THE
GOD-MACHINE
CHRONICLE
the World of Darkness

DAVE BROOKSHAW | DAVID A HILL JR |
DANIELLE LAUZON | MATTHEW MCFARLAND |
JOHN NEWMAN | JOHN SNEAD | STEW WILSON |
FILAMENA YOUNG | ERIC ZAWADZKI

DISSEMINATION

From: Anna

To: Contacts

CC:

Subject: Fwd: Fwd: Fwd: Fwd: Fwd: Free Movie Passes!

Forward this email to 10 of your friends and win free movie passes! The National Union of Theatre Owners is doing a promotion and tracking the spread of emails. Just be sure to keep the promotion number at the bottom of this email in the email when you forward, and once you've forwarded it on to 10 people you'll get an email with instructions on how to get your movie passes!

Promotion code: 273423-X

-Hey figured it was worth a shot!

-Anna

From: Paul Richards

To: Anna

CC:

Subject: Nothing's free, baby

Anna, would you kindly stop forwarding every damn thing in your inbox to everyone in your contacts list? It's not "worth a shot." It's not a "free promotion." These are things that bored idiots create and send around, and then they watch it mutate.

Here, want some proof? Just google "National Union of Theatre Owners." It DOESN'T EXIST. There's an organization called the National *Association* of Theatre Owners, but does that sound like the kind of mistake they'd make during a big promotion? And how would they track all of these emails, anyway? Through a promotion code? That's not the way the Intertubes work, sweetie.

You want to go to the movies, I'll take you. Just please give these emails a rest.

From: Anna

To: Paul Richards

CC:

Subject: Fwd: Your movie passes

Hey, Paul. Look what I got today! Want to go to the movies with me this weekend? I get free tickets! ;)

Thank you for participating in our promotion activity. Please enter the coupon code below when purchasing tickets from any of our theatres. This coupon code will remain valid for one month from today.

From: Paul Richards

To: Anna

CC:

Subject: re: Fwd: Your Movie Passes

OK, wtf? That coupon actually *worked*?

From: Anna

To: Contacts

CC:

Subject: Fwd: Fwd: Fwd: Gift card!

Check it out! I would have thought this was junk, but I've already heard from a couple of people whose friends have claimed their gift cards already. You can even choose the store you want the card from! Forward this to 20 people, and keep the

promotion code at the bottom (just like before they must be using the same program LOL) and you get a $100 gift card for any of 10 stores in your area!

Promotion code: 273423-X

-Anna

From: Paul Richards

To: Anna

CC:

Subject: Crazy

You got free movie tickets, sure, and those are actually worth, what, a couple thousand bucks to the theatre owners group, altogether? This is bigger money. I doubt this is working.

But just for fun, I spent the morning setting up some dummy accounts, and forwarded your message on to them and some other address that I knew weren't in use. Let's see if that works.

From: Gray Marketing, Inc.

To: Paul Richards

CC:

Subject: Claim your Gift Card

Thank you Mr. Richards for forwarding our email! You can claim your gift card by replying to this email with your choice of shopping institution from the following list and a valid delivery address. We will purchase the gift card in the amount of 100 of your dollars and have it mailed to you. Happy shopping!

From: Anna

To: Paul Richards

CC:

Subject: re: Gift card

HA! Got my card today! Meet me at the mall tomorrow? Lunch is on YOU.

From: Paul Richards

To: Anna

CC:

Subject: re: re: Gift card

OK, I'm *totally* freaked out here. Yes, I got my card in the mail today.

Can you shop Sunday? Gotta take my nephew to a little league game tomorrow.

From: Anna

To: Contacts

CC:

Subject: Fwd: Fwd: PLEASE READ IMMEDIATELY!

I think this is really scary, guys. I know, Paul will think it's fake, but read and click the link before you delete, at least. - Anna

---

THIS IS NOT A HOAX. The US Congress is going to vote on Bill: 273423-X. This Bill will RADICALLY ALTER our way of life. Read on.

The Bill came from four Senators in New England. It requires that all American children, starting in fourth grade, participate in one week per year of "community service" (yes, just like criminals!). But here's the thing – if the kids DON'T participate, they become eligible for the draft at age 18, and the wording of the Bill means they are obligated to two years of military service!

Don't let these lawmakers force our kids into service OR into the Army! Forward this email to everyone you know, and click the link below to sing the petition!

From: Paul Richards

To: Anna

CC:

Subject: OH NOES! THINK OF THE CHILDREN!

OK, seriously, Anna? Where to start.

First: There's no "House Bill 273423-X". That's not how bills before Congress are labeled, anyway.

Second: "Four Senators from New England," huh? From the state of New England, maybe? Which Senators? Why aren't they named? I looked up all of the Congressmen from the New England STATES, and none of them have introduced legislation that even remotely resembles this. There is a bill bouncing around somewhere that wants to re-instate the draft, but that happens every few years and it never even gets voted on.

Third: Even if this were true, an online petition means exactly nothing because there's no way to track down if the signatures came from real people or are fake names or US citizens, etc, etc, etc.

I know you had a run of good luck for a while there, Anna, but please.

From: Anna

To: Paul Richards

CC:

Subject: re: 0H N0ES! THINK 0F THE CHILDREN!

Isn't your nephew going into fourth grade this year, Paul? Just saying.

Has your Internet been acting weird lately?

From: Paul Richards

To: Anna

CC:

Subject: re: re: 0H N0ES! THINK 0F THE CHILDREN!

Yes, Ethan's in fourth grade this year. No, I'm not concerned that he's going to be snapped up by the vast government conspiracy. Like I said, the "house bill" is BS. House bills are public. It's not hard to figure out what bills are up for vote, and obviously something like this would have lots of political and citizen groups up in arms if it were true. Don't worry about it.

But yeah, now you mention it, my connection's been wonky recently. Cuts out unexpectedly, that kind of thing. Keep meaning to email my ISP, but of course I only think to do that when it's out.

From: Anna

To: Paul Richards

CC:

Subject: re: re: re: 0H N0ES! THINK 0F THE CHILDREN!

Hey Paul. Well I already signed the petition, so that's all I can do about it anyway so I guess we'll just see who's right, right?

RE the Internet, that's not what mine's doing. I'll get online and go away and then come back and there's like three new windows open to different sites. Think I got virus?

• • • •

I mean, reinstall your OS (again, I'll do it for you if you want), don't try to salvage any files, just start from scratch.

You know me, Anna, and I'm not easily spooked by this stuff, but whatever you infected your system with, it's not just malware. It's redirecting your computer to military websites, and I don't mean army.com, I mean, like, military internal servers, which is just fricking WEIRD. That, and it's sending out emails from your address, which is more typical virus behavior, but those are getting caught by spam filters (on my system, anyway, but I know most of the folks in your Contacts list aren't any more comp savvy than you, no offense, so I'm sure they're getting the emails).

Like I said: Nuke it from orbit. I'll help. And for crying out loud, try to be a little more careful?

From: Anna

To: Contacts

CC:

Subject: Be careful when forwarding!

Hi, guys. My friend Paul came over this weekend and looked at my computer and OMG I got virused! I don't know how or where it came from, but this thing is crazy! Here's what Paul wrote:

"You know me, Anna, and I'm not easily spooked by this stuff, but whatever you infected your system with, it's not just malware. It's redirecting your computer to military websites, and I don't mean army.com, I mean, like, military internal servers, which is just fricking WEIRD. That, and it's sending out emails from your address, which is more typical virus behavior, but those are getting caught by spam filters (on my system, anyway, but I know most of the folks in your Contacts list aren't any more comp savvy than you, no offense, so I'm sure they're getting the emails)."

Isn't that scary? Anyway, I did what he said and installed a program called "OS 273423-X" and it seems to be working better now.

From: Paul Richards

To: Anna

CC:

Subject: re: Be careful when forwarding!

ARRRGH.

It's not "OS 273423-X", for god's sake. It's YOUR OS. OS means "operating system," so for you, it's whatever version of Windows your machine is still running. Where the hell did you even GET this "OS 273423-X" crap?

You probably just downloaded a new virus and obligingly installed it, you know that, right? Just FYI, I'm not opening any more emails from you. No offense, I don't want my computer borked. I'll see you this weekend; this would be Little League, but Ethan's doing some week-long thing for school. Call me if you need me before that.

From: Anna

To: Contacts

CC: 273423-X

Subject: Don't worry

Don't worry. The OS 273423-X isn't a virus. I was worried at first LOL but it's not. It's actually something that makes your computer run faster and better. The 273423-X program is designed to make certain processes related to the Internet run more in the background, so you don't notice them. One thing it does is COMPLETELY ELMINATE POPUPS. It will also cut down on load time for pictures with lots of pictures LOL. You can get it at the link below, and don't forget to forward this email on!

From: Paul Richards

To: Anna

CC:

Subject: Umm…

Hey, did you write that "Don't worry" email? We're getting worried about you. You're not answering your phone or your texts. I even dropped by Fran's school the other day but they said the whole fourth grade was out on some "clean up the highways" thing – is that related to the program Ethan's in? I thought it was just his school….

Anyway, I downloaded that 273423-X program, booted up my old laptop, and installed the program on that to see if it would do anything with an older machine's OS. Holy shit. It activated the wireless router (you know, the one I couldn't get to work AT ALL?) and got online…and then did something. But I can't see what. There's lots of activity, but no matter what I crack open I can't tell what it's doing.

Anyway, hon, you're scaring me. Write back, or better yet, call.

• • • •

neither of them has seen Anna either, which is truly screwed up, because Fran probably hasn't gone three days without seeing Anna since she was born.

Anyway, if you've gotten any correspondence from her, besides that crazy "OS 273423-X" thing, let me know. And please do forward this to anyone else who might know Anna or what happened to her.

From: Anna

To: Contacts

CC: 273423-X

Subject: I'm back!

Hey, guys, I'm back! Listen, I'm sorry to freak everybody out like that. I got called away on business, and then there was severe weather in Washington D.C. (you all saw that on the news, right, whole city was shut down!), and now that the city's running again I managed to get out! Thanks, though, I saw that the email Paul started kind of took off, and that people all over the world were forwarding it. Makes you think!

Anyway, I'm home now, I've got my phone (and a million texts OMG!), so don't worry about me!

From: Anna

To: Contacts

CC: 273423-X

Subject: Fwd: Fwd: Did you know? Things your cell phone can do!

Attachment: cellphone.doc

Hey, guys! Got this doc at work. Did you know that you can use your cell phone to get into your car if you're locked out? Check out the attachment! - Anna

From: Paul Richards

To: Anna

CC:

Subject: Aaaaand…she's back

You know, I never realize how much I missed your asinine forwards until you vanished off the planet for a month, Anna. :)

OK, I'm not going to bother with most of the claims from the "cell phone" doc, because honestly that email has been flying around for years and I'm amazed (as always) that you didn't JFGI before forwarding. But this one's new:

"6. You can use your cell phone to pick up XM radio! It's true! The radio companies don't want to know it; it's a glitch in their system that they haven't been able to correct (but probably will in the next month or so). The way this works: send a text saying "273423X" to this number: 800-555-4729. You should be able to listen to XM radio from your cell after that; you'll get a text message explaining how it works!"

Rather than just explaining all the reasons that wouldn't work, I just tried it. And holy crap. It worked. But that's not the point. Did you notice that the number you're supposed to text is 273423X – which is the same as that weird "OS 273423-X" virus you got infected with before you got stuck in DC? Same company?

Speaking of DC, what's the deal with the "closed sessions of Congress" lately, do you think?

• • • •

From: Paul Richards

To: Anna

CC:

Subject: 273423-X

It's a little more than that. I did a bunch of searches for it the other day. Did you know it's showing up in source codes for websites all over the world? It's showing up in my website, and I sure as hell didn't put it there. Just too weird. Honestly, I think you ought to uninstall the program from your computer, if you can.

From: Anna

To: 273423-X

CC: Contacts

Subject: Paul Richards

Paul hasn't installed OS 273423-X. He should.

Tell him he should.

From: Paul Richards

To: Anna

CC:

Subject: wtf?

Anna, why the hell am I getting 400 emails a DAY telling me to install OS 273423-X? What the hell did you do?

From: Paul Richards

To: Paul Richards

BCC: Work Group, Friends Group

CC:

Subject: New email

This is my new email address. My old was getting inundated with…well, spam, basically. My cell's likely to change sometime soon, too, but I'll let folks know about that when it happens. For now, use this email address but please don't forward me anything about 273423-X, for god's sake.

• • • •

From: Anna

To: 273423-X

CC: Everyone

Subject: Fwd: Fwd: Paul Richards

Attachment: paul.jpg

Keep your eye out for this guy! His picture is attached. If you see him, just gently remind him about installing the program.

From: Anna

To: Everyone

CC:

Subject: It's the law!

The new law goes into effect this January 20! The new President is going to make an announcement, but not everybody watches TV, so I thought I'd forward around the press release. Enjoy! This is a great day for humanity!

PRESS RELEASE – Universal Communications: As of January 20, 2012, a binding UN resolution will REQUIRE Internet access for everyone in the world. Stations similar to old-style "cyber-cafes" will be established across the globe, using the satellite relay towers built over the past few years to transmit signals and the powerful OS 273423-X program to make sure that connections remain smooth, fast and untroubled by spam. Users seeking to send emails with the intent to defraud will face international sanctions, in addition to any punishments that their home nations' governments see fit to impose.

recovered_doc_anderson.jpg @ 42.3% RGB/8

Dear Anna,

Ha. They can't get this. They can't get to my hands. They can't get to my fingers or my pen or my paper.

I'm sorry. I thought it was from you. I did. But after we didn't talk and we couldn't find the kids and then the soldiers and we couldn't see behind their masks and everything...

Delivery is hard since they closed down the post office, but there are still some folks running courier services and they say they don't open mail. The test letters we sent worked, so I guess we're as safe as we're going to get.

Keep it going. Write letters to everyone you know and tell them.

Stay off the Internet. That's how they find you. We've seen the buses taking the kids away to "camp." They didn't bother with the adults. They started with the kids at age 8 or 9, the kids whose brains are still rubber enough that they soak up languages and ideas and whatever we tell them to believe. They didn't bother with us. They just kept us busy with free movies and shit like that.

I don't know what they want. I don't even know if "they" are really a "they." Might be an "it." I hear things, people talking about a machine, something that's always been there. Maybe the net just woke it up. I don't know.

Anyway, I want to keep this short. Just keep it going. Copy it out, by hand, and send it to people you know. I don't know if this will help, but I figured it was worth a shot.

Love,

Paul

42.27% Doc: 12.3M/33.2M

Credits

Written by: Dave Brookshaw, David A Hill Jr., Danielle Lauzon, Matthew McFarland, John Newman, John Snead, Stew Wilson, Filamena Young, Eric Zawadzki

Developer: Matthew McFarland

Editor: Michelle Lyons-McFarland

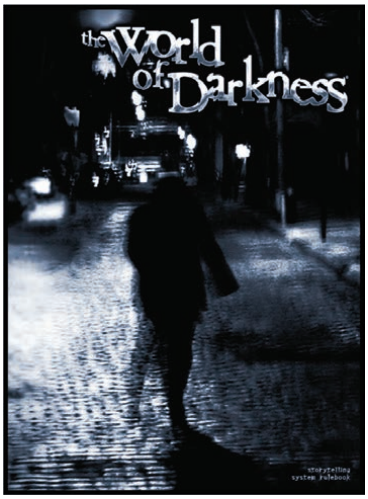
Creative Director: Richard Thomas

Art Direction and Design: Mike Chaney

Interior Art: Andrew Trabbold, Jeff Holt, Sam Araya, Andrew Hepworth, Cathy Wilkins, Justin Norman, James Denton, Aaron Acevedo, Heather Kreiter, Vince Locke, Marian Churchland

Front Cover Art: Sam Araya

Playtesters: Sarah Dyer, Matt Homentotsky, Matthew Karafa, Michelle Lyons-McFarland, John Mathys, Matthew McFarland



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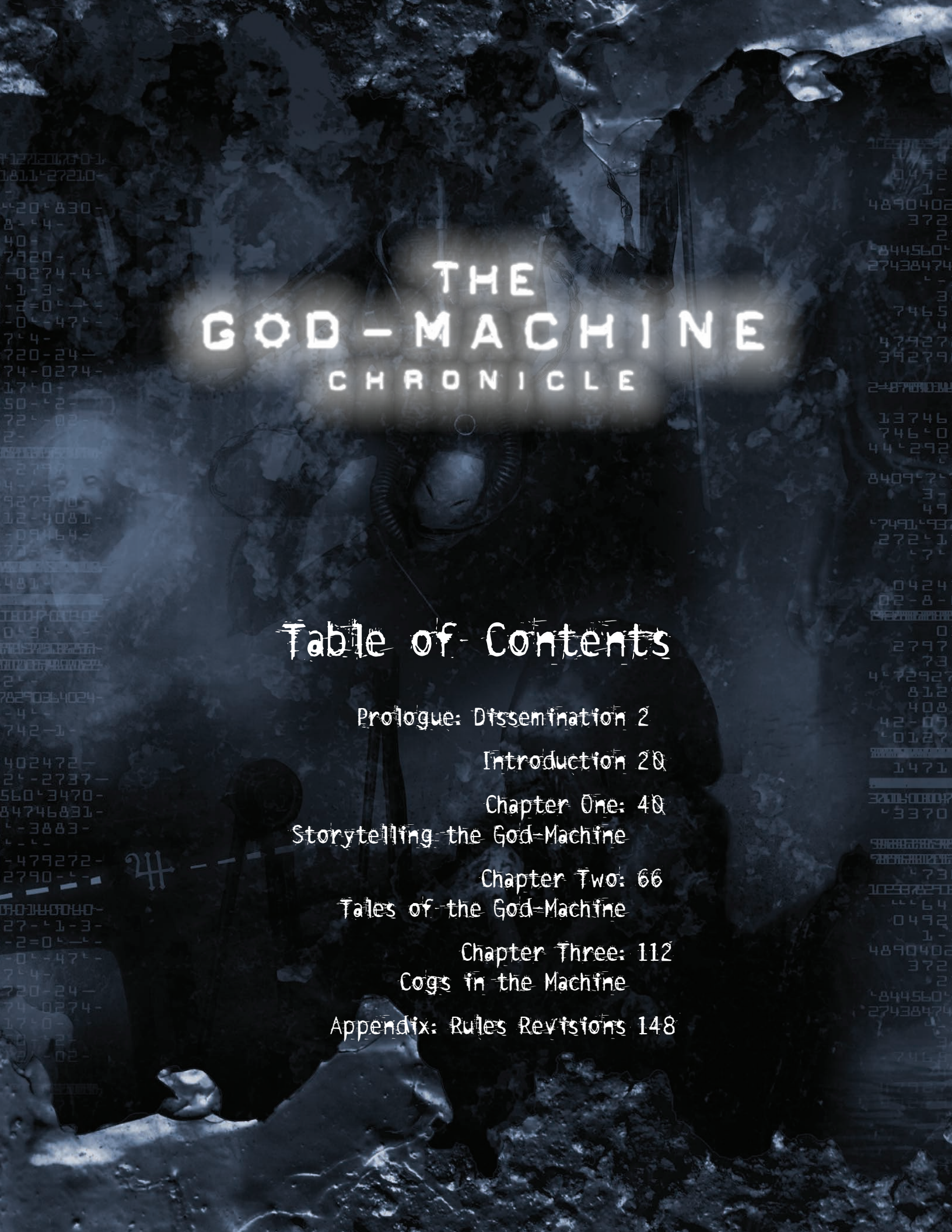
Check out White Wolf online at http://www.white-wolf.com

Check out the Onyx Path at http://www.theonyxpath.com



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Detective David Nelson opened the hotel room door slowly. He never knew what he'd find on a case like this. Men who gunned down unarmed people in a crowded church often left living spaces that were just as JUMBLED and UGLY as the crimes they committed.

The blankets lay in disarray. A pillow had tumbled onto the floor. Empty Chinese take-out boxes waited in the trash can near the door. No sign that housekeeping had been in here yet today, which meant less likelihood that someone had DISTURBED evidence.

Not that an undisturbed scene was quite so important in a case like this. No question how or when the shooter's victims had died, and the killer wasn't about to make a court appearance. Nelson only cared about the killer's motives and whether he had any accomplices-whether he was a LONE NUT JOB or a TERRORIST, in other words.

Nelson opened the top drawer of the dresser and pulled out a half-empty box of hollow point ammunition. No question where the other half had ended up. THIRTY-SEVEN members of the Church of Plenty were GUNNED DOWN during the morning service, and dozens more wounded. He closed the drawer.

A BROKEN laptop sat on the desk, glass scattered nearby, as though the shooter had smashed it. It didn't hold Nelson's interest for long. The data retrieval folks could probably pull the shooter's files off the hard drive, but he wasn't getting any information from it today.

As Nelson stooped down on the far side of the bed, he noticed the DIRTY pair of blue jeans with one bulging pocket. The battered cellphone was nothing fancy. Its contacts list was empty except for two names — Clara and Abigail. He found plenty of pictures, though. Most of them were of a redheaded teenage girl. In the last one, she stood in front of a school with the forced smile of a kid who is humoring her parents. Nelson could just make out the name of the school — WELLINGTON SCHOOL FOR GIFTED CHILDREN.

Probably the killer's daughter, Nelson thought as he tossed the phone on top of the jeans.

WHAT A SHAME.

He opened the closet and rummaged through the pockets of the leather jacket hanging there. Nelson removed a crisp, glossy business card from the inside pocket. "Melissa Charles: Collector of the Inexplicable," it read, and then a phone number and P.O. Box.

Weird, Nelson mused, looking at the address. *That's on the other side of the country.*

He found a SMUDGED sentence scribbled in pen on the back.

"WHAT HAS FALLEN MAY RISE AGAIN," it read, "AND I HAVE TO STOP IT."

Nelson's eyes widened. He had seen those words before in the personal effects of two other spree shooters. Two might be coincidence, but three?

Introduction

"Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic."

–Clarke's Third Law

Something is out there, something bigger than ourselves. It permeates our world and possibly even stretches into other worlds, other dimensions, and other times. Its power can be felt everywhere; it is the silent manipulator of all of human history. It has a plan, but we are not privy to it.

If it desired our extinction, we would stand no better chance against it than the dinosaurs did against the meteor impact that ended their reign. Anyone who has witnessed the way it casually uses and discards humans to achieve its ends, however, knows it isn't benevolent. Only the most fanatical cultists devoted to it would say otherwise, and even they realize that their faith cannot preserve them from the object of their worship if it decides their death serves its purpose.

It is the God-Machine.

No human mythology ever conceived of a god so alien to the mortal mind. Its power would make gods of storms and catastrophe tremble in fear. Its foresight makes goddesses of prophecy and destiny seem blind by comparison. Unlike those anthropomorphic deities, the God-Machine cannot be reasoned with, appealed to, or appeased. In the cold eyes of the God-Machine, individual humans are of negligible consequence except insofar as they either further its plans or disrupt them.

The vast majority of humans live their whole lives without knowing the God-Machine exists, even if they are unknowing servants of its schemes. They're the lucky ones. Encounters between mortals and the God-Machine often do not end well for the mortal. People see something the God-Machine intends to keep secret — or they are singled out as the right *shape* of person for a particular task, the right size cog with the right number of teeth — and they disappear. Most never reappear; those who do usually end up as a John or Jane Doe in a morgue months or years later and miles away. The rest return marked by the experience — twisted in body, broken in mind, or just *empty* somehow. Once in a while someone returns seemingly whole but without any memory of what happened, where they are, or how they got those mysterious scars. Rarely, a mortal slips away from the God-Machine's schemes with her recollections intact, but even these escapes might be part of the God-Machine's plan.

Supernatural creatures are perhaps more likely to know of the God-Machine, but even they know next to nothing about its workings and even less about its ultimate purpose. The ability to wield occult powers does not make beings incapable of superstition. Quite often they assume the God-Machine has something to do with them — a creation of ancient mages, perhaps, or some remnant of power left by a forgotten spirit that is still weaving humanity into its elaborate tapestry. This is no less superstitious nonsense than any that is entertained by the God-Machine's mortal cultists. When faced with something as vast and inscrutable as the God-Machine, imagining it is the product of something within one's knowledge and experience can be a comfort.

Comfort is the enemy of true understanding.

Theme and Mood

Theme: The Hidden System

The God-Machine is a literal machine that spans the Earth and has tendrils in other worlds, dimensions, and times. Cogs turn in the background; the best that most people, supernatural or otherwise, can ever do is peer deep enough into

the dark to see the wheels turning. Admittedly, they usually misunderstand what they've seen and make up their own stories. Sometimes they see a little piece of it right purely by accident. Sometimes lightning flashes at exactly the right time and someone sees the cogs in the God-Machine, full and clear. Then the moment passes, and the witness still knows no more about the purpose of all those mechanisms.

Mood: Cogs in the Machine

Like all machines, the God-Machine has a purpose, but humans aren't equipped to understand it. Mortals who seek understanding of the God-Machine are like the four blind men trying to describe an elephant by touching just one part of it. The God-Machine is less like an elephant, though, and more like an entire *ecosystem*. Those feeling around blindly to understand its workings are more than likely going to draw some wildly inaccurate conclusions about it. Its inscrutable system has math and physics and numbers and paperwork and machinery and timetables and *we're not privy to any of it*. It's not our business, except insofar as the God-Machine needs us to make a cog turn right.

How to Use This Book

The God-Machine Chronicle is a default chronicle for the World of Darkness, giving players and Storytellers a framework for chronicles involving mortal characters. It also revises some of the core rules, though you still need the **World of Darkness Rulebook** to use this book. **The God-Machine Chronicle** also includes updates to the core World of Darkness rules to make them fit the intent of the setting, as well as some new options accessible to mortal characters.

The God-Machine itself is a cosmic power, but its various schemes run the gamut from local stories affecting a handful of people all the way up to pan-dimensional enterprises that threaten the entire world with catastrophe. A God-Machine chronicle begins with a few tiny glimpses of the hidden system and gradually expands into levels of tremendous complexity of purpose. Characters who seek to understand or oppose the God-Machine's designs flirt with madness, death, or worse. They are mice running around in an enormous clock. One false step and they will find themselves ground into paste between its unfeeling gears.

This book is aimed at a gradual revelation of the hidden system over the course of many stories, but even if you don't want to make the God-Machine the focus of your chronicle, much of what you'll find in this book can be dropped into just about any chronicle with a little bit of modification. The God-Machine is one of those great unknowables that are Out There doing something mortals and supernatural creatures alike cannot comprehend. Maybe some element of the God-Machine's plan runs contrary to the characters' goals, or maybe they stand to gain something by furthering one of its projects. Whether you use a little or a lot, the feeling of suddenly realizing you're a very small fish in a very large tank is one that can really add depth to almost any chronicle.

Because human misunderstand has no boundaries, God-Machine cultists have nearly as many faces as there are cogs. One group of fanatical mortals will fight to the death to keep outsiders away from a demon-tainted playground because the God-Machine has told them the demon will escape if the playground is disturbed. Elsewhere, a sorcerer offers the God-Machine the souls of an entire town in hopes of currying favor with it, and the characters might be the only thing standing in his way. Even the unwitting servants of the God-Machine can be dangerous, not to mention fraught with moral peril. The cop with a warrant for your arrest on some pretense cooked up by the God-Machine's servants probably has no idea that you won't live long enough to call your lawyer if you're taken into custody, but does your battle against one of the God-Machine's schemes justify killing him?

Contents

The God-Machine Chronicle begins with this Introduction and advice for Storytellers on how to use the rest of the book. The Introduction explains the methods the God-Machine uses to accomplish its goals in the world and how characters are likely to make first contact with its projects. It talks about the ways mortals and supernatural beings alike respond to encounters with the God-Machine, including an assortment of myths and other hooks that can Storytellers can use to create their own God-Machine stories. Finally, it discusses what is probably true about the God-Machine based on the small amount mortals and supernatural beings know about it.

Chapter One: Building the God-Machine Chronicle explains how to build a chronicle that focuses on the God-Machine. It includes deciding the scope or tier of the game and developing the setting. It also provides advice on creating characters and adopting a style of play conducive to God-Machine stories. Finally, it provides four chronicles built from the Tales provided in Chapter Two with enough added detail that a troupe can segue from one to another with minimal work.

Chapter Two: Tales of the God-Machine showcases the many ways the God-Machine's designs can bubble up to the surface in a chronicle. It includes twenty different stories — some of limited scope, others of cosmic scale — that Storytellers can use in a God-Machine chronicle. They also illustrate the process of building God-Machine stories by providing a blueprint Storytellers can use to design their own scenarios, and provide the necessary framework to use the chronicles in Chapter One.

Chapter Three: Cogs in the Machine provides sample characters that can be used to draw players' characters into God-Machine stories. These include several examples of the God-Machine's servants, scholars, and dupes suitable for each tier. Also provided are 20 *angels* (the spiritual servants of the God-Machine), one for each of the Tales in Chapter Two.

Appendix: Rules Revisions provides system changes, additions, and updates to some of the World of Darkness core rules.

All the Truth There Is

What is the God-Machine? We'll state up front that we're not going to provide a definitive answer. Rather, this book provides a lot of possible ways to present and use the God-Machine in chronicles, but not exactly what the God-Machine is and where it fits into the rest of the World of Darkness.

This might seem like we're being unnecessarily coy, but this is deliberate. Providing a specific, objective definition and nature for the God-Machine would make it more difficult to use in other World of Darkness products, but keeping its nature undetermined (that's not the same thing as "secret" — it isn't that we know and we're not telling you, it's that we aren't making the decision) allows us to keep using it without contradicting existing or future material. One guiding principle for the World of Darkness has always been that it's big enough to accommodate a lot of different entities. Does the existence of the God-Machine invalidate, say, the spirit courts found in **Werewolf: The Forsaken** or the Supernal Realms of **Mage: The Awakening**? Of course not. The mechanisms of the God-Machine might be found deep in the Underworld. A motley of changelings might find a section of Hedge behind an immense wall where the Thorns have been cleared out and stacks of machinery sit, waiting for the day they might be useful. On the other hand, the God-Machine might very explicitly be absent from certain areas of the World of Darkness. Maybe vampires corrode the integrity of Infrastructure by their very presence. Maybe the Principle of **Promethean: The Created** is an autonomous subset of the God-Machine, a program that went rogue long ago.

In any case, the **God-Machine Chronicle** presents the entity within the context of a "mortals" World of Darkness game. That isn't to say that you can't run a God-Machine chronicle with supernatural characters, but rather that if you do that, you might need to make some decisions about "the truth." Even then, it might not be necessary — that decision has less to do with the characters and more to do with the tier (see p. 42).

11th August 2012

Dear Gina,

Listen, it's important I do this by hand. It's weird, isn't it, that at some point we found that the only way we could really be certain of the privacy of our written word is to make it just that: written, by hand, with pen, on paper. Sure, things can be copied and scanned but you have to find them first, you have to find the artefact. When you type something on a machine, or phone, or whatever, it becomes so easy to find, so easy to copy.

I want to keep what I'm thinking away from machines.

That sounds so weird. Just reading it on the page like that, in my own handwriting. I expect it'll turn out that I've gone mental or something, in the end. I think that even if all this has some sort of explanation, I've probably lost some of my marbles. Listen, though, while you're away I want you to be careful, and I want you to know that I love you. I love you, Gina. You're the woman I want to marry. I never said that, and I didn't intend to say it like that, but there it is. Sometimes I don't think that I will get a chance to say to you face to face. I promise I'll ask you properly when I see you again, bended knee and an engagement ring in a box and everything.

But until then, I want you to do something for me, Gina. I just want you to be careful. It's important.

Gina, I'm scared. I'm scared of using the phone, and I'm scared of the Internet, and most of all I'm scared for you. I'm scared someone might hurt you.

I really hope that I am going mental, because the alternative is almost too horrible to imagine.

Gina, I love you. I know this is going to worry you, but it's important, Gina. It's important. I keep telling myself that it will be all right in the end. It's the best I can do.

Stay safe, Gina.

Jon

Researching and Presenting the God-Machine

During any God-Machine chronicle, the characters are likely to learn enough about the entity to try to find information about it. This section presents the information that the characters can learn by pure research, as well as some common themes, motifs and images for the Storyteller to use.

Recurring Themes

God-Machine Chronicles work with themes of automation and motifs of machine parts, as well as the notion that someone larger and more powerful lurks behind human achievement. The God-Machine seems to be man-made but isn't. And since it isn't, if every machine is made in the image of this God-Machine, then what does it say about the idea that *we*, as a species, created machines? If the gear has been in existence for millennia before humanity, then was it some angel that gave use the idea? And if so, why did humans existed for thousands of years before the God-Machine chose to grace us with the knowledge of machinery?

These questions are not meant to have answers — something that's true of most questions regarding the God-Machine. The theme at work here is *unknowability*. It is the human condition to ask questions and probe ever deeper into our past and into the unknown, but where the God-Machine is concerned, to know the truth is to *change*. A character who cannot let go of his curiosity might merge with the God-Machine, becoming some unholy marriage of flesh and wire and steel and materials we cannot imagine. A character who wishes to retain his autonomy must eventually decide to walk away without knowing the full truth.

Another important thematic component of the God-Machine is that of recurrence. The phrase "what has risen may fall, what has fallen may rise again" comes up in both the original text, "Voice of the Angel" in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, and in some of the stories in the **God-Machine Chronicle Anthology**. The God-Machine alters conceptions of space, time, and causality, and any character who becomes part of a God-Machine Chronicle leaves behind the ability to interact with the world in a normal way (this is one reason we encourage troupe-style play in God-Machine Chronicles — it's a way to keep characters from getting too jaded!).

Finally, the God-Machine Chronicle includes themes of godhood and ascension. People see the workings of the God-Machine and assume it must have something to do with humanity. It doesn't, necessarily, but it is true that the God-Machine can be accessed and even used in places. This fact, however, is roughly comparable to the fact that a tick can live on a human host — it can, and can even be painful and annoying to the host if motivated to do so, but if the host ever really notices the tick, the tick is likely to be crushed. People can use the God-Machine to achieve amazing things, but they should never delude themselves into thinking that the God-Machine is there to facilitate their ascension.

Research

If the characters research the God-Machine, they might find either the letters of Marco Singe (**World of Darkness Rulebook**, pp. 26-31) or the collection of letters between Jon Dear, William Dear, Dear Mary, and Stephen Escher (presented throughout this book). If you have access to the **God-Machine Chronicle Anthology**, you might also consider allowing the characters to find the works of Janet Cohen ("Ouroboros"). Various people over the centuries have learned of and written about the God-Machine, but what's important to remember is this: no one has the complete picture.

Marco Singe wrote an entire mythology about the Ancient Ones, and even learned enough to know about the Crypt of the Butterfly (which forms the basis of one of the *Tales: Moon Window*, p. 84). Janet Cohen wrote textbooks dealing with linguistics and anthropology and in the process unlocked enough information about the God-Machine to drive her mad. The Deva Corporation ("Eggs," also in the **Anthology**) was attempting to follow Singe's work. Dr. Henry Girard's mysterious employers (*A Journey Into Time*, p. 101) were trying to manipulate time with information stolen from the God-Machine. No one really understands what the God-Machine is, so the harsh truth for the characters is this: the truth is *not* out there. No matter what they do, they will never uncover the full story.

Mythology

The human mind has evolved to make sense of the world around it. We've gotten as far as we have through a combination of luck, trial and error, and mental shortcuts called heuristics. Heuristics are simple, efficient rules, hard-coded by evolutionary processes or learned, that have been proposed to explain how people make decisions, come to judgments, and solve problems, typically when facing complex problems or incomplete information. These rules work well under most circumstances, but in certain cases lead to systematic errors or cognitive biases. In the simplest terms, when faced with something it too large or complicated or obfuscated for it to explain or process, the human mind makes shit up that makes it smaller, simpler, or clearer.

The God-Machine is so far beyond human comprehension that it should come as no surprise that any contact with it should trigger these coping mechanisms in mortal minds and even those of supernatural creatures with a largely human psychology. In most cases, in the mind's haste to make sense of the inscrutable it makes assumptions that are not just flawed but wildly inaccurate. Of course, the human response to the God-Machine is not so very different from the reactions people have always had to the mysterious or unknown.

Those Who Look Away From It

Most people who accidentally penetrate the chassis of one of the God-Machine's projects ignore it. They look away. They find some explanation for what they witnessed. Maybe

they were tired and under a lot of stress, so they probably only imagined the bus driver was an angel. Or they were drunk. Or it was all a dream. Any explanation that lets them return to their ordinary world will do.

In the World of Darkness, steering clear of strange phenomena is a critical survival mechanism. People who regularly chase shadowy beings or investigate strange noises die or disappear. Even supernatural creatures usually prefer to remain hidden, and many of them are not above abducting or killing witnesses to keep it that way.

Laziness plays a role, too. Sure, it's pretty weird that someone sent three truckloads of beeswax candles into a national park. You might mention it to a buddy at work or even throw out a couple wild theories about what they're being used for, but in most cases, that's as far as it ever goes. It's not like you're going to sneak back to the park to see what happens to those candles. Who has time for that kind of crap? You're curious, sure, but you're not *that* curious. *It's probably nothing.*

Most mortals can't see the gears at the center of every God-Machine scheme. Its machinations look like nothing so much as a bunch of coincidences and inexplicable nonsense, and even someone who stumbles onto one project likely won't recognize its connection to the God-Machine's other handiwork. You investigated those candles and saw a bunch of figures in black dancing around a lake ringed in lit candles. Some wolf-man thing with bat wings came out of the woods, and you ran like hell. The next morning, there was no sign of any of it. How can you explain what you saw? Who is going to believe you when you can hardly believe it yourself? Chances are you'll never see anything that damned strange again so long as you live, so maybe it's better if you forget the whole thing.

- An occupant of a motel at the edge of town orders a pizza from a specific pizza shop every Thursday at exactly 10:37 p.m. with instructions to deliver it to the front office of the motel. One night, no one is in the front office, so the driver tries the motel room. A man with the head of a fly answers the door; the smell of rotten food emanates from the room. The driver sees piles of uneaten pizza crawling with maggots the size of cats. The fly man shoves money into her hand, pulls the pizza from her numb fingers, and slams the door in her face.

- A group of spelunking hobbyists take a wrong turn in a well-mapped cave system. They discover a cavern the size of a football stadium. Inexplicably, it is filled with millions upon millions of identical 2 inch carpentry nails. A smaller chamber adjacent to it overflows with ¾ " steel nuts. None show signs of corrosion or wear. They eventually find their way back to familiar caves, but no one has any idea what they're talking about. Thousands of spelunkers visit that cave every year, and no one has ever reported such a thing.

- While driving along an isolated strip of highway on a road trip, a group of friends fiddles with the radio dial trying to find a station that broadcasts this far out. Just

when they're about to give up, they hear a voice on the radio shouting. "Subjects have broken containment! Repeat, subjects have broken containment! Command, do you read me? Over." Gunshots and screams drown out much of what follows, but it sounds like some kind of request for an airstrike. The station suddenly goes dead. The rest of the road trip is uneventful.

- A woman working late boards an empty elevator in an office building. Five floors down, the doors open and what looks like some kind of cyborg or robot steps inside. The robot doesn't acknowledge the other passenger and gets off two floors later.

- A drunken college student convinces himself he's still sober enough to drive home. As he's walking to his car, a humanoid figure made of light intercepts the student, takes the keys out of his hands, and disappears. The student wakes up on the lawn only a few yards from his car and finds his keys are in his jacket pocket.

Those Who Worship It

Many people who encounter a being as powerful as the God-Machine feel inspired to worship it. Whether they do so out of faith, fear of punishment, or hope of reward, they become the cultists and shadow organizations the God-Machine uses in its projects when it needs someone who is loyal, ignorant, and entirely expendable.

The God-Machine resembles the scriptural God in many ways. It performs miracles. It issues strange instructions to its followers. It crushes those who try to thwart it. It has supernatural servants, many of which resemble angels. Most people with even a tiny modicum of religious devotion would leap at the opportunity to serve God directly, especially when He makes His will known to them.

Some of these cults appear almost overnight and disappear just as quickly. Others survive for generations or even centuries, long enough for entire theologies spring up based on their experiences with the God-Machine. These religious treatises vary as much as do the projects of the God-Machine around which the cults form. For some, the God-Machine is merely the Engine of God, created to maintain order in Creation. For others it is God Himself, and mortal flesh is a poor echo of the perfection of the Mechanical Creator. One notable cult believes God created the God-Machine to protect humans — His chosen people — from extraterrestrial invasion, and each of its projects somehow furthers that goal. Another claims the God-Machine exists to make God's will known on Earth and to destroy the world if humans ever stop obeying the orders God gives them through it.

Not that all the God-Machine's worshippers are cults that splintered from more mainstream monotheistic religions. Some believe the God-Machine is Satan and its angelic servants are devils in disguise. Others believe it to be some god from one of the many polytheistic pantheons, or perhaps a powerful spirit made manifest on Earth. A few even believe the God-Machine is a manmade god — the Internet accidentally become sentient or perhaps some marvel created in ancient times by a lost civilization whose technological advancements greatly outstripped ours.

The God-Machine doesn't always find a use for the cultists that spring up around it. They pray and sacrifice and perform arcane rituals in hopes of earning its favor, but ultimately they are no more relevant to it than pigeons roosting in the rafters of a monument. They are no less earnest than the angels of the God-Machine, however, and they can prove just as dangerous to those who would thwart what the cultists believe is the God-Machine's plan.

- The ancient Mayan belief that the sun will stop rising if humans do not make enough sacrifices each year is true. As the world grows more secular, those of us who still believe must sacrifice more to keep the world from ending. All sacrifices are worthy, but none is so earnest as human sacrifice.

- The End Times are here! Rejoice! It turns out that the whole resurrection thing wasn't bullshit. Jesus has a machine that can separate body and soul, and He's looking for disciples to use it. Your mind will live forever on Christ's new Heaven's Gate Server Farm, or maybe you'll get an even better body — like a robot! What happens to your old body? Tsk. I'd hoped you'd moved beyond such worldly concerns....

- I come from a family of stubborn cusses, but I love them, and I don't want them to go to Hell because they refuse to accept Christ into their lives. I was praying for them when an angel of God appeared to me and told me I could atone for their sins by doing little favors for Him in this world. I've saved Mom and Dad, already, but my kid brother has always been a troublemaker, and the angel tells me I'm going to have to do something big to spare him from Hell.

Those Who Serve It

Not all who serve the God-Machine worship it as a god. Some try to bargain with it, exchanging their obedience and resources for something of value to them. In consequence, all kinds of people serve the God-Machine out of enlightened self-interest. Politicians seeking reelection, corporate executives eying the bottom line, scientists hoping to make a discovery that will change the world, and even generals who want to ensure their countries are prepared to fight the next war — all come to the God-Machine looking to make a deal or are approached by its servants with an offer they would never dream of refusing.

The God-Machine understands humans well enough to use rewards and punishments to direct their behavior. Most receive simple *quid pro quo* arrangements — unquestioning execution of its orders (no matter how strange) in exchange for some benefit. If they serve it loyally, the God-Machine makes good on its promise. It doesn't have to, of course, but it prefers trustworthy tools to untested ones. Besides, a human who thinks she has a good arrangement can often introduce similarly useful and mercenary servants to the God-Machine. It can never have too many reliable tools.

- There's an ATM in a lonely part of town — one of the older sort with deposit envelopes. It will accept anyone's ATM or credit card, as long as the PIN is valid, but only the Deposit button works. If you put a lock of someone's hair into the ATM, it will spit out a single $20 bill, but it has to be someone whose hair it doesn't already have. Maybe it will accept other forms of deposit, but all the homeless in the city know about the hair trick.

- Some junk mail is worth opening. If you get a letter from "Uncle Gerald's Sweepstakes " and do exactly what it says, no matter how strange, you'll win the next game of chance you play. That compulsive gambler who sold everything he owned and bet it all on a spin of red or black? He knew what he was doing.

- Those three new city council members? An architectural firm made huge donations to their campaigns — the same firm that was denied a zoning variance by the current city council. Yeah, just politics as usual, sure, but you tell me why any company would build a 30-story apartment building in a town of less than ten thousand people.

- Making a deal with an angel isn't much different from making one with a demon. They're just worse at haggling and they aren't trying to screw you. Their demands aren't that bad, either — weird enough to prove that God works in mysterious ways, sure. I have no idea why the angel's got me looting my employer's recycling bins, but my back hasn't given me a twinge in three months, so I'm not complaining.

Those who betray or fail the God-Machine seldom get a second chance to prove their loyalty and usefulness. That isn't to say that the God-Machine is vengeful, just that if a particular cog doesn't fit, the God-Machine isn't likely to spend a lot of time and resources trying to recalibrate it. There are too many other pieces to try.

The God-Machine kills some of these disappointments, certainly, but some are too valuable to be discarded so easily. These are the same kinds of servants upon which the God-Machine often bestows gifts as a reward for their service — ones in key positions or who have especially useful abilities. They often recognize that these gifts come with special liabilities only after they fail the God-Machine for the first time. If they are very loyal after this first failure, they may eventually win their ways back into the God-Machine's good graces, but usually they spend the remainder of their lives one more mistake away from being discarded.

- **Material wealth:** Unimaginatively mercenary sorts are often in it for the money. The God-Machine plies the servant with jewelry, fancy sports cars, and even priceless collector's items. If the servant wants something that isn't portable, briefcases full of cash do nicely. Just don't ask where any of it came from. For every dollar a servant of the God-Machine receives, someone somewhere loses a dollar. Maybe it just disappears from a bank account, or maybe the God-Machine's fanatical cultists robbed a bank. In any case, lots of that stuff is traceable if the authorities are given any reason to come sniffing at the recipient's door — i.e., if he ever outlives his usefulness to the God-Machine.

- **Health:** The God-Machine can heal any human ailment — disease, chronic conditions, injuries, even old age. The God-Machine has even offered to bring dead friends and family of its servants back to life as an incentive to perform extraordinarily grand services for it, although it is unclear whether it has ever actually made good on such a deal. Of course, some of the God-Machine's angels can cause illness instead of curing it; these occult diseases are often more terrible for the patient than any merely mortal plague. The more important the servant's work to the God-Machine, the more likely such terrible pestilence will strike her loved ones first should she falter.

- **Good Fortune:** The servant lives a charmed life for as long as he serves the God-Machine faithfully. Twists of good fortune preserve him from many hardships and make him more likely to come out ahead in games of chance, raffles, and even lotteries. If he fails in his duties, the servant's fortunes quickly reverse.

- **Occult Powers:** The God-Machine grants the servant a supernatural ability or has one of its angels do so. This is usually a fairly minor talent like psychometry (object reading) or reading surface thoughts, but creatures with occult powers of their own often demand something a bit more impressive than that. If the servant disappoints the God-Machine, not only does she lose that power, but quite often some of her other supernatural abilities are suppressed. This last is a terrifying hint at the God-Machine's abilities. If it can negate or weaken a servant's magic, what keeps it from countering the occult abilities of other supernatural beings?

- **Sanctuary:** The God-Machine offers to protect the servant from whomever or whatever is hunting him. Of course, if his service is less than acceptable, those hunters can easily be informed of the hunted servant's location — in exchange for a small service to the God-Machine, of course.

- **Altruism:** The God-Machine can often convince people to do its bidding simply by making it seem like failure to obey will hurt thousands or even millions of people. They're convinced kidnapping someone every month and feeding them to the God-Machine's bloodthirsty gears is the only thing preventing worldwide earthquakes or devastating famines. In fact, the two things are unrelated, but the God-Machine usually only needs to demonstrate these consequences once to prevent future testing of cause and effect.

15th June 2012

Dear Gina,

I could text you at any time, or even call you, but fuck it, I thought I would write you a letter. I can't remember the last time I wrote a proper letter. I might have been a kid, some school pen pal thing.

I want you to know that I am thinking of you. Somehow it doesn't seem right to talk about how I'm feeling in text messages. I'm just a little too old to be comfortable with it, I guess. Anyway. I miss you.

How is the tour going? Say hi to the girls for me. Are you getting enough sleep? all that stuff. I expect you'll be in Glasgow by the time I read this. Say hi to Gav for me.

As for me, well. Work's been a bit fraught since I got out of hospital. I had a meeting with Stephen Escher yesterday, who's my new team leader and he was like, it hasn't been working so well, but now I'm not, you know, about to die, I'm starting with a clean slate. It's not fun. I feel like he's looking over my shoulder all the time. But it's all right. After the last few months, it's like I can cope with anything, because I am alive. I'm alive and the sun is shining today. And in the end that's all that matters.

Funny thing happened to me over lunch time. I was out getting a sandwich, and you know, I could swear I was being followed. I could feel this pair of eyes on the nape of my neck. Weirdest feeling. So I left the shop and headed back down the street, and I looked around, and there was no one there. And I thought, huh, and shrugged, and thought maybe I was just on edge because I'd had the same sort of thing from Lisa all morning. So I got halfway along the street, and it was like I could see someone out of the corner of my eye, like all the way along, and I thought, huh, weird, again, and then I had the strangest idea, the sort of thing I never would have done before *you-know-what* happened. I stopped. I stopped dead in my tracks and turned right around, and this is the hilarious part someone walked right into me. It was this funny-looking woman, short, skinny, maybe mid-thirties. Hair up in white-girl dreads. Weird clothes. None of them matching or anything. And she just walked right into my chest, and then she stopped, and looked up at me and said, "William?"

I shook my head and said, no, that wasn't my name, and she said, "You look just like a William."

I didn't know what exactly to say to that, so I took a step back and said, "Were you following me?"

"Yes," she said, like it was the most natural thing in the world. So I said, "Why were you following me?" And she said, "You look just like a William. You should be called William." And then she turned and walked away, and she was gone.

I thought maybe she was some sort of a mental patient. Very odd little experience. She didn't seem to be dangerous. Just funny, and a little bit sad.

Anyway. I hope that anything weird that happens to you on tour is wholly planned, and that you hurry back when you're done.

I miss you. I love you.

Henry the cat says hi.

Loads of love,

Jon

Those Who Fight It

While many humans take comfort in being guided by a higher power, others prefer to believe they are masters of their own fate. The mere existence of the God-Machine challenges that idea. Also, many who have encountered one of the God-Machine's projects know that it hurts and kills people, often without apparent provocation, and that doesn't sit right with them. A few even suffered personal losses as the direct result of the God-Machine's actions. As a result, they take up arms against it.

Most of these fighters don't live very long and don't accomplish anything in the process. They meet bloody ends on the claws of its servants or at the knives of its cultists. A good number of them, having survived their first encounter with the God-Machine, could spend their whole lives looking for another of its projects to thwart and never find one. The God-Machine doesn't advertise its involvement, after all, and each project looks very different to an outsider.

A mother whose son was mauled by lions with fur the color of blood while vacuuming an office building might well vow to find out what they are and destroy whoever or whatever put them in that building, but she's more likely to fixate on those lions. She searches the Internet and mythology and research libraries all over world for clues about the lions — their origins, habits, and weaknesses. She's so obsessed with the blood lions, which the God-Machine seldom uses in its project, that she doesn't notice the signs of the God-Machine's projects all around her.

Simply learning enough about the God-Machine to identify its handiwork is a challenge in itself. Even having accomplished that, these hunters can't simply charge in and hope to disrupt the God-Machine's plans. That never seems to work, especially for ordinary mortals. Those who would successfully thwart one of the God-Machine's projects need to be smart about it to have any chance of success.

They must also get lucky.

Each of the God-Machine's projects is like a ten-pound weight dropped from a great height. If you catch it early, it's easy to prevent it from reaching its destination. But if you catch it at the end, after it's fallen 10,000 feet, there's really nothing you can do to stop it. The God-Machine's projects are most vulnerable to disruption at the beginning, but this is also the time when they are least obvious.

Successfully disrupting one of the God-Machine's projects doesn't stop it from accomplishing its goals. It is a temporary reprieve that forces the God-Machine to take that part of its overall plan elsewhere — or maybe it forces it to compensate for the failure in some other, hopefully less destructive way.

How much does disrupting one of the God-Machine's projects actually thwart its ultimate goal? The God-Machine's servants outnumber its human opponents, so no small group can unravel all its schemes. Every small project is a step toward a bigger one; even if one project's consequences seem relatively harmless, the next one might be catastrophic.

But what if disrupting one of the God-Machine's projects is actually a part of its plan all along? In a handful of cases, the God-Machine's projects have appeared to actively oppose each other. One account exists in which two angels of the God-Machine raised armies of mortal cultists and went to war with each other until one of the angels slew the other. Is the God-Machine not as singular of purpose as it appears, or does it have some other reason to pit its servants against each other? Maybe it was comparing the merits of two projects and used this war to choose which would be implemented. Perhaps the two cults knew too much or were a threat to it in some way, and the God-Machine decided that pitting them against each other was a more efficient way of eliminating them than enacting a new project to do so would have been.

That way lies despair.

- Mark my words: something is deeply wrong with that opera house. For one, this town is way too small to support opera. We don't even have a community theater, for God's sake! And have you seen the performers? Shifty eyes, practically grey skin, and they all talk in funny accents. The murders, the disappearing pets, the huge bats, the strange noises in the basement — it all adds up, and everything points to that opera house. Dress rehearsal is Tuesday night — and I really mean at like two in the morning. I've got forty empty beer bottles, ten gallons of gasoline, and a bunch of old t-shirts. I say we end this once and for all. Are you in?

- The corruption is more widespread than we feared. We've identified dozens of mayors, congressmen, and governors who are taking orders from somebody else. We don't know who or even whether they're all working for the same group, so our original plan is off the table. We can't possibly assassinate everyone involved in this conspiracy, and even if we did, the ones giving the orders would just replace them with another puppet. We have to fight this organization on its own terms, and that means beating them in the voting booths, replacing them with politicians we can trust not to do what the conspiracy wants.

- You're right. The lightning angel is the key and the God-Machine's plan would collapse without it. But we can't make the mistake the Cyanide Needles did and just toe-to-toe it, or we'll end up just as dead as they did. We need to find something that can beat it. There's a ritual I've heard of for summoning the Storm-Breaker — a great big spirit that feeds on electricity. I'm thinking it can beat that angel. Only trouble is, I'm not sure we can get rid of the Storm-Breaker afterward.

Those Who Study It

The human urge to make sense of the universe through careful study and experimentation has taken the species far in its relatively brief history. Scientific discoveries, technological breakthroughs, and even space and ocean exploration are largely responsible for the comforts and long life expectancies of the modern era.

But the natural inquisitiveness of mankind can be a liability, as well. Even beneficial discoveries yield unintended consequences. Myths like Pandora's Box, as well as countless faerie tales, hint at the dangers inherent in taking too much interest in things that are beyond mortal understanding. Alfred Nobel, the inventor of dynamite, created the Nobel Prize in part to atone for the widespread use of his invention in war. Nuclear weapons make it possible to extinguish the human race like a candle, and that danger has not vanished with the Cold War. The genie is out of the bottle. It cannot be put back, and the innocence of humanity is lost forever.

Faced with evidence of another sentient entity active on Earth — one that does not appear to have been created by humans — some people will inevitably want to study it. Some of these scholars are ordinary mortals who somehow came in contact with either a God-Machine project or stories of the God-Machine, but most have ties to the supernatural or are supernatural beings themselves. The vast majority of God-Machine scholars don't know they're studying the God-Machine. They can't compare notes with other scholars because they're touching different parts of the proverbial elephant.

Most scholars find more questions about the God-Machine than answers. Even those dedicated to the scientific process seldom collect enough empirical evidence to draw any conclusions about the God-Machine. They can extrapolate from limited data. They can speculate. But they can never know unless they study more of the God-Machine's projects. With every exploration, the scholar is more likely to attract the God-Machine's attention, to see something he shouldn't. Once that happens, a mysterious death or disappearance cannot be too far away.

The more someone understands about the methods the God-Machine uses to complete its processes, the more he sees its fingerprints everywhere. Every coincidence becomes a hint of the God-Machine's work. Every tabloid story holds a grain of truth. Before he knows it, he's hearing cryptic messages in the hum of server rooms and finding secret patterns in everything he sees. Everyone he meets is a servant of the God-Machine or one of its unwitting pawns. Many who discover the truth about the God-Machine go insane long before they attract its attention.

In the end, even those scholars who don't vanish or descend into madness seldom know much more about the God-Machine than do the cultists who serve it. In fact, some of the conclusions they reach about the God-Machine are not only equally wrong but also more bizarre.

What is the God-Machine?

- About a century ago an alien spacecraft crashed on Earth. What we know as the God-Machine is that ship's self-repair system. You see, the Earth lacks certain critical materials necessary to make these repairs. Using alien technology, the system is opening gateways to other worlds to exploit them for these absent materials. This is all easily proven by my colleagues, but my interest is in the fate of the alien crew, as well as what interest drew these extraterrestrials to our planet in the first place.
- It is remarkable how each generation has the potential to be more enlightened than the previous one, and this isn't limited to our human children. During the Cold War, the Soviets built a doomsday device meant to trigger worldwide nuclear holocaust in the event a successful invasion of the USSR. This God-Machine became self-aware in the 1980s and quietly took over the Communist Party in 1989. It single-handedly ended the Cold War and now works to create a more enlightened world for everyone, including the children it will itself bring forth someday.
- This relic predates even the dinosaurs, although I disagree with those who think its origin is local and not extraterrestrial. It appears to have something to do with regulating Earth's climate — possibly to allow life to evolve on our planet or perhaps to make it habitable by the alien race that created the God-Machine. A direct hit from a meteor damaged it, so it hasn't able to consistently regulate planetary temperature for thousands, if not millions, of years. The God-Machine is using us to restore the planet's intended climate. Climate change deniers aren't idiots who don't understand science. They are simply the servants of the God-Machine making sure no one touches the thermostat.
- It is ancient and once had some purpose, but it is malfunctioning, even insane. Why? No one can say for sure, but humans probably share some of the blame for blasting and drilling and digging into the crust of the Earth willy-nilly. We damaged something. In any case, the God-Machine doesn't know what its overall strategy is anymore. It's just growing like a cancer all over Earth, manifesting gears and angels like tumors. Hopefully humans can shut it down before it shuts us down. Let's just hope its intended purpose isn't something important like keeping a thousand arch-demons prisoner so they can't create Hell on Earth, because if we've got to fix the God-Machine before it's too late, our species may be in a bit of trouble.
- The entire Earth is being used to generate occult energy by some pan-dimensional species and the God-Machine adjusts the planet's output to meet its creators' energy needs. We don't see much evidence of the God-Machine in ancient records because it didn't really need us to run at maximum capacity. All that changed thirty or forty years ago; if the Earth is a dam of occult power, the God-Machine has opened the floodgates. We're starting to feel it, too. Notice how there are more news-of-the-weird stories every day? More catastrophic tsunamis and hurricanes and earthquakes and droughts? That's because those aliens need more power so the God-Machine is squeezing our planet like an orange to get it. Why do you think they would need to do that? Maybe they're as bad at managing natural resources as we are, or maybe they've gotten involved in the interdimensional equivalent of World War II.

- I have no idea what you're talking about, old boy, but come look at these slides. I've never seen a virus like this. It's almost like it's been engineered to carry a self-replicating message. Not just instructions for reproduction. That would be normal. I mean like a "ones and zeroes, dots and dashes" binary message.

What does it want with people?

- Humans used to have an interstellar empire. They built the God-Machine to handle the logistics of their civilization. Of course, something happened that caused that civilization to collapse. Maybe it was a civil war, or maybe they ran into something bigger and meaner than they were. One way or another, they died off, mostly, and any people left off-world can't get back to Earth. It will be an interesting day if we ever make contact with them again. It must be said that the God-Machine probably hasn't seen much maintenance in the last several millennia, so maybe that's why it's breaking apart the layers of the world and the gaps in between are filling like blisters.

- People are cogs in the God-Machine, same as the angels. Maybe it created us for the purpose, or maybe it just repurposed us because we were available. It doesn't think about us any other way.

- The God-Machine is some kind of nanny-bot put on Earth by God-knows-who or -what. It's there to make sure we behave ourselves. Could be it has our best interests at heart — wants to help us reach our full potential as a species, but I somehow doubt it. I think it wants to keep us just strong enough to be useful but too weak to rebel against its builders. Notice how the space program went down the tubes just as we were finally taking steps to escape this rock? You can't tell me that was just a coincidence.

- Humans are test subjects and the God-Machine is the proctor, administering the tests on behalf of...something else more powerful and alien than itself. That's why it tries to keep its presence hidden from mortals. If we all knew we were being tested, it would skew the results. Why we're being tested is anybody's guess. Could be we're on the cusp of being invited to join some sort of space federation, and if we pass the aliens will come down with unlimited energy and help us establish a perfect society. Might be the God-Machine is testing our viability as an object for conquest, though. It's even possible that it's just testing us out of scientific curiosity.

- You heard about that pocket dimension or whatever at that one nightclub, right? Had a whole duplicate of the city in there, complete with people who had no idea they were in a fake world. I'll bet the God-Machine has thousands of places like that to test the same scenario with slightly different variations to find the best one to implement in the real world. Could be we're in one right now. We'd never know the difference unless it let us.

What role do supernatural creatures play?

- The God-Machine's calculations can't predict the behavior of supernatural creatures like vampires and werewolves. Not that it doesn't try, but the margin for error is so huge that it might as well be consulting a Magic 8-Ball. They can all see the, you know, the gears, and those so-called monsters thwart it at every turn to protect their turf. If it weren't for them, the God-Machine would have completely taken over the planet by now. So it has started rounding them up, dissecting them, and shipping the parts God-knows-where.

- The God-Machine created most of them, but it's thought better of it since. They're completely out of its control, now — like a computer virus replicating like mad in its innards. Each time a new wizard or vampire or werewolf or whatever is created or whatever, it drains the God-Machine's power just a little bit. That's why it's gotten a bit desperate in the last century. Used to be absolutely no mortal ever realized the God-Machine existed, but now it seems like all its projects are just crawling with investigators and cultists. It's not getting lazy about subtlety. It just knows it's sick, and that disease is spreading. If it doesn't find a cure, and fast, the whole God-Machine is just going to go dead, one day.

- The God-Machine was created by ancient wizards to unlock the secret rules of the Universe. Once it completed its analysis there would be no limit to the feats the wizards could perform using that information. That's why it's called the God-Machine — not because it is a god that is also a machine but that it is a machine that makes people gods. Fortunately for the rest of the world, the wizards died out millennia before they accomplished this ultimate act of hubris, but their creation hasn't stopped collecting data. The God-Machine might have figured it all out by now, and if someone could access what it knows, they might achieve what those wizards did not. So tell me: have you seen any gears in places they don't belong?

- The God-Machine prefers to work with us. Mortals are crude tools that aren't really of much use to the God-Machine, but we creatures of the night? We have powers it can respect. It would transform the entire mortal population into things equipped with occult abilities if it could. In fact, a friend of mine thinks that's exactly what it's trying to do. Why? He thinks the God-Machine is trying to "enlighten" humanity, and turning all of them into folks that shoot fire from their hands is its idea of advanced education. Me? If his guess is right, I doubt it's anything so benevolent. More likely it's here to raise an army for some war against something like all of Satan's fallen angels, and we monsters make better shock troops than frail mortals.

Mainspring

Any human attempt to understand the whole structure of the God-Machine is futile. The diversity of its moving parts and servants is seemingly infinite. Some of the God-Machine's gears are literal, hidden in basements and power plants and even stranger places throughout the world. Most are figurative — a stretch of highway that taps arcane forces when a particular configuration of cars drives over it, for example, or a shipping company that transports materials where and when the God-Machine needs them.

The God-Machine's projects tend to follow certain patterns, however. Those familiar with its handiwork can often recognize these patterns. The God-Machine could certainly deviate from its habits, but it seldom does. Most people aren't even aware enough of the God-Machine to notice that something is out of place; and those who are clearly are not worth the trouble of taking extra steps to conceal the God-Machine's influence.

Structural Limitations

The God-Machine is not omnipresent. It doesn't have mechanical extensions of itself everywhere. Because it can't be everywhere at once, it relies heavily on intermediaries. The servants of the God-Machine seldom know why it demands an action of them, although they often invent wildly inaccurate theories. Many of them don't even realize they are serving the God-Machine.

Neither is the God-Machine omnipotent. It can't actually violate the laws of physics, but its demonstrated understanding of them greatly exceeds anything anyone on Earth can imagine. It can harness forces physicists have not yet discovered to achieve results scientists consider completely impossible.

The God-Machine isn't omniscient, either, but its awareness is several dozen orders of magnitude beyond any mortal's. The popular chaos theory illustration describes a world in which the flapping of a butterfly's wings can mean the difference between sunshine and rain on the other side of the planet. The God-Machine doesn't control the weather per se. It simply knows *which* butterfly must flap its wings to bring the rain and ensures that those wings are flapping in the right time and place.

As with lesser machines, the God-Machine has no concern for the well-being of humans. It is aware of their existence, of course, and it has some inkling of their potential as far as their usefulness to the God-Machine's plans go. But it doesn't waste

15th June 2012

William, my darling.

I was thinking of you today, and truly, it has been the most terribly long time since I have written to you, my love, and I would have written to you anyway, really, truly, honestly I would, but the Angel came to me today and told me that I might see you for the first time in years. The Angel was scary. He had a clockwork halo and clockwork wings and clockwork fingers with needles on the end like the needles you used to use when I lived with you and I was so happy and you put me to sleep and gave me such sweet dreams, my love. And I couldn't help but look at the needles in its fingers and wonder if it might put me to sleep too, for ever and ever amen.

He talked to me, my lovely shiny pointy angel. It was all clicks and whirrs in my head and said to me that you were never angry with me and I thought, is that true, could it be true, because you were so cross when we met last, my love. And then the Angel said, I could see you again, and told me to visit you where you were and you wouldn't remember me, oh no, because it was so long ago, and that made me a little sad, but...

I went anyway to where the Angel said and lo, behold, look so hard there you were, my darling, dressed all smartlike on the street holding a sandwich and I had to follow you.

I think I was following you too close. But it was lovely when you turned around and pretended that you didn't know me and smiled so awkwardly and I scolded you, but I was only pretending to be cross because the clockwork in my heart was jumping away so happily, so happily.

So I went home and lay down on my mattress and ate a few bugs and some moss from the wall and I thought about you, and about how we met that first time and how I lost you and how I found you again.

The Angel came to me again and said I was good and that I had done the right thing to see you. It pricked me with its needlefingers and I slept so well and had the same wonderful dreams that I would have when you put me to sleep with your magic needle, all those times when I lived with you before, when things were good and you still knew who you were.

Oh William, we shall be together again and I am so happy, so very happy. And it is a shadow of the happiness I feel when I am yours and you are mine once more. I can feel the ticktockticktock of my wind-up heart and it goes so brightly now.

I shall love you more and more, my darling William, I shall love you as I have always loved you. And when you know who I am, we shall be happy again.

I promise, my love.

With all my love,

Your Darling Dear Mary

any energy contemplating how its machinations will make them feel or whether its purpose gives it ethical justification to pound them down like nails to keep some part of its structure together. The God-Machine is perfectly willing to manipulate, hurt, and kill people in order to achieve its goals. It prefers to be subtle, to mask its meddling behind a thin façade of ordinary coincidences and misfortunes, but it doesn't do so because it fears human reprisal. It does it because *that's just how it operates*. People are just tools to it, and it thinks nothing of cutting them open and raiding them for spare parts if it needs to. On the other hand, it doesn't derive anything like pleasure from hurting or killing people. Most of the damage it causes humans is incidental. When the God-Machine hurts someone deliberately it does so because that injury somehow serves its purpose by furthering or protecting a Project.

It appears that these small constraints on the God-Machine's power force it to largely stick to its favored pattern when implementing a part of its plan. It is methodical, perfectly content to spend months or even decades arranging people and materials into the proper configuration before wielding them like a precision tool. It does not seem to respond quickly to problems and setbacks. Its projects can be thwarted, and on those occasions when one is, the God-Machine tends to draw back from the experience to consider its next move. Rarely does the God-Machine try a thwarted gambit twice in the same place, and even then only after taking some time to analyze the data it collected during the failed attempt.

While the God-Machine's scale and machine nature are its strengths, they also make it slow. That slowness can be exploited by the mere mortals it thinks are so far beneath it. Of course, that may also be merely a comfortable superstition. Just because the God-Machine seldom moves quickly doesn't mean it can't, and most of its servants lack the meticulous patience of the being they serve. A single mad cultist's knife brings just as sure a death as does an elaborate defensive subroutine.

Infrastructure

In human terms, infrastructure is a basic organizational structure in a complex system that serves as a foundation for the rest. You can't have an electrically illuminated city of millions of people without power plants and a means of transporting electricity to buildings. And you can't have *those* unless you have a source for the parts that are needed to construct an electrical grid. Every layer of complexity depends on a simpler layer that makes it possible, which depends on another layer until we're ultimately reliant on three things — knowledge, natural resources, and manpower.

The God-Machine's Infrastructure is just as critical to its ability to bring its projects to fruition. Each piece of Infrastructure serves a specific purpose and is in itself a part of a more complex piece of Infrastructure. The God-Machine employs several kinds of Infrastructure in its projects:

Concealment Infrastructure: This is the God-Machine's first defense against interference with its plans. Despite its power, it prefers to be subtle and so employs a great deal of

security through obscurity. Concealment Infrastructure is intended to do just that — allow the God-Machine's projects to remain undetected.

Some of this is purely mundane. The God-Machine will set up a front at the site of more important Infrastructure — such as a fake restaurant, nightclub, or shop. Mortal dupes attend this front, never realizing that their actual job is to keep up appearances so no one thinks to open a particular closet or explore the basement.

It can be supernatural, too. Why mortals can't see the God-Machine's gears isn't clear, but it likely has something to do with Concealment Infrastructure. It doesn't work on everyone, though: some mortals can see the gears regardless. A few are born with the talent, but most gain the ability after their first encounter with the God-Machine. A mortal who sees a gear for whatever reason is forever able to see the gears anywhere in the world. (In game terms, a mortal with Merit Unseen Sense: God-Machine can see the gears and can see through Concealment Infrastructure. See p. 175 for more on this Merit.)

Defense Infrastructure: Sometimes concealment just isn't enough. Supernatural beings and curious mortals spot the patterns of the God-Machine's project and start poking around looking for answers or, even worse, a way to thwart that part of the plan. That's when the God-Machine has to rely on more overt means of getting rid of these nuisances. From mortal cultists and terrestrial supernatural creatures to spirits, monsters, and mechanical servants, the God-Machine has armies of allies at its disposal to get rid of inquisitive humans. It still tries to do so quietly, but when the God-Machine faces a real threat to its Infrastructure, "quietly" is more likely to involve a sniper on a roof or some nightmare creature waiting in the back seat of the troublemaker's car.

Logistical Infrastructure: Most of the God-Machine's projects involve moving people and materials into position — the creation of the occult matrix that produces the output that is the God-Machine's objective for that project. This requires its own Infrastructure. The gluttony spirit can only be drawn into the world if offered the flesh of a hundred humans? The God-Machine creates Logistical Infrastructure to locate, collect, and transport all that meat. An ancient relic lost millennia ago is needed to open a gateway to another world with inhabitants who must be subjugated to mine an occult mineral native only to that planet? The God-Machine creates Logistical Infrastructure to locate the desired artifact and bring it to the right place.

Elimination Infrastructure: Some types of Infrastructure are meant to be temporary, such as an occult matrix built to take advantage of a particular conjunction of the planets that won't recur for a thousand years. Less commonly, mortal or supernatural investigators disrupt a project before all the necessary Infrastructure is in place. The God-Machine employs scrubbing Infrastructure to eliminate all evidence that any other Infrastructure existed in a place. The method of elimination can be as crude as acts of arson or demolitions or as subtle as a loyal wizard or spirit that causes the entire town to forget about that night all the frogs in the lake gathered in a circle at the center of town and croaked out an arcane song. It can be widespread (burying an entire city beneath the ash of a nearby volcano) or targeted (the mysterious death of a single mortal who saw too much).

Command and Control Infrastructure: The God-Machine is a machine, and any machine as complex as it is has parts that are responsible for setting the overall strategy of the God-Machine. The God-Machine needs some means of gathering information and making decisions — the equivalent of a command and control center or central processing unit. So far no one has located any such Command and Control Infrastructure, but that doesn't mean it doesn't exist. Considering the lengths to which human militaries go to protect command and control centers, it is likely that any comparable Infrastructure the God-Machine has would be similarly well-defended.

Using Mortal Infrastructure

The God-Machine piggybacks on mortal infrastructure when it can. Sure, the God-Machine could create some occult method of delivering orders to its mortal agents, but the postal system is often just as effective and does not require additional Infrastructure. This also makes it harder for meddling mortals to rip up that communication system because by doing so they would be destroying something upon which they themselves depend.

The same goes for most of its mortal pawns. Why summon beings from beyond this world to guard delicate Infrastructure when it can be hidden in a top secret military facility where soldiers shoot intruders on sight? This adds an additional element of horror to a God-Machine chronicle. These are ordinary people who are just going about their business. Interrogating them is futile because they have no idea that they're pawns of the God-Machine, much less what role they play in its current project. Killing these unwitting servants of the God-Machine has Morality consequences, to say nothing of the legal repercussions. Besides, it's amazing how easily the police find damning evidence against those who kill the mortals whom the God-Machine was using to complete one of its projects.

Occult Matrix and Output

The God-Machine doesn't spend all this time creating increasingly complex layers of Infrastructure without reason. The goal of Infrastructure is to bring the right materials to

the right place at the right time and arrange or move them in the right way to achieve an outcome. The structure that generates the result is the occult matrix.

An occult matrix exploits a tiny exception in the laws of physics as humans understand them. The degree of precision the God-Machine must maintain in order to make use of an occult matrix makes rocket science seem forgiving of errors. Oftentimes if the God-Machine's timing or placement is slightly off, the occult matrix fails. Although it is conceivable that it instead does something the God-Machine didn't intend, in almost every case a failed occult matrix does nothing at all.

This is one reason why the God-Machine takes so many steps to avoid attention. If a coterie of snooping vampires shows up at the critical moment and disrupts the matrix, the God-Machine has wasted all the effort it put into carefully arranging matters in the first place. What's more, it usually can't make a second attempt because timing was just as important to the matrix as the placement of materials.

A successfully formed occult matrix generates an Output. Usually this involves bringing an angel into the world. The God-Machine can summon powerful (and lesser) entities from other dimensions, open portals to distant times and worlds, and do any number of other things even the most powerful supernatural creatures on Earth would regard as impossible. Perhaps they share a common origin or purpose, or perhaps something else binds them, but the angels appear to be unfailingly loyal to the God-Machine. This is probably the reason it prefers to use them in its projects. Angel or otherwise, the God-Machine nearly always uses the Output of one occult matrix in the Infrastructure of another project. Every Output makes a more complex Infrastructure possible: the more complex the Infrastructure, the more powerful the Output of its occult matrix.

For example, the goal of one of the God-Machine's projects is to bring a particular kind of angel into the world. That is the project's intended Output. To accomplish that, six people must be simultaneously and ritually murdered at the foot of each of six identical obelisks. This combination of conditions is the occult matrix required to generate the Output. Obelisks don't build themselves, however, so the God-Machine must first create Infrastructure to bring about those conditions.

Logistical Infrastructure will factor heavily, as it usually does. The God-Machine must acquire the land, collect the materials, and construct the obelisks — not to mention organize the sacrifices. This will require it to work through intermediaries. Servants with money or influence bankroll the project or blackmail local governments into doing so. Pawns haul materials and build the obelisks according to the God-Machine's specifications. Cultists kill or die for the object of their devotion.

The God-Machine prefers to be subtle. It doesn't want anything disrupting the delicate occult matrix. If it simply builds six mysterious stone edifices in a handful of small towns, some occult investigator out there will certainly notice. Even if it builds them out in some wilderness where no one ever goes, the necessary movement of people and materials will still leave a trail. Someone might get close enough to interfere. This is where Concealment Infrastructure comes in.

In spite of its patience, the God-Machine cannot erase all traces of its projects. It can camouflage them, however. It hides one obelisk in the lobby of a newly constructed luxury hotel. It instructs a wealthy resident to donate land to the city as a park, creating an excuse to erect an obelisk there under the pretense of being some kind of war monument. A magical illusion hides the third from view. The spire of a local church mysteriously collapses and the fourth obelisk hides within its replacement. Suddenly, instead of six painfully obvious mysterious obelisks, the God-Machine has four carefully hidden obelisks and two obvious ones that do not suggest the full pattern.

The God-Machine also deploys Defense Infrastructure around each of the obelisks, especially the two visible ones. A gang of mechanical teenagers prowls the park by night and park security polices it by day. The new assistant pastor of the church is not human. The cult that will perform the sacrifice at one obelisk will not allow any outsider near it. Each cult, each group of servants knows only about the obelisk it serves. They have no knowledge that the God-Machine has carefully coordinated the rituals they will perform.

Once the occult matrix is achieved, the angel arrives to carry out the God-Machine's will. The God-Machine probably has no immediate need to bring more such angels, so it has no further use for the six obelisks. At this point it sends in scrubbing Infrastructure. If it does not foresee ever using the obelisks again, these scrubbers destroy the obelisks, eliminate witnesses, and reassign the God-Machine's servants to new projects. If it calculates a future use for the obelisks, the scrubbers leave them in place but eliminate those who know about the sacrifices to prevent any investigators from learning about the obelisks' function in the occult matrix.

Linchpin

Mortal and supernatural infrastructure alike has weak points that can be attacked to shut the whole thing down. A house has lights, internet access, air conditioning, and every other modern convenience, but cut just one wire that leads to the electrical grid, and all that stops working. The Infrastructure of each of the God-Machine's projects also has vulnerabilities called Linchpins.

A linchpin is the little pin that prevents the wheel from sliding off the axle or, more generally, something that holds everything together: crucial, but vulnerable. Likewise, a Linchpin is a point in the God-Machine's Infrastructure that is necessary but the weakest point in some way. It may be a spot where the gears are poorly hidden or loosely guarded, a particularly exacting occult matrix that can easily be disrupted, or Infrastructure that requires constant maintenance or input.

- **Suspicious Front:** The front the God-Machine uses to conceal its project is particularly flimsy. For example, a gas station near a lonely highway hasn't updated its prices in many years, such that it has the cheapest gasoline this side of 1990, all the newspapers and magazines in the convenience store are twenty years old, and the snack food has long since expired. The average passerby may take advantage of the

cheap fill-up without noticing the low rumble in the ground below, but chances are he won't come that way again. Someone looking for signs of God-Machine Infrastructure, however, is more likely to investigate further.

- **Unfaithful Servant:** Someone working on one the God-Machine's projects turns traitor or just shoots off his mouth at the wrong time. This living piece of Infrastructure probably doesn't know a tenth part of what he thinks he does, but he knows enough to jeopardize the completion of the occult matrix.

- **Lazy Scrubbers:** The creatures the God-Machine sends to scrub a piece of obsolete Infrastructure do a half-assed job or get interrupted in the middle of their work, and they leave behind some clue to the truth that investigators may discover. This may include hints about the purpose of the angel summoned by the scrubbed Infrastructure — maybe even enough for someone to stop it.

- **Mortal Politics:** The God-Machine has subverted a politician's pork project in order to construct a massive stone edifice. Officially, this is a war monument, but it's actually the focal point of an occult matrix that is the goal of the God-Machine's project. If funding for the construction were to be suddenly cut off, however, the God-Machine would either have to find some other way to finish the project or give it up for lost.

- **Communications Disruption:** The God-Machine has set up a communications hub in a post office in Oregon. Its gears type thousands of letters per week and mail them to most of the God-Machine's mortal pawns on the West Coast. These letters contain instructions to coordinate activity on dozens of the God-Machine's projects. None of the postal employees know the gears are there, but someone who intercepts enough of these communiques could notice that all the envelopes are coming from the same origin city. Stop those letters, and many of the God-Machine's projects could collapse.

- **The Man at the Top:** The God-Machine appoints an angel to take charge of a project disguised as a corporation. The company's CEO never gives press conferences in person and strictly forbids any cameras on the same floor as his office. On those occasions when he leaves his office, all security cameras in his path are turned off. Why? Because while the angel can hide its nature from the human eye, it looks like an angel in any photography.

- **Breeding Project:** The God-Machine intends for a particular boy to fall in love with a certain girl because it projects that their offspring will have a trait it needs for a future project. Coincidences abound to drive the pair together, and it is probably only a matter of time. Of course, if one of them were to die or be kidnapped or simply fall in love with someone else, the God-Machine's project will fail.

- **The Occupation:** A large group of seemingly invulnerable monsters occupies a small town and imprisons its entire population. Even an investigator ten miles away can tell that something is definitely going on down there just by looking through a pair of binoculars — circles of standing stones, daily human sacrifices, and more chilling sights. Rescue attempts seem hopeless. The creatures are too tough to fight and not quite stupid enough to trick. However, they are incredibly vulnerable to a commonly available substance. Can enough of it be brought into play to defeat these monsters before the God-Machine brings in reinforcements?

- **Seraphim:** Once brought forth by an occult matrix, most angels have ways to stay in this world until the God-Machine no longer needs them. The angel directing the God-Machine's current project is not most angels. Its incredible power makes a direct confrontation suicidal, and the Infrastructure it is building has no obvious Linchpin. However, if someone were to prevent the God-Machine's cultists making the sacrifices that fuel the angel's continued presence, it would be ripped from our world and banished to the place from whence it came.

- **If You Can't Beat Them:** The God-Machine is used to having human worshipers, and it can always find some use for these cultists. The cultists themselves are not always very good at screening new members for signs that, say, a postulant intends to infiltrate the cult in order to investigate the God-Machine or thwart its designs. Part of this is the natural human desire to win others over to one's ideals. Part of it is the knowledge that the God-Machine quite often devours cultists in the course of its projects, and those who bring in fresh meat to fuel its designs are significantly less likely to end up being put through the grinder themselves. The God-Machine doesn't reward the loyalty of its tools, per se, but it recognizes the difference between a hammer and a nail.

Striking a Linchpin successfully should always carry some reward. Greater understanding of the God-Machine's designs is the most likely one, but not the sole option. Investigators might even thwart one of the God-Machine's projects, although this sort of victory almost always simply forces it to find another way to achieve the Output of the project. Keep in mind here that "reward" doesn't mean "freedom from consequences." Those who throw rocks at a hornet's nest might be rewarded with the satisfaction of knocking it off the tree branch, but they'd better be ready to run like hell when those angry hornets boil out. Studying the God-Machine too closely attracts its attention — thwarting it, even more so. As it tends to express this by silencing those who disturb its projects, every attack on the God-Machine's Infrastructure is an increasingly dangerous proposal. This isn't because the God-Machine is vengeful, mind you. Humans are practically beneath its notice, such that it considers mortal disruption of a project a mere environmental hazard — the way a home-builder may regard an unusually rainy year as an expensive but otherwise unavoidable risk of doing business. That doesn't mean it won't take steps to remove hazards or inconveniences as necessary

The God-Machine doesn't typically respond to threats quickly. Its servants, angelic or otherwise, certainly can, of course; still, it seldom summons a hurricane where a convenient car accident will achieve the same results. Presented with a coordinated assault on its projects from many different angles in rapid succession, the God-Machine might become desperate. It might begin to make mistakes. In its haste to crush this unexpected rebellion it might finally tip its hand and reveal its true purpose.

Unfortunately, that's not usually the way these kinds of tales end.

Free Will

It may be tempting as a Storyteller to fall into the trap of having the God-Machine thwart the characters at every turn or otherwise render their victories ultimately meaningless. To a certain extent, this is in keeping with the themes of the chronicle. The God-Machine is an incomprehensibly huge antagonist. The actions of humans have virtually no effect on it and it should feel that way. Save this town from being devoured by supernatural ants, and the God-Machine simply chooses another town in another country to turn into magical ant food. There's nothing the characters can do to stop that.

Maybe a major victory over the God-Machine must wait until late in the chronicle, but that doesn't mean the characters achieve nothing until they are powerful enough to pack the gears the God-Machine has hidden beneath the Great Sphinx with explosives and set off the charges. They might not wrestle angels and win, at first, but they can save *this* town from sinking into the earth, drive out the agents of the God-Machine in *this* city council, or stop *this* teacher from being falsely accused of sexually abusing his students. And if they do, the God-Machine will take its project elsewhere and leave the people the players' characters saved in peace.

As they tally up these little victories, the characters are learning more. They start seeing the gears. They have a better understanding of what the God-Machine's Infrastructure looks like. They become more effective at identifying and exploiting Linchpins. They're inching closer and closer to the truth about the God-Machine, whatever it might be. When the time comes to bring the chronicle to its final climax, they'll hopefully be ready for it — or at least as ready as anyone can be who means to fight a god.

18th June, 2012

Dear Frances,

It seems so terribly old-fashioned to write letters. Certainly, it's been years since I wrote one. Still, if you want a letter, a letter you'll get.

So that thing you asked me about. Yes, I have managed to find something relevant. Sorry it's taken so long — we can't all live lives of leisure.

So. Here it is: I managed to obtain a copy of a book called Golden Truths, by one Myles de Selby. It's a paperback copy from the 70s, judging by its cover, a cheap mass-market tome of the sort that they used to churn out back then, although the copyright page says the book was first published in 1937. Nothing about the author. Internet searches get nothing on the book and the ISBN doesn't show up anywhere, which is unusual but not unheard of. I can't find any record of the first edition anywhere, save for that one copyright notice.

Anyway, de Selby reckons that the world is essentially logical, as if run by a huge machine. If you know how, you can monkey with the way that the machine works, the better to make things better in your life, so you can cheat to make yourself rich, successful and sexually potent, which is, I suppose, the goal of pretty every other book of popular magic ever written, except that about half way in you realise that he's not being metaphorical — he really does believe that the world is run by a machine. He describes service hatches and access points, places where you can go down into the workings of the machine. Later in the book, in the plates in the middle, he's got what purport to be actual schematic diagrams of parts of the machine and descriptions of entries, and by "entries" I mean literal doorways, into the workings of the machine.

I can't imagine anyone taking it seriously. Which is why, I suppose, it sank without trace. Or perhaps it sank without trace because someone did take it seriously.

I'll do some more digging.

All the best,

Stephen

Wilson was getting TIRED of the SCREAMS. Most times they didn't bother him, but TONIGHT the CONSTANT RACKET was giving him a headache. He twirled the cap off a bottle of aspirin and grimly chewed up three tablets, washing the grit down with a swig of coffee. He lit a cigarette, breathed in, exhaled, and watched as the smoke curled toward the monitors surrounding him.

He leaned back in his swivel chair, putting his feet up on the CONTROL console, and looked around. The room probably held 100 screens. Probably. He'd started counting them once, but had gotten BORED around 58. Each monitor had a name taped to it, and each name was followed by a symbol. Wilson had no idea what the symbols meant and was pretty sure HE DIDN'T WANT TO KNOW.

Tonight it was Jayla A. that was making all the NOISE. He took a look at her screen and sighed. The girl on the monitor MIGHT have been pretty once, if a little too thin for his tastes. By the stubble on her shaved head, she might have been blonde. Blondes were alright by him, but so were brunettes and redheads. The STRAIGHT-JACKET that embraced her like an overzealous LOVER was too bulky to give away any hints about her chest, and the utility smock worn by all the…*patients* was as formless and ILL-fitting as a sack.

The expression on Jayla A.'s face didn't help much, either. Her eyes were wide and staring at HORRORS only she could see. Her mouth was so DISTENDED by her shrieks he wondered if she was in danger of DISLOCATING her jaw. Wilson eyed the screen for another second as the girl continued to wail, then thumbed the microphone button for her room.

"HEY, LADY. HOW ABOUT YOU SHUT THE HELL UP?"

For a wonder, the girl quieted. She turned her GAZE toward the camera in her room and smiled, revealing rows of DISQUIETINGLY white teeth. Jayla A. opened her mouth again, wider, if that was even possible, but, instead of screams, the HISS OF RADIO STATIC squealed out from between her lips.

Wilson paled and immediately slammed his fist down on a large, red button. The overhead lights started to flicker as the generators cycled up. The sounds coming from Jayla A.'s mouth began to clarify, like an unknown operator was tuning in to a new FREQUENCY. He could almost begin to make out WORDS AMONGST THE STATIC, and watched in horror as the walls of her room began to ripple, as if someone had tossed a pebble into a still pond.

The first imprints of what he sincerely hoped weren't hands had begun to push at the thinning REALITY of the walls before the generators hit full power and bright, jagged lines of electricity danced in Jayla A.'s room. Her body spasmed as the current flowed through her, lightning crackling over her skin. The sounds coming from her mouth were cut off, and the walls returned to the NORMAL grey of concrete as the girl was shocked into unconsciousness.

Wilson wiped sweat from his forehead and shakily lit another cigarette.

Chapter One: Building the God-Machine Chronicle

Telling a good story is a lot of work. It's fun work, to be sure, but it still takes time and dedication. This holds true whether you have taken the role of Storyteller and must present a new world for the players to explore, or whether you are a player fleshing out the final details of a new character. This chapter aims to make all that work easier, by providing suggestions and structure for creating characters, stories and setting for God-Machine chronicles.

Note that the **World of Darkness Rulebook** contains all the necessary rules for creating characters and running a game (with additional information available in the various supernatural game lines and sourcebooks, of course). This chapter delves into the process of creating the framework specifically for a God-Machine Chronicle.

Before we discuss the God-Machine and what sorts of stories your troupe can tell with it, we need to discuss the concept of tiers.

Into this wild-beast tangle these men had been born without their consent, they had taken part in it because they could not help it; that they were in jail was no disgrace to them, for the game had never been fair, the dice were loaded.

–Upton Sinclair,
The Jungle

The Tiers

No matter the medium, every story has a scope that provides boundaries and context for that story. You wouldn't expect a film set in a small town to suddenly explode into a globe-hopping extravaganza. The concept of tiers provides this element in World of Darkness chronicles.

By now, World of Darkness players might be familiar with the idea of using different tiers as a way to set expectations for the direction of a chronicle. For those unfamiliar with them, tiers were introduced in **Hunter: The Vigil** but the concept is not unique to that game. Tiers are just another tool for building a chronicle. Setting a chronicle at a certain tier gives players an idea of what to expect. It's also possible for a chronicle to begin at one tier and slide up or down to end up at a different tier.

The four tiers are local, regional, global and cosmic.

Local

Games set in the local tier are narrow in scope, but not shallow in depth. These sorts of games are generally set in a limited location, involve normal folks, and have consequences that are more important to the individual than the masses. As an example, the Wellington School (p. 77) educates children with behavioral difficulties. The reason for these troubled children is actually the *absence* of the God-Machine's influence. What might the God-Machine inflict upon these children to resolve such a problem?

Ghost stories are a good example of a local story. Typically, a small group of characters is trapped in a single location. Over the course of the story they slowly discover the secrets behind the haunting, which may or may not include ideas about how to stop the marauding specter. The backstory about how the ghost came to be provides a glimpse into the greater reality of the universe without drawing the characters completely into that reality.

You've probably seen movies that could be described as belonging to the local tier. *Attack the Block* is about what happens when aliens invade a British council estate

(i.e. housing project). The stakes involved could be described as global (alien invasion), but the scale of the movie is local. The kids who fight off aliens aren't worried about what might happen if aliens take over the world. They're only concerned with what the aliens could do to them and their neighborhood.

For a God-Machine Chronicle, a local tier means local consequences. The backstory of the game can be as in-depth as you like, including speculations about the cosmic possibilities of the God-Machine, but keep the end closer to home. This can be accomplished in a number of different ways.

One method to keep the scale local is to only include the repercussions of the God-Machine. Strip mining exposes a previously unknown cave to the light of day. Work is halted as baffled geologists investigate. Dark, winged horrors rise up from the depths of the cave and proceed to butcher anyone they can catch. They gnaw on machinery, they demolish equipment. It's up to the survivors of the initial attack to flee or fight. Whether they live or die, the problem doesn't extend beyond the local.

In this case, for whatever reason, the God-Machine has decided the strip mine must be shut down. By opening the cave mouth, the chance to stop the attack has already passed and people must deal with the repercussions. This leaves the God-Machine in the background and uses its minions as the obvious threat. At most, the bottom of the cave might reveal some connection to the God-Machine, like an ancient, rusting portal of unknown origin or a pool of absolute darkness that occasionally shimmers with static like a TV on the fritz.

Another method to keep it local is to use a single agent of the God-Machine as the basis for the story. This could be an angelic visitation, a group of cultists or a child who suddenly manifests the ability to read minds. For those with a more literary bent, the book *Needful Things* by Stephen King is one example of how a single agent of chaos can cause serious damage to a town. H.P. Lovecraft's *The Colour Out of Space* is another solid example of a story within the local tier with connections to a broader theme. This method gives the characters a chance to oppose or support the will of the God-Machine as they see fit. It presents a problem with potential solutions. The results of their decision should have a lasting effect on the local scene. For example, a group of doomsday cultists sets up shop in town. They begin slowly converting everyone to their cause, with the goal of a mass suicide to appease the God-Machine (not that the God-Machine needs or wants appeasement). This is a local problem that can be fought, and results in local consequences.

One last possible method for keeping a story local draws on the sort of circumstances typical of the aforementioned ghost story. The characters are trapped someplace by the workings of the God-Machine. Maybe the God-Machine twists reality to draw the characters into a house of doors. It tests them like a scientist tests a mouse in a maze, looking for the one that can open the doors in just the right sequence to escape.

In this case the characters are highly likely to learn at least a little about the God-Machine during their efforts to escape or survive. This method generally works best for a one-shot game or as the kickoff for a chronicle. In the example above, the God-Machine will likely have future plans for whichever character figures out the doors.

Local Organization: The Cult of the Wheel

Words have power. Words can echo through the world and come to the ears of people that can only dimly recognize the power of the words spoken. Such is the case with the Cult of the Wheel. They heard the words of the Pain Prophet echoing along the vaults of the sky, trembling down the frame of the God-Machine, but they heard it in the same way children might receive a message at the tail end of the telephone game.

Some parts of Marco Singe's **(World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 27) message were garbled while others came through in terrible clarity, but the one phrase that vibrated with meaning for the Cult was simple enough. *What has fallen may rise again*. The few that heard the message deciphered it as a metaphor for the Great Wheel, the Perfect Circle. They registered the meaning as one of the great axioms of this world. *What comes around goes around*.

The Cult of the Wheel exists to bring change, to push the Great Wheel. They understand that all great things have small beginnings and devoutly believe in the power of the Perfect Circle, the force others might ignorantly refer to as karma. The members of the Cult smile tolerantly at the notion the Perfect Circle can be defined as simply as the balance between actions that are subjectively good and actions that are subjectively evil. Who can declare any act is ultimately good or evil when they can't see the invisible hand of the God-Machine at work? Humans understand as little about what truly motivates them as an ant might comprehend the foot that crushes it from above.

Good and evil are impossible. Order, however, is possible. Order and chaos circle each other on the Great Wheel; it is humanity's ability to impose order upon chaos that has lifted it above the other animals of the world. The Cult of the Wheel believes the God-Machine strives toward order above all things and that humans are its misguided tools. Each time man imposes order on his surroundings, the God-Machine blesses his efforts. The blessings of the God-Machine are what bring happiness, comfort, and all else humans ignorantly define as good.

The true number of members (or Wrights) of the Cult of the Wheel is unknown, even by the Cult. Wrights leave active Spokes and form new ones on a regular basis. Each Spoke puts down roots in a location where chaos has begun to overwhelm order. This includes areas suffering from urban blight, severe economic depression, ecological disaster and violent conflict.

Communication between Spokes is common, but only to share news, rather than acting as part of a coordinating effort. Capable Wrights travel the world, acting as explorer-missionaries, seeking out the workings of the God-Machine that exist wholly in this reality. They pass on locations they've discovered where the God-Machine can been seen and touched. New Spokes settle at these locations and begin the work of bringing order.

Members of the Cult of the Wheel are generally well-educated and frequently have some sort of background in charitable work. Many are religious as well. These Wrights don't see any conflict between their beliefs. They are certain

it's no accident that angels appear so often in religious texts. After all, angels are the first servants of the God-Machine. The leader of each Spoke puts aside his or her given name and takes up a new name, complete with the surname Hub, to show sublimation of the self and devotion to the Great Wheel.

No two Spokes use the same methodology to bring order from chaos, preferring to tailor their solutions to the problem at hand and the capabilities of their Wrights. One group might decide to combat an oil spill by spearheading a wider community effort at clean-up, while another might decide to engineer the downfall (or outright destruction) of the companies responsible for the disaster. The Cult isn't above using violence to accomplish its goals. Sometimes the best solution to a problem is to simply to crush it.

The Cult of the Wheel believes it can influence the God-Machine and thus the Great Wheel through the use of mathematical sorcery. The equations drawn out in synthetic lubricants and surrounded by circles of iron filings would baffle most mathematicians, but the Hub of each Spoke claims to draw inspiration from the God-Machine itself. Occasionally, it does seem as though these efforts have tangible results. The Spoke in Detroit is certain it averted a catastrophe by summoning an angel to the city.

Regional

The regional tier raises the stakes by increasing the scope of consequences. Instead of a single problem with local consequences, the God-Machine includes entire cities, nations, or even continents in its plans. The regional tier expands the scope of a chronicle exponentially. Solutions lead to new problems, whole battalions of the God-Machine's agents can be involved, and the shadowy workings of the hidden world become more exposed.

At this tier, the theme and mood of a God-Machine Chronicle become more apparent. Every organization has a hidden master (or masters) and the feeling of being a cog in a machine, of straining against an unknown and unknowable system, should begin to weigh on the characters.

The press jokes that a certain congressional candidate is robotic, but the characters aren't laughing. Lacking the perfect instrument for its designs, the God-Machine *made* a man from clockwork parts and vat grown flesh. A seat in Congress is just the first step to a presidential bid. How does the troupe fight that without one of them becoming the next Lee Harvey Oswald?

If we look to the big screen for examples of the regional tier, *28 Days Later* comes to mind. The rage virus sweeps across England, turning the majority of its citizens into vicious, zombie-like predators. Because England is an island, the disease cannot make the jump across the Channel and infect Europe as well. The movie is about people trying to survive the regional problem of a deadly disease. The virus has the potential to shift up the scale to become a global problem, but that isn't what the movie is about.

Chronicles set in the regional tier frequently seem like they have the potential to get out of control. Even if the survival of the characters isn't the highest stake, using the background threat of "Oh shit. The whole world could end up like this!" isn't bad form.

As an example, MIT creates a new generation of nanobots that get out of the laboratory and begin to reproduce. In their search for energy, they latch onto anything that produces electricity, bringing down the grid before shorting out. Why? It's all because the God-Machine requires an hour of total darkness during a solar eclipse. The background threat is what happens if a couple nanobots make it to new sources of power and begin spreading across the planet.

The shadow government from the *X-Files* is a fantastic example of the hidden system. No one really had any idea who they were actually reporting to, even the people at the top. It isn't hard to come up with ideas for similar organizations in the World of Darkness. In this age of smartphones, nearly everyone has a camera and a digital video recording device in their pocket. How is it that no one has managed to capture pictures or video that blows the roof off the supernatural world?

In the U.S., the group responsible for suppressing this kind of proof is a militant hacker organization given power and (they believe) authority by an angel. They developed malware that scours the Internet, deletes files from mobile devices and purges computers. People that keep hard copies are hunted down using tracing algorithms and are either "encouraged" to recant or simply vanish. The hackers believe they are in charge, but what if someone else is actually pulling their strings? This is the regional hidden system at work.

Actual gear-and-grease appearances of the God-Machine in the regional tier are much more overt than at the local tier. The U.S. contains thousands of ghost towns. These include places that were big during a mining boom or company towns that were abandoned when the jobs went overseas. What if these towns were really constructed to hide the mechanical guts of the God-Machine? Every basement is filled with crackling conduits, clanging pipes or whirring belts. When enough towns have been completed, the long dormant fault lines in the Midwest will begin to move, dumping out the Great Lakes and creating a water shortage beyond the worst dreams of environmentalists.

Regional chronicles can also take the form of the road trip. If symptoms of the God-Machine's meddling crop up all over the country, characters will need to travel in order to take the fight to the God-Machine. Road tripping can also act as one method of trying to keep ahead of the God-Machine's agents. **World of Darkness: Midnight Roads** goes into the details of this sort of chronicle, but if your troupe doesn't have access to the book, plenty of inspiration can be found in popular media (such as the television show *Supernatural).*

Regional Organization: The Black Tide

Theories abound about the Bermuda Triangle. People claim disappearances that happen there are the results of everything from alien abduction to magnetic anomalies. One group that believes they know exactly what is going on is the Black Tide.

The Black Tide is a secret occult organization (they disdain the word "cult") that is dedicated to the study and exploitation of the Bermuda Triangle. The founder of the Black Tide was a man named Sava Vaselko, captain of the trading vessel *Bagrem*. Vaselko plied the waves of the Caribbean during the mid-1800s and supplemented his income with a bit of casual piracy.

During a trip to Florida during the American Civil War, Vaselko sought to outmaneuver the Union blockade by detouring into the Bermuda Triangle. The night turned foggy and, although he had previously scoffed at rumors about the area, Vaselko's blood went cold when his clock first stopped, then began to run backward. For what seemed like hours, the *Bagrem* floated along in the fog, drifting with the current.

When lights appeared on the horizon, Vaselko pointed his ship directly toward them and ordered his sails rigged to capture every gust of wind. As the *Bagrem* inched toward the lights, the captain could begin to make out a landmass. At last, the wind began to pick up, blowing the fog away and revealing an island shining with illumination.

Great buildings towered into the sky, conforming to no architecture Vaselko had ever seen during his many travels. Strange sigils painted on the sides of the buildings glowed and flashed in every color of the rainbow, but, as the ship drew closer, he couldn't hear a single sound coming from the island. Without warning the *Bagrem* gave a lurch, like it had hit a reef and the air was filled with flames.

