

A hunter cell seeking crucial information finds a broker of secrets who can give them what they need in return for an act of symbolic destruction. But will the hunters realize they have stumbled into an ancient conflict between spirits? And will their new contact use them as pawns in his game?

COLLECTION

OF

HORRORS

SERPENT'S TOOTH

**A Storytelling Adventure System
anthology for Hunter: The Vigil**

WHITE WOLF PUBLISHING, INC.
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Serpent's Tooth

MENTAL ...

PHYSICAL •

SOCIAL ...

Overview

The scene takes place when the cell is seeking a piece of information or an important artifact. The merchandise they are seeking could be anything, from the name of an enemy to the final ingredient for a magic spell. Whatever it is, they meet with the mysterious Robin Garter in a smoky after-hours jazz club to negotiate for it. Garter, of course, will require payment, but this payment will be as symbolic as it is material.

Robin Garter is a follower of the Snake, a spirit of cunning, subterfuge and deceit. The Snake is locked in conflict with the Bird, a spirit of open conflict, majesty and strength. These two are battling over symbolic domination of the United States, and the Bird has been in the ascendancy for some time. Men like Robin Garter, however, are patient, and are working to slowly erode the influence of the Bird. The payment Garter demands from the hunters will be to perform a task that will weaken the hold the Bird has over the country. Whether they perform Garter's task or not, the hunters have the opportunity to gain a greater understanding into the symbolic conflict, and perhaps learn a shocking piece of history dating back to the country's founding.

This scene can easily be inserted into an existing story (although likely one set in the U.S.). All that is required is for the hunter cell to need something, perhaps the identity of a foe, a weapon to be used against the story's villain or occult knowledge about what path to take next. A Streetwise or Occult roll might suggest that the man who can help them is found after midnight at the Grey Key club, a smoky jazz venue. A contact from another cell could point them in the right direction, too, especially one interested in the occult. Once the scene is concluded and the hunters have succeeded or failed in acquiring their merchandise, the story can move on.

This scene could also form the opening of a new story, especially if the characters all have a need for the same thing (perhaps the identity of the monster whose attacks on them or their loved ones spurred them into the Vigil). If this is the case then Garter can easily become a recurring character, and perhaps the story will eventually spin out to explore the conflict between the spirits of the Snake and the Bird.

Description

The entrance to the Grey Key club is cramped between an all-night grocery store and a laundromat. A faded sign behind cracked glass hangs over the door. It doesn't look like much - the paint is peeling and the doorway looks like it's home to vagrants every other night. But not tonight. The only sound from within is the faint playing of a piano, riffling through patterns of atonal notes.

Inside, the club is dark and close. The air is heavy with cigarette smoke and the smell of whiskey. A tight staircase winds up one story to reveal the club itself: a low-ceilinged wood-paneled place with tables and chairs set around a circular stage in the center of the room. Yellowing posters for past jazz performances cover the walls behind the closed bar. The music is coming from an upright piano beside the stage, which is being played by a tall young black man in a dark burgundy suit. The club is dark, the only light coming from a spotlight on the stage, but even so he is wearing sunglasses. His fingers move so rapidly over the keys it seems like they have a dozen joints each. He breaks into a jazz refrain with a pounding, soulful rhythm and a top line as light as gossamer, and he lets the last few notes trickle out before he takes off his shades and looks at you.

"I wasn't expecting an audience," he says smoothly. "But then again I guess you're not here as followers of the art form. Am I right?"

Robin Garter is an experienced and confident negotiator, and he's willing to deal. How the hunters handle the situation is up to them, but Garter is in a position of strength because he has what the hunters want and he knows they want it. He lets the hunters make the first offer and then tells them what it will cost them, and he isn't afraid to suggest he has other bidders if they're not willing to pay.

