its energy pool. Reapers cannot replenish P.P.E. naturally, nor can they draw it from Ley Lines, nexus points or animals, only other intelligent, living beings. To use their special abilities, they must also expend P.P.E., and to replenish their energy pool they must *feed* and feed often. In order to maintain their P.P.E. levels, many Reapers enter patterns, feeding on a regular basis to maintain their supply of vital energy. If a Reaper's P.P.E. drops below 20, its body enters a kind of "starvation mode," where the depraved being needs less energy for survival, but begins suffering the effects of starvation identical to Vampires when they lack sufficient blood. If P.P.E. levels drop to ten or less, a full *feeding frenzy* is imminent; save vs frenzy requiring a 14 or better every day (no modifiers, straight roll). A failed save means a frenzy state.

Reapers whose P.P.E. reserve is down to zero and are unable to nourish themselves, waste away, lose their hold on the physical world and become living shadows in 5-10 days (function exactly like a *Haunting Entity* when in the shadow-state). Once this happens, the Reaper is bound to the immediate area where it degenerated into the shadow state (within 100 feet/30.5 m). Only a substantial amount of P.P.E. (at least 100 P.P.E.) delivered to it within 72 hours will pull it from shadow and make the Reaper whole again. However, Reapers who have degenerated to living shadows have no power to affect the world around them, except by making ghostly appearances and making a verbal plea. Thus, reconstitution once lost to shadows is rare unless there is another Reaper or evil or demented human willing to help the Shadow Reaper "acquire"the P.P.E. it needs, and that can only be done by bringing victims that fit the Reaper's obsession and killing them in its presence so it can feed and regrow. All the P.P.E. of the victims floods into the Reaper until the thing becomes corporeal again. At that point, half of all additional P.P.E. "acquired" goes to its Keeper. Anyone who helps a Reaper in this fashion is either rewarded by becoming dessert, or may be kept on as a willing henchman assisting in the Reaper's finding and hunting victims and protecting it from those who would destroy it.

Abilities & Bonuses of the Reaper:

1. **P.P.E. Reserve:** A Reaper needs to have at least one P.P.E. point to fight at full strength and to prevent becoming a living shadow (which happens in 1D6+4 days when down to zero and unable to feed). However, the creature craves a minimum of 10 P.P.E. per 48 hours and usually wants 50 or more P.P.E. in its P.P.E. reserve or pool. As many as 200 P.P.E. points, plus 20 points per level of experience, can be held in the Reaper's P.P.E. pool. Remember, the use of magic and Shadow Meld use up the Reaper's reserve, plus his body burns up five P.P.E. a day as food unless replenished by an outside source. Also remember that the Keeper takes half the P.P.E. of a fresh kill. **Note:** The Mircalla cannot feed on the Reaper's reserve, it must feed on P.P.E. at the moment of death from a fresh kill. Consequently, most Reapers hunt and kill 1-3 individuals every night or two. Binge eaters will go on a 24-48 hour killing spree, murdering 3-12 individuals to gorge themselves every five to eight days, but most Keepers and their Reapers prefer regular nightly or every other nightly feedings. Also note that while Reapers are natural night predators and are strongest at night, there is nothing stopping them from hunting during the day.
2. **Sense P.P.E. Levels.** Reapers can sense P.P.E. energy levels in living beings, sensing a small, medium or large amount of P.P.E. waiting to be devoured. While ordinary humans are their usual victims, they easily sense beings with high levels of P.P.E., including the Athanatos, Nightbane, Nightlords, practitioners of magic, youngsters and others. **Note:** The Reaper's primary targets are those people who fall into the broad categories of its hate-obsession, for only they provide it with the maximum amount of P.P.E.; all others outside those (1-4) categories provide only 1D4 P.P.E. regardless of how much energy they actually had at the time of their death.

That having been said, most Reapers seek relatively easy victims and will not continue to fight prey who prove to be powerful enough to kill them. When a Reaper has suffered grievous damage, he flees into the shadows and turns to easier prey.

3. **Drain P.P.E.:** Reapers absorb P.P.E. from the victims they murder (P.P.E. is doubled at the moment of death), and it is the only way they can survive. Reapers *cannot* naturally replenish P.P.E. through rest, nor can they benefit from a Ley Line or Nexus point. The only way a Reaper can regain P.P.E. is through the killing of victims. Furthermore, until a Reaper circulates the P.P.E. drained through her Keeper, she cannot utilize the energy to power any special abilities; it is inert to the Reaper as long as it retains that residual spark of humanity in it. Normally, the Reaper's Mircalla will show itself within 1D4 rounds of the murder to collect its bounty. This process takes only one round in and of itself and is described under the Mircalla section, below. What is worse, a Reaper who has no P.P.E. in her body is no longer considered to be "charged," and loses her nightvision, supernatural attributes, regeneration, combat skill, and extra S.D.C. (S.D.C. base at zero P.P.E. is 2D6). Finally, Reapers suffer 2D6 points of P.P.E. loss *per day* as the energy is "bled off" to sustain the creature. Should a Reaper drop below 20 P.P.E. at any given time, the body goes into "starvation mode," and bleeds off only 1D4 P.P.E. per day, but the Reaper suffers the same effects as starving vampires, leading to a full feeding frenzy if P.P.E. ever drops to 10 or below. Save vs frenzy (14 or better) every day thereafter or enter a frenzy state.
4. **Night Link:** Increased S.D.C. at night (see #9), nightvision (1000 feet/305 m) and Shadow Meld (7 P.P.E.), same as the spell at 10th level proficiency and double the usual duration regardless of the Reaper's actual experience level, but still costs the character 7 P.P.E. each time the power is used.
5. **Magical Powers:** The Reaper intuitively knows a new spell or two with each new level of experience as follows: Level One: Death Trance (1), Level Two: Concealment (3) and Detect Concealment (4), Level Three: Magic Armor (10), Level Four: Calling (8) and Domination (10), Level Five: Repel Animals (7), Level Six: Energy Bolt (5) and Escape (8), Level Seven: Mask of Deceit (15), Level Eight: Fire Bolt (7) and Tongues (12), Level Nine: Midnight Wind (12), Level Ten: Agony (20) and Energy Disruption (12), Level Eleven: Spoil Food & Water (30), Level Twelve: Compulsion (20) and Impression (4), Level Thirteen: Impervious to Energy (20), Level Fourteen: Sense Nightbane (3) and Bind Nightbane (70), and Level Fifteen: Nightlands Passage (100).
6. **Supernatural Attributes:** So long as a Reaper has at least one point of Potential Psychic Energy in its reservoir and it is night or it is in shadow, the fiend has the following superhuman abilities: *Supernatural P.S., P.P.,* and *P.E.* Add a bonus of 1D6+2 to any one of those three attributes (P.S., or P.P. or P.E.). *Supernatural regeneration:* Hit Point and S.D.C. damage regenerates at the rate of 1D6 points per melee round, and even lost limbs and grievous damage are completely regrown within 48 hours as long as the Reaper possesses one P.P.E. point in reserve at the end of that period. *Commune with the Keeper:* The Mircalla can speak to Reapers in their dreams to send them on special quests of revenge against a specific enemy in the physical world, or through inspirational dreams or nightmares. The latter are the most common and usually designed to compel the Reaper to hunt and feed its master. Though only the Mircalla can initiate this contact, the Keepers experience the emotions and experience of their Reapers in their dreams at random intervals. It is through these glimpses of the Reapers' world that the Mircalla *may* recognize a potential threat or old enemy, and elicit their minions to hunt them down and kill them. **Note:** Supernatural abilities are negated (zero) in the light of day, unless the character is in shadow, regardless of the P.P.E. amount held in reserve.
7. **Instinctive Combat Abilities:**

   Attacks per Melee Round: Three attacks to start, +1 at levels 2, 4, 8, 10, 12, and 14. Bonuses: +2 on initiative, +2 to strike at level one (+1 additional at levels 3, 5, 7, 9, 13 and 15), +2 to parry, +1 to dodge, +2 to disarm, +4 to pull punch, +4 to damage, +8 to save vs Horror Factor, +8 to save vs poisons and drugs, and is impervious to possession. Note: Reduce bonuses and number of attacks by half if the Reaper's P.P.E. reserve is depleted (zero), plus the creature loses all of its supernatural abilities (see #6 above).

   Vulnerabilities: Besides limited intellect and the need to kill, the character loses its supernatural and spell casting abilities in the light of day, plus all bonuses are halved, unless in shadow. The Reaper instinctively knows this, which is why most only hunt at night, though they may target victims during the day and wait till night to strike.

   Killing a Reaper: Despite their powers and regenerative capabilities, Reapers can be slain by conventional weapons and combat by inflicting enough damage to reduce Hit Points to 20 below zero, otherwise they will recover or turn into living, ghost-like shadows. As noted previously, exposure to light weakens the creature, making it easier to kill. The only way to free a Reaper from the control of a Mircalla (a single Keeper can be linked to a thousand different individuals) is by destroying it in the astral plane. Not an easy task, plus most Reapers were evil to begin with. If a Keeper is slain, all held under its thrall are instantly free, return to human (lose all Reaper abilities), and remember the monster's lies and betrayal, but their own murderous existence is remembered only in nightmares that last till the end of their days.
8. **Hit Points:** P.E. attribute number x2 +2D6 per level of experience.
9. **S.D.C.:** 2D6+12 S.D.C. during the day and when without a P.P.E. reserve. +80 when there is a P.P.E. reserve and the Reaper is in shadow or operating at night; a nocturnal predator. Loses this bonus in the light of day or when P.P.E. reserve is zero.
10. **R.C.C. Skills and the cunning of a supernatural predator.** The Basics: While a Reaper does not remember its family or much of its past life, it remembers enough to function unnoticed in human society. Thus, they know how to dress, talk, and act well enough to seem relatively normal. Many people who have had nonviolent encounters with Reapers report the creature had a hungry or wild look in its eyes, and may have acted a bit odd or weird (acting distracted, aggressive and leering are the most common accounts). They also remember fundamentals of everyday life, like how to turn

lights on and off, open doors, use keys and locks, dance, social drinking, how to cross the street and understand traffic signals, how to drive a vehicle (whatever they drove before becoming a Reaper), and so on. However, they aren't able to hold down a job, and only mingle with the public to target their next few victims. Part of the hunt requires being able to walk among humans unnoticed as a predatory monster and luring them to their doom. Consequently, Reapers steal money and valuables from their victims (as well as their lives and P.P.E.) to buy and maintain articles of clothing, a lair/dwelling and possibly a vehicle. They also know where to go to find prey in a vulnerable social setting, i.e., bars, night and dance clubs, sports arenas, concert halls, malls, parking lots, college campuses, and other places and events where people gather.

R.C.C. Skills: All Reapers know the following: Language (spoken) and Literacy: Native Language (+30%), Mathematics: Basic (+5%), Tailing (+20%) from the Surveillance skill, but not the surveillance part, Tracking (+20%), Climb (+20%), Swim (+10%), Running, Prowl (+15%), Pick Locks (+15%), Pilot: One basic skill like Automobile or Motorcycle (+10%), Streetwise (+20%), W.P. Blunt, W.P. Knife and W.P. Automatic Pistol or Revolver (choose one).

O.C.C. Related Skills: May remember +1D4+1 skills from before its life as a Reaper, any without benefit of any bonus. Any category, provided it is logical and consistent with the character.

Secondary Skills: Picks up one new skill at levels 2, 4, 6, 8, 10 and 14 without benefit of any bonus. Selections are limited to the skill categories: Domestic, Pilot, Rogue, and Technical.

11. Other R.C.C. Considerations:

Alignment: Roll percentile or pick one. 01-20% Anarchist, 21-50% Diabolic, 51-90% Miscreant, and 91-00% Aberrant.

Attributes: Roll up the same as always for humans, 3D6 across the board, plus an extra die roll for rolls that are 16 or higher, and then add in the bonuses listed in #6.

Starting Equipment: Two suits or sets of nice clothing, two pairs of shoes, jacket, a backpack or medium suitcase, two knives (1D6 damage each) and pistol or revolver with a box of 144 standard rounds for that particular weapon.

Starting Money: Starts with 2D4x1,000 dollars. Whatever else is acquired along the way is taken from the victims; usually cash and items that are easily pawned or sold, no questions asked. Reapers don't covet possessions or money and spend only what they need to spend to maintain their cover identity and keep a simple place to live. They rob and steal from people other than their murder victims only when desperate. Only 10% have henchmen/helpers, most are lone hunters.

Experience Table: Use the same experience table as the *Nightbane Sorcerer*.

12. Insanity: Obsession to kill: All Reapers are compelled to kill for P.P.E., but are obsessed with one to four particular types of people from which they can derive the maximum amount of P.P.E. Each is presumably some type or group who rubbed the Reaper the wrong way in its past or are the subject of prejudice or mental trauma.



Reaper Obsession Tables

1. Number of Obsessions: Roll 1D4 to determine the number of obsessions, and then roll on the Obsession Table to determine each one. Roll again if the same result comes up more than once.

2. Focus of the Obsession

01-40% Love/Desire (love kills).

41-00% Hate/Destroy (a burning hate and longing to destroy).

3. Obsessions

Note: Unless stated otherwise, the obsession applies to both sexes.

01% Prostitutes or any woman who appears to be a slut.

02% Sexist pigs (usually men who treat women like objects or second-class citizens).

03% Artists, artistic types and those who try to be avantgarde.

04% Car salespeople.

05% Clerks.

06% Doctors.

07% Dentists.

08% Divorce attorneys.

09% Lawyers other than divorce attorneys.

10% Nurses and caretakers.

11% Police and guards (may include bouncers).

12% Scientists and medical/pharmaceutical researchers.

13% Soldiers, includes National Guard, reservists and retired personnel.

14% Special agents (DEA, FBI, etc.).
15% Taxi or SUV drivers.
16% Truck drivers.
17% Writers (amateurs and professionals).
18% Actors, including wannabes and those just starting out.
19% Civil servants (especially tax collectors and postal workers).
20% Custodians (maids, cleaners and maintenance people).
21% Factory workers.
22% Rich people (including those who just look wealthy).
23% Poor people (including people who just look that way).
24% Street people/bums/panhandlers.
25% Sales people (especially telephone and door to door solicitors).
26% Repair people.
27% Executives.
28% Supervisors & authority figures.
29% College educated.
30% Uneducated (dropped out of high school or just act dumb).
31% Animal lovers and animal rights advocates.
32% Braggarts (men and women).
33% Bullies/abusive individuals (men and women).
34% Drunks (men and women).
35% Drug users (even recreational, but especially junkies).
36% Drug dealers; small-time and big-time dealers.
37% Thieves, from shoplifters and muggers to B&E men and car thieves.
38% Jocks (professional and amateur).
39% Know-it-all types.
40% Nerds and geeks.
41% Prom-queen types.
42% Prissy beauties and snobbish women.
43% Reporters, Investigators and snoops (including busybodies).
44% Loud, bossy women.
45% Loud, bossy men.
46% Loud, obnoxious teenagers.
47% Disrespectful teenagers.
48% College students.
49% Old people/grandparents.
50% Children (under the age of 12).
51% People with piercings (other than earrings).
52% People with large or numerous tattoos.
53% People who talk in movie theaters and other events, ruining it for those around them.
54% People who talk too much or speak with authority about things they know nothing about.
55% People who blaspheme, make fun of god and religion.
56% Smokers
57% Sports enthusiasts, especially the overbearing types.
58% Street performers (including mimes).
59% Tree huggers/environmentalists.
60% Members of a specific political party.
61% Gangbangers/street gangs.
62% Alternative music and those who listen to it.
63% Classical music and those who listen to it.
64% Heavy metal and those who listen to it.
65% Goth/punk and those who listen to that music.
66% Rappers (and those who listen to it).
67% Rock & Roll (and those who listen to it).
68% Country/Western (and those who listen to it).
69% Gamblers, from old ladies playing the slots, factory workers playing the ponies, to the pros.
70% Redheads.
71% Brunettes.
72% Blondes.
73% Black hair.
74% Grey hair.
75% White hair.
76% Unnatural hair; colored purple, blue, etc.
77% Bald people.
78% Litter Bugs.
79% Drivers who tailgate/drive bumper to bumper.
80% Drivers who go slow in the fast lane.
81% Drivers who speed.
82% Drivers who don't use a turn signal.
83% Drivers who drink and drive.
84% Caucasians.
85% Blacks.
86% Asians.
87% Mexicans or Hispanic.
88% Europeans.
89% Middle Easterners.
90% Indians (as in people from India).
91% Females.
92% Males.
93% Researchers & journalists (all media).
94% Teachers.
95% Gamers: Role players, board gamers and card players or electronic gamers.
96% Clergy: Females.
97% Clergy: Males.
98% Psychics or those who claim to be or have had psychic experiences.
99% Occultists from real users of magic to new age practitioners of herbology and magic.
00% Nightbane, Athanatos, monsters and other nonhumans.



The Mircalla

No one knows from where the Mircalla originate, how they came to be or exactly what they are. They claim (if one manages to talk to one and survive) to be an "Elder Race" that existed long before man or beast ever trod the sands of Earth. They say have "always been, and always shall be," but many scholars and sorcerers doubt this, since they feed on the Potential Psychic Energy of mortal beings, so it seems unlikely that they existed before their means of sustenance came into being. Additionally, their servants, the Reapers, call them the "Keepers," and serve the Mircalla as their conduit to the material plane.

The Mircalla not only exist in shadow, but they are effectively shadows themselves, for their physical essence is trapped in the Astral Plane in a domain known as Tophet. Like Alien Intelligences, the Mircalla only send a small aspect or essence of themselves to Earth, and this is done to create Reapers to feed them.

Exactly who may have trapped the Mircalla in the Astral Plane is a mater of great debate and controversy, but whoever is responsible, they did a good job, because the link to Tophet is so powerful that the Mircalla seem forever trapped within. There are a few ancient stories about Mircalla who have managed to break the bonds of Tophet by escaping into the *Nightlands*, and from there, gotten to Earth or another world in the material plane. Other tales say any Mircalla who has attempted this has supposedly found himself suddenly and inexplicably transported back to Tophet in the Astral Plane the moment he leaves the Nightlands and those who remain in the Nightlands presumably fall prey to the Nightlords and their minions.

Whatever they are and wherever they came from, the physical Mircalla cannot escape the Astral Domain of Tophet. Journeys to other realms of existence such as the Astral Plane at large, the Dreamstream, Nightlands and Earth are temporary at best and for most Mircalla, impossible. Having their physical form in Tophet makes them incredibly powerful within that Astral Realm, for it is there that they are full and complete. However, century upon century of imprisonment has played havoc with the psyches of these enigmatic creatures, driving them quite insane. Despite being mad, they remain cold, calculating single-minded monsters obsessed with escaping Tophet and punishing the Ba'al and the Children of Light (who may have teamed up to trap them in their Astral prison in some long forgotten time during the First Civilization).

Known aspects of the Mircalla

The Boaka Mircalla – NPC Villain/Monster

Alignment: 01-50% Miscreant, 51-00% Diabolic.

Attributes: I.Q. 1D6+20 (though insane), M.E. 1D6+10, M.A. 1D6+10, P.S. 1D6+30, P.P. 1D6+20, P.E. 1D6+20, P.B. 1D6 in their monstrous form (1D6+12 in a metamorphed form), Spd. 1D6+20; Supernatural attributes.

Insanity: All are quite insane, and seek to kill, torment and enslave all life forms that are free to wander the universe. Obsessed with feeding and escape as well as obsessive hatred of the Nightlords, their minions and beings of light, including Guardians, Grigori, and Athanatos.

Hit Points: 1D6x1,000 (half outside its Astral Domain).

S.D.C.: 5D6x100 (half outside its Astral Domain).

Size: Varies from 10-30 feet (3-9.1 m).

Horror Factor: 17

I.S.P.: Experience Level x20 +100, plus M.E. attribute number.

P.P.E. Available for Spell Casting. 6000 P.P.E. maximum. On average 1D6x100, but can be 3-10 times that amount if the creature has recently gorged on P.P.E. via feedings by numerous (hundreds, even a thousand) Reapers. Whatever amount is currently available, it is doubled when the monster is within his own private Astral Domain/Kingdom within Tophet.

P.P.E. Vampire. Mircalla feed on Potential Psychic Energy (P.P.E.), however, they cannot leave the Astral Realm of Tophet so they create living conduits in the physical world known as "The Kept" and as "Reapers." Thus, they must lure people/food sources to Tophet, or work through their mortal agents – the *Reapers: They Who Walk In Shadow.* The Mircalla are also known as "Keepers," because it is only through their enslaved Reaper minions that they reach out and touch the physical world with their hunger and wickedness. Reapers are the Mircalla's most devoted and favored minion, but the creatures can also touch evil mortals in their dreams, or have telepathic contact with evil human sorcerers, witches, cultists (usually death worshipers), psychics, and some Shadow Warlocks. Only those who can see Astral Beings can detect a Mircalla in the normal world, and those who look at a Reaper see a human encoiled by a giant, ghostly (Astral), green glowing, semi-transparent, worm or dismembered tentacle that has wrapped around the Reaper and become part of its Astral Being/Essence.

Combat: Prefers to avoid physical confrontation, but equivalent to Hand to Hand: Assassin.

Attacks per Melee Round: 1D4+5.

Damage: As per Supernatural Strength; typically 5D6 punch/kick damage, 1D6x10 for power punch.

Bonuses (in addition to attribute bonuses): +4 on initiative, +4 to Perception, +5 to strike, parry, and dodge, +6 vs magic, +10 vs Horror Factor, impervious to possession and disease. All bonuses (including skill and attribute bonuses) are halved when the Mircalla is outside his own home (Astral Domain).

Psionic Powers: Mircalla are natural Astral Lords and possess all their abilities.

Magic Powers: All Mircalla are at least 7th level Astral Mages, with all the appropriate abilities. All powers advance in level as the Mircalla does. (See the **Nightbane®** sourcebooks **Through the Glass Darkly** and **Between the Shadows** for details on Astral Mages and Sorcerers.) Within their own domain, Mircalla can "Summon and bind creatures" to their domain, at a cost of 115 P.P.E. for animals, 200 for supernatural beasts (such as Shadow Beasts), 300 for intelligent monsters (like Hounds and Hunters), 500 for automaton-like creatures such as unawakened Dopplegangers, and 1000 for intelligent humanoid creatures (including Nightbane and humans). All get a save vs magic (15 or higher) to resist being summoned. The power to summon and bind creatures to a domain is separate from the "inhabitants" cost for domain creation. Also see *Manipulate Reality.*

Other Abilities: Regenerates damage at 4D6 per melee round when within it home domain, 2D6 points when outside the Astral Domain. Half damage from non-magical weapons and attacks (punches, bullets, fire, etc.), though Supernatural Strength inflicts full damage.

R.C.C. Skills: All Occult and Lore skills, speaks all languages, and will have accumulated 10-20 other skills at +20%.

Experience: Typically 1D4+6 level.

Appearance: Rumor says their true form is a sphere the size of the largest Sport Utility Vehicle (SUV) with 2D4+6 worm-like tentacles that are roughly 15 feet (4.6 m) long but can stretch, like the body of a worm, to twice that length (30 feet/9.1 m), getting thinner as they get longer. No apparent eyes or other appendages. Walks on its tentacles. Its body is a semi-translucent material, like green gelatin that glows with an eerie green light that radiates from the creature itself. May be a lesser Alien Intelligence.

The above notwithstanding, the Mircalla usually appears as a giant humanoid with clawed hands, gnarled muscular limbs, small, fur covered bat wings, and a hideous head with large wings, a huge bat's nose, sharp teeth with a pair of fangs or tusk-like teeth, beard and withered/wrinkled face. The eyes are small and entirely white, the skin a pale grey or white.

The relationship between Mircalla and Reaper is a strange type of symbiosis. As described under the Reaper description, these hunter-killers supply the Mircalla with the P.P.E. the monsters need to survive. Half of whatever P.P.E. is absorbed by the Reaper goes directly to the Mircalla. Half of that is devoured/used immediately, while the rest goes into the monster's reserve for use in magic. Maximum number of Reapers per Mircalla: 1000. Maximum amount of P.P.E. that can be stored: 6000 points, though usually only 10-30% of that amount at any given time. Only Mircalla up to no good or expecting trouble max out.

Vulnerabilities. Mircalla are powerful creatures, with many of the strengths and powers of the Nightlords themselves, but their only true weaknesses are 1) their inability to affect the physical world without their Reaper conduits/servants, 2) magic (does full damage) and 3) daylight. Prolonged exposure to sunlight without any shadows to hide in will kill the Mircalla, even in the Astral Plane, suffering 1D6x100 points of damage every melee round of exposure.

Should a Mircalla actually make it to the physical plane, a lack of large shadows where it can hide, and exposure to sunlight will usually impose a forced banishment back to its Astral prison in Tophet (this occurs when half its S.D.C. is gone and Hit Points are reduced by half). Those who refuse to go, willing themselves to remain in the material plane (requires a saving throw of 15 or higher and sees its bonuses and number of attacks reduced by half) are fried by the sunlight like a giant, gooey, sunny-side up egg. The goo and stench is revolting.

Manipulate Appearance. The Mircalla can appear in a variety of physical forms. Virtually any humanoid shape is possible, from human to Nightlord, Nightbane, and Athanatos, to strange mockeries of life such as half human, half spider, or scorpion, or lion, etc., but almost always giant in size (10-20 feet/3 to 6 m tall/long).

Manipulate Reality. Knows all magic spells that metamorph, manipulate, alter and transform the physical (in addition to those of an Astral Lord), and casts them at half the normal P.P.E. cost and for double the normal duration.

Manipulate Dreams. Can travel and function in the Dreamstream the same as a *Dream Dancer* plus they can create and dispatch Rage Storms.

Manipulate the Tophet Astral Realm. Though they are not the original creators of Tophet, it has become their domain and Astral Realm, giving the Mircalla absolute control over their Astral prison and able to modify and change parts of it at will.

Create Avatars. Six +1 per every two levels of experience can be created if so desired.

The number of Mircalla that exist. Unknown. At least a hundred, perhaps a thousand or more.

Tophet

The Astral Realm of Shadows and prison that holds the Mircalla

Deep within the mists and strange beauty of the Astral Plane, tucked away and securely hidden within that black pandemonium known as *the Void*, lies the Shadow Realm Tophet, an Astral Domain of shifting silhouette, chaos, and uncertainty. This is the home of the Mircalla and other creatures of shadow and darkness. To the casual outside observer (if such a thing indeed exists within the Void), Tophet appears to be just another shifting, cloudlike mass within the countless nebulae and minuscule stars that float at random throughout the Void. Indeed, Tophet exists in such a sub-planar state that travelers have *touched* the cloudlike border, even passed *through* the mass, without entering Tophet. Unless one knows exactly what he or she is looking for, entering Tophet is impossible. Rare indeed are tales of people "stumbling upon" Tophet. Only natives, heroes, fools, and the desperate enter this place deliberately, and accidental entries are rarest of the rare.

Like any other destination within the Void, attempting to travel directly to Tophet from the Void itself is quite possible, but all too often leads to an untimely death, unless one has the fortitude of a god. Once within the Void it is entirely possible for any who have previously visited Tophet to use the same means used to travel anywhere from the Void: visualization. Due to the chaotic nature of the domain, however, this is the least recommended method for reaching the domain of the Keepers. One who endeavors to visualize a place in Tophet tends to discover the hard way that the very place they have visualized has changed drastically since their last visit, and either goes nowhere, pops up in the middle of a group of unfriendly faces, or materializes before an insane Mircalla unhappy to be bothered by a meddlesome outsider.

The only other way to reach Tophet is through a dimensional portal opened up at a ley line nexus by someone who has visited the place in the past. There are also nexuses in the world (most of them in China) where one can open a portal to Tophet by concentrating and casting the Dimensional Portal spell.

Tophet is a place of danger, violence and madness, and few travel there. Fewer still are those who enter the mists of Tophet and escape with their sanity intact. It is in a constant state of flux, and only native creatures and experts can navigate it with little to no difficulty. Those new to the *Shadow Plane*, and even those who have managed to visit on any regular basis, find themselves easily lost within the grey mists, constantly undulating and changing shadows, and waves of despair that make up the realm. Any given location within Tophet moves in and out of position at random intervals, changing places and shape without any apparent rhyme or reason. Meaning that a city visited once will be located elsewhere every subsequent visit. Even within cities, buildings and streets seem to rearrange themselves at random, and long, deep shadows roll across the landscape as if cast by passing clouds, only the sky is a constant twilight devoid of clouds. Vampires who find their way into Tophet can be active around the clock, for there is no sunlight, only a sort of radiant mist that creates a constant state of twilight. Where the shadows come from is anyone's guess. Magic, probably.

Mircalla can project their consciousness into the *Dreamstream* to invade dreams, implant wicked ideas, inspire evil, create nightmares and to solicit new recruits to become Reapers. In fact, it is through dreams and nightmares that many first make contact with future Reapers. It is also through the subconscious that Keepers find their way into the material world, and dreams are the gateway to the subconscious. The Dreamstream, you see, is also a realm of shadows and illusion, and thus a place well suited for the likes of the Mircalla. More often than not, if a Keeper is encountered outside its home in Tophet, it's usually wandering the Dreamstream, manipulating the nightmares of mankind. However, destroying a Mircalla in the Dreamstream is both dangerous and futile, because they leave their physical bodies in Tophet, and if destroyed in the realm of dreams, simply return to their prison in the Astral Plane. Dangerous, because they often vow to hunt those who dare to challenge, defy or battle them in the real world via their Reaper servants.

Unfortunately for many intrepid would-be heroes, facing a Keeper in the Astral Plane of Tophet or the Dreamstream is not a good idea, for while they are vulnerable to attack in these places, their power is also vast and formidable. It has been whispered that within Tophet the Mircalla have the power of creation and destruction. This may be something of an exaggeration, but nobody knows for certain, for while many are the tales of those who have gone to face the Mircalla, few are the heroes who return, and none are tales of success in defeating these denizens of shadow. On the material plane, Keepers can only function through their servants, the Reapers, and while Reapers are quite powerful in their own right, they are vulnerable to man-made weapons and can be killed. Indeed, the best way to keep a Mircalla in check in the material world is to destroy its Reapers.

Tophet Geography

Tophet is a vast Astral Kingdom, with estimates putting it at the size of the Earth's African Continent.

The Borders. Travelers who find their way into Tophet discover quickly that without a destination in mind, it's very easy to go nowhere. At first glance, Tophet is an endless gray, stretching to infinity and filled with a cold, shadowy mist.

Though the ground beneath the Astral Traveler's feet feels solid, looking down presents the same view of nothingness that stretches above, behind, to the sides, and above. Many travelers, upon seeing this, panic and suddenly, in their lack of faith, begin *falling* through the nothingness; it is only confidence that the ground beneath them exists and is solid that keeps one on his feet and steady. Once an adventurer gets used to the strange lack of physical laws in this outer border of Tophet, he'll discover that he can walk in any direction, even straight up or down, just by believing that there is ground beneath his feet! Needless to say, this ability to travel in three-dimensional space makes navigating the realm of shadows even more difficult.

Featureless as they appear, however, the borders of Tophet are far from safe or uninhabited. All manner of creatures roam the shifting shadows of the place, eagerly seeking new victims to feed upon. The most common types of creatures are, without a doubt, the murderous *Shadow Beasts*, but other common creatures often summoned from and to the Astral Plane and Dreamstream inhabit their realm including Astral Entities, Torturians, Necrophim, Rage Storms, Shadow Mantis, Vampire Specters, Mountebank, Dream Ghouls, Living Nightmares, Dream Demons, Soul Leeches, and Dream Furies. Even Nightbane and Nightlord minions, on occasion, are brought to Tophet and tortured to the point of insanity by the Keepers, then set loose in the Border area to prey upon the unwary.

Lucky Astral Travelers in Tophet will encounter a friendly patrol of Tarantuloids or Guardians and Void Ships, who occasionally poke their heads in just to be sure that everything is still stable, and that the Mircalla aren't up to anything too dangerous to outsiders. Even in this realm of shadows, Guardians can survive and are as powerful as they are anywhere else in the Astral Plane, since Tophet is made of the same ethereal stuff as the rest of the place. Travelers encountering such potential allies or rescuers are well advised to ingratiate themselves to get their aid. However, Tarantuloids and Guardians often question the wisdom and sanity of people foolish enough to voluntarily enter this realm, and will only join travelers who prove that they serve a truly just and noble cause. Otherwise, they are likely to fly to the rescue of travelers in peril, admonish them for their foolishness, and offer to escort them *out* of Tophet, nothing more. They are not likely to make the offer a second time.

It should be noted that like anywhere within the Astral Plane, it is possible to journey through Tophet both as an Astral bodied creature or to completely enter the domain physically (in which case the physical body becomes the Astral body). The difference is that should one enter the Astral Plane bodily and die there, no body is left behind on the traveler's home world as evidence of their existence. Those who journey anywhere from within the Void (i.e. use the Void method of entering Tophet) always do so bodily, for the Void is a gateway for travel between all dimensions.

The domains within the realm of Tophet. Every Mircalla, and many other powerful beings in Tophet, commands a fortress and domain of his own like a feudal kingdom. Most in Tophet are Mircalla, but there are other, non-Mircalla kings, queens, and emperors in Tophet who are to be equally feared. Furthermore, most are not trapped in the Astral Realm and can pursue those who invoke their ire anywhere. There are also rumors that some Night Princes and Avatars of Nightlords, both physical



and Astral, who defy their Ba'al masters and are caught, captured, and defeated, are banished to Tophet to remain for eternity under the yoke of the Mircalla who hate them. There are even whispers that King Moloch holds the very keys to Tophet, and if this is true, then Moloch is even more powerful than anyone realizes.

The domains/communities within Tophet are as individual and unique as cities on Earth or the Nightlands. They are literally created and formed by the personalities, will and (often twisted) minds of the lords who rule them. These domains are, one and all, twisted reflection of their creators where the inhabitants are almost always drones or slaves, bound Astral Entities or creatures of the same savage, evil nature that haunt the Borders. There is little for a Mircallan or any Tophet ruler to actually *rule* over, however, for the domains serve as little more than the abode of the insane Mircalla forever trapped inside. A nightmare habitat that usually reflects the demented mind of its creator and a place of power where each ruler enjoys *double* his usual level of power (Hit Points, S.D.C. and P.P.E.). Thus, the Mircalla are practically invincible within their own domain, making it best to catch them outside of their little kingdom if one wants a genuine chance to defeat them. This is not as uncommon as it may seem, since the Mircalla can wander from one domain to another throughout Tophet, but cannot leave the Tophet realm.

Upon entering a Tophet domain, whether the landscape is that of a nightmarish city, twisted forest, weaving tunnel network or frightening alien expanse, one's first impression is that they have just entered a place of horror, insanity and hopelessness. Buildings and stone formations seem to be constructed of the same shadowy stuff that comprises the rest of the domain. Spectral *people* are seen walking the streets, going about their daily business, but as sleepwalkers or leery shadows. Closer inspection reveals that most are phantoms – shadows that create a mockery of the real world. These shadows, unless they are something more than a memory or image fragment, function like ghosts who ignore intruders and go about their routine as if they weren't there. Ah, but among the shadows lurk real monsters, namely Shadow Beasts, Entities and other monsters of the Astral Plane who greet outsiders with violence and cruelty.

Somewhere in each domain is a towering building – sometimes the stereotypical castle on the hill or the palace in the forest, or a giant dome or a great hall at the center of the environment. This is the fortress of the domain ruler/creator (80% of which are Mircalla). Fortresses are always the most heavily populated with nasty creatures of the Astral Plane, all of which know they are to harass and destroy interlopers.

Note: There are *no portals directly leading to any Tophet domain.* It is possible, however, to simply wander into a Tophet domain, since none are closed to outsiders. This "Hidden" feature simply means that one must enter Tophet to seek out or enter a given domain. Location is meaningless, as all domains are randomly located throughout Tophet, and any number of astral creatures such as *Shadow Beasts, the Shadow Mantis*, and *Vampire Specters* wander in and out of Tophet domains and may be encountered anywhere.

Getting from place to place in Tophet is both surprisingly simple and incredibly difficult at the same time. It is surprisingly simple because to get from one place to another all one has to do is walk there, on two feet, in any direction he or she desires, be it up, down, left, right, forward, backwards, whatever. It is incredibly difficult because of the random, shifting nature of the place and the constantly shifting shadows that appear out of nowhere and seem to move with a life and unknown purpose of their own. The locations of realms in Tophet shift and change just as often as the layouts of the domains do. Only one who is well-versed in journeying through the Shadow Realm can go from place to place with relative ease, and all Millek can find their way around in Tophet as easily as they can anywhere in the Astral Plane. The problem is, most Millek have no desire to enter Tophet, and the cause must be a very good one, or the compensation extraordinarily lucrative.

Tartarus: A Tophet Domain

Tartarus is perhaps the largest domain in Tophet, and home to the most powerful of all the Mircalla, a being who calls himself Belial. It is unknown whether or not the Belial of Tartarus is the same Belial of Athanatos legend. Occasionally, in his insane ranting, he claims to be the one and the same, but other times he insists that he is not. There is no proof either way. It's possible that Moloch knows, but he isn't telling anyone if he does. Either way, Belial is certainly the most powerful of all the Mircalla, and the most sadistic and insane as well. His domain is one of sorrow and despair, and those entering Tartarus will immediately notice that an overwhelming sensation of hopelessness oozes from every inch of the place.

Note: Use Tartarus as a template for creating other domains in Tophet.

Special Features: Players with an M.E. of less than 13 need to make a saving throw vs despair (14 or better) upon entering the domain to keep from being overcome by the place. A successful save means they function normally, *a failed save* means the player suffers a -2 to all combat rolls, -15% to all skills and feels a constant sense of dread and that something is watching from the shadows the entire time while in Tartarus. A new roll to save is made every hour. Those who saved previously are +2 to save again, those who failed previously are -2 to save. A successful save means that all penalties disappear, at least for the next hour, and the character feels better about himself and the environment around him. Failing six consecutive saves in a row, however, means that the character completely wastes away and becomes a *Ghost of Tartarus.* See the "inhabitants" listing that follows for details. Failing three consecutive rolls makes the character paranoid for the rest of his stay in Tartarus, regardless of any subsequent rolls to save.

Size: Minor Astral Kingdom (one of very few).

Accessibility: Hidden.

Portals: None.

Landscape: Highly Complex.

Domain Appearance: Tartarus resembles a city from ancient Egypt, with stone buildings, elaborate statues, monolithic columns, and even pyramids. However, the structures in Tartarus all seem to be either neglected and crumbling, or cursed and evil (usually gnarled, twisted or adorned in demonic carvings or fresco paintings). Touching any physical structure in Tartarus requires the character to make an imme-

diate Horror Factor roll of 12 or better as one realizes that these structures are somehow comprised of the vile and depraved hopes and lost dreams of those trapped in the domain. Psychics get deeper, more frightening sensations and images flashing through them and may even catch fleeting glimpses of horrors and atrocities that may be events from the past or dreams for the future from the creator of the domain. The psychic also instantly knows the alignment of the ruler and where he can find him at that moment.

Geography: As with most domains in Tophet, mapping Tartarus is pointless, as the geography, placement of streets, structures, etc., changes hourly, and the shadows every few minutes. Sometimes the changes are minor, and sometimes the domain completely reshapes itself. Those standing outside when the domain makes a major shift (01-20% chance of any given shift being a major one, and shifts happen hourly) are afflicted with a momentary sense of vertigo, and the G.M. may require a sense of balance roll to remain standing.

Special Defenses: Alarms as well as evil Astral Beings/monsters, Entities, Shadow Beasts and others wander the domain. Also see Inhabitants.

Physical Laws: Same as Earth, but No Magic, No Talents, and Power Control.

Living Conditions: Food and Water.

Special Abilities: Belial and his Avatars can use Astral Bolts (15D4 or 1D6x10) and Ectoplasm Armor (400 S.D.C.) at will.

Inhabitants: As with most Tophet domains, the inhabitants vary. Visiting parties of *Tarantuloids* are a common sight in Tartarus and are the most likely to help good travelers in the domain. *Shadow Beasts* roam the alleyways and dark corners here as well. In addition, one may encounter all manner of *Astral Entities, Shadow Mantis*, the odd *Millek, Vampire Specter* and *Necrophim* or even a *Torturian*. Belial can create *Astral Avatars* and usually has four to six out and about at any one time. **Note:** Shadow Beasts and Tartarus Ghosts are described later in this section.

Places of Note in Tartarus:

1. Madame Borova's: Madame Borova is a Greater Astral Entity who runs a brothel within Tartarus. She offers "any fantasy you can dream up." All a character has to do is mention a (usually sexual) fantasy, and they are *instantly* transported to a room with one of Madame Borova's "girls" (or "boys," if the character prefers). Since all that is required is the utterance of a fantasy, making jokes is not advisable here. Once in the room, the fantasy is played out. What the character is not likely to realize at first, is the woman or man they are locked into the fantasy with is actually a *Succubus, Incubus* or some other evil, supernatural shape changer out to destroy them. The only way out is to kill or incapacitate the creature, at which point a doorway opens and the character may exit to the street. Once a character exits Madame Borova's, he may never return. Any attempts to do so simply end up with the character back in the street, looking at the doorway.

2. Library: This is an expansive library, probably larger than any on Earth, containing vast tomes of lost knowledge and ancient lore. Characters reading books in this library must roll on the following chart to see what results from consulting these tomes. The information contained in the books within the Library is so intense that characters can never fully absorb more than *two* books, and a single type of knowledge can only be gained *once*.

01-25% Forbidden knowledge! Roll on the Random Insanity table and cannot remember what he's read.

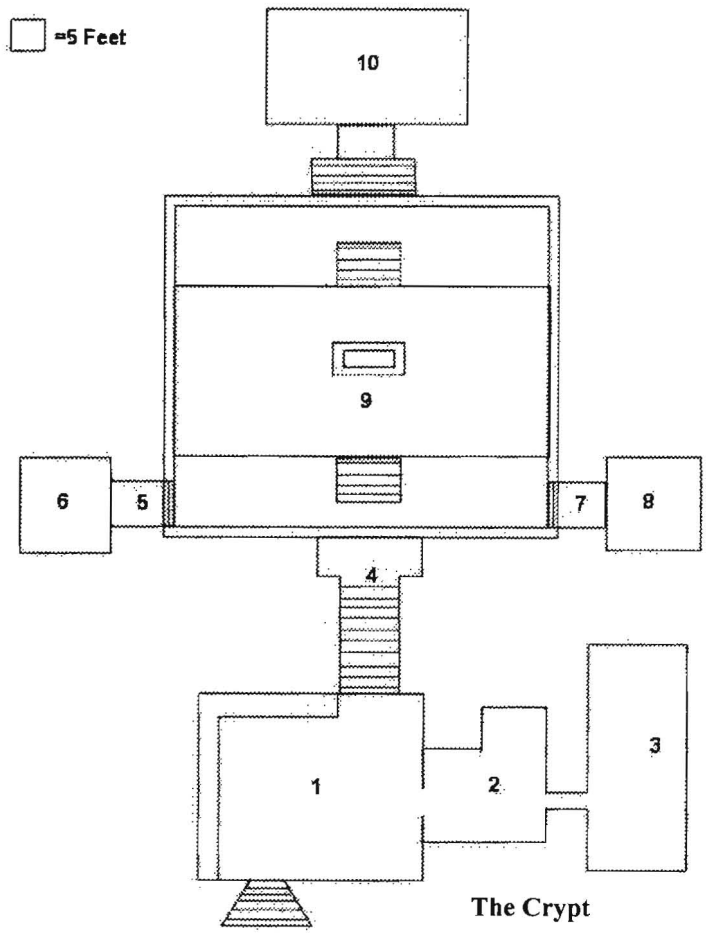
26-40% Gain one Lore skill (player's choice) at level 1D4 proficiency, or add 1D4 levels to a lore skill the character already possesses.

41-60% Gain one Technical skill (player's choice) at first level proficiency

61-80% Mystic knowledge! Player gains knowledge of spell casting. Includes a general understanding of magic and a permanent P.P.E. boost (+3D6 P.P.E.) if a lay person, while those already skilled in magic learn 1D4 spells (from any levels of the G.M.'s choice).

81-90% Psychic awakening! The knowledge contained in the book does something to awaken latent psychic powers in the character. Non-psychic characters immediately gain *Minor Psychic abilities* (choose a total of four powers from any of the three "lesser" categories of Sensitive, Healing, and Physical). These new Minor psychics now roll a 12 or higher to save vs psychic attack and gain 1D4x10 I.S.P. Abilities never increase. Characters who are already psychic may choose *one* bonus ability from *any* of the four available categories (including Master Psychic powers). These characters also gain an additional 3D6 I.S.P., permanently.

91-00% Horrific lore! The character gains one Lore skill of choice at level 1D4 proficiency (or adds 1D4 levels to one already possessed), but the knowledge gained is of such a vile na-



The Crypt

ture that he also gains either an obsession (01-50%) or a phobia (51-00%) concerning the subject of the lore. G.M.s should make the character choose the Lore skill before informing them that they develop the insanity.

While researching in the Library, characters have a 50% chance of encountering 1D4 Shadow Beasts trawling for prey or 1D4 Tartarus Ghosts.



3. Bricknack's: Bricknack is an Aberrant *Mountebank* who became bound to the domain through means he still can't discuss. He's been here for hundreds of years by his count, and he ekes out a living catering to travelers in Tartarus. He seems to be immune to the feeding of Tartarus Ghosts, but does not reveal his secret, nor can he be made to (in reality, he doesn't know why). He's a regular visitor at Madame Borova's; as a "native" entity, he can come and go as he likes, and he likes very much. When not paying for the services of Borova's girls, he likes to spend time at *The Jackal Inn* drinking his fill of ectoplasmic mead. To finance his habits, he deals in weapons and supplies. Bricknack has any number of weapons that are Astral attuned, with ammunition to boot, and his supplies could be invaluable to Astral Travelers anywhere in the Astral Plane. Prices are standard, as listed in the **Nightbane® RPG**, and Bricknack is likely to have most standard firearms, ammunition, and melee weapons on hand. He does not stock explosives, machine-guns, energy weapons, or the like; however, submachine-guns, rifles, pistols, and shotguns are available. He keeps his stock securely locked up until the transaction is complete.

4. The Jackal Inn. Probably the only place in Tartarus where human characters can get food and drink. This resembles what you'd think an ancient Egyptian tavern would look like. Statues of animal-headed gods line the walls, and the ceiling is held up by what appears to be stone pillars. Characters take a seat, at which point a mindless Astral Construct approaches their table and waits silently for them to order. All they need do is say "food," "drink," "eat," or some other equivalent, and the ectoplasmic food and water will form at their table. Food and drink takes the appearance and flavor of whatever the character orders, or would expect. This is the most likely place outside of the Palace that one might encounter an Avatar of Belial.

5. Domiciles and Tombs: Most other buildings in Tartarus are either standard clay dwellings occupied by monsters or mindless Astral Constructs at random, or tombs. Tombs tend to be occupied by Shadow Beasts, Shadow Mantises, Vampire Specters, and sometimes Necrophim. Every once in a while one encounters a Torturian tormenting a Tartarus Ghost inside of a tomb.

6. The Great Pyramid: This is apparently the home of Belial, though it is practically unheard of for a character to ever encounter the *Lord of Tartarus* in person. It is very similar in layout to the Great Pyramid at Giza, though the section that corresponds to the underground well actually leads to a secret entrance/exit that comes up through the Crypt. This entrance/exit is the *only* way in or out of the Pyramid, and is guarded by forty Hounds who have been summoned and bound to Tartarus over time. In addition, Shadow Beasts and Shadow Mantises wander the crypt unchecked. No one except the Avatars of Belial know of this entrance/exit. Map Key is as follows:

A. Secret Entrance. No one but the Avatars of Belial know about this entrance. The other end is located in the crypt and only an *Extremely Difficult* Perception roll will discover it. The grade is stepped and easily climbable.

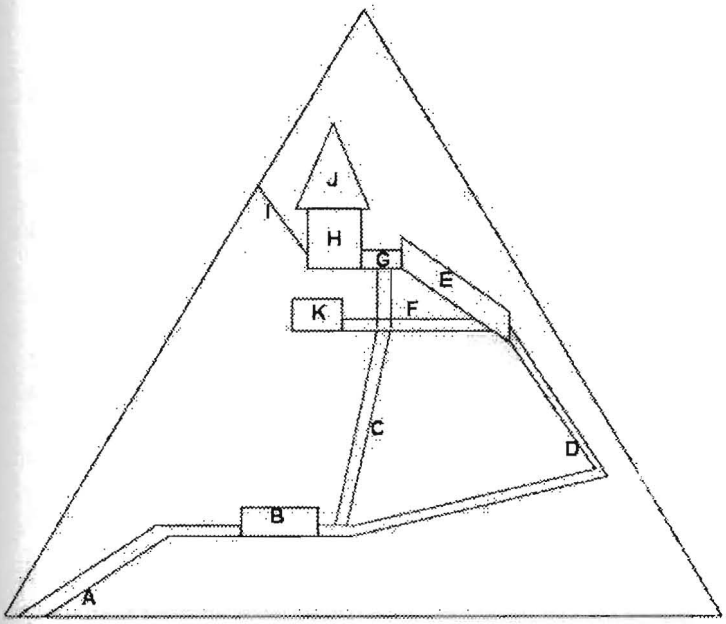
B. Underground Chamber. This chamber is largely empty; however, there are always a minimum of 10 Hounds here at any given time. A half dozen roam the corridors of the Pyramid at random.

C. Elevator Shaft. This is a hidden elevator that Avatars of Belial use to gain access to the antechamber. A successful difficult Perception roll will find the hidden panel to get in.

D. Crawlway. The initial grade of the crawlway is stepped and wide enough for two humans to walk abreast. The steeper grade is barely narrow enough for one person, and is not stepped; only a successful Climb skill -30% can navigate this grade.

E. Gallery. This is a hieroglyphics-filled chamber that illustrates the downfall of the Boaka Mircalla at the hands of the Nightlords and their allies. Clues to the true history of the Mircalla, including their real relationship to the Ba'al and the Athanatos/Gregorian question, may be found here, at the G.M.'s discretion.

F. Secret Passage. This passage is even more difficult to discover than the entrance to the Pyramid. This passageway may only be found on a *natural 20,* followed by an extremely difficult Perception roll.



G. Antechamber. This chamber is empty, save for a sarcophagus with an ornately decorated body laid within.

H. King's Chamber. Within this chamber sits an elaborate golden throne, and an equally bejeweled sarcophagus. An Avatar of Belial usually occupies this room, pretending to be the real thing. The room also contains a bed and an altar, where the Avatars sometimes perform their ritualistic escape attempts with kidnaped women.

I. Air Shaft. Too narrow for a human being to fit through.

J. Weight Relief Chambers. These chambers are empty of items of interest, but structured so that the rest of the Pyramid does not cave in upon the King's chamber. They are filled with stone support beams.

K. Belial's Tomb. The real Belial rests here in utter darkness, drooling and muttering to himself in his madness. He continually, as though by instinct, creates new Avatars in the King's chamber. There are four Avatars of Belial in existence at any one time. As soon as one is destroyed, Belial instinctively creates a new one. Likewise, should the tomb ever be discovered and invaded, Belial will immediately create four Avatars of himself in the room, who will fight to the death to defend their namesake.

7. The Crypt: The Crypt normally rests some distance from the Pyramid (though on occasion it does shift to be right next to it) and is built into the side of a "hill." It is set up much like an ancient Egyptian burial crypt on Earth, and the walls are covered with hieroglyphics (again, which at the G.M.'s option, may reveal something about the truth of the Athanatos, the Nightlords, the Nightbane, the Guardians or someone or something else). The rooms are filled with broken pottery, bones (or ectoplasmic imitations thereof), etc. Dozens of Astral Entities, many shaped like skeletons or mummies, as well as a few Shadow Beasts and Shadow Mantises make their home in these tombs. The secret passage to the Great Pyramid is located in the floor of room 10, but is impossible to see with the naked eye. It can only be opened by pressing secret pressure panels in rooms 2, 3, 6, 8, and one located in the bottom of the sarcophagus in room 9, provided they are pressed in the proper sequence (3-8-9-6-2-9). An Avatar of Belial resides here, masquerading as the real thing, but more often than not, it is here in room 10, which is decked out like a royal bedchamber, that Belial's Avatars undergo their escape rituals with human women. The complete key for the Crypt is as follows:

1. Main Entrance. This 35x30 foot (10.6x9.1 m) room is at the top of a long staircase and is filled with hieroglyphics and broken pottery. A high ledge runs along the west and northwest walls.

2. Antechamber/Chapel. This room contains an altar and various religious artifacts. A secret pressure panel (difficult Perception check to find) is behind the Altar.

3. Dressing Chamber. This chamber appears to be full of linens, oils, and such. A secret pressure panel (difficult Perception check to find) is in the southeast corner on the floor.

4. Burial Chamber Entrance. At the top of this long stairway, a doorway leads out onto a narrow ledge, approximately 2 feet (0.6 m) wide. 30 feet (9.1 m) below is the main burial chamber.

5. Hallway. Leads to room 6. A steep staircase leads down to the Burial Chamber.

6. Antechamber. Contains a hidden pressure plate (moderate Perception check to find) directly in the center of the floor.

7. Same as Room 5. See that room for description.

8. Same as Room 6. See that room for description.

9. Main Burial Chamber. This vast chamber is intricately decorated with hieroglyphics, pottery, statues, and candles. At the center of the room, staircases lead up to a large raised platform on which resides a golden sarcophagus. Inside the sarcophagus is a hidden pressure plate (extremely challenging Perception roll to notice). Four Hounds and two Hunters usually occupy this room. This is also where one is most likely to encounter an Avatar of Belial.

10. True Burial Chamber. Behind a secret door in the back ledge of the burial chamber, a staircase leads down into the "true" burial chamber. This is where the secret passage to the Great Pyramid lies. Only an extremely difficult Perception check can discover this secret passage, and such a check does not reveal how to open it. Only the Avatars of Belial have this knowledge. Also within this chamber is an elaborate bed and an altar. The bed sits at the center of a magic circle and this is where Belial's Avatars take part in their ritualistic "mating" with human women. During such a ritual, at least three of the Avatars will be present.

Belial, Lord of Tartarus

True Name: Belial.

Race: Boaka Mircalla.

Alignment: Diabolic (and insane!).

Attributes: I.Q. 21, M.E. 8, M.A. 6, P.S. 34, P.P. 22, P.E. 22, P.B. 9, Spd. 30

Hit Points: 5000 (half outside his Astral Domain of Tartarus).

S.D.C.: 3,000 (half outside his Astral Domain of Tartarus).

P.P.E: 1800

I.S.P.: 314

Horror Factor: 14 (17 when unmasked as a Mircalla).

Disposition: Belial is completely mad, and utterly incoherent. He sits alone in his pitch-dark crypt, subconsciously creating

Avatars to rule his domain, and muttering about the Ba'al, the Athanatos, the Guardians, the Reapers, the Formless Ones, and other bits and bobs. Belial's Avatars *all* claim to be the "true" Belial and are haughty, arrogant, superior, and quite psychotic.

Description: Belial (or his Avatars) resembles a completely average in appearance human male. In fact, he is *so* average that it is impossible to describe or recall his appearance after meeting him.

Level of Experience: 10

Skills of Note: Occult Lore and all Languages at 98%, and often mutters in dead languages.

Special Abilities: All standard Mircalla abilities, and he (and his Avatars) can use magic, Astral Bolts, and Ectoplasmic Armor at will, with no I.S.P. cost, as above.

Magic: Equivalent to a 10th level Astral Mage.

Psionics: Equivalent to a 10th level Astral Lord.

Combat: Hand to Hand: Assassin.

Notes: Belial, as was earlier noted, is incoherent and kept safely stowed away by his Astral Avatars. It is these Avatars who rule Tartarus in his stead, and who maintain his link to Reapers on Earth. The Avatars of Belial often travel to other domains, trading notes with other rulers in hopes of finding a way out of imprisonment in Tophet. What they have not revealed to anyone is that they have discovered (in theory) a way out. By performing a specific ritual they can impregnate human females. If they can successfully "mate" with a human female who has a five-pointed birthmark, perform an ancient and draining magical ritual, and then allow the woman to return to Earth, her child will bear within it the essence of Belial. Upon the child's twenty-first birthday, it will erupt into full power with all the abilities of a tenth-level Nightlord. At this point, Belial and all of his Avatars will cease to exist within Tophet and will come again to power on Earth within his new body. To date this is nothing more than a theory, as the Avatars have not been successful in locating a proper female host. They have experimented with mating rituals, however, and have determined that this is quite possible, though every female they have brought to Tartarus and mated with has returned to Earth quite insane. Most are currently in institutions. Once an Avatar of Belial "mates" with a human woman bearing the five-point birthmark, however, the only ways to stop the resulting horror are to kill the woman before she gives birth, kill the child before it discovers its power, or kill the Avatar who fathered the child, before the child is born. It should be noted that no other domain rulers in Tophet know of this possible way to escape Tophet.

Each Avatar of Belial in existence (there are four) currently maintains 2D6+24 Reapers on Earth – with one third of the P.P.E. automatically going to the true Belial.

Tartarus Ghost

The **Tartarus Ghosts** are miserable beings who have been "swallowed up" by the prevailing despair of the domain. These creatures are similar to *Greater Astral Entities*, but *cannot* manifest on the physical world (trapped in Tartarus). They possess an insatiable appetite for P.P.E. Tartarus Ghosts feel an almost continual desire to feed, meaning *any* entity within Tartarus is a target for the Tartarus Ghost. Their only drive is to ensnare others in the domain by feeding on outsiders. Once a Tartarus Ghost starts feeding, it becomes "bonded" to the creature it is preying upon and *must* continue feeding until it has completely drained the victim of his P.P.E. (One point per melee round).

Once the P.P.E. of a victim reaches zero, the Tartarus Ghost begins to drain the M.E. attribute at a rate of 1D4 per minute. The experience of feeding is overwhelmingly pleasurable, and the victim must make an M.E. save of 15 or better to resist. Even victims who do resist the feeding are mute with ecstasy (cannot call for help) and see all skills and combat bonuses reduced to half, and the use of psychic powers requires *double* the amount of normal I.S.P. Remember, magic doesn't function within Tartarus. A second saving throw, one round later, is allowed to restore combat bonuses. Once M.E. reaches zero, the victim wastes away and joins the spirit in its Tartarus imprisonment (becomes a new Tartarus Ghost). Tartarus Ghosts always appear as extraordinarily beautiful versions of the people they once were in life (add 2D6 to P.B.). Nightbane who become Tartarus Ghosts appear in their Facade form, for Nightbane, while immune to transformation, *are* vulnerable to becoming Tartarus Ghosts.

Alignment: 01-60% Miscreant, 61-00% Diabolic (and obsessed with feeding).

Attributes: I.Q. 1D4+3, M.E. 1D4, M.A. 1D4, P.S. 3D4, P.P. 2D6+3, P.E. 2D6+3, P.B. 1D4, Spd. 1D4x10

Hit Points: 2D4x10

S.D.C.: 3D6x10+11

P.P.E: 4D6, **I.S.P.:** 2D4x10

Horror Factor: 15

Disposition: Anger, despair and hopelessness are their entire essence. They strike out at Astral Travelers and physical visitors out of hunger and jealous rage, seeking to turn them into miserable Ghosts too, along their side.

Description: Appear as menacing ghost-like shadows.

Level of Experience: Not applicable.

Skills of Note: None; creatures of misery and instinct.

P.P.E. and Psychic Vampires: Absorbs P.P.E. and M.E. as described above.

Special Abilities: The shadowy ghosts can ooze through cracks, holes and openings, Shadow Meld (same as spell, but can perform it at will at no P.P.E. cost, and maintain it for as long as desired), fly and hover, Prowl 80%, and are impervious to most physical attacks unless the attack is magical. **Note:** Remember, Tartarus Ghosts are forever trapped inside the Astral Domain of Tartarus and can't even travel to other parts of Tophet. Nor can they appear in the physical world by any means.

Magic: None.

Psionics: Detect Psionics (and may avoid characters with them), Astral Bolts (used only to make good an escape), Empathy, and Suggestion.

Combat: Only exist in Tartarus and cannot enter the physical world by any means. Three attacks per melee round, but usually attacks only to bond with victims in order to drain P.P.E. and to turn them into fellow Tartarus Ghosts.

Bonuses: +1 to strike, +6 to save vs Horror Factor, and impervious to possession.

Fighting a Tartarus Ghost: Empathy and Empathic Transmission of positive emotions (love, happiness, friendship, a positive attitude to win/triumph, and similar) will break a Tartarus Ghost's hold on the one it is attacking/feeding on, and send the Ghost fleeing back into the shadows where it came from. This means it usually targets victims who (perhaps only momentarily) feel sad or depressed. Positive or joyful emotions are physically painful to the Ghosts and send them scurrying back to the shadows they crawled out from. Mind Block prevents them from bonding and draining anything, and using Summon Inner Strength gives the individual an extra saving throw at +5 to save. Additionally, Tartarus Ghosts are vulnerable to all psionic attacks as well as most forms of magic and magic weapons, and attacks by other creatures of shadow (i.e., Shadow Beasts).

Note: *Shadow Beasts* actively hunt and kill Tartarus Ghosts to feed upon the P.P.E. they have stolen from others. Tarantuloids also usually slay these embittered and pathetic creatures.

Shadow Beasts

Adapted from the *Palladium Fantasy Role Playing Game*®, created by Kevin Siembieda.

Shadow Beasts are creatures of the Elemental Plane of Shadow. They are feral supernatural predators that think about little other than feeding and creating more of their kind. Thankfully, these creatures are rare on Earth. However, they roam the lands of Tophet in large numbers, and sometimes in packs of 1D4+2 to 2D6+4, and a large pack of these creatures is a force to be feared. They do not seem to have a language, but communicate through a strange form of Empathy that allows them to coordinate actions. Packs of Shadow Beasts have been known to use tactics in combat much like advanced animals like lions or wolves. Little is known about their ecology, since most attempts to study their behavior have ended up with the death of the researcher.

Shadow Beasts on Earth are usually encountered as lone hunters or in a group of two or three at most, and then usually because they were summoned by a powerful, usually magical, force. They are difficult to control, and those who are foolish enough to summon them usually wind up as the creatures' first victims. A Shadow Beast summoned to Earth has no way to return to its plane of origin on its own, but usually relishes the opportunity to hunt in the rich Earth environment full of mortal prey walking the world. These creatures can feed on Nightbane, Athanatos (though neither of these can be transformed into new Shadow Beasts), and humans. It is not known if they can feed on Nightlords, Hounds, or Hunters. Shadow Beasts must feed on a minimum of 12 P.P.E. per day to survive. They have little trouble doing so, and rarely leave evidence behind, for they tend to consume the entire bodies of their victims, just for the pleasure of tasting flesh.

Alignment: Diabolic! Evil supernatural predator.

Attributes: I.Q. 1D6, M.E. 1D6, M.A. 1D6, P.S. 6D6 and Supernatural (3D6 in light and *not* supernatural), P.P. 5D6 (3D6 in light), P.E. 5D6 (3D6 in light), P.B. 1D6, Spd. 4D6 (2D6 in light).

Size: Nine to twelve feet (3-4 m) tall.

Hit Points: P.E.x2+30; average 60. (**Note:** Hit Points and S.D.C. are halved in well-lit areas.)

S.D.C.: 2D12x10+50 (Average 170).

Horror Factor: 15 for a single Shadow Beast, 18 for a pack of four or more.

P.P.E.: Base 3D6, plus any drained from victims (see below).

Natural Abilities: Impervious to most non-magical attacks; the natural weapons of Nightbane and Athanatos can harm Shadow Beasts, as can magical and psychic attacks. Light-based attacks inflict double damage. Shadow Beasts also have perfect nightvision (can see in absolute darkness) and feed from darkness rather than true shadow. In an area of absolute darkness, a Shadow Beast is completely invisible and undetectable.