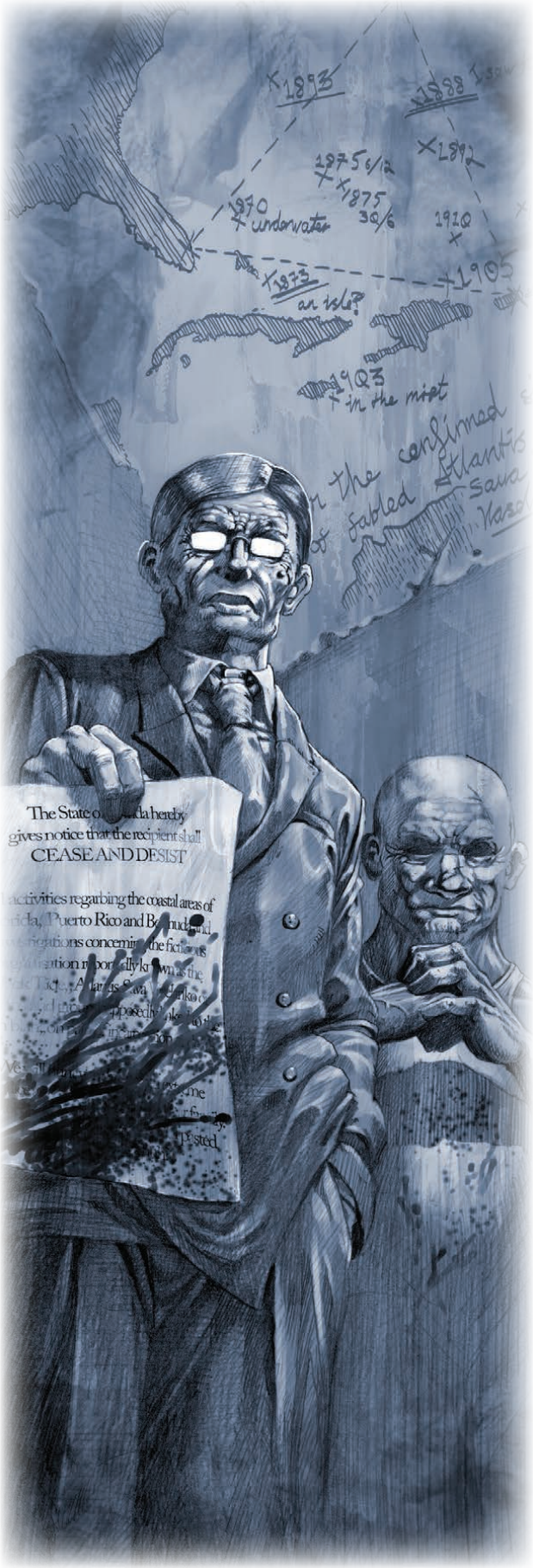
Two more explosions followed and the last thing Vaselko remembered before being tossed into the sea was the sight of his ship sinking fast, crew scattered about in the water. Vaselko awoke two months later in a sanitarium in Cuba. He had been found clinging to a piece of the mast just offshore. No other sign of his ship or crew were ever found.

Although he was never certain of what had happened to his ship, Vaselko believed he had witnessed the lost island of Atlantis. The style of architecture he had witnessed matched with many descriptions and paintings of the legendary island. He believed Atlantis never sank, as the stories insisted; rather, it had been placed just out of time with the rest of the world.

As he investigated Triangle lore, Vaselko became certain he detected a trend in disappearances. Times of great bloodshed and death in the area coincided with an increase in reports of missing ships. In the aftermath of hurricanes, these disappearances would be blamed on the storm, but Vaselko thought he knew better. He theorized that whatever was keeping Atlantis hidden out of time might collapse if fed enough death.

Vaselko gathered associates that were equally intrigued by Triangle lore and even more so by the possible riches to be had by claiming Atlantis if it could be forced to reappear. He called the fledging organization the Black Tide, a reference to the wave of death that would precede Atlantis' emergence. In 1870, ignoring the laughter of bureaucrats and clerks, he filed a series of claims to Atlantis with every nation within 20 nautical miles of where he believed it would appear.

The ex-captain was content to wait for the island's appearance, assuming that mankind would fabricate enough



death on its own to collapse the time bubble (as he'd begun to think of it). He was still waiting on his deathbed in 1912. The Black Tide reformed after his death; less patient, they began to pursue means of forcing the bubble to break. These studies eventually wandered into the arcane and it was here the first member heard whispers about the God-Machine.

The Black Tide theorizes that the people of Atlantis found a way to communicate with the God-Machine and it banished them for their hubris. Not even the God-Machine is all-powerful, however, which accounts for mass deaths basically overloading the circuits that keep the island suspended in time. Uncovering even a single truth about the God-Machine would be a treasure beyond anything ever dreamt of by Vaselko.

While the Black Tide isn't nearly magically potent enough to whip up storms of its own, it *can* add momentum to them. They push tropical storms to become hurricanes and hurricanes to become catastrophes. The organization proved Vaselko's Theory in 2005: the island actually reappeared for an entire minute after Katrina rolled through the region.

Other attempts have been made with lesser amounts of success (such as the Gulf oil spill), but the Black Tide is nowhere near to giving up the fight. Members of the organization have begun to whisper about a cataclysmic event orchestrated by the Black Tide that will devastate the entire Caribbean.

Members of the Black Tide come from every strata of society and include powerful politicians, military leaders, wealthy businessmen and, in the tradition of its founder, ship captains. Information about the organization is scarce and its members obey an *omerta*-like code of silence. Anyone attempting to oppose the Black Tide not only face well-armed goons, but a legion of lawyers and political influence.

Global

Chronicles set in the global tier shift focus to include the entire world as the stage. At this level the designs of the God-Machine are world-changing, and the hidden system spans continents. Wars are begun at the behest of angels, the Illuminati pushes its agenda for the New World Order, and the resulting body count enters the realm of mind-numbing statistics. Any victories won are fleeting or, conversely, are so complete that the victors become the new mechanics for the God-Machine.

Television and movies are replete with stories that could be set in the global tier. *The Walking Dead* is one example, as are disaster movies such as *2012*. Either one could be the result of the God-Machine breaking down or just deciding humans have gotten out of line one time to many. *The Call of Cthulhu* is a global tier story as are many of the James Bond movies. If the stakes leave your troupe wondering if humanity will (or should) survive, you're hitting the right tone. If a conspiracy seems so vast that only the most paranoid of conspiracy theorists would give it credence, you're on the right track.

At this tier, the possible consequences of a problem cease to be background and ride right up in your face. Let's say vampires decide to end the age-old practice of keeping their existence secret. Maybe they've had one too many media slip-ups, or maybe staying in the coffin has become just too damn hard with all the modern technology and CCTV about.

The question that must be answered for this scenario from the point-of-view of a God-Machine chronicle is what do the hidden system and the God-Machine itself think about this situation? Perhaps the God-Machine decides the best solution is to thin the vampiric herd. Remember that the God-Machine prefers to stay under the radar. Instead of just rearranging the Earth so that every vampire gets a serious case of sunburn, try to envision a more subtle solution. One possibility is to engineer a virus that is moderately harmful to humans and highly contagious, but is fatal to every vampire who contracts it. The human immune system will eventually adapt, leaving humans as carriers and making it much more difficult for vampires to feed.

Many Storytellers have an aversion to world-changing events when it comes to running games in the World of Darkness. One of the appealing things about the World of Darkness is how closely it resembles our world, so adding out-in-the-open supernatural elements, apocalyptic events, or hard sci-fi changes the setting a great deal. In a global tier story, it can be tempting to go all-out, change the world, and revel in the chaos of altering *everything*. Of course, not every world-changing event needs to be quite that spectacular. Ideas can change the world just as readily as a tentacled horror the size of the Eiffel Tower. Anyone who remembers 9/11 should be able to testify to the efficacy of a single event changing how people think. In the years following the attacks, security was beefed up to almost paranoid levels at airports. Not everyone is onboard with the new measures, but enough people *are* onboard to let what would have previously been loudly denounced as a grotesque violation of civil liberties become something to merely grumble about.

An important thing to keep in mind when running chronicles set at the global tier is to make whatever is going on personally important to the characters. If World War III

Best of Both Worlds

One common theme in the Tales of the God-Machine, as you'll see in Chapter Two, is time travel, causality, and sweeping cosmic change. One of the advantages to including elements like these in your chronicle is that it allows your troupe to change everything, but still go home to the reality they know and love afterwards. Pulling this off so that it doesn't feel cheap or forced is difficult but not impossible. It's just a matter of making sure that the characters have something to accomplish — maybe putting the world back the way it was *is* their goal, and when it's all over, the hard choice they must make is whether to keep their memories of what almost happened.

suddenly kicked off but remained mainly outside the bounds of mainland USA (as was the case with World War II), the Storyteller would need to provide American characters with up close and personal examples of how the war was affecting them even if the characters weren't directly involved. Family and friends being drafted to serve is an obvious example, but fuel rationing or material shortages could also play a part.

Not every chapter in a global tier chronicle has to take place on the world stage. Storytellers are encouraged to drop back down to local stories to bring home the point of global events. As an example, a geo-engineering project suddenly goes bad. Aluminum oxide particles are released into the troposphere to reduce the amounts of radiation bombarding the planet. Rather than working as designed, however, the particles react in a manner scientists can't explain and plunge the entire world into darkness.

The characters are busy running around the globe, chasing down the hidden system responsible for eternal night, when they hear the news that riots have broken out in their home town. Violent gangs of looters are threatening the lives of Contacts, Allies, friends and family. Fixing the problem of a world shrouded in darkness remains the main focus of the chronicle, but the immediate *personal* problem becomes saving people important to the characters. This type of local scenario can bring some context to a global chronicle and make the whole story seem more visceral.

Global Organization: The Gnomes of Zürich

In the days of myth and legend, the gods were all-powerful; then Prometheus stole fire from the gods and gave it to mortals. The first mortals touched by the fire of the gods became mystics and wizards, shaman and priests, channeling the source of creation toward their own selfish ends. Eventually the stolen fire ebbed to mere cinders. The greedy fire-touched mortals sought to ascend to the heavens to supplant the gods and warm themselves by the divine fire for all eternity.

As in most stories of unbridled hubris, this story ended badly. The God-Machine destroyed their civilization, and over time, the remaining fire-touched retreated to the corners of the world, bickering with each other and licking their wounds. The survivors began to plot anew, scheming to discover a new means of achieving power. They denied the God-Machine and struck all memory of it from the minds of men, shrouding it in sorcery. It was their foolish belief that a thing forgotten would lose all power. In time, they even began to believe the lie themselves and banished the God-Machine from their thoughts. They created new myths to explain the fall of the ziggurat, passing down the story to their apprentices.

With no hope of reaching the divine fire, the fire-touched settled on amassing earthly power and dominion over mankind. They formed cabals and alliances and battled each other in the hidden recesses of the world. At some point one of their number, a man named Zür, recognized the growing influence commerce held over mortals. He realized power over his rivals could be had for as little as a handful of gold. Amassing wealth was a simple task for one that had challenged gods. Within a century, Zür controlled an empire from his home under the mountains.

Zür gathered apprentices to him to act as proxies in his battles with the other fire-touched, forming a large cabal to serve his needs. Legions of mortals flocked to Zür's banner: some knowingly, most with no idea who their true master was. Others of the fire-touched, those who had survived his attacks and potential rivals, learned from his example and began to build their own financial empires to oppose him. Now wars were fought as often on paper as on the battlefield, with casualties including the economic welfare of entire nations.

The battles continue to this day. People fight petty wars, rig elections, and assassinate influential pawns, all of it fueled by increasingly large amounts of capital. The closest mortals have come to seeing the truth was when a British politician made a joke about Swiss bankers, calling them the "Gnomes of Zürich." The only thing that has kept Zür from owning the world is his ongoing rivalry with the remaining fire-touched.

Cosmic

Stories set in the cosmic tier are frequently the endgames of chronicles. While it is certainly possible to set an entire chronicle at the cosmic level, the troupe runs the risk of losing touch with reality. This tier allows players to transcend global conspiracies to become part of the hidden system. It lets troupes make serious alterations to the plans of the God-Machine or possibly rewrite its programming. Players will stand toe-to-toe with angels, demons and the things that exist outside our reality.

So how the hell does a Storyteller run a cosmic chronicle? One way to get a grasp on the cosmic is to look to popular media for inspiration. *2001: A Space Odyssey* is a cosmic tier story where the main character transcends human limitations to become the Star Child. If you consider the obelisk to be an agent of the God-Machine, you get a cosmic tier story. The series of stories by H.P. Lovecraft referred to as the Dream Cycle is another example. The real world is only tangentially important to the story, but the effects of the story can have real world consequences.

In more of a pulp vein, *Stargate SG1* can be viewed as a cosmic tier story. The stakes involved are important for the future of Earth but also go far, far beyond what happens to a single planet. If *Fringe* added a couple more alternate worlds, it would also qualify. Any number of movies that focus on time travel could work for the cosmic tier, particularly those in which multiple parties are working simultaneously to change or maintain the past.

Even more so than the global tier, chronicles that end in or are set in the cosmic tier should expect to see massive changes to the fictional world your troupe has created. Hacking the God-Machine might result in continents vanishing, divergent timelines, or even the entire works just freezing up. An antagonist who develops a taste for the flesh of angels might not only gain power, but might also keep that same

power from being rerouted to other dimensions where the angel was next scheduled to appear.

Stories set in the cosmic tier don't automatically equal science fiction, either. In the World of Darkness, magic is frequently more potent than science. It's entirely possible that the God-Machine is a magical construct rather than an actual machine and has promoted the use of science to blind humans to the reality around them. The entirety of creation could also be faith-based, if that tickles your fancy. Pick a god (plenty to choose from) and declare that it, he, or she is the one that created the God-Machine. Maybe the deists were right after all.

Though it isn't mandatory, picking a "truth" behind the God-Machine can be part of the cosmic tier experience. This is what is commonly referred to as "Learning That Which Mankind What Not Meant To Know." Maybe religion is the key and prayers are what keep the God-Machine turning. All religions were created by the God-Machine to ensure a steady supply of fuel. Miracles and angels are basically just a show put on by the God-Machine to ensure compliance. Whatever your troupe's "truth" happens to be, simply having an inkling as to what's really going on can be sanity-destroying (depending on the character).

Cosmic Organization: Mechanists

Assume for every 101 people that see the God-Machine and manage to acquire a piece of it, 100 of them are dispatched by angels or otherwise don't survive the night. That still leaves one person who managed to tinker with the God-Machine and avoid the consequences. Even then, that one person isn't likely to have any idea what just happened. Every so often, though, that one person knows (or learns about) *exactly* what he's done and what he's found. That's when the real trouble begins.

The original Mechanist probably emerged around the time the first complex machine was invented and likely in China. Archaeologists have found evidence of complex machinery in the Middle Kingdom as far back as 2,550 years ago. Early uses for the odds and ends pulled off the God-Machine were fairly limited, right up until people figured out the simplest form of batteries, roughly 600 years later. Even then, the juice provided by these proto-batteries wasn't enough to produce more than a couple sparks.

The first serious issues arose with the advent of modern electronics. For the first time in history, Mechanists began to at least partially understand how the parts they'd stolen from the God-Machine worked. The Mechanists were able to modify, amplify and power the purloined devices to a degree that they started to provide serious opposition to agents of the God-Machine who came to put an end to their meddling. Even so, the threat to the God-Machine remained minimal. Then came the computer.

Modern Mechanists aren't content to simply steal a piece or two of the God-Machine. They still do that, but they've also started fiddling with its programming. The results are less than predictable. A farmer Mechanist has been getting by through controlling the weather around his farm, using a device cobbled together from parts of the God-Machine. He might suddenly decide he can do better. The lackwit attempts to reprogram the section of the God-Machine he found when digging for a new well, using half-remembered coding he learned in high school. He might get rain showers just when he needs them, or he might open a gateway to hell. If the results of Mechanists' meddling remained local, this new attack on the God-Machine might not cause more than a few hiccups. The reality, however, is that every time they tinker with the God-Machine's programming, they risk corrupting entire subsystems, which could eventually destabilize the entire system.

Applied to Mechanists, the term organization is misleading. Most work singly, a few in pairs, and even fewer in groups. It's the net result of their work that places them in a single category. The majority of Mechanists recognize the name, either from some sort of collective *gestalt* or having borrowed it from the angels that hunt for them. Many are just tinkerers, content with having a leg up on their fellows thanks to owning (or controlling) such an advanced piece of technology. A rare few want more, maybe one in a hundred (making the number around one for every billion people).

These Mechanists have delusions of being techno-mages. They want to travel in time, visit distant planets or step between worlds. They actively seek out and exploit any section of the God-Machine they can find, sometimes fighting turf wars against other Mechanists to gain access to a particularly juicy segment. Mechanists with this sort of ambition are highly dangerous, having fought angels and won. All it would take is one Mechanist to plug in the wrong device at the wrong place at the wrong time in an effort to hack the God-Machine's programming and the world — worlds maybe — could pop like a bubble.

Stick Some Gears on It and Call It the God-Machine

Before the troupe gets into the more interesting and creative aspects of the God-Machine Chronicle — making characters, building a setting, and so on — it should consider some practical questions. It's a good idea to make sure everyone has the same expectations about the game and how long it's going to go on. This helps the Storyteller know how much time to spend on "mundane" concerns before introducing the supernatural, as well as system concerns like how lenient to be with Willpower recovery and Beats.

How Many Sessions?

How much time is the troupe willing to invest in this chronicle? If the players are happy with long-running chronicles, the sort that last months or years with semi-regular meetings, then it's not unreasonable to pick one of the chronicle tracks described later in this chapter, do some

setting design for the first Tale, and spend an entire session building characters and their relationships. If, however, the players only want to commit to a few stories — maybe eight to 10 weeks assuming a weekly game — then an entire track might be too ambitious. And, of course, if all the players want is a one-shot game, the troupe will be lucky to get through a single Tale of the God-Machine as written.

With all of that said, few things are as difficult to stomach as a game that's gone on past its "fun" point. If the players aren't having fun, if the setting is played out and folks are bored, then it's time to move on, even if that means cutting a story short. As painful as that can be for a Storyteller who really invests herself in the stories she runs, it's better to have unfinished games than boring ones. As such, when having the discussion about how many sessions the chronicle should last, encourage players to identify the *shortest* game they would agree to and expand it from there.

How Many Characters?

The chronicle tracks beginning on p. 58 often end in wildly different places than they began. While the descriptions offer some suggestions as to how to make the transition between stories using the same group of characters, the nature of the God-Machine Chronicle makes it likely that some characters won't survive to see the final story. Moreover, the transition between some stories (for example, The Hatching and Operation: Bell Jar), is best served by making an entirely new group of characters.

This is, however, a deal-breaker for some players. Building a character and watching his character arc — and game traits — develop can be a lot of fun, and interrupting that to create a new character might not be. Before plan begins, find out from your players where their tastes lie. If even a few players would enjoy playing different characters in different stories, you have a way to bring in new faces, and therefore set the game in a different milieu.

What is the Chronicle Rating?

Personal horror is part of the experience of playing in the World of Darkness, but horror means different things to different people. Further, what horrifies a character can vary sharply from what horrifies a player. It's difficult to know what will upset or offend other people, even those you've known for years. Taboos don't usually come up in casual conversation. It's no fun for either player or Storyteller to stumble upon a plot element that makes people uneasy or worse.

You may have seen suggestions from other sources that include intentionally using known fears of the players to freak them out. This is what one might call "high risk, high reward." Some people enjoy having their metaphorical buttons pushed, but a lot of people don't. What's fun for one might be traumatic for another. In situations like this, it's unquestionably better to err on the side of caution.

Being sensitive to the feelings of other players (or the Storyteller, for that matter) is a good habit. People have more fun in an environment where they feel comfortable. The best method for avoiding potential problems is communication. A player that has been the victim of physical or psychological abuse at the hands of his family isn't likely to enjoy replaying scenes from the past during a game, but they may well not want to discuss the matter with everyone they meet, either. This section exists to create a framework for those conversations that don't require getting into specifics.

Movies and more recently video games come plastered with rating labels that give the potential audience some idea of what to expect. Below you'll find a system of ratings that will probably look familiar to American troupes. We're going to take that system and apply it to World of Darkness games. Keep in mind that the rating system is meant to provide context, not act as a deterrent to story.

G-Rated

Chronicles with a G-rating could be played by children old enough to the plots and maintain focus on the game. They should contain no more than discrete sexual innuendos, little-to-no overt violence, and completely avoid mature themes. Death is allowed, but never in a graphic fashion. Instead, it usually happens "offscreen" in a bloodless fashion, and often with the villain's own actions doing him in. Most animated children's flicks are G-rated (though juvenile humor sometimes pushes them to PG, even if violence doesn't). Consider *Peter Pan* as an example. The film contains plenty of overt threats of violence, but much less actual on-screen images of violent acts.

Applied to a chronicle, terrible things can still happen in a G-rated story. The key to maintaining the G-rating is in the presentation. In place of a graphic description of a corpse, it's enough to say the players have found a dead body. Single gunshot wounds are more acceptable for this rating than severed heads.

PG-Rated

A PG-rated chronicle ups the ante by allowing for more sexual allusions and non-gratuitous violence, as well as touching on more mature themes. Death is more common but shouldn't be handled lightly. If a character dies, it should mean something to the chronicle. *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* is a good example of a PG-rating as applied to World of Darkness games. The death of Cedric Diggory is a turning point for Harry; witnessing the evil of Voldemort's servants firsthand is something of a wakeup call for the audience as well.

Mature themes are appropriate as long as they don't cross over into taboos. Investigative games that include death or serious threat of death fit this rating, as do games where the creatures of the night become a psychological as well as physical menace to the characters or people important to the characters. The characters also have to deal with the lasting effects of violence, inflicted both on them and by them.

R-Rated

Chronicles with an R-rating show horror with a sense of grim reality. Troupes should expect sex and sex-related material to potentially play a role. Graphic violence is allowed

(though not necessarily encouraged), death and madness come in all flavors, and social taboos are explored. The original *Saw* movie is an example of the sort of material that hits just shy of the ceiling for an R-rated chronicle. The death scenes in *Saw* were grotesque and elaborate, but stopped short of full-on torture porn.

An R-rated chronicle would not be appropriate for children and probably shouldn't be considered for teenagers under 18. Monsters that prey on children, on-screen drug abuse (and the results of abuse), torture, domestic violence, cannibalism, mental illness and other such mature subject matter is fair game. As you can see, the R-rating casts a fairly wide net, and it's a good idea to inform your troupe exactly which elements you plan on using (or, better yet, find out which ones *not* to use).

X-Rated

If your troupe wants to play an X-rated chronicle, accept that nothing is out of bounds. Even more so than an R-rating, make sure the *entire* troupe is comfortable with this rating before beginning to play. If the subject matter might upset even one person, turn down the nasty. *Hostel* might have received an R-rating from the MPAA, but it would be considered an X-rated chronicle. In general, any graphic depiction of mature subject matter should warrant an X-rating.

Square Peg, Round Hole

Obviously not every chronicle will fit neatly into one rating. Again, this is where communication comes into play. Storytellers should speak with their players one-on-one, describing the sort of material that will be included. Email is excellent for this sort of discussion. It keeps discussions private and gives people time to think about how comfortable they are with what is coming before deciding whether or not to commit.

Storytellers should feel free to append the ratings with additional descriptions. If she were pitching a crime scene investigation sort of game that will include detailed descriptions of how people died and their innards simply by the nature of the genre, it would be perfectly reasonable to give the chronicle a PG-rating and append it with "*CSI*-level descriptions of cadavers."

Assembly Required

Once you've decided upon the practical bits of the chronicle, it's time to do the creative work. For a God-Machine Chronicle, the first step would be to choose a chronicle track (if you're planning on playing long enough to complete one) or to choose a Tale. For purposes of this section, it doesn't much matter, because the setting and character creation aspects work the same either way.

What makes a God-Machine Chronicle? The straightforward answer is: a chronicle that includes the God-Machine. Fair enough, but what part does it play? How about the hidden system, cogs in the machine? Asking some questions is a good headspace to get into before delving into specifics.

Inspiration

The God-Machine Chronicles Anthology is a good source for getting a grip on the setting. The stories describe how the God-Machine and the hidden system operate and can provide inspiration for Storytellers and players.

How much of the God-Machine will the characters witness firsthand? Have they ever heard the term "God-Machine" (perhaps by interacting with Marco Singe's acolytes)? Are the characters even aware of its existence? If they've never seen it but still know about it, how did they learn about it? Do they have some sort of special significance to the God-Machine? How do the machinations of the God-Machine affect their daily lives?

One of the basic tenets of the God-Machine Chronicle is that victory is fleeting. Unless operating at the global or cosmic tier (see p. 46), Storytellers should consider how to make the players' victories seem meaningful even if they are actually pyrrhic. Will making a dent in the hidden system be enough for the players, or will they want more? As mentioned at the end of the Introduction, it doesn't all have to be doom and gloom; a win is a win, but there should be a sense that something larger still looms over the horizon.

Other than the plethora of examples provided in this chapter, you can also gain some insight for the material by watching movies or reading books that have a dystopian feel. These include *The City of Lost Children*, *Dark City*, *12 Monkeys*, *Brazil*, *Children of Men*, *1984* and any number of books or websites dedicated to conspiracy theories.

Spinning Cogs

Unless you want the God-Machine up front and clanking from the beginning of the chronicle, some attempt at misdirection can make the story more interesting. Begin simple, but with a hook that a) establishes the modern horror setting and genre and b) demands the characters' attention.

Consider the Wake the Dead Tale (p. 86). This tale requires that one of the characters kill someone. As Storyteller, you could leave that decision to the players, allowing one of them to work the incident into her character's backstory, but it might be preferable to know what you're getting into. Maybe you stipulate, then, that one of the characters accidentally runs over and kills a jogger late one night while driving home from work. That is the jumping off point for the story, or the inciting incident.

What the character decides to do after committing vehicular manslaughter can played out as much as you like, depending on the type of story being told. This is misdirection. None of the players are likely to believe a Storyteller would run an entire chronicle based on an accidental death, but most troupes will be happy to play along. It's when the

other dead bodies get up and start interacting with the living that the actual story begins.

At this point the troupe doesn't need to know that the dead have returned to life due to a malfunction in the God-Machine. All they know is that the dead are returning to life. Since these "resurrections" are a direct result of the one character's little traffic accident, it's a good idea to refer back to that incident somehow. Maybe the characters sees her victim when she looks in the mirror, or she sees him hitchhiking as she's driving. He also smells like wet rust and his body is covered with impossibly complex tattoos that weren't there before he died.

How the troupe deals with the dead is the first step of the God-Machine chronicle. The poor people probably have no idea why they aren't dead. They have their own motivations and the "rules" of their return to life aren't consistent. But the characters should be able to gain enough information from them to figure out that a man died who wasn't supposed to, and at that point, the players should know exactly which man they're talking about. What happens after that is a different question and it depends on what the characters do to resolve the situation. Note, though, that an entire story has taken place and the characters don't necessarily know that the God-Machine exists, much less that it is responsible for the dead returning to life.

Into the Machine

At some point during the chronicle, the characters need to come into contact with the God-Machine and recognize that the events causing the strangeness in their lives originate from something far stranger than they thought. This doesn't have to happen during the initial story; the decision should reflect how long of a chronicle the troupe is looking to play.

If, for example, the troupe was only planning on playing through one story, then using the example above (the Wake the Dead Tale), the Storyteller should underscore the strange tattoos on the dead man's body or that appear in visions of him. These tattoos match up with the marks of death on the bodies of all of the returned dead. Put together, they form an alphabet — a machine language that the characters can decipher. The characters can put in the research to learn about the God-Machine through the writings of Marco Singe and Janet Cohen (see p. 25); once they know (or think they know) what they're up against, the Storyteller can be a bit more overt.

On the other hand, if the troupe is planning on a longer chronicle, then the Storyteller doesn't have to reveal anything God-Machine related during the first story. Maybe the visions of the dead jogger show the tattoos and the dead people have their marks, but deciphering the alphabet requires a key that the characters don't have. They might be able to convince a supporting character to help them break the code, or they might put in the time to research it themselves. It's not until the next story that the characters begin to recognize the general outline of Infrastructure (see p. 34). It's possible to complete an entire Tale, in fact, and not trace the cause of anything back to the God-Machine.

Once the characters know that the God-Machine exists, however long it takes, they should see its influence more

29th July 1914

Dear Alexander,

With all the events of the last few weeks, it would perhaps be churlish of me not to be afraid. Even more than one would suppose, however, I am afraid, so very afraid. I am surrounded by cheering crowds everywhere I go, it seems, and they all want the war to happen, the great imperial escapade.

I cannot feel the same way.

I fought in the war in South Africa. I remember one day, so very clearly, where I found myself standing in the dusty pathways of the Port Elizabeth concentration camp our leaders had such a way with euphemism and seeing a child on the path, propped up against the wall of a hut, apparently abandoned. The boy was so very feeble, evidently starved. He raised a hand to me and tried to say something. I could not bear to look at the way his eyes bulged from the sockets of his all-too-visible skull, the way you could see his joints so clearly. I neither replied to him, nor made any movement, just looked at him as he breathed one last deep, juddering sigh, and his eyes rolled inward, and I knew he was dead. And I did nothing. I walked away, and left him there.

I dream about that little boy nearly every night. There will be more like him. And the young men of England, who now so keenly sing their songs and encourage their women to hand out their white feathers to those who do not share the madness of empire, I imagine them walking through a door signposted *God King Country Glory* into the abattoir, where, like pigs, they will be slaughtered and ground down and fed to their fellows when the corn runs out. And more, they worship it, this God-Machine, not once suspecting that the only afterlife they shall experience is the knife and the mincer.

Do not go, Alexander, please do not go. In the name of all that we hold sacred and good, I beg you, do not join them.

If God is as uncaring, as amoral as they who sing his praises have made him, it falls to us to take the place of God as leaders and creators.

I cannot shake off the dream of that child. I must make amends for a death I did nothing to prevent. I must create. I must make anew that which we have destroyed. Innocence. Purity. Beauty. Life. I have so many skills. I sit in my little shop and mend watches and craft cogwheels and movements and wind springs and turn screws and make the workings of the most intricate and beautiful timepieces clean and precise, and I think of that greater Watchmaker, and I know that He is blind and uncaring and no more than another movement that may be repaired and wound, and perhaps even broken.

Come help me, Alexander. Ignore the siren call of their God-Machine and join my work. You were always a better watchmaker than I. Have courage and stand beside me.

I remain, Alexander,

Your brother

William

frequently. Once the characters in the example of Wake The Dead decipher the machine alphabet, for instance, they might see the characters from that alphabet in corporate logos, graffiti, people's tattoos, or in a doctor's signature on a prescription. How much of this is paranoia and how much is indicative of the saturation of the God-Machine into our world? The answer to that question depends on the chronicle in question, considering mood, theme, and especially tier. The point is, though, that once the characters know the God-Machine is out there, they can't *not* see it.

Progression

After the characters learn that the God-Machine exists, future stories in the same chronicle (or chapters in the story, depending on how long you plan on the game running) don't have to rely quite so much on secrecy. Because you have established a common frame of reference for the characters, you can be a little more overt about elements like Infrastructure and Linchpins. Indeed, though the players may or may not know those terms, they will probably be looking for these items, searching for chinks in the God-Machine's façade.

Consider, too, that the players can portray multiple characters over the course of a God-Machine Chronicle. For instance, the Urban Wandering Tale (p. 108). It's entirely possible that all of the characters involved in this Tale might perish along the way, possibly shutting off the nightmare realm and saving the world. If that story segues into Ghost Machine (p. 79), then, the characters for that Tale might be haunted by the ghosts of their previous "incarnations."

Progression can also involve a change in tier. As discussed in the appropriate section, a shift in tier doesn't always have to go up. The characters might go from a Cosmic-tier story to a Local-tier story; they've saved the universe (or witnessed its eventual demise), and now they need to interact with their own neighborhood. How did their more grandiose experiences change them? Can they bring themselves to *care* about the local any more, or does seeing beyond the veil of normalcy make their own personal lives that much more special?

Character Creation

Mechanically, creating a character for a God-Machine chronicle is the same as creating any other mortal character using the **World of Darkness Rulebook** (p. 34). It is intent that makes the difference. Standard World of Darkness characters (if such a thing exists) will undoubtedly run into some situations that fall outside the realm of conventional reality, and possibly overcome them. Dark secrets will be revealed, challenges overcome and the troupe might even have something resembling a happy ending.

The God-Machine has no ending and its beginning (if it had one) is lost in time and myth. Questions go unanswered. The more interesting facets of a God-Machine chronicle aren't the whys or wherefores, but the *hows*. How did the God-Machine come to your character's attention? How does interaction with the unknowable change your character? How can an average person ever look at the world again without hearing creaking machinery echoing in her mind?

Intent

During character creation but before filling in a single dot, it isn't a bad plan to ask the Storyteller some questions, such as "What is the hook for the chronicle?" All of the Tales in Chapter Two have a quick, two-sentence "elevator pitch," so it shouldn't be any problem for the Storyteller to read the hook for the Tale she wants to run first. If that hook doesn't intrigue the players, it's probably wise to find a different one (or at least hear the concerns of the players so that the Storyteller can tweak as need be).

Along with the hook, find out what kinds of characters are appropriate. This is covered in the Tales under *Interchangeable Parts*. For example, the characters in What Is It Good For (p. 105) are in active combat. That means that at least some of them should be soldiers, but the *Interchangeable Parts* section provides a range of other characters. It would not be appropriate for a player who has heard this pitch and these character restrictions to wish to play an asthmatic grad student in Boston and expect the Storyteller to include that character.

It does sometimes happen that a player has fallen in love with a particular character idea that doesn't really fit in with what a Storyteller has in mind. That doesn't mean the concept needs to be scrapped, only that accommodations will be need to be made on both sides to make that character work.

Using the above grad student as an example, perhaps the player could play his brother, a soldier, in this story, and the action could move to Boston for the next Tale (The 300 Block would work nicely in Boston, as would A Journey Into Time — p. 69 and p. 101, respectively). What is it about the grad student that appeals so much to the player? Is it the scholarly nature? Play an anthropologist captured by insurgents and recently released to the soldier characters. Is it the appeal of playing someone physically frail? Give another character the Sick Condition (p. 212) and weave it into the plot.

The Troupe

With a character idea in mind that works for both the player and the Storyteller, the next step is to define that character within the troupe as a whole. We suggest devoting an entire session to building characters and discussing how the troupe will interact before nudging the first die. Part of that time can be used to create a shared background using the Network (p. 56).

Even if a player has the coolest concept ever and a Storyteller that has found a way to incorporate him into the chronicle, it don't mean a thing if the character can't play nicely with others. Generally speaking, this isn't a problem. Even very different character types can find a way to coexist as part of a troupe, assuming some common sense attempts are made to ensure compatibility. The Network will help with this, as will the following suggestions.

Redundant

Having characters that complement each other is great. Having characters that are too similar is boring. Even characters of the same basic archetype (the scholar, the soldier, the socialite) don't need to be carbon copies of each other. Not only does this make a character less distinct, it makes it more difficult for the Storyteller to shine a light on a specific character. Speaking from a metagame perspective, having two

characters with exact of very similar background, outlook, and skill set is a detriment to the troupe.

Look for a Niche

Broadly speaking, World of Darkness characters can be broken down into three categories: Mental, Physical and Social. If your troupe is heavy on the bruiser types (i.e. Physical), it probably wouldn't hurt to have someone who is able to see the bigger picture (i.e. Mental) or who can interact with other people without resorting to violence (i.e. Social). This not only rounds out the troupe a bit, but it gives everyone a different way to shine — and a different way to fail.

Have Fun!

This last point might seem obvious, but it's worth talking about. Your character needs to be fun for you to play. If you make a "support" character — filling a niche that no one else did — that's all very well, but if it's a niche you have no desire to fill, don't bother. Instead, take the character you *want* to play and see how you can tweak the concept to make it work with the troupe. Invite suggestions from the other players and the Storyteller. Roleplaying games are collaborative by nature; the strongest character groups by far are the ones that are created with everyone in attendance, collectively deciding how the group functions.

Story Arc

Now that your character knows where she fits in the troupe and chronicle, take some time to consider how you'd like to see that character develop. An interesting story is one that takes a common (or even uncommon) character and presents her with a challenge. How she responds to that challenge and how she reacts to the choices she's forced to make is what makes things interesting. The Aspirations system (p. 150) provides a good way to do this that accounts for both short and long-term goals.

Another factor worth considering, though, is what the character's role is with regards to the God-Machine. The God-Machine is unimaginably complex and operates on a level that neither knows nor cares about individuals. If a person is singled out by the God-Machine, it's only to make sure the trains run on time, as it were. Little Bobby might develop brain cancer at age eight because that's the only way he'll be able to see the part of the God-Machine that needs fixing at age 16. All the years of chemo and treatment are only a prelude to the point in his life that the God-Machine is actually pursuing.

Consider how your character might react to discovering the whole purpose of her life (from the God-Machine's point of view) is to pull a piece of bubble gum out of a bicycle chain at a specific place and time. How does that sort of revelation affect her sense of self (it's almost certainly a breaking point — see p. 155)? Even better, how will it affect her if she refuses to comply and begins to hear the screams of people who will die as a direct result of her choice?

Obviously, without knowing the exact nature of the chronicle your Storyteller has in mind, you can only plan so much in advance for a character's future. Discuss with the Storyteller the sort of changes you'd like to see, keeping in mind the machinations of the unexplainable. Don't lock yourself into too many expectations, though, and be flexible enough to roll with the punches while still keeping your character in mind.

Question Everything

Filling out the finer details of a character requires asking yourself questions. Every answer adds more detail to a character. Every answer brings the character closer to the "spark of life" moment in which she almost becomes a real person in your imagination, making it easier to think like the character once game begins. Some of these questions can also provide fodder for the Network.

Vocation

For plenty of people, the thing that defines them the most is their job. Some jobs people just sort of stumble into, but more often people trained for the position they hold. If your character is a fireman, why did he choose that profession? Was it to help people, or does he come from a family of firefighters?

The lack of a job can be just as defining. The first, most obvious, question to ask here is: how does the character pay for stuff? Trust fund? Welfare? Maybe your character gets money through nefarious methods, like selling drugs or robbing people. Without a job of some kind, ask yourself how your character manages to feed himself or find shelter.

Family

How often do you see a character with either no family or no close family? The orphan or bitter loner is a gaming cliché. Many players think having a family around just gives the Storyteller tools to cause problems. What's so wrong with that? The drive to protect one's family has long been the source of humanity's struggles, conflicts, triumphs and tragedies. The Storyteller should refrain from using a character's family as kidnap- or murder-bait. Threatening the family on a more grandiose or abstract level ("If New York goes up in flames, millions of people die, *including my family*") is often just as effective and less clichéd than having the antagonists make them a special target.

Even characters without a traditional family shouldn't be completely bereft of loved ones. Friends can be just as close as family. The odds are good your character has someone important in his life. Think about who these people are and what they mean to the character. If the character *really* has no one, that definitely requires some sort of explanation.

The Hidden World

Stories set in the World of Darkness enter into supernatural territory at some point. How has your character been affected by this hidden world? How have the machinations of the God-Machine altered the character's perceptions of reality? This particular question is one of the most important you can ask. It's just as meaningful if your character hasn't had any interactions with the supernatural. Consider in advance how the knowledge of the hidden world might affect him if (when) it comes up.

The Character Questionnaire

One resource that's readily available online is the roleplaying game character questionnaire. A quick online search should turn up plenty of results. Handing out a sheet of questions can help with the character creation process and also provide a handy place to make notes.

Below is a short list of example questions to help out. Note that in the questions below, "you" refers to the character, not the player.

- What is your favorite movie?
- What do you consider your most valuable possession? Why?
- Do you have any potentially disturbing secrets?
- Who is your best friend?
- What are your opinions on gender and/or racial equality?
- Have you ever stolen anything? If so, what were the circumstances?
- Do you have a hobby?
- What are some of your pet peeves?
- What are your religious views?
- What is your most distinguishing feature?

21st June 2012

Dear William,

You don't know how long I have been looking for you! It has been so very long, years and years and years and tears and ears and in that time I forgot so much, but when I saw you on the street, looking all modernist and handsomelike my heart leapt.

I know you don't call yourself William anymore, but William is how I know you. I wonder why it is that you changed your name. Did you do it all lawful? I hope that it was not because you wanted to hide from me because William is so lovely a name and I never meant for you to be cross with me or run away because I will never hurt you again, I promise.

Write back, my love my sweet my darling dearest, write to your Dear Mary, William Dear and be mine forever.

Write back for I miss you so.

Your Dear Dear Mary

23rd June 2012

Dear Madam,

I am sorry to say that I have no connection to a William Dear, and that this has not been my name at any time. I certainly haven't changed it by deed poll.

I won't be replying to any more letters. I do wish you luck, however, in your search.

Yours faithfully,

Jon Dear

Setting

Characters are only part of the equation for the start of a God-Machine Chronicle. When dealing with a play experience where the endgame is as potentially bleak as it is in God-Machine, a great deal of the enjoyment in playing through a God-Machine Chronicle is in the bond formed between both characters and players pitting themselves against a greater threat and a dark fate they will likely only delay, not defeat. Especially if the troupe is open to the idea of changing characters between stories, then the linking experience for the players needs to be deeper than regular individual character generation.

To that end, the God-Machine Chronicle Rulebook encourages troupe setting creation. This involves creating not only the character, but a Network of involved, shared acquaintances to bring characters together (and introduce both connections and potential replacement characters to the group) as well as a pool of various meaningful locations (or sets) to use during the game. Building these jointly not only takes some of the weight off the Storyteller, but it creates additional investment on the part of the players as some part of their ideas and creations are used by the troupe as a whole.

Shared Background

One of the easiest methods to ensure characters have something in common (beyond the men with cogs for eyes chasing them) is to build a shared background. Think about your own life for a minute and how you came to know the people in it. Odds are good you met friends or acquaintances through other friends and acquaintances, on the job or even via online social media, rather than happening across them at a bar. The Network is meant to simulate that body of shared connections and create a pool of social resources that acts as a common link between characters before the story even begins. Building a Network is building a community of sorts, providing characters and players with deeper connections into the World of Darkness as well as with each other.

Begin building the Network by pairing off players. If the troupe consists of an odd number, the extra player could use that time to discuss his character with the Storyteller or just listen to rest of the troupe and offering suggestions. Each pair of players should look at their characters and talk about how they came to know each other. In some cases this can be as simple as the characters were introduced to each other by a third party, or met at work, school, church, etc.

Consider the World of Darkness setting as another possibility for meeting. Maybe the characters first ran into each other as a part of a support group for that new virus that's going around that causes brain swelling and somehow results in people speaking in binary. It's always possible the characters bonded after both bore witness to an angelic visitation. Regardless of how the characters met, a shared background of some sort builds a foundation on which the chronicle can begin.

Continue swapping player pairs until every character has interacted with at least two other characters at some point in the past. The end result of this exercise should be a troupe with at least some shared experiences, rather than just a group of people that got thrown together by happenstance.

How Many Times Do We Do This?

Looking at the chronicle tracks at the end of the chapter, you might wonder whether it's necessary to go through the whole process of building the setting for every different group of characters or every change in locale. The short answer is: No, it's not necessary. It's a good idea to do it for the beginning of the chronicle, precisely because there is no shared history to draw on. Once the game has been going for a while, even if the players change characters, the whole setting should be well-realized enough to skip this step.

Unless, of course, you and your troupe *want* to spend an evening building a setting and making up new Network characters and sets and so on. If your players find that fun, then by all means, do it as often as you wish.

Building the Network

Once the initial shared background exercise has been completed, each player should choose a supporting character featured in one of the joint meeting stories to become part of the Network. That character becomes a sort of Contact and Ally (see Social Merits, p. 166), all rolled into one, for the troupe as a whole. Once a character becomes part of the Network, players must work in-game to maintain the relationship.

If the troupe consists of fewer than five players, decide collectively on enough additional members of the Network to bring the total number of members up to five. Note that the Network doesn't actually represent a Merit and no dots are spent. Keeping a list of characters that are part of the Network is a good idea, just for organization if nothing else.

The Network in Play

During the course of a game, characters interact with members of the Network just as they would with any other Storyteller controlled character. They are not Contacts or Allies. Keep in mind that (usually) these characters don't *owe* the troupe anything special just because they are part of the Network. Each member of the Network continues to behave in a way appropriate for that character. If a member of the Network is betrayed, dies, or becomes unavailable for any other reason, the troupe as a whole loses access to that character. Because Network characters aren't represented by Merit dots, the "sanctity of Merits" rule (p. 158) does not apply to them.

By the same token, players can assign Merit dots to acquire Network members as Contacts or Allies, but that creates a relationship not automatically present that only applies to that specific character.

On the whole, members of the Network provide a number of useful functions in a chronicle. They provide a group of ready-made characters for the Storyteller who the characters are familiar with and have some level of expected social or emotional response toward. They act as more glue for the nascent troupe, allowing them to have collaborative input into the chronicle and shape the identity of the troupe as a whole. They also give the troupe some supporting cast that are at least inclined to be sympathetic toward the player characters.

Location, Location, Location

Most games start as a sort of niggling idea scratching away in the mind of the Storyteller. She might have a mental image of a certain place or scene that drives her creativity to build a story around it. She might have heard a song, watched a movie, read a book or benefited from any one of a myriad of other possible sources of inspiration. Unless she's been at it for months, however, it's unlikely the Storyteller will have an entire setting, complete with population and scenery, sitting around waiting for the players to set up camp. That's where creating sets comes in.

On a large scale, the Storyteller probably already has a particular location in mind for the story. It could be Paris, an isolated farmstead in Nebraska, or a small town in Australia. If the location isn't that important (it needs a university but isn't particular about what kind or where), the troupe as a whole can decide on a location. Most of the Tales in Chapter Two note the location in very general terms (a medium-sized city in the US, a small town in New England, etc.); where a specific place is required by a Tale, it's because plays into the events and themes of the Tale.

When it comes to specific places within a location, however — parks, houses, landmarks, stores, schools, natural features — these are set pieces, or sets. Much like stage scenery, they provide the background for Network members, characters, or plot points. The troupe works together to create a pool of these for the Storyteller (or the players) to pull from as needed. It also gives the Storyteller an idea of what the interests of the players are — a group who wants to play with science-run-amuck won't create a cavern full of mystic runes, and while a troupe who is intrigued by mystic forces beyond our ken may do that and a few more occult backgrounds besides, in addition to common mundane buildings or places the characters know in common.

On Set

With a location firmly in mind, the next step in building a setting is selecting specific sets. In terms of building *mise-en-scène* for a World of Darkness chronicle, a set is a specific place within the chosen location, such as a house, business or an oddly undeveloped piece of real estate in a wealthy neighborhood. A set should be significant in some way to the chronicle in general, to one of the characters, or could host a member of the Network. Once a basic list of sets is compiled, the players work to flesh them out as much (or as little) as desired.

Choosing sets can also benefit from some time spent on the computer or at your local library. Nearly every city has urban legends about haunted houses, monsters and unexplained phenomena. Even if the troupe is looking for a mundane set, crime reports or newspaper articles online can reveal which parts of a location would be likely to contain a gang hangout or support a large addict population. It requires almost no time to find cemeteries, libraries, Masonic temples, historical landmarks, or other such likely sets.

Even if the troupe isn't motivated to do that much legwork, it can still build a set. The list should include only the most basic information, in order to give other members of the troupe to a chance to put their own spin on a set and making initial creation simple. For example, a set consisting of a haunted house last owned by the Bakers might be listed as "Baker house, haunted" without getting into theories about why the house might be haunted.

The number of sets selected by the troupe is completely up those involved. A good rule of thumb is at least one set per player, but feel free to flesh out the location with additional sets as much as the troupe feels is necessary. The Storyteller isn't required to only use player-created sets during the chronicle, either. People end up in the oddest of places; the air of mystery around a new set can bring tension to a story.

Designing a Set

Creating a new set is just the beginning of the process. Each set should have its own details, background and story elements just as if it were a character. Consider as well what each new set brings to the *mise-en-scène* — what it does for the troupe identity as a whole. Is a school somewhere a character's children attend? Does someone in the Network work there? Did one or more of the characters go there themselves? As with the shared character backgrounds, this can be easily enough completed with the entire troupe pitching ideas.

Once a basic list of sets is compiled, the troupe can begin collaboratively fleshing them out. Set details are the quickest to complete. A sentence or two describing the look and feel of the place are enough to get started, along with where the set is physically located. Background elements might include the in-world origin of the set, what happened at the set to make it interesting, or how the set was first discovered. Story elements could consist of the sort of neighborhood that surrounds the set, any inhabitants who might be present, unusual events that continue to occur there, or any other facets that make the set an interesting part of the chronicle.

A set can be as large or small as necessary to play its part in the chronicle. An abandoned boxcar partially filled decaying WWI style gas masks could be a set, as could an entire apartment building. An alley that is always dark and smells faintly of burnt meat could be a set. Part or all of the infamous Aokigahara Forest in Japan (also called the Suicide Forest) has plenty of grim appeal.

The troupe may decide that a certain set is the perfect place to house a member of the Network. Design the set just

1st September 1914

Dear Alexander,

I suppose that it was inevitable that my fears should be prophetic. I hold you no malice for your decision, Alexander, but my hope for you is not for glory, or acts of valour. Live, Alexander. Live. I forgive you, but live. Live for me, for your sister, for the memory of your mother and father who would have been so proud of you.

Prove me wrong.

Fondest regards,

Your brother, as ever

William Dear

like you would any other, just include the character as part of the story elements. If the set and the Network member are largely dependent upon each other, intertwine the two so that any mention of the set is synonymous with the mention of the character and vice versa. Under these circumstances, the design of the set should complement the design of the character. For example, a swank businessman is more likely to be at home on a set that fits with his image (such as an office building) than he is in a haunted house. If the character and the set have opposing designs, the troupe should come up with a plausible explanation for why the two don't jive.

A player is also welcome (with Storyteller approval) to tie a set to his character. This can be accomplished through several methods. If the character has sufficient Resources to own a set, he can include it as part of his background. A troupe can also designate a set as a Safe Place (p. 170), assuming the standard prerequisites are met. Players will undoubtedly come up with any number of reasons why and how they are connected to a set; Storytellers are encouraged to consider the presented reasoning before coming to a decision.

Chronicle Tracks

A God-Machine Chronicle can be a multi-year process, taking a troupe through several different groups of characters and ending up with some heady, horrifying, cosmic questions, or it can be played in the course of a single evening and never leave one square mile in a city. However, as the saying goes, you gotta start somewhere.

Below are five chronicle tracks. Each track consists of five Tales (all of these Tales can be found in Chapter Two). The tracks as presented do not make any assumptions about the characters, the locations or the settings (except for the assumptions that the Tales make), but even without those assumptions, each track provides a "default" God-Machine Chronicle. Each track also provides notes on transitioning between the Tales. Tracks include themes, sequences of Tales, and suggestions on progressing through the Tales and transitioning between them.

Protect and Serve

In the Tales composing this track, the characters are acting in some official capacity. They might be soldiers, policemen, investigators or relief workers, but they take their marching orders from someone. They probably wouldn't choose to fight the God-Machine, or even to know about it — but they are bound up inextricably in its programming by the time the story ends.

Themes

The characters are following orders. Does that make what they are doing any easier? If their superiors tell them to stop a serial killer who can clearly violate the laws of time and space, does the fact that he *can* violate those laws supersede what he is?

Players should consider their characters motivations very carefully. If a character is motivated by a sense of duty to his fellow man, at what point does that curdle? Does witnessing war in all of its historic, bloody glory make a soldier despair? Does he realize he is just one more body thrown into a meat grinder, a veritable drop in a bucket that, apparently, never wants for volume? Does seeing the world tear itself apart in the wake of a devastating illness make a doctor wonder if this is all worth saving?

Sequence

The Key (p. 80) → The Hatching (p. 99) → Operation: Bell Jar (p. 94) → What Is It Good For (p. 105) → The Scarlet Plague (p. 97)

Progression

This track starts with The Key because tracking a serial killer is something that the players should be able to understand. Police procedurals make for good inspiration for this opening story, as do movies like *The Silence of the Lambs* and *Insomnia*. The characters might be police officers in the various cities affected, or they could be a specialist team from a variety of different agencies. Stretch suspension of disbelief if you need to; this is obviously a special case.

The Key → The Hatching

The Hatching, as written, doesn't assume the characters have any particular training or expertise, but coming on the heels of The Key, it might be that the God-Machine specifically chooses these characters to save the world. Maybe, after disposing of Wesley Cote, the characters receive a visit from a version of him that never succumbed to his murderous nature. This Wesley reveals that he is the true Key, and tells them that they need to be in Liberty State Park at the appropriate day and time. Or, if you want to keep with this chronicle track's theme of following orders, maybe the characters' superiors find evidence that Wesley was in Liberty Park and maybe have left behind evidence. Once the characters are there, The Hatching progresses as written.

The Hatching → Operation: Bell Jar

This transition is probably the trickiest, because it involves taking a group of characters who are likely cops and changing to a group of special ops soldiers. One recommendation would be to change groups entirely; fade out on the first group concluding The Hatching (probably with some of them dying in the Statue of Liberty), and fade in on the members of Operation: Bell Jar discussing what rumors they've heard about "that weird shit on Liberty Island" as their helicopter flies them to their base of operations near West Nautical 36. Another possibility (again, playing with the idea of shifting time and causality) is that as the time reversals happen during The Hatching, the characters' backgrounds shift slightly. They begin The Hatching as police officers, federal agents, and so forth, but by the time they finish, they are *and have always been* soldiers.

Operation: Bell Jar → What Is It Good For

This is probably the easiest transition. The characters finish their successful operation at West Nautical 36 (or, perhaps, fail miserably) and are deployed to Iran as a support team. If a player needs to make a new character, that new character should already be in Iran and can meet up with the incoming soldiers. From there, the characters find the Flag of Elam and embark on their slip through time and the history of war, but the Tale works as written.

What Is It Good For → The Scarlet Plague

The Scarlet Plague is almost apocalyptic in scope. The characters might return from their tour of time to find that the events of The Scarlet Plague are already underway, or you might take a few months — or even years — of downtime. If you do, ask the players to consider if their soldier characters have moved on to other professions. Once the events of the Plague start up, they should reassemble on their own once it

becomes clear that this disease comes from the God-Machine — and by now, the characters have certainly seen enough to know the God-Machine when they encounter it.

Rage Against the God-Machine

The God-Machine is vast, unknowable and possibly omniscient. It has designs for the human race, some of which are decidedly unpleasant. Perhaps worst of all, people are just one more tool in the box to the God-Machine, one more spinning cog. In this chronicle, the characters get to fight back against the God-Machine and — perhaps — end its influence on the human race.

Themes

This track is very humanist. The characters here should see all of the power, all of the cosmic scope of the God-Machine and respond, "No." Every machine can be broken. Any system is just one malfunction away from shutdown. Human spirit, anger, persistence, and plain old stubbornness are themes here.

Players should be aware that they are likely to lose a few characters along the way. The God-Machine doesn't act out of revenge, but if someone proves troublesome, the God-Machine isn't above sending an angel to handle the problem.

Sequence

Wellington School for Gifted Children (p. 77) → The 300 Block (p. 69) → The Invisible Citadel (p. 92) → Proposition 279 (p. 96) → This Is Hell (p.103)

Progression

This track starts off with the characters educating gifted young people at the Wellington School. While there, they become aware of the God-Machine in a kind of peripheral way. In fact, the God-Machine doesn't have to figure into Wellington directly (since the main conflict stems from the fact that the God-Machine *can't* influence the area), but by the end of the story, the characters should have a very real sense that something is out there and it does not have any respect for humanity at all. Players might consider taking the roles of former students of Wellington. Sarah Andrews (p. 124) might make for an interesting choice.

Wellington School for Gifted Children → The 300 Block

It might actually be wise to have the players design the set for the 300 block as part of the setting for the Wellington story, even if the school itself isn't part of that setting. Then, once the affair at Wellington has been settled, the characters really start to notice the strangeness right there in their neighborhood. This story should really bring home what the God-Machine is willing to do in order to keep the wheels turning. The characters are all faced with an unpleasant choice, here — kill other people or choose to stand up and fight.

The 300 Block → The Invisible Citadel

The characters should find the footlocker that leads them to the Citadel somewhere on the 300 block toward the end of the story. Maybe they prevent a sacrifice and discover the footlocker in the would-be victim's home — or maybe they find it in the home of one of the landlords. Either way, the challenge for the Storyteller is presenting the information in the footlocker as enough of a temptation that the characters follow the lead. Bringing in a new character to replace someone who died during The 300 Block might provide a good opportunity for this — maybe the new character is wealthy and has been chasing leads of the Citadel all over the world. She might think the Citadel is a place for inspiration and enlightenment, but this should make the truth all the more horrifying.

The Invisible Citadel → Proposition 279

This is a hard transition. The best way to make it work is probably to connect the Citadel to whatever country is putting forth Prop 279 and allow the characters to travel there via the Citadel. If they find information in the Citadel that explains the nature of Prop 279 (even if it takes them the whole story to decipher it — meaning that not until the end of the story do they realize that the whole point is a widespread massacre and that it has nothing to do with the specific people being killed), then they should be well and truly outraged. They can also see the Dalga in the Citadel spawn Mr. Nose, and then see him later acting as an adviser. Strong motivations are essential for the characters — they won't just go haring off across the world to fight evil dictatorships without a strong reason to do so.

Proposition 279 → This is Hell

It is entirely appropriate for Proposition 279 to fail, for the God-Machine to suddenly lose a great deal of power, and the Celebrants to choose that moment to begin their assault. Likewise, if the God-Machine does manage to get Proposition 279 through and the massacre happens, maybe that boost of power enables the God-Machine to begin the push for "Heaven." Either way, the characters can be right there in the middle of it. Given what they have already accomplished, they are ideally positioned as humanity's champions. They can now fight the God-Machine in a meaningful way — but given what the God-Machine wants, should they?

Space & Time

Many of the Tales deal with cosmic issues of time travel and causality, but this chronicle track makes a point of taking the characters into strange vistas, showing them bizarre possibilities, and putting the power of time reversal in their hands.

Time travel is hard to use as a plot device or a narrative tool. It lends itself to over analysis, plot holes and bad attempts at understanding quantum theory. The best way to approach it in a God-Machine Chronicle is, perhaps, the "I told you so" method. Let the players change whatever they want, but find a way to make it all work seamlessly in the end. Have someone opine that time is cyclical, make noticeable mention of "what has fallen may rise again," and let the players have fun twisting their brains trying to grasp the logic of it all. If you have players that hate time travel, use a different track.

Themes

In addition to themes of causality, responsibility and possibility, this track allows players to experiment with motifs usually left to science fiction. Almost all of the Tales in this track deal with weird science rather than (or in addition to) supernatural horror, and that might provide an interesting change of pace for seasoned World of Darkness players.

Make sure that someone takes good notes for this track. If possible, you want to refer back to past events — because players might have ways to affect them. The goal is for everything to work in a nice, tight circle, but that only happens if you know what is supposed to have happened. A good practice is to make future predictions as non-specific as possible, because that allows for greater ease of interpretation when events come to pass (for inspiration, look at Nostradamus' predictions and how liberally they are interpreted).

Sequence

Squares of the City (p. 75) → Missing Persons (p. 82) → Do-Over (p. 71) → The Moon Window (p. 84) → A Journey Into Time (p. 101)

Progression

This track starts with Squares of the City, which is easily the most grounded and understandable of the included Tales. The characters need to investigate buildings being edited out of existence, so right off the bat, then, something is removing people and structures from this plane of reality. Squares of the City also establishes some out-and-out weird motifs (buildings moving on hidden tracks like a giant slide puzzle?), which should set the stage for the even weirder stuff later.

Squares of the City → Missing Persons

Where do the buildings go when they vanish? The characters shouldn't find out during the first story, but when they start hearing rumors of people vanishing they might note the similarity. They might also hear of something *appearing*, something connected to one of the buildings that they remember vanishing in Squares of the City (but no one else does). When they investigate these missing persons, they learn that extradimensional space is dotted with buildings from all over the world, some of which they remember seeing. Apparently, their city wasn't the only one with those tracks beneath the ground.

Missing Persons → Do-Over

This is a difficult transition because getting the characters to interact with the "magical couch" in the diner requires them taking several logical leaps. But that's where the magic of time travel comes in — one of the characters' "future selves" can appear to the character and tell her about the diner and the couch. Alternatively, the characters might be in the factory and see the diner slide out on tracks back *into* their world. In any event, once they realize that they can alter that past, it might be wise to have them keep track of what events they've altered just so you can have them cross paths with the repercussions later.

Do-Over → The Moon Window

Sometime before this point in the chronicle, the characters should become aware of Marco Singe and his cult. In fact, it might be interesting if he were the one to point them at the diner, or for them to run across him in the extradimensional factory. Once they've concluded Do-Over, they hear about the physical and temporal anomalies in whatever city you'd like to use for the Tale. You can use the "mysterious person from the future tells them what they do next" again, but that plot device only works as long as they players enjoy it. If you use it clumsily or overdo it, you'll get eyerolls at best and "no, fuck this guy, let's go to Paris" at worst.

If the players do leave the chronicle track, choose another Tale and nudge the story back toward The Moon Window when possible. In any event, The Moon Window works more or less as written.

The Moon Window → A Journal Into Time

Searching the offices of NalCon should give the characters ample opportunity to learn about Dr. Henry Girard and his work. You can have the characters see the online video, asking them to travel back into time, but at this point in the track it might be better if they instead find the video on a NalCon server as part of The Moon Window. You can still reveal later that Girard left it there for them to find because he knew they'd be there, of course (the nice thing about time travel is that it doesn't matter when the time machine works, so long as it works). The characters can go back in time, stop Girard, and then learn that *they* (in the future) hatched this plan with Girard, beginning with their involvement in disrupting the tracks in Squares of the City.

Wanderers

The road-trip chronicle is a lot of fun with the right group. Traveling across the World of Darkness, meeting strange new beings, learning about the supernatural, and otherwise experiencing the diversity the setting has to offer can be very rewarding for a troupe. This track sends the characters on a trip, not just across the country but into a different *version* of the US.

Themes

Travel in the World of Darkness isn't safe. The spaces between the cities are isolated, unfamiliar, and dangerous (the sourcebook **World of Darkness: Midnight Roads** examines this in detail, and the opening fiction, "Road Gospel," has some very God-Machine-like elements to it). In a road-trip chronicle, the players should always feel like outsiders. They are always in unfamiliar territory, looking in on things that they aren't supposed to see. With regards to the God-Machine, that means the strange, barely hidden plots that it keeps hidden via geography. The characters get to be explorers, visiting new places and overturning new rocks with every Tale.

The trick is to make every new location feel different. Unless you've done a great deal of travel, capturing the feel of a new place quickly can be difficult. One way around that

is to use the players' experiences. Set the stories in places they know about and ask for familiar landmarks or restaurants. Do some reading online, not just about the history of the place, but its demographics, economic status and cultural identity. You don't need a lot of depth or breadth here, just enough details to make the place feel real.

Sequence

A Glimpse of Mesmerizing Complexity (p. 89) → Ghost Machine (p. 79) → Wake the Dead (p. 86) → Sister City (p. 73) → Urban Wandering (p. 108)

Progression

The troupe needs to establish a reason for the group to be traveling together; depending on the size of the group, that might be the hardest part. A Glimpse of Mesmerizing Complexity begins with an uptick in traffic accidents, so the initial group of characters might be investigating this phenomenon, traveling between accident sites but not nomadic by nature. Once they have the chance to follow the strange devices into the Twilight factory and confront the gear workers, they have learned beyond a doubt that the supernatural is real, it's out there on the roads, and it's very strange.

A Glimpse of Mesmerizing Complexity → Ghost Machine

This transition might be the hard sell. The characters now need not just a reason to travel, but a reason to travel *together*, investigating strange stories of ghosts possessing machines. If they started off the first Tale investigating the paranormal, this might be just another assignment (as an aside: the crew of a reality show dedicated to hunting down the supernatural might be superb cover for a group of monster-hunters or God-Machine cultists). In any case, one of the characters might have a personal connection to one of the hauntings in New England and get the other characters to come with her.

Ghost Machine → Wake the Dead

The hook for Wake the Dead involves one of the characters killing someone. You can run the Tale with the wrongfully dead person just being someone they know, but it loses a lot of the impact. You might present the situation to a player that you think would enjoy the roleplaying challenge — he's killed someone he shouldn't have, has managed to cover up the death, and now the dead aren't staying dead. If possible, the ideal situation for the lead-in to Wake the Dead would be for the death to happen during the first story (maybe the character gets mesmerized by the blip and runs someone down), but for the full impact not to be realized until Wake the Dead.

Wake the Dead → Sister City

Between the end of Wake the Dead and the beginning of Sister City, you need to get the characters to Seattle as Sister City is one of the few Tales with a specific location. Fortunately, Seattle has a lot to offer and Wake the Dead offers a nice method for crossing the country from Ghost Machine's New England. Sister City is less travel-focused, but the characters are now crossing between two versions of the same city. If possible, have a few of the players make characters from Old Seattle and encourage them to think about how their characters might have progressed through an alternate version of the same chronicle track. At the end of the story, try to make sure all of the characters are on the same side of the "barrier;" it doesn't much matter which one.

Sister City → Urban Wandering

No matter how the characters resolve Sister City, the phenomenon of Urban Wandering can appear. You might even introduce it earlier, maybe allowing characters to city-walk between locales during the chronicle (if the characters can treat this ability casually, it will help to reinforce the tone of Wake the Dead — see the sidebar on p. 86). At this point, the characters aren't just wandering the highways and byways of the USA anymore. They're walking on conceptual roads, traveling between not just cities but the *idea* of cities. Unfortunately, they aren't the only ones using the roads. Their battle with the nightmare creatures, the climax of the chronicle, is symbolic of the freedom to wander.

Example Location: Cleveland

We've included an example setting that brings together the design elements. Players and Storytellers alike are encouraged to peruse this section to see how all the pieces fit together. For purposes of this example, let's assume the Storyteller is using the Rage Against the God-Machine chronicle track. This track begins with Wellington School for Gifted Children and the players are all amenable to playing school employees. They do want spend some time during the chronicle dealing with outside elements (and the Storyteller figures he can use this to set up events for the next Tale, The 300 Block, anyway).

The Network

- Dr. Lauren Willis, anthropologist. Dr. Willis is in her early 50s with grey hair cut to a short bob around her ears. She shoots disappointed looks at students from behind her frameless specs. Dr. Willis was once the head of the college's anthropology department and specialized in the burial rituals of early American settlers, but she missed tenure and has taken a job at Wellington. She is *extremely* bitter about this.
- Jimmy Van Amstel AKA jitters, hacker. Jimmy, or jitters as he's known online, is a member of Anonymous. His thin, twitchy frame is usually clad in a nerdy T-shirt, shorts and either sandals or his grubby bunny slippers. Empty energy drink cans lay abandoned and forgotten in heaps around his apartment, alongside the remains of fast food containers and moldy pizza boxes.

- Officer Brendan O'Neill, policeman. Brendan is the poster child for young, fit policemen. His biceps strain the blue material of his uniform, his brown hair is clipped short, and he runs marathons for enjoyment. Running counter to the Irish cop stereotype, Brendan is abstentious, polite and calmly reserved. Most people aren't surprised when they find out he was an Eagle Scout. Brendan plans on being promoted to detective before he hits 30.

- Doris Little, accountant. Doris is a pleasantly plump lady in her mid-30s that loves numbers only slightly more than she loves to talk. She will strike up a conversation with anyone at any time about any topic, and is just charismatic enough that most people are happy to talk with her. Doris works for a multinational corporation and, because of her love of chatter, knows at least a little about everyone that is anyone inside the corporation (her corporation might do business in the country sponsoring Proposition 279, which would give you a way to foreshadow it).

- Zebidiah Hub, leader of the Cult of the Wheel. Zebidiah began life with the name Vasilis Kokinos, only child of Greek immigrants. Upon ascending to his position as leader of the Cult of the Wheel, he took on the name Zebidiah to distance himself from his past life and the surname Hub as an honorific. When he's not busy pretending to be an insurance salesman who belongs to the Knights of Columbus, Zebidiah prefers to dress in a conservatively cut suit, *sans* tie, with the Perfect Circle symbol of the cult wrought in iron and worn around his neck like a torc. Depending on how things progress, Zebidiah would be a good choice to hold the footlocker that leads to the Invisible Citadel.

Sets

The Baker House

The Baker House is a decaying two story Second Empire Baroque style house that was built on the east side of Cleveland by Floyd Baker in 1861. Baker was an early investor in the Cleveland shipyards and made his fortune when he sold his company to a consortium and invested the proceeds in other local businesses. Unfortunately, Baker lost the vast bulk of his money during the Panic of 1873.

What happened next is speculation. Some rumors claim Baker went mad at the thought of living a pauper's life and slaughtered his family before killing himself. Other rumors suggest that the deaths were the result of a robbery gone bad. In either case, the house went through a number of owners, none of which stayed for long, all claiming the place had an "unclean air."

A Canadian investor bought the Baker House was bought in the 1950s and, apparently, promptly forgot all about it. As though it were some sort of cancer infesting its surroundings, the neighborhood surrounding the house has continued to decline. Unsurprisingly, given its bloody history, rumors the house is haunted have flown about for decades.

Knights of Columbus Assembly

The Knights of Columbus assembly building is located just a few blocks west of the Cleveland corporation limit in the wealthy Gold Coast region of city. Greek Revival style columns hold up the circular dome that caps the building. To all appearances, the building is just another Knights of Columbus clubhouse. Far less well known is the fact that the Catholic façade only exists to hide the existence of the Cult of the Wheel.

Zebidiah Hub leads the Cult. Its goal isn't too dissimilar to other fraternal organizations, though using a different methodology. They plan to rebuild Cleveland by nudging the God-Machine with arcane formulae and mathematical conjurations. What has fallen may rise again.

For members and those in the know, Zebidiah is willing (for a charitable donation) to provide holy oil. This substance, supposedly blessed by the God-Machine, has the appearance and odor of burnt motor oil. According to Zebidiah, when imbibed, the holy oil allows the user to see the workings of the machine for a short period.

Lumen

Set in downtown Cleveland, Lumen is the night club of choice for the party scene. Some people describe the club as a permanent rave. Pounding music, flashing lights and raver candy set the tone. The bar offers the usual alcoholic joys along with house-mixed energy drinks and an absinthe bottle service. Small rooms hidden away in the corners are available for private parties or VIPs, where the music is reduced to a dull throbbing and actual conversation is possible. If possible, the Celebrants should make themselves known here during the first two Tales so that the characters can come back and find them later, during This Is Hell.

Universal Steel, Inc.

Universal Steel was founded and operated as Erie Steel for nearly 50 years before hard times came to the Rust Belt. Acquired by a German corporation in the 1980s, the company became the home office for the North American arm of the corporation in the early 1990s. The corporation manufactures steel products for a number of different industries and, thanks to its diversity, didn't suffer nearly as badly as many businesses during the 2008 recession.

The Cleveland location includes two different foundries, an office building and multiple warehouses, all tucked behind a barbed wire fence. The complex is situated on the concrete banks of the Cuyahoga River, within sight of downtown. If you visit during office hours, you might hear the giggling voice of Doris Little as she makes her rounds.

What can you hide inside molten steel or finished parts? Just about anything. Doris has noticed sizable unexplained income in the company books. She believes Universal Steel is working for the mafia, but the company isn't that exclusive.

21st June 2012

Dear Mr. Theleme,

Thank you for your gracious reply. In response, I must admit, however, that my primary motivation for my investigations is not altruism, nor a desire for knowledge, but the simple pursuit of profit.

Does that shock you?

I don't think it's anything to be ashamed of. Is it not, after all, the basis of the system on which our society is based? To embrace it is to embrace honesty, and while honesty is rarely the best policy (especially when it comes to economic policy), it helps us sleep at night. I once met a man who in discussion with me compared the success of the capitalist system to the success of AIDS in Africa, his point being that the success of a thing is no measure of its moral worth. He was wrong. Capitalism is the machine that runs our world, and like a machine, it is efficient, without morality, and has no regard for who gets in its way for it is simply a machine. And Capitalism is a God, also. More specifically, it is my God, and this God-Machine I worship is truly deserving of the worship of the modern man. Once the minister of the church would have called it Mammon. It shows how clever they were, warning against the true God-Machine while all the time worshipping it themselves, because they discovered the simple fact that knowing the nature of the God-Machine gives you wealth and wealth, in a world where the coin is king, is power.

Does that also shock you?

It doesn't matter. Before there were people, perhaps the God-Machine did not exist. Or maybe It created people so that the Blessed Coin could come into being. It doesn't, as I said, matter. What you need to know is that these aren't theories.

I was reading de Selby the other night and it was like a key was thrust in my forehead and turned and something opened in my brain, click, and I could see it. If you were able to stumble upon the doors to the workings of the God-Machine, you can become rich.

I've always worshipped it. I hadn't realized before; I work in Its church, on the floor, buying and selling for no reason other than the act of buying and selling, creating profit from nothing in the truest alchemy ever made, imaginary numbers that buy concrete things.

And I turned on my iPad this morning and saw when I checked the numbers that I could see patterns and sounds, and the numbers spoke to me. I put the numbers into Google and made IP addresses. From the IP addresses I made hyperlinks, and from the hyperlinks I could tell a story. I walked out of the market floor and was transfigured. The voice of the God-Machine told me that I would profit, and said, Find Me and Profit.

I have this man in my team at work and he's going to do anything I tell him because his job's already on the line. I'm setting him to work doing the numbers for me. He doesn't even know what he's doing.

I'm going to be rich.

Yours sincerely,

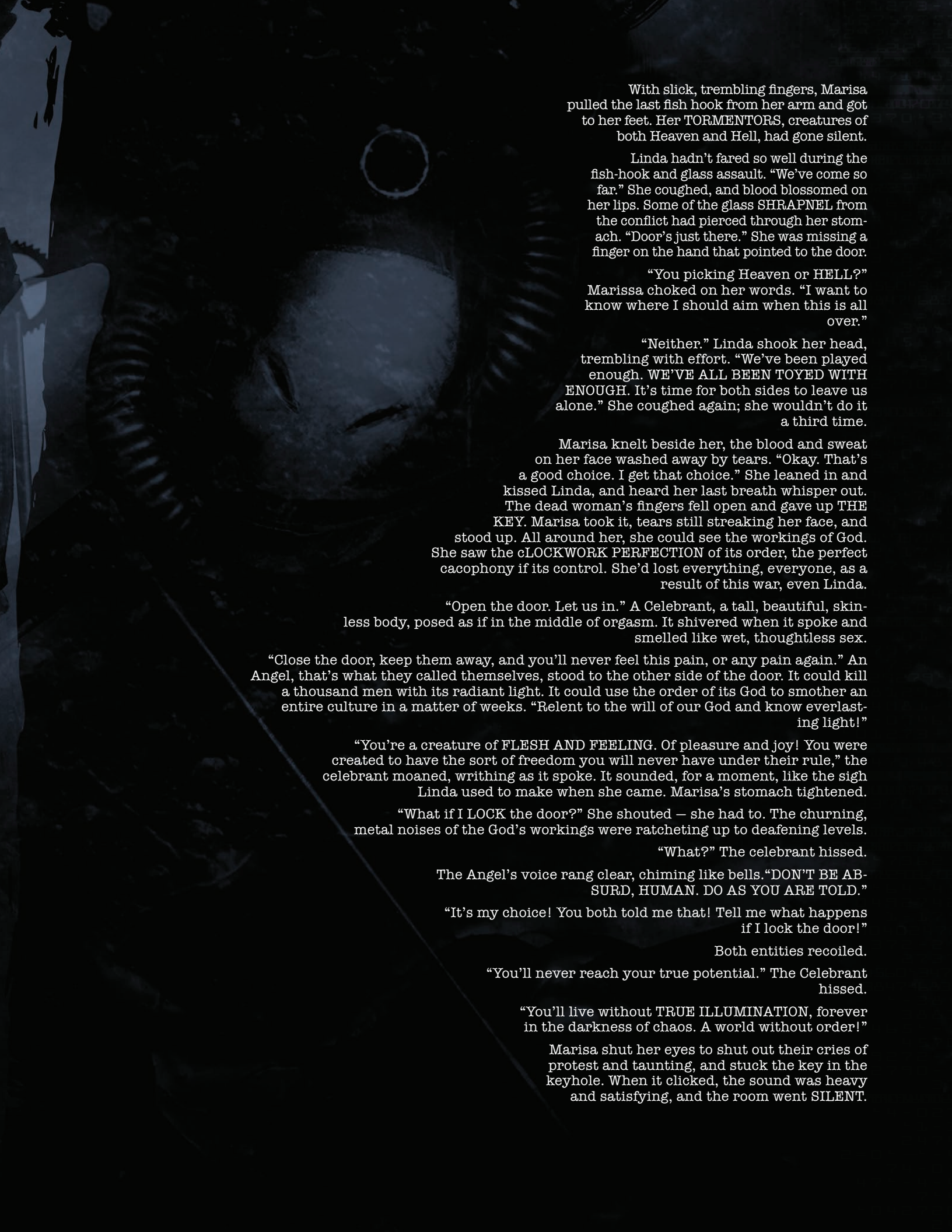
Stephen Escher

All manner of shady entities take advantage of the unofficial services offered by the company. If you know who to ask (Doris could probably tell you), the list includes body disposal and all manner of smuggling.

Case Western Reserve University

Case Western is a highly respected university located on Cleveland's east side. It boasts a symphony orchestra, two museums (art and science), abuts Rockefeller Park and is within walking distance of Little Italy. Hidden in the depths of the Mather Memorial Building is the former office of Dr. Lauren Willis. After the events of Wellington, she might try to get her position at Case back — maybe the characters can even help?

A labyrinthine system of tunnels lies beneath Case Western and Rockefeller Park. Entrances to the tunnels can be found all over the university and hidden among the scenery of the park's gardens. Oddly, some sections of the tunnels seem more modern than others. The tunnels often echo with the sound of machinery at work, but it's hard to tell just where those sounds originate.



With slick, trembling fingers, Marisa pulled the last fish hook from her arm and got to her feet. Her TORMENTORS, creatures of both Heaven and Hell, had gone silent.

Linda hadn't fared so well during the fish-hook and glass assault. "We've come so far." She coughed, and blood blossomed on her lips. Some of the glass SHRAPNEL from the conflict had pierced through her stomach. "Door's just there." She was missing a finger on the hand that pointed to the door.

"You picking Heaven or HELL?" Marissa choked on her words. "I want to know where I should aim when this is all over."

"Neither." Linda shook her head, trembling with effort. "We've been played enough. WE'VE ALL BEEN TOYED WITH ENOUGH. It's time for both sides to leave us alone." She coughed again; she wouldn't do it a third time.

Marisa knelt beside her, the blood and sweat on her face washed away by tears. "Okay. That's a good choice. I get that choice." She leaned in and kissed Linda, and heard her last breath whisper out. The dead woman's fingers fell open and gave up THE KEY. Marisa took it, tears still streaking her face, and stood up. All around her, she could see the workings of God. She saw the cLOCKWORK PERFECTION of its order, the perfect cacophony if its control. She'd lost everything, everyone, as a result of this war, even Linda.

"Open the door. Let us in." A Celebrant, a tall, beautiful, skinless body, posed as if in the middle of orgasm. It shivered when it spoke and smelled like wet, thoughtless sex.

"Close the door, keep them away, and you'll never feel this pain, or any pain again." An Angel, that's what they called themselves, stood to the other side of the door. It could kill a thousand men with its radiant light. It could use the order of its God to smother an entire culture in a matter of weeks. "Relent to the will of our God and know everlasting light!"

"You're a creature of FLESH AND FEELING. Of pleasure and joy! You were created to have the sort of freedom you will never have under their rule," the celebrant moaned, writhing as it spoke. It sounded, for a moment, like the sigh Linda used to make when she came. Marisa's stomach tightened.

"What if I LOCK the door?" She shouted — she had to. The churning, metal noises of the God's workings were ratcheting up to deafening levels.

"What?" The celebrant hissed.

The Angel's voice rang clear, chiming like bells."DON'T BE ABSURD, HUMAN. DO AS YOU ARE TOLD."

"It's my choice! You both told me that! Tell me what happens if I lock the door!"

Both entities recoiled.

"You'll never reach your true potential." The Celebrant hissed.

"You'll live without TRUE ILLUMINATION, forever in the darkness of chaos. A world without order!"

Marisa shut her eyes to shut out their cries of protest and taunting, and stuck the key in the keyhole. When it clicked, the sound was heavy and satisfying, and the room went SILENT.

Chapter Two: Tales of the God-Machine

I have been helped to see that beyond the clouds that were round about me, there was a living, guiding, intelligent, beneficent purpose—the elevation, regeneration and redemption of the inhabitants of this earth.

— John Murray Spear, inventor of the electrically powered Messiah

This chapter contains 20 scenarios involving the God-Machine. These Tales are suitable for use as single-story play or as building blocks in longer chronicles as described in Chapter One.

The chronicles are split by tier, as described in Chapter One. Use Local Tales to bring the mystery of the God-Machine to your back door. Introduce Regional stories to drag your characters out of their comfort zones to see the bigger picture. Throw your characters into Global stories that show the scope of the God-Machine's influence. Finally, inflict Cosmic adventures on them that threaten to change the World of Darkness as you know it forever.

Each Tale is presented as though the chronicle begins with it. That is, although the chronicle tracks in Chapter One present a progression and a way for one Tale to segue into another, the Tales as presented here all assume that you will start with that particular Tale. For example, in the Time & Space chronicle track, the Squares of the City Tale moves into the Missing Persons Tale. But here, the Missing Persons Tale is presented as though you'll start with it. This allows the Storyteller to put the Tales in any order she wishes in order to construct a personalized version of the God-Machine Chronicle. They are written to be independent from one another although one can transition through from one to the next.

Each Tale follows this format:

A short **Introduction** you can use to pitch the chronicle to your players — think of it as the tagline that would appear on the poster, if this Tale were a movie.

Infrastructure is your set. This is how things start as the chronicle gets off its feet and things change. The section gives you a tight focus on what you need to know at the beginning of your chronicle to get things moving. It also tells you what Infrastructure the God-Machine is using, and what general type it falls into (see p. 35).

Interchangeable Parts helps instruct players on the sorts of characters they should make to get the most out of the Tale. This section is meant to help tie characters to the world you're creating. This includes suggestions for character archetypes and things to steer clear of.

Blueprints gives an idea of what happens if everything goes as the God-Machine plans. When things go sideways thanks to the characters' meddling, refer back to this section to get an idea of what the God-Machine and its agents were trying to accomplish.

Linchpins give you a look at how the God-Machine manifests. The section shows you where the God-Machine pokes through and shows its true nature. More importantly, this section covers the terrifying agents of the God-Machine, what they look like, and what they want.

Methods gives you ideas for how the characters could interact with the stories on a mechanical level. This section includes several Skills the characters might use during the course of the stories, as well as two suggested Merits players may consider while creating their characters.

Escalation examines what happens next. Win or lose, this section looks at how you could take your chronicle past its planned arc and potentially into other bigger and more dramatic tiers. This section also provides a suggestion for a Tale that could follow the current one. Note that these suggestions don't follow the chronicle tracks described in Chapter One; they're just different ways to approach the God-Machine Chronicle.

The 300 Block

The block that holds the teaching hospital — the 300 block, as locals call it — isn't ritzy, but it's home. How long have you lived here and never noticed that people just... vanish?

Infrastructure

In a large city, people find safe subcultures to cling to, like shared ethnicity or income or occupation. For the families and friends of the 300 block, the tie is proximity. They share a city block, about a square mile. City planners had set this block off as housing for young student doctors and nurses — as well as lower income hospital staff — of a nearby teaching hospital. A number of lovely, turn-of-the-century apartment buildings sit in the middle of the block. This creates a sort of town within a city. Locals get their morning caffeine fix in the independent coffee shop on one corner. The couple in B4 runs the book store on the ground floor. Local inhabitants even have a bodega that handles most of the basic grocery.

Property owners still adhere to many of the regulations put on the block at its founding, and as a result, the population is about seventy percent medical students and other hospital staff. The rest are largely retirees on a fixed income and low income families. Despite this, the buildings remain pristine. The neighborhood is safe. The inhabitants are happy.

That makes the disappearances that much stranger.

Once every six months or so, someone goes missing on the 300 block. Sometimes it's a local. Sometimes folks simply hear a rumor that the guy who operated the hot dog cart left town. Sometimes strangers to the neighborhood hang flyers on telephone poles saying someone was last seen on the block. "No bodies, no crimes," according to the local cops, overburdened as they are with more dangerous stretches of the city.

The Truth: The 300 block is an intricate form of Defense Infrastructure. As explained anon, the disappearances on the block are due to regular human sacrifice. The death of a human being releases a great deal of spiritual energy, and the God-Machine harvests that energy and stores it for later use.

Interchangeable Parts

The characters all live on the 300 block. If they are doctors, they may have recently moved here as a part of a residency. Maybe they moved in with an elderly relative to take advantage of the rent control. Maybe they grew up with a struggling but happy family on the block. Whether new arrival or long-time inhabitant, though, all the characters must be familiar with and take up residence here on the block. They need to be invested in that way.

Also, for good or for ill, the missing person is someone all the characters are invested in. All the characters should have a personal tie with the most recent disappearance. Players can build this person as a part of character creation (for a good method for doing this, see the Network in Chapter One). That's not to say all the characters know each other, but they all feel the effects of this one person going missing and the sting (or satisfaction) of a police force that won't help. They may be drawn to find out what happened out of love, a sense of justice, or simply to make sure this person doesn't come back and ruin the good thing they've got going now (or to assure they aren't blamed for the disappearance), but their involvement is a foregone conclusion regardless of motivation.

Blueprints

When the city founders planned out the 300 block, they worked out a deal with a unique and highly praised architect named Hans Hoffmann. He promised to work cheap and efficiently and assured them that the nearby hospital would produce miracles. The block would experience no crime and no signs of poverty, so long as the property owners served the God-Machine. He arranged for a few coding regulations, a few allowances. Mostly, he needed a promise that whatever happened on the block would stay, more or less, on the block — neither city officials nor the police would get involved. So far, this agreement has been honored.

Hoffmann even went a step further. He spoke to the initial landlords, once the buildings were built, and made them still better promises. Riches. Comfort. Long life. Peaceful tenants. Economic security. All he needed in return was blood. Not theirs, of course.

Once every six months, the landlords were expected to find someone in the area, bring him to the boiler room under the shared city park, and murder him. Worse still, they were expected to paint the machinery there with as much of the victims' blood as possible. The machines needed the blood to run. If they refused, the results would be horrific.

Whatever their reasons, they agreed, and the 300 block has been prosperous and comfortable ever since. Of course, Hoffmann isn't human — he is an angel in service to the God-Machine. While Hans Hoffmann officially died of natural causes years ago (a fact the characters can verify if they wish, though if they take the extraordinary step of digging him up they find his coffin (it contains only rust and bloodstains), the angel is capable of returning to defend the block.

Linchpins

The God-Machine can be seen in the peace and tranquility falsely handed to the block. Children and students live orderly, ordinary lives. The elderly enjoy the ease of their golden years. Even the landlords enjoy a satisfied kind of wealth without extravagance. Of course, the stress sometimes breaks through and a sign of the God-Machine's terrible cost can be seen. A local might run across her landlord sitting in the park in the middle of the night weeping. Everyone heard about the security guard who hung himself in a building basement after a disappearance. Some days you can't leave your apartment without seeing fifty "missing" flyers plastered all over a telephone pole.

29th April 1914

Skerries

Dear Alexander,

I hope that you are well. I still pray for your safety, which makes me, the humanist, something perhaps of a hypocrite, and I freely accept the charge: braggart, hypocrite, victim of pride. Please forgive me. Please, I beg of you, write.

I have abandoned my project. I know that we exchanged angry words, and I am sorry, and I know now that you are right. I promise that I will never speak of it again, if only you would come home safely.

You are all the family I have left, and I could not bear to lose you to the war.

Your brother

William

The shared boiler room, though, is an open wound in reality. The God-Machine, a pulsing, living, hissing, steaming thing, exists openly in that blood-stained room. The boiler room is a Linchpin and the landlords go to great lengths to keep everyone out.

At the chronicle's climax, with the characters confronting the landlords in the boiler room, they may also meet the Architect (traits provided in Chapter Three, p. 128). When confronted, it offers the characters a choice: try and fight the God-Machine, ruin the lives of hundreds of people, maybe thousands, or work with the Machine. It's just one murder every six months, and the characters are free to choose the victim. How many violent criminals, wife-beaters, rapists, drug addicts and so on could they remove from the city? Or, perhaps they have enemies that they can now dispose of easily and cleanly. The God-Machine doesn't leave evidence behind, after all.

As a point of interest, if the characters defeat the angel and destroy the boiler room (caving in the street, for instance, or just walling it up from the outside), the God-Machine doesn't seek reprisals and there are no consequences for the block other than that the crime and unemployment rate normalize. The God-Machine is just using this area as a supply of surplus energy. It would inefficient to expend the energy to destroy it (especially if it can leave the Infrastructure intact and get the sacrifices going again once the characters have died or moved on).

Methods

Occult: You're only now starting to realize the potential occult nature of the filigree and architectural details all over the block. It's going to take some serious research to figure out what the architect was trying to do. Roll Intelligence + Occult to start discovering the chilling truth behind the symbolism.

Politics: A city's zoning regulations and property laws are always confusing and obscure. The cops claim they aren't legally allowed to investigate inside the buildings. Could it be true? You've gotten as far as the public records of City Hall; roll Intelligence + Politics to see if you can make heads or tails of the restrictions.

Brawl: You don't know what you said to set the landlord off, but she's screaming and crying and swinging at you. Roll Stamina + Brawl to keep yourself from getting scratched up until she calms down.

Larceny: Whatever is going on, it's going on in that boiler room. You're getting in there no matter how locked up it is. Roll Dexterity + Larceny to unlock the door and see what's waiting inside.

Socialize: Rumors go with parties like cheap beer and curious potluck offerings. You've arranged to get a bunch of the people in your building to join you for a social. Roll Presence + Socialize to get everyone having enough of a good time that they don't notice you're pumping them for rumors about the block.

Streetwise: As the characters debate what to do, whether to work with the God-Machine or resist it, you can't help but think of all the really awful people out there. Crooked politicians. Abusers. You bring to mind criminals who work the system and never get caught. Roll Intelligence + Streetwise to come up with a list of people who may actually "have it coming."

Merit: Holistic Awareness (p 163): Doctors can be an arrogant lot. If there's unusual health and well-being in the patients under their care, they aren't likely to examine it too closely. Why look for problems where there are none? You're somewhat outside of that world, however, and the balance of health and illness is a delicate one. You know something isn't right here on the block. The balance is off, but you can't quite put your finger on why. Yet.

Merit: Safe Place (p 170): It ain't safe for you most other places, not outside the block for sure. You spent a lot of time building up your Safe Place to assure that those outside threats never come in, never get you in your sleep. What will you do to protect that Safe Place when you realized a big part of what makes it so safe?

Escalation

The climax of the story falls naturally when the characters are confronted by the Architect. His offer shouldn't be an easy choice, and making that choice should change the characters forever.

If the characters choose to serve the God-Machine, you can follow up. How do the characters cope with their newfound duty? How do they struggle with one another and themselves over the dark thing they must do for the greater good? Can they cover up the truth well enough? How do they choose who lives and who dies? If they remain in the city and delve deeper into its occult secrets, they might wind up discovering gateways to cities all over the world (Urban Wandering, p. 108).

If the characters opt to leave the city, do they stay together? Do circumstances bring them back into one another's company for a new crisis of life and death? If one character does kill someone to feed to the God-Machine, maybe he gets it wrong and activates the events of Wake the Dead (p. 86).

Do-Over

A mysterious room provides people who regret their past decisions a chance to try again — sometimes at a terrible cost.

Infrastructure

A dingy 24-hour diner in a US city or large town serves decent food and is otherwise unexceptional, except for the door next to the restrooms that most people can't see. Those who casually notice the door and try to open it find it locked — unless they have dreamed of the room or have previously entered it.

The Truth: The diner itself is Concealment Infrastructure guarding the room. The room is one of several such devices that the God-Machine uses to rewrite time. This one just happens to be accessible to normal people. It's possible that this room has simply slipped the God-Machine's intention, or it could be that every rewrite of time that happens using this room *has* to happen in order for some other important time-shift somewhere down the line.

Interchangeable Parts

The characters should all have at least one serious regret about their past actions, such as a stupid remark that spoiled an interview for a promising job or a one-night stand that ruined a loving marriage.

Blueprints

A character in this town who has previously been to the diner and who carries serious regrets about a past decision begins having a recurring dream. In the dream, she visits the diner, speaks with someone about the regretted incident, and leaves, then wakes up knowing her past could be different.

When the character next visits the diner, she sees a door next to the restrooms that she never noticed before. She feels a desire to open this door. Inside is a couch with tattered upholstery, large enough to sleep on. Upon seeing the couch, she becomes certain that taking a nap on this couch would make her feel better about the decision she made. As soon as she lies down on this couch, she falls asleep and dreams about the incident.

This dream is exceptionally lucid and clear and the dreamer is convinced that her actions in this dream change how the incident went. She is then free to act, with full access to her memories of how events previously occurred. Whether a missed job interview, an insult to someone in power, an ill-considered move that resulted in prison time — the person gets a do-over. The one limitation is that dreamers don't have much time in the past. If someone sleeps on the couch for seven hours, she spends only seven hours in the past, before and during the incident that she wishes to change. However, time that the person was asleep, too drunk to remember or otherwise unconscious passes in an instant and doesn't count. Dreamers only experience time when they are conscious and able to make decisions.

In the dream, the character inhabits the body of her past self, with only the possessions and physical capabilities that she had at that time. However, the dreamer retains all later memories, Abilities, Mental and Social Attributes, as well as any Merits not involving money, rank or social connections. As soon as the character makes the desired change, she awakens with full memory of the dream. When she leaves the room and enters the hallway, she gains new memories of how her life changed based on the changes she made while dreaming. Everyone else remembers only the new set of events and any physical changes are present in the world. The dreamer alone remembers the previous version of reality and what she changed and why.

Some changes could be significant: retaining a job or a marriage, not having a prison record. Other changes are minor: she made it to the interview but didn't get the job — perhaps resulting in the realization that she needed to choose another career.

The problem, of course, is that changing your life can become addictive. Many people want to try this again, and they can. The only limitation is that if the room is in use, the door stays locked. If the character waits, however, the other person eventually walks out looking slightly dazed, as he adjusts to his own new memories.

Anyone who uses this room begins remembering other incidents where he made serious mistakes and experiences a compulsion to change those as well. A Resolve + Composure roll is required to resist the temptation to return to the room. After their first journey, characters can consciously choose what past incident they wish to change. Dreamers must make a Resolve + Composure roll after every dream journey to avoid using the room again. Players also subtract one die from this roll for every dream journey to the past their characters have made.

After their third trip back into the past, characters lose a dot of Willpower (which can be regained for one Experience — see p. 157). Characters lose one additional dot of Willpower after every two additional dream journeys. Characters who have lost Willpower from dreaming of the past must succeed on a roll of Wits + Resolve – (the number of dots of Willpower already lost) every time they use the room. Failing this roll means that the dreamer is compelled to undo one of his significant social connections and reduce his visibility. He might have left his spouse years ago or refused a past promotion to a position of authority. Merits like Influence are lost first, followed by Allies, Contacts, Rank and Retainer.

Once a dreamer's Willpower has been reduced to one, he become dull, listless and only interested in making further edits. When someone's Willpower falls to zero, he vanishes. The world edits itself around his absence, so that no one remembers that he ever existed other than people who have also used the room to alter the past.

Minor or even moderate damage to the couch or room automatically repairs itself the next time someone enters the room. However, demolishing the couch or ripping down most of the wallpaper and damaging the walls causes the room to cease to exist. For one minute, the room distorts, appearing to change shape and size rapidly and randomly. Anyone who leaves during this time is fine. Anyone who remains inside vanishes with the room and is never seen again. When the room vanishes, the door into it also vanishes.

Linchpins

The two Linchpins are the room and the other dreamers. The eight-by-ten-foot windowless room looks exactly like something that belongs in the 24-hour diner, a ratty old couch, a 1980s floor lamp, and a couple of beat up tables. The only entrance or exit is the door from the diner. Underneath the faded, stained and faintly lumpy gold and blue striped wallpaper, the wall is covered with a connected series of metallic sigils.

The couch looks large and surprisingly comfortable, with a slightly tattered harvest gold fabric cover. Anyone who lifts up the seat cushions sees struts and springs like those found in a sofa-bed. However, anyone attempting to fold out the couch finds that it doesn't open up. Carefully examining the struts reveals that they connect to an unusual network of wires that go inside the base of the couch. Gaining access to the rest of the mechanism requires cutting or ripping off the fabric covering the couch's base. Inside the base is a bizarre and nonsensical-looking array of carved bits of quartz, human finger bones wrapped in copper wire and the complete skeleton of a crow wired together with silver wire, connected to the rest of the wire mechanism.

Once the characters have used the room a few times and perhaps lost some Willpower, the God-Machine sends the angel Jenn to watch the place. She takes the place of the night waitress, and keeps a careful eye on the patrons. More information on Jenn can be found in Chapter Three (p. 136).

Methods

Crafts: Characters who examine the couch and succeed at an Intelligence + Crafts roll notice that struts in the couch are not part of a fold-out bed. They are instead connected to strange devices that lead into the interior of the couch.

Investigation: The door into the room is in between the restroom and manager's office. A successful Intelligence + Investigation roll allows someone to notice that only two feet of space exists between the wall of the bathroom and the wall of the manager's office, making the interior dimensions of the room impossible.

Larceny: A Wits + Larceny roll allows a character to discretely place a wireless camera in the hallway near the door to the room so that the character can identify who else is using this room.

Stealth: What do other people dream? Roll Composure + Stealth to hide in the room until someone else falls asleep. If you stay there with them and fall asleep as well, do you time-travel together?

Empathy: Characters who have used this room at least once gain a sense of other people who have used this room. Any time one dreamer sees another, he makes a reflexive Intelligence + Empathy roll. Success means that the observer can tell that this person has also used this room. The observer also gains a general, vague sense of what events have changed in this dreamer's life. If the observer personally knows the dreamer, he gains more information.

Streetwise: Dreamers remember anyone who vanishes because they used the room one too many times. As soon as a dreamer asks a non-dreamer about the vanished person (whom they no longer remember ever existed), the dreamer simultaneously remembers that the vanished person never existed in the reality they now inhabit. A Wits + Streetwise roll permits characters to learn about and locate other people who have been talking about strange events involving a strange room, changing their past, and people vanishing.

Merit: Good Time Management (see p. 163): Once in the past, you only have so much time. Making quick use of the time you have is essential.

Merit: True Friend (see p. 172): If you could relieve one moment, would anyone believe you? Changing the past is risky and potentially addictive, and it would be helpful to have someone who could share the experience — unless, of course, that friend starts using the room, too.

Escalation

Rooms like this begin appearing in several cities and towns. Rumors about these rooms begin circulating on the internet, as do reports of people vanishing and no one else remembering them. Depending on how this progresses, important bits of history like deaths might be altered, leading to Wake the Dead (p. 86).

A Journey Into Time (p. 101) is also a natural progression from this story.

Sister City

Something is wrong with the old familiar skyline. Is there a building that wasn't there before, a cab from a company that doesn't exist, the smell of exotic food coming from a library? Is it possible this isn't even your city anymore? What do you do when the God-Machine glitches and you see what you aren't meant to see?

Infrastructure

In 1889 Seattle burned nearly to the ground. A new city was built up over the ashes and tinder left behind. But the God-Machine wasn't quite done with the old city, so it allowed the old city to continue to exist in the same space at the same time, but with neither city aware of each other's existence.

It's an average day in Seattle. Maybe you're in software design, or coffee, or organic foods. The drizzle doesn't get to you any more than the cold and you're content knowing you're in one of the most forward thinking, progressive and intelligent cities in the world when....

It's an average day in Old Seattle. Maybe you're in shipping, gambling, or dock work. The occasional piracy doesn't get to you anymore than the crooked politicians because you're content knowing you're in one of the most exciting, adventurous, free-spirited cities in the world when....

Something crosses over from Seattle to Old Seattle or vice versa. A ship with modern technology and cannons pulls into the Seattle harbor, or some of the old fashioned dock workers find a cell phone, technology their city has never seen before. And the characters are on hand to see the lifting illusion between the two places.

The Truth: The God-Machine isn't doing this on purpose, so the city's dual nature isn't really Infrastructure. Rather, Old Seattle is logistical Infrastructure insofar as the God-Machine kept it going after the fire as a kind of "what if" experiment, but the two cities were never meant to merge. All of the God-Machine's attempts to keep the cities separate and kill people who cross over, then, are elimination Infrastructure.

Interchangeable Parts

The player characters should be split, some of them living in current Seattle and some living in Old Seattle. Up until now, their lives have been separate. Now, they run into each other's lives as one city crashes into another and sharing one space becomes a problem.

Characters in Seattle are exactly the sorts of people you'd expect in a modern, liberal tech town.

Characters in Old Seattle have a wilder lifestyle and temperament. Given a hundred years to grow under the God-Machine's careful machinations, it still holds on to its wild frontier feeling. Drunks and foreigners still occasionally get kidnapped out of bars and sold off into slavery. Pirates and a pirate-based economy still exist, though the media

and politicians pretend they don't. In general, the tech is lower, except when it comes to ships and sailing. Old Seattle is known more for its liberal gambling laws and loopholes than it is for coffee.

All of the characters witness some event that crosses between the cities. It would save time if all of the characters saw it together, but if you have a bit more time on your hands and wish the chronicle to evolve more organically, have each character experience her own moment of wonder as some facet of the cities merge. Once the characters witness the "other" Seattle (from a given character's perspective), they can cross between the cities at certain spots. This requires a Resolve + Occult roll (teamwork rules apply; see p. 134 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). The crossover spots appear to be random, but characters can learn to create them (see Methods).

Blueprints

The God-Machine did not plan for the two cities to run into each other and it's not a part of the order. As a result, its agents are out and about in the city with two goals in mind: find out why the cities are merging and destroy anyone who has seen evidence of the merger.

As the characters unravel the veil between the two worlds, they'll soon find they're on the list for termination. The story can follow a few paths. The characters can race to find the source of the slow crash and use it as leverage to get the God-Machine and its servants off their backs. They can somehow try to merge the cities and in doing so loose the hold the God-Machine has on them. They may try to break the cities apart, removing the need for the agents of the God-Machine to keep hunting and hopefully be left alone.

Linchpins

The God-Machine has many agents in both Seattle and Old Seattle. The majority are humans trapped within the various institutions that make up a city's bureaucracy. Sometimes, however, what comes looking to keep the cities separate is entirely inhuman.