It's possible that the hunters have no intention of giving Garter anything and intend to take what they want by force. If this seems likely, Garter is quick to tell them that he does not have the merchandise on him, and if they want it they're going to have to deal his way. Garter is no

longer entirely human, having pledged so much of himself to the Snake, and he does not give in to coercion, threats or even torture easily.

Garter's price is that the hunters must perform an act of symbolic destruction aimed at the Bird. The Bird has symbols everywhere, allowing it a tenacious hold on the country. From the eagle on a banknote to the cartoon chicken on the roof of a fast food joint, few places are outside the clutch of its talons. The hunters are to work out just what would constitute a strike against the Bird.

If the scene is part of an existing story, previous events could suggest a task to the hunters – for instance, if the hunters have dealt with government agents, they could to destroy the large seal decorating the floor of a government building's entrance lobby and so deface the eagle that graces it. They might destroy a pile of banknotes worth at least \$100,000. They might sabotage the next performance of a local sports team named after birds (Eagles, Hawks, Cardinals, Ravens – the list goes on). Garter cannot tell them how they should attack the Bird, since part of the destruction's power comes from the degrading of the Bird in the hunters' own minds. If the players can't come up with anything, you can allow Intelligence + Occult rolls and suggest any of the above, or a solution based on the story itself, on a success.

Garter is immediately aware of the success or failure of the destruction. As long as the task damaged the symbolism of the Bird in a way that is obvious to a lot of people, the hunters can return to the Grey Note club and Garter hands over the merchandise.

Hunters probably ask Garter why he cares so much about damaging the reputation of an imaginary bird. He replies that he serves another power, one suppressed and hidden from view since the earliest days of this nation, and that one day his own master will usurp the Bird and take the United States for itself. There is a war being fought through every strata of society, and if the hunters want their merchandise, they have to play their part.

Storyteller Goals

To involve the players and their hunters in a conflict that is intellectual and symbolic rather than physical. To introduce the character of Robin Garter and set him up as a potential future contact or enemy. To involve the hunters in a wider conflict between the Snake and the Bird. This scene could also serve to solve a problem that has occurred in a story (for instance, if the hunters have failed to find some important clue or item that Garter can supply to them).

Character Goals

To acquire the merchandise that Garter is offering. To understand more about the symbolic conflict to which Garter alludes.

Actions

Researching the Bird

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Occult

Action: Extended. 5 successes required, and each roll represents 30 minutes of research.

The hunter attempts to find out just what the symbolic significance of the Bird is, and what power Garter might serve that opposes it.

Hindrances: None

Help: Occult library (+3)

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The hunter comes to an erroneous conclusion. He believes, for instance, that the Bird is a symbol of savagery and brutality, and that it is opposed by the Cat, which symbolizes civilization and learning.

Failure: The hunter does not find anything.

Success: The hunter learns that the Bird and the Snake are entities – purely symbolic in some sources, powerful spirits in others – which oppose one another. The Bird is a spirit of strength, open conflict and conquest. The Snake represents cunning and deceit. Each has its followers, some of whom are dedicated to wiping out the other, and some of whom are unwitting dupes controlled by powerful followers of the spirits. Some of the founders of the United States were followers of the Bird, which is why the Eagle is so central to American iconography. The Snake, however, is not defeated, and by its nature is patient enough to fight a silent shadow war aimed at weakening the Bird's hold. You can give the player a copy of the Rutledge's Letter prop (p. 4), if you wish.

Exceptional Success: The hunter learns everything in "Success" above, receives Rutledge's letter, and may add +1 to any dice pool when interacting with followers of the either the Snake or the Bird in future. He is also aware that both the Snake and the Bird are powerful spirits, to whom many other spirits owe fealty, and that they are bound to fight their conflict using mortal proxies.

Consequences

The encounter with Garter can have as little impact as the cell acquiring a useful item, and as much as throwing them into a conflict between age-old spirits over the souls of the nation. Garter might function as a contact for the future, and the tasks he demands for his payment will no doubt become more and more exorbitant the more they deal with him. In this way the cell can end up the target of the Bird's followers, whether they are aware of the Snake and Bird's feud or not.