Shadow Meld: Shadow Beasts blend into and travel through shadows naturally. Detecting a Shadow Beast in an area that is shadowed, such as an alley, in a darkened room, or at night, requires a contested Perception roll against the Beast, and the Shadow Beast is +9 to its roll to remain hidden. In absolute darkness, Shadow Beasts are completely invisible. In most respects, this ability functions as per the Invisibility: Superior spell, except that combat actions do not cause the creature to become visible, and Prowl is a whopping 98%. Characters who fail to *perceive* the melded creature are -9 to all attempts to hit or parry the Beast's attacks in combat. Facing a Shadow Beast in an area of extreme or absolute darkness is akin to suicide.

Regeneration: Shadow Beasts regenerate 2D6 Hit Points/S.D.C. per melee round if there are nearby shadows.

Life Drain (Special): A Shadow Beast can expend 20 P.P.E. to inflict a devastating draining attack upon a foe in combat. When using this attack, the Shadow Beast makes a normal roll to hit. If successful, the Shadow Beast bites its foe and drains 1D8 (or 2D4) points from the victim's P.E. attribute. Drained P.E. points work to heal the Shadow Beast on a 1 to 1 basis. Should the P.E. of the victim reach zero, the victim lapses into a state of unconsciousness.

Energy Drain: Shadow Beasts automatically drain P.P.E. points from their victims with a successful melee attack. Each successful attack drains 1D8 P.P.E. points from the victim. This P.P.E. goes to feed and sustain the Shadow Beast. If the P.P.E. of the creature is below its original base before the attack, all P.P.E. goes to replenish this pool. If the base P.P.E. is full, the creature gains half of the drained P.P.E. (rounded down) and absorbs half to sustain its essence. The Energy Drain does not function if the victim of the attack has no P.P.E. to drain.

Combat: Five hand to hand attacks per melee round in darkness or shadow, two in a well-lit area.

Damage: *In Darkness:* Claws do 6D6 damage, plus supernatural P.S. and Energy Drain (above), or Bite for 1D4 and Life Drain (above). *In well-lit areas:* Claws do 3D6 damage, plus P.S., no Energy Drain, and Life Drain is impossible.

Bonuses: *In darkness* – +5 to strike, parry, and dodge, natural invisibility. *In well-lit areas* – perfectly visible, +2 to strike, parry, and dodge.

Magic/Psychic Powers: See Natural Abilities.

Average Life Span: Unknown.

Vulnerabilities: Light-based attacks inflict double damage, and most physical and combat abilities are halved in well-lit areas. This makes Guardians particularly adept at the destruction of these loathsome creatures. In Tophet, Shadow Beasts are visible, but retain all bonuses and abilities as though they were in darkness.

Experience: Not applicable.



The Nocturnes

Binks looked over his shades at the bespectacled geek across the table from him. Just to get a rise out of the guy, he flashed a fanged grin and let that little flash of red creep into his eyes. He saw the guy flinch, and detected the beginnings of trembling. Satisfied, he chuckled, pushed his shades back up his nose, leaned back, and kicked his booted feet up on the bar table.

"Uh, isn't it a bit dark in here for sunglasses?"

Binks sized up the kid again, reached inside his jacket, and after digging around a moment, produced an unfiltered cigarette, which he stuck in his mouth and lit. "Boy, I'm a Wampyr. It's never too dark for sunglasses."

"I was wondering if I could ask you some questions," the kid stammered.

"You're an acolyte, aren't you?" Binks said.

"H-how'd you know?"

"Call it a hunch. Relax, kid. I'm not a killer. Well, not in the way you're worried about, anyway. So what is this, some kind of initiation for the Seekers? Find a supernatural being and gather as much information as you can? You took the direct approach, didn't you?"

"Well, my mom always said I had more guts than brains."

Binks flew over the table almost faster than the kid could register. In the blink of an eye, he had the kid by the shirt, pinned against the tabletop and looking up at the face of horror. Binks could already smell the fear running down the kid's leg.

"She was right," he growled. "Taking the approach you took isn't just dangerous, it's flat-out stupid."

He let the trembling, wild-eyed kid go and sat back down.

"Still want that interview, Anne Rice?"

The teen gave a mute nod. Binks couldn't help but laugh out loud.

"I really, really like you. Okay, kiddo. Sit back. I'm gonna tell you about the Wampyrs, the Vampires, and the Nocturnes. I'm gonna tell you so much they'll think you broke into their files and stole your report. But just to make things kosher, let's get you a video camera, so they don't doubt your integrity. I've got one at home. Let's go. And don't worry, I ain't gonna hurt you. We're on the same side, after all."

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"We are ancient. As ancient as human civilization. The Lightbringers think of us as the face of evil, and who knows? Maybe they're right. But no matter what they or their unwritten "holy scriptures" say, we were here first. Well, maybe not "we," so much as the Vampires. From all indications, the Guardians only showed up after the undead, maybe as some sort of countering force. Who knows?

"Nobody really knows how the first Wampyr came to be. There are legends upon legends to be sure, but most of them are typical "stolen from organized religion." I don't have much patience for that garbage, myself. In the end, I guess, it doesn't matter where we Wampyrs come from. I mean, we're not so much a race as we are a bunch of misfits and rebels. We don't breed. We don't create others of our kind. It's just that every once in a while, it kind of happens that way. A Vamp gets a bug up its shorts to make another plague carrier like itself, but something goes wrong. Or maybe someone starts out as a Vamp and there's some sort of strange psychic backlash when the Master is kicked off. There are even rumors that if an unawakened Nightbane gets turned into a vamp, he becomes one of us. Cripes, there's almost as many ways to become a Wampyr as there are to die. Or so they say.

"How did I *become a Wampyr? That's none of your business. If you thought I was going to sit here and spill out the whole tragic story of my life, you're sorely mistaken. I got over the angst junk years ago. Now I just spend most of my time hunting the ones who made me like this, the "Pure Bloods" as they*

call themselves. That, and running with the Nocturnes. And I'll tell you what, brother. If you wanted info about a faction to take back to the Seekers, you picked the right one. I mean, the Resistance, they got no heart. They fight because they have to, or for some high-minded morality garbage. We help them out when we can, mostly through pointing them in the right direction. That direction would be out of our way. The Underground Railroad? They hide more than they talk. The only difference they make is they filter new recruits for the rest of us. Oh! The Warlords, they help us out with contacts and whatnot. Hey, you could try talkin' to them, if you live long enough to get a word out. And the Lightbringers, don't even get me started *on that bunch of stuck up, moralistic jerks. Let's see, who's left? Oh, yeah. The Spook Squad. Sure, talk to them if you want to wind up on an operating table so they can see if your occult knowledge resides in a special center of your medulla oblongata.*

"Anyway, I think you get the picture. Hey, if we all got along, there wouldn't be factions, right? Yeah. Well, anyway, what all I'm gonna tell you is probably common knowledge to your organization, so it won't get me in trouble, but it should help you get where you want to go. So settle in and enjoy the ride, bro. Make sure your tray table is down and your seat's back in the full upright position, because we're takin' off... into the Nocturnes."

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Arguably the oldest of all the organized factions, the Nocturnes are also one of the most enigmatic and dynamic groups in the war for control of the Earth since the days following Dark Day. Nocturnes are as varied as the stars, with more facets than a shattered quartz crystal. They are the ultimate paradox; a force for light that lives in the shadows.

The Nocturnes are perhaps one of the most effective organized factions in the world. As a rule, they intensely distrust Guardians, but the large number of vampires and Wampyrs in their ranks justifies this since Guardians are on a lifelong crusade to destroy vampires, and more often than not, lump Wampyrs in the same category. The Nocturnes also fear and resent the Spook Squad organization, though they have little respect for most agents. After all, the A.D.A. maintains that it is engaged in a war with all things supernatural, and the Nocturnes pretty much personify "all things supernatural."

The Nocturnes are one of the few factions who trace their lineage back to their founding member. Much like Enoch and the mythical leaders of the Lightbringers, this founder is a source of mystery and wonderment, and many Nocturnes regard him as a spiritual, and an almost religious, icon, be it savior or apocalyptic evil. His legend is a tale of a fall from grace and of a strange sort of redemption.

The Legend of Iosef Pendragon

He is ancient, more ancient and powerful than any known Wampyr can claim to be. His origins are shrouded in mystery that stretches through the ages and has its start in the fog of medieval London streets. He is the stuff of myth and legend, and for many a Nocturne borders on being a messiah figure. To still others he is an enigmatic symbol of doom and destruction, the center of an apocalypse prophecy for the faction.

As the story goes, Iosef was a knight and a cousin of *King Arthur Pendragon* in the early days of the Dark Ages, but his fate caused his name to be stricken from the annals of Arthurian myth, and Grail lore. As the Nocturnes tell it, he traveled to Great Britain from Austria in the early days before even Charlemagne swept across Europe, to support his cousin, Arthur, in uniting the Britons and creating a unified utopia to be known as Avalon. His sword is said to have been as great as Sir Lancelot's, his purity greater than Sir Percival, his determination the rival of Sir Gawain. At Arthur's side he became one of the greatest of the knights to sit at the Round Table, and a key instrument in putting down the barbarian tribes that overran England. Some have even whispered that such other legendary figures as Lancelot, Percival, and Gawain never existed and are facets of Iosef handed down from generation to generation.

With the passing of the noble King, Camelot fell to decadence and discord. The greatest of his knights vowed they'd not let Arthur's utopian dream die, and swore to find a way to hold the kingdom and the dream together. It was said that only the greatest, most dedicated, and purest knight could succeed, and it was with a humble bow that Iosef accepted this quest with the others. It was not long before the fellowship splintered, sending each knight to seek his own way. Tragically, Iosef fell from grace on the journey, seduced into sin and corruption by the most foul and evil of women, and in so doing, became the first of his kind and found a greater destiny.

Iosef traveled for years, his resolve weakening with every step. He had left his armor behind years before, and now even carrying his sword was a burden. Thoughts that once were blasphemous to him became acceptable. *He* was the greatest of Arthur's knights and yet he walked in failure. And with those thoughts a darkness grew inside him. And as the darkness spread across his soul, so too did Iosef's humanity leave him. Finally, the knight collapsed in a clearing in the middle of a deep woods, all of the resolve and strength gone from his body. His mind consumed with failure, misplaced anger and shadows. Iosef dreamed of being claimed by death and at last finding peace. Instead, he came to days later in a cabin. A strikingly beautiful woman stood at his bedside, tending to him like a saintly nurse. Looking upon her, Iosef's heart soared. Her raven black hair ran in rivulets down her back, and her skin was as smooth and cool as white marble. When she looked into his eyes he was lost. Yet as feelings of desire . . . even love filled the knight there was someplace in the back of his mind that screamed in dread and made the hairs on the back of his neck rise. Iosef even asked her if she was a witch. She smiled, spoke his name and kissed him on the neck. The ecstasy of that kiss almost masked the trickle of blood that dribbled down his neck. "I give you the power my sweet one." She leaned in forward, kissed him again. "Your innocence and purity is so sweet my love. Don't fight, give all of it to me. It must be given freely and willingly. Say yes, Iosef. Say yes and you will have the kind of power most mortal men only dream about."And the word hissed from his lips and the power was his.

Suddenly Iosef had a vision of life in eternal death. Of shadows and moons and of humanity slipping away drop by drop as his blood ran cold. Then she was gone, but her voice still echoed in the depths of his mind. "Go in the world, my love. Go and bring them all down."

Shortly thereafter, all he needed to know came to him as if by instinct. He knew exactly what it was that he craved, that he needed to drink to survive. He knew he had a greater purpose. An unholy duty was to spawn again, and again, and again, spreading the darkness and power of vampirism. He had accepted his place, and he had no choice but to fulfill his new destiny. Wherever he went, he left the mark of death and the people came to know and fear him as the betrayer of Camelot. His deeds and purpose so dark and terrible that they were stricken from the pages of history, and Iosef along with them.

With time, however, Iosef the Betrayer came to regret his actions and his life. Consumed with regret he vowed to undo what he had done. To return himself to the sphere of mortal ken, and to fight the darkness that once consumed him and so many others. The exact reason for this epiphany is unknown, but on that day, Iosef made a new vow from which he has never wavered.

The fallen knight, his name expunged from history, left England, searching across the decades for a way to break the bond of blood and darkness. It is said that somewhere in the Middle East, Iosef found his answer and underwent a strange and difficult Kabbalistic ritual to sever the ties to darkness and the hunger that consumed him. In the time before his enlightenment, he had destroyed everything that he loved, sacrificed all that he was, now he would reclaim his soul and dedicate the rest of his life to making things right.

So it was that a great battle with the darkness took place. The moon, it is said, went as red as blood that day, and the darkest of ancient magic was called upon and released into the world at large. When the agony that seemed to last for a decade came to an end, Iosef was free of the hunger, and in breaking the ties that bound him to it, opened the way for others to do so as well. Others with the will to fight in their last moments of life would not fall under the thrall of their Vampire makers, but retain their free will to become something different – for though the ties to the hunger and darkness were broken, he and those to follow his footsteps would remain more than human. And they would call themselves *Wampyr*, and many would follow Iosef on his new mission of hope. A mission to destroy the vampire plague and any unholy darkness that threatens to crush the spirit of humankind and engulf the world. Thus, though they walk in the dark, they are the enemies of darkness, bringing vengeance and light wherever their journeys take them. They would take back the night and they would be called Nocturnes.

Some say that Iosef Pendragon still wanders the world to this day, carrying a great mystic sword and using it to right the most tragic of wrongs, and guiding his new children from the shadows to the light of his just and noble quest. Others admit his time is past, and it is left to his descendants, the Nocturnes, to carry through with his mission to rout the darkness from the hearts of men. Still others believe that Iosef sleeps and that one day he will rise again and with his great sword, lead them to final victory over the minions of darkness.

Nocturnes & Arcane Lore

It's been said that if one wants the best in arcane lore, you should find the Seekers. A statement usually followed by, "when you fail to find the Seekers, look for the Nocturnes."

Indeed, the Nocturnes are certainly much more accessible than the Seekers and not nearly as secretive. Their libraries often rival the Seekers' in depth of valuable and ancient information and lost or alternate histories. This has led to friendly (and sometimes not-so-friendly) competition between the two factions, as both work to capture the same archaic tomes, artifacts and bits of rare information. Both factions are similar in that they believe the key to defeating the Nightlords lies within the secrets of arcane lore. Both actively endeavor to learn as much as they can about any given subject that may even remotely apply to the Ba'al or to the eternal battle between good and evil, light and dark.

Relations between the Nocturnes and Seekers vary from city to city, so what happens in a case where the two pursue the same piece of history varies with each regional faction. Sometimes the information is shared, with the winner getting to keep the original. Sometimes the winner simply keeps it without sharing. In the worst of situations, the two find themselves in a bitter and bloody shadow war, with high body counts on both sides. By and large, the Nocturnes think that the Seekers are bookworms and fascists who dictate the dissemination of information with godlike superiority. Most Nocturnes have some degree of contempt for an organization that hoards knowledge without any intention (in the Nocturnes' eyes) of ever using that knowledge for the betterment of all.

As a rule, if one needs a certain archaic fact, bit of information, or piece of lore, there is a 01-65% chance that the Nocturnes possess such information, and a 01-25% chance that it can be had in the very city where the characters reside. However, availability varies depending on whether the info is fairly common within the Nocturnes' sphere of influence or whether it is a rarity or guarded secret. G.M.s should use discretion when dealing with the libraries of organizations such as the Nocturnes and Seekers.

Of course, there is never any guarantee the Nocturnes are willing to share what they know. To keep their underground operations going, they may offer the information for a price or deem those asking are the wrong hands for it, and deny providing the data at any price. Sharing particularly sensitive information and guarded secrets is always a high risk, and Nocturnes are very cautious about what they say and who they tell it too. As a rule, if a book, bit of information, or relic is in the faction's possession, it is made available to most members of the Nocturne faction, though it may be limited to those known to the organization and/or to those who have proven themselves committed to the destruction of darkness and loyal to the faction. Need is also a factor, and truly rare, incriminating and coveted information is closely guarded. Another concern for those seeking knowledge from the Nocturnes is that the members of this faction, while they fight on the side of humankind (for now) against the Nightlords, are not by any means heroes. They are anti-heroes at best, and not always trustworthy. One could cut a deal to get a specific book from a Nocturne, pay for it, and then discover later that the book he's just purchased is a fake, cleverly disguised to look like the real thing. However, working with Nocturnes will yield better results than trying to work with a Seeker.

One must also keep in mind that the term "library" is to be used loosely when referring to the Nocturnes' store of knowledge. There are no immense, warehouse-sized rooms filled with shelves and shelves of musty tomes or towers of computer disks.

With the Nocturnes, it doesn't work that way. The faction believes that the best way to *protect* information is to keep it hidden. Thus, a certain old tome may be stashed away in a public library's restoration department without an identification number, or at somebody's home, while a computer scan copy may be hidden as a file on some obscure Internet server under some innocuous file name. An artifact of great power might sit quietly in a museum, protected by massive amounts of security, and by the undercover Nocturne agents stalking the grounds, or in the showcase of a private collector or stashed in a basement, attic or warehouse. Though this has proven to be an effective means of keeping knowledge and artifacts safe, it is a rather haphazard and disjointed way to do so; definitely not the most organized or easy to use system. Accessing rare data and relics can be especially difficult and may require traveling some distance and covert meetings, and while there are failsafe measures in place, there is the question of how many people know about a particular rarity and what happens if they all get killed. Is the item or information then lost? How can it be recovered? Is it truly safe from rivals and enemies? So far the answers have been yes, the information is safe and recoverable, but some doubt remains. One reason for this rather antiquated approach is the fact that many of the Nocturnes have been around for centuries, in some cases, millennia, so they are rarely in a hurry and tend to do things in more traditional ways. In this case, a more traditional approach to a *secret society*. Besides, haste leads to mistakes, and mistakes lead to failure.



Nocturne Librarians

There are those within the faction who keep lists and directories concerning the artifacts, books, and lore held by the faction, and where it can be found. Most of these "librarians" are innocent or ordinary looking and avoid attracting attention from the outside world. One may be an old man in a used bookstore who maintains a vast index of loose-leaf binders or detailed catalogs in his basement. Another may be a computer nerd with DVD-ROMs full of spreadsheet and database files. Both are dedicated to their job and keep accurate records as a painstaking labor of love. Tracking down a Nocturne Librarian can, however, be a difficult task. Since much of their information is secret and shared predominantly with other Nocturnes, Librarians function as elite and secretive agents in the Nocturne underground. Furthermore, these Nocturne Keepers of Knowledge are a suspicious and cautious lot who don't trust outsiders and are skilled in keeping secrets. After all, the treasure trove of catalogued relics, books and information put in their keeping is both priceless and dangerous (at least to certain groups like the Nightlords). In the wrong hands, they could do incalculable damage to both the Nocturnes and others who oppose the Nightlords.

Consequently, tracking down a Nocturne Librarian is often an adventure in and of itself, involving gathering clues, talking to various informants, and weeding out the false information from the true before making contact with someone who can put them in touch with the right person (i.e., a Librarian). There are a lot of schemers and con artists out there, and unwary individuals can quickly find themselves in far over their heads, in the middle of a Nightlord or NSB sting operation to capture those who oppose them or just plain tricked and cheated. Most Nocturne Librarians deliberately maintain a low profile, though many do frequent the *Shadowboard* to exchange information

and keep an eye out for sightings of new bits of lore and information. At any rate, it is a foregone conclusion that if a Librarian doesn't want one to know he's a Nocturne Keeper of Knowledge, one probably won't find out. Most are untouchable unless they want to be discovered, and generally quite powerful in their own right, making them as much espionage intelligence agents as a traditional librarian. Most Nocturne Librarians almost always have 1D6+1 artifacts in their keeping and are a minimum of sixth level by the time they are enlisted to the position of Librarian.

Roughly half of all Librarians start out as *Nocturne Collectors*, scholarly volunteers who hunt down and gather information, relics and clues for the faction. Generally, Collectors are equal parts spy, infiltrator, historian, scholar and adventurer. The most aggressive ones are also thieves who enjoy snatching information and artifacts out of the hands of rivals (like the Seekers, Lightbringers and Nightlords) and the unsuspecting (like museums and private collectors of the arcane). Collectors can be thought of as the intelligence agents who gatherers and collect information while the Librarians are the keepers, protectors and disseminators of what Collectors find.

Nocturne Contacts & Operations

Joey needed information, and he knew, just knew that somehow, the Nocturnes were the key to what he was looking for. The question, though, had been how to contact them. Joey himself was unaffiliated with any of the factions, and he liked it that way, but times change, and for Joey, it was time to make an alliance or two.

He did a little subtle poking around, and eventually came to the conclusion that a particular Goth club was the best place to make contact with a Nocturne. So here he was, standing amid a throng of hot bodies, with a driving techno-industrial beat thrumming in his head, and nursing a beer. He scanned the crowd and noticed a guy with mime makeup freak-dancing with a petite and striking girl dressed in a revealing, black leather skirt and top. Her skin was too pale to be natural and too pallid to be made up. She smiled and Joey caught the barest glimpse of a fang.

A cursory sweep of the place revealed several more Goths he suspected of being vampires. His gut told him there were more than a few of his kind around, too. He was in the right place, all right. Time to drop some hints.

"'Scuse me," he shouted to the girl next to him. "Ever heard of the Nocturnes?"

"Sounds like a band," she shot back. "Never heard of 'em. They any good?"

"From what I heard, they're the best."

That did it. Joey noticed a lanky man in a leather duster slipping through the crowd, his eyes on Joey as he moved. Joey matched the guy's gaze, letting him know that this was what he wanted. The guy crept up to a chick who was way too sexy for her own good; flaming red hair matted down with sweat, wearing a net shirt and dancing close with one of the vampires. The buzz in his head told Joey that she was a Nightbane, like him. Trench Coat Boy said something in her ear, and her gaze snapped up to look Joey right in the face. A tense moment passed, where Joey was completely oblivious to the music, the crowd, the heat, the smell, and just taken into those clear, blue eyes of the girl. She smiled, winked, beckoned him with one finger, turned, and stalked out the back door.



"Score," Joey muttered, as he set his beer down. He followed her through the press of emotionally-charged ravers, threw open the door, and stepped into the back alley. He was hardly surprised to find himself grabbed from behind, and a quick glance around confirmed that he was held and surrounded by a half dozen of the most gruesome looking characters most people could imagine. As for him, well, he'd seen worse. Heck, he was worse than half of them.

"Okay, guys," he said. "I'm safe. Where is she?"

The motley crew parted like the Red Sea, and the woman he'd followed stepped forward and up into his face. As if her beauty wasn't enough, her scent drove him absolutely crazy. Whether it was just perfume or some sort of crazy pheromone-producing Morphus he couldn't be sure, but at that moment, he would have done anything she asked. The redhead put her finger under his chin and traced his jaw line, cocking her head ever so slightly to the side and running her tongue over her lips in thought.

"I'm Blythe," she whispered at last. "I can tell you're a Nightbane. You wanted the Nocturnes, well, here we are. What's your business?"

Contacting the Nocturnes can achieved a number of relatively straightforward ways. Well, as straightforward as contacting any of the underground gang faction. One simply needs to haunt the right establishments, talk to the right people, and put the word out. Eventually, for better or for worse, one should be able to make contact. Nightbane looking for the Nocturnes usually have a relatively easy time finding the group because they can sense others of their kind. By asking the right Nightbane the right questions, contact can be surprisingly easy – easier still if someone in the faction is willing to vouch for the stranger. The Nocturnes tend to frequent *Club Freak* establishments as well as maintain an active, though secretive, presence in many Goth communities and clubs, hiding in plain sight, as it were. The Nocturnes enjoy spending time in establishments where the people are considered "freaks" or "outcasts." By checking out such locales, it's not long before one can spot likely Nocturnes, or before the Nocturnes notice them. However, until a character gains the trust of the Nocturnes or has a trusted member vouch for him, he is not likely to see much of the inner workings or meet many important people within the faction. Security is an issue the Nocturnes always take seriously. They never pass up an opportunity to recruit new members, make an ally or gather information, but they aren't stupid about it.

Most Nocturnes have a pack mentality and are fiercely loyal to the faction. Rarely does one do anything solo that might have a negative impact on the group. Likewise, Nocturnes tend to gather and congregate in groups, making it uncommon to encounter fewer four at a time, unless one happens to track one down to their home or lair, but even then, many share an apartment or house with one or more roommates. Nocturnes learned long ago that there is safety residing numbers, plus this is one faction that very much operates on a "gang" mentality. So, as the saying goes, if you find one Nocturne, you can usually count on 2-6 others (maybe more) being nearby. That means, pick a fight with one and you can count on several others (2-12) stepping up to cover their comrade's backside. This "pack mentality" has probably helped to keep the Nocturnes strong and growing, and safe from Lightbringers (who normally hunt as individuals and pairs).

It is also this pack mentality that sets the Nocturnes apart from the worldwide vampire community. Vampires, as a rule, are solitary creatures, for they seek to maintain the facade that they simply don't exist, and the best way to do that, *their traditions* show, is to blend in with the local community and not gather in numbers. The few full-blooded vampires within the Nocturnes, however (exclusively the odd Secondary Vampire; there are no Master Vampires serving the Nocturnes faction), see this sense of companionship and camaraderie as a way to also hold on to the fading vestiges of humanity that flicker in their dead souls. For many, it works, and works for a very long time. They allow themselves to become members of their pack, and even, in an instinctual sense, they become loyal and devoted to their companions, friends and allies. Sometimes, pack members even allow the vampires to feed on them, so long as there is no attempt to kill them or turn them into vampires. This can help to wean the reluctant vampire from the instinctual need to kill. Vampires who turn on their packs and the faction don't normally live very long, however, as vengeance is quick in coming from other Nocturnes. **Note:** Some Nocturne cells in individual cities don't allow full vampires in their ranks at all. This usually happens after too many betrayals or tragedies at the hands of the undead. Nocturnes who cut themselves off from the vampire nation *may* find themselves entrenched in a three-way battle between themselves, the Lightbringers, and the vampires they have spurned, in addition to the war they wage against the Nightlords and their henchmen, including the *Spook Squad.*

The Nocturnes are both geared and equipped for war in the shadows of human civilization. Unlike the direct tactics of most resistance cells who challenge the secret invasion and dominion of the Nightlords, or the criminal mayhem of the Warlords, Nocturnes engage in urban guerilla warfare, and they are masters of hit and run strategies and tactics. Many operations are planned for months to cover all possible angles, and executed smoothly, maximizing the abilities and talents of their members. Others are spontaneously executed off the cuff when opportunity presents itself, but also show teamwork and skill. Though not as powerful or brutal as the Resistance or Warlords, the Nocturnes are so at home in the night that every moving shadow is as powerful an ally to them as the living (or undead) comrades by their sides. They strike fast and hard, and fade away without a trace. Indeed, so effective are the Nocturnes at black ops, that the Spook Squad, an organization of espionage agents, often consigns Nocturne packs to carry out delicate operations for them – particularly when there is a need for plausible deniability. Nocturnes relish such assignments and rarely turn them down unless the mission is outright suicidal, would compromise their faction or doesn't accomplish much in the long run. The information and money filtered down from such ops helps to fund the organization and makes available additional cash and establishes a relationship that provides the faction with hard to get information and contacts with the Spook Squad. When it all comes together, the Nocturnes are easily one of the most precise and effective combat groups on Earth.

The Down Side

There is a down side to membership in the Nocturnes. Most outsiders don't trust the group; sometimes, not even other Nocturne cells. Every member of the faction wears two faces, and it's more than the difference between Facade and Morphus. Every Nocturne has both a business face and a bestial face, and it's impossible to tell when one will override the other. It seems most every member of the faction has a personal agenda, and that agenda tends to weaken the overall cohesion of the faction. The Nocturnes step up to the plate for one another whenever it's necessary, but one never knows when it really is necessary, or when personal plans might undermine those of a comrade's or a mission. As a direct result of this constant walking a thin line between light and dark, the Nocturnes perhaps suffer more defections and sellouts than any other two factions combined. Nocturnes could be considered the Gypsies of the Nightbane factions. They travel in tight-knit bands, keep few permanent havens, trust no one and are trusted by no one. They may even double-cross each other, and consider it their right and privilege to do so, but seldom betray the faction and always come running to help fellow Nocturnes in times of need. Their friendship is not easily gained, but once it is, it is said that having a friend in the Nocturnes is having a friend for life, so long as one does not abuse that friendship.

The differences and mistrust both within and outside of the Nocturne faction often stretch between individual cell factions. One cell may be as different from another as night is from day. A Nocturne from Baltimore who visits Cleveland may find the goals and methods of the local group in Cleveland are much different than those he is familiar with at home. Likewise, he is likely to be greeted with more than a little suspicion. Though a faction will never turn away a fellow Nocturne, so long as proper credentials can be established, earning their trust is another story entirely.

Moreover, since the Nocturnes are predominantly composed of Wampyrs and Nightbane, they are often considered to be monsters or evil supernatural beings who couldn't possibly have humankind's best interests at heart. Outside the faction, the Nocturnes can't trust anyone, for while organizations like the A.D.A. and the Seekers may find them useful on occasion, everyone seems to have it in for the group. Sure, the Nocturnes are obviously out to depose the Nightlords, but for what purpose? Many fear it is so they can eliminate the competition and claim Earth for their own monstrous kind. All too often the claim that these vampires, Wampyrs, and other beings seek redemption fall on deaf ears, and most other factions would just as soon see the Nocturnes destroyed as work side by side with them. Consequently, many members of the *Resistance* and the *Underground Railroad (U.R.)* have actively sought in the past to lure Nightbane involved with the Nocturnes away from the faction and back into Nightbane-dominant factions where they are perceived to belong. Sometimes, they even succeed. Nightbane who defect from the Nocturnes to join the Resistance or U.R. are considered "housebroken" or "tamed" by other members of the faction and may well be greeted with antipathy or even open hostility by Nocturnes they meet in the future.

Nocturne Leadership

The Nocturnes do tend to share a common structure no matter where one goes. Each city is considered a "cell," and every "cell" is divided into packs. There is an overall leader of all the Nocturnes in a given city, called a Lord or Lady, who is responsible for all operations of the local group, and responsible for maintaining the anonymity of the faction. This Lord/Lady is responsible for discipline and order among the packs, as well as maintaining the loyalty of the troops. How a Lord or Lady is chosen differs from city to city and could range from a democratic election to a battle of wits to flat-out trial by combat. Most Lords and Ladies tend to be quite effective, because ineffective leaders don't last very long before someone more capable rises to take their place.

The Lord/Lady of a given cell also determines the hierarchy of command therein. As a rule, the cell leader appoints a second in command, sometimes two, to function as generals maintaining contact among all the packs under their command. These "Seconds" usually are the next in line to become leader of the faction when the current leader is deposed or killed, or steps down, although this is not always the case.

Next in line are individual pack leaders, called "Alphas." These Alphas are not normally appointed by the Lord or Lady, but rather they rise up from the ranks to the forefront as natural leaders. Alphas deal directly with the Seconds-in-Command or the Lord or Lady of the cell.

No one knows for certain exactly who, if anyone, the overall leader of the Nocturne organization is, however. There are legends and rumors that *Iosef Pendragon*, the first Wampyr and founder of the Nocturnes, still, to this day, leads from the shadows and through representatives. Others claim the organization runs itself, with the smaller cells working in concert toward a greater, unifying goal, the destruction of the Nightlords.

The Lords and Ladies take their direction from a mysterious figure who refers to himself as "The Adjudicator" – who always appears in a dark gray cloak, his face entirely in shadow, and who speaks in a hoarse whisper. In fact, his robes are so bulky and his whisper so androgynous that no one can be certain that the Adjudicator is male or female. He claims not to be the leader of the Nocturnes, but to be the mouthpiece, the voice, of "the One." Whether he is or not, his presence and aura are so powerful that most Lords and Ladies simply defer to him without argument. Those Lords and Ladies who have been brave or foolish enough to stand up to the Adjudicator have, it is said, been taught terrible lessons at his hands. However, even the Adjudicator is something of a mythic figure among the Nocturnes, because only the Lords and Ladies of the cells ever see or speak to him. Some lower ranking members of the faction believe that the Adjudicator is merely a figurehead, a made-up persona designed to maintain cohesion and keep the underlings in line. In short, a boogeyman. Still others whisper that the Adjudicator not only exists but that he is Iosef Pendragon himself, subtly guiding the movements and actions of Nocturnes. The Lords and Ladies of the faction are certain of one thing: The Adjudicator does indeed exist, and possesses far more power than any of them. He also always seems to know just how to catch them alone and unguarded. Yet, despite the power he seems to possess, he refuses to take a direct hand in any conflict. The only rationale he offers is that there are powers far beyond what any Nightbane or

Wampyr can understand, and he mutters something about "the agreement." There is no way for Lords and Ladies to directly contact the Adjudicator for he comes to them, but the vast majority of the time they don't have any desire to make contact. No one can say whether the Adjudicator is an angel or monster, but either way, he certainly serves as a tangible reminder of the dark and mysterious side of the Nocturnes, and the dark and secretive origins from which they came.

Nocturnes in the Astral Plane

The Nocturnes are aware of the activities of the fanatical wing of the Lightbringers, who are organizing an all-out assault on the vampire and Wampyr races, though they are not quite aware of the seriousness of the operation. They do not realize that the Lightbringers are close to bringing their apocalyptic plan to fruition, nor do they realize how many people have rallied to the cause. For now, the Nocturnes content themselves with operations to disrupt the planning of the operation on a small scale wherever they can, although if their intelligence continues to be accurate and the full scope of the operation comes to light, the Nocturnes are likely to take it into their own hands to stop it, even if it means their own destruction. To the few outside observers in the know, it seems inevitable that the Nocturnes and Lightbringers clash, and some scholars among the Seekers believe that the situation has already reached the boiling point, and there's nothing that can be done to prevent it. They only pray that it can somehow be contained.

The Nocturnes, while they trust the Lightbringers less than most, don't necessarily consider anyone their outright enemies except Vampire Intelligences, and the Nightlords. Any and all allies, they believe, are essential in the war to repel the darkness from the Earth. To that end, they are quite willing to bury the hatchet and fight side by side with the Lightbringers to crush the Nightlords. They are not nearly as fanatical as the Lightbringers, nor do they see the world as black and white. Some Nocturne cells have gone so far as to attempt to establish friendly relations with the Lightbringers, but without success.

Other than disrupting the activities of the Lightbringer fanatics, the Nocturnes have three major points of interest in the *Astral Plane*.

1. The Astral Plane is a wonderful source of information, lore, and study, and many of the folios, notes and tomes hidden away in Nocturne libraries come from exploration, experiences, and information gathered in (or via) the Astral Plane. The Nocturnes also make active use of safe houses within the Astral Plane – places that are only accessible through the use of a password, and many of these passwords are Cell specific, meaning the hideaway is accessible only to the members of one, specific Nocturne Cell. Within these safe houses, Nocturnes exchange information freely, and help each other out in any way they can.

2. Nocturnes actively hunt and destroy *Astral Vampire Specters*. Despite popular belief, and no matter what their true origin, Earthbound vampires and Wampyrs do not consider Vampire Spectres to be kindred, and harbor some secret, deep-seated animosity for the creatures. Most *Wampyrs* are of the opinion that Vampire Specters of the Astral Plane are an evil plague to be wiped out; remember, Wampyrs don't like vampires, and Astral ones are just as bad as the undead who walk the Earth as far as they are concerned. Many *Nightbane* and *humans* in the faction tend to view Astral Vampires as minions of and direct links to the Dark which and deserve to be killed for that alone. It also doesn't hurt that their active policy of destroying Vampire Specters helps to keep the Lightbringers off balance and confused, since in most Guardians' eyes, a vampire is a vampire is a vampire, and they don't understand why Wampyrs and vampires and Vampire Specters all insist on murdering each other. Then again, as far as the Guardians are concerned, all undead are just crazed animals whose actions seldom make complete sense to them.

3. The Astral Plane is a way point, a means to travel almost anywhere in the Megaverse. If they can unlock the secrets of reliable travel in the Astral Plane, it would serve as a perfect staging ground for assaults on the Nightlands, the power base of the Ba'al. Thanks to powerful Astral Mages and Astral Lords as well as the occasional Mirrormage who belong to the faction, the Nocturnes have managed to establish a few stable, small-scale portals into the Nightlands, but these aren't nearly on the scale they hope to achieve. The Void seems to be the best place to establish portals to the Nightlands, but travel in and through the Void is perilous at best, and only the mysterious crews of the Void Ships *seem* immune to its draining effects. To this end, the Nocturnes seek to find and contact these crews to question them about their ships, to perhaps design their own technologies or magic for traveling through the Void without hindrance. Most of the leaders in the faction are of the opinion that the strange race that pilots the Void Ships are not Guardians at all, but a separate people with its own agendas. Thus, if they could ally themselves with them and make themselves useful, perhaps they could gain access to a resource no one else yet possesses. Thus far, all attempts to contact, capture, or question the Void Pilots have been completely unsuccessful, although a great deal of observational data and rumor has been collected for the Nocturne libraries.

The Coming Storm

Currently, there is peace between the Lightbringers and the Nocturnes, but it is an uneasy peace at best. Whenever members of the two factions meet, there is a heavy tension in the air. A tension that hints of a coming storm, and if something isn't done, it threatens to destroy not only the Nocturne and Guardian factions involved, but everything they have worked so hard to build, with and quite a bit of collateral damage to those around them. An all-out war between the Lightbringers and the Nocturnes, even a war fought in the shadows, would draw lines through all of the factions, devastate lives, and probably deal the movement to stop the Nightlords irreparable damage. Leaders of the Nocturnes, at least, realize this and have gone to considerable lengths to reduce the growing tensions.

The Lightbringers, on the other hand, are a faction that seems to be disintegrating from within. Corruption and fanatical interpretation of the principles they hold dear threaten to degrade the very foundations of all that they are. More and more Guardians have been going "rogue" lately, acting independent of the faction out of dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs. In response, the Lightbringers have become more militant, lending some to view them as almost Gestapo-like in operation. In addi-

tion, the fanatical sect of Guardians that is gearing up for the all-out assault on the vampires of Earth and the Vampire Specters of the Astral Plane threates to expose the Lightbringers faction to the world at large and make them an easier target for the Nightlords. This has caused a great many Guardians to go off on their own or to prepare for abandoning ship and going into hiding until they can rebuild from the ashes. A few have even made offhanded contact with the Nocturnes, seeing something of a common goal between the two organizations that the leaders of the Lightbringers' organization can't.

Certainly the Lightbringers and Nocturnes have far more in common than they have differences, and it is sad that the two cannot form an alliance. For the most part, the Nocturnes are as dedicated to the destruction of Vampire Intelligences as the Lightbringers, and both organizations hate the Vampire Specters. *Together,* they could certainly be a force to be reckoned with, and a combination of their resources could make them a serious threat to the Nightlords. However, the perceived differences between the two keep them far apart. The cunning Nightlords are well aware of this and try to play on those differences whenever possible to keep them apart. Nightlord undercover agents infiltrate both factions, planting the seeds of distrust and undermining both groups whenever possible. Ironically, unyielding positions and outlooks of the fanatical members of the Lightbringers make them, as a group, much more susceptible to the Nightlords' manipulation and poisoned tongues. As a result, tensions between the two factions, and tempers within the Lightbringers themselves are tearing the group apart and threatening an ill-conceived war between the factions, one that will be launched by the Guardians, but instigated by the Nightlords. For the Nightlords, it is an ideal situation, for if all goes well, two of their most hated enemies, the Lightbringers and Nocturnes, will destroy each other, and even if both should survive, they will be greatly diminished in both power and influence.

For the moment, the two factions remain at peace, but for how long?

The Lightbringers

Agent Silverman shivered as he looked at the unearthly creature sitting calmly in the chair in front of him. He never thought he'd find himself face to face with a real, honest-to-goodness supernatural or alien creature. Not even joining up with the A.D.A. had convinced him of that. But here it was, a Guardian. A real Guardian, and a chance to get some answers.

"Okay," he said. "Let's try this again."

The Guardian blinked, but remained expressionless and still. Its patience was unnerving.

"Where are you from?"

"East 53rd Street."

"That's not what I mean, and you know it."

Silverman could've sworn he caught the twinge of a smile as the Guardian spoke again. "We are from the Earth, and beyond, if that is what you wish to know. We are from . . . out there. And in here," the Guardian tapped its chest. "We have flown the mists of Astral Space, and seen places you cannot imagine."

"No more riddles! As cliché as this may sound, we do have ways to make you talk."

Now the Guardian gave a full and genuine smile. "Yes, but you won't."

"I won't, huh?"

"No, Agent Silverman. You won't. You're not an evil man, and you don't approve of torture. I can see it in your soul."

Silverman was getting frustrated, now. "Okay, let's get down to brass tacks, shall we? Are you and your people a threat to us? Basically, what I'm asking is, 'whose side are you really on?'"

"Well, that all depends, doesn't it?"

"Depends on what?"

"On whether or not you make us your enemies."

Few factions in the days after Dark Day are as mysterious or enigmatic as the Lightbringers. Led by the alien-like Guardians, this faction seemingly appears at random, assisting those in dire need and often vanishing when their aid is no longer required. The mystique surrounding the Lightbringers has led to much speculation and consternation regarding the faction and its leaders among other soldiers in the secret war with the Ba'al. No



one seems to know what motivate the faction or what their true purpose and goals are. For now, they *appear* to be on the "right side," that is to say, humankind's side, but many (the Nocturnes and American Defense Agency/A.D.A., in particular) feel that such overt self-righteousness must lead to bad things in the end. And the question that is on everyone's mind is, "What happens when the Nightlords are defeated?"

All the Guardians have to say is that they are driven to stamp out evil in all its forms. Most people look to them as saviors. After all, they wield power over light, and how could that be a bad thing, especially in a battle against the Nightlords? The problem is the average person tends to assume light is good and dark is evil, which is not always the case. However, philosophical representations present these two forces as in conflict with one another, rather than in balance. Indeed, the evil power behind the Ba'al is known as the Dark. Should it not stand to reason that this evil must somewhere have an opposite? And if this evil is the Dark, must there not be a Light to oppose it? Why not the Lightbringing Guardians?

The Lightbringers' Organization

As far as factions in the war against the Ba'al go, the Lightbringers are (on the surface, at least) perhaps the least cohesive of the bunch, save perhaps the Shadowleague. There appear to be few to no organized cells of Lightbringer operatives, and there isn't any known way for representatives of the faction to recognize one another. Yet, somehow, when two Lightbringers meet, it always seems to be for a purpose, and they always seem to know one another. Indeed, it is painfully obvious to any who witness or participate in a Lightbringer operation that the Guardians are in firm control of the organization. Actual Guardians are always deferred to as leaders in the chain of command, and even a Guardian who is not initially involved with the mission is looked at as a guide, advisor and/or commander should he join the operation. This can sometimes cause problems, because while the vast majority of Guardians are members of the Lightbringer faction, there are some rogues who operate independently, or work for other factions. Such rogues can effectively derail any Lightbringer operation, for while the Lightbringers always seem to be prepared for any eventuality and seem to know exactly which agents are in the area at a given time, there is always the "what if?" factor that can allow rogue Guardians to take advantage of a situation or usurp command. As a result, the Lightbringers actively seek out Guardians who ally themselves with other factions so that they may lead these lost sheep back into their flock. More than one bloody conflict, however, has erupted between rival factions led by a Guardian.

Despite their aloof behavior and apparent lack of true cohesion, the Lightbringer faction seems to have its hands into everything, having many important contacts in high-up places (there are even rumors of Lightbringer sleeper agents planted in high levels of government agencies, a source of much frustration to the A.D.A.). In fact, it is believed that Guardians are masters of espionage, and that if one needs to get in somewhere but doesn't have the key, the Lightbringers can help . . . if you can convince them. The Guardians' proficiency at such "black bag" operations makes some outsiders more suspicious of these so-called "Champions of Light," for how is it that these "good guys" are so skilled at espionage and break-ins? They are also excellent organizers, strategists and tacticians who work well with other members of their faction.

Guardian operatives are constantly on the prowl and are frequently assigned to work with members of a faction they have never met or worked with before (and with whom they may well never work again). Consequently, Lightbringers are highly adaptable. Supposedly this random pairing is to keep contact and knowledge about the organization to a minimum, and making a Guardian give up his secrets is almost impossible.

Despite their secretive natures, Guardians are surprisingly social, and friendships and personal connections with fellow Guardians have proven to be an anchor that helps to keep them from becoming too distant and alien. That having been said, Guardians just don't trust or socialize much with Nightbane or humans even if they are members of the Lightbringer faction. Consequently, while 1-3 Guardians may lead a group of humans or others, Guardians themselves prefer to work in pairs or groups of three. Of course, there are Guardians who prefer to operate on their own and lead solitary lives. These loners also tend to be among the fanatical rogues who share the extreme and cold-hearted views of the world, vampires, Nocturnes, and the Guardian battle against the Dark.

The loose, informal organization of the Lightbringers allows its members (human and Guardian) to associate with other factions, provided that the interests of these other factions do not clash with the Lightbringers' own interests. The most common alliances among Lightbringers tend to be with the Underground Railroad (U.R.) and the Resistance. Lightbringers who associate themselves with other factions often do so solely as double-agents, to gather information and keep tabs on rival and troublesome factions. In all cases of dual alliance, however, the Lightbringer agent is expected to place the interests of their own faction above any personal interests or the interests of any third party faction they may be affiliated with. In addition, it is expected that the agent's association with the Lightbringers be kept strictly confidential.

Every city has certain c*ontact points* where any member of the Lightbringers can get in touch with their superiors by leaving behind a personalized code. Personalized codes are always innocuous, and can be anything from a matchbook with a number written on it, to an origami frog, to an encrypted computer message. Each code represents an individual agent. Any given member of the faction knows of two contact points, but no more. If any contact point should be ratted out/compromised, or deemed insecure, that point is immediately discontinued and a new one established. Discontinued contact points are constantly patrolled by Guardians, however, and are often used to mislead any enemy attempts to infiltrate the Lightbringers. If a Lightbringer agent is captured and interrogated, he or she is permitted and even encouraged to give up contact points that are no longer active. Enemies who attempt to use such a place to their advantage usually don't walk out alive.

Once an operative leaves his personal code at a contact point, all he needs to do is leave the area, and wait. Usually, it takes a few hours for the faction leaders in a particular city to deem a code valid, but in cases of emergency (usually indicated in the code), this process can be expedited to as little as fifteen to

twenty minutes. Upon verification of the agent's code and purpose, a Guardian representative of the local faction will visit the agent and conduct whatever business needs to be addressed. Such meetings are never conducted in a public place, and are often set up via someone slipping the agent a note informing him of the meeting place. It is also not unheard of for such a note to simply appear in the agent's hands, or next to him, wherever is appropriate. Alternately, if the place the agent has gone to wait for contact is deemed safe and secure, the Guardian may simply show up there. No agent questions these practices, mostly because questioning a Guardian doesn't get one very far. In the case of new assignments, a similar contact process is done, though a visitation from a Guardian superior may simply occur unannounced. The Lightbringers operate on a "need to know" basis, and agents are expected to follow instructions without questions.

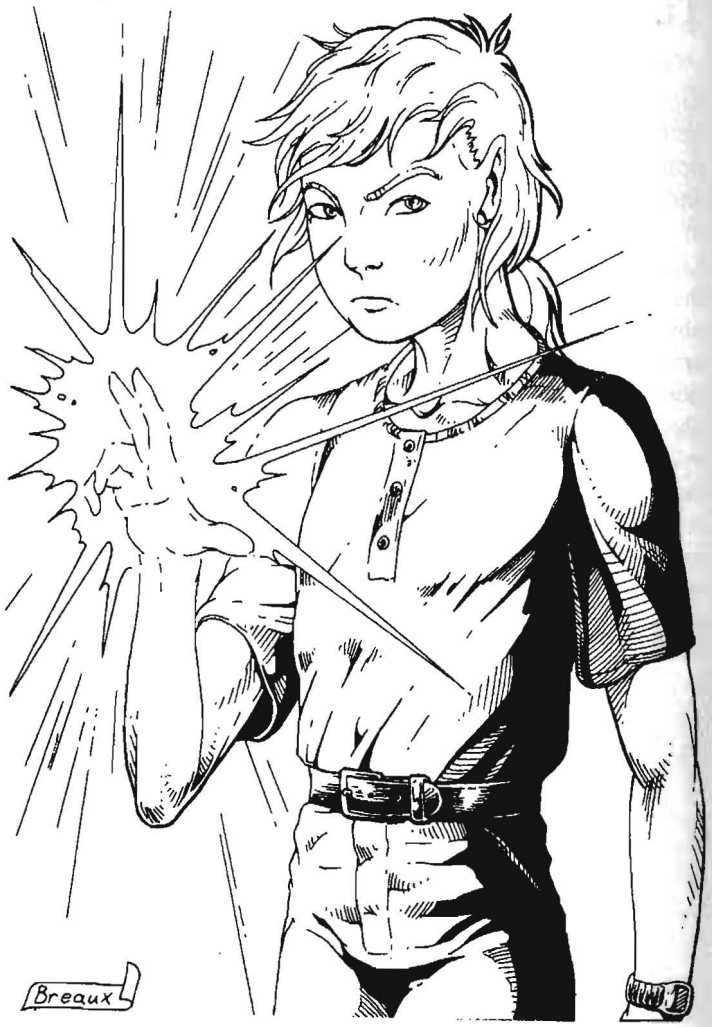
Contacting the Lightbringers

As a rule, outsiders don't contact the Lightbringers, the Guardians contact *you*. There is very much a "Big Brother" aspect about the group and a prevailing sense that the Guardians are "always watching." This has led to the belief that if anyone needs to talk to a Guardian, they can make contact by simply asking around for one. While such inquiries, especially if loud and persistent, *might* get the Lightbringers' attention, it is a crude and unwelcome method of contact. Unless the Guardians deem the matter worth investigating or the individual important enough to "shut up," such inquiries are likely to be ignored. If a Lightbringer does show up, he is almost certain to be perturbed, annoyed and angry, and probably a human or Nightbane operative rather than a Guardian (though a Guardian and/or other Lightbringers may be watching nearby in anticipation of a trap or other foul play). More often than not, contact is made only to issue an aggressive warning that if the individual keeps drawing unnecessary attention to himself and to the faction, he will meet a most unpleasant end. Only a quick and impassioned explanation for the dangerous behavior will keep the Lightbringer's attention or have any chance of winning his assistance or the help of the group. Otherwise, the inquiring person is left to his own devices.

Lightbringers are far more likely to listen to those who try to preserve their secrecy than those whose actions compromise it, consequently, discreet inquiry in the *right crowd* (Nightbane, Nocturnes, and others known to be at war against the Ba'al) is a much better approach and should put the word out through the proper channels. If the Lightbringers feel they are needed or that the individual could be useful or make a good ally or recruit, they will initiate contact, but on their own terms, when and where they deem it to be most fitting.

Another way to initiate contact is to quietly hang out at places where Guardians are known to associate, and again make a few discreet and polite inquiries. Homeless communities, shelters, soup kitchens and places where the downtrodden and social misfits (particularly Nightbane or other non-humans) congregate are some of the places where Guardians hide or go to help. Guardians are drawn like moths to a flame to places where hope is all but forgotten and despair is at its worst, for it is at such places where the *light* of hope is needed most. These are also places and people (the dregs of society) in which the Nightlords have little interest. The Guardians' presence at these lowly places only helps to reaffirm their reputation as a positive force for good and an enemy of the Dark. Why else would they come to these places and walk among the sick, poor, homeless, insane, desperate and lost, if not to bring clarity, purpose and hope, and sometimes even joy? By staking out these places, one can eventually find a Guardian or human or Nightbane member of the Lightbringers. The trick then is introducing oneself without causing a row or confrontation, and then getting the Lightbringer to listen. It is best to remember that for most Guardians, such places are viewed as special, even sacred, places, so barging in on them there is akin to a stranger walking into one's home uninvited and demanding their help.

All this having been said, the Lightbringers *are* keenly aware of their environment and the goings on with the Nightlords and other forces of darkness. Thus, the actions of new "heroes" in town engaging in battles against the forces of darkness *will*, sooner or later, attract their attention which might lead them to make contact or intervene on the heroes' behalf should they ever need help.



Lightbringer Leadership

No one seems to know who or what is the true head of the Lightbringers. Among the Guardians there are seldom-spoken legends of a vast and powerful entity referred to as the Light, which is the ancient and eternal enemy of the Dark. The Light, the legends say, has been at war with the Dark since the begin-

ning of time and will remain at war with the Dark until the end of days. Neither force can ever truly win, but the Guardians are charged with the task of fighting to maintain the balance and, when possible, to gain the upper hand, which has been recently upset in the days since Dark Day. No Guardian, however, can claim to have ever had personal contact with this force, nor has personal knowledge of the Light outside of ancient stories passed down from generation to generation. Even these stories must be considered unreliable, given the amnesia that seems to afflict Guardians when it comes to what they refer to as the *Time Before*, the days before they awoke as Guardians. If there is an entity that is the epitome of light and purity, then certainly it *might* head an organization such as the Lightbringers.

It is more likely that the Light serves as an inspiration rather than as a direct and decisive leader. One of the popular rumors is that the Lightbringers are led by a triumvirate of ancient Guardians who manage the many branches of the faction in the eternal battle against the Dark. These three mythical characters are known as **Simon, Guardian of Souls; Daena, Guardian of Secrets**, and **Alexius, Guardian of Minds**. Nobody knows exactly who these three are, or exactly what their titles mean, but they are often invoked by Guardians and Lightbringers in times of frustration, turmoil, anger, and fear, much the same way as mortals call upon their gods in dark times. To Guardians having doubts about their chosen path, it is advised they look to Simon. To those in danger of revealing too much, they are warned of Daena's wrath. Those Guardians who tend towards the intellectual end of the spectrum or find themselves puzzled look to Alexius.

Another legend whispers that the head of the Lightbringers faction is, in fact, the first Guardian, a mysterious and mythic figure named **Enoch**, who arose from the ashes of a destroyed city to do battle against the Children of the Night, and that it was from Enoch that all other Guardians came.

Finally, there is a growing myth that the Guardians are indeed connected to the mysterious *Void Ships* whose crews resemble Guardians. These Void Ships (suspected of being the origin of UFO sightings, alien abduction stories, and even ancient myths of skyborne chariots) are said to be crewed by agents of the Light who choose those on Earth that possess the potential within them to serve the Light. They then take these men and women into their vessels, where they are implanted with the mystical "seed" that allows their transformation to Guardian when the time is right. Human proponents of the claim point to the (alleged) fact that many people who claim to have been "abducted by aliens" later mysteriously disappear, only to have a young Guardian "haunt" the same areas where the victim once lived soon after. In addition, both the numbers of abductions and the numbers of newborn Guardians have spiked since Dark Day. Significant or just coincidence? The Guardians seem unwilling to speculate very far, possibly for fear of angering the strange crews of the Void Ships, or perhaps because they honestly don't know themselves and have far more important things to worry about.

No Guardian seems willing to discount any of the theories, and some maintain that all are true to some degree or another, but then Guardians often speak in riddles (when they speak to outsiders at all). Whether or not any or all of the theories have any truth to them is probably irrelevant, as the faction operates fine as it is and the mystery only enhances the Guardians reputation. It is the *cell leaders* who have the most obvious and direct impact on the members of the faction and the never-ending war against the Nightlords and vampires. These "Overseers" guide and run the Lightbringer groups on a city-to-city basis, with each major city having an Overseer who functions as the regional leader and is, presumably, in contact with the ultimate leadership, whoever he or they may be.

Overseers command all aspects of their local Lightbringers faction and their word is absolute. All Lightbringers in a given city will know the name of their Overseer, and will have probably met him or her on more than a few occasions. Lightbringers who visit a new city will inevitably meet that city's Overseer to present their business soon after arriving. This Overseer will approve the business of the visiting Lightbringers and caution them about local trouble spots and enemy activity. Depending on the individual Overseer, however, visiting agents may find themselves saddled with local members of the faction whose job it is to "baby sit" and ensure that the visitors don't endanger or interfere with the local faction's operations in the city. Lightbringers who disobey the Overseer of a particular city can find themselves labeled outcasts, hunted, or "Fallen." For non-Guardian agents, this is similar to *excommunication* from a cult. Lightbringers they meet in the future will treat them with antipathy or even outright hostility. Many who "fall" down this path find a home within the Resistance or even the Nocturnes. For Fallen Guardians, however, things get much more difficult.

The Fallen are members of the faction who deliberately and blatantly defy or refuse to obey orders. This may be the result of moral differences or personal conflict, but the result is always the same, being labeled as an untrustworthy outcast and traitor, and immediate expulsion from the faction. Contact points once used by the outcast are immediately deactivated and all fellow members of the Lightbringer faction are expected to turn their backs upon the expelled one completely. The Fallen Lightbringer becomes a pariah among his peers and loses all privileges, benefits and access to the faction once conferred to him. This can be a devastating blow, especially for those unjustly accused or who tried to follow a higher morality. *Non-Guardians* are likely to be able to find many other factions to join, if they choose to do so, but for some, living after having their life's path stripped from them is a difficult step for them. This and the fact that most (perhaps all) former comrades-in-arms usually treat the excommunicated agent with disdain or as an enemy, drives many outcasts to seek out the *Nocturnes*, who are never on good terms with the Lightbringers. Others are driven by shame and sorrow to commit suicide, and a few turn to the Dark. Still others become *independent* agents with their own agenda or start their own small group of misfits. This is especially true of outcast Guardians and Nightbane.

For *Guardians* who are expelled from the flock, there are often dire consequences. Guardians who are cast out of the Lightbringers are usually looked upon with hatred as traitors by the majority of their kin, and can never expect help or even a kind word from their former brethren. These Guardians are regarded with the same disgust and loathing as vampires, and are sometimes destroyed rather than expelled. Worse, when a Guardian truly turns from the Light to embrace the Dark, they become bent on destroying all who embrace the Light and may

join one of the faction's (and humankind's) enemies to extract a terrible revenge. This is true even of Fallen Guardians who lose their powers of light. Their powers usually begin to fade within a week of expulsion from the faction, as the base P.P.E. of the Guardian drains away at a rate of 1D20 per day. Lost P.P.E. points cannot be regained by normal means and once the Fallen Guardian's base P.P.E. reaches zero, he loses all special abilities and powers, *permanently*. Strangely, this doesn't happen with all expelled Guardians, only those who truly turn to the ways of wickedness and the Dark – alignment drops to Miscreant or Diabolic evil.

Some of these pitiful creatures seek to regain their power through an appeal to evil forces. The Dark, of course, welcomes such perversions of what the Guardians were, and is quite willing to grant new powers to these new advocates of evil. Thankfully, truly wicked Fallen Guardians are a tiny minority, for they can become the epitome of evil and corruption. In the eyes of good Guardians, these Fallen ones are worse even than the Ba'al or vampires, and Guardians will go out of their way, and do everything in their power, to destroy evil Fallen brethren.

Initiation and Membership

Pete was exhilarated. He'd never felt so alive, so worthwhile. His long, metal fingernails, which resembled straight razors, had cut through the skeletal creatures like a ginsu through a beer can. But he couldn't have done it alone. The alien-like creatures with the blond hair had helped. He straightened his red tie, smoothed down his plain, brown suit, and ran his hands over his slick chrome scales, then turned to them to offer his gratitude.

They didn't give him the chance. "Feels good, doesn't it?" said one.

"What feels good?"

"Destroying these Hounds," the second chimed in. "You know why, Pete?"

"How did you know my name?"

"We're gonna tell you why," the first one picked up. "It's because it's your calling, boy."

"I know. Somehow, I've always known. But how did you know?"

"It's our calling, too, stopping these evil beings," said the second. "And we're going to teach you the best way to do it. You were meant for this. Trust us, Chrome, we just know. Just like you know this is your destiny."

"This is my destiny," Pete whispered, as though trying the words on for size. He turned, and looked at the radiant creatures dead on.

"Who are you?"

"Us? We're Guardians. We represent a group known as the Lightbringers. Your new best friends."

Initiation into the Guardians is surprisingly straightforward. Most members of the organization claim to have received a "mystic calling" from a tiny inner voice that has whispered to them all their lives and compelled them to recognize evil and wrongdoing and put them right. Many don't realize just how significant that voice is until, one day, a few members of the Lightbringers show up on their doorstep and claim to have been "sent."

Most members of the Lightbringers don't go looking to join the faction but are themselves chosen, approached by the Guardians and asked to join. Most do so immediately, intuitively knowing this is their destiny. Prospective recruits are free to refuse the Lightbringers' offer, and if they do, they are usually left with an open invitation to come back whenever they feel the "calling" to do so. Guardians leave them in peace with the message that when they're ready, "we'll be watching." Mistakes have been known to happen, though, and usually prove disastrous to a few members of the faction. The loose-knit organization of the group, however, tends to keep damage to a minimum.

There are those Nightbane, humans, and Athanatos who attempt to seek out this "faction of ultimate good," but quite often those who are too self-righteous and arrogant are rejected out of hand or never manage to find the faction. Those petitioners who are accepted must first go through rigorous initiation tests to prove their worth.

As mentioned earlier, operations in the Lightbringers are "fast and loose," providing its members a great amount of freedom, flexibility and independence. There are only a few stringent rules all Lightbringers must observe. First, all Guardians are to be shown respect and loyalty as leaders and the elite members of the faction. It is a Guardian's prerogative to issue orders and missions to faction members at any time, and even to call off or change missions in the middle of an operation. The only way a Guardian's judgment can be questioned or countermanded is by an older Guardian. This also means that missions assigned by Elder Guardians take precedence over orders issued by younger ones.

Second, the interests of the Lightbringer faction are to be placed above and beyond the interests of any other faction, friend, family member or personal needs. Loyalty to the Lightbringers must be *absolute* and this has given rise to cult-like devotion and fanaticism within the faction. Those Lightbringer agents who associate with outsiders and members of other factions are expected to sever or ignore those ties at a moment's notice and without explanation upon order by a Guardian or superior within the ranks of the Lightbringers. Again, the needs of the Lightbringers supercede all other relationships.

Third, life is supreme and individual Lightbringers are not to sacrifice their lives foolishly. While sacrifice for the faction and the cause are expected from time to time, the Guardians encourage their followers to seek survival even if it is under duress. As along as one lives, they teach, one always has options. Dead is dead. The end. No options, no hope. To that end, the faction provides the means for its agents to "give up" safe houses and contact points with minimal damage to the faction overall, but captured agents are expected to make it look good. No amount of information should be given up too easily, lest the enemy discover the ruse. As such, captured agents are expected to be able to endure some amount of interrogation and even torture in the name of the cause before giving themselves up. There are, unfortunately, a growing number of Lightbringers (a sort of "faction within a faction") that believe that it would be worth the utter destruction of the Lightbringer faction, the Guardians, and

all of their allies are if they could wipe out the Dark and the evil it represents. These super fanatics are extremely militant, borderline suicidal and are causing a bit of a division within the Lightbringer ranks with their rancor and extreme measures.

Fourth, and arguably most important to the Lightbringers, all its members must embrace the ideal that *vampires are the greatest enemy above all others*. If a Lightbringer is engaged with a pack of Hounds and spots a few vampires in the distance, he is expected to immediately break off combat to destroy the undead. The only good vampire is a staked and beheaded vampire, and the only crime punishable by execution among the Lightbringers is failing to crush vampires whenever they are found. The faction leaders understand that success is not always possible when it comes to destroying undead, nor do they expect their Lightbringers to charge in against odds they cannot possibly defeat (again, this is where information and planning come into play), but they are, ultimately, to do everything in their power to eradicate the vampire plague from the face of the Earth. Guardians have been engaged in a tireless feud with vampires throughout the ages, and as far as they are concerned, vampires are a greater threat and abomination than the Ba'al. When it comes to Wampyrs, however, the Lightbringers have not yet made up their mind. They are aberrations but a relatively new development and aren't full vampires. For the moment, Wampyrs are never to be trusted or befriended, and a Lightbringer is expected to use extreme caution whenever dealing with one.