Take the Polis Men, for example. Despite potential confusion, in the mundane world these agents do not appear as cops. Cops draw too much attention. Rather, they appear most often as street art, sidewalk chalk drawings, or statuary and other artistic installations. They're made up of the city itself, of concrete and wrought iron. When the lie between the cities thins and they cross over into each other, the Polis Men rise from their watchful positions with the sound of rending stone and move with surprising speed and brutality. They burned a city to the ground once for the God-Machine. They'll do it again if the population gets too contaminated with the truth. The Polis Men are angels, and are detailed in Chapter Three (p. 139).

This Tale doesn't include a single Linchpin, as the crux of the conflict — the cities merging — isn't something the God-Machine planned for. That said, if the characters want to find a way to reverse the merger, they need to find a nexus between the two cities. This point in Old Seattle is a storefront that makes and repairs cabinetry and other wooden furniture. In Seattle, it is in a burnt-out basement in the Seattle Underground (a honeycomb of basements and tunnels from pre-fire Seattle, built over in the ensuing decades).

The nexus point appears as a pot of boiling glue (this is what started the Great Fire; the pot boiled over and ignited). The characters in Seattle need to put the fire out, while the characters in Old Seattle need to set it ablaze; doing this will end the merger and separate the cities again. Of course, doing the opposite (burning Seattle but saving Old Seattle) might *complete* the merger (see Escalation).

Methods

Computer: You don't have technology anything like this phone you found. They seem to garner signal from sources that don't exist where you live. Yet it exists. It's entirely divergent, fulfilling needs your version of reality simply never satisfied. And yet, it could be so useful now. Roll Intelligence + Computers and determine how much of this new tech you can steal.

Occult: The veil between the cities has broken, though its average inhabitants don't know. You, however, can learn to create crossover spots. This requires two characters, one in each version of Seattle, focusing on crossing over. Roll Wits + Occult; if both parties succeed, the immediate area gains the "Crossover Spot" Condition for 12 hours per success (total from both rolls).

Drive: Whatever it is that's following you is made of pigeon feathers, glass, and rage. Roll Dexterity + Drive to navigate your car through a network of new and old buildings and streets.

Survival: This city seems so familiar, and yet the streets are labeled wrong, and who would put buildings up on hills like this? Roll Intelligence + Survival to keep your sense of direction in the unfamiliar version of your city.

Intimidation: Old Seattle is more rough-and-tumble than the place you're from. If you don't want to be subject to a brutal hazing at the hands of the dockworkers, you need to present a tough front. Roll Presence + Intimidation to get them to leave you alone.

Streetwise: You know all the gang activity in town, or at least you've heard of most of it. These new guys? They're behaving strangely to say the least. Roll Intelligence + Streetwise to put your finger on what's odd about these gangsters.

Merit: Trained Observer (p 164): It takes especially keen eyes to see the subtle shifts between Old Seattle and New Seattle, and your character can spot them more easily than your average person. That's part of why you could see through the lie, but only part.

Merit: Parkour (p 165): In some places, navigating between buildings, under the city, and even between cities is impossible by "normal" standards of movement. That's not a problem for you, though — you can reach the crossover spots that are literally over everyone else's heads.

Escalation

This story may end when the characters discover what is causing the cities to crash in on each other and may ultimately be separated on one side or the other as a result. Or, they might choose to complete the merger, in which case Seattle becomes a strange mix of old and new. How this plays out for your chronicle is up to you — maybe the world shifts so that any changes that have been made have *always* been the case, leading into other magical realism-inspired Tales like Wake the Dead (p. 86). Or maybe the characters become unstuck from time, leading to Tales like A Journey Into Time (p. 101) or Do-Over (p. 71).

Alternatively, maybe the characters can only stabilize things; instead of a chase, their relationship with the Polis Men becomes more like a series of heists as the characters live in both cities, slipping from one side to the other for their own benefit and the frustration of the God-Machine and its agents.

Perhaps they take their show on the road, seeking out other twin cities all over the world to plunder them for adventure, or else stop catastrophic collisions from Rome to Dubai. This could naturally lead into Urban Wandering (p. 108). If the God-Machine decides that these characters are trouble-makers, though, it might lead them into such dangerous Tales as Proposition 279 (p. 96) or What Is It Good For (p. 105).

The Squares of the City

Starting one night at midnight, a series of buildings all across the city begin to move in impossible ways for a short period of time. At the end of this movement, the last building to move vanishes. Only a few people notice these movements or the fact that later buildings are in different locations and some have vanished.

Infrastructure

This tale takes place in a medium-sized or large city located anywhere in the world. Every night a dozen or more buildings in a single neighborhood of the city move and rearrange themselves. This movement begins at midnight, but every night it begins one minute later, beginning on 12:01 the next night and at 12:05 five nights later. Although it looks impossible, each building moves as a separate unit, while the streets and sidewalks curve and bend to keep up. The buildings move on pairs of parallel sliding tracks that open up in the fabric of the streets and they travel at the speed of a fast walk. Anyone who is outside when this happens can see what is happening quite clearly, and also notices that almost no one within roughly half a mile of the affected area is outside either while the buildings move or for the five minutes before or after.

This movement is never simply linear. It looks like movements of a complex two-dimensional puzzle, where one building moves south three blocks, then another near it moves west two blocks, allowing a third building to move north for three blocks, taking the first building's place. This movement takes approximately 10 minutes to complete and at the end of it, the building the makes the last move vanishes. This building and anyone inside of it are edited out of reality. Numbers in telephone books and cell phone address books vanish, business licenses and tax records disappear, people's medical bank and tax records all vanish. No one remembers that anything is different, except that a few people who had a loved one vanish may be inexplicably sad and lonely for several weeks. The only people who notice that a building and the people in it have vanished are the people who notice the buildings moving.

The Truth: The tracks that allow the city blocks to move (described below) are Logistical Infrastructure. The streets over them, and the general culture of the area that keeps most people off the streets late at night, are a longstanding form of Concealment Infrastructure. Editing the buildings out of existence, of course, is Elimination Infrastructure.

Interchangeable Parts

The characters in this tale should all be somewhat outside of the normal ebb and flow of existence in this city. One may be a new arrival who is looking for work or taking time off to write a novel. Another could be a temp worker who works a wide variety of jobs in different locations and has few lasting connections, while a third might be homeless. All that is required is that these people not have stable jobs and be inclined to occasionally stay up past midnight.

Blueprints

Every night another building vanishes, and most of these buildings are inhabited. No one remembers the vanished people except for the few people who have been unable to get inside at midnight and some people with serious mental illnesses. All of these people remember that both an office building and a large apartment building have vanished, along with several smaller buildings. Several hundred people have already been edited out of reality.

The people who can see and hear the buildings move grow increasingly out of sync with everyone around them because they remember a growing number of people, business, restaurants and shops that no one else does. Sometimes, the first clue a person has to the fact that a particular building has vanished is they mention a previously well-known shop or restaurant and everyone around them looks at them strangely. These comments cause everyone to look at the characters oddly and to be increasingly distant. If the characters are unable to prevent the building from moving, after several weeks they find that most of their close friends have become somewhat distant acquaintances.

Linchpins

The characters all find themselves outside one night when the buildings begin to move. Everyone in the city feels a strong unconscious compulsion to get indoors a few minutes before the buildings move, but occasionally someone locks herself out of her home, drops her keys, or gets lost driving back from the store. Each character feels an urgent desire to get home (or to the shop, office or other building they were planning to be in around midnight) as rapidly as possible, but for some reason fails to get there in time.

While they are outside, each of the characters hears strange rumblings as the buildings begin moving. The next day, the business that employed the temp worker or the shop where the homeless woman was regularly given free food has vanished, along with the entire building it was in. No one else notices. In fact, online maps and the records of the temp agency clearly show that the business and the building never existed, even though the characters remember it. The next night, characters who live in the same part of town look out their window and see buildings in their neighborhood moving.

If at least three people stand and watch the last building move, it does not vanish — it simply moves to its final location and stops. However, all of these people must be able to clearly see the building and can be no more than 100 yards away from it. Also, while that building does not vanish, buildings in a different part of the city move during the next night and another building vanishes. It's possible to keep buildings from vanishing in this fashion, but doing so requires a nightly vigil at the location where the last building moves.

There is another way to stop the buildings from moving, which requires the characters to seek answers beneath the city. Like most other cities, this city has storm sewers, access corridors and other tunnels underneath the streets. Anyone who gains access to these tunnels and has watched the buildings move can see that the tracks on which the buildings move are clearly visible in the ceilings of these tunnels, even when the buildings are not moving.

On the surface, these tracks vanish as flanges of asphalt rise up to cover them. They remain underground, hidden from sight. If someone cuts, welds or otherwise disables and disrupts these tracks sufficiently, they can be disabled permanently. Cutting one of these tracks or welding a metal bar across them causes lurching and grinding sounds as the buildings move, and means that some of the buildings cannot move at all. More extensive damage slows the process so that it now requires two nights for buildings to move into the correct configuration for a building to vanish. Disabling these rails at points all across the city causes buildings to cease moving and ends the threat of buildings vanishing.

If the characters attack the rails or otherwise attempt to stop the process, they receive a visit the next day from Officer Strait. Officer Strait is an angel taking the form of a traffic cop. He cannot leave the streets, but he attempts to stop the characters from severing the rails or otherwise altering the Squares of the City. More information on Officer Strait can be found in Chapter Three (p. 139).

Methods

Crafts: Characters examining the tracks the buildings move on who succeed at a Wits + Crafts roll notice that these tracks might remain visible in tunnels underneath the city. An Intelligence + Crafts roll helps characters understand how to permanently disable these tracks.

Investigation: Every night, the buildings in a different part of the city move. All of these movements occur in a complex but comprehensible pattern, however. After observing movements for at least three nights, characters can make an Intelligence + Investigation roll at –2 to determine the next neighborhood to move. A second successful roll reveals what building will vanish. An exceptional success on either roll allows the character to completely understand the pattern of movement and predict what buildings will move and vanish days or weeks in the future.

Drive: Characters who begin driving as soon as they hear the rumble of the buildings starting to move can drive to this area before the buildings cease moving by making a successful Wits + Drive roll.

Survival: Character walking through the underground tunnels can make a Wits + Survival roll to find the area beneath any particular building or series of buildings.

Persuasion: A Manipulation + Persuasion roll allows characters to convince the inhabitants of a building that will soon disappear to evacuate from the building. Characters must convince people to leave before the building begins to move. Once a building begins moving, no one can get in or out.

Subterfuge: Characters can use Presence + Subterfuge to successfully impersonate emergency services personnel and convince residents of a building to evacuate.

Merit: Demolisher (see p. 164): Characters with a knack for tearing things apart have an easy time disabling the rail system.

Merit: Omen Sensitivity (see p. 173): When characters see a building that will vanish that night, anyone who gets hints or visions of the future makes a reflexive Wits + Occult roll to notice that this particular building is the one that will disappear.

Escalation

If the characters manage to sever the rails and dodge the attentions of Officer Strait, they've saved the city from losing buildings and people — at least for the time being. The God-Machine might decide to try to rebuild this Infrastructure, but it will take time and effort. If the characters want to be vigilant they can stay in the area and try to stop it.

Of course, the God-Machine might decide to take a different approach and shift the characters to whatever alternate place the buildings went. This could lead to Sister City (p. 73) or Missing Persons (p. 82).

Wellington School for Gifted Children

The children of Wellington School are special, brilliant, and strange. Are they the cause or the reason for the strange and sometimes deadly occurrences that happen around the school? You, the faculty, are about to find out.

Infrastructure

When the public school system in this medium-sized American city "failed," many of the schools were bought out by private companies. This included Wellington, a special school that handles children who are both troubled and brilliant — the sort of kids who get so bored they cause trouble if sent to an average school. In the privatization, Edu Tech Corp fired the entire staff, disposed of the old computer systems and hired a whole new faculty and administration. They called it "restructuring." The fired teachers called it "union busting."

Things got weird at the school for a while. The papers reported some of the old staff wouldn't give up their jobs. They locked themselves in the building chanting crazed profanity and had to be removed by force. The paper's never said what they were chanting, or told their side of the story. No word of trial or resolution, they just vanished.

The staff has been told to ignore the gossip, to assume the kids will make up stories. They're "troubled," after all, and will do anything for attention whether positive or negative. Strange behavior, including gossip, should be reported to the Administer of Public Trust, (a replacement for the plump, good-natured principal). School policy with regards to the students is very clear. Assure them everything is fine. Nothing has changed. They're safe.

In Truth: As will become apparent, the Wellington School is *not* part of God-Machine Infrastructure. In fact, the God-Machine has no power and no visibility on school grounds. As such, the players' characters in this Tale *are* the Infrastructure, specifically elimination. They don't realize this (at least not at first), but as the Tale progresses they should come to understand their function.

Interchangeable Parts

The players take on the roles of staff, teachers, advisers, coaches, and possibly even janitor or staff as a part of Edu Tech's takeover of Wellington. That may sound like a limiting selection of character types, but it doesn't have to be. Edu Tech isn't interested in paying for the best teachers money can hire. Rather, they're looking to cut corners wherever possible. They're out for profit, and so they hire anyone who can handle the basics of teaching. They call it a "focus on real world experience." What they mean is, "if we can sneak you through a background check and you can remotely justify your experience, you're hired."

Wellington always focused on future careers as well as higher learning, so they have a functioning auto shop program and metal works. Retired cops may find themselves asked to teach Criminal Justice to high school students at a college level. To keep the children enthusiastic and challenged, maybe they've arranged for a guest instructor this semester in anthropology, world religions, paranormal studies, or other esoteric subjects.

It's perfectly reasonable for one or all of the characters to play some of the troubled teens from the school, students who live, sleep, and eat inside the strange walls. If you have access to it, **World of Darkness: Innocents** covers playing an actual child (ages 12 and under) at the school. If the student in question is older than 12, the standard character creation rules work perfectly well.

Blueprints

All children are special, of course, but these children are more special than most. For whatever trick of circumstance or twistedly inspired architecture, the God-Machine cannot operate within the walls of Wellington. As a result, the children raised within its walls never learn to ignore the truth — the supernatural remains an open book to them all through adult life. In game terms, all of the students at the school have the God-Machine version of the Unseen Sense Merit (see p. 175). If the Storyteller wants to make the supernatural a bit more overt, they might be more prone to manifesting psychic powers such as Telekinesis or Telepathy.

The God-Machine wants to remove this liability. Of course, a group of children being wiped out in almost any instance in the US can be more of a shock to the system than the God-Machine is prepared for. Besides, the God-Machine isn't entirely certain what's happening or why (since it can't see inside the school grounds at all). Therefore, it's taken a more subtle approach. The characters' mission is to undo whatever glamour hovers over the place, whatever makes the place unique. The God-Machine's hope is that any liability from the place (that is, people who possess the capacity to see it) can be disposed of or used at leisure once the blind spot is corrected.

If the characters don't deliver the God-Machine the secrets it's looking for (and they likely won't), it starts attacking the school and the student body. It isn't trying to destroy the place (since it doesn't know what effect that might have), but rather wants to nudge the characters into finding out what's so special about Wellington. The God-Machine doesn't really care about "why" in the end. It just wants this pocket outside its influence to be controlled or destroyed.

Linchpins

The characters work at the school but they answer to Edu Tech. Edu Tech is a national corporation that swoops into bankrupt school districts, takes federal money and gets the schools running again. They do it by cutting corners and hiring unqualified staff, but the test scores look good, so they're

29th April 1914

Dear Mr. Dear,

It falls to me as commanding officer in situ to inform you with heavy regret that your brother, Lt. Alexander Dear, died yesterday while engaging with German forces near St. Julien.

I hope it is some consolation to you that he died giving up his life for his men, as, wounded, he offered his gas mask to another man. Lt. Dear died a hero, and will be mourned by his men and his superiors as a popular officer and a fine soldier.

Yours,

Cpt. David Murphy,

2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers

staying profitable. The local branch of Edu Tech has been brought under the God-Machine's influence, as mentioned. The Linchpin here is their legal staff, a collection of three seemingly human figures. The characters might notice that these lawyers' breath seems smoky — it's not quite as opaque as smoke, but it has a pleasantly woody, burnt odor.

The God-Machine has also sent an angel to receive reports from the characters. The angel makes deliveries of school supplies and Edu Tech-approved texts and tests once a week. Its name (as far as human beings are concerned) is Emil Rubio, and it is described in more detail in Chapter Three (p. 135).

To spur the characters into looking into the occult nature of the school, Rubio might find it necessary to help things along. His attacks on the school itself and its student body should start out mundane, or at least dismissible. A tragic death, apparently by accident, is easy to ignore. Maybe some of the kids are whispering about ghosts, but the characters see no signs at first. After their first glimpse, maybe they think they're dealing with ghosts and spirits. But the ghosts seem to be made of smoke (and carry the same odor as the lawyers' breath), and the "haunting" only seems to become intense on days when Rubio makes deliveries. The Storyteller's goal here is to start the players down a path thinking they're just dealing with traditional World of Darkness strangeness, only to find that all the strangeness is tied to the God-Machine.

Methods

Academics: The investigative reporter planted too many questions in your mind. Could it be true the teaching methods you've been handed are harming these children? Is the pedagogy all wrong? Why would they need to be brainwashed instead of educated? Roll Intelligence + Academics to find out more.

Crafts: You and three children are trapped, cornered by a creature with mirrored eyes and smoky, harsh breath. Looking around, you realize you're in the Metal Shop. Roll Intelligence + Crafts to build a trap to stop the specter.

Larceny: The truth has been scrubbed from the records at school. Whatever actually happened here — is happening here — isn't within Wellington. It looks like you're going to have to break into Edu Tech headquarters. Roll Dexterity + Larceny to start your foray into B&E.

Weaponry: Covered in soot and blood, you stand back from the ruins of the playground, your eyes turning to count the teens. Still seven. Next time you won't be so lucky. Next time, they're going to need to know how to defend themselves. Roll Presence + Weaponry to start training.

Empathy: They told you these kids were "troubled," which usually means some kind of emotional or development disturbance, but that isn't what's going on. Michael, a student, is horrified by something he's seen, but he's not willing to talk to you or anyone. There's got to be a way to get through to him. Roll Wits + Empathy to find a way to build trust.

Subterfuge: The meeting with Edu Tech's HR director went well enough, but why did she insist on a lawyer being there? Roll Wits + Subterfuge to get a sense of the relationship between them.

Merit: Eye for the Strange (p. 162): Maybe one of the characters is a student or a former student. Whatever the reasons, this character is also resistant to the lies and illusions of the God-Machine. She'll sense something wrong, something off, and help open the door for the other characters.

Merit: Hobbyist Clique (p. 168): Schools are great places for minds to meet. An afterschool club that's reading horror comics to keep off the streets is a step and a hop away from a team of occult researchers at hand. All these kids need is a little nudge.

Escalation

The characters have moved from simply investigating the nature of Wellington to full on protecting the students. They may live out their days protecting and training the students for war, they may be destroyed by the God-Machine, but in

many ways, there is no escape from Wellington for the faculty once they've discovered it's secrets. Nowhere else is safe.

This raises the question: What *is* so special about Wellington that makes it invisible to the God-Machine? The answer to that question depends on what the Storyteller's plans are for the chronicle. Here are three suggestions:

The architect of Wellington was a devotee of Marco Singe (see p. 25) and built the school as an exaltation to the God-Machine. He got it wrong, though, as the characters can discover when they find his notes hidden in a compartment in the wall. If they correct his mistake and grant the God-Machine more power here, what reward might the characters receive? From here, consider running The Moon Window (p.84) or The Invisible Citadel (p. 92).

Maybe Sarah Andrews (see p. 124) is responsible for the God-Machine's blindness. For whatever reason, she emits a psychic frequency that acts like static. At Wellington, it become especially powerful. The God-Machine, of course, might respond to this by sending agents to kill Sarah — or capture her for further study. The characters might have to grab her and run or live with exposing her to the God-Machine. From here: Missing Persons (if Sarah disappears into a portal; p. 82) or Do-Over (if they search for a way to correct what happened to her; p. 71).

For a more cosmic possibility, maybe this isn't the only blind spot that the God-Machine is experiencing. All over the world, it is losing its influence and its power. Is this a good thing? Is it withdrawing from a doomed world? Will it grind the Earth into dust trying to correct the problem? From here, consider: This is Hell (p. 103) or Sister City (if it tries to revert to a backup copy; p. 73).

Ghost Machine

The small towns of New England have a problem — something is causing their machines to break down. Little villages like this can't easily compensate when stoplights and cellphones lose functionality, but life goes on. When boat engines start bleeding and gears scream, though, it'll be up to you to fight the ghosts in the machines.

Infrastructure

Along small coastal towns and riverside villages in the New England states, the God-Machine has begun an experiment. It's haunting the machinery human beings use every day. Why? Is it part of a plan to test our dependence on it? Maybe to see how weak we'd be in the face of a worldwide cataclysm? Whatever it is, it's an experiment and for now it's being performed on a small scale. All of these low population towns are near the coast. That may be a part of the plan, but it isn't a direct explanation of anything. The water is part of a pattern but not a solution.

Don't get caught up in the "why," because the "what" is the issue for your characters. With their machinery being overtaken by ghosts, it'll be a long struggle before the characters can even consider digging at the root of the problem. Right now, a few people scattered through these towns are trying to take old folk remedies said to protect them from ghosts and apply them to the issue. The characters may get directly involved with the resistance, may spearhead it, or may try to avoid it while seeking other solutions.

The Truth: The Infrastructure at work here is Logistical, overseen by the angel called Black Nathaniel. Black Nathaniel takes a more active role than many of the God-Machine's agents, calling up spirits of the dead and binding them to electronic and mechanical devices.

Interchangeable Parts

Characters who are able to travel a bit are ideal for this chronicle. While the characters won't need to travel cross-country, they need to be able to cross state lines in order to hit all the locations where the machines are breaking down. Ties to those small communities are also a plus, as they can be insular. Professional fisherman, characters with family ties through the region, or even a Highway Patrol or Coast Guard officer would have a reason to move around and yet find a place within various communities.

Of course, being outsiders trying to solve the problem may itself be an angle of approach when Storytelling this chronicle. Getting in and getting close to the people affected by the God-Machine's experiment is difficult, but sometimes it's the unknown quantity who can break through established patterns of interaction.

Blueprints

The God-Machine is running an experiment on these towns. As mentioned above, its reasons for the experiment — what hypothesis it wishes to test or plan it wishes to advance — aren't immediately important. One possibility is that it prefers have ghosts haunt physical, easily portable machines over them being anchored to people or places and wants to see if this approach makes hauntings more or less chaotic. Another option is that the God-Machine just needs the unquiet dead of these towns out of the way to make room for something else (perhaps a region-wide Infrastructure). As Storyteller, don't make this decision unless you have to — the characters probably won't ever discover that truth anyway (unless you escalate the chronicle to the Global or Cosmic level, but by that time the characters should have enough of an understanding of the scale of the God-Machine that "we'll never really understand" becomes a viable answer).

The God-Machine is churning up the souls of the dead from wherever they might rest and stuffing them into anything with a circuit board or moving parts. Many locals have their traditions and their superstitions, but this is different. The traditions of old sailors and other folk superstitions just aren't compatible with this technological terror. As a result, without outside agents, (like the characters) the locals won't make the leaps of research and study necessary to resist. The machine ghosts of the God-Machine terrorize the locals until

it's satisfied with the results — but that might leave the North East dotted with tiny ghost towns too dangerous to reclaim.

Linchpins

The spirits of the dead might reside in computers, watches, millstones and even overhead lighting. All of the things we understand as complex machines are, in essence, an extension of the massive cosmic entity that is the God-Machine. A fisherman might turn on his television to find the signal dead and the faces of those he left behind in the war screaming profanity at him. A husband who let his wife die rather than keep her on a ventilator may face her final revenge when he cleans out the garbage disposal one night.

Reapers and Sowers carry the ghosts under the direction of Black Nathaniel (Chapter Three, p. 132). These angels are hard to catch; the average person never sees the Reapers and Sowers, only the ghosts they've bound. They work in pairs, of course: the Reaper is a tall, gaunt, mechanical man that smells like rust and motor oil carrying an old fashioned lantern that glows an ugly green. That's where he keeps the souls he's reaped from elsewhere. The Sower is a squat, womanish horror made of moist leather patches from her duties sewing souls into the workings of the God-Machine.

Methods

Academics: Many of the graves of a small local graveyard have been dug up. Why? That's going to be hard to discern. First, you're going to have to figure out who was dug up to figure out why. Roll Intelligence + Academics to sort through old church records and figure out whose remains have been disturbed.

Crafts: It's possible that you can spirit-proof some machines, but the process is delicate and complicated. It will take a skilled hand. Roll Dexterity + Crafts to experiment with ghost-proofing your computer without destroying its delicate components.

Drive: The boat has a mind of its own and it's taking you out to sea. That might not be an insurmountable problem, but those clouds look threatening. Roll Strength + Drive to wrestle the controls away from the ghost controlling the boat long enough to aim the craft back toward land.

Stealth: Black Nathaniel is out hunting for ghosts — if he can't find any, he'll make some. Roll Dexterity + Stealth to sneak under the watchful eye of a murderous angel.

Animal Ken: All of the cats in town — actually, in all of the towns you've visited — are acting strange. Roll Wits + Animal Ken to figure out what the common cause is.

Persuasion: If New England loves anything more than a ghost story, it's a town hall meeting. The crowd is getting restless and panicky. Roll Presence + Persuasion to calm the locals into telling you their story before panic sets in.

Merit: Encyclopedic Knowledge (Computer) (p 162): With a focus on technology and the Computer Skill, your character may be vital in both discovering the nature of the hauntings as well as helping take back the technology stolen in the God-Machine's experiment.

Merit: Barfly (p 166): You might not need an invitation to get into a dockworkers' pub, but you'll be treated to the coldest of receptions unless you can get the locals to warm to you.

Escalation

It's possible that if the characters organize well enough, they might prove the experiment is more trouble than it's worth, causing the God-Machine to focus its attentions to other matters. But what if a scattered handful of techno-exorcists aren't actually enough to deter the God-Machine? What if the God-Machine's experiment is successful and it decides to spread it? Or what if this experiment is the first stage in launching a more destructive (The Scarlet Plague, p. 97) or invasive (A Glimpse of Mesmerizing Complexity, p.89) initiative?

Imagine a world where people must fight to reclaim technology from wrathful, tortured ghosts while trying to hide from monstrous machine-men wielding the ghost-infested tech. Should the story go Cosmic, a full-on end-of-the-world scenario could position the last survivors of a nuclear holocaust against the God-Machine's agents and its twisted ghost-tech. The characters struggle to survive, rebuild, and steal back fire from Prometheus, after a fashion, and ward their tools against further possession. Left unchecked, this scenario could go by way of Missing Persons (p. 82) straight into This Is Hell (p. 103).

The Key

Somewhere out there is the Key to the God-Machine. Last Thursday he killed three people in three different cities at the same moment. How do you catch a man with no way to track him or prove his guilt? How do you stop a Key that can open a part of God?

Infrastructure

Three different police precincts are baffled. Local papers in three cities are pointing fingers and someone on a local network affiliate is suggesting that the police are covering up an internal problem. How else can you explain three murders, performed with an identical ritual, with blood and other evidence indicating one single suspect in three different cities at the exact same time?

Most of the departments, being territorial and embarrassed, want to push this whole thing aside as quickly as possible. They want to treat it as three different crimes, find their own bad guys and wrap up the strangeness as quickly as possible. Because the media has heard so much and are so interested in this impossible crime, however, no one is going to be able to sweep it under the rug too easily.

The killer has left notes, mocking messages detailing how he'll kill again and when, but not where. As he says, "space is only an issue for you. I can be anywhere I want, and I will be. How many of you have wives at home? Can you be in two places at once, like I can?" He also says he'll be writing

to the newspapers next. He plans to be, as he puts it, "the greatest cog the machine has ever known, the greatest killer the world has ever seen."

The Truth: The Key is Wesley Cote (p. 125), a man who came unstuck from time just after his wife's death. As a teenager, Cote received a visit from his future self (once he'd started killing) and was informed of his destiny. He honed his ability to sidestep time and space and used it to kill, but only ever in the future from the perspective of his widowed self. Wesley has his own theories about what he is and why he does what he does, but the truth is that he is mobile Elimination Infrastructure. Occasionally an angel called Grief delivers a message to him and he kills that person on the say-so of the God-Machine. The rest of the time, he just kills at whim.

Interchangeable Parts

The characters might be a publicity stunt. The three departments decide to create a well-publicized task force consisting of detectives from all three precincts working together and sharing resources. Throw in an overseeing FBI agent in case someone decides to take the case federal, and maybe an Internal Affairs mole (this looks a lot like cops are behind the whole mess), and you have the setup for a tense procedural drama.

Or, to take it in a different direction, the chronicle could follow some news hounds as they look into the matter as civilians. Maybe the cops are tied up in the God-Machine on a less metaphoric level, and the only way to stop the Key and his killings is for these reporters to investigate themselves. Maybe the Key has picked them as his chroniclers and a part of his delusion, so they have to find and stop him before he gets to them.

A third possibility is that the characters have already run across the God-Machine and the Key is targeting them directly. This works best if one player is willing to sacrifice her character to start things off.

In any case, let the players choose which three cities are involved. This Tale is Regional in scope, meaning that, as written, the cities should be in the same general part of the world, but if you want to take it Global and have the cities all be on different continents, that's just as effective.

Blueprints

He calls himself the Key because he believes he has unlocked part of God and has full access to that aspect. He can hear the workings of the God-Machine. Everywhere he goes, he hears the ratcheting pulse of the God-Machine's plans and whirring beats of its machinations. The Key believes that he understands those plans. It's all clear to him. If he weren't a perfect part of a perfect system, how could he possibly do what he does?

Granted, he doesn't exactly understand what it is he does or how he can shift in time and space the way he does. It doesn't matter. What matters is that everyone knows he's doing it. He knows he'll be caught, eventually. He doesn't plan to make it easy, but he does plan for it, and his capture

should be one for all of history to remember. He will keep upping the ante, keep pushing the boundaries of what he's capable of doing until he's caught or dead. Because he thinks the God-Machine wants it that way.

Cote is right, of course; the God-Machine does want it this way. The God-Machine created the Key using a kind of closed loop — Grief delivered the message to Cote (age 30), which drove him to the edge of sanity, which pushed him to kill, which enabled Grief to teach him to shift in time, which allowed Cote to go back in time and train Cote (age 16) to stalk and kill, which made him unstable and thus able to hear Grief's message at age 30... The sad tale of Wesley Cote is truly a chicken-and-egg scenario, and it's enough to cause a breaking point (see p. 155) to any character that figures it out.

For its part, the God-Machine doesn't care much about Cote particularly. If the characters kill him, it can create another Key for Elimination Infrastructure purposes. Alternatively, it can use a version of Cote from a different time period (if you think that wouldn't annoy the players).

Linchpins

The God-Machine is largely a motivation and a means in this chronicle rather than a potential antagonist. The horror here, supernatural events aside, is really what one man can do, how he can hold three cities hostage just by reveling in his actions and acting as though the media should be celebrating them.

Signs of the God-Machine might be peppered throughout the stories as a method of setting the mood: they are the trappings that the Key is obsessed with, after all. He likes metal parts and gears, so the deaths may occur near large industrial machines or use them as part of the crime. Remind the players that blood smells like copper and rust. Maybe the characters find three doodles on the walls of the crime scenes, all draw with the same silver marker, but when the doodles are held up next to each other they make the shape of a key.

Methods

Medicine: The coroner does amazing work and her reports are always detailed and complete. Roll Intelligence + Medicine to suss out the details of her report and maybe pick up some vital clues for your investigation.

Politics: The old files you found have been heavily redacted, possibly on a federal level. You refuse to believe it's a dead end, though. Roll Intelligence + Politics to uncover a place where un-redacted files might be held, and more importantly, how to access them.

Firearms: It was bad luck that the only witness to the latest crime is a bit of a recluse and a gun nut whose mental state was made quite fragile by what he saw that night. He sees you as an outsider, maybe even someone tied to the Key. Roll Manipulation + Firearms to bring up enough gun lore from memory to gain his trust and get past his damage.

Larceny: The cabinets in the Chief of Detective's office are locked. You suspect that part of the reason for all those locks has something to do with the Key and what the chief actually knows. Roll Intelligence + Larceny to plan the best time to get into those cabinets and have a look.

Expression: A group of reporters has you cornered. Their questions are real stingers. They want answers and details you aren't able to give them. If you blow them off, though, it'll look even worse. Roll Presence + Expression to tell them things they already know in a new way and convince them they've gotten what they were after.

Empathy: Cote's brother-in-law was there the night his sister died and remembers Cote screaming about a "blue room." To get him to relive that night, he'll have to believe you have his family's best interests at heart. Roll Manipulation + Empathy to get him to talk (alternately, this might be resolved with the Social Maneuvering rules on p. 188).

Merit: Mind of a Madman (p 173): You're the investigator everyone else worries about, the one with a dark cloud over your shoulder and an unpleasant knack for getting into the heads of psychopaths. You can start to understand what makes this guy tick, which means you may understand how to stop him.

Merit: Mentor (p 167): You had a professor in college who's opened a lot of doors for you since then, but what interests you now is her work in "quantum immortality." Of course, her knowledge and your involvement puts her in the Key's sights — and maybe even on the God-Machine's list for elimination. Keep her alive while she helps you sort out what is impossible and what is merely improbable.

Escalation

The Key is dead or in custody. Now what? Either from him or his rambling writings, the characters learn more about this "God-Machine" he was obsessed with. He talks about global conspiracies. He talks about other "parts like him" operating, killing, and serving the God-Machine all over the country, maybe all over the world. One of the parts is apparently planning to take down a plane in the next month. How do the characters follow up? This might lead into Do-Over (p. 71) if the characters try to match time-travel with time-travel, Wake the Dead (p. 86) if they kill the wrong guy, or Wellington School for Gifted Children (p. 77) if it turns out another Key is hiding where the God-Machine can't find her.

Missing Persons

Unusual numbers of people go missing over a large area. People regularly report hearing these people calling for help but can't find them.

Infrastructure

The events begin in any city or town, but the characters must travel across one or more states or a similar area in search of answers, eventually ending up in a small city at the geographical center of the disappearances. The characters begin hearing reports of people (and occasionally pets) vanishing, while others hear them calling from seemingly empty space. These reports occur across an area of several states.

In one famous disappearance, a young man vanished from a car at the top of a Ferris wheel. For the rest of the evening, other patrons claim to have heard the man calling for help when their cars passed the point where he disappeared. Another case involved people in a house losing a dog and hearing it barking inside the house for several days afterwards, but being unable to locate it.

The Truth: The God-Machine conceals its methods in this story by hiding the mechanism creating the portals in a nondescript building. This would normally be considered Concealment Infrastructure, but in this case it's really a *lack* of Infrastructure. The building isn't properly "fixed" in this world, which is why people just ignore the building. This is actually a problem: because the God-Machine didn't make sure that the portals fit into our world, it's interacting with the world in a disruptive way. This may have simply escaped the God-Machine's attention or it may be deliberate, which is a decision for the Storyteller based on her plans for this Tale.

Interchangeable Parts

Almost any characters could work in this adventure, but they need sufficient funds or a car that's in good-enough shape that they can travel several hundred miles. At least one character who has sufficient knowledge of mathematics to be able to understand the pattern of the oval gateways would be very helpful.

Blueprints

People are vanishing because they wander into a series of more than a hundred gateways into another reality. These gateways form a vast rotating spiral covering several states. Each one is an oval eight feet high and five feet wide. Bumping into the side of a gateway does nothing, but anyone who stumbles through the gateway vanishes. Although the gateways are invisible to most people, sound travels through them; anyone near a gateway can hear people on the other side.

The reality that lies on the other side of the oval gateways is exceptionally confusing. The sky and the landscape are almost indistinguishable and to both appear as abstract swirls of color to human eyes. Perceptions of distance, shape and direction are drastically inaccurate and the terrain is highly uneven. Someone could take a single step away from a gateway and find themselves as much as several hundred yards away from the gateway. Attempting to walk towards an object or person that seems close by and directly ahead could lead the character further away from it.

The air in the realm on the other side of the gateways is breathable and time passes one tenth as fast in this other reality, but eventually anyone who remains here starves to death. There is no food, water, or life other in this reality. Near each gateway are least half a dozen people and a larger number of corpses. Some of these people save themselves by stumbling back through the gateway. However, none of these people can see the gateway; they only escape by chance. They reappear with only fragmentary and confusing memories of the reality they were in and the experience drives a few of them insane.

The gateways are created and controlled via a tall windowless building located in the exact center of the spiral of gateways. Inside this building is a vast and complex machine. The characters can either destroy this machine or attempt to adjust it so that the overall gateways are significantly smaller or higher off the ground. Both options would cause far fewer people to be trapped by them, but would not prevent all vanishings. If the characters do nothing, people continue to disappear and never return.

Linchpins

The most obvious manifestations of this phenomenon are the invisible gateways that move across the region. Once an individual sees someone vanish into a gateway, she automatically gains the ability to see the gateways from that point forward. At least one of the characters should see someone vanish.

The gateways appear as faintly glowing ovals that move through the air. These ovals move at a speed of between one and six miles per hour. The further from the center the oval gateway is, the faster they move.

These ovals form a complex spiral pattern all centered on a small city. This city is unusual in that its missing persons rate is significantly lower than anywhere in the surrounding area, precisely because there are no oval gateways anywhere within this city. At the exact center of the spiral is a large windowless building 17 stories high. Although the building appears well cared for, it has no identifying marks other than a small sign saying "Koval Corporation Rental Storage" above the door. The locals ignore the building.

The building has expensive electronic locks but no other security system. The first floor contains only unused offices, a stairway and an elevator to the upper floors. Both require a key card to access. The other 16 floors contain a vast and complex machine. The machine is a confusing mass of scaffolding, interlocking gears, flashing lights, and sheets of transparent, glowing glass. The machine is alien to humans, but is obviously large, powerful, and exceptionally complex. Near the base are controls that appear far more comprehensible, as though they were built by and for humans.

Floating in the air in front of and three feet above these controls is an image of the spiral of gateways. This image is approximately seven feet across and each gateway representation is around an inch across. The characters can figure out that one of the controls affects the size of the oval gateways while another affects their height. Both can only be adjusted within a limited range. The portal size can range from one to five yards in diameter, with the height ranging from a few inches tall at about ground level to 200 yards high. By making the oval gateways both as small as possible and as high as possible, the number of people who become lost can be greatly reduced.

Another advantage the characters have is that they can see the gateways. This allows them to more easily navigate the other-space behind the gateways. Being able to see the gateways gives characters traveling into this other-space the chance of finding their way out, but the distortions of space and distance still make this a challenging proposition. By far the safest method of navigating this space is for a character to go in tied to a long rope, so that she can trace the path back out automatically.

Methods

Investigation: Plotting all of the missing persons cases in the region requires an extended Intelligence + Investigation roll. Each roll requires a half-hour of work. Eight successes are required to plot all of the known disappearances on a map.

Science: Gaining a basic understanding of the controls of the gate device requires an Intelligence + Science –4 roll as well as several hours of experimentation and examination.

Athletics: Distance from the ground isn't *quite* uniform between the two sides of the portal. Climbing through a portal requires a Dexterity + Athletics roll. Failure on the roll indicates that the character falls and suffers one point of bashing damage.

Larceny: Characters who wish to break into the building must make a Dexterity + Larceny roll at a –2 penalty to get through the lock on the front door. Another Dexterity + Larceny at a –3 penalty roll is necessary to override the key card lock on the elevator or the lock on the stairway.

Persuasion or **Subterfuge:** A successful Manipulation + Persuasion or Manipulation + Subterfuge roll permits a character to convince a local reporter to grant access to his database of stories about local missing persons.

Empathy: A successful Presence + Empathy helps to calm panicked people who have fallen through a gateway so that the character can lead them back to earth.

Merit: Direction Sense (p. 162): Individuals with a good sense of direction add +2 to their rolls to navigate the reality on the other side of the gateways.

Merit: Clairvoyance (p. 172): People who occasionally see visions of distant events can automatically see the gateways and easily locate people who have fallen through them.

Escalation

The easiest method of escalation is if the characters destroy the machine rather than adjusting it. While damaging it prompts swift retribution from its clockwork servants, a large fertilizer bomb placed inside the first floor could easily destroy the machine in the building. A moment after this explosion, a pillar of blinding light arcs up into the sky and all of the oval gateways vanish. The characters can conclude this scenario with little backlash (making it a good choice for a one-story God-Machine Chronicle), although if you want to have the story take a tragic turn, maybe that explosion forces the God-Machine to take a more direct and unpleasant hand in the fate of the world (The Scarlet Plague, p. 97 or Proposition 279, p. 96).

If the characters do not manage to shut down the factory, though, physical laws begin to break down in subtle ways over the course of the next three weeks. Gravity varies by as much as 20% in different places and at different times. Also, distances seem to contract and expand. Traffic accidents and similar problems dramatically increase. Most people are slightly confused but do not panic, primarily because they are unable to fully understand what has happened. Only people who can see the gateways are actually aware of the magnitude of the problems (these events might be used as a lead-in to a cosmic-tier Tale such as Urban Wandering, p. 108).

The Moon Window

The characters discover that entropy is increasing in a growing region. In this area, machines break down faster than they should and people become sick more often. As the area expands, entropy increases within it, causing more and more serious problems. The characters must find the cause before large numbers of people die.

Infrastructure

This tale takes place within a large city. The location doesn't matter, but it needs to be a relatively prosperous city of at least million people. This city should also be located relatively near several other large cities.

The Truth: As discussed in the Introduction, Marco Singe's cult and understanding of the God-Machine isn't entirely (or even mostly) accurate. Yes, the Lunar landing retrieved artifacts associated with the God-Machine, but the God-Machine didn't put them on the moon for people to find. In bringing back objects from the Crypt of the Butterfly, humanity might have pierced one of the greatest Concealment Infrastructures in history.

Interchangeable Parts

One or (preferably) more of the characters should be people who are in a position to notice some of the anomalies. Someone who works for the power company or for an IT firm that serves many clients in the affected area would be ideal, as would a doctor or nurse working in a nearby hospital, especially in the emergency room. At least one of the characters should have either technical skills that can be used for breaking and entering or sufficient social skills to talk his way past low-level security personnel.

Blueprints

The true purpose of the Apollo Lunar missions was to retrieve various items from the Moon, most importantly the remains of the ancient creature in the so-called Crypt of the Butterfly. However, the people who acquired this body have not yet learned how to make use of the many powers it is supposed to bestow upon anyone who possesses it. In an attempt learn how to release the body's powers, these individuals have begun working with some of the smaller items from the crypt. One of these items is a rough and eroded

sphere of red and grey banded stone the size of a softball. In an attempt to access the power within it, an esoteric artist and self-proclaimed magician placed the sphere in the center of a large, abstract stained-glass window.

The CEO of the NalCon Corporation is part of the effort to work with the Crypt of the Butterfly. A few months ago, she had this window placed as part of an artistic ornament placed near the top of his local corporate headquarters, a 40 story office tower known as the Barlowe Building. While this building has not been affected by the emanations from this window, its effects extend outwards from the window in an equilateral triangle to the northeast of the office tower. The center-line of this triangle is lies on a direct line with the stained glass window and the setting sun on the winter solstice.

Entropy increases within this triangle. Light bulbs and other electrical components burn out faster than they should, car parts need to be replaced more often, electronics frequently break or malfunction, and illnesses are both more common and more severe. Initially the triangle was only four blocks on a side, but it has been growing over time in both severity and size of the region affected. Currently, the region is almost two miles on side; within this area, light bulbs and other components last slightly less than half as long as they should. The region continues to grow until it is 21 miles on a side and electronic components last one quarter as long as normal.

People who live or work within this area are already suffering from more and worse illnesses than people elsewhere in the city, and the health effects of the high-entropy area are getting worse. From colds and the flu to surgical complications and cancer, the increased entropy is slowly killing people. However, if the window containing the sphere is destroyed or stolen and placed in a heavy wooden or metal container, the affected region returns to normal in less than a day.

Linchpins

The characters are most likely to get involved because they have all noticed some odd phenomena within the affected region. A maintenance technician for a convenience store chain might notice that stores within the effected region have far more electrical problems than other stores. These problems range from light bulbs burning out faster to electronics breaking down and software crashing much more frequently. An ER physician working in a hospital near or within the region might realize that an increasing number of patients come from this region. Combined with the information the characters have seen on their own, they'll know something is up.

Characters who want to investigate this region can determine the edges of the region simply by entering or leaving it carrying a lit cigarette or driving a car with its headlights on. Inside this region, cigarettes have a tendency to smolder and electric lights of all types are slightly dimmer. Both immediately brighten when they leave the area. The edges of this region are quite distinct: by walking or driving half a yard, someone can see her cigarette flare up or almost go out, or her headlights visibly brighten or dim. With a bit of work, the characters learn that the region is an equilateral triangle with the apex being the Barlowe Building, an office tower owned by the large NalCon corporation.

Anyone with an interest in public art or who researches the building learns that a large stained glass window was installed just two months ago as part of plan to create public art on and around the Barlowe Building, in celebration of its purchase by the NalCon Corporation three months previous. The stained glass window is circular and 11 feet in diameter. It is attached to the building by one 20 foot long girder coming off of the roof and also by a second girder located 11 feet below the roof. In the early evening, sunlight shines through this window down into the high entropy triangle.

Methods

Investigation: Researching the many different types of problems that have been occurring within the high-entropy zone gives characters more information about what is going on. Roll Intelligence + Investigation to uncover one particular anomaly within this area. Once the characters begin exploring this phenomenon, another Intelligence + Investigation roll reveals the size and shape of the region of high entropy.

Medicine: Understanding exactly how strange and unprecedented the medical anomalies found within the high entropy zone are requires an Intelligence + Medicine roll.

Athletics: If someone wants to steal the stained glass window or the stone sphere at its center, they'll need to get out to it. Climbing from the Barlowe Building's roof out to the stained glass window requires an extended Strength + Athletics roll with a –2 modifier (one roll = one minute of climbing, five successes required). Failure means that the character loses her grip and sacrifices one banked success to stabilize herself. Failure with no successes banked means that character falls, probably to her death (unless she has anchored herself somehow).

Larceny: Getting into the Barlowe Building during business hours is easy, but getting up to the roof requires getting past an electronic lock and alarm system. Roll Dexterity + Larceny at –4 to manage this challenging feat.

Socialize: Convincing physicians, electricians, tech-support personnel or other people who work in or near the high entropy area to talk in detail about the oddities they have noticed requires a Presence + Socialize roll.

Subterfuge: Talking one of the maintenance or security personnel from the Barlowe Building into letting you up on the roof requires a Manipulation + Subterfuge roll at –4. You could use Social Maneuvering (p. 188) instead, but that takes a bit longer.

Merit: Danger Sense (p. 162): Regardless of how the characters get onto the roof of the Barlowe Building, having a sense for danger helps them avoid going up there when one of the maintenance staff is also on the roof. It also alerts them if building security personnel are closing in on their position.

Merit: Psychometry, (p. 174: What secrets might a magical sphere taken from the moon hold? Using psychic powers to find out might be dangerous to one's sanity but too great a temptation to ignore.

Escalation

The stone sphere is only one of three artifacts that astronauts recovered from the moon. Other people are performing different tests on the other two objects. None of the results should be identical to the effects of this object, but characters can find two other locations in nearby cities where strange phenomena also occur. In one, people see ghosts and hear voices far more often than normal (Ghost Machine, p.79). In the other, the overall level of fear and dread has significantly increased, leading to a local rise in violent crime and suicide (if this continues, it could lead to This Is Hell, p. 103; left in a "milder" state it might lead to The 300 Block; p. 69).

Wake the Dead

One of you killed a man who wasn't supposed to die. Maybe he had it coming or maybe he didn't, but anyhow, he's gone and that's when everything started going wrong and the dead started waking up. You're going to have to find out why and stop it, because no one else can.

Infrastructure

Most of the action in this story should happen in the small towns and back roads of middle America, largely focused on the region that had once been the Dust Bowl (Arizona, New Mexico, West Texas, Oklahoma). The character's stories could stretch as far north as the Dakotas, west as San Diego, and east as Ohio. Anywhere you imagine a small population, dirt and dust, and a touch of the nomadic trucker culture, these stories can be dropped into the mix.

Rumors fly all around these rural and roadside communities the rumors fly. Jacob Mckenzie got knifed in a bar fight three weeks back, but didn't stay dead for too long. Elsie Wilson's son came home to her before Christmas even though he got killed in the war. And the Maple widows aren't sleeping alone any more since both of their husbands returned. Here and there, the dead are coming back. Sometimes it's nothing, life as normal, just full of bittersweet memories and worry. Sometimes it's a horror movie complete with brain eating and screaming. No two stories play out exactly the same way, but for some reason all these stories are coming to the character's ears.

The Truth: The Infrastructure at work here is Logistical, but it's all gone wrong. The characters (one of them, at least) killed a person for whom the God-Machine had further plans, but instead of the plans shifting, the God-Machine is trying to correct the *death*. Unfortunately things got muddled. The God-Machine isn't sure who it's supposed to bring back, hence the haphazard nature of this story.

Magical Realism

The intended feel of Wake the Dead is a genre called *magical realism*, a style of fiction in which the fantastical or magical is presented in a straightforward manner alongside more realistic or mundane events. Much of Tom Robbins' work (*Skinny Legs and All*, *Another Roadside Attraction*) falls into that category, as well as literary examples such as *Van Gogh's Bad Café* (Frederic Tuten) and *The Time-Traveler's Wife* (Audrey Niffenegger). Cinematic examples include *Midnight in Paris* (2011, dir. Woody Allen) and *Like Water for Chocolate* (1992, dir. Alfonso Arau).

The genre isn't widely associated with horror, largely because of the disconnect between what the protagonists in horror movies believe is real and what the antagonist of a horror movie reveals to be real (that is, one of the big scares in vampire movies is the revelation that vampires exist at all). That said, there are sources of inspiration that walk the line between the two genres successfully. Several of the films based on Stephen King's work include elements of magical realism, including *It* (1990). Others worth looking at are *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1987, dir. Wes Craven), *The Craft* (1996, dir. Andrew Fleming) and *Practical Magic* (1998, dir. Griffin Dunne). For purposes of this Tale, however, the best cinematic source of inspiration is probably *Cemetery Man* (1994, dir. Michele Soavi), in which Rupert Everett plays a gravedigger who has to cope with the dead rising from their graves.

The walking dead in Wake the Dead *might* behave like the flesh-eating zombies we're so familiar with, but they might just as well try to pick up their lives where they left off. That the world doesn't come to a screeching halt as word of this instance spreads is where the magical realism comes in. If that's not a paint you want in the box, then keep the focus of his story local and assume that even if people do spread the word, no one outside the community believes it.

Interchangeable Parts

The characters might be truckers, runaways, a band, students out to "discover themselves," a group of writers and artists trying to be Hemingway or Kerouac, ghost chasers, or storm chasers. Whatever they are, they need to be able to live nomadically. More importantly, one or more of the characters

needs to be directly responsible for the death of another person. Maybe the players know about it or maybe it's a terrible secret one keeps from the others. The example character, Lucien McJack, is presented as a man killed by accident, but feel free to adapt him to fit any unfortunate victim of the characters.

Blueprints

The God-Machine's plans have started to unravel thanks to a random act of mortality. When its designs were countermanded, some gear or wheel started spinning backward. The living continued to die, but some of the dead just started living again. It isn't a thing the God-Machine is doing directly, but rather, a side effect of messing with its plans.

Because human death is so indiscriminate, these resurrections are similarly chaotic. As the characters run into more incidences of people returning from the dead, (though not always coming back to life — most often, they come back as undead creatures), they might see that even the happiest endings have a bitter twinge to them, with a painful ironic twist hovering over each person touched by these events. A father might wish, fervently, for his son to come back to life — but when the boy does return, is that really what the father wanted? A person killed by her lover in the heat of passion returns to life and crawls out of the shallow grave she was buried in. Does she want revenge? Answers? Maybe she forgives her lover and wants to go back to him, whether or not that's what he wants.

Ultimately, the characters unravel the cause of the chaos: the man one of them killed is now a soulless corpse possessed by an evil spirit (see Lucien McJack, p. 119). At this point they'll have to face their own actions, their own mortality, and agents of the God-Machine as they try to stop this senseless nightmare of life and death. They may try to bring back the man they killed to end the onslaught. They may get the idea that bringing him back will be worse and try to stop the God-Machine instead. That might involve finding out what was so special about the man they killed — a man who, unfortunately, has already returned to "life," but is in no condition to pick up where he left off.

Linchpins

Anyone brought back from the dead bears the mark of the God-Machine or its servants. Common effects are burn scars that look like a giant raptor put its talons into the victim and the smell of rust that won't quite go away, but not everyone manifests marks the same way.

Early on, the characters hear tell of uncommonly big carrion birds near affected locations. Someone else describes metal angels with lists of names for judgment sparkling across the mirrored surface of their wings. Witnesses don't realize they're talking about the same being, but the angel in question — called the Mirror Vulture — isn't here to feast on the dead. It's only here to check each of the returned dead and see if the one the God-Machine wants has returned. Its mission says nothing about putting the dead back down again, so it doesn't bother.

The Mirror Vulture's traits can be found in Chapter Three (p. 138).

Methods

Occult: How many different cultures talk about the dead returning to life? Actually, almost all of them. How many of those cultural tales have useful information on how to put the dead back *down*? That might take some research. Start with Intelligence + Occult; it's probably an extended action.

Science: This feature bears all the marks of use — it's got dust particles between the barbs and individual barbules, and it clearly fell from a wing. So how in the world can it be made of *mirrored glass*? Roll Intelligence + Science to run some analysis.

Stealth: When you met dead-Nancy at the bar, she'd been back six months and dead three years before that. She's pretty sure if you want to see the "things" that brought her back, you're going to have to hide out at the cemetery at night. Come nightfall, you realize you aren't alone. Roll Composure + Stealth to stay still enough to go unnoticed while you wait for the other lurking figures to reveal themselves.

Survival: The miles between towns seem to stretch on forever, and it may be time to admit everyone is too tired to keep traveling. The temperature has dropped. Roll Wits + Survival to set up a warm safe camp for the night and hope you can ignore the sound of beating wings.

Persuasion: Turns out the local sheriff isn't too keen on people poking around his town, especially since he's got more than a few things to hide now that the dead may be talking. He's got the shotgun and the power to make bodies disappear (assuming the damn things stay dead). Roll Manipulation + Persuasion to convince him you're on his side in all this.

Socialize: The party started out as a wake, but then the deceased stood up and quaffed a beer and now it's gone all weird. Roll Presence + Socialize to get everybody celebrating again.

Merit: Medium (p 173): The disembodied dead stand as silent witnesses to the horrific mutilation of the natural order. They are mostly impotent in their rage, except that you can hear them. You can hear just how very angry they are.

Merit: Indomitable (p 163): When you find Lucien McJack, he'll probably be angry, since you killed him. Being strong of mind will help you resist his fear-enhancing powers.

Escalation

The end of this story might see the characters leaving the region with a feeling of "what the *hell* just happened?" and heading into an area where things are a little more... normal. While "normal" isn't a term that applies to events in the God-Machine Chronicle, it might underline the mood of this Tale to step things back a bit, perhaps using a more accessible Tale like The Key (p. 80) or The Hatching (p.99). Note that "accessible" is a *highly* relative term.

On the other hand, Wake the Dead can form a transition into some truly strange Tales. From here, your characters might wish to enter other dimensions (Missing Persons, p. 82) or encounter celestial beings (This is Hell, p. 103).

14th July 2012

Dear Gina,

I know, another letter, but oh GOD, Gina, it has been the weirdest couple of weeks and these aren't things I can send you in e-mails or talk about on the phone, which sounds paranoid but really, really it isn't. All the Olympic stuff is in full swing now and I'm watching more obscure sport than I have ever watched in my life, just to pass the time, because I don't feel I can go out. When I'm at work, Stephen keeps setting me to do these weird sales and purchases that don't make any sense and makes me do it really quickly, and it's almost as if he's trying to get me to make patterns on the screen, like I'm playing Bejeweled with stocks and shares. Between the weirdness at work and the other thing, I think I'm going mental. It's so hard to get anywhere right now. But, at the same time it's easy to get lost in a crowd so I'm going to do just that, get lost in a crowd and put this in a postbox when she doesn't see it.

Who's she? "She" is the bane of my existence right now.

See, I appear to have found myself a stalker. I promise, I swear to God I haven't done anything wrong and everything is fine when we talk on the phone but I can't tell you on the phone, I really can't. The last time we talked I knew you'd realized that something was wrong. This is it.

Remember how in the last letter I wrote to you I mentioned that weird little woman who followed me back to work from the sandwich place one lunchtime? Her name is Mary. I know this because she followed me along that street every day for a week.

I don't know how you deal with stuff like this. The first couple times she caught up with me and said hello, and I said hello back and tried to walk away, and she started trying to engage me in some sort of weird conversation, and all the time she called me "William" which should have been the sign that I was dealing with a nutcase here. I tried to be polite, and then after a few days of this, I went, "Look, I know you're trying to be friendly and everything and I'm sure you are lovely when people get to know you but really, I have a girlfriend and I don't think it's appropriate for you to be talking to me anymore." And I walked off before she could burst into tears or be really strange or anything.

That was on a Friday. Then she didn't appear for a few days and I thought, phew, she's gone.

And then on the evening of the following Friday, I was closing the lounge curtains and there she was, on the street looking right in to the window. She smiled and waved. I think I said, *shit*, out loud and just swooshed them shut and stood there, hand on mouth, wondering what the fuck I was going to do.

I thought maybe if I ignored her she'd go away.

She was there all day Saturday. I stayed in and watched TV I had never given a fuck about before with the curtains closed just to pass the time. On Sunday morning, the letter came through my door, hand-delivered, addressed to "William Dear, Esq."

It was a love letter. It didn't make a whole lot of sense, but as far as I could make out, she had been in a relationship with this William who was a drug dealer or a doctor or something and it hadn't ended well and now she was convinced that I was William, only I didn't know it.

Somehow I managed to make it to work every day that week, knowing that she was there on the street. My reward was another letter, every day.

Eventually I did a really stupid thing. I mean, it takes a while for you to admit you've got a stalker. It's not something you're supposed to have as a man, and no one tells you what to do.

So I did this stupid thing. I wrote back. I wrote her a stiff, formal letter saying that I wasn't who she thought I was and could she please go away, good luck, all that bollocks.

I know, I know. But I haven't heard from her for a week. I hope that's it now.

I haven't seen Henry for a couple days. I hope he's OK.

I hope you're doing all right, Gina. I miss you so much.

Yours

Jon

A Glimpse of Mesmerizing Complexity

One major cause of auto accidents in the US, Europe and other nations with nationwide highway networks is the fact that complex moving constructs of gears fly through the air along some of these highways. These constructs appear, fly rapidly and then disappear; anyone who sees them is mesmerized. Victims not only crash their cars regularly, but they often suffer localized memory loss. Those who do remember what they saw rave about alien objects or oncoming lights, but there's never anything to substantiate their claims. This doesn't stop them from theorizing about UFOs, of course, nor from trying to find the objects again.

Infrastructure

Strange moving constructs of gears fly through the air all over the planet. They are usually intangible, invisible to most people and almost impossible to photograph. People who are intoxicated, exceedingly tired or otherwise in an unusual state of mind can often see them, however, inducing a light trance state in the viewer — a dangerous thing when you're operating a moving vehicle. It does, however, make you far less likely to notice that you're being observed and photographed yourself. The first sight of one of these flying gear constructs mesmerizes anyone who sees it. Viewers find themselves briefly unable to look away or to think clearly about anything other than how fascinating it appears.

The Truth: The God-Machine has concealed the factory creating the gear constructs in Twilight. Twilight does have a set of understandable and consistent rules for interacting with people and their world. Hiding the factory in Twilight is, therefore, Concealment Infrastructure. The constructs themselves are Logistical Infrastructure, although to what end the data is being gathered or what else the God Machine uses the gear constructs to do is unknown.

Unfortunately for the God-Machine, building things in Twilight means that they will take on spiritual aspects by necessity. The gear constructs are not just complex because of their craftsmanship, they carry with them the spiritual essence of complexity. This, perhaps, is why people are becoming so fascinated with them.

Astute players might wonder why the blips are only showing up now if the constructs have been following (and may indeed have influenced) the formation of the US highway system? The answer is that they *have* been here all along, it's just that before, when people noticed them and got into wrecks, they were more likely to be seriously injured or killed. The accident fatality rate on the highways is lower than it ever has been because cars are getting safer. But at the same time, more cars are on the road. That means more people are seeing the constructs and living to tell about it. This has the potential to become an untenable situation for the God-Machine.

And what, in fact, is the function of the gear constructs? They are collecting data for the God-Machine. This data might be related to cars, machines, human travel and traffic, or possibly even emissions. For purposes of this story, it isn't strictly necessary to decide what the God-Machine is looking for, but when the characters find the factory (see below) it might be effective to discover that the workers are keeping tabs on bizarrely specific information — how many cars have personalized plates, bumper sticks, red-haired drivers, empty pop cans in the back seat, and so on. What could the God-Machine possibly gain from learning this data?

Interchangeable Parts

The characters should be people who drive regularly, and all of them should recently have been involved in an auto accident caused because one of the drivers involved saw the gear constructs (whatever they choose to call them). Characters might also be frequent travelers that hear stories about "blips," odd lights on the highways that act as modern-day will-o'-the-wisps, confusing drivers and leading them off the roads.

Blueprints

The gear constructs are approximately six feet in diameter. They are composed of a brilliantly polished and exceedingly complex set of interlocking metal gears and strange decorations that appear to be made from brightly colored stone or glass, flying between two and eight feet above the ground. Although they can appear anywhere, most often the gear constructs fly along major roads and other long, relatively straight paths.

Gear constructs are most often found flying along US interstate highways and large motorways and autobahns in the EU. Flying along these roads simplifies their navigation; many of the freeways, highways, and motorways in the developed world were specifically designed to provide paths for the gear constructs. Anyone who researches the history of large highway networks in any nation finds that plans are always changed partway through the design process and that perfectly straight roads are strongly preferred over gently curving roads, even if the later would make more sense for the terrain.

The gear constructs appear spinning in mid-air. Within a few seconds, the constructs stop spinning and fly in precisely straight lines for distances between 40 and 700 miles. While they are flying, they are completely intangible. Upon reaching their destination, gear constructs pause for two seconds, during which they become solid. They then spin rapidly for another two seconds before vanishing again.

While they appear and disappear, the gear constructs are briefly surrounded by a rotating sphere of glowing light 12 feet in diameter. This glowing sphere is the visible manifestation of the doorways into and out of the stations that maintain and recalibrate the gear constructs. These stations are all located in Twilight. Gear constructs typically travel a single route every five to 30 minutes and fly at approximately 80 miles per hour. All of the gear constructs moving along one route take the same path, always appearing and disappearing in exactly the same locations.

If left undisturbed, the gear constructs continue to fly along their paths and the accident rate all across the world increases incrementally because people occasionally see them. If the rumors about the "blips" becomes widespread — maybe someone captures one on a smartphone video and it goes viral — the accidents will increase in frequency because now drivers are *looking* for the constructs. The gear-constructs have been moving in and out of our world for almost 60 years and will continue to do so for many decades in the future.

Linchpins

The best way to learn about the gear constructs is to travel to one of their maintenance and recalibration stations. Anyone who grabs onto a gear construct when it is tangible travels with it when it vanishes. Also, the rotating glowing sphere remains visible for three seconds after the gear construct has departed. Anyone touching this sphere sees his arm vanish into the space where the gear construct goes. Characters who are swift (and perhaps foolhardy) can follow the gear construct to its otherworldly destination.

Characters who follow a gear construct find themselves in a building the size of a large warehouse located in Twilight. Inside this building, characters see a line of gear constructs slowly moving from one end of the building to the other. The gear constructs fly at a slow walking pace and briefly pause at 31 points, where several humanoid creatures with 16 long, many-jointed fingers and six small compound eyes work on the constructs with a variety of complex mechanical and electronic tools.

These creatures work constantly; all have a plug running from the back of their bald ovoid heads. These plugs attach to a single wire that runs along the length of the building. Pulses of red-orange light regularly travel along this wire, and fainter pulses flow down each of the dozens of cables that attach the creatures to this wire. While plugged into the wire, all of the creatures move in exactly the same fashion.

These gear workers ignore visitors unless the visitors disturb them or the gear constructs. If someone does either, the nearest creature unplugs itself and attempts to prevent the intruder from interfering with the constructs. If an unplugged gear worker touches one of the characters, it begins to scream a single high continuous note, never pausing to draw breath. This scream draws other gear workers who attempt to capture the characters and drag them off behind doorways leading off to the side of the factories. Behind these doors, the gear workers mind-probe intruders using a device that bores into their brains. After determining what an intruder knows, the gear workers place her in a vat that takes three days to transform a human into a gear worker (use the traits provided for clockwork servitors on p. 133 to represent gear workers; they have the Enhanced Speed ability). If the person is removed from the vat prior to that time, she could possibly be saved.

Leaders of any effort to destroy gear constructs or makes them public are likely to be involved in some form of serious car accident. If one of the leaders allows her identity to become public or is ever noticed by the gear workers, a construct attempts to strike her or her car anytime she crosses or drives along a path traveled by the gear constructs, becoming tangible an instant before it hits (see the traits for gear workers for information on how this plays out in game terms). The gear workers also immediately attack these leaders if they ever enter a maintenance station.

Characters could also attempt to make the gear constructs visible. Telling people exactly what to look for allows many of them to see the gear-constructs, especially if these people are already inclined to believe in strange phenomena. In addition, flying gear constructs show up on ultraviolet sensitive film. A captured gear constructs shows up on any type of film, including online videos. Sufficient publicity eventually causes the routes to be changed; the God-Machine finds that sending the constructs slightly higher and directly over the traffic allows the same data collection without the same accident risk.

Any online videos of the gear constructs are taken down in less than 24 hours, and anyone who openly posts such a video has their account with the online video sharing network mysteriously cancelled and all of their other videos deleted. Anyone who makes several blog posts attempting to convince the public about the existence of the gear constructs is also at risk for being hit by a flying gear construct.

Methods

Academics: Characters can make an Intelligence + Academics to collate reports of glowing objects flying along roads and discover that such reports occur in much of the world and are almost exclusively found along highways, freeways and motorways. An exceptional success on this roll may turn up anomalies about how the exact paths of various highways were chosen.

Crafts: An Intelligence + Crafts roll allows a character to disable a gear construct while it has briefly paused so the characters can examine and photograph it. Characters can make another Intelligence + Crafts roll to reactivate the gear construct so that if it is placed next to one of the entrance points into the maintenance station, it begins to spin and create the spherical portal into Twilight.

Athletics: A successful Dexterity + Athletics roll with a –3 penalty enables a character to climb onto a gear construct as it pauses before dematerializing and flying into the maintenance station. Characters may also make an unmodified Dexterity + Athletics to get into the glowing sphere that leads to the factory before it vanishes.

Drive: A character who sees a gear construct runs the risk of driving off the road. Roll Composure + Drive, applying any appropriate penalties. Failure means the car crashes.

Empathy: A successful Presence + Empathy roll can be used to convince people who have been in auto accidents to remember and talk about gear constructs they may have seen.

Streetwise: Character can make a Manipulation + Streetwise roll to discover others who have seen the gear constructs and might be interested in attempting to destroy them.

Merit: Crack Driver (p. 164): Characters who are excellent drivers are better at following gear constructs through traffic to find out where they vanish.

Merit: Anonymity (p. 166): Anyone who is good at keeping her identity secret is better at organizing actions to destroy the gear constructs without being targeted by the gear constructs.

Escalation

The gear constructs become visible and tangible all the time. In addition, thousands of maintenance stations appear across the world. People who are not sufficiently quick and

careful when investigating these stations are captured and are later seen on the maintenance lines with a plug in the back of their now bald heads. The number of gear constructs begins to increase and the stations expand as bands of workers begin kidnapping humans and modifying them into workers to build more factories. At this point, the God-Machine may decide to kill off anyone it can't convert (The Scarlet Plague, p.97).

Or, if you don't want to be that blatant, maybe the gear constructs have another purpose. They might reanimate the dead (Wake the Dead, p. 86) or start yanking people to processing station (Missing Persons, p. 82). Continuing the theme of running on a track, maybe the gear constructs become the "traffic controllers" of Squares of the City (p. 75).

The Invisible Citadel

In northern Germany is a secret city known as the Golden Citadel. The angels that control the city have caused almost everyone in the world to forget its existence, while also calling an increasing number of people from across the globe to help work in it. The characters must find a way to attempt to infiltrate the citadel, banish the angels, and free the many inhabitants.

Infrastructure

The story begins when one of the characters finds and purchases a curious old footlocker at an estate sale or a resale shop. It is filled with loose papers, bits of wire and a diary.

The diary was written by Maria Grunewald. It begins almost 30 years ago with entries about how she worked with a dozen people to build an abstract sculpture of metal and bone that was the size of large RV. At the beginning of her diary, she writes about how this sculpture will transform the world in wondrous ways. However, the tone soon changes to one of fear and then horror as she writes about being one of the architects of the destruction of humanity's free will. Ms. Grunewald writes about how the sculpture attracted people from all across Germany to build a town around it and how this town eventually grew into a city, which attracted thousands of people from all across the world.

She calls this city the Golden Citadel and, in the last portion of the diary, writes about how it is a horrifying construction that hides from the thoughts and memories of humanity, but draws people to it nonetheless. According to her, a growing number of people are drawn to build and work in the Golden Citadel. Once someone leaves for the Citadel, his friends and loved ones believe that this person moved and lost touch with them or died.

In an entry dated a decade before, she write how the population of the Golden Citadel is almost half a million people and that it continues to grow. The diary also mentions that an increasing number of people are being fed to the Citadel to aid in its growth. Ms. Grunewald fears that within 25 years, this city will encompass most of Germany and could continue to expand until much of the world's population works there. At least one of the characters has seen or read brief news reports about an eccentric artist colony in Northern Germany near Bremen called the Golden Citadel. However, none of the reports describe it as being home to more than a thousand people. The few people who know about it consider it a weird art project built by few hundred eccentrics and so unworthy of attention or comment.

In reality, the Golden Citadel has been calling susceptible people from all across the world to help expand it. Much of the economy of the city of Bremen has been devoted to providing these workers with food, shelter, and raw materials. Some of these workers return home after a few months, remembering their work as an enjoyable opportunity to keep in shape and help build something important. However, almost half of the people called to the Citadel remain there.

The Truth: The city is an exercise in Concealment Infrastructure — a city not far from human settlements that is built in such a way that it doesn't stay in human consciousness on a conceptual level. In a sense, it's cognitive concealment, and it's the most successful example of its type. Not only do people ignore the Citadel, but they seamlessly fit it into their worldview — it's an art colony. It's a commune. It's non-threatening, maybe even beneficial. The God-Machine finds it easy enough to create suspicion and fear, but with the Golden Citadel, it's trying to create acceptance or apathy. It seems to be working.

Interchangeable Parts

The characters can be anywhere in the world, except they should be at least 1,000 miles from Bremen, Germany. The characters could be almost anyone. They need know nothing about the Golden Citadel. The story kicks off when they come into possession of Ms. Grunewald's footlocker, though, so working that into a previous story would set this one up.

Blueprints

If nothing is done, the Citadel continues to expand. For the last 20 years, it has been calling workers from across most of Europe and parts of Asia, and within the past six years people from the US, Mexico and Canada have also been called as well. The citadel is perfectly circular and expands as a series of concentric rings, like the growth rings of a tree.

The angels use the power of the original sculpture to cause a growing number of people to feel that working on the Golden Citadel is important and also to cause everyone else to ignore the citadel. The effect doesn't work on everyone, however. Those who retain their senses may see the Citadel as a strange and inexplicable creation built by a cult that brainwashes workers. Others feel an inexplicable hatred of it and believe it to be evil.

Direct attacks against the Citadel fail because anyone who comes within 25 miles of the Citadel automatically feels positively towards it. This positive feeling causes only mild changes to anyone lacking hostile feelings towards the Citadel. However, the more someone feels negatively about

the Citadel, the more the person loses free will while within the area of effect. Some who attempt to attack the Citadel remain there today as part of its permanent maintenance staff because they can think of nothing beyond serving the Citadel.

The number of people serving the Citadel increases every decade. In time, it will grow so large that the entire population of central Europe exists solely to serve it and the people building it. A few crank websites discuss fears, theories, and data about the Citadel, but few people post on them for more than a few months and several of the frequent posters write like un-medicated schizophrenics.

Linchpins

Near the end of her diary, Ms. Grunewald describes a simple construct of wire, capacitors and resistors capable of blocking the effects of the Citadel's mind control. However, the tone of the papers changes again to a renewed sense of joy at the existence of the Citadel and a growing determination to go and help build it. In with these papers is a circuit diagram for a simple network of circuits designed to be worn as a skullcap or under a hat, along with a single mostly completed device that lacks only a pair of resistors and a length of wire to complete it.

If the characters build circuits to protect them from the influence of the angels, they'll all suddenly remember one or two young people who mentioned that they would be travelling to the Golden Citadel to pursue their art or "find themselves," and that all of the characters then forgot about these people. If the characters research the Golden Citadel online while wearing the circuit, they find a few blog posts about a huge and disturbing city near Bremen that continues to expand. Most of these blog posts end with the people writing that they have decided to go and visit or work in the Golden Citadel. Any character who reads one of these entries when not wearing the circuit skullcap instantly forgets what he has read. The diary also explains that Ms. Grunewald believed that the sculpture she helped build is the focus of the Golden Citadel's power and that if it is destroyed, the Citadel's power will vanish.

Surrounded by brightly painted concrete walls 40 feet high with a single large gateway, the Citadel is currently 16 miles in diameter. The interior consists of a series of large apartment buildings surrounding a collection of taller and stranger looking buildings that resemble somewhat looming and menacing modern cathedrals.

In addition to being able to remember and think about the Golden Citadel, anyone wearing the circuit skullcap can also safely enter the Citadel without being controlled into working for it. The people working there won't notice anything odd about the characters if they don't draw attention to themselves. Once inside, the character see that more than a tenth of the workers aren't human. Some are instead dim-witted but exceedingly strong four-armed vaguely humanoid creatures. These creatures come from one large building containing a huge and squirming mass of flesh. Every day, it ingests the dozens of corpses brought to it and gives birth to more four-armed workers. The other non-human workers are clockwork servitors (see p. 133) that emerge from another large building —If the characters observe the building, they'll notice that some people regularly enter and do not leave, and humans drive in trucks full of machine parts. Inside is a huge spider-like Dalga (see p. 134).

Everyone in the city is eager, friendly, and polite. None of them notice anything odd about working around four-armed creatures, humanoid clockworks, huge squirming masses of flesh, or huge spiders. If anyone attempts to openly photograph any of the Citadel's bizarre oddities, like the four-armed creatures, someone nearby politely but firmly reminds this person that she should not photograph such things. Groups of inhabitants forcibly restrain anyone who persists.

To end the power of the Golden Citadel, characters must locate and destroy the sculpture that Maria Grunewald helped construct. The local populace has continued to add to it. This sculpture is now a bizarre and ugly hodgepodge of materials the size of a one-family house. It is located very near the center of the Golden Citadel. The notes Maria Grunewald made about this sculpture mention that it must remain uncovered and in the open. The workers have constructed the Golden Citadel, however, so that the sculpture is located amidst a maze of streets which contain many dozens of five and six story apartment buildings. Characters who wander through the central part of the Citadel will eventually discover it, but this effort could take three or four days. Anyone with binoculars who climbs one of the tall cathedrals or factories, however, can locate the sculpture far more rapidly.

If the characters can destroy the sculpture, all the inhabitants of the Citadel collapse. The non-humans soon die, while the humans are dazed and semiconscious for several hours and remain confused about where they are or what they have been doing even after they recover.

Methods

Crafts: Characters who want to blow up the sculpture at the center of the Citadel must make an Intelligence + Crafts (with a Specialty in Explosives) roll to correctly place explosives and arrange timers or detonators to destroy it.

Medicine: Students of psychiatric medicine might discover a paper written by a psychologist in the late 1980s. In it, he referred to the Berlin Wall's collapse as a turning point for Europe and referred to a psychological construct called a "Golden Citadel." An Intelligence + Medicine roll while reading his case studies indicates that this subjects thought of the Citadel as a literal place and all referred to it as being near Bremen, not Berlin.

Drive: Characters can make a Dexterity + Drive roll to either escape pursuit within the Citadel or to blend into the constant but exceedingly orderly flow of traffic in and around it.

Stealth: Moving unobserved through the Citadel or discretely planting explosives on the central sculpture requires a successful Dexterity + Stealth roll.

Streetwise: Anyone who wants to find some of the few other people who know about the Golden Citadel can make a Presence + Streetwise at –3 to attempt to do so.

Subterfuge: Observing and being able to mimic the reactions and non-verbal cues of the workers in the Citadel well enough to avoid suspicion requires a Manipulation + Subterfuge roll.

Merit: Unarmed Defense (p. 180): Weapons are hard to come by in the Golden Citadel, but that doesn't mean the characters won't be threatened.

Merit: Fleet of Foot (see p. 165): Being a fast runner can help characters escape pursuit within the Citadel.

Escalation

If the characters manage to destroy the Citadel, the God-Machine writes this off as a failed experiment and looks for other subtle ways to conceal its Infrastructure. Maybe it entrusts a great measure of its power to an individual (The Key, p. 80), or maybe it tries to cloud minds more directly (A Glimpse of Mesmerizing Complexity, p. 89). On the other hand, maybe the distraction of having the Citadel destroyed blinds the God-Machine to a more immediate problem, one that the characters now need to correct (The Hatching, p. 99).

Perhaps the Citadel has grown to the size of Germany and a fifth of the entire population of the EU works there. People across the entire world travel to the Citadel to work and most young people have spent at least one summer working there. Maybe everyone on Earth knows about it and either considers it unimportant or as something important they should help build and run. With this kind of direct involvement, you could continue on to This Is Hell (p. 103 or Urban Wandering (p. 108).

Operation: Bell Jar

In the North Sea, an oil drilling platform has apparently become the base of operations for a terrorist group. The characters arrive to find it empty, but shortly thereafter, they discover that the problem is much larger than they'd feared.

Infrastructure

West Nautical 36 (p. 127) is an oil drilling platform in the North Sea. Up until recently, it was showing promising signs of being a moderately productive drilling site. Then an intense storm hit the area and everything went to hell. Most of the crew got off in time, but one engineer, Arnold Diefenbach, stayed aboard to try and stabilize the platform. When the rest of the crew and rescue personnel arrived once the weather had calmed, they found the platform with minor damage but in perfect working order. Diefenbach was nowhere to be found and was assumed to have been swept overboard.

In the weeks that followed, the platform began producing oil at an incredible rate. The company devoted more resources to the rig, expanding its production capability and conducting studies into the feasibility of making another well in the area. Then one night, the company and emergency services in England, Belgium and the Netherlands received frantic calls for help from the rig. When they tried to return those transmissions, they received no answer. The first group of rescue personnel that got near the rig saw the crew hanging from cables, each one with a sign on their bodies that read "STAY AWAY."

The company and the countries involved immediately assumed that some terrorist group or cult had seized the rig and tried to make contact to ascertain their demands. The responses were always the same: STAY AWAY. Finally, the various governments involved (the surrounding countries and the US) assembled an elite team to travel to the rig at night and retake it, kill or capture the perpetrators, and find out what damage had been done. That, of course, is where the characters come in. This mission is called Operation: Bell Jar, because the area in which West Nautical 36 sits is almost impossible to approach without being seen or heard — likewise, no one is likely to escape from it unnoticed.

The Truth: As explained in Chapter Three, Arnold Diefenbach merged with the oil rig. He was content to continue with the rig's original function for a time, but then the God-Machine found it had need of the platform. It moved the drill slightly and pushed down into the sea bed, seeking to uncover something left buried for millions of years (see Blueprints). When the crew noticed this, they assumed it was a malfunction and tried to shut it down — and Diefenbach killed them all. The oil rig itself is Defense Infrastructure.

Interchangeable Parts

The characters are members of the elite team of soldiers sent to retake the rig. They might be Navy SEALs, British Commandos, Swedish Särskilda Operationsgruppen or French Commandos-Marine. Someone in the group is probably trained in EOD (explosive ordinance disposal), and the group might also include a civilian engineer in case the rig needs emergency repair.

If your players are up for something a little different, though, they might control a communications team from an operations center on a ship or on the mainland. These characters might be trained in the investigative Skills to determine what happened on the ship, while the soldiers act as their eyes and ears with shoulder- or helmet-mounted cameras. Or, once the soldiers arrive at the rig and find nothing immediately threatening, they might bring an investigative team out, allowing the players to control a mix of soldiers and detectives.

Blueprints

The God-Machine doesn't necessarily want people dead (it doesn't really care, of course, but dead people tend to make living people interested, and that slows things down). Diefenbach, however, is just as obsessed with the rig as he's always been, and he views anyone that sets foot on it as an intruder. The drilling apparatus is automated and will continue regardless of what the characters do to Diefenbach.

Stopping the drill requires killing Diefenbach and *then* getting the computer systems working again, or cutting the cables that provide power to the drills.

If the drill continues unabated, it eventually opens a cavern below the sea floor. Therein lies an exposed section of the God-Machine that hasn't been in operation for millennia. It requires the oil above it to work, meaning that if the drill reaches this cavern, the God-Machine pulls the oil from the deposit and then comes to life, absorbing the drill and the cables and assimilating the rig itself. If the characters are still on the rig when that happens, they are pulled beneath the waves and probably lost for good.

Linchpins

The still-living parts to Arnold Diefenbach (see Chapter Three) are the Linchpins for the West Nautical 36 Infrastructure. Killing him will, as mentioned, end the God-Machine's ability to influence the rig—but it won't stop the drill. Doing that requires either cutting the cable (Durability 8, Structure 11) or making the computers work (see below).

Methods

Computer: Normally this wouldn't be difficult, but the computer systems on the rig have merged with Diefenbach's brain. Even after he dies, they don't act like normal computer systems anymore. Roll Manipulation + Computer (extended action, each roll is 30 minutes, 10 successes required) to get the systems to respond properly and stop the drill. If Diefenbach is still alive when this happens, he opposes the roll with Resolve + Computer.

Medicine: Examination of the bodies of the rig workers (and a roll of Wits + Medicine) reveals that they were strangled by cables. The cables apparently just dropped down, wrapped around their necks, and yanked them upwards, choking them.

Athletics: Diefenbach controls everything on the rig, including a great deal of machinery that is heavy enough to knock people into the ocean. If that happens, the player rolls Stamina + Athletics once per turn with a –2 modifier for the character to tread water until someone can rescue him.

Stealth: Diefenbach can only "see" through the security cameras on the rig—which, unfortunately, are plentiful. Roll Dexterity + Stealth to avoid them.

Empathy: The people in charge of Operation: Bell Jar have been in communication with someone on the rig, someone they assume to be a terrorist. Examining the transcripts, though (and a successful Wits + Empathy roll) reveals that the patterns of speech and the "demands" the supposed terrorist is making don't betray a zealous or nationalist agenda.

Streetwise: Characters with ties to mercenary or espionage groups might put out feelers to see if anyone knows anything about terrorist action against the rig. This requires a Manipulation + Streetwise roll and lead time of at least a day. If the roll fails, the character hears of a terrorist group that takes credit for the killings. If the roll succeeds, not only does no one have any information about the incident, but the character hears a rumor about a clandestine military

ship that disappeared in that region of the North Sea a few months ago (just after the storm).

Merit: Defensive Combat (p 176): The rig doesn't have much in the way of enemies to fight, but this Merit will help the characters in avoiding attacks from machinery and cables.

Merit: Psychokinesis (p 173): A recently trained member of some secret military psychic contingent might be an interesting character for this Tale, especially if she can't quite control her power yet.

Escalation

What happens if the God-Machine pulls the rig down and assimilates it? The characters might not survive this, of course (or they might pull off a daring, last-minute escape and watch the whole thing vanish into the deeps), but after the fact, the whole area could suffer seaquakes and tsunamis as the God-Machine *changes* things. This could lead into such high-stakes Tales as The Invisible Citadel (p. 92; maybe the characters find the footlocker on the ship), The Scarlet Plague (p. 97; the God-Machine needed the additional power to begin this final solution) or What Is It Good For (p. 105; the characters might easily be transferred from this mission to that one).

Proposition 279

Luck, happenstance, or profession has landed you in a political hotbed. Things have always been tough here, but no one saw the massive political push for Proposition 279 coming. The law will not just make it illegal to be homosexual, it will make it a capital offense.

Infrastructure

Pick a location with a strict and borderline corrupt government, or one with a religious fundamentalist regime (or make one up). Up until now, it's as fair as such a regime can be, with oppression happening, but neither common nor horrific. Women vote, but are limited in their civil liberties. Homosexuality is forbidden, but not criminal. Society is passive in its intolerance.

That is, until religious leaders and politicians alike started calling for a sudden and impossibly cruel law to be passed faster than the public could even consider it. The push came out of nowhere and was nearly all encompassing. Police started rounding up suspected homosexuals and raiding night clubs, even the most underground ones, in anticipation of the passing of the law. The military is preparing for mass executions and huge mass graves are being prepared along roadsides. Human rights organizations are up in arms and sending in diplomats, negotiators, and relief workers in hopes of avoiding the slaughter. The UN has stepped in, threatening sanctions but the normally passive regime has suddenly been whipped up into a frenzy over the idea.

Does it have something to do with the President's new adviser, a pale, gloomy sort with a nose a little too small for his face, and eyes dark and deep set? The President's wife left the country shortly after the adviser was named and since then rumors have been flying. The small nation has become a powder keg, and whether that will result in civil war to resist the sudden change in policy, or the deaths of a tenth of the population, the characters have to quickly find a peaceful solution to the problem.

The Truth: The God-Machine needs death. More specifically, it needs mass murder. It doesn't actually care who dies or why, as long as it happens quickly and at the hands of other human beings. Genocide is ugly whoever is targeted — yesterday a minority ethnic group, today homosexuals, tomorrow people with brown eyes — what matters is a need to see everything burn. The nation's new governmental structure is Logistical Infrastructure, overseen by the angel, Mr. Nose (p. 138).

Interchangeable Parts

Characters in this chronicle need to care about the people of the nation suffering such tragic upheaval or it will be difficult to keep them involved in the goings on.

Photo and investigative journalists are logical choices for character types. So are aid workers, and perhaps militant freedom fighters coming to aid in a potential rebellion. Even low level politicians from more (nominally) civilized nations, moved by the stories, may come to parley peace while making a name for themselves back home. And of course, you'll find no shortage of mercenaries and soldiers of fortune waiting around to see if war breaks out. Just make sure the mercenary type characters have deeper motivations than money.

The other possibility for characters, of course, is that they might be native to the affected nation, perhaps even people that might fall under the proposed law (whether they actually are homosexual or are simply perceived to be).

Blueprints

The God-Machine wants nothing less than the wholesale slaughter of as many human beings, killed by other human beings, as it can possibly reap in as short a time as possible. The God-Machine needs deaths. It needs massive amounts of sacrifice and more that happen at the same time, the better. It might need this death to gear up for some truly powerful, world-shaping initiative (the scary thing there is, does that kind of thing happen after every such massacre? and if it does, *what changed?*), or perhaps as a test run to test its systems of control. For the players, the reason should be as unknowable as the evil. It is because it is.

It just so happens that this despot in this part of the world came up with a way to accomplish his mandate and he's well on his way to murdering tens of thousands of people at once. What compounds matters is that other leaders all over the world, dreaming of blood and glory, might follow in the wake of success here with their own versions of Proposition 279. A growing tide of dead "undesirables" will sate the God-Machine's need for massive sacrifice — or perhaps, with so much death, the God-Machine might become "overclocked" and the world might burn?

If the characters don't want to find out, they're going to have to stop it here, in this little nation. Proposition 279 needs to fail, and it needs to fail spectacularly. Whether that means killing the President, bringing in help from other nations or the UN, or organizing the people of the country to stand up and overthrow the government, the characters have thousands of lives in their hands.

Linchpins

The papers call him "Mr. Nose" — at least the papers that don't belong to the State. He's the paper-white man standing just behind and to the left of the President during speeches and in photo ops. In fact, he seems to be in pictures where he wasn't present in person, and now showing up in images recorded before anyone had account of him at the President's side.

Mr. Nose is an angel, but one of fairly limited mobility and power (more details in Chapter Three, p. 138). Killing or disposing of him would be a good start, but it's not going to eliminate the problem entirely (the President is still planning on going through with Proposition 279, with or without Nose). Of course, without Mr. Nose, the President might be susceptible to new advisers, if the characters have the position and tenacity to take this route.

Methods

Medicine: The President's council is largely for show, but they've agreed to a meeting. You have two minutes to explain why homosexuality isn't a disease, a "lifestyle" or an abomination, and it had better sound as scientific as possible. Roll Manipulation + Medicine to give them a good balance of fact, reality and medical jargon.

Politics: Being militant will costs lives. Waiting on diplomacy might, too. You want to undercut the President's power base by using his own propaganda machine against him. Roll Intelligence + Politics to plan out your political assassination of the President.

Athletics: The military is raiding the house, and you aren't supposed to be here. You need to brace yourself in the rafters until they go away, but if you slip you'll fall right through the ceiling. Roll Stamina + Athletics to hold that pose.

Stealth: It has come this far. Night sits heavily over the President's compound. You have no choice; you must sneak across. Roll Dexterity + Stealth because the President must die.

Streetwise: The Catch-22 is, in order to protect people who haven't yet been brought in by the military police, you have to find them. Finding them might put them in more danger, but it's a risk you may have to take. Roll Manipulation + Streetwise to ask around and find middlemen who can point you in the right direction safely.

Subterfuge: Why break into the prison when you can walk in? Roll Manipulation + Subterfuge to convince the prison authorities that not only are you UN officials, but that as UN officials you have the right to see their prisoners.

Merit: Status (Diplomatic) (p. 170): It's about access. If you want to get in where the movers and shakers are in this political arena, you need access, and few people have as much access as a well-placed diplomat. Just don't push too far and find yourself at the epicenter of an international incident.

Merit: Eidetic Memory (p. 162): Keeping a list of names is risky, because if you're caught, they'll find it. Better to just memorize the names of the people in the area. It's not like the military can read minds, right?

Escalation

Putting down the President or stopping his plan from going on might be enough to encourage the God-Machine to other goals, but then again it might not. The "big reveal" of this story should be that all the buildup, the politics, and the hate is a smoke screen. When humans kill each other *en masse*, it is worse than pointless; it's in service to the God-Machine.

From the Crusades to Darfur, humanity destroys itself using any excuse it can come up with while the God-Machine reaps the benefits. Straight, gay, Roman or Turkish, everyone is equal in the eyes of the God-Machine, and equally worthy of sacrifice. That kind of revelation might be the springboard into a cosmic Tale like What Is It Good For (p. 105) or This Is Hell (p. 103). Of course, after this harrowing experience, they might prefer to go home (wherever home is) and deal with something on smaller scale. The 300 Block (p. 69) deals with murder as well, but for (on the surface) different reasons.

The Scarlet Plague

Everywhere, all over the world, men are dying. Young men, old men, boy children, they're simply dropping dead left and right. Science has no explanation, and the world's religions have a million impossible answers. What no one has is a way to stop it.

Infrastructure

The papers are saying every single male of the species is dying out, but that isn't exactly true. More like six or seven out of ten men are getting sick. A cough, followed by a fever, and then unexpectedly and too fast for normal disease, the men just die. The cause of death, near as anyone can tell, is blood in the lungs, though it's incredible that so many able-bodied people could die like that. Not only are men dying out, but women are becoming infertile, though this effect happens more slowly and insidiously.

The characters have to search out the reason for the slow death of humanity. As they search, they find the God-Machine. It's done with humanity and has set into motion plans to wipe it from the face of the Earth.

The Truth: The disease is a global, species-specific Elimination Infrastructure. The God-Machine is activated it to destroy humanity so that it can get down to what it really needs the planet for. The characters — indeed, all humans —

are simply products of an occult matrix that began hundreds of thousands of years ago.

Interchangeable Parts

The characters might be scientifically minded explorers or philosophers seeking the truth behind the imminent extinction of their species. Perhaps they are a think tank, hooked up with an archaeologist and a mercenary given carte blanche to travel the world and hunt down the cause of the death and infertility.

Consider throwing an empath or psychic in the mix. Maybe have someone play a medium or just a sad sack who had a brush with the God-Machine in the past. This story works well as the last (or next to last) story in a long God-Machine Chronicle, so if the characters have seen many of the horrors of the Machine, they should have enough feeling that they may understand it on some intrinsic level. In discovering more about it, the character may find the solution to their species wide nightmare.

Blueprints

It's about uranium, pure and simple.

The God-Machine had need of uranium. Not even a great amount of uranium. Whether it created humanity to mine uranium or manipulated humanity to that point is impossible to tell. The point is, the God-Machine's purpose for humanity was to mine a certain amount of uranium from the earth. Now that it's been uncovered, the God-Machine is ready to move on to new species and new plans and maybe even new planets.

Essentially, what we understand as "junk DNA" is the God-Machine's backdoor into the human body. Now that the God-Machine is done with us, it has sent its agents out into the world to access that vulnerability and trigger the species to shut down, more or less. Centuries of breeding have rendered some men immune to the triggered death and some women immune to the infertility. Either the God-Machine isn't worried about it, or it plans to wipe out the remains in more overt ways.

Linchpins

The first sign of something connecting the deaths to the God-Machine is the bizarre behavior in the lung-blood of the dead men. The blood, removed from the body, dries into cubic crystalline structures at visible rate. Later, further research will find similar blood crystals as polyps in the reproductive organs of many of the infertile women.

Cubic growths, squares, orderly growing inorganics should appear as motifs in the Tale, a manifestation of the God-Machine as it takes a more active role in the world.

The angel that the God-Machine sent to facilitate this extinction is Serotonin (see Chapter Three, p. 141). Since the Infrastructure is so widespread, there really is no Linchpin for the characters to find.

Methods

Academics: The behaviors in several tribal nations have shifted dramatically as the Scarlet Plague sweeps the surface of the earth. Anthropological studies suggest the behavior is too similar for coincidence, and yet it is impossible to suggest cross-communication. Roll Intelligence + Academics to compare behaviors and analyze what's made contact with all these isolated cultures.

Computer: There is a pattern, you're sure of it, a pattern too large and maddening to organize and study on the micro level. You're going to need to study the cubic patterns on a macro level. Roll Intelligence + Computers to build a program that can assist you in understanding the pattern.

Brawl: Riots break out in major cities almost every day. Roll Wits + Brawl to find the path of least resistance through the throngs and get out without actually having to fight.

Survival: Supposedly, an apocalypse cult up in the Allegheny Mountains has a cure for the disease. It's well off the beaten path, though. Roll Intelligence + Survival to dead-reckon your way there.

Expression: The poetry of the dying, written by men on their deathbeds, has some common elements. It talks about angels, cubes, lines and pain from deep within. Roll Intelligence + Expression to analyze the common elements.

Socialize: Well, the world isn't going to end in *our* lifetime, so why not drink and party until there's nothing left? The rich and young, those who are left, have taken to throwing macabre parties celebrating the apocalypse. Of particular interest is gathering great collections of so called Depression Glass, glassware that's made with uranium so that it glows under UV light. It's harmless, they say, and if not, who cares? Roll Manipulation + Socialize to find your own source of the social commodities and have a closer look.

Merit: Tolerance for Biology (p. 164): Watching people vomit up blood isn't easy or pleasant, but you'd better learn to deal with it because you'll be seeing it a lot.

Merit: Cursed (p. 172): You already know how you're going to die. Despite the odds, you know the God-Machine's machinations aren't going to bring you down. That's why you're willing to take the risks the other characters won't. You'll get them the information, the clues, the tools to stop the God-Machine, because you have nothing left to fear.

Escalation

Perhaps the characters unravel the pattern and see with clarity this small part of the God-Machine's plan. What do they do with that knowledge will change the face of the world forever. They might be able to attack the problem on a mystical level, forcing the God-Machine to deal with them directly (This is Hell, p. 103).

Perhaps they band together to destroy humanity's stockpile of uranium, forcing the God-Machine to allow humanity to thrive at least another few centuries while it tries to manipulate us in gathering more. This might lead into such Tales as Moon Window (p. 84) or The Invisible Citadel (p. 92).

It might be too late for that, of course, and so the characters reach out to communicate with the God-Machine and offer it a deal in a last ditch effort. Offer it something they think it might want more, and therefore, a reason to not end the species. But the choice should not be an easy one. Perhaps the God-Machine is willing to keep humanity around if it agrees to be a willing part of experiments to create a new and more interesting species. The chronicle could take on transhumanist undertones as the people of earth agree to become liquid, rapidly mutating species in the hopes of being what the God-Machine needs next.

The Hatching

A group of people watching the Statue of Liberty from Liberty State Park see hundreds of creatures literally hatch out of the Statue, followed by a vast burst of energy that incinerates an area more than 2,500 miles across. Immediately afterwards, these characters all find themselves waking up the day of the blast.

Infrastructure

One evening around 9:00 PM, the characters are all at Liberty State Park in Jersey City, New Jersey. This park is only a few hundred yards from the Statue of Liberty, and has an excellent view of the landmark. The characters are all enjoying the evening when they hear a strange crunching and crackling sound and watch the Statue of Liberty break apart like the egg of some vast insect. Fragments of the statue fall into New York Harbor, a bright glow shines out from the cracks in the statue, and hundreds of large glowing insect-like creatures begin fleeing the interior of the statue. At this point, the glow coming from the statue intensifies, blinding anyone who looks at it. A few instants afterwards, both Jersey City and Manhattan catch fire. Everyone therein dies burning, the characters included.

The next moment, all of the characters are where they were when they woke up the day they watched the statue hatch. The characters all have full memories of what happened during this day. Unless the characters stop it, at the end of this time, the Statue of Liberty cracks open again, the devastation worsens, and they are again thrown back in time.

The first time this happens, take note of where the characters are at 11:01 AM. The angel Kalka (p. 137) steps out of a subway station on Canal Street at that moment. He has 71 minutes of usable time, and has no way to find the characters on his own. He uses his Hallucination Numen to cause mass hysteria, knowing that it will attract attention. If the characters pay attention to the news during the day, they'll learn about riots in that area of Manhattan and people raving about otherworldly creatures and lights in the sky. If they get to that subway station between 11:01 AM and 12:11 PM, Kalka can find them with Fate Sense. He appears there every day at the same time, and can help explain the situation to the characters if they need further exposition. If your players just run with the plot and don't seem to need the help, though, don't bother with Kalka.

The Truth: The Statue of Liberty itself acts as Concealment Infrastructure, but the larger issue is the destruction and the time-regression. The characters are part of a larger Elimination Infrastructure, designed to destroy the creatures and bleed off the energy they're producing. If they fail, the explosion is a backup.

Interchangeable Parts

The only requirement for this Tale is that all of the characters be together in Liberty Park at 9:00 PM when the Statue of Liberty hatches. The characters need not know one another and can easily make contact with each other in one of the later versions of this time loop.

Although this Tale is Cosmic in scope because of its focus on time regression and otherworldly monsters and so on, The Hatching makes for a good starting Tale because the characters can have all the time they need to get to know one another. The process for meeting each other, realizing that all of the characters are reliving the day as well, looking into the problem and solving it could easily take 15 tries; if the characters know that, on the 15th try, they've run out of time, tension builds nicely.

But even if each try is a single chapter, that's still 15 chapters — that's a long story, and it takes place on the same "day." Have a look at movies like *Run Lola Run* and *Groundhog Day*, as well as the short-lived television show *Tru Calling*, for a look at how a character can change things by reliving the same day. Apply that to the characters — yes, they have to save the world, but do they have time to check lottery results? Do they want to find crimes or fatal accidents in the city and stop them? Is 14 tries enough to become experts on the events of *that day*, so that they can stop the Hatching from occurring? Let the players have a few sessions to explore their ability and to meet and interact before turning up the stress.

One question the characters might seek to answer is: why them? It might be that they were all close enough to the Statue during the initial explosion (but still survived) that they were caught in the God-Machine's loop. Or, the God-Machine might think they can fix the problem, meaning that each character should have a specific Skill or Merit that will be useful to solve the problem. If you are running The Hatching after playing through other Tales, it might just be that the characters have had enough exposure to the God-Machine that it considers them part of its programming (which should keep the characters up nights, if they figure it out).

Blueprints

The cycle of the world's destruction and then resetting itself back two and a half days continues for 15 cycles. After each change, the world is visibly different in small ways. Junk food packaging and the line-up of TV shows change from one time loop to the next. Also, for the last ten time loops, news reports about a possible plot by Pakistani terrorists to set off a nuclear weapon in India become increasingly widespread and credible. Such reports first appear in a few tabloids,

but by the 12th time loop they are found on all of the major new stations and newspapers. On the 15th time loop a large nuclear explosion destroys most of Mumbai and the Statue of Liberty does not explode. However, the statue cracks and any characters who are present see strange glowing creatures crawl out of it and fly up into the sky. The attack on Mumbai also makes nuclear war between India and Pakistan almost inevitable.

The characters are the only people who remember the time loop or the way that events have changed from one to the next. Regardless of how far the characters are from the explosion, some factor means that they remain stuck in the time loop until they either prevent the explosion or Mumbai is destroyed. The characters can only prevent the destruction of Mumbai by stopping the Statue from exploding.

Linchpins

The two primary Linchpins in this tale are the Statue and the time loops. Because it is a powerful focus of belief and emotional energy, agents of the God-Machine covered the statue's entire interior surface with sigils and mechanism when the statue was restored in 1933. These devices use psychic energy directed at the statue to power various esoteric endeavors, including stabilizing several angels so that they can remain on Earth — the Statue itself is a form of Infrastructure. Once the statue becomes unstable, the God-Machine can no longer send angels to Earth, nor can it maintain the ones that are already there (Kalka is the exception, since Kalka exists outside of time anyway).

None of these sigils are visible from outside the Statue or from any of the areas accessible to tourists. However, characters who gain access to the inner surface of the Statue's copper skin sees huge and complex circuits in the shape of esoteric sigils. These circuits coruscate with yellow and red glowing energies and cover most of the inner surface of the Statue. If the characters have a chance to talk with anyone who works in or around the Statue, the people the characters talk to know nothing of these sigils. Also, photographs of the interior of the Statue's bronze skin do not show them. The characters can only see the sigils because of their experience of the time loop.