Robin Garter, Ophidian Musician

Quotes: "Oh, this? Just something that came to me, my man. Just a few notes swimmin' around in this head that had to get out."

"Now, I'm guessing you know a bit about what's really behind the face of this country. But you don't know the half of it. You don't know about the war."

"He's got coils that crush you like a minor chord and fangs as painful as a love song."

Virtue: Hope. More than anything, Robin Garter *knows* his

day will come. No matter how complete the Bird's grip might seem, Garter will never accept that the Snake is beaten.

Vice: Pride. Garter will not back down from his mission, a result of his own sense of superiority as well as being given his mission by a higher power.

Background: Robin Garter's origins are a mystery. Certainly, he's been around the city's jazz scene for some years, but before that no one knows. His technical ability suggests classical training as well as a jazz background, although Garter claims to be completely self-taught.

Description: Garter is a slim black man in his late twenties. He has a neatly trimmed beard and short hair, and he favors dark tailored suits, highly polished shoes and expensive watches. He speaks with an unflustered drawl, as if trying to concentrate on something else, and uses a lot of music metaphors. When seated at a piano he plays almost constantly, random riffs and snatches of songs flowing into one another. Even when it comes to matters of the Snake and the Bird, Garter talks with the ease and permanent half-smile of a man in control.

Storytelling Hints: Garter is less of a straightforward adversary or ally, and more a mystery in the shape of a man. He always has a way out and never puts himself at a disadvantage. Even outright threats of violence don't fluster him much, because he knows that he is more likely to disappear in a shower of snake scales than actually come to any harm. Garter keeps his word when it comes to deals, and if the cell has done what he has asked, he graciously pays up.

HUNTER

THE VIGIL

Name: Robin Garter
Concept: Jazz musician/
Snake worshipper

Virtue: Hope
Vice: Pride

Profession: Artist
Compact:
Conspiracy:

Intelligence ●●●●●	Strength ●●●●●	Presence ●●●●●
Wits ●●●●●	Dexterity ●●●●●	Manipulation ●●●●●
Resolve ●●●●●	Stamina ●●●●●	Composure ●●●●●

SKILLS

<input type="checkbox"/> Academics ●●●●●
<input type="checkbox"/> Investigation ●●●●●
Occult (Symbolic)
<input type="checkbox"/> Spirits ●●●●●
<input type="checkbox"/> Brawl ●●●●●
<input type="checkbox"/> Larceny ●●●●●
<input type="checkbox"/> Stealth ●●●●●
Expression
<input type="checkbox"/> (Piano Music) ●●●●●
Persuasion (Virtues)
<input type="checkbox"/> of the Snake ●●●●●
Socialize
<input type="checkbox"/> (Jazz Clubs) ●●●●●
<input type="checkbox"/> Streetwise ●●●●●
<input type="checkbox"/> Subterfuge ●●●●●
<input type="checkbox"/> 00000
<input type="checkbox"/> 00000
<input type="checkbox"/> 00000
<input type="checkbox"/> 00000
<input type="checkbox"/> 00000
<input type="checkbox"/> 00000

MERITS

Danger Sense ●●●●●
Ambidextrous ●●●●●
Barfly ●●●●●
Contacts (Followers of the Snake, Occulists) ●●●●●
Fame ●●●●●
Professional Training ●●●●●
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FLAWS

HEALTH

●●●●●●●●○○○○○
□□□□□□□□□□

WILLPOWER

●●●●●●●●○○○
□□□□□□□□

TACTICS

Morality n/a
Size 5
Speed 10
Defense 3
Initiative Mod 7
Armor

NOTES

Dread Powers:

Slither Away 4: Garter can disappear in a shower of glittering snake scales by spending a Willpower and rolling his Wits + Occult. A character who observes him doing this may make a Wits + Investigation roll to work out where Garter has gone – he usually disappears to the closest safe place. Garter cannot do this if unconscious.