Membership in the Lightbringers carries some important advantages. Perhaps the single most important of them is the availability of information and resources. While the Lightbringers operate on a "need to know" basis, a member of the organization who can demonstrate a legitimate need to know can often get information regarding any subject he might need or want. Besides this, the Lightbringers have enough agents in high places that they can often get into areas of the city and buildings closed or off limits to the average person. For example, a member of the Lightbringers may need access to a certain book held in a private collection, completely closed to the public. Upon demonstration of the necessity of it, the Lightbringer may be given access to the article, provided it doesn't leave the facility. They also know many secrets, including information about the world of the supernatural, Dark Day, the Nightbane, the Nightlords and their subtle invasion of Earth, secret conspiracies, vampires, other factions, magic, psionics and a host of other things the average citizen knows nothing about and would find terrifying or beyond belief. This makes them part of an elite underground engaged in a secret war with the Dark on several fronts. The amount of knowledge, resources, and contacts vary for each individual Lightbringer and from city to city. As a rule, Lightbringers who have proven themselves (higher level) have far more access to rare and forbidden knowledge than do new recruits, the unproven and those who are not trusted. In addition, some cities see the Lightbringers more "hooked up" than others. (This leaves room for G.M.s to control the resources for their specific game. If a player needs a resource or information that the G.M. doesn't feel it's appropriate to give, by all means have that resource not available. Be careful, though, not to restrict *too* much information from the characters, or the players may find themselves losing one of the most fun aspects of playing a Lightbringer. Likewise, G.M.s can easily use this "power of knowledge" to inspire new adventures as well as provide clues and insight to current ones.)

Another advantage to playing a Lightbringer character is the lack of angst that goes with it. Lightbringers, while living a relatively lonely existence, fight with the certainty that they serve a higher cause and a greater good. A sense of true purpose goes a long way in the world of Nightbane, and this sense of purpose can give many Lightbringer characters reserves of strength and inspiration few other factions can offer. Due to this sense of purpose, the faction also has a strong support network, and a Lightbringer who goes through a "crisis of faith," so to speak, can often find guidance and support simply by talking to other members of the faction. Lightbringers are never too busy to help one another, and often go out of their way to do so. Membership in the Lightbringers means a lifelong commitment to fighting evil, but on the side of goodness and with friends and allies to share the load.

Lightbringers in the Astral Plane

The Guardians and the Lightbringers are an active force in the Astral Plane, for here they can wage a continual war without the debilitating need for sunlight that cripples them in places like the Nightlands. In addition, the Astral Plane is a realm easily accessible to Guardians, and it is from here that they often stage raids on Ba'al strongholds within the Nightlands. The Lightbringers also set up "safe houses"within the Astral Plane, small Astral Domains often resembling chapels, libraries, inns, or quiet sanctums of study where members can go to hide from whatever forces pursue them. The only catch to utilizing one of these safe houses is that the keeper of the place will demand an explanation, and mystic defenses set up within the place can usually inform the host if a visitor is lying, withholding information, or hiding something.

One has a greater likelihood of encountering a Guardian in the Astral Plane than on Earth, for in Astral space, creatures of magic and the supernatural do not need to hide themselves and may move about openly and freely. Many Guardians who operate within the Astral Plane fill the mold of "hero" in the truest sense of the word; they are open, bold, forthright, and full of their own ability and goodness. Many Guardians in the Astral Plane are, in a word, cocky.

Here, beyond the bounds of the physical world, the Guardians battle the Children of the Night (vampires) with a vengeance. One of the primary functions of the Lightbringer faction within the Astral Plane is to hunt and kill the horrific entities known as *Vampire Specters*, or Astral Vampires. Vicious and violent conflicts between Guardians and Astral Vampires take place regularly. Fallen Guardians can survive and thrive in the Astral Plane just as normal Guardians can, and join the enemies of light to destroy their brethren. On occasion, when a Guardian destroys a vampire on the material plane, he and his cohorts are sent to the Astral Plane to seek out the creature's Astral form, for the Guardians believe the stories that whisper of destroyed vampires risen on the Astral Plane as something even more horrific. Recently, one of the most organized and concerted efforts by the Lightbringers has been to find the legendary and infamous *Abode* (see **Between the Shadows**, page 70), the supposed home and haven of Vampire Specters. Only the most

capable, dedicated, and fanatical Lightbringers are recruited for this bold operation, but rumors have it that as soon as the location of the Abode is confirmed, a major offensive will begin. The Astral Vampires, they say, are the source of the Vampire Intelligences' power on Earth, and if they can be wiped out in the Astral Plane, the Intelligences' tie to Earth will be severed, and all of the Vampires in the material world will disappear with it. No one, of course, knows whether or not any of this is true, but the rumors are persistent, and one thing is certain: a showdown between the Lightbringers and the undead is imminent.

Many Guardians who have lived in the Astral Plane for centuries feel that such an offensive is suicidal at best, and that even if the Lightbringers should win the battle, they are certain to be wiped out along with the vampires. Indeed, if the Astral Vampires come under such heavy assault, what would stop their Earthbound cousins from undertaking a massive blood-hunt against the Guardians on Earth? Chaos would ensue and the existence of Guardians and vampires, and perhaps the Nightbane, Nightlords, and other supernatural creatures would inevitably be revealed to the world at large. Mankind would rally against all of these horrors, and the Nightlords would not hesitate to subjugate humankind by force. Worse, should they be forced into the open, the Nightlords have far more power at their disposal than the many resistance factions, and the Nightbane and their allies could not hope to prevail.

Others feel that the destruction of the Guardian race is not a concern, so long as when they go, they take the vampires with them. This attitude of "righteous suicide" is spreading like a weed throughout the Lightbringers. There are whispers that if such folly continues, the mythical Enoch, the first Guardian, will rise to put his children in their place. If this happens, they say, it could lead to the death of the old generation and starting anew. The fanatics supporting all-out war, on the other hand, believe that Enoch would support their efforts and that if he reappears to once again walk among his brethren, it will be to battle the forces of Lilitia and wipe Vampirism from existence, once and for all. This division has turned violent on several occasions, with rogue cells of Lightbringers who do not support open warfare engaging in skirmishes with the fanatics who ache for combat. For the most part, such skirmishes have been confined to the Astral Plane, though some are starting to spill over on Earth.

A *third* division of the Lightbringers within the Astral Plane does not approve of the operations of either of the other two. This is the group of Guardians (or Guardian-like beings) who are the masters of the mysterious *Void Ships.*

The Void Ships

There are literally thousands of stories, accounts, and rumors regarding these mysterious vessels of light, and all have some common threads that run through them. Even before Dark Day, before most people on Earth saw for themselves evidence that there was more out there than just humanity, the tales were numerous enough to make people wonder. A light streaks across the sky, too fast to be any Earthborn aircraft, and possessing no visible means of propulsion. Suddenly, it stops, hanging in mid-air for a few seconds before jetting off in a different direction. It makes a 90-degree turn without changing its pace, then, as suddenly as it appeared, it's gone.

The weary eyewitness of the sighting sits in stunned awe for a little while before discovering that the ten minute experience has somehow taken *four hours,* and he has no recollection of the lost time.

Elsewhere, a man awakens in the middle of the night to a blinding white light that floods his bedroom. The light fades, then dies, and he lies, wondering what just happened. Suddenly, a loud *BANG* from downstairs jars him out of bed. He leaps up, rummages through his closet for his ever-faithful baseball bat. He creeps out into the hall. Another noise causes him to jump. He catches his breath and takes those first tentative steps down the staircase. Every creak of the floorboards sends a shiver up his spine. At the bottom of the stairs, the noises continue, a shuffling sound like a child dragging his feet as he walks. The clatter of something knocked over, and more shuffling.

They're in the living room.

He turns the corner and a cry escapes his lips before he can stop himself. Seven creatures, with gleaming white skin and huge, dark eyes, occupy the living room. A few are bald; others sport manes of luminous silver or blond hair. They see him. He wants nothing more than to run, run back to his room and hide under the blankets. But he can't move. He's paralyzed. They move towards him . . .

He awakens in his bed, covered in a cold sweat. Sunlight shines in through the window. It must have been a dream. Only a dream. Or was it?

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The Void Ships seem to appear out of nowhere, and once upon a time sightings of them were so rare that they were almost universally dismissed as myth or swamp gas. In ancient times, when a Guardian or Lightbringer cell was in dire need, such ships would sometimes appear, apparently from thin air, as glowing discs shooting across the skies at impossible speeds, performing aerial feats impossible by anything known on Earth. The ships, in a way, were a secret cavalry of sorts for the Lightbringers, a cavalry that none in the faction could consciously call upon, but that seemed to know when a situation called for their intervention.

Some believe the Void Ships gave rise to accounts of UFO sightings, as well as ancient gods like Hermes and Apollo, who flew across the sky in blazes of glory. If this is true, it may be that the Guardians are solely responsible for many of the old government shadow agencies that eventually gave rise to the American Defense Agency, for it was from the ashes of things like Project Blue Book in the 1950's and the research at Groom Lake that the *Spook Squad* came into being. It may even be with good reason that the Spook Squad investigates these strange occurrences, for the stories regarding "alien abduction" are numerous enough to warrant them. So are reports of "UFO sightings."

In the years since Dark Day, sightings of the mysterious Void Ships (i.e., flying saucers) on Earth have become more and more common, and abduction scenarios persist, though not in greater numbers. This could be good news, since they do not seem any more intent upon capturing and experimenting on humans, but are appearing for the sake of delivering aid and assistance to those battling supernatural forces. This could also, however, be

bad news if the vessels are mobilizing for some sort of offensive. What if the Nightlord invasion was the last straw, and the beings controlling the Void Ships intend to overthrow the Ba'al and establish their own reign on Earth? The Spook Squad has formed special committees exclusively dedicated to the study of these sightings, and the offshoot of the Pandora Project commonly referred to as "Blue Book 2K," or simply "Blue 2," has launched with a vengeance.

The Guardians aren't worried about Blue 2. The Guardians are worried about the Void Ships. Many fear that somewhere, the Lightbringers overstepped a line, and the Void Ships are the enforcers come to punish them or take over. Recent stories have been circulating lately that when splinter groups within the Lightbringers clash in combat, a Void Ship appears and destroys them both. Most Guardians fear the Void Ships very much, and if any within the faction know the truth behind these vehicles, none are talking. Still, there are reports of Guardians vanishing with increasing frequency, and some of the elders are suspiciously silent about the topic. Could the Void Ships be responsible?

Void Ship Capabilities

Whatever they really are, the Void Ships seem to defy all known laws of physics and technology. Some reports have them as being totally silent, others as emitting a low and constant humming. They can hover, make ninety-degree turns without ever changing or reducing speed, and perform feats of aerial acrobatics that no man-made aircraft can duplicate. They sometimes emit a strange electromagnetic field that utterly disables all electronic devices within a 500 yard radius (457 m) until the Void Ship leaves the area. This makes it impossible for conventional vehicles to approach the ship. Missiles fired at Void Ships malfunction, their guidance systems and engines conking out, as do their warheads, before they reach the vessel and fall harmlessly to the ground. Strangely, this E-M field doesn't always seem to be active, leading some scholars to hypothesize that either the technology is not possessed by all Void Ships, or more likely, that it is a sort of weapon that can only be used on a limited basis. Some sort of strange energy field also tends to deflect weapon fire such as Vulcan cannons or standard jet fighter machine-guns as well. Magic and Psionics may work on Void Ships; however, few mages or psychics are powerful enough to inflict any real damage to them.

Some say that the ships can break the sound (and even the light) barrier without so much as a click, let alone a sonic boom. Some sort of high-tech sound dampening device, maybe? Or perhaps the ships possess some sort of dimensional teleportation device that enables them to jump short or long distances so quickly that it appears they travel at impossible speeds. There are rumors of individuals vanishing from plain sight when Void Ships are in the vicinity, too. Some scientists have theorized that this is due to some sort of matter/anti-matter teleportation device, but practitioners of magic seem certain that it is the utilization of teleportation and dimensional magic.

There are also rumors of strange and terrible Void Ship weapons that can emit laser beams or nuclear flames (or both). These weapons, say those who claim to have borne witness to them, can tear through buildings like tissue paper and make entire battleships explode in a mushroom cloud of *green flame,* but leave no radioactive fallout behind. Others disagree, claiming that the radiation from the ships themselves causes terrible mutations and injury.

Even certain visual descriptions of the ships vary from account to account. Both gold and red-glowing vessels have been sighted, for example. Shapes range from disc to cigar-shaped, to triangular. Even sizes of ships reported vary, from ships roughly the size of regular single-engine propeller aircraft to vessels that could easily be a mile (1.6 m) in diameter. This has led some to speculate that there are more than one type of Void Ship, and that there could be a fleet of different types. The A.D.A. has commissioned *Blue Book 2K*, a "special operations" division of the Pandora Project, to look into the necessity of mobilizing *against* a possible alien invasion. Now would be a good time, since world governments are off-balance and the Nightlords are engaged in a constant struggle with resistance forces.

The Truth? Many of the reports about Void Ships are true, but very few other than the mysterious beings who crew the ships know the truth about them. For example, what of the mysterious "Guardian-like" beings who pilot these vessels? It's true they resemble the Guardians very much, but most reports of these creatures describe them as completely hairless and wearing what appear to be uniforms of a sort (plain silvery jumpsuits, apparently featureless but quite functional). Those looking at the creatures face on for the first time find it impossible to tell one from another. As for the Guardians, if they know anything, they are as tight-lipped as ever about them. Most of the younger Guardians know nothing whatsoever about the vessels, and many older ones *claim* to know nothing. Even elder Guardians who seem to have some idea about the Void Ships refuse to speak about them.

Void Ships, say those who have been taken inside, are not merely high-tech machines like jet aircraft, but are actually *alive*. Living creatures in symbiosis with their pilots. Crews of Void Ships reputedly place themselves in alcoves within the vessel and enter what appears to be a meditative trance state, their consciousness connected as one. In this fashion, the collective minds of the Void Ship's crew can exercise a control over their ships that no human being can match. By enabling the crew to control the ship by thought, the vessel responds with lightning speed. Weapons target and fire in the blink of an eye. Weapons, some claim, that are powered by the potential psychic energy (P.P.E.) of the crew – the ultimate union of minds and bodies with the vessel itself, crew powering the ship, the vessel nourishing its crew in a never-ending cycle of pure symbiosis. This, too, some say, is the purpose of the silvery jumpsuits. That the jumpsuits are made of a material that functions like cellular membranes, allowing the crew to "attach" and "connect" themselves to the living ship. Perhaps the crew are Guardians after all, and their lack of any sort of hair, odd coloring, and strange features also have something to do with the strain of the symbiosis.

If they could be persuaded to join the battle against the Ba'al, the Void Ships would certainly be a formidable enough presence to help turn the tables. But the crews, for their own mysterious reasons, are biding their time. They are not enemies of humankind, say those who have walked among them for a brief time, but neither are they happy with us.

Encountering Void Ships

There is no way to predict when or where one may encounter a Void Ship. Certainly they are most common in the Astral Plane, especially around the outskirts of Tophet. Elsewhere in the Astral Plane, one may catch fleeting glimpses of the vessels streaking through the silvery clouds of the Astral Plane, engaged in their own goals and secret motives.

On Earth, sightings have become more common since Dark Day. Common enough that most people accept their existence as fact, though no one knows what they want, why they've come or how to make contact with them. Nay sayers insist they don't really exist, but those who have seen them know otherwise. As a rule, those who see a Void Ship do so for one of three reasons: 1) The individual needs help dealing with the supernatural and the Void Ship arrives like the cavalry to lend a hand before vanishing; 2) has been deemed "worthy" of contact (limited contact in which a message or warning or clue might be given); or 3) has been targeted for abduction and strange experimentation for purposes unknown.

For now, suffice it to say that the Void Ships remain an enigma for all parties, from the Guardians and Nightbane to the Nightlords and others. They are a thorn in the Lightbringers' side in more ways than one, and yet, to the careful observer, it seems the crews of the Void Ships may be related to the Guardians or, at least, fight on the same side. (And for the same end?)

The Pandora Project

General Stevens gazed intently at the strategy board in front of him. The entire state was mapped out there, with the locations of known faction bases, Nightlord power bases, the homes of several known minions of the invaders, and plans for various missions that would further the cause of the American Defense Agency. All around him, dedicated men and women bustled about, communicating with units around the country, coordinating operations, gathering intelligence. They had certainly built up an impressive operation, here.

Perhaps most impressive were the group of young men in the corner. They sat, each with his own laptop computer, hacking into the most classified of Preserver Party files. But they never once touched the keyboards. Psychic Hackers were one of the most useful and innovative of all the Pandora Project's breakthroughs. Still, he feared the day when they might decide they didn't need the Company anymore and broke loose to strike out on their own. As with many a creation, there was always the potential for disaster and misuse. One had to judge the benefits against the possible problems, and deal with the consequences if and when they occurred. All in all, the program had worked far better than anticipated. The problems and losses all under acceptable levels.

The General's reverie was interrupted when a young Lieutenant burst in the room and ran up. The young woman almost forgot to salute, but to her credit, she managed to pull herself together and remember protocol.

"General," she said. "We have a problem."

"What is it, Lieutenant Gouirand?"

"It's Taylor, Javelle, and Murphy, sir. They're gone."

"Mmm. I was afraid that might happen. They're Psi-Leeches. That makes them tough to contain. I let the research team keep them alive for further study against my better judgment." General Stevens took a deep breath and sighed. "Well, Lieutenant, it would seem that decision has turned around to bite me on the backside, wouldn't it?"

The Lieutenant managed a smile. "Aye, sir. Looks that way. What are your orders, General?"

"You know what to do. Find them before they kill too many people."

"Aye, sir." The Lieutenant saluted and left.

"Find them, Lieutenant," the General said to no one in particular. "Before they give MK-ULTRA II, and all of us, away."

The basics of the **Pandora Project** were covered in **Nightbane® Sourcebook One: Between the Shadows™**, but there's more to it. Far more.

The Pandora Project is a special section of the American Defense Agency (A.D.A.) dedicated to paranormal research and to the development of government psychic researchers and field agents. Operatives who can gather information regarding the supernatural and effectively combat both normal and paranormal enemies. In the years since Dark Day, the A.D.A. (often referred to by its agents as "The Company") has made astounding strides in the creation and development of psychic agents. The discoveries these agents have made have led the A.D.A. to form entirely new branches of research and defense. Given that the Nightlords appear to be from a different planet (extra-dimensional or not) and given the increased number of Void Ship sightings, the *Spook Squad* has created **Blue Book 2K**, a subdivision of the Pandora Project dedicated to the recovery, research, and development of alien technologies. The leaders have used their resources and contacts to delve deeply into United States history, uncovering startling revelations regarding formerly classified subjects such as the Roswell crash of the 1940's, and of various alien abduction scenarios over the decades. The pre-Preserver Party government, it seems, had collected more data under the auspices of *Project Blue Book* than anybody ever suspected. Experiments had been done as early as World War I regarding the development of psychic agents, cloaking fields, and other highly advanced and questionable technologies. Then, sometime in the seventies, Project Blue Book was simply shut down. The only reason cited was "lack of funds." In the nineties, President George Bush re-opened Blue Book, but only very briefly, and again the project crashed and burned for unclear reasons.

When the Ba'al invaded during Dark Day, the takeover was swift and absolute, and those officials who managed to go un-

derground to form the American Defense Agency (A.D.A.) barely managed to maintain the resources to survive as an organization. Many powerful and important military installations such as NORAD were lost to the invasion, as was much of the classified information regarding operations at such places. For years the Spook Squad utilized talented computer hackers to attempt to recover this information, as well as data about any current projects going on at many top-secret military bases around the country. Approximately one year ago, a team of hotshot whiz kids (quite literally; the oldest member of the team was 17) managed to finally crack the Preserver Party's files and gained access to the information they had so hungrily sought since the day when the sun didn't come up. Now operations are under way to reclaim some of these secrets and lost technology in the hopes that the A.D.A. can at last free the world from the grip of the supernatural menaces that have secretly usurped the world governments.

In addition, utilizing records and data from past experiments, the A.D.A. has managed to break new ground in psychic research, developing agents who can apply and focus their psychic powers in new and unusual ways. Such agents can disrupt supernatural energies, move undetected through the tightest of security or the most crowded of rooms, shape and control the raw stuff of psychic energy, and even mentally link with computers, becoming one with the entire Internet! Project Blue Book 2K has become a force of crack operatives, assassins, and infiltrators that have placed the potential for immense power in the hands of the Spook Squad. Suddenly, the title "Pandora Project" seems to have taken on a whole new meaning (and life of its own), for the abilities and people that the Spook Squad have unleashed upon the world have the potential to bring unprecedented amounts of harm upon mankind even as they work to save humanity. If the A.D.A. should ever defeat the Nightlords, they may very well use the power in their hands to subjugate and control the very people they now fight to save.

The Pandora Project, in the eyes of many other factions, is pure hypocrisy, since these psychic operatives are, in many ways, just as dangerous as the creatures the Spook Squad considers to be enemy invaders. Then again, the A.D.A. is made up of men and women who have never been folk of high principle, but people who see themselves as pragmatists and righteous patriots. They do what they have decided must be done, whatever the cost to human civilization and without much consideration for the future.

The A.D.A. initiative has not been without its costs. Some of the psychics who have undergone enhancement and training have been irrevocably turned into monsters or mindless vegetables – and more than anyone would like to admit have escaped into the world. The worst of the lot include Psi-Leeches, psychic vampires who feed on the mental energies of others to sustain their own ravenous hunger and powers. Some of these Psi-Leeches have turned to organizations such as the Nocturnes for help, trying to bring their psychotic urges under control, but others embrace their bestial natures and hunt human prey in the shadows of the city streets. The A.D.A. officially denies responsibility for these creatures, but seems to go out of its way to track down and eradicate Psi-Leeches and other "mistakes."

MK-ULTRA II

Among the stolen cold war data the A.D.A. unearthed a vast amount of information on the Roswell U.F.O. crash of 1948, and on U.F.O. research conducted through the fifties. This information, combined with the research notes of the original MK-ULTRA, helped to form **Blue Book 2K**.

The first records the A.D.A.'s hackers managed to access were certain classified files dated to the World War II era. These files were considered so obsolete that security had become rather lax, which made them easy targets for the Spook Squad's first conquests. The records obtained contained information about operations such as the *Philadelphia Experiment*, in which an attempt to create a "cloaking device" for naval vessels resulted in the teleportation of the entire ship. It was abandoned because the teleportation caused insanity in some of the men and actually fused 20% into the hull of the ship upon re-materializing. The A.D.A. briefly dabbled with small teleportation and cloaking experiments, but quickly realized they didn't have the time, resources or technology at their fingertips to develop such a project. The plan hasn't been completely abandoned, rather it is considered to be "on the back burner."

The A.D.A. has since turned its sights towards classified records regarding the MK-ULTRA project, an early peek into developing psychic agents for the CIA. MK-ULTRA was a moderate success in the early cold war days, but was shut down in the late 1960's. A similar project, called Star Gate, was established in the 1980's but quickly closed down to avoid public scandal. The original project concentrated on the creation of agents with specific psychic powers and utilized chemical substances to stimulate the mind and open up the "third eye." It met with as many failures as successes.

The A.D.A. picked up where these other projects left off and has succeeded in producing dozens of fully awakened psychic agents. In addition, part of MK-ULTRA dealt with the *programming* of subjects through post-hypnotic means, and A.D.A. scientists have incorporated those elements into their own as well. It has helped the Pandora Project produce *Psychotrol*, an experimental psychotropic drug designed to awaken and enhance latent psychic powers in human beings. Tests on lab animals produced uncontrolled psychic responses such as Telekinesis, Bio-Kinesis, Phasing, even Psychic Dampening and Psychic Vampirism. Human beings, they felt, would be able to control the new found abilities much more effectively, especially with proper orientation and training. Thus, **MK-ULTRA II** was officially born in mid-2004, and relegated as a sub-section of Blue Book 2K. All programs relating to paranormal activity, including the *Paranormal Activities Bureau (P.A.B.)*, were placed under the direct control of the **Pandora Project**, which now served as the main branch of the Company dedicated to the discovery, cataloguing, and use of all things both paranormal and alien. The P.A.B. still maintains a degree of autonomy, but functions primarily as the field investigation arm of the Pandora Project.

The first experiments were disastrous, but with time and scores of volunteers sacrificing their sanity, the Pandora Project has successfully created a few dozen "psychic agents."

The process works as follows. An appropriate subject is brought into the treatment room and strapped securely to a table.

An amount of Psychotrol, determined by how deeply buried the latent psychic power is, and by the subject's psychological history and will power, is injected into the subject's brain stem. The Psychotrol redirects massive amounts of serotonin to the psychic center of the frontal lobe. As stimulation of the lobe begins, the patient is forced into a waking dream state through the inhibition of serotonin to the brain stem. Pupils fluctuate wildly, and the subject enters a REM state, though his eyes remain open and his brain alert. This procedure is disconcerting to behold, and many scientists have withdrawn from the program on this basis alone. Once the REM cycle begins, the subject hallucinates wildly and uncontrollably, entering a bizarre fantasy state where it is impossible to distinguish reality from fantasy. Subjects drool, babble, scream, tear at their bindings, and generally react to whatever their dream state is, as though it is real. The subjects are allowed to remain in this state for several hours in order to break down their mental barriers and welcome a new awareness. At this point, a hypno-therapist enters the scene.

First, the therapist listens intently to the ramblings of the patient, making notes and trying to discern the general direction the fantasy is taking. The therapist may softly ask a few questions, but is careful not to influence the subject and continues to make notes. When the hypno-therapist has determined the direction of the fantasy, he can then begin to guide the process of *awakening* the psychic power within. The type of fantasy the subject enters is often a good indicator of the type of innate psychic abilities he possesses or what type of psychic discipline the individual is best suited for. For example, a person who fantasizes that they are on the run and hiding from a group of pursuers, and then attempts to take out the pursuers one by one, may be geared towards the psychic shadow focus. The hypno-therapist then "inserts" himself into the dream state of the subject, usually as a disembodied but helpful voice. In this manner, he can implant suggestions in the mind of the subject, guiding the direction of the fantasy until the time is right to realize the psychic power. The entire time, a team of scientists monitors the responses of the serotonin-enhanced psychic synapses. As the therapist guides the course of the fantasy, synapses theoretically fire more and more rapidly in response to the growing intensity of the dream events. Finally, the scenario and the synapses both reach a sort of "critical mass" stage where resolution of the dream conflict or death must occur. At this point, the room is evacuated to prevent unnecessary harm to the psyche-team, and the therapist speaks through a microphone from an adjacent room. He tells the subject he is special, powerful, and that is time to release that inner power. For many subjects, the voice making the suggestions is the voice of a ghost, spirit guide, inner-self, an angel or even God, himself. Whatever the perception, it evokes a spectacular, and usually an uncontrolled, psychic response. The therapist continues to guide the scenario, encouraging the use of the special powers, painting the proper picture in the mind of the subject so that the use of the psychic energy resolves the crisis and empowers the subject at the same time.

In the end, the test subject lapses into unconsciousness but awakens with his psychic powers intact. At first, the newborn psychic spends the next week or two going through similar, daily sessions in which the character learns to release their psychic powers. In a fairly short time, suggestion and fantasy simulations are no longer necessary, and the psychic can trigger a psychic response at will. Unfortunately, by the time psychic powers are fully developed, the individual's psyche is a scrambled mess. Most exhibit increased aggression and/or varying degrees of paranoia and even psychotic delusions with a frightening inability to tell reality from fantasy. This damage is fixed (actually patched and molded) to varying degrees of success, via marathon sessions of hypnosis used to reprogram the subject's shattered mind. Piece by piece, like invisible building blocks, the subject's personality is rebuilt, and in the process, the Company restructures the mind to mold what they think is the perfect soldier. Sadly, this means little of the original personality and old memories are restored. Rather, the Company works to eliminate emotional ties and sentimentality, molding them to have an almost childlike need for approval from the Company, including a powerful sense of loyalty and obedience to the A.D.A. and its causes. The restructured minds are immune to fear and pain, but also nearly devoid of any sense of true individuality, the past, compassion and even love. All replaced by an unshakeable loyalty to the company, an obsessive compulsion to win (often at all costs) and an unswerving commitment to the A.D.A.'s goals and its protection. For the rebuilt A.D.A. psychics, the Company is their life. The end result is a highly effective and utterly devoted agent with deadly psychic power at his disposal.

This type of complete personality reassignment is not always entirely effective, however, and there are aberrations who not only remember their past lives, but hold on to elements of their former personalities and emotions. The most dangerous never fully recover from the trauma of the initial fantasy that instills them with power, and exhibit aggressive and anti-social behavioral traits. It is these two small groups of exceptions and outright failures that often go AWOL from the Company and find their way into the outside world where they either fight evil or join it. Additionally, the Pandora Project's psychic birthing process usually results in long-term memory loss, and virtually none of the volunteer test subjects can remember any pertinent details about the procedure that made them what they are.

Project failures are those with severe psychological disorders ranging from non-functional phobias to all-out homicidal mania and those who exhibit behavior and powers not expected. They include what the Company has termed *Psi-Leeches*, wildly insane men and women who have deadly powers, but become almost feral in nature and are cursed with an overwhelming need to feed upon Potential Psychic Energy (P.P.E.). Psi-Leeches seem to have no energy reserves of their own to power their psychic abilities, and though thoroughly deranged, many are frighteningly intelligent and calculating, and manage to escape the grip of the A.D.A. Special extermination squads of psychics and highly trained solders have been formed for the express purpose of hunting down rogue psychic agents in general, and Psi-Leeches specifically. These squads always shoot first and ask questions later, for once an agent leaves the Company, that agent is considered tainted and damaged goods. Contact with outside influences tends to cause emotions to resurface, and individual identity to return on a confusing, nightmarish level, making these disturbed individuals all the more crazy.

Ironically, if not handled with care, Project Pandora could be the A.D.A.'s undoing, for these artificially induced psychics are

like ticking time bombs that could go off at any time and inflict terrible collateral damage to everyone caught in their fallout. The American Defense Agency still actively employs "natural" psychic agents, but the vast majority are the creation of the Pandora Project. For now, the truth about the methods employed by MK-ULTRA II is a closely guarded secret. Human Psychic Enhancement operatives are valued members of the Spook Squad and embraced by most field agents happy to have their own superhuman teammates at their side.



Black Ops

Quinn squinted into the darkness from the relative safety of the branches high up in an oak tree. He didn't like this, not one bit. But the Company ordered, and it wasn't his place to mouth off. He glanced down and to his left, where Becky crouched in the bushes, waiting for his signal.

With barely a whisper, Kevin, a product of the Pandora Project, floated down from the rooftop of the building.

"We can do this," he said. "I can wreak havoc with their security systems. We'll be in and out, fast as lightning."

"You sure about this?" Quinn asked.

Kevin grinned. "No. When am I ever sure? Move it out, soldier."

Quinn sighed, and nodded to Becky, who grinned ear to ear and took off like a shot in the dark toward the research facility. Whatever the Ba'al were developing in there, it had better be worth the price Quinn was sure they were about to pay.

"Well," he muttered to himself. "What are you waiting for, Quinn? Do you want to live forever?"

He leapt from the tree and followed his teammates, silent as a cat on the prowl.

The American Defense Agency's scientific research has led the Company to believe the *Preserver Party* continues to develop new weapons and technology at various and sundry military bases around the world. They have also come to believe there are counterparts to the Preserver Party in control of puppet governments all over the world and the A.D.A. War Room feel some sort of global initiative must be coordinated to throw the invaders off balance, and stop their continued conquest of the planet, if any small victory is to be won. At this time, however, the A.D.A. does not have the resources or manpower to coordinate or enact such a grand scheme. For this reason they have turned their attention to grabbing certain key facilities such as Groom Lake, also known as Area 51, that have yet to fall completely into the enemy's hands. In an underground bunker hidden within Hangar 18, for example, is a vast warehouse and research facility filled with advanced prototype weaponry and technology. To date, the American Defense Agency does not believe that the Ba'al have discovered the location of the Hangar 18 facility, but this does not change the fact that N.S.B. forces patrol the area regularly, and are far more murderous than the United States military could ever be. That the facility has remained hidden from the Nightlords and their minions for six years since Dark Day is a testament to the effectiveness of the Spook Squad's leaders, many of whom worked Black Ops for the U.S. government for decades before the invasion. To this end, the Company has been training crack teams of psychic agents with the intent of slipping them into these (still) secret bases to recover lost research records and bits of experimental technology that would allow the A.D.A. to begin their own grand scheme to overthrow the Ba'al.

The original Blue Book served dual purposes: It was dedicated to researching the paranormal, and at the same time to covering up evidence of the same wherever it occurred. The new Blue Book 2K is far more hands-on. It is dedicated to developing, and utilizing to its fullest potential the new technologies and human enhancement techniques it comes across, for the sole

purpose of furthering the American Defense Agency's own goals to save the planet from supernatural invaders. Soldiers in the employ of Blue Book 2K go through rigorous de-personalization programs to create cold, calculating men and women completely dedicated to the program. Defectors exist, but they are exceedingly rare. More often than not, those psychics who flee the Spook Squad's ranks do so before any de-personalization takes place, or find themselves "orphaned" and hunted by the Company as expendable loose ends. The Spook Squad does not mount rescue missions, and expects all members of a black ops team to be willing to die in the line of duty. Unfortunately, no amount of de-personalization can overcome the basic human need for survival, and some soldiers find themselves in the unenviable position of running from the only home they've ever known, but still subject to all of the harsh training and conditioning implanted in their genetically enhanced brains.

However, planned missions such as *Operation: Groom Lake* are only the most grandiose of their plans. The America Defense Agency has successfully mounted assassination attempts on many puppet leaders of local and, in a few cases, state governments, thereby hampering the Nightlords' ability to maintain control in such areas. Already the Company has managed to firmly entrench their own agents within the governments of cities throughout New York, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia. The A.D.A. is currently focusing on the states surrounding the Washington, D.C. area in hopes of eventually gaining enough of a power base to move on the federal government. To date they have not succeeded in completely liberating a city from the control of the Nightlords, but the War Room feels that it is only a matter of time. Bigger and better strikes against the enemy lie down the road, and it is only a matter of time before, one by one, the Nightlords lose their grip on the towns, cities, states, and countries of the world. However, the A.D.A. wisely bides its time. There is no value in tipping their hand too soon and losing everything they have worked for. No, they will continue to build their power base, plot and move into place, striking only when they know they can win and build for the future. Unlike many other factions who have been thrown unwillingly or unprepared into a conflict they never asked for, the American Defense Agency is doing what it does best, and making excellent progress. Future plans include not only further assassination missions, but replacement of some key officials by moles and "sleeper" agents loyal to the Company, as well as a few planned assaults against major Nightlord power bases. Some psychic agents are currently in the process of training for Nightlands-specific operations as the A.D.A. plans to strengthen their operations on Earth by attempting to undermine the power of the Nightlords in their homeland. Furthermore, the other factions are quite useful to the A.D.A.'s strategies against the enemy, using them as fodder to probe and test the enemy's strengths and weaknesses, or as diversions and so on. While the A.D.A. does not trust or openly support such organizations, the Company has no problems filtering funds and helpful information to them through untraceable means.

More on the Spook Squad, their various sections and branches, and their operations can be found in **Nightbane® Sourcebooks 1 and 2: Between the Shadows** and the **Nightlands.**

Pandora Project Psychic P.C.C.s

The following characters are psychics created by the Pandora Project and/or recruited by MK-ULTRA-II. Each one has a specific area of mental focus, and thus they don't have the flexibility of some of the other psychic character classes; however, each is formidable in its own right and usually "designed" with specific missions and purposes in mind. Each should be regarded as a Master Psychic who need only to roll a 10 or higher to save vs psionic attack.

A quick note about psychic powers: Master Psionics, as well as a host of other new abilities, are described in **Nightbane® Book One: Between the Shadows.** All MK-ULTRA II Psychic abilities should be kept as *special* and *exclusive* to each specific P.C.C. described in this section. If the G.M. *elects* to make some or all of them (excluding illusion powers) available to other psychic P.C.C.s, they should only be available as *Master Psychic* abilities, cost twice the I.S.P. listed under the P.C.C., and performed at half the duration and range.

The Psi-Illusionist

A later development in the Human Psychic Enhancement (H.P.E.) program, these men and women become so enraptured in the dream state that they actually gain the ability to control and project fantasy elements onto other people. In a very real sense, the ability of the Psi-Illusionist is much like lucid dreaming, but interactive and experienced by more than a single dreamer. These agents possess a unique power that appears to be a bizarre combination of Telepathy, Empathy, and Bio-Manipulation, enabling the Psi-Illusionists to implant sensory information into the minds of their victims to cause them to see, hear, touch, smell, taste, and experience everything in the illusion. These agents have been incredibly successful in espionage missions, interrogation, and assassination. The implications of controlling the sensory input into the human mind are limitless, and these characters are quite powerful in that respect.

Illusionists themselves tend to be disquieting men and women who prefer to keep their faces cloaked or veiled. When they speak, they speak in whispers that somehow always seem to carry a threat. They are rather arrogant and often overestimate their own abilities, and while they aren't braggarts, they are bullies and rather disconnected from the real world. Human emotions are known to them, but in an almost clinical manner to be dissected, understood and manipulated to get the information they seek or to inflict confusion or harm on the enemy. Far too many Illusionists see themselves as supermen and use their power with impunity.

Psi-Illusionist P.C.C. Abilities & Bonuses

1. **Psionic Abilities:** At first level, Psi-Illusionists gain the following abilities: Telepathy, Empathy, Mind Block, Bio-Manipulation, See Aura, See the Invisible, plus one power from the Sensitive category, or one from the following powers in

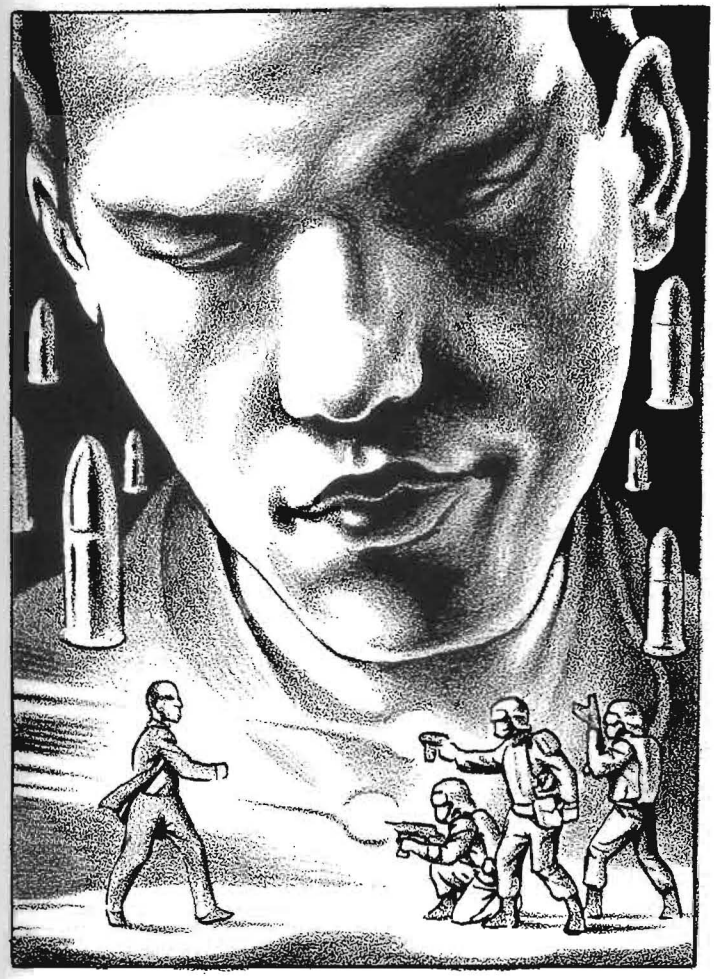
the Master category: Block Breaker, Group Mind Block, Mind Block Auto-Defense, Mind Bond, Mind Wipe, Psychic Mirage. At levels 6, 12, and 15, the illusionist may choose one additional power from those available above.

2. **I.S.P.** 2D6x10, plus M.E. attribute number. Add 2D6 points per each additional level of experience.
3. **P.C.C. Bonuses:** +3 to save vs psionic attacks and all forms of mind control, +3 on Perception rolls, +3 to save vs Horror Factor, in addition to skill and attribute bonuses.
4. **Illusionist Powers:** The Psi-Illusionist gains additional and greater power over illusions as he grows in experience. At earlier levels, the psychic can affect only one person per illusion (or must expend additional I.S.P. to affect multiple individuals), but as the character grows in experience, he may affect several individuals. As the duration of a power elapses, the psychic *may* expend more I.S.P. to extend said duration; expenditure of additional I.S.P. is the same as though the psychic had re-used the power (full cost). **Saving Throw:** Standard save vs psionics (M.E. bonuses apply). *Range* on all powers is line of sight.

These powers are gained by level and are as follows:

Level One: Simple Sound. The Psi-Illusionist can create simple sounds, such as incoherent mumbling, a scream, a banging sound, indiscernible whispers, etc. I.S.P. Cost: 2 per sound per target. Duration: One melee round per level of experience.

Spectral Image: The Illusionist can create ghostly and insubstantial images, which can be of any shape but generally lack specific discernable features. For example, a human spectral image would be a ghostlike form that generally mimics a human body, with all features placed properly, but none specific enough to describe. Images created using this power are always translucent as well, so one viewing a human shape created via *Spectral Imaging* will see the details of the door or wall behind the ghost image, etc. I.S.P. Cost: 4 per ghost image, per person targeted to see it. Duration: One minute. Size of Illusion: 6 feet (1.8 m), plus one foot (0.3 m) per level of experience.



Level Two: Advanced Sound: The illusionist at this stage can create specific, discernable sounds such as a conversation with multiple voices, specific words, a gunshot, a door slamming, etc. I.S.P. Cost: Six points per sound, per target. This power also may be used to alter one's own voice, granting an effective Imitate Voices skill of 75% unless the target makes a successful save vs psionics. Duration: One melee round.

Visual Image: The illusionist can create detailed images such as specific, describable people, solid-looking furniture, doors where none exist, etc. These images can NOT be combined with sound yet. Attempting to use the simple or advanced sound powers in conjunction with, say, a human image speaking, comes off looking like a badly dubbed foreign film. This power *may,* however, be used to alter one's own appearance, granting an effective Disguise skill of 98% to imitate general persons (standard penalties for imitating specific features) unless the victim/target makes a successful save vs psionics. I.S.P. Cost: 8 per target. Duration: One minute. Size of Illusion: Six feet (1.8 m) plus one foot (0.3 m) per every *two* levels of experience.

Level Three: Smell: The character can create phantom odors of any sort. These odors seem to have no source and simply "waft in" from nowhere. I.S.P. Cost: 2 per target. Duration: 1 minute.

Taste: As with smell, above, but creates phantom tastes in the mouths of the victims. I.S.P. Cost: Two per target. Duration: One melee round.

Level Four: Sound and Image Combo: Using this power, the illusionist can create combined illusions that use both sound and visual cues. At this level, the illusionist can create an image of a talking human being, barking dog, slamming door, firing gun, etc. I.S.P. Cost: 10, plus cost of sounds and images created.

Level Five: Four Senses: At this level, the psychic can create illusions that combine up to four of the five senses, all in one and in any combination of the four, with the exclusion of touch. I.S.P. Cost: 20, plus cost of other abilities used to create the illusion.

Touch: The illusionist can create phantom physical sensations using this ability. Common uses include prickly feeling on the back of one's neck, walking through a "cold spot" in a hallway, etc. This power cannot be used in conjunction with any other powers. I.S.P. Cost: 5 per target. Duration: One minute.

Level Six: All Five Senses: At this level of experience, the Psi-Illusionist can combine all five senses into a coherent illusion. I.S.P. Cost: 30, plus full cost of abilities used to create the illusion. Note that this ability only needs to be used when

all five senses are included in an illusion. At this level, the psychic also gains the ability to use touch in combination with up to any three other senses as part of the level five ability "Four Senses."

Level Seven: Mass Hypnosis: The Illusionist at this level gains the spectacular ability to affect the minds of entire *groups* of people with his illusions! The number of people affected is five at level seven, plus one for each additional level of experience. Note that the Psi-Illusionist does not have to affect the maximum number he is able to; he can limit the mass hypnosis to as few as two people. I.S.P. Cost: 40, plus cost of illusion as though it affected a single target.

Level Eight: Multiple Images with Sound: At this level of experience, the psychic learns such a great degree of control over phantom sounds that he can apply sound to multiple images at a whim! Cost of using sounds with multiple images is as though only a single advanced sound were created. Extra I.S.P. is still expended for multiple targets, or as per the Mass Hypnosis power.

Level Nine: Multiple Images with Sound and Smell: As per the level eight power, but now the psychic may include odors as well, by paying the costs of sound and smell only once.

Level Ten: Multiple Images with Sound, Odor, and Taste: As above, but the character must also pay the cost of the "Four Senses" power.

Level Eleven: Multiple Images with all five senses: As above, but the character must also pay the cost of "All Five Senses."

Level Twelve: Psychic Theater: At this level of experience, the psychic can create an entire landscape to place his victims within. The size of this landscape is a radius of twenty feet (6.1 m) at level twelve, plus 10 feet (3 m) per level of experience. The illusionist can create any type of landscape he desires, including plants, furniture and weather, and incorporate all five senses into the theater, but may not introduce physical characters. I.S.P. Cost: 100. Duration: Up to one hour.

Level Thirteen: The Players: Using this ability, the psychic can now create animals and characters for the Psychic Theater. Animals and characters created using this power are as detailed as any other illusions the character wishes to create, and are indeed created using standard applications of the psychic's other illusory powers. I.S.P. Cost: 75, plus the full cost of the illusory character. Duration: Up to one hour.

Level Fourteen: Mind Over Matter: At this level, the psychic has reached an intuitive understanding that reality is subjective and is all a matter of perception. Because of this understanding, he can endeavor to "disbelieve" in things that are really there. Unless his victims make a successful save of 18 or higher (standard M.E. bonuses apply) the psychic can seemingly affect reality in such ways as to seemingly be able to walk through walls, disappear, disintegrate bullets fired at him, make cars weightless to toss them around like bowling balls, etc. Note that this ability only works on *inanimate* objects that are part of the real world. Real animals and people currently within the area of the illusion cannot be affected by the use of this power because they will speak and do as they will. However, an illusionary character can be made to seemingly do anything and real people (tucked away somewhere) can be imitated with devastating realism. I.S.P. Cost: 150 per use. Duration: Up to one hour.

Level Fifteen: It Is Real: Potential victims are -5 to save vs illusion and will be convinced what they are experiencing is completely real. I.S.P. Cost: 150 per 5 pounds (2.25 kg) of weight created, and created items have appropriate S.D.C. as though they were real. Duration: Up to one hour.

Alignment: Any, but leans toward Unprincipled, Anarchist, and Aberrant.

Attribute Requirements: M.E. of 12 or higher.

P.C.C. Skills:

Native Language and Literacy (98%)

Basic Math (+20%)

Computer Operations (+10%)

Lore: Two of choice (+20%).

Radio: Basic (+15%)

Pilot (Choose either Automobile or Motorcycle; +15%).

One W.P. of choice.

Hand to Hand: Basic. It can be changed to Hand to Hand: Expert at the cost of one "P.C.C. Related Skill,"or Martial Arts at the cost of two.

P.C.C. Related Skills: Select seven other skills from the list below. Plus, select one additional skill at levels 3, 6, 9, and 12.

Communications: Any (+5%).

Domestic: Any.

Electrical: Basic Electronics only.

Espionage: Any (+5%).

Mechanical: Basic and Auto Mechanics only.

Medical: First Aid only (+5%).

Military: Any.

Physical: Any.

Pilot: Any (+5%).

Pilot Related: Any.

Rogue: Any (+10%).

Science: Any.

Technical: Any (+10%).

W.P.: Any.

Wilderness: Any.

Secondary Skills: The character also gets to select four Secondary Skills from the list above. These are additional areas of knowledge that to not get the benefit of the bonus listed in parentheses. All Secondary Skills start out at the base skill level. Select an additional Secondary Skill at levels 5, 9, and 12.

Standard Equipment: Access to a vehicle, a cell phone and scrambler, laptop computer, flashlight, weapon of choice (limited to standard melee weapons, revolvers, and automatic pistols), and a Kevlar vest (A.R. 12, 70 S.D.C.). Additional weapons and equipment are assigned as needed.

Money: MK-ULTRA-II psychics have few funds of their own. Base money is 100 bucks plus 3D6x10 dollars. The Spook Squad pays a stipend of 1D4x1000 dollars a month. Generally lives in a bunker or "safe house" with other squad mates.



Psi-Shadow P.C.C.

Perhaps one of the two most coveted types of psychic generated by MK-ULTRA II are the Psi-Shadows. These men and women are the elite spies, infiltrators, and assassins of the organization. Their prowess lies in the art of non-detection. They glide to their objective, strike hard, and fade away without a trace. Half-jokingly called "psychic ninja," these agents are in many ways a throwback to the legendary *shadow warriors* of ancient Japan. They rely almost solely on their body and mind to accomplish their duties, and at mid- to high-levels, rarely even carry weapons and require very little equipment. Such things, they feel, simply get in the way.

All costs, powers, duration, and descriptions below are specifically related to the functionality of these powers when used by a Psi-Shadow. If the G.M. would like, comparable powers can be made available to other psychics but at twice the I.S.P. cost and at half the duration and range.

Special Abilities of the Psi-Shadow

1. **Psionic Abilities:** At first level, the Psi-Shadow gains the psychic powers of Sixth Sense, See Aura, Presence Sense, and Alter Aura. At third level, the character gains the *Master Psionic Powers* of Psi-Sword and Mind Bolt. At levels 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, and 15, the character may choose any one psychic power from the Sensitive, Physical, or Healing categories.
2. **I.S.P.:** 2D6x10, plus M.E. attribute number, plus 3D6 per each additional level of experience.
3. **P.C.C. Bonuses:** +1 on initiative, +3 to save vs psionic attacks and mind control, +3 on Perception rolls, +4 to save vs Horror Factor, all are in addition to skill and attribute bonuses.
4. **Psi-Shadow Powers:** As he grows in experience, the Psi-Shadow gains new powers geared towards silence and subterfuge. As the duration of a power elapses, the Psi-Shadow may pay the full cost of the power again to extend said duration. These powers are gained by level and are as follows:

Level One: Nightvision. The Psi-Shadow can use his psychic energy to enhance his own eyesight, granting the ability to see in almost total darkness. This power does not function against magical darkness or the *Nightbringer* Nightbane Talent. I.S.P. Cost: 2. Duration: 10 minutes. Range: 2000 feet (610 m).

Level Two: Silence. The Psi-Shadow can produce a sort of psychic dampening field that absorbs all sound around his body, making all objects he carries and clothes that he wears utterly silent. The aura only projects to an area of approximately one inch or two (2.5 to 5 cm) around his person, so it does not affect groups of people. +20% Prowl bonus when this ability is in place. Note that since the firing mechanism of a gun is typically more than one or two inches away from the wielder's body, this power does not silence gunfire. I.S.P. Cost: 2. Duration: One minute. Range: Self only.

Level Three: Insect Walk. This power allows the psychic to generate a bioelectrical field that enables him to cling to and crawl on walls and ceilings like an insect. This energy field is harmless to living creatures (though generating the field and touching someone would deliver a startling shock, like static electricity). Oil and grease-covered surfaces interfere with the energy field and prevent them walking along them (slides off). Crawling on walls requires both hands and both feet, so the wall-crawling Psi-Shadow is vulnerable to attack as he scampers up the side of a wall. He may, however, utilize other psychic powers once the field is activated, and can stop to aim and fire with one hand, but must holster his weapon and crawl on all fours to resume movement without fear of slipping and falling. I.S.P. Cost: 10. Duration: 5 minutes. Range: Self. Notes: Maximum speed for an insect walk is 70% of the character's normal running speed, but reduce that speed by half if not loping along on all fours plus there is a 01-35% chance of slipping and falling.

Level Four: Mind Bolt. The psychic can direct a powerful bolt of *invisible* mental energy at a target by just looking and concentrating or pointing a finger. Make a standard 1D20 roll to strike with a bonus of +2 to strike (no other bonuses are applicable). Victims may attempt to dodge, but must know the bolt is coming (difficult, since it is invisible) and are -10 to dodge or parry. I.S.P. Cost: 15. Damage: 1D6 per level of the psychic's experience. Range: 100 feet (30.5 m) per level of experience. Note: Because this power channels psychic energy into physical, concussion damage, it does not function on the Astral Plane.

Level Five: Psychic Invisibility. At this level, the character gains the ability to affect a person's mind so that the psychic *does not appear to be visible.* ("No, he never came this way. We didn't see him.") To the eyes of the affected observer, the psychic appears to vanish into thin air. This is a mind control, illusion ability, so powers such as "see invisible" will not

function to detect the Psi-Shadow using this power, but the potential victim gets to save vs psionics, though at -2 to do so. As a mind affecting power, the Psi-Shadow may seem to be invisible to the naked eye, but he is very much visible to electronic means of surveillance such as cameras and sensors. Nightvision and infrared goggles *can* be affected by this power, so long as the psychic targets the character *wearing* the goggles. To do this, he must be aware of the person's presence. This power does not function against opponents who are immune to mind control and/or illusions. I.S.P. Cost: 10. Duration: One minute. Range: Line of sight.

Level Six: Alter Appearance. This power allows the psychic to change his physical features to look like any other human being he can imagine, from someone of the opposite sex to a Nightbane in Morphus form or even a Night Prince or minion. However, the features mimicked are not real. This is another mind affecting illusion that makes the psychic *appear* that way to those who see him and fail to save vs psionics/mind control (-5 to save against this innocuous psionic manipulation). Functions as a Disguise skill at 85% efficiency, 55% if trying to impersonate a specific, known individual. I.S.P. Cost: 10. Duration: 5 minutes. Range: 100 foot (30.5 m) radius, or line of sight.

Level Seven: Confuse Sensory Equipment. Psychic energy is directed into an electromagnetic field that confuses sensory equipment, effectively masking the psychic's presence to cameras, recording devices, etc. and fouling/confusing sensors. Anyone monitoring the device *will* get the impression that something is wrong, as equipment will show and sound static and garbled signals and foggy/fuzzy and distorted images. I.S.P. Cost: 20. Duration: 5 minutes. Range: 100 feet (30.5 m) radius per level of experience.

Level Eight: Auto Dodge. At this level, the character's intuitive combat awareness is so enhanced that he gains the ability *Automatic Dodge* (can dodge without using up a melee attack) with a +2 bonus. Dodge Firearms: The Psi-Shadow can also now attempt to dodge firearms with a penalty of -6, rather than the standard -10.

Level Nine: Pick one new Master Psionic Power. Player's choice.

Level Ten: Phase: Intangibility. The psychic can alter the speed at which his molecules vibrate to make himself out-of-phase with the rest of physical reality, effectively rendering him *intangible*. The character can, momentarily, walk through walls, travel unhindered through water, etc., much like a ghost. An intangible Psi-Shadow appears translucent and is immune to most physical attacks. Magic and Psionic attacks will still harm the phased character, and electrical attacks not only do full damage, but instantly force the character back into normal physical form. This ability takes one melee action (2-3 seconds) to activate and has no attack capabilities (i.e., he cannot materialize inside a living being). I.S.P. Cost: 20. Duration: One melee round (15 seconds). Ending the ability before its duration is up requires the expenditure of an additional 10 I.S.P.

Level Eleven: Bonuses. The Psi-Shadow is +2 to save vs illusions (magic or psionic), +1 to save vs mind altering drugs and +1 to save vs possession.

Level Twelve: Phase Dodge: The psychic has developed the phasing ability to the point where he can become intangible in response to a physical attack. This act must be performed as a standard dodge, sacrificing the character's next melee attack. To accomplish a Phase Dodge, the character must make a standard dodge roll, only rather than move out of the way, the character becomes intangible to let the attack pass harmlessly through him. This maneuver has its own set of bonuses: Phase Dodge Bonus: +4 at level 12 and +1 at levels 13, 14 and 15. Requires the expenditure of 20 I.S.P. to initiate the Phase Intangibility.

Level Thirteen: Levitation Walk. The character walks floating 3-6 inches (8-15 cm) above the ground. Walking at half or less than his maximum speed he leaves absolutely no tracks and can walk above wet or dew covered grass, mud, snow, etc. Walking faster than half speed will not leave footprints, but will leave marks as if caused by the wind or something light moving across the surface as if a bit of twine or ribbon was pulled lightly over it. Cannot walk on water, but can walk over shallow puddles less than six inches deep. I.S.P. Cost: 12. Duration: 15 minutes.

Level Fourteen: Catatonic Strike: This awesome power allows the psychic to target the neural pathways of his victim with a blast of psychic energy that overrides the electrical impulses of the victim, driving them into a coma! On a successful strike, unless a save vs psionics is made, the victim takes 4D6 damage direct to Hit Points and lapses into a state of comatose unconsciousness. *A successful save means* that the victim suffers half damage from the strike and remains conscious, but loses initiative and is disoriented; all attacks and combat abilities/bonuses are at half, and -15% to all skills for 1D4 melee rounds. This power can only be used with a stabbing attack from a blade weapon, or the Shadow's *Psi-Sword* ability. Note that damage from the Psi-Sword or bladed weapon always comes off of S.D.C. first, even when combined with the Catatonic Strike. So a Psi-Shadow using this ability with Psi-Sword would see Psi-Sword damage come off of S.D.C. first, but the Catatonic Strike damage come directly from Hit Points regardless of how much S.D.C. his opponent might still have.

I.S.P. Cost: 30. Duration: Instant, one strike only. If the psychic misses his target with a strike, energy is still expended (does not store) and full cost must be paid for every attempt. Duration of Coma: 1D6 hours, after which the victim may make a save vs coma/death at +15%. Failing this save means the victim may not save again for 24 hours. After this, the victim may save once per day, with a cumulative +5% to their save. The maximum length of a coma is equal to the victim's P.E. attribute in days, after which the victim dies if he has not awakened. Full bonuses from medical and psychic treatment apply to the save.

Level Fifteen: Containment Aura. A protective aura covers the character's body that prevents it from leaving marks, smudges, fingerprints (or bare footprints) or any genetic materials (hair follicles, sweat, skin, etc.) behind. Thus, the character can enter and leave without any physical evidence of ever having been present. May be combined with Levitation Walk and/or other psionic abilities that function for a particular duration once activated. Note that if the psychic is

cut he will bleed and leave blood droplets behind. I.S.P. Cost: 20. Duration: 10 minutes.

Alignment: Any, but leans toward Unprincipled, Anarchist, Miscreant and Aberrant.

Attribute Requirements: M.E. and P.P. of 12 or higher.

P.C.C. Skills:

Native Language/Literacy at 98%.

Basic Math (+30%)

Prowl (+20%)

Disguise (+20%)

Pick Locks (+20%)

Computer Operation (+10%)

W.P.: Three of choice.

Hand to Hand: Martial Arts (or Assassin, if evil); no other choices possible.

P.C.C. Related Skills: Choose 8 at level one, plus an additional at levels 3, 6, 9, 12, and 15. Skills available are as listed below.

Communications: Any (+5%).

Domestic: Any.

Electrical: Basic Electronics and Computer Repair only (+5%).

Espionage: Any (+10%).

Mechanical: Basic and Auto Mechanics only.

Medical: First Aid and Forensics only (+5%).

Military: Any.

Physical: Any.

Pilot: Any (+5%).

Pilot Related: Any.

Rogue: Any (+15%).

Science: None.

Technical: Any (+10%).

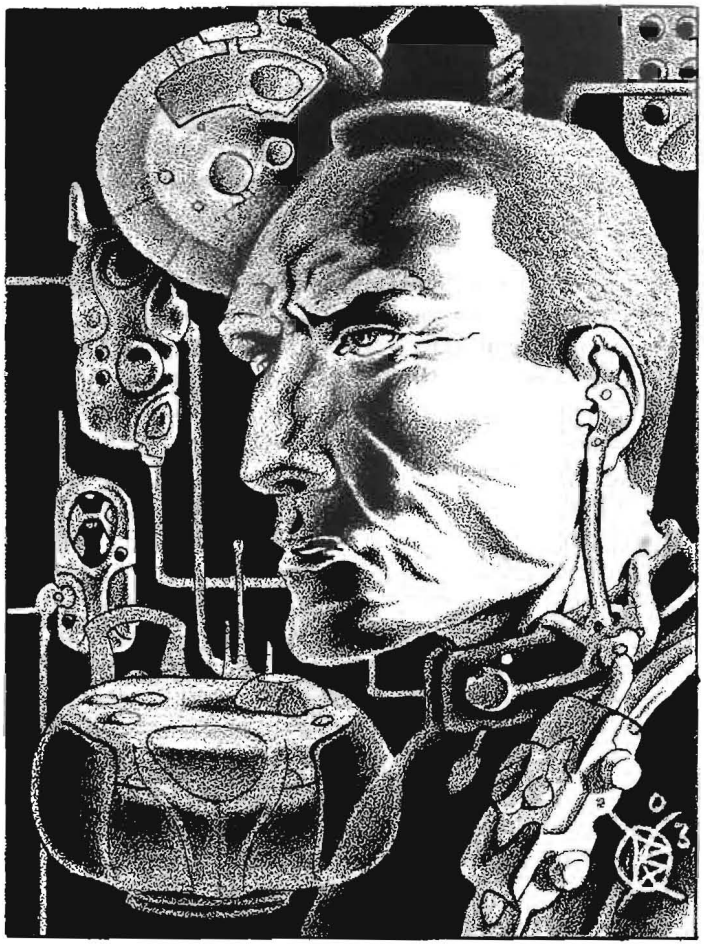
W.P.: Any.

Wilderness: Any.

Secondary Skills: Choose an additional three skills from the above list at level one, as secondary areas of knowledge that the character has learned without benefit of formal training. These skills start at the base level of experience and do not gain the benefit of the bonuses listed in parentheses. Choose one additional Secondary Skill at levels 4, 8, and 12.

Standard Equipment: Access to a vehicle, a cell phone and scrambler, laptop computer, flashlight, two weapons of choice (one melee and one firearm limited to standard melee weapons, revolvers, and automatic pistols), box of 144 ammo rounds, two extra ammo clips or speed loader if a revolver, lock picking kit, pair of fine leather gloves, and a Kevlar vest (A.R. 12, 70 S.D.C.). Additional weapons and equipment are assigned as needed.

Money: MK-ULTRA-II psychics have few funds of their own. Base money is 4D6x100 dollars. The Spook Squad pays a stipend of 1D4x1000+1000 dollars a month. Generally lives in a bunker or "safe house" with other teammates.



Psi-Hacker

Psi-Hackers are psychics who possess an intuitive understanding and bond with computers and computer-controlled systems. These psychics can perform feats ranging from hacking into a corporate computer system to starting a car with a computer-controlled ignition and shifting a car with a computer-controlled transmission, to shutting down security systems in large buildings. They are, in essence, living computer viruses who can worm their way inside of a computer system and make it do whatever they want, even to the point of uploading, downloading, and erasing data from a network.