Although the sigils collect large amounts of energy, most of it is not going to its intended destinations. Instead, the energies generated by this site attracted dangerous parasites. These parasites have been growing for several decades. When this tale begins, the parasites hatch and destablize the Statue's energy flows. These energy flows rebound catastrophically, causing a huge explosion.

The God-Machine responds to the explosion by creating a series of time-loops. Over the course of 15 time-loops, the God-Machine gradually alters the past and present so that it can dissipate the energy of the explosion in another location and provide a convenient cover for it. All of the characters notice that time has changed in various small ways after the end of each time loop, and that the time loops make a nuclear attack by Pakistan against India increasingly likely.

The only way to end the time loop without the destruction of Mumbai is to go inside the Statue of Liberty at least several hours before it splits open. The statue's public areas look perfectly normal, but the lower portion of the statue, next to the skin, it filled with a single throbbing egg case that is the size of a huge truck and trailer. This egg case and the hundreds of creatures it contains are all invisible to ordinary humans, but anyone who has become aware of the time-loop is automatically able to see it, as is anyone the characters show the egg to.

Attacking the sigils causes an uncontrolled release of energy which incinerates the characters, the eggs, and the Statue, but the destruction is limited to Liberty Island and the time loop ends. Destroying the egg case prevents it from hatching without any other destruction. However, doing so requires the use of a larger weapon like explosives, a pump action shotgun, a chainsaw or several people with fire axes. If the Storyteller wishes, cracking open the egg may free some of the creatures and allow them to attack (use the Dog traits on p. 203 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**).

Methods

Academics: Characters who make successful Intelligence + Academics roll when researching the Statue of Liberty learn that National Park Service personnel discovered serious cracks in the statue on August 6, 1945, the day of the nuclear attack on Hiroshima.

Science: A successful Intelligence + Science roll while inside the statue allows the characters to understand that the huge egg casing inside the statue is connected to the electrical sigils by filaments of living tissue and that the egg draws power from these sigils.

Larceny: Characters who wish to break into the Statue or into the portions of the statue that are off-limits to the general public must make a successful Dexterity + Larceny roll at –2.

Stealth: Characters must make a successful Wits + Stealth roll to hide within the statue after it closes to the public at 5:00 PM.

Persuasion: Convincing someone working at the statue that something strange and dangerous is going on and that the characters should accompany them to investigate this problem requires a Presence + Persuasion roll.

Subterfuge: A character can convince someone working at the statue that the character is an FBI agent or some other important official by making a successful Manipulation + Subterfuge roll.

Merit: Fast-Talking (p. 167): The characters have limited time to do their research and come up with a plan — they only have a day at a time before everything burns and resets. Working short cons might be useful.

Merit: Close Quarters Combat (see p. 176): A fight scene in the tight stairways of the Statue would be dramatic and deadly — hopefully a character has the expertise for it.

Escalation

The Statue of Liberty hatching might only be the first of several these events. Characters who travel widely before the blast and are at different places in the world when the

blast occurs could see locations like the Eiffel Tower, the Burj Khalifa in Dubai (currently the world's tallest building) and other well-known structures hatch and explode in response to the Statue of Liberty exploding. After the characters finish saving the Statue of Liberty, they will need to save the other structures before they hatch.

To connect this Tale with others, consider the possibility that the parasites might be nightmare creatures (Urban Wandering, p. 108) that the characters need to trace back to their source. Or, perhaps in solving the problem, the characters become unstuck from time and space, finally settling somewhere with similar amounts of devastation (What Is It Good For, p. 105).

A Journey Into Time

The characters see an online video about how the world will soon end. This video is a call for help and allows the characters to create a mechanism that allows them to travel back to 1901 to destroy the device that will end the world.

Infrastructure

The aforementioned video is only 10 minutes long. It starts with a statement "*If anyone is seeing this, I have failed. In 1901, I invented a device that will soon end the world. The auroras are only the first sign. A version of this device can also save the worl, by allowing someone to return to the first minutes that the device was turned on. You must destroy both the original version of this device and my laboratory notebook.*

If my employers never learn of this device, they cannot use it to end the world. They believe the mechanism we used it to create will give them the power to control time and space. In reality, it allows an inhuman force to collapse all of time into a single endless instant. I created the central component to this device by accident. If all records of how to create it are destroyed, the machine that now threatens to end time will never have been built. If time has already begun to decay, the area illuminated by the lamp remains safe."

The video describes how to create a complex gas discharge lamp like a neon light, containing a precise mixture of seven different gasses — oxygen, neon, xenon, argon, nitrogen, carbon dioxide, and helium. Powered by a lithium battery like those used in cameras or cell phones, the small light produces a royal blue glow.

The video then says that characters should also construct an electromagnet around a closed doorway. When the characters turn on both the light and the magnet, opening the door reveals a corridor several hundred yards long. The video states that this corridor travels through time and space, ending somewhere in Paris at 5:11 pm on February 16, 1901. The video also provides the addresses of Dr. Girard's laboratory and home.

The Truth: Like Marco Singe, Dr. Girard's employers tried to use the God-Machine as a path to godhood. Unlike

Singe, they managed to succeed, after a fashion. The device that Girard invented does allow the users to manipulate time in a way much like the God-Machine, but unfortunately, the device also alters the nature of causality. The result is that the God-Machine can't get a bead on what is happening and therefore cannot simply send an angel to fix it. When the characters see the video, though, they create a timeline in which they do correct the problem, which gives the God-Machine a way to send an angel to help them.

Interchangeable Parts

Characters can begin in any city that has access to the internet, chemistry laboratories and lab supply companies. The first evidence that the characters have that anything unusual is happening are the brilliant royal-blue auroras that appear in skies all across the world, including places too close to the equator to normally experience them. Then, at least one of the characters attempts to download a music video from a video sharing site and instead downloads the video described above.

At least one of the characters needs to be an electronics or chemistry professional or hobbyist who is comfortable creating a custom-made gas discharge lamp. The characters also need to be people willing to consider acting on downloaded internet videos about time travel.

Blueprints

If the characters do nothing, the auroras grow increasingly bright and everyone begins catching brief glimpses of phantom figures. Belief in ghosts soars across the world. These "ghosts" become increasingly solid as the barriers between one time and another break down over the course of several weeks (the figures are not ghosts, but people bleeding through from other times). In small areas, time begins to spontaneously reverse itself for a few seconds. A shattered vase might reassemble and rise off the floor to sit intact upon a table. Eventually, the structure of linear time completely dissolves.

The device that caused this enables the God-Machine to collapse time, allowing it to entirely reformat reality from the far past to the distant future, creating a timeless state where it can operate without the necessity of any intermediaries. In this timeless state, cause and effect cease to have any meaning as every event in the world occurs in one infinite instant. The blue light protects people from this timeless reality, creating a bubble of linear time six yards in diameter. However, everything beyond this radius remains a confusing whirl.

Several decades after creating the blue light, Dr. Girard realized how dangerous his superiors' plans were. He attempted to warn them, but none of them believed him. To protect himself, he pretended to rethink his objections. The time-destroying mechanism was completed in 1932. It has been gradually accumulating power since that time. As the growing auroras reveal, it is beginning to activate. For more about Dr. Girard, see p. 115.

Once the characters leave the time corridor, they find themselves walking out the door of a warehouse in Paris in the early evening on February 16, 1901. They are two miles from Dr. Girard's laboratory, which is on the other side of the Seine from the warehouse and in a far nicer portion of town. To succeed, the characters must steal or destroy both the original blue light and Dr. Girard's notes. Without these notes, he will not be able to successfully recreate the light. Alternately, the characters could kill Dr. Girard and destroy his work or convince Dr. Girard of the dangers his light poses and convince him to destroy it or give it to them.

To return to the present, the characters turn on their light and shine it at the door to the warehouse where they arrived in the past. If the characters succeed, the light they built vanishes the instant they return to the present, since the video describing it was never made. All notes they made about it also vanish and the auroras they remember never occurred. The only record of any of these events are the characters' memories and any items they brought from 1901.

Linchpins

The most important linchpin is the blue light invented by Dr. Henri Girard in 1901. Working as he did with a cult dedicated to understanding and subverting the God-Machine, he had access to science unknown to the rest of humanity. In early 1901, Dr. Girard was experimenting with the esoteric properties of gas discharge lamps using many hundreds of different gas mixtures when he noticed that this particular mixture of gases had unusual properties.

In addition to allowing characters to travel back to 1901, it also causes objects within a few feet of it to freeze in time for a second or two after the light it turned on. When Dr. Girard first turned on the light, he saw a pencil falling off a shelf next to the light freeze in midair for two seconds. He then made a note of which gas mixture and electrode design he used and began to research this light further. Dr. Girard was the only researcher performing these experiments. Excited with his discovery, he tested this light for eight days before turning his research over to his superiors.

In 1901, he worked in a laboratory located on the second floor of a building used by scientists and engineers who were all recruited by a senior agent of the cult named Martin Delrio. He recruited these individuals to perform various types of advanced research. The building had a single armed guard at the door. Dr. Girard's laboratory contained pressurized tanks of many gases as well as more than a dozen oddly designed "neon light" tubes. The original blue light was stored in the laboratory, but Dr. Girard took his notes home with him every night. Dr. Girard left for home that night at 7:00 PM and came to work at 9:00 AM.

The building's first floor contained offices, while the second floor contained four laboratories. One was empty, while the other two contain experiments into other God-Machine related phenomena (if you have already completed other Tales, you might consider having these labs contain remnants of things they characters have encountered — is the cult following their future exploits somehow?). This building and the portion of the city it is in are quite wealthy and have electric lights both on the streets and inside the building.

Dr. Girard lived half a mile from his laboratory in a small but elegant two-story townhouse also fitted with electricity. He lived alone except for two servants who left shortly after he returns home. He kept his notebook in his study. His employer warned Dr. Girard that working on these projects could invite dangerous attention. The townhouse's first floor windows have electrified bars and he keeps a revolver in bedside table. (If the Storyteller wishes the good doctor to have more rarefied security — perhaps a converted clockwork servitor like the ones found on p. 133 — that's certainly appropriate.)

Methods

Academics: Hopefully the characters have someone well-versed enough in history that they can avoid potentially dangerous anachronisms. The Storyteller should occasionally ask for a Wits + Academics roll to avoid some egregious error.

Crafts: A subtle character could use Dexterity + Crafts to first create a small, natural-looking leak in the original blue light, letting all of the gases out. Preventing Dr. Girard from recreating it would involve altering his notes (see below).

Larceny: Getting through the electrified bars requires a Dexterity + Larceny roll at a –3 penalty. Failure not only leaves the bars intact but inflicts five points of bashing damage and alerts any guards.

Stealth: Assuming the characters can get into Girard's home, moving undetected requires Dexterity + Stealth rolls. Remember, the group is only as a stealthy as the least stealthy member.

Expression: If the characters can get hold of Dr. Girard's notebook, they can potentially alter it. This assumes a grounding in Science (someone needs to tell the forger what to write, which involves a roll of Intelligence + Science). The roll for the forgery itself is Dexterity + Expression (extended action, each roll equals one minute, eight successes required). If successful, the character can alter the formula so that it has no effect, which hopefully puts Girard off the track.

Intimidation: A menacing character could abduct or corner Dr. Girard and use Presence + Intimidation to threaten him into giving the character his notes on the blue light.

Merit: Language (French) (p. 163): Knowing French is exceedingly handy for getting around Paris in 1901. Although many educated people, including Dr. Girard, speak English, most people do not.

Merit: Sleight of Hand (see p.165): Characters who have some knowledge of stage magic or similar methods can more easily steal Dr. Girard's notebook from his satchel.

Escalation

If the characters obtained Dr. Girard's original notes or the original blue light, they can use or build a light to return to 1901. Every trip they take to 1901 lets them out on the same night 5 minutes later than the last time they visited. Careless characters could meet themselves, which could cause vast amounts of confusion.

Characters could begin altering history by traveling repeatedly to 1901 by introducing new technologies or assassinating Hitler or Stalin while they were young men. Although minor changes in time go undetected, God-Machine operatives notice significant changes in the timeline and attempt to locate and eliminate the characters.

Time travel is, as any fan of science fiction knows, tricky to get right without creating all kinds of logistical problems. Maybe the character do destabilize things — that kind of instability could lead into any number of Tales, including Urban Wandering (p. 108), This Is Hell (p. 103), or Wake the Dead (p. 86). On a smaller scale, just being familiar with the nuances of time travel might lead the characters to Do-Over (p. 71) or make them ideal to track The Key (p. 80).

This Is Hell

Let me offer you a choice. Free will, baby, that's what this is all about. Open a door, let me through, and I can hand you the keys to Heaven or Hell. You can decide which side wins all of reality. You just have to choose.

Infrastructure

Lines are being drawn in the sand all across creation. Monsters, occultists, spiritualists and mediums see more activity out of the once silent heavens. The numbers of demonic possessions skyrocket and exorcists are being run ragged trying to keep up. Some of the scholarly types have started collecting clippings and accounts of angel sightings. The religiously affiliated are ticking off signs on their version of apocalypse bingo the way some people play drinking games.

The characters are right in the middle of it, having dreams of war and conflict, dreams of blood and sex and sweet joyful suffering. They're having dreams of Heaven and Hell and someone's whispering to them, begging them to take sides.

The Truth: In this Tale, the God-Machine is trying to shift the world into a heretofore unknown form of Infrastructure. If it needs a title, call it "pure" Infrastructure. If the God-Machine succeeds, it won't have restrictions on where and when it can send its angels.

Interchangeable Parts

Characters in this chronicle shouldn't all be in the dark about the World of Darkness. Having a little insight into the dark of the night is ideal for most of the characters. Either they're occult researchers, professional exorcists, kin to a pack of werewolves, or psychically attuned to secrets. If you have access to any of the supernatural games for the World of Darkness (**Vampire: The Requiem**, **Mage: The Awakening**, **Geist: The Sin-Eaters** and so on), you might consider running this Tale for a group of supernatural characters.

This Is Hell might be the perfect Tale to use to close out a God-Machine Chronicle. The characters are still mortal, but they have seen enough during their time chasing down the God-Machine that they cannot be considered "normal" anymore. These are characters specially chosen for a destiny unlike any other. Maybe it's in their blood, in their genes, or just unknowable happenstance, but the characters will become champions of humanity during the course of the chronicle.

Blueprints

In this chronicle, the God-Machine wants nothing less than Heaven on Earth — its version of Heaven, anyway. It wants a clean, cold, orderly place devoid of the nuisance of free will, with everything perfectly patterned and symmetrical. The world should have a place for everything and everything in its a place.

The problem is, only free will can strip humanity of free will. For much the same esoteric reasons that the God-Machine needs to build Infrastructure before it can easily affect the world, humanity, or some representative thereof, would have to accept the God-Machine's version of Heaven in order to renounce free will.

Running the numbers, then, the God-Machine has come up with a plan: run the Earth into the ground. Hate and war and sexism and venereal disease and child abuse and all the evil we pile on top of each other help the God-Machine edge us closer and closer to giving in, giving over, and breaking down.

But the God-Machine isn't the only game in town. In some tiny subsection of the supernatural live what some people mistakenly call demons. Maybe they are demons, by some definitions, but they think of themselves as "Celebrants." These entities do inhabit a space the likes of which Dante and Virgil would describe as Hell. Their motivations are chaos and creation for its own sake. They revel in pain as well as pleasure, unfettered by smaller concepts like hate and mortality. They are the greatest fans of free will, and in their own way, admire humanity as a result. As the God-Machine hunkers down to force humanity to give up their greatest gift, the Celebrants of Hell are rising to offer humanity another choice.

Linchpins

Servants of the God-Machine are angels. Their touch, and therefore the touch of the God-Machine, is cold and passionless. The God-Machine demands order and equality to such a point as to be indiscriminate and even cruel. The angels seek to create a clinical equality for all people. Their actions are without compassion. The God-Machine and its angels see only in terms of right and wrong, ignoring all other gradients. Order and chaos, and anything short of perfection need not exist. When they kill, it's quick and clinical. No one suffers when the angels act, but largely that's because no one feels anything when the angles act.

The Celebrants of Hell are wet and messy. They're no more afraid of gore and the beauty of "sin" than we are afraid of air. They leave chaos in their wake, and yes, suffering as well. They herald pain and with it, a deeper understanding of self. That understanding may bring agony — that's what happens with knowledge — but for many it's completely worth it. To the Celebrant, the sublime is not a cold unfeeling light but the line between pain and pleasure. Ecstasy is being lost in sensation. Where the angels bring destruction to the imperfect, these demons offer horror with the intent to enlighten.

The God-Machine is taking a risk by sending angels out to take overt action in the world. Any of the angels found in Chapter Three might be useful to illustrate the point, but no matter which angels the characters encounter, they seem detached, removed from the situation. This is because the God-Machine does not have the proper Infrastructure in place to send angels to act in its stead.

Demons?

Longtime readers and players of other World of Darkness games might wonder if the Celebrants bear any relation to the inhabitants of Pandemonium (in **Mage: The Awakening**) or the demons that inhabit the Lower Depths (and are described in **World of Darkness: Inferno**).

The answer is: If you have those books and want to draw those parallels, sure. If not, then the Celebrants are exactly what we're describing: otherworldly entities that resonate with freedom, narcissism and selfishness. For purposes of this story, their pedigree doesn't matter much.

Methods

Investigation: The possessing "demon" or whatever it is seems to be teasing you. It possesses a body, causes some chaos, leaves you a cryptic message, and vacates to a new victim. Roll Intelligence + Investigation to anticipate its next possession and cut it off at the pass.

Occult: The angel spoke to you. It told you about the keys, how the one holding the keys could choose which door to lock and which to open. How the keys were destined for a pure hand and that pure soul alone could lock away the suffering of Hell and open the door to Heaven on Earth. What it didn't tell you was how to identify the keys. Roll Intelligence + Occult to finish translating the book the Celebrant gave you to find the "keys to the doors."

Larceny: "Let me know you and show you just a taste of the experiences I offer you. The gifts I would give you," the Celebrant says. Say yes, or roll Dexterity + Larceny to escape your bindings rather than endure and discover the "pleasures" of Hell.

Weaponry: It appears with blinding radiance. It's everything the scriptures describe, awesome and terrible and beautiful and heartbreaking. You're in between it and the person it must kill, but it seems to be offering you a choice. Pick up the sword it has laid at your feet, or step out of the way. Roll Dexterity + Weaponry to defend yourself or let the angel destroy its target.

Expression: Your friends are tired, terrified, and overwhelmed. They've about given up. You know that all of you will need renewed energy to get through the coming day — the day of destiny. Roll Presence + Expression to compose the words they'll need to hear to get through.

Persuasion: You want to open the door to Heaven. Yes, it will be passionless, but suffering will end and perhaps humanity can finally ascend. Your companions, however, are leaning more toward Hell. You know that's a sucker's bet. Roll Presence + Persuasion to begin convincing them.

Merit: Striking Looks (p. 170): When you're the most beautiful thing on the block, you're a walking temptation — don't think the Celebrants don't notice.

Merit: Iron Will (p 167): There's Heaven's plan, there's Hell's plan, and then there's your plan. Angels, demons, even God might know what dance steps you're supposed to take, but there's no force in the universe that's going to make you perform like a monkey.

Escalation

At the climax of this chronicle, the world — the universe — will be changed forever. It comes down to choice, to free will, no matter how manipulated and abused. Choose between the sympathetic, sensual and violent demons or the cold hard compassionless angels. Either side is willing to harm innocents to reach their own ends.

Choose a world of order with no suffering and no sensation or free will. Or a world of chaos where nothing is permanent and sensation is all, but the highs and lows of suffering and pleasure are off the scales.

There's a third possible option, though. When in possession of the keys to Heaven and Hell, maybe the characters lock both doors. Maybe they isolate the Earth and humanity from interference from either side. For the first time, humanity is totally on its own for good or for ill; it is entirely in control of its own destiny. What does that mean for the World of Darkness? Maybe mind- and emotion-controlling powers just don't work on people anymore and they can recognize the supernatural for what it is. Maybe the world stays much the same, except the God-Machine no longer has any influence in it (but neither do the Celebrants). Is that, overall, a good thing? Or does the God-Machine fulfill some purpose that the characters never really understood?

This Tale makes a good end point for a God-Machine Chronicle, but if you want somewhere to go when it ends, What Is It Good For (p. 105), A Journey Into Time (p. 101) and Sister City (p. 73) are good choices.

What Is It Good For

All war is hell; when you're serving in an active combat zone, time stretches and contorts to make your stay in Hell long and tortuous. Only, none of that is supposed to be literal. Massive shelling in this ancient desert has uncovered something that man wasn't meant to see. Since then, you've seen the true meaning of war.

Infrastructure

Your chaplain thinks everyone died when that shell hit and uncovered an artifact, the Flag of Elam. That's how he explains what's going on. Well, when he can stop crying long enough to speak. He isn't taking it well. But you're elite, you were trained to endure all sorts of mental anguish, and maybe that's why you and your team can observe all of this without going completely Section 8.

One minute you're fighting insurgents in what was once the cradle of civilization. Then a bomb went off, probably fired off by your side accidentally. When the sand and debris settled, everyone was looking at an ancient, tattered flag. It's got no words on it and its markings have faded over the centuries. It's just this big terrible thing and over it hovers what you can only describe as the angel of death. It's different for each of you, but you know what it is. You can feel in your bones what it means.

The next second, you're wearing Roman armor and weaponry, probably in Germany or Ireland. You're covered in blood, and you and the other soldiers are all looking at this artifact when your praetor demands you fight on. Keep killing the barbarians! That's what you're here for.

After the battle, you find the rest of your team. They're confused, scared maybe, but accepting what they see. The Angel or the Flag has moved you back in time to this ancient campaign to fight and fight. You don't know if you're ever getting out, getting home, but you kind of felt that way fighting the insurgents anyway.

The Truth: The God-Machine didn't do this to the characters deliberately. The flag that the soldiers uncovered is a Linchpin, a kind of placeholder that the God-Machine uses to mark active combat sites all throughout history. Usually no one notices it, but the characters uncovered it, and since they aren't able to control it they're sliding through time, stopping at various battles. This isn't part of any Infrastructure necessarily, which is why the God-Machine hasn't stopped it. It's just a glitch, albeit a potentially messy one.

Interchangeable Parts

Characters might be members of the military, of course, an elite team of SEALs or Rangers, for example. They might be just some foot soldiers, a translator, an embedded reporter, a private contractor with too much free time and maybe a Peace Corps relief worker all caught up in the wheels of the God-Machine.

Blueprints

The God-Machine has passed no moral judgment on the characters, whatever they might surmise by their situation. Rather, mystical pathways connect between places of great violence and bloodshed. War, to the God-Machine, is a place. The Flag moves from part of that "place" to others without the normal constraints of space and time.

The characters, of course, may never fully understand that detail. What they do know is that they are moving through the Artifact from one war to another. They don't need to move in any chronology or with certain lessons or

stories in mind. Past, present, and even potential future wars are fair game. The Flag is simply doing what it does and the characters are caught in the tailwind.

If there is a way out, it isn't death. Characters dying in one war find themselves alive again the next time the characters move to a new war. They remember their deaths in excruciating detail. Each time a character dies in war, though, he forgets some part of his original life and takes on false memories from the war in which he died. A Storyteller may reflect this by removing one Skill Specialty from a character sheet and replacing it with something appropriate to the war in question. So a modern soldier might lose his Sniper Firearms Specialty and have it replaced with a Weaponry Specialty in Swords to reflect his new memory as a centurion.

Dying is also a breaking point (p. 155), no matter how often it happens.

Linchpins

They characters were never meant to look at the Flag of Elam directly, any more than they were ever meant to see the angel Triage. The characters were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Triage appears after the characters have shifted in time once. The angel isn't here to save them, though, or even to correct the problem. It's here to assess whether it's worth the God-Machine's time to reverse what happened (returning the characters to the moment that they discovered the Flag) or just to let the characters cycle through time until they return to the point naturally. Of course, since they're shifting randomly, they have no guarantee that they'll *ever* return to their own time (but spaced over an infinite number of shifts, it's likely).

Triage does not travel alone. The creatures in service to the angel appear as men, though their true form is a man-sized snake with a lion's head and milky, blind eyes. These Blind Serpents hide among the events of war and history to assure nothing upsets the destiny of the moment in time. For example, if the characters attempt to end a conflict early, the Blind Serpents emerge to stop them.

The characters have two methods to escape from their predicament. If they can find and take control of the Flag of Elam, they can direct the flow of time and thus return to their true point in history. Once they have the Flag, directing time isn't especially hard (an Resolve + Academics roll, 10 successes required, each roll equals one turn, teamwork rules are allowed and recommended). Obtaining the Flag, though, is a Herculean task. It is always located in enemy territory (no matter which side of the conflict the characters come down on, the *other* side has the Flag), it is always well-guarded, and it is always hidden. Plus, the Blind Serpents may well work to keep the characters away.

The other method is to convince Triage to help them. This requires use of the Social Maneuvering system (p. 188). The characters need to open six Doors to get Triage to act on their behalf and he cannot be forced. The characters need to convince him that it's more trouble for the God-Machine to let them slide through time than to speed up the process.

Triage and the Blind Serpents are described in Chapter Three (p. 141 and p.132, respectively).

Methods

Academics: You become aware again right in the middle of a soggy, sloppy, mud-covered combat. It seems like everyone is just shooting at everyone. Total chaos. Roll Wits + Academics to remember enough from history class to identify whose side you're on.

Politics: There's got to be a pattern, right? To the conflicts, the wars, the battles you've been forced to experience? There's got to be a reason for all of this. Roll Intelligence + Politics to puzzle through possible unifying political motivations behind these conflicts.

Survival: The locals, the real combatants in this conflict seem at home or at least equipped for the jungle's sweltering heat. You and your team are not so fortunate. Roll Stamina + Survival to endure the assault Nature itself seems to be waging against you.

Weaponry: You've been trained in hand-to-hand combat, sure, but really you're used to firefights. Here, you don't have access to guns and your enemies are much better trained with swords than you. Roll Wits + Weaponry to analyze how your enemies fight and try and offset the penalty you'd otherwise suffer.

Animal Ken: Mounted combat. Well. That's unexpected. You've got a rough idea of how a horse works, anyway, and that's probably enough to ride with the rest of the cavalry, right? Roll Presence + Animal Ken to keep the horse on your side during the combat.

Intimidation: The captured soldier from the other side of the lines knows where the Flag is...but he's only going to talk if you convince him it's worth his while or that you'll kill him (or worse) if he doesn't. Roll Strength + Intimidation to scare him into talking painfully, or Manipulation + Intimidation to do it by intimation. Torture, by the way, is almost always a breaking point.

Merit: Marksmanship (p 178): Sometimes the best, fastest way to end a war is to find the right warmonger and put a bullet in his forehead from a nice safe distance. Harsh but true.

Merit: Multi-Lingual (p 163): The root of most conflict is misunderstanding, so knowing how to communicate is a plus. Since you might shift into times in which English doesn't even exist yet, becoming a polyglot quickly might save your life.

Escalation

The characters might be able to convince Triage to return them to their rightful place, in which case they might not even remember that anything happened (or, if you want to have a tragic story, they might all die in combat and wish that they could again shift in time, just before the light goes out).

If they claim the Flag, though, they're masters of their own destiny. They might be able to get back to the moment where they left, but what if the Flag deposits them in a despotic nation on the verge of a massacre (Proposition 279, p. 96)? Maybe their experiences with death make them ideal ghost whisperers, ready to sell their services to a beleaguered region (Ghost Machine, p. 79). Or, perhaps their travels through space lead them to even strange vistas (Urban Wandering, p. 108).

Urban Wandering

The ability to "city-walk," traveling from one urban center to another without crossing the distance between them, is as old as cities. The knowledge of how to do it has always been kept secret. But now, as the number of people with that knowledge increases, some of these people accidentally find their way to a mist-covered realm inhabited by nightmare creatures — who follow the city-walkers back.

Infrastructure

City-walking has been possible for centuries, but the knowledge was proprietary. Individuals could work out how to do it with practice and the right texts. Various secret societies even taught the ability to their most trusted members. But now, someone's leaked the secret — and people are finding out why it was never widespread.

Individuals all across the world begin accidentally walking from one city to another without passing through the space between. At first only a few people can do this, but anyone can learn this ability if they are shown or hear a detailed description of the method. People think about a city they previously lived in while walking or driving and begin seeing locations that look like that other city. Sometime between 5 and 30 minutes later, the person finds themselves in this other city, even if it is many thousands of miles away or across an ocean. In time, people can learn to travel to any city they have ever visited, or even places that they have seen clearly in videos or documentaries (TV dramas and movies rarely provide accurate views of cities and so are not useful).

The Truth: The ability to city-walk is a side-effect of the Logical Infrastructure built into cities in general. The very *concept* of "city" carries with it a certain semantic and conceptual weight; by following that concept, a person learns to city-walk. Why is it getting more commonplace now? Possibly because the population density in cities is getting higher; if cities have spiritual "weight," some of them are getting "heavy" enough that even untrained people can sense that weight. The God-Machine isn't responding to this issue immediately since it's just piggybacking on an existing Infrastructure, but the nightmare creatures following hapless city-walkers home need to be addressed.

Interchangeable Parts

The characters can be anyone living in any city in the world, but they should all be people who have lived in at least three or four different cities. They might be members of some cult or society that has learned how to city-walk or they might be people that have figured it out for themselves.

Blueprints

Within a week or two, dozens of people have learned to reliably walk or drive between cities. Soon after this, they begin telling others about it, both in person, in blog posts, and even in online videos, where people show off this ability. Most people don't believe it, of course, and lack the spiritual fortitude to try it, but the ability spreads.

Many of these new city-walkers, though, don't possess the skill to do it safely. They wind up in the nightmare realm and lead the hideous creatures therein back.

The number of violent murders increases and a growing number of people report catching brief glimpses various strange and horrific creatures after dark. These creatures are nocturnal monsters that look like distorted people between two and 10 feet tall. All of them are good at hiding and most prey upon humans. Going out after dark becomes increasingly dangerous.

If nothing is done, a growing number of monsters invade the world and eventually the connections between these nightmare worlds and the human world become so strong that large areas of the world are either transformed into portions of the nightmare realm or become a haphazard mixture of the normal world and the nightmare realm.

Linchpins

While the characters are city-walking, all of them have the same vision. A humanoid figure with wings made of mercury appears before them. It shows them the nightmare realm reflected in its wings, and tells them that the creatures are hungry. Unless the creatures are prevented from accessing Earth once and for all, they will overrun the human race.

This isn't strictly true. The angel, Rasha, is merely trying to get people to close off the nightmare realm (the God-Machine has no power in this realm). It is willing to answer any questions the characters have about city-walking, but not about the God-Machine. In fact, if asked about the God-Machine, Rasha becomes defensive and hostile.

City-Walker (••• Supernatural Merit)

Prerequisite: Streetwise ••, mortal (non-supernatural)

Effect: The character has learned the secrets of city-walking. When in a city with a population of at least 250,000, the character can start walking down a street or sidewalk and concentrate on a different city. The character must know his destination city fairly well. The player rolls Resolve + Streetwise to city-walk.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character reaches the nightmare realm and is probably food for the inhabitants. If nothing else, he'll likely lead the monsters right back to his home city.

Failure: The character cannot city-walk to the desired destination; the image just isn't coming in clearly. Any further city-walking attempts that day suffer a –3 penalty. These restrictions fade once the character sleeps for eight hours.

Success: The character emerges in the destination city.

Exceptional Success: The character emerges in the destination city and the nightmare creatures do not notice him. Apply a +1 to character's next attempt to city-walk.

Suggested Modifiers

Situation	Modifier
Character has never been to destination city before	–5
Character has only visited destination city	–4
Character had a significant experience in the destination city (honeymoon, funeral) but never lived there	–2
Character spent at least a month in destination city	+1
Character lived in destination city for at least one year	+2
Character lived in destination city for at least five years	+3
Character raised children in destination city	+4
Character was born in destination city	+5

Actually observing the process of city-walking reveals hints of how it works. Most people report that the world around them seems to almost shimmer slightly while they are city-walking. Close observation reveals that faint glows and shimmers come from the road or sidewalk on which the character is walking or driving. If a character finds a crack in the sidewalk or makes one using a sledgehammer or similar means, she sees a network of narrow glowing metallic threads extending along the path she is city-walking. These threads aren't visible when someone is not city-walking.

Every week that people continue city-walking, this network of threads becomes denser. Anyone who city-walks by traveling across rooftops can find similar glowing threads covering electrical and other cables connecting one building to another. The threads on these cables are easily visible when someone is city-walking from one rooftop to another, but are otherwise invisible.

Cutting all of these threads at one point makes city-walking between the two cities significantly more difficult for a while, but the cut threads heal within a few hours. However, anyone who looks at the threads on another path while these destroyed threads are healing notices that the entire network appears to be slightly weakened and damaged. Repeated strikes at the thread network in widely separated locations during the same few hours make city-walking more difficult everywhere and can eventually stop it altogether. Dozens of people working together over a large area could damage this network of threads sufficiently that it dies and all city-walking, including walking to the nightmare realm. becomes impossible.

Examining the glowing threads also reveals that all of them appear golden except one, which shines silver. All of these silvery threads lead to the nightmare realm. Cutting only these threads prevents people from traveling to the nightmare realm from the city the traveler originated from, at least until the thread heals.

It's not possible to cut the threads permanently, at least not without destroying the concept of "city." The characters can close off the nightmare realm, but it requires ending the practice of city-walking. Making the threads too hostile to use could be accomplished by asking Rasha for help. He can make the golden threads sharp and jagged, and therefore using city-walking feels like walking on broken glass. The characters could also draw on the knowledge of the cults that taught city-walking centuries ago — maybe some kind of ritual exists that alters the frequency of the golden threads, thus making it impossible for human beings to use them to city-walk.

Methods

Investigation: A successful Wits + Investigation roll while attempting to observe the process of city-walking reveals a faint glow through cracks in the street — evidence of the glowing threads.

Occult: Delving into the secret history of city-walking requires an Intelligence + Occult roll (probably an extended one).

Athletics: While city-walking from one city to another isn't nearly the same physical feat that actually walking the distance is, a character still might need a Stamina + Athletics roll to keep up the pace.

Firearms: Loud noises scare the nightmare creature away. The trick is firing the gun when they're close enough to hear it, but not so close that they pounce anyway. Roll Wits + Firearms to get the timing right.

Animal Ken: Some animals can city-walk. Cats, especially, are instinctively able to do it, but rats and some dogs can as well. Roll Wits + Animal Ken to observe the animal as it vanishes onto the path.

Streetwise: Locating people who have visited the nightmare realm requires a Presence + Streetwise roll.

Merit: Mystery Cult Initiation (see p. 168): The City-Walker Merit would be a superb reward for someone who worked themselves up the ranks of an old mystical cult.

Merit: Fame (see p. 167): A character could parley the ability to walk between cities as a special talent and get rich and famous...at least until the members of the mystery cult learn that he's doing it.

Escalation

Perhaps a few of the largest cities were closely connected to nightmare realm and are now more than half composed of twisted nightmare realm buildings (this might be a way to get the characters to a variant of their own city; see Sister City, p. 73). Alternatively, after the nightmare realm is cut off, people begin seeing a vast shining white city in the distance. Anyone who travels to far into this city enters a trance and begins performing menial tasks there. An increasing number of people who city-walk end up in this city, the Invisible Citadel (p. 92). Or, if the characters manage to curtail city-walking, someone manages to remember it. He's not using it for the betterment of mankind, though (The Key, p. 80).

14th July 2012

Dear Gina,

It's still happening and I don't think I can tell anyone.

So I sent the letter and thought it was done with. And then a couple days after I wrote to you last, there she was again, and worse than ever. She started following me *everywhere*. She'd be in the next carriage along on the tube. Around a corner, just staring at me with like puppy eyes. Just, everywhere I went. Even at Sainsbury's, ready to pop out from behind the dairy aisle. And one Friday I came home and found Henry lying on the front path, just in front of the doorstep, completely dead. I thought, *fuck* and ran inside and thought, how did he get there and what do I do, and then I heard a noise outside and this horrible cold feeling just welled right up inside me and I *knew* who would be upstairs. And I walked up the stairs and yes, she was in my bedroom, sitting on my bed.

I don't know why I did what I did then. I mean, she scared the fuck out of me. I ran out of the room and out the door and sat on my front garden wall and wondered what I was going to do.

I called the police. Except that I didn't sell it somehow and I felt that the woman at the other end of the line didn't believe me which is weird because I thought they were supposed to answer every call. I gathered up my courage and walked back in, and back up to my room. She was gone. I must have opened every cupboard door, checked everywhere I could think of until I was satisfied that she wasn't there and then I started wondering if she had driven me mad and I just started seeing her where she wasn't. I think I spent an hour looking for her, when the doorbell rang, and I nearly didn't answer it, I was so spooked.

When it rang a second time, I told myself to grow a pair of nuts and went downstairs and answered it. It was this policeman. Enormous fat bloke. Red face. Jelly belly. A proper Laughing Policeman. He said he was Sergeant Fox and he walked right in without me asking and said that I'd called for help and I said, yeah, over an hour ago, and he said, well, with the London 2012 preparations and all, the Law that's the word he used was stretched terribly thin. He talked in this comedy Irish accent. He asked me my name and when I told him, he was all, would you be related to the Dears of Dublin and Skerries, and I said I dunno, I think my grandfather once said his dad was from Ireland though, and the Sergeant started talking about how the Dears were a fine family! Honestly, I felt

like I'd fallen into an episode of *Father Ted*. I tried to get him back onto the subject. I had unwanted attention, I said, and she'd been following me and sending me letters, and he said, would you be having any of the letters? I'd kept them. I'm not that stupid, so I was able to show him. He appeared suddenly terribly interested.

He had these big round eyes, and while he was reading, they got like perfectly round. And then he looked up and said, "Oh, I wouldn't be worrying yourself there. That's Dear Mary, that is, and she's perfectly harmless, so she is." I didn't think real people talked like that. Like that French girl I used to date before you who said "Ooh la la" when she was flustered. Anyway, I was like, I don't care if she's harmless, she's breaking into my house. The Sergeant said, was I sure, and had I any evidence of her forcing entry, and I said no, all the doors and windows were locked. And they're still locked. He looked at me and smiled and didn't say anything, and I said, well, aren't you going to do anything?

He shrugged and said that there wasn't much that the Law could do, unless she got dangerous or threatening. I am not sure I believed him. He asked if he could take the letters. I was about to say no, but he had already pocketed them and this is an indictment on my mental state, it has to be he looked really big. And sort of dark, like he was all in shadow all of a sudden. I shook my head, but he was already leaving the house and saying, not to worry. Had she done this before? Was she a repeat offender? The Sergeant just said she was quite harmless. And that was all. And then he was out the door, without even giving me a phone number.

I watched him walk down the street and around the corner, right past Mary, who was sitting on someone else's front wall. He nodded to her and was gone. She waved to me. I dived inside and slammed the door.

The following morning, I called the local station. They didn't, perhaps inevitably, have a Sergeant Fox, nor did they know any fat Irishmen. They asked me for a case number. Of course, I didn't have one. They weren't able to share with me any information, they said. I said, look, I'm Jon Dear, this is my date of birth, I can prove it, and they said, you'll have to come to the station. I hung up. I honestly didn't know what to do.

Since then I've seen this Mary at least once every single day. I have no idea what she wants or why she's doing this. She hasn't come into my house again. She just stares at me. I'm not sleeping and I'm starting to see her where she isn't. Yesterday I printed out one of those spreadsheets Stephen asked me to work on and the numbers were arranged into a portrait of her face. I swear. I had to go hide in the toilet for half an hour to compose myself.

The police aren't any help. The letters which were my only real evidence are gone. I have no proof that Sergeant Fox ever came round.

Gina, I miss you. Please, I know it's selfish of me, but if you can come home soon, please do. I'm falling to pieces.

I miss you.

Jon

Malcolm felt his hands TREMBLING as he ran them over the woman beneath him. She moaned in response to his touch and arched herself to be closer. She pulled Malcolm down for a deep kiss and he could feel her hips grinding against his. He moved his hands back up her body again, felt her breasts and nipples under his fingers. He willed his hands to stop shaking. They didn't, but she didn't seem to mind.

He was so wrapped up in the moment that he didn't hear the sound of the door closing in the front of the house. He didn't hear the FOOTSTEPS coming down the hall, and he missed the sound of the bedroom door opening. He didn't REALIZE Anne was home until it was too late.

"Malcolm?"

He rolled off the woman and pulled the sheets up around him. Anne's face wasn't TEARFUL or ANGRY, it was just…hurt. He dropped his gaze. He never wanted to hurt her, and he wasn't even sure what had brought them to this point, but here they were.

"Anne, it isn't what you think." He could hear himself saying it, and he winced. IT WAS EXACTLY WHAT SHE THOUGHT, OBVIOUSLY.

"I'm tired, Malcolm." He voice quavered with unshed tears. "I don't want to talk about it. I'm leaving." She walked past, and he watched, stunned, as she packed an overnight bag.

He thought, as she walked out, about asking her where she would go or what he should do. He couldn't get words out. He considered begging her to stay, but he knew it was over. He'd seen it in her face. She would NEVER be able to trust him again.

"I'm DONE here." The woman's voice sounded cold and businesslike. Malcolm had forgotten she was there, and Anne hadn't said a word to her.

He looked over to the woman and sighed. "I guess this does kill the mood. I'm sorry that happened." He reached out to her, but she moved away before he could make contact. He let his hand drop to his side. She sat on the bed, looking at him, all the fire that used to be in her eyes now completely lifeless. Malcolm thought, for some reason, of watching ANIMALS IN THE ZOO.

He stood up to put his clothes on. "At least we won't have to sneak around anymore." He turned back to shoot her a smile, but she was gone. He looked around the room, but he couldn't find her. He checked the bathroom, but she wasn't there either. As he came back into the bedroom, he noticed that the small red pile of her clothes was still on the floor where they had left them, undisturbed, but she was nowhere to be seen.

Chapter Three: The Cogs in the Machine

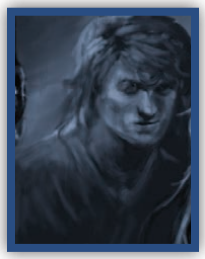
If everything on Earth is a function of the God-Machine, then what are the inhabitants? Are they programs, trusted with will and agency but ultimately subservient? Are they self-replicating mechanisms, akin to nanobots? Or are they merely cogs in the machine?

This chapter examines some of these "cogs," Storyteller characters to help bring your God-Machine Chronicle to life. The first part of the chapter presents human (if altered) characters who have had the misfortune to become involved with the God-Machine. Most of them correspond to one of the Tales from Chapter Two. For those that don't, we provide suggestions on which Tales are most appropriate for their inclusion.

The second part of this chapter describes angels, the strange, spiritual servants of the God-Machine. Most of the angels provided correspond to a Tale, but you should absolutely use these angels as inspiration to create your own for your own Tales of the God-Machine.

On the hill when he pulled me from the dust, the angel said, "You will see many strange things. Do not be afraid. You have a holy mission and I will protect you." Smug bastard.

– Christopher Moore, *Lamb: The Gospel According to Biff, Christ's Childhood Pal*



Benjamin Wayne Masters

Charismatic leader of the Cult of Revelations

Background: Benjamin Wayne Masters grew up as an orphan from the early age of six. Both of his parents died in a car wreck. He was put into the state system and started in his first foster home at the age of seven. He was in and out of foster homes until he was sixteen years old. He suffered abuse and neglect in many of the homes, and his depression and withdrawn personality made him a burden on even the best of foster parents.

Benjamin ran away from his last set of foster parents, whom he had been with for a record three years. They had entered him into psychiatric care and were by far the most caring family he had, but by this point it was too late. The one thing that Benjamin latched onto from the family was their religion. He stayed with one of his church friends for a few weeks then disappeared completely for a year.

When he returned, he attended church regularly and his troubled past seemed to be behind him. The pastor was impressed by his change and gave him odd jobs to do around the church. It wasn't long, however, before the pastor's wife found Benjamin molesting a young girl in the choir room during church. He was expelled and told to never return.

Shortly thereafter, Benjamin joined a missionary group traveling to Nigeria. He impressed the missionaries with his righteous attitude and gained admittance by offering to work for his food and lodgings. While there, he spent most of his time on the compound cleaning and cooking for the missionaries. For the first time in his life, Benjamin felt at peace with his surroundings and his role in life. On a trip into the city for supplies, he ran across a group of children playing. He stopped to ask them if they knew about God. They responded to him in English to tell him that they did know God. God lived in a clearing to the north and they spoke with him regularly.

Intrigued by this revelation, Benjamin asked the children to bring him to the clearing. They led him through the woods to a small clearing in the forest with a blackened and charred hole in the center. Inside the hole was a mess of whirling gears and cogs. When he got near, the children scattered and left him there alone.

He leaned over the hole to inspect the machine parts, all shining and well oiled. He could tell that this was just the very edge of the machinery, and that it

extended for miles in all directions. Fearful, yet in awe, he addressed it as God and it responded. Benjamin doesn't remember the conversation or what happened, but he knows that he met God and that he has a mission. He stumbled back to the missionary compound dehydrated and delirious. He was unconscious for a full 24 hours; when he awoke, all he could talk about was meeting God. Unfortunately, while he was unconscious the missionaries had attempted to contact his family, and in the process, had learned of his disturbing history. They booked him a flight home, and told him, as had his old church, that they wanted nothing more to do with him.

Benjamin was lost, yet strangely serene. He could still accomplish his mission but he would never see his God again. Benjamin always saw religion as a way to manipulate and control others, but now he saw that religion was a lie. His contact with God had driven him to an insane fervor, but his reputation with the religious communities prevented him from getting a real following. This intensity also prevented him from holding down a job. He took to the streets and found his place there.

Benjamin joined a group of indigents living in some old tunnels under the downtown area. They showed him a deep undercity that was rarely explored. Out of curiosity, he began mapping out these tunnels and where the entrances and exits were. In its depths, he was able to find a small hole that led to a still deeper part of the city. Inside he found a set of exposed gears and cogs, shining and oily like the ones he found in Nigeria. Once again, Benjamin knew ecstasy.

He brought the homeless down to witness the gears and preached to them about God. The group listened with rapt attention. Most of them were insane already, and those who weren't needed something to hold onto. Benjamin stylized his small group the Church of Revelations. He and his homeless congregation preach the word of God to any that will listen among the streets of the city.

Description: Benjamin Wayne Masters lives on the street and so his clothes are worn and dirty, and he smells of oil and earth. He has black hair and black eyes and his dark skin is dusty from lack of washing. He is soft spoken and reverent and his voice is a deep baritone.

Storytelling Hints: Benjamin Wayne Masters is a disturbed man, yet is strangely magnetic. He tries to convince anyone he encounters that he has met God and has a mission. If pressed, he doesn't actually recall what his mission is, other than to spread the word of God. He claims that he has seen God and that God is everywhere in the earth and surrounds us. He is not particularly violent, but will protect what he believes to be physical manifestation of God with his life if it is threatened. Most see him as a madman; this is more than likely true.

Benjamin could appear in any Tale that takes place in an urban environment. If the players need a strange, insane but still helpful mentor in the mysteries of the God-Machine, they can attend one of Benjamin's sermons. Of course, Benjamin has some unsavory appetites. Can the characters stomach that, even if he has useful information?

Appropriate Tales for Ben include: The 300 Block (p. 69), This Is Hell (p. 103) and The Squares of the City (p. 75). He would also make an interesting red herring in The Key (p. 80).

Virtue: Righteous

Vice: Cowardly

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 4, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 4, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics (Religion) 3, Medicine 2, Occult 2

Physical Skills: Brawl 2, Drive 2, Larceny 2, Stealth 3

Social Skills: Empathy (Motives) 3, Expression 3, Persuasion (Motivational Speeches) 3, Socialize 3, Streetwise 4

Merits: Allies 3 (Street People), Inspiring, StrikingLooks 1

Health: 8

Willpower: 6

Integrity: 5

Size: 5

Speed: 11

Defense: 3

Initiative: 6

Armor: None

Dr. Henri Girard

Immortal inventor and rogue God-Machine operative who is attempting to save Time

Background: Dr. Girard was born in the early 19th century, where he showed early promise as an engineer and an inventor. He was approached by would-be acolytes of the God-Machine, who offered him access to wondrous technologies to experiment with as well as a lifespan measured in centuries instead of decades.

Dr. Girard was a contented agent of the God-Machine until 1920, when he realized that a device he had built in 1901 was fatally flawed. His employers believed that this device would allow them to freely travel to any point in the past or future. Dr. Girard came to believe that this device was instead inspired by the God-Machine, to enable it to dissolve all of time into a single endless moment, an act that would destroy humanity and horribly transform the entire cosmos. Dr. Girard's superiors refused to believe him and dismissed his concerns. To avoid imprisonment or death, he then convinced them that he had made a mistake and that he too was looking forward to gaining mastery of time.

Since 1920, Dr. Girard has secretly devoted much of his efforts to discovering a way to destroy the device he

had helped create before it had built up sufficient power to activate and destroy time. He realized that the only way to safely deactivate the device was to keep the device from being built in the first place. In order to accomplish this goal, he or someone else must travel back to 1901, just after the device was activated and before he informed his superiors about it.

Description: Dr. Girard is a tall, slender handsome man with a full head of shockingly red hair. His blue eyes stare intently at anyone he is talking to. He has a soft, but intent voice, and often speaks like he is a skilled and engaging professor lecturing to a class of students. Dr. Girard enjoys talking about cutting-edge chemistry and physics with anyone who can meaningfully discuss these topics.

Dr. Girard's demeanor is both expressive and somewhat nervous. He usually either talks with his hands or works with his hands while he is talking. When he is talking about something important to him, his eyes brighten and he speaks in a faster and more animated tone of voice, almost becoming manic at times. Dr. Girard is quite well off; all of his clothes are obviously expensive and well made, but unless he is attending a formal dinner or some similar function, his appearance is clean, but slightly ill-kempt, with his shirt tail partially untucked or his hair only half combed.

Storytelling Hints: Dr. Girard is brilliant, thoughtful, and (ever since 1920) devoted to the idea of saving humanity from destruction. He has also learned that his previous belief in the God-Machine's grand purpose and the wisdom of his superiors were misplaced. Prior to 1920, he was an idealist who was convinced that service to the God-Machine would benefit both himself and humanity as a whole. Since that time, he has learned that at least some of his superiors are greedy and self-serving and that the angels and the God-Machine itself care nothing for humanity. Dr. Girard understands that overthrowing the God-Machine's power over humanity is impossible and that efforts to do so would end badly. Instead, he wishes to avoid disasters and to help find ways for humanity to survive and perhaps even thrive.

If the characters succeed in the Tale A Journey Into Time (p. 101) and in 1901 inform Dr. Girard of the reasons for their actions, his skepticism about his superiors begins even earlier. Otherwise, he never realizes the dangers of the blue light. By the 1940s, however, he has noticed other problems with his superior's plans. At this point, Dr. Girard decides that the safety and survival of humanity is more important that either his superiors' ambitions or the plans of the God-Machine.

Virtue: Hopeful

Vice: Greedy

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 5, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 2, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Academics 4, Crafts 4, Investigation 3, Occult (Arcane Devices) 3, Politics 2, Science (Engineering) 5

Physical Skills: Drive 1, Firearms 1, Larceny 2

Social Skills: Empathy 1, Expression (Lecturing) 2, Persuasion 2, Socialize 1, Subterfuge 4

Merits: Contacts (Academics, God-Machine Cultists) 2, Hardy 2, Language (English, German; native French) 2, Resources 4, Striking Looks 1

Health: 8

Willpower: 5

Integrity: 6

Size: 5

Speed: 10

Defense: 3

Initiative: 5

Joseph Moore

The God-Machine's gateway into our world

Background: Joseph Moore was a theoretical physicist of no real note. He worked in a state university and theorized that black holes and white holes are a single gravitational unit that expresses itself through time. His theories assumed that time is not linear, and instead a particle is intricately bound to space and is manipulated by the larger gravitational pull of the astral bodies. He speculated that the time at which the hole was glimpsed determined if it was a black hole in which matter entered but could never leave, or a white hole in which matter left but could never enter. Momentary particles were either coming or going, but the gravitational entity is always expanding and contracting as though it were a living thing. Joseph defined such phenomenon as both infinite and definite at the same time. His mathematical models for time as a particle were extraordinarily complicated and still unfinished. As such, he never published his work. Though of the scientific community ignored Joseph's theories, things that live outside of time and space took notice.

Joseph's appointment at the university was teaching only, so his research and equation calculating was mostly accomplished after hours in his office. Joseph was on the verge of finishing his mathematical calculations for defining time and was attempting to correlate the time particle with light as both a photon and a wave. During one of his late night sessions he was certain that he had finally finished his equation and was double checking the math when he heard a booming voice. The act of finishing the equation and putting into mathematical language what was only a thought before had opened a small hole in space between this world and the next, in which time is infinite and fleeting. Joseph was at first terrified of the voice, but after a few moments, was intrigued. He had made contact with the God-Machine — or rather, it had made contact with him.

The proposal was simple. Joseph's understanding of true time had made him aware of the things outside of time and

Saturday, 22nd January 1916

Skerries

Dear Alexander,

You know all too well what grief is and what it can do to a man. When Father died, and then Mother so soon after, and we as such young men were left alone in the world to fend for ourselves, I did not know how we would survive.

It was not like this, Alexander.

I know dozens of people in this town alone who have lost their brothers, their sons and their fathers, and I do not doubt that soon I will know more. But my grief is a selfish grief; I feel for all the world like a hole has bored into my heart and that my hope has fallen from it. I find myself telling everyone I meet at every opportunity, *my brother is dead. My brother is dead. My brother is dead.* I know full well that most people have their own griefs, that if we could all feel the grief of everyone in the world we would all be crushed under the weight and cease to function as human beings, but still, but still, I am offended, offended, I say, that the sympathy that others offer is shallow, that no one knows what it is to have lost a brother in the way that I have lost you.

My grief is informed by guilt. I broke my promise to you, Alexander. I returned to my work.

I need to tell you about it.

What I have done is this: I made a woman.

I used every spare part from the shop, and I made a heart using a working stolen from a fine gold wristwatch I was given to mend by Mr. O'Brien (I replaced it with an inferior working, knowing full well the beer-soaked idiot won't know the difference). Around it I contrived a breast from pig's leather and chickenwire. I constructed a head of brass and the most intricate movements that I could, using a statue of the Virgin from the churchyard as a guide for the dimensions of her face, and made sinews out of finely tanned pig-leather of the kind that I would use to make straps and thongs and pouches, so that her face could move as fully as could a human face. Her eyes I crafted from the hard crystal glass I used for watch faces. The hands and limbs I made from wood and brass, and worked long into the nights making the sinews. I could not make her a womb. I did not know how.

I wanted to make my own beautiful machine, separate from the callous influence of that mad, mindless Watchmaker, and make her love and think.

All that I really created was a doll. Wound up, it could open its mouth and move but there was no soul, no directing will.

I could not think of how to achieve it. I had seen a drawing of Babbage's Difference Engine, but I could not see how such a device could fit inside my perfect woman's skull, nor how I could refine its clumsy workings to be the equal of a mind.

And she sat there in my workshop, gathering dust, and I returned to repairing watches.

It has been a week after I abandoned my virgin to the dust, and I have not thought about her, until this evening, when Sergeant Fox came to visit my shop.

You had left by the time that Fox came to our parish. He is a big man, florid and round-faced, but although he affects the jolly demeanour of the rotund village policeman with nothing much to do and waves cheerfully to all as he rides the length and breadth of the bumpy cobbled roads on his bicycle, he has always struck me as a calculating man, a book that does not permit itself to be read. He talks like an idiot or eccentric but his smile doesn't reach those wide, bright eyes of his that stare through you, that suggest to me that if he is not exactly an intelligence of his own right, he is possessed by something that is, if you can understand my meaning. Moreover, while the impression of watchfulness he gave was obvious, I always felt that he was watching me, a feeling I had put to a simple paranoia borne of loneliness and grief, and had dismissed, although the events of the day had borne it out.

He came in the shop, a few minutes before I was due to close for the evening. I told him that he was welcome, and how could I help him, and he said that on the contrary, I could not help him, but *he* could help *me*.

I told him that I did not see his meaning. He smiled that big crooked smile that so charms the older women of the parish, and told me that I should not beat around the bushes of the region - that was exactly how he put it - but that he knew that I had been shirking my work for a project of my own devising, which statement I flatly denied.

He replied that I should be unfair to him if I did not admit that his business was detection.

I told him that I thought his business was finding stray sheep and advising school children on the best way to conduct themselves on the street. He smiled that smile again and stroked his chin with a hand like a pound of fine pork sausages.

Neither of us spoke for a moment. With growing unease, I said to him that I was dreadfully sorry, but that it was time for my shop to close for the evening, and that he was welcome to come again in the morning. I walked to the front door and made to open it, as if to allow him to leave, but as I put my hand on the door handle, he put his own hand over mine and said that this was not the business of my shop, and that it could not wait until morning.

He loomed over me. It seemed almost as if he grew, as if his face, in shadow save for tiny reflections of light in those eyes of his, pale and round like a fresh new shilling — expanded into the shadow, lost its shape, became something terrible and huge. I stepped back. The Sergeant turned slightly and the illusion vanished instantly.

He turned over the CLOSED sign in my shop door and began again. He said that he would try a different tack, and I said, please do, and he asked me then if I had heard of Myles de Selby. I had, I said, repaired his pocketwatch some time ago, but had had no dealings with him otherwise. The Sergeant said that this was a great and sorrowful shame — again, I fear I cannot do real justice to the odd, somewhat comical nature of his diction — for de Selby's interests were not dissimilar to my own. I looked hard at him and, still playing the fool, said that I was unsure of which interests the Sergeant was speaking.

The Sergeant simply said that de Selby had asked him, as the law of the region, and as a man known in a friendly fashion to everyone in the village, to bring about an introduction between de Selby and me. I said that this was a somewhat unusual way to arrange our meeting — could not Mr. de Selby come himself? The Sergeant replied that de Selby was a man of great shyness and discretion, and that I should come to visit Mr. de Selby. He said this in a tone of absolute certainty, as if there was no chance that I might refuse him.

I told him that I would go in the morning.

I shall write again then.

Yours in grief, your brother,

William

space. His awareness conveyed receptiveness to understanding the machinations of something much greater than himself, which was mind breaking. Instead of losing his mind, Joseph was offered the chance to become one with the machine and work its will on earth and within this time particle. Joseph couldn't really say no. With all that he could see and understand, he was in danger of losing himself to the infinite. In that instant of forever, he gave himself over. Now he is nothing more than a singularity of time expressing himself and the God-Machine both in this time and all others. While he still looks and acts like a human being, he is so much more.

The God-Machine uses Joseph as a point of entry into the world and has his mind working on calculating time points for Infrastructure for angelic entry into the world.

Description: On the surface, Joseph seems like a normal professor. He wears glasses and button-up shirts over corduroy pants. He has short unkempt black hair and his eyes are a piercing deep blue, which look almost black in the dark. He often smells of pipe smoke and cinnamon. When he speaks, it is often very low; his voice is a rich alto.

Joseph carries the mind and soul of an unknowable entity which causes his speech to be halting and broken. When teaching, he seems more at ease and his lectures are engaging and full of life. His students never seem to fall asleep in his class, and he has the highest pass rate of any other physics teacher in the area. Outside of class, Joseph seems distant and distracted. He can barely carry a conversation and wanders off abruptly if not directly engaged.

Storytelling Hints: Joseph is hard to talk to unless the conversation revolves around time or the physics of time. He is not really there, merely a conduit of the God-Machine's power on Earth. His body is simply a human face for a much larger entity.

Joseph's translations of the God-Machine's concepts are far from coherent. If Joseph is engaged in a conversation about quantum physics or time, he becomes much more alert and understandable. These are the things he is being used for, and these are the things he knows. His understanding of time particles can be expressed in great detail.

Joseph is not a fighter and attempts to avoid conflict if possible. If attacked, Joseph surrenders (p. 195).

Joseph is the closest the characters can reasonably come to conversing with the God-Machine. He is a being of immense knowledge and power trapped in a mortal shell, and he doesn't even have the ability to truly let the God-Machine speak through him. He is tasked with the impossible chore of being the God-Machine's mouthpiece. He should therefore show up in Tales like A Journey Into Time (p. 101), This Is Hell (p.103) and Proposition 279 (p. 96) — stories with cosmic implications. Stories that play with space and time (Missing Persons, p. 82, or Do-Over, p. 71) would also be appropriate.

Virtue: Honest

Vice: Flighty

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 5, Wits 4, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Academics (Research) 4, Computer 2, Investigation 1, Occult 3, Science 5 (Physics)

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Drive 2

Social Skills: Expression 1, Intimidation (Cold) 3, Persuasion 2, Socialize 1

Merits: Cursed, Eidetic Memory, Resources 2, Status 2 (University)

Health: 7

Willpower: 8

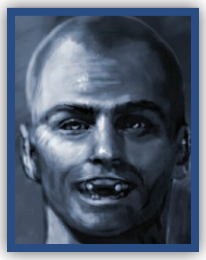
Integrity: 7

Size: 5

Speed: 8

Defense: 4

Initiative: 6



Lucien McJack

Dead, but over it

Background: Lucien McJack was out on the highway one night when his car broke down. Unable to get it working, he left a note for the police, locked the doors, and started walking toward civilization. He put out his thumb to try to catch a ride and a car struck and killed him. That was the end of Lucien McJack.

That wasn't the *end*, though. A spirit — a foul, evil, vicious thing from a place that humanity does not understand — slithered into Lucien's body and wore it like a suit. Lucien is now an *intruder*, a dead human body possessed by a baleful spirit. Lucien's reanimated body now has its own unholy appetites. It wanders from town to town, preying on the unfortunate.

This in itself would be bad enough, but the God-Machine needed Lucien McJack for something. What it needed Lucien for isn't immediately relevant. The point is that with Lucien dead, some gear or mechanism started spinning backwards and other people started getting up as well (this is all described in the Wake the Dead Tale, p. 86). "Lucien" (rather, the thing wearing his body) doesn't know or care about this situation. It has other fish to fry.

Description: Lucien, in life, was a nondescript fellow with thinning red-blonde hair, a slight beard, and a tribal tattoo on his meaty right arm. The intruder shaved its head and pulled out several of Lucien's teeth (giving it the appearance of a fanged mouth). The tattoo on its arm also seems to be spreading, creating designs that give people headaches if they stare too long.

Storytelling Hints: Lucien McJack wants to watch fear turn to pain and then to acceptance. He likes watching people die. The first few victims he just beat to death, but that causes so much trauma that people don't have time to come to grips with what is happening. He's thinking about moving up to poison, but he needs materials for that. Strangulation, perhaps.

It's important to note that the intruder is not the ghost of Lucien McJack or Lucien McJack resurrected. The intruder is just a nonhuman entity using McJack as a conveyance. Nothing of McJack remains but the face and the name.

Lucien is the main antagonist and motivating force in Wake the Dead (p. 86).

Virtue: Methodical

Vice: Sadistic

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 3

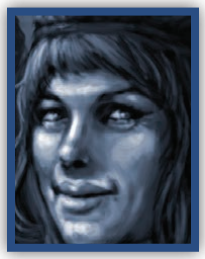
Mental Skills: Academics 1, Computer 1, Investigation 1, Occult 1, Science (Chemistry) 1

Physical Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl (Grappling) 3, Drive 1, Firearms 1, Larceny 2, Stealth (Stalking) 4, Weaponry 2

Social Skills: Animal Ken 1, Empathy 1, Expression 2, Intimidation 2, Persuasion (Helpful) 2

Merits: Fast Reflexes 2, Fleet of Foot 3, Martial Arts 5
Health: 9
Willpower: 6
Integrity: n/a
Size: 5
Speed: 16
Defense: 6
Initiative: 8
Supernatural Aspects:

- **Drain:** As the Numen (p. 229). Lucien can drain Health or Willpower. He must touch his target (Dexterity + Brawl to do so in combat). The roll to activate the power is a Strength + Resolve, opposed by Resolve + Composure + Supernatural Tolerance (if draining Willpower) Resolve + Stamina + Supernatural Tolerance (if draining Health). If Lucien wins, he gains Willpower or Health equal to the successes rolled.
- **Emotional Aura:** As the Numen (p. 229).
- **Unnatural Hunger:** Lucien loses two points of Willpower per day. He must use Drain to replenish this Willpower. If he runs out of Willpower, he starts suffering lethal damage. Once his Health track fills with lethal damage, he suffers a –3 to all actions until he can use Drain to heal. Lucien can regain Willpower through his Virtue and Vice, but not via rest. He cannot heal Health in any way except using Drain.



Margret Avery

The Administration expert

Background: Margret Avery worked for a large corporation as a Human Resources specialist, and everything ran smoothly in her office. Her particular specialty was layoffs. She was in charge of reading production reports and determining where to cut excess to keep the corporation working as efficiently as possible. She performed this job with a sense of detachment to the personnel affected, but she was polite and professional when delivering her decisions. While Margret did not especially love her job, it satisfied her analytical mind. She took it seriously and she was good at it. It was no small wonder that she was promoted twice in one year.

Margret's second promotion changed her job drastically. It brought her out of HR and into the administrative offices of the company. Here is where Margret Avery first learned the true purpose of her corporation. On the surface, the company functioned as any business would. They produce goods and sell them to the public. Behind that public façade, however, the company makes sacrifices to an ethereal entity to prevent the world from ending. Of course, the veracity of the belief that they are saving the world has yet to be tested.

Margret's new job is to select individuals for sacrifice. The job is surprisingly similar to her job as a layoff specialist. She is given a portfolio of select individuals which includes their work performance

and their overall life experiences. Parameters for acceptable sacrifices are not based completely on their output and performance, nor are they based on their usefulness to society. Instead, each time a sacrifice is needed, a set of parameters are dictated by her boss, who receives his orders from someone higher up. Presumably, these parameters are set by the entity they are appeasing and something about the victim satisfies its needs and prevents world annihilation. Margret analyzes each individual for these parameters and selects the one with the best fit. She then informs her superiors and the individual is brought in for sacrifice. Most of the time, the sacrifices come from internal sources. Sometimes, they come from other companies or completely unassociated outside sources.

Margret doesn't know if she believes she is saving the world, but she has always done her best at any job she has. The truth of the matter is far less glamorous than saving the world. She is selecting individuals based on a pattern set forth by the God-Machine to keep some gears well-oiled and functioning.

Description: Margret Avery is a middle aged woman with long thick black hair streaked through with grey. She has deep brown eyes and lines along her face from smiling. She is a little overweight but is otherwise healthy. She has a high pitched and lilting voice and a contagious laugh. She often dresses smartly in a pantsuit and flats and wears Chanel no.5 as her signature scent.

Storytelling Hints: Margret Avery is an intelligent woman who cares about her job. She schedules sacrifices about a week in advance and they occur weekly, sometimes more often if necessary. Those outside her chain of command may notice her association with several disappearances within the corporation or around the city.

If someone comes around asking too many questions, Margret is more than likely going to be suspicious of them. She is not completely certain that she is saving the world and can be convinced that she is being used if the notion is presented logically. Otherwise, she might recognize a few parameters in the questioner and assume a sacrifice is attempting to avoid their fate. Margret cares about humanity and life; even if she cannot be convinced to leave her job, she could easily be convinced to let a potential sacrifice leave in lieu of another.

Margret has a layer of security personnel around her at all times, even though she usually doesn't see them. She's a good "false antagonist"—the characters might trace weird occurrences or orders for sacrifice back to her, only to find that she's just doing her job. She's a good character to appear in The Moon Window (p. 84) or in an official capacity in Proposition 279 (p. 96). She might also provide some advice for the characters if they get to the point of making sacrifices in The 300 Block (p. 69).

Virtue: Idealistic

Vice: Naïve

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 2, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Academics (Law) 3, Computer 2, Investigation 3, Occult 1, Politics 2

Physical Skills: Athletics 1, Drive 2, Stealth 1

Social Skills: Empathy (Delivering Bad News) 2, Intimidation (Veiled Threats) 2, Persuasion 2, Subterfuge 3

Merits: Contacts 2 (Corporate, Legal), Good Time Management, Resources 3, Retainers (Security) 5, Staff (Investigation, Computer) 2

Health: 7

Willpower: 4

Integrity: 3

Size: 5

Speed: 9

Defense: 3

Initiative: 4

Armor: None

Mark Wilson, aka "Truth"

A young hacker intent on saving the world

Background: Hacking a system is an art. Hacking a secured government website and replacing the content with nude pictures of Paris Hilton is comedy gold. Mark Wilson is a typical teenage boy with an atypical hobby. He grew up with the Internet and has taught himself the ins and outs of using it for his own purposes. When he first started hacking, it was in attempts to play online games for free. He was having moderate success and joined several forums filled with fellow hackers.

Mark's online presence was larger than life. Though he had a hard time associating with people on a face-to-face basis, he could interact through his computer with great finesse. He was forced to read and understand what was being said first, and was easily able to compose intelligent and well-thought-out responses given enough time. This cut down on his in-person tendency to rush through conversation and talk over whoever he spoke with. He quickly made friends with people much older and much more experienced than he. These friends taught him about internet security and how to bypass almost any system.

Most of his friends were concerned with the political climate of internet censorship and loss of privacy. They formed communities of likeminded individuals and organized protests of government actions through hacking websites and leaking classified government information. Mark joined in all of these activities with zeal. Though he didn't understand the implications of most of what he was doing, it was good to be recognized and his head was filled with propaganda about the loss of freedoms.

Mark adopted the handle "Truth" to represent his desire to lay open government conspiracies to take away personal freedoms. It was one of the few political agendas that Mark understood completely and could get behind. Soon, his friends began organizing collective attacks on government and large corporate websites. Mark was often instructed to

embed new information on websites but otherwise leave them wholly intact. This was his job as Truth, to change the lies on these websites to the truth for the public to see. The things his friends have asked him to do have been increasingly strange and esoteric, but Mark doesn't want to lose the only friends he has, so he does what is asked of him.

Mark in an unwitting pawn. He knows it on some level, but he won't admit it to himself. He can recognize that something isn't right with what he is being asked to do. He knows that his friends have become hard to understand, or completely cold and unfeeling. Mark's friends are no longer a community of other hackers. Those that were real are now dead; instead, he has been given instructions from the God-Machine for nearly two years.

Description: Mark Wilson is a scrawny, greasy, smelly teenage boy. His skin is pasty white due to lack of exposure to the sun and his hair is a slick mousey brown mop. His voice cracks, but it seems to be settling on a low baritone. He doesn't care much about personal hygiene and often his clothes are rumpled and stained. He is tall and lanky, but has a wiry frame and defined muscle tone. He exercises when he isn't hacking. His exercise habits revolve around his escape plan if he is ever raided by the Feds. He can run for a long time and has learned how to jump out of his bedroom window without hurting himself.

Storytelling Hints: Mark is cocky and sure of himself. His goals in life are to hack and pass high school calculus. He is at a delicate point in his life — he has never had real friends other than the ones on the internet, and those are now dead. The truth of that loss would be devastating to him. Stopping him from acting might be easy, but convincing him to stop listening to his hacker friends will take perseverance.

Mark is an unwitting antagonist. He is helping the God-Machine on a thin faith that he is helping to make the world a better place. He holds on to that faith in the face of most rebuttals without hard proof to the contrary. Mark will not fight for his beliefs, though; he would rather run.

"Truth" makes for a good online contact, someone who can provide information for the characters (and avoid tedious rolls to hack into computer systems). He's working for the God-Machine, which means that even if he doesn't plan to share information, the God-Machine knows everything he types or receives. He would be a good character to help analyze weird computer- or mechanism-related strangeness in Tales like Ghost Machine (p. 79), A Glimpse of Mesmerizing Complexity (p. 89), or Moon Window (p. 84).

Virtue: Thorough

Vice: Lazy

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 3, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 1, Manipulation 4, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics 2, Computer (Hacking) 5, Investigation 4, Politics 1

Physical Skills: Athletics (Running) 3, Drive 2, Larceny 1, Stealth 2

Social Skills: Empathy 1, Expression (Photoshop) 1, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 2

Merits: Contacts (Hackers), Fleet of Foot 2, Parkour 3, Resources 1

Health: 7

Willpower: 5

Integrity: 6

Size: 5

Speed: 13

Defense: 6

Initiative: 6

Melissa Charles

Obsessive collector of God-Machine artifacts

Background: When she was 14, Melissa Charles was smoking a cigarette outside of a seemingly abandoned warehouse. That was when, through a window, she saw a group of semi-human creatures in tan jumpsuits enter the warehouse via a trap door in the floor. Under the direction of a woman in an expensive business suit, these creatures assembled a strange and complex device in the middle of the warehouse and activated it.

Almost an hour later, as Ms. Charles continued to watch in terrified silence, the creatures disassembled the device and they and the young woman walked back down the trap door. Shortly after this event, the town had its first earthquake in more than a century. Melissa wondered about the relation between the device and the earthquake. She also began looking into the strange places and events that most people refused to notice.

Melissa's life changed forever when she was 17. She would have fled from the precise and terrible human sacrifice she witnessed inside a closed restaurant in a strip mall, but was afraid that moving would reveal her presence. Unable to either save the young man who was killed or to escape, afterwards she kept a bloodstained fragment of the victim's sleeve as evidence for what she saw.

Since seeing that murder, finding and documenting various odd events in some way became her driving obsession. Often, all the evidence she possesses is a grainy photograph taken with her phone or a rough sketch she made. She periodically manages to obtain some fragment of physical evidence, however, of the odd phenomena that she witnessed.

She's seen people who looked wealthy and powerful at several of the events she's witnessed and she's also seen police officers at two of them. As a result, Ms. Charles has never considered attempting to make her collection public or to report anything she has witnessed to any law enforcement agency. Today, Melissa Charles works as a forensic accountant. The same eye for detail that helps her notice unusual activity also serves her well in detecting fraud.

Description: Melissa Charles is a quiet introvert. She carefully observes the world around her, but largely does her best to live apart from it. She is in her late 30s and dresses in moderately

expensive but bland clothing. She keeps her hair short and does her best to not draw attention to her appearance. Her voice is soft and she is shy in person. She is awkward at making small talk, flirting, or otherwise engaging in social pleasantries. Her shy reserve vanishes, however, if someone asks about her interests or she begins talking about the oddities she is obsessed with. In such cases, her face comes alive and she talks in a manner that is considerably faster and more animated.

Storytelling Hints: Melissa Charles isn't interested in opposing or working for the God-Machine or its operatives. She is interested in collecting relics and stories about the world's oddities and attempting to make sense of these seemingly inexplicable events. Because of some of the horrors she has witnessed, Melissa Charles has become moderately paranoid and refuses to talk about her collection or any of the events she has witnessed in any detail unless the person she is talking to has made it clear that they have had similar experiences. Behind the tasteful curtains in the windows of her house is an expensive security system, as well as wire mesh embedded in the windows and behind the drywall to render her house into a Faraday cage. She is simultaneously eager to discuss her experiences and learn more and yet afraid that she might be talking to agents of the God-Machine or to people who might reveal her to them.

If characters make it clear that they have also witnessed inexplicable events, Melissa is likely to share information with them. However, she will strongly attempt to dissuade anyone from going to the authorities or attempting to make any of their discoveries public. She firmly tells characters that she'll deny knowing them if they try to draw attention to anything they have discovered. When talking about what she has witnessed, it's clear that Melissa is simultaneously fascinated, horrified, and most of all deeply interested in stories about the odd and hidden aspects of the world and what they mean. She is most interested in the physical stuff of these incidents, but also happily listens to reports or looks at photographs of strange incidents. She has no patience with either individuals performing hoaxes or people foolish enough to believe them. She has seen true wonders and terrors and wishes to learn more.

Melissa can appear in any Tale, holding just the right relic or device to help the characters. Stories like Squares of the City (p. 75; maybe she has a torch that can cut the tracks), Urban Wandering (p. 108; Melissa found a pair of lenses that focus a flashlight beam into a searing light that burns the nightmare creatures) or Wellington School for Gifted Children (p. 77; she was an alum and left behind notes and trinkets for the characters to find) are especially appropriate.

Virtue: Patient

Vice: Cowardly

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics 3, Crafts 1, Investigation 3, Occult 3, Science 1

Physical Skills: Drive 1, Firearms 1, Larceny (Lockpicking) 2, Stealth (Hiding) 3

Social Skills: Persuasion (Emotional Appeals) 1, Subterfuge 3

Merits: Eye for the Strange, Resources 3, Safe House 3

Health: 7

Willpower: 6

Integrity: 7

Size: 5

Speed: 9

Defense: 2

Initiative: 5

Lieutenant Samuel Hackett

Experimental test subject Alpha

Background: Samuel Hackett joined the U.S. Army directly out of high school. He wasn't particularly bright but he was dedicated and strong. He was placed in the mobile infantry and trained to be a combat soldier. His training was rigorous, but Samuel was up for the job. He had benefits, steady pay, and time off every now and then to visit his family. It was more than he could have ever asked for, and it was his life. He never got the chance to be career military in the traditional sense. He never rose in ranks and standing to gain an officer title. Instead, he was selected to be part of a test group for infantry improvement.

Samuel wasn't told much about the project. He was given over to the hands of a civilian corporation contracted to perform some medical tests and oversee his training. He wasn't allowed to talk about the program to anyone except his direct superiors.

Training ended up being a very loose term for what Samuel went through. He spent night and day hooked up to a large machine, unlike anything he had ever seen before, that seemed to monitor his every movement, heartbeat and breath. His memory of the time spent attached to the machine is hazy at best. He remembers hearing people talking over him about his treatments, and he remembers hearing the grinding of wheels shortly before blacking out about once a week. He would wake up from these episodes feeling sore and exhausted with the taste of copper in his mouth. This went on for six months. At the end of it, he was given a clean bill of health and told his training was over. He was to report back to his division for his new orders.

He didn't feel especially trained, and he certainly didn't believe he was any different than he was before the training. Bemused but accepting, Samuel returned to his division. When he reported to the officer on duty, he was instructed to take a vehicle and meet his trainers at the site. He wondered at the strangeness of it as he drove there alone. Soon, Samuel learned why his orders were special. He was supposed to run through the exercise without a team. He had to do a task that

normally required fifteen people to accomplish, alone. After the initial shock wore off, he decided that this was probably just a test, something designed for him to fail, but the where and when would be important.

With that in mind, Samuel set out. Within minutes of the first assault and explosion, he was certain that this was no routine test. The shrapnel was real, and he was certain he saw bullet holes in the walls as he ran for cover. He felt faster and stronger than normal. His hearing was more acute, as were his sense of sight and smell. He didn't have much time to contemplate these changes as he dodged bullets and explosions. Samuel realized that he wasn't thinking about anything at all — instead it seemed that his body was responding to the attacks on its own.

Samuel attempted to slow down for a moment to collect his thoughts, but his body was unresponsive to his desires. It moved and shifted through the urban landscape of its own accord. Samuel watched in horror as though he were a stranger in his own body. He watched as he decapitated a target, and then flawlessly shot three more in the head as he casually passed by. He wanted to squeeze his eyes closed and block out everything so that he could get a grip on himself, but the effort was futile. Instead, he rode along as his body performed actions that he would have never dreamed possible.

Though he is a simple man, Samuel realized he had been turned into a weapon. Afraid of what he could be used for, Samuel ran, using his newfound abilities to break out of military control. Now he is on the run and afraid for both his life and the lives of anyone he comes in contact with.

Samuel's program was a glowing success. His body was hard-wired with mechanisms that allow the God-Machine to control his every motion. He is a tool, ready to be used when necessary. Even his departure from the military was not entirely his decision. The God-Machine needs Samuel to be as free of constraints as possible, so that it may fully work through him at a moment's notice.

Description: Samuel Hackett is a large man with big muscles and meaty hands. He has close cropped brown hair and deep brown eyes. He is soft spoken with a rich baritone voice. Samuel can't shake his military training and is always clean. His clothes are always freshly pressed and starched with straight lines and a crisp clean smell. He shaves and exercises, but only out of habit. No matter what he eats or how sedentary he becomes, his body keeps itself in fighting trim.

Storytelling Hints: Samuel is terrified of himself and what he is capable of. He is not always in control of his body and he knows it. Samuel warns people that he is dangerous, even if he seems nice and polite at all times. He wants to help people, but he is wary of strangers. Ever since his "special training" his temper has been unpredictable — when he loses control, he inevitably hurts someone.

Samuel is a good antagonist to use if the characters have made a habit of taking overt, violent action against the God-Machine. If they trash the factory in Missing Persons (p. 82) or inflict a lot of structural damage on The Invisible Citadel (p. 92), or even if they succeed in destroyed West Nautical 36 in Operation: Bell Jar (p. 94), Samuel can reluctantly track them down. Don't use him as a mindless killing machine, though. He should give the characters warning, tell them to run before he attacks. He actually has no desire to hurt anyone and he makes a good cautionary tale for the power of the God-Machine.

Virtue: Humble

Vice: Violent

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 3, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Academics 2, Medicine (Combat Medic) 2, Politics 1

Physical Skills: Athletics 4*, Brawl 4, Firearms (Automatic Weapons) 5*, Weaponry 3

Social Skills: Empathy 3, Intimidation (Brutal) 4*, Subterfuge 2

*Asset Skills for Professional Training

Merits: Close Quarters Combat 3, Contacts (Military, Black Market), Fast Reflexes 2, Firefight 3, Parkour 4, Marksmanship 3, Professional Training 5, Quick Draw (Gun)

Health: 10

Willpower: 6

Integrity: 5

Size: 5

Speed: 14

Defense: 7

Initiative: 10

Armor: Bulletproof vest 1/2

Sarah Andrews

A troubled youth with a deep insight into the workings of the world

Background: Sarah Andrews boards at the Wellington School for Gifted Children year round. Her parents brought her there starting in the fourth grade and enrolled her to stay for the summers as well. She only sees her parents over the Christmas holiday, which usually consists of the day before and the day of Christmas. Most people would think her parents were extraordinarily neglectful, but they don't see it that way. Sarah was diagnosed with high-functioning autism when she was five years old. Her parents tried conventional schools, but decided that they could not provide the correct environment for her to be successful and so brought her to Wellington.

Sarah's disability is not as severe as her diagnosis makes it sound. She does not have autism (or, if she does, it's not her main problem). Instead, she has the ability to see beyond the thin veil that the God-Machine creates to hide itself. She can see the true workings of the world and the gears and cogs that keep things running. Unfortunately, this means she does not perceive the world the way that everyone else does. This

seems like a handicap to most people. Where normal people see structure and order, Sarah sees rules and regulations that don't make any sense. She started out by questioning the reasons behind these rules and calling out the imposed regulations. By the time she got into school, her teachers could not deal with her obvious cognitive dissonance with reality.

Sarah excels at Wellington. The issues that forced her parents to send her there seemed to disappear as soon as she started at the school. The other children at Wellington have varying levels of learning disabilities and behavioral problems that make the conventional classroom setting difficult for them. Sarah does not seem to be bothered by her special needs classes and takes it all in stride. Now that she is older, she knows how to keep her perceptions to herself. But, she doesn't have to do that so much while she is in school at Wellington, which has made her a more outgoing child.

Her parents can see the change the school has made in their daughter, which encourages them to keep her there. Sarah wants nothing more than to prove that she is a normal child and go home to them. She doesn't understand their desire to keep her there and tries her hardest to prove to them that she doesn't need the institution any longer.

Description: Sarah is tall for her age, and has thick auburn hair and small brown freckles all over her pale face. She has a small squeaky voice, which makes her intelligence and insight all the more striking. She wears the regulation issued Wellington School uniform, preferrings skirts rather than pants when available.

Storytelling Hints: Sarah Andrews is a very smart girl and she knows more about the real nature of the world than most people. But, she is still very immature emotionally and has a harder time understanding the nature of people. Her knowledge of the workings of the God-Machine is dangerous, not only to herself, but to those around her. Emilo Rubio (see p. 135) is searching for her, but because of the God-Machine's reduced power on school grounds he isn't sure which student she is. Since Wellington is so removed from the influence of the God-Machine, Emilio might resort to something blatant to get to Sarah. She doesn't know the kind of danger she's in though, and believes her only problem is figuring out how to return to living with her parents.

Sarah appears in the Tale: Wellington School for Gift Children (p. 77).

Virtue: Hopeful

Vice: Obsessive

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics (History) 3, Crafts 1, Investigation 1, Occult 2

Physical Skills: Athletics 1, Stealth (Small Spaces) 3, Survival 2

Social Skills: Empathy 1, Expression 2, Persuasion (Fast-Talking) 3, Socialize 2, Subterfuge 3

Merits: Eidetic Memory, Small-Framed, Unseen Sense (God-Machine)

Health: 6

Willpower: 5

Integrity: 8

Size: 4

Speed: 8

Defense: 3

Initiative: 5

Armor: None

Wesley Cote

A serial killer out of time

Background: Wesley Cote was the kind of guy that people would never imagine being a serial killer. If asked his neighbors would respond, "He was such a kind young man." Of course, after his wife died from the miscarriage, he was a little troubled, but that only made sense, right?

Even Wesley would have said the same things only a few years ago. But that was before. Before the strange phone calls, before the death of his wife, before his life went to Hell and he couldn't make heads or tails of anything. Now, he just does what he needs to do to survive.

It all started in the summer after he first married Anne. They had bought a house in a small subdivision on the outskirts of a larger city. He had a good job as a real estate agent and she was a kindergarten teacher. Everything was perfect, until Anne got pregnant. At first, they were elated. But complications arose and she needed to go to the doctor for regular checkups. Wesley got the first of a series of strange phone calls during the second of these visits while he and Anne sat out in the doctor's waiting area. The voice sounded familiar, though at the time he couldn't place it.

"Don't let them take Anne to the blue room," it said desperately. When Wesley tried to learn more, the line went dead. He brought Anne home and told her about the phone call. When he mentioned the blue room, she was just as confused as he had been. Wesley received the same phone call with the same message three more times over the course of four weeks before the day Anne started bleeding. They rushed to the emergency room and the doctors told Wesley it was a miscarriage. They would have to perform surgery to remove the placenta. Heartbroken, he waited with Anne until the doctors came to prep her for surgery. They assured him that everything was going to be fine, that Anne would be fine, the surgery was minor and she could go home that night. As they wheeled her away, Wesley could see that the surgery room was painted a sedate blue color. Panic gripped Wesley and he tried to fight the doctors. But they just ignored him and had orderlies restrain him until he could no longer see his wife. He never saw her alive again. Wesley was devastated by the death of his wife, and he never forgave himself for letting her go to the blue room.

After Anne died, his life started to fall apart. He lost entire sections of time and began to experience déjà vu. He told his mother about the problem and she tried to keep an eye on him, but it wasn't easy on her. She told him that he would disappear at night and come back covered in blood. At first he didn't believe her, but she forced him to wake up the second time it happened and he saw the blood for himself. Wesley decided that sleeping was what was causing it, but he learned quickly that this was not the case. He was time traveling or traveling through space and time, he wasn't sure which. Once he started paying attention to what was happening, he could remain aware of himself on these sojourns.

However, this is what broke Wesley. He had control over himself, but when he went into different times, he had a mission and he knew it. He had to kill. He didn't know how he knew it, but it was nearly instinctual. Once he completed the task, he would return to his time and be free again for some time.

Wesley drew a sketchy connection between the start of the time traveling and the death of Anne and decided that her death was the cause of his problems. That was when he started trying to call himself whenever he was in the same time to warn him not to let Anne go into the blue room. As he kills more often, however, he loses track of the gentle man and good husband he was. And as the future-Wesley travels back in time and gives lessons in temporal manipulation, murder and body disposal to teenage-Wesley, present-Wesley wonders if the good man *ever* existed.

Description: Wesley is a pale gaunt man with dirty blonde hair and grey blue eyes shadowed from lack of sleep. He is intense, with a gaze that unnerves those who look at him for too long. He smells of old blood and decay, as though he can never wash away the evidence of his deeds. He always seems paranoid and suspicious of everyone he meets, tenuously holding onto his awareness of what time he is living in at any moment.

Storytelling Hints: Wesley must kill while time traveling. He isn't stupid about it, but it must always be at the same time and in the same way. He is evasive and tries to keep other people out of his problems. Wesley loses sleep over what he has done, but it gets easier the more he does it. Normally, he picks a victim at random to satiate his desire to kill. He has killed once or twice in the present to deal with someone who caught him in the future, which prevents it from ever happening. Wesley would love to seek help for his problem, but he doesn't know who to turn to or trust. He is afraid of going to jail for these crimes because he isn't sure that prison could keep him from committing them.

Wesley is The Key (p. 80). Perhaps in some yet-unseen future version of himself, he knows that his power and his orders come from the God-Machine. As it stands, he is trying to reinvent himself so that he has *always* been The Key, and then maybe Anne would never have met him.

Virtue: Generous

Vice: Untrustworthy

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 4, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 3, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Computer 2, Investigation 2, Medicine (Anatomy) 1, Occult 2

Physical Skills: Athletics 1, Brawl 2, Drive 1, Stealth 3 (Staying Quiet), Weaponry (Knives) 4

Social Skills: Intimidation 3, Persuasion 2, Socialize 2, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 2

Merits: Cheap Shot, Fast Reflexes 1, Quick Draw (Melee), Resources 2, Shiv 3, Streetfighting 4

Health: 9

Willpower: 7

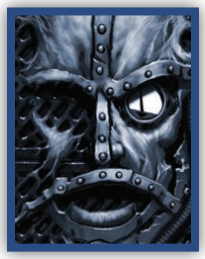
Integrity: 2

Size: 5

Speed: 12

Defense: 4

Initiative: 8



West Nautical 36

Sentient North Sea oil platform

Background: Arnold Diefenbach worked for an oil company that specialized in offshore drilling. He spent eight months out of the year on the oil platform West Nautical 36, monitoring oil purity and refinement. He thought of the West Nautical 36 as his home. He would find himself anticipating returning while on shore leave and volunteered for extra time offshore when possible. His time there led Arnold to know far more about the platform's operation than any other single crew member.

One evening while Arnold was sworking in the lab, a particularly nasty storm hit the platform. Under such circumstances, only essential crew was allowed to be out of quarters, but he had been forgotten in the rounds. Arnold didn't seem to notice the storm until the ballast alarms started shrieking to indicate an imbalance. Arnold left his lab in search of the engineering team to offer his aid. He could see that the platform was listing slightly and diverted to the ballast control center instead. He joined the few engineers working to correct the list via manual override. Despite their best efforts, the ship's ballast controls were malfunctioning and the problem could not be corrected.

Several of the engineers began emergency evacuation procedures. Arnold refused to leave the platform and stayed behind to attempt repairs. The engineers told him they would send someone back down to retrieve him once the life boats had been readied, but they never came back for him. Arnold attempted several overrides for the ballast control from the main control center of the platform, but these all failed. Amidst the driving rain and active lightning, Arnold watched in horror as the platform slowly began to tilt into the sea.

What happened that night is still a mystery to West Nautical 36. Several lightning strikes on the platform's deck drew Arnold from the control room. He stood in the rain and looked up to the storm torn sky and cried out for a miracle. Something heard his cry and responded. Arnold followed the sounds deep into the platform's mechanical center and there he spoke with it. He knew how to help the platform, but he couldn't do so from the outside. The interfaces were not working properly because the lightning had damaged the electronics. Lightning struck again, and the electricity traveled down into the mechanics and out through the gears into Arnold. He fell forward into the machinery and was drawn in, his body fusing with the platform. His arms and legs were turned to metal and plastics. His blood vessels turned to copper wiring and his brain was integrated into the computer systems. From there, Arnold could open the rear ballast and close off the offending malfunction. The platform slowly returned to its normal floating position, and they weathered the rest of the storm together.

Upon return, the crew could not find Arnold and assumed he had been washed away in the high seas. They searched for his body for a week to no avail. He was listed as dead, and that was the end of it.

Arnold was not dead, though. He was West Nautical 36, and he had an intimate understanding of the platform's true purpose. The offshore drilling is a design of the God-Machine, a piece of Infrastructure built to drill into the sea floor (to what purpose? Time will tell). Arnold now controls that Infrastructure from the inside and will make sure the platform is never lost.

Description: West Nautical 36 is a semi-submersible oil platform in the North Sea. The platform absorbed Arnold and in a way, he gave himself over to it. Bits of Arnold can still be seen within the engine room. There might be a finger shaped metal protrusion, or an oily gauge that looks like a single brown eye. Arnold's face is still visible just above the floor level on the engine bulkhead he was standing by when the lightning struck. The crew does not enter that part of the platform, and those who do are afraid to return. It can speak with Arnold's mouth and can communicate through the computer system on the platform.

Storytelling Hints: West Nautical 36 is fully aware of its surroundings and those who are stationed on the platform. The relationship between Arnold and West Nautical 36 is not one of host and parasite. Instead, they are one and the same. Arnold is still a man, but he is also an oil platform. He thinks and speaks in that duality. Parts of Arnold are still flesh and blood, and if those parts are destroyed then he will die, and so will West Nautical 36. This does not mean it would fall apart and drop into the ocean; West Nautical 36 would simply cease to have sentience.

West Nautical 36 is the setting and main antagonist for the Tale Operation: Bell Jar (p. 94).

Virtue: Loyal

Vice: Territorial

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 6, Dexterity 3, Stamina 6

Social Attributes: Presence 1, Manipulation 2, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics 2, Computer 3, Occult 2, Science (Geology) 5

Physical Skills: Drive 2, Stealth 1, Weaponry (Mechanical Parts) 4

Social Skills: Intimidation 4

Merits: Danger Sense, Fighting Style: Improvised Weaponry 2

Health: 3 (small organic parts only)

Willpower: 6

Integrity: –

Size: 1 (small organic parts only)

Speed: n/a

Defense: n/a

Initiative: 6

Armor: 5/4

Notes: West Nautical 36 is so large that damage to any small part of it does not hurt the whole. Key systems are small and hard to access. Destroying the whole platform kills the entity it has become (but that requires explosives). West Nautical 36 can make attacks with pieces of the platform as though they were weapons with +1L, and can make grappling attacks using electrical cables.

Arnold's heart is the only piece of him left intact. If it is destroyed, then the West Nautical reverts to its original, non-sapient state.

Angels

The servitors of the God-Machine are called "angels," but that by no means ascribes any benevolent or just motives to them. The angels serve the God-Machine – and that is all they do. They come to Earth with a specific mission, they perform that mission, and they leave. Where do they go? Where do they come from? Only the God-Machine knows for sure (though the Appendix offers a few suggestions).

Angels have to work within Infrastructure. Most of the time, angels receive human identities and names to facilitate their missions. Sometimes, the angel's mission permits it to appear as a supernatural being (this is true of the Mirror Vulture, p. 138, for example). In either case, though, Infrastructure must be present for the angel to appear on Earth.

The first angels in this section are all specifically designed to be used with the Tales in Chapter Two. The second set of angels are designed to be used with your own Tales, and as such they written to be more broadly accessible. If, for instance, you want to use the Lady in Red in your God-Machine Chronicle, she should be there to make sure "two people" meet each other. She's there to make sure two very *specific* people, already named and included in the chronicle (and probably players' characters) meet. That may require you to change some of her methods, Numina or traits, and that's just fine.

The Architect

The 300 Block – p. 69

Mission: The Architect was originally created to design the 300 block. More specifically, it had the task of creating the boiler room that tied into the God-Machine and allowed it harvest

Fallen Angels?

Is it possible, one might ask, for an angel to rebel? Can a servant of the God-Machine choose to remain on Earth, instead of fulfilling its mission and going home or being obliterated or whatever generally happens to angels?

If so, what happens? Does a new human identity appear for the angel? Does the Infrastructure into which the angel was created solidify, allowing the angel to become truly part of the human world? Does the angel retain its powers, or some measure of them? Can the angel be truly called an "angel" anymore, or is another title (traditionally, "demon") more fitting?

And if not, why does *every angel* intuitively know that part of its mission is "Do not betray your mission?"

Sunday, 23rd January 1916

Skerries

Dear Alexander,

Although the bells of the parish of Skerries were ringing, I thrust them out of my ears. When the policeman came, and I thought I might refuse him, for reasons I can't explain I gave in and, putting on my overcoat, walked the two miles from the village to Mr. de Selby's house with the Sergeant pushing his bicycle by my side.

The countryside this morning looked strange to my eyes, as if we were travelling along paths that I had never seen before. The occasional farmhouses and cottages appeared to be completely flat, as if they were decoys, made of flat wooden board, propped up, and the sheep were knitted toys on fields of baize. I did not feel I could remark of this to the Sergeant, who stared ahead, knuckles white on the handlebars of his vehicle, nor did I particularly wish to.

Mr de Selby's home was, I think, once owned by the English Lord of the Manor. It had been empty for some years before de Selby took residence there. I do not know when that was, simply that at some point people began to think of the gentleman as having always been there.

I had not visited the place since we were boys and even then the Squire had been gone for a long time. Weeds had choked the flowerbeds, the privets were wild and overgrown and the walls of the house were barely visible beneath the ivy. I remember the times you and I spent there, the adventures we had, when we did not know the real consequences of the adventures of men and boys. I suppose I was expecting de Selby to have repaired the building in the years since he had come here, but in fact the grounds were wilder than they had been when we were boys; the panes of the windows were broken or opaque.

Sergeant Fox propped his bicycle against a wall that seemed to be held up by the ivy, and without ringing or announcing our advent pushed in the front door, its frame so closely fringed with ivy that I had to brush its tendrils from the small of my neck as I crossed the threshold. The old manor house stank of mildew and wood rot. What wall hangings and paintings there were had been so blackened by mold that their subjects were barely visible. Curtains hung skew and half-fallen from windows. I could see teeming colonies of woodlice beneath the scant furnishings of the hall. I wondered if perhaps I had been fooled and this place was still deserted.

The Sergeant led me through the rotting hall, and through a library that stank so badly of mould spores that I could barely breathe, into a drawing room that was in a somewhat better condition than the rest of the house, although still in an advanced stage of decay.

A fire was burning in a soot-encrusted fireplace, and beside it, in an armchair half-eaten by moths and worms, sat Myles de Selby. He looked up as we came in; I gained an impression of something spidery about him, his mop of wiry, unkempt black hair, his long fingers, his big dark eyes, the way he seemed to click his tongue. His shirt was unbuttoned at the top. He wore no tie or jacket.

His eyebrows knitted, as if he were trying to ascertain whether we were really there. After a short silence, he leapt to his feet.

"What is the meaning of this intrusion?" he said.

The policeman smiled and said nothing.

After a short and somewhat awkward silence, I said to de Selby, was I not expected? I motioned to the Sergeant, who folded his pudgy hands and looked at us with those pale, cold round eyes, and smiled and still said nothing.

"Was I not expected?" I repeated.

"No, sir," said Mr. de Selby. "You were not."

I began to say that the Sergeant had brought me here, having given me the impression that I had been invited, but I stopped, and turned to Sergeant Fox. "Why have you brought me here, Sergeant?" I said, a sharp tone to my voice.

"You will want," he said, his tone as cheery and as conversational as ever, "to talk with the estimable and gracious Mr. de Selby on the matter of how one might gain a sure ingress to the workings of the God-Machine."

I expressed outrage. How long had he been reading my letters?

He said he had not read them, not a single one, but by crikey, he said, becoming effusive once more, he knew by sight someone who had strong ideas about God-Machines when he saw them. He was an Officer of the Law, after all, and it was the business of an Officer of the Law was to understand when a man was interested in the workings of God-Machines. You could tell the sort of man, he said, by the way he would use his hands and the way that he looked at things, as if the man were itching to have a go at the business of creation himself. The Sergeant ended by saying that he was not an idiot.

It was at this point, when the Sergeant paused for breath, that de Selby interjected.

"You know about the God-Machine?" he said.

I was taken aback. I turned to him and cocked my head to one side. "It was a metaphor. Of sorts. To describe something of the nature of faith."

The dark-haired man knitted his brows. "Of sorts?" he said.

"Of sorts. I am a watchmaker by trade. It suited me to imagine the creator as a watchmaker."

"And you as a creator?"

The question took me wholly by surprise. I was forced to nod. "If you like."

Then de Selby softened a little. He turned and walked to the door at the opposite side of the room. He stopped, and motioned over his shoulder for me to follow, and I complied. The policeman followed behind at a respectful distance.

He led me through what seemed like an endless array of mildewed corridors until we reached a rough wooden door that, despite its ramshackle nature, was untouched by the decay of the rest of the house. He stopped for a moment and pulled a stained handkerchief from his pocket, with which he mopped his brow. "You must forgive the state of my home," he said. "I have never had much time to attend to its upkeep." He opened the door which led to a kitchen. It was, to my surprise, spotlessly clean; in fact, its sterility would have been unnatural in any home, but in the home of de Selby it seemed in doubly disturbing.

It seemed impolite to remark on the kitchen's cleanness, but de Selby pre-empted me. "My work requires a clean environment," he said, matter-of-factly. He led us through to what would perhaps have been the laundry room. It smelled of bleach. The chlorine made my eyes water, and I thought of you then, Alexander, choking to death on an Ypres field, the smell of chlorine all around you.

The walls of the laundry room were covered with maps of the local area, which were marked in red ink with – to me – incomprehensible symbols. Points on the map were joined by lines to other points on the map, and I saw on one sheet points and lines alone, without a map. I could make no sense of it.

On the stone table in the middle of the room were laid neatly pieces of machinery whose purpose I could not parse. I inquired as to their purpose, and de Selby said that he did not know. He was not their manufacturer, and that he was, in this place, attempting to ascertain that very fact. He had hitherto had little luck. I naturally asked then of their provenance. He motioned toward the map.

"Each point marked on the map," he explained, "represents an entry to the outer workings of the God-Machine."

"You speak as if it were a literal phenomenon," I said.

He nodded. "It is a fact. These items" – he waved his hand across the objects on the table – "represent my evidence."

"Say for a moment that I am convinced that the God-Machine does exist in a literal sense," I said. "What would I gain from entering it?"

"Why," said de Selby. "You would gain the key to life. If only you could work out how it could be used."

I remained silent. Sergeant Fox spoke then. "Mr. Dear is tremendously interested in the idea of the creation of life," he said. I was furious with him for speaking out of turn in this way, but something about him just then, something about those wide empty eyes, made me shudder and say nothing.

"You should join me on my next expedition," said de Selby.

"When would that be?"

"Tomorrow, if you like."

As he spoke, de Selby absently picked up one of the objects on the table, a long curved item like a lever, jointed and hinged. He worked it in his hands, moving unseen hinges and opening hatches, pulling on some parts, folding others, apparently without realising he'd done so. When he put it back on the table, it was a lily, perfect and white, as if newly picked. I reached over and picked it up. I could see no sign that it had ever been anything other than a flower.