Rutledge's Letter

Eduard Rutledge
Philadelphia, June 1776

Dear Representative Adams,

No doubt it will alarm you to read words penned by someone, who has these last several months argued so fervently for Reconciliation with the British Crown in the face of your own stance in favor of Independence for these Colonies of America. But in these times the World moves around us and we shall find ourselves left behind like rocks in a rushing stream.

I have myself received a Revelation. I will not say it is Religious in nature, for I feel it concerns our own world and not a higher realm. Our own laws, the Lives of Men the World over, these are the subjects of the Knowledge imparted to me.

Many nights I have been haunted by dreams of the Serpent. Is this the same Beast that tempted the fairer sex in the Garden of Eden? Whatever the case may be, it leers at me and threatens with a snap of its jaws the Consequences of Capitulation to the Revolutionaries amongst us, and I believed it an extension of my own distaste for Independence. But as I write this I am exhausted and sleepless, and labor by the light of a candle, for this very night the Serpent visited me. It was no dream, for its scales gleamed as the brass of the candlestick or the wetness of this ink and the death that reeked from it was as powerful a stench as I have ever encountered. It wore upon its brow a Crown that shone, but the Light could not hide its ugliness. It opened its jaws and between them it held the whole World, and Worlds in the Heavens yet to be named.

This Serpent spoke to me. It told me of the Future that I must help bring about. In this World Men writhed blindly through darkness, and ruled one another by Cunning and Subterfuge alone. Deceit became the Coin of Kings, and the most cunning ruled not by Law but by the vagaries of their own Will. The Americas, this new World still so virgin and unexplored, was fodder for the Serpent which would wax strong in the Politicking and Two-Facedness of an America ruled by petty Despots and Governors lying both to the people of our Colonies and to the British Crown who appointed them. This was the World the Serpent desired, and everywhere its brethren Snakes would slither, pouring poisoned honey into every ear.

And then I heard a storm as if from the beating of great wings. A shadow passed over me and I espied the Bird above me. In one claw it held a lightning bolt and in the other a scroll, and written upon the scroll was a Code of Laws that all men must obey. The Snake recoiled and the Bird alighted upon a mountaintop, there to rule. Its wings embraced a new World, a World in which the Law set apart the best and highest-minded Men that they might rule the rest. In this World Law would Rule and Majesty and Conquest alone would be the makers of Kings. Cunning would win only Scorn. By Strength and Law would one Man gain Lordship over another.

The Bird spoke to me as the Serpent had, but its Words did not fall on horrified ears as the Serpent's did. It promised me this World of Justice and Right would come to pass, and that the History we few Fortunate Men were making would bring it about. But only if the Colonies broke from the Crown could the Bird be free to build this World. I saw its wings were afire and its eyes were of gold, and its beak the gleaming steel of a Soldier's bayonet! It was wreathed in rifle smoke and its pinions were purest light that could illumine every corner of our world!

Then the Bird carried away the Serpent and cast it into the Sea, so it watched over our new World alone. And so I understand now that I served the Serpent, that subtle and deceitful Beast, but now my eyes have been opened and I seek to do the work of the Bird. It is to this end that I have resolved to sign the Declaration which you and Jefferson and the others are creating. Outwardly, I shall suggest that this Decision is prompted by a Desire for Unity among the States, but to you I profess the Truth behind my Decision in the hope that you will yourself understand the Greater Conflict being expressed through the process of Independence.

I hope that I can count you as a Brother in this matter, and that you can in turn bring Others into the fold of Understanding regarding the Victory of the Bird over the Serpent. I am certain that I am not alone in my Revelation, and I am already seeking out Certain Persons who have revealed themselves to be followers of the Bird and all it stands for.

I shall speak to you soon, and rest assured that my Quill shall be in my hand as it is now,

Yours in Liberty,

Eduard Rutledge, Representative for South Carolina.