These men and women tend to be the most cold and calculating of all of the MK-ULTRA II psychics, as their minds have been programmed to link with computer systems. As a result, they are extremely left-brained, not nearly as prone to thinking creatively as many other psychics, and they tend towards the extremes of logic and analytical thinking. More than one Psi-Hacker has been accused of being no longer human, and many behave very much like robots out of some science fiction story. They are dispassionate pragmatists who have little regard for individual human lives – even their own – but who greatly value the collective (in this case, that's the A.D.A.). If one agent must be sacrificed for the Company or the team so that the rest may achieve their goals, so be it. Foolish rescue attempts that place many at risk for the sake of the one are illogical to the Psi-Hacker and thus will not be undertaken. That having been said, Psi-Hackers understand and obey the chain of command, following orders without question or protest and conducting

themselves by the book. There are those rare Psi-Hackers who either develop naturally (*extremely* rare) or who manage to break the bonds of their conditioning and rediscover emotion and morality. These, some feel, are more dangerous, because their unpredictability and creativity add to their analytical skills, though it seems they tend to be less efficient at the use of their powers than those who remain cold, unfeeling and logical (increase the I.S.P. costs for powers listed under their P.C.C. by 50%; thinking independently and using the right brain has its price).

The problem with this programming is that entering computer systems is a rush for Psi-Hackers. It provides them their only real outlet from the cold reality of everyday life. Thus, when not inside of a computer system, many hackers turn to substance abuse to quell the emptiness and 50% suffer from drug or alcohol addiction. At the G.M.'s discretion, a player character may opt not to suffer from this affliction.

Psi-Hacker Special Abilities:

1. **Initial Psychic Powers:** Psi-Hackers gain the following psychic powers at level one: Electrokinesis, Mind Block, Sixth Sense, Speed Reading, Total Recall and Telemechanics. At levels 2, 5, 8, 11, and 14, the character gets to select one additional psychic power from the *Sensitive* category. At levels 4, 7, 10, 13, and 15 the character selects one additional power from the *Physical* category.
2. **I.S.P.:** 2D6x10, plus M.E. attribute. Add an additional 2D6 per level of experience.
3. **Psi-Hacker bonuses:** +3 vs mind control and illusions, +3 vs Horror Factor, and +2 on initiative.
4. **Psi-Hacker Powers:** Psi-Hackers gain electronics- and computer-specific psychic powers as they grow in experience. Starting at second level, and for every 3 levels of experience thereafter (5, 8, 11, 14), the Psi Hacker may select *one* of the following powers.

Computer Genius: The focus of this character's psychic energy is such that they have an inherent and intuitive knowledge of the inner workings of computer systems, be it operation, programming, networking, or hacking. This character automatically has *Computer Operation* at 85% +2% per level, *Computer Programming* at 80%+2% per level, and *Computer Hacking* at 75% +2% per level. In addition, the character intuitively knows everything about the inner workings of any computer system he comes across. Base skill for this is 50% +5% per level of experience and it provides a +10% bonus to the Computer Repair skill.

Data Scrambling: The character can *encode* any type of data he comes into contact with while accessing a computer system, at a thought. This encoding is such that it can effectively lock out all those the psychic does not wish to have access. All efforts to hack the data or decrypt the encoding are at -25% -5% per every three levels of psychic scrambling. So a ninth level psychic scrambling data would impose a -40% penalty on Hacking or Cryptography skill rolls to access the restricted data (-25% base and -15% additional for being level 9). This power can effectively lock out security systems in buildings and safely store data. The psychic can include a "code key" for instant decryption of sensitive data files if he so desires, or he can make it so that he is the only one who can access the scrambled data. I.S.P. Cost: 10.

Improved Hacking: Psi-Hackers add twice their current experience level as a bonus number to their current rating for all Computer (including Computer Hacking) and Electronics skills, in addition to the standard skill percentile. Maximum skill rating for any skill is still 98%; however, this ability can be used to offset penalties regardless. So a Psi-Hacker whose hacking skill might be raised to 115% with this ability sees his skill raised to 98%, but still has 17% to offset skill penalties for circumstances or difficulty. I.S.P. Cost: 10 plus a little concentration on the skill being used.

Memory Download: Psi-Hackers have the ability to recall, in minute detail, any piece of information they are exposed to, provided they choose to store such data in the first place (i.e., makes a mental note to remember this or that). Their brain acts as a computer's hard drive, storing data in bits and accessing such data in a similar manner. However, much like a computer's hard drive, their storage capacity is limited, requiring data to be periodically purged to make room for new. For technical purposes, the character's eyes are considered scanners, and his ears are considered microphones. Such information can be recalled instantaneously, with little to no chance of failure. I.S.P. Cost: 15 per image (G.M.'s discretion; may be higher for more detailed and larger images), 50 pages of documents (text), or 5 minutes of conversation, events or film. Maximum Storage in I.S.P. worth of data is equal to the character's M.E. attribute number x50.

Upload Data: Psi-Hackers can transfer data from their own memory banks (mind) to a computer terminal or network. Speed of upload is equal to the computer used at the time. Physical contact with the computer is necessary to accomplish this feat. The character can upload data in any common format he chooses, from standard bitmapped graphics, to text files, to the latest word processor. I.S.P. Cost: Equal to the I.S.P. value of the data transferred (see Memory Download).

Control Electronics/Computer Systems: Psi-Hackers are so attuned to the inner workings of electronics and computer-controlled systems that they can exercise a degree of intuitive control over them. This involves everything from activating a portable radio to breaking into an ATM machine, to hacking the security systems of a major corporation. Using this power requires a successful Computer Hacking skill roll; standard penalties and bonuses apply. While the Psi-Hacker is using this power, he falls into a deep trance and is only aware of impending danger through his Sixth Sense power, but breaking the trance before the full duration has elapsed takes a full melee round (15 seconds).

I.S.P. Cost: Varies according to complexity of the system and the task the Psi-Hacker hopes to achieve. Simple tasks such as operating a portable CD or Mp3 player, or starting a car with a computer controlled ignition, cost a mere 5 I.S.P. Slightly more difficult tasks such as shifting a computer-controlled transmission into gear cost 10 I.S.P. Shifting the same transmission into gear *and* activating the cruise control on a car to get it in motion, costs 20 I.S.P. Tasks such as hacking into a corporate security system with the intent of deactivating the entire net cost up to 40 I.S.P. Hacking into a security system in an effort to control specific portions of the system

could cost as much as 75 to 100 I.S.P. Exact costs according to difficulties are at the discretion of the G.M., but shouldn't be prohibitive; this is the major advantage of this P.C.C. Duration: Up to 10 minutes per task.

Einstein: This power allows the Psi-Hacker to have a streak of ingenuity that enables him to imagine a schematic to create or modify machines to serve a very specific purpose. However, he must sit down to build or modify the device then and there, when inspiration first hits, or the design quickly and permanently fades away. These schematics fly out of his mind if he tries to focus to write them down, as well as when he breaks for too long a time from building the item.

The initial thought is always a very general impression, such as "I need something that will . . ." (protect me from the Hounds at the warehouse, or shield me from the cameras in the hospital, or make the vehicle run silently, and so on). The more powerful or elaborate the item/need, the longer it will take to build. Sure, an inventive Psi-Hacker might wish to be "invincible," but such an item would take (quite literally) a lifetime to build as the psychic continually puzzles out the mathematics and multitude of factors of this superhuman task. However, boosting the power of an energy weapon or explosive or vehicle, is another matter entirely, and something he should be able to accomplish quite easily. Rerouting, bypassing, disconnecting, or tapping into energy systems, communications, optics, surveillance systems, alarms, monitors, cable, other conduits, etc., or souping up things are all the kind of tasks this character can perform in a matter of minutes when the right inspiration hits. The psychic never knows exactly how long it will take to do or what result he is going to get until he finishes the item, because the process is pure inspiration and intuition.

A character with this ability should tell the G.M. what he wants his juryrigging or creation to accomplish, and the G.M. decides how powerful the item is, how long it takes to accomplish, how long it will work, and exactly how well it works (little quirks and problems are suggested). Here's a simple table.

A quick and dirty patch job: Takes 1D6 minutes. Works/remains operational for 6D6 minutes, indefinitely if the Psi-Hacker stays to nurse and tweak his work to correct any problems that appear and keep it going/operating.

A quick and (relatively) basic computer task, program, tap job or rerouting: Takes 1D6 minutes. Works/remains operational for 4D6 minutes, indefinitely as long as the Psi-Hacker stays to nurse and tweak his work to correct any problems that appear and keep it going.

Modify or soup up an existing device *within* its original perimeters: Takes 4D6+10 minutes. Works/remains operational for 1D6x10 minutes, indefinitely as long as the Psi-Hacker stays to nurse and tweak his work to correct any problems that appear and keep it going.

Modify or soup up an existing device *outside* its original perimeters: The device does more than it was ever designed to do. Takes 6D6+15 minutes. Works/remains operational for 3D6 minutes, indefinitely as long as the Psi-Hacker stays to nurse and tweak his work to correct any problems that appear and keep it going.

Create a simple device based on commonly known principles of science and mechanics: Takes 2D6 days of work to complete a working prototype. Works/remains operational for 4D6 weeks before breaking down, indefinitely if the Psi-Hacker babies it every day or two, cleaning, tweaking and fiddling with it to keep it in top operational condition.

Create a moderately complex device based on commonly known principles of science and mechanics: Takes 5D6+6 days of work to complete a working prototype. Works/remains operational for 3D6 weeks before breaking down, indefinitely if the Psi-Hacker babies it every day or two, cleaning, tweaking and fiddling with it to keep it in top operational condition.

Create a complex device based on commonly known principles of science and mechanics: Takes 3D6x10+12 days of work to complete a working prototype. Works/remains operational for 2D6 weeks before breaking down, indefinitely if the Psi-Hacker babies it every day or two, cleaning, tweaking and fiddling with it to keep it in top operational condition.

Create a complex device that goes beyond the known principles and applications of science and mechanics: Takes 5D6x10+60 days to complete a working prototype. Works/remains operational for 1D4 weeks before breaking down. 1D6+10 weeks if the Psi-Hacker babies it every day or two, cleaning, tweaking and fiddling with it to keep it in top operational condition. After that, there is a 01-33% chance of it breaking down regardless of how much time the psychic spends to keep it in tip-top working condition, and he must spend 6D6 hours on repairs and modifications to get it up and running again. Roll to determine how long it will last this time before breaking down and requiring further (3D6x10 hours) modifications and repairs: 01-25% works fine for another 1D4 weeks, 26-50% works for 1D4+2 weeks, 51-75% works for 1D6+4 weeks, 76-00% works for 2D6+6 weeks. Repeat the process.

Note: This power is very abstract, and G.M.s should feel free to disallow it entirely if they are not certain they can manage it without unbalancing their game, or modify it. Also remember that you can add strange quirks, conditions and problems to prototypes.

Prerequisite to use this ability: Must have two other Psi-Hacker powers, so it's not available until eighth level.

Alignment: Any, but lean toward Unprincipled, Anarchist, and Aberrant.

Attribute Restrictions: I.Q. 12 or higher.

P.C.C. Skills:

Native Language and Literacy at 98%.
Basic Math (+30%)
Cryptography (+10%)
Computer Operation (+20%)
Computer Programming (+20%)
Computer Repair (+20%)
Computer Hacking (+20%)
Streetwise (+15%)
W.P.: Automatic Pistol or Revolver (choose one).
W.P.: One melee weapon of choice.

Hand to Hand: Expert, but may be changed to Martial Arts (or Assassin, if evil) at the cost of one P.C.C. Related Skill.

P.C.C. Related Skills: Choose 7 skills from the list below at level one, plus one additional skill at levels 3, 6, 9, 12, and 15. These are additional areas of expertise.

Communications: Any (+10%).

Domestic: Any.

Electrical: Any (+10%).

Espionage: Forgery, Intelligence and Pick Locks only (+5%).

Mechanical: Any (+10%).

Medical: Criminal Science and Forensics, and First Aid only (+5%).

Military: None.

Physical: Any, except Boxing, Acrobatics and Gymnastics.

Pilot: Automobile, Motorcycle, and Truck only (+15%).

Pilot Related: Any (+15%).

Rogue: Any.

Science: Any (+5%).

Technical: Any (+10%).

Weapon Proficiencies: Any.

Wilderness: None.

Secondary Skills: Choose an additional 4 skills from the list above. These are additional areas of knowledge that do not benefit from formal training and do not receive the listed bonuses. Select one additional Secondary Skill at levels 4, 8, and 12.

Equipment: Portable tool kit, pocket flashlight, pocket calculator, folding pocket knife (1D4 damage as a weapon), laptop computer (top of the line, of course, with modem, networking capabilities, webcam, microphone, and any other amenities the player wishes for the character), handgun of choice, box of 144 ammo rounds, vehicle of choice. These characters also typically possess apartments, as the A.D.A. likes to keep them in touch with the world and new trends in technology.

Funds: Typically these characters had money stashed away from before recruitment by the Spook Squad. Begins play with 1D10x$1000 in available funds. The A.D.A. provides a standard stipend of 1D4x1000+800 dollars per month.

The Psychic Bloodhound

These characters have been around since before the MK-ULTRA II project, and have indeed been invaluable to its success. Psychic Bloodhounds are men and women who can read auras to the point where they can detect the nature of any given creature they observe, be it Nightbane, Vampire, Wampyr, Athanatos, Guardian, Night Prince, Namtar/Hollow Man, or other supernatural being (in general), as well as Sorcerer, Mystic, and Psychic; the latter to the extent that the Bloodhound can detect the *exact* type of dominant psychic powers a psionic possesses, whether it is latent or active. MK-ULTRA II uses Psychic Bloodhounds to find otherwise normal men and women who possess latent, unawakened psychic powers and are ripe for "awakening" through the Pandora Project. More powerful Bloodhounds can be used to track individual people via their psychic signatures/aura. These usually function as criminal profilers and crime scene investigators. Psychic Bloodhounds come in all shapes and sizes, and not all are members of, or loyal to, the American Defense Agency (A.D.A.).

Psychic Bloodhounds are at one with the world, or so they claim. They can feel everything, from the loudest suffering of an oppressed people, to the muffled cries of a single child or frightened animal hiding under the stairs. Or so they would have others believe. It is doubtful whether or not these enigmatic psychics are as "at one" with the world as they claim, but it is certain that they are a formidable presence, and their intuitive connection with the psychic and paranormal world around them grants them uncommon and unexpected abilities, including enhanced fighting capabilities.

Special Abilities of the Psychic Bloodhound:

1. **Initial Psionic Powers:** Psychic Bloodhounds are, at their most basic, Psychic Sensitives. All begin with the psychic powers of Presence Sense, See Aura, Empathy, and Object Read. For every two levels beyond first, select one power from the *Sensitive* category. In addition, as the Bloodhound increases in level, he gains access to certain powers from the *Master* psionics category, as follows:

   Level Three: Psi-Sword. Level Four: Block Breaker. Level Eight: Mind Bond. Level Twelve: Mind Wipe.

2. **I.S.P.** Base I.S.P. for a Psychic Bloodhound is 2D6x10, plus M.E. attribute number. Add 2D6 per level of experience. Psychic Bloodhounds are considered Master psionics.



3. **Psychic Bloodhound Special Abilities:** These characters can use their psi-powers to greater effect than standard psychics. In addition to the basic powers as listed above, Psychic Bloodhounds gain the following:

Know Psychic Nature: Psychic bloodhounds can determine, using their Presence Sense ability, the *types* of psychic beings and/or supernatural creatures nearby and their exact numbers. This ability also works when scanning the *aura* of a particular individual. Using the See Aura power, a Psychic Bloodhound looking at a Nightbane in his Facade knows that he or she is a Nightbane, though the psychic will not know the exact type/morphus and powers of that Nightbane. Likewise, the Psychic Bloodhound can recognize supernatural beings like vampires, shape changers and hidden beings like the Namtar, who may look human but are actually supernatural horrors (Dopplegangers are the only exception). Similarly, the character can sense whether any opponent is supernatural or not, even if the psychic has never seen one before. When looking at an unawakened psychic, the Bloodhound knows that there is latent psionic power present and the general leaning of that power (i.e., Sensitive, Physical, etc.). Base Skill: 25% +5% per level of experience.

Recognize Aura: Recognize an aura they've seen before, allowing them to see through disguises and even *Mind Blocks*. Base Skill: 15% +5% per level of experience.

Track Aura: Once the Psychic Bloodhound gains a psychic "scent" via a firsthand encounter, the lingering scent from a recent presence/visitation (within 15 minutes of a supernatural being having been present; 5 minutes for humans), or by means of an *Object Read*, the character can track the "psychic signature" using his Presence Sense ability. However, tracking the residual psychic signature becomes more difficult the more time has passed; there is a -10% cumulative penalty per 8 hours to track the source of the signature. Base Skill: 30% +5% per level of experience.

One with the World: This is a set of complementary abilities and awareness. Psychic Bloodhounds are so attuned to the world around them that they gain astonishing bonuses in combat. All bonuses are in addition to attribute and skill bonuses.

Bonuses: +1 attack per melee round, +1 on initiative, +2 to strike and parry, +3 to dodge, +3 to Perception rolls, +2 to save vs Horror Factor, +3 to save vs illusion (psionic or magic), and +2 to save vs possession.

Blind Fighting. The Psychic Bloodhound can fight unhindered even when completely blinded or facing invisible opponents (no penalties), because they can *sense* the auras and locations of their foes as well as the world around them. In order to blind fight, the character must have his Presence Sense power activated, and make a Perception roll for each action he wishes to take. Difficulty of the Perception roll when the Psychic Bloodhound is completely blinded is 12. Battling opponents with Mind Block or Mind Block Auto-Defense raises this difficulty to 15. Add +1 to the difficulty for every ten feet (3 m) of distance between the psychic and his opponent or target. In addition, the Psychic Bloodhound can maneuver flawlessly when blinded and can use "line of sight" psionic powers without hindrance, so long as he makes a successful Perception roll as described above.

Alignment: Any; come from all walks of life and are only rarely the result of a Pandora Project creation.

Attribute Requirement: M.E. of 12 or higher.

P.C.C. Bonuses: +3 to P.P., +1D6 to Spd. and +2D6 to S.D.C.

P.C.C. Skills:

Native Language and Literacy at 98%.
Basic Mathematics (+25%)
Radio: Basic (+15%)
Tracking (+10%)
Counter-Tracking (+10%)
Holistic Medicine (+15%)
Lore: Two of choice (+15%).
W.P. Two of choice
Hand to Hand: Martial Arts; no other options are available.

P.C.C. Related Skills: Select 6 other skills, plus two additional at levels 3 and 6, and one at levels 9 and 12.

Communications: Any (+5%).
Domestic: Any (+15%).
Electrical: Basic Electronics only.
Espionage: None.
Mechanical: Basic and Automotive Mechanics only.
Medical: Any (+5%), except Medical Doctor and Forensic Medicine.
Military: None.
Physical: Any (+5% where applicable).
Pilot: Any (+10%).
Pilot Related: Any except Weapon Systems.
Rogue: Any (+5%).
Science: Any, except Chemistry: Analytical.
Technical: Any (+5%).
Weapon Proficiencies: Any.
Wilderness: Any (+10%).

Secondary Skills: Select three other skills from the list above. These are additional areas of skill that do not benefit from formal training and thus do not gain the benefit of the bonuses listed in parentheses. Select one additional Secondary Skill at levels 4, 8, and 12. Secondary Skills begin at the base skill level.

Standard Equipment: Typically 1D6x1000 dollars in possessions, including clothes, weapons, and personal items, plus one weapon for each W.P., enough ammo for five reloads, a "beater" car or motorcycle and an inexpensive (but nice) home or apartment (probably rented or with an outstanding mortgage). Spook Squad trained characters usually start with some additional, basic military or espionage gear, and an extra weapon, plus they can get special equipment per assignment.

Money: 3D6x100 dollars in cash. The Spook Squad generally pays a stipend of 1D4x1000 dollars a month; otherwise, pay as per the character's employment.



Psi-Shaper

Considered to be "unfocused" and "vulgar" by other psychics, the Psi-Shaper is something of an anomaly with one particularly strange and impressive ability no other class of psychics possess, the power to shape ectoplasm. They reach out with their mind and grab ectoplasm, the stuff of Ether, and mold this mass of psychokinetic energy into whatever form suits them best. That's right, they control ectoplasm, and realize that it is a living energy, surrounding and penetrating the universe. In fact, many refer to ectoplasm as "their friend." Indeed, it is probably the only *real* friend they have.

Psi-Shapers are psychics whose experiences with the Pandora Project left them with dulled intelligence and mentally scarred for life. They cannot learn or develop new psychic abilities, tend to be paranoid, and lack "finesse," making them very straightforward – and often violent – in dealing with confrontations or any problem. When angered or frustrated, the Psi-Shaper tends to lash out with Telekinesis or a physical attack. They also tend to be loners because they view most everyone, especially strangers, with suspicion and distrust. Most are like bulls in a china shop who are best suited for combat and straightforward missions; nothing too complex or requiring subterfuge or diplomacy.

Special Abilities of the Psi-Shaper

1. **Initial Psychic Powers:** Presence Sense, See Aura, Alter Aura, Ectoplasm, Telekinesis, Astral Transference, Telekinetic Force Field, Astral Bolts (Special! See below). Ethereal Mirage, Telekinetic Punch, Telekinetic Leap and one Physical ability of choice. Other than shaping, no additional powers are available.
2. **I.S.P.** Begins play with 2D6x10, plus M.E. attribute number and an additional 2D6 per level of experience.
3. **P.C.C. Bonuses:** +4 to save vs Horror Factor, +3 to save vs Mind Control and Illusions.
4. **Psi-Shaper Power:** Unlike many other P.C.C.s, the Psi-Shaper develops the vast majority of his powers all at once, with existing abilities becoming more potent with time. The Psi-Shaper has the following "special" abilities:

Astral Reconfiguration (Objects): Similar to the *Astral Lord* (see page 49 of the **Between the Shadows™** sourcebook for details), the Psi-Shaper can infuse physical objects with ectoplasm, so that they may be carried back and forth between the physical realm and the Astral Plane. Weapons infused with ectoplasm are just as effective in the Astral Plane as they are in the physical. Unlike the Astral Lord, however, the I.S.P. expended by a Psi-Shaper is not permanently lost, but recovered as normal. I.S.P. Cost: 5 points per pound (0.45 kg) of weight or fraction thereof. Very small objects, such as bullets, can be "charged" together, but larger objects, such as the gun that fires the bullets must be charged separately. A charged gun is useless in the Astral Plane without charged bullets, to go with it. Duration: 24 hours per level of experience. Range: Touch or 10 feet (3 m) to infuse an item with ectoplasm.

Astral Bolts: Same as the Sensitive power described on page 116 of **Between the Shadows**, except that they function on the physical as well as Astral Plane of existence. Range: 30 feet (9.1 m) +10 feet (3 m) per level of experience. Duration: Can fire bolts for one melee round. Damage: 1D4 per level of the Psi-Shaper. Bonus: +3 to strike. I.S.P. Cost: 10.

Astral Domain: Psi-Shapers can build Astral Domains, much like Astral Mages, but must permanently expend I.S.P. in the process. For creation purposes, Psi-Shapers convert I.S.P. to P.P.E. at a rate of 2 to 1 (2 I.S.P. equals 1 P.P.E.) so many do not create Astral Domains until they are quite powerful. (See **Between the Shadows** for details on the Astral Plane.)

Create Ectoplasmic Armor: The Psi-Shaper can summon a field of skintight ectoplasm to protect his physical form. The Psi-Shaper's Ectoplasmic Armor, however, is equally effective in both the Astral and physical planes of existence. The armor has 50 S.D.C. +10 points per level of experience. Ecto-Armor works like a second skin and has no A.R., but all damage comes of it first, and it must be completely destroyed before the character suffers physical damage himself. I.S.P. Cost: 20. Duration: 10 minutes per level, or until destroyed. Range: Self or other by touch or line of sight up to 10 feet (3 m) away.

Create Ectoplasmic Objects: They can also calling forth ectoplasm at will and form it into solid, physical (although temporary) matter! Only simple items like a sword, club, shield, drinking glasses, etc. can be created with ectoplasm; it is impossible to form complex mechanical devices such as cars and machinery. However, a "gun" that fires *Astral Bolts* at half the Psi-Shaper's current level of experience (minimum of level 1) can also be created and used by *anyone* on the As-

tral or physical plane (2D4 damage with a range of 60 feet/18.3 m; double damage and range in the Astral Plane).

I.S.P. Cost: 50 per five pounds (2.25 kg) of weight or per three square feet (0.27 sq. m) of matter. The items themselves have S.D.C. and inflict damage that corresponds with similar man-made items created in the physical world. Ectoplasmic Walls have an S.D.C. of 50 per six square feet (0.55 sq. m). Duration: One hour. Takes 1D4 minutes to create. Note: Ectoplasmic objects are always a translucent green in color, and glow very faintly (not enough to generate practical light) in darkness.

Permanency: The Psi-Shaper *can,* through the permanent sacrifice of I.S.P., make real and permanent the objects created with ectoplasm. Permanent I.S.P. Cost: The cost of the item created. Astral Bolt firing "guns" cannot be made permanent in this fashion.

Alignment: Any, but lean toward Unprincipled, Anarchist and Miscreant.

P.C.C. Skills:

Native Language and Literacy at 98% efficiency.

Basic Mathematics (+10%)

Radio: Basic (+10%)

Streetwise (+6%)

Pilot: Automobile or Motorcycle (choose one; +15%).

Domestic Skills: Two of choice.

W.P.: Two of choice.

Hand to Hand: Basic, but may be changed to Hand to Hand: Expert at the cost of one P.C.C. Related Skill, or Hand to Hand: Martial Arts (or Assassin, if evil) at the cost of two.

P.C.C. Related Skills: Choose 6 other skills. Plus one additional at levels 3, 5, 8, 11, and 13. All new skills begin at first level proficiency.

Communications: Any.

Domestic: Any (+5%).

Electrical: Basic Electronics only (+5%).

Espionage: None.

Mechanical: Basic and Automotive only.

Medical: First Aid, Holistic Medicine, or Paramedic only (+5%).

Military: None.

Physical: Any.

Pilot: Any (+5%).

Pilot Related: Any.

Rogue: Any.

Science: Math only.

Technical: Any.

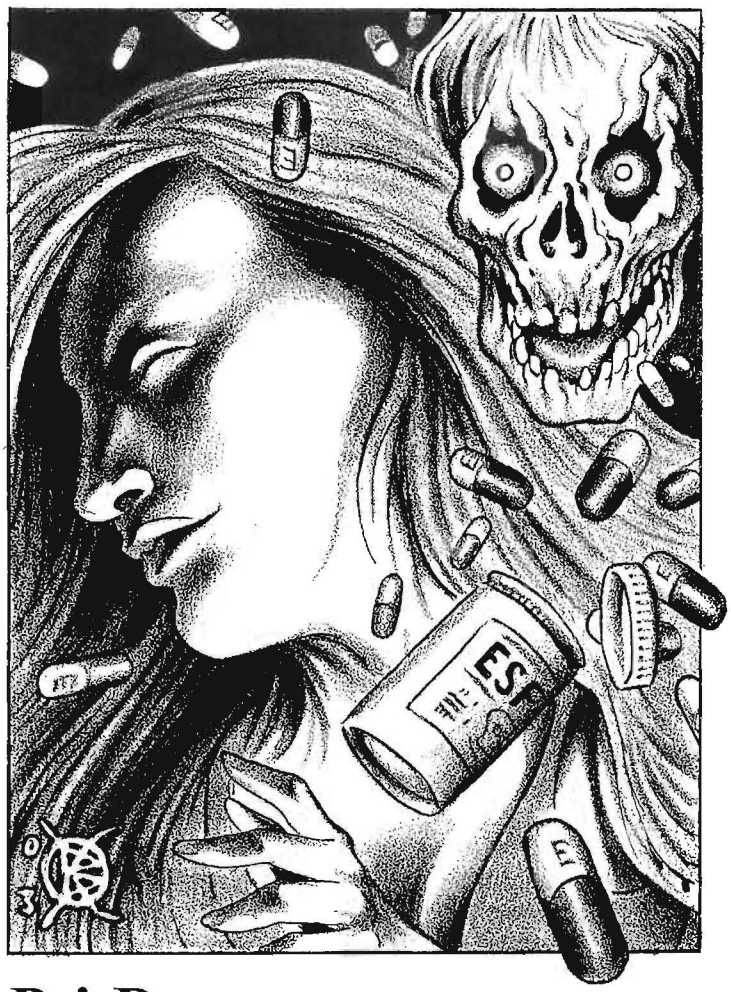
W.P. Any.

Wilderness: Any.

Secondary Skills: The character may also select 4 Secondary Skills. These are additional areas of knowledge that do not benefit from formal training and thus do not gain the bonuses listed. All Secondary Skills start at the base skill level.

Standard Equipment: One weapon of choice, "beater" vehicle (worth 1D4x1000 dollars) of choice, standard personal effects amounting to roughly $1000. Typically lives in a bunker with other A.D.A. teammates. Equipment is provided on an "as needed" basis per mission.

Money: 3D6x100 dollars in cash. The A.D.A. provides a stipend of 2500 dollars a month.



Psi-Dampener

Psi-Dampeners are actually the product of an anomaly that results from the H.P.E. process that the Company cannot understand. It seems to happen at random and only to about 10% of all volunteer test subjects. Though it does awaken a handful of psychic abilities, the most impressive result is that the individual radiates an energy field that negates psychic powers and magic. Psi-Dampeners are coveted among MK-ULTRA II units, especially by non-psychic troops. For one thing, the Dampener's perpetually-active Sensitive skills warn the team of impending danger, and the anti-magic and anti-psychic Dampening Field protects them from most psychic powers and many types and degrees of magic from enemies in close combat situations. It evens the playing field a great deal and confuses most opponents. For one thing, a tiny number of people outside the American Defense Agency know Psi-Dampeners exist, or how their powers work, so the enemy, confident in their natural psychic or magic abilities, are in for quite a shock when their abilities don't work. Many panic and flee or fall easy prey to the A.D.A. force. Even many psychic squads like to have a Psi-Dampener as part of their team, even though it turns off the abilities of any other agent within the character's range of influence. The Psi-Damp-

ener can be deployed in such a way as to help the team overall, and hold him or her back in reserve or for special situations so that the rest of the team is able to use their powers most of the time.

Special Abilities of the Psi-Dampener

1. **Initial Psychic Powers:** Sixth Sense, Presence Sense, Empathy, and P.P.E. Shield (Master psionic power). Unlike standard psychic powers, *all* abilities of the Psi-Dampener are *always active* and *involuntary* at no I.S.P. cost. Rather the character must expend I.S.P. to "shut off" an active power by paying the listed I.S.P. for the standard duration. The rest of the character's abilities are his Dampening Field.
2. **I.S.P.** Base I.S.P. is 1D6x10, plus M.E. attribute number. Add an additional 2D6 per level of experience. Should a Psi-Dampener ever run out of I.S.P., he is unable to turn off his Dampening Field or other abilities.
3. **Dampening Field:** Psi-Dampeners continuously radiate a sort of psychic scrambling signal that negates all psychic abilities, magic spells, and mystic powers within the radius of the field. Basically, *any* ability that is powered by I.S.P. or P.P.E. is scrambled and effectively turned off or reduced in strength. This dampening field *cancels out* a certain number of I.S.P. or P.P.E. dependent upon the dampener's level of experience.

   Duration: Constantly on, unless the psychic deliberately wills it to be off (see shut-of-cost below).

   The Canceling Ability: Cancels out the equivalent of the character's M.E. attribute +5 I.S.P. or P.P.E. per level of experience. So any ability or magic that costs less than the amount of the field are negated. For example, a first level Psi-Dampener with an M.E. of 15 would cancel out every psionic ability or magic spell that cost 20 I.S.P. or P.P.E. (or less) to cast or activate. The same character at third level would cancel out 30 (15 M.E. plus 15 for being third level). Magic that costs more than this amount to cast continues to function but at a diminished capacity, reduce the damage, penalties, range and duration by 20%.

   Range/Area of Effect of the Field: 10 foot (3 m) diameter per level of experience with the Psi-Dampener at the center.

   I.S.P. Cost to Create the Field: NONE! Automatically on all the time.

   I.S.P. Shut-Off Cost: This costs the Dampener an amount of I.S.P. equal to the strength of his field – i.e., the character's M.E. attribute score +5 I.S.P. per level of experience. Using the example above, the first level Dampener would have to pay 20 I.S.P. and a third level Dampener 30 I.S.P. to shut down his own field.

   Duration of the shutdown is 1D6+10 minutes per level of the character's experience.

   Note: Only the Psi-Dampener's own abilities are immune to the Dampening Field. His other psychic abilities can be shut off for the same length of time by expending the I.S.P. it would normally cost to activate the ability.
4. **Chemical Deterrent:** The Company (A.D.A.) has created a drug known as *Espex* that effectively turns off the psychic Dampening Field powers for 1D4+4 hours at a time. This drug also reduces the effectiveness of other psychic abilities, requiring the psychic to spend 50% more I.S.P. to use an ability at half its usual potency (half damage, range, duration, etc.). In this latter case, the effect of the drug lasts for only 1D4 hours at a time.
5. **Insanity:** All Psi-Dampeners begin the game with one *random* insanity (roll on the optional *Random Insanity Table*, page 45 of the **Nightbane® RPG**). Roll again at levels 6 and 12 on the *Random Insanity Table* resulting from trauma.

Attribute Requirements: M.E. 12 or higher

Alignment: Any.

P.C.C. Skills:

Native Language and Literacy at 98%.

Basic Mathematics (+20%)

Radio: Basic (+10%)

Counter-Tracking (+5%)

Streetwise: Drugs (+10%)

Running

Climbing

W.P.: Two modern weapons of choice.

W.P.: One ancient of choice.

Hand to Hand: Basic; can be changed to Expert at the cost of one P.C.C. Related Skill, or Martial Arts (or Assassin, if evil) at the cost of two skills.

P.C.C. Related Skills: Choose 9 other skills at level one, plus two additional at levels three and six, then one additional at levels 8, 10, and 12.

Communications: Radio: Basic only (+5%).

Domestic: Any (+15%).

Electrical: Basic Electronics only.

Espionage: None.

Mechanical: Basic Mechanics only.

Medical: First Aid, Holistic Medicine, and Paramedic only (+10%).

Military: Any (+5%).

Physical: Any.

Pilot: Any (+5%).

Pilot Related: Any.

Rogue: Any.

Science: Math only (+10%).

Technical: Any (+10%).

Weapon Proficiencies: Any.

Wilderness: Any (+20%).

Secondary Skills: Choose four additional skills from the list above at level one, plus one additional at levels 4, 8, 12, and 15. These are skills that do not benefit from formal training and do not receive the bonuses listed in parentheses. Secondary Skills begin at the base level of experience.

Standard Equipment: One weapon of choice for each W.P. skill and four reloads, "beater" vehicle (worth 1D6x1000 dollars) of choice, standard personal effects amounting to about $2000. Typically lives in a bunker with other Company teammates. Additional equipment is provided on an "as needed" basis per mission.

Money: 4D6x100 dollars in cash. The A.D.A. provides a stipend of 1D4x1000 dollars a month.



Psi-Leech

By Jason Vey & Kevin Siembieda

The Psi-Leech is one of the Pandora Project's dismal failures. Some unfortunate men and women simply do not "take" to the Human Psychic Enhancement (H.P.E.) process and spiral out of control. Sometimes things just go wrong. Debilitating incidents and accidents can occur during the dream state where the fantasy goes haywire, the hypno-therapist makes a monumental error, the subject has an adverse reaction to the Psychotrol drug or overall process, or the human mind simply shatters or breaks down from the stress and trauma, not to mention any number of other random factors. Most failures wind up drooling vegetables, brain dead, or highly agitated, mentally deficient lunatics.

Psi-Leeches are semi-functional failures of the enhancement process. Failures because most are psychotic, violent and driven to murder. At first, they may seem normal, or even a successful enhancement, especially if they remain smart enough to cover up obvious personality flaws. However, it is never long, before it becomes evident that there is something *very wrong* with the subject. Psi-Leeches possess vast psychic powers, but they have no personal energy reserves whatsoever to power their abilities. Rather than the personal reserves of internal energy that other psychics have (I.S.P.), Psi-Leeches must *syphon* psychic energy from other living creatures. Like the demonic *Reaper*, Psi-Leeches are constantly looking for victims from which to steal I.S.P. and P.P.E., for it is the only way for them to use their powers. It also gives them an obsessive hunger for said power. Worse, they require P.P.E. to live they must and usually kill their victims to get it. Extra P.P.E. can be transformed into I.S.P.

Under normal circumstances, these piteous, violent, vengeful and wicked mutants are put down for the safety of everyone as soon as they are determined to be insane Psi-Leeches. However, there are always those few that keep their hunger and abilities secret long enough to trick their makers and escape into the world or use their powers and cunning to escape. Turned into human predators, they instinctively know they can syphon I.S.P. from other psychics or convert P.P.E. into I.S.P. from other living beings. Since psychic beings are few and far between (not to mention formidable opponents), most Psi-Leeches turn to victimizing innocent people for their P.P.E. Unfortunately, these evil and power hungry must kill to get the P.P.E. that is doubled at the moment of their victim's death. While some endeavor to quell their hunger and lust for power by killing animals, most become bloodthirsty killers with no compunctions about murdering humans and other intelligent beings.

Though the American Defense Agency is concerned about unleashing these monsters into the world and the deaths of innocent people at their hands, they are much more concerned that escaped Psi-Leeches know about the Company and the Pandora Project, and could compromise both if they should ever join enemy forces. Fortunately, the A.D.A. programing that marks the Nightlords, their minions and other evil supernatural beings as an *enemy* to be exterminated usually "takes" in the Psi-Leech's mind. As a result, most Psi-Leeches either hunt and prey upon these "enemies" (actually, most consider *all* supernatural beings their enemy or prey, including Nightbane, Athanatos and Guardians) or avoid them entirely. However, the A.D.A. can't take the chance and usually puts together specialized hunter-killer teams dedicated to finding and exterminating rogue Psi-Leeches who escape. However, if the runaways can avoid capture for 72 hours, they can usually slip away into human society and avoid future capture unless they are especially obvious in their activities or target A.D.A. Agents.

Abilities, Bonuses, Insanities and Penalties of the Psi-Leech

1. **Syphon I.S.P.:** The Psi-Leech can absorb 1D6+6 points of I.S.P. from another psychic who is within 100 feet (30.5 m) of him and within line of sight, or 2D6+12 I.S.P. by touch. This theft of I.S.P. counts as a psychic attack and the potential victim gets to make a *save vs psychic attack*, but with a penalty of -2. Failure to save means the victim loses some of his I.S.P. (recovers normally as if he spent them). A successful save means no loss of I.S.P. and the character knows he just survived some sort of draining attack, though not from whom.

   Stolen I.S.P. cannot be used as nourishment (needs P.P.E. for that), and goes directly into the Psi-Leech's I.S.P. Reservoir to power his own psionic abilities (see #2 below). **Note:** Each attempt to steal I.S.P. counts as one of the Leech's attacks per melee round, but can be otherwise tried without limit and without any expenditure of energy.
2. **P.P.E. Psychic Vampires:** Psi-Leeches must feed on Potential Psychic Energy to survive as well as to use their psychic

abilities. They can only feed on the P.P.E. released at the time of death, so they must kill their victims.

Daily P.P.E. Requirement: A minimum of 15 P.P.E. per day, just to survive, and these 15 points are *consumed* and cannot be used to power abilities. Any P.P.E. above and beyond the initial 15 points is naturally converted into I.S.P. that can be used to power abilities at a 2-to-1 ratio (2 I.S.P. for every one point of P.P.E.).

I.S.P. Reservoir: 1D6x10+90 I.S.P. can be stored to power their psychic abilities. Any amount above this maximum number is lost. This energy can be held in reserve for one day per level of the psychic's experience, but since Psi-Leeches crave power and love to flaunt their abilities – both for the thrill of it and to intimidate others – they tend to burn through their I.S.P. within 48 hours, most in under 12 hours.

3. **Psychic Claws:** A psychic manifestation drawing on ectoplasm to create a pair of claws. Damage: 3D6 plus any possible P.S. or combat skill damage bonuses. Death Blow: The 3D6 damage goes direct to Hit Points! The player must announce the character's intention to make a death blow before he strikes and bonuses to strike are at half to do so.
4. **Initial Psychic Powers:** Detect Psionics plus select three from the Sensitive category and three from the Physical category. Every level beyond the first, the character selects *one* new power from each of the three categories of Sensitive, Physical and Healing. At levels 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, and 15 choose one ability from the *Master* category.
5. **Insanities.** ALL Psi-Leeches are violent bullies who live to intimidate, dominate, use and terrorize others. All also have a superiority complex that makes them believe they are above the law, and better, smarter and more important than anyone else. Also see Random Penalty Table.
6. **Random Enhancement Table:** Roll twice for random determination or pick two.

   01-05% +3D6 to Spd. attribute.

   06-10% +2D6 to P.S.

   11-15% +1D4+2 to P.P.

   16-20% +1D4+3 to I.Q.

   21-25% +2D6+8 to Hit Points.

   26-30% +6D6 to S.D.C.

   31-35% +5 to save vs drugs and poisons.

   36-40% Impervious to Horror Factor.

   41-45% Impervious to possession.

   46-50% Impervious to all forms of mind control.

   51-55% +1D4 to save vs magic.

   56-60% +1D4 extra attacks per melee round.

   61-65% Double the range of all psychic powers.

   66-70% Double the duration of all psychic powers.

   71-75% Reduce I.S.P. cost by 20% on all psychic powers.

   76-80% Has one Psi-Shadow power of choice.

   81-85% Double damage for all psychic powers that inflict damage or suffering.

   86-90% Select 1D4+1 extra Sensitive psychic powers.

   91-95% Select 1D4+1 extra Physical psychic powers.

   96-00% Select 1D4 extra Master Psionic powers.

7. **Random Penalty Table:** Roll three times for random determination or pick three.

   01-05% Reduce I.Q. by 1D6x10%.

   06-10% Reduce M.E. by 1D6x10%.

   11-15% Reduce P.E. by 1D6x10%.

   16-20% -2 to save vs psychic attacks.

   21-25% -3 to save vs illusions (psychic or magic) as well as hallucinogenic drugs.

   26-30% -3 to parry or dodge, probably because he is too overconfident to believe it is necessary and so only makes a half-hearted effort.

   31-35% -10% on all skills, maybe because, a) he doesn't think he has to work at keeping them sharp, b) because of a mental deficiency, or c) he has trouble focusing and concentrating when it comes to skill performance.

   36-40% Mental block: Cannot drive/pilot any type of vehicle, needs somebody to do it for him.

   41-45% Mental block. Cannot remember anything about his past or loved ones, including the A.D.A. and the Pandora Project. As a result, has no feelings or sentimentality about them and responds to them with cold indifference.

   46-50% Insanity: Roll for one random Phobia.

   51-55% Insanity: Phobia: Fears and shuns other P.C.C.s created by the A.D.A.'s Pandora Project.

   56-60% Insanity: Roll for one random Obsession.

   61-65% Insanity: Obsessed with undermining and destroying the Nightlords.

   66-70% Insanity: Obsessed with undermining and destroying the Athanatos.

   71-75% Insanity: Obsessed with undermining and destroying A.D.A. psychics and agents out of hate, revenge or an extreme sense of rivalry, but is not out to destroy the Company or stop the Pandora Project.

   76-80% Insanity: Paranoid that the A.D.A. is "out to get him." Preys on A.D.A. operatives (psychics and humans), and stalks and kills any agents he notices. In addition, will slay anybody associated with the Company or its operatives as well as those he finds reason to suspect is an A.D.A. operative (possibly player characters).

   81-85% Insanity: Hyper-aggressive. Tends to react violently to insults and threats, or targets such individuals as his next victim.

   86-90% Insanity: God complex. Believes he or she possesses god-like powers or actual divinity. Sees all humans (and most others) as apes or children by comparison and angelic or demonic beings (including the Athanatos, Guardians, Nightlords, Night Princes and some Nightbane) as rivals to be tamed or destroyed. This also makes them obnoxiously arrogant, condescending and incredibly bold; takes insane risks and chances.

   91-95% Insanity: Sadistic. Loves to inflict pain, terror and death on others just for the fun of it.

   96-00% Megalomaniac. Obsessed with taking over the world (or a big chunk of it) and will consider using or working with (for the moment) anyone, including the forces of darkness, as means to an end.

Psi-Leech P.C.C.

Alignments: Anarchist 20%, Miscreant 35%, Diabolic 33%, Aberrant 10% and 2% other (typically Unprincipled). **Note:** Ideal as a Non-Player Character villain. Evil player characters may fall to an untimely end, possibly even at the hands of their fellow player character teammates. A Psi-Leech who is not a villain is likely to be Anarchist, Aberrant or a rare Unprincipled or good alignment. Good ones, Unprincipled and some Aberrant will try to live on the P.P.E. of animals (and their enemies) rather than humanoids.

Attribute Restrictions: None. A high M.E. is helpful, but not necessary.

Alignment: The nature of the class heavily tends towards Anarchist or evil, but player character Psi-Leeches will tend to be selfish or of the "Aberrant" variety, who live by a code that requires them to kill only evil and criminal men and women.

P.C.C. Skills:

Basic Mathematics (+10%)

Native Language/Literacy at 98%.

Streetwise (+25%)

Streetwise: Drugs (+10%)

W.P.: Two of choice.

Two Physical skills of choice.

Hand to Hand: Expert; can be changed to Martial Arts (or Assassin, if evil) at a cost of one P.C.C. Related Skill.

P.C.C. Related Skills: Choose five other skills from the categories listed below. These are additional areas of training (usually leftover memories from before H.P.E.). Choose two additional skills at levels 3, 6, 9, and 12.

Communications: Radio: Basic only.

Domestic: Any (+10%).

Electrical: Basic Electronics only.

Espionage: None.

Mechanical: Basic or Automotive Mechanics only.

Medical: First Aid, Holistic Medicine, and Paramedic only (+10%).

Military: None.

Physical: Any (+5% where applicable).

Pilot: Any (+5%).

Pilot Related: Any.

Rogue: Any (+10%).

Science: Advanced Mathematics only (+5%).

Technical: Any (+5%).

Weapon Proficiencies: Any.

Wilderness: Any (+5%).

Secondary Skills: Choose 4 additional skills from the list above. These Secondary Skills are additional areas of knowledge that do not benefit from formal training and thus do not gain the bonus indicated. Choose one additional at levels 5, 9, and 13. All Secondary Skills begin at the base skill level.

Standard Equipment: Most Psi-Leeches have little more than the clothes on their back when they make good their escape, but steal money and valuables from their victims. Additionally, since most are evil, many (particularly NPCs) engage in a life of crime and violence.

Money: Begins play with 1D6x100 dollars in pocket money.

Other Notable O.C.C.s & R.C.C.s

Templar Dark Slayer

The music pounded in Drake's head. What passed for his pulse quickened as he surveyed the crowd. Throughout the club, bodies moved in an undeniably sexual rhythm, every motion suggestive of the things to come later. The almost deafening techno-industrial beats rattled the chain link fence that separated the bar from the rest of the club and seemed to reverberate off of the black walls and mirrored marble floor. The place was a cacophony of sound, passion and lust, just the way he liked it.

Drake scanned the dance floor, looking for that one special lady who would share the most erotic moments of her life on this, her last night on Earth. She was here, somewhere, a flower hidden in among the rest of the typical, pretentious Goths pulsing on the floor. Sometimes he found what he was looking for, but usually he settled for any old vessel. One had to be careful in these places though, the Nocturnes and Nightbane often hung out at such places, and tonight they were everywhere, and neither looked kindly on those of his ilk – vampires.

Finally, he saw her – the one. She was choosing her moments, biding her time and surveying the floor much as he was. She was a vision in black. A perfect body, makeup not overstated but classy. Finally, a song came on that met her approval and she moved out onto the dance floor, all by her lonesome. Her movements were fluid, smooth, graceful, wanton. She was sensual and soft, dancing in what seemed to be slow motion.

Drake could smell her blood. She was human, but she had power. Her beckoning motions seemed to draw both men and women nearer, then with a wave of her hand she dismissed them and they fell back into their frantic dance rhythm, none the wiser for it. Perhaps there was more to this one than met the eye. Didn't matter, just made her all the more special.

The song ended, and his prey faded back against the wall, leaned on one shoulder and surveyed the crowd again. The look on her face was one of extreme boredom. Now was his chance. He approached her from behind, leaned into her ear, and whispered, "Let's go."

"Excuse me?" she said. Her voice was music, one eyebrow quirked in a gesture of annoyed bemusement at his gall.

"You're bored with this place. Don't tell me you aren't. There is nothing left for you here." He moved around in front of her and allowed the red glint to creep subtly into his gaze. "I can show you things . . . give you a rush you'll remember till the moment of death," He smiled and added. "And maybe a taste of eternity if you please me. What's your name?"

"Lily," she replied.

"How appropriate. Well, Lily, shall we?" He offered her his arm, which she took without hesitation.

Together they went out into the alley behind the club. Back into the darkness, between two dumpsters, he kissed her. She

gave into his touch as they always did, melting into his embrace like so much wet clay. He worked his kisses down her throat, felt her pulse quicken. Her hands moved up his back, clawed at his chest as he sank his fangs deep into her throat . . . and then came death.

Lily gave the thin ash stake another push, just to be sure. Then she wiped the blood from the small puncture wound on her neck – just a scratch really – and looked down at the staked corpse, the flesh already beginning to decay. The sun would finish the job in a few hours.

"Say hi to the devil for me." she cooed in triumph.

Lily took a deep breath and went down on one knee. She crossed herself, muttered a "thanks to Magdalene," and anointed the dead vampire with oils and holy water. Then she stood, ran her fingers through her hair, smoothed down her velvet dress, and sauntered back into the club. One less bloodsucker in the world, and a Master at that. Sometimes it was just too easy.

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In the years following Dark Day, the *Knights Templar* carried out their crusade against the undead as they always had. However, it soon became painfully apparent that there were other dark forces to be reckoned with besides the undead, and the Templars knew that the time had to come when they would once again have to rethink their priorities and mission. In the earliest days of the Order, the Knights Templar stood for the defense of all that was good and just. The undead just happened to be the unholy blight hidden in the shadows that threatened mankind the most, for few other enlightened warriors recognized their threat to humankind. Now, the Nightlords and their minions presented a new danger, one that may even be greater than vampires, and certainly was more immediate. And while some of the Knights Templar felt that the secret society should stick to the war against the undead, there were those who recognized the narrow and self-destructive path the Red Cross and the Temple Order were treading. The time had come to expand the war and to try to pull the Earth out from the devouring darkness of the Nightlords.

The Knights Templar of today are divinely inspired men and women descended from the first Templars (or so even those who aren't choose to believe). All follow a program devised to train them in the ways of the warrior highly specialized in hunting and slaying the undead, demons and other unholy abominations. Thus, the Slayers were born.

Templar Dark Slayers are said to be divinely chosen, psychics blessed with unique powers and intuition that make them hunters and slayers of darkness. They can come from any walk of life, but they always have an awareness of the paranormal and a sense of danger lurking in the night. Many claim to have been troubled by nightmares in the childhood, and some claim to have visions that lead them to their calling as a Knight Templar. Their abilities are natural and first manifest during adolescence, but unique. The MK-ULTRA II program is aware of the existence of this type of psychic, but has been unable to replicate their abilities. The best the Company can do is send out Psychic Bloodhounds to sniff out psychics with the Dark



Slayers' potential and try to recruit them before the Knights Templar enlist them into their ranks.

Shortly after one discovers his initial psychic abilities (the special Dark Slayer powers don't and bonuses don't manifest until one becomes a Dark Slayer), the individual has a vision-dream which leaves him with the realization that he a) is special, b) was born to hunt and destroy the undead, and c) must now choose to accept these abilities or forsake them forever. About this time, a Knight Templar (sometimes a Guardian, sometimes the A.D.A.) mysteriously shows up to offer advice and recruit the psychic to the cause. If the path is rejected the character keeps 1D4+2 psychic abilities (see #1, below), nothing more. Only under extraordinary conditions will the choice be offered again, later in life. Few Dark Slayers refuse such overtures, especially when it comes from a Knight Templar – somehow it just seems like the right choice. Those recruited into one group or another are given combat and lore training specific to the tracking down and slaying of the undead, and supernatural beings in general. Those rare few who accept the calling but either refuse formal training or are not recruited, typically wind up leading independent "gangs" of would-be vampire killers, demon hunters, or Nightbane against the forces of darkness.

Formally trained Dark Slayers of the Knights Templar follow a code of ethics and chivalry, are well schooled about vampires and creatures of darkness, and are usually big on ceremony and formality. A Dark Slayer is usually well connected to other members of the secretive Knights Templar and 1D4+1 other factions (Guardians, the Resistance, Nightbane, etc.), as well as having numerous other street contacts, informers, friends and even followers, assistants and like-minded adventurers/heroes who they usually refer to as "crusaders." Dark Slayers also have elaborate burial ceremonies – rituals designed to prevent fallen crusaders and innocent victims from rising as the undead. In fact, many Dark Slayers perform brief rituals of "blessing" on the demons, vampires, and monsters they slay as a sort of good luck charm and gesture of superstition. They take their belief that they are a divinely chosen group very seriously. Unfortunately, most Dark Slayers get lost in their own sense of righteousness and self-importance. Each believes himself to be directly descended from the first Knights Templar and somehow divinely chosen and blessed. Believing they are "touched by the divine," most of them tend to be arrogant, haughty, demanding and condescending. Many are good-hearted, and most are honorable to a fault, but can wind up acting like pompous jerks and push away those who would otherwise fight at their side or help their cause. The worst of the lot are unable to cooperate with others because they either don't trust them or don't have the confidence that they can carry their weight (regard them as ignorant lackeys). Contempt, bickering and infighting even occurs between the various Knights Templar, each of whom often sees himself and his views as superior to his brethren. This lack of unity, except under duress, causes most Knights to go out in the world as lone agents or pairs of equals or a small group of 3-5 with one as the clear leader (usually the most experienced of the lot).

If a Dark Slayer acts in an overtly dishonorable fashion (selfish, miscreant, or diabolic alignment), commits the cold-blooded murder of an innocent, or begins to brazenly abuse his powers, and the Knights Templar find out about it, he is marked for death by all others in the Order. A "Blood Hunt" is called and the renegade is hunted down and destroyed as though he were an undead.

Special Abilities of the Dark Slayer of the Templar Knights:

1. **Initial Psionic Powers:** Dark Slayers are knights and warriors, first and foremost, and possess abilities to assist them in their divine quest to find and destroy vampires and other evil supernatural creatures. At level one, the character begins with the psychic powers of Sixth Sense, Presence Sense, Sense Evil, See Aura, Bio-Regeneration, and Summon Inner Strength. In addition, the Slayer may choose three powers from any of the three "lesser" categories (Healing, Sensitive or Physical). At levels 2, 4, 8, and 12, the Knight may choose one additional power from the *Healing* category. At levels 3, 6, 10, 12, and 14, he may choose one power from either the *Sensitive* or *Physical* category. Finally, at levels 4, 8, and 12, the Knight gains one ability from the *Master* category of psychic powers.
2. **I.S.P.** Base I.S.P. for a Templar Dark Slayer is 2D4x10, plus M.E. attribute number and 1D6+6 per level of experience. They are considered Master psychics.
3. **P.P.E.:** 4D6, plus P.E. attribute number and an additional 1D6 per level of experience.
4. **Recognize the Undead.** The Templar Dark Slayer recognizes vampires and other types of undead without fail; line of sight and must be within 400 feet (122 m). Furthermore, these inspired undead hunters can *feel* the presence of vampires and approximately how many (off by 20%) when the undead are within 200 feet (61 m).
5. **Demon Strike:** Through the expenditure of *P.P.E.*, the Dark Slayer can channel energy through a strike designed to cripple and destroy supernatural beings. By expending 10 P.P.E., the Knight Templar can inflict a devastating blow that bypasses the natural armor of supernatural creatures and inflicts *Double Damage* whether the attack be a punch, kick or by weapon. Note that this power only functions against *supernatural* creatures.

   At first, this power must be used in hand to hand combat or by melee weapon (sword, stake, etc.), but as the character grows in experience, the power can be infused in ranged weapons (bullets, crossbow bolts, arrows, etc.). This happens at fifth level. At tenth level, the power inflicts *Triple Damage* in hand to hand combat (only).

   P.P.E. Cost: 10 per each attack.
6. **Shroud of the Divine:** At second level, the Dark Slayer gains the ability to cloud the minds of others so that it is difficult to see the weapons he carries on his person. In this manner, the Knight can always be prepared with weapons drawn out in the open, but without those around him realizing it (they just don't notice thanks to the psychic haze of the shroud). In order to see a weapon carried by a Dark Slayer, one must actively be looking for the presence of one and make a save vs psychic illusions to spot the hidden or hand-held item(s). A failed roll means the Knight looks innocuous and weaponless, even if one is physically searching him for weapons. Furthermore, if the Knight's weapons are discovered, he can

expend 5 I.S.P. to "override" the examiner's discovery and force a second save in which a failed save makes the individual forget they found weapons. This "overriding influence" can only be attempted once per search. **Note:** The shroud is automatic against vampires – the undead simply cannot see any weapons in hand or on the Knight's person – no saving throw applies to them.

I.S.P. Cost: 10. Duration of Shroud: 10 minutes per level of the Knight (indefinite against vampires).

7. **Tainted Blood:** At sixth level, the Dark Slayer's blood becomes tainted and actually *poisonous* to undead creatures. Any vampire attempting to feed from the Knight must roll a save vs non-lethal poison (16 or better) or become dizzy from the hero's tainted blood (reduce all of the undead's combat bonuses, attacks per melee and speed by half). At level 8, the blood of the Dark Slayer takes on a sort of acidic quality that is only damaging to supernatural creatures. By cutting himself (and inflicting 1D4 points of damage in the process), the Knight can coat a bladed weapon with his blood to inflict an additional 1D6 damage against all forms of undead. If a vampire drinks even a teaspoon of tainted blood, the creature suffers 5D6 damage.
8. **P.C.C. Bonuses:** +3D6 to S.D.C., +1D4 to P.P., +1D6 to P.S., +3 to save vs Horror Factor, +4 to save vs all vampire powers and influence, +2 to save vs mind control (psionic and magic), and +2 to save vs possession.

Alignment: Any, but most tend towards Principled, Scrupulous or Aberrant.

Attributes: M.E. and P.E. of 12 or higher.

P.C.C. Skills: (**Note:** The skill package below is for a Knight Templar or A.D.A. trained Dark Slayer. "Renegade" or independent Dark Slayers also exist, but should utilize the *Nightbane Warlord* skill package. This alternate skill set is found in the **Nightbane® RPG.**)

Native Language and Literacy at 98%.

Basic Mathematics (+25%)

Radio: Basic (+15%)

Tracking (+10%)

Counter-Tracking (+10%)

Military Etiquette (+15%)

Lore: Vampires (+20%)

Lore: Two of choice (+15%).

W.P. Archery

W.P.: Two ancient weapons of choice.

W.P.: Two modern weapons of choice.

Hand to Hand: Martial Arts (if the character is evil, may opt for Assassin instead).

P.C.C. Related Skills: Select 7 other skills, plus two additional at levels 3, 6, 9, and 12.

Communications: Any (+10%).

Domestic: Any (+5%).

Electrical: Basic Electronics only.

Espionage: Any (+5%).

Mechanical: Basic and Automotive Mechanics only.

Medical: Any (+5%), except Medical Doctor.

Military: Any (+15%).

Physical: Any.

Pilot: Any (+5%).

Pilot Related: Any.

Rogue: None.

Science: None.

Technical: Any (+10%).

Weapon Proficiencies: Any.

Wilderness: Any (+10%).

Secondary Skills: Select four other skills from the list above. These are additional areas of skill that do not benefit from formal training and thus do not gain the benefit of the bonuses listed in parentheses. Select one additional Secondary Skill at levels 4, 8, and 12. Secondary Skills begin at the base skill level.

Standard Equipment: One weapon for each W.P., 288 rounds for each modern weapon, 144 silver coated bullets, 6 wooden stakes, a silver mirror, a small cross necklace, a silver cross (hand-held), 1D4 vials of holy water, one bow weapon of choice and 96 arrows/bolts, plus 1D6x1000 dollars in possessions, including clothes, weapons, and personal items. Vehicle is a simple, new or not too old, used car, truck or motorcycle worth about 8,000-13,000 dollars.

Money: Starts with 4D6x100 dollars in cash.

The Fallen Guardian

NPC Villain or Optional R.C.C.

When a Guardian is expelled for performing evil acts, his powers of light are usually stripped by whatever mysterious power grants them in the first place. The most vile and wicked of these Fallen Guardians try to turn to *the Dark*, selling their souls for powers of darkness. This is accomplished through arcane rituals contained in a rare and ancient tome of Ultimate Darkness and Evil. The book is said to be written and illuminated by hand, and inked in the blood of slain Guardians. It is believed there remain only a few copies hidden around the world, but those in the know or who are relentless enough to do so, can find one. It is also said that the ceremony that bonds a Fallen Guardian to the Dark involves the ritual sacrifice of a fellow (good) Guardian, and other terrible acts.

At the end of the ceremony, the Dark Power washes over the Fallen, taking away the pitiful creature's last shreds of sanity and leaving him a semi-functional and psychopathic monster dedicated to the Dark. The Fallen become obsessed with stamping out and destroying all that is good and noble and causing as much pain and suffering as possible. Above all others, they work to undo and corrupt all the good done by the Lightbringers faction, and kill as many Guardians and members of the Lightbringers as possible. Even heroes loosely associated with the faction may be targeted, as the Fallen Guardians try to tear the faction down on every level. For this reason, the Fallen often haunt the same places as the Guardians, tormenting, manipulating and murdering those the Guardians both work with and try to help. Though psychotic, violent and wicked, the Fallen are not raving lunatics, feral monsters or stupid. They are



terrifyingly cunning and methodical, and delight in orchestrating elaborate and long term schemes to inflict suffering, discord, betrayal and death. Destroying the members of the faction in waves of chaos and surprise attacks is only one part of their crusade to bring down the Lightbringers piece by piece.

The Fallen may work as lone individuals, but the majority choose to work in small groups with fellow Fallen Guardians, and/or other powerful supernatural beings. These groups are known as *cabals* and can have up to six supernatural Fallen as their members. A cabal of Fallen Guardians is an extremely dangerous force, ruthless and relentless in their mission to destroy the Lightbringers and all enemies of the Dark and champions of Light. To achieve their chosen goals they often recruit their own band of evil henchmen – Nightbane, psychics, vampires, Reapers, and other supernatural horrors, as well as ordinary evil or greedy humans. In fact, the evil minions of the Dark are often drawn to one another by an irresistible need to work in small groups where they can pool their resources to much greater effect. Consequently, where one encounters a single Fallen Guardian, he can be certain that 2-5 others lurk somewhere in the shadows nearby, and that they may command a score of lesser malignant henchmen and worshipers. Thankfully, Fallen Guardians are a minority, as the Dark chooses only the most vile and corrupt Guardians to act as its minions.

To become a Fallen Guardian in the service of the Dark, all powers of light are forever stripped away and the Fallen must willingly and wholeheartedly embrace the Dark. The transformation process and their new vile nature is such that the Fallen fall in love with inflicting death and revel in experimenting with the methods and ways of bringing it to their enemies, the good and mortals in general. This means embracing all forms of torture, pain and suffering, both physical and spiritual (i.e., mental and emotional torture). The more they can make suffer and die at a time, the better, making them amateur mass murderers – and they are quick studies.

Note: Being branded an outcast from the Lightbringers does *not* rob a Guardian of his powers of light or automatically make him an agent of the Dark. Like humans, each Guardian has his or her own personality and viewpoints, and sometimes they cause conflict with and expulsion from the faction. Rather, Fallen Guardians are those who become truly evil and openly turn to the Dark as their new master and source of power. Those who are tossed out for lesser offenses but do not embrace the Dark see their powers reduced or simply disappear, leaving them akin to mortals. Only a Miscreant or Diabolic Guardian character should ever lose his powers of light. G.M.s' should use caution and discretion when allowing players to run characters like the Fallen Guardian, if at all. Intended to be NPC villains.