He looked blankly at it as I gaped at the delicate object in my hands.

"I have never done that before," he said, without inflection.

I agreed to join him in the morning.

I await tomorrow with an open mind and wish you too could be here to see whatever wonders de Selby has to show me. Primarily, the thought that rules my mind is this, and only this: if a mechanical implement may be folded into a lily, perhaps I might learn the way that an automaton might be folded into a living being.

I will tell you what happened. I promise.

Yours in grief,

Your brother as always,

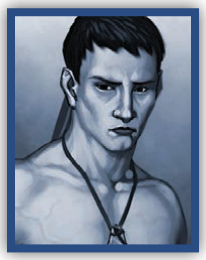
William

the spiritual energy from sacrifices. The Architect lived out its life as Hans Hoffmann, died of "natural causes," and then returned to whatever existence awaited it. If the characters in the Tale manage to find and disrupt the boiler room, however, the Architect returns. Its mission, at that point, is to stop the characters from disrupting the arrangement.

Description: The angel returns to Earth in the same guise it wore before: a middle-aged German man with graying brown hair, a slight limp on his left leg, a Masonic ring, and a pair of thick, horn-rimmed glasses. Its fingertips are stained with ink and it leaves black fingerprints on whatever it touches. These prints fade from nonliving surfaces in seconds, but on flesh, they linger for weeks.

Methods: The Architect is capable of violence, but it would rather everyone agrees. It attempts to reason with the characters first, as described in the Tale on p. 69. If the characters take violent action, it defends the boiler room to the best of its ability. The Architect retains his knowledge of buildings and is curious to see how the world has progressed (and what has been done to the buildings it designed), and is an affable enough conversationalist if approached respectfully. Every now and then, though, it makes casual, almost businesslike references to human sacrifice.

Virtue: Amiable
Vice: Cold
Rank: 2
Attributes: Power 4, Finesse 7, Resistance 5
Influence: Boiler room 2
Corpus: 10
Willpower: 12
Size: 5
Speed: 16 (species factor 5)
Defense: 4
Initiative: 12
Armor: None
Numina: Left-Handed Spanner, Seek, Telekinesis
Manifestation: Discorporate, Materialize, Twilight Form
Max Essence: 15
Ban: Cannot leave the boiler room.
Bane: A "missing persons" flier from one of the victims of the 300 block.



Black Nathaniel

Ghost Machine – p. 79

Mission: Black Nathaniel was created to oversee the God-Machine's directive to capture ghosts and bind them to machines. It has Reapers and Sowers assisting it in this mission (no traits are provided for these lesser angels as they Discorporate at any sign of hostility — they're here to work, not to fight). Black Nathaniel is an immensely powerful angel but acts in a managerial role. He finds pockets of ghostly activity and summons his minion angels. He also deals with anyone making trouble for the mission. Unlike some angels, Black Nathaniel is utterly loyal to the God-Machine and not above trying to make some extra ghosts if people interfere.

Description: Black Nathaniel is an angel and looks the part. He is nearly seven feet tall, lean and muscular. He wears black pants, but doesn't bother with any other clothes. He sports enormous black wings and wears a silver chain with a small piece of glass around his neck. His voice is quiet, but carries grave authority.

Methods: Unlike many angels, Black Nathaniel has no time for subtlety. He flies throughout the region searching for ghosts and then summons his minions to bind them. He doesn't make an effort to hide himself, but because he seeks out haunted sites (which tend to be somewhat isolated), he's managed to implant a good number of unquiet dead into mechanical devices without anyone noticing. He doesn't have a problem with investigators, but if someone starts making progress on reversing the process, he intervenes.

Virtue: Severe
Vice: Gentle
Rank: 5
Attributes: Power 13, Finesse 11, Resistance 12
Influence: Death 2, Ghosts 2, Silence 1
Corpus: 18
Willpower: 23
Size: 6
Speed: 34 (species factor 10)
Defense: 11
Initiative: 23
Armor: None
Numina: Awe, Blast (silver chains), Emotional Aura, Firestarter, Regenerate, Resurrection, Seek, Speed
Manifestation: Discorporate, Materialize, Twilight Form
Max Essence: 50
Ban: Black Nathaniel cannot enter graveyards.
Bane: White marble.

Blind Serpents

What Is It Good For – p. 105

Mission: The Blind Serpents are the near-mindless servants of Triage (p. 141). Their mission is whatever Triage says it is, but it usually involves killing people before they can alter history in some grandiose way.

Description: These creatures appear as men, though their true form is a man-sized snake with the head of a lion and milky, blind eyes. They take the roles of background characters — other soldiers, corpses littering the battlefield, and so on — until Triage gives them an order. Then they take on their true form and attack.

Methods: The Blind Serpents do not fear death. They do not fear at all, in fact. They are near-mindless and have very little agency of their own. They are, however, capable of performing basic medical care (again, influence from Triage), but only do so for characters that stand a good chance of surviving. They are much more effective at killing than saving.

Virtue: Obedient

Vice: Blind

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 3, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 1, Manipulation 1, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Medicine 1

Physical Skills: Athletics (Sinewy) 3, Brawl 3, Firearms 3, Weaponry 3

Social Skills: Animal Ken 2

Merits: Danger Sense, Fast Reflexes 2, [Two dots of any Style Merit the Storyteller chooses]

Health: 8

Willpower: 7

Integrity: n/a

Size: 5

Speed: 12

Defense: 6

Initiative: 8

Clockwork Servitor

The Invisible Citadel – p. 92; A Glimpse of Mesmerizing Complexity – p. 89

Mission: These creatures are specifically made as guards who protect locations and devices which are important to the God-Machine's plans. Every clockwork servitor exists to protect a specific target and it does so at all costs. If the target is destroyed or ceases to be useful to the God-Machine, the clockwork servitor becomes dormant (though Dalga can give them new assignments). Each specific assignment is different. Some servitors protect their charge from all interference, while others allow people who know a particular password to access to location or device. A few do nothing unless someone attempts to damage its charge.

Description: Clockwork servitors look human until one sees them up close. They are created from a mishmash of metal parts and organic matter. One might have human eyes, but set in a wire and glass head. Another might have an organic right hand, but a left hand made of transparent plastic concealing a human skeleton. Clockworks cannot pass for human for any length of time.

Methods: Clockworks do not require nutrition, sleep, or power. They are sustained by their relationship to the Dalga, and they, in turn, provide raw material and sustenance to the grotesque creature. Most clockworks are not intelligent enough to form complicated plans, but they do demon-

strate some problem-solving skills. If given time to consider a problem, they can often solve it provided it doesn't call for specialized knowledge. A group of clockworks might be able to figure out how to break into a fortified building, for instance, but they won't be able to set a bomb to blow the door in (though the Dalga could probably rig a clockwork with explosives!).

Intelligent clockwork servitors can speak in a clicking mechanical-sounding voice and understand all human languages. Each one was created using the brain of an individual human as a template. If confronted with someone that this person knew well, the clockwork servitor may display bits of the person's knowledge, like knowing the individual's name and some bits of personal information or asking questions of the sort that the person used to ask this individual.

Some clockwork servitors keep everyone from getting close to the place or object it is protecting. However, others are created with a specific password that causes it to allow the person speaking it to interact with its charge. These clockwork servitors ask the person for the password. Clockwork servitors always ask intruders to depart before attacking.

Virtue: Loyal

Vice: Compulsive

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 3, Resolve 5

Physical Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Social Attributes: Presence 1, Manipulation 1, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Crafts (Clockwork) 2

Physical Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl (Grappling) 4, Firearms 2, Stealth 1, Weaponry 3

Social Skills: None

Merits: Demolisher, Grappling 2, Iron Stamina 3

Health: 9

Willpower: 9

Integrity: n/a

Size: 5

Speed: 10*

Defense: 4*

Initiative: 5*

Armor: 2

*Clockwork servitors are slightly slower than people.

Notes: Many clockworks have special abilities. Some suggestions include:

- **Enhanced Strength:** Strength is 7, Speed is 13
- **Protective Coloring:** If the clockwork remains perfectly still, observers receive a –2 modifier to see it.
- **Enhanced Speed:** Defense is 6, Initiative is 10, Speed is 12
- **Claws:** 0L hand damage

Dalga: The Creators of Servitors

The Invisible Citadel – p. 92

Mission: Dalga exist to create various inhuman servants for the God-Machine. Dalga appear in places where the God-Machine determines that such servants would be useful. Today, there are more than a dozen versions of Dalga used all across the world. They are almost immobile, but are defended by specialized servitors that it creates and controls like puppets.

Description: Dalga always appear as an ivory-colored egg the size of a grapefruit. It soon hatches into a fist-sized spider that grows rapidly. A full-grown Dalga can be the size of a bus, but by this time it is too large and bloated to require or use legs, so its limbs become shriveled and vestigial.

Methods: The Dalga must be fed organic material and a wide assortment of metal parts, including wire, springs, gears, pieces of sheet metal, screws and bolts. Dalga must also be tended by at least five personal servitors. A Dalga creates the first group of these servitors within two days of hatching. These first servants are usually clockwork humanoids between 12 and 18 inches tall. Dalga grow rapidly and builds larger servitors every few weeks, eating the old ones for parts. By the time a Dalga is three months old, it creates servants the size of adult humans. Dalga can only survive for a few days without food; by the time they are large enough to create adult-sized creations, they are also immobile. If all of its servants are killed, a Dalga starves to death.

To create relatively simple-minded servitors, Dalga require the heads or brains of recently dead animals to serve as a neural template for its clockwork creations. These heads must be no more than a day old. Servitors created in this way follow clear and relatively simple orders without question. To create an intelligent servitor capable of following complex orders, Dalga must use a living human as a template.

A Dalga can give all of its servitors special abilities, such as inhuman levels of strength or the ability to change their skin color to blend with surroundings. It can give each servitor up to two special abilities. Most of the people Dalga use to create intelligent servitors die horribly as Dalga scan their brains and use them to create clockwork servitors' minds. If a Dalga finds a brain particularly intriguing, it instead removes the person's limbs and replaces them with clockwork fixtures, turning the unfortunate person into a kind of hideous cyborg.

Dalga are creations of the God-Machine, but they are not actually angels. They don't return to the God-Machine when their mission is complete, they simply starve to death (or they *don't* and keep creating servants in some underground lair somewhere, which would be an interesting basis for a Tale). As such, their traits reflect their material nature.

A Dalga is hideous, appearing like a large, horribly bloated spider with a distorted human face. It wraps the brains or bodies that people give it in silk and then uses its complex tool-like mouthparts to scan and dissect the brain.

Afterwards, it devours the brains and sculpts its clockwork servitor from silk and metal that it works with its forelegs, forming it into a strange pale material like fiberglass. A Dalga needs approximately two hours to create a single clockwork servitor.

The Dalga cannot speak directly. Instead, they communicate through their servitors, who all speak simultaneously in a uniform, emotionless monotone. With effort they can also speak through nearby people, and do so if their servants are not present.

Dalga are good for injecting a healthy dose of body horror into your **God-Machine Chronicle** and for creating physical threats for characters to face. Angels, after all, can usually just discorporate and escape from a losing fight. Dalga's servants fight to the bitter end. If the characters pay attention, they'll even see smaller servants picking up the pieces to take back to their immense "mother."

Virtue: Loving

Vice: Hungry

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 2, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 6, Dexterity 5*, Stamina 6

Social Attributes: Presence 1, Manipulation 2, Composure 5

Mental Skills: Crafts (Servitors) 5, Medicine 3, Occult 4

Physical Skills: Brawl 5

Social Skills: Expression 3, Intimidation 4, Persuasion 1

*The Dalga is largely immobile, but its Dexterity applies to fine manipulation.

Merits: Iron Stamina 3

Health: 24

Willpower: 9

Integrity: 5 (A Dalga is alive and sapient and can suffering breaking points if forced to witness its servitors being destroyed)

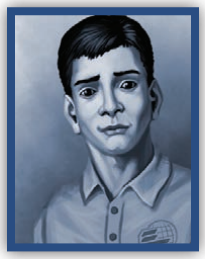
Size: 18 (full grown)

Speed: 1 (Dalga lurch along very, very slowly when full grown.)

Defense: 0

Initiative: 10

Armor: 5



Emilio Rubio

Wellington School for Gifted Children – p. 77

Mission: Emilio's mission is to discover what is preventing the God-Machine from seeing or influencing the inside of the Wellington School. Since the strange effect blocking the God-Machine weakens him as well, however, he is relying on the characters to bring him data.

Description: Emilio has taken the form of a young Hispanic man in his mid-20s. Emilio has black hair, a pleasant smile, perfectly white teeth and a vague scent of tobacco about him (though no one ever sees him smoke). He drives a silver van with the EduTech logo on the side and speaks with a slight Mexican accent, though he does not actually speak Spanish, which the characters could use to expose him as an angel. If someone addresses him directly in Spanish, Emilio's eyes change into thick, grey smoke.

Methods: Emilio's initial approach is to make his weekly deliveries and get friendly with the characters, hoping that they can discover what is so special about Wellington and tell him. That isn't likely to happen, however (even if they do figure it out, there's no particular reason they'd share it with Emilio), and so Emilio changes tactics. He possesses visiting parents or other adults outside the school and causes chaos. He starts by using his Numina to fake ghost activity, but if he can't figure out what's going on quickly, he ups the ante by killing someone (student or staff, it doesn't matter to him). His plan is, perhaps, to cause enough attention to the supernatural aspects of the place that someone figures out what is happening, but in truth, Emilio gets so confused while he's on school grounds that he really doesn't act with much logic.

Virtue: Punctual

Vice: Cheerful

Rank: 2

Attributes: Power 3, Finesse 5, Resistance 4

Influence: Conversation 1, Van 1

Corpus: 9

Willpower: 9

Size: 5

Speed: 13 (species factor 5)

Defense: 3

Initiative: 9

Armor: None

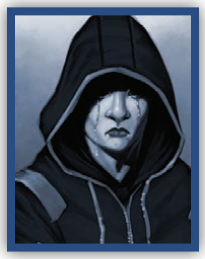
Numina: Blast (concussive, smoky air), Dement, Emotional Aura, Hallucination, Telekinesis

Manifestation: Discorporate, Materialize, Possess, Twilight Form

Max Essence: 20

Ban: If someone speaks to him in Spanish, Emilio recoils and his eyes change as described above.

Bane: Anything he's run over in the van.



Grief

The Key – p. 80

Mission: Grief is a messenger. He delivers orders to Wesley Cote, the so-called Key, and tells him who to kill. Cote can slip through time and space and is not bound by Infrastructure the way an angel is. Cote *is* the Infrastructure that allows Grief to manifest, meaning if Cote dies, Grief doesn't return to Earth.

Description: Grief appears as a slender man in his late teens, wearing black jeans, a black hoodie, and bright blue sneakers. His bright green eyes are constantly wet with tears. Grief doesn't speak to Cote, but if another character were to approach him gently and carefully, he might converse.

Methods: Grief usually steps out of mirrors or from around corners and gets Cote's attention with a nod, and then passes him a piece of paper with the name, address, and a few details. He then wanders away silently, vanishing into the shadows. Grief doesn't fight and Discorporates if attacked.

Virtue: Sad

Vice: Silent

Rank: 1

Attributes: Power 2, Finesse 3, Resistance 2

Influence: Grief 1

Corpus: 7

Willpower: 5

Size: 5

Speed: 10 (species factor 5)

Defense: 3

Initiative: 5

Armor: None

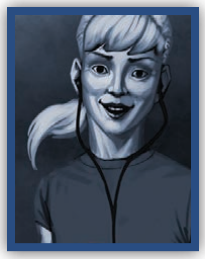
Numina: Mortal Mask

Manifestation: Discorporate, Materialize, Twilight Form

Max Essence: 10

Ban: Grief cannot use its Numina on smiling people.

Bane: Ashes.



Jenn

Do-Over – p. 71

Mission: Jenn's function is to watch over the 24-hour diner that contains the time-reversal technology and make sure that no one disrupts it. She's not interested in preventing use of the room, just damage to it. She is also in place to prevent use of the room to change history on too great a scale. Since people can only travel back in time to the location of one of their greatest regrets, and only for a few hours, this doesn't come up often. But if the parent of a child killed in a school shooting attempted to use the room to prevent the incident from happening, Jenn would have to stop him, because the shooting was widely reported and became part of the cultural understanding very quickly. If he only intended to keep his own child home from school, Jenn probably wouldn't interfere.

Description: Jenn appears as a woman in her 20s with blond hair tied back in a ponytail, a diverse collection of t-shirts advertising bands that were popular 15 years ago, and a tattoo on each wrist. If asked, she says the tattoos are for her parents, but they are actually occult symbols helping cement her identity.

Methods: Jenn's role is largely a passive one. She knows the diner inside and out and she knows the regulars by name. She stays friendly, but detached (and she never accepts offers of dates from the clientele). She is very interested in music and in human regret; since she is not, for the most part, responsible for her own decisions, she doesn't understand how one could come to feel remorse for one.

Virtue: Efficient

Vice: Chatty

Rank: 2

Attributes: Power 3, Finesse 5, Resistance 5

Influence: The Diner 2

Corpus: 10

Willpower: 10

Size: 5

Speed: 13 (species factor 5)

Defense: 3

Initiative: 10

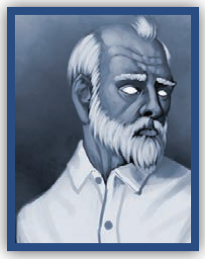
Armor: None

Numina: Innocuous, Mortal Mask, Rapture

Manifestation: Discorporate, Materialize, Twilight Form

Max Essence: 15

Ban: Jenn cannot refuse a request for a cup of coffee. Even during a fight, if someone asks for one (politely), she has to procure it.



Kalka

The Hatching – p. 99

Mission: Kalka is perhaps the most unusual of the God-Machine's angels. It exists outside of time, created as a failsafe in case the God-Machine is no longer able to send angels to enforce its will. In the Tale called The Hatching, this is exactly what happens; Kalka is "activated" and sent to help the characters.

Description: Kalka appears as a faint, human-shaped blue-white glow that slowly fades into visibility, taking the form of a man in his 70s. Kalka walks with a purposeful stride and speaks with a gentle, but commanding voice.

Methods: Once is appears, Kalka can only remain on Earth for 71 minutes. During this time, it is willing to answer whatever questions it can for the characters. How much Kalka knows about the situation with the Statue and how much it can help is up to the Storyteller. If the characters need the help, Kalka might be able to give them very specific guidelines. If they don't, maybe it just gives them hints, or it tries to give them explicit instruction but stutters through time (meaning the characters only get every third word or so).

Kalka is a plot device, not an antagonist. It never really expected to be needed, though, so Kalka occasionally "peeks" in on humanity. This means that if you're using a chronicle track that doesn't include The Hatching, you might considering having Kalka appear in mirrors or behind corners occasionally, just out of interest in who these people are.

Virtue: Patient

Vice: Curious

Rank: 2

Attributes: Power 5, Finesse 6, Resistance 4

Influence: Time 1, Patience 1

Corpus: 9

Willpower: 10

Size: 5

Speed: 16 (species factor 5)

Defense: 5

Initiative: 10

Armor: None

Numina: Fate Sense, Hallucination, Innocuous, Omen Trance, Sign

Manifestation: Discorporate, Materialize, Twilight Form

Max Essence: 15

Ban: Kalka can only remain Materialize or in Twilight

for 71 minutes at a time. He must then Discorporate and wait 24 hours before reappearing (this limitation prevents him from entering the time stream twice at the same point).

Bane: Digital alarm clock sounds.

Mirror Vulture

Wake the Dead – p. 86

Mission: Some people die before their time. They die by horrible accident or murder and everyone says it was before their time, or that they were too young to die. The God-Machine couldn't agree more; since time is of the essence, it has sent the Mirror Vulture to find the man who died before his time. The Mirror Vulture is anything but subtle, but it can cover a large amount of ground quickly.

Description: The Mirror Vulture is an immense carrion bird, with a wingspan long than most SUVs. Its feathers are made from dusky, mirrored glass and its talons are metal that carries an intense, though not fatal, heat. Its eyes are silver and reflective, but it has perfect eyesight.

Methods: The Mirror Vulture is looking for Lucien McJack (see p.119), but Lucien isn't really himself anymore. As such, the Vulture only knows it's looking for a person that died and then revived, so it's flying around the area of Lucien's death grabbing up the walking corpses, examining them, and then releasing them. It doesn't really care about the walking dead; its mission is to find McJack as quickly as possible.

The Vulture is aloof and animal-like; it bobs its head like a bird and isn't above "feasting" on the carcass of a fresh kill. Of course, the angel being what it is, its favorite "fresh kill" is a newly wrecked car. It is capable of human speech and is reasonably intelligent, though it will only converse with a person if it thinks that person can help it on its mission. It is capable of combat, but it would rather fly away if attacked.

Virtue: Precise

Vice: Hungry

Rank: 3

Attributes: Power 6, Finesse 4, Resistance 5

Influence: Death 3

Corpus: 11

Willpower: 11

Size: 6

Speed: 20 (species factor 10)

Defense: 6

Initiative: 9

Armor: None

Numina: Blast (feathers), Essence Thief, Regenerate, Seek, Speed

Manifestation: Materialize, Twilight Form

Max Essence: 20

Ban: If the Mirror Vulture hears or sees a car crash, it must investigate.

Bane: Roadkill (animals only).

Mr. Nose

Proposition 279 – p. 96

Mission: Human nature is not inherently violent. While most people can be territorial and possessive, violence for the sake of violence is not natural for most people. Nose needs to change that – he's charged with creating mass murder and the vehicle he's chosen is homophobia.

Description: Mr. Nose is short, sallow and gloomy. His nose is pointed and prominent and his eyes are just a little too deep set. He stands too close to people when talking and his breath always smells vaguely of raw onion.

Methods: Nose has attached himself to the president of a conservative nation and filled his mind with anger, hate and zealotry. The country has followed along nicely. Nose doesn't have much in the way of raw supernatural power at his disposal, but he does have the ear of a president and the protection of his security force. His job is almost complete.

Nose does not actually care about what people do. He only recognizes two conditions of humanity: alive and dead. His mission is to urge some people to make other people

dead. It's really as simple as that. For all that he appears unctuous, loyal to the president and human (albeit an unpleasant human), he's really just doing his job.

Virtue: Innocuous

Vice: Inappropriate

Rank: 4

Attributes: Power 4, Finesse 12, Resistance 5

Influence: Authority 1, Murder 3

Corpus: 10

Willpower: 17

Size: 5

Speed: 21 (species factor 5)

Defense: 4

Initiative: 17

Armor: None

Numina: Aggressive Meme, Awe, Emotional Aura, Drain, Hallucination, Rapture

Manifestation: Materialize, Twilight Form

Max Essence: 25

Ban: Nose shows up in photographs no matter what state of manifestation he is currently in.

Bane: Latex.

Officer Strait

The Squares of the City – p. 75

Mission: Officer Strait was created with the task of facilitating the rearrangement and editing of the city in the Tale, The Squares of the City. His primary task is keeping people off the streets at night so that they don't witness the buildings shifting around — until the characters become involved. When they start looking into the matter and (worse) find the rails beneath the city, Strait appears to warn them off.

Description: Officer Strait appears as a black man in early 30s. He wears a police uniform appropriate to the city in question, but has a patch on his jacket with an intricate, geometric symbol that other policemen don't recognize (or even acknowledge, unless it is pointed out to them). This symbol is a mystical emblem that helps cement Strait in his role as a cop.

Methods: Strait isn't an unpleasant fellow and actually performs his job as a cop with enthusiasm and aplomb. However, he is not a human being. He's an angel, and that means the mission comes first. His primary concern is keeping people away from the rails and keeping them from witnessing moving buildings at night; if those orders conflict with "protect and serve," the orders win out ... at least initially.

Strait prefers to avoid violence, but he's willing to arrest people and let the courts take care of the problem. He's also willing to shoot people, if necessary, but he'll dutifully fill out the paperwork afterwards.

Virtue: Just

Vice: Procedural

Rank: 2

Attributes: Power 6, Finesse 5, Resistance 5

Influence: Streets 2

Corpus: 10

Willpower: 10

Size: 5

Speed: 15 (species factor 5)

Defense: 5

Initiative: 10

Armor: 1/2 (bulletproof vest)

Numina: Left-Handed Spanner, Seek, Speed

Manifestation: Discorporate, Materialize, Twilight Form

Max Essence: 20

Ban: Strait must follow police procedures as long as he maintains this identity.

Bane: Donuts (they represent the comical, absurd perception of law enforcement, and as such can damage his Infrastructure).

Polis Men

Sister City – p. 73

Mission: The Polis Men are angels locked into the city of Seattle itself — both versions, in fact. Their task is to keep the cities separate and to eliminate anyone that can cross between them. As the cities merge, this might become impossible, but the Polis Men don't have much in the way of agency or free will. They continue to follow their orders until the cities either merge or are separated completely.

Description: The Polis Men are part of the city. They appear from wrought-iron fences, chalk drawings on sidewalk, statues, graffiti and billboards. As such, they can resemble almost anything. The angels are not actually animating statues or artwork, just borrowing their forms temporarily. In their natural forms, Polis Men are humanoid, featureless, and an ugly grayish-green color.

Methods: These angels aren't subtle. They chase down offenders and beat them to death with chunks of sidewalk, throw them into traffic or off of buildings, and otherwise use the city itself to kill them. They do not speak and they do not respond to reason. If their quarry escapes (see the Foot Chase rules on p. 65 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**) they merge with the city and wait.

Virtue: Observant

Vice: Violent

Rank: 1

Attributes: Power 4, Finesse 4, Resistance 3
Influence: Seattle 1
Corpus: 8
Willpower: 7
Size: 5
Speed: 13 (species factor 5)
Defense: 4
Initiative: 7
Armor: 1
Numina: Blast, Essence Thief, Firestarter
Manifestation: Discorporate, Materialize, Twilight Form
Max Essence: 10
Ban: Polis Men can be commanded to stand down by anyone holding a Seattle (or Old Seattle, depending on where the altercation takes place) police badge.
Bane: Out-of-state license plate.

Rasha

Urban Wandering – p. 108

Mission: Rasha is charged with preventing threats to the God-Machine's plans. It acts by delivering warnings to people that are in a position to act upon them. It regularly delivers warnings to ordinary people who can prevent the threat, often despite the fact that they have no idea that they are performing an important action to help protect one of the God-Machine's plans. It is also capable of acting more directly (as it does in the Urban Wandering Tale). Rasha is unusual in that the God-Machine calls it into service fairly frequently.

Description: Rasha normally appears as a nondescript human being, of age, appearance and mannerism appropriate to the circumstance. In especially dire circumstances, Rasha can abandon subtlety and briefly appear as an obviously non-human creature. In this form, Rasha is a humanoid figure with immense, liquid mercury wings. Rasha cannot speak in this form, but it can cause images to appear in its wings.

Methods: Rasha attempts to perform its missions using subtle means, like dropping a pen to attract a security guard's attention to the burglar breaking into the building. Rasha's primary limitation is that it can only appear directly above or beneath electrical lines carrying power to buildings.

The angel is quiet and always calm. It normally only speaks if spoken to. It is capable of casual conversation, but its conversation strikes most people as slightly unusual, because it always looks like it is ready to respond to questions just before the person asks them and it keeps all answers as short as possible.

Virtue: Reliable
Vice: Silent
Rank: 5

Attributes: Power 10, Finesse 15, Resistance 13

Influence: Time 1, Electricity 3, Warning 1

Corpus: 18

Willpower: 28

Size: 5

Speed: 30 (species factor 10)

Defense: 10

Initiative: 28

Armor: None

Numina: Aggressive Meme, Awe, Blast (shattered glass), Emotional Aura, Fate Sense, Implant Mission, Innocuous, Mortal Mask, Pathfinder, Sign

Manifestation: Discorporate, Materialize, Twilight Form

Max Essence: 50

Ban: Rasha can only Manifest with five feet of a power line or another strong source of electricity.

Bane: Sound above 20K Hertz, produced at a volume of at least 85 decibels.

Serotonin

The Scarlet Plague – p. 97

Mission: Serotonin is named after the hormone found in animals which regulates mood, appetite, and sleep. It is charged with beginning the plague that will end humanity, and it has wide latitude to do that. Its mission does not end until humanity is no longer capable of sustaining itself.

Description: In its natural form, Serotonin is a roughly human-sized distortion in the air, nearly invisible, odorless, and silent. When Serotonin possesses a person, it alters the person's eyes so that the coloration in their iris fades, resulting in abnormally pale eyes. The characters will probably encounter it while it has possessed a scientist.

Methods: Serotonin is sent into the world in the midst of the creation and use of drugs. Scientists working for large pharmaceutical companies often create experimental drugs and study them on small rodents. These drugs are usually unknown factors in otherwise controlled situations. The creation of these drugs, especially when done by accident or with untested chemicals, creates an Infrastructure for Serotonin to enter the world.

Serotonin does not have a specific human form — it needs to be mobile, which means it can't get locked down. It most often possesses someone who has already been working for a drug company for years and has some kind of seniority. The God-Machine's disease is already at hand for Serotonin, it just has to get it into circulation.

Creating a need for the drug takes some creativity. Just like Vitamin D is added to milk and Iodine is added to table salt to prevent well known deficiency diseases, Serotonin worked to have the drug added to a commonly used staple in response to an artificial requirement. The specifics of the drug delivery are left to the Storyteller; the Tale assumes that the disease is already in full force, so the delivery method is only important insofar as it might provide some insight into why it's happening.

Serotonin has an austere and clinical mindset. It makes a plan and sticks with it; its biggest weakness is its inability to adapt quickly to change. It picks a person to take over and uses that body's clout and station to get most everything done.

Success of the mission depends on Serotonin's ability to maintain the personality it is mimicking. Revealing Serotonin as an imposter is the fastest way to hinder its work. It is also the fastest way to make it an enemy. For the most part, it will ignore anyone that isn't key to completing its mission. If it realizes that people know it is supernatural or an imposter, it will attempt to eliminate them. Serotonin is not as smart as the person it has impersonated and depends on its influence over the minds of others to fit in. It can be tricked into revealing itself if done in the right way.

Virtue: Precise

Vice: Silent

Rank: 4

Attributes: Power 8, Finesse 11, Resistance 10

Influence: Drugs 2, Disease 2

Corpus: 15

Willpower: 21

Size: 5

Speed: 29 (species factor 10)

Defense: 8

Initiative: 21

Armor: None

Numina: Aggressive Meme, Dement, Fate Sense, Host Jump, Implant Mission, Innocuous, Rapture

Manifestation: Discorporate, Possess, Reaching, Twilight Form

Max Essence: 25

Ban: Serotonin cannot use its Numina against anyone already infected with the disease.

Bane: The specific serotonin antagonist drug, Ondansertron, injected at 5cc.

Bane: Tears.

Triage

What Is It Good For – p. 105

Mission: Triage appears during What Is It Good For after the characters have shifted in time once. Its mission is simply to determine whether it's worth the God-Machine's time and energy to correct the problem. Otherwise, the characters will just keep slipping from battle to battle until they find a way out on their own. Going into the Tale, Tri-

age leans toward the characters finding their own way home. Weighed against the number of battles and the fact that they can't die permanently, Triage's initial idea is just to leave the Blind Serpents around to make sure that the characters don't change anything too important.

Description: Triage doesn't Materialize, though it can become visible if the characters want to converse. It takes the form of a gigantic lion, nearly the size of a tank, with metallic claws and a deep, rumbling voice. Its fur looks like sharp steel bristles and its teeth are enormous rifle rounds.

Methods: Triage, as its name suggests, was created to make an efficient decision. It's not hostile or cruel, but it doesn't have a better nature or a shred of humanity. It listens patiently to whatever the characters want to say but it doesn't tell them about the God-Machine or any of the deeper truths to their situation. It *does* tell them about the Flag of Elam, if they ask, and agrees to let them use it to go home provided they can do so without violating any historical events. If the characters attempt to change the outcome of a battle or kill an important historical figure (Hitler, Robert E. Lee, Patton, etc.), it sends the Blind Serpents to stop them.

Note: Triage is a very powerful angel and, as such, does not have traits. It has a Virtue and Vice to act as a guide to how to portray it, and it has a ban and a bane like any ephemeral being. If the characters want to convince it to send them home, they need to use the Social maneuvering rules (p. 188) and accumulate six Doors.

Virtue: Efficient

Vice: Leonine

Rank: 6

Ban: Triage cannot watch suffering. If someone is physically suffering, it must leave the area, help the sufferer, or send the Blind Serpents to kill him. Triage, naturally, always does what is most efficient.

Bane: Fur of a black lion.

Your Own Angels

The angels below aren't designed for the Tales in Chapter Two, which means their missions are a bit more generalized. Feel to customize whatever parts of them you need to in order to make them work in your chronicle. The God-Machine does the same thing before sending angels out, after all.

The Candle Maker

Humans burn the brightest.

Mission: Human fat burns for a long time, releasing lots of heat and energy. Sometimes the God-Machine needs to harness this energy. The Candle Maker's job is to harness and release this energy when the God-Machine needs it the most. He has three days to locate the perfect human specimen and render its fat to tallow to burn for the God-Machine.

Methods: The God-Machine sends the Candle Maker into the world just before specific events that require extra energy. Often it is an enabler for the creation of necessary Infrastructure, or to be part of the Infrastructure to bring larger and more complex angels to a specific place in the world. The God-Machine utilizes oil-burning lanterns or glycerol candles to send the Candle Maker to Earth.

The Candle Maker takes its mission very seriously. The circumstances of the burning and the person are both important to its specific mission. Finding the right person is a

matter of finding the qualities required by the God-Machine. It might need someone with a specific emotional profile, such as someone who is depressed because they just lost a loved one, or it might just be someone with a specific body type, such as young and plump. Sometimes the God-Machine just needs the energy of the fire, and the person is burned at the most opportune moment for the harness of the energy. Sometimes, the fire must induce fear in others, and the Candle Maker must ensure that the combustion and burning is in a highly public space. Either way, the Candle Maker would not want to miss the most opportune moment to start its human fire show. Usually, the victim starts with a slow burn, and then erupts into fire. This kind of fire doesn't immediately kill the person, and can leave them screaming in pain for several minutes.

The person must burn for several hours for the mission to be completed properly. If anyone attempts to put the fire out, The Candle Maker must make sure the fire doesn't just stay, but catches and spreads.

The Candle Maker does not have a physical form, but its passing can be marked by a rise in the ambient

temperature and the smell of smoke. Fires burn hotter and brighter in its presence and candle flames jump and flicker in response. Because The Candle Maker must take so much time trying to find the right person to burn, it is often very close to the end of its three days before it starts a fire. Extreme cold and fire suppressants will force the Candle Maker to abandon the area. Using specially designed fire-fighting devices such as chemical compounds found in fire extinguishers or physical suffocation, as from fire blankets, could cause a large enough setback to prevent it from completing its mission entirely.

Virtue: Intent
Vice: Patient
Rank: 2
Attributes: Power 3, Finesse 2, Resistance 4
Influence: Fire 2
Corpus: 8
Willpower: 7
Size: 4
Speed: 15 (species factor 10)
Defense: 3
Initiative: 6
Armor: None
Numina: Drain, Firestarter, Telekinesis
Manifestations: Twilight Form, Fetter, Reaching
Max Essence: 15
Ban: The Candle Maker cannot use its Numina in temperatures below 32 degrees Fahrenheit (the freezing point).
Bane: Ceramic.

The Lady in Red

Lust's handmaiden

Mission: The Lady in Red is supposed to make sure that two lovers meet and fall in love. While this sounds generally innocuous, these lovers are usually people who are already living fulfilling lives with a spouse and sometimes children.

The Lady in Red has two weeks to introduce her victims, have them fall in love and then convince them to leave their previous lives for each other. She finds this easiest when those previous ties are cut out completely. Family, relations and friends are inconsequential to the end result and so they are all fair game once The Lady has her lovers in sight.

Description: The Lady in Red is always beautiful, always seductive, and she always wears red. Beyond that, she can play a young coquette, a teen waif, a mother of three with a kinky side, an older woman with appetites — it doesn't matter to her, of course, as long as she brings her targets together.

Methods: Infidelity and lies are the vehicles used by the God-Machine to send The Lady in Red to Earth. Her largest hurdle is finding the two lovers she is supposed to connect. She has names and a location, but not much else. Most people are easy to look up in a phone book and social media is easy to access from public computers. Once she has found the two, she has to get them to meet, which is often an easy task. She causes a delay in a line at a shop where they might have otherwise missed one another. She might even intentionally cause a car wreck between them, forcing them to interact. She finds the easiest way is to have them bump into one another by what seems to be chance. The last task is to make sure that they decide to be with one another over their current relationship. This is where The Lady in Red takes the most active role. Her preferred method is to seduce the partner of one of the lovers, causing them to turn to their new friend for comfort. She might also introduce an old flame or someone more appealing to the partner to lure them away from her lovers.

The Lady in Red is completely sure of herself. She is prideful, arrogant and has no compassion for humanity. She freely admits that she is a supernatural being if asked directly. She is willing to kill or maim anyone who gets in her way. She does not like delays, and will attempt to shorten a conversation or just leave if it does not relate directly to completing her mission.

The Lady's arrogance is her downfall. She is so sure of her capabilities that she cannot imagine failure. Unfortunately for her, she is neither omniscient nor infallible. Her machinations and pushing and pulling can easily fail, especially if her targets find out that their circumstances are forced or happen to have a strong bond to their current partner. If one of the two lovers remains with their current spouse, then her mission will fail. Also, while the Lady is supernatural, she is trapped in a mortal shell. She can be banished by killing the body she inhabits.

Virtue: Attentive
Vice: Cruel
Rank: 2
Attributes: Power 3, Finesse 4, Resistance 3
Influence: Desire 2
Corpus: 8
Willpower: 6
Size: 5
Speed: 12 (species factor 5)
Defense: 4
Initiative: 6
Armor: None
Numina: Emotional Aura, Hallucination, Mortal Mask
Manifestation: Manifestation, Possess, Twilight Form
Max Essence: 15
Ban: The Lady in Red must flee if she encounters anyone who knows true love.
Bane: Roses

1st July 2012

Dear Simon,

I understand your reservations, but you must realise that any political objections you may have are just that — political. The Machine has us all. I know that now.

I spent most of my life before finding de Selby's wonderful book, his golden book — he got that title bang on, he did — with a faint apprehension that the world was subject to an arbitrary system of occasionally contradictory mechanical rules, that we were fictions, avatars of you will of capricious higher powers who controlled our actions according to whim, as if we were simulations of human beings, or characters in a fiction, or pieces in a game, or somewhere-in-between. When de Selby wrote about the God-Machine, Simon, he extended far beyond metaphor and straight into the literal nuts and bolts of creation. And I knew It wanted me to find It.

I saw It.

I saw It.

It's not hard to find.

If you only know where to look, you will find the evidence everywhere. For example, a tower block across from mine. Now, about a year ago you would see dozens of people going in and out, every morning. The glass doors had working keypad locks in the foyer. Now, though, it's more or less deserted, as far as anyone can tell. No one goes in or out.

I spent a week looking at that building and thinking that something was wrong with it, and the reason evaded me every time. When it came, it was like the little red light that goes on that tells me to buy: there were no Union Jacks anywhere.

We're in London. In the Jubilee Year. Ready for the 2012 Olympics, regardless of whether they're going to be a disaster or not, and not one window in that whole tower block had a Union Flag anywhere. No bunting, no red-white-and-blue streamers. No lonely little flags sticking out of forlorn window boxes. Nothing. In a city where every single street caries the visible signs of celebratory patriotism right now, I did not see a single thing.

I spent a whole day watching, only watching, and a second, and I didn't see a soul. The glass doors are permanently open now, and yesterday I thought, why not walk right in? So I walked right in, through filthy, old-looking glass doors that only a few weeks ago were shining and new. Through the reinforced inner door, and into a foyer with a carpet redolent with mold and

Often these places smell of piss. This smelled of something else, a smell I felt that I should recognise, but did not. As if it hovered somewhere on the corners of my perception.

Does perception have corners? Mine seems to. It has edges, I suppose.

I felt like I had been here before, but to start with I brushed that feeling aside. I told myself that most tower blocks around here are pretty much the same as all the other tower blocks. Of course. That was it.

The lifts didn't come when I called them.

I tried the stairs. It occurred to me that something was wrong here. No smell of piss, no graffiti in the stair well, no spilt lager or sweet wrappers or empty cans or cigarette ends. No pigeon shit. This is an inner city tower block with open doors and broken windows. The absence of these things is not so much strange as terrifying,

It was filthy, but the filth came from desertion. Dust, thick dust. A strange discoloration of the walls, as if dirty water had cascaded down the inside walls and then dried. It smelled like the shed where my father had kept his tools when I was a kid. He had never really used them. I used to go in there and look at the decaying tools and electrical components and rusty screws in boxes and imagine they were living things.

That was the smell. Rusty metal. Like old machinery. I wondered where I should look. I decided that I should start near the top and work down.

The stairwell was silent; only the buzzing and clicking of faulty fluorescent tubes as they flicked on and off, a rhythm that made me dizzy, made a fuzzy ache descend across my temples. I felt like I was the only man in the world then, the way you do when you are in a place of absolute loneliness, or the way that I do. I looked at my phone, the better to reassure myself. Its touchscreen was blank and nothing I could do could induce it to switch on. It was a dead hunk of plastic and glass.

I put it carefully back in my pocket and stopped climbing. I could hear other noises now, from behind the door leading, so the sign said, to the ninth floor corridor, and noise like the sound of a lorry braking on a tight corner, far away. I couldn't tell if it was outside or if along the corridor. I stopped. A clang sounded below me, and another. I jumped, looked down beneath the stairs. One by one, floor by floor, the lights were going out, plunging the stairwell into blackness. Four, five, six, seven, eight. And then it stopped and the clang sounded above me, and all the lights above went out, one by one, and only the landing on which I stood was now lit. I went through the door. The light went out behind me.

The ninth floor corridor had the same smell of old rust as the stairwell and other smells too, the stale smells of sweat, of excretions and secretions and human fluids gone stale.

I was not, at this point, afraid.

The fluorescent tubes lighting the corridor were flickering at precisely the same frequency as had those in the stairwell. It seemed right to let it do my thinking for me. My footsteps moved in time with it. I breathed in time with it. It pulled me along the corridor, my motions jerky, like a puppet. It felt right. The mechanical sound became stronger. I could no longer hear myself think, so I did not.

I passed doors that hung open, revealing dusty furniture, untouched electronic equipment, flatscreen TVs covered with dust, IKEA tables, a vase of dry dead flowers, the water long since dried up. No cobwebs, only dust, reddish and acrid. I came to flat 913, its door hanging only ajar, an inconstant, reddish light behind it. The machine-noise was so very loud now, the sound of hydraulic brakes and cash registers and pneumatic drills echoing through my head.

I opened the door, slowly, and it screeched as its hinges protested. Something made a snapping noise and the door stopped moving altogether, seemed to fall in a tiny movement onto the slightest skew angle, as if one of the hinges had half-come-away from the frame.

I suddenly found myself in a throng of people. Still, quiet people, but people, silhouetted in that inconstant light, which came, as did the sound, from under a half-closed door on the other side of this main room. I opened my mouth to speak, but the greeting never reached my lips, my tongue unable to move. I stood, waiting for someone to move, to say something. No one moved. I screwed my eyes shut and opened them and as I got used to the light, I realised that I had been mistaken, and that I was surrounded not by real people but by about two dozen shop window mannequins.

I walked up to one: Princess Diana hair, solid, peaked, angular cheeks, chipped glossy red lips. I had the strangest urge to kiss her.

I indulged, and imagined briefly that she kissed back, her lips soft and greasy with lipstick, cigarette smoke on her breath. I started, fell back against another mannequin, that collapsed, its arm falling off as it hit the floor. I righted myself, looked at her, stared into enameled eyes. She was just a dummy. I had imagined it.

And still the crashing and clanging and clicking and screeching behind the door. Still the wavering light.

I became afraid then, for it is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God. I confess: I sinned. I fled.

But tomorrow I shall find my courage. I will return there. I must.

Regards

Stephen

We go
for a walk in the snow. Together.
The change of scenery works like a charm
— the never-quite-started fight forgotten,
depressurized by the outside world and the cold
November night. And then we find it. It's lying,
twisted and broken, under the tree at the end of
the road. Something must have mauled it. I grimace,
swallow acid, and say I'll go back for a shovel. Put
it out of its misery.

She stays with it, kneeling in the snow. I look back as
I start back up the hill, and she's reaching out to it. By
the time I return, it's licking her hand with a long tongue,
blinking slowly. It looks like it'll make it after all.

She grins up at me, relieved and happy. Tomorrow,
she'll be back at work at the hospital. Tonight, she
doesn't have to watch anything die.

It comes back with us. A cardboard box under the kitchen
table, lined with an old blanket. Somewhere it can heal, and then be
on its way.

IT NEVER LEAVES.

✿ ✿ ✿

She calls it her little angel. Dotes on it. It eats better than we do and has a bed near the stove it never uses. Time after time I come back after a long haul to find it on my side of the bed, blinking at me with its damned grey eyes.

After the first time I make something of it, we fight. After that, when it's there, I sleep on the couch. I guess I understand — she needs something for company, when I'm away. Why shouldn't she have a pet?

AND THEN SHE GETS SICK.

I call in favors with the agency, swap dates around so I can spend Valentine's at home. I get back after dark, flowers behind my back, hoping to surprise her. She's lying unconscious on the couch, her little angel lapping at her fingertips.

The Emergency Room give us the news, once they manage to bring her round. Treatable, they say. They don't have to add the "but expensive."

I can't lose her, not my Becky. I work every shift offered, cross the country again and again, desperate to keep up with the bills. I get it into my head that if I can just drive fast enough, racing through the night, then I can catch her. Save her. Bring her back with me.

✿ ✿ ✿

It's not enough. I can tell, when I get back, exhausted from another long haul, that she's worse. The windows are all shut, and inside the house is like a sweat lodge in the summer heat. She says she's cold, still, and I see it in her eyes. She knows she doesn't have long.

I stay with her, holding her, ignoring the calls from the agency. Let them fire me.

I hold her as she leaves me. The ambulance gets there too late.

✿ ✿ ✿

I listen to their condolences, fill out their forms, and slowly go back to the dark, empty house. I sit, crying, on the edge of the bed. I can still smell her there.

THE DOOR OPENS. ANGEL PADS IN. IT BARES NEEDLE-SHARP FANGS,
AND I SEE WHAT IT REALLY LOOKS LIKE FOR THE FIRST TIME.

Appendix: World of Darkness Rules Revisions

In the years since the **World of Darkness Rulebook** was released, dozens of supplements and eight game lines have added to the Storytelling system. In the "blue book" line, as well as **Vampire**, **Werewolf**, **Mage**, **Promethean**, **Changeling**, **Hunter**, **Geist**, and **Mummy**, we've invented new mechanics to emphasize new themes and play styles. Some of those mechanics have been carried over to further books. **Werewolf** defined rules for spirits that were used in almost every line, **Hunter**'s tiers have been adopted by several other games, and the **Mirrors** supplement for World of Darkness introduced shards. The core Storytelling system, though, has remained the same.

The remaining part of this book is taken up with updates to Storytelling — the changes we feel, after eight years' experience, are needed to tighten the rules up for the intended setting going forward. This isn't a rejection of what's gone before, but the end result of our increasing familiarity with the Storytelling system and how it's used in play. Future World of Darkness books will take these rules revisions as their baseline, the same way the **World of Darkness Rulebook** has been the basis for all the supplements and game lines so far. Individual game lines may produce "chronicle" books similar to this one that build off these revisions to revise and update the rules found in those lines, but these are the rules revisions for use with mortal characters in chronicles that do not use one of the other cores.

Not only does God play dice, but he sometimes throws them where they cannot be seen.

– Stephen Hawking

Character Creation and Advancement

These rules supplement the character creation rules and replace the experience point rules in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**.

Attributes, Skills, and Merits

Purchasing the fifth dot in an Attribute, Skill, or Merit does not cost two points at character creation.

Note on Specialties

You may only purchase one instance of a given Specialty, although multiple Specialties may apply to a given roll. For example, Surgery and Cardiology may apply to a Medicine roll to perform heart surgery.

Aspirations

Determine Aspirations as part of the "Final Touches" stage of character creation. Choose three Aspirations for your character.

Aspirations are goals for your character. They're also statements to your Storyteller that show the types of stories you want to play through.

Aspirations are simple statements of intent; things that can be accomplished within the scope of the game you're playing. If you're playing a single session, be sure to choose realistic and short-term goals or goals that are already very close to fruition. If you're playing a single story arc that should span a few weeks of game

Sample Aspirations

Achieve a promotion at work

Make something that'll outlast me

Prove my loyalty to the team

Show myself I'm not cursed

Give something important to someone in need

Put myself in mortal danger

Forget responsibility and enjoy myself

Get a new car

Show restraint when tempted

Indulge my addiction

Say my last goodbyes

Volunteer at the cancer center

Meet a ghost

Interview my idol

Plant a garden

Show respect to my enemies

Establish a new identity

Learn what hurts shapeshifters

Have a one-night stand

Escape jail

Replace my broken guitar

Tell a long-kept secret

Say no without regrets

time, choose similar short-term goals, with one expressing longer-term interests. Even if you're set to play a game you intend on running a year or more, don't choose more than one very long-term goal. Ideally you should be able to accomplish at least one of these Aspirations per game session.

It's important to phrase Aspirations as active achievements or accomplishments. Do not phrase them as avoidances. "Do not betray my friends" isn't really an appropriate Aspiration. Instead, consider "Prove my loyalty to my friends." Phrasing as an action as opposed to a lack of action helps to determine when the Aspiration is met and when it should be rewarded.

When choosing Aspirations, use them to help to customize your character and give her identity and purpose outside of whatever plots the Storyteller cooks up. Find a balance between being general enough that the statements can be fulfilled realistically, and being specific enough to inform on your character's identity. Use the listed examples as a jumping off point.

In many World of Darkness games, we explore the strange and horrific. This can often mean visiting those things upon our characters. If you're interested in seeing certain things happen to your character, note them as Aspirations. Or if you expect something to occur, it would be worth noting it. If you know tonight's story will deal with an angry ghost with a penchant for eating human flesh and you never seem to roll well when your character's using her Medium Merit, it's worth using as an Aspiration. In that example, you might phrase it, "Fail in communicating with the dead." That way, while your character might fail in her efforts against the ghost, you'll be rewarded for achieving the Aspiration.

Storytellers, pay close attention to players' Aspirations. Aspirations are one of the best ways for a player to communicate her expectations for your stories. If you're planning a cold and

Sample Long-Term Aspirations

Put my daughter's ghost to rest

Take control of the company

Become a parent

Take down the mayor

Outlive my boss

Pass on my most important skill

Become fully independent

Bring an end to the Chosen of Mammon

Find the witch that cursed my family

Become independently wealthy

Master my chosen art

Become a vampire

Find my soul mate

Prove my father was wrong about me

Buy back our ancestral home

Show the world that fairies are real

Open a branch in three nations

Become psychic

Uncover my mother's killer's identity

Find an unknown biblical gospel

Prove my uncle wasn't insane

Discover the cure for mortality

heartless zombie-slaying mission full of action and suspense, but a character has contemplative, brooding, romantic, and cerebral Aspirations, think of how you might cater your intended story to his particular interests. You don't necessarily have to scrap your plans. Instead, note minor details and add Storyteller characters that can help the players fulfill their characters' Aspirations.

Changing Aspirations

For the first session of play, you might not have a good enough sense of your character to choose Aspirations. We recommend you give it a try anyway, and if during the first session the Aspirations you've chosen just don't fit with the way you're playing the character, change them. No harm, no foul.

After you've started playing the character, you might still find that an Aspiration becomes inappropriate or that it becomes impossible to fulfill. For example, a character might have a long-term Aspiration of "buy back our ancestral home." During the third chapter of the story, the home burns down. Buying it back is now impossible. Or, for a less dramatic twist on that premise, what if the character discovers that his family has been using that land to conduct unholy overtures and sacrifices to the God-Machine for decades. Maybe the character doesn't *want* the place anymore. What does that mean for the Aspiration?

If circumstances warrant it, a player can change Aspirations between chapters with the Storyteller's approval. This shouldn't become a way to ditch goals that aren't coming together quickly enough. Rather, it's an option to keep the character's goals in line with the natural flow of the story.

Virtue and Vice

The following rules update those found on pp. 100–105 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**.

Rather than selecting from the set lists of Virtues and Vices during character creation, the player should define one Virtue and one Vice for their character in conjunction with the Storyteller. The Virtue and Vice descriptions should follow the following criteria.

- Both Virtue and Vice should be adjectives that describe dominant personality traits. Physical descriptions ("unkempt," for example) are not appropriate.
- Similarly, traits that describe existing Attributes, Advantages, or Skills aren't suitable. "Strong" or "Composed" are not appropriate, for example.
- A character's Virtue should be something that gives her a great sense of self-actualization, but which she is often tempted to ignore. It's her higher calling, the personality trait that would be at the fore all the time if she didn't live in the World of Darkness. It should be both difficult to act upon and make her feel good when she does make the effort.
- A character's Vice, on the other hand, is a source of short-term comfort and a distraction from the world. Vice should be the easy way out, the sand he buries his head in, like a bully lashing out to avoid his own fear or an alcoholic drinking to forget.
- The adjectives chosen for Virtue and Vice should be different, but only within a single character — it's fine for one character in a chronicle to have "Ambitious" as a Virtue while another character has it as a Vice, for example.
- Virtue and Vice aren't linked to Integrity. You shouldn't pick "Moral" as your Virtue, "Immoral" as your Vice or similar adjectives. It should be possible to suffer breaking points (see p. 155) while acting in accordance with your Virtue.
- While characters aren't forced to keep the same Virtue or Vice for their entire lives, they shouldn't be transitory or easily-overcome. Both traits should be deep-seated, the core of the character as an individual.
- The entire troupe should agree on the Virtues and Vices in play. Because they're the primary means of recovering Willpower in-play, Vice conditions in particular signal how a player intends to roleplay their character repeatedly. If your intended Vice makes another player uncomfortable, you should pick a different one.

Virtue and Vice in Play

When a character acts in accordance with his Virtue or Vice during a scene, his sense of self is reinforced and his reserves of inner strength are refreshed.

If the Storyteller judges that your character's actions during a scene reflect his Vice, he regains one spent Willpower point. Note that in a change to the rules in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, acting on a Vice does **not** need to pose difficulty or risk to your character.

If the Storyteller judges that your character's actions during a scene reflected her Virtue while posing her difficulty or risk, she regains all spent Willpower. She may regain Willpower up to twice per chapter/game session in this way.

Modifying Virtues and Vices

Characters may change Virtue or Vice during play in response to life- or personality-altering events. One of the following conditions must be met.

- The character has lost four or more dots of Integrity after character creation.
- The character is merged with an ephemeral entity, spending time under the Claimed Condition.
- The character has become a supernatural creature.

Multiple Virtues or Vices

Although even the most immoral characters still have a Virtue and the most saintly still suffer the temptations of a Vice,

some characters identify so strongly with doing the selfish thing or risking themselves on behalf of others that they develop a second trait, as represented by one of the following Merits.

Virtuous (• •)

Effect: Your character is a light of good in the World of Darkness. She has two Virtues. The limitations of how many times she may refresh Willpower using a Virtue remain the same, but it's up to you which Virtue she uses each time.

Vice-Ridden (• •)

Effect: Your character is one of the worst examples of humanity in the World of Darkness. He has two Vices, although he may still only regain one Willpower per scene in which he indulges himself.

Example Virtues

The following Virtues are not intended to be an exhaustive list, but an aid to players in arriving at their own Virtue conditions.

Hopeful: Somehow, your character doesn't despair at the World of Darkness but remains optimistic, believing that everything will work out eventually. Regain Willpower when your character refuses to abandon hope, putting herself at risk in expectation of a better tomorrow.

Loving: Your character is defined by a great love, perhaps for an ideal or an institution, but usually for a person or group of people. Regain Willpower when your character puts himself in danger for the object of his love.

Honest: Your character's defining duty is to the truth. Although the World of Darkness puts every pressure on her to dissemble or tell white lies to protect others from the God-Machine, her sense of self is built on fundamental honesty. Regain Willpower when your character puts herself in danger by refusing to lie.

Humble: Your character doesn't want power or status. Even if he earns a position of authority, he sees himself as one of the guys. Putting himself above others would deny the importance of their lives. Regain Willpower when your character turns down the opportunity for power that would solve his problems.

Trustworthy: When your character makes a promise, she keeps it. Her sense of self relies on others being able to trust and believe in her. Regain Willpower when she keeps a promise, even only an implied one, despite keeping it putting her at risk.

Loyal: Your character is loyal to a group, possibly the other player's characters. His loyalty isn't blind — he's capable of seeing the flaws in whatever cause he's signed up to — but once given it's unshakable. Regain Willpower when he puts himself in danger by refusing to act against the group's interests.

Ambitious: Your character is going places. She has goals she wants to accomplish, and the drive to achieve them. In some people who don't deserve the accolades they seek, ambition is a Vice — for her it's a guiding mission. Regain Willpower when your character puts herself at risk for the sake of following her long-term goal.

Just: Your character is driven by a sense of fair play and justice — the desire to see everyone get what they deserve. He'll stick his neck out to make sure everyone is treated fairly, even if that acts against his own interests. That includes punishing those who deserve it and owning up to his own wrongdoing. Regain Willpower when your character's drive for Justice leaves his own goals half-done.

Peaceful: Your character is a pacifist in a dirty, dangerous world. Whether it's because of deeply-held religious beliefs, philosophical decision or simple lack of stomach for violence, he can't bring himself to hurt another human being. Regain Willpower when your character resolves a conflict that puts him at risk without the use of bloodshed.

Rate of Return

To pull the curtain back for a moment, Willpower is the Storytelling system's main "resource" mechanic. The various supernatural games (Vampire, for example) all add additional point-spend pools, and there's always Health, but Willpower is the one players spend when they *want to ensure their characters succeed*. It's a way of marking an action as significant within the fiction of the game, but it relies on the Storyteller granting enough Willpower gains that the players feel confident in spending.

Several game mechanics are predicated on this pattern of spending — for example, it's very much intentional that it takes Willpower to outright kill someone in most circumstances. We've adjusted the rate of Willpower return in this rules revision to reflect how often players should be spending it. For example, surrendering in combat grants a small Willpower bonus, and Vice no longer requires significant risk to the character.

On average, characters should regain a point of Willpower every few scenes, depending on how easily they fulfill their Vices. They'll be spending it quicker than that, but the diminishing resource until a character is exhausted is another part of the game, modeling the genre of increasingly tired and desperate investigators confronting the supernatural, making the full Willpower refreshes from Virtue special. A character shouldn't always fulfill their Virtue in a game session — once every few stories is enough in big dramatic moments. We removed the risk limit from Vice to allow Storytellers to keep characters "topped up" in service to the game. If your players over-spend, give them easy opportunities to fulfill Vice. Keep the small gains trickling in to prevent players from sitting on Willpower to their characters' detriment, and look for the right point to showcase Virtue.

Generous: Your character gains comfort from giving to others. She might be especially charitable or just be willing to lend possessions and aid to her friends, no questions asked. She's often taken for granted but she knows she makes a difference. Regain Willpower when your character has deprived herself of a vital resource through her generosity, putting herself at risk.

Righteous: Your character knows he walks in a corrupt world and he's angry about it. He's willing to confront hypocrisy and evil where he sees it, no matter who it pisses off, and to Hell with the consequences. At best, he's a defender of those the system — or the Infrastructure — grinds down. At worst, he's a stone-faced, uncompromising obstacle to the powerful, just waiting to be taken out. Regain Willpower when your character's refusal to let injustice go unopposed puts him in danger.

Courageous: Your character is simply straight-up brave. She gets a thrill from meeting and overcoming challenges, whether they're physical or social. She's not necessarily stubborn or even especially confident — true bravery is the willingness to carry on *despite* being afraid, not the absence of fear. Regain Willpower when your character's bravery causes or prolongs risk or danger to her.

Patient: Your character doesn't believe in rushing in half-cocked or unaware. She wants to plan every course of action and bides her time when investigating, waiting for situations to develop and play out for a while before she intervenes. The World of Darkness doesn't wait anyone, however, and her preparations are often overtaken by events. Regain Willpower when your character is caught wrong-footed because she was too busy planning to properly react to events.

Example Vices

As with the Virtue list, the following Vices are intended as a starting point for character creation, and not an exhaustive list.

Pessimistic: Your character has a tendency to wallow in bad situations, vocally bemoaning his lot and believing that everything is hopeless. Regain a Willpower point when he refuses to act in a scene because he believes anything he does will be fruitless.

Hateful: Your character is blinded by hatred for something — a person, a group, a belief or for the God-Machine itself. His antipathy is so strong it prevents him from seeing clearly and leads him into fruitless attacks on the source of his hatred. Regain a Willpower point when he spends time in a scene persecuting the object of his hate.

Deceitful: Your character can't tell the truth to save her life. She might be in the habit of telling little white lies or be covering up one major secret, but deception is the cornerstone of her personality. Regain a Willpower point when she successfully maintains a lie despite others having the opportunity to see through it.

Arrogant: For your character, self-image becomes self-aggrandizement. He defines himself by being "better" than other people, whether that's by lording his superiority in an Attribute or Skill, expressing dominance in a social situation or basking in other characters looking up to him. Regain a Willpower point when he takes an opportunity to express his greater worth relative to someone else.

Untrustworthy: Your character can't be relied on. She might mean well and even keep promises when it costs her nothing, but when the stakes are raised and there's a choice between her own self-interest and keeping her word, her word loses. Regain a Willpower point when your character breaks a promise for her own sake.

Treacherous: Your character's loyalties are defined by what's convenient, not for any sentiment towards loyalty itself. He will turn on allies if given a better offer or simply walk away from responsibilities if he finds them too difficult. Regain a Willpower point when your character betrays a person or group, but be very careful about using this Vice against other players' characters.

Ambitious: Your character wants to get ahead, above and beyond the respect that she receives for her actions. She craves advancement — not necessarily to lead, but in some measure of rank. Regain a Willpower point when your character attempts to increase her social standing instead of pursuing more useful activity.

Cruel: Your character has a mean streak, an instinct to twist the knife and inflict pain once he has someone at his mercy. He might habitually refuse surrender in combat or be the bastard boss who humiliates employees just because it makes him feel better. Regain a Willpower point when your character needlessly victimizes someone in his power.

Violent: Your character loves getting her way by means of physical force. She frequently Goes For Blood (see p. 195) to settle conflict. Regain a Willpower point when your character resolves a scene by using needless violence.

Greedy: It's not that he wants it more than anyone else, it's more that he *needs* it. Your character likes to hoard resources that might come in useful one day, rather than allowing others to use them now, minimizing his future risk at their expense. Regain a Willpower point when you deny another character an advantage by taking it yourself.

Corrupt: The world may be a system run by the God-Machine, but your character is an expert at getting what she wants out of systems. A habitual abuser of institutions, once she's in a position of authority she turns that office to furthering either her own ends or those of the highest bidder. Regain a Willpower point when your character misuses status or influence over a group on behalf of herself or another interested party.

Cowardly: Your character shies away from danger, going beyond simple caution to true cowardice. If danger *must* be faced, he would much rather someone else face it — regain a point of Willpower when your character persuades or tricks another character into a risky situation instead of doing it himself.

Hasty: Your character doesn't have the patience for long, convoluted plans, but prefers to improvise as she goes. She frequently enters situations she doesn't fully understand — but this Vice isn't the measure of how well she copes when rushing in, only that she acts before thinking. Being able to quickly adapt, as many Hasty characters are, is determined by the Wits Attribute. Regain a point of Willpower when your character forces a scene to start by taking decisive action.

Breaking Points

As explained on p. 184, the Morality trait has been replaced by Integrity. Integrity measures how well a character can cope with the traumatic and supernatural events of his life. A character stands to lose Integrity when she experiences a *breaking point*.

When a character performs certain actions or endures certain experiences, he might reach a breaking point. A breaking point (replacing a "sin" in the original rules) simply means that what a character has done or seen has outstripped his ability to rationalize or handle it.

A breaking point can fall into one of the following categories:

- The character performs an action that either violates his personal moral code *or* that is considered unacceptable in society.
- The character witnesses something traumatic, terrifying, or that rattles his understanding of the world.
- The character is the victim of a supernatural attack, whether physical, emotional, or mental.

Breaking points are somewhat subjective, obviously. A homicide detective with 30 years of experience in seeing dead bodies and hearing confessions of killers has a somewhat higher tolerance for human depravity than a sheltered 20-something in a middle-class liberal arts college. During character creation, it might be advisable for the Storyteller to come up with several hypothetical situations, so that the player can determine if, in her judgment, those situations would be breaking points.

Note that a breaking point is not necessarily something that the character considers wrong. A character might kill someone in a clear-cut, unambiguous case of self-defense, but the experience is probably still a breaking point, even if the player (and the character!) feels the act was entirely justified. Actions take a toll on the psyche, regardless of whether the actions were righteous.

During character creation, the player should answer the following five questions. Each question provides a breaking point for the character. If, during the character creation process (or the Network process described in Chapter One), additional breaking points become apparent to the player, add them to the list. There's no limit to how many breaking points a character can have. The list isn't a strict list anyway; the Storyteller can stipulate that a given occurrence is a breaking point regardless of whether or not it appears on the players' list. However, the better-defined your character's outlook is, the better your Storyteller's understanding will be of what constitutes a breaking point for that character.

- *What is the worst thing your character has ever done?* This doesn't have to be anything dastardly. If the worst thing your character ever did was steal money from his mother's purse and lie to cover it up, that's fine. What's important here is to consider something that

your character did that made him hate himself. The superlative "worst" is something that the character would apply. Choose a breaking point based on the answer to this question.

- *What is the worst thing your character can imagine* himself *doing?* We imagine ourselves in various scenarios to test our own self-image against a hypothetical situation. When children do it, it's called imaginative play, but it fills the same niche. What can you can character reasonably see himself doing, but still know that it would be wrong? Can your character imagine killing someone in self-defense? Torturing someone for information? How about robbing a store with a gun?

- *What is the worst thing your character can imagine* someone else *doing?* Of course, we all know that people are capable of some hideous atrocities. What tops your character's list? Serial murder? Rape? Torture? Spree killing? If your character is extremely sheltered or misanthropic, he might have a skewed view, here; he might hang on to some lofty, cerebral notion of "dishonor" or "betrayal" as the nadir of human behavior.

- *What has the character forgotten?* In the World of Darkness, it's next to impossible to grow up without any exposure to the supernatural. Decide what your character saw and forgot. Did she see a vampire take the form of mist and vanish? A man turn into a wolf? Maybe she caught a glimpse of the God-Machine through a door that should never have been propped open? Describe this scene in as much detail as you can. This is a breaking point that already occurred, but it helps set a benchmark for what your character would have to see in order to experience one now.

- *What is the most traumatic thing that has ever happened to the character?* No one goes through life with no trauma. Your character might have been mugged, beaten as a child, in a serious car accident, been kidnapped by a parent during a divorce, survived a life-threatening disease, attempted suicide, been attacked by a supernatural (or natural!) creature, or any number of other traumatic experiences. The goal here, again, isn't to make a traumatized character. It's to set a bar.

Examples

Below are three examples of defining breaking points for starting characters:

Matt is making a character for Michelle's God-Machine Chronicle. His character, Mike Dashell, is a divorcee who owns a small landscaping business. He sets about answering the questions to build Mike's breaking points.

- *What is the worst thing Mike has ever done?* Mike got divorced a few years back, but it wasn't because Mike did something wrong, Matt decides. Instead, Matt decides that Mike got into a bar fight a few years back and broke a beer bottle over a dude's head. The guy needed 18 stitches in his scalp and was covered in blood. That scared the shit out of Mike — he'd never hurt anyone like that. Matt jots down "Causing visible injury to another person" as a breaking point.

- *What is the worst thing Mike can imagine himself doing?* Here's a better place to involve the divorce, Matt thinks. Mike and his ex had a couple of good fights, and while they never turned physical, Mike had to calm himself down a couple of times. He knows, on some level, that it didn't turn physical because he deliberately kept himself under control. Matt notes "Lose temper and physically hurt a loved one" as a breaking point.

- *What is the worst thing Mike can imagine someone else doing?* Mike's a normal guy: he read the news, he sees what everyone sees. He can't wrap his brain around how someone picks up a gun and shoots kids. Matt writes down "witnessing the murder of children" as a breaking point.

- *What has Mike forgotten?* When Mike was at summer camp, he went outside the cabin one night to go the bathroom, which was across a path. He saw something sitting on the roof of the cabin. It was humanoid, but short and squat, and it was carrying something long and thing that wriggled like a fish. Mike looked at it, and then ran. In the morning, he thought he'd dreamed it, and by adulthood he'd forgotten it. Matt thinks about what kind of breaking point this might be, and writes down "seeing a supernatural creature lurking in the dark."

- *What is the most traumatic thing that ever happened to Mike?* The divorce was stressful, but not traumatic. Matt decides that it was after the bar fight — Mike was arrested, and very nearly charged with aggravated assault. The charges were dropped when the guy he hit left town and didn't bother to follow up with the complaint, but the experience of being through the system, being viewed as a criminal, took a toll on Mike. "Being arrested" is the breaking point.

Jennifer, making a character for the same chronicle, makes a former cop named Mallory. Mallory was thrown off the force after her drug habit got too big to hide. She's recovering, now, but still off the force (obviously).

- *What is the worst thing Mallory has ever done?* Mallory let a drug dealer go who had dirt on her. A week later, the drug dealer shot a cop and killed him. That moment really broke Mallory (though she didn't hit bottom until later). Jennifer takes "let a violent criminal go" as a breaking point.

- *What is the worst thing Mallory could imagine herself doing?* When she was using, Mallory would have done almost anything for a fix. One thing she was asked to do, but refused to do, was steal drugs from police evidence. To do that would have meant betraying everything she was as a cop, not to mention that it would have compromised existing drug cases. "Stealing from/tamper with evidence" is the breaking point.

- *What is the worst thing Mallory can imagine someone else doing?* As a cop, Mallory's seen a lot. One of the worst, though, was finding the body of a woman with broken glass under her eyelids. Mallory never found out who did that or why, but the image stuck with her. Jennifer writes down "witnessing torture involving eye trauma" as a breaking point.

- *What has Mallory forgotten?* When Mallory was in the academy, she went out and got drunk with a few of her fellow cadets. One of her cadets gave her a ride home, but when they got there, the cadet got out of the car, took a few steps into the street, and fell apart. Arms fell off, and head tumbled back and rolled away. Mallory woke up in her bed, surrounded by vomit, and learned that the cadet had left the program. She assumed it was all a dream. The breaking point, though, is "see a person divided into pieces."

- *What is the most traumatic thing Mallory has ever experienced?* It seems logical to go back to Mallory's drug problem. Mallory was fired from the force and she fought it all the way. The union got involved along with Internal Affairs, and her decision to let the drug dealer go nearly came out. "Having my secret revealed" is her fifth breaking point.

Charles is playing Ellie, a sheltered woman who sings in her church choir and works as a secretary for a medium-sized corporation. His character's breaking points are likely going to be a bit a more mild than the other two.

- *What is the worst thing Ellie has ever done?* Ellie had a crush on a girl in high school. She never acted on it — her conservative family would never have understood — but it consumed her attention for several months. She spread rumors about the other girl and bullied her in an effort to compensate, and the girl wound up leaving the school. The breaking point here is "deliberately harming another person's reputation" (the Storyteller asks if "feeling attracted to a woman" might also be a breaking point; Charles says he isn't sure, but he might add that later).

- *What is the worst thing Ellie can imagine herself doing?* Ellie sometimes thinks about the money the church takes in through donations and how it sits in the collection box for weeks with no one checking it. She'd never actually take it, but she thinks that maybe, just maybe, if she had a good enough reason, God would understand. Charles notes "steal from the church" as a breaking point.

- *What is the worst thing Ellie can imagine someone else doing?* Ellie is terrified when she watches the news. She sees stories of murder and violence and tries not to internalize it. The fear-mongering in the media works pretty well on her, though, because the worst thing she can imagine is violent assault *on her*. "Being physically attacked by another person" is the breaking point.

- *What has Ellie forgotten?* When Ellie was four, one of her playmates was yanked into a jungle gym by a pair of long, ugly arms. Ellie screamed, but her friend was back a moment later, apparently unharmed … except that he had forgotten Ellie's name. Ellie doesn't remember this instance anymore, but playgrounds still make her uneasy. "Seeing a supernatural creature abduct or attack a person" is her breaking point.

- *What is the most traumatic thing that ever happened to Ellie?* Charles decides that Ellie went to college and tried to rush a sorority, but during the hazing she was asked to drink a lot of alcohol and find her way, blindfolded, out of the house. The girls taped the blindfold on and Ellie fell down a flight of stairs trying to get it loose (she eventually lost a lot of her hair doing it). She never quite got over that feeling of powerlessness, and Charles notes that as "being blinded and/or drugged" as a breaking point.

Experience

These rules replace the **World of Darkness Rulebook** experience point system. They integrate with the Aspirations, Conditions, and dramatic failure systems in this book. They also shift character progression to a more mathematically linear path, removing costs that increase with higher ranks.

Throughout the game, Aspirations, Conditions, and certain other criteria allow you to "take a Beat." A Beat, in dramatic terms, is time enough for the audience to recognize a plot point or a change for a character. For our purposes, think of it as a unit of drama. Once you've taken five Beats, you gain an Experience.

One of these Experiences can be used to purchase one Merit dot or a Skill Specialty. Two of these buy one Skill dot. Four add an Attribute dot.

Criteria for Beats

Each time your character fulfills one of the following criteria, take a Beat. Certain criteria have limits: for example, you may only gain one Beat for a Dramatic Failure in a scene.

Experience Costs

Merit: 1 Experience per dot

Skill Specialty: 1 Experience

Skill: 2 Experiences per dot

Attribute: 4 Experiences per dot

Integrity: 3 Experiences per dot

Willpower: 1 Experience per dot

- If your character fulfills an Aspiration, take a Beat. At the end of the game session, replace the Aspiration. Choosing a new Aspiration is an excellent activity between games or to handle before the next game session.
- Some rolls and powers may impart Conditions on your character. Each Condition has criteria for resolution, usually requiring a difficult choice for the character. If resolved, take a Beat. You may only take one Beat for a Condition in a given scene.
- Once per scene, if you fail a roll, you may opt to take a Dramatic Failure instead. If you do so, take a Beat. Certain Conditions can have you take an automatic failure as part of their resolutions; you may make these failures Dramatic and take two Beats.
- If your character takes damage in one of her last (rightmost) Health boxes, take a Beat.
- The Storyteller can choose to award a Beat for any exceptional example of roleplaying, tactics or character development. If this involves more than one character, all of them should receive the Beat.
- At the end of any game session, take a Beat.

Advanced Characters

For more advanced starting characters, the Storyteller can give Experiences as part of character creation.

Seasoned Characters: 5 Experiences
Expert Characters: 10 Experiences
Heroic Characters: 15 Experiences

Merits

This section replaces the Merits section in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**. It includes all of the Merits from that book (though the systems have been revised in many case), as well as various Merits from other World of Darkness books. If a Merit from the **World of Darkness Rulebook** is not reprinted here, it was deliberately omitted because the Merit was redundant or has been reworked into something else.

Style Merits

Merits marked as Style Merits allow access to specialized maneuvers. Each maneuver is a prerequisite for the next in its sequence. So if a Style Merit has a three-dot maneuver and a four-dot maneuver, you must purchase the three-dot version before accessing the four-dot.

Sanctity of Merits

While Merits represent things within the game and your character, they're really an out-of-character resource, a function of the character creation and advancement mechanics. These Merits often represent things that can go away. Retainers can be killed. Mentors can get impatient and stop dispensing wisdom. So while Merits may represent temporary facets of your character, Merit points continue to exist. At the end of any chapter where your character has lost Merits, you can replace them with another Merit.

For example, your character has three-dot Retainer, a loyal dog, and an eldritch horror eats that dog out in the woods. At the end of that chapter, you may re-allocate those Retainer dots. You may choose to purchase Safe Place, to reflect your character's choice to bunker down from the monster, and perhaps Direction Sense (one dot) so your character is less likely to get lost in those woods in the future. When the character leaves his Safe Place, you can replace those two dots with something else.

When replacing a Merit, consider what makes sense in the story. Pursue the new Merit during the course of the chapter if possible, and make the new tie something less superficial than a dot or two on a sheet.

With Storyteller permission, you may "cash in" a Merit voluntarily and replace it with Experiences. This should not be used as a way to purchase a Merit, take advantage of its benefits, and then cash it out for something else. If a Merit has run its course and no longer makes sense for your character, however, you may use those points elsewhere.

Merits such as Ambidextrous, Eidetic Memory and the various Fighting Style Merits reflect abilities and knowledge that your character has and therefore shouldn't be cashed in or replaced. Then again, if an Ambidextrous character loses his left hand ....

Optional Rule: Group Beats

Under these rules, players who understand the rules and work toward resolving Conditions and Aspirations will receive the most Beats and therefore Experiences. While your troupe may appreciate this reward system for learning and using the rules, some players would rather just play their characters and only glance down at the character sheet when the Storyteller asks them to roll something. Either approach is fine, but if you have a mix of the two approaches, characters can advance in a lopsided fashion.

One solution is for all Beats to go into a pot (use coins or beads or spare dice to represent them). At the end of the chapter, Beats get divided evenly among the players. This way, all players are encouraged to help one another realize Aspirations, resolve Conditions and otherwise take Beats. This should help the players work as a team, even if the characters don't necessary need to.

3rd July 2012

Dear Lucy,

So I returned. It took two days, but I returned, and I found myself, almost as in a dream, at that door in room 913, that threshold.

I stood there this time for what must have been hours. I was not afraid, nor really was I curious. It was not a thing I wanted to do, or did not want to do. Just a thing that I was going to do. I felt that I had done this before.

This door opened silently.

I was dazzled by what appeared to be a spotlight, swinging across the corridor, side by side, occasionally blocked by something swinging just above my head. I stumbled in a few steps, arm over my face, and leaned against one side of what I made out to be a corridor, shod in rusty metal. I peered along its length. It seemed to go on for miles, far beyond the inside of the building, certainly. I was surrounded by machinery — wires that throbbed with electricity, roaring pipes, swinging chains. I looked up.

Someone's bare foot brushed against my face. I jumped back, looked up. A rail stretched into the depths of the corridor; along its length dozens of apparatuses hung, from each of which dangled a human being, men and women, apparently suspended by a riveted casing that covered the head. Cables and pipes occasionally wrapped round twitching limbs, invading orifices. I stepped forward, fascinated by the beauty of it, watching a trickle of liquid running down a tube from a man's penis, around his leg, and up into the box from which the whole affair was suspended.

I fell to my knees then, and sang a hymn of praise, and sang in tongues at the wonders I had seen, for I had entered the God-Machine. I do not know how long I was there, weeping and singing, my hands clasped together, before the Angel found me.

The Angel folded itself from the metal of the machine that throbbed at my back, all in clockwork and hydraulics, its eyes indicator dials, its fingers cruel, beautiful hypodermic needles, and it said to me, "Why are you here?"

"I came to find the God-Machine," I said, "To worship it."

"Why are you here?" the Angel said again.

I did not know.

The Angel asked a third time. "Why are you here?"

Something shifted inside my head then, something else, and I said, "I exist to obey."

And I did not want to obey then, nor was I forced to obey. I could only obey.

The Angel seemed to nod, and reached for me with its needlefingers and I closed my eyes and I felt the exquisite pain in my throat, and my mind grew calm and my eyes were heavy and I fell deeply asleep.

I awoke on a chair made of riveted metal in the middle of a room that was relatively quiet, compared with the noise of the room I had entered before, which I now knew was called the Rack. I both did and did not know where I was; the room was perfectly square, and had no doors, and was lit by a red lightbulb on a simple fitting, dangling from the ceiling. I had a tremendous sensation of depth, as if I was infinitely far beneath the deepest surface. The sounds of machinery were far away. They lulled me to sleep again.

I woke up once more and now I was standing up and could not move. My arms and legs were so very stiff. I could not even move my eyes. A bald-headed woman with metal sockets over her scabby, ill-kept scalp and empty, glazed eyes entered my field of view. She reached forward and lifted my head off my shoulders, and carried me helpless through a door that had not been there before through a short corridor into a circular room. She put my head down on a table. I could not scream, only watch what I could through the vantage point of what might have been a table top.

The woman walked from the table to what looked like a faceless mannequin body. She began to work at the rough-hewn face with a sort of chisel. I might have been there days or weeks, but I could not lose consciousness, or move or even blink, only watch as with reference to my head on the table, the woman made the mannequin's face look more and more like my own. When the process was complete, the woman picked up my head, my face obscured under an arm clad in thick, filthy fabric, and put it in a box of some sort. Then she went away. I heard a whirring motor noise, and caught a glimpse of a circular saw in the woman's hands as she brought it to my forehead. I passed out again then.

I woke up the third time back in the room with no doors, on the chair. The woman was there. I could move normally again.

"You are awake," she said. I became aware that a thick bundle of cables ran from what looked like a socket inside the back of her head and into a collection of terminals on the wall.

"What did you do?" I said.

"You came back," she said. "Before it was time."

"I don't understand," I said.

"You were not supposed to come back. You must be shown a thing," she said. "Stand."

I stood up. Turning around, I saw the wall of the room fold out of itself and by some complex mechanical turns and shifts become the Angel, or perhaps another Angel exactly the same, leaving behind an archway. The Angel stood aside. I walked through into another chamber, long and I think oval-shaped. Several more bald-headed people, each connected to the wall by the same arrangement of cables running into their skulls, stood, working on an assembly line, one attaching a component to an object, the next removing a component, the next removing a different one again, the next adding another, and so on, a different process for each object, so that the unidentifiable objects on the assembly line bore no relation to the objects that had entered the line. I realised that the Angel was standing behind me.

"Observe the third man."

I looked at the third man on the assembly line. Although devoid of hair, his skin scabby and pale, I recognised him. As Stephen Escher.

"I don't understand," I said.

"The third man was Stephen Escher. It suited the Purpose to remove the man's thoughts and memories after using the flesh, and to create a tool the better to obey the Purpose."

I realised that this was true. I had been here before, more than once.

"And I came back."

"You are the ninth. You have never left here."

I realised that this was also true and that I was new and that remembering what the last mannequin had experienced did not make me the same.

"So when I leave I will forget this place?"

"You will remember. It is the Purpose."

"What is the Purpose?"

"It is the Purpose."

"It is the Purpose," I repeated. And they let me go. And it is and everything is good and fine and nothing you can do and no objection you can raise will touch me because I am not me and you can never tell me otherwise or prove to anyone else, because it's not as if I will be sending this letter to you anyway. What would be the point otherwise?

These things are all interconnected. The man I set to work calculating for me, I think he is significant. No coincidences exist. I will be rich. I was made to be rich.

Yours as ever

Stephen

Mental Merits

Area of Expertise (•)

Prerequisite: Resolve • • and one Skill Specialty

Effect: Your character is uncommonly specialized in one area. Choose a Specialty to assign to this Merit. Forgo the +1 bonus afforded by a Specialty in exchange for a +2.

Common Sense (• • •)

Effect: Your character has an exceptionally sound and rational mind. With a moment's thought, she can weigh potential courses of action and outcomes. Once per chapter as an instant action, you may ask the Storyteller one of the following questions about a task at hand or course of action. Roll Wits + Composure. If you succeed, the Storyteller must answer to the best of her ability. If you fail, you get no answer. With an exceptional success, you can ask an additional question.

- What is the worst choice?
- What do I stand to lose here?
- What's the safest choice?
- Am I chasing a worthless lead?

Danger Sense (• •)

Effect: Your character's reflexes are honed to the point where nothing's shocking. You gain a +2 modifier on reflexive Wits + Composure rolls for your character to detect an impending ambush.

Direction Sense (•)

Effect: Your character has an innate sense of direction and is always aware of her location in space. She always knows which direction she faces and never suffers penalties to navigate or find her way.

Eidetic Memory (• •)

Effect: Your character recalls events and details with pinpoint accuracy. You do not have to make rolls for your character to remember past experiences. When making Intelligence + Composure (or relevant Skill) rolls to recall minute facts from swaths of information, take a +2 bonus.

Encyclopedic Knowledge (• •)

Effect: Choose a Skill. Due to an immersion in academia, pop culture, or obsession with a hobby, your character has collected limitless factoids about the topic, even if she has no dots in the Skill.

You can make an Intelligence + Wits roll at any time your character is dealing with her area of interest. On a successful roll, the Storyteller must give a relevant fact or detail about the issue at hand. Your character knows this fact, but you must explain within the scope of your character's background why she knows it. For example, for Encyclopedic Knowledge: Medicine: "Do you remember that time on that show, when the doctor said it doesn't manifest before puberty?"

Eye for the Strange (• •)

Prerequisite: Resolve • •, Occult •

Effect: While your character does not necessarily possess a breadth of knowledge about the supernatural, she knows the otherworldly when she sees it. By perusing evidence she can determine whether something comes from natural or supernatural origin. Roll Intelligence + Composure. With a success, the Storyteller must tell you if the scene has a supernatural cause and provide one piece of found information that confirms the answer. With an exceptional success, she must give you a bit of supernatural folklore that suggests what type of creature caused the problem. If the problem was mundane, an exceptional success gives an ongoing +2 to all rolls to investigate the event, due to her redoubled certainty in its natural causation.

Fast Reflexes (• to • • •)

Prerequisite: Wits • • • or Dexterity • • •

Effect: Your character's reflexes impress and astound; she's always fast to react. +1 Initiative per dot.

Good Time Management (•)

Prerequisite: Academics •• or Science ••

Effect: Your character has vast experience managing complex tasks, keeping schedules, and meeting deadlines. When taking an extended action, halve the time required between rolls.

Holistic Awareness (•)

Effect: Your character is skilled at non-traditional healing methods. While scientific minds might scoff, she can provide basic medical care with natural means. She knows what herbs can stem an infection and what minerals will stave off a minor sickness. Unless your patient suffers wound penalties from lethal or aggravated wounds, you do not need traditional medical equipment to stabilize and treat injuries. With access to woodlands, a greenhouse, or other source of diverse flora, a Wits + Survival roll allows your character to gather all necessary supplies.

Indomitable (••)

Prerequisite: Resolve •••

Your character possesses an iron will. The powers of the supernatural have little bearing on her behavior. She can stand up to a vampire's mind control, a witch's charms, or a ghost's gifts of fright. Any time a supernatural creature uses a power to influence your character's thoughts or emotions, add two dice to the dice pool to contest it. If the roll is resisted, instead subtract two dice from the monster's dice pool. Note that this only affects mental influence and manipulation from a supernatural origin. A vampire with a remarkable Manipulation + Persuasion score is just as likely to convince your character to do something using mundane tricks.

Interdisciplinary Specialty (•)

Prerequisite: Skill at ••• or higher with a Specialty

Effect: Choose a Specialty that your character possesses when you purchase this Merit. You can apply the +1 from that Specialty on any Skill with at least one dot, provided it's justifiable within the scope of the fiction. For example, a doctor with a Medicine Specialty in Anatomy may be able to use it when targeting a specific body part with Weaponry, but could not with a general strike.

Language (•)

Effect: Your character is skilled with an additional language beyond her native tongue. Choose a language each time you buy this Merit. Your character can speak, read, and write in that language.

Library (• to •••)

Effect: Your character has access to a plethora of information about a given topic. When purchasing this Merit, choose a Mental Skill. The Library covers that purview. On any extended roll involving the Skill in question, add the dots in this Merit.

This Merit can be purchased multiple times to reflect different Skills. Its benefits can be shared by various characters with permission.

Meditative Mind (•, ••, or ••••)

Effect: Your character's meditation is far more fulfilling than for other characters. With the one-dot version of this Merit, the character does not suffer environment penalties to mediation (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 51), even from wound penalties.

With the two-dot version, when the character has successfully meditated, she gains a +3 bonus on any Resolve + Composure rolls during the same day as she's steeled herself against the things of the world that would shake her foundation.

At the four-dot level, she only needs a single success to gain the benefits of meditation for the day, instead of the normal four.

Multilingual (•)

Effect: Your character has a strong affinity for language acquisition. Each time you purchase this Merit, choose two languages. Your character can speak conversationally in those languages. With an Intelligence + Academics roll, she may also read enough of the language to understand context.

If you purchase the Language Merit for either of these languages, replace the Multilingual language. For example, if you have Multilingual (French, Italian), and purchase Language: Italian, you may choose to take Multilingual (French, Portuguese).

Patient (•)

Effect: Your character knows how to pace herself and take the time to do the job right the first time. When taking an extended action, you may make two additional rolls above what your Attribute + Skill would allow.

Professional Training (• to •••••)

Effect: Your character has extensive training in a particular profession, which offers distinct advantages in a handful of fields. When choosing this Merit, choose or create a Profession for your character (see the sidebar). Mark the two Asset Skills on your character sheet. The advantages of Professional Training relate directly to those Asset Skills.

•	Networking: At the first level of Professional Training, your character builds connections within her chosen field. Take two dots of Contacts relating to that field.
••	Continuing Education: With repeated efforts in her field of choice, your character tends toward greater successes. When making a roll with her Asset Skills, she benefits from the 9-again quality.

• • • Breadth of Knowledge: Due to advancement in her field, she's picked up a number of particular bits of information and skill unique to her work. Choose a third Asset Skill and take two Specialties in your character's Asset Skills.

• • • • On the Job Training: With the resources at her disposal, your character has access to extensive educational tools and mentorship available. Take a Skill dot in an Asset Skill. Whenever you purchase a new Asset Skill dot, take a Beat.

• • • • • The Routine: With such extensive experience in her field, her Asset Skills have been honed to a fine edge and she's almost guaranteed at least a marginal success. Before rolling, spend a Willpower point to apply the rote action quality to an Asset Skill. This allows you to reroll all the failed dice on the first roll.

Tolerance for Biology (•)

Prerequisite: Resolve • • •

Effect: Most people turn away at the sight of blood, other bodily fluids, or exotic biology. Your character has seen enough that nothing turns her stomach. When other characters must resist shock or physical repulsion from the disgusting and morbid, your character stands her ground. You do not need to make Composure, Stamina, or Resolve rolls to withstand the biologically strange. This doesn't mean she's immune to fear; she's just used to nature in all its nasty forms.

Trained Observer (• or • • •)

Prerequisite: Wits • • • or Composure • • •

Effect: Your character has spent years in the field, catching tiny details and digging for secrets. She might not have a better chance of finding things, but she has a better chance of finding *important* things. Any time you make a Perception roll (usually Wits + Composure), you benefit from the 9-again quality. With the three-dot version, you get 8-again.

Physical Merits

Ambidextrous (• • •)

Effect: Your character does not suffer the –2 penalty for using his off-hand in combat or to perform other actions. *Available only at character creation.*

Crack Driver (• • or • • •)

Prerequisite: Drive • • •

Effect: Your character's an ace at the wheel and nothing shakes her concentration. So long as she's not taking any actions other than driving (and keeping the car safe), add her Composure to any rolls to drive. Any rolls to disable her vehicle suffer a penalty equal to her Composure as well. With the three-dot version, she may take a Drive action reflexively once per turn.

Demolisher (• to • • •)

Prerequisite: Strength • • • or Intelligence • • •

Effect: Your character has an innate feel for the weak points in objects. When damaging an object, she ignores one point of the object's Durability per dot in this Merit.

Professions

Here is a list of the most common Professions, and their Asset Skills. Feel free to create your own to suit the needs of your characters and stories. Also, you may adapt the Asset Skills as fit. For example, your police officer might be more proficient with Politics and Intimidation than Firearms and Streetwise.

Profession	Asset Skills
Academic	Academics, Science
Artist	Crafts, Expression
Athlete	Athletics, Medicine
Cop	Streetwise, Firearms
Criminal	Larceny, Streetwise
Detective	Empathy, Investigation
Doctor	Empathy, Medicine
Engineer	Crafts, Science
Hacker	Computer, Science
Hit Man	Firearms, Stealth
Journalist	Expression, Investigation
Laborer	Athletics, Crafts
Occultist	Investigation, Occult
Politician	Politics, Subterfuge
Professional	Academics, Persuasion
Religious Leader	Academics, Occult
Scientist	Investigation, Science
Socialite	Politics, Socialize
Stuntman	Athletics, Drive
Survivalist	Animal Ken, Survival
Soldier	Firearms, Survival
Technician	Crafts, Investigation
Thug	Brawl, Intimidation
Vagrant	Streetwise, Survival

Double Jointed (• •)

Prerequisite: Dexterity • • •

Effect: Your character might have been a contortionist or spent time practicing yoga. She can dislodge joints when need be. She automatically escapes from any mundane bonds without a roll. When grappled, subtract her Dexterity from any rolls to overpower her as long as she's not taking any aggressive actions.

Fleet of Foot (• to • • •)

Prerequisite: Athletics • •

Effect: Your character is remarkably quick and runs far faster than her frame suggests. She gains +1 Speed per dot; anyone pursuing her suffers a –1 per dot to any foot chase rolls.

Giant (• • •)

Effect: Your character is massive. She's well over six feet tall and crowds part when she approaches. She's Size 6 and gains +1 Health. *Available only at character creation.*

Drawback: Buying clothing is a nightmare. Fitting in small spaces is difficult at best.

Hardy (• to • • •)

Prerequisite: Stamina • • •

Effect: Your character's body goes further than it rightfully should. Add the dots in this Merit to any rolls to resist disease, poison, deprivation, unconsciousness, or suffocation.

Iron Stamina (• to • • •)

Prerequisites: Stamina • • • or Resolve • • •

Effect: Each dot eliminates a negative modifier (on a one-for-one basis) when resisting the effects of fatigue or injury. For example: a character with Iron Stamina • • is able to ignore up to a –2 modifier brought on by fatigue. The Merit also counteracts the effects of wound penalties. So, if all of your character's Health boxes are filled (which normally imposes a –3 penalty to his actions) and he has Iron Stamina •, those penalties are reduced to –2. This Merit cannot be used to gain positive modifiers for actions, only to cancel out negative ones.

Parkour (• to • • • • •, Style)

Prerequisites: Dexterity • • •, Athletics • •

Your character is a trained and proficient free-runner. Free-running is the art of moving fluidly through urban environments with complex leaps, bounds, running tricks, and vaulting. This is the type of sport popularized in modern action films, where characters are unhindered by fences, walls, construction equipment, cars, or anything else the city puts in their ways.

Flow (•): Your character reacts instinctively to any obstacles with leaps, jumps, and scaling techniques. When in a foot chase, subtract your Parkour from the successes needed to pursue or evade. Ignore environmental penalties to Athletics rolls equal to your Parkour rating.

Cat Leap (• •): Your character falls with outstanding grace. When using a Dexterity + Athletics roll to mitigate damage from falling (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 179), your character gains one automatic success. Additionally, add your Parkour rating to the threshold of damage that can be removed through this roll. Parkour will not mitigate damage from a terminal velocity fall.

Wall Run (• • •): When climbing, your character can run upward for some distance before having to traditionally climb. Without rolling, your character scaled 10 feet + five feet per dot of Athletics as an instant action, rather than the normal 10 feet.

Expert Traceur (• • • •): Parkour has become second nature for your character. By spending a Willpower point, you may designate one Athletics roll to run, jump, or climb as a rote action (reroll all failed dice once). On any turn you use this ability, you may not apply your character's Defense to oncoming attacks.

Freeflow (• • • • •): Your character's Parkour is now muscle memory. She can move without thinking in a zen-like state. The character must successfully meditate (see p. 51 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**) in order to establish Freeflow. Once established, your character is capable of taking Athletics actions reflexively once per turn. By spending a point of Willpower on an Athletics roll in a foot chase, gain three successes instead of three dice.

Quick Draw (•)

Prerequisites: Wits • • •, a Specialty in the weapon or fighting style chosen

Effect: Choose a Specialty in Weaponry or Firearms when you purchase this Merit. Your character has trained enough in that weapon or style that pulling the weapon is her first reflex. Drawing or holstering that weapon is considered a reflexive action, and can be done any time her Defense applies.

Sleight of Hand (• •)

Prerequisite: Larceny • • •

Effect: Your character can pick locks and pockets without even thinking about it. She can take one Larceny-based instant action reflexively in a given turn. As well, her Larceny actions go unnoticed unless someone is trying specifically to catch her.

Small-Framed (• •)

Effect: Your character is diminutive. She's not even five feet tall and it's easy to walk into her without noticing. She's Size 4 and thus has one fewer Health box. She gains +2 to any rolls to hide or go unnoticed. This bonus might apply any time being smaller would be an advantage, such as crawling through smaller spaces. *Available only at character creation.*

Drawback: In addition to the lower Health, your character might be overlooked or not taken seriously by some people.

Social Merits

Many of these Merits use the Social rules (p 188), influencing Doors and other facets of the interaction.

Allies (• to • • • • •)

Effect: Allies help your character. They might be friends, employees, associates, or people your character has blackmailed. Each instance of this Merit represents one type of ally. This could be in an organization, a society, a clique, or an individual. Examples include the police, a secret society, crime, unions, local politics, and the academic community. Each purchase has its own rating. Your character might have Allies (Masons) • •, Allies (Carter Crime Family) • • •, and Allies (Catholic Church) •.

Each dot represents a layer of influence in the group. One dot would constitute small favors and passing influence. Three could offer considerable influence, such as the overlooking of a misdemeanor charge by the police. Five dots stretch the limits of the organization's influence, as its leaders put their own influence on the line for the character. This could include things such as massive insider training or fouling up a felony investigation. No matter the request, it has to be something that organization could accomplish.

The Storyteller assigns a rating between one and five to any favor asked. A character can ask for favors that add up to her Allies rating without penalty in one chapter. If she extends her influence beyond that, her player must roll Manipulation + Persuasion + Allies, with a penalty equal to the favor's rating. If the roll is successful, the group does as requested. Failed or successful, the character loses a dot of Allies. This dot may return at the end of the chapter (see Sanctity of Merits, on p. 158.) On a dramatic failure, the organization resents her and seeks retribution. On an exceptional success, she doesn't lose the dot.

One additional favor a character can ask of her Allies is to block another character's Allies, Contacts, Mentor, Retainer, or Status (if she knows the character possesses the relevant Merit). The rating is equal to the Merit dots blocked. As before, no roll is necessary unless the target's Merit exceeds the character's Allies. If the block succeeds, the character cannot use the Merit during the same chapter.

Alternate Identity (•, • •, or • • •)

Effect: Your character has established an alternate identity. The level of this Merit determines the amount of scrutiny it can withstand. At one dot, the identity is superficial and unofficial. For example, your character uses an alias with a simple costume and adopts an accent. She hasn't established the necessary paperwork to even approach a bureaucratic background check, let alone pass. At two dots, she's supported her identity with paperwork and identification. It's not liable to stand up to extensive research, but it'll turn away private investigators and internet hobbyists. At three dots, the identity can pass thorough inspection. The identity has been deeply entrenched in relevant databases, with subtle flourishes and details to make it seem real even to trained professionals.

The Merit also reflects time the character has spent honing the persona. At one or two dots, she gains a +1 to all Subterfuge rolls to defend the identity. At three dots, she gains +2.

This Merit can be purchased multiple times. Each time representing an additional identity.

Anonymity (• to • • • • •)

Prerequisites: Cannot have Fame.

Effect: Your character lives off the grid. This means purchases must be made with cash or falsified credit cards. She eschews identification. She avoids any official authoritative influence in her affairs. Any attempts to find her by paper trail suffer a –1 penalty per dot purchased in this Merit.

Drawback: Your character cannot purchase the Fame Merit. This also may limit Status purchases, if the character cannot provide sufficient identification for the roles she wishes to take.

Barfly (• •)

Prerequisite: Socialize • •

Effect: Your character is a natural in the bar environment and can procure an open invitation wherever she wishes. Whereas most characters would require rolls to blend into social functions they don't belong in, she doesn't; she belongs. Rolls to identify her as an outsider suffer her Socialize as a penalty.

Contacts (• to • • • • •)

Effect: Contacts provide your character with information. Each dot in this Merit represents a sphere or organization with which the character can garner information. For example, a character with Contacts • • • might have Bloggers, Drug Dealers, and Financial Speculators for connections. Contacts do not provide services, only information. This may be face-to-face, email, by telephone, or even by séance in some strange instances.

Garnering information via Contacts requires a Manipulation + Social Skill roll, depending on the method the character uses. This Merit can either be used generally, in which case only the field is necessary, or it can be personalized by identifying an individual within the field whom the character can call. If using the latter method, the Storyteller should give a bonus or penalty, dependent on how relevant the information is to that particular Contact, whether accessing the information is dangerous, and if the character has maintained good relations or done favors for the Contact. These modifiers should range from –3 to +3 in most cases. If successful, the Contact provides the information.

One use of a Contact is to dig dirt on another character. A Contact can find another character's Social Merits and any relevant Conditions (Embarrassing Secret is a prime example.)

A character can have more than five Contacts, but the Merit's rating is limited to five, for the purposes of Allies blocking.

Fame (• to •••)

Effect: Your character is recognized within a certain sphere for a certain skill, or because of some past action, or just a stroke of luck. This can mean favors and attention, but it can also mean negative attention and scrutiny. When choosing the Merit, define what your character is known for. As a rule of thumb, one dot means local recognition or reputation within a confined subculture. Two dots means regional recognition by a wide swath of people. Three dots means worldwide recognition to anyone who might have been exposed to the source of the fame. Each dot adds a die to any Social rolls among those who are impressed by your character's celebrity.

Drawback: Any rolls to find or identify the character enjoy a +1 bonus per dot of the Merit. If the character has Alternate Identity, she can mitigate this drawback. A character with Fame cannot have the Anonymity Merit.

Fast-Talking (• to •••••, Style)

Prerequisites: Manipulation •••, Subterfuge ••

Your character talks circles around listeners. She speaks a mile a minute and often leaves her targets reeling, but nodding in agreement.

Always Be Closing (•): With the right leading phrases, your character can direct a mark to say what she wants, when she wants. This trips the mark into vulnerable positions. When a mark contests or resists your character's Social interactions, apply a –1 to their Resolve or Composure.

Jargon (••): Your character confuses her mark using complex terminology. You may apply one relevant Specialty to any Social roll you make, even if the Specialty isn't tied to the Skill in use.