The Powers of the Fallen:

Many of the powers granted to Fallen Guardians function almost identically to certain *Nightbane talents*! This casts some awful questions on the nature of the powers of the Nightbane, and fuels the fire of those organizations such as the *Spook Squad* who insist that if such powers all come from the same source, then the Nightbane are, at best, unwitting pawns of an evil greater than anyone could possibly imagine. While this seems

unlikely, all things considered, it gives those who hate or fear the supernatural and beings like the Nightbane, reason to hunt and persecute them.

1. Appearance. Fallen Guardians appear emaciated, with sunken features and a gaunt build. Their skin becomes an ashen gray color, and their hair dulls to a dingy hue of its original color. The eyes of Fallen Guardians become black voids, and looking into them is akin to looking into the darkest corners of one's soul. Fallen Guardians have a Horror Factor of 12.

2. Draining Touch. By expending P.P.E. and making a successful roll to strike, the Fallen can deal one point of damage per point of P.P.E. spent. The attack leaves no wounds, but literally drains the life force from their opponent/victim. Victims wounded by the Touch also suffer a lingering penalty of -2 to strike, parry, and dodge, and -15% on all skills for 1D4 hours afterwards (*not* cumulative with multiple attacks/touches). This devastating attack, however, requires that the Dark Guardian expend all attacks for the melee round, and the victim gets a saving throw vs magic. A successful save means the victim takes half damage and no penalties.

In addition, not only may the Fallen Guardian use the Draining Touch to kill an opponent, but it can use the S.D.C./Hit Points drained to *regenerate* itself – gaining one Hit Point/S.D.C. for itself from every two points of damage inflicted on its enemy.

3. Powers of Darkness. The Fallen Guardian gains powers of darkness that exactly mimic the following *Nightbane talents* in place of their old powers of light: Anti-Arcane, Nightbringer, Shadow Shield, Shadow Blast, and Lord/Lady of the Wild (insects). For complete descriptions of these abilities, see the **Nightbane® RPG**, pages 107-112. Lord/Lady of the Wild is not subject to the normal restrictions when applied to the Fallen and a Dark Guardian can *never* purchase new or additional Nightbane talents. Lord/Lady of the Wild (insects) also does not suffer the P.P.E. cost for "suicidal" actions, as insects do not have the same survival instinct that higher animals do.

4. Vulnerability to Light. The Fallen take damage from direct sunlight just as Wampyrs do, but are at home and comfortable in the Nightlands, and can function on the Astral Plane without penalty. Note that the light generation power of Guardians does not harm Fallen as it does Vampires and Wampyrs, and the Fallen may use their Nightbringer ability to cancel out the Guardians' light generation. In bright light, however, Fallen are blinded and can see only 20 feet (6.1 m). All combat abilities/bonuses are halved in bright light and they suffer a -15% to all skill performances.

5. Precognitive/Enhanced Senses. The Fallen somehow retain their precognitive senses from when they were full Guardians. This enables them to track where their enemies may be, and to know when and where they should go to cause the most suffering. They also gain Nightvision 500 feet (152 m) and can even see in unnatural or magical darkness that otherwise cancels out nightvision; however, the range of their nightvision in such unnatural darkness is halved.

6. Adhesion. Fallen can crawl on walls and ceilings just like insects. Their power is so advanced that they can move their full Speed attribute rate while doing so, and can even dangle to free their hands. When dangling, Fallen cannot crawl; they must use at least three limbs (two feet and one hand) to move, and when using only three, their speed is halved, as are all bonuses to dodge.

Fallen Guardians, also known as Dark Guardians

Alignment: Miscreant 33% and Diabolic 67%. The Dark grants power only to the most despicable of the fallen bastions of light.

Attributes: I.Q. 2D4+16, M.E. 2D6+16, M.A. 2D6+12, P.S. 2D6+12, P.P. 2D6+12, P.E. 2D6+12, P.B. 1D6+8, Spd. 2D6+20

Size: Average 5 feet (1.5 m).

S.D.C.: 2D6x10+100, in addition to applicable skill bonuses.

Hit Points: P.E. attribute number x2, plus 1D6 per level. Fallen aren't as resilient as regular Guardians.

Horror Factor: 12; 15 when facing a pack of three or more.

P.P.E.: P.E. attribute number x5, plus 20 points per level of experience.

Combat: Fallen gain the instinctive equivalent of Hand to Hand: Assassin.

Damage: Per Supernatural Strength, psionics, weapon, or talents.

Bonuses: +1 on initiative, +4 to Perception, +1 to dodge, +3 to roll with punch or fall, +4 to save vs magic, +4 to save vs psionics, +6 to save vs Horror Factor. All are in addition to attribute, hand to hand and skill bonuses.

Magic Powers: None, other than the powers of darkness described previously.

Psionics: All Fallen start with Empathy, Mind Block, Presence Sense, See Aura, and Bio-Manipulation. Every level after the first, they may select one Sensitive or Physical psychic ability. Fallen are considered Master psychics.

I.S.P.: M.E. attribute number +1D6x10. Add 2D6 per level of experience.

Average Life Span: Unknown. Most meet violent and early deaths.

Experience Level: Varies. Average NPC 1D6+6.

R.C.C. Skills: Fallen Guardians retain the skills they possessed as a Guardian. Choose 8 skills from the list below. Add one additional at levels 3, 6, 9, and 12. All new skills start at the base skill level. For pre-existing Guardians, any skills no longer available to the character as per the list below are forgotten. Otherwise, select two R.C.C. Skills, and two Secondary Skills that the character simply forgets as the result of the transformation.

Communications: Radio: Basic only.

Domestic: None.

Electrical: None.

Espionage: Detect Ambush, Detect Concealment, Tracking, Counter-Tracking only (+15%).

Mechanical: None.

Medical: First Aid and Paramedic only (+10%).

Military: None.

Physical: Any.

Pilot: Automobile and Motorcycle only (+5%).

Pilot Related: None.
Technical: Any (+5%).
Rogue: Any (+5%).
W.P.: Any.
Science: None.
Wilderness: None.

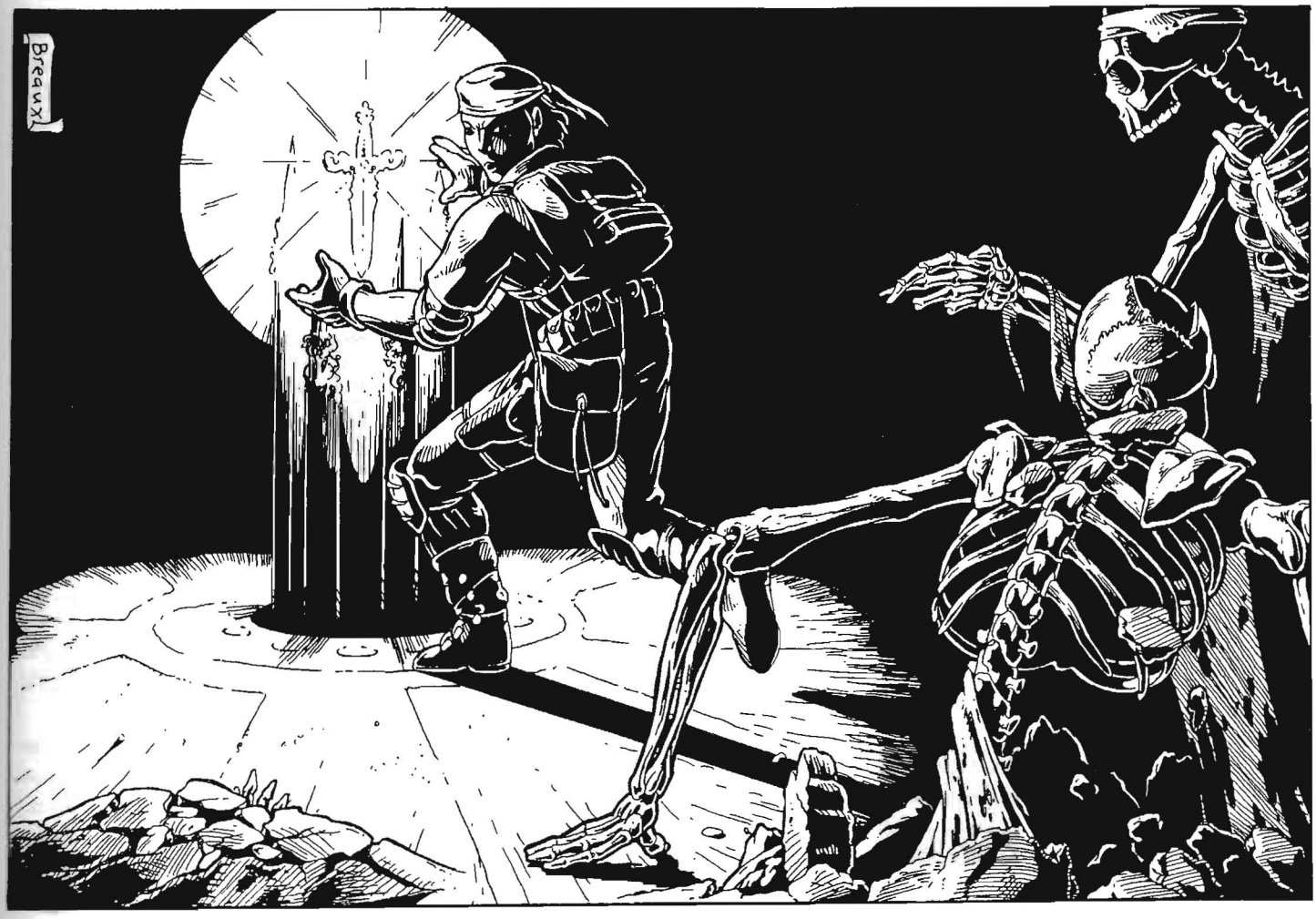
Alliances and Allies: Other Fallen or evil Guardians, Boaka Mircalla, and Reapers. They may also work with unscrupulous practitioners of magic, vampires, evil Nightbane, wicked humans, and just about any evil supernatural being willing to be subservient to them.

Weapons and Equipment: They favor handguns and wicked-looking knives (appearance is everything) to finish off their victims.

Money: Fallen Guardians typically have very little money: 2D4x100 dollars maximum. These creatures murder and steal what they need.

Haunts/Hangouts: Abandoned warehouses, back alleys, shady nightclubs/bars, drug dens and anywhere there is shadow and an abundance of vice, wickedness and easy victims.

Experience: Fallen use the Nightbane/Guardian experience table.



Nocturne Collector O.C.C.

Somewhere between secret agents and archivists, Nocturne Collectors form a special sort of intelligence branch of the Nocturnes, chosen from the best of the best and trained in the acquisition of items of ancient lore. Most Collectors specialize in a few types of lore, preferring to balance out such knowledge with the ability to obtain more, but there are those who are more "bookworm" than archaeologist, and these tend to rely on others to do the dirty work while they accompany the expedition to lend their knowledge and expertise to the task.

Alignment: Any, but lean toward Scrupulous, Unprincipled, Anarchist, and Aberrant.

Attribute Requirements: I.Q. 9 or higher, a high M.A., M.E., P.S. and P.P. are helpful but not required.

O.C.C. Skills:

Native Language and Literacy at 98%.

Basic Math (+20%)

Three Lore skills of choice (Any, +25%).

Research (+20%)

Detect Concealment (+10%)

Radio: Basic (+10%)

Cryptography (+10%)

Surveillance Systems (+10%)

Locate Librarian (new, +15%)

W.P. Automatic Pistol

W.P. Knife

Hand to Hand: Basic; can be changed to Expert for the cost of one O.C.C. Related Skill or Martial Arts (Assassin, if evil), for the cost of two.

O.C.C. Related Skills: Select two from Communications, two from Espionage or Rogue and six other skills at level one, plus two additional skills at levels three and six, and one at levels 9, 11, and 13. All skills selected add the bonus listed for the appropriate category, and all new skills start at level one proficiency.

Communications: Any (+10%).

Domestic: Any.

Electrical: Basic and Computer Repair only (+5%).

Espionage: Any (+10%).

Mechanical: Basic or Auto Mechanics only (+5%).

Medical: Any, except Medical Doctor.

Military: None.

Physical: Any.

Pilot: Any (+5%).

Pilot Related: Navigation only.

Rogue: Any (+5%).

Science: Any (+5%).

Technical: Any (+15%).

W.P.: Any, except Heavy.

Wilderness: Land Navigation and Wilderness Survival only (+5%).

Secondary Skills: The character also gets to select five Secondary Skills from the list above. These are additional areas of knowledge that do not get the benefit of the bonus listed in parentheses. All Secondary Skills start out at the base skill level. Select an additional Secondary Skill at levels 5, 9, and 12.

Standard Equipment: Access to a vehicle, a cell phone and laptop computer, digital camera, tape recorder, flashlight, note pad, 1D4 pens and markers, one weapon for each W.P., and a total of $1D6x1000 in clothes, electronics and personal items. Additional weapons and equipment are assigned (or "acquired") as needed.

Money: Starts with 6D6x100 dollars and gets paid a stipend of 1D6x1000 dollars a month from his faction.



Vaash R.C.C.

New Nightlands Denizens

The Vaash are a race of intelligent, amphibious (semi-aquatic) creatures who inhabit the Ohio Gorges in the Nightlands. This means that the Vaash are found all along the Nightlands equivalents of the Ohio, Allegheny, and Monongahela rivers, and may even spill into the Mississippi Canyon where it attaches to the Ohio Gorges. The Vaash are not indigenous to the Nightlands, rather they were brought there from their home in another dimension where they inhabit the lakes and rivers of that world. Even the Vaash are not aware of how exactly they wound up in the Nightlands; they only know that they are trapped in this desert realm of eternal twilight with little to no hope of returning home.

Survival in the Nightlands has been difficult at best for the Vaash, who need water to survive, but they are a warrior race and have managed to adapt with the help of their *Shamans*. These holy men of the race have the power to transform psychic energy into wood, fire, and water, which not only keeps the Vaash alive, but can be used as a weapon against the vampires who overrun the gorges. In addition, the underground cave system in the Pit that corresponds to the Earth aquifier contains pockets of water that the Vaash covet, and actively campaign to control. The vampires that also occupy the tunnels, while they obviously have no desire for the water, have developed a taste for Vaash blood, and view the race as competing for the same tunnels as the vampire nation, leading to frequent skirmishes and small-scale wars between the two. This also makes the Vaash allies to humans and the forces of good because they

stand against the Ba'al and undead. The Vaash tend to view any enemies of vampires and the Ba'al as their allies. More than one Nightbane, Guardian, and human rebel has found the Vaash to be stalwart allies against the Nightlords and undead. The Vaash are an honorable race and rarely betray or backstab someone they consider an ally, unless they believe their erstwhile ally has already betrayed them.

This does not mean that the Vaash are "good guys," however. They are aggressive and brutal creatures who thrive on war and exploit any perceived weaknesses to their favor, even if that weakness is in an ally. If a person encounters the Vaash and there is no common enemy to join against, the humanoids are just as likely to attack as they are to parley. However, they respect warriors and strength, and will back off and befriend those who put up a valiant fight, especially if their opponents seem more powerful than they. Similarly, the Vaash will accept those who surrender and praise the amphibians for their fighting and praise them for their great warrior skill. In fact, Vaash can be easily manipulated or provoked into combat through flattery that strokes their egos as great fighters. Once engaged in combat, however, many Vaash fight to the death, believing that death in combat is the most honorable path to the afterlife. That having been said, they are cagey warriors and do not throw away their lives in futile battles, and, depending on the circumstance and individual, will retreat or allow themselves to be taken captives. Survival of the species is paramount and above honor.

The Vaash resemble humanoid salamanders who stand six feet (1.8 m) tall. They are not a high-tech race, but can and do utilize what firearms they have scavenged from their enemies and obtained from their allies. In fact, most Vaash carry at least one handgun as a "sidearm" and also use Darkblade weapons they have managed to salvage from dead Hounds. Vaash who wield Darkblades are revered by their peers, for such a weapon is indeed a great trophy worthy of only the greatest warriors, for most won their Darkblade in mortal combat. These Vaash tend to be tribal leaders and the greatest of their warriors. Other than this, Vaash wield clubs, spears, axes, even swords and bows and arrows.

The greatest problem for the Vaash is their need for water, not only to drink, but for their skin which dries out easily. Vaash must spend at least six out of every 24 hours submerged in water, or they begin taking 2D6 damage per hour until they die or can submerge themselves in the life-giving fluid. To this end, the Vaash make a great effort to maintain control of the few "sinkholes" of water in the areas of the Nightlands that they occupy, and Vaash shamans build and maintain large tanks that they fill using their ability to create water. The Vaash generally sleep in shifts, with as many crammed into the water tanks or small pools as can fit, while others stand guard.

Some Vaash have found their way to Earth, where they live in rivers and lakes, but maintain a secretive and solitary existence. They are well aware that humans would kill them out of fear for their alien appearance and nature. A few of the more heroic among these have joined factions such as the Nocturnes or Resistance, but still tend to restrict their actions to either very late at night or underground operations. The Vaash are a freedom-loving people, and if they could be made aware that the Nightlords have subjugated mankind, they might be more open to assisting in the battle against the Ba'al.

The Vaash R.C.C.

Alignment: Any, but tend towards Unprincipled, Anarchist or Aberrant.

Attributes: I.Q. 2D6+1, M.E. 2D6+6, M.A. 2D6, P.S. 3D6+9, P.P. 3D6+6, P.E. 2D6+6, P.B. 2D6, Spd. 3D6+10

Size: Average 6 feet (1.8 m).

Hit Points: P.E. attribute number plus 1D6+2 per level of experience.

S.D.C.: 1D6x10+8, plus applicable skill bonuses.

Horror Factor: 10 when facing a single Vaash, 13 when facing down an angry party of four or more.

Damage: Claws do 2D6+2 damage, bite 1D6, or by weapon.

Bonuses: +2 on initiative, +4 to Perception, +1 to strike, +2 to parry and disarm, +3 to dodge, +4 to pull punch, +2 to save vs magic, +3 to save vs psionics, +4 vs Horror Factor, in addition to possible attribute and Hand to Hand and other skill bonuses.

Psionics: All Vaash start with Empathy, Mind Block, Presence Sense, and Sixth Sense. In addition, 20% of Vaash are born *Shamans,* and these receive the powers of *Pyrokinesis* and *Hydrokinesis*, in addition to the following "special" psychic abilities:

Create Water: By expending 10 I.S.P., the Vaash Shaman can create one gallon of water per level of experience. Water appears anywhere the Vaash wishes, within line of sight, be it in thin air, in a puddle on the ground, or in a container of the Vaash's choice.

Create Wood: By expending 10 I.S.P., the Vaash Shaman can create one pound (0.45 kg) of wood per level of experience. This wood can be of any variety and can be used to fashion tools, weapons, etc. It cannot, however, be created in any complex shape, just a two-by-four-like plank or a block of wood.

I.S.P.: M.E. attribute number x2, plus 6D6+10. Add 1D6+4 per level of experience.

Average Life Span: 65 years, if not killed in battle first.

Experience Level: Varies. Average NPC 1D4+5.

R.C.C. Skills:

Language: Vaash (98%)

Speaks and is literate in one other language of choice.

Wilderness Survival (+25%)

Tracking (+20%)

Dowsing (+15%)

Swimming (+10%)

Climbing

W.P.: Pistol or Revolver (player's choice).

W.P.: Three Ancient weapons of choice.

Hand to Hand: Expert; may be upgraded to Martial Arts (or Assassin, if evil) at a cost of one R.C.C. Related Skill.

R.C.C. Related Skills: Choose seven skills at first level, plus one additional at levels 4, 8, 12, and 15.

Communications: Radio: Basic only.

Domestic: Any (+10%).

Electrical: None.

Espionage: None.

Mechanical: Basic Mechanics only.

Medical: Any (+5%).

Military: Strategy/Tactics only (+5%).

Physical: Any.

Pilot Skills: None.

Pilot Related: None.

Rogue Skills: Any.

Science: Math, Biology and Botany only (+5%).

Technical: Any (+10%).

Weapon Proficiencies: Any.

Wilderness Skills: Any (+20%).

Secondary Skills: Vaash may choose four Secondary Skills at first level, plus an additional skill at levels 3, 6, 9, and 12. These skills are additional areas of expertise that do not gain the benefit of the bonuses listed in parentheses.

Alliances and Allies: Other Vaash and fellow warriors of any race who share their common enemies (namely vamps and Nightlords), especially those who exhibit great bravery and honor. This can include humans, Nightbane, Guardians, and others, even Wampyrs.

Enemies: Vampires, Nightlords and their minions, particularly Hounds (all types) and Hunters. Tend to regard all intruders into what they consider to be their territory as potential enemies and invaders until proven otherwise.

Weapons and Equipment: Most Vaash carry a pistol or revolver that does 3D6 to 5D6 damage, and one melee weapon for each W.P., as well as the kind of basic gear one would expect of primitive warriors, two water skins, backpack or sack, utility belt, some rope, perhaps a cloak, etc.

Money: The Vaash don't even know what money is. They barter items for items, or services for items, as well as take what they want from vanquished invaders and enemies.

Haunts/Hangouts: In the Nightlands, they occupy the Ohio Gorges and tunnel systems under Pitsburg, and all the way into the Mississippi Canyon.

Experience: Vaash use the Doppleganger experience table.

Vampires

Inspired and based on, in part, vampires as presented in Rifts® World Book One: Vampire Kingdoms, written by Kevin Siembieda.

There is far more to the hierarchy of vampires in the **Nightbane® RPG** than the divisions of Master, Secondary, and Wild Vampires. With the rise of the *Sanguine Legion*, a new breed of vampires has emerged, the **Strigoi**. The Strigoi see all Master Vampires as their sworn enemies, and all Wild Vampires as unfortunate creatures who only exist to be put out of their misery. The only part of vampire hierarchy they respect is the Secondary Vampire and "the creator" – the Vampire Intelligence. In fact, they seek to create a connection or union between all undead and all Vampire Intelligences, so that all vampires are one, and their power becomes unstoppable. Some Nightlords have gotten word of this strange sect and consider the Strigoi a dangerous rival for dominion of the Earth. A new kid in town who threatens their favored status in the current shape of things. Consequently, *King Moloch* has ordered an extensive campaign of vampire extermination that rivals his hatred of the Nightbane. Most Nightlords and Princes have taken to this campaign with a zest rarely seen among their kind, and those Master Vampires in the know, who view the Strigoi as a mutant virus or mentally deranged cousin, are also working to wipe them out, though some groups secretly share their view and assist them in their quest. Still, the Strigoi seem to be spreading rather than dying out.

Strigoi

Vampires of the Blood Moon

These creatures take their name from an ancient Romanian word for vampires. Using the title "Vampire of the Blood Moon," Strigoi are those elite (and some would say, insane) Secondary Vampires who have survived the *Sanguinization Rites of the Sanguine Legion*. In Romanian legend, Strigoi were "dead vampires," as opposed to Moroi, or "living vampires." The reason that the Strigoi have adopted this terminology for their race is to symbolize their death to normal vampiric existence. They, in essence, sell themselves to a mysterious power (unknowingly it is the Dark) in exchange for severing their subservient link to Master Vampires. In return, the Vampires of the Blood Moon gain certain new abilities not common to any other type of vampire. After the performance of the ritual, the new deacon in the Sanguine Legion is expected to behave with absolute loyalty to his new family and to pursue the goals of the Legion till the end of his undead existence. Those few Strigoi who have turned on the Legion and survived have found their new powers and abilities completely stripped, a process that is often so traumatic it renders the creature a hopelessly insane Wild Vampire. This is rarely a problem, however, since only the most dedicated and loyal acolytes join the Sanguine Legion and undergo the rites to transform to become a *Strigoi*.

Unfortunately for the vampire recipients of the rites, the ritual of transformation is flawed, and only results in a new Strigoi about half of the time. The other 50% can't handle the severing of ties with their vampire creator and the connection to more than one Vampire Intelligence, and become **Revenants**. Revenants possess all of the abilities and powers of Strigoi, but have an I.Q. of 3 (animal intelligence), a P.B. of 5 (feral and emaciated) and are afflicted with non-functional mindless aggression. These creatures are also completely incapable of controlling or slaking their thirst, which is geared entirely towards vampiric blood. This distorted bloodlust drives them to attack the first undead they come across (almost always those present when they emerge from their seclusion after the three-day adjustment period). So far as any in the Sanguine Legion are aware, no Revenant has ever survived for more than a few days, and the Legion always seeks to hunt down and destroy the poor creatures.

Strigoi love the trappings of humanity; they claim that while they are among the throngs of humankind they can smell and feel the pumping of blood within humans' veins. As such, many Strigoi immerse themselves in human culture. Their high P.B. and M.A. ratings tend to make them popular in whatever crowd they choose to associate, and in this manner they can more easily hunt their victims. Unlike many vampires, however, Strigoi love to work in teams, be it pairs or packs. Anywhere one could find a Master or Secondary Vampire, one can find a Strigoi. Strigoi are very powerful, obsessed with their life's mission and completely evil and sadistic fiends. They are more powerful than the standard Secondary Vampire, though perhaps not quite as powerful as a Master. **Note:** Intended as a Non-Player Character villain, not as a player character.

Abilities and Bonuses of the Strigoi

Standard vampire abilities: Strigoi gain all standard vampire abilities, bonuses, and penalties, except as modified below.

Immune to vampiric mind control: Vampires of the Blood Moon are completely immune to the mind control powers of other vampires; they simply do not work on Strigoi. They do retain their own abilities to control the minds of others, although they use these powers primarily on mortals and Wild Vampires that they intend to seduce or dominate for the purpose of feeding.

Immune to water: Strigoi possess a complete immunity to the vampiric vulnerability to running water. Running water is nothing to a Vampire of the Blood Moon, and many use this immunity to fool their enemies into believing that they are *not* vampires at all. Unfortunately, in exchange for this immunity, Strigoi gain a *slight* vulnerability to fire which does normal damage, and a strange vulnerability to *salt.* A handful of salt hurled in the face of a Strigoi inflicts 4D6 damage direct to Hit Points! In addition, Strigoi cannot cross a line of salt, nor can they enter or exit a circle of salt.

Metamorphosis: The shape shifting abilities of a vampire are also different for the Strigoi. Strigoi can only take the shape of a crow, black cat or large black spider (note that Strigoi can *not* turn to mist!). They retain all of their mental faculties, S.D.C., and powers in their metamorphosed form, which means stepping on a Strigoi metamorphosed into a spider is not going to kill it and the weird thing can speak.

Blink: All Strigoi possess a sort of limited line of sight teleportation ability that they refer to as "blinking." Maximum range for blinking is ten feet (3 m) per level of the Strigoi, and the destination must be in plain sight. Blinking can be done at will and as a standard defensive maneuver in combat (they can blink as a dodge maneuver. Roll for success as a standard dodge). Each blink counts as one melee attack/action.



The Plague: Strigoi possess the frightening ability to afflict normal humans with a magical disease they call "the plague." Inflicting the plague requires eye contact, concentration, and the expenditure of 50 P.P.E. by the Strigoi. It uses all the vampire's attacks for that melee round, must be the first attack that round, and because it requires concentration and the maintenance of eye contact, it is rarely used to any effect in melee combat.

Upon being inflicted with the Plague, the victim gets a saving throw vs magic (15 or better, P.E. bonuses vs magic apply). If the save is successful, the character suffers the first stage of the disease, but shakes it off after that. If he fails his saving throw, then the disease progresses. At each stage, another saving throw is granted, albeit at a -1 cumulative penalty. Eventually, the disease results in death, followed by mindless undeath. **Note:** Creatures immune to transformation are also immune to the Strigoi Plague.

The stages of the plague are as follows:

Stage 1: This stage occurs immediately after the infliction of the Plague upon its victim, and happens regardless of whether or not the victim makes his saving throw. Victims of the Plague are wracked with violent stomach cramps and a severe migraine headache, making them unable to function normally. Penalties: -4 on all combat bonuses and saves, balance is off (-30%) and skill performance is -30% for 1D4 hours, after which the cramps and headache fade to almost tolerable levels (reduce penalties by half) for 1D4 days. If the initial save was made, the symptoms completely disappear after this stage.

Stage 2: After Stage One, symptoms generally vanish for a few days, leading the victim to believe that they are "over" the illness. Then, suddenly and without warning, the cramps (and penalties) return and the body erupts in painful boils that lasts for 1D6 days. Victims in this stage have a high fever and the shakes (reduce speed by 10% and another -10% to skill performance). A successful save vs magic will negate the disease, and the character returns to normal after 1D4 days of Stage Two illness. A failed save means move on to Stage Three, next.

Stage 3: Body temperature drops dangerously low, and all the boils burst, causing 3D6 points of damage to the character. By this stage, chances are that the victim is carrying another, common disease (01-65%) and is contagious with that illness (flu, measles, pneumonia, tuberculosis, syphilitic infection, SARS, even HIV, and others, are possibilities). This secondary illness can be passed on to others in the usual manner for that given disease (01-50% chance another will catch it if exposed). Stage Three lasts approximately 1D6+3 days. A successful save vs magic, as before, negates/stops the disease after this stage and the character will recover completely within 1D4 weeks.

Stage 4: The victim begins to waste away, taking 1D6 points of damage each day, but lost S.D.C. and Hit Points do NOT recover and the P.E. attribute number drops by one point each day. A save vs magic is allowed every day to negate the illness, but continuing the -1 cumulative penalty. If P.E. drops to zero, the victim is so weak he is feeble: reduce all physical attributes by half (adjust bonuses accordingly), reduce attacks per round by half, and skill performance drops an accumulative -20%. When Hit Points reach zero the character dies. Three nights later, the Plague victim rises as a mindless animated corpse, completely subservient to the Strigoi who created it.

Plague Zombies: These "Plague Zombies" have 90 S.D.C., Supernatural P.S. of 14 (inflicts standard damage as per Supernatural P.S.), Speed of 7, regenerate 2D6 S.D.C. per round, and suffer half damage from all non-magical attacks (the attacks of supernatural creatures like Nightbane and Guardians inflict full normal damage to Plague Zombies, as do magic weapons, spells, and Nightbane talents). In addition, Plague Zombies possess an insatiable appetite for human flesh, compelling them to hunt, kill and consume anybody who comes within their or their master's reach. What's worse, whenever someone is bitten by a Plague Zombie, they must make a successful save vs magic after 24 hours have passed, or become inflicted with the Plague themselves (repeat process as above). Amputation of any limb bitten by a Plague Zombie within 24 hours of the attack adds +6 to this initial save. Unlike the affliction by Strigoi, the strain of Plague carried by Zombies requires 72 hours to incubate and thus will not be immediately apparent. Of course, killing a Plague victim before the Plague finishes them off will always stop a transformation into a Plague Zombie from occurring.

Thirst for Blood: Strigoi possess the same thirst for blood as normal vampires, but also hunger for *vampiric* blood on a regular basis. Since Strigoi view all Secondary Vampires as equals and potential Strigoi, they usually try to avoid killing Secondary Vampires unless the vampire proves to be a problem to them. However, there are a great many Secondary Vampire acolytes who willingly offer themselves up to non-lethal bites of Strigoi in hopes that they will further their status in the Legion. Aside from these voluntary "vessels," Strigoi tend to feed upon Wild Vampires, Secondary Vampires who oppose them, and whenever possible, Master Vampires. Cold-hearted and driven by their obsession, Strigoi kill without regret. A Strigoi who can truthfully claim to have fed upon a Master Vampire is highly respected within the Sanguine Legion.

Strigoi must feed upon two pints of vampiric blood each week, in addition to the standard need for human blood. Consequently, the Sanguine Legion keeps a "stock" of Wild Vampires penned up like cattle to be drained without killing them, as needed. The feeding process is accomplished through a special syringe-like "tube" just under the wrist of the Strigoi. This feeding tube extends to puncture the chest of the vampire (vampires only bleed from the heart). Once the tube penetrates the heart, the vampire victim is immobilized with a sensation that lies somewhere between agony and ecstasy, and cannot act to stop the Strigoi's feeding. Vampires who are completely drained by a Strigoi *die*, as the mystical properties of Strigoi feedings forcibly sever the vampire's connection to its Vampire Intelligence, literally tearing away the magical energies that sustain it. For this reason, most Sanguine Legion cults do not allow the complete draining of the Wild Vampires they keep in stock, so as to maintain a stable food supply.

The Slow Kill: Strigoi can attempt to turn humans into vampires with a slightly better chance of success than standard Secondary Vampires. 01-20% of Strigoi victims of the slow kill rise as Wampyrs, 21-50% as Wild Vampires, and 51-00% as new Secondary Vampires. **Note:** Vampires who receive the "slow kill" of the Strigoi without the Sanguinization rites do not rise as new Strigoi.

Alignment: Any evil; 30% Aberrant, 30% Miscreant, and 40% Diabolic; radiate supernatural evil.

Attributes: I.Q. 4D6, M.E. 4D6+2, M.A. 3D6+6, P.S. 18+2D6 (Supernatural), P.P. 3D6+9, P.E. 17+1D6, P.B. 16+2D6, Spd. 3D6+10

Size and Weight: Varies, generally human equivalents.

Hit Points/S.D.C.: Hit Point equivalent is 2D6x10, plus the P.E. attribute number. As with all vampires, Strigoi possess limited invulnerability to all man-made weapons. Vulnerable to fire, salt, wooden stake, sunlight, silver and magic.

Horror Factor: 14

P.P.E.: 2D4x10

Natural Abilities: All standard vampire abilities, except as modified above. See **Nightbane® RPG**, pages 183-187, for a complete description of powers and weaknesses of standard vampires.

Experience Level: Average for NPCs is 1D6+2.

Combat: Six attacks per melee. May combine psionics and plague attack with physical combat.

Damage: Per Supernatural Strength, or by weapon, or psionics, or bite (1D6+2 damage). Strigoi do not always possess the aversion to technology and weapons that some other vampires share, though most don't use technology to a great degree.

Bonuses: In addition to attribute bonuses, Strigoi are +5 to save vs Horror Factor, +3 on initiative, +3 on Perception rolls, impervious to psionic and magic sleep and paralysis, immune to vampiric mind control, and +2 to save vs other forms of magic and psionic mind control.

Magic: The Strigoi retains whatever magic knowledge they previously held as a Secondary Vampire. In addition, Strigoi can draw P.P.E. from ley lines, nexus points, and sacrifices to power their spells.

Psionic Powers: Standard for vampires.

Vulnerabilities/Penalties: As presented above, Strigoi no longer have the vampiric vulnerability to running water, but have a slight vulnerability to fire (does normal damage to Strigoi) and to *salt.* A handful of salt hurled in the face of a Strigoi deals 4D6 damage; larger amounts can deal up to 1D6x10 damage *per pound* of salt dumped or hurled on the Strigoi. Likewise, Strigoi cannot cross over a boundary lined in salt (a line of salt in a doorway prevents them from entering through that door), nor can they enter or exit an unbroken circle of salt. Otherwise, Strigoi possess all the standard vulnerabilities of vampires, including sun, wooden weapons, crosses, mirrors, garlic, and stakes through the heart.

R.C.C. Skills: Strigoi are basically modified Secondary Vampires and have all of the same available skills. Two new skills may be selected from standard Secondary Vampire skill categories at levels 3, 6, 9, 11, 13 an 15.

Weapons and Equipment: Varies according to the individual. Some Strigoi maintain their disdain for artificial means of destruction and prefer to rely upon their innate powers. Others love the feel of a gun in their hand. Most at least know how to drive a car and operate everyday machines like the telephone, fax machines and even computers.

The Vampire Intelligence

Adapted from Rifts® World Book One: Vampire Kingdoms by Kevin Siembieda.

Vampire Intelligences are a threat to the Ba'al in more ways than one. These malignant creatures are forces of utter evil and chaos, dedicated to the spread of misery and pain throughout the Megaverse®. They have no compassion, sorrow or regret, and only exist to propagate hate and suffering. They are utterly unlike anything humankind has ever seen or recorded, and are far more alien than the Nightlords, who at least resemble human beings on the outside. It would seem that these creatures would make natural allies for the Nightlords, but it is not so. They are deadly rivals dedicated to each other's destruction. Moreover, vampires would enslave every last human being and destroy all others who dare to stand against them. The extinction of humankind is the last thing that Vampire Intelligences want to see, for without humans, vampires cannot feed, and the Intelligences would weaken and die. This also sets Vampire Intelligences at odds against the Dark, the malignant force that ultimately seeks oblivion and death to all living things.

The goal of every Vampire Intelligence is to gain enough "children" in its bloodline on a given world so that it can take root and create kingdoms of undead, subjugate, torture, and feed upon humans with impunity, and revel in its own evil. This process begins with the **Master Vampire**. The Master Vampire is always a willing subject to the Intelligence, one who has accepted an offer for power and immortality out of evil, spite, revenge, or hatred. The Vampire Intelligence projects a portion of its essence into a new world through a dimensional portal or other portal, or is summoned by an evil practitioner of magic. Once it enters a world, the Intelligence goes in search of a mortal to seduce and corrupt to its needs. This mortal must be found within twenty-four hours or the Intelligence fragment returns to its host body. Often, summoned essences deal with the sorcerers who called them forth (this is often the reason practitioners of magic summon Intelligence fragments). The Intelligence offers immortality and power in exchange for an anchor in this world. The one who accepts this deal has their soul unmercifully torn from their body, and merged with the essence of the Vampire Intelligence. The soul is returned, and the creature is *reborn* to a life of eternal darkness, a creature of supernatural evil that must feed upon human blood to survive. The vampire's former life and all ties to it are lost forever, and the undead creature is bound to its Vampire Intelligence lord forever.

The new Master Vampire then goes forth to build for its lord and master an army of the undead. Through the *slow kill* bite, the Master Vampire creates a brood of *Secondary Vampires*, subservient to the Master and also driven by the need for human blood and procreation of the species. Given enough undead and

the proper conditions, a Vampire Intelligence can physically manifest on a world. Fortunately, the circumstances required for the physical manifestation of a Vampire Intelligence are not quite ripe on Earth after Dark Day. Physically summoning a Vampire Intelligence to the world requires that several very specific factors be met. First, there must be a minimum of 2500 vampires all attached to the same Vampire Intelligence inhabiting the same world. Second, a *massive* amount of P.P.E. is required for the Intelligence to make itself manifest. Third, once it does manifest on a world, a constant supply of P.P.E. is needed to sustain the Intelligence. A ley line nexus point would barely provide enough P.P.E. to sustain a Vampire Intelligence on modern Earth, and the nexus would be forever "dead" so long as the Intelligence lived upon it, draining every last drop of energy just to sustain itself.

Fortunately for the people of Earth, the sheer amounts of P.P.E. needed for a Vampire Intelligence to bring itself into our world simply don't exist on Earth after Dark Day. Thus, a ritual of immense power would be necessary to *summon* the Intelligence *manually.* The trick to such an event is thus: Master Vampires don't generally have the ability to tap into the P.P.E. to cast such a ritual, so they need pawns in the form of human sorcerers, cultists, or dupes to perform the deed for them. The only other option is to set off an apocalypse of such magnitude that the levels of P.P.E. on Earth would spike high enough for an Intelligence to take its chance and manifest. None of the above are incredibly likely, although there are quite a few Master Vampires currently seeking the means to ritually summon an Intelligence into the world, believing that the presence of their creators would grant them the power they need to overthrow the Nightlords once and for all, and take the Earth back for themselves.

Vampire Intelligences are concerned about the emergence of the Strigoi. By their nature, these beings are chaotic and not prone to cooperation. Each one sees every other Intelligence as a greedy competitor out to gobble up the same lands, planet, people/food stock, power base, and you name it. Thus, the idea of multiple vampires having connections to more than one Vampire Intelligence is a worrisome prospect. Still, such links have their uses, and many Vampire Intelligences are using these links in their competition to develop enough followers to enter the world. The free will of the Strigoi bothers Vampire Intelligences, but they know that most intelligent beings will crumble and give in to the offer of enough power.

If a Vampire Intelligence should arrive on Earth, its incredibly powerful aura of evil and magic could be sensed by Psychic Sensitives from over a hundred miles (160 km) away. Most practitioners of magic in the area of the Intelligence would also become aware that the ley line nexus point on which the Intelligence has to reside is dampened and no longer provides the energy it once generated. Since it is so easy to sense, the Vampire Intelligence is likely to attempt to manifest itself deep underground, perhaps in a cave network below the nexus point. This way it could remain hidden and well guarded from potential enemies such as the Nightlords, Guardians, Athanatos and free humans who would actively seek to destroy it, and might even prompt a temporary alliance between hated enemies (i.e., humans and Nightlords) to all work together to see the Vampire Intelligence destroyed (then, of course, turning on their erstwhile allies with the intent of destroying them as well).

A Vampire Intelligence resembles a massive amorphous blob of stinking, corpulent flesh, covered in slime and up to 200 feet (61 m) in diameter. Six to twelve tentacles emerge from the body mound, each tipped with a mouth filled with canine fangs. The body mass itself is covered with a hundred or more sickly yellow or blood red eyes, all encircling an enormous central eye. Any who see the Vampire Intelligence immediately know that it is a creature of ultimate evil and must be destroyed, if they can maintain their sanity after the encounter. Worse, the Intelligence maintains psychic and empathic contact with every vampire (and Strigoi) that it is linked with, and can send out a call for any or all of its minions to come to its aid with a thought. This means that those who would endeavor to destroy a Vampire Intelligence could find themselves facing hundreds of vampire minions within minutes of the assault, on top of dealing with the formidable physical and magical powers of the Vampire Intelligence itself.

Despite its massive size and raw power, however, the Vampire Intelligence possesses most of the *vulnerabilities* of the undead it creates, and its need for massive amounts of potential psychic energy and a constant supply of human blood limit the locations it can inhabit. Normally, it can only travel effectively by teleporting from one ley line nexus to another, which must be accomplished via its normal Teleportation: Superior magic ability. This means that it has to have firsthand knowledge of the area to which it teleports. Many Master Vampires are aware of this limitation, however, and make a point of traveling the world in search of the most suitable lairs for their creator. The telepathic link between a Master Vampire and the Intelligence that created it, allows the Vampire Intelligence to know everything its undead progeny knows.

Stopping the Vampire Intelligence

As difficult as it may seem, it is possible to defeat and even to kill the Vampire Intelligence. There are two ways to accomplish the task. The first is to destroy the Master Vampire and all Secondary and Wild Vampires (and Strigoi) connected to the Intelligence. By the time a Vampire Intelligence manifests on the world physically, however, this is next to impossible. It's really only a feasible tactic for controlling the population of vampires before the Intelligence is summoned to the world. With every new Secondary (and in turn, Wild) Vampire, the Intelligence's hold on the new dimension strengthens just a little. If every last vampire with any connection to the Intelligence is destroyed, the Intelligence loses all ties to the world and must vacate, unable to return for 10,000 years. In the days following Dark Day, however, there are so many vampires that one would be hard pressed to destroy any given bloodline, and there are those who dedicate their entire lives (Guardians, Templars, etc.) to the war with the undead, in hopes of keeping the numbers low enough that the Intelligence cannot manifest.

Killing the Intelligence

Destroying the Intelligence once it manifests is possible, though *very* difficult. Remember, just like any vampire, it is vulnerable to magic and weapons of wood and silver, and holy and running water. The tough part is to continue inflicting massive enough amounts of damage so that the Intelligence cannot re-

generate quickly enough to survive. Once the Intelligence's Hit Points are reduced to 100 below zero, it is destroyed, *along with all of its vampire legions,* which instantly turn to dust. The real trick is finding and penetrating the undoubtedly underground (or at least well hidden) lair of the Intelligence, then penetrating its defenses which will probably consist of dozens if not hundreds of vampires as well as the demon familiar. Then, once you've fought your way through all of that, you still have to face and kill the Intelligence itself, if you can keep your wits about you enough to do so.

Forced Abandonment

On the up side, defeating the Intelligence doesn't always necessarily mean a fight to the death. Should a group of heroes penetrate the lair and face down the creature, then manage to do enough damage that it believes its existence is truly in jeopardy, the Intelligence may be forced to leave the dimension on its own. This is referred to as a "forced abandonment" and requires the Intelligence tearing open a hole in time and space, and slingshotting from one dimension into another. Vampire Intelligences on Earth can *always* dimensional teleport into the Nightlands, and vice versa, as the two dimensions are so intertwined, and this does not count as fleeing the dimension. This connection makes it very difficult to force a Vampire Intelligence to flee the Earth/Nightlands dimension. However, with proper planning and a large and/or powerful enough force, the Intelligence can be forced to leave both Earth and the Nightlands.

If a Vampire Intelligence is forced to abandon a dimension, which takes 1D6 minutes to do, it causes a psychic shock to both the Intelligence and all of its minions, resulting in 80% of the vampires and Strigoi associated with it being destroyed, and the rest will flee immediately to their place of rest, where they will fall into a torpor-like stasis that lasts for 1D6x100 years, known as "the sleep of centuries," during which time the Intelligence is too weak to strengthen its hold upon the world. Once the Intelligence has regained its strength, however, it sends out a call to all of its vampire minions to awaken and rise from their sleep, and begin again. If the Master Vampire is among those surviving members of the Intelligence's legions, he will take up his old role. If only secondary and Wild Vampires remain, the Intelligence will contact a new power- or revenge-hungry soul and renew its Master Vampire anchor through a new vessel. The *only* way to completely sever the ties of a Vampire Intelligence to a world, and thus banish it for 10,000 years, is to destroy every last one of its minions. It is a foregone conclusion that should such an event ever occur on the Earth, the Nocturnes, Lightbringers, and Templars would form parties of hunters whose entire existence would be dedicated towards hunting down and destroying these minions while they lay helpless and dormant. An unlikely, but not impossible task.

The Vampire Intelligence

Alignment: Diabolic.

Attributes: I.Q. 20+1D6, M.E. 20+2D6, M.A. 16+2D6, P.S. 30+2D6 (Supernatural), P.P. 15+1D6, P.B. 1D6, Spd. 2D6

Horror Factor: 18

Size: 100 to 200 feet (30 to 61 m).

Weight: 60 to 120 tons.

Hit Points: 2D6x1000

S.D.C.: 1D8x1000 (or 2D4x1000).

***Reducing the S.D.C. of the main body to zero** will temporarily impair the Intelligence, but not destroy it. **Penalties:** Reduce attacks per melee by half, initiative by half, and is vulnerable to surprise attacks. Natural regeneration ability, however, will quickly restore both S.D.C. and Hit Points unless the creature continues to suffer massive amounts of damage.

P.P.E.: 2D6x100

I.S.P.: 1D4x100

Psionic Powers: All equal to a tenth level Master Psionic. Possesses all Sensitive and Healing powers, plus Empathic Transmission, Group Mind Block, Hypnotic Suggestion, and Psi-Sword (and can create more than one Psi-Sword at a time).

Magic: The Intelligence is a creature of magic and knows the following spells: All summoning and circle-type spells, Close Rift, Dimensional Portal, Nightlands Portal, Teleport: Superior, Restoration, Calm Storm, Negation, Anti-Magic Cloud (creates a black cloud that can cover an entire city and stops all magic from functioning. The Intelligence is immune to the Anti-Magic effect. Costs 5000 P.P.E. to cast), and Destroy Dead Flesh. In addition, the Intelligence will know 1D6 spells from each of levels 1, 3, 5, and 7. Any spells are available, including Fleshsculptor, Mirror Magic, Astral Magic or any other spells in any of the **Nightbane®** books.

Natural Abilities: In addition to those discussed already, the Vampire Intelligence can create one Master Vampire for every 1000 Secondary or Wild Vampires that are in its bloodline. The initial Master Vampire, however, will almost always be the Intelligence's highest-ranking "general." It can create Secondary Vampires via the slow kill bite using its tentacles, and can create a *demon familiar.* In addition, the Intelligence has superior vision (equal to a hawk's), nightvision of 4000 feet (1219 m), see the invisible, see infrared and ultraviolet spectrum, smell blood 2 miles (3.2 km) away, recognize the scent of human blood 90%, can speak and read all languages, and regenerates 4D6 Hit Points *and* 1D6x10 S.D.C. every round. Regenerates entire tentacles and eyes within ten minutes. All of this is in addition to all of the standard powers of the undead except as follows: cannot metamorphose and sunlight does not harm it, though it does weaken the Intelligence. While in the sun, all spells, psionics, regeneration, saving throws, bonuses, physical attacks, attributes, S.D.C., etc, are reduced by 75% (50% if gloomy or overcast day). Magic attacks deal damage to the S.D.C. of the creature, while wood, silver, holy water, and running water deal damage to Hit Points.

Combat: Eight attacks per melee, or one per tentacle (whichever is greater) or combination of physical and magic or psionics. Magic attacks (spells) are equivalent to two hand to hand attacks, while each psionic attack is equal to one hand to hand attack.

Damage: Per Supernatural Strength. Tentacle killing bite does 4D6 damage. Tentacles can also entangle and suffocate opponents. Breaking free of a tentacle requires a combined P.S.

(Supernatural) of 45. Foes squeezed by the tentacle are constricted for 5D6 points of damage per round (does not count as an attack), and there is a 41% chance that both arms are pinned, leaving the victim helpless.

Bonuses: In addition to attribute bonuses, +10 to save vs Horror Factor, +6 to initiative, +6 to strike and parry, sneak attacks are impossible, cannot be blinded, and has an automatic parry against all incoming attacks. Impervious to all forms of mind control, psychic and magic sleep, and paralysis.

Skills: Vampire Intelligences do not hold many skills. They can generally read and write two languages, speak and understand all languages at 90%, and will have 1D4 Lore skills at 80%. In addition, select three skills from each of the following categories: Technical (+30%), Wilderness (+30%), and Weapon Proficiencies (modern or ancient). The demon familiar knows everything the Intelligence knows.

Notes: The Vampire Intelligence is a force of pure evil and hatred, driven to sow chaos and destruction wherever it goes. It feeds from negative emotions, fear, hatred, envy, etc., which it garners through the experiences of its vampire minions. It is aware of every vampire connected to it at all times, and feels what they feel, although it cannot see nor hear through the eyes of its vampire minions; it can only do this through its demon familiar. It can, however, establish a telepathic contact with any vampire minion within one mile of it, allowing the Intelligence to see, hear, and experience everything that the individual vampire has. Only one contact like this can be established at a time, and generally this is only done with Master Vampires.

The Demon Familiar

Adapted from Rifts®: Vampire Kingdoms by Kevin Siembieda.

Should a Vampire Intelligence manifest physically, it can create a **demon familiar** in the world which it inhabits. This creature is yet another fragment of the Intelligence's essence, independent and by far the most powerful minion in the creature's arsenal. The Vampire Intelligence sees, hears, and feels everything that its familiar experiences and the Intelligence live vicariously through the familiar, which is free to travel wherever it wishes. The familiar stands 20 feet (6 m) tall and resembles an enormous, humanoid bat-thing. Like the Vampire Intelligence, a demon familiar is immune to the destructive rays of the sun, meaning that it can rampage and destroy in broad daylight! It possesses all of the abilities and weaknesses of the Vampire Intelligence, but is far more mobile which makes it a devastating foe. Fortunately, the demon familiar is rare to encounter, since it can only be created in a dimension that the Vampire Intelligence inhabits. On rare occasions, dark sorcerers and vampire cults have managed to summon demon familiars into the world; these usually regret their decision in the last few minutes of their lives. The last record of such an occurrence can be found in the historical archives of the Seekers, possibly attributable to the Knights Templar, and dates back to the dark ages. It reads:

We did arrive at the clearing as the culte finished its unholy rite, and there did I bear witness to the most foul and horrific of events. At the centre of the clearing did stand a grotesque mockery of mortal man, standing as tall as the trees around and possessed of features like unto the bats that curse the skies in the night. Neither did it parlay, nor took time to hesitate, but rather tore the evil witches who did summon it to pieces. My men assaulted the creature with the name of our Lord upon our lips, with weapons of Heaven and of purest light and cleansing font, and in the end it was destroyed, but only I alone have survived to tell the grisly tale.

Alignment: Diabolic.

Horror Factor: 18

Size: 15 to 20 feet (4.6 to 6 m) tall, weighs 3 to 6 tons.

Attributes: I.Q., M.E., and M.A. the same as the Intelligence, P.S. of 20+2D6 (supernatural), P.P. 15+1D6, P.B.: 1D6, Spd. 4D6 running, 3D6x10 flying.

Hit Points: 1D4x100

S.D.C.: 2D6x100

P.P.E.: 3D4x10

I.S.P.: 4D4x10

Psionics and Magic: Identical to the originating Intelligence.

Natural Abilities: Same as the Vampire Intelligence. A Vampire Intelligence simultaneously sees, hears, and experiences everything its demonic familiar does, without requiring any form of deliberate telepathic communication. The link between the two is continuous and unbreakable.

Combat: Six hand to hand attacks per melee, or can use magic or psionics in combination with hand to hand attacks. Magic spells each use the equivalent of 2 attacks, while psychic powers are the equivalent of one action each.

Damage: As per Supernatural Strength, or killing bite deals 3D6.

Bonuses: In addition to attribute bonuses, +10 vs Horror Factor, +3 to initiative, +4 to strike, parry, and dodge, +4 to dodge in flight, and can maneuver in total darkness using echolocation like a real bat. The familiar is impervious to mind control and sleep effects of all types, and paralysis. Magic attacks deal damage to the S.D.C. of the creature first, while water, silver, and wood attacks deal damage direct to the creature's Hit Points.

Skills: Same as the originating Intelligence.

Death: The demon familiar can only be killed by reducing its Hit Points to 50 below zero. Killing the familiar also inflicts 1D4x100 points directly to the Hit Points of the Intelligence, and causes it severe pain. This also reduces the attacks of the Vampire Intelligence to 6 until it regenerates those Hit Points.

Notes: The demon familiar is an *essence fragment* of a Vampire Intelligence, given physical form and free will, although its personality is always identical to the personality of the Intelligence that created it. It serves very much as the physical body of the Intelligence, able to move about with ease and survey the area, as well as seek out possible places for the Intelligence to teleport to, should it need to make a quick escape. The demon familiar can travel as far away from the Intelligence as it wishes, without restriction, but if trouble is brewing, the familiar is rarely more than a few minutes away. While the Vampire Intelligence experiences everything that



its demon familiar does, and vice versa, and is linked to the familiar in an intimate way, they are *not* entirely the same creature. The use of I.S.P. or P.P.E. by the demon familiar does not drain the I.S.P. or P.P.E. of the originating Intelligence, for example, nor do the two "share" damage suffered on a point by point basis, although killing the familiar does cause the Intelligence severe pain and damage.

Pittsburgh After Dark



A Nightbane® adventure setting

"Hey, come here. We need ta' talk, yo. You mus' be Ian. I know you know what I am, just like I know what you are. Yeah, I look like a Warlord, so what about it? I useta' be, then I seen the light, you know what I'm sayin'? Sometimes somethin' happens, makes you see the error of your ways, yo. 'Sides, the Colors let me move around up in the Hill without too much trouble. A lot o' my boys is still up there, and they alotta' help when we need 'em. Too many vamps up there, feedin' off the poor, cuz they think nobody misses 'em. They's wrong, yo. I miss 'em. Lotsa' friends an' family up there, you know?

"Listen. No, don't talk; listen. It's cool you goin' by plane and all, but it ain't too smart. They's N.S.B. agents all over da place in these airports. We gotsta' get outta' here. Fast. You came to find the Nocturnes . . . you found 'em. I'mo' take you to the rest of 'em, then we'll give you the run down.

30 minutes later, a small apartment on the South Side . . .

"This here's Jimbo (snicker). He don't like it when I call him that. Sorry 'bout that, James. He be our resident bookworm. Ain't nobody knows the politics o' the factions like him. He'll give you the lowdown. I'll be 'round if you wanna throw down with some o' the less friendly elements later. Keep it real, bro. Peace out."

"Hi. Sorry about Coleman. He can come on a little strong, sometimes. But he knows how to get the job done and he's good to have watching your back. Have a seat. I'm James. Yes, you guessed right. I'm a Wampyr. I'd offer you a beverage, but I'm afraid I don't have anything in the 'fridge that would suit your palate. If our intelligence is correct, you're Nightbane, yes? Wonderful. It's always nice to make the acquaintance of a fellow Nocturne from another city. I'm afraid you'll find things a little different, here, though. Well, for one, we don't have any full-blooded Vampires in our ranks here. Their tendency towards the darkness (figuratively speaking) is just a bit too strong, and in the past some unfortunate incidents have occurred. Probably due to all the mystic energy from the nexus point.

"What nexus, you ask? Just how much do you know about Pittsburgh? Probably not very much at all, I'm guessing. We're a major city, but thankfully, one that most people tend to overlook – especially since most of the steel mills shut down back in the 70's. Our other claim to fame, as it were, is the Three Rivers – the *Ohio, the Monongahela*, and the *Allegheny*, all of which meet up at *Point State Park*. There's something else that a lot of people don't know, we have a fourth river. It runs underground and it's the one that feeds the fountain at the park. All four rivers have ley lines following them, so you can imagine that a pretty powerful nexus point is just sitting there at the park, waiting to be tapped for good or ill. Naturally, I wouldn't visit the park if I were you. The name is pretty much a leftover from the days when that's what it was. It isn't much of a park anymore. Now it's more like a battle zone. The Nightlords picked up on the mystic energy at the site of the fountain right quick, shortly after Dark Day, and they wasted no time in establishing their supremacy. Since then, it's been a ragtag fight for control over the area. Whoever wins will get a pretty big advantage.

"Well, enough of my yammering. I've got some business to take care of . . . Jamie – she's our leader – needs me to have a talk with Mike, a contact of mine from the Spook Squad. Yes, I said *Spook Squad.* Things aren't quite as cut and dried here as in some other cities. People teeter back and forth between factions like a pendulum. Here, this is a paper the local Seekers have thrown together in hopes that we could somehow get the info out to some other cities. Hopefully, you'll agree that our best chance for victory is to network, and the best way to do that is to share information. It'll tell you a bit more about the city. You can think of it as a survival guide to Pittsburgh. Take heed of what's in there; it could save your life. Enjoy my digs. You've the run of the place while I'm gone. All I ask is that you keep the shades drawn. I cut it pretty close getting in sometimes, and I don't want to have to worry about beams of 'happy light' streaming in when I'm running from the dawn. Thanks. I'll try to bring back some proper food and drink for you.

"Oh! One more thing, if you get really bored, there's a club down on Carson called the *Lava Lounge.* Go to the kitchen and ask for Cajun sushi. They'll take you in back and you can spend some time with some of the local Nightbane . . . Club Freak, I think you Nightbane call it? In any case, it's a safe place. I would ask that you try and stay out of trouble tonight, until Jamie gets things settled for your visit. We'd hate to lose our first contact with the Nocturnes outside since the Nightlords cut our supply lines. I'll see you at dawn. Enjoy the paper, it's a good read.

A Dissertation on the City of Pittsburgh

By Eric Pathwalker, Seekers, Pittsburgh, PA

My name is Eric Pathwalker, and I have been chosen by the Seekers in this city to work up a paper describing the state of affairs in Pittsburgh, and as they bid, so I try to accomplish. However, while I do fancy myself a scholar, I have never been much of a writer. This being the case, I apologize if my writing is a bit dry or has too much of my own personal bias in it. I do love this city and I know I carry on too much about it, sometimes. I will endeavor to be as concise and to the point as possible. Forgive me if I fail in that regard.

Pittsburgh has many interesting facets to explore, but I have touched upon only what I feel are the more interesting and important, especially as far as the war against the Ba'al is concerned.

Since the majority of this paper will discuss mystic phenomena, allow me to list my credentials. I am a member of the Navajo nation and a practicing Arcanist. I am also a member of the Seeker Council of Pittsburgh and an avid follower of the path of Shamanism. For generations, my

family have been the shamans of my people, and I was set to follow in their footsteps, had not happy coincidence guided me to this town under the auspices of opportunity to learn more worldly skills which I thought would supplement my mystic knowledge and allow me to better guide my people. I am 24 years old, but the blood of the mystics runs strong in me and I have been guided and trained along the Path since birth, something many men twice my age cannot attest to for themselves. I have, in fact, found my age to be a great advantage when dealing with the many other factions against the Ba'al, as many of the leaders of these factions are also young, or considerably older, so they tend to underestimate my abilities. As mystics, we must understand that any shortcoming can be turned into a potential advantage if one knows how to utilize it properly.

I ask that copies of this document be passed to the Resistance, Underground Railroad, Nocturne, Seeker and Lightbringer factions of other cities. At this point, however, we deem it unwise to share this information with the A.D.A. (often referred to as the "Spook Squad") due to their prejudice against the supernatural.

Now I will begin my analysis of Pittsburgh. I pray that Father Bear will guide my pen as I write.

Atmosphere

Presenting the cultural flavor and atmosphere of Pittsburgh is not easy to do. It is a city that is best experienced to be fully understood. Pittsburgh is a "blue-collar" town through and through, though there are more white-collar businesses moving into the town all the time. It is a rock and roll town, and pretty much anywhere one goes, one hears rock music in the air, be it classic rock, the ever-popular 80's rock, or newer alternative and metal music, to techno and industrial Goth. Even the music scene in the city is active and prolific. Bars often host local bands, be it a regular show or an open stage, every night of the week except Sundays, and if a band isn't playing, one can be certain there will be a D.J. spinning out his tunes. In neighborhoods like the **South Side** and the **Strip District** (both discussed later on), one can feel the electricity in the air from the various clubs and bars beckoning people to join in the excitement. Some bars even have outdoor tables on the sidewalks where police tend to overlook the "no alcohol outdoors" laws on weekends so long as drinks remain at the seating area.

I suppose Pittsburgh isn't much different from most other big cities. It has the same general types of people, but, as a city resident myself, I honestly believe that the *feel* of the city is singular. "Pittsburghers" (as they call themselves) truly and passionately love everything about their city. Now you will find "city patriots," and maybe even a great many of them, in any city, but it is my experience that the passion for the hometown is far more powerful in Pittsburgh than in many other places. Radio stations play songs about how "We're from da Burgh," as well as local neighborhoods. People in Pittsburgh obsess about the local football team long after and long before the football season. Cars painted in the city colors of black and gold are seen on the streets year round. Pittsburgh is, without a doubt, a football town, and all other sports come second. Even the Goths and subculturists tend to be closet football fans. Exceptions exist, but they are rare.

I have found there are five general economic classes of people in Pittsburgh, and please understand that the best way to engender the proper image is to use stereotypes.

The first division is the *upper crust*, the white-collar workers who live in the wealthier neighborhoods, mostly to the North, South, and East of the city such as *Mt. Lebanon, Upper Saint Clair (South), Shadyside* and *Squirrel Hill (East)* and *Wexford (north)*. These are the people that live in $300,000 to million dollar houses. Think of the folks in these neighborhoods as the ones who don't worry if they forget to lock their doors at night, and are paralyzed with shock at the mention of a crime anywhere near their neighborhoods. Dwellings in these areas range from white picket fences to mansions, and everyone seems to drive a brand spanking new SUV.

The second division is probably the most numerous in the city, the *middle-class folk* who work your regular day jobs in the $40 or $70 K range and live either in apartments or ranch houses. Folk in this class tend to work hard, play hard, and put family and friends before their job. Most of them are good folks who just want to live out their lives in peace and be left alone. Every day after work for an hour or two the bars are jam packed with this crowd, having a few cold ones to wash away the stresses of the day. Every other **T**hursday they lament about how all the cash is gone but tomorrow is payday. On weekends they run wild through the bar neighborhoods and in private parties. Most college students fall into this or the third category, though for them, it's more partying than work, and dorms instead of houses. A good deal of the college students in Pittsburgh do work their way through school, which contributes to the blue-collar party atmosphere of the town.