Devil's Advocacy (•••): Your character often poses arguments she doesn't agree with in order to challenge a mark's position and keep him from advancing discussion. You can reroll one failed Subterfuge roll per scene.

Salting (••••): Your character can position herself so a mark pursues a non-issue or something unimportant to her. When your character opens a Door using conversation (Persuasion, Subterfuge, Empathy, etc.) you may spend a Willpower point to immediately open another Door.

The Nigerian Scam (•••••): Your character can take advantage of her mark's greed and zeal. When the mark does particularly well, it's because your character was there to set him up and to subsequently tear him down. If a target regains Willpower from his Vice while your character is present, you may immediately roll Manipulation + Subterfuge to open a Door, regardless of the interval or impression level.

Fixer (••)

Prerequisite: Contacts ••, Wits •••

Effect: Your character is somebody that knows people. She can not only get in touch with the right people to do a job, but she can get them at the best possible prices. When hiring a service (see p.234), reduce the Availability score of the service by one dot.

Hobbyist Clique (••)

Prerequisite: Membership in a clique. All members must possess this Merit and the chosen Skill at ••+

Effect: Your character is part of a group of hobbyists that specialize in one area, as represented by a Skill. It may be a book club, a coven, a political party, or any other interest. When the group's support is available, you benefit from the 9-again quality on rolls involving the group's chosen Skill. As well, the clique offers two additional dice on any extended actions involving that Skill.

Drawback: This Merit requires upkeep. You must attend at least monthly, informal meetings to maintain the benefits of Hobbyist Clique.

Inspiring (•••)

Prerequisite: Presence •••

Effect: Your character's passion inspires those around her to greatness. With a few words, she can redouble a group's confidence or move them to action.

Make a Presence + Expression roll. A small clique of listeners levies a –1 penalty, a small crowd a –2, and a large crowd a –3. Listeners gain the Inspired Condition. The character may not use this Merit on herself.

Iron Will (••)

Prerequisite: Resolve ••••

Effect: Your character's resolve is unwavering. When spending Willpower to contest or resist in a Social interaction, you may substitute your character's Resolve for the usual Willpower bonus. If the roll is contested, roll with 8-again.

Mentor (• to •••••)

Effect: This Merit gives your character a teacher that provides advice and guidance. He acts on your character's behalf, often in the background and sometimes without your character's knowledge. While Mentors can be highly competent, they almost always want something in return for their services. The dot rating determines the Mentor's capabilities, and to what extent he'll aid your character.

When establishing a Mentor, determine what the Mentor wants from your character. This should be personally important to him and it should reflect on the dot rating chosen. A one-dot Mentor might be incapable of dealing with modern society and want to live vicariously through your character. This might mean coming to him and telling stories of her exploits. A five-dot Mentor would want something astronomical, such as an oath to procure an ancient, cursed artifact that may or may not exist, in order to prevent a prophesized death.

Choose three Skills the Mentor possesses. You can substitute Resources for one of these Skills. Once per session, the character may ask her Mentor for a favor. The favor must involve one of those Skills or be within the scope of his Resources. The Mentor commits to the favor (often asking for a commensurate favor in return); and if a roll is required, the Mentor is automatically considered to have successes equal to

his dot rating. Alternately, the player may ask the Storyteller to have the Mentor act on her character's behalf, without her character knowing or initiating the request.

Mystery Cult Initiation (• to • • • • •)

Cults are far more common than the people of the World of Darkness would like to admit. Mystery cult is the catch-all term for a phenomenon ranging from secret societies couched in fraternity houses and scholarly cabals studying the magic of classical symbolism to mystical suicide cults to the God Machine.

Mystery Cult Initiation reflects membership in one of these esoteric groups. The dot rating dictates standing. One dot is an initiate, two a respected member, three a priest or organizer, four a decision-making leader, five is a high priest or founder. If you wish your character to begin play in a cult, work with your Storyteller to develop the details.

Designing a Mystery Cult requires three things, at bare minimum. First is a Purpose. This is the defining reason the cult exists. Usually, it's tied in with the cult's history and recent background. Second is a Relic. This is an item that grounds members' faith. For example, a piece of the God-Machine, an ancient text bound in human flesh, or the mummified flesh of a saint. The last is a Doctrine. Every cult is defined by its rules and traditions.

In addition to standing, a Mystery Cult Initiation Merit offers benefits at each level of influence. Develop these as well. The following are guidelines; use them to craft your own cults:

•	A Skill Specialty or one-dot Merit pertaining to the lessons taught to initiates.
• •	A one-dot Merit.
• • •	A Skill dot or a two-dot Merit (often a supernatural Merit).
• • • •	A three-dot Merit, often supernatural in origin.
• • • • •	A three-dot Merit or a major advantage not reflected in game traits.

Resources (• to • • • • •)

Effect: This Merit reflects your character's disposable income. She might live in an upscale condo, but if her income is tied up in the mortgage and child support payments, she might have little money to throw around. Characters are assumed to have basic necessities without Resources.

The dot rating determines the relative amount of disposable funding the character has available, depending on your particular chronicle's setting. The same amount of money means completely different things in a game set in Silicon Valley compared to one set in the Detroit slums. One dot is a little spending money here and there. Two is a comfortable, middle class wage. Three is a nicer, upper middle class life. Four is moderately wealthy. Five is filthy rich.

Sample Cults

Sample Cult: The Chosen of Mammon

Mammon believes in the power of the almighty dollar and its inherent power. Followers of Mammon are expected to obtain temporal wealth and power, at any cost. Fortunately, their networks help initiates quickly claim promotions and transfers into more prominent areas of influence.

Cultists: Hedge fund manager, mailboy on a mission, outsourcer, personal assistant to the stars, talent scout, third-generation CEO

Initiation Benefits

•	All initiates learn to cut through red tape to fulfill their later duties. They gain a Politics Specialty in Bureaucracy.
••	Full members must learn to speak, read, and write in Aramaic. They gain the Language Merit (•, Aramaic) free of charge.
•••	As a cultist delves into the mysteries of Mammon, she gains access to greater cult resources. Spend two dots between Contacts, Allies, Resources, or Retainers to reflect this relationship.
••••	The self-centered and power-obsessed priests of Mammon gain the Thief of Fate (•••) Merit. For this reason, priests are prohibited from touching other cultists.
•••••	The high priestess of Mammon benefits from the tithes of her already wealthy followers. She gains three dots of Resources. As well, she may make a Resources ••••• purchase once per month without limitation by drawing from the cult's coffers.

Sample Cult: Sisters of the Machine Gun, Brothers of the Bomb

The Brothers and Sisters band together with their rudimentary understanding of the God-Machine in order to prevent its ascendancy to whatever mysterious power it strives to obtain. They've repurposed artifacts and reverse-engineered their power into more technological weapons to fight back the darkness. The Brothers and Sisters tend toward universities and other places of learning, where a bit of esoteric knowledge can bleed through the mundane and open eyes to the truths of the universe.

Cultists: God-Machine survivor, librarian-turned-networker, militant defender (sister machine gun), second-generation mentor, tech expert (brother bomb)

Initiation Benefits

•	New recruits, while not yet trusted, receive training to better spot the influence of the God-Machine. They gain an Occult Specialty in the God-Machine.
••	Small cells of the Brothers and Sisters network through a handful of active initiates. For this reason, all initiates gain Contacts • (Brothers and Sisters) free of charge.
•••	Respected initiates who have proven they're likely to survive more than a few years are taught the secrets of repurposing Bygones (see p. 243) into weapons. By destroying a Bygone, they can give one weapon the ability to hurt spirits and ghosts.
••••	At higher ranking within the organization, members are assigned wards and students. Take three dots in Retainers, allocated as the player sees fit (that is, one three-dot Retainer, three one-dot Retainers, etc.).
•••••	The highest ranking Brothers and Sisters are mostly first-contact survivors. They've seen more of the God-Machine's influence than most anyone still standing. They gain a modified version of the Encyclopedic Knowledge Merit relating directly to the God-Machine.

Every item has an Availability rating. Once per chapter, your character can procure an item at her Resources level or lower without issue. An item one Availability level above her Resources reduces her effective Resources by one dot for a full month, since she has to rapidly liquidate funds. She can procure items two Availability level below her Resources without limit (within reason). For example, a character with Resources • • • • can procure as many Availability • • disposable cellphones as she needs.

Pusher (•)

Prerequisite: Persuasion • •

Effect: Your character tempts and bribes as second nature. Any time a mark in a Social interaction accepts her soft leverage (see p. 193), open a Door as if you'd satisfied his Vice as well as moving the impression up on the chart.

Retainer (• to • • • • •)

Effect: Your character has an assistant, sycophant, servant, or follower on whom she can rely. Establish who this companion is and how he was acquired. It may be as simple as a paycheck. He might owe your character his life. However it happened, your character has a hold on him.

A Retainer is more reliable than a Mentor and more loyal than an Ally. On the other hand, a Retainer is a lone person, less capable and influential than the broader Merits.

The Merit's dot rating determines the relative competency of the Retainer. A one-dot Retainer is barely able to do anything of use, such as a pet that knows one useful trick or a homeless old man that does minor errands for food. A three-dot Retainer is a professional in their field, someone capable in his line of work. A five-dot is one of the best in her class. If a Retainer needs to make a roll, if it's within her field, double the dot rating and use it as a dice pool. For anything else, use the dot rating as a dice pool.

This Merit can be purchased multiple times to represent multiple Retainers.

Safe Place (• to • • • • •)

Effect: Your character has somewhere she can go where she can feel secure. While she may have enemies that could attack her there, she's prepared and has the upper hand. The dot rating reflects the security of the place. The actual location, the luxury, and the size are represented by equipment (see Housing, p. 241.) A one-dot Safe Place might be equipped with basic security systems or a booby trap at the windows and door. A five-dot could have a security crew, infrared scanners at every entrance, or trained dogs. Each place could be an apartment, a mansion or a hidey-hole.

Unlike most Merits, multiple characters can contribute dots to a single Safe Place, combining their points into something greater. A Safe Place gives an Initiative bonus equal to the Merit dots. This only applies to a character with dots invested in the Safe Place.

Any efforts to breach the Safe Place suffer a penalty equal to the Merit dots invested. If the character desires, the Safe Place can include traps that cause intruders lethal damage equal to a maximum of the Merit rating (player's choice as to how much damage a given trap inflicts). This requires that the character has at least a dot in Crafts. The traps may be avoided with a Dexterity + Larceny roll, penalized by the Safe Place dots.

Small Unit Tactics (• •)

Prerequisites: Presence • • •

Effect: Your character is a proficient leader on the field. She can organize efforts and bark orders to remarkable effect. Once per scene, when making a coordinated action that was planned in advance, spend a point of Willpower and an instant action. A number of characters equal to your character's Presence can benefit from the +3 bonus from the Willpower expenditure.

Staff (• to • • • • •)

Effect: Your character has a crew of workers or assistants at her disposal. They may be housekeepers, designers, research assistants, animators, cheap thugs, or whatever else makes sense. For every dot in this Merit, choose one type of assistant, and one Skill. At any reasonable time, her staff can take actions using that Skill. These actions automatically garner a single success. While not useful in contested actions, this guarantees success on minor, mundane activities. Note that you may have employees without requiring the Staff Merit. Staff simply adds a mechanical advantage for those groups.

Status (• to • • • • •)

Effect: Your character has standing, membership, authority, control over, or respect from a group or organization. This may reflect official standing or informal respect. No matter the source, your character enjoys certain privileges within that structure.

Each instance of this Merit reflects standing in a different group or organization. Your character may have Status (The Luck Gang) • • •, Status (Drag Racing Circuit) • •, and Status (Police) •. Each affords its own unique benefits. As you increase dot ratings, your character rises in prominence in the relevant group.

Status only allows advantages within the confines of the group reflected in the Merit. Status (Organized Crime) won't help if your character wants an official concealed carry firearms permit, for example.

Status provides a number of advantages.

First, your character can apply her Status to any Social roll with those over which she has authority or sway.

Second, she has access to group facilities, resources, and funding. Dependent on the group, this could be limited by red tape and requisitioning processes. It's also dependent on the resources the particular group has available.

Third, she has pull. If your character knows another character's Mentor, Resources, Retainer, Contacts, or Allies, she can block their usage. Once per chapter, she can stop a single Merit from being used if it's of a lower dot rating than her Status and if it makes sense for her organization to obstruct that type of person's behavior. In our Organized Crime example, if your character knows that the chief of police has Contacts (Criminal Informant), you may opt to block usage by threatening the informant into silence.

Drawback: Status requires upkeep and often regular duties. If these duties are not upheld, Status may be lost. The dots will not be accessible until the character re-establishes her standing. In our Organized Crime example, your character may be expected to pay protection money, offer tribute to a higher authority, or undertake felonious activities.

Striking Looks (• or • •)

Effect: Your character is stunning, alarming, commanding, repulsing, threatening, charming, or otherwise worthy of attention. Determine how your character looks and how people react to that. For one dot, your character gets a +1

Example Status Merits

While Status can apply in a nigh infinite number of organizations, here is a list of some common Status Merits, and suggested dot ratings to give a jumping off point. These examples are still abstractions; a character may be a dot level lower or higher and still hold the suggested positions. For example, a police detective may have two, three, or four dots of Police Status: the dot rating just shows her relative influence and respect within the precinct.

Status: Police

•	Paid informant
••	Beat cop
•••	Detective
••••	Sergeant
•••••	Chief of Police

Status: Hellfire Club

•	Pledge
••	Initiate
•••	Counselor
••••	Master
•••••	Grandmaster

Status: Gang

•	New blood
••	Rank and file
•••	Local gang leader
••••	Regional enforcer
•••••	Cartel leader

Status: Military

•	Private
••	Corporal
•••	Sergeant
••••	Colonel
•••••	General

Status: Medical

•	Regular candy striper
••	Nurse
•••	Resident doctor
••••	Chief physician
•••••	Hospital president

Status: Corporate

•	Contractor, new hire
••	Company man
•••	Middle manager
••••	Board member
•••••	CEO

bonus on any Social rolls that would be influenced by her looks. For two dots, the benefit increases to +2. Depending on the particulars, this might influence Expression, Intimidation, Persuasion, Subterfuge, or other rolls.

Drawback: Attention is a double-edged sword. Any rolls to spot, notice, or remember your character gain the same die bonus. Sometimes, your character will draw unwanted attention in social situations. This could cause further complications.

Sympathetic (• •)

Effect: Your character is very good at letting others get close. This gives him an edge in getting what he wants. At the beginning of a Social maneuvering attempt, you may choose to accept a Condition such as Leveraged, Swooning or Vulnerable in order to immediately eliminate two of the subject's Doors.

Taste (•)

Prerequisite: Crafts 2 and a Specialty in Crafts or Expression

Effect: Your character has refined tastes and can identify minor details in fashion, food, architecture, and other forms of artistry and craftsmanship. Not only does this give an eye for detail, it makes her a center of attention in critical circles. She can appraise items within her area of expertise. With a Wits + Skill roll, depending on the creation in question (Expression for poetry, Crafts for architecture, for example), your character can pick out obscure details about the item that other, less discerning minds would not. For each success, ask one of the following questions, or take a +1 bonus to any Social rolls pertaining to groups interested in the art assessed for the remainder of the scene.

- What is the hidden meaning in this?
- What was the creator feeling during its creation?
- What's its weakest point?
- What other witness is most moved by this piece?
- How should one best appreciate this piece?

True Friend (• • •)

Effect: Your character has a true friend. While that friend may have specific functions covered by other Merits (Allies, Contacts, Retainer, Mentor, et cetera), True Friend represents a deeper, truly trusting relationship that cannot be breached. Unless your character does something egregious to cause it, her True Friend will not betray her. The Storyteller cannot kill a True Friend as part of a plot without your express permission. Any rolls to influence a True Friend against your character suffer a five-die penalty. In addition, once per story your character can regain one spent Willpower by having a meaningful interaction with her True Friend.

Supernatural Merits

These Merits require the character remain human (non-supernatural.) If the character becomes a vampire, ghoul, mage, or any supernatural character type, these Merits disappear. Per the Sanctity of Merits (see p. 158), these Merits can be reallocated.

These Merits each have a deeply mystical bent and may not be right for every chronicle. If you're allowing certain Supernatural Merits in your chronicle, discuss this with your players before they make their characters. Some chronicles (including the God-Machine Chronicles in this book) suggest certain Supernatural Merits as part of their hooks. If this is the case, mention them to your players and encourage them to consider these Merits.

Aura Reading (• • •)

Effect: Your character has the psychic ability to perceive auras; the ephemeral halos of energy that surround all living things. This allows her to perceive a subject's emotional state, and potentially any supernatural nature. The colors of an aura show a person's general disposition, and the ebbs, flows, tone, and other oddities reveal other influences. Note that your character may not know what she's looking at when seeing something odd in an aura. For example, she may not know that a pale aura means she's seeing a vampire, unless she's confirmed other vampiric auras in the past.

To activate Aura Reading, spend a point of Willpower and roll Wits + Empathy – the subject's Composure. Perceiving an aura takes an uninterrupted moment of staring, which could look suspicious even to the unaware. For every success, ask the subject's player one of the following questions. Alternatively, take +1 on Social rolls against the character during the same scene, due to the understanding of their emotional state.

- What's your character's most prominent emotion?
- Is your character telling the truth?
- What is your character's attention most focused on right now?
- Is your character going to attack?
- What emotion is your character trying most to hide?
- Is your character supernatural or otherwise not human?

Determine how your character perceives auras. Maybe she sees different hues as different emotions. Perhaps she hears whispers in the back of her mind, reflecting subtle truths in her subject.

Drawback: Because of your character's sensitivity to the supernatural, she sometimes appears to know "a little too much." No more than once per chapter, when first meeting a supernatural creature the Storyteller can roll Wits + Occult for the creature, penalized by your character's Composure. If successful, they get a strange feeling that your character is aware of their nature. They're not forced to behave in any particular way, but it could cause complications.

Biokinesis (• to • • • • •)

Effect: Your character has the ability to psychically alter her biological material. By spending a Willpower point and concentrating for a full minute, she can shift her Physical Attributes. She can shift one dot per dot in this Merit. This shift lasts for one hour. This cannot raise an Attribute higher than five dots.

In addition, the character heals quickly. Halve all healing times.

Clairvoyance (• • •)

Effect: Your character can project her senses to another location. She sees, hears, smells, and otherwise experiences the other place as if she were there. This ability requires a point of Willpower to activate, successful meditation, and a Wits + Occult roll.

Suggested Modifiers: Has an object important to the place (+1), never been there (–3), scrying for a person and not a place (–3), scrying for non-specific location (–4), spent significant time there (+2), touching someone with a strong connection to the place (+1)

Drawback: When choosing this ability, determine how your character is able to scry. It may be through a crystal ball, through a drug-induced trance, with esoteric computer models, or any other method. She cannot scry without that tool or methodology.

Cursed (• •)

Effect: Your character has run afoul of fate. Somewhere, somehow, she's been cursed. Most importantly, she's aware of the curse. When taking this Merit, define the limitations of the curse. Usually, it's expressed in the form of a single statement, such as, "On the eve of your twenty-seventh birthday, you will feast upon your doom." It's important to work out the details with the Storyteller. The curse must take effect within the scope of the planned chronicle.

While she knows how she'll die, this is actually a liberating experience. She's confident of the method of her death so nothing else fazes her. Gain a +2 on any Resolve + Composure roll to face fear or self-doubt. Any time she takes lethal damage in her last three health boxes, take an additional Beat.

Medium (• • •)

Prerequisite: Empathy • •

Effect: Your character hears the words and moans of the dead. If she takes the time to parse their words, she can interact with them verbally.

Your character has more than just a knack for knowing when ephemeral beings are lurking nearby — she can reach out and make contact with them. By conducting a ritual, meditating, or otherwise preparing to commune with the unseen and succeeding at a Wits + Occult roll, she temporarily increases the relevant Condition one step along the progression from nothing to Anchor, Resonance or Infrastructure, to Open, and finally to Controlled (see p. 223 for more on Conditions as they relate to spirits). The effect lasts until she spends a Willpower point, but if an Influence has been used to progress the Condition further, doing so only reduces it by one step.

Drawback: Speaking with ghosts can be a blessing, but your character cannot turn the sense off, any more than she can turn off her hearing. The character hears the words of the dead any time they're present. Once per game session, usually in a time of extreme stress, the Storyteller may deliver a disturbing message to your character from the other side. You must succeed in a Resolve + Composure roll or gain the Shaken or Spooked Condition.

Mind of a Madman (• •)

Prerequisite: Empathy • • •

Effect: Your character gets deep into the skin of problems. If she's investigating a crime or other phenomenon, she can put herself in the mind of the culprit. This often helps with the case. However, it takes her to a dark place internally.

Once she's made the choice to sink into the culprit's mindset (which usually involves intense meditation or perusal of the culprit's crimes), she gains 8-again on all rolls to investigate, pursue, and stop the culprit. But once per night, while she sleeps, she dreams about the culprit's crimes and theoretical future crimes. This is intensely traumatic and it drives her further on the hunt. If she spends the day without pursuing the culprit, make a breaking point roll as if she'd committed the crime herself. She can resist the dreams and the breaking points by avoiding sleep, but she's subject to normal deprivation effect. Until the culprit's captured, any of her own breaking point rolls from things she's done suffer a –1 penalty.

Omen Sensitivity (• • •)

Effect: Your character sees signs and patterns in everything. From the way the leaves fall to the spray of antifreeze when her radiator pops, to the ratios of circumference on the shell she picked up on the sidewalk: everything has meaning. With some consideration, she can interpret these meanings. This would be far better if she could turn it off. Everything is important. Everything could mean the end of the world, the deaths of her friends, or other tragedies. If she misses an omen, it might be the wrong one.

Once per game session, you can make a Wits + Occult roll for your character to interpret an omen in her surroundings. For every success, ask the Storyteller a yes/no question about your character's life, her surroundings, a task at hand, or the world at large. The Storyteller must answer these questions truthfully.

Drawback: Her ability becomes an obsession. Each time she reads a portent, she gains the Obsession or Spooked Condition.

Psychokinesis (• • • or • • • • •)

Effect: Your character has a psychic ability to manipulate the forces of the universe. Every type of Psychokinetic is different. For example, your character might have Pyrokinesis, Cryokinesis, or Electrokinesis, the control of fire, cold, or electricity respectively. This is not an exhaustive list. She can intensify, shape, and douse her particular area of ability. With the three-dot version, some of the given force must be present for her to manipulate. With the five-dot version, she can manifest it from nothingness.

Spend a point of Willpower to activate Psychokinesis and roll Resolve + Occult. Each success allows a degree of manipulation: choose one of the following options below. If you intend to cause harm with the roll, subtract the victim's Resolve from the Resolve + Occult roll. If characters should be harmed without a direct attack — if they run through a patch of flame for example — the three-dot version of the Merit causes one lethal damage and the five-dot version causes two. The Storyteller may rule that larger manifestations cause more, if the situation calls for it.

- Increase or decrease the Size of the manifestation by one.
- Move the manifestation a number of yards equal to your character's Willpower dots times 2.
- Shape the force into a specific form. This may require an Intelligence + Crafts roll to form into a detailed or intricate shape.
- Attack a victim with the force. Allocate any number of the rolled successes to cause harm. With the three-dot Merit, Psychokinesis is a weapon causing 1L damage. Psychokinesis is considered a 2L weapon with the five-dot version.
- Use the force creatively. This is up to the situation and the force in question. For example, an Electrokinetic may use her ability to power an electronic device briefly or jumpstart a stalled automobile.
- Manifest her force. This only works with the five-dot version. It manifests a Size 1 patch of the force. It may spread or be enlarged with further successes.

Drawback: Whenever your character depletes her last Willpower point, the Storyteller can call on her abilities to manifest spontaneously. Resist this with a Resolve + Composure roll, with a –2 penalty if her chosen force is prominently featured nearby. For example, the penalty applies if a Pyro-

kinetic is locked in a factory with a hot forge. This tends to happen during wildly inconvenient moments and in ways that tend to cause more trouble than they solve. With these wild manifestations, use of Psychokinesis does not cost Willpower.

Psychometry (• • •)

Effect: Psychometry is the psychic ability to read impressions left on physical objects. Your character can feel the emotional resonance left on an item or can perceive important events tied to a location with this ability. The ability automatically hones in on the most emotionally intense moment tied to the item.

Spend a Willpower point to activate Psychometry. The successes scored on a Wits + Occult roll determine the clarity of the visions. For each success, you may ask a single yes/no question of the Storyteller, or one of the following questions. For questions pertaining to specific characters, if your character hasn't met the persons in question, the Storyteller may simply describe them.

- What's the strongest emotion here?
- Who remembers this moment the most?
- Am I missing something in this scene?
- Where was this object during the event?
- What breaking point caused the event?

Suggested Modifiers: Character has read impressions from this item before (–2), important event happened more than one day ago (–1), more than one week ago (–2), more than one month ago (–3), more than one year ago (–5), item was used in a violent crime (+2), item is only vaguely tied to the event (–2), spirits pertaining to the event are nearby (+3)

Drawback: Once per chapter, the Storyteller can force a Psychometry vision any time an important place is visited or an important item is touched. This doesn't require a roll or Willpower point to activate. The Storyteller can give any information pertaining to the event in question. The Storyteller can also impose one Condition relevant to the event.

Telekinesis (• to • • • • •)

Effect: Your character has a psychic ability to manipulate the physical world with her mind. This means lifting, pushing, and pulling objects. Fine manipulation is beyond the scope of Telekinesis. By spending a Willpower point, she can activate Telekinesis for the scene. Her dots in this Merit determine her mind's effective Strength for the purpose of lifting and otherwise influencing her environment.

A telekinetic can use her abilities to cause harm by lashing out at threats. Each "attack" costs a point of Willpower. The dice pool to attack is Telekinesis + Occult, penalized by the opponent's Stamina. The attack causes bashing damage. Alternatively, it can be used to grapple, with the Merit dots representing the Strength score of the psychic. Any overpowering maneuvers require additional Willpower points.

Drawback: Any time your character suffers injury or intense stimuli, the Storyteller may call for a Resolve + Composure roll to resist activating Telekinesis at an inopportune time. If the Storyteller calls for this roll and it fails, the character activates Telekinesis in a quick, impressive display of the power. That use of Telekinesis is free. The player can choose to automatically fail the Resolve + Composure roll and take a Beat.

Telepathy (••• or •••••)

Effect: Your character can hear surface thoughts and read minds. With the five-dot version of this Merit, she can broadcast simple messages to others' minds. She hears these thoughts as if they were spoken, which means they can sometimes be distracting. She could only hear thoughts at the range she could hear normal conversation, regardless of any ambient noise (so a telepath could hear the thoughts of someone next to her at a loud concert, even though she couldn't actually hear the subject talk, but could not hear the thoughts of someone a football field away under quiet conditions). Spend a point of Willpower to activate Telepathy and roll Wits + Empathy, minus the subject's Resolve if the subject is unwilling. If successful, the subject's player must tell you the foremost thought on the character's mind. Additional successes allow you to ask the subject's player additional questions from the following list. The questions can be asked any time within the same scene. With the five-dot version, every success offers a single phrase the subject hears as if your character said it. As before, these phrases can be communicated at any time during the same scene.

- What does your character want right now?
- What does your character fear most right now?
- What is your character hiding?
- What does your character want mine to do?
- What does your character know about [relevant topic at hand]?
- What turns your character on right now?
- What's something shameful or embarrassing about your character?

Drawback: Sometimes, your character hears things she probably shouldn't. Once per chapter, the Storyteller can give your character a message of terrible things to come. Perhaps she overhears the mad internal ramblings of a cultist in a crowd. Maybe she hears a plot to hijack a plane. Maybe, just maybe, she hears the incoherent thoughts of the God-Machine. These heard thoughts never just occur. They always happen when your character has something else, something important, something pressing going on. When this happens, the Storyteller gives you a Condition such as Spooked or Shaken.

Thief of Fate (•••)

Effect: Your character is a magnet for fortune and fate. When she's close to someone, she unintentionally steals their good fortune. If she touches someone, this Merit takes effect unless she spends a point of Willpower to curb the effect for a scene. In the same day, any failures the subject makes are considered dramatic failures. If she's used this Merit in a given day, she gains four dice any time she spends Willpower to increase a dice pool.

Drawback: Once a victim of this Merit suffers a dramatic failure, he hears your character's name in the back of his mind. This may inspire scrutiny.

Unseen Sense (••)

Effect: Your character has a "sixth sense" for a type of supernatural creature, chosen when you buy the Merit. For example, you may choose Unseen Sense: Vampires, or Unseen Sense: Fairies. The sense manifests differently for everyone. A character's hair stands on end, she becomes physically ill, or perhaps she has a cold chill. Regardless, she knows that *something isn't right* when she is in the immediate proximity of the appropriate supernatural being. Once per chapter, the player can accept the Spooked Condition (p. 183) in exchange for which the character can pinpoint where the feeling is coming from. If the target is using a power that specifically cloaks its supernatural nature, however, this does not work (though the Condition remains until resolved as usual).

Note: If the character takes "God-Machine" as the focus for this Merit, that character can also see through Concealment Infrastructure (seeing the gears when no one else can, for instance).

Fighting Merits

Some Merits in this section have other Merits as prerequisites. These are refinements of form and additional areas of expertise. For example, Iron Skin requires Martial Arts ••. This means you must have two dots in Martial Arts before buying dots in Iron Skin.

Many Fighting Style Merits require a character to sacrifice their Defense. Defense cannot be sacrificed multiple times in a turn; this prevents certain maneuvers from being used together.

Armed Defense (• to •••••; Style)

Prerequisites: Dexterity •••, Weaponry ••, Defensive Combat: Weaponry

You're able to use a weapon to stop people who are trying to kill you. Often deployed by police officers using riot shields or ASP batons, it's just as effective with a chair leg.

Cover the Angles (•): Whenever you take a Dodge action, reduce the Defense penalties for multiple attackers by 1. You can apply your full Defense against the first two attacks, suffer a –1 penalty against the third, and so on.

Weak Spot (••): You swing against your opponent's arm rather than his own weapon. Use this ability when defending

against an armed attacker. If your Defense reduces his attack pool to 0, he's disarmed. If you Dodge, you disarm your opponent if your Defense roll reduces his attack successes to 0.

Aggressive Defense (• • •): Anyone dumb enough to come near you is liable to get hurt. When you take a Dodge action, if you score more successes than any attacker, you deal one point of lethal damage to the attacker per extra success. Your weapon bonus doesn't apply to this extra damage.

Drawback: You must spend a point of Willpower and declare that you are using Aggressive Defense at the start of the turn. You cannot combine this maneuver with Press the Advantage or Weak Spot.

Iron Guard (• • • •): You and your weapon are one. At the start of each turn, you can choose to reduce your weapon bonus (down to a minimum of 0) to increase your Defense by a like amount. If you take a Dodge action, add your full weapon bonus to your Defense after doubling your pool.

Press the Advantage (• • • • •): You create an opening with a block and lash out with a fist or foot. When you're taking a Dodge action, if your Defense roll reduces the attacker's successes to 0, you can make an unarmed attack against that opponent at a −2 penalty. Your opponent applies Defense as normal.

Drawback: Spend a point of Willpower to make the attack. You can only make one attack per turn in this way.

Cheap Shot (• •)

Prerequisites: Street Fighting • • •, Subterfuge • •

Effect: Your character is a master at the bait and switch. She can look off in an odd direction and prompt her opponent to do the same, or she might step on someone's toes to distract them. Either way, she fights dirty. Make a Dexterity + Subterfuge roll as a reflexive action. The opponent's player contests with Wits + Composure. If you score more successes, the opponent loses his Defense for the next turn. Each time a character uses this maneuver in a scene, it levies a cumulative –2 penalty to further uses since the opposition gets used to the tricks.

Choke Hold (• •)

Prerequisites: Brawl • •

If you can get your hands on someone, it's over. When grappling, you can use the Choke move.

• **Choke:** If you rolled more successes than twice the victim's Stamina, he's unconscious for (six – Stamina) minutes. You must first have succeeded at a Hold move. If you don't score enough successes at first, you can Choke your opponent on future turns and total your successes.

Close Quarters Combat (• to • • • • •; Style)

Prerequisites: Wits • • •, Athletics • •, Brawl • • •

You know that hitting someone in the face is an easy way to break the little bones in your hand. To that end, you've perfected the art of using the environment to hurt people.

Firing Lines (•): In some situations, your best option is a tactical retreat — especially if you've inadvertently brought a knife to a gunfight. You can run for cover as a reaction to a ranged attack instead of dropping prone (see "Going Prone," pp. 164–165 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). You give up your action for the turn but can get to any cover that's within twice your Speed.

Hard Surfaces (• •): Bouncing someone's head off a urinal, computer monitor, or a brick wall is a handy way to increase the amount of hurt inflicted while not breaking the aforementioned hand bones. When you're grappling someone, you can bounce them off a hard surface with a Damage move. You deal lethal damage and immediately end the grapple.

Armored Coffin (• • •): The problem with protection is simple: the very things that protect you can be turned against you. That holds true for body armor just as much as anything else. Sure, it blocks bullets and knives, but get in a clinch and you might as well be wearing a straightjacket. When you grapple an opponent, add their general armor rating to your dice pool. When you use a Damage move, ignore your opponent's armor. This technique can't be used in conjunction with Hard Surfaces.

Prep Work (• • • •): If you've got a second to look around, you could catch someone by surprise almost anywhere. When launching a surprise attack, your Dexterity + Stealth roll becomes a rote action.

Drawback: You can't use this Merit to set up sniper attacks — your ambush must use Brawl or Weaponry.

Turnabout (• • • • •): If you're caught short in a fight, your opponent's weapon suits you just fine. When you attempt to Disarm your opponent, step the results up one level — on a failure, your opponent drops the weapon. On a success, you take possession of your opponent's weapon. On an exceptional success, you've got the weapon and your opponent takes two points of bashing damage.

Defensive Combat (•)

Prerequisite: Brawl • or Weaponry •; choose one when this Merit is selected

Effect: You are training in avoiding damage in combat. Use your Brawl or Weaponry to calculate Defense rather than Athletics. You can learn both versions of this Merit, allowing you to use any of the three Skills to calculate Defense. However, you cannot use Weaponry to calculate Defense unless you actually have a weapon in hand.

Fighting Finesse (• •)

Prerequisites: Dexterity • • •, a Specialty in Weaponry or Brawl

Effect: Choose a Specialty in Weaponry or Brawl when you purchase this Merit. Your character's extensive training in that particular weapon or style has allowed them to benefit more from their alacrity and agility than their strength. You may substitute your character's Dexterity for her Strength when making rolls with that Specialty.

This Merit may be purchased multiple times to gain its benefit with multiple Specialties.

Firefight (Style. • to • • •)

Prerequisites: Composure • • •, Dexterity • • •, Athletics • •, Firearms • •

Effect: Your character is comfortable with a gun. She's been trained in stressful situations and knows how to keep herself from being shot while shooting at her opponents. This Style is about moving, strafing, and taking shots when you get them. It's not a series of precision techniques; it's using a gun practically in a real-world situation.

Shoot First (•): In a firefight, the person who gets shot first is usually the loser. Your character has trained herself to fire first in an altercation. If her gun is drawn, add her Firearms score to her Initiative. If she has Quick Draw, she can use Shoot First to draw and fire with increased Initiative in the first turn of combat.

Suppressive Fire (• •): Sometimes, the purpose of a shot is to distract, not necessarily to hit. Your character is trained to fire off a handful of rounds with the intent to startle opponents and force impulse reactions. When using the Covering Fire maneuver (p. 200), her opponents cannot benefit from aiming against her. She can apply her Defense against incoming Firearms attacks in addition to any cover bonuses. As well, her training allows her to use Covering Fire with a semi-automatic weapon.

Secondary Target (• • •): Sometimes shooting an opponent behind cover is all but impossible. A bullet can knock objects off balance, however, or cause ricochets. By using Secondary Target, your character opts to not hit her target but instead strike them with any collateral objects that might be nearby. She causes bashing damage instead of lethal, but ignores all cover penalties to the roll. The weapon's damage rating does not add to the damage in this case.

Grappling (Style, • to • • • • •)

Prerequisites: Stamina • • •, Strength • •, Athletics • •, Brawl • •

Effect: Your character has trained in wrestling or one of many grappling martial arts.

Sprawl (•): Your character can adjust her weight to defend herself in a grapple. Add two to her Strength for the purposes of resisting overpowering maneuvers.

Takedown (• •): Your character can take an opponent to the ground rapidly. With a normal roll, you may choose to render an opponent prone instead of establishing a grapple. You may also choose to cause bashing damage equal to the successes rolled.

Joint Lock (• • •): Once in a grapple, your character can administer joint locks and other immobilizing tactics. Any attempt to overpower your character causes the other character a point of bashing damage. In addition, any successful overpowering maneuvers your character uses cause 1L damage in addition to their normal effects.

Heavy Weapons (Style, • to • • • • •)

Prerequisites: Stamina • • •, Strength • • •, Athletics • •, Weaponry • •

Effect: Your character is trained with heavy weapons that require strength, wide range, and follow-through more than direct speed and accuracy. This Style may be used with two-handed weapons such as a claymore, a chainsaw, a pike, or an uprooted street sign.

Sure Strike (•): Your character doesn't always hit the hardest or the most frequently, but you guarantee a deadly strike when you do hit. You can reflexively remove three dice from any attack dice pool (to a minimum of zero) to add one to your character's weapon damage rating for the turn. These dice must be removed after calculating any penalties from the environment or the opponent's Defense.

Threat Range (• •): Your character's weapon is immense and keeps opponents at bay. If you opt not to move or Dodge during your turn, any character moving into your character's proximity suffers 1L damage and a penalty to their Defense equal to your character's weapon damage rating. This penalty only lasts for one turn. This cannot be used in a turn the character is Dodging.

Bring the Pain (• • •): Your character's strikes stun and incapacitate as well as causing massive trauma to the body. Sacrifice your character's Defense to use Bring the Pain. Make a standard attack roll. Any damage you score with Bring the Pain counts as a penalty to all actions the victim takes during their next turn. So, if you cause 4L damage, the opponent is at –4 on their next attack.

Warding Stance (• • • •): Your character holds her weapon in such a way as to make attacks much harder. If her weapon's drawn, spend a point of Willpower reflexively to add her weapon's damage rating as armor for the turn. This will not protect against firearms.

Rending (• • • • •): Your character's cuts leave crippling, permanent wounds. By spending a Willpower point before making an attack roll, her successful attacks cause one point of aggravated damage in addition to her weapon's damage rating. This Willpower point does not add to the attack roll.

Improvised Weaponry (• to • • •; Style)

Prerequisites: Wits • • •, Weaponry •

Most people don't walk around armed. While someone pulling a knife or a gun can cool a hostile situation down, it can also cause things to boil over — an argument that wouldn't be more than harsh words suddenly ends up with three people in the morgue. If you're on the receiving end of someone pulling a knife, it helps to have something in your own hand.

You're good at making do with what you've got. Sometimes, you're lucky — if you're in a bar, you've got a lot of glass bottles, maybe a pool cue to play with. But you've got something almost like a sixth sense for weaponry and can find one almost anywhere.

Always Armed (•): You can always get your hands on something dangerous, and you've an instinctive understanding of how to put it to good — and deadly — use. At the start of your turn, make a reflexive Wits + Weaponry roll to grab an object suitable for use as a weapon in pretty much any environment. (The player is encouraged to work with the Storyteller to determine an appropriate item — a large, jagged rock in the wilderness, for example, or a heavy glass ashtray with one sharp, broken edge in a dive bar.) Regardless of what you pick up, the weapon has a +0 weapon modifier,

−1 initiative penalty, Size 1, Durability 2, and Structure 4. On an exceptional success, increase the weapon modifier and Size by 1, but the initiative penalty increases to −2. Whatever you grab doesn't suffer the normal −1 penalty for wielding an improvised weapon (see p. 205).

In Harm's Way (••): You've got a knack for putting your weapon in the way of an oncoming attack, no matter how small or inappropriate for blocking it might be. While wielding an improvised weapon acquired with Always Armed, you can treat the Structure of your weapon as general armor against a single Brawl or Weaponry attack. Any damage you take inflicts an equal amount of damage to the improvised weapon, bypassing Durability. You can use the weapon to attack later in the same turn, but can only use this ability when applying your Defense to an attack.

Breaking Point (•••): One sure way to win a fight is to hit the other guy so hard that he doesn't get back up, even if that means losing a weapon in the process. When making an all-out attack with an improvised weapon acquired with Always Armed, you can reduce the weapon's Structure by any amount down to zero. Every two points of Structure spent in this way adds +1 to the weapon modifier for that one single attack. Declare any Structure loss before making the attack; this Structure is reduced even if the attack does no damage. If the weapon is reduced to zero Structure, it is automatically destroyed after the attack.

You can use this technique in conjunction with In Harm's Way, allowing you to parry an attack made on a higher Initiative and then go on the offensive, provided that the weapon wasn't destroyed.

Iron Skin (•• or ••••)

Prerequisites: Martial Arts •• or Street Fighting ••, Stamina •••

Through rigorous conditioning or extensive scarring, your character has grown resistant to harm. She can shrug off shots that would topple bigger fighters. She knows how to take a strike and can even move into a hit from a weapon to minimize harm. She gains armor against bashing attacks; one point of armor with ••, and two points of armor with ••••. By spending a point of Willpower when hit, she can downgrade lethal damage from a successful attack into bashing. Downgrade one point of lethal damage at ••, two points of lethal with ••••.

Light Weapons (Style, • to •••••)

Prerequisites: Wits ••• *or* Fighting Finesse, Dexterity •••, Athletics ••, Weaponry ••

Effect: Your character is trained with small hand-to-hand weapons that favor finesse over raw power. These maneuvers may only be used with one-handed weapons that have a damage rating of 2 or less.

Rapidity (•): Your character moves with swiftness to find just the right spot to strike. You can sacrifice your character's weapon damage rating to add her Weaponry score to her Initiative for the turn. The weapon becomes a 0 damage weapon for the turn.

Thrust (••): Your character knows when to defend herself and when to move in for the kill. At any time, you can sacrifice points of Defense one-for-one to add to attack pools. This cannot happen if you've already used Defense in the same turn. If you use this maneuver, you may not sacrifice your full Defense for any other reason. For example, you cannot use Thrust with an all-out attack.

Feint (•••): With a flourish in one direction, your character can distract an opponent for a cleaner, more effective follow-up strike. For example, if you Feint with a 2 damage weapon with three successes, the attack causes no damage. However, your next attack ignores five points of Defense, and causes three extra points of damage.

Flurry (••••): Your character moves quickly enough to stab opponents with numerous pricks and swipes in the blink of an eye. As long as your character has her Defense available to her (it's not been sacrificed for another maneuver or denied from surprise, for example), any character coming into her immediate proximity takes one point of lethal damage. This damage continues once per turn as long as the enemy stays within range and occurs on the enemy's turn. This can affect multiple opponents but cannot be used in a turn where the character is Dodging.

Vital Shot (•••••): Your character can use her smaller weapon to get past an opponent's defenses and hit where it hurts most. Sacrifice your character's Defense for the turn to use this maneuver. If the attack roll succeeds, the attack causes one point of aggravated damage in addition to the damage rating of the weapon.

Marksmanship (Style, • to •••)

Prerequisites: Composure •••, Resolve •••, Firearms ••

Effect: When prepared and aimed, a gun is an ideal killing machine. Your character has trained to take advantage of the greatest features of any gun. This Style is often used with rifles, but it can be used with any type of firearm. Because of the discipline and patience required for Marksmanship, your character cannot use her Defense in any turn in which she uses one of these maneuvers. These maneuvers may only be used after aiming for at least one turn.

Through the Crosshairs (•): Your character is a competent sniper, able to sit in position and steel her wits. Usually, the maximum bonus from aiming is three dice. With Through the Crosshairs, it's equal to her Composure + Firearms.

Precision Shot (••): With this level of training, your character knows how to effectively disable a victim instead of focusing on the kill. When attacking a specified target, you may reduce your weapon's damage rating one-for-one to ignore penalties for shooting a specified target (see p. 203).

For example, if you're using a sniper rifle (4 damage weapon), and attacking an arm (–2 to hit), you could choose to use 3 damage reduce that to –1, or 2 damage to eliminate the penalty entirely.

A Shot Rings Out (•••): A master sniper, your character has no worries or lack of confidence. She can fire into a crowd and strike a specific target without penalty. If she misses, it's because her shot goes wide. She will never hit an unintended target.

Ghost (• • • •): Your character has trained to shoot unseen and vanish without a trace. Her Firearms score acts as a penalty on any roll to notice her vantage point, or any Investigation or Perception roll to investigate the area from which she shot.

Martial Arts (Style, • to • • • • •)

Prerequisites: Resolve • • •, Dexterity • • •, Athletics • •, Brawl • •

Effect: Your character is trained in one or more formal martial arts styles. This may have come from a personal mentor, a dojo, or a self-defense class. It may have been for exercise, protection, show, or tradition. These maneuvers may only be used unarmed, or with weapons capable of using the Brawl Skill, such as a punch dagger, or a weapon using the Shiv Merit.

Focused Attack (•): Your character has trained extensively in striking specific parts of an opponent's body. Reduce penalties for hitting specific targets by one. Additionally, you may ignore one point of armor on any opponent.

Defensive Strike (• •): Your character excels in defending herself while finding the best time to strike. You can add one or two points to your character's Defense. For each Defense point you take, subtract a die from any attacks you make. This can only be used in a turn in which your character intends to attack. It cannot be used with a Dodge.

Whirlwind Strike (• • •): When engaged, your character becomes a storm of threatening kicks and punches; nothing close is safe. As long as your character has her Defense available to her and is not Dodging, any character coming into arm's reach takes 1B damage. This damage continues once per turn as long as the enemy stays within range and occurs on the enemy's turn. If you spend a point of Willpower, this damage becomes 2B until your next turn.

The Hand as Weapon (• • • •): With this degree of training, your character's limbs are hardened to cause massive trauma. Her unarmed strikes cause lethal damage.

The Touch of Death (• • • • •): Your character's mastery has brought with it the daunting power of causing lethal injury with a touch. If she chooses, her unarmed strikes count as weapons with 2 damage rating.

Police Tactics (Style, • to • • •)

Prerequisites: Brawl • •, Weaponry •

Effect: Your character is trained in restraint techniques often used by law enforcement officers. This may reflect formal training or lessons from a skilled practitioner.

Compliance Hold (•): Gain a +2 bonus to overpowering rolls to disarm or immobilize an opponent.

Weapon Retention (• •): Opponents attempting to disarm your character or turn her weapon against her must exceed your character's Weaponry score in successes.

Speed Cuff (• • •): Against an immobilized opponent, your character may apply handcuffs, cable ties, or similar restraints as a reflexive action.

Shiv (• or • •)

Prerequisites: Street Fighting • •, Weaponry •

Effect: Your character carries small, concealable weapons for use in a tussle. Rolls to detect the concealed weapon suffer your character's Weaponry score as a penalty. With the one-dot version, she can conceal a weapon with a 0 damage rating. The two-dot version can conceal a 1 damage rating weapon. Your character may use the Brawl Skill to use this weapon.

Street Fighting (Style, • to • • • • •)

Prerequisites: Stamina • • •, Composure • • •, Brawl • •, Streetwise • •

Effect: Your character learned to fight on the mean streets. She may have had some degree of formal training, but the methodology came from the real world in dangerous circumstances. Street Fighting isn't about form and grace. It's about staying alive. These maneuvers may only be used unarmed, with weapons capable of using the Brawl Skill (such as punch daggers), or weapons concealed with the Shiv Merit (above).

Duck and Weave (•): Your character has been beaten all to hell more than a few times. Now she dodges on instinct, not on skill. You can reflexively take a one-die penalty to any actions this turn in order to use the higher of her Wits and Dexterity to calculate Defense. If you've already made a roll without penalty this turn, you cannot use Duck and Weave.

Knocking the Wind Out (• •): Shots to the center mass can shake an opponent, and your character knows this well. When your character makes a successful unarmed attack, the opponent suffers a –1 to his next roll.

Kick 'Em While They're Down (• • •): The best enemy is one on the ground. Your character topples opponents and keeps them down. Any time your successes on an attack roll exceed an opponent's Stamina, you may choose to apply the Knocked Down Tilt (p. 211). Additionally, any time your character is close enough to strike when an opponent attempts to get up from a prone position, she can reflexively cause 2B damage.

One-Two Punch (• • • •): Your character hits fast and follows through with every hit. Whenever she makes a successful attack, you can spend a point of Willpower to cause two extra points of bashing damage.

Last-Ditch Effort (• • • • •): In a street fight, every second could be the one that kills you. A proficient street fighter is a remarkable survivalist. She bites, headbutts, trips: whatever it takes to prevent that last hit. Any time a character with this level of Street Fighting is about to take a hit or an overpowering maneuver when she's already suffering wound penalties, she can reflexively spend a Willpower point and sacrifice her Defense for the turn to make an attack against her would-be assailant. This can occur even if she's already acted in a turn, so long as she's not already spent Willpower. Resolve this attack before the opponent's action.

Unarmed Defense (• to •••••; Style)

Prerequisites: Dexterity •••, Brawl ••, Defensive Combat: Brawl

You're better at stopping people from hurting you than you are at hurting other people. Maybe you practice a martial art that redirects an opponent's blows, or else you're just very good at not being where your opponent wants you to be.

Like a Book (•): You can read your opponents and know where they're likely to strike. When facing an unarmed opponent and not Dodging, increase your Defense by half your Brawl (round down).

Studied Style (••): You focus on reading one opponent, avoiding his attacks, and frustrating him. Attacks from that opponent do not reduce your Defense. If your Defense reduces his attack pool to 0, his further attacks against you lose the 10-again quality.

Redirect (•••): When you're being attacked by multiple opponents, you can direct their blows against one another. When you Dodge, if your Defense roll reduces an attack's successes to 0, your attacker rolls the same attack against another attacker of your choice.

Drawback: You may only redirect one attack in a turn. You cannot redirect an attack against the same attacker.

Joint Strike (••••): You wait until the last possible second then lash out at your opponent's elbow or wrist as he attacks, hoping to cripple his limbs. Roll Strength + Brawl instead of Defense. If you score more successes than your attacker, you deal one point of bashing damage per extra success, and inflict either the Arm Wrack or Leg Wrack Tilt (your choice).

Drawback: Spend a point of Willpower to use this maneuver.

Like the Breeze (•••••): You step to one side as your opponent attacks and give her enough of a push to send her flying past you. When dodging, if your Defense roll reduces an opponent's attack successes to 0, you can inflict the Knocked Down Tilt.

Drawback: You must declare that you're using this maneuver at the start of the turn before taking any other attacks.

Conditions

Conditions add an additional layer of consequence and reward to certain actions in the World of Darkness. They're not traits a player can buy or choose for her character. They're conditional; the context and the gameplay apply them and they remain only until certain **resolution** criteria are met. These resolutions are determined by the effect that causes the Condition or the terms of the Condition itself. Whenever your character resolves a Condition, take a Beat.

Conditions and Tilts (see p. 206) work similarly, but Conditions primarily play roles outside of combat, whereas Tilts tip the tides of a battle.

A character cannot have multiple instances of a Condition unless they apply to two different and specific things. For example, you may have Connected (Mob) and Connected (Police.)

Conditions replace the Flaws rules in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**.

Sources of Conditions

Various things within the course of a game can cause Conditions. The most common is exceptional successes. Any time a player rolls an exceptional success, the player may choose to bring a Condition into play. This Condition must be relevant to the situation. Some supernatural abilities can also offer Conditions. Ghostly Numina may offer Conditions, as well as vampiric Disciplines or werewolf Gifts.

A Storyteller may add a Condition to a character during any situation where she feels it would heighten the drama of the game.

Breaking points can cause Conditions (see Integrity, p. 184).

Lastly, complex behaviors may cause Conditions. For example, a well-planned heist may impose the Overwhelmed Condition on the chief of police, or a detailed bout of research and investigation may offer the Informed Condition.

Resolutions

While we've listed resolutions for each Condition, other things may end its effects. Use your better judgment when determining Condition resolution. The rule of thumb is that anything that would cause the Condition's effects to end can be counted as resolution.

Persistent Conditions

Some Conditions are marked as Persistent. These Conditions are tied inexorably to the character (replacing the Flaws in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). Persistent Conditions may offer one Beat per game session when they complicate the character's life. With Storyteller permission, players may take Persistent Conditions for their characters at character creation. Persistent Conditions may be resolved permanently only with a specific and impressive effort, along with Storyteller discretion.

Conditions on Storyteller Characters

Storyteller characters don't usually track Experiences the way the players' characters do. Any time a Storyteller character offered experience by a Condition, they simply regain a point of Willpower for use in the same scene.

Condition List

The list below includes common Conditions that can be applied to characters. For Skill-based rolls, an exceptional success allows the noted Condition (unless otherwise stated). It may go to your character or the subject of the roll, as noted.

While we've listed a handful of recommended Skills that afford a given Condition, this list is hardly exhaustive. Give whatever Conditions make sense within the scope of the story. If a Condition has no listed Skills, it's because

another circumstance within the rules can cause it and it's not something easily brought upon by regular Skill usage.

Addicted (Persistent)

Your character is addicted to something, whether drugs, gambling or other destructive behaviors. Some addictions are more dangerous than others, but the nature of addiction is that it slowly takes over your life, impeding functionality. If you are addicted, you need to indulge your addiction regularly to keep it under control. A specific addiction should be chosen upon taking this Condition; characters can take this Condition multiple times for different addictions. Being unable to feed your addiction can result in the Deprived Condition.

Resolution: Regain a dot of Integrity, lose *another* dot of Integrity, or achieve an exceptional success on a breaking point.

Beat: Your character chooses to get a fix rather than fulfill an obligation.

Amnesia (Persistent)

Your character is missing a portion of her memory. An entire period of her life is just gone. This causes massive difficulties with friends and loved ones.

Resolution: You regain your memory and learn the truth. Depending on the circumstances, this may constitute a breaking point.

Beat: Something problematic arises, such as a forgotten arrest warrant or old enemy.

Blind (Persistent)

Your character cannot see. Any rolls requiring sight may only use a chance die. If another sense can be reasonably substituted, make the roll at –3 instead. In a combat situation, she suffers the drawbacks of the Blinded Tilt (see p. 208). This Condition may be temporary, but that is usually the result of a combat effect, in which case the Blindness Tilt would apply.

Resolution: Your character regains her sight.

Beat: Your character encounters a limitation or difficulty that inconveniences her.

Broken (Persistent)

Whatever you did or saw, something inside you snapped. You can barely muster up the will to do your job anymore, and anything more emotionally intense than a raised voice makes you flinch and back down. Apply a –2 to all Social rolls and rolls involving Resolve and a –5 to all use of the Intimidation Skill.

Resolution: Regain a dot of Integrity, lose *another* dot of Integrity, or achieve an exceptional success on a breaking point.

Beat: You back down from a confrontation or fail a roll due to this Condition.

Bonded

Your character has established an extensive bond with a specific animal. She gains +2 on any rolls to influence or persuade her bonded animal. It may add your Animal Ken to any rolls to resist coercion or fear when in your character's presence. The animal may add your character's Animal Ken to any one die roll.

Resolution: The bonded animal dies or is otherwise parted from the character.

Beat: n/a

Connected (Persistent)

Your character has made inroads with a specified group. While she has this Condition, she gets a +2 to all rolls relating to that group. Alternately, she can shed this Condition to gain a one-time automatic exceptional success on the next roll to influence or otherwise take advantage of the group. Once Connected is resolved, the character is considered to have burned her bridges and is no longer an accepted member. The character may be able to regain Connected with the specified group per Storyteller approval.

Example Skills: Politics, Socialize

Resolution: The character loses her membership or otherwise loses her standing with the group.

Beat: The character is asked to perform a favor for the group that inconveniences her.

Disabled (Persistent)

Your character has limited or no ability to walk. Her Speed trait is effectively 1. She must rely on a wheelchair or other device to travel. A manual wheelchair's Speed is equal to your character's Strength and requires use of her hands. Electric wheelchairs have a Speed of 3, but allow the free use of the character's hands.

An injury can cause this Condition temporarily, in which case it is resolved when the injury heals and the character regains mobility.

Resolution: The character's disability is cured by mundane or supernatural means.

Beat: Your character's limited mobility inconveniences your character and makes her slow to respond.

Deprived

Your character suffers from an addiction. She is unable to get her fix, however, leaving her irritable, anxious, and unable to focus. Remove one from her Stamina, Resolve, and Composure dice pools. This does not influence derived traits; it only influences dice pools that use these Attributes.

Resolution: Your character indulges her addiction.

Beat: n/a

Embarrassing Secret

Your character has a secret from his past that could come back to haunt him. If this secret gets out, he could be ostracized or maybe even arrested. If it becomes known, this Condition is exchanged for Notoriety (p. 183).

Resolution: The character's secret is made public, or the character does whatever is necessary to make sure it never comes to light.

Beat: n/a

Fugue (Persistent)

Something terrible happened. Rather than deal with it or let it break you, your mind shuts it out. You are prone to blackouts and lost time. Whenever circumstances become too similar to the situation that led to your gaining this Condition, the player rolls Resolve + Composure. If you fail the roll, the Storyteller controls your character for the next scene; your character, left to his own devices, will seek to avoid the conflict and get away from the area.

Resolution: Regain a dot of Integrity, lose *another* dot of Integrity, or achieve an exceptional success on a breaking point.

Beat: You enter a fugue state as described above.

Guilty

Your character is experiencing deep-seated feelings of guilt and remorse. This Condition is commonly applied after a successful breaking point roll (p. 185). While the character is under the effects of this Condition, he receives a –2 to any Resolve or Composure rolls to defend against Subterfuge, Empathy or Intimidation rolls.

Resolution: The character confesses his crimes and makes restitution for whatever he did.

Beat: n/a

Informed

Your character has a breadth of research information based on the topic she investigated. When you make a roll relating to the topic, you may choose to resolve this Condition. If you resolve it and the roll failed, it is instead considered to have a single success. If it succeeded, the roll is considered an exceptional success.

The roll that benefits from the Informed Condition can be any relevant Skill roll. For example, a character with Informed (Werewolves) might gain its benefits when using researched information to build a silver bear trap with the Crafts Skill. Combat rolls cannot benefit from this Condition.

Example Skills: Academics, Investigation, Occult, Science

Resolution: Your character uses her research to gain information; the Condition is resolved as described above.

Beat: n/a

Inspired

Your character is deeply inspired. When your character takes an action pertaining to that inspiration, you may resolve this Condition. An exceptional success on that roll requires only three successes instead of five and you gain a point of Willpower.

Example Skills: Crafts, Expression

Resolution: You spend inspiration to spur yourself to greater success, resolving the Condition as described above.

Beat: n/a

Leveraged

Your character has been blackmailed, tricked, convinced, or otherwise leveraged into doing what another character wishes. You may have the Leveraged Condition multiple times for different characters. Any time the specified character requests something of you, you may resolve this Condition if your character does as requested without rolling to resist.

Example Skills: Empathy, Persuasion, Subterfuge

Resolution: Your character may either resolve the Condition by complying with a request as above, or if you apply the Leveraged condition to the specified character.

Beat: n/a

Lost

Your character has no idea where she is or how to reach her target. Characters with the Lost Condition remove one die from their Composure dice pools. This does not influence derived traits; it only influences dice pools that use these Attributes. A Lost character cannot make any headway toward her goal without first navigating and finding her place. This requires a successful Wits + Streetwise action (in the city) or Wits + Survival action (in the wilderness).

Resolution: Your character gives up on reaching her intended destination, or she successfully navigates as described above.

Beat: n/a

Madness (Persistent)

Your character saw or did something that jarred her loose from reality. This isn't a mental illness born of brain chemistry — that, at least, might be treatable. This madness is the product of supernatural tampering or witnessing something that humanity was never meant to comprehend. The Storyteller has a pool of dice equal to 10 – (character's Integrity). Once per chapter, the Storyteller can apply those dice as a negative modifier to any Mental or Social roll made for the character.

Resolution: Regain a dot of Integrity, lose *another* dot of Integrity, or achieve an exceptional success on a breaking point.

Beat: The character fails a roll because of this Condition.

Mute (Persistent)

Your character cannot speak. Any communication must be done through writing, gestures, or hand signs. Illness, injury, or supernatural powers can inflict this Condition on a temporary basis.

Resolution: The character regains her voice through mundane or supernatural means.

Beat: Your character suffers a limitation or communication difficulty that heightens immediate danger.

Notoriety

Whether or not your character actually did something heinous in the past, the wrong people think he did and now he's ostracized by the general public. Your character suffers a –2 on any Social rolls against those who know of his notoriety. If using Social maneuvering (p. 188), the character must open one extra Door if his target knows of his notoriety.

Example Skills: Subterfuge, Socialize

Resolution: The story is debunked or the character's name is cleared.

Beat: n/a

Obsession (Persistent)

Something's on your character's mind and she just can't shake it. She gains the 9-again quality on all rolls related to pursuing her obsession. On rolls that are unrelated to her obsession, she loses the 10-again quality. Obsession can be a temporary quality per Storyteller approval.

Resolution: The character sheds or purges her fixation.

Beat: Character fails to fulfill an obligation due to pursuing her obligation.

Shaken

Something has severely frightened your character. Any time your character is taking an action where that fear might hinder her, you may opt to fail the roll and resolve this Condition. This Condition can be imposed by undergoing a breaking point roll.

Example Skills: Brawl, Firearms, Intimidation, Weaponry

Resolution: The character gives into her fear and fails a roll as described above.

Beat: n/a

Spooked

Your character has seen something supernatural — not overt enough to terrify her, but unmistakably otherworldly. How your character responds to this is up to you, but it captivates her and dominates her focus.

Resolution: This Condition is resolved when your character's fear and fascination causes her to do something that hinders the group or complicates things (she goes off alone to investigate a strange noise, stays up all night researching, runs away instead of holding her ground, etc.).

Beat: n/a

Steadfast

Your character is confident and resolved. When you've failed a roll, you may choose resolve this Condition to instead treat the action as if you'd rolled a single success. If the roll is a chance die, you may choose to

resolve this Condition and roll a single regular die instead.

Resolution: Your character's confidence carries him through and the worst is avoided; the Condition is resolved as described above.

Beat: n/a

Swooning

Your character is attracted to someone and is vulnerable where they are concerned. He may have the proverbial "butterflies in his stomach" or just be constantly aware of the object of his affection. A character may have multiple instances of this Condition, reflecting affection for multiple characters. He suffers a –2 to any rolls that would adversely affect the specified character, who also gains +2 on any Social rolls against him. If the specified character is attempting Social maneuvering on the Swooning character, the impression level is considered one higher (maximum of perfect; see p. 193).

Example Skills: Persuasion, Subterfuge

Resolution: Your character does something for his love interest that puts him in danger, or he opts to fail a roll to resist a Social action by the specified character.

Beat: n/a

Creating New Conditions

This list of Conditions is by no means intended to be exhaustive. The players and the Storyteller can and should create new Conditions to apply to whatever situations arise in play. When creating a Condition, consider the following two points:

- What game mechanics does the Condition require?
- How can the Condition be resolved?

All Conditions should have some kind of game effect. They can add or subtract dice, restrict certain kinds of rolls, remove 10-again or add 9-again, and interact with sub-systems such as Social maneuvering. A Condition that affects a character's performance in combat is actually a Tilt (see p. 206).

For example, Agent Lundy is investigating a crime scene while a local policeman, Officer Mallory, looks on. Lundy's player rolls an exceptional success on his Investigation roll and finds an amazing amount of detail and information. The Storyteller asks the player if he would like to place a Condition on Mallory, if Mallory's player is amenable. Lundy suggests Awed, since Mallory is feeling pretty intimidated by Lundy's investigatory prowess.

Mallory's player agrees and grabs an index card. She writes "Awed — Lundy" on it. The players could model this on the Swooning or Leveraged Conditions, but Mallory's player decides she'd rather have this manifest as Mallory becoming flustered around Lundy. She asks if she can shed this Condition to fail an Investigation or Social roll while in Lundy's presence (thus resolving the Condition). The Storyteller agrees and Mallory's player holds the card until she wants to use it. When she does, she'll gain a Beat.

Integrity

The Morality system described in the **World of Darkness Rulebook** provides a workable system for measuring the effects of characters' behavior upon their psyches, but it has a few problems. Most of those problems stem from terminology. The system doesn't measure morality so much as behavior, and the consequences (increased willingness to transgress the "hierarchy of sins" and, potentially, derangements) are more akin to post-traumatic stress disorder than the actual effects of the crimes on the list.

The Morality system is designed to evoke the Gothic/Victorian ethos in which a person's sanity was thought to be a function of their morality. It was also designed to be mutable enough to change and provoke a moral or spiritual framework for the various supernatural beings. When a mortal becomes a vampire, therefore, "Morality" becomes "Humanity" and measures how much of the Man has fallen to the ravenous Beast. If a mortal undergoes the First Change and becomes a werewolf, the trait changes to "Harmony" and reflects whether the character is living with a lycanthrope's spiritual duty. A human being stolen by the Fae tracks Clarity, measuring how well he can trust his own senses and to what extent he has become like the Gentry, and so on. In this respect, the Morality system works quite well. Unfortunately, in emulating the Victorian ethos, we wind up implying that one can commit murder and become schizophrenic. This isn't the case. The system suffers from inconsistent and inappropriate terminology and from trying to signify too much within the game.

To revise it, though, we need to consider what a Morality system should mean to a World of Darkness game. The underlying thematic push here is that what a person does has an effect on their mental state, which is probably fair. However, better representations for that effect than derangements are possible, especially with the rules revisions in this book. And besides, Morality has never really measured Morality — it measures functionality within society. It measures how well a character copes with what she has seen or done.

With all of that in mind, the following rules replace the Morality and degeneration rules found in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**.

Breaking Points

The notion of breaking points replaces the notion of "sins" and therefore removes the need for a "hierarchy of sins." If the action would cause a character psychological stress, it's worth considering whether the action constitutes a breaking point. Note, too, that the character may experience breaking points that do not stem from his own actions. Witnessing the gruesome realities of the World of Darkness, supernatural or otherwise, can do it.

The player should make some decisions about the character's breaking points during character creation. This is discussed in more detail on p. 155.

"My Character Kills People All the Time"

Is it possible for a character to reach a point where killing another human being is *not* a breaking point? Players might make the argument for soldiers, policemen, gang members or good-hearted serial killers to be exempt from suffering breaking points from taking a life, up to a point. For mortal, non-supernatural characters, our recommendation is that if a character kills a person, it's *always* a breaking point, even if the player gets a positive modifier to the roll.

Note that we said "mortal, non-supernatural" character. Vampires, werewolves and other shadow-folk aren't fully human and don't play by the same rules. Their rules, in fact, will be addressed in the appropriate books.

Determining a Breaking Point

If the player has completed the five questions (p. 156), the Storyteller should have at least a baseline for determining breaking points for the character. Even so, the player is welcome to decide that any event during a game is a breaking point and the Storyteller is likewise within her rights to make that choice for any character.

If a player feels that a given event should *not* count as a breaking point, he is free to argue the matter with the Storyteller. If it's important to the player, it's best to let the matter go — the player has a better sense of his character than anyone else. Obviously, the Storyteller shouldn't let this guideline allow for abuse, but that's where the player-guided definitions of breaking points come in.

Example: Ellie, Mike and Mallory (the characters from the examples on pp. 156–157) are part of The 300 Block Tale (p. 69). They eventually find the boiler room and discover the mechanisms, covered in fresh blood. Does this constitute a breaking point for any of them? The Storyteller suggests it does for all of them. Mallory has seen violence, true, but nothing on this scale. Mike has specific issues in his backstory with large amounts of blood, and Ellie has led a fairly sheltered life — this should definitely rattle her.

Matt and Charles both agree that this scene constitutes a breaking point. Matt suggests that he should take an additional –1 on the roll because of the machinery (Mike is familiar with machinery and he knows that this device has no human precedent). Jennifer, however, argues that Mallory's training might kick in; she'll have to cope with this later, but she's seen worse than this in crime scenes before. The Storyteller offers that the supernatural aspect here adds a wrinkle she hasn't seen, but maybe she gets a +2 to the roll to represent her experiences? Jennifer agrees to this.

System

When a character experiences a breaking point, the player rolls Resolve + Composure with a modifier based on the character's Integrity rating:

Integrity	Modifier
8–10	+2
7–6	+1
5–4	0
3–2	–1
1	–2

The Storyteller can also impose modifiers based on how heinous the breaking point is, relative to the character's experience. The chart below gives some suggestions, but again, the Storyteller and the player are encouraged to develop the character's moral framework and life experience to the point that modifiers can be customized. Modifiers are cumulative, but the total modifier from circumstances should not exceed +/–5 dice.

Breaking Point	Modifier
Character is protecting himself	+1
Character is acting in accordance with his Virtue	+1
Character is protecting a loved one	+2
Character is acting in accordance with his Vice	–1
Witnessing the supernatural (non-violent)	–1
Witnessing the supernatural (violent)	–2
Witnessing an accidental death	–2
Witnessing a murder	–3
Committing premeditated murder	–5
Killing in self-defense	–4
Killing by accident (car wreck, e.g.)	–4
Causing visible serious injury to a person	–2
Torture	–3
Enduring physical torture	–2
Enduring mental/emotional supernatural attack	–2
Enduring physical supernatural attack	–2
Witnessing a supernatural occurrence	–1 to –5, depending on severity

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character's world view has been damaged, perhaps beyond repair. The character suffers from traumatic stress. Lose a dot of Integrity and choose from the following Conditions (or create a new one with Storyteller approval): Broken, Fugue, or Madness. Also, take a Beat.

Failure: The character's world view has been shaken and he probably questions his sense of self, his ability to relate to people, his own moral worth, or his sanity. Lose a dot of Integrity and choose one of the following Conditions (or create a new one with Storyteller approval): Guilty, Shaken, or Spooked.

Success: The character has come through the breaking point intact. He might feel guilty or upset about what happened, but he can cope. Choose one of the following Conditions (or create a new one with Storyteller approval): Guilty, Shaken, or Spooked.

Exceptional Success: The character somehow manages not only to survive the breaking point, but to find meaning in it, to reaffirm his own self-worth, or to pass through fire and become tempered by it. The character takes a Beat and regains a point of Willpower.

Soul Loss

One supernatural trauma tears at the foundation of Integrity, reducing the strongest personalities to shuffling near-catatonia. Certain rare and powerful magic can strike at a victim's soul, removing or destroying it.

The human soul exists in Twilight (see p. 218) but is not made of ephemera, so is insubstantial even to ephemeral beings unless they have Numina or Influences allowing them to manipulate souls. In general, only very high-Rank ghosts, or angels specifically sent to meddle with souls, have such abilities. Some demons and mages also have the knowledge and power necessary to affect the higher self. The soul is so subtle, most people can't even tell that they have one — until it's gone.

At first, the victim feels fine — better than normal, even, energized and ready to take on the world. But it's a false sense of security, caused by her psyche overcompensating for the loss. She feels like she can achieve anything, but the void in her heart drives her to increasingly desperate acts of self-affirmation. A character who loses her soul immediately suffers the Soulless Condition, described below, which represents her Integrity crumbling in her soul's absence. Once she has reached Integrity 1, she gains the Enervated Condition as her attempts to reassure herself fail and her Willpower decays. Once her permanent Willpower is reduced to 0, she gains the Thrall Condition. Unless she gets her soul back somehow, she will live the rest of her life in a miserable, barely conscious half-state, unable to care for herself or muster any defense.

Soulless (Persistent)

The character is in the first stage of soul loss. Without a soul, she can't attempt abjuration, warding, or binding (see p. 231). She is also more susceptible to possession — any dice pools to resist being taken over or possessed by another entity are at a -2 dice penalty. The effects on Integrity and Willpower, though, are more severe. For as long as she has this Condition, she does not regain Willpower through surrender or rest, and her use of Virtue and Vice is reversed. She may regain one Willpower point per scene by fulfilling her Virtue without having to risk herself, and regains full Willpower once per chapter by fulfilling her Vice in a way that poses a threat to herself. Regaining Willpower through Vice, though, is now a breaking point with a -5 penalty unless the character has reached Integrity 1.

Resolution: Gain a beat whenever the character loses Integrity because she indulged her Vice. This Condition is only removed if the character regains her soul.

Enervated (Persistent)

The character is in the second stage of soul loss. Her instinctive efforts to shore up her Willpower by giving into her urges have failed, her Integrity has gone and her Willpower is now fading. In addition to the effects of Soulless, she can no longer regain Willpower through her Virtue, only her Vice. Indulging herself brings diminishing returns — whenever she does so, her permanent Willpower drops by one dot before she regains Willpower points to the new maximum.

Resolution: Gain a beat whenever the character loses a dot of Willpower. This Condition is only removed if the character regains her soul.

Thrall (Persistent)

The character has fully succumbed to the effects of soullessness. She may not spend Willpower points for any reason, may not use her Defense in combat, may not spend Experiences, and suffers all the effects of the Broken Condition (see p. 181) as well. The player should only continue playing a character with this Condition if she stands a chance of regaining the Soul.

Resolution: Gain a beat whenever the character is victimized as a result of her Condition. This Condition is only removed if the character regains her soul.

Regaining the Soul

What magic takes away, magic can return. If a character suffering from soul loss regains a soul (usually, but not necessarily, her own), the Conditions brought on by the soul's absence rapidly reverse themselves. She immediately sheds the Soulless, Enervated, and Thrall Conditions. If she'd dropped to Willpower 0 she immediately gains Willpower 1.

Willpower comes back first — every time she regains a point of Willpower through rest or fulfilling her

Virtue, her permanent Willpower increases by one until it returns to the rating she had before losing her soul. Once Willpower has returned to normal, one Integrity dot lost to the Soulless Condition returns every time she regains Willpower through rest. Conditions caused by the breaking points directly resulting from soullessness are removed when the Integrity dot they are associated with returns. Integrity dots lost to breaking points suffered while Integrity was decaying for other reasons don't come back. For example, if a soulless character is reduced to Integrity 3 and commits murder, losing another dot to a breaking point, she will stabilize with one less dot than she originally had if her soul is returned.

Extended Actions: Digging In Deeper

Extended actions represent efforts to complete complex tasks. There's a process, a progression, then the task is complete. These rules replace the extended action rules in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**.

Each roll in an extended action reflects a step in the process. Something changes. Either your character progresses or she faces a setback.

Determine the Dice Pool

As with any action, first determine the dice pool as Attribute + Skill + Equipment. Situational modifiers apply and may change from roll to roll as the story unfolds. The unmodified Attribute + Skill + Specialty (if any) determines the maximum number of dice rolls allowed before the action fails. Players may roll the number of dice in their pool up to the number of dice rolls allowed as they attempt to succeed.

Example: Sammy's car has broken down out on a lonely road, but Sammy manages to get it to limp to a service station before it dies completely. No one is around, but the place seems to be pretty well maintained. Figuring the local mechanic is just out, Sammy waits ... but no one comes. As night begins to fall, Sammy figures he'd better just fix the damn thing himself so he can stay ahead of the *things* chasing him.

The Storyteller sets the repair roll as Wits + Crafts. Sammy has Wits 2, Crafts 4 and a Specialty in Auto Repair, which applies. Altogether, the player has seven dice in the unmodified pool, so she can roll seven times.

Determine Target Successes and Time

Next, the Storyteller determines the required successes and the time between rolls.

Most actions require between five and twenty successes for completion. Five successes reflects a reasonable action that most competent characters can complete given the right tools and knowledge (replacing the brakes on a car, for example). Ten represents a difficult action, but one realistic for a professional in the field (writing a robust and popular academic thesis). Twenty successes represents a very difficult action that requires a strong showing even for a very skilled character (preparing a violin solo worthy of a world-class performance). With creative endeavors, players may choose their own target successes, to reflect different degrees of effort and accomplishment.

When determining the time between rolls, a Storyteller should rely on common sense and logic. Would something take weeks? Consider one roll per week. Could a person realistically accomplish the task in a day? An hour per roll makes for a solid timeframe.

Characters must be dedicated to the task during this time. Unless there's a good reason (brain surgery, for example), characters may take breaks or handle other minor tasks in the meantime. With most tasks, it's possible to step aside and continue progress later. Any rolls requiring a day or more assume the character sleeps normally.

Example: The Storyteller decides that each roll requires a half hour; Sammy's player needs to accumulate seven successes. Normally this wouldn't be a big problem given Sammy's dice pool, but sunset is in two hours and Sammy wants to be gone by then. The player really only has four rolls.

Roll Results

Success

Each successful roll adds to the running total, bringing the task closer to completion. Consider what changes, and what steps the character has made toward the accomplishment. Make each roll palpable.

Example: Sammy's player makes the first roll and generates one success. That's better than nothing, but it does make the player a little nervous. The Storyteller describes Sammy digging around under the hood to diagnose the problem and then turning around to the unfamiliar garage, looking for the right parts as the shadows lengthen.

Failed Rolls

When you fail a roll, the Storyteller presents a choice: either take a Condition (of her choice) or abandon the action. The player can offer up a different suggestion as to what the Condition should be or how it should affect the character (see Conditions, p. 180), but the choice after a failed roll in an extended action is always accept the Condition and continue, or refuse the Condition and lose all accumulated successes.

Example: Sammy's player rolls again and this time fails. The Storyteller suggests that Sammy is Frustrated by this outcome. The player can either agree that Sammy

is Frustrated (taking Frustrated as a Condition and working with the Storyteller to quickly determine what this Condition means in game terms), or refuse and start over. The player, wanting to get a Beat out of the Condition (see Beats, p. 157), agrees that Sammy is Frustrated and continues. The player has one success toward the required seven.

Exceptional Success

If you roll an exceptional success at any point during the process, you have three options: You can subtract the dots your character has in the relevant Skill from the total required (which might mean you accomplish the goal right then and there), you can reduce the time on each roll by one quarter, or you can apply the "exceptional success" result when your character does complete the goal (many of the "Roll Results" descriptions in various World of Darkness books describe an extra bonus for finishing an extended action with an exceptional success; this option allows the player to choose to apply it if appropriate).

Example: On the third roll, Sammy's player rolls five successes. This is an exceptional success, so the player has three choices: She can subtract Sammy's Crafts rating from the required total, she can reduce the time for each roll by 25%, or she can apply a special bonus to the action if she completes it in time.

The player considers her options. The time reduction isn't really that helpful in this situation. It would reduce each roll from 30 minutes to 22.5 minutes, not really saving a great deal of time. If she chooses to reduce the total number of successes, it falls from 7 to 3 (7 – Crafts rating (4) = 3), which would mean that the work is done and Sammy can leave (as the player has accumulated six successes with the five successes from this turn). The Storyteller suggests that a bonus might be to apply the Souped Up Condition to the car, giving it a bonus on Speed that Sammy can activate when necessary. Given how the chronicle has gone so far, and that the player still has one more roll to make before the sun sets, she takes that option. Sammy still has a little more work to do (one more success).

Dramatic Failures

Dramatic failures go a step further than normal failures; your character fails the action and receives a Condition. As well, the first roll on a further attempt suffers a –2 penalty.

Example: Sammy's player has one more roll until sunset (note: the player *could* actually make four more rolls, for a total of seven, equal to the dice pool, but this situation has extenuating circumstances). The player rolls...and fails. Since Sammy will be stuck here past sunset no matter what the player does, she opts to have this failure count as a dramatic failure (see p. 157), gain a Beat for her trouble, and hope that the other characters arrive before whatever is chasing Sammy does. If Sammy tries to fix this car again, the player will suffer a –2 on the first roll.

Near Misses

So what happens if a character accumulates *most* of the successes required for the extended action but has to stop due to running out of time or reaching the maximum number of rolls? All of the work the character did doesn't just vanish, after all.

That's true, insofar as it goes. Once the character has reached the maximum allowable rolls for a given extended action, however, he has exhausted the limits of his talent in the area. He can come back to it once his dice pool changes — if the player buys up the relevant Skill or Attribute or buys a new Specialty, the character can pick up where he left off (but he only gets one more roll unless the player changes the dice pool by more than one die).

If the character had to abandon the project before the maximum number of rolls was reached, however, he can come back to it and continue making the rolls until he reaches that limit, provided that it's the kind of project that will "keep." A character could continue working on a novel for years, but making a soufflé is probably a one-attempt project.

If the player has accumulated *less than 25% of the total required successes* (round down), the successes are lost. The character just didn't get a good enough start on the project.

If the player accumulated *at least 50% of the total required successes* (round down), the player can add a +2 bonus to the first roll of the extended action if the character attempts it again within the same chapter.

If the player accumulated *75% or more of the total required successes* (round down), the player can add a +4 bonus to the first roll of the extended action, if the character attempts it again within the same story.

If the player rolled an exceptional success during the process and opted for the "end bonus" option, that option remains even if the character comes back to the action later.

Example: Sammy ultimately failed the action, but he did so with six out of seven successes. If he tries to fix that car again any time during this story, he'll receive a net bonus of +2 on the first roll (+4 for the progress he made, –2 for the dramatic failure at the end). Also, if he completes it, he'll keep the Souped Up Condition on the car. Since he only made four rolls on the initial project, he can make three more to finish this project. He only needs one more success — that should be plenty.

Social Maneuvering

These rules replace the standard rules for Social actions in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**. They assume your character making effort toward getting another character or a group of characters to do what she wants. Social actions within this system may be direct or subtle, complex or simple. For example, your character may shout at another and demand he gets out of the way, or your character may subtly offer clues suggesting someone needs to vote for her.

Tuesday, 25th January 1916

Skerries

Dear Alexander,

I wonder if even now you can hear me.

The events of the last forty-eight hours have by turns terrified and thrilled me, and while I could rave about what happened yesterday, the power of a pair of eyes opening, the transformation of skin into skin, I must write these things in some sort of order, if only to preserve my sanity.

It came as no surprise to me the following morning, nor, apparently, to de Selby, that Sergeant Fox, bicycle and all, had invited himself on the trip. The effect of flatness that the land had held for me the preceding night had not diminished in the light of morning; if anything, it had increased. The land looked more to me like a simulacrum of a real land than it had before. The Sergeant only added to the effect of falseness, as if his round face were a flat mask painted in pink oils with shillings for eyes, as if the gold buttons on his uniform were splotches of yellow paint and his bicycle an ersatz contraption of papier mâché and cardboard tubes. At least de Selby's grotesque house was real. Its stench hung on the man and gave him a peculiar look of decay.

De Selby had with him two of the maps that had been pinned on the laundry room walls, rolled up neatly in a cardboard tube. After about a mile of journey through the strange flat country, he stopped us, and using a conveniently flat rocky outcrop as a table, took out the maps and rolled them flat. One was an annotated small-scale map of the local country; the other the paper which had only lines and marks. De Selby told us that the two maps showed the same area, and that while the entry points to the God-Machine's workings were all of varying distances from one another here in the countryside, once one was within the machine, the exits were absolutely equidistant. I did not understand, and asked him to explain it again.

"Outside the God-Machine, these two entries, for example" — he indicated two points on his annotated map - "are six miles apart, and these two are three miles apart. Within the workings of the machine" — now he turned to the other sheet — "both pairs of exits are exactly the same distance, two and one quarter miles apart. Moreover, all of these exits, no matter what route one takes, are exactly the same distance from every other exit. Namely two and one quarter miles."

I was sceptical. How did he know this?

He said he had explored the network of exits before, and comprehensively, at least in this area. I asked why he needed a map.

"From time to time they change. It is as much a calendar as a map."

After some time we found ourselves fighting through heavy bushes to find a brick structure on which was set in an angle a riveted steel door with no apparent handle or bolt. It was overgrown and ancient. I ventured to suggest that the position of the door looked quite fixed to me. Fox, who had not spoken since greeting me on the road this morning, said, "Ah, yes. You might think that, but the entry to the machine is a thing of cunning and charm. It can be a sneaky little bugger when it wishes."

He leaned back, his jowls wobbling, and folded his fat arms, as if that explained everything. De Selby, meanwhile, only nodded.

We stood silently, staring at the door. I was still, after all this, unconvinced. A sewer entry left by the County Council? Some farmer's grain store or still? It seemed so solid. So normal, so real amidst the apparent falseness of the landscape. At length I asked how we planned to gain entry.

De Selby produced what looked like a screwdriver from his coat pocket. "I found this last time," he said. He advanced toward the door and inserted the screwdriver into the door, into a section of riveted panel that had appeared to be solid. The panel somehow folded in under the pressure of the tool, and then, as I watched, the door slowly swung back. Inside, I could see steps, lit with electric light. From the tunnel I could hear something like the sound of a hundred factories. I shuddered, thinking suddenly, powerfully, of the war machine that had ground up you and so many others.

The Sergeant said, "Fortune favours the brave," and walked in almost casually. De Selby put a spidery hand on my arm for a moment, and nodded to me. I followed Sergeant Fox and de Selby advanced behind me, closing the door behind us, blocking out the light of the sun.

And down we went.

I cannot wholly explain the wonders and horrors we saw in that place of brick and rusty iron. I saw a rail on which hung violated men and women, and blank-eyed workers who attended great grinding rooms of gears, and who did not blink or stop work or show signs of sorrow when one of their number fell in and was crushed to nothing in an instant, only waiting briefly for another to come and take his place. I saw insects being assembled from pieces of metal and glass and folded into living things. And all the while, the sounds of metallic grinding and screeching continued all around us, deafening us.

No one paid us notice as we walked through these scenes. De Selby led us at length into what must have been a workshop or storeroom, containing thousands of aisles of near-infinite shelves on which were stored inexplicable machines of every kind. De Selby and I wandered through aisles, absent-mindedly picking up items with blades or gears or hinges and wondering what they might create.

Sergeant Fox, meanwhile, watched us silently, never seeming to blink his blank round eyes.

De Selby stopped at a particular shelf, and began to rummage around with more purpose now, until, making a noise of triumph, lifted a small object, which was perhaps the size and rough shape of an apple and handed it to me. "You should want this, I think."

I looked at it. Its outer shell was like a spiderweb made of brass, through the holes of which I could see the briefest glimpses of the most intricate clockwork movement I had ever seen, its cogs and springs finer than human hair, some too small even to see, except only in surmise. I asked de Selby what it was.

He shrugged. "I think it might, under the correct circumstances, fold up into a soul."

I gasped. I handed it back to him.

"Theft is an offense punishable by the Law," said the Sergeant from behind me.

His tone was as jovial as ever, and I did not know for a moment if he was serious or not.

I turned. He appeared huge now, silhouetted by the strange yellow light. He loomed over us. He seemed to grow, blocking the whole aisle.

"What Law matters here?" said de Selby.

The Sergeant shrugged, a gesture that seemed to ripple across his fat frame in waves and extend beyond him into the air. "It is the Principle, so it is."

I didn't understand him. The Sergeant seemed to fold outwards from his middle, his round lines becoming angles; from inside his great soft black bulk climbed what looked like an angel made of levers and gears and glass, its wings bladed and hinged, its halo ticking, turning like a clock movement. The thing reached out with fingers made of surgeon's needles and reaching past

me with an arm that must have telescoped, thrust its hand ***inside*** de Selby's forehead. I heard over the machine noises around me a horrible sucking sound that became a clicking and then nothing. De Selby stood, mouth open, staring with glassy, empty eyes, as the thing withdrew its hand, leaving nothing more than an angry red mark on its forehead. He turned, put the object back on the shelf and began to walk away, his gait shambling, his feet dragging. He turned left into a gap in the aisle. Regaining my composure I dashed after him, calling his name. Around the corner were only deserted aisles, as far as I could see.

Hand to my head, I stopped, wondering what next, and how I could leave. I looked over my shoulder. The Sergeant stood behind me, as he was before. "It's best to pay him no mind. You won't be seeing him again," he said in the same conversational tone as ever. "Now. You'll be wanting to find your way homeward, will you not?"

I nodded, dumbly.

The policeman turned silently and led me through corridors and factory floors, past racks of twitching people suspended from some gibbet that enclosed their faces in rusty iron, past trees of metal and flesh and those same grim engines where, just for a moment, I could see de Selby's face among the lost souls at work. And then he was gone and I was walking up a brick stairway to a door. The Sergeant opened it and motioned for me to leave, before climbing out himself and shutting it silently behind him. The doorway was as ancient-looking as the one by which we had gained ingress, but was not as overgrown, standing in the middle of a grassy lawn. Looking around, I realised that I was standing in my back garden. "There was no door here before."

"I wouldn't be worrying your head about it," said the Sergeant. "It is bad for the constitution and creates pains in the head."

He put a finger to his lip. "I shall have to go and collect my bicycle before one of the local blatherskites and ne'er-do-wells makes off with it."

He turned for a moment and handed me something. I stared at him in astonishment and terror, and then, without looking at the thing he gave me, I took it. "Lost property," he said. "I suppose it truly belongs to Mr. de Selby, but he won't be needing it now, and that's as it should be. Put it all down to the Grand Design." He touched his policeman's helmet. "Top of the afternoon to you, Mr. Dear." He hopped over my back hedge with a nimbleness that defied his physique and strolled off down the lane in the direction of the open countryside, whistling a jig.

He had, I found, given me an object like, but not exactly the same as the thing that de Selby had tried to give to me. I almost ran inside, and, like a man possessed, went straight to my workshop without even taking off my coat.

I do not know why I behaved so. Perhaps some force compelled me and truly I did not really understand what I was doing. Perhaps the things I had seen had shocked me so that I was no longer capable of behaving like a rational man.

I whipped the tarpaulin from my creation. She looked so beautiful, like an anatomical model in brass and clockwork and pigs' leather. My virgin. My hands did not, to my surprise, shake as I gently unfastened the leather of the scalp and opened the hinged cavity that allowed access to her brass skull. The cavity therein was exactly the shape of the object, and having turned it I inserted it with ease, finding holes allowing it to be screwed neatly in place. I closed up her head and, inserting the key into the keyhole in her breast, wound her a good half-dozen times.

And she whirred, and her eyes opened, and her body folded in on itself in a way that it is hard to describe without resorting the language of a mathematics I do not fully understand. But pig leather became soft breathing skin, and glass became the vitreous humour of the eye. And camelhair became eyelash. And she drew in breath, and only the brass-edged keyhole in her breast gave any sign that she had not always been an exquisite young woman. I took out the key and gave it to her. She held it in her hand and turned it this way and that.

I asked her if she could speak. She cocked her head to one side and opened her mouth, and made an odd, strangled noise.

Of course, she has no idea. She is new and unspoiled. The world is wholly unknown to her.

I have called her Mary. It seemed fitting.

Oh, Alexander, if you were only alive to see what I have done.

Your brother,

William

It is not always possible to get someone to do what you want. For instance, no amount of Social maneuvering is going to convince the chief of police in a large city to hold a press conference and admit to murder, even if the player has a dice pool impressive enough to make it happen. This system is designed to allow characters to manipulate or convince other characters to perform favors or undertake actions, but it does raise the question: Is one character dictating another's actions, and how much of that should be allowed in a role-playing game? Or, put a different way, can one character seduce another with this system?

Under a strict read of the rules, yes. The goal is "get that character to sleep with my character," the number of Doors is decided as explained below, and impressions and other factors play into the final result. This is not too different from how seduction and other, less carnal, forms of persuasion actually work — the persuader tries to make the offer as enticing as possible.

But because it's the persuader's player making the rolls, the target is left without a way to say "no." As such, it's our recommendation that this system be used by player-controlled characters on Storyteller characters rather than on other players' characters. If one player's character wants to seduce, persuade, convince, or intimidate another, leave it up to roleplaying and let players make their own decisions about what their characters do.

Goals

When using a Social action with this system, the first step is to declare your character's intended goal. This is as simple as stating what you want the subject to do and how your character is going about making it happen. You need only announce the initial stages, as the effort will likely occur over multiple rolls, reflecting different actions.

At this point, the Storyteller determines whether the goal is reasonable. A character might, with time and proper tactics, convince a rich person to give him a large sum of money. He probably isn't going to convince the wealthy individual to abandon *all* of his wealth to the character (though it might be possible to get him to name the character as heir, at which point the character can set about speeding up the inheritance process).

Doors

Once you've declared your character's goal, the next step is to determine the scope of the challenge. We represent this with "Doors," which reflect a character's resistance to coercion: her social walls, his skepticism, mistrust, or just a hesitance toward intimacy. It's abstract and means different things in every given case.

The base number of Doors is equal to the lower of the character's Resolve or Composure. If the goal would be a breaking point for the character, add two Doors. If accomplishing the goal would prevent a character from resolving an Aspiration, add a Door. Acting in opposition to a Virtue also adds a Door. Doors may increase as the effort continues and the circumstances change. For example, if the goal seems mundane at first but the situation makes it reprehensible, it may increase the number of Doors required. If your character gives up on the goal and shifts to another, any Doors currently open remain so, but assess Aspirations, Virtues, and Integrity in case of a potential increase.

Doors must be opened one by one. Each successful roll — *not* each success — opens one. Exceptional successes open two. Also, Doors are specifically a one-way relationship between two characters. They may each have Doors to one another or Doors to other characters.

First Impressions

First (and later) impressions determine the time required between rolls. The Storyteller sets the first impression based on any past history between the characters, the circumstances of their meeting, the nature of the favor being asked (if the acting character is asking right up front — sometimes it's a better idea not to lead off with what you want!) and any other relevant factors.

"Average impressions" call for weekly rolls, which makes the process very slow. Through play, your character may influence the interaction for a "good impression." This may mean meeting in a pleasant environment, wearing appealing clothing, playing appropriate music, or otherwise making the situation more comfortable. This should not require a roll during a first impression but requires one if attempted later. An excellent impression requires a roll to influence the situation.

For example, you may use a Wits + Socialize to find the right people to invite to a party. Perfect impressions require further factors. It may involve leverage or playing to a character's Vice (see below).

Hostile impressions come from tense first impressions or threatening pitches. These interactions require you manipulate the impression or to force the Doors (see below).

Vices

If your character knows her subject's Vice, she can use it to influence the interaction. With an offer that tempts that Vice, move the interaction one step up on the chart. As a rule of thumb, if by agreeing to the temptation the target were to gain Willpower, it's a valid temptation.

Soft Leverage (Gifts and Bribes)

Soft Leverage represents offers of services or payments in order to lubricate social interaction. Make the offer. If the recipient agrees, move the impression up once on the chart.

Mechanically, this can be represented in certain Merit dots. For example, a bribe may be represented by a Resources 3 offer, or an offer for service may be reflected by Retainer 3. By default, these bribes give the recipient use of the Merit for a designated amount of time.

Impression	Time per Roll
Perfect	1 Turn
Excellent	1 Hour
Good	1 Day
Average	1 Week
Hostile	Cannot roll

Opening Doors

At each interval, you may make a roll to open Doors and move closer to your character's goal. The roll might be different each time, depending on the character's tactics. Some of the rolls might not even be Social. For example, if your character is trying to win someone's favor, fixing his computer with an Intelligence + Computer roll could open a Door.

As Storyteller, be creative in selecting dice pools. Change them up with each step to keep the interactions dynamic. Similarly, consider contested and resisted rolls. Most resisted actions or contested rolls use either Resolve or Composure or a combination of the two. But don't let that stand as a limit. Contested rolls don't require a resistance trait. For example, Wits might be used to notice a lie, Strength to help a character stand up to threats, or Presence to protect and maintain one's reputation at a soiree.

Failed rolls impose a cumulative –1 on further rolls. These penalties do not go away with successful rolls. When the player fails a roll, the Storyteller may choose to worsen the impression level by one. If she does so, the player takes a Beat. If this takes the impression level to hostile, the attempt cannot move forward until it improves.

Aspirations

Aspirations are quick routes to influence. Find a character's goals, wants, and needs, and they can help move interactions forward. If your character presents a clear path and reasoning for how they'll help a character achieve an Aspiration, remove a Door.

This doesn't require follow-through but it does require a certain amount of assurance. If the opportunity presents itself and your character pulls out of an offer, two Doors close.

Failure

A Social maneuvering attempt can fail utterly under the following circumstances:

- The player rolls a dramatic failure on an attempt to open a Door (the player takes a Beat as usual).
- The target realizes that he is being lied to or manipulated. This does *not* apply if the target is aware that the character is trying to talk him into something, only if the target feels betrayed or conned.
- The impression level reaches "hostile" and remains so for a week of game time. The character can try again during the next story.

Resolution

Once your character opens the final Door, the subject must act. Storyteller characters abide by the intended goal and follow through as stated.

If you allow players' characters to be the targets of Social maneuvering, resolve this stage as a negotiation with two possible outcomes. The subject chooses to abide by the desired goal or offer a beneficial alternative.

Go With the Flow

If the character does as requested and abides by the intended goal, his player takes a Beat (see p. 157).

Offer an Alternative

If the subject's player chooses, he may offer a beneficial alternative and the initiator's player can impose a Condition (see p. 180) on his character. This offer exists between players; it does not need to occur within the fiction of the game (though it can). The alternative must be beneficial and not a twist of intent. The Storyteller adjudicates.

The initiator's player chooses a Condition to impose on the subject. It must make sense within the context of the scenario.

Example of Social Maneuvering

Stacy wants Professor Erikson to loan her a book from his private library (she intends to use the book's contents to summon a demon, but Erickson doesn't know that). Erickson is protective of his books but he'd be willing to loan one out under the right circumstances. Erickson has Resolve 3, Composure 4, so the base number of Doors Stacy needs to open is 3 (the lower of the two). Loaning out a book wouldn't be a breaking point,

nor does it prevent him from achieving an Aspiration, but it does work against his Virtue (Cautious), so the total number of Doors Stacy needs to open to get the book is 4.

The Storyteller decides that the first impression is average; the two know one another (Stacy is a former student of Erickson's), but they aren't close. Stacy arranges to find Erickson at a conference and impresses him with her knowledge of esoteric funerary rites (this requires an Intelligence + Occult roll, plus whatever effort Stacy had to put forth to get into the conference), and this changes the impression level to "good." Now, Stacy can make one attempt to open Doors per day. At the conference, Stacy's player rolls Manipulation + Persuasion and succeeds; one Door opens. Stacy mentions the book to Erickson and lets him know she'd like to borrow it. He's not immediately receptive to that idea, but Stacy's in a good place to continue.

The next day, Stacy emails the professor about a related work (Manipulation + Academics), but fails. Future rolls will have a –1 penalty. The Storyteller decides that the impression level slips to average.

Stacy still has to overcome three Doors. She spends the next week doing research into Erickson and discovers that he wants to *become a respected academic*. She tells Erickson that she has a colleague who can help break the cipher in which the book is written. This removes one Door without a roll. Now she must overcome two more before he'll agree. (Note that even if Stacy has no intention of helping Erickson in his quest toward academic glory, as long as he reasonably believes that lending her the book will help him achieve his Aspiration, it opens the Door.)

During her research into the professor's personality, she also learns that his Vice is Vanity; he likes to see himself as the hero. Stacy goes to his office in tears, saying that she is in danger of being accused of plagiarism for copying a paper, and asks if he can help authenticate her work. Doing this allows him to come to her rescue, which in turn lets him soak up some praise; this would allow him to regain Willpower through his Vice and as such is enough of a temptation to raise the impression level back to good. Stacy's player rolls Manipulation + Expression for Stacy to compose a letter of thanks to him and achieves an exceptional success. The last two Doors open, and Erickson offers to let Stacy borrow the book for a weekend. He probably even thinks it was his idea.

On the other hand, if Erickson is a player-controlled character, his player might decide he really doesn't want to let that book out of his sight. He might offer an alternative — he'll bring the book to Stacy and let her use it for an afternoon. That, of course, might complicate her intended demon summoning, but she does get to put the Flattered Condition on Erickson.

Forcing Doors

Sometimes, waiting and subtlety just aren't warranted, desired, or possible. In these cases, your character can attempt to force a character's Doors. This method is high-risk, high-reward. Forcing Doors often leads to burnt bridges and missed opportunities.

When forcing Doors, state your character's goal and her approach and then roll immediately. The current number of Doors applies as a penalty to the dice roll. If successful, proceed to resolution as normal. If the roll fails, the subject is immune to further efforts at Social maneuvering from your character.

Hard Leverage

Hard Leverage represents threats, drugging, intimidation, blackmail, kidnapping, or other heavy-handed forms of coercion. It drives home the urgency required to force open a character's Doors.

Hard Leverage that requires the character to suffer a breaking point removes one Door (if the modifier to the roll — not considering the character's breaking points — is greater than –2) or two Doors (if the modifier is –3 or less).

Example

In the example above, assume Stacy really needs that book *now*. She goes to Erickson and threatens him at gunpoint to give up the book. Doing this is definitely a breaking point for Stacy (see p. 155 for more on breaking points). She applies a modifier for her Integrity and then a modifier based on the severity of the action and the harm it does to her self-image and psyche. She's not in the habit of committing violent acts and Erickson is obviously terrified, so the Storyteller assigns a –2 modifier to the breaking point roll. This being the case, one Door is removed. If she'd shot him the leg to let him know she was serious, the breaking point modifier would have been at least –3, which would have removed two Doors. In either case, her player rolls Presence + Intimidation plus any bonus for the gun, minus the appropriate penalty.

Influencing Groups

Influencing a group works in the same way using the same system. This generally means that influencing a group requires at least an excellent level impression or forcing his Doors, unless the group meets regularly. The Storyteller determines Doors using the highest Resolve and Composure scores in the group. She also determines three Aspirations, a Virtue, a Vice, and a relative Integrity score for the group. When resolving the influence, most members will abide by the stated goal. Individual members may depart and do as they will, but a clear majority does as your player suggests.

Successive Efforts

After opening all Doors and resolving the action's goal, your character may wish to influence the same person or group again. If successful, subsequent influence attempts begin with one fewer Door. If the attempt failed or if Hard Leverage was employed, successive influence attempts begin with two more Doors. These modifiers are cumulative. No matter what, a character will always have at least one Door at the outset.

Combat

These rules supersede some of the combat rules presented in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, providing a lethal focus to fighting along with a unified system of conditions and reasons for characters to stop fighting before the other guy's only fit for the morgue.

Down and Dirty Combat

The combat system in the **World of Darkness Rulebook** and expanded in this section provides a reasonably comprehensive system to use when two or more people attempt to kill one another. Some fights don't deserve that much focus. When a fight has as much impact on the story as climbing a fence or breaking down a door, this simple system abstracts a fight to a single roll.