The third is the *blue collar working class*. These folk work in the factories, foundries, mills and other laborious and service oriented jobs. They pull down $20,000-$39,000; more only if the household has two or more people working. Some work two jobs to make ends meet. These also tend to be homebodies, spending off time with family members and friends. They work hard and play hard.

The fourth category of citizens in Pittsburgh is what could quite aptly be called "subculture," but who refer to themselves as "Goths," "Burnouts," "Freaks," "Punks," and a host of other names to describe their individual groups. These are the people who follow their own rules, who party sometimes with substances other than the occasional beer, or who can party without substances at all. They tend to live on the wilder side of life, like to think of themselves (whether true or not) as living on the cutting edge of an alternative lifestyle, and for many, art and music is more than an evening's entertainment . . . it's a passion. A good number are, in fact, self-styled artists, writers, musicians, and gamers themselves. They frequent

dance clubs, wear black t-shirts and combat boots, smoke clove cigarettes and wax philosophical. Though they often get a bad rap for being dark and brooding, many are actually very creative, imaginative and positive. *Nightbane* and *Nocturnes* are often found among these people, *vampires* too.

The final category consists of the *destitute*. These range from hardworking people whose income falls below the national poverty level and those who survive living largely on public assistance, to the homeless who live on the street. The latter are truly destitute people who come in all shapes, sizes, and backgrounds. The most impoverished live on the streets, scraping through garbage, collecting soda cans and panhandling to make a living. At least one third suffer from mental illness or some form of substance addiction. Most never finished high school. *The Lightbringers* are often found among the indigent trying to inspire hope and help those who have lost the will to help themselves.

Crime

Another sad fact of life in a large city is organized crime and gang activity. In a place like Pittsburgh, however, these groups serve a useful purpose in the diversion of and battle against the Nightlords. The criminal subculture and the mischief they create often serves to create a cover or playing field in which other underground organizations can move, fence goods, purchase weapons and illegal goods, and avoid or undermine the authorities. Crime, murder and gang activity provide the authorities with a convenient *cover story* about "gangland violence" or "crime" for skirmishes in the ongoing shadow war between the Nightlords and their minions and the legions of Light. Real criminal activity is also good for distracting N.S.B. agents from investigating our factions as thoroughly as they might otherwise, again providing a distraction and cover for our wide and varied operations.

As one might expect from fellow street operators, many criminal operatives and organizations know about us, at least to some small degree. They may not have a complete understanding or know about our war with the Ba'al and other forces of darkness, but they know there are monsters and mages prowling their streets. In fact, it is my understanding that several crime families and gangs have themselves come to employ specially trained enforcers to deal with the "supernatural threat." Enforcers with psychic abilities, some measure of mystic knowledge and beings such as the Nightbane and even Fallen Guardians. If this is true, and if their expertise and understanding grows beyond the peripheral, we could find ourselves with a new faction of players in our battle, and we might see such criminal operations become puppets or fronts for the N.S.B., Nightlords, or the A.D.A. The real problem with organized crime is that while it may serve a purpose in its own way, it is inherently self-serving, dangerous and destructive. Those who walk the streets alone at night have one more thing to fear from the shadows. Street gangs who are all too often brutalizing thugs are the most savvy to our existence, while the larger, organized crime families are just beginning to accept the supernatural is real, and presents a threat to their power structure and way of life.

Cultural & Ethnic Diversity

Many long-term visitors to Pittsburgh are struck by the cultural diversity of the city; so many people of different ethnic backgrounds living in one locale creates an interesting cultural mix. With six colleges and at least as many technical schools within the city proper and surrounding boroughs, the city is also a hotbed of philosophical diversity and debate. Below the surface there is also an abundance of independent and privately organized *mystical study* here. The presence of the nexus at *Point State Park* attracts a large number of practitioners and students in the mystic arts, many coming from all over the world. Surprisingly, most locals have no idea that such a powerful and diverse subculture exists in their own backyard. It seems they are just too busy with the daily routine of their lives to notice the supernatural underground that permeates their city. I suspect dormant psychics and those with mystical callings are drawn to places of mystic power such as this, which is why we have such a large population of Nightbane, Athanatos, practitioners of magic and psychics, and why virtually every faction has a local branch in the city and why the Nightlords and other dark forces are also attracted to Pittsburgh and the surrounding communities.

The more conventional subcultures of music, sports, drug use, and so on, also abound. The hip-hop subculture gets a lot of attention. Though it is somewhat subdued compared to cities like Los Angeles, Chicago, Detroit or New York, it is certainly a presence and from what I understand, if one wants to make contact with a member of the *Warlords faction*, one must delve into this subculture of music and dance. Actual formal hip-hop clubs are few and far between, but perhaps the most notable place to find such enthusiasts is at the hip-hop nights hosted by a local club, *Laga*. In fact, this club is a force to be reckoned with and I will discuss it in more depth later in this treatise.

More entrenched and powerful than the hip-hop culture, and much more subtle in its operation and manipulation of events, is the Goth culture. The Goths are everywhere, and have been around since the mid-90's when the genre enjoyed a serious resurgence and moved from a garage sub-genre of music into the mainstream. With the music came a slew of rebellious young people in a generation that had no identity of its own, yet was aching for something to identify with. Goth was a siren song to these young men and women and before long, body piercing, tattoos, and black became the commonplace order of the day. For many of these kids, "the look" wasn't enough. They wanted to rebel against mainstream sensibilities, values and aesthetics. Many of the more serious members of this subculture turned to occultism to become "dabblers" in magic, Druidism and the paranormal. Most had no real power, it was enough for them to embrace the trappings –



the look and characterization of the subculture – however, with so many supernatural beings and mystic energy in the city, those with latent magical and psychic abilities (not to mention more than a few Nightbane not yet manifested via the "becoming") would awaken their hidden abilities and discover a new world in the shadows of the mundane. Likewise, most could find (or be found by) individuals and groups to serve as their mentors and bring their budding paranormal abilities exploding into brilliant light under their tutelage and guidance. Such individuals are quickly recruited by the many factions, including the Nightlords, who are constantly in search of powerful minions to join their legion of evil, and destroy those who turn down their offer. Quickly is the acolyte recruited by the many factions in the war between the Dark and Light, forcing young adults and teens to make a choice and join the war, or find a happy place somewhere in the middle, provided they can survive long enough to do so.

I admire these "True Goths," as I call them. They are a secretive and quiet lot, who keep their eyes open and mouths shut. It is rare for a True Goth to spout off about his or her experiences with or mastery of the mystic arts, for they understand that magic is not something to flaunt, but to be used as a tool to subtly manipulate events for the better. They also tend to know the rules as far as the streets go, which makes them valuable allies and informants for anyone in the mystic underground culture. Indeed, most every cabal, coven and faction in the city has at least one if not dozens of Goth members, and more than a few are composed entirely of these black-clad individuals. I have had, in the past, contact with a woman who I know only as "Cheri." She served as my contact with the Goth subculture and her information was immensely reliable. She played a key role in numerous perilous operations before disappearing into the night.

Truly, the diversity of Pittsburgh is one of our greatest assets and worst dangers. Below is a list of several prominent neighborhoods and points of interest.

Bloomfield: North of the city proper, Bloomfield is the "Little Italy" of Pittsburgh, dubbed so by its own residents. Great pasta and traditional Italian cuisine; and don't forget to visit the *Bloomfield Bridge Tavern* for good music on the weekends. Just keep your true face hidden, because the people here (so far as I know) are largely ignorant to our shadow world. It is also rumored that there is a large and very organized *crime syndicate* operating within this area; if there is, it seems to have been effective at keeping supernatural elements to a minimum.

This is one of the less dangerous places, so far as the Nightlords and their minions are concerned. By and large, Bloomfield is the area where a lot of hospitals, medical professionals (general practitioners and such) and other professionals reside. It really bridges Pittsburgh and Oakland with the Shadyside area.

The Strip District: Situated just outside the city to the northeast, the Strip is an old-fashioned open-air market on Penn Avenue. Shops full of fresh produce, meat, fish, and other amenities are lined up and down both sides of the street, and on weekends during the day, and it always seems to be crowded. The sounds of rock music, both classic and new, fill the air and the mingled smells of ethnic cuisine seem to permeate everything.

On Smallman Street, which runs parallel to the Strip, are a host of clubs, bars, and specialty shops. A lot of Asians live in and around the Strip, and they're pretty territorial after the sun goes down, at least off of the main roads: Penn Avenue and Smallman Street. Still, I've seen some strange things go on in the shadows of that neighborhood and there have been sightings of some odd, greenish lights in the sky late at night.

As far as the "scene" goes for the human singles and party crowd, this is the place to be on weekends and certain week nights. On Smallman and Penn there are easily 2-4 clubs and bars on every block. Since Dark Day the amount of disappearances in this area has increased threefold. I understand, though, that some of the clubs (particularly *Area 51, Pluto's*, and *Valhalla*) have special arrangements made for some of the more unsavory (yet heroic) elements of the city if one knows who to talk to, what to say, and what face to put on.

Deutschtown: On the North Side of the city is "German Town." This area was settled by German immigrants and remains home to many of the Germanic residents of the city. It is a bit rundown and spawns more than its fair share of street gangs and gangland activity in the city. My suspicions are that it is also a feeding ground for *vampires*.

The North Side of Pittsburgh also houses the Penn Brewery and the Andy Warhol Museum. The museum in and of itself is a must-visit for newcomers, especially those seeking funding for their factions, for many of the city's wealthier subcultural figures frequent the place and are always willing to sink their cash into a "worthwhile" cause; Nightbane looking for financial backers fit in very well here.

Another notable part of the North Side is a neighborhood known collectively as the *Mexican War Streets*. This area gains its name from the fact that all the streets are indeed named after famous figures, events, and locations from the Mexican War. This area is one of the rougher parts of the city and it too suffers from a lot of vampire activity.

Hill District: Pittsburgh's population is approximately 27% African-American, and many reside in the Hill District, Homestead, and Homewood. There is a great deal of ethnic pride in the heritage represented here. Sadly, the average per capita income in these areas isperhaps the lowest in the entire city and the general dissatisfaction with the state of affairs spawns perhaps more gang and criminal activity than anywhere else in the city. *The Warlords* apparently call the Hill their turf and woe to the man, woman, Nightbane, or any other who treads on these streets without the Warlords' permission. The Hill separates the city proper from its eastern borough, Oakland. It should also be noted that there are more factions and supernatural elements living in the Hill than just the Warlords. My own studies indicate a widespread vampire presence, and indeed the Warlords in the Hill seem more concerned with and prepared for hunting undead than with battling the Ba'al. Members of other factions found in the Hill District include the *Lightbringers, Nocturnes*, and, it would seem, the *A.D.A.* and a sect of vampire slaying *Knights Templar*.

South Side: A hotbed of subculture, the South Side is the party area of the college crowd, ages twenty through thirty-something. It rivals, and possibly surpasses, the Strip District in the number of bars, but has no dance clubs to speak of and generally attracts a drinking crowd rather than the "singles scene." The bars in this area get crowded to bursting on weekends, but you don't find the loud dance music or "meat market" atmosphere. The South Side caters far more to the young adults who like to just spend time with friends, have a few drinks, shoot some pool and maybe see a live local band play. The South Side also houses a number of cafés and bistros too, as well as the Rex Theater.

Once an art-house movie theater, and one of only four surviving big single screen theaters in the city, the Rex now boasts that its doors are open to "any kind of show" and hosts bands, improvisational comedy, acting troupes, dance club-style DJ's, and more. The grapevine among the *Seekers* is that a secret cult of some sort meets in the theater at least once a week, but as yet our efforts to infiltrate this cult have been unsuccessful. It has become a popular hangout for local young adults recently, and its popularity appears to be growing, particularly among the Goth subculture. If the Goths are in the know about something, they are currently very tight-lipped on the matter. If one is looking to make contact with the Goth subculture and/or the *Nocturnes*, there are two other places worth checking out on the South Side: the *Lava Lounge* and the *Beehive coffee house*. The same people own both establishments (one a bar, the other a café), and rumor has it that both also have special back room entertainment (Freak Clubs), provided one knows who to talk to and what to say.

One of the greatest dangers to freedom fighters operating in the South Side is the presence of an *N.S.B. headquarters* just off of the main drag, East Carson Street. The *Nightlords' minions* have a strong, shadowy presence in the area, and like the Strip District, there is a high rate of disappearances here.

Oakland: Like the South Side, this is a predominantly white neighborhood with a strong counter culture. Situated to the east of the city proper, it is home to both the University of Pittsburgh and Carnegie Mellon University. Also in Oakland is the Carnegie Museum and Library, both of which have been tourist attractions for a long time. Life in Oakland is fairly typical of any college town these days.

One of the places of note in Oakland is *Club Laga*, where on Friday nights during their "Ceremony" night, members of the Goth community are present in abundance. A good place to make contacts with Goths, Nightbane and Nocturnes, but beware: Vampires often hide among the masses, not so noticeable among the pale makeup and dark clothing of the Goths. Indeed, Club Laga, while not so Nightbane-friendly as some other clubs in the city, is a place where many human and undead movers and shakers in the city gather in abundance. More often than not, there are Nightbane in their Facade form hiding among the masses as well as Wampyrs and others. On Thursdays and Saturdays, Laga hosts "Hip-Hop night," which tends to bring out a less savory element. At one point, shootings and arrests were common, but as of late the police have been a bit more lax in their patrols of the city (a bit of sarcasm: one can't help but wonder why that is).

Another curiosity in Oakland is the abandoned King's Court Theater, which once housed the Pollinator, a bar and club featuring live bands. The same people who operate the Beehive and Lava Lounge on the South Side owned the place, but it closed down suddenly and somewhat mysteriously a year after Dark Day. It has remained vacant ever since, and it is possible that a cult may be operating out of it.

The North and South Hills: These areas are largely white, suburban communities, complete with well-trimmed yards and fences. Places with names like "Fox Chapel," "Mount Lebanon," and "Wexford," where, once upon a time, people didn't go out of their way to lock their doors at night. Of course, after Dark Day, everyone locks their doors. Areas such as Arlington, Allentown, and Belzhoover are "low rent" districts and tend to be rabid feeding grounds for vampires (and Reapers).

The Ley Line Nexus

One of the reasons Pittsburgh has so many supernatural residents, factions and minions of the Nightlords, is that we have a rather powerful set of ley lines and a nexus. Each of the four rivers in Pittsburgh (the Monongahela, the Allegheny, the Ohio, and the underground river that feeds the fountain at Point State Park) has a ley line following its course, which means practically the entire city sits on one of these ley lines. Mystic energy and psychic phenomena are in abundance since Dark Day and there are whispers, rumors, and accounts of creatures more terrifying than even the most horrific Morphus form of any Nightbane walking the shadows. (**Editor's Note:** Reapers, Psi-Leeches, Fallen Guardians, and good and evil Athanatos, as well as Nightlord minions and other horrors.) Needless to say, such an abundance of mystic energy is a coveted mystic resource for both the Nightlords and those opposing them. Where the four rivers meet at *Point State Park* is a nexus point of incredible power.

Since Dark Day, the Point State Park has been closed to the public following several hundred eyewitness accounts of a horrific, black-tentacled beast erupting from the fountain itself and devouring at least half a dozen innocents. There are rumors and N.S.B. reports concerning gatherings of cloaked figures chanting and the creature being surrounded by energy (a cabal of witches? Night Priests, perhaps? There is truly no way of knowing). However, since Dark Day, N.S.B. agents, Hounds, and Hunters patrol the area relentlessly, for the powers of the Nightlands are firmly in control of the nexus, and whatever horrific rituals they use it to perform is something most people do not wish to know about.

Attempts to reclaim the nexus occur almost weekly, but our sources believe these attempts are not in earnest, but merely undertaken in an effort to keep the Nightlords off balance and from fully utilizing its power. If any organized attempt is to be made to take the park, it must be through a combined effort with many of the factions joining in the skirmish. Even then, it is doubtful that our forces could hold the nexus, for there can be no doubt that the Nightlords would direct whatever force necessary to reclaim and keep the nexus under their control. However, there are some who think they could hold the nexus from the Nightlords, whose efforts to reclaim the site would be hampered by not wanting a blatant supernatural spectacle. I do not know if this feat is truly possible, but the leader of the Pittsburgh Nocturnes is making a concerted effort to bring it about. The only thing that is certain is that skirmishes between the factions and the forces of the Nightlords have been occurring with increasing frequency every night, suggesting something is brewing the park. Something big.

The last organized effort to take the Point occurred approximately two years ago, in 2004. The Resistance and Nocturnes organized a massive strike, which took place at midnight. The park and the surrounding area were chaotic with battle, and the city rang out with a maelstrom of pained screams, rending flesh, gunfire and explosions. For hours the battle raged on, with neither side gaining a clear advantage and both sides suffering heavy casualties. In the end, for all the destruction they had wrought, the Nightbane failed to take the park, and victory fell to the Ba'al; though the Nightlords apparently did not succeed in their master plan involving the nexus in some way. The ranks of the Nightbane took severe losses, and retreated to the shadows to lick their wounds. The media painted the fracas as a gang war.

Sometime after the battle, nobody knows exactly why or how, the ranks of the Resistance in the city dwindled further, and were all but wiped out. Fearing some sort of retribution campaign, plague or master weapon against the Nightbane, the Underground Railroad went even further into hiding. Some doubt whether the U.R. still operates in the city at all. Since then, I myself have contacted the Underground Railroad on more than one occasion and can report that they survive and flourish, though they prefer to remain as anonymous as possible. Only the Nocturnes managed somehow to escape the battle relatively unscathed. Many sources attribute this miraculous event to the superb leadership of the Lady of Pittsburgh, though, as always, her identity is a closely guarded secret. The Nightbane did, however, succeed in throwing off the tentative hold the Nightlords had established on the area, leaving it once again a contested region and a continuing battle zone in our shadow war with the Nightlords. In a way, I suppose, this was a victory, since the Nightlords have been unable to complete whatever diabolical scheme they were undertaking that night and continue to be harassed to the point of frustration. This is evident by an increased number of minions in the park and other attacks directed at our factions.

History of the Point State Park & Pittsburgh. The nexus, as I have said, is at the point where the four rivers merge. This place, called Point State Park, is – or was – a public park at one time, as well as a historical landmark, and it has seen its share of war and bloodshed over the centuries. The current conflict is nothing new, except for the addition of certain mystical energies. The park is built on the site of Fort William Pitt, a fort dating all the way back to the French and Indian War. In the mid-1700's the Ohio River was a waterway of great strategic importance, connecting present-day French Canada with the eastern part of what is now the USA. Trade vessels between French colonies in the north and settlements in the south constantly traveled back and forth along the Ohio, Allegheny, and Monongahela rivers, necessitating the French to establish a stable military port along this route. At the time there existed a small British encampment named Fort Prince George, located at the juncture of the rivers, right where the French needed an outpost. In 1754, an army of French and Native Americans overwhelmed Fort Prince George, still under construction, and drove the British out. The tiny fort was burned to the ground in the battle, and the construction of the massive Fort Duquesne began. Through numerous bloody battles and attempts to reclaim the fort for the British, Duquesne held out for four more years. In 1758, General John Forbes led an army of 6,000

troops to finally drive the French out of Duquesne, once and for all. This time, the majority of the fort stood intact, and the location was re-named "Pittsborough," after the Prime Minister of England, William Pitt.

The fort became one of the largest English strongholds in North America and was never again besieged by French forces, though Native Americans did repeatedly attack until the Battle of Bushy Run, in 1763. The fort and the walled settlement within remained a garrison town until around 1790, when the city, now called "Pittsburgh," finally began to develop in its own right. The frontier had begun expanding, and Pittsburgh became a sort of gateway to the western part of the continent. As the French knew early on, the three rivers were a necessary and extensively used means of travel throughout the area, connecting the west with the east and the north with the south. Thus, Pittsburgh saw its share of visitors, from George Washington to Daniel Boone to Jim Bowie.

The fort itself, of course, is long gone, but visitors can (or could, at one point) walk the outline of the fort by means of a trench in the ground that traces the length of the original foundation. Also still in existence is Bouquet's Blockhouse, the oldest building in Pittsburgh and the only remaining original piece of the fort. Three defensive earthworks from the fort have been recreated on their original sites, and one of these houses the Fort Pitt Museum, a treasure trove of historical information about the city that has sadly been closed since the Dark Day invasion along with the rest of the park.

Evidence shows that the nexus currently in existence at the Point State Park first leapt into active status sometime during the battle in which Duquesne was conquered by the British. These days, due to the massive amounts of psychic energy in the area, ghostly images of battles long past can sometimes be seen at the park, and silent visions of soldiers walking translucent ramparts, firing weapons at ancient native warriors, fighting, bleeding, and dying, are disconcerting images that have frightened countless visitors.

The Vampire Crisis

Like many cities since Dark Day, things in Pittsburgh are far more complicated than just Nightbane versus Nightlord or inter-faction politics. Though the Nightlords represent a major problem in Pittsburgh, they are not a serious threat to its residents. After all, humans are the unwitting pawns and subjects of the Nightlords' shadow empire. Furthermore, the Nightlords put most of their efforts into holding (and using for nefarious purpose) the nexus in Point State Park, making the Ba'al's efforts in other parts of town largely ineffective or nothing to be very concerned with, at least for the moment. No, the true problem in Pittsburgh is the vampire menace. The undead plague this city as they do few others I have visited, studied, or even heard about. No one knows how or why this city is such a magnet and breeding ground for the undead, but if our figures are correct, there could very soon be enough of the monsters for them to summon forth their Vampire Intelligence creator. Should this happen, I fear the city will become the launching ground for a vampire invasion of the country, turning Pittsburgh into the doorstep to Hell. With a Vampire Intelligence taking up residence here, our city may very well be destroyed and a sort of dark invasion will emerge.

The Nocturnes were the first to recognize this threat when the vampires in their own ranks began acting far more violently than normal. Truth be told, the former Lord of the Nocturnes fell to one of his own vampire troops. The current Lady was the student of the deceased Lord, and in a very real sense inherited her position from him. She took swift action to remove all undead from her ranks. The act sickened her, for discrimination and persecution of any group goes against her values as a Nightbane leader, but she saw no other alternative if she was to keep her people safe. Many of the vampires in the organization understood and took their leave quietly, without trouble. Some of these, I understand, still maintain loose ties with the Nocturnes. Others put up a fight, and many had to be destroyed outright. Just before the assault on the Point, a Master Vampire who had infiltrated the Nocturnes made a play to gather her minions and take control of the Pittsburgh faction. Fortunately, the greater numbers of Wampyrs and Nightbane in the group overpowered the undead, and I'm told that the Lady took down the renegade Master Vampire herself.

Since that day, the Nocturne faction in Pittsburgh have cleared their ranks of full vampires and refuse under any circumstance to allow new members of the undead in their group. It seems an odd play for a faction devoted to the diversity of its members, but pragmatism demands otherwise. Unlike the Guardians and Warlords, the Nocturnes do not engage in an active blood hunt to destroy the undead, though they do hold firmly to the crusade against the coming of a Vampire Intelligence. From what I understand, the Lady of the city hopes the day will come when the Nocturnes can once again allow those few repentant vampires back into their ranks, but until this crisis passes, vampires are personae non grata.

The vampire threat goes way beyond the Nocturnes and has attracted a growing number of heroes, vampire hunters (like the Knights Templar) and dabblers in the paranormal and magic to take an open stance in exterminating the undead. Be that as it may, it appears more and more vampires have been flocking to the city, and many neighborhoods have become almost rabid feeding grounds for the fiends. The Nightlords seem either unwilling or unable to quell this influx of undead, and rumors circulate that somehow the Night Prince mayor of the city has fallen under the thrall of a Master Vampire. If this is true, it is an unprecedented and frightening turn of events, for no one has *ever* heard of a Nightlord falling under the thrall of a Master Vampire. The Ba'al are so powerful that it has always been assumed to be impossible for such a thing to happen, and some other dark force or form of magic may be at work here.

Whoever this Master Vampire is, he or she has not revealed its true identity, and a Master Vampire that could

enthrall a Nightlord would have to be powerful beyond current understanding.

I can't speculate on the truth of this rumor, except to say that the rumor mill is full of talk about the "vampire crisis." Word on the street is pervasive, and many factions and independent vampire hunters are gravely concerned. Do we have a Master Vampire in control of Pittsburgh? I can't say for certain, but if the shadows at work in the city are any indication, I would say that it is quite possible. If we do, then may all the gods of Light help us, for we teeter on the brink of doom.



The Factions

The factions in Pittsburgh are, for the most part, secretive and largely ineffective against the Nightlords. The last major battle caused so many casualties among the Nightbane legions in the city that they and their allies are still licking their wounds. Most have enough trouble just surviving, and awaiting the day when their numbers grow large enough or bold enough to make another daring assault on their eternal enemies of the night. Meanwhile, the Nightlords maintain ramped up efforts to cut Pittsburgh factions off from the rest of the country and regularly harass them. Disappearances of individuals are a regular occurrence, with Hounds, Hunters and other minions picking us off one by one when we are at our most vulnerable. Many Nightbane who have come to Pittsburgh to make contact with one of the factions wind up staying permanently, by choice or by force. In my past contacts with other Seeker branches, and my interactions on the Shadowboard, the ability of the powers that be in this city to completely shut down the means for the resistance forces to support and supply themselves is unheard of, yet that is exactly what they have done here. The Ba'al as a whole, while they managed to quite easily take the world during Dark Day, aren't usually very effective at quelling uprisings and underground organizations such as our factions. Previous intelligence showed that the Nightlord in charge of the city is one of the more "bumbling" of the bunch, so how, then, is the current stranglehold on the town so complete?

Nightbane can get *into* Pittsburgh, no problem. Getting out is another matter entirely. Word has it that most Nightbane who try to leave the city, by any means, are captured, killed or disappear, never to be seen again. For the last year, leaving Pittsburgh for a Nightbane is akin to a death sentence. There's only one known way out, and that's to contact the Underground Railroad. Unfortunately, that's not as easy as it once was, and information regarding how to contact them comes at a hefty price. Soon Nightbane factions in other cities stopped trying to send help, and the Nightbane in Pittsburgh found themselves isolated and cut off from the rest of the world. An *en masse* assault might work, but then again, no one knows exactly who or what they should be attacking. The mayor and Nightlord strongholds, or is the mayor just a puppet for a mysterious city ruler working behind the scenes? Could magic be involved? If so, perhaps taking control of the Point State Park would make a difference. The problem is the Nightbane (and other factions) must continue to work in secret from the shadows, and something like an open assault would reveal the presence of the Nightbane to the world, and the Nightbane don't want that. For now, it seems, the residents of Pittsburgh are on their own, and only through the revelation of the true powers behind their predicament will they ever find freedom again.

The following are the largest and most notable factions operating in Pittsburgh. It does not include small independent groups or newcomers.

The Nocturnes: The major movers and shakers in Pittsburgh are led by a canny and quite capable Lady. She uses the flexibility of accepting anyone and everyone (except vampires) into her fold to its fullest potential. In my opinion she is destined for something far greater. I have met her on several occasions, and at her request have agreed to keep her identity secret for obvious reasons. She is warm and friendly, but a reluctant leader. If she can ever leave this reluctance behind and embrace her destiny completely she could become one of the greatest leaders of our day. Already she is a force to be reckoned with. Currently, the Nocturnes are focused on the battle against the Nightlords and the strange situation for Nightbane. However, I know she is increasingly worried about the vampire threat, and I suspect things are worse than anyone else realizes. If any of the factions has the means to switch gears at a moment's notice when necessary it is the Nocturnes, and I wouldn't be surprised if they put their

efforts against the Ba'al on hold to suddenly engage in an all-out war on vampires. They are the eyes and ears of this city, and members of the faction can be found in almost every bar, club, gathering place and hang out in town. Mark my words, they know things.

The Resistance: Here in Pittsburgh, mostly the Resistance is fragmented. Once upon a time they were well organized, rivaling the Nocturnes for control of the Nightbane power base. Nobody really knows what happened, but sometime last year, after the battle of Point State Park, their power dwindled, their numbers vanishing, and, indeed, the organization almost disappeared completely. The general consensus among the Seekers is that Nightlord or vampire infiltration decimated their ranks. Now, there are a half dozen cells holding on for dear life while conducting guerilla raids on Nightlord power bases. They rarely make much of an impact, however, and in my personal opinion, I think their members will eventually be absorbed by the Nocturnes, or the group will simply dwindle to nothing. Then again, there is always the chance that they're quietly plotting and rebuilding behind the scenes.

The Underground Railroad: Who knows who, what, when, or where they are? Since the splintering of the Resistance and the strange loss of Nightbane exiting the city, the Underground Railroad has gone even further into obscurity than ever before. They keep their numbers, power base, and routes a closely guarded secret. Still, it's not entirely impossible to contact them, and they do offer the only reliable means of travel in and out of Pittsburgh where Nightbane are concerned. As a result, they find themselves in the questionably enviable position of being everyone's friend. Most of the Nightbane controlled factions have *some* way to contact the U.R., should they need their services. Smart ones don't use that contact very often for fear of compromising the Underground and losing their only means of escape to the outside world.

The Warlords: These troublemakers are everywhere, it seems. They control the Hill District and North Side areas of the city, but have recently spread throughout the city proper and the surrounding boroughs and even suburbs. They have apparently absorbed most of the independent gangs in the city under their banner, and while it tends to cut down on gang-related violence, only having a single ruling gang, it is an alarming trend. Alas, the underworld contacts maintained by the Warlords enable them to thrive in an exceptionally hostile environment and keep them well supplied. In addition, they seem uncommonly suited to taking out vampires, a useful talent in this town right now, raising the Warlords' status considerably. However, they have yet to commit to an all out campaign against the undead and are currently offering their services to other factions, groups and individuals who can afford to *pay* for protection from or extermination of vampires. The Warlords are only second to the Lightbringers in their ability to deal with the undead on a large scale. (**Editor's Note:** Even the Knight Templar Dark Slayers don't measure up to the Warlords in this regard, mainly because the Knights are a relatively small, secret society scattered around the world, while the Warlords represent a large, local faction with the know-how, power and numbers to launch a city-wide campaign of destruction on the undead, if only they were motivated to do so.)

The Lightbringers: Led by an enigmatic character named Sara, as far as I can tell, they've made recent steps to establish relations with the Nocturnes, something that was previously unheard of. This is mostly due to a member of the faction named Luca who has become friends with the Lady of the City, and a member of an apparently new faction who calls himself David. From what I can tell, relations between the Lightbringers and Nocturnes are tenuous at best, but this is to be expected, there are centuries of enmity and distrust to be overcome. If these two seemingly opposing powerhouse factions can find a common ground through which to unite, it could represent new hope for the entire world. If not, I fear we will limp along as we have these years since Dark Day with little, if any, significant progress against our common enemies. One obstacle between an active alliance between these two factions is that the Nocturnes still consort with Wampyrs, and the Lightbringers don't recognize a difference between Wampyr and vampire.

The Seekers: We keep to ourselves and observe, mostly. Waiting for the right moment to strike or lend a hand. We've attempted to make contact with the Lady of the Nocturnes as a group, but as yet she has not returned our overtures. It would appear that for whatever reason, she does not trust our motives. I can only hope that will change in time.

The Athanatos: Much of our activities as Seekers, these days, has been spent studying the appearance of a new faction, calling themselves *Celestials*. They seem to be very vehement in their desire to defeat the Nightlords, who apparently they refer to as "Infernals." Members of this faction appear almost universally to be Nightbane with angelic-appearing Morphus forms. They call themselves "Athanatos" and seem to draw on biblical references, motivation and history. It remains to be seen whether or not these new players are an asset or a detriment to the war. As it stands they seem to be largely disorganized, traveling in pairs or solo rather than organized groups, but something tells me they have the potential to be much more than they appear. They are a cause for study and perhaps concern.

The American Defense Agency (A.D.A.): As usual, this group of ex-US military have their own agenda, prejudice and ways of doing things that ostracize them from the rest of us. They don't talk to the other factions much and their distrust of all things supernatural and magical makes them a wild card in any concerted effort in the battle for the Point State Park and the war against the Nightlords in general. Most of the other factions agree the A.D.A. is not to be trusted. There are several members of the A.D.A. who secretly support the other factions by covertly feeding them information and supplies, but we suspect these actions are unauthorized and would be severely punished if discovered. If the Spook Squad authorizes such actions, I fear for those factions who accept the support from them are lambs sleeping with lions who will one day turn upon

them. The A.D.A. is an organization that fears and hates all things supernatural, so any alliance can only be one of convenience at best or a way to infiltrate, undermine and destroy at worst. Some intelligence reports suggest the Spook Squad may have connections with organized crime, but it's more likely this is just another alliance of convenience and a means to an end. As of late, there has been some indication that the Spook Squad *may* be considering a plan to take the Point State Park from the Ba'al on their own, or with a faction like the Warlords. Time will tell.

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Game Master Notes on the City of Pittsburgh

"That night . . . the night I made my bargain with Death . . . everything changed for me. Power was mine, and glory would follow. All I had to do was sell my soul. All you, my love, have to do is sell your soul, and things can change for you, too. Be mine, and I shall be yours. Forever."

– Anastasia Calabrese

The city of Pittsburgh boasts a rich cultural heritage and a fascinating, and sometimes violent and tragic history. Great leaders in business and industry such as Andrew Carnegie, Andrew Mellon, George Westinghouse, Henry John Heinz, and others made the city their home along with their business enterprises. Many of these men, known as philanthropists and humanitarians, were not as charitable in their day to day lives as history would like us to remember them. Other great men and women, such as Marie Curie and Albert Einstein, visited the city to receive awards and make landmark speeches. The city boasts the opening of the first motion picture theater in the country, "the Nickelodeon." Other claims to fame are the creation of the first-ever atomic engine, the launching of the U.S.S. Nautilus, the first atomic submarine (powered by the same engine), in 1954, and the development of the Polio vaccine. Currently, a working WW-II era navy submarine is docked at the Carnegie Science Center and acts as one of the most popular tourist attractions in the city.

Pittsburgh has been known by many titles, both good and bad, from "The Gateway to the West," to "Hell with the lid off." The following narrative contains a somewhat detailed history of Pittsburgh in the 20th century, melding it with a *fictional* account of the behind-the-scenes truth from a *Nightbane®* perspective. Players may wish to avoid this section, and have their Game Master summarize the historical events for them when necessary, so as not to jeopardize their enjoyment of the campaign and adventure events set in Pittsburgh.

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Things in Pittsburgh are far more complicated than in many other cities. Even for Nightbane, things are not as cut and dried as they might seem. The vampire menace in the city is quite probably the worst in the country, and to date there have only been theories and wild speculation as to why this is so. It is common knowledge that the Ba'al do have a strong presence in the city, as evidenced by the large numbers of Hounds, Hunters, and N.S.B. agents who patrol the streets, and particularly the Point Lake Park, at night. The residents of Pittsburgh have come to accept the existence of the supernatural and strange occurrences as a foregone conclusion, rather than a possibility (or impossibility, as the case may be). However, people still don't talk about it. Those who acknowledge openly that they have seen evidence of the supernatural tend to disappear, never to be seen again. People who enjoy relatively normal lives, and wish life to stay that way, know when to keep their mouths shut.

The truth behind the vampire plague

Certain neighborhoods in the city have become almost rabid feeding grounds for the vampires and Reapers. These include the North Side, the Hill District, and certain parts of Bloomfield. Weekends in the Strip District and the South Side are also particularly dangerous, though vampires tend to pick and choose their victims in these two neighborhoods more carefully. Pittsburgh is, as suspected by the Seekers, under the control of an exceptionally powerful, canny, and clever Master Vampire who discovered a secret that she has kept very well guarded: the blood of a Night Prince is a powerful ally.

The vampire in question is named **Anastasia Calabrese**, a woman of Romany (Gypsy) descent who made her bargain for undeath in the mid-sixteenth century. Like many vampire tales, Anastasia's story is one of love, loss, heartbreak, and tragedy.

Anastasia, as with most Gypsies, was lowborn into a clan of wandering metalsmiths, entertainers, and in the eyes of westerners, beggars and thieves. What westerners didn't understand was that the Romany were not thieves. They treated others with the same respect they themselves were granted, and they simply did not recognize the concept of ownership. A Romany did not steal, but rather, he "borrowed" items, recognizing that possession is only for the duration of one's life anyway. Everything returns to Mother Earth eventually, so, the Romany reasoned, possessions are only yours so long as one can hold onto them. As such, in medieval times, Gypsy caravans were seldom welcomed in towns, though they were tolerated, and often a bit feared for their reputation for possessing strange mystical powers and what an entire clan of angry Gypsies might do to a village who wronged them. Still, there were tales of tragedy where Gypsies were made scapegoats for crimes they didn't commit, and enraged lords wiped out entire tribes out of fear, anger or racism.

Anastasia made the most fatal mistake a Romany girl could make at that time. She fell in love with a European named Frederich, the son of a local nobleman, Lord Varga Gustav. Her clan, the Calabrese, originated from the Middle East and settled for a brief time in what is present day Italy, where they acquired their clan name. Eventually, they migrated north and found themselves in a small town in mid-eastern Europe, an independent holding of Lord Gustav. One day, while dancing in the town square for coins, Anastasia caught the eye of the handsome young noble, who was immediately entranced by her beauty and grace. Never, he later said, had he ever seen such an intoxicating beauty, full of such mystery and passion. He knew in that moment that he was to spend the rest of his life with Anastasia. Following the performance, he approached the young Gypsy with a humility and reverence that utterly shocked the peasants of the village. Anastasia was taken by his charm, and the two became friends, and before long, lovers. They would meet in secret, in the Romany camp or in the forests, where they would make love and Anastasia would tell Frederich about her life and the passion of the Romany. There was nothing, Frederich said, that he could give her that could ever compare to such a life of adventure and freedom, but he would show her what he could offer.

The young lord invited Anastasia to his palace, in secret as always. He told Anastasia that his father was away at battle and was not expected home for weeks. Someday, he explained, his father would be gone and he would be Lord. Then he could be free to marry her and give her a life of riches and security. Until then, he implored that she stay at his side. Wasn't it the Romany way to embrace one's passions, Frederich pleaded, even if those passions led her to find a future with a *gaje,* a non-Romany? Anastasia agreed, against the wishes of her clan leaders. The elders protested that the *gaje* were not to be trusted. They were not Romany, and as such, they did not understand nor respect Romany ways. Nor would they ever, and Anastasia was just asking for trouble. It was well known, not only within the Romany camp, but in the village, that Lord Gustav knew about the romance between Frederich and Anastasia, and certainly did not approve of the match. Their secret trysts were dangerous at best, and to go to Frederich's castle was outright foolishness. Still, Anastasia ignored petitions to the contrary, arguing that it was the Romany heart and the passion that dictated her actions and love that gave her faith in Frederich. She had given him a taste of the Romany way, now it was his time to give her a taste of the western ways. She trusted his love for her, for she knew it was true and real, and he would not betray her. Against the wishes of her clan, but free to follow her own path, Anastasia went to Frederich.

That night, Lord Gustav, returned from battle, had laid a trap for his son and the Gypsy enchantress who had stolen his heart. As Frederich and Anastasia lay together in bed, Gustav burst in, and denounced the Gypsy girl as a whore and a witch who had ensorcelled Frederich. In a blind rage, he attacked Anastasia, and Frederich leapt to defend her. A single, blind swipe of a long sword ended Frederich's life. Anastasia and Lord Gustav watched in utter horror as Frederich's head struck the floor with a sickening *crack* next to his decapitated body. Seeing his son die by his own hands was a surreal experience for the Lord, and for a moment, regret and sorrow quieted Lord Gustav's rage. A single tear rolled down his cheek, the sword clattered to the ground, and he turned to look on the sobbing face of Anastasia.

Suddenly the rage fired inside his breast with renewed intensity.

"Your fault, witch!"

Anastasia ran for the door, but the giant of a man lunged and seized her by the throat before she could escape. As Anastasia struggled and gasped to speak, the nobleman cried out for the guards. A moment later, Anastasia found herself being accused, tried, and convicted of the murder of the only man she had ever truly loved. Her words of denial were ignored as the lies of a guilty murderess. Sentenced to death by hanging in the town square, the nobleman decreed her death would be ten times as slow and painful as her victim's, and she was to be drawn up and suffocated, rather than dropped, as was the custom.

News of the murder of Frederich and the imprisonment of Anastasia spread through the town like wildfire, and before they knew it, the girl's clan was overwhelmed by a mob of enraged villagers. To the last man, woman, and child, the Gypsies were slaughtered in a mass fit of insane and misplaced vengeance. From her place on the gallows, Anastasia could see the smoldering fire in the distance and knew the fate of her family and clansmen even before official word came to her from the crowd in the street. She turned her gaze to the bloodthirsty crowd around her and spat at them.

"I will," she swore, "have my vengeance. For every drop of blood you have spilled, you and your progeny will pay tenfold. I will bathe in your blood, and revel in your vitality. Long after I have washed my hands in your life, I will bring death to you and your descendants!"

There was a moment of quiet as the girl paused, then bellowed, "I give myself to ye, the eternal Darkness. I give you my soul if you give me my vengeance. And I swear on my family's grave that I will deliver to you, o' lord of death, many more souls if you grant me my plea."

As the noose tightened, Anastasia heard a soft voice in her head. The voice was seductive and beautiful.

"Your name means "reborn," the voice whispered. "Die then, and be reborn in my image so that you may extract your revenge and give that which you have promised."

Anastasia agreed and the warm embrace of death pushed the mad cheers of the villagers from her mind. Three nights later, the warm embrace gave way to the cool night air and the killings began. Bodies drained of blood, left lying in their beds, hands folded upon their chest and just a touch of ash and rose petal applied to beautify the corpses.

More people died, night after night. No one responsible could be found, and though there was no proof as to who the killer was, the villagers knew. They knew vengeance had come in the form of the undead. Soon word spread that villagers had seen the executed Gypsy woman dancing through the streets at night, a trickle of blood running down her chin. Some tried to run away, fleeing the village before the vengeance of the undead struck them down, but they fell prey to a mysterious pack of wolves that surrounded the town and held everyone prisoner within. Panic spread and anarchy reigned. Lord Gustav's forces were unable to quell the riots, as people blamed their lord for their plight and assailed the castle with pitchforks, shovels, and torches. He ordered his troops to kill anyone who refused to back down, and watched as his own men slaughtered his people. Lord Gustav addressed the crowd, by now struck numb with terror, and announced the formation of a task force of his finest men who would hunt down and destroy the undead menace. The crowd erupted in cheers for the first time since the execution.

The following morning, the entire task force was found dead, drained of blood, and laid out neatly in their armor as though ready for burial. It was said that a deafening chorus of lupine howls went up upon the discovery of the grisly sight. In blood, upon a flat, white stone nearby, was written the phrase "*They fought well and tasted better.*"

Within a month, not a soul was left alive in the town except Lord Gustav, allowed to live so that he might know all that he had wrought. Sitting in his study he waited for death to come for him and stared with blank horror at the empty town stretched out before him. Over the last few weeks, there hadn't been enough people to bury the dead, and flies filled the air with a nauseating buzz as the remains of the last victims quietly decayed in their beds. It was his turn, next. They were coming for him, he knew. And there was nothing he could do but wait. He wouldn't make it easy, though.

Just before sundown, Lord Gustav made his way to the chapel, where he waited patiently at the sanctuary, facing the only door in. He wanted to lay eyes upon the witch just once before he slew her. Then he'd leave and return with an army and burn this town to the ground. For a long time, Gustav's only company was the soft moaning of the wind outside. Gradually he came to realize that the sound was not the wind, but the a cacophony of the dead. The doors of the chapel burst open and dozens of dead bodies poured in, his people, walking of their own volition, but without the slightest trace of intelligence and rationality in their eyes. Lord Gustav fought, punched, kicked, slashed, even bit, but there were too many. They swarmed like the flies in the village, and their moaning was deafening.

Gustav sat up in his bed, screaming. The buzzing of the flies outside, even in the cold night air, told him that his battle had *not* been a dream, yet he had no wounds nor any recollection of how he had gotten to his bed chamber. How? It couldn't have all been a dream, could it?

A soft laugh fluttered across the room, and a seductive, feminine voice addressed his unspoken questions.

"No, Gustav. It was not a dream. Not all of it."

Anastasia stepped from the shadows in the corner of the room, and Gustav suddenly found himself looking into the face of a nightmare. She smiled and laughed, a sickly, sweet sound that turned his stomach.

"I cannot control the dead, Gustav. But I *can* control your senses. You left that chapel on your own. And now," suddenly, she was kneeling by his side, "you will be the first of my brood."

The next thing Lord Gustav knew was the sweet sting of Anastasia's kiss and the warmth of his own blood streaming down his neck.

After Gustav, Anastasia transformed very few *gaje,* preferring to concentrate on her own Gypsy people in an effort to maintain the "purity" of her bloodline. Her *kumpania,* or family unit, ravaged Europe for centuries, slowly growing in size and power until, like true Romany, they grew tired of the Old World and became hungry for new experiences. They came to North America in the mid-1700's determined to expand their brood to this new continent and establish, at last, a power base in an area where European civilization had not yet taken hold. Anastasia was at first dismayed to find that no Romany had yet set foot upon the shores of the New World, but it wasn't long before she encountered the Native Americans and saw in their ways the same passions and honor that once resided in her heart. They were not Romany, but they were kindred, and would certainly suffice to enhance her brood.

Anastasia was far from a foolish or stupid woman. She kept her existence and the existence of her brood secret. For a long time they were only to feed upon those they were certain would not be missed, and they took full advantage of the violence of the frontier and the European colonization efforts. After every battle, a pack of undead would swarm upon the battlefield, drinking their fill from the dying bodies left behind. Slowly, quietly, over a period of almost 150 years in what was to become the United States, her pack grew. She had time. She could afford to wait to achieve her master's goals. Over time, even the undead Gustav overcame his fear and hatred of his vampire Mistress, and grew not only loyal, but to love her (if such a thing is possible for a vampire). He became her trusted right hand and took a brutal pleasure in carrying out her vengeance in the mutilation and torture of humankind. His savagery and cruelty became an art, and Anastasia found herself transferring her feelings for Frederich onto his father, who now was in a very real sense, her own child.

There came a time when the Vampire Intelligence became impatient and demanded that Anastasia expedite her mission. She knew that the time to give up the wandering ways of the Romany had come. A permanent base would be required to bring her creator to the New World, and so, in a fit of nostalgia, she took her brood east, and came upon the city of bridges and rivers, the Steel City of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

At first, Anastasia and her brood were unsettled by the sheer amount of running water surrounding the city, but in the end she decided that the rivers were a calculated risk and were likely to keep away many lesser vampire broods who could become a

nuisance and compete for their food and bloodline supply. In addition, she felt that the downtown area was far enough removed from the rivers for them to be much of a threat. Besides the city was perfect for vampires. It was controlled largely by false philanthropists who presented themselves as humanitarians, but in reality kept their workers in a state of poverty and destitution.

"Pittsburgh millionaires," a term coined by Gerald W. Johnson to describe millionaires who were "new money" and possessed common tastes and disgusting social habits, were among the 4,000 millionaires in the country that controlled 70% of the United States' wealth. This money, of course, was made upon the backs of poor workers regularly forced to labor seven days a week. Hope was low and opportunity meant working in a mine or a factory for twelve or more hours a day, never seeing the sun, and living in filth. Lack of social institutions, widespread slums, improperly filtered water and bad milk led to regular outbreaks of Typhoid fever. One writer later described Pittsburgh as "Hell with the lid off," and an English philosopher claimed that a month in the city was enough to justify suicide. Such deplorable living conditions and rampant disease meant that death rates were high enough for vampires to feed without bringing suspicion upon themselves. And often the factories spewed so much smoke into the air that the sun itself was blotted out. In such an atmosphere, some of the more powerful vampires could even risk walking about in the daytime.

In 1892, Anastasia's brood entered the city at a time when workers at one of Andrew Carnegie's largest steel mills in Homestead, east of the city, had been locked out of their mill upon threat of striking. The early lockout was simply a ploy of Carnegie to play to the press, and to create an excuse for justifiable violence. When conflict erupted on the picket line, most observers expected Carnegie to contact the government, and indeed, the Pennsylvania National Guard was called in to put down the enraged picketers, but there were far darker forces at work than anyone realized. Carnegie himself was rumored to be a Priest of Night, heading up a cult worshiping the Dark and seeking to bring the Nightlords back to the world through Pittsburgh, even in the nineteenth century. Worse, Carnegie and his second, Henry Frick, hired a private army to break up the rabble and take back the mill, which is rumored to have hidden some of Carnegie's private rituals and collection of ancient and forbidden books. The conflict that followed was one of the bloodiest in Pittsburgh history, and one of the worst worker-employer conflicts in United States history. It was also the first real taste of Pittsburgh that Anastasia and her brood got to enjoy. In the days that followed, they not only fed well, but added many new vampires to the clan. The workers were slaughtered and survivors forced to return to their slave-like conditions and wages. That made up Anastasia's mind that Pittsburgh was the place where her brood would settle and grow. Had she known of the existence of the Nightlords, action may perhaps have been taken sooner to cement their position, but none of her agents found any trace of the Nightlords in town. That was because the cult existed in the city's elite, upper crust of industrialists, beyond the reach of the vampires' influence and connections with the common man.

There was a brief street war with a small gang of "native" vampires already in existence in the city, but Anastasia's brood took them out quite easily. Her reign, she felt, had begun and it was only a matter now of maybe fifty years or so before her creator could manifest in the world. Then, her vengeance upon the race of men who had wronged her centuries before would meet its ultimate completion. Things didn't go quite as Anastasia had planned, and her "calculated" risk turned out to be a questionable one after all.

In 1907, a flood whose waters crested 39 feet (11.8 m) hit the North Side of Pittsburgh, killing large numbers of her brood. Still, she determined that the city was the site where her domination of humanity would stem, and an occasional flood was an acceptable risk. Many of her brood sought havens on upper floors of buildings in case of another flood.

By 1914, things became more difficult for the vampires as Henry Ford's proclamation in Detroit of a $5.00 per day minimum wage forced factory and mill owners all over the country to raise their pay scales and in some instances, shorten the work week for employees, ending the abuses suffered by many in the mills and mines. The government had passed new clean water and meat acts, and Pittsburgh boasted the first moving picture theater in the country. The Federal Reserve Act of 1913 helped to end the strangle hold banks and financial institutions held over personal finances, and the automobile had made travel easier and more convenient for the individual. Things were looking up, and this made it necessary for the vampires to take greater care in their feeding. Several times they were almost exposed as the bodies of homeless people drained of blood made local news, but still they managed to survive undiscovered and lived a fairly easy life. It is likely that it was around this time that vampire activity in the city first caught the attention of the *Lightbringers*, who before then had little to no presence in Pittsburgh.

Then, in **1918**, the worldwide influenza epidemic struck. Millions fell to the disease, and vampires in Pittsburgh once again found that they could feed with far more impunity than they could over the prior decade. Scores of men and women joined the ranks of the undead, choosing unlife over death at the hands of the flu. Records show that over 23,000 people in Pittsburgh fell victim to the epidemic, with 2,302 deaths. More than two hundred of these deaths later rose again as part of the brood.

Then, on **St. Patrick's Day, March 17, 1936**, one of the heaviest rainstorms in Pittsburgh's history hit the city, driving all of the vampires indoors to seek shelter. The rainfall caused the Allegheny River to rise and overflow. By nightfall, most of the city was underneath forty-six feet (14 m) of rushing water. Historical numbers record 75 dead, and agree that tens of thousands were left homeless and injured from the flood, which has gone down as legendary in the city's history. Damages were in excess of 50 million in 1936 dollars – somewhere in the neighborhood of $300 million in modern day terms. The true story, however, has never been told.

In 1925, the activities of Anastasia's brood attracted the attention of both the *Lightbringers* and the *Nocturnes*. Both factions came to the city intent on stopping the spread of vampirism before the Vampire Intelligence at the center of the storm could manifest on Earth. For a decade the shadowy, three-front war raged in the back alleys and basements of the city. Some events made it into the annals of Pittsburgh history, though in a heavily modified form. For example, in 1926, an explosion in a Pittsburgh Terminal mine approximately 14 miles

(22.4 km) south of the city proper is recorded to have claimed the lives of 32 men. In reality, those killed were Nocturne agents searching for artifacts that would assist them in their battle with the undead.

In 1931, a fire that ravaged the Little Sisters of the Poor home in what is the East Liberty area of the city, today, reputedly killed 42 people and injured 157. Most of those killed were Guardians or members of the Lightbringer faction. Finally, the Lightbringers scored a major victory when they overcame a Nocturne Collector transporting an ancient tome from the Carnegie Library to be catalogued and hidden away. The tome contained a ritual that would allow the Lightbringers to decimate not only the vampire menace in the city, but their Nocturne foes as well. On the eve of St. Patrick's Day, 1936, sorcerers affiliated with the Lightbringers came together in the Grant Building, then the tallest building in the city, and ascended to the peaked roof. They surrounded the flashing airplane beacon that topped the building, and as the beacon pumped out the word "Pittsburgh" in Morse code over and over again, they began their ritual.

The spell cast by the Lightbringer sorcerers brought the rain and caused the flood of 1936. The fanatical sect felt that the end justified even thousands of human deaths, because over ninety percent of the vampire population in the city would be destroyed by the rainstorm and raging river waters. They were successful on all counts. More so than they realized, for many Nocturnes fell prey to the floods as well, and in the Lightbringers' eyes, the Nocturnes were just as bad as the vampires. Unfortunately, they missed their primary target. Anastasia had only weeks before fallen prey to a bout of Romany wanderlust, and gathered up Gustav and several of her elders for a road trip. She was not even in Pittsburgh when the flood hit.

Upon her return to the city, Anastasia discovered what had happened and was both distraught and enraged. For a time, she considered leaving the city for better ground until her remaining children presented her with several facts. The first, and most important, were the identities of the cabal of Lightbringer sorcerers who had cast the rain spell. It seemed that the group had gone out celebrating after the flood waters receded, and had given themselves away. If she stayed, Anastasia could wreak terrible revenge on them, and revenge had become one of her specialities. Second, but in the long-run more important, was the undertaking of massive flood prevention measures by the city council. Satisfied that the waters weren't likely to again rise and destroy her brood, and secure in her knowledge of the layout of the city and the best ways to rapidly rebuild, Anastasia decided to stay and set about planning to take revenge upon the Lightbringers. The sorcerers who brought the flood to the city were lured into a trap and murdered, their bodies left symbolically at the Point State Park just before dawn. The book used by the cabal to cast the spell was never found. Over the next four years, dozens of Lightbringer agents met their untimely ends, victims of vampire retribution. Anastasia was a far more capable leader than the Lightbringers had counted on, and eventually they withdrew into the shadows to regroup.

During the 1940's, as World War II raged in Europe and Asia, all was strangely quiet in the city of Pittsburgh. The shadow war had reached a stalemate between the rival supernatural forces. The vampires steadily and quietly reproduced as the



Lightbringers and Nocturnes battled both the vampires and each other. All three factions spent a large portion of the time rebuilding their numbers and strength. Anastasia was forced to abandon her prior racial preference insofar as the creation of progeny, however, she still demanded that only those with the right "heart" were remade to darkness. She had failed her creator twice, and it would not happen again. If it took her another hundred years she would rebuild her brood and bring the creator home to them. She had more reason than ever to hate humankind and all those who would defend it, making her withdrawn, temperamental, and unwilling to trust anyone. Not even Gustav could get close to her during these years.

In the 1950's things became difficult for the vampires once again, as *Lightbringer* agents in high levels of government managed to take advantage of the public's fear of Communism to create a "witch hunt" throughout the country. Federal agents investigated anyone and everyone with even the slightest allegations of Communist activity, and blackballing and even imprisonment were commonplace. Beneath this surface persecution, however, the Lightbringers had their own agents operating to uncover and destroy the hiding places of evil supernatural beings, especially vampires. The ensuing investigations renewed the battle between the vampires and the Lightbringers in Pittsburgh, and brutal conflicts took place in the slums and back al-

leys of the city. It was around this time that the *Nocturnes* also resurfaced, though now the group seemed more like a shadow of gray than a force of good, alternating on the sides of the Lightbringers against the vampires, only to join with the vampires against the Lightbringers. In the end, it seemed, the Nocturnes had it out for both groups and assisted whichever benefitted them most at the time. By playing both sides of the fence, the Nocturnes were the only group of the three that survived with relatively few casualties. The Lightbringers perhaps fared the worst, for they were fanatical, unorganized, and not nearly as effective as they should have been at the time. Eventually, the group faded into obscurity, with only a few scattered Guardians left to show that the faction still had a presence in the city.

Battles between the Nocturnes and Anastasia's brood continued for decades. During events such as **1968's** race riots over the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., street battles were fought openly, with civilians in the way becoming casualties in a shadow war they didn't even know existed between creatures they considered the stuff of legend and myth.

The city was as relatively devoid of violence in the decades to follow, as both the vampires and the Nocturnes came to realize that modern technology, law enforcement techniques, forensics, and general prosperity (as compared to the earlier decades) made it foolish to continue open warfare. Occasional skirmishes occurred, but aside from these shadowy altercations, all parties in the conflict behaved with caution and discretion. The vampires were still a danger, however, because Anastasia never stopped increasing the numbers of her brood.

By the **mid-90's** the "Goth" culture erupted into full bloom, and the number of vampires in the city swelled. For the sake of all humanity, the *Nocturnes* decided, action would have to be taken, even if it meant their own destruction, and the deaths of innocents. They began preparing for an assault. For her part, Anastasia placed certain minions within the ranks of the Nocturnes; these agents continually and quietly disrupted the efforts of the faction to keep them just ineffective enough to not stand against her. The apocalyptic assault was delayed while the Nocturnes battled with turmoil from within their own ranks and waited for the right moment to strike.

Unfortunately for Anastasia and her brood, the Nocturnes and Lightbringers had come to an uneasy truce, both realizing that the vampires were a common and greater threat to both organizations. While they didn't work together against Anastasia and her kin, they no longer wasted their energies battling and undermining one another. In fact, on occasion Lightbringers and Nocturnes found themselves unwittingly working side by side towards the same mission. Still, Anastasia was confident. By now she had as many as 1,500 or more vampires in her brood, and it grew weekly. Her clairvoyance gave her insight that a day would come when the sun no longer rose, and mankind would suffer and die. It became a prophecy for the vampire faction, a prophecy that was destined to come to pass, though not quite in the way the vampires intended it.

On Dark Day, everything hit the fan. The sun didn't come up, and people took to the streets, panicked and rioting. Strange, skeletal creatures roamed the streets openly and there were reports of young men and women suddenly transforming into beautiful or hideous monsters. The fountain at Point State Park erupted with glowing bluish energy, and horrific creatures leapt forth to destroy and raze parts of the city. Local law enforcement agencies and even local military branches had their hands full dealing with the pandemonium, and Anastasia saw it as a prime opportunity to increase her power base. Her minions stalked the streets during Dark Day, feeding and vampirizing with impunity. What she failed to realize was that it was also the opportunity the Lightbringers and Nocturnes had been waiting for. Many vampires, Guardians, and Nightbane died on Dark Day as the battle for the Steel City was joined. The Nocturnes and Guardians scored a major victory and at the same time a severe defeat that day, when a pack of Nocturnes saw Anastasia herself roaming the streets with three of her undead progeny. The Nocturnes ambushed and killed all three of the Secondary Vampires, and wounded Anastasia, who barely managed to escape by transforming into mist and floating into a sewer in an alley. The Nocturnes searched for her, but Anastasia used her powers of metamorphosis to remain hidden, and eventually the Nightbane gave her up for dead. For all they knew, the sun could return at any given moment, and certainly she was too weak to withstand more than a few seconds of its rays.

Anastasia almost did die that day, her wounds severe and her P.P.E. largely depleted. She needed blood, and she needed blood fast. She transformed back into her human form and crept to the mouth of the alley, afraid to venture openly into the street. For the first time she noticed Dark Day as more than a day of providence for the vampires. Her psychic flashes hadn't pointed to the humans suffering at the hands of her people, but warned of a coming invasion from another source. Had she noticed sooner, perhaps she could've stopped it, somehow. Now, there were rivals invading "her city." Creatures of the night with strange clanking soldiers of metal and bone that wielded wicked-looking pole arms. For almost eighty years the Nocturnes and Lightbringers had sought to take her city away, and they'd failed. Now, this strange new enemy had done it in one night! This couldn't be allowed to continue.

Anastasia's gypsy luck held true. Within an hour she noticed a strangely robed individual walking proud among a group of the skeletal warriors. He was directing the creatures and they obeyed without question or hesitation. He had power, she could feel it. That meant he had answers. Quickly she sent out a mental call to her own minions: *"Come to me! I need you!"*

Vampires swarmed upon the Hounds and their apparently human master from all directions. The battle was violent, but brief, and in moments the human stood in the alley, held firm by several Secondary Vampires but staring down Anastasia. He was unafraid and even arrogant in his bearing and demeanor. Anastasia just smiled at him and said, "Let us talk, shall we?" She was mildly surprised when he simply shrugged off her attempts at controlling his mind, but it was no matter, she had other means of convincing him to give her the information she sought.

The interrogation took several hours, but by the end of it she had discovered the source of the invasion, the manner of the invading force, and the identities of both her current captive (a Priest of Night) and the overall leader of the force, a Night Prince who sought to take control of a ley line nexus point at the juncture of the rivers. The Night Prince in question, a young and relatively inexperienced character, had sought to make the city

his own in order to prove himself to his superiors. He had discovered the existence of the nexus and sought to control its power to further his own standing within the Ba'al hierarchy. Thus far, the campaign had been an incredible success. The Night Prince had taken over the Mayor's Office and replaced the mayor with a Doppelganger. Key members of the city council had already been replaced with Dopplegangers and Namtar. The Ba'al were firmly in control of Pittsburgh.

That was about to change. With neither a further thought, nor a twinge of emotion, Anastasia drained the priest dry and, rejuvenated, she gathered her minions about her and instructed them to stay hidden. She would inform them when the time was right. Her prophecy was about to come true after all, and soon they would all have the kingdom they desired.

Infiltrating the Mayor's Office was a simple matter. The city was already in flames, and in mist form Anastasia could travel relatively unhindered through the smoke and haze. She seeped into the office, eased across the floor along the walls, into a dark corner, and re-formed. The Mayor, Benjamin J. Comstock, sat at his desk, feet up, staring out the window at the flames with a look of utter joy on his face. He was a dumpy, mousy man who was balding with a thatch of graying hair running around the sides of his head from temple to temple. He wore an ill-fitting gray suit. The overall effect in the strange light from outside was of a man painted in black and white on a color portrait. A quick probe into his surface thoughts showed that here was a man who had never in his long life been given an ounce of the respect he felt he deserved, and now he was willing to take it, or die trying. She could use that.

He didn't even turn to face her when he spoke. "It's impressive that you managed to get in here, my dear. Very impressive."

She smiled.

"It was easy."

Now he turned, casually, to face her. His hands were held in front of him, fingertips pressed together. He still didn't look directly at her; rather, he seemed intent on studying the pyramid shape his hands made. She couldn't decide if it was a knowledgeable precaution on his part, not meeting her gaze, or merely a silent message that she wasn't worth his time and effort.

"No," he said. "It wasn't easy. I made it that way."

You are a cocky bastard, aren't you? She thought, then added aloud, "Why?"

"Because, my dear, you're a threat to me. Probably the greatest threat this city has to offer. But it doesn't have to be that way. We can use each other."

"Can we, now?"

He grinned, quite proud of himself.

"Yes. To both of our benefits." Then he made the fatal mistake. He looked into her eyes.

Immediately and without hesitation, she focused all of her considerable psychic energies into her next statement.

"Yes, Benjamin. You want to help me."

Anastasia expected to feel that familiar rush. That wonderful power when a victim's will simply snapped under her mental fortitude, and it was almost erotic for an instant when all the intelligence and will simply drained out of his eyes. This one was weak. Somehow she doubted that the rest of the invaders were this easy. She'd gotten lucky. She sauntered from the shadows in the corner into the flickering light from the fires outside and felt his breathing quicken.

Then, it happened. The mayor stood, his features began to shift and meld, and within moments there stood in front of her not a fat, repulsive slug of a man, but a strikingly handsome, tall, and muscular creature who positively exuded power. He looked her in the eyes, met her gaze easily, and there was no battle of wills. He shrugged off her power as though it didn't even exist. This, then, was not the Doppleganger she'd been led to believe was masquerading as Comstock; this was the Night Prince himself.

Still, Anastasia was not to be rattled easily. As she approached him, she let a seductive sway ease its way into her walk, and called upon all her years of experience and all her gypsy charms to back up the power of her suggestion. She leaned over to him, kissed him gently upon the neck, and whispered into his ear.

"I can give you all the power you seek, Benjamin. I can help you break the bonds of your masters."

"One master. Moloch," he corrected her.

"Yes. Moloch. You see, Benjamin, I have been what I am for over four hundred years. I became this way for the same reasons you seek power now. I wanted revenge. Revenge and dominion over all those who had wronged me. And I was granted it. I can grant the same to you."

And she bent to taste him for the first time.

Suddenly, his hand closed on her throat and he lifted her effortlessly into the air. With not even a glint of emotion on his face, he hurled her back against the wall and she crumpled to the floor. He moved towards her slowly, menacingly.

"Did you think it would be that easy?" He hissed.

She pulled herself to her feet. "Of course not. I would have been disappointed if it had."

She walked to the window and looked out over the flaming city.

"You have done very, very well here, but I can help you."

"How could you help me, vampire?"

She looked at him, surprised. "We don't have to be enemies. I own the underworld in this city. I know every haunt, every major player, everything. This city is mine. Do not doubt that I can escape here if I truly desire to do so. I would be a deadly enemy, Benjamin."

"My name is Causticus."

"Causticus, then. I can be a deadly enemy, or a valuable queen."

She leaned against the wall, inviting him. Without further hesitation, he came to her, threw his arms around her neck. There was lust in this one. Lust was good. Lust was power for her. She whispered to him between kisses, told him everything he wanted to hear.

"Understand, Causticus. That night . . . the night I made my bargain with Death, everything changed for me. Power was mine, and glory would follow. All I had to do was sell my soul. All you, my love, have to do is sell your soul, and things can change for you, too. Be mine, and I shall be yours. Forever."

"I've already sold my soul to the Dark," Causticus replied. "To say I give it to you is nothing."

He tilted his head back, and allowed Anastasia to drink.

So it began on Dark Day that Anastasia's kingdom was established, and she had a Night Prince in her thrall. Immediately she sent scouts out all over the country to find out whether or not others in her position had accomplished the same. To her amazement, she seemed to be the only one who had figured it out. The others were probably all too worried about their own survival. No worries, as far as she was concerned. Less competition. Within a year, she had managed travel to the Nightlands with the help of Causticus, who quickly became far more to her than a useful tool – her lover. However, as much as he became devoted to her, she became devoted to him. Her evil was tempered only for him, and his ambition was tempered only for her. Her own ambition, however, was weakened by no one, and even Causticus was unaware of her plans to bring her vampire lord to the Earth.

Causticus, for his part, deferred to Anastasia in almost every matter. Her agents were everywhere and she had it well within her power to choke off his control of the city. She was firmly in control, and Causticus admired her for that. She allowed the Ba'al a high degree of independence, but stayed near him at all times in case she should need to remind him. She was exalted at the power she gained through the taking of his supernatural blood, though she was intelligent enough to realize that Causticus was ineffective and rather pathetic next to some of his kin. She'd gotten lucky, but with her secret guidance and knowledge of Pittsburgh, the Ba'al easily captured the nexus at the Point, and Anastasia began the search for rituals that could summon her creator to Earth. Point State Park was closed to the public, a cover story about the detonation of a radioactive device in the area was concocted, and a high fence was erected around the park to keep people away.

Before long, the Lightbringers and Nocturnes were back into the fray, concentrating on undermining the vampire activities in the city while the other factions remained concerned with the Nightlords. It didn't take either faction very long to realize that the Ba'al weren't doing much to curb vampire activity in the city, which was strange compared to other places under their control. The low-rent and poor areas of the city became active vampire feeding grounds, and after a few run-ins with Hounds and Hunters, it almost seemed to the Nocturnes that the Nightlords were actually supporting vampire activity in Pittsburgh. Rumors began to circulate about who was really in charge, and almost every faction had their intelligence agents at work trying to uncover the truth. The Lightbringers, who were more shortsighted, dismissed the notion, calling the apparent alliance a simple collaboration between two evil species that were combining their forces to destroy all that was good and right. The Seekers took to the rumors and went to work trying to prove or disprove them. The A.D.A. didn't care; for them all supernatural creatures were menaces and it didn't matter who was allied with whom. The only thing that every faction agreed upon was that a large portion of their enemies' power base came from control of the ley line nexus at the Point.

Alliances were formed throughout the Nightbane underground in the city, and on **August 7, 2004**, a massive assault on Point State Park took place. The Warlords, Resistance, Nocturnes, several local organized crime families, and as rumor has it, even some A.D.A. psychics, all joined forces in an attempt to liberate the nexus point from the enemy. They didn't count on just how canny their enemy was, however. Anastasia and Causticus had seen to it that double agents, Dopplegangers, Namtar, and even human N.S.B. agents found their way into almost every one of the factions. Gustav himself was placed within the Nocturnes, assigned to gain the trust of the Lord of the city at the time and murder him when the time was right, thus causing the disintegration of the faction from within. Only the Lightbringer faction, who refused to take part in the battle anyway, remained untainted by spies and double agents, but that faction was self-destructing on its own due to the conflicting philosophies of its members.

Thanks to their infiltrators, the Nightlords and the vampires knew the assault was coming long before it took place, and although the battle lasted several hours, it was more or less a slaughter. From midnight till 4:00 am, the Nightbane and their allies were on the defensive, their proverbial tails well between their legs. Every faction involved suffered heavy losses that night. Gustav succeeded in his mission to destroy the Nocturne Lord of the City, but fell soon after to a young Nocturne Nightbane named Jamie DeDonnan. After the battle, Jamie saw to it that all full-blooded vampires were removed from the organization, either voluntarily or by force in what she viewed as a necessary evil if the faction was to survive. Most Nocturne vampires left willingly, understanding the situation. Many still assist the faction through their independent acts and through the channeling of information and favors. *The Resistance* fared the worst when many of its members unexpectedly switched sides to join the Nightlords, an act that pitched Nightbane against Nightbane and shattered the Resistance. *The Warlords* were one of the first groups to retreat, running back to the projects to sharpen their stakes for future conflicts. *The Underground Railroad*, which has never been a combat-oriented faction, was not directly involved in the assault, but had their hands full in the underground of the city. Pittsburgh has running beneath it a series of tunnels that link to current-day sewer systems and to the natural catacombs beneath the city formed by the fourth river. The subterranean river has no name but the U.R. refers to it with no small degree of bitterness as "Styx." These tunnels lead out of Pittsburgh, if one knows the route, and were used during the American Civil War as a means for the original Underground Railroad to sneak slaves into the North. For years, the Underground Railroad had been cleaning, re-opening, and utilizing these tunnels and the river in their own organization. The vampires discovered this and, realizing that the U.R. would be hard-pressed for support while the fight for the Point was occurring, moved on these secret supply routes. Hundreds of vampires, side by side with hundreds of Hounds and N.S.B. agents, swarmed through the underground tunnels in one of the bloodiest battles in the history of the Underground Railroad. The battle ended in stalemate, though the U.R. managed to preserve only a handful of their supply lines and exit routes.

Causticus and Anastasia covered the battle with a trumped up story about a major terrorist assault on the city, and used it as an excuse to place the national guard and hundreds of their own agents (minions, vampires and psychics undercover) in airports, bus and train stations, and major highways into and out of the

city. Under the cover of anti-terrorism precautions, Nightlord pawns and operatives took absolute control of the city. Normal humans were allowed to come and go as they pleased, but suspected Nightbane, psychics, other supernatural creatures and those humans with the propensity for using magic were detained for "questioning" with no other explanation given. Most were never seen again. Those who resisted or fled arrest were gunned down as dangerous terrorists. Supply routes and contacts for the factions of Pittsburgh were shut down and the city quite effectively cordoned off. Only the Underground Railroad managed to maintain a few risky ways in and out.

Now, two years later, Pittsburgh's factions remain in a stalemate with the Nightlords. The Nocturnes, under the leadership of Jamie DeDonnan, have made strides towards unifying the factions, but it is a difficult task. If she can succeed, the Lady of the City may spark the hope and inspiration to motivate the other factions and break the Nightlords and vampires' hold over the city. However, the work ahead of her is enormous. The Lightbringers, as always, vehemently resist the overtures of an organization founded by and working with Wampyrs. The A.D.A. resists contact with supernatural creatures of any sort. There is distrust to be overcome between the Nocturnes and the Seekers due to decades of competition and infighting. The Resistance is a shattered, disorganized wreck, and more than a few surviving members have found their way into the Nocturnes or the Underground Railroad.

Clubs Freak have become a necessity to the caged Nightbane community, allowing them to blow off steam, forget their troubles for a while and to meet and share information and intelligence. These nightclubs and blind pigs have become an important part of the underground network and are more active in Pittsburgh than in most other cities. The recent appearance of the *Athanatos* is a mixed blessing. Some see them as harbingers of hope, while others see them as a new danger, and still others as an X factor yet to be a proven ally for one side or the other. One of the disconcerting things about these beings is that there seems to be as many evil Athanatos as there are good.

Meanwhile, independent bands of Nightbane, mystics, psychics, and vampires not associated with Anastasia's brood make random assaults on Nightlord and vampire-held fronts, but the Nightlords' minions hold sway over the city. Hunters can be seen every night, circling the Point from high above, and Hounds prowl the streets. People don't leave their houses at night if they can help it, and those who work graveyard shifts often carry guns on their person even though strict anti-gun legislation forbids the possession of firearms by civilians.

During the daytime, and usually on weekends, the sinister atmosphere and general feeling of dread that permeates the city at night drifts away and people go about their lives much as normal.

The biggest problem Causticus and Anastasia face now are reports that have been filtering in that **The Nameless Vagabond** is making his way towards Pittsburgh, after escaping a standoff in the Midwest that left the majority of a local law enforcement agency and a vast number of Nightbane and Guardians dead. The Avatar is hitchhiking across country, leaving a trail of death and destruction in his wake. If the Nameless Vagabond has taken an interest in the city of Pittsburgh, that means King Moloch suspects there could be a problem, and Anastasia cannot afford to have the Nightlord leadership find out about her little coterie just yet. Preparations are under way to hide the presence of the vampire community and activity in the city by the time the Vagabond arrives, and to ambush and kill the Avatar if absolutely necessary though this is by far a last resort plan. Anastasia is not stupid enough to think she can pull off the destruction of a Moloch Avatar easily. Her biggest hope right now is that a group of Lightbringers that have been tracking the Avatar for years seem to be hot on his heels. However, as much as this is a good thing, it is a bad thing as well, since the Lightbringers would certainly take an active hand in the destruction of her brood. (**Note:** For complete details on the Nameless Vagabond and King Moloch, see **Nightbane® Book Two: Nightlands™.**)



Magic and Cults in Pittsburgh

There are several powerful cults operating in Pittsburgh. These are the Druids, the Cult of Night, the Knights Templar, and the Sanguine Legion. As a center of mystic convergence, Pittsburgh is a hotbed of magic and supernatural activity. In addition to these four "major" cult organizations there are *dozens* of smaller covens, cabals and groups located throughout town. They meet in secret at various locations such as warehouses, abandoned buildings, and wooded areas throughout and surrounding the city. Some of the covens and cabals are allied with the Seekers, but most are either self-serving or tied to the Nightlords or other dark supernatural beings.

On a practical note, any and all mages or psychics in the city proper (downtown area) gain the full benefits of being within a mile (1.6 km) of a ley line nexus point, as well as full benefits of being *on a ley line*. The three ley lines that surround the city, as well as the one that cuts directly through the center (the underground aquifier, or mysterious "fourth river"), form almost a solid sheet of potential psychic energy. Open mystic and psychic conflict in Pittsburgh are likely to be grandiose and deadly, and for this reason, most factions and major players turn to other methods of problem solving. It also means that cults are constantly scheming to perform their next apocalyptic ritual. There's a heck of a lot more to worry about in Pittsburgh than the Nightlords and vampires. In a setting revolving entirely around light and dark, the shadowy places between serve to make for an interesting play setting.

The following is a brief overview of some of the more notable cultish players.

The Druids. The Druids in the city tend to operate out of several vast public parklands and perform their rituals late at night. Their two major domains are in Schenley Park and Frick Park, both to the east of the city. Schenley Park is located in the Oakland borough, where the University of Pittsburgh and Carnegie Mellon University reside. The park consists of 500 acres of mostly wooded land crisscrossed with hiking and bicycle trails. It also contains deep ravines and even a pond at a site known as Panther Hollow (after the University of Pittsburgh's sports organization, the Panthers). Their other domain, Frick Park, is a 600 acre stretch of land in the Squirrel Hill area of the city.

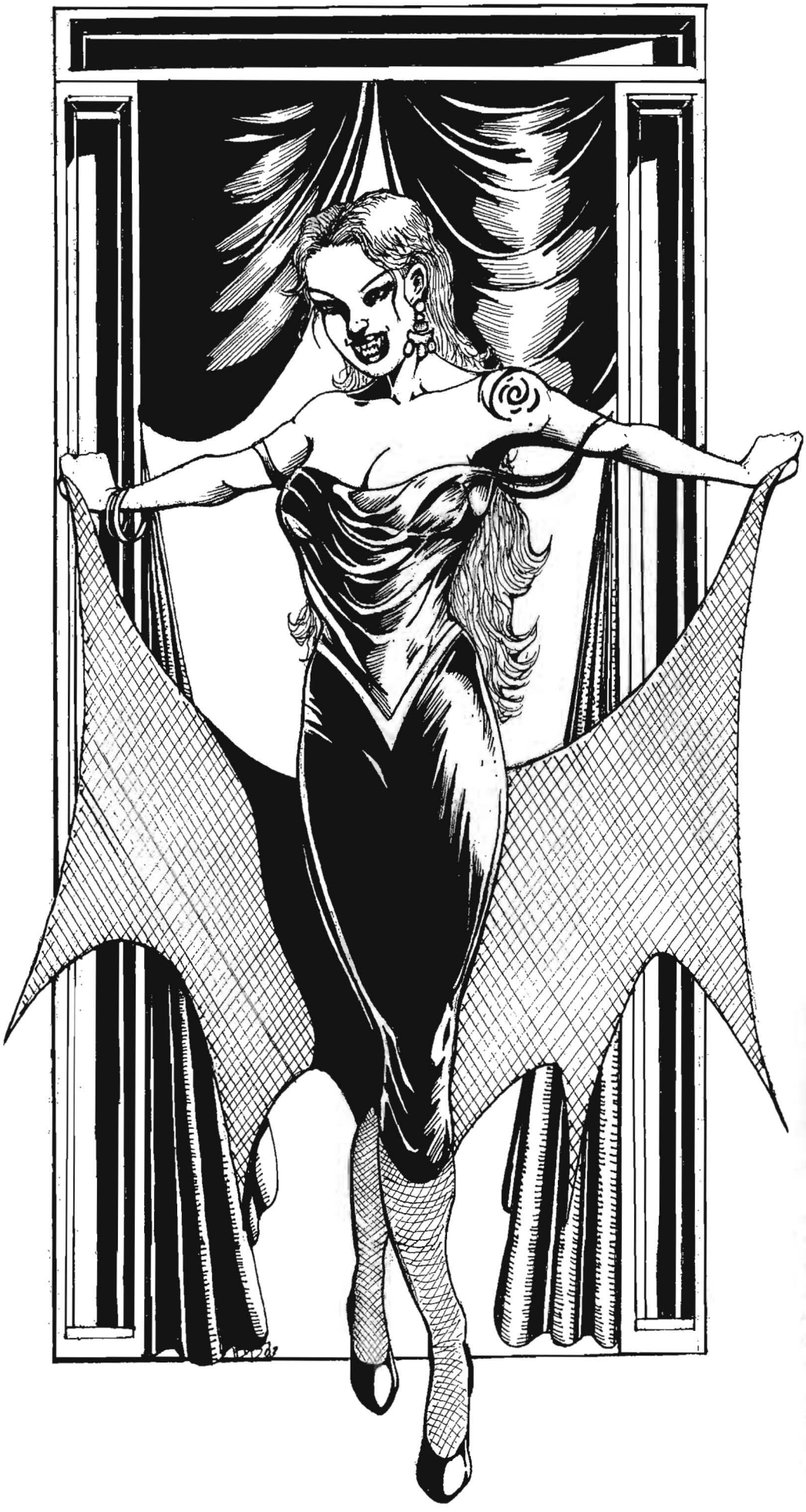
There is no public face to the Druids. They prefer to keep a low profile and hide from society (and Nightlord scrutiny). Most Druids have normal day jobs and rarely indicate their involvement or membership status in the Druids. Of all the cults, Druids are the most secretive about their ways and meetings. There have been rumors of darkly robed figures emerging from the forests in these parks at night to terrorize the populace, but no one knows if this is true or not, or whether these figures are Druids or something more sinister.

The Cult of Night. This group operates out of the Rex Theater and the old Beehive in Oakland. The Pittsburgh branch of the Cult of Night is a dangerous apocalyptic organization working to bring about the end of the world. Rather than worship the Nightlords and Night Princes, this particular Cult of Night worships *the Dark* itself. They are led by a triumvirate of Priests of Night and maintain a large and active cabal of sorcerers and even evil Shadow Warlocks in their ranks. They seek to become one with the Dark, make contact with its physical entity, and perhaps even summon it into the world, where they believe they will sit at its right hand. To this end, they have secret agents within many of the different factions of the city, from the N.S.B. and the ranks of the Nightlords to the Nocturnes and the Seekers, all in an effort to track down any ancient, hidden, or lost knowledge, artifacts, and books that could help them usher in the Apocalypse of the Dark. It is said that the Dark has granted great and terrible power to the ruling triumvirate, and that they may even control some Hounds and Hunters. Could it be that if the Ba'al fail in their conquest of the Earth, there is yet another cabal of sorcerers poised to rise and take their place?

The Knights Templar. This secret society has existed for hundreds of years as vampire hunters and defenders of the innocent. They have once again pulled out the big guns since the Nightlords' invasion of the planet. *The Order of the Red Cross* maintains a temple in the North Hills area of Pittsburgh, on a long stretch of road known as Cemetery Hill. There are few buildings around this massive cemetery, but the Masonic Temple is among those that occupy the hill. Causticus and Anastasia suspect that the building, a stone husk of what it once was before Dark Day, is a headquarters for some sort of rebel group, and would love to shut down the place, but up till now, they haven't even been able to get an agent close. It is said that those who go too near the temple don't come back. The Knights Templar recruit worthy people from all walks of life into their organization, and there are members of almost every faction associated with them, though no one in these dark times will openly admit to ever having been associated with the Freemasons. It is rumored that the Order is a front for the Seekers, but it is also rumored that they are a dark cult serving their own interests. The rumors serve the purposes of the Templars just fine, as it keeps their enemies off balance and unprepared for every strike. What is certain is that the society has gone back to the secretive, ritualistic ways of the middle ages, when they were first founded, and that they have declared war on the forces of evil in Pittsburgh. Vampires are their primary target (see the Knight Templar Dark Slayer O.C.C.), but the Knights have no love for the Nightlords and dispatch them, their minions and other supernatural horrors whenever they are encountered. With the current vampire crisis, the Dark Slayers may be a welcomed ally in the battle to save Pittsburgh from the dominion of the undead.

The Sanguine Legion. This vampire faction operates in secret in Pittsburgh, quietly drawing members even from Anastasia's own brood into its ranks. They are extremely active and maintain havens in the underground tunnels of the city, as well as in several abandoned buildings throughout the area. Given the proximity of the nexus point, the group in Pittsburgh is beyond fanatical and is obsessed with the idea that it is in Pittsburgh that their final goal of world domination shall begin. They have become a thorn in Anastasia's side. She never intended to spawn a group of fanatics who would feast on their own kind for some insane dream.

The Illuminati. This ancient organization has its fingers in everything, and the presence of the nexus at Point State Park is something they have a vested interest in controlling. Since the balance of power in Pittsburgh is so tenuous, and the power base constantly shifting between the Nightlords, the vampires, and the other factions, this society believes that they have a real possibility of seizing the day and taking control of the nexus. Given the contacts the Illuminati maintains throughout the factions and within other societies and cults, control of Pittsburgh would give them a very solid base from which they could re-launch their campaign to establish a New World Order.



Notable Personalities in Pittsburgh

Anastasia Calabrese

Mistress of the Pittsburgh Brood

Anastasia is designed as a very powerful and shadowy enemy who should rarely (if ever) actually encounter or battle the characters directly. Her high level of P.P.E. is the direct result of her regular feedings from the Night Prince, Causticus, and were he ever to withdraw his permission for her to feed from his powerful blood, she would revert to the standard base P.P.E. of a Master Vampire. In addition, so long as she maintains regular feedings from the Night Prince, she can draw P.P.E. from the ley lines and nexus point in Pittsburgh as though she were a mortal sorceress. Such power makes her incredibly dangerous, for her primary goal is to discover a ritual to summon her Vampire Intelligence to Pittsburgh. She has nearly enough vampires in her brood to accomplish the task, but the P.P.E. levels of Earth are not enough for the Intelligence to enter the world on its own, even though the nexus would sustain it once it arrives.

Anastasia is convinced that somewhere in the world is a magic ritual that will enable her to summon the Intelligence, with the proper generation of energy (she presumes that a human sacrifice of massive proportions would be necessary, and has a plan in place to perform the act when the time comes). If she ever finds the necessary ritual, she can open a portal to summon the Vampire Intelligence to the Earth, which could change the entire balance of power in the Midwest, and would certainly be the downfall of her lover, Causticus.

If Anastasia ever encounters the player characters, there will *always* be 1D4+3 Secondary Vampires at her side as well as a contingent of 2D6 Hounds and/or Hunters. These vampire aides are at least 200 years old and high (1D6+6) level, while the Hounds and Hunters are low to mid-level (1D4+2). These minions may not *all* appear present immediately, but are in close proximity to come running at that slightest hint of trouble. Anastasia will not usually fight if she doesn't have to, turning to mist to make good an escape. She is, after all the brood's creator/all mother, leader and general rolled into one, and she has learned that as long as she can survive, hope for her undead children springs eternal. She also possesses an ancient magic ring that allows her to teleport herself and up to eight minions into the *Nightlands*.

True Name: Anastasia Calabrese.

Race/R.C.C.: Vampire, and a Master Vampire at that.

Alignment: Miscreant evil, though completely loyal to the Vampire Intelligence that created her, and, in her own twisted way, the vampire brood she has created over the centuries.

Attributes: I.Q. 26, M.E. 28, M.A. 24, P.S. 30, P.P. 23, P.E. 23, P.B. 25, Spd. 28

Hit Points: 180

P.P.E: 500

Horror Factor: 14

Disposition: Haughty, arrogant and driven. Her superiority complex simply oozes from her pores. She has become an excellent strategist and tactician and is a conniving survivor – like a cockroach that just can't seem to be exterminated no matter what lengths are taken.

Description: A former Roma (gypsy), Anastasia's skin is almost gold in color. Her eyes are pitch black and her hair runs in ringlets down to the middle of her back. She dresses in revealing outfits that accent the curves of her body and moves with a hypnotic seductiveness.

Insanity: Obsession: Revenge against all humankind.

Level of Experience: 15

Skills of Note: First Aid 98%, Holistic Medicine 85%, Paramedic 80%, Lore: Nightbane 35%, Lore: Athanatos 20%, Lore: Guardian 90%, Lore: Religion 98%, Lore: Vampires 98%, Sing 65%, Dance 65%, Public Speaking 85%, Language: Hungarian 60%, Language: Italian 85%, Language: English 85%, Language: Romany 98%, Cook 55%, Horse Riding 90%, Streetwise 65%, Palming 65%, Palmistry (reading palms) 85%, Concealment 45%, W.P. Knife, and W.P. Automatic Pistol.

Special Abilities: All standard Master Vampire abilities, plus residual magic powers. See the *Nightbane® Role-Playing Game* for details on vampires.

Combat: As a Master Vampire.

Magic: Anastasia knows a great number of spells from her former life, all at seventh level proficiency. Knows the following spells: Oracle, Exorcism, See the Invisible, Death Trance, Tongues, Eyes of Thoth, Commune with Spirits, Calling, Protection Circle (Simple and Superior), Dispel Magic Barrier, Sanctum, See Aura, Sense Magic, Impression, Charismatic Aura, Domination, Compulsion, Second Sight, Hallucination, and Shadow Meld.

Psionics: Effectively none, though Anastasia retains a touch of Clairvoyance from her days as a seer. She cannot control these flashes of insight, however, which usually visit her as dreams.

Money: The vampire has accumulated and hidden away a small fortune which she uses to fund her secret operations. She has 4D6 million dollars worth of ancient artifacts (antique jewelry, works of art, books, etc.) plus 2D6+2 million dollars, half in business investments and half hidden away as cash.



Lord Causticus, Night Prince of Pittsburgh

Causticus is a young Night Prince who never talks about how he came into his powers. He is only a few centuries old, and if it's possible for one to become a Night Prince by accident, Causticus would be a shining example. Though intelligent by human standards, he is dull-witted and stupid as far as the Nightlords are concerned, and as a result, has never gotten a shred of respect from his peers. Magog granted him control of the *Pit*, the Nightlands equivalent of Pittsburgh, back in the mid-1800's, because at the time the mystical energies on Earth and the Nightlands were weak, and as a result, the nexus point in Pittsburgh wasn't very active, so the Nightlords weren't aware of its existence. The Pit was named so because it is considered a hole in the ground and at the time had no significance to the Ba'al in the Nightlands.

During the Dark Day invasion, Causticus orchestrated the murder and replacement of Benjamin Comstock, Mayor of Pittsburgh, and personally took his place. The operation was successful, but that same day, Anastasia Calabrese seduced Causticus and managed to convince him that she and her minions would be of far more value to him as allies than enemies. Her promises of power, and manipulation of his desires and passion have made him fall in love with her, giving Anastasia considerable power over the Night Prince. Anastasia pulls the strings behind the scenes and Causticus has proven, under her guidance, to be a very effective ruler. The existence of Anastasia and her Brood has been kept secret from the other Nightlords, who believe that Causticus is just not effective enough to maintain control of the vampire community in his city. So long as the nexus in the Point State Park remains under Ba'al control, however, the Nightlords could care less and are content to let Causticus have his share of power. Should the other Ba'al ever find out about Anastasia and the control she exerts over him, they would probably attempt to kill her first, then Causticus would be relegated to some poor settlement in Siberia or the antarctic, and that's if he cooperates with the Nightlords in destroying the vampire brood. If King Moloch is in a particularly bad mood, or Causticus refuses to help, he would be banished to Tophet or beaten within an inch of his life and sent back to the "Pit" of the Nightlands. It should be noted that Causticus is completely and utterly devoted to Anastasia and he would probably follow her to the ends of the Earth and beyond. His loyalty and love is unquestionably to her first, and to the Ba'al second. **Note:** Though Anastasia honestly cares about the Night Prince and, in her own demonic way, loves him, the vampire queen doesn't realize the depths of her feelings for him and thinks of Causticus as little more than a pleasant means to an end. Consequently, she will manipulate, use and betray him to achieve her own goals, even it if results in his banishment or death. However, when Causticus is gone, Anastasia will be surprised (and hurt) by the feelings of regret and loss that will consume her. Of course, she will somehow blame humanity for this loss too, and it will only make her all the more bitter, ruthless and cruel.

True Name: Causticus.

Race/R.C.C.: Night Prince.

Alignment: Diabolic.

Attributes: I.Q. 15, M.E. 15, M.A. 25, P.S. 45, P.P. 24, P.E. 24, P.B. 18, Spd. 40

Hit Points: 75

S.D.C.: 2,000

P.P.E: 320

Horror Factor: 18 when unmasked as a Nightlord.

Disposition: Ambitious and arrogant, Causticus is obsessed with the acquisition of power. Centuries of not receiving any respect from his kin have driven him to an obsessive desire to prove himself to his peers and he even daydreams about overthrowing Lord Magog, who he views as foolhardy and overconfident. More than anything, Causticus wishes to become a Nightlord and rule as Viceroy of the Midwest. For now, however, he wears a convincing mask of loyalty to Lord Magog, who sees him as a surprisingly capable servant in Pittsburgh. Causticus is utterly devoted to Anastasia and sees her as the means to his victory and success on Earth.

Description: Causticus, in his true form, is a handsome and well-built man with sandy blonde hair and green eyes. However, he often takes the appearance of the human Mayor Benjamin Comstock, who was fat, short, and balding, with glasses.

Level of Experience: Three.

Skills of Note: Occult Lore and all Languages at 98%, and knows the following skills, all at 75% proficiency: Criminal Sciences and Forensics, Medical Doctor, Pathology, Strategy/Tactics, Cryptography, Optic Systems, Surveillance Systems, Detect Ambush, Interrogation Techniques, Streetwise, Chemistry: Analytical, W.P. Automatic Pistol, W.P. Revolver, W.P. Rifle, W.P. SubMachine-Gun, W.P. Sword, Wilderness Survival.

Special Abilities: All standard Night Prince abilities; see *Nightbane® RPG,* page 177.

Combat: Hand to Hand: Assassin with five attacks per melee round.

Bonuses: +3 to strike, +3 to parry, +5 to dodge, +5 to roll, +5 to pull punch, +4 to save vs magic, +3 vs psionics, +5 to Perception, +6 vs Horror factor. All in addition to attribute and skill bonuses.

Magic: None, aside from Ba'al Zebul illusion powers.

Psionics: None.

Money: The resources of the city of Pittsburgh – city funds, the police, etc. – are at his disposal and managed reasonably well. As a Night Prince, Causticus also commands a legion of minions and is assisted in all matters by Anastasia and her vampires.

Jamie DeDonnan

The Nocturnes' Leader & Lady of the City

Before Dark Day, Jamie DeDonnan was a relatively normal girl. She grew up in Dublin, Ireland, with her family and had a normal, fairly happy childhood. Her parents informed her at the age of 12 that she had been a foundling, left on their doorstep as an infant, and while the news took some adjustment, Jamie was always one to bounce back.

At the age of 17, she came to America to study musical theater at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. It was here that she met the love of her life, Alex Martinson, a computer engineering major at the university. After a year of dating, Alex proposed marriage and the two moved into an apartment on Mount Washington, overlooking the city.

Things looked to be the picture of the American Dream for Jamie until March 6, 2000, when the sun didn't come up. That morning, Jamie was up before the crack of dawn as always, surfing the net, when she stumbled upon a strange website with bizarre stories and prophecies. These "Wanderer Diaries" caught her attention and she got so involved in reading the material that she didn't hear the commotion outside. By the time she diverted her attention, the Dark Day riots were in full swing. Looking out the window, she noticed the black sky and was confused. By this time of morning the sun should be up, and people were going crazy because it hadn't. Alex came into the room, a calming influence as always, and suggested they just stay put until everything blew over. It seemed like a good idea, but it wasn't meant to be. The looters came into the apartment, intent on robbing the place. Alex stood up to fight and was fatally shot. When the men attempted to accost Jamie she threw herself out the window in a panic. There was a flash of pain, then blackness.

The fall down Mt. Washington would have killed any normal person, but Jamie was soon to find out she wasn't normal, not anymore. She was Nightbane, and now, five years later, she leads the Pittsburgh branch of the Nocturnes and struggles to unite all of the factions in the city against the Nightlords. It is a hard curse for a woman who wanted to be a singer and dancer on stage, performing. She never imagined this future for herself, especially as a leader of a powerful underground faction of



monsters fighting to save the world from demonic invaders. Jamie manages it with the same stoicism that she accepts all the other burdens with. She is a natural and caring leader, an excellent strategist and organizer, and something of a soft-spoken visionary. She is a credit to her race and her faction.

True Name: Jamie DeDonnan.

Race/R.C.C.: Nightbane.

Alignment: Scrupulous.

Attributes: I.Q. 14, M.E. 13, M.A. 18, P.S. 14, P.P. 19, P.E. 15, P.B. 20, Spd. 13

Hit Points: 46

S.D.C.: 44

Armor: None.

P.P.E.: 165

Disposition: Brave, responsible, introspective, serious, and sad. She wears the burden of her leadership like a wound, but accepts it rather than running away. She is kind and friendly, if a bit guarded. A natural, if reluctant leader who commands the respect and loyalty of those who follow her. Her sincerity, compassion and heroic spirit are an inspiration.

Description: A stunningly beautiful Irish girl (appears to be around 19 years old) with auburn hair and jade green eyes. She has a few freckles dotting her cheekbones and tends to dress in black; her favorite outfit is a black silk blouse, cinched and belted over black jeans and black cowboy boots.

Level of Experience: Seven.

Skills of Note: Sign Language 65%, Climb 65%, Prowl 93%, Escape Artist 60%, Intelligence 50%, Concealment 76%, Detect Concealment 83%, Disguise/Impersonation 88%, Locate Secret Compartments/Doors 53%, Palming 48%, Ventriloquism 31%, Lore: Demons and Monsters 55%, Lore: Nightbane 60%, Lore: Magic 25%, Lore: Athanatos 28%, First Aid 98%, Acrobatics/ Gymnastics/Tumbling: Walk Tightrope 80%, Sense of Balance 98%, Parallel Bars/Rings 74%, Back Flip 88%, Swimming 85%, Wilderness Survival 60%, W.P. Auto Pistol, Computer Operation 70%, Sing 80%, and Dance 80%.

Special Abilities: Nightvision 200 feet (61 m) in Facade, 1000 feet (305 m) in Morphus.

Morphus Appearance: Black panther with metal claws and teeth. Her eyes in Morphus resemble glass monitor screens with minuscule readings constantly flashing across them. There are computer jacks at the base of her skull and in each foreleg, above the paws.

Sense Nightbane: 480 Feet (146 m).

Supernatural Attributes in Morphus: 250 S.D.C., 78 Hit Points, +16 to P.S. (Supernatural), +9 to P.P., +13 to P.E. and +40 to Spd.

Horror Factor in Morphus: 12

Other Nightbane Abilities: Mirror Walk, immunities, immune to transformations, leap 30 feet (9.1 m) from standing position and 60 feet (18.3 m) with a running start.

Talents: Darksong, The Shroud, and See Truth.

Combat Skills: Hand to Hand: Basic (Facade), Hand to Hand: Martial Arts (Morphus); six attacks per melee round in Morphus.

Weapons: In her Facade form, Jamie carries two Mackarov 9 mm pistols that deal out 4D6 damage per round (2D6 plus another 2D6 tissue damage from hollow point bullets). In her Morphus form, her metal claws inflict 3D6 damage, plus Supernatural Strength, and her bite does 3D6.

Magic: None.

Psionics: None.

Money: She controls and directs the faction's finances with the same discretion and savvy as everything else in her life, and works hard to spend every penny wisely and to the benefit of her people and the war against the Nightlords and other dark forces. She has no concerns about money for herself and, for that matter, has no interest in personal power. She leads because it is her duty.



Bronze Dragon

Nocturne Librarian of Pittsburgh

Erick Cooper was born in 1739 to a Hessian soldier and an Iroquois squaw. At the age of 15, he followed in his father's footsteps and joined the British army as a conscript in the assault on Fort Necessity at the juncture of the Ohio, Monongahela, and Allegheny Rivers. It was during this battle that he endured his Becoming and was reborn as a Nightbane. Terrified that the British would see him and have him burned as a witch or monster, he ran into the woods and traveled west, both to protect himself and to relieve his parents of the burden of what he had become.

He wound up living with a Lakota Indian tribe in the Great Lakes region, where he discovered a mentor in another Nightbane named Running Deer, who taught Erick to deal with what he was. The Native Americans revered him rather than

fearing or cursing his gifts, believing Cooper to be in touch with his totem spirit. It was with the Lakota that he earned the name he would later anglicize into "Bronze Dragon." It was also largely due to Cooper's abilities that the Battle of Little Bighorn resulted in the death of one General Custer. When Running Deer was killed at the Battle of Wounded Knee, Bronze found himself once again on his own, and traveled east again, eager to see the woods of his youth. He returned to Pittsburgh in the late 1800's, where he discovered the Nocturnes and his passion for books and knowledge. His philosophy and that of the Nocturnes meshed very well, and Bronze first served them as a Collector and then Librarian. Throughout the years, he has traveled extensively, collecting information, artifacts, and books of lore for the faction, and is the only Nocturne Librarian that the city of Pittsburgh has ever known. He is something of a pacifist, assisting his faction as he can, but preferring not to dirty his hands in combat. He does not hesitate to fight in self-defense, but, as a rule, believes that his days as a soldier are long past, and the battles of war are for the young. Today, Bronze is an advisor, strategist, and keeper of knowledge, and would much rather spend time with books than fighting the minions of the Ba'al. Still, he understands his and the Nocturnes' place in the war and accepts it willingly. He will never turn his back on a fellow Nocturne, nor refuse a soul in genuine need of assistance. His "card catalog" is a vast basement room filled with three-ring binders full of names, addresses, locations, and secret doors. He knows the contents of each binder by heart and could replicate 90% of it from memory if the need ever arose.

True Name: Erick Cooper.

Aliases: Bronze Dragon, Bronze, and B.D.

Alignment: Scrupulous.

Race: Nightbane.

Attributes: I.Q. 22, M.E. 16, M.A. 19, P.S. 12, P.P. 14, P.E. 15, P.B. 12, Spd. 11

Hit Points: 45

S.D.C.: 30 (233 in Morphus form).

P.P.E.: 323

Disposition: Jovial, friendly, and highly intelligent, though he is forgetful of people's names. Bronze often has his mind working on many projects at once, and seems distracted most of the time. What few people realize is that Bronze's forgetfulness is a front. He has a photographic memory and likes to test how genuine people are by "forgetting" their identities and seeing how they react.

Description: In his Facade form, Bronze resembles a relatively average, albeit portly, man in his mid 20's, with blonde hair, gray eyes, a high forehead, and a moustache and goatee. He favors a black leather duster, faded blue jeans, black biker boots, jean shirt with bolo tie, and black felt cowboy hat – he calls himself a "silicon cowboy." To all appearances, he is a slightly eccentric (fairly overweight) computer geek and bookworm. He runs a small computer consulting business out of the back of his beat up SUV and home.

R.C.C.: Nightbane Mystic and Nocturne Collector.

Level of Experience: 12

Skills of Note: Native Language and Literacy (German) 98%, Speak Iroquois 98%, Speak, Read, and write English 98%, Speak Lakota 70%, Detect Concealment 90%, Cryptography 95%, Criminal Sciences/Forensics 98%, Locate Librarian 95%, Research 98%, Lore: Demons & Monsters 98%, Lore: Nightbane 98%, Lore: Geomancy 98%, Lore: Nightlands 98%, Lore: Religion 98%, Lore: Faction Nocturnes 98%, Lore: Secret Societies 85%, Wilderness Survival 98%, Forgery 95%, Streetwise 86%, Computer Operation 70%, Computer Repair 45%, Disguise 85%, Counter-Tracking 85%, Tracking 90%, Pilot Automobile 55%, Hunting, and Identify Plants & Fruits 98%.

Weapon Proficiencies: Archery, Knife, Blunt, Tomahawk (use Battle Axe bonuses), Cap & Ball Pistols, Black Powder Rifles, Automatic Pistols, and Bolt-Action Rifle.

Special Abilities: Nightvision, 200 feet (61 m) in Facade, 1000 feet (305 m) in Morphus

Morphus Appearance: Bronze colored humanoid dragon complete with leathery wings, a tail, horns/spines that run down his spine, horns on his head and sharp claws, although his size remains roughly six feet (1.8 m) tall. (Characteristics: Were-Reptile, Bony Exoskeleton, Bat Wings.)

Sense Nightbane: 480 feet (146 m).

Supernatural Attributes: S.D.C. as listed above, +15 to P.S., +8 to P.P., +13 to P.E., and +18 to Spd.

Horror Factor as Nightbane: 13

Magic: Bronze knows the following spells, all at 12th level proficiency: Blinding Flash, Globe of Daylight, Befuddle, Fear, Energy Bolt, Magic Armor, Negate Poisons/Toxins, Call Creature of Light, Fire Bolt, Calling, Circle of Flame, Charismatic Aura, Memory Bank, Time Slip, Create Magic Scroll, Banishment, Wards, and Amulet. In battle, he favors his Fire Bolt spell, which he has learned to cast from his mouth to emulate a "real" dragon for dramatic effect.

Psionics: None.

Talents: See Truth, Darksong, Soul Shield, and The Shroud.

Combat Skills: Hand to Hand: Basic (Facade), Hand to Hand: Martial Arts (Morphus).

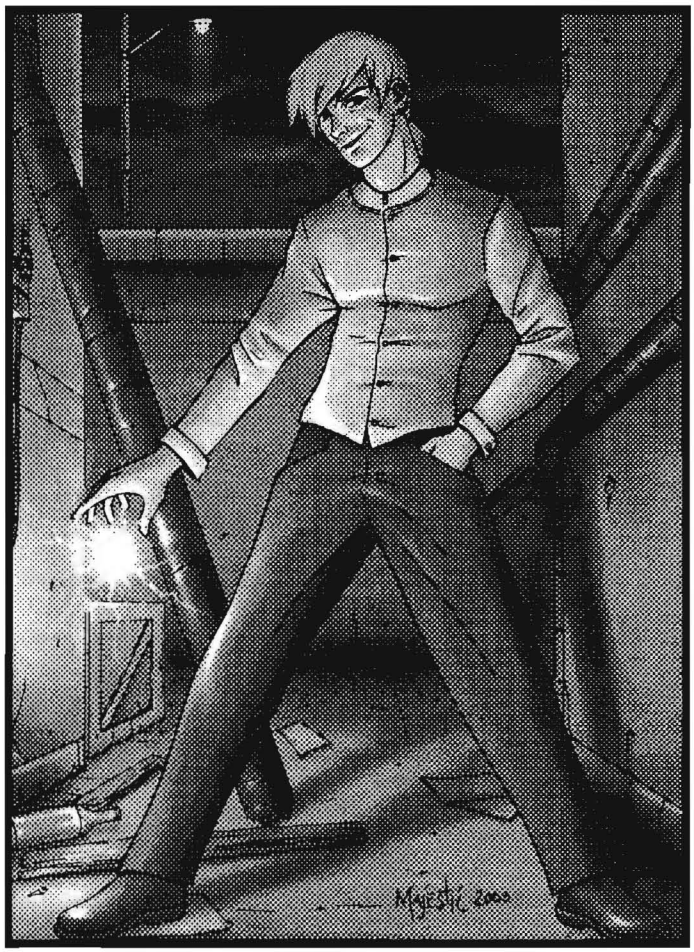
Weapons: In his Facade form, Bronze carries a .44 Auto-mag pistol that does 5D6 damage. In his Morphus form, he prefers to rely on his talents, natural weapons, and magic.

Money: Over the decades, he has stashed away roughly a half million in cash and 14 million in antiques and rare artifacts (some magic). This is in addition to the priceless books, artifacts, magic items and information he handles on behalf of the Nocturne faction.

Luca

Member of the Pittsburgh Lightbringers

Luca knows more than he should about the true nature of the War, mostly due to his close friendship with David (also described). This knowledge puts him at great risk almost continually, but he accepts this burden and wears it like a badge of honor. He considers himself a soldier, just doing his part, but he's more than willing to do whatever that part requires, short of cold-blooded murder. He is serious, honorable, and good to the



core, but also understands that not everyone is like him and recognizes the need to occasionally perform unsavory acts – this is war, after all. He is not above showing off his position as a Lightbringer by flaunting the resources at his disposal to impress someone into recognizing the power and importance of his faction. His trust is not easily earned, and often he will not admit it even after someone *has* earned it. However, once Luca considers someone a friend or trusted ally, he is true and loyal to them. By the same token, he is not forgiving of betrayal and carries a grudge a long time.

When not battling the Nightlords, Luca spends much of his time among the homeless, bringing warmth, food, comfort, and some small measure of cheer into their downtrodden lives. Due to his recent adventures with David, Luca has also begun cultivating a friendship with Jamie DeDonnan, Nocturne Lady of the City. It is relatively unheard of for a Lightbringer and a Nocturne to be on friendly terms, but Luca has always been something of an exception to the rules. His relationship with the Nocturnes began with David's young Nightbane friend, Tasha, who was a Second in the Nocturnes as well as an Alpha in her pack. Tasha was killed fighting a battle that Luca wanted to assist in, but the city Overseer denied him that privilege because Tasha was a Nocturne. Luca feels incredibly guilty over Tasha's death. Since then, Luca has come to notice the corruption of the ideals that the Lightbringers stand for, and it is only his fear of being branded "Fallen" that keeps him in that faction and in line. The organization at large is not aware that Luca knows the identity of the Lady of the Nocturnes in Pittsburgh.

True Name: Luca; the rest is unknown.

Race/R.C.C.: Guardian.

Alignment: Principled.

Attributes: I.Q. 22, M.E. 20, M.A. 21, P.S. 18, P.P. 22, P.E. 20, P.B. 17, Spd. 30

Hit Points: 92

S.D.C.: 190

P.P.E: 200. **I.S.P.:** 120.

Horror Factor: 9 or 12 when using powers (awe).

Disposition: Bold, brave, merciful and more than a little arrogant and self-righteous, but a genuinely good and honest soul. He believes in the divinity of the Guardians in the battle between Light and Dark, and is the first one to point out mistakes and flaws in others' conduct and sense of morality. All he really wants to do, in the end, is help people in whatever way he can.

Description: Like most Guardians, Luca resembles a young teenager, though even he doesn't know his true age. His unblemished features are sharp and chiseled and he wears his long blond hair tied loosely back in a ponytail. He favors a white, collarless, button-down shirt and khaki pants. Occasionally he will don a white trench coat to complete the ensemble, but only in chilly weather.

Level of Experience: Five.

Skills of Note: First Aid 98%, Holistic Medicine 75%, Paramedic 60%, Lore: Nightbane 35%, Lore: Athanatos 40%, Lore: Guardian 50%, Lore: Religion 60%, Sing 65%, Dance 45%, Public Speaking 75%, Language: Spanish 98%, Language: English 98%, Cook 55%, and Pilot Automobile 65%.

Special Abilities & Psionics: Precognitive Senses, Supernatural Senses, Super-Regeneration, Healing Touch, Powers of Light, Nullify Magic, and Fly. Does not need to eat, drink, or breathe but needs sunlight to survive. See pages 189-192 of the **Nightbane® RPG** for complete details.

Magic: None.

Money: Has little importance to him, except that he can use it to help others.

David
Celestial Athanatos

David, while not exactly an Elder Athanatos, has been around the block. He endured his Revelation a good sixty years before Dark Day as a young soldier in World War II and has adjusted well. He came to Pittsburgh shortly after Dark Day and made the acquaintance of Luca shortly thereafter and the two became fast friends. David first hooked up with Luca to protect him due to certain knowledge he possessed, but that led to a genuine friendship.

Over time, David has made contacts and friends in some of the other factions, particularly the Nocturnes. David's association with the Nocturnes has led to the sparks of a potential romance with none other than the Lady of the City, Jamie DeDonnan. David has taken it upon himself to look after the Nocturne leader and the two have become quite close. Both be-



lieve that in war there is neither the time nor stability for love, but neither can they fight their feelings for one another and love blossoms between the two. How this might impact the future is yet to be seen.

True Name: David Albright.

Race: Athanatos, Pyros Host.

Alignment: Scrupulous.

Attributes: I.Q. 14, M.E. 18, M.A. 13, P.S. 18, P.P. 19, P.E. 15, P.B. 14, Spd. 16

Hit Points: 50

S.D.C.: 90

Natural A.R.: 13

P.P.E.: 172

I.S.P.: 123

Disposition: The paternal figure, always trying to look after everyone. David is a romantic idealist who knows he feels too deeply for those he gets to know. He sees this as one of his flaws (others would argue it's an endearing quality) and he gets attached to others too easily. Consequently, he sometimes has to ask Luca for his unbiased opinions and about the trustworthiness of potential allies. David is loyal, honest, compassionate and open, but serious. His attempts at humor are rare and usually not very funny. However, his laughter is contagious and can raise the human spirit and bring a moment of joy and relief even in a bad situation.

Description: Six foot (1.8 m) tall, blonde male (in human form), tanned and handsome. He is partial to motorcycle jackets, blue jeans, combat boots, and dark sunglasses – the real "rebel without a cause" look.

R.C.C.: Athanatos, Valiant Path.

Level of Experience: 8.

Skills of Note: Speak, Read, and Write English 98%, Lore: Demons and Monsters 75%, Lore: Religion 80%, Strategy/Tactics 55%, Military Etiquette 55%, Streetwise 75%, W.P. Sword, Knife, Blunt, W.P. Auto Pistol, Submachine-gun, Revolver, First Aid 70%, Tracking 65%, Pilot Auto 80%, Pilot Motorcycle 80%, and Land Navigation 80%.

Psionics: Pyrokinesis, Psi-Sword, and Summon Inner Strength.

Magic: Fire Ball and Compulsion.

Special Abilities: Gregorian Manifestation: Seven feet (2.1 m) tall, bronze skin, hair turns a fiery red and his wings are silver. Add 100 points to S.D.C. in Gregorian Form, double Hit Points, +10 to P.S. (Supernatural), +5 to P.P. and P.E. He has Aura Sense, Smite Evil, can fly, regenerates 2D6 points of damage per round, has extraordinary vision, powers of light, +5 to save vs Horror Factor, and is immune to supernatural disease and transformation.

Combat: Hand to Hand: Martial Arts. Claws do 2D6 damage, plus P.S. bonus, or by weapon or Psi-Sword.

Weapons: David carries a survival knife (1D6) and a .45 caliber pistol (8D6), in addition to the ability to conjure forth a Psi-Sword and other abilities.

Money: Has 10,000 dollars tucked away in savings for emergencies an 2D6x100 in cash on him at any given time. Tends to spend his money, other than savings, on others and is frequently found helping the poor and downtrodden.

Sara

Overseer of the Pittsburgh Lightbringers

Sara is an ancient Guardian. Her awakening occurred sometime during the Renaissance, but even she has lost count of the years since it happened; she measures time now in centuries. The long life has not tempered her and Sara is bitter and cynical about human nature, good and evil and life in general. She is more fanatical than most Guardians, and has an unreasoning hatred for the undead. As a result, she is merciless in combat, gives vampires no quarter, and is outspoken about hunting down and annihilating them. As far as she's concerned, the only good vampire is a dead one, and all of the undead, Wampyrs included, should be utterly wiped off the face of the Earth. Her views are so extreme that allies and innocent bystanders caught in the crossfire are viewed as acceptable collateral damage, and rumor has it that Sara has sacrificed cohorts in the pasts in order to destroy vampires. The emergence of the Sanguine Legion has only served to strengthen her resolve that the undead are a plague, a mutating virus that will consume every last human unless the undead are wiped out. From her twisted view, the Guardians are the cure to the disease. Sara is a firm supporter of the plan to mount a major assault on the vampire community and has vowed to find the leader of the vampire garbage and



snuff him/her out once and for all. As the leader of the Pittsburgh Lightbringer faction, Sara has put the war on the Nightlords on hold and is mobilizing her forces to go an a mass vampire hunt. Unfortunately, this extreme view prevents her from even considering any sort of alliance with the Nocturnes and she distrusts all other factions. It is one thing to use them, but another to partner up with any. It should be noted that because of her iron-fisted leadership, more and more Guardians are going rogue, secretly assisting other factions in the city. Luca is among these rogues. The best hope for those who would like to ally themselves with the Lightbringers is that Sara will step down or pass on (few Guardians live past 400 years and Sara has to be around that age already).

Outside the safety of her lair, Sara is always seen in the company of two or three other mid-level Guardians who are utterly loyal, and will not stand for any actions to be taken against her. They even smite those who openly criticize the ancient leader.

True Name: Sara (unknown).

Race/R.C.C.: Guardian.

Alignment: Scrupulous (with twisted perceptions).

Attributes: I.Q. 18, M.E. 22, M.A. 23, P.S. 17, P.P. 22, P.E. 21, P.B. 18, Spd. 30

Hit Points: 120

S.D.C.: 170

P.P.E: 320

Disposition: Arrogant, driven to the point of obsession and fanaticism, and full of her own self-importance. Believes any who are not Guardians are lesser beings, and any who consort with those she has deemed to be enemies of the faction are to be treated with utter contempt and never again trusted.

Description: The best way to describe Sara is as a platinum blonde waif with the figure of a model. Her skin is porcelain white, her eyes a pale and piercing blue. If it weren't for the perpetual scowl on her face she would be striking. She favors form-fitting white robes.

Level of Experience: 11

Skills of Note: First Aid 98%, Holistic Medicine 85%, Paramedic 80%, Lore: Nightbane 35%, Lore: Athanatos 70%, Lore: Guardian 90%, Lore: Religion 98%, Sing 65%, Dance 45%, Public Speaking 85%, Language: Spanish 98%, Language: English 98%, Cook 55%, and Horsemanship Riding 90%.

Special Abilities: Precognitive Senses, Supernatural Senses, Super-Regeneration, Healing Touch, Powers of Light, Nullify Magic, Fly, and does not need to eat, drink, or breathe but needs sunlight to survive.

Combat: Hand to Hand: Basic.

Horror Factor: 9 or 12 when using powers (awe).

Money: None for herself, and most of the revenues generated by the faction go to her crusade against the undead and the Nightlords, in that order.

The Cipher Manuscript

An outline for adventure

Introduction

What follows is the skeletal outline for an adventure (actually, several interrelated adventures) that will, ideally, allow a Game Master to incorporate much of what is in this book into his own Nightbane game. While this "mini-campaign" is designed to be run in the Pittsburgh city setting, it could easily be transposed to any setting the G.M. desires. Playing in an area that does not have a nexus point or place of mystic power may make a few of the adventures difficult to run, but it could also be fun to spread out these ideas all over the country, or even over the entire world. These scenarios can be run in whatever manner the G.M. desires and can be closely linked to create a seamless, long-running adventure or campaign, or you can pick and choose the ones you like, incorporating bits and pieces as they suit your own vision of the world. It's your game, I'm just trying to give you the tools to explore it. Enjoy.

Beginnings

The adventure centers around the surfacing of an original copy of the **Cipher Manuscript**, an ancient and enigmatic text dating back to the middle ages. Few books in history are as mysterious and intriguing as the Cipher Manuscript, more commonly known as the *Venice Manuscript*, after Wilfrid M. Venice, a rare book collector who discovered it in 1912 amongst a collection of ancient manuscripts in a Jesuit college. Venice took possession of the manuscript and owned it until the time of his death. His widow later sold it to the book dealer H.P. Klaus who, unable to obtain what he saw as the fair value of the book, donated it to Yale University in 1969, where it resides in their rare book collection to this day.

Dating back to 1586, and perhaps even older, the book is hand-written, illuminated with beautiful and strange illustrations, and is composed entirely in code. There are no mistakes (crossed out sections) as were common in books of that time, leading some to believe that this manuscript is actually a copy of a much older tome. In addition, there appear to be two different scripts present in the book. Considering the amount of time it would have taken to illuminate the manuscript, it is possible the same person's handwriting could have evolved from script A to script B, but that seems unlikely.

Based upon the distribution of glyph sequences that it is presumed make up words, there appears to be two different languages in the book. The best theory, based upon the length of the "words" in the book, is that it is either its own language, an encoded version of Hebrew (quite possible if written by a student of the Kabbalah), or a partially de-voweled version of English, Latin, or Italian. This theory is held up by the fact that linguists have noted the presence of few to no symbols that would seem to fill the roles of vowels in the distribution of "words." Popular myth attributes the manuscript to *Roger Bacon*, a noted historical occultist, though the only evidence to support this is an offhanded historical mention of a letter attributing the work to Bacon. If it is the work of Roger Bacon, then the theory that the book is written in code seems very likely since he was known to create and write in numerous different code languages of his own design. In addition, it is possible that the work was "edited" or later modified by the philosopher and occultist Doctor John Dee, who was a fan of Bacon's works. This could also explain the variation in handwriting in the edition at Yale. If the Yale manuscript was a copy or an edited edition of Dee's, is it possible that an even older version exists somewhere? And if so, that would suggest Dr. Dee must have possessed the *codex* to decipher the manuscript, and the codex may yet exist somewhere, undiscovered, assuming it has not fallen victim to the ravages of time.

What is known about the book is that there seem to be six coherent sections within the manuscript. **Section one** is comprised of intricately detailed drawings of over 100 plant species that are unknown to any botanist from our wold. **Section two** contains twenty five astral diagrams representing the various signs of the Zodiac, all arranged in concentric or interlocking circles, and containing what appear to be star charts and notes that would seem to refer to alien cosmologies. **Section three** contains small scale drawings of nude human figures, mostly female, all immersed in fluid or trapped within or emerging from tubes or cylindrical vessels. As with the other sections, annotations and text are impossible to decipher. It has been theorized that these drawings possibly represent the union of the soul with the body. This section is also what leads some to believe that the book points to a *cult of Isis* and the drawings represent the ritualistic suicides of the members. **Section four** of the manuscript consists of a folding leaf that shows an arrangement of nine circles that appear to be filled with and permeated by shapes that represent stars and cellular arrangements. There are strange, wispy shapes linking the circles. Some appear to emit rays filled with stars, while others have shapes erupting from them that resemble bundles of pipes. **Section five** appears to be related to alchemy and the pharmaceutical applications of over 100 various medicinal herbs and roots. Each page shows various jars and plants in red, green, and yellow, or blue and green, and every drawing appears to have identifying inscriptions and notes. **The last section** is continuous text with stars surrounding the passages. The final page of this section contains what many assume to be the "key," and often translated as "To me, R.B., thou gavest many – four – gates."

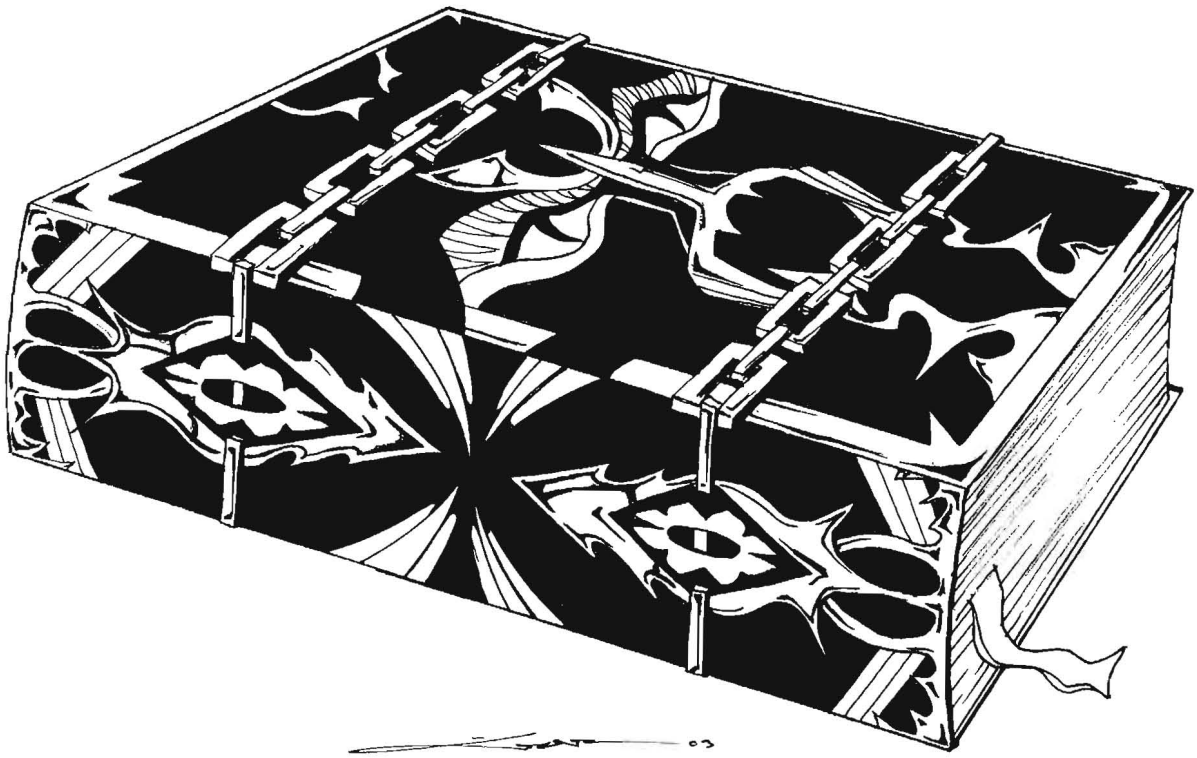
For hundreds of years, no one has ever been able to crack the code of the Venice Manuscript. Some have claimed to have the keys to it, but all have been discredited. The most notable of those who have attempted to decode the book was *Doctor W.R. Newbold*, who spent the last seven years of his life developing a codex from the key he claimed was included on the last page of the manuscript. In the last few years of his life, Newbold became more and more reclusive, and died a madman, without ever finishing his translation, or publishing a complete codex. What findings he did leave behind were published two years after his death, in 1928, to scholastic acclaim, until the debunking began. Within a few years, Newbold's translations were largely regarded as inaccurate at best, a farce or hoax at worst. However, his translations found within the manuscript a chemical reaction that produces metallic copper, and the formula for gunpowder, as well as intricate, though foreign, cosmologies, possibly based upon observations regarding comets and lunar eclipses. While the crypto-linguistic community at large dismissed Newbold's translations as wild fantasies, the information and formulae that Newbold discovered within were reputedly unknown to him, and thus impossible for him to fake or glean by mere chance.

Truly, no one is even certain who wrote the book. Legends surrounding the text claim everything from lost Biblical writings to a Sumerian book of the dead, to the bible of an ancient cult of Isis, to Kabbalistic Rituals designed to enlighten mankind to the level of the gods. Some have even put forth the theory that the book is a colossal hoax. Nobody knows for sure.

Until now.

It seems that an even older copy of the mysterious manuscript has surfaced, along with an encryption key said to have been uncovered deep in the catacombs below Rome. A code key that supposedly holds the answers to what lies within the book.

This is what tantalizes the player characters and their enemies. This is what you find yourselves searching for. If it is real, the book could play a major role in the war between Light and Dark on Earth.



The Book

For game purposes, the **Venice Manuscript** is a *Greatest Artifact*, possessing all of the standard abilities of such items, as well as a few special powers, and one or two that are unique to the Manuscript. It is these unique abilities that drive the various factions to seek out the tome. However, the abilities are locked within the code of the tome. No one may activate the book without deciphering the proper code sequence. Without decoding the book, it is nothing more than an ancient oddity that doesn't even radiate magic. In fact, it lacks any sort of aura whatsoever – it radiates nothing. Object Read, See Aura, Detect Magic and similar psionics or magic spells yield absolutely no results, as though one were trying to read an empty space in the air.

I.Q.: The book has an I.Q. of 22, but centuries of sitting in private collection after private collection, transferred from library to library, and even thrown in trunks in basements has driven the artifact quite mad from loneliness.

Alignment: Currently Miscreant (and insane).