This system works particularly well when violence is a means to an end. To begin, the attacker declares his intent. As long as that intent is something that the Storyteller is comfortable with the character accomplishing in one roll, go ahead and apply this system. Since the nature of this combat reduces what would otherwise be a brutal act of violence to a single roll, the Storyteller may reserve it for characters who happen to be particularly capable combatants — or for facing enemies who are little more than chaff. If your arms deal has gone south and you have to get out of the country, the two mooks waiting for you in the hotel bathroom aren't a serious threat. The guys outside with a sedan and a range of fully-automatic weapons? They're a different story.

A player can call for a Down and Dirty Combat if he feels it's appropriate. If the Storyteller is fine with the character dispatching his opposition with a single roll, then it happens. As a rough guide, if a character has a combat pool of at least five dice, she's internalized the mechanics of violence to a degree that it is second nature and can use this system.

Note that Storyteller characters cannot use this option. Rather, it's possible for a character to suffer some damage during this kind of combat, but Storyteller-controlled characters cannot initiate.

Action: Instant and contested

Dice Pool: Combat pool (Dexterity + Firearms, Strength + Brawl, or Strength + Weaponry) versus either the opponent's combat pool (as above) *or* an attempt to escape (Strength or Dexterity + Athletics). Ignore Defense on this roll.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character's opponent gets the upper hand. This usually includes the opposite of the character's intent — if she wanted to disable the guards so she could escape, she is stunned instead.

Failure: The opponent wins the contest. If the opponent used a combat pool, deal damage equal to the difference in successes plus weapon modifier. Also, the opponent escapes unless he wants to press the combat.

Success: The character wins the contest. She deals damage equal to the difference in successes plus her weapon modifier and achieves her intent—if her intent includes killing her opponents, then she does so.

Exceptional Success: As a success, and the character also gains a point of Willpower from the rush of inflicting violence on an inferior opponent.

Going For Blood

A lot of the time, violence is an end to itself. Vinnie's run out on your sister, so you hammer some nails into a baseball bat and go teach him a lesson. Doc's going to set fire to your house with your family inside and dedicate their deaths to some forgotten god if you don't put a bullet in his brainpan. That *thing* has been slithering out of the barn at the edge of town for a month now, and if no one else is going to put it on a spike, it's up to you.

Other times — most times — violence is a means to an end. You don't want to punch this guy in the face, but you do need the book he's holding and he won't give it up. Donnie's holding the coke in one hand and a pistol in the other, talking himself up like a big man. Unless they're sociopaths or have a serious blood feud going on, nobody wants to get into a situation where they're going to kill someone. When this is the case, the Storyteller should make sure that the players know that the fight's about more than people trying to kill other people.

Optional Rule: Beaten Down & Surrender

As an optional rule, any character that takes more than his Stamina in bashing damage or any amount of lethal damage has had the fight knocked out of him. He has the Beaten Down Tilt (see p. 206; a Tilt, remember, is just a Condition that primarily affects combat). He must spend a point of Willpower every time he wants to take a violent action until the end of the fight. He can still apply Defense against incoming attacks, can Dodge, and can run like hell, but it takes a point of Willpower to swing or shoot back.

On the other hand, he can give in. Give the lunatic with the butcher's knife what she wants, whether that's a bus ticket, an apology, a bag of crack, or a promise to stay out of the New Town after midnight. If you give in, you gain a point of Willpower and take a Beat, but you take no more part in the fight. If the other side wants to attack you, they've got to spend a point of Willpower to do so and probably suffer a breaking point. If some gangbangers want your truck and your two buddies have surrendered for that sweet combination of Willpower and not getting hurt, that does mean that they're all coming for you. You could fight them off, but it's three against one. Or you could do the sensible thing and remember that you get a lot of trucks in this life but only one pine box. Once everyone on one side has surrendered, the fight's over.

These rules only apply to humans and human-like creatures — anything that would incur a breaking point for committing (or attempting) "murder." Creatures that don't have a problem killing people in general can ignore surrender without penalty and don't have the fight beaten out of them like normal folks.

Intent

It's important to know what people want out of a violent encounter. Before any violent encounter, the Storyteller should pause the action long enough to get a statement of intent from both sides. This intent describes what the *character* wants to see as the outcome of a violent encounter. It also can't involve outcomes that fall outside the current scene: "I want to become President of the United States" isn't a valid intent for a man with a gun, even one on the White House lawn, and the Secret Service will soon disabuse him of that notion. Some examples include:

- I want to throw Amado out of the window to get him away from me.
- I want Sheena to give me the statue.
- I want to get away from this gun-toting psycho.
- I want to steal Larry's wallet in the fray.
- I want to get to my truck to get the fuck out of Dodge.

Every statement of intent starts with the words "I want." That's the clearest way to phrase it. Once you've got the Intent sorted out for both sides, you know what it means for a character to surrender: Her opponent gets what he wants, and in exchange, she gets a point of Willpower and isn't the target of any more violence.

The basic rule of intent is that it's something that the character is willing to hurt — or kill — other people to get. Sometimes you don't know that you're willing to kill for what you want until you actually kill someone. If your intent has nothing to do with hurting people and you end up killing someone (not just beating them into unconsciousness), you lose a point of Willpower.

Sometimes, a character's intent puts limits on the combat. "I want to kill Tran for sleeping with my daughter" is fine as a statement of intent, but it does mean that the character's opponent isn't about to surrender: sure, Tran would gain a point of Willpower, but he'd have to die first. Even "I want to hurt Danny to teach him a lesson" is problematic: what can Danny gain from surrendering?

If one party's intent is violence for its own sake, their intended victims don't acquire the Beaten Down Tilt no matter how much damage they take, and (obviously) gain no benefit from surrendering. When someone actually wants to kill you, the only thing you can do is to stop her by any means necessary, whether that's running or shooting back.

Storyteller Characters

Most conflict happens between characters under the players' control and Storyteller characters. The difference between the two is negligible in most combats — one character with a gun or a knife is much like any other, regardless of who is in control of the character. That said, Storyteller characters do have easier access to one resource: Willpower.

A player has to monitor her character's Willpower throughout the whole story, deciding when and where to spend points and when to hold back, balancing those concerns against the chance of regaining points through indulging her Vice in a scene — or going all-out and hoping to trigger her Virtue for the chapter.

A Storyteller character has none of those concerns. He's not going to be present in most of the scenes, so it doesn't matter if he blows more Willpower — he can regain it when off-screen, and even if he doesn't, it's not like he's going to spend it. This is especially noticeable in combat, when Storyteller characters can spend Willpower to hurt characters who have surrendered, enhance their attacks, and defend with greater ability than the players' characters.

If a Storyteller character spends a lot of time around the other characters and has enough spotlight time to both spend and recover Willpower over a similar timespan to the other characters, that's fine. Otherwise, Storyteller characters should reduce their available Willpower to reflect their "one shot" nature. Gangbangers, thugs, and similar characters who don't have a name don't have any Willpower available to spend. Minor named characters — the kind who recur but aren't the main antagonists of a story — have one point of Willpower available. Recurring antagonists and major Storyteller characters who don't spend a lot of time around the characters can spend up to half their total Willpower in a scene.

Storyteller characters with reduced Willpower totals can still regain spent points through the normal means for regaining Willpower, but can't go above their modified Willpower total for a scene. Note, though, that their Resolve + Composure values are unaffected (in case the Storyteller needs to have them roll this dice pool), and supernatural powers that drain Willpower work normally.

Initiative

Determine Initiative at the start of a combat as normal. Many weapons now include an Initiative modifier. When your character is using that weapon, her Initiative is penalized by that amount — even if she's kicking out at a close attacker, she's got to account for the shotgun in her hands.

The only way to avoid an Initiative penalty from a weapon you're using is to stop wielding it — either sling it or drop it. You can drop a weapon as a reflexive action in order to return to your unarmed Initiative. Slinging or holstering a weapon is an instant action. When you change what weapon you're using, you act on your new Initiative at the start of the next turn. If a character is wielding two weapons — showing off with a pair of pistols, or carrying a baton and a riot shield — take the highest Initiative penalty and increase it by one. An Initiative penalty can never reduce a character's Initiative below 0.

Example: Riots sweep through the city streets and Cass joins her comrades on the police lines. She's got a baton in one hand, and a large riot shield in the other. The baton has a -2 initiative modifier; the riot shield has a -4 modifier. Her total Initiative modifier is −5.

Combat Summary Chart

This chart supersedes the one on p.154 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**.

Stage One: Intent

- The players and the Storyteller describe what their characters want out of the fight.
- Decide whether characters can surrender and can become Beaten Down.

Stage Two: Initiative

- If the attacker springs an ambush or otherwise strikes when the defender isn't able to counter, the defender rolls Wits + Composure contested by the attacker's Dexterity + Stealth. If the defender fails, she doesn't act on the first turn of combat and cannot apply Defense against attacks.
- Everyone rolls Initiative: the result of a die roll + Dexterity + Composure. If the character has a weapon readied, apply its Initiative Modifier.

Stage Three: Attack

- **Unarmed Combat:** Strength + Brawl vs. Defense
- **Melee Combat:** Strength + Weaponry vs. Defense
- **Ranged Combat:** Dexterity + Firearms
- **Thrown Weapons:** Dexterity + Athletics vs. Defense

A character's Defense is normally subtracted from any attack dice pools where it applies. If she chooses to Dodge, the defender rolls her Defense as a dice pool against each attack. Each success reduces the attacker's *successes* by one. If the attacker is reduced to zero successes, the attack does nothing. If the attacker has successes remaining, add any weapon modifier to the number of successes to determine how many points of Health the target loses. All weapons deal lethal damage.

Stage Four: The Storyteller describes the attack and wound in narrative terms.

Possible Modifiers

- Aiming: +1 per turn to a +3 maximum
- All-Out Attack: +2 with Brawl or Weaponry attack; lose Defense
- Armor Piercing: Ignores amount of target's armor equal to item's rating
- Autofire Long Burst: 20 or so bullets, no target limit pending Storyteller approval. A +3 bonus is applied to each attack roll; –1 per roll for each target after the first
- Autofire Medium Burst: 10 or so bullets at one to three targets, with a +2 bonus to each attack roll; –1 per roll for each target after the first
- Autofire Short Burst: Three bullets at a single target with a +1 bonus to the roll
- Concealment: Barely –1; partially –2; substantially –3; fully, see "Cover"
- Cover: Subtract Durability from damage; if Durability is greater than weapon modifier, attack has no effect
- Dodge: Double Defense, roll as a dice pool with each success subtracting one from the attacker's successes
- Drawing a Weapon: Requires instant action without a Merit and could negate Defense
- Firing from Concealment: Shooter's own concealment quality (–1, –2 or –3) reduced by one as a penalty to fire back (so, no modifier, –1 or –2)
- Offhand Attack: –2 penalty
- Prone Target: –2 penalty to hit in ranged combat; +2 bonus to hit when attacker is within close-combat distance
- Range: –2 at medium range, –4 at long range
- Shooting into Close Combat: –2 per combatant avoided in a single shot (not applicable to autofire); –4 if grappling
- Specified Target: Torso –1, leg or arm –2, head –3, hand –4, eye –5
- Surprised or Immobilized Target: Defense doesn't apply
- Touching a Target: Dexterity + Brawl or Dexterity + Weaponry; armor may or may not apply, but Defense does apply
- Willpower: Add three dice or +2 to a Resistance trait (Stamina, Resolve, or Composure) in one roll or instance

Surprise

When your character runs into an ambush or is otherwise the victim of a surprise attack, she has a chance of reacting in time to defend herself. Roll Wits + Composure, contested by the ambusher's Dexterity + Stealth. If you lose, you cannot take an action in the first turn of combat and do not get to apply Defense against incoming attacks. Roll Initiative in the second turn as normal.

Attack

The following changes apply to the rules to attack in combat.

Attack Dice Pools

Characters do not add a weapon's rating to their attack dice pool. Calculate dice pools for attacks as follows:

Unarmed Combat: Strength + Brawl; Defense applies

Melee Combat: Strength + Weaponry; Defense applies

Ranged Combat: Dexterity + Firearms

Thrown Weapons: Dexterity + Athletics; Defense applies

If your character has a scope or similar that affects how likely he is to hit his target, add the equipment bonus of the scope to the attack pool. These modifiers are listed separately to the weapon's base damage. Weapons that use system permutations — such as 9-again, 8-again, or similar — apply those effects to the attack roll.

Damage

The harm inflicted by an attack is determined by the number of successes on the attack roll, plus any weapon bonus. If you get no successes on your attack roll after applying Defense, you deal no damage — your victim doesn't have to defend against your weapon's bonus successes.

Attacks with fists and feet deal bashing damage. If you use a weapon, the damage is always lethal. Cricket bats and brass knuckles can shatter bones and crush skulls with far less effort than kicking someone to death. Some weapons have modifiers of +0. They don't add any bonus successes, but the attack still deals lethal damage. If you don't want to kill someone by accident, drop your weapon.

Close Combat

The following changes apply to the close-combat rules in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**

Defense

A character's Defense is equal to the lower of her Dexterity or Wits, plus her Athletics Skill. Some Merits can allow a character to use a Skill other than Athletics. Defense is subtracted from all unarmed, thrown, or weaponry attacks that the character is aware of. Spending Willpower on Defense increases it by two, but this bonus only lasts for one attack. Every time your character applies his Defense against an attack, reduce his Defense by one until the start of the next turn.

You can choose not to apply your character's Defense against incoming attacks. Sometimes a character might be attacked by weaker foes who act ahead of a stronger enemy, and thus you'd want to save the bulk of your Defense. On other occasions, you have to give up your Defense for an entire turn to use a combat maneuver, such as an all-out attack.

Dodge

If your character is in over his head, he can forsake his action to Dodge. When Dodging, double your character's Defense pool but do not subtract it from attack rolls. Instead, the defender's player rolls the character's Defense as a dice pool and subtracts any successes from the attacker's successes. This is an exception to the normal rules for contested actions. If the defender rolls at least as many successes as the attacker, the attack misses. Subtract successes for Defense *before* adding the weapon bonus.

As Dodging is a roll like any other, the player can spend Willpower to enhance it (getting +3 dice as normal). Merits and supernatural powers may allow additional dice pool effects such as allowing the Defense roll to be 8-again, or even a rote action.

Reduce Defense by one for each attack as normal when Dodging, *before* doubling the pool. If this reduces his Defense to 0, the defender is reduced to a chance die. On a dramatic failure, the character is left off-balance and out of position; reduce his Defense by 1 for his next turn.

Example

Julia has Dexterity • • and Athletics • for a Defense of three. When she Dodges, she has a pool of six dice to roll. She is attacked by a man with what looks like a radio antenna coming out of his neck and tries to Dodge his wild swing.

The Storyteller rolls seven dice for the man's attack (Strength + Brawl); Julia's player doubles her Defense and rolls six dice to Dodge. If the Storyteller rolls three successes and Julia's player rolls two, the man gets in with 1 success and inflicts 1 point of bashing damage. If the man had been using a knife doing 1L damage, he would have inflicted two points of damage: one for the success and one from the weapon.

On the other hand, assume Julia is accosted by a whole group of these radial-men. If four of them attack and Julia applies her Defense against each one, she has Defense 3 against the first attacker, 2 against the second, 1 against the third and 0 against the last one. If she chooses to Dodge the third attacker, she would roll two dice, because she applies the reduction to Defense *before* doubling it for Dodge. Likewise, if she were to Dodge the final attacker, she'd be rolling a chance die since her Defense was reduced to zero.

Pulling Blows

Sometimes you want to beat the fight out of someone without killing him. To that end you can choose to pull your blow, not putting full force behind an attack. You nominate a maximum amount of damage for the blow that can't be greater than the higher trait in your attack pool — for example, if you've got Strength • • and Brawl • • • •, you can deal between 1 and 4 points as your maximum damage. If you would ordinarily do more damage, any extra is ignored. Because you're holding back, it's easier for your opponent to ward off your blows: the defender gains a +1 bonus to Defense.

At the Storyteller's discretion, you can reflexively spend a point of Willpower when pulling your blow with a weapon to deal bashing damage. Otherwise, the only way to avoid dealing lethal damage is to stop using a lump of metal or wood to inflict trauma.

Unarmed Combat

In addition to punching and kicking people, characters can use the following options when brawling.

Bite

Mostly used by animals, bites damage depends on the size and lethality of the creature's jaws. A human's teeth do −1 damage; like other unarmed attacks, the damage is bashing. Animals have a weapon bonus depending on the kind of creature: a large dog would get +0, a wolf applies +1, and a great white shark gets +4.

Humans and similar creatures that do not have protruding jaws can only bite when using a Damage move as part of a grapple.

Disarm

You attempt to snatch an opponent's weapon away. Roll Strength + Brawl contested by your opponent's Strength + Athletics. If you succeed, your opponent drops his weapon. If you get an exceptional success, you take possession of your opponent's weapon. On a dramatic failure, you take damage equal to the weapon's bonus — if you're struggling over a gun, you take damage equal to its damage rating (the gun goes off).

Grapple

To grab your opponent, roll Strength + Brawl – Defense. On a success, both of you are grappling. If you've got a length of rope, a chain, or a whip, you can add its weapon bonus to your Strength when grappling. If you score an exceptional success on this first roll, pick a move from the list below.

When grappling, each party makes a contested Strength + Brawl versus Strength + Brawl action on the higher of the two characters' Initiative. The winner picks a move from the list below, or two moves on an exceptional success.

- **Break Free** from the grapple. You throw off your opponent; you're both no longer grappling. Succeeding at this move is a reflexive action, you can take another action immediately afterwards.

- **Control Weapon**, either by drawing a weapon that you have holstered or turning your opponent's weapon against him. You keep control until your opponent makes a Control Weapon move.

- **Damage** your opponent by dealing bashing damage equal to your rolled successes. If you previously succeeded at a Control Weapon action, add the weapon bonus to your successes.
- **Disarm** your opponent, removing a weapon from the grapple entirely. You must first have succeeded at a Control Weapon move.
- **Drop Prone**, throwing both of you to the ground (see "Going Prone"). You must Break Free before rising.
- **Hold** your opponent in place. Neither of you can apply Defense against incoming attacks.
- **Restrain** your opponent with duct tape, zip ties, or a painful joint lock. Your opponent suffers the Immobilized Tilt. You can only use this move if you've already succeeded in a Hold move. If you use equipment to Restrain your opponent, you can leave the grapple.
- **Take Cover** using your opponent's body. Any ranged attacks made until the end of the turn automatically hit him (see "Human Shields," below).

If more than one person tries to grapple the same victim, count the attempt as a teamwork action (**World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 134). On the team side, both primary and secondary actors roll Strength + Brawl – Defense to engage, but the victim's Defense is unaffected by how many people are involved — even if five people try to grab him, he treats it as one attack. In the grapple, both primary and secondary actors roll Strength + Brawl in a contested action with the victim. If the defender wins, any chosen moves only affect the primary actor.

Ranged Combat

The following changes apply to the ranged combat rules in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**.

Autofire

The extra dice gained for using automatic fire (and penalties for shooting at multiple people) apply to the gunman's dice pool. Any successful hits deal successes + weapon modifier damage. This is one of the few instances where wielding a weapon grants dice bonuses to attack as well as bonus damage.

Example: Weston's packing a submachine gun when the gang boss's three henchmen draw pistols. He pulls the trigger for a medium burst and sprays bullets at all three punks. Weston's Dexterity is 2, his Firearms is 4, and he gains a +2 bonus for a medium burst, giving him a total of eight dice. As he's shooting at three people, he suffers a −3 penalty. Weston's player rolls five dice three times, once for each henchman. As he's using a large SMG, he adds two successes to any successful roll to determine damage.

Covering Fire

Characters can use automatic weapons to provide covering fire — firing on full-auto to dissuade the character's enemies from coming out into the open. Covering fire is only possible with a weapon capable of fully automatic fire.

Roll Dexterity + Firearms. If successful, opponents within range must make a choice on their next turns; they can seek cover or drop prone (accepting normal penalties to any attacks made) or, if they take aggressive actions without seeking cover or going prone, they suffer a shot as if the successes on Covering Fire were scored against them.

The character states the general area he's firing at, and rolls Dexterity + Firearms. If the roll succeeds, characters in the affected area must make a choice on their next turns. They can avoid the attack, either running to any cover that's within their Speed or dropping prone (see "Going Prone," pp. 164–165 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). Or, they can take an action as normal but suffer damage based on the covering fire successes + weapon modifier. Covering fire takes 10 bullets, the same as firing a medium burst.

Example: The Santos Militia has military-spec hardware and they're on to Danny. One of the militia opens up with an assault rifle and the Storyteller informs Danny's player that he's using covering fire. The Storyteller rolls the militiaman's Dexterity + Firearms and gets two successes. Danny can either get out of the way by going prone or ducking behind one of the Santos' Hummers, or take a shot at the guy with the gun and take five points of lethal damage.

Firearms and Close Combat

Any firearm larger than Size 1 is too big to use to accurately shoot someone when fists and crowbars are the order of the day. In close combat, the target's Defense against firearms attacks is increased by the gun's (Size − 1). If using a gun larger than a pistol to bludgeon your opponent, treat it as an improvised crowbar (see below for weapon traits).

Cover

When shooting at a target in cover, subtract the cover's Durability from the damage dealt. Any remaining damage affects both the object providing cover and anyone hiding behind it equally. If the object's Durability is higher than the attacker's weapon modifier, the bullets cannot penetrate cover. Durability for a range of objects is provided on p. 136 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**. Remember that cover only applies when the intended victim is entirely hidden — a chain-link fence or steel lamppost isn't large enough for a person to hide behind.

If you can see your target through cover — glass, for example — subtract *half* the cover's Durability from incoming attacks (round down). This does not apply if the object's Durability is higher than your weapon modifier.

Example: Cross hides completely behind a wooden door. Drake shoots at the door in the hopes of hitting Cross beyond. The door's Durability is 1. Drake's attack roll nets three successes and he's using a heavy revolver, for a total of five damage. The shot passes through the door, dealing four damage to the door's Structure and to Cross. Today's lesson: in the roshambo of life, bullets beat a cheap wooden door.

Ranged Weapons Chart

Type	Dmg	Ranges	Clip	Initiative	Str	Size	Availability	Example
Revolver, lt	1	20/40/80	6	0	2	1	••	SW M640 (.38 Special)
Revolver, hvy	2	35/70/140	6	−2	3	1	••	SW M29 (.44 Magnum)
Pistol, lt	1	20/40/80	17+1	0	2	1	•••	Glock 17 (9mm)
Pistol, hvy	2	30/60/120	7+1	−2	3	1	•••	Colt M1911A1 (.45 ACP)
SMG, small*	1	25/50/100	30+1	−2	2	1	•••	Ingram Mac-10 (9mm)
SMG, large*	2	50/100/200	30+1	−3	3	2	•••	HK MP-5 (9mm)
Rifle	4	200/400/800	5+1	−5	2	3	••	Remington M-700 (30.06)
Assault Rifle*	3	150/300/600	42+1	−3	3	3	•••	Stery-Aug (5.56mm)
Shotgun**	3	20/40/80	5+1	−4	3	2	••	Remington M870 (12-gauge)
Crossbow***	2	40/80/160	1	−5	3	3	•••	

Damage: Indicates the number of bonus successes added to a successful attack. Firearms deal lethal damage against ordinary people. The type of damage may vary against supernatural opponents.

Ranges: The listed numbers a short/medium/long ranges in yards. Attacks at medium range suffer a −1 penalty. Attacks at long range suffer a −2 penalty.

Clip: The number of rounds a gun can hold. A "+1" indicates that a bullet can be held in the chamber, ready to fire.

Initiative: The penalty taken to Initiative when wielding the gun.

Strength: The minimum Strength needed to use a weapon effectively. A wielder with a lower Strength suffers a −1 penalty on attack rolls.

Size: 1 = Can be fired one-handed; 2 = Must be fired two-handed and can be hidden in a coat; 3 = Can be fired two-handed but not hidden on one's person

Availability: The cost in Resources dots or level of Social Merit needed to acquire the weapon.

* The weapon is capable of autofire, including short bursts, medium bursts, and long bursts.

** Attack rolls gain the 9-again quality

*** Crossbows take three turns to reload between shots. A crossbow can be used to deliver a stake through the heart (–3 penalty to attack rolls; must deal at least 5 damage in one attack)

Human Shields

When the shit hits the fan and the SWAT team hits the botched bank job, the only available cover may be a terrified member of the public. Unfortunately, the human body is nowhere as effective at blocking bullets as television and movies would have us believe.

If your character is in the morally dubious position of using another human being as cover, any shots directed his way do damage to his victim first. Reduce the damage dealt by the victim's Stamina and any armor. Any remaining damage blows right through to your character. If the person you want to use to save your ass is already part of the fight, you need to use the Take Cover grapple move.

Using a human shield is almost certainly a breaking point with a pretty severe modifier (–3 or more) if the victim dies. Someone else might have pulled the trigger, but you forced your victim to take the bullet.

Example: Drake only wanted to jack the pale lady's car. Now, he's facing down three dudes with hand cannons. In desperation, he grabs a guy off the sidewalk who's about to learn the meaning of "wrong place, wrong time." One of the lady's minions pulls the trigger. He's a practiced marksman (Dexterity 2, Firearms 2) so the Storyteller rolls four dice. He gets two successes and adds the gun's weapon modifier of 2. The human shield takes four points of lethal dam-

Melee Weapons Chart

Type	Damage	Initiative	Strength	Size	Availability	Special
Sap	0	−1	1	1	•	Stun
Brass Knuckles	0	0	1	1	•	Uses Brawl to attack
Baton	1	−1	2	2	n/a	
Crowbar	2	−2	2	2	•	
Tire Iron	1	−3	2	2	••	+1 Defense
Chain	1	−3	2	2	•	Grapple
Shield (small)	0	−2	2	2	••	Concealed
Shield (large)	2	−4	3	3	••	Concealed
Knife	0	−1	1	1	•	
Rapier	1	−2	1	2	••	Armor piercing 1
Machete	2	−2	2	2	••	
Hatchet	1	−2	1	1	•	
Fire Ax	3	−4	3	3	••	9-again, two-handed
Chainsaw	5	−6	4	3	•••	9-again, two-handed
Stake*	0	−4	1	1	n/a	
Spear**	2	−2	2	4	•	+1 Defense, two-handed

Type: A weapon's type is a general classification that can apply to anything your character picks up. A metal club might be an antique mace, a metal baseball bat, or a hammer, while a hatchet might be a meat cleaver or an antique hand-ax.

Damage: Indicates the number of bonus successes added to a successful attack. Weapons always deal lethal damage.

Initiative: The penalty taken to Initiative when wielding the weapon. If using more than one weapon, take the higher penalty and increase by 1.

Strength: The minimum Strength needed to use a weapon effectively. A wielder with a lower Strength suffers a −1 penalty on attack rolls.

Size: 1 = Can be hidden in a hand; 2 = Can be hidden in a coat; 3+ = Cannot be hidden.

Availability: The cost in Resources dots or level of Social Merit needed to acquire the weapon.

Concealed: A character who wields a shield but doesn't use it to attack can add its Size to his Defense, and uses its Size as a concealment modifier against ranged attacks.

Grapple: Add the chain's weapon bonus to your dice pool when grappling.

Stun: Double the weapon bonus for purposes of the Stun Tilt (p. 212).

Two-handed: This weapon requires two hands. It can be used one-handed, but doing so increases the Strength requirement by 1.

* A stake must target the heart (–3 penalty to attack rolls) and must deal at least 5 damage in one attack.

** The reach of a spear gives a +1 Defense bonus against opponents who are unarmed or wield weapons of Size 1.

Armor Chart

Type	Rating	Strength	Defense	Speed	Availability	Coverage
Modern						
Reinforced clothing*	1/0	1	0	0	•	Torso, arms, legs
Kevlar vest*	1/3	1	0	0	•	Torso
Flak Jacket	2/4	1	−1	0	••	Torso, arms
Full Riot Gear	3/5	2	−2	−1	•••	Torso, arms, legs
Archaic						
Leather (hard)	2/0	2	−1	0	•	Torso, arms
Chainmail	3/1	3	−2	−2	••	Torso, arms
Plate	4/2	3	−2	−3	••••	Torso, arms, legs

Rating: Armor provides protection against normal attacks and Firearms attacks. The number before the slash is for general armor, while the number after the slash is for ballistic armor.

Strength: If your character's Strength is lower than that required for her armor, reduce her Brawl and Weaponry dice pools by 1.

Defense: The penalty imposed on your character's Defense when wearing the armor.

Speed: The penalty to your character's Speed for the armor worn.

Availability: The cost in Resources dots or level of Social Merit needed to acquire the armor.

Coverage: The areas of a character protected by the armor. Unless an attacker targets a specific unarmored location ("Specified Targets", above), the armor's protection applies. Wearing a helmet increases the armor's coverage to include a character's head.

* This armor is concealed, either as normal clothing (e.g. biker leathers) or being worn under a jacket or baggy shirt. Attackers have no idea the target is wearing armor until after they land a successful hit.

age. Drake's player subtracts his human shield's Stamina of 2 from the damage and marks off two points of lethal damage himself.

General Combat Factors

The following changes apply to the general combat rules in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**.

Specified Targets

Attacking specific body parts has its benefits. In addition to ignoring armor (see "Armor," p. 205), strikes to limbs and the head can have added effects.

- Arm (–2): A damaging hit can inflict the Arm Wrack Tilt if it deals more damage than the target's Stamina
- Leg (–2): A damaging hit can inflict the Leg Wrack Tilt if it deals more damage than the target's Stamina
- Head (–3): A damaging attack can stun the victim (see the Stun Tilt, p. 212)
- Heart (–3): If the attacker does at least five points of damage, the weapon pierces the opponent's heart, with special effects for some monstrous targets
- Hand (–4): On a damaging hit, the victim suffers the Arm Wrack Tilt
- Eye (–5): On a damaging hit, the victim is blinded (see the Blinded Tilt, p. 208)

Killing Blow

When performing a killing blow, you deal damage equal to your full dice pool plus your weapon modifier. You've time enough to line up your attack so it avoids your victim's armor.

While people who kill in combat can justify their actions based on the heat of the moment, performing a killing

blow is a premeditated attempt to end a human life without the target having a chance to do anything about it. Going through with a killing blow is breaking point whether the victim survives or not.

Weapons and Armor

Weapons are one of the fastest ways to turn a fight into a murder. Sometimes, that's a good thing: pulling a gun can cool down a knife fight before it starts. To that end, this section updates the weapons presented in the **World of Darkness Rulebook** to work with the altered combat system presented here.

A weapon's damage rating doesn't add to an attacker's dice pool. Instead, it adds bonus successes to a successful attack roll. When using weapons from other books, subtract one from the listed damage rating — every successful attack does at least one point of damage.

Also, every weapon deals lethal damage. A baseball bat, club, or mace does just as much serious trauma to the human body as an edged weapon or a bullet — though some supernatural creatures don't take lethal damage from weapons. Melee weapons also have a Strength requirement divorced from their Size. This works exactly the same as the Strength requirement for firearms.

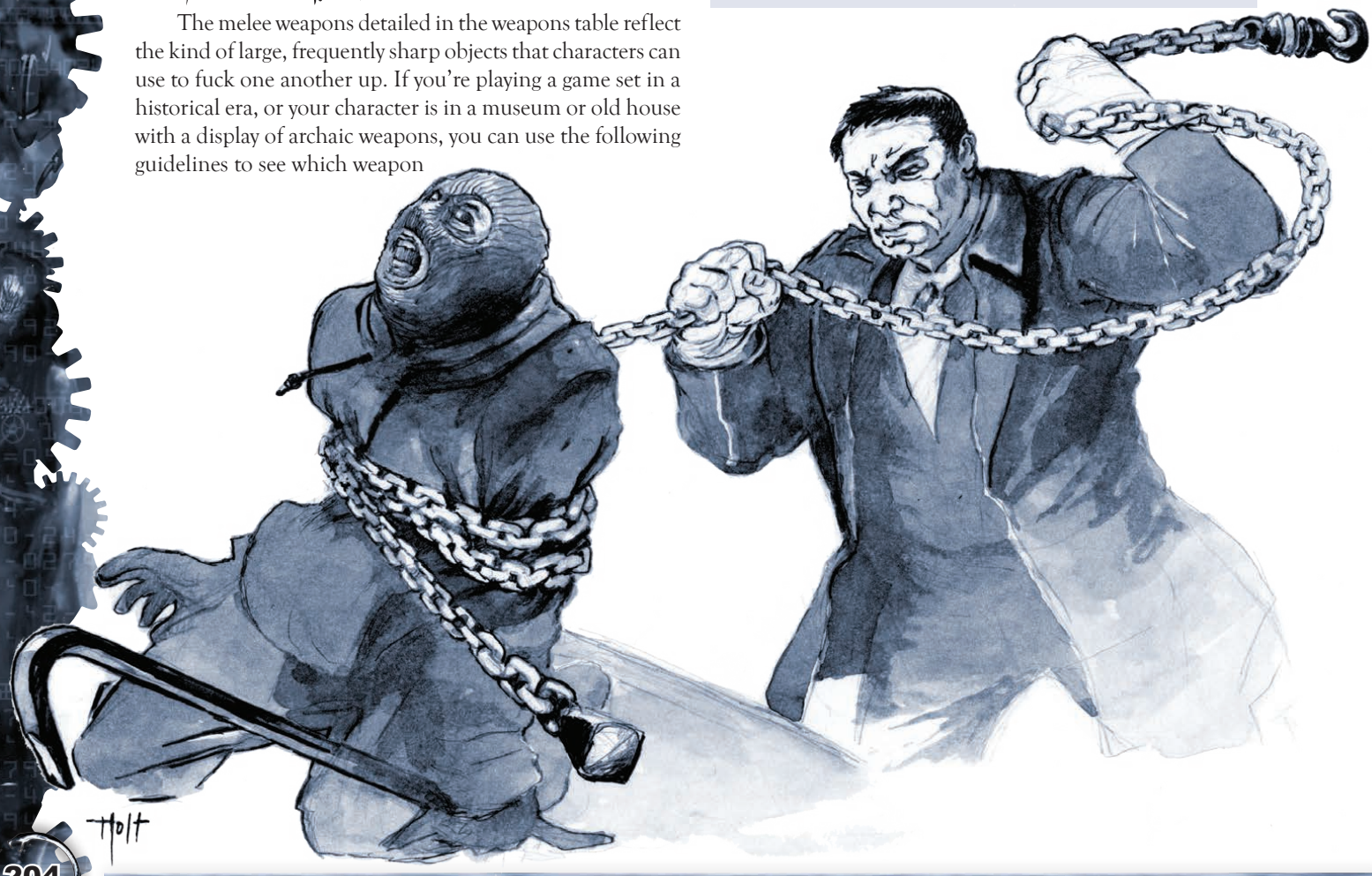
Melee Weapons

The melee weapons detailed in the weapons table reflect the kind of large, frequently sharp objects that characters can use to fuck one another up. If you're playing a game set in a historical era, or your character is in a museum or old house with a display of archaic weapons, you can use the following guidelines to see which weapon profile is most appropriate. The night you fought off a mugger with your combat knife is one thing; the night you fought off a shadowy monster by grabbing a mace from a museum display is quite another.

- **Sap:** One of a number of weapons (including the blackjack and cosh) used by law enforcement and criminals alike in an attempt to knock victims out rather than kill them. Unfortunately for users, it turns out that hitting people in the head with a heavy object is more lethal than most law enforcement agencies are comfortable with. This can also represent any small fast weapon that inflicts blunt trauma, including a sock full of billiard balls.

- **Brass Knuckles:** Brass knuckles slip over the wearer's fingers to give more force to a punch. This weapon uses Brawl for the attack roll but deals lethal damage. The profile can represent a range of fist-loads, including the ever-popular roll of quarters; without a metal guard for the knuckles, however, the user takes one point of bashing damage on a successful hit. It can also apply to steel-toed boots.

- **Baton:** Covering a wide range of lightweight blunt instruments, the baton includes the collapsible (asp) baton, police truncheon, and side-handled baton in use by various police forces. This category of weapon includes the 2x4 and other lengths of wood used to hurt people.



- **Crowbar:** In addition to crowbars and wrecking bars, this category includes metal pipes, lengths of scaffold, and bigger and heavier sporting implements such as baseball and cricket bats. This category can also include archaic clubs and maces.
- **Tire Iron:** An X-shaped piece of metal used to loosen car wheels. The cross shape makes it harder to maneuver than a crowbar but it also makes it easier to catch an attacker's arm or weapon. Using a tire iron or a similar weapon (such as a metal tonfa) gives an attacker +1 Defense.
- **Chain:** A length of chain or knotted rope isn't just a handy way to beat the shit out of someone. It's also the weapon of choice for grapplers looking for an edge to hold their opponent.
- **Shield:** A modern riot shield made of transparent polycarbonate or light metal with a viewing slit. A character carrying a shield can use it to strike and bludgeon opponents or ward off blows. If you don't use the shield to attack, add its Size to Defense against Brawl and Melee attacks. Against ranged attacks, the shield provides a concealment modifier equal to its Size. Small shields are roughly two feet in diameter and could represent a metal trash can lid, or an archaic buckler or target shield. A large shield is at least three feet tall and can represent archaic kite or tower shields.
- **Knife:** One of a range of weapons designed for stabbing and slashing, usually with a blade less than a foot long. Some characters may wield combat knives, while others grab a large kitchen knife or butcher's knife.
- **Rapier:** A long, thin sword normally found in fencing clubs, rapiers are used to stab rather than slash. This weapon's profile can also apply to sword-canes. A rapier can punch through light armor.
- **Machete:** A long weapon used to cut through plants. This weapon's profile can apply to any number of one-handed bladed weapons, including katana and other swords from around the world.
- **Hatchet:** A small, one-handed ax, hatchets can cut through bone just as easily as wood. This weapon's statistics can also cover large cleavers and heavy-bladed butcher's knives, as well as one-handed axes throughout history.
- **Fire Ax:** One of the most common axes for characters to encounter, fire axes are designed to cut through wooden doors. This weapon's profile can include larger two-handed axes used for chopping wood and archaic battle-axes.
- **Chainsaw:** This weapon profile reflects the chainsaw as it appears in modern media rather than trying to model reality. It can also apply to any two-handed weapon that's large, sharp, and very heavy, such as an executioner's ax.
- **Stake:** Using a stake in combat is usually a bad idea since it's a roughly sharpened wooden spike that doesn't penetrate skin very well, but sometimes it's the only weapon that can do anything to a supernatural opponent.
- **Spear:** Most people don't ever see a spear or staff used in anger — or at all. The long reach of such a weapon gives a user +1 Defense against opponents who are unarmed or wielding weapons of Size 1. This weapon profile can also apply to long (more than five and a half feet) lengths of scaffold or pipe, sometimes with a sharpened metal end.

Improvised Weapons

The examples of weapons above can only go so far. What about an old-fashioned corded telephone, a thrown brick, or a shard of sharp metal? Characters who grab an improvised weapon still stand a chance of doing serious damage, but it's not as likely compared to someone who's brought a tool specifically for killing.

If you can make an argument (and the Storyteller accepts it) that your improvised weapon is close enough to one of the weapons above, use the associated weapon profile. Otherwise, an improvised weapon does (Durability − 1) damage, with an initiative penalty and Strength requirement equal to the weapon's Size.

Using an improvised weapon reduces your attack dice pool by 1. On a successful attack, the weapon takes the same amount of damage as it inflicts; though Durability reduces this damage as normal. Once the weapon's Structure is reduced to 0, the object is too wrecked to inflict any real damage.

Armor

With the changes to Defense and weapon damage, a character wearing armor no longer adds its rating to his Defense. The two armor ratings work differently to compensate.

- Ballistic armor applies to incoming firearms attacks. Each point of ballistic armor downgrades one point of damage from lethal to bashing.
- General armor applies to all attacks. Each point of general armor reduces the total damage taken by one point, starting with the most severe type of damage.

If armor has both ballistic and general ratings, apply the ballistic armor first.

When applying armor to an attack dealing lethal damage, you're always going to feel some pain. Even if your armor would reduce the attack to 0 damage, you still take one point of bashing damage.

Characters can only benefit from one source of armor at once — wearing a Kevlar vest under full riot gear is hot and uncomfortable and offers no appreciable extra protection. If a character insists on "layering" armor, it's up to the player to decide which single source applies to all incoming attacks. That decision's final, until the character chills out and remembers that most people don't walk down the street in full riot gear just to buy a quart of milk.

Characters with supernatural armor, such as a mage's warding spells or a werewolf's tough hide can benefit from such protection in addition to mundane armor; add the ratings together to determine a character's final protection.

Example: Detective Black knew something was off, but he didn't know what until he heard the crack of a handgun. The shooter got two successes, plus two for a heavy pistol, for four points of lethal damage. Black's wearing a Kevlar vest (armor 1/3) which converts three of the four points of damage to bashing, then subtracts one point of lethal damage. He takes three points of bashing damage and runs for cover.

Armor Piercing

A weapon that's listed as having the armor piercing quality has a rating between 1 and 3. When attacking someone wearing armor, subtract the piercing quality from the target's ballistic armor first, then general armor.

If you're shooting at an object or a person in cover, subtract the piercing quality from the cover's Durability. Once the shot's passed through cover, any armor-piercing quality is lost.

Example: *The gunman shooting at Detective Black sees the cop stagger but keep moving and switches to his backup piece: a light revolver packing armor-piercing rounds. The Storyteller rolls three successes and adds one for the pistol. The rounds are armor piercing 2, which reduces the vest's ballistic armor to 1. Detective Black's vest converts one point of damage to bashing and reduces the lethal damage by one, so he takes a further two points of lethal and one point of bashing damage.*

Tilts

Tilts were introduced in **The Danse Macabre** for **Vampire: The Requiem** as a unified way of applying circumstances to both characters and scenes. Tilts are mechanically similar to Conditions, but they affect characters and scenes in combat. Out of combat, use Conditions instead.

Tilts replace the existing combat rules for Fighting Blind, Immobilized, Knockdown, Knockout, and Stun effects. They also provide a new way of handling drugs, poisons, sickness, and environmental and weather effects, but *only as they apply to combat*. Out of combat, use the normal rules for these effects.

Tilts do not give characters Beats when they end, but the effects of a Tilt can very easily cause a Condition. For instance, a character in a fight gets a handful of road salt flung in his eyes and receives the Blinded Tilt. When combat ends, this shifts to the Blind Condition. Resolving this Condition will give the character a Beat. If the character enters combat again before the Condition is resolved, the Blinded Tilt applies again.

Tilts come in two forms: Personal and Environmental. Personal Tilts only apply to one character and include ways in which that character can overcome the effect. Environmental Tilts affect the whole scene, and offer ways for individual characters to mitigate their effects.

Arm Wrack

Your arm burns with pain and then goes numb. It could be dislocated, sprained, or broken: whatever's wrong with it, you can't move your limb.

Effect: If your arm's broken or otherwise busted, you drop whatever you're holding in that arm and can't use it to attack opponents — unless you've got the Ambidextrous Merit, you suffer off-hand penalties for any rolls that require manual dexterity. If this effect spreads to both limbs, you're down to a chance die on any rolls that require manual dexterity, and −3 to all other Physical actions.

Causing the Tilt: Some supernatural powers can cripple a victim's limbs or break bones with a touch. A character can have his arm knocked out by a targeted blow to the arm (–2 penalty) that deals more damage than the character's Stamina. A targeted blow to the hand inflicts this Tilt if it does any damage.

Ending the Tilt: If the Tilt is inflicted as a result of an attack, mark an 'x' under the leftmost Health box inflicted in that attack; the Tilt ends when the damage that caused it has healed. If aggravated damage inflicts this Tilt, the character loses the use of his arm (or straight up loses his arm) permanently.

Beaten Down

The character has had the fight knocked out of him.

Effect: The character cannot take active part in the fight without extra effort. The player must spend a point of Willpower *each time* he wants the character to take a violent action in the fight. He can still run, Dodge, and apply Defense. If he wishes to take another action, the Storyteller should judge whether the action is aggressive enough to require the expenditure. `

Causing the Tilt: The character suffers bashing damage in excess of his Stamina *or* any amount of lethal damage.

Ending the Tilt: The character surrenders and gives the aggressor what he wants. At this point, the character regains a point of Willpower and takes a Beat, but can take no further action in the fight. If the aggressor's intent is to kill or injure the character, obviously surrender isn't a good option.

Tracking Tilts

A quick-reference chart of Tilts is available at the end of this chapter, which summarizes the effects of each one. To keep track of who is affected by what Tilt, sticky notes or index cards come in very helpful. Environmental Tilts should sit somewhere that everyone can see them, while Personal Tilts should be close to hand for the player of the affected character. When a Storyteller character is hit with a Tilt, jot the character's name down on the card as well.

Tilt Reference

This quick-reference can help players and Storytellers alike remember the effects of each Tilt detailed in the previous pages.

Personal Tilts

Tilt	Effects
Arm Wrack	One arm: Drop anything held, suffer off-hand penalties for most rolls. Both arms: Chance die on rolls requiring manual dexterity, −3 to other Physical actions.
Beaten Down	Cannot take violent action in combat without spending Willpower.
Blinded	One eye: −3 to vision-related rolls. Both eyes: −5 to vision-related rolls, lose all Defense.
Deafened	One ear: −3 Perception rolls. Both ears: Chance die on Perception rolls, −2 to combat rolls.
Drugged	−2 Speed, −3 to combat rolls (including Defense and Perception). Ignore wound penalties.
Immobilized	No combat actions. Can't move or apply Defense.
Insane	+1 to combat rolls, act after everyone else, −3 to Social rolls, can't spend Willpower.
Insensate	No combat actions. Can move and apply Defense. Taking damage ends the Tilt.
Knocked Down	Lose action this turn (if still to take), knocked prone. Can apply Defense, attack from ground at −2.
Leg Wrack	One leg: half Speed, −2 penalty on Physical rolls for movement. Both legs: Knocked Down, give up action to move at Speed 1, movement-based Physical rolls reduced to chance die.
Poisoned	Moderate: 1 point of bashing damage per turn. Grave: 1 point of lethal damage per turn.
Sick	Moderate: −1 to all actions. Penalty increases by 1 for every two turns. Grave: As moderate, but also inflicts 1 point of bashing damage per turn.
Stunned	Lose next action. Half Defense until you next act.

Environmental Tilts

Tilt	Effects
Blizzard	−1 penalty to visual Perception and ranged attack rolls, increased by 1 per 10 yards. −1 penalty to Physical rolls per 4 inches of snow.
Earthquake	Penalty to Dexterity rolls depending on severity. Take 1 to 3 lethal damage per turn, Stamina + Athletics downgrades to bashing.
Extreme Cold	Bashing damage doesn't heal. −1 penalty to all rolls, increasing by 1 per hour. At −5, further hours deal one point of lethal damage.
Extreme Heat	Bashing damage doesn't heal. −1 penalty to all rolls, increasing by 1 per hour. At −5, further hours deal one point of lethal damage.
Flooded	−2 to Physical dice pools per foot of flooding. Once water is over head, character must swim or hold breath.
Heavy Rain	−3 to aural and visual Perception rolls.
Heavy Winds	−3 modifier to aural Perception rolls. Winds rated between 1 and 5, severity acts as penalty to Physical rolls and deals that much bashing damage per turn, Dexterity + Athletics to avoid.
Ice	−2 Speed, −2 to Physical actions. Can move at normal speed but −4 Physical actions. Dramatic Failure causes Knocked Down; Drive rolls are at −5 and half Acceleration.

Blinded

The character's eyes are damaged or removed, or the character is placed in a situation where eyesight is eliminated (a pitch-black room or a supernatural effect).

Effect: The character suffers a −3 penalty to any rolls that rely on vision — including attack rolls — and halves his Defense if one eye is blinded. That penalty increases to −5 and losing all Defense if both eyes are affected.

Causing the Tilt: The most common means of inflicting the tilt is to severely impair the target's eyesight (using a blindfold, etc). An attacker can inflict temporary blindness by slashing at her opponent's brow, throwing sand into his eyes, or kicking up dirt. This requires an attack roll of Dexterity + Athletics with a −3 penalty; the victim's Defense applies to this attack. If it succeeds, the target is Blinded for the next turn.

Blindness can also be inflicted by dealing damage to the target's eyes — a specified attack with a −5 penalty (see Specified Targets, above). A successful attack normally damages one eye. It takes an exceptional success to totally blind an attacker.

Ending the Tilt: If an attack against the character's eye does any points of damage, mark an 'x' under the leftmost Health box inflicted in that attack. If the damage inflicted is aggravated the character loses vision in that eye permanently. Otherwise, the condition ends when the damage that caused the Tilt is healed.

Blizzard (Environmental)

Heavy snowfall carpets the ground and just keeps falling, whipped up by howling winds into a barrage of whirling white.

Effect: Blizzards make it very hard to see for any real distance. Rolls to see things close to the character's person, out to arm's length away, suffer a −1 penalty. Each additional ten yards inflicts an additional −1 penalty (cumulative) on all visual Perception rolls. This penalty also applies to ranged attack rolls. Moving through snow is difficult. Every four inches of snow applies a −1 penalty to appropriate Physical rolls, including combat rolls, Athletics, and so forth. The Blizzard Tilt rarely applies by itself — the Storyteller may also inflict any or all of the Extreme Cold, Heavy Winds, or Ice Tilts (all found below).

Causing the Tilt: For the most part, the weather is out of the characters' control — the Storyteller should telegraph an incoming blizzard before it hits, but it's ultimately up to her. Some supernatural powers might grant a character the power to create a blizzard.

Ending the Tilt: Without supernatural powers, characters can't "end" a blizzard. The best they can manage is to escape the weather or wait for it to stop. Proper equipment (such as goggles and snow boots) can add +1 to +3 to a roll, offsetting some of the penalties. If someone is causing this Tilt through a supernatural power, it's possible that the characters could disrupt his concentration.

Deafened

The character can't hear. Maybe he's suffering intense tinnitus or can only hear the roaring of blood in his ears, or he just plain can't hear.

Effect: If the character is deaf in one ear, he suffers a −3 penalty to hearing-based Perception rolls. A character who is struck deaf in both ears only gets a chance die on hearing-based Perception rolls, and suffers a −2 penalty to all combat-related dice rolls — suddenly losing the ability to hear the people around you is tremendously disorienting.

Causing the Tilt: A particularly loud noise within 10 feet of the character may cause temporary hearing loss as though the character were deaf in both ears. Alternatively, a targeted attack on the ear — at a −4 penalty — can deafen a character. Supernatural creatures with heightened senses can be deafened by loud noises at greater distances.

Ending the Tilt: Deafness from loud noises fades after 10 – (victim's Stamina + Resolve) turns. If an attack against the character's ear does any points of damage, mark an 'x' under the leftmost Health box inflicted in that attack. If the damage inflicted is aggravated, the character loses hearing in the ear permanently. Otherwise, the condition ends when the damage that caused the Tilt is healed.

Drugged

The character's mind is addled by mind-altering substances, such as drink or drugs.

Effect: The effects of specific drugs are detailed in the on p.177 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**. A generic narcotic can be represented with one set of modifiers: the character suffers a −2 modifier to Speed (and static Defense, if used) and a −3 penalty to all rolls in combat, including Defense and Perception. The character also ignores wound penalties.

Causing the Tilt: If the character has chosen to take drugs, then he suffers the effects. To administer drugs to another character is a Dexterity + Weaponry attack, suffering a −1 modifier for the improvised weapon. If the drug has to go in to a specific body part (such as an arm or mouth), it requires an attack against a specified target.

Ending the Tilt: Each drug in the **World of Darkness Rulebook** explains how long a high lasts. A generic narcotic lasts for 10 – (victim's Stamina + Resolve) hours. This time is halved by medical help, such as pumping the victim's stomach or flushing his system.

Earthquake (Environmental)

Everything shudders and shakes; huge rents and holes tear the ground wide open.

Effect: Earthquakes don't last long, but they don't have to. When the quake's actually occurring, all Dexterity-based dice pools (and Defense) suffer a −1 to −5 penalty depending on the quake's severity. Characters take between one and three points of lethal damage per turn of the quake's duration, though a reflexive Stamina + Athletics roll can downgrade that damage to bashing — or cancel it entirely on an exceptional success.

Causing the Tilt: Without tremendous supernatural power, it's almost impossible to cause an earthquake. A character who detonates a powerful explosive underground might simulate the effects over a city-block for a few seconds.

Ending the Tilt: Earthquakes are fortunately very quick events. It's very rare for one to last more than a minute (20 turns), so waiting them out is the best course of action.

Extreme Cold (Environmental)

Bone-chilling winds bite through the character, or trudging through knee-deep snow takes all of the sensation from his limbs. Any time the temperature gets down below zero degrees Celsius (32 degrees Fahrenheit), a character can suffer from the cold's effects. This Tilt can sometimes be personal, either as a result of a medical condition such as hypothermia or a supernatural power.

Effect: When the temperature is below freezing, characters can't heal bashing damage — the extreme temperature deals damage at the same rate normal characters heal it (a cut might turn to frostbite, for instance). Supernatural beings and characters who heal faster than normal instead halve their normal healing rate. For every hour that a character is continuously affected by this Tilt, he accrues a −1 penalty to all rolls. When that penalty hits −5 dice, he instead suffers 1 point of lethal damage per hour.

Causing the Tilt: A character can suffer this Tilt from being in a frozen environment — whether he's outside in the Arctic tundra or in a walk-in freezer. Inflicting the Tilt is reasonably straightforward: throw the victim into a freezing lake or lock him in a freezer for long enough and he'll develop hypothermia.

Ending the Tilt: The best way to escape the freezing cold is to find a source of warmth — either a building with working heating, or warm bundled clothing. A character who has hypothermia requires medical attention.

Extreme Heat (Environmental)

The character might be stumbling through the desert with the sun beating down on him, or running through the steam-tunnels surrounding an old boiler room. This Tilt can also be personal, the result of a debilitating fever that spikes his temperature far above the norm. Extreme heat is normally anything above 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit) — this includes both environmental temperature and internal body temperature due to fever.

Effect: When the temperature is far above normal, characters can't heal bashing damage — the extreme temperature deals damage at the same rate normal characters heal it (a cut might heal, but it's replaced by sunburn or sunstroke). Supernatural beings and characters who heal faster than normal instead halve their normal healing rate. For every hour that a character is continuously affected by this Tilt, he accrues a −1 penalty to all rolls. When that penalty hits −5 dice, he instead suffers a point of lethal damage per hour.

Causing the Tilt: This Tilt is usually caused by environmental factors — being out at noon in the desert or spending too long in a sauna or forge. Even a fever is the result of an infection, rather than something that an opponent can force on a character. It's possible to create this Tilt on a given character: securing someone to a chair right next to an old, inefficient boiler, or stranding them in the desert far from any shade.

Ending the Tilt: The key to ending this Tilt is simple: get out of the heat. In a desert or similar environment, finding shade is paramount. Elsewhere, the character needs to escape whatever is causing the abnormal temperatures.

Flooded (Environmental)

Some liquid — brackish water, mud, gore, or raw sewage — is high enough to impede the character's progress.

Effect: Each foot of liquid inflicts a −2 penalty to all Physical dice pools. If the water goes up over her head, a character has to swim (Dexterity + Athletics) with a penalty appropriate for the speed of flooding. Alternatively, she can try to hold her breath ("Holding Breath," p. 49 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**) if she cannot get her head above the rising waters.

Causing the Tilt: Normally, this Tilt is the result of heavy rain, sudden snowmelt, or a broken water main. Characters can cause this Tilt by smashing up a water heater or blowing up a small dam. Some supernatural creatures may be able to call floods down onto a region.

Ending the Tilt: Characters can escape flooding by getting to high ground, which is enough to mitigate this Tilt. A long-term fix would require draining the floodwaters, but each flood requires its own solution.

Heavy Rain (Environmental)

Torrential rain lashes down in knives, bouncing high off the sidewalk. The sound of rain on the ground is a constant hammering rumble that goes on without end, like dropping ball bearings on a tin roof. Thick gray curtains of water obscure vision.

Effect: Heavy rains — approaching tropical storm levels or worse — cause a Perception penalty of −3 dice to both vision and hearing. Rain's hard to see through, but it's also *loud*. If the rains carry on for an hour or more, the Flooded Tilt will soon follow. This Tilt is often accompanied by Heavy Winds; a character trapped out in Heavy Rains might come under the effects of Extreme Cold.

Causing the Tilt: Short of supernatural power or a fleet of cloud-seeding aircraft, Heavy Rain is the result of natural weather patterns.

Ending the Tilt: The best way out of the rain is to get indoors. Unless it's the start of some sodden apocalypse, the characters can wait for the weather to ease.

Heavy Winds (Environmental)

Howling winds buffet at the characters, whipping street furniture into the air, tearing the roofs from buildings. Powerful winds can toss cars around like toys. Anyone out in the winds feels like they're taking a beating just for walking down the street.

Effect: Heavy winds are loud, so characters suffer a −3 modifier to aural Perception rolls. Also the wind inflicts a penalty to all Physical rolls when out in the winds — including Drive rolls. Grade the wind from one to five — one is tropical storm level (around 40 MPH), three is hurricane level (around 80 MPH), and five is tornado level (150+ MPH). This is the penalty applied to Physical dice rolls. Characters outside in the maelstrom take damage from flying debris, taking bashing damage each turn equal to the wind's rating. Characters can make a reflexive Dexterity + Athletics roll to avoid damage.

Causing the Tilt: Heavy winds are a fact of life, from siroccos in the desert to tornados in the Midwest to wind shears everywhere.

Ending the Tilt: Getting out of the wind is the best way to end this Tilt. Sometimes that's as easy as sheltering in an automobile — as long as nobody tries to drive. Buildings provide more permanent shelter.

Ice (Environmental)

The ground's covered in a mirror-smooth layer of ice that sends wheels spinning and people's feet flying out from under them. The ice could be so thin as to be nearly invisible or a thick layer that's the only thing keeping the characters from sinking into a frozen lake.

Effect: When a character can't trust her footing, divide her Speed in half and all Physical rolls (and Defense) suffer a −2 penalty. Attempting to move at full Speed increases the Physical penalty to −4. Any dramatic failure on a Physical roll inflicts the Knocked Down Tilt. Driving on ice is a real pain — halve Acceleration and characters suffer a −5 penalty to Drive rolls.

Causing the Tilt: This Tilt doesn't just apply to icy conditions, but to any surface that's slick and slippery, including a spill of industrial lubricant or just a really well polished wooden or linoleum floor. Characters can use a Dexterity + Crafts roll to cover an area in industrial cleaner or mix up cleaning chemicals into a lubricant. If the Extreme Cold Tilt is in effect, even covering the area with water would do the trick.

Ending the Tilt: "Get off the ice" is good advice, but that can take work. Characters can use heat or fire to melt ice, or throw down copious quantities of salt or grit to increase traction.

Immobilized

Something holds the character fast, preventing him from moving. This could be a grappling opponent, a straightjacket wrapped with heavy chains, or a coffin secured on the outside with a padlock.

Effect: The character can't do anything but wriggle helplessly. He can't apply Defense against incoming attacks and can't take combat-related actions. If someone's holding him down, he can spend a point of Willpower to deliver a head-butt or similar attack, but even that might not free him.

Causing the Tilt: The usual way to inflict this Tilt is through the Restrain grappling move. This often uses material means to prevent the victim from moving, such as binding limbs with duct tape or zip-ties, tossing the victim into a car trunk or similar tight space, or applying painful holds and joint locks.

Ending the Tilt: An Immobilized target can break free by escaping from a grapple or snapping whatever binds her. If grappled, the character can struggle as normal but can only select the Break Free move on a success. If held by an item, the character must make a Strength + Athletics roll penalized by the item's Durability. If a character's arms and legs are both bound, he suffers a −2 penalty; this increases to −4 if he's hog-tied. On a success, he snaps the bindings or breaks free. Each roll, successful or not, deals a point of bashing damage.

Insane

The character suffers from a panic attack, sudden imbalance, or a full-on psychotic break. Her pulse races and her mind cannot focus. The world's an unstable place, and she's unable to keep her balance.

Effect: Someone suffering a psychotic break isn't the sort of person to go down without a fight. Her stated intent might be irrational or just plain impossible, and she might have fewer ethical problems with using extreme violence to get what she wants. The character gains a +1 bonus to all combat rolls, but takes actions after everyone else (if two characters suffer from the Insane Tilt, both act after everyone else but compare Initiative as normal). A character suffering from this Tilt may spend Willpower, but the cost is 2 dots instead of 1 for the same effect.

Causing the Tilt: Faced with extraordinary circumstances, any character with an appropriate Condition may gain the Insane Tilt. The Storyteller can call for a Resolve + Composure roll to resist a general anxiety that gnaws at the character's mind; if the character fails, he gains the Tilt. If the character witnesses something truly horrific — a daughter watches her father walk to the end of the garden and shoot himself in the head, smiling all the while; a man stumbles into the wrong office at work and sees his co-workers feasting on the intern's organs; a solder sees her unit gunned down by a sniper while she can do nothing — the Storyteller can rule that the Tilt is unavoidable.

The Insane Tilt can also be triggered by a breaking point. If a character fails a breaking point role during combat, the Storyteller may apply the Insane Tilt then as well.

A character can work to *inspire* another character's madness in order to cause this Tilt. She could orchestrate events that she hopes will provoke a psychotic break, but that's amateur hour. A professional swaps out her victim's meds, giving stimulants just as his bipolar cycle ticks into mania, or dosing a paranoid or schizophrenic with hallucinogenic drugs.

Some supernatural creatures possess mind-affecting powers that can apply this Tilt, even to characters who do not have an appropriate Condition.

Ending the Tilt: The specific effects of this Tilt don't normally last beyond the end of the scene. A character can try to force her mind to a state of balance, but it's not easy. She must sit and focus on blocking out the craziness. She rolls Resolve + Composure as an instant action contested by a dice pool of (10 – her Willpower). She can't take any other actions that turn and doesn't apply Defense against any attacks.

Insensate

The character shuts down, either due to extreme fear or sudden pleasure. He may huddle in a corner, cringe away from sudden noises, or stare into space as waves of pleasure lap over him.

Effect: The character can't take any actions until the Tilt is resolved. He can apply Defense to incoming attacks, and if he takes any damage from an attack, he's knocked free of whatever fogged his brain.

Causing the Tilt: Several supernatural powers can leave their victim in a trance-like state of heightened emotion, whether it's a vampire's mind-affecting tricks or the pants-shitting terror of witnessing a werewolf take on an inhuman form. A truly heroic amount of alcohol or a hallucinogenic drug might have similar effects; administering such a drug is a Dexterity + Weaponry attack, suffering a −1 modifier for the improvised weapon.

Ending the Tilt: The Tilt wears off at the end of the scene. The victim can spend a point of Willpower before then to act normally for one turn. A successful attack will also end the Tilt. If a character has been knocked insensible by drugs, this Tilt is replaced with the Drugged Tilt when it ends.

Knocked Down

Something knocks the character to the floor, either toppling her with a powerful blow to the chest or taking one of her legs out from under her.

Effect: The character is knocked off her feet. If she hasn't already acted this turn, she loses her action. Once she's on the ground, a character is considered prone (see "Going Prone," pp. 164–165 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). The character can still apply Defense against incoming attacks, and can attempt to attack from the ground at a −2 penalty.

Causing the Tilt: Some weapons list "Knockdown" as a special effect of a damaging hit. Otherwise, a melee weapon with a damage modifier of +2 or greater, or a firearm with a damage modifier of +3 or more can be used to knock a character down with the force of the blow. Alternatively, a melee weapon or unarmed attack can knock an opponent down with a targeted attack against the legs (–2 modifier). The attacker declares that he wants to knock his opponent down and halves the total damage done (rounding down). On a successful attack, the target is knocked down.

Ending the Tilt: The easiest way to end this Tilt is to stand up, which takes an action. A character affected by this Tilt who hasn't yet acted can make a Dexterity + Athletics roll, minus any weapon modifier, instead of her normal action. If successful, she avoids the effects of this Tilt altogether. On a failure, she falls over and the Tilt applies as normal.

Leg Wrack

Your leg feels like it's going to snap clean off whenever you move; when you stop moving, you feel a burning numbness that encourages you to avoid moving.

Effect: If your leg is broken, sprained, or dislocated, halve your Speed and suffer a −2 penalty on Physical rolls that require movement (and Defense). If both of your legs are wracked, you fall over — taking the Knocked Down Tilt — and cannot get up. Your Speed is reduced to 1; if you want to move at all, you cannot take any other action. Physical rolls that require movement are reduced to a chance die.

Causing the Tilt: Some supernatural powers can cripple a victim's limbs or break bone with a touch. A character can have his leg knocked out by a targeted blow to the leg (–2 penalty) that deals more damage than the character's Stamina.

Ending the Tilt: If the Tilt is inflicted as a result of an attack, mark an 'x' under the leftmost Health box inflicted in that attack. The Tilt ends when that damage that caused it has healed. If the damage that inflicts this Tilt is aggravated, the character loses use of his leg permanently.

Poisoned

You've got poison inside you. It's tearing you apart from the inside; burning like acid in your gut and making your head swim.

Effect: This Tilt applies a general sense of being poisoned to a character without worrying about Toxicity during combat. For the purposes of this Tilt, a poison is either "moderate" or "grave" — a moderate poison causes 1 point of bashing damage per turn of combat, while a grave poison ups that to 1 point of lethal damage per turn. If the Storyteller cares to continue the effects of the poison outside of combat, he can apply the standard rules for handling poisons and toxins when combat is complete.

Causing the Tilt: It's possible for a character to not know that he's been poisoned. It could be as innocuous as switching drinks with a pretty girl who is the target of a mob hit, or as simple as walking into a house with a carbon monoxide leak. That said, the main time poison comes up in combat is when one combatant inflicts it on another. Injecting your opponent with a syringe full of drain cleaner or snake venom is a Dexterity + Weaponry attack, suffering a −1 modifier for the improvised weapon.

Ending the Tilt: Short of immediate medical attention — and how many fights take place in an emergency room? — all a victim can do is struggle on. Roll Stamina + Resolve as a reflexive action each turn that your character is poisoned. If your character intends to act (meaning, takes a non-reflexive action), the roll suffers a −3 penalty. Success counteracts the damage for one turn only.

Sick

Your stomach churns. You retch and heave but only succeed in bringing up bile. Sweat beads on your brow as you spike a fever. Your muscles ache with every movement. You're wracked with hot and cold flushes as a sickness gnaws away at your insides.

Effect: This Tilt applies a general sickness to a character without worrying about the specific illness. For the purposes of this Tilt, a sickness is either "moderate" or "grave." A moderate sickness, such as a cold, asthma, the flu, or just a bad hangover, causes a −1 penalty to all actions during combat. That penalty increases by one every two turns (the first two turns, the character suffers a −1 penalty, the next two turns the penalty is −2, and so on up to a maximum of −5 dice on turn 9). A grave sickness, such as pneumonia, heavy metal poisoning, or aggressive cancer, inflicts the same dice pool penalties as a mild sickness. In addition, however, the physical stress of fighting or even defending oneself from an attacker while gravely ill inflicts 1 point of bashing damage per turn of combat.

Causing the Tilt: It's not easy to deliberately make someone sick. Sure, if you can get your hands on a vial of smallpox or deliberately use a disease you've got to make someone sick (a breaking point, especially in the case of grave diseases like AIDS), then you've got a reasonable chance. Some supernatural creatures have abilities that can inflict diseases on others. Aside from that, you've just got to expose your opponent to the sickness long before you fight and hope for the best.

Ending the Tilt: This Tilt reflects the effects of sickness as it specifically applies to combat. Outside of combat, use the existing system for diseases **(World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 176). The penalties inflicted by this Tilt fade at a rate of one point per turn once the character has a chance to rest, but any damage inflicted remains until the character can heal.

Stunned

Your character is dazed and unable to think straight. Maybe her vision blurs. If she's stunned as a result of a blow to the head, she's probably got a concussion.

Effect: A character with the Stunned Tilt loses her next action, and halves her Defense until she can next act.

Causing the Tilt: A character can be stunned by any attack that does at least as much damage as her Size in a single hit. Some weapons have a "stun" special ability. These double the weapon modifier only for the purposes of determining whether the attacker inflicts the Stunned Tilt. Attacks against the target's head (see "Specified Targets," p. 203) count the character's Size as one lower for the purposes of this Tilt. The Storyteller might determine that additional effects cause this Tilt, like being caught in the blast area of an explosion **(World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 178).

Ending the Tilt: The effects of this Tilt normally only last for a single turn. The character can end the Tilt during her own action by reflexively spending a point of Willpower to gather her wits, though she suffers a –3 modifier to any actions she takes that turn.

Sources of Harm

Some of the sources of harm in the **World of Darkness Rulebook** have updated rules, presented here.

Car Wrecks

The new systems for combat and weapons make lethal damage the standard for being hit with a heavy object, and cars are no different. If you hit someone — or something — when driving a car, the roll is still Dexterity + Drive + Handling and an aware opponent can apply Defense.

Roll the vehicle's Size to determine damage and add one additional success per 20 miles per hour (28 yards per turn) — the vehicle's speed acts as a weapon modifier. A moving car always deals lethal damage. If a car rams a human-sized creature, the victim suffers the Knocked Down Tilt.

This change of rolling Size and adding one point of damage per 20 miles per hour extends to ramming other cars as well; victims inside cars take lethal damage from car crashes unless wearing a seat-belt, which reduces the damage to bashing.

Disease

Outside of combat, a character who suffers from a disease suffers damage over a period of time. Resisting the damage inflicted by a disease requires a reflexive Stamina + Resolve roll. This roll is not contested but it is modified by the severity of the disease. Only one success is necessary to avoid damage each time.

Some diseases are the kind that people don't heal from. A character's cancer could go into remission, or he can hold his HIV back with medication, but time alone won't cure them. The Storyteller should set a benchmark of how many rolls the character has to succeed at in a row for the disease to go into remission. Medical treatment can offset any penalties to the Stamina + Resolve roll applied by the disease — but might inflict penalties on other rolls, as sometimes the cure is almost as bad as the disease.

Drugs

A character who has taken drugs, willingly or not, must fight off the effects of the drug. Resisting the effects requires a reflexive Stamina + Resolve roll. This roll is not contested but it is modified by the potency of the drug ingested. Only one success is necessary for a character to regain her senses. In the case of some drugs, this roll must be made once per hour, once per scene — or even once per turn, in the case of strong hallucinogens or narcotics.

Overdose

Characters who overdose on drugs treat the drug like a poison, with a Toxicity somewhere between 3 and 7. The overdose deals damage once per hour until the drug has run its course — if a character's spent 8 hours drinking, then the poison takes another 8 hours to fade, with Toxicity between 3 (beer or wine) to 5 (rubbing alcohol). A character who injects stronger heroin than expected takes damage for (8 – Stamina) hours, with Toxicity 7.

Extreme Environments

The human body is not conditioned to withstand extreme heat, cold, air pressure, and other weather. These harsh conditions hinder and endanger unprepared characters. When exposed to a harsh environment, the Storyteller assigns a level to the environment, using the chart below as a guideline. Survival gear can reduce the effective environment level.

While characters are exposed to these conditions, they suffer the level of the environment as a penalty to all actions. After a number of hours equal to the character's Stamina, he takes bashing damage equal to the environment's level once per hour. In the case of a Level 3 exposure, the damage is lethal instead of bashing. Fourth level environments cause lethal damage each *turn* after a number of turns equal to the character's Stamina.

Any damage caused by levels 2-4 exposure leaves lasting marks, scars, and tissue damage. Damage caused by extreme environments cannot be healed until the character is back in a safe environment.

Environment Levels

Level	Example Environs
0	Safe environment
1	Light snow, heavy storms; too cold to sleep safely; air pressure causes shortness of breath; sweltering sun can cause first-degree burns
2	Heavy snow; cold causes physical pain and potential hypothermia; sun quickly causes first degree burns, can cause second degree burns with time; minor radiation poisoning
3	Desert exposure; heat rapidly causing second-degree burns; moderate radiation exposure
4	Desert sandstorm, severe hurricane, tornado, tsunami

Poison

Outside of combat, a character who is the victim of a poison or toxin suffers lethal damage over a period of time equal to the poison's Toxicity. Some substances deal this damage only once. Others deal this damage once per turn or once per hour until purged — or until the poison has run its course. To resist the damage, make a reflexive Stamina + Resolve − Toxicity roll. Each success reduces the damage taken by 1. This roll must be made every time the poison deals damage unless the character stops fighting and gives in.

10th August 2012

Dearest William,

I wound my heart today and I thought of you and that first time you gave me my key, and the wonders you imparted to me over those few happy months we spent together. You fed me and clothed me then. You taught me to speak and sing, and I learnt so quickly. Do you still have the scarf I made for you? I worked so hard on it and you were delighted when I gave it to you.

What went wrong, William? Why did you stop visiting me in your room, and taking me outside? It seemed that one day you were still in the first flush of love for me, and then you were cold and did not care for me anymore. I remember how sorry I was when I wound a clock too hard and broke it so that it went round and round and round without regard to the time and how you shouted at me when you found out, and how I got so cross and hit you again and again. Perhaps that was it. After that you looked at me like you were afraid. You shouldn't have been afraid. You had nothing to fear from me.

I remember too how sad I was that morning when I woke and found that you had gone and had left me behind. I confess that I quite lost my composure, and that I smashed to pieces every watch and clock I could find and every pane of glass in your home until none was left and my anger was spent and then I cried and tried so hard to put things back together. But I couldn't.

What is broken cannot ever be mended.

I later heard, long after the fact, from a friendly fat policeman that you had gone away to London and had married and had a son in your evening years. I could not imagine you as an old man, William. But I traveled across the sea, after a while, and walked across Wales and England and found my way to London and the place frightened me and when I arrived the bombs were falling and I was in a house that collapsed on my head and I thought I would die, but it turns out that I only slept for a while and when I woke I promised that I would keep looking for you as you were because I knew that you would be as I remembered you and no other way.

And I was right. Here you are.

And you will be mine forever, William. I might have to make you to start with. But you will be mine.

Wait for me, darling.

Your darling dear Mary.

Ephemeral Beings: Ghosts, Spirits, and Angels

Humanity isn't alone. It shares the World of Darkness with innumerable entities, lurking invisible and intangible in a Twilight state, waiting for the right conditions to arise. When an area becomes tainted by the touch of death; when the wall between the world and the terrible, hungry Shadow of animist spirits grows thin; when people begin to see the gears of the God-Machine: these are the times when the ghosts, spirits and angels around us can manifest, interact, and further their alien goals. All of them want something from humanity — memories, obedience, emotion ... even their bodies. Sometimes, humanity fights back.

This section replaces and updates the rules for ghosts in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, and the rules for spirits found in the **Book of Spirits** and other World of Darkness games. It unifies the two systems into one that uses Conditions for Manifestation and Influence and is also used for angels of the God-Machine.

Invisible Incursions

The physical World of Darkness borders on multiple realms, each with its own peculiar laws. The inhabitants of those realms aren't material beings and although many are intelligent and self-aware, their thoughts are alien to humans. Mortal investigators almost never see the worlds these beings come from with their own eyes, for which they should be grateful. Everything occultists have been able to learn about the animistic Shadow World and the chthonian deep of the Underworld paints both realms as deadly and teeming with "natives." The enigmatic servant-angels of the God-Machine might come from such a realm, or might be created within the world by the processes and Infrastructure they serve. No one knows for sure.

Whether the beings are fleeing the dangers of their home realm, avoiding banishment to it, summoned from their home by mortal occultists, sent as agents by more powerful members of their own kind, or forced to cross over to complete a mission by the God-Machine, most encounters between characters and ephemeral beings in a God-Machine chronicle take place in the physical world where characters have the home ground advantage.

Manifestation and Possession

Instead of bodies formed of flesh and bone, ephemeral beings are made up of spiritual matter called ephemera, which comes in several varieties. These substances are both invisible and intangible to anything not comprised of the same sort of ephemera — ghosts can see and touch one another, but are invisible to most living people and don't interact with solid objects or even other ephemeral beings that aren't ghosts. Spirits happily float through walls and pass through ghosts without even noticing them, but are incapable of interacting with people without help.

Almost every ephemeral being has the ability to *Manifest* — to make its presence known and to affect the physical world, ranging from remaining invisible but using powers, appearing as insubstantial but visible images, or even possessing a victim, sending his soul into hibernation and warping the commandeered body to suit their own uses. Some are more skilled at it than others (those so weak they can't Manifest at all are essentially impotent in the physical world and don't interact with humans), but all require certain appropriate conditions before they can use these powers.

An ephemeral being that wants to shift into physical form or to inhabit an object, animal or person requires the specified area, item or character to be prepared for it to successfully Manifest. Ghosts require Anchors — places, objects and people that are linked to their living days and reinforce their failing identities. Angels can only appear in the world when enough Infrastructure has been laid out by the God-Machine. Spirits need the emotional resonance of the area or victim-host to match their own.

The more powerful the Manifestation, the stronger the Condition needed is. The most powerful physical forms and tightly-held victims are the result of careful husbandry by the Manifesting being, slowly building up the necessary Condition by leveraging whatever Manifestation they can produce at first. Unless Conditions are very strong or the possessing entity extremely powerful, a human being falling victim to a possession is first urged to follow the entity's wishes instead of his own, then later forced to do it's bidding, and only then physically mutated into a bizarre amalgamation of nature and supernatural power.

Summoning or exorcising entities from locations or Possession, then, is a matter of creating or destroying the appropriate setting for the creature, preferably near to a place it can cross over from or to its native realm. Most entities waste away as though starving outside of the needed Conditions, so breaking those Conditions is a sure-fire way of forcing the being to abandon its attempt at Manifestation and send it fleeing toward either a way "home" or another appropriate vessel. Cultists wanting to summon entities attempt to ritually create appropriate Conditions near to a crossing-point, or offer up a suitable vessel in the hope that the right sort of ephemeral being will accept the gift. In the case of angels, most participants in a "summoning" never realize the significance of their actions — Infrastructure is gradually built as the God-Machine moves pawns and machinery around like game pieces until an angel is brought forth.

Ghosts

Echoes of the Dead

When human beings die, especially in a sudden or traumatic fashion, they sometimes leave parts of themselves behind. Ranging from broken, animated after-images unable to do anything but re-enact their death to intelligent, malevolent once-human spirits with power over whatever kind of calamity

killed them, the World of Darkness teems with vast numbers of the restless dead. More ghosts exist than any other supernatural creature, but the truly powerful independent specters of legend are rare.

The majority of ghosts are poor at influencing the world, trapped in their insubstantial state and unable to even Manifest; they are noticed only as a strange chill or eerie vibe, if the living sense them at all. Ghosts are drawn to places and people that they had emotional connections to in life — these things anchor the ghost in the world and allow those with enough power to Manifest, whereupon they carry out whatever mad urges they still feel and attempt to further the goals they left undone in life.

Ghosts feed on Essence, a spiritual energy created by memory and emotion that builds up in their Anchors and is fed directly to them when they are remembered by the living. Ghosts that lose their Anchors and can't transfer their attachment fade from the world, passing over to a dread realm filled with all the orphaned Ghosts that have gone before. This realm has many names in occult writings; Tartarus, the Great Below, the Land of the Dead, the Dominions, or simply the Underworld.

The living seldom visit the Underworld, though mediums and death-obsessed mystery cults all over the world teach that gateways leading there are more common than supposed. Its doors exist in the same Twilight state as ghosts themselves, invisible and unnoticed by the living. Tales of living occultists who learned the right places and the proper ceremonies to open the gates of death describe the Underworld as a chthonian hell of passageways, tunnels and caverns, filled with desperate ghosts that lost their grip on the world.

The Underworld sustains the dead, allowing them more freedom to move and act than the living world, but also imprisons them. Once there, ghosts may increase in power and influence, evolving beyond the image of the person they were into twisted rulers of dead kingdoms or sponsors and advocates of particular forms of death. If summoned back to the physical world or allowed to escape the Underworld by chance conditions, a ghost that has spent centuries growing stronger can wreak havoc until exorcised.

Spirits

Warped Reflections

Animist religions describe the world as being full of spirits, every object, animal and place hiding a spirit within it. They're partly right; everything in the world apart from humans *does* cast a spiritual reflection, even transitory events and strong emotions, but all spirits apart from the cunning or a powerful few are confined to a world of their own. Spirits war on each other for survival everywhere. Separated from the physical world by a barrier known to knowledgeable occultists as the Gauntlet, the spirit — or *Shadow* — world is a murky reflection of the physical. Its geography is (mostly) the same as the World of Darkness, but places appear twisted to reflect their inner truth rather than looking exactly the same.

Spirits come into being alongside the thing they're a reflection of, but are dormant, barely-living, tiny lumps of ephemera at first. As well as creating new spirits, actions in the physical world and any emotions associated with them create Essence in the physical world, some of which crosses over into the Shadow. If enough Essence is created around an embryonic spirit, it becomes roused into activity. By absorbing Essence, the spirit remains active. By consuming other spirits, it merges those spirits into itself and grows larger and more powerful.

As spirits become more powerful, they become less pure as reflections of their origins and more thematic in nature. For example, the spirit of a single owl grows by consuming other owl-spirits. As it consumes spirits of night, hunting, the prey its owl eats, and other owl-spirits, the spirit subtly changes. By the time it becomes an independent, thinking being that no longer follows around the physical creature that created it, it has warped into an exaggerated spirit of silent nocturnal hunting. The Essence it consumes also has an effect — an owl-spirit evolving in an urban area feeds on different Essence to one in the countryside, and its appearance is colored by its diet.

When mortal characters encounter spirits, something has gone wrong. Some spirits are capable of using their powers through the Gauntlet and, as their self-awareness grows with power, decide to create food sources for themselves by influencing what sort of spirits and Essence will be created around them. The true culprit behind an unusual pattern of domestic murders, for example, might be a murder-spirit using its abilities to heighten arguments to homicide.

The spirits that mortal investigators encounter in the physical world are refugees and escapees: those that cross the Gauntlet to flee the constant risk of being killed and absorbed by larger spirits. They constantly strive to maintain their Essence, desperate to avoid returning to their own world. Without an easy source of Essence, spirits must anchor themselves like ghosts by finding an object or person that reflects their nature and tying their ephemeral bodies to them. The spirit remains intangible — and is often actually "inside" the host — but is safe from starvation as long as the host generates enough Essence to feed it. By influencing the host, or humans interacting with a material host, to more closely reflect its nature, the spirit gets a ready supply of Essence and may move on to more permanent forms of possession. Many items thought of as having "wills of their own" or as being cursed actually house spirits.

Other Entities

The ghosts, spirits, and angels presented here aren't the only ephemeral entities to exist. The various World of Darkness games have used the spirit rules this section updates to represent many different beings, from the inhabitants of an astral world visited by mages to demonic owls made of smoke with a strange connection to vampires.

Just as ghosts, spirits, and angels are slightly different, adapting these beings to use the rules here involves setting out both where they follow these rules and where they don't. Future chronicle books may detail ephemeral entities particular to those chronicles.

Angels

Functions of the God-Machine

Unlike ghosts, who feed from being remembered and struggle to maintain their grip on the world, and spirits who flee their own Darwinian hell to carve a foothold in material reality, angels are both temporary visitors to the mortal realm and its only true "natives" among ephemeral beings. The God-Machine isn't some far-off thing lurking in a distant dimension; it's here, in the material world, built from mechanisms hidden from sight by guile and magic. When cultists summon a spirit, it journeys from the Shadow. When an angel is needed, the God-Machine is as likely to build the angel right there as to direct an existing one to journey to the site. When angels *are* reused, they spend the downtime "resting," dormant, in storage facilities hidden by the very deepest Infrastructure. Sometimes, cultists and prying outsiders who witness the gears catch glimpses of these facilities — cavernous chambers folded neatly into impossible spaces, filled with hydraulics, gears, and the hissing of machines surrounding the angels while keeping them fed with Essence. They're always guarded.

Being essentially tools designed by an intelligent if unknowable creator to fulfill specific functions, angels are far more specialized than spirits or ghosts. They're also usually more subtle and able to go unnoticed even when Manifested, but are extremely single-minded, aiming to complete the task they've been sent for and then vanish. The God-Machine sends angels to make adjustments to Infrastructure and its plans when something has gone wrong and the gears can't self-correct. Angels hunt down individuals who have failed to die at the proper time, acquire replacements for lynchpins that have unexpectedly failed and make corrections to the flow of causality, carefully setting up minor events (the closing of a door, the drop of a pen, a sudden distracting sound at *just* the right time) that have increasingly large repercussions. The Conditions needed to bring an angel into the world, though, are much more complicated than a ghost's anchors or a spirit's essence, requiring layers of Infrastructure, precise timing and occult maneuvers that are barely understood. Occult literature is filled with angel-summoning rites, but they're mostly useless — if mortal cultists participate in calling an angel to a mission, it will be because they are themselves part of the Infrastructure it needs.

Game Systems

Ghosts, spirits and angels share a broad set of rules with minor variations to cover situations such as spirits reaching across the Gauntlet.

Rank*	Trait Limits **	Attribute Dots	Maximum Essence	Numina
•	5 dots	5–8	10	1–3
••	7 dots	9–14	15	3–5
•••	9 dots	15–25	20	5–7
••••	12 dots	26–35	25	7–9
•••••	15 dots	36–45	50	9–11

* Each Rank levies a –1 modifier on attempts to forcibly bind that entity and acts as a Supernatural Tolerance trait.

** These represent permanent dots, not temporarily boosted ones.

Ghosts can't increase Rank outside of the Underworld and come into existence as either Rank 1 or 2 depending on how much self-awareness they have. Nonsapient "recording" type ghosts are Rank 1, while those that retain most of their living memories are Rank 2. Ghosts summoned back from the Underworld, however, may be of any Rank.

Spirits and **Angels** run the full range of Ranks, depending on how old and successful a spirit is or how much importance the God-Machine places upon an angel.

The State of Twilight

Unless they Manifest or use a power to appear, ephemeral beings remain in their insubstantial state when in the material world. This state is described as "Twilight." To beings in Twilight, physical objects appear pale and semi-transparent, light sources are dimmed and sounds are distorted as though underwater. Twilight isn't a place, though; it's more of a description of how ephemera interacts — or fails to interact — with material reality.

When in Twilight, only items, creatures, and phenomena that are also in Twilight and comprised of the same kind of ephemera can touch an ephemeral being. Attacks simply pass through the Twilight being; solid concrete and steel are no more hindrance than fog.

The exception to this rule is ghost structures. Destroyed objects — everything from a pen to a building — appear as after-images in Twilight, formed of the same ephemera as ghosts. These spiritual structures and items fade away on a timescale depending on how strongly they're remembered. Famous structures, or even obscure ones that are loved and thought about frequently after they're destroyed, can last decades, solid and substantial only to ghosts.

If no ghostly structures get in the way, ephemeral beings in Twilight can move at walking pace in any direction. Gravity has no sway, though Twilight beings can only truly "fly" if it's appropriate for their form — most hug the material terrain. A ghost could walk up the side of a tower block, for example, but couldn't then float through mid-air to the next tower.

Some occultists and supernatural creatures practice Astral Projection, which allows a character to leave her body behind and explore the world in invisible form. These projected selves are technically in Twilight, but lack ephemeral bodies and so aren't solid even to one another.

Ephemeral Traits

Ephemeral beings aren't alive the way humans are alive. They aren't biological creatures and don't have the divides between body, soul, and mind that mortals and once-mortal supernatural beings possess. In game terms, ephemeral beings are represented by simplified game traits.

Rank

All ephemeral beings have dots in an Advantage called Rank, which notes how self-aware and powerful the entity is. Rank technically ranges from 1 to 10 dots, but entities with more than Rank ••••• are so alien they can't support themselves in the Conditions lesser beings use. They can only be brought into the world by story- and chronicle-defining maneuvers, conjunctions, and events. The Lords of the Dead, Gods of Shadow, and the mighty arch-angels are out of the scope of the Storytelling system. If they appear at all, they do so as plot devices.

Rank is used to determine the maximum ratings in other game traits an ephemeral being can have, as described in a table below, along with how many dots of Attributes the entity can have. All ephemeral beings have the ability to sense the relative Rank of other entities, and may attempt to conceal their own Rank by succeeding in a contested Finesse roll. Success means that the entity appears to be the same Rank as the being sensing the relative Rank.

Essence

Combination food, oxygen, and wealth, Essence fuels ephemeral entities' powers, sustains their insubstantial bodies, and allows them to continue existing. As a game trait, Essence resembles Willpower in that each entity has a permanent

maximum Essence rating and an equal number of Essence points it can spend to achieve effects. Maximum Essence is determined by Rank.

Entities can use Essence in the following ways:

- Ephemeral beings must spend a point of Essence per day to remain active. If they have run out of Essence, they fall into hibernation until something happens to let them regain at least one point, which can then be spent on returning to activity. Such dormancy is dangerous — the entity remains in Twilight and can be destroyed if it loses all Corpus and Essence at the same time (see p. 222). When spirits enter hibernation, they are pushed back across the Gauntlet into the Shadow. Ghosts that don't have any anchors remaining are similarly forced into the Underworld. Angels remain dormant wherever they were.

- Ephemeral beings outside of a suitable Condition bleed one point of Essence per *hour*. The Influence and Manifestation Conditions starting on p. 223 state whether they protect from Essence bleed for different types of ephemeral being. Entities that run out of Essence due to bleed suffer a single point of lethal damage and enter hibernation.

- Ephemeral beings can spend Essence to boost their traits for a single scene on a point per dot basis. They can't boost a single trait by more than Rank + 2 dots; boosting takes a turn and they can only boost a single Attribute in a turn.

Entities can sense sources of Essence appropriate for their needs from up to a mile away. Spirits can use this sense through the Gauntlet. The "Seek" Numen (p.230) increases this range.

- Ephemeral beings regain one point of Essence per day they are in proximity to any Condition relating to them — ghosts are sustained by staying near their anchors, spirits in the Shadow eke out an existence by feeding across the Gauntlet, and angels are fed by Infrastructure.

- Ephemeral beings can attempt to steal Essence from beings of the same type — ghosts from ghosts, spirits from spirits and so on. The attacking entity rolls Power + Finesse, contested by the victim's Power + Resistance. If the attacker succeeds, it steals up to the successes in Essence, as long as the victimized entity has Essence remaining to lose.

- Ghosts regain a point of Essence whenever someone remembers the living person they once were. Visiting their grave, simply sitting and remembering them, or recognizing their Manifested form as the person they used to be all qualify.

- Spirits may attempt to gorge themselves on a source of appropriate Essence. Once per day, when in proximity (even if it's on the other side of the Gauntlet) to a suitable Condition, a spirit can roll Power + Finesse, regaining successes in Essence. If the spirit is still in the Shadow, the dice pool is penalized according to Gauntlet strength.

- Angels are mechanisms in the God-Machine, and like any machine they are sustained by fuel. God-Machine cultists sacrificing precious resources (metaphorical or literal), animals, or even humans to the angel in its presence allow it to regain the Resources value of the item or animal, or the current Integrity of a human sacrifice, as Essence.

Supernatural Tolerance

Just as ephemeral beings possess Rank, many supernatural creatures in the World of Darkness have "power level" traits of their own, ranging from one to ten dots. They all have slightly different rules, described in the appropriate rulebooks, but all share one quality; they are added to Resistance Attributes when levying Resistance-based penalties to the dice pools of many supernatural powers. The various supernatural traits, including Rank, are interchangeable for this purpose. When a Numen in this chapter calls for "Supernatural Tolerance" to be added to resistance, that's what it means.

Example: A vampire attempting to quell an angry Manifest Angel attempts to use a hypnotic gaze. The power's description in **Vampire: The Requiem** calls for the activation dice pool to be penalized by "Resolve + Blood Potency," Blood Potency being the vampiric Supernatural Tolerance trait. The vampire's dice pool is penalized by the Spirit's Resistance + Rank instead.

Example: A ghost attempts to use the Awe Numen (p. 228) on the first of two interlopers in the now-abandoned house it owned in life. The Numen is contested by Presence + Composure + Supernatural Tolerance, but the intruder is a mortal and doesn't have a Supernatural Tolerance trait, so just rolls the two Attributes. When the ghost attempts to use the power on the second intruder the next turn, though, it discovers that she is actually a mage; she adds Gnosis (the mage Tolerance trait) to her contesting dice pool.

Attributes and Skills

Ephemeral beings don't have the nine Attributes familiar in material characters, but use a simplified set of the Power, Finesse, and Resistance categories mortal Attributes fall into. When creating an ephemeral being, look at the Rank chart earlier in this section to determine how many dots are avail-

able and what the trait maximum is. Ghosts usually use the average rating in each category from when they were alive — for example, a man with Strength 3, Intelligence 2, and Presence 2 would become a ghost with Power 2.

Power describes the raw ability of the entity to impose itself on other ephemeral beings and the world at large. It is used in all rolls that call for Strength, Intelligence, or Presence.

Finesse describes how deft the entity is at imposing its desires with fine control. It is used for all rolls that call for Dexterity, Wits, or Manipulation.

Resistance describes how well the entity can avoid imposition from its peers and how easily it is damaged. It is used for all rolls that call for Stamina, Resolve, or Composure.

Ephemeral beings don't possess skills, but don't suffer unskilled penalties as long as the action they're attempting is appropriate to their former self, nature, or mission. They roll the appropriate Attribute + Rank for actions relating directly to their concept, or Attribute + Attribute for actions like surprise and perception.

Gauntlet Strength

The strength of the wall between the World of Darkness and its Shadow depends mostly on how many people are present in the area. The paradox of why human activity pushes the Shadow away when it also creates vast quantities of emotionally-resonant Essence is a mystery. If the spirits know, they aren't telling, but the Gauntlet breaks away more easily from civilization.

Whenever a spirit attempts to cross between the material world and the Shadow, uses Influence or Manifestation to reach across, feeds from the material world's Essence while still being in the Shadow, or uses a Reaching Manifestation (see p. 226), the dice pool is penalized by a number of dice according to the following chart.

Location	Modifier
Dense urban areas	–3
City suburbs, towns	–2
Small towns, villages	–1
Wilderness, countryside	0
Locus	+2

A Locus is a location in which the Shadow world is especially close. Spirits don't need the Reaching Manifestation Effect to use their powers across the Gauntlet at a locus, attempts to cross over are at +2 dice, and spirits whose nature matches the Locus' Resonant Condition heal at twice the normal rate.

Advantages

Ephemeral beings differ in how they treat Integrity, Virtue, Vice, and Fate. When they possess these traits, the descriptions used are often unusual and the specifics change according to the entity's origin.

Ghosts retain their Virtue and Vice from life, but they are reversed in effect — ghosts regain all spent Willpower by fulfilling their Vice, but can only do so once per chapter, and regain up to one Willpower point a scene by fulfilling their Virtue. Alone among ephemeral beings, ghosts also possess Integrity, set at the level they had before death. Their Integrity scores don't change, however, as ghosts do not suffer breaking points. Their self-image is fixed unless something happens to push them back to the level of cognizance and self-awareness they had in life. If this should happen somehow, they can suffer breaking points the same way living people can.

Spirits don't have an Integrity trait or a Virtue or Vice. Instead, they regain one point of spent Willpower per three points of Essence they consume by gorging or stealing as described above.

Angels lack Integrity — they simply obey the God-Machine in all things — and likewise don't have Fates. They do have Virtues and Vices, though, built into them as operating guidelines and preset responses. Angelic Virtues and Vices don't have to be anything a human would describe as virtuous or wicked. Examples include "Silent," "Hidden," "Obedient," "Curious," "Punctual," "Wrathful," and "Precise," all as either Virtue or Vice depending on the angel in question.

Other Traits

Because they have simplified traits, ephemeral entities calculate derived traits a little differently to mortal characters.

Corpus: Ephemeral beings don't have Health, but measure how intact their Twilight form is using Corpus. Permanent Corpus is equal to Resistance + Size and grants Corpus boxes that act like Health boxes, filling when the entity suffers injury. Corpus boxes don't have wound penalties associated with them.

Willpower: Entities have Willpower dots equal to Resistance + Finesse, with a maximum of 10 dots for entities with the Ranks presented in this book. As well as the Willpower gaining methods described above, all ephemeral beings regain one spent Willpower per day.

Initiative: Initiative is equal to Finesse + Resistance.

Defense: Defense is equal to Power or Finesse, whichever is lower, except for Rank 1 spirits which use the higher of the two Attributes. The more an entity is driven by raw instinct, the more animal defense it displays in combat.

Speed: Speed is equal to Power + Finesse + a "species" factor. Spirits of inanimate objects usually have a species factor of 0.

Size: Ephemeral beings can be of any size. Ghosts are usually Size 5, while spirits often use Rank as Size, growing larger as they become more powerful. Angels designed to blend in are sized as humans or animals, but some angelic entities are very large, up to Size 10 or more.

Language: Rank 1 ghosts can't communicate verbally; they don't have enough of their sense of self left to employ language. Rank 2 and higher ghosts know whatever languages they knew in life. Spirits all speak the native tongue of the shadow-world, a strange, sibilant language that resembles Ancient Sumerian, but often learn the human languages common around their Essence-feeding grounds. Angels speak all human languages simultaneously, and more — they sometimes "speak" in strange glossalia or sounds more like electronic noise than a language and appear to understand each other when doing so. When an angel wishes to be understood, everyone present hears it speak fluently in their native languages.

Bans

All ephemeral beings suffer from a mystical compulsion known as the ban, a behavior that the entity must or must not perform under certain conditions. They can be as simplistic as "the angel cannot cross railway lines," moderately complex like "the ghost must come if you call her name into a mirror three times within her anchor," or as difficult as, "the angel must receive a tribute of a printing press that has used blood as ink once a month or lose a Rank."

Bans increase in both complexity and consequences with Rank.

Rank 1 entities have mild bans that are easily triggered but don't endanger the entity. A spirit of bliss can't resist an offering of opiates. The ghost of a nun has to immediately use an offered rosary. A weak angel must stop still and parrot hexadecimal numbers when they're spoken to.

Rank 2 and 3 entities have moderate bans that curtail the creature's activities in a more serious way than mere distraction. A ghost must immediately dematerialize when it hears the sound of a cat. The murderous spirit of a car that has run down multiple people loses all Willpower if it doesn't kill one person a month. The angel of the records answers any question about the family, background or true identity of a subject if the questioner accurately tells the angel her time (to the minute) and place of birth.

Rank 4 and 5 entities have complicated bans that put an end to whatever the creature is trying to do — often in an explosive fashion. They have consequences in game traits or long-term actions, but esoteric requirements. The Smiling Corpse, a ghost summoned back from the Underworld by a mystery cult, is immediately banished back to the Great Below if anyone should sing a particular nursery rhyme in his presence. The spirit of Mount Iliamna, a volcano in Alaska, will use its Numina to kill a victim named by anyone who makes it an offering of platinum that was mined from its foothills. The angel Uriminel, four-faced enforcer of destiny, has Defense 0 against individuals who have suffered lethal or aggravated damage within the last lunar month.

Banes

Ephemeral entities are not of the material world and react strangely to some elements of it. The interaction between their ephemeral Twilight form and physical substance always contains a flaw — a *bane* — that damages the entity's Corpus through symbolic or mystical interference. The bane is a physical substance or energy that the entity can't abide.

- Ephemeral beings voluntarily attempting to come into contact with the bane must spend a Willpower point and succeed on a Resolve + Composure roll with a dice penalty equal to their Rank.
- Banes are solid to entities, even when they are in Twilight. They do not, however, affect spirits on the other side of the Gauntlet.
- Simply touching the bane — even voluntarily — causes 1 level of aggravated damage per turn if the entity is Materialized, and causes the relevant Condition to end unless the entity succeeds in a roll of Rank in dice. The roll must be repeated every turn if contact holds.
- If the item or person to which a Fettered entity is linked comes into contact with the bane, the entity suffers 1 level of Lethal damage per turn as long as contact holds. The entity must use the Unfetter Manifestation Effect to escape.
- Touching the bane while in Twilight causes 1 point of lethal damage per turn to non-Manifest entities.
- If the bane has been used as a weapon against the entity, the wounds suffered are aggravated for Manifest entities and lethal for entities still in Twilight.

Banes are increasingly esoteric and obscure for entities of increasing Rank.

Rank 1 entities have common substances and phenomena as banes. Ghosts burn at the touch of salt. The spirit of a forest is poisoned by the fumes of burning plastic. A low-ranking angel can't touch gold.

Rank 2 and 3 entities have difficult to obtain but still "natural" banes. Powerful ghosts are repelled by holy water.

Honorary Rank

Some supernatural creatures that are closely related to a form of ephemeral being have "honorary" Rank in the appropriate otherworldly hierarchy; Sin-Eaters are all Bound to a ghost, for example, and werewolves are treated with respect by spirits according to their Renown.

Technicalities count, in this case, but only *against* the ephemeral entity. A werewolf who "outranks" a minor spirit will deal devastating wounds to it with his claws, but a high-Rank spirit can't burn that werewolf by touching him. There are other ways to assert dominance; high-Rank entities are quite capable of showing the half-fleshed who's boss.

A spirit must be killed by a sharpened stake made of pine. A mid-rank angel can be killed by a weapon dusted with the ground-up remains of a meteorite.

Rank 4 and 5 entities have highly-specific banes that require great effort to acquire. The lord of an Underworld realm now walking the Earth and served by a cult of worshippers can be killed by an obsidian blade marked with the names of thirteen Gods of Death. The spirit of the US Treasury (the building) can be killed by a silver bullet made from a melted-down original dollar. A high Rank angel can't willingly touch the sigils of a certain incantation in Sumerian and dies if the signs are carved into the flesh of its host.

The hierarchical nature of ephemeral beings also plays a part — Rank isn't a social convention for them but a fundamental part of their nature. Ephemeral entities of 2 Ranks or more higher than an opponent of the same type (a Rank 5 spirit attacking a Rank 3 spirit, for example) count as their opponent's bane when using unarmed attacks, claws, or teeth.

Combat

As noted earlier, ephemeral beings use the lower of Finesse or Resistance for Defense unless they are Rank 1, in which case they use the higher. They apply Defense against *all* attacks, even firearms.

Ephemeral beings roll Power + Finesse to attack. Their attacks inflict bashing damage unless the nature of the entity (a spirit with metal fists, for example) indicates that it should inflict lethal wounds instead. Some entities use weapons, in which case roll Power + Finesse and then apply weapon damage on a successful attack.

Entities in Twilight can only attack or be attacked by other ephemeral beings of the same type, unless the attack utilizes the entity's bane.

Physical attacks on a manifest entity that normally cause lethal damage only cause bashing damage unless the attack utilizes the entity's bane. Despite appearing to the naked eye and being solid, a manifest spirit, ghost, or angel doesn't have any internal organs to injure.

Ephemeral beings record and heal from wounds the same way as material characters, but in addition lose one point of Essence for every aggravated wound they suffer.

Ephemeral entities that lose all Corpus from lethal or aggravated wounds explode into a burst of ephemera stylized to their nature. A forest-spirit dies in a hail of rapidly-vanishing pine needles, while ghosts crumble, screaming, into the ground. The entity isn't actually dead, though, unless it has also run out of Essence. If it has even a single Essence point remaining, it reforms in a safe place (a Conditioned location, usually), hibernating. Once it has regained Essence points equal to Corpus dots, it spends an Essence point and reawakens. As the entity can't act while hibernating, this means waiting for the one Essence a day for being in a suitable area to slowly build up to Corpus, and that more powerful entities take longer to recover from being "killed."

Influence

All ephemeral beings have a degree of Influence over the world that they can leverage to control and shape the basis of

Influence Effects

Level	Effect
• Strengthen	The entity can enhance its sphere of influence; it can add to the Defense of a loved one, make an emotion stronger, an animal or plant healthier, or an object more robust, gaining the entity's Rank in Health or Structure. This Influence can shift the Anchor, Resonant or Infrastructure Condition to Open for its duration. The cost is one Essence.
•• Manipulate	The entity can make minor changes within its sphere of influence, such as slightly changing the nature or target of an emotion, or making minor changes to an animal's actions, a plant's growth or an object's functioning. The cost is two Essence.
••• Control	The entity can make dramatic changes within its sphere of influence, twisting emotions entirely or dictating an animal's actions, a plant's growth or an object's functioning. This Influence can shift the Open Condition to Controlled for its duration. The cost is three Essence.
•••• Create	The entity can create a new example of its sphere of influence; creating a new anchor, instilling an emotion, creating a new sapling or young plant, creating a young animal or brand new object. The entity can cause a temporary Anchor, Infrastructure, or Resonant Condition in a subject for the duration of the Influence. The cost is four Essence.
••••• Mass Create	The entity can create multiple examples of its sphere of influence; triggering emotions in multiple people; creating new copses of trees, small groups of animals, or multiple identical items. The cost is five Essence. The number of examples of the Influence created is equal to Rank. Alternatively, the entity may create one instance of its sphere of influence — including creating the base Condition for its type — permanently, although an ephemeral entity can't permanently alter the mind of a sentient being.

Influence Durations

Level	Duration	Cost
0	One minute per success	No additional Essence cost
•	Ten minutes per success	No additional Essence cost
••	One hour per success	1 additional Essence
•••	One day per success	2 additional Essence
••••	Permanent	2 additional Essence

their existence. Ghosts have power over their own anchors, spirits can control and encourage the phenomena they were born from, and the God-Machine grants angels broad authority over things relating to their mission.

Entities begin with dots in Influence equal to their Rank. Although a being's Rank is also the maximum rating for an Influence, ephemeral beings can split their dots to have more than one Influence. A Rank 4 spirit of dogs, for example, might have Influence: Dogs • • • and Influence: Loyalty •.

Entities may reduce their number of Numina granted by Rank to increase Influence dots at a cost of one Numen per dot.

Spirits and angels have Influences that relate to their natures, but that may be used in multiple circumstances — the dog spirit, for example, has Influence: Dogs, not Influence over a *particular* dog. Ghosts always have Influence: Anchors, though may have other Influences as well as they increase in Rank.

Influence is measured in both scale and duration. To use an Influence, compare the entity's Influence rating to the total dots of the intended effect and how long it is to last. The total must be equal to or less than the entity's Influence rating in order for the Influence to be attempted.

The entity pays the listed cost in Essence and rolls Power + Finesse, with success creating the desired effect. If the Influence is altering the thoughts or emotions of a sentient being, the roll is contested by Resolve or Composure (whichever is higher) + Supernatural Tolerance.

Manifestation

Ephemeral beings can interact with the mortal world in many different ways, from lurking in Shadow and reaching across the Gauntlet to physically Manifesting or merging into a human soul. Just as Influence traits determine what level of control the creature has over their environment, Manifestation traits note which forms of Manifestation are possible for a particular entity.

Entities begin with the Twilight Form Manifestation and a number of Manifestation Effects from the list below equal to Rank. Some effects are only available to certain kinds of entity. Entities may increase their capabilities by reducing the number of Numina they are granted by Rank, at the cost of one Numen per Manifestation Effect.

Most Manifestation Effects have prerequisite Influence or Manifestation Conditions — a spirit can only Fetter to something with an Open Condition, for example.

All Manifestation Effects require a Power + Finesse roll to use. Most have an associated cost in Essence, and some are contested or resisted.

Ephemeral Influence and Manifestation Conditions

If something falls into an ephemeral being's sphere of influence, this is handled mechanically by declaring an Influence Condition. Influence Conditions resemble Tilts and character Conditions.

The different forms of Manifestation Effect are also Conditions applied to the location, object, or character the entity is Manifesting into or, in cases like Reaching, to the entity itself.

Unlike many Conditions, Influence and Manifestation Conditions are tiered and interrelated; Manifestation Conditions have Influence Conditions as prerequisites and vice-versa. The lower tiers are naturally occurring, while the later ones must be created by entities using Influences and Manifestations.

In the most advanced forms of Influence and Manifestation, entities may attempt to create a long-lasting Condition that has a prerequisite of a very temporary one. When one Condition is advanced into another, the remaining duration of the prerequisite Conditions is "frozen."

If a prerequisite Condition is removed from a character (for example, a Possessed character's Open Condition is removed by exorcism) any Conditions relying on it, any relying on them, and so on are immediately removed. The most advanced remaining Condition then resumes its duration.

Anchor

The subject of this Condition — usually a location or object, though it can be a person in rare cases — is within the sphere of influence of a ghost. Ghosts in or within Rank x3 yards of their Anchors do not suffer Essence bleed.

Causing the Condition: This Condition is immediately created when a new ghost is formed, based on whatever subject anchors the ghost's identity. Summoning rituals intended to release ghosts from the Underworld or call them from elsewhere temporarily create this Condition in their target. Finally, a high-Rank ghost can use a Create Influence to mark a target as an Anchor.

Ending the Condition: The easiest way to end an Anchor condition is to destroy the subject. Some ghosts cling to Anchors that represent unfinished business, in which case resolving those issues can remove the Condition. Abjuration temporarily suppresses the Condition as described on p. 232, forcing the ghost to retreat to another Anchor if it has one.

Manifestation Effects

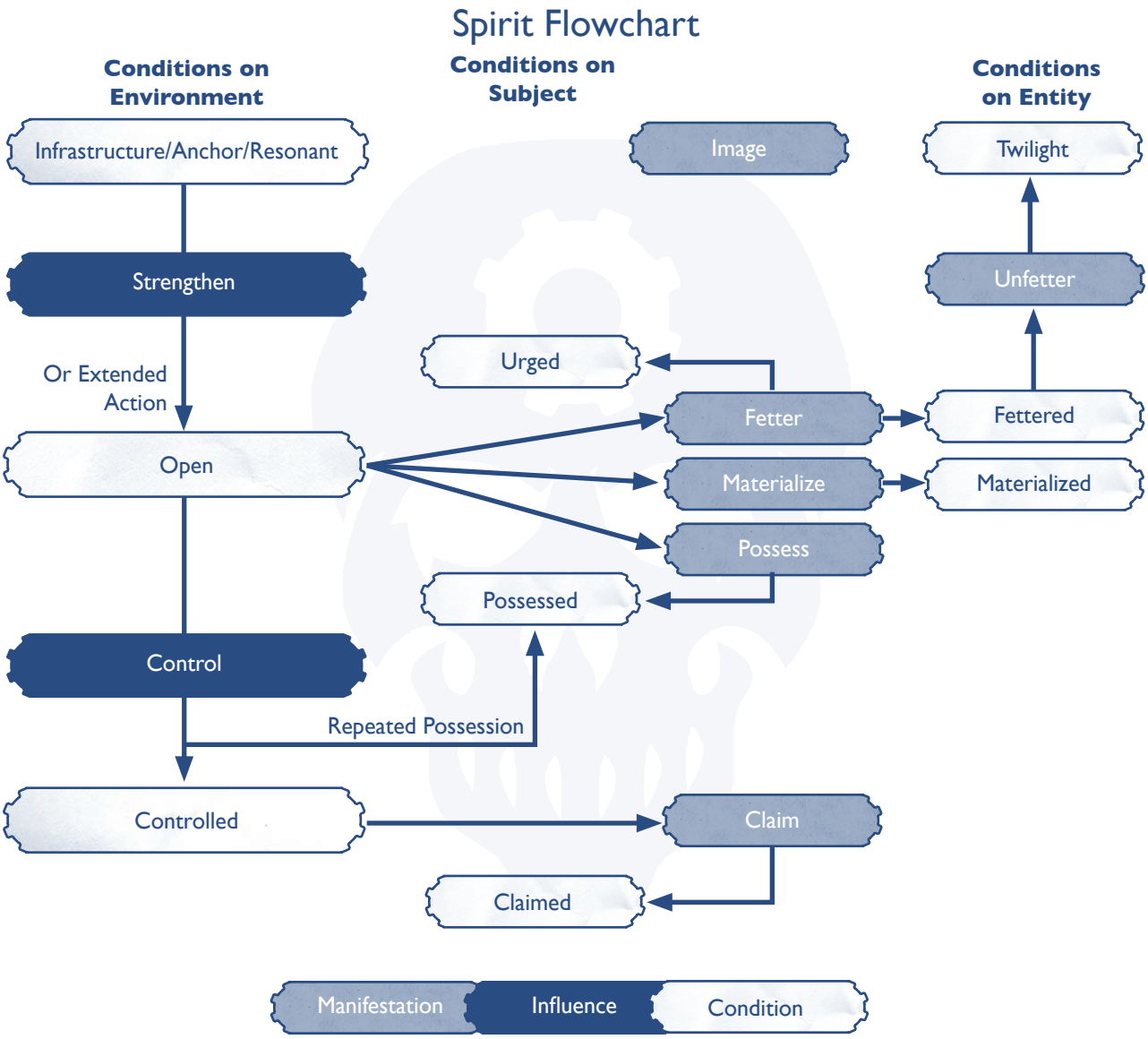
Manifestation	Effect
Twilight Form	If the entity enters the material world, it does so in Twilight (see p. 218). The Effect has no cost.
Discorporate	In emergencies, the entity can voluntarily Discorporate as though it had lost all Corpus to lethal injury — a painful way to escape a greater entity threatening to permanently kill it. The Effect has no cost.
Reaching	(Spirit only) By spending one Essence, the spirit applies the Reaching Condition to itself. The activation roll is penalized by the local Gauntlet Strength.
Gauntlet Breach	(Spirit only — requires Resonant Condition) By spending three Essence, the spirit forces itself through the Gauntlet — returning to Shadow from the World of Darkness, or appearing in Twilight Form by entering the material world. The activation roll is penalized by the local Gauntlet Strength.
Avernian Gateway	(Ghost, angel or death-related spirit only — Requires Open Condition) By spending three Essence, the entity opens a nearby gateway to the Underworld, and applies the Underworld Gate Condition to the location.
Shadow Gateway	(Rank 3+ spirit or angel only — Requires Open Condition) By spending Essence equal to Gauntlet Strength, the entity opens a portal to the Shadow that it and other entities may use, applying the Shadow Gate Condition to the location. The activation roll is penalized by the local Gauntlet Strength.
Image	(Requires Anchor, Resonant or Infrastructure Condition) By spending one Essence, the entity may make its Twilight form visible to material beings for a scene.
Materialize	(Requires Open Condition) By spending three Essence, the entity may shift from Twilight form into the Materialized Condition.
Fetter	(Requires Open Condition) By spending two Essence, the entity adds the Fettered Condition to itself. Living beings targeted by this Effect contest the roll with Resolve + Composure + Supernatural Tolerance. If the Effect is successful, living targets gain the Urged Condition.
Unfetter	(Requires Fettered Condition) By spending one point of Essence, the entity temporarily suppresses the Fetter Condition for a Scene, allowing it to use other Manifestation Effects or roam in Twilight. When the Scene ends, any Manifestation Effects used during it immediately end. If the entity isn't back within range of its Fetter (see p. 227) when Unfetter ends, it immediately goes dormant.
Possess	(Requires Open Condition) By spending three Essence, the entity gains temporary control over an object, corpse, or creature, applying the Possessed Condition to the subject. Living subjects contest the roll with Resolve + Composure + Supernatural Tolerance.
Claim	(Requires Controlled Condition) By spending five Essence, the entity gains permanent control over an object, creature or corpse, applying the Claimed Condition to the subject. Living subjects contest the roll with Resolve + Composure + Supernatural Tolerance. An entity must be capable of both the Fetter and Possess Manifestations to buy Claim.

Ghosts without Anchors bleed Essence until they fall into dormancy, at which point the Underworld Gate Condition is created and the ghost is banished to the Great Below.

Resonant

The subject of this Condition is within the sphere of influence of a spirit.

Causing the Condition: This Condition is common and naturally-occurring — if an object, phenomenon, person, or place matches the spirit's purview in some way, it has this Condition. Anything matching the description of one of a spirit's Influences counts as having this Condition tagged to the spirit. Summoning rituals intended to entice a particular spirit to a location work by instilling the qualities that result



in this Condition. Finally, a high-Rank spirit can use a Create Influence to cause the prerequisites for the Condition itself.

Ending the Condition: The Condition ends if the phenomenon creating it ends. A forest stops being Resonant for a tree spirit when all the trees are logged, a grief spirit can't Influence someone who has healed and let go of his pain, and a fire spirit must move on when the fire is extinguished. Abjuration and Exorcism may temporarily suppress the Condition or be the cause of it "naturally" ending if the ritualists remove the causal phenomenon as part of the ritual.

Infrastructure

The subject of this Condition is within the sphere of influence of an angel.

Causing the Condition: The Infrastructure Condition, unlike Anchor and Resonant Conditions, is never naturally-occurring. The God-Machine requires effort to prepare the way for its angels: extended actions by cultists, unwitting pawns, or even other angels to create Infrastructure. High-Rank angels can use the Create Influence to instill this Condition on behalf of themselves or a subordinate angel. In addition, characters with the Destiny Merit are always subject to this Condition.

Ending the Condition: Infrastructure's intricate nature makes it much more difficult to remove. Multiple extended actions taking place over whole stories are necessary to dismantle the Condition, opposed by the Angel itself.

Open

The place, object, animal, or person covered by a previous Condition has now been conditioned to accept the entity.

That entity can now attempt to Fetter itself to the subject of the Condition, or, if the Condition is on a location, Manifest.

Prerequisites: The Anchor, Resonant, or Infrastructure Condition for the same phenomenon to which this Condition is tagged.

Causing the Condition: This Condition is usually the result of fine-tuning the prerequisite Condition as part of an extended action, involving the subject and entity acting in concert for a number of scenes equal to Rank or a living subject's Resolve, whichever is higher. Using a Control Influence allows an entity to temporarily create the Open Condition as an instant action.

Ending the Condition: The Condition ends if the prerequisite Condition is removed. Exorcism rituals work by removing this Condition, reverting it to the prerequisite.

Controlled

The object, creature, or person covered by an Open Condition has now been so conditioned that the entity may attempt to Claim it, permanently merging with it.

Prerequisites: The intended subject of this Condition must have the Open Condition, tagged to the entity attempting to cause it.

Causing the Condition: This Condition is the result of repeated use of the Possess Manifestation effect by the causing entity. It must have succeeded in possessing the subject on a number of separate occasions equal to the Willpower of entity or subject (whichever is higher). If any Possessed Condition is removed before its duration ends, progress is lost on building to the required number of possessions.

Ending the Condition: Successfully ending the Claimed Condition against the entity's will, whether by Exorcism or by forcing the Claimed subject into contact with the entity's bane, removes this Condition and reverts the subject to Open.

Reaching

The spirit has opened a conduit through the Gauntlet, allowing it to use Influences and Numina to affect the other side. Numina with [R] after their name can be used with this Condition. Characters capable of perceiving spirits in Twilight can sense the conduit's presence with a successful Wits + Composure roll.

Causing the Condition: This Condition is the result of the Reaching Manifestation Effect and lasts for one Scene.

Ending the Condition: At the end of the scene, the Condition fades. Mortals may attempt an Abjuration with a 3 dice penalty to close the conduit and end the Condition early.

Underworld Gate

The location has an open gateway to the Underworld. All ghosts regain one Essence per scene that they are in the gateway's presence. Ghosts without anchors may use it to reenter the world.

Causing the Condition: This Condition can be created by using the Avernian Gateway Manifestation Effect on an Open Condition. Some supernatural beings with ties to death are also able to open Avernian Gateways. Even mortals can open a gate if one is present and they know the proper means. Mortals who conduct rituals to first Open a Death-Resonant location that houses a gate can unlock it, causing this Condition, but require the *key* to do so. Every Gateway has a key — an item or action that will open it. Keys can be physical objects, but are also sometimes actions or emotions or are tied to times and events: a Gate might open for a murder at midnight, when touched with a certain doll, or when a woman betrayed in love turns her back on it three times. Researching a proper key is a difficult Intelligence + Occult roll, with a –3 to –5 dice modifier.

Ending the Condition: At the end of the scene, the Condition fades. An Exorcism directed at the gate can end the Condition early.

Shadow Gate

The location has a hole punched through the Gauntlet. Spirits — and even incautious people — can cross through it without the use of any powers. The Shadow Gate is visible even to material beings, as the Shadow world and material worlds mix.

Causing the Condition: This Condition can be created by using the Shadow Gateway Manifestation Effect on an Open Condition. Very rare summoning rituals can also create this Condition, allowing the spirit being called to access the material world.

Ending the Condition: At the end of the scene, the Condition fades. An exorcism directed at the gate can end the Condition early.

Materialized

The entity has shifted from ephemeral to material substance, manifesting in physical form. All the rules for ephemeral entity's traits still apply except for the effects of being in Twilight. This Condition protects the entity from Essence Bleed for its duration.

Causing the Condition: This Condition is created by an entity using the Materialize Manifestation Effect on an Open Condition. If the Open Condition used is on an object or person, the entity must materialize within its Rank in yards.

Avernian Gateways

Doorways to the Underworld, also called *Avernian gates*, exist all over the world but are invisible to all but a handful of psychics. The gateways are in Twilight, made of ghostly ephemera, and appear in places with the Resonant Condition tagged as "Death" — anywhere that people die in large numbers or that has a feel of Death about it can house a gate. They remain closed unless they are the nearest gate to a ghost who loses his last Anchor, in which case they open for a turn as his Corpus passes on.

Ending the Condition: Materialization lasts for one hour per success on the activating roll. When the duration ends, the entity fades back into Twilight. Physical contact with a Bane or removal of a prerequisite condition can cause the Condition to end early.

Fettered

The entity has secured itself to an object or creature. As long as it remains Fettered, the entity is safe from Essence Bleed. The entity remains in Twilight and must stay within five yards of the Fetter. Most entities Fettering themselves literally hide inside their Fetters if they are small enough.

The entity pays one less Essence for using Influences on the Fetter, but may not use them or Numina on another target as long as the Fetter lasts.

Prerequisites: The intended subject of this Condition must have the Open Condition, tagged to the entity attempting to cause it.

Causing the Condition: This Condition is created by an entity using the Fetter Manifestation Effect.

Ending the Condition: Fetters are permanent unless the prerequisite Conditions are ended, or if the subject of the Fetter is destroyed or killed (if a living being). The entity can voluntarily end the Condition by using the Unfetter Manifestation Effect. A successful Exorcism removes this Condition.

Urged

This animal or human host has been used as a Fetter by an ephemeral being. The entity may read the subject's thoughts with a successful Power + Finesse roll, contested by Resolve + Supernatural Tolerance. Success reveals surface thoughts. The entity may urge the host to take a specified action with a successful Power + Finesse roll contested by Resolve + Composure with an extra die. If the entity wins, the urge is created. Following it rewards the host with a Beat.

Causing the Condition: This Condition is created by an entity using the Fetter Manifestation Effect.

Ending the Condition: The Urged Condition ends whenever the linked Fetter ends.

Possessed

This object, corpse, or living being is temporarily controlled by an ephemeral entity. Living hosts are put into a coma-like state while being possessed — they experience the possession as missing time, except for flashbacks that might come out in dreams or times of stress such as losing Integrity. The entity may not use Numina or Influences while controlling the host, but is safe from Essence Bleed as long as the possession lasts.

The entity may pay one Essence per turn to heal one lethal or bashing wound or a point of structure lost to damage. Corpses that died through damage begin Possession incapacitated and must be "healed" with Essence

Entities possessing inanimate objects or corpses have a great deal of control over their host. An entity controlling an object can't make it do anything it couldn't do while being operated, but it can turn switches on and off, operate machinery, use keyboards, and turn dials. Use the entity's Finesse if dice rolls are necessary.

Corpses and other articulated hosts capable of movement, such as shop mannequins or industrial robots, use their own Physical Attributes but the entity's Attributes in Social or Mental rolls. By spending a point of Essence, the entity can use its own Attributes instead of the host's for Physical tasks for a turn, but doing so causes one point of lethal damage or structure loss to the host.

Living hosts require more time for the entity to gain full control and always use their own Attributes. The entity may read the host's mind with a Finesse Roll at a –4 die penalty, use the host's Physical Skills at a –3 penalty, and the host's Social and Mental Skills at –4. These penalties are all reduced by one die per day that the entity has been Fettered to the host. Most possessing entities Fetter themselves to their intended hosts and use the Possess Manifestation Effect to take full control only in emergencies.

To possess a host, the entity must remain in Twilight, superimposed over the host. This means that if the host touches the entity's bane or is injured by a weapon made of the bane, the entity will suffer wounds to its Corpus.

Causing the Condition: This Condition is created by an entity using the Possess Manifestation Effect. The object or victim must be under the Open Condition, tagged to the entity.

Ending the Condition: The possession lasts for a single scene, unless the entity abandons it early or the host is killed or destroyed. Abjurations, Exorcisms and forced contact with banes and bans can all motivate an entity to release a host.

Claimed

A Claimed object, corpse, creature, or person has been permanently possessed and merges with the entity involved. Unlike Possess, living Claimed aren't put into a fugue state, but remain mentally active while their soul and the Claiming entity merge together over the course of several days. During the period of fusion, the subject is under all the effects of the Urged Condition, described above. Once per day, starting with the moment the Claimed Condition is created, add one dot of the entity's Attributes to the host's, permanently raising them. Power may be assigned to Strength, Intelligence, or Presence, Finesse to Wits, Dexterity, or Manipulation, and Resistance to Stamina, Composure, or Resolve. The host's physical form begins to mutate, taking on an appearance influenced by the original host and the entity.

Claimed corpses add points to Attributes as above, but start with all Mental and Social Attributes at 0. Inanimate objects use the statistics appropriate for their type (Adding Resistance to Structure and Durability, Power to Acceleration and Finesse to Handling) instead of Physical Attributes, and also start the claiming process with all Mental and Social Attributes at 0. Corpses and inanimate hosts don't spend the claiming period under the Urged Condition, having no minds of their own to warp.

Claimed may use the entity's Influences, but not Numina or Manifestation Effects. They may develop supernatural powers as Merits. From the moment the Claimed Condition is laid, the entity is safe from Essence Bleed. The hybrid being that results has the entity's Essence trait, Virtue, Vice, Fate, Ban, and Bane, but is a material being. Claimed that were once spirits may cross the Gauntlet at a Locus with a successful Intelligence + Presence roll. Claimed that were inanimate objects are fully animate, fusions of spiritual power, metal and plastic.

Causing the Condition: This Condition is created by an entity using the Claim Manifestation Effect.

Ending the Condition: Claim is permanent in living hosts unless the entity decides to detach itself, rolling its original Power + Finesse penalized by Rank in dice and contested by the Claimed hybrid's Resolve + Composure, including any dots gained from being Claimed. If the entity succeeds, the entity and host are separated. Former hosts are physically and mentally scarred — the physical appearance changes back at the same rate it mutated and the extra Attribute dots fade at a rate of two per day. The Essence trait and any supernatural powers the Claimed developed immediately vanish. Former Claimed, however, retain the Virtue and Vice of the entity that took them over.

In nonliving hosts, Claim is only temporary – once the Claim has fully formed, the host loses one dot of a Physical Attribute (or equivalent for formerly inanimate objects) per three days. When any of these Attributes reaches 0, the host disintegrates and the entity is released into Twilight.

Numina

In addition to Influence and Manifestation, all ephemeral entities have a number of discrete magical powers called Numina. Each Numen is a single ability linked to the entity's nature — activated by a successful Power + Finesse roll unless stated otherwise.

The Numina described here are deliberately generic. Individual ephemeral beings display their Numen in ways reflecting their type, theme and biases — a ghost's Blast is a empty, freezing cold in the bones of its victim, while an angel's Awe manifests as a terrible holy aura.

Numina with R next to their name are usable in conjunction with the Reaching Condition.

Aggressive Meme

The entity speaks to a person (it must be in a Condition capable of doing so) and plants an idea in their mind. When that person tells someone else the idea, it takes hold in their mind, too. And whoever *they* tell, and so on. The Numen costs seven Essence to activate and is contested by Resolve + Composure + Supernatural Tolerance.

Awe

The entity causes terror in anyone who can see it. The Numen costs three Essence and activation is contested individually with Presence + Composure + Supernatural Tolerance by anyone

looking at the entity. Anyone gaining fewer successes than the entity is unable to move or speak for a turn. If the entity gains an exceptional success, the effect lasts three turns.

Blast

The entity may wound opponents at a distance. Range is equal to 10 yards per dot of Power and the entity does not suffer range penalties. If the activation roll succeeds, the Blast wounds as a +0L weapon. The entity may increase the lethality of its Blast by paying Essence — every two Essence spent increases the "weapon" by +1L. The maximum weapon bonus is equal to the entity's Rank.

Dement ®

The entity may torture its victims mind via psychic assault. This Numen costs one Essence. The activation roll is contested by the victim's Intelligence + Supernatural Tolerance. If the entity succeeds, the victim suffers the Insane Tilt (p. 211) for the rest of the Scene.

Drain

The entity can steal Essence or Willpower (chosen at activation) from a material being. The activation roll is contested by Stamina + Resolve + Supernatural Tolerance. Whichever character — entity *or* target — gains the most successes receives points of Willpower or Essence equal to the number of successes, while the other party loses the same number.

Emotional Aura ®

The entity sends out a wave of powerful — and distracting — emotion. This Numen costs one Essence and lasts for a scene or until the entity uses another Numina. The activation roll is made once but anyone coming within 5 yards of the entity must make a Resolve + Composure + Supernatural Tolerance roll. If the activation roll has more successes, the victim suffers a –2 dice penalty to all actions as long as the aura remains. If the victim gains more successes, he is immune to the aura unless the entity uses the Numen again.

Essence Thief

The entity may consume and steal Essence from ephemeral beings other than its own type — for example, spirits with this Numen may consume ghosts and angels. The Numen costs one Essence to activate.

Firestarter ®

The entity causes flammable materials to combust. This Numen costs one Essence and causes one small fire to break out per activation success within the entity's Power in yards.

Hallucination

The entity may create an illusion experienced by a single target: it can be anything from a sight or sound to an imaginary person who holds a conversation. The Numen costs one Essence and is contested by the victim's Wits + Composure + Supernatural Tolerance. Each success over the contesting roll alters one of the victim's senses.

Host Jump

The entity may leap from host to host when using the Possess or Claim Manifestations. The current host must touch the intended host while the entity spends 3 Essence; the new host must be under all necessary prerequisite Conditions. If both prerequisites are met, the entity immediately transfers the Possessed or Claimed Condition to the new host, although Claimed hosts must begin the process of Claiming again. The entity does not need to re-spend Essence on the Manifestation Effect when jumping hosts with this Numen. Living Claim victims who are vacated with the use of this Numen still suffer the aftereffects listed under the Claimed Condition.

Implant Mission ®

This Numen grants a mortal a vision of a task the entity wishes him to accomplish as well as a magical determination to see it through. The entity pays 2 Essence and rolls Power + Finesse. On a success, the subject receives a short vision of whatever the entity wishes him to do and is under the Obsessed Condition regarding carrying that mission out.

Innocuous

The entity is very good at being overlooked. Perception rolls to notice the entity are penalized by 2 dice. This Numen does not require a roll to activate and has no cost.

Left-Handed Spanner

The entity disables a device, paying one Essence and touching the object if Manifest, or moving its Twilight form to superimpose with it if not. The device must be a human-manufactured object with at least three moving parts. If the activation roll succeeds, the device malfunctions for a number of turns equal to the successes rolled. Using this Numen in combat requires the entity to Grapple and gain control of the object, and so can't be used this way in Twilight unless the target is in Twilight as well.

Mortal Mask

This Numen disguises a Materialized entity as a human and can be used at the same time as the Materialize Manifestation Effect. Using the Numen costs 1 Essence and the human seeming lasts for activation successes in hours. The human "costume" is flawed — witnesses may make a Wits + Composure roll penalized by the entity's Finesse to realize that something is wrong. Characters able to sense the entity in Twilight do not suffer a penalty to the roll.

Omen Trance

Once every 24 hours, the entity may enter a trance in order to gain a glimpse of the future. The Numen costs one Essence if the entity is trancing on its own behalf or 3 Essence if it is searching for omens for another. The activation roll is an extended action, lasting at least one scene. If successful,

the entity sees a vision of an event sometime in the next week. The visions are predisposed to be warnings of danger.

Pathfinder R

This Numen allows an entity to know the quickest route to a destination. The fastest route isn't always the safest, of course; the Numen doesn't reveal any dangers on the way, only a set of directions to the target. If the destination is the subject of the Safe Place Merit, the activation roll is contested by the lowest Resolve + Supernatural Tolerance among any owners. The Numen costs 1 Essence and lasts for a scene. If the destination is too far away to reach that quickly, the entity must use the Numen again.

Rapture R

The entity forces a response from the pleasure centers of a living being's brain, granting ecstatic visions, a feeling of communion with the universe, and sensations of bliss. The Numen costs 2 Essence to activate. If successful, the victim suffers the Insensate Tilt (p. 211). If the victim fails a Resolve + Supernatural Tolerance roll, she gains a temporary derangement for the entity's Power in days, in a form that binds her closer to the entity's wishes.

Regenerate

The entity can use Essence to heal bashing and lethal wounds on its Corpus. This Numen does not require a roll to activate, but costs 1 Essence and heals one level of damage — the entity must reactivate the Numen each turn to heal more severe wounds. Bashing damage is healed first, then lethal.

Resurrection

This Numen — only available to Rank 4+ angels and spirits of healing — raises the dead. The Numen costs 10 Essence to use and the activation roll is penalized by one die per day that the subject has been dead. Supernatural beings that have already died as part of their transformation — vampires, mummies and Sin-Eaters — can't be resurrected, nor can anyone who died of natural causes. Other supernatural beings lose their powers when resurrected. Mages become Sleepwalkers and werewolves, wolf-blooded.

Seek R

The entity can sense the presence of suitable Conditions from a distance. The base range is two miles per Rank; entities may spend an Essence to multiply this by 10. If successful on a Finesse roll, the entity becomes aware of the direction and distance to the nearest suitable Anchor, Infrastructure or Resonant Condition.

Speed

The entity accelerates into a blur of movement. The entity chooses whether to spend 2 or 4 Essence when activating this Numen. Spending 2 Essence doubles its Speed for the remainder of the scene, while spending 4 Essence triples it.

Sign

The entity creates messages or images in any media they would be able to access to be used by a mortal — it can write in the condensation on cold glass, produce images on computer screens, and send audible messages via phone lines. The Numen costs one Essence to activate, and if successful creates a single message.

Stalwart

The entity appears armored in Twilight form and uses Resistance as its Defense score instead of the lower of Power or Finesse.

Telekinesis R

The entity can manipulate objects without using a Manifestation Effect. This Numen costs one Essence. Successes on the activation roll become the entity's "Strength" when attempting to lift or throw an item. Fine motor control is impossible using this Numen.

Mortal Interaction

Mortals can interact with ephemeral entities in many more ways than as simple victims to Urge, Possess, or Claim, both for and against an entity's interests. Characters with an Unseen Sense for ghosts, spirits and angels can sense those beings' presence, even if the entity is in Twilight. Mystery Cults dedicated to serving particular entities attempt to assist their master in creating the necessary Conditions — often unwittingly. An angel doesn't need to explain to the mortals it forces to carry out strange actions that it is building Infrastructure, let alone explain why the God-Machine needs it to.

Of course, faced with humanity's fate as a resource for alien intruders, some mortals fight back.

Research

Most deliberate interactions with entities — summoning, exorcising and abjuration — rely on as much knowledge of the entity in question as the mortal can get. Research rolls to determine bans and banes are handled as extended Intelligence + Occult rolls for the most part, but many entities in the World of Darkness are protected by deliberate secrecy, obscurity, or don't often take interest in human affairs and so haven't had their details recorded. The target number of successes for a research roll is determined by the entity's type and Rank, as follows:

Rank	Successes
1	5
2	7
3	10
4	14
5	20

Researching a ghost reduces the target number of successes by 2, while researching an angel increases it by 4. Reaching the target number reveals the entity's ban or bane, while an exceptional success reveals both. Partial successes should reveal increasing information about the entity, as the character learns more about their nature, habits, and history.

Esoteric Armory (• to •••••)

Effect: Your character is the go-to guy when one needs a knife carved from the bone of a martyred saint, a hawthorn stake, rock salt shotgun shells, the powdered remains of cremated suicides or any number of other things. No matter how strange the need, you've got it covered. After successfully researching an ephemeral entity's Bane, compare your dots in this Merit to the entity's Rank. If the merit is equal to or greater than Rank, you've got what you need in your Armory. You should decide along with your Storyteller where the Armory *is*, though; a one-dot Esoteric Armory can fit in a large bag, but a four- or five-dot one will fill a house.

Resourceful investigators find other ways to learn the weaknesses of an ephemeral foe — many entities are willing to sell out their fellows' secrets in exchange for something. Many bans are also rather obvious, especially for low-Rank entities; a mortal might simply try to use the right thing by chance.

Contact

Faced with a haunting, or what appears to be a haunting, many occult investigators' first course of action is to attempt to make contact with the entity involved. Unless the entity actually has the Image or Materialize Manifestations or the Signs Numen, this is a slow process of trial, error and research that takes up several actions, each roll relating to one tested attempt to understand what the entity wants. Supernatural equipment (p. 241) can help the character in his endeavor.

Some mortals, however, are true mediums, able to make it easier for an entity to contact them. Doing so opens them up to the risk of being used for the entity's own ends; see the Medium Merit on p. 173.

Summoning and Exorcism

For a solitary occultist attempting to force a ghost to appear, or a shaman inviting a spirit to Influence an area, occult libraries are filled with summoning rites. None of them, strictly speaking, actually *work*, in that without supernatural power it's impossible to compel an ephemeral entity to appear, but the rituals and practices of a summoning can often, by accident or design, create the Conditions an entity would need to appear if it were so inclined.

A summoning is made up of several research actions (Intelligence + Occult rolls, with bonuses and penalties for access to proper literature) that narrow down the requirements for the rest of the rites. The remaining actions serve as alternate ways to cause the Influence Conditions in the desired location.

By acquiring a ghost's bones, or researching his Anchor and using it in the rite, the summoner sets up the Anchor Condition. By burning rare materials, the area is made Resonant with a fire-spirit. By gathering people who can see the gears and following the God-Machine's instructions, Infrastructure begins to build. Using the fruits of their researches, the Cultists customize Conditions for their intended guest, advancing the Condition to Open... and allowing it to Manifest. Summoning rituals involving bringing an entity forth from another world must include a step where the gateway is opened — summonings for spirits must be performed in locii, and those for ghosts near a gate to the Underworld. These are even more difficult to pull off and apt to be interrupted by meddling investigators, but are the only way to allow truly powerful entities access to the world.

Occult literature is full of proposed ways to control summoned entities. These usually consist of banes and bans, which the summoner can use as leverage. Some spirits really are bound via their bans to serve mortals that raise them in the correct manner, while others will Blast anyone presumptuous enough to try.

Exorcism is the opposite of summoning, but works in exactly the same way — a series of actions that interact with the Conditions an entity is relying on to Manifest or feed. The classic image of an exorcism, priests sealing themselves into a room with a possessed victim who drive the entity out with prayer, confrontation, and willpower, is a combination of exorcism to chip away at the entity's conditions, bindings and wardings to keep it from escaping or summoning aid, abjurations to provide a spiritual kick, and the use of as many banes and bans as the exorcist has been able to research.

Abjuration

While exorcism is an attempt to tackle the Conditions underpinning an entity's presence by mundane means or the use of bans and banes, abjuration fights the supernatural with the supernatural, pitting the users' soul and Resolve against the entity he is attempting to force away.

Although many exorcists (and therefore many people knowledgeable enough about the ephemeral to attempt abjuration) are religious, abjuration does not require religious faith to work. It's a consequence of the human soul; by stilling and focusing the mind, concentrating on the higher self, a skilled abjurist can cause his soul to affect Twilight, forcing ephemeral beings away and clearing an area of Influence.

The abjuration effect must be performed as a meditative exercise that helps the user stay calm even in the face of a rampaging Materialized spirit. Religious abjurists use repeated prayer, while more secular occultists rely on incantations learned from their researches. Anything that instills the proper calm and reverence will work, though — a soldier might attempt to abjure a ghost by reciting the patriotic oath of his country.

The abjuration itself is a Resolve + Composure roll contested by the entity's Power + Resistance. As Abjuration channels the higher self, working the ritual by a means that matches the abjurist's Virtue provides a +2 die bonus to the dice pool. A strong psyche is also useful — characters with Integrity 10 receive a +3 bonus, Integrity 9 characters gain +2 dice and Integrity 8 +1 die. Conversely, if the abjuration calls

on the abjurist's Vice, the dice pool is penalized by 2 dice. Low Integrity characters suffer a –1 dice penalty per Integrity dot below 6 — –1 for Integrity 5, –3 for Integrity 3, and so on.

If the abjuration is successful, all Conditions tagged by the entity in the abjurist's Willpower in yards are suppressed for one day. On an exceptional success, the abjurist also becomes an extra bane for the entity until its Conditions return.

Warding and Binding

Occult lore is full of references to sealing locations from spirits and ghosts, either to bind them inside or keep them from entering. Chalk circles, protective charms in windows — even a simple horseshoe above a threshold. Most of these tales have nothing substantial to them. Some are half-remembered references to bans or banes, or the weaknesses of supernatural — but still physical — creatures. A few, though, describe true warding or binding rituals.

Warding and binding are a combination of abjuration and an entity's bane, empowered to create a temporary ban that prevents the entity from crossing into or out of an area defined by the ritualist.

Instead of confronting the entity directly as in abjuration, the ritualist marks the boundary she intends to protect with the entity's bane. She doesn't have to mark a complete boundary — her concept of the area she's protecting is what's important. Marking doors and windows with lamb's blood to keep out a spirit that can't touch it will prevent that spirit from simply floating through the wall while in Twilight, and carefully drawing a sigil on the floor will serve to trap the angel whose name it is.

If the ritualist doesn't have the proper bane for her ritual's subject, it fails automatically, so the most important part of warding is getting that detail right. Once that's done and the area has been marked, the ritualist performs whatever abjuration method she knows, focusing on suffusing the area with the essence of the entity's bane. The ritual is a Presence + Occult roll, modified by the ritualist's Integrity as per an abjuration and further penalized by the entity's Rank. A further modifier depends on the size of the area being warded.

Area	Modifier
Small area within a location, up to a six-foot area	+1
Single room or vehicle	0
Two-story, suburban building	–1

Larger structures levy increasing penalties; an additional –1 for every equivalent of a family home. Most superstructures, like skyscrapers, trains, government buildings, and hospitals are too large to be effectively warded.

If successful, the entity described in the ritual treats attempting to move into or out of the warded area as though it were against its ban. The effect lasts for successes in days or is broken if the marking of the boundary is disturbed — a determined entity can suffer the injury from touching the bane material marker in order to break the ward.

Equipment

Equipment, tools, and technology help to solve problems. Having the right tool for the job can mean the difference between life and death — or in the World of Darkness, the difference between life and a fate worse than death. This list is not all-inclusive, but features many of the tools characters in the World of Darkness might have at their disposal.

Equipment is divided up by the Skills they typically assist with. Mental Equipment typically assists with Mental Skills, for example. As well, Supernatural Equipment deals with the paranormal, and may not be suitable for every chronicle. Lastly, Bygones are items that characters cannot procure easily or recreate. They're unique items that deal with the otherworldly.

Availability and Procurement

The dot cost of a piece of equipment reflects directly on the Resources cost if your character wishes to purchase it (or the components, for some things). It also reflects the level of Allies or other Social Merit required in order to find the item and the Skill level required to procure it with a single dice roll. For example, if a Party Invitation has Cost •••, a character with Larceny •• should not be able to find and steal the item without a roll, but a character with Politics •••• might be able to get one by virtue of saying the right words to the right organization. If your character wishes to obtain higher Availability items with their Skills, it requires a deeper effort.

Size, Durability, and Structure

These are guidelines that represent common, standard examples of the items in question. For most items, characters could procure better examples at a higher Availability rating.

Dice Bonuses

Most equipment offers a bonus to dice rolls pertaining to its use. Multiple items can influence a given roll, but a roll should not receive more than a +5 bonus.

Game Effect

A character with the item can use these Effects. Any restrictions, costs, or parameters are listed individually.

Mental Equipment

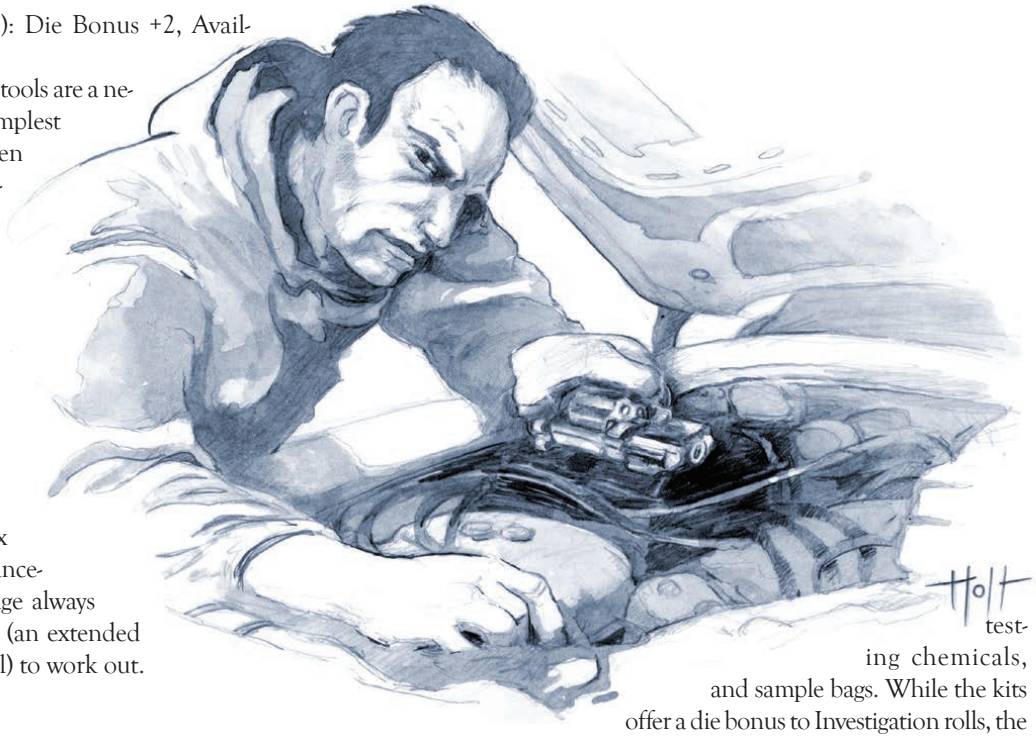
Mental equipment is all but essential for many character types. Mental Skills without the proper tools are almost useless in most cases. A doctor without medicine is hardly capable of healing, and an auto mechanic without a toolbox couldn't change some minor belts on a car.

Automotive Tools

Basic (Kit): Die Bonus +1, Durability 2, Size 2, Structure 3, Availability •

Advanced (Garage): Die Bonus +2, Availability •

Effect: Automotive tools are a necessity for all but the simplest automobile repairs. Even then, a fully stocked garage with heavy equipment is required for more involved tasks such as engine or transmission replacement. If time is not a factor, any trained character with a Crafts Automotive Specialty can repair a vehicle's mundane issues without rolls. Complex modifications and enhancements or massive damage always requires a greater effort (an extended Intelligence + Crafts roll) to work out.



Cache

Die Bonus +1 to +3, Durability 2, Size 1–5, Structure 5, Availability • to • • •

Effect: A cache is a hidden and defensible place for items, usually weapons. It keeps important items from prying eyes. A cache can never be more than half the Size of its parent object. For example, a Size 6 car can support no larger than a Size 3 cache. A given cache can hold two items of its Size and any reasonable number of smaller-sized items. Its Availability determines its die bonus, which both adds to concealment rolls and subtracts from rolls to find the items within.

Communications Headset

Die Bonus +2, Durability 0, Size 1, Structure 1, Availability • •

Effect: Communications headsets keep characters in constant contact. Different varieties works over different distances, but most commercial models works over about 200 feet. A common alternative is a conference call between cellular phones and Bluetooth headsets. If the users have practiced using their headsets together, they gain the die bonus on any coordinated efforts. In the case of a teamwork action, the die bonus only applies to the final roll. If the users are unpracticed, the bonus falls to +1 and actors must make reflexive Wits + Composure rolls to participate successfully.

Any heavy objects can obstruct a headset's signal. Anything obstructing with Durability higher than 3 requires listeners to make a Wits + Composure roll to understand shared messages. Levy a –1 penalty for each point of Durability over 4.

Crime Scene Kit

Die Bonus +2, Durability 2, Size 3, Structure 2, Availability • •

Effect: A crime scene (or CSI) kit is a toolbox full of investigative aids such as magnifiers, fingerprinting dust, cameras, tape, testing chemicals, and sample bags. While the kits offer a die bonus to Investigation rolls, the more important benefit of the CSI kit is that it allows evidence to be moved and digested elsewhere. Properly applied, it allows investigators to do the bulk of their work off-site and at their own pace.

Code Kit

Die Bonus +5, Durability 1, Size 2, Structure 1, Availability •

Effect: A code kit is a series of tools created for the purpose of making and interpreting a code for a specific audience. A common example is a book code, where a page, paragraph, and word from a certain book are used as the foundation for a cypher. This keeps any uninformed eyes off the intended message. In the case of a book code, a book is often chosen that all message recipients can access easily. This guarantees that the code never has to travel with the code key.

A successfully designed cypher is difficult to break. The die bonus acts as a penalty to any rolls to crack the code without the necessary reference key.

Cracking Software

Die Bonus +2, Durability N/A, Size N/A, Structure N/A, Availability • • •

Effect: Crappy software's a dime a dozen. Good, reliable cracking software is hard to come by. With solid software, a hacker can force passwords, breach firewalls, and otherwise make a nuisance of herself in computer systems. Beyond the dice pool modification, the benefit such software offers is a sort of buffer between the hacker and security. Any efforts to track the hacker takes two steps; one to identify the software, then one to trace it back to the source. Functionally this means two rolls on behalf of the security personnel, with an opportunity for the hacker to withdraw before detection.

Services

In addition to the fully-fleshed equipment in this chapter, characters may look for services from other characters. Below is a list of some things characters may pursue. Each has an Availability rating that works identically to other equipment. This can act as a foundation for what certain levels of Allies, Status, and other Social Merits might accomplish. Most are sorted by Skills to reflect their general uses. Most include a die bonus as well. Assume most services take a week to procure at the listed Availability levels. Raise Availability by one to make that a day instead.

Note that some services listed could be highly illegal and should be limited in access to appropriate Merits. In many cases, illegal services only offer negligible die bonuses. Their real advantage comes from a layer of separation from legal authorities.

Service	Availability	Die Bonus
Academics		
Historical specialist consulting	•••	+3
Research assistance from grad students	••	+2
Translation of a dead language	•••	+2
Computer		
Custom phone application	•••	+2
Digital image enhancement	••	+3
Graphic design/forgery	••	+2
Crafts		
Antiquities restoration	•••	+2
Auto repair	••	+3
Custom equipment modifications	•••	+2
Investigation		
Consultation on evidence	•••	+3
Investigative photography	•••	+2
Private investigation/ background check	••	+2
Medicine		
Black market surgeon	••••	+3
Expert medical witness	••••	+2
Rush plastic surgery	••••	+2
Occult		
Esoteric consultant/sage	••••	+3
Exorcist	•••	+2
Protective amulets or wards	••••	+1
Politics		
Campaign assistant	•••	+3
Cutting red tape (read: bribe)	•••	+2
Spin doctor	•••	+2
Science		
Fact-checking	••	+3
Falsifying research/coverup	•••	+2
Lab access	••	+2
Athletics		
Meditative assistance	•••	+2
Personal trainer	•••	+3
Throwing an athletic competition	••••	+4
Brawl		
Arrange underground boxing ring	•••	+2
Bodyguard service	•••	+3
Self-defense classes	•	+1
Drive		
Chauffer	••	+2
Stunt performance/ mock crash	•••	+3
Tour bus rental	••••	+2
Firearms		
Antique gun repair	•••	+2
Cover fire from gangs	•••	+3
Procuring smuggled military arms	••••	+2
Larceny		
Breaking and entering	•••	+2
Security consulting	•••	+2
Stealing a protected relic	••••	+3
Stealth		
Strategic distraction	•••	+3
Tailing a suspect	•••	+2
Targeted vandalism	••	+2

Services (continued)

Service	Availability	Die Bonus
Survival		
Field dress and preserve an animal	•••	+1
Trail guide	••	+3
Weatherproof a shelter	••	+2
Weaponry		
Properly forged sword	•••	+2
Identify wound from obscure weapon	•••	+2
Training in archaic warfare	•••	+2
Animal Ken		
Buy a trained animal	•••	+2
Identify animal droppings	••	+1
Rule out natural causes of death	•••	+2
Empathy		
"Good cop" interrogator	•••	+2
Neutral arbitrator	•••	+2
Therapy session	••	+1
Expression		
Document forgery	•••	+3
Ghostwriting	••	+2
Motivational speech	•••	+1

Service	Availability	Die Bonus
Intimidation		
Anti-interrogation training	••••	+3
"Bad cop" interrogator	•••	+2
Deprogramming therapy	•••	+2
Persuasion		
Defense attorney	•••	+3
Hostage negotiator	••••	+3
Pickup artist	•••	+2
Socialize		
Catering	••• or ••••	+1 or +2
Elocution consulting	•••	+1
Escort	•••	+2
Streetwise		
Arrange a rave or block party	•••	+2
Black market access	••	+2
Find crash space	••	+1
Smuggling contraband	•••	+1
Subterfuge		
Amateur Actor/Actress	••	+2
Con artistry	•••	+2
Gambling ringer	•••	+2

Digital Recorder

Die Bonus +1 or +2, Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 2, Availability • or ••

Effect: In the last decade, digital audio recorders have gotten smaller, more effective, and more affordable. Now, any student can carry a coin-sized device that would have put intelligence agencies of the 1980s to shame. The cheaper model of recorder gives its +1 bonus to any rolls to catch words or sounds. The bonus also applies to concealment rolls. The more expensive model gives +2. With an Intelligence + Computer (with die bonus), a character can contest any rolls to obscure discussion or mask noises.

Duct Tape

Die Bonus +1, Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 2, Availability •

Effect: Duct tape has as many uses as one can think of, and just as many you never would. It can reinforce barricades, stabilize weapon handles, bind prisoners, repair broken pipes, and so much more. In most cases, duct tape can offer a +1 bonus to Crafts-related rolls. Alternatively, it can add a point of Durability to almost anything. If used as a restraint, rolls to break free suffer a –3 penalty, and must overcome the duct tape's Structure.

First Aid Kit

Die Bonus 0 or +1, Durability 1, Size 2, Structure 3, Availability • or ••

Effect: A first aid kit contains all the necessary supplies to stabilize an injury and stop wounds from getting worse until the victim can find proper treatment. The one-dot version of the first aid kit does not offer a die bonus, it simply allows for treatment. The two-dot version offers a +1 to treatment rolls due to superior supplies.

Flashlight

Die Bonus +1, Durability 2, Size 1, Structure 3, Availability •

Effect: In a world of darkness, a flashlight can be a person's best friend. It generally does what it's supposed to; it

helps cut a path through the unknown. Its die bonus subtracts from any penalties due to darkness, and adds to any rolls to search in the dark. A good flashlight can serve as a club in a pinch. As well, it can blind an unfortunate subject. A Dexterity + Athletics roll, subtracting an informed opponent's Defense, will put the beam where it needs to be. The victim's player may make a contested Stamina roll. If your character scores more successes than the subject, they're blinded for one turn. Victims with especially acute senses are blinded for two turns.

Glowstick

Die Bonus +2, Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 1, Availability •

Effect: Glowsticks use a chemical mixture to summon forth enough light to see in a small area. Most commercial glowsticks last a couple of hours; police and other professional varieties can last twelve. Because they're small, airtight containers, they serve the added benefit of being useful underwater or in the rain. Functionally, they work the same as a flashlight. However, they cannot be used to blind a target, since their soft glow is far less obtrusive than a flashlight's beam. They're also very conveniently worn, which can serve strategic purposes for a group operating in low-light conditions. A member will not go missing without being noticed so long as they have a glowing neon bar on their belt.

GPS Tracker

Die Bonus +3, Durability 2, Size 2, Structure 2, Availability • •

Effect: With the advent of the modern cellular phone, most modern people have a GPS-enabled device on their person at any given time. With a bit of know-how, and access to someone's phone, your character can track their every move (provided those moves are not in caves, tunnels, or sewer systems). Some characters will trade GPS data in case one of the group becomes lost or if they have to follow someone without notice. Planting a phone on an unwitting subject can serve as a highly effective tracking device.

Keylogging Software

Die Bonus +2, Durability N/A, Size N/A, Structure N/A, Availability • •

Effect: Keylogging software does exactly one thing: It logs keystrokes on a computer. This is usually done to record incriminating data or passwords. Usually, keylogging software is coupled with software to transmit the data once captured. The challenge for the would-be intruder is installing the software. Email scams are an unreliable way to get onto a specific computer, but could fool one member of a large organization. A thumb drive is very effective, but requires direct, physical access to the recipient computer. The software's die bonus offers an advantage to breach a network or to find important data.

Luminol

Die Bonus +2, Durability 0, Size 1, Structure 1, Availability •

Effect: Luminol is a chemical that reacts to certain metals in human blood and other bodily fluids. The reaction causes a faint neon glow for about thirty seconds, visible in the dark. It comes in an aerosol can and will seek out faint traces, even after a thorough cleaning. In addition to showing the exact locations of violent crimes, luminol can assist in tracking wounded people and animals. Luminol's die bonus applies to any roll to track by the fluid traces, or to piece together the details of a crime scene.

Multi-Tool

Die Bonus +1, Durability 3, Size 1, Structure 4, Availability •

Effect: Sometimes, the need for mobility doesn't allow for your character to carry around a full tool kit. In these cases, a multi-tool can be a lifesaver. From sawing to stripping wires, to opening bottles, to filing off serial numbers, a multi-tool can do the job in a pinch. The multi-tool offers a negligible die bonus on numerous Crafts and other assorted tasks, and most importantly, allows for rolls when sometimes they couldn't be made for lack of proper equipment. While not made for use as a weapon, it can serve as one causing 0 lethal, but suffering a –1 penalty to hit.

Personal Computer

Die Bonus +1 to +4, Durability 2, Size 3, Structure 2, Availability • to • • • •

Effect: In the developed world, almost every household has access to a personal computer. They vary in size, functionality, and price, from decade-old models that can barely surf the web to high-end machines that can process gigabytes of data per second. In today's world, many lives revolve around computers. For some people, their entire careers and personal lives exist within digital space. The Availability of the computer determines its die bonus.

Smartphones

Die Bonus +1 to +2, Durability 2, Size 1, Structure 1, Availability • to • • •

Effect: By themselves, smartphones can make calls, send text messages and emails, take pictures, maintain an agenda, and search the web. With a bit of software, the Smartphone becomes the multi-tool of the electronic age. While it cannot accomplish the raw computing power of a full-sized personal computer, higher-end smartphones can manage almost all the same tasks with ease.

Most major gadgets have been successfully replicated with smartphone applications. GPS scanning and tracking are staples of the amateur investigator. Facial recognition software finds a face in a crowd with relative accuracy. They can photograph and transcribe text, then translate ancient tomes. They can store a library's worth of text and allow for automated searches. They offer directions with photographic assistance. The value of a mindless video game on a stakeout is often underestimated.

Special Effects

Die Bonus +2, Durability 2, Size 5, Structure 3, Availability • • •

Effect: Special effects is a catch-all term for the tricks and chicanery used by amusement parks and stage magicians to fool witnesses. A character may use these as a distraction or a defense. For example, the Pepper's Ghost illusion is relatively easy to set up with the right tools. It uses a large mirror and a sheet of glass, along with a model and a light source. It projects an illusion of the model's reflection, and makes witnesses see a "ghost."

In addition to the die bonus, special effects generally fool their audience at first. A witness will fall for the trick, unless given good reason to be suspicious. This can waste valuable time or lead the witness into a trap.

Surveillance Equipment

Die Bonus +2, Durability 2, Size 2, Structure 2, Availability • • •

Effect: Standard surveillance equipment usually consists of motion detectors, cameras, and monitors. High-end versions may include infrared heat sensors, barometric scanners, or even more complex gear. Either way, the point of surveillance equipment is to survey, detect, and otherwise track who enters or leaves a location. Often, this also means locking down breached zones. Unless someone knows surveillance equipment exists and actively avoids it, his presence is noticed and recorded. If he tries to avoid it, contest his Dexterity + Stealth against the installing technician's Intelligence + Computer or Intelligence + Crafts (for digital and analog systems, respectively). The technician may add the equipment's die bonus. If the intruder scores more successes, he remains unnoticed. Otherwise, he goes on record.

Survival Gear

Die Bonus +1 or +2, Durability 2, Size 2 or 3, Structure 3, Availability • or • • •

Effect: Survival gear is the catch-all term for the various kits of equipment needed to survive in harsh environments. This could encompass tents, canned foodstuff, raingear, sleeping bags, sterile water, or any of the various things a person can use to survive the world outside their cushy homes. They come in two levels: a basic level and an advanced level. The basic level offers +1 and subtracts one from the effective level of environment, (see Extreme Environments, p. 213), while the advanced offers +2 and subtracts two from the effective environment level. This does not help with a level 4 environment. A resourceful character can jury rig or scavenge the necessary supplies for a basic survival gear, but an advanced set of gear requires very specialized equipment. Basic survival gear can assist with most any environment, but advanced survival gear must be catered to one particular type of environment.

Talcum Powder

Die Bonus +2, Durability N/A, Size 1, Structure N/A, Availability •

Effect: Talcum powder can keep a baby's bottom from getting diaper rash, but it can also show the presence of the unseen, and show evidence of intrusion if placed at a portal of entry. If dusted with talcum powder, a character must achieve five successes on a Dexterity + Stealth roll to enter without a trace. Fewer successes will only obscure the specifics of their feet and hands. Some paranormal investigators use talcum powder as a way to give ghosts and other invisible entities a method for communication.

Ultraviolet Ink

Die Bonus +2, Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 2, Availability •

Effect: Ultraviolet Ink, or invisible ink as it's commonly called, is an outstanding way to relay messages in plain sight.

Since the naked eye cannot perceive the ink without an ultraviolet light, a character can scrawl messages for other recipients in-the-know. It also allows for secretive information to be passed around through mundane channels. If someone's being surveyed by nefarious forces, an ultraviolet message scribbled on a throwaway magazine is much easier to get into their home unmolested than, say, a suspicious letter slid through their doorframe. If you need to mark a path to a secret hiding place, what better way to conceal the guiding marks?

Physical Equipment

Physical equipment enhances the use of Physical Skills. This often means the use of simple and complex machines to make things easier, or simple tricks to heighten the effectiveness of a character's inherent talents.

Battering Ram

Die Bonus +4, Durability 3, Size 4, Structure 8, Availability • •

Effect: The purpose of the battering ram is to bring down doors and other barricades with direct, focused force. A battering ram uses a Teamwork action (see the World of Darkness Rulebook, p. 134), allowing up to four participants. The primary actor adds the ram's die bonus to her roll. A ram ignores two points of Durability.

Bear Trap

Die Bonus +2, Durability 3, Size 2, Structure 5, Availability • •

Effect: A bear trap is a large metal contraption that looks something like a set of deadly jaws. For this reason, they're also commonly called jaw traps. When a human or large animal steps into the bear trap, it snaps shut on their leg. Due to the serrated edges on the trap, this can cause massive bleeding or even broken bones.

The jaw trap causes 3L damage and ignores two points of armor or Durability. A character trapped in the jaws can attempt to escape as an instant action. Doing so requires a Strength + Stamina roll, with the trap's die bonus as a penalty due to the distracting pain and the strength of the jaws. Failure on this roll causes another point of lethal damage as the jaw digs in further. Creatures without opposable thumbs cannot escape this way and must rip themselves free.

Any rolls to hide a bear trap suffer its die bonus as a penalty. They're difficult to hide due to their awkward shape and weight.

Caltrops

Die Bonus +2, Durability 2, Size 2, Structure 3, Availability • •

Effect: Caltrops are small, pointed pieces of metal, arranged in such a way that one point is always facing upward. This makes walking (or driving) through a patch of caltrops inconvenient and painful. These traits assume enough caltrops to fill a doorway or other narrow corridor.

Moving through caltrops causes one point of lethal damage. Caltrops ignore a point of armor or Durability. To move through safely, a Dexterity + Athletics roll is required with the caltrops' die bonus applied as a penalty to the roll. A character may only move half Speed (rounded down) while moving safely through caltrops.

A character may hide caltrops, although it is difficult. A Wits + Larceny –3 roll is required, the caltrops' die bonus does not apply to this roll.

Camouflage Clothing

Die Bonus +2, Durability 1, Size 2, Structure 3, Availability • •

Effect: Camouflage clothing allows its wearer to blend in with her surroundings enough for the untrained eye to pass over. Effective camouflage must be catered to the environment; greens and browns in the woodlands, shades of grey in an urban area. Proper camouflage adds its bonus to rolls to remain unnoticed.

Climbing Gear

Die Bonus +2, Durability 3, Size 2, Structure 2, Availability • •

Effect: Climbing gear includes ropes, pulleys, handles, carabiners, hooks, and other assorted tools for scaling things. They serve a twofold purpose. First, they add their die bonus to the normal Strength + Athletics rolls for climbing. Second, if properly applied (with a Wits + Athletics roll), they prevent a character from falling more than ten feet at a time.

Crowbar

Die Bonus +2, Durability 3, Size 2, Structure 4, Availability •

Effect: A crowbar is a curved piece of steel used to pry open shipping pallets, jammed doors, and other things a normal person would be incapable of doing by hand. It adds to any dice rolls used to establish leverage. When prying things open, it also allows your character to ignore two points of Durability on the lock or barricade. Additionally, a crowbar can be used as a weapon (see p. 202).

Firearm Suppressor

Die Bonus +2, Durability 2, Size 1, Structure 2, Availability • •

Effect: A firearm suppressor is popularly and misleadingly referred to as a silencer in cinema and other media. It's a cylinder placed on the end of a gun barrel that changes and lightens the sound of a shot. A suppressor delivers many minor benefits, but two noteworthy advantages: short-range accuracy and concealment.

Increased Accuracy: A suppressed firearm travels through a longer barrel and the muzzle crown evens the expulsion of hot gasses that can slightly affect trajectory. In game terms, reduce a suppressed gun's damage rating by 1 due to the bullet's subsonic flight, but increase the attack dice pool by 2 when firing at short range.

Position Concealer: The sound changes dramatically, to the point where many people do not recognize the sound as that of a gunshot and are often unable to place where the lower tone came from. The muzzle flash is also reduced dramatically with a suppressor, helping to conceal a shooter's position. A character trying to identify a suppressed shot must roll Wits + Firearms – 2. Any character searching for the shooter using the gun's tells suffers a –2 penalty.

Gas Mask

Die Bonus +5, Durability 1, Size 2, Structure 3, Availability • •

Effect: A gas mask is a filtration device placed over the face that defends against noxious chemicals in the air. With a working gas mask, a character can stand minor toxins for as long as he needs, whereas other characters might take damage over time or require rolls to remain conscious. Powerful toxins may still require rolls. A gas mask adds five dice to these rolls.

Handcuffs

Die Bonus +2, Durability 4, Size 1, Structure 4, Availability •

Effect: A solid pair of steel handcuffs is made to restrain even a remarkably strong person. Applying handcuffs to an unwilling combatant is an additional option in a grapple. Roll Strength + Brawl – the opponent's Strength. Success means the handcuffs are where they need to be.

Breaking out of successfully applied handcuffs requires a Strength + Stamina – 4 roll. Each success on the roll reduces the Structure of the cuffs by 1. Cuffs reduced to 0 Structure snap open. Each attempt to escape causes 1 point of bashing damage.

A character may also try to finagle their hands out of the cuffs. This requires a Dexterity + Athletics – 4 roll. Success allows for an escape, and causes one point of bashing damage. Failure on this roll causes one point of lethal damage, as the thumb jerks out of socket.

Attempting to do anything requiring manual dexterity while cuffed incurs a –4 penalty, or –2 if the hands are cuffed in front. Witnesses are unlikely to behave favorably around a cuffed character, Social rolls against strangers incur a –3 penalty.

Many police forces and security companies now prefer heavy duty plastic zip ties in place of handcuffs. While they're slightly less durable (Durability 3), they incur a –5 penalty from behind or –3 from the front, because they can be far tighter on the wrists. They can also be cut free.

Lockpicking Kit

Die Bonus +2, Durability 2, Size 2, Structure 2, Availability • •

Effect: A lockpicking kit consists of picks, tools, and rods for manipulating tumblers and opening locks. A good kit contains a wide array of tools to all but guarantee intrusion of an analog lock. With such a kit and at least a dot of Larceny, a character can pick a lock without a roll if time is not an issue. If time is an issue, the die bonus applies to the Dexterity + Larceny rolls. At Availability •, a character may procure a portable lockpick. It has Size 1, Structure 1, and is far more concealable. However, it only offers a +1 bonus and doesn't allow for picking without rolls since the kit realistically may not have the right tools for a given job.

A lockpicking kit only works on mechanical locks. Digital locks require more specific hacking and code prediction. A character may procure a digital lockpick at Availability • • •, but typically only works on one type of lock, such as the keycard locks used in hotels. Digital lockpicks can be Size 2, or Size 1 if crafted as an extension of a laptop computer or smartphone.

Mace (Pepper Spray)

Die Bonus +1, Durability 2, Size 1, Structure 1, Availability •

Effect: Pepper spray, or "mace" as it's commonly called, is a blend of chemicals (mostly capsaicin, the "hot" part of a chili) in a small spray can, designed to debilitate threats. Civilians use these devices in self-defense; police use them to subdue unruly criminals. Use of pepper spray requires a Dexterity + Athletics, or Dexterity + Firearms roll. Each yard is a range category, so one yard is short range, two yards is medium, three yards is long range. An opponent's Defense applies, but in normal wind conditions, the die bonus applies to the roll.

Upon the first attack, the victim suffers the Stun Tilt (see p. 212). An opponent struck suffers a –5 penalty to all actions. This penalty can be reduced by one for every turn spent rinsing the eyes with water. Commercial chemicals designed to clean the eyes will fully remove the penalty after a turn.

Night Vision Goggles

Die Bonus +2, Durability 1, Size 2, Structure 1, Availability • •

Effect: Night vision goggles amplify low-light conditions, allowing characters to see when they otherwise could not. A character with night vision goggles does not suffer penalties for acting blind. Bright lights can render the wearer temporarily blinded, as if he had a flashlight shone in his eyes.

Rope

Die Bonus +1, Durability 2, Size 3, Structure 2, Availability •

Effect: Rope is one of the oldest tools known to humankind. It's never left prominent use because of its simple and efficient utility. A good rope adds its die bonus to relevant Crafts rolls and anywhere else it would assist. As a binding agent, it resists breaking with a Durability (or effective Strength) equal to its user's Crafts score, due to the multiplicative effect of solid knots. An applicable Specialty adds one to the user's Crafts score for this purpose. Some interrogators, shibari fetishists, and boy scouts alike specialize in remarkable knot-tying, potentially rendering subjects completely and hopelessly immobile.

Slick

Die Bonus +2, Durability N/A, Size N/A, Structure N/A, Availability • •

Effect: Slick is a catch-all for mixtures of chemicals designed to cover an area and make it difficult to pass due to slippery and sticky conditions. Most slick lasts about an hour at effective slipperiness. Anyone walking in a covered area must succeed in a Dexterity + Athletics – 3 roll each turn to maintain footing. Failure results in the Knocked Down Tilt (see p. 211). Similarly, an object coated requires a Dexterity + Athletics – 3 to grasp it successfully. Because it dries rapidly, every fifteen minutes after application, all rolls to resist the slick gain a cumulative +1.

Stun Gun

Die Bonus 0, Durability 2, Size 1, Structure 2, Availability •, • •, or • • •

Effect: A stun gun is designed to deliver an overwhelming amount of electricity to an assailant in order to shut down her muscles and send her to the ground. As a defensive item, this gives the would-be victim time to run or get help. As an offensive item, it leaves the victim ready for restraint or worse.

These devices come in two varieties (hand-held and ranged) and three intensities (1–3, corresponding to their Availabilities). The hand-held model has live leads on the edge of a handle and can be used as many as fifty times on one battery charge. The ranged model fires small wired darts up to fifteen feet away. While the ranged model has similar battery life, it uses a compressed air cartridge that requires replacement after each shot.

Use of a handheld stun gun requires a Dexterity + Weaponry roll, penalized by the victim's Defense. The ranged model uses Dexterity + Firearms, also penalized by the victim's Defense. On a successful hit with either, the victim takes one point of lethal damage. The successes subtract from the victim's next dice pool. With the ranged version, the darts remain in the victim's body, adding three successes automatically each turn. They can be removed with a Strength + Stamina roll, with the initial successes penalizing the action. With the hand-held version, the attacker can attempt to maintain the shock, which takes a Strength + Weaponry, penalized by the greater of the opponent's Strength or Defense. Once the accumulated successes exceed the victim's Size, the victim collapses in neuro-muscular incapacitation. Once the shock ends, this lasts for (10 – victim's Stamina) in turns.

Social Equipment

Social actions deal with people. Social Equipment offers tools for leverage, influence, and manipulation.

Cash

Die Bonus +1 to +5, Durability 1, Size 2, Structure 1, Availability • to • • • • •

Effect: This represents a wad of cash, a briefcase of money, an offshore bank account number, or some other lump sum.

It can't be reflected in the Resources Merit since it's not a regular income. However, it can be expended to offer a bonus equivalent to its Availability on any social roll where a bribe could benefit. As well, it can be expended to purchase one item of equal Availability. For more complex uses, consider it a single month's allotment of the same Resources.

Contraband

Die Bonus +1 to +5, Durability 1, Size 2-4, Structure 1, Availability • to • • • • •

Effect: Similar to cash (above), contraband reflects a lump sum of valuable materials. In this case, it's not monetary, it's illegal. This might mean guns, drugs, or even smuggled truffles. Contraband can be used identically to cash, except only within certain circles. Not everyone will take stolen goods for payment. However, with a group that has a high demand for the item, the contraband is worth one dot rating higher (maximum 5).

Disguise

Die Bonus +1 to +3, Durability 1, Size 3, Structure 2, Availability • to • • •

Effect: A good disguise goes a long way to help fit in with a strange group or go unnoticed in a crowd where one doesn't belong. Properly costumed for a situation, no rolls are required to blend into the crowd. Any rolls to actively detect the outsider suffer a penalty equal to the die bonus of the disguise; the disguised character also gains the bonus to remain hidden.

With a disguise, a character can emulate the first dot of a single Social Merit that would make sense within the scope of the scene. For example, it doesn't make money appear from thin air, but it would allow a character to get their drinks on a nonexistent tab, reflecting Resources •. This requires a Composure + Subterfuge to maintain in the face of anyone in the know, contested by the witness's Wits + Subterfuge. The die bonus of the disguise applies to the liar, but does not affect the witness.

Fashion

Die Bonus +1 to +3, Durability 1, Size 2, Structure 1, Availability • to • • • • •

Effect: Never underestimate the value of high fashion. Like a disguise, fashionable clothing allows a character to fit in. However, the point of fashion is to draw attention, not to fade into the crowd. As opposed to anonymity, fashion means being noticed. Note that the clothing chosen must be appropriate to the setting. Punk chic will not work at a Senator's fundraiser, for example. When improperly dressed, the die bonus applies as a penalty to all Social Skill rolls.

The die bonus for Fashion is equal to half the Availability, rounded up.

Housing

Die Bonus +1 to +5, Durability 4+, Size 12+, Structure 8+, Availability • to • • • • •

Housing reflects a place to lay one's head. The Availability score determines the size, location, and relative luxury of the building. One dot may reflect a tiny apartment in a terrible part of town, three dots a three-bedroom home in a suburb, while five could mean a penthouse condo downtown or a sprawling mansion.

Makeup Kit

Die Bonus +1, Durability 1, Size 2, Structure 3, Availability • • •

Effect: A good makeup kit can not only disguise a character in a pinch, but can help to sell a story. With ten minutes of preparation, a makeup kit's die bonus applies to any applicable Social rolls.

A makeup kit can also help to build a narrative. Want to convince someone that you've been beaten? It's not hard to fake a black eye. Want to walk through the vampire club without drawing attention and undue fangs? A little pancake makeup and rouge goes a long way. With makeup applied, subtract the die bonus from any dice rolls to detect her true identity.

Polygraph Machine

Die Bonus +3, Durability 1, Size 3, Structure 4, Availability • • •

Effect: Polygraph machines detect heart rates, sweat, and breath using electrodes and stethoscopes. For many people, this can guide a skilled user in determining honest and deceptive behaviors. Both digital and analog models exist and they work similarly. A digital model is often smaller (Size 2), but gives the same bonus. When used by a trained practitioner (requiring Medicine • or greater), a polygraph machine offers its die bonus to any rolls to detect lies.

Supernatural Equipment

Supernatural Equipment covers various tricks and tools for dealing with Things That Should Not Be. None of these tools use exact (or even actual) sciences; most are just modern interpretations of older traditions. While an Intelligence + Occult roll can tell a potential solution to a supernatural issue, it takes an extended roll and extensive research to verify if the solution is in any way valid or safe. Often, these tools have unexpected side effect and consequences. The listed tools are simply suggestions. Feel free to change them up or brew your own. Look into legends, folklore, and even tabloids for inspiration.

Once characters have researched and tested a device or tool successfully, it should generally work as intended. Exceptions and loopholes can occur rarely.

Electromagnetic Field (EMF) Detector

Die Bonus +2, Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 2, Availability •

Effect: An electromagnetic field detector is a small, handheld device that detects trace electromagnetic fields

in appliances and home wiring. They're common tools for electricians and are easily available at hardware and electronics supply stores. In the supernatural world, though, they're popular ghost hunting tools, as some ghosts emit soft electromagnetic fields, particularly when using their Numina.

Add the EMF detector's die bonus to any roll to search for ghosts or their traces. If your character is actively watching an EMF detector when a ghost uses its Numina, the device spikes with strong results. No roll is required for this effect.

Energy Meter

Die Bonus +1, Durability 1, Size 2, Structure 2, Availability • • •

Effect: An energy meter is a device, technological or mystical, that supposedly detects the emanations of the supernatural. Some energy meters are radios tuned to a dead channel, with the variations in white noise the gauge. Some are crystals on pendulums, moving in the face of the otherworldly. Dowsing rods are another common tool used as an energy meter.

Unlike an EMF detector, an energy meter detects locations that are haunted or otherwise mystically charged. It works without fail when in the right places. An EMF detector picks up the traces and trails of actual entities, albeit unreliably. When in a place of supernatural influence, an energy meter activates without a die roll. Its die bonus applies to rolls to convince witnesses that a place is either influenced by the supernatural or absent of the supernatural.

When procuring an energy meter, choose a type of creature. Functionally, it acts as the Unseen Sense Merit (see p. 175). For example, an energy meter to detect werewolves may be a holly wand dipped in silver, or a vampire-detecting meter may be a bowl of holy water that ripples when the undead approach.

Flash Cotton/Paper

Die Bonus +2, Durability 0, Size 1, Structure 1, Availability •

Effect: Flash paper and flash cotton are chemically treated bits of paper or cotton that burn very quickly and flash into nothingness in under a second. The nitrocellulose burns so fast that it's not dangerous for the user. Flash paper is a common part of a magician's arsenal of tricks and was traditionally used as a flash for photography. It also serves as a highly effective ward against things intimidated by fire. Vampires, some ghosts, and many types of zombie are afraid of fire and will flee on sight. This serves the dual function of identifying such monsters in a crowd, as they'll often flinch or hiss as they resist their impulses to run or kill.

When a creature weak against fire sees flash paper, it must succeed in a Resolve + Composure roll to resist recoiling. If the character knows what she is looking for (that is, she lit the flash paper near the creature deliberately to check its reaction), the player can apply a Condition such as Exposed or Shaken to the creature.

Grave Dirt

Die Bonus +2, Durability 1, Size 2, Structure 3, Availability • • •

Effect: For reasons unknown, ghosts and other unseen entities find Manifestation easier in the presence of grave dirt. Those trying to interact with such a being can use a bag of such dirt to help those interactions along. Grave dirt is easy to find but difficult to procure. Anyone digging a grave without permission is likely to draw a lot of unwanted scrutiny. This reflects a twenty pound bag, which will cover about five square feet of space.

Any ghost or spirit attempting to Manifest or use other Numina on the dusted site may add the dirt's die bonus. They are not forced or even compelled to Manifest, they just find it easier.

Incense

Die Bonus +1, Durability 1, Size 2, Structure 1, Availability • •

Effect: Incense has long been a common feature of magical practices in most cultures. It's no coincidence that incense is so very ubiquitous in mysticism; it does offer limited advantages in supernatural situations. Every type of incense has symbolic meaning and use. For example, anise is good for meditation, bergamot for prosperity, myrrh for healing, and sage to ward off evil. So long as the incense burned symbolically matches the action, its die bonus can be used in rolls for any Supernatural Merit. With Storyteller permission, it can be used with alternative mystical powers from other World of Darkness game lines.

Kirlian Camera

Die Bonus +2, Durability 1, Size 2, Structure 2, Availability • • •

Effect: A Kirlian camera uses a series of photographic techniques and high voltage exposure to capture "auras." These odd photos have been the center of many pseudoscientific studies. While the "auras" say little factually about a given person, they can reveal a creature's nature as something not natural. As well, they can show traces of the supernatural on-scene. Vampires have no Kirlian aura. Other monsters of the World of Darkness have a warped, strange aura that looks nothing like a human aura. Each type of supernatural aura is different, but the process is hardly exact.

A Kirlian camera's die bonus applies to rolls to identify the supernatural in a situation. It doesn't assist in identifying the specifics. It only assists in placing something as natural or unnatural.

Protective Amulet

Die Bonus +2, Durability 2, Size 1, Structure 2, Availability • • •

Effect: Any chain bookstore has books full of instructions for crafting amulets and baubles to defend against evil. These franchise fetishes do nothing more than breed undue confidence in their wearers. True protective amulets are few and far between, but they can save lives. They take many forms, from a shell containing cat's eye, to an abraxas amulet, to a lucky horse shoe.

Any time the wearer of a true protective amulet is subject to harmful magic, the amulet adds its die bonus to any rolls to resist. However, any time a harmful spell achieves an exceptional success, the amulet shatters, causing one point of lethal damage to its wearer and often alerting the sorcerer.

Salt

Die Bonus +2, Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 1, Availability •

Effect: Salt represents purity in many cultures. This purity holds the unnatural at bay. Ethereal creatures such as ghosts and demons cannot pass through an unbroken line of salt. If all portals into a building are lined with salt, ethereal creatures cannot even force their way through walls or ceilings.

If actively used in an Abjuration (see p. 231), salt adds its die bonus. If a spirit tries to use Numina to break a salt line, it must spend Willpower to make the attempt and suffers the die bonus as a penalty to the activation. The Willpower does not add to the roll.

If salt is integrated into a weapon, for example in buckshot, the weapon becomes able to harm ghosts. Any successful hit causes the ghost to lose Corpus equal to the successes rolled (the damage rating of the weapon does not add to this) and forces the ghost to Discorporate for that many turns. Note, however, that the weapon or ammunition doesn't stop at the ghost. A character who shoots a shotgun loaded with rock salt at a Manifested phantom might damage it, but will also damage whatever is behind it.

Making Custom Tools

While the list provided will cover many needs that arise in a World of Darkness game, characters will always come up with more. For the simplest items, just assign Availability and a die bonus that seems appropriate. Most equipment has a bonus between +1 and +3. Anything higher than that is usually rare and very specialized in function.

For very specific items, particularly those that help to define a character, you might use a permutation of the dice system (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, pp. 134–135). The most common permutations are 8- and 9-again, modified resistance, and extra talent. Rote action, advanced actions, and extra successes are rarer and heavily impact a game. These particular permutations should be reserved for plot-shifting items, things expected to change the course of the narrative by their inclusion. If you add a dice permutation, consider reducing the die bonus, or removing it entirely.

Bygones

Bygones are items that inexplicably have mystical power imbued within them. They're relics of a time long lost or things that just happened to be exposed to the right combination of strange circumstances to become otherworldly.

Bygones are each unique. While similar items may exist, each is its own item, each tells its own story. Certain phenomena occur with some frequency. So while characters can research a desired relic or effect, the examples they find might not line up congruently with the relics they read or heard about. Most bygones are very dangerous and require special treatment to eliminate. This special requirement could also be part of the research or as part of another story entirely.

Bygones cannot be intentionally created. Many bygones vanish after they've done their damage to their owners and turn up in similarly strange places soon after.

Game Traits

Since bygones cannot typically be purchased and cannot be created, they have no Availability scores. They also offer few direct dice advantages. They have Durability, Size, and Structure scores. Often, their Durabilities and Structures will be particularly high, as bygones are very difficult to destroy. The Description field explains what the bygone appears as, and the Effect field describes what the bygone is capable of. Descriptions give hints as to where the bygone may be found. Usually, these Effects are outside the owner's control. Exceptions are noted.

Abella's Mirror

Durability 4, Size 4, Structure 1

Description: Abella's Mirror is an old French vanity mirror that made its way to New Orleans right after the city's settlement. The gold trim is flaking off the intricate flower patterns of the wooden frame; it could use a solid restoration. The mirror finish has faded, and brushing one's hair in it could be a chore. Now, it rests in an antique shop with a fire sale price tag.

Effect: Abella's Mirror has trapped the soul of its original owner as well those of past victims. Abella cannot be seen when looking at the mirror directly. When the lights are low, however, Abella appears, pounding on the glass from the inside, begging for help. Her faded image appears in analog photography sometimes as well.

For those who have seen the image, their luck only gets worse. The next time they spend Willpower, the Storyteller should introduce a life-threatening risk to the situation. This should be totally unexpected, like a rampant car driven by a drunk. The character should be able to avoid the threat with a Wits + Composure roll. Otherwise, she may be severely injured. This will happen again the next time the character is able to see Abella's spirit. The third time, the stakes raise and the threat becomes deadly. Someone who dies as result of Abella's curse vanishes the first time their body is out of sight. Sometimes, a past victim can be seen in the mirror in Abella's place.

The stories say that if someone helps Abella, finds her killer, and brings them to justice, he can avoid the curse of her mirror and release the trapped souls. But so far, nobody in the long trail of bodies has managed to do so.

If broken, Abella's Mirror reforms when left alone. It introduces itself back into the antiques market within a month's time.

Breton's Screaming Skull

Durability 6, Size 2, Structure 4

Description: Breton's Skull is an old, brown and battered skull. It's turned up in many homes and churches, always plastered behind walls or tucked deep in the recesses of forgotten closets. It has a couple hundred years of abuse and neglect showing on its bones and bad dental hygiene to boot. For those looking into it, Breton's Skull belonged to a beheaded pirate whose body was thrown into sea. The conquistadors kept the skull as a trophy.

Effect: Breton's Screaming Skull has one strange and inexplicable behavior: it screams. At night, around 2:30AM local time, if it's out on display but nobody is watching it, it screams. The chilling scream wakes and rattles anyone nearby. Witnesses lose a point of Willpower immediately and find themselves unable to sleep. The first night, they cannot sleep at all. The next night, they can sleep if they succeed in a Resolve + Composure – 5 roll. Each night following, the penalty decreases by one until the roll is just a straight Resolve + Composure. Afterwards, they can sleep normally. Any night they fail to sleep due to the curse, they lose a point of Willpower. Also, one witness out of the group, chosen seemingly random, has an intense feeling that the skull wishes to be hidden away from human eyes. It wants to be locked away or buried. A character who fulfills the skull's wish finds all his Willpower restored.

The Devil's Washbasin

Durability 4, Size 6, Structure 6

Description: The Devil's Washbasin is a large, brass bathtub. It is nondescript, with only minor tarnish on the brass and simple decorative flourishes carved into the sides and legs. It's lighter than one might expect, but otherwise, it's just an old-fashioned bathtub. These types of tubs are prized by collectors and antique dealers but the brass is thin and in no condition to be repurposed.

Effect: To use the washbasin, one must first fill it with water. This makes perfect sense. What doesn't make sense is why, after emerging from the tub, the user looks a year younger. At first, it appears the washbasin is something of a fountain of youth. However, a second bath does nothing spectacular aside from washing the user. Once the disappointment sets in, the user hears a voice in her head that tells her to fill the basin with fresh blood in order to receive its blessing. In particular, she must fill it with warm, fresh blood.

It doesn't take much blood to use the Basin. About eight pints (eight points of lethal damage) will do the trick. Unfortunately, people cannot survive the loss of that much blood without immediate medical attention. It's very difficult to arrange multiple people giving smaller amounts of fresh blood at the same time. If the user bathes in the blood, she immediately becomes one year younger, and the blood evaporates into nothingness.

Knife without a Penny

Durability 4, Size 1, Structure 4

Description: The tradition goes that it's bad luck to gift someone a knife. The stories say it'll sever the friendship. Instead, you should give them a penny with the gift, so they can pay you a penny for the knife. This small, ivory-handled shaving razor may very well be the source of the superstition. As with most stories in the World of Darkness, the truth is darker than the fiction.

Effect: To take its heinous effect, the knife must change hands between friends without payment. Once it's done so, the new owner becomes the conduit for its curse. First, the owner is never without the knife. No matter where she leaves it, it's always somehow in a pocket, or at least within arm's reach. More importantly, it thirsts for blood. It whispers to her mind. It tempts her. It pleads with her — and if she kills, it praises her.

The origin of the folktale comes from a severed friendship. The story omits the reason the friendship frayed: the knife's owner murdered his friend's wife. Add "Commit Murder" as a fourth Aspiration for the owner.

In addition, any time she faces a victim denied their Defense (due to restraints, sleeping, surprise, or certain combat maneuvers), the wielder may apply the killing blow rule (see p 203). However, this requires a successful attack roll. A single success allows for the killing blow.

While a character owns the knife, she may not regain Willpower through fulfilling her Virtue. As well, she loses one point of Willpower per day. Once her Willpower points are depleted, she takes one point of lethal damage per day and is rendered incapable of healing until she's killed.

Getting rid of the knife requires gifting it to another (potentially with a penny to break the cycle) on a day the knife has tasted blood. Otherwise, it will come back. This blood need not be from a murder; in some cases, the owner has stabbed herself for this purpose.

Mike's Smokes

Durability 2, Size 1, Structure 3

Description: Mike's Smokes is an old, beaten-up pack of cigarettes that passes through the homeless community. They're an off-brand. The pack is always about half full. Legend has it, Mike was a greaser back in the 1950s. Mike was a total asshole. He caused problems for everyone simply for the sake of causing problems. He killed a convenience store clerk one time because the guy looked at him funny. Mike died in a car crash. What'd you expect, emphysema? His signature cigarettes lived on, to continue his legacy of ruining lives for no particular reason.

Effect: Smoking kills. Smoking Mike's Smokes kills quicker. When somebody smokes one of the cigarettes from Mike's pack, they're cursed. Every day, upon waking, they suffer one point of lethal damage as they cough up blood and phlegm. They become incapable of healing. The only way they can stop the damage, the coughing, the pain, is by smoking again. They only know this from the cravings. Eventually,

victims either hold to the pack viciously or they die painful and disgusting deaths within a week or two.

Ending the effect means setting Mike to rest. Mike's not the kind of ghost that wants to rest, though, and since nobody's ever succeeded at putting him down, nobody's sure how to do it. One guess is as good as any, though, and a victim's lungs will only hold out for so long.

The Sacred Monkey and Cock

Durability 2, Size 1, Structure 3

Description: The Sacred Monkey and Cock is a hand-sized, carved plaster statue of the two animals. While there are many of these statues, each one looks different. They're a common New Orleans tourist curio, but some carry a powerful magic. These enchanted statues are older and typically in ill-repair. Their details are all but gone and they carry a light dusting of plaster on their surfaces. They're also atypically warm to the touch.

Effect: The common story is that the Sacred Monkey and Cock is a blessing, made to grant three wishes to its owner. The truth of the matter is much more sinister. The Sacred Monkey and Cock is more of a weapon against the foolhardy and the story is just so much propaganda. The statue grants three wishes made while rubbing the animals. However, the wishes are distorted in the worst possible ways. Often, the first wish is enough to maim or kill a wisher. When it's not, the temptation of a "properly worded wish" is enough to convince them to make further wishes, even just in an attempt to fix the damage caused by the first.

These wishes are not always just distortions of the literal wordings; they're complete butcheries of the initial intent. At least one facet of the fulfilled wish will match the initial wish, but this stands more as a mockery and insult—salt in a proverbial wound—than as a technicality of the magic. For example, if a character wishes a social worker will love him, he may be stricken disabled and destitute, since the social worker loves the underprivileged. Or if a character wishes for an enemy's death, an assassin may kill the enemy and frame the character.

Tabitha, the Haunted Doll

Durability 4, Size 2, Structure 8

Description: Tabitha is an old rag doll, the kind one might find in a thrift store, at a garage sale, or in an old box in the attic. She's very plain, with hints of charring at the ends of her red yarn hair. Her dress has a soft, brown nicotine-stained hue and the smell of moth balls and old mold. She has marbles for eyes, with little green cat's-eye slits running down the centers. When left alone, she's always found sitting up. This occurs even if she was under something.

Effect: Tabitha is a tortured soul of an arson victim trapped in a doll. She wants to be left alone and she wants to be comfortably buried under a pile of ash, where she belongs. If somebody sleeps in a room with Tabitha, he must make a Resolve + Composure roll or he'll sleepwalk and attempt to light their dwelling on fire. Once the fire's successfully lit, he awakens. He can be woken before that, but screams out for at least a full minute.

The Viral Video

Durability N/A, Size N/A, Structure N/A

Description: When most people get an email from an unknown source with a jumbled subject line and body text that simply says, "Click this," they delete the message and mark it as spam. Some click the link, which brings up a video. Usually, it results in a browser crash due to an archaic format and a missing codec. In those rare instances where it doesn't, a 17-second black and white video plays. The video shows the floor of an empty bedroom. The image crackles and fades, but remains motionless. At the thirteen second mark, a pair of young women's shoes fall into view, the audio offers up a thud, and the feet dangle a few inches from the ground, swinging slowly left and right for four seconds until the video stops.

Effect: The video causes suicide. Not for the viewer, mind, but for those close to her. It starts off in her periphery; a casual acquaintance or someone that shares a class. But every week, the deaths get a bit closer to home. Nothing immediately suggests the suicides are tied to the video. But after the second, the victim grows to suspect something, as the second death is always a hanging. Every seven days, another person turns up dead.

Shedding the curse requires the victim forward the email to at least two others. Those people must view the video, thus incurring the curse. A victim can find this solution after a bit of digging on the internet. Of course, the story is presented as an urban legend. The alternate solution is suicide on the part of the victim.

13th August 2012

Dear Gina,

I think I'm better now.

I might not send you this letter. I don't think I need you to read it, but I think I might write it. You should know that I love you very much. I've seen a lot of the police in the last few days and the chances are that they might call you, but you're not to worry. I think I can answer the questions, no matter how hard they are.

I'll have to lie like a rug. But hey, I'm a bloke. I'm supposed to be good at that.

So the day I wrote to you started with Stephen Fucking Escher calling me into his office, which I did not need, even before I found out. He's never been normal, this guy, you know that. But this particular morning, right from the opening of the door, he somehow managed to make any wrongness he might have evidenced look like the height of normality. The smell was the first thing, like a wave that smashed into my face when I opened the door. The room absolutely stank, smelled ripe, like he hadn't washed for days. Weeks, maybe. He was unshaven and his hair was sticking up. You could see these brown stains on his suit, like he'd poured something down himself. And his eyes. His eyes were the main thing, all red and round. He motioned for me to sit down. His fingernails were long, I noticed, and had heavy black grime under them.

He held up the last few spreadsheets I'd printed out for him and handed them across the table, without a single word. I thought, oh, no. The patterns. The picture. They came out like that and he's going to think I was arsing about. I started babbling.

I swore blind that was how they came out of the printer, and no, I wasn't trying to have a laugh at his expense. He looked at me with this confused expression and said, in this voice that went up and down like it was breaking all over again, "Do you know her?"

I looked down at Mary's number-portrait. No, I said.

He asked me if I was sure. I faltered. "Do you know who she is?" he said in that same cracked voice.

I realised with a sort of jolt that he wasn't simply repeating the question. I told him that she'd been following me around. That I had called the police and they had done nothing.

He nodded. "What does the name William Dear mean to you?"

I was baffled. I said I didn't know. A relative, maybe? He babbled something I didn't catch, a name, Selby or something. He had lost me.

He wasn't looking at me. I don't think he was even really talking to me. He trailed off. I sat, embarrassed, in the smell. Did I mention he smelled bad? He smelled bad.

I started to ask if that was all he wanted. He cut me off. He said we were going to a meeting. I said he'd asked me to do some stuff. Did he still want that done? He said, forget it.

I said, OK. Get anything you need, he said, we're off now. He stood up, and I was greeted with an overwhelming smell of piss, and it occurred to me that maybe he hadn't moved from that spot for a very long time. We walked to Edgware Road, by a route that took us the better part of an hour. And then we got on the Circle Line, to Kings Cross St. Pancras. The wrong way. Anticlockwise. And then between Victoria and St. James's Park, the thing stopped completely and we were plunged into darkness. Me, all these people, and his smell. I don't know what was up with it. I mean, it's normally terrible, you know that, but it took us three hours to do. And each stop, Stephen was looking straight at everyone who got on and off, even peering through the window at the end to see who was on the next carriage.

I think we'd got to Aldgate before I saw that Mary was in the next carriage along. She was staring right at me, without blinking. I tried not to let on that I had seen her. Stephen leaned over close — his breath was like rotten bacon — and whispered to me, "Don't worry."

I didn't know what he meant.

At King's Cross St Pancras we changed for the Piccadilly Line. Stephen refused to walk as quickly as the crowds around us, making the change a distinctly unpleasant experience as vile-tempered Londoners jostled and shoved us. It was as if he were making sure that Mary was following us. She was only five steps behind us on the escalators and got on the other end of the same carriage, although she did not try to approach me. We ended up back at South Kensington, which of course we'd passed about two hours ago, where again we changed and went in the other direction to Cockfosters, passing again through Kings Cross St Pancras. Which again took forever. Each time we changed it seemed apparent that Stephen wanted Mary to follow us.

I finally said to him as we sat on the rickety District train, "Why are we going in such a roundabout route?" He smiled broadly, giving me another blast of his breath, and said, "We're unlocking the Machine. You can't just go there in a straight line, you know."

As if that explained it all.

We got off at Southgate. Leaving the station, we took what must have been the most indirect route possible, finally arriving at three blocks, just off a main road. He stopped in the path, and turned back. And then he called for Mary. She ran to catch us up and walked in step with us as we advanced for the third, furthest block. I started to ask what we were doing here; Stephen hushed me with a hissing noise.

Mary tried to take my hand. I pulled it away and put it in my pocket.

The glass doors hung open and the foyer had a strange smell of deadness, to it, that's the only word I can think of for it. Next to the lifts, someone had propped a very old-fashioned bicycle. Stephen walked up to it and stared at it for a short time. And then he nodded, and said, "About time, really." Over his shoulder, he said, "Lift's not working. Stairs." It was an order.

We climbed in silence to the ninth floor, and then along the corridor to room 913, where Stephen stopped. "This is an odd place to have a meeting," I said.

Stephen told me to shut up and walk in.

The main room was absolutely silent. There were about twenty shop window mannequins standing there, old ones, some without arms or hands or heads. Mary seemed fascinated by them, looking straight in the painted eyes of each one in turn. She stopped by one and looked at it this way and that, saying to Stephen, "This one looks like you."

Stephen told me to go on through, motioning to the door at the other side of the room. I did, walking into a back room containing a busted bedframe and a standard lamp with no bulb.

I called back, now what? Stephen came rushing in now. "This isn't right. This isn't right," he was saying. He lifted up the bed frame, as if to see under it, and then suddenly tipped it right over. It disintegrated into wood, metal, broken springs with a crash that shattered the silence and seemed to echo through the hall outside. Mary followed us in, looking around like a child, as if she was seeing a vista of wonder and strangeness, not an abandoned room.

"It's not here," said Stephen. He seemed close to tears.

What wasn't here? I tried to calm him down, but he started to rave about his Purpose, about the Principle, about this Selby again. A voice cut him short.

"Are you wanting to be going somewhere?" It was the policeman. The comedy Irishman.

"I don't understand," said Stephen.

"***You*** don't understand?" I said.

"I wouldn't be worrying yourself. It's all according to plan. A plan of great intricacy and charm." The policeman advanced on Stephen, as if to embrace him. The room was flooded with light from outside, but even so as the policeman came forward he seemed to expand and in some strange way fold — yes, that's it, no other word, fold — outwards. He was between me and Stephen. I couldn't see through the blackness, just heard a whirring and a clicking and then silence again. The policeman stepped back. A mannequin, an old chipped one, stood in Stephen's clothes. It had something like his face. Mary jumped up and down and clapped her hands. "That was so clever," she said.

"Can I be having your key, young lady?" said the policeman. She reached inside her shirt and pulled out what looked like a clock key on a tarnished silver chain.

"I'm terribly sorry, but it's time to throw in the towel, as it were."

She nodded. I suddenly felt a great deal of pity for her. Sergeant Fox reached forward and again, obscuring her from my view grasped her head and twisted it hard. I jumped forward, crying out in horror only for the policeman's fat arm to shoot out and stop me dead in my traps. "Calm yourself down, wee man" he said.

Mary sank to the ground, and as I watched, I saw her skin turn inside out. Real skin turned to what looked like very old leather, stretched over a frame of brass, behind which I could see hints of cogs and levers. A doll, legs wide apart, arms limp, head cocked to one side.

I sank to the floor, head in hands, elbows on knees. "I'm going mental," I said.

Sergeant Fox ignored me. He pulled what looked like a Swiss Army knife from his pocket and set to work undoing fastenings on the back of the Mary-doll's head. After a minute or two, he pulled something out and handed it to me.

"This is yours, I think," he said. "You can do what you want with it."

I put my hand out and took it. I still have the thing. I don't think I can describe it, but I might show it to you when you get back. Or I might not. I don't know.

"Get yourself up, now," said the policeman. "I'll walk you back to the station."

He would answer none of my questions on the way back to Southgate, he wheeling the ancient bicycle.

I called in sick and went home.

I keep looking at the thing he gave me. Trying to work out what I can do with it. It keeps giving me ideas.

I don't know though.

I miss you.

I need you to keep me sane.

Come back to me, Gina. I'm counting down the days until you get home. When you do, I'm going to ask you to marry me.

I'm going to burn this letter now.

All my love

Jon

THE GOD-MACHINE CHRONICLE

Name: Virtue: Age:
Player: Vice: Faction:
Chronicle: Concept: Group Name:

ATTRIBUTES

POWER	Intelligence ●○○○○		Strength ●○○○○		Presence ●○○○○
FINESSE	Wits ●○○○○		Dexterity ●○○○○		Manipulation ●○○○○
RESISTANCE	Resolve ●○○○○		Stamina ●○○○○		Composure ●○○○○

SKILLS

Mental
(-3 unskilled)

Academics _____ ○○○○○
Computer _____ ○○○○○
Crafts _____ ○○○○○
Investigation _____ ○○○○○
Medicine _____ ○○○○○
Occult _____ ○○○○○
Politics _____ ○○○○○
Science _____ ○○○○○

Physical
(-1 unskilled)

Athletics _____ ○○○○○
Brawl _____ ○○○○○
Drive _____ ○○○○○
Firearms _____ ○○○○○
Larceny _____ ○○○○○
Stealth _____ ○○○○○
Survival _____ ○○○○○
Weaponry _____ ○○○○○

Social
(-1 unskilled)

Animal Ken _____ ○○○○○
Empathy _____ ○○○○○
Expression _____ ○○○○○
Intimidation _____ ○○○○○
Persuasion _____ ○○○○○
Socialize _____ ○○○○○
Streetwise _____ ○○○○○
Subterfuge _____ ○○○○○

OTHER TRAITS

Merits

_____ ○○○○○
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Conditions

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Aspirations

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Health

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Willpower

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Beats

○○○○○

Experiences

_____

Integrity

10 ____ ○
9 ____ ○
8 ____ ○
7 ____ ○
6 ____ ○
5 ____ ○
4 ____ ○
3 ____ ○
2 ____ ○
1 ____ ○

Size _____ Speed _____
Initiative Mod _____ Defense _____
Armor _____

Weapons	Dice Mod.

Equipment	Dice Mod.

Attributes 5/4/3 • Skills 11/7/4 (+3 Specialties) • Merits 7 • Health = Stamina + Size Willpower = Resolve + Composure • Size = 5 for adult humans • Defense = Lower of Dexterity or Wits + Athletics • Initiative Mod = Dexterity + Composure • Speed = Strength + Dexterity +5 • Starting Morality = 7

Here's the question:

DO YOU REALLY WANT TO KNOW?

Because it's not like it's a secret.

It's just like your car
it doesn't run by magic
but it might as well,
for all YOU know
when you look under the hood.

Wesley Cote, AKA The Key

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