Insanity: It has developed a sense of megalomania, which it will eventually inflict upon whomever can finally decipher it (save vs insanity once per week at a cumulative -1 penalty until the save is failed). As with all Greatest Artifacts, the book bonds with its owner (the one who decodes it) but only after it has been decoded and translated completely. The book's goal is not to destroy the Dark and its minions, but to foster chaos in whatever way it can. Finally, once decoded and bonded to its owner, the book can change its form to appear more innocuous. The form it generally takes is one that is identical to its natural form, but only about 2 inches (5 cm) long, and hanging from a chain around its owner's neck.

It is important to note that once decoded and bonded to an owner, the book does not have to be read for its owner to utilize its abilities. As with any Greatest Artifact, the manuscript communicates with its user via Telepathy and Empathy, and can communicate any of the secrets contained within directly to its owner. Thus, the book can remain in its small form and effectively read itself to its master upon mental command. The book also possesses a powerful curse that renders its owner obsessed with the tome. Whoever deciphers the Cipher Manuscript will be compelled to keep the book on their person at all times, never to part with it, and will become obsessively protective of it. Any threats to the book are met with a murderous response by the owner. Most people agree the book has been corrupted and its use can only lead to evil and darkness. Unfortunately for our heroes, the book cannot be destroyed (which will become evident should the party attempt to simply set it on fire) until it has been completely decoded, deciphered, and translated, at which point the scholar who has completed the decoding process would be quite bonded to the book and unwilling to allow its destruction.

Other Greatest Artifact powers: Anti-Magic, Nightlands Passage, Protection from Psionics, Spell Magic (specific spells at G.M.'s discretion). The Cipher Manuscript also contains a chemical reaction that produces metallic copper without the presence of the element, the formula for gunpowder, and a complete cosmology of the Nightlands/Earth connection, Hades, Dyval, and several other alien and demonic dimensions. Exactly what, if any, secrets the book reveals is up to the Game Master, but it could explain the relationship of the Nightbane to the Ba'al, or to the Athanatos, or even to the Dark if it suits your game. It could contain the origins of the Nightbane or the Guardians, the true story of how vampires came to inhabit the Earth, or any number of other secrets.

The most powerful and dangerous power is **The Ritual.** What exactly this ritual does will depend upon the G.M., and can be almost anything – say a spell that would allow an Alien Intelligence to enter our world, like a Vampire Intelligence

(wink, wink, nudge, nudge). One thing that is certain, however, is that the ritual requires certain specific conditions to be met before it can be cast (an alignment of the planets, the coming of a comet, a specific phase of the moon in conjunction with a solstice or equinox, for example) and requires a large amount of P.P.E., in turn requiring a ley line nexus point and/or a massive ritual sacrifice of a few hundred men, women, and children.

Below are some examples of possible motives for various groups, societies, and factions seeking the tome, all of which revolve around what each group believes the Cipher Manuscript has to offer. All of the factions, as well as other groups and societies mentioned in this book, are included to give G.M.s a lot of options. As you will see, everyone has a different take on the manuscript, and what it can do, and everyone wants it for their own reasons. G.M.s can take, modify, bend, and adapt these notions and goals to their individual games, or create something entirely different. The great thing about the manuscript as a vehicle for adventure is that nobody knows exactly what it does, so a G.M. can use it as he or she deems best.

The Ba'al and their minions: The Nightlords believe that the Cipher Manuscript contains a ritual for directly contacting the Dark and tapping into the very source of its evil power. Any Nightlord who manages to obtain, decode, and use the Manuscript, they believe, will not only instantly surpass King Moloch as the supreme leader of all the Nightlords, but also obtain the power to immediately and completely rule both the Earth *and* the Nightlands. Not only that, but the caster of the ritual will be able to *merge* the two dimensions! Some specific Nightlords may have their own theories and motives. Lilith, for example, may have promised her demonic allies that the book can grant them powers greater than any or all of the Nightlords, and that if she can obtain the book, the demons can rule unchecked over mankind. Underlings of the Nightlords, such as Night Princes or even Cults of Night, might send their own minions out, ostensibly in the service of their Ba'al master, but really to find and use the book to further their own dreams of power.

The first theory about the merging of the two dimensions is shared by many of the Nightbane factions, including some members of the Underground Railroad and the Resistance who would seek to obtain the book before the Ba'al. Unfortunately, the book must be decoded before it can be destroyed and that may be a) impossible or b) require the translator to be Mind Wiped or slain to preserve the secret.

The Vampires: Any number of Master Vampires hearing about this manuscript (especially Anastasia Calabrese) will be convinced that the secret ritual within is a spell for summoning a Vampire (or any) Intelligence into the world! The presence of such a being would be a powerful factor in repelling the Nightlords and conquering the Earth for the vampires. An apocalypse of biblical proportions could result that would not only overthrow the Nightlords decisively, but would end with the eternal subjugation of mankind to the undead. In addition, the vampires believe that the book grants the wielder the P.P.E. necessary to cast the magic, provided it is done at a ley line nexus. This is one theory that terrifies the Knights Templar, Lightbringers and Nocturnes, and all of these factions (among others) would certainly fight to the death (and possibly even join forces) to prevent it from happening.

The Sanguine Legion (vampires): The Sanguine Legion believes the tome is a combination of the two above. That the ritual enables the caster to call upon the Supreme Intelligence, merge the Earth and the Nightlands into one, cause the simultaneous manifestation of every Intelligence linked to the Legion (currently, several dozen), and transform every Secondary Vampire in the world into a Strigoi, and rise up to throw off the bonds of their old Master Vampire lords. The Strigoi would become the only breed of vampire, and would gain the power to take the world for themselves. What would happen next, no one knows. As above, the Templars, Lightbringers and Nocturnes would go out of their way to stop the Legion from acquiring the Manuscript or unleashing its horrors (whatever that may be).

The Athanatos: The Athanatos believe that the book contains the true secret to their origins, and the answer to the fate and whereabouts of the Gregorians. They believe that the ritual possesses the power to call the Grigori/Gregorians back to Earth, to awaken those who sleep deep within the mountains of the Middle East, and to contact those who still explore the cosmos.

Infernal Athanatos seek the book in hope of heralding the return of the Obscuruphim Gregorians, who will lead them to final victory over the forces of Light and over their wayward children, the Ba'al.

A small group of Celestial Athanatos seek to re-awaken the first Gregorians who still sleep and are considered to be "uncorrupted by the taint of humanity," in the hopes that they will lead the forces of Light to victory over their enemies. Some Guardians share this theory, believing that the book also contains a ritual to place the Gregorians back into their enchanted slumber should they follow the path that their brethren took in the time before time. Still other Athanatos and Guardians believe that to awaken the Gregorians at all is dangerous, and would seek to have the Manuscript destroyed at all costs.

The Lightbringers/Guardians: A small sect within the Lightbringers theorizes that the book contains the power to call upon the deity they know as "the Light." Upon translation of the book, if one could overcome the corrupting influence of the evil thing, he could call forth the Light to manifest a "Light Day" on Earth and the Nightlands simultaneously. This opposite of Dark Day, would light up both realms of existence for 24 hours and destroy all undead wherever they lay, and drain all power from the Ba'al, who would be rendered completely mortal, without even their former knowledge of conventional magic to protect them. Their link to the Dark broken, their minions would crumble and die, and the forces of Light would achieve final victory. That's if, remember, the translator is not overcome by the evil of the book. The vast majority of the Lightbringers (and any other factions) don't want to take that risk, and would hide the book until a better, safer way could be found to call upon the Light (if ever).

Fallen Guardians: The Fallen believe that whatever dark magicks lie within the Cipher Manuscript, it can grant them the power to destroy the Lightbringers and raise themselves to a power level that they can subjugate and rule over both the Earth and the Nightlands. Whatever magic the ritual within the tome represents, it's certain that the Fallen can't be allowed to get hold of it.

The Nocturnes: There is a small group of Nocturnes within the faction who believe that if the book could be decoded and a suitably high source of potential psychic energy accessed, the ritual could free all vampires from the yoke of the Vampire Intelligences that created them, and drive that evil from the world forever. The resulting backlash, they feel, would reverberate through the cosmos and destroy the Vampire Intelligences wherever they reside, wiping the plague of vampirism forever from the universe.

The rest of the faction tend to believe the same as the Ba'al and vampires, and would want to keep the book out of those two's hands – destroying it if possible and hiding it away, otherwise.

The Resistance: They have no use for powerful rituals. In their eyes, the Nightlords represent the ultimate perversion of magic, and a book that contains any spell that is powerful enough to upset the balance of the war is bad news. They don't really care what's in the book, and they don't want anyone else to find out and use it against the world. They'll stop at nothing to ensure its destruction.

The Seekers: The Seekers are something of a wild card in the search for the Cipher Manuscript. To this faction, the book is a vastly important source of arcane and historical knowledge, and must be obtained, decoded, and translated, then hidden away and preserved for all time, never to be used. The book, they believe, is too important an artifact to simply be destroyed out of hand. Unfortunately, artifacts are made to be used, so it is unlikely that whoever the Seekers find to translate the book will abide to the idea of "hiding the tome away" and never using its power. (**Optional:** As it so happens, the Seekers have known about the Manuscript, right from the start, and are currently hiding the book in a monastery in Austria! Using a difficult translation codex found in the Catacombs of Rome, they have been working for years to decipher it. They have finally managed to understand the code, and work is almost completed on the deciphering process.)

The Spook Squad and Resistance: The A.D.A. believe the Manuscript is a weapon of mass destruction and it must be found and destroyed. If it proves to be impossible to destroy, then it must be secured to prevent it from falling into the hands of some faction who would use it against humankind. Whatever it is, the book represents supernatural power of the highest magnitude, and the A.D.A. is not willing to allow the Nightlords, Athanatos or any supernatural beings or group to get their hands on it.

The Underground Railroad: Once they learned that the book has to be translated to be destroyed, they would hide it away, and destroy the key so that no one could ever translate the book again. Power such as this is a dangerous abomination not meant to exist. They would use a network of agents to acquire and hide the book, and destroy the key codex.

The Illuminati: The Illuminati wants power, and lots of it. To this end, they'd be drooling to get their hands on the Cipher Manuscript. However, they have never been ones to take overt actions that might reveal their existence to the general public. More likely, they'd recruit and utilize sleeper agents and pawns within the other factions, letting others do the dangerous and dirty work, then attempt to steal and decipher the Manuscript for themselves. For them, the book means the power to put into place their "New World Order."

The Druids: The drawings and layout of the Cipher Manuscript give the impression that it has a great deal to do with the relationship between nature and the cosmos. The Druids are under the impression that this book represents the collected knowledge of their Order down through the ages, and that the Ritual within will send a magical shock wave through the world that will irrevocably destroy all vestiges of technology and "artificial evolution," throwing the world back to the dark ages while simultaneously imparting to all Druids the knowledge and wisdom of the ages. They would then take their place as the elite teachers, guardians, and rulers of the world and lead humankind to a golden age of magic, science and wisdom.

The Reapers: The Reapers have only one goal and one purpose: to serve their Mircalla masters. A Mircalla, however, may assign a particularly canny Reaper to obtain the Manuscript and codex, believing it to be the key to their freedom from Tophet.

The Adventure

What follows is the outline for an adventure surrounding the Cipher Manuscript. It has deliberately been left wide open for G.M.s to develop and flesh out as they please. Any or all of the previously described factors could come into play in the story. What you'll find included here is the storyline of the adventure, with key points, pieces of information, and segues from one point in the scenario to the next.

Part 1: Appearance of the Cipher Manuscript

This adventure works best if the player characters are members of a faction, or if at least one member of the party is associated with a secret society or faction that would have a stake in the recovery of the Cipher Manuscript. Or they might be hired or tricked by one of the factions to acquire it for them, perhaps before the player group learns how dangerous it may be. Whatever the case, the players should have a reason to get the initial clue and pursue the fragment. However, even for characters not associated with factions this could prove an interesting adventure. After all, nobody wants an ancient tome of magic to fall into the wrong hands, and with enough clues and prodding, G.M.s should have little trouble getting the characters involved.

It begins with a small piece of paper covered in unusual writing found in the ruins of an old castle in Austria. The fragment comes into the hands of the player characters or their faction. Perhaps they see it on the news, get orders from their faction leader, or a representative from their secret society. Maybe it's even they who find the scrap while on holiday or investigating another mystery entirely. In any case, the whole thing starts when the player characters come into possession of this strange piece of paper. The characters choose, or are sent, to investigate. The paper is obviously a part of a larger document, but no one, not even the local branches of the Seekers or the local Nocturne Librarian has any idea what alphabet was used to pen the document, or what language it's supposed to be in.

When word leaks out about the discovery, it suddenly seems everyone wants the scrap of paper, and wants to know

where it was found and who knows about it. This is easiest to accomplish if the player characters first heard about the scrap on the news or through an underground contact, but in the world after Dark Day, everyone has contacts everywhere, so getting rumors about the fragment into the right (or wrong) hands is easy.

Eventually, someone (a Nocturne Librarian, Seeker scholar, Nightlord, vampire, or perhaps even a lucky and industrious player character searching the Internet) is able to determine that the fragment appears to be a piece of the Venice Manuscript. A bit of research quickly reveals, however, that the fragment is not from the Yale University tome, meaning there is another copy of the Manuscript out in the world somewhere. Theories surrounding the Manuscript would indicate that if another exists, then it could possibly date all the way back to the thirteenth century (the one at Yale can only positively be dated to the 16th).

The race is on. Others have also learned about the new fragment and the race is on to find it. Unfortunately, the villains always seem one step ahead of the heroes. If you don't want to use the Austria connection, take the adventure in whatever direction you want.



The Austria connection

Journeying to Austria and pursuing the right leads will bring the characters into contact with an obscure sect of the European branch of the Seekers who have been hiding the Manuscript in a monastery in the countryside. Unfortunately, the villains of the adventure have gotten there before the player characters, and managed to make off not only with the Manuscript, but most of the notes of the translators! The Seekers put up a struggle, however, and managed to destroy their copy of the translation codex before the dark forces could get away. In addition, a backup copy of the notes for the translation has been saved on a CD-ROM. This means the codex, which is vital to the decoding and translation of the Manuscript, must be rediscovered. The only clue as to the location of another codex comes from an inscription on the stone wall in the vault where the Manuscript was hidden: *die Katakomben aus Rom* – which means "the Catacombs of Rome." The Seekers, if the characters have allied themselves with the faction, will reveal that there are sects of their organization based out of Rome.

G.M. Notes: How individual G.M.s want to handle any of this is left up to you. Do the characters arrive on the scene while the escape is in progress? If so, it's always possible that the villains (whoever they are) lose the battle and the player characters get the tome. If they do recover it, the Seekers will reward them handsomely, but demand that the book be returned. Honorable characters would be compelled to do so; the book was, after all, in the possession of the Seekers long before the player characters got to it. If the heroes do return the book, the Seekers will finish translating it, and the adventure will proceed from there. (The Seeker translator becomes obsessed with the book and disappears, causing the members of that Seekers faction to contact the player characters for their help in apprehending the rogue, and explaining the existence of the book at Yale. Jump to that section, skipping *Part 2*, and continue from there.)

Less honorable types, or those who feel the book is too dangerous to leave to another faction, might be tempted to take the book for themselves. In this case, the Seekers will come after it, as will every other group that has an interest in it. There will be plenty of opportunities for the player characters to lose the book, or for their own faction to translate it. Either way, the book will corrupt the translator or fall into the wrong hands, and it will be necessary for the characters to track down the codex, get hold of the notes, and translate the Yale volume. The adventure continues as normal, with the player characters' actions affecting the reactions of various non-player characters and factions to them. The Seekers, for example, will not cooperate with the characters who have stolen the book from them, unless they believe the characters are sincere in admitting that they screwed up, and the world is in jeopardy. Even then, their cooperation will be grudging at best.

Part 2: Rome

Depending on whether or not the characters endear themselves to the Austrian Seekers, the latter may put them in touch with the Roman branch in charge of the Cipher Manuscript Project. Otherwise, the characters will have to find some other way of accessing the Catacombs and discovering the location of *the codex*. Blindly searching is not likely to turn up any solutions, as the Catacombs cover hundreds of miles and thousands of tombs. Even guessing that the Manuscript isn't likely to be hidden in one of the tunnels open to the public (the Catacombs are tourist attractions) won't yield much of an advantage. However, the G.M. can devise any number of clues designed to lead the characters to the proper catacomb. Secret Societies, hidden maps,

encoded messages, following an enemy or other faction hot on its trail, or any of these things could be used to create a puzzle for characters to solve. In addition, information and rumors gathered online via the *Shadowboard* (detailed in **Through the Glass Darkly**) could prove an invaluable resource for locating the catacombs. The characters may not even have to post to the board. Remember, the Shadowboard is open to all who want to post there, and "the bad guys" often use the space for their own purposes.

Once the heroes locate the catacomb, it's off to Italy, where the Seekers apparently have a few guards who are the sole possessors of the knowledge of where the Codex is hidden. The player characters will find the guards dead, their throats ripped out. Now it falls on the characters to enter the ancient tomb, which has probably been despoiled by the Manuscript codex, a tool to decipher the greatest of evils, and could be filled with unimaginable horrors. The characters may have to fight their way through, desperately searching for the codex as they go.

G.M. Notes: Keep them on edge. Make them worry about what will happen if the villains reach the codex before them. Once the characters find the right catacomb, they engage in a classic "dungeon crawl," albeit in a modern era. Try and remember, though, that these aren't your typical high fantasy heroes used to traipsing through underground cave complexes, duking it out with monsters. Generally, characters in a Nightbane campaign are going to be young adults who are used to computers, offices, movies, and television. The things they'll encounter in these catacombs could keep them reeling. In addition to Nightlords and their minions, a "spoiled" catacomb could include vampires, animated corpses, Strigoi and plague zombies, demons, and all manner of evil and rivals.

Mapping out the catacombs is entirely up to the G.M., as there are many different possibilities for how a Catacomb in Italy is laid out. A quick Internet search should give G.M.s all the information they need to base their map on the real thing. Just remember to use vivid descriptions and a dark mood and atmosphere to help relay to the players that this is not "business as usual" for their characters. This type of scenario can be a lot of fun in a modern day setting, if your players can maintain the mood. It's your job to help them do that. It's not like the movies; it's dark, it's dank, and there could be things down there that one would rather not even dream about, let alone see in person.

The Codex should be hidden in a large chamber behind a secret panel. The chamber is vast and contains an altar, several sarcophagi, and elaborate paintings and frescoes cover the walls. Oil lamps burn throughout the room, which is surprisingly free of cobwebs and dust (the Seekers kept up the room pretty well). The codex itself will actually be engraved on the wall, so unless there are some foes to do battle already in the room, the characters will have little or no way of knowing whether or not their enemies have been there before them. This could also be a time for some exasperation on the part of the players as they try and figure out who has a pen and a notebook to copy down the codex, or better yet, a camera (still, digital or video). Then they have to get out with the data while other rivals are no doubt trying to get in. Strangely, any attempts to deface or destroy the codex are utterly unsuccessful. The stone upon which it is etched cannot be broken, scratched, or scarred in any way (and yes, it radiates a subtle aura of magic).

Keep in mind also that a number of factions, groups and individuals, good and evil, are looking for the Manuscript and codex for themselves. That means that while the player characters are racing to find the codex, the tome could switch hands once or even several times, or they could get bushwhacked, undermined, tricked and cheated on several occasions, by any number of characters or groups. Thus, when the heroes first reach Austria, they may battle through a contingent of Hounds covering the escape of a Priest of Night who has the Manuscript. Then, when they reach Italy, it could be vampires or Strigoi, or even the Fallen that they battle against, each searching for the codex for their own faction. Remember as a G.M., even if (when?) the characters forget, there is a tome that appears to be an exact copy of the one they seek just sitting in the Rare Books Library at Yale.

The important thing with this adventure is to keep things moving at a breakneck pace. Keep the tension going as the player characters race against every other faction and group in the world to get hold of this thing. Also, when you map out the Catacombs, not every room has to be filled with monsters or elaborate paintings, or important details. Don't be afraid to give a quick description and say, "otherwise, there's not much to see," or, "there's nothing here." Allow moderate to difficult Perception rolls to search for hidden corridors, passages, and items, then move on. Horror Factor can play an important role here too, and this could be an appropriate time to introduce the optional expansions from earlier in the book.

Part 3: The Venice Manuscript

So now the player characters have the codex and hopefully the Seekers' backup copy of the translation notes, but they don't yet have the Cipher Manuscript. In fact, they have no idea who has the Manuscript if you've played things right, and not a clue where it could be. Their best hope now is to figure out what their enemies want with it. If the players don't come to the conclusion that they should check out the *Venice Manuscript at Yale* on their own, any number of non-player characters ranging from the Seekers to a Nocturne to an advisor from their own faction could suggest the possibility. The almost-complete translation notes and codex should enable them, using the tome, to determine relatively quickly what their enemies want with the book. They might even go under the hope that the Venice Manuscript copy at Yale contains the same secrets as the original copy. The tricky part is getting access to the Yale copy, which is locked away and unavailable to the public. Furthermore, it is secretly kept under heavy guard and closely watched by the Ba'al and their minions, who want it where they can keep tabs on it.

Should the player group bring with them an expert at cryptography such as a Nocturne Librarian, or better yet, one of the Seekers involved in the Austrian translation project, or should the characters themselves possess a Cryptography skill level of 85% or greater, translating the Venice Manuscript with the codex is relatively quick, requiring only a few days of work. Otherwise, translating the tome could take weeks of successful Cryptography skill rolls, and the characters don't have weeks. (And remember, without the codex, it is impossible.) Finding a translator, however, won't be difficult if the characters need

one. They are at Yale, after all, and many linguistics professors would work for free just at the chance to decipher the enigmatic tome using the codex. Having a noted expert with them would certainly make the task of getting a look at the Manuscript much easier (and provide a Non-Player Character to go crazy when he gets the coveted knowledge).

A cursory examination of the Venice Manuscript could reveal a number of facts right off the bat, depending on whether the characters have gotten a good look at the Cipher Manuscript as described in Part 1, or whether one of the original Seeker translation team has accompanied them. The most important of these facts is that the Venice Manuscript, while it is written in the same script and code, is *not* the same book as the Cipher Manuscript. There are a number of similarities, but also a number of major differences, mostly in the layout of diagrams and charts, the drawings, and the text. However, the nature of the drawings and diagrams insist that the Venice Manuscript is related somehow to the Cipher tome. Is it another volume? A lost section? A later, modified, edition? There's no way to tell until the book is completely translated.

G.M. Notes: There is a good chance of an assault on the characters while they are at Yale. Such an assault could come at any time. If characters are qualified enough, they may even be granted after-hours access to the book, and nighttime is the best opportunity for many of the forces of darkness to strike. The bad guys who already have the ancient Austrian tome may seek to destroy the Venice Manuscript while others may want it for the same reason as the player group. The characters must not lose the Venice Manuscript because it is their only clue to tracking down the Cipher Manuscript before it is used, or stopping the ritual once it has begun.

The translation of the Venice Manuscript reveals that the book is intended to be a *countermeasure* to the Cipher Manuscript. It is not an artifact in and of itself, nor is it inherently magical. It does, however, list several means to defeat the purpose of the Cipher Manuscript and describes in detail the purpose of the vile tome and the terrible ritual that it contains. One of the first passages in the Venice Manuscript reads as follows:

"The Dark is, the Dark was, and the Dark always shall be. Deep within the blackest pits of the human soul doth it germinate its seed and grow its roots to corrupt and destroy the soul of man. The Cipher Tome of Roger Bacon hath fallen into madness. That book that was intended to guard the secrets of the Dark and the hidden part of the soul hath fallen to its own purpose. The Dark hath taken hold of the book, and hence exists to perform those rituals it previously sought from man to guard. The only protection that can be offered is the magickal enchantment cast over the book that maintains the code. That same enchantment, however, shall bind this very book to the Cipher Tome and force its secrets into code as well. Let the Codex be hidden deep within the Catacombs, to be sought out should the Cipher Manuscript be deciphered. Let the forces of Light cry out, "This Tome be the undoing of the evil within that book of Darkness!"

– John Dee, 1576

The tome goes on to describe the purpose, components, and necessary conditions of the ritual contained within the Cipher Manuscript, as well as the means for *defeating* the ritual once it begins. The various botanical and alchemical drawings and diagrams point to certain species of plant life that are indigenous to the Nightlands, and can be mixed in specific ways to create a potion that when hurled at the apex of the ritual disrupts the entire process; a sort of magical Molotov cocktail. The methods for creating the mixture involve the formula for producing a vessel of metallic copper, and gunpowder to ignite the concoction. It demonstrates the location of several permanent portals to the Nightlands (which Nightbane characters won't need) and general areas of the Nightlands where the Night Rose plant flourishes (namely the Waste).

The conditions for the ritual in the Cipher Manuscript require a large magic circle of summoning be drawn at the "joining of waters, where exists a centre of magickal power, a place where all the forces of light and of darkness alter nature's balance," and a specific alignment of the planets, dimensions, and stars that, upon investigation, the characters discover will occur in one week's time. What's even worse is that the evil ritual requires human sacrifice on a massive level, to the tune of hundreds of people, and "the blood of a Childe of the Light."

Exactly what to do next is up to the player characters, but in the course of their investigations, they should find clues to the location of the ritual, be it through contacts, trickle-down information, or encounters with the enemy or even possible allies such as other factions, the Athanatos, etc. One possible clue could come when the players hear about a massive gathering at an area matching the necessary requirements, such as a carnival or festival suddenly being arranged on the night the ritual is to take place. This could be a prime opportunity to work in the Pittsburgh city setting and the various N.P.C.s listed for that setting could very likely all come into play as contacts, rivals, friends, or enemies. Pittsburgh is not the only place in the world where the ritual could take place, however, and as always, G.M.s are encouraged to do what is most comfortable for them. Other possible locations would include the mouths of the Nile or Amazon rivers, the connecting point of any of the Great Lakes, or similar places where flowing water would originate, begin, or end, and where it is logical to place a ley line nexus point.

Part 4: The Nightlands

Should the characters seek to create the magical Molotov cocktail, they will either have to find someone who has what they need (like sneaking into a Nightlord's laboratory or a secret botanical garden) or they'll have to actually travel to the *Nightlands*. The key ingredient, the *Night Rose*, is located in the *Wastes* of the Nightlands. Obtaining the flower should be an adventure in and of itself, and is very likely to lead to the Nightlands. This could mean contact with human settlements, any number of Nightlord minions, awakened Doppelgangers, and dozens of various and sundry creatures native to the Lands of Night. The flower only flourishes in the rocky crags and mountains outside of Sin City, the Nightlands equivalent of Las Vegas, and well inside of the domain of Lady Lilith. The heroes will have to pass through her lands, and possibly those controlled by Lord King Magog, to obtain the Night Rose.

G.M. Notes: As a general rule, Sin City is Devil's City on a smaller scale. Lilith runs a number of casinos where people bet

their souls and blood as often as they do money. Demons fill the place, disguised and masquerading as Nightlord minions such as Hound Masters, Night Princes, even Doppelgangers, Torturians, and Necrophim. All would dearly love to bring a party of Nightbane or other heroes to Lilith's throne and drop them at her feet (dead or alive).

However, it's not necessarily as bad as it may first seem. Lilith may, in fact, be willing to help or deal with the heroes, provided it is to her advantage (and who actually possesses the Cipher Manuscript). She's not eager to see it in the hands of anyone but herself, and will be willing to help the player group stop the ritual, if only so that she can get hold of the book herself later on. If she is the one who possesses the book, however, the heroes will find themselves in horrific danger, particularly if they are not aware that she possesses it. In that instance, she'll pretend to ally herself with the group only to betray and ambush them just as they seem on the brink of retrieving the flower that they seek. Given all of these factors, seeking the Night Rose may not seem the wisest choice of action, but the mixture the rose produces would be an extremely useful fall-back tool for the group to have in their possession.

Upon returning to Earth, performing the metallic copper reaction, mixing the gunpowder offshoot, and creating the potion is an extremely easy task. At most the characters will be able to create only one potion (two if the G.M. is generous) in time to stop the ritual. This is a case where the characters are likely to get only *one shot* at saving the day by this means. The potion must be hurled at the mage performing the ritual just as he or she reaches the apex of the ceremony. If they hit and the potion explodes at the right time, it disrupts the ritual, causing the spell to fail (and, unknown to them, kill the mage who is struck with it).

In addition to making the potion of magic disruption described in the Venice Manuscript, the flowers can be used by practitioners of magic as P.P.E. batteries of a sort. By picking the flowers, which retain their magic aura if properly dried and preserved, a practitioner of magic can carry an emergency reserve of Potential Psychic Energy. Each flower holds within it a reserve of 30 P.P.E. that can be drawn upon at any time for casting spells, powering Nightbane abilities (for sorcerers and mystics only) and other such feats. Once the P.P.E. reserve in a Night Rose is used up, it crumbles to dust. **Note:** The heroes shouldn't have access to more than 1D4 extra flowers above and beyond what they need for the ritual busting potion, if any.

Part 5: The Ritual

The heroes have a week to prepare themselves for the coming of the ritual. The week could be spent in any number of ways: Trying to warn the populace, attempting to hunt down their enemies before the night of power arrives and stop them in advance, or to gather other forces to stop the ceremony. The key here is to make certain that it is indeed the player characters who partake in the final battle with the cult endeavoring to perform the ritual. This does not mean that they can't enlist the help of their faction (other factions may not believe them, or may simply be unwilling to risk helping, or try to get the Cipher Manuscript for themselves), it simply means that the G.M. needs to ensure the player characters are center stage to play a key role in saving the day.

Another logistics problem for the G.M. arises regarding the sacrifice. How will it be accomplished? The Ba'al would probably utilize a massive contingent of Hounds, Hunters, Namtar, Ashmedai, and other minions to leap from the shadows on all sides, and execute the crowd. A Master Vampire or High Priest of the Sanguine Legion would employ hundreds of vampires to the same effect. A Night Priest or other cultist might seek to poison the crowd in some fashion. A Reaper or Fallen Guardian could resort to acts of terrorism such as explosive devices planted throughout the area, all timed to go off simultaneously, or something similar. There are various and sundry ways such a massive sacrifice could be accomplished. Concerts and festivals are probably the best way to arrange for a large gathering, and then it's just a matter of mowing them down.

The Final Battle: Pittsburgh

(**Note:** The actual villains can be substituted with any of the villains or factions presented earlier in this book, with the *Nightlords* or *Anastasia Calabrese's vampires* being the most likely alternative choices.)

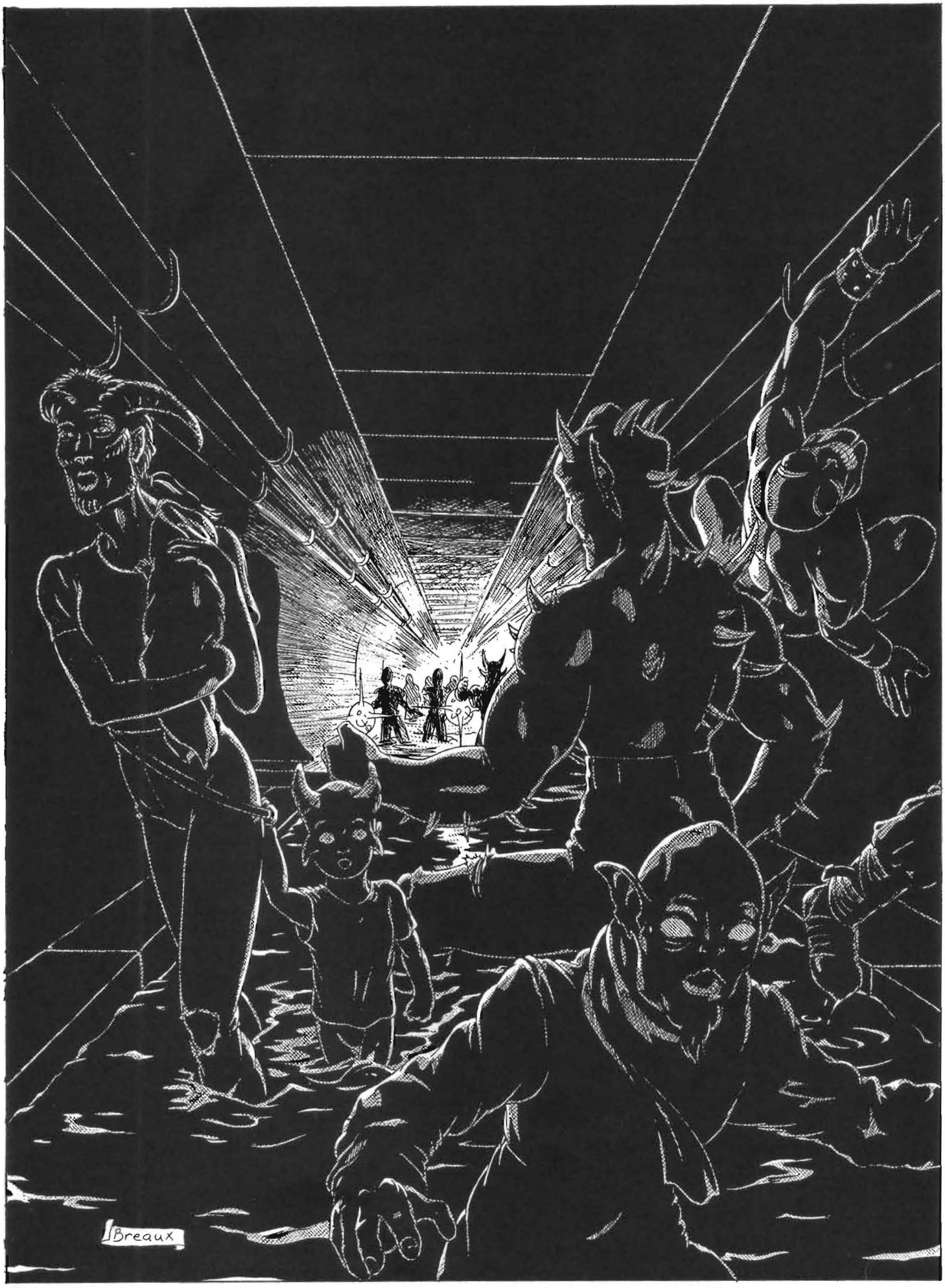
One of the biggest bands in the world, a hard rock group known as Pact, is going to play a free concert at Point State Park, the first event to take place in the park since it was closed shortly after Dark Day. Every radio and television station in the city has been carrying news and updates about the concert, and the city is abuzz with excitement. Thousands plan to turn out for the concert, to be held at the inner stage area, near the fountain, which has reputedly been broken since the terrorist attacks of Dark Day and is still nonfunctional. N.S.B. agents and police surround the fountain, not allowing anyone to get close to the rivers. A few whispers circulate about strange markings surrounding the fountain, but these are quickly dismissed as nonsense and unimportant by the crowd of music lovers who wants nothing more than to see the band.

At 9:30 P.M., Pact hits the stage to thunderous applause. They begin their show by roaring into their current number one hit, "Sell Your Soul for Love," and the crowd is delirious with the music. By the end of the five minute piece, the crowd sways in unison, staring, almost drooling at the band. It is almost as though there were some mystic force compelling them to pay attention, and indeed, that is the case. Player characters present at the concert must make a save vs mind control (M.E. bonuses and immunities do apply) to resist the hypnotic power of the band's music, which has been enhanced by magic. Because the heroes are so focused on saving the world, however, they get an extra +3 to save. Characters making this save will instantly know what's going on and can attempt to use psionics, spells, talents, or physical attacks to "awaken" anyone in their group who happens to succumb.

After realizing that the crowd is being mesmerized, a moderate Perception roll reveals shadowy figures moving about the perimeter of the park. A lot of them.

The game is afoot, but the real enemy and the book are nowhere to be seen.

The first set ends with a massive pyrotechnic blast, and suddenly everything goes pitch black; even nightvision can't pierce the darkness, and no electronic visual devices (infrared, etc.) will function. After a few moments, the players hear a loud chanting.


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Seconds after the chanting begins, Pact hits the stage for their encore and the characters can see again. Their enemy, who the characters may or may not recognize as a High Priest in the Sanguine Legion, stands at the center of the fountain, arms raised to the sky, a look of crazed ecstasy on his face. The book is nowhere in sight at first, but a difficult Perception roll will spot an amulet hanging about the neck of the priest that looks very much like the book the characters seek.

As the characters make their way through the crowd towards their enemy, the band finishes their set. The lead singer steps to the front of the stage and bellows, "Thank you very much! We'll see you in Hell!" and his eyes turn a glowing red. Long fangs and claws erupt from his mouth, and dozens of creatures exactly like him leap from the shadows. Suddenly, the park is a bloodbath as *Strigoi* and *Secondary Vampires* easily overcome the terrified citizens...the sacrifice. The characters will have to fight their way through several Strigoi and Secondary Vampires to get to their target, the High Priest. As the battle commences, two Strigoi step forward into the fountain, carrying an unconscious Guardian, and lay him across the nozzle of the fountain. Here is the blood of the child of Light that the Venice Manuscript called for. The characters at this point in time have about four rounds (one minute) before the ritual completes, merging Earth and the Nightlands to one hellish dimension and summoning to this merged plane every Vampire Intelligence with a hold on Earth.

Besides stopping the ritual, it is imperative that the party destroys the High Priest and gets the pendant that is the Cipher Manuscript from him. Once the High Priest is dead and his bond with the artifact severed, the Cipher Manuscript immediately transforms back into its full size and loses its powers. Hurling the Night Rose potion at him as he raises the knife to kill the Guardian (he is positively glowing with mystic energy by this time) will work, if the player hurling the potion manages to hit him. The potion will break and explode in a blinding flash of Daylight, filling the area with the light of day for the next thirty seconds (2 melee rounds), dealing appropriate damage to all vampires and Strigoi in the area. In addition, the magic of the spell is disrupted, but the spell is not completely broken. Rather than summoning Vampire Intelligences into a merged Earth/Nightlands world, the explosion causes two demon familiars to manifest to either side of the High Priest. These familiars will recognize the High Priest as a Strigoi and kill him, then move into the crowd with murder in their eyes. Now the players must fight these demon familiars before they tear the city apart, as well as attempt to get the book before any of their enemies do (and any number of enemies or adversaries, from Anastasia Calabrese to Sara of the Lightbringers to the Seekers or A.D.A. to the Nameless Vagabond, could be present and determined to capture the tome).

Once the characters obtain the book, the trick is to get it out of the park and to a safe place. If they are having too difficult a time dealing with the demon familiars, remind them of their primary goal by having a contingent of Hounds, Hunters, and N.S.B. agents show up, perhaps led by Causticus himself, to join the battle. Alternately, with such a strong vampire presence, the Guardians are certain to make an appearance, and a few Celestial Athanatos are also likely to show. Once they are confident that the demon familiars will be taken care of, the characters shouldn't have much of a moral dilemma as far as what their primary duty is.

Strigoi High Priest

Alignment: Diabolic.

Attributes: I.Q. 20, M.E. 18, M.A. 21, P.S. 22 (Supernatural), P.P. 21, P.E. 20, P.B. 20, Spd. 22

Hit Points: 100

Horror Factor: 14

P.P.E.: 50 personal.

Natural Abilities: Standard Secondary Vampire abilities, immune to running water, vulnerability to salt, immune to vampire mind control.

Experience Level: 8

Combat: Six attacks per melee, two by psychic powers, or one by plague infliction (not possible during combat).

Damage: Per Supernatural Strength or by weapon.

Bonuses: In addition to attribute bonuses, +3 on initiative, +3 on Perception rolls, +5 to save vs Horror Factor, impervious to psionic and magic sleep and paralysis, immune to vampire mind control, and +3 to other forms of magic or psionic mind control.

Magic: Knows the following spells: Cloud of Smoke, See the Invisible, Sense Nightbane, Fear, Befuddle, Levitation, Magic Armor, Call Nightlands Denizen, Fire Bolt, Shadow Meld, Midnight Wind, Horrific Illusion, Call Lightning, Fire Ball, Teleport: Lesser. In addition, Strigoi can draw P.P.E. from ley lines, nexus points, and sacrifices to power their spells.

Psionic Powers: Standard for vampires.

Vulnerabilities/Penalties: As presented above, Strigoi no longer have the vampire vulnerability to running water possessed by most undead. Rather, they have a slight vulnerability to fire (does normal damage to Strigoi) and to salt. A handful of salt hurled in the face of a Strigoi deals 4D6 damage; larger amounts can deal up to 1D6x10 damage per pound of salt dumped or hurled on the Strigoi. Likewise, Strigoi cannot cross over a boundary lined in salt (a line of salt in a doorway prevents them from entering through that door), nor can they enter or exit an unbroken circle of salt. Otherwise, Strigoi possess all the standard vulnerabilities of vampires, including sunlight, wooden weapons, crosses, mirrors, garlic, and stakes through the heart.

Two Demon Familiars

Horror Factor: 18

Size: 15-20 feet (4.6 to 6.1 m) tall.

Hit Points: 200

S.D.C.: 800

P.P.E.: 70

I.S.P.: 100

Psionics and Magic: See listing for Vampire Intelligence.

Natural Abilities: See listing for Vampire Intelligence.

Combat: Six attacks per melee, or can use magic or psionics in combination with hand to hand attacks. Magic spells each use

the equivalent of 2 attacks, while psychic powers are the equivalent of one action each.

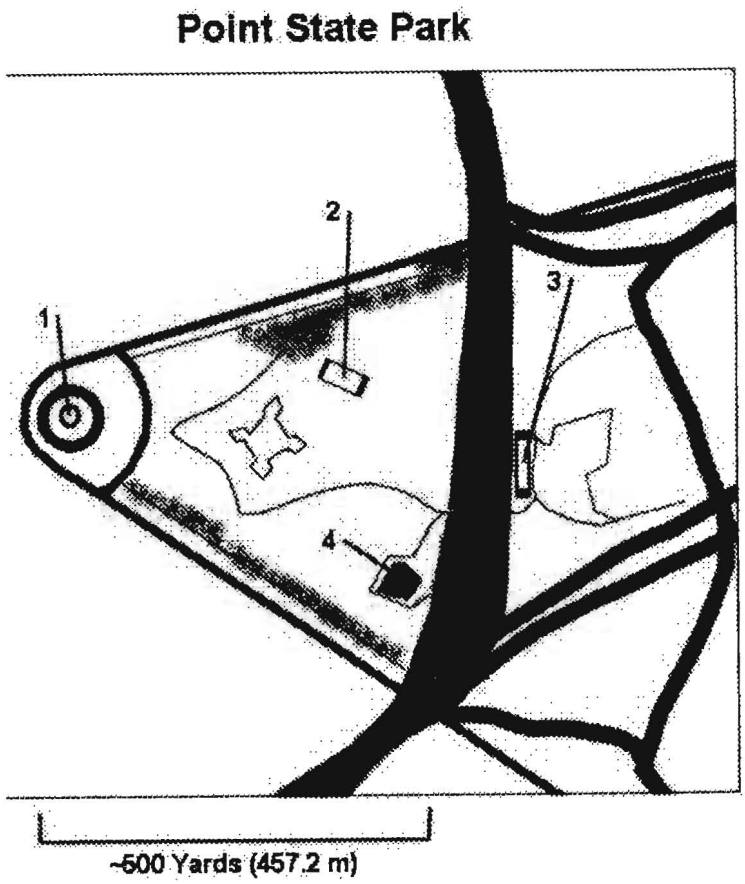
Damage: As per Supernatural Strength of 30, or killing bite deals 3D6.

Bonuses: In addition to attribute bonuses, +3 to initiative, +4 to strike, parry, and dodge, +4 to dodge in flight, +10 vs Horror Factor, and can maneuver in total darkness using echolocation like a real bat. The familiar is impervious to mind control and sleep effects of all types, and paralysis. Magic attacks deal damage to the S.D.C. of the creature first, while water, silver, and wood attacks deal damage direct to the creature's Hit Points.

Denouement

The aftermath of this adventure carries with it many repercussions. The characters have saved the world, but what next? First, what do the characters and their faction do with the book once they have it? The possibilities are many. Do they allow someone to translate it, keeping guard over them, and then force them to destroy it? Do they hurl it into a volcano somewhere in hopes that it will never be found again? Do they hide it, as per the A.D.A. agenda, in some warehouse in an unmarked and uncatalogued crate? Or do they put it under lock, key and guardian. Whatever they attempt to do, the adventures this artifact can create can extend far beyond this scenario.

Second, what becomes of the city? Surely the Ba'al will engineer a cover-up, but people know what they've seen and it could be months or even years before some semblance of normality returns to the streets. Factions could be driven even further into hiding, or it could go the opposite way, with the citizens of the city becoming so terrified to venture out of doors at night that vampires and their allies and enemies roam the streets unchecked, and the multi-fronted war takes on a far more brutal and open face than it ever has before. What were the effects on the characters' faction? How many were killed in this new battle for the Point? Was it a matter of wounded pride or a mortal wound for the faction, to the point where they will have to sit back and lick their wounds? Did something happen during the battle that changes the balance of power? Does this incident cause several factions (together or independent of one another) to go on a massive vampire extermination craze? Any or all of these questions could lead to further adventures for the characters down the road.





The Pit
Pittsburgh in the Nightlands

The Nightlands equivalent of Pittsburgh is named Pitsburg, but is commonly known as The Pit, and for good reason. There isn't much there other than desolation and misery. The three rivers that surround Pittsburgh on Earth are three deep gorges slicing across the valley like knives in the Nightlands. These gorges are collectively known as the Ohio Gorges. A few bridges have sprung up to cross the canyons, but Hounds and Hunters heavily patrol all of them. Crossing any of the gorges on foot is a perilous task, and few have attempted the trip and survived, largely due to the Vaash, a race of semi-intelligent amphibious creatures who live at the bottom of the gorges. The Vaash are humanoid, tribal, and quite savage, with hunting and war parties attacking Hounds, Hunters, and anybody else trying to invade their territory.

It's only over the past few centuries that an actual Nightlands settlement mirroring Pittsburgh has sprung up. It began when a young cultist named Causticus managed to gain the attention of the Dark and achieved the powers and abilities of a Night Prince. To this day, none of the other Ba'al know exactly how Causticus managed to become a Ba'al, and none have succeeded in making him give up his secrets. Most suspect that he himself is not certain of how he came to be what he is. Still, something about the young man caught King Moloch's attention and told him that killing the lad was a bad idea. So the Ba'al effectively banished Causticus under the auspices of giving him his own city, *Pitsburg*. Causticus took to the assignment with all the false humility he could muster, and began immediately sucking up to Lord Magog, the Viceroy who oversees the Midwest portion of North America. To this day Lord Magog mistakenly believes that Causticus is a loyal servant in his forces.

For centuries, things were quiet – some would say too quiet – in Pitsburg. None of the other Ba'al ever heard a peep from Causticus, an unusual occurrence among a race of beings constantly engaged in a struggle for power and supremacy even amongst themselves. Most assumed that he was keeping quiet simply because he couldn't stand against any of them. Others guessed that he wasn't as stupid as he appeared and was waiting to see who came out victorious. Still others believed he was developing a secret ultimate weapon that would assure him victory when he finally made his move. In particular, Causticus worried

Lord Magog, who sent delegations to spy on Causticus, but which inevitably met with a terrible fate. Others sent expeditions to attack Causticus, but his defenses proved very secure. Between the Vaash in the gorges and his own army of Hounds and Hunters, Causticus managed to defeat those who challenged him. Eventually, the Ba'al contented themselves with the knowledge that so long as they left Causticus alone, he didn't bother anyone. In addition, whenever Lord Magog required support of any sort for his various operations, Causticus was the first to send troops and resources to the cause. As such, the Viceroy views him as a loyal subordinate.

Just before Dark Day, the Ba'al discovered the existence of the nexus at the juncture of the Ohio Gorges when it began to swell with power during preparations for the invasion. This nexus seemed to be a link between several different dimensions. If Causticus could gain control of this nexus, his power base would be cemented. The Night Prince realized this and did exactly that. During the invasion, Causticus first replaced Mayor Benjamin Comstock, then concentrated his forces on taking control of the Point State Park. Once this was accomplished, he set about attempting to wipe out other supernatural threats in the city. Unfortunately, his greatest competition was cannier than he, and Anastasia wound up seducing and controlling him.

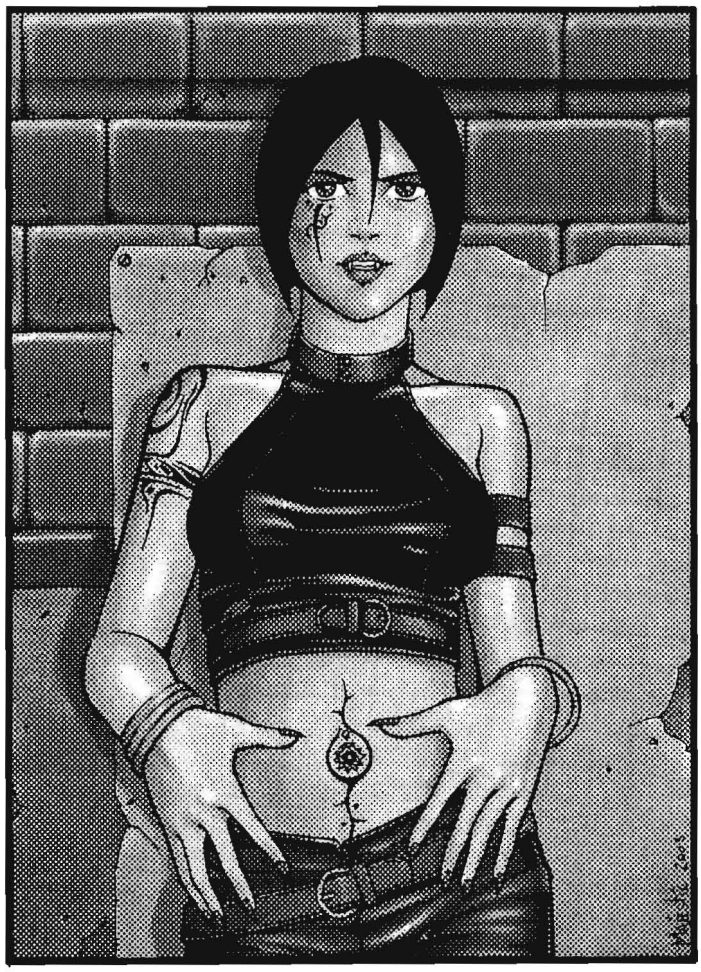
Soon after Dark Day, Anastasia began using the Nexus to send her minions into the Nightlands, where they have quickly established a vampire kingdom in Pitsburg and in the Ohio Gorges. The Vaash provided potent nourishment for the undead, allowing them to feed without the notice of the other Ba'al. Those vampires who live within the city disguise themselves as Dopplegangers and feed pretty much with impunity from anyone they wish to. Over the past several years, Anastasia has considered moving her entire brood to the Nightlands and attempting to summon her god to that world, but she knows her creator would be much happier dominating the Earth. Besides, if all goes well, it can be master of both worlds.

Geography of the Pit

Because the gorges slice across the landscape, the geography of Pitsburg is a bit different from its Earth counterpart. There are no boroughs such as the South Side, North Side, etc. Pitsburg is comprised entirely of the downtown section of the city. This makes it somewhat small compared to other Nightlands cities (Pittsburgh's downtown area is rather compact when compared to other Earth cities) and extremely crowded, as all the Dopplegangers of Earth's Pittsburgh natives are crammed into an area approximately one fifth the size they occupy on Earth.

Pitsburg is roughly wedge-shaped, with the gorges cutting it into an open-bottomed triangle. Outside of the city proper, the landscape opens up into the vast emptiness of the wastes. Approaching the city from the east is the best method, and the only way to get in without having to cross the gorges, but traveling across the wastes from the Nightlands equivalents of Philadelphia, Harrisburg, or even New Jersey is perilous at best. The landscape is crawling with the violent life forms indigenous to the Nightlands, and littered with bands of wild and often cannibalistic humans, awakened Dopplegangers, Hounds, Hunters, and other minions, as well as roving packs of Wild Vampires. The Hell Riders, too, prowl the wastes along the Nightlands equivalent of the East Coast and often delve into the mainland areas to the east of the Appalachian mountains. There are rumors of a hidden demonic kingdom somewhere in the eastern United States area, or perhaps just inside the Atlantic Wastes. It is true that there has been more confirmed demonic activity in this area than is the norm, but thus far, there is no proof of an organized kingdom. King Moloch has sent agents to investigate, but there has been little fruit pulled from that tree. For more information on the types of creatures that can be found in the wasteland areas of the Nightlands; see the **Nightbane® RPG** and the **Nightlands™** sourcebook.

Within the city proper is probably the safest place for one to reside. However, this is not to say that living in Pitsburg is safe. The city is consumed with roaming packs of vampires who prowl the tunnel system under the city which almost exactly mirror those on Earth, except that the Nightlands tunnels do not leave the city. At areas where their Earth equivalents would exit town, tunnels beneath Pitsburg either end at stone walls or double back to form a circular pattern. The one exception are tunnels that lead into the Ohio Gorges. A vast underground cave system where the vampires live and roam as the undisputed masters of their subterranean realm.



As on Earth, the vampires are the true ruling power of Pitsburg, and Causticus is nothing more than a figurehead, although Anastasia is canny enough to keep the Night Prince under the delusion that he is a partner and a force to be reckoned with. The vampires are quite content to roam throughout the Nightlands city. Dopplegangers cannot nourish vampires, but

their human counterparts certainly do, and through Causticus, Anastasia has taken a cue from King Moloch, replacing criminals in Pittsburgh's Allegheny County Jail with Dopplegangers, and transporting the real criminals to the Nightlands equivalent of the jail through a permanent portal established in the basement of the place. The jail in the Nightlands serves as nothing more than a slaughterhouse for the vampires, who regularly go there to feed, accessing the building in secret via the underground tunnel network. Vampires who prefer livelier prey hunt Vaash, while other consider life in Pitsburg a small tradeoff and enjoy the fact that they can be active 24 hours a day without ever having to fear the sunlight, and exist right under the high and mighty Nightlords' noses without them even realizing it. The Pit is certainly as close to a safe haven in the Nightlands as a vampire will ever find. In addition, disappearances on Earth at Pittsburgh's night spots are often humans transported to the Nightlands, where they are hunted or held as food stock and entertainment for the vampires.

The one snag in the vampires' freedom is the Vaash. These vicious creatures in the Ohio Gorges regularly use the underground tunnels and engage in an active campaign of warfare against the vampires. Unlike the Lightbringers, however, the Vaash do not hate the vampires out of some moralistic crusade of light against darkness, but rather, the Vaash see the vampires as invaders to be dispatched. It doesn't help matters that vampires can feed on the Vaash, and some of the more aggressive ones frequently engage in hunting Vaash for food and sport, enjoying the challenge of chasing down the amphibian warriors. Furthermore, any Vaash who undergoes the transformation to undeath automatically becomes a Wild Vampire. The Vaash, for their part, have figured out wood hurts vampires and are starting to get a handle on how to protect themselves and kill the undead. Human visitors taken into the Vaash's confidence can only help this process (and perhaps even supply the Vaash with other weapons for their arsenal).

Factions in the Pit

By far the most effective faction in the Pit are the Nocturnes. The Lightbringers, who are aware of the large vampire populace, would absolutely love to engage in operations into the Nightlands. Meanwhile, vampires love nothing more than to mix it up with Lightbringers or capture a Guardian and deprive him of sunlight as he slowly rots to nothing. Consequently, the Lightbringers engage in only brief raids into the Nightlands and seek other means of combating the vampire menace in the realm of eternal twilight. To date, they haven't found any acceptable solution. On occasion, small patrols comprised entirely of non-Guardian Lightbringer agents venture into the hellish place, but generally accomplish little more than information gathering, as they find themselves greatly outnumbered and outmatched. Sara, the Overseer of Pittsburgh, is frustrated and annoyed to no end that the Nocturnes have a stronger presence in the Nightlands than her people, and has currently established several teams of Lightbringer agents whose sole purpose is to find her a way to engage in more effective operations therein. As of now, their best hope lies in the Order of the Temple sect of the Knights Templar, who work through the Lightbringers, but who the Lightbringers aren't even aware exist.

The Nocturnes, on the other hand, are uniquely qualified for Nightlands operations when one takes into account the Wampyrs in the faction. Wampyrs not only fight vampires, but can also masquerade as full-blooded undead and infiltrate the ranks of their enemies. In fact, Jamie DeDonnan (the Lady of Pittsburgh) has already planted several undercover Wampyr agents within the ranks of the vampires in the Pit, where they quietly reside, each one hoping to gain the trust of someone in power so that eventually a major strike can be made from within. Of course, with such operations there are always the twin dangers of exposure and/or corruption of the agents, and these things do happen.

Other factions in Pitsburg are small as far as the impact they make goes. The Seekers occasionally engage in forays into the Nightlands for research and artifact recovery, and the Spook Squad still sends in military expeditions and "sweep and clean" teams on short missions (never more than 72 hours). MK-ULTRA II has proven quite successful in producing operatives who function well as crack strike teams for Nightlands operations; Psi-Shadows, Psychic Bloodhounds, and Psi-Dampeners, in particular, find their powers very effective in the Nightlands.

Bibliography of Resources

For G.M.s who want more information on Pittsburgh, there are a great many wonderful websites online to provide information both historical and current about the city itself. A few of these are listed below.

Pittsburgh.com: *http://www.pittsburgh.com/*

A Pittsburgh 20th Century Timeline (from the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette™ online):
http://www.post-gazette.com/newslinks/timeline1900.asp

Digital City Pittsburgh: *http://www.digitalcity.com/pittsburgh/*

An Overview of Pittsburgh History:
Http://zeeb.library.cmu.edu/SAA-PghHostCmte/articles/PittsburghHistory.html

Pittsburgh Ethnic History:
http://www.nauticom.net/www/maduro/ethnic.htm

Fort Pitt Museum History Page:
http://www.fortpittmuseum.com/History.html

Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission Website:
http://www.phmc.state.pa.us/

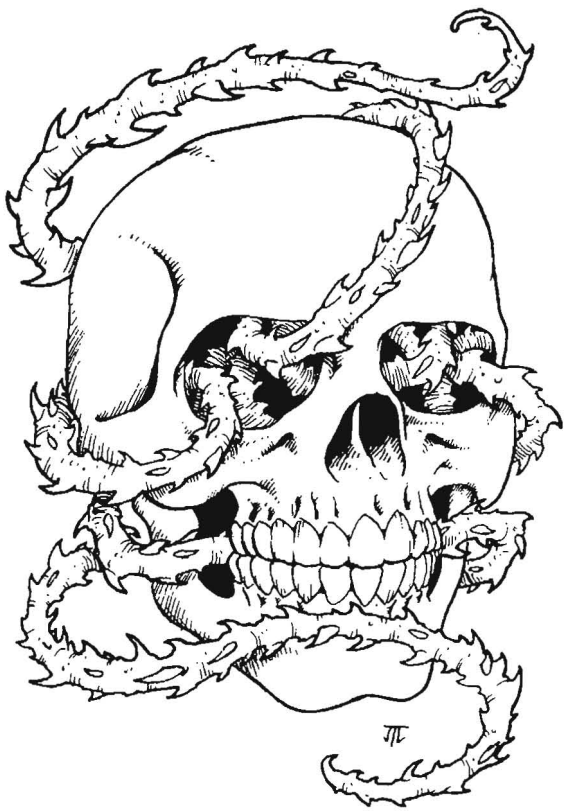
The Homestead and Pullman Strikes:
http://iberia.vassar.edu/1896/strikes.html

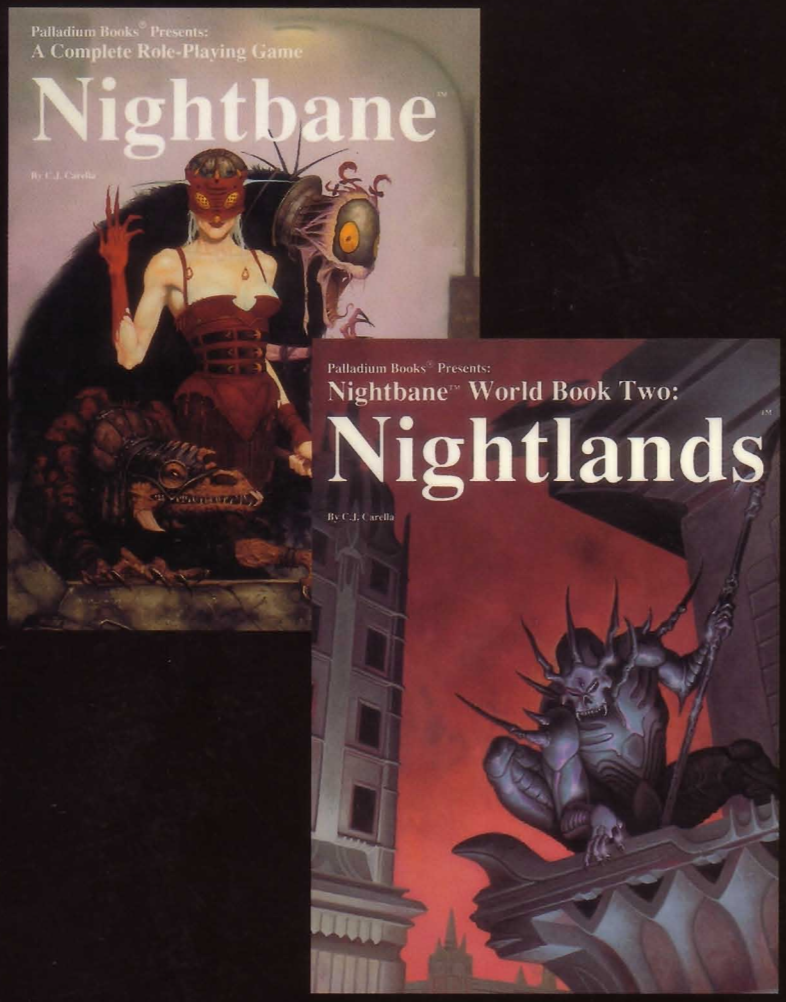
Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy:
http://www.pittsburghparks.org/

City Maps and Plans: Maps of the city of Pittsburgh, as well as tourist-style brochures, are readily available on the Internet, as well as in Atlases and tourist books available in stores and libraries.

Final Thoughts

Well, this has been a long road, but a fun and educational one at that. I hope everyone is pleased with this newest addition to the **Nightbane®** universe. I've tried to give you what you guys have asked for over the past several years, and I think I've succeeded okay. If you like it enough, I hope to be back, looking ahead to other areas of the world besides the continental United States. After all, the Ba'al did invade the entire world. There's Europe, South America, Asia, Africa, Japan . . . lots of places of interest still to cover, and I've got the ideas for them! So here's to it; I hope you're closing this book with the same sigh of contentment as me. See you in the shadows.





Also for the *Nightbane® RPG* series

The Nightbane® RPG: The setting, the Nightbane, the Nightlords and everything you need to play. Written by C.J. Carella. Suitable as a stand-alone RPG but can also be used with *Rifts®*, *Heroes Unlimited™*, *Beyond the Supernatural™* and other Palladium games.

Between the Shadows: A sourcebook that expands the *Nightbane®* setting into the Dreamstream and Astral Plane, plus the Spook Squad, Freak Clubs, new Nightbane Talents, psionics and more. Written by C.J. Carella.

Nightlands: A sourcebook that takes you into the twilight realm of the Nightlords. Key places in the Nightlands, new Nightlord minions, new demons and monsters, new Nightbane Talents, King Moloch, Lady Lillith, and much more. Written by C.J. Carella.

Through the Glass Darkly: Tons 'o magic, rules for creating new and variant magic, more than 50 new spells, the Fleshsculptor, Cybermage, Mirrormage, Living Pathways, magic charms and artifacts, three full adventures and dozens of additional ideas. Written by Kevin Hassall.

Beyond the Supernatural™ RPG, 2nd Edition: Suitable for use with *Nightbane®* or as a stand-alone game. A world of the paranormal, magic and unsolved mysteries in our modern era. Written by Kevin Siembieda.

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